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Scary, Scary Night

A Halloween Comedy by

E. Michael Lunsford

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Scary, Scary Night

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CHARACTERS

DEREK HYDE: *Age 20-30. A Halloween-phobic young man who desperately wants to marry his girlfriend, Prudence.*

PRUDENCE: *Age 20-30; Derek's girlfriend. A practical young woman who just wants a decent Halloween costume.*

JEREMY HYDE: *Age 40-50; Derek's father and the cheery co-director of the Wellsley Funeral Home.*

FORMALDA HYDE: *Age 40-50; Derek's mother and Jeremy's wife. Formalda is Jewish and from New York. She is the co-director of the Wellsley Funeral Home.*

NUSSBAUM: *Age 20-30. The evil manager of the House of Mask & Magic who has a dead body he needs to unload.*

BRIDE-TO-BE: *Age 20-30. The dead victim of Nussbaum's evil doing.*

ALBERT: *Age 20-30; Nussbaum's eager assistant, ordered to apply as make-up artist at the town's spookiest funeral home.*

SARAH HIGGENBOTTOM: *Age 40-50; the disgruntled and sarcastic widow of a philandering husband. Sarah has a southern accent.*

CLYDE HIGGENBOTTOM: *Age 50-60; Mrs. Higgenbottom's dead husband who died during some "hanky-panky" with his secretary.*

2-4 TRICK-OR-TREATERS (Children preferred)

3 FUNERAL ATTENDEES

NOTE: Play can be performed with only 7 actors using dummies and double casting

SETTING

Afternoon of October 31st (Halloween), current year; Any Town, USA

SCENES

ACT I: Scene 1: Inside the House of Mask and Magic, a spooky-looking costume store

Scene 2: Inside the Funeral Home's reception room, complete with display coffins

Scene 3: Inside the corpse preparation room, with metal slabs for body preparations

ACT II: Scene 1: The Chapel

Scene 2: The reception room with the display coffins

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ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: Halloween afternoon, the scene opens in the interior of the HOUSE OF MASK & MAGIC, a dark and spooky-looking costume store.

AT RISE: The store's front door opens, ringing the store bell. A young woman, PRUDENCE, walks in backwards, pulling on her boyfriend, DEREK.

PRUDENCE

Come on, Derek, we're here now, so you might as well come in. I don't know what you're so afraid of.

(DEREK is resisting PRUDENCE, but allows himself to be pulled into the store.)

DEREK

I'm not afraid, I'm just not crazy about Halloween.

PRUDENCE

But why? It's just a time when kids go trick-or-treating. I think it's cute.

DEREK

You wouldn't say that if you'd been raised in a spooky funeral home by crazy parents, the way I was. They had dead bodies all over the place. It was like Halloween every night!

PRUDENCE

This isn't a funeral home, and you knew we were going to need costumes. I really wish we hadn't waited till the last minute.

DEREK

It's not the *last* minute...

PRUDENCE

Are you kidding? This is Halloween. *Nobody* waits till *Halloween* to get a costume.

DEREK

Well, technically, it isn't Halloween yet. Halloween means "Hollowed Evening". But it's only afternoon. So it's sort of "Hallownoon". See?

(DEREK smiles encouragingly. PRUDENCE just stares wordlessly at him. DEREK masks the awkward moment by taking command. HE steps to the store register and slaps his hand on the counter.)

DEREK, *Continued*

OK. We just need a little help here. Hello? Is anybody here?

(DEREK doesn't notice as the store manager, a tall brooding man named NUSSBAUM, walks up behind him. DEREK is startled by NUSSBAUM's deep and sinister voice.)

NUSSBAUM

Good afternoon.

DEREK

(Wheels around and almost falls down in fright) Aaah!

NUSSBAUM

Did you find what you wanted?

PRUDENCE

(Stepping in) Actually, no, we're going to a masquerade party, and we both need costumes.

NUSSBAUM

Most of the costumes are already gone.

PRUDENCE

(Turning to DEREK) See?

DEREK

OK, OK, can we see what you have?

(NUSSBAUM takes a costume from a nearby rack and hands it to PRUDENCE. He remains strangely in profile never fully turning towards DEREK or PRUDENCE.)

NUSSBAUM

You might want to try this on. The dressing room is just behind here.

DEREK

What is it?

PRUDENCE

I'll surprise us both. Just give me a second... *(Exits to the dressing room)*

DEREK

(Looking carefully at NUSSBAUM, who seems to prefer standing in the darker part of the store) You know, you look familiar. Have we met somewhere?

NUSSBAUM

(Suspicious) What are you getting at?

DEREK

I don't know, it's just ... you look... I can't quite put my finger on it...

NUSSBAUM

Are you a cop?

DEREK

A cop? Me? No, I just...

NUSSBAUM

(Visibly relieved) Oh, I remember. You must be that kid from the funeral home.

DEREK

I did grow up in a funeral home, but—how did you know that?

NUSSBAUM

Think back. We were kids. Your family was moving in as they were pulling me out – for the fifth time.

DEREK

Oh... Oh! You're that kid who didn't want to leave. They called you—Nussbaum. *(Looks NUSSBAUM up and down)* You've grown.

NUSSBAUM

Yes, I've grown. *(Looks DEREK up and down)* You, not so much.

(PRUDENCE comes out dressed in a clown outfit that's too big. SHE walks up behind DEREK and taps him on the shoulder. HE turns around and is absolutely terrified, scared out of his wits.)

DEREK

Aaah!

PRUDENCE

Aaah!

DEREK AND PRUDENCE

Aaah!

PRUDENCE

(Pulling her clown mask off and hitting DEREK on the arm) What's wrong with you?

DEREK

What's wrong with *me*! What's wrong with *you*? Why would you dress up like that?

PRUDENCE

What are you talking about? It's just a clown costume.

DEREK

Yeah...

PRUDENCE

A *clown* costume? Hello? What, are you afraid of clowns?

DEREK

Well, sure!

NUSSBAUM

(*Gloating*) Awkward...

PRUDENCE

Aw, is it because of all those horrible zombie clowns who attacked you when you were little?

DEREK

No. But clowns, they're just bloodthirsty, and ax murderers, and chainsaw serial killers—

PRUDENCE

Yeah, in the *movies*.

DEREK

Well, I don't like it, so take that outfit off!

PRUDENCE

Excuse me?

DEREK

I said, take it off!

PRUDENCE

I will not! And I've had about enough of you! First you procrastinate like crazy, then you make me practically drag you here, then you yell in my face, and now you're ordering me around! Who do you think you are?

DEREK

Wait, what?

PRUDENCE

I've been so nice, and you've been terrible! I'm not talking to you!

DEREK

Look, I'm sorry, really. I can't stand it when you're mad. There are lots of things I can take—*lots of things— (Motions at the clown costume)*—but when I see that unhappy face (*Touches her face*)—it's much worse than a serial killer clown.

PRUDENCE

(Feeling better, and in a more forgiving mood) Okay, I'm not mad any more—well, a little mad.

DEREK

And you'll change your costume?

PRUDENCE

All right, I'll change this costume if it means so much to you.

DEREK

(Hugely relieved) Thank you! *(Turns to NUSSBAUM)* Do you have anything else she can try?

NUSSBAUM

Well, I do have one idea... *(Turns his head to the back of the shop and shouts)* Albert!

DEREK

Albert?

NUSSBAUM

My assistant.

ALBERT

(Shouting from the back storeroom) Yes, Boss?

NUSSBAUM

Do we still have that dress out back? You haven't burned it yet?

ALBERT

(Again, shouting from the back storeroom) Not yet!

DEREK

Burned it?

NUSSBAUM

Yes, it was last year's model. But it's still in good shape. It's only been worn once, at a ceremony.

(NUSSBAUM exits for a second and returns with a wedding dress and veil. The dress looks ragged and dirty, as if it's been in a fight, with a big red stain on the front. HE holds it up proudly but again, purposely remains in profile.)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

Well, what do you think?

PRUDENCE

It's terrible! And it has a stain on it. Is that *blood*?

NUSSBAUM

No. I call it my "Bride of Dracula" dress. That's just—uh—stage blood. For effect.

PRUDENCE

Um... don't you have anything else?

NUSSBAUM

How about Barney, the purple dinosaur? I have three of those left.

PRUDENCE

No...

NUSSBAUM

(Holding up a mask of past presidents in each hand) How about President Bush or Barack Obama?

PRUDENCE

Never mind... *(Sighs and shrugs)* Okay, "Bride of Dracula" it is.

(PRUDENCE takes the dress and heads back to the dressing room.)

DEREK

(Looking through other costumes on the rack and speaking as he fumbles through the meager pickings) So you're that Nussbaum kid who wouldn't leave the funeral home...

NUSSBAUM

It wasn't a funeral home then, it was *my* home. The bank took it when they found my parents—or pieces of them.

DEREK

Pieces of them? That's horrible! What happened?

NUSSBAUM

Nothing. An accident. An explosion.

DEREK

Wow, I'm sorry to hear that. How did it happen?

NUSSBAUM

(Glares at DEREK) I told you. An accident.

DEREK

Well, at least you weren't hurt...

(NUSSBAUM steps into the light and for the first time turns to show the left side of his face.)

NUSSBAUM

Maybe you didn't see my *face*.

(As NUSSBAUM says "face," we hear ominous movie music playing: DUHN-DUHN-DUUUUUUHHHNN. HE and DEREK look up and around, as if to try to understand where the music came from.)

DEREK

(Confused, because NUSSBAUM's left profile looks just the same as his right) But—I don't get it. Your face looks fine. I don't see the problem.

NUSSBAUM

(Sarcastically) No, people never do. That's what they *pretend*. But they don't fool me! I know they find my disfiguration too horrible to take! I know! I know! *(Exits angrily through the back storeroom door, slamming it in the process.)*

(PRUDENCE enters from the dressing room. SHE is wearing the wedding dress. In spite of the shabbiness of the dress, SHE looks radiantly beautiful.)

PRUDENCE

Well? What do you think?

DEREK

Wow! You look fantastic! You're beautiful!

PRUDENCE

Sure, *now* you think I'm beautiful, when I'm dressed as a *monster*!

DEREK

No, really, you're—I don't know—*stunning*.

PRUDENCE

(Actually a bit flattered now, SHE turns to pose in a full-length mirror to the right of the counter.) You really think so?

DEREK

Definitely! It's eerie, but you're really unbelievably attractive, gorgeous, lovely, exquisite—beautiful!

PRUDENCE

(Looking in the mirror) I guess it's not *that* bad.

DEREK

Bad? It's great! You're the most stunning Bride of Dracula I've ever seen. In fact...

PRUDENCE

What?

DEREK

Marry me.

PRUDENCE

Excuse me?

DEREK

Marry me, Prudence. I just can't help myself—I love you! I'm mad about you. I'm addicted to you! In fact, I've got a great idea. Let's get married *tonight!*

PRUDENCE

(Backing up) On Halloween? Not bloody likely.

DEREK

But just think, it'd be so easy to remember our anniversary!

PRUDENCE

(Sarcastically) Now, why do I find that romantic?

DEREK

Does that mean it's a 'Yes'?

PRUDENCE

In your dreams! *(Steps closer and puts her hand on his face)* Darling, you're really wonderful, and funny, and adorable, and clever, and—

DEREK

And you love me? You're crazy about me? You get breathless when I walk into the room?

PRUDENCE

Now, wait a minute. If I ever *do* fall madly in love, I won't be one of those fawning women who faints at the sight of her man and sits by the phone all night hoping he'll call. I'll handle it with grace. Quiet dignity. Self-esteem. And for me, being in love will be amazing, phenomenal, earth-shattering!

DEREK

Yeah, but...

PRUDENCE

Besides, marriage is a huge step. And there are things a girl has to think about.

DEREK

Things like...?

PRUDENCE

Well, if you must know, I'm a little worried about your phobias.

DEREK

Phobias? I don't have any – oh, you mean the clown thing. But *everybody's* afraid of clowns.

PRUDENCE

I'm not afraid of clowns. Or costume stores, or Halloween, or coffins, or graves—

DEREK

OK, I get your point.

PRUDENCE

—or corpses, or funeral homes, or—

DEREK

OK! OK! I get it!

PRUDENCE

Can't we just keep things just as they are? I do love you, you know.

DEREK

Well, that's something, anyway. But I'm still going to keep asking!

PRUDENCE

So your feelings aren't hurt? You're okay to go to the masquerade party?

DEREK

(Cozying up to her) Lead on, McDuff!

PRUDENCE

And if we have time, let's stop to see your parents on the way. I know they'd enjoy seeing our costumes.

DEREK

Stop by to see my crazy parents at the funeral home *tonight*? On Halloween? No way!

PRUDENCE

See, that's what I'm talking about. Where's that strong courageous figure of man I know you can be? Come on, it'll be great. Besides, I think you have the greatest parents ever, really kooky and fun.

DEREK

I have the *strangest* parents ever! They're not just kooky, they're certifiably weird! I've seriously considered getting them committed!

PRUDENCE

What are you talking about? They're sweet, they're generous, they're kind, they're the salt of the earth! It'll be great! I always enjoy seeing how they've decorated for Halloween, and you know they adore me!

DEREK

Hey, here's an idea. How about if we go see *your* parents instead?

PRUDENCE

Oh no, they *hate* you. That's going to take more time than we've got tonight.

DEREK

Wait, what? They *hate* me?

PRUDENCE

(*Ignoring him, figuring things out*) No, if we're going to share this with family, it should be your family.

DEREK

They *hate* me?

PRUDENCE

Pay attention, Sweetheart, you're repeating yourself. (*Looks at her watch*) If we leave now, we'll have plenty of time.

DEREK

They *hate* me?

NUSSBAUM

(*Returning from the back stockroom*) Sorry, I got bored and drifted off. Did you want costumes or not?

DEREK

Oh, right! I almost forgot! We still need a costume for me! Do you have something appropriate that goes with the wedding dress?

NUSSBAUM

Oh, you mean like a bridesmaid dress. (*Looks him up and down*) Nope, sorry.

DEREK

No, I don't mean a bridesmaid dress! I mean something like a Count Dracula costume.

NUSSBAUM

Nope. Sorry. All out... Wait a minute— (*Shouts to the back stockroom*) Albert!

ALBERT

(*Shouting from the back storeroom*) Yes boss?

NUSSBAUM

Where's that zombie nurse's outfit?

ALBERT

It's back here!

DEREK

Thanks anyway, but I honestly don't want to go as a zombie nurse. White stockings with white shoes really creeps me out.

PRUDENCE

You know, I'm thinking you must have watched a *lot* of horror movies as a kid!

NUSSBAUM

It's not for the shoes and stockings. One second.

(*NUSSBAUM goes to the back storeroom and immediately returns with the outfit. HE pulls a nurse's cape out of the outfit. It's short, only waist length, but at least it's black with a red satin lining.*)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

Here. I can let you have the nurse's cape and some Dracula teeth. If you slick back your hair, put on a black suit, and talk with a Transylvanian accent, you'll make a passable Dracula.

DEREK

(*Putting on cape*) Good idea. (*Grabs a piece of the cape with his hand and swings his arm in front of him*) I think it will work. (*Speaking in Transylvanian accent*) I'll take it. (*Turns to PRUDENCE and speaks again in a Transylvanian accent*) I never drink—wine.

(*DEREK starts to kiss her neck, but PRUDENCE playfully pushes him away, laughing.*)

PRUDENCE

(*Playfully*) Stop it!

(*DEREK smiles, proud of himself, and walks to the register, taking out his wallet to pay. NUSSBAUM moves behind the register to handle the purchase.*)

PRUDENCE

(*Does a final twirl in her dress in front of the mirror, then turns to NUSSBAUM*) I think I'll just wear this dress home.

DEREK

(Talking over his shoulder as HE pays) Good idea.

(DEREK finishes paying and gathers up the costume and other clothes. HE turns to PRUDENCE.)

DEREK, *Continued*

Well, we're all set. We'll just go to my place, grab a bite to eat, and get me all duded up as Dracula. We can be at my parents' by eight. *(In Transylvanian accent to NUSSBAUM)* Sorry to rush, but we have to fly!

(DEREK puts his caped arm around PRUDENCE and together THEY head for the door.)

NUSSBAUM

Don't forget your fangs.

(NUSSBAUM walks over and hands fangs to DEREK and then walks the PAIR to the door. THEY exit to the double sound of the store bell as the door is opened and closed. NUSSBAUM returns to the counter, opens up a laptop computer and mumbles to himself as HE types.)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

Wellsley Funeral Home... Wellsley Funeral Home... Yes!

(NUSSBAUM presses ENTER and studies the screen. HE clicks on a link and looks at the screen again as ALBERT enters from the stockroom wearing a black rubber apron and long black rubber gloves.)

ALBERT

Boss, was that really a good idea, letting them have that dress? What if that guy suspects something?

NUSSBAUM

(Looks at the door) That idiot? Don't make me laugh. Since the first time I saw him, I knew he was a moron. I really *hate* that guy!

ALBERT

Why do you say that? I peeked from the back room, and he seems nice enough. And his girlfriend is pretty!

NUSSBAUM

He's got something I want.

ALBERT

Oh, right! Say no more, say no more, nudge-nudge, wink-wink.

NUSSBAUM

Not that! What are you, Monty Python?

ALBERT

Oh, sorry. *(Pauses, thinking)* But Boss, about the dress— it's evidence, you know. With the DNA from that blood, the police could put you away for life. Or worse!

NUSSBAUM

No, it's perfect. Instead of burning the dress and leaving charred evidence behind, we just recycled it. The cops will never connect a Halloween dress stuck in some closet somewhere with our body out back.

ALBERT

Why did you have to kill her—and on your wedding day? She was crazy about you! I don't know why you get so mad and out of control...

NUSSBAUM

Of course you do. Don't you remember? She laughed at my— *(Presents his left profile)* Face!

(Once again we hear ominous movie music playing: DUHN-DUHN-DUUUUUUHHNN. NUSSBAUM and ALBERT look up and around, again, as if to try to understand where the music came from.)

ALBERT

But Boss, I keep trying to tell you, there's nothing wrong with your... *(NUSSBAUM shoots HIM an angry glance.)* Uh... what I mean is... Did you have to go that far? It's so creepy to have another dead body in the back room, I can't take it! I think I'm going to upchuck.

NUSSBAUM

How did I know she was going to die? It's just my bad luck! I didn't mean to kill her. Why me? Everything happens to me! You'd think that just once, things would go great, but nooooo. I just can't catch a break!

ALBERT

Yeah, I see what you mean... You're unlucky enough to have a body you need to get rid of...

NUSSBAUM

Yeah, that's a problem... But I think I might have found a destination for it.

ALBERT

Really, where?

NUSSBAUM

The Wellsley Funeral Home.

ALBERT

Where's that?

NUSSBAUM

It's only a few blocks from here. In fact, my Aunt Sarah is over there right now, arranging for a funeral for my dear departed Uncle Clyde.

ALBERT

Your uncle? You didn't... You don't mean...

NUSSBAUM

No, *I* didn't kill him. That cretin managed to kill himself, sort of. Under some slightly suspicious circumstances. Don't ask.

ALBERT

Okay, but—what does that have to do with getting rid of your bride?

NUSSBAUM

(Closes the laptop lid) What do they have at funeral homes?

ALBERT

Flowers?

NUSSBAUM

No...

ALBERT

Coffins?

NUSSBAUM

No...

ALBERT

Mourners?

NUSSBAUM

No, you idiot. *Bodies*. Lots and lots of bodies. It's perfect.

ALBERT

But wouldn't they notice if an extra one turned up?

NUSSBAUM

Not if somebody worked there who could fix the paperwork. And the Wellsley Funeral Home is hiring.

ALBERT

How do you know that?

NUSSBAUM

It's googleable.

ALBERT

It's what?

NUSSBAUM

It's googleable.

ALBERT

Oh. And they're hiring—*what* are they hiring?

NUSSBAUM

A makeup artist.

ALBERT

But boss, you're not a makeup artist.

NUSSBAUM

Not me, lame-brain. *You*.

ALBERT

But I'm not a makeup artist either!

NUSSBAUM

You are now. Take off that apron, get rid of those gloves (*Helps him to do just that*) —and get going.

(*NUSSBAUM ushers ALBERT to the store's front door, opens it—we hear the store bell—and HE shoves ALBERT through it.*)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

Just fake it. Tell them you have dreams of being a makeup artist to the stars, and this is your first step.

(*NUSSBAUM slams the door as we hear the store bell again. LIGHTS OUT.*)

ACT I Scene 2

SETTING: The Reception Area of the Wellsley Funeral home. Like the outside, the interior presents as an old, spooky, Victorian-looking home that once saw better days. The Reception Area has a front door, a large desk in the middle of the room with chair opposite, a tufted red velvet couch, stairs going up to a second floor, built-in bookcases against the back wall and three sample coffins with flowers next to them, set up for display.

AT RISE: One of the two funeral co-directors, MR. JEREMY HYDE, a well-meaning and perpetually cheerful but somewhat clueless sort of man, is sitting behind the large desk, reading. HE hears a sound and peeks over the top of a big folder HE is holding in front of himself on the desk. (By chance, it hides what HE is wearing.) MRS. SARAH HIGGENBOTTOM, a woman from the deep South dressed in black mourning clothes, walks in. SHE crosses to the desk, offers her hand, and speaks to JEREMY in a southern accent—something like Carol Burnett's "Eunice" role on Mama's Family.

SARAH

Hello, I'm Sarah Higgenbottom, I believe you have my husband here. Are you the funeral director?

(JEREMY rises and extends his hand to shake. We see for the first time that HE is wearing a gorilla costume from the neck down.)

JEREMY

Co-director, actually. Jeremy Hyde is the name. My wife, Formalda, is the other co-director. We take care of your dear departed loved ones as a team.

SARAH

Pleased to meet you...

(SARAH shakes his hand, but seems confused, looking Jeremy's gorilla costume up and down.)

JEREMY

Oh, sorry, it's just that it's Halloween, and I forgot that I had one more client to see before we lock up for the day.

(JEREMY moves behind the desk, beckoning HER to be seated in the chair in front of the desk. SHE sits and HE follows suit.)

JEREMY, *Continued*

Now, let's get down to business, Mrs. Higgenbottom. Your family has sent over all the paperwork, and we have Mr. Higgenbottom of course, he's in the Restful Sleep Room, as we call it.

SARAH

The Restful Sleep Room?

JEREMY

Well, it's really the prep room, cold as a polar bear's nose, I can tell you, with bodies all laid out naked on slabs. (*Shudders*) We thought it would be good to give the room a nice name.

SARAH

That doesn't sound nice at all.

JEREMY

Oh, but it is! (*Pauses, as if to collect himself*) I'm sorry, I'm giving you the wrong impression entirely. This is really a wonderful place, with our own chapel, and the Restful Sleep Room, and this nice Reception Area... it's just the perfect place to come if you've kicked the bucket—uh—I mean—if you're recently passed. For example, when we do the makeup, my gosh, I'd say we take ten years off your face, at least! (*Pauses awkwardly*)—that is—what I mean is—we take such good care of our corpses here—um—I mean—our dear departed—uh—

SARAH

You're new at this, aren't you?

JEREMY

Oh no, I've been running the funeral home for years and years! It's just that my wife usually meets with customers... I mean... with the bereaved... (*Looking down at his paperwork*) Now, I just need a suit of clothes from you and a photograph. I don't suppose you have a picture of him sleeping? Or just unconscious would be fine. Maybe you took a picture of him passed out drunk, or—maybe after being hit over the head?

SARAH

Excuse me?

JEREMY

Or—I know! You know how sometimes people close their eyes when you take their picture with a flash? Maybe you have a picture like that.

SARAH

Why do you—

JEREMY

Well, you see, it's the makeup. When you're trying to get the face just right, it helps to have a photo. But when the eyes of the photo are just staring at you like that, it can really make you feel nervous, queasy even, and you actually want to throw up— then it's so hard to do your job, you see?

SARAH

I suppose so... I'll see what I can find... Anyway, I did bring over a suit and shoes. Sorry, it's a bit wrinkled...

(JEREMY takes the suit and holds it up. It's VERY wrinkled, as if on purpose.)

JEREMY

Okay! That should do the job... *(Puts the clothes off to one side)* Now, have you thought about the wording you wanted in his obituary? We can take care of that for you.

SARAH

(Taking a paper from her purse and handing it to JEREMY) Yes, I have it right here.

JEREMY

Let's see... "Mr. Clyde Higgenbottom was found dead in the back of his '97 Cadillac, apparently after suffering a heart attack while entertaining his shameless floozy of a secretary in the back parking lot of the local Piggly Wiggly..." *(Turns the page)* Hmmmm. *(Turns the page again)* I see... *(Looking up)* Hmmmm. Gee, that's... um... really graphic, very easy to visualize. You're a good writer, Mrs. Higgenbottom. Now, at \$10 a word, that comes to... let's see... *(Counting words with a pencil, then looking up again)* \$1,130 dollars.

SARAH

That much?

JEREMY

Yes, is that a problem?

SARAH

Well, let me make a few changes...

(SARAH takes the paper, scribbles furiously, pauses, scribbles some more, pauses again, scribbles one last time, and gives it back to JEREMY.)

JEREMY

OK, now we have, "Clyde Higgenbottom.... *(Reads, turns the page, reads, turns the page, reads, then looks up at her)* ...died." Clyde Higgenbottom died? That's it? Gee, Mrs. Higgenbottom, that's awfully short. In fact, I think there's a 7-word minimum for obituaries.

SARAH

Oh. In that case—

(SARAH takes the paper from him, scribbles again, and hands it back.)

JEREMY

(Reading) "Clyde Higgenbottom died. '97 Cadillac for sale." *(Looks up, brightening, problem solved)* That's *much* better!

SARAH

I also wanted to give you this envelope, to be buried with his body.

JEREMY

What's in it?

SARAH

Well, he kept telling me he worked so hard for his money, he wanted his half to be buried with him. It was in his will.

JEREMY

(Looking at the envelope) Gee, I don't think that's such a good idea, to be burying cash with the body....

SARAH

Oh, that's okay, I just wrote him a check.

JEREMY

Oh. Then that's all right.

(JEREMY checks off a couple of items on his to-do list and looks up.)

JEREMY, *Continued*

Well then, the only other thing we need to do is pick the music. Was there a particularly favorite piece of music you wanted to be played at the funeral?

SARAH

Well, he was really fond of classical music, so I thought maybe some heavy metal or rap...

JEREMY

Hmm. I don't think the heavy metal music would work. Maybe the rap though... You know, I've been working on a new funeral hymn, and this might be the perfect debut. Let me get back to you on that. Now let's see, the funeral services are set for tomorrow morning...

SARAH

No, tonight!

JEREMY

Tonight?

SARAH

Yes, the funeral services have to be tonight! It's stipulated in his will. If he doesn't get his funeral services exactly two days after his death, I'm cut right out of everything! Not only that, he said he'd come back and haunt me for the rest of my life. The dirty dog!

JEREMY

Oh. That's awfully short notice, but... Well, I suppose we could put something together tonight... *(Thinks for a minute, pacing back and forth.)* All right, we'll do it. Shall we say at nine o'clock? We'll have to charge overtime, though.

SARAH

(Rising to shake his hand) That's not a problem. Thank you so much, Mr. Hyde. You've been very kind.

JEREMY

Not at all. Here at the Wellsley Funeral Home we try our best to make the departure of your loved ones as painful—uh—as painless as possible. We'll see you here at nine tonight then.

SARAH

Yes... Goodbye...

(SARAH exits through the front door as FORMALDA HYDE enters from a back room. FORMALDA is a bit dotty and speaks with a strong New York accent. SHE is wearing the outfit of a French apache dancer: black skirt with a slit, tight striped blouse, red scarf around her neck, and black beret tilted to one side.)

FORMALDA

Jeremy, I'm all set! I'm sexual, I'm sensual, and I'm ready to dance! *(Looks at Jeremy's gorilla suit with surprise)* Why are you dressed like that? I thought you were going to match my costume.

JEREMY

You mean you wanted me to be a French Apache Dancer?

(HE pronounces it in the American way, UH-PA-CHE.)

FORMALDA

It's pronounced AH-PAHSH. And yes, I thought you were going to wear a beret, red scarf, striped shirt, maybe a mustache...

JEREMY

That's not scary at all, why would I want to do that?

FORMALDA

For the romance of it! Halloween can be romantic too, you know!

JEREMY

Romantic? What are you talking about?

FORMALDA

I'm talking about when we first met, Dummy. Remember Par-ee? The Sacre-Coeur at twilight? Doesn't it ring a bell? We're not *that* old!

JEREMY

Of course I remember, you sweet thing. It was endearing, romantic, thoroughly enchanting! I don't think anyone ever had a more memorable visit to the City by the Bay! I remember when we went to that sidewalk cafe...

FORMALDA

And you ordered our food to go!

JEREMY

Yeah, but that was just so we could eat on the famous Steps of Montmartre! We had escargot, remember?

FORMALDA

I remember you forgot to tell me escargot means snails...

JEREMY

But that was the day I gave you my heart!

FORMALDA

That was the day you promised to call me, but you never did. If I hadn't chased you down at the morticians convention—

JEREMY

But it was a lovely convention, don't you think?

FORMALDA

Yes...

JEREMY

(Taking her in his arms) And it was romantic, wouldn't you agree?

FORMALDA

Well...

JEREMY

(Stepping back and giving her a deep bow) Bonjour, Mademoiselle. Je suis enchantée de faire votre connaissance.

FORMALDA

(Giving him a curtsy and speaking in really bad French) En-chanty!

JEREMY

Puis-je d'ancer avec toi?

FORMALDA

Da-core! Da-core! Meer-cee bow-coo, mon-sewer!

(JEREMY starts humming and they waltz around the room. Then FORMALDA remembers something.)

FORMALDA, *Continued*

By the way, who was that leaving as I came in?

JEREMY

Oh, that was just a grieving widow, Mrs. Higgenbottom. I took care of everything.

FORMALDA

Now, why did you do that? You know you have all the tact of—a gorilla. We agreed that *I* would handle all the *bereaved* and *you* would handle all the *deceased*.

JEREMY

Yeah, but—

FORMALDA

I take care of the *inconsolable*, and *you* take care of the un-revivable.

JEREMY

Sure, but—

FORMALDA

I calm the old *biddies*, and *you* embalm the old *bodies*!

JEREMY

I know, but—

FORMALDA

I manage the *miserable*, and *you*—

JEREMY

I got it!

FORMALDA

(Patronizingly, putting her hand on his shoulder) Darling, it's simple division of labor. I do what *I'm* good at, and *you* — do everything else.

JEREMY

Yes, yes! But honestly, I think I did a good job with that lady. I walked her through all the details of the funeral, and she was very happy! Well, maybe a little angry... (*Looks in the direction of the door where Mrs. Higgenbottom exited*) But that's one of the Seven Steps of Grief, I think. Number three, isn't it?

FORMALDA

Yes, number three, Anger & Bargaining, it comes right after Pain & Guilt.

JEREMY

And besides, I'd really like to get out of that back room with all those bodies. If I have to prep one more corpse back there, all by myself, I think I'll go crazy!

FORMALDA

But weren't you going to hire some help? How's your search for a makeup artist going?

JEREMY

Not great. You'd be surprised how few people want to work with dead bodies for a living. I just can't understand it. Our medical benefits are great—and we throw in free funeral services in case the medical doesn't work out.

FORMALDA

Don't worry, Dear, someone will come to interview for the job soon.

(*JEREMY turns to see ALBERT coming tentatively into the room.*)

ALBERT

Hello, excuse me?

FORMALDA

Oh, hello. May I help you?

ALBERT

Sorry, the door was open and I didn't know if it was okay to just come in. I'm here about the makeup artist job.

FORMALDA

Oh, yes! Please come in!

JEREMY

Yes, yes! Come right in! I'm Jeremy Hyde... (*Shakes hands with ALBERT*) ...and this is my wife and funeral co-director, Mrs. Hyde. (*ALBERT shakes hands with FORMALDA.*) But you can just call us Jeremy and Formalda. Have a seat. Your name again was—? (*Sits down behind the desk*)

ALBERT

Alb—uh—Al-oysius. Aloysius Smith. But you can just call me Al. I'm pleased to meet you. *(Takes a seat)* I'm really glad you could see me on such short notice, what with this being Halloween and all.

JEREMY

Think nothing of it. We weren't busy just now, only talking about bodies and corpses and — well, you know, Halloween things. We just love Halloween, don't we Pumpkin?

FORMALDA

Oh yes, we love Halloween! We look forward to it every year!

ALBERT

This is a great house for it—uh, Jeremy, Formalda. I love all those spooky decorations you put up outside. The gravestones with R.I.P on them, the jack-o-lanterns, the spiders, the cobwebs, that witch on a broom plastered all over that tree in the front...

JEREMY

Yep, the neighbors keep complaining, but we just keep adding more decorations every year! And that's not all. *(Conspiratorially)* We have real ghosts, you know.

ALBERT

Real ghosts?

FORMALDA

Oh, yes, real live ghosts! *(Pausing to consider)* I mean, real *dead* ghosts...

JEREMY

Let me tell it, Dear.

FORMALDA

No, *I* want to tell it. You told it last time.

JEREMY

But I tell it *better*.

FORMALDA

Excuse me?

JEREMY

(Standing, moving closer to FORMALDA; ALBERT remains seated.) Oh no, I mean, *you* tell it better. Definitely you. *You* should tell it.

FORMALDA

(Grumpily) No, that's okay, *you* tell it.

JEREMY

No, I insist, Darling, *you* should tell it.

FORMALDA

No Darling, *you* tell it. I'll just listen.

JEREMY

(Doubtful, but willing to take a chance) OK... but don't interrupt! *(Talking in a more sinister, conspiratorial voice)* You see, there are two of them, a man and a woman...

FORMALDA

(Interrupting) Really scary-looking!

JEREMY

(Looks at FORMALDA reproachfully, slightly annoyed that she interrupted already) ...and they have fangs down to here, and they look really mean...

FORMALDA

(Interrupting again) And their eyes are all bloodshot and red!

JEREMY

(Glances reproachfully at FORMALDA again, then continues) Right. And they have wild, fly-away hair, and the way they stare at you...

FORMALDA

Trust me, you'd never believe they're even dead!

JEREMY

Except that they're all covered with dust, and the stench—

FORMALDA

Well, it's just what you'd guess that cadavers might smell like—

JEREMY

Like something died, and then crawled under the couch—

FORMALDA

--or imagine an old rusty lunch box, full of moldy old half-eaten spaghetti and meatballs—

JEREMY

--and they make these blood-curdling sounds—

FORMALDA

Awful noises, really. If you ask me, I think they're just rude!

JEREMY

And they don't *walk* into a room, they sort of — glide—

FORMALDA

And they're all wet and clammy—

JEREMY

And when they float down the stairs, they can look for all the world—

FORMALDA

—like some scary corpse that somebody exhumed, then dragged behind a pickup truck for a couple of miles!

JEREMY

Right, and they have this horrible breath, it really can make you gag!

FORMALDA

You might even lose your lunch!

JEREMY

But, you know, for all of that, they're still good for some grins—

FORMALDA

Better than watching a horror movie in an old gothic church!

JEREMY

—and we're not really scared, actually, it's more like we're—

FORMALDA

Thrilled! It's about as thrilling as you can get!

JEREMY

Sometimes we even invite our friends to come over—

FORMALDA

—just to see if they'll show up, looking all—dead—but alive—

JEREMY

It's pretty spooky!

FORMALDA

It makes your blood drain!

JEREMY

(*Looking suspiciously at ALBERT*) You're probably thinking we just made all this up!

ALBERT

No, not at all.

FORMALDA

It's true, every word of it!

JEREMY

(Putting his arm around ALBERT) I tell you, Al, it's way better than watching TV!

FORMALDA

No commercials!

ALBERT

But why are they here in a funeral home? Were they murdered or something? Or— I know! They were brought here to be buried, but then they weren't really dead, and they got buried alive!

FORMALDA

Oh no, it was nothing like that.

JEREMY

(Speaking with a lower voice, conspiratorially) It was over 20 years ago. Right at midnight, on Halloween in fact. At the time, this was a private residence owned by a wealthy couple with a rather *strange* little boy. It seems the boy was always getting into mischief.

FORMALDA

But unfortunately, his parents made the mistake of buying him a chemistry set.

JEREMY

We're guessing he must have added a few extra chemicals, 'cause he managed to blow up both his parents with one gigantic ka-boom!

FORMALDA

And they've been haunting this mansion ever since!

ALBERT

That sounds pretty creepy...

JEREMY

Yep, it makes Halloween even more special, somehow. That's why we keep adding more Halloween decorations. In fact, this year we even added a special doorbell to greet the trick-or-treaters.

(Suddenly a loud scream fills the room.)

ALBERT

(Almost jumping out of his skin) What in the world!

JEREMY

Ah, yes! There's our special doorbell now!

ALBERT

Your doorbell is a terrified scream?

JEREMY

Wonderful, isn't it? I think that means our first trick-or-treaters are here—come for their treats! Pumpkin, where did you put that basket of candy?

FORMALDA

(Grabs the basket from a side table near the front door; hands it to JEREMY) Here it is!

JEREMY

Come on, we'll put on a brave face for the horrible little monsters at the door!
(From the side table, JEREMY grabs the gorilla mask for himself and a monster mask for ALBERT as HE directs him to the front door. THEY put on their masks and JEREMY opens the door to a group of TRICK-OR-TREATERS who begin to sing.)

TRICK-OR-TREATERS

C Dm C F C Dm F

Trick or Treat, Smell my feet, Give me Some-thing good to eat I don't want some lun-cheon meat,

c Am F G⁷ C Dm C F C

Make it choc-late-y and sweet, Trick or Treat, Can you beat sweets I got from down the street

Dm F C Am G⁷ C

I am feel - ing in - com - plete, Give me some-thing good to eat

JEREMY

(Hands out candy to the CHILDREN, while complimenting THEM) Very scary! Nice costume! Good song! *(Closes the front door, puts the candy on a side table, turns to ALBERT)* Shall we continue?

ALBERT

What?

JEREMY

I said, shall we continue?

ALBERT

What?

JEREMY

(Taking off his mask) Sorry, is this better?

ALBERT

Yes, that's better.

JEREMY

What?

ALBERT

I said, "Yes, that's better."

JEREMY

What?

ALBERT

(Taking off his mask) I said—

JEREMY

Oh, I know what you said, I was just kidding you. Ha-ha! So, back to business.

(JEREMY and ALBERT return to their previous seated positions at desk and chair.)

JEREMY, *Continued*

Now, tell me, how much experience have you had as a makeup artist?

ALBERT

I'll be honest, Mr. Hyde—uh—Jeremy. Not much. But I'm a really quick learner, I pick up things real fast, and I'll work really hard.

JEREMY

But why would you want a job like this? Some people would have a problem working in a funeral home.

ALBERT

Well, it's a sort of a first step. You see, um... I have a dream. I have a dream that someday I'll become a Makeup Artist to the Stars.

(ALBERT looks and gestures up, as if addressing the stars in the sky.)

JEREMY

Well, that's wonderful. Everybody should have a dream. Look at us. My wife and I had a dream to be funeral directors since we first met at a romantic mortician's convention in Paris. People laughed. People scoffed at the very idea. People slammed doors in our faces! They told us we were crazy!

FORMALDA

Told us we were crazy!

JEREMY

And *now* look at us.

FORMALDA

Now look at us.

JEREMY

We're not crazy, no siree, not a bit. *(Leans over to shake his finger at ALBERT)* And don't you let anybody get in the way of your dream, young man. You just chase that dream no matter what! There's nothing you can't be if you just believe in yourself. And if people challenge your dreams, just hang in there. Be persistent. You can do anything, so long as you keep pursuing your vision.

ALBERT

I'll do it, sir!

JEREMY

(Putting his arm around ALBERT) Al, I admire your passion. Even without experience, it'll take you far! You're hired!

(THEY shake hands.)

FORMALDA

Isn't that nice. Now we're one big happy family.

JEREMY

When can you start?

ALBERT

Right away. Right now, if you like.

JEREMY

Now that's what I call ambition! Certainly you can start right now. No time like the present, I always say!

FORMALDA

No time like the present! I could just scream with delight!

(Suddenly the doorbell scream sounds again, clearly startling ALBERT, while JEREMY and FORMALDA seem unaffected.)

JEREMY

More trick-or-treaters! Come on, Al, let's do the honors!

(THEY put on their masks and JEREMY opens the front door to the next group of singing trick-or-treaters.)

TRICK-OR-TREATERS

(Singing as before)

TRICK OR TREAT, SMELL MY FEET
GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT
I DON'T WANT SOME LUNCHEON MEAT
MAKE IT CHOCOLATE-Y AND SWEET

TRICK OR TREAT, TRY TO BEAT
SWEETS I GOT FROM DOWN THE STREET
I AM FEELING INCOMPLETE
GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT

JEREMY

(Hands out candy to the group, once again passing out compliments) Very scary! Nice costume! Good song! Hello, what's this?

(DEREK and PRUDENCE appear, having walked up behind the trick-or-treaters. PRUDENCE has frizzed hair and fangs and a bit of fake blood as if it were dripping from her fangs. DEREK is dressed with a dark suit and cape as Dracula, also with fangs and fake blood below his mouth, and with slicked-back hair.)

DEREK

Hello, Dad!

(The CHILDREN exit as DEREK gives JEREMY a hug. JEREMY is still wearing his mask. DEREK pulls the mask off of JEREMY's face.)

DEREK, *Continued*

That is you, isn't it Dad?

JEREMY

It's me, alive and kicking! *(Looking DEREK up and down)* But you seem to be undead! Were you attacked by vampires on the way over? *(Turns to PRUDENCE)* And here's Prudence! *(Shouting over his shoulder to FORMALDA)* Pumpkin, Derek and Prudence are here!

FORMALDA

(Joining OTHERS) Well, isn't that nice? Come in, come in!

PRUDENCE

(Waves to both, a bit shy.) Hello Mr. Hyde, Mrs. Hyde. Excuse my costume, I'm the Bride of Dracula tonight.

JEREMY

And a beautiful bride you are—but we told you before, it's Jeremy and Formalda, not Mr. and Mrs. Hyde.

DEREK

Actually, I have a better idea. How about if she calls you Mom and Dad?

FORMALDA

Of course, she could—oh—you mean...

JEREMY

(Turning to DEREK) You asked her?

FORMALDA

And she actually said "Yes"?

DEREK

(Resignedly) Well, no... Actually, she turned me down. *(With resolve)* But I'm not giving up!

JEREMY

That's my boy! Perseverance! Chase that dream!

FORMALDA

Way to go, Prudence, you go girl!

DEREK

Mom! What are you saying?

FORMALDA

(Puts her arm around PRUDENCE) I'm just saying don't settle for second best! Right, dear?

DEREK

Wait, what?

JEREMY

Oh, we're being very rude. We're completely ignoring Mr. Smith. *(Turning to ALBERT)* Al, get over here. Al is our new makeup artist, just hired. Al, meet my son, Derek, and his beloved Prudence.

ALBERT

Glad to meet you. Oh—sorry... *(Takes off his mask)* Happy Halloween!

DEREK

Don't get me started! *(Looking closely at ALBERT)* You sound familiar. Have we met?

ALBERT

No, no. Sure of it.

DEREK

Well, probably not. *(Looking around)* Are you sure you want to work in this creepy place? *(Leans toward ALBERT, conspiratorially)* Have they told you about the ghosts that haunt this place? Legend has it that two parents who died in this house are looking for their little boy who killed them.

FORMALDA

(Oblivious to her own delight in telling the tale) Now, Derek, don't you go boring our new employee with outlandish ghost stories!

DEREK

(Slightly dejected) Sorry, Mom. *(Turning to ALBERT)* You'll love it here. You couldn't find better bosses than my dad and mom. There's nobody in the world who knows more about bodies, and they really *love* their work!

JEREMY

(Missing the irony) Don't you listen to him, Al, he's just being a proud son.

DEREK

Well, we should be off. We have a costume party to go to.

FORMALDA

Will you come back after?

DEREK

Sure, if it's not too late.

PRUDENCE

Yes, we'd love to.

(PRUDENCE and DEREK go to the front door and open it. DEREK grabs his cape and half covers his face with it as he speaks in a Transylvanian accent.)

DEREK

I have to take my beauty to meet the other boos and ghouls!

PRUDENCE

Bye!

(THEY exit.)

FORMALDA

I like her! She has a good head on her shoulders.

JEREMY

Well, sure, but, poor Derek...

FORMALDA

(Changing the subject) Aren't you going to show Al around?

JEREMY

(Brightening, turning to ALBERT) What do you think, Al? If you'd like to get started, I can show you a thing or two.

ALBERT

Sure, I'm really interested.

JEREMY

OK.

(JEREMY starts to walk bent over, with a limp, and as if he had a withered arm. HE speaks in a voice like Boris Karloff as he gestures for ALBERT to follow him.)

JEREMY, *Continued*

Come right this way, to our Restful Sleep Room.

(ALBERT looks at him, curious, and they both exit to the Prep Room as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

ACT I
Scene 3

SETTING: Inside the Restful Sleep Room. This is the prep room for bodies, with coffins, stainless steel cabinet/bookcases with all sorts of colored bottles, and several stainless steel slabs covered with sheets. On one of the slabs rests the very dead body of MR. CLYDE HIGGENBOTTOM, wearing a hospital gown.

AT RISE: JEREMY and ALBERT walk into the room with JEREMY carrying the suit of clothes and shoes given to him by Mrs. Higgenbottom. THEY walk to opposite sides of the body and look down.

JEREMY

This is Mr. Higgenbottom. He died of a heart attack after certain over-strenuous activities, if you know what I mean, nudge-nudge, wink-wink.

ALBERT

Gee, he looks really dead.

JEREMY

Yep, dead, dead, dead. Just like that “Dead Parrot” skit from Monte Python. He's deceased. He's bought the farm. He is no more. He has ceased to be. He's expired and gone to meet his maker.

ALBERT

He's a stiff! He's history! Bereft of life, he rests in peace!

JEREMY

He's pushing up the daisies! Dead as a doornail! He is without metabolic processes! He's pulse-less!

ALBERT

He's kicked the bucket, he's shuffled off his mortal coil, he's run down the curtain, he's joined the flippin' choir invisible!

JEREMY and ALBERT

(Together, both indicating the body with a flourish of the hand) This— is an ex-person!

(THEY both laugh.)

JEREMY

Al, you have a great sense of humor! I'm glad you decided to join us.

ALBERT

Thanks, Jeremy. It's good to be here.

JEREMY

Now, to business. First we need to get some clothes on this stiff. Now where did I put the scissors?

ALBERT

Scissors?

JEREMY

(Puts the clothes and shoes down on a slab; finds scissors in a cabinet) Ah, here we are. Now what you have to do is take this suit of clothes... *(Grabs and holds up the wrinkled suit)* ...and cut it straight down the back, shirt and all.

ALBERT

Cut a perfectly good suit of clothes down the back? But why?

JEREMY

Oh, we always do that. It's to make the suit easier to put on. Rigor mortis, you know. People viewing the body don't know—it's not like they're going to turn the body over in the coffin or anything. What a shock they'd get, right? *(Nudges ALBERT)* And Mr. Higgenbottom for *sure* won't know.

ALBERT

(Taking the suit and scissors) Okay...

JEREMY

After you've cut the suit, just dress Mr. Higgenbottom, and you'll be all set to do your first makeup job. While you're doing that, I have to get ready for a last-minute funeral ceremony. By the way, you'll be able to join us for that, won't you? It's at nine o'clock. We're trying out a new Funeral Hymn I wrote, and it would be great if you could join in.

ALBERT

Sure, I'd be happy to.

JEREMY

Super. *(Heads for the door, opens it; offers one last thought)* ...And while you're dressing Mr. Higgenbottom, if you get queasy, just sit down and put your head between your legs. *(Exits)*

(ALBERT, now alone, starts talking to himself as HE begins cutting the suit of clothes up the back.)

ALBERT

Oh, man, what have I gotten myself into. *(Looking down at MR. HIGGENBOTTOM)* You're lucky, you've left all your worldly cares behind you. Just a peaceful, sleeping old guy... *(Looks more closely at MR. HIGGENBOTTOM's face)* ...with a strangely happy smile on your face! *(Shudders)* Brrrr! *(Returns to cutting the suit.)* And this! Making a big cut right

ALBERT, *Continued*

down the back of his clothes! Who would have thought? This is the worst! When I think of all the bodies that have come through this funeral home, all with backless suits!

(Finished with the cutting, ALBERT starts gingerly putting the clothes on MR. HIGGEN-BOTTOM. HE talks to the corpse as HE dresses him.)

ALBERT, *Continued*

You'll look really spiffy, Mr. Corpse, all dressed up—with no place to go. First the pants... *(Struggles; puts the pants on the corpse)* Now give me your arm... *(MR. HIGGENBOTTOM moves his arm in a reflexive jerk)* No, the other arm.

(ALBERT suddenly jumps back, horrified that the body has moved.)

ALBERT, *Continued*

Yow! What the— *(Moves closer, peering down at the body; leans down and yells in his ear.)*
HELLO!

(Satisfied that the body is really dead, HE continues putting on the backless clothes, tucking the cut part beneath the body.)

ALBERT, *Continued*

Let me just get this tie over your head... *(Slips the tie over the head)* And now your belt... *(Slips the belt under the waist and buckles it in front)* There, that should do it. I do feel like I'm going to throw up, though... *(Moves to a chair off to one side and continues ruminating)* I can just imagine bodies, crawling up out of the ground, shuffling to the back door, fumbling with the door knob, filing in one-by-one, and doing a weird, macabre dance, right here in the Restful Sleep Room! Oh, man, I really do feel queasy!

(ALBERT puts his head between his legs. Just at this point, the doorbell scream sounds again, and we hear HALLOWEENERS outside the front door singing the TRICK OR TREAT song as the scene end.)

TRICK-OR-TREATERS

(Singing offstage)

TRICK OR TREAT, SMELL MY FEET
GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT
I DON'T WANT SOME LUNCHEON MEAT
MAKE IT CHOCOLATE-Y AND SWEET

TRICK OR TREAT, TRY TO BEAT
SWEETS I GOT FROM DOWN THE STREET
I AM FEELING INCOMPLETE
GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT

(LIGHTS FADE OUT. OPTIONAL INTERMISSION.)

ACT II

Scene 1

SETTING: It's 9 pm inside the chapel of the Wellsley Funeral Home. A large organ is on one side of the room, and above the organ is a large stained glass window. On the other side of the room, a buffet table with a white linen tablecloth offers after-funeral refreshments. In the middle of the room we see the backs of chairs set up in rows, facing a raised platform area placed against the back of the stage where a large coffin lies open. Stands of flowers are positioned to the left and right of the coffin. To one side is a podium.

AT RISE: FORMALDA is playing a funeral tune on the large organ. Several FUNERAL ATTENDEES are seated in the rows of chairs, with their backs to us. In the coffin is the very dead MR. HIGGENBOTTOM in his wrinkled suit, lying in state. JEREMY is standing behind the podium.

JEREMY

And in conclusion, we pray that Mr. Higgenbottom might slumber in eternal peace, listening to the harps of angels, God rest his soul. *(Sighs)* And now, we'd like to hear from his lovely wife. *(Leans over the podium to address MRS. SARAH HIGGENBOTTOM)* Mrs. Higgenbottom, could you please come to the podium to say a few last words?

(SARAH, wearing a black dress, black hat and veil, SHE rises from her seat in the first row of chairs and moves to the podium as JEREMY steps to one side. SHE lifts her veil onto her hat and addresses the GROUP.)

SARAH

Well, where should I start to talk about this amazing man? Maybe I should start at the moment he died, in the back parking lot of the local Piggly-Wiggly. He must have been surprised, that's all I can say. How could he know that he'd get his just deserts so quickly? I mean, sometimes it takes *years* of philandering before a lying dog of a husband gets the big kick in the butt for doing what he shouldn't be doing. But not my Higgy. He got his come-uppings just a week after hiring that mangy she-cat of a secretary, right in the middle of committing shameless infidelity in the back seat—

JEREMY

(Interrupting) OK, OK, that's all right, Mrs. Higgenbottom, very nice eulogy, I'm sure Mr. Higgenbottom is deeply touched— *(Looks down at the body)* wherever he is— *(Brightens)* Now, this concludes our funeral service for Mr. Higgenbottom, and we have some refreshments for you over here at the buffet table, if you'll just come this way.

(ALL start making their way to the buffet table. JEREMY steps down from the platform as ALBERT rises from his seat in the first row. JEREMY puts his arm around ALBERT's shoulder as they walk to the front of the stage.)

JEREMY

Al, you did a great job dressing Mr. Higgenbottom. And your first makeup job wasn't bad either. Maybe just a little less lipstick and rouge next time, we don't want our clients looking like old wrinkled street walkers, you know!

ALBERT

Thanks, Jeremy, I'll try to do better next time. I actually started to get into it— Well, at least I did after Mr. Higgenbottom stopped jerking around—

(HE is interrupted by the sound of the doorbell scream, which startles most of the PEOPLE in the room.)

JEREMY

Ah, that must be more trick-or-treaters. If you wouldn't mind, Al, could you take care of it? The basket of candy is right by the door. I'll stay here with our guests.

ALBERT

Sure thing, Jeremy.

(ALBERT heads towards the Reception Area.)

JEREMY

(Calling after him) —And no snacking on the candy, that's for the kids!

(JEREMY turns back to the OTHERS as ALBERT exits.)

JEREMY

(Addressing the GUESTS) And if you will all join us in the next room, my lovely wife has prepared an inviting table of delicious Halloween treats for your enjoyment.

FORMALDA

How delightful for us to be able to combine our two favorite events; funerals and Halloween.

JEREMY

Right you are, Pumpkin.

FORMALDA

If you will follow me, through this door.

(JEREMY, FORMALDA and the funeral GUESTS exit as LIGHTS FADE OUT ON CHAPEL.)

ACT II Scene 2

SETTING: The reception area of the Wellsley Funeral Home.

AT RISE: ALBERT grabs the basket of candy, and happily opens the door to the sound of trick-or-treaters singing.

TRICK-OR-TREATERS

(Singing as before)

TRICK OR TREAT, SMELL MY FEET
GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT
I DON'T WANT SOME LUNCHEON MEAT
MAKE IT CHOCOLATE-Y AND SWEET

TRICK OR TREAT—

(While the TRICK-OR-TREATERS are singing, NUSSBAUM, dressed as a clown, complete with big shoes and clown mask, suddenly steps past THEM and walks into the room, reaching for the entire basket of candy.)

NUSSBAUM

Here, give me that.

(NUSSBAUM grabs the candy basket from ALBERT, throws it out the door, and slams the door in the faces of the TRICK-OR-TREATERS—which immediately stops their singing. We hear a loud sound as a disgruntled TRICK-OR-TREATER gives the door an angry kick. NUSSBAUM turns to ALBERT, who is completely surprised by all this.)

ALBERT

(Backing up) What the heck— *(Recovering; sees it's only his boss)* Oh, Boss, you really gave me a scare! Why are you dressed like that?

NUSSBAUM

It's the only costume we had left, remember? Unless you want me to walk around as a cape-less zombie nurse!

ALBERT

But why wear a costume at all?

NUSSBAUM

To blend in, of course. What better excuse to be wandering around at night with a body slung over my shoulder?

ALBERT

You mean you were walking around outside carrying the *body*?

NUSSBAUM

Sure, nobody suspected a thing, with this outfit. They were even giving me candy for *her* to eat. As if! (*Laughs*) Oh, by the way, here's my haul. Hope you're hungry. (*Hands ALBERT a big Halloween bag filled with candy*)

ALBERT

You mean—you actually stopped to do some trick-or-treating?

NUSSBAUM

I was trying to blend in, Dummy. Pay attention!

ALBERT

But where's the body?

NUSSBAUM

Oh yeah, the body. Hang on, I'll bring her in.

(*NUSSBAUM opens the door again, steps out, hoists the BODY, wrapped in a sheet, up onto his shoulder, steps back in again, and dumps the BODY on the reception desk. We can see her legs dangling off the end of the desk. Then, one hand on hip, the other hand scratching the back of his head, HE looks around.*)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

Now, where do we put her? Are there sliding body drawers or something around here?

ALBERT

Sure, Boss, but I haven't had a chance to do anything about paperwork yet. And besides... I'm really not sure this is going to work. Somehow, I don't think the owners are likely to just conveniently forget how many bodies they're really supposed to have—

NUSSBAUM

(*Ignoring him, completely distracted by a flood of memories of his early life in this house*) My home! I can't believe I've come back home at last!

ALBERT

Your home?

NUSSBAUM

Well, it *used* to be my home.

ALBERT

You used to live *here*?

NUSSBAUM

(Walking around, looking at everything with nostalgia) Yep, I was born in this house, and spent many happy years of my childhood here.

ALBERT

I didn't know that. *(Thinking)* Then when you sent me over here to get a job...

NUSSBAUM

(Interrupting) My home. Amazing, the memories this brings back! Over there is where I clamped a kid's head in a vise. I told him he was too broad-minded! *(Laughs)* And over here is where I used to play with my whips and knives... *(Moving around the room as he speaks)* And here's where I started a campfire, playing Cowboys and Indians! Ah, the sweet nostalgia! *(His mood darkens.)* It was great until I blew up my parents with my chemistry set!

ALBERT

You—blew up your—?

NUSSBAUM

(Turning sharply towards ALBERT) It was an accident!

ALBERT

Wait a minute, I heard about that story earlier today from the funeral directors.

NUSSBAUM

(Suspicious) You heard what?

ALBERT

I heard that there was an explosion, and the parents were killed. But there's more! They told me the dead parents are still here, in this house, haunting it. Apparently they're waiting for you to return.

NUSSBAUM

I always knew they loved me. Well, they don't have to wait any longer. I'm here.

ALBERT

How did it happen?

NUSSBAUM

Well, you mix a fractional distillate of petroleum fuel oil with a whole lot of porous prilled ammonium nitrate, and then you—

ALBERT

No, no, I mean, how did you manage to blow up your *parents* with the explosion?

NUSSBAUM

I *told* you. Accidentally! Try to keep up, will you?

ALBERT

Oh. (*Thinking a moment*) Say, does this have anything to do with you always talking about your disfigured face?

NUSSBAUM

You mean—*this*?

(*As he says “this,” he presents his left profile and we hear ominous movie music playing: DUHN-DUHN-DUUUUUHHHNN. NUSSBAUM and ALBERT once again look up and around, wondering where the music came from.*)

ALBERT

But Boss, I keep trying to tell you, there's nothing wrong with your face!

NUSSBAUM

So *you* say!

ALBERT

Ask anybody! You have a wonderful face, a magnificent face, a superb face! It takes my breath away!

NUSSBAUM

Well, I'm glad you're all breathless, but you can't fool me. I know you're just trying to talk me out of what I know to be true. Nice try, though.

ALBERT

(*Thinking for moment, snaps his fingers*) Hey Boss, I've got a great idea. Since I'm learning all about how to apply makeup to make people look great, maybe I could use my new skills on you. I could just borrow the makeup kit, and—

NUSSBAUM

Yeah, right! In your dreams, Doofus!

(*Suddenly, there's a bang on the door and we hear the muffled voices of DEREK and PRUDENCE outside the door.*)

PRUDENCE

(*From the other side of the door*) Darling, why don't you just ring the doorbell?

DEREK

Because I don't want to set off that darned scream that my crazy parents set up! (*Bangs on the door again*)

NUSSBAUM

(Looking around desperately, talking in a loud, hoarse whisper) Quick! Turn off the lights! Where can I hide this body?

ALBERT

Uh... *(Anxiously scans the room; points to the closest of the display coffins; whispers loudly)* In here!

(ALBERT turns off the lights, then runs over to the coffin and opens the lid for NUSSBAUM, who rushes over to the desk, hoists the BODY onto his shoulder, moves to the coffin, and starts putting the BODY inside. We hear the muffled voices of PRUDENCE and DEREK again.)

PRUDENCE

Don't you have a key? I thought you kept a key to this place.

DEREK

Yeah, I've got one here somewhere, hang on a second... Could you hold that jack-o-lantern up close to the keyhole for me?

ALBERT

(Whispering) Hurry, Boss!

NUSSBAUM

(Whispering) Hang on, I've almost got her in... There! *(THEY close the lid.)* Quick! Behind the coffin!

(ALBERT and NUSSBAUM quickly hide behind the coffin.)

DEREK

(Still talking from outside the front door) I can't believe you insisted on changing costumes. I hate this costume. I feel really silly!

PRUDENCE

Well, what else could we do? After thinking about it, I certainly wasn't going to wear that Bride of Dracula wedding dress with a big blood stain – portraying women as victims! This is the twenty-first century, after all. We're more evolved than that.

DEREK

Yeah, but – really? I mean, *really?* Look at me!

PRUDENCE

I can't see you that well in the dark. As soon as you get the door open, I'll take a better look.

DEREK

OK, wait, I got it.

(DEREK and PRUDENCE come in the front door.)

PRUDENCE

I'll get the lights.

(PRUDENCE steps inside and switches on the lights revealing DEREK dressed in the Bride of Dracula wedding dress, but with his own shoes and black socks. PRUDENCE is wearing Derek's Dracula costume, clearly too big for her. PRUDENCE gives DEREK an appraising up-and-down look.)

PRUDENCE, *Continued*

Oh, now, see, I think you look just adorable!

DEREK

(Looking down at his wedding dress) Yeah, right! Just the compliment I needed! Now I feel like a victim!

PRUDENCE

Aren't you going to say something nice about my costume?

DEREK

Oh, yes, very nice, you look *exactly* like Dracula!

PRUDENCE

Thank you, Darling! (Looking around) Gee, I wonder why the lights were off? Do you think your parents already went to bed?

DEREK

On Halloween? Not a chance. I'm sure they're around here someplace.

PRUDENCE

You know, at night, this place is especially creepy-looking—especially with those coffins over there. I can see how it might have been rough growing up here.

DEREK

Yeah, *you* try inviting friends over for a slumber party when you live in a *funeral* home!

PRUDENCE

(With mock consoling) Oh, poor baby, did you get rejected? (Walks over to the closest coffin) Say, there isn't a body in here, is there?

DEREK

No, silly. These are just for display, so customers can choose which kind of coffin they want. The last thing you'd want in a sales display is an actual *body*, that would be totally nuts. See, when you open the lid— (*Demonstrates by opening the lid, but gestures without looking inside*) —you want to show off the nice, clean, elegant silk lining, not the—

(DEREK stops short as HE sees the BODY inside. HE slams the lid shut, a shocked look on his face. Then HE turns, opens it slowly, and addresses the BODY inside.)

DEREK, *Continued*

Uh... excuse me Miss, you're not supposed to sleep in here... (*Reaches in and pokes HER.*)
Miss? Excuse me?

(DEREK closes the lid again and leans against the coffin, a shocked look on his face.)

PRUDENCE

Who are you talking to? Is there somebody in that coffin? (*DEREK silently nods his head.*)
Is it somebody playing a Halloween joke? (*DEREK silently shakes his head.*) Is it somebody really dead? (*DEREK nods his head again.*) Well, who is it? Let me see!

(PRUDENCE opens the lid and peers in, then slowly closes the lid and leans against the coffin next to DEREK.)

PRUDENCE, *Continued*

Golly!

DEREK

(Talking out loud to himself) It's my crazy parents, it must be. They've finally snapped. Gone completely around the bend. You don't just misplace a body, not in a display coffin!

PRUDENCE

Derek, what are you talking about?

DEREK

(Pulling PRUDENCE off to one side, far away from the body) Look, I didn't want to say anything before. In fact, I wasn't really sure until just now. I've always known my parents were a little—well, let's say “eccentric”. I mean, how crazy is it to have a lifelong dream to be funeral directors? Do you know that my mom used to play funeral director as a kid? She'd bury Barbie, Ken, GI Joe, any old doll or action figure she could get her hands on! And as for my dad, there was even a rumor about a missing family dog—

(As THEY talk, NUSSBAUM and ALBERT quietly slip out from behind the coffin and busily start pulling the body out, looking nervously over at DEREK and PRUDENCE to make sure they're not caught in the act.)

PRUDENCE

So they're a little kooky. That's part of what makes them so adorable.

DEREK

No, it's worse than that. Deep down, I think I always knew that they were more than just kooky. Deep down, I always suspected they were probably mutually, clinically insane!

PRUDENCE

Oh, that's crazy talk!

DEREK

Ah ha! *(Points his finger at her)* See, you think I'm crazy too! And I probably am! *(Walks away from the coffin and turns to PRUDENCE; speaks in a resigned voice)* And that's why I can't marry you.

PRUDENCE

Excuse me?

(NUSSBAUM and ALBERT have the body out of the coffin now, and are frantically looking for someplace else to hide it. They finally settle on a separate display coffin some 10 feet away.)

DEREK

Look, you wouldn't want to be responsible for me when I finally turn into a dribbling idiot who can't even dress himself. And you sure as heck wouldn't want to give birth to a whole family of little coo-coo heads, would you?

PRUDENCE

What are you saying? Don't you want to marry me?

DEREK

Nope. I'm sorry my Sweet, but it just wouldn't be fair to you.

PRUDENCE

(Warming up to him) Honey, that's very noble, but you can't really mean it. Do you? I mean, don't you love me? Don't you want me by your side for the rest of your— *(Has a sudden realization)* Wait a minute, I remember this! We saw this on late-night TV. This is straight out of that old Cary Grant movie, what's it called? *(Thinks a second, then snaps her fingers)* *Arsenic and Old Lace!* *(Stepping away from him folding her arms)* Oh, you're good! But I'm onto you. I see it all now. You lifted this whole scam from the movie! *(Walks back and forth in front of the coffin)* Sure, first you freak me out by finding a mysterious body—on Halloween no less—and then you reject me with some phony-baloney excuse about crazy relatives, and then I'm supposed to fall into your arms and *insist* that we should get married. Very clever! Nice try, handsome!

(NUSSBAUM and ALBERT have successfully stowed the body in the other coffin, and quickly hide again.)

DEREK

Wait, what? What do you mean? *Arsenic and Old Lace*? How can you *think* such a thing?

PRUDENCE

Oh sure, what a setup. You almost had me there for a minute. (*Thinking it through*) I bet you even planned this stunt with your parents. And I almost fell for it! Unexpected bodies in coffins, on Halloween—I mean, really!

DEREK

But there *is* an unexpected body in the coffin! You saw her. And it's real—Look! I mean, think about it, if this were *Arsenic and Old Lace*... (*Opens the coffin again, and without looking inside, gestures dramatically*) ...when I open the coffin again, the body would be gone!

(*PRUDENCE looks inside and sees that there's no body there. SHE gives DEREK a “Yeah, right!” kind of look and folds her arms again.*)

PRUDENCE

Nice trick, Houdini, I'm really impressed. So tell me, how did you do it?

DEREK

Do what? (*Looks into the coffin and stares back at PRUDENCE, sputtering*) But—but—

PRUDENCE

(*Moving over to the other coffin*) So now if I go to *this* coffin, I'll probably find the dead body has mysteriously— (*Opens the coffin, looks in, and turns back to DEREK*) Golly!

DEREK

I didn't do that, I swear it! You have to believe me, I don't know what's going on, I really don't!

PRUDENCE

(*Starting to believe him*) Are you telling me you really had nothing to do with this?

DEREK

Nothing, honest! Maybe it was those ghosts who haunt this place...

PRUDENCE

Right, spirits who can teleport a real live – I mean, a real *dead* body. I don't think so. (*Pondering*) Well, we have to do something! Where would your parents be right now?

DEREK

Oh, I don't know, maybe upstairs, or in the Restful Sleep Room, or the chapel, or in the cemetery next door.

PRUDENCE

I'll check the chapel. It's this way, right? You check the cemetery. *(Exits)*

DEREK

Really? The Cemetery? On Halloween? No way! *(Walks to the sofa and sits down, talking to himself)* She doesn't believe me when I tell her that my parents are crazy, she doesn't believe we really have ghosts who haunt this place—essentially she doesn't believe in me!

(DEREK stands and walks toward the second coffin, but then remembers the body and walks in the opposite direction.)

DEREK, *Continued*

She says she loves me, but she thinks I'm a coward. I ask her to marry me, but she says no, just because of a few paranoias—only I'm *not* paranoid, because this is real! *(Pauses)* At least I *think* it's real...

(DEREK walks back to the second coffin and looks in, then closes the lid again.)

DEREK, *Continued*

It's real! *(Angry now, looks towards the chapel)* You don't believe in me? Who needs you anyway? It's not like I'm pining away for you or anything! *(Stomps back to the desk)* You think I'm just gaa-gaa about you? I am not! You think I lose sleep over you? I do not! In fact, if it ever comes to that, I can get along without you just fine! *(Shaking off the problem)* OK, back to business. I need to find out what's going on around here. *(Calling up to the top of the stairs)* Mom, Dad, are you upstairs? *(Not hearing a response, starts pacing back and forth, talking to himself)* Prudence probably found them in the chapel. *(Walks toward the second coffin)* This is so unbelievable. *(Opens the coffin lid again and peers in, shouting)* Who are you? *(Closes the lid and walks away from the coffin, mumbling to himself)* Now if I were crazy, what strange, demented reason could I have for putting a body in the display coffin? And how did the body change coffins?

(As he walks, NUSSBAUM pops up from behind the coffin. ALBERT pops up too, but NUSSBAUM puts his hand on his head and pushes him down. ALBERT pops up again, and again NUSSBAUM pushes him down. Then NUSSBAUM starts creeping behind DEREK. DEREK hears flapping of his big clown shoes and stops walking. NUSSBAUM stops walking too. DEREK starts walking again, and NUSSBAUM follows him, shoes still flapping. DEREK stops. NUSSBAUM, anticipating that he'll turn around, steps to one side. DEREK wheels around suddenly, but doesn't see anybody. HE starts walking again and NUSSBAUM follows again, this time intent on grabbing him. Just as he lifts his arms to do so, DEREK wheels around again, sees the circus clown of his nightmares, and completely freaks out.)

DEREK

Aaaah!

(DEREK faints. NUSSBAUM stands there, looking down at DEREK. ALBERT rushes over to NUSSBAUM and joins him, looking down at DEREK.)

ALBERT

Is it heart attack? Is he dead?

NUSSBAUM

(Checking out DEREK) No, unfortunately he's still breathing. Must have fainted. It's the clown costume. Freaked him out good. He's out cold.

(THEY both stand there for a moment, staring down at the unconscious DEREK.)

ALBERT

That gown looks familiar.

NUSSBAUM

Suits him perfectly. Ugly shoes, though.

(NUSSBAUM collects himself and turns to ALBERT.)

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

OK, enough of this, we need to act quickly. We can tie him up while he's passed out. Give me that rope from the coffin display.

ALBERT

(Unhooks rope) Got it.

(NUSSBAUM moves DEREK into a sitting position then together hoist him into the chair in front of the desk.)

NUSSBAUM

I've been waiting for this moment all my life. Now at last I get my revenge.

ALBERT

Revenge? What do you mean, "revenge"?

NUSSBAUM

When I was a little boy, and had that *minor* accident that killed my parents, they took everything from me. My house, my yard, my whips, my knives, my chemistry set! And then this creep's parents come along, buy my house from the bank and have the audacity to turn it into—a *funeral home*. That was the last straw! I vowed then and there that I would get my revenge someday—and now that day has come. You said my parents have been haunting this place, waiting for me to return? Well, here I am, back home to make everything right again!

(Leaning down to talk to the unconscious DEREK) You thought you'd take my place in this home. Now the roles are reversed, my friend. Now I take your place!

(NUSSBAUM pulls a large handkerchief from his pocket and THEY start gagging and tying DEREK up just as he starts to regain consciousness.)

DEREK

(From behind his gag, struggling to get free) MMMFFFF!

NUSSBAUM

No good struggling, my home-squatting friend, I've done this before and I've gotten pretty good at it! *(Leans down close to DEREK)* You think you're so clever! Well, I've waited a long time to rid you of that misapprehension. Now I've caught you and soon I'll dispose of you in a way far more permanent than the way they disposed of me! Now I get my revenge, and you get to make up for all I've suffered. That's pretty lucky, if you ask me! *(Walks around, pondering)* Now, how best to do this? There are so many ways to skin a cat... *(Turns back to DEREK)* That's an idea! How about if I skin you? *(DEREK struggles)* No, that takes too long... *(Walks around again, thinking out loud)* What if I just hang you? *(DEREK squeals behind the gag.)* Or poison! *(DEREK at point of tears)* That could be interesting. Should I add poison to our Halloween candy? There's some justice in that...

ALBERT

Boss, you have a really strange look on your face...

NUSSBAUM

(Turning to ALBERT) That's the look of unadulterated joy! *(Turning back to DEREK)* But how rude of me! I suppose I really should suppress this shameless smile—but then I don't really feel regret. Besides, I'm having a bad case of schadenfreude. I hope it doesn't go to my head...

ALBERT

You're funny, boss!

NUSSBAUM

(Turns sharply to ALBERT) What did you say?

ALBERT

That you're—uh—I mean— *(Grabs NUSSBAUM by the arm)* Boss, you didn't really mean he'll be in pieces, did you? You're just trying to put a scare into him, right? Boss—you're not really thinking what I think you're thinking, are you?

NUSSBAUM

If you think I'm thinking what I think you think I'm thinking, then—yes, I'm thinking that.

ALBERT

But boss, another body? You've killed—what, eleven people already, not counting the bride-to-be in the coffin? When does it stop?

NUSSBAUM

Twelve.

ALBERT

At twelve o'clock?

NUSSBAUM

No, idiot, twelve *people*. I killed twelve people before I got to our lovely companion here. With her, it comes to thirteen.

ALBERT

Um... I think you might have over-counted... I'm pretty sure it's not that many...

NUSSBAUM

What are you talking about?

ALBERT

It's just that if you count her, it's only twelve. (*Counting on his fingers*) There's the cook you hung up in the meat locker, that drunk lady who threw up all over you, those four construction workers who whistled and said you were pretty, that cop who pulled you over for road rage, the guy in the bar who spit at you, that newly married couple who laughed and blew you a kiss, that joker guy who called you a clown, and the girl in the coffin. See? It's only twelve.

NUSSBAUM

All right then, it's twelve. But when I'm done with our funeral home friend here, *he'll* make number thirteen. Thirteen! I like it, it's poetic justice. Works for me!

DEREK

(*Struggling, shaking his head*) MMMFFFF!

ALBERT

But, Boss, you don't have to kill him. Let's just leave him here, all tied up. That's revenge enough!

DEREK

(*Nodding his head*) MMMFFFF!

NUSSBAUM

Nothing is revenge enough. (*Leans over DEREK*) Now, we have to decide. Do we hang him, poison him, or maybe just cut him up into little pieces? Hmmm. I don't have any poison... And cutting him up would be too messy, and besides, I think these floors have been refinished... (*Looks approvingly at the floor*) Not a bad job, actually! Kind of a cherry stain,

NUSSBAUM, *Continued*

don't you think? (*Getting back to the point*) ...so I guess it's strangulation. With my bare hands!

(*NUSSBAUM reaches with strangling hands towards DEREK, who pulls away.*)

ALBERT

(*Grabbing his arm*) But boss, he's a nice guy! You can't kill him, you can't!

DEREK

(*Jerking his head in ALBERT's direction as if to say, "Listen to him!"*) MMMFFFF!

NUSSBAUM

(*Turning to ALBERT, his hands still in the strangling position*) You don't want to make me mad, do you? You wouldn't like me when I'm mad!

ALBERT

(*Backing away*) No, Boss, I can't take it when you're mad. Please don't be mad. I didn't mean it!

NUSSBAUM

OK, I'm not mad, so long as you're on board. But we have to move fast. First, I'll check to make sure nobody's coming. You watch over him so he doesn't make too much of a fuss.

ALBERT

Okay...

(*ALBERT goes over to DEREK, pretending to check his bindings as NUSSBAUM goes to each of the doors in the room, poking his head through each doorway, checking for people. DEREK starts struggling and making "MMMFFFF" noises through his gag. ALBERT tries to get HIM to be quiet, whispering hoarsely to DEREK.*)

ALBERT, *Continued*

Don't struggle, don't make a noise, it's okay! Don't worry, I won't let anything bad happen to you. I'll figure out a way to get you free, I promise! Just be still!

NUSSBAUM

(*Coming back to ALBERT*) What are you whispering about?

ALBERT

Oh, I was just trying to calm him down.

NUSSBAUM

(*To DEREK*) Oh, are we feeling nervous? I wouldn't be too nervous. You're only going to be a witness—to your own execution!

DEREK

(Starting to struggle again) MMMFFFF!

(Suddenly, THEY hear the sound of a loud moan, and two ghostly figures, a MAN and a WOMAN, appear at the top of the stairs. THEY seem to be from another time, both wearing old-fashioned clothes and hats from an earlier era. THEY also seem to be covered in some kind of white dust.)

MAN and WOMAN

My soooooonnnnnn! My soooooonnnnnn!

NUSSBAUM

(Turning to ALBERT) Did you hear that? It sounded like somebody moaning about poison!

ALBERT

(Looking up at the top of the stairs) I don't think that's what they were moaning about...

MAN and WOMAN

My soooooonnnnnn! My soooooonnnnnn!

(NUSSBAUM looks at ALBERT, follows his gaze, and sees the two figures at the top of the stairs. HE takes a step backwards, and with a quaking voice, HE speaks to them.)

NUSSBAUM

Dad? Mom? Is that you?

MAN

Yesssss, my sooonnnn! We've been waiting for you for a long, long time.

WOMAN

You've been very bad! You've been doing horrible things to people!

NUSSBAUM

Well, no, not *so* bad...

MAN

Yes, very, very bad!

NUSSBAUM

(Petulantly) Well—they deserved it!

WOMAN

And what about us, young man, did we deserve what you did to us?

NUSSBAUM

But that was an accident!

MAN

There are no accidents!

NUSSBAUM

But it wasn't my fault! It was just my bad luck that always seems to come at the worst possible time. Everything happens to me!

MAN

Silence! Enough of blaming others for what you did yourself!

WOMAN

Yes, it's time for you to get what *you* deserve!

MAN

Time for you to repent for all your sins!

WOMAN

All your sins!

NUSSBAUM

(Falling to his knees) I'm sorry, Mom, I'm sorry, Dad, I repent, I repent! Please forgive me! I didn't mean it, honest I didn't!

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes