

SAINT PETER'S ESCORT SERVICE

By Gary Ray Stapp

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SYNOPSIS: When entering the uncertainty of the afterlife, everyone is first drawn to the light at the end of the tunnel—a celestial place where one will either meet Stella or Cessal, employees of competitive escort services that are literally out-of-this-world. The two of them, frenemies at best, wittingly engage in the age-old conflict of good versus evil as they roll out the red carpet for new tenants relocating to their designated eternal home. Stella, a competent and compassionate employee of Saint Peter, is constantly at odds with her adversary Cessal, a vain, deceitful, egotistical, and sexist front man for the Dark Prince.

When a giggly, over-enthusiastic apprentice is assigned to assist Stella, the strenuous office environment becomes even more challenging for the centuries-tenured supervisor. Though she struggles to constrain her frustration with her co-escorts, Stella remains the consummate professional as she meets with the recently deceased, who have been waiting in the line of purgatory for their turn in the registration process. But despite having passed on, the dead still have lively personalities, including: an aspiring dancer with a name anomaly, an impatient senator certain of her destination, and one man who goes AWOL to avoid spending eternity with his previously deceased wife. Confrontation and chaos become the norm for the day until ultimately both a promotion and a demotion alter the employment status quo thus ensuring the In-Processing Department of Saint Peters Escort Service will never be the same again.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7-10 females, 4 males; 1-3 extras)

STELLA (f)..... The supervising escort for Saint Peter. A compassionate, no non-sense professional, though snarky when provoked. Any age, but ideally older. *(539 lines)*

- CESSAL (m).....The front man for the Dark Prince. He is disrespectful, charmingly deceitful, and oozing with conceit, yet funny and almost likeable. Any age. (277 lines)
- TONI (f).....An escort apprentice. She is extremely giggly, animated, and is a certifiable ding-dong. Any age, but ideally younger. (319 lines)
- PETRA (f).....An envoy of the Dark Prince. She is a perfectly coiffed, sexily attired, and seriously mannered woman of any age. (20 lines)
- TESSA (f).....A rude, self-obsessed, stereotypical New Yorker. (46 lines)
- ANNETTE (f).....A polite, humble woman from the Bible-belt. (39 lines)
- WILLIAM WILLIAMS (m).....A kindly old man. (17 lines)
- JOHN DOE (m).....A middle-aged smart-mouth with questionable morals. (41 lines)
- MARTHA MAY TOOLEY (f).....A sweet, elderly lady. (20 lines)
- DONNAH ATCHOUR (f).....A thirty-something dancer without talent or manners. (32 lines)
- CLARENCE O'SHANNON (m).....A man in his 50's to 60's capable of making bad choices. (40 lines)
- BARBARA CZAJKOWSKI (f).....A woman of any age, with a cold heart and little patience. (27 lines)
- ZINNIA PRIEST (f).....A highly talkative middle-aged woman, bohemian in appearance, and commanding attention. (27 lines)

ABRIELLE DUBOIS (f)	A French mute nun who mimes and communicates through charades. (3 lines)
MONDAY (f).....	Cessal's "Day Girl". (Non-Speaking.)
TUESDAY (f).....	Cessal's "Day Girl". (Non-Speaking.)
WEDNESDAY (f)	Cessal's "Day Girl". (Non-Speaking.)

DURATION: 120 minutes.

SETTING: Receiving room.

TIME: Present.

OPTIONAL DOUBLING

MONDAY can double with TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY

MARTHA MAY can double with BARBARA

ANNETTE can double with ABRIELLE

TESSA or DONNAH can double with ZINNIA

SETTING

The receiving room of the "In-Processing" department of Saint Peter's Escort Service. It is a brightly lit room divided into two areas: Heaven is represented on stage right, Hell on stage left. Upstage Center is a large archway that frames the black Entry Vestibule and is the entrance for the Department's customers, the recently deceased.

STAGE RIGHT: Upstage Right is an elevator with only an UP arrow above a call button with a simple sign above reading PENTHOUSE TENANTS. At Stage Right is a door that leads to an "Employees Only" breakroom used by the employees of Saint Peter. Downstage Right within a small alcove stands a tall white pedestal upon which rests a red telephone, and beside the pedestal is a chair. At Center Stage Right facing center stage is a simple, efficient desk with a simple, but comfortable, escort chair and a customer chair. Upon the desk is large book, a palm scanner, and an assortment of office desk items.

STAGE LEFT: Upstage Left is a second elevator with only a DOWN arrow above its call button and a flashy sign with lots of bling and glitter reading SUB-BASEMENT TENANTS. At Stage Left is a door that leads to a “Naughty Chicks Only” lounge for the employees of The Dark Side. Downstage Left, lying on the floor is a golf putting green carpet and a 17th hole flag. At Center Stage Left facing center stage is a second desk that counters the first and is opposite in every way. It is ornate, plush, over-the-top, with a kingly chair.

NOTE: Doorways leading to upstairs or downstairs could be used as effectively as faux elevators.

Russian words:

Zádnitsa, slang for jerk.

Kakáshka, slang for turd.

Vásja Pópkin, slang for John Doe or Average Joe.

Kakáya zanúda!, slang for What a bore!

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

SAINT PETER’S ESCORT SERVICE premiered at The Chamber Players Community Theatre in Garnett, Kansas under the direction of Gary Ray Stapp with the following cast:

STELLA	Denise Scheibmeir
CESSAL	Tom Emerson, Jr.
TONI	Charlotte Lutz
PETRA	Karen Katzer
TESSA.....	Shauna Devening
ANNETTE.....	Katrina Kichler
WILLIAM WILLIAMS	Chuck Hamilton
JOHN DOE.....	Jamison Brummel
MARTHA MAY TOOLEY.....	Linda Miller
DONNAH ATCHOUR.....	Krystal Donaldson
CLARENCE O'SHANNON	Les Thomas
BARBARA CZAJKOWSKI	Linda Umbarger
ZINNIA PRIEST	Lori Barcus
ABRIELLE DUBOIS	Casey King
MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY ..	Cindy McCullough

DEDICATION

*For my Father-In-Law and Mother-In Law,
Robert and Margo Zinszer*

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *In the darkness, ANNETTE and TESSA arrive DSR in front of curtain.*

ANNETTE: Tessa? Is it always this dark in New York City? Or are we in an eclipse or something?

TESSA: Annette, for the fourteenth time, stop interrupting me! Can't you see I'm busy texting a tweet to Bob?!

ANNETTE: If I could see you texting, I wouldn't be asking you why it's so dark. And who is Bob?

TESSA: A guy. I met him at the airport while I was waiting on you. I barely managed to get his number before he boarded his plane. We made a real connection. Especially after I proved to him that I could twerk!

ANNETTE: Twerk? I'm afraid to ask. Tweeting and twerking. Tessa, what has this city done to you?

TESSA: NYC has civilized me, that's what. I'm no longer a country bumpkin-ite like you, Annette.

ANNETTE: I'll pray for you.

TESSA: Don't pray for me! I don't want you to pray for me!

ANNETTE: You're my sister. Why wouldn't I pray for you? And how are you texting in the dark?

TESSA: OMG. Stop with the questions already.

ANNETTE: I can't believe how dark it is here. I expected New York City to have lots of lights. Why aren't there any lights?

TESSA: Please! We can talk about street lights and stop lights and Broadway lights all you want, AFTER I've finished texting!

ANNETTE: Say, Tessa, I just remembered something. You were texting right before everything went black.

TESSA: So?

ANNETTE: And you were driving.

TESSA: So?

ANNETTE: Don't you watch the news on TV? It's dangerous to text and drive. What if we had a car accident and died?

TESSA: Then I wouldn't have to listen to your nagging anymore.

ANNETTE: I'm going to pray for you.

TESSA: I said, don't pray for me!

Suddenly a circle of light appears and the two girls are softly bathed in light.

ANNETTE: Hey, Tessa! Look! There's a light! And I see people!

TESSA: Where?

ANNETTE: Over there by that light circle thingy. It looks like they're standing in a line.

TESSA: O-M-G! They are in a line! You know how I HATE lines! Come on! We're NOT starting at the back!

ANNETTE: No, no, no. No cutting!

TESSA: We're cutting. That's how it's done in New York City. Now, if you want to pray for something, pray that all those people get the hell out of our way!

ANNETTE: I'm not cutting.

TESSA: We're cutting.

ANNETTE and TESSA exit as the curtain rises. It opens on the reception area, brightly painted. STELLA is on stage standing at the pedestal, talking on a red phone.

STELLA: (*Scowling.*) No, sir, my new—apprentice—has not yet arrived. And he's twelve minutes late. In my opinion, a reprimand is in order. I expect the staff of my department to be above reproach. However, as I've often expressed on previous occasions, I really don't require an assistant.... Sorry, sir, I meant apprentice.

CESSAL: (*Offstage.*) Ehhhhhh—yeeowww!!

STELLA: (*Looks toward the closed door of the Dark Side Lounge and rolls her eyes.*) ...Oh? Tony, is it? Well, thank you, sir, for that morsel of information...

CESSAL: (*Offstage.*) Baby, baby, baby! You're killing me!

STELLA: This morning? Well, sir, I've processed several hundred, and without incident I might add—

CESSAL: (*Offstage.*) Oh, but do it, again!

STELLA: (*Annoyed, she looks toward the closed door of the Dark Side Lounge and rolls her eyes.*) Yes, Sir! No, no, no, sir. I wasn't snapping at you. It's Cessal. As usual, he's acting entirely inappropriate and consequently he's annoying the hell out of me... Sorry, sir. Forgive me for that expletive—

CESSAL: (*Offstage.*) Ehhhhhh—yeeowww!!

STELLA: Well, yes, sir, you're right. It is best that one doesn't have any of "that" in them. I will have to thank Cessal for annoying "that" out of me. But for the record, I think I have demonstrated an exceeding amount of company loyalty putting up with that insufferable demon for the eternity that I've been here.... Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Your confidence in me is what gets me through the day...

CESSAL enters from the Dark Side Lounge SL, his hair and clothing is disheveled. He is followed by MONDAY who is dressed as a sexy nurse and carrying a little black bag. She exits USL via the Sub-Basement Elevator. She is noticed by STELLA, who rolls her eyes and shakes her head in disapproval.

STELLA: As you wish, sir. Good-bye, sir. (*Hangs up.*)

CESSAL: Hey, Doll! What's a sexy thing like you doing in a place like this? (*Taking out his comb and working on his hair.*)

STELLA: Don't call me Doll. You know my name. Use it, if you absolutely feel compelled to engage me in a meaningless conversation.

CESSAL: Oh, I'd like to engage with you, Stella. But not necessarily to talk. (*Winks.*)

STELLA: Really, Cessal, must you go there?

CESSAL: Go where?

STELLA: The gutter.

CESSAL: It's my second favorite place to be. Want to know my first favorite?

STELLA: No. However, Cessal, I would appreciate from you a reasonable degree of professional consideration when I'm on the telephone. There were several excruciating reverberations coming from within your lounge that made it difficult to hear while I was speaking with Saint Peter.

CESSAL: What do you mean?

STELLA: The screaming.

CESSAL: Oh, that. Well, sometimes things get a little crazy in there, if you know what I mean?

STELLA: Thankfully not. Those of us who are civilized find it more efficient to utilize our work-breaks as opportunities to rest and refresh.

CESSAL: Yeah, that's not going to happen. But I could use a nap. My "engagement" with my girl, Monday, has temporarily exhausted me! (*Winks.*) But I'll be good as new in about two minutes. That's what you call stamina, in case you were wondering.

STELLA: I wasn't. However, you might check your calendar. This is Thursday, not Monday.

CESSAL: Monday, Thursday, Wednesday... not a lot of difference. They essentially perform the same service, you know, making sure my needs are satisfied. I just rotate them around... sometimes several times a day. (*Winks.*)

STELLA: Those poor women. I can't even imagine what malevolent thing must reside in the dark corners of your heart.

CESSAL: Oh, well, that "thing." it's not in my heart, Doll. It's in my pants. (*Winks.*)

STELLA: Stop winking at me, you heathen. And for the record, I hope one day your immodest boasting of your conquests gets you into an enormous amount of trouble.

CESSAL: God, I hope so!

SFX: Suddenly there is an earthquake rumble and a flickering of the lights.

CESSAL: Oh, boy. This can't be good.

The Sub-Basement Elevator door opens and PETRA enters USL, wearing a seductively short dress and high heels, and carrying a note. She crosses to CESSAL and hands the note to him.

STELLA: Trouble?

CESSAL: (*Reading, then sighs with relief.*) Nope. Just a warning.

STELLA: Really? That's all?

CESSAL: Yeah, look—(*Holds of the note with the single word WARNING written on it.*) The D.P. has limited ability when it comes to sentence structure.

STELLA: Indeed.

CESSAL: Yeah, I think he must have skipped right past Kindergarten. Anyway, this says it all. I won't get another one of these. If I say the "G" word again, I'll just be...

STELLA: Be... what?

CESSAL: History. Gone. Bye-bye. So, I gotta really watch my mouth and not say that name anymore.

PETRA turns to leave.

CESSAL: Hey, Petra, my pet! What's the hurry? Why don't you come sit on my lap and I'll tell you a naughty little story about a farmer's daughter?

PETRA: (*Russian accent.*) Bite me.

CESSAL: Only if you bite me back.

PETRA: Zádniitsa! (*Snarling at him, she continues to walk away.*)

CESSAL: Then maybe next time, pussycat.

PETRA exits via the Sub-Basement Elevator, USL.

STELLA: It's nice to know one of them has a backbone and some sense of dignity.

CESSAL: Whatever. One of these days I'll have Petra eating out of my hand. In fact, I have this little trick that will make her bark like a dog.

STELLA: Cessal, the level of your depravity never ceases to amaze me.

CESSAL: It's a gift. One that keeps on giving, and giving, and giving. Sort of like a sausage of the month club. And speaking of depravity, how about you let me buy you a drink after work?

STELLA: No.

CESSAL: It would just be a little nightcap. You know, Stella, for fun?

STELLA: No.

CESSAL: (*Suddenly he drops to his knees.*) Stella! Stella!!!

STELLA: Get up.

CESSAL: (*Laughs as he rises.*) Am I a riot or what? (*Looks around.*)

So, weren't you supposed to be getting a new assistant today?

STELLA: Don't get me started.

CESSAL: Ooooo, goodie. Somebody's in a bad mood. That's what my people live for!

STELLA: I'm not in a bad mood. I'm just calmly annoyed.

CESSAL: That's nothing new. (*Looks at his appointment book.*) So, I see you've had quite the string of do-gooders while I've been on break.

STELLA: They were members of a church choir from South Africa.

CESSAL: Awesome! And all at the same time!

STELLA: A bus accident over a cliff. I'm sure your employer had his hand in that.

CESSAL: Of course! Isn't he great?!

STELLA: You should be ashamed.

CESSAL: Oh, I am. Trust me.

STELLA: Those people were a wonderful group of souls. Is there no end to the tragedies your boss will orchestrate?

CESSAL: No. He is not obligated by an expiration date, nor a single statute of limitations. The D.P. just likes to have a little fun—at the expense of others, of course!

STELLA: I am surprised, given his ego, that the Dark Prince allows you to abbreviate his moniker to just D-P.

CESSAL: It's no surprise at all. The D.P. just doesn't give a crap... about anything. Well, except your boss. The D.P. loathes him.

STELLA: Saint Peter? He loathes Saint Peter?

CESSAL: No, no, no. Not that peon. The other dude, the arrogant one, the big Kahuna.

STELLA: (*Feigning naivety.*) I'm sorry, I'm not quite following. Big Kahuna?

CESSAL: Ha! Nice try, Stella. If you think you can trick me into speaking that name again, you are only fooling yourself. I've had my warning from the D.P. I'm not betting on a second chance.

STELLA: Well, God bless you.

CESSAL: (*Insulted.*) How dare you!

STELLA: What? I can say his name, just because you don't have the... courage.

CESSAL: Uh, uh, uh. I'm not playing that game, Stella. Tricks are my bag, and treats too, if you're naughty enough. (*Glances at his appointment book.*) And speaking of naughty ones, I see I have another tenant due to appear any time. So, if you want, why don't you go take a little break? I'm sure you're exhausted from processing that entire choir, *mono a mono*.

STELLA: *Mono a mono?*

CESSAL: Yeah, you know, all by yourself.

STELLA: That's not what that means, you moron.

CESSAL: Sticks and stones. Whatever. Seriously, go on, take a break. I can cover things here while you're gone.

STELLA: It's not time for my scheduled break.

CESSAL: So, it's a little early. I won't tell.

STELLA: Unlike your organization, Cessal, mine has rules. And without rules, there can only be chaos.

CESSAL: I love chaos!

STELLA: And unlike your incessant "breaks" you take with those "girls," I don't require regularly scheduled reprieves from the performance of my duties.

CESSAL: Blah, blah, blah.

STELLA: (*Checking her watch.*) However, one thing I would enjoy having is—

CESSAL: A massage?

STELLA: No.

CESSAL: My fingers are like magic. Five minutes under these ten feisty fellows and you'll feel like a new woman.

STELLA: No, thank you!

CESSAL: Oh, pardon me, Ms. Purity. I just thought you might need a hand, or something.

STELLA: I don't need or want anything from you.

CESSAL: (*Laughs.*) Maybe not anything from me, but I know what you want... what you really, really, want.

STELLA: I doubt it.

CESSAL: You want a promotion. But nope, not happening. Passed over again. Tsk, tsk. Who was that last guy you trained? Artie? He worked under your feathered wing for, what, six months?

STELLA: Seven months, five days, thirteen hours and twenty-nine minutes.

CESSAL: No seconds?

STELLA: Eleven seconds.

CESSAL: Then, snap, he's gone. Promoted to bigger and better things. Thanks to your excellent training and unwavering dedication to the company, I suppose.

STELLA: Shut— (*Stops herself.*)

CESSAL: —Up? Go ahead, tell me to shut up. I love it when you get testy. (*A beat.*) No?

STELLA: I am finished listening to your babble.

CESSAL: I would wager you're as happy as a clam to know your efforts helped earn him a better position beyond that of a mere escort. That's what your title is, right? Escort? You know, an escort in my organization has an entirely different connotation. (*A beat.*) Wow... silence. I can almost hear crickets. But I get it, the Artie thing... that's gotta bite!

STELLA: No, Cessal, it doesn't bite.

CESSAL: Then it must at least sting a little bit.

STELLA: It doesn't sting either.

CESSAL: Burn?

STELLA: No.

CESSAL: Then it stinks. It's gotta stink.

STELLA: For the final time, Cessal, it doesn't bite, sting, burn, or stink. I am entirely content with my position here.

CESSAL: Liar.

STELLA: I enjoy my job and I have a genuine appreciation of being in charge of In-Processing for my organization.

CESSAL: In charge? That's a laugh! Seriously, that's one big bag of baloney, and you know it. Peter-what's-his-name. He's the one in charge. You're just a lackey. A peon's peon.

STELLA: Shut up. (*Instantly realizes her mistake and slaps her hand over her mouth.*)

SFX: The red phone rings.

CESSAL: (*Laughs, then sing-songy.*) Somebody's in trouble!

STELLA crosses to the red phone as CESSAL sits at his desk, leans back in his chair, and begins working in a crossword puzzle book.

STELLA: (*Answers the red phone.*) Yes, sir? ...Ah, you heard that did you? I'm sorry, sir. It's just that he's—Yes, sir.... You're right, as usual. I will strive to be better.... Thank you, sir.

CESSAL: (*Laughs.*) Yes, sir... sorry sir... it won't happen again sir—

STELLA: Shut... shut the door, please Cessal, you're letting the flies in.

CESSAL: Nice save!

STELLA: I don't like you.

CESSAL: I thought you people had to like everyone? You know, love thy neighbor, and all that jazz.

STELLA: No, we are not required to like everyone. Especially those of you from down under.

CESSAL: Australia? (*Aussie accent.*) You're too right, mate. I don't like that bodgy bunch either. Always out on a Willy Wampa walkabout and shamelessly locking lips with loopy lizards and French-kissing koalas and kinky kangaroos—

STELLA: You really are a twit, aren't you?

CESSAL: Only on weekends and holidays and the months with embers in them. So anyway, what you're saying is the big guy you work for gives you a choice? You can like me and my people, if you want to, or you can hate us. The choice is yours, is that right?

STELLA: Correct. However, I don't hate anyone.

CESSAL: Not even me?

STELLA: No. I simply dislike you... immensely.

CESSAL: Why? Is it because of what you imagine goes on behind that door?

STELLA: Well, that would be reason enough, but mostly it's because you're a wicked, lying, scheming, deceitful, manipulative, devious charlatan, without an iota of respect for anyone or anything.

CESSAL: Ouch! You know, Stella, I think you may be playing for the wrong team. But, you're wrong about one thing. I do have an iota. (*Winks.*) Wanna see it?

STELLA: Shut—my mouth! Wish I could chat more, but duty calls. (*Presses a big button on her desk.*) NEXT!

A bright light flashes in the Entry Vestibule, then TONI enters in its archway, USC.

TONI: (*Giggly.*) Here I am!

Immediately TESSA enters beside TONI and forces the two of them into the room USC.

TESSA: Oh, no you don't. I'm next.

TONI: Well, actually I sort of have a special pass—

TESSA: (*Gets in her face.*) Do I look like I care?

TONI: Actually—

TESSA: Actually, you do not want to go there! I have had a very bad day. I have been standing around in the dark like forever, then I had to walk a gazillion miles to get to this lit-up hole in the wall. Seriously, it was like being lost in IKEA! My feet are tired, my cell phone reception is non-existent, and my sister Annette is being a total drag today. And I mean drag! I've had to pull her along like an imitation Louis Vuitton luggage carry-on with its wheels missing.

TONI: That does sound like a bad day, but—

TESSA: NO BUTS! I am next! Do you have a problem with that?!

TONI: Well, since you asked—

TESSA: (*Holds up her hand to silence her.*) I will claw and strangle, with my bare hands, the person who tries to stop me from being next in line. That unfortunate person won't be you, will it?

TONI: (*A beat.*) Nope, that will not be me. I'm not that person. My mistake, you are next. I'll just sit over here and mind my own beeswax— (*Crosses DSR to the chair next to the red phone.*)

TESSA: An excellent decision.

TONI: (*To herself.*)—and wait until someone stabs you with a fork or something... probably.

TESSA: Now, come on Annette— (*Turns to look for her.*) Annette! (*Tromps over to the doorway.*) Annette, get up here right now! Do I have to do everything?

ANNETTE: (*Offstage, distantly.*) Tessa, I'm not cutting in line!

MANY VOICES: (*Offstage.*) PLEASE CUT!

TESSA: Now, hurry up!

ANNETTE: (*Offstage.*) Sorry... sorry... sorry... sorry—

There is another flash of light in the Entry Vestibule as ANNETTE enters USC, tumbling into the room.

CESSAL: Hey, Stella, what's a six-letter word for scourge?

STELLA: Cessal.

CESSAL: *(Counts on his fingers.)* C-E-S-S-A-L. What do you know... that fits.

STELLA: Like a glove. Next! Please!

TESSA: *(Hurries to STELLA'S desk.)* Hey, I know you! You're that famous lady who ran for president! Am I right?

STELLA: I'm sorry, you're mistaken. My name is Stella.

TESSA: Oh, no. I'm right. I never forget a face. Especially yours. You have a pasty complexion, did anyone ever tell you that?

CESSAL: I have.

TESSA: You were on TV like twenty-four-seven. I used to watch you all the time. Well, not all the time. Maybe five minutes, tops. I was always distracted by your hair. I'd look you right in the face and yell "Fire your stylist! Please!" I mean seriously, that haircut! Honestly, I was embarrassed for you. But now, this new hair-do, it's an upgrade. Sort of. I know a guy who does miracles with a pair of scissors. He'll have you looking like me in no time.

STELLA: No, thank you. Again, you're mistaken. Now, if you'll—

TESSA: Oh! You're right! My bad! You're not her. I just noticed your outfit. It's clearly off the rack. Hillary wouldn't be caught dead in a department store line of clothing.

STELLA: Please be seated.

TESSA: Is this going to take long? I'm in a hurry.

STELLA: Your name, please?

TESSA: Tessa.

STELLA: *(Scans the list of names in her appointment book that lies prominently on her desk.)* Tessa, Tessa—hmmmm... I don't see your name here, Tessa. It should be at the top of my list, or at least on this page. Unless—did you cut in line?

TESSA: Did I—? *(Annoyed.)* Oh, no, no, no—that "tone" isn't going to work for me, Granny Clampett. So, heads-up, I'll be asking the questions. First, where am I? Second, where is the nearest exit? Scratch the first question, I don't really care where I am, I just want to get to where I'm supposed to be.

STELLA: Your date of birth, please.

TESSA: Look, lady, I know you probably think you're important and all of that, but I can tell that you're not. So, let's just skip the coupon-cutting and direct me to someone higher on your corporate ladder. Chop-chop.

STELLA: One moment. (*To CESSAL.*) She's clearly one of yours.

CESSAL: Clearly!

STELLA: Perhaps even one of your offspring.

CESSAL: Doubtful. (*Quickly glances at his book, also prominently lying upon his desk, then flips through several pages.*) Ah... you must be Tessa Alexandria Fontaine!

TESSA: (*Impressed.*) Finally, someone who knows something. Yes, I am Tessa Fontaine!

CESSAL: Then come to me, (*Curling his finger, beckoning her to him.*) Tessa.

TESSA: (*Laughs.*) Just so you know, I didn't just fall off the turnip truck like my sister. I see exactly what kind of man you are.

CESSAL: It's that obvious, is it?

TESSA: You're one of those bad-boy types.

CESSAL: Guilty. But, I'm not all bad. Look how handsome I am! And I'm 100 percent fun and games! Come join me!

TESSA: (*Crosses to CESSAL slowly.*) I don't know—

CESSAL: Come now, Tessa. It doesn't take a genius to see that you and I are meant for each other. Look at us! We're both extremely beautiful, am I right? We're like two birds of a feather. Let's flock... together.

TESSA: Mister, your flattery may just get you somewhere. Secretly, I've always had a thing for older men.

CESSAL: It's no secret any more, baby. Wait, (*Insulted.*) just how old do you think I am? (*Pause.*) Don't answer that.

TESSA: You should also know, I have very expensive tastes.

CESSAL: Not to worry, I have a Capitol One unlimited platinum VISA in my wallet. When you're with me, you are a red-carpet V-I-P. In fact, my little kitten, I have prepared for you the most luxurious accommodation to enjoy while the two of us unwind on a no-expense-spared vacation of eternal proportion!

TESSA: A vacay! I love a vacay [pronounced: vay cay], especially if the location is exotic!

CESSAL: Oh, baby, this place is so exotic you'll just scream! I guarantee it.

TESSA: Okay, but know this: I am not easy.

CESSAL: Neither am I. Well, that's not true. I'm easy with a capital E. But I promise, I'll behave.

TESSA: Then what are we waiting for?! Come on Annette!

STELLA: Uh-uh-uh. Sorry, miss. Not so fast.

TESSA: She's with me, crone! Where I go, she goes! My sister may be plain looking and more suited for a ho-down than a swanky downtown, but I'm sure this handsome devil can work a little magic if he wants to, am I right?

CESSAL: You have no idea. But I insist that I take care of you first. Come Tessa, we have a tiny bit of paperwork to do before your personalized adventure begins. *(Leads her to his desk.)*

STELLA: *(To ANNETTE.)* Hello, my name is Stella. And your name, miss? And date of birth, please.

ANNETTE: Hi Stella. *(Sits.)* It's Annette—Fontaine. Umm, June 14th, 19XX. [Insert year related to actor's age.]

STELLA: *(Looks down the list, then flips several pages.)* Annette... Annette... Annette—ah, there you are. You are, also, a little ahead of schedule.

ANNETTE: Sorry, my sister Tessa made me cut in line.

STELLA: Indeed. Not to worry, she won't be able to interfere with your decision-making ever again.

ANNETTE: Really? To be honest, that's a huge relief! She insisted I fly to New York to visit her. But I don't like airplanes.

STELLA: Statistically, flying is safer than traveling by automobile.

ANNETTE: I suppose. But I still prayed for a safe landing.

STELLA: Yes, well, your prayer was answered.

ANNETTE: I was so relieved to get my feet back on solid ground. But then, there was my sister waiting at the airport for me. She drives like a crazy person. She made me more nervous than the airplane did.

STELLA: Not to worry. You're safe now.

ANNETTE: Stella, you are so nice! Not at all like I expected. As a New Yorker, I suppose you're often unfairly stereotyped.

STELLA: Well, actually you're not in New York City.

ANNETTE: I didn't think so. It's been as pitch-black out there as a moonless night on my granddaddy's farm. But this place, it's... well this may sound odd to you, but this room is like "the light" at the end-of-the-tunnel.

STELLA: Indeed, it is.

ANNETTE: Okay, so, where exactly am I?

STELLA: Well, Annette, you are here in what we call the "In-Processing" reception area.

ANNETTE: In-processing?

STELLA: Yes. You see, this room is essentially the arrival port for all people who have recently deceased. Here is where you are processed prior to being escorted to your final destination.

ANNETTE: Sort of like a cruise ship departure port!

STELLA: Sort of.

ANNETTE: But, I'm a little confused. Did you say, "recently deceased"?

STELLA: Yes.

ANNETTE: Then why am I here? I'm not deceased.

STELLA: Oh, but you are, dear.

ANNETTE: I am?

STELLA: Yes.

ANNETTE: Wow—being dead isn't at all like I expected it to be. And to be honest, this place isn't exactly how I envisioned Heaven to be either.

STELLA: Well, that's because this isn't Heaven.

ANNETTE: (*Suddenly wary.*) It's not? I'm not going to Heaven?

STELLA: A nice girl like you? Of course you are. You just haven't taken the elevator yet.

ANNETTE: Oh, that's a relief. So, what's it like? Heaven, that is.

STELLA: Well, it's against the rules for me to tell you ahead of time. But I can share one thing. There's someone you know, someone very special, waiting for you.

ANNETTE: Grammy? Is my grammy there? I knew she would be! I can't wait to see her again!

STELLA: Then, Miss Annette, there's no reason to delay. If you'll please place your hand here. (*Indicates the palm scanner.*) Perfect. You're all checked in!

ANNETTE: That was easy. Thank you!

STELLA: Simply doing my job, Annette. (*Makes a mark in the book with a flourish of her hand, then rises.*) Now, come with me and I'll escort you to your new eternal home.

ANNETTE: (*Rises.*) My new home, it's going to be beautiful, isn't it?

STELLA: Of course! An alabaster mansion of many rooms. Bright and cheery and quite comfortable. Filled with lots and lots of wonderful souls, just like you.

STELLA and ANNETTE cross upstage right to the Penthouse Elevator, as CESSAL and TESSA cross upstage left to the Sub-Basement Elevator opposite.

TESSA: Hey, Annette! What are you doing over there? Come over here. You're going with me.

ANNETTE: I'm sorry, Tessa, I can't. I'm going with Stella.

TESSA: Stella? Are you blind? Check this guy out! He's a hottie! Why do you want to go with that ole crab?

ANNETTE: She's not a crab. She's wonderful! And she's made me feel so happy and loved and safe! You should come with me!

TESSA: No way! I'm not about to give up this guy!

ANNETTE: What about that guy Bob you met at the airport?

TESSA: Bob? Are you kidding? Why would I settle for hamburger, when I can have steak?

CESSAL: Tessa, T-bone is waiting.

CESSAL pushes the Sub-Basement Elevator button and the door opens. It is decorated in lots of bling, balloons, party stuff.

TESSA: OMG! This just gets better and better!

CESSAL: Time to par-tay, my sweet Tessa!

TESSA hurries into the Sub-Basement Elevator, giggling.

ANNETTE: I'll never see her again, will I, Stella?

STELLA: Not to worry, dear. (*Pushes the button for the Penthouse Elevator and it opens.*) In a few moments you'll forget you ever knew her.

ANNETTE steps into the simple white Penthouse Elevator car, as she and TESSA simultaneously turn.

TESSA: Hey, Handsome! Aren't you coming?

CESSAL: Sorry, kitten. You're on your own. *(Waves at TESSA with his fingers.)*

ANNETTE and TESSA wave bye, as STELLA and CESSAL push their respective elevator buttons to close the doors, ANNETTE and TESSA disappear behind them.

CESSAL: What an idiot! *(Crosses back to his desk.)*

STELLA: *(Returning to her desk.)* I imagine your facility is full of them.

CESSAL: You got that right, Doll. So, that was number 665 for me today! What's your count?

STELLA: I don't count. This isn't a numbers game. This is about life. Or to be more concise this is about life after death for everyone who enters here. And that should never be taken lightly or reduced to some trivial contest.

CESSAL: Yeah, yeah, yeah... you lost me when you said you don't count. But, in case you can't do the math, my next one is number 666. And you know what that means! BONUS! *(Sees TONI.)* Hey, you!

TONI: Me?! *(Startled, she stands, inadvertently shoving her chair against the wall, knocking a framed picture askew.)* Sorry! *(Tries unsuccessfully to reset the picture, but it's largely out of reach.)* Yikes! *(Puts a foot onto the chair and when she does, her foot goes through it.)* Sorry! Sorry!! *(Struggles to get untangled from the chair.)*

CESSAL: Hey, baby doll. What's your name?

TONI: Uh... Toni... sir.

CESSAL: *(Hurriedly scans his book.)* Toni... Toni... Toni. Nope, not on my list. Dammit, Stella, she must be yours! *(Plops into his chair, lifts his feet to the desk and returns to his puzzle.)*

STELLA: Next... Miss?

TONI: Sorry about the picture... and this chair. I can fix it for you, I think.

STELLA: That's quite alright. We have our own people for that.

TONI: Of course! (*Hurries over to STELLA.*) Hi! It's so nice to finally meet you! I've been waiting for a long, long, long, long time for this day to get here! By the way, I'm so, so, so sorry I'm late.

STELLA: Late? You are next in line, are you not?

TONI: No, not really. I think I took a wrong turn in Albuquerque. (*Laughs at her own joke.*)

STELLA: Pardon me?

TONI: (*Giggles.*) I got on the elevator, but I must have exited on the wrong floor! Next thing I know—(*With drama.*) I'm just about to step foot into what I think was that humongous shopping mall in Alberta Canada. Whew! Seriously, I had one foot poised in the air like this... where I nearly stepped back down into that no-mans-land. But... I reeled it back in and finally tip-toed my way through that maze of people out there... and made it here... through there (*Points to the door.*) And... here I am! (*Takes STELLA'S hand and begins to vigorously shake it.*) Again, it is such a pleasure to be here! And I am soooooooooo-so-so honored!

STELLA: Who—who are you?

TONI: I'm Toni!

STELLA: (*Scans her list.*) Toni... Toni... Toni. I don't find you on my list, either.

TONI: Of course not silly! (*Giggles.*) I'm not on this list. Well, I was on a previous page of the list—way, way, WAAAY back! (*Giggles.*) Actually, we've met before. I'm surprised you don't remember me!

STELLA: Wait. Your name is Toni?

TONI: That's right! I'm Toni (*Sings out her name.*) Your new apprentice! (*Giggles.*)

STELLA: Nooo.

TONI: Yeah!

STELLA: Noooo. No, no, no, no, no—

SFX: The red phone rings.

STELLA: Excuse me a moment. (*Crosses to the red phone podium and lifts the receiver.*) I'm so glad you phoned, sir. We have a problem.... Well, yes... maybe.... Actually, someone named Toni has arrived, however, I was expecting a male Tony, a Tony with a Y... however she, Toni, here, with an "I", is extremely talkative. I don't believe she'll fit in here at all.... Oh, you do, do you, sir? ...I see... I see.... Yes, sir.... Of course, sir. (*Hangs up the red phone and crosses back to her desk and sits down.*)

CESSAL: (*Laughing.*) Yes, sir, of course, sir, whatever you say, sir!

STELLA: (*To TONI, smiling insincerely.*) Welcome to Saint Peter's Escort Service, LLC.

Brief blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *A repaired telephone chair has been re-positioned next to STELLA and TONI attentively sits upon its edge, while CESSAL thumbs through a questionable magazine.*

STELLA: Toni, the two most important things to remember are to be compassionate—

TONI: Compassionate. Got it!

STELLA: But firm—

TONI: Firm. Got it!

STELLA: (*Sighs.*) And be polite—

TONI: Polite. Got it! Wait, that's three things. You said were just two important things.

STELLA: Yes. One, be compassionate, but firm. Two, be polite. Understand?

TONI: Well, I counted on my fingers. I still came up with three.

STELLA: I stand corrected. There are three. The third is to be a good listener.

TONI: No, that makes four.

STELLA: Let's forego the accounting, shall we? My point is, you need to be compassionate, but firm. Polite, yet succinct.

TONI: What's succinct?

STELLA: To the point.

TONI: Wouldn't it have been more succinct to just say, "to the point?"

STELLA: (*Sighs.*) Probably. At any rate, it's apparently been an eventful few hours down there, and consequently we have a quite a number of souls to process.

TONI: So what you're saying is, people have just been dying to get up here? (*Giggles.*) Right? Right? Get it?

STELLA: (*Rolls her eyes.*) Therefore, Toni, we don't want the line to become unmanageably congested because of idle chit-chat. Understand?

TONI: Perfectly.

STELLA: Any questions?

TONI: Yes. What does LLC stand for... up here?

STELLA: The same thing it represents down there. Limited Liability Corporation.

TONI: Really? I'm surprised we need an LLC up here?

STELLA: His disreputable employer (*Indicates CESSAL, who waves.*) has no respect for anyone, not even for—(*Nodding upward.*)—Him.

TONI: Ohhhh... the big guy.

STELLA: Toni, we don't reference Him as the big guy.

TONI: Oh, sorry. I'll make a note. Do not call Saint Peter the Big Guy.

STELLA: I'm not referring to Saint Peter. Why would you assume he would be the big guy?! Have you been living under a rock?

TONI: Does the rock of ages count?

STELLA: I'm speaking of our Lord and Heavenly Father, you dim-wit. (*Quickly glances at the red phone, expecting it to ring. But it doesn't.*)

TONI: Oh! Him! He's the big guy!

STELLA: Yes, Him.

TONI: When you said big, I thought you meant like fat, like Saint Peter. Not that he's really fat, just big-boned I'd say. You know, it's interesting because now that I think about it I haven't seen a single soul in our place who I would describe as tremendously gargantuan. Isn't that weird?

STELLA: No.

TONI: It's the milk and honey diet. Right?

STELLA: No.

TONI: Maybe it's the white robes? Oh, they are very slimming, don't you think?! That's got to be it.

STELLA: No, that's not it either. It's... *(Sighs.)* ...oh, never mind! We do not have a gratuitous amount time for trivial questions.

TONI: Gratuitous? I don't think I've ever heard that word before. Could you spell it for me, and use it in a different sentence that isn't so wordy. You know, more succinct?

STELLA: No. And no. We have work to do.

TONI: *(Raises her hand.)* Just real quick, I have another question. And it's very important.

STELLA: *(Biting her tongue.)* What-is-it?

TONI: *(Indicating a bowl on STELLA'S desk.)* Are these candies just for you, or are they for anybody?

STELLA: They are complimentary for anyone.

TONI: Cool beans. *(Begins to dig through the wrapped candy.)*

CESSAL: *(Casually wonders over.)* So, Doll, aren't you going to introduce me?

STELLA ignores CESSAL.

CESSAL: Hello? *(Takes a megaphone from his desk.)* Hello? Hello? A polite and friendly acknowledgement would go a long way toward improving the relationships in our cold war.

STELLA: I'll acknowledge you when you address me by my name. And my name is not Doll.

CESSAL: Sorry. *(Drops to his knees again.)* Stella! Stella!!!

TONI: *(Giggles and likewise drops to her knees.)* Stella! Stella!!!

STELLA: *(Unamused.)* Really?

TONI: It's Marlon Brando from *A Streetcar Named Desire!*

CESSAL: *(To STELLA)* I like her! Hello, my name is Cessal. *(Offers his hand.)*

TONI: I'm Toni! Don't you just LOVE THAT MOVIE!?

CESSAL: I do like the title. It's nice to meet you, Toni.

TONI: Likewise. *(Somewhat mesmerized.)* Oh, you are sooooo-so-so handsome!

STELLA: Don't tell him that!

TONI: Were you a movie star, too? Like Marlon Brando? If you weren't, you could have been! Has anyone ever told you that before?

CESSAL: Often. In fact, in my former life I did several films.

TONI: I knew it! I wonder if I've seen any of them?

CESSAL: I doubt it. They didn't make it to the silver screen. Mostly internet downloads.

TONI: Well, you never know. What's the name of one of your movies?

CESSAL: Let's see, one was called Knight Riders... that would be night with a K, which was me, and the riders, well, they were a splendid assortment of beautiful young women—

STELLA: That's enough, Cessal. Now, if you'll excuse us. We have work to do.

CESSAL: Yes, ma'am. *(Salutes, and strides back to his desk.)*

STELLA: Now, Toni, for the first hundred or so of our customers, you are to just sit and listen.

TONI: *(Unwrapping a candy, she plops it in her mouth.)* Sit and listen. Got it!

STELLA: Quietly.

TONI: *(Makes a face.)* Quietly. Got it!

STELLA: Is there something wrong... with you?

TONI: It's your candy. *(Spits it into her hand.)* It tastes like crap.

STELLA: Please don't use that word. I don't care for it.

TONI: How about poop?

STELLA: *(Rolls her eyes.)* Are you ready?

TONI: Ready. *(Re-wraps the candy and replaces it in the bowl.)*

STELLA: *(Pushes the button.)* Next.

Bright light flashes in the Entry Vestibule and then WILLIAM enters USC.

TONI: Hi! *(Waves.)* Over here! Over here! *(Jumps to her feet.)* Come on down, you're the next contestant on the Price is Right! *(Giggles.)* Just kidding! *(To STELLA.)* I'm such a kidder! That's one of my best qualities, you know? I figure if I can make people laugh, they will feel much more at ease. Don't you think?

STELLA: No.

TONI: *(To WILLIAM.)* So, dude, how are you today?

WILLIAM: Well, missy, for a while I was havin' a hankerin' for Nehi belly washer, but that passed. So I reckon I'm feelin' pretty darn good, thanks for askin'.

TONI: You're soooooo-so-so welcome! (*Giggles.*) I hope you didn't have to wait in line too long?

WILLIAM: Nooo, but I wasn't in no hurry anyways. When you get my age, time flies by like a Californy wind. Then before you know it, you're just an old fart like me eatin' half your meals out of pill bottles and carin' less and less about whether or not your orthopedic shoes are on the right feet.

TONI: You don't look that old to me! You can't be more than, what? Ninety? Ninety-five?

WILLIAM: Well, no—I aint' that old. I'm—

TONI: Oh, oh, oh! Don't tell me. Ninety-nine! (*WILLIAM looks at her speechless, after a beat.*) Just kidding! (*Giggles.*) The look on your face! Stella, did you see—

STELLA: Toni!

TONI: Huh?

STELLA: Really, what part of sit quietly didn't you understand?

TONI: Sorry. (*Zips her lips.*)

STELLA: My apologies, sir. Please, take a seat.

WILLIAM: No problem, ma'am.

STELLA: And your name, sir? And date of birth.

WILLIAM: Name's Billy. Billy Williams. But what's wrote on my birth certificate says William Williams, but that sounds about as dumb as a pig sittin' on a nest of eggs, don't you think?

STELLA: I'm not here to judge. Someone else has that responsibility. And your birthday—

TONI: (*Big laugh.*) That is soooo-so-so funny! William Williams! What were your parents thinking?!

WILLIAM: Dang, if I know!

TONI: (*Aside to him.*) They had to be smoking something, right? Right?!!

STELLA: Toni!

WILLIAM: Probly. Marlboros I suspect. Least that's what I remember my daddy smokin'. (*A beat.*) Oh, wait! You're talkin' bout that Skunk Weed, ain't ya? (*Chuckles.*) I'm a little slow, but that's funny. Anyways, my maw, she didn't smoke her tobaccy. She chewed it. She shore was a purdy woman. 'Cept for her teeth.

STELLA: Please, Mr. Williams! I really need to know your birthdate. There are others waiting behind you.

WILLIAM: Oh, sorry, ma'am. September 15th, 1957.

STELLA: Hmmmm... it appears I'll also need you to oblige me with the knowledge of your place of birth?

WILLIAM: The hills of West Virginny, ma'am. Just a hop, skip, and a jump from a tiny place called Idamay. But I ain't lived there since I was little enough to walk straight up underneath the belly of plow horse. My folks wanted me to get a cityfied education, so we moved up north to Punxsutawney, P.A.

TONI: Punxsutawney... punx, punx, punx! That's kind of fun to wrap your tongue around, isn't it? (*Giggles.*) That reminds me of a really funny story—

STELLA: (*Slaps her hand over TONI'S mouth.*) We have no time for stories. Funny or otherwise. Now, if we may continue, Mr. Williams, what is the address of your current residence?

WILLIAM: You probly won't believe this, but just a couple of months ago, I moved back to Punxsutawney, P.A.

TONI: Punx, punx, punx!

STELLA: (*SNAPS her pencil in frustration, then glares at TONI.*) That's nice. Now, Mr. Williams—

TONI: Moved back? Where else did you live?

WILLIAM: Well, that's kind of a long story.

STELLA: Unfortunately, we don't have time—

TONI: I bet we have time for the Reader's Digest version?! Go ahead, Billy Williams, but make it succinct.

WILLIAM: Well, when I was about 19 years old, the cutest little gal came through town and stopped at the fillin' station my daddy owned—I worked for him at the time. Anyways, she kept lookin' at me with those big brown eyes, and smilin'. I was so smitten with that purdy girl, I decided I'd just see where she was a goin', so I loaded up in my 48 International pickup truck and started followin' her. Followed her all day long and a bit into the night. Finally, I decided to just catch her, so that's what I did. Caught her in Chuckey, Tennessee. Then we got married right there in Chuckey the next day. Even got us a little house outside of town that had a few acres and we started raisin' chickens for a livin'. Raised five kids there, too. And—

STELLA: Address! Address! Address! Please, Mr. Williams. I am on a very tight schedule!

WILLIAM: Oh, sure. 205 West Eighth Avenue.

STELLA: Thank you. Let's see—*(Begins to scan the book again.)*

TONI: *(Leaning across STELLA and peering into the book.)* Oh, let me! Let me! *(Pulls book in front of her.)* William Williams... Punxsutawney—punx, punx, punx... Eighth Avenue. Yep there you are! He's on our list!

STELLA: Indeed. *(Grabs book from TONI to confirm.)* She—my assistant—is correct. You are on our side of the ledger. Place your hand here, please.

WILLIAM: You betcha!

TONI: Congrats! Welcome to Saint Peters Escort Service, LLC!

WILLIAM: Escort service? *(Immediately checks his breath, smells his underarms, and begins to groom himself, lastly pulling a tie from his pocket and putting it on.)*

TONI: Yes, sir! And I have been assigned to be your escort.

STELLA: Toni, you have not been assigned any such task!

TONI: Please, please, please, please... please let me escort him! I've been waiting like forever to get to do this!

STELLA: No.

TONI: Why not?

STELLA: You're a trainee—

TONI: Apprentice... that's what Saint Peter says I am.

STELLA: Apprentice. Either way, you are not an escort... yet... if ever.

TONI: If ever? *(Begins to sniffle and blubber.)* But it's what I've been dreaming of for years and years and centuries even. I just want to be an escort, like you! I want to help people like you help people! Please! Please, please, please, please, please!!!

WILLIAM: She said, "please."

TONI: I won't ask again for the rest of the day, I promise!

STELLA: Uh-huh. *(Sighs.)* Well, for the sake of expediency, I suppose—

TONI: Thank you, Stella! *(Hugs STELLA, then jumps up.)* I get to be your escort, Billy Williams!

WILLIAM: Well, shake the green tail feathers of a red-headed rooster. I must have died and gone to Heaven!

TONI: Almost! You're half-way there! *(Giggles.)* Now if you'll follow me! *(Leads WILLIAM to the Penthouse Elevator and helps him inside.)*

CESSAL: Hey, Stella. I found a coupon for three boxes of adult diapers. Want it? Buy two, get one free! ...No?

TONI: I hope you have a most excel-ahn-tay eternity, Billy Williams!

The Penthouse Elevator door closes and TONI skips back to the desk and sits with STELLA.

TONI: That was easy-peasy! So, how did I do?

STELLA: You need more training.

TONI: Well, he was my first one. It's all up hill from here on! Or is it downhill? Or is it up the river? Or over the river and through the woods? Do you know?

STELLA: Toni, do you remember what I said about the chit-chat?

TONI: Don't do it.

STELLA: Correct.

TONI: But maybe a little chit chat is okay?

STELLA: No.

TONI: A tiny bit?

STELLA: No. Now this time you are to only observe and listen quietly. Which means, I'll do the talking.

TONI: Gotcha.

STELLA: All of the talking.

TONI: My lips are sealed.

STELLA: Good. Now, observe how I process a new tenant with efficiency, yet with kindness. And without unnecessary chit-chat.

TONI: Yes, ma'am.

STELLA: *(Pushes the button.)* Next.

A flash of light fills the Entry Vestibule and JOHN enters USC.

STELLA: Hello. Step over here, please, sir.

JOHN: *(Looking around hesitantly.)* Well—

STELLA: It's alright. We're here to help you.

JOHN: Okay. *(Enters USC and crosses to STELLA and sits.)*

STELLA: You're name, sir?

JOHN: What's it matter?

STELLA: It matters a great deal. It's imperative that I know your name.

JOHN: You first.

STELLA: Pardon me?

JOHN: You tell me your name, then I'll tell you mine.

STELLA: Alright. Stella.

JOHN: Stella what? Don't you have a last name?

STELLA: Not anymore. A surname is unnecessary here.

TONI: Actually, you don't even need a first name where we're from.

If you hear a voice say "hey you", you know He's talking to you.

(Catches STELLA'S glare.) Oopsie! *(Clamps her own hand over her mouth.)*

JOHN: He who?

STELLA: Please ignore her. Now, if I may have your name?

JOHN: John.

STELLA: John. And you're last name, John?

JOHN: You said last names aren't needed.

STELLA: On this side of the desk, they are not. On your side, a last name is a requirement.

JOHN: Doe.

STELLA: Really? John Doe?

JOHN: Yeah. D-O-E. I'm not kidding. Hey, finger print me if you want. Wouldn't be the first time.

STELLA: That won't be necessary. And your date of birth, Mr. Doe?

JOHN: July 23rd.

STELLA: Your country of residence?

JOHN: Dominican Republic.

STELLA: Address?

JOHN: Like you don't already know.

STELLA: Please, Mr. Doe, I merely ask for verification purposes.

JOHN: 755 Bolivar Avenue, Apartment 603, Santo Domingo. But let's not advertise it. Uncle Sam might be listening.

STELLA: I don't think so. Let's see, John Doe, 755 Bolivar Avenue—

Ah, yes. There you are!

JOHN: There I am... where?

STELLA: In the book.

JOHN: What book?

STELLA: Nothing to worry about, Mr. Doe. You're in the good book.

JOHN: I'm in a good book? Are you sure?

STELLA: Of course. It says so right here.

JOHN: But, I—I've done some things a priest wouldn't want to hear in a confessional.

STELLA: Not to worry, Mr. Doe—

JOHN: I'm telling you, there's been a mistake.

STELLA: We don't make mistakes.

TONI: *(Raises her hand.)* Ah-hum! Ah-hummm!!!

STELLA: *(Looking sternly at TONI.)* I retract that. Perhaps errors are possible. What, Toni?

TONI: This—*(Waving her hands to indicate JOHN and STELLA.)* is sounding a lot like chit-chat to me.

STELLA: *(Glares at her for a beat.)* Now, Mr. Doe, if you'll just place your palm here on this pad, we'll get you scanned in.

JOHN: Scanned?

STELLA: Oh, yes. We are very high tech here.

TONI: Except for the book. This book is way, way, way traditional. You can't replace the good book with a computer. Right, Stella? ...Right?

STELLA: Please, Mr. Doe, your hand.

JOHN: Okay. *(Places his hand on the pad.)*

STELLA: Alright. We're all done here. If you will follow me, I'll escort you to your new eternal home.

STELLA rises and JOHN stands and begins to follow her.

JOHN: Eternal, huh? Hold on just a minute. I don't wanna assume the wrong thing, but you're not taking me to that place with the set of pearly gates, are you?

STELLA: Of course!

JOHN: Really?

STELLA: Really.

JOHN: Well, to be honest—which is not my normal forte—that has me a little weirded out.

STELLA: Why?

JOHN: Well, if I'm going where I think you're taking me, I'm going to be as out of place as—well, to quote my ole man—as out of place as a turd in a punch bowl. Like I said, I've done some things... bad things... I'm talking seriously bad things. *(Looks at TONI, then quickly whispers in STELLA'S ear.)*

STELLA: *(Listening and growing progressively more shocked.)* Oh—
Oh!—Oh, my! *(JOHN pulls away.)*

JOHN: You wanna hear more?

STELLA: NO! Uh—well, John... apparently, all is forgiven. *(Smiles warily at him.)*

TONI raises her hand again, as PETRA enters from Sub-Basement Elevator, USL with a note and hands it to CESSAL.

CESSAL: Thank you, Petra, my pet. *(Pat to PETRA'S backside.)*

JOHN: *(Sees PETRA and whistles.)* Chicka-Chicka Wow-Wow,
Boom-boom baby! You are one fine glass of wine. I could drink you
up all night long.

STELLA: Mr. Doe! Please exercise some decorum!

JOHN: Can I exercise it with her?

STELLA: No, Mr. Doe, you're coming with me!

JOHN: I'd rather go with her!

STELLA: Be careful what you wish for, Mr. Doe—

TONI: *(Raises her hand again.)* Ah-hummm! Ah-hummm!!!

STELLA: What?!

JOHN crosses toward PETRA who meets him half-way. They engage is silent flirtation.

TONI: Can I push this big button?

STELLA: No, not yet. I'm still engaged in escorting Mr. Doe.

TONI: Then I can push it when you're finished?

STELLA: We'll see.

TONI: Is that a yes?

STELLA: No.

TONI: Then how much longer?

STELLA: How much longer for what?

TONI: Until you're finished.

STELLA: Soon. And if it weren't for so many unnecessary
interruptions, I would have completed the task by now.

TONI: I know what you mean. Johnnie there is quite the chit-chatter.

STELLA: *(Rolls her eyes.)* Unbelievable!

PETRA: Do not call me Rooskie! *(Slaps him.)* I am Russian!

JOHN: *(Smiling as he rubs the sting on his cheek.)* Not a problem, baby. I like to play rough. So, my little Russian wildcat, how about you give me your phone number?

PETRA: Of course, my little kakáshka.

PETRA roughly takes JOHN'S chin in one hand as she slips a black marker from her cleavage. She then pulls his face toward her and writes on his forehead, D-O-R-K.

STELLA: *(To JOHN.)* Oh, dear. I'm so sorry!

JOHN: Don't be. I'm not.

STELLA: Now, Mr. Doe, I insist that you come with me. *(Pulls JOHN away from PETRA, then leads him to the Penthouse Elevator, and pushes the button.)* Please step inside and once you arrive at your floor, the doors will open, and someone else will be waiting there to escort you to your orientation meeting.

JOHN: I'm telling you, this is a mistake!

STELLA: Probably, but it's not my decision. *(Pushes him inside and reaches for the Penthouse Elevator button.)*

CESSAL: Hey Stella! Hold up just one itsy-bitsy second. *(Crosses to STELLA carrying his book.)* This one's not yours. He's ours.

JOHN: Told you so.

STELLA: Cessal, Mr. Doe is on my side of the ledger.

TONI: I don't know, Stella. Something's not right. He's got beady little eyes!

STELLA: So? You have beady little eyes. That doesn't make you one of theirs.

TONI: I've got beady little eyes? *(Immediately props her eyes open with her fingers.)* I had no idea!

CESSAL: Look, Doll, see. *(Lifts his book to STELLA.)* This guy is all mine.

STELLA: That would be highly—

TONI: Highly what?

STELLA: Unlikely.

CESSAL: Look! John Doe, age 41, 755 Bolivar Avenue, Apartment 603, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Arrival date today.

STELLA: Hmmm... well... well—

TONI: Well what?

- STELLA:** Extraordinary. (*Crosses to her desk and looks at her book.*)
- CESSAL:** Extraordinary my—
- STELLA:** Oh! Goodness me!
- TONI:** What is it?!
- STELLA:** Well, our book indicates another Mr. John Doe is scheduled for an appearance later today.
- CESSAL:** There you go, this guy is mine.
- TONI:** Awkward.
- CESSAL:** Hand him over.
- JOHN:** Yeah, hand me over.
- STELLA:** Curiously, this other John Doe also has an address of 755 Bolivar Avenue, Santo Domingo—
- JOHN:** That's probably my old man. He's John Senior. I'm Junior. I live with him. And I'm not surprised he's following me later today. I kinda had a "misunderstanding" with a Columbian "investor." Pops was probably a loose end that needed tied up, so to speak.
- STELLA:** But your birthdays?
- JOHN:** Yep, same day. Same name. But morally, we're night and day. I like—
- STELLA:** You've already told me what you like, Mr. Doe.
- CESSAL:** There you go. All is explained. Give him up, Doll.
- STELLA:** Cessal, as much as I might prefer to cooperate with you this once, I can't just hand over. When there is doubt, my superior is the only one authorized to confirm the facts.
- CESSAL:** Then call him.
- STELLA:** Nobody calls Saint Peter. He calls you.
- SFX: The red phone rings.*
- CESSAL:** Speak of the devil!
- STELLA:** (*Crosses to the red phone.*) Yes, sir? ...Oh... well, he's about six feet tall, 192 pounds, dark eyes, brown hair, an absolutely horrid smile—
- JOHN:** Hey!
- STELLA:** Really? Thank God! ...I mean, thanks be to God and—and cheery-o and save the queen and all of that. (*Hangs up, then to herself.*) I don't know why he makes me so nervous!
- CESSAL:** Well?

JOHN: Well?

TONI: Well?

STELLA: *(To CESSAL.)* He's all yours.

JOHN: Hot damn!

CESSAL: You don't know the half of it. Petra, my little pussycat, would you do the honors of escorting this gentleman to his new quarters.

PETRA: *(Russian accent.)* My pleasure. Follow me, Vásja Púpkín

JOHN: Double hot damn!

They enter the Sub-Basement Elevator and exit USL.

CESSAL: That was as easy as taking candy from a baby. *(Returns to his desk and takes out several sheets of paper to make airplanes.)*

STELLA: You would know.

TONI: Hey, hey, hey! No chit chat, remember?! Can I push the button now?

STELLA: Alright. However, I'll do the interviewing again. You are to just—

TONI: Observe and be quiet.

STELLA: Correct. And learn.

TONI: Oh, I've learned sooooo-so-so much already. For one thing, this job is just like a box of cracker-jacks—you expect a few nuts, but you never know for sure what kind of surprise you're going to get. Am I right? Right?!

STELLA: Well, now that I've met you, I can't argue with the comparison.

TONI: And I've learned something else, too.

STELLA: And what is that?

TONI: Apprentices, like me, are not to chit-chat.

STELLA: Correct.

TONI: Even though supervisors can chit-chat all day long, night and day, twenty-four seven, if they want to.

STELLA: Toni—press the button.

TONI: *(Presses the button.)* NEXT!!! *(Then presses her lips shut with her fingers.)*

Light flashes in the Entry Vestibule and MARTHA enters USC, and then scuttles up to STELLA'S desk and sits in the chair.

STELLA: Welcome to Saint Peter's Escort Service.

MARTHA: Thank you, dear.

STELLA: Your name?

MARTHA: Martha May Tooley

STELLA: Date of Birth?

MARTHA: Let me think, uh... oh, yes, January 14th, 1932.

STELLA: Latest address?

MARTHA: I can't remember. *(A beat.)* Wait, yes—yes, I can! I can remember! How nice! Four-one-one-two Holiday Manor, Room number ten, Summerville, Indiana. I moved there to be near my niece.

STELLA: Of course, here you are Martha. You're right on time!

MARTHA: And before that I lived at home with my dear Benjamin—*(Realizing she can remember things, her excitement grows.)* on Coventry Hill Drive! Franklin, New Hampshire! A little white house on the corner across the street from the elementary school. Oh, how I loved to watch the children at recess play jump rope, and hopscotch, and Red Rover, Red Rover. That was my favorite school yard game when I was a little girl—*(Pauses and begins to get emotional.)*

STELLA: Mrs. Tooley? Are you alright?

MARTHA: Oh, yes. Never better. *(A beat.)* I can remember things again! It's so wonderful!

STELLA: And it's going to get even better. In fact, we have a lovely place prepared for your stay.

MARTHA: Really? Is it a condo? I've always wanted to live in a condo.

STELLA: Well, not quite. But I promise you will be very comfortable.

MARTHA: And happy, too, am I right?

STELLA: Absolutely. Very happy.

MARTHA: Very happy?!

STELLA: Very, very happy. I promise.

TONI: Very, very, very happy!

CESSAL: I kid you not, if I hear the phrase "very happy" one more time, I'm going to barf up the Devil's Food cake I had for breakfast!*(Giving up on the airplanes, he takes a paddleboard from his desk and starts playing with it.)*

STELLA: Now, Martha, just place your hand here... very good
(*Instantly annoyed by CESSAL'S paddle-boarding.*) We have you
all checked in, Mrs. Tooley. Now, if you'll come with me— (*Leads*
MARTHA toward the Penthouse Elevator.)

MARTHA: Of course, my dear! Thank you. You are so very kind!

STELLA: You're most welcome, Mrs. Tooley. (*Aside to CESSAL.*)
Cessal! Is that necessary?

CESSAL: Completely. (*Continues playing.*)

MARTHA: And this place I'm going to... can I afford it? I don't have
much money, dear.

STELLA: Don't worry, Mrs. Tooley, your spot has already been paid
for.

MARTHA: How nice. I don't know that I deserve all this kindness.

STELLA: Of course you deserve it. (*Aside.*) Cessal! Do you mind?!

CESSAL: Rarely. (*Paddling the ball in a frenzy.*) But I'm sure I'm due
for a spanking.

STELLA: (*Marches to CESSAL.*) Give me that! (*Takes the paddle*
away.)

CESSAL: (*Jumps up.*) Nice! I've been fantasizing about this for as
long as I've known you! (*Turns and leans over the desk, extending*
his backside toward STELLA and twerks it.) Spank me, Stella!
Spank me good!

STELLA: (*Ignores CESSAL and returns to MARTHA.*) As I was about
to say, (*Pushes the Penthouse Elevator button.*) enjoy your stay,
Mrs. Tooley.

MARTHA: I'm sure I will! Oh, by the way, will my Benjamin be there
waiting for me?

STELLA: (*Hesitates.*) I imagine he will.

MARTHA: Really?!

STELLA: Well, it's been my experience that since you remember him,
he'll be there.

MARTHA: (*Tearing up.*) That makes me feel so very happy! (*She*
steps inside.) My Benjamin was so gentle, and loving, and always
there for me. You know, dear, you remind me of him.

STELLA: That's sweet of you to say, Mrs. Tooley. Now, enjoy your
eternity with your husband.

MARTHA: (*Startled, she quickly steps out.*) A husband?! I have a
husband?

STELLA: Don't you?

MARTHA: Not that I remember.

STELLA: Then, who is Benjamin?

MARTHA: Benjamin was my little doggy.

CESSAL: *(Laughs.)* I am LOVING THIS!!

STELLA: And I remind you of your... your dog?

MARTHA: Oh, yes. Waggly little tail, big eyes, ticklish little whiskers, and a shiny coat of hair the same color as yours! *(Pats STELLA'S head.)* Just cute as a button. *(Pinches her cheek.)*

CESSAL: Hilarious! I couldn't make this shit up!

MARTHA: *(Hurries back into the Penthouse Elevator.)* I can't wait to see my little Benjamin! Bye-bye!

STELLA: Good-bye, Mrs. Tooley. Oh, here, *(Hands her CESSAL'S paddleboard.)*, a play toy for Benjamin. Compliments of Cessal.

The door closes. CESSAL jumps up and pretends to be petting and playing with a dog.

CESSAL: That's a good, girl, Stella. Good girl—now roll over! Do a trick for Daddy!

STELLA: Shut up.

SFX: The red phone rings.

STELLA: *(Sighs, then crosses to the red phone.)* Does the man have nothing better to do?! *(Answers red phone.)* Stella speaking... Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. But Cessal—yes, sir—dog spelled backward is God.... Yes, that's quite profound.... Of course, sir. And sir, might I say a word about Toni? ...Well, sir, I don't think she's going to work out... well, she's incapable of following directions, for one thing—uh-huh... uh-huh.... Yes, sir... I will strive to do just that, sir. *(Hangs up and crosses to her desk.)*

CESSAL: *(Whistles.)* Here you go Stella, *(Tosses a pencil.)* go get it! Fetch! Fetch!

STELLA: *(Looks upward.)* You do know you're going to have to intervene, otherwise I'm going to choke him with my bare hands.

CESSAL laughs and returns to his side of the room and begins to play on the putting green.

TONI: Stella, that was soooooo-so-so fantabulous!

STELLA: *(Looks upward again.)* Really? She is your idea of intervention?

TONI: I mean the way you interacted with Martha May Tooley, especially when she realized her memory was a full box of crayons again. That was be-U-teeful. It's no wonder you've been in charge of "in-processing" for as long as you have!

STELLA: Don't remind me.

TONI: I'm serious!

STELLA: Enough! *(Sits down beside TONI.)* Just press the button.

TONI: *(Smacks the button.)* NEXT!

A flash of light and then DONNAH enters USC through the archway of the Entry Vestibule.

DONNAH: Hey! Where am I?

STELLA: Hello, I can help you.

DONNAH: *(Quickly crosses to STELLA.)* I am supposed to be on the Santa Monica Freeway. How did I get here?

STELLA: It's complicated.

TONI: Yeah, it's very complicated. So, how did she get here?

DONNAH: I'm supposed to be at an audition! I'm trying out for a part in a musical-like movie the big shots in Hollywood are making. I'm up for one the chorus dancers. I've been practicing and practicing. See—*(Does a few awkward kicks and a spin.)* I've been working on my singing too. Believe it or not, I can hit a high A if I squeeze my butt cheeks really tight. Wanna hear?

STELLA: No.

DONNAH: Your loss. So, anyways, I gotta be there by three o'clock.

STELLA: I'm sorry, that's not going to happen.

DONNAH: Why not?

STELLA: It's—

TONI: Complicated.

DONNAH: Oh, I see what's going on. You're giving me the run-around. Okay, then I demand to see your boss.

STELLA: Well, perhaps you will. It all depends.

DONNAH: It all depends on what?

STELLA: On whether your name is written in the appropriate section of my book or not.

TONI: You could be in Cessal's book. But I hope not!

DONNAH: These books you're talking about—what sort of books are they, anyway?

STELLA: Well, they're directories of sorts.

TONI: Oh, Stella, that's good! I mean really, really good. THE perfect way to describe the books with just one word! Directory! Directory-Directory-Directory. I'll have to write that down!

DONNAH: Are you talking about directions? Like do this, do that, go here, go there? Is that what you mean?

TONI: Yes! (*Pats the books.*) This puppy points you in either that direction (*Points up.*), or that direction (*Points down.*)

STELLA: Miss, if you'll please just cooperate and state your name, we can have you processed and moving along as quickly and painlessly as possible.

DONNAH: You answer me a question first. Why am I here?

STELLA: Ours not to reason why—

TONI: —ours but to do and die!

TONI and STELLA: (*To DONNAH.*) Alfred Lord Tennyson.

TONI: I love that saying by Alfred Lord Tennyson! By the way, Stella, is he any relation to the big guy? You know, that should be our motto!

STELLA: No and no.

TONI: I'll make a big sign, with really, really humongous colorful letters, like blue, and yellow, and—and grey! I love, love, love grey!

DONNAH: Are you two on drugs?

STELLA: Of course not! Now if you'll please just tell me your name.

DONNAH: Alright, alright. Donnah, with an "h."

STELLA: Donnah, with an "h?" ...Is the "h" on the end?

DONNAH: Where else?

TONI: Donnah with an "h." That's different.

DONNAH: Like I haven't heard that my whole life.

STELLA: Last name?

DONNAH: Atchour.

TONI: Gesundheit!

DONNAH: I didn't sneeze.

TONI: Sorry. Sounded that way to me.

DONNAH: Like I haven't heard that before either.

STELLA: I'm sorry, but our arrival list has neither a Donnah with an "h," or anyone with a last name of Atchour.

TONI: God Bless you!

STELLA: (*Rolls her eyes.*) However, I do have a Donna, without an "h," and with the last name of Hatchour. I'm thinking that might be you, miss--Donna Hatchour.

DONNAH: That ain't me.

STELLA: Born on November 2nd, 1981—

DONNAH: Hey, that's my birthday!

STELLA: 1240 Yale Street, Apartment 12-B, Santa Monica California—

DONNAH: Hey, that's where I live! What are the odds? This is one of those, what do you call them, coincidences?! So weird!

STELLA: Yes. Weird. Although had you given even a cursory review of your birth certificate, say sometime during the previous three decades, perhaps that might have led you to the prudent discovery that your H is not actually attached to the end of your first name, but instead is the first letter of your surname.

DONNAH: I'm so not following you. Could you repeat that, only in English this time?

STELLA: Under the circumstances, it's quite irrelevant now.

DONNAH: What are you saying?

STELLA: You're not in my book, sorry. (*Points.*) That "gentleman"... over there playing golf will be assisting you.

DONNAH: Hold on to your bloomers for just a gosh-darn second lady. What's this stuff you're saying about my birth certificate?

STELLA: Sorry, I can't help you. Please, move along.

DONNAH: How rude!

STELLA: CESSAL!

CESSAL: (*Looking up from his putter.*) Yeah?

STELLA: You have a customer.

DONNAH: (*Looks at CESSAL.*) Hey! He's cute! (*Scuttles over to him.*)

Hi ya, handsome. That pushy lady over there said you could help me.

CESSAL: Hello, Dolly! I'm certain I can assist you! Holy cow, where did you gets those legs?!

DONNAH: I'm a dancer!

CESSAL: So am I!

CESSAL quickly takes DONNAH in his arms, leads her in a short two-step reverse and dips her toward the floor.

DONNAH: *(With her head upside down.)* I think I'm in love! *(CESSAL raises her upright.)* You know, you're so much nicer than that broad over there. I don't like her very much.

CESSAL: Few people do. On the other hand, I am immensely popular.

DONNAH: I can see why! *(Fixing her hair.)* You're packaged quite nicely, if I do say so myself.

STELLA: My turn to throw up.

CESSAL: *(Turns to his book.)* Ah, yes! Donna with an "h."

DONNAH: *(Glares at STELLA.)* Told you so!

CESSAL: Welcome to my place, Donna!

DONNAH: Thank you! Tell me, is this place of yours near the beach? I love the beach! Besides, I really need to work on my tan. There's nothing nicer than lying in the sun until your skin turns a golden brown. You know what I mean?

CESSAL: Do I?! My place is exactly what you're looking for. Before you know it, you'll be a sizzling bronze, *(Then to STELLA.)* seconds after turning lobster red, and right before charcoal black!

TONI: And crispy, too, no doubt.

CESSAL: Right. And crispy, too! Colonel Sanders eat your heart out! *(Laughs.)* Now, Donna, if you'll just follow me, *(Escorts DONNAH to the Sub-Basement Elevator.)* I'll get you tucked into a nice comfy hammock, stretched out between a tall pair of lush palm trees, where you can sip away at a refreshing blue Curacao rum island cocktail while being lulled into a peaceful little nappy-poo by the soothing touch of a cool Caribbean breeze.

DONNAH: *(Steps into the Sub-Basement Elevator.)* Really?

CESSAL: No, not really! *(Pushes the button to close the door.)*

DONNAH: But—

CESSAL: Sorry, no buts—*(As the door closes.)* no refunds and no exchanges.

CESSAL turns and gives STELLA two big thumbs up.

STELLA: Cessal, you are so cruel.

CESSAL: I know! Try not to be jealous!

STELLA: (*Glancing at her watch.*) Toni, it's time for me to take a short little break.

TONI: Okay. I can take care of things here! (*Moves to tap the "next" button.*)

STELLA: STOP! Do not let anyone in until I return.

TONI: But I'm ready to fly solo don't you think?

STELLA: No.

TONI: But I'm absolutely, positively, categorically sure I can handle the next person who comes in here, if you'll just give me the chance—

STELLA: No!

TONI: But—

STELLA: No buts.

CESSAL: No refunds, no exchanges.

STELLA: Stay out of this, Cessal. Toni, I'm serious. You will wait for my return. Understood?

TONI: Yes, ma'am.

STELLA: I shan't be too long. (*Exits SR into Employees Only breakroom.*)

CESSAL: (*Mimicry.*) I shan't be too long. Shan't? Did she live in the Middle-Ages? (*Crosses to TONI.*) You know, Toni, I think you could do this job just as well as Stella.

TONI: You do?

CESSAL: Of course! You're very bright. Highly observant. And your bed-side manner is to die for.

TONI: You think so?

CESSAL: Yes! Stella is embarrassingly jealous, that's all. She doesn't want you to up-stage her. She knows Saint Peter is watching you. And from what I hear he has big plans for you.

TONI: He does?

CESSAL: Certainly. If I'm lying, I'm dying. You should show her.

TONI: Show her what?

CESSAL: That you can do the job... especially in her absence.

TONI: I don't know—

CESSAL: Push the button, Toni.

TONI: Oh, no, I can't do that.

CESSAL: You'd be doing her a favor. She's so overwhelmed. One less customer to process could just make her day. Push the button, Toni.

TONI: But Stella—she told me not to.

CESSAL: Stella is holding you back, Toni. *(Leans in toward TONI.)* She's suffocating you. She's keeping you under her thumb, her hands firmly clinched around your neck. Don't you feel it?

TONI: No, I—I don't feel anything. *(Pulls at her collar as she leans away from CESSAL, knocking over the candy dish, or other desk items.)*

CESSAL: Push the button, Toni! Don't you see, Stella is dragging you down. She's a miserable, conniving, corporate-ladder-climbing-gold-digger willing to squash anyone who gets in her way.

TONI: That—that doesn't sound like Stella at all!

CESSAL: It doesn't?

TONI: No. I think it sounds like... you!

CESSAL: *(Thinking for a beat.)* It does, doesn't it! *(Laughs as he pulls away from TONI.)* Sorry, my mistake.

Immediately TONI scampers about to gather up the spilled candies, etc., when accidentally she strikes the button.

TONI: Uh-oh!

Immediately there is a bright flash of light in the Entry Vestibule as CLARENCE rushes in USC.

CLARENCE: *(Irish accent.)* Holy Mackerel! I didn't think I'd ever get me turn!

TONI: Oh-oh-oh! You—you can't come in yet! *(Hurries to CLARENCE and tries to turn him around.)*

CLARENCE: Too late, I'm already here!

TONI: No, no, no... out you go! *(Struggles to get him shoved back through the doorway, but he adamantly resists.)*

CLARENCE: You can go kiss the Blarney Stone! I'm not a goin' back out there!

TONI: But Stella is not here at the moment, I'm sorry.

CLARENCE: Who's Stella?

TONI: She's the supervising escort.

CLARENCE: Then who might you be, Lassie?

TONI: I'm Toni. I'm just an apprentice.

CESSAL: Please! Toni is more than an apprentice. She's second in command.

CLARENCE: That's good enough for me.

TONI: (*Jumps on CLARENCE'S back, or pulls him by his shirt, desperately trying to get him back through the Entry Vestibule.*) No, no, no! You have to leave! I have strict orders! ... Cessal! Help me!

CESSAL: Oh, I'm sorry, snookums. I only step in when our guests are first cleared by Stella... or cleared by you.

TONI: But Stella is not here! (*Frustrated, she pulls CLARENCE'S hair.*)

CESSAL: No, but you are.

CLARENCE: Owwww!! Stop pulling me hair!

TONI: Sorry!

CLARENCE: Get off me, you four-leafed floozy!

TONI: (*Yanks at his shirt.*) I am not a floozy! I'm an escort!

CESSAL: Toni, might I suggest you just sit this gentleman down and quickly confirm his identity. Then you could have him processed and out of here before Stella even knows he was next in line.

TONI: (*Hesitates a beat.*) Well, that sounds like a pretty good idea, I guess.

CLARENCE: It makes a lot of sense to me, Lassie.

CESSAL: It's the right thing to do, Toni. And if he's mine, I'll work just as quickly to get him on his merry way... as a favor... to you.

TONI: Promise?

CESSAL: (*With a hand pledge.*) Scout's honor. Heil Hitler. And cross my heart!

TONI: Alright, mister—(*Anxiously pulls CLARENCE to the desk and pushes him down into the chair.*) sit here. (*Hurries to the opposite side and flops open the book.*) What's your name?

CLARENCE: Patrick Clarence O' Shannon.

TONI: (*Zealously scanning the book.*) Patrick... Patrick ...

CLARENCE: But I've always gone by Clarence. My father was Patrick Angus O'Shannon—

TONI: Yeah, yeah, whatever, now shush!

CESSAL: That a girl!

TONI: Clarence, Clarence, Clarence... Oh, oh, here... I think I found you! Patrick Clarence O' Shannon! Okay, when's your birthday?

CLARENCE: April first, I was a fool's day baby. And me sister, Patricia, she was born on Saint Paddy's day!

TONI: Yeah, yeah. What year?!

CLARENCE: Well, let me think. Patricia is older than me by a few years—

TONI: Not her! I'm talking about you!

CLARENCE: Sorry, Lassie. 1945. At the end of the war. My folks they met in Switzerland, he was—

TONI: Hey! We have a rule here! No chit-chat! Now, where did you live?

CLARENCE: Ireland, of course.

TONI: You'll need to be more specific!

CLARENCE: Killnitty.

TONI: Keep going!

CLARENCE: Camcor River Road—

TONI: Close enough! *(To CESSAL.)* He's one of ours!

CESSAL: Damn!

TONI: Ok, come with me! *(Hurries around and pulls CLARENCE up from the chair and drags him to the Penthouse Elevator.)*

CLARENCE: Where are we going?

TONI: Great place! You'll love it!

CESSAL: Uh—Toni? Aren't you forgetting something?

TONI: *(Stops and looks at CESSAL.)* What?

CESSAL: *(Motions with his hand.)* The scanner?

TONI: Oh, yeah! Right! *(Drags CLARENCE back to the desk.)* Here, Patrick, put your hand right here—

CLARENCE: Clarence, not Patrick—

TONI: Whatever! *(Presses his hand down over the scanner.)* Okay, now, hurry up, let's go!

CLARENCE: Just hold on to your lucky charms, little Lassie. I want to know where I'm going.

CESSAL: It's a fair question.

TONI: (*Stops.*) Alright, alright. Heaven. You're going to Heaven.

CLARENCE: Heaven?

TONI: Yeah! Isn't that awesome!

CLARENCE: No.

TONI: What do mean no?

CLARENCE: I don't want to go there!

TONI: Why not?

CLARENCE: Me wife died a few years ago, and I presume she's already talked her way into that place.

TONI: Well, that should be good, right?

CLARENCE: Wrong. That's bad. I couldn't stand the woman. I took a vow for better or worse, but it turned out to be 99% worse. But like a good Catholic I kept me wedding vows and I stayed with the old Battle Axe "till death do us part." Well, she died, we parted. Contract complete. Me life has been grand since she died. I have no desire to spend me eternity with her! That would be hell.

TONI: (*Subconsciously mimics STELLA.*) Perhaps you should take a moment to reconsider the implications. If you don't go to Heaven, that other place is your only alternative. (*A beat, then to CESSAL.*) Why am I suddenly talking like Stella?

CLARENCE: That other place, the one without me wife, that's where I want to go. And I'd trade me last pot of gold to get there, too!

TONI: Trust me, you won't like that place.

CLARENCE: I'll take me chances. Now, how do I get there?

CESSAL: (*Points.*) With a first-class ticket on my elevator.

CLARENCE: How much?

STELLA enters SR and is stunned by the scene.

TONI: No, no, no! You can't go with him. You're ours!

CLARENCE: I don't want to be yours, Lassie! I'm with him!

TONI: You're coming with me!

CLARENCE: No, I'm not going with you! And neither you nor a whole army of Leprechauns are going to make me!

STELLA: TONI! What is going on?!

TONI: Stella... ha, ha, ha... you're back. Sooooo-so-so soon!

STELLA: Who is this man?

TONI: Patrick.

CLARENCE: Clarence. My name is Clarence!

CESSAL: Listen, Doll, I can explain.

STELLA: (To TONI.) You! Talk! (To CESSAL.) You! Shut up! (SFX: *The red phone rings.*) Seriously?!

TONI: (*Hurries to STELLA and grabs her by the waist/jacket.*) Stella, I'm so sorry! It was an accident! Honest!

SFX: The red phone rings again. STELLA tries to pull away.

CESSAL: (*Crosses to SR.*) Tell you what, I'll answer that for you.

STELLA: Accident?

TONI: Yes! Cessal was talking to me and, and saying, really, really, really pooppy things about you.

CESSAL: Throwing me under the bus? Nice!

TONI: And then I spilled that crappy candy all over the place, and somehow the button got pushed—

CESSAL: (*Answering the red phone with a German accent.*) Hallo, Mutter! Schlossgarten Restaurant at your service! Unser lunch special ist a superb Frikadellan mit limburger spaetzle for only \$8.99. Dine in or carry out?

STELLA: CESSAL!

CESSAL: (*As if offended. With a German accent.*) No schnitzel! No wieners! Auf wiedersehen! (*Hangs up and smiles devilishly.*) Problem solved.

STELLA: Are you mad?

CESSAL: Always! But at least I'm having fun!

SFX: The red phone rings again. STELLA hurries to answer it. TONI moves to CLARENCE and takes his hand.

TONI: Please, Mr. O' Shannon! You've just got to get on Saint Peter's elevator!

STELLA: I'm terribly sorry, sir. We have an urgent and unusual situation here. Could I put you on hold? For just a moment?

Suddenly there is a great rumble of thunder and a flickering of the lights. Everyone freezes.

CESSAL: Somebody's testy.

STELLA: My sincerest apologies, sir. What I meant was—

Immediately there is a complete blackout. During the blackout, PETRA enters and CLARENCE exits.

STELLA: Fantastic! Now, everyone, just stay where you are. Remain calm! I'm reasonably certain this untimely power failure will just be temporary.

Everybody begins to move around on stage, bumping into one another. Ad libs: "Excuse me. Watch out! Who's touching me?! Hmmm, and I thought they were fake." When the lights come up, CESSAL is leading STELLA in a cha-cha dance, and TONI is in an awkward bear-hug embrace with PETRA. CLARENCE is gone.

STELLA: *(Slaps CESSAL.)* Let go of me, you degenerate!

CESSAL: *(Keeping STELLA in his arms.)* Would you prefer a Waltz? *(He leads her around the room in a dance.)*

TONI: Hey! You're not Patrick Clarence O' Shannon?! *(Frantically starts looking around, under the desk, etc.)* Clarence? Patrick? Oh, Patrick Clarence, where are you?

STELLA: *(Being twirled around by CESSAL.)* Toni!

TONI: Yes?

STELLA: What have you done with Mr. O' Shannon?

TONI: Uh... I don't know! It's like he just evaporated. You know, poof! Gone!

STELLA: Gone where?

TONI: I don't know! Stella?! Please help me find him!

CESSAL: Toni, can't you see Stella and I are involved at the moment?

STELLA: Cessal, un-hand me!

CESSAL: Never!

STELLA: *(At the height of her frustration.)* CESSAL!

CESSAL: STELLA! STELLA!!!

Blackout.

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