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Big Dog Publishing

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*To the two people
who have always encouraged me to write—
my sister, Susan Swift,
and my beloved husband Michael.*

A Ghost of a Chance (“Black Tuesday”) was first performed at the West End Theater, Portsmouth, NH, in February 2018 for a three-week run.

A Ghost of a Chance

COMEDY. Eager to sell a posh penthouse that has been on the market for 10 years, a real estate agent thinks he's in luck when he meets a mob boss and his wife who are keen on purchasing the apartment. However, there's just one little problem: the penthouse is haunted by unhappily married, bickering ghosts who aren't even sure if they're dead. To salvage the sale, the real estate agent hires a "psychic" to rid the apartment of its quarrelsome ghosts and help them escape their penthouse purgatory and find a new lease on...death. This supernatural comedy features uncanny "psychic" humor, unearthly twists and turns, and otherworldly one-liners. A strong ensemble cast. Easy to stage with one set.

Performance Time: Approximately 75 minutes.

Characters

(3 M, 2 F, 1 flexible, extras)

LLOYD CARLISLE: Pompous, charming ghost who spends his afterlife haunting a Manhattan penthouse and bickering with his dead wife, Abertine; had spent his life in the upper echelons of society until his untimely death; wears a tuxedo; male.

ABERTINE CARLISLE: A wealthy, glamorous ghost who spends her afterlife haunting a Manhattan penthouse while bickering with her dead husband, Lloyd; had spent her life traveling abroad while hobnobbing with the most elite in society until her untimely death; wears a flowing ball gown and bracelet; female

NELSON CODNICK: Real estate agent desperate to sell a Manhattan penthouse haunted by two ghosts who just happen to be his dead parents; sloppy in appearance; male.

WALLY PAPASADORA: No-nonsense gangster married to Bernice; has never done a legal thing in his life; male.

BERNICE PAPASADORA: Wally's brash, loud wife who yearns to leave her New Jersey home to live the highlife in a posh Manhattan penthouse; blonde; female.

DWIGHT/TWILA MESSENGER: A "psychic" hired to rid the penthouse of its two resident ghosts; wears a turban and ethereal-looking clothing; flexible. [*Note: If female, change name to Twila.*]

EXTRAS: As Ladies and Gentlemen.

NOTE: For flexible role, change the script accordingly.

Setting

Posh Manhattan penthouse apartment, 1935.

Set

Penthouse apartment. A beautifully appointed Art Deco-style Manhattan penthouse apartment. At CS, there is a chaise lounge, a sofa with pillows, a coffee table, and two wing-backed chairs. A fireplace is located USC. At DLS, there is a bar or bar cart with two stools. The entrance to the lobby is DSR. USL leads to the balcony and USR leads to the interior of the apartment.

Sy nopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 2: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 3: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 4: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 5: Penthouse apartment, a short time later.

Intermission, opt.

ACT II

Scene 1: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 2: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 3: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 4: Penthouse apartment.

Scene 5: Penthouse apartment.

Props

Newspaper
Hot dogs
Tea set
Watch, for Nelson
Cell phone, for Nelson
Coin
Crystal ball
Ice bag
Box of chocolates
Deed
Butler/waiter apparel, for Wally
White serving towel

Sound Effects

Loud crash, thud, or splat
Thud
Waltz music
Music, "They Can't Take That Away From Me"

Notes on Music

Music is important for creating the proper mood and time period. Music should be played at the close and opening of each scene. Much of the ghosts' time onstage may be underscored with music. There are also opportunities to add singing, if desired.

“Don’t take our headstones
for granite.”

- Wally

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Manhattan penthouse apartment. Lloyd Carlisle and Abertine Carlisle are waltzing around the stage. Lloyd is wearing a tuxedo and Abertine is wearing a flowing ball gown. They stop CS and Lloyd gives Abertine a kiss on the cheek.)

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* The morning of Tuesday, October 29, 1929 was like any other morning.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* I arose at 8:15 sharp and had my bath drawn.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* I got up, leapt out of bed with enthusiasm, and did a full course of calisthenics.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* He always thought that would keep him young, as if a few lunges and squats could ward off the effects of the cigarettes, caviar, champagne, and the high cost of living a glamorous life.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* Not that any of it mattered as I was soon to find out.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* I rang for breakfast to be delivered.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* We ate breakfast—

ABERTINE/LLOYD: *(Looking at each other.)* Separately.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* One really has to have a chance to digest one's meal before seeing one's wife first thing in the morning. Even the slightest glance could really set the whole day on the wrong foot.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* I prefer to eat alone. Actually, I prefer to do everything alone, but a husband was necessary if a wife wanted to have children.

ABERTINE/LLOYD: *(Look at each other.)* That proved to be a mistake.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* I started my morning ritual of going through the daily newspapers when I saw *it*.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* I had never heard my husband scream before!

LLOYD: I wouldn't call it a "scream."

ABERTINE: Then what would you call it?

LLOYD: More...an expression of my dissatisfaction.

ABERTINE: Call it what you want, darling, but you sounded like a little girl after discovering that Santa was a myth created by Wall Street to boost end-of-year sales.

LLOYD: I did scream once that I can remember.

ABERTINE: When was that? *(Remembers.)* Oh, yes, it was on our honeymoon, but that had more to do with a mouse.

LLOYD: I would never blame you for any excitement, darling.

ABERTINE: You were saying...

LLOYD: The newspaper. Yes! *(To audience.)* I still could not believe what I was reading.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* The market had collapsed.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* Right from under our feet.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* We were broke. We lost everything.

LLOYD: Well, not everything.

ABERTINE: No?

LLOYD: *(With clenched teeth.)* We still had each other.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* As I said...*everything*

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* And let it be clear that there was much to lose.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* But in the end, it didn't matter.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* Everyone we knew was penniless.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* There would be no more weekends in the Hamptons...

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* No more parties or theatre or travel...

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* For the first time in our lives, we had to think about a future.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* When faced with challenges, I always believe that one should be realistic. Let's be honest...I could barely stand the sight of her even with all the money.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* I was sure I would not be able to stand him without it.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* So we looked at each other, really for the first time in years...

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* Instinctively, we both knew what had to be done. After all, I was not born to be poor.

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* There was some doubt that she had actually even been born. *(Snickers.)* The apartment was high enough...

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* Only the riff-raff lived below the 20th floor...

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* So we jumped...not for joy, but out of the library window.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* Had I known it was going to be so chilly, I would have worn a sweater!

LLOYD: *(To audience.)* Not that it mattered in the end.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* It was a lovely view...

LLOYD: I couldn't really notice. I was more interested in the sidewalk below than the view.

ABERTINE: *(To audience.)* Now I will spend the rest of my life—or whatever it is you want to call it—with my husband.

LLOYD: I guess you could be considered lucky.

ABERTINE: There are all kinds of luck, darling.

(As the lights fade, Lloyd and Abertine begin to waltz.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Penthouse apartment. Nelson enters, backing into the apartment.)

NELSON: (To Bernice.) As you can see, the floors in the foyer are made of the most exquisite tile. I can almost see myself in them. (Looks at the tile floor and giggles.) Nothing but the best!

(Bernice bursts in.)

BERNICE: I just love it! How many bedrooms did you say there were? Not that it matters...not that we have children...not that I don't like children... (Thinks.) Well, for pictures maybe. (Laughs.) I do go on, don't I?

NELSON: The apartment has its own private elevator.

(Bernice crosses to a window.)

BERNICE: (Looking out the window.) Just look at the view! I can just see myself seeing myself here. (Quick laugh.)

NELSON: Central Park West is the most exclusive address one can have in New York. Anyone who is anyone lives here.

BERNICE: So what does that make me? Just kidding! You really mustn't listen to a word I say. (To offstage, calls.) Honey, where are you?

WALLY: (Offstage, calls.) I'm coming, dear. I'm looking at the molding. It's foreign. I believe it is French.

BERNICE: (Calls.) Who cares about the molding? Get in here!

NELSON: (To Wally, calls.) You are right, Mr. Papasadora, the molding is French. All of it was handcrafted specifically for this building. Nothing but the best!

(Wally enters.)

WALLY: It should be...for these prices. *(To Nelson.)* Don't they have molding down on 31st street?

(Nelson starts to answer.)

BERNICE: *(To Wally.)* Honey, it's perfect! It's everything we want in an apartment. Just think about it! When we move in, people will know we have arrived.

NELSON: *(Under his breath.)* You can say that again.

BERNICE: I beg your pardon?

NELSON: *(Covering.)* Have you seen the kitchen?

BERNICE: You're funny! You don't have to sell me. It's perfect. *(To Wally.)* Honey, our first apartment in New York!

NELSON: Where did you live before?

BERNICE: Jersey.

NELSON: That's too bad. *(Makes a face. Realizes.)* I mean, it is too bad that you have waited so long to arrive. This apartment screams for someone with your flair, with your panache, with your... *(Chokes.)* ...class.

BERNICE: It's important to have a nice home...a place you can feel safe.

NELSON: The only thing I remember are boarding schools and the occasional card with a check.

BERNICE: So you and your parents weren't close?

NELSON: The school was about 120 miles away...so, no, we weren't.

WALLY: I hate to break up this tender moment, but do you have any other offers on the place?

NELSON: As a matter of fact, we had an offer this morning, but the couple backed out at the last minute.

WALLY: Why did they back out? Is there something wrong with the place? I'm starting to have second thoughts. Is there anything you are not telling us?

NELSON: Why, no. Of course not. They just had a change of heart, that is all.

BERNICE: Boys, boys, boys! Let's not forget about what is important: I am happy!

WALLY: I never forgot it for a moment, buttercup. I'm sure we can make an arrangement. Perhaps I can make him an offer...

NELSON: *(To Bernice, kissing her hand.)* Your happiness is my sole reason for being here right now.

WALLY: All right, I'll give you that one. So what was the problem with the other people who wanted this place?

NELSON: Nothing, really. It seems the wife thought she might have seen something.

WALLY: What kind of something?

BERNICE: *(To Nelson.)* It better not be a mouse. I can't stand 'em!

NELSON: It does not matter. It is ridiculous.

WALLY: Now, you listen, buddy boy. I did not get where I am today by going into a deal without knowing everything. There are those who have tried to pull the wool over my eyes—

WALLY/BERNICE: *(Crossing themselves.)* God rest their souls...

WALLY: And let's just say they have regretted that decision.

NELSON: What is it that you do, sir?

BERNICE: He makes headstones.

NELSON: Headstones?

WALLY: Headstones. I don't mess around with the banks or the stock markets because so much can affect them, but everyone—eventually, I mean—everyone will need what I have to sell.

NELSON: How dreadful!

BERNICE: *(To Wally.)* Honey, tell him your slogan!

WALLY: *(Proudly.)* "Don't take our headstones for granite."

(Bernice laughs.)

BERNICE: *(To Nelson, proudly.)* That was my idea.

NELSON: *(To Wally.)* I'm so surprised. Did you always work in a cemetery?

WALLY: No, I used to be a butler before I found my true vocation. I found that I liked to make my own decisions.

NELSON: You mean before you made your money?

WALLY: If you must know, I made a lot of changes. I lost some weight and got my teeth fixed. New look, new life... *(Grabs Bernice.)* ...and a new love!

BERNICE: You say the sweetest things!

WALLY: *(To Nelson.)* So, as you can see, I am no fool. I have been around the block more than once—mainly because I took a wrong turn, but I've been there. Now, buddy boy, you lay your cards on the table, or we are walking out right now. Tell me what the woman *thought* she saw.

NELSON: It's so ridiculous...

WALLY: I am still listening...

NELSON: It really is foolish...

WALLY: *(To Bernice.)* Honey, get your coat.

NELSON: She thought she saw a ghost! *(Laughs.)*

WALLY: *(Scared.)* A ghost?!

BERNICE: *(Delighted.)* A ghost?!

NELSON: *(To Wally and Bernice, chuckles.)* Yes, a ghost. I told you it was ridiculous!

BERNICE: *(To Wally, excited.)* Oh, honey, our new apartment is haunted! We can hold a séance! I'll invite everyone!

NELSON: Actually, there are two of them.

BERNICE: How chic! So we'll need more food.

WALLY: We're leaving!

BERNICE: *(To Nelson.)* Do we know who they are? Please tell me! I can't stand to wait another minute!

NELSON: Well, from what I heard, it is a married couple.

WALLY: *(To Bernice.)* Get your coat.

BERNICE: How romantic! *(To Nelson.)* So why do they haunt this apartment?

NELSON: Because they jumped out of the library window...together.

WALLY: Just jumped?!

NELSON: The morning the stock market crashed. They had lost everything.

BERNICE: Out of this apartment?

WALLY: *(To Nelson.)* No one pushed them?

NELSON: Right after breakfast.

BERNICE: What did they have?

WALLY: *(To Nelson.)* The deal's off!

BERNICE: Honey, slow down. I'm sure there is more to the story.

NELSON: Not really. The market crashed, they had breakfast, and then they jumped out the window. It was in all the papers.

BERNICE: Even in Jersey?

WALLY: *(Scared.)* Darling, we are not going to buy a haunted apartment. I don't like ghosts...not that I believe in them. I just don't want to live with one, let alone two. The idea of someone dead walking around their old apartment...it gives me the heebie-jeebies.

BERNICE: I agree.

WALLY: *(Surprised.)* You do?

BERNICE: Of course, I do. So you see, there is no reason why we shouldn't buy the apartment. You, yourself, said that there were no such things as ghosts.

WALLY: What I meant was—

NELSON: I can give you a good price. The apartment has been on the market for quite some time.

WALLY: How long is "long"?

NELSON: Ten years.

WALLY: That does it! *(To Bernice.)* The place is haunted, and we're leaving!

BERNICE: *(Stomps her foot.)* Now, stop right there! You promised me a New York apartment!

WALLY: So I'll buy you a New York apartment. I have a friend who owns property in Brooklyn.

BERNICE: I see. Well, I guess it's better to know now than wait. (*Upset.*) So, you look at me and you think...Brooklyn?

NELSON: Well...

BERNICE: (*To Wally, angry.*) I look at me, and I see Manhattan...less a few pounds and without the river. If you want me to be happy, snuggums, you will buy me this apartment. If not, I will just go and live with my mother back in Jersey.

WALLY: Honey... (*Bernice turns away from him. To Nelson.*) There are no such things as a ghosts, right?

NELSON: Ridiculous!

BERNICE: (*To Wally.*) Preposterous!

WALLY: (*Gives in.*) All right.

NELSON: We have a deal?

WALLY: We have a deal.

BERNICE: (*Squeals.*) Thank you, honey! (*To Nelson.*) Of course, we will want to hold the escrow for at least 90 days until we have our contractor look to see if there are any structural issues.

NELSON: Are you for real?

BERNICE: I'm full of surprises. (*Imagining her new address.*) Bernice and Wallace Papasadora, West side, Manhattan. You'll see. We'll move in right away. It looks as though things are going ahead just as I planned.

WALLY: I hope I don't live to regret this!

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Penthouse apartment. Waltz music. Lloyd and Abertine waltz on. Lloyd grabs the newspaper and sits on the chaise. Abertine goes to the bar and pours herself a cup of tea.)

ABERTINE: Darling, could you live without me?

LLOYD: How much time to do I have before I have to answer?

ABERTINE: I'm serious. It seems all of our friends are getting divorced. I just want to make sure that we are on the right course. I know our marriage was arranged...

LLOYD: Remind me to speak with that florist.

ABERTINE: Why must you always kid?

(Lloyd stands.)

LLOYD: Darling, there is no one for me but you. Whether we like it or not, we are a matched set. Whether we are dancing at the Stardust or at home despising each other, we are both settled for better or worse.

ABERTINE: I just wanted to make sure that you didn't make a mistake. I have always been fine living without love.

LLOYD: Excuse me?

ABERTINE: Our parents did it, so why can't we? We are a modern couple...more partners than husband and wife. From the outside, we look like the perfect couple, but we both know better.

LLOYD: *(Reading newspaper.)* Whatever you say, darling.

ABERTINE: I know sometimes it might get a little lonely...
(Shakes her bracelet and stares at it.) ...but that is why we have shiny things to distract us when we get sad.

LLOYD: *(Looks up from the newspaper.)* Did you say you don't love me?

ABERTINE: *(Still staring at her bracelet.)* I could do this all day!

LLOYD: Snap out of it. You say you don't love me...frankly, I've known that for years, but I now see it as a challenge. I'm sure I can make you love me.

(Lloyd kisses Abertine. No reaction from Abertine.)

ABERTINE: I think I am meeting Mindy for lunch. I wonder what I will wear... *(Lloyd kisses Abertine again. No reaction from Abertine.)* Are you done with the newspaper? I think there is a sale at Tiffany's. *(Lloyd kisses Abertine again. No reaction from Abertine.)* That reminds me...I have to feed the dog.

LLOYD: So it's true. All of this time, I thought you loved me, and now I find out the truth.

ABERTINE: Don't be such a bore, darling. For a moment there, I thought you had an actual emotion. Don't try to be deep, darling, we all know your well runs a little shallow.

(Lloyd ponders this and then laughs.)

LLOYD: If I had a caring bone in my body, I would be hurt by that remark. I better get a hold of myself then, shouldn't I? *(Lloyd and Abertine laugh. Lloyd picks up the newspaper and sits.)* So, where were we?

ABERTINE: I was wondering if I had a lunch with Mindy.

LLOYD: I'm sure you can talk your way out of it. Ring her up and tell her you have a headache, or you could just be honest...tactful but honest.

ABERTINE: Darling, tact is for people who are not smart enough to be sarcastic.

LLOYD: You truly are living proof that God had a sense of humor. Hello! Remind me to speak to the butler.

ABERTINE: What about?

LLOYD: This newspaper. I've read it before.

ABERTINE: Are you sure? Honestly, I'm surprised. I never thought you actually read the paper. I just thought you stared at it while wondering what I was going to say next.

LLOYD: *(Ruffled.)* Look at this! *(Indicating newspaper.)* Tuesday, October 29. *(Reads.)* "Stock market crashes. More than 16 million shares were traded in a single day leading to the largest crash in the New York Stock Exchange history!" *(Realizing their plight.)* We've lost everything! We're broke! *(Slight pause.)* Why do I think I've said that before?

ABERTINE: Broke?! What are we going to do?! *(Frantic.)* I can barely stand you *with* the money – *(Realizes.)* It all does sound a bit familiar...

LLOYD: That is one thing we have always agreed on in our marriage: When the money goes, so do I.

ABERTINE: There must be someone who can help us.

LLOYD: There isn't. Everyone we know has lost everything.

ABERTINE: Well, I guess I'm not having lunch with Mindy, after all. We're broke. Maybe I should change into something a bit more worn and tired...like your mother.

LLOYD: Well played, darling. Even in crisis you are still an absolute beast.

ABERTINE: Are you flirting with me?

LLOYD: Low wages, high unemployment, the proliferation of debt –

ABERTINE: *(Tossing her hair.)* Stop trying to make me feel better with your pretty words.

LLOYD: This is the end. We are ruined.

ABERTINE: I'm afraid there is only one thing to do.

LLOYD: I don't want to live in this world without the riches I deserve. I'm going to jump. That's it! I'm going to jump off the balcony! I was getting tired of this marriage, anyway. Are you coming with me?

LLOYD: *(Smiling.)* You go on ahead. I want to finish the paper.

ABERTINE: Then I will do it myself. Goodbye, cruel world! *(Manically laughs.)* I never liked you anyway. *(Exits offstage.)*

Shouts.) Hey, you down there! Your day is about to change for the better!

LLOYD: *(Shouts.)* Excuse me, darling?!

ABERTINE: Bon voyage! *(Screams as she "jumps." Note: Screams get softer as she "falls." Loud crash, thud, or splat is heard.)*

LLOYD: *(To himself.)* Yes, I am sure of it. I've read this paper before. It all seems so familiar! The crash, jumping of the ledge. Some of it good and some of it...well, no matter. This time I am going to do it right.

(Abertine enters, looking tousled with hot dogs and hot dog buns in her hair.)

ABERTINE: I thought you said you were coming.

LLOYD: Darling, I'm afraid I have some bad news.

ABERTINE: I just jumped out of a 27-story window and landed on a delivery boy who was selling hot dogs on a cart. What news could possibly be worse?

LLOYD: Now, don't get excited... *(Pause.)* ...but I believe we are dead.

ABERTINE: I'm in no mood to talk about our honeymoon.

LLOYD: I am quite serious. That ledge you just jumped off of...you have jumped off of it before.

ABERTINE: Don't be ridiculous!

LLOYD: This newspaper, this conversation, the crash...doesn't it all sound familiar to you?

ABERTINE: Us dead? That is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard! *(Bernice enters, points at them, screams, and runs off.)* On second thought, you may be right.

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: Penthouse apartment. Nelson is pacing back and forth, talking on the phone.)

NELSON: *(Into phone.)* Yes, Mr. Papasadora. I am told he is the best in the business. He'll be here any minute...How do I know he's a good psychic? Because when I called him, he said he knew I was going to call...I know. Pretty impressive. If there is a ghost in this apartment, I have been assured that he can take care of it...Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Goodbye, sir. *(Hangs up and looks at his watch. To himself.)* Where is he?

(Nelson walks around the apartment looking behind pillows and in back of furniture. Bernice enters behind him.)

BERNICE: Boo!

(Nelson jumps and screams.)

NELSON: Don't do that?! Are you trying to scare me to death?

BERNICE: We already have enough ghosts in this apartment.

NELSON: Please...I have neither the time nor the crayons to explain this to you.

BERNICE: Hey, Clodnick, don't forget who's working for whom!

NELSON: I'm sorry. All of this ghost business has put me a little on edge. I'm as nervous as a cat in a room full of rockers.

BERNICE: He's coming, isn't he?

NELSON: Who?

BERNICE: You know who. I heard you talking to him on the phone. The Messenger! [Dwight] Messenger! You know, the psychic! *[Note: If female, insert Twila.]*

NELSON: Is that his name? I was too afraid to ask. I just got his number from a colleague who had a similar problem.

BERNICE: He also had a ghost?

NELSON: I guess you could say that. Every time he looked in the mirror, he saw himself in it.

BERNICE: So what is so terrifying about that?

NELSON: His reflection was pointing at something behind him. *(Spins around quickly.)* He said that Mr. Messenger fixed it so that he never saw that again.

BERNICE: So he got rid of the ghost?

NELSON: No, he got rid of the mirror. *(Looks at his watch.)* Where is he? He told me he would be right over.

BERNICE: You can't rush the dead.

NELSON: That's what I told my ex-wife. I hope Mr. Messenger is more understanding. I don't like all this ghost business. *(Looks at watch.)* Where is he?

(Dwight enters, wearing a turban.)

DWIGHT: I have been summoned!

(Nelson approaches Dwight.)

NELSON: Boy, am I glad to see you.

DWIGHT: We are not alone in this room.

NELSON: I'm sorry. *(Introducing.)* This is Mrs. Bernice Papasadora.

DWIGHT: That's not what I meant.

NELSON: What? *(Realizes.)* Oh, yes! Oooh!

BERNICE: *(To Dwight.)* I can't tell you how excited I am to meet you! I have seen you on the stage. You have quite a bag of tricks.

DWIGHT: I can assure you, there are no tricks.

(Dwight pulls a coin from Bernice's ear.)

NELSON: At least we got that out of the way.

DWIGHT: *(Walking around the room.)* Can you feel the energy? The longing, the hunger, the pain? *(Bernice and Nelson feel it.)* I have not felt this much pain and anger since I was in Castle Montbrooke.

(Bernice sits.)

BERNICE: I think I've heard this story. It was in all the papers.

DWIGHT: I was cleared of all charges.

BERNICE: That's not what I meant.

DWIGHT: I knew that! a little psychic humor! Where was I? *(Remembers.)* The castle! It seems there had been a murder at the Montbrooke, and the victim did not want to stay dead. She haunted the people in that castle for more than 20 years until I came in and relieved them of their pain.

NELSON: *(Surprised.)* You got rid of the ghost?

BERNICE: He did! *(Dwight shoots her an annoyed look. To Dwight.)* Sorry. *(Sits.)* Continue...

DWIGHT: *(Continuing. Proudly.)* I did. The ghost merely wanted revenge on the man who had taken her life. When the family discovered it was the woman's brother, the family poisoned him. After the uncle died, the haunting stopped. Easy, really.

NELSON: So you murdered him?!

DWIGHT: "Murder" is such a strong word. Let's just say...the family was very pleased with the results. Now, how can I help you?

NELSON: It would seem we have a similar problem with this apartment. You see, the previous owners killed themselves and—

DWIGHT: *(Shouts.)* Wait! *(Startled, Nelson and Bernice jump.)* Don't tell me! I will let the spirits come to me. *(To room.)* Oh, spirits, it is I, your messenger. *(Closes his eyes, goes into a trance, and makes a few odd noises.)* I see, I see, I see a...a...a—

NELSON: A man?

DWIGHT: I see a man who is very unhappy. He is very poor—

BERNICE: He was wearing a tux.

DWIGHT: He was poor in his soul. (*Bernice and Nelson exchange a look.*) He was...he was...he was so lonely—

NELSON: Didn't you say there was a woman with him?

DWIGHT: His sister.

BERNICE: (*Correcting.*) His wife.

DWIGHT: (*Opens his eyes.*) He married his sister?

BERNICE/NELSON: Huh?

BERNICE: (*To Dwight.*) His *wife* was with him.

DWIGHT: Please stop interrupting me. (*In a trance.*) I see it all now! There was a gun—

BERNICE: No!

DWIGHT: A knife?

BERNICE: No!

DWIGHT: A bow and arrow?

BERNICE: No, they jumped.

DWIGHT: They jumped.

BERNICE: Yes.

DWIGHT: Off a boat!

BERNICE: No, off a ledge!

DWIGHT: Exactly! (*Swoons and falls onto the chaise.*) It's all so clear to me! It's almost as if I was there when it happened!

NELSON: (*Sincerely impressed.*) You're good. I never would have believed it if I didn't see it with my own eyes.

DWIGHT: It's a gift...and a curse. There are so many who want so much.

BERNICE: That was so exciting. Now that you know they are here, what do we do next?

DWIGHT: I am afraid we have only identified your problem. Now we must endeavor to communicate with the apparitions and find why they are choosing to stay on this astral plane.

NELSON: Astral plane? Impressive.

DWIGHT: It's shoptalk...you wouldn't understand. (*Stands and acts woozy. Bernice catches him and holds onto him.*) This work is very exhausting. You never know what might happen next...

(*Wally enters.*)

WALLY: What is going on in here?

BERNICE: Darling, you'll never guess what we found!

WALLY: No, but I can guess what Svengali over there... (*Indicating Dwight.*) ...was looking for.

BERNICE: Don't be ridiculous. Honey, this is "The Messenger"!

WALLY: Well, I've got a message for him!

DWIGHT: I know!

BERNICE: (*To Wally.*) No, he's a psychic, and he is here to help us with our little ghost problem.

WALLY: (*To Nelson.*) I suppose you have something to do with this?

NELSON: You told me to deal with the problem, and he comes highly recommended. So I just thought I would invite him over for a little house cleaning.

WALLY: I bet he's expensive too, or haven't we negotiated Mr. Messenger's fee? (*To Dwight.*) So you're a psychic, huh? Why don't you tell me what I'm thinking now?

DWIGHT: I will not use that kind of language in front of the lady.

NELSON: (*To Wally.*) I told you he's good!

WALLY: (*To Dwight.*) Clever! But I still don't trust you.

DWIGHT: (*Insulted.*) I do not have to stand here and take this!

WALLY: Would you prefer to sit down?

DWIGHT: (*Curtly.*) I'm leaving. I have many clients who need what I have to offer. I wish you luck with your problem, and if I were you, I would beware of a man who wears a tux. (*Starts to exit.*) You better be careful what you wish for!

WALLY: *(To Nelson.)* You see, this guy is a lunatic.

NELSON: I knew he was the moment I saw him! *(To Dwight.)*
Get out!

BERNICE: *(To Dwight.)* But you can't go. What are we going to do about our ghosts?

WALLY: Honey, don't you see what this guy is? He comes in and acts all fancy and fills your head with all sorts of ideas about ghosts and haunted apartments, and then before you know it, you will do anything to keep him around. It's easy to get rid of something no one can see. *(Lights change and Wally watches as Lloyd and Abertine waltz across the stage. To others.)* Did anyone else see that?

BERNICE: See what, honey?

NELSON: *(To Wally.)* I didn't see anything...unless you did.

DWIGHT: I will be leaving now. *(Starts to exit.)*

WALLY: You're not going anywhere! *(Grabs Dwight and brings him back.)*

DWIGHT: I can assure you that under no circumstances will I stay here and again be insulted.

WALLY: You didn't see a man and a woman just dance through this living room?

BERNICE: Are you getting one of your spells again, dear?

DWIGHT: *(To Wally.)* You must calm down. Perhaps I will stay, not because you asked me to, but because I believe this lovely lady is in distress and needs my help and guidance in order to discover the secret within herself. *(Indicating Dwight.)* I also believe that this young man—

NELSON: *(Flattered, smiles.)* "Young"!

DWIGHT: *(To Wally, continuing.)* Is connected to this apartment in ways he has not yet revealed, and I believe I can help him on his journey.

NELSON: It almost sounds romantic.

DWIGHT: *(To Wally.)* But rest assured, sir, I am not staying because of you and your insults. If you do not believe in what I do, then I fear I must increase my fees to not only prove to you my value but also to make sure that you

understand that I am no charlatan or hack...but a proven medium who can connect with those who have crossed over to the other side.

NELSON: *(To Wally.)* I told you he was good.

DWIGHT: *(To Wally.)* Whether you believe in me or not is not important. The only thing that matters is how many zeroes you put on my check. So now – doubter, non-believer – what do you have to say?

WALLY: *(Screams.)* I saw a ghost!

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: Dwight is seated on the chaise, leaning over a crystal ball. Nelson and Bernice are looking over Dwight's shoulder. Wally is seated and is holding an ice bag on his forehead. Music is heard. Dwight, Nelson, Bernice, and Wally go still as Abertine and Lloyd waltz on. Abertine stops and looks at Nelson, Bernice, Wally, and Dwight. Note: Nelson, Bernice, Wally, and Dwight remain still for the following.)

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* Now, I am sure they were not here when we left. Did you bring them home?

LLOYD: Darling, please. You know I don't like to invite people back to the apartment. I have seen their kind once before, but I believe I had to pay admission.

ABERTINE: I think it is true, darling. I do think we really are dead.

LLOYD: Stepping off the ledge of a building on the 27th floor does tend to have that effect.

ABERTINE: *(Indicating Nelson, Bernice, Wally, and Dwight.)* But who are these people? Who let them in? Don't they know who we are?

LLOYD: *(Correcting.)* Who we *were*, dear.

ABERTINE: That's going to take me awhile to get used to. Alive or dead, I will show them that I am someone to be reckoned with. They just can't walk into our apartment as if they were somebody. *(To Bernice.)* Excuse me... *(Bernice remains still and doesn't respond.)* Yes, you, miss. *(To Lloyd.)* I don't think they can hear me.

LLOYD: And yet I still can. So much for thoughts of heaven.

ABERTINE: I can't believe you! Here we have strangers in our very home—people we do not know—and all you can manage to do is to stand there and look smug.

LLOYD: It's what I do best, dear.

ABERTINE: Well, get their attention!

LLOYD: What would you suggest I do? (*Approaches Dwight. To Dwight.*) Hello! Over here! Excuse me, might I have a word? (*Shoots Abertine a hard look. To Abertine.*) There. I tried. Are you happy? Now, will you turn off that siren you call a voice.

ABERTINE: Maybe they are all deaf. (*To Bernice, Wally, Nelson, and Dwight, shouts.*) Hello! I am speaking to you!

LLOYD: And now I know what hell is like.

ABERTINE: Darling, remember, it is dangerous to use up one's entire vocabulary in a single sentence. (*To Dwight.*) Excuse me, but I would like to speak with you.

(*Dwight takes a deep breath.*)

DWIGHT: (*To Nelson, Bernice, and Wally.*) And we are no longer alone...

(*Nelson, Bernice, and Wally are now animated.*)

ABERTINE: (*To Lloyd, indicating Dwight.*) Look, dear, I got that man to notice me.

LLOYD: There is a first time for everything.

BERNICE: (*To Dwight.*) Are they here? Can they see me? (*To Abertine and Lloyd, extending her hand.*) My name is Bernice Papasadora. It is my pleasure to meet you.

ABERTINE: (*To Lloyd.*) The woman is an absolute idiot.

LLOYD: Obviously a member of your family.

DWIGHT: (*To the room.*) I am "The Messenger." I am here to help you communicate with the world of the living. Use me! Use me!

ABERTINE: I'd like to use you to get these people out of my house. (*To Dwight, Wally, Bernice, and Nelson, slowly and deliberately.*) I'm sure you are welcome somewhere but not in our apartment. (*To Lloyd.*) They don't seem to be listening at all! (*To Dwight, Wally, Bernice, and Nelson,*

shouts.) Now, get out before I throw you all out into the street! *(To Lloyd.)* That should do it!

LLOYD: You should really come with a warning label, darling.

NELSON: *(To Bernice, Wally, and Dwight.)* I think I heard something.

BERNICE: What did you hear?

NELSON: Never mind, it was my stomach. I missed lunch.

BERNICE: *(To Dwight.)* Why aren't they communicating with me? I want to talk to the ghosts.

DWIGHT: Sometimes it takes time, my dear. Sometimes communication with two people, even if they have known each other for years, happens only after a lot of hard work.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* Maybe he can hear us!

NELSON: *(To Abertine and Lloyd, calls.)* Hello, out there? *(Dwight, Bernice, and Wally look at him.)* What are you looking at?

DWIGHT: Maybe if we all take a deep breath...

WALLY: *(Annoyed.)* Now that's enough of that. *(Stands.)* There will be no more deep breaths and no more trying to get in touch with our feelings. They are here. Can't you hear them?

BERNICE: Honey, you can actually hear them?

DWIGHT: With my help, of course.

WALLY: They haven't shut up since we started this whole charade.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* Do you really think he can hear us?

WALLY: Yes, he can!

ABERTINE: *(Gasps. To Lloyd.)* The dumb one can hear us!

WALLY: *(Insulted.)* I heard that.

BERNICE: *(Excited.)* What are they saying? Are they imparting to you the wisdom of the ages?

NELSON: *(To Wally.)* Did they mention me?

WALLY: No, they are not imparting any wisdom. They are wondering who we are and why we are in their apartment. *(Looking around.)* An apartment that I thought I had bought.

(To Abertine and Lloyd.) I don't know who you are or where you are, but I do know you lost the apartment when you took a jump off the ledge.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd, taken aback.)* Well, that was direct.

LLOYD: You can't buy class.

WALLY: No, but you can rent it. Just ask your wife.

ABERTINE: *(Insulted.)* Well, I never!

LLOYD: *(To Abertine.)* Have you two met before?

WALLY: Be careful what you ask for.

ABERTINE: Where have I heard that before?

DWIGHT: *(Moans.)* I am getting a feeling...

WALLY: Probably in your wallet. What I want to know is why do I need you if I am the only one who can hear them?

DWIGHT: That is a very interesting question. Let me ask the spirits!

BERNICE: *(To Wally, disappointed.)* I want to hear them. This whole psychic idea was mine in the first place. You weren't even going to buy this apartment until I talked you into it, and then when we found out it was haunted, it was me who brought in "The Messenger" —

DWIGHT: I knew you were going to call.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* That woman is giving me a headache.

WALLY: *(Insulted.)* That woman just happens to be my wife.

ABERTINE: So much for taste. And if that is your wife, she's a tub of guts!

WALLY: *(Insulted.)* You can't talk like that about my wife!

BERNICE: The ghost is talking about me?! What's she saying?! I want to know!

LLOYD: *(To Wally.)* That's your wife?

WALLY: It sure is.

LLOYD: Looks like you're the next one off the ledge.

NELSON: *(To Bernice.)* Actually, it was me who brought in "The Messenger." I don't normally like to take credit, but —

WALLY: Enough of this.

DWIGHT: I am feeling a vibration...

BERNICE: Enough of your vibrations. *(To Lloyd and Abertine.)*
Now, you listen out there, ghosts...I am the woman of this house, and I demand to be taken seriously!

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* I don't know where she got her looks, but I certainly hope she kept the receipt.

(Wally laughs.)

BERNICE: *(To Wally.)* What are you laughing at?

WALLY: Nothing, sweetie.

LLOYD: *(Laughs.)* Now it's a party! *(Sits on the chaise.)*

Darling, would you mind getting me a drink?

WALLY: *(To Abertine.)* I could use one myself.

NELSON: You could use what?

BERNICE: *(To Wally.)* Are they still talking about me?!

DWIGHT: *(Abruptly.)* Silence! There must be a connection between you... *(Points to Wally.)* ...and the spirits that are haunting your apartment. That is the reason why only you can hear their voices. It looks like I just earned my fee! See, you better be careful what you wish for!

LLOYD: I sense a plot twist!

DWIGHT: *(All are struck as Dwight weaves his spell.)* I sense that everyone is here for a reason. I sense that the spirits chose not to leave this apartment because they have unfinished business with someone in this room.

WALLY: That's ridiculous.

DWIGHT: Now, Bernice... *(Bernice gasps.)* ...where did you meet your husband?

BERNICE: We met at the Stardust nightclub.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* I knew she was a working girl.

WALLY: And I got all the business.

BERNICE: What?

WALLY: Nothing, darling. Go on...listen to "The Messenger."

LLOYD: *(To Abertine.)* It's like a radio show...only one I don't like and can't turn off.

ABERTINE: Impressive. I have never seen such a small mind in such a large head before.

LLOYD: Darling, I used to think you were a pain in the neck, but now I have a much lower opinion of you.

BERNICE: *(To Dwight.)* Wally was my best customer. He would come in every Tuesday night...meatball night.

LLOYD: *(To Abertine.)* Quiet!

ABERTINE: You're no fun.

DWIGHT: *(To Nelson.)* And you!

NELSON: Who, me?

DWIGHT: Yes, you. *(Nelson giggles.)* How long have you been in real estate?

NELSON: Do I answer now? *(Dwight nods.)* Okay. *(Pause.)* Not long. *(Looks pleased.)*

DWIGHT: How did Mr. Papasadora become one of your clients?

NELSON: Now? Okay. Actually, he was a referral from another client who had also done business with Mr. Papasadora.

DWIGHT: Who was this client?

NELSON: Again? Me? *(Dwight nods.)* He was a bartender... *(Pause.)* ...at the Stardust.

ABERTINE: *(To Lloyd.)* Wonderful. Our apartment is being infested by a bunch of blue-collar ne'er-do-wells.

LLOYD: Please, darling, I think the man is about to make a point.

ABERTINE: I should live so long. *(Laughs.)* See what I did there? It's funny because I'm dead. *(Laughs.)*

LLOYD: Please, dear, you're killing me.

ABERTINE: Oh, you did it, too. *(Laughs.)*

LLOYD: No, I feel as if you are actually killing me. Can we let the man finish?

DWIGHT: *(To Bernice, Wally, and Nelson.)* I am seeing a connection...

WALLY: Sherlock, you'd have to be an idiot not to get the connection.

DWIGHT: That is the last time you will insult me, sir!

WALLY: Why? Are you leaving?

DWIGHT: *(Realizes.)* I think I have figured out what connects you all. It's the Stardust.

LLOYD: *(To Abertine.)* We used to love to dance there every Saturday night with Derek and Bootsie.

DWIGHT: *(To the room.)* Spirits, I call you now. Show yourselves. *(Lights flash.)* Bring us your knowledge. Bring us your power. *(Thunder. Lights out. Lights up. They all scream.)* Show yourselves!

BERNICE: *(To others, pointing to Lloyd and Abertine.)* There they are!

(Nelson sees Lloyd and Abertine too.)

NELSON: *(To Lloyd and Abertine, shocked.)* Mom? Dad?

LLOYD: Boo!

(Nelson, Beatrice, Wally, and Dwight scream. Blackout. Intermission, opt.)

END OF FREEVIEW