

DEATH OF A GERBIL

Scene: Pearly gates headquarters: There is a large desk on stage left with piles of papers and an enormous book on it. St. Peter is seated behind the desk. Darren is standing alone on stage right, perhaps pacing slightly as if he has been waiting a while.

Narrator: Meet Darren.

(light spot on Darren standing alone center stage right. He is holding a piece of paper with the number 42 on it. He looks slightly confused)

Narrator: He is a bookkeeper at Wilson, Wilson, Wilson and Smith, 3rd cubicle from the window, second floor. He has recently been promoted to senior bookkeeper. He is 30 years old, and is an average guy with brown hair and eyes. He pays his taxes on time. He is also dead. **(pause)** At this point Darren does not know he is dead. Yet.

(light spot on St. Peter)

St Peter: NEXT!!!! Number 42!

(Darren looks blank)

St Peter: 42, Number 42! **(insistent)** Going once...

(Darren realizes that he might be being called, looks at the paper, uncrumples it, turns it the right way up and hesitantly approaches the foreboding table behind which is seated an old man with an enormously long white beard. There are piles of books on the table which are voluminous, dusty and large. Darren stops in front of the desk and remains standing. If it can be achieved St Peter should be on a rostrum higher up than Darren to give the impression of power.)

St Peter: **(clears throat)** So.

Darren: So?

St Peter: Number 42?

Darren: **(rechecks paper)** Um...yes. **(he shows the paper to St. Peter and lays it on the table.)**

St. Peter: Let's see ...**(opens book)** Been a good boy this year? **(grins wickedly at Darren)**

Darren: I ththink so. Excuse me sir, but who are you?

St. Peter: More to the point who are you? **(points at Darren)**

Darren: Oh sorry, I'm Darren, Darren Gerbil. **(puts out hand as if to shake it then changes mind midway and lets it drop)**. It's been a really weird day.

St. Peter: That's okay young man, I suppose being hit by a Double Decker bus did confuse you a bit. It's quite common really. Now where was I?

Darren: **(does a double take)** I'm sorry, what?

St. Peter: Name?

Darren: Darren Gerb-.....hang on, sorry, did you say I was hit by a bus?

St. Peter: A red double decker number 42, yes. Braamfontein to South Hills. That's why you are here. **(starts leafing through book again, adjusts glasses on nose)**

Darren: Is this the Hospital?

St. Peter: No.

Darren: The outpatients at the hospital?

St. Peter: No.

Darren: Doctor's rooms?

St. Peter: No.

Darren: Then where?

St. Peter: **(Pats Darren's hand)** Look I'm sad to break this to you, my boy, but you are dead.

Darren: Look, I can't be dead!

St. Peter: This is the Pearly gates headquarters! This is where we process your application! In order to process your application you will need to fill out forms, A, B, C, D,E, F, G, I,and J. Once your application has been processed then you will be allocated and according to your allocation designation you will sent to designation: Heaven **(music - hallelujah chorus)**, Hell **(opens trapdoor and beats something with large stick, screams heard)** or Purgatory **(music crickets chirping)**. Please remember to fill out all forms in triplicate. Don't worry - we do have pens, we don't expect you to bring one with you, ahaha. **(pats him again)**

Darren: **(Gets handed large stack of paperwork and looks through forms.)** Hey, you didn't give me form H. Don't I need to fill out form H as well?

St. Peter: Let's see... **(ruffles thru papers on desk and picks up form H)** Were you in possession of a stolen spacecraft and did your spacecraft illegally crash land in area 52 on earth?

Darren: I think you're right. That's not me. So....I'm actually dead?

St. Peter: You were hit by a number 42 bus. They tend to have that effect on people.

Darren: I don't even remember being hit by a bus.

St. Peter: Probably better for you that you don't **(pats him on head)**

Darren: Really? Dead? Are you sure there hasn't been some mistake!

St. Peter: **(Adjusts glasses on nose)** Let's see shall we? **(opens large book on table and begins turning pages)** Let's see, Darren Gerbil is it?

Darren: Uh huh.

St. Peter: Darren, Darren, Darren Gable, Darren Geddy, Darren Geddies, Darren Geedies the fourth. Honestly! You'd think they'd be more original, not that I'm saying it isn't a lovely name but a bit over dramatic hey... *(clears throat, eyes Darren over his glasses)* okay, Darren Goffe, Darren Gudde.*(pauses, retraces finger on book)* No that can't be right. Darren Geffe, Darren Gudde. Hmmm. *(taps book flips back and forwards)*.

Darren: *(Tries to read book upside down by turning head sideways)* What's hmm?

St. Peter: There must be some mistake. *(Pulls out new bigger glasses and polishes them before putting them on)*

Darren: Aha!

St. Peter: This is highly irregular. *(Pulls out magnifying glass)*

Darren: Told you!

St. Peter: Now see here young man!! You wouldn't be here if you weren't dead!!!

Darren: Well if I'm not in the book perhaps I'm not really dead!!

St. Peter: The system is infallible.

Darren: Clearly.

St. Peter: Someone must have misfiled your paperwork. It will be traced. The system is infallible. Now just because we don't have you on my system doesn't mean that you're not dead.

Darren: What am I supposed to do now?. Must I just wait? *(St. Peter nods)* How long must I wait then?

St. Peter: No more than 500 years, give or take.

Darren: 500 years! What am I supposed to do for 500 years? Am I supposed to just wait here until then? *(shocked)* There's not even a vending machine!

St. Peter: Oh, no, no, no, you can't wait here!

Darren: Why not?

St. Peter: Because you are occupying the virtual queue. Only once this application has been processed will the following be executed.

Darren: Executed!!??? You mean someone down there is waiting for, oh no!

St. Peter: It was a figure of speech.

Darren: *(Relieved)* Oh thank goodness.

St Peter: We'll be sending you back down until such time as your paperwork can be retrieved.

Darren: Cool. It'll be good to be home for a while

St. Peter: No, that will not be suitable.

Darren: Why not?

St. Peter: Because you have been dead and buried these past 6 months now. Thus, you won't be going down as yourself, but merely as a spiritual mirror of your former self.

Darren: You mean like a ghost?

St Peter: Exactly. Now stand dead still. Shouldn't be too tricky eh, considering that, well, hahaha.

Darren: Just get on with it!

Lights fade,. there is a sound of a thunderclap and the Hallelujah chorus plays after the clap. Lights come up on a room, with a coffee table and a couch stage left. A bookcase stands rear stage. There is a cloth on it with books. A dustbin is on the floor next to the bookcase. Darren is sitting on the couch. He pinches himself and pats the sofa to make sure it is real. Sound of a door closing and a girl enters purposefully, carrying a handbag and stops dead as she sees Darren.

Jade: Who the hell are you?

Darren: You can see me?

Jade: Of course I can bloody see you!! Just because you're sitting on my couch, it doesn't make you invisible. What are you doing in my house? **(she pulls out a can of mace from her bag and brandishes it at him)** Don't come any closer, I'm warning you!

Darren: **(Stands up and steps towards her)** Look, you don't understand.

Jade: Of course I understand. You, you're a filthy sex pervert and you've come to my house intent on having your way with me, and to take me in strange, erotic and sensual ways, but I'm telling you straight, not going to happen, nope, no way! So you can just leave! **(Points at door)**

Darren: I don't want to have sex with you.

Jade: What? Why not? **(Lowers mace)** Why are you here then? Let me guess. You were going to rob me blind but but you thought you'd have a quick break and a nice snooze on my couch before you started collecting your loot? Why not have a cup of tea while you're at it!!!!

Darren: Look I'm not here to have sex with you, or to take you in er, strange, erotic or um sensual ways. I'm definitely not here to rob you **(looks at crappy couch)**, I'm just here!!! You're not even supposed to be able to see me, I think.

Jade: Then why are you here?

Darren: You wouldn't believe me if I told you. But don't worry, I'll leave, sorry for the fright I gave you.

Jade: Hang on. Before you leave, what was that thing you said just now?

Darren: I'm going to leave now.?

Jade: No before that! After you said you weren't a pillaging sex maniac.

Darren: Um, that I didn't think you would be able to see me?

Jade: Yes that part. I thought that's what you said. **(Hesitates as if thinking)** Never mind. You can go then! **(points to door)**

Darren: Thanks, um goodbye, it was nice meeting you.

Jade: Likewise, strangely. I'm Jade, by the way.

Darren: I'm Darren, Darren Gerbil.

Darren walks off stage towards door, sound of door opening, unearthly howls and screams can be heard. The door gets slammed shut. Darren returns at a slight run to room, where Jade is still standing. Darren is quite shaken.

Darren: Um, sorry, I don't seem to be able to leave.

Jade: I knew it! You're a ghost, right?

Darren: I think so, at least that's what they tell me. How did you know that?

Jade: **(In sixth sense voice)** I see dead people. I also see stupid people.

Darren: What? **(Takes step back)**

Jade: I can see dead people. **(Matter of fact voice)** My mom can as well. Its like familiarly familial?

Darren: Where do you get this weird language you keeping spouting?

Jade: How rude! I read. **(Gives him a withering look)** More than you, I fathom.

Darren: So why can't I leave?

Jade: Look. **(she gets up to the bookshelf and retrieves a book)**

Darren: **(looks at book)** The Idiots guide to ghosts and haunting?

Jade: See here **(opens book)**. Page 76. Hauntings. Ghosts cannot leave the place they haunt and are restricted from doing so by the powers that be. **(closes book)** What happened when you tried to leave?

Darren: I can't describe it. Like a force keeping me here.

Jade: That's it then. So now we know.

Darren: Sorry you seem to be stuck with me. Heaven only knows why they sent me to someone who could actually see me. I think its bizarre to be honest but there's nothing I can do about it.

Jade: So how did you die?

Darren: That's just it. I don't remember dying at all. One minute I was looking at this woman crossing the road, and the next I'm at the Pearly Gates being processed. Only they lost my paperwork.

Jade: They lost your paperwork? That doesn't seem right. They're infallible.

Darren: *(withering look)* I've had this conversation already.

Jade: Tea? Um, do ghosts even drink tea?

Darren: Lets look shall we? (pages thru) Here it is: "Chapter five. everyday needs. Ghosts do not need to eat or drink." Pity. I'm dying for a beer right now.

Jade: Well I've got one if you feel like one. *(gets up exits stage left and return with a beer)*

Darren: Thanks.

He attempts to drink but it pours out of his trousers as if he is porous. He shakes his feet.

Darren: Hey! It just went right through me.

Jade: Look, I didn't even think ghosts could actually hold physical items at all. Lets see what the big book says. *(Takes book)* Okay - " On rare occasions some ghosts actually pick things up."

Darren: Like poltergeists? Don't they hurl things across rooms and stuff?

Jade: "This usually happens when the ghost feels a strong emotion such as anger." There's your poltergeist thingy.

Darren: Well I'm not angry.

Jade: No you're not.

Darren: I wonder why? *(looks confused more than usual)*

Jade: Haha! That's it! You do have a strong emotion. It's confusion! That's funny

Darren: What? No it's not!

Jade: There you go. *(grins)* Sorry but it seems that the book was right. Told you it's infallible.

Darren: Oh yes, of course. Um....

Jade: Yes?

Darren: So what do you propose to do with me?

Jade: Not sure actually. Hey you could always do the dishes!

Darren: Will I need to sleep though?

Jade: Probably not. You are dead you know.

Darren: Please stop reminding me of that fact. I've had a lot to handle today.

Jade: Well its not like I actually asked to be haunted either!

Darren: Sorry.

They sit in silence.

Darren: Well I could do your books for you? I'm a bookkeeper you know.

Jade: I'm between jobs at the moment.

Darren: Oh. So what do you do when you're not between jobs then?

Jade: Well I'm a student. Kind of. Part time. I wanted to study law but there's kind of a conflict of interests with my folks. They want me to do aural readings and seances. It's just so unfair you know. Sorry. I don't even know why I'm telling you this stuff. It's not like I know you at all.

Darren: That's okay. You might get to know me pretty well so you may as well spill now.

Jade: Thanks **(blows nose)** You're okay you know for a spirit.

Darren: Thanks. But I wish there was something I could do about this.

Jade: You mean like resurrect yourself? I don't think you'd want to do that. Really. Being a zombie is not all its cut out to be.

Darren: You know this personally?

Jade: No, but mother knows a guy who is one. He goes to her for therapy you know. Says its a high maintenance life with the usual technical difficulties of, you know, constant decomposition and you have to find replacement limbs yourself. Unless you work in a morgue I believe it's quite a hassle. And they don't always fit nicely either. Not to mention how hard it is to get a date.

Darren: Yuck.

Jade: Trust me, resurrection is not the way to go.

Darren: Got it. To be frank, you seem very nice and all but I really don't want to stay here in this one bedroom flat for possibly 5 centuries.

Jade: I agree. I'm kind of a private person as it is. And you really can't be here anyway.

Darren: Any bright ideas then?

silence as they think

Jade: Hey I know!!!

Darren: Cool

Jade: *(runs to kitchen gets KFC bag and takes out sachet of chilli salt , opens it and*

throws it at him.)

Darren: Hey! You just threw salt at me. And it went in my eye! *(picks up bag)* KFC chilli salt? And this is supposed to banish me how? *(Rubs eye, gets up brushes himself off)*

Jade: Hey, It works on, you know that TV program about the brothers who fight ghosts and demons.

Darren: It's called "Supernatural." And I think that its supposed to be spiritual granular salt or something, not KFC chilli salt! Who knows how much salt is really in this anyway? *(looks at bag)* It's probably mostly preservatives.

Jade: Well I didn't have any other.

Darren: Hey next time throw it over your left shoulder, perhaps it'll bring you luck!

Jade: Don't be an idiot. *(Sits down and turns through book)* Okay.. Here's one. Exorcism for Dummies. All the basic materials you need for a stage one exorcism. Stage one being if the spirit is cooperative and not evil or malign in any way. You're not uncooperative, evil or malign are you?

Darren: Well my flatmate did moan about me not washing dishes regularly.. Does that count?

Jade: *(withering look)* No I don't think so.

Darren: Believe me the way she went on, she..-

Jade: It really doesn't count.

Darren: Well luckily this ghostly state is only temporary. That's what he said. St. Peter. I will be a ghost for between 1 week and *(swallows)* five hundred years.

Jade: Great! The thing is, I would prefer to have you out of here by tonight, if possible.

Darren: Why tonight? I thought I'd put my feet up, watch a little TV, you know. *(puts feet on coffee table)*

Jade: Oi! *(Pushes him off.)* My new boyfriend is coming over! He wants to talk to me about taking our relationship to the next level.

Darren: Oh really? You do know that is male for : "He wants to sleep with you."

Jade: No it's not that! Really? Do you think so? *(pause)* I thought it might be but I wasn't sure.

Darren: He wants to TRY to sleep with you at any rate. In fact he will in all likelihood give you a very convincing reason why you should.

Jade: Oh my god, I'm so nervous, what will I do?

Darren: What do you usually um, do in um situations like these?

Jade: I don't know. It's been a long time.....

Darren: Ah... Embarrassing. So how about that exorcism then?

Jade: Good point. Okay - Step one. Ingredients: Holy water. Sacred candles. Rope. I don't think we need rope, I mean it's not like you're possessing some guy and we have to get you out, hey? *(giggles)*

Darren: But you still need the holy water and the Sacred Candles, I think.

Jade: I have the Holy water. Its under the sink. Candles I don't.

Darren: Hey, what kind of girl keeps Holy water under her sink anyway?

(Jade leaves and returns with the Holy water and puts it on the coffee table)

Jade: The kind that has strange ghosts in her flat kind!!! I'll have to go find some sacred candles then.

Darren: I'll be here!

Jade: Where else would you be?

Exit stage left. Pause. Darren continues to read through the exorcism ritual.

Darren: Hmm wonder if I could exorcise myself if I read all this out? Hey, what happens to ghosts once exorcised anyway? I hope she doesn't send me back to the pearly gates again before I'm properly filed and faxed. We just couldn't have that, oh no! The system is infallible! *(in St. Peter's voice)*

Darren is sitting on the sofa reading deeply engrossed when the door opens and a middle aged, bucolic man, with a lecherous expression comes in. He is wearing a large black coat from which he will pull various bottles of alcohol, popcorn, a clipboard etc throughout the play. He is carrying a scythe. He will throughout his performance keep finding bottles of booze hidden everywhere through the flat as if they hadn't been there at all.

He walks quietly up behind the sofa and taps Darren on the shoulder

Rodney: Hello Darren

Darren: *(sees the scythe)* Aaahh! *(jumps up and moves away from Rodney)*

Rodney: Before you interrupt me with any meaningless twaddle or ask any vacuous questions, let me say one thing. Bottoms up! *(takes a swig from a hip flask which he replaces in his pocket)* Aah that's better. Okay then. lets get on with it.

Darren: Wwith what? *(scared)*

Rodney: They sent me for you *(points heavenward)*

Darren: They, they ddid?

Rodney: Oh yes, I'm here to sort out this almighty balls up once and for all.

Darren: What are you going to do?

Rodney: Sort this mess out, okay. *(fumbles in jacket but can't seem to get out what he*

wants as his other hand is occupied with holding the scythe) Hey you don't mind holding this do you? **(waves the scythe at Darren)**

Darren: You want me to hold your scythe? But then how -?

Rodney: Oh its not mine, it's my girlfriends scythe. She's a reaper you know. A Grim reaper. And a darn sexy one if i might add. The scythe? **(waves it at Darren who moves out of the way to avoid it)**

Darren: Um, why don't you just lean it on the sink in the kitchen? **(points to kitchen)**

Rodney: Oh - you can take it, thanks. **(Holds it out towards Darren. Darren hesitates)** No, don't worry, it's not working. I'm taking it for its 10000 soul service after I sort you out, see. Its crazy how quickly a scythe can blunt on a stubborn soul. Yup, but after this she'll be running smooth as a baby's bottom again. **(Hands scythe to Darren who takes it and tosses into kitchen as if he doesn't want to touch it at all. A crash, a cat's yowl, a car screech, a woman's scream and a police siren are heard in succession)**

Darren: Perhaps it wasn't that blunt after all! **(Rodney shrugs)** Sorry, but who the hell are you?

Rodney: I am your Guardian angel. Hang on let me rephrase that. I WAS your gaurdian angel before you made a stupid mistake and walked in front of that bus.

Darren: Guardian angel? Hang on before I ask the obvious let me start by saying that actually I don't believe you in the slightest. I mean you don't look lie an angel at all to be frank.

Rodney: Not Frank. Rodney's the name, dangers my field of expertise **(holds out hand)**

Darren: **(shakes hand)** Hi, um Rodney. I still don't believe you by the way.

Rodney: Look I know all humans are brought up on this myth that angles have wings and little tinsel halos and all, but here in the real world its rough and tough and the tinsel keeps falling apart.

Darren: Right....

Rodney: Joke? funny haha? no? You never did have a sense of humor...

Darren: Look if you don't mind I'm having rather a bad day here, so do you mind? I'm kind of occupied here.

Rodney: Can't do that.

Darren: Look if you're worried about what the big boss in the sky will say, don't worry I won't mention a thing about abstaining from guardian angel duty. Cross my heart and hope to - well, you know what I mean.

Rodney: Look, Darren, **(starting to get annoyed)** I am your friggin' guardian angel, okay, sorry WAS your friggin' guardian angel. There has been a major screw up here and I have been sent to sort this bureaucratic nightmare out before St. Peter **(points heavenwards)** implodes from the stress. And if you think you're having a bad day, tell me about it. I had a day from hell myself.

Darren: Look I'm sure dying is pretty much top of the bad day list right now.

Rodney: Darren. You weren't supposed to die.

Darren: What? *(sits)*

Rodney: You weren't meant to die. You weren't meant to get hit by that bus.

Darren: If I wasn't then why?

Rodney: Women. *(makes rude or women shape gesture)* Specifically - A woman. You were looking at that woman when you got hit by that bus. She distracted you. That's why you got hit by the bus.

Darren: The woman with the red top?

Rodney: Specifically with the low cut red top revealing a little more of the breast area than is needed, coupled with a push up bra to achieve maximum cleavage effect, designed to drive the average male to drink, speaking of which – *(takes swig from bottle)* or insane curiosity as to what her nipples really do look like. That sort of thing turns a male's brain to mush, rendering him temporarily insane, and likely to get hit by a bus.

Darren: So that was what happened. I see. Hang on, you were there?

Rodney: Of course I was there! I was your guardian angel, that's what I do! Sorry, um, did.

Darren: And you've been there my whole life?

Rodney: Yup. Who do you think moved that bush conveniently near the house when you supermanned your way off the roof?

Darren: I always wondered about that. Um, thanks. So you were there the whole time?

Rodney: Your whole life, yes.

Darren: So you saw me get splattered by that bus?

Rodney: Technically, yes.

Darren: Let me get this straight. You're my guardian angel, and you watched me get splattered by a bus? Isn't that the sort of thing a guardian angel is supposed to prevent?

Rodney: Theoretically yes, but if one's assigned human is silly enough to focus his entire attention on some arbitrary tits and legs and a small but sexy tattoo on the back of her calf, there wasn't a damn thing I could do about. It's your fault really that you died because you allowed yourself to be ruled by your glands.

Darren: Okay! So if you're my guardian angel and I am now strictly speaking as dead as a doornail, why are you here?

Rodney: I am your assigned caseworker. I'm here to sort this debacle out. First of all I need to ask you a few questions. *(pulls out clipboard)*

Darren: So do all guardian angels get changed to caseworkers when their human dies?

Rodney: Change in protocol (*dismissive*)

Darren: Ah.

Rodney: Now - question number one. State your entire name, and any name changes you may or may not have authorized through your entire existence. Also include the all of the names your parents wanted to call you before they settled on Darren.

Darren: So you were there like my entire life watching over me, wow!

Rodney: That's the general idea. Name!

Darren: How close were you to me then? I mean do you have to be in the same room as me all the time or could you be on the roof of the house or something? You see, I always felt a presence in my bedroom, I just knew it, and my mother always told me I was lying!

Rodney: That was your great aunt Bertha you sensed. She's a good sort but that see thru nightie, ugh. I mean people should realize that when you reach the ripe old age of 96, a see thru nightie is likely to have the opposite effect on people, brrr! (*shivers, takes swig from hip flask*) No to answer your question a guardian angel has to be within 1 meter of his assigned human at all times. So, um Darren Gerbil? Now how do you spell Gerbil anyway?

Darren: Oh a meter, huh?

Rodney: Aha. Like the rodent?

Darren: I was standing in the middle of the road when I got hit, right?

Rodney: Um, you know the details are a bit hazy, it all happened so fast. G.E.R.B.A.L?

Darren: A road is about 5 meters wide. That means you had to be standing in the middle of the road with me when it happened.

Rodney: A.L? or I.L? (*trying desperately to avoid the subject*)

Darren: I passed that woman and then stopped in the road to have a second look. I remember now. She was facing me when I got hit, they were facing me the whole time. I never saw the tattoo!!

Rodney: You snooze , you loose!

Darren: But if you saw the tattoo you must have been behind her. Hang on, hey! You didn't come with me. You stayed behind on the pavement to get another look. That's why you saw the tattoo, that's why you didn't see the bus and that's why I died an untimely death! You lecherous bastard!

Rodney: Look at least you died happy, eh?