

Tune In

a two act comedy

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Cast of Characters

Danton Stanton:

A lawyer a few hundred miles past his prime, kept afloat by his circle of ex-client friends. He is looking for a way out of his impossible situation. A young man of his mid-to-early 20's. A bon vivant, dressed in suits that are better suited for an early 1900's fashion museum.

Walton Harley:

Best friend and essential other working-half of Danton. After accidentally blowing up the perfume factory where he was working as an engineer, he seeks to use Danton as his segway to escape. A man, like Danton, in his mid-to-early 20's, dressed in a dress shirt, khakis and/or such acceptable business attire.

Beverly Kraft:

The elderly self-titled 'Craft Queen' of Myrtle Beach, who was ejected from her show on the local community college's TV station. She seeks revenge, and acceptance, the perfect combination for a villain who'd never be one. In her fifties or up to whatever age is castable. Dressed in shorts and a flowered shirt or such vacation-esque attire.

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Cast of Characters (cont'd)

- Fred Feltbetter: The other elderly part of the Channel 7 cast. A children's television star, fallen from grace (a great distance.) In his fifties or up to whatever age is castable. A sweater and colored dress pants, disheveled in overall appearance.
- Liza Justice: (Fred Feltbetter in disguise.) A sub-par cabaret singer dressed in a maid's dress and high-heeled shoes, along with a haphazard wig.
- Judge Amnesty: The short-sighted (in his mind's eye) Judge in charge of most cases at the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina courthouse. An older gentleman, by no short term of the words. Dressed in a Judge's robe and carries around his gavel constantly as a reminder of his position.
- Prosecutor Lockwright: The ruthless prosecutor, like Judge Amnesty, handling most cases going through the Myrtle Beach courts. Dressed in a suit. A man of any age. The poster-boy of legal red-tape bureaucracy.
- Mr. Paramount: The oil tycoon who dies 'mysteriously' after a meeting with Danton. He gives Danton his long-neglected, forgotten public access television station, Channel 7, as a surprise goodbye present from the arms of death, to Danton. Also an older gentleman. (For humor, this character is best done as doubled by Fred.)

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

- The Strange Individual: A faceless stranger who appears any time that something goes wrong at Channel 7. Who is he exactly? Read the show and find out! An older man, at first wearing a trenchcoat, when unveiled in act II, dressed in a strangely patterned suit. (Doubling role.)
- The Overbearing Announcer: A snake-oil salesman if there ever was one. He is the general host for many of Myrtle Beach's events. A man of any age, dressed in a suit that is tacky to the 'T'. (Doubling role.)
- Intern: The mysterious intern who like fate or a snake hiding behind some moving crates, arrives from nowhere and strikes with a slow-acting venom, there completely to upset the balance and destroy Channel 7. A man in his early 20's, dressed business-casual to the extent that a college student can be.
- The Bailiff: The Bailiff presiding over Judge Amnesty's courtroom. Any age, race, etc. (Doubling role.)
- Vicariously Living Mothers: A group (any size) of hoity-toity women, all living their dream lives through their unfortunuate children, forced to endure a life of glamour that they couldn't care less about. They are ruthless to get what they (their children) want. Any race, age, etc. (Doubling roles.)

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Cast of Characters (cont'd)

The Beauty Pageant Contestants:

A group (any size) of 'children' (for humor, these could be adults in costume.) They clearly would rather be at the dentist than do what they are forced to do. (Doubling roles.)

The Jury Members:

The faceless group of adults whose single purpose is to pass judgement. They will also double as television viewers in multiple scenes.

Opiate Acres Nurses, Patients, and the Three Jesuses:

Both the nurses and patients of Opiate Acres Home for the Mentally Unstable. The nurses are dressed as general nurses, with the patients looking discheveled. (Doubling roles.)

Caller - Crystal:

Simply use someone from the Jury. Only a voice is needed. (Doubling role.)

Caller - Dreamspirit:

The same as above. Only a voice is needed. (Doubling role.)

The FCC Officers:

Dressed in police uniforms, they're out to catch anyone breaking telecommunications laws. No matter the cost. (Doubling roles.)

Time

Around one hour and forty-five minutes to two hours. An intermission is recommended.

ACT I

Scene 1

Needed backdrop: A shadow screen of construction plastic. This will be present in every scene.

The Courtroom set:

A defense bench, stage left, the prosecutor's bench (stage right), a witness stand (stage center front), and the judge's podium, (stage center.)

The show opens with a little soft muzak, akin to riding in an elevator. Thunder crashes as Judge Amnesty pounds his gavel and the lights open suddenly.

The Jury, Walton, and Beverly, shrouded in the corners by shadow screens of construction plastic, cheer and clap animatedly. The lights open to reveal Danton standing at the defense bench, stage left, Judge Amnesty at his podium stage center, and Prosecutor Lockwright at the prosecution's bench at stage right. The empty witness stand sits in the center. The Bailiff stands near stage right.

Danton turns to face the audience. Prosecutor Lockwright and Judge Amnesty stand still.

DANTON:

I don't deserve what is about to befall me. I don't get paid enough for this. This case is anything but defensible. It's going to be a smear on my record. But, where are my manners? My name is Danton. I'm a defense attorney from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. My life is a wreck.

Walton and Beverly wave from behind the shadow screen.

DANTON:

That's Walton and Beverly. I've been best friends with Walton since the first grade and we've been inseparable, even after all that we've been through. He's a chemical engineer that used to work for a local perfumery, until he accidentally caused an explosion that coated Myrtle Beach in the knock-off of Chanel Number 5. The city ended up getting sued because of it, mainly because of the fact that the perfumery had never paid for the rights to knock-off from Chanel. The other person is Beverly, who we met last year at the beginning of the Fred Feltbetter case, which the

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DANTON: (cont'd)

conclusion to is about to start. She's Myrtle Beach's self-entitled 'craft queen.' She had a show on the local community college's public television channel, but it was recently canceled due to the name, 'Craft Your Own Existence', which got her in hot water with the head of the local evangelist organization, Crystal. The show was promptly canceled after the public blowout at the local church potluck where Beverly showed up and threw a pot's worth of chicken and dumplings on her. I suppose you could call us a group of people all looking for second chances.

Judge Amnesty cracks his gavel again. Thunder claps and the lights flicker.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Mr. Stanton, are you ready to present your opening to the Fred Feltbetter case?

DANTON:

Indeed I am, your honor. As you all now, I was the chief defense attorney in the first part of the Fred Feltbetter trial, but it was ended before sentencing due to a lack of evidence based around the supposed crimes of Mr. Feltbetter. The re-opening of this case is not to convict Mr. Feltbetter, but instead prove of his inability to survive in modern society. He is in need of institutionalization. His last job, a singer at Wig Caps Drag Cabaret, ended in a public tirade and the eventual attacking of a guest, claiming that he 'isn't a communist.'

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Your honor, I object to this. As the prosecution, the hand of the state, I have found that Mr. Feltbetter is in perfect mental stability, and is rather putting on an immense spectacle for the court in a vain attempt to cover his complete mental stability. However, as we all notice, Mr. Feltbetter is not here at the moment. He fled police custody when he was under arrest and has disappeared. The police are currently searching for him.

DANTON:

With this having been said, I call our first witness, a Ms. Liza Justice, who was the next act after Mr. Feltbetter after his meltdown. She was witness to the entire event.

Liza Justice (Fred Feltbetter in disguise), dressed in a haphazard Maid's dress and high-heeled shoes, along with a hastily prepared wig walks onstage and stands at the witness bench.

(CONTINUED)

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Name, please.

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

You all just said it, honey! (*She blows a bubble and stares at Danton*) Are you slow or something'? My names' Liza. Liza Justice. I'm a singer down at Wig Caps Cabaret. I saw Fred bust it, big time.

Beverly whistles from behind the shadow screen and pulls a mirror from her handbag.

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Can you tell us what happened that night?

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

For sure, honey buns. Well, I was the act directly after Fred finish his puppet show routine.

DANTON:

A puppet show at a cabaret?

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

We've got some strange clients.

Beverly pushes her way through the Jury Members and reaches the edge of the construction plastic. She whistles again.

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

Just as he finished up he flung himself onto the front of the stage and grabbed one of the creepy old men always sit directly up front by the collar.

Danton notices and moves toward her while nobody is paying attention. Beverly gives him the hand mirror and rushes back to her spot amongst the Jury Members without any explanation. Danton returns to the defense bench.

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED) CON'T:

He started screaming, real loud like, 'I'm not a communist, no matter what they say! I'm not a communist!' I don't know how many of you all know this, but Mr. Feltbetter was on PBS for a long time with his kid's show, 'Mr. Feltbetter's Cul-de-Sac.' Back in the 50's, but he was accused of being a communist and had his show taken away. All of us at the cabaret thought that he had put that all behind him. 'Guess not.

Beverly coughs from behind the construction plastic screen and lifts the ends of her shirt as if she was flashing Danton. Danton looks over to see it and is taken aback.

(CONTINUED)

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

But to tell you the complete truth, I think he really has finally finished loosing his marbles. They're so far under the couch that we'll never find them without exploring deep in there, and I don't think that anyone wants to go in there.

Danton observes Liza Justice, looking her over. He takes the mirror and slowly walks over, positioning it to look up Liza's skirt. Judge Amnesty notices.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Mr. Stanton! I'll have you know that what you are doing is sexual harassment! Stop that immediately! I'll hold you in contempt of court for this!

DANTON:

I'll have you all know that this is no woman! This is, in fact, Mr. Fred Feltbetter in disguise!

Liza Justice turns to face Danton.

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

How dare you! Do I look like a man!?

DANTON:

Would you like for me to answer that question truthfully?

LIZA JUSTICE (FRED):

How dare you!

Danton quickly yanks the wig off of Liza Justice, revealing that it is indeed Fred Feltbetter.

FRED:

You've caught me, Comrade, it is me! However, you aren't going to have me shipped off to Siberia, no, no! You won't catch me in the name of my ancestors! I will run! You'll never catch me!

The Bailiff moves to catch Fred as he begins to run. Fred quickly runs to the left, avoiding the bailiff altogether. He runs behind the shadow screen, causing the Jury Members to scream and run, attempting to get out of his way.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Someone catch that man! *(He cracks his gavel. Thunder.)* Court is adjourned until someone catches him! We will proceed with the last will and testament hearing of Mr. Paramount after this trial concludes!

(CONTINUED)

Danton runs, grabbing his briefcase, following the same path as Fred. The Jury Members, Beverly and Walton scatter. Prosecutor Lockwright, Judge Amnesty and the Bailiff run offstage.

Scene 2

The evidence room set is needed.

Boxes of evidence litter the room.

Danton quickly rushes onstage and begins shifting through the boxes of evidence littering the floor.

DANTON:

Oh sweet liberty, all of the tax money this place gets and they can't even afford a hot-damn label maker.

He sorts through a box of evidence.

DANTON:

Well, this definitely isn't it. Where is it, where is it? I know that pistol is in here somewhere, I just don't know where! It has to be!

He pulls down a few more boxes, ruffling through them.

DANTON:

My career is over, my life is over, everything is over! I'm just going to go ahead and end it all and hope that it's an all expense paid vacation on the other end. If not... Well, it's true what they say about lawyers.

He ruffles through a final box, finally finding the pistol that he was looking for. He sits on the floor, still ruffling around in the box.

DANTON:

I need some bullets now, wouldn't you know it'd be empty. Nothing is ever easy around here. I know Walton and Beverly will miss me, but that's just not enough to keep me around after all of this. I'm such a failure. So what, I managed to get myself a television station by killing someone. I've got no damn idea on how to do all of this. Aha, got them.

He pulls the pistol out and begins loading it.

DANTON:

Well, enough of all of this. It's about time I handed in the remote.

He loosens his necktie and sits upright, sticking the end of the revolver in his mouth.

FRED:

Don't you do that! I need you to get me off of the hook!

Danton lets out a yell and fires into the audience accidentally. Fred reveals himself from where he was hiding amongst more boxes.

DANTON:

Good god, Fred! Don't you know to not scare people when they're having a nervous breakdown!? I could have actually shot myself!

FRED:

You weren't actually going to shoot yourself?

DANTON:

Probably not. You know us lawyers have a flair for the overly-dramatic. If it does not fit, you must acquit. That sort of thing. Why exactly did you run from the courtroom. Do you not trust my ability?

FRED:

We won't talk about that. What you need to do is go get me off! I'll turn myself in, but only if you'll do your best job to make sure I'm insane.

DANTON:

Do they really need help to think that after this?

FRED:

Exactly.

Danton tucks the pistol into his briefcase as the Bailiff storms in and arrests Fred.

FRED:

I'll see you in court, Comrade!

Scene 3

The Courtroom set will be needed.

Danton looks to the audience and walks to front stage, carrying his briefcase. The lights dim. A couch and coffee table is carried in by some Jury Members. A sugar dish filled with sugar, two mugs and a squirt bottle sit on the coffee table. The Jury Members go back behind the shadow screen.

(CONTINUED)

DANTON:

I have to admit, maybe we aren't telling you the complete truth on how the whole of these events have come on us. Let's rewind time for a bit. Three weeks ago, to be exact.

Danton moves to the couch and sits on one end, addressing the audience. He sits his briefcase nearby.

DANTON:

The setting? My very-own law office, Stanton and Associates. Too bad I don't have any associates, huh? This is the place where I... Accidentally! Now, keep that in mind. Accidentally! Killed someone and got away with it.

Mr. Paramount enters stage left, carrying a stack of paperwork and runs, flinging himself onto Danton. He throws a stack of paperwork onto the coffee table. Danton struggles to be able to see the audience, speaking to them.

DANTON:

This is Mr. Paramount, an oil tycoon from Texas. As you can see, he's a little old. By that, I mean, I'm pretty sure that he owes Jesus a few dollars. Also, by oil tycoon, I mean, he owns a few pumpjacks and a cattle ranch. Of course, also in Texas. Did I mention that he's also - (*He struggles to get out from under Mr. Paramount*) was - infatuated with me. He paid for my office, straight-out bought the place! He also furnished it, supplied it, recommended clients, and most importantly...

Mr. Paramount pulls out a check and Danton snatches it, tucking it into his blazer. He gets up, running from Mr. Paramouont around the room, who clearly is much slower than him from his age. He looks to the audience as he speaks.

DANTON:

Gave me whatever I wanted in exchange for a few minutes of 'alone time' when he came over once a month on a Greyhound bus, which generally, consisted of doing this.

They move to the coffee table. Danton puts his hands on Mr. Paramount's chest to keep him from coming any closer. He looks to the audience.

(CONTINUED)

DANTON:

The real point to this poorly Harlequin novel of a story is that I killed him. Now, I know, you're all sitting there saying, I bashed him over the head with a bookend, I threw him from the window, I did something ghastly. Well, I didn't.

Danton picks up a cup of coffee from the coffee table, dropping spoonful of sugar into it.

DANTON:

A little sugar for your tank, Mr. Paramount.

Danton hands the cup to Mr. Paramount who takes a seat on the couch, sipping from the cup. He pets the couch, beckoning Danton to sit.

DANTON:

This is how it happened. After being chased around for a good ten minutes, I had forgotten that I was cleaning that sugar dish, and that what was in there wasn't exactly sugar. In fact, that was powdered cleaning agent.

Danton picks up the sugar dish, showing it to the audience as Mr. Paramount slumps and grows still.

DANTON:

Incredibly poisonous to human beings if ingested. I even had mixed it with a bit of...

Danton picks up the squirt bottle (filled with water) from the coffee table.

DANTON:

Industrial grade antiseptic chloroform that I had taken from the county examiner's office the last time I was there. This stuff can kill just about anything.

Danton squirts some into the audience. He puts the bottle and sugar dish back on the table.

DANTON:

Including oil tycoons with a tendency to chase young men around well-decorated offices that they paid for. (He examines the audience) What? You should see all of the harassment paperwork that has been filed from his oil company's office. More male interns fleeing the scene as if the place was on fire.

Danton examines the stack of paperwork and picks it up, putting it into his briefcase.

DANTON:

On this day in particular, Mr. Paramount had brought to me his will, which I was to look over and sign off on. I was going to convince him to give me his oil company. Of course, he died before I could get to that.

Danton turns to the body and starts dragging it offstage. He looks to the audience.

DANTON:

Anyway, that is how I killed off an oil tycoon. A cup of coffee. I suppose I could have done worse.

Jury Members come out from behind the shadow screen and move the couch and coffee table offstage, then go back behind the shadow screen. Danton finishes dragging the body offstage and then takes his place back at the defense attorney's stand. He looks to the audience.

DANTON:

How did I manage to not get caught? That's the easiest part about this entire situation. Budget cuts had shut down the county examiner's office, making it impossible to investigate the cause of death within a reasonable amount of time. Of course, as Mr. Paramount's legal attorney and proprietor of his will, I wanted him put to rest as quickly as possible.

Danton pulls Mr. Paramount's will from his briefcase. The Bailiff walks over and takes it, giving it to Judge Amnesty.

DANTON:

All I wanted was the contents of Mr. Paramount's estate, is all. Nothing too fancy, I think. I was just acting like any other half-decent attorney. As his attorney, I had to bring the will to court, albeit, a little amended post-mortem.

Scene 4

The Courtroom set will be needed.

Judge Amnesty cracks his gavel. Thunder. The Jury Members look on from behind the shadow screen.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Prosecutor Lockwright, do you have anything to say before we begin the proceedings?

(CONTINUED)

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Absolutely nothing, your honor. I have no objections to the will being presented. If I may ask, shall we expedite this case and close it? In having reviewed the last will and testament of Mr. Paramount, it seems as if he has no living relatives and is donating the most of his estate and wealth into his own company. The only stand-out portion of the will is his longest-lasting, but abandoned, acquisition of a public access television studio. (*He pulls out a stack of papers, flipping through them.*) It seems as though in a last-minute change to the documents in question that he had on his person while visiting Mr. Stanton, he transferred ownership of the television studio upon his death to Mr. Stanton.

Danton looks to the audience.

DANTON:

It was then I realized that I had done something wrong. Very wrong. I had switched the wrong line.

Danton looks back to the action.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Would you like to present this new evidence to the court, Prosecutor Lockwright?

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Of course, your honor.

The Bailiff walks to Prosecutor Lockwright and collects the pile of paperwork. He takes it to Judge Amnesty, who flips through it.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Where is the amendment to the document?

PROSECUTOR LOCKWRIGHT:

Right beneath the coffee stain, it's the scribbled-in portion. The part in smeared ink.

Danton adjusts his necktie.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

I believe that we should send this document to the county examiner to be examined for age to ensure that this document hasn't been tampered with after Mr. Paramount's death.

DANTON:

Now, Judge Amnesty, don't you know that the examiner's office has been shut down due to cuts in the budget?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANTON: (cont'd)

All cases with important evidence in need of closer examination have been postponed.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

Have you not been checking the court memos, Mr. Stanton? The county examiner's office was re-opened earlier this week. They also have an empty slate of examinations to do. When the offices were shut down, someone cut the power to the evidence coolers and morgue freezers. Everything had to be thrown out. The examiner can have this finished up before the end of the week.

Danton looks to the audience.

DANTON:

Talk about ignoring the evidence and paying attention to the small details.

Danton turns back to the court.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

I find that it would be a mistake on the court's behalf to produce a sentence handing over the ownership of the television station to Mr. Stanton without ensuring that this document was not tampered with posthumously.

Danton looks to the audience.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

However, I see that the length of the certification by Mr. Paramount on the will only lasts until tomorrow. Mr. Stanton, do you have anything to say?

DANTON:

I had instructed Mr. Paramount to keep the signature on a monthly basis due to the changing nature of his estate. It was all in line to keep the will up to date.

JUDGE AMNESTY:

We cannot postpone this will any longer, seeing as the person it belongs to is now deceased. I rule in favor. Will granted.

*Judge Amnesty pounds his gavel. Thunder cracks.
Danton turns to the audience.*

DANTON:

The one damn time that this court actually pays attention to something that they need to!

He and Prosecutor Lockwright leave the stage. The Jury Members clear the set of the desks and podium. Walton and Beverly join Danton who still stands onstage, dejectedly holding his briefcase.

BEVERLY AND WALTON (TOGETHER):

You did it! The station is ours! We've got our second chances!

WALTON:

Given, you murdered, bribed a judge and changed a billionaire's will after he died, but, it's our second chance, Danton! You never get those without drastic action!

BEVERLY:

He's right, sweetie. There hasn't been a writer in history who hasn't ended up in choking an editor to get their second book published after the first one flopped.

DANTON:

Where in the world did you hear that?

BEVERLY:

I don't know, sweetheart. I just made it up! It seemed better than telling one of the stories I've heard about being in Vietnam. What's better in this case, 'I choked an editor and got my second book published' or 'I killed a man by hitting him in the throat with a tin mug. I saved my whole unit avoided getting a dishonorable discharge.'

Danton adjusts his necktie and Walton laughs nervously. Danton hands the guidebook to Walton.

DANTON:

Take a look at this.

WALTON:

'How to Succeed in the Television Business Without Breaking a Sweat'

DANTON:

It says nothing about breaking spirits, bones, bank accounts, or anything else.

BEVERLY:

At least we won't be sweaty when it happens! We'll be very well-kept when we show up in the hospital... Or, well, the funeral home.

DANTON:

Do any of you even know anything about running a television studio?

BEVERLY AND WALTON (TOGETHER):

No.

DANTON:

That's what I thought.

WALTON:

I do know someone that does, though. I don't know if we'll be able to get him, though.

DANTON:

Well, who is it? As long as they're a step below drunk party-clown I think we'll be able to get them to join 'Team Tragedy: Nationally Televised.'

WALTON:

Do you think there is any way that we could get Mr. Feltbetter out of the mental hospital? You know, he was on PBS for all those years. He surely knows something about running a television station. Maybe not a lot, but we're running off of fumes at this point.

BEVERLY:

So is the last of his good sense. Are you sure we want him in the middle of this?

DANTON:

I'm with Beverly on this. I see a lot of reasons why we shouldn't have him with us on this, but... I'm on your side too, Walton. Some experience *is* better than none at all. (*He pulls out his wallet and looks in it*) I don't have much left, though. It cost me just about everything to keep myself out of prison.

BEVERLY:

Don't look at me, I'm on social security.

WALTON:

Don't look at me either. Ever since I lost my job I've been eating ramen noodles and past-date fig newtons. I really can't add on the extra expense of judo-political bribery this time.

DANTON:

I'm sure that there is surely *some* loophole that I could manage to get my hands on and widen up enough for him to slip through.

(CONTINUED)

BEVERLY:

This crackpot scheme already has enough holes in it. I don't think another could really hurt.

Beverly takes the guidebook from Walton.

BEVERLY:

'Here's a book on your new job. Read it since you don't have a damn clue.' Says everyone.

WALTON:

Don't worry, Beverly. Danton is a lawyer! He does that every day!

Danton grins sheepishly at the audience, and then Beverly as he tucks his wallet away.

DANTON:

I'm going to go chase the judge down and see if I can't find a way for him to sign Mr. Feltbetter over to us. I just will have to come up with a good backup story...

WALTON:

(He looks to the audience) Do I need to say it again?

DANTON:

(He begins moving offstage) I'll meet you at the car!

Danton runs offstage right as Walton and Beverly exit stage left. The Jury Members clear out.

Scene 5

The sound of a car pulling up fills the air as the lights reopen. Danton, Beverly, and Walton walk onstage.

Patients mill about the stage and two Nurses prowl around, distributing paper medicine cups. Once the nurses finish distributing the medication, the two of them go offstage.

DANTON:

Well, here we are! Sulfate Acres Home for the Mentally Unstable. I managed to get all of the paperwork we need to have Mr. Feltbetter released into our custody. Some drag about a whole work-release deal, I don't know. I didn't have time to go back to my office and look it all up.

BEVERLY:

Let's just find him and get out of here. This place gives me the willies something fierce.

(CONTINUED)

WALTON:

Isn't that Fred running this way?

There is an immense clambering from offstage right. Fred runs onstage.

FRED:

I'm telling you, I'm no communist!

Fred stops once he reaches Danton, Walton and Beverly.

FRED:

Long time no see, comrades! Let me say, it's a lot more comfortable to be alive when you don't have to wear handcuffs and shackles! Liberation! (*He glances over his shoulder*) Liberation! I have to go! The fuzz, I mean the gestapo, I mean, the KGB, are after me!

Fred runs off the stage and up an audience aisle, disappearing into the back. Danton and Beverly strain their necks, looking at offstage right.

DANTON:

I see a potted plant. What do you see?

BEVERLY:

I can't tell. My cataracts are acting up. I see a blurry mass that sort of looks like a plant. I thought that was a person in a wheelchair, to tell you the truth.

DANTON:

Is that why you almost walked into a pylon while we were walking in and said 'excuse me'?

BEVERLY:

Well, excuse me. I just thought it was an especially tall crazy person, is all. You don't just walk around making crazy people angry. Have you never seen a horror movie?

WALTON:

What about the news?

BEVERLY:

That too. Your life story counts just as well.

Fred appears from stage right and creeps up behind the three.

FRED:

Comrades!

Danton, Sue, and Walton scream in conjunction. Everyone, including the Patients looks over at them. A few patients scream in response.

WALTON:

Now look what you've done!

FRED:

Oh, I'm used to it. They do that all the time.

DANTON:

I knew this was all a bad idea. *(He holds his temple)* I feel a migraine coming on and it hasn't even been ten minutes yet.

WALTON:

Now that we've got your attention, Fred, how would you feel about coming with us for a little while? We could use your help.

FRED:

You aren't taking me to questioning, are you?

WALTON:

No, we are re-opening Channel 7. You know, the public access station. We don't exactly know how to start, though. We figured since you've been on television before, you would be a valuable resource in starting up.

BEVERLY:

Comparatively, I think the questioning sounds like a better time than what we need you for.

FRED:

I don't want to get back into the television business. It is exactly that propaganda-box that got me into trouble in the first place. The three Jesuses that live here have a better chance of turning wine to government-provided tang than me going to a television station again.

DANTON:

Fred, I completely emptied my bank account to have you back!

BEVERLY AND WALTON (TOGETHER):

And we would too if we had the money!

(CONTINUED)

DANTON:

You can't give up on us now. I have a standard of living, you know!

FRED:

Comrades, no, leave me be. Leave me to my memories. Besides, I have a new calling, anyway.

BEVERLY:

What could you possibly be doing in a mental institution?

FRED:

A lot of things, I'll have you know! I've already made friends with this floor's tribe of alcoholics and the Jesuses have made me a patron saint.

BEVERLY:

The only saints here are us, for putting up with this.

WALTON:

So, what exactly is your new calling?

FRED:

I just said it! I'm a patron saint!

WALTON:

Oh, sorry, I didn't think that you were completely serious.

FRED:

Pay more attention! If you don't pay attention you'll stray the wrong way, towards the reaches of evil!

Danton coughs and adjusts his necktie. He looks to the audience.

DANTON:

Enough with the lawyer jokes, will you? You people find anything funny.

Danton turns back to Walton, Beverly and Fred.

DANTON:

Fred, I've got an idea. Why don't you use the station to spread your message! You're a patron saint, after all. That's what you have to do! You won't get painted in the Sistine Chapel for nothing, you know.

FRED:

I could be a televangelist?

DANTON:

Sure, why not. We don't have much else to run with.

JESUS #1:

We approve! Spread the gospel!

JESUS #2:

Yes! Go out and spread the things that we have taught you, our saint!

JESUS #3:

We will do anything to support your holy journey!

DANTON:

Anything?

JESUSES #1,2,3:

Yes! In the true nature of ourselves, we will provide anything that our followers need.

DANTON:

Can you produce a few thousand dollars? Preferably over 5, but under 10. Anything over 10 is generally caught by the FBI's counterfeiting division.

The Jesuses look at one another, then at the medicine cups that they are holding. Danton looks at the medicine cups people are carrying around after being tipped off by the Jesuses.

DANTON:

Are you thinking what I'm thinking right now?

BEVERLY:

Some of the people at the home will pay top dollar for this stuff! Gloria, the friend of mine that I play bingo with, did you know that she sells these on Ebay?

WALTON:

What exactly goes on at that nursing home?

Beverly raises a can of pepper spray out of her handbag.

BEVERLY:

If I tell you that, I'd have to kill you.

DANTON:

You can't kill someone with pepper spray, Bev.

BEVERLY:

I wasn't going to spay him. I was going to hit him over the head with it.

(CONTINUED)

DANTON:

With as many people that you've used that thing on, I doubt that it's very heavy. Now, give me that bag.

Danton takes Beverly's handbag and starts walking around, taking the medicine cups from unsuspecting Patients and dumping the contents into the bag.

FRED:

That bag goes really well with your completion.

DANTON:

It goes really well with my bank account, that's what. With the profits off of these fills, I can refill at least a little bit of my bank account.

FRED:

You know, you're supposed to give a portion of your income to the church...

DANTON:

Good try, Fred. You aren't going to get any of it.

FRED:

(He shrugs) I tried.

Danton finishes 'collecting' the pills and returns to the group. He gives the handbag back to Beverly.

DANTON:

So, what do you say Fred? Are you with us or without us?

FRED:

Well, a saint is nothing without his followers. I'm in. Do you want to know who else is in?

Fred begins searching his person for his puppet, Madame Ethel. He finds her and slips her onto his hand.

DANTON:

Oh for goodness sakes. Not the puppet. I already put my trust in three Jesuses that probably got the holy message from a piece of toast, a reuben sandwich or a cup of yogurt.

FRED (MADAME ETHEL):

You'd best watch it, sweetcheeks! I'll rip you a new hole to toot from if you keep talking to me like that!

DANTON:

That's funny, coming from a puppet that needs a hand up it's--

WALTON:

What he's saying is, it's great to see you, Madame Ethel! We see you're recovering... Well? From your PTSD. We haven't seen you in forever! You look (*He reaches forward and slightly adjusts one of the puppet's eyes*) a little cross-eyed, but great.

FRED (MADAME ETHEL):

Well I feel like the tragic victim of a craft store black Friday sale. I've been tossed, torn, tattered, slung around in suitcases and even done some things I'd rather not talk about. Now, let's just kiss and make up, Danton. Give me some sugar!

Fred quickly moves to Danton and plasters Madame Ethel's mouth to his lips.

WALTON:

Stop! We don't know where that puppet has been!

BEVERLY:

And that's just the tip of the iceberg!

WALTON:

This iceberg is floating in the water of lies that nobody wants to swim in.

Danton struggles and Beverly screams and sprays her pepper spray at Fred. Fred doges by moving the other direction, keeping the puppet plastered to Danton. Danton breaks free.

DANTON:

Good god, if I wanted to taste something like that, I'd lick the floor of locker room at a one-star gym in a lower-middle class neighborhood!

WALTON:

You really need to brush your teeth now. This is a risk to your health.

DANTON:

(*Breathlessly*) If I was worried about my health, I would have already tried to flee the country.

BEVERLY:

We just might have to by the end of all of this. Fred, go get everything from your room and head to the car. We'll be waiting for you. We're going to need all of the rest that we can get if we're going to survive.

(CONTINUED)

JESUSES #1,2,3:

You have our blessing! Go forth and procreate!

Danton coughs and straightens his necktie.

JESUSES #1,2,3:

We mean, repopulate! The... Airwaves! Bring back original programing to Myrtle Beach! Down with PBS! Bring on the second-coming of cable television!

ACT IIScene 1

The sound of a car pulling up fills the air. Danton, Beverly, Fred, and Walton walk onstage. Beverly clutches her handbag as if she'll smack someone with it. Danton carries his briefcase.

A cardboard facade resembling the TV-Station building stands in the middle of the stage. Danton, Beverly, Fred and Walton move behind it.

The Office set lies behind the facade.

The Office set: A desk in the center, a chair to the left side, a file cabinet, two more chairs at the desk and a broken television to the right. Discarded papers and trash litter every crevice. The essence of long-time abandonment. A breeding ground for asbestos and workers comp claims lawsuits.

DANTON:

I know, I know! Just give me a damn minute! I can't see anything in here! When the judge said rough, I thought he meant that the place needs a new coat of paint, maybe a new window, a bit of polish on the doorknobs. (He pauses) What we are going to need is to start packing some heat, new locks, and probably an emergency room triage unit specializing in gunshot wounds by the end of this.

BEVERLY:

I just stuck my hand in something sticky!

FRED:

It's been a while since I've heard that in a dark place...

The shuffling intensifies to a nearly frantic place.

WALTON:

Just get the lights on already!

DANTON:

I can't just clap my hands and have them turn on! It just doesn't work that way! I can't just say "let there be light" and just have them come on!

(CONTINUED)

WALTON:

Well, obviously not, because you just said it! You didn't try the clapping part, though.

Beverly claps. An electrical sound jolts through the air.

DANTON:

Whatever you do, don't touch anything made of metal! We have no idea what that sound is going to. Whoever did that... Try it again.

Beverly claps again and the lights spring to life.

WALTON:

Well, look at that! What do you know, Bev, there are good things about being so old that you don't care anymore after all! They even have 'the clapper' installed in here! They probably even got it on discount for airing the commercials!

Something begins creaking.

BEVERLY:

Everyone be still again! The floor might be getting ready to cave in! This happened down at the home! Old man Jenkins moved his wheelchair too close to the drink machine and fell three floors down, drink machine and all! He didn't get hurt, though. He landed on the least favorite nurse in the building.

The cardboard facade of the building is pushed down as Danton, Beverly, Walton and Fred scream, leaving them and the Office set revealed to the audience.

FRED:

Looks like we've fixed the problem.

BEVERLY:

I'd say so.

The Strange Individual walks onstage through the audience, carrying a brick. Once he arrives at the front of the stage he throws it toward the group. The sound of breaking glass fills the air. He runs out.

BEVERLY:

Oh lord, boys! Find cover! The roof is caving in on us!

Beverly runs to find cover as Danton walks toward the brick.

DANTON:

I wish that was the case, Bev. Take a look at this little present that we've just received.

Danton picks up the brick and hands it to Fred, who begins studying it. He pulls the note attached to it off and begins to read it.

FRED:

'Just a little welcome gift for you all as you try to run PBS into the ground. We know what you are up to and won't allow it to happen. There is a reason that you were cast off television, Fred Feltbetter. We all know the truth about you.'

DANTON:

And just as I finished saying that this isn't the best neighborhood. Oh irony, you never spare me any moments to myself, do you?

WALTON:

You know what always happens in horror movies when people do this sort of thing...

SUE:

They get eaten alive by some horrible monster?

Danton looks to the audience as he puts his briefcase onto the desk and pulls out his laptop, putting it on the desk.

DANTON:

That's right. The problem is, our situation is real, and the public (*He straightens his necktie and braces himself*) is more brutal, nasty, and blood-lusting than any monster that has ever been created. (*He looks to Fred*) You'd better keep that brick handy. We may be holding off hordes of critics and angry television junkies.

Fred hastily discards the brick, throwing it somewhere on stage with abandon. Danton, Walton and Beverly dodge to avoid it.

FRED:

Well, you all can be negative Nancies if that is what you want, but I think we need a round of applause for ourselves for continuing on into the face of danger!

DANTON, BEVERLY AND WALTON (TOGETHER):

Stop!

Fred claps and the lights go out as an electrical jolt shocks the air.

(CONTINUED)

DANTON:

Damnit, Fred! I think you blew a fuse on that one!

During the scene transition, move the fallen office building facade offstage and out of sight.

Scene 2

The Office set will be needed.

Danton kneels by the file cabinets, ruffling through papers that have been discarded on the floor. Walton sits at the desk, looking at papers discarded there on the desktop. Fred stands by the desk. Beverly is offstage.

BEVERLY (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Well, boys, I have some good and some bad news. Which would you rather hear first?

DANTON:

Beverly, we only have good news now. The bad news is this building and everything in it. We already know about it.

Beverly moves onstage, carrying a dress. She sits nearby, pulls a small sewing kit out of her handbag and begins sewing it.

BEVERLY:

The wardrobe department seems to be in halfway decent shape. It could all use a little bit of work, and a decent washing to get all of the dust off of it all, but otherwise, I think we're in pretty decent shape.

Danton unfolds a poster for "Little Hoochies Southern Beauty Pageant" from the pile of mail and looks it over.

WALTON:

Well, that's good news if I ever heard it! At least that gives us a head start! We can take costumes out of our startup budget, then.

DANTON:

Would you look at this!

Danton holds the poster to show Beverly, Walton, Fred, and the audience.

DANTON:

Looks like the postman has been still slipping the station it's mail this whole time. Hoochum's department

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANTON: (cont'd)
store is doing it's annual child pageant this
afternoon.

BEVERLY:
You haven't heard about that mess?

DANTON:
I don't make it a habit to study-up on child pageants,
no.

BEVERLY:
This is the first year that it isn't going to be
televised, since Hoochum's lost it's funding for it
from PBS because of the name of the pageant and the
ladies from the Evangelical association were raising
cane about it all. I don't see why, that head sack of
botox Crystal 'goes to church' real often, and I don't
mean sittin' in a pew, if you catch my drift. She's the
reason that my show was taken off of the community
college network, you know! I've never seen such fuss
over a name in all my life. We should get on her back
for being named Crystal. 'Oh, oh, Crystal meth!'

Danton looks at the poster, then the audience.

DANTON:
'Little Hoochies'... (*Sarcastically*) I wonder why.

FRED:
Sounds like Crystal does not need any more extra people
on her back, Bev! That could give her back problems!

BEVERLY:
There is a reason they call the new wing of the Public
Health Center for Transmitted Disease Offices the
'Crystal Wing.'

FRED:
That's it! I know what I want to do! Don't say another
word! No more about 'Sister open legs!' It's always
been my dream! I want to be beautiful! I want to be
covered in jewels and a beautiful gown, I want... I
want to be Marilyn Monroe! A star!

BEVERLY:
You'll look like Marilyn, alright. Marilyn Manson.
They're going to call you 'Sister closed legs and
clentched butts.'

DANTON:
Mr. Feltbetter, you're forgetting one essential part to
all of this. (*He looks at the poster and reads it*) The

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANTON: (cont'd)

pageant is for five to ten year-olds. Even with all of the cheap, dried-up lead-based makeup in the storage closet we couldn't cover up your age. Besides, what would any good patron-saint mad Russian want to do with a beauty contest, anyway?

FRED:

You never discuss a lady's age! That's right up there with where she lives and works! Besides, queens have divine right, don't you know! I need-not worry about being myself and being a saint. I can do both!

BEVERLY:

Watch it, Fred. You're not in the dress, yet. Besides, I don't think being a crazy-as-all-getout codger retired semi-celebrity and current resident of Opiate Acres mental institution is something you'd want to tell anyone about.

FRED:

Well excuse me! Isn't that the bedpan calling the walker black!

WALTON:

You two, stop it! Arguing isn't going to fix this situation.

DANTON:

No, but it makes for pretty good office drama.

WALTON:

Well, I think a daytime talk show is a bit too expensive for us, so please stop it. At this point, with the budget... Completely... Crunched... *(He looks at the stack of paperwork on the desk concernedly)* Not including what we have currently, with the first month's utilities taken out, we have a budget of about fifty dollars, give or take. The ink in the printer started to go out as I was printing it all.

BEVERLY:

Well, we need to put something on the air. If there isn't anything there, nobody is going to watch.

DANTON:

Well, it's going to have to be done with less than fifty dollars. Does anyone have any suggestions? I think we're open at this point. *(He retrieves the handbook from Beverly's handbag and goes back to his seat, beginning to flip through it.)*

WALTON:

Could we get any show syndication rights with that much? Even if it isn't original programming, it'll get people watching, at least.

DANTON:

That isn't possible unless you want untranslated infomercials from Taiwan. That's about the most bang we'll be getting for our luck from Bangkok.

FRED:

Now, that just isn't true. You can get a lot more, if you know where to go.

Beverly, Danton and Walton look at Fred.

FRED:

Well excuse me, I didn't realize that this is the judgment channel. I'd go work for the conservative news network if I wanted that.

Fred moves toward Beverly.

DANTON:

I suppose the solution to this problem is that we'll need to do original programming. (*He points to a passage in the book as he studies it.*) It says here that syndication rights are too expensive for any startup operation, as we know. The only solution is making our own shows and paying the licensing fee with the FCC, which is still expensive, but much cheaper than syndication rights. (*He moves to Beverly and puts the handbook back in her bag.*)

WALTON:

Well, that'll be difficult, but, I think that we can do it! Danton, don't you still have all of those scripts that you wrote when you were back in College taking film classes?

DANTON:

I think I should still have them. I've tried to forget them. That was during my 'finding myself' Fellini-movie watching phase. I suppose I could scrounge something up for us to use. (*He begins clicking around on his laptop.*) It'll be a stretch, though. All of them are very art-nouveau.

BEVERLY:

You're still better off than Fred, he found who he was and then ended up losing himself right after. The man's psyche needs to be on a leash.

(CONTINUED)

FRED:
Leather?

BEVERLY:
No.

FRED:
You know what? Give me that dress! (*He snatches the dress from Beverly and holds it to his chest.*) The only people loosing it are going to be the crowd when they see me in this dress! I haven't lost it, anyway! All of that sainthood and Russian ploy was just a get out of jail free card.

WALTON:
The problem is that it is all-too-easy for you to play crazy and do it well enough that everyone believes you.

FRED:
How do you think I will look in this? It's a little shabby, but, they don't call it shabby chic for no reason at all!

BEVERLY:
Honey, if you put that dress on, I don't think you're going to be making it into Vogue. People will be loosing it, alright. Their lunches.

FRED:
Well, according to you I wouldn't make it in there anyway! Haters are my motivators! If I'm going to be fabulous (*He holds the dress to himself*) I'll just have to do it! I'll be in the wardrobe room if anyone needs me!

Walton glances up from his paperwork. Fred pauses.

WALTON:
Mr. Feltbetter, what do the words five to ten year-olds say to you? They aren't going to allow you to enter that contest no matter what.

FRED:
I'm going to enter that contest, if they like it or not! Who are they to stop me? I'll just have to be better than them all! You know what they all say, you can't stop progress! Down with ageism!

Danton sighs exasperatedly and examines the paperwork with Walton. Fred runs offstage with the dress in hand.

DANTON:

Well, I do have the script for 'The Duke of Duchess Street' on this computer.

WALTON:

Is that the one about the Victorian family that runs a bakery?

DANTON:

Well, that's only the logline of the show, Walton. In the full reality of the plotline, the family is also running an opium den on the side in order to support the business, and have to continually hide it from the police or prying eyes.

BEVERLY:

That whole sort of situation sounds familiar.

DANTON:

Get the camera. I've printed out the script. We're starting production of the next soap-opera blockbuster.

Walton grabs the camera and tripod. Danton grabs a wad of papers and moves behind the plastic shadow screen. Beverly shakes her head, concerned, and follows Danton. Walton follows, setting up the camera behind the shadow screen. The three strike bawdy and misleading poses as Fred continues the scene from this point.

Fred, clad in high-heels and his dress comes onstage and picks up the telephone from the desk.

FRED:

I am what I am, and I am beautiful! One beautiful lady. If there was two of me, I'd date myself. (*He touches his face casually, reveling in his own 'beauty'*) Oh, Fred! Stop touching yourself! You'll mess up your beautiful makeup. Those people at the pageant will just have to see it for themselves!

Walton, Beverly and Danton pose in various positions behind the shadow screen, mimicking dramatic actions from a soap opera.

FRED:

I'm just going to have to be a lady and use my charms on them. I'll change their minds myself!

He quietly dials the phone.

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Hello? This is Hoochum's department store, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. How may I help you?

FRED:

Yes, hello, dearie. I'm calling about the 'Little Hoochies' pageant.

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Ma'am, if you are calling to attempt to bribe the judges, I hate to break it to you, they're much more (*he pauses*) preoccupied than you think they are.

FRED:

Dear! I'd never think of such a thing! Oh my goodness! But, I will say, if you were to vote for the right person, I may be inclined to drop a few twenty dollar bills in front of the judge's table...

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Ma'am, I have things to be doing right now. Unless it is real business pertaining to the pageant, I have to go.

FRED:

I'll be quick. I promise. (*He laughs to himself*) Tell me, dear. What is the age limit to enter the contest?

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Five to ten years old, of either sex, please.

FRED:

Would you be willing to bend the rules for an older contestant?

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

How much older? We've had one-too-many mothers ask to join the contest alongside their daughters this year.

FRED:

What about... Grandmothers?

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Excuse me? No, no.

FRED:

Well, why not? That's just wrong! If a person is beautiful, they should be able to use it! If you've got it, flaunt every little bit and piece of it!

OVERBEARING ANNOUNCER (FROM OFFSTAGE):

Right. I suppose you realize what this means, correct?

(CONTINUED)