

FUNNY BONED

-or-

**How I Learned To
SCHTICK The Landing**

By H. Russ Brown

FUNNY BONED -OR- HOW I LEARNED TO SCHTICK THE LANDING

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To my beautiful wife, Elizabeth, whose love, support, and belief in me has literally given me everything I hold dear: my career, my family, and my life.

Special shout-out to Justin “Deuces” Taylor and Cole “The Buzz” Buzbee for being hilarious sounding boards.

Eternal gratitude to my original production team of designers, technicians, and performers at COM Theatre: The BIGGEST Li'l Theatre In Texas. It was your passion, talent, and creative energy that empowered me to shape this vaudevillian farce into some seriously silly, spookily, squirrelly, screw-bally, side-splitty, slap-schticky, slide-whistley, sock monkey fun!

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FUNNY BONED -or- How I Learned To SCHTICK The Landing was originally produced Nov. 7th – 24th, 2024 at College of the Mainland in Texas City, TX. Direction by H. Russ Brown with scenic / prop / sound design by Curt Meyer, lighting design by Carter Kelly & Curt Meyer, costume / hair / makeup design by Amanda Bezemek, fight direction by H. Russ Brown, stage management by Macey Williams, assistant direction by Juliana Butskikh and Devon Baxa, assistant stage management by Tori Graham, cast deputy duties by Devon Baxa, quick change artistry by Tomas Meza and additional production support by the amazing cohort of COM Theatre majors.

The cast was as follows:

DUPPY O’GALE: Ryan McClelland
BUZZ COLBY: Jordin McClelland
LESLIE “ZEE” SHUFFETT: Payton Been
F. N. NAGLER: Heidi Franco
CRULLER: Evan Hood
TAYLOR JUSTIN: Jacob Meza
PURL: Karlee Chapman
McCANDLESS: Colin Goldman
DEE-O-GEE: Audra Klinger
SCHMUCKER: Zariah Crowder
FRANCIS OFFICIO: Greyson Kramm
B.G. NAYBOB: Felicity Leal
COUSIN MISHKA: Alex Fletcher

PLAYWRIGHT’S NOTES:

Farce is my favorite thing to write. I’m of the mind that there are plenty of tragic

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stories out there, why not focus on adding more fun, more laughter to the world? Most of the rules of comedy I learned from a very young age by studying the masters of the craft: The Marx Brothers, Red Skelton, Abbott and Costello, Buster Keaton, Jerry Lewis, Laurel and Hardy, etc... all of whom got their start on the vaudeville theatre circuit. A couple of years ago, I was reflecting on that fact and imagining the thousands of performers who were out there plugging away at their craft from one stage to the next on “the ol’ circuit”, year after year, just hoping and praying for that big break that would catapult them from obscurity to stardom!

FUNNY BONED is a love letter to vaudeville and all those artists onstage and behind the scenes who contributed in ways both large and small to making the world a funnier, more joyous place... The echoes from those boards still resonate to this day and, for that, I will be eternally grateful and entertained.

HIGHLY IMPORTANT: It is strongly suggested that a qualified fight director is hired and given ample time to work for a dramatically effective production. In production, for this play to truly “land”, it is vitally important that the moments of physical humor and slapstick chaos that the characters portray excite as much as they amuse and contribute to the ‘magic’ of an evening of theatre. Keep it fast, funny, broad, and comedically sharp through the slapstick actions and overreactions of these hilarious characters. I would suggest (strongly) contacting a representative of the Society of American Fight Directors to help you locate a qualified individual.

www.safd.org

CRAZILY HIGHLY IMPORTANT: Racially diverse, gender-inclusive, and body positive casting is highly encouraged for all roles. I’ve purposely written this script with no gender specific names or pronouns – so any role could be played by anyone – they just have to embody the spirit of the character. So, try and read it without letting yourself be informed and influenced by traditional gender roles and expectations. The only requisite for each and every role onstage is the bias-free casting of the best performer with the skills sets to bring the funny.

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CHARACTERS

DUPPY O'GALE

The ghost of a Vaudeville Comedian who haunts the Ethereanum Theatre.

BUZZ COLBY

The high-strung, stressed-out Stage Manager of the Ethereanum Theatre.

LESLIE "ZEE" SHUFFETT

An out of work comedic actor, who is an emergency replacement for the theatre's Assistant Stage Manager.

F. N. NAGLER

Hollywood Agent who represents the legendary TV comedy icon, Cousin Mishka.

CRULLER

The deadpan, stage door Security Officer hired to guard the stage door and protect Cousin Mishka from overly eager fans.

TAYLOR JUSTIN

The theatre's Props Master and Special Effects artist. A very funny person who loves a good prop gag.

PURL

The grumpy, intense Front of House / Box Office Manager with an almost complete lack of people skills.

McCANDLESS

The theatre's no-nonsense Lighting Designer.

DEE-O-GEE

The theatre's young, quick-witted Assistant Props Master.

SCHMUCKER

The theatre's well-meaning, but bumbling Stagehand.

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FRANCIS OFFICIO

The sycophantic Senior Junior Vice President of Programming for NBC.

B. G. NAYBOB

The CEO of the Naybob Tires Company and corporate sponsor of “The Naybob Variety Hour” on NBC.

COUSIN MISHKA

The pompous, narcissistic, legendary Comedian and star of the classic NBC TV sitcom, “Matzah-Fella”.

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ACT 1 SCENE 1

In the dark, we hear gentle humming / vocalization of an old vaudeville style tune that starts in the distance upstage and seems to grow as the sound nears center stage. After a moment, an old theatre ghost light on wheels suddenly clicks on revealing DUPPY O'GALE standing next to it in an old vaudeville comedian's costume – complete with vest, bowtie, baggy pants, pork pie hat, and a thin, bent crook bamboo cane. Duppy looks at the light with satisfaction and then looks around - taking in the space. In the low illumination of the ghost light, we see a mostly completed vaudeville backdrop set which includes a free-standing scenic wall upstage center with three side-by-side door units. There is also a large costume / steamer trunk upstage left that is used to hold hand props and, next to it, an old-fashioned hall tree with a variety of hats and other small costume pieces. There may also be other items that denote “old Vaudeville stage” wherever seems appropriate for your space. Upstage right, we see a bank of old ropes tied and anchored to a wooden, pegged rail - representing an old sandbag-weighted fly system. Duppy starts to strut across the stage, humming, then whirls suddenly as though struck by Cupid's arrow and is now love struck by the ghost light. Duppy gives a non-threatening wolf whistle and wiggle of the eyebrows to express their affection and then, crossing their hat over their heart, bows deeply before launching into an old soft shoe routine – humming musically again and perhaps throwing in a hat or cane trick (or both) before beginning to then use the ghost light as a romantic dance partner, taking it far DSR.

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DUPPY. *(Singing original lyrics “Duppy’s Honeymoon” to the tune of the classic song “Nagasaki” by Harry Warren - 1928.)*

I was strutting the Vaudeville boards.
You started laughing and my heart soared.
Your ha-ha had me smitten, I was purrin’ like a kitten
And I wa-wa-wa-wa-wanted more!

We went strolling through Central Park
Shared a chuckle, began to spark
Your ha-ha-ho-ho-hee-hees had me weak-y in the knee-hees
Sappy-happy as a la-la-lark!

I tell a knock-knock, proposin’ wedlock
And I split your sides!
You start to snicker, my pulse gets quicker
I’m your rib-tickler, you’re my bubbly bride!

Sun is setting, an island cruise
And we’re all kisses and cuddle-coos
We’re forever-ever-afty since we ran to ask your pappy
For a ha-ha-ha-ha-honeymoon!

BUZZ. *(Suddenly, intruding upon this musical moment, is a big, booming voice entering from offstage.)* Works!! Coming on!

DUPPY. Thank you, works! *(Suddenly, the stage work lights come on and, immediately following, the theatre’s harried, high strung stage manager, BUZZ COLBY, walks in, early in the morning, to start a new day – followed closely by the production’s new asst. stage manager, LESLIE SHUFFETT. NOTE: Duppy is a GHOST who died at the end of the vaudeville era in the late 1930s and has been haunting the theatre ever since. Duppy can’t be seen by anyone, except Leslie. Duppy interacts with everyone as though they can be seen by everyone. Until the ‘Big Reveal’ to Leslie later, everyone reacts and behaves in ways that Leslie*

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mistakes for them seeing / interacting with Duppy. ANOTHER NOTE: The timeline of this play allows it to be set anywhere from the early 1970s to a time 'before everyone carried cellphones' - the original production set it in 1976. Buzz shakes their head in amusement / friendly annoyance, when noticing the ghost light is no longer in its place at center stage. Duppy suddenly pretends to be romancing the ghost light ala Maurice Chevalier.)

DUPPY. Ahhh, my cherie, come with me to zee Cash Bar! Drinks are on Buzz!

BUZZ. Hardee-har-har...

DUPPY. Morning, Buzz!

BUZZ. Messin' around with my ghost light again, Duppy??

DUPPY. Can ya blame me?? She really knows how to socket to me!

(Acts like their receiving an electric shock.) BZZZZZT!!!

BUZZ. *(Grabbing the ghost light and taking it upstage where it will remain until needed later.)* Find another dance partner, hah? *(Buzz begins coiling up the cord.)*

DUPPY. Over my dead body! We're plannin' on runnin' away together! *(Beat.)* Could I borrow 2,598 extension cords? *(Sensing Buzz is not in a joking mood, Zee laughs under their breath. Duppy mildly surprised by Zee's amusement.)*

BUZZ. *Sigh* *(Grabbing a second clipboard.)*

ZEE. *(Quietly waves and greets Duppy.)* Hi.

DUPPY. *(Lighting up with excitement and moving to shake Zee's hand.)* Well, Howdy-Do! Name's Duppy!

BUZZ. Same old, same old.

ZEE. Duppy. *(Before the handshake can take place, Buzz hands off clipboard into Zee's extended hand.)*

BUZZ. Duppy needs to find something else to do with their idle time – we are on the clock here! *(Buzz checks their own clipboard.)*

DUPPY. You know it really hurts the way you just look right through me, Buzzy-Wuzzy... after all we meant to each other... you... you cad!

BUZZ. *(Sighing but not looking up from clipboard.)* Right, right, right....

ZEE. *(Smiles, shrugs and whispers to Duppy.)* Sorry.

DUPPY. Raised by two bulls in a China closet... *(Pointing at Buzz.)*

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Comes from a broken home.

ZEE. Haha!! *(Buzz glares and they both stop laughing.)*

DUPPY. Sorry, Buzz... I'm invisible! *(Makes magic fanfare sound and pantomimes throwing a magic exploding cloud of smoke!) POOF! (Like a fading, disembodied voice as they drift away toward the prop trunk.)*

We'll talk laaaaaaterrrr....

ZEE. *(Responding in kind.)* Okaaaaaaaay....

BUZZ. Can we please focus?

ZEE. *(Continuing the bit reflexively.)* Soooooorry... *(Buzz doubles down their glare – Zee quickly corrects.)* Ahem... Sorry.

BUZZ. Now... We've got a lot to do over the next couple of days and since we were totally left hanging by your spectacularly incompetent predecessor...

DUPPY. Yeah... "Rob".

BUZZ. Ugh... Rob.

DUPPY. Rob the Knob. Dropped more balls than a Boy Scout jamboree.

ZEE. *Snicker* Heh-heh... "Knob."

BUZZ. We're on the same page there. Speaking of pages.... Before we go any further, you need to sign THIS Non-Disclosure Agreement... *(Zee does so.)* ... saying that you are sworn to secrecy...

DUPPY. *(Sounding comically ominous – as though speaking of a legendary curse.)* On pain of DEATH!! *(Buzz looks to ensure secrecy but Zee misinterprets as reacting to Duppy.)*

BUZZ. You may not disclose to anyone...

DUPPY. *(Hurriedly under their breath.)* On pain of death. *(Buzz takes a breath.)*

BUZZ. ...outside this theatre WHAT we are doing or WHOM is involved...

ZEE. Speaking of, who IS... *(Suddenly, F. N. NAGLER, agent to our mysterious star, enters carrying portfolio case.)*

NAGLER. Buzz!! *(Buzz scurries away to speak in hushed tones with Nagler, who is handing off a stack of papers to Buzz.)*

ZEE. ... involved...?

DUPPY. *(Shrugs.)* I don't even know yet and I eavesdrop on everything.

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(Saluting and speaking in a 1930s radio serial voice.) It's all trenchcoats and decoder rings, Captain Midnight!

ZEE. I wonder why such a hush-hush big dea-

NAGLER. *(Noticing Zee and becoming very concerned. To Buzz.)* Tut-tut-tut-tut!! Who is this?! *(To Zee.)* Are you new?? *(To Buzz.)* Are they new?? *(To Zee.)* I don't know you.

ZEE. I'm... *(Nagler holds up a hand to block view of them, as though that action puts Zee in a separate, 'isolated booth'.)*

NAGLER. *(Shouts in the direction of backstage.)* Cruller!!

BUZZ. This is...

NAGLER. CRULLER!! *(Duppy, standing next to Zee, reinforces the concept of the separate, isolated booth by starting the classic 'trapped in a box' mime routine. Shouts in an offstage direction.)* Cruller!! *(Then, to Buzz.)* We talked about this, Buzz! *(Shouts again.)* CRULLE-!! *(CRULLER, a uniformed 'rent-a-cop' enters.)*

CRULLER. You bellowed, boss??

NAGLER. Cruller! I realize those thumbs aren't gonna just twardle themselves...

CRULLER. Twardle?

NAGLER. *(Uses both hands to quickly demo thumb twiddling in frustration.)* Twardle! *(Quickly putting isolation booth hand back and indicating Zee.)* ...And, I'm gonna go out on a loony limb here, but aren't you paid to make sure there are no... *(Removes hand to 'reveal' Zee.)* ...'nosy parkers'... *(Puts hand back quickly.)* ...just waltzing through that stage door without a signed...

BUZZ. *(Holding out the freshly signed form.)* Non-Disclosure Agreement!

NAGLER. *(Seeing Zee's name and position title on the form.)* You're... Good. Okay. *(Takes their hand down to remove Zee from 'isolation'.)* That... that's fine.

DUPPY. Kid's only been working here 5 minutes, Nagler.

NAGLER. *(Shaking their hand to acknowledge their mistake, then to Zee.)* Sorry!

ZEE. *(Sniffing their own shirt and then offering Nagler a sniff.)* I've still

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got that new Techie smell!

NAGLER. Heh-heh! Yes. Apologies. (*Seeing that Cruller is still there.*) Cruller! Ya think that stage door is just gonna bounce itself? (*As in a stage door 'bouncer'.*)

CRULLER. (*Exasperated.*) But you...! Cruller!... 'nosy parkers'...! (*Decides it's not worth the argument and walks away reminding themselves all the way off.*) I need the dough. Who needs the dough? Cruller! Cruller needs the dough. It's not enough dough, but I need the dough...

NAGLER. (*Introducing themselves to Zee.*) Apologies! F. N. Nagler, I represent Cuz-hmmmm... (*Whoops! Almost said the name.*) I'm "a certain someone's" agent and we're just trying to keep a tight lid on... (*Gestures around the space to indicate the enormity of what's going on. Buzz echoes the gestures.*)

ZEE. Of course.

DUPPY. (*Introducing Zee, but Nagler cannot hear it, of course.*) This is our new knob!

ZEE. (*Assuring Nagler.*) I'm not a knob!

NAGLER. Oh.. 'kay...

ZEE. (*Pronounced with a 'z' sound.*) I'm Leslie.

NAGLER. Well, good for you. Keep... not knobbing.

ZEE. "Not knobbing" is my middle name. I've never "not knobbed" harder than I'm gonna "not knob" for you... and "a certain someone".

NAGLER. Haha... Well, clearly, we're in good hands here! (*Checking their watch.*) Buzz, that aforementioned 'special someone' is on schedule to arrive this afternoon. I'm dropping something off in the lobby, then out for a quick errand and will return shortly! (*Nagler heads off and out in the wrong direction - reappearing immediately after disappearing – realizing they went the wrong direction – but tries to save face.*) Ahem! Yes... Everything seems in order back there. (*Buzz, Duppy, and Zee all point in the correct direction of the lobby and Nagler quickly exits in that direction.*) Carry on!

BUZZ. (*To Zee.*) Okay, here's how you "not knob" this job... (*Buzz produces a thick, long list of papers attached to a second clipboard.*)

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...THIS is what still needs doing... coordinating craft services, scheduling understudy rehearsals, making a backstage cue list, arrange costume and wig fittings, coordinate scene changes list, coordinate list of quick changes, see someone troubleshoots the faulty stage left headset connections, coordinate list of electronic sound and practical foley effects, prepare the rehearsal reports, make sure set pieces are being returned to their proper location and spiked per the ground-plan as we prep for light focus, coordinating with props and making 100% certain on pain of DEATH...

DUPPY. Copycat.

BUZZ. ...that the onstage props trunk? (*Points to it as Duppy give it a pat.*) ..is organized precisely, to-the-letter according to the enclosed diagram aaaaand... pretty much everything involving the cast, crew, etc. etc! You know, just general liasing...

DUPPY. (*Making it sound as though Buzz meant 'lazy'.*) *GASP!* Hard work is the cornerstone of our revered artform and “liasing-ness” will not be tolerated!

BUZZ. Along with whatever else just might make me lose my sanity as we prep for our... (*Whispering in pig latin as though top secret.*) ...“ecial-Spay uest-Gay”.

DUPPY. (*Putting hands up to show they are not judging.*) Love who you love.

ZEE. (*Looking thru the pages.*) WHOA. I know I'm an emergency replacement, buuuuuut...

BUZZ. (*Raising an annoyed eyebrow.*) Buuuuuut...???

DUPPY. (*Previous “buts” have set up a Duck-Duck-Goose rhythm. Duppy taps Buzz on the head.*) GOOSE! (*Runs in a circle around Buzz and Zee. Buzz gives a slight shiver following the tap on the head, but it goes largely unnoticed by Buzz because they are too annoyed at the hesitant stammering of Zee.*)

BUZZ. (*As though wiping away Zee's doubt physically and verbally.*) Wait! Wait! WAIT! Hold the pickles! Hold the onions! Hold the mayo! Do you not need a job?!

ZEE. No! No!

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BUZZ. No?!

ZEE. Yes. YES! I do!

BUZZ. You do?

ZEE. Like a tassel needs a teat! *(Duppy laughs.)*

BUZZ. Then what's with the amateur hour here?? I was told you were a pro!

ZEE. I am! I am! I breathe sawdust, chew scenery, and drink it all down with a blue wash. I bleed theatre! *(Zee gets very, very apprehensive.)* It.. I-i-it's just...

BUZZ. *(Buzz snaps - but just a li'l bit - picking up Zee by the collar and glaring nose to nose.)* Just... WHAT?!

DUPPY. *(Trying to bring calm.)* Now, Buzz! *(Buzz cannot seem to hear Duppy - only glare at Zee. Duppy gets behind a wide-eyed Zee and coaches them thru this tense moment.)* "Buzz...". *(Gesturing. Encouraging Zee to repeat it.)*

ZEE. Buzz...

DUPPY. "Just... wanted you to know..."

ZEE. Just... wanted you to know...

DUPPY. "...that I came here today..."

ZEE. "...that I came here today..."

DUPPY. "...to kick ass..."

ZEE. "...to kick ass... "

DUPPY. "and kiss stage managers..."

ZEE. "And... kiss... stage... managers??"

DUPPY. "And I'm all out of Chapstick."

ZEE. "And I'm all out of Chapstick."

BUZZ. *(Let's in sink in for a second before subtly, confusedly chuckling, which only adds to the tension.)* Heh-heh... Okay, then...? *(Breaking the tension completely, is a distant but piercing shout coming from the direction of the lobby that is emanating from a, for now, unseen source.)*

PURL. BUZZZZZZ!!

BUZZ. *(Flinching in response.)* Ughhh... *(Fully releasing Zee.)* Uh, 'kay... Well, get to it. I gotta go deal with...

PURL. *(Still unseen.)* BUZZZZZZ!!

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BUZZ. *(The dread / sarcasm is clear.)* ...the ever-effervescent Purl in front of house. *(Starts to go. Stops.)* Oh. There's Chapstick... in the SM kit... I mean... if ya need some. *(Realizes how that could be taken and continues to back away awkwardly just as Duppy sneakily places a whoopee cushion under Buzz's back heel, causing it to elicit a large 'fart' sound.)*

DUPPY. *(Quoting King Lear with 'bad Shakespeare' energy)* "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!"

BUZZ. *(Duppy and Zee snicker under their breath as Buzz looks down, lifts foot, and sighs...)* Duppy.... *(Picks it up and tosses toward props trunk, landing perfectly in Duppy's hands. Buzz turns quickly to go as Duppy calls after them with a "Scottish tragedy" quote in a THICK Scottish brogue.)*

DUPPY. "Hover through the fog and filthy air!" *(Buzz grumbles as they walk away.)* Och, aye, ye love me!!

BUZZ. *(Disappearing.)* Yeahhhh...

DUPPY. *(Smiling to Zee and reassuring them.)* They love me. You'll learn to!

ZEE. *(Giggling with relief and grateful to Duppy for the save.)* I may already! *(Reaching out with a handshake – and finally introducing themselves directly.)* I'm Leslie... Leslie Shuffett.

DUPPY. *(Excited to receive it.)* Duppy O'Gale! I'm practically the spirit of this theatre. *(Takes Zee's hand. Zee shivers slightly but ignores it.)*

ZEE. I can sense that already! I'm the very new ASM.

DUPPY. *(Still in mid-shake, places other hand on Zee's shoulder.)* Aristocratic Sock Monkey? *(Zee shivers even more.)*

ZEE. Ha! Arctic Sweater Moose, more like... Is it always this cold in here?

DUPPY. They rent it out as a kosher meat locker on weekdays.

ZEE. Couldn't be kosher.

DUPPY. Why's that?

ZEE. *(Playfully meaning Duppy.)* They forgot a ham!

DUPPY. Zing-a-rooney! Ohhhh, we're gonna get along just fine... *(Pronounces name with an "s" sound.)* ...Leslie.

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ZEE. “LeZlie.”

DUPPY. “LeSlie?”

ZEE. “Lezzzzzzzzlie.”

DUPPY. *(Realizing.)* LeZZZZZZZZlie! Apologiezzzzzzzz.

ZEE. No worriezzzzzzzzzz. *(They laugh. They have a brief beat of uncertainty of what to do now. Duppy gently guides the clipboard up to Zee’s face / attention.)* Oh! Uh... yeah. Now, I should...

DUPPY. “Lezzzzlie” seems so formal... *(Entirely innocently.)* Mind if I call ya “Lez”?

ZEE: *(Cringing.)* Pretty much everyone would mind.

DUPPY. *(Shrugs it off, but still clueless.)* Howzabout, “Zee”?

ZEE. Ha! Sure, Duppy. *(Looks around, just now getting a chance to take in the space.)* Wow.

DUPPY. Beauty, ain’t she??

ZEE. Huh? Oh, yeah!

DUPPY. After vaudeville died, they converted her into an old movie house for years, before finally restoring her to her former glory!

ZEE. Cool. *(Starting to get mildly anxious.)* Ok. Heh. Not trying to rush off, but I guess I should...

DUPPY. Ah, yes! Your duties as Apocalyptic Schlep Mule... *(Giving Zee an encouraging battle cry!)* Once more, unto the breach! *(Zee looks wide-eyed, intently at list on clipboard with a steadily weakening resolve.)* Lay on, Macduff! *(No response from Zee.)* Twenty-three skidoo? *(Beat.)* Zzzzzzzzee?

ZEE. *(Mildly despondent.)* Yezzzzzzz?

DUPPY. A taxidermied sloth would have more pep in their step.

ZEE. Yeah, uhm, I just... err.. don’t know what...

DUPPY. What to do first?

ZEE. *(Muttering.)* “At all” might be more accurate.

DUPPY. Zzzzzzzzee?

ZEE. Yezzzzzzz?

DUPPY. We’d led a certain wild-eyed stage manager to believe that you had theatrical experience.

ZEE. Yes, I do!

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DUPPY. Stage managing?

ZEE. No, I don't.

DUPPY. I thought you "bleed theatre"!

ZEE. I do! "Type A" as in "Actor".

DUPPY. Ahhhh, swizzle-sticks.

ZEE. A comedic actor.

DUPPY. Buzz is gonna crap a clipboard sideways.

ZEE. A very much out-of-work comedic actor, who's been giving new meaning to the term "starving artist", until my friend I'm housesitting for – which is what I tell Mom instead of saying I'm homeless and couch surfing – got a call on their answering machine from Buzz about an emergency replacement...

ZEE. / DUPPY. Aristocratic Sock Monkey.

ZEE. I need this one! You gotta help me!

DUPPY. You are in way over your head here, Zee, better give up the ghost now... (*Bemused with what they just said.*) Ah, if only....

(Suddenly, entering from offstage while carrying dry ice in a bucket is TAYLOR – the resident props master / artisan and a total jokester. They are wearing giant google-eyed glasses with fake nose and mustache and carrying an old school hot water bottle.)

TAYLOR. Where're my hose at?! (*Going to a small box by the props trunk.*) My dryer hose... for the fog machine.... (*Finds it.*) Ah!! There. (*Holds it up to their face like an elephant's trunk and uses the hot water bottle for an elephant's ear.*) How could I forget???

DUPPY. (*Laughs and claps – Zee joins in.*) Them's the jokes, folks! (*Taylor bows.*) Who doesn't love a good prop gag??

TAYLOR. I love a good prop gag!

DUPPY. / TAYLOR. That was not a good prop gag. (*Zee laughs as Duppy joins Taylor in a well-rehearsed bit of punch line schtick that moves them around in a circle and ends in a funny pose.*) Ha-cha-cha-cha!

TAYLOR. (*To Zee – referring to how glad they are to have a replacement for Rob.*) You must be the new lifesaver! What flavor?

DUPPY. Zee? Taylor. Taylor? Zee.

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ZEE. Taylor, hey there. *(Extends a hand. Taylor takes it.)*

TAYLOR. My fame precedes me! *(As if they'd already forgotten.)* And you are...?

DUPPY. *(Shaking their head.)* Mind like a lint trap.

ZEE. Zee, I guess.

DUPPY. / TAYLOR. Well, if you don't know, who does?? *(Duppy and Taylor do the punchline schtick again.)* Ha-cha-cha-cha!

TAYLOR. Met my A.P.M. yet?

ZEE. APM?

TAYLOR. Yeah?

DUPPY. Argentinian Panda Mixer. You'll love Dee-O-Gee!

ZEE. APM D-O-G? *(To Duppy)* Dog?

DUPPY. A sock monkey's best friend. That kid's a pip!

TAYLOR. Yeah! Seen 'em?

ZEE. / DUPPY. Nope.

TAYLOR. *(Removing google-eye glasses but, surprisingly, the nose and mustache remain on Taylor.)* Smelled 'em?

ZEE. *(Zee is both amused and confused. Duppy is loving the bit.)* I hope not.

DUPPY. May have...

TAYLOR. *(Removes nose, but the mustache remains.)* Then, I MUSTACHE you... *(Removes mustaches and puts it on Zee.)* ...to keep an EYE out for them... *(Puts google-eyed glasses on Zee.)* ...and let them know I'm looking for 'em? *(Puts nose on Zee.)* If it SNOOTS you. *(Duppy is cracking up at these proceedings.)*

ZEE. I haven't met them yet, so...

TAYLOR. *(Taking nose off of Zee.)* Then, how'd you NOSE who I was talking about then?

DUPPY. I may have mentioned...

ZEE. Yeah, Duppy, here –

TAYLOR. Oh, right! Should've known! Ol' *(sings the classic 50's song)* Yakkety Yak!

DUPPY. / TAYLOR. *(singing along.)* Don't talk back!

TAYLOR. Well, if you two see Dee-O-Gee, send them my way? I gotta

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finalize some set dressing details with Buzz while YOU and Dee-O-Gee walk thru the props list – yeah? We have to get everything set “just so” in the ol’ props trunk...

TAYLOR. / DUPPY. On pain of DEATH!

TAYLOR. So each prop is pulled out one at a time at just the right moment, per the obnoxiously detailed instructions of our mysterious muckety-muck. *(Pulls a seltzer bottle and a thick clipboard full of pages out of props trunk and puts the clipboard in Zee’s hands.)* Compared to this? “War & Peace” was a pamphlet.

ZEE. Well, luckily, I got Duppy already showing me the ropes...

TAYLOR. Oh, yeah, Duppy’ll give ya enough rope alright!! *(All laugh.)*

DUPPY. I know how to show somebody a good TWINE! *(More laughter.)*

TAYLOR. With Duppy on the case...? You’re gonna need all the help you can get...!

ZEE. Yeah?

DUPPY. Like an exorcist?

TAYLOR. *(Laughing.)* I’ll bring the holy water! *(Punchline schtick bit with Duppy again.)* Ha-cha-cha-cha-cha! Break a clipboard, Zee. You behave, Duppy, I’ll be-“leave”... *(They all laugh.)*

DUPPY. *(Waving goodbye.)* Okay, I’ll be-“hay-ve”, if you’ll be-“gone”! *(All laugh as Taylor leaves.)* Heh. What a card!

ZEE. *(The two clipboards reminding them of the enormity of their task.)* I gotta get started!

DUPPY. Agreed.

ZEE. *(Beat.)* Duppy?

DUPPY. Yeah?

ZEE. How do I get started?

DUPPY. *(Taking both clipboards from Zee, acts like it weighs a ton and drops to the floor.)* OOF!! *(Duppy leaves it on floor. Spits in each hand, rubs hands together, squats low, and gives a huge heave-ho as though lifting a truck, but is unable to budge it.)* HURRGGGHHH!!!!

ZEE. Duppy...

DUPPY. *(Pops up with the clipboard – immediately dropping the bit.)*

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Okay! Let's give this a looky-loo... You can't go over props list, no Dee-O-Gee... *(Hands prop list back to Zee, who sees how big it really is.)*

ZEE. Woof.

DUPPY. Can't do dance call, no dancers. *(Looks thru original clipboard list.)* Can't do fight call.

ZEE. *(Looking around for them.)* No actors?

DUPPY. No fight. *(Suddenly, we hear commotion coming from the front of house area as Buzz enters, followed too closely by PURL, the sour-faced front of house / box office manager, who is poking them in the back each time they say 'Buzz' and clearly on an unhappy mission.)*

PURL. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. *(Passing Duppy and Zee – in hot pursuit. Anytime Purl is not speaking, then they are low level growling.)*

DUPPY. It's "The Bee That Ate Pittsburgh"! *(Maybe a yellow / black theme to the costume to help land the joke?)*

ZEE. In 3-D. *(Purl pauses. Glares at Zee and Duppy.)*

DUPPY. Purl.

PURL. 'Scuse me. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. *(Buzz finally stops, but in their annoyed state does not turn to face Purl, who has halted, way too closely, glaring, at the back of an obviously aware and increasingly, awkwardly uncomfortable Buzz until they seem ready to snap. Finally, with one last poke.)* BUZZ.

BUZZ. *(Whirling around, trying very hard to not choose violence.)* Purl! You... you... *(Stepping back and not saying what they want to say.)* ...needed something el-?

PURL. *(Moving in too close again and every time they say the name 'Buzz', it's like nails on a chalkboard.)* Buzz, I wasn't done talking...

BUZZ. *(Creating distance.)* Guess that was just wishful thinki-.

PURL. *(Moving in too close.)* Buzz, this "vaudeville-themed" concessions list that Nagler just dumped in my lap? It's impossible to source!

BUZZ. *(Creating distance.)* Well, that's what our... mysterious "high muckety-muck" wan-

PURL. *(Moving in too close – a vocal crescendo highlighting the futility*

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of their task.) Wilbur Buds? Sloppy Sallys?? Nik-L-Nips...?!

ZEE. Sounds like my last three blind dates...

DUPPY. Always the bridesmaid...

PURL. *(Looking at Zee with contempt for interrupting.) SMARTIES!*

(Turning back to Buzz.) Necco Wafers. Abba-Zabbas... those I can get, but the others...?!

BUZZ. *(Taking Purl by the shoulders and guiding them back toward the front of house area at arms length.) Well, with your can-do attitude, I am sure you will figure it... (Desperately wanting them to leave and giving a tiny, encouraging shove.) ...OUT.*

PURL. *(Turning and trying to get too close again.) Buz-*

BUZZ. *(Whirling Purl back around and urging them off with another not-quite-as-gentle nudge.) OUT! Out there! (Purl glowers intensely at Buzz for a moment before growling the rest of the way out. Buzz places two fingers on their own neck.) My blood pressure is set-to-POP! (Buzz stops so they are way too close and looking directly at back of Duppy's head but would be looking directly into Zee's eyes – if Duppy weren't there.) Much like my... (Shouts toward the direction of the lobby for Purl's benefit.) ...PERSONAL BUBBLE!!...*

PURL. *(Unseen, in the distance.) *Grumble of 'I-Could-Care-Less-About-Your-Bubble'**

BUZZ. *(Turning back to that awkward distance from Duppy.) ...that someone just insists on invading.*

DUPPY. *(Awkwardly extricating themselves from the space between Buzz and Zee.) Yeah, just hate it when that happens.*

ZEE. *(Noting just how awkwardly strange that moment was.) Relatable.*

BUZZ. Right?? How clueless can ya get?? *(Lightbulb. Making it seem like a promotion.)* Ya know, since I'm sure you've already been "kicking ass" on your "to-dos", I am inspired to also entrust F.O.H. coordination...

ZEE. F.O.H.?

DUPPY. *(Gesturing in direction of lobby.) Floppy Ogre Hamster.*

BUZZ. *(Looking suspiciously.) Front of house...? To YOU. (Takes clipboard and begins adding the duty to the list.)*

ZEE. *(Realizing that means dealing with Purl.) Noooo...*

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DUPPY. *(Simultaneously and sympathetically with Zee.)* Ohhhh...

ZEE. *(Buzz' glare changes their tone.)* Ohhhhsstssuch an... honor...

DUPPY. *(With mocking pride.)* Our little Asymmetrical Scuba Mouse.

ZEE. Duppy. Not helpful...

BUZZ. Duppy, never helpful, but hopefully, Duppy won't be making any more surprise cameos today. *(Reacting to clipboard. Zee thinks that an odd statement.)*

ZEE. Ha!.. huh?

DUPPY. Buzz, that hurts. I can take a hint.

ZEE. What.. is going...?

DUPPY. *(To Buzz.)* Clearly, you don't apprecia-...

BUZZ. *(Blurting out.)* I see items, but no checks NEXT to items... no check – no check – *(Reacting to headset – looks up at light booth.)*

DUPPY. *(Making a quick escape joke.)* Coat check! *(Gestures with hat in way that clearly blocks Buzz's view, but they don't react.)*

BUZZ. *(Looks up and speaks toward light booth.)* Seriously?? NOW?! *(Listens briefly.)* Come on, McCandless! *(Listening again.)* FINE. *(To Zee.)* Light board's frozen. Gotta reboot the whole system – including the works.

ZEE. Hey... uh... *(Looking with growing fear and confusion at Duppy and then back to Buzz.)* Hey!

DUPPY. No worries, Zee.

ZEE. But.. but...

BUZZ. *(Rolling the ghost light over to Zee.)* Here. Maybe this will ward off our mischievous gremlin. *(Zee looks directly at Duppy, who smiles.)* Going Dark!

DUPPY. Thank you, dark!

ZEE. No, thank you, dark! *(Still staring intently at Duppy.)* “Practically, the spirit of this theatre?” *(BLACKOUT. Zee clumsily-nervously turns on the ghost light and finds themselves nose to nose with Duppy.)*

DUPPY. *(Clarifying.)* “Literally.” *(A tense beat.)* Boo! *(Zee screams and the ghost light flickers off, taking us into another blackout with a brief musical interlude – the original production used a combination of vaudeville era and disco songs – while the actor playing Zee hides in the*

trunk in the blackout.)

SCENE 2

A few moments later the ghost light flickers back on, revealing Duppy dancing and flirting again with the ghost light. NOTE: The ghostlight has been the one constant companion in Duppy's afterlife and, so, they've developed a crush / relationship with it. The original actor referred to 'her' as 'Peggy'. Zee's clipboard is seen lying on the floor next to the prop trunk. Suddenly, Buzz is heard from the wings.

BUZZ. Works! Coming on!

DUPPY. Thank you, works! *(Works come up as Buzz enters and walks downstage to yell up to booth. Duppy behaves as though they are actually a part of the conversation.)* We good, Buzz??

BUZZ. We good, McCandleless?

McCANDLELESS. *(McCANDLELESS, the lighting designer, appears - popping their head out of the light booth.)* We are now! We're just trying to make sure.... *(Lights flicker onstage momentarily. McCandleless yells at an unseen assistant.)* Meyer! Are you kidding me here, with this? *(Responding to the never-seen Meyer.)* I don't care if the Chiefs just scored... *(Lights stabilize then rapidly dim.)* Would ya just bring up...! *(Lights return to normal.)* Thank you! *(To Buzz.)* Sorry! We're good! *(Reacting to Meyer from inside the booth.)* What?? *(Relaying the info to Buzz.)* And Chiefs are up by six. You don't care. *(Talking to Meyer as they disappear back into the booth.)* Nobody cares! Nope. Just you!

BUZZ. *(Happy it was good news.)* *Sigh* Praise beans. Now... *(Looks around, notices ghost light is once again moved way downstage and that Zee is gone. Shaking their head in irritation, Buzz goes to retrieve it and crosses back up, setting ghost light back next to prop trunk.)* *Sigh* Duppy...

DUPPY. *(Moving and mirroring how Buzz is walking / talking.)* *Sigh* Buzz... *(Ghost light back in place, Buzz looks around and notices Zee's*

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abandoned clipboard on the floor next to the trunk and bends down to pick it up. Duppy quickly opens the prop trunk lid. Zee, wielding a marotte - aka a “jester stick” - like a baseball bat, bursts upward from inside the trunk, screaming and sending props and clipboard flying and startling Buzz.)

ZEE. / BUZZ. AHHH!!!!

BUZZ. Geeeee!!

ZEE. B-b-b-b...

BUZZ. Going over that props list, are we?

ZEE. *(Pointing at Duppy, who is standing between Buzz and Zee.)* B-b-b-b-boo...

BUZZ. Hardee-har-har. *(Referring to the mess that was just made.)* What’s this all about??

ZEE. D-d-d-d-duppy...!

BUZZ. Now, we can’t go blaming this on Duppy. *(Confidentially.)* Though, I do blame Duppy when all the chocolate eclairs go missing from crafty. *(Buzz turns to pick up their own clipboard they dropped.)*

DUPPY. They’re not missing. Found ‘em! They just got “repurposed”. *(Pokes or whacks Buzz in the belly or on the booty with their cane and skips away. Buzz whirls around assuming it was Zee, but notices Zee’s focus is elsewhere.)*

BUZZ. Huh? *(Zee is tracking Duppy’s movement to the other side of the trunk, until their back is turned to Buzz. Buzz taps Zee on the shoulder.)*

ZEE. AHH!! *(Zee screams and swings wild with the jester stick, Buzz barely ducks in time and drops their clipboard again. Duppy ducks down behind open lid of trunk.)*

BUZZ. AHHH!! *(Having to pick up Zee’s clipboard again.)* Enough with the shenanigans, already! Now, get this... *(Referring to the state of the props.)* ...and this... *(Handing back the clipboard.)* ...squared NOW. The next time I come back’ I BETTER see progress! Or I’ll put the fear in ya...

ZEE. T-t-t-t-t... *(Zee can’t see Duppy and looks around nervously. Duppy pops up from behind trunk lid.)*

DUPPY. Too late?

ZEE. Ahh!! *(Zee scrambles out of trunk and looks back toward trunk, but Duppy has ducked down behind lid again. Zee scans all over to find Duppy.)*

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Once Zee is facing away from trunk, Buzz walks up behind to confront Zee and Duppy slams the trunk lid shut – startling Zee and causing them to swing wild behind once again... sending Buzz to the ground and scrambling, once again.) AHHHH!!!

BUZZ. Ahh!! STOP THAT! *(Snatches the marotte away from Zee. Warns again.)* Progress! *(Pointing offstage.)* Or the “Great Egress”. *(P.T. Barnum reference. Look it up! – Buzz mutters as they exit.)* Shenanigans...

DUPPY. Don’t you worry, Buzz! Progress as promised! *(Looking mischievously at Zee.)* I’ll make dead sure!

ZEE. Yipe!

DUPPY. *(Attempting to calm a quietly freaking out Zee.)* Hey, hey, hey little camper. I can see we’re a wee bit confuzzled, so why don’t we just start fresh... *(Reaches out to shake hands.)* I’m Duppy O’Gale. *(Zee screams and tries to run away out at least two exits but Duppy blocks every attempt.)*

ZEE. Ahhhh!!

DUPPY. I’m sure there’s a lot of questions doing the cha-cha in that coo-coo-cabeza at the moment – so why don’t we cut right to the chase with a lightning round of “20 Questions”? And... go!

ZEE. *(Indicating that no one else can see Duppy.)* They can’t... can’t... can’t...?

DUPPY. Carry a tune in a bucket? Completely tone deaf. Next?

ZEE. *(How is this happening?)* How... how... how...?

DUPPY. Did I become the triple threat I am today? A dash of talent and whole lotta moxie! Next question!

ZEE. You’re... you’re... you’re...

DUPPY. Disarmingly charming? Obviously. Next question!

ZEE. *(In their upper register.)* You... you... you...

DUPPY. *(As though singing a vocal warmup.)* Mee! Mee! Mee! 17 questions to go, better get Buzz to put on a pot of coffee.

ZEE. Ahhh!! *(Runs over to ghost light.)* You... *(Gestures to ghost light and back to Duppy.)* You!!

DUPPY. Light up the stage with my incandescent presence?

ZEE. Ahh! You... *(Starts charades gestures which Duppy responds to)*

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accordingly.)

DUPPY. 2 words. 2nd word... *(Zee gestures like a ghost with arms and hands held high.)* Dracula!

ZEE. Nuh-uh. *(Continues with more emphatic ghost noises and gestures.)*

DUPPY. Frankenstein!

ZEE. Nuh-uh! *(Continues MUCH more emphatic ghost noises and gestures.)*

DUPPY. *(Lightbulb moment!)* ETHEL MERMAN!!

ZEE. Nooooo!!! GHOST! *(Does the same gesture again to illustrate.)*

DUPPY! Oh, ghost!

ZEE. You... ghost.

DUPPY. *(Confirming.)* Me, ghost! *(Zee collapses on floor from exhaustion more than anything. Duppy sits next to them.)*

ZEE. *(Whispers.)* Ghost...!

DUPPY. Yes. Me, ghost. You, Agitated Stupefied Muskrat.

ZEE. A... theatre ghost!

DUPPY. Personally, I prefer “Showbiz Bug-a-boo!”

ZEE. It’s official. I’m one red nose short of a clown car. *(Duppy does a magic trick – reaching behind Zee’s ear and pulls out a red foam clown nose and places it on Zee’s nose.)*

DUPPY. Here ya go, Bobo. *(Zee sits up suddenly – still in mild disbelief and still wearing the clown nose.)*

ZEE. W-w-wha...? HOW? *(Zee means ‘how’ a ghost, Duppy explains the nose trick instead – recreating it with a second clown nose.)*

DUPPY. Well, ya palm it... and then one-part razzle-dazz and two-parts razzmatazz... *(Pulls second clown nose from behind Zee’s ear.)* ...and Tah durr!! *(Places the second nose on themselves.)*

ZEE. No...

DUPPY. Wait! Wait! Wait! I’ve lost count. Was that question number 5 or 6?

ZEE. Forget all that! You’re a ghost? A... a... a wraith? An apparition?

DUPPY. *(Doing their best Mae West impression.)* The ghoul of your dreams, cupcake!

ZEE. And Buzz... Can’t see you...??

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DUPPY. Nope. So, it just snapped my garters when you introduced yourself! (*Vocalizes the sound effects like a Tex Avery cartoon.*)
Ssssnap! *Sproing!*

ZEE. Whoa. (*Thinks.*) But... I could have sworn... everyone talked to... you... like...!

DUPPY. (*Questioning them.*) Did they?

ZEE. Didn't they?! Oh! But, they... were all... hearing... like... Yakkety Yak! *Zerbert* tee-hee funny joke! (*Duppy shakes their head.*) Soooo... they were just talking...

ZEE. / DUPPY. About you. / About me.

DUPPY. (*Shrugs and bats their eyes coyly.*) I'm just a sassy bit of local lore.

ZEE. But they were talking all like...

DUPPY. I mean, I can do stuff, like so... (*Plucks the clown nose off both of them and moves them around in a floating fashion while making spooky noises.*) WhOoOoOoOo!! (*Suddenly stops.*) The fact that you can actually see me makes this far less impressive... (*Zee shrugs acknowledgment.*) ...and I can give everyone the chilly willies... (*Duppy places a finger on them, sending a huge shiver down Zee's spine. Meanwhile, SCHMUCKER, a stagehand comes in to set something down or check on something.*) ...and some folks can hear me... sort of... on a mostly "sub-noxious" level. Like Schmucker here... (*Duppy trots up behind Schmucker and yawns long and loudly. Schmucker reflexively does the exact same yawn, too.*)

SCHMUCKER. *Yawn!* Woof. Need another soda-pop.

DUPPY. (*Whispering in their ear.*) Cup of Joe.

SCHMUCKER. Or maybe some coffee. (*Schmucker exits and Duppy bows.*)

DUPPY. Ta-dah!! (*Gesturing with a flashy flourish.*) Now watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat! (*Duppy removes their hat, reaches in and pulls out their own fingers in a classic rabbit shadow puppet shape and then has the rabbit "hop" over to a still disbelieving Zee and does their best Bugs Bunny.*) Boingy-boingy-boingy! Ehhh, What's up? Shock??

ZEE. To put it mildly. How... how did it happen...? You know...? (*Does small pantomime indicating dying and then haunting.*)

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DUPPY. *(Wincing.)* I'm tormented by the memory...

ZEE. Oh, well, if it's too painfu-

DUPPY. *(As though a forced confession.)* Alright! But remember... you begged me to tell you.

ZEE. I didn't be- *(A spotlight suddenly appears center stage. Duppy steps into as though it were there on command.)*

DUPPY. Ladies and Gentlemen! Step right up! The chickens have been vulcanized and cushions have been whooped, so get ready to have your ribs tickled until your sides split! You can all say YOU WERE THERE when Duppy O'Gale unveiled their Big Boffola!

ZEE. Thaaaat's an unfortunate turn of phrase.

DUPPY. Oh, when the boffola is this big, there's no other word for it! *(Now begins a recurring bit where Zee's last name takes the place of 'Shove it'.)* Just point me to the stage and show me where to... *(McCandleless enters.)*

McCANDLELESS. Shuffett!! Can I get you to stand in that spotlight?

ZEE. Uh, sure?? *(Does so and stands shoulder to shoulder with Duppy.)*

McCANDLELESS. Scoot downstage a skosh... two steps stage left... *(Zee complies until they are standing directly in front of Duppy.)* Much better. Hold.

DUPPY. *(Peering out from behind Zee and continuing their story.)* After years of rejiggering and oiling up the material in my special little journal I called my "bit bible", I'd done it!

McCANDLELESS. *(Shouting to booth.)* Next! *(A new pin spot appears elsewhere on stage and McCandleless points at it – indicating that Zee needs to move there. Zee quickly complies. Duppy follows.)*

DUPPY. This was the moment that was gonna put me on the map!

McCANDLELESS. *(Giving Zee instructions.)* A little step forward.. good... Now, raise your left hand like you're waving at someone... *(Zee's raised hand covers Duppy's face.)* Much better. Hold.

DUPPY. *(Ducking under the hand and crossing to the other side of Zee.)* I'd created a sketch, a character... the character... the bit... the showstopper that was gonna have 'em all doubled over!

McCANDLELESS. Now, pretend you're dipping a dance partner. *(Zee does so and, to their surprise, Duppy jumps in and goes along as their dance*

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partner.)

DUPPY. There wasn't gonna be a dry seat in the house! (*Zee shivers from the contact with Duppy and drops them on the floor.*) Oof!

McCANDLESS. (*Random light appears onstage. McCandless looks up at booth and points to the light.*) What's that? (*Reacts to Meyer's non-verbal response.*) What? What's... (*Makes a big shrug gesture with a curious look on their face.*) What's that?? (*The random light goes out. McCandless sees it but repeats the gesture.*) What's THAT?? (*Begrudgingly indicating appreciation for the light being fixed.*) Yes. Thank you, but NO. What was that?! (*Makes a big shrug gesture again but gets a perturbed look on their face as they correct it to what Meyer was actually doing – a referee's 'touchdown' gesture.*) Seriously, Meyer?! Are you still listening to that stupid game?! Ya heard me! STUPID game! (*Reacts to what was clearly an 'unkind' gesture from Meyer.*) Do I need to come up ther- (*Reacts to an even worse gesture.*) I'm comin' up there!! (*Lights return to normal.*) Shuffett.

ZEE. You can call me Zee!

McCANDLESS. Thanks, Shuffett... (*Walks off muttering.*) Unprofessional...

DUPPY. (*Sitting dejectedly on floor.*) But... my boffola never bigged. I was up here late with Pilfy, the night before the big night, for one final run of the whole act...

ZEE. Pilfy?

DUPPY. Li'l Niki Pilferton... my assistant, my second banana... "Pilfy" was just aching to be the headliner – the top banana. I tried showing 'em the ropes, but best they could do is parrot-back – all door and no knock-knock. So, I'd warm the crowd up with some of my classic bits and gags from the ol' "bit bible"... Pilfy'd be teeing up the jokes, lobbing props to me, playing all the bit characters... I was building up to the capper – the sketch that would have scouts and agents ready to milk a rhinoceros, just to be the first to book Duppy O'Gale & Company! I was on my unicycle, playing the slide whistle and..

ZEE. You rolled off into the pit?

DUPPY. No, I was supposed to roll over this banana peel and...

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ZEE. You slipped off into the pit?

DUPPY. No, as I rolled toward the banana peel, a sandbag fell...

ZEE. And hit you on the head?

DUPPY. No, it landed on the banana peel, so I went flying end over end and...

DUPPY. / ZEE. Into the pit.

ZEE. You fell to your death...

DUPPY. No, I choked to death.

ZEE. Choked to death?

DUPPY. *(Duppy adjusts their Adam's apple as though it were a bow tie, sticks one finger against their right nostril, puffs out their left cheek and then, bending their knees out to the sides, squatting slowly up and down in a pli  - creating a perfect slide whistle noise... then shrugs.)* The next thing I know, I'm back in the theatre with everything I had on me when I died, and I was... alone... for years. But NOW... I'm just so happy to finally have someone to talk to!

ZEE. Gotta go. *(Heads for the wings.)*

DUPPY. What? *(Blocking them from leaving.)* Wait!

ZEE. *(Veering toward another exit.)* Nope. Nope. Nope.

DUPPY. *(Blocking them again.)* Don't go!

ZEE. Have a nice afterlife!

DUPPY. *(Doing their best Buzz impression.)* Hold the pickles! Hold the onions! Hold the mayo! Do you not need a job?? *(Zee stops in their tracks and lets out a low-level sigh / whimper.)* Yeahhhhh??

ZEE. Yeahhhh... *(Turns around slowly.)*

DUPPY. We'd be like pickles and peanut butter!

ZEE. What...?

DUPPY. You're a little nuts and I'm a pretty big dill! Soooo maybe... with a little *(Tips their hat.)* astral assistance...

ZEE. Are you suggesting??

DUPPY. An apparitional alliance! The ultimate double-bill! The dead jokester and the dead broke-ster!

ZEE. But... you're not... really here.

DUPPY. And you're not really an assistant stage manager... yet.

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ZEE. (*Apprehensively.*) You're not gonna suck the life essence out of my body...?

DUPPY. Never on the first date.

ZEE. Or trick me into signing my soul away – condemning me to everlasting torment in some fiery pit?

DUPPY. I wouldn't send my worst enemy to Houston. (*Feel free to change the city to a local town or rival city near you for maximum funny.*) But I might send Buzz there. (*Laughs maniacally for effect.*) Bwah-hah-hah-hah-HA!!

ZEE. Duppy!

DUPPY. I joke! I joke! There are rules, kinda-sorta.

ZEE. (*Questioning.*) Sorta-kinda?

DUPPY. (*Confirming.*) Kinda-sorta. After you die, you wake up holding a step-by-step manual - “Banquo’s Guide to Better Ghosting”.

ZEE. Really?!

DUPPY. No! I've just sorta... figured things out as I've gone along. Like, I'm literally stuck on this stage...

ZEE. Stuck? (*Duppy vocalizes a bouncy vaudeville tune as they attempt to leave through the wing of the stage – seeming to push against and through an invisible barrier - and then almost instantly being tossed back out onto the stage by some unseen force*)

DUPPY. WhoOoOoA! (*Continues to demonstrate by trying to leave through the house but their feet can't go past the lip of the stage, the best they can do is a 'Smooth Criminal' lean before getting thrown back again.*) WhOoOoA! (*Stops, then shrugs.*) Stuck! The floaty stuff? All that only works if it's “karma candy”...

ZEE. Karma candy??

DUPPY. You know, serves the “greater good”. (*Duppy picks up a rubber chicken and a giant pair of scissors like you see in a ribbon-cutting ceremony.*)

ZEE. Greater good? (*Duppy charges forward and tries to stab Zee with the giant scissors, but they stop short as though they've hit an invisible barrier. Duppy tries again in vain to push thru the barrier and then stops.*)

DUPPY. Phew!! See? I can Hocus...

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ZEE. But you can't poke us?

DUPPY. (*Confirming.*) Can't "Abra-kuh-STAB-ya"! But there's always "Aluh-ka-BAM!"

ZEE. Don't you mean "Zam"? Alum-ka-... (*Duppy suddenly smacks Zee with the rubber chicken.*)

DUPPY. Nope.

ZEE. Owww-UH!! (*Reacts in a little pain and a lot of shock. Fun Fact: Adding a vowel sound on the end of a word – like "stop-uh!" or "ow-uh!" is called a "Habisreiter" – pronounced "hah-bis-riding-ger." Add it to your vocabulary! Meanwhile, Zee sputters in exasperation.*) I thought "do-no", you said "harm-no-do" wha-bou-huh??

DUPPY. (*Shrugs.*) Karma candy.

ZEE. HOW??

DUPPY. Illustrated my point and nOoOw we've a light-hearted no-real-damage-done memory for both of us to treasure. (*Smiles.*)

ZEE. Duppy...!

DUPPY. Greater good! I think this is my chance... to finally pull off the ol' "Alley Oop!" (*Duppy follows it with a quick slide-whistle up.*)

ZEE. "Alley Oop?" (*Duppy does another quick slide-whistle up, since Zee didn't choke on a slide-whistle.*)

DUPPY. (*Putting their hands up in the air and twirls around.*) Fake cartwheel! Back in the day, an Alley Oop... (*Slide-whistle bit again.*) ...was when they'd launch an acrobat up to the highest height. This could be what will finally launch me – up and beyond! Shake off this mortal coil! Shuffle off to Buffalo! Alley Oop! (*Slide-whistle bit again.*)

ZEE. Allow your tortured soul to rest?

DUPPY. Dunno about 'tortured', but I sure could use a change of scenery – this bit? Has run-it's-course. Don't wanna beat a dead camel. Maybe helping you is how I do it! (*Giving an example.*) Maybe starting with these props, which we still haven't touched yet. (*Pleading.*) There's gotta be a reason you can see and hear me!

ZEE. I dunnoooo...

DUPPY. I only want to help!

ZEE. Promise?

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DUPPY. Cross my heart and hope to... well... *(Begging on a knee and smiling hopefully.)* Pleeeeeeeeeeease?!

ZEE. *(Sighs.)* I can't believe I'm actually considering this...

DUPPY. *(Trying to seal the deal.)* Come on, you know you want toOoOoOoOo... *(Floats the clipboard around "spookily".)*

ZEE. *(Snatching it from them.)* NOT helping your case.

DUPPY. Sorry! I spent years trapped here - completely alone – staring at the backside of a flip-flopped silver screen. I loved the Westerns. “Arrow Broken”, “Noon High”, “Ugly The And, Bad The, Good The”. *(Zee considers correcting Duppy, but thinks better of it.)*

DUPPY. I never got to mosey off into the sunset like Cooper Gary. *(Smaller but similar reaction from Zee.)* No Alley Oop... *(Slide-whistle bit again.)* ...but NOW, I'm just so glad to have someone who will talk to me! To actually be seen!

ZEE. Alright. I... get that. Ever since I got to this city.... I've been feeling pretty invisible... and stuck. Four years, four thousand auditions, and I can't get cast as a cadaver – no offense.

DUPPY. *(Assuring them it's okay.)* Where's the lie? Rearview mirror.

ZEE. SOOO, with my big break nowhere in sight, *(Name bit alert!)* I'll take this job and...

BUZZ. *(Suddenly appearing.)* Shuffett! *(Zee is startled and hides clipboard behind their back. As Buzz enters, Duppy ducks behind Zee and takes the clipboard and uses the attached pen to check several items off the "to-do" list.)* Why are the props taking so long?? I BETTER start ta see some PRAH-gress, Shuffett, because my list is snowballing like a yeti doing cartwheels and I don't have time for... *(Realizing Zee doesn't have it.)* Where's your clipboard?!

ZEE. Uhhh.... *(Looks around, Buzz tries to peer around behind Zee on one side but Duppy continues checking off items and keeps Zee between them, so that the clipboard can't be seen by Buzz. Buzz then tries to peer around the other side and the bit repeats. There is a short beat and Buzz suddenly tries to zip around behind Zee. Duppy is zippier and loops in behind Buzz. Zee peers to see that Duppy and the clipboard are now behind Buzz. Seeing this, Buzz curiously turns to look behind themselves to see what*

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Zee could possibly be looking at as Duppy “floats” the clipboard in the opposite direction so that it is now between Buzz and Zee – just inches away from the unsuspecting Buzz’s head. Zee sees it and shouts.) Ahhh!! (Zee leaps forward – arms extended – and grasps the clipboard away from the bemused Duppy. Buzz turns suddenly and shouts - startled by the clipboard that is, suddenly, directly in front of their nose. Both Zee and Buzz’s shouts should overlap.)

BUZZ. Ahhh!!

ZEE. *(Turning their shout into an “I” to cover the panic.) Ahhhhhh, got my clipboard right here! (Buzz snatches it away and gives Zee an odd look and then slowly turns away to inspect the list. Zee peers over Buzz’s shoulder as Duppy peers over Leslie’s shoulder.)*

DUPPY. *(To Zee.) Shenanigans. (Duppy peels off and quickly – unseen by Buzz – puts the remaining props into the trunk.)*

BUZZ. *(Pleasantly surprised.) Progress! Several things checked off... (Referring to the props that were still on the ground.) But these props are still...*

DUPPY. *(Whispering unnecessarily.) The plot thickens!*

BUZZ. *(Looks around – sees the props are put away.) ...still... hey.... I coulda sworn...*

DUPPY. *(Pointing at Zee in victory.) P.B. & Pucker!*

BUZZ. *Sooooo, allow me to delegate a few MORE! (Zee looks at Duppy, panic stricken, and is about to speak in protest. Duppy takes off their hat and covers Zee’s face.)*

DUPPY. *Shhhhh! The look on your face is thanks enough! (Duppy lowers their hat – revealing Zee’s now angry face. Duppy flinches and then pats Zee’s shoulder in sympathy.)*

ZEE. *Brrrrr... (Buzz looks at Zee pumping their hand in the air for “no reason” – Zee covers by dropping Duppy’s hand and covers with a couple more half-hearted fist pumps and a quarter-hearted...) Rrrroad apples!*

BUZZ. That’s the spirit!

DUPPY. Technically, I am, but...

BUZZ. *(Sees an opportunity to pass an annoying buck.) In faaaact, since you’re practically done with *this*, I’m gonna have you be the VERY*

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special point person for our very special VIP.

DUPPY. Very Important Penguin.

BUZZ. Which includes... *(Reads from a multi-page document.)* ...seeing that their daily cappuccino order is topped with a “halo of nutmeg”, that there are “exactly 3 fine-tip, ball point pens – one black ink, one blue ink, one red ink - pointing to the right” available on their makeup table at all times, their room temperature-to-humidity ratio is precisely maintained “not unlike a crisp Autumnal morn”, and making sure their every OTHER insane umpteen-thousand stipulations per their... *(Holds up the document.)* ...attached rider is met... *(Quoting from the document.)* ...“to their complete and total satisfaction.” *(Plops the document in Zee’s hands.)*

ZEE. *Moans* Who IS the special gue...??

PURL. *(Heard, but not yet seen, coming from the front of house entrance.)*
Buuuuuzz! Buuuuuzz! *(Entering and getting too close for comfort to Buzz.)* BUZZ!

BUZZ. *(Shaking their head ‘no’, and pointing and nodding ‘yes’ at Zee – to indicate they are Purl’s go-to person now.)* No-no-no-no! Zee!

DUPPY. I’ll translate. *(Doing their best impression of each person.)* ‘Purl, this is the new complaint department.’

ZEE. Buzz...

DUPPY. “Please, don’t make me do this.”

PURL. Zee?

DUPPY. “Oh, so they’re gonna fix everything?”

BUZZ. Zee.

DUPPY. “Yup.”

BUZZ. *(By way of official introduction.)* Zee? Purl.

DUPPY. “Zee? Purl.”

ZEE. Purl.

DUPPY. “Ogre.”

ZEE. Buzz?

DUPPY. “Don’t leave me here!”

BUZZ. Zee...

DUPPY. “Tough cookies, noob.” *(Buzz takes off running.)*

ZEE. Buzz!

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DUPPY. “I hope you choke on a brick!”

ZEE. Purl.

DUPPY. “How may I provide you with excellent customer service while also hating my life?”

PURL. *(Growling and moving up way too close for comfort to Zee with the most unfriendly smile.)* Zeeee...

DUPPY. *(Referring to the fact Purl is so close they can see right up Zee’s nostrils.)* “When was the last time you trimmed up there?” *(Adopting a terrible English dialect.)* “Oh, I say! Dr. Livingston, I presume?!”

ZEE. *(Whispering.)* Duppy!

PURL. Duppy?

ZEE. Dup..Yip...! Y-Yippee!! I get to help Purl... *(Gives Purl an arm chuck. Purl glares at their shoulder and then slowly growls their gaze back towards Zee. Zee then speaks with uncertainty.)* Soooo... you’re back... Nik-L-Nips again?

DUPPY. It is a bit chilly in here.

PURL. Zee, concessions are the least of my worries, because I have NO IDEA who I’m supposed to be serving them for or where any of those people are supposed to be seated while watching who only knows onstage, because per my NDA...

DUPPY. *(To Zee.)* Nimble Dancing Aardvarks...

PURL. I received a guest list by private courier just now in a sealed envelope that, upon opening, would tell me who all the special VIPs in the audience would be and where and with whom they should and should not be seated next to by way of some undisclosed ranking process based on... starpower? ...or wealth?? ...or whether they’ve got... *(Belly button reference.)* ...an “IN-ee” or an “OUT-ee”?!

ZEE. That seems helpful...?

PURL. *(Laughing sarcastically.)* YeEeAaAaH!! Except I don’t speak “redacted!” *(Holds up the guest list and the entire thing, with the exception of one or two spots, is just a bunch of redaction ‘black bars’.)*

DUPPY. Is J. Edgar Hoover still around?

ZEE. Geez, okay, that’s really weird. Let me see what I can find out....

PURL. TALK TO NAGLER!

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ZEE. I'll talk to Nagler! *(Taking list from Purl and then guiding them back toward the front of house exit as they saw Buzz do earlier. At the same time, Duppy has an idea!)* In the meantime, why don't you... *(Duppy mutters hurriedly in Zee's ear, who questions aloud what Duppy just said.)* "Take the paper slips out of some Hershey kisses??"

PURL. *(Suddenly stopping.)* Because Hershey Kisses were just copycats of the original "Wilbur Buds"... *(Peering with a grim appreciation that you still wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley.)* Okaaaay... Zee. *(Nods their head slowly as they growl their way out.)*

DUPPY. I'll translate. "In gratitude, I promise to make your death... *(Purl whirls suddenly, causing both Duppy and Zee to jump.)* ...quick and painless." *(Purl slowly turns, growling, until they are completely out of sight. Zee turns to Duppy, who brushes their hands as though dusting them off after a job well done.)* Now, now, I'm not a strong swimmer, so before you let your river of gratitude flow... *(Starts limbering with archaic-looking calisthenics.)*

ZEE. Yes, yes, I have so much to be thankful for because NOW, I've got MORE to do AND yet, somehow, I've managed to still DO NOTHING!

DUPPY. *(Almost sing-song in delivery.)* Not according to these little checks!

ZEE. Little lies, quickly piling up – alley-ooing one on top of another - into one gigantic, TOWERING lie! The Chrysler building of cock-and-bull!

DUPPY. Buck up, Buckaroo! Duppy'll help ya wrangle this runaway stagecoach and then all you'll have left is Penguin duty! That's a piece of cake! Special Coffee orders, kosher lunch, couple of call girls...

ZEE. WHAT?

DUPPY. Call times! Call times. Then, you'll stay gainfully employed until your big break, I'll finally get my Alley Oop, *(Super quick slide-whistle bit again.)* ... and... *(Acting like a character from a Western on horseback.)* ..."get along, little doggie." *(They both hear the clip-clop of horse hooves. Zee looks at Duppy.)*

DUPPY. Not me! *(Suddenly, Taylor trots in as the head of a two-person centaur costume. Clearly, a second unseen person is the back half of the costume. Taylor is only wearing the front legs from the waist down but has*

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added a grass skirt and very loud Hawaiian shirt and is using a coconut shell bra for the clip-clop sound effect. Taylor stops and pretends to be out of breath.)

TAYLOR. Whooooaaa! Phew! *(Grabbing the coconut shells.)* Gotta refuel at the SHELL station. *(Duppy and Zee are enjoying the humor.)* I get 20 miles to the gallop with these babies. Giddyup! *(Taylor starts continuing on toward the props trunk and Duppy suddenly remembers that they hadn't yet dealt with the chaos of the interior of the prop trunk.)*

DUPPY. AHHHH!!!! Prop Trunk!

ZEE. Prop trunk??

TAYLOR. Prop trunk!

DUPPY. *(Trying to urgently remind Zee.)* PROP trunk...

ZEE. *(Lightbulb.)* PROP trunk!

DUPPY. Prop trunk! *(Flying past Taylor, picks up end of trunk to move it. Zee quickly grabs the "floating" end of the trunk trying to wrest it away from Duppy.)*

ZEE. Stop Trunk!! *(Taylor is confused.)*

TAYLOR. Drop trunk. *(The bottom half of the horse costume detaches revealing a confused DEE-O-GEE, the asst. props manager who is also in a Hawaiian shirt and lei. NOTE: You have the option of playing the development of the relationship between Dee and Zee as an awkwardly romantic one or just an awkward friendship. Whatever suits your casting best, but I highly recommend romance! The romantic angle will be in the primary part of the text. Any substitute / alternate lines for the friendship angle will be immediately following the 'O.G.' line in the stage directions as 'ALT:'.)*

DEE. Drop?? *(Both Zee and Duppy let go and the end of the trunk – Zee quite taken with Dee as both Zee and Duppy release the trunk, which falls on Zee's foot – who at first reacts in quiet pain.)*

ZEE. Trunk!

DUPPY. *(Wincing in empathy.)* Plop trunk.

ZEE. *(Hopping and grabbing foot – no longer quiet.)* YOW-za!!

TAYLOR. What's the BIG KAHUNA here? We gotta get our GRASS in gear! *(Throws a lei on the coat rack.)* Ya picked a HULA've a time to be

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LEI-ing around!

DEE. *(Smiling.)* Aloha.

ZEE. Alo-homina-homina-homina... *(ALT: 'Aloha-Owie.' – if you choose to forgo the romantic route. Suddenly, McCandless bursts into the space and hustles across and out the other side of the stage - clearly on a mission.)*

McCANDLESS. Hazers ain't workin'...

TAYLOR. You sure?? I jus-

McCANDLESS. Hazers ain't workin'!

TAYLOR. But, I - *(Starts to hustle after McCandless, then turning to Dee and Zee.)* You two! Get the props li- I'll be right ba- I gotta deal wi-

McCANDLESS. *(Popping head back out from the wing.)* HAZERS!!

TAYLOR. *(Acknowledging they're coming.)* Ain't workin'! *(Hustles off and out after McCandless.)*

ZEE. I'm gonna go out on a limb here and say that the hazers...

ZEE. / DEE. Ain't workin? *(Both laugh.)*

DEE. *(Extending a hand.)* Dee-O-Gee. Or you can just call me Dee-

ZEE. -lightful... *(Mildly embarrassed at the Freudian slip and realizing Dee's hand is still outstretched – shakes it a little too vigorously.)* Deeee-lightful to meet you... Dee...

DEE. So, you're the new..?

ZEE. Knob... yeah. Rob! Rob's the knob. Rob was the knob. Now it's me. New. Not knobbing. That was... I'm... *(Blanks on their own name.)*

DUPPY. *(Trying to save Zee from this disaster.)* Zee?

ZEE. Huh?

DEE. What?

DUPPY. You're...

ZEE. You're...?

DEE. I'm...?

DUPPY. No, you!

ZEE. No, you! No, me! Zee! *(Offers hand.)* You're Dee. I'm me. Zee. Zee, that's me. I'm the new ASM.

DEE. Angsty Stutter Moth?

DUPPY. *(Admiring the quick wit.)* This kid!

ZEE. *(Lost in a different kind of admiration for Dee.)* Yeah...

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DUPPY. (*Duppy tracks it.*) Moth to a flame! (*ALT: 'You're doing great.'* – *Duppy then whispers in Zee's ear – joking to get their attention – indicating their fly is down.*) Pssst...

ZEE. Hmmm??

DUPPY. Barn door.

ZEE. (*Reacts.*) WHA?! (*Seeing Dee's reaction – trying to play it off smoooooth.*) Whaaaaaaat do you say to a cup of coffee?

DUPPY. Hello, Joe!

ZEE. (*Ignoring Duppy.*) We could go grab a cup... or...?

DEE. Or... (*Taking clipboard from Zee and walking toward props trunk.*) We could get started on...

ZEE. Uh!! Wait! (*Dee throws open the trunk and sees the disorganization within.*)

DEE. Whaaa?!

ZEE. It's a...work in progress?? (*Trying to divert with humor.*) Gotta crack a few eggs to make an omelette.

DEE. Looks like a bacon, egg, and cheese BOMB-lette went off in it! (*Dee starts to fix. Duppy, in a very caring manner, helps a very unaware Dee by placing an item or two in their hand for them or turning something the correct way – almost like a guardian angel.*)

DUPPY. Anybody else hungry?

ZEE. Duppy.

DEE. Come again?

ZEE. Duppy... did it?

DUPPY. / DEE. (*Both stop fixing and look at Zee.*) What?!

ZEE. Yeah, Duppy's been VERY annoying all day.

DUPPY. No good deed...

DEE. (*Laughing, then thinking Zee might be serious.*) Wait, do you really...

ZEE. (*Playing it off cool, leaning against prop trunk to hide the mess.*) No!! Naawww... Nooope. I don't believe in ghosts.

DUPPY. How about karma? (*Duppy slams the prop trunk lid catching Zee's finger.*)

ZEE. (*Hops in pain, nursing finger.*) Mother-of-Minnie-Pearl!!

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DEE. Are you alright?? Let me see!

DUPPY. *(Playing innocent.)* What happened??

ZEE. *(To Duppy.)* You did that!

DEE. I did that?!

ZEE. Not you. Duppy!

DUPPY. Tsk-tsk... That naughty-naughty ol' ghost again?

DEE. Okay... let me see... *(Zee has yet to uncover the finger and looks away anxiously as they extend it to be inspected by Dee.)*

ZEE. Is it bad?

DEE. Not bad.

ZEE. Is it bleeding?

DEE. Not bleeding.

ZEE. Is it broken..? *(Dee grabs it and gives it a twist, forcing Zee to a knee.)* Nyaahhh!!! *(Dee lets go. Smiles.)*

DEE. Not broken!

ZEE. *(Rising, nursing finger, and a little embarrassed they may have overreacted.)* Thanks?

DEE. My pleasure! Now, let's get hoppin'! You double-check the consumables, while I set the hand props. *(Dee gets to work in the trunk.)*

ZEE. Right! Let's uhhh... *(Pretends to know what 'consumables' are – their mind is racing – and mutters confusedly to themselves.)* Consuuuumables? *(Tries looking around for what that might be, but has no clue where to look. Dee looks up and notices their aimless drifting.)*

DEE. Zee? You good?

ZEE. Yeah! Yeah, I was just uh... centering myself. I'm a "by-the-book" Angry Stutter Moth... heh... uhm... *(Looking desperately to Duppy.)* ...and I like to WALK MYSELF THRU THE STEPS... out loud... before tackling any task?

DUPPY. Now, who said you needed any help?

DEE. *(Not sure what's happening.)* Goooootcha.

ZEE. Yeah, so fundamentals... Reminding myself.

DUPPY. Oh, wait Duppy O'Gale told you you needed help.

ZEE. Okaaaaay...

DEE. Okaaaaay... *(Taking their focus back to the hand props.)*

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DUPPY. *(Quietly mocking in an abbreviated sing-song patter that later in the show will be a full out showstopper.)* Told you so! Told you so! Told you, told you...

ZEE. *(Not wanting to be heard by Dee, who is moving some props to the upstage side of the door unit, to place on a 'backstage' prop shelf set just behind the doors.)* So... Help me.

DUPPY. *(Starts to walk away.)* Well, I wouldn't want to annoy you, so...

ZEE. *(Following Duppy around in a circle and trying very hard not to be heard, while making it look as though they are just checking the list on their clipboard.)* What??

DUPPY. *(Ignoring Zee and, as though strolling thru the park without a care...)* But wait, you don't believe in ghosts!

ZEE. No! No! No! I didn't mean it.

DUPPY. So, how can something ya don't believe in, be annoying??

ZEE. I'm sorry!

DUPPY. Because, apparently, I can be VERY annoying!

ZEE. Pleeese??

DUPPY. *(Sticks their fingers in their ears and turns in a circle while making an obnoxious noise.)* LA! LA! LA! LA! LA! LA! LA! Guess that makes me a naughty ol' figment of your imagination. *(Starts making the obnoxious noise again. Zee turns away in frustration. Duppy disappears thru one of the doors and slams it.)*

ZEE. *(Hearing the slam, turns grasping the doorknob to the wrong door.)* So! Very! *(Zee throws open the door.)* NAUGHTY! *(Dee is standing on the other side with a shocked look on their face. Duppy slooowly appears, smiling, from behind the set piece with the sound of slide whistle. Dee walks away – a little disturbed and a little confused by Zee's odd behavior. Zee tries to follow to apologize, but Duppy has them by the collar. Zee, forcefully, but trying not to be overheard by Dee...)* Let me go!

DUPPY. And the truth shall set you FREE! *(Duppy suddenly releases Zee's collar, sending them stumbling forward – knocking Dee aside – and then Zee tumbles into the props trunk, messing up the work that Dee has done.)*

ZEE. *(Realizing what they've done.)* Ahhhh!!

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DEE. *(Seeing what they've done.)* Ahhhh!

DUPPY. *(Not meaning for that to happen.)* Swizzle-sticks...

DEE. What the...?!

ZEE. I am so sorry!

DEE. This trunk is NOT an omelette station?!

ZEE. I... uh... well...

DUPPY. *(Indicating Dee and encouraging Zee to come clean.)* Dee's a good egg. You can trust 'em.

ZEE. Okay! Okay, full confession! I'm... not an Angsty Stutter Moth or an Arctic Sweater Moose... I'm an Actor, Seriously Miscast as an assistant stage manager. I was desperate for work and then this gig sorta just fell into my lap and I... I need help.

DUPPY. / DEE. *(Mirroring the same gesture.)* Clearly.

DEE. *(Considering the options back and forth between the messed up trunk and Zee's pitiful expression.)* But you messed up... awww, I just... but the props... Ahhhh... *Sigh* Okay... I won't rat you out.

DUPPY. *(Wiggling booty against Zee's booty.)* Told you so, told you so...

ZEE. *(Smacking Duppy's booty away with breaking eye contact with Dee.)* Butt!... will you... help... me...?

DEE. We'll... make it happen. *(Smiling.)* Me and you.

ZEE. *(Smiling back, but acknowledging that Dee is the one who actually knows what they're doing.)* YOU and me. *(The smile lingers on a little longer than is comfortable with an engrossed Duppy wondering who'll blink first. Zee breaks the silence to try to alleviate the awkwardness.)* Shake on it? *(They shake hands just as Duppy puts arms excitedly around both their shoulders, causing massive shivers all over both of them and shakes them apart.)*

DUPPY. / ZEE. Sorry! *(Dee is confused. Zee isn't sure what to say and gives Duppy a look.)*

DUPPY. *(Apologetically.)* Ya did SHAKE on it!

SCENE 3

A couple of hours later in the early afternoon, Duppy is impatiently pacing

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onstage. Suddenly, Zee appears and Duppy scurries over for an update.

ZEE. Okay, Dee just has to check in with Taylor and we're good!

DUPPY. Was there ever a doubt?? *(Zee gives Duppy a 'Seriously?' look.)*

ZEE. My goose would have been incinerated without Dee... *(Smiles in appreciation for a beat while thinking about Dee.)*

DUPPY. *Ahem*

ZEE. And, you, of course.

DUPPY. *(Teasing about their seeming crush with the first two names.)* Zee and Dee... and Duppy makes three! Rattle 'em off!

ZEE. *(Going down the list.)* Costume and wig fittings underway.

DUPPY. Check!

ZEE. Understudy rehearsals scheduled.

DUPPY. Checkity-check! *(Starts warming up with an imaginary baseball bat.)*

ZEE. Sound and foley cues sorted.

DUPPY. Checkily-schmeckily-trifectally! *(Pretends to step up to bat in a baseball game.)*

ZEE. Quick change list made!

DUPPY. *(Using their cane as bat, 'steps up to the plate' and takes on the voice of a old-school baseball announcer. Zee takes on the role of pitcher with a big windup.)* And it's Checky McCheckster of the Checkville Checkers... *(Zee pitches and Duppy swings for the bleachers.)* *Verbal foley of bat hitting ball* ...with the grand slam home run! *(Runs around the imaginary bases as they both mimic the cheering crowd noises.)* The crowd goes wild, leaping to their feet, chanting their hero's name...!

PURL. *(Heard from front of house.)* Zeeeeee! Zeeeeee! Ze-! *(Before they can walk up too close for comfort, Zee sticks a list of names, free of black bars, directly in front of Purl's face.)*

ZEE. Redactions? Undacted. *(Purl takes the list, looks at it and starts to walk away back toward front of house. Before they exit, they turn and give one of those Purl 'smiles' and maintains eye contact all the way out while grunting what could be either an approval... or an evil spell.)*

PURL. Hhhmmm....

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ZEE. *Phew!* Did we really just get all that done?

DUPPY. You bet your big bahookie we got all that done! In fact... *(Duppy seizes up and gets a terrified look on their face.)* Oh, no...

ZEE. Duppy???

DUPPY. *(Duppy twitches - a wild expression on their face.)* It's...! It's...!

ZEE. It's?!?!

DUPPY. It's... the... POSSESSION! *(Starts moving slowly, eerily toward Zee.)*

ZEE. *(Slowly backing away.)* Possession?!?! You promised!!

DUPPY. Not. You. Me! *(Creeping forward.)* Possessed by the hunger...

ZEE. The HUNGER?!?!

DUPPY. The dark, gnawing need... to... to... *(Zee has no escape, Duppy is right on them.)*

ZEE. TO?!?!?!?

DUPPY. SING! *(Duppy starts singing and dancing merrily around Zee.)* "I told you so! Told you so! Told you, told you, told you so!"

ZEE. *(Realizing.)* Okay, okay...

DUPPY. *(Still performing.)* "Really shouldn't boastest, but I'm the ghostest with the mostest and I told you so!"

ZEE. *(Rolling their eyes.)* Yes, yes, you di-

DUPPY. *(Launches into a frantic dance and scat routine.)* Rah-duh-chah-duh-chah-duh! Sis-boom-boddi-ah-duh!

Sheboygan down to Scranton, they can prob'ly hear me chantin';

San Francisco to Poughkeepsie, I aiiiiiin't just whistlin' Dixie;

Ala-bam to Tex-Arkanny, they can watch me shake my fanny; Winnemuca up to Lovett, I can show 'em where to..." *(Buzz enters and interrupts.)*

BUZZ. Shuffett! *(Duppy continues to sing and dance around Buzz as they cross to Zee.)*

DUPPY. BIG FINISH! *(Singing / Scatting.)* Oh, yes, I TOLD!... spooky-ookey raah-kuh-two-kee-two-kee... YOU!... pip-ee-puppy thank-ee-kindly-Duppy... SoOoOoOoOoOo!!! *(Goes into big pose on one knee.)* Ya bet your boots, I told ya so... YEAH! *(Out of breath but shining in an imaginary spotlight.)* *huff-huff*

BUZZ. *(Snatching clipboard from Zee and inspecting it...)* Set pieces??

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ZEE. Spiked!

DUPPY. Like a prom night punch.

BUZZ. Craft service?

ZEE. Coffee, bagels, schmear...

DUPPY. The whole nine yards.

BUZZ. Stage right toilet?

DUPPY. *(Repulsed.)* Speakin' of nine yards. Woof.

ZEE. *(Equally repulsed.)* Plunged.

BUZZ. *(The real test.)* Front of house??

PURL. *(From front of house area as they enter.)* Zeeeeeee!

BUZZ. *(Anticipating disaster.)* Purl.

PURL. Buzz. Zee?

ZEE. Purl?

DUPPY. *(Not wanting to be left out.)* Duppy!

PURL. *(Handing Zee a copy of a color-coded seating chart.)* Seating chart.

ZEE. Thank you. *(Purl immediately walks away and before being out of the space again, stops and makes eye contact with Zee and gives that same 'approval / evil spell' from earlier.)*

PURL. Hhmmmm...

BUZZ. *(In shock.)* Wow. I've never seen Purl so... giddy. *(Still half in shock, tries to say something but can only gesture and eventually quits trying and gives Zee a pat of approval on the back as they depart in a daze of disbelief.)* Alright then... wow.

DUPPY. See? We're working full stage now! Hitting on all pistons! This is our WHY! This is our- *(Suddenly, Duppy is bathed in ethereal lights from above as the other lights dim.)* *Gasp!* This... this is it! My moment... my Alley Oop! *(Slide-whistle bit.)* I... I'm moving on – up, over, and beyond! The next thing you hear will be the rush of heavenly wings calling out to me... *(McCandleless walks on, obliviously bumps Duppy out of the light, yelling at booth.)*

McCANDLELESS. Yo, Dim-watt! What about Area 2?

DUPPY. *(Realizing it was a red herring.)* Ah, flapdoodle...

McCANDLELESS. *(Nothing has happened.)* Area 2?! Hello?? Meyer? Come on, I was kidding... alright? What else do I.... Are ya yankin' my

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chain, here? (*Sighs and with zero enthusiasm.*) “Go, Chiefs!” (*Lights change on stage. McCandless shakes their head at having to say it.*) Okay, give it a two-second fade and bump the blue by 50%. Okay, let’s hang those specials...

ZEE. Want I should...?

McCANDLESS. (*Ignoring them.*) SPECIALS!! (*Immediately, ‘Thank you, Specials!’ is echoed from ‘Meyer’ in the light booth and at least one additional area of the stage by unseen techs. McCandless exits.*)

DUPPY. Thanks, McCandless...

ZEE. (*Sees Duppy’s disappointment.*) Sorry that wasn’t... what you...

DUPPY. (*Shaking it off.*) No worries, kid!! Just... just means... there’s something else... whatever that is. (*Shoe horning a positive spin into it.*) Just means more Duppy-time for you!

ZEE. Oh, joy.

DUPPY. When that Top Banana in the sky is ready to play me off, they’ll give me the cue. (*As if on cue, chaos - Buzz enters followed closely by Schmucker, who Buzz sends off quickly to the lobby area. Taylor, Dee, McCandless come on – clearly having been rounded up.*)

BUZZ. (*Looking up at the booth.*) Meyer! Give us a little light? (*A pool of light suddenly appears onstage nowhere near anyone – all turn their heads to look at it.*)

McCANDLESS. (*McCandless walks out and gestures toward the light while glaring at the booth – like ‘seriously’?*) Meyer! (*The light suddenly changes to exactly where McCandless is standing. McCandless sighs and points to where Buzz is.*) Meyer!! (*Light shifts again, finally finding Buzz. McCandless shakes their head at Meyer and then turns to hear what Buzz has to say.*)

BUZZ. Ooooookay, gang, gather round, gather round! (*Schmucker returns with Purl as everyone else settles into place. Purl get too close for comfort to Buzz, who holds out their arm and gives them the “ol’ stiff arm.” Schmucker pulls Purl back from a very grateful Buzz.*) I know it’s been all hushity-hush-hush around here lately, but we’ve just been given the green light to spill the beans... Holy cow, this is BIG...

DEE. (*To Zee.*) Heeere we go...

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TAYLOR. *(Doing something comical with the suspenders they are wearing.)* Well, don't keep us in suspenders!!

PURL. Who's had us jumping through all these hoops??

DUPPY. Yeah! I'm dyin' here! *(Zee looks at Duppy.)* You know what I mean!

McCANDLESS. Cough it up, Buzz! *(General agreement from all gathered.)*

BUZZ. Right! The special VIP...

DUPPY. *(Quickly to Zee.)* Voluptuous Intoxicated Platypus.

BUZZ. Is.... *(Suddenly, Nagler enters.)*

NAGLER. I've got it from this point, Buzz... *(All react to the interruption of the reveal.)*

ALL. *(Reacting to the interruption.)* Oh, come on! / Buzz! / You kidding me? / Tell us! / Etc. etc.

NAGLER. Ooooookay, gang, gather round, gather round! *(Everyone looks around at each other like 'Isn't that we already did?')*

DUPPY. *(To Zee.)* Is there an echo in here?

NAGLER. I realize things have been pretty zippy-zippy-with-the-lippy around here of late, but I've finally got the rubber stamp to clue everybody in... Holy smokes, this is HUGE... Alright! The amazing MVP... is.... *(Suddenly, OFFICIO – a TV network executive and NAYBOB – a major TV advertiser / sponsor enter – escorted by Cruller. Officio likes to think they are the one in charge, but Naybob's advertising dollars are the real power... and they're not afraid to use it. Officio will stoop to any means to keep Naybob happy and keep that money flowing.)*

OFFICIO. We'll take it at this juncture, Nagler... *(Officio checks in to make sure that's okay with Naybob – and it is - as everyone else erupts even bigger into the agony of the suspense once again.)* Ooooookay, gang, gather round, gather round! *(Everyone looks at them and gestures in frustration as if to say, 'Do you not see we are clearly gathered round?')*

DUPPY. *(To Zee.)* Déjà vu, how 'bout you?

OFFICIO. We are aware it's all been a bit of sneaky-sneaky-shut-your-beaky latterly, but I've decided... *(Naybob clears their throat.)* Uh, we've decided... *(Checks in with Naybob to see if that's what they wanted. Naybob*

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nods approval. Nagler gestures to Cruller to go get the individual they've all been waiting for.) ...the time has come to finally let the cat out of the bag... Holy cannoli, this is COLOSSAL... Alrighty then! The #1 T.O.P. Top star of... (Naybob clears their throat, to indicate they've not introduced themselves.) Oh!! Yes! But, who are we?! (Officio checks in. Naybob nods. The collection of folk are losing their minds.) My name is Francis Officio, I am the senior junior vice president of programming for NBC... (General murmur of interest being re-piqued. Naybob clears their throat to get Officio's attention.) Oh!! And my esteemed colleague here is the B.G. Naybob... (General murmur of curiosity.)

NAYBOB. *(Confirming everyone's suspicions by enthusiastically saying the slogan.) "You're rolling like a King on Naybob Tires." (General murmur of recognition.) Corporate sponsor for the old and the ALL-NEW "Naybob Variety Hour"! (General murmur of being impressed.)*

OFFICIO. Which will be broadcast LIVE this week from this theatre in front of a live audience... Yes! That's right! It's back! *(Wave of shock and excitement and perhaps anxiety over the short notice.)* In fact, we've secretly already installed... *(Officio, starts pointing them out. All look and search to spot them.)* ...three hidden television cameras, ready to shoot... All of this being kept under wraps until the last minute as one of the non-negotiable conditions under which our star would agree to do it – So, there'll be a nationwide media barrage... getting the word out, generating excitement...

NAYBOB. And revenue!

OFFICIO. In the 24 hours leading up to showtime! And I think...? That about covers it! *(Naybob shakes their head 'No' as all gathered consider whether or not violence is the answer to their dilemma.)* Oh YES! Our special guest star – of "The Naybob Variety Hour" – the return of a legend, in a surprise encore performance of some of their most beloved classics... *(Naybob clears their throat indicating they want to help with this part.)*

OFFICIO. / NAYBOB. The one, the only...! *(They both make a grand sweep gesture towards the upstage entrance, and... Cruller enters – looking confused. Everyone joins in the confusion.)*

CRULLER. Uhmmm...

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NAGLER. What the...?

CRULLER. You didn't see them come out this way, didja?

ALL. (*'All' being everyone who doesn't know the identity of the 'certain individual'.*) See WHO?!?!?!?

NAGLER. (*A hierarchal passing of the buck begins.*) Cruller! (*Cruller scurries off to look again.*)

OFFICIO. Nagler! (*Nagler scurries off after Cruller.*)

NAYBOB. Officio!

OFFICIO. (*Officio gestures – questioning 'should I go to?' – Naybob nods. Officio apologetically acknowledges.*) B.G... (*Officio starts to scurry off after Nagler. Naybob sighs.*)

NAYBOB. Officio... (*Officio stops and let's Naybob pass.*)

OFFICIO. B.G... (*B.G. walks off, Naybob loops in behind.*)

NAGLER. (*Poking their head thru curtains.*) BUZZ!!

BUZZ. (*Rushes toward the wings, pauses at curtains, unable to contain it any longer, let's out a sigh of frustration and tells them.*) Ahhh! It's COUSIN MISHKA! (*Everyone assembled – except Duppy - react like teenagers seeing the Beatles on Ed Sullivan – look it up, kids.*)

ALL. (*General elation explosion.*) Wow!! / Wha?! / I can't believe it!! / Cousin Mishka?! / Etc. etc.

DEE. (*To Zee.*) This is insane!

DUPPY. Who?

ZEE. I know, right?! I am freaking out here!! Cousin Mishka is one of my idols!

DEE. I know... and did you know that...

TAYLOR. Dee! This changes everything! Come on I need you to help me double-check...

DEE. Double-check what?

TAYLOR. Didn't you hear me? EVERYTHING!! (*Taylor takes off in a flurry of excitement.*)

DEE. Right away! (*To Zee.*) Cousin Mishka – wow!! (*Follows Taylor.*)

DUPPY. What's with the ballyhoo??

ZEE. The what?

DUPPY. Ballyhoo!!

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ZEE. I know! This is crazy.

DUPPY. I'm going crazy! Helloooo! (*Grabbing Zee's nose to gain their attention and causing massive shivers.*) The folks in the peanut gallery would like to know... Who the flim-flam fritter is Cousin Mishka??

ZEE. (*Shivers and then frees themselves.*) Who is Cou-?! Where have you been the last few decades?? (*Duppy does a quick soft shoe and gestures at the stage.*) Oh. Yeah. Well... Cousin Mishka is only the biggest TV sitcom star ever!

DUPPY. Oh! Television! A little after my time.

ZEE. Man, I can't believe it. I get to work with the Cousin Mishka! (*Quoting the same TV show.*) "You Ricotta be kiddin' me!"

DUPPY. (*As though hit hit by an electric jolt.*) Wait-huh-whaaa???

ZEE. "Matzah-fella" was one of my all-time faves!

DUPPY. Did you say Mat-mat-matzah...

ZEE. Fella. Yeah!

DUPPY. I'm the fella!

ZEE. Huh?

DUPPY. That's me, the fella! Matzah-fella!

ZEE. (*So overcome with excitement about Cousin Mishka, Duppy's protestations aren't really registering. Zee just thinks their confusing it with something else. Nagler comes back in still searching for Mishka and walks in on Zee homaging Matzah-fella bits.*) Wait, no, "Matzah-fella" was a hilarious TV show about... (*Does a spot-on Cousin Mishka impression. Nagler is impressed and amused.*) ...an Italian immigrant who ran a...

ZEE. / DUPPY. (*Overlapping.*) ...kosher cheese shop...

ZEE. ...called...

ZEE. / DUPPY. MATZAH-FELLAS!

ZEE. And every episode would start off with them writing in their journal...

ZEE. / DUPPY. "Dear-a Dairy..."

ZEE. And all these crazy cheese puns! (*Cracking up more with each cheese pun.*) Like, when things went all "Awww..."

ZEE. / DUPPY. "It's-a no Gouda!"

ZEE. Or when it all went "Ahhh!!"

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ZEE. / DUPPY. “Ahhhh-siago!”

ZEE. And when their spicy sposa would get all “Grrr!!”

ZEE. / DUPPY. Fontinaaaaaaaa!!

ZEE. Oh! And there was also...

DUPPY. *(Cruller pops their head in and gestures to Nagler, who follows as a shell-shocked and enraged Duppy vents.) Dair-Gouda-Matzi-Aaaaagah-gah-gah-gahhhh!*

ZEE. What was that from...?

DUPPY. From ME! It was ALL from me!! Someone STOLE my bit!!

BUZZ. *(Rushing back in.) Team?! Team!! Cousin Mishka is here!!! (General chaos as everyone else crowds around, but Duppy can't see them, there is effusive adulation going on for the person in the middle of it all – COUSIN MISHKA. Nagler and Cruller accompany Mishka and are trying to keep people from crowding too much, especially Purl, who is proving more than Cruller can handle – so, of course, the stage manager takes charge.) Okay! Back off!! Act professional! GIVE 'EM SOME AAAAAAIIIRRR!! (The throng steps back in a clump surrounding and some directly connecting with Duppy – those who do instantly give a collective shiver, but are too starstruck to really notice. Cruller has to assist the unwilling Purl in not being too close for comfort to Mishka. Duppy's face is a mask of curious concentration. Finally, Buzz turns to Mishka apologetically.) Shenanigans.*

MISHKA. *(Waving away the fawning Nagler, and patting Buzz in appreciation.)* Now, now, Bizz...

BUZZ. Buzz...

MISHKA. ...can you blame them?? Cousin Mishka's here! *(All react in their own starstruck way.)* The big CHEESE! *(They all laugh, except Duppy, for whom it suddenly clicks.)*

DUPPY. PILFY?! *(Duppy is dazed by the realization.)*

OFFICIO. Live on... *(Sings the NBC chimes.)* ...N-B-C!

MISHKA. *(Placing a hand on Officio to move them back – unwilling to share the limelight.)* Thanks, Fishy!

OFFICIO. *(Placing their hand over Mishka's - honored that they were even acknowledged.)* Officio.

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MISHKA. Of course. *(Removing their hand from this awkward moment.)* But everyone know it's the good folks at Naybob Tires – and their deep pockets...

NAGLER. And your gambling debts...

MISHKA. *(Trying to distract from that embarrassing fact.)* ...That's bringing Cousin Mishka back into your living rooms!

NAGLER. *(Making introductions.)* Mishka? B.G. Naybob

MISHKA. *(Shaking their hand.)* Used to be your old man signing the checks, GiGi.

NAYBOB. B.G... the second.

MISHKA. *(Pats Naybob on the head.)* Winning isn't everything. *(Nagler whisks the very annoyed Naybob aside.)* But as long as you're Mascarponying up the dough.... *(Turning to everyone.)* Let's put on a show!! *(Everyone laughs and cheers, but then the moment turns awkward as all just linger in the moment – star struck and not wanting it to end.)*

MISHKA. Uhhh... Bah-zh?

BUZZ. Buzz... *(Mishka gestures, indicating they'd like the awkwardness to stop.)* Oh, yeah, gotcha. Okay, people... GO, already!! Back to work!! Do your JOBS!! *(All scurry off saying goodbye / idolizing Cousin Mishka – who is loving the attention. Cruller has to catch and redirect Purl at least two more times before finally having to escort them all the way out to the lobby.)*

ZEE. *(Stepping forward and extending their hand.)* Hi, I'm Zee! I'm here to...

MISHKA. *(Taking their hand and pulling them in close.)* Cater to my every whim, no matter how... *(Looks around and then winks awkwardly.)*

ZEE. What does tha...??

MISHKA. *(Interrupts.)* Please, call me Cousin Mishka!

DUPPY. Pilfy??

ZEE. Cousin Mishka, I just gotta say I'm a huge fan... *(It's dawning on Duppy that 'Mishka' aka 'Pilfy' aka Duppy's former second banana has achieved fame and glory by stealing Duppy's material.)*

MISHKA. *(A touch of cockiness.)* You want a little, huh?

ZEE. Uh... sure?

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MISHKA. *(Launching into the Matzah-fella bit just as the betrayal hits home for Duppy.) Ohhh noooo!!*

DUPPY. / MISHKA. “You Ricotta be kiddin’ me!”

ZEE. Wow.

MISHKA. Okay, stop beggin’, kid.

ZEE. I didn’t exac...

MISHKA. One more for ya... *(Duppy, now enraged, grabs a prop mallet or club or similar and charges toward Mishka from behind.)*

MISHKA. / DUPPY. GRRRR!!!

MISHKA. “GORGONZOL-!”

MISHKA. / DUPPY. AAAAAAAHHHH!!!! *(Duppy tries in vain to hit Mishka over the head a couple of times, but is saved by an invisible barrier thanks to “the rules”. Zee flinches and then laughs nervously.)*

DUPPY. Stupid rule!!

MISHKA. You’re a fan. I get it. Soak it up...

DUPPY. ARRRGGHHHH!! *(Lights fade as Duppy continues in vain to try and strike an oblivious Mishka as Zee stares on in amazement. Blackout. End of Act One.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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