

# THE PUNCH LINE

By Michael Soetaert

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# THE PUNCH LINE

*A Full Length Comedy*

**By Michael Soetaert**

**SYNOPSIS:** Each year for the past seventeen years, on this very night, the Hawthorne Hotel has been visited by four ghosts whose rest depends on the punch line to a joke that has yet to be written. However, tonight promises to be different; tonight Inspector Chromium is determined to rid the hotel once and for all of these sporadic spooks. That is, if none of the other very strange guests beat him to *The Punch Line* first.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(22 total; 5 males; 5 females; and the rest can be either.)*

### THE EMPLOYEES:

BOYTON BATESWOOD.....50-something. Owner and maître d' of the Hawthorne Hotel and Restaurant. Life... life has been cruel to Bateswood, and everybody knows it. He will wear a rather severe dark suit with a bowtie, but have a rather garish suit jacket (plaid would be nice) along with an equally silly hat hidden at his station. *(139 lines)*

CLAUDE ..... The very incompetent waiter. 30; A bit disheveled. He will be dressed at first in a shabby tuxedo-esque suit – dark, pants with stripes up the legs, a stained white shirt with a loosely tied bowtie, and a black jacket. Claude might be facing the wrong way at the start of the race, but he's not rude, and he's not mean. At the end of the play he will need to be in a sharp, all white tuxedo, complete with tails, with his hair neatly combed – pretty much the opposite of how he starts out. As well, he will need a jacket to put on when he goes out. *(62 lines)*

**THE GUESTS:**

- EUGENE BROOKS .....60+. A codgerty old coot, if that's not too redundant. A bit rotund, but don't over-do it. Three piece, dark suit that he wears well. (53 lines)
- ETHEL BROOKS.....Around 60. Eugene's patient wife. She will have on a nice dress with pearls, a shawl, and practical shoes. (26 lines)
- RILEY.....50ish. An Accountant by day. He takes his quest to witness ghosts very seriously. Annoyingly self-righteous. Self-assigned spokesperson for the group. He is always trying to exude a sense of self-confidence that comes really close to snobbery. He's the type of guy who would smoke a pipe because he thinks it makes him look intelligent. If you can find an old tweed jacket with leather on the elbows, he'd wear it, even though he has a bowling shirt on underneath. And he would never wear denim. (27 lines)
- CANTWELL.....40ish. A Banker by day. He also considers himself the self-assigned spokesperson for the group, and enjoys annoying Riley, which won't take much. He will dress like a banker: Dress pants, suit jacket, and a tie on his bowling shirt. (25 lines)

MELISSA WOOTEN .....30-something. A Kindergarten teacher by day, and that’s how she sees the world, as if everybody but her were six. Constantly wired, just waiting to scold. Wears a cheap, long print dress, but you can still see that her stockings have drooped. And she will have a vest that is brightly decorated for whatever season you’re *not* in, which she’ll wear over her bowling shirt. (9 lines)

BILL.....30-something. A biker. Play the stereotype chains and leather, big beard, do-rag on his head, bowling shirt, and an overly large gut. Not a very talkative guy. I mean, really, why bother when looking mean works just as well? He truly is tough, but he’s not mean. (12 lines)

URI URKINOV .....50-something. He’s a joke writer incognito... at least at first, though definitely not in disguise. What you are going for here is the stereotypical 60s comedian – green trousers, orange shirt, white shoes and suspenders, soft felt hat with optional band, and topped off with a plaid jacket that doesn’t match anything (colors may vary; please consult local wardrobe for details). “Clash” is not a word that is in his vocabulary. And don’t forget the carnation. He’s been in the business for a long time, but has never really gotten that good. Goes back and forth from a bad Russian accent to what is best described as Vaudevillian, basically a person who always is on stage. (96 lines)

DELBERT DINWIDDIE .....30-ish. He’s a younger joke writer, also pretending that he is not. Like Uri, he believes that if he gets the punch line it will make him a joke writing great. He doesn’t dress *quite* as bad as Uri. Uri is stuck in the ‘60s. Delbert is stuck in the ‘80s. Kinda makes you wonder how silly what you have on *right now* will be in another 20 years, doesn’t it? He definitely needs a hat. He always will have a bit of a Texas twang, but he will exaggerate it times. Overall, like Uri, he is a decent guy. (109 lines)

**THE OTHERS:**

ANGELICA DOUBT ..... Mid to Late 20s. She is the host of a cable ghost show. She’s really not very good at all, because she really doesn’t like people that much, but she does look good, and she does sound good when she’s on the air, although she’s a bit clueless off the screen. Just watch any silly cable show and you’ve got the idea. (34 lines)

BRANT ..... Mid-20s. He’s the cameraperson for the cable ghost show. More than any of the others in his crew, he knows that if they don’t come up with a ghost, they’re out of a job. So he’s come up with a number of “gadgets” to finally capture the ghosts on film. It’s not necessarily that he’s a slob; it’s just that he’s got other things to think about than how he’s dressed. (29 lines)

MCCOY .....30-ish. She is the director for the cable ghost show. She is tasked with the job of making sure Angelica does... well... anything of substance except mug before the camera, and making sure that Brant is actually there to film it and not off on his own projects... and she's really tired of it all. Dresses OK, but a bit frumpy. (69 lines)

GRANT GRANITE .....Pushing 40. He's the anchor for a local TV station. He has great hair, a great smile, and knows how to look great on camera... but little else. Still, that's enough to get you all the way to the top in the local news game. Just watch any local nightly news and go from there. (28 lines)

MURPHY .....Mid-20s. The local TV station's cameraperson. He knows which side of the camera he's on and dresses accordingly – blue jeans, work boots, and a dark T-shirt. (31 lines)

OOGA .....50-ish, heavy on the "ish." Seer of the unknown, knower of the unseen. The wilder you can get her to look the better – Big hair that goes everywhere, and various layers of clothes and assorted wraps. Think Russian Gypsy, and you're not far off. It's hard to tell if she's overweight or just wearing every piece of clothing that she owns. (56 lines)

AMAZO THE AMAZINGLY

AMAZING.....Mid-20s. An upstart magician of sorts. He wants to be the one who gets rid of the ghosts, which, he hopes, will catapult his career into stardom. He's more flash than substance, but he uses a lot of flash. He will be competing with Ooga, who isn't past a good competition herself. He will wear red tights and ballet shoes, with a red cape trimmed in black. He may be a lousy magician, but he looks spiffy! (41 lines)

INSPECTOR CHROMIUM.....40-ish. The clueless police inspector... just a few years late. He is confident in his incompetence. Wears a cheap suit, but he wears it well. (117 lines)

**THE GHOSTS:**

CARLISLE EDLEBROOK .....Like all of the Ghosts, 30-something – at least, he was when he died, and he really hasn't changed much sense then. He'll be dressed like someone out of a Charles Dickens' novel – wool trousers, suspenders, shirt, and an old jacket. As well, he will be wearing a conductor's hat with a card that neatly says, "Deceased," attached to the front. The idea is to make him look rather gray. Along those lines, he should be just a bit pale. (44 lines)

LAMBERT FOLKSENCRORFT ...Pretty much just like Carlisle. (46 lines)

HORACE HALFSPOON.....Ditto. (50 lines)

HAVERSHAM WITHERS.....Double ditto. (39 lines)

THE GHOSTIES ..... These are all people who, for reason only they know, follow ghosts around, somewhat like groupies, only they have a lot less fun. They will all be wearing bowling shirts, which should look a bit out of place with the rest of their costumes, as if they just put them on over their other clothes. *(Non-Speaking)*

(Eugene Brooks, Bill, Grant, Amazo, and Inspector Chromium all need to be male. Ethel, Melissa, Angelica, McCoy, and Ooga all need to be female. Minor changes can easily be made to the script to accommodate for either gender for the rest of the cast.)

**RUNNING TIME:** 90 minutes.

**SETTING:** The restaurant of the Hawthorne Hotel, 7:00 p.m., exactly one year from this very date last year.

### SET

One set, the interior of the restaurant at the Hawthorne Hotel. It would be kind to say this hotel has seen better days. This is dump. Sure, there are table clothes, china, candles, and some plastic potted plants, but those plants haven't been dusted in a long time.

The idea is to make the audience an extension of the dining room, so when the guests enter and exit the restaurant, it will be through the auditorium, right down the aisle... or whatever works on your stage.

The maître'd's station, which is where the front door is, will be on the apron DR. A solid podium would work.

There will be a large window (or two) occupying the Right wall, and the Back will have several windows as well. All of the windows need to be practical in the sense that they let light through. When the lightning flashes, you want the impression that it's happening outside as well (see Special Effects). The far Up Right window needs to be strong enough for Claude to sneak in through.

As well, between the further most Right window on the back wall and the window immediately to the Left will be a breaker box – a small hinged door about chest high where Bateswood will pretend to turn back on the lights when necessary.

A bit more to the Down side of Center Stage is the swinging door to the kitchen. Up from the swinging door is a bus tub on a cart. Next to that is a table with a coffee pot on it. There needs to be a plug in on the wall near the coffee pot, though it shouldn't be practical.

There will be five round tables on stage. Three of them will be arranged in an arc, from UR to UL. The UR table will need four chairs, and the other two will need only two, but you can always have extras. The other two tables, which need not be as big as the others, will be DR and DL, and they don't need chairs at all... but why would you have tables without chairs?

There needs to be several places on stage where things can be hidden. That's why each table will need a table cloth that goes all the way to the floor, and the windows all have wide, heavy drapes that extend to the floor as well.

And then there's all the Frou-Frou – all those things to make it look like a restaurant, such as the dusty plastic plants, salt shakers, and velvet paintings on the wall.

## PROPS

CLAUDE – To-go cup with straw, a very large knife (preferably fake), at least two sets of silverware wrapped in soiled napkins, two flyswatters with each set of silverware, coffeepot with cold coffee in it, two saucers, two cups, two additional spoons, reading glasses, an additional fork, two menus, order pad, pen, four loaves of bread (see Special Effects), two hand held cymbals (hidden on stage), silver service tray with cover, and a real piece of toast to eat.

BATESWOOD – Reservation list, small notepad, pen.

BROOKS – Bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

ETHEL – Bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

CANTWELL – Rolled up banner and tacks to hang it with, score cards, bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

RILEY – book, score cards, bowling ball case (bowling ball optional... there seems to be a theme here).

MELISSA – Decorated cloth bag (the more sequins, the better) stuffed full of papers to grade, red marker, score cards, bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

BILL – Score cards, pocket watch, bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

URI – Small note pad and pen, coin.

DELBERT – Small note pad and pen.

BRANT – A handcart with various boxes and equipment strapped to it (see below); as well, a large, hand-held camera, such as an old VCR recorder; sack of flour (strategically scored along one side so that it can easily break open); Polaroid-esque camera with flash.

ANGELICA – Cell phone, script (rolled up paper will do).

MCCOY – Clipboard, pen, business card.

MURPHY – A large, hand-held camera; invoice.

GRANT – Cell phone, script (rolled up paper will do).

OOGA – Bowling ball case with an actual bowling ball inside, contract written on flash paper (see Special Effects), dust to blow (two times), tambourine, large hour glass.

AMAZO – Over-sized playing cards, a short wand, an old, beat up suitcase with folding legs (which will contain most of his props), flash bomb (see Special Effects), handheld cymbals, set of old television rabbit ears, confetti cannon, handkerchief, dead bird (not real), aerosol can (not practical), party glitter to throw in the air, bowling ball case (bowling ball optional).

CHROMIUM – Framed diploma, several note cards, confession on scroll, pen, blackjack, small bell with striker.

HAVERSHAM – A death certificate, kazoo, small vial.

HORACE – A death certificate, kazoo, small vial.

CARLISLE – A death certificate, kazoo.

LAMBERT – A death certificate, kazoo, small vial.

**NOTE:** With the exception of Ooga, the seven bowling ball cases will already be hidden in the room (bowling balls are optional, but it should look like they're there) – four under the Ghosties' table, two under the Brookses' table, and one where Amazo can easily reach it. As well, the four sets of score cards (like the ones Olympic judges use for diving) can already be hidden at the Ghosties' table.

**Brant's Gadgets:** Brant will bring in a hodgepodge of wires and various components, such as old stereo receivers, computer monitors, microwave ovens, and the like. They should be packaged in assorted boxes (or not), and all of them will be bungeed to a two-wheeler – or whatever works for you. The overall idea is that he is putting together different devices made by combining various items that he found lying around the house, so whatever you can find can probably work.

**Relative Doppler Thermographer** – Pretty much, a spotting scope on a short tripod with a bevy of wires and antennas hooked up to as many receivers as you can get your hands on.

**Electromagnetic X-Ray Imaging Electron Pulsometer** -- This can simply be a painted cardboard box with a hole in the top for a giant light bulb, and the giant light bulb (which will be hidden under the table the whole time), which could easily be made out of papier mâché. Season with knobs and dials to taste, then hook everything up with way too many wires to an old video camera on a tripod. Have fun. You will also need another, burnt out version of the light bulb that can be quickly switched while the lights are out. As long as both light bulbs can both be hidden under the table, the bigger the better.

## SPECIAL EFFECTS

Most of the special effects won't be that special. The ghosts, for instance, will enter and exit in the dark. You will, though, need to have some flair for Amazo. I recommend:

**Flash paper** – this is a really fun effect. It looks like normal paper, but it goes up in a flash, ergo, the name. And...

**Poppers** – these are small balls that “pop” when thrown on the floor.

Both can be purchased cheaply from any theatrical supply house. They're safe, easy to use, and don't require any licenses or special training (but check local regulations to be sure). As well, Amazo will need things to toss in the air, such as party glitter and confetti poppers, or even a confetti canon. All can be easily found and cheaply purchased at any discount party store. And who knows what else you'll find while browsing around? Don't worry about needing to look slick with Amazo. It should be more than obvious that he isn't very good. As well, you will need:

**Thunder and Lightning** – Along with the sound of thunder (which will need to be louder at times than others), you need to make it look like there is lightning outside the windows (even though there will be drapes on the windows). Me? I'd mount an unseen bright light on the wall behind each curtain and wire them all up to a central switch that can be easily flipped on and off as needed. And that way you only need make one window truly practical.

**Bright Pulses of Light** – All you need for this is a strategically placed strobe that can be controlled from off stage.

**Popping Sound** – What you're after here is the sound of two wires that really don't like each other touching – you know, that sound you get when you blow out all the lights in the house. This can either be pre-recorded, or you can have somebody popping a paper bag back stage, or anything in-between. A good sound effects CD will probably cover every sound you need.

**Sound of Knife Hitting Target** – What that target is... that's up to you. Any number of sound effects would do here, from the sound of an arrow hitting a target to breaking glass. Sound effect CDs are cheap, and you can probably get any given sound off the Internet for free.

**Smoke for the Over-sized, Burnt Out Light Bulb** – I'd simply use dry ice. You can safely put it in a container inside the bulb and then just pour some water on it when necessary. Or you don't have to have it smoke at all.

**Bread** – Several loaves of bread will need to be smashed flat in the course of the play. I suppose you could use real bread, but that could get expensive in a hurry, and it would be a tad bit wasteful. The easiest would be to put a piece of "memory" foam in an real bread bag. It would easily smash flat and then return to its old shape. Remember to put some holes in the bag so it will not pop. If it were me, I'd probably make a few spares... just in case.

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**AT RISE:** *BATESWOOD is nervously waiting at his station, while CLAUDE, with his shirttail partway out, is leaning up against the wall by the kitchen loudly sipping on a drink. The BROOKSES will enter through the audience to where BATESWOOD is.*

**BATESWOOD:** Ah, yes. Good evening, and welcome to the Hawthorne Hotel and Restaurant. My name is Boyton Bateswood, the manager and maître d'. And how may I help you?

**BROOKS:** *(Gruff.)* Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Brooks. We have reservations at seven for two.

**BATESWOOD:** *(After checking the reservation list.)* Ah, yes! Of course. *(Clearing his throat to get CLAUDE'S attention, who doesn't look up; after a beat; politely to the BROOKES.)* Excuse me. *(He crosses to CLAUDE.)*

**ETHEL:** See, dear. They didn't lose our reservations.

**BROOKS:** Well, miracles still happen! We'll just see about the service, though. So far I must say that I am not impressed.

**BATESWOOD:** *(To CLAUDE.)* What is this! Put that down! We have customers. Why aren't you over there doing your job?

**CLAUDE:** Because I'm over here waiting.

**BATESWOOD:** Waiting? Waiting for what?

**CLAUDE:** For nothing. I'm just waiting. I thought that was what I was supposed to do. After all, I am a waiter.

**BATESWOOD:** Well not for long if you don't get over there and do your job.

**CLAUDE:** Oh, OK.

**BATESWOOD:** Just get to work!

**CLAUDE:** *(Crossing over to the BROOKSES, with no conviction whatsoever.)* Welcome to the Hawthorne Hotel and Restaurant. My name is Claude. I'll be your waiter tonight. If you would follow me.

**BROOKS:** *(Gruff.)* We don't want to be near the kitchen.

**CLAUDE:** You know, a restaurant's probably not the best place to be if you're trying to avoid a kitchen. But to each his own, I suppose. *(Pointing at the empty table UC.)* There ya go. *(BROOKS and ETHEL sit; after a beat.)* Are you folks here for the ghosts?

**BROOKS:** What?!

*From his station, BATESWOOD will frantically attempt to shush CLAUDE with various hand motions and body gestures, and though he's trying not to be obvious, he ends up acting so spastic that BROOKS, ETHEL, and CLAUDE will all stop to watch.*

**BROOKS:** *(After a beat.)* What on earth is the matter with him?

**CLAUDE:** I think he may be coming down with something.

*BATESWOOD will make a cutting motion several times across his throat.*

**CLAUDE:** Oh, I got it! I think he's trying to tell me he needs a knife.  
*(While crossing toward the kitchen.)* Hold on boss! I'll go to the kitchen and get you one.

*BATESWOOD will quickly cross to the kitchen and will be startled by CLAUDE as he comes out of the kitchen carrying a very large knife, raised as if to do harm.*

**CLAUDE:** Is this one big enough?

**BATESWOOD:** You dolt! I don't need a knife!

**CLAUDE:** OK.

*CLAUDE will turn back into the kitchen and toss the knife at a distant wall with the sound effect of your choice.*

**BATESWOOD:** *(In a loud whisper.)* Listen! Do *not* tell them about the ghosts.

**CLAUDE:** *(Not in a whisper at all.)* The ghosts?

**BATESWOOD:** Shhh!

**CLAUDE:** Isn't that the only reason why anybody comes here to begin with?

**BATESWOOD:** Apparently not, you nincompoop.

**CLAUDE:** Hey! That sounds bad.

**BATESWOOD:** That's because it is!

**CLAUDE:** OK. But if you change your mind on that knife, let me know.

**BATESWOOD:** *(As he crosses back to his station.)* Just do your job!

*CLAUDE will resume loudly sucking on his cup.*

**BROOKS:** *(Finally.)* Young man!

**CLAUDE:** *(Looking up.)* You think so? Because when I was younger, 30 always seemed so old. And now, 15 seems so young. But then, you seem really old. So I guess I am young... well, relative to you. So you know, really, who's to say?

**BROOKS:** I certainly hope you're not expecting a tip with such insolence.

**CLAUDE:** I can check the menu, but I'm pretty sure we don't have any insolence.

**BROOKS:** I've had enough of this!

**CLAUDE:** *(Turning to go into the kitchen.)* OK.

**BROOKS:** Now wait just a minute!

**CLAUDE:** *(Stopping and turning back around.)* OK.

**BROOKS:** Now listen...*you...we* need some silverware on this table... and some coffee would be nice.

**CLAUDE:** OK.

**BROOKS:** *(To ETHEL.)* I told you this was a bad idea.

**ETHEL:** Now, now, dear. I'm certain he's trying his best.

**BROOKS:** Trying his best to be annoying!

*CLAUDE will return with two sets of silver, along with flyswatters, all wrapped in soiled napkins.*

**BROOKS:** *(Taking out the flyswatter and holding it up.)* What is this!?

**ETHEL:** *(Taking hers out; happily.)* Oh! I got one, too!

**BROOKS:** Waiter! There a flyswatter on my table!

**CLAUDE:** At least it's not in your soup.

**BROOKS:** Why is this here at all?!

**CLAUDE:** It's for the faster ones. *(He stomps an invisible bug.)* You can just use your shoe for the slower ones.

**BROOKS:** That settles it! We're leaving! *(He will start to get up, but ETHEL will touch his hand and gently keep him seated.)*

**ETHEL:** *(Calmly.)* Let's just try to enjoy ourselves.

**BROOKS:** Enjoy ourselves? In this... dump! (*Ferociously swatting at several unseen bugs.*) Comon. (*Once again starting to rise.*) Get your coat! We're leaving!

**ETHEL:** (*Once again gently sitting him back down; calmly.*) At least we can stay long enough to have a cup of coffee. Don't you think that would be nice?

**BROOKS:** No!

**ETHEL:** Just a cup of coffee? (*There is a flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder.*) And besides, dear, if we leave now, we're likely to have to drive in bad weather. A storm's coming, you know. And you know how you don't like to drive in bad weather.

**BROOKS:** Oh! Oh, alright. (*Agitated, calling to CLAUDE.*) Excuse me, *waiter*, but where's my coffee?

**CLAUDE:** (*Snapping back to reality.*) It's in the pot.

**BROOKS:** Why isn't it in my cup?

**CLAUDE:** Oh. OK.

*CLAUDE picks up the coffee pot and crosses to their table, where he will produce cups, saucers, and spoons from various pockets.*

**CLAUDE:** (*While reaching inside of his jacket.*) Would you like some cream?

**BROOKS:** No! You know, when I come to a fine restaurant, I don't expect to have to wait on my coffee. (*He takes a drink and immediately spits it back into the cup.*) This is cold!

**CLAUDE:** What? You want it hot?

**BROOKS:** Of course I want it hot!

**CLAUDE:** Oh. Then you're going to have to wait.

*CLAUDE takes BROOKS' coffee cup, pours it back into the pot, and then crosses over to the coffee machine.*

**CLAUDE:** (*Calling across the room.*) It shouldn't take too long.

**BROOKS:** (*Rising.*) That's it! I demand to speak to the manager!

*BATESWOOD will start to cross toward BROOKS just as RILEY, CANTWELL, MELISSA, and BILL enter DR. CANTWELL will be carrying a rolled up banner.*

**BATESWOOD:** *(After a moment's indecision; to BROOKS.)* I'll be right with you. *(To the GHOSTIES.)* Welcome to the Hawthorne. Will you have your usual seats?

**RILEY:** Please.

**CANTWELL:** Yes, please.

**RILEY:** I believe my please was sufficient.

**CANTWELL:** Politeness should have no limits.

**RILEY:** But my patience certainly does.

**MELISSA:** *(Shrill.)* Haven't I warned you two about fighting? Haven't I?!

**RILEY and CANTWELL:** *(Contrite; with eyes downcast.)* Yes, Miss Wooten.

**MELISSA:** OK, then! And let me warn the both of you! If this happens again, I'll be having a little chat with your mothers. And I don't think either of you want that!

**RILEY and CANTWELL:** No, Miss Wooten.

*BATESWOOD will motion toward their table, which is UR of the BROOKSES, where they will all sit.*

**CLAUDE:** *(After putting on his reading glasses and closely inspecting a fork; making a general announcement.)* Hey, do me a favor. Would you guys check to make sure your forks are clean? *(Looking again at his own fork, then taking off his glasses.)* Oh, wait. Never mind. It wasn't the fork. It was just my glasses. *(Beat.)* You know, though, I'd probably check just the same.

**BROOKS:** *(Furious, bolts from his chair and crosses to BATESWOOD.)* Just what kind of restaurant are you running here?

**BATESWOOD:** We tend to cater to a... more specialized clientele.

**BROOKS:** That is not what I meant! *(He will turn and stomp back to his table.)* Comon! We're leaving!

**ETHEL:** *(As always, calm.)* But dear, you promised. And besides, we haven't even had a chance to look at a menu. *(BROOKS will sit down in a huff; after a beat.)* Please, dear. Can't you just try to relax? Maybe if you ordered something to eat. Maybe you can get some of those little sausages that come in a can that you are so fond of.

**BROOKS:** *(Not relaxing.)* Waiter!

**CLAUDE:** *(Crossing to their table.)* You can call me Claude.

**BROOKS:** No, I can't.

**BROOKS:** Now if it wouldn't be too much trouble, can you bring me a menu?

**CLAUDE:** Why?

**BROOKS:** Why? Don't be absurd.

**CLAUDE:** Oh. OK.

**BROOKS:** You must be the worst waiter in the world!

**CLAUDE:** At least I'm consistent.

**BROOKS:** Now go get us a menu!

**CLAUDE:** Oh. OK. I'll go see if I can find some.

**BROOKS:** You mean to tell me you don't even know where your menus are?

**CLAUDE:** I'm sure we've got some somewhere.

**BROOKS:** How can you run a restaurant without menus?

**CLAUDE:** Nobody comes here to eat... well, the people who know better.

**BROOKS:** Then what do they come here for?

**CLAUDE:** It's mostly to see the ghosts.

*All the GHOSTIES will suddenly look about, as if they may have missed the ghosts. CLAUDE will go back to his station and then into the kitchen looking for some menus*

**BROOKS:** *(To ETHEL.)* Did he say ghosts?

**ETHEL:** Yes, dear. I believe he did.

**BROOKS:** *(Once again storming from his chair and crossing over to BATESWOOD.)* What's this about ghosts?

Over the next few lines, RILEY and CANTWELL will be pinning up a rather large banner on the back wall that says, "Welcome Ghost's!" MELISSA will notice the incorrect apostrophe and angrily take out her red marker, circle it, and write "D-" on the banner. BROOKS will not notice that they are hanging the banner until it is up.

**BATESWOOD:** *(Definitely stalling.)* Who told you there are ghosts here?

**BROOKS:** The useless waiter did, that's who!

**BATESWOOD:** Well, I'm sure you just misunderstood him. Perhaps he was just saying "toast."

**BROOKS:** My hearing is fine! *(Noticing the banner.)* And what about that?!

**BATESWOOD:** Maybe they're excited about the toast. Besides, how can you trust anybody who doesn't know how to use an apostrophe?

**BROOKS:** What are you trying to pull over on me? Now is this hotel haunted... *(The GHOSTIES will all raise their hands in agreement, which BROOKS will not see.)* ...or is it not? *(The GHOSTIES will all just as quickly lower their hands.)*

**BATESWOOD:** I can assure you, sir, this hotel is not haunted... *(Aside.)* usually.

**BROOKS:** What did you say?

**BATESWOOD:** When?

**BROOKS:** Just now! Oh! Never mind! I've had enough of you and your crummy hotel! *(Storming back to his table.)* Come on, dear. Grab your coat. We're leaving.

**ETHEL:** I'm sorry, dear, but I don't believe so.

**BROOKS:** *(Shocked.)* Excuse me?

**ETHEL:** *(Firm, but calm.)* We're staying.

**BROOKS:** Oh, no, we're not! Now grab your coat. We're leaving this instant!

**ETHEL:** Oh, no, dear. You promised me a night out, and we're going to have a night out. *(Standing up and grabbing him by the tie; quite stern.)* Now sit back down in that chair and shut up! *(She'll push him back into his chair; once again calm, as she sits.)* Thank you.

**BROOKS:** *(After a moment; shocked.)* You've...You've never spoken that way to me before.

**ETHEL:** And I've never hit you over the head with a casserole dish, either, but I'm going to have my night out. You've been promising to take me out for the last 24 years, and now that we're finally out, we're staying. So, dear, just get comfortable... if you ever want to be comfortable again.

*Enter URI URKINOV.*

**BATESWOOD:** *(To URI.)* Welcome to the Hawthorne Hotel and Restaurant.

**URI:** *(With really bad Russian accent.)* I have ray-ser-vay-shun for, how you say? Bob Smith?

**BATESWOOD:** *(Checking his list.)* Yes. This way please.

*BATESWOOD will take him to the open table L of the BROOKSES, and when he gets back to his station, DELBERT will already be there waiting for him.*

**DELBERT:** My name is Bob Smith. I have a reservation for seven.

**BATESWOOD:** Haven't we already done this?

**DELBERT:** Done what?

**BATESWOOD:** *(Checking his list.)* Oh, I'm sorry. This way, please.

*BATESWOOD will lead him to URI'S table, where he will offer him the seat across from URI.*

**DELBERT:** Nothing personal, but I would prefer a table to myself.

**URI:** Nothing personal, but so myself would too.

**BATESWOOD:** I'm sorry, but we're expecting a full house tonight. I'm afraid we have no other choice but for you to share a table. Besides, since you both have the same name, I didn't think you'd notice the difference.

*Reluctantly, DELBERT will sit while BATESWOOD returns to his station.*

**URI:** Good evening. My name is Bob Smith. I come from... how you say... Too-Peck-Ah, Kan-Saw.

**DELBERT:** Topeka, Kansas?

**URI:** Quite possibly. I am old man.

**DELBERT:** I don't know what being old has to do with where you're from.

**URI:** Then you never been to Too-Peak-Ah.

**DELBERT:** You know, that's quite a coincidence. My name is Bob Smith, too. I'm an investigative reporter from the Crane Chronicle. I'm sure you've heard of it. A very influential newspaper in the Midwest.

**URI:** And this thing you work for...how you say?...newspaper? What is this?

**DELBERT:** You know...the written word? We cater to a very specialized demographic.

**URI:** Oh?

**DELBERT:** Yes. The literate. (*Suspicious.*) So, tell, me... *Uri...* have you heard any good jokes lately?

**URI:** Jokes?

**DELBERT:** You know... A joke. Comedy. A set up with a punch line.

**URI:** I may have heard one on bus coming over.

**DELBERT:** Why don't you share it? It'll give us something to do while we wait.

**URI:** OK. Let me remember. Yes. Someone knocks twice on entry way two times.

**DELBERT:** What?

**URI:** I believe it go... Knock knock...

**EVERYBODY:** Who's there!

**DELBERT:** Wait a minute! I know you! Your name's not Bob Smith. You're Uri Urkinov. You're a joke writer.

**URI:** No. That not how goes joke.

**DELBERT:** You're one of the worst joke writers in the world.

**URI:** (*Starting to lose accent.*) That not true!

**DELBERT:** Which isn't true?

**URI:** Am I only limited to one?

**DELBERT:** I know it's you! I saw you doing standup at the Grin Club in Des Moines. I was there the first time you told your fish joke. So tell us, Uri, what does a fish say when it runs into a cement wall?

**URI:** *(Completely dropping the Russian accent and picking up one better suited for Vaudeville.)* I still say, "Hydroelectric Generating Plant" is funnier.

**DELBERT:** So you admit it! You really are Uri Urkinov!

**URI:** Yeah, kid. So what?

**DELBERT:** You, sir, must have the worst standup routine I have ever seen.

**URI:** Sure. Easy for you to say. But you're not up there on that stage night after night... or are you?

**DELBERT:** What? Me? No. As I told you. My name's John Smith. And I'm a reporter.

**URI:** I thought you said your name was Bob Smith.

**DELBERT:** You must be thinking of my brother.

**URI:** So I must. But speaking of family, I'll have you know I've been in the big times. I know what it's like at the top. Jay Leno once told one of my jokes on the air.

**DELBERT:** Oh? Which joke was that?

**URI:** Mind you, it wasn't my whole joke. They changed it around some...but, son, that's how the business works.

**DELBERT:** What was the joke?

**URI:** A duck with no bill walks into a plastic surgeon's office and says...

**DELBERT:** Wait a second. How can a duck without a bill talk?

**URI:** It doesn't matter. He just can.

**DELBERT:** You just can't "Just can."

**URI:** It doesn't matter. It's a joke, already.

**DELBERT:** The jury's still out on whether it's a joke or not.

**URI:** Do you wanna hear the joke or not? OK, then. A duck with no bill walks into a plastic surgeon's office and says, "Do you have same day service." And the receptionist says, "No." "That's OK," says the duck. "You can bill me later."

**DELBERT:** That's... that's awful! No wonder Leno changed it.

**URI:** And what makes you the critic?

**DELBERT:** I don't need to be a critic to know a bad joke when I hear one. At least it wasn't the fish joke.

**URI:** So tell me, Mr. Einstein, when did you become the genius?

**DELBERT:** What do you mean?

**URI:** I mean, how is it you know so much about my career?

**DELBERT:** OK. First of all, my name's not Bob Smith.

**EVERYBODY:** No kidding!

**DELBERT:** My name is Delbert Dinwiddie.

**URI:** By choice?

**DELBERT:** Of course by choice. Do you think I'm going to trust my name to two complete strangers?

**URI:** And who would that be?

**DELBERT:** My parents. Well, they were complete strangers to me when they named me. And I know about you, *sir*, because I, too, am a joke writer.

**URI:** So the newspaper job was just a joke?

**DELBERT:** No. I really am a reporter. It's the newspaper that's a joke.

**URI:** That would depend on what kind of paper.

**DELBERT:** We'll serve them any way you like.

**URI:** I'd like mine served with humour.

**DELBERT:** You wouldn't know humour if it bounced in on a pogo stick.

**URI:** Oh, trying to play possum!

**DELBERT:** Enough of this small talk. So what brings you here... *Uri...* to the Hawthorne Hotel?

**URI:** *(There is thunder and lightning; slipping back into Russian accent.)* It stormy night. So I stop to get out of weather.

**DELBERT:** Which accent is the real you?

**URI:** *(Back to Vaudevillian.)* Whichever one pays better.

**DELBERT:** I know why you're here! You're here to steal the joke!

**URI:** What joke?

**DELBERT:** Oh! Don't tell me you don't know about the joke. Don't tell me you don't know the story of this hotel!

*BROOKS will scoot a little closer to URI and DELBERT'S table, trying to act like he's not listening in.*

**DELBERT:** This hotel used to be run by a Mr. Cavendish. And he, too, was a joke writer. An exceptionally bad joke writer...

**URI:** Worse than you?

**DELBERT:** Much. Every night he would stand up at that stand...  
(*Pointing at BATESWOOD.*)

*Startled, BATESWOOD will try to hide behind his reservation list.*

**DELBERT:** ...and Cavendish would write jokes. And every time he sent off a joke, it would come back... with postage due. Much like you, nobody wanted to hear his jokes.

**URI:** Hey!

**DELBERT:** But then, on this very night, seventeen years ago, four salesmen – each selling something more bizarre than the previous one – all checked into the hotel at the same time. It was the perfect set up for the perfect joke. It was the joke that would finally bring fame to Mr. Cavendish, and he knew it. Only thing was... he had nothing. Nothing at all. Certainly you can understand what that's like.

**URI:** Hey!

**DELBERT:** Cavendish had the perfect joke, but he couldn't come up with the punch line. They say the disappointment drove him mad. Some say he snapped and killed them all.

**BROOKS:** That's terrible!

**DELBERT:** (*After a beat; standing, with increasing theatrics; everybody is listening, and he loves an audience.*) It would've been terrible if he had. But he hadn't! The truth is, each of the four salesmen went his separate way, but before the year was out, they all were dead. Dead! And nobody knows why, except, perhaps, for all of their relatives. But that doesn't make it any less of a mystery to us. Now, every year... on this very night... all those ghosts return to the one place they all had in common... this hotel!

*Thunder and lightning. BROOKS will let out a short scream. ETHEL will be delighted.*

**DELBERT:** They say their souls can't be at rest until somebody finally comes up with the punch line. And that's why they come back here year after year. They're hoping for that punch line. And that's why you're here! You're hoping to steal that punch line!  
(*Sitting.*)

**URI:** What?! I've never stolen a joke in my life!

**DELBERT:** And it shows.

**URI:** Then you tell me, Mr. Joke Writer, what are *you* doing here?

**DELBERT:** Ummm....

**URI:** And you accuse me of wanting to steal a joke! Now that's the funniest thing you've said so far.

**DELBERT:** It's not stealing.

**URI:** Oh? How do you figure.

**DELBERT:** What is a joke? It's a set-up and a punch line. You gotta have both, or you ain't got squat. So the credit goes to the guy who puts them both together. Case closed. Besides, how can you steal a joke from a dead guy?

**BILL:** That would depend on the dead guy.

*Over the next few lines, DELBERT and URI will be silently sizing each other up. Just before the camera crews arrive they will each take out small notepads and pens and begin frantically writing jokes.*

**CLAUDE:** (*While blowing dust off the menus into BROOKS' face.*)  
Good news! I found the menus! Would you like me to give you a few minutes?

**BROOKS:** (*Grabbing CLAUDE'S arm, quite scared.*) Nobody told us this hotel was haunted!

**CLAUDE:** I could tell you now if you would like.

**BROOKS:** No! What I would like... What I would like is not to be in a haunted hotel!

**ETHEL:** Ghosts sound fun!

*Thunder and lightning.*

**CLAUDE:** Ah, don't give it a worry. Nobody's ever died.

*More thunder and lightning.*

**CLAUDE:** Well, except for ghosts. But they got over it.

**BROOKS:** *(To ETHEL.)* Can't we go? Haven't we stayed long enough?

**ETHEL:** On, nonsense. We haven't even eaten yet. Now, Claude, let me see one of those menus. *(After a few moments.)* How's the duck?

**CLAUDE:** *(With order pad and pen poised.)* Oh, he's fine. He headed south just this morning.

**ETHEL:** Well, good for him! So tell me, Claude, how about a steak?

**CLAUDE:** She's asleep out back.

**ETHEL:** Well, we wouldn't want to wake her. What about the fish?

**CLAUDE:** I'll go get my pole!

**BROOKS:** See, dear. They're out of food. We can stop at a drive-in restaurant on the way home.

**ETHEL:** *(Ignoring her husband; to CLAUDE.)* So tell me, dear, what do you have to eat that's not still moving?

**CLAUDE:** Well... we've got a toaster...

**ETHEL:** Wonderful. Then we'll have some toast. And what do you have to drink?

**CLAUDE:** We have water.

**ETHEL:** Splendid!

**CLAUDE:** *(While writing.)* With or without?

**ETHEL:** With or without what, dear?

**CLAUDE:** Ice.

**ETHEL:** Oh, I'll take mine with ice... and he will, too.

**CLAUDE:** Coming right up! *(He turns smartly and exits into the kitchen.)*

**ETHEL:** There, now. Isn't this pleasant?

*The CABLE CREW – ANGELICA, MCCOY, and BRANT – enter R. BRANT will be wheeling in his equipment. He will leave his equipment at the table UL. MCCOY will have her hand on ANGELICA, who will be on her cell phone and tends to walk into things if she is not guided.*

**MCCOY:** *(Motioning for BRANT and his camera to come DC.)* Here. *(She will then guide ANGELICA UC.)* OK. On you in three...

**ANGELICA:** Do you mind? I'm on the phone!

*BATESWOOD will start to cross to MCCOY. After all there's a bottom to be gotten to, but MCCOY will hold up her hand to signal for him to stop. After all, there's tape to be shot.*

**MCCOY:** Three, Two, One.

**ANGELICA:** *(Immediately becoming professional.)* This is Angelica Doubt, and we're coming to you live with another episode of "Ghosts Gone Wild..."

**MCCOY:** Stop. Cut. Whatever. I'm sorry. But we can't use that title.

**ANGELICA:** What? Why?

**MCCOY:** Because at least two other networks will sue us if we do. As it is, any title with the word "Ghost" in it has already been taken. And besides, if we use that title, you're really going to tick off a lot of women.

**ANGELICA:** Well, I'm a woman, and I don't care.

**MCCOY:** I don't believe that helps your argument.

**ANGELICA:** So what is the title?

**MCCOY:** "Suspicious Sightings."

**ANGELICA:** "Suspicious Sightings"? Who came up with that stupid title?

**MCCOY:** I did.

**ANGELICA:** Oh. Well... I suppose you did the best you could.

**BATESWOOD:** Excuse me!

**MCCOY:** How can I help you?

**BATESWOOD:** You can start by telling me what you're doing here!

**MCCOY:** You can't tell? We're filming. *(To Angelica.)* OK... on you in three... two... one...

*BATESWOOD, realizing he's about to be in the picture, will quickly step aside, which will only annoy him that much more.*

**ANGELICA:** Just as the swallows return to Punxsutawney and the Groundhog returns to Capistrano, we're here once again, live at the Hawthorne motel....

**BATESWOOD:** It's a hotel!

**ANGELICA:** *(She will stop and stare at BATESWOOD in annoyance.)* Do you mind? *(She will then quickly compose herself.)* OK... On me in three... two... one... Just as the same old stuff keeps happening year after year, we're here once again, live at the Hawthorne *(With much too much emphasis.)* hotel, where, for the past 17 years, on this very night, people have claimed to have seen the ghosts of four pasty passed on patrons. Only this year when they show, you'll be there, too. *(Holding her pose for a beat; to MCCOY.)* So, what do you think? A bit much on the alliterations?

**MCCOY:** Who's to say? Um... should we really be saying that we're broadcasting live from here? I mean, it's probably going to be five weeks before it's broadcast... if at all.

**ANGELICA:** I never said we we're broadcasting live. I said I was live right now, which I am. So how can that be wrong? Geez! Where did they train you?

**MCCOY:** Harvard.

*When BATESWOOD cuts in, BRANT will drift off back to his table, where he will begin taking various items out of boxes, and ANGELICA will drift off Left and become engrossed in her phone.*

**BATESWOOD:** Excuse me, but nobody told me that there was going to be a camera crew here tonight!

**MCCOY:** Didn't anybody from the network call you?

**BATESWOOD:** Isn't that what I just said? No!

**MCCOY:** *(Making a note on her clipboard.)* I'll make sure somebody from the station gives you a call in the morning.

**BATESWOOD:** A lot of good that's going to do me now! Now I want you to leave!

**MCCOY:** And I can appreciate that. But here's the thing. We were sent here to film a show, so we're going to film a show. Now we can either film inside or out. You can either get good publicity, or bad.

**BATESWOOD:** Well... I don't know...

**MCCOY:** *(Handing BATESWOOD a business card.)* Look. Here's my card. If you have any questions, call that number and leave a message. In the meantime, enjoy the free publicity.

*BATESWOOD will take the card, then in disgust throw it on the ground, and in a huff return to his station.*

**MCCOY:** *(To ANGELICA and BRANT.)* Now are we filming here or what?

**BRANT:** *(Looking up.)* What?

*Just then ANGELICA'S cell phone rings, loudly and obnoxiously.*

**ANGELICA:** *(Talking on the phone, with the appropriate pauses.)*  
What? When? What? Listen, Sid, you know I don't do commercials, and especially not commercials with children. Now if that's the best you can do, I'm getting a new agent. Sid? Don't you dare put me on hold! Sid! Sid?

*On the above lines GRANT GRANITE has entered with MURPHY, his cameraperson and they cross to center.*

**ETHEL:** Look, dear. It's Grant Granite. He's on TV.

*BROOKS will let out a short scream and cover his head with his menu.*

**GRANT:** *(Poised, professional, favoring his better side, as always.)*  
Hi. Thanks for watching. *(Immediately turning on MURPHY; trying to keep his raised voice low.)* Listen! If you don't think I get it, well buddy, you're wrong!

**MURPHY:** I'm sorry, but I'm just the guy they sent with the camera.

**GRANT:** I've been at this station eight years. Eight years! And in that time I've won two Platinum Pansies and have been nominated five times for the Mary Ann Joblonski Excellence in Broadcasting Award. I've paid my dues. And they assign me to... this hick fest... *(He notices that everybody has been listening to everything he's saying; faking a laugh and quickly turning away from the others; paranoid.)* They're planning on getting rid of me, aren't they?

**MURPHY:** Really, I'm just the camera guy.

**GRANT:** I know my ratings are low. They've always been low. Ratings don't mean that much. I've got my loyal viewers... only... fewer. But they still depend on me. (*Angry.*) Well you can let them know! I'm not leaving without a fight! (*Desperate.*) But maybe it would be best to just resign. Cut my losses. Or not. They say I'm too indecisive. And maybe I am. That doesn't make me a bad newsman, does it? What do you think I should do?

**MURPHY:** Um... we could, maybe... do our jobs?

**GRANT:** Do you really think that will work?

**MURPHY:** It's got a better chance than not doing our jobs.

**GRANT:** Maybe you're right.

**MURPHY:** If I may, sir...

**GRANT:** Yes?

**MURPHY:** We have a chance tonight to do something that has never been done before. We have a chance to actually see ghosts. Real ghosts. We have a chance to make contact with the dead. Think about that. This could be one of the biggest news stories of all time. We'll have undeniable proof that there is an afterlife.

**GRANT:** You see? That's what I've been trying to tell you. They give me a story about dead people. Dead people are yesterday's news. I knew it! They're going to let me go!

**BATESWOOD:** Excuse me! But who are you?

**GRANT:** Who am I? Don't you know? I thought everybody knew who I was. Winner of two Antennas of Excellence awards – and mind you, that third one should've been mine, and people still don't know who I am. (*Snapping into his network voice.*) I'm Grant Granite. Channel Four News. Thanks for watching.

**BATESWOOD:** I'm Boyton Bateswood. This is my hotel. And why are you here?

**MURPHY:** (*Stepping forward while unfolding a piece of paper.*) Hi. We're from Channel Four News. Our dispatcher called this afternoon about our coming out here tonight. We spoke to a Mr... Claude, and he said it would be fine if we did. Here's the invoice.

**BATESWOOD:** I should've known. Well, I intend to get to the bottom of this!

**MURPHY:** (*As BATESWOOD is walking briskly away toward the kitchen.*) Um... OK.

**CLAUDE:** *(Entering from the kitchen with a loaf of bread; announcing; happily.)* I found the bread!

*Just as CLAUDE makes his announcement, BATESWOOD will plow into him, knocking him down where he will land on the bread, smashing it flat.*

**CLAUDE:** *(Getting up and inspecting the loaf of bread; after a beat.)*  
Never mind.

*CLAUDE will then exit back through the kitchen and BATESWOOD will return to his perch.*

**BATESWOOD:** *(To GRANT and MURPHY as he's crossing.)* Oh!  
Just don't bother the guests!

**MCCOY:** *(Stepping up to GRANT and MURPHY.)* Excuse me?  
What are you doing here?

**MURPHY:** We're from Channel Four. We're doing a piece for the news.

**MCCOY:** No, you're not.

**MURPHY:** I have an invoice...

**MCCOY:** But we were here first!

**GRANT:** But I have awards. I'm a four-time winner of the Regional News Outstanding Broadcast Award, and I've been voted the most trusted newsman in the entire tri-state region for the last six months in a row, eight if you don't count February. Strangers know who I am! See? *(Pointing at BROOKS.)* These people know who I am. *(BROOKS will once again scream.)*

**MCCOY:** What? What does that have to do with... with stealing somebody else's story?

**GRANT:** Stealing? But we have an invoice...

**MCCOY:** I don't care if you have an invoice.

**GRANT:** We'll stay out of your way. We promise. *(To MURPHY.)*  
Won't we?

**MURPHY:** I'm just the guy with the camera.

**GRANT:** See, that guy says it's OK.

**MURPHY:** My name's Murphy.

**MCCOY:** Oh... Whatever. I'll stay out of your way, and you can stay out of my way. Besides, do you really think it's going to make a difference?

**GRANT:** What? If we stay out of each other's way?

**MCCOY:** No. If we're here at all. I've read the background information. Four unexcitable ghosts that everybody can see, but nobody can ever get a picture of...

**BRANT:** Yet...

**MCCOY:** For seventeen years these ghosts have been appearing at this flea bag hotel...

**BATESWOOD:** Hey!

**MCCOY:** ...and in all that time, never once has anybody gotten them on film. Sure, there's always plenty of folks who swear to having seen the ghosts. But let me tell you: Nobody cares how many witnesses you have if you don't get it on film.

**GRANT:** I knew it! I just knew it! I'm a has-been. I'm yesterday's news!

*MURPHY will drift over to where BRANT is, and without needing to talk, they will shake each other's hand. BRANT will then continue setting up his stuff while quietly explaining some of the various gadgets to MURPHY.*

**GRANT:** *(Loudly on his cell phone; with the appropriate pauses.)* Listen, you're my agent. I need you to find me something. I'm desperate! I'll take anything. Anything! Pretty please? You want me to do an adult diaper commercial? I know that's not what they're called, but that's what they are! No! What? Hello? *(He will then frantically redial his phone.)*

*CLAUDE will come out of the kitchen while putting on his jacket, crossing toward BATESWOOD and the exit.*

**BATESWOOD:** Where are you going?

**CLAUDE:** To get some bread.

**BATESWOOD:** What?

**CLAUDE:** Bread. You know, they make it with flour. It comes in loaves. It's made by loafers.

**BATESWOOD:** I know what bread is!

**CLAUDE:** That's good. I mean, if you didn't know what bread was, that would be weird, especially since you own a restaurant.

**BATESWOOD:** Why are you going to get bread you... You malingerer.

**CLAUDE:** *(Hooking a thumb at the BROOKSES.)* Because they ordered toast. *(Taking out his order pad and writing on it.)*

**BATESWOOD:** What are you doing now?

**CLAUDE:** I'm making a note to be offended later, when I'll have a little more time.

**BATESWOOD:** Offended? For what?

**CLAUDE:** For calling me a maling-ger-er.

**BATESWOOD:** Oh! You don't even know what it means!

**CLAUDE:** That still doesn't mean it's not offensive. *(After a beat.)* How do you spell that?

**BATESWOOD:** Get out of here! And don't come back until you have some bread!

**CLAUDE:** *(As he is writing.)* "...and – stop – yelling." Got it!

*CLAUDE exits through the crowd as URI and DELBERT both stand, obviously preparing to perform. DELBERT will graciously offer to let URI go first, which URI will respond to with a bow.*

**URI:** What do you get if you cross a cigarette and soccer ball?

**DELBERT:** *(Almost immediately.)* You get your butt kicked. What do you get when you cross a groundhog and a woodchuck?

**URI:** *(Very quickly, too.)* Ground chuck. What do you get when you cross a puppy and a cantaloupe?

**DELBERT:** You get a melancholy baby. What do you get when you cross a goat, a hummingbird, and an insect?

**URI:** *(Ditto.)* Bah Humbug.

*They both realize they're out of jokes... for now. ETHEL will politely clap, and all the GHOSTIES will silently hold up score cards. Both URI and DELBERT will then sit down and hurriedly begin writing in their notebooks, occasionally trying to cheat off the other. During the above, OOGA enters carrying a bowling ball case. She will walk past BATESWOOD and place her case heavily on the empty table DR, then she will cross back to BATESWOOD.*

**OOGA:** *(With heavy accent – think Russian Gypsy.)* Ooga have reservation for séance at 8:00ish, heavy on -ish.

**BATESWOOD:** Oh, thank goodness you're here! I was beginning to think you weren't going to show.

**OOGA:** When Ooga shows, Ooga shows.

**BATESWOOD:** Now... you did promise me that you can get rid of these ghosts once and for all... right?

**OOGA:** Did you pay with cash?

**BATESWOOD:** Why, no. I sent a check. It's... in the mail.

**OOGA:** Then Ooga wait it for to clear.

**BATESWOOD:** But you can get rid of the ghosts... right?

*At the first mention of the GHOSTS, everybody will immediately turn their attention on BATESWOOD.*

**BATESWOOD:** *(Turning away; a bit quieter.)* Right?

**OOGA:** Did Ooga promise to rid of ghost?

**BATESWOOD:** Yes! Yes you did.

**OOGA:** *(A bit surprised.)* Oh.

**BATESWOOD:** Listen! I'm paying you to get these ghosts out of here.

**OOGA:** What wrong with ghost?

**BATESWOOD:** What's wrong?! You try selling a haunted hotel! And as long as it's haunted, I can't get any paying customers!

**OOGA:** Ooga... Ooga will see what Ooga can do.

**BATESWOOD:** What does that mean?

**OOGA:** It means what it means.

**BATESWOOD:** I expect a lot more than that!

*Amazo the Amazingly Amazing will then enter and bound to Down Center. Facing the audience, he will take a Superman pose. After a beat, he will turn and flip his cape dramatically.*

**AMAZO:** *(Announcing.)* I am Amazo, the Amazingly Amazing!

**MCCOY:** Redundantly redundant, I'd say.

**BATESWOOD:** *(Crossing to AMAZO.)* And just who are you?

**AMAZO:** For those of you hard of hearing or slow on the uptake, I am Amazo, the Amazingly Amazing! *(Fanning out a deck of oversized playing cards.)* Pick a card, any card!

**BATESWOOD:** What? Why?

**AMAZO:** Humour me!

**BATESWOOD:** Is that my only choice? *(HE will reluctantly take one.)*

**AMAZO:** My card, sir. *(Beat.)* Get it?

*The GHOSTIES will hold up their score cards – all ones and twos.*

**AMAZO:** *(Unfazed.)* I thought if you had one of my cards it would help you to know who I am.

**BATESWOOD:** What? You're a three of clubs?

*BATESWOOD will throw the card back at AMAZO, who will pick it up off the floor, put it on top of the deck, and then, after a theatrical concentration...*

**AMAZO:** Was your card... *(As he turns the card over.)* ... a three of clubs?

*Thrilled, ETHEL will clap, and AMAZO will take a deep bow.*

**BATESWOOD:** That's the worst trick I have ever seen.

**AMAZO:** I'm just getting warmed up.

**BATESWOOD:** Then tell me, Mister Three of Clubs, why are you here?

**AMAZO:** You stand corrected sir, for I am Amazo, the Amazingly Amazing!

**MCCOY:** Did you think up that name on your own?

**AMAZO:** I had a little help. But that's not important! What is important is why I am here! For I have come to rid this establishment once and for all of its ghosts, goblins, and dearly undeparted.

**OOGA:** Wait just babushka picking minute! You can no cut in!

**AMAZO:** But I am Amazo!

**OOGA:** *(Taking out her contract.)* But Ooga have contract!

**AMAZO:** *(Taking the contract, with a sweep of his hand.)* Behold!  
*(The contract will disappear in a flash.)*

**OOGA:** Behold!

*OOGA will punch AMAZO in the gut, causing him to stagger backwards, causing ETHEL and the GHOSTIES all to politely clap.*

**BATESWOOD:** What's going on here?!

**OOGA:** Ooga thought we had deal.

**BATESWOOD:** And I thought our deal came with a guarantee. Listen! I don't care. You guys work it out. Whoever gets rid of the ghosts gets paid.

**AMAZO:** *(Having gotten his breath and his poise back.)* Then you might as well write me the check right now.

**OOGA:** Ooga thought check written already for Ooga.

**BATESWOOD:** There's my offer. Take it or leave it. Get rid of the ghosts and get a check.

**AMAZO:** The Amazing Amazo would prefer cash.

**BATESWOOD:** You'll take what you get.

**AMAZO:** *(Undaunted.)* A challenge! *(With a flip of his cape, he will bound over to the BROOKES' table, where, with much theatrics, he will take out a short wand and tap it twice on the their table.)* Behold! *(He will then reach under the table and take out an old, beat up suitcase, causing ETHEL to squeal in delight.)*

**OOGA:** You not fool nobody, you know. You hid that before earlier.

**AMAZO:** *(With a wave of his hand.)* Behold! *(The suitcase's folding legs will drop down, making a stand, which ETHEL will gleefully applaud.)*

**OOGA:** So! You dare challenge Ooga! *(Blowing dust on AMAZO.)*

**AMAZO:** *(Coughing.)* What was that?

**OOGA:** Pocket lint.

*OOGA will then return to her table, take her bowling ball out, and begin polishing it with a purpose. AMAZO will set up camp in the UL corner of the stage.*

**GRANT:** *(Talking on the phone.)* Listen, Sid. Seriously. What have you got for me? No funeral homes. No denture cream. Give me something that suits my talents. The Carson Casket Company?! I told you! No funeral homes! Listen! You're my agent! It's your job to find me work. No! Please don't put me on hold! Sid! Sid? *(He will immediately start redialing.)*

**ANGELICA:** *(Also on the phone.)* Sid? Angelica. Angelica Doubt! Listen, Sid, if the Ghost Channel is the best you can do, I'm getting me a different agent. And no animals! Do you hear me? What? Since when is a gorilla not an animal?! No! Don't you dare put me on hold!

*Trying to angrily slam down the receiver on a cell phone really doesn't work, but ANGELICA will try just the same, and then in a huff stomp out to Center Stage. MCCOY, who has gathered up BRANT, will cross to ANGELICA. MURPHY, unnoticed by MCCOY, will follow.*

**MCCOY:** Listen guys...

**ANGELICA:** What?!

**MCCOY:** *(Noticing MURPHY.)* Get out of here!

**ANGELICA:** Fine!

**MCCOY:** *(Stopping her; to ANGELICA.)* You stay. *(To MURPHY.)* You go.

*Downcast, MURPHY will go back over to where BRANT was setting up his equipment to patiently wait.*

**MCCOY:** Listen guys, we need to take this seriously.

**ANGELICA:** Are you serious?

**MCCOY:** We might be able to get some pretty good stuff tonight.

**BRANT:** You have no idea.

**MCCOY:** Listen, I want you guys to work the crowd.

**ANGELICA:** What?

**MCCOY:** You know... get to know the customers, the staff... the...

**AMAZO:** *(Stepping forward.)* Behold! *(He then will throw a flash bomb on the floor, which is harmless, but a really nice effect.)*

**MCCOY:** ...weirdoes...

*During the following lines BRANT will return to the table down right, where he and MURPHY will quietly continue assembling various components from the cases he originally brought in.*

**ANGELICA:** Why?

**MCCOY:** So we can play the human interest angle.

**ANGELICA:** Human interest? What's that?

**MCCOY:** It's where you pretend to be interested in anybody but yourself.

**ANGELICA:** Oh. *(Beat.)* Why?

**MCCOY:** Listen. You need to work the crowd in case the whole ghost thing turns out to be a bust. Then at least we'll have something to turn in.

**ANGELICA:** Do you really think it's necessary?

**MCCOY:** Yes. As your director, I would say... yes. Yes, I do. Let's try to find out what kind of people go to such a thing as this. What kind of people would continue to work here. Use your charm. Use your style. Wow them with your beauty. Impress them with your... beauty.

**ANGELICA:** I won't have to touch them or anything, will I?

**MCCOY:** You'll be fine. I'll be right behind you.

**ANGELICA:** Well... OK...

**MCCOY:** Good. OK, Brant... Brant? What are you doing back over there?

**BRANT:** I was waiting on you.

**MCCOY:** Well I need you over here!

**BRANT:** OK. I'll be there in a minute.

**MCCOY:** *(Crossing to BRANT.)* What are you doing?

**BRANT:** Listen, McCoy, I don't intend to be unemployed again. And if we don't get a picture of real ghosts... tonight... that's just what we're going to be. Unemployed. *(Indicating ANGELICA.)* And that twidget's not got any bright ideas. And that's why I brought in these.

**MCCOY:** What are... those?

**BRANT:** This... this is an Electromagnetic X-Ray Imaging Electron Pulsometer... or it will be. And if that fails, then I've always got my Relative Doppler Thermographer. These little babies are going to allow us to get the first picture of a ghost ever. And that, my friend, is job security.

**MCCOY:** *(After a moment's indecision.)* Well... Hurry up!

*MCCOY will cross to ANGELICA.*

**BRANT:** *(To MURPHY.)* Prepare to be impressed.

**MURPHY:** You know, I've always wondered. How do you do that?

**BRANT:** Take a cleansing breath... *(They both will.)* ...now get real loose... *(They will both shake out their arms and legs and roll their heads around on their shoulders.)* ...now get up on the balls of your feet... *(They will.)* ...and concentrate... *(They will both stare ahead intently at nothing; after a beat, BRANT will relax, and MURPHY will follow suit.)* There. I suppose there are other ways to prepare to be impressed, but that works for me.

**MURPHY:** Yeah. That was pretty nice. So... when am I going to be impressed?

**BRANT:** Oh, that won't be until later. I just wanted you to be prepared.

**MCCOY:** *(To ANGELICA, giving her a gentle shove in the direction of DELBERT and URI.)* Here. We'll interview these guys first...

*ANGELICA will take a tentative step toward URI and DELBERT, just as they bound to their feet. She will let out a short shriek and retreat back to MCCOY. URI will gesture for DELBERT to begin, but DELBERT will instead gesture for URI to take the honors, to which URI will politely bow.*

**URI:** What's a dog's favorite part of a house? *(Beat.)* The roof.

**DELBERT:** That makes no sense. Why would a dog be on the roof?

**URI:** That doesn't matter.

**DELBERT:** Doesn't matter? Of course it matters!

**URI:** No. You see, that's what a dog says... "Roof."

**DELBERT:** Dogs don't go, "Roof." Dogs go (*Very shrill and loud.*),  
"Yap Yap Yap Yap Yap!"

**URI:** You need a new dog.

**DELBERT:** You're telling me.

**URI:** OK, then, why do dogs like trees.

**DELBERT:** Hey! This is a family show!

**URI:** No! Not that. It's because they both "bark."

**DELBERT:** Trees don't bark.

**URI:** They have bark.

**DELBERT:** So? That's not the same as going, "Bark."

**URI:** You're just not trying.

**DELBERT:** I think you're the one not trying.

**URI:** Then you try!

**DELBERT:** Very well! Why is being on a sinking ship better than being in the desert? (*Beat.*) Because at least you have running water.

**URI:** Why is that funny? You die either way.

**DELBERT:** You're killing me here. OK. Did you hear about the unconscious grammarian? (*Beat.*) She was in a comma!

**URI:** I'd rather be in a coma than hear that joke again.

**DELBERT:** At least it's a joke!

**URI:** Oh? You want a joke? (*Conversational.*) You know, Delbert, frogs are fascinating. I find them ribbiting.

**DELBERT:** So it's frog jokes, eh? Mind if I hop in? So tell me, Uri, did you hear of the frog that was afraid of water? (*Beat.*) He would only go in knee deep.

**URI:** Did you hear about the frog who went to the restaurant? He yelled, "Waiter! There's no flies in my soup!"

**DELBERT:** I can see how that could bug him. But at least he didn't order the frog legs. And speaking of frog legs, did you hear about the frog who caught his wife with a Prince? He was hopping mad.

**URI:** You can depend on it. And speaking of such, do you know why you should you never depend on a frog?

**BOTH:** Because you never know when he will croak!

*ETHEL will politely clap, and all the GHOSTIES will once again silently hold up score cards. Both URI and DELBERT will sit.*

**ANGELICA:** *(After a beat.)* Maybe we shouldn't start there...

**MCCOY:** Good call.

*ANGELICA will look uncertainly at the GHOSTIES.*

**ANGELICA:** *(Trying to whisper, but not fooling anybody.)* What should I do?

**MCCOY:** You ask them questions.

**ANGELICA:** Oh! *(Crossing over to the table.)* Hi, guys. Tell me, do you think this dress makes me look fat?

*They will all hold up score cards, all nines and tens.*

**MCCOY:** *(Cutting in.)* No! You ask them questions about *them*. Not about you! *(To the group.)* So, who are you guys?

**RILEY:** We're Ghosties.

**MCCOY:** What?

**ANGELICA:** How about my shoes?

**MCCOY:** *(To ANGELICA.)* Stop it! *(To RILEY.)* OK. I'll bite. What's a Ghostie?

**CANTWELL:** *(Cutting in.)* It's like a groupie, only for ghosts. Well... really, it's nothing like a groupie... except we show up whenever there are going to be ghosts.

**MCCOY:** You're putting me on?

**ANGELICA:** I'm thinking about getting my hair cut? What do you think?

**MCCOY:** *(To ANGELICA, even more emphatic.)* Stop it! *(To CANTWELL.)* No. Seriously. Are you putting me on?

**RILEY:** *(With theatrics.)* Most certainly, we are not! For ours is a sacred trust. We have seen the ghosts, and now we must continue seeing them!

**CANTWELL:** Give it a rest!

**RILEY:** No. That's pretty much it. We just try to show up everywhere we know that there's going to be a ghost.

**MCCOY:** There are other ghosts?

**CANTWELL:** Most certainly.

**MCCOY:** And you guys... watch them?

**RILEY:** Yes.

**MCCOY:** *(Beat.)* Why?

**BILL:** *(Beat.)* It's something to do.

**MELISSA:** *(Almost sane.)* Especially on nights when we don't bowl.

**RILEY:** You see, we're Sometimers.

**CANTWELL:** That means we go to see the ghosts every time we can.

**RILEY:** That's a rather loose usage of the word "we," if you ask me.

**CANTWELL:** I don't believe I did ask you.

**RILEY:** Then there are the One Timers. Those folks that only go one time...

**CANTWELL:** Which makes sense, what with their name and all. But, really, who rides a roller coaster once?

**MCCOY:** I wouldn't call this a roller coaster.

**CANTWELL:** To hear some of them scream, you'd think it was.

**BILL:** *(Standing up, taking off his do-rag and holding it over his heart.)* And then there was Arnold.

*The others will stand, and along with BILL, face UR and bow their heads in silence for a beat.*

**MCCOY:** *(Finally.)* Who's Arnold?

*They all turn and do the whole bowing routine.*

**MCCOY:** *(A bit annoyed.)* We're wasting tape here. Is it necessary to do that every time you mention Ar... his name?

**BILL:** No I suppose not. It just seems appropriate.

**RILEY:** Arnold was an Everytimer. *(No bowing.)*

**MCCOY:** What happened to ... Him.

**CANTWELL:** *(Matter of fact.)* He died.

**MCCOY:** *(With no real conviction.)* I'm sorry.

**BILL:** Eh... It happens.

**RILEY:** You see, this place is rather mild for where ghosts usually show up.

**CANTWELL:** Usually they prefer some place with a little more action. They seem to be rather fond of parties.

**RILEY:** Truth be known, the only reason we come here at all is because it's close.

**MELISSA:** That, and it's not a bowling night.

**CANTWELL:** Thing is, anybody that parties that much... Well, if they weren't dead to begin with, it would certainly kill 'im.

**RILEY:** And that's what happened to Arnold.

**CANTWELL:** Rumour has it he's been seen haunting a public house outside of Lancaster.

**BILL:** He would've wanted it that way.

**RILEY:** You see, there are places where ghosts just... show up. Not necessarily the same ghosts, mind you, but ghosts just the same. And when they do, we try to be there.

**CANTWELL:** Well, as much as possible.

**RILEY:** For some of us, it's a matter of priority more than others.

**MCCOY:** So this is all you do?

**RILEY:** Oh, heavens no. It would be hard to pay the rent doing this. I'm an accountant. Cantwell's a banker. Melissa teaches Kindergarten...

**MELISSA:** That's Miss Wooten! We *don't* call adults by their first names.

*CANTWELL slightly raises his hand, and MELISSA, who wasn't even directly looking at him, immediately slaps it back down.*

**CANTWELL:** Hey! What was that for?

**MELISSA:** Don't you give me that tone of voice, young man. I know where that hand has been! Now get back to work.

**RILEY:** ...and Bill's a biker.

**MCCOY:** Being a biker is a profession?

**RILEY:** Bill seems to think so.

**MCCOY:** He... he doesn't talk much, does he.

**RILEY:** Oh, he does. But only when there's something worth saying.

**MURPHY:** *(To BRANT.)* If we did that, we'd be out of a job.

**ANGELICA:** *(On the phone.)* I'm not kidding, Sid. You've got to get me out of here. What? Really? What's the part? Why... sure... I'd wear a bathing suit. What?! I have to be in a tub of eels!? I don't care if they won't eat me! No! Hey! You don't put Angelica Doubt on hold! Sid? Sid?

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