

ASHLEY SAVES THE WORLD

**a 10-minute play
by Tom Baum**

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Characters

ASHLEY, 20s-30s

THE DEVIL 30s-40s

(ASHLEY, 20s, *enters, on a cell phone.*)

ASHLEY: (*on phone*) Kayla, I swear to God, I will never go through another night like that again. I've had it, no more bars, no more clubs, and above all no more lawyers. God strike me dead if I ever date a man who dyes his pubic hair again....

(THE DEVIL *enters. He must be invisible, because ASHLEY doesn't see him.*)

ASHLEY:No, I didn't see his pubic hair, he told me about it, talk about too much information...He's with the Cato Institute...We got into this huge argument in the restaurant, he doesn't believe in organized charity, can you believe that? And then he goes, "What's wrong with women today? Why are they all alike?" I'm like, you're the Devil, aren't you? I didn't order dessert, I just walked out, and I never did that before in my entire life. Kayla, what have we done to deserve these horrible guys? God must be punishing us for something, I wish I knew what.

(ASHLEY *now sees THE DEVIL. Tries to let out a scream. No sound comes out.*)

THE DEVIL: Shh. Everything's going to be all right.

ASHLEY: Kayla, call 911. There's a guy in my room. You know my address, right? Kayla? Hello?

(ASHLEY *ends the call, dials 911. Doesn't get a signal. Tries to scream again. No sound.*)

THE DEVIL: Sit down, Ashley, and try to remain calm.

ASHLEY: What do you want? How do you know my name?

THE DEVIL: I know a good deal more than your name.

ASHLEY: What. What do you know.

THE DEVIL: OK, let's see. You were raised on a farm in Omaha, Nebraska. You attended Episcopal convent school, but were expelled after the third bottle of tequila was found in your dorm room. After graduating from Cornell you took a position with Ploughshares, a pacifist organization, where you now work as a "project coordinator."

ASHLEY: OK. So you've been on my Facebook page.

THE DEVIL: You had a very bad date tonight. In general, you've had very poor luck with men. It's not really your fault. The whole system's designed to keep people in circulation. "Meet, mate, multiply, and move on." Wasn't my idea, believe me.

ASHLEY: Whose idea was it?

THE DEVIL: (*gestures heavenward*) His.

ASHLEY: You mean God?

THE DEVIL: You don't believe in God?

ASHLEY: Well, yes. I mean, I've always believed in something bigger than myself.

THE DEVIL: You mean, like the state of North Dakota? Or the Parthenon?

ASHLEY: Who are you? Why are you here?

THE DEVIL: Me? I'm the guy whose name you took in vain before. That Cato jerk? He's only a very minor demon.

ASHLEY: No way. This is a dream, a lucid dream, there's something I'm supposed to do to wake myself up. Wake up, Ashley. Wake up now.

(*Nothing happens.*)

THE DEVIL: It's not a dream, Ashley. It's an opportunity.

ASHLEY: What do you mean, an opportunity.

THE DEVIL: Tell me, Ashley, if you could wish for any three things to come true, what would you wish for?

ASHLEY: I'd like a cell phone that works, so I can call 911.

(*THE DEVIL produces one from his pocket.*)

THE DEVIL: There you go. State of the art. It's got all your data, don't worry. But I wouldn't bother trying to dial out. You're in a temporary dead zone. I won't count that as a wish, by the way. Do you need any further proof? Before we get down to business?

ASHLEY: Ohmigod. I wish I were back in Nebraska.

(SOUND of cows mooing outside the window.)

ASHLEY: This is so weird. What's happening.

THE DEVIL: Just a cheap effect. You're still in your apartment.

ASHLEY: What do you want from me?

THE DEVIL: Didn't I just say? I want you to make three wishes.

ASHLEY: And then you'll go away?

THE DEVIL: If that's what you think you'll want.

ASHLEY: Can that be one of my wishes?

THE DEVIL: Ashley, you're just being difficult. Come on, if you're so eager to get rid of me...first wish.

ASHLEY: I don't know...to live forever?

THE DEVIL: You don't sound too sure.

ASHLEY: I'm not. I just said that to say something.

THE DEVIL: Good, because I can't give you eternal life. Not my department. I'm not a miracle worker. Strictly cause and effect. For example, if you want money, you can say, I want to win the lottery. Of course you could end up winning fifty bucks. Just a word of warning. Try again.

(Pause.)

THE DEVIL: Ashley.

ASHLEY: Yes. Stop hectoring me. OK. I wish my mother didn't have severe arthritis.

THE DEVIL: That's a very selfless wish. You're not trying to kiss up, are you, Ashley?

ASHLEY: No. It's just something I pray for sometimes.

THE DEVIL: He hasn't answered you, has He.

ASHLEY: No, He hasn't.

THE DEVIL: Well, then. It's high time you put your trust in me.

ASHLEY: You mean she's cured? Just like that?

THE DEVIL: Let's get your ducks in a row first. Second wish, please.

ASHLEY: I don't know. I can't think. World peace.

THE DEVIL: Ashley. Don't go all beauty-pageant on me. You can wish for a mideast peace conference to be successful, or Pakistan to give up its nukes, anything along those lines. But be specific.

ASHLEY: What about a man?

THE DEVIL: What about him?

ASHLEY: Can you make a love match?

THE DEVIL: Sure. That's totally within the scope of natural law. Pheromones, oxytocin, hypnotism. Any particular man in mind? Your supervisor at Ploughshares?

ASHLEY: No. He's married.

THE DEVIL: You're a woman of principle. I like that. What's your type?

ASHLEY: I don't have a type.

THE DEVIL: Ashley, everybody has a type.

ASHLEY: All right. Sensitive, caring, funny, nice-looking... with Progressive convictions.

THE DEVIL: (*pointedly*) I can manage that.

ASHLEY: I wasn't describing you.

THE DEVIL: Obviously not. Next wish.

ASHLEY: I'd like global warming to stop. Sorry, OK, I want all the nations of the world to ratify the next treaty on climate change and stick to all its provisions. Is that specific enough?

THE DEVIL: It's perfect. OK, so let's review. Medical science finds a cure for arthritis. The nations of the world cooperate to stem the tide of global warming. And you marry the man of your dreams. Is that roughly it?

ASHLEY: I didn't say man of my dreams.

THE DEVIL: Nevertheless. Are those your final wishes?

ASHLEY: Yes. So what happens now? They all come true?

THE DEVIL: Not yet. Now comes the interesting part. If your mother is cured of arthritis, money will be diverted from other medical research, and an undetermined number of women will die unnecessarily from ovarian cancer.

ASHLEY: Ohmigod.

THE DEVIL: Could be one, could be thousands. Now if the nations of the world cooperate on global warning, the population of wolves in the frozen north will go out of control, resulting in the death of a number of native Canadians.

ASHLEY: That's horrible.

THE DEVIL: And if I make you a love match, all the spiders in the world will be obliterated.

ASHLEY: Spiders?

THE DEVIL: Think about it, Ashley.

ASHLEY: Spiders eat other insects.

THE DEVIL: There you go.

ASHLEY: It could throw off the whole balance of nature.

THE DEVIL: It certainly could.

ASHLEY: Eliminating all the spiders could lead to insect infestations and crop failure and trees disappearing and the ozone layer opening up and drought and famine and war and the whole planet could go under, couldn't it?

THE DEVIL: Eminently possible.

ASHLEY: You know it's possible. That's why you made it a condition. How long have you been doing this?

THE DEVIL: Oh, about 6,000 years, give or take.

ASHLEY: And all that time you've been granting people's wishes.

THE DEVIL: Not people. Just women.

ASHLEY: No way. Why just women?

THE DEVIL: I gave up on men long ago. Their selfishness is incurable. Women are my only hope.

ASHLEY: But if they got what they wished for, terrible things happened.

THE DEVIL: Oh yes. World War II, for example. Mother Teresa asked to be on the cover Time Magazine. And her wish was granted. Posthumously. My little joke. So what's it going to be, Ashley?

ASHLEY: No.

THE DEVIL: I'll make you a deal. You can choose one, two, or three of these wishes.

ASHLEY: None of them.

THE DEVIL: Your mother healed, the planet healed, marital happiness....

ASHLEY: I don't want any of my wishes.

THE DEVIL: Well. That's fantastic! Finally!

ASHLEY: Why. Oh come on. I'm sure it's happened before.

THE DEVIL: Never. Not once.

ASHLEY: No way.

THE DEVIL: Unbelievable, isn't it? Frailty, thy name is woman.

ASHLEY: Your sample must be skewed.

THE DEVIL: Nope. Totally random.

ASHLEY: You just go from one woman to the next.

THE DEVIL: Not necessarily.

ASHLEY: What do you mean?

THE DEVIL: Can't you guess?

ASHLEY: No. I don't know what you're talking about. So I'm the exception, big deal, so leave me alone.

THE DEVIL: You are the exception. You're absolutely unique. And that's why you're getting one of your wishes. No strings attached.

ASHLEY: Which one?

THE DEVIL: Can't you guess?

ASHLEY: No. You're ridiculous.

THE DEVIL: I've been called worse. Marry me, Ashley, and I hang up my pitchfork.

ASHLEY: You're joking.

THE DEVIL: I've never been more serious in my life. Marry me, and the game's over. No more wishes, no more Evil in the world. Marry me, Ashley.

ASHLEY: No. How. I can't marry you.

THE DEVIL: Why not?

ASHLEY: Because it's absurd! How would we live? Where would we live?

THE DEVIL: You know the song *My Blue Heaven*?

ASHLEY: No.

THE DEVIL: Anyway, that's where.

ASHLEY: You mean not on Earth.

THE DEVIL: You'll love it, I guarantee.

(THE DEVIL *gets down on bended knee.*)

THE DEVIL: Ashley, please, marry me.

ASHLEY: No. Get up.

THE DEVIL: You'll get the Nobel Peace Prize.

ASHLEY: No. Impossible.

THE DEVIL: I see. So all these social concerns, all these Progressive ideals, they're hollow, they're empty, they're sheer hypocrisy?

ASHLEY: God's telling me not to.

THE DEVIL: Oh, big surprise. God needs me to make Him look good, that's why He's trying to discourage you. That's why He created me in the first place...then threw me out of Heaven. You know who the real Devil is? He is. I mean, look at the devil's bargain He made me. I find an angel like you, marry her, I get back into Heaven, no more Hell on Earth. But I need your answer, Ashley, because I'm already late for my next appointment, so what's it going to be?

(*No answer.*)

THE DEVIL: All right. I tried. Goodbye, Ashley.

ASHLEY: Stop. Don't go. No more Evil in the world? Really? You can make that happen?

THE DEVIL: So long as God keeps His end of the deal.

ASHLEY: Will He?

THE DEVIL: Only one way to find out.

ASHLEY: When would the wedding take place?

THE DEVIL: The instant we consummate.

ASHLEY: Oh. I see.

THE DEVIL: Well, you didn't expect chastity, did you? From me? Your answer, please, Ashley. The future of humanity hangs in the balance.

(ASHLEY's cell rings. ASHLEY checks the number.)

ASHLEY: Mind if I take this?

DEVIL: Yes, but make it fast.

(ASHLEY starts to undress. THE DEVIL helps.)

ASHLEY: Hi, Kayla....Yeah, sorry, my phone went on the fritz for a while...Listen, amazing news.... I'm getting married....No, I don't think you've met him....(THE DEVIL *shakes his head no*)....Yes, I know it's sudden....Very interesting guy. Kayla, he called me an angel! He thinks I'm unique!... I know, right?...Well, I can't be more specific, but Kayla? I promise you this. You'll never have a bad date again.

(ASHLEY hangs up. THE DEVIL takes her in his arms.)

THE DEVIL: Ashley...you're glorious.

ASHLEY: Well, so are you. In a way.

(They kiss. Blackout. Music rises: the opening strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, which dissolves into a plummy radio voice.)

RADIO VOICE: This is BBC World News. Hurricane Heather, off the North Carolina coast, has been downgraded to a Category One storm....The Federal Drug Administration has approved the universal cancer cure, Fabulax, for over-the-counter distribution... The upcoming bar mitzvah of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be held at Temple B'Nai Jeshurun, Pepper Pike, Ohio, Rabbi Ezra Goldstein presiding....

(Lights up as music rises: *My Blue Heaven*, sung by Fats Domino. ASHLEY and THE DEVIL dance. END OF PLAY.)