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Cast of Characters

SHERMAN, a nerd

TOBY, a bully

MISS GRACE, a young teacher

JOHN

ROGER

TONYA

JESSICA

AMBER

COUNSELOR JONES

LUCIFER, a devil, not necessarily *the* devil

NORA

MRS. PARKER

STEVEN

MRS. BELL

ANNOUNCER

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER

OTHER STUDENTS

Character Notes

Roles may be double-cast as necessary. Genders of characters which are not vital may be switched at the directors' discretion. Please be flexible.

The Monster cards which are played in the final Yu-Gi-Oh tournament may be portrayed by actors in costumes.

Acknowledgments

The Devil in Sherman Marsh was created in collaboration with the Theatre 3-4 class at Haltom High School in Haltom City, Texas. The contributors were as follows:

Ashley Fields
Michael Day
Joseph Tripp
Yanina Gonzalez
Rachael Osborne
Bre Gibson
Chloe Gobe
Greg Davis
Richard Stutheit
Amy Priebe
Courtney Clark
Melissa McFeeters
Michael Vincent
Caleb Merrill
Chris Longobardo
Jane Tran
Stephanie Coss

This play is dedicated to the students of the Haltom High School theatre department. All royalties from performance and sale of this play benefit Haltom theatre.

THE DEVIL IN SHERMAN MARSH

by Don Zolidis

(A school. The bell rings. Noise. STUDENTS everywhere. SHERMAN, a nerdy, tweedy looking kid holding an overstuffed backpack and another armful of books, makes his way through the crowd.)

SHERMAN. Excuse me. Excuse me. I'm trying to get to class.

(TOBY, a large kid, walks very slowly in front of SHERMAN. SHERMAN can't get around him.)

Um...hello? Boy we're moving slowly. Hello? Hello? Could you move a little quicker please?

(TOBY slowly turns around.)

TOBY. What?

SHERMAN. Could you move faster please? I don't want to be late for class.

(TOBY takes SHERMAN's books out of his hands and tosses them slowly onto the floor.)

That's not helpful.

(TOBY takes SHERMAN's backpack and opens it, spilling everything on to the floor.)

Hey! No! I have some very valuable Yu-Gi-Oh cards in there.

(TOBY finds some Yu-Gi-Oh cards, crumples them up, and eats them.)

TOBY. Mmmm... Tasty. Now you're gonna be late for class.

(TOBY turns and leaves. The bell rings.)

(STUDENTS bring in chairs to form a classroom as SHERMAN gathers up his belongings. A teacher, MISS GRACE, enters.)

MISS GRACE. Okay, class. Today we're going to be learning about the Salem Witch Trials of 1690.

(One student, JESSICA, raises her hand.)

Yes Jessica?

JESSICA. My English teacher is a witch. Would she have been burned?

MISS GRACE. Well, if there was a young girl who claimed she did witchcraft on her, then yes.

JESSICA. Sweet.

MISS GRACE. The Salem Witch Trials were not, however, very sweet.

(SHERMAN has finally gathered all of his books and sheepishly enters the class.)

Sherman you're late.

SHERMAN. I'm sorry Miss Grace, but I was accosted by an ogre outside. He scattered my belongings.

ROGER. *(Coughing:)* Dork!

JOHN. *(Coughing:)* Huge dork!

MISS GRACE. Try to avoid ogres, Sherman.

SHERMAN. Ogres are large, Miss Grace. They are difficult to avoid.

JESSICA. Seriously, why do you talk like that?

SHERMAN. *(Mimicking her:)* Seriously, why do you care?

(TONYA raises her hand.)

MISS GRACE. Yes Tonya?

TONYA. How come they got burned if they didn't do no magic?

SHERMAN. If they didn't do *any* magic.

TONYA. What?

SHERMAN. If they didn't do any magic. It's called the English language. Learn how to speak it.

MISS GRACE. Okay Sherman. That's enough.

SHERMAN. I'm tired of these subliterate peasants.

TONYA. I am not subliterate!

SHERMAN. What does it mean? Do you know what the word means?

TONYA. No.

JOHN. It means you're a dork!

SHERMAN. Then you're subliterate.

MISS GRACE. Sherman, please. Let's just work on our word search please.

SHERMAN. (*Sarcastically:*) Word searches. This is education.

(*AMBER enters and sits near SHERMAN.*)

MISS GRACE. (*Walking around the room and checking papers:*) If you're worried about how to spell the words, you can check the word bank on the bottom.

JOHN. How do you spell witch?

ROGER. Your Mom.

(*The STUDENTS laugh.*)

SHERMAN. Miss Grace, must we always labor on these mindless projects? Why can't we actually use our minds in class?

JOHN. Shut up loser!

ROGER. Good one.

JOHN. Your Mom.

(*They laugh.*)

SHERMAN. I don't even know what that means. Your Mom what? What does she do?

JOHN. Your Mom.

(*The STUDENTS laugh.*)

MISS GRACE. All right, back to work everyone.

(The STUDENTS grudgingly go back to work.)

AMBER. Hey Sherman—did you find the Devil?

SHERMAN. Excuse me?

AMBER. The Devil. Did you find the word Devil?

SHERMAN. Oh. Um...third row down six letters from the left.

AMBER. Oh. Thanks.

SHERMAN. So um...Amber.

AMBER. Did you find trial?

SHERMAN. Diagonal backwards from the upper right corner.

AMBER. Oh—there it is.

SHERMAN. So...I've noticed that no one has punched your dance card for the Prom.

AMBER. What?

SHERMAN. The Prom. I've heard it's the social event of the year.

AMBER. What about it?

SHERMAN. I was wondering...if um...you would care to... accompany me to the dance.

JOHN. DUDE! SHERMAN JUST ASKED AMBER TO THE PROM!!!

ROGER. NO WAY!!!

MISS GRACE. Quiet please!

ROGER. *(Quietly:)* Your Mom.

(Everyone laughs.)

TONYA. Who's Sherman?

JOHN. He's that dork over there.

TONYA. Grammar boy? She ain't gonna go to the prom with that loser.

MISS GRACE. Quiet!

(AMBER has pretended not to hear. Embarrassing pause.)

SHERMAN. I cannot offer you much. I am just a simple man. But if sparkling conversation and an awkward, if earnest dance step are appealing to you, say the word.

(Pause.)

I will also pay for dinner. And perhaps ice cream afterwards.

AMBER. Sherman.

SHERMAN. Yes?

AMBER. I think you'd get the wrong idea. We're friends.

SHERMAN. Yes. Friends with romantic possibilities.

AMBER. Sorry. Oh do you have that English paper I had you write?

SHERMAN. Yes.

AMBER. Are there enough grammar mistakes to make it look like mine?

SHERMAN. I did abysmal things with apostrophes.

(He hands over the paper.)

AMBER. You're the best friend ever.

JOHN. Oh! HE TOTALLY GOT SHOT DOWN!!!

(SHERMAN stands up.)

SHERMAN. I have had enough of this Neanderthal!

JOHN. What are you gonna do about it, dork?

ROGER. That's what she said.

(Everyone laughs.)

SHERMAN. You don't even make any sense.

JOHN. You know what doesn't make sense? Your Mom.

(They laugh again.)

MISS GRACE. Boys, please! Sherman, stop causing problems.

SHERMAN. What? They're the ones instigating!

ROGER. Your Mom was instigating.

JOHN. Come on, geek. You wanna go? You wanna go?

SHERMAN. Go where?

(JOHN lunges at SHERMAN and gets him in a headlock.)

MISS GRACE. Sherman stop it! You're going to chip the tiles!

ROGER. Kill that dork!

MISS GRACE. That's it! You're all going to the office!

(The bell rings. Lights change as COUNSELOR JONES enters.)

COUNSELOR JONES. Okay...Sherman. This is the first time I've seen you in my office.

SHERMAN. I cannot endure their ridicule any longer.

COUNSELOR JONES. Have a seat.

SHERMAN. I refuse to be intimidated by the dregs of humanity. Which is all we seem to be enrolling at this school.

COUNSELOR JONES. Have a seat, Sherman.

SHERMAN. Fine.

(SHERMAN sits.)

COUNSELOR JONES. Have you ever thought that you seem to be encouraging their behavior? Let me explain. You need to stop acting so intelligent. All these words you use...they confuse and scare normal people. No one knows what you're saying. You stick out, Sherman. And as a result, the ordinary people are going to destroy you. That's what ordinary people do. What you need to do then is...blend in. Watch some television. Try not to do so well on tests. Make a few fart jokes. Really get in there with the common man. That's how people get ahead in the world.

SHERMAN. By pretending to be stupid?

COUNSELOR JONES. By becoming stupid. It really helps you get along with your peers. Tell you what—why don't you go home,

open a few bottles of glue and just sniff away for a few hours? You'll be just like everyone else in no time. You really need to trim those brain cells a bit.

SHERMAN. That's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard.

COUNSELOR JONES. Exactly. Which is why I get along well with people. Now...this girl...Amber Thompson. You have a big crush on her?

SHERMAN. How are you aware of that?

COUNSELOR JONES. It's all here in your file. We videotape you every day. It makes for some amusing viewing. Whenever I feel bad about myself, I just pop in your tape and I feel a lot better. At least I'm not you.

SHERMAN. Aren't you supposed to be counseling me?

COUNSELOR JONES. I am. You think I just woke up today knowing how to give this advice? No sir, I went to graduate school for seven years to know all this. Now, you ought to forget about Amber Thompson. You see, she's attractive. And you're not. You need to find someone on the same attractiveness level.

SHERMAN. That doesn't seem to be terribly fair.

COUNSELOR JONES. It's immensely fair. Now, if I were to approximate you with a girl, the girl you should really be dating is...the lunch lady. Oh. Tough break. Although, she's a robust woman—very powerful. Could be rewarding.

SHERMAN. I don't think so.

COUNSELOR JONES. Suit yourself. Have you thought about owning cats? It helps people cope with not being loved. Although, to be honest, a cat doesn't show a lot of love. At least mine doesn't. I try and I try and I try and I give Rascal food all the time and he'd drop me in a minute for someone with a sprig of catnip. I hate him.

SHERMAN. I'll be going now.

COUNSELOR JONES. Oh and you're suspended for three days for fighting. Have a good one.

(COUNSELOR JONES *leaves*. SHERMAN *is left alone*.)

SHERMAN. Ignoramuses. Idiots. Morons. They all fall down and worship someone who can throw a ball through a hoop, but when it comes to someone with real intelligence, actual insight? Shoved aside. No, we prefer our mediocrity, thank you. Teachers giving out passing grades to airheaded bimbos and roving sports monsters.

(SHERMAN *opens up his backpack*.)

Oh my Yu-Gi-Oh deck. Those buffoons nearly destroyed some very rare and valuable cards. I've worked very hard on this collection—

(*He begins to spread out his cards*.)

Oh, Dark Armed Monster, how I wish I could be like you. With Dark Arms. And powerful. If only I could...what's this?

(*He takes out a card*.)

I've never seen this card before. Why am I talking to myself? But...Lucifer? That sounds interesting. If I were to combine him with my Dark Magician with an upload booster I'd be unstoppable.

(*A rumble of thunder*.)

Hello? Hello?

(*Another rumble of thunder. Smoke*.)

Is there anyone there?

(LUCIFER *enters in a cloud of smoke*.)

LUCIFER. WHY HAVE YOU SUMMONED ME?

SHERMAN. I apologize, I didn't mean to—

LUCIFER. YOU, SHERMAN MARSH, WHAT IS YOUR BIDDING?

SHERMAN. Um... Bidding?

LUCIFER. EXCUSE ME—

(LUCIFER *coughs*.)

That's better. Interdimensional travel sometimes gets my throat all scratchy.

SHERMAN. Are you... The Devil?

LUCIFER. I wouldn't go so far as to say *The Devil*. I'd say representative of the nether regions.

SHERMAN. Epic.

LUCIFER. There's a hierarchy, you know. I'm kind of like a regional manager. I have domain over those souls who placed gum underneath desks.

SHERMAN. So if you place gum underneath the desk, you—

LUCIFER. You're going straight to the underworld where countless horrors will meet you. I've devised some pretty cruel tortures—there's the Mariah Carey listening hour, the standardized testing week, the dentist visit, and most...unnatural and soul-crushing of all...the watching of Battlefield Earth.

SHERMAN. Oh.

LUCIFER. Dreadful movie. John Travolta dressed up as a Psycho? Man, we were cheering in the underworld when that one came out. We were like, 'yes! More viewing nightmares for the damned!' In fact, we've been behind a lot of Travolta's movies lately. We're his silent partner.

SHERMAN. This is very educational.

LUCIFER. But...enough about me. Let's learn about you: Sherman Marsh. How's it going?

SHERMAN. Disastrous.

LUCIFER. Uh huh. Do you mind if I write some of this down? I like to take notes.

SHERMAN. Shouldn't you be able to use your unholy powers?

LUCIFER. Of course, but note-taking isn't one of them. All right, so...you're not doing well.

SHERMAN. Everyone else is an idiot.

LUCIFER. And you feel superior to them?

SHERMAN. I am superior to them.

LUCIFER. Even better. What in particular distresses you about the rest of humanity?

SHERMAN. The educational system. It's churning out mindless drones whose only goal is to consume natural resources and gorge themselves on fast food.

LUCIFER. Right. It's doing its job.

SHERMAN. And then...when someone does show a glimmer of intelligence—

LUCIFER. Crushed.

SHERMAN. Exactly.

LUCIFER. And you also have the hots for Amber Thompson?

SHERMAN. She's foxy.

LUCIFER. I see. Well...those are some significant issues. But I might just be able to help you.

SHERMAN. How?

LUCIFER. Just because I'm not actually *the* devil, doesn't mean I can't do some pretty devilish things. I have a few supernatural powers which might be able to assist you.

SHERMAN. Such as?

LUCIFER. Such as let me worry about that. Now, if I have the terms correctly, I think we can get a contract that can get you what you want in no time. You can ride out of here today in a fancy new life.

SHERMAN. I don't want a new life, I want a better life.

LUCIFER. Right, right, but let's try this on for size. Let's say you wake up in the morning, you flex your toned legs, you look in the mirror, sweep the flowing blonde hair out of your gorgeous blue eyes and get ready for a new day. You look good in your clothes. You're able to wear those little short shorts that look really nice.

SHERMAN. Pardon me?

LUCIFER. Your boyfriend picks you up in his red thunderbird, his name is Chip, he works for an investment banking firm, he buys you expensive dresses and you take vacations to Italy together—

SHERMAN. Wait a minute. I'm a girl?

LUCIFER. Yeah.

SHERMAN. I don't want to be a girl.

LUCIFER. Well you could have said that earlier. How am I supposed to know? Most people like you want to be girls.

SHERMAN. I would prefer to stay male please.

LUCIFER. But you'll consider female? Because I've got some great packages—

SHERMAN. Male.

LUCIFER. All right, all right. How about this? You become an extremely talented rock and roll musician, you form a band, put out a few albums, everyone loves you—you go tour, women are throwing themselves at you, you settle for marrying Pamela Anderson, which goes all right for a little while and then you switch to Carmen Electra because she's not quite as crazy, and all you have to do is put a few backwardly masked lyrics in your song.

SHERMAN. What?

LUCIFER. You know, when you play the album backwards it says things like Hate your Parents and Family Guy is smart entertainment.

SHERMAN. If they're recorded backwards how does anyone ever hear it?

LUCIFER. Fine, shoot down all my good ideas. I don't know that we can do a deal here then. I'll be leaving.

SHERMAN. Wait! Wait! I desire to be popular.

LUCIFER. Well, both the rock star idea and the hot chick plan include being popular—

SHERMAN. No, I mean—I want being intelligent to be popular.

LUCIFER. So you want me to warp the entire fabric of reality then?

SHERMAN. Can't you accomplish that?

LUCIFER. Oh I can accomplish that. I just choose not to.

SHERMAN. I don't think you're capable of it.

LUCIFER. I can do it.

SHERMAN. If you could do it, then why don't you do it?

LUCIFER. You think you're the only person I make deals with? What about the politicians that I've got agreements with? You think it'll be easy to explain to them that their whole "I'm a common man" garbage won't work any more and they'll have to be perceived as intelligent in order to be elected? That's a lot of work!

SHERMAN. Okay, fine. You're not terribly powerful. I understand.

LUCIFER. Oh I—I can do it.

SHERMAN. Do it then.

LUCIFER. Fine. I will.

SHERMAN. Right now.

LUCIFER. Fine!

(A boom of thunder. Noises. The lights flicker, then go out.)

(Lights up on a classroom. The STUDENTS sit in neat, orderly rows. All of them wear glasses. MRS. PARKER stands in front of them, looking very intelligent. The announcements are on.)

ANNOUNCER. In exciting mathematical news, the Academic Decathlon quiz team trounced Phillips Academy by the score of $12\pi x$ to 70, where x is equal to the square root of the opponent's score. Ha ha. Way to go Academic Decathlon!

(All the STUDENTS clap and cheer enthusiastically.)

And the basketball team won state.

JOHN. Whatever.

ANNOUNCER. That's all for today. And remember: The unexamined life is not worth living. Oh, and for those of you out there looking for a proper conundrum—please deduce twelve anagrams from the word palimpsest. Hint: One of them walks the streets and slaps people. Let's give the Thomas Junction cheer:

(The STUDENTS all stand up.)

ALL STUDENTS. X plus two is greater than or equal to what we do!

MRS. PARKER. Okay. Today we begin a systematic deconstruction of all the tropes involving alienation in the literature of the diaspora. If, as Jacques Derrida teaches, there is a certain amount of space between the signified and signifier, then the entire meaning of the word diaspora is called into question.

(JOHN raises his hand.)

Yes, John?

JOHN. Isn't it true that Derrida later recanted many of his own theories, including the importance of deconstruction? Shouldn't we be looking at this literature from a structural context, which doesn't require a moral framework?

MRS. PARKER. You might think that, but I'm inclined to disagree. When one truly considers what—

SHERMAN. Pardon me?

(The CLASS is shocked that someone has interrupted MRS. PARKER.)

MRS. PARKER. Sherman. In this class we raise our hands to be considered.

(SHERMAN raises his hand.)

If this is another request to go to the bathroom, it will be denied.

SHERMAN. No I was wondering: what is the nature of this discussion?

(The CLASS laughs derisively.)

ROGER. *(Coughing into his hand:)* Ignoramus!

MRS. PARKER. Could someone please explain it for Sherman?

JESSICA. I think it's inherently obvious, Mrs. Parker.

MRS. PARKER. I know it is Jessica, but some of us aren't as bright as the others.

JESSICA. Fine. It's like this: Without a proper cultural context from which to explore the iterations of the literature of the diaspora, we cannot hope to truly comprehend the signified symbolic signposts of non-linear construction. Duh.

(She sits down.)

MRS. PARKER. Does that clarify things?

SHERMAN. Not even remotely.

ROGER. What a buffoon!

JOHN. *(Coughing into his hand:)* Dullard!

MRS. PARKER. Boys, please, it's not nice to denigrate those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Sherman, do you need to be moved to a special classroom where you can get instruction on your level?

SHERMAN. No I can understand it.

MRS. PARKER. Amber, can you help Sherman please?

AMBER. Sure.

(AMBER moves over next to SHERMAN.)

It's not all that hard Sherman. You just have to open your mind.

SHERMAN. Yeah, I know...but my brain doesn't seem to be working at the moment—

AMBER. I have that effect.

SHERMAN. Um...listen, can we forget about the post-structuralist movement for a moment?

AMBER. But I adore the post-structuralists. I think they're really insightful.

SHERMAN. I'm sure they are, but—I was wondering about the prom...

AMBER. The prom?

SHERMAN. You know the dance where—

AMBER. I'm cognizant of the prom, but I'm already spoken for.

SHERMAN. Oh. Um...

AMBER. Toby.

(TOBY enters, looking particularly nerdy.)

TOBY. Darling, who is this nincompoop?

SHERMAN. I ain't no nincompoop!

JOHN. You *ain't!*? Nice language, state college matriculant.

SHERMAN. What's going on? I said *ain't!* What's happening to me?

ROGER. You need to have some respect for proper grammar!

SHERMAN. Shut up!

ROGER. A fine retort!

TOBY. Perhaps it would behoove you to close your mouth, Sherman.

SHERMAN. Your Mom!

(SHERMAN is shocked.)

I'm growing dumber by the minute!

MRS. PARKER. Sherman, cease with these disruptions!

JESSICA. Mrs. Parker, I would like to learn and he is preventing that from happening.

(The OTHER STUDENTS all raise their hands and begin to speak.)

OTHER STUDENTS. I would like to learn as well! My education is being infringed! I need an orderly classroom!

SHERMAN. Y'all need to shut up! I have a right to be here! You don't know nothing! Y'all think y'all so smart but I knows you ain't so smart cause you ain't no—aaaaaaaah!

(SHERMAN throws his backpack down. He pulls out the Lucifer card from his deck.)

Lucifer! Help me!

(Thunder. Everyone freezes. LUCIFER appears.)

LUCIFER. You called?

SHERMAN. My brain...it's returning to normal. This is inconceivable. These dolts are more intellectual than me.

LUCIFER. Is such a thing possible?

SHERMAN. My unpopularity persists.

LUCIFER. You never wished to be popular. You simply wished that being smart was popular. Let's get these children out of here, shall we?

(LUCIFER points in turn to different STUDENTS, who exit, leaving only AMBER frozen.)

This is the girl?

SHERMAN. Leave her alone!

LUCIFER. Your wish is my command, Sherman. Would you like a second round?

SHERMAN. You'll simply twist it to your own desires in any event.

LUCIFER. Perhaps. I'm not terribly trustworthy. But if you want—

(LUCIFER produces a contract.)

We can do it in writing. You see, that first wish was a freebie—like the little toy you get in a Happy Meal—and believe me, you get what you pay for. And those toys will break by the time you get

them home. But, if you're willing to purchase the wish, why, that's a different story.

SHERMAN. And I imagine the price is my soul?

LUCIFER. What is a soul, anyway?

SHERMAN. I refuse to barter my soul.

LUCIFER. You make it sound so evil. Think of it as investment in the present. Shall we see your present?

(TOBY enters, looking normal.)

Watch.

TOBY. Hey babe.

AMBER. Hey Toby.

TOBY. You're going to the prom with me.

AMBER. Okay.

TOBY. I hope you like beer cause I'm gonna drink a lot of it.

AMBER. Okay.

TOBY. Then we'll go driving at night.

AMBER. Super.

TOBY. Cool.

(Pause.)

You wanna make out?

AMBER. Sure.

(AMBER approaches.)

SHERMAN. Stop it!

(They freeze.)

LUCIFER. Hmm...two lovebirds at the prom, he's drinking beer, they're driving at night... wonder what might happen to them?

(LUCIFER crashes his hands into each other and both AMBER and TOBY fall over.)

Toby lives. Amber...well...not so much.

SHERMAN. What do you want?

LUCIFER. I want a deal, Shermy. I'll give you your heart's desire, you just give me your eensy-teensy little soul. It's not that hard.

SHERMAN. What are the repercussions for not having a soul?

LUCIFER. Oh please. Repercussions. Maybe a puppy will hate you here, a bird might poop on your head there, lots of people don't have souls. Have you ever been to Hollywood? Lots of people make it without souls. What do you say?

SHERMAN. I'll consider it.

AMBER. Hold me, Toby. I love the smell of your big strong teeth.

TOBY. Give me some sugar, baby.

SHERMAN. Very well!

(They freeze.)

LUCIFER. It was just getting good! What's your wish?

SHERMAN. Umm... I... Sherman Marsh, wish that Amber Thompson would fall madly in love with me. Wait, maybe um—

(Boom of thunder. The lights flicker. AMBER and LUCIFER are gone.)

Hello? Hello?

(The bell rings. STUDENTS are passing everywhere. They assemble a classroom, a weird new teacher, MRS. BELL, the theatre teacher, sweeps in.)

MRS. BELL. Come on, sit down, sit down. Welcome to theatre class. Gather round. Let's put the chairs in a circle, shall we? Oh boy this isn't much of a circle. Today is a day for exploring. Find a partner, everyone find a partner.

(STUDENTS shun SHERMAN immediately and partner up. He is left alone.)

Does everyone have a partner?

SHERMAN. I'm afraid that I don't.

MRS. BELL. That's okay, Sherman. I'll be your partner. Now, take hands with your partner. And I want you to look into your partner's eyes. Say the first thing that comes to mind.

(She takes SHERMAN's hands. Uncomfortable pause.)

SHERMAN. You have very sweaty palms.

MRS. BELL. That's because I'm passionate. It oozes out of me.

SHERMAN. I'm uncomfortable.

MRS. BELL. Don't let go! What do you see? Tell me what you see.

SHERMAN. A woman.

MRS. BELL. Yes?

SHERMAN. A bizarre woman.

MRS. BELL. Let it out, Sherman. Explore your feelings. That's what we do in theatre class. We delve into the mysteries of our soul—look closer, deeper.

SHERMAN. You have an enormous brown mole just above your lip.

MRS. BELL. What does it remind you of?

SHERMAN. A hairy crater. Like...some kind of squashed spider.

MRS. BELL. Excellent. Now we're getting somewhere. Look into my eyes. Feel my breath.

SHERMAN. I feel fear.

MRS. BELL. Yes. Embrace it.

SHERMAN. I want to flee.

MRS. BELL. Why don't you?

SHERMAN. You're holding my hands too tightly.

MRS. BELL. Brilliant. Physical limitations are imprisoning your soul. Now, one two three, let go! Dance, Sherman, dance!

(Everyone stops and looks at SHERMAN who is utterly confused.)

Let the emotions you are feeling feed your movement. Go!

(SHERMAN begins an interpretive dance about the hairy mole and fear. NORA enters.)

Excellent Sherman. Now all of you! All of you! Dance! Dance! Feel the rhythm of your souls! Go!

(The other STUDENTS in the class begin to dance very sheepishly.)

NORA. Hey...um...I'm new today. I'm looking for theatre class?

MRS. BELL. Brilliant! You will be partnered with Sherman. He is sensual, like peanut butter.

NORA. Um...

MRS. BELL. Wonderful, children! Wonderful! Explore!

(NORA takes SHERMAN aside.)

NORA. What's going on?

SHERMAN. We're learning about the contents of our souls. It's mind-numbing. I cringe with fear every day I approach this class.

NORA. You're funny. I'm Nora.

SHERMAN. Sherman.

NORA. So what do you do in here?

SHERMAN. You just try to avoid her notice.

MRS. BELL. Okay, everyone stop! Sherman come here and sit in this chair.

SHERMAN. I have difficulties with sitting. I have two vertebrae in my spine which are fused together—

MRS. BELL. This will help then.

(MRS. BELL grabs him and sits him in the chair. She begins rubbing his shoulders.)

SHERMAN. Do you mind not touching me?

MRS. BELL. That's okay, we're not bound by laws in this class, Sherman. Now, I want you to think back to your childhood—yesss, that's it, close your eyes—drift backwards in time—imagine a time of happy bunnies and colored blocks, a simpler time, a happy fluffy cloud time. And it's gone. Gone! Forever!

(AMBER enters upstage, staring at SHERMAN.)

SHERMAN. Forever?

MRS. BELL. Yes! Your See-n-Say, your teddy bear, your pet dog named Funkmeister, all gone! Dead!

SHERMAN. Dead?

MRS. BELL. Yes! Gone! How does that make you feel?

SHERMAN. *(Unaffected:)* Distraught?

MRS. BELL. Yessssss!

SHERMAN. *(Getting up:)* Okay, I'm done.

MRS. BELL. Okay, who else would like to travel on this emotional journey?

(No one in the class volunteers.)

Steven!

(She grabs STEVEN and drags him to the chair.)

You have sinewy shoulders Steven, have you been working out?

(NORA takes SHERMAN to the side.)

NORA. Maybe if I fake a stroke or something we can escape.

SHERMAN. I've tried it. She says it's great material and we should explore our pain.

(AMBER approaches.)

AMBER. Hello Sherman.

SHERMAN. Amber! Don't you have another educational engagement at the moment?

AMBER. I took the bathroom pass so I could be with you.

SHERMAN. Oh—

AMBER. Who's this?

NORA. Hi I'm Nora. I'm new.

AMBER. Huh. Why are you talking to her, Sherman?

SHERMAN. She's my partner.

AMBER. Your partner? You expect me to believe that? You leave Sherman alone.

NORA. We were just talking.

AMBER. Uh huh. Well quit it.

NORA. What is your problem?

AMBER. My problem, tramp, is that I was watching you flirting with my boyfriend.

SHERMAN. Boyfriend? Does that mean we're courting?

NORA. I wasn't flirting with him—

MRS. BELL. Yes! Explore everyone!

AMBER. Sherman is mine and if I see you talk to him again I'll run over you with my VW Bug.

NORA. I wasn't doing anything!

SHERMAN. It was a mere conversation—

AMBER. Sherman, I know what's best for you. And this hussy isn't it. If we're going to have a relationship, I need to be able to trust you. Can I trust you?

SHERMAN. Sure. Does that mean we are indeed courting?

AMBER. Of course!

MRS. BELL. What's going on over here?

AMBER. Why were you touching my boyfriend?

MRS. BELL. Excuse me?

AMBER. I saw you rubbing his shoulders. That's sick. You leave him alone.

MRS. BELL. I was just relaxing him—

NORA. This chick's crazy. I'll talk to you later, Sherman.

AMBER. You will not! Sherman doesn't like you! He hates you! He thinks you smell bad and have acne!

SHERMAN. Amber, perhaps we should—

AMBER. Why do you do this me, Sherman? Don't you know I go crazy when I think you're with someone else—

MRS. BELL. Okay, and scene! Very truthful. Let's give them a round of applause, class.

(The CLASS applauds. The bell rings. The STUDENTS filter out.)

AMBER. Okay, I have our afternoon planned. After school we're going to go to the park—I've made a picnic lunch for us—I spent all week planning it, and then after the park—I love you! I'm sorry that just came right out, didn't it? I didn't mean to tell you that yet! But it's true! I love you!

SHERMAN. Well that's—

AMBER. Don't you love me?

SHERMAN. You didn't give me the opportunity to say anything—

AMBER. If you really loved me you would have said it as fast as you possibly could. But you hesitated. You don't love me. It's because of that harlot, isn't it? That Nora? She's poisoned you against me! I'll kill her! I'll kill her! I love you! I said it again why didn't you say it back? Tell me you love me!

SHERMAN. I...

AMBER. You hesitated!

SHERMAN. No I love you!

AMBER. You don't mean it! You're just saying that! Why do I always fall for the wrong guy?!

SHERMAN. No I do love you, I've been obsessed with you for years! I have the diary entries to prove it!

AMBER. Really? That's the sweetest thing anyone's ever said to me! We're going to be so happy together! Our first baby will be named Elizabeth and she'll have your eyes and my personality and then we're going to have a boy, little Bobby, but we'll call him Bowser, oh he'll be so cute! This is THE MOST FANTASTIC THING EVER!!! I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!! DON'T EVER LEAVE ME!!!

SHERMAN. I won't. I won't.

(NORA passes by.)

NORA. Hey Sherman.

SHERMAN. Greetings.

(AMBER chases down NORA.)

AMBER. What did you just say?!

NORA. I just said Hey.

AMBER. Say that again! SAY THAT AGAIN!

NORA. You're crazy.

AMBER. Oh I'm crazy, huh? I'm not the one trying to STEAL ANOTHER GIRL'S BOYFRIEND!! He doesn't like you! He doesn't want anything to do with you, you Goodwill-shopping gutter tramp!

NORA. You need to chill.

AMBER. Let's go! Let's go! I'll kill you! I LOVE MY MAN AND NO ONE IS COMING BETWEEN US!

NORA. I'll see you later, Sherman.

(AMBER slaps NORA.)

Ow!

AMBER. You want some more? Huh?

NORA. All right, that's it!

(NORA fights back. AMBER flails around like a madwoman. AMBER hits NORA again and again.)

AMBER. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS!!!

(She beats NORA down.)

WE HAVE A VERY SPECIAL BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP!!!!!!

NORA. You're insane!

(NORA runs.)

AMBER. Yeah you better run!

(AMBER stops, panting.)

I feel better.

(She sings.)

Stand by your man, show him two arms to hold him—

SHERMAN. Um... Amber, I think perhaps we need to discuss our relationship.

AMBER. Oh. Good. Let's do it at my house. I have some wedding dress pictures I want to run by you.

SHERMAN. Maybe um...maybe we should have some space.

(AMBER gets right next to him.)

AMBER. What do you mean, space?

SHERMAN. Well, I think—

(He winces.)

Did you pull out some of my hair?

(AMBER puts something in her wallet.)

AMBER. Why would I pull out some of your hair? Wait a minute—space? Space?! Are you breaking up with me?!

SHERMAN. No, no, why would I do that?

AMBER. You are! You are! You're breaking up with me! Oh no!

(AMBER sinks to the ground, crying hysterically.)

SHERMAN. We're not ending our courtship—I just want some space—

AMBER. So you can be with Nora or Mrs. Bell or any of your other girlfriends!!

SHERMAN. No—

AMBER. You think I'm blind?! I know! I KNOW WHAT THEY THINK! They're not going to get you! Do you understand me?! We are soul mates and we will always be together, in this life and the next!

SHERMAN. See, this is a little bit beyond the pale—

(AMBER takes out handcuffs.)

AMBER. They've poisoned your mind, that's what they've done. I've got to help you. I understand now. The Sherman I know and love is being taken away from me and—

(AMBER wrestles SHERMAN and slaps the handcuffs on him.)

I'm not giving up on us!

(AMBER pushes him into a chair and begins tying him up.)

SHERMAN. This isn't what I imagined in a relationship with you—

AMBER. Shhhh! Oh my baby, my sweet baby, what have they done to you? I'll save you. You see, you just need your memory restored about all the great things we've done together.

(AMBER runs and gets her backpack and opens it.)

Look at these photos. Don't you see how happy we were?

SHERMAN. These appear to be of me sleeping at night.

AMBER. You sleep so peacefully with me watching over you.

SHERMAN. How many of these have you taken?

AMBER. Shhhh! And here's a photograph of your dog Spencer.

SHERMAN. I thought he was run over by an automobile!

AMBER. No. I just staged that so I could give him to you as a present on your birthday. It would be so wonderful, just the two of us and Spencer, still alive.

SHERMAN. You're sick.

AMBER. If being in love with you is sick, I don't ever want to be well. If you think that's sick, look at this:

(She takes out a doll made out of hair.)

I call this one Sherman.

SHERMAN. Is that composed of my hair?

AMBER. I've been gathering them for months now. When we can't be together, I just squeeze Sherman here and I smell him and we're together. And now...we're going to be together forever.

(AMBER takes out a knife.)

SHERMAN. What are you doing?

AMBER. Shhhh.

SHERMAN. No, please tell me what you're doing.

AMBER. I always knew this day would come. When you rejected our love. But you won't succeed that easily. Don't you know that Romeo and Juliet are together forever? In the afterlife.

SHERMAN. You see, I have a fairly good idea of where I'm heading in the afterlife, and I'd prefer not to go there.

AMBER. I'll go there with you. Right now. This will only hurt a little bit.

SHERMAN. Help! Help!

(SHERMAN tries to hop up and down in his chair. He manages to reach his backpack.)

Where are my Yu-Gi-Oh cards? Where are my Yu-Gi-Oh cards?!

AMBER. Is there a Yu-Gi-Oh card for true love? Because that's the one I'm playing.

(AMBER snatches the cards from SHERMAN.)

SHERMAN. No, please, listen, Amber, I love you.

AMBER. How much?

SHERMAN. *(Trying to spread his arms:)* This much. Um... I love you as much as a beached whale loves returning to the ocean. I love you as much as middle school girls love vampire love stories. I love you madly, deeply, passionately, like chocolate pudding.

AMBER. I love you like chocolate pudding.

SHERMAN. Exactly. And I'll show you. Let me see the cards.

AMBER. Okay.

(She hands them over.)

SHERMAN. Lucifer!

(He throws the card down. Nothing happens.)

Oh wait I forgot to combine him Dark Magician and Power up.

(Thunder. The lights flicker. LUCIFER enters in a poof of smoke wearing sunglasses.)

LUCIFER. I was just in the middle of tanning, what?

AMBER. Who's this guy?! Who's this guy?! We're in the middle of a relationship discussion, got it?

LUCIFER. Sweetheart, can it.

(AMBER freezes.)

What seems to be the trouble?

SHERMAN. I do not want her to love me any more.

LUCIFER. Why not? She seems...sweet.

SHERMAN. She's a demented harpy.

LUCIFER. Love makes fools of us all. Enjoy.

(LUCIFER begins to leave.)

SHERMAN. No wait wait! This isn't fair! I tendered you my soul, I should get something extraordinary in return!

LUCIFER. Oh, right. *That's* how it works.

SHERMAN. Allow me to have another wish.

LUCIFER. What are you going to give me for that? Another soul?

SHERMAN. Indeed.

LUCIFER. You only have one. And it's not all that impressive anyway.

SHERMAN. The quality of my soul notwithstanding, I do have one other that I could trade with you. My mother's. I acquired it as a present for my ninth birthday.

LUCIFER. Your mother gave you her soul for your ninth birthday?

SHERMAN. I am a shrewd negotiator. She wanted to get me a My Little Pony, I countered with her soul. I thought it might come in handy some day. I was correct.

LUCIFER. I like the way you think. You know, after this is all over, there might be some management opportunities for you down under. Very well, you may have a third wish.

SHERMAN. I, Sherman Marsh, wish that the following be granted unto me without undue complication, hardship, or deleterious side effect, and that said wish be accomplished in a speedy manner and with all goodwill by the supernatural entity known hereafter as Lucifer, be it also resolved that the following wish not be granted in an ironic way, with unforeseen consequences for myself, my loved ones, or my progeny: Clause 1: I wish for seventy years of good health, sound mind and happiness, in a naturally aging and pleasantly unfolding existence where I retain all of my limbs, sanity, hair, memories, athletic prowess, see subparagraph A for complete definitions of all of the above terms. Clause 2: In addition to 70 years of good health and sanity, I further wish that I be blessed with financial stability that weathers the hardships of future economic recessions, peak oil, alien invasion, zombie awakenings, and any and all other problems that may befall the world here, now, and in perpetuity throughout the known universe. Clause 3: Pursuant to clause 2, I wish additionally to be lucky in love and discover my true love in a timely fashion and further specify that said true love must be

attractive, retain all her limbs, sanity, hair, and body shape for seventy years before dying with me in a pleasant and painless manner. And Clause 4: That there be a Yu-Gi-Oh tournament at my high school in the next two days.

(Pause.)

LUCIFER. That's your wish?

(SHERMAN nods.)

Fine.

SHERMAN. I've been thinking about it for some time now.

LUCIFER. So be it. But in seventy years—you watch yourself. I'll be back. Stupid nerds.

(Boom of thunder. Smoke. The lights flicker. AMBER disappears. STUDENTS begin to set up the "tournament area.")

ANNOUNCER. *(In a nerdy voice:)* And reminding all students that the first annual Yu-Gi-Oh grand master tournament will be held today after school, so prepare yourselves mentally and physically for the duel of your lifetime. Only one duelist will reign supreme!

(In a regular voice:)

Seriously, we're having a Yu-Gi-Oh tournament? Are the dorks running the school now? Oh, it's still on? Never mind.

(SHERMAN stands aside as the tournament is assembled. He slowly puts on his dueling outfit, an outlandishly nerdy cape and medieval-looking suit that he pulls from his backpack.)

SHERMAN. My entire existence I have been waiting for the day when my prowess at collectible card games will save the world, and maybe this tournament won't save the world, but it will make me the most popular student at this high school. Ah ha!

(He finishes assembling his outfit, complete with two fingerless card gloves.)

Groovy. My deck is complete. My monsters are ready. Now it is time for battle!

(Energetic music plays.)

ANNOUNCER. Oh man I have to announce this now? Oh come on these dorks don't need me to—wait it's still on? Why doesn't some tell me when it's off? How do you turn it off? This button? I thought that was on. Okay, um...round one! Sherman Marsh versus Toby Tripp!

(TOBY emerges with a small deck of cards, looking worried.)

TOBY. Um... I just bought these cards.

SHERMAN. I'm going to enjoy this, noob.

ANNOUNCER. Duel!

SHERMAN. I play Raging Forest which allows me to play two cards at the same time, which allows me to play Dark Monster and cast a spell Rampage on Dark Monster which allows him to go first and with a Bonus Move I cast Action Explosion on him which doubles his attack so when he strikes he inflicts 2000 points of damage!

ANNOUNCER. And Toby Tripp is defeated.

TOBY. Um...do I get to go?

SHERMAN. No, you're dead. That's what's called being powned.

TOBY. This sucks.

(TOBY leaves.)

ANNOUNCER. And round two! How many rounds are we going with this? Sherman Marsh and his deck of many monsters vs. Jessica Chase!

(JESSICA enters.)

JESSICA. Hey Sherman.

SHERMAN. Spare me the niceties, Jessica, and prepare to meet your doom.

JESSICA. You're taking this really seriously. Um...

ANNOUNCER. Duel!

JESSICA. I summon tree sweat monster.

SHERMAN. Okay? Tree Sweat Monster? You think that's going to save you? Suck on an energized Dark Storm Paladin with an anger upboost. He immediately charges your Tree Sweat Monster and destroys him, and then I play Crypt Keeper and steal your Tree Sweat Monster and then he comes back from the dead and bites you with an additional Jaws of Unlife!

JESSICA. Um...okay. Then I play—

ANNOUNCER. And Jessica Chase is defeated!

SHERMAN. Epic win. That's how we play in Sherman's world.

JESSICA. Is this even fair?

SHERMAN. Sometimes life ain't fair, sweetheart. Do me a favor and study some grammar and face me again sometime.

ANNOUNCER. Round three! Sherman Marsh versus Amber Thompson!

SHERMAN. Amber?

(AMBER enters.)

How can I duel with the woman I love?

AMBER. So what is this stupid game anyway?

SHERMAN. You dare to insult the noble art of dueling? I'm afraid you must be schooled.

ANNOUNCER. D-d-d-duel!

AMBER. I summon Happy Tree Friend. I put him in defense mode.

SHERMAN. Oh Amber, that was uber-foolish. I summon Ramping Underworld Fiend. He eats your Happy Tree Friend and poisons your deck!

AMBER. Does that mean I'm dead?

SHERMAN. I can still save you, my love. But first you must play Unseen Energy.

AMBER. I don't have Unseen Energy.

SHERMAN. Then I'm afraid you have been, as they say, powned.

ANNOUNCER. And Amber Thompson has been defeated!

SHERMAN. That was the most difficult battle of my life. My heart versus my deck.

ANNOUNCER. And now for the championship round—

SHERMAN. Perhaps it's time for some real competition.

ANNOUNCER. Sherman Marsh and his dark deck of many monsters versus Nora Starr! Can I go home after this? These nerds are really bugging me. Is the dang thing still on? Shoot.

SHERMAN. Nora? A girl as a grand champion? Please. I am old-fashioned in some things. Everyone knows that females cannot create as mighty a deck as males.

(NORA enters.)

NORA. Hey Sherman.

SHERMAN. It was nice knowing you, Nora. We must now be enemies. I'm afraid I must destroy you now.

ANNOUNCER. D-d-d-d-duel!

SHERMAN. I summon Planet Eater and immediately imbue him with Arms of the Colossus and Fighting Spirit and he attacks and—

NORA. I counter with Calming sleep!

SHERMAN. Oh really?

NORA. I summon Eyes of the Angels!

SHERMAN. Why would you do that? I summon Strong Jaw Monster with Bad Breath and Spiky Soul! And he attacks—

NORA. I counter with monster bait and destroy him!

SHERMAN. You destroyed my Strong Jaw Monster with Bad Breath and Spiky Soul? How dare you?

NORA. I summon Frost Maiden and imbue her with Special Sauce! She attacks for one thousand points of damage!

SHERMAN. What? What? Special Sauce? I've never even heard of that card.

NORA. It's banned in Japan but still legal in American decks.

SHERMAN. I summon Stool Softener Monster! He strikes fear in the bowels of your monsters!

NORA. I counter with Fiber Fortress!

SHERMAN. Where'd you get that card?

NORA. It came special in my breakfast cereal. I summon Friendly Gnome Helper! He casts Strength of the woodlands on my Frost Maiden! She attacks!

SHERMAN. I counter with Shield of Skulls!

NORA. She breaks through and inflicts 900 points of damage! That's some serious pownage.

SHERMAN. How can this be? I'm going to die! There's only...

(He looks at his deck.)

I summon Dark Magician with a power booster and combine them to summon...Lucifer.

(Thunder. Smoke. LUCIFER enters.)

LUCIFER. Hello.

SHERMAN. Attack!

LUCIFER. Let's see... Friendly Gnome Helper? How about Hamburger Helper? Frost Maiden? I like popsicles. I also eat your Eyes of the Angel and for fun I draw a disfiguring moustache on her corpse. I also eat you.

SHERMAN. Sorry, babe. But that's how Sherman plays the—

NORA. I counter with Angelic Love Mother!

(Thunder. Smoke. Choirs of Angels. ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER enters. SHERMAN and NORA freeze.)

LUCIFER. Holy—

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. Angelic Love Mother strike!

(She begins an involved dance routine and then looks up to see LUCIFER.)

Steve?

LUCIFER. Hey Katie.

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. Oh my gosh!

LUCIFER. What are you doing here?

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. I'm acting as a sacred guardian for that girl over there.

LUCIFER. That sounds pretty boring.

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. I think it's rewarding. What are you up to?

LUCIFER. Oh I'm stealing that nerd's soul over there.

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. That is so evil.

LUCIFER. I know. I can't help it. It's in my nature.

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. I wish I could be like you, you know? Out there, just doing your thing, not caring what anybody thinks of you. I have to be so good all the time. It's tough being a servant of white magic, you never get to have any fun.

LUCIFER. Yeah, you guys are pretty lame. Listen, me and Dark-Armed Monster and a couple of the other guys are gonna have a party later—

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. Really?

LUCIFER. It's gonna be pretty evil. Burning corpses, Celine Dion, we'll probably roast some mortals. You wanna come?

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. Who's going to be there?

LUCIFER. All the dark magic guys. Fang Beast. Undead Knight. Stool Softener Monster.

ANGELIC LOVE MOTHER. Oh.

LUCIFER. Yeah he's not much fun at parties.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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