

Altar Ego

Setting:

Time: June, Saturday, 4 PM

Place: A church altar

Characters:

MELISSA, 20's - 30's. The bride.

CARL, 20's - 30's. The groom's brother.

FATHER MORGAN, 40's - 60's. The pastor.

DARRYL, 20's. The bride's brother.

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(A church altar. FATHER MORGAN, dressed in black clerical clothing, stands upstage center and faces the audience. CARL, dressed in tuxedo, stands downstage right of him. "Here Comes the Bride" plays and MELISSA enters stage left carrying bouquet, approaches slowly, then looks at CARL. She freezes. A moment of stunned silence.)

MELISSA

Okay, what in the hell is this?

CARL

(Cheery)

Hello, Melissa!

MELISSA

Where is he, Carl?

CARL

Where's who?

MELISSA

Your brother! My fiancée!

CARL

Actual, if it's a man the word is fiance. (Enunciates)
Fiance.

FATHER MORGAN

Um, sorry, can I ask what-

MELISSA

Where is Jason? (She hits CARL with the bouquet.
Flowers fly about.) Where is he where is he where is
he?

CARL

He - couldn't make it.

MELISSA

He what?!

CARL

He got cold feet. Not about the marriage. Just the wedding.

MELISSA

They're the same thing!

FATHER MORGAN

Wait, you mean you're not the-

CARL

You know Jason can't handle crowds. He wants to marry you, but he got scared of all this. (Gestures to audience.) He was in bad shape at the house. Hyperventilating, and you know how sweaty he gets, floor was like a slip n' slide.

MELISSA

Omigod. But the dress and the flowers and, and the cake and the table settings. Have you seen the centerpieces? They're little penguins! They're freakin' adorable!

CARL

He knows. He knows. And he still wants the wedding to go on.

MELISSA

And how are we supposed to do that?

(CARL pulls out a paper and hands it to MELISSA.)

CARL

You just need a proxy.

FATHER MORGAN

Oh dear, I'm afraid that's definitely not-

MELISSA

A proxy?! You mean *you*?

CARL

Yeah. It's all there, signed and notarized.

MELISSA

He wrote this out and signed it? While flop-sweating and doing that Hwuuuuh hwuuuuh hwuuuuh (imitates hyperventilating) thing?

CARL

I mean, he calmed down eventually.

MELISSA

Enough to locate a notary public.

CARL

There was one, you know, around.

MELISSA

You've got Jason locked in the basement, haven't you?

CARL

What! How could you accuse me of such a thing?

MELISSA

Because you've been in love with me since third grade.

CARL

That's not true. Seventh grade, maybe. (Pause.) Which is beside the point.

(MELISSA scans the document.)

MELISSA

(reading to herself)

I, Jason Lowell, do hereby appoint my beloved - that's debatable - my beloved brother, Carl, to serve as my legal substitute for my wedding to Melissa Wilkens on this 14th day of June - is this legit?

CARL

Of course it's legit.

MELISSA

And this isn't just a flimsy excuse for you to get to kiss the bride? And maybe con her into, you know, marrying you?

CARL

This seems like an awful lot of trouble to go through for just a quick peck, wouldn't you say?

MELISSA

Like you'd keep it quick. I still remember you and Janie Derkins going at it so hard your braces got tangled up.

CARL

We were fourteen!

MELISSA

Exactly! And now you're like 20 years more lecherous!

FATHER MORGAN

Listen. I'm afraid I cannot allow you to do this.

CARL

Of course you can. A wedding is just a contract signing, right? Two consenting parties entering into a binding agreement?

FATHER MORGAN

Legally, perhaps, but in the eyes of the Lord-

CARL

So Jason can sign over his authority to me, his beloved (MELISSA snorts) brother. *Ipsa facto, res judicata, caveat emptor.*

MELISSA

Sic semper tyrannis?

CARL

Huh?

MELISSA

Exactly. You know what? Let's do this.

CARL

Really?

MELISSA

Sure. This wedding is costing my dad ten grand, damned if I'm going to bail on my special day just because the groom has skittered behind the couch.

CARL

All right! Game on!

MELISSA

(shakes head)

Leave it to Jason to come up with some absurd idea like a wedding proxy.

CARL

He's kind of asinine like that. I've always been the level-headed one. Also the handsome one. Who earns a good twenty thousand a year more than him, by the way. To say nothing of my stock options.

MELISSA

Right, right. (Pause.) You know, I actually kind of like the proxy idea. In fact - anyone got a pen? Father?

FATHER MORGAN

Oh, um. Yes.

(He produces a pen and hands it to MELISSA, who reads the document.)

CARL

Melissa, what are you doing?

MELISSA

Can I use your back?

(CARL turns around and bends over, MELISSA writes on the paper on his back.)

MELISSA (cont.)

Well, this has got me all nervous. So I think I'm going to beg out too. I guess we don't have a notary, but there are plenty of witnesses.

CARL

Wait, what?

MELISSA

(writing)

Lucky for me, Jason isn't the only one with such helpful siblings.

CARL

(looks at person in audience)

You mean you're going to sub in Joanna?

MELISSA

I could. I mean, she's pretty hot. At least you'd get to make out with somebody today, right.

CARL

That's a good point.

(MELISSA signs the paper, dotting the 'I' a little hard and making CARL jump and yelp.)

MELISSA

Oh, sorry. Anyway, I didn't say sister, I said sibling. (Yells offstage left.) Hey Darryl! Drag your ass up here!

CARL

Oh no.

FATHER MORGAN

Oh dear.

(DARRYL enters stage left, dressed in an unkempt tux. He plays a video game. He barely looks up.)

DARRYL

'Sup, Mels. Will you hurry up and get hitched already? And hey, there's an open bar at the reception, right?

MELISSA

Yeah, Darryl.

DARRYL

Sweet. Aw, but we probably have to tip the bartender, right?

MELISSA

Darryl, I will generously tip the bartender for you. But I need you to do me a favor.

DARRYL

'Kay.

MELISSA

I need you to marry Carl for me.

CARL

Melissa!

MELISSA

Oh sorry. To clarify, you're not actually marrying Carl. I'm marrying Jason. You and Carl are just stand-ins.

DARRYL

(to MELISSA)

So we're like a tag team?

MELISSA

We're exactly like a tag team. (Extends her arm.)
Bring it.

DARRYL

Boom! (He slaps her hand, and they switch places.)

MELISSA

So all you have to do is say "I do" when they ask you, and then kiss him.

DARRYL

(snorts, briefly looks up at CARL)

I have to kiss him?

MELISSA

Yep. Full lip-on-lip, too, or it doesn't count.

DARRYL

(shrugs) Whatever.

CARL

Melissa!

DARRYL

What, you don't want to kiss me? You too good for me?

CARL

No, this just isn't what I had in mind.

FATHER MORGAN

Nor I.

MELISSA

Oh, now what?

FATHER MORGAN

I'm afraid I can't perform this type of service.

MELISSA

What are you talking about?

FATHER MORGAN

This type of service. (points at CARL, then at DARRYL.) You know.

CARL

Yeah, Melissa. What he said.

MELISSA

Get with the times, Father, this is all legal now. And besides, it's all, you know, proxy.

FATHER MORGAN

Maybe, but this is a Catholic ceremony, and this is not condoned by the Church.

MELISSA

What is this crap?! Carl, you gonna stand for this?

DARRYL

Yeah Carl, you gonna stand for this?

MELISSA

You're not against marriage equality, are you?

CARL

Well, er, I mean, no, but...

MELISSA

Well, there you go. See how progressive you're being? You do deserve a kiss. I mean, from Darryl.

(DARRYL snorts.)

CARL

Stop enjoying this!

DARRYL

Lighten up, dude. Reach for that rainbow!

MELISSA

(stage whisper to FATHER MORGAN)

Look, we're all totally lapsed here. We're only doing the Catholic thing for the sake of my mom and dad (Smiles and waves to 'mom and dad' in audience). So can you dispense with the dogma and just make this happen?

FATHER MORGAN

I'm sorry, I cannot break with church teachings.

MELISSA

Please. Your religion is run by guys in dresses with gold lamé accents and you're still preaching that?

FATHER MORGAN

Be that as it may, I'm not going through with this.

MELISSA

But where are we supposed to find a - hey, I know. (Holds up paper.) Darryl, I need your back.

(She writes on his back. DARRYL starts singing "I need your back" to the chorus of "I Want You Back" by the Jackson 5. He starts swaying. She steadies his back.)

MELISSA

(To DARRYL) Darryl, we all love the Jackson 5, but give me a minute here. (To FATHER MORGAN) Okay, Pops, you can go, I got this covered.

(MELISSA inches FATHER MORGAN out of position and takes his place. FATHER MORGAN raises a finger and stutters in objection but is ignored.)

MELISSA (cont.)

Now we got ourselves a wedding! (High-fives DARRYL.)

CARL

(To DARRYL) Really? (to MELISSA) Really?

MELISSA

Really! By the powers vested in me just now by this extremely convoluted piece of paper (shakes paper) I'm ready to raise the roof and launch these nuptials into the stratosphere. Can I get an amen!

FATHER MORGAN

Amen!

(Everyone looks at him.)

FATHER MORGAN

(coughs.)

Ahem. Reflex. That was reflex.

MELISSA

Anyway. (Turns to CARL.) Do you, Jason, not Carl, but Jason, take this woman, Melissa, not a man, certainly not my brother, to be your lawfully wedded wife, not husband? To have and to hold, um, need you by my side, girl to be my pride, you'll never be denied, everlasting love?

(Silence.)

MELISSA

JasonCarlJason!

CARL

Just give me a minute, okay!

(Pause.)

MELISSA

Carl? (Pause.) Carl. Jason is locked in the basement, isn't he.

CARL

It's - it's really more of a crawlspace.

MELISSA

Wow. Wow. Why? To steal a kiss?

CARL

I couldn't bear the thought of sitting there watching you marry someone else.

MELISSA

That would be sweet if it weren't coming from the dude who just chained up my fiancée!

CARL

Its fiance! And I used rope.

MELISSA

Nevertheless!

CARL

(to MELISSA)

Hey, c'mon, I was willing to marry your dropout brother just to help you out!

MELISSA

That's a twisted way of spinning things.

DARRYL

Yeah, I have my G.E.D! Dick.

MELISSA

(tears up the proxy sheet)

Besides which, I knew.

CARL

What?

MELISSA

Yeah, the whole time. Jason got free and called me like half an hour ago. Your knots kinda suck. He'll be here in a couple of minutes.

CARL

And you decided to go along with the whole thing?

MELISSA

(smiles and looks at Darryl)

I was just following your lead. But actually, it wasn't my idea.

CARL

Then who-?

(MELISSA directs CARL's gaze to DARRYL, who is staring at CARL longingly. He suddenly lurches forward and kisses CARL, who eventually squirms away.)

DARRYL

You can tie me up anytime.

CARL

Wow. I really have no idea what to say to any of you.

MELISSA

Got your kiss, didn't you? Now go sit your ass down and explore the strange new feelings welling up inside.

CARL

I hate you.

(CARL exits stage left, DARRYL following closely. DARRYL and MELISSA fist-bump as he passes. MELISSA looks out fondly over crowd.)

MELISSA

(to FATHER MORGAN)

God, I love weddings.

(Blackout. End of play.)