

# The Devil and Danielle Webster

*A comedy in one act  
by Burton Bumgarner*

*Adapted from the short story  
"The Devil and Daniel Webster"  
by Stephen Vincent Benét*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Poor Jake Stone is a loser from the word “go.” When he finally loses the worst job he’s ever had, he makes the claim that he would do anything to be a winner. Soon he meets Lucy, a seemingly attractive, professional woman who can make a special deal with him: she gives Jake wisdom, and he signs away his soul.

Rather than waste his opportunity, Jake becomes a kind and intelligent person who gives much to the world. As the time to relinquish his soul draws near, he seeks out the counsel of Danielle Webster, the best attorney in the country, to try and undo his contract with Lucy. A trial follows with an evil judge and a jury hand-selected by Lucy from her collection of souls. Can a brilliant attorney defeat the forces of darkness? The results are hilarious.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(Cast of 19, approximately 5 m, 5 w, 9 flexible)*

**JAKE STONE:** Successful man who made a deal with the devil.

**JAKE 2:** Jake before he was successful.

**DANIELLE WEBSTER:** An attorney who defends Jake.

**LUCY:** The Princess of Darkness.

**CLERK:** Works for Miss Webster.

**SCOTTY:** A friend of Jake 2.

**THE JURY:** May double with the characters below.

**THE JUDGE**

**PRODUCER**

**MAN AND WOMAN**

**PARENT AND CHILD**

**STOCK TRADER**

**BUSINESS MAN**

**PROFESSIONALS 1 AND 2**

**ACTOR**

**CHEFS 1 AND 2**

**PROPS**

Files on desk, guitar, briefcase containing files and contracts, pen, cell phone, pad and pen, chef outfits, pizza delivery uniform and insulated bags, stack of law books, birdcage, gavel, handkerchiefs.

**SETTING**

The settings include the law office of Danielle Webster, a park bench, and a demonic courtroom. The play may be performed on a bare stage with props. The time is the near future.

**THE DEVIL AND DANIELLE WEBSTER**

*(AT RISE: The setting is a bare stage with a desk and chairs right, a park bench left. MISS WEBSTER is seated at the desk reading through files. Her CLERK enters.)*

CLERK: Your ten o'clock appointment is here, Miss Webster. *(Excited)* The Governor.

WEBSTER: I'm looking forward to meeting him. I wonder why he wants to see me?

CLERK: He probably wants money for his next campaign.

WEBSTER: He can get a lot more money from someone else.

CLERK: Maybe he's done something illegal . He IS a politician.

WEBSTER: If he's done something illegal he needs a criminal lawyer. Besides, he's Jake Stone. The man who restored honor to our political process.

CLERK: Maybe he's going to bring suit against someone.

WEBSTER: Why don't we find out?

CLERK: Good idea. How can we do that?

WEBSTER: Invite him in.

CLERK: But any conversation you have with him in here will be confidential.

WEBSTER: That's true.

CLERK: I may never know why he's here.

WEBSTER: True again.

CLERK: But I have an inquiring mind. I want to know! I need to know!

WEBSTER: Actually, I'm the one who needs to know. Now show him in.

CLERK: But you don't understand. The man is one of my heroes.

WEBSTER: Why don't you show him in?

CLERK: Okay. *(Exits and returns with JAKE. WEBSTER crosses to shake his hand.)*

WEBSTER: Governor, this is such a pleasure.

JAKE: *(Shakes WEBSTER'S hand.)* Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Miss Webster.

*The Devil and Danielle Webster*

-6-

WEBSTER: It's not everyday the most popular governor in this state's history comes to see me. *(THEY sit.)* I normally don't care much for politicians, but you've given this state a whole new outlook. People actually are beginning to trust and respect the political process. *(THEY both look at the CLERK, who stands grinning.)* Is there anything else?

CLERK: No. *(Doesn't move.)*

WEBSTER: Don't you have something to do?

CLERK: Nothing that can't wait. *(Grins and waves at JAKE.)*

WEBSTER: I believe you have something very important to do.

CLERK: What's that?

WEBSTER: Closing the door ... on your way out.

CLERK: Oh. Okay. It's wonderful to meet you, Governor. Really. I'm one of your biggest fans. I voted for you twice. I mean, I know you only ran once, but I voted for you. And I would have voted more but they wouldn't let me. I don't know why. Seems kind of silly to me.

WEBSTER: Do you realize you're babbling incoherently?

CLERK: *(Giggling.)* I know. Can't help it. Just kind of an incoherent person, I guess. Always was. Silly, isn't it. I can't make a bit of sense.

WEBSTER: LEAVE! *(CLERK turns and slowly exits.)* I don't know what the problem is, but I do apologize.

JAKE: I'm used to it.

WEBSTER: I must say, Governor, I was really surprised when you made this appointment. Unlike some of my colleagues, I try to ignore politics as much as possible.

JAKE: This visit isn't about politics, Miss Webster. It's personal. I need your legal services.

WEBSTER: *(Surprised.)* Well. I'm not a criminal attorney.

JAKE: I know. Your specialty is contract law. I had my people search for the best contract attorney in the state. And your name came to the top.

WEBSTER: I'm flattered, but a bit confused. Why would you need my services?

*The Devil and Danielle Webster*

-7-

JAKE: Seven years ago I signed a contract, and I need to ... well ... get out of it.

WEBSTER: I see. Did you bring a copy of this contract?

JAKE: *(Hesitates.)* Yes. But I need to give you some background before you read it. Otherwise it will look ... very odd.

WEBSTER: Very well. *(JAKE pauses.)* Go ahead, Gov. Stone.

JAKE: *(Sighs.)* I wasn't always ... like I am now.

WEBSTER: None of us are. We all change.

JAKE: No, you don't understand. I was different. Really different.

*(JAKE 2 enters and sits on the bench. He is shabbily dressed. He carries a guitar and picks a few strings. He knows nothing about the guitar.)*

JAKE: *(Continued.)* I was ... well ... shabby and unmotivated and ... sort of a loser.

WEBSTER: I don't believe that for a second.

JAKE: Really. When all of this happened I had just lost my job as a pizza delivery boy. The third job in a month.

WEBSTER: Gov. Stone, is this some kind of joke? I happen to know that you attended an ivy league university, you played college football, and you made your first million dollars before you were twenty-five years old.

JAKE: Let me try and tell the story. Then you can draw your own conclusions.

*(SCOTTY enters and sits beside JAKE. He is equally as shoddily dressed.)*

SCOTTY: Hey, Jake. I heard you lost your pizza delivery job.

JAKE 2: Scotty. When'd you get out of jail?

SCOTTY: This morning. I went looking for you and your old lady told me you worked at the Pizza House. So I go there and they told me you got fired.

JAKE 2: *(Trying to ignore HIM.)* Yeah.

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