

THE NATURAL MEMBRANE OF THE LAMB

(a borscht circuit theological dispute)

by

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Characters

Jonathan Gridlock. Leader of the Good Lord's Coalition

Marilyn. His hard put upon wife.

The Angel. High spirited, down-to-Earth, but an angel nonetheless.

A white fluffy bed chamber. MARILYN and JONATHAN propped up on pillows. JONATHAN fiddling under the covers.

MARILYN

(reading)

"If you are using the unrolled product, simply open the capsule, remove condom and discard the plastic wrap. The natural membrane of the lamb is exceptionally thin and sensitive, yet unusually strong."

JONATHAN

It better be. Ouch!

MARILYN

Let me look at it.

JONATHAN

What? You know what it looks like. You've seen it hundreds of times.

MARILYN

Not that, *this*. Remember, darling, we're partners. Partners don't hide anything from each other.

JONATHAN

Here.

MARILYN

Lime, yuk. I hate that color.

JONATHAN

Marilyn, lets not talk about it. I've got a lot on my mind. I have full schedule tomorrow.

MARILYN

Now, don't be shy. I am your wife, with certain inalienable rights.

JONATHAN

Your embarrassing me. There is a time and a place for everything.
(hops out of bed)

MARILYN

I'd take your marital responsibilities seriously if I were you, Jonathan. Remember: The Good Lord Above sees everything.

(straightens the bed covers)

There. We're lucky to be lying on clean sheets. Next thing you know, we'll be signing affidavits to get into bed.

JONATHAN

Okay, let's start all over again.

(slips under the covers)

Go ahead, help. If you can.

MARILYN

Jonathan, you're being completely uncooperative. It takes two to tango, you know.

JONATHAN

We've got to take precautions, Marilyn. With all the horrible diseases running around, precautions may be all we have left. No matter what they say.

MARILYN

Whoever *they* may be.

JONATHAN

Yes, whoever they may be. In every barrel there's a rotten apple. Its time we faced up to the truth. That's what I said in my speech last night. I hope *somebody* heard me. Put the blame where it belongs, Marilyn. Where it *really* belongs. There are people out there who never pay attention to anyone but themselves. We pay for the excesses of those who refuse to control themselves. Thank you for making the bed. I feel better already.

MARILYN

I hate it when you talk like this. It ruins everything.

JONATHAN

It's the fault of the media. They always emphasize the negative things about me. They never look at the positive. Its time for the Good Lord's Coalition to get its act together. And I'm the one to do it.

MARILYN

Jonathan, I need the security of knowing that you will follow through on everything you say you are going to do. I was brought up on the Montessori method. I know that things work best when you complete them. I want a baby. There.

JONATHAN

Let's pray. Prayer settles the stomach. We can do the other thing later. If you wish.

(prays)

MARILYN

Good Lord Above, what do I have to do to get to first base around here?

(blows up the prophylactic like a balloon)

JONATHAN

(signs off prayer)

Sincerely yours, Jonathan Gridlock. Marilyn, the personal equation has to be set aside for the time being.

(Marilyn pops the prophylactic with a pin. He hops out of bed)

Marilyn, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do. People to bring together. A sermon to prepare.

(glowering)

Remember: the Good Lord Above helps those who help themselves.

(Exits.)

MARILYN

Good Lord Above, I don't know what's wrong with that man? I need a second opinion. Things always work best when I get a second opinion.

MARILYN

(gets out of bed, rummages through clothes rack)

Now, where is my prayer dress? The white one with the beads and the scarf and the little bells on the sleeves?

(finds it, zips up.)

Good Lord Above, I don't know what's wrong with that man. Things are really getting out of hand, Sir. If anything goes wrong between us, it might very well destroy the Good Lord's Coalition. And we can't allow that to happen.

(listens)

Yes Sir, I know that Jonathan has put a lot of effort into his work. And I'm a responsible person. But I can't be held responsible for everything that goes wrong. I have feelings too. To be frank, Sir, this marriage has gone sour. I need a little divine intervention.

(listens)

Uh, uh. Uh, uh. Well, I tried, Sir. Really, I tried. I've tried until I'm blue in the face. He's just not responding. All he thinks about is the damage being done to the fabric of society. He never thinks about the damage being done to me. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Yes, of course. I'll do my best.

(signs off)

Sincerely yours, Marilyn Gridlock.

(Burst of light, wind. ANGEL explodes out of the closet in a cloud of dust. He wears an old fashioned aviator's jump suit; helmet, goggles, and wings attached to his arms - with Delcro.)

ANGEL

What do you people do down here? Piss on each other? That ozone layer is the worst thing I ever flew through. I feel like I just got hit with a garbage truck. Next time I'm putting in for a better location.

MARILYN

Just who do you think you are, busting in on me like that? You're not one of those are you?

MARILYN

(dawns on her)

I don't believe it, an Angel! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

(on second thought)

Mr. Angel, I don't know how you got in here, but your trespassing on private property. I'd be careful if I were you. There's no telling what my husband might do.

ANGEL

Lady, don't get yourself in an uproar, okay? Give me a moment to materialize. Its been a long trip. Light year after light year after light year...

(materializes)

Ahhh, that's better..

(strips his wings, snaps out the dust)

MARILYN

Oh those wings are beautiful! Please, don't take them off. I've had enough disappointments for the day.

ANGEL

I have no proprietary interest in hanging on to my wings. Wings are merely the outward flamboyance of my inner state of being. Besides I got a report to finish.

(snaps open a cell phone)

Hello?

MARILYN

A report?

ANGEL

Hello? Hello, hello, hello! I hate these things.

ANGEL

(tosses cell phone away)

This has to be one of the toughest flights of my career. There has to be a better job than this.

(ANGEL breaks into a Tai Chi routine)

MARILYN

Good Lord Above, listen. A quick run down. Things are really hopping around here. There's an Angel hovering next to my bed. A top flight Angel. A credit to his race. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Yes sir, I will. Mr. Angel, is this your normal celestial approach? I mean you took off your wings without so much as a how-do-you-do. I'm a respectable woman. I just can't have an angel stripping off his wings in *my* bedroom.

(Angel continues Tai Chi routine.)

Mr. Angel, on behalf of human beings everywhere, I greet you. Welcome to our little planet. It's not such a bad place after all. Once you get used to it. If I had known you were coming, I'd have greeted you with a proper reception. My husband has lots of important connections. Gridlock, Jonathan Gridlock. Do you know the name?

(no answer)

Maybe you'd like a massage, I'm very good at that sort of thing.

ANGEL

You were praying when I arrived. Don't let me stop you.

MARILYN

Do you always go around making funny motions with your hands? It's very disconcerting. But you move well.

ANGEL

They pick up the smallest gesture. A sparrow, a falling leaf, a tear...

MARILYN

They? You mean there's more than one Good Lord Above? I don't know if I can handle this. My husband will have a fit!

ANGEL

Look, lady, I don't want to upset you. But let me let you in on a little secret, okay? The Good Lord Above is gone. Disappeared, into a black hole, with a big bang.

MARILYN

Gone? Impossible! I just spoke to Him a minute ago. He's not the irresponsible type.

ANGEL

He got sick and tired of everyone claiming him as one of their own. So he decided to knock off for a couple of centuries. If you got that kind of power, why not? Why work yourself to death trying to do what nobody wants to do for themselves? Look, I'm exhausted. I got to lie down for awhile.

MARILYN

He could have at least warned me. I intend to report this *episode* to the proper authorities.

ANGEL

I am the proper authority. There isn't a better ombudsman in the universe than me. Say your prayers, I'll see what I can do.

(CHIMES)

Ah, their home. Always a good sign.

(breaks into a flurry of Tai Chi gestures)

MARILYN

I need time to adjust. Rearrange the furniture. Everything I believe in, gone? How could that be? I'm sick to my stomach over this.

ANGEL

Lady, please. No tears, okay? I can't stand tears. Look, it could have been worse. Much worse. Today you have a House of Lords. One for

every religion, one for every occasion. Why there are enough Lords around to satisfy the most discriminating of tastes: A Christian, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Jew. You name it, we've got it. Every Lord has his own realm...

ANGEL

His own configuration in the Big Picture. I'd get into a different frame of mind if I were you. Its easier in the long run.

MARILYN

You are not what I expected, sir.

ANGEL

Look, there are compensations. There are always compensations. Today the traffic in prayers can be handled with a minimum of fuss. Prayers are neatly packaged and labeled before hand. And the rates haven't gone up yet. Why you can send a prayer today as cheaply as you did yesterday. It may sound like a corporate take over to you, but to me its a work of art. A striking use of contemporary technology. A bell weather of genius.

MARILYN

I don't believe you. You're much too glib to be an Angel.

ANGEL

(flashes business card)

That's me: Bernie. A full-fledged member of the Society of Activating Angels. Go ahead, say your prayers. I'll see to it that they get to the right Lord in the right place at the right time. So help me God.

MARILYN

Exactly what do you do? If I may ask?

ANGEL

Prayers. I do prayers. I separate the good ones from the bad ones and route them in the right direction. Believe me, its a lot of responsibility. Since the advent of E Mail, things get a little messy on the celestial highway. All that "at" stuff, home pages, list serves. Its beginning to sound like gibberish up there. Prayers sent from

below aren't being packaged properly. So I get a bonus whenever I find a lost soul. Today your It. Tomorrow, who knows?

MARILYN

There's something fishy going on...

ANGEL

Look, I know it sounds confusing, but Divine Intervention Release 2 is an entirely new program. The perfect solution to confusion in the Information Age. Divine Intervention Release 2 makes all previous routing of prayers obsolete. You can now send a prayer across the Great Divide without a hitch.

MARILYN

I don't think your an Angel. Something else maybe. Maybe a human being *disguised* as an Angel.

ANGEL

Human being?! Lady, don't do me any favors, okay? I've had it up to here with human beings. Human beings are the most self-centered creatures that ever walked on earth. All you do is think about yourselves. Not exactly what the Good Lord had in mind when he created this mess.

MARILYN

Maybe you're a salesman, a lawyer, a politician, a talk show host. But an angel, oh no. You're a fake!

ANGEL

Talk about lack of appreciation! Lady, I got a solid reputation in cyberspace. Ask any one and they'll tell you: Bernie, he's a top flight angel! That's it, I've come to the end of my rope. All bets are off. From now on, you're on your own.

MARILYN

No angel worth his salt would talk to me the way you do. You're a miserable excuse for a higher state of being. Go back to where you came from. I'm sure you'd be welcome down there. Lucifer.

ANGEL

Lucifer yet! I hate this job. Between heaven and hell there's not much of a choice anymore. I'm leaving.

MARILYN

First you fly through the window without so much as a how-do-you-do. Next you start making funny motions with your hands. Then you tell me that the Good Lord Above doesn't exist anymore. That you can't stand human beings. And that you would rather not be here. I thought you'd be different kind of angel. Someone I can trust. Someone I'd be proud to call my own. Tell whoever is in charge that I apologize for sending you back on short notice, but I think you're a disgrace to your profession!

ANGEL

There *is* a limit to my patience. I can have your prayers wiped out like that! And don't you forget it!

MARILYN

Sir, you are talking to the wife of the leader of the Good Lord's Coalition. What is this world coming to when an Angel doesn't know his proper place in the scheme of things?

ANGEL

Do you think its easy living in a higher state of being? I work hard for a living. Look at me, I'm a wreck! You have no idea what it takes just to get down here. One war after another and flak from everyone of them. I should have quit this job a long time ago. But something inside of me insists on finishing everything I do. Maybe its the Montessori method. It ruined me for life.

MARILYN

The Montessori method? Then we do have something in common.

ANGEL

Next time I ask for a different assignment. One where I can get a little respect.

MARILYN

What else do you do? Please, its important.

ANGEL

Blessings. I do blessings.

MARILYN

You mean I'm blessed?

ANGEL

God bless you. It took everything I had to say that.

MARILYN

When I asked for divine intervention, I expected someone a little more diplomatic. Someone who knows how to talk to a lady. A cherub maybe. With bright cheeks and round puffy legs and a bow and arrow. Good Lord Above, why did you send *him*? First, my husband. Now, him!

ANGEL

Marilyn, haven't you figured it out? I'm your guardian angel. When it comes to divine intervention, I'm all you've got. All I ask is a little recognition of the central role I play. Look, lets start all over again.

MARILYN

How did you know my name?

ANGEL

What?

MARILYN

How did you know my name? You said it like it was second nature.

ANGEL

I knew you were a Marilyn the moment I flew out of your clothes rack. Boy, I'm in for it now! Wait till they hear about this upstairs. I'll

never hear the end of it. Sexual harassment charges, congressional investigations, the works. I'm going. Where did I put my wings?

MARILYN

No one has ever said Marilyn like that before. You said it like you've been saying it all of your life. It is a miracle - after all!

ANGEL

(putting on his wings)

Miracles are part of my job. I do them all the time. Marilyn, please! Don't touch my wings, its a sin! Oh my God....

MARILYN

Their absolutely gorgeous. Ohhhhhh...

ANGEL

Marilyn, there are restrictions about what a lady can do with her guardian angel. Touch my wings and I will not hesitate to report you to the proper authorities.

MARILYN

You are the proper authority. You said so yourself.

(touches his wings)

Ohhhh.....

ANGEL

Marilyn, please! Not here, not now! Oh that feels so good! What a sensation!

MARILYN

Your so sensitive. So down-to-earth. So male.

ANGEL

(beatific)

Just call me Bernie. Its my favorite name.

MARILYN

Bernie: my guardian angel. King of the upper regions. Herald of the stratosphere. My first class ticket to paradise!

ANGEL

Marilyn, I'll never be able to explain this to the Divine Intervention Committee. They'll drop me like a hot potatoe.

MARILYN

I want to know everything about you, Bernie. Everything.

ANGEL

Okay. You asked for it. The Big Man Upstairs gave me my name. And he gave me these wings too. I mean he could have called me something traditional. Like Gabriel or Michael or Rafael or Saint Bernard. But he called me Bernie. The name stuck like glue.

MARILYN

Wear the name with pride, Bernie. It's a gift.

BERNIE

(inspired)

Here we were, a host of angels, crowded together on Cloud Nine. Suddenly He appeared. With that big, red eye of His. Like He had been weeping for His creation. Like He couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. No one had ever seen Him like that before. Everyone felt lousy. But then there was the music. Chimes, trumpets, harps, kazoos, a complete orchestra. This wasn't an everyday occurrence - this was IT!

MARILYN

IT?

ANGEL

Yes, IT! Then He pointed a finger at me. I feel right to my knees. *"You, that Angel on Cloud Nine, the one with the beard, stand up! I want to talk to you!"* You see, Marilyn, during his blue period, the Good Lord Above had taken on a big booming voice that echoed in the heavens. Once you heard it you never forgot it.

MARILYN

Like my father?

ANGEL

Exactly. *"From now on, Bernie, you shall be known as Bernie. Right down to the last syllable of recorded time. Bernie, my beloved Spokes Angel. Bernie, Defender of Lost Souls. Bernie, an Angel For All Seasons"*. Marilyn, I was ecstatic!

MARILYN

Ecstatic? Exactly the right word, Bernie. You're a genius.

ANGEL

Maybe? Who knows? But I had found my calling. Little does any one know what's in store for him until the Good Lord Above *smacks* you on the side of your head. Then you know. Now I was something more than just another angel with a pair of wings. I was the Real McCoy. I was among the Select. I was IT! I could just see my career taking off.

MARILYN

My husband Jonathan says he's IT.

ANGEL

There can be only one IT at a time, Marilyn. You just don't pass these things around indiscriminately.

MARILYN

Oh. I'll have to give it second thought.

ANGEL

Right! *"Bernie"*, He said. from way up high. Higher than I ever thought possible. But I was on my knees. Every thing looks possible from *that* position. *"Bernie, I got a favor to ask you"*. Favor? I said. Look I'll do anything your heart desires. Make a wish, I'll do it. I

mean who was I to ask Him to make a wish? I was just a mote in His eye. A speck. Why I can still feel His hand on the back of my neck like it was yesterday.

MARILYN

He picked the right man for the job.

ANGEL

Angel, Marilyn! He picked the right angel for the job. Its important that we make that distinction clear.

MARILYN

Distinctions are hard for me, Bernie. I'm not used to them.

ANGEL

I understand completely.

MARILYN

You're an angel after all.

ANGEL

Thank you.

(at the top of his form)

Bernie, here's what I want you to do. You don't have to do it if you don't want to. But if you do, you can earn frequent flyer points. Go down there. Talk to those preachers. How dare they claim me as one of their own. Using my good name to cover up their hidden agendas. Lies are being said about me, Bernie. In the beginning was the Word, and after the Word, nothing but lies. I've lost my patience, Bernie. I've had it up to here. No more pussy footing around. This is IT! Marilyn, He was pissed.

MARILYN

I understand completely.

BERNIE

All the angels fell to their knees. They asked him not to do away with the likes of human kind. Frankly I think they were just trying to

keep their jobs. I mean if He left, where would we go? None of us had tenure.

MARILYN

You're right. If He left, everything would be at stake. Everything.

BERNIE

Good Lord Above, I said, please, don't ask me to go down there. Get some one else to do the job. Some one with a high tolerance level. A devil maybe, okay? I just don't have the proper credentials. Besides, Sir, its beyond the purview of my experience. *"Purview of your experience? What are you talking about, Bernie? What kind of language is that? I'll get you the proper credentials. Wise up, I don't make an offer like this everyday. Take the going while the going is good.* Suddenly, Marilyn, I was covered: a passport, credit cards, flu shots, the works. It was like He never heard a word I said. If I had known what He had in store for me, I never would've accepted. Never!

MARILYN.

I knew all along you had a higher calling.

ANGEL

You did?

MARILYN

The way you took off your wings. Pure magic. It was like you were standing with nothing on but yourself.

BERNIE

It was like I was standing with nothing on but myself? You mean I was naked?

MARILYN

I didn't realize that until now.

BERNIE

(inspired)

"Bernie, you go down there. You tell those idiots below that I'm sick and tired of Mother Nature being trampled on for profit. Mother Nature's on my side, not theirs! Why that poor lady is so disgusted she's halfway out the door already. If they don't wise up and start acting responsibly, I will not hesitate to take my revenge: earthquakes, tornadoes, tidal waves, congressional investigations.

BERNIE

You name it, I've got it. Right here in the palm of my hand. They may think I'm residing in the New Testament, but the Old Testament is where I'm at now! And pouf, like that, Marilyn, he was gone. Right through a black hole into time immemorial.

MARILYN

And to think He took the time to listen to *my* prayers. He deserved a better world than the one He got.

ANGEL

Marilyn, talking to you is better than living on Cloud Nine. I feel like I can just be myself. Me, Bernie, with all my occupational hazards.

MARILYN

Bernie, you're exactly the kind of spiritually oriented person I'm looking for. Say it, Bernie. Say it. The Good Lord Above hears everything.

ANGEL

I want a son. Some one to pick my spirits when I am down. There, I've said it.

MARILYN

And I want you to be the father of my child. There, *I've said it*. Isn't it wonderful how two people can say the same thing when they are talking about two different things at once? It's a miracle, Bernie. A real miracle!

ANGEL

Exactly. I wouldn't have believed it if I *didn't* believe it. A once in a life time miracle.

MARILYN

Yes.

ANGEL

Yes.

MARILYN

Yes?

ANGEL

YES!

(They kiss and make up. A serious knock on the door.)

JONATHAN

Marilyn, are you in there? I hear voices. Is there someone in there with you? Open up the door and let me in!

MARILYN

Jonathan, I am in a state of beatitude. Leave me alone. Do not disturb! Remember: The Good Lord Above helps those who help themselves!

JONATHAN

Marilyn, I'd take this seriously if I were you!

(CHIMES)

ANGEL

Looks like celestial matters have come to a head. Let's go, while the going is good.

MARILYN

Now? Take matters into our own hands?

ANGEL

From your mouth to God's ears. Lets go. One, two, three!

(A thunder clap, lightning. They flee through the clothes closet into time immemorial. The door flies open. JONATHAN stands in his robes, ready for combat duty.)

JONATHAN

Yea, though I walk through the valley...

(CHIMES)

MARILYN

(on Cloud Nine)

House of Lords. May I have your account number, sir? Your mother's maiden name will do.

JONATHAN

Account number? Mother's maiden name? Jonathan Gridlock, leader of the Good Lord's Coalition. I have an excellent credit rating with the Good Lord Above - second to none. Put me through to Him or you'll never hear the end of it! Marilyn, is that you?

MARILYN

Please hold for a customer associate. One suited to your temperament. One moment, sir.

JONATHAN

I have ways *and* means, I assure you!

(CHIMES)

ANGEL

Saint Bernard speaking. This conversation is being recorded for evaluation purposes. May I help you, sir?

JONATHAN

Jonathan Gridlock. Leader of the Good Lord's Coalition. Check out my name on the priority list. I am among the select.

ANGEL

Gridlock? I'm sorry, sir, but you are not registered as a true believer. Have you tried the list below?

JONATHAN

Blasphemy! That's what this is, blasphemy!

(DISTANT THUNDER.)

Good Lord Above, what have I done to deserve this? Have I not been your faithful servant?

JONATHAN

(clasps his hands, prays.)

Sincerely yours, Jonathan Gridlock.

(A LARGE WHITE FEATHER drifts down from above. JONATHAN snaps it up.)

What is the meaning of this? Is this some kind of celestial joke?!

(A RAY OF LIGHT. RAIN. LIGHT FADES)

THE END