

Fred Bets the Karmic House

a play by

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Cast:

Fred: Middle-aged, dressed like he's been out in the snow.

Muriel: Middle-aged, silk clothes loose and flowing.

Blackjack Dealer: A man in a black suit and string tie.

Announcer: An unseen, upbeat voice.

Set: A blackjack table, chairs.

At Open: Muriel plays blackjack with a Dealer.

DEALER

Blackjack.

(slides some chips to her
already large pile)

One million dollars.

MURIEL

Let it ride.

(The Dealer deals another hand.)

DEALER

Blackjack.

(slides more chips across
the table)

Five million dollars.

MURIEL

Let it ride.

(Fred approaches and watches as the Dealer
deals another hand.)

DEALER

Blackjack.

(slides over more chips)

Twenty-five million dollars.

(Fred sits beside Muriel.)

MURIEL

(to Dealer)

Let it ride.

(to Fred)

You still trying to help Scott make it back from the
Antarctic?

FRED

Something to do. Winning?

(Dealer sets out another hand.)

DEALER
(sliding more chips to her)
Blackjack. One hundred million dollars.

MURIEL
So so.

FRED
I saw Elvis.

MURIEL
No. Where?
(to Dealer)
Let it ride.

FRED
Doing a lounge act.

MURIEL
Oh, Fred, there are more Elvis' here than a karaoke bar in Memphis.

FRED
So where is he? Your room?
(Dealer sets out another hand.)

MURIEL
Well, if you must know, yes.

DEALER
Blackjack. One billion dollars.
(He slides more chips toward Muriel.)

FRED
What are you going to do with a billion dollars?

MURIEL
Well, in this place, a billion dollars, a banana, three scoops of ice cream, and some chocolate syrup will get me a banana split.

FRED
I won five billion last week.

MURIEL
What'd you do with it?

FRED
Bought Marilyn Monroe a cup of tea before she went to her acting class. She's still determined to get it right.

FRED
How much longer before we go back?

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Welcome to Astral Las Vegas, where every bet is a winner, and our cocktail angels are eager to shake their tail feathers to serve you. Don't be shy, sign up to be a

heavenly lounge backup singer and get up and sing with Sinatra.

MURIEL

Not soon enough. I'm bored to death.

FRED

I'd even agree to go back as a gay Republican environmentalist school teacher in Texas if that meant I could blow this astral pop stand.

DEALER

If you're looking for excitement, there is another game you could play.

MURIEL

We're all ears.

DEALER

We're allowing people to place bets with their karma tonight.

MURIEL

You mean if I win, I could have a better life to go back to?

DEALER

Yes.

FRED

But if I lose...

DEALER

Then you lose some of your good karma.

MURIEL

How does that apply to relationships? I mean, if he loses, and we're together...

DEALER

If he wins, you win. If he loses, and you're together, you both lose.

FRED

What about body types? Can I bet on that?

DEALER

Yes, sir.

MURIEL

Wait a minute, you mean he can win a bet that I'd have a more attractive body in our next life?

DEALER

No, just his own.

FRED

Good enough for me. When can we start?

MURIEL

But what if he loses? Does he go from a young Marlon Brando to the...older version?

DEALER

It depends on the nature of the bet.

FRED

I'm just going to ask this straight out, could I win a better wife?

MURIEL

Better? You're lucky to have me.

FRED

It's just a question. Aren't we supposed to be thinking about how we could do better in our next lifetime?

MURIEL

That means improving yourself, not improving me.

FRED

Fine. But if I lose my karmic shirt and pants, you're still going to be left holding my...

MURIEL

Fred, I forbid this.

(to Dealer)

Can't I?

DEALER

You can only bet your own karma, ma'am.

FRED

Ha ha ha. This is great.

MURIEL

Are you serious?

FRED

I won five billion dollars last week? I'm on a roll, baby.

MURIEL

The only roll you've been on your last three lifetimes is day old bear claws. I'm sick of the smell.

FRED

That's my first bet, then.

MURIEL

What?

FRED

(to Dealer)

I want to bet my pastry karma.

DEALER

Yes, sir.

(Dealer deals)

MURIEL

What in the hell is pastry karma?

DEALER

Nineteen.

FRED
(to Muriel)

What should I do?

MURIEL
Have you ever gotten a number lower than twenty before tonight?

(The Dealer deals his cards.)

DEALER

Twelve.

FRED

I don't think so.

DEALER
(deals another card)

Eighteen.

MURIEL

I don't like this.

DEALER
(deals himself a four)
Twenty-two. We have a winner.

FRED

Yes, yes, yes!

MURIEL
What yes, yes, yes? What about your cholesterol? That truck tire around your waist in your next life will be the size of New Jersey.

FRED
(to Dealer)
Can I bet that scientists will come up with a low fat, low cholesterol pastry?

MURIEL
That tastes good.

FRED
Hey, now you're getting into it.
(to Dealer)
That tastes good.

DEALER
The bet is on the table.

(The Dealer deals. The Dealer has an ace of spades face up. Fred gets sixteen.)

DEALER
Sixteen.

MURIEL
I don't like this.

FRED
Let me think, let me think.
(Fred stares at cards. Smiles at Dealer.)

FRED
Could I get a lifeline here?

DEALER
Sorry, sir, we don't offer reality programming. I'm told in that other place, it's available twenty-four hours a day.

MURIEL
That would be hell.

DEALER
Oh, no, ma'am, it's by request.
(to Fred)
What would you like to do, sir?
(Fred rocks on his stool.)

FRED
I'm gonna...I'm gonna...

MURIEL
Stay, stay, stay.

FRED
Hit me!
(Fred gets another card, a four.)

DEALER
Twenty.

MURIEL
Thank god.

FRED
But he could have a face card to go with that ace?

MURIEL
You can't bet on getting an ace.

FRED
Yes, I can. This is heaven.

DEALER
Indeed it is, sir.

FRED
Hit me.
(Fred gets a spade king.)

DEALER

Spade king. Dealer wins.

MURIEL

Oh my God, in my next life I'm going to be married to the Fat Bastard.

FRED

God dammit, you threw off my concentration, Muriel. I needed to concentrate.

(Muriel grabs Fred by the arm.)

MURIEL

Fred, it's time to go.

FRED

No, it was one bad hand. I want to bet that in my next life, I get to live in a mansion.

MURIEL

Be careful! You want to be a servant?

FRED

(to Dealer)

Right, I want to own the mansion, mortgage paid off.

(to Muriel)

You want servants? A guest house?

MURIEL

A heated indoor pool with a sauna...

FRED

(to dealer)

With a heated indoor pool and sauna.

MURIEL

I'm still against this, but if you're going to do it...

FRED

What? Name it, baby.

MURIEL

Woodpeckers.

FRED

Woodpeckers?

MURIEL

I like the sound.

FRED

That's the bet. Deal.

(The Dealer deals.)

DEALER

Blackjack.

(Fred and Muriel jump into each others arms.)

MURIEL
You were right to keep betting, but it's time to stop now.

FRED
Stop? But I'm on a roll.

MURIEL
But this is our life.

DEALER
We have time for one more bet.

(Muriel pushes Fred off the betting stool
and sits in his place.)

MURIEL
I want to bet that in spite of his bets, we'll have just the
life we were supposed to have.

FRED
But, Muriel, we could be somebody.

MURIEL
Aren't I enough for you?

FRED
I may be enough for you, but I'm not enough for myself.
Just let me do one more bet.

MURIEL
Is it really that important to you?

FRED
It is.

(Muriel considers, then lets Fred sit.)

FRED
I want to own football team that wins the super bowl.

DEALER
That would require all your good karma.

MURIEL
Fred, don't.

FRED
I have to.

(Dealer deals.)

DEALER
King and Queen; twenty.

FRED
Please, please, please...

MURIEL

I can't watch.

(She tries not to look, but does.
Dealer plays his cards; blackjack.)

DEALER

Dealer wins.

FRED

Shit. Shit. Shit. What will I be now?

MURIEL

What will WE be? Homeless street people?

FRED

I'm so sorry, I...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Welcome to Astral Las Vegas, where every bet wins. Just a reminder, you can only bet with astral dollars; betting earthly karma is not allowed.

FRED

(to Dealer)

You lied to me...to us.

(Dealer closes the game.)

DEALER

Yes, sir.

MURIEL

Why?

DEALER

You were bored. Now you're not.

(He leaves.)

FRED

What a relief.

MURIEL

I would have asked for a new car every ten years, and a neighborhood with good schools for our children.

(She turns to go, stops by the edge of the stage.)

FRED

We can have that, the two of us, we're a team.

MURIEL

Now that I know what you really want, I'll have to think about our sharing another life together.

FRED

How about double or nothing?

MURIEL
You just did, Fred. And you lost.

(She exits.)

FRED
(after Muriel)
I just wanted to be somebody.

(Lights fade.)

FRED
Double or nothing. Anybody?

The End