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The Visitation

By

Michael Donald Mallen Jr.

A Creative Writing Project

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2019

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The Visitation

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April 23, 2019

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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## ABSTRACT

*The Visitation* is an absurdist drama set at a funeral parlour during the funerary viewing of a young man who has died by suicide. The play follows a realistic framework, both in structure and subject matter. Throughout the play, characters interact and discuss difficult topics such as suicide, hegemonic masculinity, mortality, and morality. Written as a Menippean satire, the play uses absurdist and often dark humour to disarm audiences while simultaneously bringing these difficult topics to their attention. The aim is to allow audiences to question and re-evaluate their beliefs on the areas discussed. While the subject matter is often difficult, it serves the greater goal of removing the stigma or “taboo” from these topics by presenting dialogues that are both frank and true to life.

## DEDICATION

For Madonna and Mathew

*Sorry you'll miss opening night.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my Mom, Dad, brother, and sister, for your continued support, for ignoring the messes of papers all over the house, and for being around when I needed a break. It means so much, even if it made you mad I wouldn't show you anything until it was done (Mom).

Thank you to Dr. Karl Jirgens, for supervising the process from a controlled chaos to a more refined form. Your guidance over the last two years not only with this thesis, but also with helping me get my foot in the door with publications, has been of immense help.

Thank you to Dr. Nicole Markotić, for sitting in on my defense and for telling me I needed to “make things weirder.” I'll try keeping my clothes on (for the most part) in the future.

Thank you to Dr. Christopher Grieg, for not only agreeing to be my external reader, but for opening my eyes to masculinity studies and how I can make my contributions count.

Thank you to all the other professors at the University of Windsor, especially Dr. Susan Holbrook and Marty Gervais, who helped me hone my own style, facilitate my learning and gave me the opportunities to express myself as me and nothing less.

Thank you to all those who took their time and offered it to me during the research of this thesis. I admire your bravery and openness towards, in some cases, a complete stranger.

Thank you to Nick Charlton, Tori Cryan, Ryan Paterson and all the people I shared a creative writing workshop with. Most of your critiques helped a lot.

Thank you to all the people I've shared a stage with, both as a reader and an MC, for allowing me the chance to hone my skills and for feeding my “unique” brand of comedy.

And finally, thanks to all the great people I shared my last two years working on my Master's with. I'll miss you all as much as you say you'll miss me. The same can be said to all the friends I had, made, and sometimes lost, on this journey towards making this idea a reality.

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## *THE VISITATION*

### *Dramatis Personae*

**RICHARD:** Main character. Age 40-50. White male. Portrays many traits of hegemonic masculinity. Father of Devin, husband of Carol. Was especially hard on Devin. His best friend is Geoff. He is more ignorant than unintelligent. Throughout the play, he shows tendencies of anger and frustration. As the play continues, he begins becoming aware of his faults. The climax of the play involves Richard coming to terms with his parenting style.

**CAROL:** Age 40-50. Mother of Devin, wife of Richard. Sister of Jean. She is grieving the death of her son, but is struggling, as she has very little support around her. Richard is often rude to her, nearly to the point of aggressiveness. Her character is reserved, but by the end stands for herself. Character is meant to be sympathetic, yet can flow from scene to scene.

**GEOFF:** Age 40-50. Richard's best friend. Intelligent, and unafraid to speak his mind or opinion. Has very little empathy, and looks at life in a logical, calculated way. Has a crush on Carol, and struggles with how Richard treats her. He attempts to confess his love for Carol, but is rejected. Throughout the play, he drinks alcohol, becoming more belligerent and less filtered towards the end. This drunkenness can be played up, but not overtly.

**MARK:** Aged 30-40. Friend of Richard and Geoff. He has cancer, and is quietly struggling with coming to terms with this. Occasionally, he is able to match Geoff for his wit, but is the most sensitive of the men and often disapproves of the way the others think. He is willing to go along with most things, but has a good sense of morals.

**MILLIE:** Aged 30. A friend of Carol. Slightly airheaded. Develops a relationship with the Funeral Director as the play progresses. Can be seen as the fool, or comedic relief, but will also

show dimension as a layered character (e.g. has attempted suicide). She often has stories for whatever situation and a deep knowledge of trivial facts, including professional wrestling.

JEAN: Aged 42-55. Carol's older sister. Unmarried. Looks good for her age. A plastic surgeon who constantly attempts to convince others that plastic surgery would help them feel better. Is afraid of dying. Dislikes Richard. Tends to tell other characters what plastic surgery can do for them. Has a relatively short temper.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Age similar to Millie. Native Canadian/American. Attractive, highly intelligent. Develops a relationship with Millie. Stresses proper decorum and carries themselves in a very professional manner. Minor character.

DEVIN: Aged 25. White Male. Deceased. Walks lightly around the stage. Only child of Richard and Carol. Does not give much information regarding his suicide. Often whiny. Has a deep desire to bring people together, and does so by touching them.

*The Visitation*

**Act I, Scene I**

*[The stage is set up like a funeral home. Stage right has chairs, lined up and facing a coffin, its lid open. Flowers and photographs decorate the stage. During the play, a photo of Devin appears projected on the back screen. The lights go up. The stage is empty]*

*[MARK and GEOFF enter]*

GEOFF: So, he killed himself, eh?

MARK: Yeah. Crazy to think that someone so young could do that.

GEOFF: *[Scoffs]* He was 25, so it isn't that young. Plus, there are so many different ways to do it. *[Pause]* You know, I don't trust anyone who hasn't thought of doing that.

MARK: You mean dying by suicide?

GEOFF: Okay, well I guess it's more complicated than that. Let me rephrase it. Everyone has considered causing their own death. You ever been on the couch eating chips and thought to yourself, "Man, I should stop eating these chips?" It isn't healthy, but then you keep eating them. You are actively hurting your body, pushing yourself closer to death, all because you like the taste of chips. And I mean, who doesn't?

MARK: I know *I* do.

GEOFF: But then, you have people who are paid to put themselves in situations where they could die. Police officers, firefighters, delivery drivers, magicians. All of them put their lives in jeopardy every time they go to work. Soldiers, chemists, teachers, athletes. They don't care either. They know what they're getting into.

MARK: Magicians?

GEOFF: Houdini died.

MARK: He got punched in the stomach when he wasn't ready.

GEOFF: How many people are ready to die?

MARK: He didn't die instantly.

GEOFF: Still died. Magic time. There's a scene in that movie, *It's a Wonderful Life* where people wish they were never born. That's wanting to die, in a sense.

MARK: Yeah, but that's not killing yourself.

GEOFF: Only because they don't take action.

MARK: Wishing not to be born isn't the same as killing yourself. That movie isn't about suicide.

GEOFF: The entire movie is driven forward plot wise because he wants to kill himself.

Everything that happens afterwards is because he wants to die. It has nothing to do with not wanting to be born. He wants to die, then an angel comes and tells him "wait, don't."

MARK: *[Acknowledges casket]* Too bad Devin didn't have an angel.

GEOFF: You're deflecting. The point of the movie is suicide.

MARK: He actually states that he wishes he was never born. That's a key element of the movie.

They go through a whole Scrooge thing where they show him examples of how his life has helped others.

*[RICHARD enters, walking past the men and closing the casket lid]*

GEOFF: So, it's a rip off of Dickens?

MARK: I'd say it is more of an homage.

*[RICHARD walks onstage and joins the conversation]*

RICHARD: Mark, I need \$20. *[MARK reaches in his pockets and hands him \$20]* Thanks.

*[Puts money in pocket]* What are you guys arguing about?

GEOFF: If *It's a Wonderful Life* is a movie about killing yourself or never wanting to be born.

MARK: I think we got a little off topic there, but at least we can agree that it's a Christmas movie.

GEOFF: More than we could say about *Die Hard*.

RICHARD: What?

GEOFF: *Die Hard* isn't a Christmas movie.

RICHARD: Yes, it is.

GEOFF: I told you we aren't having that discussion again.

MARK: Just because a movie is set in December doesn't mean it is about Christmas.

GEOFF: [*Whispers to MARK*] Don't get him started.

RICHARD: No, no. I like where this is going.

GEOFF: Okay, so you *do* want to talk about this?

RICHARD: I'll start. It *is* a Christmas movie because it's set around Christmas.

MARK: Who kills people at Christmas?

RICHARD: Well, Christmas isn't a time where killing stops.

GEOFF: He has a point. Do you think Christmas is a time when people think to themselves, "I better not do this until after the kids open their gifts?" At Christmas, people feel increased levels of depression, especially those who may be estranged from their families or are alone. Think about it, at a time when commercialism says that you should be wrapping presents for your family, aren't you a failure in the eyes of the capitalist system if you don't embody the preferred vision of the state? Plus, with the lack of vitamin D coming from the sun, at least in the northern hemisphere, many people experience seasonal depression.

MARK: Now *you're* deflecting.

GEOFF: Doesn't matter. It's still not a Christmas movie.

RICHARD: I'm going to deflect my foot off both of your asses if you keep saying *Die Hard* isn't a Christmas movie. The guy who wrote the thing *said* it was.

MARK: You mean, Stephen de Souza?

RICHARD: He *wrote* the damn film. You really want to go against what *he* says? You think you know more than someone who actually *wrote* the movie?

GEOFF: Everybody makes mistakes, even screenwriters.

MARK: It's true.

RICHARD: You know what, screw both of you. It's my son's funeral, and you two are arguing about *Christmas movies*? Get a life! *[Exits]*

MARK: *[Pause]* You know what was a good Christmas movie? *A Christmas Story*.

GEOFF: That movie was racist.

MARK: What, the ending?

GEOFF: Yes.

MARK: Well, what about *Breakfast at Tiffany's*?

GEOFF: I think I remember that film. I think it was pretty racist, too.

MARK: Well, that's one thing we can agree on.

GEOFF: *[Walks over to the coffin]* Have you ever considered killing yourself?

MARK: Excuse me?

GEOFF: Have you ever considered committing suicide?

MARK: Never.

GEOFF: Liar.

MARK: Don't call me a liar.

GEOFF: Then don't lie.

MARK: I'm not lying.

GEOFF: Really, have you ever thought of killing yourself?

MARK: *[Sighs]* Well, maybe. Actually, a lot more recently. You see...

GEOFF: *[Walks back over to MARK]* So, you admit to being a liar.

MARK: What?

GEOFF: You admit to lying.

MARK: No, I...

GEOFF: I mean you lied to me.

MARK: Geoff, I'm trying to tell you something.

GEOFF: How would I know it's the truth? I wouldn't. I'm here talking with you, but you just want to lie for the sake of playing devil's advocate.

MARK: I'm not trying to play devil's advocate.

GEOFF: Fine. Two can play that game. Whatever thing you're conflicted about, whatever little wheel the hamster in your head is spinning, do the one thing that your morals tell you is *wrong*.

Lie. Cheat on your girlfriend. Spend your life savings on a boat. Take LSD. Just don't do LSD on that new boat of yours. I have to take a leak, and that's the truth. *[Exits, as MILLIE enters.*

*GEOFF whispers something to MILLIE, who walks past GEOFF and towards the coffin near*

*MARK. MARK stands aside for a moment before walking over to MILLIE]*

MILLIE: Hi Mark, how are you?

MARK: I don't know actually.

MILLIE: That's okay. Everybody needs to think, otherwise their brains go to mush. What are you thinking about?

MARK: *[Pause]* Have you ever wanted to kill yourself?

MILLIE: [*Nonchalantly*] Of course.

MARK: Really?

MILLIE: Yeah. Why would I lie?

MARK: I didn't say you lied.

MILLIE: No? Oh, because Geoff just said you're a liar, or that you get defensive about your lying. I wasn't really listening. I trust you though. You seem nice.

MARK: So do you. But why would you want to kill yourself? You seem so happy.

MILLIE: Yes. But it comes and goes. That's the thing, right? For me, it happens when I've screwed up bad, and I think, maybe I *should* be dead. Then, I won't be haunted by my own failure if I'm trying to sleep, or start a new relationship, or make pizza from scratch.

MARK: You do that?

MILLIE: Oh yeah, it isn't hard. I have this great recipe for dough that my grandmother passed down...

MARK: I meant, do you *think* that way?

MILLIE: Oh, well, yeah. And it isn't a bad thing. Thinking about something doesn't make you bad. I've never killed anyone, but I've thought about it. Who hasn't? The only person I've ever tried to kill was myself, but it didn't work. Life's not fair, y'know. Nobody ever said it would be. For a while, I thought life would have fair rules. Then, I read this French writer who said, "the rules do not constitute a real constraint; they are the conventional appearance of fairness." For me, trying to kill myself was a cry for help.

MARK: So, you actually tried?

MILLIE: Mm-hmm! Like I said, it didn't work, and I'm happy now that it didn't. It's a good thing I called the ambulance.



MARK: What do you mean a “cry for help?”

MILLIE: I overdosed instead of using a gun. It’s easier to pump someone’s stomach than trying to re-assemble their brains.

MARK: That’s terrible.

MILLIE: It was pretty stupid what I did, and I doubt I would do it again. Maybe one day. I’m not ruling it out. Nobody should. Going out on your own terms is a choice.

MARK: I guess.

MILLIE: Now, I’m not saying you *should* do it, just that you should keep that option open. It’s a normal thought to have. Just having that thought means you value life. That’s what I think.

You’re alive, so you begin to wonder about the end. It’s like eating, and thinking about how eventually, you’ll be done with dinner. Same with killing yourself. One day you might. If I’m around and you do it, then I’ll go to your funeral.

MARK: Well, I guess that’s sweet of you.

MILLIE: Thank you, but honestly, I like funerals. They’re a great excuse to catch up with people you don’t normally see. It’s like a sad reunion. I don’t like to be sad. Normally, I’m not. Like today, we’re here for someone who had their whole future ahead of them. But now they don’t.

That’s all. No sense crying after the shock is gone. Plus, I love to see how the decorations look.

The flowers are usually lovely. *[Whispers]* Between you and me, I know where I can get a better coffin. Cheap too.

MARK: Uh, huh. I’m going to step out for a coffee. Would you like to come too?

MILLIE: Sure. That way I can see if Geoff is right about you being a liar.

*[MARK and MILLIE exit. The stage remains empty for 15 seconds. The casket lid opens. The stage lighting becomes darker, and blue in colour. DEVIN exits the casket and closes the lid and*

*walks about the stage for half a minute. He stops and spends a moment staring at his image projected on the back wall screen, then walks to centre stage, faces the audience and speaks to them]*

DEVIN: I'm Devin, and I'm the reason you're all here. Sorry, that sounds like I'm someone important. I'm not; I'm just someone who decided to kill themselves. I had a reason for it. Have you ever felt that you'd be better off dead? The idea seems so enticing that you feel like you have to do it? *[Pause]* You ever regret a decision? One you can't take back? *[Pause]* But enough about me. I'll visit again. *[Exits. The stage remains empty for a moment while the lighting returns to normal]*

## Act I, Scene II

*[The FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters, with CAROL and RICHARD following behind]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Here we are. If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask. *[Exits]*

CAROL: Come on, Richard.

RICHARD: *[Frustrated]* I don't want to be here. This is ridiculous. I just want to go home.

CAROL: Be respectful.

RICHARD: Why? This is as much about us as it is about him.

CAROL: I'm going to talk to Devin. *[Walks over to the coffin and opens it]* Hi honey. How are you? *[Pause]* I miss you every day, but I'm starting to accept it. You've been gone a while now, and I'm glad you didn't see me for the first few days. I was a wreck. God, did I ever look bad.

*[Pause]* I don't understand why you did this, but at the same time, I think I do. I wish I would've realized sooner. Maybe we could've helped more. Rest peacefully. I love you, sweetie. *[CAROL touches the coffin before exiting. GEOFF enters, walking up to RICHARD. RICHARD and GEOFF walk to the coffin]*

GEOFF: Crying shame really.

RICHARD: *[Closing the coffin]* Who's crying?

GEOFF: Your wife.

RICHARD: Yeah. She's taking it hard.

GEOFF: Sorry about that. *[Pause]* How'd it happen?

RICHARD: How did what happen? *[GEOFF acknowledges the coffin obviously]* Oh. He hung himself.

GEOFF: That's awful.

RICHARD: No kidding. *[Pause]* What a waste.

GEOFF: Well, I didn't want to say it. *[Pause]* He had so much potential. Why'd he hang himself?

RICHARD: Carol was asking the same thing. *[Pause]*

GEOFF: If I were Devin, I would have shot myself.

RICHARD: Why shoot yourself?

GEOFF: I'd want it to be painless.

RICHARD: How do you know that hanging yourself isn't painless?

GEOFF: I guess I wouldn't. *[Pause]* But still, with all the merits of hanging oneself, it takes something away from the people who find you.

RICHARD: Go on.

GEOFF: Well, when you hang yourself, it ends up being clean. No fuss, no mess. If I shot myself, then there'd be blood everywhere. When you hang yourself, all they have to do is untie the rope and lay the body on the ground. There's no spectacle. I'd blow my brains out. Like my dad did. For the drama. It's theatrical. Final curtain call. See what I mean? Make a *scene* of it.

RICHARD: It *was* selfish of him. *[Glares to the coffin]* What else is new? The kid was *always* selfish.

GEOFF: I hate to be the one to tell you that, but...

RICHARD: No, it's okay. I appreciate the honesty. If Devin were here to hear about it, I'd make him sorry for being so selfish. I'd teach *him* a lesson!

GEOFF: Amen. *[Pause]* So Richie, what would you do *[Indicates throat slashing motion]* to off yourself?

RICHARD: Man, I haven't thought of that for a long time. Hmmm, maybe I'd jump off a building.

GEOFF: Really?

RICHARD: Yeah. I'll make it look good too. Dress up like a superhero; cape and all. Maybe even put my underwear on the outside.

GEOFF: Very theatrical.

RICHARD: You got to give the people a show! Like you said, it's about the drama. I'd do it at lunch too, that way more people could watch.

GEOFF: That's pretty selfless of you.

RICHARD: I know. *[Waves away the coffin]* I just wish Devin would have let us know how he felt. He never talked to me about stuff like that.

GEOFF: Maybe you could have helped him. If you don't mind me asking, how'd he hang himself?

RICHARD: By his neck.

GEOFF: Thanks, dumbass. You know what I mean. Rope? Belt?

RICHARD: Rope.

GEOFF: Ah, classic.

RICHARD: Yeah, I taught him how to appreciate the classics.

GEOFF: It's hard to find a young person who appreciates the classics.

RICHARD: Maybe he learned something when I put him in Scouts. He wasn't really into camping, but he earned a lot of badges. He learned to tie knots, too. *[Pause]* But, knowing you, shooting yourself isn't really your style.

GEOFF: Thanks for noticing. Instead, I guess I'd slit my wrists in the bathtub.

RICHARD: That's dumb.

GEOFF: And yours isn't, Superman?

RICHARD: Fair point.

GEOFF: As I was saying, I'd do it in the tub. That way, I can do it lying down.

RICHARD: You lazy bastard. *[They both laugh]*

GEOFF: Easier cleanup. It's pretty cut and dry.

RICHARD: You mean cut and wet?

GEOFF: You and your jokes.

RICHARD: Yeah. So, you want to go peacefully?

GEOFF: Well, it's *my* life.

RICHARD: Not after you end it. *[Pause]* I have a question. When you slit your wrists, is it down or across?

GEOFF: Doesn't matter, if it's deep enough. Bleed out in a cozy bathtub, with a glass of wine, maybe a Bodacious Burgundy or an Italian Amarone Classico. Even a Pommard would be nice. Some music in the background...

*[The men laugh and begin walking offstage. As they are leaving, CAROL re-enters and sits down on a chair on stage]*

RICHARD: Or, just drop a toaster in the tub.

*[RICHARD and GEOFF exit. CAROL, left alone onstage, approaches the coffin, and opens it]*

CAROL: Your father says that it was selfish what you did. He's almost right. *[CAROL reaches in and touches inside the coffin. MILLIE enters, waiting for her chance to approach CAROL]*

Hanging yourself wasn't the way to do it. You should have done something more civil, like your grandmother. She did it in the garage. She turned on the car and went to sleep. That's how I'd do it, if I was going to.

*[MILLIE walks over to CAROL, placing her arm on her shoulder. CAROL turns around and they hug]*

MILLIE: How have you been holding up?

CAROL: You know, today isn't as bad as I expected. And yourself?

MILLIE: I've been doing well, though I almost forgot this was today. *[MILLIE covers her mouth]* Does that make me sound like a bad friend?

CAROL: No. It's fine. These things happen. *[Pause]*

MILLIE: If you don't mind me asking, why is it so drab in here? Honestly, I walked in and thought to myself, "who died?"

CAROL: Yeah. Décor wasn't our top priority.

MILLIE: Why not? Isn't this supposed to be a celebration of his life?

CAROL: I don't really feel like celebrating.

MILLIE: Nonsense. You could start by opening up some windows, this place is like a mausoleum. Natural lighting is key. I saw that on HGTV. The flower colours are all wrong too. Who picked them? *[Walks over to flowers, quickly examines cards]* Oh, they were gifts. Well next time, send out a colour scheme. Nobody said that you had to be so drab about it. It's a visitation, not a funeral. That comes later. And what are you wearing? Black? Cliché. No, what you need is a cream, or an off-white. It would be great with your complexion, really bring out your eyes *[Stares into CAROL's eyes]* although today they seem a bit red and puffy. Maybe we shouldn't emphasize them. But we could make this place a little livelier. If only they gave me an afternoon, I could do wonders with this room.

*[Pause]*

CAROL: How have *you* been?

MILLIE: Hanging in there. *[Pause]* Oh my God! I am so sorry! I did *not* mean to say that!

CAROL: It's okay.

*[Pause]*

MILLIE: So, how has Richard been?

CAROL: You know, he's been doing surprisingly well.

MILLIE: Really?

CAROL: Yes. He's on a leave from work to cope with the situation, though he says he doesn't want one. He just wants to get back to his normal life as quick as possible. I told him it will never really be normal again, but he said he didn't want to talk about it.

MILLIE: Andy said he was sorry he couldn't make it.

CAROL: He's your ex. I wouldn't expect him to be here.

MILLIE: I know. But we still talk from time to time. And last time we talked, it just happened to be about you, or, well, Devin. But he plans on coming to the funeral tomorrow.

CAROL: He doesn't have to. I haven't seen him much lately.

MILLIE: Me neither.

CAROL: I'm sorry about how it turned out.

MILLIE: Thank you. *[Pause]* So, you said Devin hung himself, and we were wondering if it was a *[Lowering voice]* a sexual thing?

CAROL: A what?

MILLIE: Um, a sexual thing.

CAROL: What are you getting at?

MILLIE: You know when people do it for sexual pleasure. Auto-erotic asphyxiation?

CAROL: *[Cutting MILLIE off]* Devin would never do something like that.



MILLIE: Andy and I were just wondering is all.

CAROL: Devin was never the type to do something *that* stupid and dangerous. [*Pause, CAROL is momentarily overwhelmed*] Sorry, I'm not used to talking about him in the past tense.

MILLIE: It takes time.

CAROL: It's hard, you know. Richard used to call him... a wimp, among other things.

MILLIE: I remember. He was pretty hard on Devin, wasn't he?

CAROL: Yes. But I think it did Devin *some* good. You never succeed in this world if you don't have a thick skin.

MILLIE: Maybe I should have gotten Richard to teach Andy a thing or two. [*Both women laugh*]  
I need to stretch my legs. Care to come for a walk with me?

CAROL: What about Devin?

MILLIE: He won't go anywhere.

[*CAROL and MILLIE exit. The stage remains lit and empty until MARK and GEOFF enter*]

### Act I, Scene III

GEOFF: *[While walking onstage]* Don't you find this all to be a little... lavish?

MARK: What do you mean?

GEOFF: I mean look around. All of this. It's for a dead kid. Well, not exactly a kid, but I mean honestly, do you think he really cares?

MARK: What are you on about? It's a chance for the family to say their last goodbyes.

GEOFF: That's what the funeral itself is for. The viewing is a waste of time.

MARK: Okay, I know you're about to go off on a tangent, so, entertain me.

GEOFF: I'm not going to go off. It just doesn't make sense for the dead person to be here. If the point is to celebrate the person after their death, why would you want the corpse there? And if you were the corpse, why would you *want* to be there? It's like having a party for a buddy who gets a divorce, and then inviting their spouse. The point is to celebrate newfound freedom, the next chapter, not dwell in the past.

MARK: So, you're not going to go off then?

GEOFF: The whole idea of funerals is stupid. Nobody ever wants to go to them, so why have them? The only funeral worth going to is your own, and you can't even go there because you're dead. You're there but you're not. That's why I'm not having one. I don't need to not hear what people have to say about me. *[Reaches into his pocket, pulls out a flask and drinks from it, and puts it away]*

MARK: Are you drinking?

GEOFF: Just to take the edge off. It makes sense, doesn't it?

MARK: That you're drinking?

GEOFF: No, what I'm saying.

MARK: In that backwards way you always do.

GEOFF: Score one for me.

MARK: So, what do you propose?

GEOFF: Get rid of the body and start the party.

MARK: What?

GEOFF: It's basically just an excuse for a social gathering.

MARK: Explain.

GEOFF: It's like having a party centred around an ice sculpture. Let's all gather around a cold, lifeless thing and talk about how much we either like or dislike it.

MARK: You're messed up.

GEOFF: Why? Are you afraid they're going to miss out on something?

MARK: No. It's that we'll miss out on them. My grandfather said the wake was important because it meant that you weren't sending the person off alone. Someone was always there until they were in the ground and couldn't be with us anymore. It's the traditional Celtic way.

GEOFF: Richard and his family aren't followers of the Celtic tradition.

MARK: That's not the point. Were you there when Devin died? I doubt it. And yeah, he wasn't your kid. The point is that it's your chance to say goodbye.

GEOFF: But, he's already gone.

MARK: Don't you find it comforting to see him, so you can say goodbye one last time?

GEOFF: Not really.

MARK: That's a shame. Because it really is a beautiful thing. It's like when they lay someone in repose so the public can pay their respect.

GEOFF: Ah yes. That way strangers can gawk at me. Nothing I want more than some guy from three towns over coming by and crying about how I was such an inspiration to him because I could hit a baseball better than other people could.

MARK: You just don't get it. The whole point is getting a chance to say goodbye, even if you can't be there when they pass. That's what it's all about. You don't have to understand it, but sometimes it's hard to say goodbye, and that can make it a little easier. Especially in a situation like Devin's where you never realized they were going.

GEOFF: Still sounds like an awful party to me.

MARK: Any party with you has that potential.

GEOFF: *[Pause]* When did you get so funny?

MARK: When you started drinking.

GEOFF: *[Takes a quick sip from his flask]* I've only just begun.

MARK: Classy, Geoff. Very classy.

*[MILLIE and CAROL enter, walking over to the coffin, while GEOFF and MARK talk quietly]*

MILLIE: Carol, I haven't seen you eat anything since we got here. Come on, let's go back and grab something from the reception area.

CAROL: There is no reception area. It's just a viewing. We didn't cater it.

MILLIE: Oh. Well either way, there's a nice room down the hall where they have sandwiches and a few pastries. *[Pause]* Those people didn't seem to mind. *[With realization]* Oh! I think I crashed another funeral. *[Pause]* Ah well. So, do you want something to eat?

CAROL: I'll pass on eating anything here.

MILLIE: Not eating isn't good, even when you're grieving. You gotta have something.

CAROL: You don't understand. We've gotten so many gift baskets with food in them, Richard and I haven't been able to put a dent in them.

MILLIE: Anything good?

CAROL: The usual. Fruits. Salami. Chocolate covered almonds.

MILLIE: Any pineapples?

CAROL: Only in the expensive looking ones.

MILLIE: I'll take those off your hand. Pineapples are my favourite, but they hurt my tongue after a while.

CAROL: And we have so many flower arrangements in our basement that it's starting to look like a florist shop. Richard watered them at first, but we've given up.

*[RICHARD enters, walks over to GEOFF and MARK. The three men talk quietly]*

MILLIE: Flowers are stupid. *[Mockingly]* "Here's a reminder of death." *[Mimes handing CAROL flowers]*

CAROL: And the worst part is that they all come within the first week. You get bombarded with everything, then, everyone forgets you. Like you're automatically done grieving.

MILLIE: According to the university where I went, you get up to six months to grieve. Then you're just supposed to snap out of it. Happened to a friend of mine who lost her mom. She wasn't ready to go back; had to drop out. They didn't even send her flowers.

CAROL: It's like you're supposed to forget about everything that happened. Like somehow your life can just go back to normal after a week.

MILLIE: That university gives you six months. *[Pause]* Oh, you were talking about your thing. Okay.

CAROL: I'm tired of eating fruit and sandwiches. I want something more.

MILLIE: We can go get a steak.

CAROL: Millie, I want Devin back.

MILLIE: That's not on the menu.

CAROL: I know. *[Pause]*

MILLIE: What kind of flowers did you get?

CAROL: Same as usual. And a lot of succulents, mostly green. I guess they don't want you thinking of colours when you're supposed to be sad.

MILLIE: You should have brought some here. I'm sure anything would be better than these awful looking things.

*[MARK leaves the other men and sits in a chair]*

CAROL: You really don't like these flowers, do you?

MILLIE: I know what would look better, that's for sure. But seriously, you don't want anything to eat?

CAROL: No, I'm okay, I promise.

MILLIE: No, you aren't. But, I'm going to go talk with Mark. He seems down.

CAROL: Okay. I want to talk to Richard.

*[MILLIE goes and sits, joining MARK. CAROL walks over to RICHARD, who is standing with GEOFF]*

GEOFF: Carol, now that you're here, I have a question.

RICHARD: Yeah?

GEOFF: Is your name Carol?

RICHARD: You didn't address the question to her.

GEOFF: It was heavily implied.

RICHARD: So is love in a marriage. Doesn't make it true.

GEOFF: Okay. *[Pause]* Carol, did Devin leave a suicide note?

RICHARD: I didn't find one.

GEOFF: Did you look?

RICHARD: I was a little busy taking my son down from the ceiling.

GEOFF: Fair enough. Carol, did you find one?

CAROL: Me?

GEOFF: Yes, you.

CAROL: Oh, well yes. He had one in his pocket.

GEOFF: *[To CAROL]* You still have it?

CAROL: Yes, I've been keeping it in my purse.

RICHARD: You've been carrying around his suicide note? *[CAROL nods]* That's weird.

CAROL: It helps.

RICHARD: Helps what? Helps you remember he quit on life?

GEOFF: Do you mind me asking what it said?

RICHARD: Nosey.

GEOFF: You know what they say, a good journalist follows every lead.

CAROL: Read it if you'd like. It's still a little hard for me to look at it.

*[CAROL hands GEOFF a crumpled piece of paper from her purse. RICHARD grabs for the paper, and GEOFF holds it away from RICHARD. The men scuffle]*

GEOFF: Magic time. *[GEOFF punches RICHARD in the stomach]* Houdini! *[RICHARD doubles over in pain while GEOFF silently reads the note]*

RICHARD: *[To GEOFF]* You *punched* me? *[GEOFF blows on his fist like a smoking gun while continuing to read]* *[To CAROL]* You didn't tell me he wrote a note.

CAROL: I didn't think you cared.

RICHARD: *[Angrily]* What does that mean? *[To GEOFF]* Give me that. *[Takes note and begins reading it aloud]* "Mom, I'm really sorry. Please know that this isn't your fault. I just couldn't do it anymore. Please don't show dad. He wouldn't understand. I love you, Devin." *[Pause]* What the hell does *that* mean?

GEOFF: If I may. *[Takes note from RICHARD]* The problem there is that the word "*it*" doesn't have any indication as to what he is talking about. The object of the predicate is too unspecific. It's just floating there. It's a bad sentence.

CAROL: I don't think that's what Devin was saying.

RICHARD: What do you think he was talking about?

GEOFF: Life? It's what can be assumed here, but it isn't necessarily what he meant to say. But, you don't want to assume here. It is an important piece of writing.

CAROL: What do you know about suicide notes?

GEOFF: It's actually a fascinating subject. George Eastman, the man who founded Kodak, simply wrote, "To my friends: my work is done. Why wait? G.E." See how simple it is? He doesn't even mention his family. A lot can be read into that. It's only nine words and a signature.

CAROL: He didn't mention his family?

GEOFF: Nope. But if you think that one is good, listen to this. "Dear World, I am leaving you because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck." That was George Sanders, famous actor.

CAROL: That one is really sad.



GEOFF: That was just one of three notes.

RICHARD: He sounds like he knew exactly what he was doing. Why would you want to live if there wasn't anything worthwhile anymore? There's no point to sitting around hoping for one last moment of joy.

CAROL: I think it's worth the wait.

*[MILLIE hugs MARK quickly and exits, leaving MARK alone and thinking]*

RICHARD: Useless. Just go when it's your time. That's why I have "do not resuscitate" in my files. If I get sick, I'm not fighting. I've been around long enough. Damn waste of tax dollars keeping me alive. *[GEOFF stares at RICHARD surprised]*

GEOFF: That may have been one of the most intelligent things I've ever heard you say.

RICHARD: I'm not completely stupid.

GEOFF: No comment. By the way, not to kick someone when they're down, but this penmanship is terrible.

RICHARD: Oh, I know.

CAROL: We always tried to get him to work on his cursive when he was younger.

RICHARD: But he gave up on that like he gave up on everything else. I swear the kid never committed to anything.

GEOFF: Don't forget about cell phones.

RICHARD: What?

GEOFF: Nothing. It just sounded like you were going to go on a tangent.

CAROL: *[Whispers]* Geoff, don't get him started.

RICHARD: He's right about cellphones. Devin spent so much time on his computer and his phone, I'm pretty sure it caused him to lose his ability to write.

GEOFF: You mean legibly.

RICHARD: Whatever. Cursive is a dying artform. It's faster to type things, and it comes across more clearly. But I don't need that. As long as I have a golf pencil and a pad of sticky notes, I'll manage just fine. *[Reaches into pocket to pull out sticky notes, but there are none there]* Where the hell did they go?

*[DEVIN walks onstage with his face covered in sticky notes, circling the others, who ignore him, then exits]*

GEOFF: I do remember learning cursive when I was a kid, but neither of my cousins have learned it, and they're older than I am.

*[CAROL looks at her phone]*

RICHARD: It just doesn't make sense. Do you remember when you'd write well and you'd come in from recess and instead of a pencil, you'd find a pen on your desk because the teacher thought your penmanship was good enough?

GEOFF: Yes. And that was after walking five miles uphill to school every day. Quite frankly, I'm surprised I wasn't exhausted from all that walking, and was still be able to write.

RICHARD: You're an ass.

GEOFF: *[Coyly]* Oh, you know how much I hate it when you objectify me like that. I have a beautiful set of eyes right here. All you men are the same.

*[CAROL giggles, but RICHARD glares at her, causing her to stop]*

CAROL: I'll leave you two to continue. Jean texted that she's here, so I want to go see her.

GEOFF: Bye Carol. *[CAROL exits]*

RICHARD: One second. *[RICHARD closes the coffin before returning to GEOFF]* She'll get over it. She...

GEOFF & RICHARD: *[Simultaneously]* Always does.

RICHARD: She knows better than to interfere.

GEOFF: You seem to have her well trained.

RICHARD: Trained? She isn't an animal.

GEOFF: So, you noticed.

RICHARD: Yeah. Is that okay with you?

GEOFF: As long as it's okay with her.

RICHARD: It is.

GEOFF: I'm glad you decided for her.

RICHARD: *[Aggressively]* Keep talking. Watch what happens.

GEOFF: Why? Are you going to make her do a trick?

RICHARD: She doesn't do tricks.

GEOFF: Good, you'll save money on treats.

RICHARD: Watch what you say.

GEOFF: How long have you two been together?

RICHARD: Happily together for 25 years.

GEOFF: Both of you?

*[MARK walks over to GEOFF and RICHARD]*

RICHARD: Fuck off. *[Exits]*

MARK: *[To GEOFF]* Me?

GEOFF: No, not you.

MARK: Okay, well, what were you guys talking about?

GEOFF: Well, at one point, penmanship. Where were you?

MARK: I was over there. I didn't really have much to say, so I stepped away. Clearly nobody noticed.

GEOFF: Fair point. I have a question for you.

MARK: Yeah?

GEOFF: When's your band's next show? I want to hear some tasty licks.

MARK: My band? Well, I'm not sure. We kinda haven't been practicing. Stuff has come up. But we're going to try and get a gig soon.

GEOFF: Well, I hope so. You're actually really good. I've *seen* really good. Guitarists like, Clapton, Satriani, Bonamassa. You're up there. I remember the gig where your solo drew a ten minute standing ovation. That audience was *yours*.

MARK: Thanks, but, what do you care?

GEOFF: 'Cause, I want to go.

MARK: The last time you went, you yelled "take a break!"

GEOFF: And?

MARK: We hadn't even started playing.

GEOFF: You looked tired. [*Chuckles. Pause*] Hey, penny for your thoughts.

MARK: Oh, I was just thinking. With Devin killing himself, it reminded me how easy it would be to do it.

GEOFF: What do you mean by do *it*?

MARK: I mean write yourself off, close the book.

GEOFF: You mean finish the last chapter?

MARK: [*Nodding*] Yeah. Skip to the ending.

GEOFF: Become food for bookworms.

MARK: Put the pen down.

GEOFF: I always sleep better after good book.

MARK: We'd have fewer situations like this if people talked more openly about mental health and dying.

GEOFF: What do those have to do with each other?

MARK: A failing in one often leads to a success in the other.

GEOFF: I agree. Talking to someone can help you feel less alone, and they might even be able to help you. But what are *you* worried about? Your kids?

MARK: No.

GEOFF: Because I know that you're a much better dad than Richard is. At least you care. And besides, if one of your kids died, then, I'm sure it'd be accidental.

MARK: Geoff, I don't even have kids.

GEOFF: You don't?

MARK: No.

GEOFF: I hope I don't either.

MARK: Very sun-shiny outlook there.

GEOFF: I like to be positive.

MARK: Maybe for herpes.

GEOFF: That was a rumour back in high school.

MARK: Not according to Richard.

GEOFF: You know that stemmed from a rumour about me sleeping with Mona what's-her-name.

MARK: I know. Richard told me he started that rumour.

GEOFF: He didn't think I could get a girl myself. So, he said I slept with her. And since the rumour was she had herpes, he figured I caught it too. For Richard, that was pretty clever. Still didn't stop half the kids in my class from calling me "Spot."

MARK: I remember Richard telling me that was your nickname.

GEOFF: I got over it pretty quickly. The nickname that is. One of the guys in P.E. said he had a look and said I looked clean. He lied about looking, since he thought the bullying was getting too intense.

MARK: That was nice of him.

GEOFF: The other kids didn't see it that way. They started calling us "Spot and the Pecker."

They figured I had herpes, and he wanted to look, so the nicknames stuck. Actually, his nickname became "the Pecker Pecker." He was a good guy, but his bravery sunk him. Enough about my high school experience. What's up with you?

MARK: *[Distantly]* Nothing. I'm fine.

GEOFF: You don't have to be macho with me. Feelings are okay. You can have feelings *and* a dick.

MARK: Very eloquent.

GEOFF: Thank you. Now spill.

MARK: Okay. *[Exhales]* I'll just put it out there. My girlfriend has cancer.

GEOFF: Your girlfriend?

MARK: Yes.

GEOFF: Has cancer?

MARK: Yes.

GEOFF: And?

MARK: And?

GEOFF: Yeah, and big whoop. Everyone gets cancer nowadays. And who cares if they do?

Everyone has an expiration date. So what? You get only so much time before you're done. Let me ask you something. Do you think it's a tragedy when a baby dies?

MARK: Absolutely.

GEOFF: Well, it isn't. Want to know why?

MARK: No.

GEOFF: *[Takes a drink from his pocket flask]* Now, you have a sickly baby and it dies. So? It was time for the baby to go. Same when a 100-year-old woman dies. It was her time. Their age doesn't matter. One or 100. Everyone dies. The ending of life. Why dwell on the specific age? It's like getting all excited for a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, but not saying anything about the 51<sup>st</sup>. They're just numbers. Who cares?

MARK: Is this because your birthday is next week?

GEOFF: No. But thank you for remembering. So, like I was saying, dying is just, blaaah.

*[Louder]* Shoot yourself. Get in a plane crash. Fall down the stairs. Get hit by a car. They'll all kill you, and if they don't, you're still going to die. Just, maybe later.

MARK: What does this have to do with my point?

GEOFF: *[Louder]* I was getting to that. Why dwell on it, Mark? What do you have to *lose*?

MARK: *[Softly]* I would lose *her*.

GEOFF: *[Shouting]* Boo-hoo! And boo to your melodramatic whining. You know what you're worried about? You're worried that she's going to die on *you*. You're being self-centreed!

MARK: *[Shouting]* No, I'm not!

*[FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Sirs, could you please keep it down. This is a place of quiet reflection and mourning. Please practice better decorum. *[Exits]*

GEOFF: Yeah Mark, keep it down. *[Pause]* Besides, who cares? You're a good guy. You can find someone else. Don't buy into that soulmate garbage; there are so many people on the planet. You'll find someone that you'll want to spend time with.

MARK: I mean...

GEOFF: What have you got to lose other than *her*? A few moments of your time? If she's worth it, don't worry. If she dies, you'll find someone else. Compatible women everywhere.

Newsflash, there are a lot of women around who aren't dead or dying. I'm sure you'll find another one. And hey, while you're worried about all this, you have to remember that you might be the one to die first.

MARK: Yeah. I might be. *[Pause]* Hey Geoff, I'm going to grab some fresh air. *[Begins leaving the stage]*

GEOFF: *[Shouting]* And you can always date guys tooooooo! *[MARK exits]*  
*[RICHARD enters, walking over to GEOFF]*

RICHARD: What's *his* deal?

GEOFF: *[Reaches into his pocket and drinks from his flask]* He's worried about his girlfriend. He said she has cancer.

RICHARD: That's dumb. Wait, are you drinking?

GEOFF: Hydration is important.

RICHARD: Give me some. *[RICHARD reaches for the flask]*

GEOFF: Get your own. *[Puts flask back into pocket]*

RICHARD: But yeah, that's dumb.



GEOFF: That he's worried?

RICHARD: That he has a girlfriend.

GEOFF: But you're *married*.

RICHARD: I know. It was a huge mistake. He could have porking a whole bunch of chicks.

Why would he settle for one?

GEOFF: Do you even *hear* yourself?

RICHARD: I know that if Carol wasn't around, I would. In a heartbeat. I'm a red-blooded man, and I need me a woman.

GEOFF: She doesn't deserve you.

RICHARD: [*Proudly*] No woman does. This beast can't be tamed by just one tamer.

GEOFF: You're lucky there aren't women around to hear you. Otherwise you'd be going down.

RICHARD: Naw, I don't do that.

GEOFF: You're gross.

RICHARD: And unlike you, still married. [*GEOFF and RICHARD stand silently for a moment*]

Okay, that was a little too far.

GEOFF: Because you're a man who respects other people's limits, right?

RICHARD: Oh, this coming from you?

GEOFF: Yes. You don't speak from experience, buddy. So why don't you go comfort that "chick" you call a wife. Her son died, and she needs someone.

RICHARD: He was *my* kid too.

GEOFF: Yeah, like I said, her son. [*Exits*]

RICHARD: What's that supposed to mean? [*Exits*]

## Act I, Scene IV

*[MILLIE and JEAN enter]*

MILLIE: You know Jean, you look absolutely lovely.

JEAN: Thank you.

MILLIE: No, I mean you look *really good*. If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

JEAN: Not at all. I'm 49.

MILLIE: My God. What is your secret?

JEAN: Cosmetic procedures.

MILLIE: A facelift?

JEAN: Yes. Exactly. I had one done a few years back. As a plastic surgeon myself, I have to believe in my product. You wouldn't buy a car from a Ford salesman if he drove a Chrysler, would you?

MILLIE: I drive a Honda.

JEAN: Of course, you do. *[Pause]* Let me rephrase that. Since I'm a surgeon, why wouldn't I believe in my product? I've seen what it does, and the confidence it instills in women and men.

MILLIE: What about the surgeries that are botched?

JEAN: That just implies someone was careless.

MILLIE: You can accidently cause a botch. *[Pause]* You know, it's also a pro wrestling term.

JEAN: Okay.

MILLIE: Like when Owen Hart did a piledriver on Stone Cold Steve Austin and drove his head into the mat at Summerslam '97. His head wasn't protected properly and it slammed into the mat. It was accidental, but it still happened. That's essentially what a botch is. When something that is supposed to go right, doesn't.

JEAN: It's the same with procedures.

MILLIE: *[Ignoring her]* A real shame too, because it slowed him down. He was on the verge of something big, but at the same time, his new style cemented his edge with Attitude Era audiences. It was that, and a need to overtake World Championship Wrestling during the Monday Night Wars. Owen wasn't so lucky though.

JEAN: How come you know so much about wrestling?

MILLIE: *[Pointedly]* How come you know so much about Alcoholics Anonymous?

JEAN: What happened to Owen?

MILLIE: At Over the Edge in '99, Owen was supposed to come down from the rafters as his comedic character the "Blue Blazer." The character was supposed to struggle with his harness, before a quick release would drop him into the ring. But the harness failed and he fell 78 feet, landing on the ropes. Died shortly after. Internal bleeding caused by blunt force trauma. *[Pause]* See, I know stuff *too*.

*[FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters, standing silently at the entrance]*

JEAN: How much *do* you know?

MILLIE: I have a master's degree in art history. So, I understand the finer points of professional wrestling as a form of theatre. I read that some French guy who wrote something like, "what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private." Don't you think wrestling's like that? It's a private struggle made public. Oh, and I know a lot about sculpting, too. But I find the notion of plastic surgery unnatural.

JEAN: But wouldn't you consider cosmetic procedures an art? You're taking something and improving it.

MILLIE: Sounds more like a restoration.

JEAN: Okay, well let's look at it in another way. Imagine you have your face bitten by a dog. It would be embarrassing.

MILLIE: And painful.

JEAN: Yes. And painful. But people like me have the ability to give you your confidence back. What if you were a little girl? Imagine the relentless teasing you'd get if you had a disfigured face.

MILLIE: Or a boy.

JEAN: Well, boys can handle teasing better than girls. But what I do is give people the confidence to feel better about their appearance. Be that a nose job, breast implants, tummy tuck, liposuction. Those are the big four, but we do all kinds of other things.

MILLIE: Wait, didn't Joan Rivers die because of plastic surgery?

JEAN: That's a common misconception.

MILLIE: So, she didn't die?

JEAN: Yes, she did die. But, she didn't die on the table, in case that's what you were wondering. She died from complications *after the fact*. Anyways, let me take a look at you.

MILLIE: [*Nervous and hesitant at first*] Okay.

JEAN: [*Grabs MILLIE's face*] Right away I see that you could use a little work. Not now necessarily, but I see the early signs. That being said, you have excellent cheek bones. An almost perfect structure. Stick out your tongue. [*MILLIE sticks out her tongue, which JEAN grabs*]

MILLIE: [*Tongue being held by JEAN*] What are you doing?

JEAN: Getting a better look at you.

MILLIE: *[Tongue being held by JEAN]* Who's going to see my tongue?

JEAN: Me, if I can help it.

MILLIE: *[Pulling away]* What?

JEAN: *[Clearing throat]* I can tell from meeting you that you are a pretty happy person. You smile a lot, don't you?

MILLIE: *[Slowly warming up to the idea]*. It's true! I *do* smile a lot.

JEAN: Awful habit! That makes smile lines. Make your face look like a topographical map.

What you can do is get rid of these nasolabial folds. Did you know there are surgical options?

Or, you can have them treated with lasers. Lots of options. One second. *[JEAN reaches into her purse, grabbing an eyeliner pencil]* Do you mind?

MILLIE: *[Getting enthusiastic about the attention]* No, not at all.

JEAN: Well, since I'm feeling generous, I'll give you a free consultation right here. So, again,

I'll draw a little X on each of your smile lines *[Draws X's on either side of MILLIE's mouth]*

Another thing that we could do it suck out a little of the fat in each of your cheeks. The baby fat look is out, but we can easily fix that, and emphasize your high cheekbones. High cheekbones lead to higher chances of landing a husband. Or wife. And you have some wonderful

cheekbones. *[Grabs MILLIE's cheeks]* Say "Oh."

MILLIE: Oh.

JEAN: Say "Ah."

MILLIE: Ah.

JEAN: Now say "big red rubber baby buggy bumpers."

MILLIE: Big red rubber... no! What does this have to do with my cheeks?

JEAN: It's part of the process. *[Draws circles on each cheek, under the cheekbones]* Now, can you raise your eyebrows?

MILLIE: Like wrestler, Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson? *[Raises one eyebrow]*

JEAN: Both eyebrows. *[MILLIE raises her eyebrows]* Just as I thought. You have some creasing in your forehead. A little Botox will help. *[Writes "FILL" on MILLIE's forehead]* Lift your head. Good. No loose skin under the chin. No excess fat there either. Good for you. Many women struggle with having a double chin. Now, all you have to do is suck a little fat out, and pull back the skin. Something like this *[Draws arrows from the chin to the jaw]* That would tighten the skin, but you don't really need that yet.

MILLIE: Do you really think I need *any* of this?

JEAN: We all need it. You actually have a nice looking face and confidence in your appearance too. Unless it is for something like an injury, most of the work I do is purely cosmetic. Mostly for women too. It's very important for a woman to be beautiful, otherwise, people will start to talk.

MILLIE: What would they say?

JEAN: Well a little plumping of your lips would give your face a sumptuous look. But don't think that you aren't gorgeous. I was taken aback when I first saw you.

MILLIE: Thank you, but I don't think I need all of this.

JEAN: Don't say that. What you have right now is a face that hasn't been ravaged by time. A beautiful, sexy face. *[Shakes head]* But time happens to all faces eventually. Look at any of the elderly people you know. Now that's when you want a little fat in your face. Fat don't crack, as the saying goes. But until then, you don't want any fat on you. Speaking of which, are you happy with the excess fat you may be carrying around?

MILLIE: Yes. I keep it in a clear Ziploc bag until I have enough and make soap out of it.

JEAN: That's from the movie, *Fight Club*.

MILLIE: *[Whispers]* Don't say it so loud.

JEAN: You've heard of photoshop, right?

MILLIE: Yes.

*[DEVIN enters holding a mirror and scans his body high and low]*

JEAN: Excellent! Then I'm sure you're familiar with the idea of touching up pictures to make the models look more beautiful. I do the same thing, but you don't need Photoshop. You'd always be attractive. Even in old age. You could be the most beautiful woman in the world with the right amount of plastic surgery. Think about it. Being the most beautiful woman in the whole world.

MILLIE: But isn't there something to be said about natural beauty?

JEAN: Of course. Then, you turn thirty. *[Pulls out a mirror from her purse, handing it to*

*MILLIE]* Now imagine yourself looking the way I imagine you looking. Aren't you gorgeous?

MILLIE: Well...

JEAN: Trust me you are. You absolutely are. *[DEVIN walks over and touches both MILLIE and JEAN on the shoulder. JEAN grabs MILLIE's face and kisses her passionately. DEVIN exits past the shocked looking FUNERAL DIRECTOR]* Think about it.

MILLIE: *[Stunned]* Alright. *[MILLIE exits]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: *[Walking over to JEAN]* Nice pitch, madam.

JEAN: Excuse me?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: You have a good method of selling. You literally spelled it out for her. On her face. Calling it a procedure instead of surgery is a nice touch too. Might I suggest that you try to be subtler next time? The kiss may have been a tad much.

JEAN: You saw that? I... I have no idea what came over me.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Grief can be a powerful mover. Lead to strange things. But as I was saying, you have a confidence I rarely see. You took the most beautiful woman I've seen in years and instilled doubt in her. I've seen experts of the highest measure in action; swindlers, embezzlers, fraud artists, larcenists and pilferers. You've topped them all. In brief, I admire you... at least from a business standpoint.

JEAN: Um, no. I know how to conduct my business. Besides, what I do has nothing to do with your business, nor how you practice it.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Think about it for a moment, and you'll realize that we essentially do the same thing.

JEAN: No, we don't.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: What you do is make people look better. It is for their benefit and could also be for the benefit of those who regard them. In the instance of an open casket funeral, I also make people look respectable for the benefit of those who view them.

JEAN: But you can always close the casket.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: That's like saying you can always wear a ski mask. You shouldn't hide your appearance, but you can alter it. See how similar we are?

JEAN: We aren't. You put makeup on dead people. I do actual surgery to the living.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Yes, and I'm not discrediting you. You *are* a rather talented con artist.

JEAN: Excuse me?



FUNERAL DIRECTOR: The whole point of trying to look younger is so you don't look older, correct? But why don't people want to look old? It's because they are afraid of death. But you can't prevent death, can you? They're still going to die, regardless of how many face lifts and Botox injections you give them. Eventually, we all expire. You just make my job a little easier when it comes to open caskets. Besides, the really unattractive ones generally get cremated. Everyone looks good inside a golden urn. *[Begins walking off stage]* By the way, you shouldn't furrow your brow at me like that. You'll give yourself wrinkles. *[Exits]*

## Act I, Scene V

*[MILLIE and CAROL enter from opposite sides. CAROL walks to the coffin and opens it]*

JEAN: *[Watches the FUNERAL DIRECTOR exit, while MILLIE gazes at him]* What an ass!

MILLIE: *[Sultry]* I'll say.

JEAN: What?

MILLIE: What you said, I guess.

JEAN: I'm going to grab a coffee. Want me to get you one?

MILLIE: Honestly, no. I'm not sure I want to be alone with you right now. I'm going to see what Carol's up to. *[JEAN exits. To CAROL]* Hey, Carol.

CAROL: *[Walking over to MILLIE]* Oh, you're free? Good, I wanted to ask you something.

MILLIE: Is it about my face?

CAROL: It wasn't, but what happened?

MILLIE: It was Jean. She started talking to me about plastic surgery, drew stuff on my face. She was being weird about it. I think she was hitting on me.

CAROL: I'm sorry, but I doubt she was hitting on you.

MILLIE: And I think I felt something, too. Not like an emotion, but like someone touched my shoulder. And *then*, she *kissed* me.

CAROL: She kissed you? How?

MILLIE: Like this. *[MILLIE kisses CAROL]*

CAROL: No, that makes sense actually.

MILLIE: Why? Is she a lesbian?

CAROL: Heavens no! *[Pause]* She's bi. Everyone just assumes that if you like someone of the same sex, you're automatically *only* attracted to the same sex. She doesn't pick sides.

MILLIE: Sorry, I didn't mean to offend.

CAROL: You didn't. I've just heard Jean tell people about that.

MILLIE: As long as I didn't upset you. Hey, can I ask you a question now?

CAROL: Okay. What?

MILLIE: I was wondering how much it cost for Devin's coffin.

CAROL: About 3 grand.

MILLIE: 3 grand?

CAROL: 3 grand.

MILLIE: That's far too much.

CAROL: Now you sound like Richard.

MILLIE: I could have gotten you a cheaper deal.

CAROL: How?

MILLIE: I have a coffin.

CAROL: What? Why do you have a coffin?

MILLIE: I feel like I'm not really explaining myself.

CAROL: You're not really.

MILLIE: Well, back in the day, my great-grandfather was planning for his funeral. So, he bought a coffin, and tried it out. Suddenly, he sat up and said, "if I'm going to be cremated, then this is a waste of money. If you cremate me, don't cremate the coffin."

CAROL: That makes sense. So, what happened with your grandfather?

MILLIE: *[Matter of factly]* Great-grandfather.

CAROL: Right.

MILLIE: He lived for another two years. I think they said he went to Prague, but I wouldn't know. I wasn't born yet. But they told me that he said in his will that nobody was to burn his coffin.

CAROL: So, what happened?

MILLIE: He had a heart attack.

CAROL: No. What happened to his coffin?

MILLIE: Before he died, he built a box for himself out of particle board. He got cremated in that. And, because my great-grandmother was going to get cremated she didn't need it either, and so, it was given to my grandfather. He didn't plan on dying anytime soon, so he used it as a Halloween decoration.

CAROL: A Halloween decoration?

MILLIE: Yep. Oh, and it's *very* realistic. It creeps out the kids. Then, grandmother died.

CAROL: How did she pass?

MILLIE: First, they put her in an old folk's home. She swore one of the retirement home cleaning ladies was skimming pills from her. Turned out nobody was skimming her pills, she just forgot where she put them. It was dementia in the end. From what they told me, I'm surprised she remembered to stay dead. *[Pause]* Still, my grandfather was stuck with the bill, and he remembered he still had that coffin they used for Halloween. They showed her in it during the wake, and were going to cremate her in it too, but according to my great-grandfather's will, the coffin wasn't allowed to be burnt.

CAROL: Did she get her own box?

MILLIE: Yup! They built her one from pine.

CAROL: So, the coffin has been through two funerals?

MILLIE: *[Laughs]* No. Much more. My grandmother's little brother drowned on Canada Day trying to swim closer to the fireworks. He wasn't that smart, but then again, little kids usually aren't. Since he was so small, they were going to get him his own coffin, a little kid one, but they remembered that they had the "Halloween coffin." *[Laughs]* They cremated him in his own pine box. Again they had no need for the "family coffin."

CAROL: I'm sorry.

MILLIE: That's okay, I didn't know him. The next person who died was my grand uncle. He died fighting overseas. Got into a bar fight and someone stuck him in the neck with a broken bottle. Since they didn't really have the best refrigeration at the time, he got buried over there. *[Pause]* I guess that one doesn't have much to do with the coffin, eh? *[Laughs]*

CAROL: No, I guess not.

MILLIE: I had another grand uncle who died at a death camp over in Russia.

CAROL: Really?

MILLIE: Yeah. The funny part about that is he died when they liberated the camp.

CAROL: Did they kill him as a last minute thing to take out as many as they could? I've heard about that kind of thing happening before.

MILLIE: No, the people running the camp surrendered without incident.

CAROL: Then how did he die?

MILLIE: Oh, he killed himself.

CAROL: Why?

MILLIE: He was a perfectionist, or a completist. Something like that. Never started a book that he didn't end up finishing. Never shot a man he didn't end up killing. That sort of thing.

Anyways, he was at a death camp, right? So, he finished the job himself. Like I said, he was a completist.

CAROL: I suppose that's nice of him.

MILLIE: He was always thinking of others. Next to die was my uncle who died the day my father was born. They used to joke he died from childbirth complications, since he went out celebrating with his buddies at the bar. But the thing is, when he was walking home, he got killed by someone who had a stroke behind the wheel. Funnily enough, the driver survived. He even attended the funeral! From what my aunt told me, everyone stared daggers at him, and all he could do was sit quietly in the back. Now, as I'm sure you could have guessed, my uncle wanted to be cremated, but my aunt wouldn't let him. She said it was against their Christian beliefs, so she had them change his service to a burial. After all, she argued how can a body be resurrected if it is just a pile of ashes? So, you'd think that they would have finally had a chance to bury him in the coffin, but they actually forgot about it in the basement! They ended up buying new one. What a waste of a coffin!

CAROL: But your uncle's final wish was to be cremated.

MILLIE: What was he going to do? Come back and scold my aunt? Apparently, he did. She used to have nightmares about it. One time she dreamt she was in Hawaii, and there was a volcanic eruption. She said in her dream, that the ash coming from the volcano spelled out her name, and when she noticed it, my uncle came to her and said he'd never forgive her. Now, he may have been talking about the fact she cheated on him, but I don't know.

CAROL: What do you mean she cheated on him? Was it because she went against his wish to be cremated?

MILLIE: No. There was this man who used to install hardwood floors in our town. Sometimes when I would visit them after school, the floor man's car would be in the driveway. He seemed nice enough, and always left before my uncle got home. Come to think of it, I never remember them ever getting new flooring. *[Pause]* So, after my uncle passed away, the family had about 10 years where nobody important died, just some second cousins and a few pets. But when my cousin died, as they made funeral arrangements, my aunt found out how much a coffin cost, and she couldn't afford one. She had been raising 6 kids alone for almost a decade. She had a fling with some dude for a year, but that didn't last. *[Pause]* Where was I? Oh right, my dead cousin. So, since my aunt couldn't afford it, she didn't know what to do. Then her oldest daughter reminded her of the coffin the family had left stashed in Aunt Glenda's crawlspace. So that was done.

CAROL: But they didn't bury him in it?

MILLIE: No. At that point, Aunt Glenda considered the coffin an antique, and she didn't want it damaged, so she agreed that they could use it to show my cousin and then cremated him in a pine box instead, or, as they call it, a "wooden overcoat."

CAROL: How about a "pine tuxedo?"

MILLIE: "Poplar pajamas."

CAROL: A "tamarack trench-coat."

MILLIE: A "sumac suit."

CAROL: A "mahogany moo-moo."

MILLIE: *[Laughs]* The possibilities are endless.

CAROL: *[Smiling]* Was he the last one to die?

MILLIE: No. Second last. The last one who died was my aunt Deb.

CAROL: How did she die?

MILLIE: Cancer. *[Pause]* She hadn't really written a will, or at least a formal one, so when they were making arrangements for her, my aunt Glenda remembered that her sister, Deb, had wanted to be shown in the "family coffin." So that was that. She was shown in that and...

CAROL: Cremated in a pine box?

MILLIE: Yes, cremated, but we *still* have the "family coffin."

CAROL: So, how many is that?

MILLIE: I've lost track. Right now, the casket is in Aunt Glenda's crawlspace. She's the only one with room for it. She calls the crawlspace "the mausoleum." But yeah, if you know anybody who dies, let me know and maybe I can convince Aunt Glenda to take it out of mothballs. It needs a little sprucing up. Her dryer caught fire in her basement last year, so it has a little smoke damage, but otherwise, it's in great shape!

CAROL: I'll keep that in mind.

MILLIE: \$3000 is far too much to spend, especially when you didn't have to. When you think about it, you could have prevented that expense. All you had to do was know the right person to talk to. Ah well, hindsight is 20/20, right?

CAROL: Yeah.

MILLIE: So, what was that question of yours?

CAROL: To be honest, I don't remember.

MILLIE: No worries, but I have a question for you.

CAROL: Another one?

MILLIE: How much longer do you think your mother's going to be around? I can get you a great deal. Buy or rent.



CAROL: Millie, I appreciate the offer, but I see Richard and I have to ask him something.

MILLIE: No problem, I'll talk to you soon. *[MILLIE begins exiting, passing GEOFF and RICHARD, who are entering]*

GEOFF: What's with your face?

MILLIE: Jean was giving me suggestions on how plastic surgery could help me. Think I'll look pretty?

GEOFF: One second. *[Takes out his flask and has a drink, before putting it back and looking at MILLIE]* Sure.

MILLIE: Thanks! *[Exits]*

*[CAROL walks over to RICHARD and GEOFF]*

CAROL: Do you have your eulogy prepared?

RICHARD: No.

CAROL: What do you mean, no?

RICHARD: No, as in I do not.

CAROL: Why don't you have the eulogy prepared?

RICHARD: I don't need one.

CAROL: But you're speaking.

RICHARD: Yeah, and? *[Pause]* Carol, he's my son. You really think I need to write something? I'm just going to speak from the heart.

GEOFF: You have one of those?

RICHARD: Yes. Right here. *[Points to right side of chest. CAROL moves his hand to the left side]* *[To CAROL]* Thanks.

CAROL: This is a chance to tell everyone how special Devin was to us. He was always a little shy, so I was hoping that we could let people know how great of a kid he was.

RICHARD: He was 25. Besides, I know what you want me to say.

CAROL: But you haven't written anything.

RICHARD: [*Angrily*] Do you think I'm stupid?

CAROL: I didn't say that.

RICHARD: Because only an idiot wouldn't be able to speak without written words in front of him.

CAROL: I just want this to go well.

RICHARD: Oh, so, if I don't have something in front of me, it's going to go to shit? Best reign in Richard, he gets upset for no reason.

CAROL: Richard...

RICHARD: Ok, *fine*. I'll go to the back and write it. And when I'm done, can I go play ball with my friends? But only after I eat my vegetables, right? [*Exits*]

GEOFF: Well, that went as well as it could have.

CAROL: I just want this to be perfect.

GEOFF: It's not going to be.

CAROL: What?

GEOFF: This. Funerals. [*GEOFF sits down*] They're never perfect. Not even close. Hell, I could tell you 15 things that went wrong at the last one I went to.

CAROL: [*CAROL sits beside GEOFF*] I was at that one too. It was nice.

GEOFF: Nice. Yeah, real nice. She looked taxidermized. The music was all wrong. She wasn't even wearing red. She looked amazing in red. I should know. I was married to her for 20 years.

CAROL: Geoff...

GEOFF: You know what the problem is? It's too many people all trying to get their way. They all think they know what's best, and when you have to share the decision with other people, because *[Mockingly]* "you don't get the *final* say, Geoffrey, you only get *part* of the say." *[Takes a drink from his flask]*

CAROL: No, Richard and I are very much on the same page.

GEOFF: She hated that "Danny Boy" song. It was so clichéd. *[Sings "Danny Boy" loudly and off-key before composing himself]* We both thought so. But sure enough, it played at the end of the service.

CAROL: I think she made you a better person.

GEOFF: That's only because I couldn't have gotten worse at that point.

CAROL: I remember. But she helped you get through some rough patches.

GEOFF: Yeah, she helped me get through them.

CAROL: I remember that you were in a bad place. It's amazing what happens when you decide to spend time making yourself better.

GEOFF: That's not what happened. She taught me to be a better person.

CAROL: *[Pause]* You used to be a lot more stubborn.

GEOFF: Oh, I still am. I just had to learn to let some things go. Sure, she didn't get the music she wanted, nor was she wearing her favourite colour, but I'd be damned if someone was going to try to get her necklace. It was going in the coffin with her, she wore it every day.

CAROL: It was a beautiful necklace.

GEOFF: Yup. I'm sorry, this isn't about that funeral. We were talking about Richard being himself again.

CAROL: He's grieving.

GEOFF: And so are you. He doesn't have to be a jerk about it.

CAROL: Geoff, he's still my husband. I don't want to talk about him like that.

GEOFF: You don't have to say a word. I can do all the trash talking. You can just agree.

CAROL: Geoff, I don't need this right now. I let it go earlier, but I don't need it. If you can't support us, and you're only going to make jokes or insult my husband, then I don't want to talk to you.

GEOFF: *[Pause]* You're right. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let my emotions get to me.

CAROL: You're grieving, too.

GEOFF: I guess I am. *[CAROL hugs GEOFF, who lets his arms slide towards CAROL's bottom.*

*CAROL lifts them higher, and GEOFF lets them slide down again. CAROL releases the hug with a huff, and both exit]*

## Act I, Scene VI

*[The stage remains empty for a few moments before DEVIN walks onstage. The lighting becomes blue for his monologue. He is carrying a yo-yo. He walks directly to the front and centre of the stage (onto the thrust if possible) and addresses the audience]*

DEVIN: When I was a kid, I used to wonder what it would be like to be a fly on the wall at your own funeral. To see how many people came, if they would cry, what kind of memories they would share about me. Did I make them laugh or smile? *[Starts playing with the yo-yo, poorly]* I always wanted to know, because I felt that it would make me happy, knowing I was a bigger part of other people's lives than they let on. But now that I'm here, all I can say is that it is so trivial! You can't talk to anyone, because you're dead; you can't change their minds, because you're dead, and worst of all, they don't say anything nice. They're talking about Christmas movies, and sports, and makeup. Nobody can see you, and even if they could, they would probably scream. I had to kill myself *[wraps yo-yo string around neck]* just to get their attention, and they're *still* ignoring me! No wonder I never came out of my room or didn't want to talk to any of them. I couldn't even get out of my bed some days. I was so tired. Everything in my brain was telling me that I wasn't good enough and I just thought that this would be better than always living like that. Maybe this would get their attention, but I was wrong. Today is supposed to be about me, dammit! Sharing memories, but nooooo, all they've done is ignore me or talk trash. It's *always* been like this. They didn't know a thing about me. *[Rolls up the yo-yo, displays it to the audience]* I don't even know how to use one of these things. *[Exits]*

*[The stage lights turn down, leaving the stage black. The house lights come on, signifying the beginning of the intermission]*

## Act II, Scene I

*[RICHARD and MARK enter, and stand by the coffin. The lid is open, but RICHARD closes it]*

RICHARD: I don't know what to tell you. He'd spend all his time in his room. He didn't want to make friends; well, maybe he did, but I never saw them. I'm surprised anyone saw him outside of work.

MARK: Where did he work?

RICHARD: With me. I got him a job at the tool and die factory. Well, not exactly with me. He worked midnights.

MARK: And you worked...?

RICHARD: Days.

MARK: So what could you know about his friends?

RICHARD: I know my son. He slept when I worked, slept when I got home.

MARK: Didn't that concern you?

RICHARD: *[Pause]* No. He was lazy. No work ethic. Not like me or his mother. He wasn't useless, but almost. So lazy, he wouldn't even shower.

MARK: Wait, he didn't bathe?

RICHARD: Well, when we made him. No, he was usually clean, but sometimes it seemed like he would go for days without showering.

MARK: So, what did you do?

RICHARD: I would go into his room when he was gone, take his deodorant and put it at his place on the kitchen table for when he came home. *[DEVIN enters. Walks to the middle of the stage, and sniffs under his arms. He shrugs at the audience and exits]* He usually got the hint,

which was good, because I never really cared to look into it. He was a smelly kid. It was my job to fix it. I don't need to know *why* it's broken, so long as I can fix it.

MARK: *[Sarcastically]* Well, at least you tried to fix it. *[Begins walking away]*

RICHARD: Probably one of the reasons he couldn't keep a girl around. What a useless kid.

MARK: *[Turning back]* What?

RICHARD: Yeah, he never had a girlfriend.

MARK: So?

RICHARD: What do you mean so? He's a man, he's supposed to have someone.

MARK: What if he wanted another man?

RICHARD: I mean, I guess. I wouldn't care. Just so long as they didn't kiss in front of me.

MARK: More progressive than I thought you'd be.

RICHARD: You're starting to sound like Geoff.

*[GEOFF enters]*

GEOFF: My ears are burning.

RICHARD: Probably a Sexually Transmitted Infection, like herpes.

GEOFF: *[Dismissively]* Probably. So, what summoned me?

RICHARD: Telling Mark here that Devin never had a girlfriend.

GEOFF: He dated that Sam girl for 3 years.

RICHARD: Yeah, but that doesn't count.

MARK: Why?

RICHARD: They didn't even have sex.

MARK: How would you know?

RICHARD: Just by how he carried himself around the house. *[Pause]* Oh, come on. If you aren't having sex, it's just a friendship. Like, I know women who I wouldn't bang, so clearly it isn't a relationship. It's just a friendship.

MARK: Did he love her?

RICHARD: I don't know. I didn't ask.

GEOFF: Then how can you be sure he didn't have sex with her?

MARK: Anyway, sex and love aren't synonymous.

GEOFF: *[To MARK]* I guess that's how you were born.

RICHARD: Nice. But, you can tell when a guy gets his rocks off. He has a pep in his step. Devin never did.

GEOFF: So, he had no pep?

RICHARD: No pep.

GEOFF: Pep-less steps?

RICHARD: No pep in those steps.

MARK: So just because he didn't have sex with her, it doesn't count as a relationship?

RICHARD: Basically, yeah.

MARK: So love, companionship, physical contact, sharing your thoughts and dreams with someone you love, none of that counts?

RICHARD: Look, the way I see it, if all you want is love and companionship, you may as well get a dog.

GEOFF: What kind of dog?

RICHARD: *[To MARK]* All I am saying is that if he had sex, then he would have been better off.

MARK: Have you considered the fact he may have been asexual?



RICHARD: He clearly wasn't. He had a girlfriend.

MARK: That's not what that means. That means he wasn't a-romantic.

RICHARD: Why did he have a girlfriend if he wasn't romantic?

MARK: That's not what it means. An "a-romantic" is someone who experiences little or no attraction to others.

GEOFF: Maybe he just wanted companionship, or something platonic. It doesn't mean that he had sexual feelings for her.

RICHARD: Yeah, but what's the point? Just get another friend.

MARK: *[To GEOFF]* I think I'm done with this conversation. He doesn't seem to get it.

GEOFF: No, he doesn't. But I'll stick around for another minute. *[MARK exits]*

RICHARD: I feel like I've been dealing with this for the past week.

GEOFF: *[Places his hand on RICHARD's shoulder]* Well, at least the comforting thing is knowing that now that you've got the paperwork done, he'll be safely in the ground soon.

RICHARD: You know what pisses me off the most about Devin killing himself? He didn't even have it that hard. He never knew what real hardship was. *[Mockingly]* "Oh no, I have another essay due next week and I can't handle pressure so I'm going to cry in my room. I didn't get a date for Valentine's, so I'm going to pretend that it doesn't bother me. I'm only 25 and my life has been so difficult that I am going to kill myself." What a coward. He didn't know what difficult was.

GEOFF: So, what's "difficult" in your mind, oh wise one?

RICHARD: Difficult is when you lose a fortune and you have to go to the poor house. Difficult is when you reach 80 years old, wearing diapers, and you can't stop crapping your pants. It's when you need a mobility scooter, not just because you're fat, but because you're so old your

legs don't work. *[Pause]* And you're fat. It's when you look at your wife and realize she looks like a leather couch cushion, and you want to leave her, but you can't, and your dick doesn't work anymore. It's when you start going to church again after 50 years because you heard somewhere that wrinkles are signs that the devil is slowly pulling you down to hell.

GEOFF: *[Pointing at RICHARD's mouth]* Or, when you start talking, and you get that white ball of spit on your lip.

RICHARD: Or, it's when your dementia makes you forget to take the pills you need.

GEOFF: That sounds familiar.

RICHARD: *[Pause]* Or when people are scared to be in the same car when you're driving.

GEOFF: Aren't we being a little ageist?

RICHARD: No such thing. Everybody gets old. You can't discriminate against old people as a group because they're everywhere. It's like hating people with hands. You can't do it. And when you get old, you have that "old people" smell about you.

GEOFF: It's true. They do have a smell about them.

RICHARD: No kidding. It's like... Um...

GEOFF: Werther's candy and stale piss?

RICHARD: I was going to say moth balls, but that works too.

GEOFF: I know. I've been around old people before.

RICHARD: They creep me out.

GEOFF: But *you're* getting older.

RICHARD: Not *that* old. *[Pause]* Yet. Plus, I'm not letting myself get that way. I'd rather kill myself before I reach that point. I don't want to be shuffling around with a walker because my legs can't handle my body anymore. Forget that. I'm going out like a *man*, on my own two feet.

GEOFF: Well there is something to be said about having someone care for you. They'll make sure you're fed and make sure you're bathed.

RICHARD: The last one sounds good, though it depends on who's washing me.

GEOFF: Some big burly dude named Brutus.

RICHARD: I'd rather be dead.

GEOFF: Even if he was all glistening and shiny? Like he was wearing a too-tight white polo shirt and you could see his hardened nipples peeking through the fabric? Then, he takes off your plush bath robe and you lie there in the tub, and you can feel his hard, yet delicate hands washing your back?

RICHARD: God no! Wait... did you say plush?

GEOFF: Okay, a middle-aged woman named Barb.

RICHARD: Better.

GEOFF: Yeah, I see where this is going. But overall, I agree with you. If you can't live your best life, why live it at all?

RICHARD: Thank you! Do you know how hard it is to convince Carol to go along with me?

GEOFF: What, like a suicide pact?

RCHARD: No, to agree that if I'm in poor health, that there isn't much of a point in living. Just pull the plug. Why wheel me to another birthday party that I don't want to go? Because it'll make a good photo for the grandkids who are already scared of me because my hands won't stop shaking and my teeth don't fit in my mouth? I used to be scared of my grandfather. He wasn't a bad guy, but he creeped me out.

GEOFF: I know what you mean. Before my grandmother died, I remember being about 5 or 6 and going to her house. Her eyes had sunk so far into her head that you could see her skull. And, she had that old people smell, and veins in her hands that looked like tree roots.

RICHARD: See, who wants that? It's horrible. Killing yourself is the better way. Move straight to "Go" and collect \$200. You don't have to go all the way around the board just to end up on someone else's property.

GEOFF: Or *as* someone else's property.

RICHARD: Exactly! As if I'd love to be shut up in some small, dusty room so that my kid would never visit. *[Pause]* Well, now that part couldn't happen, but if it could, do you think he'd bother visiting me?

GEOFF: That depends. If I were him, no. But Devin was a good kid. You have to understand, people are busy. They have jobs, and kids, and lives of their own. I know most people just slam their parents into a cubby-hole somewhere and wait to collect the inheritance money. And yeah, there are weekends, but that's *his* time too. He has a life of his own, right? *[Pause]* But, I'm sure he *would* have visited.

RICHARD: He didn't care about my birthday, Geoff. *My* birthday! He only cared about himself. He was always so absorbed in his own little world that he never made time for me. I made a damn effort for that kid. I tried to get him interested in sports, rock music, cars, chicks. Y'know, all the stuff I like. He didn't like any of those things. I blame his mother.

GEOFF: Speaking of which.

## Act II, Scene II

*[RICHARD and GEOFF remain where they were in the previous scene. CAROL enters. Her face is covered in marks similar to MILLIE's suggesting she also received a plastic surgery consultation]*

CAROL: Geoff, can I talk to you for a second?

GEOFF: What happened to your face?

CAROL: What do you mean?

GEOFF: You were talking to Jean, weren't you?

CAROL: How did you know?

GEOFF: I was talking to Millie earlier. Your sister Jean gets around, eh?

CAROL: Not as much as she used to.

*[CAROL and GEOFF walk over to the other side of the stage]*

RICHARD: Okay, I'll just go then. Bye. *[Exits]*

GEOFF: So, what's up?

CAROL: One second. *[Quickly walks over to the coffin and opens the lid before hurrying back]*

I wanted to ask you something.

GEOFF: Wait, before you do that, tell me honestly, how are you holding up?

CAROL: Well, I can't say I'm happy.

GEOFF: I know. I don't want to be the one to say this, but you don't seem entirely ok.

CAROL: *[Sarcastic]* Thank you. You've always had the right words.

GEOFF: I've been best friends with your husband since elementary school. I have practice saying the right things about him being, well, you know...

CAROL: Sensitive?

GEOFF: A prick.

CAROL: Oh.

GEOFF: Come on, it's not like you don't know that.

CAROL: No, I've been told that before.

GEOFF: And?

CAROL: I ignore you every time. *[Gives a small smile]*

GEOFF: There you are. I knew that Carol was somewhere in there.

CAROL: She is. It's just that she can't shake that feeling of regret.

GEOFF: Regret of what?

CAROL: You know that old saying, a parent should never outlive their child? I have survivor's guilt, or something like that.

GEOFF: That makes sense. But let me say this; I don't think it was your fault. Devin had some problems that he felt could be best taken care of by taking care of himself, so to speak. Some people just think it's best to do it themselves. That's what my father did.

CAROL: What about your mom?

GEOFF: Well, my father killed himself when I was 13. Bullet. Brain. Boom. My mother took it hard. She let herself go. She was always a bigger woman, and she eventually suffered health problems because of it. She died from complications, diabetes. I was in my mid-20s. She died about a year before you and I met.

CAROL: I remember that. Richard would tell me not to talk about parents near you. To quote him, you'd get, "all upset or some crap."

GEOFF: Yup. Or some crap.

CAROL: So, you think it's just survivor's guilt?

GEOFF: Carol, the whole idea of survivor's guilt in this context is all wrong. Outliving your kid is actually a good thing. Hear me out. *[Takes out his flask]* Sip?

CAROL: No thanks. *[Takes out a piece of gum, starts chewing]* Gum?

GEOFF: No thanks. *[GEOFF takes a drink before putting the flask away]* When my father died, I knew I'd be upset. But I had my mom there for me. When she died, I had my friends there for me. I had to bury my father, my mother, and then my wife. Now I'm alone.

CAROL: You aren't selling me on this.

*[DEVIN enters, standing upstage behind CAROL and GEOFF]*

GEOFF: But now that they're gone, I have a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. Think about it like this: now that my parents are dead, what's the worst that's going to happen? Are they going to die again? I don't have to put them into a sub-par nursing home because I'm too busy with my life and I can't give them the care they deserve. I don't have to drive them to doctor's appointments. I don't have to arrange for their deaths as I get older and closer to my own expiration date. I'm free, Carol. And my parents didn't have to become the thing they never wanted to be: a burden. On Mother's Day and Father's Day, I visit their graves, bring flowers and read a page of my accomplishments since I last visited. I do the same for my wife. I doubt it means anything to them, but it helps me remember what I have to live for. Now, I don't have to worry. I only have myself to take care of. I'll keep myself alive as long as I feel like it, and when it's time to go, I won't have to deal with anything else. Since they're dead, my arrangements will go to some lawyer, maybe a niece or something. Then they'll have to deal with it.

CAROL: So, this is like a blessing in disguise?

*[DEVIN touches CAROL and GEOFF's shoulders. DEVIN exits]*

GEOFF: *[Places his hand on CAROL's shoulder]* You know, I'm here for you if you want to talk. Or, if you want, you can wait until all this is over. I'm not great at it, but I know how to comfort people. *[Leans closer to CAROL]*

CAROL: *[Gently pulls away from GEOFF]* I'll keep that in mind. Thanks Geoff. You're a good friend. *[CAROL exits, passing RICHARD and JEAN, who enter and walk over to the coffin.*

*RICHARD closes the coffin lid]*

GEOFF: A good friend. *A good friend.* Jesus Christ.

JEAN: My god, if you think that's bad, have you ever tried to do plastic surgery on old people? Their skin is so loose. There is no elasticity or collagen anymore. It's like working with a plastic bag. And no matter what happens, it's just going to get worse.

RICHARD: A Ziploc bag?

JEAN: When you get old, there isn't much hope. *[GEOFF walks over to JEAN and RICHARD, joining them mid-conversation]*

GEOFF: Someone should have told Joan Rivers that.

JEAN: She was a lost cause. You know the doctors allegedly took pictures of her when she was under?

RICHARD: Have you ever done that?

JEAN: No! I'm a professional. I'd never do that.

RICHARD: What if you had someone famous on your table?

GEOFF: She said no, Richard. Just drop it.

RICHARD: Fine.

GEOFF: But really Jean, if it were a celebrity, wouldn't you want "before and after" shots?



JEAN: Before and after? Oh, I always get those. Both for my personal records and for official reasons. That way if they try to sue or say that we messed up, I have proof of what they looked like before.

RICHARD: Can you use that in court? “Your Honour, you see what she looks like now, but you should have seen how ugly this broad was before she went under the knife.”

JEAN: Broad?

RICHARD: Yeah, broad. Woman. Lady. You know.

GEOFF: Richard, in case you didn’t know, women hate being called “broad.”

RICHARD: Sorry.

JEAN: Whatever.

GEOFF: So, I have a serious question for you. Why do old people get surgeries like that?

JEAN: Why, to look beautiful, of course. Sometimes they are necessary. A nose job can improve breathing, but other times it’s just for looks. My job is to make people look younger, because for some, that helps them forget about the fact that they’re eventually going to die. They don’t know what’s going to happen when they die, and they want to look their best when it happens.

RICHARD: So, a nose job is going to fix that?

JEAN: People are only meant to be on this earth for a certain period of time. Why not allow them to be beautiful for the entirety of it?

RICHARD: And these old people actually buy into this?

JEAN: On occasion. Some just want to recapture their youth.

RICHARD: Mostly women, right?

JEAN: What makes you say that?

RICHARD: Guys don’t get as ugly as they age.

JEAN: As someone attracted to men and women, I can say that's both untrue, and it's a societal double standard. Both men and women age, but supposedly men can age to become "rugged."

Are you saying women who age are frail and saggy?

RICHARD: I didn't invent the aging process. I just follow it.

JEAN: You follow a lot of trends like that?

RICHARD: They aren't trends, they're "societal standards." Your words.

JEAN: You're an ugly person, you know that? On the inside. And no amount of plastic surgery can fix that.

RICHARD: I think the term you are looking for is "rugged."

JEAN: I'm going out for a cigarette.

RICHARD: Not too many! They might make you look "rugged!"

*[JEAN storms offstage, passing MARK and the FUNERAL DIRECTOR, who both join the men]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Young Devin looks peaceful, doesn't he?

MARK: Yes. And it is a lovely coffin.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: We prefer the term casket. But yes, it is quite lovely. The family *[Nods at RICHARD]* has made an excellent choice. They spared no expense in providing the best for their beloved. In fact, we like to call this the "Prince" package. We believe that even in death the deceased should be treated in a manner fit for royalty.

GEOFF: *[Sarcastically]* I'm sure that's affordable.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Excuse me?

GEOFF: Don't you find it a tad pointless? You know, trying to make the dead comfortable?

They're dead. Why not bury them in a pine box?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: A pine box? Heavens no. My work is no more useless than what anyone else does for a living. Keeping people satisfied. Bringing comfort to families of the deceased. A noble endeavour. It's a question of respect.

GEOFF: Ah, of course. The dead should be comfortable. Let's ask him. [*Knocks on the coffin and talks to it*] Knock-knock. Hey Devin, it's Geoff. You comfortable in there? I can't tell, with the closed lid.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: I can fix that. [*Begins to open the coffin*]

RICHARD: [*Places his hand on the lid*] Don't. [*FUNERAL DIRECTOR nods*]

GEOFF: Even all that commotion didn't wake him. He must be *really* comfortable in there.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: I see. A born cynic.

GEOFF: Better a cynic than an undertaker.

RICHARD: Okay, enough you two. [*To FUNERAL DIRECTOR*] Hey chief, I need a favour.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Sir, I'd prefer if you didn't call me that. I'm part Chippewa.

RICHARD: Okay. I'm part English. But, I need a favour.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: [*Sighs*] How can I help you, sir?

RICHARD: You know that screen you got over there?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: The one displaying the image of your son?

RICHARD: Yeah, that's the one. Think you could change that?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: What do you mean?

RICHARD: It's been up there the entire time. Everyone's already seen it. So, I was wondering if you could put something else on.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: What else could you have in mind?

RICHARD: Do you have the sports package? Maybe some wrestling? *[GEOFF drinks from his flask]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Sir, we do not have a satellite provider.

RICHARD: Cable?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: No.

RICHARD: What do you watch around here?

GEOFF: *[Interjecting]* Probably, people crying.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: *[To RICHARD]* Sir, this is a place of bereavement. We do not have time to watch television, let alone wrestling.

RICHARD: No. I get it. Here. *[Hands FUNERAL DIRECTOR \$20]* Just in case you do have a way. Even basic television is okay, to help me in my time of grieving. *[FUNERAL DIRECTOR exits]*

MARK: Do you think that's actually going to work?

RICHARD: It better. That was my last \$20. And I'm tired of the same pictures of Devin. I'd rather watch wrestling.

## Act II, Scene III

*[MILLIE and CAROL enter as the men stand near the casket]*

MILLIE: Did I hear you talking about wrestling?

RICHARD: Don't worry, we all know it's fake.

MILLIE: Not fake, scripted. You can know the outcome is predetermined, and they may not actually be hitting each other, but the falls are real. You can't fake gravity.

RICHARD: You sound like you know a lot about wrestling.

MILLIE: I don't want to consider myself an expert, but I do read the wrestling sheets.

RICHARD: Well, the blood is fake.

MILLIE: Not always. Sometimes they cut themselves. Not as much anymore, but it still happens. And some wrestlers use blades, glass or actual weed-whackers on each other. Skin bleeds.

MARK: So, people actually allow themselves to be hurt on purpose?

MILLIE: For entertainment value. Audiences aren't there for Shakespearean theatre. The real appeal is the athleticism and the action. *[Pause]* Plus, a lot of them are in great shape, and that's just a bonus.

RICHARD: You'd never catch me at some Shakespearean play. I'm not a fan of that "cultural stuff."

MILLIE: Professional wrestling is a cross-cultural thing. They have *lucha libre* in Mexico, technical mat-based wrestling in England, the flashiness of American wrestling, and of course, the Japanese strong style. They all have their own unique flare. It really is the sport of kings. Queens too. What with Mae Young and Wendi Richter blazing the trail for women wrestlers everywhere.

*[The screen begins showing a pro wrestling match. MILLIE, GEOFF, MARK and RICHARD silently watch the match for a few moments]*

MILLIE: I've already seen this match. I'm going back to talk with Carol. *[MILLIE walks over to CAROL near the coffin, while the men watch wrestling on the video-screen].*

RICHARD: *[To MILLIE, shouting]* I still think wrestling's fake!

GEOFF: Not *all* of it. Magic time. *[Punches RICHARD in the stomach]* Houdini!

MILLIE: *[To CAROL]* You know, it really is a great sport.

CAROL: It really isn't for me, but I can see the appeal.

MILLIE: Not even the theatrical aspects? It's like a daytime soap. The difference is, instead of someone being killed only to have their evil "twin" replace them it's... *[Pause]* Wait, they've done that too.

CAROL: You don't find it childish?

MILLIE: Sure. But, there's something about knowing that you're really watching live theatre on your television screen with a worldwide audience. That sense of communion is unmatched.

CAROL: But I heard you say they cut themselves? How is that live theatre? Actual bleeding?

MILLIE: Carol, these wrestlers make conscious decisions to do this. And if that's the case, then who cares? Personally, I'm not the biggest fan, but if someone gets a little "colour," well, you know what they say. *[Pause]*

CAROL: No, I don't.

MILLIE: They say "red equals green." Big bucks! Jean knows more about that than anyone else. Speaking of which, your sister really knows her stuff. I don't know if I can really afford it right now, but I think that plastic surgery wouldn't be a bad idea. I mean. Just imagine what I'll look like when I'm older!

CAROL: Yeah.

MILLIE: Maybe I'll look as good as Joan Rivers when I get to her age. Oh, that would be a dream.

CAROL: Speaking of dreams, sometimes Devin talked in his sleep.

MILLIE: Oh, I had a dog like that! He barked in his sleep. Sometimes he would whimper and kick his legs. My mom said he was dreaming of chasing cars. Funny, that's how he died.

CAROL: In its sleep?

MILLIE: No. Hit by a car.

CAROL: That must have been sad.

MILLIE: Did you have any pets growing up?

CAROL: I never had a pet until we got that dog for Devin. Now I think we'll have to give it up. I feel bad for saying this, but I don't think I can look at it anymore. It reminds me too much of Devin.

MILLIE: Well, that's why you should keep it. If the dog reminds you of your kid, then that dog will be a positive memory. Besides, if you got rid of it, it would break its heart. *[MILLIE begins filing her nails]*

CAROL: I'd never actually get rid of it. It's just sometimes when I see it, it reminds me too much of Devin. I don't know; I guess it just makes it hard to cope. *[Pause]* Millie, I know that you've dealt with death a fair amount, or at least your family has. How do you cope?

MILLIE: *[Focusing on her finger]* Oh, I nicked myself. *[MARK walks away from the video screen]*

CAROL: Really?

MILLIE: Yup.

CAROL: Nicked yourself? *[GEOFF walks over to MARK]*

MILLIE: Yes. I need a band aid. Come on, help me find one. Maybe that cute funeral director can help. *[MILLIE and CAROL exit]*

GEOFF: *[To MARK]* So, what's the matter with you?

MARK: Nothing.

GEOFF: Nothing?

MARK: Yeah, I don't like wrestling.

GEOFF: It's not for everyone. But we're at a funeral. We have to blend in. *[RICHARD walks over]*

RICHARD: Hey, you clowns, why aren't you watching?

GEOFF: Mark doesn't like wrestling.

MARK: Thanks for helping me blend. *[GEOFF shrugs nonchalantly]*

RICHARD: Everyone likes wrestling. Every man I've ever met liked it. Except for Devin. I tried to get him into it. He said it was boring. What was boring were all those awful school plays I had to endure for him. He couldn't even pretend to like wrestling for me? I pretended he was a good actor. I pretended the sets he made were good. I pretended I was interested. If anyone should have had their acting skills praised, it should have been me. That damn kid wasted so many of my nights, and he couldn't even watch one wrestling match with me? I tell ya, it's like he was scared to sit with me. What a wuss.

*[The screen stops playing the wrestling and returns to the image of Devin]*

MARK: So, you watch wrestling regularly?

RICHARD: I try to, but recently, Carol wants to talk, so I have to turn it off. By the time she's done, it's over. I guess she's still trying to wrap her head around everything.



GEOFF: *[Laughs]*

RICHARD: What's funny?

GEOFF: The image of wrapping your head around something. Imagine if you could just stretch your skull around some words or a concept, in a visual sense. What a picture. Think of pushing up daisies.

MARK: Lie down in the shade.

GEOFF: Buy the farm.

MARK: Shuffle off this mortal coil.

GEOFF: Assume room temperature.

MARK: Join the choir invisible.

GEOFF: Kick the bucket.

MARK: Give up the ghost.

GEOFF: Take a dirt nap.

MARK: Cark it.

GEOFF: Cark it?

MARK: It's Irish.

GEOFF: Like this? *[Pulls out flask]*

MARK: *[Shakes head]* Sure.

RICHARD: *[Pause]* Curiosity killed the cat.

GEOFF: Satisfaction brought it back.

RICHARD: What?

GEOFF: That's the full phrase. "Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back."

RICHARD: You made that up.

MARK: It's the truth.

RICHARD: Where did you hear that?

MARK: Read about it...

*[A phone rings. RICHARD takes his cell phone out of his pocket]*

## Act II, Scene IV

RICHARD: One second. Hello? *[Pause]* Yes, this is him. What do you want? *[Covers the phone. To GEOFF and MARK]* I'm gonna take this. *[Walks to other side of the stage]*

GEOFF: *[To MARK]* You know what I don't understand?

MARK: No, what's that?

GEOFF: Why is this such a downer? I mean, it could be fun!

MARK: Are you serious?

GEOFF: Well, isn't that your Irish belief? Ever heard of *Finnegan's Wake*?

MARK: Yes, and it's not that we don't want to party, but it's important to celebrate Devin's life, even if it was cut short.

GEOFF: We can celebrate his life by drinking! *[Flourishing flask, drinks]*

MARK: I don't drink at funerals...

GEOFF: *[Interrupting]* That's okay, I'll drink for both of us.

MARK: Fine.

GEOFF: You know, the main difference between an alcoholic and someone who can control themselves around alcohol is simple.

MARK: What's that?

GEOFF: Anyone can develop a booze addiction, but only some can perfect it. It takes generations. My old man was an expert. He could open a bottle of beer with his eye socket.

MARK: That's not especially impressive.

GEOFF: He never drank twist tops.

MARK: I take it back.

RICHARD: [*RICHARD returns, and interrupts*] Sorry about that, another distant family offering condolences. What did I miss?

MARK: Geoff is enlightening me about his family history and alcoholism.

GEOFF: That's right. It's genetic. If your father or mother is prone to sauce it up, then likely you'll do the same. Ditto with smokers or people with depression.

MARK: That's not true. Those whose families have a history of smoking, alcoholism or depression don't have to follow suit.

GEOFF: For fear of ending up like their parents? [*Looks at RICHARD*]

MARK: You're trying to make fun of me, aren't you?

GEOFF: I'm getting to it.

MARK: I figured you were.

GEOFF: Thank you for giving me the credit I deserve.

MARK: You'll get everything you deserve soon enough.

GEOFF: Was that a threat?

RICHARD: No. A threat is more like, "I'm going to kick your ass, and teach you a lesson."

GEOFF: There's more than one way to threaten a cat.

RICHARD: Skin one too.

GEOFF: Yes. That was the allusion I was making.

RICHARD: I didn't know you knew magic.

GEOFF: Not just me. Mark knows magic too. For example, he can make a whole bottle of whiskey disappear!

RICHARD: [*To MARK*] How?

MARK: By giving it to Geoff.

RICHARD: *[Laughing]* He got you good, Geoff!

GEOFF: True.

MARK: You know, my family didn't have an easy life. They faced hardships, especially when they came to North America. The people here didn't want to give them a break. It was like exile in the Old Testament.

GEOFF: If you want us to feel sorry for you, then you're grasping at straws, which only makes sense if you're drinking.

MARK: You're pathetic. *[Exits]*

RICHARD: You know, I don't buy into what Mark was saying.

GEOFF: The Bible thing? I mean he didn't explain himself, but I get where he's coming from. But, I don't believe in any of that.

RICHARD: Me neither.

GEOFF: You don't believe in the Bible?

RICHARD: No, I don't believe in atheists.

GEOFF: Their beliefs or their non-beliefs?

RICHARD: Neither.

GEOFF: Maybe they don't need beliefs.

RICHARD: What's the point if there isn't a reward at the end?

GEOFF: Some people need to believe there *is* a reward at the end of the day. But there's no payoff. We just die.

RICHARD: Hell no!

GEOFF: I guess the good news for you is atheists don't believe in Hell either. So, they'll have no place to go according to you.

RICHARD: How can someone believe that there *isn't* anything after?

GEOFF: How can you believe there *is*?

RICHARD: What's the point if everything stops when you die?

GEOFF: When batteries die, they don't get to come back.

RICHARD: What about rechargeable batteries?

GEOFF: I don't believe in rechargeable batteries.

RICHARD: Well, I guess we'll have to see who's right at the end of the day. Loser goes to the winner's funeral.

GEOFF: Sure. *[Shakes RICHARD's hand]* I'm going to sit for a minute. You mind?

RICHARD: Not at all. I'll be here a little longer. *[GEOFF goes to sit down]*

*[RICHARD stands alone by the coffin for 15 seconds, silently looking at the closed lid. Then, he sits beside GEOFF]*

GEOFF: I have a question for you.

RICHARD: Everyone seems to have questions for me today.

GEOFF: Did Devin ever ask for help?

RICHARD: Yeah. He always needed help with something. He was either failing some simple task or trying too hard and getting frustrated. I swear, he could barely accomplish anything. I used to wonder what it would be like for him when he got a real job, but I guess I'll never find out.

GEOFF: No, I meant, more like a cry for help.

RICHARD: What do you mean?

GEOFF: Did he ever seem like he wanted to kill himself?

RICHARD: No. He kept to himself, which was weird, at least according to Carol. She said he used to be more outgoing, but I told her to quit her worrying, because he was becoming a man, and he was finding his own interests. Half the time, I thought he was in his room watching porn.

*[MILLIE, CAROL and JEAN enter. They stand off to the side, engaged in small talk]*

GEOFF: But you didn't know what he was really doing.

RICHARD: No. He could have been watching sports highlights or car repair videos. I don't know. It's not my place to barge into his room and ask stupid questions.

GEOFF: You don't see Devin isolating himself in his room as a cry for help?

RICHARD: No. He wasn't crying for help. He was in his room. That's not a sign he needed help. If he wanted help, he could have asked.

GEOFF: Really?

RICHARD: Look, you have a problem, you deal with it like a man or suck it up. He was a man. He could deal with that stuff alone. A man's job in life isn't to dump issues on other people. Other people have their own lives.

GEOFF: But, your own son?

RICHARD: Listen, if the boy had a problem, he should have asked.

GEOFF: What if he didn't ask directly, but wanted you to pay attention?

RICHARD: Then it's *his* fault.

GEOFF: Do you even *hear* yourself right now?

RICHARD: Loud and clear.

GEOFF: Then hear this. You're an asshole. *[Walks off]*

RICHARD: *[Shouting after GEOFF]* I heard that perfectly, ya prick!

## Act II, Scene V

*[CAROL, MILLIE and JEAN look over at RICHARD, who quickly takes a seat]*

CAROL: I'm sorry you had to see that.

JEAN: I'm sorry you have to deal with that every day.

CAROL: Jean, could you be nice?

JEAN: He's a jerk!

CAROL: I know, but he's my husband, until death do us part.

JEAN: Well not to change the topic, but I want to say I'm sorry about all of this. Devin was a great kid.

CAROL: He really was.

JEAN: I have to head out. I'm going to say goodbye. I'll be here for the service tomorrow, okay?

CAROL: It's at 11 a.m., but you can come at 10:30.

JEAN: Okay, I'll be there. *[Hugs CAROL, before walking over to the casket. She kneels silent for a moment before she exits the stage. The FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters and goes to speak to CAROL and MILLIE. DEVIN follows him]*

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Has everything gone well today?

*[DEVIN touches the shoulders of MILLIE and the FUNERAL DIRECTOR. MILLIE kisses the FUNERAL DIRECTOR]*

MILLIE: It's all perfect.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Oh, my. If you'll excuse me. *[Exits]*

CAROL: What was that?

*[DEVIN sits down near RICHARD]*



MILLIE: I don't really know. Something came over me. Earlier we were talking and he said he was single. He's cute, and I don't know about you, but being around all this death just makes me want to live, find someone, make their day, make them smile. Infuse a sense of wonder into their life, because you never know what's going to happen next. Love is everywhere, you just have to know where to look for it. *[Pause]* But I think I'll take a page out of Jean's book and leave too. *[Gives CAROL a hug]* Call me any time, okay? *[Exits]*

*[CAROL walks across the stage and opens the casket]*

RICHARD: *[Standing up]* What are you doing?

CAROL: It's an open casket Richard. I don't want him hidden anymore. He made his choice, and as much as it hurts to say it, he's gone. My baby boy is gone. He took his own life and I can never bring him back. It's going to take me a long time to get over this. You know that right?

RICHARD: I do.

CAROL: And I'm going to need you to help me do that.

RICHARD: Carol...

CAROL: Can you help me do that?

RICHARD: Yes.

*[CAROL hugs RICHARD]*

CAROL: I love you, Richard. But you have to be better. You have to promise me you'll try.

RICHARD: Try at what? What have I done wrong?

CAROL: Richard, I'm not trying to start a fight.

RICHARD: Then why would you bring something like that up?

CAROL: I... no. You're right. Let's put a pin in this for now, and come back to it later.

RICHARD: Put a pin in what?

CAROL: Never mind, Richard. *[Exits]*

RICHARD: What are you talking about? *[Closes the casket before following CAROL, exiting]*

*[DEVIN walks to the front of the stage. MARK enters. DEVIN recedes]*

MARK: *[To the casket]* Hi Devin. I don't think we really knew each other, but I just wanted to say I'm sorry that you felt the need to do this. Like I said, I didn't know you, but I'm sure there was another way. *[GEOFF enters, but doesn't approach MARK]* I know we sometimes feel like we're at the end of our rope, no pun intended, but it isn't always the case. We have to hold out hope, for as long as we can.

*[GEOFF walks up to MARK]*

GEOFF: Is Richard around?

MARK: What? Oh, um... I don't see him.

GEOFF: Good, because I need someone who's rational to talk with.

MARK: Actually, I'm not in the mood to talk right now.

GEOFF: Alright, tell me what's going on.

MARK: What are you talking about?

GEOFF: This whole "my girlfriend has cancer" shtick.

MARK: You really are drunk, aren't you?

GEOFF: Drunk or sober, I know when someone is trying to pull the wool over my eyes. She doesn't have cancer, does she?

MARK: I'd rather not talk about this.

GEOFF: *[Louder]* She doesn't have cancer, does she?

MARK: Stop shouting. *[Pause]* Okay, she doesn't.

GEOFF: Knew it. You're such a liar.

MARK: Her boyfriend has it.

GEOFF: Sucks to be him. *[Pause]* Wait.

MARK: Yeah.

GEOFF: *[Exhales through teeth]* Oh. That sucks. What kind?

MARK: Prostate.

GEOFF: So, they... *[Simulates rectal exam with fingers]*

MARK: Come on, man. It means treatment, just like everyone else. I have to go through radiation, chemo, the whole thing.

GEOFF: You know, my cousin went through it.

MARK: And?

GEOFF: He's fine, but it was a bummer when it happened. He had gorgeous hair. You'd swear the man could be in shampoo commercials. He got prostate cancer. They caught it early, so he ended up being fine.

MARK: Very nice.

GEOFF: It was the most beautiful hair you could imagine. Gone. He wore toques and baseball caps after that. His daughter learned to knit and kept making him hats. It was a mess. Terrible. Once he got better, she stopped making him hats. Sometimes you just have to quit while you're behind.

MARK: Geoff, I'm actually really scared. You're the first person I've told outside of my own family.

GEOFF: Really? The first person?

MARK: Yeah.

GEOFF: Well, I would like to commend you on making that mistake. I am probably the worst person you can tell that to. *[GEOFF looks at MARK. DEVIN walks over and touches both men on the shoulder]* Well, you know the diagnosis better than I do. Does your girlfriend know?

MARK: Of course.

GEOFF: And?

MARK: She told me I'll be fine. Cancer isn't a death sentence. If I keep fighting, then I can beat it. She said it's like battling back from hell, but that I could do it.

GEOFF: Wow. She's got a positive outlook. *[Pause]* Mark, I don't know what you want *me* to say.

MARK: Tell me I'm going to be okay.

GEOFF: Really? Why?

MARK: Because I don't know what else I want to hear.

GEOFF: *[Sighs]* You're going to be okay. I know sometimes you feel like you're at the end of your rope, but if you just hang in there a little longer, things will change for the better.

MARK: Thanks. *[GEOFF pats MARK on the shoulder]*

GEOFF: *[Standing up]* Besides, there isn't even a point to trying to kill yourself. You're going to die anyways. The best suicide is natural causes. Nature decides when your time's up.

MARK: Thanks, I guess. *[GEOFF begins exiting]* Wait, you aren't driving, are you?

GEOFF: Well, I wasn't going to fly.

MARK: I'll drive you back to your place. We can figure out how to get your car back later.

GEOFF: Oh, okay. Why don't you call me a cab?

MARK: I can't afford a cab. Richard borrowed my last \$20. *[MARK and GEOFF begin exiting. CAROL and RICHARD enter. DEVIN shifts uncomfortably in his chair]*

RICHARD: Leaving so soon?

GEOFF: See you around, Carol. Hey Richard, it's magic time! *[Punches RICHARD in the stomach. Shouts while exiting]* Houdini!

MARK: Sorry about these two. See you at mass tomorrow.

CAROL: Thank you. *[MARK exits]*

RICHARD: What an asshole. It looks like everyone's gone now.

CAROL: I guess so.

RICHARD: They'll be back tomorrow for the mass.

CAROL: I know. I can't believe he's gone. *[RICHARD hugs CAROL tightly. CAROL hugs him back. They hug in silence for a moment, before CAROL pulls back, but RICHARD doesn't let go]*

RICHARD: I'm not ready to let go.

CAROL: Okay. *[CAROL and RICHARD continue to embrace for a moment, before they release the embrace]*

RICHARD: If you want, you can go start the car. I want to talk to Devin for minute. Alone.

CAROL: Of course. *[Kisses RICHARD]* I'll meet you at the car. *[Exits]*

RICHARD: *[Walks over to the casket]* Devin, I don't know why the hell you did this. If you could see what it did to your mother. I know you never cared about me. No, you did, at least I think you did. *[DEVIN stands, listening intently]* I didn't really take time to get to know you, did I? Well, I guess it's a little too late for that now. You used to be such a cute kid, so bright and full of questions. I'd be lying if I told you it didn't get tiring once in a while. I don't know what changed. You got weird. I never cared about art or any of that odd shit you liked. I didn't get it. *[DEVIN walks over and stands behind RICHARD, but RICHARD is unaware]* Maybe your mom was right. I could have put more effort into our relationship, but you could have too. *[Pause]* I'm

not blaming you, Devin, I just don't understand. I don't think I ever will. I hope I do one day.

And you know, if I did anything wrong *[Pause]* I'm sorry. I wasn't the best dad, but I tried.

*[DEVIN places his hand on RICHARD's shoulder]* I'm sure you would have made a much better dad than me. Love you buddy. *[RICHARD opens the casket and exits, passing DEVIN without acknowledging him]*

*[DEVIN watches RICHARD exit. DEVIN gets back into the casket without saying a word]*

*[The lights fade to black]*

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***If in distress, contact:***

The Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS): 1-833-456-4566

In the USA, the U.S. National Suicide Prevention LifeLine: 1-800-273-8255.

“The International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) <https://www.iasp.info/>

And, Befrienders Worldwide: <https://www.befrienders.org/>

## ESSAY

### *The Visitation* as Menippean Satire

From a personal standpoint, my decision to write this play stemmed from a desire to educate myself, and others on suicide. Having previous experience writing plays, and knowing the accessibility of live performance to the general population, I knew this was the direction I wanted to go. My first struggle came in deciding whether to write this play as a realistic drama or as an absurdist comedy; I decided on the latter while retaining some realistic elements, as it might make audiences more receptive to a difficult message.

I knew it was important to research not only suicide itself, but the effects of suicide. When writing the play, I became aware of the Werther effect, in which there was an increase in suicides amongst readers after learning of the main character's suicide at the conclusion of Goethe's *The Case of Young Werther* (Stack 238), and I wanted to be sure *The Visitation* would not advocate suicide. So, I consulted with various health organizations, particularly the World Health Organization's *National Suicide Prevention Strategies: Progress, Examples and Indicators* guidelines. My research also led me to interviews with Ph.D. candidates and faculty members of the University of Windsor's Psychology department. I wanted to be sure that my creative work did not inspire dangerous reactions. During my research I discovered an article by Jane Perkins and R. Warwick Blood in which they explained that unlike other media forms, live theatre does *not* inspire suicidal tendencies in audiences (160). Consequently, I felt justified in my decision to write my creative thesis as a play while addressing the challenging topic of suicide.

My decision to write on the topic of suicide was also influenced by the death of a cousin in 2016, who committed suicide by a self-inflicted shotgun wound. In researching the suicide of

young men, I realized there was a connection between these deaths and a hegemonic masculinity. I decided to combine my research into suicide and its causes while allowing the multidimensional layers of *The Visitation* to develop.

My research not only led me towards scholarly articles, but also towards personal interviews with those who had lost loved ones due to a range of causes, including, but not confined, to suicide. The information and stories I gathered contributed to my writing process. Through *The Visitation*, I hope to inspire greater understanding of this important and often overlooked social problem.

*The Visitation* features two acts. In the first act, the audience is introduced to the topic of suicide through absurd ways. The set design allows for the audience to be confronted with the wake or viewing as if they were included at the event themselves. A stage design is included in the Appendix. The play is set in a proscenium style theatre, with a possible thrust stage. Set design and staging are fairly minimal, thereby keeping the production values simple. *The Visitation* features eight characters, including the “ghost” of Devin. The play is performed in actual-time which adds to the realism. The protagonist is Richard (Carol’s husband), who is the father of Devin. Richard undergoes a difficult process of self-individuation during the course of the play. By the conclusion, he arrives at the first phase of an awakening which indicates that he has become aware of failures in his thinking and attitude, as well as how he has treated others including his son, Devin. This play is a Menippean satire, and I will turn to that form shortly.

The structure and plot for *The Visitation* are aimed at confronting audiences with the concept of suicide, and why it is not a worthwhile solution to life’s problems. The character dynamics include grieving death vs. celebrating life, masculine vs. feminine, fearing mortality vs. embracing vitality, and denial vs. acceptance. Each dynamic was carefully researched,



through scholarly venues and through consultations with experts in the field including faculty and Ph.D. students in the Psychology, Women and Gender Studies, and Philosophy departments.

Specialist Riaz Hassan writes that “the phenomenon of suicide may be as old as humanity itself. Ever since man discovered that besides killing others he could also kill himself, suicide has become a part of the human condition” (168). One aim of this play is as a preventative measure against suicide, while helping enlighten people about this societal problem and related social dysfunctions. Historically, drama has been a vehicle of social reform. Playwrights such as Aristophanes, Aphra Behn, Berthold Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre, Sarah Kane, and Tomson Highway have used drama to enlighten audiences. I was also influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd, and playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Tom Stoppard, as well as critics such as Martin Esslin, Albert Bermel, and Charles Highet.

*The Visitation* adopts a Menippean satiric form. Throughout the third essay of *The Anatomy of Criticism*, in the sub-section, “The Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire,” Northrop Frye identifies the key features of Menippean satire as, token fantasy, objects of attack (institutional and individual), language play, digression, anatomy, inverted hierarchies, and parodic quest patterns (223-243). It is through these features that *The Visitation* addresses challenging social situations, while examining people’s reactions to them.

Menippean satire is neither comic nor tragic. Juvenalian satires depicts tragic outcomes for the protagonist (e.g.; *1984*, *Brave New World*, *A Clockwork Orange*, etc.). Horatian satire is more lighthearted and features a comic outcome for its protagonist (e.g.; *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*). Menippean satire offers a perspective that is balanced between the comic and the tragic. Its point of view is always ironic.

Frye suggests that the Menippean form is a satire of “anatomy,” and notes precedents such as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621 (308-12). In his fourth essay, “Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres,” in the sub-section on “Specific Continuous Forms (Prose Fiction)” of the *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye goes on to say that Menippean satires feature a series of loosely connected and extended dialogues and debates often conducted at social gatherings (in this case, a visitation/wake) in which a group of loquacious eccentrics, pedants, and representatives of various professions offer ludicrous perspectives (309). Earlier examples of the Menippean satiric form also include Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1564), and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759).

Frye goes on to explain that “satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard” (224). Within *The Visitation*, there are several prominent token fantasies, multiple grotesqueries, and implied moral standards. The first token fantasy involves Devin’s misguided idea that suicide is better than living. This aspect of Devin’s experience is revealed throughout the play. The second involves the appearance of Devin as a ghost. A third token involves other characters and their denial of mortality. Grotesqueries such as Millie’s attempt to sell her “family coffin” abound. Implied morals involving sensitivity to others become self-evident.

Frye also notes that satires contain institutional and individual objects of attack (224). Within this play, attacks are launched against social institutions such as a dominant patriarchal order, and a hegemonic masculinity. Individual objects of attack include self-centredness (Geoff and Richard), insensitivity (Geoff and Richard), insecurity which manifests itself as hegemonic masculinity (Richard), as well as denial or naïve ignorance concerning mortality itself (Mark). Matters such as plastic surgery (Jean and Millie), over-attentiveness to wrestling matches (Richard

and Millie), and inept handling of funeral rites (Millie and the “family coffin”) help to present the individual attacks in absurd and often humorous ways.

Another key feature of satire, is language play. *The Visitation* includes a series of dialogues where characters are made to seem ludicrous by their attitudes and viewpoints. Such language play helps to advance *The Visitation*’s critiques of both institutional and individual objects of attack.

Digression in *The Visitation* reveals characters’ anxieties and desires as they avoid the reality of Devin’s suicide. Frye notes that digressions are a common feature in satires and they often mock a “*philosophus gloriosus*” (Frye 311). In this play, Richard’s digressions establish him as the “*philosophus gloriosus*” when he speaks of how “real men” should behave. Various dialogues are linked scene by scene to gradually reveal the ludicrous attitudes of the various characters as they interact.

Digressions also happen through scene jumps which generate irony through the play’s juxtapositional strategies. For example, in the opening of the play, there is a discussion of violent Hollywood movies set at Christmas time. This scene is juxtaposed with the parents’ consideration of their son’s suicide. The contrast of Hollywood films and the actuality of losing a child serves to highlight how disconnected people are from their own realities. The digressive jumps in this play trace the staggered progress of various characters including Richard’s reluctant movement towards understanding Devin’s death during his process of self-individuation. The digressive form of the play also reflects psychic and socio-cultural ruptures on individual, familial, and community levels.

Both Frye and Highet agree that Menippean satire typically features anatomies (Frye 311-312, Highet 69). This play features a range of satirically inspired “anatomies” on topics such as suicide, mortality, the denial of fatherly duties, and those victimized by the patriarchal *status quo*.

Frye also notes that satires generally feature inverted social hierarchies (214). *The Visitation* inverts several social “norms” thereby revealing absurdities of human behaviour. For example, Devin’s ghost appears during the play and his “visitation” acts as a guide for the living characters. Ironically, an unwarranted death can be seen as a guiding principle in other people’s lives. Often, inversions include characters avoiding mortality, overemphasizing movies, sports, while focusing on physical appearance and finances. All these receive more consideration than Devin’s suicide. Such inversions in Menippean satire feature “a combination of fantasy and morality” (Frye 310). The characters are more engaged with their own fantasies than moral actualities. Devin, as a ghost character, forwards an honest and moral outlook when he symbolically brings characters together through his ethereal “touch.”

Lastly, Menippean satire typically parodies archetypal literary quest patterns (Frye 313). Such parodying is evident in Richard’s quest for self-individuation which is less than heroic, and involves complaining, self-centredness, stubborn defiance, and a reluctance to progress towards a worthy goal. Secondary quest patterns mocked in this play include Jean’s pursuit of financial gain through plastic surgery by exploiting others’ fears of aging/mortality, and Millie’s desire to unload the “family coffin.” By contrast, worthy quests in the play are made to seem more noble, including Carol’s grief over the loss of her son which leads to her self-assertiveness, Mark’s process of coping with his cancer and own mortality, and Millie’s search for happiness and love.

*The Visitation* also utilizes aspects of absurdist theatre. In his article, “The Theatre of the Absurd,” Martin Esslin explains that absurdism has the ability to “penetrate deeper layers of meaning and to give a truer, more complex picture of reality in avoiding the simplification which results from leaving out all the undertones, overtones and inherent absurdities and contractions of any human situation” (12-13). *The Visitation* borrows from absurdism and explores the

irrationality and senselessness of the human condition. I will now expand on the key elements of Menippean satire outlined above.

#### Token Fantasy:

To understand Devin's irrational decision to end his own life, a deeper understanding of suicide is necessary. According to Madylen Gould in her study "Suicide and the Media," there are four demographic groups that are predisposed to suicide. Devin belonged to three of these four groups: male, white, and unmarried; the fourth being retired (Gould 212) These alone may not inspire suicidal tendencies, but they are aggravated when combined with depression, an unfulfilling life, and a challenging familial situation that involves gender stereotypes.

During the course of the play it becomes apparent that Devin was depressed. The characters allude to the fact that Devin became reclusive, confined himself to his room, did not bathe, and became unsociable. According to the *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*, males are less likely to be diagnosed as depressed (3). The psychological findings report that while men are four times more likely to die by suicide than women, they are less likely to be diagnosed with internalizing disorders as depression; this is because such disorders do not conform to traditional gender role stereotypes (Addis 153-166). The play also indicates that gender role stereotypes are possible contributors to Devin's suicide. Already predisposed and undiagnosed, Devin's eventual decision towards suicide is, as described in Emile Durkheim's study *Suicide*, an "egoistic suicide," occurring when the individual does not fully or properly engage in society (168). As indicated within the play, Devin often was alone, segregated from his parents and was not social. This lack of belongingness, and subsequent

suicide is typified in E. David Klonsky and Alexis M. May's "The Three-Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory of Suicide Rooted in the 'Ideation-to-Action' Framework." Klonsky and May report that if a person feels a sense of pain and hopelessness, and feels this pain is greater than their connectedness with others, and has the available means to die by suicide, then they are at an increased risk (Klonsky and May 116). Suicide as "token fantasy" is emphasized during Devin's second monologue in the play (Act I, Scene VI), when he states that he regrets his decision.

The "token fantasy" of Devin as ghost emerges when arises from his casket to move about the stage. One of its purposes of this play is to move audiences towards desirable social reform. The use of a ghost as a means to stir audiences is something that has a long history in theatre. Sophie Nield in her article, "Theatre of Screams: on Ghosts and Drama" notes that ghosts serve numerous purpose in dramatic presentations. Nield comments:

But why does the theatre remain so fascinated with the spectral? More than film, photography or television, with their inbuilt capacity to fool the eye, ghosts in the theatre really spook us. There seems to be something about seeing the undead live that chills us all the more. (n.p.)

Devin's ghost as "token fantasy" does not point any accusing fingers, rather he serves an affirmative purpose. Throughout the play, Devin returns to the stage, bringing other characters closer together, while sometimes speaking candidly with the audience about his experience.

A third "token fantasy" in the play involves the denial of mortality by various other characters. Many of the characters speak of their relationships with suicide, sometimes speaking of the subject in fantastic ways when hypothesizing possible modes of suicide, as Richard does when he references a superhero dive from a tall building (1.2). These modes of hypothetical

suicide emphasize the absurdity of killing one's self and the absurdity of characters' views of suicide.

Mark represents another token fantasy within the play involving his hesitation in publicly admitting his cancer diagnosis. By the end of the play, he discloses his diagnosis, but struggles with his possible fate. Mark is in denial, while embracing the fantasy of a healthy life.

The satiric "token fantasy" is also evident through Jean, whose work in plastic surgery serves as an apparent deterrent to aging. Jean admits to undergoing plastic surgery herself, and attempts to convince others to undergo similar procedures. Jean's desire to look younger is negatively affected by her smoking habit which ages her facial appearance and has the potential of shortening her life. A similar sense of denial is seen with Geoff who discusses the importance of eating healthily, but ends the play by consuming an entire flask of alcohol. As with other Menippean satires, *The Visitation* uses "token fantasies" to reveal the ironic attitudes of characters, towards a social critique of both institutional and individual objects of attack.

Institutional and individual objects of attack:

Typically, there are both institutional and individual objects of attack in any Menippean satire. *The Visitation's* primary social critique is aimed at individual attitudes. On the institutional level, objects of attack in the play include the dominant patriarchal order, hegemonic masculinity, and social attitudes concerning human mortality. However, most of these institutional attacks are revealed through the individual characters. For example, Richard's overly "manly," attitudes and actions show signs of a gender role conflict, similar to those defined by J. M. O'Neil as "rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles, learned during socialization, that result in personal restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self" (25). Part of the

dynamic tension in this play arises from Richard's attempts to act like a proper "man" even at the expense of himself and those around him, especially Devin. Richard has followed the hegemonic cultural "male" stereotype. Gender critics Jeff Hearn and David Morgan explain that, "hegemonic masculinities are generally characterized as being associated with Western, white, and middle-class privilege; and, strength, stoicism, and aggressiveness are key performance indicators" (330). Richard's behaviour arises from his western, white, middle-class background, and is indicative of an individual who tries to show strength and stoicism. He displays a high degree of insensitivity. This insensitivity is evident when Richard mocks Devin's difficulties, even after his son's suicide:

"Oh no, I have another essay due next week and I can't handle pressure so I'm going to cry in my room. I didn't get a date for Valentine's, so I'm going to pretend that it doesn't bother me. I'm only 25 and my life has been so difficult that I am going to kill myself."

What a coward. He didn't know what difficult was. (2.1)

Richard believes that men hide their feelings (stoicism), solve their own problems (strength) and attack others (aggressiveness). This sense of the "masculine" is defined by R. W. Connell as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). One could extend this sense of dominance not only in subordination of women, but also other men such as Devin. Richard's sense of dominant masculinity prevents Devin from seeking his father's help, an act which could have saved Devin's life.

In *The Visitation*, Richard's self-centredness is matched by Geoff's. Both act in their own best interests, often dismissing other characters in order to advance their own positions. Again,



this attitude is typical of Menippean satire where the views of certain pedantic characters are made ludicrous by their own arguments or viewpoints. Richard is dismissive of Carol's grief, implying she should "get over" the loss of their son (1.3). Meantime, Geoff openly drinks and becomes belligerent, going so far as to assault Richard physically by punching him multiple times, purportedly in jest.

Another object of attack on the individual level is evident through Jean and Millie's discussion of plastic surgery. Jean views plastic surgery as a means of helping others hold back the aging process, however, complications can arise from such surgery, as when Millie and Jean discuss the death of Joan Rivers (1.4). Here, the belief that one can mask aging is critiqued.

Yet another object of attack on the individual level emerges during the discussions of the sport of wrestling. Millie and Richard reveal an over-attentiveness to entertaining distractions. Richard asks the Funeral Director to remove the slide show featuring Devin and replace it with a wrestling program. Millie and Richard's focus on this distraction suggest that they are psychologically unprepared or unwilling to face the reality of Devin's suicide. However, wrestling as a distraction was deliberately included in this play because it parallels the human struggle as a kind of "performance." Also, wrestling serves as a mirror of theatre itself. Critic Roland Barthes in his study, *Mythologies* notes that "what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private" (15). The inclusion of professional wrestling is used as an attack against those who wish to escape from reality, something Richard and Millie subscribe to as they become insensitive to what is around them. Pursuant to Barthes, *The Visitation* present moral situations which are usually private, but makes them public.

Lastly, an individual object of attack is shown through Millie, who exemplifies the inept handling of funeral rites and an insensitivity to the emotional state of others. Her attempts to either rent or sell her “family coffin” to Carol, who has just lost her son, reveals considerable tactlessness regarding Carol’s situation. The many examples of how the coffin was never used while remaining available for some *body* underscores the immanence of death as well as materialism surrounding funerary practices. Millie’s prolonged monologue on the topic of the “family coffin” is both humorous and absurd.

In all the above examples of objects of attack, absurd humour is used to teach through laughter. The satiric form highlights human foibles, while it illustrates an implied morality and how people might improve their behaviour when facing difficulties.

Language play:

Another key feature of satire is language play. In his study, *Anatomy of Satire*, Charles Highet comments on the importance of language play in satire as a weapon used to critique larger social issues. He explains as follows: “any author therefore, who often and powerfully uses a number of the typical weapons of satire – irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, exaggeration – is likely to be writing satire” (Highet 18). Highet references a series of linguistic and rhetorical techniques. In *The Visitation*, linguistic and rhetorical repartee and humour are used to critique the aforementioned objects of attack both on institutional and especially individual levels. In *The Visitation* language play not only serves a humorous intention, but also reveals how characters deflect uncomfortable realities. For example, Mark and Geoff engage in bouts of language play where they undermine the melancholia associated with death by playing with words. For

example, in Act I, Scene III, they use euphemisms such as “close the book,” “finish the last chapter,” “Skip to the ending” and “Become food for bookworms” (1.3). Later, they indulge in similar play when they exchange euphemisms for death such as, “Shuffle off this mortal coil.” “Assume room temperature.” “Join the choir invisible.” “Kick the bucket.” “Give up the ghost.” or, “Take a dirt nap.” (2.3). Similarly, after Millie’s attempt to sell her “family coffin,” she and Carol release anxiety by thinking of alliterative euphemisms for caskets including, “Poplar pajamas”, “tamarack trench-coat”, “sumac suit”, and “mahogany moo-moo” (1.5). These characters’ conversations often serve to deflect from their fears of mortality. In each instance, the characters are talking *indirectly* about death, but that indirection indicates an anxiety over facing mortality. Such dialogues fulfill an absurdist function. The grave topic of death loses significance when rendered within euphemistic terms, and almost becomes a meaningless sonic exchange. The characters in *The Visitation* are portrayed in a way that reveals their unwillingness to face the reality of mortality.

Martin Esslin comments on how meaning in language can atrophy under absurd and satiric conditions and has become “a mask for genuine meaning and emotion” (11). By “atrophied,” Esslin means that language has failed in its function to communicate clearly. In *The Visitation*, language play is used to “mask” many of the characters’ genuine emotions. At the same time, the language play is designed to be an amusing way of disarming the audience’s personal defenses while guiding them into considering the grim reality of death.

Language play is evident even within the title of the play. “*The Visitation*” has a double meaning, referring to the idea of a wake (i.e.; a “visitation”) as well as Devin’s visit or “visitation” on stage as a ghost. The double-ness of language in *The Visitation* shows the duplicity of the various characters. Satire typically features dysphemism, euphemism, and

repetition. Richard's manly bravado indicates his own insecurity. Jean's enthusiasm for the apparent virtues of plastic surgery indicates anxiety about aging. The double-ness of meaning generated through language play reveals the two-sidedness of many of the characters in the play.

For example, Richard's dysphemisms are often aimed at Devin, even following his son's suicide, and are symptomatic of his hegemonic masculinity. Geoff's use of dysphemism is typically aimed at Richard, as when he calls him terms such as, "dumbass" (1.2) and "asshole" (2.4). Geoff's use of language as a weapon of attack extends into his use of euphemism. For example, Geoff's use of the phrase "magic time," associated with the death of Houdini, becomes a euphemism for death itself, notably, when Geoff announces it before punching Richard. The phrase is repeated, and hints at Geoff's unconscious goal of killing Richard, so that he can begin a liaison with Carol. The death of Houdini, and the repetition of the terms "magic time" and "Houdini" help raise the contrast between the life principle (Eros) and the death principle (Thanatos). Another significant repetition includes use of the phrase "cry for help" by a variety of characters, including Mark, Millie and Geoff. The repetition of this phrase by various characters indicates the possibility of preventing a possible suicide. In this way, language play is used to emphasize the avoidance of ending one's own life. The above forms of language play including dysphemism, euphemism, and repetition serve to support *The Visitation's* valorization of the life principle (Eros) over the death principle (Thanatos). The importance of embracing life while facing death is often made evident through language play.

#### Digression:

Digression is also a key feature of satire. In *The Visitation* there are two prominent types of digression. The first involves digression through dialogue, which as explained above serves to

avoid the imminence of death. The second form of digression involves jumps from scene to scene. Both types of digression in this play serve an ironic purpose which is well suited for satire. Digression through language play was discussed earlier. The non-sequitur nature of the digression evident in scene jumps is designed to create ironic juxtapositions that contrast different characters' attitudes.

In the first act, Geoff and Mark discuss the unnecessary nature of a wake, and in the following scene Millie and Carol discuss fruit baskets. This sudden shift in topics between scenes allows for the ironic juxtaposition of Thanatos (i.e.; wakes) and Eros (i.e.; fruit). For example, Act I, Scene II features discussions of suicide by the various characters, but it is followed by Act I, Scene III and Millie's disconnected comments on enlivening the décor of the funeral home, her ex-boyfriend, and perverse sexual acts that might be connected to suicide. The juxtaposition of the second scene which is filled with masculine jocularity, with the third scene featuring Millie's more personal views serves to highlight not only gender differences in attitudes about death but also differences in viewpoints and genuine feelings among the characters. Digression is also evident in Millie's lengthy "family coffin" anecdote with Carol, which features digressions within digressions, as when Millie discusses numerous deaths in her family. In addition, Millie's twisted tale of the "family coffin" digresses from wake itself. This scene contrasts Millie's insensitivity with Carol's grief. Other digressions in the play, elevate the irony of the storyline through similar contrasts in characters' attitudes.

Overall, the digressive jumps between scenes help to accentuate the characters' emotional journeys, notably those of Richard and Carol. At first, Richard is reluctant to face the reality of his son's suicide, but he slowly accepts that reality, and by the final scene is willing to leave the lid on Devin's coffin open in accord with his wife's wishes. Carol also undergoes a transition

beginning with deep grief. She moves towards acceptance but is consistently more open about her feelings towards the loss of her son. The fact that she keeps opening the coffin lid after Richard has closed it is an indication of her willingness to face reality. By the end of the play, she asserts herself with reference to her husband Richard.

#### Satire as Anatomy:

One of the key features of a Menippean satire is its ability to provide an “anatomy” of social behaviour. The “anatomy” within a literary context involves separating or dividing a topic into parts for detailed examination or analysis. In *The Visitation*, the key topic *appears* to be suicide, but the actual topic is people’s *reaction* to suicide. The play “anatomizes” the different characters as “parts” of a detailed examination. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye comments on Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* as one of the greatest Menippean satires in English (Frye 311). Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), provides a satiric attack against melancholy while referring to scientific studies, medicine, physiology and psychology. Similarly, *The Visitation* satirically critiques responses to suicide and refers to medicine (e.g.; Mark’s questions about cancer and Geoff’s concerns about healthy diets), physiology (e.g.; speculations on modes of suicide and plastic surgery), and especially psychology (i.e.; involving all the characters). The play refutes suicide.

Characters’ reactions to suicide are anatomized. Along with these anatomies, patriarchal social positions are also revealed, particularly through Devin. Richard demonstrates the mindset of hegemonic masculinity. Devin, by not wanting to be seen as “weak” by asking for help with his struggles follows a masculine hegemonic model. Psychologists Sarah Payne, Viren Swami and Debbi L. Stanstreet explain that hegemonic masculinity “prioritizes independence and

resistance, and restricts help-seeking behaviour, which implies a loss of status and autonomy” (Payne, Swami and Stanstreet 26). Devin’s dysfunctional relationship with this father emerges as one of the causes of his suicide. Devin does not seek out treatment, as he does not wish to be seen in an un-masculine light by his father. To a degree, the play anatomizes the dysfunctionality of that relationship.

Millie’s suggestion that Devin’s suicide by hanging might have been the result of auto-erotic asphyxiation adds another dimension to the dissection of the idea of suicide. Psychologist Steve Taylor writes that doubt can emerge in suicides by hanging. He explains, “in cases of hanging, suicide is still not necessarily always recorded, for there is still scope of possible doubt. Some people can in fact hang themselves accidentally while engaging in semi-masochistic sexual activity; others may hang themselves in an attempt to frighten others” (Taylor 77-78). Devin’s death was neither of these, however, the presence of doubt is part of the satiric anatomy of this case and shows people’s different reactions toward deliberate or accidental suicide.

In addition, Millie’s attempts to sell her “family coffin” reveal two aspects related to human mortality while serving to partially anatomize funerary practices. First, the original owner chose cremation over burial, not wishing to burn the expensive coffin, thereby revealing the high cost of dying. Second, it shows how an object involving death can become an unwanted family legacy. In part, the play offers a satiric anatomy of the high cost of dying, and family legacies.

The play also offers anatomies on elements such as movies, sports, and wrestling, and cosmetic surgery. All these involve a struggle to survive. In Act I, Scene II, *Die Hard* and *It’s a Wonderful Life* echo Devin’s struggle. Devin did not have anyone to help him during his crisis unlike the protagonist in *It’s a Wonderful Life* who was assisted by an angel. Devin’s ghost serves an almost “angelic” function in the play because his ethereal form helps to bring people

closer together. In *The Visitation* plastic surgery, sports, and movies help anatomize characters' personalities and reactions to Devin's suicide.

The various reactions to Devin's suicide provide a social "anatomy" revealing not only different psychologies but also individual modes of dealing with grief while choosing to confront or avoid death. These anatomies are enhanced by the inversions of social hierarchies in the play.

#### Inverted Hierarchies:

Typically, satires feature an *inversion* of social hierarchies. The inversions in this play involve reevaluations of at least one major institutional hierarchical aspect, involving hegemonic masculinity, as well as inversions or significant shifts relating to relations among Richard, Carol, Mark and Devin. Richard's attitude undergoes the first phase of an inversion when he reforms his attitude at the end of the play. There are two other inversions on the individual character level including Carol's reassertion of self-worth, and Mark's confrontation with his own life-threatening illness.

Specifically, the institutional hegemonic masculinity upheld by Richard is demoted to a very low social standing. Richard's masculine bravado is depicted as dominant in early phases of the play but that dominance shifts. A major cause of the shift arises from his wife, Carol. Carol's subservience to Richard's masculine insensitivity comes to an end when she asserts herself and demands that the relationship proceed on a more equal footing:

CAROL: ... It's going to take me a long time to get over this. You know that right?

RICHARD: I do.

CAROL: And I'm going to need you to help me do that.

RICHARD: Carol...



CAROL: Can you help me do that?

RICHARD: Yes. (2.5)

The above exchange between Carol and Richard reveals Carol's need for comfort from her husband, and is a demand for a more egalitarian relationship that equalizes the earlier masculine/feminine hierarchy. So, while this is not a full "inversion" it does suggest that dominant, hegemonic social modes can be deconstructed.

Another hierarchical inversion involves Mark's readjustment to his own illness. He moves from denial of the illness, and anxiety over his own mortality, to confession, acceptance, and a willingness to face the problem directly.

Devin as a ghost serves to combine rather than divide individual characters. While he was alive, Devin's behaviour created strife between his mother and father. The play contrasts Carol's acceptance of Devin, with Richard's intolerance. Devin's death brings about a new union between his parents. Devin's ghost also helps guide other characters closer together (e.g.; Millie and the Funeral Director, Geoff and Mark, Richard and Carol). In this regard, Devin follows the philosophical argument put forward by Scottish philosopher David Hume, who writes "a man who retires from life does no harm to society: he only ceases to do good, which, if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind" (31). While Devin does "retire from life," his "touch" satirizes the lack of communal connection between people, particularly when they experience grieving or the loss of a loved one. His ghost allows others to come closer together, paralleling the closeness that Devin longed for in his lifetime. Devin's ghost serves a "leadership" role. Philosopher Jeff Noonan explains that it is beneficial for individuals to realize that their fullest life capacity can involve helping others in order to feel they have lived a worthy life (191). While Devin may not have been able to help others while he was alive, he is partly able to fulfill this goal after death.

Devin's ghost echoes Frye's statement on satires regarding reality and fantasy. The inversion of social orders in this play allows audiences to recognize an implied morality. The role of Devin's ghost accentuates the relationship of illusion and morality in the play. The characters' illusions about life and death are illuminated by Devin's suicide and his ghost.

#### Parody of Previous Literary Quest Patterns:

Much like the inversion of hierarchical structures, Menippean satires also feature parodies of heroic actions and quest patterns. The literary use of parody can be understood in two different ways. Both ways involve imitating or mocking a previous literary situation, such as a quest pattern. One form of parody can be thought of as simply an imitation of a previous literary form or pattern in a *non-disparaging* way. For example, James Joyce parodies the *Odyssey* in his novel *Ulysses*. Ulysses is the Latinized name of Odysseus, the hero of Homer's epic poem. Joyce's novel features parallels between Leopold Bloom and Odysseus, Molly Bloom and Penelope (wife of Odysseus), as well as, Stephen Dedalus and Telemachus (son of Odysseus).

The second form of parody is more popular and involves a *disparaging mockery* of a previous literary or artistic mode by skewing it. For example, the movie *Airplane!* parodies air disaster films such as *Zero Hour!* In addition, there is the *Scary Movie* series which mocks horror films. For clarity's sake, I will call the first form "parody" and the second form, "skewed parody." To a degree, the "quests" of several of the characters are skewed-parodic because most are not truly "heroic." Rather, they indicate movements away from worthy paths. However, eventually, some of the key characters recognize the absurdity of their actions. So, this play adheres to a satiric approach by showing the ridiculousness of some of the main character's life-

paths. But this play also *departs* slightly from a fully satiric approach because it shows that characters can recognize how to improve their approaches to life.

In *The Visitation*, Devin's character goes to the underworld by virtue of his death. But when his ghost returns, he takes on the archetype of the "caregiver." His actions as a ghost are skewed-parodies of Shakespeare's Puck because they serve to unite others through love. Shakespeare's Puck was mischievous, often splitting couples apart. Devin helps his parents, Richard and Carol, to reconnect. His caregiving actions are symbolized by a simple touch on the shoulder. In addition, his touch opens relations between Mark and Geoff, as well as Jean and Millie. In a way, Devin and Mark mirror each other.

Where Mark is facing possible death due to his cancer, Devin took his own life. Devin chose death. Mark chooses life. Both face their own mortality in different ways. Devin felt he was unable to continue with his life, as Mark did at first. But Mark rallied and chose to battle his illness. Devin's return as "caregiver" is ironic because he took his own life due to the lack of care he received while still alive. Now, he symbolically provides others with the care he lacked in his own life. Conversely, Mark chooses to fight for life and to share his musical talent with others. Mark undergoes his own quest within the play.

He tries to ignore his cancer diagnosis, but by the end of the play, he is able to accept it and come to terms with it. The play indicates that Mark's girlfriend provides significant moral and emotional support in his journey. In addition, Mark as a highly talented musician is concerned about how his illness will affect his career and musical ensemble. In one sense, Mark is a parody of an Orpheus figure. In *The Visitation*, Mark is emotionally *returned* from the underworld partly due to the efforts of his girlfriend. The relationship between Mark and his

girlfriend inverts the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice because in the original story, it is Orpheus who tries but fails to retrieve Eurydice from Hades.

Richard's quest for self-individuation is held back by his overtly masculinist attitudes. In some ways, he is a parody of Don Quixote whose actions are based on male stereotypes of the time. While Quixote pursues what *he thinks* are courtly male manners, Richard pursues what *he* thinks are appropriate "manly" goals. Richard's "manly quest" causes his dysfunctionality as both husband and father. For the bulk of the play, he is an oddly Quixotic failure. Richard can also be thought of as a skewed-parody of Odysseus. Richard does not physically leave his family, but his emotional detachment as father and husband distances him from his family. Like Odysseus's wife and son, Penelope and Telemachus, Richard's wife and son are emotionally abandoned and left to fend for themselves. Richard's inability to serve as a loving and involved father contributes to Devin's suicide, which then acts as a catalyst to Richard's personal development. Joseph H. Pleck states that an engaged parental model features three components including positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control (58). Contrary to Pleck's comments on parental involvement, Richard's interactions with Devin were passive or mean-spirited (e.g.; placing deodorant at Devin's place at the table); unaffectionate, (e.g.; statements that men do not talk about their feelings); and uninvolved (e.g.; being unaware of why Devin kept retreating to his room). In all these instances, Richard shows a self-centredness and lack of understanding towards his own son. While on the surface, it may not seem as though Richard's process of grief has begun, but similar to Myers and Fine's findings in their case histories, Richard displays many common aspects of male grief, including self-isolation, private grieving, and outbursts of anger (107). It is worth noting that several of Richard's symptoms were evident in his son Devin who also chose self-isolation, and private grieving over his own

difficulties. So, in one sense, Devin is a parody of his father. But, at the conclusion of the play, Richard begins a more worthy quest direction and so ceases as a parody of masculine hegemonic attitudes. This change is symbolized by his willingness to keep Devin's coffin lid open. The opening of the lid indicates that Richard has opened his attitude towards others, including his wife Carol's request for help and greater equality between them.

Carol's path in the play serves to provide the moral base by which other characters can be measured. She is somewhat like Penelope in *The Odyssey*. Richard's "absence" as a devoted husband and father parallels that of Odysseus. He may have been physically present, but has been emotionally absent for many years, on his Quixotic quest of manliness. Like Penelope in *The Odyssey*, Carol in *The Visitation* remains loyal to Richard. Carol strives to reform Richard's bad behaviour. Her actions are successful. For example, near the end of the play, though still grieving, Carol asserts herself towards her husband. She serves to change her husband's misguided path and somewhat Quixotic behaviour. Instead, Carol rebalances Richard, and redirects his life path by indicating that he needs to be more considerate of others. In a sense, Richard's return to a more balanced emotional state is a kind of homecoming that is a skewed-parody of Odysseus' return to Ithaca, because Richard was distant but has now grown emotionally closer. Carol's role in this satiric play is to reveal the morality that is lacking in many of the other characters.

Jean's path is also parodic and absurd. Jean is partly successful in her marketing attempts with Millie, to the point where the Funeral Director comments on her "sales pitch." Jean tries to convince others that using cosmetic surgery will improve their lives. However, she is primarily interested in monetary gain. She exemplifies or parodies the stereotypical con artist salesperson similar to those found in the works of Mark Twain. Jean's con artist tactics also have a kinship to

earlier literary characters such as the “Wizard” in L. Frank Baum’s, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, or, the “confidence man” in Herman Melville’s novel, *The Confidence Man*. She tries to sell plastic surgery as a way of denying or “masking” the aging process. In doing so she is trying to “sell” a remedy for something that needs no cure.

Millie’s archetypal character parallels that of the wise fool, a stock character in the *commedia dell’arte*, an Italian theatrical form that flourished throughout Europe from the 16th to the 18th century. In addition, she is something of a “motor-mouth” who often speaks without much reflection, as when she incessantly tries to sell her “family coffin.” In this sense, her sometimes rambling and sometimes pointed comments share a mild affinity with previous wise fools such as “Feste” in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, although Millie is less witty and not quite as sardonic. In fact, Millie’s charm arises from her open-mindedness regarding the full range of life’s experiences. Her comments often have an embedded meaning, as when she says; I read that some French guy who wrote something like, “what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private.” Don’t you think wrestling’s like that? It’s a private struggle made public. Oh, and I know a lot about sculpting, too. But I find the notion of plastic surgery unnatural (1.4). Millie’s wisdom reveals that she is not a two-dimensional “flat” character. She has depth. Her comments sometimes reveal a profound understanding of life, even when she speaks of professional wrestling. Millie sometimes quotes French theorist Roland Barthes and understands the deeper significance his points.

But Millie’s foolish side is also apparent in the play. For example, her unsuccessful attempts to sell her “family coffin” to Carol reveal a naïve insensitivity. Millie is careful to mask

her intentions with a long, personal story in an attempt to connect more intimately with Carol, and while she succeeds in strengthening their relationship, she fails in convincing Carol to buy the coffin. The two forms of parody (non-disparaging and skewed) serve to satirize the often absurd direction and social relations of the various characters.

#### Conclusion:

Satire is aimed at inspiring desirable social change. *The Visitation* combines structural and post-structural elements to forward a critique of social attitudes. Structural features include the elements discussed above including token fantasy, institutional and individual objects of attack, language play, digression, anatomy, inverted hierarchies, and parody of quest patterns. These structural features permit a post-structural social critique. Post-structural aspects can be understood as the socio-cultural ramifications of the play. When united, structural and post-structural elements combine to make a statement that might stimulate desirable social change.

In her article, “The Social Significance of Modern Drama,” critic Emma Goldman speaks of theatre’s power to battle social oppression and inspire desirable social reform:

The medium which has the power to do that is the Modern Drama, because it mirrors every phase of life and embraces every strata of society, — the Modern Drama, showing each and all caught in the throes of the tremendous changes going on, and forced either to become part of the process or be left behind. (Goldman n.p.)

This play teaches through bittersweet laughter. Richard’s path serves as a cautionary tale. He must adapt his ways, or be left behind. Humour arises through difficult subjects such as suicide, mortality and aging, and the intention is to raise these topics for the audience’s consideration. The stage is designed so that audiences feel as though they are actually attending Devin’s

visitation. The amusement and discomfort that the audience may experience is designed to raise questions regarding their perceptions of morality, mortality and the recklessness of suicide. If the audience's perceptions are changed in a desirable way, then this play succeeds as a Menippean satire. In addition, if so, then the play has also successfully achieved my personal goal of bringing attention to difficult subjects which are often avoided in our society.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A – Costume Design

RICHARD: Thicker (preferably scotch) plaid dress shirt (colour should be blue, either light or dark, but not denim) with dark jeans. The shirt will be tucked into the jeans. Brown shoes. Stubbled face.



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CAROL: A sensible, simple black dress. Conservative. Black dress shoes. Black clutch bag.



GEOFF: Stylish suit, preferably black, blue or charcoal grey (either with or without tie) and dress shoes. Has an overcoat (to be worn on occasion.) Must wear a suit, but the style should be current and fit the actor well.



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MARK: A darker/neutral toned sweatshirt with a collared shirt underneath. Can be worn with a tie. Khaki pants and brown dress shoes.





MILLIE: Dressed nicely, but eccentric. Should be clean and kempt, but not standard funeral wear. Pops of colour would work well. (Lots of room for play here.)



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JEAN: Sharply dressed. Nice fitting pantsuit. Looks expensive. Should be black. If not a suit, should be a blouse and slacks combo.

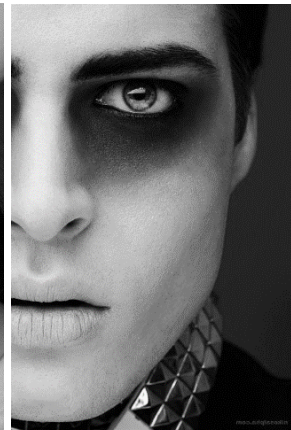


FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Standard black suit. Should not be as stylish as GEOFF or JEAN.



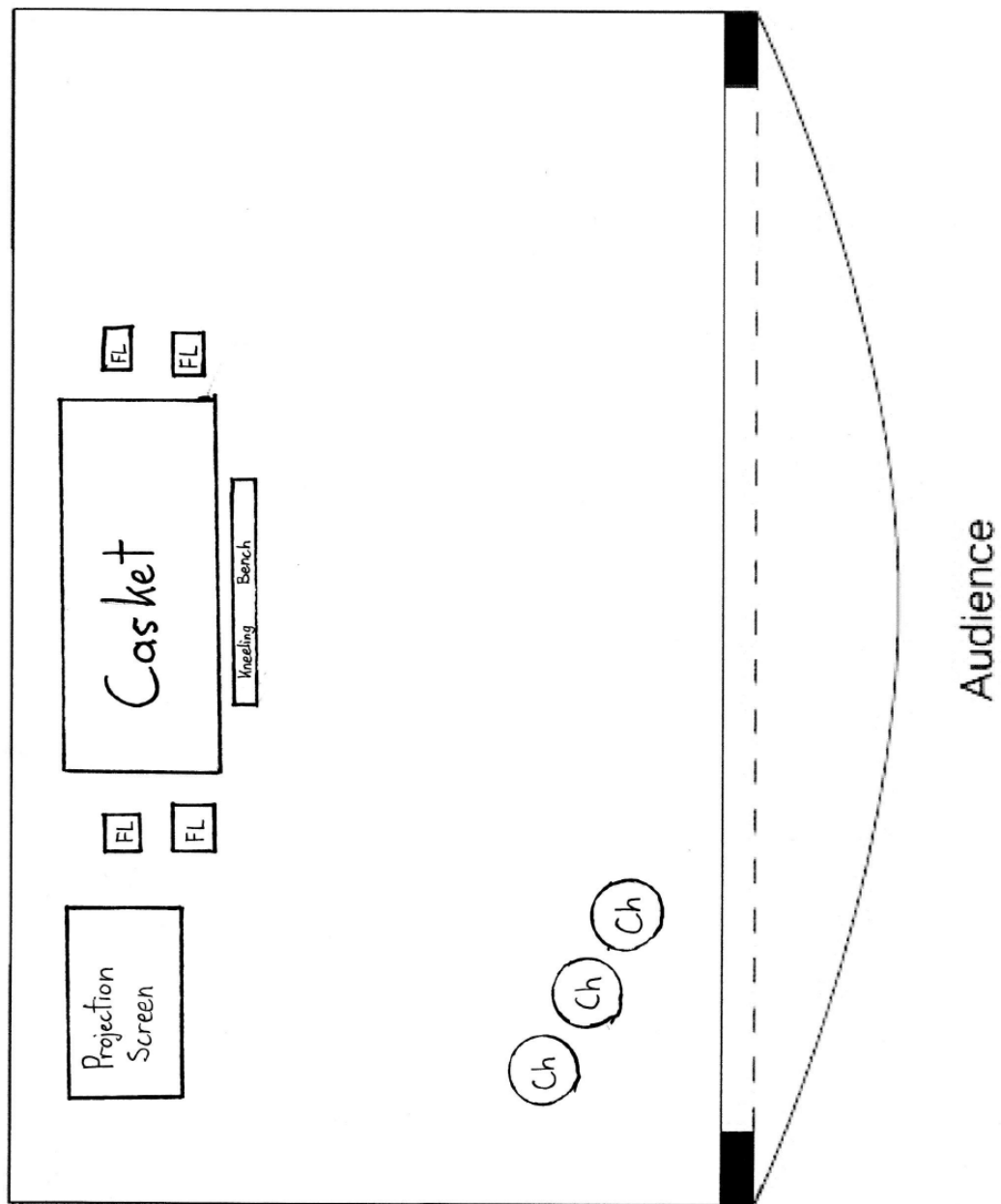
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DEVIN: Should be in all white. Powdered (white or grey) face. Hanging bruising around the neck. Not meant to look scary, but should look dead.



## Appendix B – Stage Design

Stage design may vary depending upon stage limitations, and Director's preference.



### Legend:

CH = Chairs

FL = Flowers

## Appendix C – Properties

The following is a simplified list of props needed during the play.

- Casket
- Cell phone (x2)
- Chairs (multiple)
- Compact mirror (x1)
- Eyeliner pencil (x1)
- Flask (x1)
- Flower arrangements (multiple)
- Gum
- Hand Mirror (x1)
- Images of Devin
- Kneeling bench
- Sticky notes
- Suicide note (x1)
- Video of professional wrestling
- Video screen
- Yo-yo (x1)

## VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Michael Donald Mallen Jr.

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, ON

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1994

EDUCATION: F.J. Brennan High School, Windsor, ON, 2012

University of Windsor, B.A.(H), Windsor, ON, 2017

Michael Mallen was born in Windsor, Ontario in 1994. He attended F.J. Brennan High School, graduating in 2012. In 2013, he won the Sears Ontario Drama Festival's TIS Crystal Award for writing (Regional level) for his play *The Regulars*. He began his post-secondary education in the Fall of 2013, receiving a B.A.(H) in English Language, Literature and Creative Writing with a minor in Communications, Media and Film from the University of Windsor. He commenced working towards a Master's degree in Creative Writing in the Fall of 2017. Since 2017, his creative works have been published in both Canada and the United States. Upon the completion of his Master's degree, he intends to continue working towards his goal of earning enough money from his writing to treat himself to a Dairy Queen Blizzard.