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## **Family Plays**

# PLOTS

A one-act play  
by  
**JEROME McDONOUGH**

“BLIND DATE I”

“THE CASKET”

“BLIND DATE II”

“LIFE BOAT”

“BLIND DATE III”

# PLOTS

“I want to thank your company very much for suggesting that I try McDonough’s *Plots* ... In Virginia no awards are given at state level. A judge gives a critique and that is all.

However, our judge really liked the play.”

(Billie V. Kerfoot & Portia Akers, Floyd County High School, Floyd, Va.)

**Comedy/Drama. By Jerome McDonough.** *Cast: 8 to 11 actors, flexible (ensemble play, double-casting is relatively easy).* This play could be subtitled as, “A Funeral Comedy.” It’s funny on the order of watching a hearse skid into an open grave and spill the casket onto a mud bank. Constructed somewhat like McDonough’s immensely popular and successful *Fables*, this play has five parts. The five “plots” are connected by a Father Time-like figure who is engrossed with the fun of watching a clock tick away life. Three of the “plots” deal with the strangest blind date imaginable ... in fact it takes a good deal of imagination to accept this blind date as real. These three were published in *Read* magazine as *Blind Date*. Interspersed among the blind date segments are a “plot” about a custom-built casket for someone who is terrified of being buried alive and a “plot” about two girls and a dead man in a lifeboat. It has been suggested that McDonough is a reincarnation of Edgar Allan Poe. McDonough’s penchant for using pantomime and improvisation to replace scenery and costumes is another of the many characteristics of this play that have placed his other works among the nation’s favorite short plays. Ideal for contests, touring and all other situations where superior one-acts are needed. *Plots* is recommended for all groups, upper elementary to adult. *Place: various locations—mostly nowhere. Time: now or some other time. Approximate running time: 30 to 40 minutes (5 to 10 minutes/skit). Code: PJ3.*

## Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170

Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

[www.FamilyPlays.com](http://www.FamilyPlays.com)

ISBN-13 978-0-88680-154-0



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Plots

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(PLOTS)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-154-0

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“Produced by special arrangement with  
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

*To Jerome C. McDonough, my father,  
who loves a mystery,  
from a son who loves him*

*and*

*to the original cast who requested the play and who contributed  
so much, both in ideas and in the boundless enthusiasm  
which only youth can offer*

**Original Cast**

**Kim Fiel, Debbie Fleming, Tim Purviance, Janet Duke, Wanda Kite,  
David Upton, Ivan Calhoun, Ami Davis, John Smith, Danny McKinney,  
and Chuck**

# PLOTS

## *Dramatis Personae*

**Hooded Figure**, a black- or brown-robed figure

### “Blind Date I”

**Jan**, a young woman, Tom’s girl friend

**Cloris**, another young woman, Jan’s friend

**Tom**, a young man, Jan’s boyfriend

**Chuck**, a young man whose many fine qualities may not be seen at first glance

### “The Casket”

**Margaret**, a middle-aged woman, obsessed with a fear

**Art**, her middle-aged husband, an impatient yet caring man

### “Blind Date II”

**Hostess**, worker in the trendy restaurant the couples are patronizing

**Tom**

**Cloris**

**Jan**

**Chuck**

**Waitress**, another worker

### “Life Boat”

**Sandra**, a youngish woman, still holding on to some youthful idealism

**Angie**, a bit older woman, not afflicted with any such ideals; bitter and tired

**Louis**, a man of indeterminate age

### “Blind Date III”

**Cloris**

**Jan**

**Chuck**

Since **PLOTS** is an ensemble play, double-casting is relatively easy, so the cast may be as small as, perhaps, eight people or as large as eleven.

**TIME:** Now or some other time

**PLACE:** Various locations, mostly nowhere



## PRODUCTION NOTES

There are five basic scenes or "plots" in the show. There are also six "sub-plots" played by the Hooded Figure; these are used as bridging devices and are performed while the sets are changed for the main scenes. This provides for an uninterrupted flow of action from opening to closing.

The titles of the plots should be printed in easily readable letters on headstone-shaped placards or plywood pieces. These tombstones cannot be much smaller than 18" tall by 12" to 15" wide. They may rest on an easel or, if sightlines permit, be leaned against the proscenium arch. Light from the stage should fall on the placard so that it may be read during the performance of that particular plot.

### *Costuming*

The original cast used a full ensemble approach to the show, so a standard basic costume had to be decided upon, one which could be overdressed or accessorized to suggest individual characters. This basic outfit was a pair of dark trousers and a navy blue or black top. In this way, a performer who was involved in set changing at one instant could immediately turn around and "dress up" for a role. Accessories for characters were the following:

CLORIS—a bright blouse and a bright cloth sash-type belt

JAN—a bright blouse and coordinating handbag

TOM—a sports jacket, no tie, shirt collar outside of jacket

MARGARET—a full-length bathrobe and house shoes in scene 1; an old "house-cleaning" blouse for scene 2

ART—a longish robe and basic costume pants

HOSTESS—a bright scarf tied at the neck; carrying menus

WAITRESS—a waitress smock

SANDRA, ANGIE, and LOUIS—shirts and life jackets

Only the HOODED FIGURE did not wear the ensemble outfit. His costume is a full-length hooded monk's robe (like the one worn by Death in REQUIEM).

### *Properties*

Hooded Figure: The five "tombstone" placards described in the text

A large alarm clock

A folding chair or stool

A sandwich in a wrapper

"Blind Date I": No props

"The Casket": Two glasses

A milk container

A hammer

A walkie-talkie and a CB-type base station (a small radio will do)

A shovel

A roll of duct tape

"Blind Date II": A five-dollar bill (palmed by the Waitress)

Four menus

A waitress's order pad and pencil

"Life Boat": A large knife (rubber highly recommended for safety)

"Blind Date III": No props

### *Lighting*

General illumination is basically called for in PLOTS. Dimming capability is desirable, but the show can function with switched lights if they can be turned off

in banks, yielding a low setting for the restaurant and the "Life Boat" evening. A blue wash is effective if available in "Life Boat" and the Hooded Figure scenes.

Lighting the Hooded Figure with a follow spot is a nice technique, but a low illumination setting will do as well.

Ideal lighting for the show would include good dimmable whites, color fills and wash, and follow spot. An open space with no sophisticated lighting instruments at all will also suffice.

### *Music*

No music is scripted into PLOTS, but individual directors may wish to use music to bridge scenes. The original production did not use music for transitions but set the show tone with a tape of eerie music playing as the audience gathered. Possibilities for such music include Bach organ works, some romantic period violin concerti and orchestral pieces, and commercially produced Halloween-type records.

### *Settings*

Since the most difficult piece to come up with in the producing of PLOTS is the casket, that piece is included in each main scene setting. This not only simplifies the tech crew's lives but provides a unifying element for the scenes and a symbol for the play as a whole. All main sets are comprised of simply the casket alone or the casket in conjunction with two to four chairs and/or a small table. Changes in decor and color interest are provided by covering these elements with a variety of colored throws. The casket may be a simple wooden box—½" plywood over a framework of 2" x 2" yellow pine—perhaps 6' long by 2' wide and 18" deep.

**"Blind Date I":** The casket is placed Center, the open side facing upstage. The girls sit on one side. The top is toward the audience. A bench is suggested by this arrangement of the casket.

**"The Casket":** *Scene 1*—The casket is angled at Down Left Center. A throw covers the casket, giving the impression of a backless sofa. Two chairs flank a table, Down Right Center. The chairs are covered by similar throws, suggesting chairs in the home. The table may have some flowers in a vase or other knick-knack. *Scene 2*—The casket is Up Center running lengthwise, Left to Right, the top open. A separate top is propped against the upstage side of the casket and is pulled up and onto the casket by Art where indicated in the script. The top may be as simple as a piece of upson or particle board cut to shape and painted like the rest of the casket. There is a small table Down Right Center. A CB-type base station sits on the table.

**"Blind Date II":** The casket may serve as the restaurant table, Center, running lengthwise from Left to Right, solid bottom up. It is draped with a table cloth. Four chairs, one to the left, one to the right, and two upstage of the piece, flank the casket. If this arrangement seems too clumsy, a standard table may be substituted. The casket, in this case, is placed near the hostess and draped as a waiting bench at the restaurant. A few ensemble members may sit here, waiting for a table, out of the main focus.

**"Life Boat":** The casket, with the open side up, is the lifeboat, at Up Center, running lengthwise from Left to Right.

**"Blind Date III":** The casket, draped again to suggest a sofa, is angled open at Right. Three chairs are angled opposite at Left. They are draped to suggest another sofa or love seat. (As many different throws as possible should be used in various plots so that it will not appear that the same furniture is moving from one

home to another.)

No attempt should be made to conceal the fact that the casket is present in all five plots; in fact, the audience should be fully aware of this unifying and symbolic prop.

***Final Thoughts (or Last Words)***

Those who have produced REQUIEM will have a casket already on hand, since the one for this play may be identical with the REQUIEM casket, designed by James D. Kemmerling and illustrated in the REQUIEM Production Script. The casket may be painted gray or brown for PLOTS.

Insofar as audience is concerned, PLOTS is not recommended for child audiences. Children will understand little of it, and the Hooded Figure may frighten them. This note issues from a father/playwright.



The typical greeting to a cast is "Break a leg," but when dealing with such grim/whimsical stuff as PLOTS, such a wish might seem one too many strokes. So, have a good time with the show and God bless you all.

***—Jerome McDonough***

## PLOTS

By Jerome McDonough

*[A black-hooded FIGURE enters from Down Right. He carries a tombstone on which is printed "The Blind Date." He places the tombstone on an easel Down Left or simply leans the stone against the proscenium arch. He pauses and pulls a rather large clock from the folds of his robe. He looks at the clock, nods, puts it back in his garb and slowly exits Left]*

### THE BLIND DATE (Part I)

*[AT RISE, two girls are seated on a bench, Center, as if at a Bus Stop]*

CLORIS. But why won't you tell me anything about him?

JAN. I did.

CLORIS. *[Rising, paces in frustration]* Only the most frightening sentence in the English language—"He has a great personality." Give me details, girl. Is he tall?

JAN. Well, I'd say so.

CLORIS. How tall?

JAN. I'm no good at heights.

CLORIS. Roughly. Somewhere between four-foot-six and seven feet.

JAN. Yes, definitely in there someplace.

CLORIS. Perfect. Jan, just go ahead and tell me that he's the understudy for the Hunchback of Notre Dame and let me get prepared for it.

JAN. Would I get you a date like that?

CLORIS. I hate blind dates. Why did I let you talk me into this?

JAN. Because you are my best friend . . .

CLORIS. Currently.

JAN. . . . and he's Tom's best friend. It's just one evening, then I'm off the hook. Be a sport.

CLORIS. There's what I've been waiting for: "Be a sport." The sport is probably alligator wrestling.

JAN. No, no. He's very nice. I promise you've never met anyone like him before. *[CLORIS moans]* Here they come now.

*[A man, TOM, enters from Left, seemingly alone. He pauses just onstage, as if looking for the girls]*

CLORIS. Where's my date?

JAN. Just wait. *[Calling]* Over here, guys. *[TOM starts crossing to them]*

TOM. Hi! Sorry we're late. *[JAN stands to meet him. CLORIS is busy looking past Tom, offstage, trying to locate her date. A device from here on will be leaving a space for a person in all stage compositions, a space which Jan and Tom accept as filled by Cloris's date—Chuck, the Invisible Man. To make things more complicated, Cloris can't hear him, either]*

JAN. *[Responding to Tom's line]* Oh, no problem. *[CLORIS is still searching]*

JAN. *[To Cloris]* You've met Tom, of course.

CLORIS. Yes.

TOM. *[Indicating the air to his Left, introducing Chuck to Cloris]* This is Chuck Mason.

CLORIS. *Who is Chuck Mason?*

TOM. Why, *this* is Chuck Mason. *[JAN pulls Cloris aside and speaks to her in hushed tones, but heard by the audience]*

JAN. I just couldn't tell you before.

CLORIS. Tell me what?

JAN. Chuck is . . . invisible.

CLORIS. Invisible.

JAN. Yes and he's very sensitive about it, so don't make a fuss.

CLORIS. *[Starting to exit, Right]* 'Bye.

JAN. *[Grabbing her arm]* Cloris, you promised.

CLORIS. This is a very sick joke. *[Looking around]* Where's the film crew? I know this is going to be on network television.

JAN. Stop it, You're going to offend him.

CLORIS. Jan, there is no such thing as an invisible man.

JAN. I didn't believe it, either, but there he is, as big as life.

CLORIS. There's nobody over there but Tom.

CHUCK.

*[This blank space will be inserted each time Chuck is to have said something]*

JAN. No, no, Chuck, we'll be right with you. *[To Cloris]*  
See?

CLORIS. Maybe you'd better rephrase that.

JAN. He called to us, didn't he?

CLORIS. You can hear him?

JAN. How else would we communicate, sign language?

CLORIS. Why don't I join you later?

JAN. Come on. One evening—is that so much?

CLORIS. *[Pause]* I can't believe I'm saying this, but . . .  
all right. *[Heaves a sigh]* Let's go.

JAN. Thanks.

TOM. *[As the girls approach]* Where to for dinner?

JAN. I'm open to suggestions.

CLORIS. I like little intimate places—even out of town,  
maybe.

TOM. Any suggestions closer by?

CHUCK.

TOM. Nah, Jan and I went there last week.

JAN. But the food *was* great. What do you think, Cloris?

CLORIS. Uh, I don't have any thoughts one way or the  
other.

CHUCK.

TOM. That's perfect! We can even walk it from here. *[Taking Jan's hand. To Cloris and Chuck, as he and JAN exit Left]* Come on, you two.

CLORIS. Uh, "we'll" just follow along.

*[CLORIS stands, looking after the exiting Jan and Tom, puzzled as to what to do. She decides to forget the whole thing and takes a step toward Right. Then, as if she weren't controlling it, her left hand rises from her side suggesting that someone is holding it. Very slowly, she turns to "look" at her date. She looks at the audience, then back at "Chuck." "He" leads her off, following the other couple. CLORIS's hand remains up, still being held during exit]*

**BLACKOUT**

*[Stage hands or ensemble members rearrange the set during the following. The HOODED FIGURE enters from Down Left. He places another tombstone—this one reading “The Casket”—in place on the easel or floor, covering the first one. He pulls the clock out again and looks at it as he crosses toward Right. He then looks at the audience a few counts. He replaces the clock and exits Right]*

### THE CASKET

*[AT RISE, a woman is sitting alone on the couch, Down Left. The lights are low. It is late evening. The woman wears a full-length robe suggesting middle age. A man, the same age, enters from Right, also wearing a robe]*

ART. Margaret?

MARGARET. *[Just responding]* Yes.

ART. Up again? *[Passes through to off Left. During the following, we hear him fumbling with food in the kitchen]*

MARGARET. I can't help thinking about it, Art.

ART. *[Off Left]* It's crazy. *[Changing the subject]* You want anything to eat?

MARGARET. No.

ART. Hey, are these chicken wings original style or extra crunchy?

MARGARET. I don't know.

ART. By this time, they're probably extra clammy. I guess some milk would go down better. *[Re-entering, pouring milk]* Come on to bed.

MARGARET. I'll just toss and keep you up.

ART. Have some milk. It'll relax you.

MARGARET. Go ahead, I'll be all right.

ART. *[Sitting in a chair, Right]* Margaret, this doesn't make any sense.

MARGARET. I keep telling myself that, but I can't help being filled with dread. I'm frightened.

ART. It can't happen any more. In 19....., nobody has to worry about being buried alive.

MARGARET. All right, Art. You go on to bed.

ART. Stop this, now. It can't happen.