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Family Plays

DANSE MACABRE



Comedy/Drama by
L. DON SWARTZ

DANSE MACABRE

Comedy/Drama. By L. Don Swartz. Cast: 14m., 20w., extras. Living people do the strangest things in cemeteries. A comic-drama in two acts, this “dance of death” will make you laugh, weep and shiver in your seat. Set in a graveyard outside of Buffalo, N.Y., these October tales include a teenage vandal who must pay the price for disturbing the dead and two old ladies hopelessly lost in a cemetery trying to find the funeral of a friend before it’s too late. The tales also include a dimwitted caretaker who must officiate when a priest doesn’t show for a funeral; a woman who finds seven strangers mourning at her husband’s grave, each with a secret; the last of triplets who must come to terms with the reflection she sees in her mirror, plus many more. The first act has nine skits and the second act has seven. Skits may be produced individually or in various combinations. *Danse Macabre* was originally produced by Starry Night Theatre, Inc. at the Ghostlight Theatre in North Tonawanda, N.Y., in October 2001, directed by author L. Don Swartz. *Set: a cemetery using green carpet for grass and two benches; tombstones are imaginary. Costumes: modern clothes. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: DC8.*

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www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-10 0-88680-493-0
ISBN-13 978-0-88680-493-0



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Danse Macabre

DANSE MACABRE

A comic-drama in Two Acts

by **L. DON SWARTZ**

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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L. DON SWARTZ

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(DANSE MACABRE)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-493-0

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About the Play

Living people do the strangest things in cemeteries. This “Dance of Death” will make you laugh, weep and shiver in your seat. Set in a graveyard outside of Buffalo, New York, these October Tales include: a teenage vandal who must pay the price for disturbing the dead; two old ladies hopelessly lost in the cemetery, trying to find the funeral of a friend before it’s too late; a priest never shows for a funeral and a dimwitted caretaker must officiate; a woman finds seven strangers mourning at her husband’s grave, each with a secret; the last of triplets must come to terms with the reflection she sees in her mirror; plus many more.

DANSE MACABRE was originally produced by Starry Night Theatre Inc. at the Ghostlight Theatre in North Tonawanda, New York on October 11, 2001. It was directed by Don Swartz, with set and lighting design by Jesse Swartz. The cast in order of appearance was as follows:

GRETCHEN -----	Justine Swartz
MAX -----	Trey Wydysh
JAMIE -----	Jeanette Norton
FRANK/LAWYER -----	Larry Norton
HONEY/BELINDA -----	Marlene Gullo
MARY/FLOWER GIRL/DANCING GIRL -----	Carissa Bailey
LARRY/BOY -----	Stephen Frankosky
SAL -----	Jesse Swartz
HAL -----	Don Swartz
MOM/NURSE -----	Cheri Shively Pieszak
LAURA/LADY COP -----	Julie Senko
BERNICE -----	Debby Koszelak Swartz
LOTTIE -----	Joann V. Mis
JUNE -----	Hannah Donner
EDNA/OLD LADY -----	Joy Ann Wrona
DETECTIVE -----	Carl Tamburlin
YOUNG PRIEST/SAM -----	John Strong
BIKER -----	Mario Penna
DANCING SKELETONS -----	Brienna Bailey, Amanda Ellman, Cassie Swartz
CHARITY -----	Lynn Metzger

Cast of Characters

ACT I

WITCHSTONE

Gretchen, Max, Jamie

FAMILY PLOT

Frank, Honey, Larry, Mary

LUNCHBREAK

Hal, Sal

PHANTOM MEMORIES

Mom, Laura

LOOKING FOR SOPHIE

Lottie, Bernice

FINAL PERFORMANCE

June

SORRY, WRONG TOMBSTONE

Edna, Hal, Sal

PROFESSIONAL CONFESSIONAL

Nurse, Detective, Young Priest

STINKPILE'S SEND-OFF

Hal, Sal, Mourners

ACT II

LUNCHBREAK PART II

Hal, Sal

STRANGER ENCOUNTER

Belinda, Biker, Nurse, Student, Boy, Lady Cop, Young Priest, Old Lady

LOOKING FOR SOPHIE PART II

Lottie, Bernice

DANSE MACABRE

Girl, Three Skeletons, Boy

FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY & SAM

Charity, Sam, Hal

LOOKING FOR SOPHIE PART III

Lottie, Bernice

OLYMPIC GRIEF

*Lawyer, Young Priest, Widow, First Daughter, Second Daughter, Son,
Grandchildren, Mourners*

For
my son
DONALD JAMES SWARTZ
who already loves to dance.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

ACT 1

Scene 1

Flashlights—Gretchen, Max, Jamie

Black book, candle, matches—Gretchen

Stone, knife, watch—Max

Scene 2

Keys—Frank

Blindfold—Honey

Scene 3

Lunchbag, sandwich, celery, note, money—Sal

Lunchbag, sandwich, carrot sticks, napkins—Hal

Scene 5

Plastic shopping bag—Bernice and Lottie

Scene 6

Single red rose—June

Scene 7

Wedding ring—Edna

Paperwork—Sal

Scene 8

Flowers—Nurse and Detective

Watch—Priest

Scene 9

Money—Hal

Note cards—Sal

ACT II

Scene 1

Lunchbag, sandwich, Oreos—Hal

Lunchbag, sandwich, apple—Sal

Scene 2

Flowers—Belinda, Biker, Nurse, Student, Young Boy,

Lady Cop, Priest, Old Lady

Scene 3

Shopping bag containing items wrapped in several layers of plastic—Lottie and Bernice

Scene 4

Suitcase with sign attached "Do Not Open"—Young Girl

Scene 5

Lunch bag—Hal and Sal

Napkins—Hal

Scene 6

Purse, cell phone, compact with mirror—Charity

Scene 7

Shopping bags—Lottie and Bernice

Scene 8

Briefcase, papers, pen—Lawyer

Small book—Priest

Dark sunglasses—Mother, Daughters, Mourners, Son

Costumes

Most of the characters are in modern clothing. Hal and Sal, the cemetery caretakers, may be dressed in overalls. Lottie and Bernice are two elderly Polish ladies—use your imagination. The nurse will wear a uniform; the detective a trench coat; the student a letter jacket.

Setting

The setting is simple. There is a tall stone wall upstage with two entrances on either end. There are vines on the wall and lights on top of the wall. Because it is Autumn, there are bright leaves hanging overhead, and a scattering of leaves on the ground. A green carpet may be used for grass. There are two stone benches. All the tombstones are imaginary.

DANSE MACABRE

by L. DON SWARTZ

ACT 1, Scene One

WITCHSTONE

[The setting is a graveyard, just outside Buffalo, New York. There is a tall stone wall Upstage with two entrances on either end. There are vines on the wall and lights on top of the wall. Because it is Autumn, there are bright leaves hanging overhead, and a scattering of leaves on the ground. There is a green carpet for grass and two stone benches. All the tombstones are imaginary.]

AT RISE: It is dark, just before midnight. We hear CRICKETS.

GRETCHEN, MAX, and JAMIE enter, each with a flashlight. They are searching for a grave]

GRETCHEN. Over here. Here's her grave. *[The other two join her]*
See—one, two, three, four. Do you have the missing stone?

MAX. Of course I do. Quit asking. Right here. I don't know if this is such a good idea.

JAMIE. Look, we don't have a lot of time, it's almost midnight. Do you want to go through with this or not?

MAX. Can't I just replace the stone and be done with it?

JAMIE. No, you can't. Gretchen, remind him of everything that's happened since he stole the stone last week.

GRETCHEN. You flunked the Biology mid-term, your cat ran away from home, you totaled your father's Mitsubishi, Jenny broke up with you, once and for all, your grandfather is in the hospital...

MAX. I get the point.

JAMIE. No, I don't think you do. The bad things are going to keep getting worse, leading up to your death. Before Black Hannah died, she requested that the villagers place five stones on her grave. Most people think one for each of the five points of the pentagram. Of all the tombstones to vandalize, you stole a stone from the only witch buried here. I did some research. The stones have been stolen many times but they always end up back here. I cross-referenced the disappearance of the stones with several unexplained deaths. Freak accidents, disappearances. Your only hope is to follow the advice Gretchen found in her witch book.

MAX. Read it one more time.

GRETCHEN. *[Reading]* "If you desecrate a witch's final resting place, there is only one way to remove the curse. Return or restore the stolen or damaged goods at midnight. Cut your offending hand and let the blood flow into the witches grave. Light a black candle and sit by the grave until dawn. If the candle stays lit, the curse is lifted. If the flame is extinguished before dawn, you will be dead before the sun rises."

MAX. How much blood?

GRETCHEN. It doesn't specify. Not enough to pass out.

MAX. That helps. It's all a bunch of crap.

JAMIE. A bunch of crap is you and your friends vandalizing the graveyard for kicks because you don't have anything better to do. This time you caught it in the butt and you have to pay.

MAX. *[Placing the stone on the grave]* There, I put the stone back. *[Talking to the ground]* Look, lady, I don't care if you're a witch or not. I'm sorry I took it. Okay? We're square now, right? Good. *[To his friends]* See. We're cool. Let's get the hell out of here.

JAMIE. Max, it's one night. Gretchen and I will wait on the other side of the highway. We'll wait all night for you. If the curse is true, you'll be saving your own life. If it's just an old legend...it's still just one night. I thought you agreed that you might as well do it?

GRETCHEN. He's wussin' out. I told you he'd wuss out.

MAX. I'm not wussin' out. I can waste my whole night sitting in this stupid graveyard and it won't prove anything.

GRETCHEN. True, but if you end up dead, we'll know the curse is for real.

JAMIE. Make up your mind. It's almost midnight.

MAX. Give me the stupid candle and the stupid matches.

GRETCHEN. *[Gives him the candle]* It's really for the best.

MAX. Shut up.

JAMIE. It's supposed to be an eight hour candle, which is plenty of time. Leave the candle in the glass so the wind won't blow it out.

MAX. Yeah, yeah.

GRETCHEN. You got a knife for the blood part?

MAX. *[Showing her]* Right here.

GRETCHEN. Good. We better get. Good luck. See you in the morning.

JAMIE. You okay?

MAX. I'm fine. I can do this.

JAMIE. I know you can. See you in a couple of hours.

MAX. Yeah. I should have brought something to read.

GRETCHEN. *[Offering her black book]* You can have this.

MAX. Perfect.

JAMIE. You might as well take it. Better than nothing.

GRETCHEN. It's actually good reading. I highly recommend it.

MAX. Do you, now? *[Takes the book]*

JAMIE. We better get.

GRETCHEN. See ya.

[They both give him a hug then exit. MAX lights the candle and places it on the grave. He sits beside it and checks his watch]

MAX. Well, here I am. I guess it was a really ignorant thing to do. I don't know why we did it. Bored, I guess. Drunk, more like it. This isn't so bad, except for the fact that it's almost midnight, I'm alone in the graveyard talking to a dead witch. *[Distant BELL tolls 12 times]* Now, it's midnight. The witching hour, so to speak. Oh, God, I got to do the blood thing. Sorry, I didn't mean to say God. I know how you Broads of Darkness don't like to hear that name. Let's see if I can find the chapter for this. *[Reading]* Oh, here we are. "Blood letting for the 20th century". Okay. Blah, blah. "Make sure you have a clean knife on hand with a very sharp blade." *[Looks at his knife]* Last thing I did was gut fish with it. Fish live in water. Water is clean. Yeah, it's clean. "Make a clean cut, let the desired amount of blood flow. Clean the wound, apply disinfectant ointment and dress with a sterile gauze pad". Now you tell me. Here goes nothing. *[After a few failed attempts, he manages to draw blood from his finger]* Here you go. Drink up. *[He holds his finger on the grave]* Let me know when you've had enough. Let's see if the book says anything about that. *[Reads]* Here's something. "Do not mock the blood letting ritual or the blood will work against the spell". Oops. "If you mock the ritual, the offended witch may demand more blood and perhaps your life." I don't like the sound of that. When I'm nervous, like now, I just keep blabbing. That crack about Broads of Darkness, I didn't really mean it. I'm gettin' woozy here. That's enough blood. I'm going to sit here quietly and keep the fire going. *[He watches the flame and sucks his injured finger. The WIND begins to blow. STRANGE SOUNDS fill the air]* Hello? Is someone there? Jamie? Gretchen? Is that you? Who's out there? If you guys are trying to scare me I'll kill ya! *[He continues to look around.]*

The WIND gets stronger. He tries to shield the flame. Suddenly the FLAME goes out] Oh, God, no. [NOISES get louder] No, no, no. Please... [He backs away from the smoking candle, all the while, looking wildly around] I'm sorry. Please... [He turns and runs frantically. A moment later we hear the SCREECH OF TIRES and the sound of a TRUCK CRASHING. Far away we hear the SCREAMS of two teenage girls]

BLACKOUT

Scene Two FAMILY PLOT

[The setting is the same.]

AT RISE: It is a sunny afternoon. FRANK, the father, is leading on a blind-folded HONEY, his wife. Their two giggly kids, LARRY and MARY are here too]

FRANK. Just a little further, Honey.

HONEY. This is so exciting. I can't wait to see my surprise. Grass. I'm feeling grass.

FRANK. Here we are. Kids, sit down in your spots like we practiced.

MARY. Yes, Daddy.

[The KIDS position themselves in their plots]

FRANK. Honey, here we are. Before I take your blindfold off, I need you to sit down.

HONEY. Okay, dear. Oh, okay. I'm now sitting down. I'm sitting on grass. I feel grass. We're on a picnic, aren't we? What a lovely surprise.

FRANK. Honey, your birthday present is really a gift for the whole family. It is a perfect way to keep our family together, forever. *[He sits in his plot]* You can take your blindfold off.

HONEY. The suspense is killing me. *[She removes the blindfold]* Oh. A cemetery. You brought me to a cemetery, I see.

FRANK. Surprised?

HONEY. Ah...yes. Yes, I am.

FRANK. I thought you knew all along.

HONEY. No, no. This time you got me.

FRANK. And Honey, look, places for the children.

HONEY. Oh, you mean these are the spots where we...

FRANK. Yes, Honey. Plots. They are called plots.

HONEY. I know what they're called. And you bought them for my birthday?

FRANK. Yes, Honey.

HONEY. You purchased burial plots for the whole family, for my birthday?

FRANK. Honey?

HONEY. I don't know what to say. I don't know how to respond. Yes, I do. Take them back. I can't accept it.

FRANK. Take it back? It's so beautiful here.

HONEY. I simply do not accept this gift from you.

FRANK. I know how you feel about all of this...

HONEY. No, you don't. For my birthday you buy me a hole in the ground? A hole that my corpse is going to be buried in? Jewelry would have been nice. Some husbands give candy.

FRANK. It's a lovely spot in the very best cemetery. And the beauty part is, there is room for all of us.

MARY. I want the plot next to Mommy.

LARRY. No, I got it! She likes me better than you!

MARY. She does not! I want to be by Mommy! Mommy!

FRANK. Children! Lie down in your graves and be quiet!

HONEY. Frank, I can appreciate what you are trying to do...

FRANK. Honey, think about it. With everything all prepared, we don't have to worry about making arrangements when one of us goes.

HONEY. I'm looking forward to making the arrangements! I'll be out of my skull with grief and I'll need something to do. That is the point of not making arrangements. This is just wrong. It's all wrong. Children, get out of those graves.

FRANK. Honey, listen to reason...

HONEY. No, Frank, you listen. For once, you listen. I don't want to know where I'm going to be buried. I don't want to even think about the fact that we are going to die. The thought of losing you and Larry and Mary...I can't even bear it. Sometimes I think the best thing that could happen is that we veer into the path of an on-coming semi and we all go together.

LARRY. *[To Mary]* Daddy's driving home, right?

HONEY. One should never be prepared for death. That's like an open invitation to the inevitable. Death should be a surprise. Sweetheart, as

head of the household, your funeral is the only bill you're not going to have to pay. You should look forward to that! I can not go on living knowing that this plot of ground has been reserved for my cadaver. I simply can't do it. Besides all that, the children will want to be buried with their spouses. Larry, honey, don't you want to be buried next to your wife?

LARRY. Yes, Mommy.

HONEY. See there?

MARY. Can me and my husband be buried next to you, Mommy?

HONEY. Don't be silly, dear. We don't want him in with us.

MARY. Yes, Mommy.

HONEY. The fact is, nobody wants to rot next to their parents. I hope you can get our money back.

FRANK. I'm sorry, Honey, I didn't mean to upset you. I thought that maybe this would help you with your hang-up.

HONEY. Seems to me that a person who wants to rush his family into their graves is the one with a hang-up. Did you ever wonder why animals are so happy? So peaceful? Because they don't know that one day they are going to die. They treat every day as another piece of eternity. If only we could learn to do that. We think we're so smart. We're getting out of here, right now. Get our money back or sublet...or whatever.

FRANK. Yes, Honey.

HONEY. Good. Next year, get me a pantsuit. Let's go get a pizza.

[The KIDS cheer] Give me the car keys, I'm driving. [He does. HONEY exits. The CHILDREN take their father's hands as they apprehensively approach the car]

BLACKOUT

Scene Three LUNCHBREAK

[The setting is the same.]

AT RISE: Two cemetery caretakers, HAL and SAL enter with lunch bags. Each sit on a bench]

SAL. What 'cha got?

HAL. Tuna fish. You?

SAL. Olive loaf. I'm sticking.

HAL. You don't like tuna?

SAL. I don't eat raw fish.

HAL. Raw? What are you talking about?

SAL. You think it comes cooked outta the can?

HAL. Of course it's cooked. What do you think, they catch a tuna and shove it in a can? It's cooked.

SAL. Then it's a cold leftover. Either way, I don't like the tuna.

HAL. What's olive loaf?

SAL. Cold cuts. From the deli.

HAL. I know that. What kind of animal does olive loaf come from?

SAL. What do you mean what kind of animal? It's square bologna with olives.

HAL. Someone had to put the olives in there. It don't come that way off the animal.

SAL. What's your point?

HAL. I don't like deli meats. I don't eat anything that sweats.

SAL. Sweats? What are you talking about? What's sweating?

HAL. Forget about it.

SAL. Yeah, you better forget about it. He eats dead fish and my sandwich is sweating.

HAL. Did you see the game?

SAL. Did I see the game? Of course I saw the game.

HAL. How much do you think an official makes for throwing a game like that?

SAL. More than we'll ever see.

HAL. You got that right. *[Pause]* Carrots again. I told her enough with the carrots. She wants I should turn orange.

SAL. Turn orange? What are you talking about?

HAL. You eat too many carrots, you turn orange. It's a scientific fact.

SAL. Scientific fact? You ever seen an orange rabbit? Turn orange. What are they, sticks?

HAL. Of course they're sticks.

SAL. As long as they're sticks, I'll take 'em.

HAL. What else would they be?

SAL. They could be rounds. Carrot rounds.

HAL. And that would make a difference?

SAL. I don't like the rounds. The ridges hurt my teeth. If they're sticks, I'll take 'em.

HAL. What do you got to trade?

SAL. Celery sticks.

HAL. Celery? I usually like celery. Does it smell of armpit?

SAL. Smell like armpit? Why would they smell like armpit?

HAL. Sometimes you get a celery and it smells of armpit. Let me smell.

SAL. You aint smellin' my celery. How do I know something's not going to fall out of that big schnoze of yours while you're whiffin' away? You want to switch, we switch un-sniffed.

HAL. Well, I don't want the carrots, I wouldn't be any worse off.

[They carefully make the exchange. HAL sniffs the celery and begins to eat it]

SAL. So?

HAL. So what?

SAL. They smell like armpit?

HAL. Would I eat 'em if they smelled of armpit?

SAL. You eat tuna.

[They crunch for a while]

HAL. It's my turn to get sausage at the Broadway Market. You want some?

SAL. *[Handing him money]* Sure. Get me five pounds of the good stuff.

HAL. Five pounds of Polish sausage then.

SAL. What are you, crazy? I should spend good money on five pounds of bland weenies? Italian sausage is the only sausage.

HAL. This again? With all them spices in there, how do you what you're eating? It was us Poles that perfected the sausage.

SAL. Perfected? Us Italians were making sausage while you Polish were still trying to find your way out of the cave.

HAL. Says you.

SAL. Says me.

HAL. Five pounds then?

SAL. That oughta do it. *[Pulls note from his lunch bag and reads it]*

HAL. Another note? What are you, in the third grade?

SAL. Can I help it if the wife misses me?

HAL. You saw her this morning. She'll be there when you get home. What's with the notes? What could she possibly have to say?

SAL. You're jealous.

HAL. Jealous of what? I think it's stupid.

SAL. You're jealous, alright. *[Looks in lunch bag]* Oh crap, no salt.

HAL. Salt? What do you need salt for?

SAL. Hard-boiled egg. Who eats a hard-boiled egg without salt? Do you have any salt?

HAL. *[Sarcastically]* Here, let me check my spice pocket...

SAL. I got to go back for some salt.

HAL. You're going all the way back to the shop for salt?

SAL. Unless you can think of a better way to get salt for my hard-boiled egg.

HAL. Grab me a napkin when you go.

SAL. You got three there. How many you need?

HAL. I used these already. She never packs enough napkins. I use a lot of napkins.

SAL. I'm supposed to walk all the way back to the shop to get you a napkin?

HAL. You're going anyway for the salt. What's the big deal?

SAL. Why don't you go and get your own napkin and grab the salt for me?

HAL. Because, I wouldn't make the trip just for the napkin, that's why. If you weren't going, I'd do without the napkin, but since you are going and the napkin isn't that heavy, I don't see why you can't bring one back.

SAL. *[Exiting]* We'll see.

HAL. Yeah, we'll see.

[Making sure Sal is gone, HAL reaches into his co-worker's lunch bag and takes out the note. A packet of salt falls out. He picks it up, he waves it in the general direction of where Sal exited, then shrugs. He reads the note. His eyes grow wide as they trip across the spicy details of the note. He begins to crunch his celery as...]

BLACKOUT

Scene Four PHANTOM MEMORIES

[The setting is the same.]

AT RISE: Late afternoon. LAURA and her MOM are standing before a tombstone]

MOM. *[Laughing]* And then you threw the piece of cake on your dad's head and we all laughed so hard.

LAURA. I don't remember, Mom.

MOM. You've seen the picture many times.

LAURA. Yes, Mother, I have seen the picture a thousand times. I have a memory of the picture but not a memory of the actual event. I don't remember. I was only two.

MOM. I know. I know. I'm just...

LAURA. Yes, Mom, I know what you're just...I don't remember. I can't help that.

MOM. I know, sweetheart. I don't mean to push. If you could only have seen how bravely your father held on at the end. He wanted to live long enough so that his only daughter would remember him. He said, that way, his death would have meaning. If I push, it's only because I want so desperately for you to remember him.

LAURA. I know, Mom, but that's a lot of pressure to put on me. It's always been a lot of pressure on me. I can't help that he died when I was so young. I can't help that I don't remember my father. It's not my fault that the man holding me in all those photographs is a stranger. It's not my fault.

MOM. I know. I know.

LAURA. Every year on his birthday you drag me here to see if I remember anything. I don't, okay? And that's not going to change. I know how important it is to you, and it's important to me, too. That's why I tried the therapy. I even tried hypnosis...everything. I don't know him. I'm sorry if that hurts you. At least you know who you're grieving for. I grieve for a ghost.

MOM. You're right. I do push too hard. When you have a baby of your own, you will understand. Your father held you in his arms and talked to you and sang songs to you. He'd say, "I'm going away, but I will always be near you. Look at my eyes, remember by face. I will be your angel." That horrible night you were sleeping in his arms. I thought he was sleeping, too. *[She shakes her head]* You looked so peaceful together. I left you there for awhile. I couldn't bear to take you from him for the last time. All he wanted was for you to know him. It's not fair that God would not give him at least that. It's not fair.

LAURA. I know, Mom. I know. But we can't keep putting ourselves through this, year after year. We have to accept that things didn't turn out the way we'd like them to and move on.

MOM. You're right. I feel like I have failed your dad somehow, I guess I'll just have to live with that.