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*Dramatic Publishing*

# The Beloved Dearly



Comedy

by

Doug Cooney

Awarded TADA!'s First Look Prize  
Toured by Lincoln Center Institute

# The Beloved Dearly

**Comedy. By Doug Cooney.**

*Cast: 4m., 6w., doubling possible, extras.* Twelve-year-old Ernie is always looking for a fast buck. This time, the middle-school tycoon stumbles onto a money-making bonanza: pet funerals for kids. He hires Dusty to decorate the burial boxes and Tony to dig the holes, but his prize find is a tomboy named Swimming Pool who delivers a crying jag not to be missed. Business goes through the roof—that is, until Ernie loses Swimming Pool over a raise and the whole venture unravels. “It’s only after his own pet departs for the canine hereafter that Ernie realizes just how much more there is to life (and death) than making money.” (*New York Times*) A special comedy about business, friendships, loss and how we learn to express our feelings. Awarded TADA!’s First Look Prize and toured by Lincoln Center Institute. *Unit set. Optional songs may be incorporated into the play. Lyrics are provided by the playwright to which you are free to create your own music.*

Front cover: The Lincoln Center Institute production, New York  
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# **THE BELOVED DEARLY**

**A Play**  
**by**  
**DOUG COONEY**



**Dramatic Publishing**  
**Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand**

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*“World premiere production produced by TADA!  
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# THE BELOVED DEARLY

A Full-length Play

For 4 Men, 6 Women, doubling possible, extras

## CHARACTERS

ERNIE . . . . . 12, savvy business owner  
DUSTY . . . . . 9, an artistic little boy  
SWIMMING POOL . . . . . 10, a tough little tomboy  
RICK . . . . . 17, Swimming Pool's wayward brother  
TONY . . . . . 8, a little boy with a big shovel  
BETTY . . . . . 10, a bereaved bunny owner  
KIRSTEN . . . . . 10, a bereaved canary owner  
GINA . . . . . 11, a science-fair winner  
KIP . . . . . 10, captain of the Little League  
FINNY & FANNY . . . . the Macabre Kids, bug collectors  
WENDY . . . . . 8, a squeaky cheerleader  
THE MOURNERS . various children who attend the funerals

Additional mourners are optional. Age-appropriate casting is not required.

Optional songs may be incorporated into the piece. Lyrics are provided in the text to which you are free to create your own music. For rights to the original musical score composed by Elizabeth Swados, please contact Rosalind Lichter, 375 Greenwich St., New York NY 10013.

SET: A single environment; scene shifts are suggested by props.

# THE BELOVED DEARLY

## SCENE 1

**SETTING:** *The back stoop of a brownstone and the adjoining yard. A small patch of green.*

**AT RISE:** *ERNIE sits on the stoop. He has a cell phone. Mid-conversation. All business.*

**ERNIE.** No-no-no-no-no! Cecilia, don't do this to me. I got a client coming at a quarter to four. *(With annoyance.)* Quarter to four is 3:45. I need somebody by four. How am I going to get somebody else by four?

*(DUSTY enters. He is in dark, dusty clothes hauling a weathered old suitcase. Note: Every time DUSTY appears, he's hauling that old suitcase.)*

**DUSTY.** Hey, boss.

**ERNIE** *(to the phone).* Forget it, Cecilia. You're fired. Boo-hoo-hoo, Cecilia. The tears don't work on me. You're fired. Say goodbye. Goodbye. *(ERNIE puts down the phone.)*

**DUSTY.** No more Cecilia, boss?

**ERNIE.** I'm gonna have an ulcer before I learn how to drive. *(To DUSTY.)* Okay, Dusty. You got the box?



DUSTY. You're gonna love it, boss. It's a real beaut. (*DUSTY presents the shoebox and removes the lid.*) I snagged the Michael Jordan High-Tops box from some dumpster behind the gym. Should be deep enough, I bet. Spray-painted it purple 'cause I ran out of blue.

ERNIE. What are these pictures?

DUSTY. National Geographic. And I lined the inside with this big crazy scarf I found in my suitcase. Is the bunny here yet?

ERNIE. The deceased arrives with the client at a quarter to four. Visitation from four till a quarter past. Funeral at four-fifteen. Burial to follow.

DUSTY. So okay. You wanna pay me up front or should I write out a bill?

ERNIE. I can pay you up front—but I need a bill for my records.

DUSTY. One Jurassic Bunny Box. \$2.75.

ERNIE. Two dollars and seventy-five cents? What happened to two dollars?

DUSTY. Boss, I got a paper cut doing this job. I ruined my dad's magazine. This is no two-dollar job.

ERNIE. We said two dollars.

DUSTY. Look at that craftsmanship. Jurassic Bunny Box is right up there with the Geodesic Biosphere for Gerry the Gerbil ...

ERNIE. Two dollars.

DUSTY. ...or the Star-Studded Cylinder for Sissy the Snake.

ERNIE. The price is two dollars.

DUSTY. But this is art! I could sell it on the street for ...

ERNIE. Art Schmart. We agreed on two dollars.

DUSTY. That scarf is like a Pucci original or something.

ERNIE. It's a dead bunny, Dusty. Dead bunnies don't know from Pucci. Two dollars. Going once, going twice.

DUSTY. Okay, okay. Two bucks.

*(ERNIE pays him on the spot.)*

ERNIE. You wanna hang around for the services? I might need another usher.

DUSTY. I did want to see that dead bunny.

ERNIE. Come back at four. *(Exit DUSTY.)* Oh! Hey! Dusty! Hang on a minute. *(Shouting over the audience.)* You know anybody who can cry?

## SCENE 2

SETTING: *Same.*

AT RISE: *A tough little TOMBOY stands on the stoop before ERNIE.*

ERNIE. So. The Dust-Man says you can cry.

TOMBOY. Been known to shed a few.

ERNIE. Give me a for-instance.

TOMBOY. Skinned my knee in Little League. Cracked the cap right on home plate. Umpire said he heard it crack. Yeah, I cried a little.

ERNIE. What else.

TOMBOY. Kicked in the head during Pee-Wee Soccer. It was Pee-Wee Soccer. Sure I cried. I was still little.

ERNIE. Keep going.

TOMBOY. My brother's Rollerblades. Coming off a whip. Landed on the heel of my palm and busted this bone right here. You ever break a bone?

ERNIE. Never been so lucky.

TOMBOY. First you throw up and then you go pale and then it was still hurting and everybody was yelling, so... yeah...

ERNIE. Look. My clients want to hear sadness; they don't want to hear your pain. Ever cry 'cause you were just sad or scared and stuff?

TOMBOY. You got the wrong girl.

ERNIE. Never had a pet that died, for instance?

TOMBOY. Dad won't let us have pets. He's allergic to the hair.

ERNIE. Allergic to the hair. What about a fish?

TOMBOY. Mom won't put up with the smell.

ERNIE. Mom won't put up with the smell. Nothing hairy, nothing smelly. So. Nothing sad ever happened to you. What am I gonna do with you? *(The cell phone rings.)* Excuse me a moment. *(Into phone, all business.)* It's Ernie. You got him. Matt!... Got you and Friskie down for tomorrow at eleven. The price is \$7.50. No, the price is \$7.50, same as a movie. The price is frozen; like Ben & Jerry's. And did you put little Friskie in the freezer? Do what I say. You'll thank me tomorrow. *(He hangs up the phone. To TOMBOY.)* Back to you. So tell me something sad.

TOMBOY. Ha. No. Forget it.

ERNIE. I'm offering you a buck fifty to work one half-hour. If I'm paying you a buck fifty, I wanna hear something sad.

**TOMBOY.** My brother Rick ran away. Well, he was old enough so it wasn't really like he ran away. My brother Rick left home. That was sad.

**ERNIE.** That make you cry?

**TOMBOY.** None of your business.

**ERNIE.** Look. You're standing on my business. See this yard? You're standing on a gold mine. I've got a yard full of bereaved bunny owner in about a half an hour. I need someone who's gonna cry for that dead bunny like it was their best friend.

**TOMBOY.** I can cry. Watch me. I can fake it.

**ERNIE.** I'm not interested in faking it. I run a clean show; my clients expect quality. If you're not gonna pump out the real McCoy, I don't need you hogging space around the hole. I get plenty of onlookers.

**TOMBOY.** Give me the half hour. I'll come up with some tears.

**ERNIE.** A half an hour. That's thirty minutes, you know.

**TOMBOY.** I know what a half hour is. You don't have to be insulting.

**ERNIE.** No offense. Most kids don't understand unless I spell out the time like it's digital.

**TOMBOY.** You don't need to do that with me. Gimme the half hour and I promise you—I'll be sobbing buckets.

**ERNIE.** Tell you what. You caught me in a jam. Let's say I give you one buck for your time today. Things go well, we'll talk about that buck fifty.

**TOMBOY.** Tell you what. Things go well today and you want me back? You and me talk salary.

**ERNIE.** What are you talking salary?

**TOMBOY.** I'm not greedy. Say six bucks a week.

**ERNIE.** Six bucks!

TOMBOY. I know what kind of business you do here.

Kids got pets dropping right and left. You need someone dependable. Someone on salary.

ERNIE. Maybe you're right.

TOMBOY. I come through; you put me on salary. Sounds okay?

ERNIE. If you come through... Deal.

TOMBOY. Hold up. No deal yet. If I go on salary, in four weeks, you tell me how I'm doing—and then we talk about a raise.

ERNIE. A raise? You haven't even started crying yet. Talkin' about a raise. You think I can't find another cry-baby in this neighborhood?

TOMBOY. Not in one half hour. Thirty little minutes.

ERNIE. Maybe you're right. Tell you what, you cry today and it's a deal. Deal?

TOMBOY. Deal. See you in a half an hour. (*A handshake. The TOMBOY runs off.*)

ERNIE. Hey! Tomboy! You got a name?

TOMBOY (*exiting*). Swimming Pool!

ERNIE (*writing in his ledger*). Swimming Pool. Swimming Pool? (*To SWIMMING POOL, full out over the audience.*) Hey!... Swimming Pool! How about a dress?

### SCENE 3

SETTING: *Swimming Pool's driveway.*

AT RISE: *SWIMMING POOL digs through several laundry baskets, shaking out a variety of clothes, in her search for a dress.*

SWIMMING POOL. Mom! Mom! Where's that ... ding-dang dress I had to wear? ... Mom!

*(Her older brother RICK appears. He always carries drumsticks.)*

RICK. Mom's not here.

SWIMMING POOL *(startled)*. Rick! What are you doing here?

RICK. Nobody home. I figured I'd sneak in with the key under the rock and grab a few more things.

*(SWIMMING POOL digs back into the baskets.)*

SWIMMING POOL. You could call, Rick. They wouldn't mind seeing you if you called. They would like that if you called.

RICK *(sharp and too harsh)*. Maybe I don't feel like seeing them, Pool-head.

*(SWIMMING POOL backs off fast, digging in baskets and muttering low.)*

RICK *(continuing)*. Sorry. It's not your fault.

SWIMMING POOL. I know it's not my fault. I know it's not my fault.

RICK. Hey, it's not my fault either.

SWIMMING POOL. Then whose fault is it? Nobody tells me nothing.

RICK. What are you looking for?

SWIMMING POOL. That dress Mom made me wear. Remember? That purple thing.

RICK. What you need a dress for? You got a date?

SWIMMING POOL. Funny, funny. I got a job.

RICK. A job? Doing what.

SWIMMING POOL. Nothing.

RICK. A job doing nothing. I got to get me one of those.

*(No response. RICK reaches into a laundry basket and pulls out the dress on his first try.)* What do you know.

First try. Still got the magic touch. *(He holds up a wrinkled ball.)*

SWIMMING POOL. Give me that. I'm late.

RICK. Easy, snorkle-puss. A job doing what?

SWIMMING POOL *(snatches the dress away)*. I can't wear this. It's all wrinkled.

RICK. Sprinkle it with water and throw it in the dryer.

Then hang it in the bathroom and...

SWIMMING POOL. Thanks for the advice. I thought you moved out.

RICK. I did move out.

SWIMMING POOL. Right. I remember that. That's when I stopped counting on you to stick up for me and teach me stuff. That's when I stopped counting on you at all. You said we were a team. You said we'd stick together. Thick or thin. Where'd you go? What's going on? Nobody tells me nothing.

RICK. Hey. Remember what you promised. You're tough, remember. No tears. You're tough like me.

SWIMMING POOL *(with a pout)*. I'm tough. I'm tough.

RICK. Marco... Come on, say it. Marco...

SWIMMING POOL. I'm not playing that game anymore.

Besides, I'm late.

RICK. Come on, say it. Marco. Marco.

SWIMMING POOL *(a ruse)*. Quit it. I think I hear a car.

RICK. I better run. Don't tell Dad you saw me, okay?

SWIMMING POOL. As if I would.

RICK (*exiting*). Just don't.

SWIMMING POOL. Rick! (*A beat, then.*) Polo! ... Polo ...

*(But RICK is gone. SWIMMING POOL hauls the dress over her head. She runs offstage.)*

## SCENE 4

SETTING: *Dusty's workroom in his garage.*

AT RISE: *He works on top of the old suitcase, now bulging with old clothes from the '60s and '70s. He makes final touches on the Jurassic Bunny Box. ERNIE watches and paces.*

ERNIE (*hot-headed*). I say a buck; she says buck fifty!

DUSTY. Say, boss. What say we knock off early tonight and catch a Slurpie down at the corner?

ERNIE (*calm*). Can't. Gotta walk "Mister Doggie." (*Hot-headed.*) So, a buck fifty!— I say maybe; she says "nuh-uh—salary!" Salary?

DUSTY. Can't picture you walking a dog, boss.

ERNIE (*calm-ish*). Mom's working a double so guess who gets to walk it. (*Hot-headed.*) So I say, "okay, salary"— and she starts talking about a raise! A raise?

DUSTY. Just tie Mister Doggie up out here.

ERNIE (*mostly hot-headed*). Mister Doggie is "too little for the big bad world." Too little to even run around the yard. Just as well—he'd only dig up the clientele. (*Over*



*the top.*) I tell you that little tomboy's got me totally bamboozled! She's laying out her whole retirement plan and I still haven't seen one little whimper... What have you got me into, here, Dusty?

DUSTY. I got a feeling about Swimming Pool, boss. She'll come through. Believe me. She just cuts a rough bargain.

ERNIE. Speaking of which, Matt-the-Brat called to confirm the services and haggle over price. I told him it's Ben & Jerry's, it's frozen, and keep little Friskie on ice.

DUSTY. Never liked that cat anyway.

ERNIE. Me, neither. You finish his box?

*(DUSTY raises an oatmeal container painted with red/white stripes, and rigged with a Frisbee "brim" as a lid.)*

DUSTY. Cat in the Hat for Matt's Dead Cat.

ERNIE. Perfect. You're a genius. Jurassic Bunny Box is done; we're all set for Friskie tomorrow. Now if only I could get a confirmation on the crybaby. I tell you. I'm gonna have to take up the skateboard again. I'm carrying too much stress. *(Beat.)* And what's with that name, anyway? Swimming Pool?

DUSTY. All I know is...seven brothers. Swimming Pool's the baby. Mom's pregnant with Swimming Pool, rushed to the hospital and everybody's like "what's it gonna be?" Mom says, "...a little girl would be nice." The brothers, they're like, "A little girl?" I'd rather have a swimming pool! *(Football cheer.)* Swimming Pool! Swimming Pool! *(Shrug.)* Been Swimming Pool ever since.

*(ERNIE notices something else in DUSTY's suitcase and points at it.)*

ERNIE. What's that. What else you got in that suitcase?

DUSTY. More magic.

ERNIE. What is it?

*(DUSTY reaches into his suitcase and raises a milk carton project, decorated with yellow feathers and shiny pop-tops and spangles.)*

DUSTY. A Crystal Capsule for Kirsten's Canary.

ERNIE. Excellent. Only Kirsten's Canary isn't dead.

DUSTY. Yet. She was looking peaked last time I stopped by. Just staying ahead of the demand.

ERNIE. You're good. You're very good.

DUSTY. And it's gonna cost you \$2.50.

ERNIE. You're learning fast. Just tell me one thing, Dusty. This Swimming Pool. She gonna be able to cry?

DUSTY. Swimming Pool? Only seen her cry once. But when Swimming Pool cries, she means it.