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Dramatic Publishing

PARLOR GAMES

A Comic Farce in Two Acts

by

JAMES C. WALL



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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A Comic Farce in Two Acts
For 4 Men and 10 Women

TRICIA McNULTY 29, mother of two
MORT McNULTY 30, runs the family business
ROBERTA KLUZINSKI late 40s to early 50s,
county superintendent of schools
DAVE COLLINS 29, attorney
JUDGE JOHN FAHEY late 40s to early 50s, widower
KAY INGALLS late 20s, a police officer
HARLEY ALLENBRAND 65,
employed at Thompson and Son
MRS. GRACE McNULTY early 60s,
widowed mother of Mort
GRANDMA a professional wakegoer
MA also a professional wakegoer
DAUGHTER third generation of a wake-going family
DIANE KUKELSKI a nun
FIONA BELANGER block club representative
ALICE HOCHENBECK wife of Henry Hochenbeck,
the baseball coach of a Pee Wee league team.

PLACE: Parlor B of Thompson and Son Funeral Home in Plymouthson, Indiana, a town of about 50,000. This is the Blueberry Festival weekend—the last big weekend of the summer—with parties, parades, and athletic events.

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ACT ONE

AT RISE: *Lights up on Parlor B of the Thompson and Son Funeral Home. The room is the entire stage. MORT MCNULTY enters carrying a vase of flowers which he places on the bureau. He's wearing a three-piece suit and is obviously in a hurry as he looks frantically about the room. His wife, TRICIA, hurries in. She is wearing Bermuda shorts and a light-weight college jersey along with sandals. She has a golf ball in one pocket and a college course-offerings booklet folded in half in another pocket.*

TRICIA. Mort—I rushed right over as soon as I got your message. *(She wipes her brow with a hanky.)* God, is it hot out there!

MORT. Where've you been, Tricia? I called the house two hours ago!

TRICIA *(looking around)*. Mort—what happened? Who died? Is your mother OK?

MORT. Mother's fine. *(He steps back to get a good look at her.)* Will you look at you! Where have you been?

TRICIA. I was down at the store.

MORT. Doing what?

TRICIA. The kids were next door at Sally's. I was bored. I decided to alphabetize the golf balls.

MORT. You what???

TRICIA. First I went by company name— (*She takes a golf ball out of her pocket to illustrate.*) Then the name of the player who endorsed it, then the color—

MORT. This is some “woman” thing, right?

TRICIA. I was just trying to help out.

MORT. Just look at you!

TRICIA (*looking at her clothes*). I’m looking! I’m looking!
What is going on here!

MORT. Help me with these flowers, would you?

TRICIA. Who are they for?

MORT. That’s not important. Give me a hand.

TRICIA. Not till you tell me what’s going on here.

MORT. So when I really want you to help ...

(MORT runs off for more flowers and TRICIA starts to browse through her course offerings booklet. He comes back on with another arrangement and places it somewhere around the room.)

TRICIA. Mort, is this another one of your practical jokes? Is Dave Collins hiding somewhere in a casket? (*MORT is moving vases around the room seeing how they look. TRICIA shouts at top of her lungs.*) Dave! Dave Collins! You can come out now! I know you’re here somewhere. If you’re trying to scare me, it’s not—

MORT. Tricia—be quiet! You’re in a funeral parlor. Dave is not here. What are you reading?

TRICIA. The community college course offerings for this fall. I’m going back to college... Mort—please! What are we doing here?

MORT (*hands her a folded copy of a small newspaper from his back pocket*). You don’t have time to go back

to college. Here. Read this. The mums! I've got to bring in the chrysanthemums!

(He runs out while she sits and pages through the paper. He comes back on with a vase of chrysanthemums which he adds to the others.)

TRICIA *(paging through the paper)*. The sports? The want-ads? What? What?

MORT. The obituaries, of course.

TRICIA *(turns to last page, her head is buried in the paper)*. Mort!!

MORT. Hmm?

TRICIA *(eyes appear above top edge of the paper)*. You're dead!

MORT. Yeah—I know.

TRICIA. But you're not dead!

MORT. Yeah—I know.

TRICIA *(reading from the paper)*. "Mortimer McNulty—age 30, beloved husband of Patricia, loving father of Ellen and David—owner of McNulty Sporting Goods, 384 Michiana Street—"

MORT. Free advertising!

TRICIA *(continuing)*. "—died suddenly of a heart attack Friday. Services Saturday, 6:00 p.m., Thompson and Son Funeral Home." Oh my God!! How did this get in the paper?

MORT. I called it in. Told Herbie, the copyboy—we all know how bright he is—that I was Jerry Thompson Jr.

TRICIA *(again, shouting out to wherever DAVE is)*. Dave! I'm going to kill you when I get my hands—

MORT. Shhh! Dave doesn't know anything about this! (*He goes to stack of chairs R, takes one off the top, and starts a row of chairs facing L ending up with two rows of four or five chairs each.*) But when he finds out—this will top every joke he's ever pulled on me!

TRICIA. "THIS"?

MORT. My wake!

TRICIA. Oh my God!

MORT. People should be showing up any minute now.

TRICIA (*more to herself than to MORT*). I've got to get home.

MORT. Did you bring any other clothes with you?

TRICIA (*again, more to herself than him*). Ellen and Davy are with Sally. But she thinks I'm only going to be gone—

MORT (*looking over her clothes*). Something a little more appropriate.

TRICIA. You're nuts! Most men turn thirty—they put on a few pounds and buy a cardigan sweater but not my husband, not Mort McNulty, the king of the practical jokers—No—you host your own wake! People might actually show up here in a few minutes—and you're not dead, Mort! (*Referring to his state of juvenile antics.*) God! How did this happen?

MORT (*bringing another chair*). Simple. I told Jerry Thompson Jr. I needed a place to have a surprise party for Dave.

TRICIA. I didn't mean—this! (*She gestures around the parlor.*)

MORT (*not paying any attention to her*). He said it's a slow weekend. They just finished a two-night wake. One of the Shady Resters. Jerry said she was so old, she

didn't even know she was dead! We can use the parlor till midnight—as long as we don't tell anyone what for. The coffee room and the room where they display the coffins are being repainted so we can't go in there, but other than that—everything's ready to go. (*He looks around.*) Except of course—for the coffin.

TRICIA (*looking around, horrified*). What coffin?

MORT. Tricia! I couldn't very well ask Jerry to loan me a coffin! Not for a party for Dave.

TRICIA. Mort—are you crazy? You can't have a wake without a coffin! Oh, God! What am I saying? Mort, let's get out of here while there's still time!

(*MORT lies on one of the couches*)

MORT. Don't worry about it. We'll improvise. How does this look?

TRICIA. Where did you get all these flowers? (*She's up and inspecting some of them.*)

MORT. I bought the mums. The rest I borrowed. What time is it?

TRICIA (*reading the ribbon on one arrangement*). "Farewell, Aunt Wanda." Don't tell me—these are—

MORT. Hey—she'll never miss 'em.

(*TRICIA drops the ribbon in disgust. They hear something that resembles a doorbell chime, but at some distance. At the same time, the lights in parlor B flicker for an instant, over area L where MORT will eventually "lay at rest."*)

TRICIA. What's that? It sounded like a doorbell. And something happened with the lights. (*MORT is up off couch. He pulls Lazy Boy away from wall upstage and*

brings it L, facing out to audience.) This place is spooky, you know? *(Noticing his moving the chair.)* What are you doing?

MORT. Maybe I'd look better in this.

TRICIA. This is insane! Mort, do you really think people are going to believe you're dead?

MORT *(throughout this, he tries the chair in various positions with himself in various poses)*. Sure! Give them something to start with, their imaginations will take over from there. *(While he's preoccupied with the recliner, she takes one or two of the chairs he's lined up in a row and puts them back against the wall.)*

TRICIA. But this is—so—so sick! Why are you doing this?

MORT. Should I be all the way back? Or maybe something a little more casual?

TRICIA. I like the casual.

MORT. Think about it—all the nice things people say about the corpse. It's all wasted if you're dead! This way, I'll hear everything people say about me after I'm dead, before I'm dead! *(MORT starts to replace chairs from their position along the wall into the rows he'd arranged before.)*

TRICIA. There's something I don't understand. Last Christmas, the ad Dave put in the paper for used Christmas trees, along with our address—

MORT. A stroke of brilliance—simple, direct—

TRICIA. Then in May, when Dave went on vacation, you had his backyard dug up and replaced with asphalt.

MORT *(sitting in the recliner again and trying out positions)*. I thought I had finally topped him!

TRICIA (*takes chairs from rows and replaces them along the wall*). Till he painted it green and had a tennis court made out of it.

MORT. Increased his property values by ten percent!

TRICIA. That's what I don't understand. Isn't it his turn?

MORT. Yes! That's why this is great! He'll never suspect it's coming! (*Intercepts TRICIA as she's carrying a chair back to the row along the wall. He grabs opposite side and tries to push her back to where he had them set up. They have a tug-of-war with the chair, moving back and forth.*)

TRICIA. Mort! Hundreds of people might show up here!

MORT. Tricia, this is the Blueberry Festival weekend: the corn roast at the VFW hall, the costume party dinner dance at the country club. (*At mention of "dinner dance" he tries to dance a little with her and the chair between them, then the tug-of-war continues.*) Tomorrow there's the parade. It's the last big weekend of the summer. No one's gonna want to go to a wake—besides, who do you think reads that little paper?

TRICIA. Then why did you—

MORT (*more to himself than her*). Dave always reads it to check out his legal services ad.

TRICIA (*thinking of something*). And so does your mother! (*She lets go of her side of the chair as MORT pulls on his side. He falls back into the recliner with the chair on top of him.*) Oh my God! What if—

MORT (*getting out from under the chair, getting up from recliner and then returning the chair to its position in the rows he set up*). She's out at Shady Rest helping with their float for the parade. See—there's no problem.

TRICIA. Well, there is one, Mort—and that's that I'm getting out of here. *(She heads to exit R which leads to the rear of the home.)*

MORT. Tricia! Where's your sense of humor? *(She exits.)*
You can't get out that way!

(As TRICIA goes out the doorway R, ROBERTA KLUZ-INSKI comes in the doorway L. Since MORT's chair is angled a little to the center, she can see someone's legs in the chair. Because ROBERTA is talking to herself as she comes down the hallway and into the room, MORT knows someone is there. We see him excited as he goes into his corpse act.)

ROBERTA *(to herself)*. I don't believe I'm back here again for the fifth day in a row. Of all the times for her to die— *(She sees that someone is in the chair. She speaks a little softer.)* Oh, excuse me. I didn't know anyone was in here. *(She comes further into the room.)* I was supposed to meet someone out front and I've been waiting for— *(She looks at her watch. She's now even with MORT's chair and sees that he isn't listening to her. She pauses for a second.)* Mr. Allenbrand? Is that you? *(There's no response from MORT. She looks around and then reaches out and tentatively touches his shoulder. No response.)* Mr. Allenbrand?

(She hits MORT on the shoulder trying to wake him. We see TRICIA come back down the hallway from the rear where she can't get out. She looks in the parlor and her eyes bulge as she sees someone is with MORT.)

ROBERTA. Wake up, will you? I've been waiting for you out front for the last—

(ROBERTA suddenly thinks of something, stops, looks around the parlor remembering where she is. She hesitantly reaches out and touches MORT again—this time to see if he's alive. TRICIA's head appears in the doorway just as ROBERTA jerks her hand back coming to the conclusion that perhaps this is a corpse she's been talking to.)

ROBERTA. Oh my God! *(TRICIA tries to get past the open doorway but ROBERTA sees her.)* Oh—hello. Excuse me.

(TRICIA comes into the room.)

TRICIA *(in a hushed tone of voice)*. Oh... Hi there.

ROBERTA. I'm sorry to bother you. I was supposed to meet someone here— *(She realizes there might be a connection between corpse and TRICIA.)* I'm sorry! Is this—is he—are you—

TRICIA *(recognition coming into her face)*. You're Roberta Kluzinski, aren't you? The superintendent of schools?

ROBERTA. Yes, I am. You look awfully familiar.

TRICIA. I'm Patricia McNulty. I taught second grade at Hawthorne Elementary.

ROBERTA. That's right! *(Reaching out to shake hands.)* I remember now.

TRICIA. I left teaching six years ago when our Ellen was born. But you know, I've been thinking about going back.

ROBERTA. It is so good to see you—except, of course—here. I was supposed to meet my aunt's attorney at fifty-three. I don't actually know what he looks like. We've only talked on the phone. I thought that this— (*Looking down at MORT.*) ah—that maybe he was—

TRICIA. Oh! I'm sorry. This is my husband, Mort McNulty. McNulty Sporting Goods on Michiana Street. I know the school year's already started, but—

ROBERTA. McNulty Sporting Goods! You know, I never made the connection... Is he—ah—pardon me for asking—he's not—

TRICIA. Oh no. No. No, he's not—ah—"that"! Your aunt's attorney, you say? I'm sorry, I haven't seen anyone around. Substitute teaching—does that pay—

ROBERTA. He said we had to discuss my Aunt Wanda's will. I don't know why we just couldn't meet at his office but he insisted it be here.

TRICIA. Your Aunt Wanda?

ROBERTA. Yes. She passed away last Wednesday. Wanda Kluzinski.

(TRICIA makes connection between flowers and the name of ROBERTA's aunt. She moves in front of the flowers with the "Wanda" ribbon.)

TRICIA. I am so sorry to hear about your loss.

ROBERTA. Oh, thank you, Tricia. That's very nice of you. We weren't terribly close. Aunt Wanda was something of a recluse before she retired and moved into Shady

Rest. (*TRICIA has her hands behind her trying to get ribbon off the flower arrangement.*) I visited her, of course, when I could find the time. But she was never really what you'd call a people person, you know? She had her animals, and her work and that kept her busy. (*TRICIA nods her head and smiles when ROBERTA pauses. TRICIA is still trying to get the ribbon off.*) She stuffed animals. (*TRICIA nods and smiles again as she works on the ribbon behind her.*) Had her own business for forty years. Never married. Just Aunt Wanda and those damned animals all over the house—standing around—stuffed, some of them kind of grinning at you... Are you waiting for someone? (*TRICIA finally gets the ribbon off.*)

TRICIA. No. Do you have any substitute teaching positions open?

ROBERTA. Tricia, are you sure your husband's not—ah—is he—

TRICIA (*taking her by the arm a step or two away from MORT*). No, he's not dead and he's not asleep either. I am so embarrassed to have to tell you—my husband Mort sometimes plays these little jokes on people. And he thought it would be funny to put his own death notice in the paper and pretend that he was dead and have a wake for himself. Why he's doing this is totally beyond me. But he's sitting there listening to every word we're saying. And to have to tell you this—especially here—after your loss—well, I'm just—mortified.

(*ROBERTA looks at her—especially her work clothes, steps back away from TRICIA ever so slightly, looks at MORT, then back to TRICIA.*)