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*Dramatic Publishing*

a play in one act

# CEMETERIES ARE A GRAVE MATTER

by  
PEG KEHRET



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(CEMETERIES ARE A GRAVE MATTER)

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CEMETERIES ARE A GRAVE MATTER  
*A Play in One Act*  
For Three Men and Three Women, Extras\*

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C H A R A C T E R S

JENNY McNUTT . . . *a romantic seventeen-year-old*  
JOE McNUTT . . . . . *her older brother*  
ABBY McNUTT . . . . . *their mother*  
DIANE VANISTER . . . . . *Abby's best friend*  
DANIEL CUTHBERTON III . . . . . *Diane's nephew*  
CHUCK WINCHELL . . . . . *a reporter*

TIME:            *A day in June.*

PLACE:          *The McNutt apartment located above  
the mortuary, and the street outside.*

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\*Pickets, young man with drum, TV cameraman,  
crowd of spectators.

It is suggested that a small area of the stage be used as part of the living room in the McNutt apartment and that the larger part of the stage be used for the street scene, and that action move quickly and smoothly from one area to the other as the lights shift. If this is not possible, the street scenes can be played in front of the curtain with few props, the street action beginning promptly as soon as the curtain is down, and the curtain going up as the actors leave the street scene taking the props with them.

## Scene 1

**SCENE:** The kitchen-family room of the McNutt apartment, which is located above McNutt's Mortuary, occupies about the rear one-third of the stage. The room is simply furnished with a sofa, coffee table and a couple of chairs. The effect is pleasant but not expensive. A pot of coffee and a cake are on the kitchen counter, along with plates, cups and saucers, etc. A door in the right wall leads downstairs to the mortuary. The door to the outside stairway is in the rear wall and a door at the left goes to the bedrooms.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** JENNY, JOE and ABBY are in the family room. ABBY is sewing or knitting and JOE is reading the sports page. JENNY stares dreamily into space.)

JENNY. Have you seen him yet, Mother?

ABBY. Who?

JENNY. Mr. Walston.

ABBY. Who?

JENNY. Mr. Walston. You know . . . (She points down, below.)

ABBY. Oh. The one who came in last night?  
(JENNY nods, yes.) No, I haven't seen him.  
Poor thing. So young to take his own life.

JENNY. You should go down and see him. He's

absolutely dreamy.

JOE. Oh, no! Here she goes again!

JENNY. He is. He's tall and handsome and . . .

JOE. How do you know he's tall when you never saw him standing up? Did you measure him?

JENNY. I can tell by looking. And he has curly blond hair.

JOE (shaking his head). Sick. That's what she is.

It isn't normal to get turned on by dead men.

ABBY. Joseph! Your sister is not "turned on."

JENNY. I just appreciate a good-looking face when I see one. (She looks meaningfully at JOE.)

Maybe because I see one so seldom.

JOE. Especially in your mirror.

JENNY. Mother! Make him stop that.

JOE. I was just kidding.

JENNY. Well, Mr. Walston is handsome. He looks like a Greek god.

JOE. I still say it's sick, carrying on about some poor guy who's already dead. Let's talk about something interesting for a change. Like live men.

JENNY. I never meet any interesting live men.

JOE. That's because you're always hanging around here, helping Dad. What kind of men do you expect to meet in a mortuary?

ABBY. I think it's very nice that Jennifer wants to help her father. He isn't getting any younger and all these night hours are tiring. I wish people would be a bit more considerate.

JOE. And die in the daytime?

ABBY. There have been a lot of midnight calls lately.

JOE. Maybe we should post hours. Dying allowed between 8 a. m. and 5 p. m. only.

JENNY. I don't notice you helping on the late calls.

JOE. I have a summer job. And if I had my choice, I'd never help on any of the calls. They give me

the creeps.

JENNY. Those beautiful, calm faces? You're crazy! You can walk down the streets of this town and meet shoplifters and pickpockets and who knows what else and it doesn't bother you at all. But those dear, departed people downstairs -- (She points.) -- give you the creeps.

JOE. I just happen to prefer my friends alive.

JENNY. I think I'll go down and make sure Mr. Walston has everything he needs.

JOE. And she says I'm crazy.

JENNY. I wonder if he'll get many flowers. (She exits R, to the mortuary.)

JOE (calling after her). Aren't you going to take him a cup of coffee?

ABBY. Joe, that wasn't nice. We must always be respectful of the dead.

JOE. I am respectful. I keep a respectful distance away.

ABBY. Jennifer is just showing an interest in the family business.

JOE. Ha! Some business interest. "Tall, handsome, curly blond hair . . . "

ABBY. She does seem to notice their physical attributes.

JOE. Notice? She practically flips. Remember that last one? The scuba diver who drowned? I thought she was going to crawl right in the coffin with him.

ABBY (shocked). Joseph!

JOE. If you ask me, Jenny needs help.

ABBY. Do you really think so?

JOE. I'll bet if you call a psychiatrist and tell him your seventeen-year-old daughter keeps falling in love with dead men, he'll give you an emergency appointment.

ABBY (troubled). You could be right.



JOE. At least there's one good thing about Jenny's lovers . . .

ABBY. What's that?

JOE. You don't have to worry about them getting her in trouble. (He exits L.)

ABBY. Joseph! (She starts to go after him, changes her mind. Instead, she gets the telephone book and starts to turn the yellow pages.) Let's see . . . psychiatrist . . . spelled with a *p* . . .

(There is a knock on door UC. ABBY answers, still holding the telephone book, and DIANE walks in.)

DIANE. I thought you might have time for a cup of coffee. (Notices telephone book.) If you're busy, I'll come another time.

ABBY. No, no . . . come in. I was just looking up psychiatrists.

DIANE. Psychiatrists? Whatever for? Wait! You don't have to answer that. I don't want to pry into your personal affairs.

ABBY. Don't be silly, Diane. I tell you everything anyway. The truth is, I'm worried about Jennifer.

DIANE. What's the matter with Jenny?

ABBY. I'm afraid she may be sick.

DIANE. Did you take her temperature?

ABBY. I don't mean that kind of sick. I mean . . . she keeps falling in love.

DIANE. A perfectly normal seventeen-year-old girl.

ABBY. But she doesn't fall in love with seventeen-year-old boys.

DIANE. Who does she fall in love with?

ABBY. I always thought Jenny would pick a nice young man, a minister, perhaps, since we meet so many of them in this business. But instead . . .

DIANE. Instead what? Who is it? Some hippie?

ABBY. It's them. (She points to the floor. DIANE looks down.)

DIANE. Jenny's in love with a midget?

ABBY. No, no. Them. Downstairs.

DIANE. But there's nobody downstairs except . . .

Oh, my heavens! Jenny's in love with a corpse?

ABBY (nodding). Mr. Walston. The suicide.

DIANE. Maybe she's just being theatrical. You know how girls that age can be. It's probably the first time she ever met someone who had committed suicide.

ABBY. No, she isn't being dramatic. It's happened before.

DIANE. You've had suicides before? I didn't know that.

ABBY. The suicide hasn't happened before. She's fallen in love before. With . . . one of them. (She points down.)

DIANE. She has?

ABBY. Remember that scuba diver that drowned? (DIANE nods.) She had a real case on him. Even went to the funeral.

DIANE. Oh, Abby!

ABBY. And before that it was the college football player who was killed in an auto wreck.

DIANE. Poor Jenny. Where is she now?

ABBY. Downstairs. Sitting with Mr. Walston.

DIANE. You mean she just sits there and looks at him?

ABBY. Sometimes she rearranges his flowers.

DIANE. Why do you let her do it? What does Harold say?

ABBY. He thinks she's good for business. When the families come and see her sitting there like that, keeping watch, they're very touched. The scuba diver's mother recommended us to

all her friends.

DIANE. Doesn't Jenny have any boy friends? I mean live ones?

ABBY. She's dated Chuck Winchell a few times. She really likes him, but he's in college already and has a part-time job at the newspaper. He doesn't call her very often.

DIANE. What about the boys in her class?

ABBY. She says the boys her own age aren't interesting.

DIANE. But a corpse is?

ABBY. It doesn't sound too normal, does it?

DIANE. It sounds morbid, if you ask me.

ABBY. No, I don't think it's morbid. Jenny's been around this business so long that she doesn't think of them as dead. She just imagines them as they used to be. It's really kind of sweet -- in a way.

DIANE. Well, if she was my daughter, I'd discourage it.

ABBY. Joe thinks I should take Jenny to a psychiatrist.

DIANE. He may be right. Either that or find her a live boy friend.

ABBY. And just how am I supposed to do that?

DIANE. Well. . . . Daniel came today for a visit.

ABBY. Your nephew? You didn't tell me he was coming.

DIANE. He called last night. Wants to spend a week with me before summer school starts.

ABBY. A college man. Jenny would like that. But would Daniel be interested in Jenny?

DIANE. He doesn't have anything else to do.

ABBY. Let's get them together and maybe they'll hit it off. Go back home and get him right now and tell him you're both invited for dessert. I baked a chocolate cake today.

DIANE. Sounds great.