

THE MORGUE THE MERRIER

A MACABRE COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Pat Cook

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SYNOPSIS: “You ever wonder what their stories are?” asks Jane as she looks around the mortuary. She then lets us in on her secret. “I hear dead people!” Jane’s secret becomes our reality as each corpse ‘wakes’ to tell us their story. Take, for instance, Chester who tries to recapture his youth by trying to play rock and roll with a faulty guitar amplifier. His wife, Ida, thinks his playing is terrible, but he believes he’ll be another member of the Grateful Dead. Then there’s Lydia, who has to wait hand and foot on her whining, demanding Aunt Polly. “Why does everything always happen to me?” Aunt Polly complains. Little does she know she’s in for the biggest surprise of her life! One by one, we hear the corpses’ stories, and one by one, none of them turn out as planned. Calling for an easy skeletal set and a cast of 11, this oddball comedy comes to you from the same author of *Let’s Hang Him and Read the Will* and *Caught in the Act* and is sure to keep you laughing to the grave!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 MEN, 3 WOMEN, 2-4 EITHER)

JANE (m/f).....A middle-aged forensic technician type.
(70 lines)

IDA (f)A long-suffering wife with a secret.
(33 lines)

CHESTER (m).....A 45 year-old trying to be young again.
(61 lines)

HAL (m)Chester’s handyman brother. (18 lines)

FRANK (m)An impatient, long-suffering waiter.
(84 lines)

MARVIN (m).....A sarcastic man on death row. (65 lines)

GUARD (m/f).....Prison guard. (7 lines)

LYDIA (f).....Over-worked drudge with a plan.
(61 lines)

AUNT POLLY (f).....Lydia's overbearing hypochondriac aunt.
(44 lines)

INTERN #1 (m/f).....Morgue attendant. (3 lines)

INTERN #2 (m/f).....Intern #1's superior. (3 lines)

A NOTE ABOUT THE PLAY

While the play calls for a cast of eleven, a smaller cast may be achieved using double casting. For instance, the parts of the two interns may be played by actors from an earlier scene. Similarly, some parts written for one sex may be played as another, such as the Guard, Interns, and even Jane (changing her name to John).

PROPERTIES

- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Long-haired man's wig
- ☐ Electric guitar
- ☐ Amplifier
- ☐ Extension cord
- ☐ Guitar pick
- ☐ Restaurant menu
- ☐ Notepad and pen
- ☐ Man's wristwatch
- ☐ Container of breadsticks
- ☐ Clipboard
- ☐ Small table bell
- ☐ Television remote
- ☐ Rolling serving cart
- ☐ Decanter of water
- ☐ Several glasses
- ☐ Small medicine bottle of pills
- ☐ Small medicine bottle full of liquid

PROLOGUE

The morgue is not what some people would call their first choice for a series of yarns, unless, of course, that person has a penchant for the macabre. Or else that person, in fact, spends all his or her time within its eerie walls. Whether JANE is the former or the latter is up to the audience to decide.

AT RISE:

Casting ghostly shadows in every little nook and cranny, a hospital gurney is located SR, parallel to sight lines. CHESTER rests on the gurney, completely covered by a cadaverous white sheet. After a few moments, JANE rises from behind the gurney, holding a flashlight under her chin.

JANE: *(In an eerie tone.) OooooOOOOhhhhh! (She looks around.) Did I scare you? (She flicks off the flashlight.) No? (She thinks a minute.) What if I jumped up and yelled, would that have frightened you? (She moves in front of the table.) Well, too late for that now, I guess. (She places the flashlight in her coat pocket.) Okay, how to begin? Oh, I know. (She thinks and then, with a fiendish look in her eye, rubs her hands together.) Welcome to my domain! (She lets out a sinister laugh and then looks out.) Nothing? Hey, I took a shot. (She indicates her surroundings.) This is what some people call a morgue. Oh, there are a number of other names for it, "Boot Hill," "Death's Door," "The Cadaver Cave," or my favorite, "The Last Train to Corpseville." Kinda gives you a chill, doesn't it? Well, it should. It's full of sinister sounds, twilight shadows, and not to put too fine a point on it, dead people. I mean, when all is said and done, we all end up here, right? Yessiree Bob...or Frank or Mary, they all end up here as guests of the Grim Reaper – the ultimate, the final and the genuine equal opportunity employer. But how did they get here? What brought them down to my realm? You ever wonder what THEIR stories are? Well, I'll let you in on my little secret. (She looks around and then leans out.) I hear dead people. (She leans back and looks around.) No, really. Here, I'll show you.*

(She moves behind the gurney and holds her hands up.) Now, don't panic. I know this may be a little scary, but just keep hold of yourselves. Ready? *(With one sudden move, she yanks back the cover off CHESTER'S face. He is wearing a long-haired wig.)* Ah HA! *(CHESTER lies deady still. JANE looks at him and then out.)* Okay, that was a little anticlimactic, but hang on. *(She leans over to CHESTER.)* Hello? Excuse me, you got a moment? *(CHESTER blinks a few times and then opens his eyes.)* Hiiii, there.

CHESTER: *(Unsure.)* Uh...hi. *(He looks around.)*

JANE: Who're you?

CHESTER: Chester, name's Chester. What's going on here?

JANE: You're dead.

CHESTER: *(After a slight pause.)* Could you have built up to that? I mean, a little lead-in, a little warning first, you think?

JANE: You asked.

CHESTER: I know, but couldn't you be a little more subtle about it?

JANE: Subtle, huh? Fine. How are you?

CHESTER: Okay, I guess.

JANE: Not too hot?

CHESTER: No.

JANE: Too cold?

CHESTER: It is a little cool in here.

JANE: You want a pillow?

CHESTER: Well, that would be nice.

JANE: Now?

CHESTER: Now what?

JANE: You're dead.

CHESTER: Now, SEE? That wasn't so hard now, was it? *(He sits up.)* Wow, I could use a good stretch. I feel a little stiff.

JANE: *(Looks out.)* I could make a really bad joke here...

CHESTER: Man, you just never know when you wake up - *(He looks out and gets wide-eyed.)* - Who are THEY?

JANE: *(Moves in front of the gurney.)* Don't worry, they're with me. Listen, can I ask you a few questions?

CHESTER: Sure.

JANE: That won't bother you, then?

CHESTER: Hey, man, I got no place to go. *(He looks around.)*

JANE: Then being dead doesn't bother you?

CHESTER: Is there anything I can do about it now?

JANE: Nope.

CHESTER: What are your questions?

JANE: *(Looks out.)* This is going to be easier than I thought. Okay, Chet—

CHESTER: Chester. Don't like Chet, never have. My old gym teacher used to call me that, and – *(Excitedly, looking around.)* - say, has HE been here?

JANE: Not that I know of.

CHESTER: *(To himself.)* Wouldn't that make it all worthwhile? What a goon.

JANE: Can we get back to you?

CHESTER: I never left.

JANE: First, do you remember everything?

CHESTER: Wait, is this a test?

JANE: No! Well, sort of.

CHESTER: Talk about a final!

JANE: No, I just meant do you remember how you died?

CHESTER: How I died, oh sure.

JANE: Sure? Just like that? You don't have to think?

CHESTER: Well, that's one of those things that kinda stays with you. You know, like, "Where were you on the day that..." - that kinda thing.

JANE: Okay, then tell us. *(She sits on the gurney.)*

CHESTER: They really want to hear this? *(He indicates the audience.)*

JANE: That's why we're all here.

CHESTER: *(Looks out.)* Nothing on the tube, huh?

JANE: Go ahead.

CHESTER: Okay, well, first off, it was an accident. Let's clear the air about that right off the bat.

JANE: I thought it was murder.

CHESTER: Who's telling the story?

JANE: Sorry. I won't interrupt again.

CHESTER: (*Looks out.*) And not only was it an accident, but it was all my fault as well. I mean, if we're going to attach any blame here, I'll be the first to take my medicine. (*He looks at JANE.*) There's no medicine?

JANE: You're dead. Continue.

CHESTER: Doesn't hurt to ask. (*He looks out again.*) Anyway, it was an average day, no different than any other day, certainly not a day which gave any inkling of any sort of dangerous, or may I say, lethal activity, much less—

JANE: Can you skip over a bit? I have— (*She indicates offstage.*)

CHESTER: You said you weren't going to interrupt.

JANE: (*Sighs deeply.*) Sorry. (*She looks out.*) I should warn you here, these types figure since THEY have all the time in the world that you – (*CHESTER clears his throat.*) – you were saying?

CHESTER: (*Looks out again.*) ANYway, my wife, Ida – that's her name, Ida – she was named after an aunt. Or a hurricane; I really don't remember. You can't choose your name, right?

JANE: (*Looks off.*) Oh, geez!

CHESTER: So, the thing is, I was thinking about back when I was a kid, you know. I wanted to feel like that again. I guess you could say I was trying to relive my youth... (*He whips off his wig to look at it. JANE stares at it wide-eyed.*)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE ONE
“EVERYBODY LOVES HAL”

AT RISE:

Lights come up SR. There, sitting on an overstuffed chair and talking on her cell phone, sits IDA. Near her is another chair on which rests an electric guitar.

IDA: I'm telling you, he's trying to relive his youth! I've tried and tried to talk to him. One thing you can say about Chester – you can say anything to him, he never listens anyway. No, I DID tell him. *(Unseen by her, CHESTER enters the scene holding a box behind him. He stands behind her.)* Oh, he should be back home anytime. I have NO idea what he's up to now.

CHESTER: *(Whips out the box.)* TADA!

IDA: *(Jumps to her feet.)* AhhHHHHH! *(She sees CHESTER.)* CHESTER! *(She pats her chest.)* Don't DO that!

CHESTER: Oh, sorry, hon. I just wanted to surprise you.

IDA: Well, you DID! *(She hears a small voice, looks around and then discovers the cell phone still clutched in her hand.)* Oh! *(Into the phone.)* Hang on, Carol; Chester just tried to give me a cardiac arrest.

CHESTER: Call her back. Call her back!

IDA: Can I call you back? What? *(She looks at CHESTER.)* She wants to hear what the surprise is.

CHESTER: Oh, sure, why not. *(CHESTER reaches into the box and pulls out a wig.)*

IDA: You bought a small dog?

CHESTER: No, it's a wig!

IDA: You bought me a wig? Why, you dirty—!

CHESTER: It's not for you, it's for me! *(He drops the box and tries it on.)* Wait a minute.

IDA: *(Into the cell phone.)* Hey, Carol, remember when I said that Chester has flipped his wig? Well, he just bought one to flip. Right. Bye. *(She closes the cell phone and pockets it.)*

CHESTER: *(Modeling.)* Well? What do you think?

IDA: It looks like you're missing two other stooges.

CHESTER: Oh, don't joke about it. Don't I look like the guy you married?

IDA: No, but you DO look like one of the band.

CHESTER: That's just it! I got three other guys together down at the muffler shop, and we're going to form a band.

IDA: A band.

CHESTER: Yeah, we even have a name for ourselves. You know the "Rolling Stones"?

IDA: Sure.

CHESTER: We're the "Gall Stones."

IDA: Well, if you have three other guys your age who play like you and look like you, that WOULD take a lot of gall.

CHESTER: You'll get used to it. *(He picks up his guitar.)*

IDA: Oh no, you're not going to play that thing AGAIN?

CHESTER: Can't. Not until Hal gets here with the amplifier.

IDA: Oh no, is HE coming over NOW?

CHESTER: Now, be nice, dear. Everybody loves Hal. You shouldn't say stuff like that about him when I'm around.

IDA: You should hear what I say about him when you're NOT around.

CHESTER: *(Curiously.)* Hon, how could I hear you when I'm not around?

IDA: What's his excuse to mooch another free meal THIS time?

CHESTER: Well, you know how good he is with his hands?

IDA: No comment.

CHESTER: It seems that the amp I bought at the pawn shop still had a short in it. He's fixing it and bringing it right over. Isn't that wonderful?

IDA: Obviously there is some obscure meaning to the word 'wonderful' that I wasn't previously aware of.

HAL: *(Offstage.)* Anybody home?

IDA: Speak of the devil.

CHESTER: Ida, be nice.

HAL: *(HAL enters from SR. He is carrying an old amplifier.)* Hey, I got it all fixed, Chester. You'll blow them out of the park with this thing now.

CHESTER: Aw man, thanks.

HAL: Hello, Ida. Been awhile.

IDA: Yes, we haven't seen you since, oh, last night?

HAL: I was just kidding. *(To CHESTER.)* She has no sense of humor.
(CHESTER nods.)

IDA: I HEARD that. Of COURSE I have a sense of humor; I married Chester, didn't I?

HAL: *(To CHESTER.)* She's got a point.

CHESTER: Oh, hush. Let's check it out.

HAL: Right. *(He puts the amplifier down and looks around on the floor.)*

IDA: *(Eyeing HAL.)* You sure this thing will work?

CHESTER: Ida! *(To HAL.)* I got the extension cord over there. *(He indicates behind the chair.)*

HAL: Right. Go ahead and plug in your guitar. *(HAL finds the extension cord, picks up the end and moves back to the amplifier.)*

IDA: Are we covered for this on our home insurance?

CHESTER: Will you STOP riding Hal?

HAL: Hey, I'm not charging Chester anything for this, you know. If he'd have hired a licensed electrician—

IDA: I wouldn't be looking for a fallout shelter right now.

CHESTER: Ida! *(CHESTER plugs in the cord from his guitar to the amplifier.)*

HAL: *(To IDA.)* Why are you always ragging on me?

IDA: Call it a hobby

CHESTER: Well, this is MY hobby! *(He indicates his guitar. He looks at HAL.)* Ready?

HAL: Hold on, I got you a little present. *(He fishes around in his jacket pocket.)*

CHESTER: Oh, you didn't have to do that.

IDA: Yeah, we didn't give you anything...except about a thousand free meals.

HAL: There she goes again. *(He pulls out a guitar pick.)* Here it is.
(He gives it to CHESTER.)

CHESTER: Wow, a new pick. Hey, it's metal.

HAL: I know. The guy at the store said all the rock stars use them now.

IDA: Hon, be careful.

CHESTER: Good heavens, woman, I'm just playing a guitar; what could be so bad about that?

IDA: You playing the guitar. *(HAL is now holding the end of the extension cord in one hand and the plug to the amplifier in the other.)*

CHESTER: *(To HAL.)* See? She rags on me, too.

IDA: Yes, I'm an equal opportunity ragger.

CHESTER: *(To HAL.)* Ready? *(He holds the pick high as if about to strike the first cord.)*

HAL: Ready!

HAL plugs in the two cords as CHESTER brings his arm down. He strikes the first string with his pick. The string vibrates loudly at the same time as a loud buzz is heard. The LIGHTS in the room dim as CHESTER'S eyes widen. His whole body shakes as he keeps striking the same string up and down in rapid succession. HAL and IDA stare in amazement for a moment. HAL even drops the cords.

IDA: CHESTER!

HAL: Oh NO! *(He quickly regains his senses and picks up the cords again. He quickly pulls them apart. The buzzing and vibrating string stops as the LIGHTS become normal again. CHESTER stands there, his eyes still wildly fixed.)*

CHESTER: *(Croaking.)* Rock and roll! *(He crumples to the floor, still holding his guitar, now quite dead. IDA rushes to CHESTER and is about to grab him.)*

HAL: Don't! Wait! *(He rushes over to CHESTER and carefully, gradually touches him. He then takes CHESTER'S wrist and feels for a pulse.)*

IDA: *(After a slight pause.)* Is he...is HE?

HAL: *(Nods.)* 'Fraid so. He's gone. *(He rises and looks at IDA.)* The shock must've gone right through him.

IDA: All because he bought some cheap guitar and that amp!

HAL: From that pawn shop. *(He looks at her.)* I'm sure that'll all come out in the investigation. And they even told him it had a short in it. Hey, it was an accident, and that's what it'll look like to the authorities. *(He smiles at IDA.)* So we're in the clear. *(HAL moves to IDA.)*

IDA: It's a good thing that 'Harold' sounds so much like 'Carol' when I'm talking to you over the phone. Chester never caught on to that fact that I was really talking to you.

HAL: Uh huh. And we can just thank our lucky stars for one other thing. *(They hug each other.)* It worked. *(They kiss.)*

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO

AT RISE:

Lights come up SR. Another victim lies covered on the gurney. After a slight pause, JANE jumps up from behind, yelling.

JANE: *(Waving her hands.)* AHHHHHHH! *(She looks around.)* Get you that time? No? *(To herself.)* Maybe if I had a chainsaw? *(She moves in front of the gurney.)* I tell you, these days what with slasher movies and the news, it gets harder and harder to throw a real scare into folks. *(Unseen by JANE, FRANK sits up on the gurney and pulls the sheet off his face.)* Everyone gets so desensitized as kids that when something REALLY scary shows up, I mean scary that's REAL... What I mean to say is, they can't tell the reality from what they're seeing in the movies or—

FRANK: HEY?!

JANE: *(Startled.)* AaaHHHHH! *(She spins around and glares at FRANK.)* Don't DO that.

FRANK: What's going on? *(He looks around.)*

JANE: *(Weaving.)* Hang on, I'm still dizzy.

FRANK: What IS this place? No place I've ever been before.

JANE: No, people only come here once. *(She looks out.)* Except in slasher movies. Those disgusting, gory—

FRANK: Hey, this isn't in my job description.

JANE: Really? What do you do?

FRANK: I'm a waiter. Now, can you help me?

JANE: Sorry, this isn't my table. *(She giggles and looks out.)* I've been DYING to say that one. *(She looks at FRANK.)* And speaking of dying...

FRANK: Wait. *(He pulls the sheet off.)* It's...it's all coming back to me now.

JANE: What, did you eat some of your own cooking?

FRANK: You...you aren't kidding, are you? I'm...I'm DEAD!

JANE: *(Bored.)* Yes.

FRANK: Just like that? Passed on? Gave up the ghost? Cashed in my chips?

JANE: Yes, and those are the NICE ways to put it. The not so nice ways include—

FRANK: *(A hand up.)* I get it, I get it!

JANE: And we want all the details. *(She indicates out.)* That's why they're here.

FRANK: What kinda details?

JANE: First, where did you die?

FRANK: In prison. On death row.

JANE: Well, that explains a lot. What did you do?

FRANK: No, I wasn't supposed to be there! I was innocent!

JANE: That's what they all say.

FRANK: No, I mean I was there in the capacity of my job. I'm a waiter. I was serving a guy his last meal. HE was supposed to be here, not me.

JANE: Oh. Can you elucidate? *(FRANK stares at her.)* Can you tell us about it?

FRANK: Sure, why not. See, it all began when the guy, his name was Marvin, was looking over the menu...

JANE: And...?

FRANK: That's just it. He KEPT looking at the menu.

BLACKOUT.

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