

PARLOR GAMES

By Ed Tasca

(Both excerpts may be used royalty free for auditions.)

Audition 1 (for 3 m)

(In this mini-scene which takes place just outside the funeral parlor, LARRY is trying to convince his younger brother DONNY to “stay dead” and make a new life for himself. NATHAN, the funeral home director, has serious doubts about all of it.)

DONNY: They're going to figure this all out, you know. That it wasn't me.

LARRY: But you could be long gone. Nobody would know. You yourself didn't know. We didn't know. If you just disappeared...a mistake's a mistake.

(DONNY considers the proposal for a bit.)

LARRY: *(Cont'd.)* Nobody has to know anything. You start all over. Nobody chasing you for this or for that.

DONNY: Was there an obituary for me.

LARRY: Yes. Takes out a slip and reads. “Donny D'Silva, leaves behind Lena Caribenas D'Silva and daughter Susan D'Silva. He was a fine mechanic, and was a man of many athletic skills. His greatest dream was joining NASCAR. He was 45 years old on his passing. He will be missed.”

DONNY: I'm going to do that, the NASCAR...minor league...regionals. But I'm going to do it.

LARRY: Donny, you can do it. As Craig Radcliffe.

DONNY: Who's Craig Radcliffe?

LARRY: A guy who sounds like he knows racing.

DONNY: Craig Radcliffe?

LARRY: Good WASPY name. You make up some reference letters. I'll get my students to answer any calls from people. Think. Just think about it.

(LARRY grabs his BROTHER by the shoulders and walks him toward the door, SL.)

LARRY: *(Cont'd.)* Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Radcliffe. Let's see, you have a good credit rating. No outstanding debts. You have no record for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. You're not on parole. All your references check out. Sure, we can use you...we train in Puerto Rico... or Miami or even in Puerto Vallarta. Just sit down in one of our lounge chairs by the pool there and we'll see how we can work you in. Waiter, a Margarita for our new NASCAR mechanic.

DONNY: Knock it off.

LARRY: Pick a place you'd like to live.

DONNY: Knock it off.

LARRY: Go ahead.

DONNY: Knock it off. *(Pause.)* Rio.

LARRY: Yes, Rio. See. And now it's so easy. So easy. Flying down to Rio. New references. New person. You're reborn.

DONNY: No, no. I'm going in there and straighten everything out.

LARRY: Wait, look. Death is good. We've been taught from when we were kids. And you know why? It immediately raises one to greatness. Makes the ordinary extraordinary. In death everyone achieves greatness. Even somebody like you.

DONNY: *(Long pause.)* Thanks.

LARRY: Listen to me. You know what Gandhi said?

DONNY: No, I don't know what Gandhi said. And I don't care what Gandhi said. And if you tell me, I'm going to break your jaw.

(LARRY hustles DONNY to the statue of St. John.)

LARRY: Listen. People rethink you after you're dead. (*To statue.*) John here was a wild-eyed reformer who thought he had the answers to life and death. Herod got tired of listening, and had his head cut off. Now, he's a saint. People worship him.

DONNY: What does that have to do with me?

LARRY: He's an idol. He's perfection. Maybe because he's dead. He's even the patron saint of something.

DONNY: Headaches.

LARRY: Donny, be serious. This is a chance to turn your life around. A man who stood up for the things he believed in. A man who couldn't be pigeon-holed. A misunderstood man who died young, because he lived hard and he "did it his way." Your children and grandchildren will have your photo everywhere telling all your stories. Your escape from kidnappers!

DONNY: What escape from kidnappers?

LARRY: I'll make it up.

DONNY: What!

LARRY: And the day you brought down a drug lord.

DONNY: Larry, what the hell are you talking about?

LARRY: In two generations, you'll be a hero. This here car crash...you were avoiding a little deer rushing across the street. You will be totally rejuvenated, beatified. You'll be the superhero of Westhaven. But if you live...? You're just (*Disdainful.*) Donny!

DONNY: Larry, why are you all of a sudden taking an interest in my future! What's this all about?

LARRY: I'm thinking of all the Donny potential!

(*NATHAN reenters from SR.*)

NATHAN: What do you want me to tell these people?
Please. The Lord is watching us.

DONNY: Where was He when that guy crashed my car?!

LARRY: Donny?

(*DONNY ponders his options.*)

LARRY: *(Cont'd.)* Craig Radcliffe, the Formula One genius.

NATHAN: *(To LARRY.)* I believe the ethical thing to do is to have this man come forth and explain.

(DONNY still can't make up his mind.)

LARRY: I'll have to check the mortician's code in this state. If a body's unidentified, sometimes, it's recommended that you keep it on ice for a few days...before dispatching it.

NATHAN: But the police said...and you and his wife, you both said you wanted to have a quick service.

LARRY: Donny, this is the chance of a lifetime.

NATHAN: Blessed Jesus. Please gentlemen. If you're going to debate this may I ask that you vacate my establishment. Then you can take all the time you want.

LARRY: Donny. Remember the point Plato made about people who died?

DONNY: Remember the point Herod made about people who don't shut up?

LARRY: "No one knows whether death may not be the greatest good!" That was Plato.

DONNY: *(Waving fist.)* Yeah, how'd you like to find out firsthand! *(Pause.)* Why you doing this?

LARRY: I'm trying to help you. You can't give me any credit.

DONNY: You're always looking for credit. You think you know everything, because you answer television quiz show questions. But you're really just a gas-filled rectum. Why are you in such a hurry to get rid of me?

NATHAN: Mr. D'Silva, please!

Audition 2 (for 1 m, 2 w)

(In this mini-scene NATHAN, the funeral director, has quickly shoved Donny D'Silva, the "dead man," into the chapel, out of sight. A "mourner," ASSUNTA, has entered followed by her daughter, MARIA. They cross to Nathan as Donny disappears.)

ASSUNTA: St. John Funeral Parlor?

NATHAN: Yes, St. John the Baptist's Mortuary ma'am. How can I help you?

ASSUNTA: Are you Mr. Paltrow?

NATHAN: I'm Nathan Paltrow. I am the director here.

ASSUNTA: The police told us we should talk to you.

(MARIA starts sobbing. THEY regard her piously.)

ASSUNTA: *(Cont'd.)* I'm Assunta Benitez. You cremated my brother.

(MARIA'S sobbing spikes at the statement.)

NATHAN: We did provide final services for someone today, yes. On the authority of the family.

ASSUNTA: Well, it was the wrong someone, and the wrong family, AND it was the wrong final services.

NATHAN: Mrs. Benitez, I was acting on the authority—

ASSUNTA: *(Exaggerated.)* This was a double tragedy. No, a triple tragedy! I lose a brother, a great and wonderful man, the breadwinner in our family. And then he's...he's sent off to his Maker dressed in Donald D'Silva's shabby clothes!

NATHAN: What?

ASSUNTA: You heard me, Mr. Paltrow! Have you ever met D'Silva? The man's a slob.

NATHAN: But Mrs. Benitez, we're a mortuary. All we do is follow instructions. I'm so sorry for your loss. There are no words—

ASSUNTA: No, there are no words, so shut up! Now... there's the third tragedy! The third indignity? Are you ready, Mr. Paltrow? Rodrigo's cremated!

NATHAN: I'm sorry, Mrs. Benitez. But the D'Silvas, they made the decision—

ASSUNTA: But it wasn't Donald D'Silva. It was my dear brother, Rodrigo. So what are we going to do about this?

NATHAN: Well, I think we should begin by taking a few moments to grieve for your brother.

ASSUNTA: We did that. What else you got?

NATHAN: Well, I have nothing but the most profound sympathy for your loss.

ASSUNTA: Of course you do. Of course you do.

(MARIA lets out a sob.)

ASSUNTA: *(Cont'd. Referring to MARIA.)* You see. You see what's happening. You know what this means?

NATHAN: She's still grieving.

ASSUNTA: We're suing.

NATHAN: What? Suing! Why?

ASSUNTA: You cremated my brother.

NATHAN: But, Mrs. Benitez, we had the body for three days. The only people who claimed it were the D'Silvas.

ASSUNTA: Well, it was a Benitez. And we're suing.

(MARIA sobs again.)

NATHAN: Why?

ASSUNTA: We're strict Catholics, and we don't believe in cremation.

NATHAN: What?

ASSUNTA: Mental suffering. Big time.

(MARIA sobs again.)

ASSUNTA: *(Cont'd.)* You see.

NATHAN: Mrs. Benitez, really?

ASSUNTA: You cremated a loved one. Turned him into ashes.

(MARIA sobs louder.)

NATHAN: Maria, can I get you a tissue?

ASSUNTA: Mr. Paltrow, nothing short of the blessed Shroud of Turin could help Maria right now.

NATHAN: Mrs. Benitez, the police said the car was a customized Mustang belonging to Donald D'Silva. There's no mistake about that. So, naturally—

ASSUNTA: There are no naturalys here. Rodrigo worked for D'Silva and I'm sure he was just...borrowing the car, which was in terrible condition. That's another lawsuit, I suspect!

NATHAN: Lawsuit? But your brother stole the car!

ASSUNTA: Borrowed it. Stole it. Whatever. A car should be in running order for whoever's driving it!

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