

The Changing Table

A One-Act Play

by

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SETTING:

We see a table partially illuminated in a windowless, stuffy, room. On the table a white sheet fully covers a dead body. Off to the side is a cabinet, with drawers, upon which are strewn various medical instruments and pieces of tubing. In the corner stands a coat rack bearing a white smock. A chair is placed near the cabinet.

AT RISE:

It is eleven o'clock p.m. A sound is heard off. The door squeaks open and a hand flicks on the lights. FRENCHY enters, carrying his lunch and a half-empty fifth of cheap scotch. He takes off his windbreaker, hanging it on the coat rack, and puts on the smock. Not bothering to button it, he strolls over, drops his lunch on the cabinet, and picks up a clipboard. Opening the bottle of scotch, he quickly scans the folder while taking a healthy draught from the bottle. He sets the bottle down and tosses the clipboard on the body, where it lands with a thump. Eventually FRENCHY goes to the foot of the body, lifts the sheet roughly, and reads the tag tied to the toe.

FRENCHY

Ah! Mr. Gates. You don't mind if I call you Tim?

(Without waiting for a reply, he checks the tag on the toe and takes the clipboard in hand. FRENCHY saunters to the head of the body, pulls the sheet down to about the mid-section, revealing TIM. FRENCHY compares a picture to TIM's face)

At least you've got hair. More than some who pass through here. The neck . . .

(Traces the wounds lightly with his fingers)

Tic-tac-toe anyone? Would you consider wearing a turtleneck?

TIM

(With a quiet candor, TIM speaks, only able to move his mouth and blink at this point)

Would you consider stuffing one up your ass?

FRENCHY

I asked first.

TIM

I answered first.

FRENCHY

(Chuckling darkly and motioning)

Go ahead. Name your game. You'll lose in the end.

TIM
How rare! A little wit from the living . . .

FRENCHY
(Gestures like a referee)
Foul! A little shit from the dead.
(Mimics a child)
The dead's a little shit!

TIM
(Picking up the childish tone)
My shit's better than yours.

FRENCHY
(Resumes his normal tone)
Autopsy. The drama unfolds. Be there, front row.

TIM
Oh goody! We'll see what's come of—or in—modern man.

FRENCHY
Man? Don't flatter yourself.

TIM
The word's out?

FRENCHY
Oh yes. The word's out, the horse is out, the jury's out, school's out—and—
(Makes an umpire gesture)
You're out. Without a doubt.

TIM
Those silk panties worked after all.

FRENCHY
Don't forget the jar of vaseline on your nightstand.

TIM
Chapped lips.
(Smacks his lips together)

FRENCHY
And the Playgirl pin-ups plastered on your bedroom ceiling.

TIM
Have to plug holes somehow.

FRENCHY
Holes in the ceiling?

TIM

A hole's a hole. I collected them. Kept them corked whenever I could.

FRENCHY

And no one knew.

TIM

Some guys knew Mr. Corky well. Asked for him by name.

FRENCHY

Of course. It takes two to, well . . .

TIM

Plug holes? No. You plug your own. Ole' Corky couldn't hold a candle to you.

FRENCHY

God, you're disgusting.

TIM

Name an orifice! Any orifice will do. Your mouth? You plug it with a scotch bottle.

(FRENCHY breaks away, putting his hands over his ears)

Now you're plugging your ears.

FRENCHY

Enough! Enough!

TIM

Now you're standing with your finger up your asshole because you don't know how to shut me up!

FRENCHY

Go to hell!

(FRENCHY steps back, realizing what he's said. TIM is silent and unmoving)

I—I didn't mean that.

(TIM still does not move or respond)

Oh God. Mr. Gates? Mr. Gates?

TIM

(Very loud)

What?

FRENCHY

(Jumps, then recovers quickly)

Maybe I did mean it.

TIM

Hell's a serious word. I wouldn't use it lightly.

FRENCHY

(After a beat, FRENCHY goes for the bottle again, and takes a swig)
Got to get busy. Truce: You don't chide me, I won't run you through the vegomatic.
Agreed?

TIM

(In feigned horror to the audience)
No! Not the vegomatic!

FRENCHY

Today's my one day of the year to be nice. I don't like it, but that's the way it goes.
Please! Give me a reason to chip chop your ham. I beg you!

TIM

As if the culmination of my greatest earthly desire is to lay on a slab and talk to some
fat old man while he rips out my intestines.

FRENCHY

Thought you might want to spill your guts.

TIM

(Groaning)
I accept on one condition—

FRENCHY

What?

TIM

Let me "animate."
(FRENCHY looks confused)
Okay. "Animate" means move. I want to move. Mother may I?

FRENCHY

I give a dead man a few precious moments of speech, and he farts them away whining
like a child.

TIM

Wouldn't you like the pleasure of watching this hundred and forty two pounds of
svelte flesh ripple on command?

FRENCHY

My pleasure lies in watching it deteriorate into a mass of mush.

TIM

But you agree -- no fat on the ole' rump roast?
(FRENCHY shrugs)
So you agree?

What?
FRENCHY

That I'm svelte?
TIM

You're dead. "Svelte" is for the living.
FRENCHY

Not if you let me animate.
TIM

Say I agree. What'll you do?
FRENCHY

The usual. Walk around, stretch, scratch my ass.
TIM

Who's stopping you?
FRENCHY

I'm dead, dummy! Dead people don't move.
TIM

Why aren't you content doing what dead people do, or not doing what dead people don't do.
FRENCHY
(Stops, perhaps looking at the audience)

Is that right?
TIM

Truce?
FRENCHY

Guess if I don't agree, you'll come back and haunt me; put me in panties while I'm asleep.
TIM

And get one Herculean hernia. What do you say? Truce?
FRENCHY

Okay.
(Straightens himself to increase the suspense, like a magician)

Move.