

Last Respects

A Comedy in One Act

By D. Richard Tucker

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROY

Sincere, but emotional, a bit of a boor

CHUCK

The leader - solid, gruff, but not overly bright

LES

Kind, but high strung

EDDIE

The cynic

Pastor MEEKS

SETTING

Sc i Pastor Meeks' office (represented by chairs and a desk)

Sc ii Local Tavern (represented by table and chairs)

Sc iii Church, during funeral service (represented by pulpit and chairs)

TIME

The present.

LAST RESPECTS

Scene 1

ROY, LES, CHUCK, and EDDIE are sitting in four chairs in Pastor MEEKS office. There is a long uncomfortable pause. ROY checks his watch.

ROY

He's late.

CHUCK

So what? He's a minister. He doesn't need to be punctual.

ROY

I don't like it when people are late.

LES

I don't think it's very respectful to complain.

ROY

I think that when you ask somebody for an appointment, you should keep it.

EDDIE

He hasn't broken the appointment – he's just late.

ROY

I don't like that.

LES

(long uncomfortable pause)

I wish I knew why we're here.

(pause)

It's been a long time since I've been in a church.

ROY

Not me. I was in a church two years ago – my sister Alison – she got married. In a church.

LES

I like weddings.

ROY

Yeah, I guess I do, too. I just get kind of caught up in the whole thing, though. I mean, you guys may think I'm solid as a rock, but, I tell ya, when I get around something sentimental, I tear up like a woman at a baby shower.

EDDIE

I wish he'd hurry – I need to mow the lawn before it gets dark.

LES

Me, too.

ROY

You need to mow your lawn?

LES

No, I never mow the lawn. I pay the neighbor kid to mow the lawn. My allergies, you know, I sneeze and my eyes get all puffy. I can't mow the lawn.

ROY

Then why did you say you need to mow your lawn?

LES

I didn't say I needed to mow the lawn. I said "Me, too," meaning that I wish Pastor Meeks would hurry up. I don't mow the lawn – you know that.

ROY

Which is why I asked. What's your hurry?

LES

I want to watch the news. It's almost time for the news and I want to watch it. I always watch the news. That's what I do every night - I watch the news.

EDDIE

(pause)

Does anybody know why we're here?

CHUCK

Probably because of Frank.

EDDIE

That much I figured.

LES

What about Frank?

CHUCK

The minister probably wants to talk to us about Frank.

ROY

Why, what would he want from us?

CHUCK

I don't know. We'll find out when he gets here.

ROY

(pause)

Do you think they suspect us?

EDDIE

Of what?

ROY

You know - Frank.

EDDIE

What about him?

ROY

You know - he's dead.

CHUCK

So?

ROY

Maybe they think we did it.

EDDIE

Why would they think that?

ROY

That's how it is on TV. The murderer is usually a close friend of the victim.

CHUCK

Why would we kill Frank?

ROY

I don't know.

ROY sits behind the Pastor's desk and begins to inspect the items on the desk.

LES

Roy is right. Many times the person who did it is actually the least likely person, so if you look for the least likely person, then you will find the killer and we are the least likely people – we're his friends. We've known him since third grade. One of us, or all of us, could be the killer.

ROY

That's what I mean. Maybe Pastor Meeks is going to question us to find out which one of us did it.

CHUCK

Ministers don't interrogate suspects, do they? Don't the police do that?

LES

That's a good point.

ROY

Maybe he's helping the police. We would be less suspicious being questioned by a minister. Maybe we'd open up and reveal something that the police wouldn't be able to get out of us.

LES

That's true. We might let down our guards with a minister. I wouldn't expect that.

(pause)

So which one of you guys did it?

ROY

How do we know it's not you?

LES

Because I didn't do it.

EDDIE

You idiot, Frank died of a heart attack. At a family reunion.

CHUCK

Yeah, we didn't kill him.

LES

(pause)

I've never been interrogated by a priest before.

ROY is now going through the desk drawers.

CHUCK

He's not a priest. He's a minister.

LES

What's the difference?

CHUCK

I don't know. He's just not a priest. I think ministers are allowed to do stuff that priests aren't.

LES

Like help the police?

EDDIE

Would you cut that out?

LES

(long pause)

He has a nice office.

ROY

Yes, very nice.

LES

I like his view. Those trees are rather pretty.

ROY

Yeah, they should be in bloom soon.

LES

Oh, too bad. That would make my allergies act up.

ROY

(pause)

Are you sure we're not murder suspects?

EDDIE

If he doesn't get here soon, I'm going to murder you.

LES

You need to deal with your anger in a less destructive way.

Enter Pastor MEEKS.

MEEKS

Gentlemen, thank you for coming. I'm sorry to keep you waiting.

(alarmed)
We didn't do it!

LES

Do what?

MEEKS

Nothing. He's just a little nervous, Father.

CHUCK

Not Father. You can just call me "Pastor."

MEEKS

Sorry, Pastor. We're just not sure why we're here.

EDDIE

Of course. Well, you know me - I'm Pastor Meeks.

MEEKS

All shake hands during the next few lines of greetings.

MEEKS (cont'd)

You must be Roy..... Lester.

LES

Les.

MEEKS

Charles.

LES

He's Chuck.

MEEKS

And Edmund.

LES

We call him "Eddie."

MEEKS

Thank you. I need to talk to you about Frank Ferguson.

ROY

I knew it!

MEEKS

Knew what?

CHUCK

He's just a little nervous, Pastor.

MEEKS

Well, no need to be. Frank's family asked me to address you. I know this is a trying time for you and that you are all probably overwhelmed by your grief for Frank and taken back by his sudden passing. But in spite of this, I was hoping I could rely on you, his friends, to remove some of the heavy burden from his family. As you know, Frank's funeral will be held on Saturday and it's customary for someone close to the deceased to deliver a eulogy. The family has asked me to ask you four, if you would be willing.

CHUCK

Sure, we can do that.

LES

We can?

CHUCK

Yeah, no problem.

MEEKS

Well, that's great.

CHUCK

Sure. How big is it? Can the four of us lift it? I mean, I've got pick-up, but we need to know if we should bring a dolly.

MEEKS

For what?

CHUCK

That yule thing.

MEEKS

The eulogy?

CHUCK

Yeah. Where do you need it delivered?

EDDIE

(under his breath)

Sometimes I wonder about you.

MEEKS

Perhaps I should explain.

MEEKS removes flask from jacket pocket and takes a drink.

ROY

Let me help, Father. A eulogy is a speech – delivered at the funeral service, which speaks of the many memories we have of the deceased. Eulogies have long been a part of our culture, in fact, there are records quoting Pericles during the Peloponnesian War, giving a eulogy for dead Athenians.

All look at ROY in amazement.

ROY (cont'd)

(pause)

There was this thing on the Learning Channel last week.

MEEKS

Thank you, Roy.

CHUCK

You want us to give a speech?

MEEKS

Yes.

EDDIE

I don't think so.

LES

I get cotton mouth when I talk in front of a group.

CHUCK

Sure, we can do it.

LES

What?

ROY

We can?

CHUCK

Sure, it's not that big a deal. All we have to do is stand up there and read this speech. How hard can that be, huh? After all, Frank was our friend. You only die once, you know.

MEEKS

That's very kind of you. I'm sure Frank's family will be very pleased.

CHUCK

No problem.

LES

I can't read a speech – I get cotton mouth.

ROY

I'm not so sure about this–

CHUCK

Look, we'll do it. If you guys are too chicken, I'll get up there and read it myself.

MEEKS

That's very thoughtful of you.

CHUCK

Just give me the speech – I'll read it.

MEEKS

Well, actually it's necessary to write the speech, as well.

(takes a drink)

I was hoping that you would be able to collaborate and write something memorable for the occasion.

EDDIE

Oh, it would be really memorable.

CHUCK

We have to write it, too?

MEEKS

Yes, generally that's how it's done.

CHUCK

It's not like some kind of Bible verse that we can read?

MEEKS

Well, you're welcome to use scripture if you choose, but it should be personalized to describe Frank.

LES

Look, Your Holiness –

MEEKS

Pastor.

LES

Sorry. Look, Pastor Holiness, we could never do something like this.

MEEKS

Don't you gentlemen think you could come up with something? I mean.. everyone attending the service will be supporting you one hundred percent. You needn't worry about delivering a perfect speech. Just be yourselves – that's what's important.

EDDIE

No, Pastor, you don't understand. It's not that we are afraid to stand up there and give a speech –

LES

It is for me. I get cotton mouth.

EDDIE

But we can't write one.

MEEKS

Why not?

CHUCK

Well, what is this speech supposed to say?

MEEKS

A eulogy makes the service it more personal and meaningful. Your memories of Frank are very important, and the eulogy will share them with everyone.

ROY

But what do we say?

MEEKS

A eulogy is actually quite simple. It should convey the memories and feelings of those giving the eulogy. It should be written from the heart.

EDDIE

But what are we supposed to say?

MEEKS

Talk about Frank. What he meant to you - his philosophy of life, his accomplishments, what the people who loved him really felt about him.

Then that answers that question. EDDIE

Oh? Good. MEEKS

Yeah, we can't do it. CHUCK

Why not? MEEKS

Because Frank was a prick. EDDIE

I beg your pardon. MEEKS

He said "Frank was an prick." ROY

um... Thank you for clarifying. MEEKS

MEEKS takes a drink.

MEEKS (cont'd)

I don't think you realize how much this would mean to the family. After all Charles, you are a part of the family.

Yeah. CHUCK

That's right. Sheila was Frank's sister. I'd forgotten that. ROY

Yeah. CHUCK

The family thought it might be nice if all of you would work together to produce this eulogy – paying your last respects to Frank. MEEKS

But what would we write? He was such a....a ROY

EDDIE

Prick?

MEEKS

Sometimes it's best to omit those things that may not sound favorable in public. In most cases, there will be a lot of positive things to say about the deceased –

LES

Not this time.

MEEKS

But, occasionally, someone may have more negative qualities than positive characteristics. If that is the case, remember, you needn't say everything. Just be honest about the positive qualities.

EDDIE

Then you'd have a very short speech.

MEEKS

Gentlemen, please. Think of how much this will mean to the family. Frank was your friend. Can't you do this one last thing for him?

CHUCK

I guess we're stuck. What else can we do? We've gotta give a speech.

EDDIE

Well, you can, but I'm not.

CHUCK

C'mon, Eddie. Don't bail on us.

EDDIE

No.

CHUCK

Well, how about if you just go with us, okay? Les and Roy can help me write it.

ROY

What would we say? "Frank was a bastard."

LES

Roy's right. Frank was a scumbag. A big scumbag. I'd say Frank was the biggest scumbag I'd ever met.

ROY

Maybe we shouldn't talk like this. He's dead now.

EDDIE

Thank God.

ROY

It's very disrespectful to speak of the deceased like that.

EDDIE

Even a dead prick?

ROY

Well..... I don't know.

CHUCK

We'll think of something.

LES

I can recite a poem.

MEEKS

That would be a nice start.

CHUCK

Yeah, Les, you can read a poem.

MEEKS

Remember, this is a chance for you to contribute to the service – to give Frank's friends and family a pleasant memory of his passing.

EDDIE

Probably their only pleasant memory.

CHUCK

Just the same Pastor, why didn't the family want to give the eulogy?

MEEKS

Well, often it seems that the family is grieving and that sharing such emotional memories is overwhelming for them.

EDDIE

So, Frank's dad and brothers were too choked up to do this?

MEEKS

No, I think they were concerned that they couldn't think of anything appropriate to say. According to the senior Mr. Ferguson, Frank was a real asshole.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights up on the local tavern. CHUCK, EDDIE, and ROY are sitting at a table drinking beer and writing the eulogy.

EDDIE

Guys, we're gonna have to wrap this up soon. I need to get home.

ROY

But we're not finished.

EDDIE

I can't stay too much longer.

ROY

What do you care? You're not even going to say anything.

EDDIE

I promised I'd help didn't I?

CHUCK

Ladies, quit bickering.

EDDIE

We've been working on this for two hours. Okay?

ROY

Fine. What do we have written so far?

CHUCK

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered today to bid farewell to our good friend Frank Ferguson."

ROY

That's a pretty good start. Go on.

CHUCK

That's it.

ROY

That's all we have?

EDDIE

We might as well pack it in.

ROY

Didn't we have that little allegory? About the fluffy cotton candy clouds?

EDDIE

That was stupid.

ROY

It was not. It was an allegory. About life after death.

EDDIE

It was stupid.

ROY

No, it wasn't!

CHUCK

Yes, it was. It made no sense whatsoever.

ROY

Well, at least it was something.

EDDIE

Something stupid.

ROY

Did I tell you my other story?

EDDIE

I'm afraid to ask –

CHUCK

What now, Roy?

ROY

This is an ancient fable that talks about grieving.

CHUCK

That might be good.

EDDIE

Good for a laugh.

ROY

Long ago, there was a big snake that lived in the jungle near a village. It had a really big appetite. Mostly it ate other animals, but its favorite food was people, especially babies. One man, the town musician, decided to do something about it. He packed up a blanket and a pocketknife and went to the jungle, playing his flute.

EDDIE

Okay, this is stupid, too.

ROY

Quickly the snake swallowed him whole. Down in the belly of the snake, the flute player took out his knife, and he cut away the snake's belly, a bit at a time. The snake reacted to this pain, but the flute player continued to cut and eat a bit of the snake's flesh whenever he was hungry.

EDDIE

(to CHUCK)

I warned you.

ROY

This went on a long time, until finally the flute player came to the snake's heart, and when he cut it, the snake rolled over dead. That what grief is like. Going into grief may be like being eaten by a snake.

EDDIE

I like the cotton candy thing better.

ROY

I'm not finished. Grief separates us from our friends and our world is completely changed, going from life as we know it into the belly of a snake. Sometimes the grief takes full control of your life-

CHUCK

Okay, now you're finished. This is ridiculous.

ROY

But there's more.

EDDIE

No there isn't. It's officially over.

ROY

You guys have no culture whatsoever.

[For a full copy of the script, contact dave@drichardtucker.com](mailto:dave@drichardtucker.com)