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Dead and Buried

By

JAMES MCLINDON

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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JAMES MCLINDON

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(DEAD AND BURIED)

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Dead and Buried premiered at the Detroit Repertory Theatre on March 29, 2012.

Cast:

Perdue Lulu Dahl
Bid..... Charlotte Leisinger
Robbie Benjamin J. Williams

Production Staff:

Stage Manager Hank Bennett
Set Designer Harry Wetzel
Lighting Designer Thomas Schraeder
Costume Designer..... Judy Dery
Sound Designer..... Burr Huntington
Lighting Technician Cornell Markham
Gallery Artist..... Betty Brownlee

Dead and Buried

CHARACTERS

PERDUE (w): 18 years old.

BID (w): A middle-aged cemetery supervisor.

ROBBIE (m): 19-year-old cemetery worker.

SETTING

A New England cemetery, including a small office and some graves. A realistic set is fine, but not required; much of the setting can be suggested rather than fully depicted. A protruding tree branch with autumn leaves that becomes increasingly bare as the play progresses nicely indicates the season and the passage of time, while conveying a strong sense of place. The backhoe can be suggested by as little as simple sound design and a chair up on cubes or a riser. A desk, two chairs and some large books probably suffice for the office.

SCENE 2

(The cemetery, the next day. A grave lies open. Beside it is a mound of dirt covered with a tarp. A graveside service is being concluded, a priest officiating just offstage. BID stands with her head bowed, hands clasped. She is a plain, strong, middle-aged woman dressed in work clothes. PER enters tentatively behind BID and watches. We hear the murmur of the priest and then BID's muttered responses.)

PRIEST *(off)*. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.

BID. And let perpetual light shine upon them.

PRIEST *(off)*. May they rest in peace.

BID. Amen.

(PER pulls out the crumpled paper she stuffed in her pocket in the last scene as the priest continues. The noise attracts BID's attention and she turns her head slightly. PER notices BID's movement and awkwardly holds the paper behind her back, bowing her head.)

PRIEST *(off)*. And may their souls and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

BID. Amen.

(A pause. BID raises her head and turns toward PER. As is her habit, BID blurts out what she has to say as if she just wants to get it out and stop talking as quickly as possible. BID's speech

is thus generally clipped, so much so that she drops many words. [These unspoken words and word fragments appear in parentheses, usually at the beginning of her sentences, to clarify her meaning, but should not be spoken.]

BID. Sorry for your loss. *(Pause.)* Wanna throw some dirt in?

PER. Oh, no. Thanks.

BID. 'Kay.

PER. I mean, it wasn't a loss for me.

BID. Oh. *(Pause.)* Well, however you felt about him, I'm sorry—

PER. I didn't feel anything about him.

BID. (It')s none of my business.

PER. I mean, I didn't know him. I just stopped because ... there was no one else here. Why is no one here?

BID. Transient. Town paid cuz the body wasn't claimed. *(Pause.)* (There's) nothing sadder than a funeral without mourners.

PER. Well, except for you.

BID. I'm sadder than a funeral without mourners—?

PER. Oh, God, no, no, I just meant it wasn't a funeral without mourners because you're a mourner, and— *(Looking at the paper.)* You know, I just came about the job they posted. Do you know who's in charge here?

BID. Yup. *(Pause.)* Me.

PER *(under her breath)*. Shit.

BID. Mouth. First rule is, we always show respect.

PER. Right, sure, I'm sorry.

BID. I'm Bid, cemetery supervisor. You fill out an application?

PER. Yeah.

(PER tries to smooth the paper out, then hands it to BID.)

BID. (Did you) throw it away and change your mind?

PER. Um, no, no, it just sort of—

BID. This crumpled mess indicative of your usual work product?

PER. No.

BID. Uh-huh.

(BID glances at it, then circles PER, examining her.)

BID. How old?

PER. Eighteen.

BID. You can drive?

PER. Yup.

BID. Cuz for the Cemetery Worker One job, you gotta drive. Show me your license.

(PER produces one.)

BID *(cont'd)*. This gonna come back fake when I have Sgt. Kenny run it?

PER. No.

BID. Says you live in Boston.

PER. I used to, I just moved out here—

BID. Your name's really Perdue?

PER. Yeah.

BID. Not Notre Dame? *(Pause.)* Joke.

PER. Yeah, good one. Usually I get chicken jokes.

BID. (What) kinda name is Perdue anyway?

PER. A stupid one. My oldest brother had just gotten into college, Purdue, and, my folks were kinda proud of that.

BID. (It) could be worse, I s'pose.

PER. How?

BID. (He) coulda gotten into the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (*Pause.*) Joke. (You) going to one of the colleges out here? Cuz this job's fulltime.

PER. No, I know.

BID. (Are) you a dropout? Semester off to find yourself?

PER. No. I said, I just moved here. To see my mother.

BID. Really.

PER. Yeah.

BID. You ever go to funerals for fun?

PER. Excuse me?

BID. Do you find cemeteries entertaining?

PER. No—

BID. Don't crap me now. (There's) only one reason I can think of (that) an 18-year-old girl wants to work in a cemetery.

PER. Yeah, she needs a job—

BID. She's a goth.

PER. Wha—? No, I'm not—

BID. I think you might be a goth.

PER. Well, I'm not.

BID. You're pretty pale.

PER. So are you. It's October.

BID. I'm done with goths, done with vampire wannabes, done with runaways with fake IDs who hang out with the street kids downtown. You go tell your depressed little friends, if they break into my office again, I'm coming after 'em.

PER. I'm not a goth, OK?

BID. Stick out your tongue. C'mon now.

(After a pause, PER does. BID examines it, then PER's eyebrows and her ears.)

PER. Ut are oo 'ooking 'or?

BID. Piercings. Holes.

PER *(tongue still out)*. Ah 'ont 'ave any 'oles.

BID. How 'bout tats?

(BID begins to pull up PER's sleeve. PER pulls away.)

PER. Get off me!

BID. You got any studs or ink I can't see?

PER. No!

BID *(pause)*. OK. So, maybe you're not a goth.

PER. No shit, I'm not.

BID. Mouth. Look, the kid you want to replace, Baudelaire—

PER. Baudelaire?

BID. Real name was Scott, but he'd only answer to Baudelaire.

(He) was awful pale and wore more mascara than seemed right, but I thought, hey, rock band, whatever. (Pause.)

Week after he started, police catch him in here at 3:00 a.m.

Kid'd snuck in with all his goth friends, (they) were having a black mass slash orgy slash Edgar Allan Poe festival down by the crypts. (Pause.) No. Goths.

PER. Yeah, got it.

BID. No clue what death really is. (If) I ever catch another one messing up my cemetery, I will show him some death.

PER. Okaaay.

(A pause.)

BID. That was mostly for effect. (I'm) a little passionate about this.

PER. Yeah, no shi—Yeah.

BID. (It's a) tough job. Working outdoors around here.

PER. Uh-huh.

BID. Don't "uh-huh" me, you have no idea. Hottest place in the summer, coldest place in the winter. (In a) couple months, (your) hands'll be so frozen (you) can't feel the pick handle. Dangerous, too.

PER. Dangerous?

BID. Hundred things can kill you. Fall into an open grave, dig up a buried power line, get crushed by a monument tipping over, poisoned by lawn chemicals—

PER. Like, how many people have died here?

BID (*surveying the cemetery*). Well, all of 'em. (*Pause.*) Joke. (*Pause.*) No one gets my jokes. OK, no worker has died, but we do some nasty stuff. Disinterments sometimes. (Are) you OK with that?

PER. You mean, digging the bodies up?

BID. Yup. No job for girly-girls.

PER. Do I look like a girly-girl?

BID (*pause*). No.

PER. Why would you dig someone up?

BID. Money. People like a casket for the funeral. Then they dig it up and do a cremation after. Saves money cuz you can put two urns in a plot, 'steada the one casket. World is changing. Casket-driven to urn-driven market in one generation. (*Pause.*) I hate Boomers.

PER. What's so bad about disinterments? I mean, they're dead, right?

BID. Second rule here is, we act like they're alive and watching everything we do. Respect. You disturb the dead, (the) dead get you back. Disinterment disturbs 'em a lot.

PRE. You mean like ghosts?

BID. I mean, bodies rot. Rot smells.

PER. I thought with embalming and all, they last forever—

BID. Nothing lasts forever. Well-embalmed body in a waterproof casket inside a concrete vault, (that'll) last you a few years anyway, but nothing lasts forever. (You can) buy all the formaldehyde, titanium caskets and perpetual care plots you want, but when you die, you rot. *(Pause.)* Don't suppose you're still interested.

PER. No, no, I am.

BID. Why?

PER. Who else is hiring. I need a job.

BID *(pause)*. I like you. Most people'd lie to me, tell me they always wanted to work in a cemetery. *(Pause.)* Are you orderly?

PER. Am I ... ? What?

BID. Orderly.

PER. I guess.

BID. Don't guess, you have to know. What a cemetery does, (is) it imposes order on disorder. This was once twenty acres of hills, woods and creek. They cut down the trees, leveled the hills, buried the creek, made it a nice open grid. I like that. Death's all about order, all about rows. We line up the grieving in rows. In the pews of the church, in their cars, next to the grave. We line up the dead in rows, too. Isn't that great?

(PER stares at BID for a few moments.)

PER. Yeah, no, absolutely.

BID. You'll see. Know why we do that?

PER. Cuz we're all a little OCD at heart? *(Pause.)* Joke.

BID. Death's (the) most disordered part of life, (the) worst possible calamity. (It) scares the crap out of us. So we line it up, square it off, make it neat, and control it. *(Pause.)* Can you do that?

PER. Control death? No.

BID. (Then) how 'bout heavy physical labor?

PER. I can do that.

BID. (You're) kinda small.

PER. I can do whatever needs doing.

(BID hands her a shovel and pulls the tarp off the dirt.)

BID. Show me. We fill in around the sides of the vault by hand, then the loader plows in the rest.

(PER takes a blade full of dirt and tosses it into the grave. A hollow thud. She pauses.)

BID. First one's the hardest. You get used to the sound. *(Pause.)* C'mon, I'll give you a hand.

PER. I don't need any help.

(PER begins to shovel quickly, throwing the dirt in. BID nods.)

BID. All right, then.

(The sound of a backhoe approaching is heard. The engine is cut and ROBBIE enters. He is around twenty, as good-natured as he is insecure.)

ROB. You got the sides filled in yet?

BID. Perdue's doing it.

(ROB notices PER. He affects a suave voice.)

ROB. Hello.

PER. Hey.

ROB. Wait. Did you just hire—?

(BID nods. ROB goes up to BID and whispers.)

ROB *(cont'd)*. You hired a girl?

BID. (Is) that a problem?

ROB. Thank you!

BID. Hey!

ROB. No, no, I know.

BID. Better know!

ROB. No, I totally know.

BID. This is a workplace, not a bar, Robbie.

PER. What's going on?

ROB. You. You are totally going on—

BID. Robbie, lie down in front of the backhoe.

ROB. Why?

BID *(deadpan)*. I need to go over something with you.

ROB. What?

(PER laughs.)

PER. Good thing you told me you're funny, Bid.

BID. Perdue, this is Robbie. Robbie, Perdue.

ROB. Perdue. Heiress to the chicken fortune, by any chance?

PER *(to BID)*. See. Chicken jokes.

BID. Robbie's on probation, so I wouldn't waste a lot of time getting to know him.

ROB. I'm not on—What, cuz of what I just said? It was a joke!

BID. (That's) why it's only probation. Perdue don't need you coming on to her, her first day.

ROB (*under his breath*). I wasn't.

PER (*under her breath*). You so were.

BID. Enough. Let's do some work, people.

PER. Please.

BID. Perdue needs to know how we lay out graves. (We've) only got two more left in this row and winter's coming.

ROB. I can show her, Bid. Why don't you go get all that paperwork done you've been moaning about.

(ROB takes PER by the shoulders and turns her sideways towards the new grave.)

ROB (*cont'd*). OK, so the first thing you do—

(PER knocks his hands away.)

PER. Don't touch me. (*Pause.*) Please.

(A pause.)

BID. I'll show her. Face like you were before, look between my hands.

(BID stands behind PER and extends her arms past PER's head, being careful not to touch her. PER is uncomfortable, but looks between BID's hands.)

BID (*cont'd*). See how the headstones line up?

PER (*breaking away*). Yeah, got it.

BID (*pause*). Cemeteries're like any real estate. Most efficient use is a grid. Precision is critical.

ROB. Know how far apart two graves lie?

PER. I don't know ... six feet.

ROB. 4.5 inches! Isn't that amazing? If you're digging a grave and get off the perpendicular even a little, bang! You hit the vault next door.

BID. And if you're really bad, you hit the one on the other side, too.

ROB. That was my first time! Have I hit one since?

BID. Cuz you listened to me. Measure twice, dig once. Robbie, lay out two more, teach her how it's done.

ROB. Fine, keep bustin' on me. I'm not even gonna ask if you heard from Arlington then.

BID. Fine. (I'm) not even gonna tell you.

ROB. Fine. I don't even care.

BID. When you're done showing her, finish filling in that grave.

(BID flips PER a walkie-talkie.)

BID (*cont'd*). Call me (if) you need any help with this one.

ROB. OK, Bid, so did you hear anything?

BID. Not gonna tell you.

(BID leaves.)

ROB (*cont'd*). "Call me if you need help." Can you believe her?

PER. Yeah. It's you I'm having trouble with.

ROB. I was just yanking Bid's chain. You know she hired you cuz you're cute.

PER. Fuck off.

ROB. Hey. Respect. C'mon, you know I'm right. Short hair, kinda chunky, works in a traditionally male profession. Who's that sound like to you?

PER. Hillary Clinton.

ROB. I'm just saying, she sure seemed a little jealous when I showed up.

PER. No, she didn't. Leave her alone.

ROB. I can't. If I didn't find a way to bug her sometimes, I don't think she'd say two words all day long besides "do this, do that."

PER. She talked plenty to me.

ROB. See! She thinks you're cute.

PER. Just show me what to do, all right?

ROB (*handing them to her*). Tape measure, stake, mallet. Measure 4.5 inches from the corner of the last grave. That stake right there.

(PER does.)

ROB (*cont'd*). Hold the stake where you think it should go, but don't drive it yet. Then you lay down and sight (down the new stake) —Lay down.

PER. Lay down? Do I look that stupid?

ROB. Jeez! Fine, give it to me.

(ROB lays down and follows his own directions. As he does, PER pays attention, then checks him out.)

ROB (*cont'd*). You sight down the new stake to make sure it lines up with all the headstones in the row—Are you checking out my butt, Perdue?

(PER steps forward quickly and studies the last grave.)

PER. Don't flatter yourself.

ROB. It's OK, look all you want.

(ROB pats the back of PER's leg. She grabs a pick and holds it to his neck.)

PER. What did I say about touching me?

ROB. Jesus, go easy!

PER. Why should I go easy?

ROB. Cuz you get three to ten years for manslaughter in this state. *(Pause.)* I'm taking a pre-law course at the community college.

PER. Then I'll still be young when I get out.

ROB. Well, no, cuz now you've thought about it, which makes it premeditated, which makes it second degree, which makes it, like, twenty years.

PER. Then maybe we should just stop screwing with the new girl, huh!?

ROB. Great idea.

(A pause. The walkie-talkie squawks.)

BID *(off)*. You guys doing all right?

PER. Are we doing all right, Robbie!?

ROB. Yes, ma'am.

(PER throws the pick aside and hits the walkie-talkie button.)

PER. Couldn't be better.

BID *(off)*. Finish that up and come in. (A) lot to do today. Out.

ROB. Jeez.

PER. I need this job, all right?

ROB. All right. Sorry. *(Pause.)* Are you crying—?

PER. No! Fuck.

ROB. I'm sorry, I was just—Look, I'll do this, OK. Just, y'know, chill.

PER. I need this job.

ROB. I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry. OK? Are we good?

(PER exits.)

ROB *(cont'd)*. We're really not good. Perdue, c'mon, I'm sorry—

(PER re-enters and grabs a stake out of ROB's hand.)

PER. Show me how. But I'm not talking to you.

ROB. Well, how'm I supposed to teach you something if you won't talk to me?

(PER folds her arms and glares at him.)

ROB *(cont'd)*. I'll figure it out.

(Lights down.)