

The Viewing Room

A Full-Length Comedy

by

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DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to my father whom I've come to forgive and secondly, to a certain writing instructor who advised me there is humor in everything and encouraged me to find it.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Stern patriarch Chester Dumbrosky has decided to make amends. Unfortunately, he waited for the day of his wake to do so. Lots of angst and laughs as his dysfunctional family tries to heal old wounds. Approximate run time 1.5 hours.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

“The Viewing Room” was workshopped by the Playwrights Collaborative at the California Stage in 2017 and was self-produced the following year at the Howe Avenue Theater in Sacramento, CA. This first production was directed by Leo McElroy; with lights and sound by Devin Machado. The cast was as follows:

Chester Dumbrosky – Stephen Watson
Florence Dumbrosky – Deirdre Downes
Chet Jr. Dumbrosky – David Paul
Stephen Dumbrosky – Mark Ludwig
Patti Dumbrosky – Irene Velasquez
Matthew Dumbrosky – Jim Hewlett
Debby Dumbrosky – Wendy Bosley
Jay Hollerback – David Valpreda

To our dismay, Opening Night had only one attendee show up. Despite this, we opted to go on with the performance but not before surrounding this sole audience member with “Front of House” staff so that she couldn’t escape.

Suffice it to say, “The Viewing Room” has come a long way since then and has been performed in front of much larger audiences!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 3 w, 1 flexible)

MATTHEW DUMBROSKY: Youngest son. Witty and sarcastic, full of angst, 40s.

CHESTER DUMBROSKY: Recently deceased father, retired military, frugal, 80s.

FLORENCE DUMBROSKY: Mother. Ditzzy. Traditionalist. Prone to malapropisms. 70s.

STEPHEN DUMBROSKY: Middle son. A former athlete. Somewhat arrogant. 50s.

PATTI DUMBROSKY: Older daughter. Nurse. Has learned to forgive. 40s.

DEBBY DUMBROSKY: Younger daughter. Believes herself to be clairvoyant. Outspoken. 40s.

CHET JR. DUMBROSKY: Estranged eldest son. Musician. 50s.

JAY HOLLERBACK: Funeral Home Director. Solemn. Very professional manner. 50s. The part of Jay can be played by either male or female.

SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Viewing room of the Hollerback Funeral Home in Holyoke Massachusetts. 2:00 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon, February 2005.

Scene 2: The same, around 2:30.

Scene 3: The same, around 3:00.

ACT II

Scene 1: The same, around 3:30.

Scene 2: The same, around 4:00.

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ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: The viewing room of the Hollerback Funeral Home. A wintry afternoon in February 2005. A raised casket sits at CS behind which is a wall with a large wooden cross. There is a grouping of folding chairs positioned DSL. A small podium is just to the right of CS. At far SR are French doors leading to the lobby. MATTHEW, oddly attired in a green suit jacket, enters tentatively, and solemnly makes his way across the room. With great apprehension he looks into the open casket, kneels, bows his head and closes his eyes in silent reflection. Suddenly CHESTER's voice is heard from the casket.)

CHESTER: Ahoy there. Just the man I wanted to see.

MATTHEW: *(Rises quickly, stumbling backward.)* Aaaahh!

CHESTER: *(Sits up laughing.)* Screams like a baby.

MATTHEW: *(Scrambles behind chairs.)* Oh my God!!!

CHESTER: And this from an atheist.

MATTHEW: *(Hyperventilating.)* This can't be—

CHESTER: Breathe. Or they'll be holding services for both of us ... Maybe if you'd visited me more in the hospital you wouldn't be so—

MATTHEW: *(Rubbing his eyes.)* But you're supposed to ... you're supposed to be—

CHESTER: Don't you dare say "expired." Makes me sound like an aged dairy product.

MATTHEW: *(Frantic back peddling.)* What's goin' on... how is this—

(JAY HOLLERBACK appears in the doorway.)

JAY: Oh, didn't hear you come in. You must be Matthew. I'm Jay Hollerback, the funeral director.

MATTHEW: *(Pointing to the casket.)* LOOK! THERE!

JAY: Mmm yes, it's ... it's quite unfortunate ... I want you to know I tried my very best to dissuade him—

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MATTHEW: (*Stuttering.*) So-so-so you're saying this kind of thing happens?

JAY: On occasion, yes ... it was your brother Stephen's choice.

MATTHEW: Say what?

JAY: Stephen absolutely insisted on going with the least expensive casket we sell.

MATTHEW: Huh? Screw the casket. Aren't you *seeing* him?

JAY: Who? Are you all right? (*Head tilted, hands clasped.*) I understand how emotions can run high at times like these. The important thing to remember is your father was much loved—

CHESTER: (*Gazing upward at the lights.*) Why are all these blasted lights on?

JAY: —and will be dearly missed.

CHESTER: Glad I'm not paying your electric bill.

MATTHEW: (*To CHESTER.*) Oh my god, it *is* you.

JAY: So we've met before?

MATTHEW: (*To JAY.*) Hmm? No. (*Staring dumbfounded at the casket.*) I must be dreaming. You think you lose someone... and then—

JAY: Ah. You are speaking about the circle of life.

MATTHEW: By any chance, is there a boomerang of life?

JAY: Perhaps it's best if I allow you a few more minutes alone with the dearly departed. (*Starts to exit.*)

CHESTER: (*To MATTHEW.*) Tell him to give a rebate on this casket. Show some balls!

JAY: (*Stopping and turning.*) You know, I went to school with a Chet Dumbrosky.

CHESTER: (*Angered.*) There'll be no mention of him!

JAY: Very talented musician. Haven't seen him in ages.

MATTHEW: No one has.

CHESTER: By his own choice.

JAY: Then he won't be attending today?

CHESTER: Not if I have anything to say about it!

MATTHEW: (*Turns to CHESTER.*) Well, you don't! Your decision-making days are—

JAY: Has anyone ever told you that you have an odd habit of looking away when you speak?

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MATTHEW: *(Turns to lock eyes on JAY.)* We were unable to reach Chet Jr.

JAY: Perhaps I could help you.

CHESTER: Nobody asked for your help!

JAY: I know some of his old band members, maybe I could—

CHESTER: Get this clown outta here!

JAY: —I could make some calls—

CHESTER: *(Throws up his hands.)* Now he's a party host.

MATTHEW: *(To CHESTER.)* What harm would it do?

JAY: That's the spirit.

MATTHEW: So you *do* see him?

JAY: Who? Your brother Chet? *(Stroking his chin.)* No, I haven't seen him in, god it has to be—

MATTHEW: *(Ushering JAY out.)* Never mind ... We'll call you back later when it's umm... safe.

(JAY is perplexed by the remark.)

CHESTER: Ask him how much all of this is costing. *(Studying his casket.)* It's not even real metal. Listen to this. *(Knocking on casket.)* Friggin' aluminum. I'm in a giant beer can. What am I being recycled?

JAY: I'll seat your family members outside until you're ready.

(JAY exits. MATTHEW turns to warily face his FATHER, keeping a safe distance.)

CHESTER: Don't worry. I won't bite.

MATTHEW: How are you pulling this off? This is *really* freakin' me out.

CHESTER: Step closer and I'll try to explain.

MATTHEW: What part of "freakin' me out" is unclear?

CHESTER: *(Beckoning HIM.)* Please. This is meant for your ears only.

MATTHEW: But he can't hear you. *(Reluctantly steps closer.)* What is it?

CHESTER: *(Waving him in closer.)* Come closer. This needs to be whispered.

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MATTHEW: *(Fully leans into the casket.)* Go ahead. I'm listening.

CHESTER: *(Grabs MATTHEW firmly by the lapel and shakes him.)* I'm here! Get over it!

MATTHEW: Leggo! Lemme go!

CHESTER: There's things to resolve. We need to come to common ground.

MATTHEW: *(Struggling to free himself.)* I'm all for common ground, so long as it's *above* ground.

CHESTER: We haven't been close, you and I—

MATTHEW: *(Still firmly in CHESTER's grip.)* Yes, but we're really close now.

CHESTER: *(Holding MATTHEW by the lapel.)* Was I a bad father? Be honest.

MATTHEW: *(Constricted voice.)* If you want honesty, turn me loose.

CHESTER: *(Releases his hold. Smooths MATTHEW's lapel. Gently pats him on the face.)* You don't look so good.

MATTHEW: *(Straightening himself.)* It's called *shock*.

CHESTER: How do I look? They say embalming enhances the appearance. Just gives me gas.

MATTHEW: No problem. We'll move Ma's plot upwind.

CHESTER: How's she doing? My passing must have put her in a terrible state.

MATTHEW: Yeah. She can't decide which color for her new Mercedes.

CHESTER: *(Gasps.)* A Mercedes? Geez, my body's not even cold yet.

MATTHEW: She always said, "God forbid anything happens to your father, I'm going out and buy a Mercedes."

CHESTER: *(Scratching his head.)* Now there's a mixed message.

MATTHEW: All messages from Ma are mixed. *(MATTHEW begins scanning the room.)*

CHESTER: What on *earth* are you looking for?

MATTHEW: *(Eyeballing the room.)* Could ask you the *same* question ... I dunno. Hidden cameras. I got a feeling somebody's laughing like hell at me.

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CHESTER: Son, it was important for me to come back. Have a heart-to-heart with the family. Otherwise, I'll never truly be at rest.

MATTHEW: What about our rest? Doesn't that count for anything?

CHESTER: You've always been angry with me. Why?

MATTHEW: That's a long, complicated answer.

CHESTER: Then address these issues between us ... allow yourself to be free of guilt for the afterlife.

MATTHEW: If such a place exists.

CHESTER: So you want proof of heaven? ... The Red Sox finally won a World Series. What *greater* proof do you need?

MATTHEW: Did they kick you out? Is that what happened?

CHESTER: I came back because we need to discuss my legacy.

MATTHEW: You may be a candidate for immortality but not for reasons to be proud of.

CHESTER: Does everyone feel this way? Obviously, my actions have been misunderstood. Perhaps it's best if I deliver my own eulogy today.

MATTHEW: Oh, that will go over well. Talk about awkward. Tell me, will you be going with a first or third-person narrative?

CHESTER: I need the family to understand who I am, why I've done the things I've done, what was in my mind and in my heart.

MATTHEW: The time to do that was when you were alive. Here. Let me demonstrate. (*MATTHEW crosses over to the seats, lies down and closes his eyes.*) Dead man. Lies still. Take note. Very important - *refrains* from talking. *This* is how a deceased person is *supposed* to be.

(*CHESTER slowly rises from his casket, crosses over, and stands behind MATTHEW.*)

MATTHEW: (*Oblivious to CHESTER.*) Now, an alive man *is* talkative, expresses his emotions, gives hugs and kisses freely to his family.

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MATTHEW: *(Cont'd. Opens his eyes.)* See the differ—
(Senses the presence behind him, turns to face CHESTER.) Aahhh!

CHESTER: You want hugs and kisses? Is that what's ailin' ya?

(CHESTER tries in vain to approach MATTHEW who has scrambled away. JAY appears in the doorway. Matthew runs to him and tries to keep Jay positioned between himself and Chester.)

JAY: *(Perplexed.)* Sorry to disturb your moment of reflection. But a number of your family have arrived and would like to join you.

CHESTER: Good. Let them in. We have much to discuss.

MATTHEW: *(To CHESTER.)* You won't be discussing anything.

JAY: *(Reaches out and forcibly turns MATTHEW's face.)* Understood. Generally speaking, that's outside the scope of my duties. At this late juncture... well, I could whip something up I suppose.

MATTHEW: Words can't begin to describe what I'm feeling.

JAY: Oh, trust me. In my twenty years as funeral director I've experienced all kinds of family matters. Shall I write something?

MATTHEW: How about you give us another minute alone. I need to put the finishing touches on my moment of redemption.

JAY: You mean on your moment of reflection.

MATTHEW: No, I'm quite certain this is my moment of redemption.

JAY: Of course, sir. I'll relay your wishes. *(Exits.)*

MATTHEW: *(Whispering.)* If you care at all about our family then please, I'm begging you, return to your casket and lie still. Be a good corpse.

CHESTER: But I need to speak with everyone.

MATTHEW: You'll give Ma a heart attack. You're not supposed to be here.

CHESTER: Where *else* would I be? It's my wake.

End of Freeview

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