

Frederick J. Prescott

by

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Frederick J. Prescott (A one-act comedy with two scenes)

A play in one act with 3 female players and 1 male. The women, Gloria, Jill, and Margie, are in their late fifties and/or early sixties. Some years back they worked together in the same big city university along with Mr. Frederick Prescott, the deceased. They are at the funeral home in charge of the arrangements. Frederick lies in his open coffin in one of the viewing rooms. Seven or eight chairs are arranged in the room but not so near the coffin. Also, there are lovely flowers tastefully placed here and there in the room. There's a visitor's book on a stand. A small table is placed near one of the walls. There is a tall candle holder (with candle) placed near the coffin. Viewing for family and friends will be held in a few hours, but Michael, one of the funeral home assistants, gave the women permission to go inside and pay their respects early. Gloria and Jill arrived together and Margie on her own, though at two different times.

(Play opens by spending approximately 3 minutes of Margie alone in the viewing room with the coffin. She is sitting and holds a Kleenex or two in her hands. She wipes away a tear now and then. She obviously has been praying or meditating. She stands and lights the lone candle on the tall candle holder near the coffin. The purpose is to help light the way for Mr. Prescott's spirit or soul as it journeys away from Earth. Just before Gloria and Jill enter, Margie makes the sign of the cross and sits again.)

(Enter Gloria and Jill quietly. Both sign the visitor's book then briefly step up to the coffin and view the body. Then they sit near Margie.)

Margie: (Shaking her head sadly) It's so hard to believe this. His lying here like that.

Gloria: (Begins to play with her cell phone) You can say that again. I haven't seen him in years. Isn't time a rocket?

Jill: But he looks good, doesn't he?

Gloria: Oh, I think they did an excellent job. The dark blue suit, makeup, haircut and all.

Margie: Freddie was always handsome if you ask me.

Gloria: Oh yes, always. And now with those gray streaks. Quite distinguished.

Jill: Yes, a touch of class. Did he have many children?

Margie: He had a boy and a girl. Man and woman now, of course. The daughter looks just like him I think.

Jill: That was a stupid question. Who has many children nowadays? I think he was Presbyterian anyway.

Gloria: (Puts her hand to her mouth and coughs)

Jill: Marge, didn't you and Fred work close together a few years? In the same office?

Margie: Yes, in the accounting department. I loved it.

Jill: (She and Gloria look at each other a moment) I'm sure he was easy to work with. So friendly and all.

Margie: We never once had a fight. But we did disagree sometimes.

(F.H. assistant, Michael, enters.)

Michael: (Has a smile on his face and clasps his hands together as if in prayer) My dear ladies, call me Michael. You know, as in the archangel. See my wings? (Chuckles and shows them the angel pin in his lapel) Now, would you ladies like some tea or coffee? We have both right now and they're hot.

The women look at each other.

Gloria: I'll definitely have some tea. Twinning's English Breakfast if you have it.

Michael: Oh sure. That's the red packet. Guess it tastes just as good in the afternoon as it does in the morning, right? (Laughs a bit loud considering the nature of the room. Looks at Jill)

Jill: Tea for me too, please.

Michael: Same kind?

Jill: Same is fine. (Michael looks at Margie)

Margie: Coffee, s'il vous plait. Black.

Michael: Yes, noir. Wonderful then, each of you having something. I'll be back in five. I hope.
(Makes the sign of the cross) One never knows, you know. Working here tends to remind you of that. (Exits)

Margie: (Looks at the other 2.) Powder room. Excuse me. I'll be back soon. (Exits)

Gloria: Did you see tears in her eyes?

Jill: I didn't but I wouldn't be surprised.

Gloria: Oh, okay. I thought I did. So, I've got a few cookies here in my bag. They'll go just fine with our tea and coffee. I'll let the angel fly away first though.

Jill: Great. I'd love a cookie.

Gloria: Do you think Marge is okay? She looks funny. I don't know, pale or something.

Jill: I think she'll be all right. Could be the memories.

Gloria: Well, I think we all have some of those.

Jill: Um, there was some talk you know.

Gloria: Oh. You don't mean they dated or anything, do you? Both were married. I met Freddie's wife at a staff picnic once. Sweetest thing on Earth.

Jill: That "sweetest thing" could get quite sour now and then I heard. But, no, I don't think they ever dated.

Gloria: Then what do you mean?

Jill: It was when Marge's husband Ben died. Remember?

Gloria: Yeah, I remember that. He wasn't sick very long. In fact, he wasn't noticeably sick at all. It was his heart, wasn't it? Rather sudden. That was rough. Poor Marge.

Jill: Well, after a short while the late Ben was the last thing on "poor Marge's" mind. A few months afterward I'd say. Then she and Freddie would often bring their lunches. Eat them right there at their desks, which at that time were next to each other...

(Enter Margie)

Gloria: (Smiles and looks at Margie) Well, that didn't take long, did it?

Jill: It sure didn't. You must really know your way around this place.

Gloria: Yeah.

(Sound of a fart comes from the coffin area. The women, a bit startled, look at each other kind of furtively or puzzled.)

Margie: (Hesitates a few seconds to see if she hears the strange sound again.) Believe me, I don't know my way around here and don't want to. Place gives me the creeps.

(Sound of 2 consecutive farts is heard coming from the coffin area)

Gloria: (startled again, clasping her bosom) Oh! What was that?

(The 3 women look at each other up and down somewhat furtively again.)

(Michael enters the room carrying a sizeable tray like a waiter upon which the hot tea, coffee, and supplies are placed.)

Michael: Here we go, ladies. Nice and hot. Sugar and cream here if you so desire. Plus I found 3 chocolate truffles. (He places the tray on the small table near a wall.) Wasn't so hard to find them though. Since they were mine. You can't blame me. They'll let the staff starve here. (Laughs out loud then covers his mouth as he coughs.)

Gloria: Michael, we just heard some strange noises.

Michael: (Taking his chin in his right hand.) Oh dear. Angel lust, I'm afraid. (The 3 women gasp) That shouldn't happen. In other words, what I can tell you is that around *here* it isn't unusual. We get many kinds of noises night and day. (Starts to sing lines from the Cole Porter song and dances briefly moving his arms gracefully: "Night and day, you are the one. Only you 'neath the moon or under the sun. Whether near to me or far, No matter, darling, where you are, I think of you, Night and day.")

Gloria: (Claps with delight) Oh Michael. You're so talented!

Margie: (Serious and looks at the coffin.) Gloria, please! There's a body here. Sorry, but you too, Michael. Angel lust! Sounds awful.

Michael: (Puts a finger to his lips) Shhhh! I'm afraid I've got coworkers ambling about. Now you ladies enjoy your tea and coffee and I'll be back in a while. Take your time, no hurry. You're my valued guests. (Exits the room. The 3 women begin adding sugar and cream to their teas and coffee and stirring.)

Jill: What a lovely man Michael is. More funeral home assistants should be like him. Freddie was somewhat like that. I remember now.

Margie: He was for sure. (Looks away toward the wall wistfully. Takes out another Kleenex.)

Gloria: Oh everybody loved Freddie. Not an enemy in the world. You know, I envy that.

(The ladies are sipping their teas and coffee now. Gloria passes around the cookie bag. The sound of a fart, startling the ladies again, comes from the coffin area again.)

Gloria: There it is again! The noise. I wish Michael would hear it.

Jill: I'll go find him. (Begins putting her cup down.)

Margie: No, it's okay. Just leave him be.

Jill: But he needs to hear it.

Margie: But what if it doesn't happen again? It hasn't happened while he's in here. Besides, he's heard thousands of noises. Didn't he say as much?

Gloria: Girls. This doesn't sound so nice but I think Freddie is farting.

Jill and Margie: He's what?

Gloria: It happens. Believe me. I was reading articles one time and read that dead bodies fart, move or jerk, pee and poop, even have erections, you name it. Well, the men do. Women don't have...

Margie: (Interrupting) Goodness! Have you lost your mind? You and your reading.

Jill: But... he's all cleaned up, powdered and stuff.

Gloria: No matter. It happens, believe me. Dead bodies are strange. Totally unpredictable.

Jill: Dead bodies are stiff. Freddie's a stiff. Isn't that what the police call them? (She stands and goes to the side of the coffin to view Freddie. Slowly but secretively she puts her right hand inside the coffin and gently touches Freddie here and there.)

Margie: Jill, please. Don't call Freddie a stiff.

Gloria: That's right. He's deceased. A cadaver. More like a spirit in charge. Or in transition, as Newsweek or Time magazine says. But it may have departed already. It does fly away, does it not? Probably sooner than later. Remember the song: (She sings it sweetly) "When I die, Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, oh glory, I'll fly away in the morning. When I die, Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away."

Margie: (Stands, still serious) I need some air if you don't mind girls. If I'm not back in a few minutes, find Miss Marple! (Exits)

Jill: (Sitting again near Gloria and speaking close to her ear) It's hard.

Gloria: Hard on Margie?

Jill: No, it!

Gloria: (Looks at Jill surprised) Well of course, dear. Bodies get completely hard after death.

Jill: (Looks around to be sure they are alone.) No, I mean down there.

Gloria: Due south, you mean.

Jill: Yes, due Deep South! It's not just hard. It's erect!

Gloria: (Swallows) As in sticking up?

Jill: That's it. Sticking up. Like a horseshoe stake. Well, maybe not that high. Like a railway spike is more accurate perhaps.

Gloria: Oh my. Should we tell angel Michael?

Jill: What? Are you crazy? He'll know I touched Freddie. He'll ask what I was doing touching him! Feeling around down there in the coffin. No way.

Gloria: Yes, what *were* you doing there? But... should they bury him that way?

Jill: You mentioned erection. I wanted to see if there was one. Bury? Are they going to bury him? I thought...

Gloria: Oh, I guess I presumed it. But maybe he'll be cremated. Then the spike won't make any difference.

Jill: Didn't you mention it? That you had read about it?

Gloria: Oh yes. That's one of the several things the dead body does. But it's terribly rare. Hardly ever happens.

Jill: Well, it's happening today. Think about it. Freddie was unique, you know.

Margie: (Entering the room, startling the other two) Oh yes, Freddie was one of a kind. So special in so many different ways.

Gloria: (smiles feebly) Did you get your air, Margie?

Jill: (Looks at Margie who is now sitting) Oh, I like your hair too. Perfect length.

Gloria: (Looks at Jill with a puzzled expression) Air, I said, not hair Jill! She went out for air.

End of Scene 1

