**Don’t Hydroplane**

**By Bryan Curtis**

The Place—Amenable, Tennessee--A small town of about 5,000 people located forty miles from Nashville.

The Time—the recent past

Act 1

Scene 1

*(Outside the office of the funeral director at Anderson’s Funeral Home. Annagram Woodard, age 69, is standing alone on stage. She is a woman who looks her age and dressed for the occasion. Her younger sister, Betty Queen Petty sashays in. Betty Queen is fancier looking, age 65, and wearing leggings and a top.)*

BETTY QUEEN

You didn’t tell me you were dressing up.

ANNAGRAM

I didn’t want people to see me walking in and think I’d been out feeding cows. I see you are wearing those yoga pants you seem to be so fond of.

BETTY QUEEN

Don’t start with me. You ever get ahold of Jesse?

ANNAGRAM

Yeah. They will be here later tonight.

BETTY QUEEN

They? Don’t tell me he is using pronouns now. Everybody knows I don’t do pronouns.

ANNAGRAM

Are you done? They, meaning him and his new boyfriend. I hope you got some cardio jumping to that conclusion.

BETTY QUEEN

How old is this one?

ANNAGRAM

When I asked, he said old enough. Did you get hold of Pinch?

BETTY QUEEN

I left a message, but I don’t know if they even have cell phone service in that country.

ANNAGRAM

He’s in Australia—not on the moon.

*(Funeral director Kerry Matlock, a low key, yet gossipy when you get him going, man walks out of his office and greets the two sisters)*

KERRY

Y’all come on in and have a seat. Can I get you ladies something to drink? Some cake? We’ve got leftover pound cake from Jay Hodges’ funeral.

ANNAGRAM

Who made the cake?

KERRY

Not sure. Heard it was pretty good though.

ANNAGRAM

Then no, but thanks anyway.

KERRY

I know what you mean. You never know what you’re going to get when people take a mind to bring food. Some of these things are inedible. We were always glad to see your Mama come—not because of anybody dying or nothing, but you knew her cakes were always going to be good.

BETTY QUEEN

Your parking lot’s looking a little shabby. Everybody knows that the first impression people have of any business is their parking lot. As the Bible says, you only get one chance to make a first impression. I can get Pinch or Little Pinch to come give you a price once they get back from hunting crocodiles in Australia.

ANNAGRAM

What in the Sam Hill are you going to do if they kill a crocodile?

BETTY QUEEN

I do not know. But I told Pinch Petty he better not bring home any crocodile meat to put in my freezer. It is already full of that water buffalo they brought home from Paraguay or Uruguay—one of those Guay countries--that nobody will eat. The only thing Little Pinch ever wants is chicken fingers.

KERRY *(clearing his throat)*

Let me start by saying how sorry we all are about Miss Hybernia’s passing. She was such a sweetheart. Always here with a cake for the bereaved. We’re getting lots of calls wanting details. I think you’re going to have a big turn-out for the service. And please know that our goal is to make the next few days easy for you as is possible--under the circumstances.

BETTY QUEEN

What circumstances?

KERRY

Well just that your Mama is dead and all.

BETTY QUEEN

I thought for a minute you were going to tell me something was wrong.

KERRY

Well. *(He pauses)* Actually we do have us a little problem. I guess a big problem would be more accurate.

ANNAGRAM

I knew Mama dying peacefully in her sleep at 90 was too good to be true. What is it?

BETTY QUEEN

No no no no no no no! This was all taken care of back when Daddy died. They were having a buy one get one free sale. Don’t think you are going to try to get any more money out of us.

KERRY

Of course not. Everything has been paid for in full. Miss Hybernia picked out her casket and everything, even the tombstone, 37 years ago back when your daddy died. They were having a buy one get one free sale that month so she got lucky. Well not lucky cause your daddy had to die to take advantage of it. But it was a very classy tombstone she chose. Just between us, I am so embarrassed by some of these monstrosities people put up nowadays. Have y’all seen that 12-foot-tall heart Mildred Berry’s family put up. People are furious cause it blocks the sun from the ones behind it. And it’s about killed the grass. I didn’t think it was in particularly good taste either since she died of a heart attack.

BETTY QUEEN

Then what’s the problem?

KERRY

I hope you understand. Decisions were made by the previous owner who is buried not even fifty feet from your Mama and Daddy’s plots.

BETTY QUEEN

Spit it out. Is somebody already buried there?

KERRY

Oh heavens no. Your mama’s plot is empty. We wouldn’t do that. We’re not like those cemeteries you read about in the news in places I won’t name, *(he coughs)* Mississippi, who just bury bodies all willy nilly.

ANNAGRAM

I don’t understand. You’ve got a dead body. You’ve got an empty plot. Best of my knowledge that’s pretty much all you need for a burial. What could go wrong?

KERRY

Well, to put it as politely as I can, I didn’t know how large a woman your mother was. I mean I knew your Mama. She was a saint and all. But you never really know how big a body is going to be until they are laid out flat. Standing up looks can be deceiving. And what she has is a standard sized coffin.

BETTY QUEEN

Is that all? If she needs it, we can buy her a bigger one. We can buy her a double-wide casket if we need to. So, Mama put on a few pounds after my Daddy died. It happens to a lot of us. *(She looks at Annagram)* But she was healthy as a horse until she died and always on the go. Still had her original hips and knees too.

KERRY

Plus sized.

BETTY QUEEN

Huh?

KERRY

We call them plus sized.

BETTY QUEEN

You can call em whatever you want, but I’ve got money. I can afford a bigger casket. I can buy her a triple wide if she needs it.

KERRY

It’s not that simple. I wish it was.

BETTY QUEEN

I don’t think you heard me. I’ve got money.

KERRY

Money can’t solve this. We’re full. Let me explain.

*(He pulls out a large home-made map of the cemetery and places it in front of the sisters)*

This is where your Daddy, Mr. Sneak is buried at the top of Magnolia Summit. *(He points)* It’s the oldest, and as you know, the most beautiful part of our cemetery. It’s so pretty that not a week goes by that I don’t see a bride up there getting her picture made in front of the big magnolia tree. Now normally, we have space between the tombstones so we can make allowances if need arises. Plus, it makes mowing a whole lot easier. But if you look at that *(He points on the map)* spot that is next to your mother’s plot. That would and should have been empty. As a rule, we don’t jam people in the ground like sardines. But the Fielder’s, who reside right next door, had a daughter who was unmarried and had nowhere else to go. So, my predecessor let the Fielder family put the girl, Barb, next to your mother’s spot which means we now have no place to put a plus-sized casket.

BETTY QUEEN

I went to school with Barb Fielder. I always wondered why she never married.

ANNAGRAM

So you’re saying Mama won’t fit in her standard sized casket she got for free? And that a standard sized casket is all that will fit in her plot.

KERRY

That’s where we’re at. I’ve measured it every which a way. It’s just not humanly possible. If you got the plots, you can pretty much bury a person in anything. I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but do you see that space? *(He points to a space on the map)* Dee Potts is buried here. He wanted to be buried in his fishing boat, so his family bought up six plots. Motor and everything. His wife wanted that boat out of their driveway bad, so they killed two birds with one stone.

ANNAGRAM

What do you suggest we do?

KERRY

Well, there’s always cremation. And then we could bury your mama’s cremains in the free casket next to your daddy.

BETTY QUEEN

Ain’t nobody burning up my mama.

KERRY

Or we could always exhume your daddy’s coffin and move him and your mama over to the Shady Rest Acres part of the cemetery. I’m sure you know that’s where her third husband, Mr. Ellis, is laid to rest. *(Kerry points to a spot on the far-right side of the map)* We just purchased this land a few years ago. It’s next to the train tracks but there’s a lot of open spaces there. Granted, it’s not pretty as Magnolia Summit, and it does get loud when the train goes by. We could even put Miss Hybernia right in the middle of Mr. Ellis and Mr. Sneak. One big happy family. And then you could resell the plots at Magnolia Summit. That’s prime real estate. I could sell those in a heartbeat and make you a pretty penny. It’s so in demand that people wouldn’t care that somebody were buried there before them. I got people dying to get in there. But if you do go with cremation, you can have her cremains made into jewelry that you can pass down for generations to come. They look like real diamonds. This tie clip *(he points to his necktie)* was my Daddy. I made cufflinks out of him too, but this shirt don’t take cuff links.

BETTY QUEEN

I can tell you right now we are not going to be digging my Daddy up like Tammy Wynette and moving him anywhere. And how can you get away with calling it Shady Rest Acres? There ain’t no trees. And exactly how much rest do you think people get next to the train tracks?

KERRY

It’s aspirational.

BETTY QUEEN

Are you sure there is absolutely no way to squeeze mama into her free casket? Even if you rip out the quilted satin lining and the pillow?

KERRY

I’m not sure we could even close the coffin. And even if you could, it would be so tight in there, she couldn’t breathe. *(Beat)* Well not that she could breathe anyway. And it would be uncomfortable without the padded lining.

BETTY QUEEN *(starts to offer another idea)*

ANNAGRAM

Betty Queen! She! Won’t! Fit! This is not like a suitcase when you have overstuffed it and then you sit on it to get it closed! This is Mama.

BETTY QUEEN

Don’t yell at me. I’m just trying to make sense of everything. (*To Kerry)* Could we put her in the casket and instead of her laying on her back, prop her up on her side? Like Lionel Ritchie used to do on all his album covers. Just for viewing. Like this? *(She demonstrates).*

KERRY

We can do almost anything you want. *(He pulls out his phone and puts it on the desk in front of Annagram and Betty Queen).* I probably shouldn’t be showing you this. But a buddy I went to mortuary school with sent me this picture of a body they had. This guy wanted to be viewed sitting in his recliner with a tv remote in one hand and a beer in the other. So, they did it. Now we don’t allow beer here, but anything else is ok as long as it’s sanitary and not sexy or a sin. But you should know that nine times out of ten it’s men who want to do something different. It’s men who want fishing boats and motorcycles and recliners and golf carts. It is my experience that women want a nice dress, a dignified experience and lots of Jesus. But even if we prop her up on her side, we’re still not going to be able to close it shut.

BETTY QUEEN

Well, couldn’t you turn the closed, double-wide casket on its side and bury her that way? (She illustrates with her hands)

KERRY *(Starts to say something when Annagram interrupts, angrily)*

ANNAGRAM

She! Won’t! Fit! We both know what Mama wanted.

BETTY QUEEN

No!

ANNAGRAM

We can solve all this right here and now. Bury Mama next to Ellis. He was her true love. That is where she would want to be.

BETTY QUEEN

I said no. I won’t have it. I won’t have my daddy all by himself for all eternity. Anyway, it’s a matter of principle.

ANNAGRAM

If it’s a matter of money, I’ll pay for it. Even though you got more money than sense.

BETTY QUEEN *(standing up to leave)*

Mr. Matlock. We thank you for your time. My sister and I need to speak in private about this. We will be back in touch first thing in the morning. And you really should think about getting your parking lot repaved.

*End of scene Lights down*