

"THE RESURRECTIONIST"

A Play in Two Acts

by P.S. Drake

P.S. Drake

Psdrakewrites@gmail.com

Psdrake.com

Characters:

The Past:

- CLARA: Female-presenting, age/color blind. Woman who disguises herself as a man to become a doctor.
- JACK: Male-presenting, age/color blind. Surly gravedigger who watches over his graveyard with a protective eye.
- MARY: Female-presenting, age/color blind. Clara's friend and housekeeper of the hospital. (Can also play NICOLE)
- JOHN: Male-presenting, age/color blind. Medical student at Clara's school. The villain. (Can also play DREW)
- DR. MILLER: Age/color/gender blind. Doctor at the medical school. (Can also play CLERGYMAN, DR. GRAYSON, and MARCELLA)
- CLERGYMAN: Age/color/gender blind. Clergyman in the graveyard.

The Present:

- ROXIE: Female-presenting, age/color blind. Woman who dreams of becoming a poet.
- DREW: Male-presenting, age/color blind. Medical student who is a genius, but cold and socially inept.
- NICOLE: Female-presenting, age/color blind. Roxie's sister who is a medical student in Drew's cohort.
- MARCELLA: Female-presenting, age/color blind. Roxie and Nicole's mother.
- DR. GRAYSON: Age/color/gender blind. Doctor at the medical school.

Place:

Scenes take place in both a graveyard and a medical school laboratory (sometimes simultaneously.)

Time:

Alternates between 1890 and modern day, depending on stage dressings.

Act I, Scene 1
Classroom, 1890

CLARA is sitting at a desk holding a skull. She points to different features of the skull while reciting their names in latin. She is disguised as a man.

CLARA

Sutura sphenofrontalis, sutura coronalis, sutura occipito... (She thinks) Sutura occipito... Occipito... oh, blazes, what is it? (References textbook) Sutura occipitomastoidea! How could I forget?

MARY

(Knocks on the door) Mr. Williams?

CLARA

No.

MARY

No? Did you just say, "no?"

CLARA

Yes.

MARY

"Yes" you said, "no?" Or "yes," I can enter?

CLARA

Both "yes" and "no" mean "do not enter."

MARY

Oh. Alright, Mr. Williams. Goodbye. *(She pauses)* But, sir?

CLARA

(Annoyed) What?

MARY

You should know there's a funeral tonight at King's Chapel. I'll be leaving now.

CLARA

Funeral? Mary, wait! (*She lets her in*) I apologize. We have an anatomy test tomorrow, and I'm feeling a bit pressed.

MARY

Of course you're pressed! You're in your first year of medical school. You're always holed up in this lab studying!

CLARA

About the funeral?

MARY

Yes! I overheard while cleaning the laboratory. Apparently a young man named Thomas didn't make it out of his appendectomy alive. (*She does the sign of the cross*)

CLARA

How dreadful. It's at King's Chapel, you said? Have you the time?

MARY

Tonight at six, with the burial shortly thereafter.

CLARA

Six o'clock... (*Checks her pocket watch*) Yes. Very good... Thank you, Mary. Now for your payment.

MARY

Oh, Mr. Williams! Instead of money, could I, perhaps, join you on your adventure tonight?

CLARA

That's not possible, Mary. You know I work alone.

MARY

I just thought-

CLARA

It's non-negotiable. (*Hands her coins*) Your payment.

MARY

Thank you, sir. Goodbye. (*Goes to leave, but then turns around*) Sir, this may not be my place, however, I must say something.

CLARA

(*She's studying the skull*) Mm, what is it?

"THE RESURRECTIONIST"

MARY

Unless you plan on marrying that skull, it may be time to begin looking for a wife!

CLARA

Mary! It is neither your place, nor your concern to bring up marriage with me!

MARY

I want you to be happy!

CLARA

(Upset) I'm happy already, can't you tell? Can't you tell how amazingly happy I am?!

MARY

I just thought if you had someone to share your life with, you'd be-

CLARA

I will share my life with my patients! I intend to live as a bachelor for... *(She thinks)* Yes. Forever. You should go now.

MARY

But, sir, I-

CLARA

Go. *(MARY exits, CLARA resumes studying)* Why am I such a twat? *(She gets up, goes to the door)* Mary, wait-

JOHN enters, CLARA runs into him.

JOHN

Oof! Something on fire, Clarence?

CLARA

No, John. No more than usual.

JOHN

(Picks up skull) Charming. You've been studying.

CLARA

Somebody should. *(She grabs the skull)* Your business?

JOHN

I'm sure you know next week begins our course in dissection?

CLARA

I can read a schedule, yes.

JOHN

Why aren't you friendly with us, Clarence? How many times must we ask you to come along on a hunting trip before you say yes?

CLARA

Hunting is for barbarians.

JOHN

Then to the pub, for a drink?

CLARA

I loathe alcohol.

JOHN

To the ocean? For a swim?

CLARA

Absolutely not! (*JOHN looks at her*) It's so cold and... wet.

JOHN

About dissection lab- human bodies are hard to come by. Therefore, if any student learns of a death, they must tell me of it so I can make arrangements for its retrieval. Do you know of any funerals?

CLARA

Not one.

JOHN

Shame. You're not concerned?

CLARA

Not in the least, John. God provides. Anything else you wish to discuss?

JOHN

No, I'll leave you with your... (*gestures to skull*) friend. (*He goes to leave, then stops*) You should stop avoiding us like the damn plague, Clarence. I wouldn't want your time here to be ruined because you can't play nice. Something to think about. (*Exits*)

CLARA

(To herself) Threaten me all you want, you incorrigible bastard, but I am not giving up my specimen that easily. *(Checks her pocket watch)* I must get ready.

CLARA goes to the door, looks out, checks to see no one's coming, and "locks" it. She talks while taking down her hair, pulling off a wig, putting on a dress, or transforming into some sort of woman's garb.

CLARA

You can have your manly drinking and hunting sessions, and your utter lack of care for your patients. I, however, will have exactly one more human body in class on Monday than you will. *(She grabs a shovel)* Let's go! *(Exits)*

Act I, Scene 2
Graveyard, 1890

There's a small group of mourners surrounding a tombstone. A clergyman speaks to them. CLARA stands disguised as a mourner in back.

CLERGYMAN

"Dust thou art, to dust returnest." May God welcome our dear Thomas into His kingdom. *(CLARA cries loudly)* Thomas was a bright young lad, with a golden heart. *(CLARA cries again, louder)* May Thomas's passing remind us all of the fleeting existence of our mortal coil. *(CLARA wails)* I believe we're done here. *(Rushed)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *(He exits)*

CLARA

(Throws herself on his grave) I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU, MY SWEET BOY... *(She checks headstone)* THOMAS. I'LL MISS YOU FOREVER. I LOVED YOU LIKE YOU WERE MY OWN BROTHER. *(She checks to see everyone's left)* I hate that part. *(She pulls a shovel out from under her dress)* Very well, then. *(Starts "digging")*

"THE RESURRECTIONIST"

*JACK enters, sees CLARA
"digging" up the grave.*

JACK

Aye! Aye! What are you doing?! Are you digging up that grave?

CLARA

Uh, uh, no sir! Just thought I would plant some flowers, is all!

JACK

Do you take me for a fool?

CLARA

Do you take me for a liar?

JACK

Where are the flowers?

CLARA

Why so many questions?

JACK

Forgive me, we're having a problem with body snatchers. A body barely turns cold in the ground before somebody's digging it up. It's maddening.

CLARA

How awful. Who- who would do such a thing?

JACK

They call themselves resurrectionists. Schools are running out of bodies to study, so doctors, students, even fellow gravediggers, are doing it.

CLARA

You're a gravedigger?

JACK

Have been for most of my life. These are my grounds. And now I protect it from criminals, or anyone else willing to stoop so low for a few guineas.

CLARA

The situation is much more complicated than you think it is.

JACK

Nothing complicated about desecrating a grave, miss.

CLARA

(Scoffs) Perhaps these people are doing this out of necessity!

JACK

You're taking this personally.

CLARA

(Hesitates) My brother is studying to become a doctor, so I hear of his troubles. *(Impatiently)* Look... what did you say your name was?

JACK

I didn't. The name's Jack.

CLARA

Look, Jack. May I ask you to leave me be with Thomas? To say goodbye. Properly.

JACK

You two must have been good friends.

CLARA

Yes, he was very special to me.

JACK

I find that hard to believe, you see, because this Thomas fellow was a regular ass.

CLARA

How dare you!

JACK

He would hide behind the tombstones and jump out at children. I used to chase him out of here constantly. I even caught him having relations with his cousin once behind the mausoleum.

CLARA

(Flummoxed) They were very close.

JACK

(Pats his grave) Who's having the last laugh now, aye Thomas? Stay and mourn all you like, but I'm not leaving until you do.

CLARA

You're treating me like a common criminal.

JACK

I'm simply doing my job.

CLARA

Right. Well. *(She sits by the grave, closes her eyes, bows her head. After a moment she looks up to find JACK watching her)* Must you watch me like that?

JACK

Don't mind me.

CLARA

I'm done here. Farewell, Thomas! Rest in peace and what-not. *(To JACK)* And to you, farewell. This meeting has been most intolerable.

JACK

From your mouth to God's ears, miss. Safe travels.

CLARA exits, JACK walks to Thomas's tombstone

JACK

No way a beauty like that was friends with a monster like you.

JACK exits. JOHN enters.

JOHN

Now where is that Thomas fellow buried? *(He looks around, finds Thomas's grave)* Ah, there he is. God does provide, doesn't he? Damn, my tools. You be a good boy and stay put. *(Exits)*

The stage is empty a beat, then CLARA sticks her head out from where she exited. She checks for JACK, sees it empty then runs to the tombstone and furiously begins digging. She pulls out a rope. JACK enters

JACK

AYE! AYE!

"THE RESURRECTIONIST"

CLARA

(Under her breath) Ugh.

JACK

I suppose the rope is for gardening, too?

CLARA

No, the rope is for hanging myself! *(A voice offstage calls for JACK)*

VOICE

Jack! We need you over here! We got a fresh one!

JACK

Balls. *(To CLARA)* If I see anything wrong with that grave when I return, you'll never be allowed in this cemetery again.

CLARA

Noted!

JACK exits, CLARA waits a moment, then drops the rope and begins "digging" again.

CLARA

Come on, Clara! Get the lead out!

JOHN enters. CLARA doesn't notice. He picks up the rope and sneaks up behind CLARA, he puts it around her neck.

JOHN

You wouldn't happen to be stealing *my* body, now would you?

CLARA

(Turns her head, sees it's JOHN) Your body? What makes it yours?

JOHN

This. *(He tightens the rope)* I never run into women in my line of work. They're much too frail.

CLARA

(Struggling) A woman brought you into this world. "Frail" is the last term I would use to describe our sex.

JOHN

You talk a lot for someone with a rope around her neck.

CLARA

You'd never kill me.

JOHN

No? Then I wouldn't need to dig up a body. I'd have a nice fresh one for me to take apart bit by bit.

CLARA

That's it. (*CLARA elbows him in the side and escapes from the rope*)

They scuffle, CLARA drops her pocket watch from her sleeve in the chaos, JACK enters.

JACK

What the devil is going on here?!

CLARA

Just go away, Jack! Everything is under control! (*JOHN chases CLARA around the tombstones*)

JOHN

This isn't your problem to deal with, mate. Now leave!

JACK

Nonsense! This is my cemetery! (*CLARA lines up a punch for JOHN. JACK gets in-between. CLARA ends up decking JACK in the face*) Good God!

CLARA

Jack! I told you to go!

JACK

You just punched me in the face! Dear God in heaven, that hurts.

CLARA

Hold still. (*She inspects JACK's nose*) It's just some minor damage to the cartilage of your nasal septum. There will be mild swelling and perhaps a brief nosebleed. (*JACK and JOHN look at her questioningly*) What? I... read it in a book once.

JOHN

You can read?

JACK

Everybody out! The both of you, get out of my cemetery!

JOHN

(To JACK) I should apologize for all of this-

JACK

Get out!

JOHN and CLARA exit separately from one another. CLARA leaves behind her pocket watch

JACK

(To CLARA) And I'm following you till you're off the grounds!

JACK exits behind CLARA. A moment later, JOHN enters and approaches the tombstone, he finds CLARA's pocket watch, he picks it up and inspects it

JOHN

What's this? "Clarence Williams." I thought she looked familiar. That bastard lied to my face. (JACK enters)

JACK

Oh, for the love of-

JOHN

I'm going! I'm going! Just forgot to grab my shovel. You have a nice night. Peace and blessings to you. (Exits) (JACK settles, exhausted next to Thomas's tombstone)

JACK

(He speaks to the tombstone, annoyed) What? Not even a thank you?

Act I, Scene 3

Medical School Lab, Present Day

NICOLE and DREW are taking an exam. DREW is furiously tapping his pencil. NICOLE is coughing periodically. After an annoying cough, DREW raises his hand

DR. GRAYSON

Yes, Drew?

DREW

Nicole is cheating.

DR. GRAYSON

Nicole, is this true?

NICOLE

No!

DREW

In the last 22 minutes, she's coughed 44 times, averaging 30 seconds per question. I've deduced one cough means A, two B, and so on. She is feeding the class the correct answers. Well, some are correct. You need to brush up on the lymphatic system.

NICOLE

I have allergies!

DREW

To what? The lymphatic system?

DR. GRAYSON

I'm not kicking Nicole out of the exam, Drew.

DREW

I don't think she should be kicked out of the exam, Dr. Grayson. She should be kicked out of the program.

DR. GRAYSON

That's enough. Everyone back to your tests.

DREW

(*Stands up*) I'm finished. Do you want to grade it now? I assure you they're all correct.

NICOLE

(*Pulls her phone out*) My sister's calling me. She only calls if it's an emergency. Can I be excused?

DR. GRAYSON

Yes, of course.

DREW

Nice try, but even Wikipedia can't help you now. (*NICOLE scoffs and exits*) I'll be going.

DR. GRAYSON

Actually, Drew, do you mind if we chat for a bit?

DREW

Yes, I mind.

DR. GRAYSON

Sit. (*DREW sits*) Drew, you're the top student in your class. You're president of your cohort, you're involved in all the organizations.

DREW

I have to assure my spot in a top anesthesiology residency somehow.

DR. GRAYSON

I just have one question- do you have to be such a righteous asshat?

DREW

Excuse me?

DR. GRAYSON

Could you just cool it? I can't keep watching you belittle your colleagues. You need to spend more time studying the human condition.

DREW

I study lots of conditions- arthritis, hypertension, asthma, blindness-

DR. GRAYSON

The *human* condition. Emotions, aspirations, hope, dreams. Above all, love. (*Pauses*) Have you ever been in love?

DREW

Well, no. I've never found it worth my time.

NICOLE enters, in a panic.

NICOLE

I'm so sorry, Dr. Grayson, but I have to go. My sister needs me.

DR. GRAYSON

Go be with her, Nicole. I'll give you a different version of the exam tomorrow.

DREW

(Under his breath) Must be nice to have a whole extra night to study.

NICOLE

(Approaches DREW) If you knew my sister, you'd understand. She's not exactly stable, okay? Wish me luck. *(Exits)*

DREW

Oh, come on. I'm sure she's not *that* bad.

Act I, Scene 4

A Graveyard, Present Day

ROXIE enters, screaming into her phone.

ROXIE

I don't need a freaking boyfriend, okay?! Get off my ass! *(Hangs up)* Ugh, I can't deal with her! *(Flops down on the ground in front of a tombstone, pulls out notebook and pen, writes)* "Pain, heartbreak, torture, I eat my thoughts, but still I starve. Alone, alone, ALONE." *(Thinks)* Does anything rhyme with "torture?" "More-ture." "More sure." "Culture!" Close enough. *(Her phone rings)* Nope. *(She rejects it)* I do not have the time, mom. *(Continues writing)* "Sadness is my culture. I breathe with no air, alone, alone, ALONE."

NICOLE enters.

NICOLE

Roxie! Are you okay?!

ROXIE

I'm fine. Don't you have class right now?

NICOLE

Seriously? You scared the hell out of me! You said you felt hopeless.

ROXIE

I was trying to get into character. If I want to be a poet I have to be dark and moody and depressing. You get it.

NICOLE

I am trying to become a DOCTOR to SAVE HUMAN LIVES.

ROXIE

Okay, maybe you don't get it.

NICOLE

(Sits) Can I at least see what you're working on?

ROXIE

I'd prefer if you didn't.

NICOLE

Okay. Wait, is that a beautiful, lone robin, preening its feathers in a sunbeam?

ROXIE

What, where? (NICOLE grabs her notebook) Hey!

NICOLE

Writers are so easy. (Opens the notebook and starts reading) "Dunk my head in a toilet. Call it shit for brains."

ROXIE

It's not done yet.

NICOLE

Roxie, this whole poetry thing, do you think it's realistic?

ROXIE

It doesn't have to be realistic, it's a dream. You know I'm not like you, Nicole. You were telling people you wanted to be a doctor since the second grade. I was telling people I wanted to be a mermaid.

NICOLE

You would make a great mermaid.

ROXIE

I know.

NICOLE

Well, you should at least find a way to move out of mom's place.

ROXIE

What makes you say that?

MARCELLA

(O.S.) ROXANNE FRANCISCA BROWN.

NICOLE

No reason.

MARCELLA

How dare you talk to me on the phone like that?! And then you ignore me?!

ROXIE

Mom! How nice of you to join us! (*Gestures to the three of them and the tombstone she's sitting by*) Now it's a family reunion!

MARCELLA

Don't talk about your father like that. (*Does the sign of the cross and pats the tombstone*) Good to see you, George.

NICOLE

I don't think he can hear you.

MARCELLA

Nicole! Baby, I didn't see you there! Don't you have class today?

NICOLE

I'm... here now. That's all that matters.

MARCELLA

And school's going alright?

NICOLE

It would be if I wasn't constantly being terrorized by Drew. He's such a fart bag.

MARCELLA

Who's Drew?

NICOLE

The top student in our class. He's egotistical, rude, cold, and just horrible.

ROXIE

Men are swine.

MARCELLA

Lord almighty. I'll never have grandchildren. When you bury me, put a rattle on top of my grave so I can visit your children in the afterlife.

NICOLE

That's my cue to leave. If I run I might be able to finish my exam.

MARCELLA

Exam?

NICOLE

Good seeing you, mom. Catch you later, Roxie. (*She exits*)

MARCELLA

Please tell me you didn't force your sister to leave an exam.

ROXIE

I didn't *force* her, I-

MARCELLA

Nope! No. You're done talking. I have tried to be patient with you, Roxanne. I know things have been tough since your father died. We all miss him.

ROXIE

This isn't about dad.

MARCELLA

Oh, sweetheart. You need to learn how to support yourself and move on with your life. You can't live with me forever. I'm sorry, but I'm cutting you off.

ROXIE

What?! You can't do that! I'll have nowhere to go. I'll be homeless!

MARCELLA

You have some money saved from your last job. You can live off of that until you find a new one.

ROXIE

I don't have time to find a new job! I'm too busy writing my poetry!

MARCELLA

(Grabs notebook) This? This is never going to support you. This will never give you a life.

ROXIE

I'm so close to writing something brilliant, mom! I know I am!

MARCELLA

You want more time. Okay. Alright, Roxanne. I'll give you more time. You just have to do one thing for me.

ROXIE

Anything. I'll do anything.

MARCELLA

Get a boyfriend.

ROXIE

You can't be serious.

MARCELLA

As a heart attack. *(Looks at tombstone)* Sorry, George.

ROXIE

No. No, no, no. I'm not letting you hold my love life hostage!

MARCELLA

I want grandchildren, Roxanne! You want a place to live. This makes us both happy.

ROXIE

You've lost your mind!

MARCELLA

Have I? Then you better start looking for a job. And places for rent. I have to get back to the hospital now. If you change your mind, the offer still stands. *(Exits)*

ROXIE

Fat chance of that happening! (*Pauses*) See you for dinner tonight!

MARCELLA

(*O.S., yelling*) I'm making chicken enchiladas!

ROXIE

Great! Sounds terrible! (*Sighs, lays back down in front of the tombstone, opens her notebook, starts writing*) "Now I think I'd prefer to be alone. Alone. ALONE."

Act I, Scene 5

Medical School Lab, 1890/Graveyard, Present Day

MARY is lying on the table and CLARA, disguised as Clarence, is feeling around her scalp.

CLARA

Hm. (*Feels around*) Yes, alright... Oh? I suppose it's possible...

MARY

Mr. Williams? Clarence? What are you doing-

CLARA

Shh. Shh. I'm almost finished. (*Feels around more*) And done. According to this book, the shape of your skull indicates you're a psychopath.

MARY

I'm a what?!

CLARA

Oh, Mary, this is nonsense. But it's the only thing I can practice! I couldn't get a body for dissection lab, so I couldn't do anything. Have you heard of any other burials? At a different cemetery? I can't stand that ghastly grave digger.

MARY

Afraid not.

JOHN enters.

JOHN