

ETCHED IN STONE

by Andrew Martineau



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Andrew Martineau



Andrew Martineau has had several productions and staged readings of his work in NYC with Ivy Theatre Company, Love Creek Productions, and DreamCatcher Entertainment. His play "Functions" is available through Heuer Publishing and Green Room Press. "Etched in Stone" has won "Best Script" in two one-act play festivals in Virginia and Maryland. His comedy Trash Day has had development workshops in NYC and Baltimore, MD. Andrew teaches English at a private university in Virginia. He also has two published children's books entitled "Daddy Monster" and "When Shadows Fill Your Room."

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

FANNY (f).....A widow in her ‘80s. (*113 lines*)
PETER (m).....A widower in his mid-70s. (*114 lines*)
FRANCES (f).....Fanny’s younger self, 20s or 30s.
(37 lines)
JENNINGS (m).....Frances’ husband; British; 20s or 30s.
(39 lines)
PETE (m)Peter’s younger self; 20s or 30s.
(31 lines)
LYNETTE (f).....Pete’s wife; 20s or 30s. (*29 lines*)

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AUTHOR NOTES

Rituals offer compelling dramatic action. I think of a cemetery as a space that involves rituals not always clearly defined by society because they are less public in nature. A cemetery, or more euphemistically, a 'memorial park,' is a place that evokes dread and comfort, fear and tranquility. The ritual of placing flowers at a gravesite is simultaneously symbolic and therapeutic. It is abstract in that the offering of flowers represents devotion, yet it is concrete in its ability to allow the mourner to accept and live with grief. For many still living, cemeteries are necessary spaces.

PROPS

- ☐ 1 Picnic Basket (Peter)
 - ☐ Wine
 - ☐ 1 Glass
 - ☐ Caviar
 - ☐ Crackers
 - ☐ Corkscrew
- ☐ 1 Picnic Basket (Fanny)
 - ☐ Tequila
 - ☐ Margarita Mix
 - ☐ 1 glass
 - ☐ Sandwich
 - ☐ Deviled Eggs
 - ☐ Caviar
 - ☐ Crackers
 - ☐ Chutney
- ☐ 1 Picnic Basket (Pete/Lynette)
 - ☐ Wine
 - ☐ 2 Wine Glasses
 - ☐ Caviar
 - ☐ Crackers
- ☐ 1 Picnic Basket (Frances/Jennings)
 - ☐ Tequila
 - ☐ Margarita Mix
 - ☐ 2 glasses
- ☐ 2 Blankets (Fanny and Pete/Lynette)
- ☐ Bouquet of Red Flowers (Lynette)
- ☐ Letter/Piece of Paper (Pete)

AT RISE: *FANNY, a woman in her 80's, enters a cemetery and spreads out a blanket next to her deceased husband's headstone. She takes out various picnic items, such as a sandwich, a couple of deviled eggs, and a jar of caviar and crackers. She is dressed elegantly, if not eccentrically. PETER enters. He is in his mid-70's; distinguished. He wears a double-breasted black suit with a maroon tie. He also carries a picnic basket. He kneels by his deceased wife's headstone, does a "Sing of the Cross," and recites the prayer "Hail Mary" aloud. FANNY puts down her sandwich as he begins, bows her head, and begins reciting the prayer with PETER on the line, "Blessed art thou among women."*

PETER: Thank you.

FANNY: For what?

PETER: For joining me.

FANNY: Don't mention it. I hope you don't mind. I love that prayer.

I have a rosary here in my picnic basket somewhere if you would like to borrow it.

PETER: Oh, that's very nice of you, but... thank you, no. I only say it once. I figure if she hasn't heard me the first time, she's never going to.

FANNY: No, you mustn't ever think that. She could be tied up with someone else and not catch you until, say—"The Apostle's Creed."

PETER: Maybe she needs "Call Waiting."

FANNY: What is that?

PETER: You've never heard of "Call Waiting"?

FANNY: No, is that something Pope Benedict started? I have difficulty keeping abreast of the latest doctrine.

PETER: No, it's something that the phone companies started, I think. It's really very annoying, actually.

FANNY: Well, you should never annoy, Mary. She's a very sweet lady.

PETER: So I've heard.

FANNY: By the way, I have heard of "Call Waiting." Is that your wife?
(*Looking at LYNETTE'S headstone.*)

PETER: Where?

FANNY: (*Reading.*) Lynette Foster.

PETER: How do you know my wife's name?

FANNY: It's etched in stone here.

PETER: Oh! Yes, Lynette's my wife... was. For fifty-two years.

FANNY: Fifty-two years! My, how wonderful! This is my husband Jennings. We were married for sixty-four years.

PETER: Sixty-four?

FANNY: That's right.

PETER: So, you were married when you were what... five years old?

FANNY: (*Laughs.*) You're sweet. No, I was eighteen. He's been gone five years now. Go ahead... do the math.

PETER: Why would I care to?

FANNY: You don't want to know my age?

PETER: Of course not. I don't want to know *my* age.

FANNY: Still, it must be comforting to meet someone considerably older than yourself.

PETER: Why? I had a sister die at age 36, a mother and father die at age 78 and 72, respectively, a wife die at age 75, and daughter die at age four. Therefore, being a younger age is of no comfort to me if you equate an older one with approaching death.

FANNY: You had a daughter die at age four? I'm so sorry.

PETER: Thank you. It was an accidental death.

FANNY: How does anyone survive something like that?

PETER: I don't know. There's a part of me that goes on as if it never happened. I still consider myself a father, even though I haven't had a child for nearly fifty years. There she is... down there. (*He points to a small headstone a few yards away.*)

FANNY: I can't quite make out her name.

PETER: It's Belinda.

FANNY: How pretty. (*Pause.*) It's a beautiful day for a picnic, don't you think?

PETER: Yes, I suppose. Do you mind if I join you?

FANNY: No at all. I'd be delighted. This is my plot I'm sitting on.

PETER: You don't say! I'm sitting on mine.

FANNY: Well then, you have every right to be sitting there.

PETER: True, but I don't want to disturb you, if you want to be alone with Jennings.

FANNY: It's quite all right. Jennings doesn't say much, to tell you the truth. I've been picnicking here for five years now, and frankly, it's nice to have a living person to share it with for a change. Does that sound terrible?

PETER: No. It just sounds honest.

FANNY: Although I'm sorry it has to be under these circumstances. Your wife died fairly recently, didn't she?

PETER: Yes. Well, no. It's been almost a year now.

FANNY: (*Grabbing his hand.*) Still, you're very brave. Do you know that?

PETER: Yes. But thank you for saying so.

FANNY: Well, since we're going to be neighbors, why don't we get to know each other a little better.

PETER: All right.

FANNY: You know, I was just struck by something rather funny. We know our late spouses' names already, but we don't know each other's.

PETER: You're right. I guess that's because we're fortunate enough not to have them carved out here yet.

FANNY: That must be it. I'm Fanny.

PETER: I beg your pardon?

FANNY: Fanny.

PETER: It's nice to meet you... Fanny. I'm Peter.

FANNY: Hello, Peter. You know, it's surprising we've never met her before.

PETER: Well, I must admit that I haven't been here often.

They proceed with their picnic. PETER takes out a jar of caviar and a box of crackers.

FANNY: We both have caviar. What a coincidence!

PETER: Lynette hated caviar.

FANNY: You don't say! So did Jennings. Isn't it lovely to be able to eat all the things you like now without someone asking you how you can eat them?

PETER: God yes! I mean... I wouldn't use the word *lovely*. It's... I don't think I have much of an appetite after all.

FANNY: Oh, I'm sorry. I've made you feel bad, haven't I? Wait! Maybe I have something in my basket that your wife liked to eat.

PETER: No, it's all right. I just have a little reflux problem. I acquired it recently along with my thyroid condition and my rheumatoid arthritis. Lynette used to say that getting old is about learning how to get two or three medical problems under control so you can make room for the next batch of them.

FANNY: You don't have to tell me! Did Lynette like chutney?

PETER: Yes, she did, actually.

FANNY: Here you go.

FANNY hands PETER the chutney in a plastic container.

PETER: Thank you, but I don't really like chutney myself.

FANNY: Oh, I'm sorry again. I didn't even ask you.

She takes it back. PETER takes out a bottle of wine.

FANNY: You know, Peter, alcoholic beverages are not allowed in the cemetery.

PETER: Will you tell?

FANNY: Of course not. I just thought I would warn you.

She takes out a bottle of tequila.

PETER: Tequila?

FANNY: Jennings loved margaritas.

PETER: You're actually going to make a margarita here?

FANNY: Yes... without the crushed ice, of course. But I have a chilled glass in my cooler with salt on it. Would you like one?

PETER: Thank you, no. I'll stick with my wine.

FANNY: Suit yourself. Have you ever had a drink in a cemetery before, Peter?

PETER: No. Wait... I take that back. I have.

FANNY: Really? Well, my friend, I suppose you know then that this isn't such a depressing place once you're bombed out of your skull.

PETER: Well, I don't plan to get bombed.

FANNY: I was joking, Peter. Do I look like a lush to you? Wait—don't answer that. I'd rather not know. Well then, let's get started. It's "Happy Hour"!

They go about their business. PETER gets out a corkscrew and opens his wine, while FANNY prepares her margarita.

FANNY: Bottoms up!

PETER: Cheers.

They clink glasses and drink.

PETER: How's the margarita?

FANNY: Strong. But that's good. *(As they eat and drink.)* So, Peter, tell me some more about Lynette. What was she like?

PETER: She was... she was very kind.

FANNY: Yeah? That's good. What else?

PETER: She was a good mother.

FANNY: Another plus. What else?

PETER: *(Thinks for a second.)* She loved life.

FANNY: I'm sure she did. You know, I'm going to say something now that I have no business saying, but that all sounds like a eulogy.

PETER: I'm sorry? What did you expect me to say—that she was a bitch and I'm glad she's dead?

FANNY: Yes, if it's the truth.

PETER: Well, it's not true. It may all sound cliché, but she was truly a wonderful woman. Now if that weren't true, how else could I have stayed married to her for fifty-two years?

FANNY: Well... it could be because she was a wonderful woman, which I'm sure is probably true, or it could be because of guilt of some sort.

PETER: Excuse me?

FANNY: It could be because she was a wonderful...

PETER: No, what was the last part?

FANNY: Oh... guilt. Didn't you say you had a daughter who died accidentally when she was four?

PETER: Yes, and I'm sorry that I did. And I don't know what you are insinuating, but statistics show that most marriages break *up* after something as horrific and unbearable as that happens.

FANNY: You're absolutely right. I'm very sorry, Peter. I don't know why, but I have insatiable desire to psychoanalyze you. Maybe it's because I find you extremely attractive.

PETER: You do?

FANNY: Yes, I do. And I also would like you to know that I don't hang out in cemeteries to try to pick up new widowers. I've heard there are women who do that, but I'm not one of them.

PETER: That's disgustingly sad.

FANNY: Isn't it?

PETER: Yes. But regardless of whatever *your* motives are to laden me with greater sadness than I already know, I just want you to know that the worst feeling I have right now—and believe me, I have a lot of very bad feelings—the thought that just might push me over the edge is the one in which I picture myself spending the rest of eternity right here beside *you*.

FANNY: Well... thank you. And if it will make you feel any better, just remember that we won't really be next to each other for all that long a time.

PETER: Oh, yes, I suppose that's true. I feel so much better now.

FANNY: You know something? I find you even more attractive when you're all riled up.

PETER: Do you? Well, you haven't even scratched the surface.

FANNY: Oh, good! You're finally revealing something about yourself. (*Awkward pause.*) So tell me something, Pete. How did you stumble into this cemetery? Did you just see this spot and say, "Yep, this is where I want to rest my old bones?"

PETER: No. It's pretty simple, really. Both my parents and Lynette's parents are buried here. But mine are up on the hill over there and hers are back down that road a little ways.

FANNY: That's nice. None of my relatives are here. I lived with them long enough; I don't want to be dead with them, too. Except, of course, for Jennings, but he's not a blood relation. Mercy, he's been gone so long, and the funny thing is I can remember putting him here like it was an hour ago.

PETER: I know what you mean. Then some days it seems like it never happened at all.

FANNY: Yeah, that's how you get through.

PETER: I can remember coming here with Lynette a few weeks after Belinda's funeral better than the funeral itself. We came here to say goodbye. You can't really do that at funerals you know—they're too formal—it's everyone else's time for that. It's only when it's just family that it seems right.

FANNY: So true. Tell me about that time.

PETER: No, I can't.

FANNY: Please. It'll be good for you to remember. And besides, if you don't tell me, I'll just make up my own story, and you may not like it.

PETER: Well... in that case. It was a Sunday afternoon in May. Lynette brought flowers from our garden.

LYNETTE and PETE enter. PETE is actually PETER as a much younger man. They put the flowers at the grave and then put down a blanket and start to have a picnic.

FANNY: Hey, they have the right idea! I mean... you and she. She's beautiful, Peter. You were looking good yourself, but that doesn't surprise me a bit.

PETER: We were too young to have had to go through something like that.

FANNY: It doesn't really matter how old you are, do you think?

PETER: Maybe not, but it matters how old your daughter is. We started out that day being so awkward around each other. It was just like we were meeting for the first time.

LYNETTE: The flowers look nice.

PETE: They're very colorful.

LYNETTE: Is it too much color? I should have brought the white azaleas.

PETE: No, Belinda liked the red ones. They're beautiful, Honey.

LYNETTE: Do you like the flowers, Belinda?

There is an awkward pause.

PETE: Would you like a glass of wine?

LYNETTE: Yes, please.

PETE gets out a bottle of wine that has already been opened and pours a glass for both of them. As he does this, FRANCES, who is a much younger FANNY, and JENNINGS, her husband, enter. They sit and silently start their own picnic at near their gravesites.

PETER: Who are they?

FANNY: Oh, that's Jennings and I.

PETER: I thought this was *my* story!

FANNY: I'm sorry, but your memory sparked one of mine. Do you think it's possible for me to completely tune out my memories just because we're reliving one of yours?

PETER: No, I suppose not.

FRANCES: Is this the spot, Jennings?

JENNINGS: Actually, they're right there. (*Pointing to where FANNY is sitting.*) But I'd rather not sit directly on top of where we'll be, if it's just the same to you.

FRANCES: Good thinking.

PETER: He's British.

FANNY: You're very observant.

JENNINGS: Time for a margarita!

PETER: Where did he learn to drink margaritas?

FANNY: New Mexico.

JENNINGS: We really shouldn't be doing this, you know.

FRANCES: Oh, why not, Sweetheart? We won't be able to do it when we're here for good.

JENNINGS: You're so right, as usual. So tell me, Frances my love, what do you think of this spot?

FRANCES: It's absolutely perfect.

PETER: Did he call you Frances?

FANNY: Yes, he did. That's my real name. Fanny has always been my nickname, and most people like it.

PETER: I never said I didn't like it.

FANNY: I just got that impression. Jennings didn't like it, either. He said it was a low-class name.

PETER: I don't know. It thinks it suits you.

FANNY: What... having a low-class name?

PETER: No, I didn't mean that. Never mind.

LYNETTE: It's a much nicer day than it was at the funeral.

PETE: Yes, it is... in more ways than one.

LYNETTE: True.

PETE: I never asked you how you liked the wine.

LYNETTE: It's fine.

PETE: It's not too dry?

LYNETTE: No, it's... it doesn't much matter to me how it tastes.

Thank you for letting me open it in the car. I needed to have some in my system before I got here.

PETE: You're welcome.

LYNETTE: I don't feel quite as jumpy. Would you care for some cheese?

PETE: Thank you, no.

FANNY: You even said that back then?

PETER: Said what?

FANNY: "Thank you, no." Are you sure you're not from England?

PETER: I'm sure.

FANNY: Jennings said that, too. Maybe that's why I'm attracted to you. You're a lot like him.

PETER: Am I? (*Pause.*) I think I'll eat my caviar now.

FANNY: How can you eat that stuff?

PETER: Watch me!

PETER starts to eat some caviar on a cracker.

FANNY: Peter, I apologize once again for what I said about you feeling guilty. I didn't even know the circumstances of your daughter's death. It was a very cheap shot. It's just that I couldn't stand to hear you go on about how kind and motherly your wife was. Take it from someone who knows: you'll never get over her death if that's the only way you can talk about her.

PETER: It's not the only way. It's just that it's the only way most people want to hear about someone who has died, so that it will be over and done with and they can go on to a more "acceptable" topic of conversation. Do you really find me attractive?



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