

The Double Wide Casket

By Bryan Curtis

THE CHARACTERS

Annagram Woodard—Age 69

Betty Queen Petty—Age 65—Annagram's sister

Bird Loggins—Funeral director

Gray Woodard—Age 49—Annagram's son

Everly Primm—Late 40's—Gray's boyfriend

Laura Leigh Woodard—Age 44—Annagram's daughter

Mary Pat—Age older—Friend of Hybernia and the family

Geneva—Age older—Friend of Hybernia and the family

(The roles of Mary Pat and Geneva take place via phone calls they make to each other as well as the two sisters. The purpose of the calls are to inform the audience about what is going on with the arrangements. They should also be a portrait of Southern gossip.)

Radio Announcer

The roles of Mary Pat, Geneva, and the Radio Announcer can also be played by the actors portraying Laura Leigh and Everly (he would be doing this dressed as a woman). Or if the theater prefers, they can cast actors for these parts. The radio announcer should be played by one of the six main actors.

Author's note: The people in this play should be portrayed as real characters and in no way, shape or form are meant to be seen as caricatures or stereotypes of southerners.

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

Act 1

Scene 1 (The first scene is optional. It is meant to be a way to share the news about the death of Hybernia in a true small town way. Theaters can also choose not to use this—and instead might prefer to print the spoken obituary for the audience to read)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

It is now time for Items of Regret sponsored by Anderson Funeral Home. Anderson Funeral home where the only stone we leave unturned is your headstone.

BIRD LOGGINS

We have one item of regret to share this morning. Mrs. Hybernia Bell from here in Amenable passed away in her sleep yesterday. Miss Hybernia was 90 years young. She was predeceased by her three husbands, Ellis Bell, Lee Childress, and Gerald "Sneak" Greer. She is survived by her daughters Annagram Woodard and Betty Queen (Mrs. Pinch) Petty, both of Amenable. Three grandchildren: Gray Woodard of Chapel Hill North Carolina, Laura Leigh Woodard and Little Pinch Petty of Amenable. Miss Hybernia was known far and wide for her baking skills and raised tens of thousands of dollars for local causes with her cakes. She used to go to Waverly Baptist Church but became a Methodist ten years ago and was overheard telling people she didn't know what took her so long to make the change. Visitation will be on Monday from 2 to 8 at Anderson's Funeral Home. Services will be Tuesday at 1:00 with visitation an hour before. The family says if you want a seat, get there early, as they are expecting a big turnout. Otherwise, you will have to stand in the parking lot and listen over the loudspeaker. Burial will be at Magnolia Summit Cemetery. Well maybe. At least we hope so. Stay tuned for more details. Memorials in Miss Hybernia's name can be made to the food bank at Porter Hollow Methodist because she believed no one should go home hungry.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Thank you to Anderson's Funeral Home for always keeping us informed. Now don't go away, we will be right back with the area hospital list where we will take callers if you know what's wrong with people.

Scene 2

(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 is 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 Gray?

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. You get ahold of Pinch?

BETTY QUEEN

I haven't tried. I can't remember if it's yesterday or tomorrow in Australia. Mama might not be dead there yet.

(Funeral director Bird Loggins, a very gossipy man walks out of his office and greets the two sisters)

BIRD

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?

BIRD

Not sure. Heard it was pretty good though.

ANNAGRAM

If I don't know who made it, I don't eat it. I don't know how clean their kitchens are.

BIRD

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 Ostrich they brought home from Africa. I just

about told Pinch to hit the road when I found out how much he paid to have that thing stuffed.

BIRD (*clearing his throat*)

Let me start by saying how sorry we all are about Miss Hybernian's passing. She was a real southern lady. We're getting lots of calls wanting details. I think it's going to be standing room only. Please know that our goal is to make the next few days as easy for you as possible--under the circumstances.

BETTY QUEEN

What circumstances?

BIRD

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.

BIRD

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. Y'all 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. You've been storing that coffin for almost 40 years.

BIRD

Of course not. Everything was been paid for in full. Miss Hybernian picked out her casket and everything when your daddy died. In hindsight that was a stupid promotion. We had to rent a storage locker to house all those coffins all these years. Your mama got lucky. Well, not lucky cause your daddy had to die to take advantage of it. But it was a real classy tombstone she picked out. 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. It's about killed the grass. I didn't think it was in particularly good taste either since Mildred died of a heart attack.

BETTY QUEEN

Then what's the problem?

BIRD

Just remember. 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?

BIRD

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?

BIRD

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's got 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 if we need to. So what? 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.

BIRD

Plus sized.

BETTY QUEEN

Huh?

BIRD

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.

BIRD

It's not that simple. I wish it was.

BETTY QUEEN

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

BIRD

Money can't solve this. Honey, we are 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. 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 mama'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's all that will fit in her plot.

BIRD

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 there. He wanted to be buried in his fishing boat, so his family bought up six plots. Buried him with the 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?

BIRD

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

BETTY QUEEN

You're not burning up my mama.

BIRD

Or we could always exhume your daddy's coffin and move him and your mama over to the Shady Rest part of the cemetery. That's where her third husband, Mr. Ellis, is laid to rest. But y'all know that. *(Bird 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 Hybernica 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 was 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. We used to do these rocks made out of the ashes. I thought they were going on catch on, but this nasty little girl threw one of them at her granddaddy and hit him in the head and he went into a coma. He didn't die or nothing but it made the news. The police came and everything acting like

we gave that little snot a weapon. That's when we went to jewelry.

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? There ain't no trees there. And how much rest do you think people get next to the train tracks?

BIRD

It's aspirational.

BETTY QUEEN

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

BIRD

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 Bird)* 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)*.

BIRD

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 nine times out of ten, it's men who want to do something different. It's men who want to be buried in 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)

BIRD *(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)*

Bird. 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.

End of scene Lights down