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# Gravestone Lickin' Good

by Timothy D. Starnes

Dedication:

For my dearest readers, friends, supporters, actors, directors, insurance adjustors, set designers, angry mothers and theatre investors. You're all exactly like cheap cigarettes at a nickel-and-dime convenience store. Always there. Thank you. I can only hope that this love and support isn't the butt of the joke.

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

DEATH: *Either male or female. Wears a suit and a chilling, wicked smile.*

PAMELLA PILSBOROUGH: *A feisty, southern woman with an affinity for butter.*

PAUL PILSBOROUGH: *Her husband. He wears a tacky sweater and wrinkled pants that make him look like he crawled out of a dryer lint-trap.*

BETTY: *A kindly old lady.*

ETHEL: *A woman in a nightgown. She looks eternally lost—that's because she is.*

NANCY: *An old grammar-teacher type in a flowery dress. Her scowl would frighten the naughtiest schoolchild.*

THE VOICE AND HAND: *From offstage only; first as the voice of Napoleon and later as the mysterious hand.  
(Can be played by same actor as Paul Pilsborough)*

## SETTING

*Looking in from the otherworld*

## PLAYING TIME

*Approximately 10 minutes*

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*(AT RISE: DEATH appears on what appears an empty stage. He takes out a logbook and begins flipping through it, taking no notice of the audience.)*

### DEATH

That's the round at the retirement home complete, highway accidents complete, just the back-alleys left. A productive day, all in... *(Checks pocket watch and sighs)* Ahhh. Nearly five. I should get going. Death never waits for anyone. Well, unless it is particularly fun and gruesome, that is. Then it waits until I'm bored.

*(DEATH laughs wistfully and files his logbook away. He turns and looks at the audience as he straightens his necktie and hat. He scowls and looks the audience over.)*

### DEATH, Continued

I'm sorry, I don't take walk-up-to appointments. You will just have to go about your business and wait on me. It's been like that since the beginning of time, space, and existence, and I don't plan to change the rules any time soon.

*(Suddenly a startled look appears on DEATH's face. He pulls out his logbook once again.)*

### DEATH, Continued

Great day in the mourning, I have forgotten someone during the pre-lunch shift. Pamella Pilsborough.

*(DEATH looks back at the audience.)*

### DEATH, Continued

You don't happen to know about Pamella Pilsborough, do you? Well, of course not. Let me tell you about her...

*(LIGHTS RISE on a kitchen setting as PAMELLA PILSBOROUGH enters. DEATH remains at the edge of the stage nearby.)*

### DEATH, Continued

Pamella Pilsborough is a widow. A black widow. Venomous, and not of her own choosing.

*(PAMELLA clatters about the kitchen pulling out pots and pans as if she is having a vicious stroke or heart attack. DEATH changes into a "Mr. Roger's-style housecoat and a slippers.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

She owns her own home-grown baking company, Pilsborough Pastry Products. PPP, for those with a short attention span. Plenty Perilous Problems, for those with a sense of humor about the situation.

*(DEATH laughs sarcastically in a tone reserved for late-night comedians laughing at their own jokes.)*

## PAMELLA

Hey, ya'll! How ya'll doin'? Good? *(Waits; expecting a response, but gets none)* Well... That's good...

## DEATH

She has always reminded me of someone, but I can just never put my finger on it. I suppose I'll figure it out when I stumble upon it again.

*(PAMELLA stumbles toward the refrigerator and pulls out a grossly-large tub of synthetic butter, and slams it onto the counter. She stumbles and falls down, pulling a knife from the counter down with her.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

She also has vertigo. I'm surprised that her clumsiness hasn't caused her end earlier. Do you know how many accident papers I've had to file on her? Every time I hope she's done herself in, just so that I don't have to do any more paperwork. This woman has committed forest genocide. The Sierra Club hasn't figured it out yet.

*(PAMELLA fumbles about and rises holding the knife between her teeth. She then spits it onto the counter.)*

## PAMELLA

Sorry about that, ya'll. Let's get cookin', Goodlookins'!

*(LIGHTS DOWN on the kitchen, leaving DEATH alone once again.)*

## DEATH

You may be wondering why Pamela is a widow. It's quite easy. She murdered her husband. He had a heart attack. I know, I know, you are asking – "How is a heart attack death, murder? That isn't right!" – Well, I'll tell you how.

*(PAUL enters.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

This is Paul, now *dead* Paul.

*(PAUL waves at Audience.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

Pamella killed him with kindness—literally. You see, Paul particularly loved his wife’s cinnamon-bun cake. Nobody else did. It was, and still maintains to be, the bane of church potlucks in the entire tri-state area; the conversation-and toilet-stopper at bingo night. At Christmas, the family will eat the fruitcake before even mildly considering eating a slice of cinnamon-bun cake.

## PAMELLA

*(In darkness)* It’s so good you’ll lick your fingers to the bone, ya’ll! *(Crashing sounds then LIGHTS UP on the kitchen area.)* I’m alright, ya’ll! I fell on the blender, but, it’s just a flesh wound! Nothing a little Crisco and a paper towel can’t fix!

## DEATH

At any rate, Pamella would always make Paul the particular cake in question. Paul called it food—society called it spousal abuse and a menace.

## PAMELLA

Paul loved my cinnamon-bun cake! It’s a real slice of heaven! Heaven in your mouth here down south!

## DEATH

It wasn’t the butter.

## PAMELLA

Three heaping scoops of it!

## DEATH

Or the sugar.

## PAMELLA

Two cups, give or take! Just eyeball it!

## DEATH

That is if you can see through the diabetic cataracts.

## PAMELLA

All in moderation, Honey-bun, all in moderation!

## DEATH

In her absent-minded stupor she sprinkled sugar soap onto the top instead of regular sugar. You know, the stuff used to peel off outdated wallpaper. You get it at the hardware store. In this case it peeled away Paul’s existence. He clocked-out in his easy chair.

*(PAUL exits offstage.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

The prosecution got her on a murder charge, but her lawyer got her out of the charge. He was the same lawyer that defended the muffin man of Fleece Street. No, not the fairy tale muffin man. Let's save that story for another day. At any rate, his muffins would be delightful compared to the brick'n'mortar that Pamela makes.

PAMELLA

It isn't my fault! It looks the same! *(Falls with a loud crash)* I've fallen and I don't know if I can get up!

DEATH

After Paul's funeral, Pamela served a meal in the church hall. She succeeded in snuffing out every single member of the congregation, pastor included.

PAMELLA

Lord knows, all stone dead!

DEATH

Six feet under. As far as I know, that was a unique case. The first in history. She created ricin from lima beans. Nobody knew it was even possible, and they still don't.

PAMELLA

Those lima beans were good enough to kill!

DEATH

Due to budget cuts on the state level the Coroner's office lost their poison-testing equipment. To conserve time and freezer-space the examiner chalked them all off to carbon monoxide poisoning.

PAMELLA

There was more chalk on the floor of that church hall than there is in a Crayola factory!

DEATH

At any rate...

PAMELLA

We are going to make a triple-bypass pie, ya'll! I named it this after it sent three ladies from my knitting circle to the heart disease clinic!

*(DEATH begins to speak but goes silent.)*

PAMELLA

If it's good, we have to use a lot of it, Honey-buns! That's what makes it good!

DEATH

Antifreeze tastes good. Should we use a lot of that?

PAMELLA

A pound of butter... Six cups of sugar, and some lard to grease the pan...

*(PAMELLA begins searching the kitchen for the ingredients.)*

DEATH

I'm Death... My existence is cruel! But, but, I just can't take watching this.

*(DEATH stands and watches with pure malcontent.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

But, who says that I can't have a little fun at work?

*(DEATH snaps his fingers and three elderly women, ETHEL, BETTY and NANCY run onstage.)*

DEATH, *Continued*

Annnnd—here are the victims of the bypass pie; Ethel, Betty, and Nancy.

BETTY

Why did you bring us back here? I don't feel comfortable being in this kitchen.

NANCY

It's like we are going to simply swell up like a toad by breathing in here.

ETHEL

Where are we?

BETTY

Be quiet, Ethel, you are having one of your spells. We are in Pamella's kitchen.

ETHEL

Pamella? Who is she? Who am I?

NANCY

*(Referring to ETHEL)* Why did she have to come, anyway?

BETTY

We can't leave her out just because she's lost it!

NANCY

I'm going to lose it if we keep at it.

ETHEL

What have I lost? I'm right here! Hey, girls!

*(BETTY and NANCY roll their eyes in unison.)*

DEATH

Afternoon', Ladies.

*(The WOMEN turn and look at DEATH, taken back by their sudden interruption.)*

NANCY

Well, look who it is! *(Addressing DEATH)* Isn't it a pleasure to see you. The last time we met you interrupted my shuffleboard game. *(Puts a hand on hip)* For good. I was winning, thank you.

BETTY

*(To DEATH)* I was trying to finish a crochet for my granddaughter. Thanks to you she has a Cinderella doll without a head.

DEATH

Well, I'm rather sorry, but, you know how it is. The man upstairs isn't very patient.

ETHEL

He always plays loud music and stays up too late and never pays the rent on time!

BETTY

Not the upstairs renter, Ethel!

ETHEL

Oh... Well, I'm sure whoever it is you are talking about is a nice person.

DEATH

Ladies, ladies! We can't get off-track. How would you like to enact your revenge?

NANCY

Well, I don't think we have anything better to do today.

*(DEATH looks to the audience and smiles his wicked smile.)*

DEATH

Now, with some spirits summoned, we sit back and wait.

*(DEATH snaps his fingers, and someone offers a bowl of popcorn from behind the curtain. DEATH takes it and takes a seat at the edge of the stage.)*

BETTY

Come on, girls! Let's make her pay!

*(ETHEL quickly hides in the pantry as NANCY and BETTY take up spots at the kitchen counter.)*

BETTY, *Continued*

Nancy, where is Ethel?

NANCY

I don't know! I thought you were watching after her!

BETTY

No, I'm busy making the plan of attack! If Napoleon had to babysit his troops do you think he'd have time to conquer Europe!?

FRENCH-SOUNDING VOICE (*OFFSTAGE*)

Leave me out of 'zis!

*(NANCY and BETTY look at one-another with glances akin to finding \$200 bill in a coat at Goodwill. PAMELLA stops searching the kitchen.)*

PAMELLA

Ya'll, I can't find the lard!

DEATH

You'd better check yourself before you wreck yourself.

*(BETTY quickly opens the cabinet halfway, revealing ETHEL hiding inside. PAMELLA looks over.)*

PAMELLA

Well gahl-darn, I didn't check in there, ya'll!

*(PAMELLA moves to the cabinet and looks in. ETHEL attempts to frighten her.)*

NANCY

Come on, now, Ethel! You were more scary than that when you were alive! You can do better than that!

ETHEL

Well, let's see you do better! There is a broom over there in the corner for you to fly around the room with, you old witch!

*(NANCY runs over to ETHEL and begins to wrestle her to the ground.)*

NANCY

You take that back, you dementia'd old bag!

ETHEL

*(Choking)* Paper or plastic?

PAMELLA

Found it!

*(PAMELLA starts carrying over the tub of lard, stepping over ETHEL and NANCY who are still rolling around on the floor like pigs in mud. BETTY quickly replaces the ingredients on the counter with cleaning products.)*

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**

