

GRAVESIDE MANNERS

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By **Scott Icenhower**

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SYNOPSIS: With one foot on his grave and the other on his cooler, Barry faces his mortality by planning his going away party.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN)

BARRY WATERS (m).....Mature, irreverent, honest, and outgoing, has accepted his fate.

REGINALD HOLCOMB (m).....Manager of the funeral home and cemetery. Bit of a stuffed shirt.

COSTUMES

BARRY: Shorts, Hawaiian shirt, sandals, sunglasses

REGINALD: Business suit

PROPS

- Lawn chair
- Cooler (strong enough to be sat on by Reginald)
- A drink for Barry
- File folder with various documents
- Pad and pen for Barry
- Music playing device with earphones

SETTING:

A pleasant summer afternoon in the cemetery. Present day.

AT RISE:

BARRY is sitting in a lawn chair wearing sunglasses, shorts, and a Hawaiian shirt. He is listening to iTunes while making a list and sipping on a cool drink. He has a cooler for his drinks and a file folder with documents on top of the cooler.

REGINALD: *(Walks up to BARRY and watches him for a moment.)*

Excuse me, sir... Excuse me!

BARRY: Oh, room service. I didn't see you there. How ya doing?

REGINALD: Sir, I must ask you to leave the grounds.

BARRY: I'm Barry. Barry Waters. *(Extends his hand. When REGINALD doesn't respond, BARRY says mockingly.)* To whom do I have the pleasure?

REGINALD: Reginald Holcomb. I'm the general manager here at Restful Acres. And I must ask you to picnic somewhere else, please.

BARRY: Nice to meet you, Reggie. Nice place you got here. But as I understand it, I own this land and therefore have the right to do with it as I please.

REGINALD: This is a cemetery owned by the Restful Acres Corporation—

BARRY: No, no you don't understand. *(Hands REGINALD a file folder.)* There's the deed right on top. See, it says Restful Acres, Garden of Peace subdivision, section two, plot 17. This is plot 17. I'm a landowner.

REGINALD: I'm happy for you, Mr. Waters. *(Hands folder back.)* But there does come responsibility with owning property. Several of our patrons have complained that your presence here in this way implies a lack of respect for the deceased.

BARRY: You think it's the shirt?

REGINALD: I'm sure that adds to their distress.

BARRY: Am I in grave danger? Get it? Grave danger? You probably know more funeral jokes than I do.

REGINALD: Perhaps you have been fortunate not to have lost a loved one yet. Until one comes to grips with mortality, it is often difficult to understand how other people—

BARRY: Hey! I've come to grips with mortality more than you'll ever know. Every day I'm reminded of it, but how I react to it is my choice. I'm through with the pity party. Well, I'm through with the pity. I'm keeping the party. Want something to drink, Reg?

REGINALD: Others are obviously not as enlightened as you. They still need to grieve, they need to say goodbye, they need...a final resting place for their loved ones that looks like a final resting place.

BARRY: All right, Reg man. You help me with something, and I'll pack up.

REGINALD: Thank you, sir. How may I be of assistance?

BARRY: Start by calling me Barry.

REGINALD: Certainly...Barry.

BARRY: Thanks, Reg, ol' boy. Okay, I need some help planning my funeral.

REGINALD: Your funeral?

BARRY: Yep. Doc gives me about a year.

REGINALD: I'm truly sorry...Barry.

BARRY: Thanks, Reg, but I've accepted it now. That's life, you know?

REGINALD: It's actually a very thoughtful gesture to pre-plan your funeral. It takes the burden off of your grieving family.

BARRY: Yeah, well, I don't know if they'll like what I got in mind.

REGINALD: Should I sit down for this?

BARRY: Sure, sure, where are my manners? That cooler will hold you. (*REGINALD sits on the cooler.*) Okay, I already have a prepaid funeral plan...uh, you're sitting on it. (*REGINALD raises up to get the folder out from under him.*) You see? It's irrevocable. If I could sell it all back to you I would.

REGINALD: So you didn't—

BARRY: No, my wife bought it for me when we were married. Christmas before that she bought me luggage. You could tell she was trying to get rid of me. Anyway, I don't have to use all of it, do I? Can I pick and choose on that list of prepaid items?

REGINALD: If you don't use it all then you won't be taking advantage of your ex-wife's generosity.

BARRY: I'll be dead. I won't be taking advantage of anything.

REGINALD: If you like, we can donate any services or items you don't use to hospice.

BARRY: Good. Now you're thinking, Reg-master. Okay, do I have to use a new casket?

REGINALD: I would think so because the used caskets would be...used.

BARRY: Well, could I use a new one and then donate it to hospice?

REGINALD: I don't think I'm following you on this one.

BARRY: I'm going to have it filled with ice—

REGINALD: We provide embalming services.

BARRY: No, that's what I'll be providing. A casket filled with ice to keep the beer cold. Trust me, my friends will drink enough to embalm themselves. Now, I don't need an organist. I want karaoke. Does the chapel have a sound system?

REGINALD: Stop it right there. Have you been stringing me along this whole time?

BARRY: No, I'm just trying to put the "fun" back in funeral.

REGINALD: Sir, I have asked you to leave politely. I have tolerated your irreverence and lack of respect, and I've humored you as long as I can. I'm going to call the police and let them take care of this situation. *(Starts to exit.)*

BARRY: No, don't, don't go. Come back. Please, Reginald...come back. I'm sorry I upset those people, and I didn't mean to piss you off.

REGINALD: Very well, Barry, but are you ready to leave now?

BARRY: Almost. I really wanted to plan this service.

REGINALD: A casket cooler with karaoke?

BARRY: Well, when you put it that way...I can't wait! I know it's not traditional, but it's not illegal, is it?

REGINALD: We have a reputation at Restful Acres and a respect for the ones left behind.

BARRY: Yeah, but how about the one who's dying? Doesn't he get what he wants?

REGINALD: We try to honor a last request.

BARRY: But if you don't...I mean, he's dead, what does it really matter, right? (*REGINALD remains silent.*) Well, the difference here is, I going to be alive at my funeral.

REGINALD: I'm calling the police.

BARRY: No, no, don't go. Hear me out. I'm serious, really. The last funeral I went to was unbearable. It wasn't a celebration of a man's life. It was just—sad. We lost someone, but it was more than that. The room was filled with regret. Regret held by a lot of people in that chapel who never got the chance to tell the man what he meant to them. He never really knew what they thought about him. How much they loved him. He never realized how much I looked forward to our father and son pancake breakfast on Saturday mornings.

REGINALD: A funeral is a ritual designed to aid in the grieving process and provide closure to someone's passing.

BARRY: I don't think we accomplished those goals, Reggie. My father never knew what a great man we thought he was.

REGINALD: I believe he knows now Barry.

BARRY: Well, I wanted to see him grin and shake his head no when I told him. I wanted to hug him when he laughed about it.

REGINALD: So why wasn't he told?

BARRY: No one knew he was sick. Dad knew, but he didn't tell anybody. He was already in a coma when I found out. I never had time. Mom said he didn't want to burden us. Most folks don't think to say the important stuff until it's too late.

REGINALD: Then I trust you have told your friends of your condition?

BARRY: That's why I want to have the party at the funeral home and be there to see them. Once I'm in the hospital, I won't get many visitors. It's a downer. I know that. I don't want to do that to them. I want this ritual of saying goodbye to be joyous. I need closure, too.

REGINALD: So you want your friends and family to come to a funeral home, get drunk and tell you what a great man you are? It sounds like a pity party to me.

BARRY: You don't know what the hell you're talking about! Maybe when you come to grips with your own mortality you'll understand how other people...forget it. I've already felt sorry for myself. I've cried about all the things I haven't done yet. I've even screamed at God. But I'm past that now. There's just one thing I have to know before I leave.

REGINALD: What's that?

BARRY: (*This is the heart of the play. Don't rush it.*) Did I make a difference? Just a small change for good in someone's life, but a difference. That's all I need to know. No, I'm not great. Never will be, but—was I worth it? And you can never know that for sure unless someone else tells you.

REGINALD: (*Lets it sink in.*) I've heard many a eulogy that should have been said when the person was alive. (*Pauses to consider.*) Would you be willing to have this service after hours? If you started around eleven o'clock, we wouldn't have to be concerned with the noise.

BARRY: So if we had a party loud enough to wake the dead, you wouldn't care?

REGINALD: We don't give refunds. I don't see a problem.

BARRY: I've never heard a no-refund policy sound so sweet. Thank you, Reggie. This is the best I've felt in months.

REGINALD: That reminds me. And understand I'm just doing my job. If you're donating the casket, what are your plans for your remains?

BARRY: Wow, that was a buzzkill. But you'll love this. I'm donating my body to science. My grandmother never thought I could get into medical school. Well, in your face, Granny. I'm going to [*Insert name of local medical school.*]*—in a bag—but I'm going.*

REGINALD: She'll be proud, no doubt. When did you want to schedule this—shindig?

BARRY: I like the hip talk, Daddy-O. I was thinking the last Friday of this month.

REGINALD: When we get to my office, I'll schedule it first thing. You're going to have some time afterwards. What will you do?

BARRY: I want to travel while I still have the strength. I'm going to buy a plane ticket, have a stranger feel me up in security, and see the country. (*BARRY stands takes his chair and folder.*)

REGINALD: Let me get that cooler for you. There's one more thing. Funeral personnel will have to be present while you're on the premises. It being after hours and all, I couldn't—in good conscience—ask one of my employees. So would you mind if I was present?

BARRY: It would be an honor to have you at my going away party.

They start to leave for REGINALD'S office.

REGINALD: Thank you. And since I'm making several exceptions for you, would you do me a favor?

BARRY: Sure, name it.

REGINALD: If you were willing to donate the interment fee and flower allowance, I could get us a stripper.

BARRY: A stripper? At a funeral? Interesting.

REGINALD: When I fill out the paperwork, I'll have to list who's the stiff. (*Starts to laugh.*)

BARRY: Ahhhh, that's the worst joke I ever heard. Did you just make that up?

REGINALD: No, I've got a book of them in the office. Come along, I'll show you.

They exit.

THE END