

THE ROT

By Jacquelyn Priskorn

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ISBN: 978-1-60003-830-3

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PUBLISHED BY BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS
1-888-473-8521

THE ROT

A One Act Dark Comedy

By Jacquelyn Priskorn

SYNOPSIS: The dead have risen and are now wreaking havoc in suburban neighborhoods. These clumsy undead have proven to be quite annoying, wandering aimlessly with awkward stares and knocking over garbage cans. On this hot summer day, Blair and Art want to introduce their families and announce their engagement. However due to a case of *The Rot*, it will not go smoothly and the zombies aren't entirely to blame.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 female, 2 male, 1-6 extras)

BLAIR (f).....	20s-30s; Independent, headstrong young lady with a secret. <i>(71 lines)</i>
ART (m).....	20s-30s; Smart and brave, man in love. <i>(69 lines)</i>
ELENORE (f)	40s-60s; Mother to Blair. Fashion forward, free spirit. Loves the luxuries in life. <i>(51 lines)</i>
BEV (f)	40s-60s; Mother to Art. The classic, doting type. A surprisingly fierce fighter. <i>(52 lines)</i>
LANCE (m).....	40s-60s; Conservative, All-American dad. <i>(40 lines)</i>
HEATHER (f).....	12-18; Sister to Art. Typical, pouty, younger sibling. <i>(39 lines)</i>
ZOMBIE (m)	Dead. Belching, stumbling, rotting zombie in yoga pants. <i>(Non-Speaking)</i>
EXTRAS (m/f).....	0-5; Optional Zombies <i>(Non-Speaking)</i>

DURATION: 25 minutes

SETTING: A suburban home on a hot summer's day.

PROPS

- ☐ Perfume
- ☐ Cups
- ☐ Plates
- ☐ Flatware
- ☐ Napkins
- ☐ Band-Aids
- ☐ Broom
- ☐ Red Wine
- ☐ Gun
- ☐ Purse
- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Cigarette
- ☐ Buns
- ☐ Blanket

COSTUMES

BLAIR – At opening, sloppy PJs and bed head. Second appearance, cute sundress, band aids on legs, with little patches of grey skin peeking out.

ART – Suburban guy uniform. Khakis and polo shirt. Or however you see him.

ELENORE – Fashionable pants and blouse. The best dressed lady at a picnic.

BEV – Probably best to go with an outfit with pants as well, so she can comfortably fight with Elenore. Possibly yacht club chic?

LANCE – Dark colored clothes. Possibly a business casual look that he can hide a weapon on his person.

HEATHER – Sundress, skirt or shorts so that the zombie gunk she gets on her is visible. Also washable.

ZOMBIE – Women's yoga pants, possibly super distressed and whatever other zombie wear you see fit.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The window can be as simple as a large frame hanging down from the rafters or several black boxes stacked up on either side with a couch in front to indicate a wall. Just try to make the window a focal point as the action “outside” is just as important as the action “inside.” The “shades” can be pantomimed and indicated with light cues.

Spend time choreographing your zombie blocking. Your zombie actor should be very comfortable with physical comedy. You can certainly cast a female in this role, but make sure the costume and make up design is gender neutral (aside from the yoga pants), otherwise it ruins the gag that the zombie is actually Blair’s “late husband Harry.” This could be an award winning role for someone!

AT RISE: *BLAIR shuffles through the living room in her pj's, opening shades. It's obviously morning; each window shade opened fills the room with light. She opens the last shade and is startled to see a ZOMBIE on the other side of the glass. She screams. The ZOMBIE half-imitates her scream back.*

BLAIR: Art! It's in the yard again!

ART: *(Offstage.)* Did it get in the garbage?

BLAIR: I don't know! It's just standing there!

ART: Just ignore it. My parents should be here soon.

BLAIR: *(Grumbles.)* Crap.

She exits back into the bedroom. The ZOMBIE watches as she leaves, then slowly shuffles away from the window. The doorbell rings. ART enters and opens the door. ELENORE floats in, spraying perfume in the air.

ELENORE: There are at least three of them out there! P.U.! God bless Liz Taylor's White Diamonds, am I right? Your parents here yet, Artie?

ART: Hey, Elenore. No, not yet. Good thing, too. Your daughter is in a panic. We accidentally slept in this morning.

ELENORE: Morning? Oh, Artie. Blair has been a bad influence on you. It's practically noon.

ART: Morning. Noon. It's all perspective.

ELENORE: *(Laughs.)* She teach you that, too?

ART shrugs good-naturedly.

Blair, honey? Mama's here! Need any help?

BLAIR: *(Shouting.)* I'm fine, mama! Just help Art!

ELENORE: Put mama to work, Artie!

ART: Um, well, everything is pretty much ready. I'm going to turn on the grill. Could you set the table?

ELENORE: We're not eating outside, are we? Those things are really stinking up the neighborhood today.

ART: Nah. It's too hot anyway.

He heads for the back door. ELENORE begins setting the table. She calls as he exits.

ELENORE: Have you tried calling the city? Have them round 'em up?

ART: *(Shouting.)* The city isn't any help. Hey! Shoo! Get out of there! Ugh!

He comes back in, just in time for the doorbell to ring frantically, followed by desperate pounding on the door.

That must be my family.

ELENORE: Oh goody!

She continues setting the table as ART answers the door. BEV, LANCE and HEATHER, push into the house. BEV Screams unintelligibly. ART calmly goes to kiss BEV.

ART: Hi mom!

BEV: What are those things?!

ELENORE: *(Shouting from the dining area.)* Stink, don't they?

LANCE: One was just lying in the middle of your driveway! Reached for your sister's ankle when she got out of the car!

HEATHER: It touched me. It got gunk on my ankle. Am I going to die?

ART: *(Laughs.)* Just come in and sit down. Blair, they're here!

ELENORE comes in to introduce herself. The family is still in a panic.

ELENORE: Hi. I'm Elenore. Blair's mom. You must be Bev and Lance. And Art's sister, Heather. How was your drive in?

BLAIR enters, wearing a cute sundress and several band aids on her legs. At the same time, the ZOMBIE returns to the window. BEV screams before BLAIR can say "Hello."

BLAIR: *(Exasperated.)* Art!

ART: I'm on it!

LANCE: Is it on fire?!

ART: Oh, stupid thing bumped into the grill! Sonofa—(*Runs outside with a broom.*)

BEV: Art! No! Don't go out there!

ELENORE: (*Sits down near the family.*) Did you hit a lot of traffic?

LANCE: (*Standing to follow ART.*) Art! Get back in here!

ELENORE: He's got it, Lance. Blair, go help your boyfriend.

BLAIR rolls her eyes and begrudgingly goes outside. The ZOMBIE slams up against the window. ART whacks at it with the broom. HEATHER begins to cry in fear.

Oh honey, don't worry. Art's not going to hurt it...

LANCE: Hurt it? Are you kidding?!

BLAIR: (*Offstage.*) Should I turn the hose on?

ART: (*Offstage.*) No, it's fine.

BEV: What's going on?!

BLAIR and ART reenter. BLAIR crosses to ART'S PARENTS and extends her hand to BEV.

BLAIR: Sorry about all that. It's nice to finally meet you.

BEV simply stares in horror. BLAIR looks at her hand.

Oh, gunk! I'm so sorry! (*Grabs a napkin from the table.*)

ELENORE: Blair, I just set that table.

BLAIR: I'll get another napkin, ma!

HEATHER: Are those zombies out there?

ART: Yeah. We think the hot weather brings them out. Makes 'em restless. Just like us, hey pop?

LANCE: A zombie almost ate your sister in the driveway!

ART: Ha! Good one, pop!

LANCE: Good one? Look at her leg!

BLAIR: I'll get you a napkin, Heather.

BEV: What's going on?!

ART: Mom, calm down. Can we get you something to drink?

ELENORE: I was just going to open a bottle of wine.

HEATHER: Am I going to die?

ART: Quit being such a drama queen, Heather.

BEV: It was going to eat her, Art! Those things are out there!

BLAIR kneels beside HEATHER and starts to rub the gunk off of her ankles while HEATHER quietly sobs.

ELENORE: Hold up. Are you telling me you've never seen a zombie before?

She pours wine for everyone except HEATHER. She hands HEATHER a water.

HEATHER: In the movies.

BLAIR: There. All better. Should we put the food on the grill, baby?

LANCE: No one is going out there!

ART: Pop? What's wrong?

LANCE: What's wrong? Are you joking?!

ELENORE: Artie, dear, I don't think your family is comfortable with the... *(Whispers.)* Zombies.

BLAIR: I swear, they don't get inside. The house is very clean. Oh lord, Art, your family thinks I'm a terrible housekeeper.

ELENORE: You are a terrible housekeeper, dear.

BLAIR: Ma!

LANCE: *(Pulls out a gun.)* It's back at the window.

ELENORE: Oh no, you don't like red wine? I'm so sorry.

ART: Dad! Stop! What are you doing?!

BLAIR: Why does he have a gun?!

LANCE: I'm going to protect the family.

ART: From what?!

BEV: The monsters!

ART: For Pete's sake, pop, put the gun away!

LANCE: It's at the window! It's going to get in!

ELENORE: No, no, Lance! They're far too stupid to get inside. It's fine. Really. So, white wine?

BEV: What is wrong with all of you?

HEATHER: Is it looking at me? I think it's looking at me.

BLAIR: No, Heather. They're harmless. All they do is knock over garbage cans and stink. They're like big, smelly raccoons.

HEATHER: But it tried to eat me.

ART: C'mon, Heather! They're dead! They don't eat anymore.

LANCE: Well, they're walking around. Is it too much to assume they eat, too?

ART: They don't eat, pop. They're just annoying.

ELENORE: You've really never seen them before?

BLAIR: They live in the city, ma!

ELENORE: I'm sure they have the rot in the big city, too, Blair. They're just more hidden among the dumpsters, alleyways and people who are just dead inside.

BLAIR: Maybe we should start grilling the food?

BEV: Food?

ART: You didn't eat already, did you, mom? I thought for sure I said you were coming for lunch.

BEV: Am I crazy? Or is everyone crazy?

LANCE: This was a mistake. I knew this was a mistake.

ART: Mistake? What mistake?

BEV: How can you be so calm?

BLAIR: This is a disaster. Art, this is a disaster!

ART: This is not a disaster. Now everybody just calm down. I'm going to start cooking the burgers and we're going to have a normal lunch.

ELENORE: Oh, let me! You stay here and chat with your family. *(Grabs her purse and pulls out a lighter.)* Just in case the grill went out. *(Grabs her purse and exits.)*

There is an awkward silence.

LANCE: This is crazy. I'm going out there.

ART: Dad, sit down, please! I just wanted to have a normal lunch with my family so I could show them my new house and introduce them to my girlfriend. This is Blair.

BLAIR: Hi. Welcome to our home. Sorry about...everything...

HEATHER: You guys are acting like all this is normal. Dead people walking around?

BLAIR: Well it's only really become "normal" over the last few months. But they've been around for a while. It's hard to remember life before them.

ART: Mom, please don't cry.

BEV: This is a nightmare. Someone please wake me up.

We see ELENORE pass the window outside, cigarette in her mouth and angrily throwing buns at the ZOMBIE. The ZOMBIE isn't fazed at all and wanders clumsily around the back yard.

LANCE: We warned you not to move out here.

ART: Pop, there's nothing wrong with the suburbs.

LANCE: Really?!

BLAIR: Really. Sanitation comes by once a month, scoops up the ones clogging up the streets and takes them to a landfill. We don't do anything but pay an extra point eight percent in taxes.

ART: Pick up day is tomorrow.

The ZOMBIE stumbles over to the window, bread in its mouth and hair. Unnoticed by ALL but HEATHER.

HEATHER: They are kind of cute.

BEV: The city is so much safer, Arthur. And cleaner.

BLAIR: Bev, my mom and I have lived here all our—

BEV: "Bev?" Really? Are we at that point? Because I don't think we're at that point yet.

ART: Mother, calm down, will ya?

LANCE: Don't talk to your mother like that!

ELENORE stumbles past the window with the ZOMBIE collapsed on top of her like a sack of potatoes, a bun in its mouth. HEATHER watches, enthralled.

HEATHER: Aw!

ART: Well, I can't let you talk to my fiancée like that!

BEV: Fiancée?!

BLAIR: Oh, I so wanted this to be perfect!

ELENORE: *(Enters, disheveled.)* Hope you're all cutting back on carbs. We're out of buns.

ART: We just bought buns!

ELENORE shrugs. BLAIR runs off in tears.

Now look what you did! (*Chases after her.*)

ELENORE: Was it something I said?

LANCE: C'mon. We should go.

ELENORE: No, no! Lunch is almost ready! You can't leave!

BEV: What if that...thing...is still in the driveway?

HEATHER: (*Looking out the window.*) Aw! He thinks he's people!

BEV: He can't marry that girl, Lance. He'll never come home again!

ELENORE: Hold up. "That girl?" "That girl" is my daughter.

BEV: I only meant—

ELENORE: I know what you meant. You know, you city folk are all alike. You think you're so much better than us suburban folks with your "family values" and "easy access to cultural activities."

HEATHER wanders outside.

LANCE: That's not what she's saying...

ELENORE: Of course that's what she's saying. Why else would my daughter not be good enough for your city boy son?

LANCE: Now wait just a minute!

BEV: You suburbanites live like animals in the Wild West! How can you not be disturbed about dead people creeping around your homes?!

ELENORE: This is so typical! You people are so spoiled!

BEV: Spoiled?!

LANCE: "You people?!"

ELENORE: "Oh, I live in the city where the streets are paved with gold and the dead stay dead." What a load of—

BLAIR and ART enter.

BLAIR: Stop it!

ART: Where's Heather?

LANCE: Heather?

BEV: Heather!!!

HEATHER enters with the ZOMBIE, caressing it like a puppy.

HEATHER: Can we keep him?

LANCE: *(Pulling out his gun.)* Heather, get away from that thing!

BLAIR: Now the house is going to smell like rot.

HEATHER: He smells a little, but look at him.

ART: Heather, you really don't want one of those. They're gross.

BLAIR: Also, that may be my husband.

BEV: What?!

ELENORE: Oh yeah...it kinda does look like Harry.

LANCE: You're married to a zombie?

ART: She's not married to a zombie, pop.

BEV: She just said she was!

HEATHER: Is that your wife over there? Is it? Who's a cute zombie?
You're a cute zombie!

ELENORE: Harry died six months ago.

BLAIR: He was alive when we were married. He was cleaning our gutters, fell off the ladder, broke his neck and wandered off. I never saw him again.

LANCE: 'Til now!

BEV: How can you not recognize your own husband?

BLAIR: Well, he doesn't really look like the Harry I used to know, but those are DEFINITELY my yoga pants he's wearing.

ART: Your yoga pants?

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