

# INVITATION TO A FUNERAL

by Julie McKee

*(Summer. The present. Lights up in the viewing room of a funeral parlour. SHIRLEY (50s) is sitting there alone, in the front row, dressed in black looking grim. She's about to light a cigarette when JOYCE (50s) slips in dressed in bright colours.)*

SHIRLEY. *(To herself:)* Oh Christchurch.

JOYCE. *(Loud whisper:)* Is this the viewing room, is it?

SHIRLEY. *(Annoyed:)* Yeah...

*(JOYCE sits carefully and quietly in the back row.)*

JOYCE. Had a look, have you?

SHIRLEY. Yeah.

JOYCE. Look alright does he?

SHIRLEY. Yeah.

JOYCE. Peaceful?

SHIRLEY. Unfortunately.

JOYCE. *(Hopefully:)* Normal, sort of?

SHIRLEY. *(Sharply:)* He's dead!

JOYCE. Oh yes, yes I know. But. Has he got any clothes on? Because he sent me a memo, you know, saying he was going to go out the same way he came in. So I just sort of...wondered. *(Beat.)* So. So, is he —

SHIRLEY. *(Impatiently:)* Why don't you take a look for yourself?

JOYCE. No, no I think I'll wait. Thank you.

*(JOYCE gets out a piece of paper and studies it. SHIRLEY notices.)*

SHIRLEY. I got the memo too.

JOYCE. Oh did you?

SHIRLEY. Yeah.

JOYCE. So you were married to him too, were you?

SHIRLEY. Oh yeah.

JOYCE. So was I. Don't know quite what he saw in me to tell you the truth.

SHIRLEY. Yeah well. To each his own.

JOYCE. Yes.

(Pause.)

JOYCE. Chronologically speaking, where are you in the line?

SHIRLEY. I don't know.

JOYCE. Oh. I just wondered 'cause there's quite a few names on the memo.

SHIRLEY. (Losing her cool.) Buncha tarts! At first I thought they was in the order of marriage — what did you call that?

JOYCE. Chronological.

SHIRLEY. Right. (Eyeing her.) But then I noticed the list was alphabetical!

(Referring to her memo.)

See I'm here, this is me, and I know this one here — see this tart? (Ominously.) Bloody bitch of a woman, had a face on her like a run over beer can, hope she don't show up, I'll bloody smack her one. 'Course she was after me *chronologically* speaking. And this one over here, she's before me *alphabetically* speaking, so, so —

JOYCE. You're Shirley!?

SHIRLEY. Yeah, I'm Shirley. Who are you?

(JOYCE sits down next to SHIRLEY.)

JOYCE. See, see here! This is me. Joyce. The one *before* you. Chronologically speaking. I think I was, if I remember correctly.

SHIRLEY. (Eyeing her.) Ohh.

(A pause.)

Hello Joyce.

JOYCE. Hello Shirley. Didn't recognise you. How are you?

SHIRLEY. I've been better.

(A pause.)

Bugger of a man weren't he?

JOYCE. Yes.

SHIRLEY. A real bugger.

JOYCE. Sexy though. I liked having sex with him.

SHIRLEY. Ran off and left me with the kids.

JOYCE. Oh yes, me too!

SHIRLEY. Two sulky, grizzling, bloody kids!

JOYCE. Me too!

SHIRLEY. Two must have been the "I better bugger off now" number. (Beat.) Left you anything in his will?

JOYCE. Shouldn't think so. Never had a pot to pee in, did he?

SHIRLEY. No.

JOYCE. No.

SHIRLEY. Would have been nice for the kids though.

JOYCE. Mine don't care anymore. Better things to do today, they said.

SHIRLEY. Mine care. All hot to trot. Specially the eldest. She remembers him.

JOYCE. Oh that's a shame.

SHIRLEY. Tough, it's tough. Blames *him* for her shitty life.

JOYCE. Perhaps he's got some insurance?

SHIRLEY. Life, I should think.

JOYCE. Oh nice. So who's he married to now?

SHIRLEY. Oh some young thing.

JOYCE. Oh no, I don't think so. I don't think she'd be young. Oh no. He liked his women mature. Every time he got married they got older. I mean you are older than me aren't you?

(SHIRLEY gives her a look.)

JOYCE. (*Obliviously:*) So I think the one he's married to now must be old enough to be his mother. I think perhaps that's what he needed all the time, you know, pretty common problem really.

SHIRLEY. Either way she'll get it all.

JOYCE. Stands to reason, yes.

SHIRLEY. Maybe it'll be shared.

JOYCE. He shared everything else, didn't he? Ha, ha, ha.

(SHIRLEY gives her another look.)

SHIRLEY. Are you going to take a look at him? Or what?

JOYCE. No. (JOYCE notices SHIRLEY's look.) No, I, I just popped in to, to pay my respects, I probably should be off now.

(*But JOYCE doesn't move.*)

JOYCE. Did you re-marry?

SHIRLEY. Of course. Someone had to give me a hand with the kids. And then I went and had two more.

JOYCE. Oh nice.

SHIRLEY. Nice? Let me tell you, weren't much better the second time around.

JOYCE. Plusses and minuses.

SHIRLEY. At least this one stuck around. More's the pity. Grouchy touchy bugger.

JOYCE. Mine's an actual idiot. I liked him over there, best.

SHIRLEY. Yeah, well. Me mother couldn't stand his guts.

JOYCE. Full of confidence though, wasn't he? I liked that about him best, 'cause I never had any.

SHIRLEY. Had to slap a writ on the bugger to get me maintenance.

JOYCE. Me too! But he was very clean, wasn't he. You have to give him that.

SHIRLEY. Yeah.

JOYCE. And very, very particular about his hair.

SHIRLEY. Yeah.

JOYCE. Good sense of humour.

SHIRLEY. Only one who could make me laugh. I'm happy I've outlived him though. Gives me some sense of satisfaction.

JOYCE. The living must go on living.

SHIRLEY. I've actually come to dance on his grave.

JOYCE. Oh well. That's not exactly...

SHIRLEY. I know.

JOYCE. But look at him now.

SHIRLEY. I am. And he's dead. Wearing a flipping cowboy hat.

JOYCE. Oh nice!

SHIRLEY. Holding a joint.

JOYCE. Oh heck!

SHIRLEY. Buck naked. And I haven't had a good laugh since you left, you miserable sod. (*Beat.*) Want me to look with you? I'm ready to have another look. Come on.

JOYCE. No. Yeah. Oh no, I can't. I don't—

SHIRLEY. Rest assured the hat is very strategically placed.

JOYCE. Ah ha. Is it a big hat? Ha, ha, ha. Sorry, I'm sorry.

(*Loud music suddenly comes over the speakers. They are startled.*)

SHIRLEY. What the—?

JOYCE. What is that?

SHIRLEY. Pink Floyd. 1973.

JOYCE. Oh nice.

(SHIRLEY dances.)

SHIRLEY. Cool. *Dark Side of the Moon*. Remember it?

JOYCE. No.

(*The music goes off as suddenly as it came on.*)

SHIRLEY. Hey! What happened? What the hell is going on?

JOYCE. Shirley, you know what I think? I think it's for the service! I think he'd like for you to be dancing on his grave.

SHIRLEY. (*Immediately alerted.*) What do you mean?

JOYCE. (*Waving the memo.*) He wants it to be a party, a big celebration! Look, see, he's having it catered special and everything, lobster sandwiches, an oyster bar, sausage rolls, the lot.

SHIRLEY. (*Defiantly.*) Oh Yeah!? Yeah!? Well! In that case I'll just sit myself down.

(*She does.*)

JOYCE. All my favourites.

SHIRLEY. If he thinks I'm going to enjoy this, he's got another thing bloody coming.

JOYCE. After the cremation we're scheduled to scatter his ashes in the ocean.

SHIRLEY. Can't even let me celebrate his funeral without he's running things.

JOYCE. Shirley? Have you, actually, you know, said "goodbye" to him?

SHIRLEY. No! But that's besides the point. I didn't come to say *goodbye* did I? I came to say *bigger off and good riddance*, and enjoy myself doing it. But if you want to say *goodbye* you better get in now

before those other tarts start lining up, because according to this memo, there's going to be quite a few.

JOYCE. So. Is he really —?

(SHIRLEY nods.)

JOYCE. And the hat is —?

(SHIRLEY nods.)

JOYCE. Oh no, no, no, no!

(*Laughs nervously.*)

Ohhh, ha, ha, ha.

(*Seriously.*)

Yeah. All right. You only live once. Okay. Okay. Okay.

(JOYCE doesn't move.)

SHIRLEY. Want me to come with?

(SHIRLEY offers her hand.)

JOYCE. Yeah. In case I faint. I might.

(*Hand in hand, they go up to the coffin together.*)

JOYCE. (*Glued.*) Ohhh.

SHIRLEY. Yeeeah.

(*After a moment or two.*)

JOYCE. Weren't no oil painting was he?

(*They look for a moment longer before...*)

SHIRLEY. I'm going to lift up the hat alright?

JOYCE. (*Horried.*) No, no. (*Beat.*) All right.

(SHIRLEY has lifted the hat.)

JOYCE. Oh look, oh. Sweet. Gave me a lot of pleasure that did.

(*A respectful silence.*)

SHIRLEY. Real carrot top weren't he?

*(They are still. Then SHIRLEY puts back the hat. They are stock still for another moment or two. Then suddenly SHIRLEY puts her hand back in the coffin.)*

JOYCE. What, what are you —

*(SHIRLEY, triumphant, has pulled out a hand rolled joint.)*

JOYCE. Put that back! Put that right back — what are you...

*(SHIRLEY smells the rolled joint.)*

SHIRLEY. Oh yeah, yeah. Best quality. He would have rolled it himself as well.

*(Something in the coffin has caught JOYCE's eye.)*

JOYCE. Here.

SHIRLEY. The prick.

JOYCE. You notice anything — odd? Look, look here. Something's — not quite right. I can't, I can't quite put my finger on it, but something is definitely —

SHIRLEY. What?

JOYCE. Shirley? Are you shedding a tear?

SHIRLEY. NO!

*(She is. SHIRLEY puts back the joint. She tries to cover her tears.)*

SHIRLEY. He actually called me up before he, he went, you know, to, to say *goodbye*. I. I hung up on the bugger.

JOYCE. Oh now there, there.

SHIRLEY. *(Fiercely.)* I'm all right. I'm all right! Nothing wrong with me! It's just that now I'll never know what he wanted to say, that's all. Perhaps he wanted to say he was sorry.

JOYCE. I don't think so, no.

SHIRLEY. And what would you know about it?

JOYCE. 'Cause he rung me up too.

SHIRLEY. Son of a —

JOYCE. Said if there's a hereafter, he'd see me there. I said, oh no, I don't think so, because I'm coming back as a dog. Ha, ha, ha, ha.

SHIRLEY. A what?

JOYCE. *(Still laughing.)* I don't know why I said it. Why did I say I was coming back as a dog? *(Beats.)* Cause both my dogs had good lives.

*(JOYCE bursts into tears.)*

SHIRLEY. Christchurch.

*(SHIRLEY gives her a hanky.)*

SHIRLEY. Hey! He weren't worth it. He left you with two kids to fend for yourself.

JOYCE. *(Snapping.)* Well what are you doing here then!?

SHIRLEY. *(Flustered.)* I come to, to — So shut yer gob!!

*(SHIRLEY is back at the coffin.)*

SHIRLEY. Uh-oh. Christchurch! That's it. That's it! I see it. Do you see it?

*(JOYCE joins SHIRLEY. She sees it. They look at each other.)*

JOYCE. It's parted —

SHIRLEY. — on the wrong side.

*(Then back at the coffin. They are transfixed.)*

JOYCE. Do you think we should. You know — Fix it?

SHIRLEY. No.

JOYCE. He was so particular —

SHIRLEY. NO! No. We'll just sit here, and —

*(SHIRLEY sits down.)*

SHIRLEY. And observe. Ha, ha, ha. See if any of those other tarts notice.

JOYCE. It's not funny.

(SHIRLEY checks her makeup.)

SHIRLEY. Cheer up for Christ's sake! How do I look? Do I look all right?

JOYCE. Yeah.

SHIRLEY. You too. (Beat.) God I'm dying for a fag.

(JOYCE sits down next to SHIRLEY.)

JOYCE. A dog! Why did I – What a stupid –

(Then with sad awareness:)

Both my dogs were loved.

(SHIRLEY looks embarrassed. Neither of them look at the other. Then SHIRLEY gets out a miniature vodka, hands it to JOYCE.)

SHIRLEY. Here.

JOYCE. Ta. Thank you Shirley.

(JOYCE drinks it down in one go.)

SHIRLEY. Don't mention it Joyce.

(Overwhelmed and in tears at Shirley's "kindness:")

JOYCE. That's nice. Isn't that nice? Thank you, thank you so much, that's –

SHIRLEY. Shut up Joyce. Life goes on. (Beat.) And on.

JOYCE. Think I better study the memo then, take my mind off it.

SHIRLEY. Right!

(SHIRLEY goes up to the coffin and retrieves the joint, JOYCE reads her memo.)

JOYCE. Look here Shirl, it says, *no black*.

SHIRLEY. I know, but it's me favourite colour.

(JOYCES notices the joint in Shirley's hand.)

JOYCE. Oh my!

SHIRLEY. Shame to let it all go up in smoke innit?

(SHIRLEY puts the joint in her mouth and strikes a match.)

(Blackout.)

(In the blackout, the flame flickers for a moment or two, then it goes out.)

End of Play