

EXQUISITE CORPSE
By Maggie Smith

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Draft Two
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CHARACTERS

HESTER HELLER - a senior in her first year of creative writing, joined because she happened to have a free period; carefree and cool; Darcy's older sister, hellbent on taking her down a peg

ANNE "DARCY" HELLER - a junior in her third year of creative writing, head editor of the literary magazine; a headstrong leader in need of perfection

MADELINE MEYER - a freshman, unaware of what she's gotten herself into; desperate to impress but even more desperate to get home before curfew

DOROTHY SOLIS - a junior in her third year of creative writing; a quiet poet with more passion than anyone could know

JO FOSTER - a sophomore in her second year of creative writing; funny and loud, disinterested in seeming intelligent

SARA HUNT - a senior in her second year of creative writing; a tennis player more interested in quality than getting the job done

CARRIE BLACKWELL - a senior in her third year of creative writing; loyal and heartfelt, but ready to take those qualities elsewhere

SETTING

Room 209 of Mary Magdalene's Preparatory School for Girls
Much Later in the Early Evening than Allowed

NOTES

A / indicates an overlap in dialogue

Underlined words should be emphasized

If a beat is mentioned, it's up to you to determine the length of it

When it comes to the whiteboard, only the potential magazine names mentioned in the script need to be unchanged. Other filler names used as set dressing, so to speak, can be decided by the performers or production team.

ACT ONE
EXQUISITE CORPSE

[Room 209 of Mary Magdalene's Preparatory School for Girls. There's a whiteboard in the background, anywhere between twelve and seventeen desks scattered everywhere. The desks are the fun kind that are attached to the chairs and barely have any room for the student to write on. There is a whiteboard somewhere, preferably attached to a wall but that's not a requirement. On the floor is a rug, almost as big as the room, which CARRIE lays on, looking at printed out submissions for the literary magazine, which are scattered across the classroom floor. JO sits at one of the desks, engrossed in her book. MADELINE and DOROTHY are at the whiteboard, writing out potential names for the magazine. HESTER and DARCY, who is wearing a pair of glasses on her eyes and another pair on a chain around her neck, are standing over a desk, arguing about a submission.]

DARCY

There's no substance!

HESTER

It's a high school literary magazine, no one reads it expecting substance.

DARCY

That doesn't mean we can't strive for it!

CARRIE

This one's kind of good... If you're willing to overlook a few things.

DARCY

What "things?"

CARRIE

Ahh... Blood... And gore... And violence... But it's written so artistically I'm not entirely inclined to care.

DARCY

Absolutely not.

HESTER

Oh, so we're censoring people, now?

DARCY

This isn't about censorship, this is about school standards.

HESTER

I thought you wanted something groundbreaking.

DARCY

I do want something groundbreaking. I just don't want to cause a problem.

CARRIE

Oh, so groundbreaking without breaking any ground.

DARCY

Pieces don't have to be vulgar to be good.

HESTER

Half of the books we've read in class were banned for vulgarity!

DARCY

Vulgarity— Name one book about vulgarity / that we've—

CARRIE

The Bible.

DARCY

Alright—

HESTER

Greek mythology has a lot of sex.

DARCY

Greek mythology is different—

CARRIE

There's Simon's death in *Lord of the Flies*.

HESTER

And Piggy's death in *Lord of the Flies*.

CARRIE

And that guy with the parachute's death in *Lord of the Flies*.

DARCY

Okay, well, I was in AP Lit, so I didn't have to read *Lord of the Flies*, okay? I read Chaucer with the big kids. And death isn't vulgar. It's gruesome. Gruesome is fine when I don't have to read about someone's sinews snapping in half.

HESTER

Sinews don't snap. They tear.

CARRIE

Not according to this story.

HESTER

Alright, all I'm saying is that a little rule breaking never hurt anybody. But if you want to be remembered as whatever you are right now, that's fine. Don't rock the boat. Write a story about a dog.

[At the mention of the dog, JO turns from her book.]

JO

I love it when stories have dogs in them. They're usually the best characters.

[JO turns back to her book. Beat, reading.]

JO

Cujo, no!

CARRIE

We have some poetry about passion over here. Well, passion that leads to profound drug usage, but...

DARCY

Does nobody at this school understand the importance of decorum in writing?

HESTER

Move on to something else. I swear to God I can't keep talking about this with you.

DARCY

Fine. What do we have for titles?

MADLINE

Yes. Right. Here's our list.

[MADLINE gestures to the whiteboard. It's filled with absolutely awful names, all of which you would expect to come from high schoolers in a creative writing class.]

MADLINE

So, so far, our favorites are, uh—

DOROTHY

Panoramic—

MADLINE

Yes, yes, Panoramic Quantity. Uh—

DOROTHY

The Elect—

MADLINE

The Electric Corset. Christmas Light Canopy, and—

DOROTHY

And Cloistered Highway People.

MADLINE

Yeah, Cloistered Highway People.

[A beat as DARCY takes all of this in.]

DARCY

So when I asked you to come up with an encapsulating title...

MADLINE

We did exactly that.

DARCY

And by “exactly that,” do you mean, and I don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say this, coming up with, what I believe to be, the most meaningless series of words that I have ever heard.

HESTER

No, you’ve read the *Odyssey*.

DOROTHY

I think that some—

DARCY

Who are the Cloistered Highway People?

JO

In a way, aren’t we all?

DARCY

[Looking at the blackboard] This one just says, “Broken Mirror Truth Shards,” what does that even mean?

MADELINE

Well that one was more of a feeling than a title.

DOROTHY

It kind of was based off of the poem I submitted, I don’t know if you read it yet—

HESTER

Darcy already deemed it “unsuitable.”

DOROTHY

What, why?

DARCY

Nuns read this. Actual living— Well, mostly-living nuns who would say every single decade of the rosary if they had to read the phrase, what was it—

[DARCY quickly finds the poem on a paper on the ground and reads:]

DARCY

“I stare into the broken mirror and wonder if God is staring back at me, waiting to forgive the sin of being a teenager.” What sins could you possibly have committed, you barely even speak.

DOROTHY

It was mostly a metaphor about being alive in stagnant bodies with changing personalities.

DARCY

Okay, God is not staring at you through a broken mirror. God has bigger things to worry about.

DOROTHY

I mean, we don't need to take the message literally. Did Dorian Gray really have a portrait of his decomposing body?

DARCY

Are you writing a piece warning us about being prideful?

DOROTHY

No, I'm writing a poem about a mirror.

DARCY

The poem's cut, Dorothy. Find something else or don't be included.

[SARA enters, late and in her tennis uniform.]

DARCY

And where have you been?

SARA

Tennis. I told you when you called this stupid meeting, I had a match. And I won, too.

DARCY

Great, well, while you were out there hitting a ball with a stick, we were hard at work getting this magazine ready for tomorrow.

SARA

Yeah? Get a lot of work done?

DARCY

Immensely.

SARA

[Reading the blackboard] Cloistered Highway People?

DARCY

[Immediate] We are still in the planning stages of some aspects of the magazine.

CARRIE

All aspects.

SARA

Let me tell you what I see. A disgruntled upperclassman on a power-trip corralling her older sister and sister's best friend into editing submissions. Her only friend and a freshman who doesn't know better forced into coming up with sub-par titles, all of which will certainly be scrapped by the end of the night for something of lower-to-equal-caliber that you will come up with. And, of course, the sophomore in her own world reading... Stephen King. And how's that going for you, Jo?

JO

This is interesting— Apparently, Stephen King writes scary books.

SARA

All that sound about right to you, Darcy?

DARCY

If I say yes will you go write titles with Dorothy and Madeline?

SARA

No, I'd rather read.

DARCY

Fine.

MADELINE

Wait, I want to read, too.

DARCY

No, because then we won't have anyone to come up with titles like...

[She reads a new title written on the list.]

DARCY

Alamort Musings— Come on.

MADLINE

I think it's poetic.

DARCY

And I think it's an apt descriptor of every single suggestion you've presented thus far.

JO

Isn't the Alamort that place in Texas.

DARCY

I'm going to have an aneurysm.

MADLINE

[To DOROTHY] Is she like this every year?

DOROTHY

She's like this every day.

HESTER

[Louder, getting DARCY'S attention and holding up a piece of paper] Hey, how about this one?

DARCY

There's an X on top. We cut it.

CARRIE

You cut it.

DARCY

I voted on behalf of the board that it doesn't fit the criteria necessary to warrant being published.

HESTER

Come on, it's got a nice start.

DARCY

It does. It has a great start. And middle. And end. And if I had to use one word to describe it, I'd say familiar. What do you think?

HESTER

I mean, I only read two lines but I don't know if I'd say "familiar."

DARCY

Really? Let me read you the last line. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep—" It's a Robert Frost poem. It's complete plagiarism.

JO

I think I misunderstood the assignment.

SARA

Every single one of these pieces has an X on it. Except for, what, five? Five pieces, that's all we have?

DARCY

I'm sure we've got more.

CARRIE

No, it's just the five. And three of them are written by, guess who?

HESTER

Would it by any chance be Anne Heller?

DARCY

[Bitter, disgruntled, some third annoyed synonym] I penned it under Darcy.

HESTER

Ah, but in the school's computer system you'll always be Little Annie Heller.

SARA

Anne? What, you just decided to change your name?

CARRIE

Her freshman year.

SARA

What is it, like a middle name?

DARCY

Yes.

HESTER

No.

DARCY

Hester!

[As HESTER speaks, DARCY goes back to reading, pretending to ignore the story.]

HESTER

So, Mom has three kids, names them all after her favorite literary characters. She's a college professor, she's obsessed. So she has me and my brother, I get *Scarlet Letter*, poor boy gets Algernon from *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Or maybe the book about the mouse, I don't know. Then my little sister Anne is born—

SARA

Like The Orphan?

HESTER

Nope.

SARA

So Anne...

HESTER

As in Green Gables.

DARCY

Shut up.

HESTER

But Annie decides when she's thirteen that her name isn't fancy enough. She insists it's because her brother's name starts with an A, too, and that she doesn't like alliteration, but we've all read her writing. And maybe it's because she wants to impress Mom, maybe it's because she thinks he's cute, but she chooses her namesake to be none other than—

SARA

Not the *Pride and Prejudice* man!

HESTER

Absolutely the *Pride and Prejudice* man.

DARCY

It's not that weird!

HESTER

You were in love with a fake man named Fitzwilliam.

DARCY

So? You had a crush on Charlotte Bronte!

HESTER

Yeah, but I didn't name myself after her!

CARRIE

I mean, Darcy Heller does sound better.

SARA

It fits better, too. Wasn't the *Pride and Prejudice* man an asshole?

HESTER

You only think it fits because you know this version of her. Now, if you knew her in grade school when she'd wear her hair in two braids every day...

SARA

Wow, you really leaned into the look, Green Gables.

DARCY

I was seven! Everyone wears braids when they're seven.

HESTER

A child with a dream to become a "serious writer."

DARCY

A dream I will never achieve if we don't finish this magazine.

CARRIE

A dream you will never achieve if you don't stop censoring students for no reason.

DARCY

You prefer me to not uphold the rules of this magazine?

HESTER

Okay, so then you want a magazine with five submissions?

DARCY

No.

SARA

Then you're fine with being more lenient on the censorship?

DARCY

Also no.

CARRIE

We've been arguing about this for ten minutes. Either you come up with a solution or I'm starting a coup.

DARCY

You don't even know how to spell "coup".

CARRIE

You don't need to spell to start one.

MADLINE

Isn't coup just soup with a "C"?

JO

No, that's alphabet soup.

DARCY

I will not be belittled because I'm upholding standards.

MADLINE

[A new title] What's Heard at Dawn?

DARCY

That's just a rooster.

DOROTHY

Darcy, come here for a second? I have a question.

[DOROTHY pulls DARCY aside.]

DOROTHY

Okay, buddy, what's going on?

DARCY

What's going on is none of you are pulling your weight.

DOROTHY

[Forced enthusiasm] Alright! Let's take a step back. Ask ourselves some questions. What do we need?

DARCY

I need a team of people who are willing—

DOROTHY

[A variety of shushing and interrupting noises] We. I said we. What do we need? Physically.

DARCY

Enough pieces for a literary magazine.

DOROTHY

Okay. And how many do we need?

DARCY

Forty at least if we want to keep it around the same length as last year's. It could be more or less, though, depending on the length of the pieces.

DOROTHY

And we have five?

DARCY

Yes.

[MADELINE calls from the whiteboard.]

MADELINE

Dorothy? Could you—

DOROTHY

I'm busy. *[To DARCY]* We have thirty-five to go, then. So...

HESTER

[Laughing] We're so fucked.

DOROTHY

Hey. Hey. No. Well, maybe, but not for sure.

DARCY

There is no possible way—

DOROTHY

Yes. Yes there is. How many submissions did we get?

DARCY

Around 50?

DOROTHY

So then we accept them.

DARCY

We can't accept them all. We have standards.

DOROTHY

Okay, so then we accept thirty-five more of them.

DARCY

But the material—

DOROTHY

Bud, bud, look at me, I don't care about the material. No one here cares about the material. You're the only one here who cares about the material. And that's so great for you that you care about things like that, but for now, we gotta put it aside.

DARCY

But the cursing.

DOROTHY

Okay. Okay. God— Alright. Why were pieces cut from the magazine?

DARCY

What do you mean?

DOROTHY

Content warnings, come on. Give ‘em to me.

DARCY

Uh, okay. Um. Well, the cursing, obviously. Blasphemy, sexual innuendos, lust, greed, sloth, gluttony, envy, anger—

MADLINE

Dorothy—

DOROTHY

Not now. *[To DARCY]* Keep going, what else?

DARCY

Pride—

DOROTHY

Stop naming deadly sins.

DARCY

Someone wrote their real home address and that’s just a security issue, if nothing else.

DOROTHY

Okay, yeah, that’s not great, what else?

DARCY

Drug usage, murder, general lack of morals. War, pestilence, famine, death—

MADLINE

Dorothy, I’m really sorry, but I’m running out of ideas. Could you maybe come over—

DOROTHY

Madeline, I swear to God. *[To DARCY]* Is that it?

DARCY

Someone wrote a really graphic piece on childbirth. But that's all of them, for the most part.

DOROTHY

Great. Okay, and what did Mrs. Beckett say needed to be censored?

DARCY

Anything overly violent, anything sexual, and any major cursing.

DOROTHY

Okay...

[There's a beat.]

DARCY

That's it.

DOROTHY

That's it? Why did you censor all of the pieces, then?

DARCY

Bad.

DOROTHY

Bad?

DARCY

They were bad.

DOROTHY

Morally or artistically?

DARCY

Both.

DOROTHY

Okay, let's go through this. What can we be lenient on?

DARCY

Nothing.

HESTER

Any mild cursing.

DARCY

She wasn't asking you.

[MADELINE leans on the whiteboard, watching the conversation.]

CARRIE

What about the sinning?

SARA

And the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?

DOROTHY

And we could just edit any major cursing, the blasphemy, even the home address could be changed?

JO

If you change the address then I'm requesting you cut the piece entirely. I want people to know where I live.

DOROTHY

What do you think, Darcy? Is it doable?

DARCY

I mean, yes. But what about the ones that just aren't good?

DOROTHY

Then those are still cut. You said it yourself, we need standards.

DARCY

I... Fine. Fine.

CARRIE

Great, because I have a whole pile of ones that I think you were too harsh on.

DARCY

And how many is that?

CARRIE

I don't know? Twenty-five?

DARCY

Okay, well, twenty-five doesn't help us. Add that to the five we already have, we still need ten more.

HESTER

Then we write ten more.

MADLINE

We could do an Exquisite Corpse?

DARCY

Absolutely not.

SARA

Okay. What about this— We can look through older pieces that we didn't submit?

DARCY

If we didn't submit them in the first place then why would we want to try to submit them now? We don't want leftover poems.

CARRIE

We're running out of options, Darcy.

DARCY

Oh my God— Fine. Look through your old poems. But I swear to God, if any of you try to submit a piece you got lower than a 95 on—

HESTER

Yeah, find good poems. We got it.

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR THE FULL WORK, PLEASE CONTACT:
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