

An excerpt from

MOURNING GLORY (from **ADVANCED CHEMISTRY**)

a comedy in one act

by Rich Orloff

Place: The living room of a condominium apartment.

Time: The present.

Characters: AGGIE, a woman in her older years
MILT, a man in his older years
BEVERLY, early 30's, Aggie's niece

The living room of a condominium apartment. The furnishings are the kind bought by an older generation when they could afford the best but still hadn't developed any sense of taste. Beyond the room's usual furniture, several chairs have been set about. There is also a great deal of food and paper plates, plastic cups and silverware. This is a room where many mourners have recently come to pay their respects.

As the play begins, AGGIE is at the door. She's an older woman, the kind who may have had a face lift by now, but instead of looking youthful, she looks like an older woman with a face lift. She wears black.

MILTON, an older man in a conservative suit, nibbles at some food, and watches as Aggie speaks to an unseen couple outside the door.

AGGIE

Thank you so much for coming. It means a lot to me, and I'm sure it means a lot to him, too. And please thank the bridge group for the dairy platter. Max *loved* Gouda... 'Bye.

Aggie shuts the door. She looks at the room and then at Milton. Milton has looked only at her.

AGGIE (cont'd)

I've never seen so much food in my life.

MILT

You hardly ate a thing. Can I fix you a plate?

AGGIE

No, no, I have no appetite today.
(starting to nibble:)

I'll just pick.

MILT

I think the caterers did a wonderful job.

AGGIE

I think the food at the Westfalls' funeral was better.

MILT

This is much better than what the Westfalls had. The food at the Garrisans' funeral was better than the food at the Westfalls'.

AGGIE

You think so? I thought the food at the Steinmans' funeral was twice as good as the food at the Garrisans'.

MILT

Are you kidding? The food at the Steinmans' funeral wasn't even as good as the food at the Feinsteins' funeral.

AGGIE

There's been too much death lately.

MILT

I know.

AGGIE

I've gained five pounds.

MILT

The cheesecake at Norman Butler's funeral, that was worth gaining weight for.

AGGIE

I asked Dorothy for the recipe, but she said it was a family secret. And I thought, great, I won't have cheesecake this good again until you die.

MILT

Doesn't Dorothy's sister have emphysema?

AGGIE

So?

MILT

You may not have to wait that long.

AGGIE

Milt, I want you to know, I'm, I'm just so grateful for all you've done for me the last few days.

MILT

Max was my business partner for 36 years, and my best friend for even longer. I know he'd want me to look after you.

AGGIE

Having you by my side every moment, it's been a great comfort.

MILT

You and Max were there for me when Sylvia died. You even more than Max.

AGGIE

Max was never comfortable around death. It gave him indigestion.

MILT

Well, I'm glad I could be there for you.

AGGIE

If it hadn't been for you and my niece, I could've never gotten through the last week.

MILT

Well –

AGGIE

I mean it. I had forgotten how many decisions you had to make when you buried someone: open casket, closed casket; flowers, no flowers; should he rest for eternity in the blue suit or the gray suit.

MILT

Call on me any time, Aggie, day or night.

AGGIE

You call on me, too, Milt. And if I'm not in, be sure to leave a message on the machine.

MILT

Can I help put some of this away?

AGGIE

Beverly said she'd do it after her nap.

MILT

Your niece cares about you so much.

AGGIE

She's a very caring person. Whenever there's a family trauma, we can count on her to be the first to show up and the last to leave.

MILT

How come a sweet girl like that has never found a man?

AGGIE

I think she's too busy with family traumas.

MILT

That's a shame.

AGGIE

My sister worries about her. She's afraid that with Beverly's values, she'll end up with either a mortician or an emergency room technician.

MILT

As long as she's happy.

AGGIE

As long as she can be miserable, she's happy.

MILT

Well, since most people are usually miserable or happy, she should be very happy.

AGGIE

The eulogy you gave today, it, I never knew you could be so eloquent.

MILT

I spoke from the heart.

AGGIE

The picture you painted of Max was so, so –

MILT

Don't cry.

AGGIE

I just thought, if Max could only hear these words, he wouldn't recognize himself.

MILT

Max had many beautiful qualities.

AGGIE

Yes, he did. And I often thought the tragedy of his life was that he kept them so well hidden.

MILT

I know. Often when we were going through a difficult business negotiation, I'd want to say to him, "You're a beautiful person, Max. Stop acting like a jerk." I hope you don't mind –

AGGIE

No, I understand.

MILT

He was a very complex man.

AGGIE

And yet he appeared so simple.

MILT

Few knew the real man.

AGGIE

That's why your eulogy was so touching. Now his friends know the kind, caring man that he refused to let anyone see.

MILT

If my words offered you even a moment of solace –

AGGIE

Many moments. And when we were at the gravesite, and you shoveled the dirt on his casket, I never saw anyone shovel with such spirit before.

MILT

Well, you don't work with a man 36 years without feeling a lot.

AGGIE

Everyone there could see how much you loved him.

MILT

Yes, I did.

AGGIE

Especially when you refused to give the shovel to anyone, and you kept shoveling and shoveling until he was completely buried.

MILT

If I had gone first, I know he'd do the same for me.

AGGIE

Not with his bursitis. Max was a lucky man to have you as a partner.

MILT

I was the lucky one –

AGGIE

No, *he* was the lucky –

MILT

I was the lucky one, to work with him, and to get to know you.

AGGIE

Well...

Aggie checks her hair in a mirror to make sure it looks nice.

MILT

I hope what I'm about to say isn't improper, but –

AGGIE

Yes?

MILT

You look excellent in black.

AGGIE

Thank you.

MILT

And if there's anything *at all* I can do –

AGGIE

You know, the last few nights, I get in bed, and I still expect him to be there.

MILT

I know.

AGGIE

Snoring. I hope that doesn't sound disrespectful.

MILT

You're just being honest.

AGGIE

I hope when he rests in peace, he doesn't snore, because then nobody else will.

MILT

My wife, may she rest, will rest.
She could sleep through anything.

AGGIE

In the morning, I wake up, and I still expect to see him.

MILT

I know, I know.

AGGIE

...tossing all the towels on the bathroom floor, yelling he can't find his socks, putting on a shirt and pants that even color-blind dogs know don't match, drinking coffee and dribbling into the newspaper, and then finally looking at me, with his deep soulful eyes, and saying, "I'm retired. What the hell do I do now?"

MILT

You never know how much someone affects you until they're gone.

AGGIE

I don't know how I'll fill the hours now that I don't have to clean up after him.

MILT

You're strong; you'll move on.

AGGIE

God, I hope so.