

BEREAVED FOR THE BETTER

By Michael Dalberg

CHARACTERS

CASSIE A woman of an indiscriminate age. The younger sister of MICHELLE.

MICHELLE A woman of an indiscriminate age. The older sister of CASSIE.

PLACE

The home of their late mother.

TIME

A short time after the funeral.

BEREAVED FOR THE BETTER

A Play in Ten Minutes

SETTING: a living room. TIME: undetermined.

(The lights rise on the interior of a home. There is a stillness for a moment. Perhaps the sounds of a car pulling up, or someone outside the door. Keys are heard jingling, and the front door opens. MICHELLE enters. She is carrying an empty box. She takes in the room, and picks up a framed picture. She goes to place it into the box, but then decides to put it back down. She exits the room, box in hand.)

(CASSIE enters. She is also holding a box. She takes in the space, and eventually picks up the same frame MICHELLE had placed back. CASSIE puts the frame into her box, and exits further into the home.)

(MICHELLE re-enters, making a direct line to the frame she had passed up. She searches for it. After a bit, CASSIE enters. They see each other, and shout.)

MICHELLE

Holy shit!

CASSIE

Fucking Christ, Michelle! Could you learn how to make a goddamned noise once in a while?

MICHELLE

Me? You didn't exactly announce yourself!

CASSIE

I didn't think you were here!

MICHELLE

Didn't the unlocked door tip you off? Or have the drugs finally taken all reason from you?

CASSIE

Glad to see recent events haven't changed you. The Rock of Ages is still a cunt.

MICHELLE

And you're still a mouthy slut, stealing Mommy's things.

CASSIE

I'm not stealing! Some of this belongs to me!

MICHELLE

You lie like a Gemini.

CASSIE

That's a poor insult; you know I'm a Gemini.

MICHELLE

Oh, please. As if I'd ever commit your birthday to memory.

CASSIE

What are you even doing here?

MICHELLE

I could ask the same of you. You said you were coming tomorrow.

CASSIE

I didn't want you to beat me here, so I came early.

MICHELLE

So, you lied, then?

CASSIE

No! I intended to come tomorrow, too.

MICHELLE

Ah, I see. You wanted to be sure that you could get what you wanted, then play dumb if I said I suddenly couldn't find something that you yourself had hidden away.

CASSIE

That sounds awfully smart for someone who has no reason left.

MICHELLE

You know the saying: you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but an old bitch can sandbag. What do you even want here?

CASSIE

None of your business.

MICHELLE

Of course it's my business; the estate was left to me.

CASSIE

You were left in charge of the estate, yes, but nothing said I couldn't pick things out.

MICHELLE

As long as I approve of you having them.

CASSIE

Total control, just how you like.

MICHELLE

Just how it needs to be.

CASSIE

Would it kill you to unclench your ass? Or is that where you keep your frigid coal of a heart?

MICHELLE

Enough. Get out.

CASSIE

You can't throw me out, I—

MICHELLE

This house and everything in it is in my name; I can do whatever I damn well please. And I refuse to let you scalp anything here. Now get out.

(MICHELLE hands CASSIE her box.)

CASSIE

You never could take a little heat, for fear of thaw.

(She goes to exit, and looks in her box.)

This is mine.

MICHELLE

None of this is yours.

CASSIE

This is.

(She withdraws a plate from the box.)

MICHELLE

Oh.

CASSIE

I didn't put this in here.

MICHELLE

Well, just take it, and be on your way.

CASSIE

You took this from the kitchen.

MICHELLE

I did not. Why would I want that? There are heirlooms in there worth hundreds. What would I want with some trite ceramic?

CASSIE

I made this.

MICHELLE

Did you? I guess I was being too kind in calling it “trite.”

CASSIE

Then you wouldn't mind if I took it with me?

MICHELLE

Please! One less thing to throw away.

CASSIE

Good.

(She pretends to place the plate into her box, and drops the box on the floor. MICHELLE gasps. CASSIE reveals the plate wasn't in the box.)

You did want it!

MICHELLE

I—I was afraid you might have hurt yourself. I can't afford a lawsuit for your being injured on the property.

CASSIE

Christ, Michelle, just admit that you want the damn thing!

MICHELLE

I don't!

CASSIE

Michelle!

MICHELLE

Fine! If it gets you out the door, then sure! I want it!

CASSIE

So fucking stubborn.

(She sets the plate down, and goes to exit.)

MICHELLE

It's not yours, anyway.

CASSIE

How do you figure?

MICHELLE

You brought this home from art class. You made it for me. On your eighth birthday. June 3rd.

CASSIE

It's a shitty plate. You can throw it away.

MICHELLE

It is a shitty plate, but it's from my sister. And I want it.

CASSIE

Was that so hard?

MICHELLE

Why are you even here?

CASSIE

Our mother died.

MICHELLE

Yes, and you attended the funeral. You did your duty. Why are you still here?

CASSIE

You were right. I thought I could sneak a few things from under your nose, and make a quick buck.

MICHELLE

That box isn't big enough for what you'd be stealing.

CASSIE

I don't need much money, just enough.

MICHELLE

You need all the money you can scrape under your fingernails. You're an addict.

CASSIE

I am not!

MICHELLE

We all know, Cassie! Everyone in the family knows. Has known!

CASSIE

I'm not the one who did drugs!

MICHELLE

What, are you saying I did? Are you insane? My law firm would never keep me around if they even suspected for a moment—

CASSIE

Not you, you narcissist! Perhaps you've forgotten, but there are other people in the universe, and they are capable of mistakes, not just me!

MICHELLE

If not you, then who? Hmm? What, no names to share? Funny how you go silent when you're caught. All bold, and bluster, but in the end you're just plain weak. Aren't you?

CASSIE

Drop it.

MICHELLE

You couldn't stick it out in college—

CASSIE

You don't know—

MICHELLE

—you couldn't hold down a job—

CASSIE

Drop it, please.

MICHELLE

—all because you couldn't let go of your needles.

CASSIE

They weren't mine!

MICHELLE

You're a disgrace!

CASSIE

It wasn't me!

MICHELLE

Then who?

CASSIE

Mother!

...What?
MICHELLE

It was Mother. Not me.
CASSIE

How dare you.
MICHELLE

It's true!
CASSIE

Our mother?
MICHELLE

I found her injecting!
CASSIE

Listen to yourself. The delusions of grandeur!
MICHELLE

The chemo wasn't working, Michelle. You know that! The doctors told you.
CASSIE

They didn't say—
MICHELLE

Mother overheard them. Several times.
CASSIE

Oh, now she was spying on me?
MICHELLE

You treated her like she was half gone when she was wholly in the room!
CASSIE

How would you know? Being across the state for years, and—
MICHELLE

She called me. First it was you. And the doctors. Then the pain. Then the constant pain.
CASSIE

She had relaxants.
MICHELLE

CASSIE

She couldn't think straight on those. She needed an alternative.

MICHELLE

And you just handed her a needle to "thread?" Daughter of the year!

CASSIE

She knew she couldn't come to you. She knew how you'd react.

MICHELLE

Like a sane human being?

CASSIE

It's not insane to—

MICHELLE

Why would you even agree to help her? Hmm? You were building your education!

CASSIE

I loved her as much as you did! I couldn't see her suffer. So I dropped out, and I moved in here.

MICHELLE

To kill her.

CASSIE

To help her!

MICHELLE

You were caught with drugs on campus! They expelled you!

CASSIE

I had bought it all for her!

MICHELLE

I'm sorry, Officer, it seems there was a misunderstanding. You see, my sister isn't an addict, she's a drug mule for our psychotic mother.

CASSIE

Stop shaming for one second, and—

MICHELLE

Shaming? Me? Listen to yourself! The filth! I won't let slander our mother! For what? To save your reputation? And you're willing to turn her over in her grave to do it? God, you are disgusting.

CASSIE

I came here to set things straight.

MICHELLE

You came here for money. And if you want money, then fine, I'll write you a check. Just get the fuck out!

CASSIE

I don't want your money!

MICHELLE

Bullshit. That's what your box is for, you thieving bitch.

(She grabs CASSIE's box.)

Look at this shit, it's—

(She takes out the frame.)

This is a cheap frame. You could've found better.

CASSIE

I don't care about the frame. The picture, it's—

MICHELLE

I know when it's from. I wanted it for myself.

CASSIE

Me, too. That's why I came today.

MICHELLE

You should've stolen the silver.

CASSIE

I'm not an addict!

MICHELLE

No, but it would've been easier for me.

CASSIE

I loved her. I would've done anything for her.

MICHELLE

And you did. That's more than I can say.

CASSIE

You took care of her!

MICHELLE

Not in the way she wanted. She couldn't even tell me the way she wanted.

CASSIE

We were different daughters to her.

(Pause.)

Well. I should go.

MICHELLE

What do you do now?

CASSIE

Hmm?

MICHELLE

For work. For money. What do you do?

CASSIE

Odd jobs. Waitressing. I can't make enough to try another college, so. You know how that goes.

MICHELLE

Sure.

(CASSIE goes to exit.)

You've thought about going back? To college?

CASSIE

Every day.

MICHELLE

Any place in particular?

CASSIE

I always figured I'd pick a place after I got back out there, and on my feet.

MICHELLE

What about staying here, and giving your feet a rest?

CASSIE

How do you mean?

MICHELLE

It couldn't have been cheap what you bought for her. And it kept her from buying it herself, preventing her from selling things in this house. Or even the house. In a way, I only have this place because of you.

CASSIE

That's a bit of a stretch, I mean—

MICHELLE

No, it's not. And you deserve a chance to have it back. Let me help you.

CASSIE

But the estate sale—

MICHELLE

I didn't really want to sell any of it. Hell, I couldn't even part with your shitty plate. But I knew I couldn't stay here alone.

CASSIE

You want to live here? With me?

MICHELLE

There's room to spare, I think.

CASSIE

I don't know if that would work very well.

MICHELLE

I don't either. But I'd like to try. To be better.

CASSIE

I'd like that, too.

MICHELLE

Even if you are a bit of a bitch.

CASSIE

Says the cunt.

MICHELLE

You know I don't like that word.

CASSIE

Yes, I do.

(They laugh together. Lights fade to black.)

END OF PLAY