

DEAD MIDDLE-AGED WHORE

by Dawson Moore

based on the Tennessee Williams poem "Cinder Hill"

PO Box 3505

Valdez AK 99686

907-835-5325

dawsonguy@juno.com

DEAD MIDDLE-AGED WHORE

CHARACTERS

CHILL Male, mid-30s. The ice man. A young soul.
WILLY Male, mid-20s. The soda jerk. An old soul.
RAKE Male, mid-30s. The field hand. Itchy.

SETTING

Early 1900s. The soda shop in a small town somewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

A line of stools sits in front of a bar counter. In addition to the shop's main exit, there is a door behind the bar that leads to a storage room. This can all be suggested with stools and lighting.

Scene one is late afternoon. Scene two is nearing dawn. In an evening of one-acts, these two scenes should be separated by other plays.

Scene One

Willy stands behind the counter, idly wiping it with a rag while reading from a tattered pamphlet.

Chill enters, panting.

WILLY

Chill.

CHILL

Willy ... hit me with a cold one.

WILLY

It's early for you.

Chill sits.

Willy pours him a soda and puts it on the counter.

CHILL

Thanks. Hell of a day.

WILLY

It's only Monday, and already you're cutting out early.

I suppose people'll get their ice when you choose to give it to them.

CHILL

Are you out of ice?

Have I ever let you run out of ice?

WILLY

(waving his pamphlet)

They have the machines now, Chill, so everyone can make their own ice.

Dad and I'd save money.

CHILL

I cannot believe you would shake that rubbish at me, Willy.

Have you had ice out of one of those devices?

WILLY

No.

CHILL

Half the time it comes out with dirt in the cubes.

Dirt.

They're too small to do the job properly.

And then the ice machine company's got you lined up on parts.

You can't fix the thing, so you need them.

You're a slave to those machines.

With me, you get as much ice as you need, when you need it.

WILLY

That's what you tell me.

Chill downs his soda and passes the glass back.

CHILL

Another.

I've got news, Willy, and I need to know I can trust you with it.

WILLY

Have I ever betrayed a confidence of yours?

Hell, when you were all hot on Sally Walters, I stepped aside for you.

CHILL

You got the better end of that.

Woman'd turn crazy every fourth week.

WILLY

(handing him another soda)

Beside the point.

CHILL

All right, all right ... Mathilda's dead.

WILLY

What?

CHILL

I found her when she didn't answer the door.
Laid out cold in her bed.

WILLY

That's horrible.

CHILL

Didn't smell too bad.

WILLY

Lucky you.

CHILL

But still ... I've never seen someone ... not alive.

WILLY

Did she have bruises?
I mean, did it look like somebody did her in?

CHILL

I don't know!
I look like a funeral director?
Held a mirror up to her mouth.
There was nothing there.

WILLY

She wasn't breathing.

CHILL

That's what I've been saying!

WILLY

Poor Matty.

CHILL

If you'd just shut up for a minute, Willy, I'm not finished.

WILLY

It's a strange coincidence, that's all.

CHILL

What's a coincidence?

WILLY

You haven't heard?

CHILL

Heard what?

WILLY

People in here all day talking about how ol' Matty finally came out of seclusion last night.

CHILL

What?

WILLY

Near six years since anyone even seen her, 'cept you and Carr with deliveries.
Last night, she's in both bars at once.
She was a dervish, buying rounds, dancing.
And today, I've had three men in here who've told me they lay with her last night.
Are you the fourth?

CHILL

Now I'm having sex with the dead in your mind?
You have no respect for me at all, Willy?

WILLY

Not much.
I'm just keeping a tally, for curiosity's sake.
On how many fellas were with her on her last night.
You number four?

CHILL

I thought you said you were discreet?

WILLY

I didn't say those other fellow's names, did I?

It's not like she cares.

And it seems like pertinent information.

Do you think maybe one of them killed her?

Sorry, I mean 'one of you.'

CHILL

I wasn't with her last night, Willy.

I can't afford to be going out.

Wish I'd known she was buying.

WILLY

The woman's dead, and you're saying you're sorry you missed her last call.

CHILL

Look, there's a bigger issue here.

WILLY

How she died seems important to me.

CHILL

She got any family?

Any friends?

Women hate her, men only wanted her 'til they were done.

Who cares how she died?

The question is ... where's the whore's money?

WILLY

Chill, you're a good man.

You have severe moral failings.

CHILL

Do the math.

There's gotta be gold buried up there somewhere on Cinder Hill.

Back a spell, she used to get half a dollar a pop, and she don't spend money on anything more than the basics.

And the occasional gold tooth.

WILLY

She was Spartan, that's sure.

CHILL

Though she must have spent more than the average person on food, to get that big.

WILLY

You might wait another sunrise or two before speaking ill of her, Chill.

She was an attractive woman.

She just had a large frame.

CHILL

I like less meat on the mutton.

Don't be sidetracking me.

You heard what I said.

You know what I'm meaning.

Wily considers him, then polishes off Chill's soda.

WILLY

No, you're right.

Where'd the whore keep her money, it's a fair question.

It's bound to be a fair-sized pile she's been hoarding up there.

And even split between us, it should be enough for me to afford an ice machine.

CHILL

That's a hurtful thing to be saying, Willy.

Hurtful.

WILLY

Tell the constable your story, Chill.

He's the one to be dealing with a dead body.

CHILL

You're not going to help me, Willy?

WILLY

No, Chill, I'm not.

*They stare at each other.
Chill shakes his head and storms to the exit.
He runs full steam into Rake, who knocks him over and stands
over him, screaming.*

RAKE

You damned idiot, look where you're going!
I've been trying to learn you common sense since you were a baby, and you just keep bumping
into things.

WILLY

Calm down, Rake.

RAKE

He does it intentional to rile me.

WILLY

Does what?

CHILL

(rising)

Eat from my crotch, Rake.
You ran into me, you lummoX.

RAKE

I want to talk to Willy alone.
I'll beat you out the door, or you can leave on your own wind.
I don't care, either way.

CHILL

I was just leaving anyway.

Chill takes a pointed glare to Will, then leaves.

WILLY

Afternoon, Rake.

RAKE

I need to talk to you, Willy.

WILLY

Okay.

What is it?

RAKE

It's what I was talking to you about this morning, Willy.

It's that woman.

I don't know what she did to me, but I can't stop itching.

WILLY

It was just last night!

RAKE

Ever since then.

All right, sometimes the itching has left, but then I can't stop thinking ...

And they're the thoughts of a lunatic!

I fear she's bewitched me in some unnatural way ... maybe syphilis!

You've got to help me, Willy.

WILLY

I don't know what you want from me, Rake.

I told you what you need to do.

RAKE

I can't afford to see Doc, Willy.

Can you —

WILLY

No, I can't loan you anything.

I look rich to you?

Me and Dad barely make ends meet here.

Chill reenters.

CHILL

Rake, I have a proposition for you.

RAKE

What the hell?

CHILL

I always wait around the corner after I leave a room, so I can hear what people might be saying about me.

WILLY

Chill—

CHILL

This doesn't concern you, Willy.

Rake, I've got a line on some very fast coin, but I can't get it alone.

One night's work, no danger ... no telling how much it'll be.

RAKE

I'm in.

WILLY

What?

RAKE

Sounds good.

Chill wouldn't dare ask me if it wasn't real.

CHILL

Right, that's right!

WILLY

It involves Matty, Rake.

RAKE

Wait ... what?

You didn't mention her.

CHILL

That's the deal.

WILLY

She's dead, and he wants to go dig up her place looking for damned buried treasure.

RAKE

Oh.

CHILL

Let me explain it.

You're making it sound wrong.

Her cabin is way back up Cinder Hill, and it's surrounded by thick trees.

Her nearest neighbor is Earl the Gardner.

He's over a mile away, and it's not like they're all social.

RAKE

Sounds good.

WILLY

What?

CHILL

Yes!

WILLY

What part of this sounds good, Rake?

CHILL

He's just got vision, unlike a certain soda jerk I won't bother to mention.

You're the one making this more complicated than it needs to be, Willy.

RAKE

I've got a shovel at my place.

CHILL

Oh ... I don't own one ...

Willy —

No, you can't borrow mine.

WILLY

Bastard.

CHILL

Just go buy one.

RAKE

Yeah ... could you spot me?

CHILL

I'm only letting you come 'cause I don't want to do all the digging.

RAKE

It was my idea!

CHILL

You're lucky I'm still letting you come.
So I take it you turned him down, Willy?
When he asked you to help him first.

RAKE

That's right.

WILLY

I'd rather have you with us on this.

RAKE

No thanks.

WILLY

Normally, my voice carries.
I would like you with us on this, Willy.
Since you know about it and all.

RAKE

WILLY

I don't like your tone, Rake.
You're in my place.

RAKE

And I don't like your attitude.

WILLY

I don't like that you're threatening me.

RAKE

I DON'T LIKE THAT YOU'RE WEARING AN APRON!

*Rake and Willy are nose to nose, ready to throw down.
Chill steps in between them.*

CHILL

All right, all right, just calm down, you two. There's no reason –

*They throw him aside and continue staring at each other.
Willy is the first to step back.*

WILLY

Look, Rake.
I don't want to tax you too much here, philosophically, but you see where this is wrong?

CHILL

We're just talking about digging, Willy.

RAKE

Nothing wrong about digging, Willy.

WILLY

What is wrong with you two?
Ever hear of the Bible?
Ever hear of right and wrong?
When people die, their worldly belongings don't go to the first person who shows up.
Mattie may have been a whore, but she was honest, didn't steal, worked hard ...

CHILL

She was all right, Willy.
No one's saying she wasn't.

RAKE

You're a coward, Willy.

WILLY

How you figure that, grave robber?

CHILL

Don't be flinging around words like that.
We're just going to see what's lying around.
We're not robbing graves ... she's not in the ground!
And I never wanted anything to do with her body, even before it was dead.

RAKE

You're always going on about how you and your dad can't make ends meet.
Whole time I've known you, you have never given me a free soda.
But you're not willing to take a small risk to deal with it.

WILLY

Small!

RAKE

Yeah, small.
You heard him, we're not going to get caught.
You're just a cheap coward.
You'd rather let your poor old pa starve to death when this place finally goes bust.

WILLY

We're all right.

CHILL

Ha!
That's the first time anyone's ever heard those words out of your mouth, Willy.
You're always on about how you're going to close down.
Now you're rich?

WILLY

I didn't say rich.

CHILL

You can't afford to loan someone the money for a shovel!
Sounds doggone poor to me.

WILLY

I'll always be too poor for an investment that bad.

CHILL

Hardy har.

WILLY

(turning on RAKE)

And you!

It takes some nerve to call me a coward, when not eight hours ago you were crying all drunk into your soda, "I had sex with that whore and now I'm gonna die!"

RAKE

I was still drunk.

WILLY

Then again five minutes ago —

CHILL

It takes one to know one!

RAKE

Shut up!

CHILL

I'm just saying —

RAKE

Not another word, Chill.
Stop trying to help.
Well, Willy?

WILLY

Well what, Rake?

RAKE

Are you in, or do we have a conflict?

They stare each other down.

WILLY

All right, fine ... let's go.

CHILL

All right, Willy!

RAKE

Good choice.

WILLY

I'll throw in with you fools for tonight.

Because I know you might be right.

There could be a lot of money up there, and who're we hurting?

Except this sort of thing almost always blows up like old dynamite, never when you need it.

So we're doing it right.

I call the shots, you unspeakable cretins.

RAKE

Just 'cause I don't know what that word means, that don't mean I don't take your meaning.

CHILL

He don't mean anything.

WILLY

We have to do this fast, united, and with no drama.

We split everything three ways.

No palming stuff

No claiming you did more work later.

Three even ways.

RAKE

Sure.

WILLY

We leave straight from here and go there as a group.

No cold feet.

No head starts.

RAKE

I need to get my shovel.

WILLY

I've got plenty of shovels.

CHILL

What are you talking about?

WILLY

You'd be amazed what a fellow will trade for a cool soda on a hot day.

CHILL

But if you have a bunch of shovels ...

WILLY

A fellow doesn't get a bunch of shovels by giving them willy-nilly to men like you.

I'll check outside, and when the coast is clear, you two get into the back of my buggy.

Stay down in the carriage until I open it for you.

CHILL

You need a Ford, Chill.

Buggies are what old people ride.

WILLY

We go in together.

We're done early enough for me to drop you off before the sun's up.

I'm here in time to open up like normal.

Maybe we find her money, maybe we don't.

After tonight, we never speak of this again.

WILLY cont.

None of us are qualified to do this.
None of us deserve any of the money we might find.
But if we are brave enough ... we might just get lucky.

RAKE

Amen!
Can we get this show on the road?

WILLY

The shovels are in the shed to the side of the building.

Willy moves to the door.

RAKE

This all sounds all right.
It doesn't mean you're the boss.
That clear?

WILLY

I don't need to be the boss, as long as we do it my way.

RAKE

Okay.
As long as we're clear.

WILLY

Coast is clear.
Let's go, let's go!

CHILL

We're all going to be rich!

*Rake and Chill follow Willy off stage, hooting and hollering.
End of scene one.*

Scene Two

Dim lights rise on the lip of the stage.

It is deep into the night.

The men enter slowly.

They are disheveled and grimy.

Willy leads, carrying a broken shovel like a weapon.

Rake has a noticeable limp, possibly a broken leg.

Chill has a makeshift bandage around his forehead, and his face is covered in blood.

Willy turns and they all stare at each other.

WILLY

Worst idea ever.

CHILL

It was your plan.

RAKE

I'm going to murder you both.

They exit.

End of play.