

Saleswoman of the Year

A Comedy Based on (Almost) Real Events

by Morgan Soundy

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MALLORY

Wednesday Addams from Heaven. A young woman learning how to trust herself and her family without letting either hold her back.

BEATRIX

Lorelai Gilmore from Hell. Fast-talking, enthusiastic, shrewd, and potentially demonic manager of a cemetery. *Note: Her truly mean-spirited nature should not really be explicit until she loses her smile for the first time on page 8. Until then, she's only passive aggressive.*

DEIDRE

Mallory's mother, a caring woman who's on edge and struggling to hold it together after losing her own mother.

BRENNAN

Mallory's uncle and Deidre's brother. An enthusiastic man with an eye for bargains.

TRISTAN

Mallory's father and Deidre's husband. A quiet man with a big heart.

SUMMARY

MALLORY TALBOT and her chaotic family are visiting her grandmother's grave when a freak lightning storm changes their lives forever, leaving only MALLORY to bargain with the cemetery's manager, BEATRIX. In a darkly comedic exchange, MALLORY narrowly escapes a deal with the devil, embracing herself and her family along the way.

DEDICATION

To my mother, father, grandmother, and uncle:
Thanks for not dying that day at the cemetery.
And to Grandad, for bringing us together and saving our place.

SCENE 1

Lights up. THREE FIGURES stand center stage: a MAN to the left, his WIFE in the middle, and their daughter, MALLORY, to the right. Whether the grave and flower are staged or not, we can tell that the family is clustered around a headstone, a dead chrysanthemum at its base.

The man, TRISTAN, coughs once. Twice. After a pause, his wife, DEIDRE, sniffs. Silence. Then TRISTAN coughs again.

DEIDRE

Do you need a cough drop, Tristan?

TRISTAN

No. Just a little throat tickle, that's all.

The THREE bow their heads in more respectful silence until TRISTAN is thrown into another coughing fit.

DEIDRE

Tristan, I am asking you in the name of dear, dead Christina: do you need a cough drop?

TRISTAN

No, Deidre.

DEIDRE

Then for the love of Go—

She pauses. Makes the sign of the cross. Catches herself before making a mistake. Sighs.

DEIDRE

I just—

MALLORY

Why is there a chrysanthemum by her grave?

DEIDRE

Pardon me?

TRISTAN tries to stifle his cough.

MALLORY

There's a chrysanthemum. Why, of all the world's flowers, would someone choose to lay a *chrysanthemum* with Granny Chris?

TRISTAN

Chris. With a chrysanthemum. Huh.

MALLORY

It's morbid.

DEIDRE

Mallory, you're giving me a headache. It's been three days since my mother died and all you two have done is complain. Or cough. Or mope, or make some ridiculous comment when what I need is a moment of quiet to mourn.

And she gets it. For just a minute, TRISTAN isn't coughing and MALLORY has withdrawn into herself again. DEIDRE takes a deep breath, opens her mouth as if to speak, and—

BRENNAN

(From off stage.)

You guys!

MALLORY'S eccentric uncle (DEIDRE'S brother)
BRENNAN enters excitedly.

MALLORY

Uncle Brennan?

TRISTAN

(With a hint of relief.)

Brennan, where've you been?

DEIDRE

Brennan, we told you we'd be here at 10:30 to visit Mama's—

BRENNAN

Yeahyeahyeah, nice to see you and all. But listen to this: I'm walking through the cemetery, right? Birds chirping, willows weeping, storm clouds gathering and everything... And I come across this empty plot.

DEIDRE

(Unimpressed.)

Really, Brennan?

BRENNAN

I know, right? Toooooooootally free for the pickings!

DEIDRE

Lord, grant me strength.

BRENNAN

Here's the thing. A bunch of birds land on the nearby trees and now the plot's like their own personal bathroom. Plus, there's moss. Just an absolute boatload of moss. And there's construction nearby. Not a whole ton of peace and quiet. Sooooo... Boom! Discount central, baby! It's the perfect spot, you guys. Plot THIRTEEN! We're getting it for cheap, I know it.

TRISTAN

Brennan...

BRENNAN

And you know what the best part is? There are four, yessiree, FOUR little holes arranged in an AB-SO-LUTE square! One for me, one for Tristan, one for Mallory, and even one for you, Deidre-Doo! I tell you, our family's never had such luck since Mama was picked up out of her orphanage.

DEIDRE stares at him angrily.

BRENNAN

You all HAVE to come see it! If we put in an offer today, I betcha we could get it for half the asking price—

DEIDRE

No.

Thunder cracks. TRISTAN coughs.

BRENNAN

Well, gee. No need for all the...

BRENNAN mimes an explosion. Or perhaps thunder.

DEIDRE

We are here for time with Mama, Brennan. Not a coughing session...

She looks at TRISTAN.

DEIDRE

Not a moping session...

She glares at MALLORY.

DEIDRE

And most certainly not a shopping spree for your dream home!

When DEIDRE turns back to BRENNAN, the stage lights flash. A lighting storm sets in. Rain's patter echoes through the theater.

BRENNAN

You know, the trees covering that plot protect it from the rain, so it's not getting too musty right now—

DEIDRE

That's IT! I've HAD it with you three. Mallory, go grab the car. Brennan, for goodness's sake, if it will shut you up, then fine. Lead us to the plot. And Tristan, I will SHOVE a cough drop down your throat once we get out of this storm, you hear me?

She forcefully kisses Mallory on the forehead, hugs Tristan, and then stomps off. BRENNAN runs after her, ad-libbing directions. TRISTAN gives MALLORY'S hand a squeeze, then follows his wife.

MALLORY moves to take her mother's place directly behind Christina's grave.

MALLORY

I hope we don't disappoint you, Granny. Everyone's trying their best, really. It's just... confusing. Without you. Mom feels unmoored, I think. Dad's trying to help her know she's not alone, but I don't think coughing's the way to go about it. And Granny, I feel like I'm walking on thin ice with everyone except Uncle Brennan. Although, I'm pretty sure he could convince a polar bear to dive in and save me from a frozen lake if worse came to worst... That doesn't make any sense, does it? You know what I mean.

After blowing a kiss to the grave, MALLORY continues.

MALLORY

I miss you and your advice. And your snickerdoodle cookies. Sorry about the chrysanthemums.

MALLORY begins to exit. Suddenly, she hears a blood-curdling scream as the lights flash again. Lightning has struck nearby.

MALLORY

Mom? MOM! DAD!

The lights begin to dim as MALLORY runs off, screaming.

MALLORY

Help! Someone, please! We need help over here!

Lightning strikes again as the stage transforms into...

SCENE 2

An office in the cemetery's administrative building. It has been unexpectedly inundated with activity.

A WOMAN, wearing an altogether too-enthusiastic expression for someone working with dead people, enters. She's energetic but contended, ready to handle the buzz. This is BEATRIX, fast-talking (wo)manager extraordinaire. With a beatific smile, she calls out:

BEATRIX

Harold? Send in the first!

In stalks MALLORY, her cheeks stained with tears. She refuses to shake BEATRIX'S hand.

BEATRIX

Welcome, Miss Talbot! I'm Beatrix, cemetery warden. Nice to meet you, you're right on time.

MALLORY

I've been waiting in the lobby for three hours.

BEATRIX

Mmm. According to my records, your mother, father, and uncle were struck by lightning at 10:52 in the morning. Assuming it would take a few hours to sort out the more ghastly details of the aftermath and, of course, give you adequate time for initial mourning, you are, in fact, early! Some family members wait a few days to begin the burial process.

MALLORY

Then why is your building currently filled with people seeking closure and space for a handful of dead bodies they didn't expect to be responsible for when they woke up this morning?

BEATRIX

Yes. Well... You are very wordy, aren't you? And blunt, terribly blunt.

MALLORY

Only when I have to be.

BEATRIX

Miss Talbot—

MALLORY

Call me Mallory. Or impending doom.

BEATRIX

Miss Talbot, I'm going to be frank with you. I'm a busy woman today. Lots of unanticipated work on my hands. Like you were saying, there are so many people to meet with, so many papers to sign, so many crisp Benjamins to exchange... I mean, who would have guessed that a freak lightning storm would kill so many visitors? All at once! At a CEMETERY!

MALLORY

Are you supposed to be this chipper about it?

BEATRIX

Listen, dear. What do you know about supply and demand?

MALLORY

Enough to see that right here, right now, you could become—

BEATRIX

Extreeeeemely rich?

MALLORY

Ha. More like saleswoman of the year.

BEATRIX

Glad we're on the same page. Now, let's talk business. I'll get a map of our grounds. Why don't we take a look together and you can pick out a spot you think you might like?

MALLORY

No need. I know exactly where my family should be buried.

BEATRIX

Do you?

MALLORY

Yes, Plot Thirteen.

BEATRIX

(After a pause, evaluating her opponent...)

Mallory, I'm impressed.

Falling into a chair, a lean, or some other relaxed pose,
BEATRIX puts a hand to her chin.

MALLORY

Has anyone ever told you that you look like Meryl Streep in *Devil Wears Prada*?

BEATRIX

You can't distract me, dear. I took one look at you and guessed it: you're shrewd. You know what you're doing. There's business acumen hidden somewhere behind your heavy eyeliner. So. You want that fabulous plot for three bodies? You're looking at fifty thousand dollars.

MALLORY

Total?

BEATRIX

Each.

It is MALLORY'S turn to think for a moment. Finally,
she says—

MALLORY

No.

BEATRIX'S grin grows. The bargaining has begun.

BEATRIX

And why not?

MALLORY

That's a crazy price! I don't know... Maybe if the spot was next to the lake. Maybe if there were free flowers delivered once a week. Maybe if ghost paparazzi found ghost Marilyn Monroe there.

BEATRIX

Mmm. The best I can do is Charlie Chaplin.

MALLORY

Honestly, Beatrix. This plot? It's caked in bird droppings. Smothered by moss. Flooding as we speak! There's a reason no one's ever picked it. But — and the Lord only knows why — my uncle was dead set on it. My mother loves a sale. And Dad loves... Dad loved my mom. So they're getting that plot. But I'm not dishing out a hundred and fifty thousand bucks. That's ridiculous.

BEATRIX

Sure it is, kid.

MALLORY pauses.

MALLORY

Really?

BEATRIX

Mmm hmm. But here's the real kicker: who are you to change my mind?

MALLORY

I don't understand.

BEATRIX stands, maybe pacing leisurely, maybe placing a hand on MALLORY'S shoulder. What's important is that she's in control here and she knows it.

BEATRIX

Miss Talbot, you're, what, thirteen?

MALLORY

Eighteen.

BEATRIX

Fifteen.

MALLORY

Excuse me?

BEATRIX

You're right, we'll compromise. A solid sixteen.

MALLORY

Hold on—

BEATRIX delivers the following line with her characteristic humor, but as silly and charismatic as she is, she's really just a bubbly bully.

BEATRIX

But I can tell, you're not all that dumb. You just don't have the upper-hand. You DO have some dead bodies to sort out. You clearly have a lot of emotional baggage. You have a questionable fashion sense and, yep, I can smell it, a tough family life. Oops! I guess that one's a "had," huh...

MALLORY cringes, this close to crying.

BEATRIX

Face it, hon. You're just a little moody Judy with some terrible luck and nobody to help you out... Except for me! So, either you cough up a hundred and fifty thousand for that dream plot, or we move your dearly deceased mother, father, and uncle to the newly added Overflow Zone™ for cheap... er. Your call!

And as BEATRIX steps away, confident in her superiority, MALLORY realizes something.

MALLORY

You know what? It IS my call. And you're wrong.

BEATRIX spins around, her smile falling for the first time today.

BEATRIX

Whoa there, Faust. I'm never wrong.

MALLORY

Actually, you are. Because I have a third option. In fact, I'm making *you* an offer.

Slowly, BEATRIX's smile returns.

BEATRIX

I'm listening.

MALLORY

Good. It's about time you shut up. I can't imagine how dry your mouth must be after all that yapping. It must reeeeeeeally hurt to be where you are right now. To see all these people walking into your office with all their grief, just there. Plain. Dripping down their cheeks, pooling in their eyes. Because you might not give a shit, but they care. I care. I really care.

MALLORY'S voice breaks the slightest bit as her family members' spirits enter the stage. They appear just as they were in life, if a bit dimmed. Not alive, but there. Always there.

MALLORY

You think you're some clever "people-reader" but you're not. You don't know a thing about me. You think I have emotional *baggage*? Bullshit. I'm eighteen; I'm emotional, period. You think my clothes are awkward? I'm figuring out my style. And if that puts me in an awkward phase, I guess I'll be awkward. You think I had a tough family life? I mean, maybe. I don't think so. I don't think anyone has a perfect family. But, man, did I love mine. And they loved me. It doesn't take much to screw up once in a while but it takes a lot to stick together. To vouch for one another. To be there, always there, no matter what. But that's what we did. And that's what I'm gonna do for them now.

DEIDRE, TRISTAN, and BRENNAN all step forward. BEATRIX can't see them and maybe MALLORY can't either, but when her PARENTS grab each of her hands and BRENNAN lays a hand on DEIDRE'S shoulder, MALLORY stands a bit taller.

MALLORY

You're not some all-powerful cemetery overlord. You just kinda suck. And I feel really bad for you, and I'm sorry for whatever this world did to you, because it must have taken a lot of hate and neglect and fear to make you this way.

BEATRIX wholly lost her smile long ago.

MALLORY

So, here's my proposition.

DEIDRE, TRISTAN, and BRENNAN step away.

MALLORY

You're, what, thirty-five?

BEATRIX

Huh?

MALLORY

Gotcha. Thirty-seven.

BEATRIX

Hold your horses, missy. I've been twenty-nine for... ever.

MALLORY

Okay, fine, I'll accept a solid fifty-two. Regardless, you're old. Old enough to know that, in the new age of technology, online reviews can have a biiiiiiiiig impact.

BEATRIX

You wouldn't...

MALLORY

Oh, yes. I would. I found your Yelp page hours ago. And if you don't give me that plot for the thirty thousand bucks I am prepared to give you at maximum, you're getting a credible, reasonable, and oh-so painful two star review.

MALLORY pulls out a wad of cash. BEATRIX grimaces and lays out her palm.

BEATRIX

Deal. I'll take the forty-five thousand—

MALLORY pulls the cash out of reach.

MALLORY

Thirty thousand or it's a star and a half.

At first BEATRIX splutters in shock. Then she coughs, red in the face. Eventually, BEATRIX slouches, crosses her arms. Sniffs. Coughs again.

BEATRIX

The cemetery accepts your deal and welcomes your loved ones with open graves.

MALLORY slams her cash down and, with a sly grin, pulls out an extra couple of dollars.

MALLORY

Keep the change. And maybe take a cough drop.

MALLORY stalks out of the office. Her family follows. Once alone, BEATRIX takes a deep breath, plasters her smile back on... But maybe it's more forced than before?

BEATRIX

Harold? Send in the next.

Thunder cracks. Blackout.