

# DEATH ALWAYS COMES IN THREES

A Trilogy of One-Acts

By Renee C. Rebman

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## THE STORY

A small-town funeral parlor in Ohio is a hilarious place to visit as revealed by a wonderful and unusual group of characters in this trilogy of one-acts, *Death Always Comes in Threes*.

In “All Laid Out,” Mama, who stubbornly clings to out-dated manners and mores, finds being a new widow not nearly as stressful as being with her two squabbling daughters, the stuffy and pampered Lorena, who’s most concerned with appearances, and Ronnie, a single, free-spirited woman who makes even the funeral director loosen up!

In “Dust to Dust,” the wife of Rick and the wife of Fred meet face to face at the same coffin! But their outrage turns into understanding as they compare notes—and jokes—about their one and only late, traveling salesman husband.

In “Breathing Isn’t Living,” Julie, a young assistant at the funeral home, shows Ernie, a young hired man, about dreams, expectations, taking chances in life.

## **ALL LAID OUT**

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS (1 M, 3 W)**

**MAMA PROFFITT:** About 60, a transplanted Southern belle clinging to outdated manners. She dresses beyond her budget, but lacks sophistication. Her humble background often shows through her carefully constructed facade.

**LORENA TURNER:** Attractive, 30, a carbon copy of her mother with an extra layer of stuffiness. Oblivious to the real world with no concern for others. She is coddled by her husband and is used to being taken care of.

**VERONICA PROFFITT (“RONNIE”):** At 32, the oldest sibling of the family, always misunderstood by the others. She is a modern, single woman and this is evident in her dress and confident manner. Her tough exterior hides a tender side.

**WILLIAM BURNS, JR.:** Forty-ish, polite, quiet and vaguely handsome. He wears an appropriate dark suit and looks the part of a funeral director thrust into the job at too young an age. His interest in Ronnie collides with his usual staid demeanor.

### **SETTING**

A typical old-fashioned funeral home parlor with a window and door. A casket positioned at the side of the room is obscured by a display of flowers. Other flower arrangements dot the room. A few chairs, a couch and a small table with an attendance book are the only furniture.

**TIME:** The present. Mid-afternoon.

### **PROPS**

Large stack of cards on table, large flower arrangement, bouquet of wild roses, bag from Frozen Treats (slush, chips, milkshake) and a glass of ice water, purse-size package of wet wipes.

### ALL LAID OUT

*(AT RISE: MAMA is in the room alone. She walks slowly around reading the cards attached to the flowers.)*

MAMA: Looks like it's going to be a beautiful summer, Jake. You could've got in a lot of fishing ... *(SHE starts to break down, then composes herself and continues in a more cheerful fashion.)* Do you like my new dress? I was saving it for the annual barbecue, but I thought you'd like it. I'm wearing black for the funeral, of course ... I charged the dress, Jake - and the shoes. I meant to tell you about it. You saved me from that little episode, didn't you? Guess I'll learn the hard way now; how to manage on my own. The girls will be here soon. Pray for me. I'll need it more than you do.

*(The door opens quietly.)*

LORENA: Mama! *(THEY embrace. Lorena pulls away and walks around the room checking everything out.)* Did mine come from Farley's yet? Oh, there it is! They promised two dozen blooms. Does that look too small to you? It doesn't seem like two dozen blooms to me. Shoot! Farley's is supposed to be the best. *(SHE reads card on a huge display in front of casket.)* Uncle Roland and the cousins. The Haskins always were a bit pretentious.

MAMA: Now, Lorena!

LORENA: Sorry, Mama. Not too many arrangements from the Proffitt side yet. Any news from Jake?

MAMA: He can't make it until tonight ... business.

LORENA: *(Sarcastically.)* Business. What's this? *(Picks up large card from a stack on table, reads aloud.)* "In memorial, Jake Proffitt, Senior. Born July seventeenth ..." Why, this is lovely, Mama!

MAMA: I had the printers make them up to pass out as a remembrance.

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LORENA: And the embossing matches the attendance book, very tasteful. *(Walks toward the casket, stops before getting too close.)* Daddy looks nice. Everything looks nice. I nearly forgot to ask, how are you doing?

MAMA: Just fine, honey. Busy. Planning a funeral takes time.

LORENA: Well, you've done a beautiful job. Like you always say, breeding shows. I wish I could've been more help, but you know how it is raising a family. Morgan and the boys are coming tomorrow. I thought that would be soon enough.

MAMA: I prefer it. I wanted this afternoon to be just family. Our one last time together.

LORENA: Jake should be here, then.

MAMA: We have to make allowances for your brother. Men aren't as accessible. He's a manager now. It's more responsibility.

LORENA: Manager of Wonderworld. Please! It's putt putt golf, not IBM. He's probably washing the ape's armpits on the eleventh hole.

MAMA: *(Defensively.)* It's a living.

LORENA: It's a crock! Where would I be if Morgan didn't have a real job? And that sister of mine is just as senseless. How long did her marriage last ... three months? *(SHE glances out the window.)* Speak of the devil.

MAMA: Behave, Lorena. Don't argue in front of your father.

LORENA: That line isn't as effective now. Think about it.

*(RONNIE enters carrying a hand-picked bouquet of wild roses. She isn't as dressed up as the other women and looks like the odd man out. She is obviously trying to make the best of an awkward situation.)*

RONNIE: Hello, Mama. Lorena. *(SHE goes to casket.)*  
Oh, Daddy. *(SHE lays the flowers down.)*

LORENA: *(Picking up the flowers.)* Was Farley's closed? If you would've called me, Ronnie, I'd have put your order in with mine. No trouble at all. That's what sisters are for.

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RONNIE: I didn't want to order from a florist. I got the roses from Marble Lake where Daddy use to fish. They aren't for show, they have meaning. You wouldn't understand.

MAMA: Veronica, let your sister be. She has different priorities. She's always had more traditional values.

RONNIE: Lorena has values - and priorities! What a startling piece of news. When did all this come about?

LORENA: How clever. She made a joke, Mama. Isn't she clever?

RONNIE: (*Picking up memorial card.*) What's this?

MAMA: In remembrance of your father. I had them printed up.

RONNIE: A souvenir program of the funeral? This is what you consider good traditional values? (*Reading aloud.*) "Veronica and Lorena will sing 'Amazing Grace.'" Have you lost your mind? I'm not singing with her!

LORENA: What's the big deal? The Proffitt sisters always sang together at church. Daddy loved it.

MAMA: Yes, he did.

RONNIE: How would you know? He never went to church. He was never there!

MAMA: Well, he liked the idea of you girls singing together. He saw you in the dresses I made.

RONNIE: That isn't the same thing at all.

LORENA: Why spoil it?

RONNIE: Why not? Don't I spoil everything? Another grand Proffitt tradition; Ronnie is the difficult one, she spoils everything.

LORENA: I'll just sing it alone.

MAMA: Like hell you will! I won't be embarrassed in front of the Haskins!

RONNIE: The Haskins. (*Walks toward display by casket.*) Let me guess, these?

MAMA: There's nothing wrong with showing respect for the dead.

RONNIE: A great deal of expensive respect. Farley's is loving this.

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MAMA: It's all in keeping with your father's standing in the community. He was associated with the city's greatest institution.

RONNIE: I'm well aware of his association with the hallowed institution.

LORENA: There she goes again, making fun. Where would Canton be without the Football Hall of Fame? We're known all over the country. National recognition, Ronnie, national.

RONNIE: Our father was head custodian.

MAMA: How dare you say that! He was in charge of building maintenance and security. He was a very important man. If one of those super bowl rings ever came up missing, his butt was on the line. Not that it ever happened - no. Your father was good at his job.

RONNIE: He was very good at his job. I know that. But, he never pretended it was more than it was.

MAMA: Where I come from it's proper to give all the credit that is due. The Haskins of Mobile stand by their own. We build them up not belittle them.

RONNIE: I would never belittle Daddy! I'm simply sick of the pretense. This isn't the Old South. Can't this family ever look at the truth without cringing?

MAMA: Southern ladies don't cringe.

RONNIE: Or admit to the truth.

MAMA: Truth becomes what it is necessary for it to be.

LORENA: Boy, I didn't understand that last one at all. It's too hot for this kind of talk.

RONNIE: I didn't realize the heat affected your comprehension so drastically.

LORENA: Don't throw big words at me, Miss Book Boutique.

RONNIE: Yes, I have to work for a living. But, that shop is my own. No one gave me a thing.

MAMA: Stop it! If your father weren't here I'd scream. I would! You've driven me over the edge.

LORENA: *(Going to comfort HER.)* Oh, Mama. I'm sorry.

RONNIE: I'm sorry, too.

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