

THE ASYLUM FOR REJECTED CHARACTERS

A One Act Stage Play

by

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Cast of Characters

Axe Man: Possessed axe murderer / vampire /
werewolf character cut by Steven King

Caitlin "Kate" Todd: Female character killed off by NCIS

Jane Doe: Female character cut by Sue Grafton

The Voice: Loudspeaker voice with Asylum updates

Scene

The Asylum for Lost Characters.

Time

The present.

SETTING: A couch and chair angle toward the audience. The Rolling Stones "19th Nervous Breakdown" plays in the background, then fades away.

The Voice

Welcome to the Asylum for Rejected Characters, where literary characters go when they've been deleted, cut, or retired. Here, they wait for a chance to be reborn in the mind of another author. And wait. And wait.

LIGHTS: AXE MAN, a poorly-dressed middle-aged man carrying an axe, is seated in the chair. KATE, an attractive brunette in business attire, is seated on the couch with JANE, a young woman.

The Voice

Attention characters. The Asylum for Rejected Characters is pleased to announce a casting call this afternoon at 2PM sharp in the Hopelessly Hoping Auditorium. All male characters are invited to apply. If picked, you'll proceed immediately to that author's story in the light.

Kate and Jane sag. Axe Man waves his axe over his head.

Axe Man

Woo-hoo. I told you I'd get released first.

The Voice

This author of children's stories is racking his brain for a nurturing grandfatherly type who will cater to children under ten.

Axe man looks at his clothes, his axe, and lowers his axe and head.

Axe Man

Oh, sure. Another grandpa.

Jane

I'm sorry. I was rooting for you.

Kate

You better root for yourself, sister. Not that you have a real shot at escape.

Jane

You don't know that. How about you, mister? Been in the asylum long?

Axe Man

Just a week. Name's Axe Man. I was slated to be a character in the next Steven King novel. But he cut me during rewrite.

Jane

Steven King! Wow. I bet you're really interesting.

Axe Man

I am. One day I'm wreaking havoc in a small town in Maine, and the next I'm in here. It sucks.

Jane

I'm Jane Doe. I was going to be in Sue Grafton's *W is for Wasted*, but didn't make the final draft.

Axe Man

I love getting wasted. And killing. And porn.

Kate

Great. I get to spend life in purgatory with you. I'm so blessed.

Axe Man

Hey. If it weren't for characters like me, reading would be boring.

Jane

I was going to be a murder victim. Instead, I ended up a victim of the editor.

Kate

Loser.

Jane

That's not nice. You're in here, too.

Kate

I'm not a loser. I'm a star.

Axe Man

I got news for you lady. Ain't no stars in here.

Jane

But they have casting calls. Opportunities for authors to be inspired by us, and give us another chance.

Kate

The only thing those casting calls are good for is to be rejected again, and again, and again.

Axe Man

Some people get out.

Jane

Really?

Axe Man

Just yesterday a guy went to a casting call and got pulled up into the light.

Jane

That's awesome. What character was he?

Axe Man

A zombie. I spoke to him on his way to the interview. He said there's still plenty of demand for his character.

Jane

Oh. I don't think I'd do well as a zombie. But you might. You were some kind of axe murderer, right?

Axe Man

Actually, I was a much more complex character. Axe murderer, yes. But also possessed by a demon, and I was also a vampire and a werewolf.

Kate

All in one? No wonder you got axed.

Jane

I saw what you did there.

Axe Man

Ha, ha, ha. Like I said, I was complex.

Kate

It sounds like you were some overwritten first-draft monstrosity that couldn't survive a proper edit. Like Steven King says, don't be afraid to kill your darlings.

Jane

I wonder if they know what happens to us when they cut us.

Kate

They're writers. They don't know shit.

Axe Man

King certainly dropped the ball on this one. I could have been a star.

Kate looks at Jane and rolls her eyes.

Kate

Woulda, coulda, shoulda. You two didn't even make it to publication. I was a star. In TV scripts.

Axe Man

That doesn't count. That's not even a novel.

Kate

Scripts count as writing.

Jane

Of course it does.

Axe Man

I don't know. Novels is where the real writing happens.

Jane

What about plays? Is that real writing?

Kate and Axe Man
(think about it)

Nah.

Jane

So, what happened?

Kate

I was on the number one show on television. Everybody loved me.

Axe Man

What's your name?

Kate

Caitlin Todd. But everyone called me Kate. I'm a former Secret Service Agent who got fired and then hired by Agent Gibbs at NCIS.

Jane

That sounds great. What happened?

Kate

The actress playing my character left the show after only two years. Can you believe it? Two years! Did she even consider what would happen to me? Noooo.

Jane

It sounds like you have potential. Lots of writers like a strong female character. I bet you get another shot.

Kate

It's been ten years. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting.

The Voice

Attention characters. We have an author who is developing her character list and can't decide whether to include a zombie, or a housewife who hosts her own cooking show. Interested characters should stay ready.

Jane

A cook, or a zombie?

Kate

That's another thing. Why do these writers get to make all the decisions about my life? It's too much power, I tell you.

Jane

That's a fair point.

Kate

Writer's these days. You never saw Ray Bradbury trying to decide between a zombie or a housewife. He knew what he wanted, and he went and wrote it. You think Faulkner ever put his characters through this sort of misery?

Jane

(to Axe Man)

Maybe she'll go zombie. Could you do that?

Axe Man

(ponders)

Interesting. I was a vampire. Why not a zombie? Yes, why not?

Kate

They're not the same thing. Vampires drink blood. Zombies eat brains.

Axe Man

I could adapt.

Jane

I think you can do it.

Axe Man

I'll tell you one thing. If I get another chance, I'll be bad-ass. None of this lover-boy-vampire shit. I was going to drink everybody dry. Evil, that's what I was. I'd make an excellent zombie.

Kate

Zombies are so last year. She'll probably go with the housewife.

Jane

I could be a housewife.

Kate

Do you even know how to cook?

Jane

I can learn.

Jane turns to Axe Man.

Jane (cont)

Do you think I can learn?

Axe Man

Anybody can learn.

Kate

(shaking her head)

No. You two don't get it. The writers want a character ready-made for the role in their head. They just want to add ink and see the character come to life. Like a cook adding water to a cake mix.

Jane

I can do that.

Kate

Plus, many authors are focused on plot now. We used to come first. Now it's blow up this, screw that. It's like we're second class citizens.

Axe Man

Some writers still put the characters first.

Jane

Yeah. And some like to be challenged by their characters. Some make them really complex, with layers and everything.

Kate

I'm telling you, the competition in here for every character they create is outrageous. Someone out there already has everything the writer is looking for. And if there isn't they create a new character. If you want to get to the light, you have to be perfect for it.

Axe Man

What about writers that want to be surprised by their character? You know, they start seeing the story and the character going one way, and then, zip, it turns around and heads somewhere else. What about that?

Jane

Yeah, what about that?

The Voice

Attention characters. Please extend an Asylum for Rejected Characters welcome to new our latest inmate. He's fresh off a long run on Grey's Anatomy. Welcome, Derek Shepherd.

Kate shakes her head.

Kate

Not another one. That show sends us more characters than anybody.

Axe Man

It'd be better to never be conceived than end up in this purgatory.

Jane

Don't say that. We lived. Even though we got rejected, we have a chance to go back up to the light.

Kate

Or down to the darkness.

Jane

The darkness?

Kate

Yeah. If they decide your character has no chance for a future, they send you down. To the darkness. There's no coming back from the darkness.

Axe Man

I don't know about the darkness.

Kate

There's the light, where characters live, there's this Asylum in purgatory, where we wait our fate, and there's the darkness, where characters go to die. Permanently.

Jane

I don't want to go to the darkness.

Kate

You just got here. I'm the one with something to worry about. My time could be up any day now.

The Voice

Attention characters. Are you suffering from performance anxiety, or a performance problem? Meet us in the Blue Pill Room to learn how you can get, and keep, a high level of performance. Attendance side effects may include vomiting, diarrhea, liver failure, kidney failure, heart failure, and permanent exile to the darkness.

Axe Man

Why would anybody want that? The risks sound worse than the problem.

Axe Man points off stage.

Axe Man (cont)

Hey, who's that?

Jane

It looks like Otto, the inflatable pilot from the movie Airplane! What's he doing here?

Axe Man

I love inflatable dolls.

Kate

Eeeew.

The Voice

Attention characters. We have a new playwright suffering a serious case of writer's block. We'll be opening the portal in the Lane Excuses Room. If you want to audition, walk by and see if the author gets inspired.

Jane

Should we go?

Axe Man

I wonder what kind of play it is. Maybe we can all get picked.

Jane

Oh, wouldn't that be fun. Just think, a possessed axe murderer/vampire/werewolf with a murder victim, and a federal agent. Who wouldn't want to see that?

Kate

(looks at audience)

Me, for one.

The Voice

Attention, Jane Doe. Please report to the elevator.

Jane

The elevator? Am I on my way up? To the light?

Kate

That elevator only goes one way. Down.

Jane

Down? But why? I just got here. I deserve a chance, don't I?

Kate

Sorry, kid. You're too nice for genre, not hot enough for romance, and not fleshed out enough for literary fiction.

The Voice

Attention, Caitlin Todd. Please report to the elevator.

Kate

Oh, damn it.

Jane

Sorry, Kate.

(points at Axe Man)

But why does he get to stay? He's the worst of all of us.

Axe Man

Hey, I'm right here.

Jane

But it's true. You're a monster.

Kate

Don't sweat it, kid. He's probably right behind us.

The Voice

Attention, Axe Man. Several Steven King wanna-be's are considering you after hearing King speak at a writer's group. Please come to the Plagiarism Room right away.

Axe Man stands and raises his arms.

Axe Man

I knew it. You can't keep a great character down.

Jane

This is so unfair. You're evil.

Axe Man

I am indeed. And you know what? I give the readers exactly what they want. No milk toast, frilly, boring characters for them. They want blood, and guts, and explosions, and sex. They want action and mayhem and conflict. They want creatures that crawl inside their head and scare the hell out of them. They want to lay awake at night with the hair on their arms rising and their breathing constrained.

(turns to audience and grins)

Don't you.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)