

**CADAVER LOVE**

**a one-act play  
by Tom Baum**

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**Characters**

**JESSICA, 20s, a first-year medical student, African-American**

**YANCEY, 20s, Jessica's lab partner in Anatomy, white**

**HORACE, 50s-60s, a homeless man, African-American**

**BETTY JEAN, 40s-50s, Horace's white street wife**

**DR. GANESH, 30s, Jessica and Yancey's Anatomy instructor**

**The action takes place in a first-year med-school dissection room.**

**The time is the present.**

## Scene 1

*(Lights up on an anatomy-lab dissecting table. On the table is a cadaver completely wrapped in bandages, head to toe. Two first-year students, JESSICA, African-American, and YANCEY, white, both wearing labcoats, are preparing to do their first dissection. JESSICA is reading from the dissection manual, as YANCEY scissors the bandage covering the cadaver's thigh.)*

JESSICA: "Make a longitudinal incision through the skin downward along the medial aspect of the thigh, from the lower border of the pubic symphysis to the medial condyle of the tibia..."

YANCEY: Hey, slow down, OK? I'm not down to the skin yet.

JESSICA: Well, quit dawdling. I've got an Immunology test I've got to study for.

YANCEY: Right, yeah, Immunology. You wouldn't mind boning up with me tonight, would you? Maybe those amazing smarts will rub off.

JESSICA: Yancey...leave it alone, OK? I'm never hooking up with you.

YANCEY: Because I'm a white guy.

JESSICA: You're a whiter than white guy. Shut up and start cutting.

*(YANCEY bends over the Cadaver. Then pulls back.)*

JESSICA: What's the matter?

YANCEY: I'm just wondering where it came from....this body we're about to carve up.

JESSICA: Skid Row. Potter's Field. Even in death, the rich exploit the poor.

YANCEY: OK, now I'm seeing the problem. Yes, my filthy rich white dad gave a ton of money to this med school. Without it, there wouldn't be scholarships, all right?

JESSICA: Oh, you're assuming I'm on scholarship. Do you know who wrote me a recommendation? My cousin, Colin Powell.

YANCEY: OK, so we're both privileged. We have so much in common, it's staggering.

JESSICA: Except you make assumptions based on race.

YANCEY: Didn't you get the memo? Race doesn't matter to Millennials.

JESSICA: Oh sure. What's the first thing you noticed about me?

YANCEY: Your beautiful eyes.

JESSICA: That's bullshit and you know it's bullshit. What was the next thing you noticed about me? That I didn't sound black. Yes or no?

YANCEY: But you do sound black. It's subtle, but it's there, and it's music to my ears.

JESSICA: In other words, my race was foremost in your mind.

YANCEY: Fine, Jess, you win. Let's get this poor derelict's thigh dissected, and we'll discuss racial politics over dinner.

JESSICA: Didn't you hear what I just said? I'm never going out with you. Suck that up let's get this done.

YANCEY: Your wish is my command. Here goes.

*(YANCEY bends over the small portion of exposed thigh, starts to make the incision. The Cadaver twitches violently to life, grabbing YANCEY around the neck. YANCEY and JESSICA let out screams.)*

YANCEY: Holy shit! Leggo!

*(YANCEY frees himself from the Cadaver's grip, backing away from the table in horror. The Cadaver sits up, begins to unwrap itself, starting with its head. Underneath is HORACE, a middle-aged African-American man.)*

HORACE: Sorry, son. Instinctive reaction.

YANCEY: (*to JESSICA*) You're seeing this, right?

JESSICA: I don't know, am I?

YANCEY: I smoked some weed before I came, maybe it was laced with something.

HORACE: Son, you're not hallucinating. Neither are you, Jessica.

JESSICA: How do you know my name?

HORACE: I've got ears, don't I? At least till you get to dissecting the head. Name's Horace. What's the matter, hon? You assumed I was white, didn't you? Didn't want to be slicing into a brother. I appreciate that.

JESSICA: This isn't happening. This man didn't die.

YANCEY: What do you mean, he didn't die?

JESSICA: They put bodies in the morgue before they're dead, they wake up screaming in the drawer. Happens all the time. I'm getting Dr. Ganesh.

HORACE: If that's your lab instructor, forget it. This whole set-up reeks of injustice—treating God's favored species like helpless laboratory animals. That must be why He chose to spare me.

JESSICA: God had nothing to do with this. You were buried alive, and yes, I'm going to see that justice is done. (*sudden shriek*) Whoa, what are you doing? Don't!

*(By now, HORACE has unwrapped everything but his private parts, and is about to.)*

HORACE: Right. Sorry about that.

YANCEY: Here. Take this.

*(YANCEY hands HORACE his labcoat. HORACE puts on the labcoat, discreetly discarding the last piece of bandage.)*

HORACE: Thank you, son. And now I'll be out of both your hair.  
Got to go find Betty Jean.

YANCEY: Who's Betty Jean?

HORACE: Only the love of my life. Except maybe at the very end.  
I'm thinking she might have poisoned me.

YANCEY: Why would Betty Jean poison you?

HORACE: Who knows? Maybe it was a suicide pact. (*sniffs himself*)  
Whoa, I stink of preservative, don't I? That's OK, Betty Jean will  
understand. When we couldn't find a place to shower? She never let  
that inhibit us. We should all be so lucky in love. (*to YANCEY*) A  
word with you before I go?

(HORACE *steers* YANCEY *aside*, *out of* JESSICA's *earshot*.  
JESSICA, *totally benumbed*, *sorts through the discarded bandages*.)

HORACE: You've been praising her intelligence. Tends not to work  
with a black chick. She thinks you're being patronizing.

YANCEY: I told her she was beautiful.

HORACE: She writes that off to Jungle Fever.

YANCEY: So what do you suggest? Listen to me, I'm asking dating  
advice from a corpse.

HORACE: I resent the word "corpse." Here's what you do: Take her  
to karaoke. Have a drink or two—just enough to oil the wheels.  
Look at her, she's half-silly already behind my resurrection. Strike  
while the iron is hot. (*heads for door*) Bye, you two.

JESSICA: No, please don't go! This has to be a case of premature  
burial. We'll sue the guy who signed the death certificate.

HORACE: Johnny Cochran's dead, sweetheart. (*to YANCEY*) I'm  
rooting for you, son.

(HORACE *exits*. JESSICA *starts out after him*.)

YANCEY: Whoa, where are you going?

JESSICA: I'm going to tell Dr. Ganesh what happened. He needs to find out who slipped up here.

YANCEY: I'll tell you who's gonna be blamed—me. I'm the stoner who was kicked out of three prep schools, who's only here because I'm a third-generation legacy. I'm gonna say it was body-snatchers.

JESSICA: What body-snatchers?

YANCEY: You didn't hear about this? They sneak into anatomy labs and steal the cadavers for sex.

JESSICA: Yancey, please get a grip. We are going to tell the truth. In the interest of medical science—

*(The door opens. It's not Horace. It's DR. GANESH, the Anatomy instructor.)*

DR. GANESH: What are you two doing here so late? *(re dissection table)* Is this your station? Oh gosh, where is your cadaver?

JESSICA: Horace? He's gone.

YANCEY: Walked out that door two minutes ago.

JESSICA: Dr. Ganesh, I swear it's true. Whoever signed his death certificate made a terrible mistake. As soon as we cut into him, he lurched off the table and unwrapped himself. Look, here are his bandages.

DR. GANESH: Yes, well, I am familiar with first-year pranks. Are you going to tell me where your cadaver is—your naked cadaver—or do I have to take this up with the Dean?

JESSICA: Here, I'll prove it to you.

*(JESSICA has been Googling. Shows GANESH her phone.)*

JESSICA: Dozens of false burials. It's practically an epidemic.

DR. GANESH: I see. Very curious indeed. I will reserve final judgment. Meanwhile, a new cadaver will be furnished. Though why you chose to pair up with this fellow, I can't imagine.

(DR. GANESH *exits*. YANCEY and JESSICA *pick up the bandages, disposing of them in a trash bin.*)

YANCEY: You chose to pair up with me? That's kinda encouraging.

JESSICA: I felt sorry for you, all right? I knew nobody else would want to partner with you, after you botched every single lab in physiology.

YANCEY: Hey, I'll settle for pity. How about we drown our confusions at karaoke? Don't think of it as a date. Just one drink.

JESSICA: All right. But only one.

YANCEY: And then we'll go study for that Immunology exam. What? Right. Don't push your luck. I hear you. (*contemplates last piece of bandage*) Poor Horace. I wonder if he'll find his lady love.

(*Blackout.*)



**Scene 2**

*(Lights up on JESSICA, in a labcoat, and YANCEY, minus his labcoat. There's a new cadaver on the dissection table, wrapped head to toe.)*

YANCEY: What's the matter, Jess?

JESSICA: I just have the most awful feeling. Like I went to sleep and I can't wake up.

YANCEY: You're just hung over.

JESSICA: I could hardly read the karaoke screen. Yancey...when we went back to my room to study...did anything happen?

YANCEY: We didn't study, if that's what you mean.

JESSICA: But you acted like a gentleman.

YANCEY: Yeah, I guess that's the word for it. Why don't we start on the pectoral area? Just for luck. *(referring to Manual)* "In the midline at the base of the neck is the jugular notch..."

*(JESSICA cuts the bandages at the cadaver's neck.)*

YANCEY: "At its lateral end the clavicle articulates with the acromion process of the scapula..."

*(JESSICA makes an incision. The Cadaver utters a blood-curdling shriek and bolts up from the table.)*

BETTY JEAN: [shrieks]

JESSICA: Ohmigod, please not again.

*(The Cadaver unwraps itself, starting with the head. Underneath is BETTY JEAN, a white Woman in early middle age.)*

BETTY JEAN: Where am I, is this Hell?

YANCEY: Close enough. It's medical school.

JESSICA: I can't take this anymore. I'm losing my mind.

YANCEY: Uh...by any chance is your name Betty Jean?

BETTY JEAN: What, they tell you your cadaver's name now? Is privacy completely dead?

YANCEY: Horace told us.

BETTY JEAN: Horace? Don't tell me he's here too.

YANCEY: Horace was here, but he left. He said you might have poisoned him.

BETTY JEAN: Oh that ridiculous man. Fifteen years together, he's still paranoid about white women.

YANCEY: Then how did you both die? Assuming you did.

BETTY JEAN: Hypothermia, most likely. That's how most street people cash in their chips. Mind letting me have your wrap?

JESSICA: Oh. Yes. Here.

*(Still dazed, JESSICA takes off her labcoat and BETTY JEAN steps into it.)*

BETTY JEAN: Thank you, hon. And please don't be upset that I hooked up with a brother. *(simulated whine)* "Where have all the black men gone? Why would they rather have a sloppy white chick than a sleek African princess?" So tell me, where's Horace now?

YANCEY: We don't have a clue. He woke up on that table and he waltzed out that door.

BETTY JEAN: Then it's time I did some waltzing. Poison? I'm gonna find that man and give him a piece of my mind.

JESSICA: Please don't leave yet! *(prompting YANCEY)* Dr. Ganesh needs to know about you.

BETTY JEAN: Sure, go get Dr. Ganesh, and I'll end up back on that dissecting table.

JESSICA: I promise that won't happen! We need to do a workup, that's all.

YANCEY: Gotta love Jess. She's got a one-track mind.

BETTY JEAN: You're sweet on her, aren't you, hon.

YANCEY: From the moment I saw her.

BETTY JEAN: *(to JESSICA)* Is the color barrier holding you back? Come here a second.

*(BETTY JEAN takes JESSICA aside. JESSICA shoots YANCEY a look, miming "Go get Ganesh." With a reluctant shrug he sneaks out the door.)*

BETTY JEAN: Are you waiting for your Fresh Prince to wake you from your beauty sleep? Forget it. Those gorgeous Denzels have too many options. You ever been alone with Yancey? In a romantic situation?

JESSICA: Last night. *(hint of regret)* But nothing happened.

BETTY JEAN: Listen here: Any white man, confronted with a black woman, feels like a twig on the tide, no matter how well-endowed he is. *(turns around)* Hey, whoa, where'd he go? Damn, and I thought you were my friends.

JESSICA: Something is keeping you alive. If we can figure out what it is, think of the benefit to humanity!

BETTY JEAN: Considering the life I've led, I don't reckon I owe humanity any favors. *(heads out)* And remember what I told you. A bird in the hand is worth two in the African bush.

*(BETTY JEAN exits. JESSICA quickly shoves the discarded bandages out of sight. The door opens. YANCEY and DR. GANESH enter.)*

DR. GANESH: Well? What did you want to show me?

JESSICA: (*to YANCEY*) I couldn't stop her from leaving.

DR. GANESH: Stop who from leaving? What in God's name is going on here?

JESSICA: Same thing that happened to Horace. We started to cut, and Betty Jean woke up.

DR. GANESH: That does it. I'm notifying the authorities.

JESSICA: No! There's a mechanism here!

DR. GANESH: Oh, and what would that mechanism be?

(*Pause. JESSICA improvises:*)

JESSICA: They both caught a virus. Meta-neurotin Type 6. It's an artificially engineered organism. Instead of killing the host, it keeps the host alive.

DR. GANESH: I have never heard of this virus.

JESSICA: It's a government secret. Regina Benjamin, the 18<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General? She's my aunt, she told me all about it. The virus puts people in a coma. Simulates death. Like curare.

DR. GANESH: And you are telling me this happened twice.

JESSICA: Yes, because these two people were intimate. The virus is sexually transmitted.

DR. GANESH: A secret government STD.

YANCEY: Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

DR. GANESH: It certainly does. You will both remain here to answer further questions from the authorities. If it turns out you're lying, Jessica, you can both pack up your microscopes for good.

(*DR. GANESH exits.*)

YANCEY: Meta-neurotin Type 6?

JESSICA: I made all that up. Well, except for Regina Benjamin, she really is my aunt.

YANCEY: That was genius, I have to say. Not that I expect any less from you.

JESSICA: But what happens when they find out I was lying? I can't go to jail. My dorm room makes me claustrophobic.

YANCEY: Calm down. Nobody's going to jail.

JESSICA: Yancey, can I ask you a question? Last night...were you scared you couldn't perform? Was it because I'm a black woman?

YANCEY: Could be. Why, were you disappointed?

JESSICA: Yeah. Kinda.

YANCEY: That makes me very happy.

JESSICA: Maybe Horace and Betty Jean will find happiness.

YANCEY: They were made for each other. Dead or alive.

JESSICA: Yancey...they weren't dead. I refuse to accept that.

YANCEY: Either way we'd better haul ass. Before Ganesh gets back here with the cops.

*(YANCEY and JESSICA start for the door. As they near it, it swings open.)*

YANCEY AND JESSICA: *[stifled shrieks]*

*(HORACE and BETTY JEAN are silhouetted in the doorway, wearing the labcoats they borrowed from YANCEY and JESSICA. HORACE locks the door after they enter.)*

JESSICA: You found each other!

BETTY JEAN: No trick to that. We had a favorite alley on the Row. This one couldn't wait to take me against the wall. Not my favorite Kama Sutra position, but beggars can't be choosers.

HORACE: And then this cop car comes roaring up the alley.

YANCEY: Dr. Ganesh. He must have sic-ed the police on you.

JESSICA: And the FBI. And the CDC. And the NSA.

HORACE: Why would the government be after us?

YANCEY: Because of the secret virus that's keeping you alive.

HORACE: Secret virus?! What kind of ludicrous bullshit is that?

BETTY JEAN: Horace, don't get hot with them, we need their help.  
(to JESSICA and YANCEY) We're headed out of town. Horace is starting a new religion.

HORACE: It was True Love kept us alive. We are Citizens of Eternity and we observe the following Commandments: Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor and Thy Neighbor's Wife. Thou Shalt Bare Thy Bodies, Thou Shalt Spill Thy Seed, Thou Shalt Covet Everybody's Ass. Can I get an Amen?

*(A knock on the door.)*

DR. GANESH: *(other side of door)* What is going on? Why is this door locked? Open it please!

BETTY JEAN: *(to HORACE)* Ganesh.

*(The doorknob rattles. Then stops.)*

YANCEY: He's gone to get the key. Hurry up.

*(YANCEY quickly strips off his clothes, handing them to HORACE, who discards his labcoat. He examines the label on YANCEY's jacket.)*

HORACE: Hugo Boss! Thank you, son.

(JESSICA follows suit, handing her clothes to BETTY JEAN.)

BETTY JEAN: Kimora Lee Simmons?

JESSICA: She's a designer of color.

BETTY JEAN: Figures. Thank you, dear.

(As he surrenders his pants to HORACE, YANCEY takes his wallet out and hands over his credit card.)

YANCEY: Use it all you want. If they call me, I'll say yes to all the charges.

(JESSICA has taken her credit card out of her fanny-pack and hands it to BETTY JEAN.)

JESSICA: In case you max out Yancey's card.

(Sound of approaching footsteps. The door unlocks. DR. GANESH enters.)

DR. GANESH: Now what is going on? Why are you two in your underwear? Who are these people? Is this some kind of orgy? This is definitely going in my report to the Dean.

HORACE: Hey...Ganesh...cut 'em some slack, OK?

DR. GANESH: Who are you? How do you know my name?

HORACE: Name's Horace. And this is Betty Jean.

DR. GANESH: (realizing) "Horace"? "Betty Jean"?

BETTY JEAN: (to HORACE) Sugarpie? I think it's time we hit the bricks. (to JESSICA and YANCEY) Bye, you two. We'll remember you long as we live.

HORACE: In other words...forever!

(HORACE and BETTY JEAN start for the door. DR. GANESH starts after them. YANCEY steps in front of him.)

DR. GANESH: You will please get out of my way.

YANCEY: Why, what are you going to do?

DR. GANESH: *(to JESSICA)* I did a Biolinks search on your virus. The Army, it appears, is experimenting with life-prolonging organisms.

YANCEY: Keep the dead troops firing away.

DR. GANESH: How those derelicts became infected is a mystery. One I intend to solve.

YANCEY: Nope. Sorry.

DR. GANESH: You are not going to let me pass? You are both standing in my way?

JESSICA: Both of us.

DR. GANESH: In that case...good luck ever becoming doctors.

*(DR. GANESH exits. Alone, JESSICA and YANCEY shoot looks at each other's near-nudity, and put on the discarded labcoats.)*

JESSICA: There goes my brilliant career.

YANCEY: Hey look, we did the right thing. They've had a rough time of it, those two. They deserve a happy afterlife.

JESSICA: What if that religion catches on? This planet's gonna get awfully crowded. What do we do with the rest of our lives?

*(Pause. A tender look comes into their eyes.)*

YANCEY: Well...there's always dental school.

*(As they kiss...the lights fade. END OF PLAY.)*