

THE CORPSE WORE WHITE

by

Mike Hallett

v2.3

Mobile: 07758 834072
E-mail: micafilms@btinternet.com

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FADE IN:

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - DAY

A white rose.

SARAH POTTS, 57, mousy, clutches the rose. She weeps openly. She stands by a white coffin which lies on a conveyer belt that leads to a cremation chamber. Sarah places the rose on the coffin.

SARAH

She always loved white...

A crowd of MOURNERS watches in grief. Among them are: REGGIE POTTS, 58, withdrawn; AMY JONES, 32, svelte and sassy; and a mournful FUNERAL DIRECTOR.

SARAH (O.S.)

No one should have to bury their own daughter...

The BERNADINO family sits together: MICHAEL, 35, intense; FRANK, 40, brutish; and PAUL, 32, devious; with their WIVES and CHILDREN. LUIGI, 75, lies on a camp stretcher and coughs.

SARAH

(gathers herself)

I don't want to cry... I want to remember Tina as she was before... before she was in this box.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

TINA POTTS, 32, quiet and self-contained, wanders dreamily through the garden. She stoops and smells a white rose with her big, sad eyes.

SARAH (V.O.)

Christina was a quiet child, never said 'boo', never shouted out loud what she wanted from life.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Sarah breaks into tears. Reggie hurries to support her. She smiles and finds new strength.

SARAH

But she never gave up on her goals
and her happiness... She seemed to
have found both... in Michael.

Michael manages a smile.

Amy's face is emotionless.

SARAH (CONT'D)

So it seems doubly cruel that, just
at this time, she was taken from...
from all of us by this --

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A stone splashes into the river.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Sarah's knees weaken. Reggie struggles to support her.

SARAH

She was a water baby. I still can't
believe she drowned...

Michael rushes over and supports Sarah. Michael and Reggie
escort Sarah to her seat. Michael faces the mourners.

MICHAEL

Thank you, Mrs. Potts. I can't tell
you how much I was looking forward
to being part of your family... and
for Tina being part of mine.

He glances at --

Luigi eyes Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Family is everything.

INT. BERNADINO HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Michael and the Bernadino family sit around a table in an
opulent dining room. Luigi lies on a camp stretcher beside
the table. He coughs. The wives lay food on the table then
seat themselves. There is a spare chair.

LUIGI

Say 'grace', Michael.

MICHAEL

Aren't we waiting for someone?

LUIGI
That's for your wife-to-be.

Michael huffs.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
Say 'grace', Michael.

Michael joins his hands. Everyone follows.

MICHAEL
Dear Father, please keep this
family safe, healthy and wealthy.

EVERYONE
Amen.

The wives serve food to the children.

LUIGI
I hope that seat won't be empty for
too long. I can't tell you how much
pleasure your brothers have brought
me with their families.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Lost in thought for a moment, he addresses the mourners.

MICHAEL
When I met Tina, it seemed like a
dream, like the answer to a prayer.

INT. TINA'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Tina circles the room. Michael follows her.

TINA
Get married? I hardly know you.

MICHAEL
Isn't that what you want?

TINA
Well, yes, but...

Michael takes her arm.

MICHAEL
Say... early September? An autumn
wedding.

Tina pries Michael's hands off her.

TINA
Michael, what's the rush?

MICHAEL
What? Is there someone else?

A tiny hesitation, then she firmly shakes her head.

MICHAEL
That was convincing.

TINA
There's no one else, all right?

Michael rounds on Tina.

MICHAEL
Some old boyfriend, isn't it? Some
old flame, some old candle that
hasn't quite guttered.

TINA
(turns away)
No --

Michael forces Tina to look at him.

MICHAEL
Look at me. Look me in the eye.

TINA
(refuses to look)
All right -- September.

Looking smug, Michael strokes her hair.

MICHAEL
...The seventeenth.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Michael wrestles with his thoughts.

MICHAEL
I have a confession to make... Tina
proposed to me.

Sarah cries. Reggie comforts her.

Amy's face twists with distaste.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
It was a shock to me -- and my
family.

INT. BERNADINO HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The Bernadinos finish their meal. Luigi coughs. The sounds of cutlery scraping on plates and glasses thudding on the table. Luigi sits up with some difficulty and reaches for the salt-shaker. He bangs it on the table. Everyone quietens.

LUIGI

(coughs)

I have come to a decision.

Luigi eyes Michael, who gives a perplexed glance to Frank and Paul. They look unsure.

LUIGI (CONT'D)

I will divide the wealth of this family between my sons... on the seventeenth of September.

MICHAEL

Why the seventeenth of September?
What saint's day is that?

LUIGI

Don't be smart, Michael.

MICHAEL

Sorry.

LUIGI

You've been smart all your life.

MICHAEL

I said, "sorry" --

LUIGI

On the seventeenth of September I will be seventy-five years, eight months and three days old.

The brothers exchange mystified looks.

LUIGI (CONT'D)

My father was exactly that old when he died... may he rest in peace.

EVERYONE

May he rest in peace.

LUIGI

Every day I live beyond that is a gift from God.

MICHAEL

I'm sure it'll be a long gift.

LUIGI
Don't suppose to know God's mind.

Michael sighs. Luigi eyes him askance.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
On that day I will divide my wealth
between my sons... my married sons.

MICHAEL
What?

Luigi sinks back onto the stretcher.

LUIGI
I'm tired.

He signals to Frank and Paul. Michael stares in amazement as Frank and Paul rise. They carry Luigi out on the stretcher.

MICHAEL
I have to marry by the seventeenth
of September?

Luigi signals "stop". Frank and Paul do so. Luigi gestures at Michael to come close.

LUIGI
Look me in the eye, Michael.

Michael hesitates.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
(coughs)
You're keeping an old man waiting.

Michael reluctantly approaches Luigi. He kneels before Luigi and looks into his eyes.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
Can you see my love for you?

MICHAEL
...Yes.

LUIGI
Before you marry, I'm going to look
your bride in the eye... So forget
about those mail-order Russkies.

Michael is astonished. Luigi signals to Frank and Paul, who carry him out.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
Family is everything, Michael.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Michael looks a little dazed. The mourners watch him.

MICHAEL

So you can imagine my devastation
when I discovered that Tina...

Michael scowls angrily and struts to his seat. Frank looks smug. The funeral director rises.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Is there anyone else who would like
to say a few words?

Amy awaits her moment and rises. She checks her watch as she goes to the front of the room. She faces Sarah and Reggie.

AMY

Thank you, Michael, for that very
touching speech... As Tina's best
friend, I can only echo your words
about how thrilled she was at the
prospect of marrying you.

INT. TINA'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Tina sits at the table. Amy circles her.

AMY

You're joking --

TINA

He's not that ugly and his family's
loaded.

AMY

I've heard of sleeping on the first
date, but... proposing?

TINA

It wasn't the first date.

AMY

...No.

TINA

After... after Caleb, I see things
differently. The sand's running out
of my hourglass figure.

Amy sits at the table and squeezes Tina's hand.

AMY

'Course, love. When's the big day?

TINA
September... The seventeenth.

AMY
And there's no shotgun involved?

She laughs and shakes her head.

TINA
He said this weird thing... At the wedding, his father's going to look me in the eye and I have to pretend I'm infatuated with him.

AMY
The father?

TINA
No, Michael.

Amy looks bewildered.

TINA (CONT'D)
Must be some Sicilian thing...

Amy digests this. A knock comes from the door.

AMY
Is that Michael?

TINA
(rises)
I'm not expecting him.

Tina paces to the door. She opens it to reveal --
CALEB McLAUGHLAN, 31, dishevelled and puppy-eyed.
Tina is both thrilled and devastated.

TINA
Caleb... You've got all your stuff.

CALEB
Left something behind, didn't I?

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Amy addresses the mourners.

AMY
She had no hesitation in saying, "I will". And I wholeheartedly agreed. Tina couldn't wait for the day when she got to wear white.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Two stones splash into the river in quick succession.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
You'll look great in white.

Michael throws stones into the river. Tina loiters nervously.

MICHAEL
I'll borrow one of the old man's suits.

Tina pales.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
They're Saville Row.

Michael reaches for a stone.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
He arrived from Italy with a hundred quid. Spent it all on a suit. He never looked back and neither will we.

Tina stares at the river.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Will we?

Tina doesn't respond. Michael follows her gaze to the dark, swirling river.

INT. BERNADINO HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A bottle of "VIN SANTO" stands on the table. Michael, Frank and Paul dip *biscotti* into shot-glasses of dessert wine. The table has otherwise been cleared.

MICHAEL
She wants to delay the wedding.

PAUL
Why?

Michael emits an exasperated huff. Frank guffaws. Michael glares at Frank, then addresses Paul.

MICHAEL
Will you talk to Papa?

PAUL
No point. You know what he's like.

FRANK
Don't worry, it's only money.

Frank and Paul chortle. Michael forces a laugh.

PAUL
Do a deal with Tina. Marry her then
get rid of her once Papa's gone. We
won't cut you out.

FRANK
Much...

Michael leaps up, grabs Frank and takes a swing at him. They
wrestle. Paul tries to separate them. The brothers fall to
the floor in a heap. Frank shoves Michael aside and rises.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Why should I care if you're not
married? Half beats a third.

Michael has another go at Frank. Paul hauls Michael off and
pushes him back towards his seat.

PAUL
Michael... Talk to Tina, please.

Michael slumps into his seat.

MICHAEL
There's someone else.

FRANK
I knew it --

PAUL
Well, that's easy, then.

Paul sips from his glass.

INT. TINA'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Tina circles in a fluster. Amy sits at the table.

AMY
He's going to kill Caleb if you
delay the wedding?

TINA
Both of us -- so we can be together
in heaven. The guy's sick.

AMY
Go to the Police --

TINA

He warned me against it. He said his family has got 'connections'. Bernadino -- they're Italian.

AMY

Great... 'The Godfather'.

Tina breaks into tears and sinks onto the couch. Amy hurries over and consoles Tina.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

Amy suppresses a smile.

AMY

Tina was so excited she'd break into tears... She was so looking forward to a life with the man of her dreams.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Caleb's massages Tina's feet. She sits on a bench and purrs.

TINA

I want this every day for the rest of my life.

CALEB

So you will marry me?

TINA

I didn't say I wanted it from you.

Caleb is horrified. Tina slides off the bench and squeezes his hand.

TINA (CONT'D)

I didn't mean that.

Caleb looks unsure. Tina gently kisses him. Caleb still seems concerned.

CALEB

What about Michael?

TINA

He'll... take it well.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The riverbank is deserted. The river eddies. A white rose floats on the water.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

The white rose lies on the coffin. Amy stands beside it.

AMY

And then came the awful news... But
I will always remember her whenever
I see...

(picks up the rose)

...a rose as pure as snow.

Amy replaces the rose on the coffin and walks away. The funeral director goes to the coffin.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Well, thank you for those lovely
words... And now, dear ones, it is
time for Christina Eleanor Potts to
complete her journey into the fiery
bosom of the Lord, on this day, the
seventeenth of September, 2006.

Michael glances at Luigi, who closes his eyes.

The funeral director cracks the coffin open and peers within.

The coffin is empty.

Startled, the funeral director quickly closes it.

MICHAEL

What's wrong?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

(stabs a button)

No, nothing --

A low, electric hum. The conveyor belt carries the coffin towards the cremation chamber. "THE WEDDING MARCH" plays.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - SAME

Tina, in a white bridal gown, enters an aisle between beds of white roses.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - BACK TO SCENE

The coffin rumbles towards the furnace.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - SAME

Caleb and a MARRIAGE CELEBRANT wait at the end of the aisle. Caleb has something cupped in his hand. "THE WEDDING MARCH" emanates from a boom-box.

Tina slowly paces down the aisle. The music continues as --

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - SAME

The coffin continues towards the furnace.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - SAME

Tina treads barefoot over white rose petals.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - SAME

The coffin disappears into the cremation chamber.

Sarah emits a pained cry. Reggie draws her close.

Luigi coughs, bitterly disappointed.

Michael glares.

Amy suppresses a huge smile. Her eyes shine.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - SAME

Tina nears the end of the aisle. Caleb waits. He opens his cupped hand to reveal a white rose. He gives it to Tina. She smiles and clutches the rose to her chest.

FADE OUT

THE END