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Product Code A0825-SP

Death is a Many Splendored Thing

A Short Comedy By
Greg Freier

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Death is a Many Splendored Thing

by Greg Freier

CHARACTERS

DEATH: *Any age; speaks quite eloquently.*

HOWARD: *60's; Brooklyn all the way through.*

SYLVIA: *60's; also Brooklyn all the way through.*

SETTING

An apartment in Brooklyn; not a very nice one at that

Death is a Many Splendored Thing by Greg Freier

SETTING: *An apartment in Brooklyn; not a very nice one at that.*

AT RISE: *HOWARD is seated on the couch reading the paper. He's dressed in an old tee-shirt, old dress pants and an old sweater. After a moment the DOORBELL RINGS.*

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

Howard, the doorbell.

HOWARD

I know it's the doorbell.

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

Well then answer the doorbell. I'm in the middle of some lady thing.

HOWARD

Of course you are. You always are when the doorbell rings. *(Rises and crosses to door)* What I wouldn't kill for some non-doorbell me time.

HOWARD opens the door and DEATH is standing before him. DEATH is dressed in typical black DEATH attire, complete with sickle in hand. At no time do you see his face.

HOWARD

What do you want?

DEATH

'Tis a noble man who questions the state of the obvious unknown. Let me introduce myself, for I am Death.

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

Howard, who was at the doorbell?

HOWARD

I don't know. Some idiot who says he's Death.

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

What? Again?

HOWARD

What do you mean, what again?

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

He was just here last week and I told him we didn't want any.

DEATH

Which naturally of course I tried to explain....

SYLVIA, *Offstage*

You tell him to go away before we call the cops.

HOWARD

(To DEATH) You heard her, now go away.

DEATH

I'd love to, but unfortunately it doesn't quite work that way.

HOWARD

Then I guess we're going to have to call the cops, now aren't we?

DEATH

If it is so ordained.

HOWARD crosses to phone and picks up the receiver.

HOWARD

What the hell? The phone is dead.

DEATH

(Enters the room) Naturally.

HOWARD

Who said you could come in here?

DEATH

The same person that said you could be born.

SYLVIA enters dressed in a bathrobe.

SYLVIA

I thought I told you never to come back.

DEATH

That you did my good madam. But life dictates otherwise.

SYLVIA

Howard, call the cops.

HOWARD

I tried, but the phone's dead.

SYLVIA

How could the phone be dead? Did you forget to pay the bill again?

DEATH

I can assure you, there's nothing wrong with the phone.

HOWARD

Then it's a good thing you don't moonlight for the phone company, because you're an idiot.

DEATH

There's no need for name calling. I do have feelings after all.

HOWARD

(To SYLVIA) Do you believe this guy? He comes into our house uninvited and now I've hurt his feelings. I mean he's worse than your mother was.

SYLVIA

Nobody's worse than my mother was.

DEATH

She's right you know. You should have seen the fuss she put up when I took her. I've never seen anything like it.

SYLVIA

(To DEATH) You leave my mother out of this.

HOWARD

(To DEATH) I'm going to give you to the count of three to get out of here, or I'm going to get one of my shoetrees and give you the beating of your life.

DEATH

You seem to be missing the point here. I'm Death. I don't have a life.

SYLVIA

I don't care who you are. We still don't want any.

HOWARD

You heard the lady. Now get the hell out of here.

DEATH

I don't think you people are seeing the big picture here.

SYLVIA

Don't be calling us, you people. Howard was union I'll have you know. And so is Mr. Noodleman from next door.

DEATH

Yes madam, I'm well aware of that.

HOWARD

Then you also probably know what kind of connections union people have.

SYLVIA

So if you know what's good for you, you'd best listen to Howard and be on your way before something accidental happens to you.

HOWARD

The key word being "accidental."

HOWARD and SYLVIA give a quick laugh.

DEATH

I think it might be best if I explained the situation at hand.

HOWARD

The only thing you're going to be explaining is why I beat you senseless to the cops.

SYLVIA

And let me tell you, I've seen Howard beating before and when he does it, it's one of the most senseless things I've ever seen.

HOWARD

Somehow that didn't sound right.

SYLVIA

In what way?

HOWARD

Just the whole thing. It sounded, I don't know...kind of dirty.

DEATH

He's right. There was the implicit double entendre. It was completely obvious to anyone with a proper education.

SYLVIA

Is he calling us stupid now too?

HOWARD

(Starts to cross right) That's it. I'm getting my shoetrees.

DEATH

How about we all take a deep breath and just relax for a moment. Okay now, everyone just breathe in, and breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

HOWARD

Now you've hit two shoetree territory.

DEATH

Okay, we're going to do a refresher course here. I'm Death. You can't beat me anymore to death than I already am. Does that make sense or do you need me to speak slower?

SYLVIA

Now he's patronizing us.

HOWARD

I think there might be a shovel in the basement.

DEATH

You could drop a building on me, and it still wouldn't matter. *(To himself)* And they think I'm an idiot.

SYLVIA

Howard, go next door to Mrs. Noodleman's and call the cops from there.

HOWARD

I can't go over there. She always touching me.

SYLVIA

Well I can't go next door either. Last time I went over there she threw her pantyhose at me.

DEATH

It wouldn't matter which one of you went over there. Mrs. Noodleman no longer resides there...or anywhere for that matter.

HOWARD

Since when? I was just telling to her to shut up through the walls this morning.

DEATH

Since around 10:30. She was my first visit of the day.

HOWARD

And what exactly do you mean by that?

DEATH

Apparently I need to speak slower. I am Death. When Death comes, people die. Are you with me so far?

HOWARD

We're not stupid. Of course we know you're Death.

DEATH

Then what part of this don't you understand?

SYLVIA

We understand all of it. But the part I don't understand is why you're back when I told you clear as day last week that we didn't want any.

HOWARD

She's right. You're the one that's not getting this.

DEATH

(To himself) And to think I actually applied for this job.

SYLVIA

So in the meantime, why don't you just take your stupid darkness and curved stick and go bother somebody else.

DEATH

It's not a curved stick. It's a sickle.

HOWARD

I don't care what it is. Just get it the hell out of my house.

DEATH

I will the minute you begin the cooperating portion of the visit.

SYLVIA

I would hardly call this a visit.

HOWARD

Exactly. It's more like when her brother Sylvester shows up and eats all the cheese.

DEATH

What does cheese have to do with any of this?

HOWARD

It has everything to do with it.

SYLVIA

You would think Death of all people would understand the analogy.

HOWARD

He probably doesn't even know what an analogy is.

DEATH

Of course I know what an analogy is. I know what everything is.

HOWARD

Then you should realize you're the cheese here.

DEATH

That still doesn't make any sense.

SYLVIA

It makes plenty of sense.

DEATH

The only sense it makes is if your brother Sylvester wants to eat me.

SYLVIA

(Beat) Why would he want to eat you?

DEATH

Because your analogy makes me the cheese.

HOWARD

He's dumber than I thought.

DEATH

I am not.

SYLVIA

Then why would you think my brother wanted to eat you?

DEATH

(Beat) You know what? We're getting off subject here. Let's bring this back around to the reason I'm here.

SYLVIA

And as I told you last week, we don't want you here.

DEATH

For the last time it doesn't work that way. I'm here. And I'm here for a reason. So the sooner you cooperate the sooner we can get on with this.

HOWARD

And what if we don't want to cooperate?

DEATH

(With sarcasm) Then you'll find out why I carry a curved stick.

SYLVIA

Oh, aren't we being a Mr. Smarty Pants now.

DEATH

(To SYLVIA) You know what? I'm going to simplify things. You madam, are not the reason I'm here. If it was I could have been through with this nonsense last week.

HOWARD

So what is it you're saying here?

DEATH

I think it's rather obvious for someone who thinks I'm an idiot.

SYLVIA

(To HOWARD matter-of-factly) I think he's here to take you.

DEATH

Bingo. We have a winner.

HOWARD

What do you mean, we have a winner? I'm not going anywhere. Football season starts next week. You can't just take someone right before football season. Especially someone who is a man of health like me.

DEATH

Man of health? You eat lard out of the can.

HOWARD

Of course I do. It's healthier that way.

DEATH

How is it everyone thinks I'm the stupid one here?

HOWARD

Why don't you just shut up? *(To SYLVIA)* And you, feel free to chime in here at any moment with some help.

SYLVIA

(Beat) I hate to say it Howard, but maybe he's right. I mean if it's time, it's time, what are you going to do.

HOWARD

Why would you say something like that?

DEATH

Because she knows it's time.

HOWARD

I thought I told you not to talk.

SYLVIA

Naturally, I'm going to miss you.

DEATH

That's why I left you Mr. Noodleman next door.

HOWARD

What kind of Death are you?

DEATH

The kind that knows about your wife and Mr. Noodleman.

HOWARD

(Beat) You bitch. So that's why you sent me over there all the time.

DEATH

Been going on for years. Only an idiot wouldn't have realized it.

HOWARD

You know what? Fine. *(To DEATH)* Take me. Take me right now.

DEATH

That's the spirit.

HOWARD

And you know what? At least when Mrs. Noodleman touched me...unlike you...she touched me in the right place.

SYLVIA

That's because yours aren't as easy to find as Mr. Noodleman's.

DEATH

Well played. Well played indeed.

HOWARD

You know what? I'm glad I'm going. And you know why? Because I'm stupid—

SYLVIA

You've certainly got that right.

HOWARD

—Stupid for ever marrying you.

DEATH's cell phone rings.

DEATH

Hold those thoughts... (*Answers*) Hello...speaking... (*Nods a lot and goes uh-uh a lot as well*) ...are you sure?...Whoops...I'll get right on it... (*Hangs up*) It seems we have a slight problem.

HOWARD

Whatever...could we just please get going?

SYLVIA

And make sure you don't make too big of mess on your way out. I've got company coming over after you're gone.

HOWARD

I'm sure you do you bimbo.

DEATH

If you'll just bear with me for a moment. It seems I read the invoice wrong. What I thought it said was to take Mrs. Noodleman and Howard here. What in fact it did say, was that I was to take Mr. Noodleman and well....

DEATH and HOWARD both look at SYLVIA.

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes