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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
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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.

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.
And what if we don’t want to cooperate?

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

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

(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.

So what is it you’re saying here?

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

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

Bingo. We have a winner.

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.

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

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

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

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

(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.
Why would you say something like that?

Because she knows it’s time.

I thought I told you not to talk.

Naturally, I’m going to miss you.

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

What kind of Death are you?

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

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

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

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

That’s the spirit.

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

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

Well played. Well played indeed.

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 do 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