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Dramatic Publishing



The Door

Drama by Paul Elliott

The Door

Drama. By Paul Elliott. *Cast: 1m., 1w., 1 off-stage voice (m. or w.).* A grandmother in her late fifties sits in her darkened apartment and refuses to answer the insistent knocking at her front door. In fact, this woman has shut herself off from everything except the one person still capable of reaching her, her teenage grandson, Justin. Now, he sits with her in the darkness, trying every trick he knows to get her to respond, to turn on the lights, to answer the door and reclaim her life. He teases. He torments. He goads. He reminds her that never once would she have let him hide away like this and he's not about to let her get away with it either. He pushes every annoying button he can push to finally get her to face her worst nightmare and what lies outside that door. She has to do it for herself. She has to do it for him. It's only at the last moment we discover that what she must face when she opens that door is the night the police came to tell her that her grandson had been savagely beaten and brutally murdered because someone thought he might have been gay. There are some doors that must be opened if we're going to ever change the way things are. *The Door* is a play for the theater company that wants to make a difference in its community, that wants to open the door and shed light on a very frightening truth: each year hundreds of our nation's youth are violently abused and murdered simply because someone questions their sexuality. *Bare stage w/ props. Approximate running time: 25 minutes. Code: D99.*

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THE DOOR

By
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THE DOOR

CHARACTERS

GRACE late 50s, a once strong-willed woman
who needs to refind her strength

JUSTIN a good-looking, sometimes disrespectful
teenager—the one person who now needs
Grace’s strength the most

THE VOICE at the door (m or w) . . sympathetic authority

NOTE: Please see important notes from the playwright on
pages 22 and 23.

THE DOOR

(GRACE's living room—night.

Moonlight comes through the partially curtained windows revealing a room in disarray.

A sudden knocking is heard from some unseen door. A figure, GRACE, bolts upright on the sofa where she's been sleeping.)

GRACE (*groggily*). Don't answer that. Justin, don't answer that!

(JUSTIN'S VOICE is heard coming from the darkness.)

JUSTIN'S VOICE. I won't. But you're going to have to eventually.

GRACE. Well, not today.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Tomorrow's a long way off.

GRACE. Suits me. *(The knocking stops.)* I'll answer it then.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. It's not going away. They're not going away.

GRACE. Well, they can wait. I'm trying to sleep.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. If you were trying to sleep, you'd be in bed.

GRACE. If I could have slept in bed, I would have, but I couldn't. So I came in here.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. And...

GRACE. It didn't help.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Then why don't you give up and turn on the light.

GRACE. I never give up and I don't want to turn on the light. Why do you care one way or the other? Light or no light. What difference does it make to you?

JUSTIN'S VOICE. I can't see you.

GRACE. You don't have to see me. You know what I look like. The same, just older.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Come on, Grace, stop playing games.

(GRACE clicks on the light beside the rumpled sofa where she's been lying in her bathrobe. The light reveals a once neat room in clutter and that JUSTIN is not just a voice. He's a young man of eighteen, curled up in the high wingback chair opposite her.)

GRACE *(turning on the light)*. Games? You think this is a game? Why in the hell do you think I'm sitting here in the dark? Because it's not a game. It's not pretend anymore.

JUSTIN. Let there be light.

GRACE *(looking at him, then looking away)*. Smartass.

JUSTIN. See. That wasn't so bad.

GRACE *(reaching for the light again)*. Okay, you see me. Enough.

JUSTIN. Leave it on. It gets easier. Once it's on, you can't just shut it off.

GRACE (*reaching for the light switch again*). You just watch me. I can do what I damn well please.

JUSTIN. But you won't cut the light off again.

GRACE. What the hell do you know? (*Her hand holds by the switch, but she doesn't cut the light off.*)

JUSTIN. You'd be surprised what I know. I know you. I'm all grown up.

GRACE. That'll never happen.

JUSTIN. Can't stay the same forever. Why are you doing this to yourself anyway? This isn't like you. You know that.

GRACE. Well things change.

JUSTIN. Not you.

GRACE. Even me.

JUSTIN (*mimicking the commercial*). I've fallen and I can't get up.

GRACE. I can get up. I just don't want to. (*Someone knocks on the door again. The sound comes from the direction of the audience. Angrily, to whomever is knocking.*) Go away. Leave me alone. I mean it. Stop knocking. (*The knocking stops.*)

JUSTIN. Oh come on, Gram. Your legs are not broken. There's nothing keeping you here except you.

GRACE. Well, I'm enough. I'll get up when I damn well want to.

JUSTIN. Why not now?

GRACE. Because I don't want to. That's why. So you can just leave me alone too. (*After a beat.*) No. I don't mean that. (*Another beat.*) It's just... What's the point?

JUSTIN. The point is, you wouldn't let me do this...hide away like this.

GRACE. Maybe I should have.

JUSTIN (*getting up and crossing behind her*). Never. (*Throwing open the drapes to look out.*) Look, it's all the same out there. Morning still comes. People still get up and go to work.

GRACE. Well, they don't know. They wouldn't see the end of the world if it smacked them in the face.

JUSTIN. It isn't the end of the world.

GRACE. Don't you tell me what it is or isn't the end of. Nothing's the same and you know it. And get away from that window. (*Just then urgent knocking is heard again, coming from the audience. GRACE wheels toward the sound.*) See. See what you've done. Just leave me alone and close those curtains.

JUSTIN. Why? Are you afraid someone's going to see? They don't have to see. They know. They knock. You don't answer. They know.

GRACE (*desperately*). Justin, please. Just close the curtains. Please.

JUSTIN (*after a beat*). No. (*Looking at his hands, as though realizing something.*) I can't.

GRACE (*getting up*). Then I'll close them myself.

JUSTIN. No. Gram, please.

GRACE. If I want them closed, I want them closed. It's my life. My house. (*But she doesn't close them, instead, turning away:*) And stop calling me Gram. You know how much I hate that. Makes me feel old. And you only do it to piss me off.

JUSTIN (*laughing softly*). Whatever it takes to get you off the sofa. (*An evangelist.*) It's a miracle. Gracie's legs are moving.

GRACE. Smartass. And I hate Gracie as much as Gram. It's Grace.

JUSTIN. Amazing Grace.

GRACE. You better damn well believe it.

JUSTIN. That's more like it.

GRACE. Like what?

JUSTIN. Like you. Ornery as hell.

GRACE. Should have left you out on the streets. That's what I should have done.

JUSTIN (*as Joan Crawford in Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*). But you didn't, Blanche. You didn't.

GRACE. Should have. And that was a piss-poor imitation of Joan Crawford in *Baby Jane*.

JUSTIN. So I don't do dead actresses. Want to hear my Cher?

GRACE. No, got enough of that when you were twelve.

JUSTIN (*mimicking her*). Cut that music down. Can't hear a body think. Should have just left a sniveling little shit like you on the streets.

GRACE. I've never called you a little shit.

JUSTIN. Yeah you did.

GRACE. Then you must have deserved it. Must have pissed me off.

JUSTIN (*laughing*). I tried. God knows, I tried. Royally.

GRACE (*smiling at the memory*). You sure did. Nothing but aggravation.

JUSTIN. Are you saying when you got me, you got a hell of a lot more than you bargained for?

GRACE. I didn't complain.

JUSTIN. What do you mean you didn't complain? You complained all the time.

GRACE. No I didn't. And if I did, it was only 'cause that's what I was supposed to do. Your mom gone, it was up

to me. And I never lied about what kind of parent I was the first time around.

JUSTIN. You weren't that bad.

GRACE. I was for shit and you know it. Must have been, or your mother wouldn't have up and died like that.

JUSTIN. She was a junkie. Junkie's die.

GRACE. And whose fault was that? If I'd raised her right. If I'd spent more time with her. She might have still been here...and you'd be her problem, not mine.

JUSTIN. Oh come on, Gracie. You know I added zing to your fling. You loved me always getting into things.

GRACE. Could have done with a lot less. Every day it was something. Some new mischief. Should have taken a belt to you.

JUSTIN. But you didn't.

GRACE. No. I didn't. (*A beat, then turning to him.*) Would it have helped?

JUSTIN. Wouldn't have changed anything if that's what you mean. I was me. Even when I didn't know it, I was me. I still am. And in spite of everything, you never threw me out. I've got to give you that.

GRACE. Should have. Should have just chucked you out that door.

JUSTIN. You still could. (*A beat.*) Maybe you should.

GRACE (*suddenly having to gasp to keep from crying*). Never. You hear me, never. Ain't gonna happen. You may be a pain, but you're my pain.

JUSTIN (*after a beat*). Thank you. (*After another beat.*) Can I turn on another light?

GRACE. You never asked me before. Why are you asking me now? (*She clicks on another lamp.*) I'm not afraid of

the dark. Don't you go thinking I'm afraid of the dark, because I'm not. It just makes not seeing a lot easier.

JUSTIN (*looking at her*). You need some more color. I can see the roots.

GRACE. See, that's why I want the lights off. In the dark, nobody can see my roots. I can't see my roots.

JUSTIN. Well, you need a touch-up. You want me to help?

GRACE. And how do you propose to do that?

JUSTIN. I can watch.

GRACE. I was dyeing my hair before you came into my life. And I'm still capable of doing it again. I didn't need you then and I don't need you watchin' now. If I want to color my hair, I'll do it.

JUSTIN. Then why don't you?

GRACE (*angrily*). Because there's no point.

JUSTIN. Maybe there is. Maybe you ought to go green again...or maybe purple this time.

GRACE. I'm not dyeing my hair purple...or green, and that's final. Once was enough. And why would you want that again. It embarrassed the shit out of you the first time.

JUSTIN. I wasn't embarrassed.

GRACE. Don't give me that. You were like something melting in the sidewalk. All those people pointing and sniggering and you just dying inside.

JUSTIN. What did you expect me to do?

GRACE. I don't know anymore.

JUSTIN. Sorry.

GRACE. Why? What do you have to be sorry for? You didn't do anything. You weren't the one with green hair.

JUSTIN. No, I didn't have the green hair. (*Almost laughing, painfully.*) It was about the only thing that wasn't

green. You know, I look back and, Jesus, how did you stand me? I must have been the stupidest kid around. I couldn't see for shit. Why didn't you just come out and tell me?

GRACE. Why didn't you?

JUSTIN. Maybe I didn't know. (*On her look.*) It's sometimes just a feelin' you're not sure about and pretending is better than facing the truth. Or having it shoved in your face.

GRACE. I didn't shove anything. I wouldn't have done that.

JUSTIN. How could you let me hate you like that? Making me go with you.

GRACE. It was a mistake.

JUSTIN. No. It wasn't a mistake. (*Hitting his head.*) And once it finally hit me, I don't think I've ever loved you more. (*A long beat.*) Why didn't you just sit me down and tell me from the start what you were doing?

GRACE. We weren't a sittin' family. And besides, what was I supposed to tell you? I couldn't tell you if you didn't tell me first. You'd think we never talked.

JUSTIN. We didn't.

GRACE. Yes we did. Don't give me that.

JUSTIN. We shouted a lot.

GRACE. Nothing wrong with a little loudness to get your point across. I don't break easy. And I thought I raised you the same way. This was important.

JUSTIN. When did you find out?

GRACE. Find out what?

JUSTIN. You know what?

GRACE. No, I don't know what. I want to hear you say it.

JUSTIN. Why?

GRACE. Because if you don't, I feel like shit. Like you didn't trust me. Like I was nothing. Like all those years were... Just say it. You never said it.

JUSTIN. I couldn't.

GRACE. Why? (*Almost in tears.*) What do you think I'm going to do? What for God's sake do you think I'm going to do?

JUSTIN. I don't know. You were always saying you were going to chuck me out the door for one thing or another.

GRACE. That was for pissing me off, but never for anything important. (*Almost in tears.*) Why didn't you know that? How could you not know that? (*Trying to regain her control.*) Aw forget it. Besides, you were getting too big to pick up and throw out the door.

JUSTIN. I'm sorry. It was just you were all I had. I couldn't take that chance.

GRACE. Honey, I may have been old, but I wasn't that old and I sure as hell wasn't senile. This is Miss Amazing here. I'd been through every scraped knee and bloodied nose you ever got. So I sure as hell wasn't gonna... Why'd you think I sent you to the Y for those stupid boxing lessons? 'Cause I thought bloody noses ought to go to somebody else's house for a change.

JUSTIN. I know you loved me.

GRACE. I never said that.

JUSTIN (*laughing softly*). I know. But you did everything else. Green hair. Damn!

GRACE. It was stupid.

JUSTIN. No. It wasn't stupid. I was just slow on the uptake. Took me a while to get the point.

GRACE. But if I hadn't...

JUSTIN. Gram. Grace. I was dying inside and you opened the door. I didn't know it, but you did. When you walked out that door Miss Lady Green-hair, everyone that morning, everyone was pointing and laughing behind your back...and you just kept walking. Looking straight ahead. Minding your own business. You didn't give a damn. Dragging me along behind you, telling me to hold my head up. Never to give a damn. No matter what they said.

GRACE. Well, it was a mistake. If I hadn't...

JUSTIN. No. It wasn't a mistake. Don't you ever think that.

GRACE. Yeah, well look where that got you.

JUSTIN. Gram, I don't regret anything. Especially not that. And you shouldn't either. Every day of my life I thanked God for the green hair. If it hadn't been for you, and that morning, I don't know what I'd have done. I should have told you that. There was so much I should have told you and didn't. You were the only one I could depend on.

GRACE. Well, that's not saying a whole lot.

JUSTIN. It is, when you really listen. Or open your eyes. Up until then, I was so afraid of everything. Ashamed. Nothing like a massive dose of embarrassment to show you can survive anything.

GRACE. I wasn't embarrassed.

JUSTIN. No?

GRACE. Not ever. You listen to me, young man. And look at me. Not ever.

JUSTIN. Not even when you knew?

GRACE (*looking him right in the face*). Knew what?

(Loud knocking is heard again.)

JUSTIN. You know.

GRACE. You still can't say it to me. Maybe that's a door you should have opened. *(Then resigned, waving off the idea.)* No, you open the doors you can. If you can't, you can't. I'm just sorry you didn't open that one, at least for me. *(Shouting at the door.)* Go away! *(The knocking stops. She turns in resignation to JUSTIN.)* Justin I was... I may not have wanted to know, but deep down, I knew. So even if you had told me, it would have just been a confirmation, not an "omigod." Maybe I should have come right out and said it. But I didn't. Sort of like the elephant in the house. You know it's there, but you kinda walk around it. Too many things go unsaid. Half of life is reading between the lines. I tried letting you know. I did everything but paint a sign and hang it on that door. But you never opened it to me. I think that's what hurts the most.

JUSTIN. I'm sorry, Gram.

GRACE. So I'm saying it now, what I wanted to say back then. "Boy, that is your bedroom and this is your house...your home. And no matter what, that's never going to change." There I've said it. Then, I'd have probably added, 'cause you know how nasty I can be, "And for God's sake get those girly pictures off your wall. You're not fooling anyone."

End of excerpt. Following are comments and notes from the playwright.

COMMENTS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The Door was written to dramatically address a very real problem facing our country today. Hundreds of young people are being murdered each year just for being themselves. To help your drama department get this message across and maximize its impact, the play calls for the faces of many of these victims to be projected behind the grandmother (Grace) as she asks for new laws to be enacted at the end of the play. To technically help you, these pictures have already been created and are available to you as a power-point presentation, with one empty slide space at the beginning for you to insert the picture of the actor playing Justin in your production. The immediacy of seeing the face of your Justin, a character the audience has learned to love, followed by many of the real victims will greatly enhance the impact of your production.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

If your drama club does not have the computer or projection capabilities of doing a powerpoint presentation, you can have the actress playing Grace hold up a large picture of the actor playing Justin as she makes her final appeal; as she says to remember the others, have the many members of your drama club who have been seated throughout the audience, stand up one at a time, say the name and age of one of the victims and hold up a picture of that young person until you literally have dozens of pictures spread throughout the audience. Then the entire drama club cast can join Grace in repeating the final line of the play, "Please remember," as the lights go out.

Another way to intrigue the audience before they enter your theater space is to have the waiting area lined with either real doors or large 4' x 8' panels that look like closed doors. The programs they are handed as they enter the theater are also emblems of closed doors. Once the audience is inside the theater watching the play, each of the doors in the lobby can be turned around so that when the playgoers exit, they find that on the backside of these doors are the pictures of literally hundreds of students who have been murdered in the past years.

The powerpoint presentation, program designs and the artwork and directions for creating the 4' x 8' doors and all the necessary photographs to support your production are readily available for your use; simply contact GayAmericanHeroes.com. Attention: Scott Hall.