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Dramatic Publishing



DON'T FEAR THE REAPER

By
EDDIE ZIPPERER



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Don't Fear the Reaper's first scene was originally produced as a ten-minute play entitled *The Doorstep* at Georgia State College & University's (Milledgeville) 24-Hour Plays with the following artists:

Director Brian Jones

Robert Conan Joshua Santamaria
Jessica Elisha Hodgins
Death Warren Downs
Jack. Peter Springsted

The show in its entirety was originally produced at Augusta Preparatory Day School in 2008 with the following artists:

Director Jamie M. McAteer

Death/Bill Michael Sodomka
Robert/Jeremy/Announcer Adam Kronowski
Jessica. Kirsten Newlin
Donnie Destiny/Jack. John Duggan
Steve Stuart Lee
God. Yutong Dong
Satan Samantha K. Osburn
Conception Alex Ploetzke
Game Show Crew Adam Kronowski & Alex Ploetzke

Lights & Sound. William Bailey
Lights Deema Elchoufi

DON'T FEAR THE REAPER

CHARACTERS

DEATH (BILL) the Grim Reaper in his classic form
ROBERT a 30-year-old grocery store manager
JESSICA a 30-year-old housewife
JACK a dead man
STEVE . . a lazy young man who is a gamer and television
connoisseur
GOD King of Kings
SATAN a beautiful, seductive woman
JEREMY the Grim Reaper of insects
CONCEPTION the opposite of Death; his wife
DONNIE DESTINY a game show host
ANNOUNCER a game show announcer
TWO GAME SHOW CREW MEMBERS

PLACE: Three suburban living rooms and God's office.

TIME: The present.

DON'T FEAR THE REAPER

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *A living room located somewhere in suburbia. There is a sofa in the room and the front door of the house is located upstage.*

AT RISE: ROBERT enters. *He has long hair, but it is pulled up into a ponytail. He looks clean-cut. His wife, JESSICA, yells to him from offstage.*

JESSICA (*from offstage*). Robert, you forgot your keys!

ROBERT. I don't need them. Jack is picking me up today. We have a meeting with the regional managers at 8:30. (*He looks at his watch.*) A meeting that we're going to be late for if he doesn't hurry. (*ROBERT plops on the sofa and begins looking around.*) Do you know where the remote control is?

JESSICA (*offstage*). Wherever you put it.

ROBERT. Damn it! I wanted to check out Sportscenter to see if the Sox won.

JESSICA. Since when do you care about baseball?

ROBERT. I don't, but the guys I'm meeting with do. It's important to be able to talk to these guys. That's how you sell yourself. They're always saying crap like, "Can you believe Johnson got hurt? He's going on the L.D.,"

or “Did you see such and such pitcher hit that home run last night?”

JESSICA (*peeks her head in*). Pitchers don't hit in the American League, honey. Why don't you bring in the paper and read the sports page?

ROBERT. Oh yeah.

(ROBERT opens the door. DEATH, in all his pale, skeletal black-hooded glory, is on the other side of the door. ROBERT and DEATH stare at each other for a long moment. Finally, ROBERT calmly closes the door and begins to take off his tie.)

ROBERT. I think I'm going to stay home today.

(He is visibly worried. He begins pacing. JESSICA enters wearing an apron.)

JESSICA. Did you say you're staying home today? You can't stay home today. Are you sick?

ROBERT. No, I'm not sick at all! Are you sick?

JESSICA. No. Why would I be sick?

ROBERT. I've never felt better in my life! Let me feel your pulse.

JESSICA. What? You're worrying me, Robert. Your face is turning all white.

ROBERT (*distracted*). Yeah. Maybe I should go lay down or something. (*JESSICA goes back in the other room. ROBERT walks to the front door.*) I'm not sick though!

JESSICA (*offstage*). Okay!

ROBERT (*to DEATH*). Look, I'm not ready to go yet. One more year. Okay. One more year. I have a lot of impor-

tant things going on right now. Especially at work. I'm chipping away at this promotion—you can't take me before I get the promotion. I've been kissing my boss' fat ass for five years to get this promotion. I earned it. At least give me that. I'm sure you hear this all the time, but I'm about to be made head manager of the organic foods store I work for, and I think I'm gonna be really good at it. One of the bag boys told me the other day that if he were a manager, he'd be a cool one like me. Anyway, it's not the most impressive job, but I take pride in it. Let me do that for a little bit, and then I'll go. I won't say a word. I'll go quietly. Six more months, okay. Six more months? (*He peeks out the window.*) Damn it. Why won't you leave?

(*JESSICA enters.*)

JESSICA. I thought you were getting back in bed.

(*ROBERT sits down on the sofa.*)

ROBERT. No. I'm just going to sit in here for a while.

JESSICA. You want me to help you find the remote?

ROBERT. No. I watch too much TV.

JESSICA. Now I know you're sick.

ROBERT. I think I'll just read the paper. (*JESSICA goes back to the kitchen. ROBERT sits for a moment trying to think. He has an idea.*) Hey, Jessica!

JESSICA (*offstage*). Yeah?

ROBERT. I think I do feel a little sick. Will you go get the paper for me?

JESSICA (*offstage*). I'm busy cooking dinner.

ROBERT. Dinner? It's 8:00 in the morning.

JESSICA (*offstage*). Yes. It takes all day to make a turkey.

ROBERT. It'll only take you five seconds. It's right on the doorstep.

JESSICA (*offstage*). I told you, I'm busy.

ROBERT. You weren't busy ten seconds ago when you came in here!

JESSICA (*offstage*). I had a break. Now I'm busy again.

ROBERT. Okay. I'm gonna go lay down. When you see Jack drive up, will you go out and tell him that I'm sick?

JESSICA (*offstage*). Why can't you?

ROBERT (*peeks out the window again*). Because I'm not sick, and I don't look sick. I'm the living portrait of a very, very healthy man, and why wouldn't I be? I'm only thirty for God's sake. Besides, I'm getting back in bed.

JESSICA (*offstage*). I think I see his car coming down the street right now. Just run out and tell him.

ROBERT. Please, Jessica. It'll take five seconds. Just run out there, tell him I'm sick, run right back in. That turkey's not going to miraculously spring back to life, pop out a new head, and fly away because you turn your back for five little seconds, is it?

JESSICA (*offstage*). I can't right now, Robert!

ROBERT. Fine! I'll call him! God! (*ROBERT takes out his cell phone and dials as he walks downstage. In a sickly voice:*) Jack, this is Robert. (*Coughs.*) Look, I'm not going to be able to make it to the meeting this morning. I'm really sick. (*Coughs harder.*) I'm really sorry. I owe you one. I'll come in early Friday morning and open the store for you. Good luck with the meeting.

(ROBERT hangs up. JESSICA enters.)

JESSICA. Did you get it taken care of?

ROBERT. Yes. I left him a voice mail. I thought you were busy.

JESSICA. I had another break, and I wanted to check on you. You're acting really weird.

ROBERT. It's hot as hell in here! Will you pull that door open? *(ROBERT takes a step back.)*

JESSICA. I don't want the door open. I'm already cold, and it's freezing out there this morning. You're just feeling hot because you have a fever. Why don't you sit out on the doorstep until your temperature gets back down to normal. That's how you cool down.

ROBERT. I guess you're right. It is a little chilly in here. I'll just turn up the heat. *(ROBERT adjusts the thermostat.)*

JESSICA. Be careful. What did you set it on?

ROBERT. One-o-five. That'll warm you up. Yep, it's gonna be like a sauna in here soon.

JESSICA. That's fine with me. Whatever makes you feel better, sweetie. Now, go lay down.

(ROBERT exits. JESSICA runs over to the door and speaks to DEATH.)

JESSICA. I don't know which one of us you're here for, but Robert is two years older than me. Did you know that? It's not fair. I haven't gotten to do anything with my life yet. He spends every day meeting new people and having interesting conversations with all the neighbors who shop at Natural Mart. Who do I get to talk to?

Nobody, that's who! (*JESSICA sits down on the floor next to the door with her knees pulled up to her chest.*) My whole life isn't any different than this morning, really. A prisoner in this house, knowing that death is lurking and I haven't accomplished anything at all. I know that we're all insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but I'm still insignificant in the small scheme. Just wait for me to do one meaningful thing, please. Just let me make my tiny little insignificant life matter to one person. Then, I'm yours.

(*ROBERT enters in his boxers, walks to the thermostat and begins messing with it. JESSICA gets up quickly and walks toward him.*)

ROBERT. Would you believe this thermostat goes up to 120 degrees? That's perfect.

JESSICA. You're setting it on 120?

ROBERT. If it's too hot for you, you can always step outside.

JESSICA. Not at all. I said I was cold, didn't I?

ROBERT. Good.

JESSICA. Good.

(*JESSICA exits. ROBERT runs over to the door.*)

ROBERT (*to DEATH*). I'm through bargaining. You should know that I have a gun in here. I guess I can't kill you with it since you're Death, or whatever, but it will at least mess you up. It's not a pansy .22 either. My dad was a weapons collector before you took him. That's right, and he left all that crap to me. I have an ar-

senal five steps away from me, and I won't hesitate to blow those rotten old bones to dust!

(JESSICA enters in something skimpy. ROBERT stands up.)

JESSICA. Bring on the heat.

(They both sit on the sofa. They are silent for a few seconds.)

ROBERT. I wonder if it's 120 yet.

JESSICA. Doesn't feel like it to me.

ROBERT. Well, it will be soon. Yep. It's gonna get sweaty in here. Hair sticking to your face, clothes sticking to your body. But at least you're still safe. It's when you stop sweating that you have to worry. You start getting headaches, feeling dizzy. That's when you know heat-stroke is setting in.

JESSICA. You've got a good fifty pounds on me, so let me know when you start feeling it. It doesn't bother me. Not one bit.

ROBERT. Me either. *(They sit in silence with their arms crossed for a few seconds. ROBERT sighs extremely loud.)* I sure wouldn't mind having that newspaper right now.

JESSICA. Fine, Robert! If you want the newspaper that much, then I'll go get it for you. *(She takes one step toward the door then turns.)* Just like I do everything else for you. *(She takes another step toward the door then turns again.)* Just like I cook your dinners, and clean your house, and watch whatever you choose on TV be-

cause you had a hard day. (*She steps toward the door then turns again.*) I have hard days too, Robert, but I don't complain. (*She steps toward the door then turns again.*) I don't complain because I just want you to be happy. That's all. I just thought you should know that before I get the paper.

(*ROBERT watches as JESSICA slowly grabs the door-knob.*)

ROBERT. Wait!

JESSICA. What?

ROBERT. Never mind. (*She grabs the doorknob again. She almost begins to open it.*) No, wait! (*ROBERT jumps up and stops her.*) I'm the one who wants to read the paper. I should be the one to get it. I'm sorry I tried to make you get it.

JESSICA. Why can't we just say screw the paper? Let a hundred of them pile up out there, and just stay in this living room forever? I don't want either of us to get the paper.

ROBERT. We have to accept it, Jessica. Let's come out and say it. We both know that Death is on our doorstep, and he's not leaving here without one of us. (*Pause.*) I'll go.

JESSICA. No, I—

ROBERT. Shhh. It's okay. I'm sorry that I tried to send you out there. I wouldn't really have let you go, you know? I want you to have a good life, Jessica. That's all I've ever wanted for you. I wish I could have given you everything that you deserved, but the present was for work and money and responsibility, and it was exhaust-

ing. Tomorrows were for all the good stuff, and you start to feel like they'll never run out, but I guess mine finally have. Goodbye, Jessica. (*He kisses her. He starts to open the door.*) One more thing.

JESSICA. What is it?

ROBERT. There's a flash drive for the computer in the pocket of my pants. I told a friend I would hold onto it for him, so if it has pornography on it or something, it's his. Not mine.

JESSICA. Okay. (*ROBERT slowly starts to open the door.*) Stop. (*He stops.*) Why should we just give in like this? That's exactly what's wrong with us. We just give in to people and let them push us around. So what, Death shows up, and he just gets to take us? The stakes are too high to just give up and die. Everyone has to go, but nobody has to go quietly.

ROBERT. Yeah. Yeah. We're Americans! It's our right—screw that—it's our duty to stand up to this guy and say, “you can take our lives if that's your job, but you're going to have to earn your payday just like everyone else in this country!” Let's do it then. (*ROBERT exits and re-enters with a machine gun and ammo strapped over his shoulder. He steps up onto the couch.*) Get behind me. (*JESSICA gets behind him. ROBERT takes the rubber band out and lets his hair down. They strike a pose that belongs on the cover of a romance novel.*) All right, Death! You want us? You come in here and take us! You hear me, you sick sack of bones? We built this life with our blood, sweat and tears, and I'll damn well defend it with them too. You've got to the count of three to get in here, or I'm gonna come out there, and you

don't want me to come out there, pal! One! Two! (*Long pause.*) Three!

(*ROBERT creeps to the door with JESSICA behind him. He pauses for a moment and then pulls it open quickly. A large man is lying dead on the doorstep. DEATH is gone.*)

JESSICA. Oh my God. Who is it?

ROBERT (*bends down and checks the guy's pulse*). It's Jack. He was here for Jack. After all that nonsense and bickering, he wasn't here for either of us.

JESSICA. Poor Jack. I wonder how long he's been there?

ROBERT. I don't know, but it's freezing out here. (*ROBERT shuts the door.*) I guess this means that you're stuck with me for at least one more day.

JESSICA. You're not so bad. (*They hug.*) The weird thing is, now that it's ended well, not for Jack but for us, I think this was the best day of my life.

ROBERT. Yeah, I know what you mean.

JESSICA. What do we do now?

(*There is a short pause.*)

ROBERT. Let's find the remote.

(*Blackout.*)