

NOTHING PERSONAL

A Comedy Duet

by
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JAKE: **(enters with coffee cups and calls)** Coffee's ready . . . **(sees DEATH and is taken aback)** Who let you in – Harriet . . .

DEATH: Delighted to meet you. I'm Death. You must be Jake. **(reaches out to shake his hand)**

JAKE: Very. Funny. **(pause)** Harriet!

DEATH: She can't see me.

JAKE: Harriet!

DEATH: **(HE raises his hand. JAKE is shaken by a paroxysm of pain.)** Stop! **(more gently, courtly)** You're hurting my ears. **(releases JAKE with a small hand motion)**

JAKE: I know this is a joke, but you're not funny. So get off it.

DEATH: I beg your pardon?

JAKE: You're one of those actors who rent themselves out? Right?

DEATH: **(laughs heartily)** You mean like, "Dial A Death?" Boo!! **(lightly zaps JAKE)**

JAKE: Cut it out. Who hired you?

DEATH: I'm freelancing.

JAKE: Was it Harriet?

DEATH: Well, actually . . .

JAKE: **(calling)** Very funny, Harriet.

DEATH: You know, you're getting to be a bit of a pain.

JAKE: And you – old boy – are one lousy actor. Take a tip from me and stay away from Cary Grant roles. You just don't have the *savoir faire*.

DEATH: Really?

JAKE: Yes. And if you're going to play Death . . .

DEATH: Do tell.

JAKE: First of all, Death isn't, like, urbane, sophisticated . . .

DEATH: Fascinating. **(lifts his arm, flicks his wrist, JAKE falls to the floor)** I'm sorry, but I really don't have much time and you're not making it easy. I'm here on a mission of mercy.

JAKE: **(rising slowly)** Good grief!

DEATH: **(affable)** I've been wanting to pay a visit for some time. But – you know – schedules. Now that I've actually met you, I'm sorry I waited this long.

JAKE: What do you mean, 'waited this long'? I'm still a kid! I run 5 miles a day. I'm on the Pritiken diet! The last time I tasted a lamb chop was when I was 16. Gimme a break!

DEATH: **(ignoring him, continuing his train of thought)** Fortunately, I was in the neighborhood. So I thought I'd pop in for a chat.

JAKE: Why me?

DEATH: Why? Well, for one thing, you seemed so anxious to meet me.

JAKE: Are you kidding? **(pause)** I take it back - you are a good actor. Okay, I'll play along. Well, Mr. Death, where did you get the idea that I wanted to meet you?

DEATH: Every time you get a little twinge, you say, "I'm dying". I do believe you really want to know me - in more than a metaphoric, religious way. So, since I was in the neighborhood . . .

JAKE: Is that how you operate? Just drop in unannounced? No warning? No – invitation?

DEATH: Alas, I seldom get invited. Occasionally . . . **(taking out a cigarette and gold holder)** Mind if I smoke?

JAKE: I'd rather you didn't. Secondhand smoke can be dangerous . . .

(DEATH looks bored, makes a movement with his wrist. JAKE lets out a yell and clutches his chest, sinks to his knees. Gets back on his feet with difficulty.)

JAKE: Smoke the whole pack if it makes you happy.

DEATH: Don't be vulgar. One cigarette is a pleasure. Two at one sitting is excessive. **(Removes a silver cigarette case from his jacket pocket. Offers JAKE a cigarette. JAKE shakes his head. Can be pantomimed.)** No? How about a glass of brandy. No, again. Do you mind if I . . . **(pulls out silver flask and unscrews top)**

JAKE: Aren't you afraid – you know – the big "C"? No, of course you're not . . .

DEATH: A perk of the job. **(lights up cigarette and drinks from flask)**

JAKE: I don't suppose you'd be interested in negotiating?

DEATH: I'm not a lawyer

JAKE: What are you then?

DEATH: Now that you realize I'm not an actor?

JAKE: **(laughing nervously)** You can't be too careful.

DEATH: Quite right. Actually, I'm a facilitator of sorts.

JAKE: So, you pay home visits before the - event - whatever you call it—

DEATH: Look, I'm a busy man— I don't have time for chitchat— charming as you are, and amusing as it is to play what I call my *"Intimations of Mortality"*.

JAKE: You mean . . . **(clutches chest in mock alarm)**

DEATH: Precisely - it's one of my little diversions. The freckle that turns out to be - a freckle. The crushing chest pain that's indigestion. The lump that's a fat globule . . . and so forth. **(becoming brisk and businesslike)** But that's not why I'm here. I'm here to suggest you rehearse far too strenuously. I'm here to assure you - I have never known a single soul who didn't exit on cue. **(snaps fingers)** They do it beautifully every time. But people like you - I don't quite understand - it's an obsession that resembles love. And yet, I'm not vain enough to delude myself. You don't love me. It's perplexing.

JAKE: Nobody ever gets to stay on for - um - a curtain call?

DEATH: No one.

JAKE: Or - say - gets an understudy - you know - the wrong person.

DEATH: That's another game.

JAKE: A game?

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