

THE ALMOST END OF THE END FOREVER

by

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Registered WGA/E

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(Note: Throughout this play, there are several special effects called for, such as flowers being created or withering, tree leaves changing color, etc. These will be accomplished via pneumatics and lighting effects.)

ACT 1

Scene 1

The action of the scene takes place in front of a black curtain that remains closed the entire scene -- there should be four to six feet between the curtain and the lip of the stage. The theater and stage should be as dark as possible. There are no lights, no sound, until called for as described.

A cacophony of sound slowly rises, though not too loud...more like an aural fabric, a presence. It's an almost white noise jumble of voices with different emotional timbres -- talking, crying, pleading, calling out, demanding -- hundreds, if not thousands of voices.

A single, intense, well-defined cone of light suddenly appears stage center-right. It falls directly down onto the stage and does not touch the curtain.

A dark Figure ENTERS stage right. He's tall, gaunt, dressed all in black, the long black well-worn duster he wears obscuring his legs, so he seems to float as he moves.

As the Figure passes into the cone of light, we hear:

A man coughing, then beginning to choke.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Dad?

Without stopping, the Figure quickly reaches out, grabs air with his outstretched fingers, pulls it back to himself. He looks off as he does it, almost nonchalant in the action, walking on. As he leaves it, the cone of light and choking sound disappear.

A second cone appears center stage simultaneous to his leaving the first. The Figure walks into it. As he does so we hear:

The beeping of an intensive care heart monitor. The Figure reaches out, grabs air, and pulls it back to himself as he again simply moves through the cone. The beeping becomes one long, shrill tone as the Figure steps out of the cone of light, which disappears -- along with the audio -- the second he leaves it.

Another cone of light appears before The Figure as he moves. He enters it. As he does so, we hear:

FRAT GUY
Hey, guys! Check this out!
Geronimo-o-o-o-o...!

The Figure stops and looks up. He puts his hands on his hips and watches.

FIGURE
Oh, for the love of...Really?!?

(Beat)

FRAT GUY
Whoa, shit!

The Figure shoots his hand up over his head, leaning right, like an outfielder reaching for a long fly ball. He catches something and pulls it back to himself. He shakes his head as he moves out of the cone of light.

FIGURE
Idiot.

But another cone of light immediately appears directly in front of him. The Figure stops and shakes his head.

FIGURE
Enough of this.

The Figure turns away from the new cone. But immediately another appears in front of him. He turns again, but another cone of light drops to the stage. They're coming faster now.

FIGURE
Enough, I said!

The cacophony gets louder. The Figure looks stage right. Another cone appears. He looks left. Another cone is lit.

The cacophony has become intense, the voices stronger and more strident.

Frustration is obviously mounting in The Figure.

FIGURE
(looking up)
What the hell do you want from me?!

A line of cones now stretches across the stage. The Figure puts his hands over his ears against the cacophony.

FIGURE
NO! NO MORE!

He turns and runs, EXITS stage right.

The cones of light disappear one by one, from stage left to stage right, almost as if they're chasing The Figure. The cacophony begins to fade as the cones of light extinguish until, as the last cone of light goes out, the cacophony of voices has yielded to abject silence.

Scene 2

Curtain up. Lights up.

A park. The entire upstage area, full left to full right, is trees and shrubs. From there downstage is a carpet of green grass, with an occasional bush, small tree, or small bunch of flowers randomly placed. At far stage left, a fallen tree trunk rests, large enough to sit on.

An old park bench, with worn wooden slats, sits slightly stage left of center. It's long enough for two people to comfortably sit without crowding one another.

Six feet stage right of the park bench is a spindly tree about six feet tall, with a slightly bowed, thin trunk and a bushy top of short, horizontal limbs covered in leaves.

The light is that of early morning: warm, with the occasional angled shaft of sunlight splashed across the trees and grass. There is no sound of any kind.

ENTER stage left, LIFE, a voluptuous woman who looks to be in her forties. She's beautiful, with long hair pulled back loosely, and bright eyes set in an open, happy face. Her body language and movements are sensuous, lusty. She wears a flowing, floor-length dress, fitted at the waist, under a cardigan sweater. Her overall visage could remind one of an earth mother, or a late-Sixties hippy. She carries a hobo bag.

Life sits on the bench, sets her bag next to her.

LIFE
Beautiful. Just beautiful.

She looks to her left, then behind her.

LIFE
Could use a little music, though.

Without looking, Life flicks her left hand at the trees center left behind her. Immediately, the sound of baby birds chirping for their morning worm is heard.

LIFE

That's better.

She reaches into her bag, pulls out a ball of yarn and two large knitting needles. As she plops them into her lap, she glances downstage left.

LIFE

And maybe a bit of color...right over...here.

She flicks her hand at the spot, and a group of two or three bright red flowers rise up.

LIFE

And over here too, I think...

Another flick, and a couple of yellow flowers pops up.

LIFE

Wonderful.

She begins to hum as she inserts her needles into the yarn, begins to knit. She casually glances stage right. She looks back to her knitting, still humming to herself. But a moment later, she glances stage right again, this time leaning back, as if watching for something. She drops the knitting to her lap.

LIFE

Where is he?

Life goes back to her knitting, humming again. Another flick of the wrist and a grouping of crocuses pops up at her feet. She smiles at them.

LIFE

(to the crocuses)

Hello-o-o-o, you little sweeties!

A moment later...

DEATH

(offstage right)

Go away! Leave me alone, damn it!

LIFE

(smiling and nodding)

Ah...Always the subtle one.

DEATH enters stage right. He's the Figure we saw earlier: tall, gaunt, and dark -- handsome in a roguish way with longish, disheveled hair, mid-to-late Forties, if age had any relevance. He's still dressed all in black -- open collared shirt, pants and belt, boots, and the "duster" style coat, open now, that flows around his ankles as he walks.

His hands are over his ears as he enters, and he's twisting his head left and right, like a child refusing to hear a parent.

DEATH

No more! No, no, no!

Life doesn't seem to notice Death's foul mood at all. Just keeps knitting.

LIFE

Well, there you are. I was beginning to get worried, dear.

Death ignores her. He stops, tentatively lifting his hands from his ears, listening. He relaxes a tad at the silence.

LIFE

Beautiful day, isn't it?

DEATH

(finally acknowledging her)

Beautiful...?

LIFE

Yes. The day. Gorgeous, isn't it?

Death looks back to where he just came from.

DEATH

Depends on one's perspective, I'd imagine.

LIFE

Oh, now...just look around. Beauty everywhere.

DEATH

If you say so.

LIFE

I do. Every day should be so pretty.

Death flops onto the park bench next to her.

DEATH

Uh-huh. Real skippy.

LIFE

Somebody's certainly Mr. Mopeypants
this morning. Didn't sleep well
last night?

DEATH

Sleep? What are you talking sleep?
We don't sleep. Since when do we--

LIFE

(pats his leg)

Oh, I know we don't! Just making
conversation, dear. They say a little
routine chit-chat can make things
seem better, more normal.

Death turns his eyes to her.

DEATH

Normal.

LIFE

Yes. Normal.

DEATH

What about what we do is "normal" to
you?

Life stops knitting a moment, looks back at Death.

LIFE

Well, all of it, silly. What you
do, what I do. Never done anything
else, have we, now? So...

(sing-songy)

Normal is as normal does.

*Back to her knitting. Death stares at her a moment, then
slowly looks away, his thoughts elsewhere. After a beat...*

LIFE

So...?

DEATH

So...what?

LIFE

How are things?

(Beat)

DEATH

Things are...I think I'm losing my
mind, actually.

Life's needles keep clicking.

LIFE

Mmm-hmmm.

DEATH

Maybe I've *already* lost it.

LIFE

Where, dear?

DEATH

Where, what?

LIFE

Where did you have it last?

DEATH

Have what last?

LIFE

Your mind, dear.

DEATH

(facetiously)

Seriously?

LIFE

Certainly. Remembering where you last had something--

DEATH

It was a figure of speech! I just said, "I'm losing my mind", like, "The cheese is sliding off my cracker".

LIFE

You lost some cheese too, dear?

He regards her disbelievingly.

DEATH

You're not helping.

LIFE

Well, it's always worked for me...just thinking back and visualizing.

DEATH

I'm certain of it now. I *am* going crazy!

LIFE

You're going crazy too?

DEATH

Oh, for the love of...

LIFE

Who's making you crazy?

DEATH

You really want to know?

LIFE

Of course I do.

Death flicks his arm at the world in general.

DEATH

They are.

LIFE

Who is that, hon?

DEATH

They. Them. All of *them*. They just don't stop.

LIFE

Who's that dear? Who won't stop?

Death rises, paces.

DEATH

(petulantly)

Oh, I don't know...let me see. How about the idiots who think they can drive after a fifth of gin? Or punks who think a gun is their manhood? Cancer, diabetes, heart disease, regional skirmishes, religious zealots...

(a disgusted pause)

...idiot frat boys. And this is not to mention the dozens of species a day I'm supposed to clear because mankind can't manage things.

LIFE

Sounds like you've been busy.

DEATH

Oh, that's not the half of it! Then you have the terminally ill. The tortured. The insane. Toss in a few imminent suicides. I can't stand it!

Life stops knitting a moment, flicks her hand toward a spot downstage. A small seedling springs up. Life smiles, goes back to her knitting.

LIFE

Is that why you're late, love? Were you helping a few of them?

Death stops short and gazes at Life.

DEATH

Was I help...? No. Actually I wasn't. I'm doing my best to ignore them, if it's any of your business.

LIFE

Now, why would you do that?

DEATH

Have you been listening at all?

LIFE

Certainly.

(beat)

You still haven't explained why you're late.

DEATH

Stuff your "late". I wasn't late.

LIFE

Well, we agreed on ten, and it is half past...

DEATH

So what? When did time start meaning anything to us?

LIFE

It's just common courtesy, hon. If you were going to be late...

Death bounds up.

DEATH

I wasn't late!

Death steps to the first clump of flowers Life created, gazes down at them.

DEATH

(more to himself)

In fact, I'll never be late again.

LIFE
 (not looking up from
 her knitting)
 What's that?

Death reaches his hand out toward the clump of flowers, spreads his fingers, but then abruptly pulls his hand back, as if he'd stuck it into flame.

DEATH
 I said, I'll never be late again.

Life continues to knit and consider her flowers. The conversation may as well be muzak.

LIFE
 Well, that's a good attitude. Not polite to be late, you know.

DEATH
 Polite is irrelevant. You can't be late if you're not expected.

LIFE
 Don't be silly. Everyone expects you to be dropping by at some point.

DEATH
 "Expects" may be the wrong word. "Fears" is more like it. Or "Abhors the thought of..." maybe.

LIFE
 You don't really believe that.

DEATH
 Doesn't matter. It's a moot point.

LIFE
 Is it?

DEATH
 It is.

LIFE
 Mmmm-hmmm. And why is that?

Death sits on the bench, watches Life almost absentmindedly flick up another small bunch of crocuses nearby. He rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

Beat.

DEATH
 Because I quit.

This stops Life mid-stitch, brings her focus to Death.

LIFE

Excuse me?

DEATH

I said I quit. Q.U.I.T. Quit.

LIFE

Quit...what?

DEATH

This.

LIFE

What are you talking about?

Death opens his arms, looks to the sky.

DEATH

This! This whole arrangement!

LIFE

I'm not sure I follow.

Death rises.

DEATH

I think you do.

He moves to the flowers again, stands over them.

DEATH

But just to make the point crystal...
(*disgustedly*)
Specifically: *This*.

As Death utters the word, he reaches toward the flowers, closes his fingers and withdraws his hand. Immediately, the flowers shrivel to the ground. Death stands above the dead flowers and looks at them a beat, a pained look on his face.

DEATH

That I no longer wish to do.

Life drops her knitting on her bag. She rises, moves to Death.

LIFE

(*a bit irritated*)
Oh, now, that wasn't necessary.

DEATH

My point exactly.

Life gives him a small shove out of the way. She stoops over her dead flowers, waves her hands over them. They immediately spring back to life. She fluffs them up and smiles at them.

Death sits on the bench.

DEATH

None of it's necessary. We're not necessary.

Life rises, goes back to the bench.

LIFE

Oh, stop. It would be pretty boring around here without us, don't you think?

DEATH

From where I sit, the silence of oblivion might be a nice change.

LIFE

Stop it. You don't want that any more than I do.

Another flick of Life's wrist, another flower.

DEATH

How would you know? Do you ever stop your ceaseless birthing long enough to even consider what I have to go through just to make room for all of it?

LIFE

You're Death. It's what you do.

DEATH

Did.

LIFE

(*amused*)
Stop it.

DEATH

I mean it.

LIFE

(*sing-songy*)
No, you don't.

DEATH

I'm serious, El!

Life continues to concentrate on her knitting.

LIFE
 (more sing-songy)
 I know, I know.

DEATH
 You're not hearing me, are you?

Knit one, pearl one.

LIFE
 Of course I am.

DEATH
 No, you're not. You never do.

LIFE
 You're just having a bit of a bad
 day.

Death whirls on her.

DEATH
 This isn't about a bad day! It's
 about every day! Every second of
 every minute of every hour of every
 excruciating day!

Death spreads his arms, shouts to the sky.

DEATH
 It's *ENDLESS!*

*At this last, the lights darken slightly, some of the flowers
 at Life's feet wither a bit.*

Life, startled, drops her knitting.

LIFE
 Dee! Control yourself! You don't
 have to shout!

*Death watches her bend and bring the flowers back to full
 vigor.*

LIFE
 What's gotten into you?

*A look lingers a moment between them before Life sits, looks
 down at her folded hands.*

LIFE
 All right. What's really going on
 here?

Death looks around, lost in thought.

DEATH

You ever wonder who thought all this up...this whole thing? You ever wonder about that?

LIFE

No...not really--

DEATH

I mean, it's got a certain appeal, I'll give it that...colors, smells, tastes...water. Weird material, water.

LIFE

Can't do without it. Pretty tasty stuff.

DEATH

(turns to her)

And then there's us. What you are, what I am. "The quick and the dead". What do you have to be smoking to come up with a concept like that?

LIFE

I've always thought of us as two sides of the same coin, darling. You know, a heads and tails kind of thing. Can't have one without the other?

DEATH

(pissily)

Yin and Yang?

LIFE

Night and Day.

DEATH

Ones and zeroes.

LIFE

(enjoying the game)

Light and dark.

It gets faster...

DEATH

Dits and dahs.

LIFE

Odd and even.

DEATH

Wet and dry.

LIFE

Up and down.

DEATH

East and West.

LIFE

Young and old.

DEATH

Thin and fat.

A quick finger of warning....

LIFE

Watch it!

DEATH

(beat...contritely)

Hot and cold?

LIFE

Better. Positive and negative.

Beat. They look at one another.

DEATH

Yeah. Positive...and negative. You see, that's...that's just it, El. How'd I end up on the minus side? Where is it written that it's always got to be *me* that negates everything? Why do *I* always have to be the bad guy?

LIFE

You aren't...really. In the bigger picture, I mean.

DEATH

Things don't see the bigger picture when it comes to me, El. They just see me, and they don't like what they see.

LIFE

Don't be silly.

DEATH

You're not there. You're not looking in their eyes.

LIFE
Maybe not, but--

DEATH
They see me and everything goes cold
and black. I'm always the ugly end.
It's depressing.

LIFE
Oh, now...

Death looks at her a long moment.

DEATH
What do you see when you look at me,
El?

Life observes him, smiles.

LIFE
I see my Dee. A good guy who does
what he has to do.

DEATH
Who hates what he does.

LIFE
Sweetheart, it's who you are.

DEATH
Yeah. Well, I don't want to be me
anymore.

LIFE
Silly. You're you. Who else would
you be?

DEATH
I don't know. A Picasso, maybe? A
Pavarotti? A Steve Jobs! Someone
people will give a little respect
to.

LIFE
You are respec--

DEATH
Don't say it! Fear is not respect.

LIFE
Honestly, I don't know what your
problem is. We have--

DEATH

What's so hard to understand? I've always had the shit end of the deal in this setup. You get the new, the joyous, the electricity of the first breath. Creation, for the Sun's sake! You're Life! Worshipped! Revered! How refreshing! And what do I get to work with? Decay. Stench. Ruination. Foulness beyond belief. And these days, thanks to mankind's continued ingenuity, more blood and guts and screaming than you can imagine. And oh, the screaming! My God, it's incessant! And if it's not a scream, it's a whimper, a sniveling plea for mercy that's not mine to give.

*(he pauses, his voice
now sadly quiet)*

Not a damn thing in this universe wants to have anything to do with me. Nobody seeks me out for tea. They won't take a walk with me, go antiquing...nothing. And forget dating! I can't have an intelligent conversation with a single person. If someone mentions my name at all, it's in a whisper or a curse. And I hear all of it, too -- "Oh no, it's the Grim Reaper!" "Stay away, Dark Companion!" "Save me, it's HIM!!!" All I have to do is be near them...they can sense it. You have any idea how that feels? And then to have to watch the light go out of them...to take all they are, all they'll ever be -- and pretend it's just business as usual. For me, it's forever been lights out, party's over, stop tape. Well, I just can't do it anymore. I won't do it anymore.

Death flops onto the bench, dejected. Life smiles at him a moment, shakes her head. A moment later, she nonchalantly flicks her wrist and the cry of a newborn is heard.

Death sees and hears it, slides down on the bench, his head bent over the back rest, arm over his eyes.

DEATH

(sorrowful moan)

Awwww, for the love of--

LIFE

Sorry! Sorry, sorry, sorry. Just slipped out. Sorry.

DEATH

You're impossible, you know that?

Life very pointedly goes back to her knitting.

From SR, ELVIN enters. He's dressed in jeans and a sport coat over a nice shirt. He seems to be just wandering, reading a book. He crosses to the log, looks around, sits and leans against it, lights a cigarette, continues reading.

Life glances at him.

LIFE

Oh, now, why?

DEATH

Hmmm?

LIFE

Nasty habit.

DEATH

(raising his head)

What's that?

LIFE

(tilts her head toward Elvin)

Smoking. Nasty habit. Nasty, nasty, nasty. Makes more work for you than most things, I'll wager.

DEATH

(lays head back down)

Not anymore. He has nothing to fear from me.

LIFE

Well, he should...if you weren't being so obstinate. It's poking the bear, Dee...not that I'm comparing you to--

DEATH

Forget it. Let him enjoy.

LIFE

But it's such a limiting action -- It...

(MORE)

LIFE (CONT'D)
 (she struggles to
 find the right words)
 ...denies, it...disrespects...

Life rises, moves toward Elvin.

DEATH
 El, what are you--?

LIFE
 ...I mean, look at him. Completely
 unaware that he's compromising his--

DEATH
 For fire's sake...will you leave the
 guy alone?!

*Death rises, follows Life. They stand near Elvin, who is
 obviously unaware of them.*

LIFE
 You complain about what you have to
 deal with! See what I have to watch?

DEATH
 What? Someone enjoying himself?

LIFE
 The ingratitude! I take the time to
 create all this wonder and beauty,
 and he does something stupid that in
 the end throws away what I've given
 him and makes work for you. It's a
 sacrilege he makes you do that!

DEATH
 Ah...the dawn breaks...

LIFE
 What?

DEATH
 Nothing. It's called free will, El.
 Something they were given that we
 obviously weren't.

LIFE
 Well, you cry about no one liking
 you...he seems to be doing everything
 he can to run right to you!

DEATH
 He's not running to me any more than
 he's running from you.

LIFE
 (*points at the
 cigarette*)

That's not a death wish? Or at the
 least a lack of fear?

DEATH

Bullshit.

LIFE

You don't think so?

DEATH

No. I don't. The man's just--

LIFE

Ask him.

DEATH

What?

LIFE

Ask him. Manifest and ask him how
 he feels about you...about dying.

DEATH

You're not serious.

LIFE

Deadly.

A look between them. Death can't believe she said it.

LIFE

So to speak.

Beat.

DEATH

Look, I haven't been corporal in
 ages. Not sure I remember what to--

LIFE

Like falling off a bike. Come on.
 I'll go with you. It'll be good for
 you.

DEATH

I don't want to scare him.

LIFE

He can't be that afraid of you if
 he's doing things like smoking.
 (*sotto voce*)
 Probably has unprotected sex, too.

Life takes Death's hand, pulls him slightly aside. A bright, intense flash of light envelopes them, then fades.

Elvin jumps as he suddenly notices them, startled.

ELVIN

Oh, my God! You frightened me.

Death immediately spreads his arms in an "I told you so" gesture.

ELVIN

Didn't hear you coming.

Life gestures back to Death, then smiles at Elvin.

LIFE

(to Elvin)

Sorry about that, love. Light on our feet, I guess. Beautiful day, isn't it?

ELVIN

Yes. Gorgeous. Perfect for reading.

LIFE

It is, isn't it?

Elvin smiles, then goes back to his book. Life sits on the log next to him.

LIFE

Good book, is it?

ELVIN

Yes. Very good, actually.

Elvin shows her the cover.

LIFE

(reading title)

"On Death and Dying".

(glances at Death)

How 'bout that?

ELVIN

Kubler-Ross. The five stages of dealing with death. Not that I have a vested interest, mind you. Came across it in a yard sale. You know it?

LIFE

(eyes still on Death)

A bit. How about you, Dee? You familiar with it?

DEATH

(pissily)

Intimately.

(points at Elvin's cigarette)

You have another one of those?

LIFE

Dee!

DEATH

(sitting on log)

I don't get here that often. When in Rome, right? May I?

ELVIN

Certainly.

Elvin hands Death a smoke, lights it. Death takes a long, satisfying drag.

ELVIN

You can take the rest of the pack, if you'd like. I've been thinking about quitting.

DEATH

Have you?

ELVIN

Not the best thing you can do for yourself, but they're just so damned pleasurable.

Death has taken another large drag.

DEATH

They are, aren't they?

LIFE

They'll kill you eventually, you know.

Death is really enjoying the cigarette.

DEATH

Maybe. Depends.

(glances at Life)

Some people could live forever these days.

ELVIN

(laughs)

I doubt that. Not really interested in testing those waters, though.

LIFE

Uh-huh. But...you concerned about dying? That why you're reading the book?

ELVIN

Not really. I certainly don't want to shuffle off this mortal coil just yet. Got too much I want to do before I fall off the perch.

LIFE

I'm sure you do. But...let me ask you, since we're on the subject. Would you be afraid? If you came face to face with death, I mean?

ELVIN

Face to face with The Grim Reaper?

Death's head falls back as he sighs deeply. Life ignores his histrionics.

LIFE

Well, yes. Like, if I said -- what's your name, hon?

ELVIN

Elvin.

LIFE

Like if I said, "Elvin..."

*(gestures to Death,
still enjoying his
cig)*

"...I'd like you to meet...Death."

Death rolls his eyes at Life, who goads him on.

LIFE

Death, meet Elvin.

Death stares wearily at Life.

LIFE

Come on. Say hello to Elvin.

ELVIN

You're supposed to be death?

Death extends his free hand.

DEATH

(flatly)

Yes. Death at your service. How do you do?

Elvin laughs, shakes Death's hand, playing along.

ELVIN

Fine, thank you. Nice to meet you.

Elvin laughs nervously, withdraws his hand, wipes it on his lapel.

LIFE

What's the matter? That wasn't so bad, was it?

ELVIN

That? No, of course not. Just a game, right? But if he really were death, I mean, really *him*, I'd have screamed like a little girl and run as far and fast as I possibly could.

LIFE

You would?

ELVIN

Are you kidding? Who wants to meet the Black Angel? Certainly not me. Not now, not ever, right?

DEATH

Uh-huh.

Death stands, looks hard at Life, crushes out his cigarette with his foot.

DEATH

(to Life)

Satisfied?

Death stomps away, moving to where they manifested earlier, looks at Life.

DEATH

Coming?

Life smiles at Elvin as she rises.

LIFE

Excuse us a minute, will you?

ELVIN

Certainly.

Elvin goes back to his book as Life joins Death. She obviously wants to talk about this more, but as soon as she gets there, the bright, intense flash of light envelopes them, then fades.

Elvin glances over, looks around for them, sees nothing.

ELVIN

Huh.

Elvin shrugs, checks his watch, gathers his things, and wanders off SL.

Death strides to the bench, obviously distraught. Life follows slowly.

LIFE

Dee...

DEATH

That's it. I'm finished.

LIFE

He thought it was a game. He didn't mean--

DEATH

Of course he meant it! They all mean it!

Life moves SR.

DEATH

Not a single thing you've ever created wants to have anything to do with me.

LIFE

Aw, Dee...

DEATH

Well, if that's the way they want it, that's the way they'll get it. To use one of their more insulting phrases, "I'm dead to them!"

A silence rests between them for a moment. Life finally sits, takes up her knitting, and is about to flick her wrist again, but after a quick glance Death's way, pulls her hand back in.

LIFE

What will you do, if not what you were designed to do?

DEATH

I don't know. Travel, maybe. Chill for a while. Let things go, you know? I mean, hasn't it occurred to you that you're *much* too wrapped up in what you do?

LIFE

I love what I do. I always have. From minute one. I have no problems with it.

DEATH

Goody for you.

LIFE

Look...I'm sorry you're out of sorts, but this is the way things are. I don't know that we can do anything about it.

DEATH

I'm not asking you to do anything about it. It's me that's going to stop.

LIFE

Well, that's just it. What do you suppose will happen if you stop and I don't?

DEATH

Maybe that's something you should consider. You're a bit out of control, you know. Got me running full-tilt boogie just trying to maintain parity. You should pull back a bit, regardless of what I do.

LIFE

Phooey.

DEATH

Anyway, nobody will notice a damn thing, if you ask me. In fact, there might be more than a bit of rejoicing. Imagine the headlines:

(MORE)

DEATH (CONT'D)

*(he sweeps his arm
across an imaginary
masthead)*

"Immortality Finally Achieved!"
(again)

"Plan Ahead! You're Going To Need
It!"

LIFE

Where do you get such nonsense?

DEATH

I daresay, there might even be a
Nobel in it for me: "The man who
conquered Death".

LIFE

You are Death.

DEATH

Still.

LIFE

Now you're just being foolish. You
know you can't just quit. I don't
know why you're even considering it.
We're a team -- Life and Death -- I
need you, you need me.

DEATH

Then quit with me. Let's drop it
all. Just...be...for a while.

LIFE

Not a good idea.

DEATH

What's not good about it? Everybody
else gets some time off. Why
shouldn't we?

LIFE

It would get a bit stale around here
rather quickly, don't you think?

DEATH

What do you mean?

LIFE

Everything getting older but not
dying? Nothing new coming up to
renew it all? And imagine the backlog
of work you'd have once we came back.

Death shudders at this prospect. He drops onto the bench again, distraught.

DEATH

It's not fair. I'm capable of so much more than dust to dust, ashes to ashes. I can be creative.

LIFE

You are creative. In your own way. But it's just the way it was designed. One of us creates, the other uncreates. Yin and Yang. Dits and dahs.

Life pats Death's knee, smiles at him, then stands.

LIFE

Which reminds me. I need to do a few things. It's spring, after all.

Life moves downstage, peruses the area in front of her. Death, slumped and sullen on the bench with his chin on a hand, watches her.

LIFE

I think we can make a nice patch of wildflowers right here, don't you?

DEATH

Oh, sure. Go ahead. Pile it on.

Life ignores him, kneels, begins to hum softly. She flicks her hands lightly over an area of grass. Yellow tulips spring up as her hands pass. She giggles.

LIFE

Oh, how nice. Aren't they nice?

DEATH

(as flat as slate)
Stunning.

Death sighs, watches Life create another patch of flowers with a flick of her hand. He looks at his free hand a few moments, then over at Life again, then back to his hand. His head snaps up, his eyes go wide. He brings both hands up in front of his face, looking from one to the other. He stands.

DEATH

One of us creates, the other uncreates. That's what you said.

LIFE
*(fluffing her new
 flowers)*
 Mm-hmm.

DEATH
 So...it's just a matter of the
 creation getting done, and vice versa.

LIFE
*(waving her hand,
 bringing up a new
 batch of flowers)*
 I suppose so.

DEATH
 So technically, it doesn't matter
 who does what.

*This stops Life. She sits back on her haunches, looks around
 at Death.*

LIFE
 What are you getting at?

Death comes to her, excited.

DEATH
 I propose a trade.

LIFE
 What?!

DEATH
 Let's swap jobs. I'll create, you
 uncreate.

*Life immediately withdraws, gets to her feet, moves toward
 the bench.*

LIFE
 Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no.

DEATH
 Why not?

LIFE
 You can't be serious.

DEATH
 What's the difference? You said,
 one of us creates, the other--

LIFE
 Correct. I create. You uncreate.

DEATH

That's a bit segregationist--

LIFE

It's the way it's always been.

DEATH

Who said so? There's only you and me. We can do what we want to.

LIFE

You can't just arbitrarily change the status quo.

DEATH

Oh, really? And what "quo" might that be? Is there a caste system here that I've been missing?

LIFE

No, of course not. It's just...the specialization of labor. Experience. Craft.

DEATH

(*amused ridicule*)
Craft?!

LIFE

Yes, craft. What do you know about creating life?

DEATH

Plenty. I have a unique perspective that gives me a very deep appreciation for it.

LIFE

It takes more than appreciation, let me tell you. It takes years of study. Millennia of learning through trial and error. Do you really think the world can tolerate another age of dinosaurs while you're getting up to speed?

DEATH

I don't know. I rather liked the dinosaurs.

LIFE

They were an anomaly! A young, inexperienced girl experimenting with parts and pieces.

DEATH

Still, it was a shame to have to eliminate them.

LIFE

That's not the point. The point is, it's taken me billions of years to get it right: to internalize an innate feel for balance; to understand how to manage the progress of evolution. The nuances of DNA alone took me eons to figure out! You have to know what you're doing. You can't just cowboy it out there.

DEATH

Cowboy it? Are you suggesting that I--

LIFE

Well, one has to wonder how much nuance is involved in pulling the plug on something.

This pushes Death over the edge.

DEATH

"PULLING THE PLUG?!?" Is that all you think I do?!

LIFE

Oh, of course not. I was just--

DEATH

Well! The truth finally comes out!

LIFE

Oh, come on. I didn't mean...

DEATH

No, no. I get it.
(*indicates her*)
Life.

(*indicates himself*)
Death. Specialization of labor, right? I'm just here to reclaim the raw materials for your next masterwork, to feed the machine.

LIFE

Now, you know that's not--

DEATH

I don't know what I was thinking. Me being creative. Ridiculous.

LIFE

You are being ridicu--

DEATH

No, no. Please. Let me return to
my proper station...*Death moves to the spindly tree stage right of the bench.*

DEATH

...Assume my proper role.

*He grabs the trunk. Immediately, the leaves fall from the
limbs and rain to the ground, and what Death is left holding
is his classic scythe, which he lifts from the ground.*

DEATH

Let's see, where shall I begin?

LIFE

(very concerned now)

What are you going to do?

Death turns upstage, moves toward the trees and shrubs.

DEATH

A bit crowded over here, yes?

*Death swings the scythe in an arc that roughly covers from
upstage center to mid-stage right. As he does so, the
lighting changes in such a way as to paint the leaves as
brown and dying. Certain limbs droop.*

LIFE

NO! STOP!

DEATH

And what is that I hear? Birds?
Too many of the little bastards around
already, don't you think?*Death thrusts the scythe at the area of trees upstage center
left where Life had created the baby birds earlier. A black
hole is blown in the foliage, and the chirping immediately
ceases.**Death turns to Life.*

DEATH

How'm I doing? Maintaining the status
quo, am I?

LIFE

You're acting like a child. You
stop this behavior immediately.

Death walks to a clump of flowers DSC that Life has created.

DEATH

Why? It's just...
 (mockingly)
 what...I...do, isn't it?

He drops the scythe to ground level, sets up like a golfer with a driver, then lifts the scythe like a golf club, about to cut through the flowers.

At the top of his swing, Life jumps forward, grabs the scythe, prevents Death from swinging it down.

LIFE

ALL RIGHT! ENOUGH! STOP THIS!
 (puts her face into
 his, eye to eye)
 Please. Stop.

Death slowly lets the scythe down, relinquishing it into Life's hands.

Life takes the scythe back to where Death got it, sticks it into the ground.

LIFE

Honestly. I don't know what's come over you.

Life bends, and wiggling her fingers, draws the leaves back up the trunk of the tree until they are back in place on the limbs, obscuring the scythe.

LIFE

That was completely unacceptable.

DEATH

Well, this whole situation has become unacceptable to me.
 (he turns to her)
 You, me, all of it.

Death moves determinedly toward stage right. Then he stops, turns back to Life.

DEATH

I'm telling you...I'd consider destroying this whole fucking ball in one shot and be done with it. But that would mean I'd have to care enough to bother. Which I don't. So you do what you want. Just don't count on me cleaning up after you anymore. I'm out of here.

Death *EXITS*.

Life calls after him.

LIFE

Dee! Get back here this second!
Dee!

Life stands transfixed.

LIFE

Shit.

Life goes back to the bench, sits, wringing her hands.

LIFE

Damn it.

Staring straight ahead, distraught, Life absentmindedly flicks her left arm back behind her. The baby birds begin chirping again. She flicks her right hand downstage in front of her, and a couple of yapping puppies are heard.

Life comes to herself, pulls her hand in.

LIFE

Perhaps under the circumstances...

She sits silently, holding her hands in her lap. But in a moment or two, she starts to fidget, her eyes glancing left and right. She starts to rock back and forth. She seems very uncomfortable.

Finally, Life can't hold it in anymore. She suddenly flicks her right hand out, and immediately the cry of a newborn baby is heard offstage. Her left hand flicks, and another newborn wails its first breath.

This continues as the lights begin to fade -- more birds chirping, puppies yapping, flowers jumping up, newborns crying out.

LIFE

(flicking her wrist)
Oh, shit...
(flick)
shit...
(flick)
shit...
(flick)

CURTAIN

Scene 3

CURTAIN UP.

Probably the same park. If you could see it. It is overgrown with trees, brush, flowers, vines. It's a mess.

There's a cacophony of sound as well -- a fabric of crowd noises, honking horns, crying babies, bird calls, dog barks, monkey howls, cricket chirps, frog ribbets, lion roars, the occasional pig squeal.

The park bench is still center stage, but almost completely surrounded by what looks like bamboo and rushes, some even coming up through the slats of the seat. Nearby, Life's wildflower garden has gone berserk -- a tangle of blooms and vines.

On the bench sits Life, slouched over, her chin propped on a hand. Her hair is unkempt, tousled, her clothes sloppy and disheveled. She's definitely not her jovial, lusty self, even as she flicks her wrist and the cry of another newborn baby is heard. All this does is elicit a deep and troubled sigh from her. And yet...she does it again, almost like it's autonomic.

As this ensues, an OLD MAN in a tweed jacket and vest enters, pushing his way through the bushes upstage. He carries a book and moves like molasses, shuffle-stepping and leaning on a cane. He just barely makes it to the bench, flops down onto it with a hugh sigh.

Life looks up at him. He struggles to catch his breath, sucking in air through a toothless mouth. He looks back at her with rheumy eyes.

OLD MAN/ELVIN

Sorry to disturb you. Mind if I rest here a minute?

LIFE

Be my guest.

OLD MAN/ELVIN

Don't know if I coulda made it much farther.

LIFE

You do look a little worn out.

OLD MAN/ELVIN

That I surely am.

The Old Man breathes deeply a moment or two, then turns to Life.

OLD MAN/ELVIN

Forgive me.
(offers his hand)
 Name's Elvin.

Life takes his hand.

LIFE

Elvin?

ELVIN

Yes. Elvin Wisterly.

LIFE

Elvin...Elvin. Have we met?

ELVIN

Mebbe. Been comin' here all my life. Nice place to read when the weather's cooperating.

LIFE

Ah, yes! Elvin. Been a while. You can call me LaVida.

ELVIN

LaVida, did you say?
(off her nod)
 Pretty name. Spanish? Italian?

LIFE

Little bit of everything, I suppose.

ELVIN

Well, nice to meet you...or see you again...or whatever. Mind's not quite what it used to be.

LIFE

Oh, I hear that. Where are you headed, Elvin?

ELVIN

Can't really tell you. I think I knew this morning, but...

LIFE

Well, then, where are you coming from?

Elvin's eyes show his attempt to remember.

ELVIN

I...uh...

Elvin turns, looks and points back from where he came.

ELVIN

Back there a ways...

LIFE

Mm-hmm.

ELVIN

Don't remember exactly...

LIFE

Well, don't worry about it. Not important.

Life takes a long look at Elvin, as he pulls out a handkerchief, begins to wipe his face with it.

LIFE

If you don't mind my asking, how old are you?

ELVIN

Older'n I thought I'd ever be, I can tell you that. Last birthday I remember was a hunnert and ten, mebbe? Not sure any more -- quit countin' a way's back. How old are you?

LIFE

A bit older than that.

ELVIN

Really? The years have been kind to you.

LIFE

In the genes, they say.

ELVIN

Uh-huh.

(beat)

It's awful, though, isn't it?

LIFE

Awful?

ELVIN

Bein' this old, I mean. Just plain awful. Sometimes I think if I could find a way to end it, I would.

LIFE

Really?

ELVIN

Sometimes, yeah.

Elvin puts the handkerchief back in his pocket.

ELVIN

Don't know why nothin' dies anymore. Some scientist messed up somewhere, is what I figure. Made somethin' in a test tube and it got out. Who knows? But livin' longer's not the blessing everyone thought it would be, I tell you true. Can't hardly see. Gotta gum my food. Just breathin's more work'n I've ever done. And forget tryin' to pee. No, there are days I think I'd give anything just to lie down, shut my eyes, and not wake up again.

LIFE

I had a friend once I wish could have heard you say that.

ELVIN

He feelin' his age too? Kinda lookin' for his eternal rest?

Life smiles.

LIFE

Not exactly.

(beat)

But life is so...precious. How can you...?

ELVIN

It is, yes. I'll not argue the point. But these days you could make a case of it being too much of a good thing.

Life looks around at the chaos that surrounds them.

LIFE

Hate to admit it, but I kind of see your point.

Life rises, turns to the overgrown wildflower garden nearby.

ELVIN

Just the way things are now, I suppose.

Elvin watches Life trying to primp the garden.

ELVIN

That your garden? You like flowers,
do you?

Life smiles at Elvin, nods, then turns back to the garden, touches a bloom here, another there, getting lost a bit in the interaction.

LIFE

I love their faces when they first
show them to me, you know? Especially
in the morning. So full of energy
and promise. The richness of the
colors surprises me sometimes, too.
I mean, I know what they're going to
be, but still...It's like they're
trying to show me how *much* they can
be. Like they're proud of it, or
grateful. Like they want my approval.
All of it, maybe. And they want me
to be proud of them.

*(moves from the garden
to a nearby tree)*

I see that in most everything, really.
Or feel it, is more what it is. It
feels warm. The kind of warm you
get when your children put their
arms around you and hug you and
whisper their love in your ear.
Basic, elemental. It's a feeling I
can't get enough of. I think it's
why I can't stop mak...

Life catches herself, realizes she's about to say something she shouldn't.

LIFE

Well...

ELVIN

You're a mother then?

Life laughs at this.

LIFE

Oh, my, yes.

ELVIN

Grandmother too, I suspect.

LIFE

And then some.

ELVIN

Well, you don't look it. Life's
been good to you, seems like.

LIFE

That's an odd thought, actually...

Elvin starts to get up. It's not easy for him.

ELVIN

Guess I'd better try to get goin'.
I'm probably late for somethin'
somewhere.

Life offers him a hand, gets him on his feet.

ELVIN

Thank you. Old bones, you know?
(*off Life's smile*)
Nice talking with you.

LIFE

You too. Safe travels.

*Elvin smiles, begins to shuffle his way off stage left.
He's agonizingly slow.*

*Life watches him a moment, then begins to pace, wringing her
hands.*

LIFE

This is getting a little crazy.

*Absentmindedly, she flicks her hand. Another flower pushes
it's way up through the scrub. She gazes at it a moment,
half smiles. Then she shakes her head, suddenly upset.*

LIFE

Oh, damn it!

*Life stuffs her hands into the pockets of her now-tattered
cardigan, flops onto the bench, drops her head over the bench
back in exasperation, looking silently up at the sky.*

LIFE

Give me strength...

*Elvin continues his impossibly slow shuffle toward stage
left. For a moment or two, this is the only movement on
stage.*

*Then Death ENTERS stage left. He's dressed completely
differently -- board shorts, an untucked Tommy Bahama shirt
under an unconstructed, loose-fitting suit jacket, Wayfarer
sunglasses, and sandals.*

He carries a Starbucks Grande Latte cup, and is reading a People magazine as he walks.

As Death comes upon Elvin, he gazes over the top of the magazine at him. Elvin smiles, waves weakly. Death guy-nods to Elvin, and turns slightly as he walks by to continue watching the old man move off stage. He shakes his head in a 'tsk-tsk' manner.

Death turns back around to notice Life sprawled on the bench. He smiles, folds the magazine, sits on the other end of the bench, sips his latte.

LIFE
(*head still back*)
Back already, Elvin?

DEATH
That's a new one. Haven't been called that one yet.

Life's head snaps up, sees Death. She sits upright, looks of hate, joy, relief, and uncertainty flashing across her face simultaneously.

LIFE
Dee!

DEATH
(*spreads his arms*)
Hiya, Sweetheart!

LIFE
I'm so glad you're back!

DEATH
Just passing through, actually. On my way to Cabo. Thought I'd drop in a sec and say hi.

LIFE
(*disappointed*)
Oh. I thought maybe...

DEATH
(*knows what she's thinking, shakes his head*)
No.

Life looks him up and down.

LIFE
Kind of a new look for you.

DEATH

Trying to lighten things up a bit.
The other was a little...severe,
you know? All that black.

LIFE

Sure. I don't use the color much
either. Been keeping busy?

DEATH

Nah. Just chilling. Catching up on
my reading. Finally got through all
of Stephen King. Tackling Baldacci
next.

LIFE

Going for the classics, I see.

DEATH

(shrugs)

All in one's perspective, isn't it?
Anyway. Been traveling a bit too.
Just came in from St. Lucia. Fabulous
place. Not too crowded. Yet.

(looking around)

You've been busy, looks like.

LIFE

(in a big sigh)

So it appears.

Beat.

DEATH

Warned you.

LIFE

Don't start.

DEATH

Just saying...

LIFE

Well, don't.

DEATH

O-o-o-kay.

They sit in silence a few moments. Death looks around, shakes his head. Life notices, is about to say something...

DEATH

Not saying anything. Nothing to
say. Not...a...thing...

Beat.

DEATH

It's just that it didn't have to be this way.

LIFE

(touchy)

What part of "don't start" didn't you understand? I don't want to talk about it.

DEATH

Okay. Whatever.

After a moment...

DEATH

Who was the Old Timer?

LIFE

You didn't recognize him?

DEATH

No. Should I?

LIFE

Name's Elvin. We talked to him once, remember? Right over there? He was reading that book on Death and--

DEATH

And Dying! Yes! I remember him. Vaguely. Nice looking young guy, gave me a smoke.

LIFE

The same.

Beat.

DEATH

Aged a bit.

LIFE

(touchy)

That supposed to be funny?

DEATH

(sips his latte)

What? All I said was--

LIFE

I know what you said.

Life rises, moves downstage. She glances at Death, then at her hands.

LIFE

Truth is...he's aged a lot.
Everything has. He's getting so old
he barely knows his own name anymore.
(sits next to Death)
You could really help him out, you
know.

DEATH

Why? He going to Cabo too? Need a
lift?

LIFE

You know what I mean.

DEATH

Sorry. Don't do that anymore.

LIFE

He actually asked for you.

DEATH

Right. Look, I didn't stop by to
rehash old--

LIFE

Maybe you didn't, but....just look
at all of this, Dee!

DEATH

(sing-songy)
Not my re-spon-si-bil-ity.

LIFE

This world is crying out for you!

DEATH

Bullshit. I've been listening. And
you know what? Everything still
values you over me.

LIFE

You'd be surprised. You should have
talked to Elvin. I think he's been
trying to find you for years. I
really think he's had enough of what
I gave him.
(sadly)
Everything has.

DEATH

(rising)

No, they haven't. They're just tired of where it's led. Your friend's looking for me simply as an out. He doesn't really want me. Nobody wants me.

LIFE

I think you'd be surprised.

DEATH

Balls. They see me as the end. And every last one of them sees it as unfair. Can't tell you how many of them try to convince me "it's a mistake."

(beat)

Frankly, I'm inclined to agree with 'em.

LIFE

You're making too much of it, Dee. All they want --

Death jumps quickly to sit beside her.

DEATH

No, see, I've had a lot of time to think about this.

(a proud beat)

There's a flaw in the system.

LIFE

A what?

DEATH

A flaw. The system's flawed.

LIFE

Yes. You're not participating.

DEATH

It has nothing to do with me. Listen. The flaw is the unalterable progression. It's an unstoppable train. Once begun, you can't just get off...like, pick an age you want to be and stick with it awhile. Not allowed. You can't even slow it down. Once you're on the damned escalator, you have to go all the way. And now...well, all the way's a long stretch, isn't it?

LIFE

You have too much time on your hands.
You're over-thinking this.

DEATH

No, I'm not! I'm serious! I mean, what if that fellow...Elvin, was it?...what if he wanted to be, say, thirty for more than a year? Hale and hearty, vibrant, everything still working? He can't do it, the way things are set up. He's just got to get older and shakier, and watch it all slip away. Maybe if we work together, we could change things, correct the--

LIFE

Dee, there's no flaw! The system's perfect. Or it was. It's broken now only because of you...because you're ignoring your end of it.

Death doesn't like hearing this. He rises, picks a flower and studies it.

DEATH

My end of it? All I was was a way to balance the numbers.

LIFE

You were...are...more than that.

DEATH

I was a garbage man, and you know it.

LIFE

When did you become so depressive?

DEATH

Not depressed any more, baby. I've stepped off the treadmill. Livin' the life.

LIFE

You're shirking your responsibility.

DEATH

Not shirking. Abdicating. Not going to hang around when I'm not wanted.

LIFE

Don't be ridiculous. You're valued. And needed. Can't you see that?

DEATH

No, I can't, frankly. I never saw anybody fighting for *me*. Not once have I seen a gazelle stop in it's flight and bare its throat to the cheetah chasing it. I've never heard of *anyone* lying on a *lifebed* fighting for *death*.

LIFE

I'll bet that anything in this world right now would beg on its knees for your touch.

DEATH

I doubt it. But even if they did, it's a moot point. I told you -- that's not what I do anymore. I'm into positive waves only now.

LIFE

What if they thought what you could do for them was a positive thing? What if they'd consider it a gift beyond measure?

DEATH

Oh, please.

LIFE

I'm serious, Dee. In some strange way, this whole mess has turned into your best chance ever to be embraced as a valuable part of the continuum. They miss you. They'll understand now.

DEATH

Bullshit. They'll always like you, they'll always hate me.

LIFE

Maybe that's your problem. You've become so literal you're missing all the beauty in what you do--

DEATH

It's pretty hard not to be literal when you're killing something.

LIFE

(*undeterred*)
...or the opportunity you provide.

DEATH

What *opportunity!*?

LIFE

To go around again, give it another shot. To grow. To evolve. What an amazing gift that is, and only you can provide it.

DEATH

You think it's so great, *you* do it.

LIFE

It's not my job. It's yours. And frankly, you need to start doing it before all of this gets so out of hand we'll never regain control of it.

DEATH

All *you* need to do is stop.

LIFE

You really want to make this about me, don't you?

DEATH

It's as much about you as it is me. Yin and Yang, remember?

LIFE

But it wasn't me that upset the apple cart.

DEATH

You could have come with me when you had the chance. Retirement is pretty good, you know. You might like it. You ever seen Cabo this time of year?

Life stands, her frustration boiling over.

LIFE

So what are we supposed to do? Just put it all on cruise control? Let everything age so long it becomes intelligent *dust*? I can't do that. And neither should you.

They sit in silence a few beats.

LIFE

Seriously. Dee. You *have* to come back. It's getting impossible.

Death leans forward, elbows on knees. He's silent a few beats, then he sits up straight, looks at Life.

DEATH

You know what I want.

Life stands looking at Death a moment, then...

LIFE

I'm sorry. I just can't.

DEATH

It's a simple swap. It doesn't have to be forever.

LIFE

I can't take the life out of something.

DEATH

It's not much different than what you do now, you know. You just pull back instead of push out. I suspect it feels the same in most respects.

LIFE

It doesn't matter.

DEATH

It's not like I don't understand. I mean, I don't want to do it anymore either. But if we're going to put this thing back in balance, one of us is going to have to.

LIFE

No. I told you. I can't kill. I won't.

A heavy beat.

DEATH

Even to save it all?

A very heavy beat.

LIFE

Even to save it all.

Even heavier.

DEATH

Then that's it, I guess.

A long silence hangs between them, like an old married couple who have realized they've reached the end of the line and have nothing more to say to one another.

Death slumps back on the bench, stares off despondently. Life walks to the bench, slowly drops down. She sits up straight, staring down at her hands folded in her lap. No more flicking.

The lights begin to fade very slowly. The cacophony of sound, however, does not. It continues well past the point of complete darkness on stage, then slowly fades out.

CURTAIN

Scene 4

Curtain up. Lights up.

The stage is an even more congested mess of overgrowth. The park bench is completely surrounded now, with reeds and vines crawling over and through it, palm leaves falling over the back, one across Death's shoulder.

The sound pollution of life happening is again loud, almost oppressive.

Life and Death have not moved. They sit as they were at the end of the last scene: he despondent and slumped at one end of the bench, she sitting straight, her hands folded in her lap.

They sit this way for several beats.

A loud lion roar nearby startles Life. She looks back into the tangle of overgrowth, then slowly turns her gaze to Death, who hasn't moved a muscle.

DEATH

You might at least have cut back on things like that.

LIFE

(somewhat defensively)

They're magnificent beasts.

DEATH

Uh-huh. I suspect you'd say much the same about the Ebola virus.

LIFE

Well, actually, its architecture is--

DEATH

Oh, please.

Death stands, begins to move downstage, but trips on a vine, almost falls.

DEATH

For the love of Sol!

Death stands with head bowed, hands on hips, shaking his head. Life sits quietly a moment, chagrined. She then peruses the unkempt mess around her.

LIFE

This is ridiculous.

Death rolls his eyes, nods his head.

DEATH

The light bulb flickers on again.

Life looks around another moment or two, then looks up at Death.

LIFE

Waiting you out's not going to work,
is it?

DEATH

What do you think?

Life considers Death another moment, then looks down at her hands, still folded in her lap.

LIFE

All right. All right. Maybe we can
try a few things...

Death looks to her.

DEATH

Excuse me?

LIFE

I said, maybe we can try--

DEATH

You're serious?

LIFE

I'm terrified, if you want to know
the truth. God knows what you'll--

DEATH

You're saying you'll swap jobs?

LIFE

No, I'm not saying that. I've told you...ending life isn't my cup of tea, but...what I *am* saying is that I'll coach you...let you try a few things, and then...

Death sits close to her on the bench.

DEATH

What's the catch?

LIFE

And then you clean things up.

Death stands, shaking his head.

DEATH

No. No. That's not what I--

LIFE

(*undeterred*)

You return things to their proper balance, and--

DEATH

No! That's not--

LIFE

That's as far as I'll go, Dee. No further. If that's not good enough for you, then I'm sorry. You might as well just vaporize it all. Me along with it.

Life sits back on the bench, crosses her arms. Death considers her a moment, then turns away in frustration, screams at the sky.

DEATH

AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!!!!

Death stands motionless, again with head bowed, hands on hips.

DEATH

Okay.

LIFE

Okay what? You'll come back?

DEATH

I'll consider it. But first...

Death looks around, pushing up his sleeves.

DEATH
(enthusiastically)
 Where do you think I should start?

LIFE
 Wherever. Just think of something beautiful, give a little push, and see what happens.

Death stands, moves stage left of the bench. He rubs his hands together in a gleeful way.

DEATH
 Okay. I guess I'll try something right here. Right here good?

LIFE
 Just a second.

Life stands, moves far stage right.

LIFE
 Okay.

Death looks at her disappointedly.

DEATH
(as dry as dust)
 Thanks for the vote of confidence.

He turns back and looks at the ground in front of him.

DEATH
 Okay. Ready?

LIFE
(almost to herself)
 Oh, geeze...

Death raises his arms, then almost throws them at the ground. In that same instant, the lights go immediately to black and all sound ceases.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, Scene 1

LIGHTS UP. *The same park, still pretty much a congested mess.*

But there are a few new things added:

A spindly, skinny tree stands downstage, midway between center stage and stage left. On it's one scraggly branch hangs an ENORMOUS apple, so heavy it bends the tree over.

Downstage right is a large tree trunk, topped with a couple of spindly limbs with two or three hot pink leaves on them. Protruding through the trunk at a dozen points -- part of the actual bark -- are bird's heads. An occasional chirp comes from one or two of them.

And near the stage left end of the park bench sits a large exercise-ball-sized ball of fur -- no head, no tail, no paws -- just a big ball of fur with a couple of floppy ears. Occasionally, it barks.

Life and Death stand side by side at the other end of the bench, backs to the audience, blocking whatever sits on the bench in front of them.

LIFE

This is what I was saying about DNA.
It's a little squirrely sometimes.

DEATH

I see that.

LIFE

Especially when you get into the
more sophisticated organisms.

DEATH

It's really hard to get it to give
you what you want, isn't it?

LIFE

I've always thought working with DNA
is kind of like trying to mold
something out of mercury.

DEATH

Uh-huh.

LIFE

Where were you going with this?

DEATH

Well, follow my thinking here...

Death turns and paces stage right a bit, which forces Life to turn and step back a pace to look at him. This reveals what is sitting on the bench:

It's a single naked creature, HE/SHE, humanoid. If one were to draw a line down the center, head to toe, the right side would be male, and the left side, female. The male side has shortish, dark hair, a three-day growth of beard, and a moderately hairy chest and torso, well-chiseled. The female side has pageboy blonde hair, smooth fair skin, pouty lips, and one well-formed, moderately-sized breast.

DEATH

You know how there's always so much tension between men and women, right?

LIFE

Ye-e-e-e-s-s-s...

DEATH

And a lot of that is because they just don't really understand what it's like to be one or the other, to really be *in the other's skin*, so to speak.

LIFE

Go on...

While this conversation evolves, the Creature's eyes ping-pong between Life and Death, a look of wide-eyed innocence, apprehension, and confusion all in one.

DEATH

So I thought, why don't I just put them together? Make them one. They'd have an innate understanding of one another. It could eliminate an awful lot of problems, don't you think?

Beat.

LIFE

The reproductive act should be interesting.

Death looks at He/She, then to Life, then back to the Creature.

DEATH

Didn't consider that.

LIFE

Mm-hmm. Bit of an oversight, there.
*(Walks to the tree
 with the birds in
 the trunk)*

I kind of like your songbirds in a tree.

DEATH

Just a matter of syntax.

LIFE

Maybe so. But that's all part of it, Dee. There's specificity in the chaos. There's room for nuance, of course, but nuance is itself an exacting science.

Life sits next to He/She, who turns to her with a childlike smile. Life smiles back.

LIFE

And believe it or not, there's some self-control involved.

DEATH

This from you.

LIFE

Hear me out. Anything that lives is a wonderful thing, isn't it? A one-of-a-kind that has value simply because it exists. But that's not to say there aren't the occasional mishaps -- random mutations that find their way into the soup, so to speak. Doesn't make them any less special, but if you have the choice...

DEATH

Your point?

LIFE

One needs to consider that just because you *can* make something, doesn't necessarily mean that you *should* make it.

Life discreetly dips her head toward He/She.

DEATH

Bad idea, huh?

LIFE

Could rank up there with some of the things I tinkered with as a younger girl, before I knew what I was doing.

DEATH

Like what?

LIFE

The minotaur, maybe. Mermaids. Satyrs. The Hydra. Unicorns. There were a number of them.

DEATH

I thought those were all myths.

LIFE

That was spin. I mean, would you have advertised any of them as your best work?

Death wanders over to the Balldog, scratches and pets it. It whimpers with pleasure. HeShe smiles, gets up and wanders over. Death takes its hand, shows it how to rub the dog, which it begins to do vigorously and with joy through the following:

DEATH

(referring to his creations)

So all of this...?

LIFE

(cautiously)

I like it. I mean, they're all a bit...impractical...but what's important is that you've expressed yourself.

DEATH

Impractical, huh?

LIFE

(looking at the huge apple)

Well, it would be kind of hard to carry that around in your pocket for an afternoon snack.

DEATH

I was thinking about ways to end hunger.

LIFE
 Admirable. Glad you didn't start
 with beef.

A withered smile from Death.

By this time HeShe and the Balldog are having a grand time, jumping, romping, playing like a kid and a puppy. At one point the Balldog rolls SR with HeShe wrapped around it.

LIFE
 (*looking at HeShe*)
 I love the young. Such innocent
 energy.

HeShe and Balldog circle each other in play. Then Balldog rolls offstage. HeShe follows eagerly.

LIFE
 (*nods toward HeShe*)
 Probably shouldn't let them run free,
 you know. Might upset a few people.

Death shrugs.

DEATH
 People need to cultivate a little
 more tolerance. Let 'em have a little
 fun.

LIFE
 And then what?

Death sits on the bench, chin in hands, obviously despondent.

DEATH
 I don't know.
 (*beat, sigh*)
 Don't know anything anymore.

Life sits beside him.

LIFE
 Don't take it so hard, Dee. I told
 you it wasn't easy. We've had
 millennia to hone our skills. I
 certainly can't do what you do
 anywhere near as well.

DEATH
 Did. Remember?

Life rises.

LIFE

Yes, well...we need to talk about that.

DEATH

Nothing to talk about.

LIFE

We had an agreement. You play around a bit, then you clean things up.

(no response)

Dee...something needs to be done about this.

DEATH

You can do it if you want.

LIFE

That's not going to happen and you know it.

DEATH

You haven't even tried.

LIFE

And I'm not going to. That's not what I'm good at, just like your gifts aren't...well...

(indicates his creations)

DEATH

Look...I may not be the best at creating things, but I sure as hell know I don't want to be *ending* them anymore.

Life considers for a moment.

LIFE

Maybe you're looking at this the wrong way.

DEATH

Looking at what?

LIFE

What you do.

DEATH

How else am I supposed to look at it? One moment something's alive, the next moment I show up and it's not.

LIFE

You're being too literal again.
 What if....what if the opposite of
 "being" isn't "not being" but "being
 something else"? What if you thought
 of it that way?

DEATH

(a weary sigh)

We going to get all metaphysical
 now?

LIFE

You yourself said that all you did
 was "reclaim the raw materials" for
 me to do something new with, right?

DEATH

If you say so.

LIFE

I do. Now, think about that. You're
 not really *ending* something, you're
 an integral part of the process of
transforming it. Without what you
 do, nothing new gets made. You see?

DEATH

Doesn't matter what I see. What
 matters to me is what THEY see. And
 when they see me, it's the worst--

*At this moment, an extremely old and decrepit Elvin suddenly
 stumbles through the underbrush nearby, falling to his knees,
 moaning and coughing and moaning some more. He's in really
 bad shape.*

LIFE

Oh, the poor dear!

*Elvin crawls a few feet, then tries to stand. It's an
 agonizing process.*

LIFE

Look at this! Look what your
 selfishness has led to!

DEATH

Me?!

*Life moves toward Elvin, stops. A bright flash of light
 surrounds her as she manifests. She moves quickly to Elvin.*

LIFE

You all right?

Elvin is barely aware of her. He looks up at her voice, but his eyes are obviously not seeing her -- or anything else for that matter.

ELVIN

Eh? What...? Who is it?

LIFE

It's LaVida, Elvin.

ELVIN

LaVida?

LIFE

Let me help you up.

She tries, but it's awkward and difficult. Life looks at Death.

LIFE

Dee!...Give me a hand!

Death's head drops back wearily.

LIFE

Dee!

DEATH

Yes! Yes, yes, yes....

The intense bright light flashes around Death as he moves to them. He helps Life get Elvin to the bench, where he sits unsteadily.

LIFE

There you go. You all right now?

ELVIN

Yes, thank you. Not as spry as I used to be.

LIFE

Well, rest here a minute, catch your breath.

Elvin takes out his handkerchief, mops his brow. Life sits next to him.

LIFE

We've met before, I think. You remember me?

Elvin squints up at Life, adjusts his glasses.

ELVIN
Vaguely...You one of my wives?

DEATH
Wives? How many have you had?

ELVIN
Can't recall exactly. Twelve, fifteen
maybe. Got fifty-some-odd children.
Two hundred thirty grandkids, last
count. No idea how many greats and
great-greats and all that.

Death turns and throws a withering glance at Life.

DEATH
(to Life)
You really need to get some help.

Life shoves her hands into her cardigan pockets.

LIFE
We're not talking about me right
now.

She throws her chin at Elvin.

LIFE
(to Death)
How long are you going to let this
go on? You'd think you could show a
little mercy.

DEATH
Mercy!?! Why do you think I quit in
the first place? Biggest act of
mercy in history, you ask me.
(beat)
Nobody cares anyway.

LIFE
(indicating Elvin)
HE does!
(spinning, arms spread)
ALL of this does!

Life steps to him.

LIFE
I do.
(touches his arm
tenderly)
Dee, please!

DEATH

How many times do I have to tell
you...No!

*Death sits on the bench near Elvin, his head in his hands.
After a moment, Elvin leans into him.*

ELVIN

Little fracas with the Missus, is
it?

DEATH

(looking up at him)
Excuse me?

ELVIN

Used to have 'em all the time myself--

DEATH

No, it's not--

ELVIN

--til I learned the Secret.

DEATH

The Secret?

ELVIN

Capital "S" Secret.

DEATH

Which is...?

ELVIN

Whatever she wanted, I wanted.
Simple, eh?

DEATH

(dryly)
A bit, yes.

ELVIN

Took some time to learn, I tell ya.
Burned through a few marriages before
it clicked in.

DEATH

You've had the time, looks like.

ELVIN

Bit too much, you ask me.

DEATH

How so?

ELVIN

Well, last I looked, I was north'a a hunnerd and eighty somethin'. Feels too much like forever.

DEATH

Thought everyone wants to live forever.

ELVIN

Not sure this is what anyone'd call "living".

DEATH

Still better than the alternative, isn't it?

LIFE

(to Death)

Is it? Quantity and quality are not always complimentary, you know.

DEATH

Again the light bulb...

LIFE

(to Death)

Stop it.

(to Elvin)

What if I told you you didn't have to go on like this?

DEATH

El...

LIFE

What if I told you that all it would take would be to simply ask for your eternal rest?

DEATH

El! Don't!

ELVIN

(to Life)

How's that? Ask who?

LIFE

If you could meet Death--ask him to take you...end all this? What if you could do that?

ELVIN

Funny, that.

(MORE)

ELVIN (CONT'D)

Someone said much the same thing to me years ago, right here in this very park, I believe. Had me shake hands with some fella like he was Death. Some game they were playin'. Made me a little skeevy, that did.

LIFE

What if it wasn't a game?

Death jumps up.

DEATH

Don't you dare do this!

Life is undeterred.

LIFE

What if he were here? What would you ask of Death?

ELVIN

What would I ask *him*?

LIFE

Yes.

ELVIN

Well, now...not sure...

(mops his brow again)

I mean, life is sweet, isn't it? Any way it comes. You never want to think about lettin' it all go, now do ya? So much to it. I mean, the thought of not seeing the fire of another sunset. Not tasting chocolate ice cream again, or dark Cuban coffee, or a beautiful woman's lips, or feelin' her fingers caress the back of my neck. Having someone make me laugh 'til I cry, or a piece of music move me to tears. And smells -- Lordy, apple pie just out of the oven...the air after a rain...cinnamon. God, I love cinnamon. So many things I'd miss.

DEATH

(to Elvin)

Then why give it up?

(to Life)

Why are we even talking about this?

LIFE

Because it's time to end this
nonsense.

ELVIN

More'n time, you ask me. I don't
mind tellin' you folks...I'm pretty
tired. And lettin' go of all this --
as sweet as it may be -- might be
the only cure I can see for how tired
of life I am.

(beat)

So if he were here...Death... yeah,
that's probably what I'd tell him.
That it's time.

(beat...looks right
at Death)

So...I'm ready if you are, son.

Death is taken aback by this.

DEATH

Excuse me?

ELVIN

I said I'm ready. Let's go.

DEATH

You know--?

ELVIN

Who you are? Oh, yes.

DEATH

How...?

ELVIN

Not sure. Could sense it, that's
all.

DEATH

(to Life)

Told you.

(to Elvin)

You know who I am and you're not...?

ELVIN

Afraid? Nah. Maybe at one time,
when I was a younger man, you know,
but not any more.

Life moves to the bench, sits next to Elvin, takes his hand.

ELVIN

Been too long here. Need to go. So, please, do whatever it is you do. I won't make a fuss.

Death rises, distraught, caught off guard.

DEATH

I'm sorry.

ELVIN

You want me to beg? I'd drop to my knees if I could.

DEATH

I...I don't...It's not...

ELVIN

Not what?

DEATH

What I want to do anymore, that's all.

LIFE

He's having a mid-life crisis. This is his version of the little red sports car.

DEATH

(to Life)

It's nothing of the sort! For the love of....Why is it so hard to understand? I want what I do to have some value! Not just turning substance to void!

Beat.

ELVIN

Had me one of them little sporty cars once.

DEATH

What...?

ELVIN

Pretty much the same reason: wasn't happy with where I was, so tried to paint happy on myself with things like that. Don't work.

DEATH

This is not about--

ELVIN

Sure it is. It's all about knowin' who you are, isn't it? Acceptin' it?

(pats the bench)

Set with me a minute, son.

Death doesn't move. Elvin pats the bench again.

ELVIN

Come on. Set.

Death reluctantly moves to the bench and sits.

ELVIN

Kinda funny you thinkin' we don't need you. Need you a lot. Now, *understand* you...maybe not. That's a different cup a' tea. S'why we run when you come. But need you? Oh, yeah. 'Specially now.

DEATH

What's different about now?

ELVIN

Nothin's movin'! The train's stopped.

(beat)

See, the way I've come to look at it,

(he pats his chest)

this -- me, Elvin -- is just a suit of clothes I put on this morning. If I ever get to move on, I figure I'll just be puttin' on a different suit tomorrow, know what I mean? And to be honest with you, I'm more'n a little curious as to what I'll be wearin' tomorrow mornin'. I'm pretty sure I'll like it just fine.

Elvin reaches over and touches Death's knee.

ELVIN

But I can't do it without you, son. None of us can. Without you, there is no her.

(throws a thumb at Life)

What you can do for me is as important as what she did for me...and will do again...

(smiles at Life)

...if she's willin'. But only if you help me now.

No one says anything for a moment. Death rises, walks SR.

DEATH

I'm sorry...

Life moves to Death.

LIFE

Dee...

DEATH

Why don't any of you understand?

LIFE

Why don't you?

Death slowly turns and crosses to the spindly tree stage right of the bench. He fiddles with a leaf on the tree. Life follows.

LIFE

Did you not hear him just now?

DEATH

I heard an old man mumbling about clothes.

LIFE

Oh, come on! He as much as told you he respects you, needs you, needs what you can do for him.

DEATH

What? Provide him with a new Hugo Boss off the rack?

Life touches Death's arm.

LIFE

Dee...listen to me.

DEATH

No, El...I can't listen any--

LIFE

Please. It's important.

Life takes Death's hand, holds it tenderly.

LIFE

One thing I've always known about you -- the one constant -- is a compassion for life that runs so pure and rich within you, finely

(MORE)

LIFE (CONT'D)

tuned. It's magnificent. But it's a color you never show because...I don't know...maybe you think revealing it will give them hope for a last minute reprieve. Which you can't give, of course, and which you know would only make the passing more difficult for *them*. So you've buried that part of you, hidden it deep. But it's that compassion that's brought you to this point, Dee. That compassion born out of a love for every single thing living. A love as great as mine. I see that now. *And oh, how I love you for it!*
(takes both his hands in hers)

Dee, it was *me* that took you for granted. Not them. It's *me* that was blind to the gift you provide. To them and to me. The gift that Elvin needs from you now. I can't give it to him, sweetheart. I can't give it to any of them. Only you can. So find it in your heart to forgive me. Please. Forgive yourself. Come back to us. We need you.

Life and Death look at each other long and hard. Death finally closes his eyes, wraps his arms around Life, buries his face in her neck. They remain entwined for several beats, before Death disengages. He holds her arms, gazes at her.

DEATH

One condition.

LIFE

What...condition?

DEATH

We do this one together.

Life gazes back at Death, then slowly, almost imperceptibly, she nods.

They walk back to the bench, where Elvin sits quietly. They sit, flanking him.

ELVIN

Time, is it?

LIFE

Yes, dear.

Life puts her near arm around Elvin's shoulders. He looks at her.

ELVIN

(to Life)

Oh, thank God. Thank you.

(to Death)

And thank you too.

Death wraps his near arm around Elvin as well, smiles at him.

DEATH

(to Life)

First time I ever heard that.

Life smiles at Death.

DEATH

(to Elvin)

You ready?

Elvin smiles, nods.

ELVIN

Kinda giddy, actually. Is it gonna hurt?

DEATH

Nah. Nothing to it. Just let it wash over you.

Life and Death hug Elvin tighter. He closes his eyes and smiles.

The intense bright light of de-manifestation surrounds them all, then all lights fade to black.

Scene 6

The park. It's back as it was in the beginning...trim, uncluttered, nature at its most beautiful.

Life is sitting on the bench, once again knitting. She hums absentmindedly. She stops a moment, flicks a wrist, baby birds begin chirping. She sighs contentedly.

Death enters from SR. He's again in black, but now it's a nice suit, black open-collared shirt. He carries a Starbucks cup and a book.

LIFE

Well, there you are! Right on time.

(MORE)

LIFE (CONT'D)

(he sits)

Beautiful morning, isn't it?

DEATH

It is. Just right.

(offers her cup)

Coffee?

LIFE

Does it have cream and sugar?

DEATH

Black.

LIFE

Of course. Silly me. I'll pass, thanks.

DEATH

Suit yourself.

LIFE

(notices the book)

What are you reading?

DEATH

Vonnegut.

LIFE

Like his writing, do you?

DEATH

I like his perspective. A little dark, a little twisted.

LIFE

(momentarily concerned)

Dee...you're not getting all...

(makes a 'crazy' gesture)

...again, are you?

DEATH

No! I'm fine! Never better! Now if I were reading Sartre or deSade, maybe...

LIFE

You're making fun...

DEATH

A little.

(MORE)

DEATH (CONT'D)
*(indicates the
 surroundings)*
 Things are looking nice.

LIFE
 They are, aren't they?

Beat. Life reaches out, touches Death's arm.

LIFE
(heartfelt)
 Thank you.

DEATH
 For what?

LIFE
(indicates surroundings)
 You know...

DEATH
(shrugs)
 Sure. A little rusty at first, and
 it took awhile. I still think you
 ought to lighten it up a bit...

LIFE
 Well, maybe. We'll see. Things
 keep pollinating, you know. I just
 try to keep up with them.

*Back to her knitting. After a beat, Death rises, wanders a
 few paces...*

DEATH
 Speaking of that...I...uh...I was
 wondering if you ever...you
 know...gave any thought to that guy...

LIFE
 What guy, dear?

DEATH
 You know...the old guy we met here a
 while back...

LIFE
 Elvin--?

DEATH
 Elvin! Yes. Elvin. You ever help
 him out with that new suit of clothes
 he was talking about?

LIFE

No. No, I haven't. Why do you ask?

DEATH

No particular reason. It's just...

(sits back down)

He really helped us out back there, you know? I was thinking it might have been nice to return the favor.

LIFE

Did you now?

DEATH

Well, you know...he did sort of save the world.

Life drops her knitting, turns to Death.

LIFE

To be honest with you, darling, I was waiting for you. You've been so busy and all lately. But now you're here, so...

DEATH

So...?

Life smiles at Death.

LIFE

So let's give Elvin another ride, shall we?

DEATH

We?

LIFE

Yes. You and me. Together.

DEATH

What about that "division of labor" thing you were harping on about...?

LIFE

Why don't we just see what happens, shall we? Here, give me your hand.

He does.

LIFE

Okay, now, ready, sweetie?

Death nods.

LIFE
Together, now. One, two...

Life smiles at Death, then with a flourish...

LIFE
Three!

...she flicks her wrist.

Blackout. The last sound heard is a newborn crying his first breath.

CURTAIN

THE END