

Death and the Psychiatrist

Even Death Could Use a Friend

A Comedy in One Act by James Hutchison

Death and the Psychiatrist © Copyright 2015, James Hutchison

The author asserts moral rights.

CAUTION: Death and the Psychiatrist is fully protected under the copyright laws of Canada and all other countries of The Copyright Union, and is subject to royalty. Changes to the script are expressly forbidden without the prior written permission of the author. Rights to produce, film, or record, in whole or in part, in any medium or any language, by any group, amateur or professional, are retained by the author who has the right to grant or refuse permission at the time of a request.

Production Enquiries

To secure performance rights please contact the author, James Hutchison, at:

e-mail: contact@jameshutchison.ca

Web: www.jameshutchison.ca

Please Note: Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play including radio, television and internet advertising.

Acknowledgements

Death and the Psychiatrist was workshopped at the Suncor Energy Stage One Festival of New Plays at Lunchbox Theatre Calgary in 2011 with the following creative team:

Dr. Donald Thompson	Joe Norman Shaw
Mortimer Graves	Terry Gunvordahl
Randy	Joe Perry
Dramaturge & Director	Anton DeGroot
Artistic Director	Pamela Halstead

Death and the Psychiatrist – Even Death Could Use a Friend
A Comedy in One Act by James Hutchison

ISBN 978-0-9940128-0-7

Also available from www.jameshutchison.ca

What the Dickens!

Even Scrooge Got a Second Chance

Two Act Comedy, 6M 3F, Multiple Sets, 100 minutes

Marty Fisher has doubts and fears about getting married and staying in Pine Ridge with his fiancée Tami Cooper and so he's been focusing on directing the Pine Tree Players Production of *A Christmas Carol* instead of helping his fiancée plan their wedding. On opening night when his Uncle, who's playing Scrooge, turns up drunk, half the cast gets food poisoning, and Marty gets caught kissing his stage manager Samantha both the production and Marty's relationship with Tami are on thin ice. As the curtain rises and the show lurches forward Marty will do all he can to save his show while trying to salvage his relationship with Tami.

A Christmas Carol

Every Man Has the Power to do Good.

Two Act Drama, 26M 12F, 11Boys 7Girls, 56 Characters, Multiple Sets, 100 minutes
Actors may certainly play more than one character and the genders of some characters may certainly be switched to suit casting requirements.

In this fresh, fun and lively adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* you'll meet Mr. Bentley, learn about the letters Scrooge wrote to his sister Fan, and find out who Mr. Newbury is. You'll still find all the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future along with Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit, the Ghost of Jacob Marley, Old Fezziwig, Scrooge's nephew Fred, and the love of Scrooge's life, Belle. There are some new scary bits, a few good laughs, a tender moment or two, and some surprises! It's a fresh take on an old tale sure to thrill young and old alike.

500 bucks and a pack of smokes

How much is your life worth?

One Act Comedy, 2M 1F, 8 Characters, Three Sets, 50 minutes

After being told by his doctor that he's dying Donny Bracco put out a contract out on his own life. So, when his Doctor calls him on his birthday and tells him the lab made a mistake, Donny is more than a little upset. Making matters worse, the original killer Donny hired, subcontracted the hit to another killer – who subcontracted it to another killer – who subcontracted it to another killer – who doesn't know Donny is the one who put the hit out on himself. With time running out, Donny has to find the killer and convince him to call off the hit, otherwise this might be the last birthday he ever celebrates.

DEATH AND THE PSYCHIATRIST

CAST:

Dr. Donna Thompson: the psychologist
Randy Cooper: the patient
Mortimer Graves: the Grim Reaper

SETTING:

The office of Psychiatrist Dr. Donna Thompson

TIME:

Just before 4:00 pm the Friday before the Canadian Thanksgiving long weekend.*

STORY OF THE PLAY:

When Mortimer Graves shows up at Psychiatrist Dr. Donna Thompson's office claiming to be the Grim Reaper the good Doctor simply assumes that Mortimer is under the delusion that he is death. Although Mortimer says he is there to escort Dr. Thompson to the other side, Dr. Thompson convinces Mortimer that he should go into therapy in order to help him deal with his loneliness and emotional issues. With the Doctor's help Mortimer confronts his emotional issues and Doctor Thompson, with Mortimer's help, reevaluates her life priorities.

ALTERNATE U.S. VERSION:

In Canada Thanksgiving is the second Monday in October. In the United States Thanksgiving is the fourth Thursday in November. Alternate lines have been provided for an American version where needed.

**Just before 4:00 pm the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.*

For Sheri

DEATH AND THE PSYCHIATRIST

SCENE: PSYCHIATRIST DR. DONNA THOMPSON'S OFFICE

Setting: A desk and chair are on one side of the stage and a sofa and chair on the other. The door to the outer office exits stage left. A door to a washroom is upstage right. Family photos sit on the desk and a mantel clock sits on one of the bookshelves and chimes the hour.

At Rise: RANDY COOPER is sitting on the couch. DR. THOMPSON sits in the chair beside the couch.

RANDY

You really think I'm ready Doc?

DR. THOMPSON

Believe me Randy, you're ready. Look at how far you've come and how many fears you've already laid to rest.

RANDY

Was I really afraid of stuffed animals?

DR. THOMPSON

Yes, you were, but no longer.

RANDY

And I have overcome my fear of toasters.

DR. THOMPSON

As well as your fear of clowns and birthday cakes.

RANDY

And my fear of rubber chickens.

DR. THOMPSON

And your fear of vanilla.

RANDY

My fear of chocolate.

DR. THOMPSON

Your fear of failure.

RANDY

My fear of success. And hopefully my fear of Thanksgiving.

DR. THOMPSON

You have so much to be proud of.

RANDY

I know, you keep telling me that Doc, but I still wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat because I have this feeling that...that...Death is after me.

DR. THOMPSON

Randy, remember what Mark Twain said?

RANDY

“The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.”

DR. THOMPSON

That’s not the quote I was thinking of.

RANDY

“Buy land they’re not making it anymore.”

DR. THOMPSON

No. “The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully...”

DR. THOMPSON & RANDY

“...is prepared to die at any time.”

SFX: CLOCK CHIMES FOUR

DR. THOMPSON

And look at that, it’s four o’clock and we’re out of time.

RANDY

That’s how we’re ending this session! Be prepared to die; we’re out of time.

DR. THOMPSON

Whether we like it or not, death is simply a fact of life. I'm going to die. You're going to die. No one lives forever. Oh, dear God.

DR. THOMPSON winces and rubs her temples.

RANDY

Are you okay?

DR. THOMPSON

I've been fighting a migraine all day.

RANDY

You don't look well.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm fine.

RANDY

Should I call an ambulance?

DR. THOMPSON

I don't need an ambulance. Now listen, I want you to watch your thoughts. Thoughts are powerful. The wrong thought can trigger an intense emotional response.

RANDY

Yeah, yeah I know. Do you control your mind or does your mind control you. That's a lot easier said than done.

DR. THOMPSON

But that's the key. You can change how you feel by changing your thoughts. You've seen it work. If someone asks you to toast them a bagel you can do it. That wasn't always the case, if you recall the tragic English muffin incident and the resulting lawsuit.

RANDY

So I can toast a bagel or an English muffin, how does that help me deal with death? Death can strike at any moment. This moment. And this moment. And this moment. Or this moment. Or tomorrow, the moment I toast a bagel.

DR. THOMPSON

Randy, stop. Do you see how you let your thoughts run away with you and create those feelings of fear and anxiety? Do you control your mind or –

RANDY

– does your mind control you? I know. I know.

DR. THOMPSON

Remember Randy, we've traced your initial fear of death back to your childhood – and the death of your pet turkey – Oscar.

RANDY

I loved that turkey. I didn't have a lot of friends growing up on the farm. He was so smart. I taught him how to roll over and play fetch. It's just...

RANDY pauses.

DR. THOMPSON

It's okay. Don't keep your emotions locked away – let it out.

RANDY

It's just I didn't know that when my parents gave me Oscar and asked me to raise him, that one day, that come – Thanksgiving...that come Thanksgiving...I had three...three...helpings including a wing and a drumstick all covered in rich creamy gravy. After dinner, I ran out of the house to take Oscar for a walk, and when he wasn't there I ran back to my parents in a panic. And that's when they sat me down and told me the whole horrible and bloody truth. Well that's a hard thing for a six year old to deal with.

DR. THOMPSON

Of course losing a pet is a traumatic experience for a young child. Even more traumatic if you eat the pet for dinner.

RANDY

But to me he wasn't a turkey. He was my friend. Someone I loved. I know my parents didn't mean to traumatize me, but it didn't help that they laughed. They laughed so hard they had tears in their eyes. I had tears too. Plenty of tears. They found it comical; I found it painful. Of course, as soon as mom and dad realized that I was upset they tried to make me feel better. I just don't think mom understood how much I loved Oscar, or she would have never made me a turkey sub for lunch the next day.

DR. THOMPSON

You had a right to be upset.

RANDY

The next year they gave me a puppy to raise. I think that's when I became a vegetarian.

DR. THOMPSON

Many of your phobias, including your fear of death, are the result of you not expressing your emotions. Going to Thanksgiving and telling your family how much you loved Oscar and how hurt you were by his death will go a long way towards helping you heal. For your own good, you need to think of Thanksgiving as a holiday that celebrates family and togetherness, instead of one that represents the murder and eating of your childhood pet.

DR. THOMPSON rubs her head again and winces.

RANDY

Are you sure you're okay? It looks like you're in a lot of pain.

DR. THOMPSON

It's nothing a healthy dose of codeine won't cure.

DR. THOMPSON recovers.

RANDY

I hope you feel better Doc. Listen, on the off chance that things don't go as planned, do you think I could give you a call?

DR. THOMPSON

You can always reach me on my cell. Now before you leave I want to give you a copy of my new book, *Death – Make Him Your Friend*. I've inscribed a copy for you. Many of the techniques and exercises I mention in the book are things we've done as part of your therapy.

RANDY

Gee, thanks Doc. I appreciate it. This will be the first time I've had Thanksgiving dinner with my family in years thanks to you. Mom's making me Tofurkey. She says, they're having ham. I'm just glad I never had a pet pig. Happy Thanksgiving Doc.

DR. THOMPSON

Happy Thanksgiving Randy.

RANDY exits.

DR. THOMPSON crosses to her desk and makes a phone call.

DR. THOMPSON

Hello hon, how's your day going? Oh God, mine isn't even close to being over and my head is killing me. Listen, I'm going to be working late. Since when was I supposed to take Jess and Samantha to music lessons? When did you tell me you were going out? You know I don't like to work from home. Because, I never get any work done. Right. Right. Fine. Yes. Alright I'll be home by five. I just need to finish up this week's blog. I thought I'd title it, *How to Deal with an Unsupportive Spouse*. Oh, you don't think that's funny. What about Thanksgiving? We already talked about this I can't spend the Holiday at my parents. I said, "I'd try." I never promised. Well, you and the girls drive up on Sunday and have a good time and I'll see my mom and dad at Christmas.* If I could I would. Well I'm sorry you feel that way. Yes. No. I know that. Well you could try being a little more understanding! Fine – fine – whatever. Bye.

DR. THOMPSON slams the phone down and holds her head.

DR. THOMPSON

Dammit!

DR. THOMPSON sighs and heads to the washroom to get a pain killer.

MORTIMER GRAVES enters.

MORTIMER

Take a deep breath.

MORTIMER takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

MORTIMER

There now just be yourself. You've done this a billion times.

** Well, you and the girls drive up tomorrow and have a good time and I'll see my mom and dad at Christmas.*

MORTIMER crosses to the desk and takes one of the Death – Make Him Your Friend books. He turns to the back cover and reads.

MORTIMER

“The greatest challenge each of us faces is the acceptance of our own mortality. You cannot escape death. So why even try? Instead you can prepare for death.”

DR. THOMPSON, having heard MORTIMER, emerges from the washroom holding a bottle of prescription pain killers and a glass of water.

MORTIMER

“You can accept death. You can make death your friend. And by making death your friend you are free to live fully and happily in the moment.” *(Beat.)* Who would want to be my friend?

DR. THOMPSON

Excuse me, can I help you?

MORTIMER

Ah, Dr. Thompson. How lovely to meet you. I’m really looking forward to reading your book, *Death – Make Him Your Friend*.

DR. THOMPSON

Are you? Well that’s good, I can use all the sales I can get. I’m sorry, do we know each other?

MORTIMER

Well, let’s just say – I’m a friend.

DR. THOMPSON

I don’t see how we could be friends if we’ve only just met.

MORTIMER

Oh no, sorry for the misunderstanding. We have an appointment.

DR. THOMPSON

Really? I don’t have any other appointments booked for today. Are you here on a referral?

MORTIMER

Why would I need a referral?

DR. THOMPSON

I'd be happy to arrange for one of my colleagues to help you.

MORTIMER

Help me what?

DR. THOMPSON

You are looking for a therapist, I take it?

MORTIMER

Why on earth would I be looking for a therapist?

DR. THOMPSON

I am a psychiatrist. People come to see me when they have problems. Why else would you come to see me?

MORTIMER

You know I've never seriously considered therapy. Well, my schedule is relentless. It's difficult to find the time. Do you know how often I hear the expression, "I didn't have the time?" People are always telling me how much they had wanted to tell their mother or father or children or dentist something or other they never got around to telling them. "If only," they say.

DR. THOMPSON puts down the prescription and glass of water and checks her calendar.

DR. THOMPSON

Uh, yes. And speaking of time, mine is in high demand at the moment. So, if you want to see me let's book something for the middle of next week, if that works.

MORTIMER

I seem to recall you and Dr. Finkelstein published some early studies comparing how people's acceptance of death impacts their overall satisfaction with life.

DR. THOMPSON

You knew Doctor Finkelstein? Dr. Bernie Finkelstein.

MORTIMER

We met a few years ago. He mentioned you at the time. He thought of you as a daughter you know.

DR. THOMPSON

We were close. Bernie and I used to go hiking, he was always a bit of a nature nut. That's probably why he lived so long. I was less than half his age and I could barely keep up with him. He's been gone for almost five years now. My God. Did you know Bernie well?

MORTIMER

No, not well – a passing acquaintance.

DR. THOMPSON

I studied with Bernie while I was in University and we became friends and colleagues afterwards. God, I miss him. I'm sorry, just thinking about Bernie brought back some happy memories. Huh.

MORTIMER

Are you alright?

DR. THOMPSON

My headache's gone.

MORTIMER

Well, that's good isn't it?

DR. THOMPSON

It's a relief that's for sure.

MORTIMER

What about your own father, do you go hiking with him?

DR. THOMPSON

My dad? He not much of a hiker.

MORTIMER

No?

DR. THOMPSON

No, his focus has always been work and career.

MORTIMER

Has it?

DR. THOMPSON

He practically lived at the office when I was a kid. I'm sorry, I don't know what's gotten into me, you certainly don't need to hear about my life.

MORTIMER

Oh, that's quite alright. People tell me all kinds of things when they meet me. They just open up. I'm always surprised by how honest people are when they have nothing left to lose. Do you mind if I ask you a question?

DR. THOMPSON

Not at all.

MORTIMER

What sort of a person goes to a psychiatrist?

DR. THOMPSON

Usually people come to see me because they're unhappy about some aspect of their life.

MORTIMER

Someone unhappy with their job perhaps?

DR. THOMPSON

Finding fulfilling work is an important cornerstone of mental health.

MORTIMER

Do you ever help people cope with emotional issues or feelings.

DR. THOMPSON

All the time. I often help people cope with their emotions or with their fears and phobias including their fear of death and their own mortality. That's the focus of my new book. The one you were reading when I came in. Are you unhappy with some aspect of your life?

MORTIMER

Work. I would welcome the opportunity to talk to someone about my work.

DR. THOMPSON

So, you've been experiencing work stress.

MORTIMER

Oh, you've no idea. That's something we have in common I guess.

DR. THOMPSON

Alright, let's make an appointment. How does next Wednesday work for you, Mr?

MORTIMER

Mortimer Graves. But, I'm afraid we'd have to start now and more than likely limit our therapy to one session. How does that sound?

DR. THOMPSON

Mr. Graves therapy involves more than a single session. It can take weeks, months, and sometimes years depending on the issues we need to deal with.

MORTIMER

Years. Really? Just how good a therapist are you?

DR. THOMPSON

If you want references I'd be happy to supply them.

MORTIMER

The sad part is you've worked so long and hard on your new book.

DR. THOMPSON

I've put a lot of late nights into this. My Dad always says, "Never turn down an opportunity, because you never know if you'll get another one."

MORTIMER

Trying to make your daddy proud are you?

DR. THOMPSON

What I'm trying to do is set up an appointment for you, but so far all you've done is keep me from getting my work done.

MORTIMER

Is that your best bedside manner?

DR. THOMPSON

Uh no, I'm sorry, that was unprofessional of me. If we could just go ahead and book something – I'll see you next week. I just have a lot on my plate right now.

MORTIMER

Like your book launch.

DR. THOMPSON

Exactly.

MORTIMER

It's such a shame you're going to miss it.

DR. THOMPSON

Miss it? What are you talking about?

MORTIMER

Well, you see Dr. Thompson, I'm not like any other patient you've treated.

DR. THOMPSON

No?

MORTIMER

No. I am the phobia.

DR. THOMPSON

You are the phobia.

MORTIMER

Yes. I am the thing people fear most. Well, next to public speaking. Apparently, people would rather die than speak in public.

DR. THOMPSON

You are the thing people fear most.

MORTIMER

Next to public speaking, yes.

Beat

MORTIMER

I'm death.

DR. THOMPSON

Death?

MORTIMER

Yes.

Beat.

MORTIMER

Surprised?

DR. THOMPSON

Not really. In my practice I've had two Napoleons, four Hemingways, and a Da Vinci or two, but you are my first death. I just didn't expect death to come walking through my door the day before the Thanksgiving long weekend.*

MORTIMER

I often show up when I'm not expected, and on those occasions I'm usually not welcome. You know people can say the meanest things. Things that until recently never really bothered me, but I've discovered that words can sting. And a lot of people actually hate me. Despise me. Well, I think it's rather shallow to judge an entire person based merely on his occupation.

DR. THOMPSON

You know Mortimer, I think you might need to see someone before next Wednesday. Maybe it would be better if you were to see a colleague of mine.

MORTIMER

What, giving up on me so soon?

** I just didn't expect death to come walking through my door the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.*

DR. THOMPSON

It's not a question of giving up. It's a question of time. You need help and it's my professional obligation to make sure you get help.

MORTIMER

Oh, what's the point. People are never going to like me. You know, even sweet little grandmothers, who wouldn't so much as utter a profane word in life, spew a torrent of insults once they're dead that would make Russell Brand blush. So few people are prepared for death that they are quite surprised when it happens.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm not surprised. My research shows that most people believe they'll live to be one hundred or beyond when the truth is more than half of them won't make it past seventy-five.

MORTIMER

Exactly, look at you. You're not even close to seventy-five and a very long way from one hundred. You should have kept a better eye on your cholesterol. You know heart disease is the number one killer of women. Would it have hurt you to eat a bowl of Cheerios in the morning once in a while instead of bacon?

DR. THOMPSON

What's the matter, you don't like bacon?

MORTIMER

You don't believe me. You think I'm a nutcase or a looney. Well, I'm not.

DR. THOMPSON

How long have you believed that you're death?

MORTIMER

I am death.

DR. THOMPSON

Okay, let's say you are death. What do you want with me?

MORTIMER

"Do not ask for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee." I'm sorry, but I'm here for you.

DR. THOMPSON

Well, Mr. Graves –

MORTIMER

Call me Mortimer.

DR. THOMPSON

Well Mortimer, I hope you can understand my concern when a complete stranger shows up in my office claiming to be death and also indicating that he has come for me. How do you think that makes me feel?

MORTIMER

Cheated. People, especially your age, usually feel cheated, but you can't cheat death. Look Donna, maybe this was a bad idea.

DR. THOMPSON

Why do you say that?

MORTIMER

Well, what's the point of talking about something I can't change. People don't like me. Nobody ever wants to spend time with me. How would you feel if you didn't have a friend in the world? It makes for a lonely life and a solitary existence – believe you me.

DR. THOMPSON

Is that the real reason you've come to see me? You haven't been able to establish and maintain significant relationships in your life.

MORTIMER

What about your relationships? What sort of shape are they in?

DR. THOMPSON

My relationships are fine thank you.

MORTIMER

Lucky you. I have no one who cares about me. So, I bury myself in my work, but now I can't even do that.

DR. THOMPSON

Why not?

MORTIMER

I'm just not sure if being death is right for me anymore.

DR. THOMPSON

So, you're telling me death is thinking of a career change.

MORTIMER

Oh, if only that were possible.

DR. THOMPSON

Why do you say it's impossible?

MORTIMER

Can you imagine a world without death? A world where everyone lives forever? Just think how long the lines would be at Tim Hortons.*

DR. THOMPSON

You paint a frightening picture, Mortimer.

MORTIMER

I just wish we had more time. Or, that you had more time.

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, I've already told you I don't like you talking that way. It feels threatening.

MORTIMER

Oh, I'm sorry. You have nothing to fear from me. Usually, I just appear, introduce myself, do a quick PowerPoint presentation, and then I'm onto the next one.

DR. THOMPSON

Alright Mortimer, can I ask you, just so I understand – how do you manage to see everyone? I mean there must be several deaths occurring around the globe at the same time.

MORTIMER

Yes, that's a tricky one.

DR. THOMPSON

No ready answer then?

** Just think how long the lines would be at Starbucks.*

MORTIMER

Time is part of the mortal world. There is no such thing as time after you die. Where we are, time ceases to exist. That's immortality.

DR. THOMPSON

And you're immortal?

MORTIMER

I am.

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, as much as you'd like me to believe that you are death, I don't believe it. You've said you've never been able to establish long term relationships in your life. So, I think you've created this fantasy where you are death and suppressed your emotions. That way you can easily explain the lack of significant relationships as well as put up a barrier around you so you can't be hurt. I suspect that sometime in your past you've been hurt, and that incident has transformed itself into this delusion.

MORTIMER

Why is it so hard for you to believe that I am the Grim Reaper?

DR. THOMPSON

Does the Grim Reaper have parents perhaps?

MORTIMER

Ah, mom and dad. Well my mother and father aren't exactly what you might think. My mother is life and my father is time. When the two come together the inevitable result is death. What about you? Tell me about your parents.

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, therapy isn't supposed to be about me. It's about you. My relationship with my parents is not open for discussion.

MORTIMER

Dear oh dear, sounds like a touchy subject. I understand if you don't want to talk about it.

DR. THOMPSON

It's not a touchy subject. I have a very good relationship with my parents.

MORTIMER

Really? Sounded like I hit a nerve.

DR. THOMPSON

My relationship with my mother and father couldn't be better. Life is all about keeping family and work in balance. Sometimes that's not easy. God knows, my Dad had to make sacrifices.

MORTIMER

Sounded like he wasn't around much when you were young.

DR. THOMPSON

He put food on the table and a roof over our head.

MORTIMER

But is that enough? Is that all there is to life: food and shelter? What about art and literature and spending time with your family.

DR. THOMPSON

I spend time with my family, but right now my priority is my book and my work and that means making sacrifices.

MORTIMER

How does your husband feel about all this?

DR. THOMPSON

Walter? Walter could be a little more...

MORTIMER

...supportive?

DR. THOMPSON

Exactly. Do you know he wants me have Thanksgiving dinner with the family – uh my parents to be precise.

MORTIMER

Imagine that. How unreasonable. Wanting you to have Thanksgiving dinner with the family.

DR. THOMPSON

There will be other Thanksgivings. Do you have any idea how long I've worked on this book: ten years.

MORTIMER

Ten years. Really? You'd think it'd be thicker.

DR. THOMPSON

It's just frustrating that Walter's not giving me the time I need to focus on my book launch.

MORTIMER

You do sound frustrated. When was the last time you saw your parents?

DR. THOMPSON

How is that relevant?

MORTIMER

Well, it must be nice to have family to spend the holidays with. Do mom and dad live in town?

DR. THOMPSON

Look Mortimer, we're here to talk about you – not me.

MORTIMER

Okay, let's say for the moment, I'm the patient.

DR. THOMPSON

You are the patient.

MORTIMER

Am I? Oh yes, quite right. I've never been a patient before. So, if I was the patient – which I am – and I had conflicting work and family commitments and I had already chosen work several times over family what would your advice be? What do you think your friend Dr. Finkelstein would say?

DR. THOMPSON

Bernie would tell me to stop working so much, but I can't right now.

MORTIMER

Dear oh dear, it doesn't sound like the good doctor is following her own advice.

DR. THOMPSON

Don't get me wrong, of course I want to spend Thanksgiving with my parents and my kids, but if I want this book to have any chance for success I have to promote it. And there's a very short window before the book moves from the front of the store to the discount rack at the back. Do you know what my publisher's parting words were?

MORTIMER

I'm death not a fortune teller.

DR. THOMPSON

"We hope you enjoy promoting your book as much as we enjoyed publishing it." Can you believe that? I mean, I know a lot of publishing houses are strapped for cash but what's the point of publishing a book if you're not going to promote it? The only piece of advice she gave me was, "Try and get on Oprah's book club." So, now I'm the one organizing and paying for my own book tour because I believe in this book and what it has to say.

MORTIMER

But at what cost? The key to enjoying life is accepting your own mortality and making every moment count. I read that on the back cover of a book you wrote. *Death – Make Him Your Friend*. Of course now you could retitle it, *Death – Make Mortimer Graves Your Friend*. Oh, I do hope we're becoming friends. Do you want to Facebook me?

DR. THOMPSON

You're on Facebook?

MORTIMER

Isn't everyone?

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, there is supposed to be a professional relationship between us. We've completely gotten off track here.

MORTIMER

But your own book says that you should make me your friend. Can't we be friends?

DR. THOMPSON

No, not if I'm going to be your therapist and you want treatment.

MORTIMER

So, I have to choose between treatment and friendship. Why can't I have both?

DR. THOMPSON

Sometimes we can't have everything we want.

MORTIMER

But, I'd like to be your friend. This has been such a welcome change from my usual conversations with people. Welcome to the afterlife. We hope you enjoy your visit. And the questions they're always the same. Am I really dead? Yes, you're really dead. Is this a joke? No, this isn't a joke. Do I get wings? Of course you do, barbecue, honey mustard, and lemon pepper.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm curious Mortimer, are there others like you?

MORTIMER

No. I'm one of a kind. You know Donna, it amazes me how important you mortals consider it to be unique and yet – how unique are you? Physically there is variation, but the basic building blocks are pretty much the same.

DR. THOMPSON

It's hard to believe that Danny DeVito and Brad Pitt come from the same building blocks.

MORTIMER

You mortals don't understand what it means to be unique. To have no others like you. It is, as I mentioned earlier, a solitary existence.

DR. THOMPSON

Are you lonely?

MORTIMER

I feel needed but unloved.

DR. THOMPSON

I can relate to that. I have two teenage daughters.

MORTIMER

It must be wonderful to be a parent. To bring life into the world instead of – you know – the problem is I've begun to experience emotions you see. At first, these emotions were something new and wonderful. I learned to laugh. I actually developed a sense of humour. There were great feelings of happiness and joy.

DR. THOMPSON

That's good. That's healthy.

MORTIMER

But there's a dark side to emotions that I didn't anticipate.

DR. THOMPSON

You can't have white without black or laughter without tears. Life is a spectrum of experience.

MORTIMER

But I don't like feeling bad.

DR. THOMPSON

Nobody does.

MORTIMER

At first, I simply tried to ignore these bad feelings. But these negative emotions have been growing more intense and I find it more and more difficult to bury them.

DR. THOMPSON

Suppression is a common coping mechanism. When we feel bad about something we often suppress how we feel and ignore those feelings hoping they'll go away. You simply have to acknowledge your feelings and then accept them without letting them control you. How we think is often a source of what we feel. To put it simply: Do you control your mind, or does your mind control you?

MORTIMER

Oh, hogwash. Is that the sort of brilliant advice you give your patients? It's not that simple.

DR. THOMPSON

But it is. The Buddha said, "What we think we become."

MORTIMER

I've met the Buddha.

DR. THOMPSON

Have you?

MORTIMER

Oh, yes. He's more complicated than you think and quite adept at Pinochle.

DR. THOMPSON

Is he?

MORTIMER

Yes.

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, do you recall what first sparked these emotions in you?

MORTIMER

Music.

DR. THOMPSON

Music?

MORTIMER

Yes, I had a quick pick up at a concert hall in Vienna. It was an unfortunate bit of business involving a tuba and a practical joke gone horribly wrong. Anyway, I arrived a bit early and they were playing Eine kleine Nachtmusik by Mozart. It was the most beautiful and pure sound I had ever heard. It was heaven on earth and it stirred something deep within me. It reached my soul.

DR. THOMPSON

So death has a soul?

MORTIMER

Why wouldn't death have a soul?

DR. THOMPSON

Is it only classical music that you like?

MORTIMER

Oh no. I love all kinds of music – folk music, instrumental, pop, disco.

DR. THOMPSON

I prefer Jazz.

MORTIMER

Jazz, country, rock and lately I've been listening to the blues – a lot of blues. Music has helped to fill the growing loneliness. I never go anywhere without my iPod. I was so happy when they finally put the Beatles on iTunes.

DR. THOMPSON

So, you first noticed these feelings when you were in Vienna at a concert hall listening to an orchestra play Mozart.

MORTIMER

Oh no, I was listening to Mozart – play Mozart.

DR. THOMPSON

Of course you were. Alright then Mortimer, how do you feel about being death? How do you feel about being the one and only Grim Reaper?

MORTIMER

How do I feel? No one's ever asked me that before. How do I feel about being death?

DR. THOMPSON

Come on Mortimer, you want to talk about your feelings – let's do it. Tell me what it's like to be death.

MORTIMER

For the most part I really enjoyed being death. I loved my job. I found it very rewarding helping people and providing guidance.

DR. THOMPSON

But you don't feel that way now?

MORTIMER

No, I don't. I began to feel uneasy about my job – and now I can't help feeling bad about what I do and the more we talk about it the more I realize just how much I need help to understand what's going on.

DR. THOMPSON

Why do you think you never had feelings before?

MORTIMER

I always thought emotions were part of the mortal world.

DR. THOMPSON

But you've begun to experience emotions.

MORTIMER

Yes.

DR. THOMPSON

Could you be mortal?

MORTIMER

Could I be mortal? Are all things mortal – even death. I wonder? Could I actually cease to exist?

DR. THOMPSON

Does that idea frighten you? Could you be afraid of dying?

MORTIMER

Afraid of dying. That's ridiculous. Oh my God, how could I be afraid of myself?

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, maybe your fear of death has made you hide behind the delusion that you are death.

MORTIMER

I am not delusional. I am death. Why won't you believe?

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, it's not a terrible thing to be mortal. In fact, immortality is a more difficult concept for me to comprehend. I treat people all the time that are afraid of death and desire immortality – and yet – these same people get bored just waiting for their computer to boot up or standing in line at the grocery store.

MORTIMER

I meet the same people. They're always so huffy and impatient. You know the ones who roll their eyes and give the big sigh.

MORTIMER illustrates.

MORTIMER

Those people deserve to die.

DR. THOMPSON

Alright, then enlighten me. What is immortality like? What do people do with all that time?

MORTIMER

Twister is very popular.

DR. THOMPSON

People spend immortality playing twister.

MORTIMER

Well, there is no time after death. You can only become bored if you exist in time. Without the passage of time there can be no boredom. It's an enlightened state of being – like meditation.

DR. THOMPSON

Is that what the Buddha told you?

MORTIMER

He did as a matter of fact. You know that's one of the things I really like about my job. I get to meet so many interesting people, but I never get to spend much time with any of them. I met the so called father of your profession – psychology.

DR. THOMPSON

Freud?

MORTIMER

He was a real piece of work let me tell you. His own mother said he was very difficult to potty train.

DR. THOMPSON

Have you seen any other therapists?

MORTIMER

As a patient – no. But I do eventually see everyone. Including therapists. I have an appointment to see Dr. Phil in three months.

DR. THOMPSON

Well, death is the great equalizer.

MORTIMER

Precisely, just as you pointed out in your book, no one escapes death. Not the rich or the poor, the celebrated or the obscure. I treat everyone I meet exactly the same regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or religion.

DR. THOMPSON

You need help Mortimer, and you need it now. You need to deal with your feelings and your delusion.

MORTIMER

I'm not delusional. My feelings are the problem. I've been an emotional wreck since last Friday.

DR. THOMPSON

What happened, Friday?

MORTIMER

Well, it was a particularly heart-breaking encounter. I had a pick up at a retirement party in Moose Jaw. Steve Gardner. He volunteered for the humane society and always played Santa at the Children's Christmas Party. Such a sweet man. He was head canner at the Saskatoon Berries Jams and Jellies company for the last forty-five years. He worked right up until his 65th birthday and then took his retirement. He had a good pension too the lucky sod. Anyway, his wife and him had been making their retirement plans for the last few years. Their first adventure was going to be a trip to Europe. A long overdue second honeymoon with a romantic stopover in Paris. And then, right in the middle of his retirement party – a brain aneurism. Poof, gone just like that. Keeled over into the buffet. Not very dignified, I'm afraid. It probably would have been easier on everyone if he'd been sitting at the table instead of going for the last chocolate-fudge brownie and ending up on the dessert tray.

DR. THOMPSON

And then what happened?

MORTIMER

Well, his wife was crying, his boss was crying, his friends and co-workers were crying and then suddenly – I found myself crying. And I never cry. Never have. Not once.

DR. THOMPSON

You've never shed a tear?

MORTIMER

Never. And believe you me, there have been far sadder stories than this one. Like that busload of seniors in Mexico last year. But for some reason, I found myself in tears. I kept thinking, what if that was me? What if that was me in the dessert tray? Oh, poor Steve. I felt terrible and I had this overwhelming feeling of – I don't know – guilt I guess. I think it's guilt.

DR. THOMPSON

You felt guilty?

MORTIMER

Guilty. Yes, I felt guilty. I had never felt guilt before. Oh, it's a terrible emotion and so intense that it has led me to feel utter despair. Steve's death was unfair. And although, I've always heard those words, "death is unfair", it has never meant anything before. It was just a fact. Of course, death is unfair. Your next breath could be your last.

DR. THOMPSON

How did Steve Gardner take the news?

MORTIMER

He was concise. Summed up his feelings in just two words. Then he left. Didn't even take his afterlife discount card.

DR. THOMPSON

And how did that encounter make you feel?

MORTIMER

Even guiltier, can you believe it! You mortals are always putting off things assuming that you'll be able to enjoy your retirement or success later in life. A word of warning, Donna, sometimes later doesn't happen.

DR. THOMPSON

But, why do you feel guilty? You didn't cause his brain aneurism.

MORTIMER

No, but I do have the power.

DR. THOMPSON

The power?

MORTIMER

The power to lengthen life. But, if I start to act on emotions who knows what I might start doing. How would I decide who gets another week? A day? A few years? I'm not God. No, it's better that I let nature take its course and not interfere. But I can't even do that now. It hurts too much. I feel horrible like it's all my fault. That's why I've been avoiding my job. I can't go through that again. Poor Steve. If only he'd taken an early retirement.

PAUSE

DR. THOMPSON

Mortimer, it's not your fault. You didn't cause Steve Gardner to die.

MORTIMER

As good as pulled the trigger don't you think?

DR. THOMPSON

Not at all. I want you to consider this. I don't think it's guilt you're feeling.

MORTIMER

No?

DR. THOMPSON

No. I actually think you're feeling – compassion.

MORTIMER

Compassion.

DR. THOMPSON

Yes.

MORTIMER

Can death be compassionate?

DR. THOMPSON

Yes, it can. It's not guilt that made you cry. You have done nothing wrong. Compassion gives you the ability to understand what other people are feeling. Remember you said, "What if that was me in the dessert tray?" Compassion is what makes us human. It's a gift. You have nothing to feel guilty about.

MORTIMER

It isn't guilt. It's compassion. It's compassion! You're right, this is a gift. Oh, Donna, thank you. Thank you so much. This has been very helpful. You've provided a real insight. Oh my word, what a relief. It isn't guilt. It's compassion.

DR. THOMPSON

The Buddha would be very proud.

MORTIMER

Oh, but there's still so much more I need help to understand. I suppose I could – you know. I mean well – like I said it isn't often done but it could be done. Oh, and I can just see the red tape – the e-mails – the text messages – the conference calls. Is it worth it?

DR. THOMPSON

Is what worth it?

MORTIMER

Letting you live.

DR. THOMPSON

Now Mortimer, I've already told you that sort of talk makes me feel uncomfortable. Your choice of words is disturbing.

MORTIMER

How could what I say be interpreted as disturbing? Suppose, for just a moment, that you are actually dead.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm not dead.

MORTIMER

But just for arguments sake, let's say that you had actually died. That you are already dead. That you'll never see the important people in your life again: your husband, your daughters, your father and mother, not even your family doctor. If you were to die at this moment anything left undone will always be so. Would your affairs be in order? Have you, as your book suggests, prepared for death? Would you be able to go into the next life free of regret? Would you have lived your life fully and honestly having told those you love exactly how you feel?

DR. THOMPSON

I've always been able to tell my family how I feel.

MORTIMER

But have you told them lately? Remember now, think carefully over the last week – month – year – are you happy with the amount of time you have devoted to your family?

DR. THOMPSON

Honestly (*pause*) no.

MORTIMER

So, if you were given the opportunity to live for another day – maybe another week – with the knowledge that you only had that one week left to live – what would you do?

DR. THOMPSON

You know the funny thing is everyone, including myself, talks about the importance of having a balance between our work life and our family life, but when you add up the hours we spend working compared to the hours we spend with the people we love there's a real imbalance there. My life hasn't been in balance for a long time.

MORTIMER

Well, do something about that? You're a therapist.

DR. THOMPSON

That's true. I'm always helping other people figure out how to live their lives – how to live in the moment, but I keep putting off the moments in my own life. Do you know I missed Jessica's thirteenth birthday this year. You know why? I was running a retreat called, "Putting Family First." When I think about it, I've missed too many school concerts, family picnics, days at the beach, and movie nights over the last couple of years.

MORTIMER

You and your father must be very much alike. When was the last time you saw your parents?

DR. THOMPSON

Christmas. Last Christmas. It's been almost a year since I've seen them. Can you believe that?

MORTIMER

So, do something about it?

DR. THOMPSON

The problem is I love what I do. I love helping people. But you're right I've been so focused on my work and my book I haven't been looking after the important things in my life. If I were to die today, I would die with regrets.

MORTIMER

If only?

DR. THOMPSON

Exactly, if only I'd made the time. Do I want to leave my husband and daughters with the memory of a wife and mother who was too busy to make time for them, or do I want to leave them with the memory of a wife and mother who was there when they needed me. That's a pretty easy question for me to answer. If I had another week to live, I would make time for my family – tell my father how I felt – spend Thanksgiving with my parents – go to my daughters' recital – and tell my husband – I love him.

MORTIMER opens his arms in a benevolent gesture.

MORTIMER

Granted.

DR. THOMPSON

Sorry?

MORTIMER

Granted. You have another week.

DR. THOMPSON

You're very clever Mortimer. Granting me another week of life will delay you having to give up the delusion that you are death.

MORTIMER

Donna, whether you believe that I am actually death or not, doesn't change the fact, that in your own words, you have been choosing work over family. You don't want to end up like Steve Gardner. I think we both know you need to change your priorities.

DR. THOMPSON

Well, since I'm going to be around for another week, shall we schedule an hour for next Wednesday? Same time? Four o'clock?

MORTIMER

I'll add it to my calendar. Is there anything I should do before our next session?

DR. THOMPSON

Yes, I want you to read my book, *Death – Make Him Your Friend*.

MORTIMER

Oh, how exciting. Would you sign it for me?

DR. THOMPSON signs the book.

DR. THOMPSON

I'd be happy to. Now, next week – like it or not – we'll start working on your delusion.

MORTIMER

After all we've been through today, you still don't believe me.

DR. THOMPSON

There's no proof, Mortimer, that you're actually death. Truth is, I'd be alive now whether you were here or not.

DR. THOMPSON reacts to her headache.

MORTIMER

You don't look well Donna.

DR. THOMPSON

I've been having these headaches – that's all. I thought it had gone away.

MORTIMER

Donna, one word of friendly advice – you might want to go see a specialist – these migraines you've been experiencing are a symptom of something more serious.

DR. THOMPSON

Are they? I didn't realize you were a physician. Here you go.

DR. THOMPSON hands MORTIMER the book.

MORTIMER

Reading the inscription

"To Mortimer – more than my patient – my friend." Oh, Donna, you don't know how much this means to me. Thank you.

DR. THOMPSON

You're a one of a kind Mortimer – that's for sure.

MORTIMER

Maybe we all are. Anyway, I'm off to Hollywood.

DR. THOMPSON

Hollywood?

MORTIMER

Yes, you'll read all about it tomorrow. Should be quite the scandal. Happy Thanksgiving Donna.

DR. THOMPSON

Happy Thanksgiving Mortimer.

MORTIMER exits.

DR. THOMPSON crosses to her desk and makes a call.

DR. THOMPSON

Hi. Listen Walter I'm sorry, I know I said I'd be home by five but I'm running late. What do you mean you just got off the phone with me? It's got to be almost five. That's

impossible. No way. I've been at the office with a patient for almost an hour since I called you. You're right. My watch does say 4:10. (*He looks at the clock on the bookshelf it says 4:10 as well.*) You sure you just got off the phone with me a minute ago? Uh, hold on.

RANDY enters. DR. THOMPSON lowers the phone.

RANDY

Doc, sorry to interrupt, but I need you to validate my parking.

DR. THOMPSON

You want your parking validated?

RANDY

Why is that a problem?

DR. THOMPSON

No, not at all. Have you been waiting out there for an hour?

RANDY

No. I just left a minute ago.

DR. THOMPSON

You did?

RANDY

Yes.

DR. THOMPSON

Did you see...

RANDY

See what?

DR. THOMPSON

Hold on.

DR. THOMPSON raises the phone back up to her ear.

DR. THOMPSON

Listen Walter, I'm so sorry I was being so difficult and thoughtless earlier. You know you and the girls are the most important thing in the world to me. I know we need to make some changes. I agree and I think we should start today. Why don't you give mom and dad a call and tell them we'll be there for Thanksgiving. All of us. Yeah, I'm coming too. No problem, we'll drive up Sunday and spend the night.* I'm fine. I'll tell you all about it when I get home. Yes. I love you. Bye.

DR. THOMPSON hangs up the phone.

RANDY

So you're spending Thanksgiving with your mom and dad too. I hope you're not having turkey.

DR. THOMPSON

Randy, I want you to promise me you're going to sit down and talk seriously with your parents about your relationship.

RANDY

I'm sure gonna try but there's always next year – right? Just in case.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm serious Randy. Don't leave things unsaid. You never know.

RANDY

Know what?

DR. THOMPSON

Whether or not death could be waiting for you – right outside that door.

RANDY

Is this one of your therapies?

DR. THOMPSON

Maybe more of a wake-up call.

** No problem, we'll drive up tomorrow and spend the night.*

RANDY

Is he really waiting for us on the other side of that door?

DR. THOMPSON

In a manner of speaking he's waiting for all of us. That's why you need to make him your friend.

RANDY

Okay, I'll try Doc.

DR. THOMPSON

I'm glad to hear you say that.

DR. THOMPSON picks up her briefcase.

RANDY

So, do I have to face death alone or do you think we could walk out together?

DR. THOMPSON

I think we can face this together. It's time I went home, anyway. Everything else can wait. Let's go.

RANDY

How about you go first Doc. Just in case.

DR. THOMPSON

Alright Randy, I'll lead the way.

END PLAY