

What Matters

By Sue Schleifer with Emily Duryee

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List of Characters

<u>Grim Reaper:</u>	A hypochondriac, bleeding-heart soul with a feminine vibe, late 20s. Seen and heard only by the audience
<u>Marie:</u>	A white woman in her mid-60s married to Peter
<u>Peter:</u>	A man in his early 60s married to Marie
<u>Beth:</u>	A woman in her mid-50s
<u>Angela:</u>	A Black woman in her early 30s. Also Party Guest 4 and Book-Reading Attendee 1
<u>Jacob:</u>	Marie's nephew in his mid-30s of mixed race (Black/white). Also Paramedic 2, Party Guest 3, and Book-Reading Attendee 3
<u>Dr. Pierce:</u>	A family doctor in his late 50s. Also Paramedic 1, Party Guest 1, and Book-Reading Attendee 2

(Party Guest 2 and 5 may be played by stage hands.)

Scene and Time

The play takes place in 2019, set primarily in Marie and Peter's eclectically furnished home filled with books, art, and music.

“Death is not waiting for us at the end of a long road. Death is always with us, in the marrow of every passing moment. She is the secret teacher hiding in plain sight. She helps us to discover what matters most.”

Frank Ostaseski, *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*

Scene 1

SETTING: Bedroom in Marie and Peter's home at night.

BEFORE RISE: Marie and Peter sit in bed reading. Books and magazines are stacked on their nightstands.

AT RISE: Marie reads Gawande's book, *Being Mortal*. Peter reads Harjo's *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

Grim Reaper, carrying a sickle, walks across the stage and picks up a piece of paper with a red number and picture of Marie. Reaper reaches into the pocket of her robe and pulls out a paper bag. She hyperventilates into aforementioned paper bag and then composes herself. She crawls up through the Earth trapdoor right outside of Marie and Peter's bedroom and stands and addresses the audience.

GRIM REAPER

Calm down. It's not like I have to take Marie's soul. Er, yet. It's just...the higher-ups at DEATH CORP don't take too kindly to humans sniffing around the subject of death. Marie, writing a book about death, puts up a red flag. Stealing DEATH CORP's thunder, that's a huge no-no.

(Puff-puffs into bag)

But remember, this is only a recon mission, so easy peasy.

MARIE

What if we had a choice?

PETER

What do you mean? We do have choices.

MARIE

What if we had a choice about how we die?

PETER

Oh, not again. Can you stop with the death stuff?

MARIE

No listen. If you could choose how you die, what would you want?

PETER

Do I have to? What's on your mind now?

MARIE

I've been thinking about mom and dad. I'd like to die more like my dad, in my sleep, but I wouldn't want to live so long.

PETER

I don't think you can just make up your mind about that. Sure, you can eat healthy and exercise but ultimately, what happens, happens.

MARIE

That sucks. I used to think my demise would be from a car accident. But now I'm afraid I might not actually die in the accident, just suffer the consequences. You know, broken limb or neck or lots of pain.

PETER

Do you actually spend time thinking about this?

MARIE

I guess I do. What do you think about?

PETER

Right now, I want to read my book. How about that?

MARIE

Okay. But can we come back to this later?

PETER

(Gives her the look)

Yes, my sweet.

(They go back to reading.)

GRIM REAPER

Sorry to butt in, peeps, you seem like nice folks. So I'll let you in on some DEATH CORP trade secrets, as long as you keep your traps shut. I'm just gonna rip the band aid off: your lot don't get to choose your afterlife realms, not consciously anyways. Everything you buy, the books you read, the TV shows and movies you watch gets tracked. Mind blown? It gets worse, every single phone convo., text message or social media post you make is compiled by the AFTERLIFE DATA COLLECTORS. So if I were you, the next time you're on the ole' internet; I'd be awfully careful when you do your type-y, type-y. Once your number is up on Earth, you'll be collected by one of us fine Grim Reaper Professionals. Your soul will be escorted to one of our many afterlife realms. Now, do the AFTERLIFE DATA COLLECTORS try to respect your religious, cultural, political, and all your many other beliefs when choosing your afterlife realm? Yes, they absolutely do. Do they sometimes get it wrong? Yes, they absolutely do.

(REAPER places a finger in front of her face and shhhhhh)

PETER

Would you like me to read you a poem?

MARIE

Oh yes! Preparing for retirement are you?

PETER

What do you mean?

MARIE

Reading a book of poetry. You said that one day you'd like to write poetry.

PETER

I don't know. Well, maybe. I think you'll like this poem. It fits with your current theme. It's from Joy Harjo's *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. Nice title.

*I heard a raven cry the blues one winter, in Anchorage,
outside the Indian hospital. There was thick snow on
the ground. Bushes with red berries lined the walk to
the entrance. On a light post hunched a raven. He was
mourning his human who was dying inside, who would
be gone by sundown.*

What will I do without you?

*How will I find you again in the woven story of dark
and light?*

MARIE

Wow. What will I do without you?

(Continues reading. A bit later PETER looks at MARIE
and can tell she still wants to talk)

PETER

What is it?

MARIE

I want us to think about, even put down on paper what we want near the end of life.

PETER

We've done that. It was a long time ago, but we filled it out, what's it called? Advanced health directive?

MARIE

Advance (not advanced). Though, now that you mention it, what I want us to do could be considered advanced.

PETER

I know you like to be on the cutting edge. But even at the end of life?

MARIE

Yes, definitely. We'll be charting new territory, exploring the outer perimeters of time and space. We'll be considered so evolved in our thinking about death that people will travel far and wide to learn about our ideas. We'll come up with a system. A database. I know how you love your databases.

PETER

Come on.

MARIE

But seriously, I do want to talk about this. If you're in the hospital, how far do you want them to go with medical treatment? Not just whether to put you on life support, but a more nuanced discussion. I want you to know what I want too.

PETER

Ugh. Why am I not looking forward to this? Do we have to do it now, tonight? It might give me bad dreams.

MARIE

Why? This is part of the cycle, you know: life, old age, sickness, death. Okay. We can do it later. But let's not put it off.

PETER

What's the urgency? You're not going to die on me any time soon are you?

MARIE

No, not tonight darling. I have a headache.

(She gives him a kiss and they turn out their lights)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: Dining room in Marie and Peter's home.

AT RISE: Marie and Peter are sitting at their dining room table eating lunch.

PETER

So about last night. What led to that discussion? Is there something you're not telling me?

MARIE

What? No. It's research for my book. Right now, I'm rereading Gawande's, *Being Mortal*.

PETER

That guy is so prolific. How does he even do everything he does?

MARIE

Do I detect some jealousy? Some comparing going on? You're right though. He does seem unusually productive. But he writes about important topics. Topics *we* need to discuss.

PETER

I remember reading his *New Yorker* article several years back and was surprised he didn't seem to know much about hospice.

MARIE

Well he does now. His father got sick, and eventually died. So he got a lot of personal experience with end of life decisions.

PETER

You are really caught up on this topic.

MARIE

Well, I don't want an endless array of tests, drugs, operations, stuck in the hospital to keep trying one invasive procedure after another. That's not what I want.

PETER

There are plenty of examples of people getting good care. People doing chemo and their cancer going away for years. I don't think you can dismiss medicine entirely.

MARIE

I'm not saying that. I just don't want to die in a hospital hooked up to tubes. I want a peaceful death. I try my hardest to live a peaceful life, I don't want my death to be an assault.

PETER

Well, I don't want that either. For you or for me.

MARIE

I'm glad to hear that.

(Doorbell rings)

That must be BETH. We're going for a walk. Let's continue this conversation later.

PETER

I can't wait.

MARIE

(MARIE goes to the door and greets BETH)

Beth, hi, come in. Well, aren't you bright and shiny!

BETH

Do you like me new hat? Hi Peter. How are you? Are you ready for retirement?

PETER

Is one ever ready for retirement? I'm a bit leery actually. How are you doing?

BETH

I'm okay. I thought you'd be excited to stop working, since you have so many interests. Now you'll have time to pursue them.

PETER

I suppose. I'm glad you came when you did. This gives me a good excuse to get out of the house and hit some golf balls.

(Goes to the closet to get his clubs and hat)

BETH

Oh, okay, have fun. Golf is not something I've ever tried. What about you Marie, do you think we should take that up?

MARIE

No, that doesn't interest me. But I have heard lately about pickleball. Maybe we should give that a try?

BETH

I'm game.

PETER

Bye you two.

(Heads out the door carrying his golf bag)

BETH

He seemed rather eager to leave.

MARIE

I think our conversation scared him. I tell you. Some people are just afraid to talk about death.

BETH

Well that wasn't what I thought you were going to say. Ohhh, death.

GRIM REAPER

Ohhhh, death ... death ... death, what a cruel mistress, am I right, ladies and gents? Back in my human days, I came up with a death scenario for every single occasion. I focused so much on death that I forgot to get on with the business of living. I worried about complete strangers dying. I cared about democracy, the environment, and humanity and shit. Do you know where all that fear led me? To high blood pressure and um, let's not get too bogged down in the details of my untimely death. But after I croaked, and I can say this with absolute certainty, the AFTERLIFE DATA COLLECTORS got it dead-ass wrong. I was sent to Reaperville. Reaperville, is home to DEATH CORP one of the tallest skyscrapers of any realm. Each office resembles a dingy room (think of DMV), fill it with uncomfortable steel chairs and supposedly soothing pan-flute versions of pop songs. Here, at DEATH CORP they relish throwing a once anxious sap like me off her game. "Only with extreme change can you develop your highest soul-taking potential." When you first arrive, you attend the prestigious REAPER ACADEMY, located in the basement, where you're taught by the best and brightest soul-takers in the business. Through a series of Reaping Infomercials, you learn to be productive and achieve daily death tallies — our top priorities. So if any of you folks, sitting out in the audience were like me: empathetic, prone to panic attacks, fearful of death or change, well damn skippy, you'll be the first bleeding hearts through that trapdoor to REAPER ACADEMY. So get that stress handled, fools.

MARIE

I'm sorry to bring this up. I know you know what I'm talking about. Are you ready to go for a walk?

BETH

Yes. Let's get out of here.

(They head outside. A projection of a park or forest surrounds MARIE and BETH as they talk and walk around the stage and perhaps into the audience. REAPER puts on a hat and scarf and follows, using her sickle as a walking stick.)

BETH

Marie, next week it will have been ten years since Charlie died. It seems like so long ago, and also like yesterday.

MARIE

Wow, it's been ten years? (Pause) I've been trying to get Peter to sit down with me to work on our living wills and other documents. He's so resistant.

BETH

Charlie and I made living wills, but they were so basic. I would do it differently today.

MARIE

Have you?

BETH

What do you mean?

MARIE

Have you updated your living will?

BETH

Oh my god, Marie. I haven't touched that in years. I guess I should do that.

MARIE

I've added a page to the basic form. I wrote about what a quality life might look like for me, when I'm old or near the end of life. All the reading I've been doing has me thinking about this stuff, a lot. It may be overkill, but I decided to get my thoughts down on paper. I haven't shown it to Peter yet.

BETH

Marie, let's have a party! Let's get a small group together to write or update our living wills and talk about this stuff. But let's make it fun. Maybe we can do it to honor Charlie.

MARIE

Oh, Beth, that's a great idea.

BETH

What should we serve? Love potions or poison pills?

MARIE

Oysters with pearls or with pellets?

BETH

Should we dress up as skeletons or surgeons?

MARIE

Sugar Babies or Sugar Daddies?

BETH

What? Are you talking about what I think you are?

MARIE

You just may need to hire a Sugar Baby when you're old and want someone to go to the movies or dinner with. No really, you might.

BETH

That's going too far. Would you do that?

MARIE

Maybe? We shall see.

(They continue walking)

What I think about is what if Peter dies first. Who will take care of me if I need to be taken care of? And worse, what if I have Alzheimer's?

BETH

I know. That's so scary to think about. Did you feel it was a burden? A burden to take care of your mom?

MARIE

Phew. That's a big question. In the beginning, Peter and I just did it. We were in the right place at the right time. Then it started to wear on us. I remember Mom's doctor returning my call on a Saturday morning. We were still in bed, and the doctor sensed that. He told me to get up and go outside. It was a beautiful day. That was kind of a wakeup call, literally.

BETH

I just don't want to be a burden to James. He has his own life to contend with without worrying about me. (Pause)

MARIE

Maybe he won't feel it's a burden. Maybe he'll want to be there for you, because you're his mom. You know, love.

BETH

So, did you feel that way?

MARIE

If I'm being honest, I suppose yes and no. It was hard. But, in retrospect, I learned a lot and I'm glad I was able to help care for Mom. A *mitzvah*. I feel like I could've done a better job. We were just doing what we thought was right, but now I wish I could have some do overs.

BETH

What do you mean?

MARIE

The main one was when mom was in the care facility, near the end of her life, and I was sitting next to her. We were in this area at the front of the house. It was so uninviting: the tile floor and six ugly recliners draped with handmade afghans with ridiculous color combinations. Had my mom been healthy, she would have hated that room. She wasn't talking much by then, but she lifted up her head and said to me, "I want to go home." That stabbed me directly in the heart.

And I had the nerve to say, “Mom, you are home.” She didn’t respond. Why did I say that? That tears me up to this day.

BETH

You did the best you could at the time. Don’t you think?

MARIE

It just didn’t feel good enough. And I still feel sad about that.

BETH

I guess that’s what I want to protect my son from. I don’t want him to have regrets or feel guilty.
(They walk, wrapped up in their own thoughts)

MARIE

Have you heard about the death with dignity movement?

BETH

Is that when you can take a pill to end your life? Isn’t that for terminally ill people?

MARIE

Yeah. It turns out it’s not so easy. It’s not like you can just go to the pharmacist and request a death pill. There’s all kinds of rules. Do you think you would want to take a pill if you knew you were terminally ill?

BETH

I guess it would depend on how sick I was; what my life was like at that point. With grandkids there are always milestones. Wanting to live for a graduation, birthdays, a wedding. What about you?

MARIE

I don’t have grandkids, so that part’s different. We’ve done graduation with Jacob, and I guess I’ve given up on him getting married. I don’t know. It’s a tough question. Apparently, the majority of people who get the prescription from their doctor don’t actually use it. And if you have Alzheimer’s, you can’t get the pills. It’s against the rules. (Pause) I saw this TED talk by a woman whose husband decided, when he was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer’s, that he didn’t want to live with the disease and put his family through that. He decided to stop eating and drinking when he still had the ability to make that decision. He actually did it, and she was by his side to watch.

BETH

Wow. That’s intense. That must have been so hard for his wife to do.

MARIE

I know. She gave the TED talk to let others know that it’s an option. As she told the story, tears streamed down her face. (Pause) If I get Alzheimer’s and my life is crap, will you give me an exit pill?

BETH

Are you kidding? I don't want to be responsible for your death. I could never live with myself. You are obsessed with this topic! You're starting to get me down.

GRIM REAPER

If I may interject.

(Hunches over breathing heavily)

At REAPER ACADEMY, I debated the pros of the death with dignity movement in my Death Ethics class. Say that five times fast. Can't do it, can you? Spoiler alert: it did not go well. First of all, I was matched against a fierce orator, this gal Gabby, who I have it on good authority, though I won't reveal my source, won First in State in debate at her all-girls Catholic high school four years running. That gal Gabby got ahold of that mike and let it rip oratorically-speaking. She didn't stumble over her words or say a single um, or like. And ummmm, I have a public speaking phobia or like whatever; it's been diagnosed and everything. Let's face it, I don't have the gift of gab like Gabby. But my thesis still holds true, death with dignity is sort of a gray area; who's to say what's right or wrong.

(She reaches inside a pocket in her robe, pulls out a bottled water, and gulps it down)

Phew, I'm parched.

MARIE

Shit. Let's go back to planning our party.

BETH

Marie, (Pause) I worry about death every single day. I worry about James jogging in his neighborhood. I worry about my grandkids playing in the street. Heaven forbid when they start to drive and then get stopped by a cop. You know, you and I don't talk about this much. In fact, we seem to avoid the topic. I know you worry about Jacob too.

MARIE

I do worry about Jacob. There's so much to worry about these days. (Pauses, as they walk together in silence.)

BETH

You know what I've been thinking about lately? What if Charlie had been white? Would he have gotten better medical care?

MARIE

Oh my god Beth. Do you think that's true?

BETH

If he were white, would they have done things differently? Maybe his cancer would've been diagnosed earlier, when there was still something they could've done.

MARIE

I can't believe I haven't I thought about that.

GRIM REAPER

I'm not saying I'm an expert on death or anything. There's as many reasons for death as there are people on this Earth.

(They run into ANGELA who is coming out of her house next door)

MARIE

Angela, hi, this is a pleasant surprise. You remember my friend Beth.

ANGELA

Hi, yes, good to see you both. MARIE, thank you so much for the lemon bars. They were so delicious, at least that's what Darrell said. I'm sorry I haven't thanked you before. But I do need to tell you that I'm desperately trying not to eat sugar. My mom has diabetes, and I'd prefer not to go down that same path. And really, Darrell doesn't need to be eating sweets either.

MARIE

Oh Angela, I'm so sorry. I didn't know.

ANGELA

Of course you didn't know. That's why I'm telling you now. I hope you understand.

MARIE

Yes, of course. I'm glad you told me. How are you liking the neighborhood and your house? We hardly ever see you and Darrell.

ANGELA

I know. We spend almost all our time at work. Poor Pepper, he isn't getting out on many walks these days. I feel bad about that. We like the neighborhood, though we mostly just stick to ourselves.

MARIE

Maybe you could hire a dog walker. Or, maybe I could take Pepper for walks. Hmm. What brings you home now, in the middle of the day?

ANGELA

Oh, well. Actually, I had a doctor's appointment, so I thought I'd stop by the house and take Pepper out for a short walk before going back to work.

MARIE

Is everything okay? Oh, is it okay if I ask you that?

ANGELA

Um, yes. I guess it's okay to tell you. I'm pregnant!

MARIE

Angela, congratulations!

BETH

Congratulations!

MARIE

How far along are you, if you don't mind my asking?

ANGELA

(Pause) I'm about 12 weeks. Can you believe it? We're still kind of in shock. We're excited too. We're kind of wondering how we're going to have time for a baby when we can't even seem to take the dog for a walk.

MARIE

Well, you have another six months to figure that out.

ANGELA

I suppose that'll be long enough. I better get back to work. So great to see you both. Bye.

BETH AND MARIE

Bye.

BETH

Wow. That's big news. I'll be going now too. I have to pick up the grandkids from school. Their mother texted me at the last minute, yet again.

MARIE

Oh, okay. Bye. Let's talk soon.

GRIM REAPER

All I can say, without getting written up again by Karen in HR, is life and death have to be in perfect balance. With every innocent baby born, a human soul must be taken. The BIRTHS to DEATHS balance is as delicate as the edge of this sickle.

(She runs her finger along the blade)

Ouch! Papercut.

(She sucks her thumb)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: Living room in Marie and Peter's home.

AT RISE: Peter listens to music, song "Famous," by Steve Conn plays. He reads and drinks an IPA.

(Marie enters, takes off her coat, and dances along with the song)

MARIE

Hi. So, do **you** want to be famous?

PETER

I think it's a little too late for that.

MARIE

But if you could, would you want to be?

PETER

How do you come up with these questions?

MARIE

The song. It seems like Steve Conn would like to be famous.

(Sings along with the song, "I'll be famous when I'm dead. I'll be famous when I'm dead.")

You know, I've always wanted to be on *Fresh Air*. I fantasize that Terry will interview me when my book comes out. That's if I ever finish it. Well, write it. And then it has to get published. And if I'm still alive at that point, go on a book tour. Except I don't think they even do book tours anymore for people like me and for a book about death.

PETER

I hope she doesn't ask you all those personal questions. It bugs me that she does so much poking into people's personal lives, rather than focusing on their book or film or whatever. It's sensationalizing, like reality TV.

MARIE

Isn't that what people want to hear? All the "juicy" bits about people's lives.

PETER

I guess that's what sells. But she's on *public* radio. I hope she doesn't dig into your personal life. I mean, you have sooo many secrets.

MARIE

I really doubt we need to be worrying about that. Getting back to my question, maybe it's not about being famous, maybe it's about how do you want to be remembered?

PETER

Are you thinking about, what was her name? Estar Lefton?

MARIE

How'd you know? That's funny that you remembered her name as "Estar". To be. Her first name was Esta.

PETER

I'm going to blame her for getting you into this whole death topic.

MARIE

Blame? Really? I'd call it inspiration. A vacation to London turned into something more. It's taken me on this tangent. I never would have imagined that I'd want to write a book because of that trip. I guess Esta had something else in mind for me. This woman I've never met, and I hardly know anything about, and yet she inspired me. She didn't die alone. Well, she did die alone, but she's given me the desire to do all this research.

PETER

You don't know that.

MARIE

I don't know what?

PETER

You don't know if she died alone.

MARIE

What? It sure seems like it. But is that really the point? Is that what you're going to focus on?

PETER

It seems like that's your premise.

MARIE

Really? (She thinks back and remembers) Andy, you haven't forgotten our dearest old friend, have you? We went out in the morning. He was going to point me in the direction for a walk in his neighborhood while he went to buy lunch. Outside we saw this elegant man who lived in his building, probably in his 70s. He was so nice and friendly. We talked, well actually, he did most of the talking, maybe 15 minutes out in the cold. He told us about a business he had manufacturing sports clothing for women. He recently got married, for the third time, and then it was his birthday, and he was really sick. He felt bad that his new bride had to take care of him. He shared a lot of stuff about his life in a short amount of time. I don't remember his name. Isn't that weird?

PETER

(He goes to the refrigerator, gets another IPA, opens it,
and comes back to the couch)

Where are you going with this?

MARIE

Well, then he said, “You know, Esta died.” Andy and I looked at each other because Andy had told me about her the night before. She was an older woman who never left her apartment. Sometimes he heard strange noises, cries coming from behind her door. He never met or actually even saw her. Then the dapper man said, “You should Google her. She was a really interesting woman.” And I can’t put her out of my mind. I did Google her. She was a poet and a nurse in World War II, among other things. I want to know more about her. I don’t want her life to be forgotten. (Pause) But really, if I’m honest, I think what it gets down to is I don’t want to be forgotten. I don’t want to be another Esta. I don’t want to die alone.

PETER

Marie, you aren’t going to die alone. I’ll be there.

MARIE

We don’t know that. You may die first. You said earlier that we can’t control how or when we die.

PETER

But I’m younger than you.

MARIE

And your parents didn’t live nearly as long as mine did.

PETER

Now you’re really going off on a tangent.

MARIE

No, I’m not. Well, maybe. But that’s just it. Life’s full of tangents. Andy’s neighbor went on and on and on about his life and then told us about Esta’s death. It was all so fascinating. We go on these tangents, and then we forget. We forget who we are. We forget what matters. I just can’t seem to let it go.

GRIM REAPER

I say this with no judgement, but Peter, old buddy my pal, drinking two expensive IPA’s in the course of one conversation on a soon to be retirement salary might be a little excessive. I wouldn’t mind doing a little imbibing of my own, to yah know, take the edge off the sickle. Do you think we have alcohol in Reaperville?

GRIM REAPER (CONTINUES)

Not a moonshine chance in hell. Not to complain, but DEATH CORP only lets us buy one brand of non-alcoholic beer.

(Pulls out a bottle of non-alcoholic beer from the pocket in her robe and holds it up.)

“REAPING BEER, same shitty flavor without the debauchery.”

(Takes a big gulp and wipes away the foam)

No buzz. Lucky me. I’ll bat it back to you, Peter darling, take it away.

PETER

(They are both silent for a moment)

Where are you going?

MARIE

I’m getting the book I was reading last night. There’s a passage I want to read to you.

(Goes to the bedroom, as she comes back into the living room holding the book, she almost trips over the area rug in the living room. PETER notices but doesn’t say anything.

MARIE flips through the pages of “Being Mortal” which she has marked with sticky notes, landing on page 128)

“Medicine’s focus is narrow. Medical professionals concentrate on repair of health, not sustenance of the soul. We have decided that they (he means doctors) should be the ones who largely define how we live in our waning days. For more than half a century now, we have treated the trials of sickness, aging, and mortality as medical concerns.”

PETER

But things are starting to change. More people, like Gawande, are writing about new ways to do medicine. Isn’t that true?

MARIE

Yes, I suppose. I guess there’s a glimmer of hope. You always do find the silver lining, don’t you?

PETER

I didn’t get this gray hair from doing nothing.

MARIE

And I’m getting gray hairs worrying about Jacob. Will he have the same options that we have? To think about a long life and also how he wants to die? You know what Beth told me?

PETER

How am I supposed to know? What did she tell you?

MARIE

That she's wondering if Charlie would have died so young if he were white? Maybe he didn't get the medical care that he should have gotten?

PETER

Oh man. That's heavy.

MARIE

I know. I just can't believe that with all the reading I've been doing, I'd never thought about that. Oh, and Angela is pregnant!

PETER

Wow, you are full of news today.

GRIM REAPER

Look, I don't want to compare my medical care with yours. That's not part of my mission. I'm only supposed to listen, take notes, and report any flagrant 'death talk' back to my superiors. But I'm here in front of a captive audience, so I might as well get this off my chest. In Reaperville, most of my reaping wages goes to my suck-ass health insurance plan. The doctors there are not like the doctors on Earth. For one, they have a million years of medical training, yet they think all my valid symptoms are in my head. Can you imagine? All they offer me is pithy platitudes and placebos. Like that'll do a lick of good. Plus, they think my empathy is like a disease that will infect my fellow Reapers.

(END OF SCENE)