

Cheating DEATH

By Kamron Klitgaard

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 **Pioneer**
DRAMA SERVICE

CHEATING DEATH

A comedy in one act

By KAMRON KLITGAARD

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Speaking.)

	<u># of lines</u>
BOB	39
DEB	33
ANN	62
SAM.....	71
SUE	29
RON	57
DEATH	137

SETTING

TIME: 8:00 PM

PLACE: A mental hospital.

Seven chairs are arranged in a semi-circle for a group session at a mental hospital.

CHEATING DEATH

- 1 AT RISE: BOB, DEB, ANN, SAM, SUE and RON are seated and waiting for the session to start. ALL wear hospital gowns.
- BOB:** They ought to get rid of daylight savings time.
- DEB:** Why?
- 5 **BOB:** Well, look. It's eight o'clock, and it's still light outside.
- ANN:** So, in Finland it stays light until midnight.
- SAM:** How do you know? Have you ever been to Finland?
- ANN:** No. But they call it the land of the midnight sun.
- DEB:** They do?
- 10 **SUE:** I wish they didn't make us wear these gowns.
- RON:** I think they're comfortable.
- SUE:** It looks like we're all going in for surgery.
- SAM:** Are we? Are we all having surgery? Am I?
- ANN:** Relax.
- 15 **RON:** That's exactly what they want. They want us to relax and be comfortable and then once you get relaxed and comfortable... Bam! Surgery!
- ANN:** Relax.
- RON:** See? She's probably working with them.
- 20 **SAM:** Who?
- RON:** The doctors.
- SUE:** Don't be silly. She's not working with the doctors. She's exactly like one of us.
- ANN:** I am one of you.
- 25 **DEB:** I wish I could have a surgery.
- RON:** Come to think of it, my spleen has been acting up.
- SAM:** Do you think I could have an appendectomy?
- ANN:** No one is having surgery! We are here for our group session.
- DEB:** I wish our group was bigger. Then there would be more people
- 30 to talk to.
- SAM:** Why do we have to have group anyway?
- SUE:** Because we are all exactly like crazy people.
- BOB:** What do you guys think about this? No bars at the zoo.
- SAM:** Wouldn't the animals get out?
- 35 **BOB:** No, no. There's a high iron fence around the whole zoo, and the animals are just free to roam anywhere inside, just like in the wild.
- SAM:** Wouldn't that be dangerous?

- 1 **BOB:** No, the people travel through the zoo in little cages with wheels and a motor.
- SUE:** What if you were one of those people in a cage, and you had to go to the bathroom?
- 5 **RON:** Yeah, you'd step out of your cage, and a deer would attack you.
- SAM:** A deer? What about a lion or a tiger?
- ANN:** It's a well-known fact that more people are attacked by deer than are attacked by both tigers and lions combined.
- RON:** And when do all these attacks happen?
- 10 **ANN:** As a matter of fact, they happen at night while people are driving in their cars.
- BOB:** You'd just go to the bathroom in your cage just like the animals do now. See? It's all reversed.
- DEB:** I wish the doc would get here.
- 15 **ANN:** Yeah, let's get this session over with.
- RON:** They're probably watching us. They're observing us to see how we react under pressure.
- SAM:** What pressure?
- BOB:** What about this? While the peanut is still growing we inject the
- 20 peanut plant with jelly. It's brilliant! It would save at least a couple of steps.
- DEB:** You should be an inventor.
- BOB:** Thank you.
- DEB:** I wish I was an inventor.
- 25 **ANN:** Can we have a little peace and quiet before the session starts? I'd like to get my thoughts in order.
- SAM:** Do crazy people have ordered thoughts?
- ANN:** We're not crazy. We're just... eccentric.
- SAM:** They lock us in here because we're eccentric?
- 30 **SUE:** I can't be eccentric, I'm not rich.
- RON:** I think we must be crazy, but they're hiding it from us.
- ANN:** We're not crazy.
- SAM:** How can you be sure?
- ANN:** All right, let's put it to a vote. Raise your hand if you think you are
- 35 crazy. (*No hands.*) All right, raise your hand if you think the person next to you is crazy. (*All hands.*)
- BOB:** Instead of raising hands what if we had levers to pull? And each pull of the lever would count as one vote.
- ANN:** Enough! I forbid you to talk!

1 **DEB:** I wish you had forbidden me to talk.
ANN: I forbid you all! (*Silence.*)
DEATH: (*ENTERS wearing a suit and tie, approaches RON and then flips through a notepad.*) Excuse me? I'm looking for a Sam Johnson.

5 Are you Sam Johnson?
RON: Who wants to know? (*During this dialogue, OTHER PATIENTS ignore RON'S talking. They're clearly used to people talking out loud to themselves.*)
DEATH: Are you Mr. Johnson?

10 **RON:** Maybe. Who are you?
DEATH: Well, I guess there's no harm in you knowing now, Mr. Johnson. I'm Death.
RON: Death?
DEATH: That's right.

15 **RON:** Uh-huh. Are you here for group session?
DEATH: Hardly. I'm here for you, Mr. Johnson.
RON: Uh-huh. You're Death. As in dead? As in the Grim Reaper?
DEATH: That's right, Mr. Johnson. That is one of my names.
RON: One of those levers would come in handy right about now. (*To OTHER PATIENTS.*) Hey, you guys, I think this guy's here for group, but he doesn't know it yet.

20 **SUE:** Who?
RON: (*Indicates DEATH.*) This guy.
DEB: What guy?

25 **RON:** This guy right here!
ANN: Imaginary friends are not in your profile.
DEATH: They can't see or hear me, Mr. Johnson.
RON: Why not?
DEATH: Because I'm Death. I only appear to those who are about to die.

30 **RON:** Hey, can you guys see this guy? He's right here. White shirt, tie, bad suit? Anyone?
BOB: No one's there. (*They look away.*)
DEATH: Now that that's settled, Mr. Johnson, you have exactly fifteen minutes before we have to be on our way, so I suggest that you—

35 **RON:** Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm not Mr. Johnson.
DEATH: What?!
RON: You've got the wrong person. I'm not him.
DEATH: But when I came in I asked you if you were Mr. Johnson, and—

1 **RON:** And I said, “Maybe.” Maybe? As in, “perhaps,” “possibly,” “might be, might not be.”

DEATH: But—

RON: But nothing. I’m not him. *(To OTHER PATIENTS.)* Hey, you guys, is
5 my last name Johnson?

OTHERS: No.

RON: *(To DEATH.)* See?

DEATH: But I appeared to you.

RON: That’s your fault, not mine.

10 **DEATH:** Then which one of them is he?

RON: I’m not telling you.

DEATH: But—

RON: I’m no snitch.

DEATH: All right then. I guess I’ll have to do this the hard way. *(Walks
15 to the middle of them and waves his hand over himself.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I am looking for Sam Johnson.

ANN: Where’d you come from?

DEATH: It doesn’t matter. Which one of you is Sam Johnson?

RON: Don’t tell him. He’s Death.

20 **DEATH:** Would you stay out of this?

RON: No. He’s the Grim Reaper, everyone. Don’t tell him anything.

SUE: You’re Death, huh? I thought you’d be taller.

DEB: I wish he was taller.

SAM: Why do you want Sam?

25 **DEATH:** Well, what he said is true. I’m Death. It’s Sam’s time to... come with me.

ANN: *(Stands up and takes a few steps back.)* We may be crazy, but we’re not that crazy. There’s no way you can get us to believe that you are Death.

30 **DEATH:** I don’t care if you believe me or not, I just need to know which one of you is Sam Johnson.

RON: We’re not telling you. *(Stands up and turns his back on DEATH. [NOTE: PATIENTS can move about the room at the director’s discretion until they return to their seats for the group session.]*

35 **BOB:** What do you think about this? Instead of the Grim Reaper you could be the Grim Farmer. That way you wouldn’t have to carry a sickle around, and you could ride a tractor. Then you could plow souls to the afterlife. No one uses a sickle anymore.

SAM: Hey, where is your sickle?

- 1 **DEATH:** It's actually just a prop. It isn't necessary. What is necessary is that I find out who Sam Johnson is. First, I can eliminate the women.
- ANN:** Why?
- 5 **DEATH:** Because the name is Sam Johnson.
- DEB:** Sam as in Samuel?
- SUE:** Or Sam as in Samantha?
- DEATH:** Well, I... Now look here!
- ANN:** Well, which is it?
- 10 **DEATH:** I don't know.
- SAM:** What does your notepad say?
- DEATH:** It just says, "Sam."
- RON:** Looks like you've got a problem, buddy.
- SAM:** Would you like to join our group session? It's supposed to start
- 15 in fifteen minutes.
- DEATH:** I'm afraid that's impossible. I've got to be gone in 15 minutes... (*Looks at his watch.*) ...make that 13 minutes and 45 seconds, with Samuel... or Samantha Johnson or there are going to be some serious repercussions.
- 20 **ANN:** Okay, here's the deal, mister. We don't really believe you are who you say you are. You see, if you really were Death, we would tell you about Sam Johnson, no problem. But as it is, there are some things that are worse than death. For instance, you could be a DMV employee.
- 25 **BOB:** Or a politician.
- DEB:** Or an I.R.S. auditor.
- RON:** Or a proctologist.
- SAM:** Or a dentist.
- SUE:** Or a proctologist/dentist.
- 30 **ANN:** Or maybe you're even a math teacher. And we'd hate to give Sam up to a math teacher.
- DEATH:** I am none of those things.
- ANN:** Then perhaps you wouldn't mind showing us some identification.
- DEATH:** What?! I don't have any identification.
- 35 **SAM:** Then how are we supposed to know who you are?
- DEATH:** Well, when I first appeared, I only appeared to him. (*Points to RON.*) What was your name?
- RON:** Nice try.
- DEATH:** But the rest of you couldn't see me.
- 40 **SAM:** How do you know we couldn't see you?

1 **DEB:** I wish I couldn't see him.

SUE: Maybe we were just like those plastic people that stand in the stores modeling clothes. And that's why we didn't look at you.

RON: You know the government puts cameras in those things to keep
5 an eye on us while we're shopping.

BOB: What about this? Every car comes with a fold-away mannequin that pops out and sits in the passenger side so that everyone can drive in the carpool lane. (*OTHERS ignore him.*)

ANN: Now, Mr. So-Called-Death, why do you think we couldn't see you?

10 **DEATH:** Because I only appear to the one who is to come with me.

BOB: But you appeared to all of us.

DEATH: I'm running late, I only have... (*Looks at his watch.*) ...12 minutes now. Normally, I would hang out in the room, undetected, until I was sure which one of you I was to take. Then, I would appear
15 to just that one, and we'd be on our way. But I didn't have time.

RON: So you broke the rules?

DEATH: (*Slumps in an empty chair.*) Yes, yes! I broke the rules. I just thought it couldn't hurt this one time.

DEB: I wish I could break the rules.

20 **SUE:** You shouldn't break the rules. You could end up just like us.

DEATH: I know, I know. I just needed to make up some time. Oh, I'm going to be in so much trouble! Can't you people just be reasonable?

ANN: Do you even know where you are? Perhaps we didn't see you
25 when you first came in because we are all crazy.

DEATH: Oh, dear.

SUE: You can say that again. (*DEATH puts his face in his hands.*)

RON: I think he's one of the doctors trying to spy on us.

ANN: Let me confer with my colleagues, Mr. Whoever-You-Are, and
30 we'll let you know. (*PATIENTS huddle away from DEATH and whisper, occasionally peeking up at him individually. They break the huddle.*) All right, we've decided to help you out.

DEATH: Great. I can't tell you how much I appreciate this.

ANN: If you can prove to us that you are really Death, then we'll tell
35 you about Sam Johnson.

DEATH: Prove?

ANN: Yes, prove.

RON: I think you're a doctor in disguise, studying how we cope with death.

40 **DEATH:** I see. Then I shall prove it. (*Points to a window. [NOTE: An actual window isn't necessary.]*) Everyone, look out that window.

1 You see those birds perched on the telephone line? Watch the third one from the left. (*Lifts his hand and points at the "bird." PATIENTS watch and react as it plummets to the street below. They all take a step away from DEATH.*) Convinced?

5 **SAM:** You killed a bird?!

DEB: Don't you have to wait until it's the bird's time?

DEATH: There are different rules for animals.

BOB: Big deal. I can do the same thing with a BB gun. (*PATIENTS huddle again, then break.*)

10 **ANN:** All right, you're Death.

DEATH: Good. I'm glad that's settled. Now, about Sam Johnson...

BOB: All right, all right. Sam Johnson is definitely one of us... and is in this very room.

DEATH: And which one of you is Sam?

15 **RON:** We're not telling.

DEATH: But you agreed that if I proved who I am that...

SAM: ...we'd tell you about Sam Johnson. And we've told you. Weren't you listening? Sam is one of us and is in this room.

DEATH: Oh, you people are trying my patience.

20 **SUE:** What are you going to do about it?

BOB: I think you should get a new notepad. One with more details.

DEATH: I had one.

ANN: Let me guess... you lost it.

DEATH: No! I just left it back at... the place. (*Checks his watch.*) Nine

25 minutes.

BOB: I think you should invent a machine to take you back in time, and then you could take a class on deductive reasoning.

DEATH: All right, wait a second. You! (*Points to RON.*) I can eliminate you!

30 **RON:** Why?

DEATH: Because when I came in, you said your last name wasn't Johnson, and you asked all of them if your last name was Johnson before they even knew who I was and they all said, "No." (*Awkward silence.*) Ah ha! Gotcha!

35 **RON:** All right, all right, it's true. You got me.

DEATH: Good! One down. So what is your name?

RON: Sam Johnson.

DEATH: What?

RON: Yeah, I was just teasing with you. I'm Samuel Johnson. (*DEATH*

40 *looks at him in disbelief.*)

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE

Seven chairs.

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON

Notepad, pen (DEATH)

COSTUMES

The six PATIENTS wear hospital gowns. DEATH wears a suit, a tie and a watch.

SOUND EFFECT

Watch alarm.

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