

CELEBRITY DEATH WATCH

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A 10-minute play

By Rom Watson

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Cast:

Charlie Doth, early thirties  
Angela, early to mid-thirties, Charlie's co-  
worker and friend

The location: Los Angeles.

The time: the present.

(CHARLIE and ANGELA sit at their workspaces. CHARLIE holds a 6"x8"x3" wooden box.)

CHARLIE

At least it didn't rain.

(Silence.)

ANGELA

The flowers were lovely.

(Silence.)

CHARLIE

Thanks for going with me. Even though you only met him the one time.

ANGELA

It gave me an excuse to wear my little black dress.

CHARLIE

Did I tell you how nice you look in it?

ANGELA

More than once.

CHARLIE

Sorry.

ANGELA

Don't be.

(Silence.)

CHARLIE

It feels strange coming back to work after something like that.

ANGELA

You should have gone home.

CHARLIE

No; I'd only . . .it's better I'm here.

(Silence.)

ANGELA

(Nodding or gesturing to the box.)  
How did you end up with those?

CHARLIE

By default. None of his relatives wanted them.

ANGELA

You're kidding.

CHARLIE

They didn't approve of Steven.

ANGELA

What are you going to do with 'em?

CHARLIE

I have no idea.

ANGELA

(Trying to make a joke.)  
Sell them on eBay?

CHARLIE

Not funny.

ANGELA

Sorry.

(CHARLIE sets the box down.)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

There was quite a turnout.

CHARLIE

Steven slept around.

ANGELA

He can't have slept with *all* those people.

CHARLIE

You'd be surprised.

(Silence.)

ANGELA

I wonder who else is going die.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

ANGELA

Famous people always die in groups of three.

CHARLIE

They do, don't they.

ANGELA

Celebrity Death Watch – You too can play.

(Silence.)

CHARLIE

I wonder if all people die in groups of three.

ANGELA

What?

CHARLIE

Famous people dying catches our attention, but they can't be the only ones who die in threes. It must be everyone.

ANGELA

Why would everyone die in groups of three?

CHARLIE

Maybe that's how death has worked since the beginning of time. We just never noticed it because we couldn't see the pattern. Now that media has made so many people famous, we can finally see that humans leave this life in threes.

ANGELA

That theory is either brilliant or you're completely crazy.

CHARLIE

Is there a difference?

ANGELA

So you admit it.

CHARLIE

What?

ANGELA

That you're crazy.

CHARLIE

It's not crazy to look for a pattern.

ANGELA

Even if there isn't one?

CHARLIE

There must be some sort of pattern.

(Silence. He gets an idea.)

That's it!

ANGELA

What?

CHARLIE

I'll make a spreadsheet!

ANGELA

(Warily.)

What kind of spreadsheet?

CHARLIE

One listing the death of every famous person.

ANGELA

Every famous person? Who's ever died?

CHARLIE

Yes! And all the living ones. That way, when they die I can match them up with two other famous people who croak.

ANGELA

Charlie, when I said "Celebrity Death Watch," I was making a joke.

CHARLIE

I know. I do have a sense of humor. Even today.

ANGELA

Good. Then you realize your plan is ridiculous.

CHARLIE

Angela, why are you being so negative?

ANGELA

I'm not being negative, I'm trying to be the voice of reason.

CHARLIE

Same thing.

ANGELA

Even if you did construct a spreadsheet, . . .the scope of what you're proposing is impractical.

CHARLIE

And what would you suggest? A huge chart with colored pins stuck into it? Modern technology has finally made it possible to track this information and connect the dots.

ANGELA

And you want to waste your life waiting for famous people to die?

CHARLIE

Don't be a buzz kill.

ANGELA

What buzz could be found in a gigantic spreadsheet of death?

CHARLIE

Knowing how it works. It would give death some meaning.

ANGELA

What meaning? It's just a transition.

CHARLIE

No, changing keys in the middle of a song is a transition. Death is one of the great mysteries of existence. That and the chupacabra.

ANGELA

Just because it gives meaning to life, doesn't mean death has any meaning of its own.

CHARLIE

So to you, Steven's death meant nothing?

ANGELA

I always thought he was a very talented actor. I'm sorry he's gone.

CHARLIE

Then why are you talking me out of this?

ANGELA

Because I know you're going to ask me to research the death dates of every famous person who ever lived.

CHARLIE

Well, you are the librarian here. That's part of your job.

ANGELA

You would waste this paper's resources on a crazy idea?

CHARLIE

That's part of *my* job.

ANGELA

You're serious about this?

CHARLIE

If I dig deep enough and find the answer, it could change humanity's concept of death. And it would be a great story.

ANGELA

Scoop!, Stop the Presses!: People die.

CHARLIE

Angela, . . .

ANGELA

That's not news.

CHARLIE

But showing the world that there is a discernable pattern behind the death of every human: that is front-page news.

ANGELA

Why would humans have to die in groups of three? What purpose would that serve?

CHARLIE

Maybe . . . maybe each soul splits into three parts when it's born into human form. We think every person has a soulmate, one person that completes us. But maybe our soulmate isn't one person. Maybe it's two people.

ANGELA

And when we die?



CHARLIE

All three parts leave at the same time so they can  
. . .rejoin in the afterlife.

ANGELA

Do you remember when Katharine Hepburn died? I do. She was my favorite actress. And I also remember the two other famous people who died, because the three of them passed away one right after the other. Charlie, I find it hard to believe that a spiritual triumvirate was formed by Katharine Hepburn, Herbie Mann, and Buddy Hackett.

CHARLIE

It does sound unlikely.

ANGELA

Besides, even though they died within hours of each other, they were born years apart.

CHARLIE

Thanks for blowing my theory out of the water.

ANGELA

Anytime.

CHARLIE

So then, . . .how do you explain it?

ANGELA

I can't.

CHARLIE

Don't you even want to try?

ANGELA

Maybe there is no pattern. Maybe people just . . .die.

CHARLIE

Do you think about your own death?

ANGELA

I used to. When I was a teenager I planned my funeral.

CHARLIE

Were you one of those "Goth" kids?

ANGELA

From my black boots to my black lipstick. I wrote detailed instructions on how my funeral was to be. The type of flowers, the guest list, even the songs I wanted played.

CHARLIE

And now?

ANGELA

Now I never think about it. There's so much I want to do. Why waste life thinking about death?

CHARLIE

I just wish I could understand. I keep thinking. . .

(CHARLIE'S emotions regarding the death of his friend surface at this point.)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

. . .if only I'd found him sooner.

ANGELA

Charlie. You are not responsible for Steven's death.

(Silence.)

CHARLIE

How do I make sense of this?

ANGELA

You could finish his book.

CHARLIE

What book?

ANGELA

Weren't you helping Steven write his autobiography?

CHARLIE

He asked me to be his ghostwriter . . .

ANGELA

He trusted you.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

ANGELA

Well?

CHARLIE

He died before we even got started. There is no book to finish.

ANGELA

Write one. You want to give his death some meaning? Tell the story of his life.

(Pause.)

You knew him before he was famous. You must have stories from college, anecdotes no one else would know.

CHARLIE

I do have a . . . more rounded picture of Steven. Most people only knew about . . . part of him.

ANGELA

Meaning?

CHARLIE

Meaning the women didn't know he slept with men, and the men didn't know he slept with women. And almost no one knew he had a son.

ANGELA

You could ensure his legacy isn't tarnished.

CHARLIE

I'm not sure anyone could do that.

ANGELA

Too many skeletons in his closet?

CHARLIE

An entire truckload of skeletons. And not all of them in the closet. But, you can't libel the dead. Once you're gone, your reputation is up for grabs.

ANGELA

In Sweden, it's a crime to defame the dead.

CHARLIE

How do you know that?

ANGELA

I'm a librarian. I know everything.

CHARLIE

Well, we're not in Sweden. There's sure to be at least one muckraking tell-all biography of Steven.

ANGELA

Somebody's probably writing one as we speak. But you could tell the truth and beat the muckrakers to the punch.

(Pause.)

Don't you think Steven would be happy to know you're in his corner?

CHARLIE

"Setting the record straight?"

ANGELA

Defending him.

CHARLIE

He did put his trust in me before he died.

(CHARLIE picks up the box.)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll spread them at sea. Steven always loved the ocean.

ANGELA

I'm going to make some coffee. You want some?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Thanks.

(ANGELA exits.)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Ghostwriter for a ghost. How do I tell the truth without--  
(He gets an idea.) Ooohh. Yeah . . .

(He smiles, sets the box down  
and begins writing.)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Steven, you're gonna love this book.

(As he continues writing,  
lights fade to black. End of  
play.)