

THE CERTIFICATE: DEATH, [YOU] LEAVE ME BE

Mister Death jist listen up. I ain't ready for [you] to take me jist yet. I've got a few more decent years left in me. I've worked all my years. Truth be told, from time to time my bones creaks like ungreased wagon wheels. And then there's my old achin' back. Lord, when, it rains, it feels like being kicked by a wild mule. And I have [you] know that I can burn like it's nobody'd business, and I clean folk houses like a dog cleans a bone, and I can tend to anybody's bad younglings. But still I ain't ready for no Certificate of Death. Yea, it ain't no secret that my life ain't been a bed of tall sweet smellin' roses, but it shure ain't been a burr patch, either. I have you knows that that I ain't never tries to wear no high and mighty tall crown. I tries to treat all people like the 'Good Book' says so. And I ain't never befriended ole Lucifer. Oh he tries to git into my heart and head, but I shoos him away faster than a gust of winter wind. My preacher drops by to see how I was doin' and he tells me that Mister Death treats Christians and Satan worshipers the same when the time comes to give them his Certificate. And ole Death places his mouth against yours and sucks the breath away before anybody knows it, and a person don't feel a thang. He says this much, too: "y'all faithful Christians, I'm here to tell y'all that the one that y'all got to fear, is not Mister Death; rather it is Misses Sickness, she ain't merciful at all. When she gits hur arms around you she'll wear your soul down, spin you like a tornado before she hang you out to dry. And Lord, you will suffer like an old stray mad sick dog before Misses Sickness turns you over to her brother, ole man Death. But Mister Death is a kind and faithful servant of Almighty God. He is told by God when to pay a visit to a person and there just ain't no reasons to put up an alley-cat fight; it will jist make the situation worse. Ole Death is as wise as King Solomon and as gentle as a mother's arms. If you followed the words of the Bible, you will live in that Promised Land. But if you is a sinner Ole Death calls Satan and tells him to be ready for another subject." Now don't be mad with me but lots of people says that [you] doesn't care who [you] gives that Certificate to. And without blankin' an eye, [you] just as well take a newborn child, jist as fast as you takes an old worn-out soul. You sees me, I just wish I didn't have to see the likes of either one of ya'll. I remember to well what happens to my first cousin. When she starts feelin' poorly, she begged [you] Mister Death to give hur a Certificate but you took your own sweet time. She would tell us that cancer in hur belly had turned into a mean fightin' black devil right from hell. The more that gurl ask for mercy, the worse hur pain gits. That black devil poured coal oil inside hur belly and chest, and even in hur birthin' place and set them on fire. That gurl begged and screamed for hur Death Certificate like she is a preacher beggin' for a second offerin' and she don't git nothin'. She ends up lookin' like a burnt wiener. The undertaker says he didn't see no needs to embalm hur. I was told that my uncle on my mommy's side, fights [you] tooth and nails. Every night he moans and kicks when [you] reaches for him. Folks says he tells [you] that, if [you] ever shows your ugly head again he'll give [you] a taste of his double-barrel shotgun. And [you] bitter not comes back 'til he tells [you] he is ready for his Certificate. Listen up [you]! My ole sweet papa, God bless his rest his soul, use to say: Baby gurl, Mister Death is bouts as sneaky as a mouse fetchin' crumb off of a kitchen floor. When ole Death comes, you best not look him squarely in the eye 'cause he will git madder than a drunk who can't find his bottle. My older sister calls [you] a coward 'cause [you] doesn't gives a person a fightin' chance to whip your behind. Mister Death, my girlfriend says hur granddaddy tells hur that when a person is feelin' poorly, the best way to keep from getting' your Certificate is to keep one eye open when you sleeps. Every night he drinks a glass of strong whiskey 'fore he gits in his walnut bed. And I'm here to tell you that hur granddaddy lives to be nearly as old as Methuselah 'fore he gits his Certificate. My auntie on Mommy's side tells me to watch my words around [you] 'cause [you] has spies everywhere, and the one thang that a person doesn't want to do is to make [you] mad by sayin' bad things 'bout [you], 'cause [you] will snatch a soul away from earth quicker than a young boy can steal the sweetness out of a gingerbread cake, and then [you] will write somethin' bad on their Death Certificate and keep them from gittin' to the Promised Land. [Man], I hears you sneakin'

upon my porch like a bill collector at the first of the month. And yea I hear you knockin' at my door, kinda softly at first, then hard enough to wake the cemetery dead. I knows it was you 'cause I feels your presence. But I have you know that I don't open my door past midnight for nobody. And that ain't all, one cloudy night somebody tells me they sees [you] sneaking and peepin' in my bedroom window. Well, I knows that it was you, and so I boarded-up all my windows tighter than a drum. And here's the kicker, my next door neighbor says [you] comes over to hur house hopin' she would tell you if I was in poor health and [you] offered to help write my obituary. But she knows you had a Certificate and she wasn't 'bout to tell [you] 'bout my weekly business or my Sunday business. And I'll tell [you] somethin' else, I removed that black wreath [you] hung on my front door as if I was dead. Yea I knows it was put there by [you]. Mister Death, I'll let [you] know when [you] can bring me a Certificate. I figures somebody tells [you] that I might have the pox 'cause I've been runnin' a fever of sort. I 'member that it was 'bout a year ago when you leaves a piece of paper on my dresser fur me to sign 'cause I knows that I read poorly, but I takes it to a teacher and he says don't sign nothin'. And [you] knows that I goes to the funeral home and pays down on a mahogany 'true suit' [casket], not that I plans on usin' it anytime soon. I ain't near ready for the undertaker's knife and that poison stuff. Then maybe that old drunken fool of an undertaker sends for you 'cause lately he ain't hardly got no work. Yea he uses to have the hots for me and him gits mad when I tell him to go and lock himself in one of his 'true suit'. Now that ole fool tells me that he can't wait to git me on that table and put some poison in my veins, and he says he would fix me up good for folks viewin'. Please excuse me, but I thank I better get on my prayin' knees just in case [you] comes by. And likes I says 'fore, when I feel it's time I will give you a personal invite into my bedroom and you won't have to sneak 'round like a thief in the night. And one more thang, I would be mighty beholdin' if [you] will see fit to put some good words on my Certificate when my times comes. Now respectfully, that's all I gotta say to you, Mister Death.

Written and by Clifton A. Casteel, 2012.