

You Damn Well Can Take It with You

Setting:

Time: The present

Place: TED's garage, decorated (crudely) to resemble an ancient Egyptian temple

Characters:

TED, 50, dressed like an ancient Egyptian pharaoh

LOUISE, 40's TED's wife, modern dress

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Scene 1

(Lights are dim. The stage resembles an ancient Egyptian temple, with torches and stone walls covered with Hieroglyphics surrounding a gilded throne. In it sits TED, dressed in a garish robe and headdress - full Pharaoh's garb. He fingers a statue of Osiris, then holds it up and addresses it reverently.)

TED

Glory be to thee, O Osiris Un-nefer! From the womb of Nut thou hast ruled the world and the underworld. Thy body is of bright and shining metal. Thy head is of azure blue, and the brilliance of the turquoise encircles thee-

(A KNOCK comes from offstage. Ted frowns and glares.)

TED(cont.)

Grant that I may enter in and come forth from the pylons of the underworld without let or hindrance, and that loaves of bread be given me in the house of coolness-

(More KNOCKS.)

LOUISE(O.S.)

Ted! You in there? Ted!

(TED sighs and puts the figurine down.)

TED

You may enter.

(LOUISE enters. She walks into something in the dim and loudly stubs her toe.)

LOUISE

Ow! Dammit! (She continues onto the stage.) Jeez, Ted, do you have to keep it so dark in here? (She flips a light switch. Nothing happens.) Do any of these lights work?

TED

My sanctum is kept dim for ceremonial purposes. And do not refer to me by that name.

(LOUISE hits a button. We hear the sound of a garage door opening and light slowly floods the stage. The temple is revealed as a fake: crude hieroglyphics on Styrofoam walls, electric torches, and an elaborately-gilded and accented kitchen chair for a throne.)

LOUISE

What, I can't call you Ted now? Is Theodore okay?

TED

You are to refer to me as Thutmose, ruler of truth, who pacifies the land and pleases the gods. You got the Facebook message.

LOUISE

Thutmose. Right. I, uh, like what you've done with the place. Very ... atmospheric.

TED

It is a dwelling suitable for a Pharaoh.

LOUISE

Ted, are you - all right?

TED

A sound query. (He stands.) As you are aware, our time on this earth grows shorter by the day, and I-

LOUISE

Oh no, are you sick? Is it that melanoma again, because I know this guy in Jersey who can clear that right up.

TED

I am sound in body. I merely look toward the inevitable. I weary of this world's trials and long for my ka to commence its journey to the netherworld. For this I require your help with my interment.

LOUISE

(beat)

Your ka. Right. Look, I'm pretty sure the divorce papers didn't create any obligation for funeral arrangements, so I don't think that-

TED

Your feeble arguments hold no sway over me! I am divinity brought to earth! Only through your subjugation will my ba and akh reunite and my essence voyage to its rest eternal in the Field of Reeds!

LOUISE

(beat)

You know, you've changed.

(TED hands her a piece of papyrus.)

TED

The sarcophagus has been ordered. The burial plot has been procured. I will need your assistance in obtaining and preparing the following items to place in the tomb in order to sustain my khat in the hereafter.

LOUISE

You're serious about this, aren't you?

TED

I would not make light of the underworld.

LOUISE

Yeah, but...

(LOUISE shakes her head and looks at the list.)

LOUISE (cont.)

You want this stuff buried with you.

TED

Correct.

LOUISE

(looking at list)

Coors Light? What, there's no liquor store in the Field of Dreams?

TED

Reeds. It's the Field of Reeds, and it happens to be where I'm spending eternity, so please.

(LOUISE continues to peruse the list.)

LOUISE

Your funerary ship? What's that?

TED

I will be accompanied by my most treasured vessel.

LOUISE

Your most treasured vessel. The Camaro? You're getting buried with an eighty-five Camaro?

TED

I have many outstanding memories of that Camaro. I plan to accumulate many more.

LOUISE

It hasn't run for ten years! (Points offstage.) It's up on blocks in the backyard.

TED

Yes. I need you to pick up some tires too.

LOUISE

I remember when you were just an Egyptologist. Now you're an Egyptian. And an ancient one too.

TED

We can learn much from the ancients.

LOUISE

If you'd learned anything from history, you'd realize that stunts like this were why we split up in the first place.

TED

No one may divorce a Pharaoh!

LOUISE

I guess I'm just grandfathered in then.

TED

No. You remain my spouse. It is your responsibility to secure my place in the netherworld and to accompany me into the afterlife. It's all right there in the Book of the Dead. It's not my fault if you haven't read it.

LOUISE

Do you even have a job anymore?

TED

Pharaohs need brook no earthly toil.

LOUISE

So no.

TED

Silence! After acquiring my needed sustenance-

LOUISE

You mean the cheap beer and the ribwiches.

TED

Yes. You will then make preparations to accompany me into the afterlife. Upon the event of my death you will be sent for to join me.

LOUISE

What?

TED

As my spouse, you are responsible for servicing me during my transition to the astral plane.

LOUISE

Service you? Ugh! Ted, you're starting to really creep me out. You're dressed like a greeter at the Luxor and you're babbling about having me ritually sacrificed ... or something.

TED

This should not surprise you. You have long known of my proclivities.

LOUISE

You know, at first I tolerated all of this. I even enjoyed it - I mean, you were passionate about something. Lots of people don't have that. So I put up with it. With you vanishing for entire summers on archeological digs. With the barrage of random artifacts flooding the house. I even let you pick a name for our daughter, even though it meant she spent the whole of junior high getting called "Nevertitties." But tolerance can only get stretched so thin. You must realize that by now. So what are you hoping to accomplish here?

TED

This is the will of Osiris, Lord of the underworld, guardian of the Elysian Fields and-

LOUISE

Dammit, Ted, just because I think you're full of shit doesn't mean I don't care.

(Ted is silent. LOUISE sighs and turns to leave.)

LOUISE

All right, don't say I didn't try.

TED

I turned fifty last week.

LOUISE

Aw, crap.

TED

I'm getting older.

LOUISE

That tends to happen.

TED

So I just thought, you know...

LOUISE

What?

TED

That we could maybe...

LOUISE

I've found someone else.

TED

I know. Word gets around. You love him.

LOUISE

Yes. I do.

TED

You plan to marry him.

LOUISE

Probably.

TED

Wally.

LOUISE

Yup.

TED

Wally Epstein.

LOUISE

Mmm-hmm.

TED

You know, Egyptians and Jews, we don't so much get along. The frogs and the locusts and everything.

LOUISE

You should really be over that by now.

TED

Plus, Jews, you know, they don't have much of an afterlife. It's kind of a crapshoot, really. Ill-defined. No guarantees. It could be like an eternal drizzly Monday morning.

LOUISE

Is that what this is about?

TED

The Egyptians, on the other hand, really had their dogma sorted out. Just do A, B, and C and you're in. Plus, no blank slate. You get to hold onto the things you treasure.

LOUISE

Like (looks a papyrus) your bowling trophies.

TED

I was referring to you.

LOUISE

I know you were. So this is how you try to talk me out of it? Out of Wally?

TED

Egypt's all I have to work with.

LOUISE

So I see.

TED

And I don't want you to miss out on the Field of Reeds. It's quite the place.

LOUISE

Really. What's it like.

TED

Well, it's this big field. With ... reeds. (Pause.) The Book of the Dead is somewhat lacking in details on the subject. But everything I've read makes it sound great.

LOUISE

Look, Wally's non-observant and I haven't been to church in 20 years. We plan to spend the rest of our lives going to secular places and doing agnostic things. I figure on continuing this for a few decades, then calling it a night. After that, I'll take my chances.

TED

You would gamble with eternity?

LOUISE

I'm a bit more concerned about the next thirty years. Those I have some control over. And I think I've found a level-headed, stable guy to share them with me.

TED

He sounds boring.

LOUISE

Maybe. But boring I can live with. And frankly I think you're getting ahead of yourself too.

TED

How so?

LOUISE

Are you really out of a job?

TED

Sabbatical. They think I'm in Aswan.

LOUISE

(shrugs)

Aswan, Yonkers. Look, I sincerely doubt Ramses and Tutankhamen packed it in at fifty, did they? They found ways to be reverent their whole lives without locking themselves in the dark and brooding on their numbered days.

TED

Tutankhamen died at nineteen.

LOUISE

Oh yeah. What about Ramses?

TED

Ninety.

LOUISE

Well there you go. So how about you go back to the university and, you know, get on with it. Maybe get that Camaro running again. Why not?

TED

Perhaps.

LOUISE

Make you a deal. You stop acting like you're at death's door, and when you do peel out into that field of reeds - assuming I'm still around - I'll observe a couple of the less involved Egyptian funerary traditions for you. Like, aren't I supposed to stand over your corpse and howl?

TED

You're thinking of Klingons.

LOUISE

Close enough. Happy birthday, Thutmose. (She kisses her hand and taps him on the forehead.) See you in the next life.

(LOUISE exits. TED starts to call after her, but stops himself. He sits for a second, pawing the statue of Osiris, then pulls out a cellphone and dials.)

TED

Greetings, commoner. You are being addressed by the gloried and radiant Thutmose, who demands your aid in locating a mechanic. (Pause) Yes, that's correct. One who specializes in the timeless Chevrolet Camaro. (Pause.) What? (Sighs) Yes, the mighty Thutmose will hold.

(Blackout. End of play.)