

THE RED DEATH

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THE RED DEATH

SYNOPSIS:

A drama group are meeting for the dress rehearsal of their production of "The Masque of The Red Death" based on E.A. Poe's story while a real pandemic rages outside. Despite doubts and worries, they decide that the show must go on, but just like the story, before they know it, the plague hits them.

CHARACTERS

DEAN – Director, actor, plays Prince Prospero

BRYAN – Actor, plays Count

VANESSA – Actress, plays Countess

JUDY – Actress, plays Ballerina

WILLY - Actor, plays Knight.

RAMONA – Actress, plays Dame

DIEGO – Actor, plays Buffoon

RED DEATH

SETTING: Prospero's black chamber. An ebony grandfather clock, a table, black carpet, red panes.

TIME: The present. Dress rehearsal.

PROPS: Bottles, tankards (on stage)

Swords (Bryan, Willy)

Dagger (Dean)

AT RISE:

(The dress rehearsal is about to begin. DIEGO and RAMONA enter.)

RAMONA: I'm so nervous, Diego.

DIEGO: No worry, baby, you're one of our best actresses.

RAMONA: It's because of Willy, dear, I'm sure he'll find out.

DIEGO: *(Takes her in his arms.)* I love you, sweetie, and don't care if you're his wife.

(VANESSA enters.)

RAMONA: *(Pushes DIEGO away.)* Not here, not here, hon.

VANESSA: Sorry to interrupt, guys, but I have to check that damned clock is working properly. Dean's so afraid it might let us down during the show.

DIEGO: No worry, Vanessa, it's as good as new.

VANESSA: Swell... *(Looks around.)* A bigger carpet would have been better, but this will have to do for now.

RAMONA: So you're in charge of the set... *(Sneers.)* Seems you're replacing Judy pretty quickly.

VANESSA: Better take care of your own affairs, hon.

(DEAN enters dressed as PROSPERO.)

DEAN: Hey, where are all the others? And why aren't you in your costumes? This is our dress rehearsal, they'll be no other one before the show.

(WILLY, BRYAN enter.)

WILLY: Are you sure you don't want to postpone the opening, Dean?

DEAN: Absolutely.

BRYAN: The matter is serious, the epidemic is sparing no one.

DEAN: I know, I know, but the show must go on. Where's Judy?

VANESSA: Making up her mind whether to change or not. By the way, the clock's *(Parrots DIEGO.)* as good as new, dear.

DEAN: Thank goodness.

(*JUDY enters.*)

DEAN: Still without your costume on, baby?

JUDY: Still determined to have us perform? There will be strict safety rules soon, all shows might be cancelled any minute.

DEAN: Keep cool, Judy. You want to eat, don't you?

RAMONA: Dean's right, the house will be full, we can't call the show off.

WILLY: Why not? Lives are more important than business, I presume.

DEAN: I've invested all I had on it and you know it.

BRYAN: (*Sneers.*) We also know where that dirty money came from.

DEAN: The end justifies the means, and that's not new for either of you, right?

DIEGO: Our boss's implying we're rotten souls as well.

BRYAN: That's not a good reason to risk our lives. Punishment is not in the contract.

DEAN: (*Wicked.*) Afraid, huh?

BRYAN: And you?

DEAN: No. I guess practising Prospero's role has made me just like him, *dauntless, sagacious*, (*Chuckles.*) and why not? A bit mad too.

DIEGO: (*Parrots him.*) And why not? Arrogant and conceited as well.

DEAN: Have you ever considered that also *you* are like our revellers, light-hearted, (*Looks at the girls.*) frivolous and most careless?

VANESSA: So what? (*Sneers.*) It helps us interpret our parts better.

RAMONA: Cut it out, guys. We've got to make a decision now.

DEAN: This is our big chance to stop being an amateur company and turn into a professional one. Why miss it?

VANESSA: Sure, if we manage to survive.

WILLY: You may be our director, but you can't force us to do what's a hazard for our health.

DEAN: Director, producer and owner of the company, don't forget that. However, I had enough of it, whoever wants can quit... no pay, no fame, nothing but a penniless future ahead. (*Looks at WILLY.*) and no more gambling for you, man.

DIEGO: See what I mean? Vice spares none of us.

BRYAN: Alright, alright, let's have it your way. I won't go against regulations however, keep that in mind, boss.

RAMONA: Yeah, we'll perform and see what happens, then we'll figure things out.

DEAN: Good girl, Ramona, as wise as gorgeous.

JUDY: Hold it, love, I might get jealous.

DEAN: Why, Judy? You know you're my one and only sweetheart.

JUDY: Haven't seen the ring yet.

DEAN: Wealth and fame are just around the corner, baby. Be patient and you'll have the kitschiest ring there is.

BRYAN: Hey, where's our Red Death?

DIEGO: Just caught a glimpse of him in the changing room. Already in his costume.

VANESSA: An odd fellow indeed.

JUDY: You bet, always sliding in and out like a ghost.

RAMONA: Never heard a hello or a goodbye from him. I doubt he even has a name.

BRYAN: Red Death, Ramona, isn't that enough?

DIEGO: (*Sneers.*) A true character straight from the outside world.

DEAN: Indeed. To tell the truth, I did have quite a few refusals for the part... It was sort of a last minute engagement.

WILLY: A rather grisly role on the whole. I'm far happier playing the knight.

RAMONA: And I your dame.

WILLY: Mine only, love.

VANESSA: Wouldn't be too sure about that.

RAMONA: Why won't you shut up, Vanessa?

DIEGO: No fighting, ladies. Time to change now. It's our final rehearsal. Nothing can go wrong.

VANESSA: From starlets to divas, wow! Come along, girls, can't miss the chance.

(JUDY, VANESSA, RAMONA exit.)

WILLY: Better get into our costumes, or it will be *(Looks at DEAN.)* a one man show.

(WILLY, BRYAN exit.)

DEAN: Better settle the matter with Willy or he'll settle it with you, Diego. He has no idea that Ramona cheated on him.

DIEGO: Hey, who told you?

DEAN: Cheating is our Dame's pleasure, so why not take advantage of it?

DIEGO: *(Grabs DEAN's jacket.)* Another word and I'll...

(VANESSA enters in her costume.)

VANESSA: What's going on here?

DEAN: Just practising, sweetie, our Diego is on his way to the changing room as well.

(DIEGO grumbles and exits.)

VANESSA: *(Moves close to him.)* Have you talked to Judy yet, darling?

DEAN: Vanessa, love, with all that's been going on lately, however could I? Can't you see what's at stake?

VANESSA: Our future, Dean, if you still care for it.

DEAN: *(Takes her hands.)* Of course, I do, Milady *(Kisses them).*

(JUDY, RAMONA enter. They are wearing their costumes.)

JUDY: Say, are you playing Prospero or Casanova?

DEAN: Our Prince is a most amiable host, don't forget it. *(Looks around.)* The scene is perfect, as creepy as it should be.

RAMONA: Yeah, and that infamous clock makes it even creepier.

(BRYAN, DIEGO, WILLY enter in their costumes.)

BRYAN: Well, here we go.

DEAN: All at your posts now. The performance must be as remarkable as to seem true. Don't let me down.

(DEAN, DIEGO, JUDY step aside. Actors assume their posts. BRYAN and VANESSA are talking. RAMONA and WILLY enter.)

WILLY: *(Bows.)* Good evening, Your Lordship, Your Ladyship.

VANESSA: How pleased I am to see you here.

RAMONA: Highly delighted too, Milady, and what a lovely attire.

VANESSA: Thank you, my dear.

BRYAN: We had to wear our best costumes for Prince Prospero's masquerade.

(JUDY enters pirouetting.)

RAMONA: I love masked balls. They're so much fun.

JUDY: And so intriguing...

(DIEGO enters.)

DIEGO: No proper masquerade without a buffoon.

BRYAN: Our Prince is a true master of revels.

VANESSA: *(Looks around.)* Wonder why he has gathered us in this gloomy suite, though...

WILLY: He's always been quite bizarre.

BRYAN: Hey, the clock is about to strike again.

(Clock strikes ten.)

VANESSA: Oh no.

JUDY: Those chimes make my blood run cold.