

THE ONE WHO KNOCKS

By Alyssa McNerney

CHARACTERS

OLIVER	A man in his 30s. Workaholic. Genuine, but distracted.
SYLVIA	Oliver's wife of around the same age. SYLVIA is never actually present, just heard off stage.
DEATH	Portrayed as a regular person wearing regular all-black clothes (e.g. no stereotypical black hood and scythe). Intimidating/erie, but charming in a weird way.

SETTING

OLIVER and SYLVIA 's home.

TIME

Modern day.

SCENE

(A door perpendicular to the audience separates SR and SC. A large grandfather clock sits on the other side of the door in SC facing the audience. A desk and chair are at SL, the desk has a computer and a coffee mug. If a player was sitting at the desk the audience would get a profile view. DC/DL is a “living room” with a couch facing the audience and a coffee table in front of it.)

OLIVER

(Sitting at the desk, typing)

(Yawns, takes a drink of the coffee, it’s clearly empty, sets it back down)

(Stretches arms and legs sitting in the chair, rubs his eyes, checks his watch)

I guess it’s not too late for another one...

SYLVIA

(Yelling from offstage in the direction of UL/SL) Olli?

Are you coming up soon?

(OLIVER sighs)

OLIVER

(Yelling back in the same direction)

I will be before you know it, just go ahead and hit the sheets now, okay?

SYLVIA

(offstage)

How many nights a week do I have to go to bed alone?

OLIVER

I’m sorry, honey...

(Checks his watch again)

I’ve... I’ve got a deadline this time. It’s a really big one. I’ll be up soon.

(OLIVER is silent, expecting a reply, there is none)

(Cracks his knuckles and gets back to typing)

(DEATH enters from SR and knocks on the door three times at precisely the same moments as the grandfather clock chimes on the other side of the door)

(OLIVER stops typing at the first knock, looks from the clock back to the door during knocks two and three)

(There is silence, OLIVER appears confused as to whether he was actually hearing knocks with the chimes)

(DEATH knocks once more, another identical round of three knocks in rhythm)

(OLIVER slowly makes his way to the door, gets close enough so that he appears to be looking out a peephole, he barely has peeped through it before a third and final round of knocks begins)

OLIVER

(A bit angry, to himself, as he unlocks the door *the door has a double lock so OLIVER is leaving the chain allowing for the door to only open a few inches, the opening should be on the side visible to the audience)

Alright, okay I get it...

(Speaking out the door to DEATH, flustered) Can

I help you? What is it?

DEATH

It is time.

OLIVER

Time? Time for what? What do you mean?

DEATH

It is time for you to let me in so that I can do what must be done.

OLIVER

(Clearly creeped out, starts to close the door)

Look, it's kinda late and...

DEATH

(Places a single finger on the door, OLIVER clearly begins to struggle as if DEATH's finger is as forceful as a brick wall) Oliver, have I not made clear, time is of grave importance?

OLIVER

(Suddenly stopped pushing the door at the mention of his name, hands fall to his side, he takes a step back, but still looking at the door)

What did you... how do you know my name?

DEATH

How would I not? I know the names of all who are living and all who are dead.

OLIVER

(Resumes trying to close the door)

Alright buddy that's it, I've had enough of this... whatever it is you're trying to pull, I'm not having it.

(Gives one final shove and the door closes, OLIVER locks it)

DEATH

(Sighs, to himself)

Oh, Oliver. You are only making this more difficult for yourself.

(DEATH "transitions" through the double locked door and into the house SC so that he is on the other side of OLIVER, who is peering through the peephole again **player could walk around the door behind the grandfather clock and around to this spot) What are you looking at?

OLIVER

(Spins around startled, frantically backs up towards the door with his arms out to protect him)

Who... *what* are you?! How did you... how did you do that? What the hell is going on here!

DEATH

(Starts to walk slowly towards OLIVER)

I suppose entering a stranger's home without an introduction is rather rude, although I *have* already made clear you are no stranger... to me.

(Stops an arm's length away from OLIVER, who is still up against the door, frozen)

But... I remain a stranger to you, Oliver. If providing you with a title will ease this process, you may refer to me as Death.

(DEATH extends his arm to shake OLIVER's hand)

OLIVER

(Still frozen)

Death...?

DEATH

(Arm still extended)

The one and only...

(Gestures hand a little bit, like are you going to shake it or?)

OLIVER

(Still not reciprocating the handshake, straightening up as if realizing something)

Wait, what process? You said something about easing this process, process of what? Why are you here?

DEATH

(Realizes OLIVER is not going to shake his hand, retracts his arm)

I already told you, I am here because it is time for me to be.

OLIVER

(As if he is putting it all together)

This doesn't make sense.

(He feels his forehead, touches his stomach, puts his hands on top of his head with elbows out)

I'm fine. Look at me...

(Gestures to himself)

Look at me! I'm okay. It's not time. It can't possibly be time.

DEATH

(Turns around, away from OLIVER)

It is fascinating, isn't it?

(Begins walking towards OLIVER's desk, studying the room, OLIVER nervously follows still keeping a good space between them)

The illusion of control mortals have a habit of investing in.

(DEATH has stopped in front of the desk, he looks down at the computer and the coffee cup, OLIVER has stopped on the other side of the grandfather clock, behind the couch)

You certainly have an abundance of stock in that market.

OLIVER

(Walking towards DEATH)

Please I... I'm not ready! I just need a year, no, no a few months! Two, or three... anything! I would take anything just not now, not tonight!

DEATH

(Turns around to face OLIVER)

I am not in the business of bargaining. There is nothing I can do beyond the natural order.

OLIVER

(Desperate, thinking on his feet)

The natural order has waited this long, surely it could spare another five minutes?

(DEATH looks at OLIVER as if to say "go on...")

Can I... Can I get you anything? A coffee?

(OLIVER gestures to the coffee mug on the table, then gestures to the couch)

Maybe a few minutes to sit and kick your feet up before the trip home? It must be tiring...

DEATH

Very well.

(Walks around OLIVER to sit on the couch, puts his feet up on the coffee table)

It can be a strenuous journey.

(Relaxes posture)

OLIVER

(Quietly sneaks to the desk, looks back to see DEATH isn't watching him)

(Over his shoulder, to DEATH) Pretty comfy, yeah?

DEATH

(Relaxed still, eyes now closed) Quite.

(OLIVER is quietly opening drawers on the desk, the first drawer he pulls out a notebook, the second drawer he looks through but finds nothing, the third drawer he looks through and finally pulls out a pen. He removes the cap and is about to put the pen to paper...)

(DEATH still with eyes closed)

Oliver, writing her a letter serves no purpose to anyone.

OLIVER

(Freezes and looks back at DEATH, who still has his back to him from the couch)

W-hat? Why? Why not?

DEATH

(Opens his eyes and starts to straighten his posture sitting back up)

Because she will never read it.

OLIVER

(Clearly upset, walks towards the couch so now he is directly behind it, slightly to the side of DEATH)

Why wouldn't she read it? What were you gonna do, turn the paper into thin air the second we left?

(Walks towards the door, breaking down)

You were gonna come in here and explain it like this without even giving me a chance to tell her goodbye?

DEATH

(Stands up and faces towards the direction of the door) I

was never the one who took that chance away from you.

(Quickly turns, walks around the couch opposite side of the door, and disappears offstage UL)

OLIVER

(Pauses in confusion *allowing time for DEATH to “disappear”* and suddenly turns around back to the couch)

What does that...

(Realizes DEATH is gone)

...mean?

(Starts to look around the room. Turns around and looks out the peephole of the door. Unlocks both locks and opens the door. Steps “outside” and looks around. Comes back inside and locks both locks.)

(The grandfather clock chimes three times like in the beginning, startles OLIVER on the first chime. He leans against the door and puts his hands on his temples. He shakes his head a few times and walks back towards his desk. He notices/touches the notebook and pen that he had pulled from the drawers. He rubs his eyes and blinks several times. Looks down at his watch.)

I can't keep staying up like this, I'm not even thinking straight.

SYLVIA

(Painfully screams offstage, a loud thud is heard, silence)

OLIVER

Sylvia?

(Realization, panics, runs offstage UL)

Sylvia!

END