

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

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Kathryn Staublin

ACT I

Scene 1

The curtains open up to a quiet stage full of darkness. There is a soft humming sound—the ice machine of a refrigerator. We hear small footsteps, and then there is light as the silhouette of a small girl appears opening the refrigerator door in the center of the stage. There is darkness once more.

For a moment, nothing changes, and then the lights slowly begin to turn on, leaving a dim morning cast over an empty kitchen. The refrigerator is attached to a set of cabinets and countertops, while a large kitchen island sits in front beside a small square table. On stage right is a set of stairs. Everything in the scene is either black, white, or gray.

MARSHALL, the stepdad, enters from stage left. He is tall, thin, blond, and is dressed in business attire. He slowly makes his way to the fridge, yawning, and opens the door to reveal Phil, the plastic prop skeleton, who is sitting on the top shelf.

MARSHALL

Holy mother of biscuits!

(He shuts the refrigerator door quickly and spins around on tip toe, facing the stairs) Emily! Would you come down to the kitchen, please?

Emily, a six-year old girl dressed in bright pink clothing with a pink bow in her hair, flops down from the

stairs on stage right. She stops at the bottom and stares at Marshall, who points at the fridge.

Darling, why is your uncle's prop skeleton in the fridge?

EMILY

He said he needed to cool off.

MARSHALL

To cool off?

EMILY

Yeah. He's always dreamed of living up in Alaska where it's cold. It's too hot here. He said it makes his bones sweat.

MARSHALL

Emily, would you take him out of the fridge?

EMILY

No.

MARSHALL

Please?

EMILY

You can't make me!

Emily sticks out her tongue and runs back up the stairs without another word. There is an uncomfortable silence, and then DELILAH comes from stage left. She is wearing a gray dress with a light gray decorative scarf, and she is pinning up her long brown hair.

DELILAH

Good morning, Marshall.

MARSHALL

Good morning, Delilah.

(He walks over to the counter awkwardly and begins to make coffee) You won't believe what I found in the fridge this morning.

DELILAH

I find it hard to believe that I won't believe what you found in the fridge this morning. But try me.

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MARSHALL

That prop skeleton your uncle gave her. Pretty big fridge, you know. That skeleton is at least three feet tall...would you like some coffee?

DELILAH

Please.

MARSHALL

Two spoonfuls of sugar?

DELILAH

Your idea of two spoonfuls and mine is different.

(She gets out a few mugs from the cabinet and retrieves a sugar bowl from the stove) I never level off the spoons.

MARSHALL

Oh. Well, I don't prefer sugar, so I wouldn't know.

DELILAH

That's right. You like your brew bitter, don't you?

MARSHALL

(Pause) Can I ask you a personal question?

DELILAH

We're married. Not sure how much more personal we can get. *(She pours her coffee, kisses him on the cheek, and then sets it down on the table)* What's on your mind?

MARSHALL

Well, I've been thinking—

DELILAH

That's dangerous.

MARSHALL

—about, you know, the afterlife and such. And I was wondering how you felt about it.

DELILAH

About the afterlife?

MARSHALL

Yeah. I mean, what you believe. Do you...you know. Believe in ghosts?

DELILAH

I don't see how that's really a personal question,

dear.

MARSHALL

I think it is, kind of.

DELILAH

Do you?

MARSHALL

Do I what? Believe in ghosts or think it's a personal question?

DELILAH

Marshall, we don't really have time for this. Emily has to get ready for school, and I haven't even started breakfast.

Delilah walks over to the refrigerator. She pulls the plastic prop skeleton out of the way briefly and retrieves a gallon of milk. She then replaces the skeleton and closes the door. She walks around the rest of the kitchen, rummaging for breakfast.

MARSHALL

I can help with breakfast. *(He pours his own cup of coffee, watching her)* Would you like me to make some eggs or something?

DELILAH

No, dear. We're running a bit late. Cereal will have to do.

Emily sneaks halfway down the stairs. She peeks through the railing to spy on her mother and step-father. Unaware, Delilah sets the gallon of milk on the table.

MARSHALL

You never answered my question.

DELILAH

Yes, Marshall, I believe in ghosts.

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

MARSHALL

Thank god. I mean, I don't exactly believe in them, but at the same time, the idea kind of scares me, too.

DELILAH

I never said they scared me.

MARSHALL

What?

DELILAH

Ghosts. They don't scare me.

MARSHALL

What do you mean?

DELILAH

Think about it. In real life, and in real life alone, ghosts are simply something we don't understand. A ghost isn't there, in our world, like us. A ghost can't hurt you, Marshall. People can.

MARSHALL

What about poltergeists? You know. Spirits coming back, haunting places, throwing things, possessing people...talking about how they wish they'd moved to Alaska.

DELILAH

Alaska? *(Confused pause, then she shrugs)* Movies aren't real either, you know. I would be far more terrified of someone breaking into the house than finding some object randomly moved from one side of the table to the other.

Marshall looks at the jug of milk expectantly. Nothing happens.

DELILAH

What's sparking this conversation? Did you have a dream or something?

MARSHALL

I'm just curious. There's a lot we still don't know about each other, and since the wedding we ha-

ven't really had much time to ourselves. I mean, the honeymoon was nice, but we didn't really talk much—

DELILAH

It's not my fault we had to cut the honeymoon short, Marshall. Funerals aren't exactly planned weeks in advance.

MARSHALL

I know, that wasn't really what I was getting at.

(He pulls the prop skeleton out of the fridge by its spine and looks at it uncomfortably. Its plastic joints crackle and its jaw wiggles due to a loose screw)

MARSHALL (cont'd)

Your uncle, was he a big Halloween decorator?

DELILAH

Not exactly. He collected lots of weird stuff. He actually had what he called his "creepy room" in the basement, where he kept all these strange things he found at antique stores and whatnot. *(She begins pulling bowls and silverware from the cabinets)* I don't know why he felt compelled to share any of it with Emily. It must have meant a lot to him. His things, I mean.

MARSHALL

(Sarcastically) Shame I never met him.

DELILAH

I miss him.

Delilah moves all of the breakfast items to the table and sets them up neatly.

Marshall doesn't say anything. He is still holding the plastic skeleton by its spine.

MARSHALL

Hey, I noticed it's been a while since Emily went to stay over at any of her friends.

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DELILAH

What? Are you interested in a romantic night alone?

MARSHALL

Well—actually, that would be nice, but I was just thinking about Emily. She and her best friend were so close way back when. And I've noticed her grades are dropping a bit, she's forgetting homework...

DELILAH

Emily's grades always go up and down. Kids can't be perfect all the time. You'll notice that after a while.

MARSHALL

She definitely has a vivid imagination.

DELILAH

So she does.

MARSHALL

You know, I caught her laughing with that skeleton the other night. She must crack herself up.

DELILAH

Marshall?

MARSHALL

I just—*(He shakes the skeleton in front of him lightly)*

I don't know if she should be spending so much time with...out real people. She might end up—

DELILAH

Like you?

MARSHALL

What?

DELILAH

Introverted. Like you. Is that what you were going to say?

MARSHALL

I'm not introverted. I'm the best salesman in my department.

DELILAH

I know you are, dear.

MARSHALL

Delilah, let me be frank for a moment. Emily and I...haven't spent a lot of time together. We're not close. And I can't say I know what's best for her. But I'd like to think I could help her, you know, with her friends and her grades. I could even read to her if she'd let me—

DELILAH

She's too old to have someone read to her. She likes to do it on her own.

MARSHALL

See, that's what I mean. She can't raise herself.

DELILAH

(Pause) Excuse me?

MARSHALL

No, I didn't mean—

DELILAH

No, I'm sure you didn't.

MARSHALL

Lilah—

DELILAH

Marshall, don't dig yourself into a deeper hole. *(She takes the skeleton from him and puts it on the counter)* Hurry up and find something for breakfast.

MARSHALL

Do you want to talk about this later?

DELILAH

There's nothing to talk about. You're talking in circles.

(She checks the clock on the stove)

Ten minutes.

MARSHALL

Lilah, I think Emily should talk to a professional.

DELILAH

Professional? Why? *(She takes a dish rag from the*

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

sink and begins wiping down the counter)

MARSHALL

I think she's going through some problems right now that you can't help her with. She's just been so withdrawn.

DELILAH

I'm not sending her to an overly educated knob-by-nosed psychiatrist when she can talk to me about anything.

MARSHALL

Well, you, yes, but she doesn't say anything to me—

DELILAH

You're not her dad, Marshall.

MARSHALL

(Somewhat irritated) Legally, I am. Listen, Delilah, please. I'm the most non-violent guy I know. I would never hurt you or Emily.

DELILAH

I've heard that before.

MARSHALL

Just because Emily's father got sent to jail for stabbing his boss one too many times with a box cutter doesn't mean I'm going to do the same. Give me a chance to be everything that man never was.

DELILAH

(Throws the rag into the sink, frustrated) I didn't marry you so Emily could have a father. I married you because I didn't want to be alone anymore.

MARSHALL

Well, did you ever think about why I married you? Did you think that maybe, just maybe, I wanted to have a family, and to be part of a family?

DELILAH

If you want to be part of a family then you need to act like it.

MARSHALL

What's that supposed to mean?

DELILAH

Great, now Emily doesn't have time for breakfast. Toaster pastries will have to do.

MARSHALL

Delilah, you need to listen to me.

DELILAH

I don't want to hear it. *(She dumps the rest of her coffee in the sink and begins putting away breakfast items)*

MARSHALL

(More desperate) Delilah? Delilah, look at me!

Marshall steps in her way. She pauses, then walks around him, putting away the gallon of milk.

MARSHALL (con't)

Why do you have to make this so goddamned hard?

In a moment of passion, Marshall knocks the plastic prop skeleton off the counter. The skeleton breaks into pieces. Its head pops off, its jaw comes loose, and one of its legs disconnects at the knee. The pieces, including plastic screws, roll around the stage and then settle.

There is a moment of silence, and then Emily, who is still sitting on the stairs on stage right, begins to cry. Marshall looks up at Delilah, who is shaking her head, and then he looks at Emily, realizing what he has done.

EMILY

Why? Why did you do that? *(Emily holds onto the railing of the stairway for dear life)* Don't you know that I love him? Why would you do that to him?

Emily sits on the stairs for a moment, crying, and then she gets to her feet and stumbles upstairs. Her cries fade out only seconds before Marshall faces Delilah.

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MARSHALL

I-I didn't mean...

DELILAH

Save it.

Delilah goes over to where the plastic skeleton has fallen. She gathers the pieces in her arms while Marshall stands alone, watching. She stands straight and walks up to him.

You said you wanted to be part of a family. If you really want to be a father—(She shoves the plastic skeleton pieces into his arms)—then prove it.

Speechless, Marshall looks down at the bits of skeleton he's now holding. Delilah crosses her arms. Marshall looks at her, and then he takes the pieces of skeleton with him to stage left.

Delilah covers her face with her hands, shakes her head, and then puts her hands on her hips. She walks over to the stairway on stage right.

DELILAH (cont'd)

Emily? Emily, would you please come down here? I'd like to talk to you.

A few seconds pass and then Emily ambles down the stairs to her mother. She wipes her nose on her sleeve. She looks around, but realizes the prop skeleton is missing.

EMILY

Where's Phil?

DELILAH

The prop skeleton?(She looks over to the other side of the stage)Marshall is looking after him. Here. Sit with me for a moment. (She sits down on the last

stair and pats the spot beside her) We need to talk about...Phil.

EMILY

Why? (Emily rubs her eyes and sits down by her mother) Is he going to be all right?

DELILAH

Honey...you didn't know your uncle very well, but he was a pretty strange guy. And carrying around a prop skeleton all the time—well, that's not exactly normal. But honey, all that matters to me is that you're happy.

EMILY

I don't understand.

DELILAH

You like Marshall, don't you?

Marshall looks over his shoulder uncomfortably, aware of their conversation. He waits for a reply that doesn't come. He then sits on his knees and uses a multi-tool pocket knife from his back pocket to help screw the skeleton back together.

DELILAH (cont'd)

I know you don't always get along. But can you try, just for me? (She hugs her daughter and sits quietly in the moment of silence) Why did you name him Phil?

EMILY

Because that's his name. It's Uncle Phil. But he just wants to be called Phil.

DELILAH

(Whispers) Do me a favor?

EMILY

What?

DELILAH

Don't ever tell Marshall that.

EMILY

But why?

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

DELILAH

Marshall can't handle things like that. You know, ghosts, stuff he doesn't understand. And I think it would be best to keep anything about Phil away from him. You don't want to upset him, do you?

EMILY

No.

DELILAH

Good girl.

EMILY

Mommy?

DELILAH

Yeah?

EMILY

You do believe me, don't you?

DELILAH

What?

EMILY

About Phil. That he talks to me. That he's real.

DELILAH

Honestly, honey, I don't know. But it doesn't matter. *(She sighs)* If you're happy, and if you keep in mind the fact that Phil might bother other people...then I don't see why you can't keep him. I don't want to take him away from you. After all, it was, in a sense, the dying wish of your great uncle.

EMILY

I like having him around. He's good company.

DELILAH

Is he now? *(She wipes a tear off of Emily's face)* Are you ready for school?

EMILY

Yes.

DELILAH

Good. I'll bring some toaster pastries so you can have breakfast on the way.

EMILY

Okay.

Delilah kisses Emily's forehead and then walks to the kitchen. She begins putting the rest of the breakfast items away.

While she is going through the cabinets, Marshall stands from stage left with a fixed plastic prop skeleton. Emily sees the skeleton first. She stands up from the stairs, wipes her eyes, and walks slowly over to Marshall.

EMILY (cont'd)

You...you fixed him?

MARSHALL

Yeah. The plastic screws were just loose. Everything popped back together pretty fast. *(He hands her the prop skeleton, somewhat reluctantly)* I'm sorry I broke him.

EMILY

You fixed him. That's all that matters.

Emily goes up to Marshall and hugs his leg. He looks down at her, astonished, and then pats her awkwardly on the head. She pulls back, grins, and then lifts the prop skeleton up to show Delilah.

EMILY (cont'd)

Look, Mom! Phil is all better!

DELILAH

Well, would you look at that. I think it's an improvement. *(She smiles at Marshall, who smiles back)* Go get your backpack, honey. I don't want you to be late to school.

EMILY

Okay. *(She rushes over to the stairs)*

DELILAH

Emily?

Kathryn Staublin

EMILY

Yeah?

DELILAH

Would you leave Phil here? He's had a long day. I think he could use the rest.

EMILY

Yeah. Okay. *(She puts the prop skeleton on the bottom step, runs upstairs, grabs her backpack at the top, and then runs back down)* Got it!

DELILAH

Go out to the car honey. I'll catch up.

Emily exits stage right. Marshall is still standing awkwardly center stage. Delilah walks up to him and kisses him on the cheek.

MARSHALL

What was that for?

DELILAH

It doesn't take much to be a good dad, Marshall. You just need a little practice. And maybe a bit more patience.

MARSHALL

Thank God it's Friday.

DELILAH

Come on.

Delilah laughs briefly and exits stage right. Marshall just stands there for a moment. He looks over at the plastic prop skeleton now sitting on the stairs.

MARSHALL

You really creep me out, you know. *(He walks over to it and examines it closely. Nothing happens)* Huh.

Marshall shudders visibly and exits stage right. There is an audible click, and the lights dim, as if someone has shut the light out in the kitchen. There is enough light

to see the prop skeleton still sitting on the stairs.

After a moment, the plastic prop skeleton's head moves to look straight at the audience. Its jaw goes up and down, making a loud clacking noise. Black out.

The End.

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