

Close To The Edge

A Play in One Act

By

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Close To The Edge

Cast List

Jack Price Male, aged 30-50. A businessman.

Grim Male. Any age. Casual, enigmatic.

Janice Harper Female, aged 49. A nurse. (NB: reference to age in script can be changed if necessary)

Amy Wells Female, aged 30-60. Partner of Susie.

Susie Porter Female, aged 30-60. Partner of Amy

Susie and Amy might have similar hairstyles or clothes.

Setting

A clifftop with a stunning view.

Upstage centre there is a rock, log or bench where Grim spends much of his time. There are further areas downstage left and right with places to sit.

/ indicates overlapping speech.

Close To The Edge

A clifftop, with a spectacular view of the sea. Jack is sitting on a rock, taking in the beautiful view. He is dressed for outdoors – walking boots, waterproof jacket etc. and his backpack is resting against the rock. There is a luggage label attached to his backpack. It is peaceful, apart from the sound of seabirds and maybe some crashing waves. There are other rocks scattered about, and maybe a couple of logs which would be used as resting places by walkers who arrive here. He is enjoying the peace and solitude.

Grim enters. He is also dressed for walking, but has no backpack – he keeps everything he needs in his pockets. He approaches Jack without speaking, and sits next to him on the rock, rather too close for comfort. Jack is clearly irritated by this.

Grim: *(Looking at view, breathing in deeply and sighing)* Lovely, isn't it? *(Silence)*
I said, 'lovely, isn't it?'

Jack: Hmmmmmm

Grim: What a view! *(Silence)* Makes you glad to be alive!

Jack: Look, I don't want to be rude.....

Grim: But you're going to be?

Jack: Well, I'm sorry but...there's a lot of space up here. Why are you sitting right there?

Grim: Just being sociable!

Jack: I've come up here to get some peace and quiet

Grim: Got it! Won't say another word
(Silence. Grim makes a loud, contented sigh. This clearly irritates Jack. Then Grim sees something interesting and makes a sound)

Hah!

(Jack gets up, walks away to another rock or log and sits. Grim watches him go. He gets up, stretches, takes his time, then goes and stands next to Jack)

Jack: Look, what are you playing at?

Grim: Me? Nothing. Not playing at anything, pal.

Jack: Then leave me alone!

Grim: Ooh! A bit rude!

Jack: I've told you, I want some peace and quiet.

Grim: *(Still cheerful)* Well, you've come to the right spot. Lovely here!

Jack: It was until you arrived!

Grim: That's not very friendly

Jack: I don't want to be friendly! I don't want to be your friend. I have plenty of friends already

Grim: Really? *(Looks around)* I can't see any of your 'friends'. From where I'm standing there's a distinct lack of 'friends' in these parts. Actually, you look quite lonely to me, pal

Jack: I'm not lonely, I'm fine. Now GO AWAY!

Grim: No can do, I'm afraid

Jack: Look, I've tried being nice/

Grim: /Can't say I've noticed/

Jack: /but you're really getting on my wick. Now piss off! *(Walks away)*

(Grim starts whistling or humming tunelessly to himself)

Jack: Oh for Pete' sake! Would you shut up!

Grim: Sorry. Sorry. Quiet as a mouse; you won't know I'm here *(yawns and sighs very loudly)*

Jack: Right! That's it! I've had enough! *(Goes to backpack and starts to wriggle into it)*. I'm off!

Grim: Oh no! You can't go!

Jack: Watch me, 'Pal'

Grim: No, I'm serious. You *can't* go!

Jack: What? Look, what is your problem?

Grim: I think we got off on the wrong foot *(offers his hand for a handshake)*. I'm Grim

Jack: *(Ignoring the offered hand, still struggling with his backpack)* You're telling me!

Grim: No, I mean, that's my name: Grim!

Jack: Stupid bloody name

Grim: Well, it's not my real name, obviously. It's more of a nickname really. I've got quite a few, but 'Grim' is my favourite

Jack: Whatever. Have a nice life. *(Starts to exit)*

Grim: You can't leave, Jack

Jack: *(Stops)* What did you say?

Grim: I said 'You can't leave'

Jack: No – you used my name

Grim: Did I?

Jack: How do you know my name?

Grim: Sorry, it just slipped out, I wasn't supposed to let on just yet. But you have been making it difficult for me

Jack: Do I know you?

Grim: We've never met before, if that's what you mean, but we do have an appointment

Jack: What are you on about? Appointment? How could I have an appointment with you here? Today? Apart from anything else, it's my day off!

Grim: Ah, well, it's not a business appointment It's of a more.....personal nature.....

Jack: Do you know what? You're seriously getting on my nerves

Enter Janice

Janice: Hello! *(Turns to admire view)* Wow! What a view! That was one hell of a climb but wow! So worth it!

Jack: Oh great, another one!

Janice: I beg your pardon?

Grim: Don't mind him, he's not in a very good mood

Jack: I was fine until you turned up. I was having a nice day. I was enjoying the PEACE AND QUIET!

Janice: *(To Grim)* You're right, he is in a bad mood! *(To Jack)* You ought to be careful. I bet you've got high blood pressure, and that can be dangerous, you know/

Jack: /what would you know about it?/

Janice: /heart attack, stroke/

Grim: /he is very wound up/

Janice: /especially at your age...

Jack: At my age? You don't even know me! And I haven't got HIGH BLOODY PRESSURE!

Janice: Blood, not bloody

Jack: I know what I said! What would you know about it anyway?

Janice: I'm a nurse, so actually I know quite a bit about it. I also know rudeness when I see it, and I don't think it would hurt you to be a bit nicer. Hash-tag-be-kind.

Jack: Oh just leave me alone! *(turns away)*

Janice: *(To Grim)* Is he a friend of yours?

Grim: No, we've never met before

Jack: *(To Grim)* Then how do you know my name? Did you follow me here?

Grim: In a manner of speaking

Janice: Oh no! You're not one of those stalkers are you? Hash-tag-personal-safety-for-women

Grim: Not a stalker, no! Perish the thought! *(Offers hand to Janice for handshake. She hesitates, then takes it)* The name's Grim

Janice: Grim? As in Reaper? Grim Reaper, do you get it? *(She laughs at her joke. Grim starts to laugh too, but stops abruptly, leaving Janice still laughing, until she realises Grim is now serious, and her laughter tails off. She removes her hand from Grim's; Grim slowly nods his head)*

Seriously? (Grim nods again. There is a silence as all 3 look at each other, then)

Jack: Grim Reaper? Oh please!

Grim: 'fraid so, Jack

Jack: *(Throws arms up in the air and trembles in mock fear)* Ooooooh! The Grim Reaper has come to get me! Help! Help! *(Laughs bitterly. Grim shrugs and goes back to sit on the rock)*

Janice: *(To Jack)* He is a little strange

Jack: Strange? He's a complete nutter! But what's weird is, he knows my name!

Janice: Jack?

Jack: Yes! How does he know that?

Janice: Jack Price?

Jack: Oh my God! You too? What's going on here?

Janice: It's on your backpack

Jack: What?

Janice: *(Points)* There! 'Jack Price' and a phone number

Jack: *(Struggling out of back pack to check)* I'd forgotten that was there! That explains it! *(To Grim)* Why didn't you say? You were deliberately winding me up!

Grim: It's not difficult to get you wound up, Jack

Janice: That's true Jack. Hash-tag-blood-pressure-awareness.

Jack: Grim Reaper! You must think I'm some sort of idiot!

(From offstage)

Amy: Nearly there! I can see the clearing. Come on! *(She appears, doesn't acknowledge the others. Looks at the view)* Oh wow! *(Shouting into wings)* It's amazing. You need to see this!

(From offstage)

Susie: *(Very out of breath)* Coming! Nearly.....there.....! *(She staggers onto stage, struggling to breathe)*

Amy: Are you OK? *(Susie nods, can't speak)* I told you it would be worth it! Just look – what a view! *(Susie, bent double, still gasping for air, looks up and nods in agreement)*

Janice: Is your friend alright?

Amy: Yeah. She's just a little out of condition

Jack: I'll say!

Janice: *(Goes to Susie, who is still struggling)* Can I help? Why don't you come and sit down? *(Leads Susie to a log and sits her down. Feels her forehead, checks her pulse etc.)* Nice deep breaths....that's it.....in. Out. In. Out.

Susie: *(Gives thumbs up. Still breathless but able to talk)* Thank you. I'm fine now. Panic over! That last bit was quite a climb! *(Looks at view. To Amy)* You were right. That's quite a view! And it looks like we got here just in time; that's quite a mist rolling in

Grim: Sea mist. It's very common in these parts: one minute you're in bright sunshine, and the next, you can't see a thing

Amy: Well, it looks like none of us will be going anywhere for a while

Jack: What? *(Looks out at mist)* Oh, great! Just when you think things can't get any worse, the mist comes down and you can't escape the nutters!

Susie: I beg your pardon?

Amy: Rude!

Janice: That's not very nice

Grim: Our Jack here has trouble being nice

Jack: Will you stop using my name?

Janice: Why did you put it on your backpack for everyone to see, then? Hash-tag-identity-theft-protection

Grim: Good point, Janice

Jack: Janice? How do you know her name is Janice?

Janice: I told him....didn't I?

Jack: No, you didn't....

Grim: Well, you didn't, actually. I just happen to know it. Janice Harper, 49, nurse...

Janice: I told you I was a nurse...

Jack: Are you 49?

Janice: Yes...

Jack: Well you didn't tell him that

Janice: Lucky guess?

Susie: Or maybe he's one of those people you see on the telly who work things out about people, then use it to control them. Darren Somebody? Apparently we all give stuff away all the time, with our body language and wotnot. That Darren can get people to do all sorts, like walk across hot coals....

Amy: Rob banks...

Jack: Jump off a cliff?

(Silence, as they all take in where they are)

Grim: Okay, okay. As we're all stuck here together for the foreseeable, I suppose, in the spirit of full transparency, I should come clean. I know all your names: Jack Price, Janice Harper, and *(pointing)* you must be Susie Porter and you're Amy Wells

Amy: Wrong! I'm Amy and she's Susie

Grim: Damn! Rookie mistake!

Susie: Don't worry! We're used to it

Amy: Yeah! Happens all the time

Susie: Not that we look alike, it's just that we're always together!

Jack: Shut up! This isn't a tea party! Why are none of you bothered by this? He knows our names! Ages! How? Why? *(They all turn and look at Grim)*

Grim: Well, I can't really tell you how, because that'd fall under Data Protection. But you know who I am, so that should explain things, at least a bit.

Susie: Who are you? Did we miss something? I don't know who you are

Amy: Yeah, this is like arriving at the cinema after the film has started!

Janice: Oooh! I hate that! I like to get there early enough to get popcorn, settle in, watch the trailers...

Amy: Although the adverts are pretty annoying

Janice: Oh I don't know, I quite like the adverts

Jack: Will you PLEASE be quiet! *(To Grim)* Tell them your name

Grim: Grim. Reaper. The.

Susie: Grim.....The Grim Reaper? As in *(makes throat cutting gesture)*?

Jack: Apparently, yes!

Susie: And you know our names because....?

Jack: We're on his list! Or at least one of us is

Amy: On his list? You mean....? OH MY GOD! WE'RE STUCK ON A CLIFF IN THE FOG WITH THE GRIM REAPER! DON'T GO NEAR THE EDGE! HE'LL PUSH YOU OFF!

Janice: There's no need to panic

Amy: *(Clearly panicking)* Who's panicking?

Jack: Well you are, for a start!

Janice: *(To Jack)* And you're not? You're the one who started all this, freaking out about him, stirring everyone up!

Susie: I think we all need to calm down (*Goes to Amy, takes her hand*) Breathe....That's better

Janice: Well said Amy

Amy: It's Susie...

Janice: Susie. Sorry. Look – panicking isn't going to help anyone. We're up here together; we can't leave until the mist clears. So let's all try to get along...calmly...like rational human beings

Grim: Very sensible, Janice

Susie: She's right. Either he's a fraud, a prankster having a laugh – in which case we just wait for the mist to clear, then we leave, no harm done...

Amy: Or he really is the Grim Reaper!

Susie: In which case there's nothing we can do

Grim: If it's any consolation, I'm not going to push anyone off the cliff. I don't actually do the killing myself. I just...oversee it

Janice: I'm sure that's very reassuring, but I think you've caused enough trouble. Maybe you could just keep quiet for a while?

Grim: OK, fair enough. (*He searches through his pockets and pulls out a packet of peanuts which he opens and starts eating during the next few lines*)

Janice: (*She goes and sits next to him*) Do you know, you could get some therapy via your GP? Hash-tag-mental-health-issues. They're really hot on it these days. I think it could really help with your....delusions

Grim: (*Offering nuts*) Peanut?

Janice: No thanks, I'm allergic

Grim: Of course you are. You can't blame a chap for trying, though (*laughs*) (*To Jack*) Peanut?

Jack: Thanks

Grim: Here, have the bag. I've got some more (*Jack takes the bag and starts to eat them*)

Janice: I meet all sorts in my line of work. There's no shame in needing a little help, you know. These days mental health is regarded as just as important as physical health. It's such a common problem and...
(*During the above Jack has started to choke and cough, clutching at his throat. He staggers across the stage, clearly in distress*)

Amy: Oh my God! Oh my God! This is it!

Susie: He's choking. Somebody do something!

(Amy runs over, starts clapping Jack on the back to no avail. Susie continues to panic. Janice jumps up, goes behind Jack and performs the Heimlich manoeuvre. The nut flies out of his mouth, and Jack collapses to his knees, gasping and breathing hard. Grim does not move from the rock and stays calm throughout)

(Together)

Janice) He's OK! Just take deep breaths

Susie) Are you sure?

Amy) Oh thank goodness!

Jack: *(Weakly)* I'm OK, I'm OK

Janice: Stand back everyone, give him some space

(Susie moves away from the others, goes to join Grim)

Susie: He could have died there!

Grim: It wasn't his time

Susie: So who's time is it? Are you going to tell us?

Grim: I'm not allowed, I'm afraid.

Susie: Don't you think we have a right to know?

Grim: Well, no, actually. We can't make that decision for people. And on balance, I think you'll find that most people would rather not know

Susie: I find that hard to believe

Grim: Think about it. What would be the correct amount of notice to give? An hour? A week? Six months?

Susie: I don't know exactly, but surely it would be kinder than all this uncertainty...

Grim: So, maybe from the minute you're born?

Susie: Oh no! I don't think that would work.

Grim: Exactly! You'd live your life very differently if you knew precisely when you were going to die

Susie: It might be a good thing, for some people

Grim: It'd cause chaos. If people knew they still had another 20 years they might do all sorts of ridiculous things. They'd be leaping off cliffs and jumping in front of trains willy-nilly, if they knew it wasn't their time to go

Susie: But people do ridiculous things anyway! And maybe, as they got nearer to their 'time', they'd start to appreciate their lives and the people around them so much more than they do when the end seems a long way off

(Pause)

Grim: And you'd know all about that

(Pause)

Susie: Yes

Amy: *(Has produced a hip flask and is offering it around)* Brandy, anyone?

Janice: Ooh, lovely! Good idea! Jack? It's good for the shock

Jack: Definitely! Thanks!

(There are murmurs of approval as the three of them pass around the brandy, and lapse into a companionable silence)

Grim: Have you told Susie?

Susie: Amy! I'm Susie, she's Amy !

Grim : Sorry ! Amy...

Susie : Just when I was beginning to quite like you!

Grim: Sorry, it's been a long day! Have you told her?

Susie: No. I never seem to find the right moment. Or the right words.

Grim: You're going to have to

Susie: But maybe not. I have a progressive disease; it's only going to get worse. Much worse. I don't want her to go through that....and to have to nurse me through it. You could spare us that! If you have to take someone today, take me! Let me go now, quickly, in this beautiful place. Then everyone is happy. You've done your job, filled your quota, I've gone quickly, sparing Amy all that...nastiness...and whoever you've got your eye on here among this lot could live longer

Grim: I'm afraid it doesn't work like that...

Susie: But it could! Why not! Rules are meant to be broken! You bring so much misery; why not do a good thing for once? I'm saying I don't mind. Of course, I'd like a bit longer – who wouldn't? But in the circumstances you must agree, it would be a good thing all round.

Amy: *(Approaching Grim and Susie)* I need a comfort break. *(To Susie)* Can you come with me and keep watch?

Jack: Keep watch? It's thick fog; who's going to see?

Amy: You can't be too careful! *(Starts to exit)*

Susie: At least think about it. Please. *(Exits after Amy)*

(Janice gets up and wanders over to sit next to Grim, leaving Jack happily drinking the brandy)

Janice: Did you do that on purpose? The whole nut thing....

Grim: What? With my 'hashtag-mental-health-issues'? How could I possibly have caused that? Or are you saying that now you believe that I'm who I say I am?

(Pause)

Janice: I think you're enjoying this. Keeping us all guessing, toying with us. Like some sort of power trip

Grim: Just doing my job

Janice: Well.....speaking of which....you know I'm a nurse?

Grim: Yes, you said. A few times.....

Janice: My business is saving lives. Although I wouldn't expect you to appreciate that

Grim: On the contrary, it's admirable. It's all about balance, Janice. You can't have death without life, and vice versa

Janice: So you agree?

Grim: With what?

Janice: That it shouldn't be me! That I shouldn't die today! I'm useful to society, I have an important skillset. I'm no use to anyone if I'm dead! And what a waste of all that training. If I don't die today I can carry on being useful, saving lives. And I'd be your adversary: you try to kill them, I try to save them. I'd keep you on your toes. It's a good thing to be challenged in your job, it encourages lateral thinking, problem solving. Hashtag-continuing-professional-development.

Grim: Ah, I see. You make a good argument, Janice

Janice: Great! That's settled then! Nudge, nudge, wink, wink

Grim: Shouldn't that have a hashtag, Janice?

Janice: Oh no! We wouldn't want anyone else to know. This is strictly between us (*she moves away, back to Jack*) Any of that brandy left, Jack? (*Takes the hip flask from him*)

(*Amy and Susie enter*)

Susie: Can I have some? Need to warm up....

(*Amy goes to Grim*)

Amy: I've been thinking

Grim: That's nice....

Amy: Can it be me? (*Grim is silent*) Susie's ill, you see. She's dying

Grim: Really?

Amy: She thinks I don't know, but of course I do. You can't love someone that much and not know when there's something seriously wrong

Grim: I see

Amy: Besides, I've been reading her letters. From the hospital

Grim: Isn't that an invasion of privacy?

Amy: No! Yes! Well, anyway, that's not the point. The point is that she's going to need me, to look after her, to nurse her

Grim: So let me guess....you can't die today?

Amy: Exactly. But here's the deal: I'm okay with dying, but could we just postpone it for a while? Until she....goes. Then I can go too. I want to, once she's gone. I can't go on without her. Susie and Amy, Amy and Susie; we're the same, do you see? That's why people muddle us up; we're interchangeable. What would I do without her? Who would finish my sentences? Who would put just the right amount of sugar in my tea? Who would know that when I say I want to be left alone, what I really mean is that I want a cuddle? I can't live without her. I can't exist without her. So when she goes, I can go too. Just not today. I have to be with her until.....Then I can go too. What do you say?

Grim: I'll certainly give it some thought, Amy

Amy: Hey! You got my name right! I'm taking that as a good sign! (*Heads back towards the others*)

Susie: *(Offering Amy the hip flask)* Here! There's not much left

Amy: Thanks *(Raises flask in a toast to Janice)* Well done Janice! You were literally a life-saver today!

Jack: Yeah, thanks Janice

Janice: All in a day's work! Although it's a good job I got lost on my walk. If I'd gone where I intended, I wouldn't have been here to help Jack.

Susie: Really?

Janice: Yes! I was intending to walk through the woods to the waterfall. The Penniway Falls?

Susie: That's miles back! How did you go so wrong?

Janice: I think I should have crossed the river at the stepping stones, but they looked a bit precarious so I carried on along the woodland path. Truth be told, I've never been much of a map-reader. It was quite a climb! I thought perhaps I'd end up at the top of the waterfall, but actually I'm glad I went wrong. I got to see this wonderful view and save Jack's life! Hash-tag-make-a-difference!

Susie: View? *(Looks out at view)* Oh, wow! Look everyone, the view's back; the mist is clearing!

Amy: So we can leave! Come on! *(They all start to get up)* But what about...you-know-who? *(Indicates Grim)*

Susie: He might follow us?

Jack: Wait a minute everyone, don't you see? He was here for me, but we cheated him! I should have choked on that peanut and died – that's what he was planning! But fate intervened. Janice wasn't meant to be here but she was, and she saved me! Completely by chance! He can't hurt us now, we have nothing to fear! We've won! He's failed!

Amy: Do you know, he could be right!

Jack: Of course I'm right! It was me all along – I'm the one he wanted. Come on! Let's get out of here before he comes up with another plan! He's not getting his hands on me!

(General ad libbing as everyone quickly collects up belongings. Grim calmly sits, watching)

Janice: 'Bye Jack. Take care.

Grim: Hash-tag-nice-knowing-you Janice *(she gives him a thumbs up)*

Jack: *(Ushering the women off)* This way, come on! *(They exit. Jack turns back to Grim)*
Loser!
(Jack exits after the others)

Grim: *(Watches them go. Sighs, gets up, stretches casually. Takes out mobile phone and holds it up, wanders around to get a signal. Dials a number)* Hello? Yes, fine, fine. It got a bit complicated at one point but it's all sorted now. They're all on the cliff path, so the landslide can happen now. Thanks. Yeah, I'm off to my next appointment. Talk soon. Bye!
(Puts phone away)
(To audience): Well, I never said it would be only one of them, did I?
(Starts to exit. Stops and speaks to audience again)
Oh! I'll be seeing you....! *(Exits)*

Curtain