

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Dead Man Walking

By Ali Keller

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The street outside the Dead Rabbit, a bar in FiDi (financial district). An upscale pub where you'll find two kinds of men. The first being the new gen finance bro: guys in their twenties wearing rolex-esque watches so people know they make bank, suits to make up for how young their baby face makes them look, and pastel dress shirts for when their baby faces aren't enough to get away with their slightly inappropriate jokes. It's an ensemble that says, "I'm nice and open-minded, I'm not tryin' to offend anybody. I'm too clueless to offend anybody just look at my pink shirt."

And the second kind, being that one friend the new gen finance bro has, that owns a leather jacket.

JACK, late 20s, a jacket, shoves PETER, a suit, out the front door and onto the sidewalk in front of the bar.

The stumble out of the bar still fighting.

PETER

I'm out. I'm out. Jesus.

He swipes at Jack.

PETER

I was kind of in the middle of something important, you ass-hat.

JACK

This couldn't wait.

They stop fighting and pull it together a little bit. Peter straightens himself out. Jack takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket.

JACK

(holding out the pack)

Have one.

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PETER
 Maybe after.

Peter heads back into the bar. Jack grabs his arm and pulls him around.

PETER
 I don't want a cigarette right now.

JACK
 You never want one anymore.

PETER
 Yea. 'Cause cancer and shit.

JACK
 Jesus, Petey. You're so whipped.

PETER
(correcting him) Peter. And I'm not whipped just because I don't want cancer.

JACK
 No, you're whipped because you never used to care about getting cancer and now you do. You're *(imitating Peter's girlfriend Amy)* Peter now. You're different.

PETER
 Yea, I'm less likely to get cancer. So it's a good different.

JACK
 Well nobody else thinks so.

Jack goes to light a cigarette.

PETER
 Can you not?

Jack moves the lighter away from the cigarette.

JACK
 If you say second hand smoke kills, I will punch you.

PETER
 I was gonna say 'cause I wanna to get this done. And Amy hates the smell.

Jack goes to light it.

PETER

You of all people knows it does though.

Jack stops before lighting.

PETER

I'm just saying - how do you explain yourself to all those sick kids? How do you look them in their sweet little faces and smile while lighting up the very thing that is second-hand killing them?

JACK

The kids don't have cancer from second-hand smoke.

PETER

Not even one of them?

Jack is quiet.

PETER

How do look yourself in the eye?

JACK

How do you?

PETER

How do I what?

JACK

Look at yourself - knowing that your with Amy. *Amy* - the cancer of people.

Peter is stunned. He takes a step back towards the door, but something stops him. He turns back around.

PETER

No, I'm not just gonna ignore your shit anymore, Jack. Are you fucking serious? What is wrong with you? That's a fucked up thing to say.

JACK

No, it's not. She killed you. Like cancer. She killed you and I won't let you marry her.

PETER

Let me? I don't need the permission of a hospital receptionist to get married.

JACK

I'm your fucking brother.

PETER

(loudly)

Then fucking act like it.

(regaining control of himself)

And just be supportive.

JACK

I'll be supportive when you want to marry the right person.

PETER

Amy is the right person.

JACK

You called her your training model.

PETER

I used to say and do a lot of things that I wouldn't today.

JACK

Exactly and now you're this pastel person proposing to this -

PETER

Watch it.

JACK

Whatever. Everybody hates her.

PETER

Everybody hates her?

JACK

I don't know if *(makes a global gesture)* everybody hates her. But your family definitely does.

PETER

That's just you.

JACK

Well our friends too.

PETER

Our friends have only met her like once or twice.

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JACK

Yea. That's how much she sucks.

PETER

(aggressively)

You suck.

JACK

Look, I know this isn't what you want to hear right now. The timing's not great, but -

PETER

Not great? I was down on one knee.

JACK

Yea, but it's not like she turned around yet. I don't think she noticed.

PETER

JACK.

JACK

I didn't think it'd come this.

PETER

I told you I was thinking about proposing.

JACK

You also said you were thinking about dumping her. You're twenty-four -

PETER

So? You're only like two years older than me.

JACK

Yea, but the difference between twenty-four and twenty-six in adulting is like the difference between a watergun and a semi-automatic.

PETER

Is it though? 'Cause you just used the word adulting to prove a point.

JACK

My point is when a toddler says they want to play army, you don't buy them an AR-15.
(beat) You've said you were gonna marry every girl you ever dated.

PETER

Well Amy's different.

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JACK

Yea, and she made you different too.

PETER

I jumped off a roof a year ago. On a dare. Totally sober. If I didn't change I'd probably be dead.

JACK

That's a little dramatic.

PETER

Me? You tackled me mid-proposal. For no reason. You were never gonna like the person I ended up with. You never liked any of my girls.

JACK

Because you have terrible taste. You've always have. From the beginning - since Megan.

PETER

What about Megan?

JACK

Megan was the most immature person on the planet.

PETER

We were in third grade.

JACK

She pushed you off the swing set -

PETER

Oh my god, let it go. I'm not proposing to Megan so it doesn't matter.

JACK

Yes, but you would be - you'd still be in that toxic relationship if your big brother hadn't broken up with her for you.

PETER

Yes, if you hadn't helped me, I'd definitely still be in the relationship that started when I was eight. Thank you. I'm going to propose to Amy now.

Jack takes the ring out of his coat pocket.

JACK

Gonna be a little hard without this, yea? *(beat)* You're not ready for marriage if you can't even hold onto the ring.

PETER

Give it, Jack.

He rolls his fist into a ball.

PETER

I mean it.

JACK

(referring to Peter's shirt)

That would be a lot scarier if you weren't dressed for Easter Sunday.

Peter tries to get the ring from Jack. They struggle for a minute. Jack shoves the ring down his pants.

PETER

That was expensive as fuck. Get it away from your dick.

JACK

Come and take it.

Jack goes to light a cigarette as Peter charges at him. Jack fends him off with one hand. Peter keeps trying, but eventually tires out and stops. Beat. Peter smacks the cigarette Jack's been trying to light out of his mouth.

JACK

Fuck you.

PETER

Fuck you. I wanted you here so the only real relative I've got left could be by my side for one of the most important moments in my life. And you're fucking it up. You're fucking up my life right now.

JACK

You're fucking up your life right now. I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to save your life.

PETER

(rolling his eyes)

Oh my god, not everything's life and death, Jack.

JACK

It's an expression.

PETER

It's your world view.

JACK

What is that supposed to mean?

PETER

It means that everything with is do or die -

JACK

That's not true -

PETER

It's a normal day or the *end of the world* -

JACK

Just because I take things seriously -

PETER

"Remember that this commitment is forever - you can't get annoyed after two years and quit."

JACK

That's good advice.

PETER

Not during a game at a fucking wedding shower of people you barely know! People don't want to think about that shit then.

JACK

And in two years they'll thank me later.

PETER

No, they won't 'cause they were my friends. Jesus Jack...

Beat.

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JACK

What? (*no response*) You're not getting this ring back until you say whatever it is you wanna say. So just say it.

Beat.

PETER

What you see from your little reception desk warps you -

JACK

Warped? Could you be a bigger jackass? These families do not -

PETER

I'm not saying the families are warped. I'm saying you're warped.

JACK

Excuse me?

PETER

Jack, look at your life. You're like homeless.

JACK

No, I'm not.

PETER

You live in Brooklyn.

JACK

In *an apartment* in Brooklyn. You're such a fuckin' douche.

PETER

But you didn't have to, Jack. You walked away from a fucking job at Lazard to what? Watch terrified parents hover around their dying kids from the check in desk?

JACK

Those kids needed me.

PETER

They need doctors. Not you. God, haven't you changed since we were eight - swooping in to be the hero when you're actually just exacerbating the problem.

JACK

That's not true.

PETER

Yea, it is. I wasn't afraid of Megan. I forgot we were dating.

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JACK

A likely story.

PETER

For an eight year old, yea it is likely. I didn't need you then. And those kids don't need you to leering at them and their doting parents now.

JACK

I'm not leering. I am helping them - lifting their spirits.

PETER

The only spirits your lifting are your own. If you really wanted to help those kids you'd use your degree from Columbia, make bank, and donate it. Or be the hospital's fucking fund manager and make that place more money so that the kids would be in an even better facility. But you're not. 'Cause it's not enough for you to just see people trying to smile through the worst shit in their lives, you need them to smile at *you* too.

JACK

That's not true.

PETER

Yes, it is. We couldn't get you home for the last five Thanksgivings, Christmases, but you flew home right away once Mom was admitted into the hospital. That's when your family was good to you. Not for the good times. When we could fucking thank you for all your help. It's fucking embarrassing.

JACK

No, you know what's fucking embarrassing someone who cannot understand that money isn't the only way to help someone. That sometimes being a smiling face and someone to talk to goes just as far as ten thousand dollars.

PETER

A smile can't cure cancer.

JACK

And money can't cure anything.

PETER

Actually, the only thing money can't cure is the family you were born with. But it can buy me a new family to replace them with.

Beat.

PETER

Can I have the ring back now please?

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JACK

Why did you even want me here tonight?

PETER

Because you're my brother.

JACK

Am I? Or am I just an embarrassment?

PETER

Right now it's a little hard to tell.

JACK

Not sure why you'd want me in there then. Amy might not marry you just to avoid having such a giant loser in her life.

PETER

No, because Amy doesn't think like that - she's nice. She's from a *family* family. One that plays board games, and talks, and fuck forget talks - they smile when they see each other.

JACK

As a formality, not because they feel anything.

PETER

They do feel something - it's called happiness. You wanna know who smiles out of formality? The parents of dying kids. (*beat*) Amy just wants to smile when she sees her family, in-laws included. She wants to make sure that her in-laws are able to smile back when they see her. Ya know for when we have kids and shit.

JACK

So you have to prove to her you're good enough? You shouldn't have to do that. We may not be the perfect -

PETER

Not perfect? You're fucking garbage. You can't even pretend to be happy for me.

JACK

Pretending's never helped anyone.

PETER

That's some big talk from someone who's reaped the benefits.

JACK

What are you talking about?

PETER

Your confidence. You wouldn't have the balls to disrupt my life right now if you had known I'd been laughing at you behind back all year.

Beat.

JACK

You say that now, but you're just upset I'm being honest with you. You told me you were proud of me for switching careers.

Peter shakes his head.

PETER

No, I said I was proud of you for "taking the leap." It's what you said to me when I jumped off that roof. Because that's what you say when you have to let someone do something stupid.

Bea.

JACK

I'm not gonna say it.

PETER

Then don't say anything. Just stand there while I propose and slap a smile on your face for the pictures.

JACK

No. I'm not gonna smile while I watch you put the final nail in your own coffin. I won't lie to you.

PETER

Why not? That's what those parents do every time they smile in the face of their dying kids. They're not happy - it's not out of love - it's so they and their kids can pretend for that one second they're not in excruciating pain.

Beat. Jack takes the ring out of his pants and holds it out to Peter. Peter takes it and starts heading inside. Jack stays put, staring at his cigarette. Peter gets all the way to the door and turns around.

PETER

If you're not inside for the photo, don't bother coming back in.

Peter opens the door.

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JACK

You never said you loved her.

Peter looks at Jack.

JACK

You said you wanted her to be your family. You didn't say you loved her.

PETER

I never said I loved you either.

They stare at each other for a second. Jack forces a smile. Peter nods and goes in. After a moment Jack follows. Blackout. End of play.

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