

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Year After Year
by Melisa Breiner-Sanders

We see a living room modestly decorated for Christmas: a one-foot Christmas tree with lights and a star on top sits in the corner, a poinsettia is at the door and various other decorations are scattered. A box of decorations remains half unpacked and to the side. There is a warm, soft glow to the room. MARY, 50s, is beginning to set the table.

PAUL, also 50s, enters and begins to take off his layers. He holds a shopping bag.

Paul The stores weren't nearly as bad as I thought they'd be but the shelves were just about emptied out. Still able to get milk but only a pint.

Mary That's fine, we won't be having more than that anyway.

Paul puts the milk in the fridge then walks over and kisses Mary on the head as she continues setting the table.

Paul What are you doing?

Mary Setting the table.

Paul You know what I mean.

Mary I'm just setting the table.

Paul Don't do that.

Mary Don't do what?

Paul Please, Mary, just stop.

Mary Would *you* rather set the table?

Paul No, I would not rather set the table.

Mary Because you can certainly set the table if you don't want me to set the table.

Paul Can we stop saying, "set the table"?! *(beat)* I thought we were past this.

Mary Past what?

Paul Don't play games.

Mary I'm not playing games.

Paul You don't see what you're doing?

Mary I'm cooking dinner, I've decorated, I'm setting the table.

Paul I never asked you to decorate, I could have done that.

Mary I wanted to.

Paul And now we see how well that's worked out.

Mary I think it all looks rather nice.

Paul Look at what you're doing.

Mary What?!

Paul You're setting the table for three.

Mary looks down at the table, takes a moment and realizes what she did. She sits down, defeated.

Mary Shit.

Paul This is bad...

Mary It'll be fine.

Paul How is it going to be fine?

Mary I don't do it on purpose. ... It's ... muscle memory and sometimes it's easier to go with it then to fight it. I'm not even thinking, it just comes out.

Paul After six years it shouldn't get this bad still.

Mary I didn't realize there was a time limit.

Paul There's no time limit but at some point...

Mary At some point what?

Paul At some point we...have to...I don't know.

Mary You don't know...

Paul I just want you to be better.

Mary But I don't want to forget her, Paul.

Paul Being better doesn't mean you forget.

Mary It does to you.

Paul It does not.

Mary It does. Every time I remember her, you get upset.

Paul If you told stories or looked at pictures or...this is something else.

Mary You've forgotten.

Paul I have not. How dare you.

Mary You have. You never speak about her, I always have to be the one to –

Paul Just because I don't go around crying my pain from the rooftops doesn't mean it's not there. Not all of us have to advertise. Sometimes things are private.

Mary Private from me?

Paul How am I supposed to talk to you?

Mary With your words...

Paul I can't. I have to be the strong one, you're the one who is coming apart at the seams.

Mary I am not!

Paul I walk in that door and I never know what to expect.

Mary That's not true.

Paul Some days are fine and then some days you cry non-stop and then some days you've dragged her tennis racket out of storage and put it by the front door like she's coming home from school.

Mary I'm doing the best that I can.

Paul It's just...when things are good with you, I don't want to ruin it.

Mary You won't ruin it. *(beat)* When I remember her, it's like some part of her is here. It's nice.

A few beats.

Paul I don't know if that's good or bad for you...

A few more beats.

Mary You have to stop hiding things from me.

Paul I know, you want me to talk about—

Mary Not thoughts. Things.

Paul Oh.

A beat.

Mary I found her stocking today. I saw it and I just stared at it and thought, "What am I supposed to do with this?" Do I put it up? Do I throw it away? Do I put it back in the box like it doesn't exist? Paul clearly thought it was better to hide it. But now I know it's here, I can't forget I know it's here and then it just feels like I'm ignoring her if I put it away, like she's no longer part of the family. So I put it aside to figure it out later and then I see the old Christmas cards. You always hated that I saved them, said it was pointless and it was all just junk Janey would have to go through when we passed so better for us to throw it out now to save her the trouble.

A few beats.

Paul Did you find the angel?

Mary Where is it?

Paul I put it in a box labeled “More Bows.”

Mary But I labeled that box.

Paul That’s why I knew you wouldn’t check in there.

Paul goes to the box. He knows exactly where it is, though some things have been moved around a bit. He searches.

Mary Where are the bows?

Paul Why do we need two boxes of bows?

Mary They were still good.

Paul There was four layers of tape on the back and they were all smushed down. If you really want, I can get a whole new bag at the dollar store.

Mary It just seems wasteful.

Paul Here it is.

He finds the box labeled “More Bows” and reverently brings it to the table. He opens the box to find an angel tree topper that has seen many years of use but has been flattened because of its time in the box. Paul takes it out and hands it to Mary. Mary stares at it and unconsciously begins to fix it up.

Mary Remember how she wanted to look just like this angel?

They both just stare at it.

Paul Let’s put it on the tree.

Mary nods, rises, and moves towards the tree in the corner. The angel is too big for the small tree and most of the angel has to lean against the wall to be upright. She takes out a bulb from the string of lights, plugs in the angel and she glows. Paul and Mary stare at the tree, just far

apart from each other so as not to touch. Mary begins to cry. Paul gingerly puts his arm around her shoulders as the lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY.