

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Stay
A short play by Jenny Kirlin

Running time: 12 minutes

Synopsis: At the tail end of a breakup, a man returns to the house he once shared to take the last thing he's left behind.

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Stay
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PEN, mid-thirties, circles the kitchen table, her hands clenched, knuckles white. NEIL, also mid-thirties, rifles through the cabinets grabbing items and placing them into a box.

Pen I'm sick about it. I really am.

Neil That's not my problem.

Pen Okay.

NEIL turns and opens his mouth to say something and doesn't. He opens the refrigerator and cracks open a can of soda. He takes a gulp and puts it back in the refrigerator.

Pen (cont.) I'm not going to drink your old coke.

Neil Fine.

NEIL takes it out.

Pen (cont.) Please take the sardines. I really can't look at them anymore. They've been in there for months and Sam keeps trying to get at them. Do Sardines go bad? I don't even know. They're white and fishy and...please just take them.

Neil (grabbing the can of sardines) Then why did you buy them?

Pen I had a coupon.

Neil That's not a reason.

Pen You tried them once on a dare. At our old apartment.

Neil I remember. They were disgusting.

Pen Yeah, but you liked them. Kinda.

NEIL chucks the can of sardines into the trash receptacle across the room. PEN flinches.

Neil FIXED. (beat) Have no idea why you couldn't have done that...

He takes another gulp of the soda and empties the rest in the sink. He goes back to the cabinets and takes out a small white plastic bowl with a red and blue train painted on it. PEN sees this and starts.

Pen Don't!

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Neil Pen, it's one bowl.

Pen I *made* that for him.

Neil There's an entire cabinet of bowls you made for him.

Pen Yes, but that's his favorite.

Neil Well, I need to bring *something* to make him feel at home. And everything I take you say is his favorite.

NEIL places the bowl in the box.

Pen NOT YET!

PEN lunges for the box. NEIL grabs it and puts it on the counter and whips back around on PEN.

Neil *Don't make this a thing.*

Pen I-

Neil I purposefully saved his stuff for last. To be nice. But we have to go now.

Pen *He's going to miss me.*

Neil Of course he is.

Pen You can't stop that.

Neil I don't want to stop that.

Pen You're *taking* him from me!

Neil You'll see him again.

Pen And what am I supposed to do in the meantime?

Neil Get out. Shop, get your nails done, make new bowls. Whatever it is you do.

Pen *I don't do anything.*

Neil (*bitingly*) I know.

NEIL grabs the box and heads out of the room.

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Pen *(calling after him)* That's not what I meant!

Rustling is heard in the other room.

Neil *(O.S.)* I'm not playing house with you and Sam for the next ten years.

Pen I just meant –

More rustling.

Neil *(O.S.)* Do you know where my beard trimmer is?

Pen I put it under the sink –

Neil *(O.S.)* Sam will be *fine*. He'll adjust.

PEN goes to the doorway.

Pen He's not so great at adjusting. He goes crazy every time you're gone –

Neil *(O.S.)* Because he's young –

Pen He runs around in circles –

Neil *(O.S.)* And the second I'm back it's like I never left. I bring him a new toy and he doesn't remember he's sad.

Beat.

Pen WOW.

NEIL steps back in the doorway.

Neil You know what I mean.

PEN just stares.

Neil *(con't.)* And, besides, I won't be gone so much anymore.

Pen You know. I've never really been with you when you've been around all the time. *(beat)* Maybe I'd like you.

Neil Stop it, Pen. I've been back for three months. Nothing has changed.

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Pen I don't want to just be the person that waves stuffed animals in his face to get him to like me, *Neil*.

Neil Stop.

Pen I'm his *mother*.

Neil He's a dog.

Pen He'll go crazier for you with me gone. I'm the one who feeds him, walks him, brushes him, talks to him, plays with him...

Neil *He's a dog*.

Pen Stop saying that! If you think that so hard, maybe you should just leave him with me. Maybe you should get a fucking fish.

Neil What?!

Pen A *fish*, Neil. You can feed it and then leave it for a few days. Or just stick it in the fridge. It'll suit you.

Neil He's MY dog.

Pen But I'm the one that takes care of him!

Neil When *I can't*. Yes.

Pen When he's a burden for you.

Neil Excuse me?!

Pen You *left* him here with me.

Neil He's still my dog. You don't think I wanted to stay home with you and him? You knew the deal when I left. If I just stayed there a year, I would make enough that I wouldn't *have* to go anymore. We could afford a better apartment. We could go to Morocco. I remember. It was a "wicked" good idea.

Pen Just don't blame me for the fact that I am close to him because *you weren't around*.

NEIL hits the frame of the door with his fist.

Neil I can't do this. Most of my stuff has been at Bill's since Wednesday and you never said a word.

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Pen I was lonely!

Neil *So was I.* And I was living in a hotel room in Ashtabula. And got cards from a *dog*. Every week.

Pen You laughed –

Neil Because I thought it was funny. The first time! I just didn't think I would stop hearing from you altogether.

Pen That didn't happen.

Neil It absolutely did. For Christ sakes. It was six months of hearing about new friends Sam made on a walk and how he thought a black plastic bag was a cat. You don't think I wanted to hear about what you were doing?! I wasn't there. You could have said anything. Anything would have been news.

PEN spins around and throws her arms up in the air.

Pen You can't just do *that*. You can't just put that on us. You never said anything. It's not our fault you just let that build up inside you.

Neil I'm not putting it on Sam.

PEN starts past him in the doorway.

Neil (*con't.*) Do you know how much I was looking forward to being back here with you?! Which was *the plan* the whole time.

PEN stops.

Pen Fuck you. So have I. I wasn't having picnics here you know. I was running home every day between meetings and dinner appointments to get home to Sam. I missed my cousin's wedding because he doesn't get along well with others. Don't put this all on me.

Neil Fine. I can take care of Sam now. And you can do whatever you want. Without him to run home to.

Pen I have liked coming home to him.

Neil I know you did.

Pen It was the best part of my day. I just meant it wasn't easy. I didn't mean I wasn't excited about being with you again.

Neil Except you're on a couch. Cuddling with a dog.

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Pen I keep telling you I want it to work. I don't not want it to work, Neil.

Neil You don't even ask how my day was. That's like the most basic thing. How is that making it work?

Pen Well, when was the last time you told me?

Neil When was the last time you *asked*? *I'm still lonely*. There is nothing else for us to talk about besides kibble and squirrels.

Pen *What do you want me to do?!*

Neil You keep asking me that! *Anything*. Be a professional Mary Kay lady in one of them pink cars on the side if that excites you. I don't know. It doesn't matter. I just want you to be excited. And to tell me about *people things* that you're doing.

Pen Fine. The people thing that I'm doing right now is fighting with my boyfriend. My boyfriend who wants me to drive around in a pink lady car.

Neil That's NOT what I'm saying. Just fucking talk to me. I just want to be excited about what you're doing. I want to have to keep up with you again.

Pen My job is not exciting. It's a job. The same way your job was that took you away from here for a year.

Neil Then why don't you quit.

Pen Because I've been there six years. And I can't just quit every job after six years if it isn't exciting anymore.

Neil Then what else —

Silence.

Pen You and Sam. I'm excited about you and Sam.

Neil I think you just want my dog.

Pen That's not what I meant-

Neil I think it is.

Beat.

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Pen I don't want to have to race around for you to like me. I want to come home...and just...be home. And maybe that's terrible, but –

Neil That's not terrible. That's just not what I want.

Pen Neil....

NEIL crosses to the back door. He grabs the chain from around the knob and wraps the leash around his hand.

Pen (con't.) Please don't.

Neil Pen-

Pen You're gonna make me lonesome when you go.

Neil I'm not up for doing this alone anymore.

Pen PLEASE.

Neil He'll be fine.

Pen Please. Stay.

Neil I'm sorry. I really am.

NEIL goes into the other room and grabs the box with his free hand.

Pen Who will I cuddle with in bed? Who can I wiggle my feet under on the couch to keep my feet warm? My ripped up red slippers, the extra attachment on the vacuum, my collection of paisley bandanas.

Neil This is what I am talking about! *I'm* leaving and you're going to miss *him*.

Pen I am. You've been for a long time, Neil. And he was the reason I was never alone.

NEIL opens the door and leaves, the screen door swinging shut behind him. You can hear SAM running up to greet him, followed by a muffled "good, boy," "how are ya?," etc. PEN slumps down in a chair.

End of play.

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