

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Vega
by Jerzy Gwiazdowski

The Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History. Waiting outside the entrance is AMBER, early twenties. She's looking at her smartphone, texting. She scans the crowd. Back to her phone. She texts again, shrugging to herself. She looks up and scans again, this time landing on a spot in the distance. She gives a nod of recognition and an unenthusiastic wave. CARTER arrives and makes an awkward "hello!" face.

They stare at each other.

CARTER: Hey, Amber.

She doesn't reply.

CARTER: Where is she?

AMBER: She's coming.

CARTER: Okay.

AMBER: Thanks for being here.

CARTER: Yeah, of course.

AMBER: You're late.

CARTER: Late? I made record time from JFK.

AMBER: You're still late.

CARTER: There was traffic. I tried to Google a faster route but Siri thought I was saying "Hayden Panettiere" instead of "Hayden Planetarium."

AMBER: You said you'd be able to make it at 2:30. It's after three.

CARTER: Give me some credit. This wasn't easy.

AMBER: Wasn't it?

CARTER: No. You're really a frightening person.

AMBER: Good.

CARTER: Well, she's late too. So: surprise intact. No harm done. The stars aligned in our favor.

AMBER: Did you bring your- thing?

Carter reaches into the pocket of his hooded sweatshirt and pulls out a small, rolled-up plastic bag.

CARTER: I haven't missed one yet. Not gonna start now.

AMBER: I mean, she would have understood.

CARTER: Amber. I'm fine.

AMBER: No, I know- I just- It's different now.

CARTER: Doesn't have to be.

AMBER: Carter...

CARTER: I know you have a very high opinion of yourself, but can we just- I'm over it. Let's pretend that never happened. Okay?

AMBER: You moved away. It was hard for her.

CARTER: I'm here now.

AMBER: It's weird.

CARTER: I don't want to be weird. It's good to see you. I missed you.

Carter opens his arms for a hug. Amber accepts briefly, buttoning it with a professional back-pat.

AMBER: Nobody Loves You because you make things awkward.

CARTER: Nobody Loves You because you are a control freak.

AMBER: Nobody Loves You because you run away when they need your help and now the business is in debt.

CARTER: Nobody Loves You because of your stupid haircut.

AMBER: You noticed.

CARTER: When was the last time we did this?

AMBER: After I broke up with Trip.

CARTER: Right. Trip. Ugh.

AMBER: He was fine. Just not for me.

CARTER: Nobody Loves You because you've never been heartbroken. *(Beat)* I don't know anything about this guy, so you have to take the lead here.

AMBER: Arthur. I barely know him.

CARTER: Nobody tells me anything.

AMBER: This isn't about you, Carter.

CARTER: Wow. Okay. But you know, I'd like to be there for her. FOR her. I know what it's like to have my heart broken. You don't.

From offstage, we hear an excited shriek. It's RENA.

RENA *(Offstage)*: Ohh myyy gosssshhhh!!

AMBER: When was the last time you spoke to her?

RENA enters, holding a twisted balloon flower, flying toward CARTER and wrapping him in a giant bear hug.

RENA: Carter! Ahhh!

CARTER: Heyyyy.

RENA: Yaaaaaaaay! Thank you for coming.

They release the hug and look at each other. RENA is all smiles. Radiating energy.

CARTER: You summoned me for a Love Funeral. I created the rule, I guess I should follow it.

RENA: Oh my God, how are you?

CARTER: Okay. How are you?

RENA: I'm me.

CARTER: I guess that'll have to do.

Carter laughs. Rena bops him on the nose with the balloon flower. Carter looks at it.

CARTER: Is that what you brought?

RENA: This is it.

AMBER: It's going to be hard to bury.

RENA: *(to Amber)* I know, I'm late!

CARTER: We were worried about you!

RENA: You mean Amber was worried about me.

AMBER: I wasn't worried. We were just wondering where you were.

RENA: I was "enjoying the sunshine."

Amber looks at the flower.

AMBER: When did you start making those again?

Rena holds up the flower.

RENA: Do you like it?

AMBER: I was always bad at the balloons. It's great.

RENA: It's terrible!

AMBER: Well, you're out of practice. It's been a while.

RENA: The first few popped.

AMBER: You'll get back in the groove of things.

CARTER: Nobody Loves You because your flower is crooked.

RENA: Ha. The bag was old. I think the balloons were expired.

AMBER: When was the last time you made one?

RENA: Last year. With Albina.

AMBER: Whoa. Flashback.

CARTER: Who's Albina?

RENA: Albina. (*Rena holds up the balloon flower. Beat.*) Albina? We used to work together?

CARTER: No idea.

AMBER: You met her.

RENA: We got arrested for clowning by the Central Park Zoo without a permit?

AMBER: Remember? The cops jumped out of the bushes!

RENA: Yeah! After Goofy Gary called them on us for working in his territory.

CARTER: When was this? Was it after I moved?

RENA: It was before you moved.

AMBER: But after you stopped caring. So yeah, a year ago. Shit! Almost two.

RENA: No.

AMBER: June 20th.

RENA: Jesus.

CARTER: Oh! Albina! She's Russian! We didn't hire her!

RENA: Yeah.

CARTER: She scared children.

RENA: No she didn't...

AMBER: She scared Carter. And she always made weird faces when she was twisting. Very stressful. Like she was diffusing a bomb.

RENA: But very enthusiastic!

CARTER: Albina... What was her clown name?

RENA: Albina the Clown.

CARTER: Right. How is she?

RENA: She has a permit now.

AMBER: Good for her.

CARTER: How'd she manage that?

AMBER: She works alone.

Beat. Rena gasps.

RENA: Oh my God you guys hate each other! Is this awkward?

CARTER: We don't hate each other.

RENA: Amber hates you.

AMBER: I'm putting up with him. Because you're that important to us.

RENA: Why didn't we ever do a Love Funeral for you two?

AMBER: Because we weren't in love.

RENA: *(teasing)* Carter was.

AMBER: You can't fall in love by yourself.

RENA: I fall in love about every time i take the subway. Ooh, on the way here, there was this guy with a neck tattoo, but not a gross one-

CARTER: Can we drop it?

Beat. Rena doesn't drop it.

RENA: Are you staying with her?

AMBER: No, I-

CARTER: I got an Airbnb.

AMBER: He's not staying with me.

RENA: Cuz that would be weird. Roomies again! Can we get out of here?

AMBER: What, why?

RENA: I don't feel like being cooped up.

AMBER: Okay, but there's a show! We have tickets!

RENA: But I've seen all the shows.

AMBER: This is a new one.

RENA: Let me see?

Amber reaches into her purse and gives Rena an envelope. Rena hands Amber the balloon. Rena reaches into the envelope and pulls out three tickets.

AMBER: It looks really good. Dark matter.

CARTER: Cool.

RENA: Ugh. Okay, BRB.

Rena heads for the entrance.

CARTER: Where are you going?

RENA: Gotta pee.

AMBER: Oh- I'll come with you.

RENA: No, I'm fine.

AMBER: Maybe she should-

RENA: Nope.

AMBER: That's not what I meant.

RENA: Don't kill my flower while I'm gone... Byeee!

RENA bounces into the planetarium entrance, ticket aloft.

RENA: Paying customer, make way!

Rena disappears inside. Carter turns to Amber.

AMBER: What?

CARTER: I'm not doing this.

AMBER: What the fuck, Carter?

CARTER: Can't we just go to a bar and catch up? Do we have to do this stupid thing?

AMBER: You came up with this stupid thing.

CARTER: So you agree that it's stupid.

AMBER: *It's what we do.* Someone - usually Rena- goes through a breakup, we see a cool space show, and we bury the relationship in the park. It's *our* stupid thing. It was your idea!

CARTER: We were 14.

AMBER: Listen, if you can't handle it...

CARTER: I can handle it. But I don't want to do it. Can't we just go to Fred's and talk through it?

AMBER: We can't go to Fred's.

CARTER: Why not?

AMBER: Because we can't.

CARTER: Why don't we ask Rena? It's her breakup.

AMBER: No.

CARTER: Why not?

AMBER: If you wan't to go, then go. But Rena and I are going to do this.

CARTER: Even if she doesn't want to?

AMBER: She wants to. *This was her idea.*

CARTER: She's not acting like she wants to do it.

AMBER: She needs to.

CARTER: Does she? What makes you so sure?

AMBER: I'm sure, Carter.

CARTER: You don't have any idea. I've never seen you even *blink* at the end of a relationship. How can you possibly know what she's going through?

Beat.

AMBER: She tried to kill herself.

CARTER: What?

AMBER: Rena tried to kill herself, Carter.

CARTER: That doesn't make any sense. Rena- that doesn't make any sense.

AMBER: I know.

CARTER: She's way to self-obsessed for something like that.

AMBER: Apparently not.

CARTER: When?

AMBER: It was the day after they broke up. So a week?

CARTER: Why didn't you tell me?

AMBER: I didn't tell anyone. *Especially you.*

CARTER: Well now we're definitely not doing this ceremony.

AMBER: *Yes we are.* She asked me to do it. She wanted you here for it. She hasn't asked for anything- or wanted to DO anything since it happened. So that's what we're going to do. Can you do that?

CARTER: I don't know if I can.

AMBER: Nothing is different. So no suicide, no hospital, no crying. Just normal, shitty, life. As if none of this happened.

CARTER: Amber.

AMBER: Do *not* bring it up.

CARTER: How can I not bring it up?

AMBER: Like this:

Amber stares at Carter for a silent beat.

CARTER: Did she say anything beforehand? Did she seem depressed?

AMBER: Yeah, she seemed depressed. So I thought everything was normal. She was her usual miserable self.

CARTER: There weren't any signs?

AMBER: What, like "spoiler alert: I'm suicidal?"

CARTER: Maybe we could have stopped it.

AMBER: I did stop it. She took a fuckload of pills. *Instantly* regretted it. And then she called *Arthur*. He was- he didn't know what to do, so he texted me. I fucking ran out of work in the middle of my shift and brought her to the Emergency Room, they gave her this charcoal stuff- got her to puke. Put her in the psych ward, involuntary commitment, took her shoelaces away, the whole deal. We stopped it.

CARTER: Was it over this this Arthur guy?

AMBER: I don't know. I mean, it was the day after.

CARTER: What's his deal?

AMBER: He's Arthur. He's just a guy. They were dating for a few months.

CARTER: How did she meet him?

AMBER: He's a bartender. I mean, he's studying for his Masters Degree- history. They met at Bryn's birthday party.

CARTER: How's Bryn?

AMBER: Haven't heard much from her recently. Haven't heard much from anyone.

CARTER: I'm glad she has you.

AMBER: Yeah.

CARTER: Arthur the historian.

AMBER: Yeah.

CARTER: That's so weird.

AMBER: Yeah.

Beat.

AMBER: I didn't even think she was that interested in him.

CARTER: She never mentioned him to me.

AMBER: He just didn't seem like the type that would make her...

CARTER: Yeah.

AMBER: Fall that hard.

CARTER: I can't believe you didn't tell me.

Rena emerges from the entrance.

AMBER *(to Carter, pointedly)*: I didn't.

CARTER: There she is!

RENA: Did he confess his undying love for you?

AMBER: Ha,ha.

CARTER: Not this time...

RENA: It's crowded in there. I think the director is holding a talkback afterward?

AMBER: Yeah.

RENA: Too many people. Let's bail.

AMBER: Rena.

RENA: What?

AMBER: I think we should stay.

RENA: Well, I don't. Crowds like this give me anxiety.

CARTER: Well then, let's go.

AMBER: Listen. I know you want to go. But you were really excited to come here.

RENA: Yeah, 'cause Carter was coming.

AMBER: Yes, Carter was coming. But also, It's good to get out.

RENA: I know. It is good to get out. That's why I'm out. You want me to go inside and learn about dark matter. I'm sick of dark matter.

CARTER: Okay, okay. We can do anything you want.

RENA: I want to skip the movie.

CARTER: We can skip the movie. How about a walk. I miss Central Park. Let's take a walk. Amber?

Amber is silent.

CARTER: Whatever you want.

RENA: I want to have my Love Funeral.

AMBER: But we always do the movie first.

RENA: I don't want to do the movie first.

AMBER: You told me you did. I got tickets.

RENA: It doesn't feel right. Not this time.

CARTER: If you don't want to be here, we can go. *(to Amber:)* We can go. It's fine.

AMBER: Rena. This is your favorite place.

RENA: No it isn't.

AMBER: You're here all the time.

RENA: Being here makes me feel so small. Like I don't matter.

Carter approaches Rena.

CARTER: Rena. He isn't worth it.

RENA: Who?

CARTER: Arthur.

AMBER: Carter...

CARTER: You don't need him. He's not worth it.

Rena is taken aback.

RENA: I know.

CARTER: No. I mean. *You matter.* We're here for you.

AMBER: What the hell, Carter? *(to RENA)* I'm sorry...

CARTER: I'm sorry- I can't pretend I don't know.

RENA: *(to AMBER)* You told him?

AMBER: Right- you can't. Even for your sister. You can't do that for her. You had to make it about yourself. You had to "speak your truth."

CARTER: So we just pretend it didn't happen? It happened. So lets help her move on.

AMBER: That doesn't mean throwing it in her face.

CARTER: I'm not throwing it in her face. *(to Rena)* Am I throwing it in your face?

RENA: No.

AMBER: You haven't *been here*, Carter. You can't show up and take over because you think you know what's right for her.

CARTER: You don't think I know what's right for her?

AMBER: No, I don't.

CARTER: You're forcing her to watch this show she doesn't want to watch. Didn't you ask Rena what she wanted to do?

AMBER: It would be good for her.

CARTER: So you know what's right for her?

AMBER: Maybe we shouldn't let her do everything she wants to do.

CARTER: She wants to go on a walk. I think she can handle that. *(to Rena)* Let's get out of here. Is that what you want?

RENA: I want to be dead.

Beat.

AMBER: Rena.

CARTER: You don't mean that.

RENA: Yes I do. I mean it. It's fine.

AMBER: Rena.

RENA: That's what I want.

CARTER: You don't want to die.

RENA: No. I don't want to die. I want to be dead, but I don't want to die.

AMBER: What does that mean?

RENA: That means I'm making progress. I already tried dying. It didn't work. So I'm trying to figure out what else I want. And I have an Idea.

CARTER: What's that?

RENA: I want to have our Love Funeral.

AMBER: Okay. Fine. Let's go do it.

RENA: I want to do it right here.

AMBER: At the museum? We always do it in the park.

RENA: I can move it if I want to. It's a rule.

AMBER: Since when?

CARTER: Two years ago. After I broke up with Rebekah. We did it at a bar.

AMBER: There was a blizzard.

RENA: The rules are the rules. It's my ceremony; I can have it here if I want. We're basically in the park anyway.

AMBER: Okay.

RENA: Okay. Ready?

Amber and Carter nod. Rena ushers them into a circle, facing each other.

RENA: Do you have your artifacts?

Carter nods, reaches into his pocket and retrieves the plastic bag. He unrolls it and produces a small figure of the Statue of Liberty.

AMBER: Did you get that at the airport?

CARTER: So what?

RENA: Amber, do you have your artifact?

AMBER: Can't we do this after the show?

RENA: No. I threw the tickets away.

AMBER: Dammit, Rena-

RENA: Do you have it?

Beat. Amber looks around at the passersby.

AMBER: Right here?

RENA: Right here.

Amber pokes around in her bag and pulls out a small, shiny object.

RENA: Okay.

Rena turns to Carter, ceremonially.

RENA: Carter, what have you brought to bury?

Carter looks at this Liberty figurine.

CARTER: This is life I thought I would have in New York City. Nobody Loves Me because I couldn't make it here, and I don't think I can make it anywhere.

Rena takes the figurine from Carter.

RENA and AMBER: Nobody Loves You.

RENA: Amber, what have you brought to bury?

Amber holds the silver, rounded disc in her hand. She runs her fingers across it.

AMBER: I bought this in the museum shop.

CARTER: That's better than the airport?

AMBER: It's a fifty year calendar. It's the hope I had that I'd find someone to spend the rest of my life with. Nobody Loves Me because I won't let them.

Rena takes the calendar.

RENA and CARTER: Nobody Loves You.

RENA: Okay, my turn.

CARTER: Let's just stop.

RENA: I'm here to bury a relationship. A relationship that wasn't what I thought it was. A relationship that really damaged me-

CARTER: Do we have to do this?

RENA: Yes. We have to do this. It's what we do. We bury things.

Rena turns to Amber.

RENA: Ask me.

AMBER: Rena, what have you brought to bury?

RENA: So, I met this guy. Arthur. He was cute. He remembered my name- and my drink order- at Bryn's birthday party. At the end of the night, I wrote my number on my receipt. He was very sweet, and kind, and sexy, and smart. And we had so much fun together. But even the shitty times- I remember I was having a particularly bad time after I didn't get into grad school; I couldn't get out of bed for three days. Arthur showed up and he took me on a walk. And he made me feel okay. And he listened. And he helped me cope. And we became closer, for a while. But I think we were too different to stay together. I know that now. At the time, it just hurt. When he ended things- I didn't handle it well.

AMBER: Rena-

RENA: There were a lot of things. I missed him. I did. But it wasn't just him. It wasn't just any one thing. It was all of it. School. *(she turns to CARTER)* and the whole thing with

you and Dad. And the company. I really felt like we failed when we let it fall apart. And it felt like I couldn't do anything right. I felt unlovable. I just wanted all of that to go away.

Beat.

RENA: And so I tried to do that. I took enough, and I sat and waited. And in that moment, I realized something. I was sitting on top of my made bed, in what I thought were the last moments of my life. And my memories didn't come rushing in. I didn't relive all of my most important moments. I didn't feel peaceful. I just kept thinking, over and over, three words: "Nobody Loves You." And I thought of you two. And I thought of this fucking ceremony. So that is my new rule: today is the last Love Funeral. Ever.

CARTER: Rena- you know we love you.

AMBER: We do this *because* we love you. It's just a joke.

RENA: It's not just the ceremony. Every moment I spend with the two of you makes me feel so small. Like a tiny piece of cosmic dust. And if a relationship fails, or anything fails, we just crush it. Ourselves. Each other. Down into something insignificant. Like it never mattered anyway. And if I want to get through this, I can not live my life that way anymore. I can not be around that anymore. So I'm here to bury this friendship.

CARTER: Rena.

RENA: I need to start finding the things in my life that are good for me. And cutting out the things that are hurting me.

CARTER: We're trying to help.

RENA: This is how you can help. This is what I need.

AMBER: I thought this is what you wanted. A return to normal.

RENA: I don't want to minimize myself, or the things in my life that were important. Even if they were failures.

RENA hands Carter and Amber's artifacts back to them.

RENA: Bury these if you want. But I'm not going to be a part of it.

Rena places the balloon flower on the ground.

She exits.

Carter and Amber hold their artifacts, watching her go.

CARTER: She can't really mean that. Can she?

AMBER: I'm not sure.

Beat.

AMBER: Carter.

CARTER: Yeah?

AMBER: I'm sorry. About the whole-

CARTER: Do you wanna go to Fred's? I need a drink.

AMBER: Absolutely.

They exit, leaving the balloon flower on the ground behind them.

END