

ABSOLUTELY DEAD

By Michael Walker

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ACT I

SCENE ONE

(Before the lights rise, there is a flash of lightning and the sound of THUNDER and WIND. As the lights rise Ben is discovered sitting on the sofa with a shopping bag near him. He is a middle-aged man wearing comfortable, warm clothes.)

We are in the great room of a winterized summer home. While somewhat rustic, the home clearly belongs to wealthy, unpretentious people who enjoy the comfort of old money. The room serves as a combination living room, study and entrance hall. There is a stairway up to second floor bedrooms, doors to the outside and the kitchen, and an archway leading to other rooms on the first floor. At one end of the room is a large desk and desk chair. Behind the desk are bookcases and a painting on the wall. In the living room area are a sofa, some easy chairs and a built-in cocktail bar. The room has been set up for guests to have drinks before a dinner party.

Ben reaches into the bag, takes out a package of party hats, opens the package and looks at one. He lets his head lean back on the sofa and relaxes a moment before he puts the hats back in the bag and rises to look around the room.)

JACK (OFFSTAGE)

Ben?

BEN

Down here, Jack.

JACK (OFFSTAGE)

Make yourself a drink; I'll be down in a minute.

(Ben walks to the bar and discovers there is no ice for a drink. He pours a whiskey anyway and walks to the painting on the wall behind the desk. He pulls the painting away from the wall to reveal a wall safe. He tries to pull the safe open, but when he discovers it is locked, he replaces the painting, sits back on the sofa and stares out at the room.)

Jack, 60's, enters from upstairs and goes to the bookcase by the desk. He is dressed in casual clothes,

which appear to have been hastily thrown on, yet he still gives the impression of being a powerful, corporate giant.)

JACK

I have arrived! Well, I'm arriving. I see you've met the bar. Whiskey! Whiskey cures all. Ruth told me you were here; sorry to keep you waiting. I'll get those for you.

BEN

Not a problem, I was just looking around. You're out of ice, by the way.

(During the dialogue, Jack gets a key from a hiding place in the bookcase and uses it to open the safe behind the painting. When he has opened the safe, he takes out two small boxes, looks at them and gives one to Ben, returning the other to the safe.)

JACK

I'll take care of that later. Are you ready for tonight? It won't be easy you know.

BEN

Where's Jon?

JACK

He's upstairs; just got out of the shower. Anything wrong?

BEN

Oh no, Alice and I were going over some things and I remembered I had to come over here to pick those up.

JACK

I should have given them to you the other day and saved you the trip.

BEN

As it turns out, I had to come anyway. I bought some things for the party tonight and I wanted you to have them before the others got here.

(Ben gets the shopping bag and hands it to Jack, who looks inside.)

JACK

Cocktail napkins! Ruth must have told you. And what do we have but ... hats?

BEN

It's supposed to be a party, Jack.

JACK

Oh...yes.

BEN

I'm sorry it all has to end like this. How's Ruth?

JACK

Not great right now; she'll be better in a day or two.

(Ben gets his coat on and moves toward the door.)

BEN

I'd better be going; Alice will be wondering what's happened to me. Oh, Nate should be here soon. I saw him up the road sitting in his cruiser; not sure what he's up to, but it looks like you can expect him as soon as he remembers how to start the car. I'll be back later.

JACK

Good; I'll see you then. Thanks for these!

(Ben exits out the front door. Jack watches through the front window as Ben leaves and then he goes back to close the safe and put the key away. He takes the napkins and the hats out of the bag and puts them on the bar, throwing the bag away in a small wastebasket beside the bar. Ruth enters from the staircase. She is the no-nonsense matriarch of the family and she is dressed for the party.)

RUTH

Is Ben still here?

JACK

No, he just left.

RUTH

Why was he here?

JACK

Nothing really.

RUTH

Guests don't come and go hours before a dinner party for no reason, Jack; I'm not an idiot.

JACK

I can only say you're right on both counts.

(Ruth sees the party hats.)

RUTH

What are those?

JACK

Those are hats, my dear. Remember, we're supposed to be having a party.

(Ruth throws the hats into the wastebasket and starts to exit into the kitchen.)

I take it you don't approve.

RUTH

This may be a party for you but it makes me sick.

(As Ruth begins to exit there is a CRASH OF THUNDER and the stage suddenly goes to BLACK.)

RUTH

Jack!?

JACK

STAND STILL!

RUTH

What happened?

(Pause.)

JACK

Well, I can't be certain, darling; maybe it's an eclipse.

(There is the sound of a POWER-FAILURE ALARM and more THUNDER AND LIGHTNING.)

RUTH

Jack!

JACK

Don't move. I'm listening. Just stay right where you are.

(Pause.)

RUTH

What's wrong with it?

JACK

Nothing's wrong; it just takes more time.

(The stage LIGHTS FLICKER and come on FULL)

RUTH

Is that it?

Be quiet.

JACK

Is it working?

RUTH

Be quiet, Ruth, for the love of Mike. I'm listening.

JACK

(Pause while Jack listens.)

Are you there, Jon?

(Jon, a very handsome man in his late 20's appears at the top of the stairs.)

Right here, Dad.

JON

Stay where you are.

JACK

(Jack continues to listen.)

Nothing.

Isn't it on?

RUTH

It won't kick in unless the power's off for a minute.

JACK

Do you want me to check it?

JON

What if it isn't working?!

RUTH

Will you relax? The generator's working fine; it wasn't supposed to come on.

JACK

Jack...

RUTH

Take it easy, Dad.

JON

Oh, for the love...

JACK

RUTH
There's no need to get excited.

JON
Mother!

RUTH
WHAT?!

JON
You're the one getting Dad upset. You're the one...

JACK
Both of you stop! I'm fine; the generator's fine. Everything's fine but the weather. Jon, why don't you go up to the guest room and make sure everything's "fine" in there.

RUTH
It is.

JACK
All right then, why don't you go into the kitchen and make sure...

RUTH
Oh, for God's sake, Jack, you act as if I've never had guests for dinner.

JACK
I just want to be sure...

RUTH
IT'S FINE! The world is "fine!" The bedrooms, the kitchen, the towels, the food – everything's perfect; we lack nothing!

JACK
Ice. We lack ice.

JON
I'll get it.

RUTH
Stay out of my kitchen! You're right, Jack, no ice. I'll get the ice and I'll put it in the bucket. But for two cents I'd throw...

JACK
(Jack Sparrow) "For two cents I'd throw your heart into the bucket, Jack Morgan – because it is by far the coldest thing in the room."

RUTH
Well it is!

(Ruth exits to kitchen with ice bucket. Jack gets the key from the bookcase and opens the safe again.)

JACK

Pour me a drink, Jon.

JON

Dad...

JACK

Vodka. Neat. Very short. You think my heart is cold, you should see hers.

JON

I think you're running neck and neck.

JACK

Don't get snippy, Jon.

JON

I don't see why you have to fight all the time.

JACK

We don't.

JON

Yes, you do! Every day and night you fight about...

JACK

Of course we do, Jon – we're married! But we don't *have* to, as you said. We fight because we choose to; we enjoy it.

JON

I don't see the point.

JACK

The point is, in a moment your mother, my loving bride, will return to us with a cooking-sherry smile from ear to ear - annd the ice bucket. The only question is, "Will she remember the ice?"

(Jon brings the drink to Jack, who has taken a stack of bound papers out of the safe. Jack takes a pill from a case he carries in his pocket.)

JON

You shouldn't be drinking this.

JACK

I'll switch to gin after I take my pill. Will that make you happy?

(Jack holds the glass up to the light and examines it. Satisfied, he puts the pill into the glass, swirls it and

looks at it again before he downs the drink and pill together.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Yikes.

JON

It's going to kill you, you know.

JACK

Something will. I suppose you mean the vodka.

JON

You only took one pill.

JACK

I'll take another one later.

(He holds up his glass.)

My God, the damn thing's empty. One more, will you?

(NATE, a Maine native, the local sheriff and a kindly man, comes in without knocking. He is dressed in his black uniform raincoat and rain hat.)

JACK

Well, look what the wind brought in!

NATE

Hello Jack. Jonathan, how're you doing?

JON

Fine, Nate.

JACK

We're staying out of trouble best we can.

(Nate stands at the doorway, dripping wet, silent.)

NATE

Raining out.

JON

No.

NATE

Oh, yeah.

Really? JON

Oh, yeah. Thunder, too. NATE

That's what all that noise must have been. JON

Oh, yeah. It's coming down hard. NATE

Well I'll be. JON

What? JACK

"What?" JON

What will you be? You can't just blurt these things out. JACK

Jiggered, I always say. NATE

Perfect! Jon will be jiggered. JACK

Jonathan? RUTH (OFF STAGE.)

(Ruth enters with the ice bucket and a briefcase. she holds out the briefcase.)

Will you take this up to your room? What's it doing in my kitchen? Oh, hello Nate.

Hello, Ruth. Sorry about dripping on your floor, here. NATE

Oh, don't worry about it; what brings you here? RUTH

(Everything stops.)

Raining out. NATE

I should say so.

RUTH

“Oh yeah.”

JON

How’s the law business, Nate?

RUTH

Well, just fine, I guess; depending. We had those break-ins up the way awhile back – Carlson’s. Not much since then.

NATE

Everybody gone up the road?

RUTH

Oh, yeah. Up the road and down. It’s just you folks and Ben and Alice across the way. This storm blowing up, I’m going over to town to ride it out. You going to be all right, Jack?

NATE

We’ll be fine, Nate. We’re having some friends over for the weekend, so we’re all stocked up: liquor, dice, cards and guns.

JACK

Oh, yeah.

NATE

What more could we want?

JACK

We’re going to play cards.

JON

That so?

NATE

Oh yeah.

JON

Jon?!

RUTH

Long as you’re not playing guns, Jon. Going to lose power before this is over. How about fuel for that generator?

NATE

Plenty.

JACK

RUTH

Make him check, Nate; I keep asking and he won't move.

JON

I'll check in a minute. We'll be fine.

NATE

That causeway's going to flood over, Jack; don't you be getting stuck out here without power.

JACK

Ben's out here, too. If we get into any trouble, we'll go over there.

NATE

What about these friends of yours -- coming to play cards and throw dice, right Jon?

JACK

Well, I'm sure Ben would take them in, too.

NATE

They better be getting here pretty soon or the only thing that'll take 'em is the high tide.

(Nate laughs.)

JACK

They're due any time now. You best be getting along; don't get stuck out here.

NATE

Oh, yeah. See you, Ruth, Jon. Jack, don't you be drinking all night. And stay inside -- it's blowing like stink out there.

JACK

I'll be fine, Nate. Good night.

NATE

I'll check in on you when I get back. Ben's got a radio if the phones go.

RUTH

Nate?

NATE

Yeah?

RUTH

Did you ever find out who was breaking into the cottages?

NATE

No, but I wouldn't worry; probably long gone by now. Not much to take when the summer folks go. Probably kids I'm thinking.

JON

Oh, I don't know, Nate.

NATE

You don't know? Why hell, Jon, I thought you knew everything. (Going out.) If I see your friends along the way, I'll send 'em up.

JACK

Thanks, Nate.

RUTH

Check in with us when you get back.

NATE

Will do. Will do.

(Nate exits. Jon starts upstairs with his briefcase.)

JACK

Wait a minute, Jon. Just put that down for now. Darling, I'd like to talk to Jonathan alone for a minute. Why don't you run along back into the kitchen and...I don't know.

RUTH

"Run along?"

JACK

That's right. Now that Nate has given us a detailed weather report, I'd like you to step back into the kitchen so that father and son may talk privately; "man-to-man."

RUTH

I'll run along, Jack, and why don't I make sure everything's "fine."

JACK

Yes, why don't you?

(Ruth exits to kitchen. Jon puts his briefcase down in the closet.)

JON

Dad...

JACK

Be quiet, Jonathan. I don't need a lecture from you. Have a drink.

JON

I don't drink.

JACK

Well, you're supposed to be making one for me.

JON

Why did you send her away like that?

JACK

She wasn't done yet. She wasn't smiling "ear to ear." You really should consider alcohol, Jon; it does wonders for your mother.

(End of "First Pages.")