

TANYA EVERETT

excerpts from *A Dead Black Man*

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *A Dead Black Man* is both a call to action and my love note to black men. I want to remind America to cherish black men and give them space to dream again. I want to imagine black men in all of their many hues, in all of their sensitivities, quirks, passions, and insecurities. In this play I want to remember that the lives of black men are layered, sweet, funny, and complex. That the picture we have painted of black men limits not only our imagination of them but also their very humanity.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: The body of THE DEAD BLACK MAN is onstage throughout the play.

INTERSTITIAL 3

(BLACK FEMALE ACTRESS *comes out, dressed in mourning.*)

BLACK FEMALE ACTRESS: I saw someone get shot today. Not like theoretically. I saw someone actually get shot. And it was the realest thing that had happened to me in quite some time. 'Cause there isn't like an antidote for death. You know, like in the movies? When a superhero gets shot? And they're bionic, and they grow a second skin. In real life they cannot morph their bodies or shapeshift. The shot rings out and there's a chain of reactions. It happens like a flame hitting oil—like there's nothing to contain it, and the chaos is instantaneous.

That is what it is to be caught in the cross fire. There's nothing to create distance. There's just fury . . . and the flames are lapping at the passerby. What does it mean: to be caught in someone else's fury? If it spreads quickly, wantonly, is there respite? And if I am to be caught in the web of someone else's hatred—is there any possible escape? In the movies I would be whisked off by a webbed creature

or flung upon someone else's back. But in reality—I might be taken off on a stretcher—or more than likely: I may not make it off—at all.

WILL I EVER COME BACK?

(DIONNE WILKES and DESHAWN THOMAS. DIONNE struts on in full drag—just hot off a show. DESHAWN is acting weird.

THE DEAD BLACK MAN is reconfigured in a wild, flamboyant pose—as if he were break-dancing.

He gets up and follows DESHAWN in. At a distance. Throughout the scene he is DESHAWN's shadow.)

DIONNE: That was ill—I mean—that was actually that hot fire—did you see that sick move at the end—the death drop? I mean—that was it—and I mean—I know I know—it's not polite to toot your own horn . . . it's not *cute* or whatever . . . and then again—I'm thinking—*fuck that*. Am I right? I mean . . . toot—toot!!

(DESHAWN is typing on his phone at a crazy speed.)

DIONNE: Who you texting . . . at this hour?

DESHAWN: No one.

DIONNE: Nigga?

DESHAWN: Akesha . . .

DIONNE: (*sucks teeth*) Your baby mom's at it again? She ever rest? (*mumbles*) Bitch do entirely too much, always at you—

DESHAWN: She trippin' cause I'm late on my payment—I been told her—I *forgot*—wasn't like I ain't good for it—she always on me 'bout sumthin'—I don't be takin' the baby enough—or when I do, I drop him at my auntie's for too long—and she make it sound like I ain't got no interest? But that ain't it. The baby don't *do* nuthin'. Girls is different—girls be like cooin' at babies—they jus'; they speak a different kinda language with babies—but I don't got that. Mayasia? My oldest? That's my girl. That's my best friend. But Lindee? She just—she so little. I'm almost afraid. . . . (*sucks his teeth*) Nevamind.

DIONNE: What?

DESHAWN: I'm just a lil afraid Ima break her. She jus' that fragile, nahmean?

(DESHAWN *picks up the remnants of a broken glass bottle and throws it out.*)

DIONNE: You need to tell Akesha ass you busy. I don't get nearly enough time alone with you as it is . . . and she had betta learn how to share . . .

(DIONNE *goes to pull DESHAWN in—who backs away . . .*)

DESHAWN: Not now. I can't think straight . . .

DIONNE: This ain't about your kids or they mothers. This different.

(*beat*) What's up . . . what's up witchu?

DESHAWN: (*sighs*) I uh . . . It's nuthin'. It. Is. Nuthin'.

DIONNE: Deshawn—it's not nuthin' . . .

DESHAWN: Get offa me . . . (*beat*) Please.

DIONNE: It's cool. It's whatever man.

(*A pause. THE DEAD BLACK MAN leans on DESHAWN. Then walks away and takes a seat.*)

DIONNE: You don't um . . . you don't look at me the same.

DESHAWN: What?

DIONNE: You don't—you don't—it's like—like you lookin' *through* me . . . and if I was to look at you, nigga—like you—like you not-lookin' at me—

DESHAWN: Baby-baby, please . . . It's—I got a lot on my mind right now . . .

DIONNE: Yeah, I could see that. But usually we talk about that shit . . . and that's not what you doin'. You standin' inside—like grippin' on your balls by the fireplace—and you got me out here—in the cold . . .

DESHAWN: Some things don't gotta get shared, aight? We ain't gotta talk about everything all the goddamned time . . . some things . . . just is . . .

(THE DEAD BLACK MAN *agrees.*)

DIONNE: No, you right. We don't. (*beat*) Ima go . . .

DESHAWN: Please . . . Please . . . don't—don't leave.

(THE DEAD BLACK MAN *is pulling DIONNE in the other direction.*)

DIONNE: What's goin' on witchu? Usually—we up in a show? We up in a show . . . and—you all up in it wit' me. You mah biggest supporter, nigga! I—(*lowers his voice*) I started to do dis' shit—'cause a you. "Nah, D. That ain't me—I jus' wanna be a regulah nigga . . . I don't wanna—stand out 'n shit." But *you* said—you had told me—"Nah." You 'member? (*beat*) You told me: "You gonna be so big, baby—nobody gon' want you to be regulah. Nah. Regulah ain't chu."

(THE DEAD BLACK MAN *climbs onto DESHAWN's back. And they wait there.*)

DIONNE: You gotta tell me. It's like—I could almost see it—sumthin' weighin' on you. Heavy. And you not gon' be okay again 'til you let it down.

(DIONNE *helps DESHAWN sit down, still carrying THE DEAD BLACK MAN. DBM then wraps himself around him as they sit on the lip of the stage.*)

DESHAWN: It's jus' a lot. A lot goin' on . . . a lot all up in mah head—and it sits and sits there . . .

DIONNE: And I'm here. I'm here, baby. (*beat*) You ain't gotta carry it all. It ain't all on you.

(THE DEAD BLACK MAN *holds them both—they rock, a gentle caress. A lullaby plays, softly.*)

DESHAWN: I got two lil girls, man. And they waitin'. Every night. For me to come home. (*beat*) I'm afraid to go outside sometimes, D. I'm afraid to leave mah crib. 'Cause I don't—I don't wanna *not* come back to them lil girls. Mah life? Different now. Been different six

goin' on seven years, baby. And I don't—I don't think nuthin' the way I usedta think it. (*pause*) I get outta bed. I make a lil omelet or whatever. Green juicin' and shit—keep it healthy. I gotta lay offa the fried shit—so I do that. Get my moms ready for her job. I take care a mines. I'm organized even. I mean—I live here—but I done come up . . . Ima get offa the block. One a these days. But 'til then . . . baby—what happen 'til then? What gon' happen when I uh . . . when I'm out at the wrong time, and I'm wit' the wrong cats—or I say the wrong thing to the wrong cop? (*beat*) I jus'—I don't wanna not come home to them . . . I don't wanna not come home to them . . . I gotta come home to them . . .

(*At this, THE DEAD BLACK MAN, DESHAWN, DIONNE are all huddled in a ball holding each other. They stay this way for a long time.*)

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(*THE DEAD BLACK MAN sits on the stage with a candle. The ensemble hums "Silent Night."*)

DEAD BLACK MAN: It is. Silent here. Which is something. I mean—it's something to be silent. And just listen to what comes up.

(*A quiet beat: the ensemble stops humming. And then:*)

DEAD BLACK MAN: There's so much . . . noise . . . so much chatter. And I feel like that chatter's gotten us away from ourselves. Like if we just sat and listened? We would hear the ancestors. We could hear them and feel them. And they would tell us . . .

(*The ensemble speaks in all of the languages they know, at the same time . . . and then a hum.*)

DEAD BLACK MAN: But it would be crystal clear to us. We could see our way out. We could *feel* our way out. Maybe then? Maybe then we could get free.