

TJ
Day 5
"Lave"

by
Chris Leyva

1666 Weldon Ave
Columbus, OH 43224
Chrisleyva@gmail.com

Spotlight. A man dressed in warm clothes, dingy, ragged, from the streets. This is TJ. He's in his 40's.

TJ

Cold. Where I am. Not freezing cold. Not "chilly" cold, somewhere in between. Just solid cold. The cold that feels kinda good, where your teeth don't chatter and you can just barely see hints of your breath.

A spotlight on another part of the stage. Kate and Brandon are talking together.

KATE

Last week?

BRANDON

Last month.

KATE

How could it be last month?

BRANDON

Maybe even two months.

KATE

Jesus. And they're keeping him?

BRANDON

The morgue.

TJ

Could probably take the coat off. But it's a nice cold. Almost forget I'm cold.

Another spotlight. Teresa is on the phone.

TERESA

Four months ago? I feel like I just saw him. Where did they? Don't tell me.

KATE

He wasn't found, you know, just someplace. Just tell me he wasn't out there just somewhere.

BRANDON

Hotel.

*Another spotlight. John in a button down shirt, unironed.
A hotel name badge.*

JOHN

Forty a night. Same price for everyone. No matter if it's 6pm or 11pm. It's a hotel not some halfway house. You want charity, go sleep in a church. Go to a shelter. Here, you want a hotel room with a shower? Privacy? All the amenities? A pool outside. Continental Breakfast? Forty dollars.

TERESA

I swear I just saw him.

TJ

When I think of cold, some people think of water. Snow. Sweaters. I think of summer. Because that's the time when you crave the cold. I think of drinking an ice, cold pop. God, even though I'm cold now, I'm craving one of those.

JOHN

There's a coffeemaker in each room. A laundry room you could use. It takes quarters.

KATE

What are they doing with him?

BRANDON

The body?

KATE

Not the "body," him!

BRANDON

Nothing. What can they do?

TERESA

I never wanted him to be, you know. We all were kind of nasty. I say all, you, me, you were all hurling shit at him.

BRANDON

We all said what we said.

KATE

Kick him while he's down.

BRANDON

Did as much damage as any good.

KATE

He started acting...

TERESA

His eyes changed, we all saw when his eyes changed. He was harmless. Just sweet. Kind-hearted. I always said he was. I always said. But then his eyes changed.

JOHN

You want the room? I got things to do. You want the room? Forty bucks. You don't want the room, not being rude, but there's the door. Not being rude. You want the room?

BRANDON

He's in a better place.

KATE

The morgue?

BRANDON

Kate.

KATE

The morgue's a better place?

KATE

Kate.

TERESA

A hotel room? How the hell did he get a hotel room?

TJ

I can't get it out of my mind. A nice, cold pop. In a bottle. Not a plastic bottle, a nice, think glass bottle. You know, Michigan gives ten cents a bottle? Maybe paying out crap like that is a reason our city is dying. Some say it's dead already.

TERESA

I read the news. I'm glad I left. Sad. Everyone, all of you, you're in my thoughts. But this TJ thing. That's too much. That's insult to injury.

BRANDON

What do we do then?

KATE

Something.

BRANDON

You want to pay for the burial?

KATE

Someone has to?

BRANDON

Why does it have to be us?

KATE

Why not us?

BRANDON

You want my unemployment check to go to buying some homeless guy you didn't even give a shit about?

KATE

You think about him in the morgue. Alone.

BRANDON

What about when he was on the streets? Alone. Cheaper to give a dead man a home than a living man, I guess.

TERESA

They don't have the money for trash collection, you think they can pay for that? So many bodies. He has plenty of company there. What were they calling them? Unclaimed? How about unloved? Unnecessary. Undeserving. Unburied.

KATE

Maybe we could call people.

BRANDON

What people?

KATE

Neighborhood people. Maybe we all could pool some money.

BRANDON

You think people would give?

KATE

I hope. We did so much wrong in life. We should do right by him in death.

JOHN

Just sign your name. Even though you're paying cash, there's gotta be a record.

TJ

Signing your name. Leaving your mark. That cold pop is still in my mind. I see the condensation on the outside. I could lave it with my tongue. Feel the cold of the bottle on my lips.

JOHN

Here's the key.

TJ

Crazy thing about being dead. You hear what people say about you. You're tuned in to this radio station, all you, all the time. You know how they say, "Your ears must be burning, someone's talking about you?" It's true. My ears are on fire. Ablaze. These voices. I've heard them all before. The words now are friendlier. Now that I'm gone. My body in a cooler. Bankrupt city holding onto me.

KATE

Someone has to do something.

BRANDON

Maybe post something online.

KATE

People could pitch in.

TERESA

It'd be a shame for such a good man to not be at rest.

During the next lines, the lights slowly fade on all the others.

TJ

These people turned generous. They were never all that generous while I was around. And I don't mean generous as in doling out five dollars, fifty cents, one dollar, or even a hundred dollars. I mean generous in heart. A generous spirit. Something very rarely felt. Where was this generosity four months ago? Five months ago? Six years ago when the bank kicked me out? You can be generous now that I'm gone. If that makes you feel better, you can get me out of the freezer into the ground. Don't even know if I get a gravestone. Would they even know what name to put on it? How much is it going to cost to make a man a memory? You know Jesus was an unclaimed body, too. Joseph-somebody came forward and paid to put him in the ground. Not in bad company. Waiting for my Joseph-somebody to come.

(Beat)

Cold in my veins. Burning ears. I hope this doesn't last. The cold is starting to bite. What's another couple of months in the freezer? Another year? Could I even tell the time is passing? A few more months in the cold then an eternity in the dirt.

(Beat)

I think I can wait.

Darkness.