

Cody and The Jack Ripper

A Play

by

Jay Dover

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CAST

JACK SMITH, late 45 construction worker, ex pro-football player. His relationship with his son, Pete, has been strained for years. Tall, thick and worn-out. Philosophical at times. Says what needs to be said and it's usually short.

JIM SMITH, 40, bartender, would-be country music singer, younger brother to Jack. Pudgy, fun-loving, creative, restless. Worn-out, but hiding it well. Recently returned from Nashville where he tried to make it the past 12 years. Good guitar player, good singer.

MARY GREENE, 22 former waitress turned fanatic, novice photographer. Plain Midwestern looks and style. Fearless, powerful, ceaseless due to the recent involvement of a self-improvement seminar. Had a kid at 19, gave it up for adoption to her mother.

TIME:

The entire play takes place in 1998. A Saturday evening in August, the evening of Thanksgiving Day and the afternoon of the fifth day before Christmas.

PLACE:

Parma, Ohio, a southwest suburb of Cleveland. The house of Jack Smith.

STAGE:

The stage should be plain, somewhere between real and representational. As long as it communicates "ordinary" anything is fine. Two areas: the front porch, the living room/dining room. The front porch will include the front door but not the front porch, having been destroyed by Jack. A rope designates its former shape. The living/dining room is sparse and disarray. Moving boxes and suitcases are piled to one side, little makeshift furniture, card table in dining, aluminum web chairs and futon make a living room set. No couch! Entrances to the kitchen and a hallway leading to back bedrooms. One scene has Jim performing at a local establishment, created by nothing but light and stage location.

NOTE:

The nature of the brothers' relationship and Mary's relationship with Jim is such that much is unspoken and much is understood. Those moments when this kind of communication is desired are indicated by "----" within the text. The context of this unspoken communication is driving by the immediate text, either before or after the "----".

ACT I SCENE I: YEAH, WELL. WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO.

Lights up on Jim and Jack sitting in aluminum web chairs in the front of the house. Behind them are the remnants of a former porch. It is night. They hold out beers in their outstretched arms a few moments.

JIM
Go.

JACK
You called it.

JIM
So.

JACK
You gotta go first.

JIM
I got the beers

JACK
So.

JIM
That's going first

JACK
That so.

JIM
Yeah. So, go.

JACK
You're fucking the rules.

JIM
I'm not fucking the rules. I got the beers.

JACK
It's tradition.

JIM
What?

JACK
Guy who calls it goes first.

JIM
But I went first already.

JACK
Can't fuck tradition.

JIM
I'm not fucking tradition.

JACK
Suit yourself.

Jack sits back.

JIM
You said you would play.

JACK
Not if you're fucking the rules.

JIM
See. This is what I'm talking about.

JACK
Yeah?

JIM
Yeah.

JACK
What?

JIM
You.

JACK
Yeah?

Jack snaps open his beer and swigs.

JIM
See. There you go. That's your problem right there.

JACK
Yeah?

JIM
Yeah.

JACK
Well, what are you gonna do.

JIM
Yeah, well, according to you, nothing. Just roll over and die. Like you always do.

Jim snaps his beer, toasts Jack.

JIM
Here's to shoveling shit against the tide, like he always said.

He swigs.

JIM
What?

JACK
The porch.

JIM
What about it?

JACK
That's not shoveling shit.

JIM
Not what I'm talking about.

JACK
I thought we were just gonna sit here.

JIM
You just want to sit here. I want us to do something. I mean, Jack, this is it. You and me are it.

JACK
I know.

JACK
The Game is dangerous.

JIM
So.

JACK
Bad things can happen.

JIM
Good things, too.

JACK
Not many.

JIM
So what? What's the difference what happens as long as something does and that's the whole point. He knew it. That's why he did it. We need to start doing something with all this or I mean, what's the point? That's why I'm wearing this hat. These boots, this shirt. You need to start doing something.

JACK
I did the porch.

JIM
Something constructive. Something happy and positive and fucking fun for once.

JACK
Well, you got to bust things up before you can fix 'em.

JIM
Yeah, well. All I know is this. I'm not sitting around here waiting to die.

JACK
No one said you had to.

JIM
Right, and no one said you had to either. I mean, you saw him. Right? You saw him.

JACK
Yeah. I saw him.

JIM
I ain't going like that. Didn't that scare the crap out of you?

JACK
Wasn't good.

JIM
That's what I'm telling you. You got to do something now while we can still appreciate the wonder of breathing oxygen.

I am. JACK

What? JIM

I'm sitting here having a beer with you. JACK

You shit. That's not what I'm saying and you know it. JIM

Yeah. I know what you're saying. JACK

Do you? JIM

Yep. JACK

What? JIM

You're saying I should do something. JACK

Jim gives Jack the finger.

Blowjob total? JACK

Your sperm count. JIM

Jack gets up.

Where are you going? JIM

I'm going to go clean the garage. JACK

Now? We're sitting here. JIM

You want me to do something. JACK

I'm leaving on Monday. JIM

JACK

I know.

JIM

Okay, so now you're just being an asshole.

JACK

Ain't that what you talking about? Come on, you can help.

Jack begins to exit.

JIM

I don't want to clean the garage. What I want is..., hey, wait, wait.

Jim holds back Jack.

JIM

Look, I just want to hang out here. Shoot the shit. I mean, one day we're all gonna end up like cat litter in a box. So, I'm just saying that we should do something, you know, you and me. Because after it's all over, it's all over and then who the hell knows what. You know? You and me are it.

JACK

Okay.

JIM

Good. I mean, screw the garage.

Jack sits back down, followed by Jim. They sit quietly for awhile, sipping their beers.

JIM

I was reading People magazine the other day and there was this story about this guy in North Dakota who got his arms ripped off in some mysterious train accident. No shit. I mean, he lives, right, and he takes this job as a crossing guard for an elementary school. Wears a plastic stop sign on his head. The kids call him Mr. Stoppy.

JACK

Yeah?

JIM

No shit.

JACK

Well, we all gotta do something.

JIM

I was thinking of writing a song about him. Something like:

(sings)

Well, I lost my arms on Amtrack
 Rolling down the line
 I wish I had my arms back
 But I guess I'll be a stop sign.
 So call me Mister Stoppy
 Make sure you look both ways.
 Mister, Mister Stoppy
 Da, da, da, da, da, da, da day.

(stops)

Something like that. With a Johnny Cash thing underneath.
 (imitates J. Cash rhythm)

JACK

Sounds good.

JIM

Eh, I gotta keep working on it.

JIM

So. What do you think of me going back to Nashville?

JACK

Sounds good.

JIM

Why don't you come down. You know, few days. We can hang out. Show you 'round town. I'd think you'd really like it.

JACK

Yeah?

JIM

Yeah, a lot of construction going on down there. A lot. You'd have no problems getting work. If you move there.

JACK

I got work here.

JIM

Yeah but what else?

JACK

I don't think so.

JIM
 You got to get out of Parma. Out of Ohio. Cleveland don't even got a football team, for crissakes. Nashville's got a football team and country music Don't get much better than that.

JIM
 What do you say?

JACK
 I'll think about it.

JIM
 Where's the urn?

JACK
 It's safe.

JIM
 Safe?

JACK
 Yeah.

JIM
 Where is it?

JACK
 It's safe.

JIM
 Did you do something with it?

JACK
 It's in my truck.

JIM
 Your truck? What the hell is it doing there?

JACK
 I took it to work.

JIM
 What the hell for?

JACK
 Show him the new stadium.

JIM
Oh. Nothing bad happened, right?

JACK
It's safe.

JIM
Well, it shouldn't be in the truck.

Jim rises.

JACK
Don't.

JIM
He shouldn't be there.

JACK
Don't go in my truck. I'll get it.

Jack quickly rises, exits past Jim, who sits back down. We here the slam of a truck door. Jack re-enters with the urn, sets it down in front of the chairs.

JIM
There he is.

JACK
Yep.

JIM
This is what I'm talking about.

JACK
Just like the National Football League.

JIM
What?

JACK
One play you're running. Next play you're not.

JIM
Yep.

JIM
See. This is why we got to start having some fucking fun.
Come on, let's do the Game.

JIM

He's the one who taught it to us. Least we could do with him sitting there. Come on.

JACK

Gotta be unopened beers.

JIM

I know.

Jim hands Jack unopened beer.

JACK

You gotta go first.

JIM

I know, I know.

JACK

You sure you want to do this.

JIM

No tomorrow like today.

JACK

Alright.

They sit up, perhaps stand, hold out there beers.

JIM

No lies, no whys.

JACK

No lies, no whys.

They snap open their beers, stomp five times, and click cans.

JIM

I don't want Mary to go to Nashville with me.

JACK

I poured dad's ashes into the cement of the new stadium.

Jim stops drinking. JACK chugs his beer dry, stomps five times, places the can on the ground, crushes it with his foot. Jim stares, then grabs the urn, unlids, turns it upside down. Nothing.

JACK
Go.

JIM
Are you kidding? Are you fucking kidding me!?

JACK
You gotta drink.

JIM
What the hell did you do? Huh!?

JACK
This ain't the way the Game is played.

JIM
Fuck the Game! Are you out of your mind? You poured him into cement?!

JACK
You don't drink, bad things can happen.

JIM
Fuck you!

JIM pushes JACK

JACK
Hey.

JIM
You asshole! What the fuck did you do?

JACK
You know the rules.

JIM
What the hell do you do!?

Jim punches Jack in the arm. Jack quickly maneuvers, wresting Jim's arm behind his back, the urn falls.

JIM
Ow!! Let me go. What the fuck did you do?

JACK
You wanted to play.

JIM
Let me go you shit.

Jack pushes Jim away. He picks up the urn, relids.

JIM

Asshole.

JACK

The end of every thing, Jimbo.

JIM

What?

JACK

When I burned his clothes in the Weber they smelled like the banana bread mom used to make. Remember?

JIM

What the fuck are you talking about?

JACK

Hey, he wanted to get fried up in an oven so he got fried up in an oven so I'm finishing what he started and I ain't gonna stand here and feel bad about it because in the end, you can't do anything about the things you can't do anything about. Just like the National Football League. One play you're running, the next play you're not. This whole thing is just shoveling shit against the tide. He knew it.

JIM

You really did this?

JACK

His zippers ended up in the bottom of the Weber. All black and twisted. Looked like weird teeth. And that's when I saw the point of a zipper. Keeps things in, lets things out. Thousands of practical applications. You don't ever see that unless you burn 'em. He had the right idea.

JIM

What?

JACK

(grabbing Jim)

The end of a thing is where the point is, Jimbo! But the only way you see it is by getting to the end. That's the thing!! Why do you think football players want to get in the end zone? Because that's where the points are! Anybody would burn clothes to know that.

JIM

I can't believe you did this. You're fucking nuts.

JACK
Yeah, well. What are you gonna do.

Jack begins to exit.

JIM
Where are you going?

JACK
I gotta go clean the garage.

Jack exits, Jim watches him go.

JIM
Shit.

Jim exits with the urn.

LIGHTS fade, country music plays.

SCENE II: FULL FRONTAL MARY

The following evening.

Lights up on the living room. Packed and taped moving boxes and a couple of suitcases are piled near the door. Some are labeled: "Jim's Crap", others "Goodwill." Aluminum web chairs and a card table constitute the only real furniture.

MARY GREENE stands near the boxes taking pictures of them with an expensive 35mm camera, slung around her neck. Every once in awhile, she checks the lighting with a light meter, like the pro she wants to be. She wears a stylish coat, jeans and cowboy boots.

Jack sits in one the aluminum chairs, sorting through a couple of boxes. Occasionally he throws a heap of papers, miscellany into a garbage bag.

At one point, Mary starts taking pictures of Jack from different angles. Jack notices.

MARY
Just be yourself.

More picture taking.

JACK

Stop taking my picture.

MARY

Photography is the expression of the authenticity of what is so.

JACK

I don't want my picture taken.

MARY

I'm recording your authenticity. It's my P.O.V.

JACK

Well, don't.

MARY

You can let that go.

JACK

What?

MARY

Your fear of exposure. Just be you.

JACK

This is my house. I don't want my picture taken.

MARY

Alright. I get your positioning.

Mary closes up her camera. Sits at the table, checks watch, fidgets. She crosses to Jack

MARY

Can I get a beer?

Mary hands Jack her driver's license. Jack looks at it.

JACK

In the fridge.

MARY

Thanks. You want one?

JACK

No.

Mary exits into the kitchen, returns shortly with a beer.

MARY
This is my new Nikon. I got it for Nashville.

JACK
That so.

Manual focus, manual exposure. 60/40 weight. All metal.

JACK
That so.

MARY
You gotta know what you're doing to work one of these.

JACK
I guess so.

MARY
I carry it with me all the time. You never know when something authentic is going to happen.

JACK
No kidding.

MARY
Why are you talking down to me?

JACK
I'm not talking down to you.

MARY
"That so." "No kidding" That's all you're saying to me.

JACK
I'm just talking.

MARY
No one just talks. Words are who we are.

JACK
What?

MARY
Words aren't just talking. They are who we are. Words are the expression of the truth of who we are.

JACK
Huh?

MARY

I need to tell you something powerful. Can I have your permission?

JACK

What?

MARY

What I need to say to you is very powerful and whenever words are powerful, I need to take responsibility for how they land. So, it's courteous to ask permission first. Can I tell you something powerful?

JACK

Go ahead.

MARY

Thank you. Great.

(takes a deep breath, sits up straight)

I'm nervous around you.

Jack grabs garbage bag and exits into kitchen. Mary watches him go.

MARY

(to self)

Okay. Release it. Okay.

Jack returns with another garbage bag and a beer.

MARY

As I was expressing. I'm nervous around you. I know nervousness is a Reality Gizmo and I'm committed to releasing it. In the meantime, it occurs to me that you think I don't know what I'm talking about or what I'm doing and you don't take me seriously because I'm twenty two years old and I'm in love with your brother who is forty.

JACK

Forty-one.

MARY

Forty. October 7th he'll be forty-one.

JACK

Oh. Right.

MARY

I want to tell you what you should know about me. I know who I am. I am a powerful person. I am committed to ongoing, all-out, full self-expression. Can you get on board with that?

JACK

Sure.

MARY

Great. Now. Are you willing to hear me speak very, very powerfully?

JACK

I got to finish this.

MARY

I request that you don't. This is just too powerful.

JACK

Okay.

MARY

Great. So. Jim and I are committed to dedicating our lives as powerfully self-expressed human beings.

JACK

Great.

MARY

I want you to take me seriously.

JACK

I am. I just got alot to do here.

MARY

I understand. And I need to know that I'm committed to you and I becoming good, close friends, unafraid to fully express ourselves to each other. You're Jim's only family now. That makes you my family.

JACK

I appreciate it?

MARY

Do you?

JACK

Yep.

Great. MARY

Okay. JACK

Okay. MARY

Anything else? MARY

Nope. JACK

Okay. MARY

(takes a deep breath)
Isn't powerful speaking killer stuff? Authenticity rocks,
you know?

Oh, hey, let me get a picture. Capture this moment. MARY

I wish you wouldn't. JACK

I promise, just one. Just this moment when you and I became
friends. MARY

*Mary unlens her camera, focusing on
Jack.*

Look this way. MARY

Jack does. She takes picture.

Great. Now you take mine. MARY

She hands him the camera.

It's this button here. Just turn the lens... MARY

Wonder what happens next?

For a copy of the full script, email me at:

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Thanks!