

THE DOG WATCHER

a play for a solo actor

(EXCERPT)

by
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Lights up - the harsh white light of a boardroom. We hear a faint buzz. HORACE YANCY, a 60-year-old man, stands behind a long table, wearing a grey suit. Lying on the table are several handmade items: crosses woven out of plastic Wal-Mart bags, homemade greeting cards lightly shaded with Crayolas, a sailboat made of straws, string, and Coca-Cola cans, a birdcage made out of popsicle sticks. He looks at the audience for a moment as though he is looking at everyone individually and no one in particular. The buzzing sound slowly grows louder and harsher, as though it is coming closer to us. He continues to look without comment. Lights out.

Lights up on JAMES MONTGOMERY, a 36-year-old black man, sits at a metal table in a metal chair, drinking a carton of chocolate milk and making a model sailboat out of straws, string, and Coca-Cola cans.

JAMES

I can kill a man with my bare hands. If you hold your fingers together like this and jam them straight up under someone's ribcage, like this? You can kill a man that way. Or smack them in the nose real hard. That's what they teach you in the special forces. I was in the special forces for 8 years, and after I got out, my wife and I bought a place up in Union City. Big house. Real nice patio in the back, and I bought myself an MP47 Roaster. Best grill money can buy.

Well, yeah, I did the assignment. I wrote it down, it's right there, and I put my paper for you to sign on the top.

I mean, I wrote it all down, so you can read it.

Why would I tell you when you can read it?

That is how I remember it. There's nothing different in the way I'm gonna tell it and the way it is right there, so...

I just need to get my paper signed.

Alright. It's your life. Well, let's see...well, it was a beautiful spring day. Sun was out. Wind in the trees and all that. I had a deal with this guy. \$225,000, and the guy was coming to pick up the cocaine. And I was out on the patio barbequing on my MP47, and the guy showed up acting funny.

Just shifting around and saying funny shit, and it entered my head that was he was fixing to steal this cocaine. And, uh, kill ME. So after the deal seemed to be going sour, I reached over like I was going to turn the chicken on the grill, took the chicken knife, reached up, and cut the guy's jugular vein. And he started bleeding, so I got a tarp and pulled him over on it, so he'd bleed out on the tarp and not get blood on the patio. My wife saw the whole thing through the kitchen window, so she came running out and said, "You gotta do something with that body." So I took the body over to Coweta County, and buried it in the woods. Figured by the time it rotted, that it'd be pretty well gone and all I'd done is cut the guy's throat.

So in the meantime, somebody reported this guy as missing. And there'd been some noise that he'd known me, so the police came by asking if I'd seen him. I said I hadn't. Which was true. I hadn't seen him since I left him out in the woods. They investigated for awhile, but they never found anything and dropped the case.

So a year went by, and it was the spring of the year again. My wife was worried that hunters might find the body. I tried to tell her nobody would find him out there, but she kept nagging me, so I went out to the woods, got all the bones, and brought them home. I found a 5-gallon bucket in the carport, poured a bunch of muriatic acid into the bucket, and started putting the bones in there, one by one. And the bones start dissolving right away, so I'm pretty happy with myself, and I go in the house and get a chocolate milk out the refrigerator. Open up the carton, take it outside and stand there drinking it on the patio, watching those bones dissolve, and enjoying the spring afternoon.

All of a sudden, something moves in the corner of my eye, and there's a little dog standing there. The dog looks at me, I look at the dog and say, "Get on out of here!" Dog doesn't move. He looks at the bucket, and one end of a femur is sticking out over the edge of the bucket while the bottom part's dissolving in the acid. The dog runs over, grabs onto that femur, and stands there looking up at me. I try grabbing the femur out of his mouth, but he takes off running. I take off after him, but don't get real far, cause it's not exactly inconspicuous chasing after a dog running around with a femur in his mouth. So I got in my car and drove around the neighborhood all day looking for the dog, but couldn't find him anywhere. So I forgot about it. Went on back to the house.

So one year later, it's a beautiful spring day again, and my neighbor's cutting grass in his yard. And all of a sudden, his lawnmower hits a bone. The man, being an amateur fucking detective or something, gets off to look at it and decides this might be a human bone, so he calls the GBI.

And the GBI comes down and says, "Yes, indeed, this is a bone. A human bone! It's a human femur!" So they'd traced the bone back to my street. I just came out of the house when the police car pulled up in my driveway. They didn't have to tell me what for. I've got seven more years on a ten-year sentence for manslaughter, so if you sign this piece of paper, give me credit for this class with you, I might be able to get that down to five. I did the assignment, so...

Thank you. I appreciate it.

You know, it really was the perfect crime until my wife starts running her mouth. If I'd left the bones in the woods, someone might have found them, but they'd never of linked it back to me. You said you read about the case, so you know what the deal was. Just crooks messing with crooks. You know what I mean. I can look in your eyes and tell. You know. You're the same.

Same. Same as me. I can look at you and tell.

Only difference between you and me is the things you've done aren't things anybody's gonna arrest you for. Doesn't mean you're any better. Stick around here and you'll find out. If you're not crooked when you come in, you will be by the time you leave. You've got it in you. Same as me. Takes one to know one.

SPONTANEOUS SHAW, a 19-year-old black boy, sits in the same metal chair, making a birdcage out of popsicle sticks.

SPONTANEOUS

Yo, don't wanna. You supposed to be helping me get my GED, not talking about what I done.

Whatcha gonna do to me if I don't tell you?

Yeah. That's what I...

Naw, naw, but you know, it's like - you ain't trying to help me. You just using me to save your program they don't give a shit about.

Oh, I know. Folks been talking. I heard all about it. They cutting education and you trying to get our stories to save your program. Save your ass.

Your ass. Your white ass.

No, you don't. You don't give a shit about my GED. You just want my ghetto redemption story to make you sound good. Like you can save the poor little colored boy done lost his way.

What? Does that bother you?

Uh huh.

Gimme one reason I should tell you.

I don't know. Nowhere, I guess.

Aight.

I said aight! I'm telling you!

(beat) You ever seen that farm on Highway 15? Bigass farm. Ostrich or some shit. Like who the hell gonna eat a goddamn ostrich?

Eggs? That's a big motherfuckin' omelet then, you ever seen those eggs? That's like some Huddle House sixteen egg omelets, like, ostrich eggs? Shiiiiit. Healthier my ass. Ain't nobody need all that. Maybe yo' mama.

What? You think we ain't say that no more? Like that some 1995 shit?

Aight. Ostriches. Fucking fatass birds. Someone told me the man with the ostrich farm on Highway 15 needed a strong motherfucker to shovel ostrich shit and pick up feathers and, naw naw naw, it was my cousin, LaDetris. We was driving down Highway 15, and LaDetris said, "You know that's a rich motherfucker lives up there?" and I looked out the window and saw this bigass white house sitting on top of the hill, like, like, one of them birthday cakes at the grocery store. Just...pure, like. You know that house?

Yeah. So I get LaDetris to take me up there, and he dropped me off and I walked up the driveway. Ostrich shit. Everywhere. Ostriches just. Looking. Looking at me like they could kill me, like, "You a trespassing motherfucker and we kick you to death if you don't watch yourself." Cause they kick, you know? Kick you straight into next Tuesday. They ain't never kick me, though, cause I'm real gentle with them and Mr. Bronson always said, "Boy, you have a real way with 'em," and...you know Mr. Bronson?

Knew. Yeah. Sometimes I forget. Well, thas' what he said.

I ain't know whether or not he got money at first, cause even though he got that birthday cake house, he just wear overalls all the time, like he some sharecropping motherfucker. In school, they got pictures of these old white sharecropping motherfuckers in my social studies book, and I always liked those pictures 'cause it was the closest thing I ever saw to white slaves, you know what I'm saying?

Twelfth.

Nineteen.

Got held back twice.

Mama. She wouldn't let - Naw, cause my brother drop out in the 11th grade and my sister drop out in the 10th grade to have her baby. I got one, too. Toria. See her on Sundays.

She's two. I got her a new pair of shoes for her birthday, which, my birthday's the same day. Red shoes. You got any?

How old?

Hmph.

Anyway, Mister Bronson look like a Depression-era motherfucker. Like one them folks in my book. Like he ain't got two nickels to rub together. So I start thinking someone left him that house, and why ain't he sell it? Nobody else live there. Only other person was his granddaughter, Kasey. She three. Her mama bring her out every Thursday afternoon, and it's like every minute of the week there ain't nothing going on in his head except for Kasey. Talk about her. All. The. Time. Motherfucker's in love. I ain't seen someone fall that hard since Lil' Kim came out with that that - you know that video? My friend, Metrius, was like...shiiiiiiiiit. In love. Like, he lived for Lil' Kim. Mr. Bronson? All he care about was ostrich shit and Kasey. That's all. I thought he was crazy at first. He called me in everyday at noon, dead on noon, not 11:55, not 12:05, fucking dead of noon every day. And he'd have a sandwich sitting there for me on the picnic table outside with a ginger ale in a bottle. And we'd sit down and eat. He ast me about Toria. It was real...he was real nice to me.

So I'd been shoveling ostrich shit two weeks and got to wondering if he ever gonna pay me or what, cause being out with them birds, the way they look at you, just...looking at you like you the freakass bird, and they the ones come to clean up after you. Like I ain't got enough folks looking at me like that, like those white bitches at Wal-Mart staring at me like I'm gonna cut 'em or some shit. I'm not a thug. I don't get out in the street and do all that jive and shit. My pants ain't about to fall down. But the way they look...look just like them goddamn ostriches. So I been shoveling shit two weeks when Mr. Bronson come out to tell me it's time to go home, and I said, "Mr. Bronson? You gonna pay me?" And he said, "Come on, Spontaneous," so I went inside that house for the first time, and shiiiiiiiiiiiiit! Sparkled and shined and everything new. Or if it wasn't new, it looked new. Old shit looking new as morning glories.

He went to his desk to write a check and I said, "I can't take no check," and he said, "Why not?" and I said, "I ain't got no checking account," so he get out his wallet, and when he open it up...I ain't never seen that much goddamn money in my life, not on TV, not in the movies, just...Nothing!

Motherfucker pulls out three hundred-dollar bills, and I look in his wallet and see ten, twenty, thirty more. All that goddamn money walking around in them Depression-ass ragass overalls this whole time. He's like one of them flower pots look like a flower pot but really got some keys in it? He's like the Trojan horse or some shit. Got twenty thousand damn dollars there in his wallet. Right there!

So.

So.

After that. Like, when you're just around other brokeass motherfuckers, you don't feel like a brokeass motherfucker. You just feel, you know, normal. But when you see all that? See what someone else got, a kind of rich you ain't ever seen before, it's like...you know how you have a bad dream and can't stop thinking about it the next day? That wallet was my bad dream.

So on Wednesday night, I knew he'd be at the store buying groceries cause Kasey be coming the next day, so I waited out in the parking lot. He come later than I thought - like 8:00 - but that was good, cause everybody's in church on Wednesday night. He goes inside the store and I crouch down on one side of his truck. And I had a mask on so he wouldn't know who I was and if anyone seen me, I'd just run down Floyd Street and nobody'd come after me. Cause white folks don't go down Floyd Street ever during the day and especially not at night. So I waited. And waited. And after while, he come out the store with a bunch of bags. When he gets up next to the truck and starts fumbling around for his keys, I stand up real fast behind him and put one arm around his chest, slide the other one in his pocket, real fast so I could get in, get out, and get my ass back on down Floyd Street. But don't you know it, Mr. Bronson stops fighting and goes almost limp like he'd done had a heartattack or some shit. And he says, "Spontaneous." It was like someone poured ice down the back of my shirt. I couldn't find my voice. It's like finding salt in a bag of sugar, and someone, maybe it was me, says, "Naw" in his ear, soft-like. He shakes his head and says, "Spontaneous. Didn't I pay you enough?" and I'm still sifting through that bag of sugar looking for my salt, looking for where to go or what to say when this voice says, "How you know it was me?" "Who said that?" I thought, and Mr. Bronson grabs hold of my shirt and says, "There's only one person in town other than me who smells like ostrich shit." And after he says that, this hand, I don't know whose hand it was, reaches in my pocket and takes out a knife, same knife Toria's mama gave me for my birthday.

Same day I gave Toria those red shoes cause our birthdays on the same day. Did I tell you that?

That knife she gave me. I seen it cut down into Mr. Bronson's throat hard and deep making a mark. And then the mark's a river, and then the river's a lake. And my feet are running, running, carrying me down Floyd Street like I'm winning the gold medal in the goddamn Olympics. And I ain't got the money and I ain't got my knife, and the bag of sugar done spilt all over the floor, but there's no way to pick it back up, cause them grains are too small to see in the floorboards. Too small to reach in the cracks except with the tip of your tongue.

(beat) When they come get me, they ain't know it was my knife. They ain't got the DNA or nothing like that. They just say I'm the only one who got any kind of motive. Now what the hell you make of that? Motive. What motive I had to kill that man? Nothing. Unless you look at the motive of anyone broke and ain't got shit. But that might as well be the motive of Metrius or Shendrica or LaDetris, or anybody down on Floyd Street. Or you. How much they paying you? Not enough. Anybody ever been looked at like them ostriches look at me got a motive. Like they gonna kick you whether you hurt them or not, just cause? Just cause you might? Anybody ever been on the receiving end of that look got motive enough. It ain't have to be me. Could've been anybody.

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