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Dramatic Publishing

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“A moving study of muted sorrow.” —*Variety*

American Dead

Drama by Brett Neveu

“Neveu ponders the dilemmas of the living with tenderness and admirable simplicity.” —*LA Times*

American Dead

Drama. By Brett Neveu. Cast: 6m., 2w. Lewie Froah, a one-time handyman in a town hit hard by the economic downturn, rambles drunkenly through the town's abandoned buildings, dwelling on the death of his sister, Grace. Unable to come to terms with the murder and haunted by the unsolved crime, Lewie imagines Grace to be with him as they discuss how she was murdered during a robbery attempt at a local grocery. For five years he has continued his relationship with Grace's former husband, Doug, and his new wife, Lisa, but they are preparing to leave town. Lewie finds himself at Bill Doane's bar where he meets Dennis, an out-of-towner in a similar emotional tight spot. Feeling the loss, of his sister, his former brother-in-law, and the town itself, Lewie continues drinking and hallucinating discussions with Grace until he is confronted by Dennis, who tells him he knows who killed his sister—that he heard the men confess to the killing while he was in prison. This information drives Lewie into a tailspin. Yet by being forced to come to terms with the true senselessness of Grace's death, Lewie begins to take the first real step toward healing. Commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Company. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: AC8.*

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AMERICAN DEAD

By
BRETT NEVEU



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for Kristen and Lia Pearl

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American Theatre Company, Chicago, premiered *American Dead* on February 18, 2004, with the following:

CAST:

Lewie Froah James Leaming
Deputy Grace Tisdale Isabel Liss
Mark Shawver Mark Minton
Bill Doane John Mährlien
Dennis Rescola David Parkes
Sheriff Alan Starett Marty Higginbotham
Doug Tisdale Danny McCarthy
Lisa Tisdale Jennifer Avery

PRODUCTION STAFF:

Directed by Edward Sobel
Stage Manager Deb Styer
Set Design Keith Pitts
Lighting Design Michelle Habeck
Costume Design Rachel Healy
Composers Ray Nardelli and Richard Sparks
Artistic Director Damon Kiely

AMERICAN DEAD

CHARACTERS:

LEWIE FROAH (m) early to mid-40s
MARK SHAWVER (m) grocery store clerk, 16
GRACE TISDALE (f) deputy sheriff, early 30s
ALAN STARETT (m) sheriff, late 50s to early 60s
BILL DOANE (m) bartender, early to mid-40s
DENNIS RESCOLA (m) late 30s
DOUG TISDALE (m) widowed from Grace, late 30s
LISA TISDALE (f) Doug's 2nd wife, mid-30s

TIME: The present

PLACE: Various abandoned buildings in a small,
Midwestern town
A roadside bar
The yard outside Doug and Lisa Tisdale's home
Sheriff Alan Starett's office at the county courthouse

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Night. A thunderstorm rolls in the distance. Lights up inside an abandoned home. LEWIE sits on the ground talking to MARK. MARK wears a grocery clerk's uniform. LEWIE has been drinking. LEWIE laughs.)

LEWIE. Patty Rose had a pool in her backyard. It was small and was out on the lawn and me and Grace would go over there and swim around. You could swim in circles and then there would be a current like a river and it would push you, around and around and around, but everybody had to swim so that there would be a current, so then you'd go in a circle, then let the current you made carry you. You'd just sit floating and the water would push you in a circle until you swam to make it happen again, over and over. *(A distant gunshot is heard. MARK, startled, reacts. Another distant gunshot is heard. A beat.)* Grace was at 4-H and I was swimming.

(GRACE, dressed in a deputy sheriff's uniform, enters. As she approaches MARK and LEWIE, another distant gunshot is heard. GRACE and MARK react, then slowly turn back to LEWIE.)

LEWIE *(cont'd)*. Where were you at, 4-H?

GRACE. I was at Laura Townsend's across the street.

LEWIE. You weren't at 4-H?

GRACE. No.

LEWIE. Patty Rose had that pool.

GRACE. There were dead bugs in it.

LEWIE. You'd scoop them out. You could scoop out dead grasshoppers.

GRACE. There were water bugs in it.

LEWIE. There weren't water bugs.

GRACE. There were bugs that could swim.

LEWIE. There weren't water bugs.

GRACE. Her dad owned the Tastee Freez.

LEWIE. Her dad owned it.

GRACE. Her dad owned it.

LEWIE. Her dad owned the Tastee Freez.

GRACE. Patty Rose and Dana Gates liked you.

LEWIE. I know.

GRACE. You were swimming with them over there. They thought you were cute!

LEWIE. They asked me if I liked them and I told them I liked our dog Reggie. I was eleven years old.

GRACE. They were wearing bathing suits.

LEWIE. Very pretty. Those girls were very pretty.

GRACE. I was across the street at Laura Townsend's.

LEWIE. They were twelve and pretty.

(A beat. ALAN enters. He has a gun holstered at his side and a sheriff's badge on his belt. He wears a rain slicker. He shines a large flashlight on LEWIE.)

ALAN. Lewie, you can't be in here. Walk over this way and I'll take you home. (*LEWIE stares at ALAN.*) Sherry Cadell called. She called and said you were in here.

LEWIE. Okay.

ALAN. Come on out to the car then.

LEWIE. Okay.

ALAN. I'll meet you outside. (*ALAN exits. A pause. Lights fade to black.*)

SCENE 2

(Lights up inside a somewhat empty roadside bar. DENNIS sits on a stool and is finishing a bottle of beer. DENNIS talks with BILL, who is standing, tending bar.)

BILL. He locked himself in there?

DENNIS. He and his sister locked the doors and windows.

BILL. Where were you?

DENNIS. At work.

BILL. Why weren't they at school?

DENNIS. They were supposed to be on their way.

BILL. Why were they in there, again?

DENNIS. Brad locked himself inside and his sister Karla was in there, too.

BILL. Didn't he fire shots?

DENNIS. No.

BILL. I thought he shot a gun or something.

DENNIS. No, he had some guns, but he didn't fire them.

BILL. Oh. How long's he supposed to be at Eldora?

DENNIS. He's been there a little over a year. He has a few months left, then he's eighteen.

BILL. What about your daughter? What's her name?

DENNIS. Karla. She lives with her mom.

BILL. Are you staying up in Eldora?

DENNIS. Yeah.

BILL. At a motel?

DENNIS. The Days Inn.

BILL. You were at work when it all happened?

DENNIS. That's right.

BILL. I remember seeing it in the paper.

DENNIS. He came out on his own after a few hours. Nothing really happened.

BILL. I remember the article in the paper.

DENNIS. Brad's mom visits him every few weeks. I see him when I can, it's a bit of a drive.

BILL. How many guns did he have with him?

DENNIS. Two.

BILL. He didn't want to go to school that day, that's why he did that?

DENNIS. I guess so.

BILL. Just because he didn't want to go to school? All that happened up in Cherokee?

(ALAN enters, still wearing his rain slicker. He walks to the bar.)

ALAN. Hey, Bill.

BILL. Hey, Alan. Remember that kid that wouldn't come out of his house and he had a couple of guns? This is his dad. His boy's in Eldora now. His kid just didn't want to go to school. *(To DENNIS.)* That's what you told me, that's why he did all that, right?

ALAN *(to BILL)*. How many did Lewie have tonight?

BILL. He was fine when he left.

ALAN. I found him at David Rose's old place.

BILL. You did?

ALAN. Yes.

BILL. Tonight?

ALAN. Yes.

BILL. Oh. *(Pause.)* He was fine when he left here.

ALAN. How many did he have?

BILL. Just three, no more than three, I think. He was fine when he left. What was he doing at David Rose's, he'll get himself killed going in there, he could fall right through the floor, what was he doing? *(ALAN looks at BILL. A beat. ALAN sits. BILL gives him a bottle of beer. ALAN drinks. To ALAN:)* So you remember that boy that locked himself in his house because he didn't go to school?

ALAN *(to DENNIS)*. Hello.

DENNIS. Hey.

BILL. His kid's up in Eldora now.

ALAN. How long's he there?

DENNIS. He's been there a year.

ALAN. I hated school, too, but I never wanted to shoot any policemen over it. *(A pause.)*

DENNIS *(to BILL)*. Thanks for the beer.

BILL. Yeah. *(DENNIS exits.)* That happened up in Cherokee.

ALAN. Huh.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

(Lights up. The next day. LEWIE stands in the yard beside Doug and Lisa Tisdale's home. DOUG kneels nearby and sorts through a cardboard box.)

LEWIE. Don't throw that stuff out.

DOUG. I'm getting rid of most of it.

LEWIE. Let me look through that box.

DOUG. You can look through it afterwards.

LEWIE. You'll throw it out first.

DOUG. You can look through it in just a second.

LEWIE. You've got fourteen bags of stuff out in front.

DOUG. You can look through those.

LEWIE. What's in them?

DOUG. Grace's clothes from the basement and some things from some other boxes.

LEWIE. What boxes?

DOUG. Boxes from the basement.

LEWIE. You should have let me look through that stuff before you bagged it all up.

DOUG. I didn't know when you were coming over, so I just went ahead and started.

LEWIE. I said I'd be by today.

DOUG. You said yesterday or today, and I have to get this stuff done.

LEWIE. Let me look through that box.

DOUG. Go ahead.

LEWIE. Let me see what's in it.

DOUG. Here.

(DOUG moves out of the way and LEWIE kneels by the box. DOUG exits. LEWIE digs in the box. He finds a small, green jewelry case. He opens the case. DOUG returns with an empty plastic garbage bag.)

LEWIE. Holy shit, were you going to throw this out? Are you even looking in some of these things?

DOUG. I don't have time to look through everything.

LEWIE. These are my aunt's earrings. My aunt just asked me a few months ago where these were. She gave them to Grace to wear at you guys' wedding and my aunt didn't know where they went since then.

DOUG. You can have them back.

LEWIE. These are antique and worth a lot of money.

DOUG. Take them with you.

LEWIE. They're not mine. They're my aunt's.

DOUG. Take them.

LEWIE. You can give them to Lisa, if you want. Would Lisa want to wear them?

DOUG. They're your aunt's earrings. Give them back to her.

LEWIE. Okay.

DOUG. You should go through those bags on the porch and go through any of the boxes with Grace's things and see if there's anything else.

LEWIE. There's Grace's clothes and stuff from boxes in those bags on the porch?

DOUG. It's mostly clothes.

LEWIE. I can get rid of that stuff for you. I can take it to some used clothing store or something.

DOUG. Sure, if you want to, okay.

(Pause. LEWIE looks through a small cardboard box of miscellaneous items.)

LEWIE. You and Lisa are out then on Saturday?

DOUG. She has summer school kids waiting, I guess.

LEWIE. Do you want to have dinner on Friday?

DOUG. Okay.

LEWIE. I'll bring some chicken over.

DOUG. Okay.

LEWIE. Lisa's fine?

DOUG. Yes.

LEWIE. She's home?

DOUG. She's upstairs. She's nervous about the move.

LEWIE. Yeah, I imagine.

DOUG. She's packing some things upstairs in the bedroom.

LEWIE. Are you keeping Grace's pictures?

DOUG. Pictures of what?

LEWIE. She had some pictures of when she was a kid. Easter and parties and things.

DOUG. I haven't found those yet.

LEWIE. She had pictures of this slumber party and I'm in nearly every picture. I was eight or something. *(Pause.)* I was pulling barbed wire down over behind Ashby's yesterday. They wanted it off that back wall. I'm finishing that up today.

DOUG. This afternoon?

LEWIE. Yeah.

DOUG. Did you want some lunch?

LEWIE. Okay. You guys need any help on Saturday, moving anything or anything?

DOUG. Sure.

LEWIE. Lisa's packing inside?

DOUG. Yeah, she's upstairs.

LEWIE. Does she need any help up there?

DOUG. She's just packing up the hall closet.

LEWIE. Like towels and sheets?

DOUG. I think it's just a few things we don't use much.

LEWIE. Some baskets or something?

DOUG. Baskets? (*Laughs.*)

LEWIE (*laughs*). Baskets? Ah, I don't know. (*DOUG and LEWIE continue to laugh, slight pause.*) After you guys leave on Saturday, it'll just be me.

DOUG. What do you mean?

LEWIE. After you guys go.

DOUG. You'll be okay.

LEWIE. I know.

DOUG. You know more than just Lisa and I. It'll be all right.

LEWIE. You're right.

DOUG. You should take better care of yourself.

LEWIE. I will.

DOUG. You should. You need to take better care of yourself.

LEWIE. Okay.

DOUG. I'm not trying to throw anything away you might want. (*Pause.*) You were pulling barbed wire down?

LEWIE. I was up on the wall and cutting it down with a pair of needlenose pliers. It came right apart. It's weird because the wall's just there and you can go around it easily, so I don't know why that barbed wire was there. It must have been left over from the building next door that got knocked down a few years ago. I finished cutting the wire yesterday and I was going to try to pull the

brackets off today. (*Pause.*) If you find those pictures of Grace's slumber party there's one where you can see her in the background. She's got her foot up in the air and a weird look on her face. It's really funny. She's got her foot up in the air or something. It was Grace's ninth birthday. It was her slumber party so I don't know why I'm in every picture.

DOUG. You just wanted to be part of the action. You just knew it was a birthday and you wanted to have fun.

LEWIE. There was one girl, Crista Norvell, that was really homesick but my dad took pictures of her anyway. My dad took a picture of her sitting in a chair looking like she'd been crying.

DOUG. Really?

LEWIE. My dad was always taking pictures of people when they looked like shit.

DOUG. Yeah, I think he took a few like that of me before.

LEWIE. He did?

DOUG. You know he did.

LEWIE. Yeah. He did. (*DOUG and LEWIE laugh.*) What do you want me to do. Put me to work.

DOUG. Okay.

LEWIE. Put me to work.

DOUG. We should get some stuff out of the garage.

LEWIE. Where do you want to put it?

DOUG. We should pack some stuff out there and then bring the boxes in.

LEWIE. Okay.

DOUG. You can go through the rest of Grace's things.

LEWIE. I'm happy for you. I'm happy for you and Lisa. I wish I could buy you guys something. I wish I could buy you and Lisa a romantic vacation or something.

DOUG. It's all right.

LEWIE. I wish I could buy you and Lisa something as a present.

DOUG. It's all right.

(DOUG exits toward the garage. LEWIE watches after him. GRACE appears. LEWIE and GRACE smile at each other as LEWIE exits. Lights fade to black.)