

LOVE'S DISENLIGHTENMENT

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

JASON	Resident playwright of a small theater company – eccentric, insecure, enthusiastic, temperamental
ASHLEY	Resident artistic director of the theater company, a good and personal friend of Jason’s. Generally open-minded, but practical. Name chosen to simplify director’s choice of making the character male or female.
STAGE HAND 1	Nearly any personality that includes “bored”. No spoken lines.
STAGE HAND 2	Basically the same as Stage Hand 1. No spoken lines.

Note: Names and genders are not relevant to the plot, and can be changed as desired.

SETTING

A theater in modern day.

SCENE

(Jason and Ashley are sitting in chairs on the side of the stage, each holding a script in their hands. Opposite them are a lamp and a stick, perhaps on the floor or possibly on platforms or stools or something to make them easier to see. The lamp should be plugged in, with the chord close to fully extended. Jason and Ashley are staring at the objects in silence for a time, the former with a look of appreciative contemplation and the latter with an expression of confusion that eventually becomes impatience.)

ASHLEY

I don't get it.

JASON

What's not to get?

ASHLEY

What's not to... The whole thing. I don't get any of it. What's going on?

JASON

Isn't it obvious? They're falling in love.

ASHLEY

Oh.

JASON

Starting to. This is that awkward, uncomfortable phase.

ASHLEY

Yeah. I'm definitely picking up on the awkward and uncomfortable.

JASON

(Mistaking the comment for sincere...)

Isn't it great?

ASHLEY

And this is the whole bit? I thought plays were supposed to have dialog and action and stuff.

JASON

- There *is* dialog. It's just nonverbal.

ASHLEY

Nonverbal dialog? What the hell is that supposed to mean? That's like inedible food. It doesn't—

JASON

Shhhh. You're missing it.

(Ashley just stares at Jason like he's an idiot.)

ASHLEY

Uh huh. *(Pause.)* Have I missed all of it yet?

JASON

Are you seriously telling me that you can't feel the tension between them? The longing? The uncertainty?

ASHLEY

No.

JASON

The deep connection...

ASHLEY

No.

JASON

...as they get past their inhibitions...

ASHLEY

No.

JASON

...each one wondering if the other feels the same way...

ASHLEY

No.

JASON

...neither one brave enough to be the first to reach out...

ASHLEY
It's a stick...

JASON
...to take that first bold step...

ASHLEY
And a lamp...

JASON
...to jump off the precipice of fate...

ASHLEY
You're shitting me.

JASON
...into the great beyond...

ASHLEY
You are, right?

JASON
...unable to know if the other will jump with them...

ASHLEY
Jason?

JASON
(Pulled out of the theatrical experience...)
What?

ASHLEY
You're full of shit, right?

JASON
What do you mean?

ASHLEY
I mean, we're staring a lamp. And a stick.

JASON
Are you honestly telling me that you can't feel the growing passion?

(Ashley shakes his/her head in disbelief. Jason suddenly reacts like something important is going to happen, turns a page in his script.)

JASON (CONT)

Oh, pay attention. This part is really moving.

ASHLEY

They're just...

(A stage hand, dressed in the typical blacks, comes out and with a look of unsurpassed boredom and apathy pushes the stick closer to the lamp. Jason sighs in appreciation as the stage hand exits.)

JASON

Oh. Isn't that beautiful.

ASHLEY

What the hell just happened?

(Jason motions to Ashley's script.)

JASON

He couldn't take it any longer.

ASHLEY

He?

JASON

And you said there wasn't any action.

ASHLEY

What makes the stick a 'he'?

JASON

Or she. Whatever.

ASHLEY

It's a stick.

JASON

You need to get over your preconceptions if you're ever going to have a chance to see it for its inner nature, Ashley.

(Ashley just stares at Jason. S/he blinks like he is out of focus.)

ASHLEY

What's really going on here, Jason?

JASON

Haven't you ever been in love, wanted to take that first step but not known how?

ASHLEY

Is this because no one came to auditions last week?

JASON

Shh shh shh.

(Jason motions for Ashley to be silent. A moment later, another stage hand comes on, just as bored as the first, and moves the lamp back away from the stuck a little, then exits. We can see the sympathy play out in Jason's face.)

ASHLEY

What just happened?

JASON

The lamp got cold feet. They're too different, she's thinking. It could never work.

ASHLEY

And how did you get that?

JASON

Look.

(He points to the script in Ashley's hand.)

ASHLEY

An audience isn't going to have the script, Jason.

JASON

You don't really need the script to get it if you are in tune with what's going on.

ASHLEY

Nobody's going to be—

(Ashley pauses as the first stagehand comes on and moves the stick back to where it started.)

JASON

The pain. We've all been there. That sense of rejection, where you reach out, and...

ASHLEY

Jason.

(He is lost in the moment.)

Jason!

(Jason breaks out and looks at Ashley.)

JASON

What?

ASHLEY

Is this about last week. I know you were bummed.

JASON

No. It's a love story. *The* love story. Reduced to its rawest elements.

ASHLEY

A stick and a lamp.

JASON

Right.

ASHLEY

You want to know what I think?

JASON

No.

ASHLEY

(Ignoring his response...)

I think you took that joke about ‘who needs the damn actors anyway’ a little too far.

JASON

You’re projecting, Ashley. That’s what you want to believe, so you can’t see anything else.

ASHLEY

(Incredulous, looking back and forth between Jason and the ‘scene’...)

I’m *projecting*.

JASON

Right.

ASHLEY

I’m... projecting.

JASON

I’m just calling it as I see it.

(The second stage hand comes back on and moves the lamp back to where it started, then exits.)

ASHLEY

What’s that?

JASON

(Shaking his head...)

You’re not even trying. If you aren’t going to at least—

ASHLEY

Fine. Fine fine. Let me guess. The lamp has decided that it really does like the stick.

JASON

And?

ASHLEY

There’s more?

(Jason gives Ashley a “well, come on” look.)

ASHLEY (CONT)

And...is reaching out.

JASON

Because?

ASHLEY

Jesus, Jason, I'm trying to... Fine. *(Takes a breath.)* Because... it has decided that it wants the stick more than its lamp friends.

JASON

See? Was that so hard?

ASHLEY

No one's going to get this, Jason.

JASON

See how the stick is just sitting there, not moving. Uncertain. Can it risk the pain the again? Can it let her be vulnerable and unsure just as he was, and not rush to her side to ease that discomfort? Or should he just leave, resigned to a life with other sticks.

ASHLEY

And you're getting all that from... what? It's expression? Body language?

JASON

Mostly the body language. It doesn't *have* expressions, Ashley.

ASHLEY

It doesn't have a *body*, Jason.

JASON

Shh, shh. Wait.

ASHLEY

(Muttering...)

Oh god.

(The first stage hand comes back on, this time holding a piece of paper that s/he is looking at. S/he walks up to the stick like s/he is going to move it. S/he glances once more at the paper, then looks up and mouths counting up from one. While that's happening...)

JASON

The uncertainty is palpable, isn't it? What's he going to do?

(The second stage hand comes out and goes to the lamp. The first stage hand reaches about seven, and moves the stick slightly away.)

There! There. Can you see her devastation? How she second-guesses everything? But...

(The second stage hand moves the lamp just a little closer to the stick, and its cord is now fully extended.)

JASON

She won't give up.

(The first stage hand then moves the stick back to its original position.)

ASHLEY

You can't write a play without actors, Jason.

JASON

This isn't about the actors. It's about the story.

ASHLEY

The stage crew being out there is really distracting.

JASON

Jesus, Ash, will you stop being so judgmental? *(Turning to address the crew.)* Just give us a minute, okay?

(The stage hands relax.)

In an actual performance we wouldn't use stage crew. We'd have them move using strings or something. Look, if you can't leave your preconceptions and unconscious biases at the door, there's really no point in sharing this with you.

ASHLEY

I just don't think this is going to play.

JASON

So you won't direct it?

ASHLEY

There's nothing to direct! It's a stick and a lamp! What am I supposed to do? How am I suppose to know if they've stopped acting when I yell 'cut'? Jason, this isn't going work.

JASON

Forget it, then!

(He stands up, clearly hurt.)

ASHLEY

Jason, look...

JASON

Just forget it! Forget the whole thing!

(He starts to storm off.)

ASHLEY

Jason, wait!

(Jason exits.)

Jason!

(Ashley shakes his/her head in disbelief at the situation. S/he stares at the script, then looks up at the stage hands.)

Might as well finish it.

(The first stage hand finishes mouthing silently until reaching ten, then moves the stick next to the lamp. The lamp suddenly turns on, and the first stage hand makes the stick dance around in happiness. After a moment, with the help of the stage hands, the stick and lamp start to move downstage together, but the lamp is jerked backwards, unable to proceed because of the cord. The stick stops, motions the lamp on, and starts to move

again. The lamp tries to move again, but can't go any further. The stick, now a bit away, is put down motionless. The lamp tries one last valiant effort to get there, and makes it at the cost of being unplugged. Unlit, it is placed where it reached just as it went out. The stick goes back to the lamp, prods it, then is leaned up against it. The stage hands exit.

Ashley stares at the scene/objects as they lie there motionless, then down at the script. After a moment...)

ASHLEY

Ah crap. That actually works. Jason!

(S/he goes after him.)

Jason, wait!

(Ashley exits. Lights out.)