LAURA

by Shawn Deal

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SYNOPSIS: A chance encounter between an older man seeking to reconnect with his estranged daughter and a younger man grappling with relationship troubles takes a dark turn, culminating in a chilling murder confession. As layers of truth and deception unravel, the characters' true motives remain hidden—until a shocking and deadly finale.

DURATION: 50 minutes.
SETTING: An apartment living area.
TIME: Present.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 2 males)

DUNCAN (m).....a man in his 50's, British accent. *(193 lines)*
JAKE (m).....a man in his 20's. *(194 lines)*
LAURA (f).....a woman in her 20's. *(6 lines)*
YOUNG GIRL (f).....between 6 and 12. *(4 lines)*

SET: Jake's apartment. It should be a bachelor's apartment but super neat, a couple of chairs are needed, a table, a kitchenette with some glasses and drinks.

AT START: *JAKE is currently mopping the floor and especially focused on one part of the floor, at center stage or down center stage. He focuses on scrubbing out something that was possibly spilt there. It seems to be a big spill like the dropping of a champagne bottle on the ground. Beat. A knock comes at the door.*

JAKE stops his cleaning to see if he heard it correctly, as he is not expecting anyone to be coming by at this very moment. A knock at the door again.

JAKE: *(Shouts at the closed door.)* Hold on!

JAKE quickly tries to put away the mop and cleaning supplies away before going to answer the door. A second knock comes. JAKE is still fumbling around to get everything picked up. The knock comes again.

JAKE: *(Shouts at the door.)* Oh, just come in already!

JAKE'S back is turned to the door as DUNCAN enters.

JAKE: *(Still not facing the door, as he is still putting his cleaning supplies away.)* Lee, man… I said I couldn't get together until later… like this afternoon.

DUNCAN looks around to see who JAKE is talking to. He holds a paper bag.

JAKE: Lee, I really need to get this done. I promise you I am fine… Honestly just fine.

DUNCAN looks around again, trying to identify who this Lee might be. He does a double check all around, making sure that JAKE is truly talking to himself.

JAKE: *(Still has yet to look at the visitor.)* Lee just go home… I appreciate that you are trying to help but…. *(JAKE turns around to face the person who has walked into his apartment and with a start realizes it is not Lee.)* You're not Lee.

DUNCAN: As it would happen, my name is not Lee.

JAKE: As it would happen?

DUNCAN: Yes, I was born without a name and by some sort of strange circumstance, my parents chose a moniker for me that was not Lee.

JAKE: Okay… then.

DUNCAN: Most people call me Duncan Freeman, some call me asshole. I would prefer if you, at least, started with Mr. Freeman.

JAKE: Okay Mr. Freeman…. What the fuck are you doing in my place? You can't just barge into my place….

DUNCAN: *(Puts his hand up to stop the tirade that seems to be coming.)* I was invited.

JAKE: By who?

DUNCAN: By you…. *(DUNCAN begins to walk around the apartment, checking things out, making himself comfortable with the surroundings.)*

JAKE: No I didn't. When?

DUNCAN: When I knocked… you should eat avocados.

JAKE: I didn't… wait avocados.

DUNCAN: Avocados are supposed to strengthen memory.

JAKE: Dude… I didn't invite you over here. I don't even know you. I've never met you before. Hell, I swear I've never seen you before in my life.

DUNCAN: All that is true. So it was kind of you to invite me into your humble apartment.

JAKE: Get the hell out of here man. I didn't—

DUNCAN puts up his hand.

DUNCAN: Let's replay events shall we. I knocked on the door. You shouted "come in." *(DUNCAN points to his ears.)* I'm sure I heard correctly. The door certainly muffled the sound a bit… but you yelled with great ferocity so I was able to make out the words: "Come in already". So I did.

JAKE takes a moment to be thunderstruck and tries to size up the man. DUNCAN wanders the length of the apartment, noticing a distinct smell.

JAKE: Dude… I wasn't talking to you…

DUNCAN: All evidence to the contrary.

JAKE: No that's not what I mean. I guess I was talking to you, I just thought you were someone else.

DUNCAN: Yes, I think that was quite established. A person by the name of Leigh. A young lady perhaps?

JAKE: No… I mean yes… I mean my best friend Lee, who is a guy.

DUNCAN: Of course… thank you for clearing that up.

JAKE: And we're not like that…. I like girls…

DUNCAN: I never thought or suggested anything else.

JAKE: You can't be too sure these days. I don't want to give off any presumptions.

DUNCAN: Assumptions on my part you mean.

JAKE: Exactly… it saves confusion… just in case you had any.

DUNCAN: Assumptions. I don't in this case.

DUNCAN continues to poke around the apartment. JAKE stares at him in disbelief.

JAKE: Dude, what the hell?

DUNCAN stops to stare at JAKE.

DUNCAN: I'm not sure how to go about answering that question. Is it something to do with Dante?

JAKE: Wait… what? No dude, what the hell are you doing in my place?

DUNCAN: *(With a true look of concern.)* Do you have a learning disability I should be aware of, because I thought we had covered this topic. I knocked on the door. You yelled: "Come in already."

JAKE: I remember that…. Just stop looking around. What's your purpose for being here, here in my apartment?

DUNCAN: You know it smells.

JAKE: What smells?

DUNCAN: You're apartment.

JAKE: No duh… I'm cleaning. *(Motions to the mop and cleaning supplies.)*

DUNCAN: You should open a window. You could kill someone, without proper ventilation in here with those fumes.

JAKE: *(Takes a suspicious look at DUNCAN.)* Yes, I think that you're right.

JAKE walks over to open a window. Beat.

DUNCAN: Ah… much better…. I would have hated to collapse right there on the floor. *(Motioning to the spot that JAKE had been mopping.)* Especially after you had cleaned it so thoroughly.

JAKE: Dude, look around. I'm a neat freak. I clean every damn day. I can't help it. I'm a bit OCD on the whole thing.

DUNCAN: *(Looks around the apartment slowly.)* Apparently.

JAKE: You didn't answer my question.

DUNCAN: Sorry, my mistake, let's just say that the fumes were getting to me.

JAKE: I opened the window man.

DUNCAN walks closer to the window.

DUNCAN: And I thank you for that. I truly do. *(DUNCAN takes some deep breaths of the incoming fresh air.)*

JAKE: Can you just answer the damn question? Why the hell are you here? I'm about ready to call the police.

DUNCAN: Really? Would you really? I would be most interested in where that conversation would go.

JAKE: What do you mean by that?

DUNCAN: Well… I knocked on the door and you invited me in….

JAKE: And you're not leaving.

DUNCAN: You haven't asked me too. You may call the police, but I don't believe I've committed any crime here in your apartment.

Beat.

JAKE: Dude… seriously.

DUNCAN: Duncan please. "Dude" is getting quite tiring.

JAKE: Okay… Duncan… I want you to….

DUNCAN: *(Interrupts.)* I just want to talk to someone.

JAKE: Is that why you're here?

DUNCAN: Yes… I'm looking for someone to talk to.

JAKE: Have you really been knocking on doors, hoping someone would just invite you in and talk?

DUNCAN: Yes and no. It did take me a few knocks on a few doors.

JAKE: And you came through my door because I was the one who yelled: "Come in already."

DUNCAN: That was quite convenient.

JAKE: Why don't you go to a bar and spill your guts out to some bartender?

DUNCAN: There is a cultural logic to that. Bartenders are portrayed as sympathetic listeners in literature, in movies, on television. But in reality… have you gone to many bars? You're over the drinking age aren't you?

JAKE: Yes and yes, I've been to a few bars.

DUNCAN: Wonderful. Then you know that bartenders, at least, these days, don't have the time to listen to anything other than the drink order. They must focus on getting your drink to you as fast as they can, so you will drink the drink as fast as you can, so they can make another drink as fast as they can and multiply that by how many people are in the bar. They're working as fast as they can without a free moment. Reality is not what it is in the movies. I find that people who are at home in the middle of the day, have time to spare.

JAKE: I'm taking a day off. You know it's use it or lose it. I never get sick or anything so I have a lot of time built up.

DUNCAN: So do you have free time…?

JAKE: Well… yes… I guess… I mean I took the day off to take care of some odds and ends. To clean. When I get stressed, I like to clean, it helps. My work is very stressful. Often fourteen to sixteen hour days.

DUNCAN: That sounds most rigorous..

JAKE: More than that. At the very least depressing and damn frustrating. I can't tell you how angry I get sometimes having to work that many hours day after day.

DUNCAN: *(Stares at JAKE.)* I imagine. Maybe this can help. I brought us a bottle. *(DUNCAN pulls out a bottle of scotch out of the paper bag he has been clutching.)*

JAKE: A bottle? A bottle of what?

DUNCAN: Scotch…. Glasses? *(DUNCAN points over to the kitchenette are as if asking for directions. And walks in that direction not really waiting for an answer. He looks around trying to find two suitable glasses.)*

JAKE: Wait… what are you doing?

DUNCAN: Pouring us an inch a piece in a couple of glasses. Ahh here they are. *(DUNCAN would give a good appraising of the glasses, if they were acceptable scotch glasses and frown upon anything less.)*

DUNCAN finds two glasses. He opens the bottle and pours a glass.

JAKE: You're pouring us alcohol?

DUNCAN: That is too far from the truth. No. I'm pouring us scotch. Scotch transcends mere alcohol. *(As he pours one glass of alcohol, he consults the color and gives it a smell, all to his liking.)*

JAKE: *(Pauses as he watches DUNCAN appreciate his scotch.)* Okay… dude. What the….

DUNCAN: Duncan, remember. Avocados trust me.

JAKE: Okay, Duncan… what the hell? *(Beat.)* Sure why not.

DUNCAN: Fantastic… that's the spirit.

DUNCAN pours a second glass. JAKE puts any cleaning supplies away. DUNCAN walks back over and gives a glass to JAKE.

DUNCAN: Shall we sit? Scotch is meant to be sipped and lingered over, which is much easier to accomplish sitting down as opposed to standing up.

JAKE: *(To the point of giving up, not understanding anything about this man.)* At this point, why not, let's go for broke.

JAKE puts together a couple of chairs and a small table to put glasses on. This may be a part of the set already or just something JAKE puts together from folding chairs or whatever.

DUNCAN: To the day. May it be illuminating. Cheers.

JAKE: *(Shrugs shoulders, not really understanding or caring about the toast.)* To the day. Cheers.

JAKE and DUNCAN clink glasses and each sip their drinks. For JAKE there is a burn of the alcohol that he instantly reacts to, for DUNCAN this is a common drink he is long use to and savors it.

DUNCAN: Good isn't it?

JAKE: I don't know that I would go straight to good… whoa.

DUNCAN: You didn't gulp it, did you?

JAKE: I didn't think so.

DUNCAN: You've got to sip it… nice and even… and then take a moment let it roll over your tongue and really enjoy it.

DUNCAN demonstrates. JAKE picks up his glass and looks at it doubtfully and watches DUNCAN clear enjoyment of the scotch and tries it again. JAKE takes a sip and makes another face.

DUNCAN: Better?

JAKE: Uhh… I guess… maybe… a little better. What are we drinking?

DUNCAN: The greatest drink in all the civilized world. *(Picking up the bottle.)* This is eighteen-year-old Macallan's.

JAKE: Is that a good one?

DUNCAN: It is at least very good, bordering on great.

JAKE: *(A bit surprised.)* Really? *(Looking over the glass and bottle.)*

DUNCAN: Nestled among the hills of Criagellachie, Moray Scotland, it uses the barley from the area as well as the Scottish water. It is smooth, with a somewhat sweet taste and bright oaky caramel color. You can get just the hint of sherry, from the casks used to age the scotch, creating a drink that is smooth and silky, with a fruity after taste. There can be the hint of cherrywood, the wood the cask is made from. Overall, the scotch has a rich complexity and a clarity to its flavors.

JAKE: *(Annoyed, perhaps angry.)* Are you trying to make me feel stupid? With all that fancy description and all that. I hate that.

DUNCAN: Hate what? Information? Descriptive words?

JAKE: Feeling stupid.

DUNCAN: Well, that wasn't my purpose or intention.

JAKE: I wouldn't know anything about that anyway. *(Looks at his glass.)* This is just god awful. *(Gets up and heads to the kitchen.)*

DUNCAN: Where are you going?
JAKE: If nothing else I have had a revelation.
DUNCAN: Outstanding. What pray tell?

JAKE pours his glass of scotch down the sink. DUNCAN rises from his chair.

DUNCAN: Oh my god. You killed it. What a waste.

JAKE opens the fridge.

JAKE: I'm strictly a beer man.

JAKE opens a beer and takes a long draft. JAKE drinks most of it down and grabs another and comes back to his chair. DUNCAN is somewhat taken aback by the immediate downing of JAKE'S beer.

DUNCAN: My god man. Did you even taste it?

JAKE looks down at his beer and takes another big drink from it.

JAKE: Of course, I tasted it.
DUNCAN: A test then. What did it taste like?
JAKE: What do you mean? What did it taste like? It tasted like beer.
DUNCAN: If you were to explain the taste. Actually, have to vividly describe the taste, to someone who doesn't drink beer then how would you express yourself.

JAKE takes a look down at his beer and back to DUNCAN befuddled.

JAKE: I… I… don't know.
DUNCAN: Take a sip of it man and tell me how it makes you feel, tell me the flavors that it invokes. Tell me something. Tell me anything.
JAKE: You're not trying to make me look stupid?
DUNCAN: *(Looks at JAKE questioningly.)* Why would I do that? Besides… *(DUNCAN takes a long look around the apartment.)* who are you going to look stupid in front of?
JAKE: *(Looks around the apartment.)* Well… you I guess.

DUNCAN: And that bothers you why?
JAKE: Because I don't want to look stupid.
DUNCAN: Why does my opinion matter on the subject? You don't know me.
JAKE: *(Anger suddenly rising.)* Yeah I don't know you!
DUNCAN: *(Not caught off guard by the anger.)* Okay then.
JAKE: Yeah! Okay then! *(JAKE self-consciously realizes he is yelling and softens his tone.)* Sorry.
DUNCAN: Just so.

JAKE looks at this beer and drinks. Beat.

JAKE: Okay I'll try. This is a Budweiser can't imagine it is more than six months from when it was canned. Probably brewed somewhere in the Midwest. It tastes a bit watery. Somewhat malty with no complexity whatsoever. This is just a straight up drink that makes you want to chug it down.

DUNCAN walks over to the refrigerator.

DUNCAN: May I?
JAKE: *(Gives a nod.)* Go ahead.

DUNCAN pulls out a beer from the fridge. Finds a glass, opens the beer and pours the beer into the glass. He holds up the glass as he tries to examine the color and the body of the beer in the best light. DUNCAN after a moment takes a sip of the beer as if he were drinking his scotch. He makes a non-comical face.

DUNCAN: So based on the description you gave me, which I totally confirm is accurate, you like this… *(Tries to find a word to describe it.)* drink.

JAKE looks down at this beer.

JAKE: It's okay… I don't dislike it.
DUNCAN: So you don't like this drink?
JAKE: Is that the purpose of it?

DUNCAN: The purpose of the drink?

JAKE: Is the sole purpose of the drink to enjoy it?

DUNCAN: *(Looking straight down at his scotch.)* I can't imagine not enjoying it. I drink this because of the sheer enjoyment, the sheer pleasure it gives me. I will sip this drink for two hours and be this short of heaven the entire time.

JAKE looks down at the beer in his hand, takes a swallow, not getting near the enjoyment that DUNCAN did from his drink.

DUNCAN: What is your purpose?

JAKE: To get drunk. *(Points to the glass of scotch.)* Don't tell me you're not getting drunk off that.

DUNCAN: I'm certainly not trying to get drunk. *(Clearly disgusted by such a notion.)*

JAKE: But you got to be getting some sort of buzz, some sort of jolt, some sort of something.

DUNCAN: *(Shakes his head.)* No. No. Stop please. You have no appreciation of drinking. *(Referring to the beer.)* This is a drink that is not to be appreciated. *(DUNCAN pours out the glass of beer he poured.)*

JAKE: Waste not want not. *(JAKE picks up the half can left by DUNCAN and drinks it.)*

DUNCAN: Are you getting drunk?

JAKE: Am I getting drunk? *(JAKE asks more to himself than back at DUNCAN. Beat.)* Yes, I think I am.

DUNCAN: It's a woman right?

JAKE: *(Suddenly shocked.)* What?

DUNCAN: It's a woman correct? Why you're getting drunk? There're only two reasons why a single young man will get drunk. There're more reasons once you get married—believe me—but only two for a single young man.

JAKE: What the hell are you talking about?

DUNCAN: Reason one: You're trying to impress a woman. You're out partying. You're both drinking. You're both having a good time. You're hoping for more. *(DUNCAN looks around.)* I see no girls here though. Reason two: Guilt or sorrow of some kind because of a woman. She broke up with you. She did you wrong. You did her

wrong. You broke up with her. I can tell by your face it is indeed reason two, in some way, shape or form.

JAKE is getting visibly angry.

DUNCAN: I'm just talking here. Douse that fire with that beer.

Beat. JAKE tries to get a hold of himself. He slowly sees the wisdom of DUNCAN'S words and shoots down one of his cans of beer.

DUNCAN: There you go drench that fire.

JAKE drinks more. If necessary DUNCAN goes to the fridge and fetches JAKE another beer. JAKE begins to calm down.

DUNCAN: Are you better? Feeling quite yourself?
JAKE: *(Nods.)* Yeah I guess.
DUNCAN: The arrow struck pretty close to the bullseye.

JAKE nods again. DUNCAN smiles and laughs.

DUNCAN: We've all been there. I know I have.
JAKE: You have?
DUNCAN: Oh yes, more than once. It hurts every time.
JAKE: It sure did this time. *(Realizes that he didn't actually mean to share that.)* But you know, I'll be fine.
DUNCAN: *(Looks JAKE up and down, slowly draws the next two words out.)* I'm… sure. So what was her name?

DUNCAN sits down. JAKE stares at DUNCAN, looks at his beer, looks at the empty chair. He is at a loss for what to do, wondering what he, if anything, should share. JAKE finally drops into a chair.

JAKE: Laura.

LAURA a young lady roughly the same age as JAKE walks onto stage.

DUNCAN: That's a good name, Laura. I like it. It comes from the laurel trees.

LAURA shapes herself into a tree.

JAKE: Why would you say that?
DUNCAN: Say what?
JAKE: Something about trees and Laura.
DUNCAN: The Laurel tree. Sometimes it looks like a big shrub, an evergreen, with a wonderfully sweet smell. Smooth leaves with a nice yellow flower. The name Laura came from Laurel, which came from the Laurel tree.
JAKE: Oh. *(A certain understanding comes across his face, making him feel a bit more relaxed.)* So that's where the name "Laura" comes from.
DUNCAN: Of course…. What did you think I was talking about?

LAURA walks across the stage, walking through Laurel trees. She stops to smell them, looking at their flower. She smiles, clearly this is one of her favorite activities. JAKE moves to watch LAURA walk through the trees. Beat. LAURA exits.

JAKE: Oh nothing really.
DUNCAN: You seem to be lost in your own thoughts. You seem to be staring off into space. *(JAKE is looking in the direction that LAURA exited.)*
JAKE: It was nothing, just a memory.
DUNCAN: Of this young lady named Laura?
JAKE: Yes, yes of her. She use to love to walk through trees.
DUNCAN: Maybe that's a girl thing. My own daughter…

A young girl, aged 8 to 12, comes on stage to sit and play among the trees.

DUNCAN: My daughter loves to play amongst the trees.

The young girl plays among the trees. DUNCAN looks on wistfully.

JAKE: Maybe it's something they don't grow out of, still, you would have thought boys and trees more than girls and trees.

DUNCAN: Certainly, there is an image perpetuated in culture of boys climbing trees, building tree forts, going on hikes, getting merit badges. Yet I know my daughter loved to be in the trees. *(The young girl runs up to DUNCAN and whispers in his ear.)* Sometimes she would tell me they were trying to tell her secrets. She knew this because the trees would whisper to her. It was more likely just the breeze blowing through the grove, but she insisted they were telling her secrets. She discovered a magic out there among the trees.

JAKE: That's nice. That's really a nice story.

DUNCAN nods and sips his drink.

JAKE: For Laura it was her place to escape, to get away from the world. A way to calm down and refocus. She went all the time.

DUNCAN: Was there a lot of stress in your relationship with her?

JAKE: *(Takes immediate offense.)* What? What are you saying? Are you trying to say something to me?

DUNCAN stares at JAKE with an amount of surprise. LAURA reenters and starts walking all around the apartment, like she is pacing.

DUNCAN: I am not. You said she used it to calm down and that she went often. I was just putting a couple of puzzle pieces together. It sounds like you guys were going through a rough patch or something. Not uncommon in relationships.

JAKE: You're putting the puzzle together wrong. Work. It was her job. It was very stressful.

DUNCAN: And what was her job?

JAKE: She was a veterinary tech.

DUNCAN: Really? She must have really loved animals.

JAKE: More than anything.

Young girl comes up to DUNCAN.

YOUNG GIRL: Can we get a puppy?

DUNCAN: They're a lot of work honey.

YOUNG GIRL: I promise to do all of it. I'll feed it. I'll wash it. I'll make sure it goes potty outside. I'll hug it. I'll have it sleep with me. I'll love it.

DUNCAN: All that?

YOUNG GIRL: Yes Daddy. Please can we get a puppy?

DUNCAN: We'll see honey.

YOUNG GIRL: Okay Daddy, you're the best.

YOUNG GIRL merrily exits.

DUNCAN: *(Regretfully.)* I should have gotten her a puppy.

JAKE: What was that? *(JAKE looks around the apartment and so does DUNCAN.)*

DUNCAN: Don't you have a pet?

JAKE: Oh my god no! The mess they make. Hair all over the place. They drag in dirt every time they go out and come back in. I would be cleaning all the time. And my place would never be clean.

LAURA comes over to take up the conversation.

LAURA: Get over the mess. There is nothing more precious than a pet—a cat or a dog. They would make this place much better. It would give this place some life rather than an antiseptic hospital waiting room. You would be less lonely.

JAKE: I have you.

LAURA: I'm not here all of the time, a pet would be.

JAKE: You could be… here all the time, move in.

LAURA: No I couldn't. I work. I have a job I love. I have school. I'm going to be a vet and not just a tech.

JAKE: You don't have to. I make plenty of money. We could get married.

LAURA: And what am I going to do? Stay home all day and what clean.

JAKE: I don't want a pet.

LAURA: It would be giving you unconditional love.

JAKE: No, no way.

LAURA: *(Turning away from JAKE.)* A pet would make you a better person.

JAKE: What? What did you say?

LAURA walks away from JAKE. JAKE is angry and takes a step or two to follow her, until DUNCAN speaks up and he comes out of his memory.

DUNCAN: So a lot of stress being a vet tech?

JAKE shakes his head trying to get back to the present rather than stuck in the past.

JAKE: *(Looking away from LAURA as LAURA walks away from JAKE, across stage. LAURA has her arms crossed in front of her, very annoyed.)* What? What did you say?
DUNCAN: Being a vet tech, very stressful?
JAKE: She didn't like having the animals die….
DUNCAN: I can imagine. Although there must have been some satisfaction in making the animals better.
JAKE: Maybe, I guess, but it was just a job for her.

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