

A BLACK CAT KIND OF DAY

A play for the stage by
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Characters

Elliot: 30-something male

Dead Girl: Late-20s female

Tilly: Elliot's girlfriend

Setting

Elliot's apartment

Playwright's Note

Elliot does not 'see' Dead Girl until specified, despite the fact that she's in his apartment the whole time. Dead Girl sometimes addresses the audience, sometimes Elliot, even when he cannot hear her.

Time is elastic.

ELLIOT is putting on his flight attendant's uniform after short night's sleep.

DEAD GIRL lies on the ground in front of Elliot. One of her high heels sits at the front of the stage.

DEAD GIRL: *[To audience]* Elliot had no idea that this was what he'd find as he left home, on his way to work. *[Pause]* When he opened his door the girl plunged into his house, her weight falling heavy and flat. Just inches from his toes.

ELLIOT pushes the hair away from her face to see if she's still breathing. He is alarmed.

ELLIOT: *[slapping her cheek]* Hey, hey. Wake up. Fuck. Wake up!

DEAD GIRL: No such luck.

*ELLIOT continues trying to wake her.
TILLY enters.*

ELLIOT: Jesus. Fuck. Jesus.

TILLY: So you didn't hear anything?

ELLIOT: No, No. No, I didn't.

TILLY: You sure?

ELLIOT looks at her furious.

ELLIOT: No, I did, but I just decided not to help. What do you reckon?

TILLY: Just asking.

DEAD GIRL: Red paint from his apartment door lodged thick under her fingernails.

ELLIOT: What are you trying to say?

TILLY: I'm just asking.

Pause.

DEAD GIRL: Maybe, he thought, it was because he'd fallen asleep blind drunk that night. He pictured himself from above as if another Elliot were perched on the ceiling looking down at the sleeping one, shaking his head in disgust. Snoring great sighs of liquor. His shoes still on.

ELLIOT: Jesus.

DEAD GIRL: I practically broke your door down.

TILLY: How did you sleep through all that noise?

DEAD GIRL: Yeah. What's wrong with you?

ELLIOT: What kind of a question is that? I was asleep for fuck's sake.

TILLY: But you didn't hear a thing.

ELLIOT: No. Not a thing.

TILLY: Of all the doors she could have knocked on, eh?

DEAD GIRL: Of all the doors.

ELLIOT: [*Angry*] What, mine?

TILLY: I didn't mean -

ELLIOT: Well what did you mean?

DEAD GIRL: One high-heel laying dormant on the stair [*pause*] just below her outstretched leg.

Silence.

TILLY: Is my spare ventolin still here?

ELLIOT: No, it expired. I threw it out.

TILLY: Oh well, that's good, in a way.

ELLIOT: Good?

TILLY: You won't have to feel as bad. I mean, not that you should be feeling bad. I just know you are, that's all.

ELLIOT: I could have called an ambulance at least.

TILLY: Well *she* could have had her own ventolin!

ELLIOT: Easy to say that now.

DEAD GIRL goes to check the cupboard for the ventolin.

TILLY: But- [*awkward pause*] Okay. Well, you didn't have what she needed Anyhow. That's all I'm saying.

ELLIOT sighs in response. DEAD GIRL returns.

DEAD GIRL: Liar! It's there all right. Wedged between the condoms and shave cream, up the back of the third shelf. Better get rid of it, eh?

ELLIOT looks at DEAD GIRL and sees her. He looks alarmed but hides it. TILLY keeps talking.

TILLY: This could happen to anyone.

ELLIOT: What dying? Or not waking up when someone's breaking your door down?

TILLY: I meant -

ELLIOT: You meant what?

DEAD GIRL: Blaming her won't make you feel any better.

TILLY: Well, either. I guess.

ELLIOT: Thanks. That's made me feel heaps better.

TILLY: Look, this is nothing to do with me, so stop -

ELLIOT: Well, you could have been here.

TILLY: But I wasn't!

DEAD GIRL: Capeish?

ELLIOT: But what if you were eh?

DEAD GIRL rolls her eyes and groans.

DEAD GIRL: God, keep up Champ. Jesus.

ELLIOT: Would you have heard her?

TILLY: I don't know!

ELLIOT: Well, would you? I mean, you're no light sleeper. What about that time I came over to your house when you were asleep, that time on your birthday, I practically had to shake you to wake you up. I could have been anyone!

TILLY: Elliot, I know you're upset, but –

ELLIOT: Just say it could have just as easily been you!

TILLY: Well it could have. It could have happened to anyone. Like I said!

ELLIOT/DEAD GIRL: But it didn't.

TILLY: No, it didn't. It's just bad luck.

DEAD GIRL: You're telling me.

Awkward pause.

ELLIOT: Surely, out of the two of us, one of us would have had to have heard her.

TILLY: Elliot, this is insane.

ELLIOT: You should have been here.

TILLY: Elliot, baby -

ELLIOT: Just say it!

TILLY: For fuck's sake Elliot!

ELLIOT: Say it!

TILLY: Fuck this. I'm going.

ELLIOT: Yeah, maybe you should.

TILLY: I'll call you later.

ELLIOT: Don't bother.

TILLY shakes her head and leaves.

DEAD GIRL: Nice one.

ELLIOT: Fuck you!

DEAD GIRL: This has got nothing to do with her.

ELLIOT: What would you know?

DEAD GIRL: Well, let's see – I believe that that night it was just you and me baby!

ELLIOT: Stop it.

DEAD GIRL: Just you and me.

ELLIOT: But she should -

DEAD GIRL: Oh give it a rest! I think I speak with fair authority when I say that this has nothing to do with her.

ELLIOT: But everything to do with me?

DEAD GIRL: Just you and me baby.

Pause.

DEAD GIRL: Are you sure?

ELLIOT: I'm sure.

DEAD GIRL: You're absolutely sure?

ELLIOT: I didn't hear anything.

DEAD GIRL: It's possible though.

ELLIOT: I was asleep.

DEAD GIRL: Cammy. My name's Cammy.

ELLIOT: Don't. I don't want to know.

DEAD GIRL: Born August 18, 1982

ELLIOT: Stop.

DEAD GIRL: I'm 5'6", blue eyes, brown hair. I like crosswords, eggs for breakfast on weekends, but only if they're poached. I'm reading *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* at the moment -

ELLIOT: Please stop.

DEAD GIRL: Well, *was* reading, anyhow.

ELLIOT: Please.

DEAD GIRL: Oh, I've got a good one. You might know this story.

ELLIOT: I don't want to know. Could you please leave?

DEAD GIRL: Leave? Are you crazy? [Pause] Anyhow, the story.

ELLIOT: Please don't.

DEAD GIRL: But you're the main character!

ELLIOT: I'm begging you.

DEAD GIRL: A starless night with a wailing wind. Branches and freshly mowed grass bounding up the street. Swirls of garbage bouncing around, battering windows of nearby shops and you ask yourself: Did I hear something?

ELLIOT falls into DEAD GIRL's story.

ELLIOT: What was that?

DEAD GIRL: [Cont.] Was it just the wind? Someone at the door?

ELLIOT: What was that?

DEAD GIRL: A girl at the door. She's looking for her cat. And suddenly...

ELLIOT: Suddenly?

DEAD GIRL: And suddenly...

DEAD GIRL grabs at her throat and pretends that she can't breathe.

ELLIOT: Hold on! Wait, I'm coming just hold on!

DEAD GIRL collapses. ELLIOT rushes to her side.

DEAD GIRL: But it was too late wasn't it?

ELLIOT doesn't answer.

DEAD GIRL: I belted so hard, my hands were bruised. Cut crimson half-moons on the sides of my hands. Bloodied paint from your door, thick under my nails. Clumped. Stuck.

ELLIOT: Just the wind.
DEAD GIRL: [*Angry*] It was me!

Long pause as DEAD GIRL realises what happened to her.

DEAD GIRL: Shit. This is it.

Pause. She's angry now.

DEAD GIRL [*Cont*]: Anyhow, the story.

ELLIOT looks defeated.

DEAD GIRL: [*Cont.*] The wind in her lungs fast running short. Whooping and gasping.
The air cutting out. Like a break in transmission.

ELLIOT: Please.

DEAD GIRL: Gale force wind turned dead still.

ELLIOT: I don't like this story.

DEAD GIRL: I had a date planned for that night too. Damn you. Shit, my dry-cleaning.

ELLIOT: I could pick it up for you.

DEAD GIRL glares at him like he's stupid.

ELLIOT: I'm sorry, that was a stupid thing to say.

Pause.

DEAD GIRL: Things just got worse and worse for him. Something told him that he deserved this. Something about the dead girl on his doorstep tugged at his sleeve like an impatient child.

Pause. ELLIOT looks defeated.

DEAD GIRL: [*Cont.*] He felt a guilt so immense that he felt almost out of breath.

ELLIOT: Is this a part of the story?

DEAD GIRL: The weighty mass of it holding him under, like a bully shoving a kid's head in a toilet and flushing. And flushing.

ELLIOT: Can you stop please?

Suddenly TILLY's there.

TILLY: Well it could be worse, Elliot.

ELLIOT: [*Sarcastic*] Sure.

TILLY: [*Indignant*] Are you serious?

ELLIOT: I don't think it gets much worse than this.

TILLY: You should be grateful.

ELLIOT: Oh please.
TILLY: At least –
ELLIOT: What you think it's some kind of life lesson?
TILLY: No.
ELLIOT: Do you?
TILLY: God, listen to yourself.
DEAD GIRL: Yeah, listen to yourself.
TILLY: It could have happened to anyone.
DEAD GIRL/ELLIOT: But it happened to me.
TILLY: Look, just forget it. You're missing the point.
ELLIOT: What point?
TILLY: Forget it. I'm done.
ELLIOT: Done? What do you mean done?

Pause.

TILLY: You could have prevented this, you know.
ELLIOT: Don't, Tilly.
TILLY: It was all in your hands.
DEAD GIRL: Can anyone prevent anything?
TILLY: But you won't or you can't...or whatever.
ELLIOT: It's just that. Well, I didn't know you were unhappy.
TILLY: Which is exactly my point.
ELLIOT: How's that?
TILLY: Jesus Elliot.
ELLIOT: I need you.
TILLY: Wrong again.
ELLIOT: I do.
TILLY: Well, it's fine to say that now.
ELLIOT: What do you mean 'now'?
TILLY: You've been taking me for granted.
ELLIOT: That's not how it is.
TILLY: You should have seen this coming.
ELLIOT: Please. Please. We can work this out, can't we?
TILLY: Too little too late.
ELLIOT: Please. Don't go.
TILLY: I've already cut my losses. Self-preservation, I guess. I threw in the reigns long ago.
ELLIOT: Tilly, C'mon. Don't do this.
TILLY: It's already done.

She walks out

ELLIOT: [*Shouting*] Tilly! Please. Come back. Please! I just want to talk.

Silence.

ELLIOT: [*Yelling*] Tilly! Please! [*beginning to sob*] Tilly...[*long pause*] Fuck!
[*realising she's gone*] Fuck..

DEAD GIRL: It's just you baby. It's just you.

Pause.

DEAD GIRL: Once upon a time a man named Elliot slept through a storm.

Pause.

ELLIOT: I saw this little black cat on my doorstep today. I soaked some cat biscuits in milk and left them on my doorstep. Then I watched her through the spy hole. Timid at first, edgy.

As he speaks, DEAD GIRL finds her shoe and puts it on.

ELLIOT: And then I slowly opened the door, just a crack, and she jumped, but she stayed and when she'd calmed a little, she kept lapping, purring. I sat there for a while and then I slowly reached out to her. Lightly tickled my fingers under her chin.

DEAD GIRL exits.

ELLIOT: And she purred and purred. Then she pushed right passed me and walked into the kitchen. Like she owned the place.