

D U D B L O O D

A SHORT PLAY ABOUT
LIFE AND DEATH

By
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Like anyone alive, Doctor Faktencheck is also dead. The beginning and the end are the two brackets we can probably all agree on, even if the temperatures and the murals of the rooms before and after are still up for discussion. When Doctor discovered, as a young man, that death grips as certainly and tenderly as living, he was as much dead waiting to be alive as alive waiting to be dead. Perception promises purpose, even if it can't deliver on direction, and the new purpose was now to rewrite the end. The problem was the end was where he begun. The problem was it is difficult walking backwards. So pointlessness, so circles, so religion and other fictions. Doctor Faktencheck, like anyone alive, does not fail and succeed at being alive, but fails and succeeds at being dead.

The first show he ever saw was "GOOD PEOPLE GET DRUNK" a horror ill-billed as a romantic comedy. They were full of Propanolol getting agitated holding pint glasses ready to pour from their own ocean. But at the first sight of their child, the Doctor, they

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were sobered by his errors, the yellow lights made them look sick. Desperate for his eyes to change colour or his skin to liquify they reached out to touch him. Seeing all this, the Doctor closed his eyes and immediately rolled off his mother's stomach onto the cold hospital floor. Refused a swing on the viney cord, citing technical difficulties.

All was dark red, an emergency sign in a shadow then as she split her third finger from her fourth, more the underside of magma. Through the gap he looked up the inside of her arm up to her chin all buzzing and miragey, behind that leaves with edges overexposed by a tiring but still-bright late-afternoon light. She put her mouth over his and they used each other's lungs scuba tanks. Even if a screw loosened here nothing would be volatile and nothing would be peaceful. Peace too damp. It was buried and impossible. The grids under eyelids, before pixels were born, were once the final fires of a war just won.

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Doctor Faktencheck thought of this as he masturbated in the bathroom attached to his office. He placed a plastic pot now-full, the length of his index finger, in line with four others on the desk, next to the silver scissors, next to the anglerfish. He looked out of the window and watched the great single tree in the far far distance, the air con on, bullying the branches. He worked on the edge of the slow town of Ignohbel, which was most famous for having no cemetery.

In front of his desk was a second chair, far enough away so the sitter could never lean on his desk, with elbows or toes, but close enough so their sneezes and bad breath would splash him. A knock on the door made him turn off the the television. He walked to the door, crouched to the knee-high mirror, straightened his hair, stood up, scratched his neck, opened the door. Doctor showed her to her chair then he sat at his.

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LEAF.

I'm very lonely.

DR.

Lying. At last – you are no longer lying.

LEAF.

Oblong shaped silo two doors down from her. Tinsiled and tils-en it was. Watched it from her window turned off at ten like her very own night-light. Necklace hung around her neck looked very heavy. Don't know how she ever did it, such a strong neck and she was only young! Caricature of herself she was, all blocky really very little to say she was her and another was another. Used to have a mind of her own until the presents came out she got given a leaf from a tree now knocked over they said she could frame it or something.

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DR. *Stands up. Picks up the silver scissors, next to the jars, next to the anglerfish. Until.*

LEAF. It blew outta the window the second she held it in her hand now should have blamed the wind but could never have done that her father always said wind needs gaps and we made the gaps didn't we. She chased it.

DR. *Putting down the scissors, picking up the first jar and syringe. Could she run fast?*

LEAF. Well see I don't know them kind of details but I know she ran past all other trees which had fine fine leaves but not hers found herself stopped in front of a tall tall white wall it was perfect and clean like it had come from north of the sky.

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DR. *Rotating her chair one hundred and eighty degrees.* Sometimes the best move forward is to turn back.

LEAF. Well yeah strange considering how you gonna climb without hooks well you wait to grow and how long's that gonna take? Well she she stood there. Stood there fifteen years until she grew tall enough to climb over that wall. Of course when she did get over there was no wall after it that she could see horizon the same on all sides. Just a massive tree there was fifteen thousand humans high it was so hot so she sat in its shade.

DR. We're all done.

LEAF. Thank you, Doctor.

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Doctor half-turned on his government issued television.

COMMENTATOR. I think it's... yes! It's sixty eight!
A new world record over the 100 metres we have just witnessed a man become the fastest man to have ever lived. But Andy – the atmosphere in here is like a funeral...

Whenever at his desk, bacteria, instead of quietly doing whatever bacteria does, stretched out near to prey and pincerd their uncut fingernails into his elbows, making holes through which his energy couldn't help but escape. He was playing a cover of life so bad Shazam wouldn't recognise it. On the rare moments it would wave, he would wave back, only to realise, with arm still raised, that he was not the intended wavee.

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COMMENTATOR. ...somehow the victory has turned this story into a tragedy. I don't know if it's him or the audience but the silence says someone here has been wounded.

He changed the channel. He recognised the new Mayor, who had a gross ponytail oily kebab and dimpled skin reused balloon.

MAYOR. ... the unmovable marks on wind-screens and the sweat patches of boardrooms! If free will is the truest sign of life, the cause, then the effect must be the decisions we are free to make...

Doctor imagined himself to be decently happy watching the world end from underneath an umbrella on a very tall hill. He too will be cold and eventually blown away, but despite the discomfort, he would get to

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watch until nearly the very end. He feared very little which you could put down to his mother, who was oppressive, but in the way a great tree covers the infidelious sky.

MAYOR.

... and as your new Mayor, I will give you the choice. Death is the tide which once, and all at once, manufactured time. Without an end, we find ourselves sore in our living. It frustrates like the countryside and it is liven't. The burden of breath hunkers out of ear-shot, bunkered as you beg, "Out! Out from this run-over leg!". At the end of today the town-wide democratic vote...

A knock on the door made him turn the television off. He walked to the door, crouched to the knee-high mirror, straightened his collar, stood up, scratched

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his chest, opened the door. Doctor showed her to her chair then he sat at his.

FLY. I've been lying.

DR. Dying. At last – you are no longer dying.

FLY. Like that fly. He likes that fan doesn't he. Flicking its adverts around the eyes pricking our peripheral putting hope in the static like the end of a phone when no one answers it. Ghosts make us feel cold when they should make us feel warm I guess no matter what we say we don't really the idea of being a gas. And here we are! Swatting like idiots! Sorcerers of the air they are of the air itself! Making us wave to ghosts! Makes me think they're swimming on the air roads track-

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ing it well the leftover wind at least.

DR. *Stands up. Picks up the silver scissors, next to the jars, next to the anglerfish.* Then all the swatting is more like playing piano.

FLY. Yes or we're the conductor. Yes we should feel relieved! The fly can't be held responsible for its wings not for its habits either.

DR. *Putting down the scissors, picking up the second jar and syringe.* Or for making us wave.

FLY. That fly's hovering around that fan as if it knows it's doing you know as if it was meant to. We could be watching evolution that fly right now could be historical one day.

DR. *Rotating her chair one hundred and eighty degrees.* Nothing gets his-

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FLY. torical in this town.
Well there's a chromosome in there trying to work out where the air's coming from but it's slaloming and it's on crutches and the light is too bright and in bright lights as we all know all you can see is those tiny fire-works. In one... ten thousand years that fly will look at that fan like it looks at something dead like it knows it well.

DR. We're all done.

FLY. Thank you, Doctor.

Doctor Faktencheck turned the television back on. A sitcom was on about three monks lost in a supermarket it was called something like WHERE'S THE

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ALTAR? or STUCK IN THE LONG AISLE, I can't remember. As you can imagine, this wasn't his favourite show. A knock on the door. He walked to the door, crouched to the knee-high mirror, straightened his shirt, stood up, scratched his wrist, opened the door. Doctor showed her to her chair then he sat at his.

STICKS.

I've been dying.

DR.

Living. At last – you are no longer living.

STICKS.

Two sticks he had. In front of him on a floor green as if no one ever burnt it. Head tight like watching ballet while a wars going on calves trying to soften blows but floor was explosive something must be about to happen but surely not in this room he thought.

Stands up. Picks up the silver scissors, next to the jars, next to the angler-

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fish. The smaller the room is the bigger a small thing appears to be.

STICKS. Well he rarely thought bigger than the room he was in thing is this room was as big as the world.

DR. *Putting down the scissors, picking up the third jar and syringe.* Okay. Looked at these two sticks.

STICKS. So long he thought was seeing things flapping like curtains in them gas full of gas looks soft like bread but warm on skin like butter.

DR. *Rotating her chair one hundred and eighty degrees.* Was he scared?

STICKS. So scared of it could have snapped them. But no for some reason he rubbed and rubbed them together fast started to peel off each other slow. And

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then he saw the thing the thing full of gas! When he imagined it it was like this but nothing like this. In this he could really see real things. Nothing was in front or behind it must have been like the first ever television they made television to distract people from war. No one believed him then called him a liar but the story told so many times they call him a fire.

DR.

Okay, we're done. Thank you for coming in.

STICKS.

No thank you, Dr!

The toilet hummed. In less than a minute there was another knock on the door. He walked to the door, crouched to the knee-high mirror, straightened his belt, stood up, scratched his neck, opened the door.

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Doctor showed her to her chair then he sat at his.

WELL. I've been living.

DR. Trying. At last – you are no longer trying.

WELL. There is a well.

DR. *Stands up. Picks up the silver scissors, next to the jars, next to the angler-fish. Ok.*

WELL. Or so I heard. A well one for you one for me. On an island where clouds sit so low no ship ever found it just the same today as whenever it started. Outta your well your song is playing but the notes hardly ever make it up to here where you can hear them.

DR. *Putting down the scissors, picking up the fourth jar and syringe.* How do you hear it?

WELL. Sometimes you do hear a little.

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See people see life like one two three but its more tetris. You know when you meet something or someone out of nowhere and you want it to be everywhere now that's a note. A big note. Or when the lights keep going green now that's a little note.

DR.

Rotating her chair one hundred and eighty degrees. How do you find it?

Don't know myself. All I heard is outta the well you can get two or three could even start to sound like your song but its only after it's all done you get to hear the whole thing.

WELL.

DR.

Thank you. Come back in a day's time or so.

WELL.

Thank you, Doctor.

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Doctor checked the clock and knew there he only had time to see one more patient. In less than half a minute there was another knock on the door. He walked to the door, crouched to the knee-high mirror, straightened his shoelace, stood up, scratched his chest, opened the door. Doctor showed her to her chair then he sat at his.

BULLET.

Guns weren't alright in the house. She always liked talking about getting him into the head of his problems he was always awake when he was dreaming and dreaming when he was awake. Always had a fan on like one you get on the oven. That hissing in the background dumbed down the teeth sounds and would muzzle that hummingbird too used to sit on his favourite chair.

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She tilted her head to the side trying to see the picture behind Doctor, all she could see was a black poster with small white dots on it. Doctor stood up. He picked up the silver scissors, next to the jars, next to the anglerfish. She could see it was the earth that was behind his head.

BULLET.

Said he used to dream of singing
he did well he once sang to someone.
In a room with small rooms
like these ones even smaller windows
near the ceiling made him think
it was a basement he said.
Behind the back of the someone
there was one of those machines
you hit hard at fairs makes a winning
sound. Every note he did it
filled emptied filled emptied like
blood tryna push through a drip.
He sang the nearly last line and
it filled all the way – eyes firm

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on the world outside now! Sang
the last line like a man modest
looked down saw a piece of paper
it said. FAIL. AVERAGE 99/100.
Think it was only 100 to pass the
exam not even do very well think
she was trying to say something
there.

Doctor Faktencheck stared down at his desk, at the
last jar, at the anglerfish. The only soily truth this ar-
rangement ever contained now looked fake it was dug
out from an old Windows screensaver.

BULLET.

One night a long time later he
sung a little something to himself
in the kitchen and his mother
said he couldn't sing for shit. So
he took the gun went out and
shot that little hummingbird.
Never was the same after that see

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wanted to sing good see didn't
want to be the gun needed to be
the bullet.

DR.

Thanks.

BULLET.

Thank you, Doctor.

Hum hum hum.

Doctor took all of his clothes off, picked up the last jar and looked into it for a very long time, trying to make his eyes zoom, so long that the day ended and night begun. Thunderstorms are heavy and harsh. The bad uncle who says nothing at Christmas gets too drunk and finally says something like. It's the saddest thing I ever seen seeing people still believe in God! Fist on the table through glass knuckles sharded but before he even gets to mark the exclamation the crowd already has tissues and ethanol. Doctor watched the clock, next to the picture of the planet in space. As the final second of the day shut, a bolt of lightning cracked the great single tree in the far far distance

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exactly in half, so precise and so intricate it could have been self-harm.

The walls turned blue, everything turns blue when the sun actually gives up. Naked, he picked up the scissors and sat on the chair that wasn't his. He closed his eyes. Whistle starts.

He looked up, the plaster in the ceiling creasing, a new cloud does that just before it rains for the first time.

Eyes too tight. Closer. Eyes shut.

CLOSER. LOUDER.

THE BULLET.

He must be the bullet. With the silver scissors in hand, he walked quickly to the knee-high mirror and cut off his penis. He looked down at his bloody lap.

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He put the scissors down, next to the jar, next to the anglerfish. Half awake, half dreaming, he started hearing notes of a song he might have heard before. He put his head to the toilet to see if it was playing the song. While staggered to the cupboard, he realised the music was coming from outside his office door, getting tighter as it got louder as whispering does. He put on his best white suit, leaving the sleeves unrolled, put the last jar into his pocket.

Crack.

Normally, Doctor Faktencheck would be the last person to move closer to loud music. But here, he didn't know the why of anything. He opened the door and began to walk down a very long corridor, down the middle of two rows of people lined up on either side.

Clap clap clap clap clap.

Still walking. Faces glitched under the blue strip

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lights, second-took on a few of them, he thought they were people he knew.

Ccllaapp cclaapp cllaapp cllaapp.

Maybe he'd crossed a road with them once, there was something of him in them.

Ccclltaaappp ccclltaaappp ccclltaaappp.

There is only one way down a corridor. He reached a door at the end and knocked on it. It opened and a hand, lit dark red, slowly reached through the gap. He took it and walked through. As he walked the room became brighter, palms slapped his shoulders, bad breaths chilled his neck.

Cccclltaaapppp Cccclltaaapppp.

He was backstage with everyone he had ever known.

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Ccccclllllaaaaappppp.

The crowd stopped clapping and sat down. Alone at last. He stretched onto his toes arched his back as if he could spray from his ribs. Left hand on chest. His face a dog who has just had his last meal but is still hungry.