

Dead Dogs

William Gillespie

CAST

D: Designer (casual professional)
T: Tony (sharp professional)
P: Pat (formal)
(characters may be male or female)

[Stage is dark. The following slides are projected. Designer speaks through amplifier.]



D: Dogs are people too.

P: Cute. So cute. We don't want cute.



D: If you plant your memories, they will grow.

P: Too creepy.



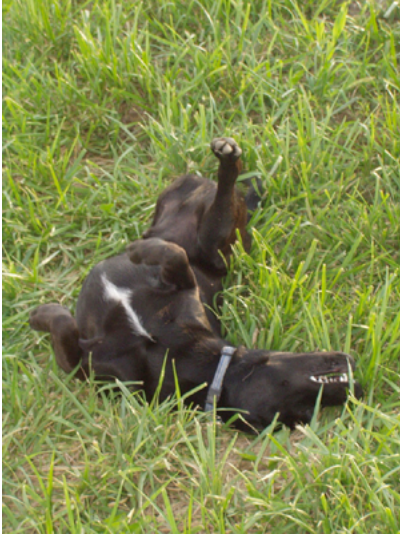
D: There's a paradise, and it's just for dogs.

P: The ascending to heaven thing, like it, like it, but this looks like a Mountain Dew ad.



D: Thousands of people die every day, but your dog will die only once.

P: No. That's wrong for our company.



D: Because dead dogs... are important. To us.

[3 seconds silence]

P: That's the one. Where'd you find her? She's perfect? [Lights up. They shake hands.]
I'll talk it over with my brother when he gets back.

[Exit designer. Pat has a soliloquy.]

I'll tell you this place ain't like Kansas City. Back in Kansas City, people would treat their dogs like dogs... or worse. I tell you, up here in New England people are fucking nuts about their dogs. It's unreal. Don't get me wrong, I love dogs, hell, but that doesn't mean I want people to bring them into restaurants. I mean what do you say when you can't get a seat at the movie house here? "Excuse me lady, is it okay if your dog sits on the floor?" And the dogs here, they're serious. Playful? Hell, they won't even look at you. Frisbee? Forget it, maybe chess. I mean, talk about breeding. I met this one guy, he showed me his dog's family tree, right, this long scroll that showed that his dog's ancestors came over on the Mayflower. Yep, these are some serious dogs. It takes some getting used to.

[Enter Tony, confident.]

P: So how'd things go in Connecticut Tony?

T: Heh heh

P: That good huh?

T: Let me just say that we're going to need a whole new shipment of caskets. 100 more.
Top of the line: mahogany, silk lining, inlaid mother-of-pearl.

P: A hundred?

T: The old world is dying my friend. It's the end of an era, in dog years it is. I met no fewer than five people whose dogs have been on life support for months, but they won't pull the plug until they're sure everything's perfect.

P: Doggie life support? Is that expensive?

T: It is so expensive. You and I, we would be lucky to get health care like that. When I found out how much, I saw how serious these people were about their dogs. That's when I changed tactics. Instead of starting with the basic package and working up, I started right in with our deluxe dog funeral. That's when I started making sales.

P: The deluxe package, you mean with the full orchestra?

T: Full orchestra for starters. You bet. Get the orchestra on the horn first thing tomorrow, tell them to rosin up their bows because we have a lot of very distinguished canines who need to be escorted into the afterlife. But if the orchestra didn't grab em, I started improvising. I started talking about a full bar and a bone buffet for the survivors. Long slow processions of ivory limousines. Elaborate ceremonies: releasing cages of doves, white streamers trailing from hot air balloons, acres of orchid petals, high-frequency choirs.

P: You're a visionary Tony. I got to hand it to you. Before we moved up here, I always thought that dog heaven would just be... a lot of trees you know. Just a park, maybe a cat or two. But these dogs up here in Rhode Island, they don't frolic. They're very serious dogs Tony. I don't think they even go to the bathroom. I just wonder what kind of heaven they go to. A leather armchair, smoking a pipe, I just can't figure it out.

T: That's exactly it though. I had to sell these people on dog heaven. Convince them that where their dog was going, well there wouldn't be any mutts there. But something funny happened. I was at the dog park in New Haven scoping out future clients, and I saw Henry David Thoreau.

P: That's impossible. He's dead.

T: I swear to you, I saw him. I was sitting on a bench and he walked right by. I called his name.

P: Did he respond?

T: No, of course not. That's how I knew it was him. A dog like that wouldn't even sniff the hand of somebody like me. That dog went to obedience school at Brown University, class of 89. He was off the leash. And his owners came along behind him, Mr. and Mrs. Rockwell. I was incredulous, but they didn't recognize me.

P: Henry David Thoreau? But his funeral's tomorrow! It's a big, big funeral Tony. We've got so many flowers in here I can hardly breathe. How can he still be alive? We got his casket back in the cooler.

T: Well, the dog's not in it. The only thing I can figure is that it's some kind of life insurance scam.

P: They got life insurance for dogs?

T: Big policies.

P: But Tony that don't make no sense.

T: It makes sense to them. These dogs are valuable. A dog like Henry David, you could use him as collateral on a bank loan. A dog like that'll cost you more than a car. I don't know what's going on. I need to get to the bottom of this. I'm gonna go back and see what's in that casket.

[Exit Tony. Pat's soliloquy #2 accompanied by Frank Martin's Cello Concerto Movement 1 00:00-00:-55]

P: Sometimes I miss Kansas City. Our family did funerals for people back then, until the big chains took our business. Papa told us the death industry was going to the dogs. They have self-service burial plots now where you can dig your own grave. When Papa passed away it was my brother's idea to move to Newport and do canine funeral services. I thought he was crazy but he did due diligence, he's good with numbers. Now we dig holes for dogs, it's funny. I've buried dogs who owned their own homes: winter homes in Newton and summer homes on Martha's Vineyard. This greyhound had three convertibles—2 BMWs, one Mercedes—and a chauffer. They've got chew toys made in France. Some of these dogs know how to read, in more than one language. And play piano.

[Tony returns, expressionless.]

P: What's in there? What's in the casket? Tony?

T: [pause] A person.

[3 second pause. They stare at one another. Lights down. Frank Martin's Cello Concerto Movement 3 4:19-4:25]