

The Put Down

A one-act play
By Deborah Pardes

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CURTAIN UP

Lights up on the empty office of Dr. Jane Scott, veterinarian. There's a big desk, covered with some files, etc. There's a phone, a Lucky Bamboo plant. The walls are filled with photos of dogs, cats, framed degrees, and a big red coo-coo clock on the wall. Nothing feels out of the ordinary.

There are two chairs in front the desk.

After a beat, the big reed clock face OPENS- a DOG FACE comes out instead of a coo-coo bird. The clock BARKS VICIOUSLY LOUD. It's 6:05.

After another beat, JANE enters.

JANE
(entering)

Zoe, come sit down.

Jane stares back at the open door.

ZOE (O.S.)
(anxious)

No.

JANE
What's wrong with sitting down?

ZOE (O.S.)
If I sit in there - you're going to talk to me.

JANE
Talking is good. Come on.

Jane reaches out through the door and coaxes
Zoe onto the stage.
You need to just sit for a second.

ZOE
(standing, looking around)

I hate this place.

JANE
Sit there. I'm gong to sit here, across from you.

Jane sits in one of the chairs and looks up at Zoe,
who's still standing, fidgeting.

ZOE
No. No.... No.No. NO!

JANE
Sit.

ZOE
(guarded)
As if sitting is going to do what? What's your plan when I sit?

JANE
I have no plan. In fact, you can stand if you want.

ZOE
Yes. That would be good. I'd like to stand.

JANE
So Puddle--

ZOE
I knew this was about Puddle.

JANE
Zoe, I'm her vet. What else would this be about?

ZOE
No. This answer is no.

JANE
Fine.

ZOE
Fine? Fine what?

JANE
You said no. That's fine.

ZOE

What do you mean, that's fine? What did I say no to?

JANE

I don't know, Zoe. You haven't let me speak yet.

ZOE

I don't want you to tell me anything bad.

JANE

I'm getting that sense.

ZOE

Tell me something that's not bad.

JANE

Okay. How about the fact that Puddle is 14 years old and for a dog that is a good long life --

ZOE

Don't say another word!

JANE

Okay.

ZOE

You have no idea what kind of life Puddle has had.

JANE

A dog's life, I bet.

ZOE

See? That's where you're wrong. She's had a very complicated life.

JANE

Zoe--

ZOE

I saved her from becoming what ever they would have made her down there - cheese wiz or something. She was in Tijuana for Christ's sake. She was the size of my fist. If I hadn't saved her when I did there's no way--

JANE

I don't have all day.

ZOE

What?

JANE

I said I don't have all day. I have to leave at 6:30.

ZOE

(bewildered suddenly)

Oh. I see.

Zoe sits down slowly in the chair.

Beat.

JANE

Zoe, putting Puddle to sleep is the best way to honor her right now.

ZOE

Where do you have to go?

JANE

What?

ZOE

Why do you suddenly have to leave?

JANE

Not suddenly. It's in a half an hour.

ZOE

What's more important than dealing with the life of my dog?

JANE

There's no comparing the life of your dog with anything else right now. That's why I've taken the time to sit with you and talk about Puddle and the best course of action. She's very sick and she's only going to get sicker.

ZOE

I know she's sick.

JANE

I know you know she's sick. That's why you took her in this morning. You were right to take her in.

ZOE

Well, she stopped breathing.

JANE

And you did CPR which was amazing. You kept her alive.

ZOE

(off in the mist)

My mouth on her mouth like that... It was like the meaning of my whole life shifted with each breath. In..Out...In...Out. It was like we were one organism for a moment.

The clock dog BARKS. It breaks Zoe's moment.

ZOE

(startled)

Jesus! That's not very nice.

JANE

(standing up, looking out the window)

Looks like it's going to rain--

ZOE

Maybe change that thing so it's not so loud.

JANE

The clock? Oh, my mother gave me that when I finished medical school.

ZOE

Well that was sweet of her, but there's something wrong with it. And it doesn't even bark on the hour. You should train it better.

JANE

It barks when it wants to. It's 25 years old. It's got a weak bladder or something.

ZOE

I'll say.

JANE

You have to be gentle with old things.

ZOE

I'm very glad you feel that way.

JANE

So... if you want to be gentle with Puddle, you should let her go now, before her pain gets worse.

ZOE

Absolutely not.

JANE
Okay.

ZOE
You keep on doing that.

JANE
Doing what?

ZOE
You say it's okay when it's fucking not okay!

JANE
Zoe, what ever you decide is okay. It's my job to make a recommendation. That's all.

ZOE
You seem so cold about it.

JANE
Cold is not accurate at all. I'm extremely close to the reality of the situation. My ability to communicate the facts unemotionally is part of my service to you.

ZOE
I see.

JANE
Do you really? Because most people don't. Most people expect me to break down with them. They expect me to curl up, on the floor and convulse with moaning and crying and banging on the ground. "Why, God, Why?" They want me to writhe with them. "How could you be so cruel as to take this 26 year old bulimic cat away - and so suddenly? How could you?" And then there are those who actually think I have a business model that keeps me tied to some kind of quota system. Oh, yes. Some people are certain that I have to kill their dog immediately so I can get a palette of free kibbles next week. What kind of sick fucks are you people?? Do you think I like my job? Please.

Zoe is startled. Jane is staring her down like a child.

ZOE
I actually did think you liked your job. Until just now.

JANE
How long have you been coming here?

ZOE

Since Puddle was...I don't know - from the very beginning.

JANE

So what is that - 14 years?

ZOE

Yes.

JANE

So you've known me for 14 years and you assume you know me?

ZOE

What do you mean?

JANE

It's stupid. Forget it. The point is, my agenda here today with you is two-fold. One, I want to tell you the facts. So that you have the facts to consider as you make your decision. And Two, I want to know what your decision is so I can take a course of action before 6:30.

ZOE

Because you have to leave at 6:30.

JANE

You know what? Actually - You can leave her here over night.

ZOE

What good will that do?

JANE

You can have the night to think about it. We can keep her on pain meds. She's asleep. That's all she's capable of doing now anyway.

Jane starts collecting her things to leave.

ZOE

Hold on a second. You're going to let her die in the night, aren't you?

JANE

What? Are you nuts?

ZOE

You said the meds will make her sleep. But they might make her die, too, right?

JANE

Our technicians only give the amount needed to make her sleep - not to kill her.

Really? ZOE

Really. JANE

I'm allowed to ask. ZOE

You didn't ask - you accused. JANE

I'm sorry. ZOE

You should be sorry. So what do you want to do? JANE

What? ZOE

Do you want to leave her here? JANE

I want to take her home. ZOE

She's very sick. She needs to be on an IV with drugs. If she goes home with you, she'll be in a lot of pain. JANE

I don't want that. ZOE

Then leave her here and come back in the morning. JANE

Zoe softly begins to cry. Jane sits back down.

I don't want to be apart from her. ZOE

I know. JANE

Jane pats her on the back. They have a moment.

Don't go. ZOE

What do you mean? JANE

I want you to stay. ZOE

You're transferring your needs onto me. That's not cool, Zoe. JANE

I need you. ZOE
(weepy)

You don't even know me. JANE

Where do you have to go at 6:30? ZOE

Why are you so concerned about where I need to go? JANE

Because if you didn't have to go, we could just breathe together and talk this through and you could help me make a decision. But now I feel all rushed and pressurized. What can be more important than Puddle?? ZOE

I have a meeting. JANE

What kind of meeting? ZOE

A meeting! JANE

You're being cryptic. ZOE

No, I'm not. I got to meetings. To AA meetings. I never miss them. JANE

ZOE
(taking a breathe in)

You're a drunk?

JANE

No, I'm not a drunk.

ZOE

Then why do you go?

JANE

I'm an alcoholic.

ZOE

I never knew that.

JANE

You don't know me very well, Zoe. I think we just went over that.

ZOE

How long have you been an alcoholic?

JANE

My whole adult life. But I've been sober for 9 and half years.

ZOE

9 and half years? That means when Puddle was younger - you could have been drunk during one of her check ups!

JANE

What would you like me to say to that? Would you like me to unfreeze one of my urine samples from back then?

ZOE

You could do that?

JANE

Is this an act or are you really this stupid?

ZOE

I'm just aware of patient rights and I'm concerned.

JANE

You are free to walk out this door right now, with Puddle in tow. In fact, I really wish you would.

Zoe and Jane are now standing, looking as if they are about to wrestle.

ZOE

I'm allowed to have a reaction upon learning that Puddle's doctor was a drunk.

JANE

You are allowed to have any reaction you want. Just keep in mind that half this planet is populated by drunks and currently I'm not one of them.

ZOE

I get that.

JANE

So what is your fucking problem?

ZOE

My fucking problem is that you want to go and share at a meeting somewhere while my dog lies dying in a shoebox.

JANE

I have 3 other animals back there in the same situation and my going or my NOT going to a meeting bears no consequence on their fates.

ZOE

How do you know that?

JANE

Because I am a doctor!!!!

Jane throw her keys on her desk.

ZOE

Well, you don't have to get so upset.

JANE

Where do you have to go tonight?

ZOE

Me? No where.

JANE

Why's that?

ZOE

I don't know. I have no plans tonight.

JANE

Where are your kids?

ZOE

Kids? I only have one kid. He's 23 and lives in Chile.

JANE

Figures.

ZOE

What's that supposed to mean?

JANE

When did he run away? When he was 16?

ZOE

That was downright mean. I bet you were a mean drunk.

JANE

I wasn't. But right now, I'm feeling like one because you are pushing my buttons.

ZOE

Not my fault.

Jane takes an angry breath.

JANE

So what's your story? What's your dark secret?

ZOE

I don't have one.

JANE

What you do? What do you do for a living?

ZOE

What is this, 20 questions? What are my plans? What do I do?

JANE

You're the one all nosy about my 6:30 meeting.

ZOE

That's different. I'm paying you - you're not paying me

JANE

Oh, so that's what it comes down to. I see.

ZOE

I'm just explaining the circumstances - they're different. I have a right to ask.

JANE

And I don't.

ZOE

No, you can.

JANE

I did.

ZOE

Okay. I'm a hand model.

JANE

A what??

ZOE

A retired hand model.

JANE

(laughing)

You're joking.

ZOE

No, I'm not joking.

JANE

Let me see your hands.

ZOE

No.

JANE

Let me see your hands.

Jane pulls out Zoe's hands from under her armpits.

ZOE

They're all rough and old now.

JANE

No, no. I can see why they were model hands. They're very nice.

Jane begins to laugh again.

ZOE

Why are you laughing?

JANE

I would have never guessed that - in a million tries. I got to hand it to you - you surprised me. Hand it to you! Get it?

ZOE

Yea, I get it.

JANE

(laughing)

What - did they call your agent and say "Can you lend us a hand?"

ZOE

(bored)

Yup.

JANE

And did he call you and say "Hey, I got a hand job for you!"

ZOE

Sure did.

JANE

Oh - did you have a union? "Hands Free ! Hands Free! Hands Free!"

Jane is hysterically laughing at this point.

ZOE

I made good money with my hands.

JANE

When you retired, did they give you a hand?

ZOE

What's wrong with you?

JANE

What? I'm sorry. That just tickled my funny bone, I guess. Oh... feels good to laugh.

ZOE

Well, I'm glad I was able to help.

JANE

So now that you're retired - what's next? You're young-ish. Can you start with a new body part?

ZOE

You think this is funny?

JANE

No, it was actually a serious question.

ZOE

Well, I'm seriously in between jobs right now.

Jane sits to catch her breath, and tries to adjust to what Zoe just said.

JANE

It's not easy.

ZOE

Nope. You were smart to get a degree in something. I was in college when they got me hooked.

JANE

Hooked on what?

ZOE

Hand outs.

JANE

What?

ZOE

Oh, so you're the only one who gets to make hand jokes?

JANE

Oh - God. Very funny. Hand outs.

ZOE

I became a hand model at 20 and never looked back. I didn't think about what I'd do when I hit middle age- that's when the veins really start popping out and they can't be covered up anymore.

JANE

Wow. Tough business.

ZOE

Whatever. You're not my career counselor. You're my vet. And my dog is dying.

Beat.

JANE

And I don't know what else to say, Zoe.

ZOE

You're saying I should put her down tonight, right?

JANE

Yes. I'm saying that's the best course of action.

ZOE

Course of action.

JANE

Yes. The best option given your circumstance.

ZOE

What do you think Puddle wants?

JANE

I think Puddle is ready to go.

ZOE

She's old.

JANE

She's sick.

ZOE

We'll all be joining her soon enough.

JANE

Don't go down that road right now. I know it's tempting. Just deal with your dog's mortality. Not your own.

ZOE

Don't you feel like death is staring you down every morning?

JANE

No, I don't.

ZOE

Well, good for you.

JANE

I prefer living in the present as much as possible.

ZOE

Is that an AA thing?

JANE

It's AA. It's Buddhist. It's on the back of cereal boxes. It's just a helpful way of living. You should try it.

ZOE

If I try it, you going to bill me? You a shrink too?

JANE

I can't tell if you're cynical or funny.

ZOE

Pick one. They're both true.

The dog clock BARKS again.

ZOE

(wincing from the sound)

Oh, Jesus!

JANE

That dog always barks when a person's about lose it. I swear.

ZOE

Is that what you think? That I'm losing it?

JANE

No. But that dog knows.

ZOE

You ever think that you might me losing it?

JANE

What's that supposed to mean?

ZOE

That rant you just had about people and you hating your job. Is that normal?

JANE

I was blowing off steam.

ZOE

Yeah, but think about it. You have a pact with the devil. That could drive anyone mad.

JANE

With the devil?

ZOE

You take care of animals that are all going to die on your watch - -every single one of them - eventually. That must be toxic to your brain at some level.

JANE

I don't see it that way at all.

ZOE

That's because you live in the present which is code for you live in denial.

JANE

I live in denial?

ZOE

I'm not saying it's a bad thing. It obviously helps you be okay with the fact that there are dogs and cats 20 feet away from you dying -- right now, while you're in here chatting it up with me.

JANE

Is that what you think I'm doing -- chatting it up with you?

ZOE

What else have we been doing? You haven't given me a rectal exam.

Jane suddenly spins out of her chair.

JANE

You can leave now.

ZOE

What?

JANE

Get out. You're out of line right now. I can see you have no respect for what I've been trying to do here.

ZOE

Maybe I don't understand what you've been trying to do.

JANE

That's not my problem.

ZOE

You brought me in here to tell me I had to put Puddle down.

JANE

Bingo. See? You do understand. Now let's leave. I'm going to be late.

Zoe stays in her chair and begins to weep again.

ZOE

What am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to go?

JANE

Oh, for Christ's sake. Zoe, keep it together.

ZOE

I can't.

JANE

I have given you my time and my thoughts. You've denigrated me for doing so, and now I don't know what you're expecting of me.

ZOE

Just sit for a second.

JANE

(reluctantly sitting)

I'm sitting.

ZOE

I'm sorry.

JANE

You don't have to apologize.

ZOE

No, I do. The fact is, is that I know I have to put Puddle down. I know that. I just don't know what to do afterwards. Am I supposed to go home? Am I supposed to eat? I don't know what to do.

JANE

I understand how you feel.

ZOE

Am I supposed to clean her bowls, wash her bed? Do I give them to Good Will? What do I do??

JANE

There's no... Everyone has to go through this. It's a process. It's a loss. It's messy.

ZOE

I feel messy.

JANE

There are support groups.

ZOE

For what - for being messy?

JANE

People get together who have lost their pets. They talk about their feelings.

ZOE

(sniffling back her tears)

Oh, God. I can't do that.

JANE

Why?

ZOE

I'm not a group kind of person.

JANE

What does that mean?

ZOE

I just don't do group. I'm not good at it.

JANE

Well, it's time to be open to it.

ZOE

Don't try to enroll me. I know how you people like to enroll.

JANE

You people?

ZOE

I'm just saying I don't want to be pushed.

JANE

I would never push you. It doesn't work like that. It has to be your decision. I was just telling you about opportunities out there.

ZOE

Okay.

JANE

It's going to be hard going back into your house without her. There's no getting around that.

ZOE

Can I come with you?

JANE

What? Where?

ZOE

To your AA meeting.

JANE

My - no, no! You can't just come because you're lonely.

ZOE

Says who? I bet half the people there don't even have a drinking problem. I bet they go just to be around people.

JANE

Well, we don't use lie detectors, so you can never be sure.

ZOE

See? That's all I'm saying. So let me come. I'll act drunk if that's what's required.

JANE

No, Zoe. You don't need to act drunk.

ZOE

Wait. If I was drunk - would they turn me away? That's like a church turning away Christians.

JANE

No. We'd let you in. Jesus! Why are we talking about this?

ZOE

I just don't want to go home tonight. Not right away.

Beat.

JANE

This is too weird.

ZOE

Let me come to the meeting with you. I won't say a word.

JANE

It's not that. Well, it is that.

ZOE

Zip. I'll just sit. It's better than going straight home.

JANE

The meeting is only 60 minutes.

ZOE

Okay. That's something. I'll get some free coffee. A little donut, too, right? So I can come with you?

Beat. Jane paces a bit then throws up her hands.

JANE

Okay, Okay. You can come.

ZOE

Thank you. So.. Let's go. Let's go kill Puddle.

JANE

(shocked)

What?

ZOE

Don't we have to do that before we leave?

JANE

Zoe.

ZOE

Don't worry. I'm fully accepting of it. I'm ready to do the Serenity Prayer and everything.

JANE

I'm glad you've made a decision. But it's not me who administers the drug. My technicians are trained to do it.

ZOE

Really? Are you afraid?

JANE

Am I afraid? No, I'm not afraid. It's just not necessary for me to put dogs to sleep. Technicians do it - it's part of their job.

ZOE

Can you make an exception tonight?

JANE

No. We're going to be late.

ZOE

Why? How long does it take to put a dog down? I want you to do it.

JANE

Longer than we have.

ZOE

What's more important - seeing Puddle off in a decent manner or being on time for a bunch of drunks?

JANE

They're not drunks. You are so out of line. You know what? You can't come with me. I...I was stupid to say yes. It breaks our code.

ZOE

Code?

JANE

Don't say another word.

ZOE

Don't get so defensive. You know I'm right. You have strange priorities.

JANE

I have impeccable priorities. You are so wrong!

ZOE

Okay. I'm wrong. I can't expect you to see this situation from my perspective.

JANE

I'll tell the technician to put Puddle down, and you can come get her body in the morning.

ZOE

Just like that?

JANE

Just like what? Are you expecting a parade, Zoe?

ZOE

Where do I take her body?

JANE

We've got partners. Some cremate, some bury. Your choice.

ZOE

Which one should I do?

JANE

(whining)

I don't care!

The dog clock BARKS again.

ZOE

See - he barks when people are losing it.

JANE

I am not losing it! I'm leaving. Now. I'll tell the front desk you'll come for her in the morning.

ZOE

Well... Can I see her?

JANE

(Taking a breath)

Yes. Yes you can see her. Of course.

ZOE

Will you come with me?

JANE

No. I won't. This is a very private matter between you and Puddle.

ZOE

You know why I named her puddle?

JANE

(Looking at her watch impatiently)

No, I don't.

ZOE

(gently, slowly, full of nostalgia)

Because for the first few days in my house - just after I rescued her - she would hide. I'd look for her everywhere. She was such a scared little girl. I would try to coax her out with food. I'd sing softly. I even rolled up a pair of socks, hoping that she'd mistake them for a friend. But she'd stay hidden - for a whole day sometimes. The only way I knew she was alive was when I would see a puddle of her pee. It wasn't a lot of pee. She's so small. Not a lot of pee ever came out of her. But her puddles were like little messages to me that she was in the house. That she was okay. So... I started calling her Puddle.

Beat. Jane has been taken in by the story.

JANE

That's sweet.

ZOE

Yeah.

The two woman sit.

JANE

So.

ZOE

I'm going to miss Puddle.

JANE

(resigned, gentle)

Why don't we both go see her.

ZOE

Yeah?

JANE

Yes. I'll help her. I'll give her the medicine to make her sleep.

Sleep forever?
ZOE

Yes.
JANE

You'll be late.
ZOE

I'll go to meeting tomorrow instead. It's fine.
JANE

Thank you.
ZOE
(holding Jane's arm)

You're welcome.
JANE

The two ladies head for the door.

Can I go with you tomorrow - to the meeting?
ZOE (O.S.)

No. No you can't.
JANE (O.S)

The dog clock BARKS again.

Curtain