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Disambiguating D

A play in one act

by S G Collins

CHARACTERS.

D Blacky Davis, a once controversial author and grumpy iconoclast

Wioleta Wojciechowska, his new housekeeper

Jane van Six, a journalist from *Dezimental* magazine

Dariusz Gryzbowski, a freelance photographer

SCENE. *The apartment of BLACKY DAVIS. From outdoors we hear Amsterdam street traffic and an occasional passing tram.*

There's a wall of books, a tall window with curtains, a couple of big paintings. There's a low sofa with matching comfy chair arranged around a rather large coffee table. On the table there are lots of papers and a small computer, a man's wristwatch, an oversized coffee mug filled with pens and pencils, a one-liter Bavarian beer stein with the lid open, and an almost empty wine glass. The empty wine bottle is standing on the floor beside a pair of old work boots.

An open doorway leads into what seems to be a kitchen. From the kitchen we hear breakfast noises, clunking and clattering, water running. Rising whistle of a kettle, falling again as someone takes it off the heat.

WIOLETA (off). I am very happy, to be living in Amsterdam. Hello, my name is Wioleta. Nice to meet you. Thank you, I am fine and you. I am very happy, to be living in Amsterdam.

WIOLETA enters from the kitchen. She opens the curtains to let in some daylight. Signs of life on the sofa: a body stirs under a blanket.

BLACKY (groans). Fuckin hell.

BLACKY throws off his blanket and rolls to a sitting position, holds his head. he's dressed in his boxer shorts and a t shirt. WIOLETA picks up the empty bottle and wine glass, and smiles at him.

WIOLETA. Good morning.

BLACKY (turns briefly). Yeah, hey. Jen dobroy to ya.

WIOLETA. Dzień dobre. What do you like to drink — tea, or cheese?

BLACKY (turns to her again). Ah. That's a tough one. What about some coffee?

WIOLETA. Coffee. Regular, or decapitated?

BLACKY. Just regular, thanks.

WIOLETA. I go make.

BLACKY. Fantastic. Jenkooya.

WIOLETA (hesitates). I am very happy, to be in Amsterdam. Living.

BLACKY. Yeah me too. It's a good job to be living.

WIOLETA exits into the kitchen. Blacky taps a key on his computer to wake it, and looks at the screen. He grabs a sweatshirt from under his blanket, pulls it on while reading.

BLACKY. Ah, the disambiguation of desire, is it? A job. Food. Sex. The absence of clear signals for wanting. Either verbal or nonverbal. Christ Blacky could ya be a little more opaque. Because what? The confusion serves some evolutionary purpose? Fucking doubt it. You're mad. You're mad I tell you. Mad. Where's my damn socks.

BLACKY looks around for a moment, then finds his socks tucked into the beer stein. As he's putting them on, the doorbell rings.

BLACKY (picks up his watch). Now fuck me almighty. Who's that ringin at ... a quarter after eleven in the morning?

WIOLETA emerges from the kitchen.

WIOLETA. Someone is on the door.

BLACKY. Yeah. You can answer it if you like, be my guest.

WIOLETA disappears into a hallway. We hear the door opening and quiet voices.

WIOLETA (off). Good morning.

JANE (off). Hi, I'm Jane van Six. From *Dezimental* Magazine?

BLACKY. Fuck me and a half. Pants. Pants. Come to me, pants.

WIOLETA (off). Hello! My name is Wioleta Wojciechowska. I'm nice to meet you.

BLACKY rises and scans the room frantically.

JANE (off). Nice to meet you too.

WIOLETA (off). Thank you, I'm fine and you.

JANE (off). Good. Thanks. Sorry I'm a bit late. I was supposed to be here at eleven.

WIOLETA (off). Yes?

JANE (off). Yes. This is 206 isn't it? I'm supposed to see D Blacky Davis.

At last BLACKY spots his pants folded up neatly on a chair. He rushes to put them on.

WIOLETA (off). Yes. Please, come inside. We drinking coffee.

JANE (off). Great, thank you.

We hear the door closing and locking. JANE VAN SIX enters, stops to see BLACKY pulling up his trousers. WIOLETA follows JANE into the room.

BLACKY. Well then. Hiya.

JANE. Hiya. Well then.

WIOLETA. Blacky, we have guest!

BLACKY. Yes, I see, thank you Wioleta.

He zips up, offers an embarrassed hand.

BLACKY. Blacky Davis.

JANE. I'm Jane van Six. It's an honor to meet you. I'm sorry I'm late.

BLACKY. Yeah, likewise. You coulda been thirty seconds later even.

JANE. But now I won't have to ask if you wear boxers or briefs.

BLACKY. Can I take your coat?

JANE. Sure.

He takes JANE'S coat, then doesn't seem to know what to do with it. WIOLETA takes it from him and goes to hang it.

BLACKY. Please. Have a seat.

BLACKY gestures for JANE to sit in the comfy chair, and moves to sit on the sofa. JANE reaches into her shoulder bag, takes out a tiny sound recorder and a note pad.

JANE. Do you mind terribly if I record this?

BLACKY. No that's fine, go nuts. Now I have to confess something Jane.

JANE. Let me guess. You completely forgot I was coming today.

BLACKY. That too, you got me. But I was gonna tell ya, you know I don't get out much, and honestly I've never actually seen a single issue of *Mental Desi*.

JANE. *Dezimental*.

BLACKY. *Dezimental*, right. See. I don't get out much.

WIOLETA. Now, I go take coffee.

BLACKY. Fantastic, thank you Wioleta.

WIOLETA exits into the kitchen. JANE sets her recorder on the table.

JANE. Perfectly understandable. It is a fairly influential rag, I'd say we're read faithfully by only the most excruciatingly hip intelligentsia.

BLACKY. Really. All twelve of them?

JANE (cheerfully). You got it. D Blacky Davis, do I call you Mister Davis, or D, or D Blacky, or?

BLACKY. Just Blacky.

JANE. Blacky. So we're just here to explore the new phenomenology of you. Maybe try to disambiguate some of those myths and legends.

BLACKY. Oh, you're disambiguating too are ya. I was doing it last night. There's a lot of that going around. Like which slit did that photon really go through?

JANE. I see you're couch surfing.

BLACKY. Yes.

JANE. In your own flat.

BLACKY. Yeah I gave Wioleta the bedroom. I'm fine out here.

JANE. New housekeeper?

BLACKY. She moved in yesterday. How'd you know?

JANE. Cuz the last one spoke better English. When I phoned three weeks ago.

BLACKY. Oh yeah, Pani Zosia. She was tryna teach me some Polish too.

JANE. What happened to her?

BLACKY. I cooked her and ate her. Nah really I dunno, she just didn't come back. Maybe she got deported or something.

JANE. Deported? I thought they were all EU now.

BLACKY. So did I. But they keep acting like they're not allowed to be here. Bent u nederlands by the way? With a name like van Six, I thought you'd be Dutch.

JANE. Ancestors only. I'm from Michigan. Now here's the thing. One year ago, if somebody —

WIOLETA. Coffee!

JANE. Okay cool.

WIOLETA carries in a tray loaded with coffee pot, cream, sugar and three cups and spoons. They struggle to make room on the coffee table. WIOLETA sits on the sofa beside BLACKY, between him and JANE. She sits forward and starts to pour.

JANE. Great, thank you!

WIOLETA. No pleasure, it's my problem!

BLACKY. Jane you were saying.

JANE (leans forward to see him past WIOLETA). I was gonna say. If somebody asked me one year ago who is D Blacky Davis, I woulda said he is — he or she, cuz frankly nobody knew what your gender was — I woulda said D Blacky Davis is a notorious iconoclast, of whom very few people have heard, but those few are, in someone's opinion, really important people.

WIOLETA. You like milk?

JANE. Uh, no, thank you, I'll take it black. Blacky how do you take your coffee?

BLACKY. Orally.

WIOLETA. Blacky?

BLACKY. Just black thanks. No milk. Jenkooya.

WIOLETA. I drinking coffee with many milk.

WIOLETA pours cream into her own coffee cup, then sits up straight and takes a sip.

JANE. Whereas now, a year later, you've got tens of millions of college students buzzing and blogging and talking the D Blacky talk.

BLACKY. Uh huh, yeah I heard something about that too.

WIOLETA. It's okay?

JANE. Very good, thank you. So what changed? I mean it's not like you went on a world tour with your new book or something. When did *Jacabilly* come out? Like what seventeen years ago?

BLACKY. Yeah about.

JANE. And then there was *Conservation of Urchins* about ten years back, loved it by the way, and then maybe six years ago you came out with *The Uncontemplatable*. Which forgive me but almost nobody bought.

BLACKY. Yeah well you can't blame em, that was a pretty depressing book.

WIOLETA has been following the conversation, turning to each of them with a pleasantly interested expression on her face. Now there's a bit of silence, and all three of them look at each other. And WIOLETA starts to look concerned.

BLACKY. Jane I'm fucked if I know. I dunno what happened, honest.

JANE. You don't know?

BLACKY. I don't know.

WIOLETA. Nie wiem. I don't know.

BLACKY. See, she doesn't know either.

WIOLETA. It's problem?

BLACKY. No problem. Chalk it up to phenomenology. Some freak accident in the nösphere. A short circuit in the fabric of sense.

BLACKY sets down his cup, with a look of resignation.

JANE. But Blacky this has gotta be either *the* most ingenious buzz marketing campaign in history, or — I mean there's talk of a film adaptation of *Jacabilly* with Edmund Lark attached? That's gotta be worth an easy five or ten mil.

BLACKY. Don't look at me, that's agent stuff. They don't tell me shit and I don't ask.

JANE. So what's the D stand for?

BLACKY. The D is for *don't ask*.

JANE. Is it true you have a background in linguistics?

BLACKY. It's true. I have a PhD in applied linguistics from Göttingen.

JANE. So D is for Doctor.

BLACKY. D is for dammit woman, desist.

WIOLETA (smiles, catching on). M is for love.

WIOLETA sets her cup down, puts her hand on BLACKY'S shoulder and gestures sympathetically toward JANE.

WIOLETA (pleading). Blacky. She's nice girl! She's very nice girl. Look.

BLACKY looks at JANE and smiles.

BLACKY. Yes. Jane is very nice girl. You're nice girl, aren't you, Jane?

JANE. I'm nice girl. Yes.

WIOLETA looks slightly reassured.

BLACKY. And you're not gonna go tell them all where I am, are ya?

JANE. Can I tell em you live somewhere in the Old South of Amsterdam?

BLACKY. How about 'somewhere in northern Europe' ?

JANE (looks at her watch). Don't worry. I have to tell the photographer, of course.

BLACKY. Photographer.

JANE. Well I can't exactly have him kidnapped and delivered to us with a hood on.

BLACKY. What's this about a fucking photographer?

JANE. I told you about the photographer. Dariusz. He's brilliant, he's one of the best freelancers in the world. You'll be very happy with Dariusz.

BLACKY (rising). What the fuck, Jane. Nobody told me. Maybe you told Pani Zosia about a photographer. Nobody told me about a photographer.

WIOLETA. Blacky. Please. Be nice!

BLACKY. Be nice? I'm being fucking nice. Do I get to brush my teeth first? Or do you prefer me in my underwear?

JANE. Blacky can I tell you something? You look beautiful.

WIOLETA (nods). Beautiful. It's beautiful.

BLACKY picks up his coffee cup and drinks a hefty gulp of it.

JANE. I'm not kidding. I mean, you can clean up or brush your hair or whatever you wanna do, but you're not getting any more beautiful. Not in this lifetime. You're a beautiful man, Blacky, and that's it, full stop.

BLACKY. You mean you wanna sleep with me? How much time do we have?

WIOLETA. You sleep with him?

JANE. Dariusz should be here in a few minutes, and no, I don't sleep with him.

BLACKY. I better go take a shower at least. I'm fucking rank.

JANE. That's great. Relax, have a shower. I'll just be chilling here with Vee ...?

WIOLETA (smiles). Wioleta.

JANE. Vee-oletta and me. We're chillin.

BLACKY. Right.

BLACKY puts his cup down, starts to exit, pauses and shakes his head.

BLACKY. Christ. Fuck me with last week's goat willya. Blind me with a Mayan fucking calendar. Jeezus. Let's hope there's no more surprises lurkin in the bath now.

BLACKY exits. JANE looks after him until he's gone, then doubles over silently, tries not to laugh out loud. She grabs WIOLETA'S arm and squeezes hard.

JANE. Oh, I love him. You gotta love him! He's amazing.

WIOLETA. You wait. First, you get married. Then it's okay. No problem.

JANE. Where did you find him? How did you two meet?

WIOLETA. I'm sorry, I didn't understand you.

JANE turns off her recorder, and moves to sit next to WIOLETA on the sofa, sitting where BLACKY was before.

JANE (pantomimes shaking hands). I mean, you, Blacky, hello I'm Vee-oletta, hello I'm Blacky Davis. Where?

WIOLETA. Gdje. Where we meet? In bar. We meet in bar.

JANE. Really? Which bar?

WIOLETA. Which bar. In Leidseplein. Rock in Roll out. Hello. Do you want drink something. Thank you yes. Then we go, other bar. Eyelders something. More drink. But. (Wags finger.) Not sex.

While she explains this, JANE leans back to see if BLACKY is really out of earshot. Then she leans to tap a key on the computer, and has a look at what's on the screen.

JANE. No sex?

WIOLETA. He don't want.

JANE (looks at her). You're serious?

WIOLETA. I think, he is waiting.

JANE. Waiting for what?

WIOLETA. He is waiting for you. Nice girl. Not agly girl, Polish girl.

JANE (distracted). Disambiguation of desire. I'm sorry, did you j— did you just call yourself ugly? Ohmygod. Vee, you're fucking kidding me right?

WIOLETA (gestures to herself, seemingly at peace with the judgment). I am, agly girl. Too much fat. It's okay. He is waiting for you.

JANE. Oh don't you dare. Vee. Don't you dare even think of going there. You are gorgeous girl. You hear me? Gorgeous.

WIOLETA (nods sadly). I am gorgeous girl.

JANE. You betcha. I'd do you in a New York minute. You're beautiful.

WIOLETA. No.

JANE. Listen. D Blacky Davis, he no wait for me. No. He maybe wait for something, but he no wait for Jane van Six. Understand? Do you understand me? You are beautiful girl. Vee is beautiful. Hang on a sec.

JANE glances off again to see if the coast is still clear, then resumes reading what's written on BLACKY'S computer. Her lips are moving furiously.

JANE. Wo. Wo, this is some heavy shit right here. Near total absence of explicate codes for wanting ... only if the ambiguity itself serves as some perverse form of survival mechanism ... the regrettable and quite maddening conclusion ...

She scrolls down furtively.

JANE (almost whispering). That language is not about communication at all. Or marginally so. And that our grand communion of souls, such as it is, is merely an epiphenomenon to the greater game of ... what. He stopped. He fucking stopped?

WIOLETA. It's problem?

JANE. It's problem. I am not nice girl. I am ugly girl. I am sneaky, conniving, ugly girl, may God forgive me.

WIOLETA looks at her sadly, touches her arm.

The doorbell rings.

JANE. That's Dariusz.

WIOLETA (rises). There is someone on the door.

WIOLETA goes out to answer the door. JANE moves back to her original chair, apparently trying to memorize something, and praying at the same time.

DARIUSZ (off). Goede morgen. Ik ben Dariusz. Ik heb hier vanmorgen zo'n opdracht met een zekere Mevrouw van Six?

WIOLETA (off). Good morning! I am Wioleta Wojciechowska, very nice to meet you. Please come inside.

Suddenly the conversation in the hall turns to Polish. There's a bit of laughter. They enter together. WIOLETA'S whole aspect is much more relaxed.

WIOLETA. This is Jane from Sex.

DARIUSZ. Yes we know each other. Hey Jane.

JANE. It's the Dariusz G. Wazzup baby.

DARIUSZ (looks at his watch). I'm up. Where's the man?

JANE. Having a shower. I think I freaked him out, he didn't seem to know you were coming. Man we gotta play this one cool okay, this is like really big for me.

DARIUSZ. Ya think?

JANE. Oh yeah. Too hot.

DARIUSZ. I read one of his books the other night.

JANE. Which one.

DARIUSZ. *Conservation of Urchins.*

DARIUSZ pinches his nose, then starts to unpack his camera.

JANE. Stop, I loved that book.

DARIUSZ. You would.

JANE. I was nineteen.

DARIUSZ. Nineteen and on Prozac, I hope.

JANE. Let's just make this quick and genius and get out of these people's hair. It's way too hot.

DARIUSZ. Sure Jane. No problem.

DARIUSZ looks around the place, while making some more friendly conversation with WIOLETA. He declines her offer of tea or coffee, and asks her about what brought her to Amsterdam. He seems to decide something, then waves for Jane to get up.

DARIUSZ. Jane, move please. Thank you.

As JANE gets up, DARIUSZ drags the chair closer to the window. He asks WIOLETA to sit there for a moment, and uses her face to set his exposure and take a few test shots. Then he thanks her.

DARIUSZ (to JANE). Did you talk to this girl?

JANE. Yes. She met him in Leidseplein, at some Rockin Rolling place.

DARIUSZ. She's an engineer.

JANE. Really.

DARIUSZ. With a specialization in materials sciences.

JANE. Wow. And she comes all the way to Amsterdam to cook and clean for D Blacky Davis. How do you swing a deal like that, you gotta wonder.

DARIUSZ. Family problems. She's hiding from a bad man and his bad friends.
Trying to keep a low profile.

WIOLETA. I am very happy to be living in Amsterdam.

DARIUSZ. Yes. There's a lot of that going around. Listen.

DARIUSZ gives one of his business cards to WIOLETA, and tells her in Polish to call him if she ever has any trouble with this guy. If she ever feels exploited or anything.

BLACKY enters, with his hair wet but looking a bit more groomed.

BLACKY. I'm clean.

DARIUSZ. Good morning, Mister Davis. I'm Dariusz Gryzbowski.

BLACKY. Good to meet ya.

DARIUSZ. If you just sit here for a moment, I can do this real quick and it won't hurt much at all.

BLACKY. Okay. You can't see where we are, can you?

DARIUSZ. No. It's all a blur.

DARIUSZ gets in position and starts to frame up a wider portrait shot.

JANE. So Blacky, are you working on anything lately?

BLACKY. I've been writing an essay. About desire. The language of it.

JANE. Ah. Sounds fascinating. Is there a language of desire?

BLACKY. Well, not exactly.

DARIUSZ takes a few photos from that position, then moves closer to BLACKY for a few more.

JANE. Hmm. It always seemed to me it's difficult for people to be clear about what we want. Like if a guy kisses your hand, does it mean he really respects you? Or that he wants to eat you for dinner? It's not like we have some universal code for these things. Maybe we're not supposed to. You know? Maybe it's about the not knowing. Maybe that's what the language is. Some kind of game maybe. You think?

BLACKY looks past DARIUSZ' camera at JANE, softening like a day-old balloon.

BLACKY. Yeah, maybe you're right.

DARIUSZ. Okay. Thank you for your patience. I'm finished here.

BLACKY. Already.

JANE. Great. I guess we'll be on our way then, I have to get to Schiphol and on to Berlin. It was truly an amazing experience to finally meet you, Blacky. I'll never forget this.

BLACKY rises. Jane shakes his hand vigorously, gives him a hug. DARIUSZ is packing up his camera.

JANE. You riding with me, D?

DARIUSZ. Yeah, one sec, J.

JANE. Vee. You're beautiful, don't you forget it. Thank you so much for the coffee. Be safe, okay?

JANE gives WIOLETA a kiss on the cheek and a light embrace.

WIOLETA. Very nice.

JANE. Bye for now, Blacky.

BLACKY. Bye now. Have a good trip.

WIOLETA escorts JANE off into the hallway. We hear the door open. BLACKY follows behind DARIUSZ, who pauses to shake his hand — and doesn't let go right away.

BLACKY. Hey, thanks for making it so quick and painless.

DARIUSZ. Easy peasy. And take good care of that girl, okay? The Polish girl. Make sure no harm comes to her. Take care of her.

BLACKY. I certainly will.

DARIUSZ. I certainly hope so. Because if not, I'll certainly come see you again, and it won't be so quick and painless. (Smiles warmly.) Byebye now.

DARIUSZ goes out, there's a flurry of final farewells, the door closes. BLACKY is standing there a bit dumbfounded as WIOLETA returns.

BLACKY. Well that was ... clear.

WIOLETA. Very nice. So sad. She think she's agly. Very nice girl. Blacky?

BLACKY (turns to her). Yes. Pani Wioleta.

WIOLETA. Do you like to eat something?

He looks at her.

Amsterdam, 01 December 2008