

STAGE REVIEW

# Dan Hunter's 'Legally Dead' is alive and well

By Jeffrey Gantz | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 19, 2013



BOSTON PLAYWRIGHTS' THEATRE

From left: Kippy Goldfarb, Jen Alison Lewis, and Adrienne Krstansky in the Boston Playwrights' Theatre's production of "Legally Dead."

'Where there's a will, there's way,' as the saying goes. So the Lincoln family just needs to find the will. In Dan Hunter's new play, now up at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, it's Christmas Eve, and the Lincolns — mom Marsha and adult children Rebecca, Annie, and Tommy — are home for the holidays at mom's place on the Gulf Coast of Florida. What's more, some of the kids are looking to give themselves a Christmas present by selling the family's Cadillac dealership back in their native Peoria, Ill. The hitch is, they can't unload it without the OK from their dear departed dad, who's not dead, just departed — he's been missing for five years. They need to have him declared legally dead so they can inherit. But . . . where is that

will?

Hunter, a former managing director of Boston Playwrights' Theatre, hails from Iowa, and his previous efforts include the book "Let's Keep Des Moines a Private Joke" and the song "Please Don't Burn Perry Como," so he has a sense of humor. But "Legally Dead" is more of a black comedy. Marsha has secreted a bottle in every nook and cranny of her kitchen, where the entire play (100 minutes with no intermission) is set, as well as several flasks about her person, and God knows what she has in the never-seen closet, which houses, at the very least, a ping-pong table and a snowblower. Rebecca, who lives with her mother, works as a church secretary and has found Jesus. Lawyer Annie, who's just arrived from Peoria, is newly divorced and has found sobriety — for the moment. Tommy's not expected, since he's spent the past four years in prison for hiring a hitman, but he blows in after getting a Christmas release. Yorkshire terrier Walter, on the other hand, has gone missing.

Why does Marsha have a Canon "vintage" toner cartridge on the table when she has no printer? Why does Rebecca keep drinking from the Windex bottle? Who was Tommy's hitman supposed to hit? Is it a good idea to vacuum your dog after giving it a bath? And will dad eventually come out of that closet? One glance at Cristina Todesco's hilariously tacky set makes it clear the answers will be over the top. Marsha's kitchen is a riot of plastic, Formica, and linoleum, with green plaid wallpaper, and cabinetry in a hideously bright turquoise. A small Toshiba TV anchors one corner; the walls are festooned with imitation Early American prints and a couple of mounted fish; the refrigerator sports a heart-shaped magnet with a photo of Walter. The few concessions to the season include a styrofoam snowman and, high overhead, a huge plastic Santa and sleigh with flamingo reindeer.

Director Steven Bogart and the four actors (Walter, for reasons that are immediately obvious, is not played by a live dog) keep Hunter's uproarious script hopping. Jen Alison Lewis's self-righteous Rebecca favors pink gloves and goggles for cleaning and obsesses over "Jesus jewelry." Adrienne Krstansky offers a bossy, single-minded Annie who's desperate for money but shows her sentimental side when she reconnects with her childhood stuffed chimpanzee, Zippy. Christopher James Webb's Tommy is a smooth-talking bully who wants the family business for himself. And Kippy Goldfarb, as Marsha, seems devoted to protecting the Lincoln name but shows her true colors when the wills — a quartet of them — start to turn up. Somehow all four actors manage to make their characters likable. "Legally Dead" would play well in Peoria. It would play well just about anywhere.

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

*Jeffrey Gantz can be reached at*  
[jeffreymgantz@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreymgantz@gmail.com)

**LEGALLY DEAD**

866-811-4111 .

**Writers:** Dan Hunter

**Director:** Steven Bogart

**Other Credits:** Set, Cristina Todesco.,  
Lights, David Wilson., Costumes, Rachel  
Padula Shufelt.

**Performing company:** Boston Playwrights'  
Theatre

**Date closing:** Feb. 24.

**Ticket price:** \$10-\$30

**Company website:**

<http://www.bostonplaywrights.org>