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Norman Maine Publishing

HERE, THERE, OR IN THE AIR
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GOD BLESS AND KEEP YOU
TILL WE MEET AGAIN.

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HERE, THERE, OR IN THE AIR was first produced in 2003 by Artspace in Raleigh, NC.

INTERCOM: Seth Blum

CAN I KID: Sara Rashkin

GOVERNESS: Betsy Thompson

REALIST: Sharon Pigott

GENERAL PATON: Johnny McNeil

REVEREND: Bob Phelps

COUNSELOR: Jennifer Marlowe

DANCER: Susan Johnstone

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THEATRE OF THE ABSURD. Three nameless death-row inmates spend their days writing empty slogans on a blackboard as they await death. Prison personnel hired to “help” the inmates include an ineffectual prison counselor and a reverend who would rather watch soap operas than preach the Gospel. In this world, there is no room for humanity. God has been replaced with the “Intercom”—a menacing, omniscient force that controls all behavior. Inmates are no longer human but rather products of the system: The Governess’ only wish is to exact power and to control others; the Can-I-Kid is rendered completely dependent upon the system for her wants and needs; and the Realist has fully surrendered herself to prison life and can no longer hope or dream. This biting satire offers a brutal look into American culture, where empty slogans about individualism mask a system whose only function is to perpetuate itself.

Performance Time: Approximately 20 minutes.

ABOUT THE PLAY

This play is inspired by Mr. Krawiec’s writing workshops and work with death row inmates and other prisoners at the Women’s Correctional Center in Raleigh, NC.

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CHARACTERS

(2 m, 4 w, 1 flexible, extras)

REALIST: Death-row prisoner.

GOVERNESS: Death-row prisoner.

CAN-I-KID: Death-row prisoner.

INTERCOM: Voice.

GENERAL PATON: Prison guard.

REVEREND: Prison reverend.

COUNSELOR: Prison counselor.

EXTRAS: As members of the tour group.

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SETTING

Death row at a women's prison in North Carolina. There is a small common room with a window, a blackboard on the wall, a small institutional table with chairs, and a TV.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Common room, morning.

Scene 2: Common room, next day, morning.

Scene 3: Common room, next day, morning.

Scene 4: Common room, next day.

Scene 5: Common room, evening.

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PROPS

Chalk
Chalkboard
Papers
Empty toilet paper roll
Roll of toilet paper
Campaign literature
Bubblegum
2 Pencils
Hand-held radio or walkie-talkie
String of paper dolls
2 Boxes of playing cards
Bible
Mental-health pamphlets
Piece of exercise equipment (Pilates ball or Thighmaster, etc.)

SOUND EFFECTS

Toilet flushing
Door slam
Screaming and yelling

SCENE I

(AT RISE: Death row, morning. A small common room in a women's prison in North Carolina. The Realist stands at the blackboard, writing the thought for the day. At a table CS, the Governess is wading through campaign papers. The Can-I-Kid is in the bathroom SR.)

INTERCOM: Ladies, are you ready to go? Are you ready to go?

CAN-I-KID: *(From the toilet.)* I'm going right now. Can I have more time? Can I have a roll of toilet paper? Can someone help me?

(An empty toilet paper roll comes flying out of the bathroom. Realist throws a roll of toilet paper to her. Governess rises as if to address a crowd.)

GOVERNESS: That's an important question. As citizens of North Carolina, we all must ask ourselves these questions. Are we ready to change the criminal justice system? If I'm elected governor...

(Toilet flushes.)

REALIST: Why do we have to change the system?

(Can-I-Kid enters.)

CAN-I-KID: It's psychological. Can I have a cigarette? Can I? Can I?

INTERCOM: Ladies? Who's ready to go?

REALIST: Well, we're all ready. Who do you want first? *(Turns to Can-I-Kid.)* What do you mean it's psychological?

INTERCOM: No, it's not psychological. Hold on, there's been an emergency. You'll just have to wait.

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(Governess crosses.)

GOVERNESS: That's one reason we need to change the system.
We need an efficient...

CAN-I-KID: These people are all crazy. *(To Governess.)* Can I have a match? Talk about efficiency. *(Approaches Realist.)* Can I have a match? Can I have a cigarette? Can I have chewing tobacco? Can I have some bubblegum?

REALIST: You can have bubblegum, but you better not let me hear you popping it. *(Gives Can-I-Kid gum. Pats her on the head.)* Now go sit. *(Crosses to Governess.)* P.J., can you please help me to understand why you want to run for governor?

GOVERNESS: As my grandmother used to say, if you want anything done right, do it yourself. Besides, I'm intelligent, interesting, thoughtful, kind. In fact, I'm one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. My educational achievements are unprecedented by any other candidate—and I currently have earned three degrees. In 1989, I received my first degree.

REALIST: *(Aside.)* First-degree murder, that is.

GOVERNESS: Two years later, I had my second degree.

REALIST: *(Aside.)* Burn that is. She was trying to hide a lit cigarette.

GOVERNESS: I went through the third-degree learning to survive in prison. At this time, I'm completing a 6-year residency at NCCIW—

REALIST: To get my vote, you're gonna have to do better than that.

(Governess drapes her arm around Realist's shoulders.)

GOVERNESS: Just between you and me, how else are the three of us going to get a pardon?

INTERCOM: It's been canceled.

(Governess jumps.)

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GOVERNESS: What?

CAN-I-KID: What's been canceled?

(Pause. Fade to blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Common room, next day, morning. The Realist is writing the thought of the day on the chalkboard. Realist and Can-I-Kid are sitting at the table. Governess is going through campaign literature.)

GOVERNESS: If I were governess, we wouldn't be writing this on paper because the state budget would allow for computers and when—

REALIST: A good governess wouldn't be at the table writing. She'd have a good secretary doing the writing. She'd be out talking to the people.

(Can-I-Kid rips up paper and throws it onto the floor.)

CAN-I-KID: *(To Governess.)* I am a good secretary. But too much is expected of me. Will you teach me how to operate a computer?

GOVERNESS: As soon as you learn to write, we'll teach you how to operate a computer. *(To Realist.)* And what I really want to do is to be out there having these fireside chats.

CAN-I-KID: What kind of chats?

GOVERNESS: Fireside.

CAN-I-KID: Do you like firesides. *(To Realist.)* Do you like firesides?

GOVERNESS/REALIST: Yes. Yes I do.

(Can-I-Kid bends down to the table leg and rubs two pencils together.)

GOVERNESS: What are you doing with those pencils?

(CAN-I-KID kneels.)

CAN-I-KID: I'm trying to make a fireside. Got anymore paper?
(General Paton enters, speaking into a hand-held radio.)

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GENERAL PATON: My 10:20 is death row, and remember, if there's a problem, I won't go down alone. *(He pats his stomach.)*
Ladies. Oh, my stomach's kicking up again.

CAN-I-KID: You want a sick call?

(Can-I-Kid hands him a form. Paton looks for the tour group.)

GENERAL PATON: No, no. Y'all feeling okay? Good, good, 'cuz we had some reports about some bad fish. Now, how about a nice little room search?

GOVERNESS: Yes, some more legalized vandalism. Wasting more state funds tying up—

GENERAL: Don't even try it.

REALIST: It's the pressure of the campaign...running for governess...and we just had a room search. We don't need this again.

INTERCOM: General Paton, we've checked the 141s. They were searched third shift last night. And, sir, the tour group is here.

(General draws himself up and looks out the windows at the rear. Tour group arrives and looks through the windows at the inmates.)

GENERAL: *(To Tour Group.)* Welcome. I'm glad you're here to see just how tough we are here. You'll find it's not the Holiday Inn at the Rock. There are no comfy chairs, no cushions...a nice, solid American concrete floor...no frivolous decorations or Christmas trees, the shower cuts off every nineteen seconds after eight cups of water. When I was with the 7th Marine Battalion in Desert Storm, I went two weeks without drinking eight cups of water.

(While he's speaking, the women hum the Marine Corp anthem.)

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CAN-I-KID: *(To General.)* Can I have a bucket of ice? Can I have a cup of water? Can I? Can I?

GENERAL: Thirst is just psychological. What's wrong with the water fountain?

REALIST: Have you tasted the water in the fountain recently? We think maybe we found Jimmy Hoffa.

GOVERNESS: When I'm elected Governor, we'll put a stop to the hog farms draining into our drinking water supply.

(Tour group begins to move off. General Paton obviously wants to follow them.)

GENERAL: *(To Inmates.)* Ladies, keep up the good work. If you'll excuse me, the tour is leaving.

(CAN-I-KID chases him to the door.)

CAN-I-KID: Do you have a match? Can you teach me to write? Where can I find some fire wood?

(Fade to blackout.)

[End of Freeview]