

HOTEL ARIZONA_

by

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Arizona Performing Arts
2641 E. Beekman Place
Phoenix, Az 85016

Time : June 2000

Place : The Holding Cell Tent City

Characters

Catherine/Katie	Sales Executive	40
Margaret/Meg	Attorney at Law	34

Lights come up slowly. There are four benches arranged lengthwise. A clock with a second hand is centre back wall, big enough to be seen by audience. Sound effect of clock ticking. There is a speaker just below the clock and a flush toilet upstage right against the back wall. The beam of a search light crosses and re-crosses the ceiling behind the stage.

SPEAKER FEMALE VOICE

Catherine Pollard. Take your blanket, pillow and possessions and report to the security office.

There is a pause of 20 seconds. The sound of a key turning in a lock and a heavy metal door opening. Katie enters looking back at the door which clangs shut and is locked. She is wearing a pair of shorts under her slacks and a nondescript top. She is very disheveled and looks like she hasn't slept in a week. She stares at the clock and sighs deeply. She goes to the front bench downstage right and sits facing the audience holding her head and sighs deeply again and shivers closing her eyes. Lights fade. Sound of clock ticking. Searchlight goes across backstage. Lights up. Katie has moved to upstage right bench. She wants to cry but suppresses it. Her shoulders and chest heave with the effort. She continues to breathe heavily. The lights fade. Lights up. Katie has moved to upstage left bench.

SPEAKER FEMALE VOICE

Margaret Landers. Take your blanket, pillow and possessions and report to the security office

Katie rises , goes up to the clock, stares at it, looks at the door and gets on her tip toes as if she is looking through a window in the door.

She walks a few steps away from the door. Sound of key in the lock turning, door opens. Meg enters dressed in slacks and track suit top.

KATIE

Meg! Shouldn't you be going to work?

MEG

I was getting ready to go when they called me to the desk. I must be getting out.

(Pause)

KATIE

They called me two hours ago. I thought I would be out by now. I'll have to phone my husband to pick me up or get a taxi.

MEG

Don't worry. I've got my car. I'll give you a ride. If we ever get out.

KATIE

Thanks. He'd have to get off work.

MEG

(glances at the clock)

I'm going to be late. Damn them. More lies.

KATIE

Oh, remind me to give you the shorts you brought in for me.

MEG

I'm sorry Kate. I forgot you've been in here five days without getting out on work leave.

KATIE

It feels like five months.

(She starts to take off the sweat pants and reveals bright colored shorts.)

MEG

Just keep the shorts. A souvenir. Of course they'll keep us waiting. Just to piss us off. Fucking bastards.

KATIE

At least we're out of Tent City.
(Pause)

MEG

What did you do with your stuff? Your prized peanut butter?

KATIE

I gave it all to the black girl in the bunk below me..the one that never talked. I also gave her the stash of quarters you smuggled in. Thanks again.

MEG

You're welcome. I just left my stuff in the locker.

KATIE

If you and the girls hadn't brought me the clothes and the quarters I would have ended up with the druggies.

MEG

Oh yeah that sounded like fun. That poor woman who was put in there by mistake in a white linen suit and high heels. For a DUI What did you do in Tent city? Got high and had sex with a tattooed female gorilla....

KATIE

I bet those women are hard. You would have to be to survive in this place. Someone told me they called our part of tent city, the Hilton.

MEG

The first circle of Hell. All I can say in their favor is that defending them feeds my family.

KATIE

I don't know what I would have done without your advice .. avoiding the guard that first day and telling me to keep quiet....

MEG

You're welcome. You got well and truly screwed by your lawyer.

KATIE

Yea, to the tune of \$5,000. When my husband phoned him to ask why he didn't request work leave, he said I hadn't asked him.

MEG

Probably an ex cop?

KATIE

Yea. How did you know?

MEG

They're the worst...they learned most of their law from tthe NRA and the TV..they're there to put the bad guys away which means everyone. God it's hot in here and I'm thirsty.

KATIE

Sorry! I threw away that powdered stuff they brought in earlier. It was making me sick.

MEG

The blue stuff?

KATIE

I think it's packed with salt and sugar to make sure you don't pass out from the heat.

MEG

You know when we get out we ought to publish a guide or do a blog. "How to survive and stay alive in Tent city."

KATIE

What a great idea.

MEG

Of course, the problem is someone might find out we'd been in here. I can just hear the intake of breath if the partners at my law firm realized where I had been.

KATIE

Won't they know?

MEG

My friend, the one I was in the car with when I was arrested, is a Judge and will get it buried. Thank God. He offered to get the charges dropped but I.... Well... I didn't want to owe him ...

KATIE

Somebody ought to let the world know what goes on in here and what the Sheriff is doing.

MEG

They don't want to know. He's a celebrity. Him and his pink underwear. Sheriff Humiliation. Give him someone to victimize and he'll think up something. Thank God he isn't working for the Third Reich. He would probably call the Gas Chambers an expensive luxury.

KATIE

But it's not right.

MEG

Nobody wants to know. This is Arizona. People figure it's your fault, you had it coming. Look at the number of cop cars hiding around the bars. We were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

KATIE

Do you think its true his brother has the concession on the vending machines?

MEG

The ones that only work half the time? Probably.

KATIE

I must have put six dollars in there and I got two packets of crackers.

MEG

(sarcastically)

Unfortunately, you can't prove anything. Like I told you, when you are in jail, you lose all your rights.

KATIE

Yesterday they told us we could line up to go to the kiosk and we waited for an hour before they announced that because someone had smoked in the tent last night we were not going to be allowed to go. I was so hungry!!

MEG

Just another way of letting you know who's in charge.

KATIE

Oh and I forgot to tell you. Yesterday you know we had visitors... the "do-gooders" ... suddenly the food was edible and the bologne was a lighter shade of green. I must have lost five pounds this week. See, I'm trying to convince myself there was something good in all this. Is it hot in here or it is me?

MEG

It's not so bad when they open the door and we get a little breeze from their A.C.

KATIE

I'll see if I can get them to open it.

Goes to the door, bangs on it.

Would you open the door? Hello! We need some air. We're suffocating. Hello!

Returns

I don't think they can hear us. That door is pretty thick.

MEG

They don't want to hear us. Remember, it took four of us pounding on it when we arrived for them to open it. And there were twenty of us in here.

KATIE

Yeah... God that was awful. Remember that drug addict being sick on the floor and then in the toilet.

MEG

I think they put her in here on purpose.

KATIE

Why?

MEG

A little warning.... Here's what you get if you get a DUI and here's what happens when you do drugs.

KATIE

Oh, come on.

MEG

I wouldn't put it past them to put a mass murderer in here. The aim is to make you hesitate every time you get in a car and you're over the limit.

KATIE

The smell, the toilet going, the embarrassment. At least we got the guard to open the door when we told him about the diabetic.

MEG

They were probably worried they had packed too many in here and that girl was getting really pale... the one who didn't have her medication. They were probably afraid of the headlines... "DUI prisoner dies in Tent city holding cell because they took her meds."

KATIE

She looked like she was going to pass out.

MEG

Yea. And besides her and the drug addict writhing on the floor we had the girl who had to have a shit in front of us... I had to get out.

KATIE

The guard seemed decent.

MEG

He was. Remember? He let us sit out there. It always amazes me.

KATIE

What?

MEG

Well you look at people like guards and you know.. You know if they have any feelings whatsoever or if they just want to see you suffer. He was just trying to do his job and he treated us like human beings. They are trained to stare past you as if you're an alien. For most of them it's a chance to push someone around.

KATIE

It's like you've landed on another planet
(Lock in key turn. Door offstage opens)

MEG

(Goes to the door)
Excuse me. We need water. Could you leave the door open. It's hot in here.
(MORE)

MEG (cont'd)

(Door is slammed and key turned)

Bastard. It's the day shift. They know I am a lawyer so they're just trying to intimidate me.

KATIE

Do you know that I started crying last night when the news came on? I couldn't figure out why. Maybe it was just seeing the real world rather than some sort of week long nightmare. It made me feel like there was a whole world out there that I would never be part of again. Did you ever sleep?

MEG

Dozed off and on.

KATIE

It doesn't help with the lights and the loudspeaker waking you up every fifteen minutes. Remember that night it rained and we had to stop the tent from falling down? I never slept at all. And those guys shouting obscenities from their prison cells every time we passed the bathrooms. I felt I was drowning in this great pool of slime, being sucked under ...sinking... the stink of the burning animals from the incinerator across the street and the thought of home which I kept pushing aside, a toilet that didn't smell, a warm shower, clean water, a door you could walk through, my husband. My dog.

DIRECTOR

Comes out of the audience

I'm sorry but I've got to stop you. Look. The shorts open tomorrow. This is our final rehearsal. Jean.. you're supposed to be upset. This is the trigger moment. You've had five days in this place. You're hot you're thirsty and you're pissed off. We're not doing a production of Chicago. This is meant to be serious. Take it again from "Do you know...."

KATIE

I'm trying to be upset. It's difficult. I don't feel a lot of sympathy for these characters.

DIRECTOR

Imagine you're there in Tent City . Locked in this room. They're victims of the system.

KATIE

They're victims of themselves.

DIRECTOR

Your job is to be the character Jean. It's called acting. And don't forget the bit about your nose being up against the canvas when it rained.

KATIE

O.K.

(she composes herself)

Do you know that I started crying last night when the news came on? I couldn't figure out why. Maybe it was just seeing the real world rather than some sort of week long nightmare. It made me feel like there was a whole world out there that I would never be part of again. Did you ever sleep?

MEG

Dozed off and on.

KATIE

It doesn't help with the lights and the loudspeaker waking you up every fifteen minutes. Remember that night it rained and we had to stop the tent from falling down? My face was two inches away from the canvas. I never slept at all. And those guys shouting obscenities from their prison cells every time we passed the bathrooms. I felt I was drowning in this great pool of slime, being sucked under ...sinking...

(MORE)

KATIE (cont'd)

the stink of the burning animals from the incinerator across the street and the thought of home which I kept pushing aside, a toilet that didn't smell, a warm shower, clean water, a door you could walk through, my husband. My dog.

MEG

What happened to the tent city cat?

KATIE

The little kitten?

MEG

Yes.

KATIE

It disappeared. Someone said the Sheriff had it killed.

MEG

I saw him once downtown. He looked so miserable. He had a gold tie pin in the shape of a handgun. A little man begging to be noticed. Full of himself.

KATIE

Will we even get out of here? I think I've died and gone to hell. (looks at clock)

MEG

Hey... cheer up. We'll get out and next week we will have a night on the town WITH a designated driver.

KATIE

You're right. That's what we're going to do. And I am going to fight this system. They can't do this people. It's retribution. It's revenge. I drank a couple of those small bottles of wine at a staff get together and was taking Zyban. I felt odd so I was being really careful.

(MORE)

KATIE (cont'd)

The cop stopped me because I was doing 20 miles and hour through a green light.

MEG

Cops who don't make arrests don't get promoted. They have to have their quota.

KATIE

I didn't have a wreck, hurt or kill anybody. I made a mistake. In any other country and many states for that matter you'd get a fine and a warning instead of five days in this hell hole enduring the heat and the mosquitoes. Thanks to you I avoided wearing a prison suit while trying to survive in the druggie section with the real criminals. On top of which I had to pay some stupid lawyer that I found in the yellow pages \$5000 for the privilege. Diana Ross only spent one evening in a NY police station. She probably gave them a concert and she was way over the legal limit.

MEG

We'll be out soon. Then it will be a bad memory and you can forget it ever happened.

KATIE

HI don't know, Every time I think about the last two months, I get so upset! My lawyer contacts me and tells me my case has been dismissed because there was something wrong with the police breathalyzers and then phones me the next week to tell me that it didn't apply to my case so I still had to go to court.

MEG

Well you did.....

KATIE

No. I know I did something wrong... okay... I made a mistake but shouldn't the punishment fit the crime" or is that out of fashion?

(MORE)

KATIE (cont'd)

I couldn't believe it when our poor diabetic was put in our tent. Do you know what she was in for? She was as high as a kite, way over the legal limit, jumped on a police car, yelling fuck this and fuck that, tried to hit a police officer and she gets work leave and only five days.

MEG

The law is not always fair.

KATIE

Do I have a record... no! Am I a law abiding citizen? Yes. Do I pay my taxes? Yes. Do I work hard? Yes. I'm an American. This is NOT Russia. This is not the gulag. We treat people with decency. We show respect to the individual. This is the law. I have let these fuckers and that fucking lawyer walk all over me...

MEG

Hey take it easy.

KATIE

Oh, and the report the officer wrote on my mental and physical state when he arrested me, the charge sheet? It looked like a little kid's writing, it was full of mistakes. And then he starts flirting with me! Unbelievable!!

MEG

Calm down. We're going to out of here soon. They'll bring us some water.

(Goes to door again and knocks)

Hey. We could do with some air in here.

KATIE

It's not right. They can't do this to people. I made a mistake. I just made a mistake. I was being so careful.

MEG

Come on. We'll get together and laugh about all this. Lesson learned. Right?

KATIE

We should be ashamed of Tent City. It reflects society's indifference, our cruelty. The crueller we are to people the more we fill our prisons. We have two million people in prison, a university of humiliation.

MEG

You're right but what's the alternative. Free for all? No consequences for your actions?

KATIE

I don't know. But this is not it.

MEG

Okay. Let's write letters to the press. Maybe a book or something. "Five Days in Tent City - the Real Story." We could publish that along with your survival guide.

KATIE

When I got home that night, after being arrested.... it must have been two o'clock in the morning. I couldn't tell my husband. I just sat there crying. I told him something terrible had happened but I couldn't tell him. Of course the idiot thought immediately I'd been having an affair. He was so relieved when I told him it was only a DUI. He never once criticized me. He just held me while I cried. He kept saying, "It's OK... nobody was hurt. Nobody was hurt. We were lucky." When I phoned him yesterday I told him I would never drink and drive again.

MEG

Hey, my husband got crazy because I wouldn't let the judge bury the case. Actually he was mad because he had to babysit the kids each night while I was at the Hilton. I still can't believe I turned the wrong way on a one way street in front of Bank One Ballpark. And...the game was lousy.

KATIE

We've got to do something about this.

MEG

We will.

KATIE

Seriously.

MEG

I know. I wrote down the names and addresses of the five of us. Lauren the bank exec.. Sophie the housewife, you, me oh and Charlotte the realtor. They are on my computer. We'll have a night out together and write up a plan of action.

KATIE

That was the good part of all this?

MEG

What?

KATIE

The support, smuggling clothes in for me, and quarters. Having a stash of food. People under stress coming together... it was like one of those WW2 prison camp movies. I felt I had support and friends who hardly knew me but cared. The conversations were honest. There was no hiding.

MEG

I couldn't have put it better myself. You should have been a trial lawyer.

KATIE

We'll fight this, won't we?

MEG

Of course. Let battle commence.

KATIE

I hope so.

(SX key in door, turns, sound of door opening)

MEG

Awake oh heart for the dawn rises and the soul
rushes forth to seek its endless day.

KATIE

What's that?

MEG

Something my mother always used to quote.

KATIE

Cool air. That feels good.

MEG

Looks as if we've made it.

KATIE

We'll keep in touch?

MEG

You betcha.

KATIE

Thank you.

(She turns and they hug)

MEG

And you know what else she said? Whatever doesn't
kill you

(Kate joins in)

BOTH

Makes you stronger.

KATIE

Hey, let's get our of here. Maybe we can stop
and have a drink to celebrate.

MEG

Not unless it's orange juice. Anything else and you're driving.

KATIE

No way!!

They exit

DIRECTOR

O.K. Ladies. Can we have notes please. Terry what happened to the lights? I want the backstage to be like part of the prison. The lights have got to go backwards and forwards. And you were late with the sound effect for the door. Can you cue that in.

Girls re-enter

Well you know what they say... bad dress good first night. Tell me what's the matter. You were dead up there. There was nothing going on. You've got to look at each other. Where's the chemistry?

KATIE

It doesn't feel realistic. It doesn't ring true.

MEG

I feel the same. They both sound as if they've got axes to grind.

DIRECTOR

I talked to them. They're kinda embarrassed. This was difficult for them. Their livelihoods were at stake. They don't want people to know they've been to prison. Believe me it took me all I could to persuade them to give me the story. One of them, your character Susan says she wants nothing to do with it. Katie says she doesn't mind.

MEG

I'm doing my best.

DIRECTOR

I know you are. I don't want you to go out there and embarrass yourselves. I think you know what was wrong. Try some visualization. Imagine yourself in that prison, in the heat, in a canvas tent and you're stuck there for five days. The administration doesn't know you're there all the time. You're both going to be fine. Katie you dropped that line about the grape jelly for peanut butter. Put that back in. And that line "We've got to do something about this." A lot more emphasis. Sound determined. And Meg can you make that whole thing about your husband a little more ambiguous. I may be wrong but I think Meg and the Judge were... at the ballpark...you know things weren't going too well.otherwise... it's going to be a great little show.