

H O S T A G E

A Play in One Act by

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HOSTAGE

The scene is the kitchen of a small house. A door opens into the back yard of the house, next to a window with drawn curtains.

Jane, a girl of about twenty, dressed in sweater and jeans, sits in a kitchen chair. Her ankles are tied to the front legs of the chair; her hands are tied behind her to the back of the chair.

Katherine, a girl a year or so younger than Jane, leans against the wall of the room, covering the latter with a sub-machine gun. She is dressed identically to Jane, except that she wears a child's "monster" mask on her face.

Both girls speak with upper middle class accents.

Katherine: You don't seem very frightened?

Jane: Well, I am. It would be stupid not to be frightened with that thing pointing at me.

Katherine: You just don't look it.

Jane: If I break down and cry, and beg hysterically, would you let me go?

Katherine: No.

Jane: Then there's no point to it, is there? (pause) Could I have a cigarette?

Katherine shakes her head.

Jane: A glass of water?

Katherine: When the others get back. (Pause) They're making contact with your millionaire father. (Then, aggressively:) He's a momey-grubbing parasite who sucks the blood of the working class.

Jane (matter-of-factly): Of course he is. Otherwise he wouldn't be a millionaire.

Katherine: He won't be quite so rich when he's paid our ransom.

Jane: I'm afraid you haven't done your homework.

Katherine: What do you mean?

Jane: He won't pay a penny for me. You should have nicked his Jag.

Katherine (confidently): He'll pay up if he gets your finger in the post. They always do.

Jane shakes her head slowly.

Katherine: You think we wouldn't cut off your fingers?

Jane: Oh, I don't know; I don't know you. But I know my father. And he wouldn't pay. (Then, bitterly:) On principle, of course!

Katherine: On principle?

Jane: He would say it was the principle of refusing to be pressured by criminals. (Pause) People don't get rich by being soft, you know.

Katherine: I take it you don't like your father?

Jane hesitates.

Jane: No, I don't like him. He was a pig to my mother. You know I don't live at home. I haven't lived at home since I was seventeen, when mother died. (Pause) No, I don't like him. And

he certainly won't pay any ransom for me. How much are you demanding, anyhow?

Katherine: Fifty thousand.

Jane: Not a hope.

Katherine shrugs slightly.

Katherine: Well, we'll have to see, won't we.

She pulls back the curtain slightly to look out of the window.

Jane (mischievously): Getting worried?

Katherine: No; the traffic's bad at this time of day. They went south of the river to telephone, as a precaution.

She lets the curtain fall back, and turns again to cover Jane with the gun.

Jane: I wish you wouldn't point that thing at me. After all, I am tied up.

Katherine: Don't worry; it won't go off unless I want it to. We've no intention of hurting you if you do as you're told.

Jane (sarcastically): Of course! What's a few fingers, anyhow?

Katherine: I'll untie you when the others get back.

Jane: If they get back. Maybe they've run off with the fifty thousand pounds!

Katherine (confidently): Not them! In any case, I thought you said your father wouldn't pay?

Jane: That's true. (Pause) What were you intending to do with the money? Six months in the Bahamas?

Katherine: It's not for us. It's for the revolution.

Jane (surprised): Oh! And what revolution is that?

Katherine: The proletarian revolution. We're not criminals. You're in the hands of the Red Brigade.

Jane: You work in a factory?

Katherine: No; I'm a full-time revolutionary. I joined the Red Brigade at university.

Jane (delightedly): Actually, you're not proletarian at all, are you? You're a petty-bourgeois student!

Katherine (irritably): You can't help what class you were born into. What matters is whether you embrace the cause of the working class.

Jane (sarcastically): I hope the working class are duly grateful for your embraces.

Katherine (shaking her gun slightly): You're not in any position to sneer.

Jane: I wasn't sneering. I just can't see how kidnapping me helps the working class!

Katherine: Only armed struggle can liberate the working class. We shall use your ransom to buy arms.

Jane: To be used against who?

Katherine: Against whom.

Jane: Sorry; I never went to university. Only Holland Park Comprehensive. Against whom are the arms to be used?

Katherine: Against the bourgeoisie and their state. Against your father and all those like him.

Jane: But how do you intend . . . ?

Katherine (interrupting): Look! My job is to guard you, not make conversation.

Jane: But I'm interested, really! Surely you want to convince people of the justice of your cause? (Then, flippantly:) After all, I might be converted, like Patty Hearst, and help you rob a bank.

Katherine: Oh, shut up!

Jane: You think because my father is . . . what he is, that we must be on opposite sides. (Katherine laughs in disbelief) You think only the poor, and the homeless, and the unemployed, can see how rotten the system is we live under? But they can't tell me anything about capitalism. I've seen it from inside, from the top. When I was ten years old I watched my father shaking hands with someone over a whiskey-and-soda, and putting fifty thousand men on the scrap-heap. But my father didn't invent capitalism; it was capitalism that made him what he is. After all, the poor have fathers; I had a cold financial computer instead of a father. And yet -- if he'd been born into a socialist society, he might well have been a warm, unselfish, efficient Commissar.

Katherine: You talk well!

Jane: After all, you're not poor. It wasn't poverty that turned you into a terrorist.

Katherine (indignantly): We're not terrorists! We're Marxist revolutionaries.

Jane (with apparent surprise): Oh! (pause) I tried to read "Capital" once, but I couldn't get beyond Volume One. I suppose you know it well?

Katherine: Know what?

Jane: Marx's "Capital".

Katherine: We're not armchair theoreticians; we're practical Marxists. We base ourselves on the essence of Marxism -- that the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state have to be smashed by revolutionary violence.

Jane: I thought Marx saw the working class as doing the smashing.

Katherine: So he did. But someone has to make a start.

Jane: That's what you . . . the Red Brigade, is doing?

Katherine: That's right. We've already liquidated three capitalists and a judge this year.

Jane (doubtfully): Um!

Katherine: You don't believe me? You've got to remember that the press and the BBC don't want the working class to know the truth.

Jane: Oh, I've no reason not to believe you. I was just thinking -- there must be half a million capitalists, big and little, in Britain. At that rate it would take -- if my arithmetic is right -- over a hundred thousand years just to wipe out one generation of capitalists.

Katherine looks at Jane, then puts down the sub-machine gun, leaning it against the wall.

Katherine: We're only beginning. As the revolutionary movement grows, so will its activity. As Chairman Mao said: "A single spark can start a prairie fire".

Jane screws up her eyes doubtfully.

Jane: I just can't see it happening that way. For every politician you manage to . . . to liquidate, there must be a dozen waiting to take his place. You know the anarchist song:

We bumped off Margaret Thatcher
With a shot between the teeth;
Now things are worse than ever:
They've replaced her with Sir Keith!

(Pause) In fact, if you managed to bump off Thatcher, Ted Heath might send you a donation!

Katherine (scornfully): Funny!

Jane: You see, you talk about Marx and revolutionary violence. But from what I've read, Marx rejected acts of individual violence as counter-productive. He saw the working class as the revolutionary force.

Katherine: That's true. But the working class has been brain-washed and corrupted. Before it is capable of rising, it needs to be fired -- inspired -- purified by revolutionary acts like those of the Red Brigade.

Jane pauses to think.

Jane: To me, that just sounds like arrogant contempt for the working class. In any case, when Airey Neave was blown up . . .

Katherine (interrupting quickly): That wasn't us.

Jane: OK. But when Airey Neave was killed, I didn't see the working class being fired with enthusiasm for the cause of Irish freedom. Most workers seemed to feel much more sympathy for Neave's family and party than for the IRA. In fact, all the evidence goes to show that many of them reacted by responding to the call for "law and order" and voted in the Tories on that basis.

Katherine: I don't think that's true.

Jane: Isn't it? I suggest that acts of terrorism . . . (Katherine makes to object to the term) . . . all right, acts of individual violence like bombings and assassinations help to soften up public opinion for the suppression of civil liberties in the name of "law and order" and "security". In other words, whatever your motives, you help to bring about the repression of the working class. Surely that's why the secret police in most countries have their own terrorist squads -- all ready to provide a pretext for repression where real terrorists aren't active enough! (Pause) And then, as security round the VIPs gets tighter and tighter, you have to resort to throwing bombs into working class pubs!

Katherine is silent for a moment.

Katherine: When the others get back, I'll get them to explain it to you.

Jane (genuinely taken aback): Oh! It's like that in the Red Brigade, is it? The men do the thinking, and your job is to love, honour and obey.

Katherine (indignantly): No, it isn't. But they've been in the movement much longer than . . .

She is interrupted by the sound of a loud-hailer.

Loud-hailer: This is the police. We have the house surrounded on all sides by armed men. We will wait for you to walk out slowly with your hands raised above your head.

Katherine has quickly picked up the sub-machine gun, gone to the window, pulled back the curtain and looked out.

Katherine (shouting): I have a hostage here. If you try to enter the house, I shall kill her.

Loud-hailer: We've all the time in the world. I suggest you come out quietly, then no one will get hurt.

Jane: Your friends have been caught and given you away.

Katherine: No. They wouldn't grass even if they had been caught.

Jane: How else would they know where you'd got me stashed away?

Katherine lets the curtain fall back in place, goes to Jane, searches her pockets and removed a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. She opens the packet of cigarettes, removes its contents and drops the cigarettes one by one on the floor. She examines the packet and then the lighter. She hurls the latter into the corner of the room, and then slaps Jane hard across the face.

Katherine (angrily): You bitch!

Jane: Yes, it was me, I'm afraid. Once you press the knob it gives out a continuous radio signal until the battery runs out. It's an anti-kidnapping device. My father insisted that I carry it. You shouldn't underestimate capitalists. Whatever they are, they're not fools.

Katherine: So all that stuff you were giving me about "I'm on your side" . . . You were just taking the mickey out of me!

Jane: Well, well! I never expected to hear a revolutionary using such an anti-Irish chauvinist expression as "taking the mickey"! (Then, seriously:) No, I meant what I said.

Katherine: I've a good mind to shoot you anyway.

Jane: That wouldn't be very sensible, though, would it? You wouldn't have a hostage.

Loud-hailer: Is there anything we can send in to you?

Katherine goes back to the window again, pulls back the curtain and shouts out.

Katherine: I take nothing from pigs!

Jane: Wouldn't it be sensible to give in. They're not going to let you get away. I'll say you treated me well.

Katherine shakes her head.

Jane: They can just sit there for days, weeks, till you fall asleep.

Katherine: No. I can use you to get away. It's been done before.

Jane: They may kid you. But if you try to get away, they'll have sharpshooters waiting to kill you. Why die for nothing? Why not live to fight another day?

Katherine: I'll keep you covered with this till I'm away. If

I die, so do you!

There is silence for a moment, and then Jane begins to laugh.

Katherine (sharply): You think that's funny!

Jane (still laughing): Yes, I do. You see, you kidnapped me to try and screw fifty thousand pounds out of my father. Right?

Katherine: So?

Jane: But my father has my life insured for fifty thousand pounds, with himself as beneficiary. So if you shoot me . . .

A flicker of a smile crosses Katherine's face. She continues to point the gun at Jane thoughtfully for a moment. Then she puts it down, leaning it against the wall, takes out a penknife and cuts the ropes that bind Jane's hands and feet. She takes off her mask.

She goes to the door and opens it, then turns back to Jane.

Katherine: I'm sorry I hit you.

Jane: That's OK.

Katherine (shouting through door): I'm coming out!

She raises her hands above her head and walks slowly out of the door.

Jane stamps her legs and shakes her wrists to bring back the circulation. then walks towards the door. As she does so, she sees the sub-machine gun leaning against the wall. She picks it up, together with the penknife which Katherine has dropped on the floor nearby. Quickly she prises up a loose floor-board, puts the gun underneath it, and replaces the board.

She is walking towards the door, as

BLACKOUT