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# The Private Room

A One Act Drama by  
**Dan Haughey**

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# The Private Room

by Dan Haughey

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**2W / 1M**

JONATHAN (JON) SMITH; *a youthful 40-44 year-old, attractive Harvard guy, solid but starchy, an exacting corporate man; President of a small business college called Green Stedman.*

MELANIE “MEL” MCHENRY; *young 25-year-old, rather plain-looking, but possessing strength and beauty of her own; she is smart, truthful, sometimes a little edgy; a new English teacher at Green Stedman College.*

AMBER JACOBS; *in her early 20’s, single parent, hard-working Green Stedman student; she is prone to seizures.*

## **SETTING**

*Green Stedman College located in a Midwestern metro city.  
It is Friday night, early February, during a sub-zero winter storm.  
Due to the terrible blizzard, the only building on campus has been placed on lock down.*

## The Private Room

by Dan Haughey

### SETTING:

*February, inside a dimly-lit wide, institutional-looking hallway, of a brand new, small business college called Green Steadman College. The hallway gently tapers or funnels back toward U. C., but the hallway itself is wide enough you could drive a small car and a large bus down the center of it, side by side, and still have room for hall pedestrians to walk along the edges. The walls are empty, bland, no windows, no decorations, no clocks; nothing but a dull color of off-white paint covers them. There is a somewhat broad pool of light S.L., vaguely focusing on an institutional but modern bench up against the S. L. wall. We see at far U. R., what appears to be a “left-turn” in the hallway path, extending and vanishing into a perpendicular hall that leads off U.R., to another area of the building. U. C. is an institutional windowless door, with a plain 8 ½ X 11” white sign, in black bold, Courier font, that reads PRIVATE ROOM. The door appears to be a locked interior door, leading to nowhere special. The hallway seems bleak. A fierce winter storm has forced a lock-down of the building. Occasional blizzard or wind SFX may provide an up and down undercurrent of present, eerie, foreboding weather.*

### AT RISE:

*A young woman sitting, shivering, wearing professional educator attire, but only a sweater over it. She is MELANIE (MEL) MCHENRY. At far D. R. of that, there is a man, in a nice, dark, business suit, wearing a white shirt and green tie. He is pacing up and down, rubbing his hands, shivering. He is JONATHAN (JON) SMITH, President of the college. JON looks at his watch. He is quite agitated and speaks to himself.*

JON

It’s almost mid-night. My call to the fire department was six hours ago. What’s goin’ on?

MEL

I'm freezing. This is ridiculous. I can't even think.

JON

Hang in there, Ms. McHenry. Someone from Corporate will unlock the doors and rescue us.

MEL

It's Melanie.

JON

You know I can't break protocol. These are college guidelines. I'm sorry.

MEL

*(Pause)*

I'm hungry. Of all days to skip lunch. During a damn snowmagedden!

JON

What?

MEL

Snowmagedden. A damn blizzard. That's what my English students were calling it at three-thirty. That's when I should have gone home.

JON

Think warm and lean thoughts. No one knew it would get this bad.

MEL

I'm thinking absurd thoughts. Locked in a hallway. No way out. You're the President, for Christ sake.

JON

Look, I'm not the President of the world. Help will come. There will be a way. Time is on our side.

MEL

Let's go over this again. I'm sure we missed something. Is your cell-phone working yet?

JON

I told you .... When my call to the station dropped, the battery crashed.

MEL

Can't someone call you and give it a charge of techno-juice or something?

JON

It doesn't work that way. It's dead.

MEL and JON, *Overlapping*

MEL

So. We're getting ready to leave at five, everything has been shut down... state-of-the art business college. Pop, slap, bang. Lights off, all doors shut, doors lock themselves. We're stuck. I don't get it. Jon—may I call you Jon?—this sucks. Everything...and everyone.

JON

Technology's great...when it works? Remember, I've asked you ladies to avoid after-hours. I told you... the redundancies weren't encoded. Without the codes, all electric, heat... it's all shut down during an outage. The building secures itself.

MEL

*(Pause)*

I have a low tolerance for the cold. My butt's freezing!

JON

Professor McHenry, as I said, this will never happen again. The security contractor and our I. T. Department will be all over it come Monday. You'll see.

MEL

Oh, my god! Who can you rely on?

JON

Professor McHenry...

MEL

It's Melanie. We were way beyond formalities three hours ago. I think we're officially called hostage now. And where is Security anyway?

JON

Melanie, calm down. *(Pause)* I sent them home when I announced the all-campus closing at four-thirty. My mistake.

MEL

All campus? We're only one building. Wouldn't the police...somebody have checked on us by now. Could someone else be in the building?

JON

I checked that before five. You were screaming for two hours after that. No one else. The whole town's shut down. Paralyzed. No one's even close to this place.

MEL

We have to figure something out.

JON

It's more snow than the municipal systems can handle. The weather services never saw it coming.

MEL

Some police force.

JON

Look. The building's been dark. They had no way to know you or I were heading out. I'm just glad I stayed to check things.

MEL

Really? *(Pause)* Someone must see a car in the parking lot or something.

JON

You take the bus. Mine's in the shop. Look. It could be a long night. Let's just avoid the stress.

MEL

*(Beat)*

It must be sub-zero outside. It feels like ten degrees and falling in here.

JON

No. It's gotta stay above freezing. There's too much carpet in this building...too much insulation. The building will hold some heat for us. Relax.

MEL

This building is sterile. I'm trying to relax. Good god. Of all days to forget my cell phone.

JON

Teacher appreciation day?

MEL

Cute. *(Thinking)* I thought college buildings had fire alarms. The Community College had one in every hallway. This place is too private.

JON

*(Pointing out the U. S. R. hallway)*

Bad luck. There's an alarm down this other hall, on the other side of the door. It's around the corner, only ten yards away.

MEL

Sure it's not nine yards...maybe seven...?

JON

It's ten. *(Changing topic)* May I ask.... What do ya do for fun?

MEL  
What?

JON  
For fun. Relaxation.

MEL  
Really? Okay. Taekwondo and cooking.

JON  
A strange mix.

MEL  
That's me.

JON  
Martial arts. What level?

MEL  
Class for three years. Blue belt. *(Changing topic)* My turn. *(Pause; looking at U. C. door)*  
What's behind that door?

JON  
I told you. An empty room.

MEL  
There's gotta be something. Maybe a window. We could break out. You can at least try.

JON  
No. I told you. It's a corporate designated Private Room. It stays that way until further notice. No window in the master plan. No purpose.

MEL  
In all due respect, Jon. And I really do hold you in esteem because you will do anything for your teachers. But would you please unlock it?

JON  
I can't.

MEL  
We may be sleeping in here tonight, and I would prefer a little space. *(Pointing to Private Room)* Or maybe a maintenance worker left his granola bar in a corner.... Come on....

JON  
I told you I'm not at liberty to use the key...which I don't have on me anyway.... And it's against the Service Center rules. It stays locked at all costs.

MEL

Then be a man and just kick it in, damn it! I lost my patience two hours ago. If you don't do it, I will!

JON

*(Laughing)*

Are you kidding? It may look soft, but it's reinforced steel. A tank wouldn't touch it!

MEL

*(At the door, pounding on it and screaming)*

Help. Help! Somebody! Open a door! Any door! This damn door! Please. President Smith is in here. We're both in here. *(Pounding)* Help. Don't let us die in here. Help, please!

JON

Melanie, don't waste your energy. That's a room with a desk and a chair. Calm down. It's no good. Corporate will get us. Sooner, than later. Get a grip.

MEL

*(Defeated)*

You won't break it down?

JON

It's against the college guidelines. Service Center rules. *(Sitting at the base of S. R., back against the wall, facing MEL)* We just have to stay calm and quiet on the chance we may hear some steps in the snow... someone trying to knock on another door...anything.

MEL

*(A pause)*

Alright. I'll freeze. I'll work with you. *(Returns to bench and kicks it)* Damn. *(Pause)* I refuse to cry. *(Moves the bench a little from wall; positions it more open, on angle toward JON)* Even if I have to work through a deep freeze.

JON

This is the biggest, newest business college east of the Mississippi. We will be found. We got to work through this. We solve crises every day. We can do this. We're adults.

MEL

No shit.

JON

Melanie...

MEL

Well, I mean it. I should have stayed at the Community College. I'm sorry, but this corporate education business has always seemed a little over-rated. It's doomed. *(Changing tactic)* What I'm trying to say is, you're a man, and I want out. You know this college like the back of your hand. I want you to fix this. And don't hold back.

JON

Alright. I'll review the options one more time...

*MEL rolls over on the bench and lies in a fetal position, facing away from JON.*

MEL

I'm tired of that. Don't talk to me until you can get us out.

JON

Alright then. I'm sorry. *(Pause)* Let's talk about things some more.

MEL

*(Begrudgingly)*  
What things?

JON

Anything. We were getting along for six hours. We can get along for another six hours.

MEL

What'd you say?

JON and MEL, *Overlapping*

JON  
I didn't mean that. I meant several hours, a few hours.... It won't take...  
...much more time.

MEL  
*(Angry)*  
Shut up!

JON

But we gotta stay awake. We gotta talk.

MEL

Oh, hell, please take me now. I'm good to go. Just get me to a big hot furnace.

JON

Let's talk about the beach. Think warm. Ever been to Miami Beach in June?

MEL

Been to Fort Myers. Does that count?

JON

Perfect. The warm sun. Tropical Breeze....

*SFX: Blizzard in the background.*

MEL

I think I hear a hurricane approaching. I want to go home. I want to be safe.

JON

Come on. Work with me. Tanning oil. Hot sun and... sweat. Basking on the beach....

MEL

I went to Disney World with my family once.

JON

Sure. Tell me about your family. Are you married, Melanie?

MEL

*(Sitting up)*

Mel. Call me Mel. Had you interviewed me for my teaching position – or ever tried to talk to me – you would know, the answer is no. I'm single. *(Showing and wiggling her ring finger without a wedding ring)* You men are so observant. Especially you Doctoral types. *(Pointing to his ring finger)* You have a Doctorate from the Harvard School of Business. So why aren't you married? What's your story?

JON

Yeh. Harvard. Then straight from the stint in the Marines and into Green Stedman. Corporate. Never had time. Been too busy to settle down. Green Stedman is my family. No time for the dating game. I'm dedicated to my students and faculty. I love them. I'm lucky.

MEL

True. *(Pause)* You know, there's a rumor among faculty that you live in this building. I'll bet that Private Room's yours.

JON

That's half-true. Just don't put that room into the rumor mill.

MEL

Well somebody's gotta change your lifestyle. You ought to date somebody.

JON

Forget it.

MEL

*(Coming to life)*

No. Really. What would be your image of a good family? A good woman. Come on. Go with me.

JON

Well.... I suppose... strong core values, equal opportunity for men and women, a view toward diversity, balanced budget, efficient planning and strategic goals, and the husband and wife oversee things mutually, with identical leadership and teaching styles....makes for good kids, I think. Oh, and love, there's gotta be love.

MEL

Nice. You saved yourself with love.

JON

Oh?

MEL

You must be a stand-up guy.

JON

My well-kept secret.

MEL

*(Pause)*

May I be honest?

JON

Shoot.

MEL

Well... and I'm not kidding. Half of the women on campus felt like killing you when you removed that feminist art exhibit from the showcase.

JON

Too much Venus envy.

MEL

Venus.

JON

Venus. Not balanced for Stedman. *(Pause)* And nobody else is gonna save me. I've got my priorities.

MEL

So be it. *(Pause)* As for what I look for in a man, I suppose good looks would be preferred in a man, but truly, Jon – I never thought I'd call you Jon –but truly, the man I want has to make good money, has to be a strong provider like my father, have strong values, have a good sense of humor, be well-respected in the community, know who he is, want to raise a family, spoil me a little, and ...

JON

You don't ask much.

MEL

...and give me my space. But above all, I need a loyal man who will love me.

JON

*(Intrigued)*

Hypothetically. Let's talk hypothetically. I don't argue with the love component, but why all the needy space? Is there an issue? Shouldn't both man and wife have their space needs...uh...fulfilled?

MEL

I'm a liberal soul. I need adventure, travel, the fine arts. I love Hemingway. I love scuba diving. I can be awfully independent. But when ya got me, ya got me.

JON

So you want your cake and eat it too.

MEL

And, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. *(Pause)* Okay. I've been serious with two men, and engaged once. It didn't work. They said I was too much the free-spirited type.

JON

You have always seemed very pleasant to me.

MEL

I'm not a saint. You gotta get to know me. *(Shivering)* God, it's too cold!

JON

Enough!

*Jon joins her at the bench, takes off his coat and sits next to her.*

JON, *Continued*

*(As he wraps her in his coat, and puts his arm around her)*

There. That's all I'm good for.

MEL

Good. You extended my life by another hour. *(Pause; snuggles up to him, both sitting on bench)* This is better. Are you warm enough?

JON

*(Shivering)*

Yes.

MEL

So let's find out more about each other. What did you do in the Marines?

JON

Well, I was a special forces Captain. Mainly I was search and rescue.

MEL

Ironic.

JON

Did a tour in Afghanistan before it became so famous. Special Ops. I retired early as a Captain.

MEL

You're allowed to go on. But tell me what's in that room first. Is it some big secret lab or something?

JON

Drop it. Back to the discussion at hand. I'm from Ohio. I love sports and computers. I'm an only child. Parents still living and content with each other. And fighting a good fight. I'm very competitive. Always fluctuated between private enterprise and education. But I think I have too many extreme highs and lows in my life. Women don't like me.

MEL

Explain.

JON

Well, there's the hard part. During my last tour of duty, I found someone just like me, got married, then divorced in less than a year. She said I lived on the edge way too much.

MEL

I'm sorry.

JON

No regrets. I'm here now and I love it. Green Steadman changes lives. What about you?

MEL

Go Green! Sorry, I've always wanted to say that. What about me? I've always lived in Illinois. Except when I went to College. Did my undergrad and graduate work at Brown.

JON

I see everybody's personnel file and vita. I knew that. Your credentials have no equal. Summa Cum Laude. Published thirteen times. Teacher of the Year. Tell me something that isn't on the résumé.

MEL

Well, I come from a big family near Chicago. I love nature, natural things, literature of course, and I love to be a people watcher. That's my hobby. I've only told one or two of my best friends that. O. M. G. I'm talking too much.

JON

I wish I was a little more like you. I have no time for hobbies.

MEL

I really want children someday. I love children. But it's got to be with the right man. Parenthood is a big responsibility.

JON

I feel the same way. No worries. It will happen for you someday. *(Pause)* You're a beautiful woman.

MEL

No it won't.

*JON snuggles closer, comforting himself in her warmth.*

JON

I don't understand.

MEL

Well my doctor says I have a few problems. It's like this; I can't conceive.

JON

Oh. *(Pause)* Well, you have several other options. You'll make a good mom.

MEL

But it's not easy to find a man who can live with that. Would you? Would you marry someone like me who couldn't give you what you deserve?

JON

Why not?

MEL

Don't you think I'm damaged goods? That's what others said.

JON

Love doesn't see damage. It sees duty and dedication. It sees a lifetime and acceptance.

MEL

That's beautiful. *(Shivers)* Oh, it's too damn cold, I'm still freezing. Hold me.

JON

I think you're special, Mel. Just stay close. We can help each other.

*JON moves closer and holds her tighter. Pause.*

MEL

Help me stay warm, Jon.

*MEL slowly moves her hand to his knee, watching his eyes, transfixed on his expression. He tenderly warms her hand with his.*

JON

I want to... may I... *(Pulls back)* I shouldn't be doing this, I'm a public man.

MEL

Shhh...keep me warm. It's okay, Jon. It's just us here. We have to stay warm, don't we?

*JON, out of fascination and reassurance, carefully and gently strokes her hair in a loving way.*

MEL

Tell me this is really happening. I like what you're doing. It's been a long time. Mmmm....

JON

*(Tenderly but quivering a little)*  
Why did I never notice you before? *(Pause)* I feel safe with you. No pressure. This works.

MEL

I'm loving this. *(Pause; mood change)* But... I'm hungry. I could go for a nice hot pizza right about now. *(Relaxed)* How about you, Love...? I mean, Jon. Did I say, Love? Oh. I should take that back. That must have been Freudian. That's what I used to call my fiancé. I didn't say, Love....

JON

*(Pauses; looks into her eyes)*  
No. You said pizza. *(They both laugh.)* I'm a porter house steak man myself. But go ahead. You name it. What do you want on it? And think big. We can afford it.

MEL

*(Playful at first)*  
Oooh.... You make me feel warm. Double, thick, gooey, cheese. Mushrooms. Black ripe olives...

JON

No spicy onions?

MEL

Maybe on one half but go easy. I want meat. I'm a meat-lover.

JON

Then I'm tasting pepperoni, ground beef, with seasoning. Gotta have a thick crust.... Juicy tomato sauce. And I love the taste of fresh anchovies.

MEL

But let's just go all the way. Thick. Layered. Rich.

*JON Slowly picks up on her cues; he adds a tone of sensuality.*

JON

Steaming hot? Should I add more?

*She responds slowly as if she's overcome because she's so hungry.*

MEL

Like bell pepper. It's alright. Go for the hot stuff.

JON

And you can have sausage.

MEL

Yes, more.

JON

Really? What else?

MEL

I want to explore. Dessert. Surprise me!

JON

I know. Cannolis!

MEL

Oooh...! I can do those. Are there nuts?

JON

That's what I'm talkin' about.

MEL

*(Cuddling up to him)*  
Mmmm..... Succulent cannoli...!

JON

And you like it thick.

MEL

Yes, yes. With white, sweet, thick cannoli cream coming out of long savory shells!

JON

Okay. Share. Make me taste it.

MEL

But my needs... my special ingredients...

JON

Come on...

MEL

You must feel what I feel.... When I do it...

JON

Yes... I'm hungry...

MEL

Okay. I need real ricotta cheese...

JON

Mmmm.

MEL

*(Pausing; breathing deep)*

Oh my god, what a cuisine...! I like a piping bag... a coupler...chocolate chips, powdered sugar, cinnamon... lustful, gushing, sweet, sinful cannolis! Yum!

JON

I can't take it. It is sinful. Maybe we've gone too far...

MEL

*(Cuddling; between shivers and warmth)*

Jon?

JON

Yes?

MEL

One of us could die here; I want you to know something.

JON

*(Clinging to her warmth)*  
Please don't...

MEL

I love your sense of hunger... I mean humor. *(A pause)* I love your warmth. You satisfy me. I want to trust you.

JON

Mel...

MEL

Just let me talk. *(A pause)* I want to add something. *(Pausing again, confessing a genuine feeling)* I feel a connection with you.

*MEL gazes into his eyes, JON is seduced and he oddly likes it. He is surprised. Yet, she begins to kiss him. He begins to respond in-kind, but suddenly there is a flash of lights and sound, as stage lights go to black. Overlapping with the brief flashing hall lights, is a female voice coming from off Right. There is a big sound of a door or doors opening and slamming from off Right as well. The voice belongs to AMBER JACOBS, a young Green Stedman student and single mom. She is very scared and is calling out with random screams of desperation: "Help! Can anyone hear me in there? Oh, my god. Where is everybody? Hello? Hello? I'm comin'. Don't close the door, please!" Then come the sounds of more than one door slamming shut, especially off Right. JON and MEL stand up immediately, astounded. JON rushes to U. R. as AMBER enters wearing a winter jacket, cap, slacks, and carrying a shoulder bag of text books and notebooks.*

AMBER

Oh, my god! I think it shut. Shit! *(Short pause; seeing JON)* Dr. Smith?

JON

Watch out! Are you crazy?

*JON bolts past AMBER, almost bumping into her, as he exits U. S. R. into hidden hall. After a moment, he slowly walks back in, stunned. The lights dim again to emergency mode.*

JON, *Continued*

Something happened. (*Angry; to AMBER*) Young lady, what's your name?

AMBER

Amber Jacobs. I'm a student here. I didn't do nothin'. (*Pause*) But I've seen your picture online.

JON

Ms. Jacobs, I think you just locked the damn hall door. We're all locked in now.

AMBER

No, I swear. (*Breathy*) I was locked-in down the hall, just past that door. Ms. McHenry's my teacher. She knows me. She knows I wouldn't lie about a freak thing like this.

MEL

Jon, be careful. She's one of my English students, and a good one. I think we should take her word for it and just listen. I trust her on it. She didn't gain anything by this.

AMBER

I just don't know what's goin' on. I was stuck down the hall doin' some late homework in room one-fifty-five, peace and quiet. I lost track of time. I worked a double last night. So I went to sleep back in the corner. Didn't bother anything. Don't think anybody knew. And then I hid after all the commotion. But I couldn't get out. And it's freezin' everywhere. I tried to pound and scream for somebody. It's just too weird.

JON

The rooms are sound-proof. Did you hear the doors slam tight? Witness the lights go off?

AMBER

Yes, sir. I did. It's been real spooky... But what happened just now? Why did they open and close like that?

JON

It must have been a temporary power surge. It's odd. Something's going on. And you were only four rooms down. (*Pause*) You are a fast one, Ms. Jacobs.

MEL

(*Carefully approaches AMBER, consoling*)  
It's alright. We're glad you're here. I'm sure Dr. Smith didn't mean anything. Let's stick together and stay warm until help arrives.

JON

I'm sorry, Amber. It's just been a little stressful around here.

AMBER

Has anyone been contacted?

MEL

Dr. Smith thinks he got through to the fire department. But we're not sure. His phone...

AMBER

Whatever. I need help. Can I use your cell? I'm ashamed. But I gotta tell somebody. *(Pause)* I left both my kids at home without a sitter and very little to eat. Between checks. I'm afraid my kids are frozen. They have no family but me. Nowhere to go to. My neighbors don't even know. My daughter was sittin', but she's only six.

JON

Sorry. Our cell phones are either dead or back at home. We'll think of something.

AMBER

I love my kids. I'm gonna die. What's behind that door? Is that a way out?

JON

No. It's a dead room. It's waiting to be filled. It's got nothing for us.

*AMBER, distressed, drops to the bench. She begins to cry and plead.*

AMBER

I love my kids. Ms. McHenry, we've talked you and me. You know how I feel. My kids are my passion!

MEL

Jon, forget you and me. We need to do something. Fast!

JON

We have to make her feel better and wait it out. We're in charge. There's nothing else now.

AMBER

*(Sobbing a little more, pointing to the Private Room)*  
Is there a bathroom in there? I have to go.

MEL

Amber, honey, it's not a bathroom. President Smith, explain...

AMBER

*(Sitting upright)*  
Does anyone have a lighter, some matches? Maybe we could burn our way out....

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**