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The Holding

A One-Act Play By
Dan Weatherer

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The Holding
by Dan Weatherer

APPROXIMATE PLAYING TIME

45 Minutes

CHARACTERS

2W / 1M / 1Either

TONY: *Late Thirties; Scruffy and unkempt. Appears to be paranoid but harbors a sharp mind.*

ANNA: *Early Forties; Homely and naive. Sides with whoever she seems to think is winning the current argument.*

SOPHIA: *Early Twenties; Headstrong and streetwise. Her tongue is almost as sharp as her cunning.*

FACILITY DIRECTOR:
Voice (Either male/female)

SETTING

A cell

SYNOPSIS

Three strangers awake to find themselves locked in a cell together. They are informed that only one of them will be allowed to leave, and are drip fed snippets of one another's past. Tensions mount as the group tries to facilitate a means of escape where everybody gets out alive.

ACT I

Scene 1

Lights up (Halfway): Three figures are laid on the ground. The stage is shrouded in darkness. ANNA (well dressed) is the first to wake. She sits up. She is afraid and disorientated. She begins to grope around in the darkness.

ANNA

(Upset)

Oh...oh...

Her hand brushes against TONY'S (Scruffy and unkempt) foot. He mutters something unintelligible, startling Anna, who retreats into a corner. Tony slowly gets to his feet.

ANNA

(Sobbing)

What's happening? Where am I? Where's David?

TONY

Who's David?

Anna stops sobbing.

ANNA

My husband, I was with him and...

Tony regards Anna for a moment before turning his attention to SOPHIA (Fashionably attired, pretty) who is still unconscious on the floor.

TONY

And now you ain't.

Tony gestures towards their surroundings.

ANNA

Well...where is he? Where am I?

TONY

Where are we don't you mean? I don't see him here, just you, me and this 'un on the floor. As for where we are, your guess is as good as mine.

Tony checks Sophia for a pulse.

ANNA

Is she...

TONY

Dead? No.

ANNA

I wasn't going to say dead! I was going to ask if she's alright!

TONY

I dunno about that. Perhaps you should ask her.

Sophia sits up. Tony backs away to give her space.

SOPHIA

Christ! My head is killing me!

Tony checks his pockets.

TONY

Good morning miss sunshine, I'd offer you an aspirin but as you can see, I'm all out.

Anna stands and approaches Sophia.

ANNA

Are you OK sweetie?

Sophia frantically checks her pockets.

SOPHIA

(Angry)

Ah shit! They took my smokes! Fuckers took my smokes, the hell is up with that?

TONY

I'd say she's about as fine as the rest of us lady.

Sophia begins to pace the stage. Anna watches whilst Tony takes a seat on the floor.

SOPHIA

So, what shit did I do now? Why did I wake up in a place I don't recognize with people I don't know?

TONY

I'm sure it's not the first time.

SOPHIA

(Angry)

The hell is that supposed to mean?

TONY

Nothing as such, you just don't strike me as the type tucked up in bed at nine with a glass of warm milk and a chocolate chip cookie.

SOPHIA

Don't be acting like you know a damn thing about me!
Where'd they drag you in from? A park bench?

TONY

Ha! Say's the real tramp in the room!

Sophia covers her arm.

SOPHIA

You don't know a thing about me!

ANNA

(Nervous)

Please, this isn't getting us anywhere. I don't do well
with conflict.

TONY

She's right. We need to cool it and figure out where we
are.

(To Sophia)

Sorry toots.

(To Anna)

You, what was the last thing that you remember?

ANNA

I-I don't know, one minute I was with David, the
next...

SOPHIA

The next what?

ANNA

I don't know, it's all a blur.

TONY

(Interrupting)

Same here. Reckon we are in some kind government
holding facility or something. Probably ruffled the
wrong feathers somewhere along the way and ended up
here.

SOPHIA

That's a pretty outlandish statement to make - you read
about that whilst hawking copies of the Big Issue?

Tony laughs

ANNA

I haven't done anything wrong...

TONY

(Interrupting)

Ladies, I don't know spit. Just throwing an idea out there, you wanna venture yours? C'mon, lets hear it?

Anna shakes her head and retreats to a corner.

SOPHIA

Last thing I remember is leaving the deli at lunch. Now I'm here with you two. How about you shoot me your names at least?

ANNA

I'm Anna, Anna Caudlow, I'm from Buckinghamshire, I work in...

SOPHIA

OK Anna, I don't need your life story. I'm Sophia Redman. You?

TONY

Tony.

SOPHIA

Tony what?

TONY

Just Tony.

SOPHIA

Ah right, so that's how you wanna play it then? Tony it is.

Tony stands

TONY

I'm not playing anything anyway. I don't know you people and at this point I don't see what good it's gonna make getting to. We gotta figure out where we are. Agreed?

Anna nods.

SOPHIA

(To Tony)

Suppose so. Time wasted talking is time I gotta spend in your company. I'm all for getting outta here.

The lights suddenly switch fully on. The Facility Director begins to speak over a PA.

FACILITY DIRECTOR

(O.S.)

Your reluctance in regards to knowing your cellmates will be your downfall.

SOPHIA

(Angry)

Cellmates? I knew it! Just what the hell is going on? You can't just lock us up for no reason!

TONY

They can hear us.

ANNA

Does that mean they can see us?

SOPHIA

Probably.

Anna begins to sob.

FACILITY DIRECTOR

Who we portray ourselves as to the outside world is not who we are at heart. Three strangers, thrown together, trying to understand a situation that they cannot possibly comprehend. One of you is an aid worker who has given much time and money in order to safeguard the welfare of others. Selfless and dedicated, a latter-day saint, you are traumatized by your experiences. One of you is a swindler and a thief, a master of misdirection with an unrelenting ruthless streak. You have taken much from the vulnerable and given nothing in return. Though you lay blame elsewhere, it is you who smiles as you watch the gullible sign away their savings. One of you has bloodied hands and no matter how many times you wash them, the taint of death remains upon you. At first you killed for necessity, pushed beyond breaking point by a world oblivious to your hardship, you were a product of your suffering. Now you kill for sport. Broken though you are, insane you are not. This is your day of reckoning.

Silence

TONY

And?

FACILITY DIRECTOR

One of you shall leave this place. It is up to you to decide who.

The lights dim to half-light.

ANNA
What? Just one of us? Why? I want to go home! What have I done to deserve this?

TONY
(To Anna)
What indeed?

SOPHIA
And what's that supposed to mean?

TONY
You heard him! You heard who we are amongst!

SOPHIA
Yeah! And what if he is wrong? What if all that is a load of bullshit?

TONY
And what if it ain't?

Tony begins to pace the stage.

ANNA
I've never done anything wrong, I've cared for others all of my life...I shouldn't be here.

TONY
Well, that's a load of B.S already!

ANNA
What? How do you know?

TONY
Look at your fancy clothes and your expensive jewelry! Only one of us is the aid worker and it sure as shit ain't you! You are far too well off to give a shit about anybody else.

ANNA
So just because it appears that I have money that means I couldn't possibly be an aid worker? How insulting! I know my own life! I'm the one who shouldn't be here! I have nothing in common with you two!

TONY
That right?

Anna regards Tony with a look of fear.

ANNA
Yes.

TONY
Care to elaborate?

Anna moves closer to Sophia and further from Tony.

ANNA
Because you two are criminals.

TONY
And you figure Paris Hilton over there is the lesser of two evils?

Anna looks at Sophia

ANNA
(Whispers)
Look Sophie, I don't know what you've done and I don't care.. but I don't trust him...I mean look at the state of him. Look at how he's pacing. He's spent time locked up, I can tell...he's like a caged animal. I think we should be careful?

Sophia looks at Tony, then at Anna.

SOPHIA
You saying I'm the con artist and he's the killer?

ANNA
Con artist sounds so harsh, I'm not labeling you but look at him, look at how hostile he's being? Plus he wouldn't give us his name, that's suspicious right? Maybe he is worried we'd remember it from the newspapers?

TONY
(Assertive)
My names Tony. I already told you.

SOPHIA
Why not give us your full name?

TONY
Would it make a huge difference if I gave it now? Of course not. You'd not believe me even if I did. It changes nothing, not after the seeds of suspicion have been sown by our captors...that's right, our captors! Seems to me they - whoever they are, they are the only ones that we can be one hundred percent sure are guilty of any wrongdoing.

ANNA
But they said...

TONY

Exactly, they said! Are you going to trust the words of your faceless kidnappers on this? It's only their say so! Who are they to label us?

SOPHIA

I'd expect a murderer to say something like that.

TONY

And I'd expect a murderer to pick up on someone saying that and make a point of it. Look, we can deflect accusations as to who we all are till the cows come home but it ain't gonna get us out of here. We need to figure out where we are and who is behind all of this.

ANNA

You're right. Suspicion isn't going to get us anywhere, we will just play right into their hands.

SOPHIA

Any idea who put us here?

TONY

I dunno. Some rich guy with a hard on for fly on the wall drama? A secret government experiment...

SOPHIA

Oh, I've heard it all now! You are one of those conspiracy nuts aren't you! Those sort come undone all the time!

TONY

That's what the governments want you to think, that all those horrible stories of social manipulation and chemical testing are just that! Stories! I'm telling you now, we are caught up in one of those black book studies now...the types that are kept hidden from the public eye.

SOPHIA

Bullshit! We live in a free country! A fucked up country maybe, but shit like that only happens in the movies.

TONY

Does it now? Look around you! Do you think that you did something which warrants putting you into a situation like this? You think you deserve this? Is that what you are saying? Seems to me like you got something to hide!

SOPHIA

Rubbish, you are deflecting onto me! Hiding behind your conspiracy theories to conceal your true nature - sure,

(MORE)

SOPHIA *(cont'd)*

I belong here, if hearing that helps you sleep at night, but you aren't fooling me!

ANNA

What are you saying?

SOPHIA

Isn't it obvious? He's trying to build a reality where he isn't here because he's a murderer! Your mask isn't fooling me.

TONY

I think I'm the only one who isn't wearing a mask in here! I'm not playing up for the cameras or pretending to be someone I'm not. Wouldn't you agree Anna?

ANNA

I-I don't know! I don't know anymore, I want to go home, I want to see my David!

TONY

None of us are going home.

SOPHIA

(Threatening)

Shut up! Yes we are, maybe not you - I know who you are.

TONY

You really think so? Blinded by your captors will already? Tell me, do you even see a way out of this room?

Sophia and Anna look around the room.

TONY

Thought not.

ANNA

We-we have to do what they say, then they will show us the way out. David would say the same.

TONY

You do that.

Anna and Sophia retreat into the corner opposite Tony.

Pause.

The lights flicker onto full beam. A door is heard unlocking and a small box slides into the middle of the room. The door quickly closes and is locked again.

The lights dim to half light again.

Anna and Sophia look at the box and then look to Tony.

TONY

I see the age old assumption of the male taking all of the risk in order to protect the female is alive and well.

ANNA

Surely you can't expect either of us to open it...it could be a bomb!

TONY

If it's a bomb and I trigger it, we'll all feel it. Hiding in the corner of the room won't spare you.

Tony approaches the box and kneels before it. The lid opens towards the audience. Tony looks at the contents.

Pause

SOPHIA

What is it?

Tony stands up and produces a gun from the box

ANNA

(Shocked)

A gun?

TONY

Revolver. Colt 45...quite a nice example too.

SOPHIA

They gave you a gun?

Tony turns towards the girls and opens the gun with practiced ease.

TONY

No, they gave us a gun with two bullets. You starting to get a clearer picture of what's required here?

ANNA

Oh my God! They can't expect us to -

SOPHIA

(Interrupting)

Is there something else?

Tony turns his attention back to the box and crouches alongside it.

Tony sifts through the contents of the box with his free hand.

TONY

A bracelet, several bank statements and a newspaper clipping.

SOPHIA

Let me see!

Sophia pushes past Tony and takes the box to a corner of the room. She produces the bracelet first.

ANNA

What does it all mean?

TONY

(To Sophia -winks)

If I was to take a stab in the dark, I'd say that these relate to us in some way. Sort of like a prop from our past.

SOPHIA

This bracelet is handmade, some kind of leather...looks ethnic to me.

ANNA

That's mine, it was given to me in -

TONY

(Interrupting)

What about the other stuff?

Sophia produces the bank statements.

SOPHIA

Just a load of bank statements for a company called easistair? Lot of money going in...huge sums in fact, nothing going out.

TONY

Any names on there?

SOPHIA

Nope. All blacked out.

TONY

Perhaps the accounts of our con artist...and the newspaper clipping, what's that about?

SOPHIA

Hold on...a lot of it is blacked out...male...found dead in front room...stab wounds to the head and chest. Investigation ongoing. It's dated last week.

Sophia places the items back into the box.

TONY

And there's the prop for our murderer.

ANNA

You don't know that for sure! It's just their word against ours.

TONY

This entire situation is based upon their word against ours. Maybe it's about time we showed one another who we really are?

Tony crosses the room and takes the box from Sophia. He places the gun back into it and lays the box in the middle of the room.

TONY

Anyone wanna lay claim to any of this?

ANNA

I already told you that the bracelet is mine -

TONY

(Interrupting)

Yet I don't believe it is. Let's look at what we have, two bullets, a box of evidence that relates to us all...I knew this is what we were here for!

SOPHIA

How could you possibly know they want one of us to kill the others?

TONY

You heard what the voice said. One of us leaves, we decide who. Only this isn't to be a discussion where we debate self-worth, this is a test of morals, or more to the point, to see if we have any.

ANNA

I-I really shouldn't be here...

TONY

(Interrupting)

None of us should, that's the whole point! We should be standing together, refusing to play this sick game, not actively looking for ways in which to fuck the others over. We should all be looking to get out of here alive!

SOPHIA

That's what you want us to think that you believe.

TONY

I'm getting real tired of your reverse psychology bullshit.

ANNA

You can't think that I'm a criminal?

TONY

(Agitated)

I don't care if you are! The only criminals I know for sure are the ones who put us in here.

SOPHIA

(To Anna)

He's got a point. What does it matter what happened before we wound up here? That's not for us to judge, despite what those fuckers said over the speaker.

TONY

That's right. It's who we are now - the choices that we make in the moment - that's what is important. Are we the sum of our past choices? Labeled and judged without a chance of reprieve? I don't believe so. If that were true nobody could ever change. Perhaps that's what our captors want to see? I don't know. Forget the past, it's who we are in the present that really counts.

ANNA

I-I guess so. How do we get out then?

TONY

I-I don't know yet. We need to take time to think about this, all of this. Forget the gun, that's not an option. Agreed?

Anna nods. Tony turns his attention to Sophia, who is looking at the box.

TONY
Agreed?

Sophia turns towards Tony.

SOPHIA
(Reluctantly)
Agreed.

Tony takes a seat on the floor. Sophia begins to pace the room. Anna takes a seat on the floor.

Lifts out.

Pause.

Lights on half.

Tony is pacing the room. Sophia and Anna are sitting together. Anna is asleep on Sophia's shoulder. Sophia is staring at the box.

Lights out.

Pause.

Lights on half.

Tony and Anna are asleep. Sophia slowly creeps towards the box but is startled by Tony stirring.

Lights out.

Pause.

Lights on half.

Tony is seated away from Anna and Sophia who are sat together. The box remains in the center of the room.

ANNA
David will be wondering where I am. We are supposed to fly out to Niger tomorrow...or today, I don't know how long we've even been in here. The Red Cross will be wondering where I am...I shouldn't be here.

TONY
So you keep saying.

ANNA
I remember one visit. We were in the Sudan. There was a war going on between rival tribes at the time. We were
(MORE)

ANNA *(cont'd)*
called into this village, I forget the name now. When we got there the place was ablaze. Every hut had been set alight, all the crops too. It took us hours to get the blaze under control. The only men left in the village were too sick to help us and the women, they were all in despair. It was only when the fires were out that we noticed the absence of children. I spoke to one of the women. She was inconsolable, I'd never seen anyone so upset before. Apparently, one of the war lords had come to the village that day demanding the children go with him and join his army. When the elders refused, citing that the able bodied men had already surrendered to their cause, they set the village alight and took the children anyway.

SOPHIA
That's awful.

TONY
So what did you do? Colour me curious.

Anna begins to fumble in her pockets.

ANNA
The best we could. What else could we do?

Sophia hugs Anna who begins to break into tears.

TONY
That's a nice story by the way. Those extra touches really help sell it. You don't seem awfully traumatized by it all though?

SOPHIA
Can't you give it a rest?

TONY
Come on now, we all know that story was a pack of lies. I thought we'd agreed to stop trying to play the game?

Anna stops crying and turns towards Tony. Sophia lets Anna go.

ANNA
Wh-what do you mean, of course it wasn't a lie, I'm not playing any game, I'm just telling it how it is!

TONY
So you are trying to tell us that you are an aid worker and you don't belong here because your life is spent doing good for others right?

ANNA
I am an aid worker, yes.

TONY
Seems to me you are trying to convince yourself more than us, why else would you keep banging on about it.

ANNA
What? I should be going to Niger with David tomorrow, I'm offering relief-

TONY
And what of David. Will he go without you do you think? I mean there's always people needing help - where do you think you lie in terms of his priorities?

ANNA
I...he will wait for me. We will go together after all of this.

Tony turns his attention towards Sophia

TONY
(Interrupting)
So, if we are back to playing the game, where do you stand on this then? You buying that bullshit?

Anna turns towards Sophia

ANNA
Sophie, he's starting to scare me.

Sophia looks at Anna then looks at the box. After a short pause, she strolls over to the box and opens it.

SOPHIA
It's not here!

ANNA
Wh-what do you mean? The gun?

Sophia turns towards Tony

SOPHIA
Damn right I mean the gun, where is it you son of a bitch?

Tony takes the gun from his pocket and places it onto the floor next to where he is seated.

TONY

With me. Where it will be safe.

Anna approaches Sophia's side.

SOPHIA

Safe? Safe for who?

TONY

Safe for me.

Tony gestures towards Anna

TONY

Safe for her.

ANNA

(To Sophia)

What does he mean?

TONY

(To Anna)

I saw her going for the gun while we slept. I startled her enough for her to back off. Figured I'd keep it with me. Didn't fancy waking up to a gun being waved in my face. So much for us standing together.

SOPHIA

Liar!

ANNA

(To Sophia)

Why would you go for the gun? I thought we agreed that wasn't an option?

TONY

Because she's a junkie and she's getting desperate. I saw those marks on your arm!

Sophia covers her arms

SOPHIA

I didn't make a play for the gun, he's lying...trying to paint me as dishonest, trying to divert suspicion from himself. I'm a diabetic and I need my insulin, without it I'm going to die!

TONY

Bullshit. Diabetics don't inject into the vein. You are and addict, I should know, I've seen enough of them.

SOPHIA

And how do you know about how diabetics take their meds? Maybe I take mine that way, what the hell has it to do with you?

TONY

I know a lot of things, and you are a junkie liar and can't be trusted. Funny you never mentioned this earlier. Your mask is starting to slip.

ANNA

Her mask?

SOPHIA

Don't listen to him, I have a serious medical condition and I need my medication. It's been hours since my last shot.

TONY

Don't you mean fix?

SOPHIA

(To Anna)

We need to get out of here. You were right, he's gotta be the killer. Look at him with that gun. Did you see how easily he opened that thing earlier?

TONY

Oh, so because I know how to load a pistol that automatically makes me a killer right?

SOPHIA

You seem awfully at ease with it, like it's not the first time you've handled a gun.

TONY

It isn't, but that doesn't make me a killer. I've been around guns. That's all.

SOPHIA

I'm not buying it - I think you should put the gun back in the box before this gets ugly.

Tony picks up the gun, stands, and aims it towards Sophia and Anna.

TONY

I think you should both sit down and shut up.

Sophia moves towards Tony.

SOPHIA

Or else what asshole? You haven't got the stones!

Tony cocks the trigger.

TONY

Sit. Down.

*Anna pulls Sophia back and they sit opposite Tony.
Tony takes a seat and rests the gun on his lap.*

TONY

That's better.

ANNA

(To Sophia)

I knew it was him all along, you can see death in his eyes, trust me.

TONY

Lady, you don't know shit.

SOPHIA

(To Tony)

As I guess you are calling the shots, what now?

TONY

Same as before, we try an' figure out a way outta here.

SOPHIA

Only you are keeping the gun. Sort of shortens our odds of getting out alive a little, don't you think?

TONY

So long as the gun stays with me, we've all got a chance to get out of this alive.

Lights out.

Pause

Lights on half

Tony is pacing the room. Sophia and Anna are sitting together.

Lights out.

Pause

Lights on half

Tony, Anna and Sophia are asleep

Lights out.

Pause.

Lights on half.

Tony is stood with his back to Anna and Sophia who are sat together on the opposite side of the room. Tony is fidgeting with the gun.

SOPHIA

Any ideas yet?

TONY

Shut up - I'm trying to think.

SOPHIA

It's been hours now...

ANNA

Days even - I've missed my flight, David will be so worried. I'm so thirsty...Someone will come for us soon. They have to!

TONY

Really? You think that they will? You think that they know where we are?

ANNA

It's just a matter of -

Tony turns towards Anna and Sophia

TONY

Don't you get it? Nobody is coming because nobody knows we are here!

ANNA

But-

TONY

But nothing. We stay here till we starve or until someone makes a decision. That's the only way.

Sophia stands up. Anna follows.

SOPHIA

Wait...I thought you wanted us all to get out of here together?

TONY

I did...I do, dammit I do! There's no way though, not until we choose! I've seen this sort of thing before -

(MORE)

TONY *(cont'd)*
governments playing with their people. In the end you
have to play by the rules or everybody loses.

ANNA
What are you saying? Are you going along with what they
want?

TONY
I'm sorry - I don't know you. I don't know what you've
done, but I can make up for all this if I get out, I'm
well positioned to help others and I don't believe that
you are.

*Tony raises the gun and fires twice in quick
succession.*

Anna and Sophia scream and react but are not hit.

TONY
(Angry)
Fuck! They gave us blanks! They gave us fucking blanks!

*Tony throws the gun into the middle of the floor
and turns his attention to the ceiling.*

Anna and Sophia are in a state of shock.

TONY
You assholes have your answer! I chose! I made the
fucking call, rightly or wrongly! We played your game
now let us go!

ANNA
(To Sophia)
He-he tried to kill us!

Sophia nods

ANNA
(Shocked)
That maniac actually tried to kill us!

*Anna picks up the gun and holds it by the barrel.
She approaches Tony from behind.*

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

