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Barbed Wire

A 10-Minute Play

by

Ross Peter Nelson

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CHARACTERS

3W

MACHINA: *Female; dressed in gray*

AVIA: *Female; dressed in blue*

FEMME: *Female; dressed in red.*

SETTING

A dream

TIME

Unknown

MASKS

The play requires three masks that are worn by the first two characters. MACHINA wears a mask that is clearly made from barbed wire. It is threatening and dangerous. AVIA wears two masks. The first is a finch mask worn in the prelude; it is brightly colored, even playful. The second, worn in the scene, is a hawk mask, edgy and militaristic.

Barbed Wire

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PRELUDE

(On rise, the stage is empty but for MACHINA and AVIA, who is wearing the finch mask. MACHINA holds AVIA tightly, but at arm's length. AVIA struggles unsuccessfully to free herself. FEMME enters, sees the action and watches for a time without intervening, then exits. Lights down.)

SCENE

(Lights up on a bare room which contains a back wall, a bed, and a desk with chairs. The wall is blank but for a small window high above the bed. FEMME is in the bed, sleeping. After a time, AVIA enters, now wearing the hawk mask and carrying a leather bag.)

AVIA

Awake and report to the Citadel.

FEMME

Who are you? What do you want?

AVIA

If you do not report of your own volition, you will be detained.

FEMME

Get away from me.

(AVIA sets down the bag and removes an orange prison jumpsuit. She forces FEMME out of bed and into the jumpsuit. She takes a pair of handcuffs from the bag, and cuffs FEMME, and seats her at one of the chairs. FEMME acquiesces to this treatment as if hypnotized.)

AVIA exits, then returns following MACHINA. MACHINA has in her arms, a black cloth with a heraldic symbol, which she lays on the bed like an altar covering, and sits behind the bed. AVIA seats herself at the desk.)

AVIA

Case four, victor, three, three, foxtrot, echo, one.

MACHINA

The criminal will state her name for the record.

FEMME

Wait! Don't I get a hearing?

MACHINA

The hearing has begun.

FEMME

You called me a criminal.

AVIA

You are clad in prison clothing and wear handcuffs, it's obvious you are a criminal.

FEMME

That makes me a prisoner, not—

MACHINA

This is irrelevant, let the proceedings begin.

FEMME

I beg your pardon, Administrator, but I disagree. The language is prejudicial.

MACHINA

You claim you've never committed a crime?

FEMME

Yes.

AVIA

I have your files. You were detained for shoplifting at age twelve, you have three traffic violations, and last New Year's, closed-circuit cameras captured you in a state of public intoxication. Shall I go on?

FEMME

Is that the subject of this hearing?

MACHINA

You are charged with domestic terrorism. How do you plead?

FEMME

There must be a mistake. Do I look like the type to plant bombs and take hostages? Search my house, you will find no weapons, no chemicals.

MACHINA

How do you plead?

FEMME

I'm innocent.

AVIA

The defendant pleads not guilty. I request permission to proceed to trial.

MACHINA

Proceed.

FEMME

When will my trial be? Will I be provided with a lawyer?

MACHINA

The trial has begun.

FEMME

Where is my defense? Where is the jury?

AVIA

As an enemy of the state, you are not entitled to a jury. This tribunal will determine the facts of the case.

FEMME

Not entitled...how can this be?

MACHINA

You are charged with terrorism. Under protocols established by the Act to Safeguard the Motherland, you are no longer considered a citizen but an enemy of the state.

FEMME

What is the charge against me?

MACHINA

You will stop interrupting this court or there will be further penalties. ... Proceed.

AVIA

You consider yourself an artist?

FEMME

I do.

AVIA

Did you, on or about the third day of the preceding month, hold an art exhibit in the Village?

FEMME

Yes.

AVIA

And did you include in that exhibition, a painting entitled “Barbed Wire”?

FEMME

I did.

AVIA

And did you paint that picture yourself?

FEMME

All the paintings in the show were mine.

AVIA

Administrator, the prisoner has admitted guilt in the matter. There is no need for further questioning.

FEMME

What?

MACHINA

You have been found guilty of acts of terrorism and will be confined prior to sentencing. If corporate penal facilities in this district are full, you will be transferred to a holding cell until space becomes available.

FEMME

Are you mad? All we’ve spoken of are paintings.

AVIA

Do you deny that that painting was intended to incite revolution?

FEMME

I have no idea what you are talking about. I was walking through a meadow one day, and came across a bird with its foot caught in a barbed wire fence. I tried to free it, but it was so frantic that it pecked at me. I ran home to get a wire cutter but I hadn’t paid attention to where I had been, and I got lost trying to find the place I’d seen the bird. The image haunted me, and so I painted it. That’s all.

AVIA

You claim that this was an actual event.

FEMME

Yes.

AVIA

But in the story you just told the bird was alive. In your painting, the bird was dead.

FEMME

That’s what was haunting me. I knew that if I didn’t find and free the bird, it would starve. I felt responsible.

AVIA

Why did you choose to make the bird a finch?

FEMME

The bird I saw was a finch.

AVIA

Purely a coincidence, then.

FEMME

What are you talking about?

AVIA

Our Chancellor.

FEMME

What about him? ... You can't be serious.

AVIA

Many who attended your show saw the piece as allegorical, and believe that you sympathize with the factions who oppose the Castle. Your painting would imply that you want Chancellor Finch dead.

FEMME

Are you telling me that if I had painted a sparrow I would be free? This is ridiculous. Insane.

AVIA

Is it? There is a long history of propaganda in your art form.

FEMME

I'm not political.

MACHINA

This has gone on, long enough. I have a full docket. The evidence has been presented, you've been found guilty.

FEMME

I want to appeal.

MACHINA

This is a tribunal for treason. For that crime there can be no appeal.

FEMME

This can't be right. There are supposed to be processes and procedures. I have rights.

AVIA

They are forfeit.

FEMME

What about the right to question those who accuse me?

MACHINA

The people accuse you.

FEMME

Bring me one.

AVIA

The people make up the state, I represent the state. I accuse you.

FEMME

And have you seen the painting?

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