



SONGS OF SUFFERING: A TORTURE PLAY

by Nolan B Nightingale

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Songs of Suffering: A Torture Play

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written by

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NOTES

In the play, there is an intense scene of waterboarding. I urge productions to get creative with staging and not actually pour water onto the actor's face. That is very dangerous. Just please...don't be stupid.

The race of The Subject is given as white in the play. This can be changed to whatever the race of the actor portraying The Subject is.

The Candidate and The Musician can also double as Mom and Son.

THE PLAY

THE GREAT DEBATE

THE CANDIDATE stands at a podium. She is handsome and charming. She is also mid-debate. The opposition is off to the side, somewhere in the audience's imagination.

THE CANDIDATE

My opponent would have you believe that our practices are inhumane. That we are monsters for even suggesting that study sessions are moral. He'd like to have us talk out our feelings with enemies to the state and hope that they give us the information needed to keep our citizens safe. This simply is not the case. We live in what is, unfortunately, a harsh and unforgiving world. Therefore, we too must be harsh and unforgiving. We-we must-It is my time to speak, sir! I will not be interrupted by a bleeding heart lout such as yourself. If you do not agree with me, you may verbalize it during your turn. There are rules that we must operate on! Now, if you would be gracious enough to let me continue...Thank you.

THE CANDIDATE takes a deep breath and continues.

THE CANDIDATE (CONT'D)

We must do everything in our power to not only keep ourselves safe...but our families safe. So yes, I do support water boarding and other such activities. They are a vital part of any good agent's process that put the suspects in no actual, physical danger. Meanwhile, my opponent would let us stray into peril and lose countless citizens all for what? The comfort of criminals? I'll yield my time to the moderator.

This is met with applause. THE CANDIDATE smiles.

THE TORTURERS-PART I

The stage is DIM. We can see three chairs, one with straps on it. There's a light hanging over the scene. HERB, overweight and grizzled, enters. HERB looks around.

HERB

What the fuck?

He stares intently at the light. He takes a shoe off and throws it at the light. He misses horribly.

HERB (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch.

He takes his other shoe off and takes aim. He misses again, even worse than the first time.

HERB (CONT'D)

Screw it.

Suddenly, the light turns on. LIGHTS UP onstage. HERB looks completely befuddled. LARRY enters, he's young and fit.

LARRY

There's a switch, you know. It's on the outside of the room. Safety precaution. They don't want any of the subjects being able to turn the light off and get an upper hand. New Academy issue.

HERB

The new guy, I take it?

LARRY sticks an enthusiastic hand out.

LARRY

Yes, um, Larry!

HERB

Gotta last name, Larry?

LARRY

Yes, sir.

HERB

That was a joke, Larry. I'm asking what your last name is.

LARRY

I'm not allowed to disclose that, sir.

HERB

Says who?

LARRY

The Handbook.

HERB

Are you gonna listen to that shit? Why shouldn't I know my partner's last name?

LARRY

You don't even know my first name, sir. Larry is made up. They believe that it will make sure that we don't become personal and close. Makes it easier on us if one of us has to be punished, they find.

HERB

That's bullshit.

LARRY
Have you ever had a partner who required punishment?

HERB pauses.

HERB
Yes.

LARRY
Did it hurt you to punish them?

HERB becomes defensive.

HERB
They were traitors and enemies to the state!

LARRY
But...

HERB
...but yes.

LARRY
And there's no shame in that. We are all human here.
Attachment is natural. But it can be avoided.

HERB
Alright. Call me Herb then, I guess.

They shake hands.

LARRY
It's a pleasure to meet you, Herb.

HERB
Now, we need to talk strategy. I like to do that before every
study session. Make sure we're both on the same wave-length.

LARRY
I completely agree!

*HERB takes a seat in his chair. He pulls out his
wallet and takes some cash.*

HERB
Here, go grab us some coffees. You fly, I buy.

LARRY
Certainly.

*LARRY grabs the cash from HERB and exits. HERB
twiddles his thumbs. He might roll up his sleeves. He
splays his fingers out, inspecting the bruises on his
knuckles.*

HERB

Don't remember how I got that one.

LARRY re-enters with two coffees. He hands one of them to HERB. Throughout the conversation, HERB is sipping at his coffee but LARRY doesn't touch his.

LARRY

So, what are you thinking?

HERB

Well, what are the specs on the subject? Do we have those on file?

LARRY

Subject 2157, male, age 23, brought in for his relation to a radical group known as Pax Americana. We have reason to believe they are planning a bombing. We just don't know where or when.

HERB stares at LARRY incredulously.

HERB

You're just keepin' all that information in your head? No clipboard or tablet?

LARRY

I'm very good with memorization.

HERB is thinking.

HERB

Hey, I didn't catch what race you said the guy is. Could you repeat that?

LARRY

I didn't give you a race.

HERB

Okay. Well, what is it?

LARRY

I fail to see why it's relevant.

HERB

It's relevant.

LARRY

Fine, he happens to be a white man.

HERB

Really? We hardly ever get those.

LARRY

That is a very unprofessional thing to say, sir!

HERB

It's unprofessional to make me have to study my own partner for information. Or is there something in The Handbook about that, too?

LARRY

I didn't mean to offend.

HERB

Eh, live and let live. So, I'm thinking we start this with some light beating.

LARRY is caught off-guard by this.

HERB (CONT'D)

Then, we move further into the territory of waterboarding. Speaking of, we need to prepare the bucket and rag before we bring the subject in. If we have to wait around to do that mid-torture, it's kinda embarrassing. A classic rookie mistake.

HERB smiles.

HERB (CONT'D)

Funny story, I actually had that happen to me in my first study session. It was hilarious for everyone but me. So, I'm running around the hallways with a bucket, looking to fill it up. Turns out, the pipes are busted. No water to be found. So, I take the bucket into a corner and piss into it. Get as much as I can. Still, it ain't much. So, I go into the offices, carrying this bucket of my own piss, looking for anyone who can contribute. Eventually, I figure that I have enough and run back to my room...but the subject has fallen asleep!

HERB laughs.

HERB (CONT'D)

They made fun of me for a solid year for that one. They called me...nevermind what they called me. Anyways, if the waterboarding doesn't work, we'll go from that to ripping out fingernails. I've never met the man, woman, or child who could make it past that without giving up what sock they used to cum into in 8th grade. Definitely an effective method. I don't know, though. It's your first rodeo. I'll let you pick the order you wanna go in.

LARRY

None of that. I don't want to use any of those methods.

HERB

What, are you more of a jumper cables guy? We have those, too. Don't worry.

LARRY

No, I don't want us doing anything that will harm the subject.

HERB doesn't know how to process this.

HERB

He's a subject.

LARRY continues on, ignoring him.

LARRY

It has been found that studying a subject can be done far more effectively using psychological methods.

HERB

You wail on subjects. That's how you study them.

LARRY

Luckily, I happen to be trained in these very methods. I specialized in them back at The Academy.

HERB is annoyed.

HERB

So, you think you can just talk it out of him?

LARRY

It's not just talking.

HERB

You think that these wackos and loons are just going to give up their plots because you ask nicely?

LARRY

That's not what I'm saying.

HERB

That's exactly what you're saying.

LARRY

You can't just beat answers out of people!

HERB

What? Are you some sort of pacifist?

LARRY

No. Your way is just old and outdated. People don't use those kinds of methods anymore.

HERB

My "outdated" way has been used on hundreds of study sessions! It's saved countless lives!

LARRY takes a deep breath, rethinking his strategy.

LARRY

If we can find a more efficient way...why not use it?

HERB

We don't have to find anything. The search is over. We found the way to do things. It's that easy.

LARRY

You seem like a rough and gruff kind of guy.

HERB

Blow me.

LARRY

Do you live alone?

HERB

What happened to not making things personal?

LARRY

I'm going to assume you live alone. Who needs a woman-

LARRY searches HERBS face.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Or a man? Oh...that's interesting. Wouldn't have expected that. Who needs a man cluttering up the place in your cramped apartment? I live alone, too.

HERB is getting uncomfortable.

HERB

Cut this shit out.

LARRY

Cut what out? We're just two colleagues having a conversation.

HERB

You haven't touched your coffee.

LARRY

And you haven't put your shoes back on yet. You should put those back on. It's not safe to walk around the workplace with no shoes. You really don't care about your feet, do you? Don't care about yourself at all.