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Becoming Ellen Van Oss in Lee Blessing's *Two Rooms*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film and Theatre
Performance

by

Tiffany Anderson

B.S. Loyola University 2011

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the process implemented in creating the character of Ellen Van Oss in Lee Blessing's *Two Rooms*. It includes research, character analysis, script analysis and an evaluation of my performance. *Two Rooms* was produced by the UNO Department of Film and Theatre and directed by Erick Wolfe. The play was performed at the Robert E. Nims Theatre in the UNO Performing Arts Center November 7, 12, 13, 21, 2015 at 7:30pm and November 8 and 22, 2015 at 2:30pm.

RESEARCH

The Playwright

Lee Blessing was born on October 4, 1949, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He spent his early childhood and most of his young adulthood in Minneapolis. He attributes his interest in writing to his junior high school and high school English teachers (Minnetonka Alumni Association, “Lee Blessing”). He initially wrote stories and then immediately started writing poetry (Rosenberg, “The Way We Weren’t”). Poetry had a major presence in his writing portfolio until the end of his high school years. Blessing’s first venture into playwriting was at Minnetonka High School. In order to avoid a thirty-page writing assignment on a topic of no interest to him, he petitioned his teacher to allow him to write a play instead. The play was produced at the high school. Blessing’s parents were not very interested in the theater, however, they were supportive of his endeavors and attended his first production.

Even though he possessed a strong interest in writing, Blessing referred to himself as a poet and an actor. At Minnetonka, he was cast in small roles. He also was a crew member on a few of the high school’s productions. His reference to himself as an actor ended when he began graduate school. Blessing remembers “I was about 25 and I realized I couldn’t remember my lines even at that age. It just didn’t bode well for when I got older,” he says. “And I was never entirely comfortable on stage, even though I enjoyed acting” (Minnetonka Alumni Association, “Lee Blessing”). Blessing graduated high school and attended the University of Minnesota for his first two years of college. It was there he took another stab at playwriting and in his freshman year wrote a play about his

brother's death in a car accident (Rosenberg, "The Way We Weren't"). He would not do anything more with that particular play.

He later transferred to and graduated from Reed College in Portland, Oregon with a Bachelor of Arts in English. During his undergraduate studies, Blessing sparingly wrote plays. Poetry was still at the forefront of his writing. He even did a poetry thesis at Reed College (Rosenberg, "The Way We Weren't"). After graduating, Blessing ventured off to Russia. When he returned to the United States, Blessing entered the University of Iowa writers' workshop as a poet (Rosenberg, "The Way We Weren't"). He continued through the program and earned a Master of Fine Arts in English. Blessing expanded his education at the University of Iowa where he studied playwriting and earned a second Master of Fine Arts in Speech and Theater. Blessing wrote, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, his first published work, while pursuing his second Master of Fine Arts at the University of Iowa. This work was staged at the University of Iowa as a student production, as well as at the Kennedy Center. It was awarded the National Playwriting Award at the American College Theater Festival.

After leaving the University life, Blessing went on to form what would be two beneficial relationships for his career. These two relationships played an important part in formulating a career built on awarded successes. One was with the Actors Theatre of Louisville where the first of his professional productions was premiered. The Actors Theatre of Louisville premiered Blessing's plays at their Humana Festival throughout the years. Not only did they give Blessing an opportunity to showcase his work, they also awarded him for his skill in and commitment to playwriting. In 1981 at their sixth annual

festival they premiered *Oldtimers Game*. In 1983 at their eighth annual festival they premiered *Independence*. In 1984 at their ninth annual festival they premiered *War of the Roses* and in 1986 at their eleventh annual festival, they premiered *Down the Road* (Ullom 171-173). The other beneficial relationship Blessing's joined was with the O'Neill Theater Center where he was able to continue to receive recognition. Many of his plays have gone through workshop readings at their National Playwrights Conference.

Even though Blessing was very active in the theater world, the initial recognition he received from *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* would be short lived and it wouldn't be until eight years later he would receive another huge success. This success came with his play *A Walk in the Woods*. Before writing the play, Blessing noted "critics were complaining a great deal that American playwrights were only writing family plays, domestic plays, that weren't really connected to politics. So I looked at the first page of the Times to see what's on people minds. People were very nervous about missiles and there was all this stuff about nuclear negotiations" (Rosenberg, "The Way We Weren't"). It was in part because of the critic's frustration that Blessing began writing *A Walk in the Woods*. He mentioned in an interview the play is derived from actual events in which an American negotiator and a Russian actually leave formal negotiations to go for a walk in the woods (Powers, "Lee Blessing - An Interview"). *A Walk in the Woods* premiered at Yale University's Repertory Theater in New Haven, Connecticut. It then went on to La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California where it won the American Theater Critics Association's award for best play. Following these two successful productions, *A Walk in the Woods* opened on Broadway at the Booth Theater. There it received rave

reviews and was nominated for a Tony award for best actor and best play. It was also nominated for the Pulitzer Prize (Powers, "Lee Blessing - An Interview"). *A Walk in the Woods* would continue production in London's West End at Comedy Theatre as well as a reprised production in Moscow (Katz, "Pioneer Producer"). It would also go on to be adapted for television (IMDb). *A Walk in the Woods* catapulted Blessing's career and made him a permanent fixture in the theater world.

Even presently in his career, Blessing continues to use historical events and characters in the theater to address social issues in many of his plays. For example, *Patient A* addresses the Kimberly Bergalis case. "An exploration of the experience of Kimberly Bergalis, whose case marked the first known instance of HIV transmission from a health-care worker to a patient. Issues of testing, discrimination and personal responsibility are examined against the larger backdrop of the AIDS epidemic in America. Commissioned by the Bergalis family to explore Kimberly's case of contracting the AIDS virus, the playwright becomes part of the story as an essential observer to the story. Kim's encounters with Lee reflect their relationship in real life as well as the "playwright" and "character" in the play. A third character, Matthew, represents a composite of the thousands of gay men who have suffered in the AIDS epidemic. As the play recounts Kim's case, spotlighting the media and political circuses surrounding it, we see all three characters struggle with the debate and with their innermost feelings about themselves and each other" (Blessing, "Patient A"). This use of models of societal issues by Blessing can also be seen in *Cobb*, a play he based on Ty Cobb, a controversial baseball legend, as well as, *Two Rooms* just to name a few. According to Blessing, his sole purpose for

writing in this manner is to incite an emotion in the audience members as opposed to attacking prominent present day societal issues. His plays are not written as political pieces attempting to get a response from the government or elected officials instead their purpose is to force the individual to think about the content of the play and emotionally deal with whatever inner conflict or peace they feel as they watch the play. “I tend to write serious plays that use humor,” says Blessing. “Mostly I’m trying to get the audience to go through an experience, emotionally. It’s a subtle emotional thing that happens not altogether in the conscious mind when you watch a good drama. You realize you’re going through something that has become important to you emotionally. That’s what I’m after when I write plays, to do that to audiences” (Minnetonka Alumni Association, “Lee Blessing”).

In addition to the aforementioned works, Blessing has written a multitude of full-length and one-act plays; *Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music*, *Eleemosynary*, *Fortinbras*, *Lake Street Extension*, *Going To St. Ives*, *Chesapeake*, *The Winning Streak*, *Thief River*, *Black Sheep*, *The Roads That Lead Here*, *Whores*, *Snapshot*, *Tyler Poked Taylor*, *Flag Day*, *The Scottish Play*, *A Body of Water*, *Lonesome Hollow*, *Moderation*, *Great Falls*, *Perilous Night*, *Into You*, *Heaven's My Destination*, *Courting Harry* and *Wild Blessings*. Blessing also ventured into writing for television in 1993 with *Cooperstown* which appeared on TNT. Also amongst the aforementioned awards and nominations, Blessing received the Great American Play Award a numerous amount of times at the Actors Theatre of Louisville’s Humana Festival for *Oldtimers Game* in 1982, *Independence* in 1984, *War of the Roses* in 1985, *Down the Road* in 1991, *Snapshot* in

2002, *The Roads that Lead Here* in 2003, *Great Falls* in 2008 and *Wild Blessings* in 2009; the Humanitas Award for *Cooperstown*; the L.A. Drama Critics Award for Outstanding Writing for *Eleemosynary* in 1997 (Viagas, “Drama Critics Awards”); the Steinberg/American Theater Critics Association New Play Award for *A Body of Water* in 2006 and many more awards and meritorious acknowledgments.

Blessing does not keep his talent and immense knowledge on successful playwriting to himself. His passion for playwriting has led him to offer his wide array of knowledge to many interested, fledgling playwrights. He has taught at Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Iowa’s Playwrights Workshop and the Playwright’s Center in Minneapolis. After spending a lot of his time in the Midwest, Blessing migrated to the east coast and made Brooklyn Heights, New York his home. In New York, he served as the head of the Master of Fine Arts playwriting program at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. He just recently chose to move on from Rutgers University. He met Melanie Marnich, a fellow playwright, in New York. Not only did they share a common interest in playwriting, but they also grew up in Minnesota. Blessing married Marnich in 2006 (Minnetonka Alumni Association, “Lee Blessing”). Marnich flourished in her own success as a playwright in New York City. She was eventually offered a position as a staff writer on HBO’s *Big Love* where she received rave reviews. This opportunity moved Blessing and Marnich to Los Angeles where they now reside.

The Play

Blessing wrote *Two Rooms* at the end of the 1980's. As with *A Walk in the Woods*, he perused the front cover of magazines and newspapers to ascertain the current events of which the general population was most concerned. The most pressing topic at the time was Americans being kidnapped in Lebanon and the government's overt position of non-negotiation (Diverse City Theater Company, "A Conversation with Lee"). Blessing realized the public's fascination and fear in regards to this subject matter and knew he had found the topic for his next play. While a facile assumption would be to consider Blessing's intentions for his plays to be politically driven, he opposes this speculation. "I think all theater is political. It's just that some plays are a little more conscious of it than others. It seems a curiously American point of view to think that there is a "private" life that is completely divorceable from a "public" one. Everything we eat is the product of a political system. The worth of our houses turns out to be a very volatile product of a political system. The clothes on our back, the gas in our cars—it's ubiquitous. Everything we do, think or say is done in the context of a political system. Political battles are fought in every sphere of our lives: cultural, business, aesthetic, religious, filial, romantic—you name it. Even choosing to ignore politics completely is, at base, an intensely political decision. Once a society has at least three members (perhaps only two) politics is born. This is the sadness and I suppose the majesty of politics. Who can imagine the Garden of Eden without a serpent?" (Diverse City Theater Company, "A Conversation with Lee"). Blessing's perspective of the existence of politics in our everyday lives, as opposed to the characteristics understood by the vast majority, relieves *Two Rooms*, and

many of his other plays, from the duty of taking a stand on the political subject matter presented. This allows the viewer to consider the lives of each individual involved in the situation and how they are affected versus having the taxing charge of deciding which side to choose.

“The two rooms of the title are a windowless cubicle in Beirut where an American hostage is being held by Arab terrorists and a room in his home in the United States, which his wife has stripped of furniture so that, at least symbolically, she can share his ordeal” (Blessing, “Two Rooms”). Therefore, *Two Rooms* physically takes place in one room. However, throughout the play the one location transcends physicality and is recognized as two separate rooms determined by the characters present on stage. Blessing provides an ambiguous time of the recent past, the present. There are four characters in the play; each serving as the main player with their significant intentions and motivations. Michael Wells is the purpose for everyone’s interactions. He is the American hostage being held by Arab terrorists (Blessing, “Two Rooms). Lainie Wells is Michael’s wife. She is the main point of contact for the remaining characters in the play; Walker Harris, a newspaper reporter intent on getting Lainie to tell her side of the story and Ellen Van Oss, a representative of the State Department intent on keeping Lainie quiet.

It is imperative that I point out the purpose of this summary of *Two Rooms* is to gradually lead into an in-depth character analysis for Ellen. Therefore, it will not follow the expected unbiased summative form, but instead, explain the characters and sequence of events in the way I needed to relate to them in my attempt to further develop the character of Ellen.

In act one, scene one the play opens with Michael's explanation of the turn of events that led to the captivity of him and Mathison, a colleague of Michael's. Throughout his story, Michael provides descriptive rhetoric about the day of his detainment and his experience as a hostage. He also digresses and gives a glimpse of the depth of his love for Lainie. Michael's choice of words contorts the monologue from playful to serious on many instances. One example is his playful explanation about Mathison pulling out the "little fantasy pistol" combined with laughter imposed by the playwright and then his immediate seriousness when explaining Mathison's consequence to his action, "at that same moment one of them shot it out of his hand, along with some of his fingers ..." (Blessing 8). Michael's manner of relaying information in this monologue allows a glimpse into one of two possibilities; Michael's personality, or the possible coping mechanisms he uses to survive the uncertainty of his current circumstance.

Immediately following Michael's monologue, Lainie is present, alone, trying to decide the final placement of a mat she has chosen to replicate the one she thinks Michael has to sleep on during his captivity. She presents her side of the situation and all of the challenges she's had to face up to until now. She makes it clear she has spoken with everyone from the Syrians to the United States government; all to no avail. Instantly she is characteristic of a dedicated and persistent wife fighting for the release of her husband. Her constant struggle with every authoritative figure is disclosed and her frustration with them is detected. Through Lainie's monologue we are made aware of the length of time she has had to endure a selectively informative government and an unforeseeable future.

Her increasing frustration could be the reason she allows an outsider into her personal space. This prepares us for Walker's appearance.

When Walker is first introduced, he is aggressively inquisitive. He asks a continuous stream of questions completely unaware of the possible consequences of his actions. It is clear his first intention is to get as much information as he can to write a viable story concerning Lainie's situation and the government's lack of immediate response. This initial behavior is indicative of either a fledgling reporter attempting to exist in unfamiliar territory or an underachieving reporter driven by the possibility of a substantial news story. He is so completely consumed with asking questions he completely glosses over Lainie's piercing answers. "I cleansed it ... I took all his things out" (Blessing 10). Here Lainie allows Walker into her psychological world. A physical retreat she has created that provides her the ability to cope with her situation. However, Walker is completely unaware of the gem of information she has given him. His ignorance of the importance of Lainie's disclosure is further exemplified by his continual desire to get the answers to the questions he has created beforehand instead of delving deeper into what it is Lainie is trying to reveal to him. Whether Walker's carelessness towards the intimacy of his encounter with Lainie is because of a lack of experience as a reporter or with this type of situation, he continues to prove himself unprofessional during his interaction with Ellen, a representative of the State Department.

Ellen makes her first appearance as she is being thrust into an unexpected situation. It is immediately known that Ellen and Lainie have been having regular meetings since Michael was taken hostage. It is also known, by Ellen's immediate response to Walker,

that Walker was never a part of these regular meetings. Ellen and Walker have never met and Ellen was unaware of his existence let alone expecting to meet him at the present moment. However, when she arrives at Lainie's house Walker is a very present reality. It is evident she completely disagrees with Lainie's decision to have any kind of dealings with the press. Ellen and Lainie's interaction reveals a comfortable relationship. We see two characters that have been involved in a specific routine for quite some time.

However, there is an underlying discrepancy. Lainie wants more than Ellen is willing to give. This intense desire for something to be done other than what has already been going on for the past year is presented again as it once was with the introduction of Lainie and Walker. The force of Lainie's desire catapults the conversation into a heated debate between an austere Ellen and an indecorous Walker. It is important to note that Lainie's vexation with Ellen and the government is not unwarranted. Ellen's indirect, self-serving communication overlooks Lainie's concerns and provides only superficial evidence of the government working in favor of Michael's future. After the altercation, we are left with Walker's continual pull to get Lainie on his side. Lainie, overwhelmed with emotion dismisses Walker. The next phase of the scene following Michael and Lainie's intense altercation lends itself to a vast array of interpretation. However, because it immediately follows a highly emotional experience for Lainie, I interpret it as Lainie's psychological retreat from the intensity of her present paradox. As scene one continues, Lainie and Michael are together, for the first time, in the 'room' designed to represent one place at a time. However, in this moment, the two places either transcend or combine forcing the passage of time to be slowed, paused or irrelevant. I considered all of the above options

and concluded that time and place were irrelevant and this meeting was, as aforementioned, a psychological retreat Lainie used as a coping mechanism.

Scene one ends - in Lainie's 'psychological solace' - with Michael's details about his captivity as well as an estimation of the passing of time. "It has been more than a year, hasn't it?" He gives vivid accounts of his various experiences while living in Beirut. He describes the reality of a place being run by overzealous teenage boys armed with artillery and an undeveloped and manipulated idea of world affairs. I considered most of Michael's monologue to be informative. However, the latter part invoked some thought. "We walked down the street, through the rubble, past the checkpoints, past the bombings - we had days full of ordinary moments. Amid - what? - devils from Hell. Boys who might shoot you the next moment. Cars that might drive up, park and explode. (*With a growing tension that finally breaks through.*) And none of us seemed ready to say, "Leave it. Let us out of here! Please, God *anything* but this! *Stop it!!* And none of us was ever quite ready to leave" (Blessing 15).

My reflection on Michael's words led me to believe it was at this point that Michael was making it clear that he understands his captivity as the consequence of his decision to stay in the maelstrom of Beirut. After all, what else did they expect to happen, living amongst fractious boys easily incited by those in favor of warped beliefs?

These initial interconnections amongst the characters set the stage for the constant push and pull each character experiences as a result of their own desires. In act one, scene one, Lainie is immediately torn between the desire to believe in the favorable outcome of Michael's predicament if she follows Ellen's lead and the desire to incite any kind of

change in the government's dealings with Michael's situation. It is this underlying desire to 'get the government moving' that allows Walker into her space. Walker is immediately conscious of this weakness and aggressively attempts to convince Lainie to allow him to write a story. He even goes so far as to incite a heated debate with Ellen about the government's elusive behavior in regards to Michael. As a result, Lainie experiences one of her many breaking points.

In act one, scene two, Lainie's vulnerability is visible as she allows Walker even more access to her personal story. In this meeting with Walker, she shows him some of Michael's pictures of the locals until she is no longer capable of withstanding the emotional consequences of her endeavor. Walker's unrelenting intention is ever present as he uses a variety of tactics to achieve his ultimate goal of an interview with Lainie; he aggressively asks questions, he attempts to empathize with her, he tries to incite a stronger desire for change. It isn't until Walker's motivations turn into an attack that Lainie asserts her belief, or what could be the imposed belief of Ellen and the government, and dismisses him from her home.

"You know what will get him back? Nothing we can understand. Whatever took Michael, whatever will bring him back is a power so incomprehensible we'll never understand it" (Blessing 20). This statement can be the truth of a woman whose husband has been held hostage for over a year and has lost hope for the future or it can be the regurgitation of words that have been continuously repeated to her by a system designed to control everyone involved. At this point, I don't even think Lainie is able to decipher one from the other. I feel, at this very moment with these very words, she is hopeless in a

situation that requires her to have hope and all of the combined emotions, beliefs, desires since the beginning of this process are presenting themselves in this declaration.

Scene three validates Walker's unprincipled intentions. Ellen visits Lainie's house to tell her that Walker has written a story detailing everything he and Lainie talked about during their visits together. Ellen's ability to reveal this information to Lainie puts Ellen back in control of their relationship. This is an important observation as the dynamic of Ellen and Lainie's relationship revolves mainly around the ability to have control of the other. Ellen's ability to be in control ensures cooperation from Lainie, whereas Lainie's ability to be in control allows her to assume she can push the government into aggressively negotiating for the release of Michael. It is important to note that Lainie's attempts to force the government to action are all based off assumptions that those attempts will work. This will help to understand her continued relationship with Walker even in the face of his dishonorable actions.

Scene four introduces the change in Lainie and Walker's relationship. Initially, there was a sense that Lainie trusted Walker. She allowed him into her private space, expressed her frustrations and even introduced him to Michael, by showing him Michael's personal pictures. However, now that she has valid proof of Walker's intentions, Lainie has adjusted the way she deals with Walker. An example of this adjustment is the reason behind her decision to give Walker an interview; "A lot of reporters would work, I suppose. But with you there's a special advantage. I know how far I can trust you" (Blessing 27). The disheartening news from Ellen and then validation from Walker sends Lainie into another 'psychological solace'. This time, we are presented with Michael's

revealing of another coping mechanism he uses while being held captive. He imagines being home with Lainie in detail from the position of the furniture to the smell of the room. He even remembers the very detailed position of all of the files in his file cabinet. Act one ends in Lainie's psychological solace. This ending further validates my desire to refer to Michael's appearances as Lainie's psychological solace because Michael's presence always comes after Lainie experiences an emotionally charged encounter with either Ellen or Walker. These confrontations force Lainie to deal with her present situation the only way she knows how - with Michael, in this room, this space that she has created specifically for the purpose of semi-experiencing what he's experiencing with him and feeling his presence.

Act two opens with Ellen's motivation; to convince Lainie and anyone who will listen that the government handles hostage situations in the best way possible. The explanation Ellen offers as justification for the government's actions not only validates her motivations presented at the beginning of the play but it also reveals a lot of her character. This revelation can be perceived in two ways. One way is that she is a very regimented woman whose stoic handling of her job responsibilities presents her as lacking compassion or consideration. Another way is that of a woman who has allowed the government to impose its views on her so much so that she unconsciously regurgitates it whenever presented with opposition to the way she has to handle her job responsibilities. Either way, her very practical approach to such a sensitive situation serves as an unnerving dynamic in the play amongst the other characters.

Immediately following Ellen's petition for compliance, Lainie, as a continuance from the end of act one, is still withdrawn in a place where only she and Michael can exist. She is once again inquiring about his experience in captivity. The subject of the conversation moves toward everyday life and instantly the two characters are removed from the reality of the situation. Up until now the encounters between Lainie and Michael have been that of a wife in desperate need of the comfort of her husband. However, this scene gives a glimpse into what life would be like if Michael was home and Lainie could exist as she had before he was taken hostage. This very comfortability that is presented is immediately interrupted when Lainie is propelled into reality by Ellen's visit. The conversation between Ellen and Lainie offers some insight into Lainie's demeanor with Michael in the previous scene. Ellen arrives, after an extended absence, irritated and disappointed in Lainie's decision to go public about Michael's captivity. Lainie has chosen to go public during a very serious hostage situation. A decision that was certainly carefully thought out. This decision explains her relaxed demeanor with Michael in the previous scene. It can be perceived that she is confident her decision will force the government's hand and will force them to tend to Michael's situation just as fervently as they are tending to the current hostage situation. Lainie's confidence is quickly shot down by Ellen's harsh presentation of the government's reality. "If you go public, if you make demands, you'll only delay matters and increase the danger for everyone involved. And frankly, no matter what you do, we won't ask for Michael's release ... It's not his time" (Blessing 33).

Ellen's rashness did not hinder Lainie's decision. In the middle of act two, scene one Lainie and Walker are preparing for Lainie's first television appearance. Lainie does present some apprehension, however, it is not strong enough to resist Walker's push for her to do what he thinks is best. It is important to note that Lainie's apprehension does not seem to come from Ellen's desire for her to keep quiet. Instead, she is concerned about the danger she may be putting Michael and the other hostages in and the well-being of the other hostage families. This is a clear indicator of Lainie's separation from Ellen's forceful hand and a desire to stand on her own. The motivation behind Lainie's desire to stand on her own can be questioned due to Walker's aggressive presence in her life. However, the underlying turn of events presented in this scene is Lainie's detachment from the government and her connection with Walker and the media.

Act two, scene one ends with Michael saying what are present day occurrences for him but it also serves as a glimpse into the future. In his account, Michael talks about Mathison being moved to another place. This revelation stirs an interest in the reason Mathison is being moved. The last time Lainie and Walker were together they were preparing for Lainie's first television appearance that was to happen in the middle of a very serious hostage situation being negotiated by the government. With this information, it can be assumed that Lainie and Walker were successful in their attempts to move the government into greater action for the release of Michael and the others being held hostage with him. Therefore, Michael's account of Mathison's removal from where they are both being held hostage suggests that Mathison is being released and soon Michael will also be released.

Scene two opens with the deed being done. Walker has successfully convinced Lainie to follow through with his idea of going public. This decision is satisfying to Walker but has a detrimental effect on Lainie. Walker instead continues to attempt to coerce Lainie. “Nothing in this world happens because it ought to. You have to push people into it. Right now, you have a quality that lets you push. You have a thing to say, and the means to say it. If you’re lucky, when you look back on it, it’ll have been moral. If not, too bad - you made your best guess” (Blessing, 37). However, in this moment, Lainie continues to resist Walker’s repeated attempts “...for all I know, I haven’t done anything more than risk the lives of innocent people tonight” (Blessing 37). Lainie continues to exert her independence, from Walker and Ellen, by adamantly standing her ground about how she feels about the situation and how it should be handled. This is the first time in the play where it seems Lainie is saying how she feels and not repeating what has been repeatedly told to her. It is this same independence that pushes Walker over the edge into a fury that prevents him from hiding his intentions any longer. “I know! That’s why I’m writing about the stupid fuck!!” (Blessing 38). With the slip of the tongue, Walker’s true intentions are revealed and Lainie is left to deal with the truth. A truth that forces her, once again, into that one place she goes to escape reality.

This time when Lainie goes to her psychological solace she is the only one there. Michael isn’t physically present with her but she is still talking to him. This is an interesting turn for Lainie. It’s almost as if she feels as though she has let him down and has chosen to only talk to him rather than feel him. At this point, Lainie has reached the nadir of her distress. This decline begins with Lainie’s decision to make her story public

because of Walker's continuous insistence. However, Lainie doesn't feel this decline until Walker reveals his hand and she is left alone with her decision. This alone time allows her to process, not only the effect her decision will have on the lives of the hostages but the fact that, even though she is continuously surrounded by someone else, she is alone in this process.

Walker, relentless in his fight to win sides with Lainie, returns to Lainie's home on the tail end of what he thinks is, good news. Mathison has been released. Immediately he begins to take credit for this happening. He has even convinced himself that what he forced Lainie to do was the best thing to do in this situation. This is where perspective plays an important role. It is possible to assume that Walker is not a self-serving journalist and instead he has real concern for Lainie, Michael and all of the people being held hostage around the world. It is also possible to consider Walker as a career-driven journalist whose only interest is to get a good story. There is not a sole correct perspective, but it should be noted that both perspectives were considered. However, following along with previous evidence that proved Walker to be more self-serving than considerate, the perspective of Walker's motivation for a crowd-pleasing story is more compelling than the one of him being considerate and caring. Therefore, his return to Lainie's house presents an audaciousness and not an altruistic spirit. Lainie's vulnerability allows Walker another opportunity to achieve his goal.

In this moment, Lainie's vulnerability is an extension from her being alone in her psychological solace without Michael. Even though it is presented that Lainie chose to enter into her solace without Michael's physical presence, there are still consequences

because of that decision. Lainie's ability to go to her quiet place with Michael for strength has been diminished and now she is experiencing a self-imposed susceptibility. While this could be considered further, it is only necessary to mention the observation as Lainie is not my character to analyze. However, Lainie's weakness is the point of attention once Walker arrives and as she experiences the recent news. This news lends itself to Michael's last revelation of Mathison's removal from where the both of them were being held. It also carries with it the disheartening truth that only Mathison was released. Michael is still being held hostage. Walker's visit with Lainie ends and takes with it what seems to be her last bit of strength. The scene closes with Michael's lost sense of time. Just as he can't sense time, the lack of time the remaining hostages have left smothers all of those around them. This is especially true for Lainie.

It is ironic the importance time takes at this point in the play. There is a sense of urgency as the events move forward and rightfully so. However, just as time becomes a determining factor, it doesn't. There is a sudden carelessness with time as is seen when Ellen arrives for a visit with Lainie. A lot of time has elapsed since Ellen has been to visit Lainie. This is incongruous as it would seem the government would have felt the same urgency of time that Lainie felt. However, the reaction of the government in letting a lot of time pass between Ellen's visits shows the level of concern for Michael's situation. It is safe to say that if the government, Ellen, held Michael's captivity in high priority, she would have been pressed for time to get him released just as she was for the bus station hostages. Mathison's release would have meant an increase in opportunity for Michael's release. However, that was not the case. It was not the case so much so that she was able

to stay away from Lainie for an elongated period of time and even take a vacation. Hence, a reason to question her even returning to Lainie's house. It is protocol; something she has to do to fulfill her job requirements. This is all true, however, there is something additional to fulfilling a job requirement. Ellen has important information pertaining to Michael that could very well predict his future. This is something that has to be considered. The way Ellen relays the information to Lainie is a tell tale sign of her assurance of what will likely happen to Michael, however, she has to communicate this information as delicately as possible and not give too much insight into the predicted outcome. In Ellen's conversation with Lainie, she attempts to appear as if she does not understand the gravity of the situation. Of course, she addresses the danger that Michael and the other hostages are now in, however, she does not expose what she knows, from professional experience, to be true. The truth is she knows that the consequence of what the government has done is death for Michael and the other hostages. She even knows the government wagered Michael and the other hostages lives against the current situation and decided the current situation was more important than the lives of Michael and those being held by his captors. She expresses this to Lainie, but in her typical roundabout way. "There are times when it becomes impossible to negotiate. When the very act of negotiating legitimizes a philosophy that's ... not human anymore. Those places where such a philosophy reigns have to be isolated. Those people who try to extend such a philosophy must be stopped. At any cost" (Blessing 42). It is in this moment Ellen's words "at any cost" means the cost of Michael's life.

This meeting with Ellen and the many news and radio reports she is forced to hear sends Lainie into a frenzy. She is emotionally explosive as she does not know what to believe - her faith that Michael will return home or the facts that were given to her by Ellen. Walker attempts to reason with her and offer alternative arguments, but that is not enough. Lainie is inconsolable. It is in this moment Michael appears to recount the last hours of his life. Ellen's professional intuition was right. Michael is killed. His life a part of an intricate chess game the government has to play in regard to foreign affairs, hostages and keeping the majority safe. The logistics of Michael's death can be studied and it can be assumed he was not killed by the captors who held him for three years, but by a new faction to whom the terrorist the government decided to kill belonged. Whether Michael was killed by his original kidnapers or new ones is not as important as the fact that he was a pawn in a very intricate and dangerous game of chess.

Michael's death is the finality of Ellen's case with Lainie. In scene four, the final scene of the play Ellen and Walker are alone together for the first time. There is a sullenness in the room, however, the tension between Ellen and Walker is still a present reality.

Instantly Walker questions Ellen's experience at delivering news about the death of a loved one and she exposes her lack of experience in this area. This piece of information is an explanation of her ability to remain detached from her cases. She has never had to deal with the reality of death. Her normal routine would be to determine the day-to-day progression of hostage situations; however, she has never had to face the reality of her decisions. Lainie's case is different. During the development of Ellen's character, I decided Ellen not only had an impressive part in determining the outcome of Michael's

situation, she now has to inform a loved one about the dire consequence of that decision - death. Throughout the scene, Ellen attempts to remain professionally covered with an unchanged demeanor, however, Lainie's response to the news of her husband's death sends a stark reminder to Ellen that the reality of these situations is more intricate than just black and white. Ellen verbalizes this acknowledgment - "I wish I could take your pain away" (Blessing 47) - and immediately removes herself from this intense encounter. Lainie and Walker are left with the burden of truth that was almost inevitable. A truth that Lainie expressed early on in the play. "You know what will get him back? Nothing we can understand. Whatever took Michael, whatever will bring him back is a power so incomprehensible we'll never understand it" (Blessing 20).

CREATING THE ROLE

According to Stanislavsky, a character comes to life in three stages "studying it; establishing the life of the role; putting it into physical form." This is the protocol I followed when creating the role of Ellen. I first read through the play once free of all perceptions or ideas on how she should be played. My second reading of the play focused on Ellen and her responses, motivations and desires. I allowed this analyzation to soak in for a while. I then began to create the role by creating a history for Ellen outside of the events happening in the play. This led to the formation of her life as it existed in each individual scene.

Character Analysis

Before I started thinking about Ellen, I wanted to understand Blessing's interpretation of the character. When asked about the importance he puts on research when writing his plays, Blessing responded "..... The trick is to get an audience to accept the two characters as negotiators with a minimum of proof. It's not a dramatist's job to festoon these men with evidence of authenticity. It's a dramatist's job to get an audience to stop asking the question and focus on the other, more important questions closer to the heart of the show" (Powers, "Lee Blessing - An Interview"). Even though he was referring to playwriting, I extended his view to all of the characters of the play. An actor's job can be the same as Blessing explains the dramatist's job - to get the audience to focus on the heart of the show. I began to create the role with this in mind. *Two Rooms* deals with some very important political issues. However, at its very core, the play deals with three

people with varying moral perspectives on what is going on around them politically. The politics that determine the way the government handles hostage situations. In this case, as is the case in any situation where there are opposing views, everyone thinks their perspective is the correct perspective. Therefore, as I began to breathe life into Ellen, I began with her moral character. I wanted to address just how much she believed what she was telling Lainie and Walker. The more I added details to her moral character the more she came to life.

Ellen Van Oss, 41, is a representative of the State Department. She has a master in political science. She has been divorced for 5 years and lives alone. She does not date much or have much of a social life, because she is so committed to her career. Her main hobby is to read, otherwise, she is fully enthralled in work. She really loves to vacation in St. Thomas and looks forward to that around the same time every year, even though it has become more of a pattern in her life than a vacation. She is not very religious. She prefers practicality as opposed to idealistic explanations. She requires facts. She requires theories proven by empirical evidence not rooted in hearsay, feelings or intuition. Ellen is informed about politics, but surprisingly not committed to a political party. She does stay abreast of political current events because it is imperative for her job not because of her personal interest in politics.

Ellen is very professional and can handle herself accordingly in many different situations. She exhibits this impressive self-control many times in the aggressive situations she faces with both Lainie and Walker. Even though Ellen exhibits this impenetrable external appearance, there are times in the play where she may seem to

attempt to befriend Lainie, however, her awkwardness and commitment to her job would not allow it to go further than a thought. Just as strong as she is in making accurate professional decisions she is just as inadequate in the social realm of her life. This is the reason, other than she has committed every waking moment of her life to work, she does not have many friends. Her husband divorced her soon after she was transferred to the State Department because she committed herself to be successful and not fail again.

She prides herself on being superior at her job. She takes her job and herself very seriously being sure to pay very close attention to detail in everything she does. Her physical appearance is neat and clean; very well put together. She sits, stands and walks with a very erect posture which in turns gives her a very stern external appearance. Ellen's outer core has a lot to do with her inner life. Her austerity is the reason for her divorce. She was so committed to succeeding at her career she completely neglected her marriage. Even though Ellen is not very pleased with being a part of a failed marriage, she does not regret putting her marriage second to her career. As a matter of fact, her biggest regret is that it was another failure in her life more so than it being her losing a husband. This recurring theme of failure in Ellen's life is one of the driving forces for her in the play. She is intensely determined to succeed in accomplishing what she has set out to do in regard to Lainie's case.

Ellen's initial goal for Lainie and Michael's case is to keep Lainie believing the views of the government and discourage the formulation of her own perspective of the situation. The control that will establish itself as a result of this goal will allow for Ellen and the government to handle Michael's kidnapping the way they see best and not be interrupted

by quixotic suggestions from the public. Unfortunately, with the introduction of Walker, and Lainie's increasing agitation, Ellen has to constantly navigate her way through the rough water created by this opposition. The many turns of events that occur throughout the play displays Ellen's fierce adamancy for success. This exerted aggression depicts Ellen as brash and inconsiderate. It made me question the belief she had in what it was she was saying. I thought it could be that she is so devoted to her job and the government she regurgitates the government's beliefs in place of her own. However, her commitment to these views until the very end of the play, when they did not matter anymore, convinced me they were her own. Even though they coincide with the government and are a part of her job they are her, well thought out, well-reasoned beliefs.

This was validated when I arrived at the middle of the play, the beginning of act two. I realized Ellen could have been delivering her speech to a variety of people. Because what she was saying was true to herself, she could have been talking to a group of colleagues or a room full of reporters or hostage families who were in opposition to the government's dealing with their individual cases. She could have been in a personal or professional environment and she would have been relaying the same information. This determination made that monologue a declaration of her personal and professional stance. Ellen was not being forced to say these things because it was her job. She was saying these things because she believed them to be true. Even though her delivery was controlled by her intent to convince, her personal belief in what she was saying was affecting.

At the end of the play, Ellen makes mention of her previous job in the Defense Department. She initially started working for the government in the Defense Department, however, she was not very successful in that position. She then transferred to the State Department and has excelled tremendously. This past experience for Ellen is the reason she is incredibly antsy when she is being questioned by Walker before she has to tell Lainie that Michael is dead. This situation reminds her of the many times she failed at doing this when she worked for the Defense Department. Until now, Ellen was able to escape the duty of consoling the relatives of the hostages she was assigned to because of her new position within the government. However, this particular case caused Ellen to take the responsibility of personally delivering the bad news. Ellen's decision to do this triggered another concern. Why? Why would she decide to make another attempt at her past failure? This opened up a variety of possibilities, but one presented itself stronger than all of the others.

When I did my first read through of the play, I instantly realized that Ellen could be played as a straightforward, no non-sense government official. However, I wanted to give her more layers. I thought certainly there is an opportunity to create vulnerability. I did not want the obvious vulnerability that can be presumed when Lainie is threatening to go public. I wanted a deeper susceptibility. Therefore, I decided to create a string of failures that continue to affect Ellen in her present day life. These failures are the reason for her extreme allegiance to success. She is consumed by her fear of failure so much so that she has not allowed herself the freedom to enjoy any other facets of life. However, there is something different about Lainie - something affecting that sometimes puts Ellen in

unfamiliar territory. This is one of the reasons Ellen felt a strong urge of obligation to go outside of her job duties and personally deliver the devastating news to Lainie. The other reason is to face a previous failure head on and succeed this time. I consider this because Ellen wouldn't allow herself to be completely altruistic without some form of self-satisfaction. Therefore, she allowed herself to be affected by Lainie's desperation and also used it as padding to succeed in a situation she failed at so many times before. In Ellen's last scene with Lainie she is, at first, nervous and anxious expecting to console Lainie, however once she is met with opposition she instantly reverts to her professional demeanor and succeeds at handling the situation accordingly.

Script Analysis

During my process of creating Ellen Van Oss, I also analyzed all of her scenes in the play. My analysis not only allowed me to dig deeper into Ellen's character but to also work through her motivations and intentions in each scene. I decided to try different motivations and objectives during the rehearsal process. For example, one night in rehearsal I chose to be straightforward; matter of fact in act one scene one, however, Erick and I decided that would make her seem robotic and we wanted to go for a more personal approach to Ellen as to give her personality room for advancement for the duration of the play. Therefore, I committed to keeping her delivery of information straightforward, however, I added a frustration with the information to the scene. This allowed for Ellen to appear to have emotions and be attached to Lainie's case.

Therefore, for act one scene one my objective was to inform Lainie about the possible changes made to Michael's location. However, my obstacle was Walker's unexpected

presence once I arrived. Walker's presence was not only an obstacle, but it also changed my objective. Once he includes himself in our conversation, I am instantly determined to convince Lainie to discontinue any associations with him. My first attempt at this objective is to covertly impose my opinion onto Lainie in hopes that she will agree and dismiss Walker. However, this does not work. My next attempt is to indirectly answer his and Lainie's questions all while trying to steer the conversation in a direction favorable to my desires. When neither of my attempts work, I immediately result to defense mode by lessening the appeal of Walker's advances and condescendingly opposing his views and just before I am forced out of my professional disposition, I excuse myself from the conversation, but not without one last attempt to persuade Lainie of my loyalty to her case.

In act one scene three, Ellen is back to inform Lainie of the consequences of her association with Walker. This time, my attitude is self-righteous and my objective is to arrogantly advise Lainie of a way to correct the problem. I considered what happened before the scene and decided I had just left a meeting with my very angry boss who demanded I get a handle on the situation. My intention was for this frustration to spill over into the scene. I enter the scene with this frustration and allow it to move me until it is time for me to reveal to Lainie what Walker has done. It is at this moment I can satisfy my ego by proving myself right. I initially told Lainie Walker would be a problem and now he has proven himself. This beat change allowed me to slyly pursue my objective of convincing Lainie to give an interview to a reporter that favors the government. When this does not work, I attempt reasoning with Lainie and then eventually decide to assert

power. This assertion leads to a power struggle, Lainie takes charge and I am forced to take the back seat to her emotions.

In rehearsal, I manipulated the next beat two different ways. One night I attempted to disregard Lainie's aim to guilt me with her story. However, it felt too disconnected. Therefore, at another rehearsal, I attempted to understand Lainie's story as it related to our previous conversation. This allowed me to connect with Lainie's current emotional state and it also gave Ellen more dimension as opposed to playing her one-sided. This approach allowed me to have more meaning when I say to her "Not every nest is visited by a cuckoo" (Blessing 24). It also aided in a seamless transition between my conversation with Lainie and my conversation with Michael. I carried the same sentiment I had for Lainie into my conversation with Michael. I feel my choice to relate to Lainie assisted in the softness that was required in my dealing with Michael. My objective was to convince Michael of my commitment to his release. This objective is instantly presented with the obstacle of Michael's dismissiveness. Which in turn leads to my defensive response and dismissive exit.

I considered my opening monologue for act two to be a direct presentation of Ellen's beliefs about Michael's situation and how the government should, and does, handle hostage situations. I believed her initial presentation of the background of the types of people that become involved in holding hostages was true to her own beliefs with an undertone of propaganda. Her adamant determination to convince the listener of the government's commitment to anyone effected by hostage situations forced her to skew the identity of the captures to her advantage. I used her need to covertly control her

listener to inform, convince and manipulate throughout her speech. Initially, I delivered the monologue straight on without much movement. However, Erick suggested we try a little more movement which then led to a very specific blocking I was to follow. Even though it was not my initial approach to this scene, I was excited about the challenge to make each movement intentional and meaningful. Every rehearsal allowed for me to feel comfortable attaching my actions not only to my words but to my movement.

In my next scene with Lainie, I was convinced Ellen would be very upset with Lainie and that's just how I played it – very upset. It did not work until I increased the intensity of the emotion. After one of the complete run rehearsals, Erick expressed his captivation with that scene and that was the same time I felt I was fully committed to being infuriated with Lainie and I allowed that emotion and Arielle's response to that emotion to guide me throughout the scene. There were a couple of times throughout the run I experienced that same connection, however, it was a challenge getting there every night. I often thought about the cause of this inconsistency and I realized that sitting on stage for the entire performance was a contributing factor. Even though I could mentally prepare for my next scene, there is still an awareness of being a player in the play even though you are not the main focus. This awareness conflicted with my ability to fully commit to my preparation process because I still felt the need to be present on stage.

Scene three allows me to contrast the emotional state I was in during my last visit with Lainie. In this scene, it has been a long time since we have talked. I am coming to tell Lainie about Michael's life being in danger. However, I do not use a candid approach. Instead I, very hesitantly, inform Lainie of the recent events that have taken place. This,

in turn, allows her to formulate her own assumptions which I then dismiss. This evasiveness allows me to achieve my imposed obligation to Lainie while also not candidly telling her that it is highly likely that her husband will be killed. At the beginning of the scene, I am apprehensive and my objective is to efficiently give Lainie this bit of information that I have and easily leave the situation. As the scene progresses, it is clear that Lainie will not allow me to weasel my way out and I am forced to tactfully explain Michael's diminishing importance to the government.

This diminishing importance is validated in my last scene. I have come to tell Lainie that Michael has been killed. Walker pry's and pry's until I am forced to disclose the truth.

"We miscalculated. We valued Michael's life below a chance to make an international point. We increased the danger for all the hostages. We chose to" (Blessing 46). I considered two effects this revelation could have had on Ellen. The first one was it was the truth and, because of that, she did not feel any regret. The second one was, even though it was the truth, having to admit to it and say it out loud had an effect on her. It brought to life the reality of the families affected by these situations. I chose the second one because it gave me an opportunity to make a turn at the end of the play. I could go from a dismissive government official to a compassionate human being. This turn validated Ellen's final line "I wish I could take your pain away" (Blessing 47).

PROJECT EVALUATION

Self-Assessment

Initially, I wanted to say this process was different for me, however when I considered all of my experiences with creating characters, I realized they all were 'different'. What I was trying to convey when I used the word different was that there was an element in this process that was not present in all of my other experiences. This process was a lot more challenging than any of my other experiences. When I am offered a role in a production, my first instinct is to do whatever I can to be prepared for rehearsal. Rehearsal is where it all happens and, for me, it is imperative that I do all of the work that I need to do in order to be completely available to my fellow cast members and the director. It is challenging to work in an environment where this same work ethic is not shared. This was the missing element in this process that was present in all of my other experiences. There were times in rehearsal we had to spend the time allotted rehearsing scenes with the purpose of learning lines as opposed to finding moments. This was very frustrating because we were given our off book date the first day of rehearsal. However, the good thing about it all is that I was challenged to still continue and fight for success.

When I think about my work in rehearsal and performance the most persistent things that plagued me were time management and clarifying moments, actions and tactics. When approaching a character, I have the tendency to instantly listen to my intuition and just go from there. This often leads me to an underdeveloped character, a very emotional one, but underdeveloped nonetheless. As with Ellen and many of my previous characters,

the detail about their lives and the intricacies of their purpose in each scene is not discovered until the last few performances. This is a weakness in my craft I would like to strengthen. As I was writing my thesis there were so many things I discovered about Ellen that would have added even more dimension to her character if I would have taken a closer look during the rehearsal process as opposed to after it was all said and done.

This takes into account my need for better time management. Even though a lot of time is put into rehearsal, there are still a lot of other things going on in life that require attention. Therefore, sometimes I get into robotic mode whereas I show up to work, to class, to rehearsal and do what it is that needs to be done and then move on to the next. However, the most beneficial thing would be to show up prepared for each obligation, dedicate your whole being completely to that one moment and then allow some time to evaluate what you discovered and what's left to discover so the next time you can bring more to the table. These are two consistencies I've noticed about myself as an actor that can be strengthened.

Overall, I feel I have grown as an actor since first beginning the program. In this performance, I used all of the techniques, readings, rehearsals and forged them all into guidelines on how to approach a production. I gauged my success by the connections I made with my fellow actors. There were times when it felt like it was only us on the stage. These moments were fueled by a confidence in the work we did during rehearsal and a commitment to our objectives and emotions. The audience did not exist. Those are the moments I will most remember and strive to experience in future performances.

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Appendix A
Scored Script

*Iran contra affair
reagan*

-9/27

TWO ROOMS

BY LEE BLESSING

*Oct 12
off book*

*intend me in a good way
in his...*

★

5-33

★

DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

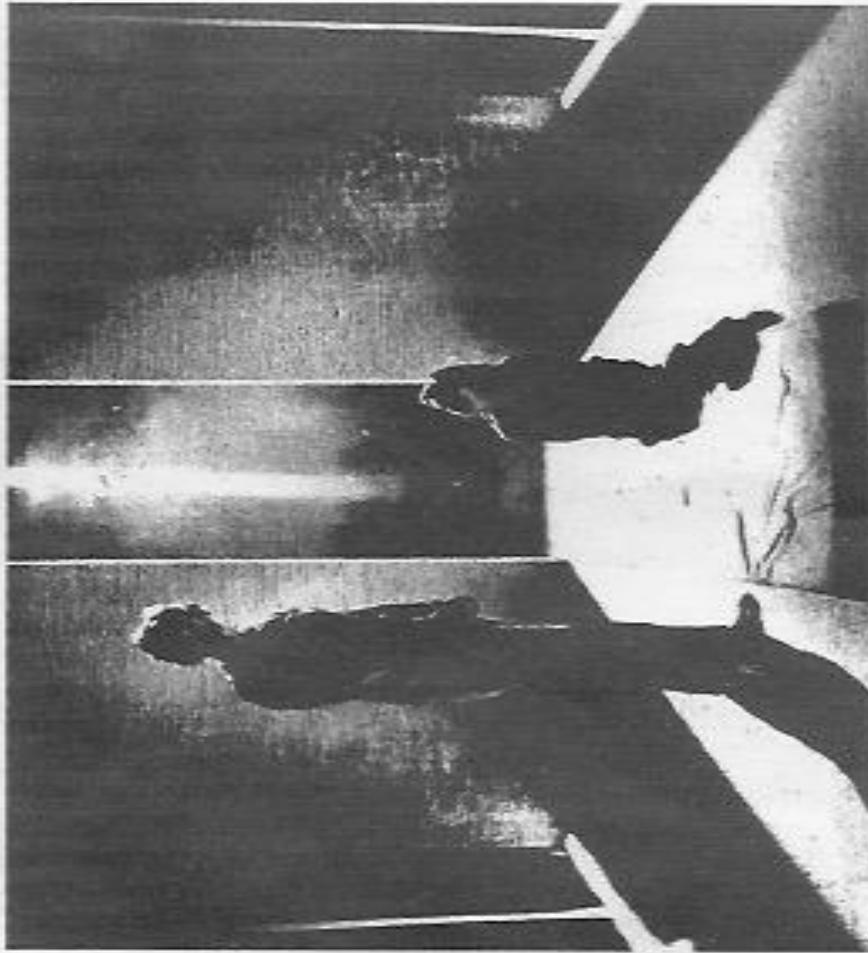


PHOTO BY SHEILA LANGER
John De Vries and Amanda Plummer in a scene from the La Jolla Playhouse production of
"Two Rooms." Setting by Marjorie Bradley Kellogg.

TWO ROOMS received its world premiere at the La Jolla Playhouse (Des McAnuff, Artistic Director; Alan Levey, Managing Director), La Jolla, California, on June 21, 1988. It was directed by Des McAnuff; the set was designed by Marjorie Bradley Kellogg; the costumes were designed by Susan Hilferty; the lighting was designed by Peter A. Kaczorowski; the music was by Michael S. Roth; the sound was by Serge Ossorguine; video production was by Dennis McNabb; and slide photography was by Harry Hendrickson. The cast was as follows:

LAINIE WELLS	Amanda Plummer
WALKER HARRIS	Brent Jennings
ELLEN VAN OSS	Jo Henderson
MICHAEL WELLS	Jon De Vries

A revised version of TWO ROOMS was produced at the Cricket Theater (William Partlan, Artistic Director) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in October 1989. It was directed by Jeanne Blake; the set design was by Rick Polenek; the lighting design was by Tina Charney; the costume design was by Anne Ruben; and technical direction was by John David Paul. The cast was as follows:

MICHAEL WELLS	Terry Edward Moore
LAINIE WELLS	Camille D'Ambrose
WALKER HARRIS	Steven Hendrickson
ELLEN VAN OSS	Shirley Venard

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL WELLS	30's, educator
LAINIE WELLS	30's, educator, married to Michael
WALKER HARRIS	30's, reporter
ELLEN VAN OSS	40's, representative of the State Department

PLACE

A room

TIME

The recent past, the present

TWO ROOMS

ACT ONE

Scene One

Lights rise to reveal a dull-colored emptiness. A narrow mat lies on the floor. The sense of an entry upstage, but no more than that. Michael lies on the mat. He has an unkempt beard, wears a t-shirt and pajamas. He also wears handcuffs. He is blindfolded.

MICHAEL. ^{unf 1} Mathison had a gun. Under his jacket. A little automatic pistol or something — I'd never seen it before. Silver. I remember it gleamed in the sunlight when he pulled it out. It was just as they were forcing us both into the car — just as he put one hand on the roof of the car. He was right in front of me, there was nowhere I could go. And suddenly this shining little fantasy pistol appeared. Can you imagine? I taught for two years with the guy and never knew he carried it. As though that was supposed to save us. As though that pitiful gun — that absurd, miniscule tribute to one man's utter lack of realism . . . I mean, he had to know what the world can do — if it just *feels* like it — to a man. To any man. And to carry a gun? The size of a cigarette case? In Beirut? *(He starts to laugh, stops because it hurts.)* He didn't even know what to do once he pulled it out. I think he really believed all those kidnapers would take one look at this mighty weapon of the West, drop their AK-47's and flee. "Run! It's a trap! He's got a tiny gun!" *(Starts to laugh again, stops.)* God, Lainie, I love

you. I wish this was a real letter. *(A beat.)* What Mathison forgot was these people have been taking hostages for thousands of years. They know how to do it. He yelled, "I'm armed!" I remember, and that same instant one of them shot it out of his hand, along with some of his fingers, and they slammed us into the car, did the old Kalashnikov-to-the-forehead routine, wrapped Mathison's hand up with his own shirt, blindfolded us and drove us . . . wherever this is. No one spoke. The only sound was Mathison weeping. I wasn't paying that much attention. I was busy counting my own fingers. And toes. *(A beat.)* Ok, this is a digression, but I'm suddenly thinking of your toes. Really. I'm remembering them on the beach at the ocean. First few dates — somewhere in there. You had a bathing suit on — which could have been the first time I saw you in one — and we were lying on towels and you dug your toes down in the wet sand. You dug them around very slowly, and suddenly I felt overwhelmed by this powerful image of . . . a sea turtle, coming ashore, digging in the sand and laying millions, or hundreds — you'd know — of eggs. And it's stupid, but it made me feel connected in a way I'd never felt before, to amphibians. I mean, there they are — forever faced with the choice: go on land and risk their life to lay eggs, or stay in the sea where it's warm and safe and eventually die out. And it occurred to me in that moment that marriage is exactly the same proposition. And I looked at your toes in the sand once more, and . . . married you anyway. *(A beat.)* I wear a blindfold. I can take it off, but if I do they beat me. Or if they come in and it looks re-tied, they beat me. Sometimes it doesn't look like I've taken it off, but since I'm an American they're sure I must have, and they beat me anyway. Their voices are so young. I'm sure it's a delusion, but sometimes I think I've had one or two of them in my class. *(A beat.)* Now I'm in theirs. *(The lights fade quickly to black. When they rise again, Lainie is alone in the room. She stands staring at the empty mat. The room is much brighter — light from an unseen window surrounds her. When she speaks, she addresses the mat at first, then moves around the room. She does not address the audience.)*

LAINIE. *unit 2* I'm talking to myself. All last night, taking the

furniture out of this room, I was talking to myself. It's not the worst habit. Besides, for the last year, what else have I been doing? *(She regards the mat critically, slides it toward one corner of the room, silently appraises its new position.)* Talking to everyone in power — which is, of course, the definition of talking to yourself. I don't know about it here. It'd probably be in a corner, but this one? Which one? *(Sliding it to another corner of the room.)* It's hard to know which was worse: talking to Moslems or talking to Christians. Talking to Lebanese or talking to Syrians. Going across the Green Line to beg, or to Damascus — or Washington. *(Suddenly nods her head decisively.)* Washington. Definitely Washington. The Arabs wouldn't help me, but at least they'd respect the pain. In Washington, I was the pain. *(Of the position of the mat.)* This is absolutely wrong. *(She moves it to another corner, stares at it.)* The head of the University said they'd do everything humanly possible to get you back. So did the head of Amal. So did the Lebanese President. So did the Syrian Foreign Minister, our embassy in Beirut, our embassy in Damascus, the Undersecretary of State, the President, and everyone running for President. This doesn't work at all. *(She moves the mat to the center of the room again.)* This is just going to have to stand for all the corners of the room. Why not? It's . . . not an exact science. *(She stares at the mat.)* You'll be here. *(She moves towards the source of light from outside, mimes pulling down a shade and lights dim. She goes to the mat, sits on one side of it, then lies on it, allowing space as though another person were lying on it with her. Tentatively, she reaches out as though stroking the cheek of her 'companion.')* From now on, I'm only talking to you. *(Lights fade to black. When they rise again, Lainie sits on the floor a few feet from the mat, staring at it. Walker stands staring at her.)*

WALKER. How long has this room been like this? *(A beat.)* Do you redecorate often? *(A beat.)* Rest of the house looks real nice. Very normal. *(A beat.)* This room, though. This room you seem to have done something to. *(A beat.)* Lainie? Can I call you Lainie? *(A beat.)* I want to thank you for letting me come. I know a lot of other reporters would like to be here. I'm glad you chose to talk to me. *(A beat.)* Lainie? *(A beat.)*

So — what is it you'd say you've done to this room?

LAINIE. I cleansed it.

WALKER. Cleansed it? *(Attempting to break the mood.)* Is that a new thing? In decor? Cleansing? *(A beat.)* Lainie? *(A beat.)* It's hard to ask the right questions if you won't —

LAINIE. I scrubbed and painted all the walls. I took all his things out.

WALKER. Was this his room? I mean — is it?

LAINIE. His office. His things were here.

WALKER. Where are they now?

LAINIE. In the basement.

WALKER. What if he comes back? Soon, I mean.

LAINIE. I painted everything. Walls, ceiling.

WALKER. A lot of consistency. What's the mat for?

LAINIE. I look at it.

WALKER. Why? *(A beat.)* Do you mind if I open the shade? *(A beat.)* Lainie? *(Without attempting to open the shade.)* So — does the government keep in contact with you?

LAINIE. She's coming today.

WALKER. She?

LAINIE. The government. Her name is Ellen. She's been attached to me. My case. *(A beat.)*

WALKER. Ellen. What time is she coming?

LAINIE. I liked your voice.

WALKER. What?

LAINIE. Your voice on the phone. I liked it.

WALKER. Why?

LAINIE. It took its time. *(She stares steadily at the mat.)*

WALKER. When is Ellen coming? *(A beat.)* Did you want me to meet her? Is that why I'm here? *(A beat.)* The government hasn't always told the truth on this issue. You do know that. *(A beat.)* I could write about this right now. With what I've got. Just having been here. I could write about this room. What you're saying, what you're not saying. But I won't — if you'll just look at me. *(Again, no response.)* What is it you're staring at?

LAINIE. His hands. *(Lights fade to black. Quickly they fade up again. Ellen now stands where Walker did. Lainie remains in the*

small emotion

frustrated

MORE POWER
IN VOICE

same position.)

writ 4

ELLEN. We think they've moved him. Not far. A different section of town, perhaps. Or even just across the street. We're reasonably certain it's no further than that. It's good strategy for them to move him from time to time. It enhances their power. (A beat.) Still, they may have moved him all the way to the Bekaa Valley. That is possible. (A beat.) They may not have moved him at all. They may only be pretending to move him. As you know, our intelligence in Beirut isn't the best. Even pretending to move him could enhance their power. (She sighs.) Frankly, almost everything enhances their power. It would be hard for Michael's captors to make a mistake, at the moment. Lainie, are you listening to me? (Walker enters with a small ottoman.)

buh-kah

WALKER. Here you go.

ELLEN. Thank you.

WALKER. (Setting it down for her.) I'm getting your tea. Lainie?

LAINIE. Nothing. (Walker exits U.)

ELLEN. Why is he here?

LAINIE. Shouldn't he be here?

ELLEN. He's from a newspaper. What have we been talking about for the last year, Lainie?

LAINIE. It's better to be quiet.

ELLEN. We have no way of knowing what public statements by hostage relatives may do. No way at all. It could make it even harder for us to secure a safe return. I'm disappointed that you called him.

LAINIE. He called me.

ELLEN. I'm disappointed he's here. It's absurd for you to talk to newspapers. Besides, one doesn't talk to newspapers in any case. One lights their fuse. Please, get rid of him.

LAINIE. I can't do that.

ELLEN. (Starting to go.) Then I'll go.

LAINIE. No.

ELLEN. I won't be able to be free with information.

LAINIE. When is there ever any information?

ELLEN. (Sighs, sits.) When are you going to do something about this room? (A beat.) Where were we?

IS RAYNELL IS VE UHL BAY ROOT

int
IR
RAN

LAINIE. You said they were moving him. Or maybe they weren't.

ELLEN. The most important thing to remember is that we're not speaking of a country of terrorists here. We're barely speaking of a country at all. We're speaking of factions. Some friendly to Iran, some to Syria, some to Israel, some to us. They're all fighting for power. For all we know your husband — ^{to include} ~~is~~ ^{liberated by a faction that favors us}

LAINIE. Michael.

ELLEN. Michael may be ^{to state} liberated by a faction that favors us. Something like that could happen at any time.

LAINIE. What are the chances?

in
proud
of this

ELLEN. The important thing is to maintain cautious optimism. ^{direct} ~~Advised~~ ^{hopeful} ~~hope~~, I call it. We're ~~hopeful~~ advised. We're not unintelligent. We recognize the reality of the situation, then we inject hope. Into that reality. Because without hope there can be no foreign policy. (Walker reenters with a small tray-table. On it is a tea set. He sets it all down next to Ellen and pours.)

WALKER. I let it steep in the kitchen.

ELLEN. Thank you. (A beat.) I'm so odd. ^{to withdraw} Everyone in Washington pumps down coffee all day as fast as they can. And then there's me — with my little cup of tea. I feel like a foreigner. (She studies the tea a moment.) The ^{ground} ~~main~~ thing — the crucial thing — is knowing that hope is a real and present possibility. Men have disappeared in Beirut, men have reappeared.

wait
I wait for me

WALKER. So when's Michael Wells going to reappear?

ELLEN. Well — that is what I mean by hope. (A beat.)

WALKER. Sorry? ^{parry} ~~ward off~~

ELLEN. I mean, for example, there are pictures. We have pictures of Michael. Taken just a month ago. Pictures of him alive.

WALKER. He had the shit beat out of him. He was barely recognizable.

ELLEN. The point is, he's alive. ^{or one}

WALKER. He was alive then. ^{stand}

ELLEN. And hope keeps him alive, right up to the present

where is James house? is there a washer for me? 12 Is a 30 mi drive from Washington

moment. That's why we use hope. Hope enhances our power.

LAINIE. When will my husband be released?

ELLEN. We can't say. *to defy on not telling*

WALKER. What do you mean, you can't say? *what is going on?*

ELLEN. I really should go. I didn't come here for a news conference. *(Ellen moves to leave.)* *to finish*

LAINIE. Ellen. *(Ellen stops.)*

WALKER. It's our Middle-East policy that's keeping your husband hostage. Nothing else.

ELLEN. That's ridiculous. *insult*

WALKER. In terms of priorities, Michael comes below oil, below U.S.-Soviet relations —

ELLEN. He's totally uninformed — *your husband is not as*

WALKER. Below U.S.-Israeli relations, U.S.-Syrian relations —

ELLEN. Lainie — *insult*

WALKER. U.S.-Iranian relations — *what?*

ELLEN. *(To Lainie.)* You'd be well-advised to reflect on your relations with the press.

WALKER. Can I quote you? *(To Lainie.)* Have you ever wondered why other governments can get their hostages out and we can't?

ELLEN. They pay ransom. *answer*

WALKER. And it works!

ELLEN. This government is using every ethical means to bring your husband back to you. *communication*

WALKER. This government wouldn't care if your husband died. *we had motion picture*

ELLEN. Mr. Harris! *reprimand*

WALKER. Because then he's not a problem anymore.

ELLEN. Either he goes — right now — or I do. *deal with*

WALKER. *(To Ellen.)* How does she get you to come out here, anyway? It's a thirty-minute drive.

ELLEN. Lainie? *to insult*

LAINIE. I won't talk to her on the phone.

WALKER. Really?

LAINIE. I hang up the minute I hear her voice.

WALKER. How come?

ELLEN. Lainie. *to demand*

LAINIE. I don't want to be alone when I hear about Michael. I want to hear it from her face to face.

ELLEN. I come out here because I wish to!

LAINIE. I told them I'd fast. I'd chain myself to a building.

ELLEN. We have never taken her seriously.

WALKER. You're here.

ELLEN. The Department feels that since Lainie does live close by, and is only asking for one personal visit per week —

LAINIE. I want two next week.

ELLEN. One or two visits per week, it's a small price to pay for keeping her —

WALKER. Quiet?

ELLEN. From embarrassing herself. You're a newsman, Mr. Harris. Certainly you understand the degree to which media can adversely affect a sensitive situation.

WALKER. Sure. That's why I investigate every goddamn story I can. (A beat.)

ELLEN. We encounter all sorts of emotional responses in these situations. This we are prepared for. My job is to help victims learn which responses are appropriate, and which are not. The response of running to the papers, in the vain belief that they are somehow the repository of virtue and kindness, is woefully inappropriate. I urge you to ask yourself what's in it for them. (Starting out, then stopping.)

The government is doing all it can along every avenue. There are however acts of God, for example, over which no government has power.

LAINIE. You think this is an act of God?

ELLEN. No. But it is . . . as remote. (Starting out again.) I'll be back next Wednesday.

LAINIE. Monday.

ELLEN. (A glimpse of irritation crossing her face.) Monday. (Ellen exits U.)

WALKER. (Once she is gone.) You wonder why the government can't do anything. Right there — that attitude. That's the reason.

LAINIE. Walker, goodbye.

WALKER. Goodbye? What do you mean?

LAINIE. Goodbye.

WALKER. We've just gotten started.

LAINIE. Goodbye. *(A beat.)*

WALKER. When can I come back? *(No response.)* You know, I've got better things to do than chase down stories of uncooperative people. *(A beat. He starts to go, stops.)* Do you want me to leave? I'll do what you want me to do. *(A beat.)* Lainie? What is it you want me to do?

LAINIE. Bring back my husband. *(He stares at her, then leaves. Lights quickly fade to black. When they rise again, Michael is alone onstage, as he was at the beginning.)*

MICHAEL. I have new guards now. *unit 5* It's been more than a year, hasn't it? They don't tell me exactly. I've discovered some things here. For example, your hands can become friends if they're in handcuffs long enough. *(A beat.)* I once saw a hand just lying in the street. You remember that day I came home, after walking past a car-bombing? I didn't tell you at the time, but I saw it. Just a hand, lying there, unclaimed. It wasn't even horrible so much as . . . terrifyingly lonely. *(A beat.)* I ask myself all the time, "Why did we stay here? Why did we stay here? Why?" *(A beat.)* I look back now and can't believe we stayed. Can't believe we actually sat there at the University and said, "One last term. Then we'll leave." One last term. I wonder if we would've left even then. I wonder if somehow, some part of us even liked the danger. Or was in awe of what we were witnessing. I mean, why does anyone stay? This city's in the hands of boys. Teenagers roam the streets carrying AK-47's and somebody stays? I don't know if there's ever been a city that has for this long been such a horror. That's taken itself apart brick by brick, life by life. And so many of us stayed. We walked down the street, through the rubble, past the checkpoints, past the bombings — we had days full of ordinary moments. Amid — what? — devils from Hell. Boys who might shoot you the next moment. Cars that might drive up, park and explode. *(With a growing tension that finally breaks through.)* And none of us seemed ready to say, "Leave it. Let us out of here! Please, God anything but this! Stop it!" *(A beat. He recovers himself.)* And none of us was ever quite ready to leave. *(He moves towards a wall. Lainie enters and sits next to the mat, reaching out as though stroking Michael's hair. Michael is oblivious to her.)*

LAINIE. Michael? This bothers me. Here on this side, just below *unit 6*

your mouth. It's a line here. A little tuck, almost. A wrinkle. It's not on the other side. I don't mind you growing older, but you should do it all over your face, evenly. Don't you think? *(A beat.)* This, though. Here at your temple. I like this. The way the hairs glide along the side, over your ear, into the tangle in back. Just these hairs on the side, running straight back, like they're in a hurry. *(With a slight laugh.)* But all this car-hair. This has got to go. *(Quieter.)* A beard. I can't imagine it. *(A beat.)* I suppose you don't get enough sleep. Or maybe you do. Maybe all you do is sleep. I hope so. I wish you could sleep from first to last. That you'd never open your eyes again, till I was in front of you. Your eyes are so . . . Why do women love eyes so much? They say it's men that are visual. *(A beat.)* Michael? *(Lights fade to black.)*

Scene Two

2 months later
A slide appears on the U. wall. It's a picture of a heavily-damaged building in Beirut. We see Lainie and Walker silhouetted on the floor, looking up at it.

Unit 7
LAINIE. This is a hotel in Beirut near where we lived. It was destroyed in some shelling a couple of months before . . . before he was taken. *(We hear the sound of a slide projector. The picture changes the site of a car-bomb explosion.)* A car bombing. Michael used to take pictures as he walked along. He wasn't looking for these kinds of things. You just couldn't avoid them. People at the University told him it was dangerous. It made people notice him. Even more, mean. And he did stop a few weeks before . . . *(Another slide: a Lebanese youth, perhaps 15, with an automatic weapon.)* This guy commanded a whole block. He liked Michael. He wanted to pose *(Another slide: the coast. A few indistinct figures at the shore.)* Michael heard that people had started fishing with grenades. They'd just toss a grenade in the water, and . . . fish that way. *(Another slide: a Lebanese woman, weeping bitterly.)* Michael said he could've taken this picture a hundred times. I'm not sure what it was about her. He didn't know her. He saw something different as he passed. Maybe the sun's shining on her in a different way. Maybe it's something

about the way she's standing, or — whatever it is, all the values just seem to . . . hold you. *(Suddenly the projector shuts off. The image disappears. Blackness.)*

WALKER. What's wrong?

LAINIE. I want to stop now.

WALKER. We just started.

LAINIE. I'm sorry.

WALKER. I'll get the lights.

LAINIE. Don't.

WALKER. You want to sit in the dark?

LAINIE. Do you think they still blindfold him?

WALKER. They might. Who can know?

LAINIE. Do they chain him?

WALKER. They might. *(Walker flicks on the lights. He stands at the U. wall. Lainie still sits on the floor.)* Those are good pictures. He's a good photographer.

LAINIE. He's a good teacher, too. I'm sorry. These pictures were harder than I thought. I shouldn't have agreed to show them to you.

WALKER. It's a shame. They'd go awfully well with an interview. If you'd ever give me an interview.

LAINIE. I can't decide.

WALKER. It's been two months. *(A beat.)*

LAINIE. Why haven't you written anything up to now? You have more than enough without me talking.

WALKER. I guess I'd like to have your permission. *(With a self-deprecating laugh.)* My editors think I'm crazy, of course. But that's why. *(A beat.)* I won't write anything if you don't want me to. That's a promise.

LAINIE. What's a promise?

WALKER. You were teaching, weren't you? After you got back here? *(Lainie nods.)* But recently you took a leave of absence?

LAINIE. You've been asking about me?

WALKER. Why'd you leave?

LAINIE. It's hard to teach natural sciences when . . . *(She trails off.)*

WALKER. When what?

LAINIE. When nothing's natural. *(A beat.)*

WALKER. So. Do you sit in here all day?

LAINIE. No. I'm working on a project. It's something I couldn't do in Beirut.

WALKER. What is it?

LAINIE. I watch birds. I go down to the marsh a couple miles away and. . . Warblers, mostly. I'm working on them.

WALKER. Does it relax you?

LAINIE. It teaches me.

WALKER. And the rest of the time you're in here? Not much of a life. *(A beat.)*

LAINIE. Michael's here. I can't explain it, but for me he is. In this room. The moment I come in, I feel. . . the warmth of his body. The rest of the house — everywhere else — is cold.

WALKER. You need to talk to people. Away from here. At work or —

LAINIE. I work in a marsh.

WALKER. You should talk to friends. How about the other hostage families?

LAINIE. It's like looking in a mirror.

WALKER. Then talk to the public. That really hasn't been tried enough. We could start with an interview. In depth, about —

LAINIE. My pain?

WALKER. Among other things. We could run it in the paper. Two, three installments. Maybe more.

LAINIE. We could run my pain in installments?

WALKER. It's better than hiding in a marsh. *(A beat.)*

LAINIE. Ellen says that won't help anyone but the kidnappers.

WALKER. No one knows what will help. That's the first thing. No one knows. All we know is what we've done, and what hasn't worked. Keeping silent hasn't worked.

LAINIE. Why do you care about this? You don't have anyone over there.

WALKER. I care about people who are going through what you're going through.

LAINIE. But why? Why our pain? There's so much to pick from. The world is full of terrible . . . outcomes. Why did you choose this? Is it because you can win an award?

WALKER. An award? What are you talking about?

LAINIE. Intense suffering. A long series. Lots of installments. A

Pulitzer prize.

WALKER. Is that what you think I'm here for? I've been waiting for months! You think that's how I'd go after a Pulitzer prize? You think I'd wait for you to ask me here? I'd be on your doorstep every day. I'd be out in the marsh with you.

LAINIE. I'm sorry.

WALKER. I've stared into too many faces — yours included — of people who've been told, "Your husband's gone. He may be dead. There's nothing you can do." (*A beat.*) The reason I'm here is because more than anyone this has happened to — any family, I mean — you understand what's really going on.

LAINIE. What's really going on?

WALKER. What's really going on is that they'll let him die. They've already made the value judgment on him and the others. To this administration, it's more effective to use his captivity — and even his death — to push a bunch of policy points, than it is to use every means to get him back.

LAINIE. You really think that?

WALKER. I know it. So do you. The day he's reported dead, do you think they'll be taking any responsibility? They'll be all over TV, pointing the finger at every terrorist in the Middle East and saying, "These are barbarians. Don't try to understand them, just let us do what we must do." And we'll let them.

LAINIE. What do you think I should do?

WALKER. I've said. Speak out. Do interviews. Go on TV if you have to. (*She considers this.*)

LAINIE. No.

WALKER. Why not?

LAINIE. (*Shakes her head.*) It's too public for me. It's too . . . public.

WALKER. Well. Fear of speaking. Right up there with — what? Fear of falling, fear of loud noises —

LAINIE. That's not fair.

WALKER. Oh, I'm not being fair? Sorry. You're right. Loud noises can be pretty rough. (*He suddenly claps his hand loudly behind her ear. She pulls away from it, holding her ear in pain.*)

LAINIE. Stop that!

WALKER. That's probably going to be the last thing Michael ever hears. Only it won't be two hands clapping, it'll be a gun.

LAINIE. Get out of here!

WALKER. Care about your husband.

LAINIE. I do!

WALKER. Do something!

LAINIE. I am!

WALKER. Do more!

LAINIE. No!! *(A beat.)* You know what will get him back? Nothing we can understand. Whatever took Michael, whatever will bring him back is a power so incomprehensible we'll never understand it. And all the running around screaming about injustice won't change a thing. All we can do—all anyone can do—is take pictures of mourning widows. Write stories about mourning widows. Become fascinated with widows of men who aren't even dead yet. But nothing—*nothing*—will make a difference.

WALKER. Lainie, I'm only—

LAINIE. Get out! If I want to see a scavenger, I'll go to the marsh. *(A beat. Walker hesitates, then exits. Lights fade to black. When they rise again, Michael sits alone on the mat. He is blindfolded.)*

MICHAEL. *(A beat.)* War isn't a tear in the fabric of things, it is the fabric. If earth is our mother, our father is war. The chief priority we have on earth is to vie with each other for a place to stand. Does any of this make sense, Lainie? I'm trying to explain why this has happened to us. Americans fight all the time—lots of wars. But always far away. We haven't had to fight for the soil we stand on in a century. We've forgotten that level of sacrifice. These people haven't. Everyone in this country—Christian, Sunni Moslem, Shi'ite, Palestinian, Israeli—everyone is fighting for the ground. The ground itself. They stand here or nowhere. So it's easy for them to give up their lives. Small sacrifice. It's easy for them to kill, too. Small sacrifice. You know how being here, being swallowed up by it, makes me feel? Like I'm finally part of the real world. For the first time. Lainie, something in me never felt... affected... until this happened. You know what it makes me think of? Shiloh. Vicksburg. The Wilderness. What those places must have been like: suffocating, endless, bleeding disaster. Stacking of bodies ten deep for a few feet of *our ground*. Don't you see? We're not different from these people, we've just forgotten. We think this urge doesn't exist anymore. We abstract everything, we objectify. We talk about

global politics, how all this affects the balance of power. Do you know what a twenty-year-old Shi'ite thinks of the balance of power?
(Lights fade to black.)

Scene Three

Lights fade up to reveal Ellen sitting in a chair. Lainie sits on the floor facing her.

ELLEN. I got a call today.

LAINIE. About Michael?

ELLEN. Not exactly. About Walker. He's been visiting you now and then, hasn't he?

LAINIE. What's wrong with that?

ELLEN. Nothing. He was here about a week ago. You looked at slides, I believe.

LAINIE. How do you know that? Did he tell you?

ELLEN. Walker? Oh, no. (Laughs slightly.) No, no, no. Sometimes we watch your house.

LAINIE. You do?

ELLEN. Of course. You're on the list.

LAINIE. What list?

ELLEN. The Watch Your House list. You've made threats. You're a potential embarrassment. In the realm of international politics, that can be serious. Terrorists can use what you do. What Walker does, too. Americans are often naive in their efforts to affect things like the media, public opinion. They can end up helping this country's enemies far more than themselves. In a situation like this, where so little can be done, the temptation must be irresistible to do something irrational, counterproductive. That's the only way I can understand what Walker's done.

LAINIE. What's he done?

ELLEN. Oh, that's right. You don't know yet. That call I got? It was from one of his editors. Walker's written a story. About you. It'll be out tomorrow. Not an interview. He doesn't quote you directly. But he details the kidnapping, and all your various meetings with people during the early months, and... I'm afraid

... also this room.

LAINIE. He'd never do that without telling me.

ELLEN. That's what I thought. That's why I'm here, in fact. To find out if he really has done this behind your back. (A beat.) Is that the case?

LAINIE. Can we get them not to print the story?

ELLEN. No. But I'd like to make a suggestion or two, if I could.

LAINIE. What?

ELLEN. If you were to make a public statement disavowing the article, that might help. Perhaps having a different reporter, from a newspaper we could recommend, come in and see this room in a more normal state —

LAINIE. No.

ELLEN. Whatever you like. Perhaps only a photographer. Just a picture of you sitting in this room with furniture, the window open

... (Lainie is silent.) Well. Let's see what damage is done before we look for solutions. (A beat. Ellen rises.) I probably should be getting back to the office. (She moves to leave. Lainie is motionless.) Lainie? Are you all right?

LAINIE. Are you pretending to care?

ELLEN. I care very much. I think you know that.

LAINIE. If you did, you'd do something.

ELLEN. I told you, there's nothing we can do about Walker —

LAINIE. Not about Walker; about Michael.

ELLEN. We do things all the time. Every day. We just can't tell you about them.

LAINIE. Nothing happens.

ELLEN. Sometimes something happens. People do get released.

LAINIE. Not because of anything you do.

ELLEN. You can't know that.

LAINIE. I can't know much, given how little you tell me.

ELLEN. A government must have secrets.

LAINIE. Why?

ELLEN. I'm not conducting a course for children. (A beat.) We need silence. From you, from all the hostage families. And a willingness to let us do our job. It isn't easy for you, we know that. But talking with people like Walker doesn't help anyone, and as we've learned today, it's its own punishment. The one thing you

can do — the only thing that will be of any use — is to hope.

LAINIE. Hope?

ELLEN. Hope.

LAINIE. Hope doesn't come from you, does it?

ELLEN. What do you mean?

LAINIE. It comes from God, doesn't it? Or Allah? Jehovah? Fate? A higher power — isn't that right? Certainly not the government. The government doesn't dole out hope. It's not an entitlement program.

ELLEN. I don't see how this —

LAINIE. I study hope all the time. You know where? The marsh. I watch the warblers there, nesting. I know their whole life cycle. Little, friendly I-won't-bore-you-with-the-Latin-name warblers. Thousands of them. Going about their business. Not too many predators, plenty of insects to eat. They wouldn't need hope at all if it weren't for one thing.

ELLEN. Which is?

LAINIE. The cuckoo. A much larger bird. Fewer of them, but . . . larger.

ELLEN. I'm not sure I see the connection. *take a day down*

LAINIE. You're right. Cuckoos don't eat warblers. They also eat insects. But cuckoos don't build nests. Instead, they wait till the warblers are away from theirs. Then they lay their eggs in the middle of all the warbler eggs. Neat, eh? Camouflage.

ELLEN. Sounds . . . effective. *to do this*

LAINIE. Oh, it works every time. *never by itself* The warblers return, and because they have — literally — bird brains, they don't seem to notice the great big egg among the little ones. They sit on them all. And what do you think happens? I mean, what's evolution for? The cuckoo hatches first. And there he is — nearly as big as his step-parents, demanding an immense volume of food, and waiting for the warbler eggs to hatch one by one. And when they do, do you know what happens then?

ELLEN. Inform me. *to prevent her to go on w/ her story*

LAINIE. They crawl around — blind, as the cuckoo chick is blind — in the nest, waiting for their parents to return with food. But as they do, one by one, they encounter a miracle of natural selection: the back of the baby cuckoo.

ELLEN. The back?

LAINIE. Its back, unlike other birds' backs, is indented. There's a hollow. And you know what it's shaped like? What it's just big enough for? A baby warbler. And yet another miracle of nature: the baby cuckoo has an instinct. To do what? Push against anything that touches its back. Push and push until that thing is not there anymore. And with great effectiveness, one by one, this blind, newborn, totally innocent bird murders each of the blind, newborn, totally innocent warblers, by pushing them out of the nest where they'll starve or be eaten by rats and snakes.

ELLEN. Thank you for sharing such a wonderful story.

LAINIE. I'm not done. Warbler Mom and Dad come home. What do they find? One baby — which is as big as a Buick, and doesn't chirp like them. What do they think? Who will ever know? What do they do? Feed the only baby they have. Until one day it flies off, fully-fledged, a different species. And God or Allah or Nature or Fate — which we've already agreed is the author of hope — looks on with something more than indifference. With approval. *(A beat.)* The indentation in the cuckoo's back — that is the face of God. That is the chance of hope in the world.

ELLEN. Not every nest is visited by a cuckoo.

LAINIE. Mine was. Now offer me hope. *(Lainie turns, exits quickly U. Ellen sighs, starts to follow after her. Before she can reach the door, Michael enters, in handcuffs. He is blindfolded. Ellen is unsurprised to see him.)*

MICHAEL. They take me to the bathroom once a day. If I'm lucky I can shower once a month. Pardon my appearance.

ELLEN. That's perfectly all right.

MICHAEL. I imagine you dream about all your hostages.

ELLEN. Just you.

MICHAEL. Really?

ELLEN. Well, I'm assigned to you. The State Department is very big. Other hostages are dreamt about by others.

MICHAEL. *(Nods.)* Ah.

ELLEN. Don't misunderstand. The dreams don't bother me.

MICHAEL. They don't?

ELLEN. What do you think about all day?

MICHAEL. I think about a man as a stored object. As a broom in

from the
story of the
man who
was
in
the
broom

a broom closet. I think about brine shrimp in the Kalahari.

ELLEN. Brine shrimp? *question*

MICHAEL. Tiny shrimp that live in the desert, in Africa. Lainie told me about them. They can live for years in suspended animation in the mud of a dry lakebed. When rain comes — if it comes — they wake up, and swim around, and procreate as fast as they can and get eaten by everything around them. Then after a week or two the lake dries up again, and the lucky ones hit the mud for another . . . decade. Ninety-nine percent of their life is spent waiting for their life. You get out of the United States, you see a lot of that. Whole cultures waiting to be alive.

ELLEN. You're sympathetic to your captors' cause. The Stockholm Effect. A common syndrome — it's documented.

MICHAEL. It's convenient. You're sure your dreams don't bother you?

ELLEN. No more than the student's dream of being late to the exam bothers the student. There's some real anxiety at first, but ultimately —

MICHAEL. Indifference?

ELLEN. I realize it's not real.

MICHAEL. I am real.

ELLEN. Of course. But I'm not required to treat you that way. *(She exits quickly U. Lights fade to black.)*

Scene Four

Lights rise to reveal Lainie and Walker. The chair is gone.

WALKER. I want to be able to give you my side of things. *(A beat.)*

I want to show you that what I did —

LAINIE. You promised me. *(A beat.)*

WALKER. That what I did —

LAINIE. You promised me.

WALKER. Lainie —

LAINIE. This room. You put this room in a newspaper.

WALKER. It's in a newspaper every day. It's Michael's room. It's

the room they're all in. Hell, everyone's in it. We can't get out.
LAINIE. People call me. They've been calling all week. They want to know if this room really exists. They want to know if they can come over.

WALKER. I'm sorry.

LAINIE. You're sorry?! My life hasn't been that different, you know. I've had friends take advantage of me before. I've had them hurt me, betray me. I know what it's like. But I never thought someone would come into my life now — as it is now — and do this.

WALKER. Lainie —

LAINIE. *Why?*

WALKER. 'Cause you were smothering, that's why. You were sitting in here and pumping the air out, and for all Washington cared you could do it forever. Your husband, the men in Lebanon, the people in this country need you. They need you to say "I hurt" — in public. They need you to say, "I don't believe my government," and "We have to try new ways." They need to hear you say it over and over.

LAINIE. *That's for me to decide! That's my choice! You took my choice!* (A silence.) You think that just because you've been in this room, you understand it? It's the one place I can go and find Michael. Where I can feel — however imperfectly — what he's experiencing. No barrier between us. No one coming between. No one. I don't have to hear about him from a government spokesperson, or a reporter or concerned friends — I have him here. He's mine.

WALKER. (Quietly.) It's an illusion.

LAINIE. *What isn't?* How do you want me to experience Michael? On the news? In the faces of all the sick human beings I've had to beg for his freedom? Holding hands with how many other helpless relatives? You're a great one to talk about illusions — that's your whole business. If I can have Michael — no matter how I do it — I'm going to have him. Do you understand?

WALKER. Lainie —

LAINIE. *Do you understand?!* (A beat. Walker nods, turns to leave.) People are calling me. Reporters — other reporters — want to do articles about me and this room. What are we going to do about that?

WALKER. I don't know. I'm sorry. (A beat. He starts out again.)

LAINIE. I'm going to give you an exclusive interview.

WALKER. Why?

LAINIE. Because now that you've written what you've written, talking to someone is inevitable. Unless I just want to be thought of as . . . odd, I'll have to speak out. A lot of reporters would work, I suppose. But with you there's a special advantage. I know how far I can trust you. *(Walker exits. Lights fade quickly to black and quickly rise again. Lainie is with Michael, who is blindfolded.)*

MICHAEL. Some days I go around a room at home. Any room. Doesn't matter, they're all wonderlands compared to where I'm kept. Today it's my office. I try to remember everything about every piece of furniture. Where I bought it, what it was like that day, the smells in the air. It's really very sobering, how much the mind recalls when it's forced to. I remember my chair, my filing cabinet — and not just my filing cabinet, but the exact order of files: household, course-plans, medical, automobile, retirement — all of it. As if I took a picture. I remember the *smell* of my desk. And each day. I think I remember each day in my office — all of them. Cold days, wet days, days of incredible light. *(A beat.)* Did I tell you I was making a new country? On the wall. I feel the tiny bumps. They're mountains, of course. And the cracks are rivers. I work on it all day, sometimes. Every mountain has a name. There's Mount Freedom — of course. There's Mount Hope and Mount Sense of Humor. And Mount Forgiveness. There's Mount Forgiveness. Most days though, I fill up with the people we know. You, mostly. *(Lainie carefully removes Michael's blindfold. He smiles at her.)* You know that child we thought about having? We had him. He's um . . . almost six months now. I'm aging him faster than normal so we can talk together sooner. His name is Andrew. Because I like it. He has your hair and eyes, and . . . I can't tell about his nose yet. We may have a daughter later, I'm not ruling it out. *(A beat. They stare at each other.)* Who can predict the future? *(Lights fade quickly to black.)*

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT TWO

Scene One

A tight spot comes up on Ellen, sitting on a chair in the room. She smiles.

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ELLEN. What does it mean to be an American? Well, here it means — for most of us — “to be comfortable.” Elsewhere in the world it means to be punished. To be punished justly, some would say, for the crime of having been born here and not there. *(We suddenly see a slide of a young Shi'ite terrorist on the same wall Lainie's slides appeared in Act One.)* This is one of those who does the punishing. He may be college-educated. He may well be a graduate of the American University in Beirut. He may be a shepherd, with no education whatsoever. He may speak English, or only Arabic. He may be devout — he may not. He may be utterly committed to his cause, or only doing this because it provides work and food and some measure of security. Perhaps he likes the excitement. Perhaps, like most young men, he just likes the guns. He may be relatively humane; he may be monstrous. *(Another slide — another young Shi'ite terrorist.)* Here's another one. *(Another slide — another young Shi'ite terrorist.)* And another. *(Another slide — another young Shi'ite terrorist, then several more in quick succession. She speaks as they flash past.)* And another, and another, and — thousands in this country. And this of course is only one country. Think of it — enormous numbers of people all over the world hating Americans. Hating other Westerners too, of course, but particularly Americans. Willing to kill even the most innocent of us. To make an example of our men, women, children, infants, of the aged, the infirm — of any American. To imprison us without trial. For years. Why? *(Another slide — a very young Shi'ite terrorist, complete with rocket-launcher.)* They watch our television, you know. See our films, wear our clothes, drive our cars, listen to our music. They use our technology — what they can afford of it. They learn in our universities. What do they learn? That by sheerest accident, they have been born in a part of the world which has no power. That to be an uneducated person in a small country, speaking a bypassed language, worshipping an old

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fashioned god is worse than death. That to be such a person without a *revolution* — or promise of a revolution — is to be shut in a room, blindfolded, with a chain around your ankle for life. (*More slides — pictures of slain hostages William Buckley, Peter Kilburn and William Higgins.*) These men are dead. They were American hostages taken in Lebanon, and later apparently murdered. They were not killed for who they were so much as for who they might have been: that is, any of us. They were our representatives in death. Their lives were erased by those whose lives otherwise might never have been written. (*Another slide — Shi'ite militiamen celebrating in a Beirut street.*) Men whose only reality is to reject and destroy what they can of the Western world — which floats before them as an unreachable illusion, both detested and desired. Infinitely powerful, infinitely weak. In a real sense, the Crusades are here again. We in the State Department understand that. It's our job to be ready to sacrifice the few for the many when necessary, and we do. It's our job to look down the road, to ascertain what is and isn't likely to happen, and form our judgments accordingly. For example. (*More slides: Americans who have been kidnapped in Lebanon since 1984.*) These men, all kidnap victims, are of course undergoing dehumanizing conditions in their false imprisonment. No one denies this. They are being held by men who would as soon kill them as anything else. Yet, since 1984 out of the total of more than sixty foreigners taken, only a few have died. Over thirty have been released. We in State have to believe that the kidnapers are no more interested in dead hostages than we are. We have to believe that time is therefore on our side, not theirs. That ultimately the situation will be resolved — after a presidential election here, or a shift in the military or political situation there or whatever. A break will come. (*The slides stop on a picture of Peter Kilburn.*) But if I'm wrong, if these men in fact all suffer torture and die as a direct result of this country's policy in the Middle East, I must be ready to accept that too. American citizens have to realize that when we take a risk, the U.S. government can't always save us. That the time comes when we — on an individual basis — will simply have to pay. (*The slide goes out. Total blackness. When lights rise again, Linnie and Michael sit on the mat in the same position as at the end of Act One.*)

unit 15

LAINIE. Do they move you very often?

MICHAEL. Now and then.

LAINIE. Are the rooms ever different?

MICHAEL. It's always the same room. Whatever it looks like.

LAINIE. Why do they move you?

MICHAEL. They're nervous. I'm a prize, remember? The Army could steal me away, another faction could steal me. Sort of like sea gulls fighting over an orange rind on the beach.

LAINIE. What do you do all day?

MICHAEL. Write letters to you. What do you do?

LAINIE. Well, I . . . I do a lot of things. I do my work.

MICHAEL. And how's that?

LAINIE. Oh, you know . . . never-ending.

MICHAEL. *(With a smile.)* That's the trouble with nature. What else do you do?

LAINIE. Nothing.

MICHAEL. Still?

LAINIE. I'm still getting used to it.

MICHAEL. It's been a —

LAINIE. I know how long it's been — it's been longer than my life, all right?

MICHAEL. I know.

LAINIE. I wish they kidnapped women.

MICHAEL. They do. Sometimes.

LAINIE. They let them go. *(A beat.)*

MICHAEL. Does anything make you happy?

LAINIE. Sometimes Walker does.

MICHAEL. What's he like?

LAINIE. He's like you. He likes to be where he's told he shouldn't be. *(A beat.)* I gave him an interview.

MICHAEL. You did?

LAINIE. I talked about you. I talked about how little anyone's doing. All the standard things. I feel like such a fool when it's all over and nothing's happened. We all of us seem that way to me sometimes — all the ones who speak out. Going around the country, grabbing the whole nation by the elbow, saying, "Please! Can't you do something?" *(A beat.)* Do you ever hear gunfire where you are? Or shelling?

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MICHAEL. Yes.

LAINIE. Close?

MICHAEL. Close enough. I fantasize sometimes that the place gets hit. A hole opens up, and I run out of it. Like someone escaping from a crashed plane. About the same odds, I suppose. I like the room this way. Thanks.

LAINIE. Ellen always want me to open the window.

MICHAEL. Maybe you should.

LAINIE. You think so?

MICHAEL. You know what I'd give for a window?

LAINIE. Yes. *(He rises, moves towards the window. He makes a gesture as though opening a curtain. Light pours into the room. He looks out, smiles. Lainie rises and joins him at the window. After a moment Michael exits U., leaving Lainie staring out. Lights fade to black. When they rise again, Ellen and Lainie stand across the room from each other. The light in the room window is apparently still open, since the light remains brighter.)*

ELLEN. Well. This is certainly an improvement.

LAINIE. Thank you.

ELLEN. When did you start opening the window?

LAINIE. A couple of weeks ago. Right after you were here last.

ELLEN. Really. It's much more pleasant. Maybe I should stay away longer next time.

LAINIE. If you do, don't come back.

ELLEN. Don't be cross. You know I've had to be in the office every minute lately. That's the whole point of a crisis, isn't it? Keep the bureaucrats in their place.

LAINIE. How's the crisis coming?

ELLEN. You should know. You're doing enough to intensify it.

LAINIE. That's not what I'm doing.

ELLEN. It isn't? Let me remind you of your phone call to me yesterday.

LAINIE. You don't have to —

ELLEN. *(From memory — perfectly, of course.)* Walker says I should go on TV. I think he may be right. Maybe this is a real opportunity to put pressure on people.

LAINIE. I didn't mean you.

ELLEN. Of course you meant me. You meant the State Department.

LAINIE. All right, so I did mean you. So what?

ELLEN. Lainie, this crisis has been manageable so far. But there's no telling what can happen. We have a lot of Americans trapped with some exceedingly dangerous terrorists in a very cramped charter terminal in Crete. If you and other hostage relatives start jumping onto TV screens now, God knows what effect it will have.

LAINIE. Maybe a good effect.

ELLEN. I doubt it. Lainie, there are twenty-three American lives in that building. We can't break in, they have the building rigged to explode. We have to bargain. Fast. It's important that no other issue gets involved.

LAINIE. You mean Michael.

ELLEN. We're speaking of innocent lives here.

LAINIE. What's Michael? Guilty?

ELLEN. *(With a frustrated sigh.)* There's a dead serviceman lying twenty feet from the door of that terminal. At the moment they won't even let us take his body away.

LAINIE. I know.

ELLEN. He just thought he was on vacation. He wasn't even in uniform. But he was unfortunate enough to have a military I.D., and —

LAINIE. *I know. (A beat.)* Can't we just wait them out? Can't we — ?

ELLEN. This group likes to die for what they believe in. They're not like a bunch of bank robbers. As far as they're concerned, when they die, they win. *(A beat.)* Now, they have made demands. They want some fellow terrorists released. Those demands are being studied by various . . . governments, and just between you and me, we may be able to come to an agreement. Or somebody may. It's rather complicated, you can imagine. But believe me, when terrorists take a group as large as this, everyone understands it's a short-term project.

LAINIE. Project? Is that how you see it? What's Michael — a long-term project?

ELLEN. Sadly, in a sense, yes.

LAINIE. Because he wasn't lucky enough to be abducted in an airport? With a bunch of other people?

ELLEN. Lainie, there are physical realities.

Walk
away
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LAINIE. What about moral realities?

ELLEN. Please — don't mix apples and oranges. If you go public, if you make demands, you'll only delay matters and increase the danger for everyone involved. And frankly, no matter what you do, we won't ask for Michael's release.

LAINIE. You won't?

ELLEN. It's not his time.

LAINIE. His time? *same / different orientation*

ELLEN. It's nice with the window open. You should leave it this way, I think. *(Rising to leave.)* Well, I don't have much free time. I'm afraid I'll only be able to talk on the phone, at least until this present emergency's over. It's hard for me to be away right now. Lainie? *(Lainie hasn't moved.)* Soon it will be over and everything will be back to normal. *(A beat.)* I am sorry it can't be now. *(Ellen exits. Lights fade to black, then quickly rise again on Walker entering with a photograph in his hand.)*

WALKER. *(Calling out loudly.)* Lainie! This is great! This is fantastic! Thank you!

LAINIE. *(Entering.)* It's just a picture.

WALKER. Are you kidding? Michael and Jim Mathison together at the University of Beirut? You never told me you had this.

LAINIE. I didn't see any reason to —

WALKER. Look at it. They've got their arms around each other, they look warm, human, vulnerable — it's perfect.

LAINIE. Walker —

WALKER. We've got to bring this along. They'll want to use it on the show, I know it.

LAINIE. You think so?

WALKER. They'd kill for it. It's got everything you'd want: simple, affecting — this'll communicate.

LAINIE. I don't want to bring it.

WALKER. You don't?

LAINIE. I look at that picture. I don't want it flashed all over the country.

WALKER. Why not? That's exactly what you want to do. It's the perfect one. It affects you. It'll affect other people. *(She takes it from him.)*

LAINIE. I'll find another one.

WALKER. No.

LAINIE. No?

WALKER. Either you're going to do this or you're not. You have a chance to make a statement here. But it's only going to be heard if you make it as strong as possible. "Quietest Hostage Wife Speaks Out" is a headline. "Quietest Hostage Wife Sort Of Speaks Out" isn't.

LAINIE. But this is a picture.

WALKER. Doesn't matter. It's all imagery. The pictures we choose, the copy we write, the interviews you give — it's all a matter of giving the proper image. That's how people think. Images — not ideas. Images.

LAINIE. *(Of the picture.)* If I give this up, I give it up. I won't be able to look at it. *(A beat. She gives it to him.)*

WALKER. Good. Thanks. They'll pick this up everywhere, believe me. They'll run it all over — all the networks. This is the perfect time. Couldn't be more perfect. I was afraid this would all be over by now, I really was.

LAINIE. Have they let anyone go? Women, children?

WALKER. Nobody. Not a one.

LAINIE. What if they decide to . . . to — ?

WALKER. Kill more of them? It's possible. But it's not all that likely. They've already made their point with the soldier. We know they're serious.

LAINIE. They could get nervous. Someone could make a mistake.

WALKER. No one's going to make a mistake. These things are rituals. Everyone knows the role they're playing. Our role is to get Michael into the deal. We can, too. We're going to help him — starting with this . . . *(Indicates the picture.)* and one very intense interview. Come on — let's get you down to the studio. *(He moves to leave, turns, sees that she's not moving.)* Come on.

LAINIE. What happens after the interview?

WALKER. Another interview. Maybe a lot of them.

LAINIE. And after that?

WALKER. Everybody. Everybody who asks. 7 o'clock, 11 o'clock, late-night news shows. You name it.

LAINIE. And after that?

WALKER. I don't know. Threatening phone calls from the State

Department — or the White House, if we're lucky.

LAINIE. And from the families of the new hostages. They're going to hate me — you know that, don't you? If I try to complicate this negotiation by insisting that Michael —

WALKER. Bullshit.

LAINIE. It's not bullshit. They will.

WALKER. Do you care?

LAINIE. Of course I care. I know what they're going through —

WALKER. How long have they been going through it? *(A beat.)* You've been in line. It's your turn, too — not just theirs. *(Michael enters, handcuffed but not blindfolded. Walker is oblivious to him, but Lainie sees him. Michael smiles at her, goes and lies down on the mat, closing his eyes.)*

LAINIE. All right.

WALKER. *(Taking her by the hand, exiting.)* Come on. Believe me, you'll get used to it. *(They exit. Michael suddenly bolts straight up, screaming.)*

MICHAEL. ^{unit 18} LAINIE!! LAINIE!! *(A beat. He looks around fearfully, as though expecting someone to enter. When no one does, he relaxes slightly.)* They moved me again. That's why I dreamed. They have a box that they put me in when they move me. It's the shape of a coffin. And it's soundproof. The first time they tried it, they put the box in the back of a van with a bad exhaust system. I was unconscious when they took me out. I know this is an illusion, but sometimes — usually right in the middle of the night — it occurs to me that I don't know, I don't absolutely know, whether I'm alive or dead. *(A beat.)* They brought Mathison here — you know that? No, of course you don't. I never actually saw him. They moved him into a room just down the hall. I could hear him go by once a day when they took him to the bathroom. He said something in the hall the first time he passed by. They shouted at him to shut up, but I could tell his voice. I was afraid they'd take him away again if I said anything back. I'd been warned about that sort of thing before. So for a week I'd just listen to him shuffle past, once a day. Then one day, I heard them moving him — for good, I thought — so I shouted to him. "Mathison!" Once, real loud. It got very silent in the hall. Then the sound of them shoving him out, and then my door opened. Two guards came into my room and beat me. They never would admit

he'd been there. But I knew. I heard him. He heard me. (*Lights fade out on Michael.*)

Scene Two

Lights up on the empty room. Walker enters carries a glass of champagne. He calls out.

WALKER. ^{WMT 19} Hey, Lainie! Come in here! What are you doing?

LAINIE. (*Off.*) I'm getting some coffee.

WALKER. Coffee?

LAINIE. (*Off.*) We need to sober up.

WALKER. Why!? We did it! We got the message out! We put those bastards on the spot. They're going to have to ask for everybody — I know it!

LAINIE. (*Entering with a cup of coffee.*) I can't remember the last time I had alcohol.

WALKER. (*Holding his glass towards her.*) Have some more. I'm sure it's a very good month.

LAINIE. No, thanks. This'll be fine. (*Gradually a silence surrounds them. They look at each other, can't help a smile and a slight laugh.*)

WALKER. You were fantastic. Fantastic. Everybody in America felt for you. And that picture. Was I right or what? The cameramen were tearing up.

LAINIE. They were not.

WALKER. They were. I saw tears. Sixty-year-old union guys. Men who've seen every disgusting, pitiful atrocity that ever happened. I bet they haven't cried since the doctor hit 'em. But they cried tonight. For Michael. For you.

LAINIE. No one has to cry for me.

WALKER. They *do*. That's the point. That's the power. You have whatever it takes. You have authority. People feel what you say. You can't help it. They look at you, and they trust what you say.

LAINIE. What if what I say isn't for the best?

WALKER. They'll believe it anyway. Right now — not a week ago, not a week from now — but *now*, this instant, people believe what you say. They're moved by it. They may even act on it. How do you

think things happen in the world? They happen because every once in awhile enormous numbers of people become ready to hear something. And if you've got what they're ready to hear, then you're a very powerful person.

LAINIE. Walker —

WALKER. Use it. You have to use it. You have to push at the ones who are pushing you.

LAINIE. No one's pushing me.

WALKER. Nothing in this world happens because it ought to. You have to push people into it. Right now, you have a quality that lets you push. You have a thing to say, and the means to say it. If you're lucky, when you look back on it, it'll have been moral. If not, too bad — you made your best guess.

LAINIE. When did you first decide I had this . . . quality?

WALKER. First time we talked.

LAINIE. And that's why you've kept at this? With me?

WALKER. Lainie —

LAINIE. I mean it. Is that all this has been? You've just been waiting for me to . . . blossom into some kind of spokesperson for you?

WALKER. Not for me, for yourself. For Michael. How do you think you're going to get him back? ESP? You going to pray he'll show up? He won't. You'll get him back when you make this government uncomfortable enough to make some other government uncomfortable enough to lean on somebody — that's it. *(She stares at her coffee.)*

LAINIE. You'll write a lot of articles now, won't you? No matter how it comes out.

WALKER. Yes, I will. That's my job. That's how I push. *(A beat.)* So look — in my business, when you make the government uncomfortable you drink champagne, not coffee. What do you say? *(He offers her his glass. She doesn't take it.)*

LAINIE. Go home.

WALKER. Go home?

LAINIE. I don't feel like celebrating.

WALKER. Why not?

LAINIE. Because for all I know, I haven't done anything more than risk the lives of innocent people tonight. That's no reason to

celebrate.

WALKER. That's not what you were saying earlier.

LAINIE. Earlier I didn't think I was with someone who — *(She stops herself.)*

WALKER. Someone who what? Who what, Lainie?

LAINIE. Who makes friends just so he can . . . push.

WALKER. I have to be able to do my job.

LAINIE. That's what Ellen says. It's probably what the Shi'ites say.

WALKER. What's wrong with that? It's a world of work, Lainie.

LAINIE. It's a world of crime. We call it work so we can keep doing it. *(A beat.)*

WALKER. I'm sorry you feel this way. I think I've been pretty damn patient, all things considered. I've waited a year for a story that —

LAINIE. Michael's waiting. Not you. Not me. Michael.

WALKER. *I know! That's why I'm writing about the stupid fuck!!* *(A long beat.)* Lainie? *(A beat. He takes a hesitant step towards her, pulls back.)* I'll call you in the morning. *(He exits quickly U. with the champagne, his glass and her cup. Lainie sits on the mat thoughtfully for a moment, then lies back on it, and closes her eyes. Lights change, isolating her on the mat.)*

LAINIE. Michael? The first time I saw you, time turned a corner. I'd always thought of it as gray, impassive. But it wasn't. When I married you, I felt as though time were our child. That somehow we could . . . *(She stops, sits up.)* We could shape it to our lives. *(Lights fade. In the darkness we hear Walker's voice. When lights rise, Lainie is sitting in a corner on the floor.)*

WALKER. *(Off.)* Lainie? It's me, Walker. Can I come in? *(Off.)*

Lainie? *(Off.)* Your car's in the garage; I know you're here. *(Off.)*

Lainie? *(After a moment, Walker enters. He looks at Lainie with concern but not surprise.)* It's not a defeat. It's a step closer. *(No response. He moves to her.)* They released Mathison. Plus everybody from the charter terminal. That's a step. They recognized a linkage. They bargained. We can take credit for that. You're as responsible as anyone that Jim Mathison's free now.

LAINIE. Why him?

WALKER. No one knows. *(A beat.)* You haven't been answering your phone.

LAINIE. Reporters call. *(Of the mat.)* I can't see him anymore. All

morning I haven't been able to feel him. I can't remember what he looks like.

WALKER. He'll come back. I know he will. *(She moves to the mat on all fours, places a hand at its center.)*

LAINIE. He may as well have disappeared into the earth. Right here. On this spot. I would feel more hope.

WALKER. Lainie, he's . . . For God's sake, we got Mathison back.

LAINIE. Did you see the President? On the news? "We have them back now, after eight harrowing days of captivity."

WALKER. *Plus Mathison.*

LAINIE. Is that what they tell mothers of dead soldiers? "Your boy's dead, but don't worry — the one right next to him was just fine."

WALKER. I'm just saying that Mathison —

LAINIE. *I didn't do this for Mathison! HE'S NOT MINE! (A beat. She collapses on the mat, crying. Walker hesitates, moves to the door, stops, moves to her. He strokes her shoulder and arm awkwardly, tenderly. She is on her side, facing away from him. He stares up and away while she cries. As her crying abates, his stroking moves to her hair. After a moment, she moves closer to him, so that her head rests on his lap. She slowly grows silent as he continues to stroke her hair. Lights fade to black. Lights back up on Michael sitting alone on the mat.)* *unt 22*

MICHAEL. Sometimes I wake up with the most intense desire to know what day it is. Sunday? Thursday? I feel like I'm going to die the next minute if I don't find out. Other times I'll wake up and suddenly realize that months have gone by — must have gone by — since I last had a conscious thought about time. It makes me feel like the astronaut who travels forty years at the speed of light and then returns, no older. "What's happened to everyone?" he must think. "Time must be for them, not me." I never thought of time as a coat you could take off and put on again. Too cold to live without it — so we all keep it on. We hug it to ourselves, because if we can't . . . *(A beat.)* Time is change. That's all it is. When there's no change. When there's no change . . . Yesterday one of my guards told me I'd been here three years. *(A beat.)* I didn't know what he meant. *(Lights fade to black.)*

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Scene Three

unit 23
Lights rise on Ellen, sitting on the ottoman. The window is open.

LAINIE. (Off.) Oh — Darjeeling or English Breakfast? I can't remember.

ELLEN. English Breakfast. Always.

LAINIE. (Entering with the tray-table and tea.) Good. That's what I made. Imagine me forgetting. (She sets down the tray-table and pours tea for them both.) How've you been?

ELLEN. Fine. Just got back from a vacation, actually.

LAINIE. Really? Where'd you go?

ELLEN. St. Thomas.

LAINIE. You went there last year, didn't you?

ELLEN. It's where I go every year. I even go to the same hotel there every year. It's the one my husband and I used to stay in when we were married. We both still go there. Only he goes a month before I do now.

LAINIE. That's an interesting arrangement.

ELLEN. It's not an arrangement at all. It's a circumstance. (A beat.) How are you holding up?

LAINIE. About the same. It's been a long time.

ELLEN. We're aware of that —

LAINIE. Since I've seen you, I mean.

ELLEN. Yes, well —

LAINIE. I've just gone back to work.

ELLEN. Really?

LAINIE. Last month. I'm teaching again. Everyone there is being very considerate. No "What's it like?" questions.

ELLEN. Good.

LAINIE. Strange to be around so many people all day. I'd gotten out of the habit. (A beat.) Have you heard anything new about Michael?

ELLEN. Not specifically —

LAINIE. I thought when you called —

ELLEN. No, it wasn't that we'd heard anything new about Michael, precisely.

out

LAINIE. What was it then?
ELLEN. Nothing, actually. Nothing official.
LAINIE. Is there something you want to say to me?
ELLEN. Of course. I'm here, aren't I?
LAINIE. Then why don't you say it?
ELLEN. It's just a little tricky, to be frank. It's — well, I'd like to feel I'm not here in my official capacity this time. That is, if you could feel that way.
LAINIE. Why?
ELLEN. Could you feel that way? *(A beat.)*
LAINIE. All right.
ELLEN. Good. I wanted to tell you about something that happened last night. It, um — well, it certainly took me by surprise.
LAINIE. What happened?
ELLEN. We intercepted someone. A terrorist. Not a Shi'ite, not even Lebanese. But an Arab, and . . . we killed him. *hand up → the tea*
LAINIE. You what?
ELLEN. He fought back. He resisted. It made no sense — he was completely surrounded, but . . . he resisted. *ball up into tea cup*
LAINIE. Where?
ELLEN. In a small Italian coastal town. It should be on the news within an hour or so. We've managed to hold it back a bit, but —
LAINIE. What are you saying?
ELLEN. I think you know what I'm saying.
LAINIE. Michael's in more danger now?
ELLEN. They all are. *(A beat.)* It was bad enough for Michael that we intercepted this man. But to kill him. I'm afraid it's a very dangerous situation.
LAINIE. Not for you.
ELLEN. Lainie —
LAINIE. Whose idea was this?
ELLEN. I couldn't tell you if I knew. *mt*
LAINIE. What was the point? What did you think you had to gain?
ELLEN. This man was implicated in the deaths of scores of American citizens. He was behind at least three bombings.
LAINIE. So somebody at State said, "Kill him."
ELLEN. They *did not*. They decided to capture him. If possible.
LAINIE. And it wasn't. So now Michael's going to —

ELLEN. Nothing will happen to Michael, for all we know. The risks were carefully analyzed, and —
 LAINIE. The President's image — that's what was analyzed. Did he need to look forceful this week?
 ELLEN. We can't assume that any of the hostages will be harmed simply because one terrorist leader was intercepted.
 LAINIE. Killed! Use English! (A beat.)
 ELLEN. Killed. It was the judgment of the Department that Michael and the others would not be overly . . . endangered.
 LAINIE. Was that your judgment? (A beat.) You never answer questions like that, do you?
 ELLEN. No.
 LAINIE. Is it because you know if you started you'd never be able to stop? (A beat.)
 ELLEN. Early in the war between Iran and Iraq, there was an offensive. Iranian soldiers — Shi'ites, like the people holding Michael — needed a way to break through Iraqi minefields. They chose an all-out frontal assault, classic World War I stuff. But with one difference. To clear the mine fields, the Iranian army — which has some significant technical limitations — used boys. The boys didn't go out and dig up the mines. They ran over them. The mines blew up, killing the boys, and the soldiers followed after, across the newly-cleared fields. These boys were fourteen, fifteen — up to twenty. Some were as young as ten. They had . . . volunteered for the duty. They wanted to be martyrs. And their families too, many of them, freely gave their sons to this honor. The boys wore white headbands, ran into the fields shouting "Shaheed", which means martyr. Some of them wrapped themselves in blankets first, so that when they were killed the explosions wouldn't blow them apart quite so much, and their bodies could be . . . gathered more easily, and returned home to inspire other boys to take the same path. Their parents do not grieve. They are proud, and satisfied their sons are in heaven — to them a place as tangible as this, without pain. (A beat.) There are times when it becomes impossible to negotiate. When the very act of negotiating legitimizes a philosophy that's . . . not human anymore. Those places where such a philosophy reigns have to be isolated. Those people who try to extend such a philosophy must be stopped. At any cost.

met
of Michael's capture in the Gulf of Persia
the only way to get Michael out of the Gulf of Persia
captured
Michael
plans

move to chair put tea cup down

face to face w/ Lainie
 42

m

LAINIE. Any cost? *face to face w/ Lainie*

ELLEN. Any cost. *(Lights fade to black. They come up quickly again on Lainie and Walker. Lainie is very agitated.)*

WALKER. I don't think it means anything. *wait 24 take chair by the way*

LAINIE. What do you mean, it doesn't mean anything? They said they were going to kill him!

WALKER. It's a radio report. They've been wrong dozens of times. They're almost never right.

LAINIE. What if they're right this time?

WALKER. It's a tactic. That's all it is. We hit them, they threaten the hostages. Nothing happens. It's just a pressure game.

LAINIE. This isn't a threat. They said they were going to kill him.

WALKER. That announcement didn't even come from his captors. It came from an entirely different faction. They wouldn't even know where he is, let alone how he is.

LAINIE. Oh, God — I can't stand this. I can't. Not knowing — this is . . . oh, GOD!!

WALKER. Lainie — *(She moves away from him, pacing the room with increasing agitation.)*

LAINIE. There is a circle of hell for these people. There is a circle of hell so deep —

WALKER. Lainie, calm down —

LAINIE. NO!!

WALKER. You know, there might even be an advantage in this.

LAINIE. Advantage!!

WALKER. Listen to me! A false story's been broadcast. Michael's kidnappers may have to show pictures of him alive now. There could be a video tape, or —

LAINIE. And if there's nothing?

WALKER. That doesn't mean anything either. They can play this a lot of different ways. The point is, they've kept him for three years. And now they're just going to kill him? When they've got nothing to gain? It's not rational.

LAINIE. What's rational about killing? *(A beat.)* I want to go on TV. I want to talk to somebody. To everybody. I want to —

WALKER. You shouldn't do that.

LAINIE. Why not?!

WALKER. Nothing's known yet. We have to wait and find out the

status of things.

LAINIE. *Status?*

WALKER. We killed one of their people. I don't think Michael's captors want to hear from any American right now — even you.

LAINIE. I didn't kill anyone.

WALKER. *We did. The country did. We have to wait for some time to pass.*

LAINIE. How am I supposed to sleep? Till we hear. How am I supposed to live? Not knowing.

WALKER. I don't know. But that's the situation we're in. They can say he's alive, they can say he's dead —

LAINIE. They can say *anything!* They can do *anything*. . . to him. *(A beat.)* We should obliterate the city.

WALKER. Lainie —

LAINIE. Why not!!? Don't you want to!? Lebanon, the Middle East — let's *get rid of it!* *(Walker grabs Lainie and hugs her to him tight.)* I want to kill them.

WALKER. It's all right.

LAINIE. I want to kill them.

WALKER. I know. It's all right.

LAINIE. I want to kill a million people. *(He continues to hold her. Reluctantly, her arms finally go around him. They freeze in this position. Michael enters — handcuffs, no blindfold. He circles them as he speaks, but doesn't look at them. He finishes his speech staring out the window.)*

MICHAEL. One night someone came to move me. It was no one I knew — none of my guards. I was blindfolded, but I could tell by his voice. He spoke English better than any of them. He said I had to be moved at once — that the Syrian Army might have learned where I was. He was nervous, but there was a softness in his voice, too. I think he was young. *(A beat.)* Some clothes were thrown on me and I was hustled into the back seat of a car by three men. All the voices were new — not one of them was familiar. It was actually a cool night. The feeling of being outside was incredible. I listened for anything — any sound, any voice — over the noise of the car. Not because I was planning to escape. Just for the sheer, sensual pleasure of it. A sound, at random. A voice. Anything that was completely disconnected from my being a hostage. That just . . . existed in the world. And I thought for some reason about all the

things that always exist in the world simultaneously — with or without us. Innumerable parts of a system designed to not even recognize itself as a system. Dogs barking in the streets, wind in the shop awnings, people talking on corners, flowers letting go their fragrance, people riding bicycles, pigeons mourning nobody we know, people driving in cars, people buying oranges, distant explosions, people carrying guns, people dying of poison gas, oceans rocking on their stems, people making love for the first time in their lives, people designing clothes-hangers, people designing the end of the world, people in movie theaters, people singing in languages we don't understand, insects filling the world — filling the world — people in restaurants ordering the best meal of their lives, people using the phone, petting their cats, holding each other in each other's arms. (A beat.) All of it, at once. (A beat.) They drove me to a quiet neighborhood and shoved me into a building. I was taken down, still blindfolded, to a small, cramped room that smelled like . . . clay, and I was shot to death. (Michael exits, but not U. He passes through the 'wall' of the room. Lights fade to black.)

Scene Four

Lights rise. The room is empty. Walker enters carrying the chair. He sets it down. Ellen appears at the door.

ELLEN. Do we have to be in here?

WALKER. That's what she wants. (A beat.)

ELLEN. There are three reporters outside. They seemed to know I was coming. Did you tell them?

WALKER. Not me. I like exclusives. Maybe they're just here because it's an important story. Then again, maybe they like watching the State Department deal with the consequences. (A beat.) So, when's the phone call from the President?

ELLEN. He's sending a letter.

WALKER. A letter? No post-game phone call? No national hookup?

ELLEN. Not this time.

WALKER. Have you done a lot of this kind of work? Bearer of ill-tidings?

NERVOUS
want to be standing
Walker's not a reporter
handing her the offer
how do I feel about Walker?
in this scene

man

LAINIE. Why are you saying this?
ELLEN. It's my job to say this.
LAINIE. You don't have a job. You have a license to manipulate.
(A beat.) I want to be like you. Tell me how to be like you.
ELLEN. What do you mean?
LAINIE. I want to think like you. I want to be able to put people away, in my head. I want to forget them there. I want to lock them in whatever room you have for that.
WALKER. Lainie —
LAINIE. Teach me! (A beat.) You won't, will you? That's your most closely-guarded secret. That's where all the real weapons are.
WALKER. (To Ellen.) You should go.
LAINIE. No. Not till I say. Ellen, I think you and government did your best. I think everyone did his best. Michael did his best, Walker did his best, you did, the Shi'ites — even the ones that killed Michael. Probably everyone has done his best. That's what frightens me. That's why I don't know if I'll ever be able to walk out of this room anymore. Into what? A world filled with people doing their best?
ELLEN. I wish I could take your pain away. *walk away*
LAINIE. I wish you could remember it. (Ellen exits U. A beat.)
WALKER. Do you need me to be here?
LAINIE. Not right now. Not for awhile.
WALKER. I'd like to be.
LAINIE. No.
WALKER. Why not? (A beat.) I don't think you should be alone.
LAINIE. I'm not. (A beat.)
WALKER. What about tomorrow? I'll drive you to the Air Force base.
LAINIE. Thank you. You should go now.
WALKER. Are you sure? (She nods, stares at the mat. He looks around the room.) I'll call you later. All right? Lainie? (A beat.) Lainie? (She moves to the mat, kneels down beside it, stares at it. Walker studies her for a moment, then starts out U.)
LAINIE. (Pointing at the chair.) Could you take that out? Too much furniture. (Walker picks it up, stares at her, then leaves. She is again focussed on the mat. Her hand strokes through the air, as though caressing Michael's face. At this point Michael enters U., silently. He moves to the

unit 28
mat and reclines on it, so that her hand now strokes his hair.) I think my favorite is the African hornbill.

MICHAEL. Of all birds. Why?

LAINIE. After they mate, the male walls the female up, in the hollow of a tree. He literally imprisons her. And all through the weeks of incubating the eggs, he flies off and finds food, and brings it back and feeds her — through a little hole in the wall he's built. After the eggs are hatched, he breaks down the wall again, and the whole family is united for the first time. You see? It hasn't been a prison at all. It's been . . . a fortress.

MICHAEL. Their devotion, you mean?

LAINIE. Their devotion. *(He smiles, closes his eyes. She continues to stroke his hair. Lights fade to black.)*

THE END

Appendix B

Poster



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

Department of Film & Theatre

TWO ROOMS

BY LEE BLESSING

DIRECTED BY ERICK WOLFE



Nov. 7, 12, 13, 21
at 7:30pm
Nov. 8, 22 at 2:30pm

Lab Theatre - UNO
Performing Arts Center
General Public \$12
Stud./Fac./Sen. \$8

Appendix C
Production Photos





VITA

Tiffany Anderson was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1979. She received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Loyola University New Orleans in 2011. She began her work towards a Master of Fine Arts in 2013, appearing at UNO in *Parsifal Worthy* (Jessica Medoff, director), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (David Hoover, director), *Melancholy Play* (J Hammons, director) and *Two Rooms* (Erick Wolfe, director).