

LAST ONE UNDER

**a one-act play
by Tom Baum**

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Characters

ARKY, 20s-30s

BRIDGET, 30s

KYLE, 30s

OFFSTAGE VOICE, male, deep, resonant

Sometime in the near future.

(A door slams in darkness.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *YOU MAY REMOVE YOUR BLINDFOLDS.*

(Lights up on ARKY, BRIDGET and KYLE, all wearing prison jumpsuits with name tags. BRIDGET is wearing glasses. The room is empty except for three mattresses.)

BRIDGET: This isn't procedure.

ARKY: This is very unusual.

KYLE: This is fucked up.

(A drawer opens in one of the walls.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *PUT THE BLINDFOLDS IN THE DRAWER.*

(They put their blindfolds in the drawer. It closes.)

KYLE: I have no fucking idea why I'm here.

ARKY: "You're under arrest." That's all they told me. Something to do with my work.

KYLE: What do you do?

ARKY: I design nanosystems. Medical diagnostics.

BRIDGET: Really? I'm a nurse.

ARKY: Which hospital?

BRIDGET: St. Mary's.

KYLE: Means you're a nun?

BRIDGET: Yes, I'm a nun.

KYLE: A nun in a jump suit. You don't see that every day. Sorry for the F-words, Sister.

BRIDGET: I've heard worse. You really don't know why they arrested you?

KYLE: I'm guessing it was a bar fight.

ARKY: Were you in a bar fight?

KYLE: I'm a bouncer at The Knack. Might have got sideways with one of the customers.

ARKY: Were you wasted? Is that why you don't remember?

KYLE: That's part of the job description, drinking with the VIPs.

BRIDGET: Did they give you a flu shot?

KYLE: Yeah, after they booked me. You?

BRIDGET: I'm kind of wondering why.

ARKY: There's cameras in every corner, did anybody notice?

BRIDGET: Where?

KYLE: Just below ceiling level.

BRIDGET: (*adjusts glasses*) Oh yes, now I see.

KYLE: (*to BRIDGET*) So what dragged you here, Sister? What terrible offense did you commit?

BRIDGET: Nothing. I mean technically it's not a crime. All in the line of duty.

KYLE: Sister...if we're gonna share this cell...if it is a cell...I'd appreciate a little candor.

BRIDGET: Well, if you really have to know. I was on the night shift at St. Mary's...about a week ago...I was wheeling a cart down the hall. The doctor asks me, "Where are you going with that?" I said, "To give the pancreas in 314 an enema." He goes, "Why? So he can shit in the next world?"

KYLE: So what did you do?

BRIDGET: I laughed. Politely.

ARKY: Why politely?

BRIDGET: Because you can shit in the next world.

KYLE: There's toilets in Heaven?

BRIDGET: God will provide.

KYLE: You're on speaking terms with God.

BRIDGET: I try to be.

ARKY: So did the pancreas in 314 die?

BRIDGET: The next morning.

KYLE: All because you didn't give him an enema.

BRIDGET: I'd rather not go into details. *(to ARKY, reading his nametag)* Arky, what was your big mistake?

ARKY: I wish they'd tell me. And why we're all here together, in this empty room, with cameras in all the corners.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *HANG ON, I'M CALIBRATING.*

KYLE: Calibrating what?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *YOUR TEMPORAL LOBES HAVE BEEN IMPLANTED WITH MINI-TRANSPONDERS. THE INSTANT YOU FALL ASLEEP, I'LL KNOW ABOUT IT.*

KYLE: Hey, wait. That can't happen.

BRIDGET: I think we're being punked.

KYLE: How could they put in the implants.

BRIDGET: Wouldn't they have to drill?

ARKY: With the flu shot.

BRIDGET: Oh gosh, you're right.

ARKY: Self-assembling molecules. The crystals bond with glial cells in the brain and replicate.

KYLE: How do you know so much?

ARKY: It's my...area of expertise.

KYLE: Well, I call bullshit on those molecules. Has anybody tried the door? If we're being punked, chances are they didn't lock it.

(KYLE reaches for the knob and gets a tremendous electric shock. Kyle vibrates for several seconds, then manages to ungrasp the knob.)

KYLE: Jesus fuck! They're serious.

BRIDGET: But why would they want to know if we're asleep?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *BECAUSE, BRIDGET, THE LAST ONE OF YOU TO FALL ASLEEP WILL BE ELECTROCUTED.*

BRIDGET: God help us.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: I WOULDN'T COUNT ON DIVINE INTERVENTION.

KYLE: Shit, I think I know what this is.

ARKY: Yeah, what?

KYLE: This is one of those sadistic psych experiments. The ones who show any balls get to join the CIA.

ARKY: This isn't governmental. *(to KYLE)* And it wasn't any bar fight, was it?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *I SUGGEST YOU TELL THEM, KYLE.*

KYLE: Or else what? No, it wasn't a bar fight.

BRIDGET: What was it?

KYLE: Somebody died on my watch too.

BRIDGET: Who?

KYLE: North Korean chick I was interrogating. I thought I beat that rap. The President named his pit bull after me. But that was a military offense, and you guys are civilian.

ARKY: Doesn't matter. I'm pretty sure this is private sector.

KYLE: Yeah, how do you know that?

ARKY: Because I did the R&D. Those molecular embeds? So they can tell when we're asleep? I helped design them.

BRIDGET: Oh goodness, why?

ARKY: I didn't know what I was doing! It was pure research! Guys, I hate to tell you, but I believe we're on the Snuff Channel.

BRIDGET: No, come on. That's an urban legend.

KYLE: It's no legend. I've seen it at the club. Pay-per-view executions, animé lynchings, gas-chamber stuff. They had some torture footage from North Korea and I assure you that was for real.
(*to the air*) Hey, Mr. Emcee. Are we the first victims?

ARKY: Don't bother. He's not gonna tell you that.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *YES, KYLE, THIS IS THE PILOT.*

ARKY: (*to the air*) Well, I hate to spoil the climax to your show, but I'm already the loser. I can't fall asleep without medication.

KYLE: (*to BRIDGET*) That does put him in a hole, doesn't it.

ARKY: (*to KYLE*) So what's your sleep ritual?

KYLE: Other than masturbation? Couple shots of Jameson's. If that doesn't work, a couple more shots. You?

ARKY: Fast-acting Amygdalax. 20 milligrams. Five seconds, I'm out like a light. (*to BRIDGET*) How about you?

BRIDGET: No drugs. No alcohol.

ARKY: Well, I can't fall asleep without drugs. Nice knowing you both.

KYLE: (*to BRIDGET*) I think he's lying. I think he's just trying to guilt us.

ARKY: No, actually, I'm facing facts. Isn't that what you're supposed to do before you die?

BRIDGET: Arky...death is not the end of existence.

ARKY: What if I don't believe that? Do I still get an afterlife?

BRIDGET: In death, we all wake from life.

ARKY: Right. Bridget, if you don't mind, I'd rather not spend my last minutes on Earth debating, you know—

BRIDGET: Religious crap.

ARKY: I didn't say that.

BRIDGET: It's not crap. The soul outlives the body.

KYLE: Amen to that. (*aside*) Conference, guys.

(They all move downstage, lowering their voices:)

KYLE: What if we all agree to stay awake? Make a pact, like a blood oath, not even try to sleep.

ARKY: That could work.

KYLE: I know these Snuff Channel fans. They're easily bored.

ARKY: They'll tune out.

KYLE: And the pilot won't get picked up.

BRIDGET: Which is what God wants. We'll be doing the world a service.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *PEOPLE, I'M WAITING. IF ONE OF YOU ISN'T ASLEEP BY THE TIME WE BREAK FOR COMMERCIAL, I'M DELIVERING 6,000 VOLTS OF ELECTRICITY TO ALL YOUR BRAINS.*

ARKY: OK, that is bullshit. Who would buy time on this channel?

KYLE: Gun companies. Drug companies. Crazy politicians. I've seen all the ads.

ARKY: Yeah, but if we all fry, where's the fun in that?

KYLE: Game over. Instant tune-out. Bridget, you with us? Hey, what are you doing?

BRIDGET: Nothing. I was just deep-breathing. It's an anti-panic maneuver.

KYLE: Helps you sleep?

BRIDGET: Helps me relax. You're both free to try it.

ARKY: I've tried it. Doesn't work for me.

KYLE: It's not gonna work for anybody. Bridget, didn't I make myself clear? We're all staying awake. Nobody tries to sleep. Are you with us or not?

BRIDGET: Eesh. It's tickling the dragon's tail.

KYLE: Sister, shame on you, that's a pagan concept. What would Jesus do? You gotta believe, you gotta fight the power—

(Loud sizzle of electricity. KYLE, BRIDGET, and ARKY all vibrate violently with the shock.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *JUST A LITTLE TASTE OF THINGS TO COME.*

KYLE: We get it! Turn it off!

(The sizzle stops. Arky collapses onto one of the mattresses.)

KYLE: *(to BRIDGET)* This guy's got an itchy trigger finger. *(to ARKY)* Dude? Say something. You OK?

ARKY: No, not OK.

(ARKY curls into a twitching fetal ball. KYLE sidles up to BRIDGET.)

KYLE: Sorry I doubted you, Sister.

BRIDGET: You meant well.

KYLE: *(aside)* See, I have my own theory about Death. Death is like this emotional freeze-frame? Whatever we're feeling at the last moment, that's what we're going to feel forever, throughout eternity. And if that's true, we should try and die with a smile on our face. Are you with me so far?

BRIDGET: I think I know where this is going.

KYLE: Are you by any chance into cuddling?

BRIDGET: What do you mean, am I into it?

KYLE: Or do you fall asleep afterwards like me.

BRIDGET: Like a man, you mean.

KYLE: OK. So you're familiar with what happens in the bedroom.

BRIDGET: All too familiar.

KYLE: This wouldn't be your first time.

BRIDGET: No, it wouldn't be my first time.

KYLE: You weren't born a nun. But hey, if you're not interested, you're not interested. Guess that leaves me to my own devices.

(KYLE yawns, starts to unzip the fly on his jump suit.)

BRIDGET: Wait. I didn't say I wasn't interested.

KYLE: Awesome. We do it right, we'll both be out like a light.

(KYLE starts taking off his jump suit. BRIDGET takes off her glasses.)

KYLE: No. Leave your glasses on.

BRIDGET: Why?

KYLE: Because you're so pretty with them.

BRIDGET: Thank you for saying that.

KYLE: No problem, it's true. Here, come here.

(KYLE starts helping BRIDGET off with her jump suit. Her arms are heavily tattooed.)

KYLE: Whoa, those are some killer tats. What does Mother Superior have to say about that?

BRIDGET: She says they're badges of my sins.

KYLE: *(reading a tattoo)* Who's "Malique"?

BRIDGET: A former lover.

KYLE: Male or female?

BRIDGET: Female.

KYLE: OK. That helps me. Come here, darling.

(KYLE starts to make love to BRIDGET. She breaks away, zipping up again.)

BRIDGET: Please. Stop. I shouldn't have encouraged you. I can't do this anymore. I promised Him I wouldn't.

KYLE: Not even for a North Korea veteran?

(KYLE pulls her closer.)

BRIDGET: Please don't.

KYLE: I'm sure God doesn't want you to die.

BRIDGET: Seriously, stop it!

(ARKY groans and opens his eyes.)

ARKY: I can't believe it! I was almost under! Leave her alone!

(ARKY leaps to his feet, steps between them.)

ARKY: You ever hear of no means no?

KYLE: You believe this guy? The professional insomniac, look at him.

(KYLE gives ARKY a shove.)

ARKY: Go ahead. Hit me. Knock me out. That counts as sleep.

BRIDGET: Stop it. Both of you. God, I can't stand this. I'm the one who deserves to die.

ARKY: For what? Following doctor's orders?

BRIDGET: That's not all I did.

KYLE: You didn't just deny him an enema.

BRIDGET: That's right.

KYLE: You pulled his plug.

BRIDGET: I gave him morphine. He was screaming for it.

KYLE: You helped a man kill himself. Yeah, that probably wasn't too pleasing to God. *(to ARKY)* And you. You're worse. You're like the scientist who helped gas the Jews.

ARKY: Yeah, let's dig up that guy and electrify his bones. And why stop there? What about the guy who invented gunpowder? The machine gun? The electric chair?

KYLE: Yeah, right, all you superbrains. And us poor slobs, we end up doing all your dirty work.

BRIDGET: He's right, Arky.

ARKY: No! He's not right! *(pause)* Well, OK, what if he is right? This is exactly the show they want! All of us at each other's throats!

KYLE: Fine, you're right, let's all calm down. *(to ARKY)* Maybe we should all try to go to sleep....at the same time.

BRIDGET: What are the odds of that?

ARKY: About seven quintillion to one. Don't worry, guys. I'm still the loser. I'll never get to that sleepy place again.

BRIDGET: Stop being such a pessimist. It's boring to God.

ARKY: You're really on intimate terms with Him, aren't you? Stop being pessimistic? That's like saying, don't be five foot eight. I'm cooked.

(ARKY sits. BRIDGET sits beside him. KYLE's attention is distracted...by a drawer slowly opening in the wall.)

BRIDGET: You can stop the negative thoughts. That's why God gave us free will.

ARKY: If I stop the bad thoughts, I stop the good ones. Not that I'll have either kind again.

BRIDGET: I said cut that out! (*pause*) Sorry, I didn't mean to yell. No more yelling. Try and relax. Put everything out of your mind.

(BRIDGET *massages* ARKY's *temples*.)

ARKY: Why are you bothering to do this?

BRIDGET: I'm a nurse. This is what I do.

ARKY: You're allowed to give patients massages?

BRIDGET: Whatever eases their burden. There's no decorum on a terminal ward.

ARKY: Mmm, that feels good. You're very good at this.

BRIDGET: Don't talk.

(*During this, KYLE has taken a bottle of Jameson's out of the drawer, and mouthing "thank you" to the heavens, has been bubbling it back. BRIDGET, meanwhile, has started to yawn as she massages ARKY's neck.*)

ARKY: No. I can't. It's just making me more tense.

(ARKY *opens his eyes, sees BRIDGET on the point of nodding out.*)

ARKY: Wow. Very sneaky.

BRIDGET: (*comes to*) What?

ARKY: Being good relaxes you!

BRIDGET: I was only trying to help.

ARKY: Like you were helping that pancreas patient.

BRIDGET: No. That was an offense against God. All right, yes, I was trying to relax. OK... sleep. It was an act of desperation...which also is an offense against God, you're perfectly right, those sins are closely related—

(KYLE *lets out a loud snore.*)

ARKY: Whoa.

(Blackout. A blast of technopop. Lights up. KYLE is gone. Only the now half-empty liquor bottle remains.)

BRIDGET: What happened? Kyle?

ARKY: He's gone.

BRIDGET: How did he manage to...OK. I get it.

(ARKY has found the liquor bottle.)

BRIDGET: Where did that come from?

ARKY: From the audience. They voted to help him.

BRIDGET: His buddies...from the VIP room.

ARKY: They must have text-bombed the studio. I wonder which one of us they like more.

BRIDGET: Or dislike.

ARKY: The lapsed nun or the mad scientist.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *ONE MINUTE TO COMMERCIAL, GUYS.*

ARKY: Oh Jesus. Go ahead, lie down.

BRIDGET: What, you're going to try and have sex with me now?

ARKY: No, I'm telling you to go to sleep. I can't take this anymore!
I'm starting to fibrillate. Whoa, wait, if I die of a heart attack...that could fuck up the show, couldn't it? They're expecting electrocution, that's what the sponsors are paying for—

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *CHECK BEHIND YOU, ARKY.*

(The drawer in the wall has opened. ARKY looks in, takes out a pill.)

BRIDGET: What is it? Arky?

ARKY: Fast-acting Amygdalax. 20 milligrams.

BRIDGET: The audience wants you to live.

ARKY: Fuck the audience. They're wrong. Take the pill, it's yours.

BRIDGET: I don't want it. I won't take drugs.

ARKY: Bridget, this is no time to keep your promises!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *THIRTY SECONDS. SOMEBODY GO TO SLEEP, OR I FRY YOU BOTH.*

BRIDGET: The pill was meant for you. Take it.

ARKY: It's no use. If I'm wired, it just wires me more. *(to the camera)* Kill me now, you can all jerk off to it!

BRIDGET: No! Stop it! For God's sake, Arky, have a little faith!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *(overlaps)* TWENTY, NINETEEN, EIGHTEEN... [ETC.]

(ARKY snatches the pill, swallows it dry. BRIDGET starts doing her deep breathing exercises. ARKY desperately imitates her.)

BRIDGET: *(overlaps)* Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

ARKY: *(to the air; overlaps; more and more sleepily)* Hey.
Everybody who's watching. Do the world a favor. Turn off your TVs. Don't let this shit go on. You criminals out there, you tax evaders, you terrorists, nobody's safe, if you don't turn off your TVs you could end up here....

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *(overlaps)* FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE...

(ARKY is nodding out. BRIDGET sees. Shakes him.)

BRIDGET: No! Wake up! Wake up!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: ...ZERO!

*(Blackout. A blast of technopop. Lights up. ARKY is gone.
BRIDGET is alone.)*

BRIDGET: That's it? I'm done? This is what I get for loving my Creator? For this I gave up promiscuity and drugs?

(The lights grow brighter. More than ever, the OFFSTAGE VOICE sounds like the VOICE OF GOD:)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *(booms out) THOU SHALT NOT KILL.*

BRIDGET: Oh...my...(pause)...God?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *(duh) HEL-LO.*

BRIDGET: Oh please no.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Oh yes.

BRIDGET: It's You!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *YES, BRIDGET, IT'S ME.*

BRIDGET: You! You're the Voice of the Snuff Channel!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *I AM THE SNUFF CHANNEL. DIDN'T THE TORNADOS CLUE YOU IN? THE EARTHQUAKES? THE FOREST FIRES? THE FATAL DISEASES? MY GENERAL AIR OF WRATH?*

BRIDGET: But why a game show?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *WELL...LIKE THE HUMANS I CREATED IN MY IMAGE...I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE ON TV.*

BRIDGET: Ohmigod...You're a narcissistic psychopath!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *I'M ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING. GOODBYE, BRIDGET. SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE.*

BRIDGET: No! I don't ever want to see You! Go fuck Yourself, God!

(Loud sizzle of electricity. BRIDGET collapses, twitching convulsively. Blackout. Blast of technopop. Lights up. BRIDGET is gone. ARKY and KYLE are in the room, staring about in some confusion.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *CONGRATULATIONS, FELLAS, YOU'VE BEEN SPARED. YOU OWE THE VOTERS A BIG THANKYOU. BACK AFTER THIS MESSAGE.*

KYLE: I feel bad about Bridget.

ARKY: Yeah, that was harsh.

KYLE: Sweet girl. And something of a hottie. I wasn't lying about that.

ARKY: Not hot enough, apparently.

KYLE: I served my country, they cut me a break. You, I don't know.

ARKY: Without my science, there'd be no show.

KYLE: Well hey, we're both alive, and that's what counts. No hard feelings, dude?

ARKY: Nothing I can't handle.

(They head for the door. KYLE starts to reach for the knob, thinks twice about it. ARKY reaches for the knob, hesitates, sucks it up, grabs the knob. No electric shock. Deep relief. ARKY starts to turn the knob, and the door suddenly flies open. On the other side is a WOMAN IN A BUSINESS SUIT, blindfolded.)

WOMAN: Hello? Can anyone tell me why I'm here?

(ARKY and KYLE share a frozen look.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: *AND...I'M BACK!*

(Blackout. Door slams in darkness. END OF PLAY.)