

In the Penal Colony

by

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Master of Fine Arts

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## ABSTRACT

"In the Penal Colony" is a three-act play based on the original short story by Franz Kafka and adapted by ASU MFA playwright Christian Krauspe.

Told in flashback-form; a lone female Traveler arrives at a nameless penal colony where she is asked to comment on an old execution device known simply as, "the apparatus." She is pressured by the colonies administration to condone the practice while simultaneously asked to endorse the machine by her guiding officer in hopes of preserving the mystical powers the apparatus seems to possess. The Traveler must make the choice to endorse or condone the machine while she faces her own demons in the process.



In the Penal Colony  
By  
Christian Krauspe

Adapted from the original short story by  
Franz Kafka

Characters:

Traveler

Interviewer

Officer

Commandant

Soldier/Convict/Begging Man/Constituent/Islander\*

The Condemned/Islander/Constituent/ Prostitute?/Islander\*

Bureaucrat/Young Girl/Prostitute/Islander\*

Voice

Various Islanders/Prostitutes\*

Time:

Not Available

Location:

An Island Penal Colony and other settings

\*Cast size may vary dependant on desired aesthetic effect.

## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE (The Colony)

We open in darkness. Faintly we begin to hear the whispers of the community of the penal Colony.

#### WHISPERS

"Tear him apart... Let it be done... It's time... It's time... He stole bread... Put him in the machine... The Old Commandant is dead... We will do what we can to last! Who will take his place? What will become of our way of life... Tear him apart... He deserves what is coming to him... Yes! We will do what we can to last... The one who stole bread deserves everything... Let him see the face of God... Tear him apart... He deserves everything.."

Behind the whispers we hear the tap and tambour of snare drums. The whispers of the masses of people turn into laughter. As if we are no longer at an execution, but a humongous celebration. We see begin to see faces. Happy faces of the crowd. Happy and joyful in anticipation of the act they are to witness. We hear a singular voice begin to scream, pleading with his unseen captors.

#### BEGGING MAN

No, please let me go! I'm begging you!!! Please! We were only trying to eat! We were starving! Help me, please God, help me! Don't put me in that thing!!

#### WHISPERS

"It's coming... Tear him apart... Everything will become clear to you very soon... Tear him apart..."

The "Apparatus" begins to hiss to life. The rusty cogs, aching levers, and pulleys begin to do their work - warming themselves up for the feast to come.

#### BEGGING MAN

I'm sorry! Just, please, no!! Don't put me in that thing!

The Begging Man's screams are muffled. We hear clasps hammer down and locks shut tight. The OFFICER appears - his hand raised to quiet the crowd.

#### OFFICER

We are all just people. We believe in righteousness and above all - preservation of the will. There has been talk regarding the death of our Old Commandant and his coming replacement. Measures have been undertaken. But know this - They may change a face here or there, try to implant ideas, or hold knives to our necks, but we will have... conviction. And our conviction is what holds us together! We are, all of us... just people... Let's begin!

The crowd of voices roars. We hear the sound of the Apparatus in full operation. The muffled screams of the Begging Man become a sick gurgle. The Officer outstretches his hands in front of him. Blood drips down into his palms and runs off onto the ground. The voices of the crowd swell.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO (BUREAUCRATS)

Lights up again as a BUREAUCRAT and the INTERVIEWER enter the space carrying mounds paper.

BUREAUCRAT

(speaking very fast)

Sub-section of Article Four, dash-two-B: "Any unlawful maritime travel between one-hundred and four-hundred hours is to be met, surveilled, and escorted to the nearest dock and processed."

INTERVIEWER

(shuffling papers, busy)

Yes.

BUREAUCRAT

If the weight limit of the cargo has been exceeded then the I9-form must filled out in triplicate and submitted to the magistrate, myself, and the regional department organization head. This is essential. Follow?

INTERVIEWER

Yes. It has - the weight limit...

BUREAUCRAT

You may find the I9 in the sub-basement of Administration-building-three. It is to be filled out within three hours of vessel registration.

INTERVIEWER

Yes. Initial inventory reports something... an unlicensed parcel. It was obtained in one of the outer territories.

BUREAUCRAT

A what?

INTERVIEWER

An unlicensed parcel. A woman.

BUREAUCRAT

A woman? A stowaway?

INTERVIEWER

Not exactly, she was... found.

A woman enters. Our TRAVELER. A desk is placed at the other end of the stage, which she sits at. Her hand is bandaged and she looks even worse for wear.

BUREAUCRAT

Found?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

BUREAUCRAT

Alive?

INTERVIEWER

Yes. Semi-conscious.

BUREAUCRAT

Has she been processed? Her information?

The Interviewer shuffles through a pile of papers, distressed to find the right one quickly.

INTERVIEWER

Eh... Here we are. Documents officially assigned by the state: One Assessor's Degree. Judicial License. One death certificate - a minor. Her's.

BUREAUCRAT

What else?

INTERVIEWER

Um, no... She's, uh, was, uh - an sort of appeals adjudicator. She had, um... She was well-known for her... swiftness. Have you heard of her?

BUREAUCRAT

No. They found her in the outer territories?

INTERVIEWER

That's correct.

BUREAUCRAT

Far.

(Pause)

How long has it been since the territory has been surveyed?



INTERVIEWER

To my immediate knowledge? I don't know...

BUREAUCRAT

Find out. Process her. Take down her account. Should there be any evidence for raw materials that would be beneficial to the state, push harder for information.

INTERVIEWER

Absolutely.

BUREAUCRAT

Be as quick as possible.

(Pause)

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

BUREAUCRAT

Go to it.

The Bureaucrat exits.

SCENE THREE (INTERVIEW BEGINS)

The Interviewer enters and sizes up the Traveler. The Interviewer lets out a sigh, now that he is away from the hustle and bustle of the workplace.

INTERVIEWER

(looking through papers)

It says here you've had your inoculations?

(Silence)

Feel good to be home?

(Silence)

I'm sorry, is there something you would like? Water? Maybe some food?

Something like that?

TRAVELER

Some water. Yes.

INTERVIEWER

For a minute there I thought you might be a mute.

(muses)

... Did you hear the one about the mother who washed her sons hands off with soap when he cursed?

The Interviewer laughs expecting the same reaction from the Traveler... But no.

TRAVELER  
I can speak.

INTERVIEWER  
I'm not sure I- That's unfortunate somehow? That you can speak?  
(Silence)  
Here you are.  
(Pause)

The Interviewer obtains a glass of water from... somewhere. The Traveler reaches for it with her bandaged hand but quickly remembers her injury and reaches with the opposite hand. The Interviewer sees this.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)  
Fresh wound?  
(Pause)

TRAVELER  
Yes.

INTERVIEWER  
You've seeped some. It's fresh enough to forgotten that you've had it.

TRAVELER  
I didn't notice.

INTERVIEWER  
You've been busy. We'll get you some fresh bandages soon enough - but we have some things to take care of first off. Things to discuss, document. Discuss, document. Discuss, document. You see the pattern.  
(Pause)  
I think about how wonderful it would be to Travel like you have. The places, the people, the stories. Exciting.  
(Pause)

TRAVELER  
I don't have much to offer you.

INTERVIEWER  
Your story. I'm going to take it down.

TRAVELER  
My story?

INTERVIEWER

The area in which you were found has not been inventoried in some time.

TRAVELER

You're looking for something?

INTERVIEWER

It's standard to assess value of potential resources. Details become lost.

(Leafing through papers)

We several trading outposts listed - the one you were found - and one-

TRAVELER

-I know what you're looking for.

INTERVIEWER

Yes. I would like to know about-

TRAVELER

-It won't do you any good-

INTERVIEWER

-You'll tell me either way.

TRAVELER

-... About the Colony.

INTERVIEWER

That's correct. A prison camp? Something like that?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

You know this place?

TRAVELER

Well.

INTERVIEWER

Not much activity there lately. New Commandant was sent there some months ago after the passing of the previous. Your story should be quite helpful as to the colony's progress.

TRAVELER

Who is it that you work for?

INTERVIEWER

I work at the discretion of the State. I must please this person, who reports to a committee, who is lead by a board, advised by an administrator and so on and so on.

TRAVELER

"Heaven has fallen,  
Janus is dead.  
Bureaucracy now,  
Is the God with two heads."

INTERVIEWER

I don't know that one. I've never had an ear for poetry.

TRAVELER

When I was younger I enjoyed the older poets. There's always time to learn.

During this, something has changed. A subtle shift in lighting or media. While the Traveler and Interviewer remain physically alone, it would seem that the spiritual has found them. It is the ghost of the OFFICER. The Traveler notices, the Interviewer does not.

INTERVIEWER

Right. Let's move along.

TRAVELER

You want to know if there is anything on the Colony that may benefit you.

INTERVIEWER

Well, yes. That and to make sure of your well being. You are, after-all - still of value.

TRAVELER

You mean, what I did before?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

TRAVELER

I don't believe I'm a help to anyone anymore regarding my previous occupation.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe just to me then.

TRAVELER

Maybe.

INTERVIEWER

So what's it all about then? What are your new-found convictions?

OFFICER

What is your conviction worth?

The Traveler has turned white, her attention is elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

Are you alright?

TRAVELER

I'm sorry... What?

INTERVIEWER

Let's start from the beginning.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I will tell you what you want to know, but first; a warning. I sit still in silence, close my eyes, and the things that happened before me only come only after my mind wanders past the stars. The reason that you and the ones that you work for, and the ones they work for, are curious is the same reason a grown man searches for God or something profound. You want to know that there is a sense of something to be gained. You want to know there is a sense of order in the world and that it is your responsibility to belong. A correct answer. A right choice.

INTERVIEWER

Right, well...

TRAVELER

A fair warning is deserved.

The Officer's looming ghost-like presence seems to dissipate.

INTERVIEWER

You worked as an appeal's adjudicator, yes?

TRAVELER

(clears throat)

That's correct.

INTERVIEWER

And a well-known one at that.

TRAVELER

Some would say controversial.

INTERVIEWER

We would say efficient.

TRAVELER

I have been requested for comment at three-hundred-and ninety-eight hearings all with the same result.

INTERVIEWER

Which result was that?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

The result was death.

INTERVIEWER

Hmm. Tell me more.

SCENE FOUR (CONVICTION)

As we transition into flashback, the Traveler's clothes and hand are repaired. The Interviewer may move and watch from the shadows until his interjections as the scene moves forward. A FACELESS VOICE is heard addressing the TRAVELER. A CONVICT enters. He is in chains and tatters. He stands alone far-off from the Traveler.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

I had been asked to comment on an appeal of a worker whose negligence had been costly.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of worker?

TRAVELER

Factory worker.

INTERVIEWER

I think I heard about this one.

VOICE

In your opinion regarding the appeal of the convicted - what is in the State's best interest for proceeding?

TRAVELER

(to voice)

I do not deal in opinion, only in fact. And the fact is this: The convict, married and father of four, has been indited and reprimanded multiple times regarding the same offense - carelessness. Only this time it has resulted in the death of a coworker. The idea that this convict is the character of the, "ne'er do well," is absurd and is a complete myth of satirical fiction... Simply, he has neglected responsibility. Responsibility that was his alone.

VOICE

Your recommendation?

TRAVELER

Execution. As was previously recommended.

VOICE

Do you consider that just? Taking another life as well as the one that was lost? Behind the Traveler we are shown a slide-show of sorts of execution methods of old.

TRAVELER

Society is only as strong as it's weakest link. We've had that proven again and again by history. While some authorities maintain that retribution and rehabilitation are fundamental rights deserved by all - we simply do not share that opinion. The accused has had his opportunity to present a case, and the accused lost. That is our process.

VOICE

This is just?

TRAVELER

We are not only taking a life, but allowing others to prosper.

VOICE

Is it easy for you to come to such a conclusion?

TRAVELER

There is no epiphany here. Only the one answer.

VOICE

What about your critics?

TRAVELER

What about them?

VOICE

How are you able to make such a recommendation for this man's demise. You speak a word, wash your hands of him, and go on with your day.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

My responsibility to society is fulfilled. That is all I need. "Efficiency" is the word of the day.

VOICE

Excellent. Anything else?

TRAVELER

Death and promptness make good partners. I suggest that those are the last two the condemned share.

VOICE

Very well.

The Convict explodes at the Traveler as she tries to walk past.

CONVICT

You black-hearted bitch! You-You know what you are? You're nothing but a rusty nail sticking out of an ugly machine! I'll see you burned in hell for what you are! What do you think your words are worth? TURN AND LOOK AT ME! Tell me! WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY'RE WORTH!?!?

The Traveler is visibly effected by this.

INTERVIEWER

(to Traveler)

It went pleasantly?

TRAVELER

It gets easier.

INTERVIEWER

Those eyes looking back at you knowing that they will die based on your... expertise?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

That is all I have to say about my occupation.



INTERVIEWER

How did you learn about the Colony?

TRAVELER

It was soon thereafter I received a sort of invitation.

INTERVIEWER

You were invited?

TRAVELER

More or less.

The Traveler returns to the desk, she retrieves a letter. Opens it, and reads it silently. The COMMANDANT appears. He recites what the Traveler is reading.

COMMANDANT

"Three-hundred and ninety-seven is such a precise number. But, I suppose it must be three-hundred and ninety-eight by now. Maybe higher? I've written to you to give you a chance opportunity - one that may not present itself often. I have recently come into a high position in a relatively large prison institution. These places still exist far-off from the factory-laden lands that your and yours inhabit. I agree with your personal politics and offer you the chance to appease the people who choose to challenge the weight of your rulings. I would like you to help us streamline our judicial proceedings. Think of it as charity work to make you seem more -how should I say- merciful. On this colony there exists a peculiar machine - one that has been in use for ages, since the earlier years of the old Commandant. It is, well, you shall see for yourself, but there is some talk to rid the Colony of it. I wish you to survey our methods and possibly give feedback that would benefit us. You will silence opposition by showing us your humble guidance and our efforts will be all the better for it. I'll set a place for you here."

INTERVIEWER

Scant.

COMMANDANT

"P.S. - I found this poem. I thought you might enjoy it."

INTERVIEWER

You remember it?

TRAVELER

I couldn't forget it if I tried.

INTERVIEWER

What was it?

TRAVELER

("The Second Coming")

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The Falcon cannot hear the Falconer."

COMMANDANT

"The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned."

TRAVELER

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

INTERVIEWER

Oh, I like that one. A bit dark, but I like it.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

I left shortly thereafter.

The setting around the Traveler begins to change as we transition into the Colony.

INTERVIEWER

What is it you first remember?

SCENE FIVE (THE ARRIVAL)

A young GIRL enters. Her face is shrouded. She is accompanied by various ISLANDERS. Perhaps they help in the transition.

TRAVELER

It was evening when I arrived. The sky had not become black, but dark blue. Draco and Aires watched my arrival from above. And hot. Very hot. I could feel the fabric of my clothing stick to my body. It was almost as if I could peel apart the air. Drums pounded off in the dark wilderness of the island.

INTERVIEWER

Good. What else?

TRAVELER

A young girl.

The lights on the Girl intensify.

GIRL

(to others)

You, grab the rope! You, pull it in!

(to Traveler)

You want me to watch your things for you?

TRAVELER

(to Girl)

You want money don't you? Is that it? Money?

GIRL

(proudly)

If you want me to watch your things for you I'll do it.

The Traveler reaches for some coins in her pocket and hands them to the Girl.

GIRL (CONT'D)

What have you come here for?

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

It was evening when I arrived. The sky had not become black, but dark blue. And hot. Very hot. I could here drums off in the dark wilderness of the island.

TRAVELER

I've come to see the Commandant. Do you know where I can find him?

GIRL

Oh, yes. Many people surround him, they give him anything thing he wants.

TRAVELER

Oh really?

(to Interviewer)

She was an ambitious little thing. I even caught her fishing in my pockets.

(to Girl)

Stop that please.

GIRL

I'm sorry.

TRAVELER

Can you take me to him?

GIRL

Oh yes. Where do you come from?

TRAVELER

Aways-away.

GIRL

I know that place.

TRAVELER

Good for you.

GIRL

Do you have any family? Someone like me?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

No. I, um...

Pause. The Traveler in either time is unsure of what to say. The Interviewer leans forward intent on listening.

TRAVELER

No one like you.

GIRL

Then I'll get you food.

TRAVELER

Thank you, but no, I've just come to see the Commandant.

GIRL

You've come to only see the Commandant?

TRAVELER

Yes, I am just a traveler.

GIRL

"Traveler?"

TRAVELER

Yes. I go from place to place.

GIRL

Why?

TRAVELER

That's what travelers do.

(Pause)

GIRL

You're looking for something?

TRAVELER

I'm here as a favor. Nothing more.

GIRL

Have you found what you're looking for? I know what it is.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

(Trying to step around)

Excuse me.

GIRL

I have seen many wonderful things. Do you know these things?

TRAVELER

No.

GIRL

... Have you ever seen the face of true beauty?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

What?

GIRL

I have. I see everything. It's that way. You may go there.

TRAVELER

There's no light.

GIRL

(pointing to her own)

Follow ears.

TRAVELER

What kind of drums are those?

GIRL

(shaking her head 'no')

Prison march.

TRAVELER

Will I know the colony when I see it?

GIRL

Oh, yes...

(smiling)

You're like the last person who was here.

TRAVELER

And who was that?

GIRL

He came in chains.

TRAVELER

And what did he say?

GIRL

I'll tell you.

(Pause)

The Girl takes out the coins given to her by the Traveler and places each on her eyelids.

GIRL (CONT'D)

He said, "We now begin the ritual of death."

The Girl begins to laugh as the lights on the Girl fade.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

I was a pilgrim in a land that had begun to crawl under my skin and behind my eyes.

The Interviewer sits dumb-founded, but quickly snaps out of it.

INTERVIEWER

(writing)

Good line. You found the Commandant?

TRAVELER

She was right. I found the Commandant's barracks as easily if I had lived on the colony my entire life. I made my way through five-hundred meters of brush with no light whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER

... With no light?

TRAVELER

It was if someone had cleared a perfect path to which I was following. I heard the snap of the snare in the distance. I could feel the blades of the plants scrap against my face as I moved. But, I never once faltered or fell. I never became lost. And surely enough, some distance ahead, at the break of the trees, resting in front of me, was... the colony.

The Interviewer rises with paper in hand standing behind the Traveler, as to watch the story take place as an observer.

INTERVIEWER

The Commandant was prepared for your arrival?

TRAVELER

I didn't seem so, but I was escorted to his office by the standing sentry.

The COMMANDANT enters and sits at the desk. He is a robust individual gleaming with the shine of a spotless new uniform. With him is a PROSTITUTE. The Prostitute sits in his lap. They giggle and prod at one another, unaware of the Traveler.

INTERVIEWER

What was he like?

TRAVELER

He was a character to say the least.

COMMANDANT

I ask you - what is the world becoming? Land is being bought and sold. Industry booms and wanes. Systems of constant control. The next thousand years will be decided on the choices we make today. There is no time for cowardice. And more so, no time to look like we don't know what we're doing. If we mean to keep our bodies afloat, we must act quickly... You must be out visitor.

The Commandant looks up at the Traveler.

TRAVELER

I am.

COMMANDANT

You're um- You're-

TRAVELER

Go on.

COMMANDANT

-It's just that I wasn't expecting a woman.

TRAVELER

Is there a problem?

COMMANDANT

It's fine. Well, I suppose I was expecting someone I could be blunt with. But welcome. Pleased to have you.

TRAVELER

(stern)

I as well.

COMMANDANT

I'm happy to have someone of your expertise with us.

TRAVELER

It's necessity and relativity.

COMMANDANT

Which I why I was so pleased to hear of your arrival. I have to say I was surprised to learn of the eager interest.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Well..

The Commandant throws the Prostitute off him.

COMMANDANT

And even still that you came so far.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Yes...

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Anyway, my relief at your arrival comes with a bit of anxiety.

TRAVELER

Which is what?

COMMANDANT



You've come as an assessor, and that is well and good, but I have to tell you I have something else to ask of you.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Yes?

COMMANDANT

I've found in life you may either be a coward or a man-of-action. I am the latter.

(Pause)

There's the matter regarding the apparatus.

TRAVELER

It was mentioned-

COMMANDANT

-Good, then I've save myself the explanation.

TRAVELER

I don't really know anything about it-

COMMANDANT

-It's an ugly thing. I've come under pressure from outside authority to seriously scrutinize the way things are done here. Tomorrow afternoon at your presentation-

TRAVELER

- Sorry, what presentation?

COMMANDANT

You know, in front of my staff, various politicians, people who spend the money. Just something short and to the point. Could you do that?

TRAVELER

I've heard nothing about this.

COMMANDANT

It's nothing, eh, too important. Just a word or two, commenting on what you've seen.

TRAVELER

(puzzled)

... I-uh-well, I suppose I could say something...

COMMANDANT

It's that... My presence here only carries with it -- how should I put this... a meager amount of respect from my officers.

TRAVELER

Can't imagine why.

COMMANDANT

The trouble is that a few of my officers are still very much loyal to the ways of the Old Commandant. They don't openly support it in front of me, but I know I have conspirators still. They believe it's use is something spiritual and also something of a necessity. I'm not sure exactly how, but it seems that with the use of this machine the Old Commandant could command remarkable adoration from both his officers and the locals. Much dismay has grown from the ranks since I have issued orders to discontinue its use. I fear that, very possibly, I could be dealing with a mutiny and find myself exactly where I do not want to be.

(Pause)

I need you to side with me.

TRAVELER

I have to tell you that I feel I would be interfering with personal business that is not at all mine.

COMMANDANT

All business is personal in some way. You're an outsider - and because of that you're held in high regard. I need your voice to make sure I don't have a mutiny. What do you say?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I'll see what I can do.

COMMANDANT

Listen. This place won't be around forever, and neither will I. I have plans for my future as everyone does. And if you do this favor for me I'll make sure that you won't be forgotten, in my rise, as it were.

TRAVELER

In what way?

COMMANDANT

I have many friends in many places that can ensure that you live very comfortably. So comfortable that you would never have those faces looking back at you while you pass your swift judgment. How does that sound?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

A very generous offer.

COMMANDANT

(smiling)

You think about it... Don't make me look foolish.

(quick pause)

I have arranged for you to be guided by my First Officer for the rest of the evening.

The Officer enters.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

There you are. Finally. Please, come in here. This is our illustrious traveler.

The Officer nods.

TRAVELER

Oh, hello.

COMMANDANT

I've told her the plans for the evening.

OFFICER

Very good.

COMMANDANT

I would like things to proceed as quickly as possible.

OFFICER

I understand.

(Pause)

COMMANDANT

Do you?

OFFICER

Yes, sir.

COMMANDANT

(to Traveler, Re: Officer)

Must keep up things that need keeping... For now - good evening. I have other things to attend.

The Traveler produces a small book.

TRAVELER

I've, um, I've brought you something I thought you would enjoy.

COMMANDANT

Really? I'm flattered.

TRAVELER

With your eye for prose I thought...Well, here you are...

(Pause)

The Traveler hands the Commandant the book.

COMMANDANT

Poems?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Yes?

(Pause)

Is something wrong?

COMMANDANT

No, I-... Yes... Thank you, anyhow...

TRAVELER

For your hospitality.

COMMANDANT

Yes.

The Traveler and the Officer exit. The Commandant leafs through the book and quickly disregards it. He exits.

SCENE SIX ("REMARKABLE!")

The Officer leads the Traveler about the space.

OFFICER

It's remarkable. Truly remarkable!

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

It was just as quick as that - taken head first by my new guide.

OFFICER

This way. Follow me please.

INTERVIEWER

Had this Officer been on the island a while?

TRAVELER

Maybe too long.

INTERVIEWER

He had information about the Colony? The land surrounding? What did he say?

OFFICER

(to Traveler)

So glad to be rid of him. Could you feel it? The stench. The dolefully ironic sense of self-worth? Do you think he was born that way or conditioned? Some person gives him a slip of paper and with a shiny emblem and all of a sudden he's the ruler of the world. Pathetic. Who knows? This way.

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Would I be able to see where I'm staying? It's been a long trip.

OFFICER

Shortly, shortly. Wouldn't you like to know why you're here?

TRAVELER

As a matter of fact-

OFFICER

Shortly, shortly. Eh... fucking humidity. Let's hold for a second.

(Pause)

Oh, I haven't properly greeted you!

The Traveler puts out her hand awaiting a shake. The Officer embraces her fully.

OFFICER

You've come. You've finally come!

The Traveler is bewildered by this sudden embrace.

TRAVELER

... Mmm. Right...

The Officer takes two handkerchiefs from his uniform and wipes his brow.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, are those... women's handkerchiefs?

OFFICER

Oh, yes. Magic in the web of 'em - gifts from the ladies. Meaningless except that they remind me of home. And we don't want to forget home now do we?

TRAVELER

(awkwardly)

I suppose not.

OFFICER

You know about things that are important. The importance of purity?

TRAVELER

Yes.

OFFICER

Of course you do.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

I suspected he was one of the Commandant's belligerents. He was young.

OFFICER

Not much further now.

TRAVELER

Where is it you are leading me?

OFFICER

Why you're here.

TRAVELER

I'm a little in the dark about that.

OFFICER

Not anymore.

The lights rise in the room. Sitting on the floor is the CONDEMNED, lazily watching is his guard. The SOLDIER.

OFFICER

As you can see this is not a typical setting for executions. I've been trying to keep things in order for your arrival.

TRAVELER  
(to Interviewer)  
He referred to it simply as:

OFFICER  
Our Death Chamber.

INTERVIEWER  
Death Chamber?

TRAVELER  
To the point - I respect that.

OFFICER  
Come closer.

The Traveler takes a baby-step forward.

OFFICER  
Come... You can do better than that. Watch this.

The Officer pulls a lever? Presses a button? Anyway - he signals the arrival of the "Apparatus." Now, of course, the reveal of the Apparatus depends greatly on the construction.

OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Remarkable, isn't it!?

--- END OF ACT I ---

## ACT TWO

ACT TWO. SCENE ONE (HOW IT WORKS)  
The CONDEMNED stands in one corner, bound, but able to move a small distance. He is guarded by a SOLDIER.

TRAVELER  
My God. I... What is this?

OFFICER  
This is our "Apparatus."

TRAVELER  
This is...

OFFICER

This is how we execute.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

It's-

OFFICER

-Truly remarkable.

The Officer yells at the Soldier, and the Soldier, in return, yanks the Condemned back to him.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Pay attention to your post!

(Pause)

Pardon me.

The Condemned chokes and struggles to vocalize something.

TRAVELER

What's wrong with him?

OFFICER

Don't worry about him. Now, this machine-

TRAVELER

-He's struggling.

OFFICER

He's hasn't had anything to drink for several days. Thins the blood, which is essential-

TRAVELER

-Did you say days?

The Officer pauses for a moment, but decides to oblige the Traveler.

OFFICER

Of course. We should do something about that, shouldn't we?

The Officer procures a bucket. He crosses to the Condemned and throws some slop into his face. The Condemned chokes.

OFFICER (CONT'D)



Better? As I was saying...

(inaudible)

This, as you can see, is our apparatus and it is made out of...

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

Truthfully, I wasn't as excited about the Apparatus as the Officer. But, the Commandant was correct about the machine - it was like something I had never seen before.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me about the room.

TRAVELER

To the side of the machine was the Condemned Man in chains and his guard. The Condemned couldn't have been more than sixteen. He had been broken.

OFFICER

The Apparatus is our previous Commandant's invention. I also helped him on the very first tests and took part in all the work right up to its start. But, the credit for the invention belongs to him.

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Yes. I've heard only so much of the previous Commandant.

OFFICER

Oh, it's such a shame that you didn't know the Old Commandant! Well, I hope I sound modest when I say that the organization of the entire penal colony is his and his alone... At first, people thought he was a strange man, an eccentric. But we, his friends, understand the importance of what he has laid out. And as much as we would like to take credit for its invention, his Apparatus stands in front of us!

TRAVELER

Lucky for me.

(Pause)

Wait a moment, I think I understand.

OFFICER

Oh, yes?

TRAVELER

Yes. I've heard of something like this before.

OFFICER  
That couldn't be.

TRAVELER  
But I have.

OFFICER  
I honestly doubt-

TRAVELER  
-It's a really wonderful, um, mythic concept of morality. There was a Greek King once who would pack six or seven men into a giant copper statue of a Bull. Then a fire would be lit under the belly and, as the men were cooked inside the steam from their melting bodies would come rushing out the nostrils of the animal. Really quite awful.

OFFICER  
That's not anything like this.

TRAVELER  
Sure it is. It's a technique used to discourage people from crime by using this... contraption... as a fear-based motivator. Brilliant idea.

OFFICER  
This contraption isn't a myth. This is real. And it provides a much more interesting sensation. If only our pig of a Commandant understood...

TRAVELER  
I want to put this in front of everything - If my being here is the matter of some sort of internal dispute between you and the new Commandant, then I'm sorry to say that I have no interest-

OFFICER  
(annoyed)  
Certain channels must be followed. That is why you are here.

TRAVELER  
There are more efficient ways to conduct protocol.

OFFICER  
"Heaven has fallen,  
Janus is dead.  
Bureaucracy now,  
Is the God with two heads."

TRAVELER

I don't know that one.

OFFICER

There's always the time to learn. "Efficiency" is the word of the day...

(Pause)

On to the good stuff!

(in awe)

As you see, it consists of three parts. With the passage of time, funny little names have emerged to describe them. The one underneath is called the Bed, the upper one is called the Insciber, and here in the middle, this moving part is called the Harrow.

TRAVELER

... The Harrow?

(to Interviewer)

He had stopped paying attention.

The Officer finds a SCREWDRIVER and tunes the machine.

OFFICER

(to the Apparatus)

How does that feel? You'll be running like new in no time.

TRAVELER

I glanced over at the Solider. I was jealous of his comfort.

The Officer snaps the Traveler back into his story.

OFFICER

Yes. "The Harrow." The whole thing is driven like a harrow, although it stays in one place and is, in principle, much more... artistic. The condemned is laid out here on the Bed. Anyway, you'll understand in a moment. I know it's a lot to take in. Pardon me.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

The Solider and Condemned were unresponsive to the Officer's excitement. It's as if they didn't understand the Officer's lush affection. Though only one was sentenced to die, they both seemed dull to everything.

INTERVIEWER

How was the machine powered? By petroleum? Electricity? Were there storages around?

TRAVELER

Up to that point, it didn't seem to have a fuel source.

OFFICER

So, here is the Bed, as I said. The whole thing is completely covered with a layer of cotton wool, the purpose of which you'll find out in a moment. The condemned man is laid out on his stomach on this cotton wool... naked, of course.

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Of course.

OFFICER

There are straps for the hands here, for the feet here, and for the throat here to tie him in firmly. At the head of the Bed here, where the man lies face down. And this small protruding lump of felt, which can easily be adjusted so that it can press right into the man's mouth.

TRAVELER

Into the mouth?

OFFICER

Its purpose is to prevent him screaming and biting his tongue to pieces.

TRAVELER

Do that happen often?

OFFICER

More often than not. Ha. Of course, the man has to let the felt in his mouth -- otherwise the straps around his throat will break his neck!

TRAVELER

And you wouldn't want that, why? It is an execution device is it not?

OFFICER

You-You-YOU DON'T GET ANY OF IT!!!

Pause. The Officer collects himself.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I-I'm ashamed of myself. I am. I have to remind myself to slow down. I have trouble remembering...

(Pause)

Forgive me, please.

TRAVELER

Yes. The humidity.

OFFICER

Yes.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

It was a massive construction.

INTERVIEWER

Did the Apparatus appear to be valuable in anyway? Perhaps salvaged for monetary reasons?

TRAVELER

I don't know. But to the Officer it was priceless.

INTERVIEWER

Did you admire it?

TRAVELER

It had become hard not to appreciate the intricacy. It was almost beautiful in a way.

INTERVIEWER

(writing furiously)

Yes! Yes!!

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

The Officer was certainly happy to see I was admiring the Apparatus.

OFFICER

Would you like a chair so you may be able to observe more comfortably?

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Certainly.

The Officer gets two CHAIRS.

OFFICER

Here you are. For those of us not on the block, we can be civilized, believe me.

TRAVELER

Of course.

They sit and marvel for a moment.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

Tell me more. So now the man is lying down?

OFFICER

Yes. As soon as the man is strapped in securely, the Bed is set in motion. It quivers with tiny, very rapid oscillations from side to side and up and down simultaneously.

TRAVELER

Where have I seen something like this before?

OFFICER

(beaming)

Mental hospitals.

TRAVELER

... Right.

OFFICER

Only with our Bed -- all movements are precisely calibrated, because they must be coordinated with the movements of the Harrow. But it's the Harrow which has the job of actually carrying out the sentence.

TRAVELER

I'm sorry, I'm confused.

OFFICER

(playfully)

You don't even know about that!? Oh, come now.

TRAVELER

You'll have to forgive me.

OFFICER

Previously it was the Commandant's habit to provide such explanations...

(slightly heated)

But the New Commandant has excused himself from this honourable duty.

TRAVELER

Please, it's fine-

OFFICER

(heated)

-I was not informed about it. It's not my fault. In any case, I am certainly the person best able to explain our style of sentencing. Our form of sentencing is a unique one.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

How so?

OFFICER

The law which a condemned man has violated is inscribed on his body with the Harrow.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I'm sorry... He's... tattooed?

OFFICER

In a way. This man's sentence for instance, would be something like, "Ever Vigilant."

TRAVELER

Ah, I get it now -- "sentencing" -- that's clever.

OFFICER

Someone who is not intimately involved sees no external difference among the punishments. The Harrow goes to work, and as it quivers, it sticks the tips of its needles into the body, which is also vibrating from the movement of the bed. And now, the inscription is made on the body. Don't you want to come closer and see the needles for yourself?

(Pause)

The Traveler steps forward.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Closer... We have two sorts of needles in a multiple arrangement. The long one inscribes, and the short one squirts water out to wash away the blood and keep the inscription always clear. The blood drips.

ACT TWO. SCENE TWO (THE CONDEMNED)

TRAVELER

(aside to Officer)

Pardon my ignorance but, does the Condemned know his own sentence?

OFFICER

No.

TRAVELER

No?

OFFICER

(like his own private joke)

I caught him sleeping on guard one night. He didn't even know I had spotted him!

Ha-ha!

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

The Officer explained to me that his arrest happened something like this...

Flashback. A black hood is placed on the head of the Condemned. He begins to scream as the scene is acted out.

CONDEMNED

What! What is going on!?! Help me! Stop! Please!

SOLDIER

Shut up!

CONDEMNED

What is this?

SOLDIER

Shut up!!

The Soldier strikes the Condemned with an object. A gun, maybe a rifle butt.

CONDEMNED

Please, there's been a mistake!

SOLDIER

You're under arrest.

CONDEMNED

What have I done?

SOLDIER

You know.

CONDEMNED



I don't! Tell me!

SOLDIER

I said, "SHUI UP!"

CONDEMNED

What is my crime? Tell me what my crime is!

SOLDIER

You're going to be put to death for what you've done.

CONDEMNED

For what!? Please God, don't do this to me!

The Soldier strikes him again.

SOLDIER

You're going to scream and suffer!

CONDEMNED

No! Please tell me my crime and I will atone!

SOLDIER

You have committed your crime and that is all you need to know!

CONDEMNED

I'm sorry! Tell me what I've done! Tell me my crime!!!

We return to the Officer and Traveler.

TRAVELER

That's-how is that possible?

OFFICER

It would be pointless to tell him what he has done wrong when he will understand it for himself.

TRAVELER

I'm not sure-

OFFICER

He will understand it.

ACT TWO. SCENE THREE (THE LETTER AND OTHER BUSINESS)

TRAVELER

I have some concerns about your methods.

(Pause)

OFFICER

The matter stands like this -- Guilt is always beyond a doubt! If I had first gotten hold of the man and interrogated him, the result would have been confusion. He would have lied, and if I had exposed his lies, he would have replaced them with new lies, and again and again. But now I have him. Now, does that clarify everything? So much easier this way. To cut out the middle-man. Don't worry. He will have a pure death. His execution is to take place at noon tomorrow. After your presentation.

TRAVELER

The Commandant said nothing about my speaking directly before this man's death.

OFFICER

Just goes to show you what I've been working with.

TRAVELER

I don't mean to seem unreasonable, but it seems that with all the talk of a Harrow and the bed - all costly to upkeep. Why not just have them shot?

OFFICER

("A Satyre Against Mankind")

"Anything but that vain animal, who is so proud of being rational." Come, I want to show you the best part...

TRAVELER

Can't wait...

OFFICER

I know! Isn't it wonderful? How have we come so far?

The Officer fine-tunes the machine. He climbs a ladder to the top.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You see, it's not supposed to kill right away, but on average, over a period of twelve hours.

TRAVELER

You're saying that this machine continually inscribes into his body for twelve hours? He's marked over and over, deeper and deeper?

The Officer climbs a latter to the top of the machine.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

He becomes... art?

OFFICER

Of a kind! It's fascination in all of us, to watch art become life!

TRAVELER

Only in this case - it's in reverse. Art becomes death.

OFFICER

From the coliseum to the sacrificial-altar to the funeral pyre. We want to watch...

The Officer jumps down from the machine.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

For the first six hours the condemned man goes on living almost as before. You see!? I told you it was exquisite!

TRAVELER

He feels no pain?

OFFICER

No. He suffers nothing but pain! Ha! After two hours, the felt is removed, for at that point the man has no more energy for screaming.

(Pause)

But how quiet the man becomes around the sixth hour -- the most stupid of them begins to comprehend! Remarkable...

TRAVELER

They understand their punishment?

OFFICER

Their judgment. Only through this process are you able to be truly illuminated.

("The Inferno")

"The more a thing is perfect, the more it will have pleasure and pain."

(Pause)

TRAVELER

What did you just say?

OFFICER

Pardon?

TRAVELER

Dante.

OFFICER

What about him?

TRAVELER

I know that one. The quote. That was Dante.

OFFICER

I didn't realize.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Have you always been so fond of verse?

OFFICER

I'm embarrassed. It comes out sometimes. The beauty. Just can't help myself.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

Wait.

OFFICER

We should move on, yes?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

You... It was you wasn't it? The Commandant never wrote that letter to me. You wrote the letter. "The best lack all conviction..."

OFFICER

"And the worst are full of passionate intensity..."

(Pause)

TRAVELER

But you - How did he know I was coming?

OFFICER

I forged a letter from not only him to you, but from you to him. Good, no? It went something like this:

TRAVELER

"Dearest Commandant, I have an eager interest in a unique situation that I believe that the both of us may prosper from... And as I understand that you are fairly new

to your position as Commandant, I would like to offer you my humble services to more easily fit your command. Much time is wasted trying to preserve thoughts and practices of old. As I suspect maybe just the case with your new title. Allow me to visit and offer a hand in judgment - say by presentation, thereby appeasing those around you, and take the experience home with me so that I may appear more compassionate to those in far away places. With your permission I will leave right away."

OFFICER

I try to write for women, but something eludes me.

(Pause)

You're upset, aren't you? Forgive me, but it was-

TRAVELER

-I need to speak to him.

OFFICER

Now, hold on-

TRAVELER

-Out of my way.

OFFICER

Let me explain!

TRAVELER

Move!

OFFICER

No! It was a necessary evil. You know all about those. Listen-

TRAVELER

-It still doesn't change the fact-

OFFICER

-Please, please, you need to be fully aware how important, how pure the epiphany this machine provides is! Let me show you how wonderful-

TRAVELER

-I need to speak to the Commandant. Now.

OFFICER

Wait! Wait! I believe I know how to best explain myself.

INTERVIEWER

How did he best explain it?  
(Pause)

TRAVELER  
(to Interviewer)  
He turned it on.

INTERVIEWER  
... He did what?

OFFICER  
"Speak hands for me."

The Officer goes to the Apparatus and starts pulling levers and the machine hisses to life. The metal creaks and strains producing horrible noises. The Condemned, Soldier, and Traveler cover their ears.

OFFICER  
Ha! Wonderful!

The Bed shakes furiously, and the Inscriber pulses. The COMMANDANT was right -- it is terrifying.

OFFICER  
Do you see!? Do you see!? Remarkable!

TRAVELER  
(to Officer)  
Turn it off! That noise! Turn it off!

The Officer powers-down the machine, in winces and creaks as it slows to a stop.

OFFICER  
I beg you to reconsider. You see, this practice is pure to us. It is a way of life.

TRAVELER  
I don't know what this is.

OFFICER  
No, no. Don't jump to conclusions too quickly! I would rather cut out my own eyes than see this machine disgraced.

TRAVELER  
Violent.

OFFICER

It is violent. But it is ours. This here, where we are, is our coliseum. And this is combat.

TRAVELER

Fanatic then.

OFFICER

A "Fanatic" are only fanatic when someone else says it... Here? We call them "family."

--- Intermission ---

ACT TWO. SCENE FOUR (THINGS LOST)

Lights rise again on the Traveler and the Interviewer. The Apparatus is now dark. (or gone?) But the Soldier and Condemned can still be seen.

TRAVELER

Turning and turning in the widening gyre...

The "ghost" of the Officer looms. The Interviewer coughs to get the Traveler's attention.

INTERVIEWER

Are you alright?

TRAVELER

My mind wanders.

INTERVIEWER

Had you any means for an escape?

TRAVELER

I was stuck between a rock-

INTERVIEWER

-A rock and a death chamber.

The Officer enters.

OFFICER

Take the condemned to a cell. We need to speak alone.

The Soldier and Condemned exit.

TRAVELER

I scolded him for his lying.

OFFICER

Please let me explain. You want to appease those you think judge you too harshly, and I'm offering you an opportunity to keep our methods prospering and make you look humble all at the same time. It's perfect for the both of us!

TRAVELER

If you really want to know I came here out of pity for the Commandant's cause, not for selfish reasons.

OFFICER

(laughing wild)

That's hysterical! You call me a liar!?! HA! You see? You're stuck in the same system as the rest of them. Lying and treading moral-water until they die!

TRAVELER

You should watch what you say.

OFFICER

If you weren't concerned about your personal convictions, then why did you come here?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

What makes you think I'd entertain the idea of helping your cause? The Commandant has already asked me to speak out against it.

OFFICER

As I planned. When?

TRAVELER

At the presentation.

OFFICER

Of course. And what did you say?

TRAVELER

I said I'd see what I could do.

OFFICER

Wonderful! You didn't give him too much, just a glimmer of hope!

TRAVELER



You've lied to me. Betrayed my trust. What makes you think I'd help you instead?

OFFICER

I'll tell you, but first I want you to answer a question for me.

TRAVELER

What?

OFFICER

I want you to think very hard. And be very honest.

TRAVELER

I have nothing to hide from you.

OFFICER

I have shared this wonderful machine with you and made you privy to it's importance. Now, can you be honest with me?

TRAVELER

Yes.

OFFICER

Have you ever made a choice that you wish you could take back?

(Pause)

TRAVELER

(confidently)

No.

OFFICER

No?

TRAVELER

Definitely.

OFFICER

Three hundred and ninety-eight people dead because of your certainty, and there's not one of them you'd give second thought to?

TRAVELER

No.

OFFICER

I admire that. Boom-blam-splat. Done! Goddamn, that's righteousness! I admire your conviction, I do. But alas, I'm at least still human. But I wonder why that is? What drives you to have such conviction?

TRAVELER

We are each given roles in society that must be filled.

OFFICER

You learn to read the faces after a while seeing people on the block, so to speak... You're attractive. Younger. Never married?

TRAVELER

... That's not the point.

OFFICER

... I would bet that you were married.

TRAVELER

Makes no difference in my observances.

OFFICER

You don't have to keep this up anymore.

TRAVELER

I don't care to share anything of my personal life-

OFFICER

-Children?

(Silence)

A child?

(Silence)

Something taken away?

TRAVELER

You'd be smart to keep your mouth closed.

OFFICER

There it is... Something pure destroyed. I can only imagine the agony.

TRAVELER

Utter another word and I'll show you what real certainty is.

OFFICER

I-I just, um, cannot tell you how deeply I sympathize.

TRAVELER

I don't want sympathy.

OFFICER

Of course you don't. Who does? You want black and white! You want what we want! You want to rid this world of the mundane rhetoric which fills our lives. And that is done with purity. I want you to help us preserve our purity...

TRAVELER

What does that do for me?

OFFICER

You will know that somewhere in this world - the spirit of human illumination is not shattered. You gave the people their salvation instead of destruction. You did this. It was because of you.

ACT TWO. SCENE FIVE (MY PLAN)

OFFICER (CONT'D)

This is in front of you.

TRAVELER

I want nothing to do with any of it. Send someone to get my things.

OFFICER

Just wait.

TRAVELER

Why?

OFFICER

What if I told you, I have a plan...

TRAVELER

Would it get me out of here quicker?

OFFICER

No, but it may offer you some peace of mind. Peace of mind that you could not have elsewhere. A chance to at least know that somewhere you may have given comfort instead crushed it.

TRAVELER

What would you have me do?

OFFICER

I want you to endorse our machine. Publicly. At your "presentation."

TRAVELER

The Commandant already half-expects me to condone this practice. Don't give me a reason to.

OFFICER

Just listen. Go along for a moment. Humor me.

The Commandant enters along with his CONSTITUENTS and the Prostitute.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, you will be seated next to the Commandant, of course. Very regal.

The Constituents and Prostitute help dress the stage. The Commandant and the Traveler sit.

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Like this?

OFFICER

Just like that. After various trivial and ridiculous agenda items designed only for the spectators, the judicial process also comes up for discussion. If it's not raised by the Commandant himself or does not occur soon enough, I'll make sure that it comes up!

TRAVELER

Is that customary?

OFFICER

I'll do it anyway. I'll stand up and report the news of day's execution. I finish and...

The Commandant rises. The Prostitute enters.

COMMANDANT

Thank you for your report.

OFFICER

And he'll probably say:..

COMMANDANT

"The report of the execution has just been given."

OFFICER

Watch. Now he can't help himself.

COMMANDANT

I would like to add to this report only the fact that this particular execution was attended by our Traveler whose visit confers such extraordinary honor on our colony, as you all know. Even the significance of our meeting today has been increased by her presence. I've mentioned to all of you how she leans on the issue, and I am confident she will not disappoint. Do we not now wish to ask our guest for her appraisal of the execution based on old customs?

CONSTITUENT#1

Hear Hear!

CONSTITUENT#2

Let her speak!

CONSTITUENT#1

Wonderful, our Traveler

OFFICER

And everyone claps.

The party claps.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Now's the part.

COMMANDANT

Then in everyone's name, I'm putting the question to you!

The Traveler rises. The Prostitute pulls at the Traveler's clothes.

OFFICER

You say:

TRAVELER

"Although, in I believe this practice may be considered a different means of execution."

CONSTITUENT#1

Different?

CONSTITUENT#2

Different how?

OFFICER

That's all right. You want them to be confused.

COMMANDANT

You've seen the execution?

Immediate Silence. This is the point of prosper or peril for everyone in the room.

OFFICER

What you must respond in return, is something short and vague.

TRAVELER

(calmly)

Yes. Yes, I have.

OFFICER

People should notice that it has become difficult for you to speak about the subject, that you feel bitter, that, if you were to speak openly, you'd have to burst out cursing on the spot.

COMMANDANT

And?

OFFICER

Say something like:

TRAVELER

"Yes, I've seen the execution."

OFFICER

Yes, something like that. Or:

TRAVELER

"Yes, I've heard the full explanation."

(to Officer)

And now?

OFFICER

Now you hit them right between the eyes...

TRAVELER

"I believe that this practice, though seemingly somewhat strange and abnormal, is an essential procedural factor in the colony's operation."

COMMANDANT  
(enraged)  
You what!?

The Constituents babble to one another.

OFFICER  
Hahaha! Perfect!

TRAVELER  
"I'm saying that this procedure is acceptable as is, and I furthermore see no evidence that it should be discontinued."

OFFICER  
You've done it!

TRAVELER  
(to Officer)  
That's it?

OFFICER  
That's it.

The Commandant and his train exit.

OFFICER (CONT'D)  
What do you think?

TRAVELER  
I don't know what to say.

OFFICER  
Just say yes.

TRAVELER  
No, I can't do that.

OFFICER  
Sure you can.

TRAVELER  
I have a lot to think about.

OFFICER

This machine, though menacing is a symbol of something wonderful to us..  
Something eternal. Grant us your mercy.

TRAVELER

"Us?" I see no one who has the attachment that you have.

OFFICER

There are others! I had questioned myself in telling you this, seeing as though I had placed a good amount of faith in my demonstration today. But, I find the need to personally convey this to you. I am its single open defender and at the same time the single advocate for the legacy of the Old Commandant. I have something of the Old Commandant's persuasiveness, but I completely lack his power, and as a result the supporters have gone into hiding-

TRAVELER

-Before you continue-

OFFICER

-There are still a lot of them, but no one can admit to it. They are all supporters, but under the present Commandant, considering his present views, they are totally useless to me. And now I'm asking you: Should such a life's work, come to nothing because of this Commandant?

TRAVELER

Your struggle is not my struggle, no matter how much you want it to be. Now all you have is this lingering hope to comfort you. Embrace the future - you might live longer.

OFFICER

If I could only have it make more sense to you...

TRAVELER

It doesn't matter.

OFFICER

You should have seen the executions in earlier days! The entire chamber was overflowing with people, even the day before the execution. They all came merely to watch. Early in the morning the Commandant appeared in freshly shone shoes. Fanfares woke up the entire island!

The Villagers start to enter. Some of them old, some of them young. Some of them natives and some of them Europeans.

ISLANDER#1

It's Ready!



ISLANDER#2  
It's Ready!

The Prostitute and others rush onto the space in a grandiose ritual to watch the execution.

OFFICER  
I delivered the news that everything was set. The whole society arranged itself around the machine. This pile of cane chairs is a sorry left over from that time. The machine was freshly cleaned and glowed. In front of hundreds of eyes!

ISLANDER#1  
What's his crime?

ISLANDER#2  
I'm not sure what his crime was.

ISLANDER#3  
It's remarkable every time.

ISLANDER#2  
Truly remarkable.

ISLANDER#1  
Today!

ISLANDER#3  
It's coming!

ISLANDER#1  
I heard he stole Bread!

ISLANDER#2  
I heard he's a surly drunk!

ISLANDER#3  
Take your places!

ISLANDER#1  
Take your places!

TRAVELER  
(to Officer)  
Please, try to underst-

OFFICER

-Often I crouched down here, right here, with a small child.

The Young Girl enters.

OFFICER

(to girl)

And how are you this fine morning?

GIRL

Very well, sir.

OFFICER

Come to watch the show? Are you excited?

GIRL

(excitedly)

Yes, very much!

OFFICER

Then you will get a front-row seat, right next to me.

GIRL

Oh thank you.

OFFICER

Think nothing of it... You sit here in my arms, and together we will take in all the majesty of the world... Pure beauty.

GIRL

I'm excited!

OFFICER

(to Traveler)

How we all took in the expression of transfiguration on the martyred face! How we held our cheeks in the glow of this justice, finally attained and already passing away! It was in the Condemned's face we saw... everything! What times we had!

The Villagers exit. The Officer throws an arm around the Traveler. The Traveler has to stand there embarrassingly.

TRAVELER

I don't want to upset you.

OFFICER

Upset? Who's upset? I know it's hard to understand.

TRAVELER

It's not a matter of understanding.

OFFICER

But, can't you see the wonder in it!? I know you can!

The Traveler removes the Officer's arm from his shoulder.

TRAVELER

No, I cannot see the wonder in it.

OFFICER

The machine still works and operates on its own. It operates on its own even when it is sitting alone in this chamber.

TRAVELER

How?

OFFICER

I don't know. The Commandant took that with him into the next world.

TRAVELER

Without a fuel source?

OFFICER

If I knew I would tell you.

TRAVELER

You talk like it's possessed.

OFFICER

Maybe it is... But whatever possesses it is pure and true.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

It's getting darker.

OFFICER

It is.

TRAVELER

I have no answer for you now.

OFFICER

I didn't think you would. I'll give you the rest of the evening to think over my proposal.

--- END OF ACT II ---

### ACT THREE

ACT THREE. SCENE ONE (THINGS SACRED)

The Apparatus is either dark now or gone. The Young girl sits alone in the corner of the stage. She plays with an object. Her face is covered by rags. The Traveler enters.

INTERVIEWER

You were left alone?

TRAVELER

I couldn't sleep. I left my room to explore the island.

INTERVIEWER

You were looking for the right answer?

TRAVELER

I don't know. I left to find... Something...

INTERVIEWER

And what did you find?

TRAVELER

The girl... That beautiful young girl.

She warily approaches the Girl.

TRAVELER

(to Girl)

... Dear? Are you alright?

GIRL

Numb.

TRAVELER  
Are you lost?

GIRL  
All numb.

TRAVELER  
Can you hear me?

GIRL  
Numb. All Numb.

TRAVELER  
Come over here. Do you need help with something? Um, food? Water?

GIRL  
I could drink, but what is the point?

TRAVELER  
Let me get you something.

GIRL  
I don't want anything.

Pause. The Traveler notes that the Girl's face is shrouded.

TRAVELER  
Why is your face covered?

GIRL  
Are you going to help us?

TRAVELER  
Help you?

GIRL  
Are you going to let us keep it?

TRAVELER  
The machine.

GIRL  
It's not only a machine.

TRAVELER

What is it then?

GIRL

It's... ecstasy....

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I'm going to tell you something. Can I tell you a secret?

GIRL

Yes.

TRAVELER

If I tell you, will you show me your face?

GIRL

Yes.

TRAVELER

You have to promise to keep it to yourself.

GIRL

I will.

TRAVELER

You know, I knew someone like you once. Someone innocent. But then one day it was gone, and I thought from then on that this entire world was simply black and white - there is no choice but to move on, but... There's always supposed to be a right answer, isn't there? Justness. But now, I don't know what the right choice is. I don't know what I'm supposed to say.

GIRL

You should help us. Let us keep it.

TRAVELER

There has to be another way.

GIRL

There is no other way.

TRAVELER

Do something for me.

GIRL

Yes?

TRAVELER

Lie to me. Be someone else. You're not a girl, you're someone Just please lie to me and tell me what I should do. Tell me what the right answer is.

GIRL

Let us keep it.

TRAVELER

What good is one side than the other?

GIRL

You know what you want to do.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

There is no end-game either way.

GIRL

You have to help us. You have to say something. Or else, there will be consequences.

TRAVELER

Show me your face.

GIRL

I'm in mourning.

TRAVELER

You have your entire life. What could you possibly have to mourn?

GIRL

I am mourning my sacrifice.

TRAVELER

Sacrifice?

GIRL

In hopes that you will help us.

TRAVELER

What sacrifice?

(Silence)

Let me see your face.

GIRL

Stay away from me.

TRAVELER

Show me your face.

GIRL

Get away.

The Traveler reaches down to touch the Girl's face.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Don't touch me!

The Traveler grabs a hold of the shroud and tears it off. The girl screams and covers her face. The Girl slowly puts her hands down.

TRAVELER

My god.

The Traveler is shocked when it is revealed that the Young Girl has cut out her own eyes.

GIRL

Exactly.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

Why would you do this to yourself?

GIRL

It's my offering to you. To show you how important it is.

The Traveler grabs the girl close, hugging her.

TRAVELER

How could it mean this much?

GIRL (CONT'D)

You're beginning to see... It means everything...

The Girl exits. The Traveler looks at her and ponders her choice.

ACT THREE. SCENE TWO (SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU)

The stage is set for the coming execution. The Officer, Condemned, and Soldier enter.



OFFICER

The time is fast approaching. You've had the night to think it over?

TRAVELER

Yes. I-

OFFICER

-You've reached a decision?

TRAVELER

I have.

OFFICER

You make me a very happy person.

TRAVELER

I would like this to go quickly.

OFFICER

Understood.

TRAVELER

Once you have my final recommendation I want you to promise me that-

OFFICER

(excited)

-Wait. Now before you say anything. I want this to glimmer.

The Officer grabs a bucket and cloth. He throws them towards the condemned.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

(to Solider)

Make sure he goes over some of the finer points.

The Soldier nods as he forces the Condemned to clean the machine which has been chosen to kill him.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Continue.

TRAVELER

It was not an easy thing to come to.

The Traveler collects herself ready to pass her final judgement.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

I'm going to tell Commandant-

OFFICER

-Hold there... Please... I want you to just stop for a moment. You're exhausted, yes? Exhausted? Been traveling for days on end to get here. Poor thing... Just take a take a brief second and think very carefully about what you want to say.

TRAVELER

There is no need to wait. The Commandant will be here shortly. I've decided you deserve to know-

OFFICER

-I bet you miss your home right now, don't you?

TRAVELER

I look forward to seeing it again soon. As soon as I can.

OFFICER

So far away. I haven't been home since I was a little boy. I wonder sometimes if anyone from where I was born remembers me...

TRAVELER

Of course they do.

OFFICER

Maybe I'm just a ghost to them. They consider me dead?

TRAVELER

You can return home in the future, I'm sure of it.

OFFICER

So long ago. So far away. So many possibilities of harm that may befall one out here.

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I'm sorry?

OFFICER

They probably think I'm dead. Written me off as a small foot-note. "He was a good young boy who never returned home after he left." And that was all that was written.

TRAVELER

You're becoming too sentimental.

OFFICER

There are dangerous things that can happen to someone so far away from home.

(Pause)

One more thing... I've forgotten something from yesterday.

TRAVELER

... Shall we save it for after the presentation? Don't you want to know my decision?

OFFICER

Why wait till then? Let's have a look now.

The Officer steps towards the machine.

TRAVELER

(unnerved)

... Yes.

OFFICER

This is my favorite part.

The Officer begins to touch the needles. He runs his hands along the tips.

OFFICER

Do you know anything about steel?

TRAVELER

Not really, to be perfectly honest.

OFFICER

Iron-chromium. Prevents rust. Look at all of them. Hundreds. Perfect. Come closer.

The Traveler steps toward the Apparatus.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

When a wound first hits fresh-air the immediate reaction is to cover it with your hand, do you know why that is?

TRAVELER

To hinder the bleeding.

OFFICER

Imagine what it would be like to have your arms strapped in here. These little pieces of metal. They're so sharp.

TRAVELER

I shouldn't-

Before she can finish the Officer grabs his arms and places the palm of the Traveler's hand on the inscriber. The Traveler winces. The Soldier and Condemned stand dumb-founded.

TRAVELER

AHH! Stop that!

OFFICER

Do you see? Each one in the machine begins to understand.

The Officer lets go and the Traveler backs away.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You cover your wounds to keep your soul from escaping.

(Pause)

Tell me what I want to hear.

TRAVELER

It's been a difficult choice...

OFFICER

Say it...

(Pause)

TRAVELER

I've decided...

The Traveler pauses for a brief moment. The Officer beams with excitement.

OFFICER

Wait! No-no-no-no. Don't say anything! I can read it in your eyes! Oh my... I can't tell you-

(to Soldier)

Unlock the condemned and begin prep him!

TRAVELER

Wait-

The Soldier does so. The Condemned's chains fall to the floor. The Commandant enters.

ACT THREE. SCENE THREE (THE END)

OFFICER  
(to Traveler)

-Let's give him a presentation he won't soon forget!

COMMANDANT  
Sleep well?

TRAVELER  
Yes, and-

COMMANDANT  
-And my Officer's presentation?

TRAVELER  
Informative.

OFFICER  
She's been a delight!

COMMANDANT  
Shut up.

The Commandant shoots the Officer a harsh look.

COMMANDANT  
(to Traveler)  
I've come to go over some things with you

OFFICER  
Like what?

COMMANDANT  
To make sure she understands the full gravity of her choice.

OFFICER  
What?

TRAVELER  
I need to speak with the both of you actually.

OFFICER

Wait. Why do that now? She knows what she's doing, after all.

COMMANDANT

Watch your tone. I need piece of mind for my own sake.

OFFICER

But then you'll spoil it!

COMMANDANT

Leave me with her.

OFFICER

No.

COMMANDANT

No? I'm not asking you.

OFFICER

(to Traveler)

Go ahead and tell him.

TRAVELER

Wait.

COMMANDANT

Tell me what?

OFFICER

Tell him.

COMMANDANT

We have an agreement.

OFFICER

C'mon and say it.

TRAVELER

Wait.

COMMANDANT

What is going on here?

OFFICER

TELL HIM NOW!!!

COMMANDANT  
I said watch your tone!!

TRAVELER  
I'll tell you both.

COMMANDANT  
And?

TRAVELER  
I've decided that I will give the both of you nothing.

OFFICER  
YOU WHAT!?

TRAVELER  
You want me to voice an opinion? I'm telling you, you can't have it.

OFFICER  
How could you? How could you do this to us?

The Officer is visibly crushed.

COMMANDANT  
That is not what we have agreed upon!

TRAVELER  
We've agreed upon nothing! I said that I would see what could be done and I've chosen to abstain.

COMMANDANT  
Now, hold on-  
(to Traveler)  
You! What has he been telling you? What have you done here?

OFFICER  
Get out of here. OUT!!!

COMMANDANT  
Let's-let's not loose ourselves-

OFFICER  
Shut your mouth!

COMMANDANT

What's the matter with him? Answer me!

OFFICER

Get out of my sight.

COMMANDANT

Get a hold of yourself. Someone answer me!

OFFICER

Leave now!

COMMANDANT

What's he doing!?! One of you stop him!

The Officer darts over to the Solider and Condemned pushes the Condemned out of the way and grabs one of his chains. He rushes towards the Traveler.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Are you listening to me!?! I said stop!

The Officer grabs the Traveler with a sharp piece of the machine.

OFFICER

Oh will you get over yourself! You stupid, pompous, bastard!

COMMANDANT

How dare-She has come here to help me! ME, understand!?! I demand that you explain-

OFFICER

-You've lost it! Don't you understand that? You've lost control - if you every really had it! There have been a hundred eyes on you since you first set foot on this colony, and if you so much as make another peep I'll see that you are burned. All of you out!

TRAVELER

(to Commandant)

Help me!

They hesitate.

OFFICER

Do you want to see what this will do to her? Get out...



COMMANDANT

I wish there was something I could do -but I- please forgive me.

The Commandant, Soldier, and Condemned rush out. The Officer releases the Traveler.

OFFICER

Well, that was easier than I thought it would be.

TRAVELER

Stay away from me.

OFFICER

You said you'd help me.

TRAVELER

I thought you wanted me to help all of you...

OFFICER

Out of my way.

TRAVELER

What are you doing?

OFFICER

I hope your conviction is worth it.

TRAVELER

I don't know.

OFFICER

Oh, grant me that! Grant me something other than indifference!

TRAVELER

I can't.

Pause. The Officer becomes empty. Dead-faced. He lets out a horrifying giggle.

OFFICER

This place is stale now.

The Traveler steps in front of the Officer as he prepares the Apparatus, and the Officer just simply walks around her. The Traveler places a hand on his shoulder, and the Officer shrugs her off.

TRAVELER

Stop! For Christ's sake! It's done! There is no point to this!

(Pause)

OFFICER

Yes! Exactly! You know, that's the first intelligent thing you've said. There is no point! Not anymore! The world is getting smaller. Every inch of this planet is being mapped out, exploited, and used up and there is nothing but something that resembles burnt wood. And one day a child will be born and he will go off and fight in wars, work his entire life for something better, and only until he gets to the twilight of his life that he will realize that it was all the time a part of some stupid, simple plan to get him to feed some ludicrous idea of societal structure! What is structure? NOTHING! And all the while he will be unknowing that he is part of some ruse while to keep his small mind busy. He will never know that there was once people before him who actually believed in something! Who had conviction! And the only way he will be able to feel anything true for himself will be to take a knife and cut open his palms.

TRAVELER

What are you going to do?

OFFICER

Beginning the ritual of death.

The Officer activates the Apparatus. It slowly chugs to life, like a steam train leaving a station.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

It was nice meeting you.

The Apparatus, activated again, makes little to no noise as if understanding the plight of the Officer. The Officer strips out of his uniform. And stands there naked for a moment observing the machine. Pulsing. He reaches down to his piled clothes and picks up the two ladies' handkerchiefs. He gives them to the Traveler.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I want you to have these.

TRAVELER

What for?

OFFICER

A gift from the ladies. Magic, remember?

OFFICER

That's all for now. Goodbye.

The Officer climbs onto the bed of the machine. Unstrapped, he lays there and let's the harrow go to work. Traveler gasps at the horror of the murder taking place in front of her. The Apparatus is clearly aged and broken. And because of this, the regular 12-hour procedure is now futile. The machine begins to tear the Commandant to pieces. The Officer's body shakes violently with the vibrations of the machine. The Traveler decides to intercede. The Traveler rushes to the arms of the Officer and holds them down. The Officer screams. The machine stops making noise, as if it appears to have righted itself. The Officer grabs the Traveler, whispering something in his ear. The Apparatus is flown out and out of view of the Audience. Blood falls from above. The Traveler is left alone in silence for a moment. The Young Girl enters.

TRAVELER

How did you get in here?

GIRL

Numb... All numb...

TRAVELER

Come here.

GIRL

All numb.

TRAVELER

I'm taking you away from here. This is no place for you. Take my hand.

As the Traveler begins to exit with the girl she is blocked by the various Islanders who have, unnoticed by the Traveler, filtered in.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

Stay away from us!

They creep towards the Traveler, reaching and scratching for her. She is terrified, as they have all cut out their eyes the same as the Girl. The Traveler picks up the chain she was held captive with to defend herself.

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

Stay back!

After a struggle Traveler is able to escape and exits.

ACT THREE. SCENE FOUR (EPILOGUE)

The Interviewer enters and the Traveler resumes her place in front of him.

INTERVIEWER

It killed him instantly?

TRAVELER

No. The machine was unable... or unwilling to turn his body, therefore the sentence penetrated his skin faster than normal. When the needles passed his skin, the machine did not produce water to wash the blood away. And he bled-out.

INTERVIEWER

What was his sentence?

TRAVELER

There was too much blood to read it.

INTERVIEWER

No, no, that's impossible. I need to know what his crime was! I want to know. I have to know!

TRAVELER

Do you envy him?

INTERVIEWER

Of course not!

TRAVELER

I warned you, any attempt to gain something from this will simply raise more questions.

INTERVIEWER

That's unfair!

TRAVELER

Yes it is.

INTERVIEWER

I have certain things to report! I need something! I have to know his sentence. Please!

TRAVELER

You want know to the "answer?" You want purification.

INTERVIEWER

Please.

TRAVELER

No.

(Silence)

I don't expect you to like it but, nonetheless...

INTERVIEWER

That's it then?

TRAVELER

I saw something before I left.

INTERVIEWER

What?

TRAVELER

A plaque.

INTERVIEWER

What for?

TRAVELER

Commemorating the old Commandant. A curse: "To our Old Commandant. His followers, who are now not permitted to have a name, buried him on these grounds and erected this plaque. There exists a prophecy that the Old Commandant will rise again. And his ghosts will haunt the indifferent..."

INTERVIEWER

That's it then?

TRAVELER

You will communicate this story as truthfully as possible?

INTERVIEWER

... Yes.

TRAVELER

Thank you.

INTERVIEWER

You're positive you didn't read the Officer's sentence?

TRAVELER

No, I didn't read it. I didn't have to -- he told it to me.

INTERVIEWER

He told it to you? But how?

The Officer's ghost can be seen as the scene re-plays from before.

TRAVELER

(to Officer)

Pardon my ignorance but, does the man know his own sentence?

OFFICER

No.

TRAVELER

No?

OFFICER

It would be pointless to tell him that information when he will experience it for himself.

TRAVELER

I'm not sure-

OFFICER

He will understand it.

TRAVELER

(to Interviewer)

Whoever is in the Apparatus cannot read their own inscription. When I knelt next to the Officer's body in the machine while holding him down I looked into his lifeless eyes and I knew he could see the face of beauty and in his eyes I could see beauty as well - And the Officer said:

OFFICER

"Be just."

(Silence)

TRAVELER

There are no correct answers. You don't ever purge yourself of ghosts. You just trade old ones for new.

INTERVIEWER

One last thing - Did you really just decide not to give them what they wanted out of spite, or-

TRAVELER

-Or what?-

INTERVIEWER

-Or were you just too afraid to make the wrong choice entirely

The Traveler pauses. It's as if she chews the correct answer inside her brain - gritting her teeth looking for the right answer. She panics ever so slightly. She tries to swallow and stand tall but she closes her with regret for a beat. She opens her eyes and looks at the Interviewer absent and distant, know she will never ever be able to give the right answer.

Blackout.

The End.

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