

Cell 66

By Earl Reimer

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DEDICATION

I am indebted to many sources, including the writings of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Vasily Grossman, The International Representation for the Council of Evangelical Baptist Churches of the Soviet Union, and the stories told me by my mother and other relatives, of the persecution suffered behind the Iron Curtain.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Dramatized from real life events, this contemporary 1-act play focuses on religious believers in the former Soviet Union who were jailed for their convictions. Inside a jail cell, a small group of prisoners are trying to survive harsh interrogations and lack of food. When Katya is denied the privilege of visiting with her family who have traveled two thousand miles to see her, several in the group try to comfort her with a piece of saved bread. But the bread is missing. They suspect it was eaten by the newest prisoner, Nadya, a tough, street-wise woman. Later that night, an older woman, Ulyana, reveals the gut-wrenching reason behind her imprisonment. Her smuggled Bible, which if discovered could add another year to her imprisonment, gives her great comfort. Ultimately, the Word of God guides her, and the others, in dealing with a cruel guard, and the thief and traitor in their midst.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a prison drama. All the action takes place in a single cell. Although the names have been altered, the great majority of the incidents dramatized or narrated actually occurred.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4m 4f)

THE GUARD: In his twenties, burly, aggressive.

ULYANA GRITSENKO: A woman of great courage and sensitivity, in her late forties or early fifties.

VIKTOR GUREVICH: A farmer from the Urals, in his forties, a bit gruff in manner.

KATYA FIRSOVA: A young girl in her late teens or early twenties, a bit naive but with some spirit.

VASILY BYELOV: A cynic, in his late forties.

NIKOLAI RYTIKOV: A young man in his twenties.

ALEXANDRA ZETKIN: A refined lady in her early forties.

NADYA KRYMOV: A woman in her mid-twenties, streetwise, suspicious.

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This page for your rehearsal notes.

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The LIGHTS are very dim. FIVE PRISONERS are sitting or lying on the floor. As the lights gradually brighten, we hear footsteps walking, then metal doors clanging shut. The sounds get louder as the lights brighten. The upstage door to the cell opens and the GUARD roughly thrusts another prisoner into the cell. The prisoner is a YOUNG MAN, frightened, and rather naive.)

GUARD: *(Giving the prisoner a shove so that he sprawls on the floor.)* Good morning! I have a little gift for you.

VASILY: Gifts like that, we don't need.

VIKTOR: He's probably a spy.

GUARD: *(Laughs derisively. Nudges the YOUNG PRISONER with his foot.)* This piece of garbage? You must be joking! He's too dumb to be a spy. And besides, who is there to spy on anyway? A cynic who's outlived his usefulness, a couple of misguided Christians, a lady who's spent her life drinking tea and crocheting flowers for pillowcases, and an old farmer from the Urals. You're nothing, all of you! You're zeros!

VIKTOR: Then why are we here?

ALEXANDRA: Why don't they let us go?

GUARD: Oh, I'd like to let you go. Right through that door to the firing squad.

VASILY: *(Mockingly.)* How kind of you.

GUARD: I'll show you how kind I can be if you don't hold your tongue. *(Grabs HIM by the throat.)* My knife is very sharp, and my dog loves roast tongue.

ALEXANDRA: Be careful.

GUARD: She's right. Around me, you'd better be careful. Is that – clear?

(VASILY is choking and gasping for air. The GUARD finally shoves him back down.)

GUARD: Ugh! What a waste of time! As for this piece of slime! (*Jabs HIM again with his boot.*) Do what you want with him. (*Turns on his heel and leaves.*)

ULYANA: Are you all right, Vasily?

VASILY: (*Irritably, rubbing his throat.*) Yes, I'm all right! Just once, I'd like to get my hands on his throat! I swear to you, he'd never forget it, if he lived.

KATYA: You mustn't talk like that.

VASILY: Why not?

KATYA: Well, it's ... it's just not right.

VASILY: (*Scornfully.*) It's not right? I suppose you sweet-faced little Christians would say that we should love that monster.

KATYA: Well ... yes.

VASILY: (*Disgusted.*) What's there to love in that animal? He's cruel and selfish right down to the core. And if I had a chance to throttle him, I would.

KATYA: But by thinking like that, you're just ...

ULYANA: Hush! That's enough. Let's help this man here. He may be hurt.

VASILY: Let him help himself. That's what the rest of us have to do.

ULYANA: (*Ignoring him. To NIKOLAI.*) You've been beaten, haven't you? Are you all right?

NIKOLAI: My side hurts. I hope nothing's broken.

ULYANA: Here, sit up here. (*Helping HIM to a stool.*) It's not as cold as the floor.

KATYA: Where are you from?

ULYANA: Katya, let the poor man rest.

NIKOLAI: No, it's all right. I'm from near Ufa.

KATYA: Ufa? I have an aunt who lives there. Do you know any Warkentins?

ULYANA: Katya.

NIKOLAI: No, I'm afraid I don't.

KATYA: Oh, my uncle has a farm.

NIKOLAI: Well, actually, I'm not right from Ufa. We lived about 40 miles south.

VASILY: That's no excuse, young man. Everyone knows about the Warkentins from Ufa.

End of Freeview

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