

John Tissot

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ON GUARD
2

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ON GUARD
3

I love humor.

*I dedicate this play
to all who like to laugh
as much as I do.*

ON GUARD
4

ON GUARD

BLACK COMEDY/THEATRE OF THE ABSURD. This wry, sardonic play offers a humorous and chilling look at war. A lonely, bored young soldier stands guard at a military hospital. There, he encounters wounded soldiers coming in from the “boom boom.” One shell-shocked soldier believes he is a dog named Fido, while another delirious soldier thinks the hospital is really a prison. Meanwhile, dimwitted kidnappers set out to free the Vice President’s brother, who is purportedly being held hostage at the hospital. The kidnappers manage to overtake the Guard and enter the hospital, but the “hostage” refuses to be freed—he doesn’t want to leave his poker game.

Performance Time: Approximately 25 minutes.

ON GUARD
5

CHARACTERS

(9 M, 4 F)

GUARD: Bored, obeys orders.

CAP'N: 50 or older, leader of the kidnapers; wears jacket.

OLAF: Kidnapper, larger man; wears jacket.

MILLY: Kidnapper; wears blouse and jacket.

MOUSE: Kidnapper, small man; wears Mickey Mouse watch.

ESCORT: Accompanies Wounded Soldier from the front to the military hospital.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: 20-30, thinks the hospital is a prison; uses a cane and wears bandages on his head, arm, and leg.

SOLDIER 2: Looking for escaped prisoner.

OFFICER: 35 or older; doesn't have a pass.

SOLDIER 3: Wounded; thinks he's a dog.

NURSE 1: Takes Soldier 3 to the hospital.

NURSE 2: Wants to visit her boyfriend but doesn't have a pass.

NURSE 3: Returns escaped Soldier 3 to hospital.

COSTUMES

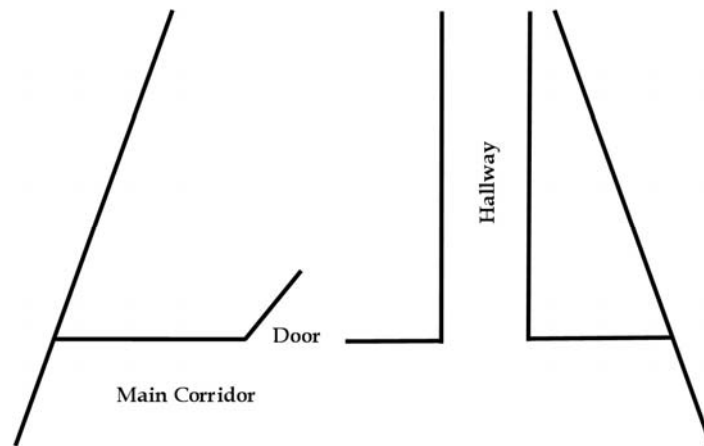
Cap'n, Olaf, Mouse, and Milly wear casual clothes for a secret kidnapping caper. The other characters wear some sort of military hospital "uniform." As the country is small and poor, the uniforms could be nothing more than a badge, a sash, or whatever the director wants.

ON GUARD 6

SETTING

World War II, middle of the afternoon. The main corridor of a military hospital in some small country in Europe.

SET



The wall of the corridor runs stage right to stage left. There is a door with a sign over it that reads, "Military Hospital." Farther down the corridor, there is the entrance to a hallway that runs perpendicular to the corridor.

ON GUARD 7

PROPS

Box, large
3 paper bags with eye holes cut out of them
3 lengths of rope, 3 feet long
Paper "military passes"
Purse
Dog leash
Pocket watch on a chain

SOUND EFFECTS

Siren or gong

"BYE-BYE
TO ALL
OF THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS
IN THIS WORLD.

BYE-BYE, MOTHER.
BYE BYE, SUNSETS.
BYE-BYE, PORKY.
BYE-BYE, DORKY."

-WOUNDED SOLDIER

ON GUARD

(AT RISE: Corridor of a military hospital. A sign over the door reads, "Military Hospital." A Guard stands in front of the door. He examines his hands and nails, front and back. Farther down this corridor, stage left, we see another hallway. This hallway is dark. After about 15 seconds of watching the Guard, we are aware that people are moving forward along the hallway. When they reach the corridor, they stop, hiding from the Guard. Cap'n sticks his head around the corner, peeks down the corridor, and sees the Guard. Cap'n pulls his head back. Now Olaf, Mouse, and Milly bunch up behind Cap'n, wanting to look down the corridor, too.)

OLAF: Cap'n, what did you see?

CAP'N: Some guy admiring his hands.

MILLY: Is he good looking?

CAP'N: I didn't look.

MILLY: Let me see.

(Milly sticks her head around the corner, but Cap'n pulls her back quickly.)

MOUSE: *(To Milly.)* What did you see?

MILLY: Not much. Old spoil sport here... *(Indicates Cap'n.)*
...pulled me back too soon.

MOUSE: I want to see, too. *(He tries to look around the corner, but Cap'n pulls him back before he can.)* Spoil sport. You never let me have any fun.

CAP'N: Not true. Didn't I let you jump off that bridge last month?

MOUSE: You didn't let me jump. You pushed me.

CAP'N: Same thing. You had fun.

MOUSE: If you call getting water up your nose and in your eyes having fun, then I really enjoyed myself.

CAP'N: Enough.

ON GUARD
10

MOUSE: I had to blow my nose for a week.

CAP'N: Enough.

MOUSE: And my eyes are still red.

CAP'N: Enough. *(He looks around the corner and pulls his head back.)*

It looks clear. Okay, men. And you, too, Milly. First thing is to sync our watches. *(He looks at Olaf.)* What time have you got?

OLAF: In five seconds, Mickey's long arm will be on eight and his short arm will be on five.

(Cap'n cuffs Olaf.)

CAP'N: Is that 4:40?

(Olaf counts on his fingers.)

OLAF: I think so.

MOUSE: Long arm on eight and short arm on five. Right, Cap'n.

(Cap'n looks toward heaven.)

CAP'N: *(Aside.)* Give me strength. Give me patience. Give me men with at least room-temperature IQ.

MOUSE: What did you say?

CAP'N: I said, "The room temperature is hot." *(He opens his jacket and fans himself. Mouse and Olaf open their jackets and fan themselves. Milly fans herself.)* We've got to get that guard away from that door. It's up to you, Milly.

MILLY: I don't know if I can do it.

CAP'N: You can. Have you got brains?

MILLY: I got brains.

CAP'N: You got looks?

MILLY: I got looks.

CAP'N: You willing to die for the cause?

MILLY: I got looks.

CAP'N: Then go out and use them.

ON GUARD
11

(Milly starts down the corridor. An Escort and a Wounded Soldier enter and approach the door from the other end of the hall. Milly sees them and runs back to the others, who hide and watch from the hallway. Escort and Wounded Soldier halt in front of the Guard. Wounded Soldier has bandages on his head, both arms, and one leg. He's carrying a cane and leaning on the Escort.)

GUARD: *(To Escort.)* You got a pass for this man?

(Escort pulls out a piece of paper and shows it to the Guard.)

ESCORT: Okay?

GUARD: Take him in.

(Wounded Soldier looks around.)

WOUNDED SOLDIER: No, no. I don't want to go to prison.
What did I do?

ESCORT: This isn't a prison.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: I know a prison when I see one.

ESCORT: But it isn't.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: You're trying to trick me. Bye-bye to all
the beautiful things in this world. Bye-bye, Mother. Bye, bye
sunsets. Bye-bye, Porky. Bye-bye, Dorky.

ESCORT: Porky? Dorky?

WOUNDED SOLDIER: When I was little, we lived on a pig farm.
For years, Porky and Dorky were my best friends. They went
with me on my first day of school. They went with me on my
first date.

GUARD: That must have been some date. I wonder what that girl
thought.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: She threw me over for Porky. The ingrate.

GUARD: The ingrate.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: The hussy.

GUARD: The hussy.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: But I didn't hold a grudge.

ON GUARD
12

GUARD: The hussy.
WOUNDED SOLDIER: Porky was really adorable.
ESCORT: Can't blame her.
WOUNDED SOLDIER: And now I won't see Porky or Dorky again. Say, do they let prisoners have visitors?
ESCORT: You're not going to prison. This is not a prison. This is a hospital.
WOUNDED SOLDIER: Am I allowed to have visitors?
GUARD: No visitors except by permit. And I don't think Porky and Dorky have the credentials.
WOUNDED SOLDIER: So they don't let prisoners have visitors.
ESCORT: You're not going to prison. This is not a prison. This is a hospital. *(To Guard.)* He took a direct hit.
GUARD: Kaboom? Blam?
ESCORT: Worse than that. Kaboom. Blam. Blooie.
GUARD: Poor guy.
ESCORT: But they can fix him up in there, can't they?
GUARD: They've got closets full of duct tape in there.
ESCORT: Duct tape?
GUARD: Just kidding. They'll fix him up.
ESCORT: Good.
GUARD: What will they do with him, once he's able to stand on his own?
ESCORT: They'll take him back where he's needed.
GUARD: His pig farm?
ESCORT: No! The front. *(Gives Guard a serious look.)* What's the matter? You been hit, too?
GUARD: No, just thinking. Wondering.
ESCORT: About what?
GUARD: Wondering if it's true you should never kick a cow chip on a hot day...wondering if it's true you should always drink upstream from the herd...wondering what it's like up at the front.
ESCORT: It's no picnic.
GUARD: Lots of noise.
ESCORT: Lots of pain.

ON GUARD
13

GUARD: Lots of noise.

ESCORT: You've got it lucky, you know.

GUARD: I know.

ESCORT: Let's get this guy into the hospital.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: What's that?

ESCORT: *(To Guard.)* He's delirious. Got hit on the head by a shell. *(To Wounded Soldier.)* It's all right. They'll make you well.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: Well? What's that?

ESCORT: You'll see things as they really are.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: But I like it the way I am. *(Pointing and looking out.)* Fields of flowers. Everywhere. It's beautiful.

ESCORT: Get in there. You'll be well again.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: No fields of flowers?

ESCORT: No.

GUARD: You have to go in.

WOUNDED SOLDIER: No! No!

(Wounded Soldier puts out his arms and legs so the Escort can't get him through the door.)

ESCORT: *(To Guard.)* Help me get him through the door.

(The Guard and Escort push and struggle, but they can't get the Wounded Soldier through the door.)

WOUNDED SOLDIER: No! No!

(Escort and Guard finally get the Wounded Soldier through the door and into the hospital. They close the door behind him.)

GUARD: *(To Escort.)* Poor guy. But he'll be all right.

ESCORT: I hope so.

GUARD: Me too.

ESCORT: Because if they can't patch him up, they'll need someone to replace him. You understand what I'm saying?

GUARD: Only too well. Strange.

ESCORT: What?

ON GUARD
14

GUARD: That poor guy said he saw a field of flowers. I'm beginning to see them, too.

ESCORT: Okay. Okay. Just stand here. Guard the door. They'll call you if they need you. *(He goes offstage, stage right.)*

GUARD: *(To himself.)* Flowers. Flowers everywhere.

(Kidnappers wait until the Escort is out of sight.)

CAP'N: It's up to you, Milly. *(Milly steps to one side and arranges her hair and buttons up her jacket. As she does this, Cap'n says to no one in particular.)* She's going fishing and she leaves the bait at home.

OLAF: Let me go, Cap'n.

CAP'N: Not you, Olaf. *(Sniffs Olaf.)* Besides, your bait is ripe.

OLAF: Ripe?

CAP'N: How can I put this? Olaf, the next time you see a body of water, jump in it.

(Pause. Olaf thinks.)

OLAF: Okay, Cap'n. Gotcha.

CAP'N: *(To Milly.)* It's up to you. Go out there. Give him all you've got, whatever it is.

MILLY: Lure him away, is that it, Cap'n?

CAP'N: *(Annoyed with her stupidity.)* Yes.

(Offstage a siren goes on and sounds for about five seconds. Guard looks around. Soldier 2 comes running up to Guard.)

GUARD: What's happening?

SOLDIER 2: A prisoner escaped.

GUARD: I haven't seen anyone.

SOLDIER 2: He's about this tall... *(Indicates about three feet high with one hand.)* ...and about this wide. *(Indicates about three feet wide with both hands.)*

GUARD: Nobody came by here answering to that description.

SOLDIER 2: They call him "The Toad."

ON GUARD
15

GUARD: Because he's this tall... (*Indicates height with one hand.*)
...and this wide...? (*Indicates width with both hands.*)

SOLDIER 2: No, because his skin is slimy, and he's got warts all over his body. Ugh. (*Makes a face.*)

GUARD: That bad?

SOLDIER 2: He's the poster boy for "ugly."

GUARD: Ugh.

SOLDIER 2: You can't imagine.

GUARD: How did he escape?

SOLDIER 2: The holding room was full of flies, and they gave him the job of catching them. He was good at it. I'll give him that. Longest tongue you ever saw on a man. But when they turned their backs for a moment, he ran out...hopped out. Been missing ever since.

GUARD: I'll keep my eye out for him.

SOLDIER 2: Thanks. (*He turns and starts to exit.*)

GUARD: If I touch him, will I get warts?

SOLDIER 2: I don't think so.

GUARD: Just asking.

(*Soldier 2 exits.*)

MILLY: Now, Cap'n?

(*Cap'n nods. From the other end of the hallway comes Officer. Officer halts in front of Guard.*)

OFFICER: Evening.

GUARD: Evening.

OFFICER: Evening, what?

GUARD: Evening, sir.

OFFICER: That's better. Now, stand aside.

GUARD: I can't do that.

OFFICER: I said, stand aside.

GUARD: You got a pass, sir?

OFFICER: I don't need one. I don't need anything.

ON GUARD
16

GUARD: Does Popeye need his spinach?
OFFICER: Well, yes.
GUARD: Does Tarzan need a rope to swing on?
OFFICER: I suppose so.
GUARD: Does every boy need a dog with a wet nose?
OFFICER: *(Doubtfully.)* I guess so.
GUARD: Then you need a pass.
OFFICER: Do you know where the passes come from?
GUARD: From the Office of the Chief Medical Officer.
OFFICER: That's right. And do you know who I am?
GUARD: I don't know you from Adam. For all I know, you're a chimpanzee in an officer's uniform.
OFFICER: Attention!

(Guard stiffens to attention.)

GUARD: Yes, sir.
OFFICER: Do you know you can be sent to the brig for making fun of an officer?
GUARD: And I wouldn't have to go to the front?
OFFICER: That's right.

(Guard gets down on his knees.)

GUARD: *(Pleads.)* Oh, please send me to the brig.
OFFICER: No.
GUARD: Chimpanzee?
OFFICER: No, now get up. *(Guard stands up.)* You don't know who I am?
GUARD: No.
OFFICER: I am the Chief Medical Officer.
GUARD: If you say so, sir.
OFFICER: Now, let me by.
GUARD: No. My orders are to let no one go in there without a pass, and you don't have one.
OFFICER: I've already told you, I don't need one.

ON GUARD
17

GUARD: I have to obey orders like everybody else.

OFFICER: Well, I don't have to obey orders. Not from anybody.

GUARD: Except one.

OFFICER: No. No one tells me what to do.

GUARD: Are you married?

OFFICER: Yes. So what?

GUARD: And when your wife says, *(In woman's voice.)* "Honey, my mother's coming for a visit, so smile," do you smile? *(He grins.)* And when she says, *(In woman's voice.)* "Honey, we're going to the ballet tonight, so smile," do you smile? *(He grins.)* And when she says, *(In woman's voice.)* "Honey, I'm going shopping for a new dress this weekend, and I need you to come with me, so smile," do you smile? We all take orders, sir. And mine are to let no one in there without a pass. Now, do you have one?

OFFICER: No.

GUARD: Then go get one.

(Officer turns and walks away from the Guard in the direction he came from. Guard stoops over and waves his arms in the manner of a monkey and makes ape noises.)

GUARD: *(Out loud to himself.)* They don't come past me without a pass even if they are a banana-eater in a uniform.

(Milly starts to go toward the Guard, but she sees Nurse 1 and Soldier 3 coming from the opposite direction. She runs back to her friends. They watch. Nurse 1 and Soldier 3 approach the Guard. Soldier 3 is walking on his hands and knees like a dog. They halt when they reach the Guard. Soldier 3 sniffs the legs of the Guard, who doesn't know what to think.)

GUARD: *(To Nurse 1.)* What's going on here?

NURSE 1: He got a direct hit, and now he thinks he's a dog.

GUARD: I've heard war turns men into animals, but I thought it was something different.

ON GUARD
18

(Guard growls like a tiger and makes a "pass" at Nurse 1.)

NURSE 1: *(She shakes her head.)* Poor Fido.

GUARD: He calls himself Fido?

(Soldier 3 sits up with his hands in front of his chest like a dog, sticks out his tongue, and bobs his head up and down. Guard looks at Soldier 3.)

GUARD: Fido?

(Soldier 3 nods again and rolls his eyes.)

NURSE 1: Poor Fido. He used to be a strong, vital young man,
and now look at him.

(Soldier 3 lowers his head sadly and shakes his head back and forth.)

GUARD: If I had a bone, I'd give it to him.

(Soldier 3 looks up happily and nods his head.)

GUARD: But I don't.

(Soldier 3 lowers his head sadly and shakes his head. Nurse 1 takes out a piece of paper and shows it to the Guard.)

NURSE 1: Can we go in now?

GUARD: Yes.

(Guard opens the door and Nurse 1 tries to lead "the dog" in, but Soldier 3 rubs his body against the Guard's leg instead.)

GUARD: *(To Nurse 1.)* He likes me.

NURSE 1: You're likeable.

GUARD: I never had a pet when I was a child.

NURSE 1: Never?

GUARD: Unless you count Hairy.

ON GUARD
19

NURSE 1: Harry?
GUARD: A tarantula.
NURSE 1: (*Shivering.*) Ooh.

(*Guard stoops and pets Soldier 3.*)

GUARD: I think Hairy liked me.
NURSE 1: (*Shivering.*) Ooh.
GUARD: But I couldn't really talk to him.
NURSE 1: A boy needs someone to confide in.
GUARD: I wanted a dog or a cat. My parents said no. (*He stoops and pets Soldier 3 again.*) I don't suppose I could keep him?
NURSE 1: No. We have to treat him. Make him well. He's needed...ah... elsewhere.
GUARD: (*Makes a "gun" with his hand.*) Boom, boom?
NURSE 1. Yes. Boom, boom. (*To Soldier 3.*) Come on, Fido. (*The Dog shakes his head "no" and rubs up against the Guard's leg.*) Fido. Come on.

(*The Guard opens the door and Nurse 1 and Soldier 3 go in. The Guard stands at attention. Pause. After ten seconds, Nurse 1 comes out and closes the door behind her.*)

GUARD: Everything okay?
NURSE 1: Yes. They will make him well.
GUARD: And send him... (*Makes a gun with his fist.*) ...boom, boom?
NURSE 1: Yes, boom, boom. Now, I've got to get going.

[End of Freeview]