

White Room

A Ten-Minute Play

by Gary Lark

published in *The Dirty Goat* #15, 2006
staged reading – Fifth Ashland Ten-Minute Play Festival, 2005

Cast

YAEGER, middle aged man.

DOCTOR, younger middle aged man.

KITCHEN WORKER, older man.

NURSE, twenty-something woman.

Set

A white room. YAEGER is in a hospital gown, robe and booties lying flat on a gurney in the middle of the room. There is a desk and two chairs stage left and a door stage left and a door stage right. YAEGER is more a caged bird than victim.

YAEGER

(Abruptly sitting up straight) What? (Looking around) Where am I? I was....no I wasn't. How did I get here? Hello. HELLO! IS ANYBODY HERE. (Silence) No, apparently not. I remember....there were fields. On the way to the river, grasshoppers in the weeds and buzzards circling. The sun was warm. (Looking at his hands) But that was long ago. HELLO! We marched out onto the parade ground for the last time. The General walking by, reviewing what was left of us. And all I felt was contempt. Yes, we had survived, no thanks to him; it was luck and a tight platoon. We were ripped apart and sown back together....but the pieces didn't match anymore. (Gets down off the gurney. Checks his limbs. Everything seems okay) HELLO! (Looking at how he is dressed. Begins to pace) I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior when I was fifteen. They dipped me in the water. At eighteen the preacher handed me a gun. Render unto Caesar, he said. When I came home I confessed killing and hating and fucking prostitutes. I WANTED TO BE SAVED....and he said I was.... that the holy spirit had entered my being at the very moment I spoke the words. I asked him where the holy spirit was when I was watering the fields of death. I asked him if that was like quantum mechanics....like you couldn't track it but there it was anyway. (Beat) He just looked at me. Or like a unified field, I said. Where all energy is connected to all other energy, that what effects one effects all, that souls may be like light....particle and wave at the same time....substance with more than one property....maybe infinite properties that undulate with psychic flow. Or a nonsubstance dreaming. (Beat) Then I saw how hollow he was. This preacher was as empty as the General. He was a magician with a musty back of tricks. God had already escaped out the bottom of his bag. His slight of hand was slow. His words were somebody else's. (Beat) Are mine? Am I just a mime with a mouth that works? HELLO! I can't stay here forever. (He tries one door, then the other. They're locked) Catherine, where are you? CATHERINE! We walked across campus kicking maple leaves....so close to freedom we could smell it. We kissed in that little grove of trees. So tender I ached. I ache for you now. CATHERINE! I want to go home....Are you there? I want the slow meaningless days where nobody thinks we're important enough to bother with. The rain coming down outside and we're reading books side by side, always close enough to touch. The silence like a symphony playing.....

DOCTOR enters stage left.

DOCTOR

Well, I see you're up. How are you feeling?

YAEGER

Fine. I feel fine.

DOCTOR

That's good to hear....but are you sure?

YAEGER

A little anxiety is all.

DOCTOR

A little anxiety.

DOCTOR sits down at the desk and motions for YAEGER to join him.

YAEGER

A little. You know, like why am I here?

DOCTOR

I see. So you have some anxiety about why you are here.

YAEGER

That's it.

DOCTOR

You feel that's about it.

YAEGER

Not about.

DOCTOR

It is it.

YAEGER

Right.

DOCTOR

How long have you been feeling this anxiety?

YAEGER

Since I woke up....a few minutes ago.

DOCTOR

So, you've been feeling this anxiety since you woke up.

YAEGER

(Hidden frustration) Yes. That's right.

DOCTOR

Do you think the anxiety is manageable?

YAEGER

Yeah, I can handle it.

DOCTOR

You feel you have the resources to handle it.

YAEGER

(Open frustration) Look, I've been through a lot in my life and I know that this is manageable. Got it?

DOCTOR

I see.

Pause

YAEGER

You see what?

DOCTOR

I see someone who says they can handle their anxiety, but they are getting visibly upset.

YAEGER

I just want to go home.

DOCTOR

Go ahead.

YAEGER goes to the door, opens it, looks outside, closes it again.

YAEGER

It was locked a minute ago.

DOCTOR

Was it?

YAEGER

(Frustrated) Yes, it was. I tried the handle and it was definitely locked.

DOCTOR

You tried the door.

YAEGER

Yes.

DOCTOR

The door was locked.

YAEGER

The door....was....locked.

DOCTOR

How do you feel now?

YAEGER

I feel like a dog that's chasing his tail.

DOCTOR

(Chuckles) Well, if you catch it let me know.

Pause

YAEGER

So, I can go home now?

DOCTOR

I am a little concerned about your anxiety.

YAEGER

I told you it was manageable.

DOCTOR

Perhaps we could give you something for it.

YAEGER

Sure....why not....what do you recommend?

DOCTOR

We have good luck with soup.

YAEGER

Soup?

DOCTOR

We have the standard chicken, a miso broth and a very nice Thai fish soup.

YAEGER

Whatever.

DOCTOR

Which one appeals to you?

YAEGER

I don't know. The chicken, I guess.

DOCTOR

The Thai fish soup is awfully good.

YAEGER

(Frustrated) Okay, make it the Thai fish soup.

DOCTOR

Good choice. (Yells at the door) Let's have some number three in here. (Back to YAEGER) That should do it.

YAEGER

Then I can go home?

DOCTOR

Right you are.

YAEGER

Soup.

DOCTOR

Yes, we've tried them all, from Thorazine to Tylenol and we think soup does the job best.

KITCHEN WORKER rolls a cart in with a tureen of soup, two bowls and spoons.

KITCHEN WORKER

Here you are captain....Thai soup with fish. Nice soup it is. Had some meself not long ago.

KITCHEN WORKER ladles soup into the bowls and places them on the desk.

KITCHEN WORKER

There you are. Anything else captain?

DOCTOR

That will do nicely, thank you.

KITCHEN WORKER

Right then.

KITCHEN WORKER exits.

DOCTOR

Dig in.

They start eating.

YAEGER

He called you captain.

DOCTOR

It's a little idiosyncrasy of the Kitchen Worker...thinks we're on a ship.

YAEGER

On a ship?

DOCTOR

But he's a good worker.

YAEGER

Where are we?

DOCTOR

Where are we? Or, where am I?

YAEGER

Either.

DOCTOR

We are in a white room.

YAEGER

(Looks around) You got that right.

DOCTOR

So, where are you?

YAEGER

I seem to be in a white room.

DOCTOR

Precisely.

They continue to eat.

YAEGER

And where is this white room?

DOCTOR

Where it needs to be.

YAEGER

In a hospital?

DOCTOR

You are a very good observer.

YAEGER

A Veteran's hospital?

DOCTOR

Can't pull the wool over your eyes. (Beat) How's the soup?

YAEGER

It's very good.

DOCTOR

What'd I tell you?

YAEGER

So, the soup's a part of the therapy.

DOCTOR

You see the soup as part of the therapy.

YAEGER

I taste the soup as part of my therapy.

DOCTOR

Do you feel that the therapy is beneficial?

YAEGER

Well, I'm less hungry.

DOCTOR

(Notes something on a clipboard) And where would you say you are?

YAEGER

In a hospital.

DOCTOR

Yes....anything else?

YAEGER

In a white room.

DOCTOR

(Beat) Anything else?

YAEGER

(Frustrated) I don't know. What else?

DOCTOR

Where I need to be.

YAEGER

I want to go home.

DOCTOR

Okay. But it helps if we can see reality first.

YAEGER

Which means....?

DOCTOR

We recognize what we need to say.

YAEGER

(Beat) Like....this is where I need to be?

DOCTOR

So, this is where you need to be.

YAEGER

I only said it because I thought that's what you wanted to hear....so I could go home.

DOCTOR

(Noting on clipboard) I see.

YAEGER

What do you see?

DOCTOR

(Looking at the soup bowls) I think we've finished our soup.

YAEGER

And I can go home?

DOCTOR

Indeed.

NURSE enters.

NURSE

Doctor, can you come with me?

DOCTOR

Certainly.

DOCTOR and NURSE exit. YAEGER looks at the soup bowls and around the room, then goes to the doors to find them locked.

YAEGER

Hey....I'm supposed to go home. Hey....anyone. HELLO! (YAEGER tries the doors again. They're locked. Kicks one. Starts raging around the room) HELLO! ANYONE! HELP! GODDAMN IT! HELP! IS ANYBODY THERE? HELP! It's a another goddamned mine field. Look but you don't see. Could be anywhere. HEY! (YAEGER slows down) Hay is for horses. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. If nothing were molecules, everything would rise. HEY! IS NOBODY THERE? Hey-hi-ho. Care to dance with my knife. Put my head in a cast; I think it's broken. Have a little soup. Have a little mustard. Eat me. Drink me. HEY! Hey.

YAEGER gives up, climbs back onto the gurney and lays down.

YAEGER

(In defeat) Kiss my ass.

Lights fade to black.