

A PAYMENT UNKIND**one act drama****by James Chalmers****Copyright © April 2015 James Chalmers and Off The Wall Play Publishers****<http://offthewallplays.com>**

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by James Chalmers

Introduction

This is a one-act play for three female characters (aged 20 - 40 years). The running time is 25 - 30 minutes.

The Set and Properties

The play is set in the basement of an office building - dimly lit and claustrophobic. The basement is being used as a storage area. It is an untidy place where a number of things have been dumped. For example - boxes, a table with an upturned chair on top of it, files and a pile of old celebrity magazines. Off stage to one side (either left or right it's not important which way round) – are the lift (elevator) doors. Off stage on the opposite side are the fire doors leading to the stairs. There needs to be a telephone (suggested this is on one of the boxes) with the cord hanging down behind so that the plug end can't be seen. Two sound effects are required - the "ping" to announce the arrival of a lift (elevator) and a bell or tone caller for the telephone. The character Martine has a mobile phone in her handbag. The character Hazel has a (stage) knife in her handbag.

The Plot

Three women find themselves trapped in a small basement room of an office building after the lift takes them down instead of to the floors they wanted to go to. They've not met before. There's initial tension as a result of being stuck in this small room. And then increasing tension between them as it is revealed why each of them is in the building. They are able to establish contact with the reception desk - so they know they will be freed - but they don't know when. They side with each other in different combinations as arguments develop - the main disagreement being about Alex Naylor an entertainment impresario whose office is on the seventh floor of the building. Is he a sinner or a saint? Why has Martine, one of his former proteges, come to see him? Is Hazel really his PA which she claims to be? Rhona is in the building for a different reason - but this too connects with the underlying theme of how men sexually dominate and exploit women.

The Characters

Martine

Bitter and angry. As a child star who won a TV talent competition she was taken advantage of sexually by the impresario - Alexander Naylor. After she left his record label - Martine found herself in a relationship with man who betrayed her by posting pornographic images of her on the internet. Martine is intent on killing Alex Naylor - having learned from the papers he's getting married.

Hazel

She tells the others she is Naylor's PA. But there's something weird about her. Things don't add up but she has an answer for everything. Changes her story from one of defending Naylor's good name to having killed him after a row. She is a fantasist and a stalker.

Rhona

An actress still waiting for her lucky break. In the building for a screen test at a movie company based there. Naïve in that she didn't realise this company makes pornographic films. When she's told - she goes into denial - being desperate for any kind of acting work.

OPENS WITH ALL THREE ACTORS OFF STAGE

FX - "PING" - LIFT REACHING THIS FLOOR LEVEL

MARTINE *(Off stage)*

Oh bugger. Which floor is this?

RHONA *(Off stage)*

It looks like the lower ground.

HAZEL *(Off stage)*

Try the grey button. That'll close the doors.

MARTINE *(Off stage)*

Nothing's happening. We'll have to use the stairs.

HAZEL *(Off stage)*

I'm staying here. It'll move in a minute.

ENTER MARTINE and RHONA

Rhona goes across the room - she finds the doors

RHONA The doors are locked.

Martine goes over to the doors and tries them for herself

MARTINE *(Peering through the "windows")*

I can see the stairs. This is pathetic. We'll have to go back to the lift.

ENTER HAZEL

HAZEL Don't bother. The doors have closed.

MARTINE I thought you said you were staying with it?

RHONA *(Heading off stage)*

I'm going to try the call button. I've got an appointment at two. I need to get out of here,

HAZEL What's wrong with the stairs?

EXIT RHONA

MARTINE We can't get to the stairs. The doors are locked.

(Spotting the phone)

There's a phone.

Hazel goes to the phone - picks up the handset - presses the switch

hooks a few times then puts down the handset

HAZEL It's dead.

ENTER RHONA

RHONA It must be a power cut. I don't think the lift has moved. What are we going to do?

(Spots the phone)

Oh there's a phone there.

HAZEL We've already tried it.

Rhona goes to the phone - picks it up - listens - then puts it down again.

MARTINE Hang on a minute. I've got my mobile.

(Gets out her mobile and looks at it)

Shit! No signal.

HAZEL I could have told you that. We're in a basement.

Martine wanders around the room trying to get a signal on her phone.

RHONA I don't believe this. Today of all days. I've got a screen test at two o'clock. This is terrible.

HAZEL Were you going to the Realist Film Company on the third floor?

RHONA Yes. I'm on a short list. Down to the last twelve. This is the nearest I've been for ages. Why did this have to happen?

Martine gives up trying to find somewhere in the room where she can get a signal on her mobile phone. She approaches the other two.

RHONA *(To Martine)*

Where were you going?

HAZEL *(To Rhona)*

She was going to the seventh floor. I was watching which button she pressed.

HAZEL *(To Martine)*

I know who you are. I recognised you when you got into the lift. So what are you doing here? Why were you going to Naylor Records?

MARTINE Mind your own business - what's it got to do with you?

HAZEL *(To Martine)*

I work at Naylor Records. So I know that you don't do business with us anymore.

RHONA *(To Hazel)*

Well if you work there won't they be wondering what's happened to you?

HAZEL I've got the afternoon off. They won't be expecting me back until tomorrow morning. We'll probably have to spend the night here.

RHONA What! My boyfriend will be worried sick. And what are we going to sleep on. And there's no loo. And what if we use up all the oxygen? I

don't want to stay here another minute. I want out. I want to go for my screen test.

MARTINE *(To Hazel)*

Hang on a minute. If you were taking the afternoon off - why were you going back to the seventh floor?

HAZEL I left my purse on my desk.

MARTINE *(To Hazel)*

You've got an answer to everything - haven't you?

(To Rhona)

Did you tell your boyfriend you were going for a screen test?

RHONA No. So he doesn't know where I am. No one knows where I am.

MARTINE Why didn't you tell him where you were going?

RHONA Because if I didn't get the part he wouldn't be upset for me.

HAZEL I'd have thought he'd be more upset if you did get the part.

RHONA Why?

MARTINE Shut it will you. All this talk isn't helping. We need to find something we can use to get those doors open.

Martine goes over to the boxes - takes the lid off one of the boxes - lifts out some old celebrity magazines - replaces lid

RHONA It's hopeless. We'd need a sledge hammer to break those doors down. We're completely trapped. And we'll either starve to death or die from asphyxiation.

MARTINE Calm down. Getting hysterical won't help.

(She moves the phone from the top of the box to the box next to it - she finds that the cord of the phone isn't connected)

That's why it doesn't work. It's not plugged in.

RHONA Well a phone's no use without a socket. Let's face it - we're in real trouble. We might never get out of here.

MARTINE Well if there's a phone, there must be a socket.

(She looks behind the boxes and finds a socket)

Oh - there's one down here

As Martine plugs in the phone - Hazel steps forwards and picks up the handset.

HAZEL I'll call reception.

HAZEL *(Speaking on the phone)*

Hello. We're stuck in the basement. The lift's not working. And the fire doors are locked.

(Pause)

I don't know. It went down instead of up.

(Pause)

There are three of us.

(Pause)

We're fine - but get a move on.

Hazel slams down the phone handset

RHONA What did they say?

HAZEL They'll put out a call for the maintenance guy.

MARTINE And how long is that going to take for Christ sake?

HAZEL I don't know. They didn't say.

MARTINE If you'd told them you worked for Alex Naylor - they'd be jumping through hoops backwards.

HAZEL They've put out a call for the maintenance guy - alright?

RHONA Oh God! I hope we get out of here soon. I'm starting to feel claustrophobic.

MARTINE *(To Rhona)*

They know we're down here. And they're on their way. You'll get to your screen test. I expect they're running behind schedule anyway.

Rhona goes to Martine. Rhona sifts through the magazines

RHONA *(Picking up a magazine)*

Oh these aren't much good. They're really old.

HAZEL *(To Rhona - indicating Martine)*

Well in that case - you might find her face in there somewhere.

MARTINE Why don't you just button your lip.

HAZEL *(To Rhona - indicating Martine)*

Get her to tell you her life story. That'll take your mind off things.

MARTINE *(Going back to search the boxes)*

Give it a rest will you.

Rhona goes over to Hazel

RHONA I wish I could get my face in celebrity magazines. What was she famous for? Is she an actress?

HAZEL No a singer. At least she used to be. Martine McGregor. The youngest ever winner of that TV show - Up There With the Stars. She was only fourteen. It was Alex Naylor's first TV venture. Or should I say Sir Alex. He's just been knighted for his services to charity and the music industry.

- RHONA That sounds really exciting. But I can't sing unfortunately. I could never have auditioned for a show like that. So all I can do is stick with my acting, and hope that one day I'll land a really great part. Oh why didn't I take the stairs.
- HAZEL What's the film about?
- RHONA It's called *The Call of the Wild*. It's about a female conservationist working in the jungle. They're going to shoot the film in the Pyrenees or somewhere like that.
- HAZEL You do know the Realist Film Company only does pornographic movies.
- MARTINE *(Coming over to Rhona)*
What the hell are you getting involved in a porno movie for?
- RHONA *(To Martine - indicating Hazel)*
It's not pornographic. She doesn't know what she's talking about.
- MARTINE *(To Hazel)*
You're just trying to wind her up aren't you?
- HAZEL No - I've worked in this building for six years. Everybody knows what happens on the third floor.
- MARTINE *(To Rhona)*
Didn't you check their details on the internet?
- RHONA *(To Martine)*
No - because I'd end up not going to any auditions if I took everything I read seriously. You've no idea how soul destroying the whole thing is. I expect you had it easy.

HAZEL She had it very easy. Alex Naylor saw to that. Two best selling albums. A couple of world tours.

(To Martine)

But you threw it all away

MARTINE *(Approaching Hazel aggressively)*

Button your lip before I do it for you.

RHONA *(getting between Martine and Hazel)*

Why are you arguing - we should be worrying about getting out of here.

MARTINE *(To Rhona)*

Well maybe it's fate being stuck down here. You'll miss the screen test. And that means you've been spared the disgusting humiliation of the porn industry .

RHONA *(To Martine - indicating Hazel)*

She's probably got it all wrong. She works on a completely different floor to that company.

MARTINE Oh for Christ sake. Isn't it bloody obvious there's a catch. How many years have you been trying to get a decent part? Why should one land in your lap now Believe me, you don't want to get involved in pornography. So check things out before you jump in there with both feet.

HAZEL It's her life. What the hell's it got to do with you? If she wants an acting job - what does it matter if it's porn. She'll get paid.

MARTINE *(To Hazel)*

Acting doesn't come into it. All you need is a decent face and big tits.

HAZEL Watched a lot of it have you?

MARTINE Seeing as you asked - yes. And guess where? At Alex Naylor's Villa in the South of France. When I was there with the others being coached for the competition finals.

HAZEL Alex likes Hollywood musicals. Nothing dirty. He wouldn't let a fourteen year old watch things like that. He's a responsible and caring man.

MARTINE How do you know? Have you ever been to his villa?

HAZEL Yes actually - I have been to his villa.

MARTINE What about the home cinema in the annex?

HAZEL What about it?

MARTINE Well that's where he showed the porno movies. We all had to watch them. Team building or some crap excuse like that.

HAZEL You're making this up because you're bitter. Trying to blame him for your problems.

(To Rhona)

I know everything about her. It was in all the papers. She started drinking and snorting coke. Ended up in the gutter.

(To Martine)

Alex gave you the best possible start and you blew it.

RHONA *(To Hazel)*

That's really cruel. She was only young at the time. She didn't know any better.

HAZEL *(To Rhona)*

She deserves all she gets. Saying things like that about Mr Naylor.
He could sue her for slander.

MARTINE *(To Hazel)*

And just exactly what is the work you do for Mr Naylor?

HAZEL I'm his personal assistant. I go everywhere with him. I organise his
life.

MARTINE You don't look like his type.

HAZEL Oh yeah - what would you know about it?

MARTINE Because he took over my life. He forced me into being his type. He
changed my hair colour and he chose my clothes. He dressed me up
like a little tart. I was only a child for Christ sake. But he knew how to
swing the votes in my favour. All those dirty old men drooling over me
on Saturday night television. I got their vote. That's why I won.

(to Rhona)

And what you're planning to do is just as bad. Prostituting yourself,
but at least you're old enough to make choices.