

FERVAN CERATO DOES NOT EXIST

A One Act Play by: James Chalmers

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FERVAN CERATO DOES NOT EXIST

A One Act Play by: *James Chalmers*

Running Time

40 - 45 minutes (*Depends on the time taken for scene changes*)

Genre

Drama

Players

Female - 2. Male - 3.

This play is only suitable for adult players and an adult audience as it contains some sexual language.

Synopsis

The play is set in an unnamed undemocratic country. The head of state is the narcissistic President Cerato. The President has a daughter Fervan. Fervan's mother, the President's wife and a former pop star, has disowned Fervan because she is so unattractive. The official line is that Fervan died at birth. Fervan's existence isn't known outside the Presidential Palace. A tourist from the West, Stafford Careen, is held on espionage charges. Stafford is an artist. He will be released in return for painting a portrait of the President. Fervan is desperate to experience sex and she wants to sleep with Stafford. Fervan also wants Stafford to help her escape the confines of the Palace and flee the country. Before any of this can happen, Stafford falls for Corvis an attractive female guard. Then to add to Stafford's difficulties, the head of security, Brenton Kender, attempts to overthrow President Cerato in a coup on the very day Stafford is due to have his passport returned.

The Characters

FERVAN

Fervan Cerato. Female - age 16 to early 30s. The President's daughter. Unattractive. She has a sharp wit and is highly intelligent. *NOTE On page 38 there's a reference to Fervan's age - this has been left blank so that the Company can insert the age of the actor taking Fervan's part. Fervan and Corvis should be as near as possible the same age.*

STAFFORD

Stafford Careen. Male - age 25 - 35. He is a gifted portrait painter. He has mild Asperger's syndrome. **He avoids eye contact with the person he's in conversation with. The actor needs to remember to maintain this at all times unless the directions state otherwise.** When Stafford is painting the President's portrait he does look directly at the President, but the President isn't making eye contact with Stafford.

KENDER

Brenton Kender. Male - age around 48. The Head of Internal Security. Manipulative and aggressive.

CERATO

President Cerato. Male - age around 50. Pompous and narcissistic.

CORVIS

The Guard Corvis. Female. Younger than Stafford. Very attractive. Wears military uniform. (Hair tied back) Carries a handgun in a holster. *NOTES Corvis and Stafford fall in love with each other - it's important that the two actors chosen make this believable. Corvis and Fervan should be as near as possible the same age.*

The Stage Set

A room in the Presidential Palace set up as an artist's studio. Consisting of a chair in front of a plain fabric screen. This is where President Cerato sits for his portrait (The Company may wish to include a low rostrum). A little way from this is a canvas on an easel. The easel is turned away from the audience so that the developing portrait of the President can't be seen. (The picture is never revealed) Alongside the easel is a small table on which there are tubes of paint, palette, brushes etc. Also in the "room" a dining table (robust enough for Corvis to sit on) and a chair. The Company may wish to have something that

represents a window at front of stage - left or right. Stafford's cabin bag and suitcase are on stage.

Setting

The play is set in an unnamed country. The script refers to Britain, England or the United Kingdom as Stafford's home country. These names are bracketed in the script. Stafford's home country should be the country in which the play is performed and the script amended accordingly.

Entrances and exits

There are just two Entrance/Exit points. Downstage right (or left) - this is the door that connects to the main part of the Presidential Palace. Upstage left (or right) leads to a bedroom with en suite bathroom. (Companies are free to amend the Entrance and Exit arrangements to suit the playing space)

Scene Changes

The opening of a scene is signified by: **LIGHTS UP**

The closing of a scene is signified by: **LIGHTS DOWN**

Stage Directions

Stage directions are in italics

SCENE 1. Morning 11am - seven days after Stafford's arrest

LIGHTS UP

ON STAGE CERATO (*sitting in the chair in front of canvas screen*)

KENDER (*standing next to Cerato*)

CERATO

Did he take much persuasion?

KENDER

He was a bit stubborn, sir. But in the end he relented.

CERATO

Well spare me the details. He's going to paint my portrait. That's all that matters.

ENTER STAFFORD and CORVIS

A blindfolded Stafford is led in at gunpoint by Corvis.

KENDER

You can put the gun away. I'm not expecting any trouble.

Corvis puts the gun into its holster. Kender removes the blindfold from Stafford. He is unused to the light level and displays obvious discomfort.

STAFFORD (*To Audience - indicating Kender*)

His name is Brenton Kender. Head of Internal Security. He kept asking me the same questions over and over. Why was I drawing pictures of military aircraft? Who was I spying for? I told him the truth - but he wouldn't listen. There was a serious delay to my flight home. So I went for a walk and took a sketchbook with me. There were some interesting ruins just outside the airport perimeter fence. That's where I was arrested.

KENDER (*Hands a phone to Stafford*)

I've put the number in - just press the call button.

STAFFORD

Who am I phoning?

KENDER

The (British) Ambassador. You agreed - remember?

STAFFORD (*Replies with a barely discernible nod - then he makes the call*)

Hello - is that the (British) Ambassador?

(PAUSE)

Oh - his secretary. Can I leave a message please?

(PAUSE)

My name? Stafford Careen. I was arrested five days ago.

KENDER

It was seven days.

STAFFORD (*Speaking on phone*)

No sorry - I meant seven days.

(PAUSE)

Oh you know who I am.

(PAUSE)

No - not for a few days.

(PAUSE)

Do I just turn up at the Embassy?

(PAUSE)

OK. I'm sure someone will point me in the right direction.

Stafford turns off the phone and hands it back to Kender

CERATO

I'd like to get started Kender.

KENDER (*To Corvis*)

You have your orders.

CORVIS

Yes sir.

KENDER (*To Stafford*)

You will be shot if you cause any trouble.

CERATO

Kender - get out of here.

Kender starts to walk towards the exit

KENDER

I'm sorry sir.

(Pauses just before exiting and turns to look at Stafford)

You'll get your passport back once the picture's finished.

Make sure you do a good job.

EXIT KENDER

LIGHTS DOWN

End of SCENE 1.

SCENE 2. The same morning - an hour later

LIGHTS UP

ON STAGE
portrait)

CERTO *(sitting in the chair for his*

intently)

CORVIS *(standing stiffly - watching Stafford*

STAFFORD *(at the easel painting)*

CERATO *(To Corvis)*

How long have I been sitting here?

CORVIS *(Looks at her watch)*

Fifty-five minutes, Mr President.

CERATO

That's enough for today.

*Cerato gets up from the chair - he stretches himself.
Stafford puts down the palette and brush.*

CERATO *(Moving towards the exit)*

Tell the artist I'll be back tomorrow at the same time.

CORVIS (*To Stafford*)

The President says he'll be back tomorrow at the same time.

STAFFORD (*Muttering to himself*)

I heard what said.

EXIT CERATO

Stafford goes over to Cerato's chair - he turns it just a few degrees

STAFFORD (*To himself*)

That's better.

CORVIS

What difference does that make?

STAFFORD

It's nothing to do with the portrait. The position of the chair didn't match the line of the floorboards.

CORVIS

Is that important?

STAFFORD

It's important to me.

(To audience)

People find my behaviour a bit odd at times. Things like re-positioning the chair. But more noticeable are my inadequate social skills. I find relationships very difficult to deal with. I've come to the conclusion that I probably suffer from Asperger's Syndrome.

CORVIS

The President will be here at eleven hundred hours each day to sit for his portrait. He will stay for an hour - possibly less. Your lunch will be brought to you at thirteen thirty hours. They will clear the table at fifteen hundred hours. Your evening meal is at twenty hundred hours. Breakfast is at zero nine hundred hours.

STAFFORD

What time will they clear away the things after the evening meal?

CORVIS

You don't need to worry about details like that.

Everything is organised. All your needs attended to.

(Corvis moves to the EXIT that leads to the bedroom)

The bedroom is through here with an en suite bathroom. You have a generous king-size bed and a comfortable chair to sit in. A flat screen television that receives the state broadcast channel. You're not permitted to watch anything else.

Corvis moves back to Stafford. Uncharacteristically Stafford looks directly at Corvis. When their eyes meet - it's Corvis who turns away - finding his gaze unsettling.

CORVIS

When I'm not guarding the President - I'll be outside your door - to make sure you don't escape.

Corvis moves towards the exit

STAFFORD

Will you be there all night?

CORVIS

Another guard is on duty overnight. I'm at my post from zero eight hundred hours to twenty hundred hours.

STAFFORD

Well you can tell the guard on the nightshift - I've no intention of leaving this room - so he can relax.

CORVIS

It's not a he - it's a she. All the guards in the Presidential sector are female.

STAFFORD

Do you have to stand when on you're on duty - or do they give you a chair?

CORVIS

Whether I sit or stand is not your concern.

STAFFORD

I'd still like to know the answer.

CORVIS

There's no chair. We must stand when we're on guard duty.

STAFFORD

Why don't you stay here for a little while? Even you going on about your duties would be better than no conversation at all.

(Moves towards the EXIT to the bedroom)

I'll get the chair from the bedroom. You can use that.

I'll sit at the table.

CORVIS

No - I must get to my post.

Corvis moves towards the exit. Stafford moves to his suitcases.

STAFFORD

No wait - I've got another idea.

Corvis pauses - looks back.

Stafford looks in the cabin bag. Then he rummages frantically through the contents of the large case.

CORVIS

What are you looking for?

STAFFORD

My sketchbooks. I had two. They must have taken them - the bastards.

CORVIS

I didn't take them.

STAFFORD

I wasn't suggesting that.

CORVIS

What did you want your sketchbooks for?

STAFFORD

I was going to draw your portrait.

CORVIS

My portrait? Why?

STAFFORD

It would have helped pass a bit of time for both of us.

CORVIS *(Edging closer to the exit)*

Even if you had found your precious sketchbooks - I wouldn't have agreed to a portrait. I'm supposed to be on guard duty.

STAFFORD

What's your name?

CORVIS

Why do you want to know my name?

STAFFORD

I'm just trying to be friendly - that's all.

CORVIS

I've already broken many rules by talking to you like this.

Turns to face the exit

STAFFORD

At least you could give me your name?

Corvis keeps her back turned to Stafford

CORVIS

It's Corvis.

STAFFORD

Is that a first name or a family name?

CORVIS

I'm Guard Corvis. I don't have any other name.

EXIT CORVIS

Stafford remains rooted to the spot - looking in the direction of the EXIT.

STAFFORD *(To Audience)*

She's very attractive. Shame about the uniform and her obsession with orders.

Stafford moves to the "window"

STAFFORD *(To audience)*

At least I've got a nice view. The old part of the city with the mountains as a backdrop.

(Thoughtful pause)

I could do with a bath. That'll fill in some of the time before lunch.

EXIT STAFFORD

LIGHTS DOWN **End of SCENE 2**

SCENE 3. The same morning - half an hour later

LIGHTS UP

ON STAGE FERVAN *(looking at the canvas on the easel)*

ENTER STAFFORD

Stafford is wearing a bathrobe. He pauses when he sees Fervan. He looks at her - but only while she's looking at the portrait.

FERVAN (*Referring to the portrait*)
This isn't very good. The President will hate it. Then you'll never get your passport back.

STAFFORD (*Hurt by Fervan's remark*)
I've only just started.

FERVAN (*Turns to face Stafford*)
Do you think I'm qualified to judge a painting?

STAFFORD
I don't know who you are.

FERVAN
I'm Fervan Cerato. The President's daughter.
(*Moves closer to Stafford*)
I can't see if you're surprised or not. You're not looking at me. Is that because you find me unattractive - you being an artist? I've seen your sketchbooks. Full of beautiful drawings. Including female nudes. Everyone one of them is perfect. None of them have a body like mine.

STAFFORD
Have you got my sketchbooks?

FERVAN
No Brenton Kender has.

Stafford moves away from Fervan

STAFFORD
I didn't know the President had a daughter.

FERVAN
Officially she doesn't exist. According to the State News Media - she died at birth - just a few hours old.

Fervan moves back to the portrait

FERVAN
I'm sure the President will be very pleased with his portrait when it's finished.

STAFFORD
But you've just said it isn't very good.

FERVAN

I wanted to see your reaction to negative criticism. That usually reveals a lot about a person.

Fervan moves from the canvas to the President's chair

FERVAN

You've moved the chair.

STAFFORD

How do you know?

FERVAN

Do you think Kender has it in him to set up an artist's studio? No - this is all my doing. I know exactly where this chair was.

Fervan moves the chair back to where it was before Stafford moved it. Fervan moves towards the exit - then pauses before exiting

FERVAN

If anyone asks about me - you must deny ever having seen me. Otherwise you may never get out of here. Remember - Fervan Cerato does not exist.

EXIT FERVAN

Stafford moves the chair back to his preferred position

STAFFORD *(To audience)*

How can I deny ever having seen Fervan Cerato? Guard Corvis will have seen her coming in here?

LIGHTS DOWN

End of SCENE 3.

SCENE 4 **Three days later - Morning**

LIGHTS UP

ON STAGE CERATO (*Sitting in the chair for his portrait*)

STAFFORD (*Painting at the easel*)

CORVIS (*Standing on guard duty*)

CERATO (*Shifting restlessly in the chair - speaks to Corvis*)
How long have I been sitting here?

CORVIS (*Looking at her watch*)
An hour and ten minutes, Mr President.

CERATO (*Gets up out of chair*)
That's far too long.

CORVIS (*To Stafford*)
The President wants you to stop painting.

Stafford puts down his brush. Cerato goes over to the canvas and looks at the picture.

ENTER KENDER

Kender is carrying Stafford's two sketchbooks

CERATO
Ah Kender. Take a look at the picture.

Kender goes over to the canvas to stand beside Cerato

STAFFORD (*To audience*)
Kender's got my sketchbooks.

CERATO
Well Kender - what do you think?

KENDER
It's coming along very well, sir.

CERATO (*To Corvis*)
Tell the artist I'll be back tomorrow at the usual time.
(*Heads towards exit*)
Are you coming Kender or staying here to talk about art?

KENDER
Not art sir - other matters.

CERATO
I was being sarcastic Kender.

EXIT CERATO

KENDER (*To Corvis*)
Get to you post.

CORVIS
Yes sir.

EXIT CORVIS

KENDER
Sit down Mr Careen.

Stafford sits on the chair at the dining table.

KENDER
I'm returning your sketchbooks.

Kender hands Stafford the two sketchbooks. Stafford flicks through each book looking at the pages.

STAFFORD (*To Audience*)
A lot of the pages have been removed.

KENDER
If you're wondering about the missing pages - we have strict rules in this country about pornography.

STAFFORD

It wasn't pornography - just sketches I made at a life class.

KENDER

Whatever you call it - you broke the law. You brought sexually explicit material into this country. And that comes on top of getting caught making drawings of military aircraft.

STAFFORD

I was sketching some ruins. I was nowhere near the aircraft.

Kender gestures for Stafford to hand him the sketchbooks. Stafford hands Kender the two sketchbooks. Kender flicks through the pages of the books.

KENDER

Maybe you've disguised them as other things. Used a kind of code.

Sketchbooks in hand - Kender goes over to the canvas on the easel

KENDER

When will the portrait be finished?

STAFFORD

In about a week - give or take a couple of days.

KENDER

How about we say - five more days?

STAFFORD

I can aim for that.

KENDER

Today is Sunday. The President will have his last sitting on Friday. Is that understood.

STAFFORD

I might manage to finish by Thursday.

KENDER

No - Friday. That's the day you'll get your passport back. And the guards at the gate will be instructed to let you pass.

Kender goes over to the table and he slams the sketchbooks down in front of Stafford.

KENDER

Friday, Mr Careen. Keep that firmly in your mind.

EXIT KENDER

Stafford remains seated - he slowly flicks through the pages of the sketchbooks.

ENTER CORVIS

Most of the military "stiffness" has gone from Corvis

CORVIS

You've got your sketchbooks back. You must be very happy.

STAFFORD *(To Audience)*

What's got into her? She's like a completely different person.

CORVIS

Did you really mean it when you said you wanted to draw my portrait?

STAFFORD

I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it.

CORVIS

It's eight hours before the other guard arrives to take over. So we've got plenty time.

STAFFORD

My lunch will be here at one-thirty.

CORVIS

I'd forgotten about that. Could you do a quick sketch? Then if I'm OK as a model I'll come back when we've got more time.

STAFFORD

OK.

CORVIS

So what do I do?

STAFFORD

You just need to sit - I do the rest.

Corvis moves towards the chair in front of the canvas screen.

STAFFORD

I don't think you should sit in the President's chair.

Stafford gets up from the chair at the dining table. He moves the chair back about six feet from the table. He goes to the table and he demonstrates what he would like Corvis to do - i.e. half sitting on the edge of the table keeping her feet on the floor.

STAFFORD

Position yourself something like this.

Stafford goes over to the small table beside the easel. He puts one of the sketchbooks down and picks up a pencil. Meanwhile Corvis has arranged herself on the table - not as instructed - but actually sitting on the table in a sexually provocative pose. (This can include undoing buttons on her uniform jacket) As Stafford goes to sit down on the chair - Corvis undoes her hair and shakes it free. Stafford is surprised by Corvis's pose.

CORVIS

I know this isn't what you suggested - but I want to feel less like a guard - more like a normal female.

STAFFORD

Whatever you're comfortable with is OK with me.

Stafford starts to sketch Corvis. There's a short period of silence.

STAFFORD

It's OK to talk.

CORVIS

What shall I talk about?

ENTER

FERVAN

Corvis gets off the table as quickly as she can and attempts to tie her hair up - fumbling nervously. Stafford stays seated - shocked and unable to move.

FERVAN (To Corvis)

Get back to your post.

EXIT

CORVIS

Fervan holds her hand out to Stafford. Stafford gets up out of the chair. He hands Fervan the sketchbook. Fervan looks at the drawing.

FERVAN

It's a shame you didn't get to finish the drawing. It was going well.

Fervan closes the sketchbook and gives it to Stafford

FERVAN

When I was here a couple of days ago - there was no way I could avoid Guard Corvis seeing me.

STAFFORD

I've been worrying about that.

FERVAN

Well you can stop worrying. She'll keep her mouth shut. If I told Kender - she'd be finished.

STAFFORD

She only sat for a drawing.

FERVAN

She was supposed to be on duty - outside your door. And even more serious - she undid her hair.

STAFFORD

Well why did she sit for me?

FERVAN

You might know a lot about art, but you don't seem to understand what goes on in the heads of women. Did you ask her to sit on the table - posing provocatively? Or ask her to untie her hair?

STAFFORD

No.

FERVAN

She's fallen for you Stafford.

STAFFORD

How do you work that out?

FERVAN

I don't have to work it out - it's bloody obvious.

STAFFORD

It's not obvious to me.

FERVAN

You've got her in the palm of your hand. If you'd asked her - she'd have posed naked. And when you were done with sketching her - you could have got her into bed.

STAFFORD

Things don't work like that. Not for me.

FERVAN

You do surprise me? You - a good-looking, talented artist who can flatter girls with his brilliant sketches?

STAFFORD

It takes a lot more than a sketch to get a woman into bed - and I'm not talking about money. I mean emotional things - like having to pay for sex with unhappiness.

FERVAN

That may have been your experience with women in the past. But Corvis would sleep with you without wanting anything in return.

STAFFORD

Well I'm not in the position to find out if that's true.

FERVAN

No you're not - because Corvis has been brought back to reality with a crash. She'll stick to her duties from now on. If it had been Kender who'd come in rather than me - she'd have been taken out and shot.

STAFFORD

Shot!

FERVAN

Don't you know anything about this country? And its appalling human rights record?

STAFFORD

I didn't come here to get involved in politics. I was on an organised trip around the archaeological sites.

FERVAN

Well you weren't going to find out anything about this country by looking at piles of crumbling stones. Didn't you speak to any of the ordinary people?

STAFFORD

No. We had two guides that never left us - even for a few minutes. I tried to go for walk one evening. I fancied a look around the city on my own. But a guy at the hotel door wouldn't let me out.

FERVAN

If you'd kept that in mind when you got to the airport - then right now you'd be back in your own country.

STAFFORD

As things have turned out - I'm not complaining. I'm being well looked after.

FERVAN

But your passionate love affair with Corvis is over before it began.

STAFFORD

I wasn't trying to get her into bed?

FERVAN

Would you have turned her down if she'd offered?

STAFFORD

That's a hypothetical question.

FERVAN

Well here's a real question for you to answer. You can use my body for sex right now. Let's go to the bedroom. Is the answer yes or no?

STAFFORD

What if someone came in - like Kender?

FERVAN

We can jam the door shut with the chair.

Stafford doesn't reply

FERVAN

My offer was unconditional. But you have conditions don't you? You only want sex with attractive females. That must be how it is for an artist who only wants to draw pictures of beautiful things?

Stafford doesn't reply

FERVAN

Inside this undesirable body of mine I'm no different to Guard Corvis or any of those women who posed for you naked. But I won't know what it feels like to be a complete woman until I'm (fucked good and hard*) by a man. A man like you Stafford - good looking and presumably virile. (*this may be toned down)

STAFFORD

I'm sorry.

FERVAN

You don't have to apologise.

(Pause)

You'll have noticed Kender has cut several pages out of your sketchbooks.

STAFFORD

He said the nude studies were pornographic.

FERVAN

Did you have sex with any of the girls who modelled for you?

STAFFORD

The drawings were made at a life class. There were a dozen other artists in the room. I didn't get to know any of the girls personally.

Fervan laughs

STAFFORD

Are you laughing at me?

FERVAN

No - I'm laughing at Kender. He assumed all these girls were your mistresses. He's jealous. It's as simple as that.

STAFFORD

A man in his position - I would have thought he'd have no trouble finding sexual partners.

FERVAN

His duties confine him to the Presidential Palace. He has very little opportunity for sexual relationships.

STAFFORD

What about the Presidential guards - they're all female?

FERVAN

He wouldn't dare. The guards are extremely loyal to the President. If one broke rank and had a relationship with Kender - the others wouldn't hesitate to tell the President. The best he's been able to do is have an affair with the President's wife. It's been going on for nearly two years.

STAFFORD

Does the President know about this?

FERVAN

No of course not. And he's not likely to find out - because she lives in a separate part of the Palace and spends very little time with the President.

STAFFORD

How did you find out about the affair?

FERVAN

I keep myself amused by hacking into emails and listening in on conversations. I've little else to do with my time.

STAFFORD

The President's wife is your mother!

FERVAN

Do you think I care what she gets up to?

STAFFORD

I know that she was a pop star before she married the President.

FERVAN

So you do know something about our country.

STAFFORD

At the time there was quite a fuss about her marrying a President. The papers were full of it.

FERVAN

Pop star - that's joke. From what I've heard she couldn't sing and had to rely on technology. All that was going for her were her looks - a lot of which was down to silicone and Botox.

STAFFORD

Well she seems to have done OK by marrying President Cerato.

FERVAN

Yes - until she gave birth to me. She wanted a little girl she could dress up like a doll - the image of how she used to be. What a bitter irony that she ended with a child she couldn't bear to look at. I've seen photographs of me as a baby. Ugly isn't a strong enough word to describe what I looked like. My mother made it clear that no one outside the Palace would ever see me. The news went out that I'd died at birth. There was even a death certificate deposited in the records office. So if anyone asks - the answer is short and simple - Fervan Cerato does not exist.

STAFFORD

