

BETWEEN BARS

Characters

Hope, 17, cynical but courageous.

Lynx, 19, smug, confident, masking himself.

Act I, Scene 1

HOPE is in a cage, locked stage right by a set of metal bars center. She wears an orange jumpsuit. On stage left LYNX paces around in a guard uniform. He starts to light a smoke.

HOPE

Can you please not do that?

LYNX

What, are you afraid of lung cancer?

HOPE

I'm afraid of being burned.

LYNX

By this little thing?

(He flips it in the air and laughs.)

HOPE

Don't mock me.

LYNX

I guess there are easier ways of dying. You'll find out soon, right?

HOPE

Thanks for the reminder. Very helpful.

(Pause. He takes another drag. She glares.)

LYNX

So what's your name?

HOPE

Why do you give a rat's ass about my name?

LYNX

I mean, if we're stuck here together.

HOPE

I'm the one who's stuck here. You can go on your merry way.

LYNX

You think babysitting you is the best use of my time?

HOPE

Well, smoking is a waste of time wherever you are.

(He drops the cigarette and snuffs it out on the ground.)

LYNX

My name is Lynx.

HOPE

That's a funny name.

LYNX

Thanks. I chose it myself.

HOPE

Original.

(Pause.)

I'm Hope.

LYNX

That's ironic. 'Cause, like/

HOPE

/I really appreciate the constant reminders of my imminent death.

LYNX

Sorry. I haven't done this before.

HOPE

Yeah. Me neither.

LYNX

Why are you here?

(She rattles her handcuffs.)

HOPE

I can't leave.

LYNX
No, I mean/
HOPE
/I know what you mean. My confession is on record. You can read it yourself.
LYNX
But why?
HOPE
Why did I distribute illegal pamphlets detailing the torture, rape, and murder that our government commits on a daily basis?
(She shrugs.)
I don't know, I felt like it.
LYNX
You committed treason.
HOPE
Call it what you want.
LYNX
That's pretty bold for a girl like you.
HOPE
A girl like me?
LYNX
I just mean you're not the kind of girl who seems...like she had nothing to lose.
HOPE
Are you saying I look like a virgin?
LYNX
(Flustered.)
I just meant/
HOPE
/I don't like that phrase, nothing to lose. Everyone has something they can lose.
LYNX
What?
HOPE
Life, for starters.

LYNX
Life sucks.

HOPE
Better than nothing.

LYNX
You think?

HOPE
Well, I'll find out soon, won't I?

LYNX
Yeah. Maybe you can come back from the other side and let me know.

HOPE
Even if there was another side, do you think I'd come back for you?

LYNX
A guy can hope. Y'know, "did you fall from heaven, because you look like an angel?" all that.

HOPE
Are you hitting on me?

LYNX
I don't hit on corpses.
(Pause.)
Sorry. That was harsh.

HOPE
Yeah. Yeah it was.

LYNX
Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat?

HOPE
I didn't think corpses ate.

LYNX
Yeah but now I feel bad.

(He goes to the bag by the chair and pulls out two biscuits. He walks over and passes it through the bars to her. She tentatively accepts.)

HOPE
This isn't poisoned or something, right?

LYNX
Does it matter?

HOPE
Not really.
(She takes a bite and closes her eyes to take it in.)
That's amazing.

LYNX
They give you guys gray slop, right?

HOPE
It's disgusting. I think they're trying to kill me with starvation.

LYNX
Is that better or worse than burning?

HOPE
Better.

LYNX
But it's so much longer.

HOPE
But you don't have to smell it.

LYNX
Yeah.
(Pause.)
Will anyone come to your funeral?

HOPE
That's morbid.

LYNX
I mean is there any family you're close to?

HOPE
I have a mom and two younger sisters.

LYNX
Really? I have two sisters too. What a coincidence.

Yeah. Funny.

HOPE

Did you guys get along?

LYNX

Well enough.

HOPE

We used to drive each other crazy. Well, I drove them crazy at least. I was really energetic as a kid, bouncing off the walls y'know, like little boys do.

LYNX

I wouldn't know.

HOPE

I always wanted to have my own little boy someday. Find a girl, settle down, all the cliches. Have some kids to run around with, who thinks I'm the shit, always looking up to me. And to raise them with some girl who loves me and I love back and have the quiet life and all that. Like a life outta a storybook y'know? Doesn't that sound nice?

LYNX

So what's stopping you?

HOPE

Money, I guess. Work. Anxiety. Time.

LYNX

Yeah. That sounds really hard. You not having enough time.

HOPE

No one does.

(Beat. She shivers)

You're so afraid.

LYNX

Is that not normal?

HOPE

I mean, it is, I just, I thought, you were so bold/

LYNX

/And look where that got me.

HOPE

LYNX

Did you really do it all yourself? Write them, and print them, and distribute them, all by yourself?

HOPE

I mean...

(She stops herself, looks at him, looks out into the audience.)

Yes. Yes I did. I did it all myself.

(Beat.)

And now I'm going to die for it by myself.

LYNX

That's incredible. Hard to believe, that you could do all that yourself.

HOPE

Don't underestimate the power of a pissed off teenage girl. Those hormones can really make you want to revolt.

(He snorts.)

HOPE (CONT.)

But seriously. It was just me. You have to believe it was just me. It was me, and I'll die, and it will be over.

LYNX

It's just, the logistics/

HOPE

/No one else was involved.

LYNX

Someone else is always involved. The people who took them? Who read them and didn't say anything?

HOPE

Someone said something.

LYNX

But how many people didn't? How many people acted on what you said?

HOPE

Don't flatter me. I'm your prisoner, not your hero.

LYNX

It's just, you started something. Even if you're here now. Something is different.

HOPE

Not really. I'll die and they'll forget and it will all be the same.

LYNX

You're gonna die thinking that?

HOPE

It doesn't matter what I think. Things don't change. You give your life for something but the only difference is there's one less life.

LYNX

That's...hopeful of you.

HOPE

Always look on the bright side.

LYNX

But what if that's not true? What if you inspired someone?

HOPE

I didn't.

LYNX

What if someone does something because of you?

HOPE

They won't.

LYNX

What if you set someone free?

HOPE

Then they'll die too. Whose side are you on, anyway?

LYNX

Mine.

HOPE

Then you're smarter than me.

LYNX

Why do it, if you can't believe in it?

HOPE

I just couldn't do nothing anymore. Cause then all the suffering felt like my fault. It was my fault, and I couldn't carry that.

LYNX

Most people just forget it.

HOPE

I wish I did. I didn't solve anything. I just made myself suffer more.

LYNX

But you did something.

HOPE

Don't tell me you're jealous. Don't forget what you're part of. What you've done.

LYNX

I know.

HOPE

It doesn't matter how much you nod at me, because my blood is on your hands and you will not be forgiven.

LYNX

Wow, that's harsh.

HOPE

I'm harsh?

LYNX

You're not what I expected.

HOPE

What did you expect, a martyr? Someone who could walk with her head held high, without shame, without bitterness, with some famous last words to slip into the annals of history? Or some weak thing sobbing in the corner? Or some monster?

LYNX

I expected a hero.

HOPE

Not a villain? You don't really believe in what you're doing, do you? You're afraid too.

(Realization.)

You don't have to do this.

You don't know what you're asking.

LYNX

Come closer. Kiss me.

HOPE

I'm confused.

LYNX

(She looks into the audience. He looks out too.)

Just come here. Come kiss me.

HOPE

I can't.

LYNX

There's a way for us.

HOPE

I know what you're asking. I'm not who you think I am. I can't do it. Even if I wanted to.

LYNX

There can be something between us. I know there can.

HOPE

I don't have the key...to your heart.

LYNX

I'll give it, if you give me your key in return.

HOPE

I don't have it.

LYNX

Get it! Then...our love...can be free.

HOPE

I can't.

LYNX

Try.

HOPE

LYNX

You don't understand.

(His tone sharpens.)

Enough. I don't have time for these games. I need to know who your accomplices were. I'm not playing anymore. Tell me.

HOPE

Or what?

LYNX

I'll...hurt you.

HOPE

You don't have the key. And I don't care what you do to me. I'm a corpse, right? I know I can't stop you. I'm alone. And I was alone.

LYNX

I know what you're trying to protect. But you have to tell me. Please.

HOPE

(She laughs.)

Please? You threaten me, and then you say please?

(Beat.)

Who are you protecting?

(Realization.)

You're not one of them, are you? No, of course you're not.

LYNX

What/

HOPE

They put you up to this. Who are they/

(JOSEPH and EVA interrupt Hope's line and pull Lync off stage left. Blackout.)

Act I, Scene 2

LYNX sits stage right, orange jumpsuit, his own cage. He's in a corner, fetal position, breathing heavily, possibly crying. Hope is stage left, in her own cell, watching him and tearing a napkin from the biscuit into little pieces.

HOPE

I'm sorry. They would have got my family too, if they didn't have money. They need evidence because of the money. We can't just disappear. But it isn't always like that. I'm sorry.

(Beat.)

You were really brave. You confused me for awhile. Most people couldn't perform like that, under the circumstances. I couldn't.

(Beat.)

In the long run it doesn't matter. We all die. And then we forget who died.

(Beat.)

You tried to do something. That's more than they do.

LYNX

It's so stupid. It's all so stupid.

HOPE

Yeah. But maybe it's a good kind of stupid.

LYNX

Maybe for you.

HOPE

And you were just an idiot? Like I wasn't?

LYNX

I thought I had nothing to lose. I was so wrong.

HOPE

We all make mistakes.

LYNX

But you had a goal. A purpose. You were trying to do something. I was just lost.

HOPE

What did you do?

LYNX

I threw a tantrum. Like a child.

HOPE

Okay.

LYNX

I burned down a factory.

HOPE

Oh shit.

LYNX

I know.

HOPE

That's bold.

LYNX

It's foolish. And dangerous. Other people could've gotten hurt.

HOPE

Yeah. But I bet the flames were beautiful.

LYNX

For a moment. They had so much power. And their power was my power. But I was an idiot. They consumed me too.

HOPE

You make it sound not so bad.

LYNX

I remember the heat, even standing at a distance, how hot it was. I remember the smoke, how hard it was to breathe. And I stood there, choking, and laughing, laughing because this was something I had started. But it was out of my control. And when it died, there was nothing to show. The children working there, they'd just be sent to another one. My little sister working there, now that my older sister is dead and I've failed here, what do you think they'll do to her?

HOPE

You can't worry about what you can't control.

LYNX

What about what I start?

HOPE

We won't live to see it, so it doesn't matter.

LYNX

I don't believe that.

HOPE

It makes this easier.

LYNX

I can't just believe it because I want it to be easy.

HOPE

Most people do.

LYNX

You're still protecting your family. You must believe the future matters, keeping your secrets even now.

HOPE

But I'm not torturing myself over it. Que será, será. I'm done fighting.

LYNX

You should be proud of what you did. You can't see it, but it's starting to ignite.

(She looks curious.)

LYNX (CONT.)

What you've done, it isn't nothing. People are talking, Hope. You're here because they're scared of what you've started and where it could spread. Hell, I even heard of it. For the first time, truth. People don't know what to do with it, but their blood is starting to simmer. Students are talking. Young people, like us, who don't know any better. I'm sorry you can't see it.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry I messed my life up before I could join.

HOPE

The time for apologies is over. What's done is done.

(She crawls closer to the bars.)

Are people really talking?

LYNX

Whispers. But that's how it starts. A flicker.

HOPE

Flickers die.

LYNX

(He moves closer to the bars.)

All fires do. But not before they make way for something new. You're so brave.

HOPE

I hid as long as I could.

(She moves closer.)

I think what you did was brave. Not having to hide. Gutsy, at least.

LYNX

It was stupid. You knew the risks the whole time. You knew what could - would - happen, and you chose to do it anyway. That's brave. I just acted on feeling.

HOPE

I acted on feeling too. It just took longer.

(She takes his hand, and for a few beats they sit together, holding hands between the bars. There's a warmth and fear mixed in the silence.)

LYNX

Do you think it'll hurt?

HOPE

Do you want the honest answer, or the better one?

LYNX

The better one, please.

HOPE

I think it'll feel like floating on a cloud of pinky pink marshmallows down a rainbow through that purple, you know, that really pretty purple, just as the sun is rising.

(Pause.)

No, that's not it. I think it'll feel like a rubber band being released. Like you're flying through the air with all this force but without course, just being jettisoned somewhere.

(Pause.)

Or it'll hurt.

LYNX

As a kid I always used to wonder how it would happen. Part of me was curious. Like, it's the one thing you can't relive, the one mystery you can only find out on the last page.

HOPE

Hopefully we won't be alone.

LYNX

Yeah. Hopefully.

(Blackout.)