

LIFE WITHOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE (a prison play)

BY: DONALD "C-NOTE" HOOKER

**INSPIRED BY: THE 175+ WOMEN IMPRISONED AT THE CENTRAL CALIFORNIA
WOMEN'S FACILITY (CCWP) SERVING A SENTENCE OF *LIFE WITHOUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE.***

IN HONOR OF: LORRAINE HANSBERRY (AFRICAN-AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT)

IN THE SPIRIT OF: THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

[CAST]:

KAY

CAROL

(The CAROL role must have the highest pitched voice)

SISSY

YOUNG WOMAN

OLD WOMAN

PRISONER

PRISON GUARD

PRISON GUARD (*Voice over P.A. system*)

[OPENING SCENE]

A YOUNG WOMAN and OLD WOMAN are in a courthouse, prisoner, holding cell. The YOUNG WOMAN is pacing the floor.

YOUNG WOMAN:

I wonder what they're going to do? My lawyer said...

OLD WOMAN:

Ah, the heck with them lawyers, all they do is lie. They tell you what you wanna hear to get you to plead guilty, then when you get upstate it's a whole nother story.

In comes KAY crying

OLD WOMAN:

Hey, nobody wants to hear you crying, you ain't the only one who got problems here.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Do you always got to be so negative. Do you see she's hurting?

OLD WOMAN:

[Stands up with her fist balled up] Who you talking to Missy, I'll deck both you and Miss Sunshine. Now stop your crying!

KAY:

[Stops crying, does slow whimpering]

YOUNG WOMAN:

Hey, whatcha crying for?

KAY:

YOUNG WOMAN:

Whoa, whatcha do?

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KAY:

[About to speak]

OLD WOMAN:

Don't answer that. Never answer that. Ain't nobody supposed to ask you whatcha in for? And if they do, don't tell them.

KAY:

[Looks at the OLD WOMAN and then to the YOUNG WOMAN]

OLD WOMAN:

Life Without eh, well you still won't look as good as me when you get my age. *[Smiles with missing teeth]*

YOUNG WOMAN:

Ugh, your teeth are missing.

OLD WOMAN:

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You want your teeth missing too, I can arrange it you know.

KAY:

[Asks if she's been to the pen? What is waiting for her? Both OLD WOMAN and YOUNG WOMAN tell her all the programs she can get into.]

[SECOND SCENE]

KAY arrives at prison, Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). She awaits outside her newly assigned cell, carrying a bedroll. Inside is CAROL, her now cellmate. Cell door entrance has been electronically opened by a guard in a control booth. Once inside, the guard closes the door electronically.

KAY:

Hi.

CAROL:

Hi, I'm CAROL.

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KAY:

[Throws bedroll on her bunk and begins to quiz CAROL about the program]

So what do you gals do around here all day?

CAROL:

Nothing.

KAY:

You gals do go out to the yard, get some exercise?

CAROL:

Nope.

KAY:

[Looks incredulous] We just stay in the cell all day?

CAROL:

Nah, I just moved to this cell.

KAY:

When we're not on lockdown, do they have any programs we can do?

CAROL:

School or work.

KAY:

What kind of work?

CAROL:

In the kitchen, yard crew, or building porter.

KAY:

I heard you can get trades at prison.

CAROL:

Yeah you could, but they moved all vocational trades off the level four, maximum security yards.

KAY:

Why they do that?

CAROL:

Budget. We're not worth spending the money on. These are the yards with the long-timers, and if you are a short-timer on one of these yards, then you're a screw-up.

KAY:

Never go out????

CAROL:

We do, but we're on lockdown right now.

KAY:

For what?

CAROL:

A sticking.

KAY:

Wow.

CAROL:

Yeah, these women can be vicious.

KAY:

How long you've been here?

CAROL:

Seven years.

KAY:

In this cell?

KAY:

I'm not worth spending the money on?

CAROL:

None of us are.

KAY: *[Looks dismayed]*

[THIRD SCENE]

[FIVE YEARS LATER]

CAROL:

Kay, I finally got a way to get you more out of the cell time.

KAY:

Really??? Can't believe it's been 5 years and they still haven't given me a job or anything to do.

CAROL:

That's because nobody goes home from a level four. So when they do get a job they stay in them for years and years. It's not like the Men's prison, they have lots of level fours and lots of prisons. We only have this one.

KAY:

That's true. So what did you get me hooked up for?

CAROL:

A.A.

KAY:

That's great! *[KAY and CAROL jump up and down with excitement]*

FOURTH SCENE

[2 weeks later, CAROL and KAY are doing their hair and putting on their best prison clothes for the A.A. meeting in about an hour]

KAY:

You didn't tell me this A.A., would be scheduled during our yard time.

CAROL:

I know. I didn't know either, but we have to give up our yard to go to A.A., to get the lessons.

You want to teach the other women right?

KAY:

Yeah *[KAY and CAROL starts jumping up and down with excitement]*

Prison Guard announces names over the loudspeaker of the prisoners slated for A.A..

PRISON GUARD:

Attention in the building, attention in the building, listen up. The following inmates are to report to the building 5 dining hall for A.A.. Sarina Ruiz; Sharon Walton; Carol Wells; Carmen Hildago; Tawana Alexander. If I called your name, when your door opens, step out and report to A.A..

KAY:

KAY:

A.A.? What's that?

CAROL:

Alcoholic Anonymous.

KAY:

Really Carol, that's the best you could do. I don't drink, you know that.

CAROL:

I know, but I was thinking since you got time to do, that you could start your own group and help out these women here.

KAY:

Really!!!

CAROL:

Yeah.

KAY:

Okay, when we start?

CAROL:

Well one of the blacks, said in about 2 weeks. She was going around signing people up, so I signed us up. Apparently her boss who is a free staff and works in the canteen put in an application with the warden to open up A.A. classes.

What happened! They didn't call my name.

CAROL:

I know.

KAY:

Are you sure you got me on the list?

CAROL:

Positive. I signed you up first, then mine right under yours.

KAY:

I bet you one of those wenches took my name off in favor of one of their friends.

CAROL:

Now we don't know that for sure Kay. *[Cell doors open]* I gotta go. I'll tell you what's going on when I get back.

2-hours later, CAROL enters the cell looking bewildered

KAY:

Carol, what's wrong, what did they tell you?

CAROL:

[CAROL with tears in her eyes tells KAY] They say you have life without the possibility of parole and that no LWOP'ers can participate in any state run program.

KAY:

But A.A., is not state run.

CAROL:

I no. but the sponsors check is coming from the state.

KAY:

Who told you that?

CAROL:

Sissy. She has Life Without, and been in prison for 37 years.

KAY:

Well we're going to go and talk to her.

[KAY and CAROL finds SISSY on the yard.]

KAY:

Hi Sissy.

SISSY:

Hi Kay.

KAY:

Sissy, I have Life Without. I can't be in any programs?

SISSY:

Nah. We can't get in any programs.

CAROL:

How come?

SISSY:

We're never getting out. So they think. Every time some man rapes a little girl, they change the laws to come down really hard. But it never screws the child rapist murderer, but everyone else. The three strikes law. A child rapist murderer. Now they're giving people 25 years to life for a \$2 bump. This one gal got 25 years to life for stealing aspirin for her teething daughter. And my cousin's boyfriend got 25 years to life for driving a car without the owner's consent.

KAY:

WOW!

SISSY:

They use to give LWOP'ers a chance to go to the Board after 30 years. But guess what?

CAROL:

A man raped a little girl and killed her.

SISSY:

You got that right. Now the parole board can deny up to 15 years before you get another hearing. And as for us. The LOWP'ers. They took our parole board chances all together.

KAY:

That don't make sense.

SISSY:

None of it makes sense. People get their life without commuted to life with the possibility of parole all the time. But then when you go to the parole board you have no certificates in your file. Because when you had life without, you weren't allowed to participate in any programs. So you're way behind the eight ball as far as parole suitability. Everybody else who's been down a long time the board sees all these self-help and other good stuff to make release. But with you and I. Nothing. So we're not going home even if we do get our sentences commuted.

CAROL:

That's not fair.

SISSY:

I know, but what can we do.

KAY:

I know.

[FIFTH SCENE]

KAY, CAROL, and SISSY, all decide to start their own A.A. group once CAROL completes A.A. Six months later, KAY, CAROL, SISSY, and 15 other prisons, mostly LWOP'ers, begin their first A.A. meeting. A prison guard at a considerable distance from the group asks a prisoner, "What's going on over there?"

PRISON GUARD:

Eh, eh you, come here.

PRISONER:

Yes.

PRISON GUARD:

What they got going on over there?

PRISONER:

They're doing an A.A. group.

PRISON GUARD:

Those are Life Withouters. They're not supposed to be in no self-help group. *[Prison guard radios in]* lay the yard, lay the yard, sound the alarm.

30 guards come and lock up all the women in the hole. After 3 days, they have their administrative segregation assessment hearing. CAROL is called first and returns to tell the others the news.

KAY:

Carol tell us what happened?

CAROL:

They're releasing me out the hole.

KAY:

See Sissy, I told you this was nothing.

CAROL:

That's not true okay. They're keeping all the Life Withouters back here and giving them SHU terms.

KAY:

SHU Terms! But I thought they ended long-term solitary confinement.

CAROL:

No. Kay. They say you're all a part of a disruptive group, and that you pose a threat to the safety and security of the institution.

KAY:

For being in A.A.?

CAROL:

No. for being a Life Withouter in A.A. and that you and Sissy are the ringleaders because Sissy knows better.

KAY:

How long they say we have to stay in solitary confinement?

CAROL:

Indefinitely [*Cell door opens releasing CAROL out of the hole. CAROL shouts*] Kay the cell door is opening they're taking me out of here!

KAY:

[Realizing that she has only seconds as she will never see CAROL again in her life, yells] Carol!

CAROL:

[Yells back] Kay!

KAY:

[Yells] I love you!

CAROL:

[Yells back, with tears welling up] You're awesome Kay, I'll never forget you!

KAY:

[Yells] I'll never forget you too!

CAROL:

[Yells back] I love you too, and remember, if I ever have a daughter I'm naming her after you.

Before KAY could utter another word, the heavy, rusty, iron door that led out of the long corridor where the women in the hole were being kept, reverberated with a bellicose roar from being slammed shut. Then, there was a deafening sound. Silence [Allow for a considerable amount of time for silence before announcing The End. Let the audience feel the effects of absolute silence]

The End

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Donald "C-Note" Hooker is America's most prolific prisoner-artist. He is an internationally known poet, playwright, painter, musician, and is known as the King of Prison Hip Hop. He's written for Prison Action News, California Prison Focus, and has been in People Magazine, Public Television-Los Angeles (KCET), and ABC-Los Angeles (KABC).

Life Without the Possibility of Parole (a prison play) is a series of work, created around a poem of the same title. This poem inspired a painting (Life Without the Possibility of Parole). The artist has more to come, surrounding just this piece "Life Without the Possibility of Parole."