

Castles in the Sky

by

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Cast of Characters

MANUEL:

50's

ARCO:

30's

Place

Concrete office (no natural light)

Time

Any

Setting: The play takes place inside a concrete walled office with no natural sunlight entering the room because there aren't any windows. There is a door for entering and exiting stage right. A steel desk stands stage left. A steel chair faces it stage right. A record player, coffee maker and a few books remain on top of a bureau furthest stage right.

At Rise: The play opens with Manuel puffing on his cigar behind his desk observing Arco. Arco is handcuffed and chained to a steel chair facing Manuel.

ARCO is handcuffed and seated in a steel chair before a steel desk.

Behind the desk sits MANUEL, the highly decorated military prison warden.

Manuel puffs on a thick cigar and observes Arco. Arco stares at the floor.

MANUEL: ...I don't like my job. But I love my country. Cannot stomach the waste I must answer to...superiors who are superior at nothing, quite frankly. They have no craftsmanship. No acquired gifts. No secret abilities. Their only positions were spoon-fed to them, from their ancestors. But as one does, I obey. I keep my most troubling thoughts to myself in order to function. As we all do, no?

I know my men have worked you over quite a bit. It always comes down to a battle of wills. *(puffs his cigar)*

How many times have you gone off to visit another place in your mind? Does it help? It helps me. I am no different than you Arco. I get paid to kill and you got caught for killing, but other than that, we are the same. The same kind of man.

You love your country, as do I. You love your wife, as do I. You love your children, as do I. Do you love music? Jazz? The theatre? Cinema? What about a walk through the park on a breezy night? Or the sunset from the terrace of a cafe, with a cappuccino and a side of tiramisu?

You will become the one-hundred and thirteenth man that has been killed inside these walls. An institution of death. So many lost spirits, their shadows walk the nights, still trying to escape, still crying out in anger. When I hear their shrieks I put on those records, pour myself a drink... contempt, you might call it, leaving nothing in my windpipe but promise. A promise to continue doing the work I've no choice to do. I promise something, I do it! As any man should. Ahh, but the excuses! Excuses! Not me. Do you think that's a good quality for a person to have? I do. I do. I have decided that for one day and for one day only I will let you go, set you free. See that door? *(pointing)*

Arco looks up.

That door will lead you downstairs, out into the back courtyard where a car will be waiting for you. It will escort you to a secure place where you will see your wife and children one last time.

You will have the entire day with them, you can talk to them, embrace them, feel alive once more Arco.

MANUEL (*cont'd*): When your time is over, you will get back into the vehicle and be driven back here. Does this sound right with you?

ARCO: I think you are attempting to play a game with the little that is left of me.

MANUEL: It's no game.

ARCO: Why?

MANUEL: I am giving you an opportunity no one in your position has ever been offered.

ARCO: Would this opportunity bring you great satisfaction?

MANUEL: That is a question for yourself to answer.

ARCO: I refuse.

MANUEL: We can't except your refusal.

ARCO: I can't -

MANUEL: If we ask for you to do one-hundred jumping jacks, you will do one-hundred jumping jacks. Not because you wish, but because you must.

ARCO: No.

MANUEL: No? (*he grins*)

ARCO: I will be killed long before I see my family.

MANUEL: That isn't so.

ARCO: Liar!

MANUEL: ...Shame that is, tempers flare up and resolve to nothingness.

ARCO: PIG!!!

*Manuel goes to make himself a cup of coffee
at center stage.*

MANUEL: ...I've been doing this shift day in and day out for too many years. I go home to a wife of stone...she is as coldblooded as any serial killer. I no longer recognize her Arco, you on the other hand had a wife that still loves you, children that still love you.

You took it all, carried it in your hands and threw it away. Choices, those kinds of choices define our fate. Yours was defined, there's no escaping that. (*beat*)

MANUEL (*cont'd*): When I look into my wife's eyes, it's as if I am staring into the great abyss, as if I am falling through an open ground with no surface in sight. You'd think she'd change over the years for the better, become warmer as the years took a toll on her, no, no, quite the opposite happens to her kind. I have a son who has nothing but hatred for me. Soullessness, inherited from his mother. Resembles me, that I'll give him, but terrifying to his core. That's what I'm left with Arco, a son I've had to continuously bail out of carnage. You could even say he was born to take the reins from his father; a certified natural. Not me. I had to cultivate myself, put on a good face...reshape my abilities. Which, I think, speaks for itself. (*notices the time*) That's enough discussing roguery. I will have you cleaned up and we will set you free by way of the courtyard.

ARCO: I will not go!

MANUEL: Please, there's no need for the extra effort.

ARCO: My family is already dead.

MANUEL: On the contrary, we captured your family not two weeks ago, brought them back and are holding them gently in private quarters.

ARCO: No.

MANUEL: Your wife Susanna is a lovely woman. A class act. Nothing like my wife, I can tell you.

ARCO: You do not have my wife.

MANUEL: I assure you, I do.

Arco get up and charges Manuel but gets yanked to the floor from the chain hooks.

Manuel sits behind his desk.

Arco gets up and makes his way back to his chair.

MANUEL: What story would you like to hear?

ARCO: Story?

MANUEL: I am full of stories. It's what I originally wanted to do with my life. Become a storyteller. I still have a few stored in my mind somewhere that I visit from time to time. I can pretty much tell you anything in this moment and have you believe it.

The strangest ability, really. Want me to show you? Your wife, for example, I could very easily convince you of *her* story...I could tell you the most horrific stories about her Arco. The worst bedtime stories one could ever imagine. Would you like me to share only one?

ARCO: (*sulks*)

MANUEL: People prefer to imagine your sort doesn't exist. They believe in the higher good and that's fine but we both know that the scum of this world also get to build castles in the sky.

...I am entering retirement, not so much because I have to but because I need to. The doctor says I have high blood pressure and my cholesterol is monstrous...seems quite reasonable. This work is too much for anyone, really. Here's what I propose we do. You allow my men to clean you up. We will give you a good meal, get you healthy, strong...when you resemble the man you once were, I will personally unite you with your wife Susanna and your children...I do not wish to be questioned. I do not want to fill in the blanks as to my justifications...I care not to explain my motives nor do I have to...this is what I want because it is what I want. If it does not make sense to you it truly does not make a difference...

ARCO: Why would I want to see my family?

MANUEL: You have my permission.

ARCO: There would be no greater torment.

MANUEL: I disagree.

ARCO: I refuse.

MANUEL: Your family is most moved over the fact that they are going to see you again...it's already been carefully worked out and diligently explained to them in full detail what the rules will be for visitation. They completely comprehend that this will be your final goodbye.

ARCO: There is no greater humiliation.

MANUEL: Nonsense.

ARCO: Do you understand the consequences of doing such a thing?

MANUEL: Consequences?

ARCO: This will destroy them.

MANUEL: Not at all.

ARCO: They cannot see me ever again.

MANUEL: This could be your final gift.

ARCO: It's impossible.

MANUEL: So, what?

ARCO: I can't go through with it. Not after what I've done.
Please.

MANUEL: It doesn't matter what you've done.

ARCO: It does! Don't you see? I've shamed them all. Everything I thought I stood for has died. It's wasted away. There is nothing left but my rotting flesh and blood. I deserve to peel away quietly amongst myself. I deserve the treatment I've received. I am guilty of my wrongs.

MANUEL: You are guilty of your wrongs. That is quite true.

ARCO: And I must perish at the hands of fire!

MANUEL: You will perish. I can attest to that.

ARCO: I wish to be forgotten. I didn't exist. Don't you see?
Please. I could never have existed.

MANUEL: But you do exist.

ARCO: Kill me now! Kill me now!

MANUEL: You will not die until I say you are ready to die.

ARCO: Kill me now! I want to die! Please!

MANUEL: I was thinking about inviting your mother and father as well.

ARCO: NO!!!

MANUEL: (*laughs*) (*beat*) At the end of the day I've asked you and you refuse and that's fine. You will meet with your family regardless. You can do it gracefully or you can do it like a beaten dog. Makes no difference to me Arco. We'll begin making our progress tonight.

ARCO: What progress?

MANUEL: Good food, wine, fresh air, music, dance. Do you like to dance?

ARCO: I don't wish to dance!

MANUEL: I can teach you. What dance would you like to learn?

ARCO: I don't wish to dance, please!

MANUEL: The tango, cha-cha-cha, many to choose from.

ARCO: NO!! Guards! Guards!!

MANUEL: The guards only answer to my voice, you know that. Calm down. Catch your breath and relax. Sometimes in life Arco, there are things we simply have to accept. Sometimes there are things we do not want to accept but we must accept because there is nothing we can do about it. This is one of those situations we find ourselves in when unfortunately for you, you have to accept. There is no change, other than you will achieve the goal I have set for you and see your family one last time.

ARCO: You are a sick man.

MANUEL: One might think.

ARCO: Aware of your own sickness?

MANUEL: I've always been aware of my own incapacities.

ARCO: Why not let me go for good?

MANUEL: (*laughs*)

ARCO: Why not pretend you have already killed me?

MANUEL: It's a sweet thought.

ARCO: Either kill me or set me free.

MANUEL: What's the sense in that? I want you to get well. I want you to become your former self. Strong, confident, focused. I want you to see your family one last time, knowing that you are going to die thereafter. What does that do to a man? I'm curious. (*beat*) The truth is, I'm writing a book. I may as well tell you. I'm writing a book about all these experiments I've performed throughout the years. I jot down notes, I explain in full detail the psychology these experiments have on an individual's mind. It's quite fascinating when you consider it...how far can the mind go. Where is the breaking point? It's a fragile thing. Our mind.

Yet, it's almost impossible to see its boundary. What happens is that once a mind is unlocked, it doesn't seem to ever go back. Quite a mystery, really. Where does the mind travel? Sort of like broken glass, all the pieces are there but it's not what it once was.

So, I'm writing this book with the hope that all my important work will somewhat contribute to science.

ARCO: (*laughs*) You are a delusional man.

MANUEL: Am I?

ARCO: You are nothing more than a thug carrying out orders for a paycheck.

MANUEL: On the surface, that's all but true.

ARCO: You will fail science.

MANUEL: ...No...I think I'm going to make significant headway.

ARCO: You won't ever succeed with me.

MANUEL: Yes, perhaps, but I'm still carrying out my agenda. I've had to make my time inside these walls count. It wasn't until the tenth or eleventh execution that I began to feel like I wasn't doing enough.

ARCO: And what do you expect to gain from all of this?

MANUEL: What are any of us to gain from doing what we feel is a contribution to humanity? Maybe all this pain and suffering we've been forced into will somehow be useful.

ARCO: FOR WHAT??!!

MANUEL (*calmly*): We'll just have to wait and see...won't we Arco? Sometimes things take on a life of their own and it's our job to do the work faithfully...the rest is something we can't control.

Black out.

END OF PLAY