

Mountain Language

A PLAY BY

HAROLD PINTER

SAMUEL FRENCH LTD

MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

First performed at the National Theatre on 20th October, 1988
with the following cast of characters:

Sergeant
Young Woman
Officer
Elderly Woman
Guard
Prisoner
Second Guard
Hooded Man
Women

Michael Gambon
Miranda Richardson
Julian Wadham
Eileen Atkins
George Harris
Tony Haygarth
Douglas McFerran
Alex Hardy
Jennifer Hill
Irene MacDougall
Kika Mirylees
Charlotte Seago

CHARACTERS

Young Woman
Elderly Woman
Sergeant
Officer
Guard
Prisoner
Hooded Man
Second Guard

Directed by Harold Pinter
Designed by Michael Taylor

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(See also page ii)

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A PRISON WALL

A line of women. An Elderly Woman, cradling her hand. A basket at her feet. A Young Woman with her arm around the Woman's shoulders

A Sergeant enters, followed by an Officer. The Sergeant points to the Young Woman

Sergeant Name?

Young Woman We've given our names.

Sergeant Name?

Young Woman We've given our names.

Sergeant Name?

Officer (to the Sergeant) Stop this shit. (To the Young Woman)

Any complaints?

Young Woman She's been bitten.

Officer Who?

Pause

Who? Who's been bitten?

Young Woman She has. She has a torn hand. Look. Her hand has been bitten. This is blood.

Sergeant (to the Young Woman) What is your name?

Officer Shut up.

He walks over to the Elderly Woman

What's happened to your hand? Has someone bitten your hand?

The Woman slowly lifts her hand. He peers at it

Who did this? Who bit you?

Young Woman A Dobermann pinscher.

Officer Which one?

Pause

Which one?

Pause

Sergeant!

The Sergeant steps forward

Sergeant Sir!

Officer Look at this woman's hand. I think the thumb is going to come off. *(To the Elderly Woman)* Who did this?

She stares at him

Who did this?

Young Woman A big dog.

Officer What was his name?

Pause

What was his name?

Pause

Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are

given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It's a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot!

Silence

Now — attention! Silence and attention! Sergeant!

Sergeant Sir?

Officer Take any complaints.

Sergeant Any complaints? Has anyone got any complaints?

Young Woman We were told to be here at nine o'clock this morning.

Sergeant Right. Quite right. Nine o'clock this morning. Absolutely right. What's your complaint?

Young Woman We were here at nine o'clock this morning. It's now five o'clock. We have been standing here for eight hours.

In the snow. Your men let Dobermann pinschers frighten us.

One bit this woman's hand.

Officer What was the name of this dog?

She looks at him

Young Woman I don't know his name.

Sergeant With permission, sir?

Officer Go ahead.

Sergeant Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the State. They are shithouses.

The Officer steps towards the Women

Officer Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me?
Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No-one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. Any questions?

Young Woman I do not speak the mountain language.

Silence. The Officer and Sergeant slowly circle her. The Sergeant puts his hand on her bottom

Sergeant What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse?

Officer These women, Sergeant, have as yet committed no crime. Remember that.

Sergeant Sir! But you're not saying they're without sin?

Officer Oh, no. Oh, no, I'm not saying that.

Sergeant This one's full of it. She bounces with it.

Officer She doesn't speak the mountain language.

The Woman moves away from the Sergeant's hand and turns to face the two men

Young Woman My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?

Officer Show me your papers.

She gives him a piece of paper. He examines it, turns to the

Sergeant

He doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch.

Sergeant So is she. She looks like a fucking intellectual to me.

Officer But you said her arse wobbled.

Sergeant Intellectual arses wobble the best.

Black-out

2

VISITORS ROOM

A Prisoner sitting. The Elderly Woman sitting, with basket. A Guard standing behind her

The Prisoner and the Woman speak in a strong rural accent

Silence

Elderly Woman I have bread —

The Guard jabs her with a stick

Guard Forbidden. Language forbidden.

She looks at him. He jabs her

It's forbidden. (To the Prisoner) Tell her to speak the language of the capital.

Prisoner She can't speak it.

Silence

She doesn't speak it.

Silence

Elderly Woman I have apples —

The Guard jabs her

Guard (*shouting*) Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden!
Jesus Christ! (*To the Prisoner*) Does she understand what I'm saying?

Prisoner No.

Guard Doesn't she?

He bends over her

Don't you?

She stares up at him

Prisoner She's old. She doesn't understand.

Guard Whose fault is that?

He laughs

Not mine, I can tell you. And I'll tell you another thing. I've got a wife and three kids. And you're all a pile of shit.

Silence

Prisoner I've got a wife and three kids.

Guard You've what?

Silence

You've got what?

Silence

What did you say to me? You've got what?

Silence

You've got what?

He picks up the telephone and dials one digit

Sergeant? I'm in the Blue Room ... yes ... I thought I should report, Sergeant ... I think I've got a joker in here.

The Lights dim to half. The figures are still. The following voice-over is heard

Elderly Woman's voice The baby is waiting for you.

Prisoner's voice Your hand has been bitten.

Elderly Woman's voice They are all waiting for you.

Prisoner's voice They have bitten my mother's hand.

Elderly Woman's voice When you come home there will be such a welcome for you. Everyone is waiting for you. They're all waiting for you. They're all waiting to see you.

The Lights come up to full

The Sergeant comes in

Sergeant What joker?

Black-out

3

VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

Sergeant's voice Who's that fucking woman? What's that fucking woman doing here? Who let that fucking woman through that fucking door?

Second Guard's voice She's his wife.

The Lights come up

A corridor

A hooded Man held up by the Guard and the Sergeant. The Young Woman at a distance from them, staring at them

Sergeant What is this, a reception for Lady Duck Muck? Where's the bloody Babycham? Who's got the bloody Babycham for Lady Duck Muck?

He goes to the Young Woman

Hello, Miss. Sorry. A bit of a breakdown in administration, I'm afraid. They've sent you through the wrong door. Unbelievable. Someone'll be done for this. Anyway, in the meantime, what can I do for you, dear lady, as they used to say in the movies?

The Lights dim to half. The figures are still. The following voice-over is heard

Man's voice I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile.

Young Woman's voice You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

Man's voice We are out on a lake.

Young Woman's voice It is spring.

Man's voice I hold you. I warm you.

Young Woman's voice When my eyes are open I see you above me and smile.

The Lights come up to full. The hooded Man collapses. The Young Woman screams

Young Woman Charley!

The Sergeant clicks his finger

The Guard drags the Man off

Sergeant Yes, you've come in the wrong door. It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia. But I'll tell you what—if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains. He's right on top of his chosen subject. Give him a tinkle one of these days and he'll see you all right. His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes.

Young Woman Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?

Sergeant Sure. No problem.

Young Woman Thank you.

Black-out

VISITORS ROOM

Guard. Elderly Woman. Prisoner

Silence

The Prisoner has blood on his face. He sits trembling. The Woman is still. The Guard is looking out of a window. He turns to look at them both

Guard Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.

Prisoner She can speak?

Guard Yes. Until further notice. New rules.

Pause

Prisoner Mother, you can speak.

Pause

Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.

She is still

You can speak.

Pause

Mother. Can you hear me? I am speaking to you in our own language.

Pause

Do you hear me?

Pause

It's our language.

Pause

Can't you hear me? Do you hear me?

She does not respond

Mother?

Guard Tell her she can speak in her own language. New rules. Until further notice.

Prisoner Mother?

She does not respond. She sits still

The Prisoner's trembling grows. He falls from the chair on to his knees, begins to gasp and shake violently

The Sergeant walks into the room and studies the Prisoner shaking on the floor

Sergeant (to the Guard) Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up.

Black-out

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST

1. A PRISON WALL

On stage: Basket

Personal: **Young Woman:** piece of paper

2. VISITORS ROOM

On stage: 2 chairs
Basket
Telephone

Personal: **Guard:** stick

3. VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

On stage: Nil

4. VISITORS ROOM

On stage: 2 chairs
Basket

LIGHTING PLOT

Cue 1 To open (Page 1)
Full general lighting

Cue 2 **Sergeant:** "... wobble the best." (Page 5)
Black-out

Cue 3 To open 2. VISITORS ROOM (Page 5)
Full general lighting

Cue 4 **Guard:** "...a joker in here." (Page 7)
Dim to half

Cue 5 **Elderly Woman's voice:** "...to see you." (Page 7)
Return to full general lighting

Cue 6 **Sergeant:** "What joker?" (Page 7)
Black-out

Cue 7 To open 3. VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (Page 8)
Black-out

Cue 8 **Second Guard's voice:** "She's his wife." (Page 8)
Bring up full general lighting

Cue 9 **Sergeant:** "...to say in the movies?" (Page 8)
Dim to half

Cue 10 **Young Woman's voice:** "...and smile." (Page 9)
Return to full general lighting

Cue 11 **Young Woman:** "Thank you." (Page 9)
Black-out

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Mountain Language

Cue 12 To open 4. VISITORS ROOM (Page 10)
Full general lighting

Cue 13 **Sergeant:** "... and they fuck it up." (Page 11)
Black-out

EFFECTS PLOT

Cue 1 The Lights dim to half (Page 8)
Voice-over as script page 8

Cue 2 To open 3. VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (Page 9)
Voice-over as script page 9

Cue 3 The Lights dim to half (Page 9)
Voice-over as script pages 9-10