

# The Prisoner's Hands

An Original Drama in One Act

*By E. Jack Williams*

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my wife, Mary, for her help, encouragement, and support.*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

This is the story of a killer, her relationship to the family of the victim and her relationship to her own conscience. The play opens in a courtroom with the murder victim's blind sister, Whitney, giving a family impact statement. Her personal sentence seals the fate of Cheek, the defendant, far worse than any court punishment of "life in prison" could ever do. *"I sentence you...to see the image of my sister's face in your hands. I want your hands to be the constant reminder of the horror you saw in her face as you squeezed the life out of her...I want this image in your mind every minute of every day for as long as you live."* In prison, Cheek experiences the daily horror that makes it impossible for her to live a "normal" prison life. The image of the murder victim is a constant reminder of the horrible act of pain that she inflicted on the family. The daily reminder makes life impossible. Will a surprise visit change the situation?

## **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

The show was first performed on June 12, 2015 at the Waseca Art Center, Waseca, Minnesota under the direction of the playwright. The original cast and crew is as follows: Emily Rux, Patrick Leigh, E. Jack Williams, Heidi McCabe, Lori Sanborn, Karen Pfarr, Brittany Arndt, Mary Williams, Tiana Moore, Dann Weske, Aaron Roessler, Samantha Maranell, Kaylee Seifert, Dawn Leigh, Jack McCabe, and Monica Priebe.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(8 w and 6 flexible, extras, doubling possible)*

**GRETCHEN/GARY HEATH:** Aggressive TV reporter

**CAMERAMAN:** Young and confident

**COURT BAILIFF:** Offstage voice

**LYNN THOMAS:** Judge

**COURT GUARD:** Non-speaking

**CHEEK REESE (f):** Evil defendant with a curved scar on her  
left cheek

**DEFENSE LAWYER:** Non-speaking

**MRS. REAGAN (f):** Grieving mother of the victim

**WHITNEY REAGAN (f):** Angry blind sister of the victim

**KELLY:** No nonsense prison guard

**BRUNO:** By-the-book prison guard

**BILLIE (f):** Prisoner, irritating and overly talkative

**GLADYS (f):** Prisoner, street smart, with front teeth missing

**SAMMY (f):** Prisoner, tough, with a long criminal record

**JO (f):** Prisoner, quick to anger, drug addict

**PEGGY (f):** Prisoner, sweet girl, completely out of place

**KIM O'BRIEN (f):** Prison counselor, compassionate

**SPECTATORS:** In the court

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**Sound effects:** Prison siren, heavy metal doors opening and closing. Eerie music is used during the hand effects. Live harmonica music is used at the end and beginning of scenes because it helps create a prison atmosphere. The tunes could be original except for the final song "Amazing Grace" by John Newton. "Amazing Grace" is in public domain.

**Special Hand Effects:** Hand effects include a blue glow that covers the area and a red spotlight on the actor's face. Eerie music plays.

**Props:** Video camera, microphone with long cord, gavel, handcuffs, briefcase, white cane, sunglasses, folded paper, two clipboards, pencil, name tags, seven code books, seven work assignment forms, necklace pouch, six food trays, dinner and breakfast "food," knit hat, white socks, mop, bucket, napkin and cake, and basketball.

**Set piece list:** Judge's desk and chair, American and state flags, speaker podium, four chairs, table, mug shot camera on stand, height chart, written jail rules, small table, telephone, written phone limit sign, seven folding chairs, two pillows, blankets, and sheets, two beds, stool, sink and towel, mirror, long table, two stools and bench for four.

**Set note:** The prison bars are made of ½ inch PVC plastic pipe. The bars making up the DS wall are cut shorter to give the impression of a full wall and the audience an unobstructed view of the scenes in the prison cell.

**Costume** suggestions are at the end of the play.

**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: Courtroom for the sentencing for Cheek Reese. Judge's desk and chair CS, American and state flags are behind judge's desk, two chairs and podium SR, defendant's table and two chairs DSL. SPECTATORS are present. Television reporter GRETCHEN HEATH is preparing to do a live report. She adjusts the ear piece and tests the microphone. CAMERAMAN aims camera at her. LIGHTS up.)*

**HEATH:** Test, test, test. Hal, can you hear me? *(Pause.)*  
Good.

**CAMERAMAN:** We're on in ten... nine... eight... seven... six...  
*(The rest of the count is done silently with hand gestures until the final "you're on" signal.)*

**HEATH:** *(Speaking into a microphone and looking at camera.)*  
I'm in the courtroom of Judge Lynn Thomas who is about to announce the sentence of convicted murderer Cheek Reese. Three days ago a jury found Ms. Reese guilty of the brutal strangulation murder of Marcy Reagan, a young college student, for five dollars and a Starbucks gift card.

*(MRS. REAGAN and WHITNEY REAGAN, who is blind, enter. Whitney wears sunglasses and carries a white cane. They sit SR.)*

**HEATH:** *(Cont'd.)* The Reagan family has entered the courtroom. Mrs. Reagan's face shows the strain of weeks of listening to the gruesome details of her daughter's horrific death at the hands of what some are calling a heartless beast with no sign of remorse. Even though the verdict is guilty the family shows no signs of relief. Their loss is too great for celebration.

*(CHEEK REESE, in handcuffs and escorted by a COURT GUARD, enters SL. Her LAWYER follows. They sit behind a table SL. Court guard stands at attention.)*

**HEATH:** *(Cont'd.)* The defendant is being lead into the courtroom followed by her lawyer.

*(CAMERAMAN turns the camera in the direction of CHEEK.)*

**HEATH:** *(Cont'd.)* Her facial expression is blank, but her eyes have a dark, defiant stare that chills you to the bone. Judge Lynn Thomas is about to enter the courtroom.

*(CAMERAMAN turns the camera back to HEATH.)*

**HEATH:** *(Cont'd.)* I'll be back immediately after the court has adjourned. Gretchen Heath sending it back to you in the studio.

*(HEATH and CAMERAMAN stand off to SR.)*

**BAILIFF:** *(OS. voice.)* ALL RISE!

*(SPECTATORS in the court stand.)*

**BAILIFF:** *(Cont'd. OS.)* THE HONORABLE JUDGE LYNN THOMAS PRESIDING!

*(JUDGE LYNN THOMAS enters and sits at desk CS.)*

**JUDGE:** Court is in session. You may be seated.

*(SPECTATORS in the court sit.)*

**JUDGE:** *(Cont'd.)* The jury has found the defendant, Cheek Reese, guilty of second degree murder in the death of Marcy Reagan. We are here today to issue the sentence. Before the court announces the length of incarceration, the family has requested time to address the defendant. Mrs. Reagan, you may read your statement.

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*(MRS. REAGAN slowly steps to the podium, nervously unfolding a piece of paper. With deep sadness she struggles to speak.)*

**MRS. REAGAN:** Thank you, Judge Thomas. It is extremely difficult for me to be here, but I DO have something to say. A part of me died the day you killed my precious, precious daughter. There will be no more good morning hugs or..."good-bye, Mom, I love you!" as she rushes out the door. I'll miss the little things she did...the way she sipped the last drop of soda from the glass with that annoying slurping sound and hopped on one foot to put her shoe on. I'll miss sitting on the couch watching television with her toes digging into my back. Her sense of humor! First she would slam the car door shut, then yell, "WATCH YOUR FINGERS!" You may have taken these moments from me, but you can never take her memory. I can't imagine what could have happened in your past to make you take a person's life, my Marcy's life, my Marcy. AND for what... five dollars and a Starbucks gift card! It makes no sense...no sense at all! I... I... I'm sorry. I can't go on.

*(Wiping away tears, MRS. REAGAN sits. WHITNEY comforts her mother, then stands and takes the podium.)*

**WHITNEY:** My name is Whitney Reagan. Judge Thomas, thank you for this opportunity to address the court. *(Speaks in the direction of CHEEK.)* I can't see you, but I can feel the chill in your soul. I won't tell you how killing my sister affected me. You wouldn't care anyway. Once we leave this room you will be forgotten. We won't speak your name. We will erase any thought of you from our memory. We will only think of Marcy and what a wonderful human being she was. But...before the judge imposes the court's punishment I am going to issue my own sentence. *(Pause.)* I sentence you...to see the image of my sister's face in your hands.

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