

Stand Sentry

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Representation:
www.halljas.com

Stand Sentry

By Jason Hall

Characters:

Soldier 1 – Male, middle-aged, white.

Soldier 2 – Female, younger, not white.

Soldier 3 – Roughly same age as **2**. Gender / ethnicity is open.

Setting:

The action of the play takes place in front of a large, military-style gate and/or checkpoint. This may or may not be physically represented on the stage.

Punctuation:

There are two devices used in the text to indicate overlapping dialogue. A ‘ / ‘ in a line indicates where the actor with the next line should begin speaking. Similarly, lines that end without punctuation should be understood to continue without pause at the next indicated line for that character. Ellipses indicate a trailing off of the line.

Scene One

1 So you're new.

2 Yes.

1 The new one.

2 That's right.

1 Well...welcome.

2 Thank you.

1 You probably won't like it very much here.

2 What?

1 Sentry duty. I don't think you'll like it here.

2 Why do you say that?

1 Just a feeling. Why, do *you* think you'll like it?

2 I don't really know.

1 You don't know?

2 No. I'm new.

1 Ah. Ah, I see. You're not just new, as in new to here, but new as in *new* new.

2 That's right.

1 That makes sense.

Pause.

2 Why does that make sense?

1 Well...look at you.

2 What about me?

1 Well you're...you're not me. You understand what I mean? You're not like me. If you look at me, and you look at you, anyone can clearly see we're not.../alike.

2 Oh.

1 Yes?

2 You mean in an ethnic...

1 That's it.

2 In a gender...

1 Yes.

2 Age kind of way, we're

1 Different

2 not very similar.

1 looking. We're not very similar looking. Quite, in fact, *different* looking to each other. The new face of the operation.

2 Who? Me? I'm the new face of the operation?

1 *We're* the new face of the operation. The two of us. Me, I'm the old. The history. The legacy. You, you're the future. The two of us together, well, it's obvious Command wants the world to see the operation can change, *has* changed. It can grow. But at the same time, it doesn't discard its history.

2 The operation wants the world to see its new face?

1 That's right. We're not just guarding, we're not just standing sentry. No. We are, yes, I don't think it's too much to say, we are a symbol.

2 For the world to see?

1 Yes.

2 They why are we guarding the inside?

Pause.

1 Why are we...?

2 Guarding the inside. We're on the inside. We stop people from getting out, out to the outside world, which is on the other side. (*Pause.*) The world is out there. I don't think the world sees us in here.

1 I don't think you're going to like it here at all.

Scene Two

2 I don't think that's a good idea.

1 It's tradition.

2 We're supposed to be / standing here.

1 Wait. Hold on. Are you telling me what we're supposed to be doing?

2 I'm not

1 Yes?

2 *telling* you anything. I'm just relaying the orders.

1 It's tradition.

2 That may be...

1 Doesn't tradition mean anything to you?

2 The orders are to stand, you and me, on either side of the / road and guard.

1 I know the orders. And I think the orders allow room for a little tradition. It's nothing big. You simply go in the cabin, unplug the kettle, take it to the tap, fill it, bring it back to the counter, plug it in, turn it on, and wait.

2 I know how to make / a hot drink.

1 While the water is boiling, you get the jar from the cupboard, scoop out a spoonful of crystals into each mug – the mugs are in the cupboard too. Mine's the red one. So, you scoop the crystals then put the jar away. Stir in the boiling water. Oh, there's sugar cubes in the cupboard too. I take two. I don't take milk. You? *(Pause.)* Well, anyway, if you do take milk you know you're going to have to use that powdered stuff. I suggest you grab some from base. Anyway, stir everything in and bring the two mugs out here. That's it. *(Pause.)* A small break is nice when you're on duty.

2 I would prefer, if you don't mind, to follow orders.

1 It's a nice tradition.

2 Then you make the drinks.

Pause.

1 Oh, what do you people know about tradition?

2 'You people?'

Pause.

1 I...

2 Yes?

Pause.

1 I tell you what. I'll make the drinks today. Then you can see how nice it is. And tomorrow? Tomorrow, once you see how nice it is, tomorrow you can make the drinks. And carry on the tradition. *(Pause.)* Okay? *(Pause.)* You take sugar?

Scene Three

Soldier 1 and **Soldier 2** are talking over each other.

2 You cannot say that, you simply cannot. These people in here are not the enemy. They're not. They do not deserve our scorn. They do not deserve punishment. We are here to guard them, to protect them. We are protecting them. Okay? They are in a bad situation and sometimes to stop people being in a bad situation you have to build a wall, a temporary wall, to protect people from that situation. Does that make them bad? Does that make them the enemy? No. And that's why you *cannot* say that.

1 I can...I can...I can say whatever I want. And I can say that because it is the truth and I know it is the truth because I have the experience, and from my experience I know they are the enemy. They are. It's not nice thing to say, it's not a nice thing to realise, but it's the truth and sometimes the truth is ugly. And knowing that, that's why I *can*, I can say it.

Their lines end simultaneously.

2 It's not like that any more. There is no us and them.

1 No?

2 No.

1 The moment you and me put on this uniform, we're 'us' and they become 'them.' Us? We are a team. Them? They are the enemy.

2 We have been told, in rather plain English I would like to add, not to think of them that way. They are people, human beings. They're not the enemy.

1 I know what we've been told.

2 Well maybe you should listen.

1 And maybe you should see.

Scene Four

Soldier 1 *is holding a red mug*

1 *(Takes a sip.)* Mmmm. *(Pause.)* Nice. *(Pause.)* Nothing breaks duty up like a nice hot drink. *(Takes another sip.)* Mmmm. *(Pause.)* Very nice.

2 How long have you been here?

1 What, today, or

2 How long have you been

1 how long have I been doing this?

2 in post?

1 Oh. In post.

2 That's right. How long have you been in post. How long have you been doing this, sentry duty, here on the inside gate?

1 A long time.

2 You must be good at it.

1 They wouldn't keep me here if I'm not.

2 So you would say if one is good, if I'm good, let's say, if I'm good at this, good generally for this operation, then they would keep me here? They'd keep me on this duty?

1 If you were good, they might just let you.

Pause.

2 Yesterday they told me if I kept up the way I was performing they would move me on next month. They said they don't waste their good people here. *(Pause.)* Enjoying your drink?

Scene Five

In the darkness, a gunshot.

Lights up on **Soldier 1** *and* **Soldier 2.**

Soldier 2 *is holding her rifle. She is in a mild state of shock. There is a body lying in front of them.*

1 He had a gun.

2 Yes. A gun.

1 He came at you, and he had, we both saw it, a gun.

2 We both...?

1 Yes, we both saw it.

2 The gun?

1 That's right. Yes?

2 Absolutely. Absolutely, yes, of course. I mean, he came *at* me.

1 That's right. Walked up, kind of swaggered, like it was high noon, and this was some film, some kind of / cowboy and

2 Western?

1 Yes, that's right. Like he was the outlaw. Just sauntered up. And then it was like, 'draw.'

2 And I'm the sheriff.

1 That's right.

2 The fastest draw.

1 You got it. The quick and the dead. You were quick and now he's...And that's what happened. That's how it happened, we both saw it.

2 Of course. (*Pause.*) Except.

1 Yes?

2 It's - no, it's nothing.

1 No, go on.

2 Well it's just that...

1 Uh huh.

2 It's just that he sauntered up, like a cowboy, like in a western, and looked at us, both of us, looked back and forth slowly between us, right into our eyes and then stood

there, yes, stood there and I - I am suspicious, mind you, so I have my finger on the trigger, slowly put it there stealthily – and he's standing there and suddenly he draws, and I see him draw and with some instinct, some instinctual reaction, I get my gun up first and I get him. And he goes down.

1 Yes, that's / how it.

2 And, yes alright, but here's the thing, if that's how it happened, I would think, and I could be wrong on this and you can help out here, but I *think*, probably, most likely, there should actually in fact be a gun. Near him. Or thereabouts.

1 Ah. (*Pause.*) I see your point.

2 Sorry.

1 God no, don't be / sorry!

2 You were on a roll and I didn't want to seem / negative.

1 No, no, well spotted. A gun, of course he needs a gun for that to...(*Pause.*) I mean he could have had a gun.

2 Yes. But he didn't.

1 Sure?

2 Yes

1 Shame.

Pause.

2 Wouldn't they believe...

1 Yes?

2 Couldn't we just say, simply, that he came up to us

1 Okay.

2 He walked up to us, right up to us, hands up, that's how he got so close, and asked for a cigarette and / the gun just went.

1 Hold on there, just hang on a second. He asked for a *cigarette*?

2 That's right.

1 Who's going to believe that?

2 Who's going to / believe it?

1 Nobody just walks up and

2 Well.

1 just asks, says, 'hey, can I have one of your cigarettes?'

2 Well...

1 because cigarettes, in here, are like gold dust, they are like, I don't know, but you don't just *give* them away, and you don't just borrow one, you certainly don't just ask for one

2 I realise they are.

1 because you won't get one so nobody does that. Okay? Nobody *does* that so nobody is going to *believe* that so if you're going to *say* that you might as well just give up right now / because it's all over.

2 But that's kind of what happened.

Pause.

2 (*Beginning to break down.*) Oh god, oh god, what have I, what have I...

1 He charged us.

2 He...?

1 Charged us. Yes. Charged *at* us. Arms flailing. A wild look in his eyes. Screaming. Clearly mad, like a dog that's gone, what is it, a dog that's...

2 Feral?

1 Rabid. I was thinking rabid, but feral is good too, although, I think for this particular context, I think, and this is nothing against you, rabid is really the phrase -

2 Word.

1 Word, that's right, yes, thanks, rabid is the *word* that we're looking for.

2 So he came at us like a rabid dog and we shot him.

1 That's right.

2 We shot him in the back.

1 We shot him in the...(*Pause.*) I see your point.

2 Sorry to keep doing this.

1 No no no. This is good. This is what we need. It's constructive. *(Pause.)* Okay, how about this. He runs up to us, pretty close, right the way up, closer than where he's lying now, and then he suddenly stops.

2 Okay.

1 And looks at us both, real nervous, real jittery, back and forth.

2 Okay.

1 And then he yells this, word, or something, and we don't – you don't understand the language do you?

2 No.

1 Why should you? I don't. So he runs up, looks at us in a nervous, suspicious way, and he yells this word, which sounds, yes, here we go, an *awful* lot like a command, and neither of us speak the language and we're a bit shocked. But you, you are quick on your instincts and I, and I'm a little ashamed to admit it, I am caught a bit unawares by the whole situation, and I am just standing, but you, you have your gun ready. And he turns to run away, and you see what he's going to do and you yell, 'Hey! Stop! Stop right there!'

2 Okay.

1 But he doesn't stop, he turns, and tenses like he's going to run and we sense, I can vouch for it, because I sense it too, that the word he shouted was a command, and we sense things are going to start happening, bad ambush type things, and that's why he's going to run. And I hear your gun go off. And he drops to the ground.

2 And I've shot him.

1 And that's what happened.

Pause.

2 That's what happened.

Scene Six

Soldier 1 is standing alone on the stage. There is a long pause. Then, the sounds of a teaspoon hitting the edge of a mug. A short pause. The sound of the teaspoon again. After a short pause **Soldier 2** enters, carrying two mugs, one of which is red. She hands it to **Soldier 1**.

1 Thank you.

2 Don't mention it.

They drink.

1 Mmm.

Pause.

2 Yea.

Pause.

1 Nice.

2 Yes.

Scene Seven

1 So. You're new.

3 Yes.

1 The new one.

3 That's what I said.

1 Well...welcome. *(Pause.)* Do you like tea?

Blackout.