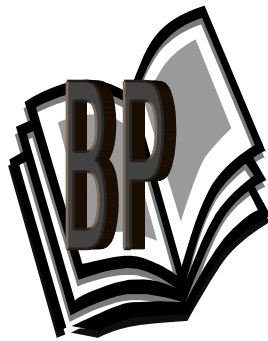


THE HAPPY HANGMAN

A Ten-Minute Melodrama

by
Michael Callahan



BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS, LLC

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AT RISE: *Lights up, SYDNEY enters carrying a flower in a vase, and puts the vase on the desk. HE tests the lever, then sits in a chair by the table perusing a magazine. After a bit HE looks at his watch, sighs, goes to the closet (box), looks through it, selects a black hood, puts it on, and picks up the phone.*

SYDNEY: I'll take whoever is next in line.

NORMAN: *(Beats. stumbles in as though someone roughly pushed him. His hands are tied or handcuffed behind him.)* Watch it!

SYDNEY: *(To unseen character offstage.)* Please, a little consideration.

This gentleman is our guest. Don't be naughty. A pleasure to meet you, sir. My name is Sydney and I'm going to be your executioner for today. Please excuse me if I don't shake your hand. *(Takes Norman by the arm. Talks offstage)* I can take over from here. I see our guest is securely bound and I'm sure there will be no problems.

NORMAN: *(Offstage, sarcastically)* Love you too. Wish you could join me.

SYDNEY: I apologize for the rude behavior. I suppose that's got to be expected from a certain type of individual. It is so hard to get good help. *(removes hood)* This outfit is simply ridiculous, and stuffy. Talk about bland colors. But they insist I wear it. Protocol. I'm supposed to look sinister. Doesn't scare anyone. So Silly. It's the rules. Comfy?

(NORMAN nods.)

Good. *(takes a pen and pad)* Now then. More formalities. Forms to fill out. You know how it is with bureaucrats. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask some questions. Could I have your name?

NORMAN: Norman Killer.

SYDNEY: Is that with a C or K?

NORMAN: K. K.I.L.L.E.R.

SYDNEY: *(Looking at the pad)* Oh, here we are. Couldn't find you at first. Odd name. For a minute I thought you might be joking. You know, your name and the rather unusual circumstances. Actually, we are a little early for our appointment. I hope you don't mind waiting.

NORMAN: Are you kidding?

SYDNEY: Good. There are some preparations I have to make. You would think they'd have the courtesy to get all the information to me beforehand. Save us all a lot of trouble and get you on a speedier journey.

(NORMAN rolls his eyes.)

I know. The bureaucrats will be the death of us all. No pun intended. Oh, sorry, hope I didn't offend.

NORMAN: *(shakes his head)* Not at all. I think you will find I am very thick-skinned.

SYDNEY: Good. How tall are you?

NORMAN: Six feet.

SYDNEY: Nice. How much do you weigh?

NORMAN: 190.

SYDNEY: Well, you look fairly fit. But your shirt is a little tight in the shoulders. Typical of the management here; no taste in clothes whatsoever. You look like you could stand to lose a couple of pounds.

NORMAN: If you would release my hands, I'd be happy to start running.

SYDNEY: Start running? Oh, I get it. Very funny. You have a sense of humor. I like that in a client. Don't get it often. To be honest most of them are pretty morbid.

NORMAN: I can't imagine why.

SYDNEY: Listen, you seem like an intelligent person. Can we talk? This job teaches one just how important it is to live each moment to the fullest. Most clients just stand there feeling sorry for themselves. They don't seem to understand; none of us know how much time we've got left... 10 years, 5 years, 5 minutes. We should all live each moment as though it was our last.

NORMAN: You are quite the philosopher.

SYDNEY: My profession makes one look at the big picture.

NORMAN: You like being a hangman?

SYDNEY: I detest that term. It is so crude. I wish they would use something else.

NORMAN: How about government dance instructor?

SYDNEY: No, no, no. Something more dignified. A hangman is little more than a paid killer. I don't know... I could live with executor, like the executor of a will, a person who gets things done.

NORMAN: So, Mr. Executor, how do you feel about this rather odd profession?

SYDNEY: I take great care to see my clients are treated with respect and enjoy the experience as much as can be expected . . . considering the circumstances.

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