

LOCKED IN

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Jane and Jim Jeffries

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SYNOPSIS: Grace has Locked-In Syndrome, in which a person is completely unable to move but can still hear and understand everything around her. Her life is revealed in flashbacks as her husband and her father debate whether or not to end life-support.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 MEN, 3 WOMEN, 1 EITHER GENDER)

GRACE (f).....Grace must look as identical as possible to the girl on the bed (Grace II).
(107 lines)

MARTHA (f) Grace’s nurse. *(36 lines)*

DR. BOATMAN (m/f)..... Grace’s doctor. *(32 lines)*

PERCY NIOBE (m)..... Grace’s husband. *(76 lines)*

JANE (f)..... Enthusiastic swing dancer. *(14 lines)*

DOUG (m) Enthusiastic swing dancer. *(13 lines)*

JOHN TANTES (m) Grace’s father. *(69 lines)*

GRACE II (PATIENT IN BED/f)..... Identical to Grace *(Non-speaking role)*

SETTING: Private hospital room.

PRODUCTION HISTORY:

Locked In was first performed at the Wisconsin High School Forensics Association’s One-Act Competition at the District and Sectional levels in 2011.

LOCKED-IN SYNDROME

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes, (<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/lockedinsyndrome/lockedinsyndrome.htm>) Locked-In Syndrome patients lose control of all voluntary muscles except for some eye movement. In Complete Locked-In Syndrome, the patient cannot even move his/her eyes. The patient is aware of everything that occurs around him/her and can feel excruciating pain due to the awkward body positions from which he/she is helpless to extricate him/herself. There is no treatment for Locked-In Syndrome, and recovery is very, very rare.

People with Locked-In Syndrome can sometimes communicate with eye movements. A French journalist and victim of Locked-In Syndrome named Jean-Dominique Bauby dictated a book entirely through eye movements. This book, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, is an excellent source for understanding both the suffering and victories that these patients can experience.

DEDICATION

Special thanks to Sue Dahl and Hudson High School's one-act drama group of 2011. To God be the glory; to us be the blame.

AT RISE:

Hospital bed is center stage left with GRACE II in it. She has an I.V. bag connected to her. The bed is angled with the foot toward downstage center and head toward upstage left. Life support machines are upstage, mostly concealed by the hospital bed. Chairs are to the left and right of the bed. A nightstand is near the bed with a copy of the Wall Street Journal and a vase with flowers. A trash can is next to the nightstand. GRACE sits on the downstage side of the bed. The stage is dark as GRACE speaks.

GRACE: Once upon a time, in a land far away lived a dancer. Every morning, she would take her sheep to the meadow and dance among the wild flowers.

Audience hears the background sound of a respirator. Lights up. A heart monitor is steadily beating along with the slight hiss of the respirator. Enter MARTHA.

MARTHA: Good morning, Grace.

Checks the patient in bed.

GRACE: Good morning, Martha.

MARTHA: How are you doing today, Grace?

She starts checking various machines and IV's during her entire dialogue.

GRACE: Pretty much the same as yesterday, Martha.

MARTHA: Well, I had “the talk” with Mike yesterday after work, like I said I was going to. Mary was already asleep when I got home. I didn’t want to wake her just to tell her a bedtime story.

GRACE: You should have.

MARTHA: So Mike and I grabbed a couple of beers and sat out on the steps. I told him, “We need to talk.” He said, “‘We need to talk’ are the four most dreaded words in the English language.” We didn’t— *(She is interrupted by the entrance of DR. BOATMAN from stage right.)* Dr. Boatman. Making the rounds early?

BOATMAN: I wanted an early start so that I’d be late later. If that makes sense. Who are you talking to?

GRACE: Me.

MARTHA: Grace.

BOATMAN: Grace?

MARTHA: Mrs. Niobe, the patient.

BOATMAN: *(Goes over and checks the body on the bed.)* She hasn’t been responsive for months. You’re wasting your breath.

MARTHA: I don’t think—

BOATMAN: I see the bed sores have healed up. That nurse who had your shift for a while, what was her name?

GRACE: Callous Carter.

MARTHA: Kelly Carter. She’s been reassigned.

BOATMAN: Someplace with a little more supervision, I hope.

MARTHA: She’s just a little burned out. It happens to all of us.

BOATMAN: It wouldn’t happen if you were more clinical.

MARTHA: Yes, doctor.

BOATMAN: Replace her feeding tube today and up her calorie count. She’s losing some weight.

MARTHA: Yes, doctor.

BOATMAN: I’m off. I’ve got to check the quadriplegic in 1502, and the other coma in 1513—

MARTHA: They’ve got names.

BOATMAN: Right. I also have some GI rounds. Don’t take too long in here.

MARTHA: But—

BOATMAN: You’ve got a lot of patients to cover. Get in and get out. Efficient. Fast. Clinical.

GRACE: You forgot “cold.”

BOATMAN: Don’t forget the important meeting we have today with Mr. Niobe and Mr. Tante. I want you there.

GRACE: What meeting?

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MARTHA: How could I forget?

BOATMAN: I'll see you then.

MARTHA: Yes, doctor.

BOATMAN exits.

GRACE: What meeting, Martha?

MARTHA: *(Stares at the body as she soothes down the sheets.)*
Oh, Grace.

GRACE: What? What is it?

MARTHA: I've got other patients. *(Growing bitter.)* I have to get in and get out. Efficient. Fast. *(Draws herself up resolutely.)* Clinical. *(She exits.)*

GRACE: *(Sighs.)* So. What shall I do today? Watch TV? Read a book? Nah. I know. I'll listen to my respirator. There's hours of excitement. *(Listens to respirator for a while. Enough for the audience to feel a bit uncomfortable. Then she says in her best Darth Vader voice.)* Luke, I am your father! *(Sighs. Becomes melancholy.)* Once upon a time, in a land far away lived a dancer. *(PERCY enters.)* Percy! *(GRACE jumps out of the chair and races over to PERCY. She cannot touch him.)*

PERCY: Good morning, Grace.

He sits on the bed, facing the audience.

GRACE: *(Moves around the bed to sit down next to PERCY.)* Oh, Percy, I'm so glad you're here. How are you? *(Beat.)* Percy. Talk to me. Please!

PERCY: I went to a dance recital. Katie was dancing. I promised John I would go. It was fun. Katie even did some swing dancing. *(Pause.)* Remember the Moose Lodge? You remember Jane? Jane dragged me there for the lessons. And you were with, what was his name?

GRACE: Doug. Or Duggie when I wanted to irritate him.

PERCY: I thought I was a bad dancer. But then I met you . . .

Lights fade to half. Swing dance music without words begins to play in background. JANE and DOUG enter. PERCY and GRACE cross downstage. Lights up to half on downstage left as JANE begins to dance with PERCY; DOUG begins to dance with GRACE. PERCY steps on JANE'S foot, and she stops in frustration.

JANE: *(Demonstrates in a swing beat.)* Percy, it's one, two, one-two.

PERCY: *(Tries to imitate.)* One, two, one, two.

JANE: No, no. One, two, one-two.

PERCY: I don't see the difference. You are using a basic binary system—

JANE: It's music, not math.

PERCY: Music *is* math.

JANE: I had to date a math major.

PERCY: Can't we just dance the way we've always danced? *(Grabs JANE close for a slow dance.)* One, two, one... *(Dramatic pause, then dips JANE. Impressed with his whole machismo.)* ...two.

JANE: *(From dipped position.)* One, this is swing music, not slow dance music. Two, I'm tired of constantly just shuffling around the dance floor. And three, sometimes a girl just doesn't want a dip.

PERCY: Oh. *(Lifts JANE up and attempts swing dancing again.)* One, two, three—

JANE: Three? Argh!

The focus shifts to DOUG and GRACE as they continue to struggle.

DOUG: I saw this video—

GRACE: Do you realize how many disasters have started with those words?

DOUG: Where's your sense of adventure?

GRACE: I left it at the emergency room at St. Mary's.

DOUG: Killjoy. I saw this video on swing dancing.

GRACE: Convenient.

DOUG: And here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to swing you up—

GRACE: I don't—

DOUG: And then swing you down past my right hip.

GRACE: That's not—

DOUG: Swing you up again.

GRACE: I think once is—

DOUG: And then swing you past my left hip.

GRACE: That's a lot of swinging—

DOUG: Then both your legs will go around my hips.

GRACE: In your dreams. *(Puts her hand on his chest.)* That is so not happening.

DOUG: But this is *swing* dancing.

GRACE: And I don't *swing* that way.

DOUG: Huh?

GRACE: Let's just do a nice two-step. *(DOUG grabs GRACE close for slow dancing. GRACE pushes him to arm's length.)* Better yet, how about a waltz.

DOUG: You can't waltz to a swing beat.

GRACE: Oh, I have a feeling I'll be waltzing around all night.

Focus shifts back to JANE and PERCY.

JANE: One, two, one-two—ouch!

PERCY: Look, Jane, can't we go do something else? I've got STDS9—

JANE: Stop right there. You've got an STD?

PERCY: STDS9. *(Blank look from JANE.)* Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. I've got all seven seasons on DVD.

JANE: Percy, I think it would be better if you had an STD.

PERCY: That's not funny.

JANE: You said you'd go dancing.

PERCY: To make you happy. No guy goes dancing just for the fun of it.

JANE: *(Points to DOUG.)* He seems to be having fun.

PERCY: *(Looks at DOUG who has just been pushed by GRACE.)* Not so much.

GRACE: And no way am I doing that, either!

JANE: *(Taps DOUG on shoulder.)* Excuse me.

DOUG: Yes?

JANE: Do you like to dance?

DOUG: Yes.

JANE: Then let's go.

JANE and DOUG dance together very well, leaving GRACE and PERCY in the cold. They stand shocked for a bit then look at each other. Then GRACE looks at JANE and DOUG again.

GRACE: Not bad.

PERCY: Excuse me?

GRACE: I've had worse break-ups. At least I didn't get the "It's not you; it's me" speech.

PERCY: Or, "You deserve someone better."

GRACE: Or, "I've decided to enter the priesthood."

PERCY: (*Awkward pause.*) The priesthood?

GRACE: You'd be surprised how often it happens. A girl could get a complex.

PERCY: Right.

GRACE: (*Looks at PERCY and laughs.*) So, wanna dance?

PERCY: No.

GRACE: Look, I just had a not-so-messy break-up. Do you really think I can handle more rejection tonight?

PERCY: Well ...

GRACE: You're not into incense and Latin, are you?

PERCY: No.

GRACE: Then let's dance.

PERCY: You deserve someone better.

GRACE: Excuse me?

PERCY: It's just when I dance, I hurt people.

GRACE: Oh. (*Thinks then stomps on PERCY's foot.*)

PERCY: Ow! What did you do that for?

GRACE: Now I'm up one. You can step on my foot any time, and you'll just break even. (*Grabs PERCY into dance position.*) Now, on the count of five.

THEY dance very clumsily but very enthusiastically, knocking JANE and DOUG offstage in the process. The music and lights fade as GRACE and PERCY dance back to their original positions on the bed. Lights return to full center stage.

PERCY: I thought I was a bad dancer. But then I met you. (*Looks at body in bed.*) You are the worst dancer ever created by God. By the end of the night, you were up seventeen toe stomps.

GRACE: Hey, like it's my fault you can't dance the five-step.

PERCY: I fell for you that night, especially when you tried to dip me. You were so alive. (*Looks at body.*) You were so alive.

GRACE: I'm still alive.

PERCY: I want to dance with you again, Grace.

GRACE: Watch your feet.

PERCY: Why am I even talking? This is stupid. (*As PERCY starts to exit, GRACE tries to stop him but has no effect. He exits.*)

GRACE: Percy, don't leave me...alone.

GRACE sits alone silently, long enough for the sound of the life support to get oppressive.

MARTHA: (*Enters.*) Was that your husband I saw in the hall? I've missed seeing him these last two weeks while I was on vacation.

GRACE: I missed seeing him, too.

MARTHA: (*Checking tubes and vitals again.*) Dr. Boatman is on his GI rounds, so I thought I'd stay and chat a bit. (*Bends over to shift the body's position in bed. MARTHA straightens up slowly and painfully.*) I had the talk with Mike last night.

GRACE: How did it go?

MARTHA: Mike said I work all the time, weird hours, and that even when I'm home, my head's still at the hospital. He wants me to quit.

GRACE: Martha, you can't—

MARTHA: That's when we fought. I'm needed here at the hospital. I'm doing good here.

GRACE: I need you.

MARTHA: But they keep loading up more patients on me, Grace. I don't have time to spend with any of them. The only reason I can—

BOATMAN: *(Enters.)* Nurse.

MARTHA: *(Startled.)* Doctor, I—

BOATMAN: Weren't you listening this morning?

MARTHA: Our patients need conversation.

BOATMAN: You're wasting your time and also neglecting our other patients. 1326 needs a new I.V.

BOATMAN exits.

MARTHA: *(Watches as BOATMAN exits then looks at GRACE.)* I'll check back later.

Exits. JOHN enters.

GRACE: Dad! Is it 10 o'clock already?

JOHN: *(Takes flowers from vase and throws them in the trash. He replaces them with wildflowers.)* How's my baby girl today?

GRACE: I'm blue.

JOHN: It might seem silly...*(Holds up book.)*...but I brought your favorite book from when you were a little girl.

GRACE: *The Stone Princess.* I remember.

JOHN: You had me read it again. And again. And again. I got really sick of this book.

GRACE: Read it again, Daddy.

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