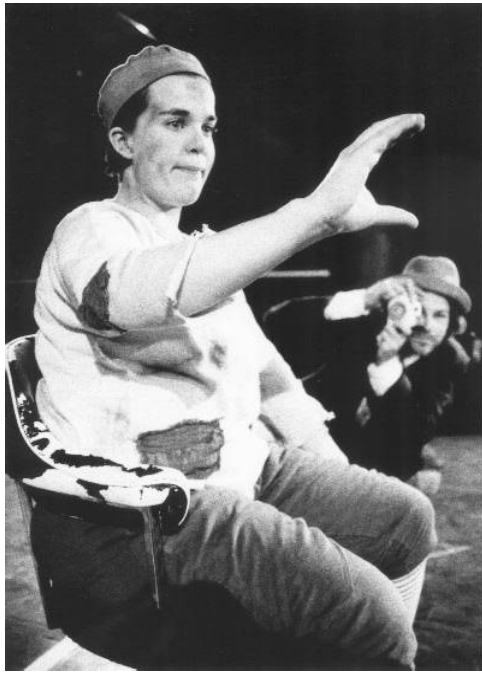


A LAND WITHOUT TREES
© Peter Papadopoulos
(SAMPLE)



"About this much."

Alissa Cooley pleads
her innocence in
Bedlam Theatre's
production of *A Land
Without Trees*.

KING

Trumpeter Matthew, your first witness.

(The screen above the architect clicks back on with close-up footage of the ARCHITECT on the stand. The TRUMPETER rises and begins to pace.)

TRUMPETER

State your name, please.

ARCHITECT

Harold.

TRUMPETER

(with great distaste)

Your full name, please.

ARCHITECT

Harold Wentworth.

TRUMPETER

Occupation?

ARCHITECT

Architect.

TRUMPETER

Do you think, Mr. Wentworth, that you could provide for the court a possible reason as to why rain leaked into Jester Jack Straw's cell?

ARCHITECT

Well...it could have happened for any number of reasons.

TRUMPETER

And what might those be?

ARCHITECT

It could have been due to the excessive rainfall we've had this year. Or perhaps it was as a result of a weakness in the bonding element we used to cement the prison stones together. But most likely it's due to the holes I punched in the roof.

TRUMPETER

I see.

(pause)

And were you, or were you not, hired some several years ago to build this kingdom a *prison*?

ARCHITECT

I was.

TRUMPETER

And did you successfully complete this *prison*?

ARCHITECT

Yes, I did.

TRUMPETER

And is this *prison* we have today?

ARCHITECT

(long tormented pause)

NO.

ALL
(shock and dismay)

Ohhh!

TRUMPETER
No? Then what is it we DO have? I mean, where do we keep our prisoners? Or, “in what,” should I say?

(pause)
Let’s cut straight to the point, shall we? You built a DUNGEON, didn’t you? After successfully completing the prison, you secretly converted it into a dungeon. Didn’t you?

ARCHITECT
(pause)

YES.

ALL
(shock and dismay)

Ohhh!

TRUMPETER
And it’s standard practice in the building of a dungeon to punch large holes in the roof, isn’t it?

ARCHITECT
Yes.

TRUMPETER
And so you did.

ARCHITECT
Yes.

TRUMPETER
So, while this kingdom entrusted you with the building of its new castle prison, you went off on your own, without your superior’s knowledge, I’m sure, and built a castle dungeon?

ARCHITECT
Yes.

TRUMPETER
And if I’m not mistaken, it costs a considerable amount of money to convert a prison into a dungeon. Is that correct?

ARCHITECT

Yes, that's correct.

TRUMPETER

And could you tell the court the reasons for the additional costs?

ARCHITECT

Well, for one, as we discussed a moment ago, there's the wrecking of the roof that needs to be done. As well, I removed some of the floor stones so that prisoners would twist their ankles in the dark. A few other things...Moving the fire far away from the cells and, of course, the buying of rats and snakes.

TRUMPETER

And how did you raise all the extra money needed for these "adjustments?"

(The ARCHITECT does not answer.)

Bear in mind that we have several witnesses whom we can call upon to testify against you if need be.

ARCHITECT

(pause)

Once the dungeon, or prison, or whatever the hell you want to call it, was open for prisoners, I began pilfering potato spuds from the mess pit and selling them to the Punics.

ALL

(shock and dismay)

Ohhh!

TRUMPETER

(throwing up his hands in mock exasperation)

NO FURTHER QUESTIONS, YOUR HIGHNESS.

KING

Your witness, defense.

(The TRUMPETER sits back down in the downstage left chair.
The CONSTABLE rises from his downstage right chair where he has been sitting.)

CONSTABLE

Mr. Wentworth. Why don't you tell the court a little bit about your childhood? About the tragic circumstances of your youth which led you to believe that this kingdom needed a dungeon rather than a prison.

TRUMPETER

(rising)

Objection, Your Highness! Relevance?

KING

Yes, Constable, what is the relevance of such a story?

CONSTABLE

The defense wishes to provide background information for the jury, in order that they might see exactly what circumstances led up to the construction of this dungeon.

KING

Objection overruled for the time being, but please show relevance, Constable.

CONSTABLE

Thank you.

(pause)

Now, Harold, why don't you please start by telling us a little bit about your parents?

ARCHITECT

I was born into a very poor peasant family. My father. A ditch digger. He died when I was only four...

ALL

(groan of sympathy)

Awww...

ARCHITECT

One day, while out working out alone in the fields, toiling for the success of this great country, he fell into the hole he was digging and was unable to get out. He suffered a slow starvation.

ALL

Awww...

TRUMPETER

And what about your mother?

ARCHITECT

My poor, poor mother. A collector of fish heads. She never even...

(The trial continues, but in mime. REPORTER ONE rises from the front of the audience. She holds a microphone.)

REPORTER ONE

Well, Peter, clearly we're seeing a desperate defense attorney. Constable George of Canterbury, fearful that a direct line of defense would not suffice in the matter of his client's wrongdoings, has—

ALL

(responding to ARCHITECT'S continued but silent story)

Awww...

REPORTER ONE

—opted to try to win the jury's sympathy with tales of horrible misfortune. These childhood experiences, argues the defense, made Harold Wentworth realize—

ALL

Awww...

REPORTER ONE

—the need for a strong kingdom which could defend its peasants from attack and plight, both from without and within. And part of a strong kingdom, says the defense, is a nasty, foul, dungeon, complete with leaky ceilings and dangerous vipers. That's all for now, Peter, and let's take you back to the trial.

ARCHITECT

(growing emotional)

...And while I may have been acting without the knowledge or consent of my King or his loyal peasants, I was only thinking of this noble country and our war against the Punics when I punched those holes in the ceiling and built that dungeon. I always told myself, by God, my parents were struck down in service to this glorious nation before they ever even had a chance to show their true love and proud allegiance, and so I vowed to devote my life to this cause. And the best way I knew how was to build DUNGEONS! Not PRISONS!!! DUNGEONS!!! DUNGEONS!!!

ALL

HURRAH!!!

(There is a great din of applause and everyone leaps to their feet and begins singing and swaying.)

ARE YOU WITH US
OR AGAINST US?
WE ARE MARCHING
TO THE SEA!

WE'RE UNITED
UNDEFEATED
WE ARE MARCHING
TO THE SEA!
THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

WITH MY BROTHERS
FROM SEA TO SEA WE WILL BE FREE!

ACROSS THE OCEAN
GOT A NOTION
ABOUT A LAND—

KING

(breaking off from singing and banging his gavel)

ALRIGHT NOW! ORDER!

(Everyone reluctantly stops and settles back down.)

CONSTABLE

No more questions, Your Highness.

KING

Has the jury reached its decision?

Yes, Your Majesty, we have.

And how do you find the defendant?

NOT GUILTY!

ALL

(great din of applause)

HURRAH!

(jumping to their feet)

ARE YOU WITH US
OR AGAINST US—

KING

(banging his gavel)

ORDER! I MUST HAVE ORDER IN THIS COURT!!!

(silence)

The defendant is free to go. Tomorrow we shall hear the trial of the prison fire boy. Until then, court dismissed.