

HERO'S CHANCE

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A Ten-Minute Play

by

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## Characters

DR. EILEEN HART: Psychologist, female, early 30s. Works for the government. Patriotic to a fault; believes wholeheartedly in the future she is helping to create.

MARA COHEN: Female, late 20s. A fugitive, recaptured. Holding on to her last strands of optimism. Has strong morals, and prioritizes her fiancée's safety above all. Has the power to predict probabilities.

## Scene

DR. HART's office, in the detention center where MARA is held. Possibly in Washington, D.C.

## Time

Near the end of the twenty-first century. Two years after the American Hero Initiative first opened its doors to the public.

SETTING: DR. HART's office. A desk with books and papers on it in organized stacks, a NEWSPAPER prominent, a small American flag and perhaps a vase with a fake flower or a picture of a family member as decoration. A desk chair, facing away from the desk. Another chair, not as comfortable as it looks, facing the desk chair.

AT RISE: DR. HART sits in the desk chair, a clipboard and pen in her lap. She faces MARA, sitting in the opposite chair. MARA is very still, her eyes on the floor.

DR. HART

I'd like to talk about something you said in our last session, just before you went back to your room.

(waits for a verbal or physical response from MARA. Neither appears)

I asked you if you could see yourself ever rejoining the Hero Initiative.

(referring to her clipboard)

Your response, if I remember the exact phrasing, was that there was "such a small likelihood of that ever occurring that any chance I can see isn't worth thinking about." Could you explain why you believe that?

MARA

(flat voice)

I know.

DR. HART

Excuse me?

MARA

I don't believe. I know. There is next to no chance of me ever becoming one of the government's heroes again.

DR. HART

It sounds like you think you have no chance of redemption.

MARA

There's always a chance. But if it were offered to me, if your boss decided to give me a name and a cape, I'd refuse.

DR. HART

I find that hard to believe.

MARA

It isn't a matter of belief, Dr. Hart.

DR. HART

That may be. But two years ago, your answer to that same question was very different.

(tapping the clipboard)

According to your records, you were one of the first to sign up for the American Hero Initiative when it opened to the public. You and your fiancée, Gal Peretz. The two of you even postponed your wedding when you learned it would conflict with the administration of the serum. I would call that dedication, even devotion to national security.

MARA

That was then.

DR. HART

What changed?

(MARA gives her nothing)

Mara, I'm trying to understand you.

(again, MARA gives her nothing)

Six months after you eagerly received the serum, you and four other Initiative members made an unauthorized departure from the training center. Instead of continuing on to become heroes, defenders of the American people, you chose to become fugitives. The five of you created a threat to national security. A rebellion. And it's my understanding that you were the leader of this rebellion.

MARA

(trying hard to remain stoic)

You understand nothing.

DR. HART

(pressing)

It is also my understanding that you left your fiancée behind when you fled. Was she always more patriotic than you? Do you ever feel guilty for leaving her?

MARA

(finally bursts, making eye contact with DR.  
HART for the first time)  
How dare you try to use Gal against me!

DR. HART

Miss Cohen--

MARA

Haven't you people used her enough already? You dropped her  
in a sewer! Her gills were so clogged with slime when she  
found me-- If I hadn't turned myself in, she'd be dead, so  
don't you dare try to tell me how I feel!

(long silence, long eye contact, neither side  
visibly gives)

DR. HART

(cautiously)

...then why don't you tell me how you feel?

MARA

Because there's only a tiny chance it'll make a difference.

DR. HART

I'm curious why you keep referring to things in terms of  
chance.

MARA

Don't my records tell you what the serum did to me?

DR. HART

(referring to the clipboard)

I admit, on that point your records are vague. Your  
trainers made allusions to mild precognition and telepathy.

MARA

Hm. Well they're wrong.

(mentally wrestles with herself for a long  
beat. DR. HART allows the silence)

We didn't think I'd changed at all. Not at first. With Gal  
it was obvious; she had her gills and fins by the end of  
the day. But I'd been here a week, and there was nothing.  
So they took me to a room. The room. Big and white, nothing  
in it but a wall stretching almost to the ceiling, and a  
door. A door in the wall. And they told me they wouldn't  
let me out of that room until I got to the other side of  
that wall. Do they have that in my records?

DR. HART

The Initiative training procedures are confidential.

MARA

I thought so. So I was in the room, and I looked at the door, and I looked at the wall, and I said--I couldn't see them anymore, but I knew they were watching, and listening--and I said, "Would you just let me out of here please?" They didn't answer. So I kept talking. I told them the door was never going to open. I could try to break it down, but it'd take so much force that there was a bigger chance that my arms would break. I could try to climb the wall, but it was too smooth, and there was no chance my hands were going to become sticky or clawed. I could try to squeeze through the crack under the door, but I'd never get thin enough, and it would take days to work away at the crack to make it big enough for me to wiggle through, and I'd die of dehydration first because there was no chance of them giving me water. I told them, if they left me in there, the most likely thing of all was that I'd go insane, but there was a chance, a tiny chance, that if I asked them to let me out, and I explained myself, then they would...

DR. HART

And did they?

MARA

No. They asked me to call heads or tails on a coin. I said it should be fifty-fifty, but in this case it wasn't because the coin had two heads. *Then* they let me out.

DR. HART

Do you really believe that they would have left you in that room until you went insane?

MARA

It isn't a matter of belief, Dr. Hart. When it comes to God, I believe. When it comes to chances, I know.

DR. HART

So your superpower is detecting probability.

MARA

Basically.

DR. HART

And how accurate is this power?

MARA

Accurate enough. It's hard to sort through all the possibilities sometimes. When it comes to random behaviors, I can't make any confident predictions at all. Determined people, people who are sure of themselves, are easier to predict. But it's also harder to change their minds.

DR. HART

So you could use your abilities to, for instance, predict the likelihood of a terrorist attack in a certain city.

MARA

If it's premeditated.

DR. HART

Mara, do you realize how useful your superpower could be to the United States government? The founding vision of the American Hero Initiative was as an antiterrorist organization. You would be invaluable to our mission.

MARA

I know.

DR. HART

Then why did you run away?

MARA

I had to go, before they used me. Before... There's a difference between being useful to the government and doing good for the people.

DR. HART

And you don't think you'd be doing good for the people as one of the government's superheroes?

MARA

I know I wouldn't. Most likely.

(DR. HART takes the NEWSPAPER from her desk and passes it to MARA)

DR. HART

Mara, the American Hero Initiative is doing the American people a world of good. Every day, our superheroes solve problems and prevent tragedies.

(indicates the newspaper)

Just yesterday, Alex Ramirez, codename Giganticus, used the strength and height the serum gave him to stop a building in downtown Chicago from falling over. He saved thousands of lives.

MARA

(looking at the paper's front page)

Who knocked it over?

DR. HART

Excuse me?

MARA

The building. Who knocked it over? The article doesn't say.

(long pause. A power shift in the room. DR. HART tries to maintain control)

DR. HART

It must have been structural wear and tear. I'm sure there will be an investigation, and--

MARA

(tossing the newspaper aside. Confident)

Dr. Hart, do you know that I don't exist?

DR. HART

(honestly confused)

I don't know what you mean.

MARA

Neither did I, until I met Xinping. Li Xinping.

(indicates DR. HART's clipboard)

She's on there as one of my fellow "rebels", right?

DR. HART

Yes...

MARA

She had a twin sister. Xifeng. They joined the Initiative together. Xifeng got her name and cape pretty quickly, but Xinping? They had trouble with her. Something about her attitude; she had the claws and fur of a cat, and they thought the serum had given her the temperament, too. She's really a sweetheart, if you talk to her, but... Anyway, she was still in the training center when I got there. We went

through some tests together. And then we saw her sister on TV. Greenhawk, they called her. Not a very creative name, but then neither is Giganticus. And the interviewer was asking her about her past. About her family. About her sister Xiping, who had tragically died in a terrorist attack, and whose death was her motivation for taking the serum. That was the official story. Xiping was sitting there right next to me, but to the world, she didn't exist.

DR. HART

There must have been a mistake. The media is sensational.

MARA

(gaining momentum)

Not a mistake. A recruitment drive. They were using the story, the inspirational origin story of an American superhero, to convince more people to sign up for the Hero Initiative. And that's when I knew, and Xiping, and the rest of us--we knew that if it benefitted the Initiative to say that we didn't exist, then we didn't exist. If it made for a better story, we didn't exist. If we didn't do exactly what they wanted, then we didn't exist. I didn't have to look at the chances to know how little we each mattered to the nation.

DR. HART

That's not fair, of course you matter.

MARA

Do we? Even as a threat to national security? You say that's what we were, Dr. Hart, but the whole time I've been on the run, the newspapers never mentioned five superheroes walking out on the program. If we mattered, if we were a threat, then why wouldn't they alert the public?

DR. HART

I'm sure no one wanted to create a panic.

MARA

When a regular criminal is at large, every news channel in the nation shows their face front and center. This wasn't about a panic. It was about preserving a story. As far as the American people know, no one has ever dropped out of the Hero Initiative. It has never mistreated anyone. It has never failed. The people are told over and over that the American Hero Initiative solves problems and prevents tragedies. But what they aren't told is that the problems

it solves and the tragedies it prevents, more often than not, were caused by the Initiative itself. There isn't the slightest chance that that building Giganticus saved fell over on its own accord!

DR. HART

These accusations are-- Miss Cohen, what you're saying is positively outrageous!

MARA

But there's a chance--a tiny chance--that if I tell you this, you'll believe me.

DR. HART

I thought you said it wasn't a matter of belief.

MARA

For me, it isn't. I live it. I know how it is. But for you? I'm telling you that the greatest enemy to the American people is other Americans who claim to be doing it good. I have nothing you would take as proof, only my word. And accepting my word would go against everything you believe. Everything you've worked for. But I swear to God that every word I've said is true.

DR. HART

...I think it's time for you to return to your room.

(she starts to stand, but MARA stands more quickly)

MARA

Don't call the guards, I can walk out the door myself.

(she starts to walk off, but stops and turns to face DR. HART again)

Dr. Hart, what's the longest you've been away from someone you loved?

DR. HART

I'm not sure that's any of your business.

MARA

No, probably not.

(beat)

I didn't want to leave Gal behind. I really didn't. But she couldn't run away with us. She can't breathe air anymore; she has to stay in her tank. I couldn't even tell her why I

was leaving. But there was a chance she'd understand, that she'd think I'd done the right thing... And I took that chance. I can't always tell when tiny chances are worth it. And maybe taking this chance with you won't make a difference. But with Gal, in that case, I think I was right to take that chance.

DR. HART

How could you know?

MARA

Because she Hero Initiative still hasn't introduced the public to "The Incredible Fish Girl." She hasn't accepted her name and cape yet either, has she?

(MARA exits. DR. HART stares after her for a few moments. Then she stands, goes to pick up the newspaper)

DR. HART

(sings softly to herself)

"My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of... liberty..."

(she looks at the newspaper. Looks at MARA's now-empty chair)

...and justice for all... For all.

(looks in the direction MARA exited)

It isn't a matter of belief.

END OF PLAY