

January 2017

Head in the Game: A One-Act Play

Carolyn Gage

Independent Playwright, Performer, and Activist, carolyn@carolyngage.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity>

 Part of the [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gage, Carolyn (2017) "Head in the Game: A One-Act Play," *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 4.

DOI: 10.23860/dignity.2017.02.01.04

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol2/iss1/4><http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol2/iss1/4>

This Research and Scholarly Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

Head in the Game: A One-Act Play

Abstract

Head in the Game is a fifteen-minute, five-character, easy-to-stage-anywhere play that brings audiences into the world of male "pay-to-play" abuse of women, through a fantasy scenario of "boxing girls," women whom men pay to batter. The world of the boxing girls is an apt analogy for prostitution. The play uncompromisingly brings home the point that paying to use someone for sexual gratification is no more "sex" than paying to punch someone is boxing.

Keywords

prostitution, drama, play, violence, theory

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Snowlion Repertory Theatre of Portland, Maine for their help in workshoping this play, and my gratitude to Rachel Moran who inspired the play, and also to Donna Hughes for her support and her activism. Special thanks to Dr. Morgne Cramer, University of Connecticut--Stamford, for her help with revisions. With the permission of the reviewers and the author, Dignity thanks the following reviewers for their time and expertise: Susan Hawthorne, PhD, adjunct professor, writing program, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia; Judith Swift, professor of theatre/communication studies, University of Rhode Island, and freelance professional theatre director, Rhode Island, USA; Elda Dawber, author and Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, Rhode Island, USA; Evelina Giobbe, founder (1985), WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), Minnesota, USA; and Kim Sykes, actor, writer, director, and member of the Actors Center Workshop Company, the Artist Workshop (WAW), and Plays in Progress (PIP) in New York, USA.

HEAD IN THE GAME: A ONE-ACT PLAY¹

Carolyn Gage

Independent Playwright, Performer, and Activist

This play is dedicated to Rachel Moran.

KEYWORDS

Prostitution, drama, play, violence, trauma, theory

ABSTRACT

Head in the Game is a fifteen-minute, five-character, easy-to-stage-anywhere play that brings audiences into the world of male "pay-to-play" abuse of women, through a fantasy scenario of "boxing girls," women whom men pay to batter. The world of the boxing girls is an apt analogy for prostitution. The play uncompromisingly brings home the point that paying to use someone for sexual gratification is no more "sex" than paying to punch someone is boxing.

THE PLAY OPENS OUTSIDE the Boxing Girls Gym. In the Boxing Girls Gym, clients (nearly all male) pay by the hour to "spar" with the women who work there, the "boxing girls." In this form of "boxing," the boxing girls are not allowed to hit back or defend themselves. The client pays to "win." In the eyes of the law, the activity is recreational and considered just another form of boxing.

In the play, a reporter and her intern, both women, are infiltrating a Boxing Girls Gym to do a story for *Gentlemen Magazine*. While they are there, a policeman shows up to investigate a report of a man beating up a woman. When he realizes where he is, he stops asking questions. The victim of the beating appears, begging for protection. The owner of the gym, showing more concern for the client's interrupted service, sends another "boxing girl" to finish "sparring."

The head of the gym sends the policeman off with a stack of Boxing Girls business cards, and she counsels the victim not to pursue the matter. She reminds the boxing girl that she has a daughter at home she can barely support, offers her drugs, and sends her to the Makeup Room to prepare for another "round."

¹ All rights for professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. All inquiries concerning professional and amateur performance rights should be addressed to the author via her website at <http://carolynage.weebly.com/>

Meanwhile, the intern has become increasingly upset by what she sees as blatant violence against women. Her attempt to rescue the victim ends with a nasty twist.

5 women, 20-35
1 male
Single set (first scene can be done on apron)
20 minutes

Introduction to *Head in the Game*

Head in the Game is activist theatre, written for performance by political activists—specifically abolitionist activists, who cannot be assumed to have prior experience or background in theatre, or access to resources. Because of this, the play contains minimal set requirements and detailed stage directions.

The play runs a little over fifteen minutes. It was written with university classroom and conference workshop timelines in mind. The short duration of the play allows forty minutes of post-show discussion in academic venues. It was intended to “get in and get out” quickly, to deliver a sharp, one-two punch to liberal feminist complacency about the violence of prostitution, leaving the audience to sort the fallout.

In a six-character play of fifteen minutes’ duration, there are obviously many dynamics that remain unexplored. Some might argue that the major action of the play occurs offstage and that the absence of the john weakens the play. The focus of the play, however, is not on the perpetration. I am interested in the framing of prostitution, and in the ways that cultural institutions (media, law enforcement, businesses) legitimize and enable the commodification of women’s bodies. Graphic depictions of violence in live theatre can desensitize or traumatize audience members, shutting down dialogue instead of provoking it. The perpetrator and his twisted desires may be sensational, but they are not as dramatically compelling as the arcs of the passive witnesses.

I have lived among and worked on the street with heroin addicts and prostituted women. I have been engaged in the cat-and-mouse games between police and marginalized communities, and it was my intention to depict a member of the police force whose choices reflect the historical reality that police do not take seriously reports of rape by women who are prostituted. As the Black Lives Matter videos have so graphically demonstrated, police protocols that audiences may have learned from watching “cop shows” are frequently bypassed in encounters with those whom the police consider to be members of a disenfranchised underclass.

This play was inspired by an interview I saw on the Internet with the author Rachel Moran, a brilliantly eloquent anti-prostitution (“abolitionist”) activist who was prostituted for seven years, from age fifteen to twenty-two. Here is the excerpt that inspired this play:

Interviewer: You describe it [prostitution] as a form of sexual abuse. Tell me why.

Rachel Moran: Because unwanted sex is unwanted sex...

Interviewer: Even if you’re being paid for it.

Rachel Moran: Oh, yes. Money doesn’t have any kind of magical quality that can remove the feelings that you feel in yourself when you’re having unwanted sex... and I always make the comparison if I was to hand

somebody twenty quid and give them a smack in the mouth, that wouldn't do anything to take the sting out the slap, you know.

Interviewer: And I suppose some people might say, "Well, there is a difference there in that a woman might offer herself for paid sex rather than offer herself for a slap in the mouth." You know... is there another side to that argument at all, in your mind, Rachel?

Rachel Moran: Well, no, because—the funny part about it is receiving violence for money is part of prostitution. There's plenty of men out there who'd pay you to do exactly that.²

This analogy struck me as helpful, and I decided to build a one-act around the conceit of males buying access to women's bodies for "boxing." Obviously, what is going on is *not* boxing. Just because the male is throwing punches as if *he* were boxing, the lack of freedom or reciprocity on the part of the "sparring partner" make it clear that she is in no way a partner, in no way boxing, in no way recreating—and that what is actually going on is paid abuse.

Only in a patriarchal culture would the activity resulting from paid access to a woman's body be given the same name as an intimacy that is mutually welcomed and mutually reciprocated. Even outside of prostitution, "sex" has traditionally been defined by men, from their perspective, and serving their interests. This is evident from the continued use of the word "foreplay" to describe activities that are overwhelmingly main events with regard to women's arousal and orgasm. The myth of the vaginal orgasm still holds sway in a popular culture that routinely misapplies the word "vagina" to refer to the "vulva"—in effect, performing a linguistic clitorrectomy. For millions of women, clitorrectomy is literal. I want my audiences to consider why they would characterize prostitution as the selling of "sex," when only one person is enjoying it.

Multiple studies document the high level of sexual violence experienced by prostituted women, as well as the frequent bias against them on the part of judges, police, and juries. There is also documentation of prostituted women being arrested when they report violence, as well as cases where victims were threatened with arrest or rape when reporting.

In the eyes of the law, the john has purchased sexual access to the woman's body, and the courts are more likely to view cases of rape as contractual disputes than criminal assault. I was interested in putting the reality of this dynamic on the stage with the policeman's aborted intervention.

I also wanted to explore the circumstances of the women involved in a paid-abuse industry. The gym owner in my play sees herself as looking out for the interests of her "boxing girls." And, arguably, that she is doing just that.

Through a lethal combination of poverty, child sexual abuse, cultural brainwashing, and addiction, women can "choose" to become boxing girls. What would it take to create a society where women would never "choose" to be prostituted? The sad answer is the complete dismantling of patriarchy—a task not likely to be achieved in a century or even several.

² Moran, Rachel. (2013, April 16). Interview with Keelin Shanley on RTE Morning Edition. Available at YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qtLyFLZ8DU>.

On the other hand, great inroads can be made toward the abolition of prostitution, even in a world filled with patriarchal institutions and oppressions. The Nordic model, where it is illegal to buy a woman's body for sex but not illegal for a woman to sell it, has shifted the focus from viewing prostitution as a form of moral deviancy to the framing of it as an issue of social inequality. In the countries where this model has been implemented, there has been a significant reduction of prostitution and trafficking, and the fear that this would result in an escalation of male violence against women has not been realized.

The key to abolition is understanding prostitution as paid abuse—as paid rape. *Head in the Game* is my attempt to catalyze the dialogues that lead to changed attitudes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SARAH: Young woman, college student, 20's, interning on the side. Working-class background.

KAI: Young professional, early 30's. Career journalist. Middle-class.

POLICEMAN: Male, any age.

HARLEY: Young woman, same age as KAI. Aggressive, entrepreneurial.

CONNIE: Young woman, 20's. Poor, single mom.

MARISA: Young woman, late teens or early 20's.

SCENE

Sidewalk and interior of Boxing Girls Gym.

TIME

The present

HEAD IN THE GAME

SCENE 1

Lights come up on the sidewalk outside the entrance to Boxing Girls Gym, a new establishment in an urban area. SARAH and KAI are talking. SARAH is in her mid-to-late 20's. She's a college student from a working-class background and part-time intern at Gentlemen's Magazine. KAI, early 30's, works full-time for the magazine. Raised middle-class, she is very much the young professional on her way up.

SARAH: *(Looking at the sign.)* So this is it...

KAI: Yep. *(Reading.)* "Boxing Girls Gym."

SARAH: Do you think they'll believe us?

KAI: Why wouldn't they?

SARAH: Because I've never been undercover before.

KAI: (*Annoyed.*) We're not "undercover."

SARAH: But you said we weren't going to tell them we're from *Gentlemen Magazine*... that you didn't want them to know we were journalists and that we were going to pretend that we were there because we wanted to be boxing girls.

KAI: First off, only *one* of us is a professional journalist... (*Patronizing smile.*) You're an *intern*—

SARAH: But what if they find out we're spying on them, and they beat us up?

KAI: Why would they do that?

SARAH: Because that's what they do, isn't it? (*KAI looks at her.*) The "boxing girls....?" (*Pause.*) Hello...? The men come in and beat them up.

KAI: (*Shaking her head.*) That is *not* what they do at all. The men come in and *pay* to *spar* with the girls. They pay for a sparring partner's *time*. It's a gym. There's a ring. It's *boxing*. That's why they call them "boxing girls."

SARAH: But the boxing girls aren't allowed to punch back or defend themselves—

KAI: (*Exasperated with SARAH's slowness.*) They're paid to let the men win.

SARAH: They're paid to get *beat up*.

KAI: And football players are paid to get concussions. You can look at it that way if you want to, but it's a sport.

SARAH: But in football, the whole point of the game isn't the—

KAI: They get *paid*. They're not victims. It's a job, a career. No, it's not for everyone, but then again... (*Pointedly.*) ... neither is journalism.

SARAH: I'm just trying to understand... If it's so legitimate, then why aren't we going to tell them we're from *Gentlemen Magazine*?

KAI: Because most people get nervous talking to journalists. We can get a better view of their operation if they treat us like insiders.

SARAH: My name is going to be "Jean."

KAI: We don't need fake names. They aren't going to know who we are anyway.

SARAH: (*Getting into it.*) I always wanted to be "Jean." I look kind of like a "Jean," don't I?

KAI: (*Shaking her head.*) I have to file the story tonight. Come on...

SARAH: (*Prompting her.*) "Jean."

KAI: (*Rolling her eyes.*) C'mon, "Jean." (*SARAH beams. They exit into the gym, SARAH doing her "Jean" strut.*)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

Lights come up on the lobby of the Boxing Girls Gym. There is a front desk and a row of chairs. MARISA, a nervous young woman in her early 20's or late teens, is sitting in one of the chairs. She wears boxing attire, but otherwise in no way looks athletic. HARLEY, a woman in her 30's, owns the franchise. She stands behind a large counter. She is busy with bookkeeping. Behind her is a row of keys to the different sparring rooms. KAI enters, with SARAH following. KAI steps up to the desk. HARLEY doesn't look up.

KAI: Hello...?

HARLEY: *(Looking up, she checks out KAI and SARAH.)* Yeah?

KAI: We're here to box...

HARLEY: *(Looking down at her books again.)* That's \$100 an hour, and I need to have the cash up front.

SARAH: What?

HARLEY: \$100 for an hour of sparring. Apiece.

KAI: No... We're not here to *hire* a boxing girl. We want to apply.

SARAH: *(To KAI.)* Wait... You mean *women* come in here too... to—

KAI: *(Cutting her off.)* To box. Of course. Why wouldn't they? Boxing is an equal opportunity sport.

SARAH: I just thought—

KAI: *(To HARLEY.)* Do we have to fill out something...? A job application...?

HARLEY: *(Suspicious.)* Where did you hear about us?

SARAH: *(Quickly.)* At the university. Some of the girls in my dorm were boxing girls over the summer.

HARLEY: *(Eying her.)* You're a student?

SARAH: Yes.

HARLEY: *(Nodding, turning to KAI.)* What about you?

KAI: Oh, single mom. You probably see a lot of us.

HARLEY: Not usually in designer clothes. *(SARAH looks anxiously over at KAI.)*

KAI: I have expensive tastes. Here to support my habit. *(She attempts to stare down HARLEY. HARLEY doesn't respond.)*

SARAH: But *I* really *am* a student. *(KAI gives her the side eye. HARLEY looks at the two of them.)*

HARLEY: Any prior experience?

SARAH: Not boxing, but I took some self-defense classes. *(HARLEY stares at her.)*

KIA: *(To SARAH, between her teeth.)* Relevant to the job.

SARAH: Battered women's shelter...?

HARLEY: (*Exasperated.*) Massage parlor. Escort service. Exotic dancing.

SARAH: Oh... Then I guess not. (*HARLEY turns to KAI.*)

KAI: Waitress at a strip club.

HARLEY: You can both intern. Unpaid. And you gotta sign a waiver.

SARAH: Is that legal?

HARLEY: (*To KAI.*) Take it or leave it.

KAI: We're in. (*HARLEY slides some papers toward her.*)

SARAH: What's the waiver for?

KAI: (*To SARAH, exasperated.*) Oh, for god's sake, Sarah! It's a *gym waiver*—

SARAH: (*Correcting her.*) "Jean."

KAI: Sarah-Jean. You have to sign them for any gym. You have to sign them for yoga classes...

SARAH: (*To HARLEY, with a little swagger.*) My friends call me "Jean."

HARLEY: (*Not impressed.*) Well, "Jean," sign here.

SARAH: (*Holding up a finger, she begins to read:*) "I hereby agree to assume all risks attendant upon myself while participating in this gym. As a result of my participation on the Boxing Girls Gym, LLC, I hereby waive, release, and discharge any and all claims for personal injury, or property damage which I may have, or which may hereafter accrue to me, or death... (*She looks up.*) "Death...?" (*Suddenly the door swings open and the POLICEMAN barges in. He turns initially to KAI and SARAH.*)

HARLEY: (*Behind the desk.*) May I help you?

POLICEMAN: (*Turning to HARLEY.*) Police... (*Flashing a badge, he speaks aggressively.*) We got a call from a woman saying she was getting beat up... that some guy was trying to kill her...? Know anything about that? (*SARAH nudges KAI, who moves away from her. He sees this and approaches SARAH.*) You... what's your name?

SARAH: (*With pride.*) Jean.

HARLEY: (*To POLICEMAN.*) Excuse me. Do you know where you are?

POLICEMAN: (*Whirling around.*) And who are you?

HARLEY: Harley Dolan. I'm the owner.

POLICEMAN: The owner of what?

HARLEY: The gym. This is a Boxing Girls Gym. (*She waits for him to get it.*)

POLICEMAN: "Boxing girls...?" (*HARLEY smiles and nods.*) Oh.... oh, boxing girls! Well, why didn't you say so...? (*Nodding.*)

HARLEY: You've heard of us?

POLICEMAN: Oh, yeah, the guys down at the station come over here all the time after their shifts. You know... work off a little steam...

HARLEY: Maybe you'd like a tour...?

SARAH: Wait... what about— *(Just then a boxing girl runs in. This is CONNIE. She's in her 20's, and her face is badly flushed and swollen.)*

CONNIE: Help...! Oh, my god. Thank god you're here... Help me! *(She clutches the POLICEMAN's arm, and begins sobbing hysterically.)*

POLICEMAN: *(Uncomfortable, he turns to HARLEY.)* I thought you said this was... what you call it...?

HARLEY: *(Smiling indulgently.)* Boxing Girls. It is. We're a legitimate gym. I can show you our license.

CONNIE: *(Focused on the POLICEMAN.)* He said he was going to kill me... He just kept hitting me—

POLICEMAN: *(Confused and suspicious.)* This don't look legitimate to me...

HARLEY: Just let me deal with it... *(She crosses to CONNIE and gently pulls her off the POLICEMAN's arm. She speaks slowly and directly to her, as if to a child.)* Connie, where is your client?

CONNIE: *(Confused.)* Whaaa..?

HARLEY: *(Reaching up to hold her face. CONNIE flinches with pain and a trauma response.)* Your client. The man who was sparring with you... I need you to tell me. Where is he?

CONNIE: *(Confused.)* "Sparring...?"

HARLEY: Connie, we need to know where he is.

CONNIE: I don't know.

HARLEY: Was he still in the gym, when you left?

CONNIE: Yes.

HARLEY: *(Turning to MARISA.)* Marisa!

MARISA: *(Jumping.)* What?

HARLEY: Marisa, I need you to go Gym 4, immediately.

MARISA: But—

HARLEY: Gym 4. And tell the client that you are tagging in for Connie... *(MARISA gets up.)* ... and that we apologize for the interruption of service.

CONNIE: *(Grabbing MARISA.)* No! He's going to kill you! *(To the POLICEMAN.)* You don't understand! He's going to kill her!

HARLEY: *(Pulling CONNIE off MARISA, HARLEY stands between her and MARISA.)* Connie, let go. *(To MARISA.)* Did you hear me? *(HARLEY checks her watch.)* And I'll pay you the full fee, even though it's only half a round. Go! *(MARISA hesitates.)* GO! *(MARISA exits.)*

CONNIE: *(Struggling to get away from HARLEY to stop her.)* No! Marisa...!

HARLEY: *(Grabbing her again.)* Connie, stop it!

CONNIE: *(Turning in anguish to the POLICEMAN.)* He had his hands around my neck... Look...

HARLEY: *(To the POLICEMAN.)* That's not possible. We make all our clients wear protection.

POLICEMAN: Now, when you say “protection...?”

HARLEY: (*Exasperated.*) Gloves. Boxing gloves. We don’t want anyone to get hurt. He couldn’t have put his fingers around her neck, because of the gloves.

CONNIE: He took them off.

HARLEY: Now, why would he do that? He knows that’s not allowed.

CONNIE: He said he wanted to feel it. (*Pointing again to her neck.*) See...? He had his fingers around my neck, and he kept squeezing tighter and tighter... and I told him to stop, that I couldn’t breathe, and he laughed said that was the point—

HARLEY: (*Cutting in.*) Connie, did you hurt him?

CONNIE: What?

HARLEY: When you thought he had his hands around your neck, did you kick him... or claw him...?

CONNIE: I tried to pull his fingers away—

HARLEY: You didn’t attack him in any way? (*A long silence. CONNIE is finally understanding.*)

CONNIE: No.

HARLEY: Good. (*She turns to the officer and shrugs.*) Nothing to report.

POLICEMAN: (*Suspicious, to CONNIE.*) If you didn’t attack him, then how did you manage to call us and get away?

CONNIE: He was out of breath from punching me—

HARLEY: Connie, “sparring.” You were his *legal* sparring partner.

CONNIE: (*A beat.*) ... and his face was all red, and he started to take off his gloves, so then I knew he was going to do something worse than punching... so while he was doing that, I was able to crawl under the ropes and get my phone, but while I was doing that, he got them off, and he came up behind me and grabbed me by the neck... (*Pointing again to the bruises.*) See...?

HARLEY: What did you do?

CONNIE: I pretended to pass out, and he dropped me to the floor, so I ran to the other side of the ring... So, now he was between me and the door, so we just stood there, because he knew if he came after me, I’d make it to the door before he did. So, we were like that for a long time, and then I pretended like I was starting to faint, so then he came after me, but I ran around the other side of the ring and got to the door, and then I locked it.

HARLEY: (*Shocked.*) You locked it? (*CONNIE just stares at her.*) You locked the client in the gym? (*She shakes her head and turns to the POLICEMAN.*) Well, I suppose he has a claim for unlawful restraint if he wants to make it, but since Marisa hasn’t come back, I think the most likely scenario is that he is finishing his round with her. But if you need to go talk to him— (*Just then the POLICEMAN’s beeper goes off. He takes the call.*)

POLICEMAN: Yeah... (*Pause.*) Yeah... (*Pause.*) Where? (*Pause.*) Okay. (*Pause.*) Yeah. (*Pause.*) No... false alarm. I’m on my way. (*Hanging up, he turns to HARLEY.*) I got another call. I’ll take a raincheck on that tour.

HARLEY: Okay. (*He turns to go.*) Oh! Here's a card. Just call any time, and I can set up an appointment.

POLICEMAN: (*He takes it and looks at it.*) You got some more of these?

HARLEY: Sure... a whole stack. (*Handing them to him.*)

POLICEMAN: I'll pass 'em out at the station. (*Putting them in his pocket.*) Okay then... (*Turning somewhat awkwardly to CONNIE.*) Take care... (*He exits.*)

SARAH: Wait! What—

KAI: Hey... (*Holding SARAH's arm.*) Remember why we're here... Jean.

SARAH: But this woman almost got killed!

KAI: And Harley is dealing with it. Let the woman do her job. And you do yours. (*Still holding SARAH's arm.*)

HARLEY: Connie... (*CONNIE has slumped into one of the chairs, holding her head. HARLEY sits next to her.*) Connie, look...

CONNIE: I guess I'll go home...

HARLEY: You don't need to do that. (*CONNIE shakes her head.*) Hang on... (*HARLEY crosses behind the counter and comes back with a jar of pills and a bottle of water.*) Here... Take these... (*CONNIE holds out her hand. HARLEY counts out a specific number and opens the water bottle for CONNIE.*) Look, it's the end of the month, right? (*CONNIE takes the pills.*) Okay, rent's next week... right? (*CONNIE nods.*) And you've got a kid... a little girl...? (*CONNIE nods again.*) So, it's not just you... (*She waits for CONNIE to nod. A long wait.*) You don't want to lose your kid, do you? *I don't want to see that happen.* (*Silence.*) Connie, honey—You've got to get your priorities straight... right? If you go home now, I can't pay you for today. I had to give the whole fee to Marisa to cover for you, remember? (*CONNIE's head falls down in her hands again.*) No, but listen... Here's what I can do. Elaine has a client tonight, and he's out-of-shape, not much of a boxer. Easy sparring. I'll see if she'll trade off with you, and you can give her one of your clients later. That way you can get your rent money. (*An arm around CONNIE.*) Honey, you have to get your head back in the game. (*Pause.*) Tell you what... take some time out... Go to the Makeup Room and fix your face. That always makes a girl feel better... Hey, try out the new massage chair I bought for you girls... Maybe take a little nap. Elaine's client won't be here until after six. By then, you'll be all fresh and ready to go again. How's that? (*Silence.*) That's the best we can do. (*CONNIE nods.*) More pills? (*CONNIE shakes her head.*) Atta girl. You got this. (*She exits.*)

SARAH: That's it? (*HARLEY, who has gone to put the pills back behind the counter, turns.*) That's it? That's all you're going to do?

HARLEY: What would you suggest?

SARAH: (*Extremely upset.*) She's just had the shit beat out of her and escaped an attempted murder... and he's got another victim in there, and you just let the police walk of here—

KAI: Jean—

SARAH: "Sarah." My name is "Sarah." And her name is "Kai," and we're doing a story for a magazine.

HARLEY: *What* magazine?

SARAH: It doesn't matter—

HARLEY: *(To KAI.)* WHAT magazine?

KAI: *Gentlemen.*

HARLEY: *(Relieved.)* Oh, yeah. They're okay.

SARAH: If you're not going to do anything, I will—

HARLEY: What? What are you going to do, tough girl? Pay her rent for her? Get her a job at Burger King, so she can dump her toddler in daycare for forty hours a week and still not afford groceries? She makes good money here. And that's her choice. She makes enough money where she only has to work a few hours a day. She can spend the rest of her time with her kid. Yeah, some days are harder than others, and this was one of them. Part of what she signed on for.

SARAH: Shut up! Shut up! This is bullshit, and you know it!

HARLEY: I know a lot of women have it worse, every day, and they don't get paid at all. *(A beat.)* I used to be a boxing girl. I know what it's like. That's why I bought me a franchise. Do things a little different. The makeup room, the massage chair. I give 'em the pills, so they don't get hooked... My girls *trust* me.

SARAH: It's criminal assault! Did you see her face? Just because someone pays to hit her, doesn't mean she's not going to feel it, not going to bruise, not going to have a black eye, not going to have her jaw dislocated!

HARLEY: Boxing. It can be a rough sport—

SARAH: *(Screaming.)* It's not a sport! It's *not a sport!* Only one person does the punching. That's not boxing!

HARLEY: Then I suppose you think prostitution isn't sex either...?

SARAH: *(Thrown.)* What?

HARLEY: *(Shaking her head, she turns to KAI.)* You and your friend, out.

SARAH: I'm taking that woman! She needs to go to the ER... and then to the police.

HARLEY: She doesn't want to go.

SARAH: I don't care. She's not staying here.

HARLEY: Lay a finger on her, and it's assault. *(She picks up the phone and begins to dial.)* "Nine...one..." *(Looking up.)* And this is trespass right now. Both of you. I'm going to count to five, and if you're not gone, I'm hitting that last digit. Your choice... *(Pause.)* One... Two...

KAI: Sarah, we gotta go...

HARLEY: Three...

KAI: Come on!

HARLEY: Four...

KAI: We're going ... We're going! *(She grabs SARAH. SARAH turns and shoves her. KAI grabs her again. SARAH shoves again.)*

SARAH: Don't do that again.

KAI: Come on! *(This time, when she grabs SARAH, SARAH throws a punch. KAI staggers back. HARLEY completes the call. She pulls out a gun from behind the counter and holds it on SARAH. SARAH freezes.)*

HARLEY: Got an assault-and-battery going on. Boxing Girls' Gym, 874 Franklin Boulevard... Nope... nobody hurt. I got a gun on the assailant... (*KAI slips out the door. HARLEY hangs up the phone.*) You know, it can be tough to get work when you've got a criminal record... (*SARAH glares.*) Tell you what... look us up, and I'll give you a job. You won't have to intern.

END OF PLAY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Snowlion Repertory Theatre of Portland, Maine for their help in workshopping this play, and my gratitude to Rachel Moran who inspired the play, and also to Donna Hughes for her support and her activism. Special thanks to Dr. Morgne Cramer, University of Connecticut—Stamford, for her help with revisions. With the permission of the reviewers and the author, Dignity thanks the following reviewers for their time and expertise: Susan Hawthorne, PhD, adjunct professor, writing program, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia; Judith Swift, professor of theatre/communication studies, University of Rhode Island, and freelance professional theatre director, Rhode Island, USA; Elda Dawber, author and Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, Rhode Island, USA; Evelina Giobbe, founder (1985), WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), Minnesota, USA; and Kim Sykes, actor, writer, director, and member of the Actors Center Workshop Company, the Artist Workshop (WAW), and Plays in Progress (PIP) in New York, USA.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Carolyn Gage is a playwright, performer, director, and activist. The author of nine books on lesbian theatre and 75 plays, musicals, and one-woman shows. She specializes in non-traditional roles for women, especially those reclaiming famous lesbians whose stories have been distorted or erased from history. Her work is widely produced, and in 2014 she was one of six featured playwrights at UNESCO's World Theater Day in Rome, where the subject was violence against women. She has won the national Lambda Literary Award in Drama and her play *Ugly Ducklings* was nominated by the American Theatre Critics Association for the prestigious American Theatre Critics Association—Steinberg New Play Award. She has also been awarded numerous grants and fellowships from the Maine Arts Commission, the Maine Women Writers' Collection at the University of New England, the Astraea Foundation, Lewis and Clark College, the Oregon Institute of Literary Arts, and the Oregon Arts Commission. Her papers are archived at the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Gage, Carolyn. (2017). Head in the game: A one-act play. *Dignity: A Journal of Sexual Exploitation and Violence*. Vol. 2, Issue 1, Article 4.
DOI:10.23860/dignity.2017.02.01.04. Available at
<http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol2/iss1/4>.