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600 Words

THE REALITY SHOW

By

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My cell has a toilet, sink, and cot. The bars encasing this eight by ten broom closet are colder than the toilet-like sink I use for freshening up. Sometimes I feel as if I've been sentenced to a prison studio in one of America's 1000+ warehouses and the world is my audience—an endless season of *Lock-Up*. That's the best way to describe my life.

After putting on my costume, the show begins. *I pretend to be an inmate*, which isn't really hard to do if you demonstrate model behavior. Walk tall, back straight, keep your head up, and be fierce. *Yaaaassss Bitch!* Onward as a shape-shifting, prison-performing, disorder having con-artist. I have to tap into multiple personalities and at any given moment display one of them. For instance, the "Twins": Passive and Aggressive. These personalities are inseparable in this environment. You wear them like the finest of fabrics and you develop an innate ability to shed them when necessary. However, it has to be suitable to the situation.

One time, I was reminded that I'm an inmate, nothing more: a black, white, and Puerto Rican officer—I know it sounds like the beginning of a cheesy joke, but bear with me—were standing in the corridor. Like gossip girls. Commenting as inmates passed by. (Walking through the corridor is like the runway, you're always on display.) They scrutinized each prisoner, assessing him based upon his physical appearance, his swagger. Crack Head, Junky, Drug Dealer, Killer, Child Molester, Rapist, etc., they'd name them, sounding like Hollywood directors

summoning their actors. I was shocked to say the least. How did they know who was who? Was it that obvious?

Though hesitant, I approached the reality check point with nervousness. Then BOOM! I was objectified. The dirty word left his lips like a particular expletive uttered loosely by prosecutors. A nickname wannabe thugs use to bolster their street cred. A mobster's attribute. Something you give to a condemned person. "Murderer." I never killed anyone in my life. Me? Not Yvonne's son. Hell. No. They got it twisted and they're absolutely and definitely mistaken. I don't fit the criteria of any of those miscreants they mentioned. I guess it doesn't matter who I am, all that matters is who they think I am or want me to be. So I played the part; yeah, I'll play it until the director says *cut!* Although they didn't necessarily write a script, the directors are responsible for the reoccurring themes. Male testosterone, mixed with racial identities, the presence of women, constant gossip, unwarranted jealousy, prison yards, razors and shanks and there you have it folks, a movie. This is a big step out of the reality show where one jumps into a feature film—though, hesitant and fearful like walking into a prison for the first time. His role is typical and short lived. The next day a new character replaces him. Every day is the same. The prison cell receives a new tenant. BAM! A fresh body with a new identification number, no association with the Actors Guild, yet, a background in criminal activity. As a result you have something called the "Groundhog's Day-effect."

You go to sleep, only to wake up in prison. Same stale cell, same cold bars and same paint peeling corridors. The meals are the same. Your weird and creepy neighbors are the same. Your company officer never goes home. He stood in the same spot while you slept. Everyone is playing their role, except you're the star of this show, movie, or whatever you want to call it. The only good thing is you get to play yourself, over and over again.