



STAGE RAW

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The Kill-or-Dies

Reviewed by Pauline Adamek

The McCadden Place Theatre

Through December 13

RECOMMENDED:

Playwright Meghan Brown drops her audience into the swirling midst of her drama right from the start.

A woman enters a chintzy living room, startling the other occupant asleep on the couch. The two women immediately launch into the kind of messy rapid-fire argument familiar to siblings or long-time friends. But are they sisters?

Part of Brown's genius is to surrender bits of information gradually. You might not know what's going on right away, but eventually you see the pieces fall into place. It's best not to ask too many questions and just sit back and enjoy the thrill ride.

These women could not be more different. Chelsea (Karina Wolfe) is a mousy shut-in while Maggie (Megan Kathleen Duffy) is stylish, confident and domineering. She's also a skillful liar and manipulative sociopath.

Maggie has shown up at the country home of Chelsea's recently deceased grandmother with an important job for Chelsea. It's easy enough; Pop down to the local watering hole, switch bags with a stranger, don't ask any questions and then return with the other bag. Get paid \$15,000 for less than 10 minutes work. What could be simpler? But suddenly Chelsea gets cold feet, and so the women hotly debate the issue.

Little do they know there's a greater threat lurking beyond the cottage door. When Maggie's irate boyfriend Billy (Daniel Dorr) shows up, backed by his large and terrifying henchman Lawrence (Rob Nagle), each of the women has to do some fast-talking to get out of trouble.

As Chelsea, Wolfe brings real emotional depth and complexity to her character. Duffy is absolutely convincing portraying an equally complex persona - someone whom you both loathe and admire in equal measure. Dorr's Billy is more a love-struck loser than a criminal mastermind, something Maggie expertly exploits. Nagle negotiates the nuances of his menacing hit man with aplomb.

Brown's brilliantly crafted one-act play is a taut thriller, with flashes of black humor, four intriguing characters and mesmerizing performances. Direction from Darin Anthony is solid.

Electric Footlights in association with Moving Arts, at The McCadden Place Theatre, 1157 N. McCadden Place, Los Angeles, CA 90038. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; through Dec. 13.
<http://movingarts.org/the-kill-or-dies/>; Running time: 85 minutes, no intermission.





Photo by Marjorie Salvaterra