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THEATER REVIEW | 'A KITE CUT LOOSE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SKY'
MORE ON 'A KITE CUT LOOSE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SKY'

Quadriplegic and Thief Square Off

Rosie (Rebecca Challis), the central character in David Greenberg's in-your-face new drama, "A Kite Cut Loose in the Middle of the Sky," at the Spoon Theater, may be the least sympathetic character in a wheelchair you'll ever see onstage. Foulmouthed and bitter, she appears to have been constructed to shatter any impression you might have had that people with disabilities are pliant drones who don't feel emotions like envy, hatred and sexual desire. And, in case you missed the point, in his first act Mr. Greenberg brings in a bunch of Rosie's friends, also disabled, who are just as unpleasant and sex-obsessed as she is.

The real question is whether this is a point that needs making quite so bluntly. People with disabilities aren't as invisible on stage and screen today as they once were, which makes the attention-must-be-paid scream that is the first act seem more gimmicky than courageous. Weirdly, Mr. Greenberg himself proves that less would have been more in his second act, where he clears out those friends and delivers a compelling one-on-one.

As the play, by the Nicu's Spoon company, opens, Rosie, a quadriplegic, is being left alone for the evening by her able-bodied caretaker, her sister (Margaret H. Baker), who heads out for a night on the town. Rosie is decidedly not a woman who is content to watch TV: among other things, she rings up a phone-sex line, but the thing she is asking for is too unsettling even for the smut-spewer who takes her call.

Then those five friends come over, one with drugs, and Mr. Greenberg gets both excessive and formulaic. All have to tell the stories behind their disabilities, and Mr. Greenberg seems to be desperately pushing any buttons he can think of: incest, war, random violence. It's too much of a grab bag to be moving, though the actors are convincing.

Act II, though, shows a much more nuanced touch. The party breaks up and Rosie is again alone, until Jerry (David Tully), a criminal running from the

law after holding up a liquor store, bursts in. He quickly finds that Rosie is no ordinary hostage. There are some crackling moments as the quadriplegic with a death wish squares off against the criminal with contempt for life. If the first act had the unpleasant feel of a sideshow, in the second Ms. Challis and Mr. Tully, under Russell Waldman's direction, give us real theater.

“A Kite Cut Loose in the Middle of the Sky” continues through Oct. 26 at the Spoon Theater, 38 West 38th Street, Manhattan; (212) 352-3101

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