

# INSIDE/OUTSIDE

## SIX PLAYS FROM PALESTINE AND THE DIASPORA

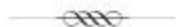
**EDITED BY NAOMI WALLACE AND ISMAIL KHALIDI**

**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY NATHALIE HANDAL**



# **INSIDE/OUTSIDE**

**SIX PLAYS FROM  
PALESTINE AND THE DIASPORA**



# **INSIDE/OUTSIDE**

## **SIX PLAYS FROM PALESTINE AND THE DIASPORA**



**EDITED BY  
NAOMI WALLACE  
AND  
ISMAIL KHALIDI**

*With an Introduction by Nathalie Handal*

**THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP  
NEW YORK  
2015**

*Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora* is  
copyright © 2015 by Theatre Communications Group

Introduction is copyright © 2015 by Nathalie Handal

*Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora* is  
published by Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 520 8th  
Avenue, 24th Floor, New York, NY 10018-4156

All rights reserved. Except for brief passages quoted in  
newspaper, magazine, radio or television reviews, no part of  
this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means,  
electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or  
recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system,  
without permission in writing from the publisher.

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this  
material, being fully protected under the Copyright Laws of  
the United States of America and all other countries of the  
Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions, is subject to a  
royalty. All rights, including but not limited to, professional,  
amateur, recording, motion picture, recitation, lecturing,  
public reading, radio and television broadcasting, and the  
rights of translation into foreign languages are expressly  
reserved. Particular emphasis is placed on the question of  
readings and all uses of this book by educational institutions,  
permission for which must be secured from the authors'  
agents.

Epigraph: "Mahmoud Darwish: Hope as Home in the Eye of  
the Storm," Ashwani Saith, *ISIM Review* 15 (Spring 2005),  
29.

Due to space constraints, copyright and author contact information for the individual plays are found at the back of the book.

The publication of *Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora*, through TCG's Book Program, is made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

TCG books are exclusively distributed to the book trade by Consortium Book Sales and Distribution.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION  
DATA

*Inside/outside : six plays from Palestine and the diaspora* /  
edited by Ismail Khalidi,

Naomi Wallace ; introduction by Nathalie Handal.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-55936-798-1 (ebook)

1. Arab-Israeli conflict—Drama. 2. Palestinians—Drama. 3. American drama—Palestinian American authors. 4. American drama—21st century. 5. English drama—Palestinian Arab authors. 6. English drama—21st century. 7. Arabic drama—Palestine—Translations into English. 8. Arabic drama—21st century—Translations into English. I. Khalidi, Ismail, editor. II. Wallace, Naomi, editor.

PN6120.A76I57 2015

808.82'989274—dc23 2015009938

Cover design, book design and composition by Lisa Govan

Cover art: “Tapestry of Life,” 2013 (mixed media on canvas)  
by Nabil Anani

First Edition, June 2015

*Tennis in Nablus* is copyright © 2015 by Ismail Khalidi.  
Representative: Ron Gwiazda, Abrams Artists Agency, 275  
Seventh Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10001, (646)  
486-4600.

*Keffiyeh/Made in China* is copyright © 2015 by Dalia Taha.  
Representative: Rachel Taylor, Casarotto Ramsay and  
Associates, Ltd., Waverley House, 7-12 Noel Street, London,  
W1F 8GQ, +44 (0)20 7287 4450, [taylor@casarotto.co.uk](mailto:taylor@casarotto.co.uk).

*Plan D* is copyright © 2015 by Hannah Khalil.  
Representative: Jessica Cooper, Curtis Brown, Haymarket  
House, 28-29 Haymarket, London, SW1Y 4SP, +44 (0) 20  
7393 4400, [jessica.cooper@curtisbrown.co.uk](mailto:jessica.cooper@curtisbrown.co.uk).

*Handala* is copyright © 2015 by Abdelfattah Abusrour.  
Representative c/o the author: [aabusrou3@gmail.com](mailto:aabusrou3@gmail.com).

*Territories* is copyright © 2015 by Betty Shamieh.  
Representative: Ron Gwiazda, Abrams Artists Agency, 275  
Seventh Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10001, (646)  
486-4600.

603 is copyright © 2015 by Imad Farajin. Representative c/o the author: [imadlm@yahoo.com](mailto:imadlm@yahoo.com).

*This anthology is dedicated to  
our Palestinian colleagues  
who continue to create the kind of  
vibrant, vital theater  
we all need.*

*And to Juliano Mer-Khamis,  
whose vision of resistance,  
through love and theater,  
has inspired so many.*





Exile is more than a geographical concept. You can be an exile in your homeland, in your own house, in a room. It's not simply a Palestinian question.

—*Mahmoud Darwish*

## CONTENTS

### Preface

*By Ismail Khalidi and Naomi Wallace*

### Introduction

*By Nathalie Handal*

### TENNIS IN NABLUS

*By Ismail Khalidi*

### KEFFIYEH/MADE IN CHINA

*By Dalia Taha*

### PLAN D

*By Hannah Khalil*

### HANDALA

*Adapted by Abdelfattah Abusrou*

### TERRITORIES

*By Betty Shamieh*

### 603

*By Imad Farajin*

## Further Reading



## PREFACE

*By Ismail Khalidi and Naomi Wallace*

**P**lays written by Palestinians have an uphill battle in order to see the light of the stage. Palestinian dramatists do not so much write against the grain, though many do, but write against the odds. And the odds are stacked against them: their work is culturally delegitimized, derailed and delimited by the Israeli-Palestinian “conflict” wherein the Israeli perspective is always/already privileged. Our aim in this first-of-its-kind collection is to contribute to the process of putting Palestinian theater on the map, to give it space both in its homegrown as well as its global and diasporic forms.

It is important to note that this anthology is ultimately a curated selection and thus only a mere sampling of what is a diverse, ever-growing and constantly evolving body of work by Palestinian writers. Further-more, it is a selection shaped by our respective linguistic and geographic limitations as editors, in that our choices were made from a pool of those plays either originally written in English or already translated from the Arabic. That is why upon reading this anthology it is our hope that readers will be inspired to venture out into the wider body of Palestinian drama, whether in Arabic, English, Hebrew, Spanish, French or any other language through which it expresses itself.

While the taboo status of Palestine is changing, especially among younger generations, there are still various levels of censorship, intimidation, misinformation and bias that prevent open discussion of the subject in the media, in Washington

DC, on campuses, on screen and onstage. Palestinian plays (or any voices critical of Zionism or Israeli policies), no matter their content, often fall victim to this chilling of free expression.

While there have of course been notable exceptions to this rule in the American theater, there is also a laundry list of acts of censorship, pusillanimity and discrimination when it comes to putting Palestine onstage.

One of the common refrains used to justify the censoring of these voices is that “both sides” must be represented; the Palestinian requires an answer by the Israeli (though the reverse is rarely demanded). This spurious strategy to equality of representation (that there are “two sides” whenever the Palestinian is aired) is, of course, highly problematic for several reasons. First of all, it is used as a way to limit or shape free speech about Palestine. Secondly, it deprives the work of the right to be judged on its own merits as good drama, irrespective of its being “provocative,” “controversial” or “political.” Ultimately, though, the obsessive need for “balance” adversely affects the weaker party in the conflict, which is the Palestinian side. For there is already profound imbalance in the form of a nuclear-armed occupying state supported by the world’s lone imperial superpower (the U.S.) opposite a divided, dispersed and militarily controlled people with little power and even less access to the mainstream media. Moreover, the long and complex history of Palestinian culture is not reducible to a subset of Israel or the occupation, only legible within the paradigm of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We believe these plays are a vital part of a diverse multi-pronged grassroots effort in the U.S. and internationally to

create space for more honest conversations on these issues. It is our hope that this book serves as a modest contribution to countering the obstacles and erasure that face Palestinian playwrights and their work.

This collection of compelling, feisty and imaginative plays fits into the long struggle of Palestinians and other oppressed and marginalized people who insist that they do not need permission to narrate their own stories, their own history, and their own visions of a future. We, as editors and writers, believe that Palestinians possess this inalienable right and, in fact, have always exercised it despite the heavy odds against them. We only hope that more and more people will listen to what they have to say.

As Nathalie Handal details in her introduction to this collection, Palestinian theater existed long before the advent of the State of Israel and has endured since the expulsion of more than three-quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes in 1947–1948 and the subsequent episodes of dispossession and violence. This collection—and the ones that will surely follow in the coming years—is a testament not only to the existence of Palestinians, but also the vibrancy, the diversity and the perseverance of Palestinian culture and identity and all it has to offer to the theater and to world literature.

*North Yorkshire and New York*

*April 2015*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**S**pecial thanks from Naomi to Bruce McLeod, and to her three lights: Nadira, Caitlin and Tegan.

Thanks from Ismail to friends and fam in New York, Palestine, Chicago, Chile, France, Minneapolis, London, Beirut and beyond. Special thanks to his parents Rashid and Mona, his sisters Lamya and Dima, and his partner Caro.

Also, special thanks to the invaluable and endlessly patient Emma Jeszke at TCG for her excellent work and guidance in the creation of this anthology.





## INTRODUCTION

*By Nathalie Handal*

**I**n my early twenties, I went to speak to an old man near Herodion, not far from Bethlehem. His son, who I met a few days earlier, at one of the first gatherings of theater makers I attended there, told me that his father was a storyteller. I was keen to meet him and hear one of his stories. When I arrived, the old man was alone, sitting in a mostly bare garage-like room on a worn-out orange velvet loveseat. He was wearing loose-fitting white cotton pants with a slightly oversized gray suit jacket, a vest and a white T-shirt beneath. He had a wooden *mesbaha*, or prayer beads, in his hand and wore another, black with two red beads, as a necklace.

The cement floor, three white-painted walls, the tin ceiling with a few metal bars dangling at the far left corner, looked like the set of a play. He motioned for me to enter. I sat to his left on a plastic white chair. Between us was an unpolished, unpainted, low wooden rectangular table with two cups of tea, an empty unlabeled plastic soda bottle, an old metal skeleton key, and two used wooden tourist handle canes—one dark, the other light. The canes positioned against each other formed a straight line; the handles, hanging on opposite sides, were like unfinished roads, journeys, lives.

We drank tea for close to one hour. He never uttered a word. He invited me into his silence, which to me meant into his most important story. Then, he stood up, walked a few steps toward me, placed his right hand on my right shoulder, and

left. I spent years wondering what story he told me that afternoon.



The French actor and director Jean Vilar wrote, “Il s’agit donc de faire une société, après nous ferons peut-être du bon théâtre.” Palestinian society since the 1948 *Nakba*, or the catastrophe, has been fractured.<sup>1</sup> So if we consider Vilar’s statement that only after we’ve built a society, can we perhaps make good theater, is there a Palestinian theater? And who is a Palestinian playwright, theater maker? To understand the trajectory of Palestinian theater we must have a notion of what it is to be Palestinian today.

The editors’ choice of the title *Inside/Outside* could be understood as Palestinians inside the occupied territories and Gaza, and those in the Diaspora, and at some level that’s what it suggests. It can also raise debate about degrees of Palestinianness. Can one person be more Palestinian than another? Is a theater maker less Palestinian because he isn’t born in Palestine or has never been or does not speak Arabic or writes in a different language? And how about the playwright who lives in the occupied territories but writes in a language other than Arabic, or the one from a refugee camp in Iraq, Lebanon or Syria who writes in Arabic but has never been to Palestine, or a playwright from the Diaspora whether Australia, Canada, the United States or elsewhere, who doesn’t speak Arabic but often returns to the homeland and knows it extensively. Can identity be measured?

The title *Inside/Outside*, however, implies a more fundamental truth, the tragic fact that Palestinians whether

inside the occupied territories or Gaza, or in Israel, or scattered worldwide are all inside/outside whatever parameters their situation dictates—whether it's physical or national, psychological or emotional. Inside/outside of a checkpoint, the Green Line, Areas A-B-C, or whatever identity card or passport they hold. Gazans aren't permitted into the West Bank or anywhere. West Bank residents can't go to the 1948 territories unless given a special permit, and those are rare. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship can't live in the West Bank, and Palestinians in the Diaspora are refugees and can't live in Israel, the West Bank or Gaza due to Israeli laws. Even love needs a permit. For instance, generally Jerusalemites are blue card holders so they can't realistically maintain a love story with a Bethlehemite seven miles away, because if the Jerusalemite moves to Bethlehem he will lose his Jerusalem ID and the Bethlehemite is simply not allowed to live in Jerusalem. Now the wall divides the once sister cities. The visible and invisible divides are endless. Every Palestinian is inside/outside of their particular confines determined by whatever fate they were dealt after the *Nakba*.<sup>2</sup>

The six playwrights presented in this anthology reflect the landscape of this fragmented people and despite their multiplicity in accents, cultures and nationalities, they have an unyielding collective voice.<sup>3</sup>

(I should note here that although this diversity has dynamic qualities, it was imposed by the *Nakba*, thus is accompanied by trauma.) The biographies of the playwrights represent a piercing testimony of the Palestinian experience. In these pages you will find a playwright from a destroyed village in 1948, now living in a refugee camp in Bethlehem, and one whose family was chased out in 1948, moved to Bir es-Saba

in the an-Naqab (Negev), then to the al-Arroub refugee camp between Bethlehem and Hebron. Another playwright born in Berlin who grew up in Ramallah, and one born in Beirut who grew up in Chicago. You will find a Palestinian American and a Palestinian Irish.



When I began writing this introduction, I sought to give a brief panorama of modern Palestinian theater, leading to the work of the playwrights in this volume. To do so, some essential questions needed to be posed. Who are the main playwrights, directors, actors, performers, theaters and troupes; how have plays been and are being produced and funded; and who is the audience? Why have the doors to Palestinian theaters over the past sixty-six years been opened and shut? But the primary question was, would I be able to unseal such information? I was aware that the challenges could be deterring, as Palestinian theater has been relatively undocumented.<sup>4</sup> One of the most important records—which most reference—on Palestinian theater in the first half of the twentieth century is *Tarikh al-masrah al-Filastini, 1918–1949* (*The History of Palestinian Theater 1918–1948*, Sharq Briss, 1990) by Nasri al-Jawzi,<sup>5</sup> a pioneer and a prolific playwright in the pre-1948 theater movement.<sup>6</sup>

Palestinian theatrical productions were—and continue to be—mainly created through collective improvisations rather than from written plays.<sup>7</sup> A profuse amount of archival records have been lost or destroyed, making it challenging for researchers in the field. However, plays are constantly being unearthed,<sup>8</sup> as Palestinians were principally interested in drama as literature.

The question of language—*fusha* (classical or modern standard Arabic) and *ammiya* (colloquial)—has been important in modern Arab theater. Well-known scholars Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Roger Allen explain that initially the main challenge that theater makers' faced when attempting to present translations and adaptations of Western drama was the linguistic medium. They write:

The use of formal written Arabic for dramatic dialogue was markedly inadequate at the turn of the twentieth century, when the Arabic language still carried many pedantic trappings and still retained formal modes of address inherited from older periods . . . The use of the various regional colloquials faced two major problems . . . It introduced a barrier in understanding among various regions themselves, whose colloquials could differ widely . . . The Arab colloquials themselves, during the first decades of the twentieth century, were still unable to express adequately, and with the necessary profundity, the more sophisticated experience of people. It was through the decades . . . that an instinctive thrust toward a middle language was felt and has become feasible for the future.<sup>9</sup>

## ROOTS, THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND BRITISH MANDATE PERIOD

Storytelling in villages or in towns—public squares, fields, salons, coffeehouses, homes—has always existed and been an integral part of Arab culture. This practice was not only a source of entertainment but it also became a space with political dimensions.<sup>10</sup> They included stories of voyages and battle, treasons and trials, history and colonialism, grief and love, freedom and passion. These itinerant storytellers or

*hakawatis* encouraged listeners to participate in the story, usually historical or folk.<sup>11</sup> The storyteller became a messenger of cultural heritage and tradition, of nation and collective identity. Some popular storytelling traditions include *Khayal al-Zill*,<sup>12</sup> shadow or puppet theater; *Sundug al-Ajab* (Box of Wonders or Magic Box), where audiences look at illustrations or colored images while the storyteller entertains them;<sup>13</sup> *Sha'ir al-Rababa*, a singer of poetic folk songs, accompanied by a stringed instrument with one to three strings; religious festivals such as *Mawlid al-Nabi* (the Prophet's birthday) and *Mawalid* (the Saint's birthday) during Ramadan; the *dabke* or popular traditional songdance; and *zajal*, the vernacular form of the *muwashshah*, an Andalusian Arabic strophic form that seemed to have developed from romance folk poetry and was adopted in the eleventh century in Muslim Spain, and from the twelfth century onward, became popular in the Middle East and North Africa. Oral historian Rosemary Sayigh suggests that oral narratives are essential to the writing of Palestinian history.<sup>14</sup>

According to the majority of existing narratives, Palestinians did not practice Western-style theater until the 1850s.<sup>15</sup> Due to the loss of archives, scholars have come up with several deductions. Reverend Mitri Raheb from the International Center of Bethlehem/Dar Annadwa Addawliyya told me that in certain religious diaries set in Bethlehem, records show that religious-themed plays were performed in the early 1830s.<sup>16</sup> In its initial stages, drama was cultivated in missionary schools and had religious orientations.<sup>17</sup> Then the vibrant cultural and artists associations, clubs, and literary salons helped create a foundation for the theater movement to grow. For example, the Christian Youth Association established in 1877<sup>18</sup> in

Jerusalem did dramatizations of novels; records from the Russian Teachers Group show theatrical productions in Nazareth in 1896; *Hamlet* was presented in Gaza in 1911;<sup>19</sup> Al-Montada al-Adabi (a literary club) was established in Jerusalem in 1909,<sup>20</sup> and produced a play about Salah al-Din;<sup>21</sup> and the most illustrious was the ad-Dagdni Literary Salon in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Others propose that drama started in 1913 when the Cairo-based Lebanese actor George Abyad and his famed Ramses troupe performed in major Palestinian cities. And some point to later dates, such as 1920, with the establishment in Jerusalem of Jamiyat al-Traki Wa al-Tamtheel al-Arabi (Arabic Society for Acting and Culture), or in 1928 with the establishment of Jama'iyat al-Funoon Wa al-Tamtheel (Organization of Arts and Acting) by al-Jawzi.<sup>23</sup> Another force fostering theater at the time was the creation of newspapers such as *Al-Zahra* (the *Flower*), founded by the prominent theater maker Jamil al-Bahri, and *Al-Karmel*, founded by Najib Nassar.<sup>24</sup>

After the Ottoman Empire (Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century) came the British occupation, circa 1920–1948.<sup>25</sup> This period saw increased exchange with the Arab world, especially the pioneering theater world of Cairo and Beirut. In the 1920s, performances by local talents and visiting troupes from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon were expanding in Palestinian cities such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Haifa, Jaffa and Nazareth as the interest in theater amplified in venues such as the Al-Ma'arif Café in Jaffa and the Arab Club in Jerusalem. The Rising Arab Economic Association, established in 1922, aided in developing theater on the page by holding playwriting competitions and publishing them in Arabic as well as having them translated into other languages such as English, French, German and Russian. There was a



significant increase in performances and troupes<sup>26</sup> including traveling ones, namely the Acting Board Troupe of the Youth Association in Bethlehem, which performed throughout Palestine and Jordan. However, many productions were banned by the British Mandate authorities, who claimed that the gatherings were illicit. But the reason was most likely because the plays' themes explored the increase of Jewish immigrants and Zionist activities, and the threat of Palestine being lost.<sup>27</sup> Another challenge to theater makers was funding, as there was no national government, institutions or cultural foundations to sponsor the arts. Despite the obstacles, Palestinian theater persisted.

In 1929, the first Palestinian female actor appeared in the play *Majdulin*, and the Islamic Sports Association performed the first play about women's issues, *Women's Aspirations*, albeit with an all-male cast. There were also women playwrights, namely Asma Tobi.<sup>28</sup> Another playwright that began writing school plays in the 1920s was Mohamed Aza Darouza.<sup>29</sup> Parallel to the flourishing of theatrical activities, Aziz Dhomatt from Haifa was gaining recognition in Germany after a critically acclaimed staged performance of his novel *Akko Rulers*.<sup>30</sup> Birzeit College for Girls (today Birzeit University) started producing plays in 1924, and drama and theater were part of their curriculum. Samira Ghandoor who studied with the prominent intellectual, scholar, educator, writer and nationalist Khalil al-Sakakini, lead the drama division.

An overt political consciousness emerged in the productions of 1930s<sup>31</sup> as Palestinian nationalism further solidified, in large part in opposition to British colonialism and increased Zionist immigration. In 1936, radio broadcasting was

introduced to Palestine. The well-known poet and writer Ibrahim Touqan was in charge of the art and literature programs including a radio drama series at the Palestine Broadcasting Station, one of the most important stations. Some of the key venues and theater makers of the time were Khalil Baydas from Nazareth; Nasri al-Jawzi (apart from the plays he wrote, he is credited in 1945 for being the first Palestinian dramatist to write plays for children; he was forced to flee to Damascus after the *Nakba*, and en route, lost his earlier plays); Najib Nassar (credited for the first written Palestinian play *The Loyalties of the Arabs*, published in *Al-Karmel*);<sup>32</sup> Jamil al-Bahri<sup>33</sup> (along with his brother Farid) wrote, adapted and directed more than sixteen plays, namely *His Brother's Killer* in 1919, *The Palace Prisoner* in 1920, *The Amusing Thief* in 1922, *The Beloved Homeland* in 1923 and *The Traitor* in 1924; the troupe belonging to Shaykh Muhammad al-Salih's Rawdat al-Ma'arif al-Wataniyya school in Jerusalem; and Haifa was an important city for theater.

By 1948, Palestinian theater was thriving. The Union of Palestinian Artists and the Union of Theater Troupes<sup>34</sup> were created to further develop the theater movement. Both unions stopped being active after the *Nakba*.

## POST-1948 NAKBA

After the catastrophe of 1948, three-quarters of a million Palestinians were dispossessed. Palestinian society and its cultural, literary and artistic communities were torn apart. Palestinians who remained in what became the State of Israel were isolated from the Palestinians in the West Bank, then under Jordanian control, and the Gaza Strip, under Egyptian

control, while the rest were forced out and dispersed throughout the region and beyond. It quickly became impossible to regroup the Diaspora and reconstruct that which had been destroyed.<sup>35</sup>

The Palestinian theater movement in the newly founded Israeli state endured jarring challenges such as restricted artistic freedoms. The communist party gave a significant amount of support to Palestinian cultural production during this period.<sup>36</sup> Among the important works in the 1950s are al-Jawzi's *The Evacuation Feast* in 1956, Mahmoud Saif al-Din al-Irani's *The Flame* and Haroon Hashem Rashad's *The Question* (the only play written at that time to make it onto the stage, although not until 1975, at the National Theatre of Cairo).<sup>37</sup>

Samia Qazmouz al-Bakri, most known for her one-woman performance *The Alley*<sup>38</sup> about pre-1948 Acre, recounts her city and its inhabitants—the Pasha Place and its baths, now an Israeli museum, the Al-Ahl Cinemas, now the Israeli National Bank, and Han al-Umdan, the lane at the center of the city, now with an Israeli company for urban development.<sup>39</sup> The Palestinian scholar Rania Jawad says that al-Bakri cited “specific examples to illuminate the ongoing process of eliminating tangible markers of Palestinian life by replacing them with Israeli ones.”<sup>40</sup>

On the West Bank, in municipalities such as that of Ramallah and Al-Bireh, small theater gatherings started in schools and colleges, and individual initiatives aiming to challenge the difficult circumstances increased. Eventually new troupes were created and presented plays that spoke of their experience. To name a few, the Catholic Action troupe

founded in 1951, the Orthodox Club troupe in Beit Sahour, the Acting and Cinematographic troupe in Bethlehem, who performed on the stages of Terra Sancta and Silesian high schools.

In the 1960s, the Palestinian theater movement in Israel became more active as amateur troupes put on productions and more professional<sup>41</sup> ones emerged, namely the Nazareth-based Popular Theater in 1964 and Contemporary Theater in 1965, and the Haifa-based Rising Theater in 1967 and the Progressive Theatre in 1967. The play *The Door*, 1964, by Ghassan Kanafani<sup>42</sup>—one of most renowned Palestinian writers—was inspired by an Arab fable about the clash between humankind and its divinities and is considered an impactful piece of resistance theater. In the West Bank, plays tended to be performed in the colloquial Palestinian dialect. In 1964 in Gaza City, the drama students of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Egypt formed a troupe and presented plays on the stage of the Filistin School and the UNRWA Staff Club. But arguably, the most interesting Palestinian theatrical activities in the 1960s were happening in Syria. The Arab Association for Palestinian Theatre was established in Damascus in 1966<sup>43</sup> to bring awareness through theater about the Palestinian cause and to preserve Palestinian culture. The productions toured Arab countries, and were later funded by the PLO.<sup>44</sup>

## THE 1967 WAR TO THE FIRST INTIFADA

Although by the mid-1960s there were more theater practitioners with knowledge of how to work the stage, the lack of financial support made it difficult to sustain. The situation of Palestinians worsened with the June War, also

known as the Six-Day War or the 1967 War, as Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights and annexed the Old City of Jerusalem, displacing Palestinians further.

In the 1970s, Palestinian national consciousness fortified as a result of years of hindrance and frustration, and Palestinian culture revived.<sup>45</sup> Some plays written by illustrious Palestinian writers of the period included Samih al-Qasim's *Qaraqash* and Muin Bseiso's<sup>46</sup> *The Negroes' Revolt*, *Sampson and Delilah* and *Birds Build Their Nests Between Fingers*.

Some suggest that the first Palestinian theater festival took place in Ramallah in 1973, and important theaters and troupes were formed. George Ibrahim's Al-Kasaba Theatre was established in Jerusalem in 1970. It was initially named Theatre Arts group, then Shawk Theatre in 1984, the Artistic Workshop in 1986, Al-Kasaba Theatre in 1989 and Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque today. A'ilat Al-Masrah (the Family of Theater) founded in Ramallah in 1970 formed the nucleus for the significant Balalin troupe in 1971.<sup>47</sup> Some members of this group included Nadia Mikhail Abboushi, Emile Ashrawi, Mustafa al-Kurd and François Abu Salem. What differentiated this collective was that it included a group of politically minded yet artistically advanced writers, actors, directors, architects and philosophers.

One of their defining productions was the avant-garde experimental play *The Darkness*—written, developed, directed and produced collectively.<sup>48</sup> But members began disagreeing over politics and artistic directions, which brought the group to an end.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, Balalin had

paved the way for the vital force of El-Hakawati Theatre,<sup>50</sup> formed in 1977 and led by François Abu Salem.<sup>51</sup>

Most of El-Hakawati productions were directed by Abu Salem and written collectively through improvisation and experimental methods. El-Hakawati's approach was a blend of tradition and modernity. It was progressive and sociopolitically conscious, and had profound influence in the Palestinian theater movement. El-Hakawati was successful from the first play they produced, *In the Name of the Father, the Mother and the Son* in 1977–1978, portraying the life of a Palestinian under oppression. The play also incited debates as it questioned traditions. Other highly acclaimed productions include: *Mahjoub, Mahjoub* in 1980–1981, which the theater scholar Reuven Snir suggested used similar techniques to those in Woody Allen's movies and Emile Habibi's<sup>52</sup> 1974 novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist; A Thousand and One Nights in the Meat Market* in 1982; *Ali, the*

*Galilean* in 1983, which consisted of thirteen miniature dramas about the pressures of having a Palestinian identity in Israel; *The Birds*, a political allegory about a man looking for refuge in a tree to flee Israeli soldiers; and one of their most praised plays abroad was *The Story of the Eye and the Tooth* shown in London in 1986.

The Israeli military censored written or staged plays. Snir quotes from the *Encyclopedia Palestina*<sup>53</sup> that out “of twenty-seven dramatic works examined by the committee from 1977 to 1984, only seventeen texts were approved, and even those texts were partially censored.”

Between the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 until the First Intifada or uprising in 1987 against Israeli military occupation, the Palestinian situation further worsened. In 1983, with the help of a Ford Foundation grant as well as other funders, El-Hakawati rented and renovated the Al-Nuzha cinema in Jerusalem and opened their doors in 1984 with four hundred seats in the main hall and one hundred and fifty seats in the small hall. For their first production, they remounted *A Thousand and One Nights in the Meat Market* or *A Thousand and One Nights from the Nights of Stone Thrower* (the play had two titles), a contemporary tale of the Palestinian David and Israeli Goliath, which echoed powerfully amongst Palestinians.

Eventually, members began finding new creative platforms leading to the disintegration of El-Hakawati. But it had forever changed the landscape of Palestinian theater by heightening artistic standards and becoming globally recognized.

It is important to mention that there were other troupes and theaters established in the 1970s and 1980s, but most did not last long. Among those which made some impact in the Palestinian theatrical scene were: Sanabel Theatre Company, established in Jerusalem (their production *Waiting for Salvation* in 1987 was affecting); Dababis, established in Ramallah and Al-Bireh in 1972–1973; the Palestinian Theatre Troupe established in Jerusalem in 1973; Al-Kashkool established in Jerusalem in 1974; and Sunduq al-Ajab in 1975.

POST-OSLO, THE SECOND INTIFADA TO THE PRESENT

From 1988 to the 1993 Oslo Agreement,<sup>54</sup> theater suffered because of the political turmoil of the Intifada. The post-Oslo period became defined by restrictions on movement, which hindered theater even further. Palestinians now needed permits to move from one city to the next, which isolated the artistic and cultural communities from each other and from their audiences.

Abu Salem presented the play he wrote with his mother, *Jericho, Year Zero*, in 1993, a romance about a tourist and a refugee, an exploration of East and West misunderstandings and stereotypes. El-Hakawati became the Palestinian National Theatre. The American actress Jackie Lubeck, Abu Salem's former wife, eventually began Theatre Day Productions in Gaza, focusing on training actors and theater practitioners to create new initiatives. Iman Aoun and Edward Muallem, former members of El-Hakawati and theater makers since 1977, established Ashtar Theatre Productions and Training in Jerusalem in 1991. They later moved to Ramallah because of closures of West Bank Palestinians to Jerusalem, and opened a branch in Gaza. They also established a theater and drama in education project, which offers intensive theater training programs for local students, master classes for theater professionals and students, and a community-focused Forum Theatre, based on the work of Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal. Forum Theatre as discussed by its founders is a "vital and engaging democracy-building tool."<sup>55</sup> Ashtar, in the years since its inception, has cooperated with local and international theater makers.<sup>56</sup> One of their most important productions to date has been *The Gaza Monologues*, based on monologues written by Gazan children after the war in 2009.



The play has been performed by over fifteen hundred youth, and continues to be performed internationally.<sup>57</sup>

In the West Bank by the mid-1990s onward, there was a continuous increase of artistic output. From new productions to the formation of festivals (the Palestine Festival, Jerusalem Festival, the Sabastia Festival and Ramallah Festival, to name a few), to cultural centers (the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, the A.M. Qattan Foundation, among others), and more collaborations between Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and the West. And in Israel, the annual Acre Festival began (although it has not been a productive environment in the recent years), and new theatrical venues opened.

One of the important theaters created during the 1990s was Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Society in Aida refugee camp, founded in 1998, with a special interest in children's theater. Abusrour describes theatrical work as "beautiful resistance against the ugliness of occupation."<sup>58</sup> Theater to him is a way not only to resist occupation and a vehicle of change, but also a way to stay alive. Alrowwad's first play was *We Are the Children of the Camp* in 1999, and it was a collage of stories from the children of Aida refugee camp. It toured the United States in 2005. The play portrays the cruel reality of the occupation, as the children list the villages, towns and cities they came from, then list the camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. It's hard to imagine peace as you watch the play yet it is explored toward the end. Another important theater institution is the Jenin Freedom Theatre<sup>59</sup> in the Jenin refugee camp, which Juliano Mer-Khamis directed until he was murdered on April 4, 2011.

The assassination occurred in front of the doors of the theater, while he was in his aged red Citroën, his infant son, Jay, on his lap, and the babysitter beside them. He left a wife pregnant with twins, and his daughter Milay, from a previous relationship.

Mer-Khamis's mother, Arna Mer-Khamis, and Zacharia Zubeidi founded the Stone Theatre in 1993, on the top floor of Samira Zubeidi's house (Zacharia's mother). Both of Mer-Khamis's parents died of cancer—his Israeli-Jewish mother in 1995, his Palestinian father a few months after. And the theater was destroyed in the 2002 Israeli assault on Jenin. Mer-Khamis returned to Jenin—where nearly all of his former students from the 1990s had been killed—to finish the documentary on his mother, *Arna's Children* (released in 2004), and to continue her work. The theater was reopened in 2006, and renamed the Freedom Theatre.

Mer-Khamis believed that “theater makes community.” His legacy continues onstage with initiatives like the Freedom Bus project, an interactive theater which aims to bring “awareness and build alliances throughout occupied Palestine and beyond.” Endorsers of this continuing project include Alice Walker, Slavoj Žižek, Noam Chomsky, Angela Davis, John Berger, Peter Brook and Maya Angelou.<sup>60</sup> Nabil al-Raei is currently the theater's artistic director.

A few months after Mer-Khamis's murder, in Ramallah on October 1, 2011, another force in Palestinian theater was lost when François Abu Salem committed suicide. It was a tremendous loss for the artistic community, and the nonviolent cultural resistance movement. Like many who met him, Mer-Khamis made an impact.

After every interaction with Juliano along the years, he left me with the same memorandum: *ask death questions*.<sup>61</sup> Juliano's untimely death triggered memories of significant people on my own journey. In 2000, at the start of the Second Intifada, I went to Ramallah to a gathering of artists, writers and dramatists. Mahmoud Darwish and Iman Aoun were among us. I met Mahmoud in my early twenties in Paris. My most vivid moments with him are of us drinking coffee, silent conversations where his metaphors became alive in ways only dreams can. During that trip, the sea was with us every time we met. Perhaps because it was so close yet forbidden to us. Perhaps because water is something we don't think about when we are abroad, but here it is life. And we are only allowed drops. I had also met Iman before, but that trip forged what would become a long friendship. It was the first time a verse piece I wrote was adapted for the stage. This experimental adaption by Iman gave me a desire to work with theater in a way I had not felt before.

During that trip, although not with us at the gathering, I also saw Abdelfattah Abusrour, or Abed, as he prefers to be called. Being in Bethlehem together (where I come from, and where Abed grew up—more specifically in Aida refugee camp), linked us in ways I am still discovering. It is our conversations on beauty that stay with me most. The way he unfolds it, and inspires children to write words on the wind. As they practice freedom, hope plants itself deeper.

Palestinian theater in the occupied territories has experienced an increase in productions since the end of the Second Intifada in 2005,<sup>62</sup> with shows touring internationally, namely at the Royal Flemish Theatre, Abbey Theatre (Dublin), the Young Vic, Bush Theatre and the Royal Court Theatre

(London). Some recent productions abroad include *48 Minutes for Palestine*, a highly acclaimed international collaboration between British-Nigerian-Danish theater maker Mojisola Adebayo and Ashtar Theatre; and Jerusalem-born, Jaffa-based playwright Amir Nizar Zuabi,<sup>63</sup> who has had a number of plays produced abroad such as *I Am Yusuf and This is My Brother*.<sup>64</sup> There are also collaborations such as Yaa Samar! Dance Theatre, founded in 2005 in Palestine and New York City, “which uses art and technology to create performances across disciplines, cultural geographies, and physical borders.”<sup>65</sup> Apart from making theater, touring abroad is a way to generate funding and awareness, which can potentially lead to policy change.

Many productions portray the occupation, continued hostility, the loss of homeland, the need to assert Palestinian cultural identity, and the preservation of Palestinian folklore and history. Other plays include historical fable, traditional and experimental, sociopolitical and social realism, surreal and metaphysical, satire and tragicomedy.

Leading theatrical venues in the West Bank today, despite the occupation and funding issues,<sup>66</sup> are: Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque,<sup>67</sup> which relocated to Ramallah and is one of the biggest, most important and long-lasting theaters in Palestine (in partnership with the German academy Folkwang University, it has established a drama academy and is the first to offer a bachelor’s degree in performing arts); Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah and Gaza; the Palestinian National Theatre in Jerusalem, mostly a hosting space; the Pocket Theatre founded by Dr. Nabil al-Haggag and Amar Khalil (former member of El-Hakawati, who joined in 1980 when he was sixteen years old); Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre

Society; Inad Theater<sup>68</sup> and Al-Harah (Raeda Ghazaleh, co-founder and artistic director)<sup>69</sup> in Beit Jala; Yes Theatre<sup>70</sup> in Hebron which emerged from Jackie Lubeck's Theatre Day Productions<sup>71</sup> based in Gaza (they won a prize in Morocco for best production in 2014); the Jenin Freedom Theatre; and Emad Metwally began Qafilah, a mobile theater in Jerusalem. (He first used a van and is now using a truck.) Leading Palestinian theatrical venues currently in Israel include: the Ensemble Theatre in Nazareth; the Mahmoud Darwish Theatre in Nazareth, mostly a hosting space; Al Midan Theatre in Haifa; Saraya Arab Theatre of Jaffa, which operates under the umbrella of the Jaffa Theatre Arab Hebrew Theatre Center<sup>72</sup> in the Old City (since 1998, Jaffa Theatre has housed the Saraya Arab Theatre and the Local Hebrew Theatre, and many well-known actors and playwrights have worked there, namely Mohammed Bakri). Some smaller theaters include Al-Jawwal in Tamra, Al-Niqab in Isifya, Al-Khashaba in Haifa, ShiberHur, Al-Battof in Arraba and Al-Sira.

The Palestinian Theatre League, which was founded in 1989, counted twenty-six to twenty-eight theaters in the West Bank and Gaza in 2009–2010. The numbers are approximately the same today.

The passion and dedication of Palestinian theater makers, despite all odds, is what has kept theaters breathing. All productions faced, and continue to face, challenges from Israeli censorship, continuous disruption or destruction of works, roadblocks, compulsory permits, closures to Jerusalem, actors and writers imprisoned or detained, bulldozed theaters and lack of funds. Funding in the 1970s and 1980s came mostly from individuals, namely volunteers

and ticket sales, and in the 1990s, a large portion of the money came from international funders, who more often than not had conflicting agendas with Palestinian theater practitioners.<sup>73</sup>

The audiences in Palestine from all economic and social standings have always engaged theater makers. Scholar and dramatist Samer al-Saber writes that the audience in every production he has ever “participated in, seen, studied, heard about, or reconstructed, has had a significant talk back session afterwards. And these talk backs last. A half hour is a short one. When Palestinian audiences see a play, they discuss it, challenge it and speak about it with the actors. If the playwright is there, they want to ask him or her questions. Everybody demands the participation of everybody, that’s an essential part of this theatrical front.”<sup>74</sup>

In 2009, before a PalFest (Palestine Festival of Literature) performance at the Palestinian National Theatre, the Israelis closed it down, as they have been doing for decades, for no reason other than to harass and deter. As everyone walked out of the PNT, I thought of my weekly walk to Hamilton Hall at Columbia University, where I teach, and where Edward Said had his first office. His words on the right to narrate echoed loudly in the streets of Jerusalem, where each day a piece of it is forbidden to Palestinians.

This past summer in Haifa, I read for the first time in the Al Midan Theatre. Although I’ve performed in the occupied territories, I’d never read in pre-1948 Palestine. The experience moved me deeply. And I finally understood the old man’s story: *silence is also a language*.

Those close to me, who also spend a life on the stage, taught me a version of that language—Iman, that motion is the silence of music; Juliano, that before we can understand existence, we must truly be dedicated to coexistence; Abed, that humility is the way silence hopes; Mahmoud, that freedom is the silent flame in every word.

This past summer, I stood by the sea in Acre. A city I feel deeply connected to, and realized that the old man had also given me the key

to enter anywhere I wanted. And although no stage can reproduce the drama of Palestinian lives, we will keep imagining.



Palestinians in the West are steadily more present in all areas of theater whether as writers, directors, producers and/or actors. Their involvement in comedy, drama, and both classical and experimental theater demonstrate their diversity, aesthetically, thematically and structurally. In 2001, the pioneering Arab American theater collective Nibras was established, and paved the way for many theater makers. It was an important, inspiring and energizing experience for those of us who were part of Nibras. Palestinians in the collective included Najla Said,<sup>75</sup> who served as artistic director for several years, Afaf Shawwa and Nathalie Handal. (Official members of Nibras included Said, Shawwa, Handal, Lebanese Americans Leila Buck and Omar Koury, Syrian Americans James Asher and Maha Chehlaoui, and Egyptian American Omar Metwally.) For the first time, Arab and Arab American theater makers in New York City—later throughout the U.S. and globally—joined to develop, produce and

perform onstage. In 2002, Nibras collaborated with the Palestinian American stand-up comedians Maysoon Zayid and Dean Obeidallah, and later with producer Waleed Zuaiter, to create the Arab-American Comedy Festival in New York City, officially founded in 2003.

In 2005, after numerous readings and productions not related specifically to Palestine, several Nibras members—Buck, Chehlaoui, Handal and Said, along with the Kazbah Project co-founder, Syrian American Rana Kazkaz—brought *Acts for Palestine* to the Blue Heron Arts Center in New York City. The featured one-act plays included *Friday Morning* by British Palestinian Razanne Carmey; *Between Our Lips* by Handal, performed by Palestinian Americans Lameece Issaq and Ramsey Faragallah; *Macklubeh* by Sami Metwasi; and *Pressing Between and Beyond* by Soha al-Jurf.

In the spring of 2006, following New York Theatre Workshop's cancellation of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, NYTW began a series of dialogues with Nibras members Buck, Chehlaoui, Handal, Said and Koury, concerning the complex issues surrounding artistic output from and about Palestine. The two companies discovered a mutual passion for using theater to pose challenging questions and expose points of view that have been obscured or silenced. After a highly successful collaboration to produce two nights of readings for the Public Theater's "New Work Now!", NYTW named Nibras a company-in-residence and invited Buck, Handal and Said to join its extended community of affiliate artists, the Usual Suspects.



Nibras' next project with NYTW was "Aswat: Voices of Palestine," a two-day mini-festival co-produced with New York University. The lineup included *Last Train to Jerusalem* by Fuad Abboud; *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* by Suad Amiry, adapted by Shawwa; *It Happened in a Place Called Palestine* by Carmey; *Deir Yassin: The Stonecutters* by Handal; *The Monologist Suffers Her Monologue* by Yussef El Guindi; *Food and Fadwa* by Issaq and Jacob Kader; *Souvenir* by Metwasi, who was also a member of Al-Harah Theatre in Beit Jala; and *Between This Breath and You* by Naomi Wallace. El Guindi and Wallace, although not Palestinian, were included because their powerful plays dealt with Palestine in important ways, and we felt their voices were essential. Juliano Mer-Khamis moderated one of the post-show discussions. It was an exhilarating festival showcasing nearly thirty artists connected to Palestine.

As our careers evolved, members of Nibras progressively went on to do other projects. Among the Palestinians, Issaq co-founded Noor Theatre in New York; Said's play *Palestine* was produced in New York City, and her memoir *Searching for Palestine*, based on the play, was published by River-head Books in 2014; Zuaiteer starred in several films, and was a producer and actor in the Academy Award-nominated film *Omar*; and others went on to write plays, produce award-winning shows, and perform nationally and internationally.

Some other Palestinians working in the world stage include Italian Palestinian Omar Elerian, who is associate director at the Bush Theatre in London; Australian Palestinian Samah Sabawi, whose play *Tales of a City by the Sea* has been received in Australia with great enthusiasm; Palestinian

American Tala Manassah and Lebanese American Mona Mansour, who have co-written numerous plays, such as *The Letters* and *After*; and the editors of this anthology recently did a reading of their stage adaptation of Kanafani's novella *Returning to Haifa* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.<sup>76</sup>

In tracing their theatrical journey, we witness how Palestinians have boldly and ingenuously created theater despite their imposed fracturedness. The theater bears witness. Its actors always present, in the faces buried in the ruins, in the imagination, in captivating humor, in the illusions of an old man incapable of preserving what's left of his innocence, in the names we beg never to pronounce, in the grief that draws maps, maps that create stages and stages that illuminate history with light rather than obscurity. The shadows on Palestinian stages remain most silent when they take voices apart to retell not only what is unbearable but what is possible—*acts of justice*.



Naomi Wallace says, “History is a study of intimacy or our lack of it, with others. What else is history or politics but the struggle of people to define who they are and what they can and cannot do?” The playwrights presented in this anthology dive into intimacy's most concealed forms and explore what is most invisible and/or unheeded. These plays are a cosmos of mindscapes, vast and varied in beauty, theme, style and form. From the San Francisco-born Palestinian American playwright Betty Shamieh, we have an intelligent, high-concept and thought-provoking *Territories*, a play about the unrecorded roles of women in historical events, in this case that of the sister of the legendary Sultan Saladin.

Her kidnapping, some argue, caused the Third Crusade. The play, as its title suggests, echoes the never-ending focus on land and the terrain of bodies, and Shamieh expertly delivers razor-sharp feminist insights throughout.

The London-born Palestinian Irish playwright Hannah Khalil returns to 1948 in *Plan D*. Inspired by the testimonies of Palestinians who endured the *Nakba*, she writes poignantly about a fictional family faced with the unbearable question: should we stay in our homes and risk our lives, or leave? They have no choice but to leave, and convince themselves that they will return. They never can. “Plan D” refers to the name of the Israeli military operation to expel the Palestinians, and Khalil’s skillful and intense work presents us with the story of one family in its destructive path.

Abusrour, whose father was from the village of Beit Nattif and mother from the village of Zakariyya, both destroyed in 1948, now lives in Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem. He revisits the legendary cult cartoon *Handala*, created by the famed Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali, about a ten-year-old boy frozen in time, barefoot, his hands clasped behind his back, ears pointed toward the sun. He’s never seen frontally. He will *turn* around, when he can *return* to Palestine. The play is itself a drawing of resistance. But the force of Abusrour’s free interpretation lies in his composition, one that unfolds at various levels, poetically and lyrically, wittily and humorously, as it draws from daily colloquialism.

Dalia Taha’s sparse, original and fast-paced play, *Keffiyeh/Made in China*, interrogates the role today’s multimedia world plays in creating misconceptions that impact lives in a painfully intimate way. The constant repetitions in the

dialogue and the brisk short lines demonstrate the repeated interruptions of daily life in the occupied territories as well as echo the brief lives of the youth who live there. *Keffiyeh/ Made in China* boldly attempts to rescue and reignite a repressed humanity within these interactions.

While Taha was born in Berlin and grew up in Ramallah, Khalidi was born in Beirut and grew up in Chicago. His daring and stirring *Tennis in Nablus* is part political tragedy, part dark comedy. Khalidi turns his attention to pre-1948 Palestine, taking us to the last days of the Arab Revolt against the British occupation (1936–1939). As death looms in the streets of Palestine, the English play tennis, and the absurdity of the moment delivers

the cruelty of history in the most piercing way. The indifference of that moment comes to a sharp presence with this past July's Gaza War, as the most basic principles of humanity and justice were called into question.

The playwright and actor Imad Farajin's intense and gripping *603* brings us to the very core of the Israeli justice system.<sup>77</sup>

As one character, Mosquito, says: "I don't care if I have to rot in here for a hundred years, I would never stand up for that judge. They occupy us and then dare to judge us." Through Farajin's beautifully drawn characters we are reminded in the most distressing way not only of the insanity created by confinement, but also of the unbending will to survive, and the vigor of resistance in its many forms, including acts of imagination and hope:

MOSQUITO: Outside the world is green . . . green. Even though it's nighttime, I could see the green.

SLAP: The bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The smell of almond blossom! God, I've forgotten what almonds taste like.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The air had a touch of cold . . . but it was a gentle touch.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The mosquito shivered inside her matchbox.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

This past summer, Haifa's Al Midan Theatre produced the play *Taha*, based on the poet Taha Muhammad Ali's life, performed and directed by Amer Hlehel. In Jerusalem, the young aspiring playwright Hussam Ghosheh performed his monologue *The Last Barrier*, about the increasingly brutal harassment of Jerusalemites, which is meant to make their lives so unbearable they leave the city. To remain in such unconscionable circumstances is their boldest and most powerful act. In Ramallah, Aoun of the Ashtar Theatre spoke to me about the youth production of their Gaza branch. A few days later, the Israeli airstrikes began and resulted in hundreds of dead children. Once again, the theater doors shut. But as is true of the enduring character of this people, the theater doors in Palestine will keep reopening.

*Jerusalem and New York*

March 2015

## NOTES

1. In January 1948, Palestinian and Zionist fighting escalated and by April, over ten thousand Palestinians, mostly from the North, were forced to flee. On May 14, the British high commissioner left, and a Jewish state was proclaimed. What followed was the extensive displacement of Palestinians. “Two out of every five refugees in the world are Palestinian. At the beginning of 2007, there were approximately seven million Palestinian refugees and four hundred and fifty thousand internally displaced persons (IDPs), representing seventy percent of the entire Palestinian population worldwide (9.8 million). Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians (IDPs) represent the largest and longest-standing case of forced displacement in the world today.” Refer to Badil Resource Center for more information (<http://www.badil.org/en/historical-overview/>), and Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

2. The Palestinian theater scholar Rania Jawad in “Ashtar’s Forum Theatre: Writing History in Palestine,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall 2008): 115-131, reminds us of Edward Said’s words on the difficulty of representing Palestinians. In *After the Last Sky* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), Said writes: “It is a terribly crowded place.” Jawad adds that Said remarked elsewhere that the construction of Palestinians continues to be “conducted both on the ground in Palestine and outside Palestine, as an ideological, informational, and interpretative conflict.” Also, refer to Issam Nassar’s “Reflections on Writing the History of

Palestinian Identity,” *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Volume 8 No. 4 (2001) and Volume 9 No. 1 (2002).

3. The Palestinian experience in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, in refugee camps in the Arab world, and those displaced in countries globally, differs. The diversity of these experiences echo in the plays. For statistics, refer to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

4. One of the main challenges of writing about Palestinian theater is the lack of resources and studies. Much has been lost, was never archived or recorded, or is extremely difficult to find. Despite the numerous interviews I conducted with Palestinian theater makers, I was unable to confirm a lot of information. Although most recounted similar occurrences, the variations in relation to dates, how a theater groups split up, and so forth, were endless. Some prominent scholars in the field include Hala Kh. Nassar, Reuvin Snir, Masud Hamdan, Faysal Darraj, Samer al-Saber and Rania Jawad. I am grateful to Abdelfattah Abusrour and Samer al-Saber for their time, generosity and guidance while I wrote this introduction.

5. According to Faysal Darraj, with additional material by Fateh Azzam, translated by Christine Henein, in *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, Volume 4, The Arab World*, edited by Don Rubin (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 189, al-Jawzi wrote over a hundred plays. Hala Kh. Nassar in *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, edited by Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1031, lists some of the following plays by al-Jawzi: *Truth Is Supreme* in 1928 (note: Darraj says it was 1927); *Leila's*

*Heart* and *The Burning Candles* in 1930; *The Ghosts of the Free* in 1935, staged at the YMCA theater in 1935 and in 1936, and the play was banned in the rest of the country due to British censorship; *The Wisdom of the Judge*; *No to the Sale of Land*; *Palestine, We Shall Not Forget Thee*; *Loyalty of Friends* and *Break the Idols!* And Father Estefan Yousef from Nazareth was another important dramatist.

6. Samer al-Saber points out that al-Jawzi wrote the bibliographical account from memory twenty or so years later, thus inevitably some discrepancies exist. He tells me: “The problem with so many attempts to write about Palestinian theater has to do with the desire to establish the narrative—to say what is/was! But the job of establishing the narrative is nearly impossible at the moment because the topic is far too big and there hasn’t been enough original research with indigenous sensibilities on the ground. Even most theater artists don’t realize how big it is. In interviews, you get a number of floating narratives, spoken with authority because these narratives tend to be experiential or transmitted by word of mouth. Yet, these experiences require not only a gatherer, an interpreter, or a narrator, but also an historian and ethnographer. Everything gets mixed up. Some will claim to have it, but in truth, none of us do. These full narratives can only emerge and be established after so many scholars have gone through the grunt work, produced studies, published them, then repeated the task again and again and again. Eventually, we can have the one thousand different narratives that may permit us to write the seamless/synthetic factual summary we wish to produce. The layers of Palestine are mind-blowing.”



7. On contemporary modes of Palestinian theater refer to Reuvin Snir's "The Palestinian Hakawati Theatre: A Brief History," *Colors of Enchantment: Theatre, Dance, Music and the Visual Arts in the Middle East*, edited by Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001). It was first published in *Arab Studies Quarterly* (6:2/7:1): 57-71, and slightly modified for Zuhur's anthology. He writes: "Due to a lack of resources and out of an experimental incentive, the act of play writing, and devising plots, characters, and dialogues became a collective undertaking by the actors themselves in rehearsals and workshops, and was based largely upon improvisation and interaction within the troupe. In addition to the influence of the traditional theatrical Arab tradition, Western theatrical strategies were merged with the Arab *hakawati*, Ariane Mnouchkine and her famous Théâtre de Soleil, Jérôme Savary's Grand Magic Circus Théâtre, commedia dell'arte, as well as American slapstick, all inspired Palestinian dramatists. Critics have compared this amalgam to Gabriel García Márquez brand of 'magic realism,' and sometimes to Brechtian expressionism."

8. The exact number of plays and productions in modern Palestinian theater remains unknown.

9. Refer to the preface by Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Roger Allen, editors, in *Modern Arabic Drama: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), vii-viii. For more on modern Arabic drama, refer to the introduction by M.M. Badawi in the same anthology. For information on short plays, refer to Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Short Arabic Plays: An Anthology* (Northampton, MA: Interlink 2003).

10. “In Iraq it is known as *al-muhaddið*, in Morocco *fdawi*, in Algeria *al-qawwal*, in Turkey *al-makla*.” Hala Kh. Nassar, “The Invocation of Lost Places,” *The Open Page* (2002).

11. If interested in traditional Palestinian folktales refer to Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana, editors, *Speak Bird, Speak Again* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989) and Jamal Sleem Nuweihed, *Abu Jmeel’s Daughter and Other Stories: Arab Folk Tales from Palestine and Lebanon* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2002).

12. Refer to Nassar, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1030.

13. Nassar, in “The Invocation of Lost Places,” writes that: “According to Pellat two distinguished forms of storytelling exist in the Arab world: ‘The tales of the supernatural, the ancient *asmar*, which correspond to the German *Hausmärchen*, are told by women, especially old women, while the heroic tales and historical legends are the province of men.’ Pellat, *Hikaya, Encyclopaedia of Islam*.” For more on storytellers in the Muslim world, refer to Snir’s “The Palestinian Hakawati Theatre: A Brief History,” 113, footnote 73.

14. Rosemary Sayigh, “Women’s Nakba Stories,” *Nakba*, 137, and “Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 27 No. 2.

15. According to Darraj, at the time “theater in the European sense still had a limited audience, appealing as it did primarily to the educated, the cultured and the wealthy.” *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 189. Jawad

quotes in “Saadallah Wannous in Palestine: On and Offstage Performances and Pedagogies,” *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre*, edited by Eyad Houssami, Masrah Ensemble (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 35, that “researchers agree that the birth of modern Arab theater was 1847 in Syria.”

16. Also refer to “The Theatre in Palestine,” *Dramaturgie Arabe Contemporaine/Contemporary Arab Dramaturgy*: [http://www.arab-dramaturgy.eu/index/.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43:le-theatre-en-palestine&catid=20&Itemid=185&lang=en/](http://www.arab-dramaturgy.eu/index/.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43:le-theatre-en-palestine&catid=20&Itemid=185&lang=en/) (accessed March 30, 2015).

17. These missionary schools established in the mid-nineteenth century whether French, English, German, American, Russian or Italian, exposed children to a different culture and language.

18. Other researchers say it was established in 1911.

19. Refer to “The Theatre in Palestine,” *Dramaturgie Arabe Contemporaine/Contemporary Arab Dramaturgy*: [http://www.arabdramaturgy.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=20&Itemid=137&lang=en/](http://www.arabdramaturgy.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=20&Itemid=137&lang=en/) (accessed March 30, 2015).

20. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 187.

21. Michael R. Fischbach, “Performing Arts,” *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, edited by Philip Mater (2005), 391, wrote that the play was produced in 1915. Betty Shamieh’s play

*Territories*, included in this anthology, is about the sister of Saladin.

22. Nassar, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1031.

23. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 187.

24. In various conversations with Iman Aoun, 2000–2014, she spoke about the numerous journals and newspapers that covered performances such as the magazine *Al-Zahra*, where one of al-Bahri's verse plays was published. Aoun spoke of the extraordinary coverage George Abyad received. According to Darraj, the Abyad's troupe performed *Andalusian Song* and *Louis the Eleventh*. In my 2014 conversation with Nassar, she said there were more than fifteen magazines like *Al-Zahra*, based mostly in Haifa or Jerusalem, and mentioned Khalil Beidas's *Majallat al-Nafaees al-Asreyah*.

25. For culture and arts during the Ottoman Empire, read Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

26. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 188, lists the following: Youth Orthodox Club in Jaffa, the Literary Club in Nazareth, Orthodox Club in Gaza and the Islamic Cultural Club in Jerusalem.

27. Nassar, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1031, also says that "the British Mandate . . . issued various

restrictive and oppressive rules and laws concerning every aspect of Palestinian daily life: print, publication, distribution of newspapers, transfer of goods, establishing clubs and association, opening shops or libraries.”

28. Aoun spoke about women and theater in our conversation in Ramallah in 2000. She mentioned Najwa Qawar and Tobi’s plays included *Women and Secrets*, *Endurance and Happy Denouement*, *The Origins of the Christmas Tree*, among others. But I was unable to find more information about these women and their plays.

29. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 188, lists some of Darouza’s plays (1887–1984): *Wufood al-Norman al-Ashra* (*The Ten Norman Emissaries*), *Akher Mulook Bani Serag* (*The East Kings of Serag’s Children*), *Saqr Kuraish* (*Kuraish’s Eagle*) and *al-Fallah Wa al-Simsar* (*The Farmer and the Broker*).

30. According to conversations with Iman Aoun.

31. Mattityahu Peled, “Annals of Doom, Palestinian Literature 1917–1948,” *Arabica*, Volume 29 No. 2 (1982): 141-183.

32. Nassar, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1031.

33. Many agree that al-Bahri is the most important pre-1948 playwright.

34. Al-Jawzi, *The History of Palestinian Theater 1918–1948*, 32. And according to Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of*

*Contemporary Theatre*, 196: “Masrah Al Ghorbal, a small theater group in Shafa Amru, Galilee, founded in 1977, pioneered the establishment of Palestine’s first Arabic Theatrical Union in 1983. This union has played a positive role in the coordination of efforts by all who care about the theater.”

35. Snir has done a substantial amount of research on Palestinian theater between 1948–1967. Refer to his website for list of books and articles: <http://arabic.haifa.ac.il/staff/rsnir.html/>. Snir notes in “The Palestinian Hakawati Theatre: A Brief History,” 107, that “a unified Palestinian culture was split and for almost twenty years there were almost no direct connections between Palestinian authors in Israel and those in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or in exile.”

36. According to a conversation with al-Saber, 2015.

37. Refer to Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 189, who also mentions Ibrahim Mata Ali’s *The Awakening of Conscience* and *The Calm Angel*.

38. For more on the play, refer to Nassar, “Stories from under Occupation: Performing the Palestinian Experience,” *Theatre Journal*, Volume 58 No. 1 (March 2006).

39. Refer to Nassar, “Stories from under Occupation: Performing the Palestinian Experience.”

40. Jawad, “Ashtar’s Forum Theatre: Writing History in Palestine,” 118.

41. In a conversation with al-Saber, he noted that the idea of professionalization does not apply to the recent history of Palestinian theater due to its emergence under the extreme conditions of occupation and statelessness.

42. Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972) was a dramatist, novelist, and short story writer, born in Acre. Some of his most celebrated books include *Men in the Sun* and *All that's Left of You*. His other plays include *The Prophet and the Hat*, and the radio play *A Bridge to Eternity*.

43. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 192. But Nassar says it was established in 1964 in *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1032.

44. Also known as the Fatah Theatre. It was composed of artists from Palestine, Syria and Iraq. They were especially active in 1968 and 1969. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 192.

45. Nassar writes: “The October War in 1973 was significant, not only in terms of the inter-Palestinian process but also as a boost to Palestinian morale.” *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, 1033.

46. Muin Bseiso (1927–1984) was born in Gaza, and is one of the most important Palestinian dramatists. *The Negroes' Revolt*, first performed in Cairo in 1970, relates the Palestinian tragedy to that of the Blacks and Native Americans; *Sampson and Delilah* was performed at the Tawfiq al-Hakim Theatre in Cairo in 1971; *Birds Build Their Nests Between Fingers* was performed at the Arab Theatre Festival in Rabat in 1973; *The Tragedy of Guevera*; *The Trial*

of the *Book of Kalela and Dimna*; and *The Play Within a Play*. He was also a poet and nonfiction writers. His well-known memoirs include *Gaza Memoirs* and *Palestinians Notebooks*.

47. Reuven Snir's *Palestinian Theatre*, *Literaturen im Kontext*, Volume 20 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005), is a survey of major works, theater makers and troupes within an artistic, cultural and historical context. The study includes an in-depth investigation of the activities of two major Palestinian troupes, Balalin and El-Hakawati, because of the vital effect these troupes have had on Palestinian theater.

48. Other productions of note included *A Slice of Life*, *The Weather Forecast*, *The Emperor's Cloak*, *The Treasure*, *The Cripple and the Walnut Tree* and *Come Let Me Talk To You My Friend*.

49. Darraj, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 193, writes that the company split in 1974, and that year Abu Salem founded a new troupe and called it Bila-Leen, a play on words. The new group staged three productions and folded in 1975. In 1976, Abu Salem tried to create the Magic Lantern with al-Kurd as its star but troupe lasted only four shows.

50. Refer to Snir, "The Palestinian Hakawati Theatre: A Brief History."

51. For in depth information on El-Hakawati refer to Snir, Nassar and Jawad's "François Abu Salem," *Jadaliyya* (October 20, 2011).



52. Emile Habibi was born in 1921 in Galilee and died in 1996 in Nazareth. He is considered is one of the most important Palestinian novelists. Many say his best play was *Dwarf Son of a Contemptible Dwarf*, 1980. For more on Palestinian literature refer to Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

53. Refer to *Encyclopedia Palestina*, Volume 4 (1990), 218.

54. For more on the Oslo Accords refer to PBS's "Shattered Dreams of Peace": <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/negotiations/>; Edward Said's "The Morning After," *London Review of Books*, Volume 15 No. 20 (October 21, 1993): <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after/>; as well as Said's *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

55. Refer to Ashtar Theatre's official website: <http://www.ashtar-theatre.org/about.html/>.

56. For more on Ashtar Forum Theatre's successful production *Abu Shaker's Affairs*, refer to Jawad's "Ashtar's Forum Theatre: Writing History in Palestine."

57. For the history and productions of *The Gaza Monologues*, refer to Rania Jawad's "Aren't We Human? Normalizing Palestinian Performances," *Arab Studies Journal*, Volume 22 No. 1 (Spring 2014): 28-45.

58. For more on Abusrour refer to: [http://voicesacrossthedivide.com/documentary/interview\\_abusrour.pdf/](http://voicesacrossthedivide.com/documentary/interview_abusrour.pdf/); <http://www.progressive.org/news/>

2012/02/174886/beautiful-acts-resistance/;  
<http://wagingnonviolence.org/2012/02/beautiful-acts-of-resistance-in-palestine/>.

59. Refer to the Freedom Theatre's official website: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/>. Also, refer to Samer al-Saber's *Alice in Dangerland: A Re-Imagined Revolution in Jenin's Freedom Theatre* in *CounterPunch* (February 4, 2011) for a description of one of Jenin Freedom Theatre's daring productions. Other interesting essays on theater and politics: al-Saber's "A Theatrical *AWDA*: Palestine, *Sahmalah*, Refugees, and Going Home," on the making of the 1998 theatrical event *Sahmalah*, and Jawad's "Staging Resistance in Bil'in: The Performance of Violence in a Palestinian Village," *TDR: The Drama Review*, Volume 55 No. 4 (Winter 2011, T212). And for Jawad's thought-provoking account of her experience teaching *The Elephant, the King of All Time* to Palestinian students during the recent Arab revolts, refer to "Saadallah Wannous in Palestine: On and Offstage Performances and Pedagogies."

60. Refer to <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/what-we-do/theatre/freedom-bus/>.

61. Refer to "This" by Nathalie Handal, dedicated Juliano Mer-Khamis: <http://wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/this/>.

62. Refer to al-Saber's "Arabic Facts in Palestine: Clashing Hybridities in Transnational Cultural Production," *Forum: Arabic Facts in Palestine* (2014): 386-398. He narrates his experience on a production he worked on, and also discusses

why some plays don't make it to Palestine, reasons that stem from political to linguistic and translations challenges.

63. When I asked Zuabi why he writes in English he told me: "I write in English because it's not mine and I feel free to mess around with it. Arabic is such a complicated language, with such richness, I often feel it lacks a sense of urgency. Also, I think in Arabic and write in English—this doesn't always make sense but when it does, it feels very true to me." Zuabi's play *I Am Yusuf and This is My Brother* was produced by ShiberHur (<http://shiberhur.org/>), an independent Palestinian theater company based in Haifa. It also toured all over Palestine, and was produced in London at the Young Vic.

64. For more on Amir Nizar Zuabi, refer to Mustafa Khalili, Laurence Topham, Andrew Dickson and Michael Tait, "Theatre in the Shadow of the Palestinian Nakba" on [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) (February 5, 2010): <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/video/2010/feb/05/theatre-palestinian-nakba/>.

65. Refer to Yaa Samar! Dance Theatre's official website: <http://ysdt.org/>.

66. Funding continues to be challenging, and troupes that tour in the West try to garner international collaboration and raise funds while abroad.

67. Al-Kasaba's many productions include the bilingual Arabic-Hebrew production of *Romeo and Juliet*, that also toured Europe; *Alive from Palestine: Stories Under*

*Occupation; Smile, You are Palestinian; The Wall; and Cell*  
76.

68. Refer Inad Theater's official website:  
[www.inadtheater.net/](http://www.inadtheater.net/).

69. Refer to Al-Harah's official website: [www.alharah.org/](http://www.alharah.org/).

70. Refer to Yes Theatre's official website:  
[www.yestheatre.org/](http://www.yestheatre.org/).

71. Refer to Theatre Day Productions official website:  
[www.theatreday.org/](http://www.theatreday.org/).

72. Amir Nizar Zuabi told me that since he became the artistic director the two theaters (Arab and Hebrew) have separated, and no longer act under one umbrella. He said: "For years this theater had not been dedicated to serving the Palestinian minority but was busy trying to create a false notion of coexistence so now it's just a theater in Arabic trying to make good art."

73. Samer al-Saber and Yana Taylor, "Reflecting on Palestinian Theatre: A Resilient Theatre of Resistance," *Performance Paradigm* 10 (2014): 96-97.

74. Al-Saber and Taylor, "Reflecting on Palestinian Theatre: A Resilient Theatre of Resistance," 95.

75. I am particularly grateful to Leila Buck, Najla Said and Rana Kazkaz for years of theatrical collaboration. I would also like to thank Miriam Said for her continuous support.

76. I wanted to mention the start of new journal *Arab Stages*, “devoted to broadening international awareness and understanding of the theater and performance cultures of the Arab-Islamic world and of its diaspora.” Refer to Arab Stages official site: <http://arabstages.org/about/>.

77. An estimated seven hundred and fifty thousand Palestinians have been imprisoned by Israel since 1967. Palestinian Prisoners’ Day is on April 17. Despite a series of hunger strikes launched by prisoners, most recently on April 24, 2014, which stopped after sixty-three days after supposedly reaching a deal with Israeli prison authorities, not much has changed for these prisoners. The massive Israeli military airstrikes on Gaza became not long afterward.



# TENNIS IN NABLUS

A Tragipoliticomedy in Two Acts



Ismail Khalidi

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

I was inspired to write *Tennis in Nablus* for many reasons. I grew up hearing stories of the Arab Revolt and its importance to the formation of Palestinian identity and the modern struggle over Palestine. Both sides of my family, like most Palestinian families, were involved in or affected by the revolt against the British in one way or another. Several relatives were exiled by the British, in fact. Another reason I found myself writing this play is that it seemed a very unique and important point of historical intervention into the discussion of Palestine/Israel. That is to say, the timeline of the “conflict” is often determined by the victors (Israel) and does not, in my opinion, serve to truly illuminate the historical context. In fact, I think the Zionist mythology and its timeline are meant precisely to obscure historical fact and context, because it is based on the premise that Palestinians don’t exist. That has been amended in increments over the years as it has become impossible to ignore the existence of Palestinians, but this core premise of Zionism remains intact in the discourse, explicitly or sometimes more subtly. But it remains. When Palestinians are allowed to exist in this narrative, it is only in relation and/or in opposition to Israel. Writing about the period of the Arab Revolt (1936–1939), which took place before the creation of Israel in 1948, was a way to subvert the timeline and the narrative and to show not only that Palestinians existed before Israel, but also that they had a sophisticated society and culture and that they were struggling against colonial British rule for their own freedom and self-determination. In the U.S., for example, we have come to accept as a just cause the Irish struggle against British subjugation, just as we rightly sympathize with and



celebrate the Indian struggle for independence from British rule. Yet, Palestinian struggle against the same colonial overlords is not included in this category. Worse yet, it is ignored, erased, forgotten, and Palestinians are erased with it. That is not only a historical injustice, but it fundamentally limits the public's ability to understand Palestinian identity as well as the basic context of the larger question of Palestine and the conflict itself.

So this moment seemed a much needed entry point for the public, but also an inherently dramatic one. In addition to the drama and tragedy of a failed revolt, the play takes place in 1939, on the eve of World War II and the tragedy that befell European Jewry in the form of the Nazi genocide. The characters popped out of that soil, so to speak, and from one image specifically. I was reading a book by an Israeli historian on the period, and he described two British officials in Palestine playing tennis at the time of the Arab Revolt using Palestinian prisoners chained together as ball boys. This image struck me and it seemed like it summed up so much about imperialism, and about Palestinian history, too. It also brought up many questions about who the Brits in this scenario were, who the prisoners might have been, and their relationship to each other. I worked outward from that image and the other characters and the stories came as I started writing. Also, some of the plotlines and characters are based on family lore and other historical events and characters.

Lastly, I would add that there is also comedy inherent in the scenario of the play. As tragic as imperialism is, there is something absurd about it: the gall, the chutzpah, the utter delusion of the enterprise. And likewise, within the Palestinian tragedy there is humor to be found. Palestinians

find ways to laugh amidst it all. They always have and I actually think it is a form of resistance.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Tennis in Nablus* had its world premiere at Alliance Theatre (Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director) in Atlanta, Georgia, on February 3, 2010. It was directed by Peggy Shannon. The set design was by Brian Sidney Bembridge, the costume design was by Anne Kennedy, the lighting design was by Mike Post, the sound design was by Clay Benning; the production stage manager was R. Lamar Williams and the dramaturg was Celise Kalke. The cast was:

ANBARA

Suehyla El-Attar

YUSEF

Demosthenes Chrysan

TARIQ

Bhavesh Patel

MICHAEL O'DONEGAL, REGGIE Michael Simpson

RAJIB

Jim Sarbh

GENERAL FALBOUR

Bart Hansard

LIEUTENANT DOUGLAS DUFF Joe Knezevich

SAMUEL HIRSCH, SOLDIER 1, Andrew Benator  
EMILIANO ZAPATA

HAJJ WALEED, SOLIDER 2

Tom Thon



## A BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTE

Palestine was under British rule from 1917–1947. During this time, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased dramatically as a result of the growth of the Zionist movement, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (which promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine), as well as growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

This period coincided with the rise of Arab nationalism across the Middle East as well as the rise of a Palestinian national consciousness.

The years 1936–1939 saw a revolt among the indigenous Arabs of Palestine against British rule and growing Jewish immigration from 1933 onward. Promises of Arab independence were not kept by the British who were also promising Palestine to Zionist leaders.

By 1939 the British had succeeded in brutally smashing the Arab rebellion using tactics similar to those employed to suppress uprisings in other parts of the empire such as India and Ireland. Although the Zionist militias in Palestine had been incorporated into the British army in order to defeat the Palestinian rebels, the Zionists would also break with the British after the onset of the war (WWII) in response to the London issued 1939 White Paper which challenged Zionist nationalist aims by putting quotas on Jewish immigration from Europe.

The Palestinian independence movement never recovered from the defeat of the revolt in 1939 and less than a decade later, in 1947–1948, nearly three-quarters of a million

Palestinians were driven from their homes as the state of Israel was created in the vacuum created by the British withdrawal.

## CHARACTERS

ANBARA, a Palestinian writer and the wife of Yusef Al Qudsi. She is modern but not necessarily Western. She is never melodramatic or sentimental, thirties

YUSEF, a notorious Palestinian rebel. He is old school. He has a swagger, but with humor and childishness, forty-six

TARIQ, a successful Palestinian businessman and the nephew of Yusef. He speaks with a hint of a British accent and wears Western dress, thirty-five

MICHAEL O'DONEGAL, an Irish "criminal" serving in the British army in Palestine, mid-twenties

RAJIB, an Indian conscript in the British army. He wears a turban but other than that is in British army attire, thirties

GENERAL FALBOUR, he is not entirely brilliant but he loves Britain and that's enough, mid-sixties

LIEUTENANT DOUGLAS DUFF, a preppy British officer not without ambition, thirties

SAMUEL HIRSCH, a British-educated German Jew and a respected member of the growing Jewish community in Palestine, forty

HAJJ WALEED/HAJJA WALEEDA, works for and lives with Anbara and Yusef. He/she is more an uncle/aunt than a servant and does chores easily for a person of his/her age, seventies



SOLDIERS 1 AND 2, British soldiers

REGGIE, a British businessman

EMILIANO ZAPATA, a ghost

TIME

1939.

PLACE

Nablus, Palestine. A tennis court, a balcony, a house and a jail cell.

THE SET

On the upstage wall we see the facade of the British headquarters with arched windows. The interior of the building is only visible through the windows. There is a large second floor balcony overlooking the hard clay tennis court, which runs horizontally right to left on the stage, the net cutting vertically across center stage.

One part of the stage also serves as the interior of a Palestinian home, simple, perhaps sharing the back wall of the British HQ.

Another part of the stage serves as the office of Tariq in Act One, [Scene 2](#) and then the prison cell.

NOTE

A slash (/) indicates a suggested slight overlap in dialogue and/or quick pacing of cues, but need not be followed literally.

#### A NOTE ON CASTING

Soldiers 1 and 2 are intentionally left unspecified in the text so as to give the director discretion with doubling.

In past productions, Emiliano Zapata and Samuel Hirsch have been doubled, and the same actor can play one of the British soldiers as well. Similarly, Hajj Waleed and General Falbour can be doubled if needed. The role of Reggie can be doubled with the actor playing Michael O'Donegal.

The character of Hajj Waleed can also be played by a woman and become “Hajja Waleeda,” with only minimal changes to pronouns.

## PROLOGUE

*Darkness. A summer night. Nablus, Palestine, 1939. The creaking of wheels on a donkey-drawn cart can be heard, then the cocking of a rifle.*

SOLDIER (*Offstage*): Halt! Step down from the carriage with your hands in the air, old man.

*(Out of the darkness Waleed, an old man in a peasant's robe, enters with his hands raised. From the opposite direction a British soldier enter.)*

What's in the carriage Methuselah?

WALEED: *Bidenjan*, your . . . highness.

SOLDIER: What?

WALEED: Eggplants sir. Aubergines. I want to take them to the early morning markets up north.

SOLDIER: Eggplants, huh?

WALEED: No relation to eggs though, sir. They are related to the potato and tomato, however. Who would have known that such a dark elegant purple orb was related to the fat lumpy white potato, eh? The world is a mysterious place, sir, and God has a way of making a kind of poetry with his creations, no?

SOLDIER: I prefer to be called "your highness," old man. Now let's see what's in the cart.

WALEED: The word aubergine, for example, “your highness,” derives from the Spanish “berenjena” which comes from the Arabic “bidenjan,” which in turn is from the Persian “badingan,” all derived originally from the Sanskrit, “vatin gameh.”

SOLDIER: Bloody fascinatin’.

WALEED: Yes, I think so too.

SOLDIER: Why don’t you tell me why you’re driving up in the dead of night? There’s a curfew you know.

WALEED: Well, because eggplants are in the nightshade family, sir, so it is their custom to move at night. They rot under the sun. But when they travel in darkness they arrive at the market pregnant with the night, full of the whispers of their friend the moon . . . And this way I sell twice as many as the farmers who transport their produce in the morning heat! Shall I tell you about the harvesting of the eggplant sir? It really is / fascinating.

SOLDIER: Jesus, please don’t! Just piss off old man. Be on your way, and stay off the main roads!

*(Waleed bows and exits into the shadows.)*

## ACT ONE

### SCENE 1

*Later that night in an old Palestinian house. There is a table with a typewriter on it. On the back wall hangs an Ottoman sword.*

*Yusef Al Qudsi enters quietly. He wears a British officer's uniform. He stops and takes in the room. He begins to remove oranges from his various pockets. One after another.*

*After a moment Anbara enters from behind Yusef. She silently grabs the sword off the wall and places the blade on his neck. He raises his hands and turns slowly to face her. They look at each other for a beat, the sword still near his throat.*

YUSEF: Have you escaped from your harem to seduce a British officer such as myself, young lady? *(He sits)*

ANBARA: It doesn't suit you.

YUSEF: Or am I being knighted?

ANBARA: You're in my chair.

YUSEF: This chair belongs to His Majesty King George! I . . .

ANBARA: Yusef.

*(Anbara touches his face. He rises.)*

YUSEF: Anbara. You . . . Two years . . . It's been two—

*(Anbara pushes him back into the chair.)*

ANBARA: Two years. Yes. I know.

YUSEF: . . . And I've gotten older.

ANBARA: But you've been giving the Brits hell since they released you. At least that's what everyone in Nablus is talking about.

YUSEF: Seven days, nonstop. What are they saying?

ANBARA: Yet after two years apart it took you seven days to make your way to your wife?

YUSEF: Blame the British, not me.

ANBARA: I do. But you must have known they would capture you that day at Tulkarem.

YUSEF: Anbara, I was arrested and exiled because I fought. And I fought because they occupy us.

ANBARA: Simple.

YUSEF: And if it weren't for them I'd be playing the oud for you every night.

ANBARA: I'd like that.

YUSEF: Like I used to. But that life is gone Anbara. So as soon as I was released I went to work. The revolution can't wait—

ANBARA: Don't talk to me like some young recruit from the hills.

YUSEF: I came as soon as I could.

ANBARA: I've been waiting.

YUSEF: Well. I had to see if I still had it in me.

ANBARA: And? Do you still have it?

YUSEF: Naturally.

ANBARA: I've missed you.

YUSEF: Naturally.

ANBARA: And still so modest. Naturally. *(Beat)* So you've come home to me?

YUSEF: In the flesh.

ANBARA: And who said you could come here, anyway?

YUSEF: You are my wife. This is my house.

ANBARA: And what if I have a guest over and this isn't a good time? Did you think about that?

YUSEF: I can leave.

ANBARA: A young man to keep me company perhaps, a man fleeing out the bedroom window as we speak.

YUSEF: Somehow I imagined this homecoming differently.

ANBARA: That my clothes would fall to the ground the moment I saw you?

YUSEF: For instance.

ANBARA: Perhaps you should be the one stripping down for me.

YUSEF: You haven't changed.

*(She lights a cigarette, takes a drag and then hands it to him.)*

ANBARA: It's dangerous, Yusef, they'll be after you.

YUSEF: Hence the disguise.

ANBARA: You look ridiculous.

YUSEF: But I bet you're dying to hear how I got it.

*(She ignores him.)*

The English, as you know, are formidable opponents, Anbara: they're ruthless, callous and greedy . . . *But!*

ANBARA: Tea, coffee or a drink?

*(He nods to the bottle and continues:)*



YUSEF: *But* . . . they have one weakness which allows a quick-witted opponent in need of a disguise to get their uniforms off their backs quicker than a Turkish prostitute.

ANBARA: And you have experience with such women?

YUSEF: It's a figure of speech, Anbara. Please. Ask me how I did it!

ANBARA: No.

YUSEF: Simple. Costume parties. The British will drop everything at the mere mention of a themed costume ball.

ANBARA: I've noticed.

YUSEF: I got the idea when I arrived with the other prisoners to Haifa last week. We docked before dawn and on shore I could see half the officers' corps in costume, returning from a night out. By mid-morning they'd released us and I was on the road, down the coast and then inland, village to village, town to town.

ANBARA: Like the old days.

YUSEF: Except half of my men from before are dead or in prison.

ANBARA: I've been to my share of trials and funerals while you were gone.

YUSEF: You hate funerals.

ANBARA: Almost as much as I hate trials. And stories that drag on.

YUSEF: Right. So yesterday, finally I arrive in Nablus.

ANBARA: Not to see me, however.

YUSEF: Not yet. To see the general, actually. Falbour. But he wasn't in. Off playing cricket. Or tennis. With lord so and so.

ANBARA: So you walk in.

YUSEF: Just like that. Disguised as a servant of the house I enter through the kitchen and up the back stairs, where I convinced none other than Lieutenant Douglas Duff that he was terribly late for the India-themed ball at the high commissioner's house in Jerusalem. The man was in costume and out the door before you could say "His Majesty's a royal ass!"

ANBARA: Leaving his uniform for the taking.

YUSEF: Precisely. And with it I was able to borrow from the Nablus armory forty brand-new 1939 edition Enfield rifles, enough ammo for a month's campaign and a supply of dynamite to derail British trains. (*A bow*) Thank you, thank you very much.

ANBARA: And where is all of it now, Yusef?

YUSEF: Safe.

ANBARA: Not here I hope.

YUSEF: Hajj Waleed's taken it up to the fighters in Jenin . . .  
Hidden under his eggplants.

ANBARA: You shouldn't make the old man run your errands!  
He won't last if they catch him.

YUSEF: Waleed's been with my family for years. He was  
fighting the Turks before you finished grade school!

ANBARA: Exactly.

YUSEF: And if all fails he can bore anyone to death with the  
details of the eggplant or the olive harvest.

ANBARA: How they must regret the day they set the famous  
rebel Yusef Al Qudsi free.

YUSEF: Imagine! They wanted to send me to London for the  
negotiations. But I said no. They thought I'd scurry off to  
England to beg them for terms with the others.

ANBARA: Don't underestimate them, Yusef.

YUSEF: Trust me, I know the Brits; I know precisely what  
they're about.

ANBARA: And what's that?

YUSEF: They're after the sun.

ANBARA: The sun?

YUSEF: They want to conquer everything south of their dreary little island in order to kidnap the sun and brighten the bloody place up a bit. *(He starts to shed the uniform)* I'm sweating like a sweaty fucking Brit!

ANBARA: Relax.

YUSEF: I'm babbling huh?

ANBARA: Yes.

YUSEF: I still get nervous every time I see you.

ANBARA: Like a little schoolboy. In love with his teacher.

YUSEF: Or like a handsome rebel made speechless by a beautiful peasant girl.

ANBARA: Your fantasies are predictable.

*(Yusef kisses Anbara for the first time. A beat.)*

Drifting in at the strangest times.

YUSEF *(Pointing to the typewriter)*: And you, writing away at the strangest hours.

ANBARA: If I didn't write who knows if you would ever have become the dangerous revolutionary you are today.

YUSEF: When's your deadline?

ANBARA: Before noon. Arabic and English editions. I want it published before the British release their report on the London meetings.

YUSEF: And what's the nom de plume these days?

ANBARA: Mohammad Ali Baybars. At your service.

*(They shake hands.)*

YUSEF: A pleasure Mr. Baybars. I hear you're quite a thinker. But you also have a great ass and—

ANBARA: Go. I'll follow. When I'm done. *(She gathers the clothes from the ground)* And your costume?

YUSEF: Waleed will make sure it's put to use. Give it to him when he gets back.

*(She throws the uniform at Yusef.)*

ANBARA: Give it to him yourself.

YUSEF: Fine. But one more kiss, Mr. Baybars. Please.

*(A kiss.)*

ANBARA: Away beast!

*(He starts to leave but turns.)*

YUSEF: Exile is not fun, you know. It's lonely. Very lonely.

ANBARA: I know. You see, my husband was imprisoned on an island at the end of the earth for six hundred and thirteen days . . . But I almost got used to being alone.

YUSEF: You got used to being alone?

ANBARA: Almost . . . Where are the oranges from?

YUSEF: Stole them from a grove between Nebi Musa and Jericho.

ANBARA: Your family's land?

YUSEF: New ownership: it's a Jewish farm now.

ANBARA: Tariq.

YUSEF: He's been busy while I was gone. Business must be good.

ANBARA: There's a killing to be made on real estate these days and your nephew isn't one to miss out.

YUSEF: We're becoming thieves in our own land.

ANBARA: With friends like Tariq it's not hard to see why.

YUSEF: When Waleed returns I'll have him fetch Tariq for a friendly breakfast. I'll have a word with that boy.

ANBARA: They'll follow him here, Yusef.

YUSEF: He'll listen . . .

ANBARA: Well he clearly didn't get the message last time.

YUSEF: I'm his uncle, I'll make him listen . . . You better finish that article before the old man returns from Jenin.

*(He exits. Anbara begins to type. She stops, gets up and follows him.*

*Lights fade.)*

## SCENE 2

*A Western-style office. Tariq sits at the desk. He wears a European suit. He reads the paper. It is early morning. The call to prayer is heard. Tariq turns on the radio.*

RADIO (*Voiceover*): “And from Palestine, British commanders hailed the success of anti-terrorist measures against the ‘Arab Revolt,’ which has raged on since 1936. High Commissioner MacMichael announced that: ‘the violent unrest of the Arab population is in its last throes.’ His assessment was confirmed by commanders of the Jewish units fighting alongside British troops. On the European front, escalating tensions between Germany and Britain—”

*(A knock is heard. Tariq turns the volume down.)*

TARIQ: Come in.

*(Reggie enters.)*

REGGIE: Mornin’ Rik! Here early.

TARIQ: Couldn’t sleep. You?

REGGIE: Haven’t slept since I got here. All that chanting from the mosque at five in the bloody mornin’. Dublin was shit but the most you’d hear from the Irish was a fiddle or a brawl outside the pub, yeah.

TARIQ: You’ll get used to it.



REGGIE: Hope I'm gone before then. When did you get back from Alexandria?

TARIQ: Late last night.

REGGIE: Business as usual then?

TARIQ: Everything in order, yes.

REGGIE: Well it's good to have you back, Rik.

TARIQ: Good to be home. Any news?

REGGIE: No, just talk of war back home and how to get the Arabs on our side if we fight the Huns.

TARIQ: Let's hope for the best.

REGGIE (*Lowering his voice*): Though it's no secret that war is good for business, ey. Oh yeah, almost forgot. That Hirsch fellow came by while you were gone to finalize the deal on that land in . . . uhh . . . Beiyt . . . Beiyt something or other. He said you'd know the place.

TARIQ: I know it, yes. I just have to convince the owners to sell.

REGGIE: They're a stubborn lot, them Arabs . . .

TARIQ: Indeed . . .

REGGIE: All right then, cheers man.

*(Reggie exits then pops his head back in.)*

Forgot to mention: party at the governor's place Friday night.  
You gonna come along?

TARIQ: I hadn't planned on it but I might drop by.

REGGIE: You don't want to miss it. I'm gonna dress as a Bedouin Chieftain of the Hijaz. Fantastic, man! I make Lawrence of Arabia look like an amateur when I put this one on, yeah.

TARIQ: Weren't you a Bedouin Chieftain last time, Reggie?

REGGIE: No! Last time I was a Maharaja of the Mogul Court. Get it straight, man. Not all Orientals are the same.

TARIQ: Right. Thanks.

REGGIE: Actually I am using a bit from the Maharaja costume, but I can lend you the rest if you like.

TARIQ: I might just throw on the old Venetian mask again. Keep it simple.

REGGIE: Boring!

*(Reggie exits then pops his head in once again.)*

TARIQ: Yes, Reggie?

REGGIE: Uh, you got someone out here waiting to see you.

TARIQ: Good. Is it Hirsch?

REGGIE: No. It's an Arab, an older bloke.

TARIQ: Oh. Send him in.

*(Reggie exits. Tariq picks up an Arabic newspaper then picks up the English paper then switches again. As the door opens he has one in each hand. As Waleed enters, Tariq pretends to read both at the same time. Waleed bows slightly.)*

WALEED: *Sabah al Kheyr ya Tariq effendi.*

TARIQ: Good morning to you Hajj Waleed.

WALEED: You know, I never knew you were such a two-faced man, young Tariq!

TARIQ: And what is that supposed to mean??

WALEED: Well you are reading two newspapers at the same time. It is very impressive.

TARIQ: How can I help you this morning?

WALEED: I came to let you know you're invited to your uncle's house.

TARIQ: My uncle? Yusef? Here?

WALEED: Yes. He's back.

*(Tariq springs up, making sure no one is outside.)*

TARIQ: Back in Nablus? Since when?!

WALEED: Since now. He wants to see you immediately. He's cooked you breakfast.

TARIQ: I'm busy. Until later this afternoon. Send him my lukewarm regards.

WALEED: He insists. It must be now, he said. It's important.

TARIQ: It's not even eight! I haven't read my papers or, or had my tea.

WALEED: He's your uncle, Tariq.

TARIQ: Uncle?! He had my store in Jaffa looted and burned to the ground and then made my workers strike. My own workers! Some uncle he is.

WALEED: So what should I tell him . . . "Rik"?

TARIQ: What did you call me?

WALEED: "Rik." It's what the English one out there called you no? I thought maybe you had changed your name to "Rik."

TARIQ: It's just a silly nickname, okay. At the office! That's all.

WALEED: Fine. Shall we go then?

*(Tariq, deep in thought, does not answer.)*

. . . Tariq!

TARIQ: No. Yes. You go ahead Hajj. Tell him I'll be there around nine. I have an urgent matter I have to attend to first. Is that all?

WALEED: Since you ask, I wonder if we could talk about this land sale in Beit Jala? That land has been in my family for over seven hundred years / and—

TARIQ: Thank you Hajj Waleed! Your reservation has been noted. I assure you I have everyone's best interests in mind, including your cousins in Beit Jala, when I conduct my business. Now if you don't mind . . .

*(Waleed exits. Tariq picks up the phone.)*

Get me Lieutenant Douglas Duff please.

### SCENE 3

*Later that morning at the house. Yusef cooks. Waleed sits at the table, reading.*

WALEED: Excellent! It gives me hope. A manifesto for revolution. Who wrote it?

YUSEF: A friend of ours. Mohammad Ali Baybars. It's a draft of his piece for *Filastin*.

WALEED: Never heard of him. Where's he from?

YUSEF: He's . . . from the Galilee. From a very small family. A recluse really—a shy, shy man.

ANBARA: But in private he's no pushover.

WALEED: Well it's very mature. Reminds me of the writing of that other boy who used to write for the weekly journal before they shut it down. What was his name . . . ?

ANBARA: Mustafa Abdullah . . . I believe. No, Yusef?

YUSEF: Similar styles, yes, but I think this Baybars is even better.

WALEED: He's a damn genius if you ask me.

ANBARA: Agreed.

YUSEF: Yes, and pretty, too.

WALEED: Pretty? Did you say / pretty—?

YUSEF: I was saying pretty *likely* the most important thinker between Cairo and Baghdad.

*(A knock at the door . . . Yusef signals Anbara to the door. He draws the pistol and melts into the shadows. Anbara lets Tariq in. Yusef emerges stealthily from behind him.)*

You look richer, Nephew.

TARIQ: Yusef! Still a bit creepy, even after all these years.

YUSEF: Come here. Give your uncle a hug.

*(Yusef grabs Tariq and hugs him.)*

You're late. Sit. I made *ful*. Still the best beans this side of the Sinai.

*(They sit. Yusef puts his pistol on the table near his plate. Tariq eyes the gun.)*

TARIQ: Um, excuse me but, are you . . . threatening me, Uncle?

YUSEF: Um, are you threatened by me? Nephew?

TARIQ: No need to mock me as if I were a little boy, you're only ten years older than me.

YUSEF: Eleven years, actually.

TARIQ: Could you please just put that thing somewhere else?!

*(Yusef slides the gun a couple of inches away.)*

Further maybe?

*(Yusef repeats the motion, sliding it another couple inches away.)*

Further! Like NOT within reach. Like in another room perhaps!

YUSEF: Well maybe you'd like to hold it? Is that it? Here take it!

*(Anbara takes the gun and slides it into her robe.)*

ANBARA: Now, who would like some food? Tariq?

TARIQ: Thank God your wife is more civilized than you, Uncle.

YUSEF: I'll take that as a compliment. Unless, of course, you are referring to British "civilization."

TARIQ: And so what if I was?

YUSEF: Then I would consider it an insult, since they were painting their bodies blue and drawing on caves when we were building fountains and universities and inventing mathematics!



TARIQ: Oh, such an example of refinement you are, sitting at the table with a bloody revolver on your plate.

YUSEF: In case you didn't know I am a hunted man, so I have to be careful. Look at how they got Zapata in Mexico.

TARIQ: Oh no.

YUSEF: Don't "oh no" me. He was betrayed in his own territory. Ambushed!

TARIQ: Still comparing ourselves to dead "revolutionary" heroes, are we?!

YUSEF: Well, my dear nephew, I'm simply protecting myself from the death they wish upon me. I don't know who I can trust after all.

TARIQ: Spare me your suffocating self-indulgence Yusef! You're a petty thug.

YUSEF: And you are a petty little prick. But believe it or not, I've missed you Tariq . . . Or is it "Rik" now?

*(Tariq shoots a look at Waleed.)*

TARIQ: It's Tariq! Let's please not confuse my business with who I am as a person.

YUSEF: Fine.

TARIQ: Though, such a notion surely didn't cross your mind as you sent my investments into flames in '36, dear Uncle!

YUSEF: Yes. Well . . . I wanted to . . . apologize. For that incident. It was. Unfortunate.

TARIQ: It was an insult!

YUSEF: It was not how I would have wished for it to happen, no!

TARIQ: It was a betrayal Yusef. It was utterly foolish and unjust. / It was—

YUSEF: It was a rebellion Tariq! There was a rebellion going on! Your people. You remember who your people are?!? And that business of yours was breaking the boycott.

TARIQ: I was making a living for myself, not to mention my workers; our fellow countrymen!

YUSEF: You see this Anbara? I try to apologize and explain it to him but he's thick!

ANBARA: Calm down. Both of you. And keep me out of this.

YUSEF: Listen to me Tariq! Your “business as usual” helped the British to undercut the revolt! Is all this lost on you, boy?

TARIQ: I'll tell you what I lost. I lost years of hard work! I lost contracts, employees, investments, and thousands and thousands of pounds.

YUSEF: And I lost friends. I lost two years of freedom.

*(A moment of charged silence.)*

TARIQ: You must understand, I am not a little boy anymore.

YUSEF: Oh just shut up and eat your food!

*(Tariq gets up from the table.)*

TARIQ: I'm sorry to leave Anbara but I won't take his abuse.

YUSEF: Please. I'm sorry. Sit . . . It's important.

TARIQ: Make it quick.

YUSEF: It is precisely because you are not a boy anymore that I'm asking for your help. I am asking you as a fellow Palestinian. We need you Tariq. I need you.

TARIQ: No. The answer's no.

YUSEF: We are this close! The Brits think they've won but if we can make one push—

TARIQ: And what do I have to do with this?

YUSEF: We need a man of your standing, with your knowledge of the British . . . If you were to support the revolt we could maybe hold our ground. But this is our last chance.

TARIQ: It's already over. You're practically the only one still fighting.

YUSEF: Maybe. But if you joined me others would follow. You are my last hope Tariq.

TARIQ: Our leaders went to the London conference. Give it up, man.

YUSEF: The Brits kill thousands of us, imprison thousands more and now they want to negotiate. They will use us and then throw us aside. Help me! Help us!

TARIQ: Tell me, Uncle: What would I need to do to help save your little revolution? Carry a gun around, mugging people, like you?

YUSEF: Don't worry, I wouldn't trust your aim . . . But you could start by not selling off our lands to the Europeans.

TARIQ: You mean I'd have to stop selling to Jews, is that it?

YUSEF: No, I said Europeans. They are Europeans to me. I have no interest which way they talk to God. We've always had Jews among us, but they were Arabs, like us. These Zionists, they are Europeans, fighting side by side with the British Empire.

TARIQ: I happen to be friends with some of them and find they are equitable, kind business partners.

ANBARA: They are not just buying summer homes, eh Tariq! They're building a country right on top of ours while the British hold us down.

TARIQ: That's a matter of opinion.

YUSEF: Opinion?! Those aren't toy guns they're carrying around! Wake up, Tariq! The days of looking the other way are over. They want it all for themselves!

TARIQ: Good-bye Uncle. I suggest you make yourself scarce for a while. You are a hunted man after all.

YUSEF: Tariq, wait!

ANBARA: Let him go.

*(A crash. The door is kicked open and a British soldier enters with his rifle pointed at Yusef. Lieutenant Douglas Duff enters behind him with a pistol drawn. He wears a full Maharaja costume.)*

LT. DUFF: Breakfast's over! Everybody keep your hands where we can see them. *(To Yusef)* Well, well. Hello again. I've been looking for you.

YUSEF: Good morning . . . your Maharaja-ship.

LT. DUFF: Have this man cuffed and arrested at once.

SOLDIER: I think we arrest him and then cuff him sir. Technically.

LT. DUFF: Technically I don't care which order you do it in. He is a rebel and a thief! Cuff him!

*(The soldier cuffs Yusef.)*

YUSEF: In case no one's told you, it really is an excellent costume, Lieutenant.

*(Lieutenant Duff slaps Yusef.)*

LT. DUFF: Well in case no one's told you, I don't need my uniform to arrest you and have you exiled to some God awful island, or better yet: executed. Now, if I hear one more word out of your mouth I'll have you all lashed and then gagged . . . Or gagged and then lashed. Soldier, search the house.

TARIQ: Sir. Lieutenant Duff, please. There is nothing here I assure you, upon the king's throne. You've got who you came for, now leave these people alone.

LT. DUFF: And you are?

WALEED: You can call him Rik, sir.

TARIQ: I don't believe we've had the pleasure. My name's Tariq Al Qudsi. Here's my card. *(He hands Lieutenant Duff his business card)* I'm in the import-export and real estate business, sir.

LT. DUFF: Yes. I've . . . heard of you. Surprised to find you in the company of such a lawless bandit as this.

TARIQ: Family, sir. One can't choose them.

LT. DUFF: I'll take your word on that. *(To Yusef)* Now, could I have my uniform back?

YUSEF: It seems I misplaced it last night, your excellency. How was the party?

LT. DUFF (*As he rummages around*): Not as enjoyable as the costume party you'll be attending. We've chosen a very convincing set of chains for your hands and feet. Take him away!

(*Anbara draws the pistol, cocks it, and holds it to the back of Lieutenant Duff's head.*)

ANBARA: You'll be taking no one out of my house. Unless you want a hole through the back of your turban, sir!

LT. DUFF (*To the soldier, unable to see her*): Is that thing . . . real?

SOLDIER: Uh yeah, it looks pretty real to me sir.

LT. DUFF: Jesus, I thought they were supposed to be timid and docile in the Orient?

ANBARA: I'm very outgoing sir, and this gun is quite real. I could show you, if you'd like.

LT. DUFF: That's quite all right lady. (*Beat*) Shoot her.

YUSEF: Wait!

LT. DUFF: I said SHOOT the bitch!!! Ready! . . . Aim! . . .

(*The soldier prepares to fire.*)

YUSEF: Anbara, put it down!

ANBARA: I won't let them take you, not again.

YUSEF: I'll be fine. I'll be free in no time.

LT. DUFF: You'll hang.

YUSEF: Go to Baybars. What he writes in the papers makes a difference.

LT. DUFF: Silence!

YUSEF: If he can't free me at least he won't let me die in vain.

LT. DUFF: Shut up, everyone shut up or I'll have you all shot!!!

YUSEF: Put the gun down, Anbara.

*(Anbara pushes the gun deeper into Lieutenant Duff's turban but after a moment lowers it.)*

LT. DUFF: Very good! Now arrest her and confiscate that weapon.

*(The soldier grabs Anbara and the gun.)*

On second thought, give me the gun.

*(Lieutenant Duff now holds two pistols.)*



Ahh that feels better. I quite like the whole Wild West cowboy feel. How do I look man?

SOLDIER: Really great / sir . . .

YUSEF: Duff, let her go. I beg you. I'll give you names, just leave her. She's a woman, sir.

ANBARA: No. Take me! Yusef, shut up!

LT. DUFF (*Intrigued, up in Yusef's face*): I want the financiers behind the revolt. Can you give me that, boy?

YUSEF: Yes.

LT. DUFF: Very well. Release her. Move out.

(*The soldier and Lieutenant Duff leave, pulling Yusef with them.*)

TARIQ: He was irresponsible to come here, to put you in danger Anbara. The one place they'd know to look! He acts *recklessly*! But, don't worry, I'll put my reputation and connections into play to free him. I'll go at once to straighten this out. And you'll see that my name, and my way can achieve more than mere thuggery. Negotiations, compromise and deal-making! A calm discussion between responsible, reasonable and reputable adults! That is the way to get things done today.

(*Lieutenant Duff reenters, seen by Anbara but unbeknownst to Tariq.*)

You must assure me, however, that when I get Yusef out you will make him see things my way. After all it is only with restraint and cooperation we can all stay out of trouble and help our cause more. The revolution is really about evolution! I call it “rational nationalism”—

*(Anbara gestures to Tariq to stop talking.)*

I’ll take care of this. I’ll make the Brits pay for their arrogance. Everything is under control, Anbara, trust me.

LT. DUFF: Bravo. Very inspiring. You were done, no? Or is there more?

TARIQ: No, I’m . . . done, sir. Yes. Thank you, sir.

LT. DUFF: In that case I must inform you that you’re under arrest by the Mandatory Authorities of His Majesty King George of England.

TARIQ: But, for what, sir!?

LT. DUFF: For your clandestine role in assisting financially and materially the treasonous rebellion against the British Mandate in Palestine.

TARIQ: There’s been a terrible mistake, sir—

LT. DUFF: Evidence doesn’t lie, Mr. Qudsi. *(Beat)* And if it does, oh well!

TARIQ: What evidence?!? This is an outrage, Lieutenant! Not your fault per se, of course, sir, but a big misunderstanding. Please, I demand to speak with the general. At once.

LT. DUFF: Yes. Perhaps you could give him your card.

*(Lieutenant Duff slips the card Tariq gave him into Tariq's front pocket.)*

Cheers.

*(Lieutenant Duff exits, leading Tariq out with him.)*

WALEED: Allah works in mysterious ways Anbara. It is in his hands now.

*(Waleed exits. Anbara retrieves her typewriter and begins to write. She stops and slams her fist on the table.)*

## SCENE 4

*The courtyard in the British compound. Rajib and Michael O'Donegal play cards and drink tea.*

MICHAEL: Two kings. What do you have?

RAJIB: Two threes!

MICHAEL: Shite! Your hand. Again.

RAJIB: I've never been this lucky at cards Michael, I swear.

MICHAEL: How do I keep drawing fuckin' face cards? It's a curse. A bad omen. Goddamn useless royalty!

RAJIB: A worthless lot the kings and queens, I agree. *(Beat)* You owe me a pound O'Donegal.

MICHAEL: I don't have it Rajib, but I'll pay you back Friday, I swear.

RAJIB: Fine. Just don't go gambling away more money you don't have. At least until after you've paid me.

MICHAEL: Fuck, at this rate I'll never escape back to Ireland.

RAJIB: It was your idea to change the bloody rules, Michael; Bolshevik poker was your idea!

MICHAEL: Oh come on, we were both equally fond of that bloody inbred bastard on the Thames. I didn't hear you complainin' when we made the change.

RAJIB: That's true. And I'm not complaining now.

MICHAEL: I couldn't even buy a king before our glorious little revolution!

RAJIB: Yes. That's also true.

MICHAEL: Right! So one would then surmise that I'd keep drawing low cards and be winning under the new rules. But no! Now that I don't bloody want 'em, I'm drowning in the high cards!

RAJIB: Technically the high cards are the low cards and the low cards are high / but—

MICHAEL: Jesus, who are you, the fuckin' Commissar of the People's Republic of Poker? Fuck off!

RAJIB: Just a poor comrade like yourself, Michael, trying to get out of this powder keg before it blows. I don't want to die in Palestine either. I'd prefer Calcutta or Karachi any day.

MICHAEL: It's all shit.

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): Guards!!!

*(Rajib and Michael pause, then continue as if they heard nothing.)*

MICHAEL: Another cup of tea?

RAJIB: Yes, why not. Thank you. Another hand perhaps?

LT. DUFF (*Still offstage, louder*): PRIVATES RAJIB AND O'BLOODY-FUCKING-DONEGAL!!!

RAJIB: Sugar?

MICHAEL: Oh yes, thank you. Two spoons. Whiskey?

(*Michael takes out a flask of whiskey, pours some, and offers it to Rajib.*)

RAJIB: No thank you. Too early for me.

(*Soldier enters, winded.*)

SOLDIER: Lieutenant Duff is back. He's been screamin' his head off for you two.

MICHAEL: Really? I didn't notice. Did you hear anything Rajib?

RAJIB: No. No. I think I heard a dog barking maybe.

MICHAEL: That was a hyena I think. (*To the soldier*) Did his head really come off?

SOLDIER: No O'Donegal. His head's still there. And he's still a pain in the arse.

MICHAEL: Damn.

RAJIB: One can always hope.

SOLDIER: Your orders are to report to the front office immediately. He says he's got a job for the two of you.

MICHAEL: Oh, how wonderful.

RAJIB: Maybe it's not too early. If you don't mind.

*(Rajib extends his cup. Michael serves the whiskey and they both gulp down their drinks and then grab their rifles and exit.)*

## SCENE 5

*The prison holding area. Tariq and Yusef are cuffed. Lieutenant Duff, still in Maharaja wear, sits at the desk writing. Rajib and Michael enter.*

LT. DUFF: Oh, well thank you for coming soldiers. I'm sure it was quite a struggle to follow orders and walk all the way here. Remind me to commend you to the general.

MICHAEL: Really sir?

RAJIB: Oh, thank you, sir. That's very kind of you sir.

LT. DUFF: No, it's not! I was being . . . never mind. At ease.

*(Rajib stares at Lieutenant Duff's outfit. Lieutenant Duff notices.)*

*(To Rajib)* Yes?!?

*(Michael snickers loudly.)*

Is there something you want to say Private O'Donegal? No? Good. Now button your uniform, soldier!

*(Michael rests the rifle against Yusef and starts buttoning his shirt.)*

MICHAEL *(To Yusef)*: Watch that will you. I can't manage the buttons with that thing in my hand.



LT. DUFF: Private! I'd prefer you didn't hand the prisoner your rifle, thank you.

MICHAEL: You're right, sir, it would have been a disaster; he might have shot you, sir.

*(Michael takes the rifle back.)*

LT. DUFF: One more insubordinate remark from you Private and I'll punish you! Understood?

TARIQ: Sir, I'd like to speak with the general, at once.

LT. DUFF: You'll get your chance to chat to General Falbour soon enough.

TARIQ: Thank you. This is all a big mistake.

LT. DUFF: As it happens, he's the presiding judge of the military court you'll be standing in front of. *(To Michael)* Private, these two men are from a very well-respected clan of Palestine. And Arabs are quite fond of their honor, you know, so make sure they are treated accordingly.

YUSEF: You know Lieutenant, our ancestors fought alongside Salah-a-din when he defeated your Richard the Kittenheart and his Crusader hordes.

LT. DUFF: King Richard the Lionheart, damn it! Lionheart! A little respect! Now shut up. All of you!

RAJIB: Sir? Any orders? For me?

LT. DUFF: Oh, you. Yes actually. While the slow-witted Paddy takes these brigands to their cell, you can hop on over to the tennis court and have it leveled and ready to go by eleven o'clock. Sharp. Dismissed.

*(Rajib salutes and exits.)*

Now that you look more like a soldier, O'Donegal, I'll ask you to escort these two men to cell five. Not four. Not three. Five!

MICHAEL: Funny 'cause I was thinking I'd show them out the front door, save us the trouble of watching and feeding them, sir.

LT. DUFF: Very amusing Private. Do remember these men are dangerous rebels and will gladly slit your throat. Though I suppose that'd save me the trouble. *(He starts to leave)*

MICHAEL: Just promise to send my body back to Ireland, sir.

*(A moment; Lieutenant Duff leaves.)*

YUSEF: What's your name young man?

MICHAEL: Well it's not Paddy or Mick, I'll tell you that.

YUSEF: I like to be called "Arab beast," or just "wog." I also like "damned Semite scum," if only because it has a wider scope of targets for the discerning British gentleman.

MICHAEL: Is that so? You dirty Mohammedan!

YUSEF: Irish bastard!

MICHAEL: Bloody Bedouin goat-shagger!

YUSEF: Filthy potato-eating pope-lover!

MICHAEL: Two-timin' camel-ridin' terrorist!

YUSEF: Tinker Mick Taig monkey son of a Paddy whore!!!!

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL: Touché. *(A laugh)*

YUSEF: Yusef Al Qudsi. And this fellow next to me is my worthless, traitorous nephew Tariq. Say hello Tariq.

*(He doesn't.)*

MICHAEL *(To Yusef)*: Michael O'Donegal. Cigarette?

*(Michael shares a cigarette with Yusef who is still cuffed.)*

YUSEF: Any relation to Sean O'Donegal?

MICHAEL: It's me dad's cousin, yeah. You know him?

YUSEF: We know of him. He fought the partition, gave the Brits a hiding in 1918. An inspiration.

MICHAEL: Well he'd give me a hiding if he saw me wearing this uniform, but it was either this or rot in a Belfast prison for five years. This turned out to be much worse of course.

YUSEF: The choices we're left with dear boy. I was conscripted into the Ottoman army; got a British bullet in my ass at Gallipoli. Now, whiskey's the only thing that numbs the pain.

MICHAEL: Well I've got somethin' for what ails you then. Irish of course. Blended.

*(Michael un-cuffs Yusef, gives him the flask.)*

Not a pious Moslem I take it?

YUSEF: More of a pious rebel, Michael. It comes first these days.

MICHAEL: Amen. To the Empire!

LT. DUFF *(Offstage)*: O'Donegal!!!

MICHAEL: Speak of the devil. Master calls. I'd best be off.

*(Michael puts cuffs back on Yusef and exits; Soldier enters to stand guard.)*

TARIQ: This is absurd.

YUSEF: Yes, Tariq: An army of pink, pig eaters thousands of miles from their island telling us how to live. It's the height of absurdity.

TARIQ: That's not what I mean! You know what? I'm going to sit here in silence! Because I clearly cannot have a conversation with you!

YUSEF: Fine. But you should know that communication with other human beings during imprisonment is the key to maintaining one's sanity. I learned that in the Seychelles. Ended up talking to a banana tree after one month in solitary.

TARIQ: You framed me! You gave Duff my name.

YUSEF: And you know the worst part?! . . . I had to eat them afterwards.

TARIQ: What are you talking about?

YUSEF: The bananas. I killed and then ate my only friends; my confessors, my comrades. We were fed mostly bananas. Imagine! Like a bunch of monkeys! Very sad.

TARIQ: You framed your own nephew, your flesh and blood.

YUSEF: Well, Tariq, I figured I'd return the favor.

TARIQ: Are you suggesting that I turned you in? You're insane.

YUSEF: Perhaps I am. And you are guilty. Banana sandwiches. Banana kebab.

TARIQ: Me? Guilty??? Of what?

YUSEF: Stuffed bananas. They were the best!

TARIQ: What am I guilty of?

YUSEF: Doing monkey business!

TARIQ: You know, you've always been jealous, Yusef. Because I built a fortune and a good reputation against all odds.

YUSEF: But despite your "reputation," to them, you are just another dirty Arab monkey! Guilty!

TARIQ: I am well respected by colleagues from Nablus to London!

YUSEF: And yet here you are, in jail.

TARIQ: I'm in jail because you've framed me and sullied my name!

YUSEF: For your information, being in prison is the one thing that can save your name from being truly "sullied." If only you were lucky enough to be guilty of fighting for your country!

TARIQ: Ahh! So you admit it! I'm innocent!

YUSEF: No, you're clueless, Tariq.

TARIQ: Really? Because I think I'm the only one preparing himself realistically for the future of Palestine.

YUSEF: You're absolutely right. Because there won't be a Palestine to do business in before long! We'll be the foreigners soon enough and your business partners will be the citizens. *(Pause)* But perhaps you'd trade it all for a flat in London? What a sight! A naive, collaborating ape walking the rainy streets of the imperial capital in a nice European suit.

TARIQ: I am not a collaborator. And I am not going anywhere.

YUSEF: Banana juice with a little yogurt!!!! That was my favorite!

TARIQ: And you wonder, you wonder why I would turn you in!?!?

*(Beat.)*

YUSEF: No, I wonder, how we are related, Tariq . . .

*(Tariq starts writing with a small pencil and a piece of paper.)*

What are you writing?

TARIQ: I am drafting a request for the prompt assistance of a respected man, a friend, who will vouch for my character and get me out of here. But not you I'm afraid.

*(Michael returns to lead Tariq and Yusef to the prison cell.)*

YUSEF: That's true, your friends would have me rot in here while you run free.

TARIQ: You know what I think Uncle Yusef? I think you are the perfect example of why we need to be ruled. At least until we learn how to act civilized.

YUSEF: A question, Tariq: what good is your pocket watch if you are nothing but a slave?

*(Both are led into their cell.)*



## SCENE 6

*Later that morning on the balcony of the British compound. Standing over a map is General Allen B. Falbour with an elephant tail fly swatter in hand. He flicks away the occasional fly as he moves pieces around on the map.*

*Lieutenant Duff enters. He wears a white 1930s-era tennis outfit. He holds a stack of files.*

GENERAL: Oh bollocks Douglas! Damn you, man!

LT. DUFF: What is it sir??

GENERAL: Well, you've withheld crucial information from me Lieutenant Duff. You've clearly failed to remind me about the costume party this afternoon! Do you deny the charges?

LT. DUFF: No, sir! I mean yes! No! Sir I . . . think there's been a misunderstanding.

GENERAL: Now I'll have to go and see if I can dig up my Zulu Chieftain outfit from last year.

*(The General exits.)*

LT. DUFF *(Calling inside)*: Sir? Sir, I don't think that's necessary sir.

GENERAL *(From inside, offstage)*: I could have sworn that party was Friday night.

*(The General enters shirtless with a headdress; Lieutenant Duff lowers his eyes as the General disappears again.)*

*(Offstage)* And now you'll show me up with that smart little sailor's outfit you've put together.

LT. DUFF: But it's Wednesday, sir. Remember. *(Pause)* . . . And I'm not a sailor, sir.

GENERAL *(Offstage)*: Well what the hell are you supposed to be then?

LT. DUFF: A tennis player. Sir.

GENERAL *(Still offstage)*: Oh yes, of course. Very good. Well done. You're missing the racket though.

LT. DUFF: That's because it's on the tennis court, sir. We play tennis together, Wednesdays sir, after the briefing. I got dressed a little early today. So there's actually no costume ball, sir.

*(The General reenters behind Lieutenant Duff. He wears a Zulu headdress and holds a spear. His face is covered in crude blackface.)*

GENERAL: No party then?

*(He exits before Lieutenant Duff can see him and returns quickly, without the costume but still in blackface.)*

Tennis it is. Shall we carry on with the meeting then Lieutenant?

LT. DUFF: Um, sir?

GENERAL: Get on with it man, so we can hit the court before it's too bloody hot to play.

LT. DUFF: Your face, sir. You seem to have put on your Zulu . . . um . . . war paint . . . sir.

GENERAL: Yes. Of course. Just a little. Prototype. We're testing it out. A sort of anti-wog camouflage, Lieutenant, to blend in better with the natives. I wanted to get your top secret feedback before we put it to the test in the field. Maybe a shade lighter, but you get the idea.

LT. DUFF: Great thinking sir!

GENERAL: Thank you. Turns out I couldn't find the old Zulu costume anyway.

LT. DUFF: Too bad, General. It was stellar, sir. The Spanish Consul was quite convinced you know.

GENERAL: Yes, yes. I think I remember that. *(He wipes off the blackface)*

LT. DUFF: And when you did your war dance in the fountain in the high commissioner's garden at two in the morning . . . Now that was pure genius, sir!

GENERAL: I don't remember that so well Douglas but I suppose it was as you say.

*(Lieutenant Duff studies the map.)*

LT. DUFF: I see you're strategizing sir. Studying the battlefield of the Levant to give us the upper edge. Tell me, what's on your mind, General. Why have you moved this regiment here for instance?

GENERAL: This is actually a miniature recreation of the Battle of Waterloo, Lieutenant. Arrived yesterday from London. Even that mad little midget Napoleon was a more honorable foe than these half-savage Arab hostiles.

LT. DUFF: Oh. Most definitely sir. Shall we get on with the briefing?

GENERAL: Yes, hold on though, you've given me an idea.

*(The General exits. Lieutenant Duff looks at his watch then calls out.)*

LT. DUFF: Rajid! O'Donegal! Report to the courtyard at once!!!

*(Michael and Rajib enter.)*

Didn't I tell you two to have this raked and smoothed over by eleven A.M.?

MICHAEL: Definitely not me sir. Sorry.

*(Lieutenant Duff points at Rajib.)*

LT. DUFF: And what about you?

RAJIB: I don't recall you telling me anything, sir?

LT. DUFF: Are you certain?

RAJIB: Oh yes, sir. I do remember a very odd looking Maharaja told me something about tennis courts but I have not seen him since. He must have gone back to Rajasthan, sir.

MICHAEL: Oh I've seen him too, sir. He was wiping the general's arse for him just this morning.

LT. DUFF: That's it! I warned you O'Donegal! *(He calls offstage)* Soldier!!!!

*(Soldier runs onstage.)*

Administer five lashes to Private O'Donegal for being a smug Irish bastard. *(To the soldier)* On my count . . .

*(Michael removes his shirt. The soldier, with a whip, stands over Michael. With every count, Michael is struck on his back.)*

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . and five!

I won't say this again: This isn't Dublin or Belfast or wherever your whore of a mother spawned you! You will follow orders and act civilized even if it is against your otherwise barbaric nature. And that goes for you too Vikrum! I'll deal with you later.

RAJIB: It's Rajib, sir.

LT. DUFF: Just get to work damn it! Both of you!

*(The General reenters in his tennis outfit.)*

GENERAL: Now. That's much better. Proceed.

LT. DUFF: Gladly sir. Ahem. The European front looks increasingly, well, warlike, sir. But, here in Palestine our tough response to the "Arab Revolt" has paid off. We are within reach of crushing the terrorists.

GENERAL: Good Lieutenant and what of the "prison situation"?

LT. DUFF: As of yesterday we were down to roughly nine thousand Arabs in custody. Also, the decision to bring the anti-terror experts from the Irish and Indian campaigns has been effective: confiscation of weapons is up as is the suppression of agitating publications.

GENERAL: Good, good.

LT. DUFF: Similarly, the pattern of executing convicted rebels in the military courts has clearly sent a message to the average Arab. Just as you predicted sir.

GENERAL: Damn it's hot.

LT. DUFF: And last but not least sir, I am happy and proud and excited and deeply honored to announce to you here, just me and you, on this veranda, that just this morning we've apprehended a most foul and dangerous renegade! His name is Yusef Al Qudsi.

*(Lieutenant Duff removes a file and hands it to the General, who is at a loss.)*

Well sir, he was behind the strikes in Jaffa and Nablus in '36 and he fought us to a standstill in Tulkarem in '37. He was captured, exiled and then released, which turned out to be a bad idea. But he's in our custody again now . . . I personally oversaw the operation, sir.

*(The General has tracked the fly and swats Lieutenant Duff.)*

GENERAL: Well done!!!

LT. DUFF: Thank you, sir.

GENERAL: You're welcome. Now what do you say we bring the Arab out for our tennis match?

LT. DUFF: Well, I'm sure he's not up to our level of play sir, and with the chains—

GENERAL: No, not to play Lieutenant! To fetch our balls.

LT. DUFF: Ball boy, sir? Have I not been doing a good job of it lately, sir?

GENERAL: In Rhodesia and Tanganyika, Dougy, we'd march the Pygmy prisoners to our cricket matches where we'd have each one stand in as the wicket. Then, the batsman would miss on purpose so the bowler could really knock one right on the blackies' jewels! I thought Africa was hell until I came to Palestine. There was water there at least, and not an Arab or a damned Jew in sight. *(He leans confidentially toward*

*Lieutenant Duff*) And the problem with the Jews, Douglas, is that I don't quite know whether to fear them or have contempt for their groveling and jockeying. They're not as simple as the Arab.

LT. DUFF: Nor quite as short as the Pygmies, sir!

*(They enjoy the joke as Samuel Hirsch enters the courtyard.)*

HIRSCH: Hello gentlemen.

GENERAL: Oh . . . Hello there.

HIRSCH: May I?

GENERAL: Of course Mr. Hirsch, join us, we were just finishing up. *(To Lieutenant Duff, sotto voce)* Speak of the devil.

*(Rajib enters with a tray of tea along with Hirsch.)*

LT. DUFF: Two sugars in mine this time I hope?

RAJIB: Yes sir, sugar sir. Two.

LT. DUFF: Next time do inform us beforehand if a guest arrives. Dismissed.

*(Rajib exits.)*

GENERAL: How can we help you Mr. Hirsch?



HIRSCH: Well sir, I've come by to follow up on our last meeting. I've also brought our counterproposals in regard to the Jewish immigration and land purchase quotas, as Lieutenant Duff requested.

*(Lieutenant Duff puts the files with his papers but receives a look from the General.)*

LT. DUFF: . . . By the way, thank your comrades in the special night squads for their assistance in suppressing the Arab rebellion. Quite a job they've done.

HIRSCH: That isn't really my doing sir. It's frankly not my field of expertise or my responsibility. But I'll be sure to pass on your thanks if I get the chance.

LT. DUFF *(To the General)*: The Jewish units have proven quite competent and fierce fighters actually, sir. It's been quite a shock, really.

HIRSCH: What exactly is that supposed to mean Lieutenant?

GENERAL: Oh, don't take it badly Mr. Hirsch, it's a compliment. Anything else we can do for you?

HIRSCH: There is one other matter, which is the worsening situation in Europe this summer, sir. Our community is deeply worried and I hoped you could pass on our growing concern to / your superiors.

GENERAL: Yes, yes. We're all very concerned Mr. Hirsch.

HIRSCH: You can call me Samuel, sir, or Sam if you'd like.

GENERAL: And I assure you, Samuel, that we in England are vigilantly watching Mr. Hitler.

HIRSCH: Thank you sir / but—

GENERAL: And we are deeply committed to the plight of the Jews, in Europe and everywhere, as I believe we have proven time and again in Palestine.

HIRSCH: That's very reassuring, thank you sir. I simply wanted to convey to you that it is of the utmost importance that something is done at the highest levels to stop the / coming storm.

*(Lieutenant Duff sips from his tea and spits it out all over himself and Hirsch.)*

LT. DUFF: Good God, it's horrible!

GENERAL: What is it Douglas, what's happened to you??

LT. DUFF: It's bloody salty! My tea's full of salt, the bastard!

GENERAL: These servants, from God knows where! You can't trust them with anything! Shifty as a pack of . . . *(He looks at Hirsch and stops himself)* Shifty as a pack of . . . shifty things . . .

If that's all, you must excuse us Mr. Hirsch. We have a tennis date to get to. Nice of you to drop by though; let us get a taste of each other's brains.

## SCENE 7

*Yusef and Tariq sit on opposite ends of their cell. Tariq continues to write his letter. Michael enters with food and the newspaper.*

MICHAEL: Stole a bit of fish from the kitchen . . . scraps off the master's table. And some old Arab out front told me to give this to you. He said the Arabic edition sold out.

*(He hands the newspaper to Yusef.)*

YUSEF: Here it is! Page one! "The Fork in the Road."

*(As Yusef reads, Anbara appears at her typewriter.)*

YUSEF AND ANBARA: By Mohammad Ali Baybars . . .

ANBARA: "This, people of Palestine, is the decisive moment. It is our fork in the road . . ."

YUSEF: "Our cry for freedom is once again threatened by the terrible sound of silence and servitude . . ."

ANBARA: "Our leaders have been exiled, killed, imprisoned, or co-opted. And the Arab kings are far too comfortable under the tutelage of their Western masters to be of any use. Soon we will find ourselves strangers in our own land."

YUSEF: My line. "The question then, is this: why should we believe our British overlords who promise us morsels of a state that is not theirs to give or take?"

*(Tariq rips the paper from Yusef's hand.)*

TARIQ: Cheap words printed on cheap paper! People need food on the table. They need stability and progress, not your “revolution” with its funerals and famine and anarchy in the streets! And you can tell your friend Baybars I said that!

*(Yusef pushes Tariq and Tariq pushes back. The paper falls to the ground as they wrestle . . .*

*Michael picks up the paper and reads on as they fight, which they do, off and on, throughout the scene.)*

MICHAEL: “The British promises of independence are empty: Their declarations and delegations, their mandates and solutions, are nothing more than the crude tricks of magicians. And as long as they rule, they’ll play the Arab and the Jew like so many chess pieces.”

YUSEF *(Subdues Tariq)*: See! You’re a pawn, being played by the Brits and the Zionists. Resist boy, it’s in you! I can see it in those beady little eyes!

TARIQ: I do not have beady eyes!!!

*(Tariq breaks free.)*

ANBARA: “When the British do leave we will find ourselves outgunned. Our Jewish cousins see their prize and they are armed and ready to take it by force. In the meantime, the British will promise us the moon to keep Palestine and to ensure our help in their coming battle with Germany.”

*(Tariq approaches Yusef and pulls his mustache.)*

TARIQ: That's for burning down my store!

*(Yusef subdues Tariq again.)*

MICHAEL: "So let us look to the opponents of England elsewhere in the world for guidance: to the brave Irish strikers and to the mass movement of nonviolent resistance led by Mr. Gandhi and Badshah Khan in India today . . ."

ANBARA: "And yet so many of our leaders have been neutralized by British foul play and violence."

MICHAEL: "Most recently, Yusef Al Qudsi." Hey, that's you! He's talkin' about you! "Qudsi, returned from exile, was thrown back into British dungeons. It is our duty to free him and the others from their chains."

*(Yusef takes the paper from Michael, who keeps reading over his shoulder.)*

ANBARA: "The British believe that they have made us into a defeated people but we are only defeated if the flame of resistance recedes into fear and doubt."

YUSEF: "If we are reduced to such a state then we are nothing but walking ghosts."

ANBARA: "So let us march to the gates of every British compound and show them that the resistance of the people of Palestine is eternal and just."

YUSEF: “Let them hear our voices rise above the thunder of their rifles and the crack of their whips: we will be free.”

*(Anbara fades back into the darkness.)*

MICHAEL: Jesus. Give me a pitchfork and a torch and let’s burn this fucking prison down!

TARIQ: Bloody rhetoric and drumbeating. We can work with the British to get what we want. It’s called “rational nationalism” and it’s based on the premise / that—

*(Yusef shoots Tariq a threatening glance.)*

*(To Michael)* Listen, please just get this letter to Mr. Samuel Hirsch.

*(Yusef intercepts the letter.)*

YUSEF: Now here we have really cheap words on even cheaper paper!

TARIQ: It’s very important.

RAJIB: Enough!!! You’re needed on the court today boys and it’s hot, so save your energy. The general and his poodle await.

*(Michael takes Tariq’s letter as they are led out of the cell toward the tennis court.*

*The General and Lieutenant Duff stand doing their stretches as the prisoners enter the court.)*

GENERAL: Ahh. They've arrived. So which one is the rebel Yusef Al Qudsi?

*(Tariq points to Yusef and Yusef points to Tariq. Lieutenant Duff points to Yusef.)*

Welcome back to hell, boy.

YUSEF: Thank you sir, it's good to be back.

GENERAL: Maybe this time we'll send you to rot in Sarafand prison instead of the Seychelles. It'll make you miss those days of tropical bliss, stuffing bananas in your mouth.

YUSEF: I know somewhere else I'd stuff a banana, General.

LT. DUFF: I'll have you lashed, boy!!!

GENERAL: Oh Douglas, manners please. Let him have his laughs now. It'll make it that much more fun later, when we get our turn.

*(He looks at Tariq.)*

And you must be the financier? Definitely not the rebel type in any case.

TARIQ: Well, yes, that's precisely it General. There's been a grave misunderstanding. I would happily explain—

GENERAL: Soldier, have these men shackled together at the feet.

*(The two men are chained together by their feet as the General and Lieutenant Duff retreat, rackets in hand, to their playing positions in the wings.)*

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): It's love all, sir.

YUSEF: What do you barbarians know about love!

*(The tennis balls start flying back and forth across the net center stage.)*

TARIQ: Just keep your mouth shut Yusef.

YUSEF: I will not be censored, not by you.

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): Balls!!!

*(Tariq jumps up and runs for the ball but runs out of chain and falls flat on his face.)*

I said, grab the balls!

*(Yusef grabs his testicles emphatically.)*

YUSEF: Is that what you had in mind sir?

*(Lieutenant Duff walks into view and hits Yusef in the stomach with his racket. Yusef falls and slowly gets up as the balls start flying again.)*

GENERAL (*From offstage, as they play*): I wonder if that Hirsch has an ulterior motive Lieutenant? A kind of hidden agenda, you know.



TARIQ: You know Hirsch sir?!? Sam Hirsch is a friend and business partner. He'll vouch for my continued cooperation with the British—

*(Yusef pulls the chain, Tariq falls hard.)*

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): BALLS!!!

*(Yusef hops on the court to one side of the net and throws the balls back at Lieutenant Duff as hard as he can while Tariq gently rolls the balls back to the General. As they both rush off court, the balls start flying again.)*

GENERAL (*Offstage*): Balls!!!

*(Yusef does not get up but sits at the base of the net as Tariq jumps up, slavishly running from one side of the net to the other collecting balls.)*

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): For God's sake, balls! Pick up the balls!

YUSEF: Tariq, look at yourself! Look what they've turned you into! A monkey!

*(Tariq returns to the base of the net and sits with Yusef. A look to each other, a slight laugh as the stage darkens and the rumbling of thunder is heard followed by a flash of lightning. It starts to rain heavily. General and Lieutenant Duff come into view)*

GENERAL: Damn . . . Tea time Douglas.

*(General and Lieutenant Duff exit. Yusef and Tariq sit on the ground together. As lights fade their laughter is heard mixing with the storm.)*

## PROLOGUE

*The dark cell. Steady rain. Tariq is asleep alone. An anguished scream pierces the cell. Tariq is startled awake. He looks around the empty cell; Yusef is not there.*

TARIQ: Yusef?

*(Another scream. It is coming from a room close by. Tariq moves around the cell trying to determine where it is coming from.)*

Yusef!?!

*(The rain gets steadier. Tariq nervously picks up the newspaper with Anbara's article. He reads it, trying to block out the muffled cries from Yusef. Suddenly the door swings open and Yusef, badly beaten, is thrown in. The rain outside slows to a trickle as a dull morning light creeps onto the stage.)*

## ACT TWO

### SCENE 1

*Anbara in her house, practicing jabs with the sword. She stops, returns the sword to its place on the wall, picks up the telephone and dials, determined.*

ANBARA: Nablus 4125, British HQ please . . . Hello. Yes. I'm calling again to inquire about the status of my husband, Yusef Al Qudsi . . . Yes, he's there . . . Yes, I'm sure! *(She listens)* Well try the dungeons damn it! I'm sure he's down there . . . Hello!?? Well fuck you too akhou sharmuta!!

*(Waleed enters with a small sack in his hands.)*

WALEED: *Salaam ou Alaykoum sitt* Anbara. I brought soap from the factory, half-priced but fresh.

ANBARA: You think we can wash the British off with that, Waleed?

WALEED: No, but this might work.

*(He pulls out a folded newspaper from the bag.)*

The latest Baybars article. He is something else, that man.

ANBARA: Yes . . . I know.

WALEED: As soon as I read it I went straight back to the newsstand and bought all the copies I could.

ANBARA: I thought the British raided the newsstands?

WALEED: That's why it's the grocer who sells the papers now. Keeps them hidden under his produce. My idea. I passed out copies for free on the way home . . . as discreetly as possible of course. Listen to this: "Brothers! Have we still not realized that in order to truly liberate Palestine we must also liberate and elevate the Palestinian woman?" . . . Ah! And here it is, the second to last paragraph. He's got balls this Baybars! "If the high commissioner is a buffoon, and he certainly is, then our leader the mufti is at the very least marked by the unmistakable signs of opportunism, egoism, and above all, mediocrity." It is true, I've met him.

ANBARA: And what news on the streets?

WALEED: There's a British warrant for Baybars's arrest. And apparently our dear mufti has sent word from Beirut that he wants Baybars "reined in."

*(He draws his finger across his throat.)*

And the word from Tel Aviv is that the Jewish Agency fellows are looking for Baybars as well.

ANBARA: To . . . ?

*(She draws her finger across her throat in a question.)*

WALEED: Much more civilized. They want to pay him to stop writing against the Zionists.

ANBARA: Really? *(Beat)* How much?

WALEED: No idea. They did the same thing with the editor of *Filastin*. A couple years back. He refused the money of course. Just like he refused to agree with the mufti. Now he's a poor exile in Beirut . . .

ANBARA: Maybe he should have taken the money then?

WALEED: God forbid! Anyone low enough to take such money would have to disappear and start over, with a new name, a new everything.

ANBARA: And Baybars wouldn't stoop so low?

WALEED: Who knows. They can't even find the man. No one can. The money will just sit and rot in Tel Aviv.

ANBARA: Well, what if Baybars took the money and used it for a worthy cause?

WALEED: His ideas, my dear, are worth more than a thousand rifles.

ANBARA: This coming from a man who drove a cart full of guns up to Jenin just the other night.

WALEED: I didn't just take rifles up to Jenin. I took copies of Baybars's article . . . And it would be a shame if a bag of gold silenced his tip-tap-typing in the middle of the night . . . Unless he had a really good plan. Though, if my memory serves me he's not very good with money.

*(Anbara disappears into the bedroom. Waleed prepares a bag. Anbara reenters with her hair up and covered. Waleed hands her the bag.)*

ANBARA: Watch the house.

WALEED: I take it you're going to Tel Aviv.

ANBARA: I hear they've made it look like Europe.

*(She exits. Lights fade down on Waleed as he begins to sort the soap from the bag, smelling each piece deeply.)*

## SCENE 2

*Lights up on Tariq and Yusef in the cell while unseen, from offstage, a tennis game is heard.*

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): Fantastic shot General!

GENERAL (*Offstage*): Thank you Duff . . . Deuce!

YUSEF: It's a little repetitious no?

TARIQ: I find it exciting.

YUSEF: I prefer football: more of a people's sport.

TARIQ: This is still a rather new game. Give it time.

YUSEF: It can have all the time it wants.

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): Balls!

GENERAL (*Offstage*): Pick up the pace Paddy!

TARIQ: I dreamt of eating *kunafi* last night, Yusef!

YUSEF (*Calling to the court through the small window of their cell*): Hey General! Ever had *kunafi*? It's a Nablus specialty. Hot cheese with a crispy layer of shredded dough on top, all of it drizzled with warm orange blossom syrup. A hell of a lot better than your lemon curd or you Bedfordshire clanger! Yukhhh!

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): Balls!!!



YUSEF: Empire Biscuits are also predictably depressing!

LT. DUFF (*Offstage*): I'm going to count to three O'Donegal. One! Two . . .

(*Rajib enters and shouts offstage toward the tennis court.*)

RAJIB (*To offstage*): General, there is a telegram just arrived from London.

GENERAL (*Offstage*): Well what does it say Dipankar?

RAJIB: It's Rajib, sir. Rajib . . . And I don't know what it says. Strangely enough, I am fluent in Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit, Tamil, Urdu, Punjabi, Malyalam, Gujarathi, Telegu—Dutch—and at least six more languages sir, but English is still a mystery to me. Perhaps you should come and read it yourself, sir.

GENERAL (*Offstage*): We have to do everything around here don't we. Here I come.

(*Rajib exits.*)

TARIQ: Perhaps I owe you an apology . . . for turning you in. I hope when we're old men we can laugh at all this.

YUSEF: Sure. If I don't hang, why not.

TARIQ: You won't hang.

YUSEF: I've seen plenty hanged for less.

TARIQ: While you were . . . gone last night, I read Baybars's article.

YUSEF: Is that why you crying when I came in?

TARIQ: I was not crying! I was just overcome with . . . this sense of . . .

YUSEF: Guilt?

TARIQ: I heard you screaming and it made me / feel . . .

YUSEF: I wasn't screaming . . . I was laughing.

TARIQ: I thought they were going to kill you in there Yusef, I did.

YUSEF: I'm immortal kid . . . But this revolt. Maybe you're right. It's dead. I'm starting to see it now.

TARIQ: After all your grand speeches you've suddenly given up?

YUSEF: No.

TARIQ: So?

YUSEF: The problem with a revolt, Tariq—and I realized this as Duff was tickling me last night—is that it's a reaction, a stand against something. But sometimes people forget that it also has to be a step towards something. We want independence, fine, but what's next? So we just fight to

forget, to survive, and chaos and violence become the wine and the hashish of the oppressed.

TARIQ: You don't sound like yourself.

YUSEF: I haven't been myself for years. All this, it changes you. *(Beat)* Tell me, what if we can't get back what we've lost?

TARIQ: Wait, are you saying the ferocious rebel thief Yusef Al Qudsi doesn't have it in him to scare the Brits into concessions?

YUSEF: I am telling you that I don't want to be feared in order to be free!

*(Beat.)*

And as long as the Brits fear the Jews more than us, we will always be at the bottom, fighting over the scraps. The British, Tariq, they see the Jews as plotting to rule the world. Me, I see them as our long lost cousins changed from all their years of wandering. Now they are the tribes of Berlin and Odessa, Vienna and Warsaw. They come and they are intrigued. But also repulsed. So they change the land it to make it theirs. Mercilessly. Efficiently. That's what scares me about them . . .

TARIQ: Not all of them think like that. I know them Yusef, personally. I can have an influence.

YUSEF: I know not all think like that, but the ones that matter do!

TARIQ: You don't know how this will end.

YUSEF: What if I do? What if told you I know because the bananas told me! Or because I read history and watch people; their eyes, their hands! Because I read the coffee grounds every morning; because, Tariq, the other day I was forced to steal an orange from what had been my own family's grove! Or because there is a European city that has appeared on the coast of Palestine and it wasn't there thirty years ago. Because the air doesn't feel the same in the morning; because the olive trees cry to me at night and tell me they're scared! Because it rains in the summer . . . Because I dream of vultures and I wake up with the urge to run and keep running! Because . . .

TARIQ: Yusef . . .

YUSEF: Because I dream of my unborn children and they do not know my language. And because the wind has told me secrets: we will soon be the new Jews—wandering, hated, nostalgic nomads with anger and sadness in our prayers.

*(Thunder rumbles and then turns into the sound of a protest rising in the distance.)*

TARIQ: Well what if I told you that I have hope, Yusef. Me! Your worthless, traitorous nephew.

*(Protest sounds become louder and clearer.)*

Listen. There must be thousands. They've come to get us. They're calling our names, Yusef.

*(Yusef rises and listens. He lights a cigarette.)*

YUSEF: They've answered Baybars's call.

TARIQ: I've never heard so many people saying my name at the same time! I feel . . . like I need to piss.

YUSEF: Whether you like it or not, you're guilty now little Tariq.

TARIQ: No! Yes, I like it. Give me a cigarette.

*(Yusef hands him one.)*

So this is what it's like, huh? To be a rebel? . . . I can do this.

YUSEF: Ah, but sip it. Sip it slowly. No need to get drunk. There's work to do.

TARIQ: Yes, you're right, you're right. You know, these people, they—

YUSEF: They're resilient.

TARIQ: They love me! Yusef, I can put my money behind the revolt. With certain caveats, I'm in.

YUSEF: Caveats?

TARIQ: Stipulations, requirements—

YUSEF: Yes, I know what it means.

TARIQ: I can put money to strengthen and unify us. What if I can convince other businessmen too.

*(A raucous cheer from outside.)*

I can't let them down Yusef, not now. They came for us.

YUSEF: You have to love them back. I mean really love them.

TARIQ: Yes. But I don't have a clue what to do. I mean, now . . . A memo perhaps. Or maybe a press release?

*(Suddenly from outside, shots are fired, screaming, chaos, more shots. The sound of a riot.)*

YUSEF: Just promise me something.

TARIQ: What?

YUSEF: That you'll always come back to them.

TARIQ: Yes. But I won't leave them. I'm here.

YUSEF: Just don't forget how they cheered for you today.

TARIQ: I won't. I promise.

*(Suddenly Yusef is pulled violently and suddenly out of the cell. The crash of thunder brings darkness.)*

### SCENE 3

*Still in the cell. The rain has stopped. Tariq sleeps. Yusef is thrown back into the cell; he is in pain. He sees a man in the shadows wearing a wide Mexican hat. Yusef removes a folded picture from his pants. He looks at it and then the man, as if to compare. The man hands him a bottle.*

ZAPATA: Have a sip brother. It dulls the pain.

*(The two men drink in silence. Yusef smiles. Church bells ring in the distance as gray daylight creeps into the cell. It is morning. It is just Tariq and Yusef. Zapata is gone.)*

TARIQ: Yusef. Are you okay?

YUSEF: Been better. Duff kept me up all night. Chatting away.

*(The door swings open and Rajib and Michael enter.)*

MICHAEL: Word is, your trial's been set for tomorrow morning, boys.

TARIQ: Trial?

MICHAEL: That's what they call them, at least.

TARIQ: But what's the charge? Where's the evidence? Who's the judge? Do we get lawyers? What about habeas corpus?

*(Michael and Rajib stare at Tariq, confused.)*

RAJIB *(To Yusef)*: He's serious?

YUSEF: Give him a break. Yesterday he still thought he was equal to any Brit in the Empire.

RAJIB: Ah yes, one of those? *(To Tariq)* You'll adjust.

MICHAEL: And if you ever feel yourself drifting back into fairy land just remember hopping around that court picking up tennis balls for those two baboons.

YUSEF: Michael, Rajib, I need a favor from you two.

RAJIB: Anything your rebelliousness.

YUSEF: You'll have to go to the Old City.

MICHAEL: Ahh but we're both fond of mingling with the riffraff, sir.

RAJIB: We feel right at home.

YUSEF: My house is at the end of Khalil Street, white stone, three arches and a fig tree in front. Give this to my wife. *(He takes out the same folded picture and writes something on it, then hands it them)* Tell her time is running out and to tell Baybars to think of something. Today.

RAJIB: Anything else, sir?

YUSEF: That I love her. And miss her. That I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: Do you want me to show her too? I mean, I could demonstrate to her the depths of your affection, sir, if you



know what I mean. Humbly, of course, and with your permission.

*(Rajib smacks Michael across the back of his head.)*

YUSEF: No need, Michael. You Irish boys can fight but I hear you're not much as lovers.

MICHAEL: British lies and propaganda! They're threatened by our unmistakable virility and romanticism, sir. They're quite insecure you know.

RAJIB: You should see how they turn beet red when they flip through the Kama Sutra. It's quite remarkable.

MICHAEL: And it does explain the British obsession with conquest and plunder.

TARIQ: What are you saying? That the Empire is fueled by sexual repression?

MICHAEL: Inadequacy, more precisely.

RAJIB: Some combination of the two is the most probable explanation, in my mind.

MICHAEL: One day we'll get to the bottom of it.

RAJIB: I'd rather not, actually. *(To Yusef)* We'll ship out first chance we get, sir.

*(Rajib and Michael salute and exit.)*

TARIQ: So the costume parties?

YUSEF: Not to mention the stripping and the whipping.

*(Lieutenant Duff and Soldier enter.)*

LT. DUFF *(To Tariq)*: You have a visitor.

*(Tariq exits with Lieutenant Duff. Yusef is left in the cell with the soldier, who takes a menacing step toward Yusef as lights fade down.)*

## SCENE 4

*Hirsch sits waiting in the prison holding area. He bounces a tennis ball to himself as Tariq enters. When Hirsch sees him he loses the ball and it rolls downstage.*

TARIQ: I'm not picking that up.

LT. DUFF: You've got five minutes. *(He exits)*

HIRSCH: My God, what have they done to you?

TARIQ: They've made me a ball boy. I'm quite good at it.

HIRSCH: Have they mistreated you?

TARIQ: I'm okay.

HIRSCH: I came as soon as I heard. I've already talked to the high commissioner and the general—

TARIQ: How are you Sam?

HIRSCH: Tired, stressed, smoking like a chimney, nightmares, an ulcer . . . the usual . . . but good.

TARIQ: From here it looks . . . different out there. Worse, you know.

HIRSCH: Of course it does, but when all this calms down a bit, some sanity will return and we can—

TARIQ: Sam, I think we both know it's not going to end the way we talked about it.

HIRSCH: But two men like us. We can make a difference. Can't we?

*(Beat.)*

TARIQ: You really look like shit, you know. How about one of those cigarettes?

*(Tariq takes one and Hirsch lights it for him.)*

It helps me wipe a little of the bourgeois shine off. I'm a rebel now.

HIRSCH: Yes, you're quite the star in the casbah. You look good. Alive. Alive is good when you've been thrown in a British prison.

TARIQ: I'm not out yet.

HIRSCH: Not yet. But I've arranged for you to be released. By the afternoon. It's a matter of paperwork at this point.

TARIQ: And Yusef?

HIRSCH: No.

TARIQ: I see.

HIRSCH: Not him.

TARIQ: Tell me Sam, can we both live here, or is it only going to be one of us in the end?

HIRSCH: You're being released. Say something.

TARIQ: You say something. Answer me.

HIRSCH: I want to live in Palestine, as a proud Jew. Alongside the Arabs. Safe.

TARIQ: I don't feel safe, Sam.

HIRSCH: That's why I want you out of here.

TARIQ: What about your leaders? The Ben-Gurions and the Sterns, what do they want?

HIRSCH: There are always reactionaries as well as sensible folks, Tariq.

TARIQ: You're building an army! With British weapons. An army that will fight anyone in the way of an all Jewish state, including the Brits.

HIRSCH: The British are limiting our immigration now, so, yes, there is talk of a break with the Brits. But what does this have to do with anything?

TARIQ: It's everything Sam. I just ask us to talk, as friends, honestly, while it is still possible.

HIRSCH: That way of thinking is winning. It's stronger every day. And every day the Arab Revolt is struck a blow, the stronger the hardliners get, on all sides!

TARIQ: I'm asking about your side.

HIRSCH: I'm not represented by those who dream of war and conquest Tariq! You know that!

TARIQ: And yet you do not oppose them. You do not oppose them when they speak of us as trash to be disposed of.

HIRSCH: No. Yes! When I can, I do. But as their strength grows our population grows, our economy grows, our land grows!

TARIQ: And you have to take the good with the bad?

HIRSCH: We all do.

TARIQ: And I just gave it away to you. I sold off the land like it was a crop that could be regrown the next year.

HIRSCH: Listen, all of Germany is mad!

TARIQ: And what do I have to do with Germany?

HIRSCH: There is talk of the Germans invading Poland by the end of the summer. There will be war and there will be nowhere for us to hide, Tariq. It's become intolerable for Jews, for anyone who thinks differently or looks differently. People are being shipped off in trains they say, a trickle now, but perhaps a flood tomorrow.

TARIQ: I am sorry for that . . . I am . . .

HIRSCH: It's going to make Palestine look like paradise, even to the non-Zionists.

TARIQ: And what if your paradise turns into our hell Sam? I don't think I can help you anymore, not like before.

HIRSCH: Yes. I suppose that is how it must be now . . .

TARIQ: I've been a fool.

HIRSCH: It's an age made for fools.

*(Beat.)*

. . . I brought you the paper. *(He hands him a newspaper)*

TARIQ: Three killed and twenty injured in the protests yesterday. Anything from Baybars?

HIRSCH: Ahh, Baybars. He's good; smart, fiery. He's awoken the Arabs.

TARIQ: And terrified the Brits.

HIRSCH: Not to mention Ben-Gurion and the Sterns. But between us, I don't think you'll be seeing anymore articles from him.

TARIQ: How come?

HIRSCH: He was paid heftily by Tel Aviv to shut his mouth. So I've heard. I find it a bit disgusting, throwing money around to silence opponents. But if he can be bought then it's his burden to bear.

*(Tariq is silent.)*

TARIQ: I . . . should get back.

HIRSCH: You'll be released. It's the least I could do for a friend.

TARIQ: Thank you Sam, but I'll find my own way out of this. Good-bye.

HIRSCH: Tariq, please, you must reconsider—

LT. DUFF *(Entering)*: Time's up!

*(Tariq exits with Lieutenant Duff. Hirsch stands alone for a moment, then exits.)*



## SCENE 5

*Anbara sits at the table with stacks of money in several piles. She shifts the piles into different arrangements as she speaks.*

ANBARA: Run. A ticket to Beirut. Me and Yusef and Hajj Waleed in a villa . . . No.

*(She shifts the piles)* Rifles, plus ammo. Or . . .

*(She shifts it again)* Buy back land. Plus a new typewriter and some books. A library. No.

*(Shifts the money)* A citrus grove hugging the coast, orange scented wall against the spread of Tel Aviv. No. It would never work.

*(Again)* Olive trees. Old thick twisted olive grove. Huge, endless, deep.

*(. . . And again)* A car. Like the British generals. And a sailboat to zigzag between Greek islands, sunbathing nude, no veil, no call to prayer . . . Or . . .

*(Shifts the money again, this time into one huge stack.)*

A typewriter, fifty rifles, a small sailboat, five olive trees, five orange trees, a bicycle, books, a ticket to Beirut and a weekend in Alexandria.

*(She knocks over the stack of money, letting it fall across the table.)*

Yusef where are you? I'm no good with money . . . *(Beat)*  
Yusef . . .

*(A knock at the door. Anbara covers the money with the table cloth, leaving a bulge. She grabs the sword from the wall and walks to the door.)*

Who is it and what do you want?

MICHAEL: We're looking for Yusef's wife. We've brought word from him. We're friends, ma'am.

*(She opens the door to reveal Michael and Rajib in kitschy Arab garb.)*

I have a feeling our disguises are not entirely convincing, ma'am.

ANBARA: Come in.

*(She directs them in with the sword.)*

RAJIB: You have a lovely sword, miss. And a beautiful house.

*(Michael notices the lumpy table cloth.)*

MICHAEL: And a very unique table as well.

ANBARA: What's your message?

*(He hands her the folded picture from Yusef. She opens it and laughs.)*

MICHAEL: Well, what is it?

ANBARA: An old picture of Emiliano Zapata. The rebel. Yusef tore it from the papers years ago. He's written his name on it.

MICHAEL: Perhaps it's a secret message ma'am!

ANBARA: It's more like an autograph. My husband has a terrible tendency to make a martyr of himself . . . How is he?

RAJIB: He's holding up. We're quite fond of him. He asks that we tell you / that—

MICHAEL: That he loves you very much ma'am. And that you're bloody drop-dead gorgeous—

*(Rajib smacks Michael across the back of his head.)*

RAJIB: He said Mr. Baybars could help. Their trial is tomorrow, ma'am.

ANBARA: Can he escape before then?

MICHAEL: It'd be difficult ma'am.

ANBARA: Well, could you help him?

MICHAEL: Perhaps . . . but . . .

RAJIB: We'd be . . .

MICHAEL: Done for ma'am . . . It'd be the gallows for us.

RAJIB: We've thought about it, but we'd need to disappear too, miss, for our own safety, and one needs money for that. Unfortunately, our Irish friend here is not lucky with the cards, and in serious debt with officers and cooks alike. He keeps drawing kings, ma'am. In pairs. It's quite ugly.

ANBARA: I thought that was a good thing in cards.

MICHAEL: It's Bolshevik poker, ma'am.

RAJIB: Different rules.

MICHAEL: Long story.

*(Anbara uncovers the money.)*

ANBARA: What if I were to say that half of this was yours?

MICHAEL: I'd probably say I could lose that in one night.

RAJIB: More like three hands. *(To Anbara)* Ma'am, have you thought this through?

ANBARA: Not really. No. Half. If you can get him out tonight . . . I'd say this would take you as far as?

RAJIB: Calcutta.

MICHAEL: Monte Carlo.

ANBARA: Monte Carlo?

MICHAEL: Irish by origin ma'am, but a gambler by fate.

ANBARA: What do you say?

RAJIB: I'd say you have a deal.

## SCENE 6

*In the cell. Yusef is praying, his head to the ground, as Tariq is let back into the cell. Tariq stops and watches him in silence.*

TARIQ: I didn't know you prayed.

YUSEF: Good for my back.

*(Yusef finishes.)*

It also softens my secular image into something more pious and sagely.

TARIQ: Maybe we could use God's help at this point.

YUSEF: What does God have to do with any of this? It's all about the pounds and dunams. Land leases, population registries and business ownership ratios.

TARIQ: Numbers?

YUSEF: It's all just a complicated real-estate deal.

TARIQ: I want to make it right.

YUSEF: I know.

TARIQ: Then help me. Give me orders.

YUSEF: You know, I can almost see myself disappearing sometimes. Just now when I woke up, I couldn't even see my

right arm! It flickers in and out of sight like a mirage on the horizon of my body.

TARIQ: Samuel Hirsch came . . . He got me out. Everything arranged. Later today, he said.

YUSEF: That's good.

TARIQ: I said no.

YUSEF: Are you out of your mind? Get out of here, man! Go!

TARIQ: I won't leave you.

YUSEF: I'd leave you.

TARIQ: No. You wouldn't. Anyway, in here I'm a hero! Out there, I don't know, but I'm not that. I'm afraid, Yusef.

YUSEF: What's to be afraid of? Like I said, it's about numbers and you're good with numbers.

TARIQ: They've paid off Baybars.

YUSEF: What?

TARIQ: He's taken money from the Zionists to shut up.

*(Beat.)*

YUSEF: How much? I mean, how much do you think a bribe like that will get you?

TARIQ: You're missing the point.

YUSEF: No. I'm not. She's got something up her sleeve.

TARIQ: Who?

*(Rajib and Michael enter.)*

MICHAEL: From your wife sir.

*(Yusef takes the note and reads it.)*

YUSEF: It's signed Abdel Qader Salah al Din. Which means Mohammad Ali Baybars has just been reincarnated.

RAJIB: As a very wealthy man.

YUSEF: So what's the plan?

RAJIB *(Quietly)*: During the ball tonight, at midnight, while the general drinks and dances . . .

MICHAEL: . . . With a particularly pathetic creature at his side . . .

RAJIB: We, well-armed with lots of cash, will unlock your gate and slip you out unnoticed . . .

MICHAEL: . . . Into the serene Palestinian night full of gunshots and distant explosions . . .

RAJIB: We take you as far as you need to go and then . . . we all disappear our own ways. There's enough to pay off one of



the guards and get me and Mr. Monte Carlo as far away from the Britishers as possible.

MICHAEL: She's like a bloody casino, man.

RAJIB: Be ready at midnight. The signal is three knocks and a sneeze . . .

MICHAEL: And then another knock.

YUSEF: And how did she look?

MICHAEL: She is quite a stunning specimen sir, and sharp as a knife. Not to mention her—

*(Rajib smacks Michael again.)*

YUSEF: Stay. Have a drink.

*(Michael complies but Rajib stops him.)*

RAJIB: We have to prepare. And pack our things.

MICHAEL: In that case, it's on me, boys. We'll have a round later. On the other side of these stinkin' walls.

*(Michael hands his flask to Yusef. They salute and exit, leaving Yusef and Tariq.)*

## SCENE 7

*On the balcony. The same evening. Lieutenant Duff stands dressed as an Italian-style clown, nervously adjusting his buttons.*

GENERAL (*Offstage*): Okay. Ready!

LT. DUFF: Ahem. Ladies and gentlemen. Fräuleins and . . . monsieurs. I now present to you the man with the plan and the most peculiar facial hair in the free and fascist worlds: the mad chancellor, the freaky Führer, Mr. Adolf Kraut-Hun Hitler.

*(The General walks out in a Hitler costume.)*

Oh bravo sir! You've really captured the gravitas, and all the stern, intense, demented energy of the man. Bravo, tut-tut, well done!

GENERAL: And you are supposed to be . . . ?

LT. DUFF: I am a clown of the *comedia dell'arte* genre of Italy sir. I had it sent from Florence, actually.

GENERAL: I thought you were going to be a Nazi thug with me, Douglas?

LT. DUFF: Well sir, I was, but then I thought that one of our sharp and alert guards might spot my convincing outfit and mistake me for a German infiltrator, and then shoot me. I figured that you wouldn't want to lose me over a misunderstanding like that.

*(The General doesn't respond.)*

Right sir?

GENERAL: No I suppose not Dougy, I suppose not.

LT. DUFF: I was also thinking sir that the Nazi theme might upset some of our Jewish guests at tonight's party and that perhaps—

GENERAL: Oh nonsense, it's a damn good joke, a witty piece of political satire as far as I'm concerned, and nothing more. And if all else fails they'll laugh to please us and keep us on their side.

LT. DUFF: Right sir. Of course.

GENERAL: Not that it matters much, since London will court the Arabs for the war effort now that the revolt has been crushed.

LT. DUFF: And what of this new journalist writing pamphlets against us? Mr. Saladin?

GENERAL: Dreadful bloke. If we can't hang him then at least the Jews will take care of him. You know what I tell people Douglas: I say that I'm neither anti-Arab, nor anti-Semitic, but that I am simply, utterly and eternally pro-British.

LT. DUFF: Well said sir.

GENERAL: Though that is a bit of a lie too. God help them and their wicked ways if the British Empire leaves Palestine and

they're left to fight over it. But in the meantime, we have work to do. In the meantime—

LT. DUFF: The Mandate is here to / stay!

GENERAL: In the meantime Lieutenant Duff, we have a fabulous party to attend and a busy day ahead of us tomorrow. Orders to execute, tennis to play, and a trial to get on with!

LT. DUFF: Yes sir, the case of Al Qudsi.

GENERAL: Yes, yes, now remind me how they do their little thingy Douglas.

LT. DUFF: What? Oh, no. I don't know sir . . .

GENERAL: C'mon, it's an order. Get me in the mood. salute me.

*(Lieutenant Duff does a halfhearted Nazi salute.)*

Now don't let me see you do that again or I'll have you shot for treason! . . . Shall we then? Last one there's a foolish Italian clown.

*(The General exits off the veranda with Lieutenant Duff following close behind. Lights fade.)*

## SCENE 8

*Lights up on a soldier in the prison holding area. Rajib brings Tariq in.*

SOLDIER: Sign this paper, please.

TARIQ: What's this?

SOLDIER: You're being released.

*(Tariq hesitates. Rajib nudges him to get on with it. Tariq signs the paper.)*

Your things. And a note. You're lucky to have friends like Mr. Hirsch.

*(The soldier disappears. Rajib shakes his hand and Tariq steps forward, out of the prison. After a moment he opens the letter. As he does Hirsch appears elsewhere.)*

HIRSCH:

Dear Tariq,

I hope they've treated you decently and I hope you don't mind that I went against your wishes . . . but it seemed the right thing to do. I hope to never see your freedom taken away, I hope this all ends well . . . but perhaps that's naive.

In my life I've seen capitalists turn to socialists, socialists to capitalists and far too many people turn into fascists. I've seen communists quoting the Torah in one hand and holding

their still-warm rifles in the other. I've seen a whole country fall into line behind the devil dressed in a well-ironed uniform. I've moved in and out of dozens of apartments on three continents. I've learned Hebrew, the few words of Arabic you've taught me, and now, I've fallen in love with Palestine, its past and its future. And yet I hope that none of us love it so much that we would smother and strangle it just to keep it all to ourselves. I am not that kind of lover and I don't think you are. That is not true love but possession.

So it is my hope that this place is big enough for us all. Either way, I will find solace in the knowledge that I have a friend who wished it otherwise before our future was stolen by men who follow a violent God. And I will remember that you welcomed an exile to these shores and made me feel at home when perhaps you had every right to do otherwise.

Take care of yourself friend,

Samuel

*(Tariq folds the letter and puts it into his jacket. The lights shift.)*

## SCENE 9

*The cell. Yusef plays cards. Across from him sits Emiliano Zapata's ghost again. They both drink as they play.*

ZAPATA: It was smart to let the boy go.

YUSEF: I know.

ZAPATA: You never know. Or maybe you do.

YUSEF: It's a shame. What they did to you.

ZAPATA: They hunted me down.

YUSEF: Stabbed you in the back. Fuckers.

ZAPATA: I went to Jerusalem. It's a sad city. The stones cry and the shadows whimper in corners. But the sky. It's a special color when you're inside those walls. Jesus was lucky to die with a view of that sky.

YUSEF: You know what Jesus was? A Palestinian-Jewish freedom fighter; an anti-imperialist leading a spiritual rebellion against the occupiers.

ZAPATA: That's good.

*(Yusef and Zapata play their cards. Yusef loses again.)*

YUSEF: That's three straight for you, compadre!

ZAPATA: I was riding in a valley today, just south of the walls, and for a moment, for one moment, I could have sworn I was riding across plains of Northern Durango. Then I saw a camel.

*(They laugh. After a moment, church bells are heard in the distance. They listen as they ring.)*

YUSEF: It's almost time. They'll get me out of this place. You think I have more fight left in me?

ZAPATA: Yes. I do.

YUSEF: This is my country Emiliano! It's all of ours!

ZAPATA: But full of hunters these days. Beware how the prey can turn to predator, the hunters into the hunted and back again, until we don't know predator from prey, right from wrong, up from down.

YUSEF: I keep losing my hands. They flicker. On and off.

*(Zapata whips his head toward the door and watches it. It is silent for a beat.)*

Is it time?

*(Zapata turns and looks at Yusef. A loud knock and then darkness.)*



## SCENE 10

*The prison holding area. Rajib waits. He has a small duffel bag. He looks at his watch nervously as he paces. Suddenly Michael runs up out of breath, holding several bags.*

RAJIB: Damn it Mike, you're late. I've been here twenty minutes. It's almost midnight.

MICHAEL: Sorry. I got caught in the markets.

RAJIB: What the hell were you doing in the market?

MICHAEL: I had to pick up souvenirs for me mum and me family.

RAJIB: Souvenirs?

MICHAEL: You know, crosses, olive wood virgins.

RAJIB: I know what souvenirs are you fool!

MICHAEL: It took me an hour to find an open store at this hour. Then, you know, we sat for tea, and . . .

*(Rajib stares at him in disbelief.)*

What?? I can't come back from the Holy Land empty-handed.

RAJIB: Let's just go. We have a job to do. It's time.

*(They quietly make their way to the cell and talk to each other in hushed voices.)*

MICHAEL: So it's two knocks, a sneeze and then another knock right?

RAJIB: No, three knocks, then a sneeze . . . or is it a cough? . . . and then another knock. Definitely a knock.

*(Rajib finally knocks three times then coughs, then sneezes, and knocks again. No response from the dark cell.)*

MICHAEL: Fuck it.

*(They unlock the door and they look in)*

Yusef . . . Yusef . . . Hello?

*(From behind them a soldier walks up.)*

SOLDIER: What you fellas up to?

MICHAEL: Nothing. Just . . . nothing really.

RAJIB: Where's the prisoner?

SOLDIER: I was looking for you. You missed the show.

MICHAEL: Was the general doing his belly dancing routine again? Gave me nightmares last time.

SOLDIER: No, the trial. The general decided to get on with it a bit early. Apparently the high commissioner's coming tomorrow but the trial was scheduled when the general wanted to play tennis with him . . . So he pushed the

proceedings up a bit. Wouldn't have made much of a difference anyway, tonight or tomorrow.

RAJIB: . . . It might have.

SOLDIER: Well at least you didn't have to clean up the mess. I was at it alone, so you owe me a pint.

MICHAEL: Mess?

*(The soldier turns and looks toward upstage and we see, in the dim light, the twisting silhouette of a limp body hanging from the balcony.)*

SOLDIER: He wouldn't go easily. *(Beat)* I tell you what. You two can have the job of taking him down tomorrow after the tennis game and we'll call it even.

RAJIB: After the tennis game?

SOLDIER: The general insists the Arab watch his tennis match. From the balcony.

## SCENE 11

*The sound of protests and rain outside. Anbara sits at the table alone. A knock at the door. Anbara opens it. Rajib and Michael stand in the doorway, their hats off.*

RAJIB: We let you down miss.

MICHAEL: We went in to get him like we planned.

RAJIB: But he just wasn't there ma'am. It was a secret trial.

MICHAEL: You're not at the funeral? It's massive ma'am. You should see all the / people—

ANBARA: I hate funerals . . . *(Beat)* He used to play the oud for me. The notes fit perfectly in the creases of my skin, and into the arches of windows; they just fit. The way an olive branch gnarls itself into dance . . . He sold that oud to buy a gun.

MICHAEL: They say he fought to the end.

*(Rajib hands her the money.)*

RAJIB: We can't take it ma'am, not now.

ANBARA: It's yours. Go home.

*(Rajib and Michael bow and exit. After a moment there is another knock at the door.)*

Come in.

*(Tariq enters carrying a bag.)*

TARIQ: It's started to rain again.

ANBARA: It's unusual this time of year.

TARIQ: I'm sorry. For / everything—

ANBARA: Shhh.

TARIQ: Your writing. Your writing. You should be . . . careful.

ANBARA: I should. *(Beat)* But I won't hide anymore.

TARIQ: I suppose if anyone can handle the times, it's you Anbara.

ANBARA *(Calmly)*: That's nice.

TARIQ: I went to the rally. I walked up to the front of the crowd. I got up on the fountain and I spoke. I felt intoxicated, on fire. I was holding something, a flag maybe, or a rock, a gun, I don't even remember. It was as if.

ANBARA: As if Yusef was speaking.

TARIQ: Yusef. Yes. And they cheered me, Anbara. They roared, and we marched, moving like a sea.

ANBARA: And then the shots.

TARIQ: Yes.

ANBARA: Always the shots.

TARIQ: And we ran. We scattered, screaming, bleeding, in every direction. I ran like a boy escaping a beating, not seeing or hearing anything, just the explosions echoing in my head. I was lost. In Nablus; lost in my own city. I made my way back. To where the shots were fired, and it was empty. I was sure it was a dream, Anbara. I told myself that it was a dream the whole way home. And it was in flames. The house of my great grandfather. And I felt empty. On fire.

ANBARA: Who did it?

TARIQ: The British . . . the Zionists. Does it even matter anymore?

ANBARA: Yes. And no.

TARIQ: I have to leave. I don't want my hands to disappear in all this blood. At least until things die down . . . I can't, Anbara. I can't live like this.

ANBARA: None of us want to live like this, Tariq.

TARIQ: I'm going to Beirut. I came to say good-bye. To you.

ANBARA: Go . . .

*(He hands her a ring of three old iron keys.)*

TARIQ: I want you to take the keys for what's left. What I haven't sold or seen burn. Until I return.

ANBARA: Yes.

*(Tariq turns to leave.)*

Don't forget us. Don't forget how they cheered for you.

*(Tariq exits. From the back door, Waleed enters.)*

WALEED: Who was that who just left?

ANBARA: Just another ghost.

WALEED: Imagine, they were throwing perfectly good vegetables at a pair of British soldiers. People have no sense anymore. No sense at all.

*(Anbara goes to the back wall and takes the sword down. In its place she hangs the keys. Waleed sits by the window and looks out. A kind of sunlight peeks through the windows.)*

The sky is clearing. That strange rain has stopped. Perhaps things will start looking up.

*(Blackout.)*

END OF PLAY



PHOTO BY ZOE ZENOWICH

**ISMAIL KHALIDI** was born to Palestinian parents in Beirut in 1982. In 1983, his family left Lebanon and came to the United States. Although they planned to return to Beirut, the family ended up settling in Chicago when the political situation failed to improve year after year. Khalidi graduated from Macalester College and then went on to earn his MFA in dramatic writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

Khalidi's debut play, *Truth Serum Blues* (Pangea World Theater, 2005) was a one-person play about torture and memory in which he acted. His next play, *Tennis in Nablus*, was written in his final year at Tisch and won the Kendeda Graduate Playwriting Competition as well as the Quest for Peace Playwriting Award and a Mark Twain Prize for Comic Playwriting at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. *Tennis in Nablus* received its world premiere production at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia (where it was nominated for a Suzi Bass Award for best world



premiere play) in 2010. Its second production was at Stageworks Hudson in Hudson, New York, in 2011.

Khalidi's father hails from a well-known and politically active Muslim family of Jerusalem while his mother's family is Christian from Jaffa. Khalidi's great grandfather on his mother's side was Issa el-Issa, the founder and editor of *Filastin* newspaper, perhaps the most influential Palestinian paper of the first half of the twentieth century (founded in 1911).

Khalidi's other plays include *Foot; Final Status*, about the Middle East peace negotiations of the 1990s; *Sabra Falling*, which takes place in the Sabra refugee camp in Beirut in 1982 on the eve of the Sabra and Shatila massacres (commissioned by Pangea World Theater); and the co-adaption of Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *Returning to Haifa*, for the stage.

Khalidi has been a Many Voices Fellow at the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis as well as an Emerging Writers Fellow at New York Theatre Workshop (where he is currently a Usual Suspect). He was most recently the first ever writer-in-residence at Mizna, the Arab American arts organization and journal in Minneapolis. Khalidi's writing has appeared in the *Nation*, *Guernica*, the *Daily Beast*, *American Theatre* magazine, *Remezcla* and the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. His poetry and plays have been published by Mizna.

He currently lives in Chile.



KEFFIYEH/MADE IN CHINA



Dalia Taha

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

Theater is a celebration of fragility, transience, imperfection, collapse, precariousness, unreliability and collision. Of all the art forms, it is the one that relies most on what is avoided. It's the space in which failure isn't a disaster but an explosion of possibilities. It's inherently a resistive space because, quite simply, it's constantly in creation. I'm in love with theater, and the source of that love is never identifiable. But when prompted for an answer to the question of what is it that I prize most in theater . . . Seriousness. Terror. Humbleness. Poverty. Generosity. The theatrical experience cues the intricateness of these states by creating a space where they are exercised outside their status as social values, outside the exchange system that conventionally structures our interactions. It molds a space that carries within its transience its strength.

Theater is a permanent demonstration of the limits of power. It ridicules power and renders it impotent. It affirms again and again the potentiality of our agency: the agency that can only be exercised when being engaged fully with avoidance. I write for theater because, to me, in writing about ordinary people in extraordinary conditions—where guilt, responsibility, morality, ethics, empathy, love and hatred are constantly threatening to collapse—it's only theater that could establish the threat of collapse as a collective experience: understanding the consequences and the stakes of such moments, and our responsibilities as humans and individuals in relation to them. I believe in theater because it doesn't make us happy.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Keffiyeh/Made in China* was presented in a co-production of the Royal Flemish Theatre and the A.M. Qattan Foundation in 2012. It was directed by Bart Danckaert. The set and costume design were by Ann Weckx, the lighting design was by Ralf Nonn, the original music was by Thomas De Vos; the dramaturg was Hildegard De Vuyst and the production managers were Nisreen Naffa' and An Van Der Donckt. The performers were: Joris Van Den Brande, Mohamed Allouchi, Saïd Jaafari, Thomas De Vos, Kaat Arnaert, Farah Saleh, Remah Jabr, Yazan Eweidat, Zina Zarour and Alaa Abu Saa.



*To Juliano Mer-Khamis,  
murdered on April 4, 2011 in front of the doors  
of his Freedom Theatre in Jenin,  
and to François Abu Salem, founder of El-Hakawati  
and patron of PASS, who committed suicide  
on October 1, 2011 in Ramallah*







## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Mohamed Kacimi, Hildegard De Vuyst, Bart Danckaert and A.M. Qattan Foundation (Ramallah). This collection of texts is the outcome of an order by the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) in Brussels.

CRAVING MANGOES

*A father and a mother.*

FATHER (F): Where is he?

MOTHER (M): In there.

F: Are you sure?

M: I haven't gone in yet.

F: Why not?

M: It's up to you.

F: What?

M: Go in.

F: You're his mother.

M: You're his father.

F: There might still be hope?

M: Hope?

F: That it's not him.

M: Go in.

F: What if it is him?

M: It's not.

F: How do you know?

M: He doesn't throw stones.

F: So go in!

M: You go in.

F: I don't know.

M: You don't know what?

F: What he was wearing this morning!

M: Your green shirt.

F: My green shirt?

M: Yes.

F: You told me you couldn't find it.

M: I gave it to him.

F: Why?

M: Aren't you going in?

F: And my black cardigan?

M: What about it?

F: Did you give that to him as well?

M: He doesn't have anything to wear.

F: And all the clothes we buy him?

M: Torn.

F: How?

M: They hit him.

F: Where?

M: At school.

F: And you believe him?

M: Are you going in?

F: I can't.

M: Why?

F: They say it's difficult.

M: What?

F: To identify him.

M: But I told you.

F: What he's wearing?

M: That he doesn't throw stones!

F: You think he's the only boy in town?

M: He's not the only boy in town.

F: To what?

M: To throw stones!

F: I mean wearing a green shirt.

M: Aren't you going in?

F: No, you go.

M: You're his father.

F: What time is it?

M: Five o'clock. I've been here for two hours.

F: Here?

M: Yes, here.

F: I was held up at the checkpoint.

M: His watch!

F: What about his watch?

M: It's stopped.

F: Stopped?

M: On five o'clock.

F: That's why . . .

M: What?

F: Every time I ask him for the time . . .

M: He says it's five!

F: Why didn't you change its battery?

M: I didn't have time.

F: Why not?

M: I was getting my tooth filled.

F: What's wrong with it?

M: It hurts.

F: Why didn't you tell me?

M: It doesn't matter.

F: What doesn't matter?

M: My tooth.

F: I mean why didn't you tell me to change the battery.

M: I told you.

F: I don't remember.

M: Go in.

F: Where?

M: See if his watch is stopped on five.

F: But it is five o'clock!

M: It doesn't matter!

F: Haven't they told you?

M: Who?

F: The doctors.

M: What?

F: His left arm.

M: What about it?

F: It's missing.

M: He doesn't wear his watch on his left.

F: He doesn't?

M: He wears it on the right.

F: On the right?

M: Yes.

F: How many times have I told him to wear it on the right!

M: Leave the boy be.

F: Who wears their watch on the right?

M: You!

F: Me?

M: He copies you.

F: I never noticed.

M: In everything.

F: So go in.

M: You go in.

F: You go.

M: He doesn't throw stones.

F: Didn't he come just to tell us?

M: Who?

F: The grocer.



M: That he wants his money?

F: That he saw him throwing stones!

M: Haven't you paid him yet?

F: What?

M: His money?

F: I paid him when he came.

M: So that's why he came.

F: Go in then.

M: You go in.

F: You know him better than I do.

M: We'll go in together.

F: You open the door, I'll look.

M: Which one?

F: The number is on the paper.

M: Number 2345.

F: 2345.

M: Strange number.

F: Shall we?

*(They try to enter.)*

M: He's never thrown a single stone.

F: Who taught him?

M: Taught him what?

F: To throw stones.

M: It's that mischievous grocer's son!

F: The grocer's son?

M: The grocer's son.

F: Ali?

M: Next time his father comes, tell him off!

F: He won't come.

M: Tell him to keep his son away from ours.

F: Why would he come? I paid him the whole month's bill two days ago.

M: He'll come.

F: I just told you, I paid him.

M: Not everything.

F: What do you mean?

M: I bought some fruit yesterday by debt.

F: Fruit!

M: Yes, fruit.

F: Fruit when we're broke!

M: I was thinking of him.

F: The grocer?

M: Our son!

F: What did you buy?

M: Oranges, bananas and mangoes.

F: Mangoes?!

M: He likes them.

F: Mangoes are expensive!

M: He likes mangoes!

F: So do I!

M: I left you some on the table this morning.

F: There weren't any!

M: There were two!

F: None!

M: He probably took them.

F: Who?

M: To school.

F: Son of a dog!

M: We go in and see now?

F: See what?

M: See if he has some mango.

F: He doesn't throw stones.

M: Maybe it was just the once.

F: Maybe.

M: The bananas were rotten.

F: This is the third time he sells us rotten bananas.

M: Don't forget to tell him off.

F: The boy?

M: The grocer!

F: About his son?

M: About the bananas!

F: His fruits are shit.

M: His son is always going around throwing stones.

F: And he is busy cheating people.

M: Some people just can't raise their kids.

F: He's his only child.

M: Like us.

F: Just like us.

M: Poor guy, he'll lose that boy one day.

F: He'll blame us for not saying.

M: Saying what?

F: That his son throws stones at the checkpoint.

M: Poor guy.

F: Poor guy.

M: Aren't you going in?

F: You.

M: What?

F: Go in.

M: You're his father.

F: You're his mother!

M: He failed yesterday.

F: At what?

M: The history test.

F: Is that why he went to bed early?

M: He was afraid you'd know about it.

F: But he knew it by heart!

M: He got muddled.

F: Muddled?

M: Since that day they came in and took you.

F: He still wets his bed even if he's twelve!

M: And fails his tests.

F: Not just history?

M: Everything.

F: Why didn't you tell me?

M: Aren't you going in?

F: You go in.

M: But he doesn't throw stones!

F: Are you going in or not?

M: Yesterday he swore to me . . .

F: What?

M: That it wouldn't happen again.

F: Throwing stones?

M: No, wetting the bed.

F: Really?

M: The doctor said so too.

F: Really?

M: Yes, I'm telling the truth.

F: Isn't that great?

M: I forgot to tell you.

F: Then we need to celebrate.

M: Celebrate?

F: Yes, celebrate!

M: Ah my little sweetheart, he deserves it.

What shall we do for him?

F: I'm going to the grocer's.

M: To tell him off?

F: To buy our little boy mangoes!



## 60 SECONDS

*A woman and a man.*

HE (H): I don't know that it's the last minute of my life.

SHE (S): He doesn't know that it's the last minute.

H: 60 seconds.

S: One, two, three.

H: Shhhhhhhh . . .

S: Exactly 60 seconds.

H: No more no less.

S: If it was more it would not be the last minute of his life.

H: It wouldn't have been the last 61 seconds of my life.

S: In another situation, this would be of no importance.

H: For sure she's going to give you an example now.

S: The shirt I brought him was one size too big.

H: See! One size too big?

S: You don't know because you didn't even try it.

H: You always irritate me when you do this.

S: Irritate you?

H: You annoy me.

S: I wasn't going to tell you.

H: She wasn't going to tell me.

S: I just wanted to give an example.

H: We've already said this sentence before.

S: We have?

H: Theater doesn't support repetition.

S: But what are you blaming me for?

H: A mistake in the text.

S: Tell the playwright.

H: A small mistake in the text.

S: Tell her.

H: She will be upset.

S: Tell her.

H: She doesn't pay attention to repetition.

S: Because she has more than 60 seconds to say what she has to say.

H: Maybe she has less.

S: Why do you sympathize with her?

H: Me?

S: She doesn't even know you.

H: She writes about me.

S: Why you?

H: I don't know.

S: You've been a ladies' man all your life.

H: All my life?

S: Your life. His life.

H: You don't know me.

S: I'm sure that you were flirting with her even in the last 60 seconds of your life.

H: With whom?

S: You act as if you don't recognize her.

H: Who?

S: The journalist.

H: You're crazy.

S: I'm sure you love her broken Arabic.

H: I love her courage.

S: She made a documentary about you.

H: About me?

S: She made a documentary about him.

H: A documentary about me?

S: A documentary of twenty minutes.

H: Twenty minutes about me?

S: On a German satellite channel.

H: A documentary in German about me?

S: Your brother changed the antenna settings so that we could watch the channel.

H: Changed the settings for me?

S: You don't get it.

H: Me?

S: Half of the Arabic channels don't function anymore.

H: And Al Jazeera?

S: We didn't understand anything, it was in German.

H: We can't receive Al Jazeera anymore?

S: The same thing for YouTube.

H: What about it?

S: A video.

H: I'm on YouTube?

S: 9,870 views.

H: By mistake, I have the same name as a singer.

S: Nobody knows.

H: What?

S: That it's because of him that we met.

H: Because of the singer with my name?

S: You have the same name as him.

H: In the music store.

S: You looked into my eyes.

H: I was mad at you.

S: You didn't look into my eyes?

H: I opened my shirt on purpose.

S: A white shirt.

H: So you could see the two hairs that peeped out.

S: His beard hadn't grown yet.

H: She was taller than me.

S: I'm still taller than you.

H: When you wear heels.

S: My eyes crossed his eyes.

H: Her eyes crossed mine.

S: His right eye.

H: My whole body became an eye.

S: The same eye that the bullet will enter.

H: My shirt was soaked with sweat.

S: 60 seconds left.

H: Shhhhhhhhhhhh.

S: The bullet is going to enter his right eye.

H: Why are you so grumpy?

S: It's all on YouTube.

H: You need to stop with YouTube.

S: 9,870 people saw the bullet. I saw it.

H: My mother.

S: Your sister.

H: My father.

S: Your friends. His friends.

H: The journalist.

S: The news anchors.

H: People who don't know me.

S: They might not even know why the bullet entered.

H: Why it entered my right eye.

S: It entered but didn't kill him right away.

H: They're going to take me to hospital.

S: And these kind of things are not on YouTube.

H: They're going to announce that I'm in good health.

S: And that the 60 seconds were not the last 60 seconds of his life.

H: That they can save my right eye.

S: A brown eye—not exactly brown.

H: Hazel?

S: It depends on the light.

H: Why are you silent?

S: I'm thinking.

H: About what?

S: I'm pulling your leg.

H: How?

S: I'm not thinking.

H: Why are you silent?

S: I remembered something.

H: What?

S: You don't know that this is the last minute of your life.

H: OfTTTTTTTT!

S: What?

H: Why do you keep reminding me?

S: Do you want me to hold your hand?



H: Do you want me to hold your hand?

S: A brown eye.

H: A hazel eye.

S: A red eye.

H: An exploded eye.

S: An eye that exploded on the screen.

H: On the pictures.

S: In reality.

H: An eye that exploded between my hands.

S: Between her hands.

H: Between his hands.

S: The journalist's hands.

H: On the street.

S: Under the soldier's boot.

H: An eye that exploded on the lens of the camera.

S: That exploded on the pictures.

H: On the pillow.

S: A hazel eye.

H: I want to hold your hand.

S: Before the bullet reaches it.

H: Why is it cold?

S: Every time the bullet reaches it.

H: You have become a pessimist.

S: I have no choice.

H: Don't start blaming now, I don't have much time left.

S: The writer has.

H: Maybe not.

S: I have to be a pessimist.

H: YouTube turns people into pessimists.

S: Every night I intend to stop watching.

H: Ah, the good intentions at night.

S: When I wake up, I have forgotten.

H: If I could apply all my night intentions, I would be a millionaire.

S: Millionaire.

H: A millionaire with one kidney.

S: You only have one eye.

H: She likes to tease me.

S: He always makes jokes at the wrong time.

H: There no such thing as the wrong time.

S: There is something as the wrong time.

H: No examples.

S: I cannot . . .

H: You cannot tell something without giving examples.

S: I don't know how to tell.

H: Without giving examples.

S: I would not know how . . .

H: It's not necessary for us to talk.

S: He's always silent at the wrong time.

H: For her all the times are wrong times.

S: He doesn't know, the meaning of the word "stress."

H: And this all because of the news and YouTube.

S: His life, your life.

H: These are all dark schemes.

S: He doesn't know.

H: Doesn't know what?

S: You don't know.

H: I don't know what?

S: It's not worth it.

H: Nothing's worth it.

S: You don't know this is the last minute of your life.

H: The last 60 seconds of my life.

S: What does she want from us?

H: Who?

S: The playwright, why does she write about us?

H: About me.

S: Why did she choose you?

H: I impressed her.

S: Why you?

H: How should I know.

S: Many people die.

H: With a bullet in their eye?

S: Their faces disintegrate.

H: I am disintegrated?

S: The world is filled with their pictures, before and after.

H: Haha.

S: Like on the publicity for hair implants.

H: But in the disintegrated pictures everything changes, except their hair.

S: Enough joking.

H: You have to be able to laugh about it.

S: I don't want to laugh about it.

H: Just once.

S: When you choose the right time.

H: I don't have time: 60 seconds!

S: 60 seconds.

H: 60 seconds, one, two, three.

S: Shhhhhhhhhh.

H: 60 seconds. Why is your hand cold?

S: It's not cold.

H: What color was it?

S: What?

H: The shirt.

S: I don't remember.

H: Why don't you want to tell me?

S: There's no time left.

H: If it's white I'm not going to wear it.

S: It's striped.

H: Dark blue?

S: Your eye.

H: My eye.

S: It's leaking on the shirt.

H: I'm not wearing it.

S: Your eye.

H: Why is your hand cold?

S: It's leaking on the shirt.

H: No, I'm not wearing it.

S: How will I return it now?

H: Why don't you want to laugh?

S: It's the wrong time.

H: Camera.

S: It's the wrong size.

H: Hazel eye.

S: It's the wrong YouTube.

H: You don't want to laugh?

S: If only . . .

H: I can't hear you.

S: You moved your face a bit.

H: I can't hear anything.

S: If you could see your shirt.

H: I can't hear anything.

S: It's still bleeding. The bullet will enter his right eye.

H: My right eye?

S: We will get the news in an hour.

At this moment he's still alive.



## THE CAMERA DOESN'T LOVE ANYONE

*Two women and a man.*

WOMAN 1 (W1): Her voice is clear

WOMAN 2 (W2): and she talks, she stops and she remains silent

w1: and then she continues

w2: without trembling

w1: without crying

w2: without being sad

w1: without smiling

w2: and her voice is loud

w1: but not too loud

w2: exactly

w1: exactly the right level

w2: there is a translation

w1: there is always a translation

w2: so that everybody understands

w1: so that everybody hears

w2: so that everybody sees

w1: so that everybody pays attention

w2: because it's important that everyone is aware

w1: it's important that everybody hears

w2: and loves her

w1: because when they hear

w2: when they see

w1: they will know

w2: they will love her

w1: and they will want to hear

w2: and see

w1: even more

w2: because she has to talk

w1: everybody wants to talk

w2: but nobody wants to listen

w1: to someone else

w2: except to her

w1: because only she

w2: has a loud voice

w1: but not too loud

w2: exactly

w1: exactly the right level

w2: because she always tells

w1: the same story

w2: but every time, every single time she adds something

w1: and she omits something

w2: and every time

w1: every single time

w2: the translation adds something

w1: and omits something

w2: but while they're watching her

w1: they don't pay attention

w2: to what is being added

w1: or what is being omitted

w2: everybody knows her

w1: everybody watches her

w2: her children only see her on TV

w1: they hear her talk about their father and the bags

w2: and about a leg and a hand

w1: and about his brain

w2: and how he stopped talking to her

w1: whereas everybody knows

w2: and she knows it too

w1: that he loved her

w2: because he used to get her sweets every day

w1: from Saâdeh Sweets

w2: because she likes them

w1: he didn't eat sweets

w2: because he had diabetes

w1: and everybody knows

w2: and she knows it too

w1: that he had diabetes

w2: and that he didn't eat sweets from Saâdeh

w1: everybody knows that

w2: and she knew it too

w1: because she is the one who gave him the injections

w2: because he had diabetes

w1: she trained as a nurse

w2: and she worked at a hospital

w1: where she learned how to talk

w2: in a loud voice

w1: but not too loud

w2: exactly, exactly the right level

w1: in a clear voice

w2: without trembling

w1: without smiling

w2: without being sad

w1: and without crying

w2: she learned to say

w1: your son is dying

w2: or dead

w1: or paralyzed

w2: or blinded

w1: or deaf

w2: or chopped up

w1: or burnt

w2: then she started saying all sorts of phrases

w1: in a loud voice

w2: even: good morning

w1: but not too loud

w2: exactly, exactly the right level

w1: in a clear voice

w2: without trembling

w1: without smiling

w2: without being sad

w1: without crying

w2: as if she was saying

w1: your son is dying

w2: or dead

w1: and everybody loves her

w2: but they don't believe her

w1: they all want to listen to her

w2: the TV loves her

w1: and she loves it

w2: she hears herself

w1: every day

w2: on TV

w1: on the radio

w2: in all languages

w1: with a translation

w2: everybody loves her

w1: but nobody asks

w2: nobody asks the right question

w1: nobody wonders

w2: why she put him in the bags

w1: because if I die, I don't want to be put in bags

w2: he was in the kitchen

w1: he was drinking water

w2: of course he was drinking water, everybody drinks water

w1: and the first missile hit the kitchen

w2: she was in the kitchen too

w1: nobody wondered why she couldn't tell a right hand from a left hand

w2: because even if you don't concentrate or pay attention

w1: and even if you were bleeding

w2: your eyes

w1: your hand

w2: your leg

w1: if your whole body was bleeding



w2: even if everything was the same color

w1: and even if you could put the left hand where the right hand should be

w2: you can still tell the difference

w1: between the right hand and the left hand

w2: because they are different

w1: of course they're different

w2: but nobody knew

w1: that they were both left hands

w2: and if both were left hands

w1: how could she carry the bags

w2: all those bags

w1: with only one hand

w2: with her right hand

w1: but she didn't say anything

w2: she doesn't say everything

w1: although every time

w2: she adds something

w1: and she omits something

w2: but there are things

w1: she doesn't add

w2: and things she doesn't omit

w1: but we know everything

w2: we can speak about her

w1: in a loud voice

w2: but not too loud

w1: exactly

w2: exactly the right level

w1: we can talk about her

w2: but we can also talk about ourselves

w1: but there are no bags in our story

w2: bags from Saâdeh Sweets

w1: because we didn't know

w2: for sure we didn't know, that's why

w1: that plastic bags are not good

w2: and that we should keep them

w1: fold them until they're small

w2: and store them in the drawer

w1: and then reuse them

w2: we used to throw them away

w1: and we didn't have bags

w2: where to put them

w1: and even if we knew

w2: that the bags are not good and that we have to keep them

w1: and even if we had bags

w2: nothing was left to put into them

w1: anyway, everybody listens to her

w2: and everybody likes her

w1: and she is still talking

w2: she only talks

w1: but I am sure

w2: and me, I am sure too

w1: that one day she will stop talking

w2: in a loud voice

w1: but not too loud

w2: exactly, exactly the right level

w1: one day it will be louder

w2: a bit louder than the right level

w1: or lower

w2: a bit lower than the right level

w1: and nobody will listen to her

w2: or maybe she will get bored

w1: the people will get bored

w2: even if she continues to speak in a loud voice

w1: exactly, exactly the right level

w2: because it's true, each time she adds something

w1: and omits something

w2: but the people will start asking

w1: why she couldn't tell his left hand from his right hand

w2: and how she managed to hold all these bags in one hand

w1: because people are not stupid

w2: people are not stupid

w1: and people are waiting for their turn

w2: to speak

w1: because everyone has stories about bags

w2: and shoes

w1: and rooms

w2: and kitchens

w1: and pots

w2: and knives

w1: and toilet paper

w2: and water guns

w1: and blankets

w2: and carpets

w1: and pillows

w2: and dead children

w1: who haven't been buried

w2: everybody wants to talk

w1: everybody should have a chance to talk

w2: everybody should talk

w1: everybody is ready to learn

w2: how to talk

w1: in a loud voice

w2: but not too loud

w1: exactly, exactly the right level

MAN: Is there something you would like to add?

w1: something else?

w2: ah, other things

w1: no there is nothing else

w2: but if you like

w1: if you really want

w2: if you want us to add something

w1: or omit something

w2: for sure we can add

w1: we can always add

w2: yeah sure of course

w1: sure sure

*(The man takes the recorder from the table, turns it on. We hear the voices of the two women talking. Lights go down, we can still hear the recording.)*

## A MAN WITH A GUN

*A young soldier and an elder revolutionary.*

REVOLUTIONARY (R): Is something bothering you?

*(The soldier never answers.)*

I saw her insulting you.

Of course something's bothering you, why am I even asking.

She was yelling, in her broken Arabic!

Why? Because the girl in front of me came in with a bottle of water?

Is she concerned about the painting?

That she'll splash water on it?

Because of a bottle of water she's humiliating a soldier.

And you said nothing.

It doesn't matter. A soldier should be able to rise above these trivialities.

You need to learn not to blush . . .

Don't they teach that anymore?

Not to look away?



They no longer teach you that you must never forget you are soldiers? Even if someone hits you? That you must not blink?

Of course, they don't have the right kind of people training you.

Someone like me, who took up arms at the age of sixteen.

Who was alive at the time of the revolution.

Who fought in the war and was injured . . .

Who knows what a Kalashnikov is.

Where do they train you these days?

They say they send you to France and Italy . . . And us? . . .

Us, veterans?

Ask me some questions about the revolution.

You don't want to?

Are you frightened?

Have they forbidden to speak to people?

Will she insult you again if you speak to me?

But I'm not here to talk.

I saw the painting.

There's a photo of the painting in the newspaper with a huge  
"Picasso in Ramallah" headline.

And you were beside it. Beside the painting.

You were carrying the Kalashnikov.

You were guarding the canvas.

You must surely feel it was a great honor.

What did you do beforehand?

Were you a doorman at a bar?

Have you ever pulled the trigger?

You pull it and you feel the blood racing through your body.

I'm not talking about the shots they fire in the air at  
weddings.

Why are you afraid of me?

Don't be afraid . . . Do you know your face speaks volumes?

You need to learn to control your nerves.

How old are you?

Eighteen?

Twenty?

Do you want to know how old I am?

No, I'm not going to tell you.

You surely know why.

You're a soldier. You mustn't tell anybody anything about yourself.

You're about to confess and I haven't even touched you.

What would you do if you were being tortured?

What are you looking at?

Are you looking to see if there's anybody else but me?

Do you want me to leave?

Look, there's nobody here.

Everybody's at the art conference.

I'm alone with you.

You, me and the Kalashnikov.

Me, you and the Kalashnikov.

Oh, and the painting.

Are you frightened I'll steal it?

And what would you do about it?

Point the Kalashnikov at my mouth?

You could shoot me.

It's as easy as that.

As simple as that.

You could pull the trigger. Are you going to pull the trigger?

I could have been your teacher.

That's what they teach you these days.

Instead of being prepared to die for your teacher, you want to kill him.

You are like a son to me.

Anyone you've taught to use a gun becomes like a son to you.

But as soon as you get old, they throw you out.

Look at you!

Your uniform is ironed.

Your hair's been cut.

Your face is clean and shaven.

Your shoes are polished.

Why are you surprised?

Because someone is talking to you?

Am I the first visitor talking to you?

The others don't see you.

Is there a girl looking at you?

Smiling at you?

Trembling for you?

We had a smell that filled the whole local area.

Because we were revolutionaries.

Now it's the girl with the bottle of water who's defending you.

She's defending you from the foreigner who's insulting you.

While you remain silent, lower your eyes and look away.

With your ironed uniform.

With your Kalashnikov sweating in your hands.

And me making you sweat.

Stop looking at the door.

What? You weren't moving your head?

Only your eyes are moving.

Nobody will come.

You're afraid I'll steal it.

How much is it worth?

Millions?

You don't know.

You're guarding something and you don't know how much it's worth.

I'm not here for the painting.

Don't be afraid.

I won't hurt you.

You're like a son to me.

What sort of father would hurt his son?

Even if his son was prepared to kill him.

Don't be afraid.

You're my prodigal son.

The son who needs to be shown the right path.

The son who needs his father to open his eyes.

You still don't trust me?

Do you hear these voices?

And the clapping?

But they won't come. I still have time.

The buffet has just opened.

Are you hungry?

I have some biscuits.

Have one.

Eat something.

A soldier must eat well.

You don't want any?

I can look after your gun.

Are you afraid?

I'll give it back to you.

I came specially to feel it.

To carry it.

Don't try to change the subject.

Stop trying. No, don't insist.

I won't tell you how I'm going to help you.

Let me have it, I can hold it for a bit.

You don't want any biscuits? I'll put them back in my pocket.

If you're as frightened as that, I won't take off with it.

Shall I go right there?

I wanted to swagger about the local area with it.

But as you're so frightened, I won't.

I'll stay right beside you. I just want to hold it.

Twenty years.

You're a soldier and you should trust your new fellows.

Especially when they're older.

When they're experienced.

Are you afraid of me?

Afraid that I blow my head off.

Have you gone mad?

Me, commit suicide?

Impossible. Why should I?



That doesn't mean I've never thought about suicide.

On the contrary.

All the time.

I've been thinking about suicide all the time.

It wouldn't be a problem for anybody if I disappeared.

I'm not married.

I've no family.

I've no children.

You're all I have.

Just you, my son.

Nobody would feel sorry for me.

But I'm a bloke.

I'm a rebel.

A fighter.

A soldier.

If I'm to commit suicide, I need to do it like a revolutionary.

A bullet in the head, right? What else?

Blood gushing from my body.

Splattering you.

Your black jacket.

Ironed.

Your polished shoes.

Your shaven face.

Your lowered eyes.

Your picture in the brochure.

In the newspaper.

On the poster.

On the websites.

It will splatter Picasso.

Make him disappear.

With you.

With everybody.

And I alone I will remain.

BUSINESS

*A man and a young girl.*

YOUNG GIRL (G): Excuse me, I'd like a keffiyeh.

MAN (M): A keffiyeh?

G: Yes, black and white.

M: Where are you from?

G: Belgium.

M: I'd guessed that.

G: I've been told I could find a keffiyeh here.

M: Is it for yourself?

G: No, it's a gift.

M: I think I have something better.

G: I don't want a scarf.

M: I know, I don't want to sell you a scarf. Are you French?

G: No, Belgian.

M: You're well-known for your scarves, how could I sell you a scarf?

G: We are well-known for our chips and waffles.

M: Not scarves?

G: No, that's the French.

M: But where do you come from?

G: From Belgium, from Belgium.

M: Ah Belgium, but that's the same.

G: I could also ask in another shop.

M: You are not aware of the situation?

G: I don't understand.

M: Nobody wants a keffiyeh just now. Nobody's buying.

We have an economic crisis.

G: Okay, is there another shop?

M: Why are you in such a hurry?

G: Quite the contrary.

M: Do you know anything about economics?

G: I did a course before I left school.

M: What did you study?

G: I've just told you I dropped out.

M: Why?

G: I had other things to do.

M: But studying is free in your country.

G: There's more important things.

M: Did your parents not have the means to pay for your studies?

G: I wanted to travel, see the world first.

M: Alone?

G: Alone!

M: And who's the keffiyeh for?

G: What did you mean?

M: When?

G: When you questioned me about economy.

M: Oh yes, are you familiar with the law of supply and demand?

G: Why?

M: There's no demand for keffiyehs.

G: Why?

M: That's all I know . . . Do you like my country?

G: Yes, it's very beautiful.

M: How long are you here for?

G: Until I've had enough of it.

M: Funny.

G: Usually, I never spend more than two weeks in a country.

M: Don't you miss them?

G: Who?

M: Your parents.

G: I miss my sister. You didn't give me an answer.

M: And your father and your mother.

G: You didn't give me an answer!

M: To what question?

G: Do you or don't you have a keffiyeh?

M: It's black and white you want?

G: Yes!

M: Do you know you've come to the best shop to buy a keffiyeh?

G: That's what I was told.

M: Mine aren't cheap imports from China, we have a secret factory, but of course people told you that.

G: The story about the factory?

M: About the other one. It's the only one which produces keffiyehs.

G: I was simply told to come to you.

M: The other factory is a myth.

G: Now you've lost me . . .

M: There's only one secret factory, and that's ours.

G: It's secret?

M: Completely!

G: Can I visit it?

M: Impossible! There's a go-slow at the moment.

G: Because of supply and demand?

M: That's it, you're very clever.

G: Is it underground?

M: What?

G: The secret factory?

M: That's a secret.

G: I don't understand what China has to do with it.

M: Why are you in a hurry?

G: Me, in hurry?

M: Let me explain everything to you, step by step.

G: Why has the production stopped?

M: They closed it down, it's illegal.

G: Since when is it closed?

M: A year.

G: But it's secret.

M: That's what I said.

G: It hasn't produced anything for a year?

M: It's come to a standstill since it went bankrupt.

G: After its closure?

M: No, it went bankrupt three years ago.



G: So where do you get your goods from?

M: What factory was I talking about?

G: The secret one.

M: There's another one.

G: The one they closed down?

M: No another one.

G: You've lost me.

M: The goods are local but they come from China.

G: And your goods, where do they come from?

M: You know . . .

G: What?

M: Every time I try to explain it, I never manage . . .

Do you know Karl Marx?

G: I'm not a communist.

M: Of course, who is? I'm half and half.

G: What do you mean by half and half?

M: And you, what are you?

G: Vegan.

M: Vegan, what's that? A new party?

G: I don't do politics.

M: That's normal, in Germany, where you come from, everything's calm.

G: I'm not German.

M: I meant Bulgaria.

G: Belgium!

M: Ah, that's right, Belgium.

G: Yes.

M: My God, you're really Belgian?

G: Yes, there's only you . . .

M: I've heard so many good things about you, Belgians.

G: For example?

M: That your method of government is so perfect that if we adopted it in our country, all our problems would be solved.

G: I don't do politics.

M: What use is it?

G: Belgium?

M: No, vegan.

G: Tell me . . .

M: Yes?

G: Is there a shop where you can find a map of the country?

M: I already told you.

G: I've forgotten.

M: You don't need a map, the country is so small.

G: Is there a shop where I can find what I'm looking for?

M: I'm going to give you something better than a keffiyeh.

G: I don't want a scarf.

M: Just a moment.

*(He brings out a blue bra.)*

G: What's that?

M: Feel the fabric.

G: Sorry?

M: You will never find the same quality elsewhere.

G: You are sick.

M: But why are you putting me on the spot?

This is worth far more than a keffiyeh.

G: I see now why you asked me that question.

M: What question?

G: If I was traveling alone.

M: I don't see the connection.

G: They were right, the people who warned me for the Arabs when traveling alone.

M: Who warned you? Where are you going?

G: I'm leaving.

M: I think you haven't seen the video yet.

G: Aren't you ashamed?

M: The Egyptian girl dragged along by the soldiers.

G: What Egyptian girl?

M: The images are famous throughout the world.

G: I've never been to Egypt.

M: Don't you follow the news?

G: I don't do politics.

M: Wait, I'll show you the photo.

I'm selling fifty of them every day, it's a hit.

G: But what is that?

M: A demonstrator stripped bare by the soldiers.

G: My God!

M: She's a symbol.

G: A tragedy.

M: Do you see this box?

G: What about it?

M: A theater ordered ten of these.

G: Do you have a theater?

M: First they wanted keffiyehs, but instead they took ten blue bras. Not bad, eh?

G: I didn't know you had a theater.

M: You should take one.

G: I want a keffiyeh.

M: This is better than a keffiyeh. I'll do you a good price, because you're English.

G: Belgian.

M: Belgian. Yes, that's true.

G: Somebody asked me to get them a keffiyeh.

M: If you buy three I'll give you one free.

G: Three keffiyehs.

M: Three blue bras.

G: I don't want three.

M: As you wish. You only need to take one, I'm not going to force you.

G: Where can I find another shop?

M: I have other colors if you want, but blue's the fashion.

G: I want a keffiyeh.

M: You're not convinced?

G: I sympathize, that's all.

M: Did you not see what they did to that girl?

G: No.

M: They smashed her chest.

G: Who did?

M: The soldiers, fifty of them kicking her.

G: Why did they smash her chest?

M: Their shoes are made of iron, did you know that?

G: My God!

M: Shoes made for the soldiers who have to walk in the desert, made of iron.

G: Did they hit her?

M: They dragged her through the streets.

G: Crikey!

M: Soldiers have iron shoes, or did I tell that already?

G: Yes, for the desert.

M: Iron for the desert. He kicked her on the chest with his iron shoes.

G: Jesus!

M: He broke her ribs.

G: But what has the blue bra to do with it?

M: She was wearing a blue bra.

G: When they kicked her.

M: Wait a minute. I'll show you the video.

G: What video?

M: On YouTube. Let me open it.

G: YouTube?

M: You'll see.

G: No, I don't want to see it.

M: Why, are you under eighteen?

G: Twenty.

M: Then you can watch it, under eighteen it's forbidden.

G: I don't want to see it.

M: Why? You must see it, I can't describe every detail.

G: I can't stand violent scenes.

M: You can't stand violent scenes?

G: No!

M: There's another video, a light version, you won't see the scene in close-up.



G: I don't want to see it.

M: You don't want to?

G: No . . . Don't open it.

M: I've another one, an interview with the girl at the hospital.

G: I don't want to see any of them.

M: You don't want to see the bruises. Do you know what?

G: What?

M: The video for over eighteen is worse.

G: I need to go.

M: I've kept you, sorry.

G: It's not a problem.

M: Okay. Do you want one? Or three with one free?

G: I'm going to another shop to look for a keffiyeh.

M: You don't want a blue bra?

G: No.

M: Why? I sell a hundred of them every day.

G: No, I don't do politics.

## THE UNHAPPY WRITER

*Two sisters.*

LEEN (L): Can you turn off the radio?

MARIAM (M): You don't like the song?

L: No I like it, I just need to concentrate.

M: I thought you liked this type of song.

L: I like it, but . . .

M: I don't understand a single word, isn't there any Arabic station?

L: There is one, but it comes only late at night, can you please be quiet now?

M: What are you writing?

L: Something.

M: You haven't finished your novel yet?

L: No.

M: You can't find an ending?

L: I'm rewriting it, so please now . . .

M: The whole novel!

L: Well, not exactly, I mean yes, some parts, let me focus, I have a deadline tomorrow.

M: You know our mother will kill herself if she knows?

L: Knows what?

M: You wearing glasses.

L: I wear them only for the computer.

M: She'll think you'll become blind like our neighbor.

L: I will not become blind.

M: She keeps talking about you in front of her neighbors—they will get envious—you know you are her favorite.

L: I don't have any problem with my eyes, they only itch when I sit behind the computer, and even if I wear them all the time, it doesn't mean that I'll go blind!

M: Mine don't itch when I use the computer, you should have them checked.

L: I had them checked.

M: And what did he say?

L: Who?

M: The doctor.

L: Fine, perfectly fine, he told me to wear glasses for the computer.

M: Only for the computer?

L: Yes, that's what he said.

M: Are you sure?

L: And for the TV, but you know I don't watch TV.

M: You don't watch TV! You are the educated girl, you prefer to read books.

L: No, I watch TV . . . I mean, not that often, but yes I do, on weekends.

M: You don't go out on weekends?!

L: I didn't mean that! I go out on weekends but not that often.

M: You don't have friends!

L: Listen, I need to focus, can we talk later?

M: You know your eyes are beautiful, you should put lenses instead of hiding them under these terrible glasses.

L: It's only for the computer!

M: Green lenses would be nice with your skin color.

L: Mmm.

M: I have green lenses, would you like to try them?

L: Green lenses?!

M: Yes, dark green! Very beautiful.

L: Why do you have dark green lenses?

M: I have other colors as well, if you don't like these ones!

L: Why do you have lenses of different colors?!

M: They were on sale, forty percent if you took the whole set!

L: I can't imagine someone changing the color of his eyes!

M: Sales are amazing here! Everything fifty percent off.

I'm glad that I came to visit you in this period!

L: The idea of putting something in your eyes! Disgusting!

M: What?!

L: I can't imagine lenses!

M: Listen, we should go shopping together, you can buy something for your boyfriend.

L: I hate sales.

M: What! They're the best thing in the world!

L: Too many people, a long queue for the changing room.

M: That's exactly the best thing about it! I met some people while waiting there.

L: You met who?

M: I gave them my number.

L: Your number?

M: I mean yours!

L: Why do you give my number to strangers?!

M: They are nice, we went to McDonald's together!

L: You can't just become friends with just anyone here. It's a big city!

M: I'm bored, and you are not introducing me to anyone!

L: You would not like my friends.

M: Why? Too smart for me?!

L: That's not what I said.

M: Anyway I don't need them now, I have my own friends.

By the way, if they call, I'm Leen.

L: What? You stole my name!

M: I'm sorry, I had to.

L: You had to? You could've simply said yours.

M: It's just that I was holding your student card.

L: So you had it? I've been searching for it the whole day.

M: You told me they give discounts for students.

L: For museums!

M: I thought for clothes too!

L: For clothes! Oh God, you are so stupid!

M: Okay, I know now!

L: So please go watch TV or something, I need to work.

M: I hate TV, it's stupid!

L: Seriously, since when?

M: They keep broadcasting the same movies, do they think we're stupid or something?!

L: You can watch the news.

M: News? Do you watch the news? I once read that artists—writers are artists too aren't they, yes—they are too sensitive to watch the news, most of them don't watch the news, it was written in *Your Beauty* magazine.

L: For God's sake, stop!

M: It's a monthly magazine, you know it?

L: No.

M: Not exactly monthly, sometimes they don't have enough money to print it.

L: I see they are fighters.

M: Oh yes, they work hard, it is also available online, do you want to see it?

L: If you remain quiet, I will give it a look later.

M: Well, sometimes I'm published in there.

L: You are published?

M: Yes I'm published, well not exactly, but if something is printed on paper, it means I'm published, no?

L: What do you write?!

M: Several times actually.

L: What do you write?

M: For the "I Need a Solution" section!

L: What, you send your problems?!

M: Yes, I send them a problem.

L: You have a serious problem?!



M: I have problems, of course, everyone has problems in life, but no, not serious ones.

L: What kind of problems? Love? Usually they are about love?

M: Oh, not only love. I write about everything: love, death, growing old, loneliness, being raped, being kidnapped.

L: I'm sorry, what?! What do you mean?

M: I invent problems, it's the only place you can.

L: What do you mean, "I invent," you lie?

M: I can't say I lie, do you lie when you write?

L: This is totally different.

M: Are you jealous?!

L: Jealous?! Of you?! Oh God forbid!

M: At least I'm being published.

L: In the "I Need a Solution" section.

M: They must have liked them to consider them. You know how many people send their problems. Hundreds of thousands! In each issue I have one. Under different names of course!

L: Is this your achievement in life?

M: You can't even finish a novel!

L: But I can easily be published in your silly magazine!

M: I doubt it!

L: Where is the site, open it for me, I want to read your things.

*(She leaves her seat in front of the laptop, and her sister goes to sit there.)*

M: You know after all, I didn't really lie!

L: About what?

M: When I told the people I met that I'm a writer.

L: You are not a fucking writer!

M: Do you know how many people read that magazine?

And in the problem section I'm famous!

L: You are not!

M: Someone once sent a response to the magazine for the "Lady of Sorrows"! *(Points at herself)* And the magazine published this, to lift up her spirits, to show her that people sympathize with her. Can you make people sympathize with your characters?! This is what defines a writer!

L: Don't lecture me about writing!

M: Well, it's quite an achievement, you can't deny it.

L: I can write better things, I can be published there easily.

M: It needs a certain talent.

L: I can prove it!

M: You know what? I can tell them her story when I meet them in the weekend!

L: Who?

M: The people I met in the clothes shop.

L: You told them you are a writer.

M: Hush, I need to concentrate.

L: You lie, everything is a lie!

M: By accident, I didn't mean to, actually I don't like to be called a writer! In the end I'm just someone!

L: You are not!

M: I was telling them that I came to visit my sister, and that she is a writer, but with my broken English they understood that I'm the writer. They were really interested in me afterward so I didn't correct them!

L: You liar!

M: I really don't like to be called a writer or a liar!

L: Show me the fucking magazine.

M: Can you be quiet, I need to concentrate.

L: I will be published in your magazine next month.

M: Ah!

L: Give me my computer, I want to write about a problem.

M: Hush, can't you be quiet for God's sake!

L: I want my computer back!

M: Why are you still wearing your glasses!

L: I fucking told you I wear them when I'm sitting behind my computer!

M: But you aren't sitting there now! Were you lying?

L: I wasn't!

M: You can't see without them!

L: No, I can!

M: I don't believe you! Mother will go mad.

You are her favorite child! She'll think you will become blind!

L: I wasn't lying, I will take them off.

*(She takes them off, the other sister takes them and wears them.)*

You are wearing my glasses!

M: Hush, go watch some TV, I need to work!

L: I can't watch TV without my glasses.

M: I need them now, and turn off the radio.

L: It's the Arabic station, broadcasting now.

M: Turn it off, I need to focus.

L: I need my glasses to watch TV!

M: I'm sorry, my eyes are itching!

## THE PRISONER AND THE OTHER PRISONER

*Two prisoners.*

PRISONER 1 (P1): Have they questioned you?

PRISONER 2 (P2): Sorry?

P1: I'm asking you if they've questioned you.

P2: Not yet.

P1: Are you ready?

P2: I haven't done anything.

P1: This is your first time?

P2: It's a mistake. I shouldn't be here.

P1: Ah, I understand.

P2: What?

P1: I've nothing to do with them.

P2: You understand what? Nothing to do with whom?

P1: You're fretting, I'm a prisoner just like you.

P2: I'm not a prisoner. They're going to release me today.

P1: It's not your first time, is it?

P2: I'm telling you I've done nothing.

P1: I don't want to know what you've done.

P2: I'm going to tell you.

P1: I understand them right away. Do you know how?

P2: How?

P1: As soon as they start questioning.

P2: But it's my first time.

P1: I told you I didn't want you to tell me anything at all. I understand.

P2: Understand what?

P1: I know you're frightened that I'll let you confess something.

P2: I've nothing to hide.

P1: You need to understand that this kind of questioning is nothing like anything you've seen.

P2: Which means?

P1: Which means it's really tough.

P2: You don't understand. I'm here by accident, it'll all be sorted out and then I'm out of here.

P1: Are you a little bit paranoia?

P2: Paranoia?

P1: A little.

P2: Do you mean suspicious?

P1: You said it.

P2: Paranoia is a noun, the adjective is paranoid.

P1: I mean it's the first time I've met someone who denies everything.

P2: Denying, me?

P1: I can understand.

P2: Denying is not the right word.

P1: I mean . . .

P2: Denying means that somebody did something and doesn't want to admit it.

P1: You're so . . .

P2: Sorry, my wife doesn't like it when I do things like this, but I can't help myself.

P1: I understand.



P2: No, you cannot understand, it's complicated. I treat everybody like they were my students.

P1: You don't want to talk about it.

P2: Quite the contrary.

P1: Okay, so what have you done?

P2: I correct other people's mistakes.

P1: That's not what I meant.

P2: I'm obsessed with language because I stuttered when I was little.

P1: You stuttered?

P2: Yes.

P1: And now you've stopped?

P2: Not completely.

P1: What do you mean?

P2: I still do it when I'm nervous.

P1: Only then?

P2: Yes.

P1: That mustn't be easy.

P2: But I don't get nervous that easily.

P1: And when you are angry and can't speak?

P2: That's hell.

P1: But why did they arrest you?

P2: I've no idea, I need to get out of here.

P1: It's not getting through to you.

P2: I really need to go to school tomorrow, it's the end of year exam.

P1: You know you won't get out of here. It's impossible.

P2: They'll look at my files and see that it's all a mistake.

P1: Nobody comes in here by mistake.

P2: I'm here by mistake.

P1: If it was a mistake, you wouldn't be here.

This is the worst place.

P2: What do you mean?

P1: It's for serious offenses.

P2: Serious, why serious?

P1: You know, you're very convincing.

P2: Sorry?

P1: You play it well.

P2: I'm not an actor.

P1: You probably think I'm interfering, but there's nobody else here, and I've been alone for four weeks now.

P2: Not at all.

P1: Do you know what's going to happen now?

P2: What's going to happen?

P1: It is hard.

P2: Have you been questioned?

P1: For the last two months.

P2: Two months?

P1: Yes.

P2: I need to get out tomorrow.

I've been waiting all year for that day.

P1: What day?

P2: The day of the end of year exam . . . What do they do?

P1: Everything.

P2: What do you mean by everything?

P1: It depends on what exactly you've done.

P2: I've prepared the questions.

P1: What questions?

P2: The exam questions.

P1: It will be somebody else who . . .

P2: I won't give them that chance.

P1: Who?

P2: The students. The chance to see their teacher absent.

P1: But why are you so scared?

P2: Me?

P1: I just want to warn you.

P2: About what?

P1: About what you're going to see there.

P2: You don't understand.

P1: . . .

P2: I've never missed a lesson.

P1: . . .

P2: You know they gave me the Model Teacher Award?

P1: . . .

P2: And I could be in the running for the award again this year.

P1: . . .

P2: Even if the English teacher is sucking up to the headmaster because he wants the prize.

P1: . . .

P2: He must be happy now.

P1: . . .

P2: He's been plotting against me for some time now.

P1: . . .

P2: He organizes activities with the students.

P1: . . .

P2: He forces the students to speak English during break time.

P1: . . .

P2: The headmaster really likes him.

P1: Are you taking the piss?

P2: What's that sound?

P1: I told you not to tell me anything.

P2: What is that? Why is he shouting like that?

P1: You don't need to tell me your little stories.

P2: What's happening in there?

P1: Teacher . . . Your wife . . . Exam questions.

P2: What's that noise?

P1: Do you really think I'm that stupid?

P2: What are they doing to him?

P1: I won't disturb you any longer.

P2: Whawhwhwho??

P1: I'm going over there.

P2: Whwh whawhat do you you youwwwant???

P1: I don't want you to tell me anything.

I don't want to hear a thing.

## CROWDEDNESS

*A young couple.*

WOMAN (W): What boxer shorts are you wearing?

MAN (M): What boxer shorts?

W: Let's see!

M: What?

W: They strip the young people at the checkpoint.

M: Bloody hell, we're going to be late.

W: Are you going to answer?

M: Answer what?

W: What boxer shorts are you wearing?

M: I don't know. What do you mean?

W: I'm talking about the boxer shorts I bought for you.

M: I took them from the clean linen this morning.

W: Are they white?

M: Why are you so bothered about the color of my boxer shorts now?

W: They're going to strip you.

M: Was that guy in front of us?

W: Which one?

M: He was behind us. I'm going to say something to him.

W: Let it be, he's old.

M: Why? They're all going to take our place.

W: Let it be.

M: Do you see over there?

W: What?

M: The old lady.

W: What about her?

M: She's been trying to take our place for an hour now.

W: I think she was before us.

M: No, she arrived after us.

W: Are you sure?

M: I am sure she arrived after us.

W: I mean, are you sure you didn't put one of those boxer shorts?



M: Which ones?

W: The ones I bought for you.

M: When did you buy me boxer shorts?

W: When I came back from Syria.

M: Syria?

W: You don't even remember.

M: You bought me shirts.

W: And boxer shorts too.

M: What do you mean?

W: The colored boxer shorts.

M: Ah, those ones. No, I'm not wearing them.

W: They're going to strip you.

M: No they won't. It's impossible. Don't worry.

W: Why are you so sure of yourself?

M: Because I'm not wearing those ones.

Look at the old lady. She's trying to jump the queue.

W: You mean you've never worn them?

M: You know fine well they were too small for me and that you gave them to your brother.

W: The boxer shorts?

M: No, the shirts.

W: You never wore the boxer shorts.

M: Why would I wear them? They were a joke.

W: Do you know what I went through to get them for you?

M: Don't let her pass.

W: Who?

M: The old woman. Can't you hear the fuss she's making about the time?

W: So?

M: She wants us to think she's in a hurry so we'll let her go in front.

W: You do know they're one hundred percent cotton?

M: They're pink with embroidery on them. Wait a minute, that little girl wasn't with the old woman.

W: I wasn't watching.

M: Typical! She let the girl pass, and now she's going to catch up with her again.

W: You told me you liked them.

M: Liked who?

W: The shorts.

M: You know something? I'm not going to let her pass this time. No way!

W: Have you ever given me anything in your life?

M: Didn't she arrive while I was on the phone?

W: Who are you talking about?

M: The old woman. I'm sure she was behind us.

W: I don't remember.

M: Pay attention, we can't be late.

W: They're going to strip you.

M: I don't care. I'm more interested in making sure the old woman doesn't get in front of me. I know her game.

W: Why have you changed so much?

M: I don't like the fact that every time an old woman takes me for an idiot.

W: I'm not talking about the old woman.

M: Next she'll be coming over to tell us she's ill.

Look how ill she is the poor old dear.

W: Why are you not listening to me?

M: I am listening.

W: Before, when I gave you something, you wore it for a month.

M: Do you hear what she's saying?

W: I can't hear anything.

M: The old woman. Do you hear what she's just said?

W: No, I can't hear anything I told you.

M: She's saying that she's been on her feet for an hour.

W: Why is that winding you up? Do you remember, do you remember when I brought you . . .

M: An hour! We've not been here for an hour. She's not been here for an hour.

W: Is it because you lost yesterday?

M: What do you mean?

W: Playing cards . . . I know you . . . When you lose . . .

M: I didn't lose yesterday.

W: Then why are you in that state?

M: I've an important meeting for work and I can't be late.

W: No need to throw a fit every day.

M: Don't start.

W: Instead of spending time with me you spend time with your friends every evening.

M: Did you see that? Did you see her gesturing to the little girl?

W: We've not even been married a year. How will we be after ten years?

M: She knows she's going through the checkpoint, so why is she carrying ten bags?

W: You're rambling on rather than going to help her?

M: Do you know what? I'm sure they're empty . . .

W: The bags?

M: It's all part of her strategy. She wants us to feel sorry for her so we let her go in front.

W: Give her a break.

M: How am I supposed to forget her when her full attention is on me?

W: She's not asked you anything.

M: Look at her eyes. It's obvious she wants to take our place.

W: How will it be when we have children?

M: Did the doctor say something?

W: Are you going to bring them up like this?

M: I don't want any children just now.

W: When do you want them?

M: I don't know.

W: So it's your decision alone?

M: Wait a minute. You are still on the pill, aren't you?

W: What does that change?

M: What do you mean?

W: You know fine well what I mean.

M: Come closer.

W: Why?

M: Don't go too far. We can't miss our turn. I'm just very busy at the moment.

W: Calm down my love.

M: Did you hear that?

W: No.

M: Can you hear what she's saying?

W: No, what does she say?

M: What she wants us to hear.

W: There's too much noise.

M: She says, "Don't bury him before I've seen him."

W: The poor old dear!

M: Do you believe her?

W: Perhaps it's about her son.

M: It's a tactic these old women use. Did you hear the ringtone?

W: What ringtone?

M: From her mobile.

W: No, not at all.

M: Anyway, old women don't know how to use mobiles.

W: How's that? Look at your mother.

M: She's the worst old dear I've come across.

Don't let her pass, even if she begs on bended knees.

W: She's not asked you for anything.

M: She's doing everything she can . . . And by the way, what have you got against my mother?

W: Me?

M: It's *your mother, your mother*, all the time.

W: Can't you see how she interferes in our life?

M: She's an old woman. Leave her alone.

W: You're fed up with her too.

M: Do you want her to die tomorrow because of you?

W: I don't believe that.

M: Her eldest is in prison. Is that not enough?

W: You know how I put up with her.

M: Okay, so she says things about your cooking.

What's the harm?



W: She says things about my cooking?

M: It's just an example.

W: Your mother thinks I'm a bad cook?

M: That's not what I mean.

W: What did she say then?

M: You really are too sensitive.

W: So why doesn't she tell me to my face that she doesn't like what I cook?

M: What will you do when she's coming to live with us?

W: What?

M: She'll grow older. Do you want to leave her to herself?

W: Are you being serious?

M: She had a frank chat to me about it yesterday.

W: But we visit her every day. You can't make a decision like that all by yourself.

M: What do you mean?

W: I'm your wife.

M: You don't want Mum to come and live with us?

W: No.

M: Sorry?

W: I'm fed up with all the concessions I make in my life.

M: Concessions?

W: Yes, concessions . . .

M: The little girl has gone on ahead without the old woman. Is it our turn now?

W: Yes.

M: Wait a minute. They're still searching the young men.

W: Yes they are.

M: Wait then.

W: Wait for what?

M: Let her go in front.

W: Who?

M: The old woman.

W: Why do you want her to pass in front of us?

M: That way, when it comes to our turn they'll have stopped the searches.

W: What are you so frightened of?

M: That the soldiers strip me.

W: You really are frightened.

M: Yes I am.

W: Get out the way.

M: What are you doing?

W: I'm not telling you.

*(The woman takes off all her clothes and goes through the roadblock naked.)*

## THE GREEN GLASSES

*A couple.*

HIM (H): We'll fuck all day and night!

SHE (S): Have the kids left already?

H: Come on take it off.

S: Take what off?

H: Everything and at once!

S: In broad daylight?

H: We don't care.

S: You're insane, the neighbors will see us.

H: We'll fuck all day and night.

S: Take it easy love, take it easy.

H: I've been waiting for six months!

S: Did you pack all they need in the bags?

H: Aaaah, I want you so much!

S: Did you tell your sister to drive carefully?

H: Just take it all off, quickly!

S: What's wrong with you?

H: What's wrong with me?!

S: In such a hurry!

H: Your children.

S: What's with them?

H: They've been suffocating me for the last six months!

S: How?

H: Every time we're in bed, they keep popping out of the blue.

S: Where?

H: On top of us!

S: Did you tell her?

H: Tell who?

S: Your sister.

H: What?

S: That Wassim is allergic to onions.

H: I've been waiting for six months!

S: She loves it.

H: Loves what, me?

S: Your sister loves onions.

H: Forget about my sister.

S: Did you give her the paper?

H: What paper?

S: The one where I noted their allergies.

H: I don't know, I gave her a bunch of papers! Come on, just strip.

S: Easy, easy . . . Did you give her the list or not?

H: By the way, I have a paper too.

S: What paper?

H: With all the spots itching me.

S: And what am I supposed to do with it?

H: It's a list of everything we're going to do, until the morning.

S: I feel like you've forgotten something.

H: Impossible! Do you want us to go over it together?

S: I mean in the kids' bags.

H: Forget about the kids' bags!

S: Did you pack Samer's blue pants?

H: No, the brown ones.

S: The brown ones?

H: Yeah, the brown ones, is that a problem?

S: They have a hole in them!

H: A hole?

S: Yes! A hole below!

H: So what?

S: What do you mean, so what?

H: You know what?

S: What?

H: I will fuck every hole in your body.

S: He's not going to wear them!

H: He can wear his brother's.

S: And his brother?

H: He can go around in his boxer shorts.

By the way, I'm not wearing any.

S: What?

H: Boxer shorts.

S: He's been telling me to sew them up for a week!

H: Darling.

S: I shouldn't have put them away in the closet.

H: Put what?

S: The pants!

H: I'm taking them off.

S: Take what off?

H: The pants!

S: Are they crumpled?

H: My pants?

S: His pants!

H: They're clean.

S: So they're crumpled!

H: Baby, forget about the kids, come here, I want to eat you alive.



S: Eat me?

H: I'm going to eat you.

S: Did you pack them something to eat?

H: Who?

S: The kids?

H: Why?

S: They'll get hungry.

H: They're never hungry.

S: I'm hungry.

H: I'm hungrier, come on, take it off!

S: Take what off?

H: We're going to fuck all day and night.

S: I'm longing for you.

H: Then what are you waiting for?

S: I feel like you've forgotten something.

H: Just forget about the kids now.

S: The house is empty.

H: It's empty.

S: Finally.

H: Finally.

S: Come on, close the shutters.

H: Leave them open.

S: The neighbors will see us.

H: I want to pinch your ass.

S: You like my ass?

H: Ohhh yeahhhhhh.

S: And what else?

H: What?

S: What else do you like?

H: Everything.

S: My neck.

H: Your neck.

S: My breasts.

H: Your breasts.

S: My eyes.

H: Your eyes.

S: His glasses!

H: Whose glasses?

S: Fouad's glasses.

H: Fouad wears glasses?

S: Of course.

H: Fouad?

S: Green glasses.

H: Fouad wears glasses?

S: When he sleeps.

H: Only when he sleeps?

S: So that he can dream.

H: Fuck, fucking kid!

S: I can't count on you.

H: You're crazy, you're pissing about for a kid who wears glasses to sleep.

S: How will he sleep?

H: Drop it, baby, his aunt will give him her glasses.

S: What color are they?

H: I don't know.

S: Black!

H: So?

S: Impossible! He doesn't like black.

H: We don't care, so he doesn't dream tonight.

S: How can he not dream, what stories will he tell then?

H: Come on, open up.

S: Open what?

H: I said, open, open!

S: The shutters?

H: Leave the shutters alone.

S: I know! Arwa's teddy!

H: What teddy, goddamned?!

S: Did you remember to pack it?

H: Yes, I remembered to pack it.

S: I feel like you've forgotten something else!

H: You're the one forgetting.

S: Forgetting what?

H: Why we sent the kids away.

S: I don't know.

H: Do you know what I've been through these past six months?

S: What?

H: I've gone crazy, I'm exploding, I'm dying.

S: That's it?

H: Just come here, I want to ride you until the morning.

S: Do you love me?

H: I'm crazy about you, goddamned.

S: How crazy?

H: I'll tell you afterward.

S: After what?

H: After I devoured you.

S: And the toothbrushes!

H: What toothbrushes?

S: Did you write each kid's name on their toothbrushes?

H: Why, are our kids that stupid?

S: They forget.

H: Forget what?

S: They mix things up.

H: I've written their names on their foreheads, does that work?

S: Are you messing with me?

H: I'm screwing around.

S: Why are you screwing around?

H: Because I'm horny.

S: Wait a minute.

H: Wait? For six months I've been more patient than Job was for God!

S: What're you waiting for?

H: I'm fucking the wall.

S: Not possible, they've already fucked up the walls.

H: Who fucked up the walls?

S: Who do you think?

H: The kids.

S: This room needs painting.

H: I will paint it!

S: What color?

H: White.

S: Oh white.

H: Come on.

S: Take it easy love.

H: Here I am as easy as you like.

S: Ou ou ouch!

H: I haven't touched you yet!

S: Ou ou ou . . .

H: What's wrong?

S: There's something under my back.

H: What is it?

S: The glasses.

H: What glasses?

S: The green ones.

H: So what?

S: He can't sleep without his glasses!

*(The woman picks up the glasses and exits the stage. The man remains alone on the stage.)*

H: We are going to fuck all day and night!



## REDECORATION

*A couple.*

HE (H): Since when our neighbors built another floor?

SHE (S): Where?

H: Look.

S: You haven't seen it before?

H: No, did you?

S: It has been a while.

H: You never told me.

S: I thought you knew.

H: It's high.

S: No more sunlight in the room.

H: What?

S: Since he built it.

H: That's why . . .

S: What?

H: It's dark.

S: Are you going to fix it?

H: The floor?!

S: The window, you know how to do it?

H: Water still leaks when it rains?

S: All the wall peeled.

H: That's why it's so damp.

S: The room?

H: Dark and damp.

S: You can't breathe.

H: Like a grave.

S: We'll paint them.

H: The walls?

S: Other color, blue maybe.

H: Possible.

S: It will lighten up the room.

H: And bring some curtains.

S: Curtains?

H: Look.

S: What?

H: The neighbors can see everything.

S: No one has time to snoop at others.

H: I know our neighbor too well.

S: What's wrong with her?

H: She never gets tired from snooping at others.

S: How many times should I tell you that she returned your hammer?

H: Where it is then?

S: I don't know who you lent it to.

H: Why did she need my hammer in the first place?

S: Since then you always talk bad about her.

H: I've always thought she was unbearable.

S: Why?

H: Look! They built another store without telling us.

S: It has been a year.

H: If light is on at night they can see everything.

S: It's broken.

H: What?

S: Since two weeks.

H: You didn't buy another bulb?

S: It's not burnt.

H: What then?

S: I tried to put a new one but it didn't work.

H: What's the problem?

S: The electrician said the problem is internal.

H: You brought an electrician?

S: You were busy.

H: Don't tell me it was your cousin?

S: Come on.

H: You know he's no good.

S: Who else would I ask?

H: We'll change it all.

S: He said it all needs to be changed.

H: I mean: we will install neo lighting.

S: Neon?

H: It's better for his eyes when studying.

S: But it will . . .

H: It will brighten the room more.

S: The neon?

H: It's too dark now.

S: Dark and damp.

H: Like a grave.

S: Like a grave.

H: Where did she buy that?

S: Who?

H: Your sister.

S: The curtains?

H: No, the carpet in her son's room.

S: You will bring one?

H: Not exactly the same.

S: They come in different sizes.

H: I didn't like the curtains.

S: You didn't?

H: I don't like her taste.

S: Neither do I! The way she dresses her boy!

H: I feel sorry for him.

S: But why don't you install heating?

H: Heating?

S: It's too cold in here.

H: It costs a lot.

S: Gas Soba is not safe.

H: Next month maybe.

S: I'm always scared of Gas Soba.

H: Next month.

S: And buy him a desk.

H: I know.

S: His back will ache without a desk.

H: Do you think she was snooping?

S: Who?

H: Our neighbor.

S: Come on.

H: I will have a talk with her tomorrow.

S: Come on.

H: I will tell her from now on, she won't see anything anymore.

S: What?

H: She won't see anything but the curtains with the bears.

S: What bears? He doesn't like bears.

H: And she will see a bright light shining through them.

S: Come one, you wouldn't dare.

H: Neon light, not a bulb.

S: But neon is too bright at night.

H: What?

S: We could buy a cute table lamp?

H: Why?

S: Neon is too bright at night.

H: That didn't occur to me.

S: A table lamp.

H: But where will we put it?

S: On the bedside table.

H: We don't have one.

S: Aren't we going to buy one?

H: For the table lamp.

S: He can lay his books there.

H: Ah.

S: When he reads before falling asleep.

H: Maybe some shelves.

S: Shelves?

H: Yes, to organize his books.

S: Shelves, a desk, a bedside table. Why not a new bed as well?

H: Brilliant, we will ask the carpenter.

S: To design one.



H: In light wood.

S: Light, absolutely, to brighten up the room.

H: It's too dark.

S: Dark and damp.

H: Like a grave.

S: Like a grave.

H: Have you ever seen him?

S: Who?

H: In his striped pajamas.

S: Who?

H: Her son?

S: The neighbor's son.

H: Yes.

S: Sometimes.

H: In his room.

S: Preparing his schoolbag.

H: Sitting on the carpet.

S: The same carpet we will bring.

H: Not exactly the same.

S: It looks like it.

H: Have you seen the walls?

S: When his mother turns off the lights?

H: Yes.

S: The stars.

H: That's beautiful.

S: Yes.

H: What are they?

S: Fluorescent stars glued to the walls.

H: They light up in darkness.

S: Green light.

H: That's beautiful.

S: I bought a package.

H: What?

S: We went together, we bought the same ones.

H: Who?

S: The neighbor and me.

H: You have some?

S: Yes, I will show you.

*(She brings the package, he looks at the picture on the package.)*

Look, this is how the room will look like.

H: What is this?

S: What?

H: Where is the boy?

S: What?

H: It's a picture of a boy's room, where is the boy??

S: I don't know, he's not there, how should I know where he is?

H: You see, that's exactly why I hate buying things.

S: What?

H: Where is the boy? They put a picture of a boy's room, and the boy is missing, and they think we will care about the product in the picture, they don't know that we will start

thinking differently, we will start thinking, Where is the boy? Why is he not there? Why isn't he in his room? It's a nice room, look, it has a carpet, a desk, a bedside table and even a table lamp, why would he want to leave such a room, can you, can you tell me where the boy is?

S: You enjoy this, don't you?

H: What?

S: Ruining my good mood.

H: I'm not.

S: You always see the dark side of things.

H: Fuck it, I don't want to decorate this room.

S: Maybe . . .

H: What?

S: Maybe we should just give him our room.

H: Our room?

S: It's sunny, large windows, bright, you don't need to redecorate anything.

H: And us?

S: What?

H: Where will we sleep?

S: Even in winter the sun comes in.

H: Where will we sleep?

S: It will never be damp.

H: Where will we sleep?

S: Even if water seeps in along the window, the sun is too bright for the room to get damp.

H: Where will we sleep?

S: No one can snoop.

H: And where will we sleep?

S: It's warm in winter, we don't have to install heating.

H: Answer me!

S: We will just glue the stars on the wall.

H: And us?

S: What about us?

H: Where will we sleep?

S: Us?

H: Yes.

S: In his grave.

END OF PLAY



PHOTO BY NORA TAHA

**DALIA TAHA** is a Palestinian poet and playwright. She was born in Berlin 1986 but grew up in Ramallah, Palestine. Her first play, *Keffiyeh/Made in China*, was produced by the Royal Flemish Theatre and A.M. Qattan Foundation. The play premiered in Brussels in 2012, and then was brought to Palestine where it toured seven Palestinian cities across the West Bank. The play was given a staged reading in July 2013 at the Mosaic Rooms in London, as part of the Shubbak Festival: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture.

In 2013 Dalia was awarded a young artist grant, to travel to both Kinshasa and Hanover to attend the theater festivals in the two cities, meet artists, and participate in several discussions and debates. In addition to plays, Dalia writes poetry and fiction. She has published two collections of poetry and one novel. Her poems were translated into English, French, German and Swedish.

Her new play, *Fireworks*, was produced in 2015 at the Royal Court Theatre, and was originally developed as part of the Royal Court International Playwrights Group. Dalia is currently enrolled in the Brown University MFA playwriting program.





## PLAN D



Hannah Khalil

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

### *What inspired you to write Plan D?*

Before *Plan D* I'd never written a play about Palestine, it seemed too big, too difficult a topic. But it was always there in the back of my mind as something I MUST write about because my father is from Palestine. Although I have never lived in Palestine myself, I still have family in the West Bank. My father—an incredibly inspiring man who taught himself English at night under the street lamps by a motorway in Kuwait—has told me many wonderful, evocative stories from his childhood, and I've wanted to weave them into the narrative of a play since I started writing. What's more, I'm constantly inspired by all the strong women in my life—both my grandmothers and especially my Irish mother whose own history oddly and closely mirrors my father's.

All these inspirations came together in March 2008 when I was at a seminar at SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies), set up by the wonderful Palestinian Society there, called "The Eye of the Spoken Word: Oral History and The 1948 Nakba." ("Nakba" means catastrophe in Arabic and it's what Palestinians call the events of 1948, when the State of Israel was created and many Palestinians were expelled from their homes and land.)

This seminar aimed to bring together scholars, filmmakers and oral history specialists to reflect on the narratives of the 1948 Nakba to try and preserve the Palestinian collective memory. In it, a brilliant Israeli academic, Eyal Sivan, talked about his project collecting filmed interviews from

Palestinians and Israelis who lived through 1948, *Common Archive Palestine 1948*. He was concerned that many who'd been there were reaching the end of their lives and that because "history is written by the victors," these stories would vanish. He played a few interviews and some of the stories from the play are directly borrowed from them. I found the interviews incredibly affecting—especially because the Palestinians were not doing what they usually do when you see them on TV (crying or mourning a death), they were calmly and measuredly telling these awful stories about what happened to them, happy to at last have a forum to do so.

It was these personal stories and experiences, largely untold, which inspired me to write *Plan D*. I've created a fictional family faced with the same impossible question that too many Palestinians were in 1948: should we stay in our home and risk life and limb, or leave our country and seek safety elsewhere?

Most had no choice but to leave, and so convinced themselves the war would pass and that they would return home soon, little imagining that sixty-eight years later (at time of writing) millions of Palestinians would still be displaced.

*What you think a reader might want or need to know?*

A lot of people have an issue with my attempt to make *Plan D* universal, in deliberately not naming the country or the characters in the play, but it was a decision I didn't take lightly. I wanted to try and force the audience to see the story with new eyes and not have a prejudice or bias toward the situation.

I hoped that in watching it and not immediately knowing where it was they'd be surprised to find it was Palestine and be interested to discover more. I also loved the idea that other people might read the play and recognize the experience of these people as something from their own history, and that a director from Bosnia, South America or Africa might want to do the play and cast it as such, bringing fresh resonance. Ultimately, it's a play about relationships, family responsibility and how the family unit copes under unbearable strain.

The Israeli military operation to expel the Palestinians was called Plan D. This, I thought, was the perfect title for the play, in that anyone who knew the history of the time would understand the reference and anyone who didn't would (I hoped) think that Plan D was probably the last option for the family in the story (after plans A, B and C had failed).

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

The world premiere of *Plan D* was produced by ReSister Theatre Company at the Tristan Bates Theatre in Covent Garden, London, on January 26, 2010. It was directed by Chris White and designed by Paul Burgess. The cast was:

FATHER	George Couyas
MOTHER	Houda Echouafni
GRANDMOTHER	Amira Ghazalla
DAUGHTER	Loukia Pierides
NEPHEW	Kamal Kaan
COUSIN	Richard Sumitro
OLD MAN	Leonard Fenton

## CHARACTERS

FATHER

MOTHER

GRANDMOTHER (Granny)

DAUGHTER

NEPHEW

COUSIN (male)

OLD MAN

## NOTES

The time and place in which this play is set is intended to be non-specific, but the inspiration for the play comes from oral testimonies by Israelis and Palestinians who lived through 1948.

A slash (/) in dialogue refers to an overlapping of text, when two characters speak at once.





*To:*

*My father for the stories,*

*my mother for the support,*

*my husband for the belief, patience and love,*

*and my daughter for the future*





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I must thank filmmaker and academic Eyal Sivan whose *Common Archive Palestine 1948* video testimonies project inspired me to write this play. Also the Palestinian Society at SOAS, who hosts many important events and conferences including the Oral Histories day where I first met Eyal. The play wouldn't be what it is without the work of brilliant dramaturg Hanna Slättne from Tinderbox Theatre in Belfast; she took the play on its own terms and we developed it with a group of brilliant Northern Irish actors. Thanks must also go to those who believed in *Plan D* and helped support the original production—not least my inspirational mother, my wonderful in-laws and the rest of my family and friends who got passionately involved (too many to name—you know who you are). My gratitude also goes to Michelle Normanly, Liz Hyder and the cast and crew of that London production—especially my husband and collaborator Chris White.

## PART 1

*We are in the kitchen/living area of a very small house. It is evening and it is dark outside.*

*There is a large table in the center. On one side of the table sits the Daughter and the Nephew. They are doing homework, writing in exercise books and helping one another. The Father sits at the other side of the table, smoking a cigarette. The Mother is washing plates from dinner in a sink. In one corner sits the Grandmother. She has a photograph in her lap and is cleaning an old-fashioned gun.*

MOTHER: I tore it up—I just had to. Are you listening to me?

FATHER: What? No, I was looking at those two working away. Remembering my school days

MOTHER: Good boy, helping her with her homework

DAUGHTER: What was your school like?

FATHER: On the first day I didn't go

NEPHEW: Were you sick?

FATHER: Yes, scared sick

DAUGHTER: You? Scared?

FATHER: I had to go with the boy from next door and as we walked he told me that his brother said the headmaster was evil, and had all kinds of torturing contraptions in his study.

On the first day, new boys had to go and see him one by one, and he'd try out his latest instrument

MOTHER: Don't tell them that!

FATHER: He said there was a thing you had to put your thumbs in, and he would ask you a question, and every time you got it wrong he'd turn the key and it would twist your thumb

DAUGHTER: But what if you didn't know the answer?

FATHER: It'd snap off

MOTHER: Please!

FATHER: And another tool was a ruler covered in nails which he'd use to—

MOTHER: Enough!

NEPHEW: It's not true, is it?

FATHER: No, but we didn't know that—we were terrified

DAUGHTER: Who made up those awful lies?

FATHER: The older boys, to scare us, or maybe the teacher spread the rumor so we'd be too frightened to misbehave, anyway it worked and we decided to hide in the woods. We played all day long and that night went back home and pretended we had gone to school. But the second day we had the same problem

NEPHEW: What happened?

FATHER: I went in,

DAUGHTER: How brave

FATHER: but he didn't—he never went to school

NEPHEW: Never?

DAUGHTER: Did you get caned?

FATHER: I don't remember

*(A beat.)*

MOTHER: Get on with your homework or I'll cane you all—and you

FATHER: Me?

MOTHER: I said I tore it up

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: The green shirt—it was so threadbare there was no point stitching it again—there was already more thread than material. I hung it on the line and watched it blowing about, and I could see all the way through, no protection at all

FATHER: But that was my favorite

MOTHER: I know—it was falling to bits

DAUGHTER (*Quietly to the Nephew*): And it smelled

FATHER: What did you say?

DAUGHTER: Nothing

FATHER: I heard you—share it with the class . . .

*(She looks bashful.)*

Come on—stand up and share the joke with the class—what did you say?

DAUGHTER: I said . . . it smelled

*(He puts his cigarette down, gets up and moves toward her.*

*A beat.)*

FATHER: I thought that's what you said

*(A beat.)*

Give me your thumbs

DAUGHTER: No, no!

*(She hides behind the Nephew's chair.)*

FATHER: You dare to tell your father he smells

*(The Daughter squeals as he picks her up in a fireman's lift and starts smacking her bottom playfully.)*

DAUGHTER: Help me! Help me!

NEPHEW: Let her go sir!

FATHER: Or what?

NEPHEW: I'm warning you—I'm armed (*Brandishing his pencil*)

FATHER: You wouldn't!

NEPHEW: Watch me

*(A chase ensues around the table with a lot of noise.)*

MOTHER: Stop it stop it—you'll break something

*(The chase continues. As they run past the Grandmother, the air blows the photograph from her lap and it is almost trampled in the play-fighting.)*

GRANNY: Stop! My picture!

*(She wades in amongst them shouting. They stop and she picks up the picture, smoothing it out with care.)*

Bloody sods—my poor man—come here (*She kisses the picture*)

DAUGHTER: Sorry Granny. (*Kissing her*) Did we ruin it?

NEPHEW: It's okay—it's not damaged



MOTHER: No thanks to you monkeys, now get on with your homework

*(They all retake their places at the table and the Father picks up his cigarette. The Grandmother puts the picture in her lap again, dabs her eyes with her sleeve and resumes cleaning the gun.)*

FATHER: It's just a picture

MOTHER: Sh!

GRANNY: To you it's just a picture, you don't understand, you've never lost anything—to me it's my love, long dead . . .

FATHER: You don't know that

GRANNY: What?

MOTHER: Leave her alone—she's not another child for you to tease

FATHER: I'm not teasing, I'm just saying we don't know he's dead

GRANNY: I do—if he was alive he would be here with us

FATHER: He was only a prisoner—they might have set him free—he could be living over there, enjoying himself with a new family

MOTHER: Don't say that

GRANNY: He knows he's dead—he knows what they do to their prisoners—

unarmed (*She gestures the gun she is holding. She is about to cry*)

MOTHER: Please— (*She signals the children*)

(*Pause.*

*There is a scratching noise, like a knock on the door.*)

It sounds like someone's at the door

FATHER: That's the wind

MOTHER: No, there was a knock—will you look?

FATHER: There's no one there

(*The Mother goes to the door and opens it. A gust of wind blows through the room. A stray piece of paper floats off the table.*)

NEPHEW: The wind! It's upset everything!

(*She closes the door and comes back in.*)

FATHER: I told you

MOTHER: It was that branch—I've asked you and asked you to cut it—

FATHER: I've been busy

MOTHER: But you haven't cut it

FATHER: I haven't got 'round to it

MOTHER: I hate that tree, it grows so quickly, one day it was tiny and the next huge with branches pressed up against the window like they are trying to get in

FATHER: I'll cut it.

MOTHER: You keep saying that but you don't. By the time you get 'round to it the saplings underneath will be fully grown too—we'll be overrun

*(He goes to her and puts his arms around her.)*

That won't make up for it

*(He moves his hands to her breasts—she gives him a look.*

*Then he moves his hands to her neck and pretends to strangle her.)*

Wouldn't you like to . . .

*(He leans around her, where she is washing plates again, and puts the cigarette out in the water.)*

Why did you do that—it's not hygienic

FATHER: Don't want to burn the house down

MOTHER: Put the butt outside

FATHER: I was going to

*(He goes to the door. The Nephew is watching the Grandmother clean the gun.)*

NEPHEW: It looks clean

GRANNY: It should be—I'm very thorough

NEPHEW: Are there bullets in it?

*(She nods gravely.)*

Can I hold it?

*(The Grandmother and Nephew both look toward the Mother who has her back to them as she continues to wash up.)*

GRANNY: Not yet—but soon—when you are old enough

FATHER *(From outside the door)*: Come and see this you two

*(The children get up and go to the door.)*

DAUGHTER: Oh—blood

NEPHEW: It's shaking

DAUGHTER: No it's dead

NEPHEW: It's not

FATHER: Shoo! I think she was bringing you a present darling

NEPHEW: What a horrid present

DAUGHTER: I think he's sweet—poor thing, he's squeaking a bit

NEPHEW: Won't he die, Uncle?

FATHER: I don't know

DAUGHTER: Can we put him in the shed—with the chickens—make a bed for him

FATHER: If you like

*(The children go out and shut the door behind them. The Father comes in.)*

GRANNY: That's a vicious cat—always killing things

MOTHER: She's not been the same since she got locked in the barn

FATHER: It was a field mouse—incredible it wasn't dead

GRANNY: It's bound to die—they better not get too attached

FATHER: They're so close those two

MOTHER: Of course—they grew up together

*(The Father sits at the table and toys with another cigarette.)*

FATHER: I never thought I'd be happy here

GRANNY: Why not? You chose to live here, no one forced you

MOTHER: You liked the house didn't you?

FATHER: I did—and the woman who was born in it

GRANNY: Do you mean me or her?

FATHER: Her, Mother, her

MOTHER: There. That's that done

GRANNY: If you were after her then why did you insist she sign the house over to you?

MOTHER: Mother must you? It's been years

GRANNY: He saw a good house and he wanted it

*(The Mother sits down and puts her feet onto her husband's lap. He removes a slipper and begins to rub her foot.)*

FATHER: No—I saw a good woman. Then I saw the house and I think that land should always belong to the man. It's his family, his home. I wanted to be the one responsible for looking after the house and everyone in it. And now I am. I work those fields, tend the animals, keep the house in order

*(The Mother darts a look at him.)*

I'll cut the tree—and I don't see you complaining when you tuck in at dinnertime, Mother

*(The Grandmother takes the gun and puts it away in a drawer.)*

*There is a nice peaceful moment.*

*Then a tapping on the door again.*

*The Father and Mother look at one another.)*

FATHER: There's no one there

*(She tries to get up—he holds onto her foot.)*

MOTHER: Let go

*(He does. She picks up a large knife from the draining board.)*

FATHER: Are you going to kill me?

MOTHER: No, I'm going to do your job—cut that bloody tree

*(She opens the door and lets out a little cry.*

*There is a man there.*

*He is very disheveled and looks exhausted. He has been traveling for a long time. He has not brought much with him—perhaps one small bag.)*

FATHER: What is it?

GRANNY: Who is he?

*(The Father goes to her at the door and sees the man.)*

FATHER: Can I help you? Oh—is it you? Cousin? Welcome, welcome— *(To the Mother, pointing to the knife)* Put that down

*(The Father hugs the man at the door. The Mother enters the kitchen looking pale. She puts the knife away and a look passes between the Mother and Grandmother.)*

You look tired, come in, come in, sit, make tea

*(The Mother begins to prepare tea and put together some food for the Cousin.)*

COUSIN: Thank you

FATHER: Sit, sit, how was your journey?

COUSIN: Long—

FATHER: Did you come on foot?

COUSIN: Not all of the way

MOTHER: We weren't expecting you—were we?

FATHER: Hush now, he's welcome

COUSIN: Auntie—



*(The Cousin greets the Grandmother by holding her hand to his lips. He smiles broadly.)*

GRANNY: Stop it. No wife yet?

COUSIN: God hasn't chosen to bless me with one—

*(The Grandmother snorts; he smiles at her and sits down. The Mother serves the tea and food.)*

I'm sorry I didn't let you know of my visit—I left in rather a hurry

FATHER: Is everything all right?

COUSIN: Yes—no—I—couldn't not come and see you

FATHER: Has something happened?

MOTHER: Let the man drink his tea, he looks famished

*(He eats some food.)*

FATHER: It's so long since we have seen you—

GRANNY: Let him eat

COUSIN: How's your daughter?

FATHER: Beautiful, a good scholar, and a lovely imagination

COUSIN: And the boy?

GRANNY: Don't talk with your mouth full—no manners

COUSIN: Excuse me. Thank God you were generous enough to take him in

FATHER: It was nothing—

GRANNY: I suppose you'd like to see them

*(She gets up and goes out through the door to call the children.)*

COUSIN *(To the Father)*: I must speak to you

MOTHER: There's no hurry, rest. How is your mother? Is your sister married yet?

COUSIN *(To the Father)*: There's something I need to tell you

MOTHER: Say hello to the children, meet them, see us all together as a family, Cousin, please . . .

*(At this moment the Grandmother reenters with the children who stand sheepishly, looking at the man who they have never met.)*

FATHER: Say hello

DAUGHTER AND NEPHEW: Hello

FATHER: You don't know who this is do you? It's my cousin—he's come all the way from the village where I was born to see you

NEPHEW: The village where you were born—that's near where I come from, isn't it Auntie?

MOTHER: Yes, yes it is, my sister, your mother lived in the village next door to this man

NEPHEW (*To the Cousin*): Did you know my mother? What was she like?

GRANNY (*To the Daughter*): Is it dead then?

DAUGHTER: No—it's a bit shaky though

NEPHEW (*To the Cousin*): Next door's cat brought a field mouse to the door

DAUGHTER: It was bleeding and everything

COUSIN: Poor fellow

FATHER: Did you make it a little bed?

DAUGHTER: Yes and we left some water in half an eggshell

NEPHEW: That was my idea

MOTHER: Very clever

DAUGHTER: It was mine actually

COUSIN: Do you want to take a bit of my cheese to him in case he gets hungry

GRANNY: Don't waste good cheese on a mouse

DAUGHTER: Yes please

*(He hands her a bit of the cheese from his plate; the children go out the door.)*

MOTHER: Come straight back—it's bedtime

COUSIN: They are so grown up. The time passes so quickly

FATHER: Doesn't it?

COUSIN: They look so alike

*(A beat.)*

GRANNY: Where are we going to put him?

MOTHER: Mother!

COUSIN: I'll sleep anywhere—in here on the floor will be fine

FATHER: We should put him in your bed, Mother

GRANNY: What?

COUSIN: Oh yes—I'd happily share with a lovely woman like you

GRANNY: Get out of it!

FATHER: It's a while since you've had a man in your bed isn't it, Mother?

MOTHER: Leave her alone! We'll put him on the mattress in the children's room. Is that all right?

COUSIN: Of course

*(There is a banging and ghostly "whooooing" noise from the door.)*

FATHER: Stop playing you two—trying to frighten your mother

*(He opens the door and they run in laughing, shouting good night as they run up to their bedroom.)*

GRANNY: I'll go and make sure they wash their faces

*(She exits.)*

COUSIN: Ahh they're wonderful *(He wipes his eyes)*

FATHER: Is everything all right, Cousin?

COUSIN: It's so good to be around people again

FATHER: Traveling is a lonely business

COUSIN: You don't understand—everyone left the village. It's like a ghost town

MOTHER: What do you mean?

COUSIN: There were still clothes hanging on the lines—but no one there—everyone left

MOTHER: Everyone?

FATHER: What about your mother and father, and your sister?

COUSIN: They went to a safe place—in the North to my father's people

MOTHER: You didn't go with them?

COUSIN: I promised them I'd warn you

MOTHER: It's a long way

COUSIN: Blood—family is important

FATHER: I've heard about this—but I never thought—my own village

MOTHER: This is your village now

FATHER: But I grew up there

COUSIN: They had no choice. We have no choice

FATHER: Of course there's a choice

MOTHER: You can't judge—thanks to God we don't have to worry about that

COUSIN: I'm not so sure

FATHER: What do you mean?

COUSIN: I think the same will happen here

MOTHER: No—what would they want with us—we’re too far east for them to bother about us. We’ll be okay. Won’t we?

FATHER: Of course. And despite its oddities this town is full of men of fighting age—no one will go anywhere—they’ll stand and fight

MOTHER: Don’t talk about fighting—please, I can’t bear it

COUSIN: You need someone to fight against though

MOTHER: Stop! We are fine here

COUSIN (*Directly to the Mother*): There are some truths you have to face up to, which you can’t hide from

MOTHER: Shush please

FATHER: Don’t cry, don’t get upset—he’s on our side, he’s just come to warn us

MOTHER: He’s threatening us

FATHER: No my darling, he’s warning us—aren’t you?

COUSIN: Of course and then we can all leave together

FATHER: We’re not going anywhere—this is my home and there’s nothing happening in our village—it’s fine, we’re safe. Stay with us though— please. Just until things return to normal in your place—then you can go back. But you’re family—stay with us

COUSIN: Thank you

MOTHER: You should go back to your people

FATHER: He's just arrived

COUSIN: You'll need me

FATHER: I think we should all go to bed, it's been a long day and there's a lot to be done in the fields tomorrow—you've come at the right time

COUSIN: Good—I'll help

FATHER: Yes *(The men move to the door)* I'll show you where you are sleeping. *(To the Mother)* Are you coming?

MOTHER: I'm just getting some water

*(The Mother anxiously watches the men go. She stands over the sink trying to control her breathing. The Grandmother comes in and the two talk in hushed whispers.)*

GRANNY: Are you all right—what did he do?

MOTHER: Nothing, sh!

GRANNY: Why is he here?

MOTHER: He said they've all left his village . . .

GRANNY: Did he?



MOTHER: That's what he said

*(A beat.)*

GRANNY: He's dying to say something

MOTHER: I know

GRANNY: Those remarks—heavy with meaning—he knows

MOTHER: Of course he knows . . .

*(A beat.)*

Do you think he picked up on it?

GRANNY: No, no—not yet—we need to get rid of him

MOTHER: It seems like he's staying

GRANNY: He can't—he might—

MOTHER: I know but what can I do?

GRANNY: Ask him?

MOTHER: What?

GRANNY: If he intends to tell

MOTHER: I couldn't

GRANNY: Do you want me to?

MOTHER: NO, shh!

GRANNY: He's a stirrer, like that mother of his . . . It's okay—we'll just have to keep an eye on him. Come on, let's go to bed

MOTHER: Oh Mother, I don't want my life, my children, this house to collapse around me—if he finds out . . .

GRANNY: Shh, child he won't. Come on, bed.

*(They exit.*

*We hear the branch scratching on the door.*

*Lights down.)*

## PART 2

*The lights gradually come up on the same setting. It is the morning.*

*The table is in front of the door. The Grandmother sits in a chair in the center of the room, fast asleep with the gun in her lap. The Daughter enters and takes in the scene. She gently wakes the Grandmother.*

DAUGHTER: Granny—Granny—are you okay?

GRANNY: What! Oh—oh my back

DAUGHTER: Did you sleepwalk?

GRANNY: No I did not, oh

DAUGHTER: Did you move the table all alone?

GRANNY: Yes

DAUGHTER: But it's so heavy

*(The Nephew enters.)*

NEPHEW: What happened?

DAUGHTER: Help me move this—I need to check the mouse

GRANNY: No, don't

DAUGHTER: I want to make sure he's okay—something's going on

GRANNY: Don't go out there!

NEPHEW: I'll go with her don't worry

*(They are out the door.)*

GRANNY: Come back, come back!

*(The Cousin enters.)*

COUSIN: What's all the noise? Gun? Who you shooting now Mrs.?

GRANNY: Stop! They've gone outside—get them—something happened in the night

COUSIN: What?

GRANNY: Quickly!

*(He registers her fear.)*

COUSIN *(Shouting)*: Children!

*(He rushes out the door.)*

*The Grandmother looks out the door. The Mother enters.)*

MOTHER: What is it? *(Referring to the gun)* Put that away

GRANNY: It's okay—everything looks normal I think

MOTHER: What do you mean?

GRANNY: Didn't you hear it?

MOTHER: No—what?

GRANNY: In the night—the noise—it terrified me so I came down and put the table in front of the door and kept guard

*(The Father enters.)*

FATHER: Why is everyone up—it's barely dawn

GRANNY: I can't believe none of you woke up

MOTHER: Mother thinks there was a noise in the night

FATHER: Probably just wolves

GRANNY: Not that kind of noise

FATHER: Then what?

GRANNY: Something bad. A bang

FATHER: A gun?

GRANNY: Bigger

FATHER: What? Are you sure you weren't dreaming, Mother?

*(The Daughter, Nephew and Cousin come back to the door.)*

NEPHEW: There's a huge hole in the field—behind the shed

MOTHER: A hole?

FATHER: Do you think it was a tremor?

COUSIN: A tremor doesn't make a crater

MOTHER: It could, couldn't it?

FATHER: Show me

*(The Father and Cousin exit.)*

GRANNY: I knew I wasn't dreaming

DAUGHTER: The mouse is fine—he was snoozing away as if nothing had happened

NEPHEW: The hens were a bit funny though

DAUGHTER: Like when they see Granny with her gun

NEPHEW: That's because they know one of them's for it

MOTHER: Oh God—what was it?

GRANNY: Children move the table back to its proper place. I can't believe you all slept through it—well! It woke me right up and I looked at the picture of your grandfather and I said, Did you hear that? We'd better go and see what's happened, and it was eerily still. I didn't trust it. So I set up camp down here

NEPHEW: Did you move the table all alone, Granny?

GRANNY: Yes I did

NEPHEW: But it's so heavy

GRANNY: I wasn't going to let anything come in here

NEPHEW: Who wants to come in here?

MOTHER: No one, it was a tremor, nature

*(The Father and Cousin appear again.)*

FATHER: It's huge. It nearly took out the whole field, the bordering trees were uprooted

DAUGHTER: Like a giant's footprint

FATHER: At least that field was just for grazing—it didn't damage any crops

COUSIN: This time

FATHER: Children go and collect eggs for breakfast

DAUGHTER: Do we have to?

NEPHEW: Don't worry—I'll distract the cock, you get the eggs, then you won't get pecked again

*(The Daughter and Nephew go.)*

COUSIN: You see—I told you. This is what happened in my home too

FATHER: Describe the noise exactly—what was it like?

GRANNY: A bang, a rumble

MOTHER: A rumble is like a tremor

GRANNY: I can't believe no one else woke up

COUSIN: It was no tremor. It just missed the shed

MOTHER: What missed the shed?

GRANNY: If it just missed the shed then it just missed—

COUSIN: The house, and next time you might not be so lucky.  
We must leave

FATHER: We're not going anywhere

GRANNY: But the children?

FATHER: This is their home

COUSIN: Don't be stupid, you don't want them to die in this  
place

FATHER: Who's talking about dying? They are just trying to  
frighten us

MOTHER: It's working

COUSIN: She's sensible—she knows how to look after herself

*(A look passes between the two women.)*



FATHER: I won't leave—it's taken me years to get it to where it is now—this is our home—and there's the livestock, the fields to be tended—we can't go anywhere

COUSIN: You need to get your priorities right, Cousin

FATHER: If you're afraid, go—my family and I are staying

COUSIN: I'm not afraid for myself—talk to him, Auntie

GRANNY: You are both right

COUSIN: What?

GRANNY: Well, we can't leave—this is our home

COUSIN: Think of the children. If that thing had been any closer . . .

MOTHER: Maybe we shouldn't stay here

GRANNY: Listen, we can stay and go

FATHER: We're not splitting up

GRANNY: No, no, listen—if we go to the woods beyond the last field—we're still on our property—we can set up a camp and come back to look after everything, but know we are safe. Then this man can go

MOTHER: The woods?

FATHER: With the wolves and wild boars and hyenas?

MOTHER: I don't go into those woods

COUSIN: You'd rather take your chances here?

GRANNY: There hasn't been a hyena there since I was a girl—  
(*To the Mother*) You can do it

FATHER (*To the Mother*): Listen to them—this is madness!

MOTHER: The woods? But maybe—we don't need to go in too deep—we'll be close enough to come and do things but we'll be safe—just for a couple of days while we see what happens

GRANNY: Listen to your wife

FATHER: What about school?

COUSIN: I shouldn't think that will be an issue

MOTHER: Their safety comes first

COUSIN: It's amazing how a woman always thinks of her children

GRANNY: We can tell them it's an adventure

MOTHER: Yes—good idea

FATHER: Stop, this is crazy—I've work to do

COUSIN: Please, look I'll stay, help you with the work. Just humor me—if I'm wrong, well I hope I'm wrong—either way your family will be safe

MOTHER: Better safe than sorry—just for a few days

GRANNY: The children

*(The Mother goes to the Father.)*

MOTHER: Please

*(A beat.)*

FATHER: Oh all right then. But this is . . . Come on Cousin we've a lot to do— *(To the Mother)* You get the household things together

MOTHER: Yes of course

GRANNY: And we'll have a hearty breakfast with eggs and cheese before we go

*(The Father and Cousin exit. The Mother begins to collect together bits and pieces to take with them—not much though—she knows it's only for a few days.)*

What do you think of that?

MOTHER: Don't Mother

GRANNY: You know what he's up to

MOTHER: Of course—what shall I do? What if he says something? Do you think he means to?

GRANNY: Yes. I do. You know what he's like. Can't keep it shut. Look what happened to his sister

MOTHER: Oh God! What shall I do?

GRANNY: Nothing—we'll just keep an eye on him

MOTHER (*Referring to some kitchen utensil*): Do you think we'll need this?

GRANNY: Probably not—leave it—we can always come back for it

(*A beat.*)

(*In a whisper*) Shall we bring?

MOTHER: I was just wondering about that—will it be safe here?

GRANNY: I don't know—shall I get it?

MOTHER: Yes—quick

(*The Grandmother exits and returns with a small pouch.*)

GRANNY: I've slept on this for eleven years—I think I'll miss lying on it. Can I open it?

MOTHER: No Mother

*(A beat.)*

Oh, go on, but quickly

*(The Grandmother opens the pouch and removes four or five pieces of gold jewelry.)*

GRANNY: This one is my favorite—poor you, never being able to wear it

MOTHER: I wouldn't want to wear it

GRANNY: If I'd had something like this I'd never take it off. You put it on

MOTHER: No—you know where it came from—I hate it

GRANNY: I can't imagine you cleaning in it. But try it on—you'll look pretty

MOTHER: No it makes my skin crawl

GRANNY: It's gold, it's yours

MOTHER: It's for him for when he's grown up

GRANNY: We may need it sooner than that

*(She puts it away.)*

MOTHER: What shall we do with it?

GRANNY: We'll worry about that later—for now it'll be safe here

*(She puts it down her ample bosom.)*

No one will look there, eh?

*(They both giggle.)*

MOTHER: Will you get some bedding?

*(The Grandmother goes.)*

No need to go too mad—we shouldn't be there long

*(She continues to collect things together. The Father comes in.)*

FATHER: Where's my knife?

MOTHER: In the drawer—I told you, I don't like it left out with the children

FATHER *(Finding the knife)*: Here it is. Make sure your mother packs the gun

MOTHER: What, why?

FATHER: Just in case

MOTHER: What did he say to you?

*(No answer.)*

Tell me. You are making me frightened

*(A beat.)*

FATHER: Maybe that's good

MOTHER: I hate those woods

FATHER: I'll be there to protect you, remember what I promised. I haven't let you down yet, have I?

MOTHER: No

*(A beat.)*

Is it fair to ask him to come? He's done what he wanted to, warned us, he should go back to his people now

FATHER: He wants to stay

MOTHER: Why?

FATHER: To help us. What is it?

*(A beat.)*

MOTHER: Some people like times like this—they find it exciting. Not me. I want everything safe and routine, in our home

FATHER: Me, too. It'll be okay

MOTHER: You still love me don't you?

FATHER: Why are you saying that?

MOTHER: You do though?

FATHER: Of course—

MOTHER: You hesitated

FATHER: No I didn't

MOTHER: You did you did—you, oh—

FATHER: No, what is it?

*(He holds her.)*

Silly hen. What is it? Why are you crying?

MOTHER: I wish he'd never come

FATHER: You can't blame him—he's just the messenger

MOTHER: He's going to ruin everything

FATHER: What? What is it that you are frightened of?

*(A beat.)*

*The Daughter and Nephew run in.)*

DAUGHTER: What is it, Mother? What's the matter?

NEPHEW: Please don't cry



FATHER: She's not crying, she's—

MOTHER: Excited—I'm excited—your father has just come up with a great idea

FATHER: Have I?

MOTHER: Yes, remember? The “adventure”

NEPHEW: Adventure?

FATHER: Oh yes, we are going on an “adventure”

DAUGHTER: Really?

*(The Grandmother walks into the room, her arms full of blankets. She puts them down, goes to the dresser, and takes the gun.)*

MOTHER: What are you doing with that?

GRANNY: I'm going to shoot two chickens to take with us

NEPHEW: Can I watch?

GRANNY: Yes, come on boy

DAUGHTER: Don't frighten the mouse

*(The Grandmother and Nephew exit.)*

Why doesn't she just ring their necks like you Dad?

FATHER: She likes to practice her aim

*(A beat.)*

Have you got everything together?

MOTHER: It's hard to know what to bring . . .

DAUGHTER: Where are we going?

MOTHER: On an adventure, we're going to sleep in the woods

DAUGHTER: That's creepy though

MOTHER: Not with your father to look after us

DAUGHTER: Can I bring Mousey?

MOTHER: If you like

DAUGHTER: What about school?

FATHER: You've got a few days holiday

DAUGHTER: Oh! Today is the best day, first a giant wakes up and walks in our field and now we get to play in the woods

MOTHER: Get your things ready, go on

*(The Daughter goes to the stairs. The sound of a gunshot is heard—the Mother jumps.)*

DAUGHTER: Don't be scared Mum, it's just Granny in the henhouse.

*(Lights down.)*

### PART 3

*The Mother, Grandmother, Daughter and Nephew are in a small clearing in the woods. They are unpacking a few bags of things, making up beds and setting up camp.*

DAUGHTER: So if your bed is here, and my bed is here, where shall we put this fellow's bed?

NEPHEW: You could put him in between us

DAUGHTER: No way—what if you roll over in the night and squash him—that would definitely be the end of him

NEPHEW: Okay, how about here—on this tree trunk, that way he's raised up a bit too so when the wolves come they won't get him

DAUGHTER: Wolves?

NEPHEW: Yes—everyone knows there are wolves in this forest—and wild boar too

DAUGHTER: Is that true?

GRANNY: Yes

MOTHER: No

GRANNY: Come, we must tell the child the truth, she's old enough to hear it now—she can't be protected forever

MOTHER: She's just a child

NEPHEW: She's the smallest here

DAUGHTER: No I'm not—Mousey is

GRANNY: Listen—there are horrid things that live in the forest—once when I was a little girl your great grandfather—he was a tyrant—he sent me to this very wood to collect branches for the fire. It was the middle of winter and freezing and I could hardly see my hand in front of my face . . . I walked in through a path on the other side and began gathering different twigs. But I kept thinking I heard things behind me—it was terrifying. Then, just as I had enough wood, I looked up to find myself nose-to-nose with a wolf

NEPHEW: You didn't?

GRANNY: I'd been so busy looking over my shoulder I hadn't seen him walk right up to me, bold as you like, and start salivating

DAUGHTER: It's awful

MOTHER: Mother enough

NEPHEW: What did you do?

GRANNY: I saw in those big yellow eyes of his that he liked the look of me, so I threw the wood at him and jumped up the nearest tree. He was down below looking up at me, and I clung on up there . . . He was prepared to wait for dinner, so he sat himself down

MOTHER: I thought wolves could climb trees

GRANNY: Not this one. Well there I am getting colder and colder and I know if I stay up there too long, I'll drift off and fall out and that'll be the end of me, or I'll freeze to death

NEPHEW: What did you do?

GRANNY: It was him or me. So I very quietly maneuvered myself so I was above him and jumped down hard so I landed on his back

NEPHEW: Didn't he bite you?

GRANNY: No—I broke him—he just lay there, sprawled in the snow with blood coming out of his mouth, moaning . . . I ran back to the house

DAUGHTER: Gosh—what did your father say?

GRANNY: Nothing, he was too busy knocking me black and blue for forgetting the firewood . . . So you see the forest is like the world, there are horrid things out there too, but look—you've your cousin and your mother and me and here's Grandad's gun—and he'd never let any harm come to us

DAUGHTER: And Father

GRANNY: Yes of course

DAUGHTER: Where is he?

MOTHER: Don't fret, he'll join us in a while—he wanted to check on the animals

DAUGHTER: And the man—he's coming too isn't he?

MOTHER: Yes

DAUGHTER: I like him, don't you, Mother? He's handsome. Is he going to stay with us?

GRANNY: Not for long so don't get too attached to him

*(A beat.)*

You two help me find wood—we are going to build a pyre in the middle here and that'll keep all the nasties away in the night

*(The three begin collecting pieces of wood together from the vicinity of the camp.)*

*The Mother continues to sort things out. She stops and watches the Daughter, Nephew and Grandmother collect the wood.)*

MOTHER *(To the Nephew)*: Come here my boy

NEPHEW: Yes Auntie

MOTHER: Give me a kiss

*(He does so.)*

NEPHEW: Are you all right?

MOTHER: Yes

NEPHEW: We aren't just here on an adventure are we?

MOTHER: Yes of course we are—it's a game and I've a task for you. Will you do it?

NEPHEW: Anything Auntie

MOTHER: I want you to climb that tree over there and keep watch

NEPHEW: What for?

MOTHER: For when our men come back—when they do, you call down to me—okay, can you do that?

NEPHEW: Of course

MOTHER: Go on then

*(He climbs up the tree stealthily.)*

DAUGHTER: Shall I go too?

MOTHER: No—you help me by finding a good place to dig a hole. Mother, come here

*(The Grandmother goes to her.)*

NEPHEW (*From the tree*): I can see the whole village from up here

MOTHER: What do you see?

NEPHEW: It's dead—there's no one about—but there's smoke coming from a few chimneys—people must be inside having their lunches

GRANNY: At ten in the morning?

MOTHER: Shush!

(*A beat.*)

Good boy—you keep watch for me and tell me if anything changes—all right?

NEPHEW: Eye, eye, Captain!

DAUGHTER: How about here, Mother?

MOTHER: Somewhere further away—but don't go anywhere we can't see you

(*A beat.*)

Give it to me Mother—we are going to bury it

GRANNY: What about the boars?

MOTHER: We'll bury it deep—no one will find it



DAUGHTER: How about here?

MOTHER: Clever girl, that's perfect, now here we are

*(She gives the Daughter and Grandmother a spoon and takes one herself.)*

Right let's dig a hole

DAUGHTER: What for?

MOTHER: Treasure—it's part of the game—but this is a girls' secret—you can never tell your father

DAUGHTER: Or the man?

GRANNY: Definitely not him

DAUGHTER: Or him? *(Pointing to the Nephew)*

MOTHER: Boys aren't good at secrets like us

*(The three females begin to dig a hole with their spoons.)*

GRANNY: Good girl—deeper, deeper

NEPHEW: What are you doing down there?

MOTHER: Never you mind—you just keep watching and tell me what you see

NEPHEW: Nothing yet

DAUGHTER: It's getting hard

*(They keep going.)*

MOTHER: Darling I want you to go and find a special stone—one we will recognize to mark the place—yes?

DAUGHTER: Okay. *(She gets up)* This is fun

*(She goes to look for a stone. The Mother and Grandmother continue to dig.*

*A beat.)*

MOTHER: That should be enough, do you think?

GRANNY: I'd say so—a couple more for luck

*(They continue.)*

DAUGHTER: What about this?

GRANNY: That's a pebble—it's far too small

DAUGHTER: Oh, okay

*(The Mother and Grandmother check to be sure the children aren't watching.)*

MOTHER: Quick Mother—put it in

*(The Grandmother fishes the pouch from her cleavage, kisses it and drops it into the hole.)*

NEPHEW: I think I see something—yes—it's them, they are walking across the fields, Auntie

MOTHER: Both of them?

NEPHEW: Yes

MOTHER: Alone?

NEPHEW: Yes. Shall I come down then?

MOTHER: No stay there a while longer

GRANNY: Quickly—fill it

*(They both begin to refill the hole. The Daughter comes over with a large white stone—she is struggling under its weight.)*

DAUGHTER: This?

MOTHER: Perfect—put it down sweetie

GRANNY: Help us

*(They all fill the hole, then put some leaves over it and place the stone on top.*

*They are brushing off their hands as the men come through the clearing. The Mother studies the Father's face anxiously.)*

DAUGHTER: Daddy, Daddy, look—we made camp and built a pyre and everything—and I made up the bed for you and

Mummy over here away from everyone else's—see—under a canopy—isn't it lovely— like a fairy bower

FATHER: Good girl

COUSIN: Where's the boy?

NEPHEW: I'm up here—keeping lookout

COUSIN: In the crow's nest

NEPHEW: No we're not on a boat

FATHER: Like a monkey in a tree

GRANNY: Come on child let's clean these spoons

*(She gets a cloth and wipes them.)*

DAUGHTER: Shouldn't we wash them, they're dirty

GRANNY: They have the soil of your homeland on—they are not dirty

MOTHER: What happened?

COUSIN: Nothing—no houses were hit, this time

MOTHER: And the animals?

COUSIN: Restless

FATHER: They were fine. This is nonsense, I vote we go back to the house

MOTHER: I hate this place

COUSIN: Don't be stupid—at least leave it a day or two to see if anything happens

FATHER: Everyone's gone—for nothing—nothing has happened. Running from ghosts—things that aren't there

NEPHEW: Can I come down now?

MOTHER: Come down darling—come down

*(The Nephew comes down and instinctively goes to the Mother and puts his arms around her waist.)*

NEPHEW: Did I do it right?

MOTHER: You did it perfectly

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: Well look at you two

NEPHEW: What?

COUSIN: There's a striking family resemblance

GRANNY: Make yourself useful boy and fill the pitcher with water, there's a well that way

MOTHER: He can't go alone

COUSIN: I'll come with you

NEPHEW: No

MOTHER: Please darling

*(The Nephew sighs in assent.)*

COUSIN: Thank you

*(The Cousin puts his hand under the Nephew's chin and looks into his face. He then looks pointedly at the Mother.)*

Remarkable

GRANNY: Go on!

*(They move away through the woods. The Grandmother and Daughter take things out of the bags to make a kitchen area.)*

FATHER: Look at the bed she made us—isn't it sweet . . .

MOTHER: Does he have to stay?

FATHER: My cousin? He's a good worker and I don't mind having another man around with these things in the air

MOTHER: But you think this is all nonsense—let him go home—you're probably right

FATHER: Why don't you like him?

MOTHER: He wants to make trouble—turning everything upside down

FATHER: It's harmless enough

MOTHER: I want him gone now

FATHER: What's this?

MOTHER: I ask very little of you as a wife, I've been good to you and ministered to all your needs, I just want you to do this one thing for me. This one thing. I'll never ask more of you as long as I live

FATHER: But—

MOTHER: He means to do us harm, I know it

FATHER: There is more to this

MOTHER: Don't ask me, if you love me don't ask me, just do what I say

FATHER: You look so anxious my darling, uncrease your frown, come here

*(They embrace.)*

You sense something don't you?

*(She nods.)*

You feel something coming that's bigger than both of us

MOTHER: I do, I do

FATHER: I have always trusted your intuition

MOTHER: Trust me again—do as I ask, please

*(The Cousin and Nephew return with the water.)*

COUSIN: Are you sure you can carry it alone, it's heavy

NEPHEW: Let go, I can I can, everyone, watch me

*(They all watch as the Nephew tentatively lifts the heavy pitcher. Slopping a bit of water at first, but then with growing confidence, he carries it the final steps to the kitchen area. The Grandmother and Daughter receive him with a round of applause and then the three of them busy themselves with preparing the food.)*

COUSIN *(Seeing the Father and Mother embracing)*: Are you okay?

FATHER: She's an intuitive woman, my wife, she's apprehensive

COUSIN: She should be

*(A beat.)*

FATHER: Maybe it's time you went back

COUSIN: I can't—I made a promise

FATHER: You've done your bit, go, I can take care of my own



COUSIN (*Directly to the Mother*): This is a dangerous time—you are at great risk, your husband, your family, your children, it's all in the balance

*(The Mother breaks from the Father and turns to glare at the Cousin.)*

MOTHER: This is too much, to my face . . . to my very face . . . why are you here? What do you want? I can't take any more of your insinuations, your comments—just go will you, you are not wanted here—leave us alone

FATHER: Hey, hey, enough

*(The Grandmother has noticed this and leads the children into the woods out of earshot.)*

What's this about, eh?

MOTHER: You allow him to threaten me before my face

COUSIN: Not threaten, warn—I've come here to warn you

MOTHER: It's all the same, I won't allow you to do this—go—just go—I know what this is—well I won't allow it

COUSIN: I understand you are afraid of what will come next, but you have to face it

MOTHER: What? That you want to destroy my home?

COUSIN: If you don't listen to me your family will be destroyed. It seems like an impossible situation but really you have no choice in the end—you knew this was coming

*(A beat.)*

Didn't you?

MOTHER: Yes

*(A beat.)*

I knew

*(A beat.)*

Fine. I'll tell him. But you go

COUSIN: What?

FATHER: Tell me what?

MOTHER: You go

FATHER: Hold on—tell me what?

MOTHER: You've heard him, all his comments

COUSIN: My what?

MOTHER: Be quiet, I'm doing it

COUSIN: Wait!

FATHER: What's going on?

MOTHER: You must know, don't you? You must . . .

COUSIN: Stop!

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: The boy. My boy. He's mine.

FATHER: Your nephew—

MOTHER: No

*(The Mother shakes her head.*

*A beat.)*

Mine.

*(The Father grabs her by the throat at arm's length. He doesn't squeeze, just stares at her.*

*The Cousin approaches.)*

COUSIN: Don't do anything you'll regret

FATHER: You knew,

COUSIN: None of this is important now—these are dangerous  
/

FATHER: you knew!

*(The Father punches the Cousin and walks into the woods at a pace. He sees the children and Grandmother and turns away from them with his head in his hands.*

*The Nephew runs into the clearing.)*

NEPHEW: What happened?

COUSIN: Just another game

GRANNY: No game

MOTHER: Climb that tree again for me, look out will you?

NEPHEW: Yes

*(He does so. The Grandmother hands the Cousin a wet cloth for his face.)*

GRANNY: You deserved that

COUSIN: What for?

MOTHER: You can go now

COUSIN: I'm going nowhere

MOTHER: Your work is done. He knows. Now leave us

COUSIN: I had no intention of telling him anything

MOTHER: You liar

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: I thought he knew

MOTHER: What? But you have been insinuating since you came

GRANNY: You have, I heard

COUSIN: You misunderstood, I . . . I thought he knew

*(A beat.)*

GRANNY: You kept saying how they look alike

COUSIN: Well they do . . . Why didn't you warn me?

*(A beat.)*

I wouldn't have said—I heard how it happened—it wasn't your fault /

MOTHER: DON'T

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: He didn't know

MOTHER: No.

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: These things don't matter in times like this, there's more at stake

MOTHER: They matter to me, and him

*(A beat.)*

What have I done?

COUSIN: Told him, for no reason

MOTHER: It's your fault

COUSIN: Pointless

MOTHER: I wish you'd never come here

COUSIN: I came to help you

DAUGHTER: Stop arguing, you are upsetting Mousey, he's hiding in the straw

NEPHEW: Someone's coming

GRANNY: What?

COUSIN: Who is it?

NEPHEW: I can't see

COUSIN: Look harder

DAUGHTER: I'm scared

NEPHEW: It's . . . it's . . . a man

*(They all move together, into a group. The Cousin stands in front and takes the Grandmother's gun. The Nephew remains in the tree.)*

DAUGHTER: I don't like this game, I'm scared . . .

GRANNY: Shhh

COUSIN: What else?

MOTHER: What else do you see?

NEPHEW: He's tall—

*(A beat.)*

Dark—

COUSIN: What else?

NEPHEW: He's—he's wearing a uniform

MOTHER: Oh my God

GRANNY: What else?

DAUGHTER: Mum

MOTHER: Shh!

COUSIN: What else?

NEPHEW: He's coming this way—he's—he's

*(The Nephew turns and looks at them and starts to laugh.)*

Not really!

MOTHER: You stupid, stupid boy, get down here

COUSIN: This is real—can't any of you understand that?!

*(The Mother goes to the foot of the tree, grabs his legs and pulls him down. She hits him around the head.)*

MOTHER: Never, ever, ever do that again you stupid, stupid boy do you hear me? Never

NEPHEW: I'm sorry—I was only playing—please! Stop! You're hurting me—

*(Suddenly she stops and holds him hard, uncomfortably hard, and then kisses him.)*

MOTHER: I love you, you're a good boy, I love you

*(He pulls away from her and runs to the Grandmother.)*

GRANNY: Come boy—come with me— *(Indicating the gun)*  
It's time you learned to shoot this thing

MOTHER: He's too young

GRANNY: No he's not

COUSIN: He needs to be a man now—go with your granny

*(They start to walk.)*

Make sure you walk far into the woods



DAUGHTER: Can I come?

MOTHER: No—you stay here with me

COUSIN: I'll come with you—in case

*(The three set off into the woods.)*

MOTHER: Don't be too long—we'll need to start the fire

DAUGHTER: Are you okay Mummy?

MOTHER: Why don't you go and see if you can find any mushrooms, then your father and I can teach you which ones are good to eat when he gets back

*(The Daughter reluctantly gets up and starts hunting.)*

Don't put anything in your mouth though

*(The Mother leans on the tree and looks into the woods in the direction her husband went. She talks into the tree.)*

Where have you gone?

*(Pause.)*

I'm worried

*(Pause.)*

I'm sorry

*(Pause.)*

Come back

*(Suddenly he appears in front of her like a ghost.)*

Oh! Please, we can't be arguing at a time like this, we need to be strong and together

FATHER: I thought we were together—solid

MOTHER: We are—we are

FATHER: But you lied to me. What else have you lied to me about—is she even my daughter?

*(She goes to him.)*

MOTHER: You know she is

FATHER: I don't anymore

MOTHER: Look at her—she's you through and through, more you than me

*(A beat.*

*She tries to touch his hand—he pulls away.)*

FATHER: Why didn't you tell me? Who else knows? Your mother of course—oh—does everyone know?

MOTHER: No one—no one—he just guessed

FATHER: So when we were married you had already had—I don't understand

MOTHER: It wasn't something I wanted—it wasn't out of love, the opposite.

*(A beat.*

*He looks at her.)*

FATHER: And?

*(A beat.)*

Do you want me to ask him?

*(A beat.)*

How could this happen?

MOTHER: You were away. *(A beat)* When I found out I was afraid. I thought you'd change your mind . . . I went to visit my sister, had him and left him there. *(A beat)* And then when she died suddenly . . . Mother came, and brought him back

FATHER: And like a blind fool I agreed

*(A beat.)*

You didn't tell me

*(A beat.)*

How can you look at him?

MOTHER: He's mine. Yours too now—really /

FATHER: NO

*(A beat.)*

MOTHER: This is his fault—if he hadn't come

FATHER: I'd still be ignorant

MOTHER: Things would be as they were, we'd be in our house, together, a family . . . Send him away, we don't need him, you can protect us, we don't need anyone—

FATHER: No . . . I can't. I don't want to hear anymore. I will stand by you but we don't speak

MOTHER: What?

FATHER: Only to communicate practical things. We don't sleep in the same bed and what I say goes—no challenging me, right?

MOTHER: But please—I

FATHER: No challenging me—that's it. He stays. We may need him

*(He gets up and goes to the Daughter.)*

What did you find?

DAUGHTER: All of these—look aren't these ones ugly—they must be dangerous

FATHER: No—they are fine, but these you have to be careful of

DAUGHTER: But they are so pretty. Mother these can't be bad

FATHER: Your mother doesn't know which ones are poisonous

*(A shot is heard from deep inside the forest.*

*They all look around.)*

DAUGHTER: What was that?

*(A beat.)*

How long are we going to stay here Daddy?

*(He looks at her deeply.)*

What is it? What's the matter?

*(A beat.*

*She hugs him.)*

Don't worry—this is just a little adventure. We'll be back home in a few days and everything will be back to normal—the giant will have gone back to sleep and all that

will be left are his footprints as a reminder that he was awake at all. Isn't that right Mother?

MOTHER: Yes darling. That's exactly right.

*(Lights down.)*

## PART 4

*The clearing. Early morning.*

*There is a new bed made up farther from the others. The Daughter is in her bed. The Grandmother is sitting and cleaning the gun with the photo of Grandfather not far away.*

GRANNY: At least he took the boy with him this morning—that's progress

MOTHER: As long as he doesn't throw him in the stream— Oh look at this—it's ruined—black and it's my favorite pot

GRANNY: Don't worry they can bring another one from the house later

*(A beat.)*

Did he sleep over there?

*(No answer.)*

MOTHER *(To the Daughter)*: Are you awake? Darling?

*(The Daughter turns over in the bed.)*

GRANNY: Let her rest, the little mite—God knows her dreams will be more appealing than this

*(A beat.)*

MOTHER: No—she should get up and do things—she can't sleep all the time

GRANNY: She was up in the night—the noises frightened her—she got in with me

MOTHER: Did she? I didn't hear her, with you?

GRANNY: Were you awake too?

MOTHER: I'm not sure—half awake—I heard them but they were incorporated in my dreams, you know?

GRANNY: It's the whistle I hate. Makes me hold my breath

*(A beat.)*

I thought I could hear a baby crying in the night

MOTHER: Yes I heard that too—you don't think / someone

GRANNY: A fox—it was just a fox

*(A beat.)*

MOTHER: I wonder what was hit this time

*(A beat.)*

Darling—wake up—it's time to get up—look, Granny will pour you some nice tea



DAUGHTER: No—leave me be—I'm cold—I don't want to wake up

MOTHER: Granny will give you tea—then you'll be warm

GRANNY: Leave her

DAUGHTER: It's too late I'm awake now

MOTHER: Don't be grumpy

DAUGHTER: I'm cold

MOTHER: Well get up and put some clothes on and then you can have something to eat—that will help

DAUGHTER: Where are they?

GRANNY: Gone to get water

DAUGHTER: All of them? Together?

GRANNY: Yes

*(Slowly, the Daughter gets up and dresses herself. Her Grandmother pours her some tea and takes it to her. The Grandmother begins to brush the Daughter's hair with her fingers and ties it in a knot on her head.)*

There is no law, but the law of the wind, the law of the grass,  
the law of the earth

DAUGHTER: There is no law, but the law of the earth, the law of the land,

GRANNY AND DAUGHTER: the land of our birth

GRANNY: There—now it won't get in your way

DAUGHTER: Thanks Granny

*(She kisses her.)*

MOTHER: What was that you said?

DAUGHTER: A skipping song—from school

MOTHER *(To the Grandmother)*: How do you know it?

DAUGHTER: I taught her

GRANNY: I don't skip though

DAUGHTER: It goes on, there's four verses—shall I say it?

MOTHER: Later

*(They all sit and stare.)*

Where are they? They're taking such a long time

GRANNY: I can't see the sky—what time is it?

DAUGHTER: It's morning of course

*(The men return.)*

COUSIN: Looking for us?

MOTHER: What took you so long—I was getting worried

NEPHEW: We saw the butcher—his family are down by the stream

GRANNY: Really?

NEPHEW: They said everyone else in their street left but he didn't want to leave his stock—and the shop

MOTHER: Did you ask them to come and see us?—it would be nice to see someone else

FATHER: Of course not—look at this place

GRANNY: We've done our best

COUSIN: Maybe we should all set up together—there's safety in numbers

FATHER: What are you talking about—safety? I am sick of all this talk

COUSIN (*In a whisper*): Don't start this again—you heard what they said

MOTHER: What's that?

COUSIN: They said they had seen people in the village—from There

MOTHER: Soldiers?

COUSIN: No—they weren't sure. Probably just people taking advantage of the fact no one is about

NEPHEW: Do you want me to climb the tree and look again? I can

MOTHER: Yes /

FATHER: No

COUSIN: Go on

*(The Nephew climbs the tree. They all look up at him, except the Daughter, who is collecting together a few things.)*

GRANNY: What do you see?

NEPHEW: Nothing different—quiet . . .

FATHER: You see?

COUSIN: What else?

NEPHEW: There's some smoke coming from the other side of the woods

MOTHER: That'll be other families who've done the same as us

NEPHEW: There's nothing else to report—I can't see a living soul

GRANNY: Come down again

*(He does. The Daughter takes advantage of their attention on him to walk out of the clearing into the woods, in the direction of their house.)*

COUSIN: Hey, where are you going?

*(She starts to run.)*

Come back here

FATHER: Hey!

MOTHER: Darling come back!

*(The men pursue her. It is the Father who catches her and carries her back screaming. He dumps her in the middle of the clearing. Her Mother grabs her by the hair, bends her over and smacks her bottom hard with a wooden spoon, over and over. Both the Mother and Daughter are crying. The Nephew, Father and Cousin look away. They say the following simultaneously:)*

You stupid, little, girl, what the hell do you think?

DAUGHTER: Stop it—stop it—you can't do that anymore—I'm not a child

MOTHER: Well stop behaving like one you little madam

DAUGHTER: Let me go—I hate you—I hate you

GRANNY: Enough—darling—that's enough

*(The Daughter runs to the Grandmother, holding her bottom. The Mother sits crying—surprised at herself. The Nephew comes forward and gently takes the wooden spoon from her hand.)*

What were you doing huh? Where were you going?

MOTHER: Stupid child

GRANNY: What is it? Why?

DAUGHTER *(Sobbing)*: I just want to go to back

NEPHEW: You can't just run away!

DAUGHTER: I want my teacher—

*(Pause.)*

My friends . . . where are they?

GRANNY: We're here

DAUGHTER: I miss school

*(A beat.)*

FATHER: Of course you do. It's natural

*(Pause.)*

Come on—we're going to go to your school—I'll take you there

COUSIN: Are you mad?

GRANNY: No one will be there

FATHER: She hasn't left these woods since we came here—she misses her home, the house, the school

NEPHEW: We all do

FATHER: Well let's go then

MOTHER: You can't

FATHER: Yes I can—we need to collect more things from the house anyway—get some eggs, some more clothes—the weather is turning

COUSIN: It's not safe

FATHER: She won't go inside—she can hide—but just see from outside—would you like that my dove?

*(The Daughter nods and goes to put her arms around the Father's neck, sniffing.)*

There we are then

MOTHER: I'm against this

FATHER: I don't care

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: I'll come with you—in case. *(To the Mother)* Is there anything you want from the house?

MOTHER: I just want you to all come back

FATHER: Stop being so dramatic

GRANNY: Bring a new pot

COUSIN *(To the Nephew)*: You stay here with your Auntie and keep watch. You keep guard

NEPHEW: Yes sir *(He does a salute)*

MOTHER: Don't do that

*(The Father, Daughter and Cousin start to go.)*

Wait—come here

*(The Daughter is holding her Father's hand; she doesn't move. The Mother moves to her, kneels down in front of her and whispers something in her ear. She tucks the Daughter's hair behind her ear, then gets up and the group walks away. The Nephew goes to the Mother.)*

NEPHEW: We'll be okay—I'll protect us. I'm going to take up post

*(No answer.)*



GRANNY: Good boy. Better take this with you *(She hands him the gun)*

NEPHEW: Really?

*(She nods.)*

GRANNY: Your grandfather gave that to me, you know?

NEPHEW: I know

GRANNY: He used to give it to me every time he went out, so if anything happened I'd be able to protect myself in his absence. But then one day he went out and he needed it, but I had it . . . and he didn't come back

*(A beat.)*

Take it

*(He does. The Grandmother goes to the Mother, brings her to the bed and sits her on it. She then lights the fire. Meantime, the Nephew has climbed the tree.*

*Long pause.*

*The Mother shivers.*

*Pause.)*

*(To the Mother)* Come in closer to the fire

*(A beat.)*

*(To the Nephew)* Are you warm enough up there?

NEPHEW: Yes

*(A beat.)*

GRANNY: What do you see?

NEPHEW: Same as before. Nothing. No wait—the smoke on the other side of the wood has gone

*(Pause.)*

This is the longest game I've ever played

*(A beat.)*

GRANNY: You know it's not a game don't you

NEPHEW: Yes

*(Pause.*

*The Nephew begins to whistle.)*

GRANNY: Stop that—it's bad luck

NEPHEW: Sorry

*(Pause.*

*The Grandmother takes some cheese from a bag and eats a piece. She hands a bit to the Mother who shakes her head.)*

GRANNY: Eat it

*(The Mother puts it in her mouth and chews distractedly.)*

*(To herself)* There is no law but the law of the—

*(She eats another piece, then goes to the box where the mouse is kept. She looks in it, around it, and then goes to the Mother.*

*She speaks quietly.)*

*(To the Mother)* The mouse is gone

MOTHER: What?

GRANNY: The field mouse—it's chewed a hole in the box and gone

MOTHER: Oh

GRANNY: They'll both be really upset. He won't last five minutes in these woods—if it's not a fox or a bird it'll be a boar that gets hold of him. May be we can try and catch another one

*(A beat.)*

Are you listening?

NEPHEW: I can see them

MOTHER: Who?

GRANNY: Who do you think?

MOTHER: Where are they?

NEPHEW: Behind our house . . . Now they are walking past the school . . . They're ducking down below the wall . . . I can see her looking through the gate, she looks so tiny—I could almost hold her in my hand . . . The school gate seems to be locked

GRANNY: There's no one there—the teachers have all gone

MOTHER: And the students—everyone's gone but us

GRANNY: Is there anyone else about?

NEPHEW: No one. It's a ghost town

GRANNY: What are they doing now?

NEPHEW: Just looking at the school playground

MOTHER: You keep watching them—you make sure you watch over them—their every move. Tell us everything you see

NEPHEW: The clouds are rolling across the sky fast—it must be very windy

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: We should have harvested by now

*(Pause.)*

GRANNY: What now?

NEPHEW: They are still there—no wait—they seem to be moving . . . Around the side . . . They've gone out of view, I can't see them . . . And now the sun's gone behind a cloud—I can't see anything

MOTHER: Look harder—look harder—can you see them?

NEPHEW: I'm trying—I can't

MOTHER: Oh no

*(Pause.)*

NEPHEW: Yes it's very windy—the tree in the school yard is getting blown about like mad—it's like its possessed—or dancing—crazy dancing

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: If I was at home we'd have done the windows by now—as it is, it'll be too cold when we return—and we won't have aired anything properly for the winter months. Everything will get moldy

*(Pause.)*

And how can I make my preserves?—all the fruit will be bad. It's such a waste

GRANNY: Can you see them yet?

NEPHEW: No

*(A beat.)*

Wait I think I see her—yes, just behind our shed—there they are peeping 'round—looking at the house. They're looking at our house, Uncle's going inside now

MOTHER: Through the front door?

NEPHEW: No, the back door

*(A beat.)*

He's stopped—

GRANNY: Why?

NEPHEW: He's petting the goat

MOTHER: Silly fool—get inside

*(There's a huge gust of wind which blows the tree.)*

NEPHEW: He's gone in

MOTHER: Be careful

*(Pause.)*

NEPHEW: Now she's moving in the field—she's picking flowers

MOTHER: What if someone sees her?

NEPHEW: It's okay, the grass is long. She must be picking them for you, Auntie. Cousin is watching her—don't worry

*(There's another huge gust of wind. The Nephew cries—he nearly falls out of the tree.*

*The Grandmother and Mother rush to the foot.)*

GRANNY: Are you okay?

MOTHER: What happened?

NEPHEW: The wind—I lost my footing

GRANNY: Hook your foot over the branch below—there that's better

*(The women draw back.)*

MOTHER: What do you see?

*(Pause.*

*We now simultaneously see the camp area, where we have been, and the Cousin and Daughter hiding behind the shed near the family house, waiting for the Father to come out. The Daughter has a handful of wild flowers.*

*There is a long pause with everyone's attention focused on the back door [whether they are actually seeing it, or seeing it*

*in their mind's eye] willing the Father to come out. This pause continues and continues, longer than seems possible.*

*And then the Father comes out of the back door very, very slowly and quietly, closing it silently behind him and walking past the Daughter and Cousin toward the woods. They look bewildered and they follow him. Only now the Nephew begins to relate what he sees.)*

NEPHEW: He's come out and he is walking back—they are following him

GRANNY: What does he have with him?

NEPHEW: Nothing. He is walking very straight

MOTHER: Come down from there now

*(The Nephew climbs down and goes to the women, who are looking into the forest to catch a glimpse of the Father, Daughter and Cousin coming back.*

*Long pause.*

*Eventually, the Father strides in at a pace. He looks different. He goes to his bed and sits.)*

Are you okay? What happened?

*(The Daughter and Cousin come bounding after, trying to keep up with him. The Daughter goes to the Mother with the flowers.)*



DAUGHTER: I saw it—it's still there—it looks much smaller than I remember it. But the gate was locked and there was no one there, but it's still standing—real as you or I. And the goat says hello

MOTHER: What happened?

COUSIN: I don't know

NEPHEW: Come over here—what did you see?

*(The Daughter and Nephew sit in their area talking quietly. The Father has begun to slowly gather together his bedding. The women watch in surprise, as does the Cousin.)*

GRANNY: What are you doing?

*(He continues to pack things away with some pace.)*

MOTHER: Husband—what are you doing?

FATHER: Everyone—pack your things

*(They all look at him in amazement.)*

NOW, come on

COUSIN: It's not safe to go back to the house

FATHER: We're leaving the village

*(A beat.)*

Come on!

MOTHER: But what about the crops?

GRANNY: And the livestock

COUSIN: Do as you're told, collect your things

GRANNY: Must we go now though?

MOTHER: Surely we can wait another day

FATHER: I told you—you aren't to challenge me— If you want to stay behind you can with your boy and your mother—but I'm taking my daughter—come on girl get your things

*(The Grandmother, Mother, Daughter and Nephew begin to pack their things together.)*

*The Cousin takes the Father to one side.)*

COUSIN: What was it Cousin—what did you see?

*(A beat.)*

FATHER *(To himself)*: We saw no one enter or leave the house

COUSIN: This is how they work—by stealth—they are clever. Had they killed an animal? They did that in one house in our village and smeared everything with its blood

FATHER: No not that

*(He looks close to tears.)*

COUSIN: Was it a body—had they left a corpse in your house?

FATHER: No

*(A beat.)*

DAUGHTER: He's gone

*(She is frantically looking around everywhere.)*

Where's Mousey gone? I can't find him

NEPHEW: He's chewed a hole in the box. He escaped

DAUGHTER: Oh no! What will become of him! We can't leave him behind

COUSIN: Come on children, gather up your things—we need to go

DAUGHTER: I need to find him

COUSIN: He's clever—he can look after himself—he's gone—come on, we need to go too

DAUGHTER: But my mouse

GRANNY: Don't cry—come on—we all have to leave things behind

*(The Grandmother looks at the white stone and then at the Mother.)*

NEPHEW: It's just a mouse

DAUGHTER: It's my mouse . . . Where are we going?

MOTHER: Away from here—come on, pack your bedding

DAUGHTER: But how will he find us?

*(No reply.)*

What if the cat gets him again?

GRANNY: He has to learn to take care of himself. Now come on—

FATHER: Quickly

GRANNY: Gather up your things, we mustn't forget anything important.

*(The lights fade gradually as they collect their things together. We can hear the Daughter softly sobbing all the while.*

*Lights down.)*

## PART 5

*We are in the kitchen area of another house, which is similar to our family's house. The Mother is sitting at the table with her head in her hands. The Father stands smoking at the window, looking out. An Old Man comes into the room.*

OLD MAN: They seem to be settled. They got into the one bed and wrapped their arms around one another and fell asleep straight away. Like a couple of babes in the wood

*(A beat.)*

So alike—like peas in a pod

FATHER: I can't thank you enough for your kindness, we won't bother you for too long

OLD MAN: Please—we always welcome travelers. And this is a frequent occurrence in these sad times

*(A beat.)*

*(About the Mother)* Is she all right?

FATHER: We lost her mother on the way

OLD MAN: Oh dear

FATHER: My cousin has gone back to find her

OLD MAN: Does he know where you are?

FATHER: Yes—he walked us to the gate

*(A beat.)*

OLD MAN: Would you like some water dear?

*(The Mother doesn't respond.)*

FATHER: A cigarette?

OLD MAN: Oh—well—don't mind if I do—I haven't had such a thing in years. My wife didn't like it

FATHER: Is she dead?

OLD MAN: Yes—thirty years, God rest her.

*(The Old Man lights his cigarette from the Father's. He takes a drag.)*

Very nice

*(A beat.)*

FATHER: You never married again?

OLD MAN: I thought about it—but I couldn't do it. She still filled my head. She used to stand out there and pick lemons from the tree in the yard. I'd stand right here and watch her. And at night she smelt of them. Her hair, her skin, her blood, her bones . . . When she died I cut a branch that was covered in leaves and took it to my bed. I put the leaves in my nose and tried to breathe her back . . .

*(Pause.)*

What have you seen? Is it all true?

FATHER: It's strange—there are buildings that have been destroyed, and craters in the ground—trees uprooted. And people—lines of people walking east. Or north. They were told to go, and they went. That's all.

OLD MAN: Amazing

*(A beat.)*

A disaster

FATHER: Yes

*(A beat.)*

But it can't last—we'll be able to go home soon

OLD MAN: It will blow over

*(Pause.)*

FATHER: We saw one man sitting beside a pile of rubble crying. We told him to come with us but he said he wouldn't leave his family—they were all inside. We helped him to take out their bodies and bury them and then he lay on the soil and cried. He wouldn't come

OLD MAN: What happened to him?

FATHER: I don't know. He just kept saying the same thing over and over, "You can't cut a man's roots, you can't cut a man's roots"

*(A beat.)*

In a way he is better off

OLD MAN: What do you mean?

FATHER: He has nothing to lose now—no house, no family

OLD MAN: Only his country

FATHER: They can't take that away

*(A beat.)*

They can't . . .

*(A beat.)*

This won't last for long

*(A beat.)*

OLD MAN: And you? What happened to you?

*(Pause.)*

FATHER: We'd been staying in the woods and I went back to collect some things . . . I went in and the house felt warm, the sun coming in the window, and as I closed the door I had



decided that this was all nonsense. I was going to go outside again and fetch my family, bring them back to the house, because this is madness, we can't be hiding from nothing. But then I noticed something—a new smell—something I didn't recognize. Not a smell of my house or of my family or of my people. And I walked into the kitchen and that's where I saw it. There. Him. A Man. Sat at my table. The one I made. Smoking a cigarette with one foot on the chair. He had just eaten something and the plate was pushed away from him. He heard me come in and he turned and looked at me, looked right at me. He almost smiled. And then I thought he was going to get up—I could feel a scream rising in my throat. But he didn't get up, he turned away from me, leaned back in the chair, pulled on the cigarette, closed his eyes and put his hands behind his head. He turned away from me. As if I wasn't there.

*(A beat)*

And I quietly walked out of the room.

*(A beat.)*

In my chair. My plate. My table. My knife. My house. It was as if I didn't exist—as if I had never been born. A catastrophe.

*(Pause.)*

You know, they seem to be moving in this direction—you should come with us—travel with us—there is safety in numbers. We have family over the border we can stay with until the wind changes

OLD MAN: I can't leave my home

FATHER: That's what I said

*(Pause.*

*They both look at the Mother, who seems to have fallen asleep on the table.)*

OLD MAN: How did you lose the mother?

FATHER: I don't know—she just vanished. One minute she was there mumbling away about something or other and the next she was gone

OLD MAN: You don't think?

FATHER: No. I think she was up to something—crafty old thing. She had a gun with her—she'll be okay

OLD MAN: How long ago was this?

FATHER: Yesterday— *(Indicating the Mother)* She wanted to search immediately, wanted to go back, but it wasn't safe for the children. My cousin persuaded her to keep going, said he'd search for her himself

OLD MAN: Perhaps she forgot something?

FATHER: The only things that mattered to her were her husband's picture and her gun—and she had both of those

*(A beat.)*

OLD MAN: Oh dear. Sorry business

*(A beat.)*

You see I couldn't leave without that tree—but you can't take a tree with you, can you?

*(He smiles.*

*A beat.)*

I'm afraid I don't have any other beds—I've put the children in mine—I'll sleep up there too, on the floor—so you will have to stay down here

FATHER: That's fine—a roof over our heads is luxury these days

OLD MAN: Wait

*(He goes to a drawer and takes out an old service revolver.)*

You might need this old lady

FATHER: Where did you—?

OLD MAN: Look at the date on it

FATHER *(Looking at the inscription on the gun)*: Where did you get it?

OLD MAN: We used to need her . . . It seems she'll have to come out of retirement. Take her

FATHER: I couldn't—you might—

OLD MAN: No, no, I'm a man on my own—you have a whole nest to protect

FATHER: Does it even work?

OLD MAN: Now, now, old she may be, but she's up to a fight—never let me down before

FATHER: If you're sure . . .

OLD MAN: The wife never liked it in the house, thought it was dangerous

*(He yawns.)*

FATHER: You go up—it's late. Thank you for everything

*(The Old Man shakes his hand and goes to leave the room. At the door he turns back to look at the Mother and then goes up to bed.*

*The Father sits and the other end of the table and stares at his wife, asleep with her head on the table. He lights another cigarette and smokes it.*

*When he has finished the cigarette, he sits on the chair with his arms crossed and gradually falls asleep on his chest.*

*Pause.*

*The Daughter appears at the door.*

*She walks over to the table and looks at her sleeping parents.  
She places a hand on the Mother's head.*

*Then she pulls up a chair and sits down.*

*Pause.*

*She ties her hair up in a knot in the same way the  
Grandmother used to.*

*Pause.*

*The Nephew enters. He sees the Daughter and approaches  
her, speaking quietly, so as not to disturb the sleeping adults.)*

NEPHEW: Was his snoring keeping you up? Do you want me  
to try and turn him over?

DAUGHTER: No, I'm waiting

NEPHEW: What for?

DAUGHTER: Granny

*(Pause.)*

I knew I should have held her hand

NEPHEW: It's not your fault

DAUGHTER: She did have the gun didn't she?

NEPHEW: Yes—no chicken in the land is safe—she’s probably walking up the path now with armfuls of dead poultry

*(A beat.*

*The Nephew goes to the window and looks out hopefully.)*

DAUGHTER: Poor Mousey’s out there somewhere too

NEPHEW: Maybe he met a friend who helped him escape

DAUGHTER: Escape—what from? He was at home . . .

*(A beat.*

*The Daughter moves to stand behind the Father.)*

I’m sorry he’s been so mean to you—he’s just worried about us all, you know

NEPHEW: About his family

DAUGHTER: Yes, us

*(A beat.)*

NEPHEW: There’s more walking tomorrow, you should sleep

DAUGHTER: So should you

*(Pause.)*

NEPHEW: Come up—let's go back up—we don't want to disturb them—we can wait up there

*(A beat.)*

You'll get cold here

*(A beat.)*

Come on

*(Reluctantly, she gets up.)*

*They both look at the adults for a moment and then head upstairs together.*

*Stillness.*

*Many hours of the night pass.*

*Suddenly, the Mother wakes with a start. She gets up and goes to the door. The Father wakes now, too.)*

FATHER: What is it?

MOTHER: He's back

*(She opens the door and watches the Cousin walk in.)*

COUSIN: How did you know I was coming?

MOTHER: Did you find her? Where is she?

COUSIN: No, I asked everywhere—someone said they had seen her heading north along the stream a few miles from where we lost her

MOTHER: Why would she go there?

COUSIN: Doesn't she have family in the valley beyond there?

MOTHER: I don't remember

FATHER: Now you mention it—she does—your old uncle? Her brother?

MOTHER: I thought he died

FATHER: No—not that one. She must have wanted to check on him

MOTHER: Without telling us?

COUSIN: She knew we'd never let her go alone

FATHER: Silly old thing

MOTHER: I don't know—we should go there then—find her

FATHER: But we are so close to the border—we'll cross it by nightfall tomorrow—let's take the children to safety and then we can come back for her

MOTHER: Are you sure?

FATHER: Yes of course



COUSIN: I think that's a good plan

MOTHER: But what if she—

COUSIN: We must think of the children first—it was her decision to go

FATHER: She'd never want you to leave them

MOTHER: No, of course. Where are they?

FATHER: Asleep upstairs—why don't you go and get in with them?—you've an hour or so before we need to leave

MOTHER: Okay. I will

*(She hugs the Cousin.)*

Thank you, Cousin

*(She goes upstairs. We hear her footsteps. The two men look at one another. The Cousin sits down.)*

*Pause.*

*The Father is looking at the Cousin, but doesn't want to ask.*

*Pause.*

*The Cousin places the gun and the empty jewelry pouch on the table.*

*Pause.*

*The Father hands him a cigarette. The Cousin's hand is shaking so much he can't light it. The Father takes the matches and does it for him.*

*A beat.)*

COUSIN: She was in the forest. Near our camp

*(A beat.)*

She must have gone back for whatever was in this *(Indicating the pouch)*

FATHER: We'll go over the border tomorrow and stay there until this has all passed

COUSIN: I'm coming back—to fight

FATHER: Fight who?

COUSIN: They'll come—once we have all disappeared, they'll come

FATHER: They are just trying to teach us a lesson. Show us who's boss. We'll all be back home by spring

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: They shot her

*(A beat.)*

The animals—in the forest—ate her. I buried what I could find with his picture

FATHER: Where?

COUSIN: Near the clearing. I marked it with a big white stone

FATHER: Thank you

*(A beat.)*

We'll know where to look when we go back

*(A beat.)*

COUSIN: Next spring

FATHER: Yes next spring

*(A beat.)*

You'd better get some rest, we've a long journey ahead of us.

*(The Cousin nods and puts his head on the table.)*

*The Father takes the gun and goes to stand by the window, looking out.*

*Pause.*

*The lights gradually fade to black, but not until we see the silhouette of the lemon tree and the Father.)*

END OF PLAY



PHOTO BY LISA BOWERMAN

**HANNAH KHALIL** was born in the UK to Palestinian Irish parents. Khalil grew up in Dubai in the UAE. She returned to the UK at the age of ten and still works and lives in London.

Khalil wrote her first play, *Ring*, while studying English and drama at university, and it was selected for Soho Theatre's Westminster Prize. One of her main aims in writing plays for the stage is to create interesting, three-dimensional roles for the many talented Arab actors who are underrepresented in theater, and to redress the balance of the way Arabs are portrayed in the media in general.

Her first full-length play *Leaving Home*, about an Iraqi man's quest to raise money for eye surgery for his daughter, was produced at the King's Head Theatre. She was then commissioned by Rose Bruford drama school to write the short play *The Unofficial Guide*, about the meeting on Mount Sinai between a Western woman and her Arab guide, for the graduating students to perform at Battersea Arts Centre.

A bursary from the Peggy Ramsay Foundation enabled Khalil to complete *Stolen or Strayed*, a play about a woman with dementia who is reunited with the Arab prince she nursed as a child, which received a Special Commendation in the Verity Bargate Award.

Khalil's first play about Palestine, *Plan D*, was selected for development by Hanna Slättne of Tinderbox Theatre in Belfast. It was work-shopped there and subsequently included in the Pic n Mix Festival 2009. It then received a full production, enjoying sold-out performances at the Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden, London. Director Chris White brought the play to life and it was shortlisted for the inaugural Leah Ryan Award and nominated for the prestigious Meyer-Whitworth Award.

Khalil's other stage plays include the monologue *The Worst Cook in the West Bank* (Old Red Lion Theatre, London and Liverpool Arab Arts Festival) and *Bitterenders*, which won Bulbul 2013 and will be staged as part of Golden Thread's ReOrient Festival in San Francisco, California, in autumn 2015.

Khalil wrote her first radio play, *The Deportation Room*, in the weeks after becoming a mother to Muna. It was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2012 and fused verbatim monologue and fictional scenes to tell the experiences of Gazans trying to travel through the Cairo airport. Her second radio play, *Last Pearl of Fishers*, explores the experiences of migrant workers in the UAE and was on BBC Radio 4 in 2015.

Forthcoming work includes a 2016 London production of *Scenes from 68\* Years*, a play that offers an epic snapshot of life under occupation.



## HANDALA

Based on the cartoons of Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali



ADAPTED BY

Abdelfattah Abusrour



## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

*Handala* is a play that I wrote based on the cartoons of Naji Al-Ali. I am inspired by his work throughout the years before his assassination in London in 1987, and the life that his cartoons still have after his death. As a writer, I also identify with the symbol of Handala, as it represents the continuation of struggle and resistance against the illegal occupation. I call active, unarmed resistance “beautiful resistance,” and that is what Naji Al-Ali engaged in: *beautiful resistance*. I felt it was important to adapt his cartoons for the stage because they are still very relevant. There is so much false history that works to wash the truth of our memories away. Naji Al-Ali, the artist, is an important role model for the continuing commitment to human rights and values. Al-Ali's creation, *Handala*, which is often humorous, represents the guardian of these same rights and values.

I think that the cartoons of Handala are an intelligent and anguished cry against all the compromises and degradation of our values and rights. Handala's spirit creates space for crushed people to speak, and to challenge the politicians and merchants of rights and values. Handala is also a vehicle through which we can reclaim our true histories.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Handala* was produced by the Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Society and toured in Palestine, France and Luxembourg in 2011. *Handala* was first performed on June 11, 2011 at the Alrowwad Center, Bethlehem. It was directed by Abdelfattah Abusrour. The technical team was Ahmad Alajarmah and Murad Abusrour. The cast was:

NAJI AL-ALI	Abdelfattah Abusrour
-------------	----------------------

HANDALA	Canaan Abusrour
---------	-----------------

ABU SABER	Issa M. Abusrour
-----------	------------------

FATIMA, FORTUNE TELLER	Hala Alyamani
------------------------	---------------

ABU HUSSEIN	Mahmoud Nour
-------------	--------------

HAMDOUL	Ribal Alkordi
---------	---------------

DAHDOUL, PRISON GUARD	Bassam Hassanieh
-----------------------	------------------

JOURNALIST	Tarek Jawabrah
------------	----------------

## CHARACTERS

NAJI AL-ALI, a Palestinian artist and cartoonist, about fifty years old

HANDALA, a cartoon character created by Naji Al-Ali, always appears with his back to the public, ten years old

ABU SABER, a Palestinian refugee, about forty to fifty years old

FATIMA, Abu Saber's wife, beautiful and direct, about thirty-five years old

FORTUNE TELLER, a woman, about forty to sixty years old

ABU HUSSEIN, a friend of Abu Saber, about forty to fifty years old

HAMDOUL, a composed character representing Arab leaders and Palestinian leadership, superior to Dahdoul in status, about thirty to seventy years old

DAHDOUL, Hamdoul's servant, larger than life, about thirty to fifty years old

PRISON GUARD, about twenty to forty years old

JOURNALIST, has an American accent, about twenty to thirty years old

NEWSPAPER DIRECTOR

## NOTES

This play is based on the cartoons of the Palestinian artist Naji Al-Ali. Therefore I consider this play to be, in some ways, an adaptation of the cartoons combined with my understanding of the spirit of Naji Al-Ali and his drawings. I have remained true to his writing and have not adapted anything in order to be politically diplomatic. The true author is Naji Al-Ali.

The radio is very visible in a lot of the cartoons and I included it as a character in the play. Radio has been very present as a source of news in the Arab world, until television became stronger in the nineties and later on.

## PROLOGUE

*Darkness. The stage is empty. There is a wall covered with newspapers in the back, with cartoons of Naji Al-Ali spread throughout the wall.*

*There is a circle of light on the right side of the stage, where Naji is standing, his back to the audience.*

*Darkness.*

*Another circle of light on the same spot, where Handala is now standing.*

*Darkness.*

*Lights back up on Naji, who turns to the audience:*

NAJI: My drawings are not made for exhibitions. My task is not to present achievements. My responsibility is to uncover the mines. I stand with my class, the poor, and I don't kiss ass. The poor are the ones who die and who are imprisoned. The simple fact is that I was afraid of being lost or spoiled or silenced or numbed. I am not a hero. To preserve myself, I created Handala. Handala keeps me awake. Handala kicks my ass. My mission as a cartoonist is to provoke. Provocation is a process of history. Isn't it our duty to speak the truth to tyrants?

*(Sound of two bullets . . . Naji is hit, and falls on his knees.)*

And there are too many tyrants.

*(Sound of an ambulance, and then heartbeats. Handala, Fatima, Abu Saber and Abu Hussein enter from one side of the stage carrying candles. Dahdoul and Hamdoul enter from the opposite side without candles. They surround Naji in a half circle, facing the audience. Handala stands aside, back to the audience.*

*Blackout.)*

1

*In the darkness, we hear Abu Saber speaking with a low voice.*

ABU SABER: Palestine is Arab . . . Palestine is Arab.

*(Lights up on Abu Saber writing on the newspaper wall, in Arabic, "Palestine is Arab." There is a little table in the middle of the stage, in front of a chair.)*

2

*Sound of a violent wind and the crying of a child. We hear Fatima singing a lullaby in Arabic. Fatima enters carrying a baby in her arms.*

*Fatima sits on the chair, looks at her husband and then continues singing for the child.*

FATIMA:

Sleep, sleep my beloved one

I will give you two pigeons

Don't be afraid oh pigeons

I only sing for my child to sleep

The best talk starts with a prayer for Prophet Muhammad, Salla Allaho Alayhi Wassalam. Listen to me carefully, my beloved ones: The chicken has a house. The house of the chicken is called the henhouse. The rabbit has a house. Its house is called the lair. The horse has a house. His house is called a stable. The Phalangists who murdered our children in the camps have a house. It is called the house of the Phalangists.

*(Abu Saber hears her and seems worried. He tries to silence her, saying "shshshsh" louder and louder.)*

America, which supports Israel, has a house. It is called the White House. The Palestinian lives in the camps and doesn't have a house.

The house of the Palestinians is Bayt Almakdes.<sup>1</sup> How can the Palestinian return home? I will tell you a story. The story of Naji and Handala. Once upon a time, there was an artist who was called . . .

ABU SABER *(Interrupting)*: Shut up, Fatima. Every night you taunt me with your stories. You want to lose your children and become a widow?

FATIMA *(She stands and faces him)*: But this is our story, Abu Saber, and we should tell it!

*(The cry of the child.*

*Blackout.)*

3

*In the darkness we hear a storm rising and things breaking. Lights up on Naji, spinning on his feet in the middle of the stage. After he finishes his monologue, the light shifts to blue and prison bars appear.*

NAJI: I was ten years old when the war broke out. I was uprooted from Al-Shajarah, my village, barefoot. A storm flared in my heart. The walls of our homes were destroyed and the fragrance of our homeland was swept away like a summer cloud. It was replaced by the fog of exile and the barbed wire of refugee camps. There, I ate hard bread, and I sculpted my pain and my nostalgia in paintings on the cloth of the tent which sheltered us.

*(Naji moves behind the bars. The Prison Guard enters. He is very large and carries a gun, a notebook and a stick. He has a huge mustache. He looks at Naji, opens his notebook, and starts the interrogation.)*

GUARD: Who are you?

NAJI: A swallow looking for its nest, a space liberated and not mortgaged to any organization or regime, a—

GUARD *(Interrupts)*: Religion?

NAJI: Unbeliever in sectarianism.



GUARD: Age?

NAJI: Short.

GUARD: Eyes?

NAJI: One eye on Ain al-Hilweh<sup>2</sup> and the other eye on the enemy.

GUARD: Hair?

NAJI: Shaved in Arab prisons.

GUARD: Head?

NAJI: Held high.

GUARD: Skin?

NAJI: Flayed.

GUARD: Hands?

NAJI: Mine do not raise white or black flags.

GUARD: Your profession?

NAJI: An engraver of the tragedies of our people from the Atlantic to the Gulf. Rubbish collector, but I do not polish other people's shoes.

GUARD: In short?

NAJI: A painter.

GUARD: And in what galleries do you display your works?

NAJI: On the tissue of our tent in the camp and on prison walls and the floor of my prison cell. I engrave them in the hearts of the poor and the minds of the fugitives—

GUARD (*Interrupts*): What nonsense! Are you mad?

NAJI: Maybe. I am one of the people.

GUARD: I am the people.

NAJI: Owls thinking they are nightingales.

GUARD (*Threatening him with the gun*): You're making fun of me? You'll rot in prison. I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget!

NAJI: They raised their guns and I raised a flower.

GUARD: A filthy cheap rogue.

NAJI: And my name is Naji Al-Ali.

*(The Prison Guard is very angry. He exits.*

*Blackout.*

*Music: Ya Dhalama Essejni khayyem.<sup>3)</sup>*

*Naji's body is lying in the middle of the stage, curled up, back to the audience. The body starts to move as if in pain, stretching . . . then slowly stands up as if it is protecting something, always with back to the audience. Naji stands up completely.*

NAJI: You have come?

HANDALA: I've come, bitter like colocynth, I come.

*(As Naji moves from his place while he talks, he reveals Handala standing in front of him, back to the audience as well. Naji goes to face him and the audience.)*

NAJI: You're bitter because of poverty and defeat, but you're made of musk and amber.

HANDALA: And my hair?

NAJI: Rough like a hedgehog, a weapon against capitulation.

HANDALA: Barefoot. Poor.

NAJI: Exile, son. You're the talisman that protects me from slipping. You're the drop of sweat on my forehead that will sting me if I retreat.

HANDALA: And my hands?

NAJI: Crossed behind your back until concessions, sales and cheap bargaining come to an end.

HANDALA: I was born ten years old.

NAJI: And you'll stay ten. You're an exception because the loss of a homeland is an exception. You won't grow up until the mirage disappears.

HANDALA: I am the scream.

NAJI: Yes, of those who pay the price and die in graves without shrouds and their corpses float in the seas of treachery and oblivion.

HANDALA: Martyrs?

NAJI: Sandalwood trees grow from their shrouds, and from their blood, poppies bloom. Our people are the flower that entwines the cell bars and turns into a giant, wrenching the bars apart.

HANDALA: With their hands, they squeezed stones to water the poppies.

NAJI: Son, take a brush and draw a tree and decorate it with fruit, hearts and keys dangling from its branches.

HANDALA: And the dove of peace?

NAJI: The dove in the moonlight turns into a woodpecker hard at work on the gallows in the squares. The world sees the dove and the olive branch but ignores the right of nightingales to their homeland.

HANDALA: The shepherd is sleeping. And the sky is encrusted with revolting knives.

NAJI: Wake them up from their deep sleep . . . Wake them up,  
Handala.

*(Fade out.*

*Darkness.)*

*Fatima wears a Palestinian dress and a white cover on her head. A big house key is hanging around her neck. She is sewing a dress with a needle. There is a tall box on the wall, which is an old radio.*

RADIO (*Various voices*): I am from Yarmouk refugee camp; I send my greetings to my mother and father in Hebron. I am from the south and I send my greetings to my beloved mother in Acre and to my sister Fatima in Aida refugee camp. I am from Baqa'a refugee camp, sending my greetings to my wife and my daughter Amal. Tell me your news. I am from Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp; I send my greetings to the Egyptian people. I am from Rafah, sending my greetings to our brothers in Iraq. I am from Bileen, sending my greetings to our brothers in Sudan. I am in Ansar prison; sending my greetings to all prisoners in Arab prisons. Give me your news. I am Abu Saber in an Israeli jail. I give my best wishes to my wife Fatima. Don't worry, I am fine.

*(Abu Hussein enters wearing very old clothes, carrying a cloth bag on his shoulder. The radio volume decreases as he sees Fatima. She is sweeping the floor.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: Salaam, Fatima.

FATIMA: Welcome Abu Hussein. Alhamdulillah, you're well.

ABU HUSSEIN: Trustworthy, Fatima, still holding the key to your home in Jaffa.

FATIMA: Still holding it. What news?

*(She brings tea.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: The sun has set in an ocean of tears, the sparrow is a prisoner of screams, and—

*(Fatima continues for him, pouring the tea in glasses.)*

FATIMA: —and we are prisoners of waiting, prisoners of news and greetings.

*(He sits contemplating.)*

What is it with you? Are you sick? Tired? You're not your usual self. You didn't eat or drink, and you haven't yet cursed America.

*(Abu Hussein looks at her, but doesn't speak. We hear the music of Fairuz singing "Wasalami lakum.")*

Abu Hussein, you know when I listen to the messages on the radio between mother and son, wife and husband and all the others, I remember how they told us, "Wait for a week or two and you'll return to smell the thyme and mint in your gardens." Weeks passed, then months. Years ran after years. The walls of our homes turned into the canvas of tents.

ABU HUSSEIN: The smell of basilica is still in your braids so don't be sad, Fatima. And Abu Saber will be free, incha Allah . . . but you know, I swear I'll shave my mustache if one of these Arab states liberates Jerusalem, one of these days.

FATIMA: Zainab, may Allah bless her soul, never remained silent. Even when you were imprisoned, she never took the key to your house from around her neck. Once, she refused to take fifty dinars from a benefactor and she asked for all her legitimate rights of return.

*(She takes a piece of cloth and starts sewing.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: Oh my Zainab, may Allah bless your soul. She died dreaming of return or at least that when she died, her body would be covered with a handful of earth from our land in Jaffa.

FATIMA: If we don't return today, we will tomorrow. If not tomorrow, the day after or the one after that. God willing, even after one hundred years. If not us, then our children or their children, or their children's children.

*(She holds tight the key around her neck. Abu Hussein takes a gift out of his sack that he offers to Fatima. She takes the gift, holds it, smells it and kisses it.)*

Sometimes I close my eyes, and I pray. And when I open my eyes I see my beloved Abu Saber opening the door and coming to me.

ABU HUSSEIN: Everything is possible . . . but don't let bitterness sneak into your eyes.

FATIMA: Sometimes he gives me his hand. I feel his heartbeat stronger than thunder.



ABU HUSSEIN (*Standing up to leave*): You feel his touch even without him touching you. (*Leaving*) Passion, love . . . Oh Zainab, Zainab.

(*Radio plays Fairuz's "Wasalami lakum."*)

*Lights fade.)*

6

*Blue light on Fatima sitting in a chair. Another light on Abu Saber, who is on his knees. They speak as if in a dream.*

FATIMA: You came?

ABU SABER: Yes. I came for the most precious in the world, for my beloved.

FATIMA: How are you?

ABU SABER: The days dig their lines in my hands. And you, Fatima?

FATIMA: I sew a new patch on my dress. It becomes like the map of the Arab world or the Bantustans of Palestine. Kingdom of Jerusalem, Emirate of Gaza, Sultanate of Nablus, the Republic of Hebron. From each part a different color, and a patch on each hole. And you? Still standing as a mountain, as an oak tree, despite your poverty?

ABU SABER: My mother, Allah bless her soul, used to bring the hot bread, and olive oil and za'tar, and the teapot. Ah, that tea with sage. I used to take a bit of bread, soak it in the olive

oil, then in the za'tar, and chew it. Take a sip of tea. Best meal in the world.

FATIMA: Do you think the bees will find flowers to sop up its essence?

ABU SABER: I am a bee who found its flower, and a sparrow who found its nest . . . You're the flower and you're the nest. Walk this road with me.

FATIMA: On one condition. That my dowry be five thousand bullets in the chest of those who violated Jerusalem!

*(Intermediary music. Lights fade.)*

7

*Hamdoul enters, riding on the back of Dahdoul like a donkey.*

HAMDOUL: I am free, Dahdoul. And now I want to be agent number one for the Americans.

DAHDOUL: Cursed is such a time, Master, when you are more acceptable to the Americans than I am. In what way are you better than me? Have you made more compromises than me? Have you destroyed the revolution more than me? Did you ruin the people more than me? Do you smell worse than me? Did you have more hemorrhoid operations than me?

*(Hamdoul gets down from Dahdoul's back.)*

HAMDOUL: You've been a rag for their shoes. Me, I don't give them the chance to mock me. I even demonstrate!

DAHDOUL (*Singing as in a demonstration*): We are your men, Mr. President (Reagan!). One of us is equal to one thousand. Oh, Protector of Afghanistan, on the camp, you invade and conquer.

HAMDOUL: I demonstrate against them.

DAHDOUL (*In denial*): Demonstrate against them?!

HAMDOUL (*Proudly*): Of course. Do you want to see?

DAHDOUL: Show me, sir.

HAMDOUL (*Chants*): May American bombs fall on Libya. Fall, fall, fall!

DAHDOUL: May they fall on Damascus and Beirut as well. I was worried, sir.

(*They laugh.*)

HAMDOUL: By my honor, if the U.S. wants to hit Libya I swear I will break . . . your hand! You see, I told them: land in exchange for shalom.

DAHDOUL (*Nervously*): What? No, shalom in exchange for land, sir.

HAMDOUL (*Angry*): Listen, Dahdoul: land versus shalom. This is my last offer. One should know how to negotiate. Then Dahdah, you know . . . And as you know, we have one day in solidarity with Palestinian people in the year, but we have also 364 days to conspire against the Palestinian people,

right? The important thing is that during the negotiations, you keep the Palestinian decision independent. Any questions?

DAHDOUL: An innocent question, sir. If, God forbid, there was a difference in the Palestinian-Palestinian point view, with whom shall we stand?

HAMDOUL: What an idiot! Do you need to ask that? And if Israel attacked Syria, we should attack?

DAHDOUL: Be clear, sir. Attack who?

HAMDOUL: Don't be stupid, Dahdah. Concerning the massacre of Palestinians and uprooting them from their lands, we have all agreed not to lift a finger. And we are all Amal.<sup>4</sup>

DAHDOUL: I doubt that America and Israel—

HAMDOUL (*Interrupts*): Idiot . . . (*Taking Dahdoul's ear and kneeling him down*) Doubt is a sin. Know that, first, the Americans have more honor than you. Second, we make peace with Israel, and third, we slaughter the resistance.

DAHDOUL: Sir, in my opinion, firstly we slaughter the resistance, secondly Americans have more honor than my father and your grandfather, and thirdly we beg Israel for peace, and pray that Israel accepts.

HAMDOUL: Is that what you think, Dahdah?

DAHDOUL AND HAMDOUL: One uncle, not two; it is only Uncle Sam.

*(Abu Saber and Abu Hussein enter.)*

HAMDOUL: Okay Dahdou, no problem. *(Sees Abu Saber and Abu Hussein)* Welcome, Mr. Resistance. Where have you been man?

*(He tries to shake Abu Hussein's hand, but Abu Hussein turns his face away.)*

DAHDOUL: Ah, the poor guys. They've been stuck in Israeli prisons for fifteen years.

HAMDOUL *(Meaning Abu Hussein)*: Surely, he misses his wife and kids.

DAHDOUL *(To Abu Hussein)*: Your house is in ruins. Your wife died in bad circumstances, three of your children are martyrs and the rest are in jail.

ABU HUSSEIN: Why are my children in jail?

HAMDOUL: Well, that's healthier for them than being on the streets. We put them away for you and if you'd like to join them, no problem. In either case, you will join them.

*(Abu Hussein exits shouting.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: Zainab . . . Zainab!

ABU SABER: Abu Hussein, Abu Hussein!

*(He tries to catch up with Abu Hussein but comes back alone.)*

And what did you do after all that happened? (*Silence*) I say we protest, people and government side by side.

HAMDOUL: Great. Just out of prison and you haven't changed a bit. Raise your voice man.

ABU SABER: We want to speak openly.

DAHDOUL: Lower your voice man.

ABU SABER: We don't want to see Americans.

HAMDOUL: Shut up. I thought you were protesting for the United States.

DAHDOUL: Really? Then why not protest in support of Israel as well?

HAMDOUL: That'd be great. You see, Israel is trying to make peace with us. That's why they keep annoying us. But if Israel wants to hit, let them hit. The important thing is not to respond. I'll never respond, even if they hit me with a shoe. What would America say if I responded? They'll say I'm a terrorist and that would be a catastrophe!

DAHDOUL: Even if Israel squeezes my neck under its boot, it will be shameful if I respond. And if Israel smacks my right butt cheek, I'll turn to them with my left one. Isn't that what Jesus said?

ABU SABER: Jesus is innocent from what you say till the Day of Judgment. And don't worry, they will not hit you because hitting the dead is haram.<sup>5</sup>

HAMDOUL: That is why we say that every Palestinian is a terrorist until proven innocent from the crime of resistance.

ABU SABER: Truly I say to you, I am innocent from you, till the Day of Judgment, you bastards.

RADIO: Expectations for 1985: the Americans will recognize the PLO on the condition that the Palestinian decision will be made in Congress, instead of by the Palestinian National Council, and the armed struggle will become a nudity struggle.

HAMDOUL: A nudity struggle? Did you hear that? And you want to protest against America?

DAHDOUL: You see what America is doing for you? They will recognize you.

*(Abu Saber starts to speak, but Hamdoul and Dahdoul jump on him, interrupting.)*

HAMDOUL: Confess that you were saying *no peace!*

ABU SABER: I was going to say: no God except Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.

*(They release him.)*

And after this recognition, what are you going to do?

HAMDOUL: Leadership travels.

DAHDOUL: First class.

HAMDOUL: Administration for the revolution.

DAHDOUL: Second class.

HAMDOUL: Fedayeen.

DAHDOUL: Cargo.

HAMDOUL: That's it. No fighting. Israel wants to make peace and give us a state.

ABU SABER: Ah, sure!

HAMDOUL: They made a promise and they'll keep it. But we should prove to Israel that we are against terrorism, and deliver the pilot.

DAHDOUL: And the debris of the plane.

HAMDOUL: And the fedayeen who shot the plane. And then they will give us a state.

ABU SABER: Of course they'll give you a state . . . of Bantustans and ghettos, resting on a nest of thorns.

DAHDOUL: And what do you suggest, bro?

ABU SABER: I have a solution.

HAMDOUL: May Allah guide you well.

ABU SABER: We teach our children swimming, shooting, fighting, and to love the country.



DAHDOUL: May Allah forgive you.

ABU SABER: And in this way we can rid ourselves of the dominance of the U.S. and its allies.

HAMDOUL: May Allah break your neck.

ABU SABER: That's fine with me.

HAMDOUL: You know, the best thing you can do? Leave.

ABU SABER: Leave? Where should I go? You gave me a passport, a travel document to hell. You wrote in it: It is requested from all government employees and its representatives, locally and internationally, to allow the bearer of this passport to travel under the mercy of God. The bearer is to reside only in besieged residences, forbidden to work and to breathe.

HAMDOUL: Why don't you go and relax for a while?

ABU SABER: You want me to relax? If the system has no mercy, and even Allah's mercy won't come to aid us, what is the solution? How can I relax when I still taste Jaffa oranges in my mouth, and the smell of za'tar tickles my nose? Poppies swirl in my eyes, perfume from Al-Quds fills my lungs, and the salt of the Dead Sea crusts my skin with tiny lights.

HAMDOUL: You know, Abu Saber, we will do the impossible; I'll make of the impossible a donkey that I'll ride wherever I want, till you regain your rights inch by inch.

ABU SABER: Truly one can depend on you!

DAHDOUL: And on me as well.

ABU SABER: Isn't there a catastrophe, I mean, *anything* you are not involved in?

*(Telephone rings.)*

DAHDOUL: 'Allo . . . Telephone from the White House, sir.

HAMDOUL: Give it to me. 'Alloooo, yes, 242-338, yes, yes, ya, oui, yes, yeh—

*(Gives back the phone to Dahdoul.)*

Son of 242 old shoes, and 338 slippers! I lost my breath saying yes, and he ends by saying *yeh-no* and slams the phone down.

DAHDOUL: Maybe they are busy, sir.

HAMDOUL: Let's see what's happening.

*(Hamdoul and Dahdoul exit. Abu Saber, lost, listens to the radio.)*

RADIO: Welcome to your second home: Lebanon. Welcome to your fifth country: Tunisia. Welcome to your seventh home: Sudan. Welcome to your thirteenth country: Canada. Welcome to your twenty-fifth home: Australia. Welcome to your seventieth country: Alaska. And now with the Arab hymn:

Arab countries are my country	بلاد العرب اوطاني
From Sham to Baghdad	من الشام لبغداد
From Najd to Yemen	ومن نجد الى يمن
To Egypt till Tetwan	الى مصر فتطوان
Nobody can marginalize us from each other	فلا حد يباعدنا
No religion can segregate us	ولا دين يفرقنا
Language unites us with	لسان الضاد يجمعنا بغسان وعدنان
Ghassan and Adrian	

ABU SABER: They want me to be an eternal refugee. They want me to forget my right to return. They prepared a million exiles for my departure but they've forgotten that I have a homeland. It is called Palestine.

*(Blackout.)*

8

*From off, we hear the yoyos of Fatima. Fatima enters, making the last sound of yoyos, carrying a big falafel with a candle in the middle. Abu Saber follows her.*

FATIMA: Alhamdulillah, you came back safe. Come, come, let's celebrate!

ABU SABER: You made a cake for my liberation from prison?

FATIMA: This is just a falafel, sweetie. I wish it were a cake.

ABU SABER: We can't even afford to eat falafel now, except on great occasions.

RADIO: Enemy attacks, jets bombing refugee camps in south Lebanon.

ABU SABER: You see, Fatima. They are bombing the camps.

FATIMA: Allah gives us patience.

ABU SABER: They injured our little ones.

FATIMA: As usual.

ABU SABER: They killed our elder one.

FATIMA: As usual.

ABU SABER: They destroyed us.

FATIMA: As usual.

RADIO: Palestinian fedayeen were ordered to turn in their weapons and leave Beirut.

ABU SABER: I am lost in a sea of question marks, Fatima.

FATIMA: Me, too.

ABU SABER: We sang for the revolution, and we revolted.

FATIMA: We demonstrated and slept in streets.

ABU SABER: But our rifles have been turned into brooms. When the fedayeen left Beirut, their revolutionary uniforms dissolved into the clothes of refugees, and their boots were put on sale.

RADIO: Palestinian communists are preparing for armed struggle.

FATIMA: They are going to Mecca after the pilgrimage has already finished.

RADIO: Breaking news: Palestinian political parties declared their intention to make peace among themselves.

ABU SABER (*Happy*): They will make peace among themselves! Give me a kiss, Fatima.

FATIMA: When they do it, Abu Saber.

ABU SABER: So what do you think if we go to Kuwait to see your brother, or to Emirates to catch up with your sister? Maybe to Saudi Arabia to visit your uncle, or to Sham to meet your maternal uncles, or to Baghdad to meet your son-in-law? You know, the best thing is to go on a trip around the world, maybe we can catch up with Abu Ammar and ask him about the cause. Surely we will see him in Manama.

FATIMA: In your dreams.

ABU SABER: You know, Fatima, the crisis in the revolution is in its bourgeoisie, and because of the complications of demagoguery, in a comparably pragmatic way, it depends on—

FATIMA (*Interrupts*): You and your political propaganda, like all these corrupted leaders who swallow promises.

ABU SABER: Fifteen years in prison and endless negotiations, what do you expect? The pigeons have built their nests in the holes of cannons, and ravens are sleeping in them.

FATIMA: Clean them up with your tears Abu Saber. You're not a coward.

ABU SABER: I'm fed up with cleaning, Fatima. No tears anymore. I want to scream out loud:

The news came from Tunis,

That our revolution will conquer the Americans.

And the news came from Amman.

Our Parliament is worried about us.

And the news came from Sham

That Ja'ja<sup>6</sup> was defeated like a sheep.

And after midday the news came from Egypt

That help will come from the Muslim Brotherhood

And a fatwa came from Al-Azhar

To get rid of David, son of Mr. President,

The news from Kabul—

FATIMA (*Interrupts*): Poor Fatima, my husband has lost his mind.

ABU SABER: And when I went to pilgrimage, I prayed.

FATIMA: What did you pray?

ABU SABER: Unite their flags and media, break down their cartoon borders, and unite their passports! Oh God, guide them to give me a visa on my travel document, that they consider me an American . . . What else, Fatima?

FATIMA: Be brief. Say: ya Allah, help us to get rid of their corruptions.

RADIO: And now with the political analysis: those who fast should not eat—

ABU SABER: Oh, I am fasting.

RADIO (*Continues*): —and should not drink—

ABU SABER: Oh, I am fasting.

RADIO: —and should not smoke—

ABU SABER: Oh, I am fasting.

RADIO: —and should not talk, and should not open their mouths even if the Palestinian case is closed.

*(Fatima and Abu Saber take their shoes off, and throw them at the radio.)*

ABU SABER AND FATIMA: Shut up bastard!

*(Fade out.)*

9

*Hamdoul lies down mid-stage. Lights flash with Oriental dance music.*

HAMDOUL: The best fight position is lying down.

*(Focused light on Hamdoul sleeping, snoring. There are background images of belly dancers and Hamdoul's body moves with them. There are flashes of Palestine's map shrinking and being eaten, bit by bit. Handala comes in with his back to the audience, and seems to be throwing stones at Hamdoul. At a certain moment, he begins to urinate on Hamdoul.)*

RADIO: The totality of the National Land from the ocean to the Gulf.

*(Sound of snoring.)*

Palestine is an integral part of Arab consciousness.

*(Snoring.)*

Israel threatens to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

*(Troubled snoring while Handala finishes urinating on Hamdoul. Handala leaves. Hamdoul wakes up suddenly.)*



HAMDOUL: Ah, God. What a devil! This monkey is oppressing me. He's trying to kill me. I can't even sleep and enjoy a good dream. Should this son of a bitch be allowed to disturb my peace?

*(He screams, calling for Dahdoul, who enters.)*

Dahdoul, Dahdoul!

DAHDOUL: What happened, sir? Why are you screaming?

HAMDOUL: Where were you, asshole? How can you let this little monkey invade my dream?

DAHDOUL: But . . . but I didn't let anybody in, sir.

HAMDOUL: Oh yes you did. Nightmares have started their invasion. We'll find no peace of mind anymore. These monkeys must go back to their jungle.

DAHDOUL: But . . . but what monkeys are you talking about, sir?

HAMDOUL: What MONKEYS? You become more of an idiot every day.

*(Dahdoul exits, angry. Hamdoul is alone.)*

10

*Hamdoul is onstage. Abu Hussein enters. He looks at Hamdoul and tries to provoke him with singing. Hamdoul tries to capture him but fails.*

ABU HUSSEIN:

Shish Bish, we are dying      شيش بيش

and you remain silent      عم بنموت وساكت ليش

You are dressed in silk      انت عمتليس حرير

and we are in rough clothes      ونحن بنتسربل بالخيش

Through the dice your palace      هبّ اليك

will break like ice      قصر الظالم راح يندك

HAMDOUL (*Angry*): I will break your neck, bastard!

(*Hamdoul tries to capture Abu Hussein.*)

ABU HUSSEIN: What a heavy guy . . . you need to do better than that. Didn't I promise you that I'll shave my mustache if your system liberates even one inch of Al-Quds?

(*Abu Hussein exits. Hamdoul sits exhausted.*)

HAMDOUL: Aren't the people enough? Do I need this idiot to make me more crazy than I already am? Dahdoul? Dahdah . . . Dahadiho, where are you?

(*Dahdoul enters.*)

DAHDOUL: What is it, sir?

HAMDOUL: Where did you go? You left me and now every crazy person comes to attack me and you're not here.

DAHDOUL: I . . . there is an angry woman at the door, crying from hunger and she says her name is Fatima.

HAMDOUL: Hungry? Let her shake her ass.

DAHDOUL: Sir, there is also a journalist who has come to see us.

HAMDOUL: Really? Us? You're my equal now? And what did you say to him?

DAHDOUL (*Exaggerating*): I said wait here. Stop, don't move.

HAMDOUL: Okay, leave me now and don't let anyone in. We'll see this journalist later. Writers and journalists are only good at talking. What we need at this stage is people who write nothing important.

DAHDOUL: But this is an American journalist, sir.

HAMDOUL: American? Why didn't you say so? Where is he?

DAHDOUL: With . . . wiz . . .

HAMDOUL: What . . . zzzz . . .

(*He hears the Journalist and Abu Saber speaking.*)

ABU SABER (*Voice off*): No, mister. I said no.

HAMDOUL: How can you let him to talk with that bastard?

DAHDOUL: But sir—

HAMDOUL (*Interrupts*): Shut up idiot. Let's hide.

*(Hamdoul and Dahdoul exit. Abu Saber and the Journalist enter from the opposite side. Abu Saber attempts to communicate with his poor English, but his poor English is also a resistance.)*

ABU SABER: No mister. Me not communist. Ana, I mean me, ana revolution until victory. Ana with Fatah. Fatima, my wife, was and still with Palestine. (Ibni lekhir) My eldest son is with Popular Front, (alsaghir) my small son is with the Lebanese Resistance. (Binti) My daughter is with the Democratic Front. The others I don't know with who, but all the family are against America, and against the Phalangists and Arabs of America and Camp David and Abu Hasira group. I mean I am poor (Yani fakir ibn fakir) poor son of poor and despite this comrade, I mean mister, it will never be possible to sell my country, and if my children are killed, I will with Fatima make new children. You see, none of these leaders know how much we suffer. Christ was crucified once but we are crucified every day. You know how Job has been patient? My wife, Fatima always says everybody sold us. Fatima (Habibti) my love, worth more than a thousand men who are only good for talking. Fatima still wears the key of our Jaffa home around her neck.

JOURNALIST: And what is the role of oil?

ABU SABER: Americans are sucking it up completely.

JOURNALIST: Do you believe in armed struggle?

ABU SABER: This is our legitimate right. All our people resist by existing and steadfastly on their land and reclaiming their rights. This resistance is not terrorism. You hear me? We are not terrorists.

JOURNALIST: Are you Muslim or Christian? Sunni or Shiite?

ABU SABER: What a stupid question. Didn't I tell you from the beginning that I am a poor son of the poor?

*(Abu Saber runs behind the Journalist, who flees from him. Hamdoul and Dahdoul enter from the other side, meeting the Journalist to protect him. Abu Saber retreats while Dahdoul confronts him. Hamdoul brings the Journalist back to center stage.)*

HAMDOL: Our guest. When you come, you own the house and we become your guests.

JOURNALIST *(Looking around)*: Marhaba,<sup>7</sup> Mr. Hamool. Could you speak about the situation in the region?

HAMDOL *(Speaks with accent)*: All is tamam.<sup>8</sup> Kull shee<sup>9</sup> all right. We are fine. Our neighbors are fine. We live in peace. But we have few monkeys who ran away from the zoo, and we don't know what to do with them.

JOURNALIST: And what do you think of Israel?

HAMDOUL: Israel, my brother. And I like to tell you, ya'ni,<sup>10</sup>  
we have nothing to do with Al-Motassem.<sup>11</sup>

JOURNALIST: Ya'ni, you don't want to throw Israel into the sea?

HAMDOUL: What? Israeli knows how to swim. What a useless exercise that would be. You understand, homma<sup>12</sup> can swim better than me.

JOURNALIST: And the just cause, what are you going to do with that?

HAMDOUL: Oh, they accuse us of forgetting, what is it called, oh, gosh it was on the tip of my tongue. How can we forget Fil . . . fil . . . Philippine . . .

JOURNALIST: And the Palestinians? What are you doing for them?

HAMDOUL: Ah, yes, them. This is Dahdoul's specialty.

DAHDOUL: Oh, ya, of course. Honestly, we don't know. They break our hearts. It is too complicated. We intend to invite the Palestinians and *Izraelis* and say to them: make love not war.

JOURNALIST: That's nice. Do you think they will accept?

DAHDOUL: Well, you know, we do what we have to do. And we make love on both sides, and everything else is in the hands of America.

JOURNALIST: Ah, do you like America?

HAMDOUL (*Interrupting*): *Hada*<sup>13</sup> is my specialization. Of course, we love very, very much America. And we make love also with Americans. High quality. You know, Americans protested at having my name on the Palestinian delegation, and they recommended that I be on the Israeli delegation.

DAHDOUL: What a lucky guy!

JOURNALIST: Did you like that?

HAMDOUL AND DAHDOUL: Very, very much.

*(Hamdoul makes a sign to Dahdoul to leave. Dahdoul exits and comes back with a bottle and glasses.)*

HAMDOUL: Let's drink in solidarity with the camp's children, who die of hunger and thirst. *Sahtain*.<sup>14</sup>

JOURNALIST: That's nice. *Sahtain*.

HAMDOUL: Of course you— (*A moment of silence*) I mean, do you have around you, *banat*, I mean *girls*? You know in Europe and America I'm known for being A Minister of Petrol and Administer of Women.

*(They all laugh. The light fades out, little by little.)*

RADIO: The people present their condolences to the camps of Sabra and Shatila, and Burj el-Barajneh with great regret for the death of Arab dignity since 1982. Inna Lillah wa inna elayhi rajeoun.<sup>15</sup> (إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون)

*(Music. Lights fade.)*

*Naji is sleeping, his drawing paper and pen next to him. Handala is on his knees next to Naji, with his back to the audience. After a moment, Handala starts shaking Naji to wake him up. Finally, Naji wakes up. Handala gives him the paper and pen to draw. Naji looks at him. Handala comes closer to him, whispers in his ear. Naji starts drawing. Handala stands up, his hands behind his back and back to the audience. Fade out.*



*The Newspaper Director is sitting in his office. Abu Saber enters with an article that he delivers to the Director. The Director reads the article and then looks at Abu Saber.*

DIRECTOR: Good article. We can publish it. But I advise you to write your will.

*(Blackout.*

*Lights come up. Abu Saber arrives home and sits at his table, trying to write something. He listens to the radio, and at every news announcement he spits at the radio.)*

RADIO: During the elections of the new board for the drummers and singers for peace among the Palestinian writers and journalists, we had the opportunity to meet with some candidates . . .

FIRST WRITER: I had a deep experience with my writing. I used to write voodooos but then I developed my capacities to write reports for secret services.

*(Abu Saber spits at the radio.)*

SECOND WRITER: Oh Mama Mia . . . Me, writing takes all my energy, and gives me a headache. That's why instead of taking aspirin, I take suppositories . . .

*(Abu Saber spits at the radio.)*

THIRD WRITER: What can I say? What can I tell you? People read my thoughts, and their hair stands straight up like spikes.

*(Abu Saber spits at the radio. Fatima enters with a cloth to wipe up the spit and dust around in the room.)*

FOURTH WRITER: I have never read or even carried a book. They gave me a checkbook.

*(Abu Saber spits at the radio.)*

FIFTH WRITER: One thousand times people can say I am a coward, but it's better than saying, God bless his soul. My advice to the new generation is: write a line and leave the second line empty.

*(Abu Saber spits at the radio.)*

FATIMA: What is it? I'm always cleaning up your spit. Why don't you carry your own cloth to wipe up your spittle every time an idiot speaks on the radio?

ABU SABER: Everybody is a writer and literary specialist now. May Allah give us our daily bread and save us from the Ghadanfar.<sup>16</sup>

*(Knocking at the door. We hear the voice of Abu Hussein. He enters as Fatima leaves.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: What is it, Abu Saber? How are you?

*(Abu Saber shakes his hand and makes a gesture with his head.)*

You know, I liked your article about democracy in the newspaper today.

*(A moment of silence.)*

What are you writing for tomorrow?

ABU SABER: I wrote an article entitled “Oppression and Obedience” and now I am writing out my will.

ABU HUSSEIN: Doesn’t make sense, man.

ABU SABER: The other day I went to the general assembly of Palestinian Union of Writers and Journalists. I told them to write as independents. You know what they said? *(Imitating with another voice)* You are coming here to give us lessons in patriotism, and you are not even a writer, or a journalist, or a poet, or a critic? Who the hell are you? I blew up in their faces: I am the reader. And I’m telling you, I am going nuts.

ABU HUSSEIN: I was nuts before you were nuts. You think it’s easy, brother? Israel imprisons any of us who resist and the Arabs do the same and it’s the same blood that goes out through the wounds. When I was in prison, I had a friend in the cell with me. His name was Butros, a Christian, you know. He was accused of being a member of a secret organization. They tortured him to a point where he’d swear that the rabbit is a flying goat. In the end, he confessed to being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. They sentenced him to life. I was released after fifteen years.

RADIO: Speech is silver, silence is golden.

ABU SABER (*Loudly to the radio*): And screaming is earth and Adam is of dust. (*To Abu Hussein*) Yesterday, I came back home and started writing on the walls of the house: Palestine is Arab . . . Palestine is Arab . . . I didn't leave a single spot bare, not even in the bathroom. I am afraid that the slogans of these governments will erase the brains of my children.

(*Abu Hussein pours two drinks.*)

ABU HUSSEIN: Drink, Abu Saber. I drink when I am happy in order to see people in double.

ABU SABER: And I drink when I am pissed off to see the fifteen Palestinian political parties united as one.

*We hear the voice of a Fortune Teller.*

FORTUNE TELLER (*Voice off*): I read in the lines of the hand . .  
 . I read the lines of the hand . . .

ABU HUSSEIN: Should I call her in?

*(He goes out and returns with the Fortune Teller.)*

Come on, sister. Come and read the luck of my friend here.

FORTUNE TELLER (*Taking the hand of Abu Saber*): You've been either a freelance writer, or you were interpreting the feelings of people and drawing caricatures against the Arabs that belong to America, or probably you were trying to steal a loaf of bread for your children, and Allah knows better.

ABU HUSSEIN: What about me?

FORTUNE TELLER: The lines in your hand are erased. Do you want me to read the lines in your feet?

ABU HUSSEIN: Hands or feet. Doesn't matter. The important issue is that you tell me my luck.

FORTUNE TELLER: It seems from the fine lines that your rights were violated, and from the thick lines you have, you can't even earn your daily bread, and from the deep lines, you have been beaten to a point where everyone in the neighborhood has heard your cries . . . and Allah knows better.

ABU HUSSEIN (*Gives her a piece of money*): And our luck.

FORTUNE TELLER: I'm sorry. I didn't see any luck for you . . . and Allah knows better.

(*She exits.*)

RADIO: An official declared that a bullet refused to be shot in the direction of the refugee camps or to participate in the Palestinian-Palestinian fighting, or ethnic fighting, and now it is sought after by all the rifles accused of terrorism.

ABU HUSSEIN: Drink, Abu Saber. They will never capture that bullet. They really know how to make us enjoy a drink!

ABU SABER: How can you enjoy anything?

ABU HUSSEIN: I was considering the banquet of Pacific Solution.

ABU SABER: Which is?

ABU HUSSEIN: You don't know? Couscous, cher ami.

ABU SABER (*Moves around*): You know, Abu Hussein, every morning, the first thing after wake up, I wander around the house. People do their morning exercises, have breakfast . . . but I do a silent demonstration after I hear the news so that the secret service will not hear me shouting. Otherwise, I'll explode.

ABU HUSSEIN: What about Fatima?

ABU SABER: Oh, Fatima. She stays the same. The other day, we had a handful of flowers. She wept on the flowers, then baked them like bread on the fire after the bombardment. She gave this bread to the kids.

After they ate and thanked God for the food, she took what remained and kissed it, and hid it for the dark days that are coming so she can feed the kids again.

ABU HUSSEIN: Sometimes I'm jealous of her, and of my beloved wife Zainab, Allah bless her soul, better than a thousand men.

ABU SABER: You know, my friend, I went to pilgrimage, and I cursed Ibliss.<sup>17</sup> And I said to him: you pushed Sadat to visit Al-Quds, you were the reason for the delay in the call for struggle, and for the ridiculous incapacity of the Arab oil countries to do anything. Arab solidarity and unity never happened because of you! The Gulf War and all the troubles in this region are because of you! Without you, Palestine would not have been lost, and south of Lebanon would've been great, and we would not have lost the war, and the resistance would have stayed in Beirut. Without you, even Kahana would've been a good citizen, and Abu Musa and Abu Ammar would have good relations, and the Yemen would not be two, and the rich would love the poor, and you are the one who separated me from my wife after you convinced me of cheating on her. And you . . .

*(Something hits him in his head.)*

My head . . . Who is the son of devil that hit me in the head?

ABU HUSSEIN: Ah, the vicious couple.

*(Hamdoul and Dahdoul enter from opposite sides of the stage, both dressed in beach clothes and holding drinking bottles, shouting.)*

HAMDOUL: Down with imperialism!

DAHDOUL: Down with America!

HAMDOUL: Down with the Iranian infiltrations in the Arab Gulf!

DAHDOUL: Down with the enemies of freedom!

HAMDOUL: Down with the dirty right wing!

DAHDOUL: Down with the decadent left!

HAMDOUL: Down with Arab retros!

DAHDOUL: Down with traitors!

HAMDOUL: Down with colonialism's agents!

DAHDOUL: Down with the enemies of the revolution!

HAMDOUL: Down with the Atlantic Alliance!

*(They hug each other . . .)*

ABU HUSSEIN: They can't even kiss well; they are only good at sucking people's blood.

RADIO: And now, to continue with the radio series . . .



ABU SABER: Israel occupied the entire country.

HAMDOUL: No problem.

ABU SABER: And humiliated the people.

HAMDOUL: No problem.

ABU SABER: Don't you want to do any good?

HAMDOUL: Go to hell. Do you think I'm fooling around? Don't you see that I'm celebrating the memory of the Battle of Hattin, when Saladin defeated the Crusaders?

ABU SABER: If Saladin were alive, you'd have him assassinated!

RADIO: And now for the political analysis about the Arab Spring . . .

POLITICAL ANALYST (*Voice off*): Without doubt, the Arab youth uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria . . .

*(Dahdoul leaves to bring Hamdoul his clothes while we hear background noises from the different Arab demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, etc.)*

*Dahdoul enters carrying Hamdoul's clothes, and gives them to him. Hamdoul puts them on.*

HAMDOUL: I am for constructive dialogue. I am for the youth, who are the future. That's why I do declare that whoever sees me doing something wrong, he should come and tell me, so that . . . *(He changes his tone)* I kick his ass, knock him down to hell till he wishes he'd never been born. Leading crowds is an impossible mission. And life is take and give. This is why I offer you all the promises, and the sweetest words, take them, but in exchange you should give back yourselves, and you know what? What does it mean if some of you rot in prison? Prisons are schools, guys, great schools.

ABU HUSSEIN: And what about democracy, Mr. Hamdoul?

HAMDOUL: This is democracy. I am your guardian, and people follow the religion of their kings.

ABU SABER: If you are kings, then we are atheists.

HAMDOUL: I know what is best for you.

ABU SABER: And what is best for us, great guardian? To walk naked? We've given everything. Nothing is left. We're completely broke.

HAMDOUL: How else do you want us to reach an agreement with our friends in Israel? Don't you listen to the news?

RADIO: The children of Palestine have declared that they will never give up and they'll never stop throwing stones.

HAMDOUL: I will cut off their hands. (*Referring to Handala*) It is this monkey who is at fault, whose hair is like a hedgehog. He comes to me every night and taunts me.

ABU SABER: Why does he bother you, *chief*? Is it because he has a stone to throw? Or because his hands are behind his back and he refuses to shake your hand?

HAMDOUL: Both.

ABU SABER: You know, he claims only his right, like everyone else, to see the sun break over the lake of Tiberias, to touch the sand of Jaffa, to swim in the sea of Gaza, to walk through Bethlehem and to pray in Al-Quds.

HAMDOUL (*As though giving a speech*): This is simply not acceptable. You must recognize Israel and throw your weapons down and die quietly.

(*Fatima enters holding a white cloth. She is sad.*)

Bravo! Give me this piece of cloth. We will make a white flag!

(*He tries to take it by force but she refuses. Abu Saber supports her.*)

FATIMA: This is a coffin for my brother.

HAMDOUL: You see? How do you reclaim democracy when such people are an obstacle to peace? The other side offers you self-rule and this obstinate little madam wants to make a coffin for her brother?

FATIMA: You know how my brother died!

HAMDOUL: We are the legitimacy. We make the legislation. And those who resist the Palestinian right wing will go to hell.

*(He sees the others leaving him.)*

Where are you going?

ABU SABER: To hell!

*(Hamdoul is angry and retreats.)*

I'm confused. Fatima. Everyone disagrees on which Khazouk *(He makes a sign with his middle finger)* we can sit?

FATIMA: Trees die standing, Abu Saber.

ABU SABER: They offer us a colossal prison, surrounded by thousands of prison guards!

FATIMA *(To Hamdoul)*: Have you no shame? Do you want us to live on reserves like wild animals?

ABU SABER *(To Hamdoul)*: You want us to be shadows without shadows! Just shapes without life or will.

*(Hamdoul leaves, furious.)*

Oh Handala! I see you walking at night, you cross the wide Arab desert, clutch the running stars, and sometimes, a smile opens on your face.

FATIMA: Be the witness, Handala.

ABU SABER: Record everything.

FATIMA: Register everything, and don't neglect the tiniest fact.

ABU SABER: Write who sold Palestine.

FATIMA: Who profited at the expense of Palestine.

ABU SABER AND FATIMA: Register every sound so that one day each name will be spoken again.

*Hamdoul and Dahdoul enter. Dahdoul is carrying a poster of Handala. Written under it is: "Wanted, Dead or Alive." He hangs up the poster.*

ABU SABER: What are you doing?

HAMDOUL: He disrupts my sleep. He's a dagger in my dreams. And what makes me nuts is that he paints all the time. He draws trees, and hearts hanging from these trees. I want him dead or alive.

FATIMA: He won't stop drawing trees.

HAMDOUL: You'll see. *(To himself)* Every night in my sleep I capture him but he escapes, he becomes a swallow. The swallows won't leave me. Like a group of ravens, they spin around my head.

*(He screams)* You will disappear!

ABU SABER: Handala is looking for the sad face of Córdoba. Every time he wakes up in a new exile, his research renews itself. He won't stop.

HAMDOUL: What chutzpah! You insult us after all we've done for you?

DAHDOUL: Don't worry, sir; I have an exceptional, state-of-the-art American soap which will wash away all of our dishonor.

FATIMA: The sound of Palestine gave us its melody before our Nakba, and we gave it to our children and grandchildren after them. Whoever won't fight for what is ours should leave. Out, get out!

*(Abu Hussein enters, with a long mustache and beard.)*

ABU HUSSEIN: Jerusalem is still not liberated? Then my mustache and beard will continue to grow. As promised, I swear on my honor that I will not shave until the moment you liberate Al-Quds.

*(Song—"Mawtini."*<sup>18</sup>*)*

*Handala enters, his hands behind his back, his back to the audience. Naji comes in from another side. Abu Saber, Fatima and Abu Hussein are on one side, and Hamdoul and Dahdoul are on the other. Handala moves closer to Fatima and Abu Saber.*

NAJI: Handala. They say, "Forget!" Yes, I should forget the barefoot children in refugee camps. Forget these tired hands embracing the stones, kissing them, clasping them. They say, "Make peace." Why not? Even if they never presented a flower without hiding a massacre, even if they never negotiated without committing a crime? They say, "Compromise!" What is left to compromise? For Palestinians to enjoy only the music of stones? They say, "Just take it easy." How can I take it easy with those who rend the dreams of my people? Yes, I should shut up, make peace, negotiate, compromise, and take it easy, and piss on our dignity. I must honor the liar and praise the thief and order the resistance to cease resisting because there is nothing left to fight for! I must salute the mercenaries and shout out loud: "May honest people fall! May true patriots die . . . die . . . die!"

*(Suddenly, the sound of a bullet. Naji is hit and falls down slowly. Fatima moves closer to him and kneels, holding him up slightly. Other characters come closer, except Hamdoul and Dahdoul, who keep their distance.)*

With this bullet death becomes life and a song without words.



*(He touches Fatima's face, to wipe her tears. He looks at Handala.)*

You are my memory and consciousness. Stay next to me.  
*(Beat)* Handala carries a stone, carries a pen, carries a brush.  
Handala paints the road of return. Handala draws Palestine.

*(Naji falls dead. Hamdoul and Dahdoul slowly move closer to him. Abu Saber and Abu Hussein move toward them.)*

FATIMA *(To Abu Saber)*: Help me to turn his face towards Palestine. Take care that none of them touches his feet; they'll make them impure with their touch. And you, Handala, take a handful of earth from the land of sad oranges, and throw it in the faces of those who do nothing. Maybe if they smell this earth, they'll wake up. *(To the audience)* But what will you do, people? What will you do?

*(Blackout.)*

END OF PLAY

---

1. Jerusalem.
2. A refugee camp in Lebanon.
3. "Ya Dhalama Essejn" is a poem-song written by the Syrian journalist and poet Najib Al-Rayyes (1898–1952) against French colonization in Syria when he was imprisoned in 1922. The music was composed by Mohammad Fleifel.

4. “Amal” in Arabic means hope, but it is also the name of a Shiite militia which encircled, and then starved, the Palestinian refugee camps in the 1980s.

5. Forbidden.

6. The Christian Lebanese leader involved in the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

7. Hello.

8. Perfect.

9. Everything.

10. I mean.

11. Abbasid caliph who went to war against the Romans as they arrested a Muslim woman because she called upon him to rescue her.

12. They.

13. This.

14. Arabic expression equivalent to cheers or santé after drinks.

15. An Islamic expression said after someone is dead. It means, “We were created by Allah, and we return to Him.”

16. Means “lion,” in reference to Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat).

17. Satan.

18. “Mawtini” means “my homeland” or “my country.” It was written by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Touqan, and was used as the Palestinian national anthem.



PHOTO BY AHMAD DARI

**ABDELFATTAH ABUSROUR** is a writer, actor and director from Bethlehem. He co-wrote the plays *Salut c'est nous* in 1990 and *Nourrir de faim* in 1993. With Naomi Wallace and Lisa Schlesinger, he co-wrote *21 Positions*. He has written, adapted or performed in many plays produced in Palestine, including *Waiting for the Rain*, *Staying Alive* and *When Old Men Cry*. He wrote and directed *Tent*, *The Orphan*, *We Are the Children of the Camp* and *Blame the Wolf*, which toured Europe and the U.S. His short play, *Far Away from a Village Close By*, won first prize in London in 2006 in the Deir Yassin Remembered Festival. His play, *Handala*, was adapted from the cartoons of Naji Al-Ali and was performed in Palestine before touring in France and Luxembourg. He performed in Arthur Milner's *Facts* and Claire Audhuy's *Enemy Brothers*. In 2014, he was invited to direct *The Diary of Anne Frank* for Burning Coal Theatre in Raleigh, North Carolina. Films include: *Beautiful Resistance*, *Nakba* and *Exam*. Abusrour has a PhD in biological and medical engineering, is a recipient of the first Ashoka Fellowship in

Palestine in 2006, and in 2011 he received the Synergos Social Innovator Award. In 1998, he co-founded the Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Center for Children in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem. He is the General Director of Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center, and from 2009–2013, was elected President of Palestinian Theatre League.



## TERRITORIES



Betty Shamieh

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

I was initially interested in writing about Saladin and Richard the Lionheart. Then, I stumbled upon the character of Reginald of Châtillon whose exploits seemed too fantastical to be actual historical fact. He was a handsome second son of a minor lord in France who seduced and married two wealthy Crusader widows, initially attacked the Byzantine Christian cities instead of Muslims, and tried to attack Mecca in order to steal the Prophet Muhammad's bones. He convinced the Crusader King Guy to confront Saladin, and that unwise decision led to the battle that was the beginning of the end of the Crusades. Most significantly, in terms of my play *Territories*, Reginald was known to attack Muslim caravans on pilgrimage to Mecca that passed his castle, which is still standing in modern-day Jordan. There are several conflicting historical accounts of the personal history of the Muslim woman that he captured, who is the basis for the character of Alia. Like it is mentioned in the play, her identity is never known because the chroniclers did not think it worthwhile to write down her name. I began to question: Who was this woman? What kind of person would choose to pass an enemy's castle, knowing that a man like Reginald might well take her captive? Could she have predicted that her capture would ignite a war?

The play is steeped in historical flavor and much of what I wrote about the male characters of Reginald and Saladin, including their showdown at the Battle of Hattin and Reginald's torture methods, is verified by both Western and Eastern writers of that era. I found that the Middle East at that time was a surprisingly harmonious crossroad of different



religions. For example, Maimonides, the Jewish-Arab philosopher and doctor from Spain, was Saladin's personal doctor and Yusef Batit, an Orthodox Christian Arab priest, was one of Saladin's chief advisors. The Crusaders settled into their city-states for hundreds of years and were influenced by the customs, medicine and science of the Islamic world. Women, on both sides, were taken as slaves. But, there is strikingly little written about the female captive that Reginald took prisoner and only Western sources verify that it was Saladin's sister.

The play is my attempt to imagine the story that the historical chroniclers did not give us about this wealthy, highborn woman who would, in the midst of wartime, insist upon taking a journey that she had to know was extremely dangerous.

Looking at world history keeps us humble enough to recognize that all races have the potential to contribute to the enlightenment of humanity, and that the cultures that are on top now may not always be. As a woman writer born to Palestinian parents in America, I can lay claim to many different communities (whether or not those communities want to embrace me is another question). In *Territories* and in many of my plays, I try to examine the question of what is an individual's responsibility to his community, and whether being a good citizen of one's own particular nation inherently means being less committed to acting as a citizen of the world.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Territories* had its world premiere at the Magic Theatre (Chris Smith, Artistic Director; David Jobin, Managing Director) in San Francisco on January 19, 2008. It was directed by Jessica Heidt. The set design was by Melpomene Katalalos, the costume design was by Fumiko Bielefeldt, the lighting design was by Ray Oppenheimer, the sound design was by Will McCandless; the stage manager was Sarah Runke and the choreographer was Monique Jenkinson. The cast was:

SALADIN

Alfredo Narciso

REGINALD

Rod Gnapp

ALIA

Nora el Samahy

The play had its European premiere in German translation as a co-production of the European Union's Capital of Culture Festival (Airan Berg, Artistic Director) and the Landestheater (Rainer Mennicken, Intendant) on January 31, 2009. It was translated and directed by Gerhard Willert. The set and costume design were by Alexandra Pitz, the original music was by Christoph Coburger; the stage manager was Gabriela Korntner and the dramaturg was Kathrin Bieligk. The cast was:

SALADIN

Sebastian Hufschmidt

REGINALD

Lutz Zeidler

ALIA

Nicole Reitzenstein

*Territories* was developed at the Magic Theatre as part of the Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights, a project of the National Endowments for the Arts and Theatre Communications Group. It received additional developmental support from the Lark Play Development Center. *Territories* was commissioned by Trinity Repertory Theatre, developed at Al-Harah Theatre, and presented at the Bethlehem Peace Center with support from the Doris Duke Foundation in 2005.

## CHARACTERS

SALADIN (Salah Al-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub), a man

REGINALD, a man

ALIA, a woman

## SETTING

The stage is divided into separate spaces.

One side of the stage is a royal room in Damascus, where Saladin sits in the dark. The other side is an underground prison in Reginald's Kerak Castle, where Reginald also sits in the dark.

Alia will move between the two spaces.

The lights will go up on each man when they start to speak and go down to signal a shift in location and time.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 1187, a caravan was captured by Reginald of Châtillon, a middle-ranking French nobleman and ruler of the Crusader city of Kerak. A highborn Muslim woman was among the captives and was held as a prisoner by Reginald. She was believed to be the sister of the Islamic ruler Saladin. This story is inspired by those events.

The play moves back and forth in time—before, during and after the kidnapping—fluidly.

*For my amazingly loving mother,*

*Ghada Ghannam Shamieh*



## PROLOGUE

*Lights up on Saladin and Reginald on their sides of the stage.*

*Lights up on Alia in the center of the stage. Alia is wearing a traditional Muslim woman's clothing (not a burka but rather a headscarf, a handkerchief to cover her face except for her eyes, and a light robe).*

SALADIN: I will be praised for my chivalry in poems and epics for hundreds of years. It won't only be my people who speak of my valor as a soldier and a king.

REGINALD: I will be a footnote of a footnote. In that footnote of a footnote, I will be called a pirate.

*(Alia takes off her face covering and places it onstage.)*

ALIA: No one will think it worthwhile to write down my name.

SALADIN: The descendants of people who considered me their enemy will praise me too. Dante, Sir Walter Scott, the list goes on.

REGINALD: However, I prefer to think of myself as the Official Royal Plunderer of God's Greatest Gifts in His Holiest of Holy Lands.

ALIA *(As she takes off her headscarf)*: I will be known only as one man's sister and another man's captive.

SALADIN: I negotiated a peace treaty with Richard the Lionhearted.

REGINALD: The battle I lost is the reason Richard the Lionhearted had to come.

ALIA: And I am the reason why the battle was fought in the first place, though the chroniclers of our time refer to me as such, not one ever wrote down my name.

SALADIN: When I died soon after putting an end to the Crusades, my men opened my treasury. They found there wasn't enough money to bury me. I had given everything I had to the poor.

ALIA: Fool!

SALADIN: But, my people built me a glorious tomb in Damascus anyway.

ALIA: A tomb with no prayer written anywhere on the walls that mentions my name. A tomb which a French general named Henri Gouraud will enter in 1920.

REGINALD: I love it that he was French like me.

ALIA: Over eight hundred years after we are all dead, Brother, this French general will kick the entrance of your tomb that lies near the Grand Mosque. He will say:

REGINALD: "Awake, Saladin, we have returned. My presence here consecrates the victory of the Cross over the Crescent."

ALIA: And I will know that I was right to do what I did. I, who was just a nameless, faceless woman to everyone except for . . .

SALADIN: Me.

REGINALD: Me.



*The lights focus on Alia. She glances from one man to the other before speaking.*

ALIA: Why don't you ask what you want to ask?

SALADIN: Did he rape you?

REGINALD: Should I rape you?

ALIA: I'm not answering that question.

SALADIN: Why not?

REGINALD: Why not?

ALIA: It's a trap.

SALADIN: You're not going.

ALIA: Who are you to decide?

REGINALD: I'm disappointed that you even attempted the trip, actually. Don't you know who I am?

SALADIN: I am the sultan of the Muslim world. Your brother.

ALIA: I know who you are.

REGINALD: And you dared to make the trip anyway. That's naughty. My name, my castle right smack in your way, is not enough to strike fear in your heart. Or that of your monkey brother. Did you hear that? I called your brother a monkey.

ALIA: Which brother?

REGINALD: *The* brother. The only way you could be here is if he allowed it.

SALADIN: No caravan will attempt the trip without my consent. No one will take you if I forbid it.

ALIA: You said “if.”

SALADIN: I meant “when.”

ALIA: There is so much hope in the world, room for possibility, when a sentence begins with the word “if.” If I was the ruler, I’d make a decree! All sentences should begin with the word “if.”

REGINALD: If I rape you, I wonder how your brother would react? What would that Mohammedan vow to do to me if I laid a hand under your skirt?

ALIA: Am I supposed to fear you?

SALADIN: No.

REGINALD: Actually yes.

ALIA: My faith, my God, commands me to go to Mecca.

SALADIN: Since when are you so pious, Sister?

ALIA: Since when have you discouraged me from being religious, Brother?

SALADIN: Since it has become too dangerous. That devil incarnate Reginald has been catching caravans on the road to Mecca.

REGINALD: Of all the caravans I could have captured—

SALADIN: Sister, no one slips through anymore, everyone that passes Reginald's castle has been harassed at the very best and at the worst . . .

REGINALD: I caught yours.

ALIA: He won't catch mine.

*(The lights go down on Saladin.)*

REGINALD: I heard you called for the one in charge. Welcome to my cozy little home.

ALIA: You speak Arabic?

REGINALD: Would you prefer Kurdish? I could manage, but my Kurdish is rather rusty.

ALIA: Arabic is fine.

REGINALD: I'm so glad, my honorable guest. I wouldn't want you to be in the least bit uncomfortable.

ALIA: Leave me alone. Get out of here now.

REGINALD: Unless I'm mistaken, you are my prisoner and you stay, well, you know, alive only at my discretion, so I decide—

ALIA: There's a funny thing about power. You don't have to declare it if you possess it.

REGINALD: You don't have to, but declaring it is so much fun. Haven't you heard about what I do to caravans?

ALIA: I've heard.

REGINALD: But you came anyway. I'm curious. Why did you even attempt the trip?

ALIA: I'm curious. Where did you learn to speak Arabic?

REGINALD: I learned Arabic the same place you did. Prison.

ALIA: What do you mean by that?

REGINALD: You figure it out, woman.

ALIA: Where is my maid?

*(Reginald smiles.)*

Miriam is her name. It means Mary. She's a Christian, you know.

REGINALD: Arab Christians always side with you Muslims over us. I have a collection of ears I've cut off of their priests and nuns—

ALIA: I'd bet you do.

REGINALD: Then you'd win your bet. Would you like to see it?

ALIA: No.

REGINALD (*Yelling*): Add the ear of the Christian maid to my collection.

ALIA: Are you trying to terrorize me?

REGINALD: No, I'm trying to impress you. Something makes me feel like I will.

ALIA: I do not ask for many favors, sir. She is a defenseless Christian girl.

REGINALD: And, when my men are done with her, she will have a Christian burial. Save your pleading. You will need it for yourself.

ALIA: You won't see me plead for myself.

REGINALD: We'll see about that.

ALIA: I'm too expensive of a hostage to kill.

REGINALD: We'll see about that too.

ALIA: Do you have any idea who you're dealing with?

REGINALD: Yes, I do. Your shield says you are from the family of Izz Al-Din. But you aren't. I know Izz very well, and he says no one from his family is missing. I thought to myself—the only reason someone would pretend to be in his family is if they were from a greater one. I'm very clever, aren't I? But also your retinue told us everything. They betrayed you utterly and rather quickly, I might add.

ALIA: They didn't want to die.

REGINALD: You're wrong there. They wanted to die. They very desperately wanted to die and we wouldn't let them but never mind all that. So, tell me, how is good ole Salah Al-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub? Also known as—

ALIA: Arrange a ransom for my return.

REGINALD: Saladin. I haven't yet met the sultan—the famous Kurdish cur—but I'm sure I'll get the chance. What's your name?

ALIA: My name is five thousand dinars in your treasury if you turn me over. That's all you need to know about my name.

REGINALD: I was told that you were shaking last night. Had a sort of fit. What's wrong? Are you afraid of little old me?

ALIA: Sir, if you scared me, do you think I would have even attempted the trip? This shaking is a condition I have.

REGINALD: That's unfortunate. To not be able to control how you move—

ALIA: It's better than not being able to control how you think.

REGINALD: Or what you want. (*Pause*) Is it true that your brother has a Jewish doctor? A Jew playing doctor to a sultan? Who would believe it?

ALIA: I'm not answering your questions. But I will say our doctors aren't ignorant charlatans using leeches—

REGINALD: Well, apparently your esteemed doctors, Jewish or not, have not helped you very much, have they?

ALIA: No, they cannot cure me but I shudder to think how I would have lived had I been born in Europe.

REGINALD: Well, you just plain shudder.

ALIA: Excuse me?

REGINALD: You shudder, get it? As in you shake?

ALIA: I often tell my brother—and by the way he is my brother—I tell him that he's too lenient on you Crusaders. You are the ones who attacked us in our own land and slaughter our people.

REGINALD: Well, you know. Everyone has got a different way of getting through the day.

ALIA: Well, your day will soon be over. We will be victorious over you.

REGINALD: How do you know?

ALIA: We are defending ourselves and, when you are defending yourself, you have one advantage in battle that can make up for almost any other.

REGINALD: What's that?

ALIA: We have no choice but to fight.

REGINALD: And when, even with that advantage your forces still don't add up to much, you have no choice but to die. I wish I could see your brother's face when he finds out you're here. I heard he was pretty upset when I attacked your holiest city.

*(The lights go up on Saladin.)*

ALIA: Yes, Brother?

SALADIN: A fleet of Crusaders is trying to invade Mecca.

ALIA: What? Who would dare lead such a fleet?

SALADIN: A French knight. A devil named Reginald of Châtillon. He says he won't respect the truce I signed with Raymond and the other Crusaders. This Reginald is boasting that he'll steal the Prophet's body and take it back to his castle.

REGINALD: I'm going to get those bones and drag them back here.



SALADIN: With the size of his army, he'd have to be mad to attempt such a thing. He's mad, he's mad! And I'm going mad that he would have the . . . the . . .

ALIA: The balls? Well, fortunately it takes more than balls to win wars, Brother. Don't you always tell me that, if there was no infighting amongst us, we'd have these pale monkeys swimming back to their primitive continent in a matter of months?

SALADIN: Sister, I don't have time to discuss—

ALIA: Let's say that this Reginald gets to Mecca and manages to do a little damage to our shrines. (*Saladin makes a move to speak*) I know it would be an outrage, but we'd all be outraged together. Traitors like Izz Al-Din wouldn't dare make separate truces with the Crusaders if they wreak havoc on our holy sites.

SALADIN: Do you want me to be forever known as the ruler who lost Mecca?

REGINALD: Those Mohammedans will have to pay to see those bones, just like they make Christian pilgrims pay to visit Jerusalem. Doesn't that sound nice?

ALIA: No.

SALADIN: I can't take the chance that Reginald will get to Mecca before I get to him. I'm giving the order for Adil's forces in Cairo to go ahead of us and cut Reginald off.

ALIA: You're sending our brother, Adil, alone?

SALADIN: No, with his army.

ALIA: I mean, without you. Isn't that dangerous?

SALADIN: Adil's forces are twice the size of this Reginald's.

ALIA: But you and I both know the Crusaders have better weapons.

SALADIN: But we have more faith.

ALIA: I'd rather have the weapons. Maybe our brother should stay in Cairo. The other Crusaders could use this as an opportunity to sack the city.

SALADIN: We're talking about Mecca.

*(Lights down on Saladin and Alia.)*

REGINALD: Yes, get me their dirty Prophet's bones. And that stone thing they like so much. Yeah, I want that too.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin and Alia.)*

SALADIN: Sister, we won this time.

ALIA: I've heard.

SALADIN: What have you heard?

ALIA: That we didn't manage to cut off the head of the snake.

SALADIN: Mecca is safe.

ALIA: And Reginald is safely back in his city walls.

SALADIN: I was fiercer than I had ever been in this battle. I went crazy. Normally I ransom the Crusaders we catch or set them free, but this time I had every soldier we caught slaughtered.

ALIA: It's war, Brother.

SALADIN: Adil . . .

ALIA: What? *(Pause)* Tell me. What happened?

SALADIN: Adil's battalion was cornered. Reginald's men didn't believe he was my brother, that they could get a ransom for him.

ALIA: He's dead.

*(Lights down on Saladin. Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: They say you refuse to eat. This is unacceptable. No prisoner who can fetch a handsome ransom dies on my watch. Why won't you eat? You are given food from my own kitchen. It's Arabic food.

ALIA: When I see your people eating our food and visiting our towns and pretending we both have forgotten our dead just because a truce is called, it makes me want to vomit.

REGINALD: You know, I believe that is the first time I have ever seen you angry. Even more angry than you were last night when you caught me peeking at you. An eye always

zooms in on another eye and knows what it sees, because what it sees is what it is. *(Pause)* Well? Aren't you going to speak?

ALIA: No.

REGINALD: Ah, I got you to speak. You said "no" when I asked if you'd speak, but by saying "no" you were actually speaking.

ALIA: Let me tell you one thing, sir. I do what I want. Do you understand me? You don't fool or trap me into anything. In good time, you will see. I do what I want.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin.)*

SALADIN: You asked for me, Sister.

ALIA: Yes. You know it's been a year since *(Pause)* Mecca was almost sieged.

SALADIN: I know what day it is, Sister.

ALIA: I want to make my pilgrimage to Mecca.

SALADIN: You know the road is too dangerous.

ALIA: You know I want you to make it safe. Rid us of these Crusaders, Brother.

SALADIN: When our forces are ready, I will.

ALIA: Your advisors keep telling you that our forces are ready now. *(Pause)* It is my duty to go. Since you are the only brother I have left, I must get your permission.

SALADIN: What is wrong with you? You've heard the stories of what Reginald does to caravans and the captives he keeps in his underground chamber. It's unsafe.

ALIA: How much control is exerted over women in the name of safety?!

SALADIN: How much of it is necessary to keep them safe?

ALIA: You let other caravans go. You let Adil's only son go.

SALADIN: That's different. He's a soldier.

ALIA: If Reginald captures him, he is at as much risk as I would be.

SALADIN: Men are never at as much risk as women are. Look, Sister, I didn't make the world this way. I have never denied you education or freedom, but I cannot let you go. If he catches you, he could do things to you that he can't do to a man.

ALIA: Men can be raped. Men are often raped. I believe visiting Mecca may cure me of my disease, Brother. I have to go.

SALADIN: You're lying. You don't believe that. You've never been devout.

ALIA: No. I don't believe in a God that made me a cripple. I don't believe in a God that takes people I love.

SALADIN: Sister!

ALIA: You don't believe in God either. No one does!

*(Saladin raises his hand to slap her, but he stops himself.)*

I still know how to get you angry, Brother. I will use it against you.

SALADIN: I'm sorry. I shouldn't hit you. Your mind is sick. It must be the new medicine.

ALIA: I haven't been taking it, Brother. The medicine makes it so I can't move. When I can't move, it makes it hard to think about anything but how much I want to be able to move. I will shake and shiver till I shrivel and die, but I will die thinking and I will die saying—none of you believe in God. None of you follow every law—

SALADIN: Because we are weak. Just like a drunkard who wants to stay alive might still drink himself to death, a devout man who knows the right way cannot always choose it. Sister, you know not to talk this way in my presence.

ALIA: And what if I do, O Great Sultan?

SALADIN: That's enough! What do you have up your sleeve? Why this sudden talk about going to Mecca?

ALIA: Dear Brother and Great Sultan, you know one of the things that are required of us by our faith—

SALADIN: For men.

ALIA: And women of able means and that we are, Brother, despite your inability to take a penny for yourself or a jewel for your sister's ears from our treasury, I'm not complaining!

SALADIN: If all that's not complaining, God help us if you were to start. You don't need to go, you are not devout.

ALIA: Maybe being in Mecca will change that. You cannot have on your conscience that you kept a sick woman from making her pilgrimage. I don't have infinite time either, Brother. You remember that Mother said her great aunt with my condition did not live long past thirty—

SALADIN: Don't speak like that.

ALIA: This Reginald doesn't have to conquer Mecca to destroy us. All he has to do is make it so we're too afraid to get to Mecca.

SALADIN: Not for long. Our next generation will live free—

ALIA: I don't live in the next generation. I live in this one.

SALADIN: Leave well enough alone for now. Things have been peaceful for a while.

ALIA: It's been a year, Brother.

SALADIN: I know what day it is!

ALIA: I can find a way to make the journey without your help.

SALADIN: Why are you doing this to me? I'm working on a treaty with Raymond and soon enough—

ALIA: Treaties which Reginald never respects.

SALADIN: Reginald is not forcing me to go to war before I can win it. And neither are you. I'm going to look like a fool if I let my own sister be captured.

ALIA: Everything is about how you look.

SALADIN: Do you want us to go back to mindlessly massacring one another? Ordinary people on both sides being slaughtered as if they were soldiers, chaos. With no rules of warfare being respected, random destruction—

ALIA: The best of our people are slaughtered while you sit here, eat, sleep with your wife and discuss with me the rules of warfare. I say there are no rules. When I think of all the prisoners you set free—the able-bodied, downright hearty European soldiers who you feed so well—

SALADIN: If we starve all the prisoners of war we capture, they'll starve ours. Do you see the importance of establishing standards of behavior?

ALIA: Let them starve our soldiers. It will make our men fight harder to know that if they are caught there is no hope—



SALADIN: Now you're speaking about something you know nothing about. Our men could not fight harder. It is not humanly possible.

ALIA: Feed the invading army if you must! But don't feed them quite so well. So they're extra strong when they go right back to the front lines, killing Muslims like our dear sweet brother, Adil—

SALADIN: Don't bring him up.

ALIA: I just—

SALADIN: I said, don't bring him up.

ALIA: Fine, O Great Sultan. But when I think of the Crusaders—

*(Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: My prisoners die when I want them to die.

ALIA: When I think of the invaders, the enemies you let live, it makes me want to tear my eyes out and yours too. Yours especially.

REGINALD: And you will live, whether you want to or not.

SALADIN: You aren't going.

*(Alia slips to the ground and begins to have a seizure.)*

SALADIN: Woman?

REGINALD: Sister?

*(The lights shift and focus more strongly on Alia. She stops shaking. Saladin and Reginald begin to shake in their places in a dance-like, rhythmic fashion.)*

ALIA: When the seizures come, I think this time it won't end. I won't stop shaking till I stop breathing. When I realize it won't matter that I will be gone, even to me, everything shifts. It is not me shaking. It is the world that is moving and I'm the only one standing still.

*(Lights down on Saladin. Lights up on Reginald.*

*Alia wipes her mouth.)*

REGINALD: This is happening to you because you aren't eating. Are you forcing me to have my guards force food down your throat?

ALIA: That is not physically possible.

REGINALD: There was a patriarch of an Eastern Orthodox church. He was an Arab Christian, like that girl you brought, Miriam, was.

ALIA: Was?

REGINALD: Was. The patriarch was a stubborn old man. He denied me something. I had him whipped. I had his open wounds covered with honey and left him outside for the insects to gnaw on him as if he were a corpse who didn't have

the luxury of being dead. From then on, he thanked me for the opportunity to obey me. As I bet you will one day.

ALIA: There was a goblin who met a ghoul on a road. The goblin said, "Hello, ghoul." The ghoul took out a card that said, "I am deaf. I can't hear you." The goblin took out a card that said, "I'm illiterate." With this level of understanding, they became friends. Every day, they walked a mile or two to a coffeehouse in the hope of drinking *(Pause)* tea.

REGINALD: Does this story have a point?

ALIA: None. Except to show you that your stories make no sense to me and mine will make no sense to you, so keep your little stories to yourself. How could you kill her?

REGINALD: Easy. Just a snap of the neck. Want a memento?

*(Reginald pulls out a human ear and hands it to Alia.)*

It's nice to have a servant within hearing range. She seemed like the type to always have her ear peeled for you.

*(Alia throws the ear at his face.)*

Have you ever been married?

*(Alia does not respond.)*

Never mind. Don't answer that. Guards, make her swallow more food than she can spit up.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin.)*

*Alia wipes her mouth.)*

SALADIN: Are you all right?

ALIA: I'm always all right.

SALADIN: Thank God. Sister, you have to take your medicine.

ALIA: Make me.

SALADIN: You should have gotten married.

ALIA: Why? A husband to keep me down? To feed me my medicine?

SALADIN: A husband for you to love. Children to make you value your life more so you wouldn't be so willing to throw it away.

ALIA: You know it's not likely I could have had—

SALADIN: Of course you could. And as for keeping you down, ha! I'd like to see any man try.

ALIA: You're doing a pretty good job of it yourself.

SALADIN: Because I love you. Because I want to keep you safe. Since Adil died, I haven't been able to live without your guidance.

ALIA: I didn't want anyone you would have to force into marrying me!

SALADIN: No, of course not. I was just—

ALIA: I didn't want anyone that you would bribe into marrying me. I hated him and I hated you for that.

SALADIN: You're acting like a child. I've apologized about that incident a million times.

*(Alia begins to have a seizure. Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: Not again!

*(Reginald and Saladin begin to do their rhythmic dance.)*

ALIA: Seizures. That's what it is. A seizure of your spirit. It tries to wrench itself from the body it was melded to on the day you were born. Each time you're ill, your spirit tugs. You live through it, your body wins. This time.

*(Reginald breaks free of the dance.)*

REGINALD: I've had enough of this.

*(He walks over to the middle of the stage and grabs hold of Alia, pressing his fingers on the pressure points of her arms and neck. Lights down on Saladin.)*

ALIA: That feels . . . how did you do that?

REGINALD: Pressed on your pressure points.

ALIA: How do you know where they are?

REGINALD: When I catch Mohammedans, I drive steel splinters—thin enough so they don't bleed to death right away—into those points. I know where the points are by the screams.

ALIA: You do not!

REGINALD: How else would I know?

*(Alia pulls away.)*

ALIA: Don't ever touch me again.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin.)*

*Alia wipes her mouth.)*

SALADIN: I didn't want to hurt you by touching you. Sister, you will take the medicine.

ALIA: I . . . um. I'm sorry you had to see me like that, Brother. I'm sorry your sister is such a freak.

SALADIN: Don't say that. Don't call yourself that.

ALIA: Why don't you let me call myself what everyone else does? Tell me the worst thing people say about me so it will lose its power. Nothing they call me can hurt me then.

SALADIN: Everyone respects you. No one calls you bad names.

ALIA: Never mind, Brother. You'll never understand. By the way, I wouldn't have married that asshole for a million dinars.

SALADIN: I know. I'm sorry.

ALIA: It's not your fault. My handicap—

SALADIN: Your condition.

ALIA: I sneak out dressed like a man and I hear men talk. They laugh about me and about what it would be like to have sex with me—

SALADIN: Who laughs at you?

ALIA: Why should I tell you?

SALADIN: You're my sister and anyone who marries you would be privileged to be your husband.

ALIA: Would you marry someone like me?

*(Pause.)*

SALADIN: Of course I would.

ALIA: When it takes a man too long to answer, the answer is never the truth.

SALADIN: I would marry a girl like you in a second. Look who I married! My predecessor's widow. She's fifteen years

older than I am. I married her to secure my throne, I married her for power. Everyone does it.

ALIA: And yet you grew to love her. How?

SALADIN: It's hard to explain, Sister. I don't know. I just did.

ALIA: One day you'll give me a real answer to that question. By the way, how is the old bitch?

SALADIN: Don't call my wife that.

ALIA: I don't know why you like the dumb whore so much. Don't get me wrong, you had to marry her, especially since you wanted to usurp the throne from that little brat of hers. But remember, if you died tomorrow in battle, she would marry the next king in a heartbeat. And prefer his son to yours.

SALADIN: Perhaps.

ALIA: Perhaps? Of course she would. She's done it before. I'm not saying don't trust your wife.

SALADIN: Actually, Sister, that is exactly what you are saying.

ALIA: No. I'm saying know what you are dealing with and stop thinking everyone is as noble and honest and straightforward as you are.

SALADIN: I'll keep that in mind.



ALIA: And find another wife. Get yourself more sons.

SALADIN: I don't know why you hate her so much.

ALIA: She hates me more. You know she's going to be so excited when she finds out I'm making the journey.

SALADIN: You are not going.

ALIA: She would help me find a guide to lead me to Mecca and think to herself, Finally I got rid of his sister.

SALADIN: Ha! You've admitted that it's dangerous.

ALIA: Oh. Yes, I've admitted it. Doesn't mean I'm not going. Tell me again about Reginald's first wife Constance.

SALADIN: I don't know much about that devil. I heard he was a mere officer in Constance's army, a penniless younger son of a minor royal in France.

*(Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: Constance was . . . how shall I put it . . . she was . . .

SALADIN: She was a powerful widow who vowed never to marry again.

REGINALD: A real bitch.

*(Lights down on Saladin.)*

ALIA: Marriage for position or riches alone never turns out well.

REGINALD: It does if the bitch dies. Then, you've got money and a position and, voila! No bitch.

ALIA: I bet you loved her. I bet it hurt you when she died.

REGINALD: Yes, it ate me up inside.

ALIA: So what if she had wealth that you enjoyed? She was still your wife. She still had your children.

REGINALD: I tell you, I hated her.

ALIA: You must have been attracted at least to the power that a position imbues a person with. I mean, she was an object you desired, that you had to earn. Doesn't that make you feel something for a person?

REGINALD: No. I killed her.

ALIA: You lie! She died while you were languishing for fifteen years in a Turkish jail.

REGINALD: True. But I eventually would have killed her. I wanted to kill her. Doesn't that count for something?

ALIA: It counts for a lot.

REGINALD: How do you know so much about my life?

ALIA: The tales of fools travel far. Did you tell her you loved her?

REGINALD: All the time.

ALIA: How did you pretend to love her? I mean, in a way that made her believe it. She must have been on her guard, knowing men wanted her for her wealth and position. Tell me.

*(The whole stage lights up so all three characters are visible. A medley of Eastern and Western music plays. Alia moves back and forth between the two spaces, dancing with each man. The men stay on their side of the space and pass Alia to one another.)*

SALADIN: These are the things I will never tell you about men and how they love. These are the things a brother and a sister do not share. These are the answers you imagine I wouldn't give you, even if you were here with me instead of lost.

REGINALD: All you have to do is learn how to coo. Do it once—the first time you meet her and never again.

ALIA: Coo?

SALADIN: It involves recognizing that we're all human beings and when you see that in someone, everyone, you can't help but love.

REGINALD: You see, we're animals. That's why we love music.

SALADIN: The main elements of every love story are always the same. So, the expression of that love always involves me getting inside you or you getting inside me.

REGINALD: A song is the sound we make when we want to mate.

SALADIN: It is the first thing human language was created for and the most important thing it has been used for since. When we pay troubadours to sing us a melody, our minds fool our bodies into believing someone is really singing that song for us.

REGINALD: That's why we cringe at the sound of someone singing badly.

SALADIN: It reminds us of how awkward a love call can be, how humiliating our needs are.

ALIA: So you sang songs to Constance? And the new one you're married to now? Stephanie?

REGINALD: No, I can't sing worth a shit. But, that's not important since we're a little more evolved. We coo differently now.

SALADIN: There is a rhythm of words, a poetry in promises that mimic the music of a mating call.

ALIA: Really?

REGINALD: Really. You don't have to know how to sing, if you know how to . . .

SALADIN: . . . praise her in front of others . . .

REGINALD: . . . and yet you ignore her when you are alone.

SALADIN: When she is in despair, comfort her with all your heart and soul and flesh and every ounce of self and spirit that makes you a man.

REGINALD: But only when she is in utter, utter despair. Make her feel that she must reach her lowest point before you will give her that kind of focus, that level of attention again.

SALADIN: Be truthful about everything. That is how you sustain a bond forever.

REGINALD: Love doesn't require honesty. She could know that you only want her for her power or her position or her *(Pause)* passionate heart, but she won't care. She's too busy thanking God for whatever she possesses that keeps you a half a second longer in her arms. So, there it is. Any more questions?

SALADIN: Only in your imagination will I describe what kind of care I put into loving a lover, because I know no one will put that kind of care into you. This is the thing I'll never say out loud—you will never be loved.

*(The music ends. Lights down on Saladin. Reginald and Alia face one another.)*

ALIA: I want you to stop watching me at night.

REGINALD: I don't do that anymore.

ALIA: You want to come here and speak with me, fine. But no spying on me between the cracks in the walls.

REGINALD: You forget that you are my prisoner and not the other way around. Besides, I said I don't watch you anymore.

ALIA: You watch me all the time and I want you to stop.

REGINALD: Maybe I will, maybe I won't. I think you like me to watch you undress.

ALIA: Please.

REGINALD: I think you wouldn't have come here if you didn't want to meet me. I think you're fascinated with my wives and my life and my story. I think you knew you were going to be caught. So are you a virgin? *(Pause)* Answer me. There are ways I can find out with or without your consent.

ALIA: I'm sure you know all the ways. You were in prison.

REGINALD: You know what the most contested territory in all of the Middle East is? It's a little tight sacred space right here in this room. Your brother has offered to pay more ransom for you than has ever been offered for anyone, but I'm not so sure I want to give you up just yet.

ALIA: You don't have a choice. Your king will make you.

REGINALD: I made the king the king.

ALIA: What?

REGINALD: Guy knows not to trouble me about my affairs.

ALIA: Guy? Raymond didn't take over from the leper king?

REGINALD: No, I put Guy of Lusignan on the throne.

ALIA: But Raymond was the regent.

REGINALD: Yes, he was. Got some knights to swear allegiance to Guy while Raymond was away.

ALIA: But Guy's a total fool, certainly not fit to be king.

REGINALD: Exactly. And I control him and that makes it so I can continue to control you.

ALIA: I can't believe you got away with that.

REGINALD: Neither can I. *(Pause)* Don't make me call the guards in here.

ALIA: To do what?

REGINALD: To watch us. Because they'll get jealous when they see how much fun I'll have while having you. And, the minute I turn my back, they will take advantage of you. Isn't it funny that the most brutal thing you can do to a woman leaves no mark? And when you try to tell me what the guards have done to you in the hours I'm away, I won't believe you.

ALIA: You'll believe me.

REGINALD: You're right. I absolutely will. But then I'll still kill the guards, each in a way more gruesome than the last, and you'll scream. Please, please, please stop. (*He takes a step toward her*) You'll beg for mercy for them.

ALIA (*She takes a step back*): But you won't listen because you have no mercy.

REGINALD: You know that better than anyone else because neither do you.

ALIA: Say you're right. Say I hear their screams and tell you to stop, you will. You must.

REGINALD: Not a chance.

ALIA: Not even if they deny it? Scream, "I never touched her!"

REGINALD: I'd say, "But you wanted to." They'd answer, "She shakes. She's a cripple. We prefer the maid you gave us. Her maid is beautiful and supple and tall."

ALIA: Is?

REGINALD: Is. Minus an ear. And a hymen. If my guards will say unflattering things about you, I will roar, "How dare you insult the woman I love."

ALIA: Love? They would laugh at you in the midst of their torture.



REGINALD: Then, I would use their teeth to poke out the jelly of their eyes. I cannot stand being laughed at.

ALIA: So don't tell them.

REGINALD: Tell them what?

ALIA: That you, you know, love me. They wouldn't believe it. They'd laugh. I'd laugh. Everyone would laugh.

REGINALD: I have one question for you.

ALIA: Yes?

REGINALD: Am I going to touch you or are you going to touch me first?

ALIA: You're going to touch me.

REGINALD: You're right.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin. Alia continues to face Reginald as she speaks with Saladin.)*

SALADIN: Sister, Sister. Thank God you're home. I have prayed every day, every hour, that you would come back to me. Did he starve you? How is your condition? Did it worsen? Should I call the doctor?

ALIA: Why don't you ask me what you want to ask me?

SALADIN: Did anyone—did he . . .

*(Pause.)*

I should call the doctor.

ALIA: No.

SALADIN: You need to be checked.

ALIA: Reginald threatened to do that to me.

SALADIN: What? What did that devil do? Did he . . . If he . . .  
I'm calling the doctor. You may have contracted diseases.

ALIA: I was born diseased. Our God chose it that way.

*(Lights down on Saladin. Lights up on Reginald. He steps over to Alia and embraces her.)*

I must convert you to my religion.

REGINALD: Really? So your family will like me more?

ALIA: So we'll have a proper Islamic wedding. So you will understand a message of peace.

REGINALD: As long as everyone is a Muslim, everything will be peaceful.

ALIA: Not everyone has to be a Muslim. Just you. And you need to know only one word.

REGINALD: What's that?

ALIA: Submit.

REGINALD: Not in my vocabulary. I think you should convert to Christianity.

ALIA: Really?

REGINALD: Yes.

ALIA: I bet I know more about Christianity than you do.

REGINALD: Hardly.

ALIA: All Jewish and Christian prophets are our prophets too. You would know that if you knew a thing about our religion.

REGINALD: I know your religion and I know your language, you crazy freak.

ALIA: Call me that again.

REGINALD: Freak. Cripple. Loser.

ALIA: Don't go overboard.

REGINALD: Never, my sweet little gimp. Do I have to wring your scrawny neck to get you to convert?

ALIA: Yes, probably.

REGINALD: First, I'll baptize you. *(He licks her leg)*

ALIA: Ugh. Don't.

REGINALD: Then, I will preach to you. Do you know the Beatitudes?

ALIA: What's that?

REGINALD: Jesus on the Mount? Forty days in the desert? Ah, Muslims don't know as much about Christianity as they think they do. Well here goes:

Blessed are the blessed,

Because being blessed is so much damn fun.

Blessed are the sex fiends,

They know what we were put on this earth to do.

Blessed are those who never play by the rules,

They understand life is no game.

Blessed are the women,

Because they can be both ravishing and ravished at the same time.

There, you're a Christian.

ALIA: Hardly.

REGINALD: Come outside with me.

ALIA: No.

REGINALD: Why not?

ALIA: I'm afraid of your wife.

REGINALD: You're lying.

ALIA: You're right.

REGINALD: Don't you miss the sun?

ALIA: I belong in your prison. This is the only place for me in this city you've built. Here I know what I am, your prisoner of war. Your trophy. Don't take me out there. Don't trust me out there. All your dreams are my nightmares. If you want me, you will come to the place where I know how to feel about you.

REGINALD: You lie. Woman, you know how to feel about me. Inside or outside these walls.

ALIA: I wouldn't be so sure. I'm not a lonely widow, Reginald. I have no illusions about you or me and what we do and what we are.

*(Lights up on Saladin. Lights stay up on Reginald and Alia.)*

SALADIN: Go to Raymond, the former regent. Tell him if I do not get my sister back—

REGINALD: Your brother has offered a bigger ransom than before. It's a lot of money.

ALIA: You're not going to take it, are you?

REGINALD: No. You make yourself worth every penny I'd get. But, I am in debt.

ALIA: It takes a lot of money to invade and plunder a land that isn't yours.

REGINALD: You're right.

ALIA: You never tell me that I'm right. What's going on?

REGINALD: Well, it's just that . . . I have come under pressure from Raymond. He has a lot of influence over the other knights.

ALIA: Raymond is a wise man to not want to fight with my brother.

REGINALD: Yes, he's a wise man. Bastard.

SALADIN: If I do not get my sister back safely . . .

ALIA: But, Raymond has no balls. You never listen to him, do you?

REGINALD: No, of course not. It's just that the Mohammedan, I mean your brother, is threatening to storm our castles if you are not sent back to him.

SALADIN: If I do not get my sister safely and immediately . . .

REGINALD: The knights are putting pressure on me to give you up. They're scared.

ALIA: I understand. If you do not let me go—

SALADIN AND ALIA: Every single European invader on this land is in danger.

*(Lights down on Saladin.)*

ALIA: And you don't give a damn, right?

REGINALD: Alia, I don't.

ALIA: Stop using my name.

REGINALD: Why?

ALIA: You've never done it before. We don't call one another by our names.

REGINALD: I was not born into royalty.

ALIA: Neither was I. My brother seized his power.

REGINALD: My father was a minor lord and I was the second son. All my father's money and the land he had left had to go to my elder brother.

ALIA: I don't want to hear this.

REGINALD: You have to. I came to the Holy Land because here the sons of minor lords have the chance to become major players. All you have to do is risk your life in order to have a life worth leading.

ALIA: Stop it!

REGINALD: I married a woman I couldn't stand to look at. Twice. Yes, Alia. I wasn't born into power, I seized it.

ALIA: Reginald, I'm not leaving.

REGINALD: I don't want you to. But, if the other knights storm my castle to get you, I'll end up in a prison. Probably my own.

ALIA: You'll end up here?

REGINALD: Right. And they'll send you back. Because Raymond and those stupid cowards are afraid of your brother.

ALIA: Is it true Raymond converted to Islam?

REGINALD: No, that's just a rumor.

ALIA: How do you know?

REGINALD: I started it.

*(They laugh together. Alia suddenly stops laughing and looks at Reginald.)*

ALIA: You cannot send me away.

REGINALD: Alia, only someone like you knows what my power means to me.



ALIA: How weak are you if you can't keep a woman you want? Convince the knights not to be afraid of my brother. I'm telling you, Reginald. My brother is afraid of you. Don't you think if he had the power to throw you out he would have a long time ago?

REGINALD: It's true. But it's not your brother I'm worried about. I'm worried about what happens before we fight your brother. My own people are not on my side.

ALIA: Everyone knows I am diseased. Say I died.

REGINALD: But what about a body?

ALIA: What has gone wrong with you? Are you telling me that you don't know how to fake a death of a woman hardly anyone but you has seen? You can't send me back there.

REGINALD: I don't want to, Alia.

ALIA: Look at us. We're being sentimental.

*(Lights up on Saladin.)*

SALADIN: I don't make idle threats. If she is not brought back to me, *I* will be sorry. Because I will have to go through the trouble of making you sorry and I will.

*(Lights down on Saladin.)*

REGINALD: Come on now, Alia. This is the best thing. Don't you want to go back? Help your brother defeat me and the infidels?

ALIA: I don't have the heart for it. Especially since I know he can't do it. We don't have the weapons, we don't have the strength. The Crusaders will eventually rule over us forever.

REGINALD: Why are you telling me this?

ALIA: I only respect strength and you have more of it than my brother. And still you disappoint me. I always promised myself I'd never fall in love with a man who isn't a man.

*(Lights up on Saladin.)*

SALADIN: Raymond, I won't hear that you can't control him. Don't make me angry. Make him return my sister.

*(Lights down on Saladin.)*

REGINALD: No, I'm not a man. I am a beast and no one understands that better than you.

ALIA: I forbid you to let me go.

REGINALD: Everyone is forbidding me everything. It's quite annoying actually.

ALIA: My brother despises me because I am not whole. He hates it that I shake and show everyone our family is not perfect, blessed by God. Many of our people think my condition is a sign that I am possessed. I can't help but feel that he thinks I am too. He is humiliated by me.

REGINALD: Are you proposing we do something desperate like run off so we can be together?

*(Pause.)*

ALIA: No.

REGINALD: I didn't think so.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin.)*

ALIA: I won't tell you a thing, Brother. I am ashamed. Can't you understand?

SALADIN: I understand.

ALIA: You don't. Men have no idea what it's like to be a woman in the world.

SALADIN: I meant only that I understand if you don't want to tell me, but trust me that it is right for a doctor to—

ALIA: Trust? When I was a girl, our mother took me aside and said, "Alia, you are almost a woman now. Don't trust anyone." I looked at her, confused. Did she mean what she said? Not my father? Not my brothers? Not anyone? She answered questions I could not ask by repeating, "Anyone." So, no, I don't trust you, Brother. Your mother told me not to.

SALADIN: You have to be checked in case . . . in case you have a disease that our doctors can cure.

ALIA: No.

SALADIN: Call Benjamin, the doctor.

ALIA: No!

SALADIN: And bring some guards in here. *(To Alia)* Don't make me order them to hold you down.

ALIA: No!

*(Lights up on Reginald. Lights down on Saladin.)*

I'm in your power. I have always been in your power and I will not berate you for making me leave. All I'm asking is that you prove that I didn't fall in love with a coward.

REGINALD: How should I do that?

ALIA: Attack my brother the first chance you get. Attack him and come get me.

REGINALD: Oh, that's all? No problem. I'll fit that into my plans.

ALIA: I'm serious.

REGINALD: I'm a better lover than I thought.

ALIA: Reginald?

REGINALD: Yes?

ALIA: I came here a crippled virgin.

REGINALD: So?

ALIA: Don't flatter yourself.

*(Lights down on Reginald. Lights up on Saladin.)*

So the doctor has told you what you wanted to know? But you don't know everything. If it had just been that devil who violated me, that would have been one thing. But he brought in hundreds of men—

SALADIN: Please. I can't hear this.

ALIA: You asked. You will listen. I could feel the flesh on the walls of my inner parts start to chafe and then begin to be worn down.

SALADIN: Oh, Sister.

*(He reaches out to her, but she cringes and avoids his embrace.)*

ALIA: Please, I don't want to be near men. You understand, don't you?

SALADIN: Yes, of course.

ALIA: Don't worry, Brother. You will be avenged upon him.

SALADIN: Yes. Why did you insist upon going, Sister?

ALIA: I was wrong to do it, Brother. When he humiliated me over and over again, I understood how wrong it was to go against your wishes. I will never do it again.

SALADIN: It was my fault. I shouldn't have let you go. I was so afraid that I'd have the sin on my head of not allowing you to go to Mecca.

ALIA: It is important to be pious. While I suffered there, I truly found God for the first time. He was there to help me when you couldn't.

SALADIN: It is important to be pious, but not at the expense of common sense.

ALIA: Yes. You should ban going to Mecca altogether. For men and women.

SALADIN: How can I tell my people that I can't protect them on their way to their holy sites?

ALIA: You forbade me. Aren't you as concerned with your people as much as your own sister?

SALADIN: I can't believe that devil incarnate did this to you.

ALIA: There is a weak spot in the fortress guarding his castle near the southern gate. We could attack.

*(Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: My men are going to lead you out through the southern gate where Raymond will meet you and take you back to your brother. Today.

ALIA: So it is over.

REGINALD: My hands are tied, Alia.

ALIA: We bind ourselves to our dreams, we tie our own knots. When we have to choose one dream over the other, we say “our hands are tied.” Sir, I will go. From this moment on, we are enemies again.

*(Alia makes a motion to leave.)*

REGINALD: Wait. You can’t just walk out like that.

ALIA: You are sending me away.

REGINALD: Not without a kiss good-bye. *(Pause)* We have a few hours. Come on, Alia. It’s too late in our love affair for you to make me rape you now.

ALIA: Will you come to get me? Swear you will.

REGINALD: You know my word doesn’t mean a thing. But, there may be a way to make this happen. Are you sure—if I convince the other knights to attack—that your brother’s forces can’t withstand us?

ALIA: I’m sure.

REGINALD: You know what will happen to your brother if we succeed.

ALIA: I know.

*(Lights down on Reginald.)*

SALADIN: It's true we have enough manpower to attack the Crusaders now, Sister. But in two to three years' time—

ALIA: He did not take two to three years to do what he did to me.

SALADIN: In this life or the next, God will avenge us.

ALIA: I don't want to wait for God, Brother.

SALADIN: You may not have to. Our spies say that Reginald intends to attack and the foolish king Reginald installed may command Raymond and the other knights to fight with him.

ALIA: So attack first. Surprise him.

SALADIN: I will not be the one to break the truce.

ALIA: He broke it by capturing me, Brother!

SALADIN: I told you not to go. You see where disobeying me got you. Stay out of my affairs.

*(Lights up on Reginald.)*

REGINALD: I will attack at dawn.

SALADIN: I'm forced to fight before I am ready but I am prepared to win.

REGINALD: I cannot lose. I will not lose.

*(All three characters address the audience.)*



ALIA: Go!

REGINALD: I can feel the battle cry echoing in every chamber of my heart. Beat that drum louder. I am never alive like I am right now.

SALADIN: Surround and storm Raymond's castle first. Raymond helped save my sister. Anyone who harms his family will answer with his life.

ALIA: Go!

REGINALD: No, we aren't using half our men to protect the road to the wells at Tiberias! We've got enough water for days. Don't argue with me, lackey! Coward! You don't want to drive forward because you're afraid to lose your pretty blond head. Where are you going?

SALADIN: The blond one squares off with me and I slide out my sword. I know him! He was at Raymond's side when we signed the truce. He slams down the armor that covers his face and rushes towards me.

ALIA: Go!

REGINALD: Screaming on every side. Every turn, death. Don't look it in the face. Don't turn your head, don't ask is that an arm? A leg? Keep focused. I see where the servant who questioned my battle plan is heading and oh God!

SALADIN: My sword goes into the vent for his eyes. I can't get the blade in far enough. His weight is on me. We dance our dance. I lay him down. He's still breathing.

REGINALD: Everyone knows I am responsible for calling a brave man a coward and watching him die. We're being cornered. Let's go back through Tiberias.

ALIA: Go!

SALADIN: I give the death blow. His blood—warm liquid—sprurts on my face. I get an idea! I will lead half of my men through Tiberias and cut them off so that they won't be able to get to the—

REGINALD: They've captured Raymond's castle with his family inside. When others console him, he snaps back "that he would trust Saladin with his family more than he would trust some of us." I tell him "if you mean me, say me." He takes a glass of water and drinks. All the men understand. It may have been the wrong move. Cutting ourselves off from the sources of—

SALADIN: All things are a matter of time and this case is no exception.

ALIA: Go!

REGINALD: Give the horses the remaining water. We won't survive without our horses. If I catch a man stealing from the provisions of the animals, I'll kill him myself.

SALADIN: Encircle the enemy. Keeping people where they are destroys them, because where they are never has enough of what they need for very long. Put glass jugs of water on the battle line—clear boats in a red sea, shimmering in the sun.

REGINALD: It's a trap. You'll never get to the water. You see the ones before you being cut down? Stop those men! Stab them in the back before you let them run!

ALIA: Go!

*(The men begin the rhythmic dance that indicates Alia is having a seizure.)*

I've stopped shaking.

REGINALD: Water!

ALIA: I've stopped shaking.

REGINALD: Water!

ALIA: The only time I'll stop shaking is when I stop breathing. And I've stopped shaking for good. Soldiers are not the only people who die during a war. I do not live to see how the battle I dreamed of putting in motion ends. To take a journey means you are trying to force the hand of change. You go hoping you'll return, but be a different person when you do. *(Alia and Reginald's eyes meet for a moment)* But sometimes what you see alters you so completely that—for a time—you can forget why you left in the first place.

*(Reginald and Alia cross each other. Alia stumbles, as if pushed by someone, onto Reginald's side of the stage. Reginald stumbles toward Saladin's side of the stage and falls face-first in front of him. Lights up on the entire stage.)*

REGINALD: Water.

*(Reginald glances up at Saladin. He's obviously parched. Reginald groans, but it sounds like in annoyance more than pain.)*

ALIA *(Picking herself up from the floor)*: Why am I being separated from the others in my caravan?

SALADIN: How could you position your army in a place where you could so easily be cut off from it?

REGINALD: Look, Saladin. That's who you are, right?

SALADIN: I am Salah Al-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub.

REGINALD: Yes, well, Saladin's easier to pronounce. So here we are. Finally face-to-face.

*(Saladin stares Reginald down.)*

ALIA: So here I am. Why did they take my maid? Will they kill me before I even face this Reginald? Or will he torture me himself? Oh, God!

REGINALD: Well, let's get it over with. Start whipping me or something. Don't just stand there and stare at me like that. It's creepy. So how are you planning to end me?

SALADIN: Thirst.

REGINALD: Why thirst?

SALADIN: It's the only need that doesn't get numbed even slightly.

REGINALD: Now, I understand why you let all the other prisoners drink except for me. Well, I lapped up most of the water supply during the battle. So, I figure I'll be fine for at least a week or so.

SALADIN: You'll live one day at most.

REGINALD: I'm touched, but really no need to wait it out with me.

*(Saladin takes a glass of water and drinks.)*

Come on, man. Give me just one sip of anything. I'd drink a bottle of piss if you offered it.

SALADIN: Piss is too good for you.

REGINALD: Reducing a man like me to the point that he is begging for piss. That's quite a stylish way to end someone. A bit subtle for my tastes, but subtle can be good. So you've brought me here just to watch me suffer?

SALADIN: I brought you here to tell you that we could have lived in peace together. The truce I signed with the other Crusaders would have lasted for many years if it weren't for you.

REGINALD: That's the problem with truces. Some bastard is always fucking them up. If it wasn't me, it would have been

someone else. Does Alia know I'm here? Are you keeping her from me?

SALADIN: You're not going to get me angry. You're going to die of thirst. Did you think you'd get away with having your men defile my sister?

REGINALD: My men? I would never let my men touch her.

SALADIN: You're lying.

REGINALD: Why would she say that unless . . .

ALIA: Being captured by this Reginald is the only way I can make my brother go mad as every military leader must be mad.

*(Reginald bursts out laughing.)*

REGINALD: That sly little wench. Bring her here!

SALADIN: How dare you?!

REGINALD: She lied to you and me both.

SALADIN: My sister would not lie to me! She was a modest woman!

REGINALD: Was? *(Pause)* Was? Is she dead?

*(Saladin puts his head down for a moment, then faces Reginald again.)*

SALADIN: I want you to know I will not rest till I drive you foreigners out. No more truces.

REGINALD: Richard, son of Henry, and more warriors from Europe are on their way here right now.

SALADIN: If this Richard is more committed to his faith than I am to mine, then I wish him victory.

REGINALD: See! That is why you always got on my nerves. And on Alia's.

SALADIN: You know nothing about my sister. Do not speak about her with your filthy tongue.

REGINALD: She hated that you respected Crusaders and made truces with men like Raymond.

SALADIN: How do you know that?

REGINALD: Because she told me.

SALADIN: Why would she tell you anything?

REGINALD: Why do you think? She always said Raymond had no balls and she was right. You had captured his family in Tiberias and still he wanted to wait before attacking. If a man isn't going to be hotheaded about his wife and children, what should he be hotheaded about?

ALIA: No, I have not martyred myself in vain. No one can know his family is in danger and sit still.

SALADIN: Nothing.

REGINALD: Not even his sister?

SALADIN: Don't talk about my sister.

REGINALD: When did she die? Did she suffer?

SALADIN: Enough!

REGINALD: One thing I know for certain is—

ALIA: I am a nameless, faceless woman. I don't matter, but the men that I will force to fight one another do. They will decide the fate—the destiny—of both their civilizations. I will make them decide it—

REGINALD: But I still had your sister. *(Saladin reaches for his sword)* She loved it. She begged me for it.

ALIA: At the point— *(Saladin stabs Reginald on the word “point”)* Where my people can win!

*(Reginald dies. Alia moves to the middle of the stage and Reginald stands up and returns to the prison side of the stage.)*

*Alia begins to dress in the traditional Muslim woman's outfit she left onstage at the beginning of the play.)*

SALADIN: Regarding your request to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, I know I will regret this, but it is a holy place, you have a right to go and I will let you. I fear God.



REGINALD: The knights are making me send you back. They fear your brother's wrath.

SALADIN AND REGINALD: I want you to stay with me.

SALADIN: I will give you a caravan with armed warriors to protect you. Brave men who I know and trust will not betray you if you are caught.

REGINALD: I'll give you a camel to get back home. One camel. If my fellow Crusaders are so eager to send you to your brother, then they'll have to provide a retinue.

SALADIN: I will have the caravan marked as if you were a member of the family of Izz Al-Din. In case you are caught by Reginald. He can't know who you are.

REGINALD: Okay. Maybe a horse. My finest horse. Look at me, I'm turning into a sap.

SALADIN: God!

REGINALD: I love you.

SALADIN: I will not be your jailer, Sister.

REGINALD: I can't keep you here.

SALADIN: I will let you go.

*(Alia is now almost fully dressed. She ties one side of the face covering to her headdress. She smiles. She snaps the other*

*side of the face covering into place, completely covering her face so all that is visible is her eyes.*

*Lights out.)*

END OF PLAY



PHOTO BY STEPHANIE KEITH

**BETTY SHAMIEH** is a Palestinian American playwright. She is the author of fifteen plays. Her Off-Broadway premieres include *The Black Eyed* (New York Theatre Workshop) and *Roar* (The New Group), which was selected as a *New York Times* Critics' Pick and is currently being taught at universities throughout the United States. In 2012, Princeton University's Institute for Advanced Study presented the world premiere of a suite of arias from *Territories*, an opera that Shamieh wrote the lyrics and libretto for based on her play. *Again and Against* was presented in Russian translation as part of the American Seasons in Russia/U.S.-Russia Presidential Bilateral Commission and Lark Play Development Center in 2011. *As Soon As Impossible* was commissioned by Second Stage through the Time Warner Commissioning Program. *The Machine* was directed by Marisa Tomei and produced by Naked Angels. Her play, *Free Radicals*, was commissioned by Het Zuidelijk Toneel (Holland). Shamieh performed in her play of monologues,

*Chocolate in Heat*, in three extended Off-Off-Broadway runs and over twenty university theaters.

A graduate of Harvard College and the Yale School of Drama, she was a recipient of a NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program at the Magic Theatre. Shamieh was selected as a Clifton Visiting Artist at Harvard in 2004 and named as a Playwriting Fellow at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2006. She was selected as the winner of the Playwrights' Center's 2012–2013 McKnight National Residency and Commission. Shamieh was named a UNESCO Young Artist for Intercultural Dialogue in 2011.

Shamieh's contributions to theater and literature have not gone unnoticed. Her life and work has been the subject of features in the *New York Times*, *Time Out*, *American Theatre* magazine, *Theatre Bay Area*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Teaterstockholm*, *der Standard*, *Aramco Magazine*, *Kathimerini* and the *International Herald Tribune*, among others. A cartoon of *Roar* appeared in the *New Yorker*'s "Goings On About Town" section. Her works have been translated into seven languages.





Imad Farajin

*Translated by Hassan Abdulrazzak*

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*603* was first developed between 2007–2008 as part of the Royal Court Theatre/British Council’s new writing project in the Near East and North Africa. The play was first performed as a rehearsed reading as part of the “I Come from There: New Plays from the Arab World” season in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court Theatre, London, on November 14, 2008. It was directed by Rufus Norris. The cast was:

MOSQUITO

Lee Ross

BOXMAN

Nathaniel Martello-White

SLAP

Tom Fisher

SNAKE

Matt Smith

SIREN

Houda Echouafni

A full production of *603* in Arabic was produced by Al Haya Theatre in July 2009 and directed by Manal Awad. It toured various theaters in the West Bank, Palestine and Dubai and Abu Dhabi, UAE. The play was later brought to the Martin E. Segal Center in New York as part of the PEN World Voices Festival on April 30, 2010.

## CHARACTERS

MOSQUITO

BOXMAN

SLAP, based on a real character who suffers from “dryness of the brain blood vessels” as a result of being hit with the butt of a rifle

SNAKE, a real character with the nickname “the sniper of thief valley”

SIREN, a girl in her mid-twenties

PLACE

Askalan central prison.

A prison cell with four beds and a side bathroom.



*The lights come up gradually; everyone is sleeping except Mosquito who is holding a plastic cup. He is tapping on it a variety of rhythms, quietly. He has an empty matchbox open on the floor. He is scanning the room for a mosquito. He looks up toward the ceiling. A mosquito appears and flies into the open matchbox; Mosquito closes the matchbox and goes back to bed.*

*Boxman wakes up and takes out a plastic cup from his box. He places it on the floor to listen, then he moves somewhere else.*

BOXMAN: The buses are here, the buses are here, on my mum's honor the buses are here.

*(Mosquito and Slap wake up. Snake carries on sleeping.)*

Come here. Listen to the sound of the buses. These are the buses coming to take us. *(He dances)* That's it boys. It looks like they're about to exchange us for Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier. Come here, listen. We're leaving, we're going home. The letter was true. We're going to be released this week.

*(Mosquito and Slap go to listen. Mosquito puts his ear to the cup.)*

MOSQUITO: God, it does sound like buses!

SLAP: Let me listen . . . I think it's the sound of buses.

BOXMAN: Man, it's the sound of buses.

MOSQUITO: It's clear now, one hundred percent, it's the sound of buses.

SLAP: Brothers, clearly and surely it's the sound of buses.

MOSQUITO: I want to say this to you, it is definitely the sound of buses, the sound of buses arriving . . . but I also hear women.

BOXMAN: What?

MOSQUITO: Women laughing.

BOXMAN: Maybe they're the drivers.

MOSQUITO: I tell you women, you tell me drivers!

BOXMAN: Women could be drivers, man. The world has changed. Your mind is still set to nine years ago; today everything is different.

MOSQUITO: You really think they'd use women drivers to transport inmates who've spent at least eight years inside? There're guys in here that could impregnate a rock.

BOXMAN: Man, you're so removed from reality. Give it here, I want to listen.

*(Slap coughs.)*

I can't hear over your coughing Slap . . . Wait, I can hear the flashes of cameras making a tcheeck tcheeck sound.

MOSQUITO: That's not right. Camera flash is tcheck tchook, tcheck tchook.

BOXMAN: Man, that was nine years ago. Nowadays cameras make a tcheeck tcheeck sound.

MOSQUITO: Bullshit, let me listen. (*Puts his ear to the cup*) There, tcheeck tchook, tcheeck tchook.

SLAP: May I? To be honest I can't hear neither tcheeck tcheeck or tcheeck tchook . . . I hear tcheeck tchack . . . tcheeck . . . tchack . . . but there are people speaking in English.

BOXMAN: They must be working for the Red Cross. That's it. Tonight the exchange is going to happen. They're here to supervise the exchange, the give and take. Slap, let Mosquito listen. He speaks good English. His wife was Canadian.

MOSQUITO: And a bitch. Give it here. What's this? Someone is saying to a girl "give me a kiss."

BOXMAN: What does it mean?

MOSQUITO: It means give me a kiss.

BOXMAN: Maybe it's Shalit? It's been a long time since he's seen his sister. He's asking her to give him a kiss. What's wrong with a man kissing his sister?

MOSQUITO: God give me patience . . . what a donkey you are.

SLAP: English is not my strongest language but I think “kiss” is used in a girlfriend, boyfriend situation whereas “French kiss” is used amongst family.

BOXMAN: Now you’re both experts on kissing!

MOSQUITO: Shh . . . I can hear the clanking of keys.

*(Silence, they look at one another.)*

SLAP: It’s happening tonight.

BOXMAN: Tonight?

MOSQUITO: Tonight.

*(Mosquito opens the matchbox and looks at the mosquito inside. He then looks at Snake who is still sleeping. He goes toward his bed.)*

I wish tonight never came.

BOXMAN *(Angrily)*: What? You wish it never came?! I wish it came years ago. What are you saying? Are you mad? You don’t want to go, then don’t. Me, I’m going. I want to see Siren. Eight years, I’ve been waiting. And you say, “I wish tonight never came.” Siren’s hair must’ve turned gray with waiting by now. I want to take her and fly. I want to see life. I love life. Why the fuck did I throw that petrol bomb?

MOSQUITO: And what about Snake???

*(Silence.)*

BOXMAN: What about Snake?

MOSQUITO: We leave him here, all alone?

BOXMAN (*In a low voice*): What do you want us to do? He's serving twelve life sentences. The man is never getting out of here. Look, if my dear old dad himself was serving life here, I'd still leave him behind. We don't want to be tied to him. Let's just get out of this place and forget all about it.

SNAKE (*From under the covers*): Like Mosquito says. I'm here for life. No blue skies for me. (*To Mosquito*) Go, find your daughter; she must be a grown woman by now. I'll be here. Twelve life sentences mean twelve generations.

(*Pulls the cover away, looks at all*) Come on brothers, get ready. Don't just stand there! Move it Mosquito. You too, Boxman. Hey Slap, go on, get going. What's wrong with you? Come on, what the fuck guys? Don't worry about me. Prison is for real men. Anyway, you'll visit, right? Boxman, you'll come and invite me to your wedding with Siren. Slap, you've got to have that operation. Come on brothers, celebrate your freedom! (*He hands each man his luggage. They hold the luggage but do not move*) No good-byes. I don't like them. Come on, if you love me just go . . . (*Stands aside*)

MOSQUITO: I just want—

SNAKE: Not another word. Good-bye.

SLAP: I . . .

SNAKE: Look after yourself.

*(Boxman runs up to Snake and hugs him.)*

Boxman, I want you to love Siren. Love her every day, more and more. Tickle her!

*(Mosquito, Boxman and Slap line up and walk in procession. We hear the sound of the metal door opening. They dart a glance toward Snake before exiting.)*

*SNAKE gets up and looks toward where they went. He then takes the plastic cup and places it on the floor to listen to what's going on outside. He begins to sing:)*

Here comes the bride, dancing for her groom.

Kicking the devil way beyond the moon.<sup>1</sup>

*(At the same time, we hear Siren breathing as she runs across the cell. Snake jumps on the bed and scans all corners of the cell. Siren begins dancing across the cell in search of Boxman. Snake keeps trying to touch her but she escapes. As this is happening, Mosquito enters slowly followed by Slap.)*

*Mosquito and Slap begin talking with Snake.)*

MOSQUITO: Outside the world is green . . . green. Even though it's nighttime, I could see the green.

SLAP: The bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The smell of almond blossom! God, I've forgotten what almonds taste like.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The air had a touch of cold . . . but it was a gentle touch.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: The mosquito shivered inside her matchbox.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: I thought she was hungry, turns out she's cold.

SLAP: . . . Opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: A puppy yapped in the distance.

SLAP: . . . Opened and shut.

MOSQUITO: And Boxman was puffing away as if he was a nympho and the cigarettes were cocks.

*(A sigh of longing is heard from Siren.)*

SLAP: . . . Opened and shut . . .

MOSQUITO: Boxman never smoked before . . . I looked left and right for my daughter, couldn't see her.

SLAP: And the bus door opened and shut . . . and the pup barked from far away.

MOSQUITO: And the bus door shut and didn't open . . . It turns out today is their Independence Day. They've come to celebrate. And they wanted us to fetch wood for them. So they could start a fire and dance around it.

SLAP: I wish I could've seen that fire lit and danced around it also but Mosquito refused to collect the wood so we were sent back.

MOSQUITO: Man, you can't even dance! You barely know how to walk.

SLAP: When Slap went to weddings, he'd wear a pink suit and put a flower in the breast pocket. I'd dance from the beginning till the end of the wedding. People thought I must be the groom because I was always so happy.

*(We hear Boxman outside. Siren leaves.)*

BOXMAN: Open the door, why you closed it? Hey *shotair*<sup>2</sup> . . . *hayal*<sup>3</sup> . . . open the door. Fine, no problem, I can wait outside till morning. You son of a dog, don't pretend you can't hear me. I'll get you, you Ethiopian bastard. Or is the brother from Morocco? Better go and find out who your father is, could be Indian for all you know. Mosquito, man . . . come and help me out, I'm rubbish at Hebrew. You could talk to them in English . . . tell them no need for the buses to go . . . there're only two hours left till morning. Tomorrow, they could take me to Gaza . . . and later come back to take you to the West Bank. They should sleep a little otherwise tomorrow they'll



turn up drowsy and instead of taking me to Gaza, I'll end up in Guantanamo. Get up man. No? Fine. I just want to say, I've gone back to smoking and I'll be smoking hash this time and if I can't get hash I'll roll up tea leaves and pretend I'm getting high.

SLAP: Tomorrow comes to those who wait.

BOXMAN: Way I see it, those who wait never see tomorrow.

*(Mosquito opens the matchbox and observes the mosquito flying out.)*

SLAP *(Takes out a notebook and begins writing)*: 25th April, one o'clock at night. We heard the sound of buses. Mosquito and Boxman began to argue over camera flashes. Mosquito said they made a tcheck tcheck sound and Boxman said it was tchook tchook. I didn't want to interfere but the boys were begging me to tell them what I thought. I refused, they begged even more. In prison, my word counts.

I screamed at Mosquito and Boxman. Enough, I said. And I slapped Mosquito so hard, sparks flew out of his eyes. Boxman fled like a cat and hid under the bed. *(Silence)* I stared at Snake then told him we're leaving. The time for prisoner exchange has come. Mosquito started crying because Snake was going to be left all alone. So I slapped him again. "Prison is for men," I said. Then I slapped Snake as he began to cry also. I shouldn't have lost control like that, not in front of the guys, they look up to me. I am the manliest amongst them. Outside we found the buses waiting. The warden's eyes were on me like a hawk's. He knows how tough I am. Everyone knows the story of Slap, the secondary

schoolteacher who slapped the soldier when he dared to touch one of his pupils. I slapped him, once, twice, three times . . . I slapped him till he lost consciousness . . . his buddy leapt on me and slammed down the butt of his rifle on my head. He hit me so hard, I slapped him back and I slapped him and slapped him . . . I want to slap and slap . . .

*(Slap loses complete control over his mind and body. Snake goes up to him and carries him to bed. He gives him a tranquilizer pill. Mosquito and Boxman have a conversation in a low tone . . .)*

MOSQUITO: He's been writing for six years. He used to write one letter a month, now it's one per day. I feel he's mocking us. He's the only one that doesn't talk about his private life.

BOXMAN: Man, he must have close to a thousand letters hidden.

MOSQUITO: Where?

BOXMAN: Under his bed; I saw him one night sorting them out, dozens and dozens.

MOSQUITO: Slap is a devious bastard. He's like the water of a river: on the surface, nothing but calm but underneath the current runs and runs . . . He hates my mosquito, every time I want to feed her, he starts causing trouble. Marxists are like that, love no one but themselves.

BOXMAN: You know sometimes I feel he's a good man. Hey look what's with Snake lately, always going to the toilet . . . back and forth . . . spends the whole night there.

MOSQUITO: Could be constipated . . . too embarrassed to talk about it.

BOXMAN: Come on, Snake embarrassed? Since when?

MOSQUITO: Sometimes I envy him.

BOXMAN: Envy him what?

MOSQUITO: He's not waiting for anything. He knows he'll be spending the rest of his life in prison.

BOXMAN: If I had to spend the rest of my life here, I'd kill myself. You know what I think? The minute we leave here, he's going to hang himself.

MOSQUITO: Snake wouldn't do that.

BOXMAN: You give him too much credit, man.

SNAKE (*From the bathroom*): What's up Boxman? Everything okay with you?

BOXMAN: Everything's cool, bro. (*To Mosquito*) What we said stays between us.

MOSQUITO: Don't worry, if there's one thing I hate in life, it's betrayal.

BOXMAN: Because of your wife.

MOSQUITO: I don't want to think about her.

BOXMAN: Man, if you stood up for the judge, you wouldn't be here, waiting for the prisoner exchange. You'd be outside, waiting to greet us when we come out.

MOSQUITO: I don't care if I have to rot in here for a hundred years, I would never stand up for that judge. They occupy us and then dare to judge us? Are you crazy, I'll never do it.

BOXMAN: You could've done it for the sake of your daughter.

MOSQUITO: What daughter, man? I have no idea where her bitch of a mother has taken her.

BOXMAN: Take it easy.

MOSQUITO: No I won't. And I'll never stand for no judge even if I have to endure a life sentence like Snake.

SNAKE: Everything all right, Mosquito?

*(Mosquito is silent.)*

BOXMAN: So if they tell you unless you stand up for the judge, you won't be going home tonight, what would you do?

SLAP: We all exaggerate.

MOSQUITO: How's it going, Slap?

SLAP: Just dandy.

MOSQUITO: Come on boys, before you go to bed, let's feed the mosquito. She looks hungry.

BOXMAN: Man, you haven't fed her yet? It's two in the morning. How could you.

MOSQUITO: Give me your finger, not the one you put out at lunch, another.

BOXMAN: I can't remember which finger I gave you at lunch.

MOSQUITO: The middle.

BOXMAN: Fine, take the index.

MOSQUITO: Has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Now?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Now?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Change fingers.

BOXMAN: Why?

MOSQUITO: You've put her off; God knows where you've stuck it.

BOXMAN: What? She could smell?

MOSQUITO: Of course. So where have you been putting it?

BOXMAN: Nowhere.

MOSQUITO: Liar. I'm going to ask her. *(Takes the matchbox to one side and asks the mosquito inside)* What? Ha ha ha. Really? . . . Ha ha ha.

BOXMAN: What's she saying?

MOSQUITO: Shame on you. Give me another.

*(Boxman puts out another finger.)*

Has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Not . . . ouch. She bit me!

MOSQUITO: Thanks . . . *(Goes to Slap)* Please give me your hand and be quick about it.

SLAP: Piss off you and your mosquito! I'll slap you and slap her.

MOSQUITO: Put your hand out man and let this poor creature have her supper. *(He grabs one of Slap's fingers and puts it inside the matchbox)* Did she bite you?

SLAP: No.

MOSQUITO: What about now?

SLAP: Ouch. This is the last time I'm feeding her.

MOSQUITO *(Goes to Snake)*: Give me yours . . . She bit you?

SNAKE: She bit me.

MOSQUITO (*To Snake*): You never say ouch. (*To the mosquito*) Satisfied? You want pudding? I don't think so, you've put on weight. Don't be like that, it's an honest observation. Look how your arse wobbles. All you mosquitoes are the same, if someone tries to tell you the truth, you get upset. Tell me, do you think Sama, my daughter, has heard about the prisoner exchange? Maybe she's waiting outside for me. But even if she is, how will I know it's her? I've never seen her in my life.

SLAP: For years, you've been telling the mosquito the same story. "You want pudding?," "you've put on weight," "how your arse wobbles"— find something new to talk about with her.

MOSQUITO: Something has changed. I dreamt last night she was sleeping on the bed, turning left and right, then she fell off the bed. When I picked her up, she was dead.

SLAP: It was a nightmare.

*(Snake is listening all this time. Mosquito closes the matchbox. Snake goes to Mosquito.)*

SNAKE: Mosquito.

MOSQUITO: Yes.

SNAKE: You . . .

MOSQUITO: What about me?

SNAKE (*He wants to say something but then changes his mind*): You miss your daughter?

MOSQUITO: Very much.

SNAKE: So when a man marries and has children . . . he gets closer.

MOSQUITO: Closer to what?

SNAKE: To his parents.

MOSQUITO: Sounds like you're ready to be a dad.

SNAKE: No, not at all . . . it's nothing . . . I was just asking.

SLAP: When a man gets older, he starts to think about these things . . . settling down . . . without even thinking, his emotions just carry him forward.

SNAKE: My emotions are dead, Slap. I don't let myself think about these things. I know where my path is taking me . . . give us a cig, Mosquito. (*He lights it*) I need to take a crap . . . guys do you want to use the toilet before I go in there? I'm staying all night. Boxman, how about you?

BOXMAN: You go and enjoy yourself. I'm waiting for the bus. No time to sleep.

SNAKE: Ah, you want to wait for the bus.

*(Snake takes the cigarette with him to the bathroom. The rest sleep with the exception of Boxman. Boxman goes to the door*



*and tries to listen with the aid of the plastic cup. Then he goes and sits on his box. Meanwhile, Snake looks out of the bathroom calmly to see if everyone is asleep. He notices Boxman and hides quickly. Boxman walks slowly toward the bathroom and tries to listen to what's going on inside. He puts his ear to the door. Suddenly, Snake reaches out and grabs him by the neck.)*

BOXMAN: O bollocks!

SNAKE: When I was twelve, I'd spend the day catching young snakes in the valley. I'd stick them in a bucket and head east, towards the settlements. I'd hide behind a boulder and wrap the baby snakes around rocks. And when a bus came, carrying settlers, I'd chuck my snake load at it. The windows smash. The snakes uncoil and run amok between their legs. I watch the settlers run like crazy inside the bus . . . never do that again . . . I know you fear the Snake.

*(A movement intermission.)*

*Next day. The light increases. The men walk in one row to the front of the stage.)*

MOSQUITO: 2002.

SNAKE: 704.

SLAP: 607.

BOXMAN: 301.

*(They go back to their beds in one line. They bend in unison. Turn around on the spot. Boxman takes out the cup and puts it on the ground.)*

Stop boys, I want to hear.

*(Snake goes to the toilet to urinate. Mosquito goes to his bed. He releases the mosquito from inside the matchbox and follows her flight path. He then begins to put on the clothes he has set aside for his release, all the while observing the flight of the mosquito.)*

MOSQUITO: Can you hear anything?

BOXMAN: No, just Snake taking a dump.

MOSQUITO: Snake, how long you're going to take?

SNAKE: I'm nearly done. Just wiping.

MOSQUITO: Hurry up . . . we want to hear the sound of the buses.

SLAP: What do you think about this shirt, Mosquito? I love pink.

MOSQUITO: Ugly . . . Isn't that the one you wore in court? When you stood up for that judge?

SLAP: Yes, I save it for important occasions.

MOSQUITO: And you consider standing up for the judge a happy occasion?

SLAP: Yes. Just to feel the cool breeze of the air condition in the court. It was relaxing.

BOXMAN: I can't hear anything, just dogs barking.

SLAP: It's too early.

BOXMAN: True, it's early. But don't forget the road from here to Gaza is long, and all the streets of Gaza have armed fighters . . . We want to get there before the call to evening prayer . . . I want to see Siren . . . see her face.

MOSQUITO (*Observing the mosquito*): If you get there at night, you'll recognize her by her scent.

BOXMAN: All her life, she wore lovely perfumes.

(*Snake sighs from the bathroom.*)

SLAP: Today's perfumes are different from yesterday's.

SNAKE (*From inside the bathroom*): Even after one hundred years, her scent will be familiar to whoever smelled her first.

BOXMAN: I was sixteen the first time I caught a whiff. You know, Slap . . . the first time I saw her, I was wearing a red shirt. I had a poem prepared. I looked into her eyes and read it . . . I was just a boy . . . Here, listen to the first verse:

This way, this way, kiss.

This way, this way, bite.

This way, this way, frown.

This way, this way, tease.

SNAKE (*From inside the bathroom*): This way, this way . . . shut it!

BOXMAN: She was astonished. It was the first time she'd heard a poem with an internal rhyme.

SLAP: You call this silliness poetry?

BOXMAN: It came to me on the bog. (*Laughs*)

SNAKE: That explains it.

(*They all laugh.*)

BOXMAN: Huh, there's a sound. (*He uses the plastic cup to listen*)

(*Snake gets out of the bathroom and looks at Boxman.*)

SNAKE: Boxman, come here, I want a word.

BOXMAN: What? Something happened?

SNAKE: I've a Marlboro ciggie; I've been hiding it for ages.

BOXMAN: Marlboro? O what happy day, come, come, let's smoke it before the bus gets here.

SNAKE: We'll smoke it in a sec. Let's go to the corner so Slap and Mosquito won't see us. They'll want a puff.

BOXMAN: You're right, come on . . . you know when I said you'll never see the sky again, I didn't mean it . . . light it.

SNAKE: Don't worry about it Boxman.

BOXMAN: Light it . . . light it.

SNAKE: Missing Siren?

BOXMAN: Of course . . . do you need to ask . . . light it, light it.

SNAKE: When you saw her, you were wearing a red shirt . . . but what was she wearing?

BOXMAN: A long skirt . . . come on, light it.

SNAKE: Skirt . . . what color?

BOXMAN: Black, with burgundy embroidered down the side . . . come on . . . the bus will be here any minute.

SNAKE: And her top . . . what was it like?

BOXMAN: A flowery shirt . . . light it.

SNAKE: Shirt??? (*Lights the cigarette, takes a breath, Boxman reaches out to take the cigarette, Snake doesn't let him*) What color? . . . For God's sake focus, Boxman.

*(Boxman is silent. Snake gives him the cigarette.)*

BOXMAN: Red.

SNAKE: Black skirt, red shirt. *(Takes back the cigarette)* Was she wearing lipstick?

*(Boxman is silent. Snake gives him the cigarette.)*

BOXMAN: Yes, she had red lipstick on.

SNAKE: And did you touch her with your hands?

BOXMAN: Why you asking? . . . I touched her plenty . . . once I cornered her in the chicken coop.

SNAKE *(Giving him the cigarette)*: Right, right . . . well, go on . . . what happened in the chicken coop? *(Boxman is smoking)* Carry on . . . what happened in the coop?

BOXMAN: I picked her up and put her on the windowsill.

SNAKE: What was she wearing?

BOXMAN: Same skirt and shirt.

SNAKE: Black and red, right . . . she always wears the same clothes . . . go on, what happened next?

BOXMAN: I got closer . . . and then I cornered her.

SNAKE *(Takes back the cigarette)*: Wow! Your legs between hers? *(Boxman nods)* Go on, go on.

BOXMAN: Yes. I cornered her, and then . . .

SNAKE: Go on, don't stop, what happened next?

BOXMAN: She looked at me and closed her eyes.

SNAKE (*Takes the cigarette*): She was enjoying it . . . well, don't stop.

BOXMAN: I put my hand . . .

SNAKE: Where? Where did you put your hand?

BOXMAN (*Realizing the cigarette has finished*): I can hear something . . . sounds like the bus is here. (*He goes*)

SNAKE: Finish it, for fuck's sake. Finish it. Fuck the bus. Finish it—

BOXMAN (*Takes out the plastic cup and begins to listen*): Huh, there's a sound. The buses are here. The buses are here. I want to get to Gaza before dark.

MOSQUITO (*Takes out a cup, taps on it . . . the mosquito returns and goes inside the matchbox*): Guys, we've got to feed the mosquito so she doesn't get dizzy on the bus.

BOXMAN: Why would she get dizzy? Is she pregnant or something?

MOSQUITO: Don't be a smart arse . . . has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Not yet.

MOSQUITO: Has she bitten you?

BOXMAN: Ouch! She did.

MOSQUITO: Give me your hand, Slap.

SLAP: Fuck off.

MOSQUITO: Ha ha ha . . . come on now . . . enough with the jokes.

SLAP: Who says I'm joking?

MOSQUITO: We've been feeding her for seven years. You always went along with it.

SLAP: Today I refuse.

MOSQUITO: Don't piss me off.

BOXMAN: For God's sake, the buses are waiting.

SLAP: I don't have enough blood today.

MOSQUITO: Yes you do.



SLAP: I don't.

BOXMAN: For God's sake.

MOSQUITO (*To Slap*): Give me your hand before I break it.

SLAP: Clear off! Before I slap you and slap who slaps you.

BOXMAN: Snake.

MOSQUITO: Fine, Slap, be like that . . . I'll sort you out in the coming days . . . this mosquito which you refuse to feed, pissed off the highest judge in all of Israel, she circled around his head, landing one time on his nose and another time on his ears. She made him so nervous, he had to leave the court, at a time when the gallons of blood spilling on our streets failed to move a single hair on his head. Have you forgotten? This little mosquito has done far more than your dear old friend Marx . . . the one you write about day and night . . . about his opinions . . . and theories on communism and socialism. The age of communism has passed. If your friend, Marx, were living today he'd be writing about this mosquito you hate so much. I know what you've been writing. And I'll sort you out one day soon.

SLAP: There are no days to come . . . the bus is here.

MOSQUITO: Dream on.

SNAKE (*Reaches out from under the cover*): Come, Mosquito, let her bite me.

MOSQUITO: Not today.

SNAKE: Why not?

MOSQUITO: Listen mate, I don't want . . . I don't want this to be the last bite.

SNAKE: A second ago you said he was dreaming . . . now you talk about "last bite" . . . What's going on, Mosquito?

MOSQUITO (*Avoiding the question*): You reckon she'll survive outside?

SNAKE: As long as you breathe, she lives.

MOSQUITO: I'll miss you.

SNAKE: Don't forget to visit *haja*<sup>4</sup> Salma, my dad's aunt.

MOSQUITO: Don't worry about it . . . I'll be happy to do that for you.

*(They go out and come back again. Snake observes them from the bathroom as if they are somewhere else.)*

SNAKE: Who, Mosquito? How you've been? . . . Slap.

MOSQUITO: Hello Snake.

SNAKE: Slap?? How're you doing, mate?

SLAP: I had the operation. They put a screw in my head.

SNAKE: Where's Boxman?

MOSQUITO: Boxman is on honeymoon. With Siren, they went to Talousa.

SNAKE: And how is your daughter Sama?

MOSQUITO: Says hello. *(Repeats that several times, they all laugh)* It turns out these were the buses for the next guard shift.

SLAP: We've been hearing them for years . . . how could they've slipped our minds?

BOXMAN *(From outside)*: The buses are here. Seriously. Come boys, let's get in line before everyone else comes out.

*(They continue laughing and saying good-bye to one another.*

*They exit. Snake remains alone. No one returns. He approaches the door*

then turns his back to it and begins singing hysterically. Mosquito and Slap return; they look at Snake. Snake laughs.)

*(His voice is far)* The buses are here. Come on boys. This time the buses are here for sure. *(Everyone looks at the door with suspicion)* Come on Mosquito, Slap, the guard is calling cell block 603. We're the first to board.

*(As they exit, they run into Boxman.)*

*(Enters)* Just kidding! . . . You're so gullible. *(Laughs hysterically)* The prison authority must love to needle us . . . but their sense of humor stinks. *(Lets go of the box)* Why are they torturing us? What have we done? All I want is to marry

Siren, and finish my degree in agriculture, buy a small tractor with a right wing and a left wing, put a small chair for Siren next to me. She'll be seven months pregnant and on the right wing, I'll have a son and on the left wing, a daughter. And another boy running behind the tractor, he'll be the one we always forget about. "Dad, stop, take me with you." Fairuz will be singing "Last Days of Winter" on the radio . . . and Siren will split open tomatoes and pop them in my mouth. "Eat, they'll strengthen your blood . . . damn we've forgotten about the boy again."

*(Mosquito goes to Boxman and hugs him.)*

SNAKE: My granddad, Salama, loved to tell jokes. Married haja Nasra . . . crazy Nasra. In the '67 war she went out and started sprinkling rice on the Israeli tanks, thinking they belonged to the Iraqi army. Sprinkling rice and ululating. One of the soldiers inside the tank pulled back a side hatch and said *shalom, haja*. She cried, "Who the hell are you?" and ran back to Grandpa Salama. "It looks like the Turks are back, Salama. These soldiers are not with the Iraqi army." Salama tried to reassure her, "Don't worry love; tomorrow the Iraqi army will be here." So every day, haja Nasra waited on the bridge leading to our village. She died waiting on that bridge.

*(The others perform mourning rituals for the passing of haja Nasra.)*

BOXMAN: God have mercy on the soul of your grandma.

SNAKE: Thank you, thank you.

MOSQUITO: My condolences.

SLAP: She lives in you.

*(This repeats as if they are at a very grave funeral and slowly the atmosphere changes and becomes more jubilant until it seems they are celebrating Snake's wedding.*

*Slap brings his chair to the edge of the stage. Boxman takes his box to the door and sits on it.)*

16-04-2007. Many things happened in the cell block today. The boys heard the sound of buses in the morning and thought they were coming for their release. Idiots! They were so happy. But I knew they were the buses bringing food. I have the ears of a fox. I didn't want to spoil their fun, especially that fool, Boxman.

*(Mosquito is trying to hear what Slap is saying.)*

We went out then came back. A little while later we heard the buses again. I knew what they were for. I was tired and didn't want to go out and come back again. I told the boys these buses are bringing new prisoners. Boxman said, "That's not true." I stood up, gave him a piercing look and shouted, "You calling me a liar?" Then I went up to him . . . to be honest I didn't go up to him, he came to me . . . I grabbed him by the hair and slapped him. He cried like a child. I felt sorry for him and went out of the cell. I asked the *shotiers* to call the warden. The warden came, shaking with fear. I looked at him . . . then I slapped him. His secretary, Dani, she wanted to intervene but I slapped her too and I slapped the guards and I slapped the warden's daughter, Ya'ael and his son, David and I slapped his wife . . . forgotten her name now . . . then the unit in charge of putting down prisoner revolt tried to stop

me. I slapped the first of them, then the second and I slapped and slapped and slapped and I slapped Snake and haja Nasra and the Iraqi army, one by one I slapped them all. They all know my story. I was a teacher and the soldier hit one of my pupils. I grabbed hold of the soldier and I slapped him and slapped him and slapped him. The boy died and I carried on slapping and slapping. *(Loses control completely)*

*(Snake goes to Slap, picks him up and puts him on his bed.)*

SNAKE: I'm beginning to hate this job. If only I didn't run out of fucking bullets. They dried his brain with the butt of their guns. *(Goes to the bathroom)* He used to get the fit once a week. Now it's daily. And what's worse, he's only got the one pill left. Slap . . . slaps . . . for they are the slappers. I wish I hadn't run out of bullets, Slap.

*(Snake, Mosquito and Boxman suddenly stop. They look in all directions in unison. They then look just up and down. They hear the sound of the mosquito. It's strong. They move together in unison performing a dance [the dance of search].)*

*(In a low voice)* Can you hear that?

BOXMAN: Where's she?

MOSQUITO: Under our stuff.

*(They start moving their clothes and beds slowly. They go through the clothes piece by piece. They look astonished.)*

SNAKE: What the fuck? *(Sighing)* She's naked.

BOXMAN: Who's that with her?

SNAKE: What are they doing?

BOXMAN: Is he biting her?

SNAKE (*Sighing*): O God.

MOSQUITO: Turn around, turn around. Don't stare at them.

SNAKE: They're doing what Boxman and Siren did in the chicken coop.

BOXMAN: We didn't do anything in the chicken coop.

SNAKE (*Looks at Boxman*): O God.

MOSQUITO: Everyone back to his bed. "O God," "O God" . . . you all turned religious all of a sudden . . . (*He brushes off the male mosquito*) Shoo, shoo, get off her, piss off.

(*Boxman and Snake exit. Snake goes to the bathroom.*)

BOXMAN (*From far*): Your mosquito's a slut; you've raised her badly.

MOSQUITO (*To the mosquito*): Look what scandal you've made. Didn't I tell you sweetheart that we have customs and traditions? First he has to ask for your hand in marriage then you can have your wedding night. I want to give you the best wedding and dance and sing in your wedding. (*Sings a lullaby*) Why she doesn't have photos? Why can't her mum send me her photos from Canada . . . her mum . . . probably

running around with her boyfriend . . . or maybe she sends the letters but they take long to get here . . . I wonder if Sama knows me . . . does her mum talk to her about me . . . I've even forgotten what her mum looks like . . . it's been seven years since I've seen her.

*(Slap takes the cup from Boxman and puts it on the floor.)*

SLAP: The buses are here . . . they're here . . .

SNAKE: It's true, they're here.

MOSQUITO *(Laughing)*: Don't be ridiculous. We're going to rot in jail.

SLAP: Get up Boxman. Don't make me slap you and slap who slaps you. Get up before you end up like the boy who cried wolf.

*(Slap and Boxman go. Mosquito and Snake remain. They look at each other. We hear the iron door opening loudly. Snake comes close to the edge of the stage. Faint rhythmic sounds can be heard.)*

SNAKE: The door has opened. Get up, Mosquito . . . It's the first time in nine years I've ever heard the door open. Get up. The day you've been waiting for is here. Get up.

*(Snake goes to Mosquito. Siren appears in the corner. She begins to dance like a Sufi. Snake carries Mosquito over his shoulder and heads for the door.)*



The door is open . . . the day you've been waiting for is here. It's here, Mosquito . . . go, go home. Me, I'm never getting out of here.

*(Mosquito escapes, runs to his bed and hides.)*

MOSQUITO: My wife is running around with her boyfriend and my daughter is lost.

SNAKE: Forget your wife. What matters is your daughter.

MOSQUITO: I've lost everything.

SNAKE: That's it. That's the heart of the story, it's not about standing up to some judge.

MOSQUITO: It's all about the judge. I refuse to stand up for a symbol of our occupation.

SNAKE: Don't be a prick. This is your chance. The prisoner exchange. Take it.

MOSQUITO: I'm worried about what people might say . . . they might mock me because of her.

SNAKE: Because of whom?

MOSQUITO: The Canadian.

SNAKE: Fuck them. She's your wife.

MOSQUITO: Was my wife, though I'm still responsible for her . . . and now she's got a boyfriend.

SNAKE: What do you care? When you get out, divorce her and take back your daughter.

MOSQUITO: I can't be sure . . . that she's my daughter. Biologically.

SNAKE: Don't say that man. Sure she's your daughter. One hundred percent. Your wife was pregnant when she left to Canada . . . her stomach out to there . . . and you had a premonition she was going to give birth to a daughter . . . that's why you chose the name Sama.

MOSQUITO: What if she told her "your father is dead"? Or that her boyfriend is the true father.

SNAKE: So what? The girl will still look like you.

MOSQUITO: And her mum, my wife?

SNAKE: What about her?

MOSQUITO: Haven't you been listening? She left me for someone else.

SNAKE: Abandon who abandons you, my friend . . . to hell with her . . . you just worry about your daughter.

MOSQUITO: And my wife?

SNAKE: Forget her.

MOSQUITO: She's her mum.

SNAKE: She's gone.

MOSQUITO: Her mum.

SNAKE: She fucked you good, what do you want with her?

MOSQUITO: No . . . I love her. *(He goes to his bed and hides. Snake goes after him)*

SNAKE: If you loved her how can you be scared to think about someone else loving her? Stand up. Stand up. You're a father.

In two hours, your house will be full of visitors. *(The rhythmic beat intensifies and so does Siren's spinning)* People coming and people going. All sorts of people. There'll be the political and the perverted. The wise and the idiotic; the nervous, the fearful and the confused. The imam and the priest. Those with Hamas and those with Fatah. Communists and capitalists, slapper and slapped. In two hours, your house will be full of people talking rubbish, about a world you don't recognize, a land severed like the cord of an overplayed guitar, about a nation slapped in the face and trodden down in fear. In two hours, you'll have your fill. And whatever they ask you, answer it. The honest man has nothing to fear. Two hours and you'll see, you'll see what can't be seen and hear what can't be heard. Two hours and the house will be full. I want you to stand in front of them, glowing, a man. Your feet planted in soil; head, nailed to the sky. Let them touch you but not possess you. Two hours and the house will be full.

*(Snake begins to sing: "Here comes the bride, dancing for her groom. Kicking the devil up beyond the moon." He*

*repeats it three times before collapsing on the bed. The music stops. Siren disappears. Boxman enters.)*

BOXMAN: Fuck it. Slap's gone. Gone home. They shut the door in my face. Told me to piss off. Slap tricked them. They called for someone whose name sounded something like "jab" or "crap." Slap lifted his hand and said, "That's me." I thought I'd do the same. I told them, my name is "Khadir." They said, there's no one with that name in the entire prison. Then I said, "Actually my name is Salem." They told me Salem died two years ago. Why there're so many buses. Coming and going. Turns out, these ones are buses for people who served their sentence.

*(He sits and begins driving an imaginary bus.)*

SNAKE *(Goes to Boxman)*: Your driving is brilliant. Just brilliant. Driving a bus is like driving a tractor. Easy. Easy. Slow down. Slow down. Watch out for the cars . . . slow . . . slow . . . put it in second gear, now third. Sweet. Go on. Go on. Pull up, pull up. Don't be scared. Pull up . . . brill.

*(Snake stands before Boxman and indicates that he wants to get on the bus.)*

BOXMAN: Where to, bro?

SNAKE: How do I know . . . wait . . . take me to Haifa.

BOXMAN: Haifa? How would I get there? They say it's far.

SNAKE: I don't know, it's got a bridge. Grandpa Salama used to tell me, if you want to smell the sweetest fragrance, go to Haifa.

BOXMAN: Got any money?

SNAKE: Don't be ridiculous.

BOXMAN: What a shit day this is turning out to be. Get in. Get in.

*(Mosquito looks at Boxman as he drives the imaginary bus. Mosquito indicates that he wants a ride.)*

Where to?

MOSQUITO: Don't know.

BOXMAN: Don't know? I've worked this route for twenty years and no one has ever said that before. Got any money?

MOSQUITO: Nope.

BOXMAN: You don't know where you're going and you've got no money . . . what a shit day . . . get in, get in.

MOSQUITO *(Riding behind him)*: Looks like there is a problem at Zoqaq gate. Take another route.

BOXMAN: That's normal, it's time for the school run.

MOSQUITO: School? What time do schools in Canada finish?

BOXMAN: How would I know? Why you asking?

MOSQUITO: I have a daughter studying there.

BOXMAN: What year?

MOSQUITO: I don't know.

BOXMAN: I swear, you don't even know where on earth the Lord has put you.

SNAKE (*To Mosquito*): How's it going? (*To Boxman*) Could you step on it a little, you're driving like a pensioner.

MOSQUITO: Yes, hurry please.

SNAKE: Faster.

BOXMAN: Hang on.

MOSQUITO: Faster, Boxman.

SNAKE: Just fucking step on it, man. Fly, fly and take us with you.

BOXMAN: Hang on tight. I'm going over the other cars.

MOSQUITO: Think the rocket, be the rocket.

SNAKE: Fly and set the exhaust pipe on fire . . . take us to Haifa . . . to Spring Hill, to Zakarya and Gabreen House . . . Jaffa . . . Al-Nasra . . . Akka . . . and the lion's well . . . the watermill, Golan Heights and Deir Yassin.

*(Siren appears and she walks slowly toward the bus.)*

BOXMAN: Shit! I want to fly, not slow down.

MOSQUITO: Fly to Canada.

BOXMAN: I want to go to Gaza.

SNAKE: Fly, let the exhaust cough up black smoke. I want to become a shepherd again, running free in the mountains. Say hello to haja Salma.

MOSQUITO: We're on fire . . . fly, fly . . . Sama, daughter . . . how I miss you.

BOXMAN: Siren, I'm coming to you. Hang on baby.

SNAKE: Two hours and the house will be full, two hours and the house will be full, hurry.

MOSQUITO: Take us back to prison, to prison. Turn around, turn around and go back.

SNAKE: Ignore him; ignore him; keep going.

MOSQUITO: If you don't stop, I'll throw myself out of the window.

SNAKE: Don't listen to him. *(Holds Mosquito to prevent him jumping from the bus and sings)*

*(Siren is suddenly before the bus. Boxman presses the breaks. All three collapse on the floor. Silence.)*

*Boxman approaches Siren. He tries to tell her everything very quickly.)*

BOXMAN: Your hair is longer, eyes bigger, smell . . . just as I remember, neither thinner nor fatter, as you were . . . but why the black under your eyes . . . why you've stopped combing your hair . . . I've got so much to tell you . . . so much . . . I want to talk and talk . . . I want to marry you and have twenty kids . . . I'll work like a donkey . . . why the dark under your eyes . . . is it from waiting? What news of our village on the mountain? Still facing the sea? I want to smell you, lose my soul in yours. *(Siren turns her back and prepares to exit)* Wait.

SNAKE *(Stands in front of her)*: Wait . . . wait. *(Siren wants to leave. He grabs her by her clothes)* You've been on my mind for years . . . I was lost in your smell . . . your name . . . talk of you . . . I imagine your hair, long, braided, straight, kinked, wet, liberated and covered up. *(She tries to leave . . . he rips her clothes)* I imagine you sleeping, standing, bent over, waiting for the day to end and night to begin. *(Boxman tries to intervene. Snake pushes him violently out of the way)* I pull you and you pull back . . . bite you and you bite back . . . stay. *(Siren tries to leave. Snake lifts her off the ground. She manages to free herself)* Call me scum, lowlife, lecherous, treacherous, whatever else you like but know this, I want you, desire you, dream of you every night, perverse images come and go. I lose myself to them.

*(Siren escapes.)*

BOXMAN: Shut up, shut up, shut up . . . Are you crazy? Fuck you and fuck your father and his father also . . . you fucking



shepherd. What? You've been fantasizing about her . . . she's mine.

SNAKE: Was yours.

*(Silence . . . we hear the metal door shut.)*

BOXMAN: You're so selfish . . . you did this because you knew I am leaving this place and you're stuck here. We're all going except you. I'm going and you'll stay in the darkness and the dampness and the isolation, dying slowly. I'll get married and have kids and whoever said prison is for men is a cunt . . . and a liar. Prison is the end of men. You're going to die, Snake. Know how? Inside the toilet where you spend all your time . . . you're going to hang yourself. You pretend to be tough but you're weaker than Mosquito's mosquito . . . get ready for death, Snake . . . because after you see us go, you'll feel as if a knife went through your back and came out of your belly. Your death should be slow, bloodless . . . you know where they'll bury you? Near *Askalan*, in the prisoners' graveyard with just a number to mark your grave because all you are is a number . . . you'll live and die without making a woman pregnant, without leaving behind a son to carry your name . . . think about what I'm saying . . . no woman pregnant . . . no son to carry your name . . . let your death be bloodless, Snake. Let be a hanging.

SNAKE: Do you want to know what happened to Siren?

BOXMAN: Snake.

SNAKE: She died during the shelling of Gaza.

*(Boxman goes back to his place, puts his cardboard box down and drives the bus slowly. Mosquito starts tapping on the plastic cup for the mosquito to return . . . she doesn't. His tapping intensifies throughout the scene.)*

*(To Mosquito)* Your mosquito will come back, don't worry.

MOSQUITO: So says the famous sniper . . . you're only someone on the outside.

SNAKE: I don't care how people rate me. What matters is what you think.

MOSQUITO: They tell your stories to children before they go to sleep.

SNAKE: I don't care about that, tell me what you think.

MOSQUITO: They tell them about the shepherd who whenever he stopped, his flock stopped along with him . . . and when he walked, they walked behind him . . . once upon a time, there was a shepherd, holding an old English rifle from the time of Jordan.

SNAKE: Worn out with rust.

MOSQUITO: He roamed the valleys . . . watching the blockades between the mountains. You fell in love with the love of your friend . . . lost yourself in a fantasy that didn't belong to you. *(He slaps Snake)*

SNAKE: If someone else did that, I'd cut off his hand. What do you want me to do? Outside, they think of me as hero. But

what kind of hero am I when I'm rotting here and no one gives a fuck? First two years passed and no one came to visit yet outside they call me the sniper hero and talk endlessly about how I shot twelve soldiers with a rusty English rifle. Only Haja Salma comes around to see me. Her kidneys are rotten; she sells half her medicine to buy me things, gifts she brings. She tells me, "Thank god I have kidney disease; it's the only way I could make money." I'm killing her slowly. What kind of hero does that make me? A hero waiting to be exchanged with another prisoner. An exchange that will never happen. The only way it could happen is if my blood turns black, expires, ages. I'll be exchanged when I'm completely humiliated. Not humiliated by my jailer, no, the jailer doesn't have that power over me. My humiliation feeds on watching Haja Salma, selling her blood for my sake. Fuck the prisoner exchange. Fuck it.

SLAP (*Enters*): Your mosquito is on my shoulder. Take her.

*(Mosquito puts the mosquito back in the matchbox. Slap takes out his notebook and begins writing.)*

The time for lying is over. I'll write what I didn't write before, what no poet or author has penned before. You'll be surprised to learn that I went outside, I went at thirteen hundred hours outside the prison . . . there was a real bus. Suddenly the bus starting spluttering, the engine putting out smoke and sparks flew through the bars of the front grill . . . I felt a danger coming . . . I went to the bus driver and asked him what's wrong. Said to me, the motor is dead so I slapped him black and blue. One of the prisoners stood up and started crying, "Our happiness is not meant to be." I slapped him so hard, his teeth popped. The other prisoners started gathering

them from the floor. The guard looked at me with fear in his eyes. He said, “Due to a technical error, the prisoner exchange has been delayed till tomorrow” . . . I laughed a mocking laugh . . . ha, ha, ha . . . then I slapped him and told him . . . tomorrow is Friday and I’d like to rest . . . leave it till the day after . . . then on my way—

MOSQUITO: Come on, man! The mosquito is dying of hunger.

SLAP: Leave me be or I’ll slap you so hard, you’ll see stars at noon.

MOSQUITO: Boxman is lost, Snake is not talking to me because I hit him . . . there’s no else left but you.

SLAP: I hate your mosquito . . . I hate all insects . . . I’ve no blood left in me.

MOSQUITO: Yes you have.

SLAP: No I don’t.

MOSQUITO: She’s got nothing but your blood and mine to suck on.

SLAP: My blood is contaminated by all the medication I’ve been taking. It won’t do.

MOSQUITO: She got used to it.

SLAP: Get away from me or I’ll slap you so hard, blood will pour out of your eyes.

*(Mosquito takes out a letter from his shirt.)*

What's that?

MOSQUITO: Your story . . . your diary . . . not the stories about "I slapped him" and "he slapped me" where you are the hero but the other kind, the stories you write while we sleep . . . and there I was thinking you're writing about Marx and Lenin.

SLAP: Where'd you find it?

MOSQUITO: None of your business . . . give me your hand.

SLAP: I won't.

MOSQUITO *(Starts reading)*: They've imposed a curfew . . . gathered the men on one side and the women on the other.

SLAP: Don't, Mosquito.

MOSQUITO: The soldier shouted at the men, "Sit down on your arse now!"

SLAP: Stop, Mosquito. Please.

MOSQUITO: They all sat on their arses except Slap . . . the soldier looked at him and said, "Hey you, on your arse, now!" I told him I wasn't going to do it. The soldier got angry and told his commanding officer that "this animal" refuses to sit down. The officer told me, "I'll massacre this entire village if you don't sit down on your arse right now." The villagers panicked, their elders began screaming at Slap to sit down.

SLAP: Enough, Mosquito. Don't finish it.

MOSQUITO: And the woman beat their heads and screamed, "God curse you Slap, you want to widow us for the sake of your arse?" The officer slapped me so hard I saw the stars of noon. He fired rounds between my feet. I screamed, "In the name of Allah, don't shoot! I've got piles, that's why I can't sit down" . . . everyone began to laugh . . . I was humiliated.

SLAP: Enough Mosquito.

MOSQUITO: I became the butt of all jokes in the village. "Here comes the piles man, there goes the piles man" . . . even when I found a girl and wanted her hand in marriage . . .

*(Slap snatches the matchbox from Mosquito and puts it between his feet. Mosquito approaches him.)*

SLAP: You take one more step and I'll squash her . . . turn her to powder . . . to dust . . . blood will pour out of her eyes . . . as it did from mine, when you were reading just now.

MOSQUITO: Don't do it, Slap.

SLAP: Go on . . . continue . . . I went seeking the hand of the girl. Her father told me, "We're not marrying her to a joke like you; her groom must have a sound arse."

*(Slap's foot gets closer to the matchbox.)*

MOSQUITO: For God's sake.

SLAP: I asked to be transferred to another school in another village; they transferred me to a garbage heap . . . a broken man.

MOSQUITO: You've never been broken . . . you were the man who slapped the soldier and put him in the hospital for a month.

*(Slap's foot gets closer still to the matchbox.)*

SLAP: I slapped him by accident . . . I didn't do it out of patriotic duty . . . I've never given our nation a moment's thought in my life.

MOSQUITO: I'm begging you, don't do it.

SLAP: Fuck the nation. Fuck this country. Look how much blood it has demanded from us . . . and for what? For dirt and rocks and stones and orchards . . . fuck all these things . . . I want to live . . . I want to hear the other and have him hear me . . . not slap and be slapped back . . . forgive and be forgiven . . . not hit and be beaten . . . fuck this country for all the blood it took . . . I want to hold this country by the scruff and slap it across the face . . . slap its greens and yellows . . . slap Marx and Lenin, slap and slap and slap.

*(Slap goes into a fit and smashes the matchbox.)*

MOSQUITO: What've you done?

*(He runs to the box, trying to rescue the mosquito.)*

You've trampled on my soul.

*(Snake carries Slap and puts him in bed. Slap remains in the grip of the fit till the end due to absence of medicine. Snake grabs the matchbox and begins tapping on it until the mosquito returns.*

*Lights dim slowly until complete darkness.*

*Suddenly we hear the horn of a bus loudly. The sound is deafening. The metal door opens.*

*We see Siren is in the corner wrapped in a white dress, spinning in circles.*

*A voice comes over the loudspeaker saying in Hebrew:*

*“Prisoner 2002, known as Mosquito. You are released.”*

*“Prisoner 607, known as Slap. You are released.”*

*“Prisoner 301, known as Boxman. You are released.”*

*This is repeated several times.*

*No one exits.*

*Snake heads toward the door. He looks at the exit then suddenly runs out.)*

SIREN: Wait.

*(Lights down quickly and completely.)*

END OF PLAY



---

1. The literal translation of the song is: “The bride descended to the circle of the groom. Glory to Muhammad, shame to Satan.”

2. Guard in Hebrew.

3. Soldier in Hebrew.

4. Haja is a lady who has been to the annual pilgrimage in Mecca.

**IMAD FARAJIN** is as an actor and started writing plays in 2002. He studied acting at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts. He performed in Al-Kasaba Theatre's *Alive from Palestine: Stories Under Occupation*, which was devised by the company and has toured throughout the world. In 2007 he won the A.M. Qattan Foundation's Young Writer Award for his play *Chaos*. In 2008 he attended the Royal Court Theatre International Residency for Emerging Playwrights. *603* was presented as a staged reading at the Royal Court Theatre in November 2008 and at Al Balad Theatre in Amman, Jordan in February 2009. Since then, a production of *603*, directed by Manal Awad, has toured various theaters in the West Bank, as well as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Farajin also writes extensively for television.



## FURTHER READING

Refaat Alareer, *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine*, Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, 2014.

Suad Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, New York: Anchor Books, 2006.

Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948*, translated by Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

Max Blumenthal, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, New York: Nation Books, 2013.

Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007.

Ronit Chacham, *Breaking Ranks: Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, New York: Other Press, 2003.

Akiva Eldar and Idith Zertal, *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967–2007*, New York: Nation Books, 2007.

Amira Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1999.

Amira Hass, *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010.

Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, New York: Grove Press, 2003.

Gideon Levy, *The Punishment of Gaza*, London: Verso Books, 2010.

Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, New York: Schocken Books, 1989.

Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2007.

William Parry, *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011.

Vijay Prashad (editor), *Letters to Palestine: Writers Respond to War and Occupation*, London: Verso Books, 2015.

Tanya Reinhart, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002.

Reporters Without Borders (editors), *Israel/Palestine: The Black Book*, London: Pluto Press, 2003.

Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, translated by David Thorstad, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973.

Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Joe Sacco, *Palestine*, Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2001.

Edward Said, *After the Last Sky*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, London: Zed Books, 2007.

Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, New York: Henry Holt, 2001.

Adam Shatz (editor), *Prophet's Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing About Zionism and Israel*, New York: Nation Books, 2004.

Raja Shehadeh, *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*, New York: Scribner, 2008.

Raja Shehadeh, *When the Bulbul Stopped Singing: A Diary of Ramallah Under Siege*, London: Profile Books, 2003.

Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (updated and expanded), New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations*, London: Verso Books, 2010.

Michel Warschawski, *On the Border*, translated by Levi Laub, Boston: South End Press, 2005.

Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, London: Verso Books, 2007.



PHOTO BY GREGORY CONSTANZO

**NAOMI WALLACE** is an Obie Award–winning playwright. Her plays, produced in the United Kingdom, the United States and the Middle East, include *One Flea Spare*, *In the Heart of America*, *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East*, *And I and Silence* and *The Liquid Plain*. In 2009, *One Flea Spare* was incorporated in the permanent repertoire of the French national theater, the Comédie-Française. Wallace is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and the Horton Foote Prize. In 2013, Wallace received the inaugural Windham-Campbell prize for drama, and in 2015, Wallace received an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature. Wallace is a current Residency One playwright at Signature Theatre in New York.





PHOTO BY ZOE ZENOWICH

**ISMAIL KHALIDI** was born in Beirut in 1982. He is a Palestinian American writer. His plays include *Truth Serum Blues* (Pangea World Theater, 2005), *Foot, Tennis in Nablus* (Alliance Theatre, 2010), *Sabra Falling* and a co-adaptation of *Returning to Haifa* with Naomi Wallace. His writing has been published in *Mizna*, *Guernica*, the *Nation*, *American Theatre* magazine, the *Daily Beast* and *Remezcla*. Khalidi received his MFA in dramatic writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.



PHOTO BY LINDA KALLERUS

**NATHALIE HANDAL** is a Palestinian poet and playwright. She was raised in Latin America, France and the Arab world, and educated in the United Kingdom and the United States. Handal is the author of the flash collection *The Republics*, which Patricia Smith lauds as “one of the most inventive books by one of today’s most diverse writers” and is a winner of the Virginia Faulkner Award for Excellence in Writing. Handal’s other works include the bestselling collection *The Invisible Star*, the critically acclaimed *Poet in Andalucía* and *Love and Strange Horses*, winner of the Gold Medal Independent Publisher Book Award, which the *New York Times* says is “a book that trembles with belonging (and longing).” She has worked on over twenty theatrical productions either as a playwright, director or producer. The author of eight plays, her most recent works have been produced at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Bush Theatre and Westminster Abbey in London. She is a professor at Columbia University and writes “The City and the Writer” for Words without Borders.