

MY SISTER SYRIA

Paul Stebbings

Scene one

Rachel, an NGO worker – is on the London underground listening to Sufi techno music – it's crowded, rush hour– a woman in a hijab next to her overhears the music they start to talk – in the crowded train a man takes opportunity to molest the Moslem woman and pull off her hijab and pushes off the train through the crowd.

Scene 2

(The NGO worker, shaken, arrives at her office. It is Amnesty International equivalent).

Razan: Hi Mike.

Mike: You OK, Rachel?

Rachel: I can't stand the tube. It brings out the worst in everyone. Crush people together like rats and they behave like rats. Can I smoke?

Mike: No. It's against the law.

Rachel: I thought we opposed oppressive laws?

Mike: Look, I'm working on the Bangladesh bloggers, another one today.

Rachel: Murdered?

Mike: Badly beaten up, but by police it seems.

Rachel: Try this journalist (hands Mike a card) He is married to an Indian. You never know. I have to skype Razan, but I have to smoke too. I'll go outside.

Mike: It's freezing.

Rachel: The smoke will keep me warm (she puts coat back on and goes to front of stage with laptop, logs in).

Hi Razan, Rachel here. How you doing?

Razan: Oh as fine as anyone in this terrible land.

Rachel: Have you run out of coffee?

Razan: As long as I don't run out of cigarettes. Hezbollah is blocking the routes from Lebanon.

Rachel: So you can't get to Beirut for anymore clubbing!

Razan: Don't go telling that to the world. They think I am deeply serious lawyer.

Rachel: You are.

Razan: Yes, serious about coffee and cigarettes. And have you heard the latest Mercan Dedar album? It's called Su – Turkish for water. It's brilliant.

Rachel: Give me the link. I'll get it on Amazon.

Razan: We need some Amazons here – women warriors to free us from these damn Islamist men. Always men.

Rachel: What have they done now?

Razan: Well, I want you to publicise these missing persons. Assad's guys snatched them from Aleppo yesterday at dawn. They are kids really, law students. I have a list of the names – just a minute – I need to refill my. (sudden shouts) –

Rachel: What's going on? That's a gun! Razan?

Razan!

(The skype screen is projected behind the action/dialogue. Suddenly masked and armed men break into Razan's room. In Syria. This is then the laptop is knocked to the floor but the skype

camera keeps rolling and we see fractured images of weapons, hear Arab dialogue or violent confrontation, a shot and Razan is clearly being dragged away – then a face appears, a gun and the laptop is smashed and the screen goes dark. Rachel's scream blends with the Razan's).

Blackout.

Scene 3

(A calm and collected Rachel is addressing the audience as if it is a press conference):

"Razan Zeitounch has disappeared. No one has done more to bring the sufferings of the Syrian people to the attention of the world than her. And she stayed in Syria, despite the death threats and the arrest and harassment of her brothers and parents. We do not know if it is the Assad regime or the Islamist militias who have taken her. She has offended both violent factions. We do not even know if Razan is still alive (choking back tears).

She, she, she never hid herself or her identity. She, she was my friend. We appeal, no we insist, that whoever abducted her release her now, today.

Voice from audience: Do you think that with this action President Assad has crossed a line?

Rachel: We don't even know if it is Assad.

Voice: So you would defend Assad?

Rachel: No the Assads have killed more of their own citizens than any dictator since Pol Pot in Cambodia.

Voice: So you would advise western military intervention to end the regime? Even after Iraq?

Rachel: I would never advise violence. Neither would Razan.

Voice: And what about the gas attacks? Would the gassing of civilians change that opinion?

Rachel: This is not about my opinion. This is about a very brave woman who may be dead. I have to stop. Thank you.

Scene 4.

(Once again Rachel is on the underground. She climbs to her office but there is a man in her chair – we never see his face).

Rachel: We don't have an appointment.

Man: We don't do appointments.

Rachel: We?

Man: We save brave women who stand up to dictators.

Rachel: Razan?

Man: There's more than one brave woman in Syria.

Rachel: Who are you?

Man: We don't speak about who we are. We get things done because of that. And what we want done, what you want done needs your participation Rachel, your active participation. You are an activist?

Rachel: Words are never enough. So get to the point.

Man: I like that. The point is Fatima Kassab, General Fatima Kassad formerly of the Syrian army and now the most senior female officer to defect to the rebels. The right rebels, your rebels, Razan's.

Rachel: Razan spoke of her. She is a brave woman, but ...

Man: Violent. Yes she is a violent soldier, what other type of soldier would survive in a war zone?

Rachel: So she is alive.

Man: And we want to keep her that way, and the only way that will happen is if she gets out of that war zone.

Rachel: Why do you want her out and not Razan?

Man: Guess?

Rachel: Oh because a female General would be an excellent figurehead for the pro-Western opposition that sit comfortably in Paris and at the moment lack any credibility inside the Syria they pretend to represent.

Man: Bravo. You should join us.

Rachel: Never.

Man: Which is exactly why General Fatima will trust you and only you to get her out of the Hell hole that is Syria.

Rachel: What?

Man: She asked for you. For some strange reason she does not trust us or the CIA. In the words of Elvis "Only you (hums rest).

Rachel: No, absolutely no.

Man: Fine. Well at least we asked. Is there a Starbucks near here?

Rachel: (shocked) er yes, by the underground.

Man: Goodbye, shame about Razan.

Rachel: There is a threat in that, isn't there.

Man: Look, I have done my job. It's time for a break. We have a union now you know.

Rachel: What do you want?

Man: Double espresso with a dash of skimmed milk and one sugar.

Rachel: I'll join you.

Man: Off the record.

(They go to edge of stage and order coffee – banal music plays).

Rachel: I hate these places, so plastic. I wish the coffee wasn't so good.

Man: The coffee is better in Aleppo, they heat the grounds on a fire and add cardomen. It's real not plastic. You'll like it.

Rachel: I'm not going.

Man: Razan was not kidnapped by Assad's forces. She was taken by the Islamist warlord Zharan Alloush of the Mujahideen Council. Not that it councils anything but extreme intolerance, especially towards women.

Rachel: you know that?

Man: Of course we do because we have people inside the council.

Rachel: Can you get her out?

Man: All I know is that the Alloush and his "council" are funded by a Sunni Gulf state with whom the British are on very good terms on account of a Formula One racing track - its complicated.

Rachel: Its simple. You pressure the Gulf state into pressuring Alloush.

Man: On condition....

Rachel: You bastard.

Man: Yes that's what we are bastards. And the West needs bastards to protect it from bigger bastards. If I were not a bastard I would never have got this job, with its unionized coffee breaks and low life expectancy.

Rachel: (pause) I want to got to Syria.

Man: I know you do, you posted it on Facebook on...(checks phone) the tenth of May.

Rachel: Bastard.

Man: You will have all our support, all our cover and all our resources. My name is James (my card).

Rachel: I'll keep calling you bastard if that's alright.

Man: I love it. You will be briefed at HQ, you know it from the Bond film I suppose? Thursday 6 pm. We can fly you straight to Turkey.

Salaam al likem. (Or equivalent)

Rachel: I don't speak Arabic.

Man: Good.

Rachel: Why?

Man: Because you will have to follow our orders.

Both: Bastard.

Blackout.

Scene 5

(a plane landing, Turkish airport announcements. Rachel looks around, she has a rucksack and boots. She walks into the audience – a man hails her from the back of the auditorium).

Turkish man: Are you the friend of Mr James Barstad?

Rachel: I am.

Turk: Mrs Rachel.

Rachel: Ms Rachel.

Turk: No Mrs Rachel, we are giving you a ring. From your husband. Now you are Mrs Barstad.

Rachel: What!

Turk: Its is cover, oh not good idea to shout across airport. Come.

(the go to stage – he puts scarf over her head). It is good you have dark hair. Your cover (he covers her).

Rachel: Razan never wore scarf.

Turk: Who?

Rachel: Forget it. What now?

Turk: The border guard is already paid. Here is your passport, you are from Kazakhstan. Half Russian.

Rachel: I don't speak any Russian and Kazakh.

Turk: Neither does anyone in rebel Syria. Just go Da or Nyet – Ms Rachel, do you want to go into Syria as an infidel imperialist?

Rachel: I was not warned.

Turk: No one in Syria was warned. Hurry the border guard is on duty for a few hours. I have motorbike.

Rachel: Helmet?

Turk: I am not soldier.

Rachel: For the .motorbike..

Turk: British comedy. Famous, I like your Borat. He is from Kazakhstan too.

(Darkness falls – motorbike as headlamp – gradual sound of artillery fire – flashes of light in distance – darkened faces – a border guard, a torch on a passport, a stamp – money changes hands something alarms Rachel).

Rachel: He touched me.

Turk: Then he is not a good Moslem. Give me your phone.

Rachel: No it's my...

Turk: Proof you are spy. Take this, it is Kazak phone. Very bad quality. Very good protect you.

Rachel: Does it work?

Turk: You press 007 it connects with London Mr James. British comedy.

Rachel: I am sick of – (but realizing she is offending her helper she backs down) – Thank you. I don't even know you name or how to say thank you in Turkish.

Turk: Choc teshekur.

Rachel: Choc teshekur. (She holds out hand)

Turk: Do not shake hands with man please. Not in Syria. The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, protect you. Walk two kilometers due East along the road. You will see white Toyota pickup. Get in, the driver will speak no English.

Rachel: Is that the road, the dirt track?

Turk: Yes, it is the road to Damascus.

(Rachel walks a forlorn and vulnerable figure, she is lit by flashes of gunfire, a swiveling searchlight and a watery moon – a sudden vast explosion – she is thrown to the ground. When she recovers she realises that the white Toyota has been hit).

Rachel: Oh my God! No, the car the Toyota.

(The driver is dead – Rachel vomits and coughing sits by slumped by the roadside - she takes water from her rucksack, Swallows then reaches for her mobile phone – and dials the number – muttering – the phone is answered).

Rachel: You are your stupid fucking games.

Man: Where are you?

Rachel: The driver, the Toyota, it's been hit.

Man: Tell me you are fine.

Rachel: I am alive I am not fine. I am very angry.

Man: Then be angry with Assad or Putin.

Rachel: No I blame you – I blame, it's all I game. I need help.

Man: I will help you. But if you let me say one thing it is this" Laughter is not a game, laughter is a way to live, to survive.

Rachel: Just help me. Don't preach.

Man: Ok OK, I know where you are there is a gps in the phone. I have been there.

Rachel: You have?

Man: There is a moon, flares too. Yes?

Rachel: Yes.

Man: Look to the right. The ground slopes away towards some stumps of olive trees.

Rachel: I see the trees. They have been cut down.

Man: Firewood. That means the small house above the tree stumps is occupied by civilians. Go there, ask for shelter –

Rachel: I don't speak fucking Arabic!

Man: Hold this phone to your ear and repeat what

I say.

Rachel: What about the battery on this piece of shit.

Man: There are four charged batteries in your rucksack. This phone is such a shitty phone it hardly uses any power. Did you laugh?

Rachel: I might have smiled. But you don't deserve it.

Man: Thank you. Now let's go. Keep talking.

Rachel: OK. I am walking off the road, I can make out a goat track – ow!

Man: Rachel?

Rachel: No just a stone and I slipped on goat shit.

Man: Just remember those black round things are not olives.

Rachel: (Laughing) That's not funny.

Man: Not if you ate one. Keep talking.

Rachel: I am in the chopped down trees now. Ouch there are brambles and cactus, everything is spiked like barbed wire.

Man: Plant goat defence but it helps the rebels too.

Rachel: I've torn my trousers.

Man: Not badly? I mean is skin visible? It may be a problem in the house. If there are men.

Rachel: No, It should be OK. I have a safety pin too. My Mum-oh never mind. I am almost at the house.

Man: Is there a light?

Rachel: It doesn't look like it.

Man: Shit.

Rachel: Hey you are not supposed to panic.

Man: Sorry.

Rachel: Whoa that's a first, Mr Bastard.

Man: Am I allowed to smile.

Rachel: Yes because there is a light, but its probably a lamp or a candle - it flickers.

Man: Then knock – but no stop stop – I am being stupid. Shout first. Do it in English, shout Hello! Everyone knows the word Hello. Let them know you are a woman. Then when someone appears or opens a crack in a door repeat the word that I will spell phonetically on the SMS that I am sending...now.

Rachel: Got it – what does it mean

Man: I come in peace, help me sisters.

Rachel: Sisters?

Man: It is the women who will let you in. There would only be old men there and they will be afraid.

Rachel: Here goes: (Shouts) Hello! Hello! (To phone) Nothing.

Man: Try again (She does). Now go towards the house. Maybe it's empty and you can shelter there overnight. I will get a car to you at dusk tomorrow. You have water yes?

Rachel: Yes. I am going towards the house now.

Man: Put your hands in the air, in case.

Rachel: What if there are soldiers there?

Man: I can't see, Rachel, I can only hope.

Rachel: This is when it doesn't help being an atheist.

Man: I smiled. Now go forward and shout the Arabic as you near the door.

Rachel: How can I hold my hands in the air when I am reading a text message.

Man: Memorise it – you're smart.

Rachel: OK (Mutters Arabic under breath). Here goes. I will probably ask for a goat by mistake..Hello! (Speaks Arabic and moves towards flickering light). I think I the house is empty. I am opening the door – it's stuck.

Man: Locked?

Rachel: No it's wedged but it's giving.

Man: Push.

Rachel: Hello? No!

(Chaos as strangers jump on Rachel and drag her to floor, tie her hands behind her back and throw her against a wall. Her phone slides into the darkness. Two women stand back then place an oil lamp at Rachel's feet. They hold a knife and an axe. As Rachel's eyes adjust to the light she makes out an old man in the corner swathed in blankets and bandages. The women ask the man what to do. There is a disagreement, with one woman arguing for kindness and trust the other uncertain and the man being angry and frightened).

Rachel: English. English. Friend.

Woman: Russia – (holds phone to light) Russia. Assad (spits).

Rachel: Er ah London.

Woman: London?

Rachel: (Tries hopelessly la-la-ing National Anthem then has idea) Assad (spits and woman claps with agreement. Rachel gestures to phone and garbles her Arab phrase. Then speaks Razan's name):

Razan, Razan Zaitounh. (makes kissing on cheek gesture).

Woman: Razan Zeitounh? (More heated discussion then some mime with the phone and at last they untie Rachel's hands and give her the phone, but the axe and knife and old man's hostility are still there).

Rachel: Now, answer, answer. (The phone is silent but then speaks):

Man: For God's sake, are you OK?

Rachel: Yes, yes...God seems to be believe in me more than I believe him. Talk to these people. It's not safe yet.

(She holds the phone out and the three captors pass it between them animatedly. Then they drop their weapons, and taking a pot from the hearth pour Rachel a hot drink, saying in Arabic that she is welcome).

Rachel: What are they saying?

Man: That you are welcome and that they ask your forgiveness and that the Prophet instructed us always to be kind to strangers who knock upon our doors. I am texting you a reply, it is better form your own mouth than mine. You need to bless them in the name of the Prophet.

Rachel: I want to bless them, I have never blessed anyone in all my life. (She reads the Arabic blessing aloud – the old man laughs which gives permission for the women to laugh and one hugs

Rachel). I did ask for goat, didn't I?

(Blackout – daylight – Rachel is staring out as one of the Women drags a water bucket back through the auditorium – she goes to help her – she takes her phone and asks via translated SMS).

Rachel (How do you live here? (Then in halting Arabic). The stage freezes and Rachel addresses the audience as the family are still) I asked her, and all day she replied, slowly via the hesitant translations of the Khazak phone: (Rachel speaks loudly in English over the Woman's narrative in Arabic – the whole text is left in to be edited in rehearsal)

Rachel: I asked her how they survived and she told me:

Rachel and Woman: My husband brings the food when he can, we bathe once every two weeks, and we rotate our few clothes In the winter, we use plastic bags to block up the draughts. The cold weather is killing us. We can't get firewood any more, because there are no trees left.'

Rachel: Her sister Oum Fadi interrupts,

Woman and Rachel: 'We can't leave our husbands when they're fighting. We always follow them. I was a doctor's secretary and I'm good at reading and writing. Now we live like cave people. We move from village to village, dragging our children along. We just about have enough to eat, and our husbands fight. Can you imagine what that's like?'

Rachel: She places her hand in mine as she spoke and stared into my eyes, then squeezed my fingers in her palm. It is painful.

Woman and Rachel: Do you really want to tell people what happened to us? Swear that you'll tell the whole world that the people of the other villages made us leave. The people are not united! There's a growing hatred between them now, Sunni, Alewite, Shia, Druze, Christian we were neighbours, now we hate. You see over there?

Rachel: She points towards the small window, the metal frame worn and rusty.

Woman and Rachel: 'There's the front line. We see the soldiers and they see us. There're only three kilometres between them and us. We live here in isolation, penniless. You can hardly call it living. If it weren't for the fact that I fear God, I would've killed myself. We're dying slowly here, like animals that have been tied to a tree and left to starve to death. Our family who stayed behind have died in the bombing. The snakes creep around us day and night. Look at these bags.

'These are our clothes. We stuff them into bags so that we can leave quickly at any moment. We're lost and homeless. See my stomach?' She rubbed her swollen belly and continued. 'I'm going to get pregnant every nine months and keep having children so that we don't become extinct. Our children will regain our rights. We want them to be educated. We want them to fight so that we can return to our homes. We won't kneel down to Bashar al-Assad. We are not dogs. Assad is the dog and the dog will die.

Man: (Phone) She asks that now you have understood you will tell the world, the West.

Rachel: Tell her I will, I will repay the kindness of those who have nothing and have given me everything.

Man: She asks if you will come back here?

Rachel: (Hesitates) Tell her, I will come back to them. (To phone after the translation) You know I am lying, don't you?

Man: You are giving them hope.

Rachel: But this is hopeless. Is the car near?

Man: Yes, the green Honda. You can see it if you look out the small window.

Rachel: Yes. By the broken olive tree.

Man: Safid is a good man. Go to him.

(The woman goes to Rachel and blesses her in Arabic).

Rachel: Tell her I have never been blessed before.

Man: She says that you will forever be safe.

Rachel: Forever. Let's go. Choc teshekur – I know it's Turkish but it's all I know that is not from this (waves phone – leaving) – ah do we shake hands – who knows? Bye bye sister, aunt, mother, who knows? Teshekur... (Leaves).

Scene 6

(A car)

Rachel: (approaching car) Safid?

Safid: Greetings Mrs Rachel. I am your guide.

Rachel: Oh do I need that!

Safid: (She moves to get in beside him) No, no I am super sorry but you must travel in back seat. It is not good to sit beside a man.

Rachel: Oh I see. I had better learn the Arabic for sorry, I seem to need that all the time.

Safid: Sorry is a good word in any language. In Arabic it is.....

Rachel: (Repeats).

Safid: Good good. You are a scholar.

Rachel: A scholar! I have never been called that before.

Safid: You have never been to Syria before. True?

Rachel: I am the most ignorant scholar in all Syria.

Safid: No, Mr James said you know all about Razan Zeitounh.

Rachel: I know some things that matter. But I can't ask for a cup of tea.

Safid: Turkish tea is very good. We still get some from the Kurds. We will drink some in Saraqeb. And falafel, Saraqeb has the best falafel in Syria!

Rachel: I'm hungry.

Safid: I know and that is why I have this bar of Russian chocolate for you. You must eat it quickly or it will melt in the heat.

(Lights fade and then go up again for passage of time – darkness of night – soundtrack of occasional shelling and then a nightingale – Safid pulls over).

Safid: Mrs Rachel, wake up and listen. We are almost there.

Rachel: What is it, firing.

Safid: Oh yes firing, always the big guns but no that is far away, this is close.

Rachel: The bird?

Safid: It is not a bird it is a nightingale, which we believe is the spirit of a Sufi saint. He sings and with his longing he brings us close to Allah.

(Silence and bird song, then the crash of a shell).
Safid: So many birds have been killed. We know the children are more important. But still we are sad. The birds are killed by the shellfire, they die in the blast, they are so delicate. And then the hungry people eat the birds too. Soon we will only have silence and guns. No birds.

Rachel: Can I smoke a cigarette?

Safid: Now yes, but not in the street.

Rachel: (suddenly snapping) How does a woman breathe in your country?

Safid: Here, a woman breathes well because she has respect.

Rachel: Razan smoked all the time. She is respected.

Safid: Razan Zeitouneh, peace be upon her, was a target. Come, Mrs Rachel, let us not fight. We have enough fighting in this country that is beloved of the Devil. Enjoy your cigarette, I do. (Smokes too and drives).

(Blackout)

Safid: So Saraqueb falafel is number one! Yes.

Rachel: Yes, better than London Tesco. Thank you – oh (uses Arabic).

Safid: You will be sleeping now. We have a cellar for you. Safe.

Rachel: I sat all day inside. Must I go to cellar now?

Safid: Well Mrs Rachel, I am worrying – should I ask if Mrs Rachel wants to go to party or will Mr James be very angry and stop sending me cigarettes.

Rachel: Do you have parties (a shell lands) in this!

Safid: We do not want to sit in cellar being sad.

Rachel: It is so sad.

Safid: (angry now) No, no not sad. Sad was Assad – see even in his name A- sad. We are free. We are free to party and kick Devil's ass of Assad! Come, follow and wear scarf!

They wind through the darkness, challenged by an armed man which Safid deals with then down steps into a room (audience) where they are confronted with a crowd (audience) and the music of Syrian Rap

(Suggestion Refugees of Rap
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeLth9qxX4U>).

Rachel: (Over music) No one would believe me, no one in London.

(Clapping audience).

Safid: Now we are not sad! Now we are not Assad! Now we are free!

Rachel: What is Arabic for free?

Safid: Hooreyah!

Rachel: Hooreyah!

All: Hooreyah!

(Blackout).

Scene 7.

Man on phone: Safid will pick you up in an hour. The General will speak to you by skype in the Media Centre.

Rachel: (Drinking tea) There is a media centre

here?!

Man: Every rebel held town has one. If you cannot fight you can witness.

Rachel: I want to go out and see the streets.

Man: It's not safe.

Rachel: Safe is London. I'm going. Tell Safid I will get to the Media Centre by myself. Just text me the Arabic.

Man: No, Rachel.

Rachel: Then I will get lost by myself, I won't be controlled by you. Isn't that why the General trusts me?

Man: Rachel – I advise.

Rachel: Oh shut up. (switches off phone – opens door – sudden bright sun) Wow! The sun!

(a call to prayer - a moment of peace – then suddenly she is surrounded by two or three boys-puppets manipulated by actors in black – the boys are selling everything, they hang onto Rachel – they laugh and play, they offer petrol in bottles, chewing gum, cigarettes, CDs of rap, anything and everything and are amused by her refusal as if it were a game – they even improvise a mock rap – This is an improvised scene which gets out of control moving from laughter to anger as they pull at her clothes and run off with a shoe – then Safid emerges and chases them off and takes the shoe back to her).

Safid: Oh Mrs Rachel you are honey to these bees. (Laughing) What is that story of yours? The shoe and the daughter of the King.

Rachel: Safid that is Cinderella, but maybe I am the ugly sister.

Safid: No no, not at all. But it is not for me to say.

Rachel: Why are there so many boys?

Safid: You know, don't you.

Rachel: Their families are all killed?

Safid: Now they live by stealing petrol and fuel for our cooking. They sleep in the trees down there, it's safer than the town anyway.

Rachel: Strange. They seem happy.

Safid: They are not at school, but that is sad because they have forgotten how to read. We will be a nation of fools. Come, meet the wise men at the media centre and the wise woman who will Skype with you if, Allah wills it, we have power.

Scene 7

(A scene of intense activity in the media centre).

Rachel: Why are you here in the middle of the market? Isn't it an obvious target?

Safid: I keep telling them that. But the market, the Souk is heart and our head. They say if we leave here we shall be running away and because we are here we give the people of Saraqueb power.

Rachel: What are they doing?

Safid: See they download pictures, confirm numbers of wounded and martyrs, liaise with humanitarian organisations on the phone, letting them know the conditions we must live and die in. They keep careful records of attacks by the regime: how many missiles, what kind, shape and size. And, Asaf here is preparing a dossier on the chemical shells that fell on Saraqueb.

Rachel: Why would anyone stay here? It's so dangerous.

Woman at desk: (Stands) You are welcome here, but we are not welcome in your land. We are in danger here but this is our home. We cannot give it to Assad or the Islamists. Would you live in a tent surrounded by people who hate you? No, let me die in my home first.

This is our message to you. Take it back.

Rachel: I am not a journalist.

Woman: Then you are no use to us and a fool to be here.

Safid: (Argues with woman in Arabic).

Woman: Forgive me, I did not know you were a friend of Razan, may peace be upon her, she was the best of us and now she is gone.

Rachel: We can find her.

Woman: Then you must follow her to paradise. (Tearful) I need to go outside.

Safid: They are not frightened of the bombs. When you survive a bomb every day, after a hundred days the bomb is just a bang. But we are all frightened of the Takfiris.

Rachel: Takfiris?

Safid: Islamists, like Al Qaeda or Daesh. We have them here, they are the Nusra Brigade. They are not Syrian. They used to be with us but now they will capture the Revolution. They are our dog, it barked for us now it bites us...Stops us.

Rachel: Stops what?

Safid: Everything that we do here, except suffer because we know we must do more – look – here is one who takes films to the villages, here is one who organises graffiti – graffiti is our voice. It is how the Revolution started. We are masters of the art, it is our voice in stone on stone. We have magazines for children, training workshops so the widows of the martyred can earn money, we have schools that teach in cellars. We make toys and play football. For girls too. And the Takfiris will stop all that. If this is a river, alive and rushing water with life they are the desert. And we cannot stop the desert.

Rachel: When Assad falls, maybe they will go home.

Safid: But they have no home, their home is their faith. Come it is almost time. We have power from the generator after noon prayers it is only from a car battery.

Rachel: Ok, give me the Ipad.

(A burst of Arabic, anger, Rachel is confused).

Safid: They say that the General is under great, how do you say "stress". She is caught between two front lines: to one side Assad and his gangsters from Hezbollah and Iran and on the other side the Daesh, you call Isis but we never allow the I of Islam in their name for they are from Satan.

Rachel: What do you mean "stress" aren't I stressed? Am I nothing in this?

Safid: Perhaps you are too much. We used to have foreign journalists here now they have all run home. I take you to the border tonight. Mr James stop my cigarettes. I live or I die. Who cares? See it tells me on my packet "smoking kills", well so does war.

Rachel: Give me a cigarette and give me your mad general.

Safid: I did not say she is mad. How can anyone in Hell be normal. And she has a special Hell.

Rachel: Is it just where she is?

Safid: No she is Alawite. Like Assad. She betrays her people to save Syria. Now Daesh will kill her as she is Alawite. Maybe our own people too. Maybe these people too, my friends. (gestures) do not want you to save her.

Rachel: Give me the Ipad.

Safid: (speaks angry Arabic). Take it. The General is online see, but she cannot stay online for long or they will locate the signal. Moscow is working for Assad now. They have satellite tracking and rockets. We have Google and graffiti. Take it.

Rachel: Hello, Hello General Kassad. Oh Jesus! Why are you showing me this –

Safid: What?

Rachel: It's a child. Was a child. There is no head. (Looking away) No head.

Safid: (Screams in Arabic at Ipad).

General: I am not accepting insult, polluting language of the Koran. I speak English with Rachel.

Rachel: I am switching off the picture.

General: No you are remembering the child. You cannot smell the child as I can, in the heat the bodies stink. The flies buzz. This is where we are. Beelzebub, they are his flies.

Rachel: So why do you want to shock me, to hurt me?

General: I want to protect you, Rachel. If you come here you must know what you come to. I have a task for you. You must save a soul. But to do so you must uncover your eyes.

Rachel: I have never smelt death. I have hardly seen it, a cat crushed by a car, nothing more. (A burst of machine gun fire). General?

General: It is our birdsong now. Do you know Mercan Dedar ?

Rachel: Who?

General: If you come here to me I will play you his music. Will you come, Rachel, soul saver?

Rachel: Is Razan alive?

General: More than me. More than me.

Rachel: You know that?

General: She lives in our hearts. You and I will never know that life. Meet me or go home. I have to stop now or they will track the call. May the Sufi saints pour blessings on you. (Cut off).

Safid: I can take you back to the border. I only have to tell Mr James it is not safe.

Woman: Nothing is safe in Syria. Will you leave our General alone there?

Safid: This is not Mrs Rachel's revolution.

Woman: And it is no longer yours, Safid, it is a religious war.

Safid: Stop, stop! That is why we must get the General out – because she is not a Sunni! How can this be a religious war if she is our voice?

Woman: They will kill her first.

Safid: They? They!

Woman: Everyone will kill her, the Militias the Takfiris, Assad, the Iranians, Hezbollah. Only you (she trails off looking at Rachel).

Safid: If the General was less stupid, less stubborn we could get her out. Rachel can go home.

Woman: If General Kassad was less stubborn less foolish she would not desert from Assad's army and join your Revolution.

Safid: (Switches angrily to Arabic, as does woman then both realise they are speaking about Rachel). A thousand pardons. Rachel, what would you do? I am your servant.

Rachel: I don't do servants. Give me the Ipad. I want to talk to my Dad.

Safid: Mr James told me not to...

Rachel: Just give me back the Ipad and trust me.

Woman: Trust (then Arabic). This is a word that we have forgot.

Safid: Your Syria, not mine. (Passes I pad to Rachel).

Rachel: (Dials – creaky skype ringing then a voice – muffled – Rachel plugs in an earpiece so we only hear her responses – protecting her Father). Dad?

Voice: Rachel? (Then earpiece is plugged in).

Rachel: Yes, Dad, I'm still in Turkey. I'm fine. (Pause) Of course it's safe. It's a beach resort. There are lots of foreigners. You could even get an English breakfast. (pause) No I told you I split up from Roger. I didn't want him here. (Pause). I don't need him I just need to say hello to you, Dad. (pause) Thanks. (pause) Yes it's warm, sunny. Good people, Moslems who smile not like on TV. I'll see you at Easter. Take care. (Pause) I know. I know that. (pause) Bless you. (pause) well maybe I've changed. Bless you. Bye Dad. (Puts I pad down).

Safid: Turkey? ..Beach?

Rachel: We going to find the General.

(Blackout).

Scene 8:

Music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbPkh-Fikt0>

(Night – Safid and Rachel in the car).

Safid: If I could sing I would sing him. Abo Hajar. He is the best.

Rachel: What does he sing?

Safid: No to all suppression, no to violence of Assad, no to corruption of this Revolution.

Rachel: Is everything a no?

Safid: Ah Mrs Rachel, we have lost "yes". You are wise.

Rachel: Bollocks. Give me a cigarette.

Safid: What is bollacks?

Rachel: I am not telling you. I dropped my lighter (bends – a shot passes through the car).

Safid: Rachel! Rachel!

Rachel: I'm OK.

(Arabic words in the dark).

Safid: Roadblock. If it's Takfiris, just say nothing – hijab! Veil! Veil! (Rachel pulls up cloth over her face).

(A sequence in Arabic in which Safid and Rachel a forced at gunpoint out of the car – he hands over his ID and wallet – he gets the ID back but the

wallet is stolen).

Safid: They are Militia. Not Islamist. They want your ID – (Arabic) They want your money. They say you are foreign and must have dollars.

Rachel: Here's my wallet.

Safid: They say it's not enough. They threaten to search you. A woman. This is very bad. A Moslem man cannot search a woman, brothers – (goes into Arabic. He is struck across the face – Rachel rushes forward taking a second wallet from her hidden belt – the soldiers accept it and wave Safid back into the car, putting their arm round him in sudden fake friendship).

Soldier: Free Syria!

Safid: (Fake) Free Syria. (They drive off) Pigs, whores of Satan. I spit on their mother's grave!

Rachel: Are you OK?

Safid: No. I am ashamed. I feel as if I am dirt, like you know...shit. These are my army, the army of my people and my Revolution and they are bandits. Whores they have sold my love. Ah...ah (into Arabic).

Rachel: I am very sorry.

Safid: Why should you be sorry? You are good woman. Christian but good.

Rachel: Well, I'm not really a Christian...

Safid: Words mean nothing, you are of God, of Allah and these pigs of Satan – listen to me Rachel wise woman: people from the West are always asking why Isis, why Daesh, why the black flags and beheadings? It is because of men like these who are traitors, who were our shield against Assad but when the money started coming they followed it, dirty Gulf money, oil money for the Sunni. And then they stopped fighting Assad and started robbing us Syrians because it is easy and safe. So the people they say: these men do not follow right road. But Islamic man in black with guns and praying every day five times and not stealing from people of Syria – yes we see they are our protectors and they are from Allah. So the people love them because they respect, and respect is everything in Syria, everything, Mrs Rachel. So there is no Revolution. It is a backwards. Like this car with one wrong gear. Back, back!

Rachel: You think you have nothing, Safid, you think you are defeated. But everything is alive here. But in London I can feel as if I must die of boredom.

Safid: Oh please let me be boredom for just one day!

Rachel: We each want what the other has. Shall we be sad or happy?

Safid: Yes we shall be those things: sad happy. Wise Rachel.

Rachel: Bollocks!

Safid: A secret word?

Rachel: Yes I am a spy.

Safid: That is not so boring?

Rachel: Not all. And I have two money belts. (Waves wallet).

Safid: Super clever, super wise, Rachel is very bollacks!

Blackout

Safid: Wake up, Mrs Rachel.
 Rachel: What is it?
 Safid: Listen. (A noise of loud, distorted speech and confused music). There is a van in the road.
 Rachel: Drive round it?
 Safid: The sand is too soft. We may not get out. (He shouts Hello in Arabic – no response).
 Rachel: What is he saying?
 Safid: That God is great. That Baghdadi is the Caliph that Sharia has come and we are living under the guidance of God who is great, who is great, who is great. (Safid is losing it, he drags out a cigarette). It is them, the Jihadists.
 Rachel: Don't get out the car.
 Safid: I must, take my cigarette. Fifty whips on my back for one cigarette.
 Rachel: Well, the packet warns you it is bad for health.
 Safid: Wise and funny one.
 Rachel: Take care.
 Safid: Too late. (He walks towards the noise which is deafening propaganda). If I don't come back drive the car away – you drive? (she nods) Get in the front seat now. (She does).
 Rachel: Bless you, Safid. My new magic...
 (A wait as the propaganda cranks up, chanting and calls to action. Then Rachel gets up, takes a flashlight and leaves the car. She finds Sharif by the body of a man).
 Sharif: He was hit by a roadside bomb. I think his own. I think it sent him to his own Paradise.
 Rachel: And the van?
 Sharif: They use them. They preach. They make soldiers. (He grabs a gun from the dead driver – then fires at the sound system, at first nothing but it stops and he hysterically empties the chamber into the machine).
 Rachel: Show me the gun. I never held one before. It's empty now, yes? (Takes gun) It's warm. As if it was alive. (She puts it to her cheek) What's that noise. (Safid grabs the gun and reloads then turn to the noise).
 Safid: (Arabic) Come out!
 Rachel: It's weeping, it's a man, no, a child crying.
 (A little boy – one of the puppets, comes out with a stick in his hand like a gun – Sharif covers him. The boy tearfully speaks Arabic in a flat voice).
 Rachel: What's he saying?
 Safid: We have broken America in two. We have crushed the countries of Europe. We promise you car bombs and explosives. Today we have declared the Caliphate. We will destroy the enemies of religion The Caliphate, the Caliphate will remain until the end of the world! And God willing we will fight under the banner of Caliph Al Baghdadi and unite Syria and Iraq forever under God, his prophet and our Caliph. Blessing upon him!
 (Safid puts down his gun – the boy just weeps and Rachel goes to him and takes him in her arms and he drops his stick gun).
 Rachel: (Sings haltingly) Once there was a way to get back homeward Once there was a way to get back home. Hush now little darling don't you cry,

and I will sing a lullaby. (Safid joins in as she repeats).
 Safid: Golden slumbers. I learn English with the Beatles.
 Rachel: What shall we do?
 Safid: Push the van off the road. Then..
 Rachel: We take him with us.
 Safid: Of course. So he can kill us...(Rachel makes a disbelieving face) when he is a man.
 Rachel: Ask him his name. (Safid does so),
 Safid: Abdullah.
 Rachel: Tell Abdullah he can sit in the back of the car with me. (Speech)
 Safid: No, he is ashamed he wants to sit in the front like a man.
 Rachel: Was that his father?
 Safid: No, Abdullah was working. They train them. Their fathers are already dead.
 Rachel: Poor orphan. Ow! (She reaches out to Abdullah, but he shakes her off in anger – speaks to Safid in Arabic).
 Safid: He doesn't want us now. The little warrior is ashamed to be weak. We can drop him off at the next village. They will take care, and send him back to Isis. Let's go.
 Blackout
 Scene 9
 Safid: We have to get out of the car now. There are mines and roadside bombs. We should park here. Come back to the car if we need it.
 Rachel: I want to phone Mr James before I go further. He has to live up to his deal.
 Safid: Mr James has told me not to contact him within 20 kilometres of the General. The Russians are now for Assad, they can hear every call.
 Rachel: He's lying.
 Safid: I think so, but I do not know so. And we talk a life. Or many lives.
 Rachel: You think Razan is dead, don't you?
 Safid: We are all dead in this terrible country. We just wait.
 Rachel: How Arab you are. You vanish when I try to touch you.
 Safid: (pause) Come on. We need to get to the camp before sunrise and the helicopters. I have a stick. I place it in the earth, then we step where I check. Follow my foot. (They labour across the stage).
 Rachel: What is that smell?
 Safid: It is the dead. (Rachel retches). Be careful! Only where I put my foot!
 Rachel: I can hear drums.
 Safid: It is her, it is her music. The whirling.
 Rachel: Whirling?
 Safid: She is a Dervish, a Sufi, this is her crazy crazy (he collapses and lies back up in the sand). See I did not explode. Boom! We have crossed the minefield. There is her tent. Go alone now. She will not want me. I will wait and smoke Marlboro to keep away the stink of burnt skin. Go wise Rachel.
 Rachel: Tricked Rachel. Stupid fucking Rachel.
 Safid: Good woman, bad word. Now I know you

bollocks!
 Rachel: Bollocks! Bollocks! Bollocks! (She edges forward alone, pulls back the flap of a tent as music grows louder then suddenly it is so loud that it is almost an explosion of sound – two sweaty dancers in military fatigues dance to *** in the corner a shrouded figure lies on a camp bed wrapped in a camouflage net. Rachel is amazed as the music ends the two military dancers climb to a ladder and train their weapons on both Rachel and the distance.
 General: You came.
 Rachel: For Razan.
 General: That is much better than coming for me. I am going nowhere. Razan is everywhere.
 Rachel: What do you mean, "you are going nowhere?"
 General: I am lying here in the dark. Waiting for death.
 Rachel: But you are coming with me.
 General: No you should live. Look at you, fresh as a flower.
 Rachel: Are you wounded? (General nods, places a hand inside her cover and brings out blood). We can drive to a hospital. Or get help.
 General: The music. Did it touch you? It used to touch Razan. I play this from her to you.
 Rachel: What is it?
 General: Sufi. I used to be secular. Assad loved me for that. Now I am something else. Nothing maybe.
 Rachel: Let's go (reaches for her).
 General: Get away (She pulls a gun). In the back of your car you will find a boy, almost a man. Take him to Germany. Munich. I called you here for this. Your Mr James owes me this.
 Rachel: But I came to take you away from here.
 General: My journey is over, my Syria is over. Now, help me up. (Rachel does so). Oh I were free to choose I would have liked a less costly freedom. But this is the price we are forced to pay. Come now, I am going out for a walk. It is almost sunrise. I want to look out over Jordan. This is for you. A poem of Rumi. You must go west. Now let me go east. Look after my son for me, like a mother, like a lioness. May blessings fall upon your head now and forever.
 Rachel: (crying) You can't (she gestures out into the desert).
 General: Death is a feather. So light.
 (Rachel moves away as the General staggers out. Shouts, shots gunfire in the distance – nothing clear).
 Rachel: (walking back towards the car) Safid, Safid!
 Youth: Safid (Arabic intense).
 Rachel: What do you mean?
 Youth: No Safid (makes cutting throat gesture)
 Rachel: (Howls) Safid!
 Youth: Go, go (waves keys at her) Turkey. Turkey. Auto – Istanbul!
 (Soldier appears running back across stage covering with machine gun)
 Soldier: Jihadi, Jihadi, Mujahadeen (Gestures her

to go and fires a burst of bullets as Youth takes Rachel by the arm and drags her towards the car)

Rachel: Safid!

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Scene one.

(Now Rachel is driving and the Youth is on back seat – she is on the phone).

Rachel: So Mr James what now?

Man: I'm sorry about Safid. He was a good –

Rachel: He was another expendable Arab. So come on and tell me what I do with this valuable Arab.

Man: Can I speak to the General.

Rachel: She doesn't trust you. She says she does not want to speak to anyone like you until she is in Paris.

Man: Fine Fine. We want her to be ..what she wants to be. Now listen. When you get near Saraqueb don't go into the town. You will see a caravanserai, Seljuk, old. To the left before the first water tower. Drive as close as you can then go to the field by the east gate. There is a helipad marked out with white stones. Call me when you see the caravanserai. Well have a chopper to you from Turkey in 20 minutes.

Got it.

Rachel: Yes. Then two tickets to London on the first flight.

Man: You don't want a night in a hotel first?

Rachel: No, I want to go, I want us out. She does too.

Man: I understand.

Rachel: You don't understand anything.

Man: OK Rachel. Whatever. Call me. Good luck.

Rachel: Thank you James. (clicks off). I'm going to screw you, you bastard. (She turns to the young man). Good, good? (Raises thumbs).

Youth: Good (raises thumbs). Marlboro?

Rachel: So young...OK – who cares. Take one. Take them all. Just fuck it.

Blackout.

Scene 2

(Noise and wind of helicopter – Rachel and Youth struggle against the wind – a soldier in goggles and helmet steps out – shakes hands with Rachel).

Rachel: Thank you.

Soldier: No thank you. You are braver than me to be on the ground in Syria.

Rachel: Well, we want to get off the ground now.

Soldier: Where's the General?

Rachel: She is joining us in Turkey. But she wants us to take her son out.

Soldier: What? That's not my orders.

Rachel: Well it is the General's demand. Which strikes me as an order.

Soldier: I take my orders from London.

Rachel: No boy, no General. (She waves youth over). Get in. (The soldier blocks the Youth)

Soldier: Steady, steady, lad.

Youth: (Swears in Arabic).

Soldier: I can't take him.

Rachel: Then you can't take me or get the General to Paris. Are you going to hand Syria to the Russians? Is that your orders from London? Besides, I thought London takes its orders from Washington?

Soldier: I am a soldier.

Rachel: This is not a military mission. It's diplomatic. You are out of your depth, Captain. (he hesitates). Blame me. I take the rap.

Youth: (Brightening) Rap?

Rachel: Yea Refugees of Rap. (Youth and Rachel pose and laugh).

Soldier: Get in. Your general had better be in Antayka. There's a press conference tomorrow.

Rachel: She's a General. She can get through the border faster than we can. And she wants to see her son, not just you, Captain.

Soldier: I'm not a Captain, but thanks for calling me one. Let's go.

Black out.

Scene three.

(Turkey. A large chair again. The Man is seated in it, face unseen).

Man: The General is dead.

Rachel: I was there.

Man: Why did you lie?

Rachel: Because she asked me to get her son out. And a bit of revenge, if I am honest, Mr Bastard.

Man: That joke has outworn its welcome.

Rachel: Safid is dead too. Had he outworn his welcome?

Man: He was in the Free Syrian Army. There is a war.

Rachel: Ok so you are right, politically, morally and all you have to do to prove it is get the General's son to Britain with a nice visa. Then we will all live happily ever after.

Man: I can't issue visas.

Rachel: Why not? I thought you were it, the government?

Man: The government is very sensitive to public opinion. We have quotas for refugees. Immigrants? Well you know about that better than I do. You live in Londonistan.

Rachel: So the Daily Mail runs MI6? Oh Mr Bond, where are you now?

Man: I admire you, Rachel, your failure in Syria is hardly your fault. Any more than you should blame yourself for your friend Razan's disappearance. You simply gave Razan the platform to offend every violent faction in Syria. How were you to know that you were putting her in terrible danger, like most western activists you need to be naïve to get the job.

Rachel: Cunt.

Man: Maybe.

Rachel: I'm going to the press.

Man: Oh they will be so bored I doubt if you will make the Guardian online. And here is your ticket home. One ticket.

(Rachel takes it and tears it up). Well, that's your problem, sweetheart. You won't be seeing me again. Ever.

Rachel: I'm getting the boy out. Watch me!

Blackout.

Turk: Mrs Rachel. Mer haba. It's me.

Rachel: Oh. Choc Teshekur. See I remember.

Turk: I can help you.

Rachel: How do you know.

Turk: I listen at door. Mr James so angry I laugh. Sorry.

Rachel: I laugh too.

Turk: British lose Empire very funny, like is it under the table? Where's my empire? (Bends and looks) Empire? Hello? Empire!

Rachel: (Both laugh) The best jokes are true.

Turk: We Turks lost our empire too. But forget it, we talk help.

Rachel: How?

Turk: Your man, well boy-man. I can get him to Greece. Maybe Germany.

Rachel: How?

Turk: Much.

Rachel; How much?

Turk: No much money. But possible.

Rachel: He showed me. He has one thousand dollars.

Turk: That is not much.

Rachel: Then how much?

Turk: Two thousand to Greece, another two maybe two and a half to Germany. But that is advice only. You need to meet men in Greece. Or he walks.

Rachel: From Greece to Germany!

Turk: Many do.

Rachel: No. I promised I would care for him.

Turk: Do you have money?

Rachel: Why does everyone here think every Westerner has money?

Turk: Because if they do not have money they can get it. Always.

Rachel: I work for an NGO! I earn in my job... no..my credit card was stolen. Actually it was a debit card. (Crestfallen).

Turk: Then he has not much chance. Just a tent in Turkey, five years maybe then back to Syria.

Rachel: I will make a call. Can I use your phone? (Turk nods) Teshekur. (She dials) Hello, Dad?

Blackout

Scene 4

Turk: (In Arabic) This is your bus, Hassan. (English) It will take him to Mamaris.

Rachel: How long will it take?

Turk: Twenty seven hours. Maybe thirty.

Rachel: And I hop on a flight.

Turk: You are British. (Shrugs).

Youth/Hassan: And in Mamaris? (he is very subdued, almost uninterested).

Turk: (Arabic) Take this phone. Dial the number in the contacts under "A". He will get you to the boat. When you are on the beach, or near the Greek beach, phone "R" that is Mrs Rachel.

Rachel: Tell him I will be in Lesbos. Tell him it will be wonderful to see him and that we will go to Munich, to meet his people. As his Mother

wished.

(Turk starts to say this but Hassan just walks away fiddling with his phone).

Turk: Is he alright?

Rachel: I don't know, I don't think so. I think he is in shock. I need to get him to see a doctor or someone. (Angry and frustrated) What do I know? I am not a mother! And I am certainly not a lioness.

(Blackout).

Scene 5

(A movement sequence with music – probably again from Dedar. Hassan sits on a wheeled platform in a life jacket – other life jackets on poles with neutral puppet heads are squashed around him. The boat is pulled by ropes to left and right, finally the boat spins and Hassan is tossed into the water, he rolls offstage as the boat vanishes and returns soaking in his life jacket crawling as if on the edge of beach, collapsing face down. A policeman comes and kicks him. Perhaps another body is beside him, but this body is drowned. Hassan groans. The policeman sighs, and pushes him to his feet with a truncheon. With his arms raised, coughing water, but still strangely subdued, Hassan exits as Rachel enters and sits on a chair).

Rachel: No I am taking full responsibility for him. He is not staying in the camp. I have papers stamped in Athens two days ago - see.

Voice: He has no right to leave the island until his case is processed. He is a man.

Rachel: A boy.

Voice: We decide that. We have been instructed to screen for terrorists. Take him to the hotel but if he leaves the island before screening he and you face arrest.

Rachel: You know thousands of men are leaving this island without screening!

Voice: And when they put a bomb in your London underground you will know why I must do everything to stop them!

(Hassan emerges – she goes to hug him, then shake hands then raises a thumbs up to which he nods having made it clear he wants no physical contact).

Rachel: I wish you could understand me, Hassan, "Hotel". This is the hotel.

Hassan: Ah hotel.

Rachel: Good, (miming) I have you a room. New clothes – gives him bag (pointing). We get the key. Reception. (Key).

(A the hotel reception desk is a woman in bikini/swimsuit/towel – she has a glass of wine – Rachel and Hassan must queue behind her).

Excuse me, can I just get my keys?

Receptionist: One moment please. (Hassan is staring at the woman, incredulous not leering).

Woman: Do you have an ice bucket? I mean how can I drink warm white wine.

Receptionist: I have no ice. We have electricity problem, So many refugees on the island.

Woman: Well it's a disgrace. No one told me this when I booked the holiday. Why did no one tell me? Oh my God there's even one here! (Sees

Hassan). I 'm not going on holiday in a refugee camp.

Rachel: Just shut up/fuck off you spoilt bitch!

Woman: (Cries and runs off). I want my money back.

Rachel: I'm sorry, sir.

Receptionist: So am I. Hello young man. Welcome to Greece. (Then repeats in halting Arabic. Hassan solemnly shakes his hand). We are all God's children. Bless you for helping him.

Rachel: Bless you too.

(Blackout).

Rachel: (To man in Balaclava) OK a cargo boat. A cabin. Thessaloniki. Then a lorry- a truck, with a seat, his own seat. To Munich. OK to Bavaria then he claims asylum and they take him to Munich. No screening until he gets to Munich. Two thousand dollars - one thousand now and t he rest when I get a phone call from Munich with a photo, a phone photo will do.

Man: Two thousand now. One thousand on arrival with photo.

Rachel We agreed two thousand.

Man: Photos are expensive.

Rachel: Oh I see, for one thousand now you just push him in the water.

Man: What do you do for these Arabs, lady? What is your risk? You do not speak. Well. There are others who want this truck. Maybe four thousand dollars. I am busy, speak quickly.

Rachel: I agree. Here (passes money in envelope). I am not a lioness I am a chicken.

(Hassan enters in his old dirty Arabic clothes).

Hassan, why didn't you change? (she gestures to clothes – he hands her the bag back with jeans etc).

Blackout.

Scene 6

(A movement and music scene). Hassan enters a lorry. The doors slam – the others in the darkness lit only by mobile phone light. There are two lorry walls, metallic. The lorry sways and judders. Lights go out, cars pass. A sense of time passing.

The refugees start asking for water, then shouting in Arabic and English for water. They bang on the walls and doors. Nothing happens, they become hysterical. The sound of a police siren – the doors are forced open and the refugees including Hassan spill out).

Policewoman: (Handing out bottles of mineral water which they drink ravenously). Welcome to Germany.

Woman Refugee/survivor: (Dancing) Oh Germany, Germany, Germany!

Man Refugee: (Salutes Policewoman who laughs) You are number two most beautiful wonderful woman in world!

Policewoman: (Shouting in German) Ambulance over here! (Back to English) Who is number one most beautiful, wonderful woman, your wife I hope?

Man: No, no most wonderful lovely woman is Mrs Merkel!

All chant and laugh: Mrs Merkel, Mrs Merkel, Mrs Merkel!

Man: Marry me!

(The scene blacks out but a spotlight settles on Hassan who kneels in prayer).

Blackout.

Scene 7

(Hassan is standing holding an identity document. Rachel takes a picture of him on her phone).

Rachel: Congratulations, Hassan. You are granted asylum.

(A man in Moslem dress and a white Haj cap comes out and addresses Rachel – he puts his arms on Hassan's shoulder).

Man: Thank you Madam. We are very happy that you have brought my cousin's son to us.

Rachel: You and Hassan should be very proud of his mother.

Man: We honour her but we believe she made many mistakes.

Rachel: I think it is not necessary to say that to Hassan.

(Arabic talk between Hassan and the Man).

Man: Hassan says he is of the same belief. His mother, blessing be upon her, was not close enough to Islam.

Rachel: Well that is not for me to know. Are you learning German now, Hassan. Maybe you can learn English so we can speak to each other at last?

Man: Hassan has already told me to say this to you: that he thanks you for what you have done. That he will not learn any language but the language of the Koran. That he does not think it correct to have contact with an unbeliever and a woman who is not married. He cannot give you a gift as you have so much, but he wills that one day he can give you the greatest gift of all, that you will come to Islam.

May the prophet send his blessings down upon you. (Hassan repeats in Arabic and turns coldly away from Rachel who is left alone. Tears in her eyes. She walks to the front of the stage, switching music from her I phone on – it is Mercan Dedar and speaks the poem from the letter that the General gave her).

Rachel: For Razan, for the General and for Rachel, neither mother nor lion:

Inside this new love, die.

Your way begins on the other side.

Become the sky.

Take a hammer to the prison wall.

Escape. Walk out like someone suddenly born into color.

Do it now. You're covered with a thick cloud.

Slide out the side. Die, and be quiet.

Quietness is the surest sign that you've died.

Your old life was a frantic running from silence.

The speechless full moon breaks from a cloud now.

(pause)

I am blessed.

The end.

Paul Stebbings 2017 January

tnttheatre1@gmail.com