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October 7th
a one-act play in five parts

by

Allan Havis

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PRODUCTION NOTE: The 3 actor play requires multiple casting for the fictional ensemble. The actor playing Shira will reappear in the role of the Woman in I. The actor playing Ahmed will reappear in the role of the Man in Part II. The actor playing Aisha will reappear in the role of Nour in Part II. In Part III, with only two women on stage, assigned casting can be random. In Part IV, the male actor plays CQ Taylor and the actor playing Nour in Part III will continue in the same role. The actor playing Aisha/Nour will play Sofia in Part V. The narrative jumps from a Gaza tunnel 2023 to a Minneapolis café 2024, back to October 8, 2023, in Los Angeles, to Chicago May 2025, and finally to New York May 2025.

PART I

SETTING: A TUNNEL IN GAZA, SOME DAYS OR WEEKS AFTER OCTOBER 7, 2023. PITCH BLACK. LIGHTS RISE SLOWLY TO A DARK INTERIOR. PERHAPS THE SOUND OF DRIPPING WATER IN THE DISTANCE.

SCENE ONE

SHIRA, AN ISRAELI WOMAN, HAS A BLINDFOLD MASKING HER EYES. SHE SITS ON A METAL FOLD CHAIR. AHMED, A HAMAS COMBATANT, SMOKES A CIGARETTE. SHIRA AND AHMED ARE IN A TUNNEL. HER LEGS ARE TIED, BUT HER HANDS ARE FREE.

AHMED

I watch you. You know I watch you. I like to watch you. I do not speak loud but I want you to hear me.

(Silence)

My name. I want to tell you my name.

(Silence)

I am not allowed to tell you my name.

(Silence)

I know you are thirsty. I brought you clean water. In a bottle. A plastic bottle. Here. I speak a little Hebrew. I speak a little English. I speak a little French.

(Silence)

Je parle un peu français.

אני מדבר קצת עברית / ani me-da-ber ktsat iv-rit

Tell me you understand.

SHIRA

(After a long silence)

I understand.

AHMED

Good. Take the bottle.

(He places the uncapped bottle of water in her hands)

Drink. I tell you. Drink.

(She drinks and coughs up water)

Don't waste the water. I know your name.

(Silence. He removes her blindfold)

Shira. Look at me.

(She looks at him for an instant)

Shira. I am not like the others.

(Pause)

I worked in Sderot. I worked construction. For two years. I lived in Morocco for a few years.

(Silence)

Drink water.

(Pause)

You don't want to die today. Do you understand?

(Pause)

Say you understand. Shira.

(Shira nods her head slowly)

Do you want a cigarette?

SHIRA

No.

AHMED

A cigarette might be nice. I think it would be very nice.

SHIRA

I don't smoke.

AHMED

Okay.

SHIRA

Where is Ayelet?

AHMED

Who is Ayelet?

SHIRA

My girlfriend. We were at the Luna festival. She is my roommate.

AHMED

Is she as pretty as you are?

SHIRA

Ayelet is very pretty.

AHMED

Does she have tattoos?

SHIRA

No tattoos.

AHMED

Describe her.

(Pause)

Shira, describe her. I will not ask a third time.

SHIRA

Red hair. Long red hair. Black glasses. Skinny arms. Pink halter top.

AHMED

Halter top?

SHIRA

Pink shirt. Pink blouse. Pink top.

AHMED

She's dead.

SHIRA

What?

AHMED

She died in her sleep. Some days ago. She refused to eat. She was very sick.

SHIRA

Ayelet.

AHMED

We gave her medicine, Shira. Antibiotics. She coughed up blood. Diarrhea. Bad health. She was a lucky one. Death and sleep. No pain. She feared pain, Shira.

(Pause)

The moon is full tonight, Shira. I can leave the tunnels. My cousin gives me the freedom. I dress in black when I go up. We are not allowed to leave the tunnels. Some leave the tunnels and die in a minute. That fast. Yes. Allah can take anyone. Any time. Allah's will controls us. Allah can never forgive Jews. You must know this.

(Pause)

I like the moonlight. The full moon has a face. A laughing face. Nothing funny.

(Pause)

I am lonely in the dark. But the moon fills me with hope. Do you want sanitary napkin?

SHIRA

No.

AHMED

I could wash you. I could wash your hair. I could be gentle. Answer me, Shira.

(Silence)

Your body has an odor. It is a bad odor, Shira. Let me wash your hair. If I do a good job, you can let me wash your body. You are pretty for a Jew.

(Silence)

Or do you wish to die in dirty hole with half dead rats? They will eat you as they drop dead.

(Pause)

You have a boyfriend who thinks you are dead, Shira.

SHIRA

How do you know that?

AHMED

I know it.

(Pause)

My brothers are in the next tunnel.

(Pause)

We share information, Shira.

(Pause)

We think together.

(Pause)

We are not stupid. I'm protecting you.

(Pause)

I'm protecting your body.

SHIRA

Shut up.

(Pause)

I said to your face . . . shut up.

AHMED

I cannot shut up. I am your only friend in Gaza. Allah knows this.

(Pause)

Baby, I keep you alive.

SHIRA

Shut the fuck up.

AHMED

Shut the fuck up? Is this how you talk to me?

(Pause)

I offer you help. I offer you the life of your boyfriend. He is in the next tunnel.

And I count nine dead bodies in the tunnel. The odor is horrible. We wrap the bodies in burlap and plastic tarps. Nothing stops the odor. We vomit from the odor.

(Pause)

Do you attend university with your boyfriend, Shira?

(Pause)

Answer me and I will be your friend, Shira.

SHIRA

I go to Tel Aviv University.

AHMED

Thank you.

(Removes her blindfold)

We can put this back on in a few minutes, okay?

(Pause)

What do you study at Tel Aviv University?

SHIRA

Health sciences.

AHMED

Health sciences?

SHIRA

العلوم الصحية

aleulum alsihiya.

AHMED

Will you be a doctor or a nurse?

(Pause)

Will you be a pharmacist or a professor?

(Pause)

You have to answer my questions, Shira.

SHIRA

I don't know.

(Silence)

My mother is a doctor.

AHMED

I think you want to be a doctor.

(Pause)

What does your father do?

SHIRA

He is a lawyer.

AHMED

A lawyer?

(Pause)

For the Israeli government?

SHIRA

No.

AHMED

For Mercedes Benz?

SHIRA

No.

AHMED

For Coca Cola?

SHIRA

No.

AHMED

I hate Coca Cola, Shira.

(Silence)

I like Pepsi.

SHIRA

If I became a doctor, I would treat Arabs and Jews in my clinic.

AHMED

I believe you. I do. Look at me.

(Pause)

I could untie your hands.

End of Scene

SCENE TWO

(SHIRA HAS HER BLINDFOLD ON. AGAIN, SHE SITS ON A METAL FOLD CHAIR; HER HANDS AND LEGS ARE TIED. A HAMAS FEMALE COMBATANT, AISHA, ENTERS. THERE IS A

VIDEO CAMCORD ON A TRIPOD AIMED AT SHIRA, WITH TWO CONICAL LAMPS TURNED OFF)

AISHA

I need to talk to you. Your name is Shira.

(Pause)

Is that your name?

(Pause)

How old are you?

(Pause)

I ask again. How old are you?

SHIRA

Twenty.

AISHA

You look older. I am older than you. We can feed you now.

(Pause)

Did you hear me?

SHIRA

Yes. I heard you.

AISHA

Are you hungry?

SHIRA

Yes.

AISHA

Yes?

SHIRA

Yes, I am hungry.

AISHA

How many days do you think have gone by?

SHIRA

I don't know.

AISHA

You should count the days. You know how to count.

SHIRA

I know how to count. But I lost count.

AISHA

How could you lose count? You look like a smart Jew. Like smart IDF soldier.

SHIRA

Where is Ahmed?

AISHA

Ahmed?

SHIRA

The last guard was Ahmed.

AISHA

I don't know any Ahmed working this tunnel.

SHIRA

Maybe he told me a fake name.

AISHA

Yes, some of us feel like using made up names. Prisoners deserve little from us. You're not a hostage of war. You're a prisoner of war. You're a war criminal and before you die, or . . . before you are released, you will have this charred into your brain.

(Silence)

Did you ever watch the movie, *Charlie's Angels*? Do you like Cameron Diaz?

(Nudges Shira's blindfold to see her eyes for a moment which becomes a very intimate action)

Your name is Shira.

(Pause)

Shira. With the beauty mole on your neck.

(Pause)

And you don't smoke cigarettes. Is that correct?

(Pause)

I want you to make a video for us, Shira. I know "Ahmed" asked you to make the video, but you became a little girl with him. I want you to be a woman with me. Do you understand me?

(Pause)

I don't like silence. You don't like silence. Would you like to try a cigarette? A filtered cigarette. A smooth, relaxing cigarette, Shira.

(Pause)

You don't like pain. I don't like pain. Your mother had pain when she birthed you. I want you to think about your mother today, Shira.

(Pause)

I can read your mind, Shira. You feel guilty. You think God is testing you. You want to know why God is testing you. I can tell you why Allah is testing you. And how long Allah is testing you.

(Pause)

The answer is . . . over six centuries.

(Pause)

1299. Anatolia. 623 years, Shira.

(Pause)

Go tell Noa Tishby, okay?

(Silence)

You know how to survive. You have been with several men in the tunnels. Some of the men thought you are here for their sexual pleasure. Is that true? Maybe you are pregnant. Have you ever been pregnant, Shira?

(Pause)

I will ask you again. Have you ever been pregnant, Shira?

SHIRA

No.

AISHA

This is the Book. This is the Quran. No doubt about it— for those mindful of Allah. who believe in the invisible, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you 'O Prophet' and what was shown before you, and have faith in the Hereafter. It is they who are 'truly' guided by their God, and they will be successful. As for those who lie, who embrace disbelief, it is the same whether you warn them or not—they will never believe. Allah has sealed their hearts. These infidels will suffer endless punishment. And there are some who say, "We believe in Allah and the Last Day," yet they are not 'true' believers. They wish to lie to Allah and the believers, yet they only deceive themselves, but they fail to perceive the full truth. There is cancer in their hearts, and Allah 'only' lets their cancer spread. They will be tortured for their lies. When these sinners are told, "Do not spread corruption," they reply, "We are only peacemakers!" Indeed, it is you and your Zionists who are our corruptors, but you fail to see this.

(Pause)

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَى أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ

Khata mal-lahu 'ala qulubihim wa 'ala sam'ihim, wa 'ala absarihim ghishawah, wa lahum adhab.

(Allah has sealed their hearts and hearing, and over their eyes is a veil, and for them is a great punishment)

(Pause)

You need a sister. You need a sister. Do you hear me, Shira? Let me be your sister. You don't want to die today. Do you have a sister back home, Shira?

(Pause. Aisha touches Shira's hair)

Netanyahu. Netanyahu. Netanyahu. Netanyahu.

(Aisha laughs gruffly)

Do you have a brother back home? A baby brother? Are you kosher? Did you fuck "Ahmed", Shira? Did you let him touch your hair? Were you sleeping with Ahmed? Hugging his chest of hair? Look at me, Shira. Don't look away when I talk to you. I am more pretty than you. You have a scar on your face. I see it. A new scar. I have no scars on my face.

(Aisha coughs and sweeps the hair from own face as a gesture to Shira)

SHIRA

I need to go to the toilet.

AISHA

The toilet?

SHIRA

Yes. Please.

AISHA

The toilet is broken. We have a bucket, Shira.

SHIRA

I don't care. I need to go.

AISHA

Ahmed does not know you were part of Israel Defense Force Unit 414.

SHIRA

I told him.

AISHA

Did you? Then he has no memory.

(Pause)

Ahmed does not know that you served at Nahal Oz IDF base.

SHIRA

We had no weapons. We had no weapons on our bodies. No women in uniform had guns at the base. You had a chance at Oslo. Arafat turned his back.

AISHA

I know. Yes. Arafat was crazy. IDF is crazy. Look how they respect you. Only your God can laugh at this.

(Aisha turns on the two lamps next to the tripod. She turns on the video camera, adjusting the lens to frame Shira's body. She removes Shira's blindfold)

We will make a recording now, Shira. You know what I want you to say. I want you to live. Do not spread corruption. Honor the Quran, the true Book.

(Aisha takes out a cigarette and lights it. She inhales and then exhales. The spaces slowly dim to blackout and then a red glow illuminates the area behind Shira's body)

SHIRA

You could be my sister.

(Pause)

You could be my cousin.

(Pause)

You could be my neighbor.

(Pause)

In Leviticus, we are told something contradictory.

(The space becomes completely black again. There is a gunshot. There is sustained silence for over a minute before the set changes. During the set change, we might hear war sirens, bombings, automatic gunfire which eventually transition to urban sounds and perhaps a fire truck)