

LAST TRAIN INTO NIGHT

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The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give that away.

– Pablo Picasso

I call for actors burning at the stakes, signaling on fluttering wings through the flames.

– Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double

LAST TRAIN INTO NIGHT

TIME AND PLACE

Now. Gaza (and a little beyond).

CHARACTERS

MALAK (“Angel” or “Messenger” in Arabic ملاك), female, 16.

FATHER, Angel’s father.

SAWAD, Angel’s abusive husband.

UKHTI (“my sister” in Arabic), Angel’s somewhat older, more ingenuous, sister.

Two women in black; and two Israeli soldiers (one male, one female).

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE 1 – FIRST SHOOTING

Upstage right two rooms are raised on stilts or risers. The “Father’s room” is a one-window, dimly-lit room with holes shattered in the walls, debris on the floor, a mattress, a chair, and a damaged doorway. Stage left of it is the “Other room,” with a bed, table, and chair – serving first as Sawad’s bedroom, and later as a bedroom in the house of two of the Gaza humanitarian sisterhood. Outside, between the two rooms, are broken walls and rubble, likewise elevated.

Underneath is a secret tunnel from Gaza into Israel.

Night. Sounds of bombs exploding. Flashes of light. ANGEL, dressed in white, exits Father’s room to go to a nearby broken wall, where she rescues a bleeding child, and sits and cradles it in her arms, until a medic comes from behind the wall to carry the child offstage. ANGEL stands, goes back into Father’s room, fetches a backpack and a pair of paint guns, puts the paint guns into the backpack, and sits. A full moon comes out.

SCENE 2 – SECOND SHOOTING

Morning. ANGEL, dressed in black, the backpack on her back, climbs down to stage level from Father’s room. At center stage:

ANGEL

I paint, not to kill people but the plague that’s in them.

Like Picasso painting Guernica.

Past armies of rats.

Through a virus that destroys social order.

To the heart of hatred.

To the very swollen tongues of hatred.

And the soul of a contagion that must be eradicated.

I was named Malak.

Arabic, meaning Angel.

Or messenger.

But naming me Malak hasn’t kept the scourge from touching me.

Names don’t protect people in this place. Titles don’t protect people in this place.

Nor does buying a seat on the last train into night.

Because there are no trains out of Gaza.

**Behind ANGEL hangs a white sheet,
down to and partially on the stage floor.
On a signal from her, four individuals
(dressed entirely in white scrubs, white
masks, white gloves, and white bags over
their feet) line up against the sheet.
ANGEL sets her backpack down, pulls
out the two paint guns, and spray paints
the four of them in red. They fall to the
ground.**

ANGEL

I was born with a pillar inside me.
Allah's pillar.
Inside me.
It's what drew Allah *into me*.
Like a stone, which doesn't come alive until it draws a master sculptor's hands
over its body.
I care for children. Not for men. It's an angel's blessing/curse upon me.
I've cared for nothing but children, and stories of children, since ... for as long as I
can remember. Four I guess.
Civilized men are judged by their behavior, regardless of their power.
And what civilized man of power lives along our border?
On either side?
Gaza *or* Israel?
I haven't met any. Not a one! None who care for children. Not like I do.
None but those who corrupt Allah's divine poetry of life.
Children are the only real feeling left in the hollowness.
In this crumbling piece of salt where I've tried sixteen years to live.
Tried most of my sixteen years caring for children.
Keeping them alive.
Tried most of my sixteen years keeping my voice alive.
Unswallowed by the moral pollution of this place.

I need to stop rehearsing, and write things down.
Everything that has not yet been born can be brought to life in the theatre of the
mind. Even hope. If it's written down. And found.

**The four painted victims rise and exit,
taking the white sheet with them as
ANGEL puts the guns back in the
backpack.**

ANGEL

Plagues, like those in Egypt at the time of Moses, like those during the Black Death, like Gaza, plagues describe more than simply the morbid. They describe the overwhelming, demoralizing effects produced on the minds of the victims. It's what I've been told, and it's what I've seen.

The lies.

The depravity.

The hypocrisy.

The utter feeling of helplessness.

And that is why my paint....

And why theatre....

And why angels.

There is a second pillar in me.

It comes from the ground.

From the scorched soil.

From the almost unbearable pain of children dying in my arms.

From the hateful blackness of the plague.

From the diarrhea of words some might serve as poetry.

Pause.

When all is said and done, I shall be the double I am.

A husk. A seashell of myself.

Existing in a reality I deny.

Passing myself on the streets of bomb-raked buildings.

Conscious of feeling unconscious.

Connected with emptiness.

Alive and dead.

Married off by my Father for the sake of poverty.

Distressed with the endless rhythm of distress and despair, rising in the air like a burning cloud.

Witnessing the best minds of a generation destroyed.

Palestinians, howling on their knees in the streets at night.

And I shall write it all down.

To be found....

Goodbye.

ANGEL climbs up, hides the backpack in a broken wall, enters the Other room, and sits down on the bed.

3 – A BEATING

Evening. ANGEL is sitting alone on the bed. Her husband, SAWAD, enters, and she stands. He stares at her.

SAWAD

Remove that hideous garment....

ANGEL

[*pause*] Sawad, I am pregnant.

SAWAD

I said, take your clothes off, or I shall rip them off you....

ANGEL

[*beat*] No, Sawad, I cannot.

SAWAD

I am your husband.
You do as I say, Malak.
Now.

ANGEL

I have my rights. You are ungentle with me.

SAWAD

I despise insolence in a woman....

SAWAD lunges at ANGEL, slapping her hard across the face. She steps back at first, and then forward, scratching his face and eye, severely. He staggers, holding a hand over one eye, and begins beating her savagely with his free hand. She turns her back and falls onto the bed, where he kicks her several times. Continuing to hold a hand over his bleeding eye, SAWAD exits. After a period of time, writhing in pain, ANGEL struggles to her feet, stumbles out of the Other room, and to the doorway of her Father's room, where she stands motionless.

SCENE 4 – FATHER

Dusk. Angel's FATHER is lying on the mattress inside. Olive trees, upstage center, are lit by a spot. ANGEL enters through the doorway and walks toward the mattress.

ANGEL

Father?... Are you in here?... Are you alone?

FATHER

Who's here?

I'm a weak and sick man, and cannot get up now.

[*beat*] Is that you, Daughter?... I cannot see you.

ANGEL

It is I, Father. Angel.

FATHER

Why are you not with your husband?...

[*pause*] So small, you. So small your fingers, reaching out.

So small your ears; so small your nose.

I call goodnight to you, every night; but I hear nothing.

What parent should be so deaf?

[*pause; then surprised*] What are you doing here?

Speak up. I can barely hear you.

ANGEL

Sits.

My baby's dying, Papa.

FATHER

Angel! It is you! You're a married woman.

Get yourself to your husband ... straight off ... before he locks you out.

ANGEL

He did this to me.

FATHER

What am I to do? I have nothing to share.

Go back to him. I have no money. I have little food. I can hardly see.

I can't fight the darkness, and the weather, too.

Changing all the time. Blowing in one problem after another.

ANGEL

I won't go back.

FATHER

Go back?

ANGEL

Never.

FATHER

I can't care for you. I have nothing.
You belong to your husband.

ANGEL

Why did you do this to me?
Why did you promise me, and never take me away from here?

FATHER

I can't remember.

ANGEL

You were my father. Do you remember that? And what it means?

FATHER

I had a father, once. He was quiet like me.

ANGEL

Another word for "coward"?

FATHER

He was no coward. He died fighting.
I only wanted him to stay.
Whether he loved me, or didn't love me, I only wanted him to stay.
But he turned his eyes away. And mother cried. And I cried....

ANGEL

I don't understand you, Father. Anymore.

FATHER

I can see their faces. Walking in the trees.

ANGEL

I don't understand what's in your mind.

FATHER

The *land* is in my mind. The land, and the trees. They are always in my mind. It is *our land*. They are *our trees*. Israel took our trees.

ANGEL

That was ages ago.

FATHER

It was a crime.

ANGEL

The crime is now. The killing of children in Gaza.
The crime is *now*. *My* dying child....
[beat] *Can't you see, Papa?*

FATHER

I can scarcely see a thing.

ANGEL

Can you see this child, dying inside me?

FATHER

The time is never right.

ANGEL

The time is never right?

FATHER

For getting our land back.

ANGEL

Land is not Allah's prize. Children are the prize.

FATHER

Land is all there is. Land is the only important thing there is.

ANGEL

You love land more than me? You love land more than your own grandchild?

FATHER

I hate Israel for stealing Palestinian land.

ANGEL

You hate Israel more than you love me?

FATHER

[*beat*] The time is never right.

ANGEL

For what?

FATHER

For getting our land back.

ANGEL

Allah's time is always right. The Qur'an says so.
It says land belongs to the tribe Allah chooses.
And Allah gave Ishmael our lands, in Arabia, and Isaac, their lands.
Read the Qur'an: Allah gives each tribe the land they need and deserve.

FATHER

Why are you talking to me like this? I have read the Qur'an. I know the Qur'an.

ANGEL

Reciting the Qur'an the way you do proves nothing.

FATHER

What can *you* know?
A woman has no idea how to read the holy book.
You know nothing.
You can know nothing.

ANGEL

I know that Allah has said:
He will join together the hearts of enemies.
You say the time is never right.
I say the time is right now.
Before *I* die.

FATHER

Right now?

ANGEL

For giving up the land and saving our children.
We must give up the land.
They have toiled it more than seventy years.
It's theirs.
And life is our children's birthright.

FATHER

How could you have been so light in my arms, and now so heavy on my chest?
You were raised with more respect than that....
[beat] *You must be dead*, and I am too old and weak to see it.
But I tell you: You must be dead. All of my family.

ANGEL

I am Angel. *You* named me.
I am a woman ... and a mother about to lose my child.
And I *can* read.... And write.

FATHER

I should have taught you more respect.
I should have remarried.
But I was too poor....
[beat] You are nothing to me.
I should have

ANGEL

Caught the last train into night. With me on it. As you always promised.

FATHER

There is no train. Gaza is an island. It has no trains. It has no escape.
It is nothing but a shipwreck of refugees, oceans of hatred, and Israelis on every side....
I hate Israelis.
Every Palestinian hates Israelis.

ANGEL

Gaza is indeed a prison. As you say. The greatest prison on this Earth.
There are times in life to praise Allah for joy and hope.
Gaza is not one of them.
Up and down, thirty miles. In and out, five.
One hundred fifty square miles of skulls, banging against walls, with brains leaking out.
Two million people trapped and broken.
Electricity, three hours a day.
Sewage, flooding the waters of our only beach.
People insanely praying for oblivion.
Throwing themselves against the wall in desperation.
Sons and daughters of Lot, gathered under a smothering storm of pestilence.
And no way out.

ANGEL

Let them have their sand, and let us have our children safe.
The children deserve their own life. Not ancient hatreds.
For what? You mourn dry land. I mourn live souls.

FATHER

I mourn the memories....
There's no room for you here. Get out. Go back to your husband.
Allah burdens a man with only what he can bear, and I can bear you no more.

ANGEL

What's happened to your mind? What's changed you like this?
You're not my Father anymore.... Why?...

FATHER

Go back to your husband.

ANGEL

I shall not. I'll live outdoors in a tent.
I'll live in abandoned buildings with rats for parents.
I'll live with the homeless until I find refuge, or die in the streets.
But I'll never go back to Sawad again.

FATHER

Nothing's happened to my mind.
I have memories, that's all. And I am lonely.
I have memories of trees that come suddenly over me, like a blanket.
And the smell of baking bread.
And the sand, waiting for the shadows of my feet.
I have memories of a stand of cypress wood, dozing at my father's knee.
I have memories of the sound of my parents' quiet whispering, and fields growing
high and green, and braids of wheat, groomed by the wind.
I have memories of almond blossoms, and olive trees cut down by Israelis.

The spot on the olive trees goes dark.

ANGEL

I don't care about that. I'll find my own train out.

FATHER

Death....

ANGEL exits.

SCENE 5 – A MISCARRIAGE

Night. ANGEL stumbles from her Father's room, across the rubble (where she gets her hidden backpack) to the door of the Other room, and knocks. A woman, dressed in black and wearing a niqab over her face, opens the door, and ANGEL collapses into her arms. A second woman, similarly dressed, rushes to her assistance; and the two of them help ANGEL onto the bed, where they remove her backpack and outer garments, revealing a white undergarment, extensive bruising, and considerable blood at her midsection. ANGEL suffers a miscarriage, attended by the two women – at the final stage of which she makes her way, painfully, to her knees and aborts. The women clean her up. During the scene the following is heard from offstage:

FATHER (Offstage)

O, my Angel, my little, little Angel.
O, my Angel, my soft and precious pearl.
Why do I do when I always do nothing?
When every breath brings sadness to my heart?

Why should such a one as you be locked within the darkness of this place?
So small, you. So small your fingers reaching out.
So small your ears; so small your nose.
So sweet your smile, your eyes, your innocence.

Oh, that you could always stay an angel, and always smile at me.
And never see your father as the defeated man I am.
And never see your father as the one who let your mother and your sister slip away.

Angel, you are the last one left alive.
The last of beauty left alive in all the dirt and misery of this hole.

Shhhh, shhhh, my little one.
When the moon opens its eye....
Shhhh. We'll send ten thousand thoughts a million miles away.
You are so sweet and beautiful.
Surely you're an angel, brought to comfort grief.
Surely you're an angel, brought into my arms to comfort me.
Brought to comfort with your shining eyes.

FATHER (Offstage)

What can I offer you to stay? Peace?
We have no word for peace with Israel.
A home?
I have no home that's free from pocks and poverty.
A husband?...
Possibly, God willing.

Tonight I feel the night when you were born.
You came in the dark, sweet and perfect.
I saw the sky open with promise, adorning every face....
Now I call goodnight to you, every night.
But I hear nothing.
Why should a parent be so deaf?

SCENE 6 – A WRITING

Evening. ANGEL, alone in the Other room in candlelight, seats herself at the table, where there is a laptop.

ANGEL

The air feels sucked from my lungs.
Like my baby, from my womb.
Like walls from my tomb.
I've lost my baby, and can barely catch a breath.

Pause.

It is not my time to choke to death. Not with this inside me.
Sawad was inside me.
His male impregnated me.
Suffered me.
Unloved me.
Beat me and un-pregnated me.

I was powerless ... what was done to me.
But my story.
I have my story, and the power to write it down.

Chapter One.
Two weeks ago I was beaten; and I miscarried.

ANGEL

Chapter Two.
My Father once loved me.
And cared for me.
And bathed me.
And fed me.
And sang to me.
And lied to me.

Chapter Three are children, dying in my arms.
Too many to count.
Wasted brains, rotting in broken shells.
Without hope of escape.

Chapter Four is the evil of the ghetto,
ignored in an equally evil way by the richest cities in the world.
What is the solution? Burn Gaza down?
The world to watch, afraid of saying anything,
afraid of being branded anti-Semitic?

Mohammed A is 28. He's lost his teeth. All of them.
With no dental care, they all rotted away.
Because of poverty. Ghetto poverty.
And *not* because of lack of working.
Mohammed works sixty hours a week, earning \$6 a day.
And he's a lucky one.
Nearly half of Gaza is unemployed, earning nothing.

Fatima B is 65. She has seven children, all unemployed. To her:
"Dying with dignity would be better than this living with humiliation."

Rania C, a mother of three, has breast cancer.
No treatment's available in Gaza, so she travels to Jerusalem.
That is, until Israel ceased issuing permits to terminally ill patients.

Fabia D, age 52, would have succeeded in committing suicide.
If her children hadn't wrestled the knife away.

Three-year-old Yamin looks through the bandages on his face.
He has burns which will disfigure him for life.
And he is only one of hundreds of burn victims,
overwhelming Gaza's one hospital.

ANGEL

Issa E is a driver for emergency health workers in Gaza.
While waiting in his vehicle, Israeli soldiers came up.
He produced the proper papers, but one of them struck him in the face, anyway.
“For treating Palestinian dogs,” the soldier said.

Mohammed F is a 22-year-old graduate student *and* a writer.
He could be me, scribbling a note before committing suicide:
“What’s the point to life when there is no decent light or air?
I can close my eyes, and fall asleep. But to where?
Green sky; black boots; screeching sea gulls burying their heads in the sand;
and walls forever blocking any escape?”
He tried a hundred times to get out of Gaza, and couldn’t.

Random raids against the children of Gaza.
Soldiers arresting boys for no reason.
Putting them in prison. Some never getting out.
Bombings in the night.
Some pray to Allah to burn Israeli souls in Hell forever.
I have prayed for forgiveness for all souls.

What are my words here trying to do?
Change the world?
Only God can do that.

No.
God changes people.
People change the world.
Gaza’s the way it is because it’s the way the people have let it become....

Or is it all an accident?
Is this whole planet merely an accident?
Gaza certainly is.
Words certainly are.
What city planner could ever have imagined a place like Gaza in his worst
nightmare?
It’s lost from the world.
People have stopped noticing we’re human.
Parents have tried to burn themselves to death in the streets they can’t escape.
Children talk in school about wishing *they* were dead instead of here.
And me? How many times in my life have I been outside this ribbon of land?...
Never.

ANGEL

All the words that Gaza has wept, and no one to shed a tear.
In sha'Allah, my words will bring a flood.

Later I shall write Chapter Five ... of my husband, Sawad.
Who married me. And raped me. And beat me.
And of the women who cared for me. And bathed me.
And fed me. And saved me.
And because they saved me, and fed me, and bathed me, I believe in them.
The Sisterhood.
They told me I would meet a stranger. A soldier.
Armed with a weapon with rubber bullets. And I trust them....

Chapter Six will be a lowly ant, resting in the upper corner of this room,
contemplating a journey down, to the far opposite corner.
Straight down and diagonally across?
Or diagonally across and straight down?
What is the shortest route? There is a solution.
I used to do problems like that, all the time, in my mind.
Sitting in my room, when it was quiet.

Pause.

I had a name. But I am *not* my name.
I had a baby. Who had no name.
I have what I have on. But I am not what I have on.
I do not question the favors of Allah. But they are not what I am.
I am where, where I am nowhere.
My memories are other peoples' memories.
My name is Angel.... Malak.
I have lived sixteen years, and I have a purpose.

Chapter Seven will be my purpose.
And I will go to prison for it. Near Ahed Tamimi.
Allah knows the pain I bear, and how hard these words are for me.
Gaza is all I have. It is all I have known.
But I am not branded by it.
Gaza is a story of slavery. But I am not a slave.
Gaza is a story of never enough room. Never enough water.
Never enough electricity. Never enough trains.
Gaza is a story of Israeli soldiers, bulldozers, and bombs.
Gaza is a story of fear. But I shall not be another victim of its fear.

ANGEL

Chapter Eight is fear.

The Qur'an has eleven fears.

خوف Khwaf is a dog, about to attack you....

خشية Khashyah is the awe you have, knowing the greatness of what you fear.

Moses said to Pharaoh: "That I might guide you to your Lord, that you have **خشية** khashyah." To fear the name of Allah is the highest level of fear in life....

خشوع Khushoo' is submission. With **خشوع** khushoo' in your limbs, you fall, limply, to the ground, face, arms, and legs, fearing, and praying....

تقوى Taqwa is the state of heedfulness, protecting yourself from falling into sin and into the wrath of God....

حذر Hadthr is running away from something out the fear of not knowing it....

راع Raa'a is the racing of a heart when it's been startled, shocked, or surprised....

وجس Wajas is the fear you hide, when you don't want others to know. When Moses was challenged by Pharaoh's sorcerers, and saw their ropes and staffs turned into serpents, he conceived a **وجس** wajas in his heart. But he cast down his staff; and it, too, became a serpent, which devoured the others....

وجل Wajl is the penetration of your fear, deep into your inner self, that cannot be removed. It becomes a massive hole that forces you to tremble....

رهب Rahb is the strength from fear that makes you keen and alert, like David, facing Goliath....

رعب Ru'b is to be overwhelmed with fear, to the point you lose your reason. And

شفق Shafaq is the fear of love.... The fear of losing one you love....

My Father was afraid of losing olive trees. Bulldozed into the ground.

I have survived the olive trees.

Yet I have fears, too.

They are the black pieces, on the board, opposing the white pieces of my resolve.

Is it death I fear? No.

It's more the fear of living and feeling other children dying in my arms.

Or is it I fear being captured? No.

It's more the fear I shall become invisible.

The fear I have, and it's insane: That a body will fall down on me.

I *do* have that fear.

A man with a rope cut into his neck.

Swollen hands of white gelatin.

Bulging eyes and maggots oozing through his rotting lips.

I think I'd die if that ever happened to me.

ANGEL

Chapter Nine is Moses.

The new Moses who will lead Palestinians out of Gaza.

When Moses was young, he found two men fighting in the streets.

One was a Jew. The other was not.

Moses took the part of the Jew, and slew the other.

The next day one, who called himself a friend, ran to Moses, crying:

“Flee, before they catch you, and execute you for murder. They are coming.”

And so, Moses fled, and came to the waters of Midian.

And there, many shepherds drawing water.

And standing apart from them, two maidens holding back their flocks.

He asked them why.

“Because our father is old, we dare not draw water until the others leave.”

So Moses drew water for them, and rested.

And as he rested, the two maidens approached, walking modestly.

“Our father wishes to repay you for your kind service to us.... Come.”

When he went, and related to their father his story, the old man said to him:

“You have escaped evil. Seeing you have strength and honesty,

I desire to marry you to one of my daughters.

On condition you hire yourself to me for eight years.” And Moses agreed.

[*beat*] Maybe we do not need Moses to draw water for us.

My Father used to weep for my Mother, who died before I knew her.

My Father used to weep for lost land I’ve never walked upon.

My Father used to weep for olive trees whose fruit I never tasted.

I want to say something.

That it’s a delusion that intimacy of experience bonds people.

I want to capsize the lies of people who lift no finger to part the sea of our captivity.

I want the world to know that the greatest lies in the world are the untruths preached that people *want to believe in* more than the truth.

It’s a crime to lie, more than to be poor in Palestine.

And it’s time to let our people go, and our children live.

FATHER (Offstage)

You tiny bee, who found the only rose in me.

No one knows the who that’s you, like I do.

The Angel whose laughter grows a rose in her father’s heart.

Never let it go, Angel, how much your father loves you so....

I’ll be yours when tonight is a memory. I’ll be yours in my heart, in my mind.

FATHER (Offstage)

O, my Angel, my beautiful, beautiful Angel.
Hush, my sweet little one.
Hush, my baby.
Hush.
Hush, my curly headed girl.
You are the silence in the thunder....

Who will keep you safe, if I am gone?
“I will,” say the droplets, floating down from the sky.
“I will,” says the moon.
“I’ll shower Angel’s hair with silver beams, every night.”

Witness this blessed face.
This is Angel.
Why should a world frighten a baby so?

Fly away, thunder.
Fly away, glass.
Fly away, despair.
Say goodnight to the moon, my Sweet One.
Goodnight to the door.
Goodnight, window.
Goodnight, floor.
Goodnight, candles.
Goodnight, room.

ANGEL

Chapter Ten will be the voices in my head.
I have so many voices in my head.

FEMALE VOICE (Offstage)

Your Angel has the greatest mind I’ve ever witnessed in a child.
You must be very proud to have raised her, as you have, without a wife.
She’ll be a writer.
She’ll be a poet.
She’ll be a teacher.
She was only seven when she solved the ant-in-the-corner problem.
And maybe, some day, she’ll be a leader.

ANGEL

My Father once used to be a poet.

FEMALE VOICE (Offstage)

Listen to what she wrote the other day.
You won't believe it. At age eleven:

A kiss is a compact, the cadence of prayer.
A kiss is a chill, a caress, and a chain.
A kiss is a chance for new dawning and change.
A kiss is a crow on a cradle and clock.
A kiss is a curtain, a cave, and a cry.
A kiss is a cavern of chanting and care.
A kiss is a camel, the sand, and a rock.
A kiss is a candle in captivity's eye.

ANGEL

There is no justice under occupation.
There is no love under humiliation.
And there's absolutely no purpose in poetry like that.
It petrifies the skin. Selfish, personal-feelings poetry.
What the world needs is movement poetry. Action poetry. Daring poetry.
Poetry that is free from stylized form. Poetry that is as free as a desert wind.
I'm talking personal danger poetry.
Danger that dares to form something new.
I'm talking poetry that stuns with the naked truth.
With naked action.
Getting naked on a stage. That kind of naked.
Truth that forces people to take off their shoes and touch the ground with their
bare feet, to feel reverberations of cruelty next door.
I'm talking Macbeth.
I'm talking about something that will shock Israelis and Arabs alike into
dreaming differently at night.

There is nothing, but one thing: Action that risks death and love.

If my heart had room enough, I would love to every bound left beating.
Praise Allah, His Name be praised, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
I doubted once the mystic swoon would ever come upon me.
Sura twenty-one. But it has.

Allah surely knows me, as Allah surely knows everyone and you.
And surely knows all that I do.
Tonight's the night we have so long awaited.
Tonight we shall produce our proof of God, and all will be revealed.

ANGEL

Here I am, God, your humble servant.
Where stars are falling, and children dying, under metal skies.
Where hatred thrives, and faith grows dark on desert sand.
Where peace is buried with olive trees.
Am I too far from the words I need to beseech the mercy of our Lord?
Am I too far to save just one child's life?

No. Tonight I shall become my destiny.
I shall sing the rains to wash the hatreds from our land.
To blossom wild flowers from quiet sands in peaceful starlight.
To press Israelis and Palestinians together like wine from my words.
It is Chapter Eleven: My pilgrimage.

SCENE 7 – PREPARATION FOR A PILGRIMAGE

Night. ANGEL, sitting at the table, typing. The two women of the Sisterhood, dressed in black and wearing niqabs covering their faces, enter. They help her undress and then put on a school-girl's uniform, and over that, a black outer garment and a niqab covering her face. They give her a flashlight, which she puts into her backpack, along with sheets of her own writing. Briefly, each of them hugs ANGEL and exits. ANGEL puts on the backpack, leaves the room, and goes to a place in the broken wall where she picks up a long, relatively thin box with a strap.

SCENE 8 – THE PILGRIMAGE

ANGEL climbs down to stage level, entering the tunnel into Israel, carrying the lit flashlight, and over her shoulder, the long, thin box. She is followed in the shadows by UKHTI, also dressed in black, but no niqab. By various twists and dark turns, the path of the tunnel becomes many widths of the stage.

Sirens blare for a few moments.

ANGEL

I hear sirens, almost every night, and ask myself, why?
Why I'm the one still living. And now I know....

UKHTI

You call me Sister, but what?

**ANGEL abruptly stops, turns around,
and shines the flashlight on UKHTI.**

ANGEL

Ukhti!! Why do you do that?!... Such a scare!
Where did you come from??

UKHTI

I followed you. Didn't you notice?

ANGEL

But why? Why tonight? I haven't seen you for

UKHTI

Ages.
But where are we going?...
Why are we down here? in this dreary tunnel? It frightens me.
You don't tell me a thing.....

ANGEL

Go back.
Get out of here.
This is not your doing, and I don't want you spoiling everything.

UKHTI

I'm not spoiling a thing.
You're the married sister.
I'm just along for the adventure.
Which is what?

ANGEL

It's my hajj. My miniature hajj. The only one I get; and I'm taking it *alone*.
Get out of here.
Go back home.

ANGEL turns, and walks briskly away.

UKHTI

You won't even stop to listen to me? Your own sister?...
Angel, will you please stop?

**ANGEL stops and turns toward UKHTI,
shining her light in Ukhti's face.**

ANGEL

I didn't ask for you to come, did I?

UKHTI

Yes, you did.
When you were thinking of me....
And get that light out of my face. Please.

ANGEL turns, and walks on.

ANGEL

No I didn't. I don't remember any such thing.

UKHTI

Well, I thought of you; and I felt you thinking of me.
And, by the way, there's a lot you don't remember so well, Angel.
More than you think....
Slow down.

**ANGEL stops, and turns around, this
time with the flashlight pointed down.**

ANGEL

Let's get this straight, Ukhti ... Sister ... right from the start.
There's a lot you don't know about me; and I don't intend for you to.

UKHTI

About your husband, right?

ANGEL

Leave Sawad out of this.
He's not my husband anymore.

UKHTI

He divorced you?

ANGEL

For all intents and purposes, yes.

UKHTI

How do you feel? About it?

ANGEL

How do you think I feel?
I'm scared, too.
And down here.
Who knows what men might be lurking in this tunnel?
Or what they'd love to do to a sixteen-year-old girl alone.
But I'm here. And I'm walking. And I'm willing to chance it.
Because my reason is more important than my fear. Or anything else.
And I don't mind your company. But I'm not pretending.
You're as dead to me as our Mother.
And my baby.
I'll talk to you, when I need to. But *I'm* in control.
And there's no way you're going to change that.

UKHTI

You had a baby?
When?
And it died??

ANGEL

Yes.... And yes.... Last month.

UKHTI

Why didn't you tell me?

ANGEL

Why weren't you there?

UKHTI

You know, I have some control in this relationship, too.

ANGEL

Keep talking. I'm walking.
Tonight you're just a voice in my head I can't get rid of.

**ANGEL turns and walks on. UKHTI
walks with her.**

UKHTI

I'm the one who watches over you.
Which is what I'm doing now.
So, tell me your plan.
What are we doing down here?

ANGEL

I hate it, when I feel like you're hiding behind my back all the time.

UKHTI

That's what sisters are for....

[*beat*] Tell me where we're going.

ANGEL

Button your face, I've got things to do in my mind....

Spelunking, if you need to know. And I've not been in this cave before.

UKHTI

I'm going to make you tell.

UKHTI stops walking. ANGEL walks on.

ANGEL

If I had a camel, I'd stick you on it, and send you off for good.

Once and for all.

UKHTI

[*calling out*] You *are* a camel ... a rude one.

ANGEL stops, and walks back.

ANGEL

Will you shut up? We don't want any noise in here.

UKHTI

I'd die without you.

ANGEL

Then keep your lip shut.

Long silence, as they go on walking together.

UKHTI

You treat me like a dog.

You've always treated me like a dog....

Why are we here?

ANGEL

You know why.

UKHTI

No I don't.
And I'm not going any farther, until you tell me.

**UKHTI stops walking. ANGEL stops, and
turns the flashlight off.**

ANGEL

[emphatically whispers back] Go ahead. Stand there by yourself.
What are you afraid of?

UKHTI

[whispers back emphatically] Nothing.

ANGEL

[emphatic whisper] Nothing, like everything.

**ANGEL turns the flashlight back on,
pulls off her niqab, drops it to the
ground, and makes a face in the light
while walking back to UKHTI.**

ANGEL

You're afraid of your own shadow.

UKHTI

Why are you so mean?
It doesn't make sense.
You should be just as afraid as I am.

ANGEL

Of what? Of getting caught by Hamas, in a forbidden tunnel?
And what they'd do to punish me?

UKHTI

You'd be nuts not to be afraid of that....
Why are we in this place in the first place?
If all you're going to do is get punished?

ANGEL

You want to know the truth? about what's nuts?
Living, in Gaza. That's what's nuts.
It's a life of pain, covered with little else to feel the least proud of.

UKHTI

It's not our problem.

They walk on together.

ANGEL

No?

Whose is it, then?...

[*beat*] What are you, anyway ? just a bedbug in my brain?

Of course it's our problem. Children getting killed every day.

UKHTI

It's men's problem.

ANGEL

And you see them doing anything about it?

Other than firing off puny rockets, and hiding when bombs come flying back....

How many children have died in my arms?

Tell me, Sister. Can you count them?

UKHTI

[*beat*] No.... But why should *we* be the ones?

ANGEL

When I woke up yesterday morning, I couldn't see it any clearer.

The world's been turned upside down.

Everything's waiting to fall from the sky to the floor.

UKHTI

You need glasses.

ANGEL

The sky's hanging there, in thin air, on rotting glue.

UKHTI

We'll get you a pair in Gaza City.

ANGEL

Have you always been this stupid?

Or did you sneak it in, one wit at a time?

UKHTI

Half.

ANGEL

[*beat*] One *half-wit* at a time. I'll buy that.

UKHTI stops walking.

UKHTI

You need glasses, like I said.

Then hurries to catch up with ANGEL.

ANGEL

You're telling me, *I* need glasses?

When it's *you*, who can't see a wasteland in front of your nose?

UKHTI

Live with it.

ANGEL

I *can't* live with it.

UKHTI

Well, you can't live without it.

ANGEL

With Allah's help I can.

UKHTI

You're sixteen, and a girl.

Live with it. Like I said.

Case closed.

ANGEL

I'm reopening it.

UKHTI

You're stupid. Or you're demented. Or you're stupid *and* demented.

What can a sixteen-year-old girl do?...

The difference between you and me is that you don't know your place.

ANGEL

My place is my feelings.

UKHTI

I have feelings, too ... for my comfort.

ANGEL

Well, that nails it.

UKHTI

What?

ANGEL

The difference between you and me.

UKHTI

Maybe you're right.

Maybe you're right.

Maybe I *am* selfish.

But face it: What else can a women have?

It's men who have all the power.

ANGEL

When I was with Sawad:

My meals

My clothes

My body

My sex

My head

My bed

My waking and my sleeping

Everything mine I owed to a man....

[*beat*] Shh, I hear something.

They both stop walking, and listen.

UKHTI

[*pause*] It's only the wind.

ANGEL

[*beat*] It sounds like a scratching noise.

Maybe rats.

UKHTI

[*softly*] I hate rats.

ANGEL

[*softly*] And I hate unidentified scratching noises.

UKHTI

[*softly*] You'd have to be really weird to like unidentified scratching noises.
Especially in a cave like this....

[*beat*] Remember that rat we named Hitler?

ANGEL

He scratched his ears and neck until they bled.
And demanded the water in his toilet pot be checked for poison....
What country, with a choice, would put itself in the hands of a paranoid?

UKHTI

I wonder sometimes: What if Hitler had won?

ANGEL

We'd be in a different kind of Hell.
But not in this tunnel, that's for sure.

UKHTI

You think?

ANGEL

Hitlers will be around somewhere for the rest of time.
And one of them, someday, will win.

UKHTI

That's bad for us?

ANGEL

If a Hitler wins, Arabs will be next.

UKHTI

How can you say that?

ANGEL

How different are we? Arabs and Jews?
Put a Jew and an Arab side-by-side and you couldn't tell the difference.

UKHTI

I could, if they opened their mouths.
Or their wallets.

ANGEL

Israelis are afraid of us becoming Hitlers.

UKHTI

Which, what?
Makes it all right they become Hitlers themselves?

ANGEL

I didn't say that.
And I don't believe that.

UKHTI

What *do you* believe?

ANGEL

That people can come together.
And listen to each other.
When they don't fear each other....
And when they care.

They start walking again, in silence for a while.

ANGEL

I care.... And they will *feel* how much I care.

UKHTI

You care more about orphans than about me ... *or* Father.

**ANGEL stops; and for a few steps more,
UKHTI keeps walking, then returns to
ANGEL.**

ANGEL

Don't talk about him.

UKHTI

Why not? He cares. Don't you know how much he cares?

ANGEL

He's not right in the head.
And I don't know *what* he cares about anymore....
I will have to think about it later.
All I know is that he promised me a train out of Gaza, and never took me.

UKHTI

There aren't any trains out of Gaza.... Don't blame him.

I've found one.

ANGEL

Where?

UKHTI

Here!

ANGEL

ANGEL turns the flashlight off, then back on, takes a few steps forward, arms raised overhead, stops, lays the flashlight, the long, thin box, and her backpack down on the ground, and then begins removing all her clothes.

I've never felt so free.

ANGEL

You're ridiculous. Put your clothes back on.
And what's that stupid-looking uniform?

UKHTI

*This is the train we've missed....
Can't you see?
We're on it.
Underground.*

ANGEL

You're naked.

UKHTI

This is the train of the naked truth.
And my vagina is the conductor.

ANGEL

You can't use language like that!

UKHTI

Why not? Who's to stop me?

ANGEL

Women don't talk like that.... What kind of woman are you?

UKHTI

ANGEL

I'm free.
You've never seen a woman who's free and unashamed.

UKHTI

I'm the sister of an idiot.
You have no defense ... with your clothes off.

ANGEL

They weren't much help on, were they? against my husband's feet and fists.

UKHTI

A wife's entitled to be beaten by her husband, if she's disobedient.
It's the law.

ANGEL

That's man's law.
As though men are two degrees better than women.
And five steps ahead in depriving us pleasure.

ANGEL redresses herself in the schoolgirl's uniform. She leaves the black outer garments lying on the ground. While she does, the conversation continues –

UKHTI

What's it like?

ANGEL

What's what like?

UKHTI

Not being a virgin.

ANGEL

It's being like a candle.

UKHTI

Being lit on fire?

ANGEL

Getting blown out.

UKHTI

Do you know why you're so miserable, Malak?
Because you let yourself be, that's why.

ANGEL

You don't understand me.
Not really.

UKHTI

What?
What don't I understand?

ANGEL

I'm like a desert wind.
Harsh at times, and gentle.
It's that I hate pouring my heart out seeing children hurt, and bleed away.
I hate it.

UKHTI

You hate *me*.... That's what you mean, isn't it?

ANGEL

I don't hate you.

UKHTI

You don't *love* me. The only thing you love is dying children.

ANGEL

You're probably right.
I don't know what love is, anymore, except for children.
Maybe I'll never know until I get to Heaven.
What I do know is that love without doing is like smiling without teeth.
Like gold dipped lightbulbs without electricity.
When Sawad beat me, it changed me like a knife....
Sometimes a knife comes at you, and over you,
and pierces you without touching skin.
When the child in you dies; and your father doesn't feel a thing.

UKHTI

Let's go back.

They begin walking again, ahead.

ANGEL

Not. My feet are heading in the opposite direction.
And I hope the dirt of Gaza never touches their soles again until my battle's won.

UKHTI

Which is?

ANGEL

The end of cruelty toward children.
And toward all Palestinians.
And toward wives.

UKHTI

You think Gaza's to blame for all that?

ANGEL

Listen to what I've heard that other wives in Gaza go through:

Alia's been married five months.
She lives with her husband's family, who curse her every day.
She's forbidden from visiting parents, relatives, and friends.
Her husband beats her daily, once leaving her in a coma for two weeks.
And she's planning on taking her life.
As soon as she gets the chance.

Fatima, 34, has been married fifteen years.
Her husband's beaten her everywhere on her body.
"He bites me and hits me with anything he can grab.
The last time it was a stick; and it broke my arm."

Maryam, 55, is the mother of five children.
As a child, she was one of the brightest students in school.
When she was first married, her husband would hit her, and then ask:
"Who do you think you are? Why are you so arrogant?"

Heba, 21, was married at 19.
In the daytime her husband beats her.
At night, he sleeps with her as if nothing has happened.
"It's a daily pattern," she says.
"I've lost all desire to do anything with my life."

We're a combination, Ukhti, don't you see? of men's lust and repulsion.
What kind of witches' brew is that? I ask.

UKHTI

There *are* good men.

ANGEL

Oh?

Too good, I suppose, to stop all the others.

I remember a woman once I saw in a room, just sitting there, motionless.

Not moving. Like a wax figure in a wax museum.

No motion at all.

Her hair was exposed, and the precise hairs on her scalp made me think even more she was wax.

Her children moved around the room, like two leaves on the water, their diapers nearly falling off.

That's Gaza marriage, in a nutshell.

UKHTI

Why are wives beaten? It makes me not want to be a wife.

ANGEL

I was sent away, without a choice.

Father said he couldn't keep me anymore.

UKHTI

But why are wives beaten?

ANGEL

[*beat*] It's poverty and no work that change a man.

And hatred and vengeance.

It's sorrow that changes a woman.

All that, carved on cold, hard stone.

[*pause*] When this is over, if I'm still alive,

I want to run where my feet can touch free ground.

Where smiling children can fly kites over hills of grass.

And I want to have a friend.

I have legs made for running, without a thorn at every step.

I have a mind made for invention, without rejection at every turn.

I have eyes made for seeing, without a world telling me I can't see what I want.

I have a body made for love, without an ounce of shame....

And without a need to give it away. Or have it taken by force.

I'm too young to be so old.

UKHTI

You don't know a thing about love.

Pause.

I said, you don't know a thing about love, Angel.

ANGEL

Shush! I'm trying to think.

UKHTI

About what?

ANGEL

About what you were saying.

UKHTI

What was I saying?

ANGEL

Oh, for God's sake, what help are you?

UKHTI

I can't remember every stupid thing I say.

ANGEL

About love.

I used to read Jalaluddin Rumi.

Do you know what *he* says about love?

UKHTI

I couldn't care less.

ANGEL

He says: "Love is not a drop in the ocean. Love is the entire ocean, in a drop."

UKHTI

Why are you thinking about love at a time like this?

ANGEL

Because nobody knows the kind of love I'm thinking about.... But they will.

UKHTI

Who will?

ANGEL

The Israeli children will.

UKHTI stops walking.

UKHTI

Is that who you love?
Israeli children?
More than Father and me?

ANGEL, examining her hands, turns and walks back to face UKHTI.

ANGEL

In my own, peculiar way.

UKHTI

I don't believe it.
What's happened to you?
When did you change like this?

ANGEL

I don't know really. Truthfully, I don't know.
Maybe I changed when Father told me I was dead.
Or when I climbed to my knees to abort my baby's body.
Or when Sawad beat me.
Or maybe, just now, when I looked at these sixteen-year-old hands,
and realized that they'll always be Palestinian hands.
No matter where I take them.
No matter how many children I shoot.

UKHTI

No, wait.... "No matter how many children you shoot?"
Is that what you just said?
You're going to shoot children? and get *us* killed?

ANGEL

How can you hold a child in your arms, and feel it die right there, and know love?
And not give everything you have in blood and strength and hope to stop the
dying?

UKHTI

It's terrible what loving street children has done to you.

ANGEL

So, what was I supposed to with my life?
Give up? Become a submissive wife, cry, and finally die?
I thought life was more than that.

UKHTI

Like what?

ANGEL

I don't know.... Like doing something that changes something.
Like saving the Earth; or at least a life or two.

UKHTI

Be serious.

ANGEL

I am being serious. Deadly serious.

UKHTI

You're planning to save lives by taking children's lives away. Right?

ANGEL

In a way.

UKHTI

Well, history won't agree with you.
It will say you wasted your life like a fool.

ANGEL

Then history can go fuck itself.

ANGEL turns off the flashlight.

ANGEL

Got that?

UKHTI

[*beat*] It's dark in here.

ANGEL

Do you hear anything? Do you feel anything around you?

UKHTI

No.

ANGEL

Well, *I do*.

This tunnel just suddenly seems to be breathing down my neck.

A body, hanging by the neck, falls down on ANGEL as she walks slowly ahead in the dark. It is a corpse with swollen hands of white gelatin, bulging eyes, and maggots oozing through rotting lips. The weight and surprise of it bring ANGEL, screaming, to the ground. The box and flashlight clatter to the tunnel floor.

ANGEL

Screams again.

Ukhti, help! Help, for God's sake!

Help me!

Something horrible is on me.

UKHTI feels around in the dark for the flashlight, finds it, and switches it on.

ANGEL pushes out from under the rotting body, looks at it, and screams again.... And once more.

UKHTI

Ugh.

That's what they do to trespassers in here, I guess.

ANGEL

Gags.

I've never felt fear that close to me.

UKHTI

Let's go back, now!

ANGEL

But looking at it, all it is, is death.

They'll have to do better to get me to quit.

UKHTI

I think I hear them coming.

ANGEL

Then we better be on our way. Quickly!

ANGEL retrieves the fallen box, puts it back over her shoulder, takes the flashlight from UKHTI, walks past the corpse, and continues on toward Israel.

UKHTI

That's it.
I'm going back.

ANGEL

Into the arms of the tunnel guards you heard back there? In the dark?

UKHTI

Where are you going then?

ANGEL

Not to Gaza.

UKHTI

Where, then?

ANGEL

On an underground railroad into Israel.

UKHTI

We can't go to Israel.

ANGEL

Why not?

UKHTI

Israel's no place for women like us.

ANGEL

Gaza's certainly no place for a woman like me.

UKHTI

But Israel? Not Israel! We can't go to Israel.

ANGEL

Next stop on the line.

UKHTI

I want to go back.

ANGEL

To that dead man?

UKHTI

Why Israel? It's the end of the world.

Why not Egypt?

ANGEL

Egypt is where people live, and never go see the pyramids.

UKHTI

And people see pyramids in Israel?

ANGEL

No, Sister, no they don't.

They see fresh beds.

Homes without holes in them.

And women, speaking their minds.

UKHTI

They don't want any piece of your mind there.

ANGEL

That's what you think.

They *need* me, this young Palestinian voice that I am.

They need me to ask them about the blood on their hands.

And when they say to me, "Not so much blood as is on Palestinian hands,"

they need me to say, "And Palestinian blood washes away your sins?"

Come Judgment Day?"

UKHTI

Israel is doomed on Judgment Day.

ANGEL

On our Judgment Day I was eight.

Israeli planes and soldiers came in and killed over 2200 Palestinians, and wounded over 10,000 more.

Left at least 1000 children dead or permanently disabled.

Blew up schools, homes, clinics, and our one hospital.

Do you remember that? The holes are still in Father's house.

UKHTI

And it's them you're going to bargain with?

ANGEL

I have my means of persuasion.

UKHTI

It's better not being an Arab in Israel....

What are your means of persuasion?

ANGEL

There's fire.

There's wind.

And there's paint.

UKHTI

Paint?

ANGEL

Making an argument that can't be refuted.

For the children of Israel *and* the children of Gaza.

UKHTI

Arguments are never won, between enemies.

ANGEL

Not with words.

With action.

UKHTI

You're going to die, aren't you?

Like some Joan of Arc, or something.

ANGEL

I'm not afraid of dying. If that's what makes me heard.

But dying's not my plan.

UKHTI

What exactly is your plan?

ANGEL

I pray to Allah I'm doing the right thing.... A person lives through all the bombings, but never gets over what they do to a child's mind.

UKHTI

It's *your* baby, isn't it? You're killing yourself over your baby's death, aren't you?

ANGEL

Shut your mouth.

UKHTI

You're only thinking about *your* baby. That's it.
And risking *my* life along with it.

ANGEL points the flashlight at UKHTI.

ANGEL

[*angrily*] Shut the Hell up, if you don't want this across your face....
I'm warning you.

UKHTI

If you want a baby so bad, take one. I'll help you....

Long pause as they walk on.

Talk to me. You better tell me what you're planning to do, or else.

ANGEL turns, and swings the flashlight at UKHTI. They then walk on, silently for a while.

ANGEL

What did I do to deserve you?

UKHTI

You didn't. Sisters don't *deserve* each other.
We're gifts from heaven.

ANGEL

From Hell, more like it.
You're a crow, winging in the back streets of my mind.
No, actually, a grimy pigeon, strutting along Gaza Mall.

UKHTI

When you talk like that, I get afraid.

ANGEL

Do you hear wolf sounds in the night?

UKHTI

Sirens.... I hear sirens in the night.

ANGEL

Not sirens. Wolves, breathing, and snarling.

UKHTI

You mean, like your snoring?

ANGEL

I snore?

UKHTI

So loud, sometimes, it frightens me.

ANGEL

That's my point. Something's always frightening you.

UKHTI

You need to be more afraid.

ANGEL

What are you most afraid of? Death?

UKHTI

Of course. Isn't everybody?
Like that hideous body back there.
Looking ugly like that.

ANGEL

Not me.

UKHTI

Well, you're not a virgin. That's why.

ANGEL

What's that supposed to mean?

UKHTI

You know what happens to virgins, in heaven, when they die.

ANGEL

Ukhti, you're too stupid for words.

UKHTI

Speak for yourself.

**ANGEL stops walking and turns to face
UKHTI, who likewise stops walking.**

ANGEL

Sister, this is the most important thing I'll ever tell you.

Listen: I want you to hear this, and understand it...

No matter how nervous and afraid I am, that's not going to stop me.

And I'm not insane. Not completely, that is.

Because it's not insane for a woman to put her life on the line for a child.

UKHTI

You're not talking like a woman. You're talking like a martyr....

Pause.

Okay. Indulge me.

Explain it, in simple Arabic so I can understand what you're planning to do.

ANGEL

All right, but don't interrupt me, or that's the last you'll hear....

[beat] I have two paint guns in my backpack.

I intend to break into an Israeli school, and spray paint as many children as I can.

UKHTI

Shit!

ANGEL

[slight pause] In my backpack is my story.

And with it, a note that says:

"An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. A life for a life.

That's your law.

That's our law.

And every Jewish child my paint touches.

And everyone who loves that child.

Owes God a debt to protect God's children in Gaza.

As in Israel."

UKHTI

Say that again.

ANGEL

“An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. A life for a life.
That’s your law.
That’s our law.
And every Jewish child my paint touches.
And everyone who loves that child.
Owes God a debt to protect God’s children in Gaza.
As in Israel.”

UKHTI

So that’s why the schoolgirl uniform.

ANGEL

It’s Moses.... Moses told his people:
God commands the sacrifice of a cow.
They asked, how old a cow?...
Neither old nor heifer.
What color a cow?...
A golden color, pleasing to behold.
What kind?...
One kept safe, without a blemish on her.
You *know* what kind of cow God means.
And they knew. And they knew God knew.
And they did what they were told.

UKHTI

What are you saying? That you’re God’s chosen cow?

ANGEL

I’m saying, God knows.
And God tells us, sometimes in secrets we keep to ourselves.

UKHTI

And what about me? I’m not much more than a child.
Doesn’t Allah want me protected, as well?

ANGEL

My little blackbird, you only worry about yourself, don’t you?

UKHTI

Doesn’t everybody? Isn’t that what life’s about?
Of course I want to live.
And not be shot in Israel, or starve to death in this crazy tunnel.

ANGEL

We're not in here to starve to death. There's a trapdoor at the other end.
First farther down; and then up and out.

UKHTI

A trapdoor? into Israel?

ANGEL

Yes. Actually, we're underneath Israel right now.

UKHTI

A trapdoor into an Israeli prison.

ANGEL

Here I am, seriously arguing about this again....
I'm a messenger, sent like an arrow, for the suffering children of Gaza.
And the arrow has been shot.

UKHTI

You're the one that's going to be shot. Like a dying swan.

ANGEL

No one's dying.
There's a soldier they've gotten a messages to.
Who, at the right moment, will stop me with rubber bullets.
I'll go to jail, for a while, near Ahed Tamimi, God willing.

UKHTI

We're going to jail?

ANGEL

There's no other way.

UKHTI

Well, that's the end of everything.

ANGEL

Not!
A prisoner in an Israeli jail has more freedom to speak than a wife in a
Palestinian marriage.
What I want my life to stand for is peace. Like Sura 3.
The Earth wants peace.
And Allah will fuse the hearts of enemies together.

UKHTI

How do you mean, there's a soldier they've gotten a message to?

ANGEL

Will you choke it, please?

UKHTI

Answer me.

ANGEL

No. It's confidential.

I won't tell you, or anybody.

And, besides, how else can a never-ending war be ended?

When governments fail, people must find their own ways.

UKHTI

Somebody's going to be supremely pissed.

That we used their tunnel against the law.

ANGEL

You take opportunity when it comes to you....

Ukhti, the one permanent law in life *is life*.

In this spider web of a world we've inherited, evil has become the law.

A law that pulls us in like a spider.

And I'm one, waiting for the spider to come out of hiding, where I can paint it,
and shock its inevitability into submission.

Let me tell you a story.

UKHTI

A short one, I hope.

ANGEL

Just long enough to get to the end....

Many years ago, there was a handsome young Arab lad, who left his home, on a
camel, with a monkey, and little money, to pursue his dreams.

UKHTI

Does this story have anything to do with us?

ANGEL

Keep still and listen.

UKHTI

All right.

ANGEL

They wandered in the desert, many days, until they came to an oasis.
Not far from a Bedouin settlement,
where they stopped to eat, and camp for the night.
That night, while the young man was sleeping in his tent,
a most beautiful maiden crept in.
She came up to him, lifted her veil, and was about to kiss him,
when a noise frightened her off.
It was a rich merchant approaching, who saw the tent, and decided to look in.
He'd lost his only son, and dreamed of adopting another as his heir.
But just as he came to the tent flap, he heard the growling of a panther,
and he fled.
And when the young man woke up the next morning,
there were the panther's eyes, staring him in the face.

UKHTI

O, God! Did he kill the boy?

ANGEL

Of course. What did you expect? Right there on the spot

UKHTI

What a stupid story.

ANGEL

[*laughing*] No, he didn't kill the boy.
In fact, the young man had enough wits about him to show no fear at all.
He actually started talking to the cat.
He told him what a magnificent creature he was.
What phenomenal eyes he had ... and teeth.
And they became companions.

UKHTI

The boy and the panther?

ANGEL

The boy, the cat, the monkey, and the camel.
As time went on, the panther hunted, out on his own.
And they all lived happily together on the oasis, undisturbed.

UKHTI

[beat] And that's how the story ends?

ANGEL

Not exactly.

One day they were playing together, wrestling,
when the panther accidentally scratched the boy's arm; and it bled.

UKHTI

And he tasted it....

Right?

ANGEL

The boy knew: It was the panther, or himself....
The next evening, with the panther's face almost in his own,
the boy shot him between the eyes.

UKHTI

That's a horrible story.
What a terrible ending.

ANGEL

Except for a few of the names, my story's the same one.

They walk on. After a short while ANGEL stops, places the flashlight and the box on the ground, and opens a trapdoor in the stage.

She climbs down, taking the box and the flashlight with her, and disappears.

SCENE 9 – THE FINAL DAY

Early morning. ANGEL (backpack on her back and the long, thin box over her shoulder) emerges from a trapdoor stage left, and begins walking, looking around. Passing an olive tree, ANGEL stops to pick up an olive branch. Upstage center is a bench across from a school building, which can be heard but not seen by the audience.

Far stage right a female Israeli soldier crashes on her motorcycle.

ANGEL

This is the hardest part, now.
I have to concentrate on walking the right way.

[beat] This is everything I've planned for ... except ...
I really want to get out of here!

[beat] Shut up! I don't want you near me anymore.

**ANGEL swings the box at an invisible
UKHTI.**

ANGEL

I think of children all the time.
But I don't think of you as a child.
You're not a child.
You're a symptom of what's wrong with me.
A split personality.
It didn't use to bother me much, before.
All I know is, there's no cure for what I have.

**ANGEL flings the box at the invisible
UKHTI. Then retrieves it.**

ANGEL

Every child's face is a piece of my destiny.
I acknowledge it to you. To all of you.
It's painful. You're painful.
But it's more painful to feel nothing. And do nothing.

Pain is what we can endure.
When we can't any longer, the only relief is action ... or death.

**ANGEL takes the box, and opens it.
Inside is a white flag on a staff, which
she pulls out and waves over her head.**

**When appropriate, in the Director's
discretion, the white flag becomes the
blue and yellow flag of Ukraine.**

ANGEL

After I do what I have to do, I'm going to surrender.

Sound of children laughing and playing.

ANGEL

Quiet. I hear something.

It's children. It's a sign.

My guns are loaded.

When you've seen enough, and have gone through enough, what does it matter?

You do what your conscience demands.

Sane or insane. I'm a little of both. You do what your conscience demands.

How do I know I'm a little crazy?

Besides talking, incessantly, to myself?

Because I have an absolute conviction my worldview is the only valid one.

Which is: That a woman has the right to die for a cause, just like a man.

Focus.... Focus.... From here on, focus, focus, focus....

Men can be so dangerous, when they're strange....

That makes me laugh....

They'd get suspicious if I didn't laugh....

But I don't know how to laugh in Hebrew.

Think of dachshunds. They always make me laugh....

Who knows dog shit how someone feels, when they're prepared to die?

Wrapped in a fearless, cellophane sense of calm.

ANGEL stops next to the bench, upstage center. Children can be heard talking and laughing. She puts the olive branch down on the ground; rests the flag against the bench; and takes a sheet out of her backpack. After reading it over, she places the sheet under the branch. As she does so, she sees a kendama in her backpack, takes it out, and begins playing with it.

A minute later a male Israeli soldier enters. When ANGEL sees him she drops the toy to the ground, and goes (offstage) into the school.

In a few moments, loud screaming is heard. The soldier rushes offstage (to the school), and gun shots follow. ANGEL stumbles back onstage, bleeding, followed by the second soldier. The female soldier, hobbling as she runs, comes across and catches ANGEL before she falls to the ground. She waves the male soldier away, who, on a cellphone, exits. The female soldier attempts to administer aid to ANGEL

ANGEL points to the bench; and the soldier carries her to it, and lays her down on it.

SCENE 10 – LAST WORDS

ANGEL, lying on the bench, the female Israeli soldier kneels beside her.

ANGEL

It's so dark....
I felt shots....
And the pain....
And blood in my eyes....
[pause] Are these my last words?

FATHER (Offstage)

My daughter's dead?... Angel?... She's dead?
They say her heart has stopped.
Dressed in school clothes.
Baby girls don't wear school clothes....
They say Israel did us a favor....

ANGEL

An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. A life for a life....
Everyone owes God a debt, to protect God's children in Gaza.
As in Israel....
My final words?

FATHER (Offstage)

You said that?...
Why?...

ANGEL

Because you couldn't.

FATHER (Offstage)

Because I couldn't....
[beat] All you wanted was to be held again....
Like a baby, in my arms....
Time is a clock a father can't turn back....
Or fix.

ANGEL

Forgive me, Papa....
I can't remember....
I don't have the words anymore....

FATHER (Offstage)

O, my Angel, my little, little Angel.
O, my Angel, my soft and precious pearl.
Why do I do what I always do?...
[beat] You'll never be young again....
[beat] We live to leave something behind.
I leave nothing, but weakness and guilt....
That's what poverty, and hatred, and injustice do to a man.

ANGEL

Forgive me, Papa....
For the grief.

FEMALE VOICE (Offstage)

If you want to smell the fragrance of God, lean your head in.

**ANGEL reaches out and weakly grasps
the Israeli soldier's hand.**

ANGEL

I love you.... Good night.... Sleep well.

**The soldier holds her hand, and brings it
up to her lips to kiss.**

FEMALE VOICE (Offstage)

Saleh led the she-camel of Allah to his people, and told them:
“Remember the bounties God has brought into your life, and allow no harm to come to her.”
When Saleh’s back was turned, they hamstrung the camel,
saying, “What will your Lord do to us?”
The morning after, they lay crushed upon the sand.
And Saleh turned his back, and walked away.

Pause.

You are dying, Angel.
Dying with so many other Palestinians today.
Shot dead, charging the fence....
Crowds came.
To protest.
To cheer the boys on.
Like spectators at a soccer match.
Thousands, camping, in families, in tents.
Vendors selling drinks, and flags.
An occasional kite, in Palestinian red, black, white, and green.
Occasional music.

Bilal Abu Zaher, in a wheelchair damaged by Israeli gunfire, shouts:
“I’ll be back. I’ll cross the fence tomorrow, even if you cut me in half.”

Another young man, rubbing his bandaged hand, hit by a rubber bullet, shouts at them: “Kill me. I don’t want to live. There’s nothing here to live for.”

ANGEL

The Qur’an tells how blessed we are with Your blessings.
Your sun.
Your moon.
Your stars.
The sky they adorn.
Your palms.
Your pomegranates.
Your olives.
Your gardens.
How even the trees bow in worship of You....
Which of Your blessings would I deny?
I don’t have to tell You.... None.

FEMALE VOICE (Offstage)

Let there flow a river of peace underneath Palestine and Israel.
Let it be named for Angel, may she rest in peace.
Let it quench the bitter fruits of hatred, and nurse the she-camel of Allah.

Rest in peace, you beautiful child.
You walked in modesty, and you deserve a blessed rest.

Rest in peace, you courageous soul.
We shall love you more than you have ever known.

Rest in peace, daughter of peace.
You tried to blow away the smoke that cursed the Earth.
Wide and broad enough for all of us.

Rest

END



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[Angel](#)



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