

# A Stone's Throw

by Ismail Khalidi

**Time:** the present

**Place:** a prison yard

**Characters:**

Yasser, a man in his 30s

Suraya, a young woman, late teens, early 20s.

The Voice\*, (s)he is a shrink and/or interrogator.

The Judge\*, a military judge, any age, any sex.

\* Both can be double cast with actor playing Suraya if needed

## SCENE 1.

*The suggestion of a prison yard.*

*Yasser enters in a brown prison outfit and walks to his assigned place. There is no one but him visible. A loud buzzing or a whistle breaks the silence. Yasser looks around. After a moment, a baseball rolls from offstage and hits his feet. He picks it up. He tosses it in the air, catches it, then inspects the stitches, sliding his fingers around the ball in different positions. He throws it back offstage. He is waiting for it to come back, ready to catch it, when another buzz or whistle is heard. Yasser looks offstage in the other direction.*

YASSER (to himself): Damn it.

*Lights shift.*

## SCENE 2.

*Yasser sits and faces us. There is a table in front of him. His hands are cuffed. On the table is a pack of cigarettes.*

YASSER: I already told you. A hundred times. I told you-

VOICE (offstage): Again.

YASSER: Hey, are you a shrink or a cop? I mean, are you trying to heal me or turn me? Trying to switch me, flip me, make me your special snitch? Either way, I told you what I know. My story never changes. I give you details, but you want more. I give my opinion, my commentary, my poetic flourishes, even. But you just want more. Want me to give you everything. But I already have.

VOICE (offstage): Again.

YASSER: ‘Again. Again. Fine. Let’s do it again, then. Here’s the part where I ask you for a ciggy and you say “knock yourself out, Yasser”. And I say thanks. *(Beat)*. But what I don’t say is how much I hate the way you say my name, without the roll of the r at the end. How it really fucks the whole...the whole essence of my name up, you know.

*Yasser takes the cigarette and lights it. He relishes it.*

Hey, I just changed our routine, huh? Our script. Articulated my inner dialogue out loud. How about that? *There’s* something for you to write down.

VOICE *(offstage)*: Again.

YASSER: Yeah yeah, from where?

VOICE: Start with the girl.

YASSER: Suraya?

VOICE: Yes. Your cousin.

YASSER: Suraya. Right. Well she grew up mostly in Chicago. And Cincinnati before that for a couple years. Those are indigenous names by the way. Of forgotten tribes. Forgotten except to them of course.

VOICE: When?

YASSER: Started right after the first settlers arrived I guess. The erasure, the forgetting. With the Spanish first...and then the Mayflower and -

VOICE: When?

YASSER: When what?

VOICE: The girl.

YASSER: Oh. Yeah, Suraya moved to the US when she was like, five.

VOICE: Her father.

YASSER: Her father, my uncle, got a postdoc in Cincinnati so they left us. That was 1986, I think. We stayed. Here. Home. The reservation. The ghetto. The camp. Whatever you want to call it. My mom had no postdoc, just a job at the UN library. Not much of a library, either. A metal truck container with two windows and a handful of books and old magazines... And my father was... Well you know.

VOICE: Again. Everything.

YASSER: My father was in prison. Not this one. Ofer. That was his job I guess. Prisoner. His calling. His fate. His life. Most jobs here are... harder to pass down these days, you know. Especially since the farmer can't get to his groves, the baker can't always access his flour, the merchant his goods, the builder his supplies. And the ones who used to work in Tel Aviv, washing your dishes and your floors, they can't get across anymore. Not easily at least. Or legally. Been replaced by Philipinos and Falashas. So the only thing a father or mother is sure to pass down easily is time in jail. Plenty of work as a prisoner in Israeli jails. Something like three quarters of a million of us arrested since '67.

VOICE: Go on. The girl.

YASSER: We stayed. Suraya left. We'd been inseparable, me and Susu. She calls me Yoyo. I call her Susu. In the states, she got into baseball.... You know baseball? She would send me cards in the mail, a video too. A taped over VHS of clips. Of Andre Dawson, of Lee Smith, of Ozzie, of Barry Larkin and Doc Gooden. She was obsessed. And she would bring more when they came to visit during the summers. I would copy it all and pass it to the other kids. I heard one of the VHS copies made it to Gaza, man. Imagine that. And the photocopies of the baseball cards made it all the way up to Jenin.

Susu brought a ball and a mitt for me one summer, a Rawlings. I was 11 or 12. Loved that mitt. Slept with it. The bat you all wouldn't let through. A Luisville Slugger. Wood. (*Beat*). Mitt. Mitt. Mitttttt. weird word, right? Anyway, Susu taught me how to throw when she visited; side arm, over hand, lobs, throws on the run. Throwing on the run is important, especially in the infield. And in Palestine, Soweto, Belfast, Pine Ridge. Suraya taught me about America while we played catch, and I taught her about Palestine. Told me that in three or four hundred years that's how we would be living maybe. Like the Sioux and the Iroquois. Half extinct, clinging to little patches of earth.

Man, Susu could play ball, I'm telling you. She taught me how to catch a tear gas canister on the short hop with my mitt and then transfer it to my right hand, and sling, toss, pitch, fire back towards your green clad co-workers up the road. You know those canisters, those tubes of gas you all fire at us automatically and we hurl back manually, some of 'em are made in Cincinnati? Where Susu used to live. Weird huh? To think about that?

VOICE: That day.

YASSER: Hey, you ever notice the difference between how soldiers and Palestinians throw? The difference in form, I mean. See, your soldiers, when they throw their stun grenades at us, I mean, it's bad. We laugh at them. But their form is shit. Like really kind of noodley and uncoordinated. It's surprising too, cause these guys all macho and geared up, all powerful and manly, but they throw worse than my two year old nephew. The Palestinians on the other hand, you break down the form, the arm angles, the trajectories, follow through, and the distance that rock will go and it is spot on, like they grew up playing baseball in the Dominican, like its second nature. I'm telling you, the form is good. Watch the tape. And it's weird, because historically there's no baseball or cricket in Palestine. Right? Maybe the English played some cricket when they were running the show, but I doubt they let many of us play along. So what is it, right? Well, what we do have is Suraya. I'm telling you, the rock throwing form of the latter of half of the first intifada and the beginning of the second can be traced to Susu, to her pirated tapes, to the obsessed young boys that studied her throwing the ball, throwing stones from every angle, the multitude of *shabab* who refused to throw any less powerfully than she showed them. I call it the Suraya Effect. And I can guarantee you it cumulatively increased the level of

talent and proper form in pre-teen, teenage and young adult rock throwing. I was going to write my honors thesis on it at Birzeit...But then....

*Lights shift. Suraya, late teens, faces us. She wheres baggy sweats, a hoodie and a backpack. She flips a baseball as she speaks.*

SURAYA: Here's the thing about being a girl playing baseball. you're a freak. if you're not any good they ridicule you. Relegate you to be their girl, their cheerleader, their bitch. Just a chick to laugh at and patronize and lust after....But if you're good it's all of that plus something else. They lust after you in secret maybe, but they want to beat you. Humiliate you on the field, fuck you over, make you pay. For your audacity. They ask out loud if you're a 'dyke', 'cause you must be, must be something unnatural to it all, must be some explanation why you throw like a dude, don't want to cheer them on from the sidelines or wear your hair down, why you won't take off that training bra pressing down your budding breasts. Must be a reason you throw like a demon. or rather, "you ain't that good really, Suraya, just that Ii couldn't concentrate" they say. Couldn't concentrate playing against a girl, trying to hit a ball pitched from the hand of a girl, coming, coming fast, fast, and it was witchcraft. Coming high and tight or breaking bad and hard, out of sight, must be black magic, so curse her, burn her, burn her at the stake for it. You know, I bet athletic girls in medieval times got burned and tortured and inquisitioned by those fat fundamentalist Spanish priests and mad monks who got a tip from some sniveling local snitch and came into town with their hooded henchman to deal god's divine justice upon those wenches that plowed too hard, brawled or ran, jumped or swam or lifted the way only a man should, or even better. So I guess the looks and comments I got, the nervous testosterone taunts and the occasional charge to the mound weren't all that bad compared to what i might have gotten in some shit village in Spain or Portugal back in the day. That kept me going strangely enough. allowed me to keep dealing. Five foot three, but on the mount I felt taller.

*A scream in the distance. She turns. Lights shift.*

VOICE: And the day you were apprehended?

YASSER: What about it?

VOICE: When you injured the soldier.

YASSER: There were protests that day. I went with the other guys. The soldiers had raided campus the night before. Killed a classmate of ours and arrested all the student leaders and two professors. So we went out into the streets.

VOICE: To kill?

YASSER: To protest.

VOICE: And the girl?

YASSER: She was my age. 19. Freshman at UIC. I was a sophomore..

VOICE: Where was she?

YASSER: She had stopped playing ball by then. She didn't want to play softball. And they wouldn't let her try out for the university baseball team. She had come to study Arabic that summer, get out of Chicago for a while.

VOICE: Where was she when you-

YASSER: When I went out with the others she tried to come but my parents stopped her. They tried to stop me but I ran. They made her stay.

VOICE: And you threw a molotov at the "protest"?

YASSER: But it just hit the road, burned out. But then I saw this stone, in the pile next to Faris, who had a slingshot he had made himself. And this stone, it was perfect. Size of a baseball, maybe a little smaller, but it had these ridges, that I swear, they looked like stitches. on a ball. Like a sculptor made it. I picked it up, and just then, a group of soldiers ran past the alley, chasing another kid down, and they



were firing as they ran, tear gas, rubber bullets, like cowboys, and I gripped the stone across its four seams, so it would rise, a fastball, a fourseam fastball, just like SuSu and I had practiced a thousand times, I wound up and

*BAM! Lights shift. Suraya sits above Yasser in a judges frock, holding a gavel, which she has just slammed down.*

SUSU (AS JUDGE): I sentence you to a minimum of ten years for the throwing of a lethal object and causing grievous bodily harm to a member of the Israeli Defense Forces.

*BAM! The gavel strikes. She takes off the robe and looks at us.*

SUSU: He had migraines for months.

*BAM! The gavel strikes again and the lights shift. It is Yasser alone again.*

VOICE: And the girl?

YASSER: After they arrested me, Suraya slipped out the house and went with the others to the checkpoint.

*As Yasser speaks we see Suraya, getting ready. Putting Keffiyeh over her nose and mouth, hoodie and backpack on, mitt on one hand.*

I wasn't there but...She must have thrown some beauties at you motherfuckers. She was ahead of all the others, popping out from behind the barriers with that hopstep of hers, the one she used for long distances, like a throw home from right field to cut down a runner trying to score. I heard she was out in front, the other guys following her example, mimicking her form as they fired stones and pebbles, chunks of rock and concrete that spin and slice and dive towards the caged jeeps and helmeted heads of the enemy.

*BAM! Suraya freezes.*

YASSER: And then the rubber bullet, in her right arm, first. I imagine the look in her eyes realizing she'd never throw again, not after the way it blew her elbow apart. Then the decision to get up again and pick up another stone and

*BAM! Lights shift. From the darkness Yasser's voice.*

YASSER: they look at me, the guards and the other prisoners, like I'm crazy. I mean who plays baseball in Palestine, in *prison* in Palestine.

*The bright light of the hot sun. Yasser enters the yard, as in the beginning, and walks to his assigned place. He is alone. A buzzing or a whistle breaks the silence. Yasser looks around. After a moment, a baseball rolls from offstage and hits his feet. He picks it up. He tosses it up in the air and catches it, then inspects the stitches, sliding his fingers around the ball in different positions. He throws it back offstage then crouches in a catcher's position, waiting for it to come back, ready to catch it,*

YASSER: Right here Susu, give me that heat, baby! Give me that gas!

*A ball strikes his mitt with a snap! Lights cut to black.*

*END OF PLAY.*