

*An Echo of Laughter*

*By*

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Cast: 1 male (Hitler in full Nazi garb), 1 female (Palestinian teacher wearing a headscarf).

*Lights up on Hitler. Lights up on Teacher in another pool of light. She addresses the audience.*

*Hitler watches her. He can possibly even walk around her or try to interact with her, but she never sees him or acknowledges his presence.*

TEACHER

It wasn't really a political act. Not meant to be. Her job was to teach English to young Palestinian girls. She wanted them to write – to create - in English. It is only when you know a language well enough to create in it, that you really know a language at all. She assigned them to write their own diaries after she assigned that they read the published diaries of different young girls. She never expected press about it - that the diaries of her girls would be turned into a basis for a play that would be produced in countries she and her girls had never seen.

*Hitler laughs.*

TEACHER

Or maybe she absolutely expected it. Of course, she expected it. A Palestinian schoolteacher in Bethlehem assigning her students to read The Diary of Anne Frank, when they themselves are being subjected to curfews. Let's be real. That kind of story is perfect for CNN. A perfect way to get attention and – of course – attention is what we are all after. To get attention - that means you win.

*Hitler laughs.*

TEACHER

Our craving for it drives our every waking moment. Are we not always yearning to be noticed for our panache in our workplace? Looking to be told we are the epitome of style every time we dress for a party? Asking to be acknowledged as generous when we buy a friend a coffee– or better yet – a stranger? Aren't we all waiting for our unique and unparalleled charms to be discovered by a prince or a supermodel?

At the very least, don't we want to be applauded for rising above the fray in our political thoughts? To be told that we are not like sheep who blindly follow the dictates and little rituals of religious identities our ancestors chose for us? To prove that we have the strength to humanize those who dehumanize us - to know their histories even if they deny and demean ours? Don't we want to be acknowledged for everything we do and everything it costs us to do it? At least in one international paper? At least once?

I do. She did. No doubt about it.

I wonder if she was married. That's the kind of goody-two-shoes move that people who are sexually frustrated make, right?

I'm married. Doesn't mean I'm not sexually frustrated. When you aren't married, you believe it is because you haven't yet found the right one. When you marry even the boy of your dreams, like I did, you realize there is no right one. You learn to compromise, and you feel sorry for those who don't know how to.

There is value in being uncompromising, though. It means hope matters more to you than customs and comfort. It means you aren't afraid to stand alone.

So – if I teach the Diary of Anne Frank to my English class here in Gaza – what will it get me? To teach Palestinian students the stories of the Holocaust was brave, bold,

and unfortunately has been done before. No one is going to gather the diaries of my girls and make it a play and fly us to Edinburgh to see it. I'll be asked over and over 'Aren't there any stories of our own people – our own struggles - worth telling?' The person who is going to ask that question the most of myself is me.

*Hitler laughs.*

TEACHER

Change is easy. It's simple to divert a river to another direction. It's keeping that river diverted for more than a moment that is hard. It's sustaining a change that matters.

There will always be people who fight to teach controversial books that first time. It's the second time or millionth time – when there is the same battle but none of the rush of glory of being the first to fight it – that is the key.

And should I be that person? Do I insist upon teaching the history of a people who hurt us – trying to understand how what was done to them affects what they do to us? Will it make them tell our stories in their schools if we tell their stories in ours? I don't know.

The problem is that I feel like I am being laughed at no matter what choice I make. By who, I don't know. Why, I don't know. But, I feel I'm being laughed at just the same.

*End of Play.*