

CRACK IN MY WALL

A short play

By Najla Said

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najlasaid@gmail.com
917 991 8945

NOTE: This piece can be performed, as written, for one voice, but it is essential that the actor make each character voice and that characters mannerisms distinct and precise. It can also be done with multiple actors sharing the roles of each character voice. Essentially, the text as written is a monologue for the writer, but can be altered for performance by others— innovation and creativity are encouraged in terms of staging.

I didn't notice it at first, weirdly. I had been in and out, struggled with the locks, played with the windows, done all the things that I thought might make me look like a serious homeowner but I didn't see the mezuzah at the front door. It was my friend Alysa who noticed it, when she helped me bring over some boxes.

"Awww you have a mezuzah," she'd said as she rubbed her fingers over the painted scroll.

"I what?"

"You have a mezuzah"

"Oh! awesome," I lied.

I waited until she left to freak out and call my mother.

"MOMMY.

I have a mezuzah.

I mean it's painted over but

THERE IS A MEZUZAH

outside the front door."

She chuckled...(she actually chuckled!) and said, "Of course you do."

OF COURSE I DO.

I've lived here, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, since I was born. It's traditionally a very Jewish neighborhood, of course, so it isn't weird that someone left a mezuzah outside the door of the apartment I bought (with my mom's help) when i was 38 years old.

My father, the deceased Palestinian who'd left Jerusalem at the age of 12, refused to ever own property. When asked about this, he always made it seem like it was a symbolic and important decision, but in private, he was more than clear about the fact that he couldn't be bothered with the responsibility:

"Why should I own a dumb house when I can go on vacation and stay in a five star hotel and be waited on?"

I think what he really meant was "why should I have to get a toolbox and fix stuff when it breaks?"

So I grew up in a rented apartment in New York City. Our family home in Palestine had long since been confiscated, and even when it was ours, my grandfather had made sure the deed wasn't in his name, because he too, didn't want to own anything.

WHAT KIND OF PALESTINIANS DONT WANT TO OWN A HOME?

My family is insane.

Truth be told, there is an apartment in Beirut, Lebanon, where my mom is from, that my brother and I will one day inherit,

but there was no real home in New York City, until this one, my beloved 4C.

My mom told me to take it down- the mezuzah, I mean.

"Take it down. Yallah. It is your house now."

"But I don't have touch up paint, Mommy. And everyone in this building is Jewish besides me and so if i take it down, won't they all think that I am an evil, anti-Semitic Palestinian?"

"If they aren't upset about the swastikas on the tiles in the lobby, I don't think they will be mad about a non Jew removing a mezuzah. Really, Naji, sometimes you are so crazy."

(There are indeed swastikas on the lobby tiles. Everyone who visits me notices them. I When they ask, I tell them the truth: that I didn't notice them at first and

"Everyone else here is Jewish and they don't seem to be upset and maybe it is because aren't they hindu symbols originally? I mean I think its awful and gross and weird and the building WAS built in 1938 so yes it is REALLY bizarre... but they were here well before I was, and I really don't want to annoy anyone and complain about anything bc I'm just so grateful they let me live here.")

"This mezuzah, though, Mommy, it is outside MY DOOR. And I don't want to draw attention to myself. I barely got past the coop board since I am a broke Palestinian artist type, so I really don't need to make any enemies by tearing down mezuzahs. Will you be mad if I just leave it?"

"No Najla, I won't be mad, but I think it is silly that you don't just take it down. You are not Jewish, and you don't have to apologize for not wanting a mezuzah outside the door of the apartment you now OWN. But I also think that someone who is having as neurotic a reaction as you are to such a stupid thing, only proves that you are, in fact, a Jewish person who belongs on the Upper West Side, so maybe you should just leave it."

She chuckled again.

She made me, this woman.

But I digress...

I couldn't sleep that night, and I wanted to be sure I made the politically correct decision, so I went on Facebook to ask.

As you do.

I mean, if you are me.

I figured that if the Jewish people I know and love gave me permission to remove the mezuzah, everything would be ok.

I got what I needed, for the most part, but I also got too many opinions.

- "You're not Jewish and mezuzahs are for Jewish people and that's that for me, and I am very Jewish, and Israeli too!"

- "There was a guy from Denmark who thought too much. I think he was a prince. Give yourself a break, hon. You are loved and don't need anyone's approval or forgiveness."

- "Removing it would mar the paint (says he who has tried to remove several to take with him and failed.)

- "Mezuzahs are really nice, I'd keep it (as arabs we can love our Jewish heritage!)"

Since I was still entirely confused about covering up the chip in the paint, I decided to leave it until I had a Plan B. Or weird putty colored paint.

What could happen?

Two months later, on a quaint fall evening, the doorbell rang. It was odd that the doorbell rang, because the doorman wouldn't have let just anyone up without calling first. But sometimes the doorman wasn't around, because that was the kind of doorman he was, so sometimes people got in the building anyway. But I suppose I thought it was the doorman with a package, so I opened the door.

I KID YOU NOT - STANDING IN FRONT OF ME WERE TWO HASIDIC JEWS (Lubavitchers to be precise-the guys that stand on street corners all over New York City and ask anyone who walks by: "Are you Jewish?")

They looked right at me and said (OBVIES!) "Are you Jewish?"

And I said, very very politely "oh, nooo, I am so so sorry- I am not Jewish."

"Is your husband Jewish?"

"No, I don't have a husband, sorry."

Then, as an explanation, they each lifted their respective pointer finger to the mezuzah outside my door, in unison, without a word (because what word was really needed when there was a mezuzah in my doorway?)

I started laughing, and then worried they thought I was laughing AT THEM so I started to explain:

“So funny that you rang my bell because of that. I am actually Palestinian and that was here when I moved in and I wanted to take it down but I didn't want my neighbors to think I hated Jews bc I am a Palestinian who removed a mezuzah! And now here you are? Incidentally I have lived here for my whole life and I NEVER knew you guys rang doorbells!!!”

They stared at me like I was a leper.

Only one of them understood English so he turned to his friend to explain what i had said. I understood none of it of course, but I did hear the Yiddish? word for “Palestinian” somewhere in there.

They both looked deeply afraid of me.

I continued to shower them with “sorrys” and “thank yous” until they left. And then danced around merrily laughing and saying to absolutely no one “I KNEW IT WAS NORMAL TO WORRY ABOUT THAT THING OUTSIDE MY DOOR!”

and then I wondered why of all the apartments in the building, and all the mezuzahs, they chose mine!

Figures.

I called my mom to tell the story, and then posted about it on Facebook bc i HAD TO fill in my loyal followers.

One Arab American friend wrote to tell me he had been curious because of my post and had looked up what the scroll inside the mezuzah actually said.

He advised me to go to wikipedia and check it out for myself.

Wikipedia sent me to Deuteronomy

Specifically, to Chapter 6, vs 4-9, and Chapter 11, verses 13-21

But I read a bit more,because it was there on the page, staring straight at me

18 Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul; and ye shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

19 And ye shall teach them your children, talking of them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

20 And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates;

21 that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of the heavens above the earth. {S}
22 For if ye shall diligently keep all this commandment which I command you, to do it, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave unto Him,
23 then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves.
24 Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness, and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the hinder sea shall be your border.
25 There shall no man be able to stand against you: the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as He hath spoken unto you. {S}

and I sat down and cried.

I remembered the Orthodox woman (of Syrian descent!) that I had recently met who told me that before the state of Israel was established “there was nothing there but rocks!!”

“...and my grandparents and great grandparents and and and and and...” I had wanted to say but didn’t because why argue with a deeply religious person, ever?

So I let it go, as I always do...

But it had stung.

And it suddenly stung deeper and deeper.

So I called my super and asked him to remove the dumb thing, once and for all.

And now there is a great big hole of stripped away paint over where a mezuzah might be, outside my door.

But I don't care

because

THIS

is

MY

HOME.

MINE.

THE ONLY ONE I HAVE.

And no one is taking it from me.

EVER.