

Bitterenders

A short play by Hannah Khalil

Cast

Father – Ahmed 50

Mother – Selma 45

Grandmother – Sitti 68

Daughter – Maha 25

Part 1:

We are inside a house in East Jerusalem. There is a visible line drawn in chalk on the floor. One side of the line is empty of people, but furnished. On the other side of the line is a basic kitchen and a family: Ahmed 50, Selma 45, Sitti 68

Ahmed sits on a chair at a table looking at his mobile phone. Selma washes some dishes in the sink, Sitti is sat on the floor with her back to the audience, we cannot see what she is doing.

AHMED: She's not back yet

SELMA: I know that.

AHMED: She should have been back by now

SELMA: I know.

AHMED: She missed the food

SELMA: I know.

AHMED: Do you think something happened to her?

SELMA: I don't know.

A beat

SELMA: Sitti, get up

No answer

SELMA: Ya Mama ... Umi .. Get up. You'll get a sore leg again and I'll have to massage it all night. Come on. Stand

A beat

AHMED: She was going to bring me cigarettes

A beat

AHMED: I haven't had one all day...

SELMA: Is that what you're worried about? I thought you were worried about your daughter, but turns out you just want a smoke

AHMED: No – no I am worried about her. She normally texts if she's going to be late

SELMA: If you're so desperate for a cigarette, go out and buy some yourself. You're not a cripple are you?

AHMED: Go out? Are you mad? And leave you two alone? After what happened? Never again.

SITTI: (*whispering*) "I'm already drowning so why should I fear getting wet"

AHMED: What?

SITTI: (*To him*) "I'm already drowning so why should I fear getting wet"– it's what you always say

SELMA: Sitti, get up off the floor, come on, I'll make some tea. Sit at the table, yullah

SITTI: Oh, help me up then, I'm not a young woman

Selma helps her up and to a chair at the table. Sitti is holding a baby doll. It's very ugly with no hair and has lost a leg.

SITTI: Poor baby is crying

AHMED: I don't blame her. She's probably worried about Maha too

SITTI: Don't be stupid. It's a doll

Ahmed sighs and goes back to his phone. Selma boils the kettle.

AHMED: Maybe she got stopped. I told you you packed too much in that bag.

SELMA: It was just food. Nothing else. Food.

AHMED: Enough to feed an army

SELMA: Enough to feed my boys. I don't know what they give them in there

AHMED: There are only two of them, you've only two sons

SITTI: I've two children

AHMED: No you've only got one son Sitti – me

SITTI: And the baby girl

AHMED: No just me. *(to Selma)* They probably won't be able to eat it all – I told you there was too much – it's a waste - they'll probably give it away

SITTI: Don't say that!

AHMED: You spent so much money and time on it, and they'll give it away – I could be eating that makloubeh, instead I'll be living on oil and zaatar all month

SELMA: So what if they give it away? They're all my boys in there, doing time, for what? They all deserve a bit of love – a bit of home cooking

AHMED: It won't be the other prisoners who'll eat it – it'll fill the belly of an Israeli soldier, give him the energy he needs for his next interrogation

SELMA: Shut up! Don't say that!

SITTI: Ahmed! Don't say that to a mother! Don't worry Selma, the boys will get it.

A beat

AHMED: Sorry. I'm just worried.

Pause

SITTI: They're out again then, they're always out that lot

SELMA: Good. I hate it when they're in. I hate listening to them talk

AHMED: You just wish you could understand them

SELMA: What could they possibly say that is of interest to me?

SITTI: After all the screaming they did to get in you'd think they'd stay home a bit more. I don't think they like us – do they baby? Your crying keeps them up at night too. We all hear you crying (*sotto voce to baby*) we all hear you crying (*she continue to talk in hushed tones to the baby doll*)

SELMA: I'm glad they go out. We can pretend it never happened

AHMED: "Better a thousand enemies outside the house than one inside" - when they're in it's impossible to ignore them, all the noise they make

SELMA: And the smell of their food – it's so strange – it smells like.. like – hospital food

AHMED: It smells alright to me, where's that tea?

SELMA: It's coming

But Selma doesn't move to make the tea.

SELMA: I think their daughter's pregnant you know

AHMED: Why do you say that?

SELMA: Haven't you noticed the way they're all looking at her nowadays?

Different. And she doesn't do so much house work

SITTI: She's eating a lot – getting fat

AHMED: Are you sure?

SELMA: They all look so pleased with themselves. I'm sure. Soon she'll start getting round

A beat

SELMA: It'll kill Maha

AHMED: Why would she care if those people have a baby?

SELMA: Use your brain Ahmed. *She* can't after what happened to her – can she?

AHMED: Maha's not even married though

SELMA: Sometimes you are so stupid, do you really think Maha will get a husband? Everyone around here knows what happened to her, that she can't have a child. So to have to watch that woman grow big and flaunt it – it'll be so painful for her

AHMED: If you're right – but she might not be -

SITTI: She is – she's pregnant. Her colour's changed. And the husband's behaving like the prize bull

SELMA: May be we should send her away

AHMED: Who? Maha? How can we? Where to?

SELMA: Your cousin in Jordan. I've that money from my jewellery – she could take that

AHMED: We need that. Emergencies. And anyway - who'd run all our errands?

SELMA: I can

AHMED: No – no there needs to be three of us here at all times – two they could overpower but three... there's safety in numbers.

SELMA: Don't be ridiculous – they've got what they want. A roof over their heads.

AHMED: You think they want to share with Arabs... they're biding their time, waiting and as soon as we get complacent they'll attack again and we'll be out on the street. I don't want to live in a tent like a refugee. This is my house.

A beat

SITTI: It's mine actually

AHMED: Besides – if Maha left who'd go and visit the boys?

SELMA: They won't be in prison forever. And when they come out everything will be different. If they'd been here none of this would have happened in the first place.

AHMED: I did my best. I'm an old man

A beat

AHMED: At least we got half the house

SELMA: Why 'at least' – it's all ours

SITTI: It's mine actually.

SELMA: Exactly. So why are they confident enough to go out all the time. We should go over there and take their stuff and throw it out of the window. And change the locks.

AHMED: We can't do that

SELMA: Why? Why can't we do that?

AHMED: Because a court ruled that we have to share with them

SELMA: What court?

AHMED: The court

SELMA: An Israeli court – I don't recognize an Israeli court. I'm in Palestine. They have no business being in our house. I'm going over there and throw all their stuff out

SITTI: Yulla go!

AHMED: Be reasonable. Don't make a fight – we're at a compromise now

SELMA: What bloody compromise? We're the ones compromising they just came in and took what they wanted

Selma gets up and approaches the line

SELMA: What would happen if I went over?

AHMED: Don't do it

SITTI: There might be guards – a sniper, a watchtower

AHMED: There might be an alarm

SELMA: There's no alarm

AHMED: You can't Selma. We've been over this – you can't.

SELMA: Why?

AHMED: Always 'why' – you know why: Because if you don't respect their space then they won't respect ours. We are being forced to live together, we have to make it work... we have to be mature. We have what we need here. Come on darling. Come away from there. Forget about it. Come back.

She sighs and turns back

AHMED: Make me some shay bin naana – my favourite – you make it the best

She nods and goes to reboil the kettle.

Maha appears at the door she is a 25-year-old woman.

SITTI: She's back!

AHMED: I didn't hear you come in

MAHA: Following your proverb Dad – "Go softly come softly/"

AHMED: /so the cat doesn't get you" My girl

He kisses her

She hands him the cigarettes

AHMED: Thank you! I've been dying for one of these all day. Can I -?

SITTI: It's bad for the baby

SELMA: Go outside

AHMED: I don't want to leave you alone – in case

SELMA: Go outside

He gets up and goes outside to smoke

Maha sits at the table and sighs

SITTI: She looks tired

SELMA: Of course, she's been travelling all day. She went to another country you know

SITTI: The land of David

SELMA: How are they?

MAHA: I only saw Firas

SELMA: What – why? Only Firas? What about Hussein?

MAHA: They said there'd been a mistake. That I could only see Firas

SITTI: One is better than none

MAHA: Yes. And he's ok mum. He seemed ok. A bit quiet/

SELMA: You gave him the food?

MAHA: Yes of course

SELMA: You told him I made Makloubeh – and that there were pastries too

MAHA: Yes. He was pleased

SELMA: How did he look? Did he look thin?

MAHA: Not really. He looked tired

SITTI: Maybe the baby's crying is keeping him up too

SELMA: Why is he tired? What else is there to do in prison but sleep?

SITTI: And dream

MAHA: I don't think it's relaxing – they make them do jobs in the day. Work. And at night I don't think it's peaceful

SELMA: Of course it's not peaceful

SITTI: The baby cries (*she begins to whisper to the baby*)

SELMA: What did he say about Hussein?

MAHA: Not much

SELMA: He's not getting himself in trouble in there is he?

MAHA: I don't think so

SELMA: He just needs to keep his head down – they both do, not get involved in anything stupid, just get through it and get home

MAHA: There's hardly room for them to come home now

SELMA: There's always room for them. This is their home.

A beat

SITTI: Is Firas the handsome one?

SELMA: Both my boys are handsome

SITTI: No they're not – one is handsome the other has a big nose

MAHA: Yes Firas is the handsome one Sitti

SITTI: We like him, don't we baby? (*once again she whispers to the baby*)

A beat

MAHA: Why do you let her carry that thing around everywhere Mum?

SELMA: It keeps her calm

MAHA: It's weird. I hate it – it's ugly – it's got no hair. Where did she even find it?

SELMA: I don't know

MAHA: Look at it – it's missing a leg and it's falling to bits. She's an old woman – she's got no business carrying a doll around

SELMA: Leave her alone

SITTI: She's not ugly

MAHA: It's embarrassing. What do people think?

SELMA: What people? We never go out anymore after what happened – unless you are talking about them? The people who live in our house? Do you care what they think of us? /Because I don't

MAHA: Of course I don't – why do you always bring 'them' into everything?

SELMA: How can I avoid them? They're here, in my house.

SITTI: Don't you call her ugly, she's beautiful. The most beautiful baby you have ever seen. With auburn curls and slate blue eyes – look closely and you'll see there are yellow flecks – she doesn't look like an Arab at all – her skin is white and smooth like marble and she has lips like rose petals. She's perfect. You're just jealous because she's more beautiful than any child you've ever seen – jealous because she's more beautiful than any child you'll ever have – jealous because you can't have a child - because a black bullet burrowed its way into your stomach where your baby would have lived and now you are scarred and ugly and dry and you'll always be empty/

SELMA: That's enough Sitti

MAHA: /give me that thing

SITTI: NO! Get off

SELMA: Leave her

Maha grabs the doll from her grandmother.

SITTI: My baby! My baby – she's got the baby

SELMA: Give it back

MAHA: I'm going to pull her head off

SELMA: Don't MAHA don't

SITTI: She's crying, please don't hurt my baby !

MAHA: Ugly bloody thing

SELMA: Give it back

SITTI: Please!

MAHA: If you want her go and get her

Maha lobs the doll across the stage and she flies over the chalk line into the area on the other side.

A beat

SITTI: MY BABY!

She cries

SELMA: AHMED AHMED!

Ahmed comes in

AHMED: What's the matter? Why are you shouting? I go out for one minute and – why is mother crying? Maha?

Maha points to the doll on the other side of the line

AHMED: Oh shit.

Part 2:

The family sit around the kitchen table.

SITTI: I can't bear to hear her crying.

AHMED: Why would you do that?

MAHA: You didn't hear what she said to me!

AHMED: You are an adult Maha

MAHA: So is she!

SITTI: How can you sit there and listen to it *She covers her ears*

AHMED: Your granny needs that to keep her calm

MAHA: Why can't she just take tranquilisers like everybody else!

SELMA: Maha didn't mean it – she had a tough day. What's done is done. Now we have to get it back, before they come home.

AHMED: What do you mean?

SELMA: Look at her, she's so distressed. She needs it back

SITTI: My baby

AHMED: We will wait until they get back and ask them to pass it to us

SITTI: What if they take her prisoner? Kidnap her? Interrogate her? She doesn't know anything! They might kill her, she's just a baby!

MAHA: What if they won't give it back out of spite?

AHMED: I'm sure they'll be reasonable

SELMA: REASONABLE? Were they reasonable when they forced their way into our home?

MAHA: we need to go over there and get it before they get back. It's just over there. It'll only take a second.

AHMED: It's a bad idea

SITTI: Please, please, don't leave her there, to be attacked by the wild animals

AHMED: What if they've put booby traps over there, or an alarm on the line

SELMA: We'd have seen them if they'd done that – one of us is always in this room

AHMED: I don't know. It seems dangerous. What if they find out? They'll think, "they haven't respected the line". And if we cross the line, they could do the same

MAHA: How would they know? We just go over there pick up the doll

SITTI: Baby

MAHA: and bring her back. End of story. They'll never find out.

AHMED: You might knock something over. Break something by accident

SELMA: She won't

MAHA: I won't

SITTI: Go on, go on you – you caused this problem

MAHA: I did not cause this problem!

SITTI: You heartless thing – you threw her over there, listen to her

MAHA: This is stupid I'm going

AHMED: No!

SELMA: Go on – do it quickly

Maha gets up and approaches the line

AHMED: Darling please!

MAHA: Dad I spent the best part of my day today waiting at Israeli checkpoints where there were soldiers – with real guns, itching to shoot people. I think walking across a room to pick up a doll should be a piece of cake

SITTI: Go on then, hurry up

SELMA: Yes, go on Maha before they come home

MAHA: OK. I'm going

A beat and she is about to step over the line but Ahmed stops her

AHMED: NO! No don't do it.

MAHA: DAD!

AHMED: Don't – I don't want to lose you – you're my only daughter. You're young. We need you. I'll go. If something happens to me it doesn't matter. I'm an old man – I'm good for nothing.

MAHA: On that reasoning granny should go – she's the oldest

SITTI: Get lost! I'm not going over there. Who knows what could happen to me.

You go Maha. This is your fault. You go.

MAHA: Fine. I'll go

SELMA: Just do it quickly stop talking about it – I keep thinking I can hear them coming.

A beat

SITTI: Go on!

SELMA: Yes quickly !

MAHA: Dad?

AHMED: I'm not happy about it

SITTI: Stop talking and go – I can't listen to that crying any more, my head will explode – go!

Maha steps over the line and stops still, waiting to see if anything is going to happen. Nothing does and she turns around to her family and laughs

MAHA: SEE! I told you nothing would happen.

SELMA: Hurry up

SITTI: Get the baby!

MAHA: Now I'm here I might just take a look around

AHMED: Come back – quickly!

MAHA: I'll see them out of this window – remember it has a view of the yard - don't worry

AHMED: They're good at sneaking up on people – that's how we got into this position – remember: “he who peeps at his neighbour's window may chance lose his eyes”

MAHA: Well it's our window isn't it ! They've put a nice window box outside
actually – with herbs

SELMA: Hurry up

MAHA: There's parsley – mint – sage – do we need any for dinner mum?

SELMA: Leave it, come back

SITTI: Pass me the baby

MAHA: Alright, alright, calm down

Maha goes to the doll and picks her up

SITTI: Is she ok? Is she hurt?

MAHA: She's still only got one leg

SITTI: That's ok – a birth defect. Be gentle with her.

AHMED: Come back Maha

MAHA: I'm coming

*She approaches them and is about to cross over the line when something catches
her eye on a table*

SITTI: Why have you stopped – give her to me

MAHA: There's a letter here dad – it's addressed to you

AHMED: What? It can't be

MAHA: It is – look

She picks it up and holds it up for him to see

SELMA: It's addressed to them

MAHA: And dad – afterwards see?

SELMA: That's strange

SITTI: Come back – bring me my baby

AHMED: Are you sure?

MAHA: It's open. I'm going to read it

AHMED: Don't – it's not for you

MAHA: No, it's for you dad.

AHMED: Exactly. Bring it to me. Come here

Maha crosses back to her family's side of the house. There is a sense of relief. Maha gives Sitti the doll.

SITTI: My poor baby

She takes the doll to a corner and rocks her and whispers quietly to her. Ahmed takes the letter and reads it.

SELMA: *To Maha* Are you ok?

MAHA: Yes. That was quite exciting actually.

SITTI: Poor baby. What a trauma

A beat

MAHA: Sorry Sitti. I didn't mean it. /I've just had a hard day – a long day

SELMA: Baby's OK isn't she Sitti? She's a tough old thing, been through much worse than that

SITTI: Been through the wars

Ahmed has been reading the letter and has paled somewhat. He quietly replaces the letter in its envelope and approaches the line – the woman suddenly notice

MAHA: What are you doing dad?

A beat

He crosses the line and puts the letter back on the table where it was.

SELMA: Oomri? What are you doing?

He very slowly, deliberately sits in a chair and wipes his face with his hands. The women gather at the line staring across at him agog –

SITTI: Son! Quick, what if they come back?

MAHA: Dad?

AHMED: "I complained because I had no shoes, until I met a man with no feet"

Pause

SELMA: What does that mean? Ahmed!

MAHA: He looks strange mum

SELMA: What did the letter say?

No answer

SELMA: Habibi?

No answer

SELMA: Go over there and get him Maha

MAHA: Shall I?

SITTI: AHMED! This is your mother speaking – get back over here this instant before I tan your hide. I'm not joking. I've a wooden spoon and you know I'll use it

MAHA: Dad!

SELMA: Ahmed – they might come back – taalahone habibi

AHMED: Shut up you witches! – Let me think for a minute

Silence

SELMA: But what if they /come back

AHMED: /They're not coming back

MAHA: They're not?

AHMED: No

SELMA: How do you know?

AHMED: The letter

MAHA: They've really gone? For good !

He nods

SITTI: Does that mean it's my house again?

MAHA: Yes Granny!

SITTI: Mashallah! *To doll* Baby do you hear that the Yehuds have gone home!

SELMA: I can't believe it!

The three women proceed to dance around on the line scuffing it up as they do laughing and ululating and singing joyously. Ahmed sits in the chair, a man defeated, his head in his hands.

Part 3:

Three large laundry bags stand in the room. The chalk line is all but gone. Maha and Selma are filling the bags with things, Ahmed sits at the kitchen table looking at his mobile phone.

AHMED: "If you know - it's a disaster. But if you don't know it's a greater disaster"

Pause

AHMED: "Only three things in life are certain, birth, death and change"

Pause

AHMED: "If a wind blows, ride it"

SELMA: ENOUGH! Enough with your bloody proverbs! When did you start this incessant proverbing! MY GOD – you didn't do it when I met you

MAHA: Don't take it out on him Mum, it's not his fault.

A beat

MAHA: Besides – I like them. They’re comforting. How do you remember them all dad? Were they something your father said to you?

AHMED: Oh no – my father was a modern man, he didn’t believe in such things. I read them on Twitter

MAHA: You’re kidding me? You have a twitter account?

SELMA: Twitter?

AHMED: (*indicating his phone*) Yes – not many followers – I don’t say much but I like to read others. There’s one called ‘arabic proverbs’

Selma gives him a look

AHMED: What? They’re helpful

SELMA: How – how are they helpful?

AHMED: They help to keep me positive

SELMA: Positive! Put that phone away and get the bedding

AHMED: Ok

He does so and puts it in one of the laundry bags

MAHA: We’ll never fit everything in here

AHMED: We can’t bring everything – just the things we can’t live without

SELMA: One bag each. It’s all we can manage.

MAHA: It’s hard to know what to take and leave.

AHMED: Us Palestinians should be good at this by now

MAHA: What will happen to the things we leave behind?

SELMA: What do you mean?

MAHA: Will they come and clear the house first? Perhaps give everything we leave to the needy

SELMA: The needy? We are the bloody needy! Do you think those people care about 'the needy'? If they did they wouldn't do this to us!

MAHA: Really? They won't even come and look inside

AHMED: I doubt it. Just start the engine and / drive

SELMA: Don't – let's not talk about it. I can't think about it.

A beat

SELMA: Just as well your mother has gone ahead. I don't think she'd be able to cope with seeing this – it's better she doesn't know. After all it took her to buy it.

MAHA: Tell me the story

SELMA: You've heard it a hundred times

MAHA: Please

SELMA: Your father will - Ahmed?

AHMED: You tell it

SELMA: Fine. *(As she continues to pack up)* That poor woman. What a life –48, Nakba, refugee camp, married. Had him *(indicating Ahmed)*. Then 67, only in her twenties. And it happened all over again. Lost everything, even her husband. Everyone else left Palestine. Not her. She came here. To Jerusalem. Took the Israelis to court. For what happened to her husband. Shot. In cold blood. No reason. But there were witnesses. Proof. So she sued them. Took years, worked as a cleaner, slept in one room with your father, in the basement of a house she cleaned. And eventually she won. WON! They admitted they'd made a mistake. Of course the financial sum that they put on his life was laughable. Yet after she'd paid all the lawyers and the fees she had enough to buy this – this small house. Bought from the blood of her husband. So for this to happen...it's sacrilege.

A beat

MAHA: It's so inspiring mum, she's so brave

SELMA: Shame her courage didn't pass to her offspring.

AHMED: What would you have me do? Lie down in front of the bulldozer?

SELMA: You know that's not what I'm talking about

AHMED: I've seen enough of Israeli courts to last me a lifetime

SELMA: It's one thing to roll over and die, but to pay them? To pay them to finish you off! Come on Ahmed – I thought you had some blood left in you?

AHMED: Selma – we agreed

SELMA: I didn't

AHMED: We agreed – not in front of/ Maha

MAHA: What does she mean pay them?

AHMED: Nothing/

SELMA: She's not a child – tell her!

MAHA: Tell me what Mum?

AHMED: You really want me to do this? You don't think it's humiliating enough for me? You want me to spell it out to my daughter? Fine. You're right. Maha – listen up – not only is your father a coward who can't provide for his family, can't protect them – now he's paying for the enemy to destroy his home – with money he doesn't have –

MAHA: Paying? What do you mean?

AHMED: The letter said – either we bulldoze it and bill you, or you do it yourself – how am I supposed to do that?

MAHA: So the Israelis are making us pay them to bulldoze our house?!

SELMA: I've told him to take them to court, fight – like his mother. But he wants to roll over and die. Where are we supposed to get this money anyway?

AHMED: We'll have to use your emergency jewellery fund

SELMA: What? No way – you know I wanted that for Maha

MAHA: Me? I don't want any money

SELMA: She needs a fresh start – to get away from here – it's my money

AHMED: I bought you that jewellery

SELMA: Don't you dare! It was MINE!

AHMED: I'll end up in prison Selma, with Firas and Hussein, is that what you want? Go to court! If I do that they'll put me inside and throw away the key this time...

SELMA: But/

AHMED: ENOUGH! I need a cigarette

He goes outside to smoke

SELMA: *(to herself)* That's right – smoke. Leave us to sort this out.

MAHA: I don't need money mum honestly –

SELMA: We'll talk about it later, come on, quickly, let's just grab the last few things, put them in the bags and take them out. Quickly. Like ripping off a plaster.

MAHA: Except the plaster's on a mortal wound

The women try to zip up the bags and look around.

MAHA: I don't feel as sad as I should

SELMA: you're brave

MAHA: No. It just hasn't felt like home since those people moved in

SELMA: That was the beginning of the end for us.

A beat

SELMA: I wanted you to go to his cousin, Jordan. More opportunities. People don't know us... they'd think you were Jordanian

MAHA: I'm not Jordanian. Anyway I'm happy here

SELMA: Happy?

Maha shrugs

SELMA: I wanted better for you – better for you than the rest of us... but now they want to take what little money we have too...

MAHA: I don't want to leave anyway – they'd probably never let me come home again

The women struggle out of the door with the three laundry bags.

SELMA: Concentrate on the bags. Don't look back. Come on Maha.

They exit.

We can hear them talking to Ahmed outside.

SELMA: You take this one – it's the heaviest

AHMED: Ok – oh it's very light!

SELMA: That's because you are stronger than us. You're the man.

MAHA: Come on, let's go before I get upset

SELMA: Yulla

They move off dragging the laundry bags

Pause.

In the distance we can hear something that sounds like a baby crying

Granny comes in

SITTI: I can hear you.

A beat

SITTI: Where are you? Habibti?

A beat

SITTI: Don't hide – not now... come on... where are you?

She is looking around – then finds the doll

SITTI: There you are! Were you hiding from me? *Whispering to the doll* What were you doing behind there? Did you hear what they were saying – about me? About my life? Did you believe it? It was true you know. All of it - the truth. Just a few facts were missing. A few. Vital. Facts.

A beat, she is talking to the doll but gradually starts to talk out the audience

I was three. 1948. When It happened. I don't remember much. Just a sea of people. Running away.

A beat

The second time I remember though Baby. The second time I remember it all. The morning. Cold. The baby was crying. Had kicked off her blankets silly thing.

A beat

Strange. It was really peaceful. Once you stopped crying. I put the blanket on you, and it was really peaceful. Your father was already at the garage working, he was coming back for breakfast any minute. Your brother was still asleep. I made myself a tea – with Naana – and the smell of it – the mint, was peaceful, even with the bitter edge of the tea. But then in a second everything changed. The noise, the shouting, the blood, the noise – getting closer... It was a nightmare – crazy. I grabbed your brother – I grabbed you, we ran – outside – with nothing. Just us – the most precious things to one another. And all around us the buildings falling – those wispy homes we had built in haste – went up quickly, came down quicker, around our ears in a flash. Like paper.

A beat

Your father didn't have a chance. Found himself face to face with a gun. And that was it. The black bullet burrowed its way into his stomach. And he was gone.

A beat

But we escaped - ran and ran out of the town into the woods, through the woods, and gradually - as we got further away we managed to catch our breath a little - but we didn't stop. No - not until we got to the olive grove. That was far enough - to be safe - to be sure. And then we stopped - exhausted - the three of us - I was beside myself... what had happened to your father? But I had you two - my babies. I held you both. My son - so brave - he'd held on to me, my hand - so tightly. And I held you - my baby - fiercely - close. I wanted to look into those beautiful, calm eyes of yours - but when I loosed my arms - nothing - blankets - you'd disappeared. Where? Where? Still in bed? Fallen - no not fallen - not dropped - a mother never drops her child... she can't - it's not possible. Still in bed then. Please god still asleep. Peaceful. Not knowing. Oblivious.

A beat

I went back. I went back for you. I searched and cried out for you - my daughter - with perfect auburn hair - your grey eyes with yellow flecks.

A beat

But I never found you my baby did I? You still allude me - still hiding from me. Were you inside that house? Inside your bed? Under the covers? Behind the pillows? Under the rubble? I'll find you, my girl... I promise to come and find you - I'll just close my eyes here for a minute and you hide, then call me when you're ready and I'll come and find you.

She sits in a chair

Don't worry - I won't cheat. I won't look. Hide wherever you like.

A beat

I'll count to ten.

One

Two

Three

I'm not looking I promise

Four

Five

Six

Hide wherever you like. I'll find you

Seven

Eight

Make it as difficult as you want I won't give up.

Nine.

Even if it takes forever.

Ten

She stays seated

We hear the sound of a bulldozer engine starting up

Blackout.