

Mazen SAADEH

A film treatment, a play, an essay

## **The Last Hour**

Film Treatment

### **Summary:**

Ahmad is a young college student in his early twenties. He studies literature at Birzeit University, and lives in Kalandiya refugee camp. He falls in love with Ameena, who comes from a very rich family. Ameena studies psychology at the university. She lives in Ramallah.

Ahmad and Ameena get married, despite the disapproval of her family, whom she defies to marry Ahmad. On their wedding night, Ahmad gets arrested by the Israeli army, being an activist against occupation.

He spends 10 years in prison.

Ahmad gets out from prison a transformed man. He comes back to Ameena, who discovers that he's become sexually impotent. Ahmad becomes depressed, while Ameena tries to convince him that this impotency is only temporary, and that he'll soon be his normal self. She suggests that he see a doctor, but he refuses, fearing what he sees as scandal.

After two months, Ameena decides to leave him. He thinks it's because of his impotency, and becomes more depressed. He sees a doctor in an attempt to convince her to come back home. The doctor tells him that the cause of his impotency is psychological, not physical.

Ahmad's mother convinces him to see a soothsayer. Being lost and willing to do anything that could bring Ameena back, he decides to see the soothsayer.

All his attempts fail, and his depression deepens.

After ten months, on the anniversary of his release, and of eleven years of their marriage, he sits in his room waiting for Ameena, totally believing that she's coming back.

He starts to write a poem to celebrate her expected return. In that period of waiting he recalls and recounts the past days. Standing before the mirror, he sees himself a young man, before his imprisonment. In an instant, the young Ahmad comes out from the mirror and stands before him, starting a debate on Ameena and her reasons for departure.

The relation between Ahmad and his young reflection deepens and becomes more complicated. The young Ahmad tries always to turn the debate in the direction of what

happened to Ahmad in the period of his captivity, but Ahmad tries to escape that period all the time.

Despite his resistance to the young Ahmad's attempts, Ahmad at last remembers what happened with him during interrogation, and the confession he made that caused the death of his friend Khaleel under torture.

Ahmad then realizes that Ameena will not come back, and that she left him not because of any sexual impotency, but because of his confession and his cowardice during the interrogation. He was no longer her hero.

But he does not lose hope. He decides to wait until the end of the last hour on which she was expected to show up. When the hour ends, Ahmad decides to end his life with the aid of his young reflection, to give Ameena the chance to come back to the other Ahmad: the pure Ahmad that carries not the prison within, and who's totally open to the choices of life.

### **Dramatic treatment**

We see a young man, 33 years old, coming out of a prison. He crosses an Israeli checkpoint that separates the Palestinian territory from the Israeli borders. He passes through a pedestrian gate in the separation wall, carrying a small shoulder bag. We see him distraught, and tired as if he hasn't slept for a week. He stares at people and things in astonishment, and stops occasionally to stare at pedestrians and sellers who are scattered beside the checkpoint. He hears a voice of a woman calling to him. He looks in the direction of the sound to see a tall, pretty woman, 30 something, waving. He approaches and embraces her shyly. The woman looks eagerly at his face, taking it between her two hands, touching it with affection as if to make sure he existed, and that it was him who she was touching. Feeling the change this face endured. She smiles and weeps at the same time. Holding hands, they walk away together.

Ahmad comes out of prison a transformed man, tired and worn out, as if aged 20 years. We see him and Ameena standing in the living room of the house, staring at the 3650 lines that fill one of the walls. The lines are divided into fives to represent the days of ten years, and in the middle is a photograph of Ahmad and Ameena in their wedding outfits. Ahmad looks at the photo amidst the lines. Ameena approaches him, stands before him, beholding the photo. She says that she's keeping this "work of art", and will not erase the lines from the wall. She says that each line represents to her what it held of pain, longing, and dream.

She tells him that this day was delayed ten years, and that she's so happy for being with him now. She takes hold of his hand and leads him to their bedroom. She takes off her shirt while he lays in his clothes on the bed. She looks at him in yearning and reaches for his shirt. We see him perplexed, and embarrassed. He takes off his shirt, and hesitantly removes his trousers.

Ahmad becomes depressed because he can't have an erection. We see him standing at the bedroom's window, smoking a cigarette and looking outside, while Ameena sits on the bed looking sad and tense.

Ameena discovers that Ahmad is impotent. They try several times with no success. He tells her that it hasn't been so in the prison, but he's facing very complex, conflicting emotions after his release. He says that he doesn't feel free, that there's something stuck within him, that he's struck and unhappy in general, and can't feel so. He insists that ten years of imprisonment can erode steel, not only a mortal.

He becomes obsessed with his impotency, stuck in a permanent depression.

Ameena consoles Ahmad, and tries to not let him feel her frustration. She tells him that this is normal, and that it was due to the long years of imprisonment, and that it may be due to the humidity which fills the cells. She says that he'll soon come back to his normal self.

Ameena asks Ahmad to see a specialist. Ahmad refuses, fearing scandal, and wanting to maintain his social image as a man in a society that so values sexual prowess as a way to define masculinity.

*After two months*

Ameena is holding a damp sponge. She uses it to erase some black lines on the wall. She moves her arm automatically, looking sad and worn out by thinking. The lines disappear, but black smudge fills the area around the photo.

Ahmad is struck by what Ameena has done, and realizes that she has taken a decision. He's devastated by her decision. He tries his best to convince her not to leave. He asks her to be patient, but she refuses and insists on a divorce. He tells her that he's now willing to see a doctor, and do whatever she asks if she'll stay.

She tells him that he will never understand her for the rest of his life, hinting (ambiguously, for she wouldn't say so directly) that she's not leaving him for his sexual impotency but because he's no longer the Ahmad that she had loved eleven years ago. She tells him that she misses the glamour that had always drawn her to him, and that there's something dead in him that she cannot pinpoint.

Ahmad tells her that the hardest thing any prisoner could ever endure is that his wife leaves him. He reminds her of the story of his friend Saleh, who'd been with him in prison, and how his wife decided to leave him after the military court decreed that he be sentenced twenty years of imprisonment. He assures her that Saleh became mad because of this. She tells him that she did not decide to leave him while he was in prison. And that he's no longer a prisoner now.

Ahmad tells her that he understands now what happened with Saleh, but he doesn't understand what's happening with himself, and that it would've been easier had she left him while he was in prison. And that it would have been fine had it been so. She would have done better had she waited until he got used to the air outside his imprisonment walls. She repeats that he had never understood her and never could.

Ahmad's depression deepens. He locks himself up, never taking care of his appearance and resorts to alcohol and smoking.

Despite his depression, he decides to see a doctor, in the hope that this will bring Ameena back. And in spite of the phrase that she had said before her departure: "You will never understand me."

In the beginning, Ahmad is shy to tell the doctor about his problem. The doctor asks him several times and realizes what his problem from Ahmad's hesitation in talking about it. The doctor ascertains him that this is a common problem from which a large number of men – and women- suffer. But only few dare to talk about it in this country.

The doctor asks him to relax and calm down, and then starts to perform a check on his body: his eyes, his nose, and his neurons. Ahmad assures him that he doesn't have anything wrong in his eyes, nose, or his other organs. The doctor explains –using many foreign words- that man is a complex machine, and that all organs affect each other; that a problem in the eyes may have an effect on erection, or one in the nose may have its effect too, because a man who cannot smell well may also not perform sexually.

The doctor assures Ahmad that he has no physical problems, and that his troubles are only psychological. He tells him that he's not one of a kind in the Palestinian society, that a majority here suffers from psychological problems, without ever admitting it. Comparing people in developed countries like Europe and the United States and those the Palestinian society, he tells Ahmad that the company that produces the anti-depression medicine "Prozac" sells what amounts to 44 million dollars a year of that product just in the US. He asks him to pay attention on his way out to how people in the street are acting. He asks: "What is the cause of the increased rate of car accidents in all the cities lately?" Not due to speed –as in other countries- but because of depression. He then asks: "What do you think is the cause of the increase in divorce cases in Palestine? The economic situation? NO, NO! It's depression!" He adds that more than twenty percent have at some point been in an Israeli prisons, but none dare to talk about the problems they faced after their release.

Ahmad observes the streets through the doctor's eyes after he leaves the clinic. He sees what the doctor had described:

- A man in his fifties walks alone, laughing for no reason.
- A boy walks in the middle of the street without taking heed of the cars. A driver blows the horn but the boy doesn't care.
- A BMW passes by Ahmad at a great speed. A young man extends his arm from the window, holding an iron bar that he uses to break the side mirrors of the cars that are parked at the side of the road.
- A young man climbs a column at the Al-Manarah traffic circle in Ramallah. He calls upon Allah, saying that he cannot take it any longer, and that he doesn't want to be a prophet.
- Ahmad passes by a boy who sells religious books, incense, and *miswaks*. He holds a book in his hand and calls: "Enter Paradise for only ten shekels!"

- A woman walks in the street, holding her young daughter's hand. The child's walking on the street, while the woman is on the sidewalk. A car passes them at a high speed, and the child panics. The mother slaps her across the face.
- A young man is talking to one of the five lion statues at Al-Manarah circle in the middle of Ramallah.
- A group of guys are sitting on the edge of a wall that overlooks the main street in the city. An old blind man is walking in the pedestrian area with the help of a stick, a stone directly in his way. The guys move their legs in a rhythm, looking at the stone. The old man stumbles over the stone, and the rhythm of their legs' movement rises.
- A group of men are sitting in a shwarma restaurant, at a bar-like table which faces a long mirror. They watch themselves as they're eating.
- A man in his late twenties is walking through a street-garden. He trips over into the roses, but no one cares.
- A group is gathered around two men facing each other. They knock their heads together repeatedly, competing as to who's more stubborn.
- A young woman is walking in the street, wearing a veil (*kehimar*) covering everything. She walks with difficulty, sometimes raising her head to find out her way. When making a turn to the left or right, she turns her head in the direction she's heading, sometimes running into pedestrians.
- A young man is walking in the street with a long rope tied around his neck, on which there are empty tins. He's walking, dragging the tins behind him.
- A group of old men are sitting in a street café that overlooks the vegetables market street, Al-Hisba, smoking a narjilah water pipe. A girl in jeans passes, and they look at her all at the same time, in an automated manner.

We see a traveling salesman leading a donkey loaded down with garments and shoe boxes. The man approaches a refugee camp. He enters the graveyard, and then stands to read the "Al-Fateha" verse on the tomb of one of the dead. He reads: "Sayed Abu Farhan, died in 1985, at the age of ten days." He heads for another tomb and reads: "Eid Abu Arja, died at the age of five days." The salesman looks at the grave, astonished by its size. He crosses himself, measures the tomb, takes the leash of his donkey and heads towards the camp. He stands in front of a large house, knocks at the door. An old man wearing traditional Palestinian dress greets him, and asks him in for a coffee.

Ahmad locks himself up in his house, avoiding other people, and talking to himself most of the time. His depression and solitude are so deep that he starts to talk to his sexual organ, blaming it for his misery, and holding it responsible for the departure of Ameena who had waited ten years.

Things become so mixed up for him, and many questions torture his mind. He tries to answer as much as he can, but reaches a point when all seems like gibberish, each answer opening yet more questions.

His mother visits him and assures him that his problems are neither physical, nor psychological, nor any of that nonsense, and that the solution is at the hands of a very famous soothsayer in the city. She gives him many examples; one of them is her neighbor

Zainab who was thought to be barren, but gave birth to ten children after a visit to the soothsayer. Ahmad refuses his mother's advice at first, saying that he does not believe in soothsayers and their nonsense. But in the end he resigns himself to his mother's wish and goes with her to the soothsayer.

The soothsayer tells him that there's a bird imprisoned inside him, trying to fly, but is locked behind bars after bars. Ahmad asks her about Ameena, and she tells him that there's a black cloud hanging over his head. He asks her again, and she answers that Ameena's heart is closed to him, as a result of magic done against him. He asks her who did the magic, and she answers that it was people who didn't like him, that he should make a spell, a *b'jab*, and that Ameena's heart will not open unless she drinks from a potion in which a paper she gave him must be dissolved.

He asks his mother to dissolve the paper in the potion and give it to Ameena. But his mother asks where Ameena is.

Ahmad's situation becomes even worse, and he decides to stay at home forever.

He checks all his organs, talks to himself, and argues with Ameena between him and himself; He tells her reproachfully that he didn't go to prison of his own will. That nobody likes to go to prison. He tells himself that he's healthy and sound, and that he wants to put out this fire that is swelling within him. He asks his organ why it let him down just after his release.

Ahmad's only obsession becomes his sexual impotency. In his solitude, he only talks to his organ, blaming it for all that happened, saying that the disaster that he's living now is due to his impotence. He asks it why it is letting him down now when it never did hundreds of times in prison. He picks up this habit of standing before the mirror for hours each day.

We see the traveling salesman, Jabr, sitting in the living room of the mayor of the refugee camp. The mayor offers coffee and tells him that he sees on his face the expression of someone who has something to say. Jabr asks him why the people in the camp die so early. The mayor laughs and tells him that it has been the habit of people in the camp since 1948, the year of the Nakbah, since they were forced from their homeland, to count only those of a man's days in which he'd been happy. Jabr laughs and tells the mayor: "If I die here, write on my tombstone: "Jabr the Wretched: from his mother's womb to the tomb."

We see Ahmad crossing his room to and fro, tense and hesitant. He approaches a table in the middle of the room and holds a medicine bottle. He looks at a wall clock, and sees it at 6:00 p.m. He gets out some pills from the bottle and swallows them all. He gets hold of himself and sits on the chair, with his elbow on the table. He starts composing a poem:

*I, in the morning*  
*I, in the evening,*  
*I am now ...*

He stands up, paces, continues with hesitation:

*The worry of dew, the worry of dew...*

*The worry of dew on the cheeks of jasmine.  
I, in the morning  
I, in the evening,  
I am now;  
The worry of dew on the cheeks of a jasmine.  
I ask,  
What do I ask?!!  
When? Where? Who? Why?!!  
Why does my heart circle what is sweetly said?*

We see Ahmad standing before the mirror in a totally different state, as if he were on his way to a wedding, on this the first anniversary of his release and the eleventh of his wedding.

He goes on with his poem:

*I am not my self. I am not my self...  
When I desire, when I tire out, and when I love.  
I am not myself when I desire, when I tire out, and when I love.*

He stops reciting, and starts to pace the room again, counting:

*One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve...*

*He stops and looks at his reflection in the mirror, then continues to walk. He forgets where his counting reached, so he starts all over:*

*One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...*

He stands before the mirror again, touching the wrinkles and lines beneath his eyes. Suddenly, he sees someone else: himself eleven years ago, the young Ahmad. He approaches the mirror, but the other Ahmad doesn't move. He touches the wrinkles beneath his eyes, and the other person laughs out loud.

The young Ahmad asks, "What is it that you want? Why do you see me? Why have you brought me here? What is it that you want from me?"

Ahmad tells him, "I want to rest. I wish I could retire."

The young Ahmad answers, "Retire from what?"

Ahmad says, "Retire from life. From my self. From you. From Ameena. From my head. From all that's within me. From everything, Ahmad! From everything! From you, from you, Ahmad!"

The young Ahmad steps out of the mirror, and continues Ahmad's counting. Ahmad holds a chain of rosary beads and starts to name his friends. He explains to the young Ahmad that he likes to remember the names of his friends and the people he met in his life. He says that he doesn't know what he's saying sometimes while he's running the chain of rosary beads.

The young Ahmad says that this rosary beads thing was a good habit, and that it was a relaxing thing, as Khaleel, Ahmad's friend in prison, used to say. Ahmad becomes very angry, and asks the other not to mention Khaleel's name. The other provokes him, asking, "Why are you trying to forget Khaleel? You can't erase him from your life. It's nonsense." He says that a person fills emptiness by running the beads. Ahmad says he doesn't do it out of faith, but rather to kill time.

The young Ahmad asks, "When is Aameena coming back?" And Ahmad assures him that she'll be back in an hour. The young Ahmad doubts this, and Ahmad becomes angry, insisting that she will come, describing her characteristics, and her waiting for ten years. Sure she'll come back. He assures him that she earned her name --Aameena means "faithful." The other laughs, saying if parents paid for nice and meaningful names they give their children, they would've chosen names of lesser consequence: have you met an Ahmad ('well spoken of') who was as his name implied? Or a Jamila '(beautiful)' who was really pretty? Or a Kareem ('generous') who was? Or a Fadel '(loyalty)' who was really loyal? Or a Mansour ('victor') who has ever had a victory in his life? It would have been better for parents to give names like Shoe, Slipper, Boot, Tin, Crab, or Iron Bar to their newborns. Ahmad objects, says he knows Aameena well, knows here to really be faithful, and that she'll come today, in less than an hour, for she can never forget this day: The day of their wedding, and the first anniversary of his release. This was impossible.

The young Ahmad asks, "Why would she come back? I know her well. She is determined, and cannot go back on a decision once she made it."

They argue. Ahmad becomes upset, telling the other that he was just an image out of his head that he can force back whenever he wanted. The other assures him that he can not. Ahmad orders his younger image to disappear and go back from where he came. The other refuses, and surrenders to the fact that there was another Ahmad facing him in their waiting for Aameena. They argue over Aameena and her name. Ahmad remembers his relationship with Aameena, and how they met. The other accuses him of cowardice in his relations with her. Ahmad bears his words impatiently, and asks him to listen to his new poem for Aameena. He starts to recite when someone knocks the door. Ahmad runs for the door.

Ahmad opens the door just to find the other Ahmad standing before him. He looks behind him, but sees no one. The young Ahmad enters and asks, "To whom were you reading that poem?" Ahmad answers, "To Aameena." The other provokes him, saying, "She's not coming back." Ahmad gets angry and say, "Is there a woman who waits her husband ten years then leaves him as he comes back?" The other says that this was normal, very normal...

Ahmad heads to a box in one corner of the room. He takes out a candle and lights it. He looks at the other and asks him if he remembers it. The other says he does, and that this was the candle she blew out on his birthday many years ago. Ahmad says that she would surely remember this, and that it's impossible for anyone to forget his wedding day, or the day he came out of prison. He recalls what Aameena told him on the day of his release: that the only day she could not forget was their wedding day, that it changed her life, and was the most beautiful, and hardest day in her life.



Ahmad's condition worsens. He starts to see his illusions incarnated. He sees Ameena sitting with his younger self on the bed, telling him: "I have never forgotten my love story with you. What do you think a girl remembers in her life? The first boy who touched her hand. The first boy who kissed her; and you were the first one that ever kissed me, and wrote poems for me. I could never forget that."

The young Ahmad reproaches her for leaving him. Ahmad tries to talk to her, and tell her it would've been easier had she left him while he was in prison, as other prisoners' wives did. People would've understood better had this happened. But this way was something far beyond his comprehension. He asks her, what was it that changed? And begs for an explanation, telling her he'll never be at peace until he understands. He tells her he saw a doctor, and even a soothsayer, and it never helped.

Ameena tells him he will never understand her. She says, "It's a waste you would never understand." He asks her, "Understand what? Tell me WHAT?" But she doesn't answer. He reminds her of what he did for her, then remembers his impotency all of a sudden. He reprimands his organ, asking it, "Am I not a man?" He raises his head to ask her, "Does it mean I'm not a man?" But he doesn't see her anymore. Instead, he finds his younger image before him, looking down on him in contempt. He asks what has happened, and tells the other that his body is healthy, and his muscles strong, that his blood is good, and that his sight and smell are all in order.

He asks him when Ameena came. The other beholds him contemptuously and says she never did come, except in his imagination. He tells him: You know, and I know. Think about what she meant when she said: you would never understand.

Ahmad asks the other about what she had meant. The other says: "Khaleel." Ahmed is outraged, asking the other not to mention the name. The other tells him, "Until when are you going to run away from it? Do you think you can be done with it if I don't mention it?" Ahmad asks the other to shut up. He puts his arms over his head, covering his ears, and starts to shout, asking the other to leave. He collapses and weeps.

#### *Flashback*

During his interrogation, Ahmad is placed in a "fried chicken" position. The hands of a prisoner are tied before his body, then he's ordered to sit on the floor, and place his bent knees between his tied hands. The interrogated then inserts a bar from under his inner knees and above his hands. Then the two sides of the bar are placed on two chairs, which results in the prisoner's head being down, while his bare feet are up. This gives the interrogator the freedom to lash the prisoner on the palms of his feet, which can be very painful.

The interrogator asks him who was the leader of the university resistance group against the occupation. In the beginning Ahmad refuses to admit, and denies any link to the group. He is then beaten up and tortured, but he never confesses.

The interrogator resorts to another method. He uses dialogue to convince Ahmad to confess. He tells him, "I know you're wishing for death now. But why? And for whom? For the motherland? Which motherland? There's no man who lives today for such things as a homeland or a nation... Things have changed, and no one chooses his nationality or

homeland...nationality was a destiny, not a choice, and a man's right is to defend his choices, not that what was destined for him...A man in this day and age chooses his life only."

The interrogator assures him that he is living an illusion, and that there was not one person in the world willing to sacrifice for him. That even his closest friends wouldn't bear to be in prison even one day for him, so why does he insist on not confessing?

He gives him three days to make up his mind, or he'll be sorry. He keeps him in the "fried chicken" position. And, touching his chains, he tells him he'll remain in this position to help him think. "Pain compels us to think well."

We see Ameena in the living room, hanging the photograph of her wedding in the middle of the wall. She then draws a black line on the wall next to three other lines. Day 4.

The interrogator visits Ahmad again. He approaches him, asking with contemptuous satisfaction, "How are you doing? Having fun? How is the weather there today? Hot? Cold? It's cool outside, pretty cool. In fact it's great: perfect for a weekend. Do you like weekends?"

Ahmad doesn't answer.

The interrogator carries on, "I myself like weekends: sun, sea, flesh ...(he draws curves in the air to represent a feminine body)... Mediterranean flesh..."

Another interrogator comes in. The first asks, "Do you miss Ameena? Sure she misses you."

The other interrogator intervenes, "Nonsense! He only understands one language". He raises his club and lashes Ahmad's feet: "Confess or be sorry for your life! We'll bring Ameena here, and you know what we're gonna do with her! We'll eat her! You know how we're gonna eat her: like this: hmmm!"

The first interrogator intervenes: "Are you jealous for her? Ah! What does she look like? (He draws two big breasts in the air) Big?"

The second interrogator says, "No, no. Small... but real nice." He circles Ahmad. "We don't want you to confess now, but in front of her, when we get her here."

Ahmad could not imagine that the interrogator could bring Ameena. He tells himself that these were only empty threats meant to force him to confess. But when the interrogator picks up the phone and orders someone to go get Ameena, he starts to scream, "No...no!"

The second interrogator asks him, "Will you now tell us what you know?"

Ahmad nods. The first interrogator asks him, "Who is the head of the resistance group?"

Ahmad's voice breaks. He collapses on the floor and weeps.

The young Ahmad approaches Ahmad, helps him sit on the side of the bed, then gives him a glass of water. Ahmad drinks a little, then tells his younger self, "I feared to die under

torture. I could not bear the idea, and I told myself that Khaleel must have run away anyhow. He had a week to leave the country."

The other assures him that Khaleel had put so much faith in him, and reminds him of the pact they had sealed together that none of them would turn in the other what ever the circumstances were. Ahmad confesses that he couldn't bear the idea that they would bring Ameena to the interrogation room, and that he'd been tortured by miserable images of Ameena in that situation, that led him to turn Khaleel in.

"Why didn't he run?!!" he asks loudly. "He had a full week to run. Why didn't he?! I'm not responsible for his arrest! Yes, I am not responsible!"

The young Ahmad roars in laughter. He stands to face Ahmad, asking in accusation, "Who told Ameena? Who told her? Nobody knows."

Ahmad holds the other by the front of his shirt, shaking him. "Nobody knows. Who told her? Tell me who did?!"

The young Ahmad frees himself. "You did. Yes, it was you who told her."

Ahmad screams, "A lie! This is a lie! I haven't said a word to her."

The other replies, "Not necessarily. A woman's got a sense, you know, a very precise sense."

Ahmad avoids looking the other in the face. He says, hesitantly, "He should've run rather than count on me. Why did he not run? Why didn't he disappear?" His voice falters. "Was it necessary for him to remain and torment me? Was it necessary for him to remain and torment me?" He repeats the sentence several times and collapses on the floor. The other watches him from afar. Ahmad gets a hold of himself a little bit, and looks between his thighs, "You are innocent, mister. Ameena hasn't left me for you. I know Ameena. Ameena would never leave me for you, mister. Ameena has been patient for ten years. Yes: full ten years."

He hears knocking on the door. He jumps in rejoicing, thinking it's her. He looks in the direction of the other, "Haven't I told you she's coming back?" But he finds no one. He heads for the door, and opens it to find his father standing before him. His father looks at a pile of cans, left beside the door. He enters and sits.

His father talks with him about life and its worries. He asks him about his work and about Ameena. Ahmad tells him that it would've been better had he named him "Jabr," in reference to the traveling salesman who once asked the mayor of the refugee camp to write on his tomb if he died "Jabr the Wretched: from his mother's womb to the tomb."

The young Ahmad looks down on Ahmad in contempt. The father doesn't see the young Ahmad. Ahmad screams at the other, "Leave me alone! Get the hell out of here! I've had enough!" The father looks at Ahmad in bewilderment, thinking that he was addressing him. He gets out praying for God's help on this hopeless matter.

The young Ahmad looks at the wall clock. It has reached seven. He looks toward Ahmad, then takes hold of a rope, playing with its end.

Ahmad, too, looks at the clock. He stares at the rope's end in the other's hand. He stands before Ameena's photo on the wall, and shouts, "It's for you that I have confessed. Yes, for you, not because I was weak or cowardly."

The young Ahmad laughs, and swings the rope in Ahmad's face. He draws a chair and places it in the middle of the room. He stands on the chair, and ties one end of the rope to a hook in the ceiling.

Ahmad takes a paper from his pocket and starts to recite:

*I, in the morning  
I, in the evening,  
I am now;  
The worry of dew on the cheeks of jasmine.  
I ask,  
Why does my heart circle what is sweetly said?  
I am not my self. I am not my self when I desire, when I tire out, and when I love  
How can I love?  
When the earth is narrower than the palm of my hand?  
O, woman coming out from the impossible  
The thyme of the eyes takes me to a sea of madness  
Come.....  
Come let us go to where we wish to be.*

The young Ahmad approaches him, repeating:

*I, in the morning  
I, in the evening,  
I am now ...*

Ahmad stops, bewildered. He shouts, "Lies! It's all lies! Ten years of lies....!"  
He imagines that he heard a knock on the door. He heads for the door but finds no one. He feels dizzy, and collapses. He weeps, looks at his watch, stands up with difficulty, then holds the end of the hanging rope. He says, "It's seven."

The young Ahmad says, "Two minutes to seven."

Ahmad says, "I cannot wait another ten years for her to come; until my problem is solved. I cannot live alone... A black cloud...the black cloud of which the sheikha Mabruka spoke." He moves in a circle, repeating the soothsayer's words, "A bird locked up inside you... A bird locked up inside you."

The other tells him, "Your problem will not be solved until you get rid of the prison."

Ahmad replies, "The prison is within; it's you; it's in my head; it's in Ameena; it's in Khaleel...Khaleel is in prison; the prison is in everything; in everything; it's within us- that's what Faris told me when we were there."

The other asks, "And how will I know that you got rid of the prison?"

Ahmad takes a rose from a vase on the table. He flounders about hysterically: "She's coming, she's not. She's coming, she's not, she's coming, she's not coming." The clock strikes seven.

They laugh hysterically. Both say, "She's not coming."

They stop laughing, as if awakening. The young Ahmad breaks the bar of the prison, gets out and wraps the end of the rope round Ahmad's neck.

Ahmad says, "Only Ameena can get me out of the prison."

The other says, "No. It's Khaleel."

Ahmad says, "No. Only Ameena!"

The other insists, "I told you, it's Khaleel."

Ahmad says, "Ameena, just Ameena."

The other defies him. "Ameena is not coming back! And if she comes, it would be to me, only for me."

Ahmad says she'll come back, and forgive, but the other shouts, "She will never come back. WILL NEVER COME BAAACCK! It's only her who can deliver you, and she did not come back."

Ahmad confesses, "Ameena is not coming back. I know she's not coming back."

The other adds, "And Khaleel is still in prison. Your bird is still locked up inside you. Inside you it is all echo..."

Ahmad stands before the mirror. He says, "What does life mean? Why is it short? Why is it long? Why does one have to live fifty or sixty or seventy years when we all die, finally?"

He wraps the rope around his neck, and tells the other, "I hereby give you my will. If you see her, tell her that Ahmad waited, but was bored. That he couldn't take it any longer. Tell her he did everything--he tried, but you never came back. Tell her that he finally understood; understood perfectly what the problem was."

The young Ahmad ties the knot round Ahmad's neck. We hear his last breath, then see him hanging down from the ceiling.

#### *Another ending*

A man in his mid-forties and a woman in her early forties are sitting silently, looking at each other, each absorbed in his own world.

The woman looks sadly at the man. Stands up abruptly, then heads for the door.

The man moves towards the door. "Stay. Don't leave. Stay..."

The woman is silent.

Light falls on a woman walking in the direction of Ahmad's room. Ahmad's body is lying in a dark corner of the room.

#### *Another ending*

Ahmad and Khaleel as ten-year olds, playing with paper airplanes.

#### *Another ending*

Ahmad stands on the chair and wraps the rope around his neck. He then kicks the chair with his foot, and hangs dead from the ceiling.

Ameena enters and sees him. She behaves as if all was normal. She grabs the chair, sits down, sighs about being tired. She looks at him, realizes she's sitting, stands up and places the chair under his feet. She looks at the young Ahmad. Holding hands, they leave the room.

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## The Kingdom of Chaos

a play in 20 scenes

### Scene 1

Three men (a crippled, a one-eyed, and a deaf, all handicapped on the right side) stand, bored, inside a triangle, each in one corner, looking outward, waiting for something.

Boredom rules (music accordingly). Each complains in his own way.

*The cripple:* He's late.

*The one-eyed man* looks at him and despises him.

The one-eyed man: Oh, he's very late.  
The cripple looks at him and despises him too.

*The deaf man:* Oh, he's very late, more than he should be.  
The cripple and the one-eyed man look at him in disdain.

All three look at their watches, then look up. They all turn around and their faces are turned into the space of the triangle now; they stare at each other in disgust. Then they again turn their faces away from each other, outside the triangle.

These scenes of waiting in boredom and disgust repeat themselves. Suddenly the place comes to life, with exciting and celebratory music, conveying happiness and liveliness (perhaps a march.)

Three men enter the stage, each from a different direction (a crippled man, a one-eyed man, and a deaf man, all from the left side, which implies that they are partners for the other three and make pairs.)

The man crippled in his left arm approaches the man crippled in his right arm, the man blind in his left eye approaches the man blind in his right eye, the man deaf in his left ear approaches the man deaf in his right ear. They meet as if they know each other from before; each couple takes up a corner and starts whispering, as if to conspire.

One-eyed (right): I've waited for you, for so long...

One-eyed (left): I've been dreaming about coming back for years...

Right arm (handicapped): I waited for you too long.

Left arm (handicapped): For so long, I've been dreaming about coming back to this place.

The deaf (right-ear): I've been waiting for you, for a long time, my friend.

The deaf (left-ear): I faced many problems on the border.

They get out of the triangle's borders.

One-eyed (1): Come on, come on we have to build the place, it's completely destroyed

One-eyed (2): Yes, yes; we have to build the place where we'll spend the rest of our lives in, look, it is destroyed.

Handicapped (1): Come on, come on, we have to rebuild the place, look, it's completely destroyed.

Handicapped (2): Yes, yes; we have to rebuild the place where we'll spend the rest of our lives.

Deaf 1 looks toward the others and whispers, while Deaf 2 cups his ear trying to hear what he's saying: We have to rebuild the place, as to be convenient for living; look (he points out with his hands) it is destroyed

Deaf 2 looks where Deaf 1 has pointed, and nods: Oh, I've missed the place a lot, wonderful, perfect.

All six leave.

*Lights dim*

## Scene 2

The one-eyed pair setting opposite each other at a round table, in front of each a briefcase. They open it at the same time and take out documents and maps

(1) The first one spreads his maps and plans, and says: I'm ready, I've prepared everything, and it is ready here

(2) The second one spreads his maps and plans, and smiles: I'm ready too, I too have prepared everything, I too have everything ready right here (he points to the bag) long ago. Yes, since many years.

(1): Good, good. I hope you wouldn't mind having a look (he points to his maps and plans), look, every thing is organized, I've spent years preparing.

(2): Me too, my friend. Look (he points to his maps and plans)

(1): Looking at the second one's maps: Strange (carefully checking the maps again), strange, unbelievable?

(2): wondering: What? (looks at his maps)

(1): Approaches him and hugs him, while he appears surprised

(2): What?

(1): The same project, the same idea, it is unbelievable

(2): What idea?

(1): Our idea. The project. God, you think exactly the same way I do (hugs him again).  
Hangs a picture of a TV on a wooden stand: Look, wonderful, isn't it? Yes it is so great to have a television, our television, yes television

(2): comes closer: We would control the city.....

(1): Imagine, all the town's inhabitants sitting for long hours in front of the TV, watching what we want--only what we want

(2): Facts, information, we give, we hide, we highlight anything as we please. Only as we please. This is what I thought about all of those years

(1): And don't forget about the business, it's business my friend. Just imagine

(2): We have to hurry up, before those bastards steal the idea

(1): A nice idea makes me so excited, my friend

(2): And don't you ever forget two in one

(1): Yes, we do complete each other

(2): No, no, don't get confused, my friend. We are identical. Two in one, yea, don't forget

(1): (hesitated): Imagine, (he's quiet for a moment): I like the word

(2): Which word?

(1): Imagine

(2): (in deep thoughts): You inspire me with imagination, imagine, imagine it is a very stimulating word, a crazy incentive. Imagine a picture, imagine something which does not exist, imagine an other world, or imagine the imagination itself

(1): You know, it's not a coincidence that we've met, and had the same idea--the TV project! The key, or to be more precise, the secret of that idea is the word IMAGINE



(2): Yes, you are right, the secret of the idea, is there, IMAGINE

(1): And the secret behind the success of this project, the idea to visualize, to notice, I invite you to visualize, not to imagine—and there is a difference. Yes, a big difference. Imagination has something to do with desire, a mental form based on desire, and on the other hand visualizing is a form based on logical thinking. You conceive something according to actual facts that already exist.

And for that my friend, picture how we'll take people there, not to where their imagination reaches, but to where we wanted to reach, as far as our imagination reaches.

(2): So there is a relationship

(1): Between what and what

(2): Between visualization and imagination

(1): How? In what sense

(2): You said it

(1): What did I say?

(2): As our imagination reaches

(1): True (hesitated), I've got it. Look, visualizing, as I said before, picture the coming future according to facts we already know, are you with me!

(2): Yes, yes I am

(1): But you have to notice, here is the genius, yes genius--to invest your knowledge about facts to draw the desired future, which means achieving what you want. And here we'd need the ability to imagine

(2): You want to say that visualizing is a realistic and practical way of thinking about something, while on the other imagining is an extremist way of thinking about the future?

(1): Extremist in a way, extremist in a way-- a succession of a brilliant idea

(2): Yes, brilliant. Life, elections, hamburger, ketchup, sugar, almonds, market, fashion, modernism my friend

(1): Life does not await anybody

(2): If you were not a wolf, you'd be a meal for other wolves (Hammm, hammm)

(1): Woooo,wooo

*Lights dim*

Scene 3

The two deaf men sitting opposite each other at a round table, in front of each a briefcase, their briefcases have different color than the one-eyed's briefcases  
Each of them opens his briefcase, and takes out his plans, maps, and different radios (At the back of the stage we can see One-eyed (1) and (2) preparing and fixing the machines and equipment for the television

.Deaf (1): Ha Television! They don't have an idea that hearing is the most important sense of all, and that ears are much more important than eyes

Deaf (2): What are you saying?

(1): What?

(2): (puts his hand on his ear, gesturing that he can't hear) and say: I can't hear you

(1): (makes the same movement in an indication that he can't hear) and say: I can't hear you either

(2): Never mind, the important thing is the idea (he picks up a transistor and carefully examine it) and say: miracle, sound, music, news, speeches, rumors, jokes, songs

(1): (laughs and dances) and say: Radio, Transistor, Country Voice, Nation Voice, Peoples' Voice, everybody; every body's voice, small but very effective, great influence on others, really great. Words, in all languages. Ears, my brother have great importance, much more important than anything else in the world, ask me, I know

(2): It's not a coincidence that the very first step for any Third World revolution in the world is to control the radio station; for that we shall have an army, yes an army to protect the radio station, or what?

(1): Do you know something? The mountains around the city are very important, yes very important, without having control over them we won't have a wide influence over the city, our voice won't reach; only to a limited number, yes very limited

(2): Reaching the mind is not possible without ears, exactly, without ears as if the way is blocked or closed, yes completely blocked. Can you enter a city when the road is closed? Of course not

(1): You know that idea has inspired me in many ways, for example: Radio station and Borders. It is very difficult for an army to storm another country's' border, but for a Radio

station it's not, it can easily break through to another country. So it is more dangerous than an army

(2): Yes, Army of words, I like the idea  
(An army march with humming and incomprehensible words)

(The conversation between them continues about the role of the radio station and the benefits they could gain out of it)

[...]

### **The Palestinian art scene: local media analysis**

Bashar al-Hroub gouges a square of chipboard with a chisel until the image of a woman's genitals emerges. The 27-year-old Palestinian artist is making prints for an exhibit that will highlight "things that are forbidden in our society," he says. Denounced in his own village near Hebron as immoral, al-Hroub came to this town of more than 100,000 citizens to join a new generation of artists whose focus is surprisingly free of the nationalism and violence for which Palestinians are usually noticed.

The relative freedom of expression in Ramallah has fueled a major revival, since last year, of the cultural capital of Palestine — and is transforming Palestinian art in the process. While most Palestinian towns remain as ghostly quiet as they were during the curfews of the intifadeh, Ramallah has a lively nightlife, new theaters, a cinema and a flourishing music scene. "When people come to Ramallah, they taste culture," says Munther Jawabreh, 29, an artist from a refugee camp near Hebron. "Instead of the Israeli occupation, they can think about beauty."

In Ramallah, there's plenty to think about these days. Since Palestinian leaders announced a halt to the intifadeh in February and Israel's tanks pulled back, Ramallah has seen a burst of creativity. In July, a \$5 million Palace of Culture, funded by the U.N. and Japan, opened with performances by local poets and musicians. Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim brought his orchestra to the town in August. Ben Kingsley screened a version of *Gandhi* dubbed in Arabic to promote nonviolent resistance. The town's cinema — the only one in the West Bank — reopened, and musicians founded a school to teach classical Arabic music in Ramallah's Old City.

Even as the town's art scene revives, artists run into expectations that they'll play a role in fighting Israel. For decades, Palestinian art has been highly political, with creative activists often prominent in the Palestine Liberation Organization; artists spoke of "the poetry of the gun." For many ordinary Palestinians, disillusionment with political corruption and grand slogans has led to a desire for leaders who want merely to secure a better economic future. Artists similarly discontented with politics are turning to more personal themes. "The old

period of nationalist art was a big lie," says Khalid Hijazi, a painting instructor at An-Najah University in Nablus who mentors many new artists. "The political picture in Palestine is confused, so artists take refuge in their personal concerns."

The new style doesn't appeal to older artists. Karim Dabbah, a 68-year-old painter from Ramallah, argues that Palestinian political art "defended a noble idea. New artists are affected by sick art from Europe. It is against Palestinian values." The debate is more than simply aesthetic: Ismail Shammout, a leading Palestinian artist who lives in Amman, was refused permission to open an art school in Ramallah last year because he declined to paint a portrait of Yasser Arafat. Early last year, the board of Hakawati, the Palestinian National Theater, canceled *The Last Hour*, a play in which a prisoner newly released from an Israeli jail holds a dialogue with his own impotent penis — a far cry from the typical heroic portrayals of prisoners in previous Palestinian art. The playwright, Mazen Saadeh, describes the fate of his play as a prime example of the conflict between political oldsters and the new generation. "This new movement is another door to our country," says Saadeh, 45. "I don't watch the news. I don't keep an eye on Hamas or [Palestinian President] Abu Mazen."

But Hamas keeps an eye on the artists. The Hamas-run municipality in Kalkilya, a West Bank town, banned a poetry and dance festival in July because men and women wouldn't be separated. A mural commissioned for a public park in Nablus was barred by the city engineer because it "constituted idol worship and is not allowed in Islam." And sometimes the conflicts turn ugly. The town's rebirth extends to the culinary arts: Ramallah has 20 top-class restaurants, all better than anything else in the West Bank or Gaza, including five that have opened just in the last six months. But restaurateurs can't always shut out politics. Darna is a popular, traditional Middle Eastern eatery, where bow-tied waiters serve loyal customers, including top Palestinian Authority officials. Last April, local gunmen who wanted to show their discontent with the government charged into the restaurant during a busy dinner period. As diners fled, the gunmen shot the restaurant to pieces. Even in Ramallah, sometimes violence trumps civilized life.

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