

The Sign

Atyaf Rasheed
Playwright

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The First

The Second

The military voice (offstage)

TIME

Present day

SETTING

The crossroads. The stage is empty except for the two characters.

ACT ONE

The Second: I am utterly fed up.

The First: There is no place for boredom; death besieges us.

The Second: What can we do? Run?

The First: It does not leave us. It does not leave us at all.

The Second: You said that you were running?

The First: How can I run when the space is too small to escape?

The Second: Well, it will chase you wherever you go. Death does not leave anybody.

The First: I love to be here with everything, with all people, including my enemies or even those who hate me.

The Second: Then why were you running?

The First: I was a few meters away from the car that exploded, and I did not feel anything, only that my feet were trying to follow the light before it was obscured by the smoke.

The Second: To where?

The First: When I went away from the explosion, the explosion and the smoke continued to follow me.

The Second: These were long moments.

The First: Yes, it was truly like this, moments were years full of fear and disappointments.

The Second: The years were long indeed, and I remember them. They are still long.

The First: The details are numerous and dense, heavy and bitter. They passed with all the heaviness at that moment.

The Second: The main thing is that they have passed.

The First: I did not know if I was escaping from the fire or whether I was following it as it faded in front of me.

The Second: How so?

The First: Did I want to catch something in front of me before I lost it? Were these years motivating me to escape? I felt the sun brighten suddenly, then concentrate its rays on my face and pull me toward it.

The Second: So, you were saved.

The First: Was I saved? I do not know, I was breathing with difficulty. When I was far away, I looked back. Fire was a red dome covering everything, and suddenly...

The Second: What happened?

The First: Someone emerged out of the fire and smoke.

The Second: Who?

The First: A little girl.

The Second: Did you see her?

The First: Yes, she emerged from the depth of fire and smoke.

Her face was colored with horror and ash, and her braids, without their ribbons, were loose. Her gaze penetrated me.

(The sound of army cars, sirens, and chaos. The First and the Second are motionless throughout this.)

The military voice offstage: Please, all stop for inspection. Please stop for inspection. Open the windows of the car, open the boot, turn on the internal light, come out of the car, show proof of your identity. Show respect to be respected.

The Second: Were you far away from her?

The First: Yes, I was far away and she was in the heart of an ash storm.

The Second: Is it true? How did the little girl come out alive from the explosion? Did you know her?

The First: No, but she...

The Second: What?

The First: Don't you think that she was beautiful even in that state – that her eyes radiated with waves of tenderness?

The Second: You returned to her, didn't you?

The First: Yes, I returned to her. She seemed alone and I wanted to save her. I wanted to carry her far away. I returned to her and ran toward the fire, but the closer I came, the farther she went.

The Second: Then?

The First: As if it were a nightmare in a long night that does not want to end, I ran in every direction where corpses fell like emaciated birds, and the eyes of those saved were like balls of timbers, red.

The Second: Red from the pain?

The First: What?

The Second: Red from the horror?

The First: Red from the pain, from the fear and from the horror.

And I was trembling. Every cell in my body trembled. I was cold.

The Second: How so? When the fire was raging around you?

The First: Why was I trembling and blood was gushing out of my mouth as if it were silence? Why did I not control my body as it trembled excessively?

The Second: Maybe because you were searching for her.

The First: Who?

The Second: The little girl, man. The little girl. Did you find her?

The First: The little girl.

The Second: Did you find her?

The First: No. Something strong and sharp hit my head – I do not know, I was screaming – I held my head and then...

The Second: Then what? Speak!

The First: The edge of the bedside table left a mark on my forehead while I was still in bed, turning and screaming in pain.

The Second: O man, you have terrified me. I thought you were talking about something real.

The First: But it seemed so real. Believe me.

The Second: How could the nightmare, the dream, be a real thing?

The First: When I woke up, I opened the window in the room. I saw people sweeping away the debris from an explosion from the night before with brushes and water hoses; I saw the burned cars being taken away. Some had already bandaged their hands or feet or heads, and were walking steadily to their work. And the girl... the little girl...

The Second: The little girl? You saw her?

The First: The beautiful little girl with her colored braids carrying her schoolbag on her back. She stopped and looked up.

The Second: Really?

The First: Yes, I looked at her as if she knew me. Minutes passed while she was looking at me. She glanced at me tenderly and then continued in her way toward the newly cleaned sidewalk.

The military voice: The inspection has come to an end. You can now pass. We apologize for the disturbance.

Translated by Atef Alshaer.

Atyaf Rasheed is an Iraqi poet and playwright. She lives and works in Baghdad.

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