

Rami and Bassam: Apeirogon

a play

Avner Ben-Amos

Based on the novel *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann

Dramaturgy: Sinai Peter

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Characters:

(two men, two women and a musician play all the characters)

Bassam Aramin

Salwa Aramin (his wife)

Abir Aramin (his daughter)

Araab Aramin (his son)

Mother of Salwa Aramin

Rami Elhanan

Nurit Elhanan (his wife)

Smadar Elhanan (his daughter)

Yigal Elhanan (his son)

Soldier

Nurse

Palestinian physician

Israeli physician

Prison warden

2 Security guards at Ben Gurion Airport – A + B

Policeman

Palestinian School principal

Israeli School principal - Yaël

Vendor

Teenager

Judge

Commander of Border Police Unit

2 Combatants for Peace – A+B

Yitzhak Frankental

Adolescent

Secretary

Senator John Kerry

American consul

Reserve soldier

Scene 1

Video. Date: 7.10.2023

(Rami and Bassam, over the phone)

Rami: Hello?

Bassam: It's me.

Rami: How are you, Bassam?

Bassam: I saw the news.

Rami: Me too. Just now Nurit spoke with her cousins in Kibbutz Be'eri. Hamas are right there in their yard. They burned down the neighbors' house—with the neighbors inside.

Bassam: What horror.

Rami: And no army or police anywhere in sight.

Bassam: Listen, brother, this looks serious. From what I see on TV, they could even reach you in Jerusalem. If that happens, you're welcome to come to us, in Jericho, with your entire family.

Rami: Thank you, brother. And you too—if the settlers come for you, you'll have shelter at our place...

Bassam: I'm not kidding.

Rami: Neither am I.

Bassam: Well, Rami. We're meeting soon, remember?

Rami: Yes, on Wednesday. With a group at that monastery. Like last time, a mixed group—some Israelis, mostly foreigners.

Bassam: A lot can happen till then. Who knows if we will...

Rami: Yes, I'm afraid they'll block all the gates at the border... no one's coming, no one's going...

Bassam: In which case we'll meet in Europe...

Rami: Who knows...

Bassam: Take care of yourself, Rami.

Rami: Thank you, brother. You too—stay safe.

Bassam: See you.

Scene 2

Video. Philippe Petit walks on the wire above Hinnom Valley, holding a bar. He stops, takes a pigeon out of his pocket, and lets it fly. The pigeon perches itself on the top of his head. He shakes his head, but the pigeon does not move. He chases it away with his hand, and the pigeon is perched on the end of the bar. Petit sits on the wire and rotates the bar in his fingers, but the pigeon turns with the rolling bar. Finally, the pigeon flies away.

(Hadassah Hospital. Rami and Bassam on a bench).

Rami: This is Hadassah hospital, in which Smadar was born. Abir is lying, unconscious, in the room behind me. And right in front of me passes a female border guard, with a gun strapped across her shoulder. She is in the same age that Smadar would have been today, and she looks just like her. My blood freezes. She could have been the soldier who shot Abir.

Bassam: Abir is lying there, her eyes closed. Will she ever open them?

Scene 3

(Salwa and Nurit)

Salwa: From the age of eight, Abir wanted to be an engineer. Her older brother Araab had a plastic see-through ruler and a silver bow compass. She liked to draw circles on the back of her copybooks and then intersect the circles with straight lines. For her tenth birthday she asked for a book about Galileo. And she knew that an Apeiogon was a shape with a countably infinite number of sides. That is – a circle.

Nurit: At the swim competitions in Jerusalem, Smadar patrolled the edges of the pool. Her body looked as if it had been set on springs, always fidgeting, moving, on the go. Before a race she had a habit of placing her fingers in the rear of the swimming cap, snapping the latex tight against her neck. It made a loud popping sound. They

could hear it in Tel-Aviv.

Scene 4

Video. A “childish” picture drawn by Abir of a ship sailing with gulls flying around her. The ship begins to fly above the sea, accompanied by the gulls.

(Salwa and Abir.)

Abir: (Showing Salwa a painting) Look, Mama, in class today, the teacher asked us to draw a picture, using our imagination. This is what I did.

Salwa: (Looks at the painting) This is very nice Abir. How did you know to paint the sea?

Abir: I saw it from the rooftop (pause). Mama?

Salwa: Yes, dear?

Abir: When shall we go to the sea?

Salwa: I don't know. I'll talk about it with Dad.

Abir: He's already promised us many times.

Salwa: I know, sweetie. We will get there, eventually.

Abir: When?

Salwa: When they will allow us.

Abir: But why don't they?

Salwa: Because they think the sea belongs to them.

Scene 5

(Bassam and Nurit)

Bassam: One afternoon I saw Abir walking home alone from school. She played a child's game, trying to move in and out of her own shadow. Normally I would have picked her up and give her a lift, but there was something about her that day, the flick of the foot, the arc of the head, that made me hold back and just watch. I kept the car in first gear and remained close to the curb. She ran the final portion of the hill up the broken staircase toward our apartment block until I saw her uniform disappearing behind the grey wall.

Video. Date: 16.1.2007

Nurit: But for an early break in the Anata school. But for the open school gate. But for the

two shekels in her pocket. But for a pause in the candy store. But for a concrete barrier that forced her to veer into the street.

Scene 6

(Palestinian school principal and Bassam, over the phone.)

Principal: This is the principal, the school of Abir.

Bassam: Good day.

Principal: Something happened to Abir. She fell.

Bassam: I am on my way to work. I can call Salwa, my wife, and tell her to pick her up.

Principal: No, you should probably come yourself. She has to be taken to the hospital.

Bassam: Will she be all right?

Principal: Oh, yes, she will, *inshallah*, yes (end of phone conversation).

Bassam: I was sure she had fallen from the top of the school wall. Even from a young age she liked to walk along the length of it. Ten years old. I was afraid she might have a scar.

Scene 7

(Street of Anata. Bassam and a Palestinian adolescent).

Adolescent: (running) Shooting... shooting...

Bassam: Where?

Adolescent: At school.

Bassam: Which school?

Adolescent: The girl's school.

Bassam: Are you sure?

Adolescent: Yes.

Scene 8

(Shop in Anata. Bassam and vendor).

Bassam: Did you see Abir? A child, ten years old?

Vendor: Sure, I know Abir. A nice girl. During recess she came to my shop and bought for two shekels, two bracelets with pink candies. The kind you can put on your arm.

One for her and the other...

Bassam: Where is she?

Vendor: She went out and I heard the pops. Then the shouting of the girls. I got out, and saw Abir, on the pavement, lying on her stomach. I told her: Abir, wake up, wake up. She didn't move, but she had a pulse. I touched her bare feet – the flesh was warm. I cradled her head until a taxi arrived. I told him to take her to the hospital.

Bassam: Which hospital?

Vendor: At Anata.

Scene 9

(Hospital in Anata. Bassam and a Palestinian physician).

Bassam: Doctor... Abir Aramin.

Palestinian physician: (with a piece of paper in his hand) Trauma to the back of the skull. Contusions on the front of her head. A weak pulse, a fluttering of the eyelids, no lucidity. What is needed is a skull decompression, but that requires a CT scanner, and the only one we have is inoperative. But don't worry. We had done it before, in cases of emergency. We make an incision into the skull...

Bassam: We have to get her to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. They have all the proper equipment there.

Palestinian physician: You can't. Everything is closed off.

Bassam: I have friends in Jerusalem. Rami... They can get an ambulance here.

Palestinian physician: I told you. It's all locked down.

Bassam: No, I'll take her to Hadassah.

Palestinian physician: Okay, we will give you one of our ambulances.

Bassam: Wait a minute, where is the bracelet that she bought?

Palestinian physician: What bracelet?

Bassam: The bracelet with the pink candies...

Palestinian physician: There was no bracelet.

Scene 10

(Checkpoint. Bassam in front of a soldier).

Soldier: (to Bassam)

No, the ambulance cannot go along.

Yes, I understand this is an emergency.

Please wait. There is still rioting nearby.

It is for your own safety.

Please wait patiently.

Scene 11

(Bassam and Salwa, over the phone.)

Bassam: Salwa, it's me.

Salwa: Where are you? I've been trying to call you for two hours. Abir's okay?

Bassam: Abir's okay. Don't worry. We are coming.

Salwa: What do you mean – don't worry? Where are you exactly? We are all waiting for you here. Rami is here too. Everything is okay?

Bassam: Calm down. Abir's is okay. We're coming soon.

Salwa: Bassam... come quickly (end of phone conversation).

Bassam: After two hours and eighteen minutes the ambulance was given permission to drive to West Jerusalem. During the ride, I checked her bag. There, tucked under the mathematics textbook, I found the pink bracelet.

Scene 12

(Rami and Bassam)

Rami: For the first few years after the death of Abir, Bassam sometimes told her story two or three times a day. Once in the morning at a school, once in the afternoon, at the Bereaved Families Forum offices. Then again in the evening, in a mosque or a synagogue. To pastors, imams, rabbis, reporters, senators, visitors from Sweden, Mexico, Azerbaijan.

Bassam: I wondered how actors did it. To say the same thing meaningfully, performance after performance, But the more the story took on a singular shape, the more I began to realize that it did not matter. To the run of an actor there was always an end, but we had no such end. We had no grand finale. Our story is a beginning without an end.

Rami: Shall we begin?

Bassam: Okay.

Rami: (Stops Bassam) Stop! Stop! I can't look at it. Who taught you to tie a tie? (Rami tightens Bassam's tie). Okay, now we can begin.

Bassam: Wait a minute. Did you take a look at yourself? Tell me – haven't the Jewish people suffered enough? Look at your shoes. Riding on your motorcycle, you gathered all the dust of Palestine (Bassam takes a paper handkerchief from his jacket and gives it to Rami).

Rami: Thank you (takes the handkerchief and cleans his shoes.) Please (hands it to Bassam, who refuses to take it).

Bassam: You can keep it. A gift. Shall we begin?

Rami: Sure. After you.

Bassam: No way. Last time I began. Now it's your turn.

Rami: No, no. Can't you hear my hoarse voice?

Bassam: What hoarse voice? Okay, I give up. In the end, the Jew always wins. But only this time. Remember! (to the audience)
Please meet Rami Elhanan, seventh generation in Jerusalem.

Rami: Only on my mother's side.

Bassam: And the father of Smadar.

Rami: Please meet Bassam Aramin. Born and raised in a cave near Hebron.
And the father of Abir.

Scene 13

(Rami, soldier and Bassam)

Rami: When Bassam was seventeen, he and his friends found a stash of grenades in a shallow cave. They were the size of large stones, covered with dust. They went to the junction, Bassam stayed behind, and his friends threw two grenades at a military Jeep. They did not explode – just fizzled out. The soldiers chased them in the hills, Bassam fell, tried to rise, but a foot landed on his neck. His arms were pulled behind his back, and a blow to the back of his head knocked him out.

Soldier at a checkpoint: What's your problem? Step behind the line.

I said behind the line.

Speak up, I can't hear you.

I told you not to cross the line. Go back to the beginning of the queue.

Rami: He was tied to a chair, hooded and beaten. The hood was coarse,
brown, dirty. He whispered his prayers into the hood.

Bassam: (in Arabic) *I invoke the perfect words of Allah from which neither a good person
nor a bad person can escape.*

Rami: They lifted him up from the chair with a rope tied around his neck. They looped
the rope over a water pipe and stretched him in the air while he stood on the chair.
They rocked the chair back and forth. He took blows to his kidneys, his stomach,
his groin. He invoked the name of God again. He was thumped in the side of his
head until he collapsed.

Soldier at a checkpoint: Give me your identity card,

Who is this person in the photo?

But he has no beard.

Take it and come back without a beard.

Rami: When he woke up he was in a cell, six feet by three. His testicles were so swollen
that he could hardly move his legs. He was seventeen years old, and he
was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Scene 14

(Bassam and Rami)

Bassam: When Rami came back exhausted from the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he studied
graphics at Bezalel and then began work as a graphic designer, drawing posters for
the right wing, the left wing, the center too.

Rami: Making a living.

Bassam: He didn't care. If they wanted fear, he would give them fear. If they wanted glamour,
he would give them glamour, Anything at all. A raised fist for the new Israel. An
expansive border, from the Nile to the Euphrates. A wounded dove. A long elegant leg.

Rami: Make it sexy, make it smart, make it rude.

Bassam: He had no party allegiance. To have a house, a family, not to be disturbed, that's what

he wanted. A good job, a mortgage, a nice neighborhood. A good place to raise the kids.

Rami: They had given Bassam, without warning, two extra months on his sentence.

Bassam: For security reasons – that’s what they said.

Rami: He went immediately on hunger strike. Bassam knew he could take the chore of extra time. He had already spent seven years, a third of his life, inside. Sixty days hardly mattered.

Bassam: But this was a matter of principle.

Rami: He knew the hunger strike routine. Other prisoners had gone through it. The body would start to break down after three weeks. After five, it would become critical. After six, the damage would be irreversible.

Scene 15

(Prison warden’s office. Bassam and prison warden)

Warden: (standing. To Bassam, on a chair) I hope they treat you well.

Bassam: I only wish to be treated fairly.

Warden: Nothing can be done until you come off the hunger strike.

Bassam: I will not come off the hunger strike until you cancel the two extra months you added to my sentence.

Warden: Why don’t you consult your lawyer?

Bassam: How can I do that? You denied my access to him.

Warden: But nothing can be done until you come off the hunger strike.

Bassam: I will not come off it until you cancel the extra months.

Warden: Something surely could be done if you’re willing to help us a little. The world is full of give and take.

Bassam: I have been giving and taking for seven years in this place. Two more months are not going to break me.

Warden: Okay. I agree to cancel the extra two months, on condition that you announce first that you give up the hunger strike and that you spend full week in recuperation. I want you to look like a human being. Then, we will release a statement.

Bassam: I will do so if we release the statements simultaneously, and I don’t want to be fattened. Only three days in recuperation.

Warden: Simultaneous statements are out of question. And five days of recuperation.

Bassam: Well, you could issue the statement first thing in the morning, but my fellow prisoners should be told first. And only three days.

Warden: Agreed to that. And four days of recuperation.

Bassam: I need a written commitment.

Warden: I cannot provide you one. But I can give you my word that the statement will be released on time.

Bassam: Your word is not worth the air on which it is written.

Warden: At least you are allowed to breathe.

Bassam: Okay. Three days of recuperation or nothing.

Warden: Fine. It's a deal.

Bassam: I will tell the prisoners tonight.

Warden: Guard (exits).

Scene 16

(Rami and Bassam)

Rami: Bassam had a small black-and-white television set in his prison cell. It received the State Channel in Hebrew with occasional Arabic programs, nothing else. On the night before Holocaust Memorial Day he switched it on to a documentary. It came as no surprise – it was for him no more than propaganda. He watched it anyway.

Bassam: I wanted to see Jews die. One after the other. To watch them fall. Starve. Collapse in ditches. To experience their annihilation.

Rami: Twenty years old, lying there on the bed, Bassam was waiting for the moment he could applaud. He wanted at first to cheer the fallen corpses. Know your enemy, keep them close. Under your feet preferably. In the ground.

Bassam: I wondered why they did not fight back. One after the other. Their bodies pitched forward again and again.

Rami: He felt as if something had taken over the mechanical gears of his mind.

Bassam: In prison I began to think about our lives, our identity, being Arab, and that led me to think about the Jews too. And I knew now this Holocaust was real – it had happened. And I began to think, reluctantly first, that so much of the Israeli mind must have

stemmed from that, and then I decided to understand who these people really were, how they suffered, and why in nineteen-forty-eight they had turned their oppression back on us, took away our land, gave us our Nakba, our catastrophe. We, the Palestinians, became the victims of the victims. I wanted to understand more. Where was all this coming from? In prison I began to pick up few more words of Hebrew and even Yiddish. Gai Schluffen, Rami.

Rami: Gai kacken.

Scene 17

(Hadassah Hospital. Bassam and an Israeli physician)

Israeli physician: Mr. Aramin, if things take the wrong turn... If the worse happens...that is, if we are unable to revive her... Do you understand what I am telling you here?

Bassam: Yes, I understand.

Israeli physician: If Abir dies, I ask your permission to donate organs to other children who need them. For example, the liver or the kidneys or the cornea. Some people are reluctant, and we understand that. But there's a severe need... We would take very good care of her... Please take a minute...

Bassam: (to the audience) Children are waiting... whose children?

A bat mitzvah dress.

Military service directives.

The checkpoint and barbed wire. Permits and stamps. The blue and white flag fluttering above her.

Yellow license plates on cars.

Israeli television, Israeli books, Israeli recipes.

She might go home for Shabbat and bake the challah and light the candles and wake to her husband and kiss his eyes and raise her children and teach them to sing Hatikvah and their kids might have kids.

And I always wanted Abir to see the sea.

It was the thing I promised her for so many years.

To take her for the short drive to the coast of Akka.

Along with her sister and brothers, to let them run along the wooden piers,

to bath in the blue water.

(to the Israeli physician) No, I am sorry, I cannot do that, sorry, no.

Scene 18

Video. Text: Jerusalem 1987. Philippe Petit, dressed in white, holds a balancing bar. Sound of a crowd. Petit walks on a high wire.

(Voices of Rami and Smadar)

Rami : Can you see him there?

Smadar: No, I can't.

Rami: Okay, I'll lift you up.

Smadar: Why is he holding that stick?

Rami : This is not a stick. This is a balancing bar, to help him keep the balance.

He is going to start walking on the high wire, from here to the other side of Hinnom Valley.

Smadar: But why does he do it?

Rami: He wants to bring peace.

Smadar: When I grow up, I will also be a high wire walker.

Rami: Sure. Look, he starts walking.

Scene 19

(Elhanan's family home. Rami and Nurit)

Murit: (Holds a notebook) Did you see it?

Rami: No. What is it?

Nurit: The heart that Smadi drew in her notebook.

Rami: Show me (takes the notebook). What's written here?

Nurit: Can't you read her handwriting? *Smadar loves Ze'ev.*

Rami: Who is Ze'ev?

Nurit: He's in the school's jazz club.

Rami: What's he like?

Nurit: A nice kid I think.

Rami: (Turns the page) There's more. (Deciphers slowly, with Nurit).

Nurit and Rami: *All the flowers that you...*

Rami: *Pranted?*

Nurit: *planted in the backyard died when you went away.* That's cute.

Rami: Cute?

Nurit: What's wrong with it?

Rami: Shotgun time.

Nurit: Oh, shut up.

Scene 20

Video. Date: 4.9.1997

Nurit: But for a late sleep-in. But for an early bus. But for a crush of pedestrians on the corner on Ben-Yehuda Street. But for a hobbling man that she had to loop around.

(Rami and Nurit, over the phone)

Nurit: Hello? Smadi?

Rami: Nurit, it's me.

Nurit: Where are you? I've been trying to call you.

Rami: My phone is dead. I'm calling from a pay phone.

Nurit: Where are you?

Rami: On the way to the airport. To pick up your mother. Did you forget?

Nurit: So you heard the news? There was an explosion in Ben-Yehuda street, a suicide bomber.

Rami: Yes. I called you at your university office.

Nurit: I came home

Rami: Why?

Nurit: Smadar went downtown with her friends. She wanted to buy some books. Said something about jazz dance studio.

Rami: Where?

Nurit: Down town.

Rami: Have you heard from her?

Nurit: Not yet.

Rami: Okay. What about her friends?

Nurit: Nothing.

Rami: Who is she with?
Nurit: I don't know, Sivan, Daniella, a few others, she went by bus.
Rami: Did something happen to the bus?
Nurit: Nothing... I don't know, I just haven't heard from her. Normally she calls.
Rami: She doesn't have a phone with her, does she?
Nurit: She can use a pay phone.
Rami: Maybe the lines are jammed.
Nurit: I can just about hear you. Speak up.
Rami: Everyone here is trying to use the phone. (louder) She'll be fine, love.
Where are the boys?
Nurit: They called, they're okay.
Rami: Where did you say she went?
Nurit: Shopping.
Rami: Should I come back home?
Nurit: No, I am going down town. Meet me at Ben Yehuda corner of King George.
Are you with your phone?
Rami: I told you. My phone is dead.
Nurit: How long will it take you to get there?
Rami: I don't know, half an hour, forty-five minutes?
Nurit: Okay. Rami?
Rami: Yes?
Nurit: Hurry up.

Scene 21

(Street in Jerusalem. Rami and Nurit)

Nurit: (to Rami) They saw her here, at the center.
Rami: Where?
Nurit: With Daniella and a group of girls.
Rami: What time?
Nurit: I don't know. Here, in Ben-Yehuda. This is what he said...
Rami: Who said?

Nurit: Elik heard it from Daniella's parents.

Rami: Where's Daniella?

Nurit: They're looking for her. For Sivan too. He said he heard that forty or fifty people were injured.

Scene 22

(Hospital in Jerusalem. Rami, Nurit, and a nurse)

Nurse: (holding a board) Her name, please?

Rami: Smadar. Elhanan.

Nurse: (looking at the board) Samantha... Sigal... Simona... Sorry, no Smadar.

Rami: Are you sure?

Nurit: (Showing her a picture of Smadar) This is what she looked like...

Nurse: Please.

Rami: Let's try the police.

Scene 23

(Elhanan's family home. Nurit, Smadar and Rami)

Nurit: She would arrive home cheerful and bright-eyed. She would stand in the kitchen and let out a sigh and say

Smadar: What's the big deal, *Ima*? We were miles away. Enough. I'm fourteen years old.

Rami: She would make herself a chocolate sandwich, and then she would go off to her room, turn up the stereo and begin to dance. Or she would arrive back late at night, in a taxi, saying

Smadar: Sorry, sorry, sorry, Daniella was close to the blast, we had to go to get her eardrums checked, I couldn't leave her side, I know, I know, I should have called, I will next time, I promise.

Nurit: Or there would be a bandage over her leg where she fell while running away, and she would come home and sit at the kitchen table, and we would comfort her and it would be fine.

Rami: And I'd say that it was time for everyone to go to bed. It had been a long day.

Scene 24

(Police station in Jerusalem. Policeman, Rami and Nurit)

Policeman: (holding papers) Can you spell her name?

Rami: Elhanan, Smadar.

Nurit: E... L... H... A...N... A... N... Smadar, S....

Policeman: Okay, okay... (looks at his papers) The news is neither good nor bad. She is not to be found anywhere. Perhaps, as a last ditch, just to clear your minds, you should try at Abu Kebir, the morgue.

Rami: When they slid Smadar out on the metal tray, she lay there in a blue smock, the wristwatch of her grandpa Matti on her hand, the blown apart sections of her discretely covered. Her face had remained perfectly intact. No cuts, no bruises. For this I was grateful. The door closed with a hiss. I knew even then that all subsequent sounds would derive from this.

Scene 25

Video. Birds fly.

(Rami and Nurit)

Rami: After the end of the *Shiv'a*, on the eighth day, everybody goes back to their normal, everyday business, and you're left alone. Without your daughter. You wander the house, you say her name, you whisper it, and when you are alone you shout it. Smadar. Smadar. Her books on the shelf, Her music tapes. You listen for her. She's not there. You have to make a decision. What are you going to do now with this new, unbearable burden on your shoulders? What are you going to do with this incredible anger that eats you alive? What are you going to do with this new you, this father without a daughter?

Nurit: Me, at first... I did not stop talking. Everybody wanted to hear what a bereaved mother and the daughter of a famous major general had to say. So I said. The killing was not the fault of the bombers. They were victims too. Me too, I was not immune. Everyone was complicit. Oppression, tyranny, megalomania. Israel was inviting its own children to be slaughtered. They might as well put gun powder in their schoolbags. And then I

stopped talking. I was inundated with phone calls. Reporters from all over the world. French, British, Canadians. They wanted to make documentaries featuring me. I did not agree. I did not want to become a mouthpiece, a pawn, I did not want to talk about it anymore. No more television, no more newspapers, no more poking at the wound.

Rami: My answer is revenge. When someone kills your daughter you want to get even. You want to go out and kill an Arab, any Arab, all Arabs, and then you want to kill his family and anyone else around him. Of course you don't always do this yourself, but you do it by asking your leaders. You ask them to take his land, to steal his water, to arrest his son, to slam a missile into his house. If you kill one of mine, I will kill ten of yours.

Nurit: At the end I took a sabbatical year and went to London. I wanted to be as far as possible from Israel, to cleanse myself of the noise, the rancor, the pity. Invitations to speak still came from all over the world, but I did not want to talk publicly about Smadar. It simply hurt too much. I took Yigal with me. He was then five years old. Rami and the two older boys stayed behind. I read books, wrote articles, took long walks in the neighborhood. We had a Sunday ritual. We would go to the red telephone box and dial home. To let Yigal speak with his brothers, to hear that the boys were all right. But sometimes, at night, I would sneak out from the house, alone, and call Rami again, in the dark, in the rain.

Rami: Nurit?

Nurit: Hi Rami.

Rami: I knew you'd call again.

Nurit: Yigal is sleeping now. I just wanted to hear your voice.

Rami: How are you, love?

Nurit: It's quiet here. I like it.

Rami: Don't you even dare think about it...

Nurit: (laughs) Who knows? I might find a nice position in a London college...

Rami: If you do, I'll come and bring you and Yigal back...

Nurit: Okay, just let me know in advance... (pause) Good bye, Rami.

Rami: Bye, love.

Nurit: Take care.

Rami: After a while, you start asking yourself: will killing anyone bring your daughter back? Well, the answer comes to you in the middle of that long dark night, and you think. Ashes return to ashes, that's all. She is not coming back, your Smadar. And you have to get used to that new reality. So you start asking what happened to her and why? It's difficult, it's frightening, it's exhausting. How could such a thing take place? What could cause someone to be that angry, that mad, that desperate, that he is willing to blow himself up alongside a girl, not even fourteen years old? How can you possibly understand that instinct? To tear his own body apart? How can he think that way? Who taught him this? Did I teach him this? Did his government teach him? Did my government?

Scene 26

Video. Date: 1992

Bassam: I was released in October 1992. I got married right away. Out of prison and into marriage, go figure. But seriously, it was the happiest time in my life.

(Bethlehem, Salwa's family home. Salwa, Salwa's mother and Bassam)

Mother: Salwa! (Salwa enters).

Bassam: Thank you. This is the best *ma'amoul* I've eaten in my life.

Mother: Thank you (exits).

Salwa: (laughs) You are a liar and a flatterer.

Bassam: No, I'm not. She is a wonderful cook, your mother, and the *maklouva* was delicious.

Salwa: I also like her *maklouva*.

Bassam: So where did you grow up?

Salwa: Here, in Bethlehem.

Bassam: Did you like it?

Salwa: Yes.

Bassam: I grew up near al-Khalil.

Salwa: Oh, I know.

Bassam: How do you know?

Salwa: Ibrahim told my mother.

Bassam: (laughs) Ibrahim's a snitch.

Salwa: How was prison? (Bassam shrugs) I heard you were a *muchtar*.

Bassam: He's a dirty snitch, that Ibrahim. I was the speaker of the prisoners. And I also sang.

Didn't Ibrahim tell you? It passed the time for me.

Salwa: *Wallaha?*

Bassam: Yes, songs of Abu Arab...

Salwa: Such as?

Bassam: I have a terrible voice. But it goes like that (sings in Arabic)

Calm down, sea, calm down, our exile is long

Say hello to the fatherland where I grew up

Salwa: (joins the singing). *Calm down...*

Bassam: You have a beautiful voice.

Salwa: Thank you. What did you miss most in prison?

Bassam: I missed your mother's *ma'amoul*.

Salwa: (they both laugh) Sure, you didn't even know my mother.

Bassam: How old are you?

Salwa: Twenty-two.

Bassam: You look much younger.

Salwa: You have a golden tongue.

Bassam: Not really. I am shy. I've always been shy.

Salwa: Me too.

Bassam: Are you devoted?

Salwas: Somewhat (pause). Is this a bad answer?

Bassam: There's no bad answer.

Salwa: That's good.

Salwa's mother: (enters) Shall I bring the coffee now?

Bassam: (to the audience) I've been waiting for this day for a long time

Scene 27

(Bassam, Combatants for peace A + B, Rami)

Bassam: In 1994, we had our first child, we called him Araab, after Ibrahim Abu Araab, the poet of the Palestinian revolution. I was a father now. I had a duty to think about things differently. It was the time of the Oslo Accords and there was a great feeling of hope. When I saw the Israeli jeeps leaving Jenin and the kids threw olive branches at them, I asked myself: "Why did I spend seven years in jail when it might have been achieved another way?" But then came the suicide bombs, the Israeli oppression intensified, and Oslo disintegrated. I was completely distraught. Another chance gone. I understood that we needed to change our ways. I read more and more about nonviolence and political engagement. I began to realize that violence is exactly what our opponents wanted us to use. They prefer violence because they can deal with it. It's non-violence that is hard for them to deal with. It's confusing to them. I started to get even more politically active. Then, one day, I was invited to a special, secret meeting. Listen – I am flabbergasted. Four Palestinians and seven Israelis around the table. One of them had been a pilot, another, a paratrooper, one had spent much of his service as a commander at the Qalandia checkpoint. Now, I am familiar with Israeli peace activists who are impressed by someone who does high wire walking for peace, but who does not care that the ground beneath his feet is occupied territory. But these people are different. Yes, they had been in the forces, but they had begun to speak out: against the occupation, humiliation, murder, torture. I had never heard an Israeli mention such words before. I was certain they were on an operation. Intelligence, surveillance, an undercover ploy. What confused me was that one of them, Yehuda, looked like a settler. Stout and spectacled, with a long beard and a *kippah*. He had been an officer in Hebron. He had - so he said - begun to rethink it all, the conscriptions, the operations, all the talk of the IDF as a moral army. I did not understand. Why would they send such obvious imposters? What kind of mockery was this? Perhaps it was a form of double-think, triple think; the Israelis were known for it, intricate and ruthless. Afterward, when the meeting was over, one of the Israelis tried to pay, but I took the bill. Palestinian hospitality I said. No, no, please, let me. This is my home. At the end, I paid the costly bill. We shook hands.

This was the first meeting of Combatants for peace.

I was sure we would never see each other again.

Combatant for Peace A: Please meet Rami Elhanan. Welcome.

Bassam: I was wrong. In the second meeting, we immediately started fighting. Not me with them. No. They, the Jews, among themselves.

Combatant A: Rami Elhanan is from the Bereaved Families Forum, and he shares our views concerning the occupation.

Combatant B: Are you a combatant?

Rami: Yes.

Combatant B: Because we do not accept just anybody who wants to join us.

Rami: I was a technician in an armory unit during the Yom Kippur War.

Combatant A: You see? He was in a combat unit. And now, he is a combatant for peace.

Combatant B: But what about someone who is in a non-combat unit?

Combatant A: If he is a soldier – he is a combatant.

Combatant B: But if you sit on your ass all day, watching a computer screen – that doesn't make you a fighter.

Combatant A: But you enable others to fight...

Bassam: Why does it matter?

Combatant B: It matters because we need to have clear rules.

Rami: With us, at the Bereaved Families Forum, it's very simple. We are an organization to which nobody wants to belong. So if someone wants to join us, we say – welcome.

Bassam: Did you hear? I like the way he reasons. (to Rami) Pleased to meet you. Bassam.

Rami: Pleased to meet you. Rami (they shake hands).

Scene 28

Rami: I joined the Bereaved Families Forum about a year after Smadar was killed. This was after I met for the second time a man whose name was Yitzhak Frankental, a religious Jew, with a *kippah*.

(Elhanan's family home. Rami and Yitzhak Frankental)

Yitzhak: Don't you remember me?

Rami: Now that you mention it... Yes, you look familiar.

Yitzhak: We met about a year ago. I came here during the *Shiv'a* for Smadar.

Rami: Yes, yes, I remember now. And you said something about an NGO that promotes

reconciliation...

Yitzhak: And you kicked me out of the house...

Rami: Yes, I yelled at you. I am sorry about that, but I was so angry... I couldn't understand... How did you dare coming to a house of someone who had just lost his daughter and talk about peace?

Yitzhak: You know, I am, like you, a bereaved father. I lost my son, Arik, about four years ago. He was a soldier, and was kidnapped and murdered by Hamas. But I did not blame them. I blamed myself for not doing enough to bring peace. So I founded this NGO, the Bereaved Families Forum, with other Palestinians who had lost their loved ones...

Rami: You are out of your mind.

Yitzhak: I know it sounds crazy. But, please listen to what we have to say. Our next joint meeting is in Jerusalem, next week. Just come and take a look...

Rami: No way. I will not yell at you this time. But I am sure: you are a lunatic.
(Yitzhak exits)

After he left, I continued to think about what he had said. His words kept coming back. And I became curious, and said to myself: let's give it a try, there is nothing to lose. So I went there and saw a group of Palestinians getting off a bus. This shocked me. Arabs? Really? Going into the same meeting as these Israelis? Until then Arabs were for me nothing but objects to be feared. And I remember seeing this lady in a black, traditional Palestinian dress, with a headscarf – you know, the sort of woman who could be the mother of one of the bombers who took my child. She was slow and elegant, stepping down from the bus, walking in my direction. She had a picture of her daughter clutched to her chest. She walked past me. looking at me. I couldn't move. This was like an earthquake inside me: this woman had lost her child. I had been in a sort of a coffin. This lifted the lid from my eyes.

Scene 29

Video. Images of electronic surveillance – green screens, radars, an eye.

(Ben-Gurion airport. Bassam and two security guards)

Guard A: (holding a passport) What's your name?

Bassam: Bassam Aramin.

Guard A: Who are you travelling with?

Bassam: My wife and children.

Guard A: Destination?

Bassam: England.

Guard A: Where in England?

Bassam: Bradford

Guard B: Never heard of it.

Bassam: It's a university.

Guard A: Are you a professor?

Bassam: No.

Guard A: What's the purpose of your trip?

Bassam: To study at the university.

Guard B: Are you trying to be smart with us?

Bassam: No.

Guard A: Where did you go to school?

Bassam: In the village, in Sa'ir.

Guard A: Where's that?

Bassam: Near Hebron.

Guard A: Did you finish school?

Bassam: No, my studies were interrupted.

Guard A: What does that mean *interrupted*?

Bassam: I didn't finish school. No.

Guard B: Why are you smiling?

Bassam: I always smile, it's part of what I do, I like to smile.

Guard B: Do you want to miss another plane, Bassam?

Bassam: No.

Guard B: Then wipe that grin off your face and tell me where did you learn Hebrew?

Bassam: After school, I learned it after school, then I worked for the Palestinian Authority, first in Sports, then in Archives, then I was accepted into the program at Bradford. I have a special permit, I have the right to go there.

Guard B: Answer my question, why are you going to university now?

Bassam: I was offered a stipend.

Guard A: For how long?

Bassam: For a year,

Guard A: And you're going to study what?

Bassam: The Shoah.

Guard B: Pardon me?

Bassam: The Holocaust.

Guard B: I heard you, you're studying the Shoah, you're an Arab, you're a Muslim, you're a terrorist, seven years in prison, you attack us, you throw grenades, and now you're studying the Shoah? Is this a kind of joke? Bass-sam, do you think we are stupid?

Bassam: I don't think you're stupid at all.

Guard A: Is that what you're telling us, you're going to England so you can tell us how the Shoah didn't happen?

Bassam: No.

Guard B: What do you mean, *no*?

Bassam: One of the things I have learned is that nobody wants to be expelled from history.

Guard A: What the fuck are you talking about?

Bassam: I am not interested in denying the truth.

Guard B: How many terrorists are you going to be meeting in Bradford, Bass-am?

Bassam: I don't know. What's a terrorist? Can you define it for me?

Guard: B You're asking *me*?

Bassam: Look, my wife is waiting, my children are waiting, we're going to miss another plane and I have to say that I'm a little terrified right now, yes.

Guard B: Oh, you're a real smart-ass, Bass-am, aren't you?

Bassam: I don't think so.

Guard B: Don't smile.

Bassam: I am not smiling. I am not laughing. I'm not doing anything. I'm just sitting here, answering your questions, waiting for my plane.

Guard: State your name.

Bassam: I gave it a dozen times already.

Guard: Name!

Bassam: Bassam Aramin.

In the library of Bradford I read Primo Levi, Theodor Adorno, Susan Sontag, Edward Said. I watch *Schindler's list*, I search out other films, documentaries, comb through reams of news footage, dig out pictures of the camps, find everything I can about Theresienstadt. How dictatorship twists language. How trauma shapes memory. At times it seems to me that my brain has caught fire.

Scene 30

(Rami and Smadar)

Rami: My father, Yitzhak, never spoke to his children about his experience during the Holocaust, until he was asked by Smadar. She prepared a project of family roots for school.

Smadar: I nudged him and nudged him until he agreed. And this is what he told me.

At the age of fourteen he was assigned to work as a runner for the rabbi of Monkatsch, smuggling gold down to the market. The money was used by the rabbi for food and medicine. He was quick and light and wore no yellow star on his jacket. He knew the alleyways and rooftops and could make his way around town without being spotted, jumping from chimney to chimney or shimmying down to the street level on a drainpipe. In the evenings he hung around the cinema and began to scalp tickets, selling them at a little over face value. One evening, with a single ticket left, he decided to go in and treat himself to a Zarah Leander film. He had just settled in his seat, when an officer from the Gestapo slid into the seat beside him and blocked his exit. This is how he arrived at Auschwitz.

Scene 31

(Elhanan's family home. Rami, Nurit and Smadar.

Smadar enters dressed in a too-large army shirt, and a red army cap on her head. She walks around as though she is in a military parade, giving herself orders, making fun of the drill)

Smadar: Left, right, left... attention... at ease... relax.

Nurit: (Chases her and takes the cap off her head) Stop it, Smadar. And take that shirt off.

Rami: Leave her alone, she's having fun...

Nurit: This is not an innocent game.

Rani: She's proud of her big brother and wants to imitate him. What's wrong with that?

Smadar: I'm not taking the shirt off.

Nurit: (to Rami) You know how much I hate this cult of the army.

Rami: But this is no cult. We need a strong army. If not – we can all start packing.

Nurit: We've been through this before... This is why I didn't want Elik to enlist in the first place. I knew he would come in the weekend with his uniform, and show off, and the kids would admire him, and I would have to listen to his combat stories and his military bragging... every other weekend, for three years... just like my father, This is awful...

Rami: But your father was a dedicated peace activist...

Nurit: Yes, but only after he had left the army... and in his heart, he remained a military man...

Rami: We are all soldiers on permanent leave... (to Smadar) You keep that shirt on you...

Smadar: Please, daddy, mummy... No more politics... (takes off the military shirt) Here, mummy, you can have it.

Scene 32

(Hadassah hospital. Rami and Bassam)

Rami: We've been here now for two days, and I've been thinking... (pause)

Bassam: Yes, you've been thinking...

Rami: I've been thinking hard about what we're doing, all these lectures, meetings, talking... What's the point, Bassam? Here we are, waiting for the news about Abir... It's all in vain. Nothing has changed. Never will.

Bassam: You don't understand, Rami.

Rami: What? What don't I understand?

Bassam: It's all in the hands of God. He's trying us. You first, and now, perhaps,

me as well.

Rami: This is your God, not mine. Remember the binding of Isaac and the ram?

Only in my case, there was no ram.

Bassam: You've got to believe in what we're doing.

Rami: Believe? The only thing that I believe in, is that one should not bring children into this world.

Bassam: Think about your other children.

Rami: Okay. Let's wait and see what happens to Abir.

Bassam: (to the audience) A short while after Abir's funeral I called Rami and told him that I would like to join the Bereaved Families Forum. Even tomorrow.

Rami: Tomorrow.

Scene 33

(Aramin's family home. Salwa)

Salwa: After Abir's death, I did not open the newspapers. I did not watch the television. And I never asked Bassam where he had gone, nor with whom he had met. I did not go to the Bereaved Families Forum. It was not that I disagreed with them. But I knew that my silence spoke. It was part of my prayer. I did not want to tell my story. It was not anything the journalists were able to understand. They were nearly all Western, mostly European. Good people. I invited them to my home, I cooked for them, poured tea, emptied the ashtrays. But I did not let them interview me. I knew they wanted to get a picture of me in my hijab. I knew that it would be misunderstood. Once I was filmed carrying my youngest, Hiba, through the apartment. I stopped to look at a photograph of Abir. You know, she was a beautiful child, with long hair, arched cheeks, big eyes, the color of a plum. He caught me crying. If they could have understood my anger, if they could have captured it without making a spectacle of it, I would have talked with them. But I knew. I was a Muslim woman, a Palestinian: always suspect.

Scene 34

(Hadassah hospital. Bassam and an Israeli physician)

Israeli physician: I am sorry. I cannot authorize an autopsy. And there's no need. This is clearly a blunt force trauma, a splintering of bone in the posterior casing of the skull, the bone itself penetrating the brain. I can give you X rays, official reports, blood tests. cardiograms. The results could be notarized if you like. I understand your pain, Mr. Aramin, really, I would like to relieve any burden. But an autopsy is impossible.

Bassam: I need an autopsy.

Israeli physician: Can you explain why exactly do you need an autopsy?

Bassam: I am going to bring criminal charges.

Israeli physician: Against whom?

Bassam: Against the state.

Israeli physician: I understand. Look, something surely has gone wrong. There is quite possibly blame to be apportioned. But criminal charges, Mr. Aramin? Really?

Bassam: Yes, I'm sure.

Israeli physician: I'm just not convinced this is the right path.

Bassam: It's not a question of a path. It's a fact.

Israeli physician: I'm sorry, but I haven't got the power to order an autopsy.

Bassam: As a parent, I have the right to demand an autopsy.

Israeli physician: I see. If you want an autopsy you would have to pay for it yourself. It could not be state-ordered. And it would cost many thousands of shekels. You'd be better off relying on our records.

Bassam: Okay. I will pay for it.

Scene 35

Video. A soldier aims a gun, in profile.

(Street in Anata. The judge and Commander of the Border Police Unit)

Judge: Would you like to come over here, commander?

Commander: Yes, your honor.

Judge: Where did the child exactly fall?

Commander: (points to a point in front stage) Here, your honor.

Judge: And the Jeep, from which the shots were fired, was there? (points toward the audience).

Commander: Yes, your honor.

Judge: And where is the graveyard?

Commander: Excuse me?

Judge: The one from where the stones were thrown, those that according to you endangered your soldiers?

Commander: I do not understand, your honor.

Judge: According to your testimony. In the court file.

Commander: (points toward backstage) Just over there, your honor.

Judge: Around the corner?

Commander: Yes, your honor.

Scene 36

(Checkpoint. Bassam and a soldier - played by Rami)

Soldier: (to Bassam, who approaches him). Stop! Hands up! (Bassam raises his hands).

Show me your palms. (Bassam puts down his hands. The soldier examines his palms).

What is that? what is that? Everybody - move away. Take off you jacket. Slowly.

Throw it over there. (Bassam takes off the jacket and throws it on the ground).

Now, on your ass, hands behind the back. Where is your identity card?

Bassam: In the inner pocket of the jacket.

Soldier: (takes out the identity card. Talking to a microphone connected to the collar). Do you hear me? Aramin, Bassam, number three, two, zero, seven, nine eight, one. Pink palms. Suspected of handling Semtex explosive.

Bassam: What Semtex?

Soldier: Shut up.

Bassam: I can explain the pink.

Soldier: I told you to shut up.

Bassam: Put your hand inside the right pocket of the jacket, and you'll find the pink.

Soldier: (takes a bracelet of pink candies out of the pocket) What is this?

Bassam: The candies of my daughter, Abir. This is the most precious bracelet in the world,

Soldier: And Semtex is the most effective explosive in the world. Don't move.

Scene 37

(Street in Anata. Judge and Commander of the Border Police Unit)

Judge: Let me see the graveyard.

Commander: I don't think that's a good idea, your honor.

Judge: These are my proceedings, commander (they exit the stage).

Scene 38

(Rami and the soldier who shot Abir – played by Bassam)

Rami: (to the audience) One day I will catch the soldier who shot Abir (pokes the soldier in the shoulder). Why? Tell me why?

Soldier: It was a mistake, just a mistake. (Rami pushes him). Hold on, hold on, not my fault, leave me alone, not my fault brother.

Rami: Don't call me brother.

Soldier: Hey, it wasn't my fault man, you've got to believe me, I was just following orders. You know what's it's like out there, it's a jungle, man. We didn't even look where we were firing, it was a mistake, I had no idea we were near a school, we were being pelted with rocks, you know what that's like, come on man, you served too, come on brother.

Rami: I told you not to call me brother.

Soldier: It's terrifying there, man, how could I know it was a girl anyway?

(Rami beats him) Hey, leave me alone. I did nothing wrong, don't blame me, I was just doing my job, I saw her, yeah, she was throwing stones man, they're a bunch of liars, born to lie, fucking Arabs, all of them, she was there, (Rami beats him harder). Fuck you, man, leave me alone, she had a rock in her hand, I saw her standing there, she wasn't hit by a rubber bullet at all, she got a rock in the back of the head, it wasn't me at all, she was hit by one of her own. (Rami beats him. He falls on the ground. Rami stands above him). I am sorry, I didn't mean it, I had no idea what happened really, just listen to me please, it all happened in a flash, the truth is I was scared, I did not know what the fuck I was doing, you would have done the exact same thing, admit it, man, admit

it, you would have.

Scene 39

(Street in Anata. Judge and Commander of the Border Police Unit)

Judge: (out of stage). They were throwing stones from here?

Commander: (out of stage) Yes.

Judge: (enters) They've come a long way, these Arabs.

Commander: (enters) excuse-me?

Judge: Quite a feat. Throwing stones from such a distance. And around the corner.

Commander: With all due respect, your honor, they could have been firing from several angles.

Judge: I see,

Commander: You have to understand, your honor, these are combat conditions. We are constantly under attack. There can be stones coming from anywhere. The top of the roof even. We got to have eyes in the back of our head. We are in mortal danger.

Judge: She was a ten years old girl, commander.

(The Commander exits. To the audience) The verdict. We have come to the conclusion that the shooting of Abir Aramin was an act of negligence, a violation of military procedures for initiating fire. The State is the responsible for the killing of the ten years old girl, and it will compensate the family (exits).

Scene 40

(Office of senator John Kerry. Bassam, secretary and senator Kerry)

Secretary: (to Bassam) The senator will see you now.

Bassam: (giving Kerry and photo of Abir) Pleased to meet you. This is my daughter, Abir.

Kerry: (takes the photo and looks at it). Thank you. She was a beautiful girl.

Bassam: Senator John Kerry, I am sorry to tell you this, but you murdered her.

Kerry: Yes, I know what you mean. American Jeeps, American guns, American dollars.

But the tide is turning, and I hope an agreement will soon be in place.

I understand your pain, Mr. Aramin. I can feel it, as a father, I am learning every day.

Where did you grow up, Mr. Aramin?

Bassam: In a cave.

Kerry: I mean, where really?

Scene 41

Video. An olive tree.

(Abir's room. Bassam and Abir)

Bassam: And that was the story of the holy man Omar. Now – to sleep. Good night.

Abir: But I am not tired.

Bassam: It's late, Abir.

Abir: I also want to tell a story.

Bassam: Fine, but a short one.

Abir: Once upon a time there were many olive trees in the field of Moussa. One day, they heard that bad people wanted to come and cut them down. What did they do? They carefully took out their roots, turned their branches into wings, and in the middle of the night, when nobody was watching, flew away.

Bassam: But what about poor Moussa? He came in the morning, and did not see any tree in his field,

Abir: You don't understand anything, Papa. They flew to another field of Moussa.

Bassam: Okay, then everything is fine. And now go to sleep (hums a lullaby).

Video. The olive tree flies.

Scene 42

(Elhanan's family home. Smadar, Rami and Nurit.

Smadar enters, listens with her headphones to Sinéad

O'Connor's song *Nothing Compares to You*. She approaches Rami and Nurit).

Smadar: Hi Mom, hi Dad, I'm crazy about Sinéad O'Connor.

Rami and Nurit: Yes, we know.

Smadar: And I want to cut my hair short, just like her. You don't mind, do you?

Nurit: No...

Smadar: Thank you.

Nurit: No way. You mean becoming bald?
Rami: I think it's beautiful. Like Sinéad.
.Smadar: And also a small ring in the nose... made of gold. What do you say?
Nurit: It will be cute. I have a small golden earring that grandma gave me. It can fit very well.
Rami: A ring in the nose? What are you - a cow?
Nurit: You know what? Decide. Either a haircut or a ring.
Smadar: So, perhaps, here, on the shoulder, a tattoo in the form of a butterfly... (exits).
Rami and Nurit: Wait, wait....
Rami: Out of the question.
Nurit: A tattoo does not come off with water.

Scene 43

(Elhanan's family home. Rami, Nurit and a soldier - played by Rami)

Rami: Can I help you?
Soldier: (gives Rami a package) Please, sign here... to confirm receipt.
Rami: What is it?
Soldier: A vase. A present for a bereaved family, on the occasion of Memorial Day.
Rami: Open it.
Soldier: There is also a letter from the Minister of Defense.
Rami: Read it.
Soldier: Dear Elhanan family, on this Memorial Day we would like to honor the memory of Smadar and the special sacrifice of the family on behalf of the State of Israel.
Rami: Every year I get a present from you, and every year I beg you: stop this disgusting practice. Take your hands off Smadar. She did not fall on behalf of the state of Israel.
Nurit: We picked up the pieces, put them in a box, wrapped it up with a nice string, and sent it to the Minister of Defense.
Rami: (Throws the vase and smashes it) Get out of here.

Scene 44

Video. Date: 24.7.2024

(Rami and Bassam, over the phone).

Rami: Hi, brother, what's new?

Bassam: Do you hear?

Rami: Yes, loud and clear.

Bassam: I cannot take it anymore.

Rami: What is it? What happened?

Bassam: I went to the grocery store of Abu Salah this afternoon.

Rami: Yes.

Bassam: I get in, there's nobody there, not even Abu Sala. I don't get it. I walk around, I find him sitting on a trash can, crying. I ask him what happened, and he tells me he has just received a phone call from Gaza. Sixty-three members of his family died in a bombing in Jibaliah.

Rami: This is terrible.

Bassam: And next week we fly to lecture in Warsaw. How can we do it?
It's a waste of time. I feel as though we are going in circles. No, worse, going backward. Look at Gaza. Not one house remains standing. Only ruins and corpses, and dogs roaming around them...

Rami: You have to be strong, brother.

Bassam: And why Warsaw? What are we looking for in Europe?

Rami: Here, they don't listen to us anymore. We have to try elsewhere. We have to continue.

Bassam: Continue? Where to?

Rami: Remember, you are doing this for Abir, and Smadar, and Araab and Yigal...
All our kids.

Bassam: Yes, yes...

Scene 45

(A psychiatrist's clinic. Reserve soldier, member A of Combatants for Peace – a psychiatrist, member B of Combatants for Peace)

Reserve soldier: Doctor, please help me... I cannot sleep, I stopped working, I hardly get out of my home, my wife thinks I lost it... I know I'm sane, but I keep

hearing these voices in my head...

Member A: What voices?

Member B: What are you doing in a military clinic?

Member A: What's wrong with that?

Member B: Don't you remember? We are not getting mobilized, we do not cooperate with the army. We refuse... This is why we joined Combatants for Peace. To end all this shit.

Member A: I know, but he suffers. This what I am here for. To treat soldiers who are in trauma.
(to the soldier) What voices?

Reserve soldier: The screams... they keep coming back... The scream of my friend, Noam... he was with me in the Nova party, on the 7th of October, and when Hamas arrived, we got into my car and drove away... fast.... they shot at us and hit him in the back... he screamed and screamed until we got to the hospital in Beer-Sheva, and there, after several hours, they told me he died. And I made a promise – to revenge him. Then I joined my reserve unit, and entered Gaza... we shot them like they were mad dogs... until one day... It was dark, we were on the outskirts of Khan Yunis... ruins and rubble around us... and we were told that if anybody advanced towards us, no matter whom, we shoot...

Member A: Shoot to kill?

Reserve soldier: Of course, otherwise, why shoot? And we see four figures coming in our direction... They did not even see us... The platoon commander gives the order, and we begin to shoot, like crazy... all the squad... they scream and we shoot... and then silence. We approach, carefully, and we see them lying... an old man and three children, with plastic bags. They were looking for food. And blood all over. Their bodies torn apart. The commander said we acted properly. But I couldn't utter a word. Later, I asked to quit the squad, but they would not let me.

Member B: A soldier in trauma? He is a war criminal. Aren't you ashamed?
He should be judged and imprisoned.

Member A: He deserves to be treated like any other human being.

Reserve soldier: And since then, any squeal, any yell, brings them back. The screams.
Doctor, can you help?

Scene 46

(School office/ American Embassy. Rami, Yaël – Israeli school principal,
American Consul)

Yaël: Hi Rami, good to see you.

Rami: Hello Yaël, nice to be back. I always like to return to your school. Makes me young again.

Yaël: You are always welcome.

Consul: Mr. Elhanan?

Rami: Yes.

Consul: (looking at his papers) I see that your demand for an extension of your visa was rejected.

Yaël: I suppose you came...

Rami: (to Yaël) I came in order to talk about a meeting between the twelfth graders and me and Bassam, as we did last year. Remember? We had a very good conversation about Israeli-Palestinian dialogue... Though there is a difference now. Since the 7th of October, Bassam cannot enter Israel. He will be in his house in Jericho, and we will speak with him via zoom...

Yaël: Okay. Let me check the calendar... (looks at her papers) I am sorry. The schedule of the twelfth graders is full with all sorts of extra-curricular activities...
I don't see any...

Rami: Come on... You must be kidding... We've been doing these encounters for the last seven years, and you always managed to find a date...

Consul: And I understand that you would like to appeal?

Rami: (to consul) Yes, indeed. You see, in 2013 I got a ten-year visa to the US, and we would come quite often, my friend Bassam Aramin and me, for lecture tours and fund raising for the Bereaved Families Forum... And then, about half a year ago, my renewal demand was rejected. They told me that my application was missing some information. So, I gathered the necessary information, and added support letters from senators, congressmen, professors, peace activists, lawyers, journalist... This is all in the file that I left at the desk... If you like, I could get a letter also from Pope Francis...

Consul: I don't think it will be necessary.

Yaël: I am sorry Rami, but we plan these activities months ahead... You should have come earlier...

Rami: Yaël, what is going on?

Consul: I read your file, Mr. Elhanan. Just one question. Are you still in touch with Mr. Aramin?

Rami: Yes, of course, he is like my brother. We continue to work together...

Yaël: Everything is as usual.

Rami: (to Yaël) Don't bullshit me... Something has changed...

Yaël: You know, Rami, we were always happy to host you and Bassam...
And the kids learned a lot from you two...

Rami: But...

Yaël: We have been recently under a lot of pressure. Many parents complained about the presence of a Palestinian in school, and I got threatening messages from the Ministry of Education... This has become a very sensitive issue, and I am not sure I can afford ignoring... Please, understand my position...

Rami: In other words, you cave in...

Yaël: Don't misunderstand me, Rami. I've always been for peace and dialogue. Only this is not the right moment.

Consul: Thank you. We will let you know our decision soon.

Rami: (to the audience) After two weeks I got a letter from the embassy, rejecting my appeal, saying I failed to prove that I had strong ties to my country which would guaranty my return after a visit to the US. And then I realized that I forgot to mention in the file that I had the grave of Smadar to return to.

Scene 47

Video. The fence between Israel and the Occupied territories.

(Rami and Yigal Elhanan; Bassam and Araab Aramin.

Yigal holds an envelope; Araab holds a stone).

Yigal: Look, Daddy, I got the conscription letter.

Rami: If I were you, I would've torn it up.

Yigal: No way. It's my turn now.

Rami: And what would you do if, while standing there in the middle of the road,
along comes a black Kia. You flag it down, and it's Bassam inside?

Yigal: I'll let him go.

Rami: And if your commander says, "Arrest him"?

Yigal: I'll refuse.

Rami: And what if they arrest you for refusing?

Yigal: Then they can arrest me.

Rami: And go to prison for it?

Yigal: Yes.

Rami: So why not do it now and refuse altogether?

Yigal: It's my duty, my obligation.

Bassam: The school principal told me what you had done. Give me the stone, Araab.

Araab: No.

Bassam: Okay. Leave it and listen to me. You are a big boy now. You can understand what I say.

You throw a stone, they pick you up and they beat you. And then you
get out and you throw another stone. Then they beat you again. And again and
again. It means they've won. Do you want them to win?

Araab: I don't want them to win. But they killed Abir. And one day they will kill us all.

You know that they are capable of anything. I won't shut up.

Bassam: I'm also mad at them because of Abir. And I know how ruthless they are.

But throwing stones is not a solution.

Rami: If you can't tear it, give it to me. I'll do it.

Yigal: If I don't serve, I have no voice.

Rami: Your voice is louder if you don't.

Yigal: You served, you went, you did it.

Rami: Those were different times.

Bassam: What I'm going to do is walk over there and close my eyes. And then I want
you to throw your stone at me. As hard as you can. And I want you to hit me.

Araab: No.

Bassam: If you don't, I'll go back to the roadblock. I will stand there and I will wait
for an Israeli jeep. When it comes, I will throw a stone at it for you. Do you

understand?

Araab: Yes.

Bassam: And then you know exactly what will happen to me.

Yigal: They're not all Bassams, you know.

Rami: I know that.

Yigal: There are other people out there,

Rami: Yes, there are.

Yigal: They blew up my sister. And their hatred will bring about more bloodshed.

Rami: Killing Palestinians will not bring Smadar back.

Bassam: Throw it. Throw it now. We don't leave here until you hit me.

Scene 48

(Rami, Bassam, Smadar and Abir watch the musician as he gets off the stage and walks through the audience, playing his instrument).

The End