

Salim Salim

By

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THE CHARACTERS

SALIM, a Palestinian man, 34 years old.

THE COMMANDER, the officer in charge of the Erez Crossing, 28. Likes to think of himself as a liberal, believe he is doing an important job running the crossing.

NAI'MA, Salim's Wife, originally from Gaza, now lives in the West Bank, 30. A smart, strong woman who raises her three children by herself.

THE SOLDIER, a young woman, serving at the Erez crossing, 20. Cheerful and friendly, she hates her job at the crossing point.

WA'EL, lives in Gaza, 28. Fadel's close friend, knows the Fadel and Salim since childhood.

FADEL, Salim's brother, lives in Gaza, 30. A sensitive man who fights for his people's liberation.

Location: The crossing point between Israel and The Gaza Strip

The stage is unevenly divided into three sections. To the right and to the left, two vertical fences run through the stage, turning its center into a large rectangular cage. These are chain-link fences, permitting characters to see, talk and even reach out to one another through them. However, the fences cannot be crossed or climbed over. To the back of the stage, within the fenced area, are two medium-sized guardhouses, one to the left and one to the right. Next to each of these, is a gate, providing access to the other side of the fence. Stage left is Israel; Stage right is Gaza. The audience is seated on both sides of the stage, divided between "Gaza" and "Israel".

SCENE 0

This scene takes place before the story begins and while the audience is entering the theater. The whole theater space is the border crossing, and once the audience steps in, they are at the border crossing. To reach their seats, the audience has to first go through a border checkpoint. The soldiers stand near the gates leading to Gaza and Israel, and the audience is directed to them by a soldier. This scene can take as long as needed, and it is preferable that audience members will have to wait in line to be cleared by the soldiers.

The soldiers stop every party for questioning. They can question groups together, or separate them and question them one after the other. The dialog with the audience should be done strictly, the audience members are Palestinians going through the crossing and the soldiers treat them as they would treat Palestinians. The soldiers should be aware of the distance between them and the viewers. They can't allow them to stand too close, as it might be dangerous for them.

Audience members should have crossing permits in hand (these can be given to them by the person at the door or before they enter the theater). These permits can also function as a playbill, as long as they look like an authentic crossing permit.

The audience sitting area is divided into two separate sections: Gaza and Israel. At the end of the questioning, the soldiers determine if the viewers cross to Gaza or Israel.

SOLDIER – DIALOGUE #1
(to an audience member)

Permit / ID

The soldier waits for a second, if the viewer doesn't immediately understand, they repeat the request.

Show me your crossing permit.

The soldier takes the permit, examines it thoroughly.

What's your name?

The soldier waits for an answer.

What your father's name?

The soldier waits for answer, then checks the permit again to see the information fits.

Where did you come here from?

The soldier waits for an answer.

Do you live there?

The soldier waits for an answer.

Where were you born?

The soldier waits for an answer.

I see. Okay. You can cross to Aza.

The soldier directs the viewer to Gaza.

SOLDIER – DIALOGUE #2

Next!

Permit!

The soldier waits for the next person in line to approach. If they are getting too close the soldier can say "Step back!". If it's more than one person the soldier can ask -

Are you together?
Show me your permits.

The soldier takes both of their permits. The soldier examines the permits, looking carefully at both.

Names

The soldier waits for their answer.

Where did you come from?

The soldier waits for an answer.

Do you have a valid work permit?

The soldier waits for an answer. Once the soldier is satisfied, they conclude.

Okay, you can cross to Israel.

The dialog with each viewer should be slightly different. If a viewer doesn't take the questioning seriously and talks back to the soldiers, or makes jokes, they can detain them by saying: "You, wait here" while they take care of other viewers who came after that person. Then they can come back to the detained viewer, and complete the questioning process.

Additional questions:

What is your name?

What is your father's name?

What is your mother's name?

Do you have any siblings?

Where do they live?

Where do you live?

Do you have children?

What are their ages? Names? Date of births?

Did you come here straight from your home?

Do you carry any weapons on you?

Is it your first time crossing at this border point?

Do you speak Arabic?

SCENE 1

The crossing point between Israel and The Gaza Strip.

A soldier in full uniform and a weapon is sitting on a plastic chair next to the guardhouse. She is on her phone, texting. A bus is heard screeching to a halt off-stage.

VOICE (O.S.)

Come on, we're here. That's your stop.

SALIM (O.S.)

Wait, here?

VOICE (O.S.)

Get a move on, we haven't got all day. Get off and good luck to you.

Salim arrives at the crossing point, through the Israeli side. He is wearing an old-fashioned, faded, jacket and holding a small suitcase. He looks around, blinking, blinded by the strong sunlight. The soldier is still on her phone. She doesn't notice him. Salim hesitates and walks towards her.

SALIM

Excuse me...

She lifts her head from the phone to see that he is standing much too close.

SOLDIER

Back the fuck off! Shirt.

Salim does not understand.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Lift up your shirt.

Salim raises his shirt, she checks him for weapons.

Turn around. 360 degrees.

Pockets. Pants.

Fine.

ID. Jyb al Hawiya.

(Arabic for: "give your ID card")

Salim hands her his papers and ID card. The soldier looks at it, reading thoroughly.

So we're out of prison, aren't we?

Good for you. I see you spent ten years in prison... What'd you do? Organized a terror attack?

SALIM

No! Of course not!

SOLDIER

I see.

(reads slowly from the paper)

"Conspiracy to provide material support and resources to terrorists, attempting to aid terrorists, making false statements to the security services." And after all that they took eight years off your sentence?

(calling out.)

Hey, commander, come here, check this out.

The checkpoint commander approaches.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Look at this

(shows him the papers)

We've got a terrorist on his way home. What do you think?

COMMANDER

(looking Salim up and down while going through the papers)

So, you are going back to Aza after ten years in prison? Well done. It says here you've been rehabilitated, that you've been studying in there. What'd you study?

SALIM

To Raza?

COMMANDER

I asked you, what did you study?

(smirking at the Soldier)

Shame it wasn't Hebrew, huh?

SALIM

(looking around in increasing panic)

What do you mean Raza? What's going on? Where am I?

COMMANDER

(to the Soldier)

They fucked him up good in prison, ha? I can't understand why they left him here without any explanation. They're supposed to take guys like this across themselves.

SOLDIER

He does look pretty fucked up. Maybe that's why they let him out early. You know, maybe the security service has...

She makes an obscene gesture with her hand, one that clearly means "fucked". They both laugh. Salim looks around, stepping away from them, clutching his suitcase. His eyes dart about for a sign to tell him where he is. Finding none, he returns to the soldiers.

SALIM

I am asking you to please tell me exactly where I am.

The commander and the soldier exchange mocking glances.

COMMANDER

You are at Erez Crossing, that's where.

SALIM

Erez crossing? At the Raza checkpoint? No, that's a mistake. That's a mistake. They were supposed to release me at the Tulkarem Crosspoint, in the West Bank.

COMMANDER

Well, I'm sorry, but you are at Erez Crossing. See? It says so right here.

(takes his papers, showing him)

And they know where to take you. So, if they brought you here, this is where you belong.

SALIM

No, you don't understand. I was just released. My wife is waiting for me, I haven't seen my children in ten years. My home is in Tulkarem, they are waiting for me there.

COMMANDER

No. YOU don't understand. We have these documents, official documents, what they say is what we do.

SALIM

But I'm not/

COMMANDER

I am not going to stand here all day. When you decide to cross into Aza, bring these papers to the soldier and she'll process you. Here. Take it.

Salim hesitates for a moment, then takes back his documents. The commander starts leaving to return to the soldier's post.

SALIM

No. I will not cross.

The Commander turns around and starts coming back towards Salim.

COMMANDER

What did you say?

SALIM

I will not cross into Raza.

COMMANDER

You WILL cross. And it better be soon.

(looks at his watch)

It's now 5 pm. My shift ends at seven. If you're still here at seven, you are going to have a serious problem. With me. Now back the fuck off.

(MORE)

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

(to the audience behind the fences)

So because Salim Abyad is not going through, nobody is going through. This crossing is now closed. You can all go home.

(to the Soldier)

Close the gates. I'm going to call Miriam from the prison authorities. Keep an eye on him until I'm back.

SOLDIER

(to the audience)

You heard the Commander! Everybody go home, the crossing is closed!

The Commander walks off angrily. Salim is left standing, stunned. He looks at his papers, then at the Soldier. She is back in her chair, checking her Phone.

SALIM

Is there a phone I can use around here?

SOLDIER

Only on the other side.

SALIM

Yes, but...

SOLDIER

On the other side.

SALIM

But I can't cross to the other side.

SOLDIER

Too bad, so there is no phone.

SALIM

I have to make a call, it's important. My family has been waiting for me for over two hours at the Tulkarem crossing. I need to let them know I'm here.

SOLDIER

Then just go to other side and call them. No problem.

A beat.

SALIM

Can I maybe make a call from your phone?

(a beat)

Just one call.

(a beat)

I am not going to steal it. I can even pay you.

He searches his pockets for money but finds nothing.

SOLDIER

(looks up)

I will give you one call, but then you cross. Understood?

U-n-d-e-r-s-t-o-o-d?

Salim nods slightly, as if agreeing to the deal.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

What's the number?

SALIM

057-7249436

SOLDIER

(dialing)

Here. And make it quick.

She hands him the phone, watching him as he makes the call.

SCENE 2

The phone rings three times before Nai'ma picks up. We can only hear Salim's side of the conversation.

SALIM

Nai'ma!

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
(his voice quivering)

Nai'ma, I'm at Erez Crossing.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
(louder)

I am at Erez crossing, at the entrance to Raza, can you hear me?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
Yes, I know. It wasn't supposed to happen...

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
Because of the address! It's still listed on the Israeli registry as Raza, so they brought me here.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
I know. But you remember the day we tried to change it from Raza to the West Bank?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
Yes. And the clerk said that that's the law in Israel – if you're born in Raza, you stay in Raza. And Now they're insisting I must enter Raza. And you know that if I cross over, I'll never be able to come back to the West Bank.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)
Of course I said that. Of course. But they're insisting
(a beat)

And I can't go into Raza.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Nai'ma?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

I need you to come here.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Yes, to Erez. Come quick. Before they force me over.

(a beat)

But how will you get here? Who drove you there?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Daud? Which Daud, the neighbor? He gave you a ride?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Okay, okay. So can he bring you here?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Okay, good. But don't bring the children with you.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Don't bring them here, please. I just need you to come and help me sort it out, so we can go home already.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Meanwhile, try calling anyone you can.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Try that lawyer from Ramallah, the one who handled my case – do you have his number?

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Good. So call him and tell him what's happening. Tell him I am not going anywhere unless they let me go home.

The soldier walks towards Salim, she wants her phone back.

SALIM (CONT'D)

I have to hang up.

Nai'ma speaks.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Thank you. Just come. As soon as you can.

SCENE 3

The soldier walks up to Salim, looking at him. She makes a gesture for Salim to give her the phone back, he hands it over.

SOLDIER

Not such a short call after all, huh? Never mind. Is everything okay?

SALIM

No.

The soldier walks over to the gate leading to Gaza, unlocks it and waits for Salim to go through. Salim doesn't move.

SOLDIER

Look, the Commander is talking to the prison service for you, but it looks like you are supposed to go to Aza. And honestly, it would be better for you if you just cross. They don't change their minds about these things.

SALIM

No, I can't.

SOLDIER

I really suggest you think it over, and go through. The Commander might seem nice, but if he gets angry, this situation can get unpleasant. It's better if you just cross, for everyone.

SALIM

What don't you understand? I'm not going anywhere, except my home! And you can tell your commander, that I am not afraid of him and his words. All of you – with your weapons and your Hebrew and your threats – I am not afraid of you anymore. And I am not going anywhere, not anywhere. He can call whoever he likes. They can come here and talk to me.

The Soldier is startled. She closes the gate and walks back to the crossing.

SCENE 4

15 minutes pass. Salim paces restlessly from side to side. The soldier is watching him from her seat, occasionally looking at her Phone. Salim is desperate. He looks around for some salvation. Suddenly, his eyes catch someone on the Gaza side. Salim walks up to the fence and calls out to a man sitting in the audience.

SALIM

Abu-Mahmud! Abu-Mahmud!

Abu-Mahmud raises his eyes toward Salim. He looks at him but doesn't seem to recognize him.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Abu-Mahmud, it's me. Salim Abyad, eben Jamil Abyad.

(a beat, Salim waits for a response)

Abu-Mahmud, don't you recognize me? Can you come over to the fence, please? I want to talk to you for a minute.

Please.

(a beat)

Abu-Mahmud. Come on, I know you can hear me.

You've known me since I was a boy and now you won't even talk to me?

Are you ignoring me on purpose? Please. I need to talk to you. I'm stuck here, I could really use some help.

(a beat)

Please.

Salim looks at him, despairing at his lack of response, and slowly backs off from the fence.

SCENE 5

Wa'el enters the stage from the Gaza side. He nods at Abu-Mahmud in the audience.

WA'EL

Thank you, Abu-Mahmud, don't worry about him. it's alright.

Salim flinches, but stands his ground before the approaching man. They stand on both sides of the fence, looking at each other from a distance.

WA'EL (CONT'D)

Salam Aliekum, Salim.

(Arabic: "Hello".)

SALIM

Wa Alaikum Assalam, Wa'el.

(Arabic: "Hello to you to".)

WA'EL

We weren't expecting to see you back here so soon.

SALIM

I had no intention of coming back.

WA'EL

So what are you doing here, Salim?

SALIM

I, I... Got out.

WA'EL

Good. How long has it been, ten years? Every one round here thought you got fifteen.

SALIM

(his voice quivering)

Yes. It was supposed to be longer.

WA'EL

They knocked off a third for good behavior? That hardly happens, lucky you. I wonder how well you need to behave in prison to make them that happy.

(a beat)

And you've missed us so much that you came straight here on your release day? Or maybe you felt guilty and came to make amends?

SALIM

No, no. Wa'el, it's not what you think...

WA'EL

I don't think your brother is going to like this.

SALIM

No, please don't tell him you saw me.

WA'EL

Not tell him? Who do you think I work for? You? If not for your brother we'd all be in deep shit. He takes care of us. And I think he'd be very interested to know you've suddenly shown up here.

SALIM

Please.

WA'EL

What, are you scared? Of your brother?

A beat.

SALIM

No, I'm not scared.

WA'EL

You are scared. I can see it on you. And you have every reason to be.

(a beat)

Everyone here knows what you did, Salim. We all know.

SALIM

Know what?

WA'EL

You can stop pretending. We have informants of our own. You talked. You gave names. And we know it was you. No one here will help you. People already had to escape. Freedom fighters, great people who fight for their country, who try to make a real change for us. And you sold them out.

Salim looks around searching for a way out.
There isn't any.

SALIM

No, Wa'el... You've got it all wrong.

WA'EL

No, unfortunately I don't think I do.

(takes out his phone)

I'll let your brother know you are here. I'm sure he'll want to be here to welcome you home.

Wa'el walks away while dialing. From now on, he'll be standing on the Gaza side, constantly watching Salim.

SCENE 6

Half an hour goes by. Salim is in distress. He walks from side to side. A car stops on the Israeli side, It's Nai'ma.

Salim sees her and runs towards her. They stand on both sides of the fence, their fingers touching. They take their time, this is their first time holding hands in ten years.

NAI'MA

Salim...

SALIM

Nai'ma, ya hay ati

(Arabic: my life)

I've missed you so much.

NAI'MA

I've missed you too.

Salim reaches his hand to caress her through the fence. They touch, they hold hand.

After a few moments -

SOLIDER

Hey - no hands!

They both separate their hands. And then slowly during the scene they bring them back to the fence.

NAI'MA

We came as quickly as we could. It's a good thing you arranged that permit for me.

SALIM

Did you get anyone?

NAI'MA

I called the lawyer, he said he would send someone. Did anyone come?

SALIM

No.

NAI'MA

What are we going to do, Salim?

SALIM

You keep making calls. Did you try Fahed? maybe he can talk to his friends in the army?

NAI'MA

Fahed?...

SALIM

Fahed, Rima's husband.

A beat.

NAI'MA

You don't know? He's gone. They said he was a collaborator. Poor Rima was left alone with three children.

(she looks back at her own children,
standing by the car)

Salim, we can't go back to Raza...

SALIM

I know.

NAI'MA

We said we'll never go back. It's too dangerous. Someone might want to take revenge on you. They're not going to let us get away with it.

SALIM

I know.

NAI'MA

Maybe you should try talking to your brother.

SALIM

No.

A beat.

NAI'MA

Apologize to him. It's been long enough, he should forgive us.

SALIM

No! I can't! No way.

NAI'MA

But you don't have any other options!

SALIM

Be quiet! Enough with that, okay?

He makes a small gesture, pointing at the audience on both sides – Israel and Gaza.

SALIM (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Now listen carefully.

He takes out a folded note from his pocket and hands it to her through the fence.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Find a quiet corner, away from anyone who might be listening, and call this number. When he picks up, tell him you're Salim Abyad's wife. Tell him we have a problem and he must get me out of here immediately.

(a beat)

And if he doesn't agree to come, tell him he can forget about my testimony.

NAI'MA

What are you talking about, Salim? Who am I calling?

SALIM

Just do what I'm asking! Now! Go. Please.

NAI'MA

What is this testimony, Salim?

SALIM

Stop it! We shouldn't be talking about this here!

NAI'MA

But Salim...

SALIM

How do you think I got out so early? You know everything has a price.

(a beat)

Now go and call him. And tell him exactly what I said.

NAI'MA

Okay... But the children...

SALIM

What about the children?

NAI'MA

They're waiting. They want to see you. They were so excited that we're picking you up.

SALIM

They're here?

(a beat)

No, not now. Not like this. First make the call. And make sure no one hears you!

Nai'ma walks back to the Israeli side.

SCENE 7

Salim stays by the fence, watching Nai'ma and the children in the distance. The Soldier interrupts his thoughts.

SOLDIER

Your wife?

SALIM

What?

SOLDIER

There. She looks nice.

SALIM

She is. Very nice.

SOLDIER

Maybe if you crossed over, she could join you in Aza.

SALIM

What are you talking about? Do you even understand what Raza is? Do you know what kind of life people live over there?

SOLDIER

Of course I understand. I see the news, you know. I just think that you can build a life there, too. Look, my grandmother came from Egypt, and they didn't want to leave their homes, either. But then they came here and started a new life. And look at everything we have now.

SALIM

It's a very different situation, it's not the same.

SOLDIER

Why not? Look at the beautiful life they've built here – and without giving anything up. My grandmother always watched the Friday afternoon Arabic movies with Omar Sharif. She used to listen to Egyptian music at home...

SALIM

Oh, yeah? Who did she listen to? Umm Kulthum? "Inta Umri"?

He's mocking her, "Inta Umri" is the one most famous Arabic song.

SOLDIER

Yes. And Abdel Halim Hafez too. As a little girl, I used to cook with her and we would sing together in the kitchen.

SALIM

You? You know this music?

SOLDIER

Of course.

She starts singing (in the original Arabic) the first verses of Abdel Halim Hafiz' song "drifter" (Arabic: Sawah).

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Sawah,
wei mashee feil beilaad,
sawah

(Drifter)
(Walking through this world)
(Oh, drifter.)

Sawah,
wei mashee feil beilaad,
sawah

(she stops singing)

Do you know it?

SALIM

Of course I know it.

SOLDIER

(She goes back to the song)

Weil khatwa beinee wei bein
habibee barah

(And a mere step between me and my
lover)
(Is a vast distance.)

SALIM

(interrupting her)

Khatwa. It's pronounced Khatwa.

SOLDIER

(repeats after him)

Khatwa.

(sings)

Meish war bei-eed, wana feeh gareeh
Weil leil yei-arab, weil nahar rawah

(It's a long journey)
(And in it, I'm a stranger)

Salim joins her, singing quietly.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Wein laakom habibee, saleimulee alei
 Tameinuneel asmaranee, amla eil el ghorba
 fee
 Sawah, wana mashee layalee
 Sawah, walla daree bhalee
 Sawah, meil for-a ya ghalee
 Sawah, eih elee garalee

SALIM

Wein laakom habibee, saleimulee alei
 Tameinuneel asmaranee, amla eil el ghorba
 fee
 Sawah, wana mashee layalee
 Sawah, walla daree bhalee
 Sawah, meil for-a ya ghalee
 Sawah, eih elee garalee
 (And a mere step between me and
 my lover)
 (Is a vast distance)
 (A long journey)
 (In which I am a stranger)
 (And the night is coming)
 (And the day is ending.)
 (If my lover meets you)
 (Send him my regards)
 (And tell me)
 (Oh that dark-haired man,)
 (What have these foreign lands
 done to him.)

The Soldier hums the end of the song alone.
 They grow silent.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

You see, life goes on.

(a beat)

So, are you going to cross?

SALIM

You don't understand. You really don't understand. There is nothing there for us
 anymore.

(a beat)

I will not cross into Raza.

SOLDIER

So what are you going to do?

SALIM

I am going to go home, and my home is not here. You Israelis think you are God, that you can do whatever you want...

SOLDIER

(tenses up)

Listen, we are on your side. We want to help you.

SALIM

Really? How are you going to help me? All you want is for me to get the hell out of here and stop being your problem.

SOLDIER

I am asking you not to yell here!

SALIM

Why shouldn't I yell? Maybe if I yell something will happen.

He looks around. After a few moments he starts walking towards the guardhouse.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Where is the commander? I want to talk to him.

SOLDIER

You can't talk to him now, he's out.

The soldier stands in front of Salim, blocking his path to the guardhouse.

SALIM

I need to talk him, it's urgent.

SOLDIER

I am telling you, he's out.

SALIM

Get him!

The soldier places a hand on her rifle.

SOLDIER

Are you giving me orders?

SALIM

No... But I'm asking you, begging you, please get the commander. I need to speak with him.

The soldier hesitates, then enters the guardhouse. Salim stands there waiting. A few moments later, the Commander comes out.

SCENE 8

COMMANDER

You're still here? It's starting to get late.

SALIM

Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about.

COMMANDER

There's nothing to talk about. I told you— I'm leaving at seven — and so are you.

SALIM

Yes, but I need a little more time.

COMMANDER

Time for what?

SALIM

Time to... Just time...

COMMANDER

I'm sorry, but —

SALIM

Please...

COMMANDER

What do you need more time for? You're going to have to cross over anyway. Nobody is going to let you back into Israel. So cross, spend a little time in Aza, and see how it goes... Maybe your family can join you there? What do you say?

SALIM

No, I can't...

COMMANDER

I don't understand what's the problem. You lived there before, right? So you can live there again.

SALIM

You really don't understand? It's not written in your 'official' documents?

COMMANDER

What?

SALIM

That they will kill me if I cross into Raza! Isn't that in your documents!?

COMMANDER

(embarrassed)

No, it's not...

SALIM

And they also forgot to mention that it's because I helped your SHITTY country – you, instead of my own people. That now they hate me over there. That I moved my family to Tulkarem to keep them out of this. That my children live in danger EVERY DAY. Isn't that in your documents?

COMMANDER

No- So- but-

(a beat)

So why were you in prison, then?

SALIM

Because with YOU, everything comes at a cost. I've done some things, mistakes. But I also tried to fix them. All I got was screwed, by everyone. And now your thanks is sticking me here, in Raza, instead of letting me go home.

COMMANDER

Look, maybe it's a mistake. Maybe it's something we can fix...

SALIM

(his eyes light up)

Yes, exactly! But I need you to give me more time, I won't make it by seven. Give me until later tonight.

COMMANDER

It is very problematic.

SALIM

Please.

COMMANDER

I can't just go and leave you here. I'm going to have to stay here myself.

SALIM

I beg you.

COMMANDER

And I have a family waiting for me too.

SALIM

So you understand.

COMMANDER

I'm sorry. This is very problematic.

(a beat)

Look, I'll do what I can, but you need to hurry up. Is anybody coming for you?

SALIM

Yes, I think so. I called him. He's supposed to be here soon.

COMMANDER

(He finally makes a decision)

Okay, you have until eight. Good luck.

The Commander almost reaches out his hand to shake Salim's, but holds back. He turns around and reenters the guardhouse.

SCENE 9

The soldier returns to her post. 10 minutes pass. Fadel, Salim's brother, arrives at the crossing. He stays behind as Wa'el approaches the fence on the Gaza side. Salim sees getting closer to the fence. He turns around and walks toward the Israeli side, looking for Nai'ma. He sees her standing in the distance.

SALIM SALIM

(calls out to her)

Nai'ma!

(no response)

Nai'ma! Come here!

Wa'el is now at the fence on the Gaza side.

WA'EL

Salim!

Nai'ma comes to the fence, she looks like she's been crying. She reaches for Salim through the bars.

He tries to comfort her, but he can't fully grasp her. They are both aware of Fadel and Wa'el standing by the fence on the other side.

NAI'MA

I can't take this anymore, ya albi.

(Arabic: "my heart", my love.)

WA'EL

Come here, Salim! We want to talk to you!

SALIM

Stop it, my love, okay? Come on.

NAI'MA

(looking at Wa'el)

What does he want?

SALIM

Don't worry about him. Did you call the number I gave you?

FADEL

Salim!

NAI'MA

Yes... He said he doesn't know you.

WA'EL

(loosing his patience)

Salim!

SALIM

What? No, he knows me. What else did he say?

NAI'MA

He had no idea what I was talking about.

SALIM

That's it? Nothing else?

FADEL

Salim!

NAI'MA

I don't know. Before he hung up he said it was getting late, and that he wishes us that everything will be solved as soon as possible, hopefully before the crossing closes at seven thirty.

SALIM

What time is it, Nai'ma?

NAI'MA

Forty past six.

WA'EL

Salim! Come here!

SALIM

And he said seven thirty... That's great! Ya hayati, it's going to be fine, just fine, I'm telling you.

Fadel joins Wa'el closer to the fence. Nai'ma and Salim both notice them.

NAI'MA
(Looking at Wa'el and Fadel)

How will it be fine, Salim?

FADEL
Salim!

SALIM
It will be. He'll be here at seven thirty.

Salim smiles to her, for the first time.

NAI'MA
Really, he will come? Are you sure?

The Solider approaches Salim and interrupts his conversation with Na'ima.

SOLDIER
Come with me for a second.

FADEL
Salim! Come here!

SALIM
(to Nai'ma)
Yes, he will be here. And then it will finally end, and we'll go home.

SCENE 10

Salim steps away with the soldier, Nai'ma walks back to the kids.

SOLDIER
Can't you hear them calling you over there?

SALIM

Yes, I can.

SOLDIER

Do you know those people?

SALIM

Yes.

SOLDIER

Good. So the Commander is asking you to go over there. Otherwise, we're going to have to take care of this our way.

SALIM

It's not my responsibility if they're giving you trouble.

SOLDIER

Look – Salim, right?

SALIM

Yes.

SOLDIER

Look Salim, the Commander has decided, for his own reasons, to work with you here. So it would be a very good idea if YOU gave him something in return.

SALIM

It's not that simple.

FADEL

Come here, Salim! I won't wait for much longer!

SOLDIER

Neither is letting you stay here. You know what would be very simple? To force to cross. I'm sure that would calm them down. All we're asking is that you go over there, so that we don't have any more problems. That's all. Can you do that?

FADEL

Walak Salim! Come here already!

SALIM
(to the soldier)

Yes.

SOLDIER
Good, perfect. I am sure the Commander will appreciate it.

SALIM
Fine. But you tell him to remember this later, before he forces me across.

SOLDIER
I will. Now go over there.

SCENE 11

Leaving the soldier, Salim hesitantly heads towards the fence on the Gaza side, where Fadel, Salim's younger brother and Wa'el are standing, waiting for him. Salim walks up to his brother. The two stand on both sides of the fence.

FADEL
Ahalaan, akui li'kbir.
(Arabic: Hello, big brother.)
It's been a long time, almost 12 years.

SALIM
Ahalaan, Fadel.

FADEL
How have you been?

SALIM
I'm fine. What do you want, Fadel?

FADEL
You know exactly what I want, ya akhi.
(Arabic: my brother)

SALIM

I don't owe you anything anymore.

FADEL

Oh, yes, you do. You owe me everything.

SALIM

We are brothers.

FADEL

I thought so too.

SALIM

Yes, and brothers/

FADEL

And brothers don't betray each other. They don't steal from each other. They don't snitch to the enemy.

SALIM

That's not what I did.

FADEL

Isn't it?

(Salim doesn't reply)

Isn't it?

SALIM

I never said a word about you.

FADEL

But you talked about my men. And they knew exactly how to pick them up, one by one. They took good care of you in prison, didn't they? But you're not in prison anymore, Salim. And even if I didn't want to hurt you, there are plenty of angry people around. And believe me, I couldn't stop them even if I wanted to.

SALIM

But you don't want to.

FADEL

It's not that I don't want to. But betrayal is something that people find hard to forgive, Salim.

He steps away from the Soldier.

FADEL (CONT'D)

Listen, I've been thinking seriously about this. There is a way for me to help you. Salim looks up hopefully. Cross over to our side, and come back to working with us. Tell the Israelis you're still with them, it's alright, let them think that. But you'll be working for us. I can really use your help, Salim. And I'll protect you from anyone who wants to hurt you.

SALIM

Fadel...

FADEL

What options do you have, ya akhi? You have nothing. It's either us or nothing.

SALIM

I can't, Fadel...

FADEL

Can't? What do you mean, can't? Is fighting with us and liberating our people not a worthy enough cause for you?

SALIM

I don't want to fight anymore. I am tired of wars. I just want to sit at home, with my wife, my children...

FADEL

With your WIFE?

SALIM

Yes, with my WIFE.

FADEL

Have you no shame?

SALIM

No. MY wife.

FADEL

The wife you stole, you mean?

SALIM

Fadel, I'm warning you, don't talk about her like that.

FADEL

Why? What can you do to me through this fence? This wife of yours who ran away with you to the West Bank, instead of getting married like she should have. To me.

SALIM

Come on, Fadel... That was years ago. Enough. Let it go.

FADEL

I told you, Salim, betrayal is hard to forget.

SALIM

How many years, Fadel? How many years can we keep playing this game?

FADEL

Until you fix your mistakes, ya akhi.

(a beat)

For ten years, you've been hiding in the Israelis' prison. They even put you in protective custody. They took real good care of you, huh? But it's over, Salim. You're here now.

SALIM

I just want to go home.

FADEL

And tell me, what's waiting for you at home? Do you think she just sat around and waited for you, for the last ten years? It's hard to tell if you're naïve or stupid, ya Salim.

(a beat)

Rumors have been circulating. Well-founded rumors.

SALIM

Liar.

FADEL

Why would I lie to you? It's all true. Ten years is a long time to be alone.

(a beat)

Tell me, how did she get here? Who brought her?

SALIM

She came, she had a ride.

FADEL

Daud?

SALIM

What? That's none of your business! You're just trying to make us fight, to ruin what we have. Like you've wanted all your life. Always, ruining everything.

FADEL

No, I'm simply looking out for you. I want to spare you the humiliation.

(a beat)

Actually, you did me a favor by taking her. I wouldn't wish a woman like that on anyone. How old is your little girl? Just turned nine, didn't she? Isn't that cutting it a bit close to the date you went in?

Salim jumps on Fadel, trying to grab Fadel through the fence.

SALIM

I'll kill you! I'll kill you! You'll pay for this.

The soldier walks toward them and raises her weapon.

SOLDIER

Hey! Let go of him!

A beat. Salim sees her, and after a moment slowly backs away from the fence.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

You cool?

She waits a moment to see things settled down, then lowers her weapon and backs away. She keeps watching them with close attention.

SALIM

(still caught in his anger and humiliation)

It's all your fault, Fadel. You dragged me into this. You sent me on a hopeless mission. You knew what would happen, and you sent me anyway.

FADEL

That's what you think of me? I'm your brother, I would never do that to you.

SALIM

But you did.

FADEL

Tell yourself whatever helps you sleep at night, Salim.

(a beat)

Just think about my offer. Come work for me and I'll protect you.

SALIM

They'll jump me the moment I go through. You said "betrayal is hard to forget".

FADEL

I told you, I'll protect you. They will listen to me. What other choice do you have?

SALIM

Why are you doing this?

FADEL

I want to give you a chance. You are still my brother. You were young and you made a mistake. I can accept that. What I can't accept is a brother who's a collaborator and a traitor. Cross over to us, help us, fight for once in your life for something worth fighting for. And I will look after you.

SALIM

And while I'm at it, give up everything, right? That's what you want?

FADEL

What is everything? What do you even have, Salim? You're out of prison after ten years of running away. But you're out only to return to the same prison. Here, every day is a prison, Salim! This is our life and you can't escape that.

(a beat)

And don't think it will be any different in Tulkarem. They know about you there too. I suggest you choose to cross, cross on good terms. Take care of yourself; let me take care of you.

SALIM

But... Fadel, my family...

FADEL

What about your family here, Salim? You have family here too. Think how happy mom and dad will be to see you, after all this time. For years mom has been waiting for you to apologize and come back. She hasn't been the same since it happened. Do it for her.

SALIM

How is mom?

FADEL

Not so well. It's hard for her. It's a bad time. And people talk – that hurts her too.

SALIM

Does she still bake her fresh pitas every morning?

FADEL

Sometimes. Things are different now. But if you come back, Salim, I'm sure it will be good for her. She really misses you. You're still her eldest son, no matter what you did.

Salim looks at Nai'ma and the children, waiting in the distance, on the Israeli side.

SALIM

And what about them?

FADEL

What about them? They'll manage. Just like they've managed for the past ten years.

SALIM

And if I cross over, what exactly do you want me to do?

FADEL

This isn't the time. This place is crawling with soldiers. Cross and we'll see.

A beat – Salim makes up his mind.

SALIM

Yes, and as soon as I blink, someone will come to take his revenge on me and it will all be over.

The Soldier exists to get the Commander.

FADEL

You know what, Salim, that might happen. It's true, people are very angry with you here. They can't understand how you did what you did – naming people and getting them arrested? Explain it to me, Salim, how could you do something like that? You, who sat in prison, should have known what that would mean.

SALIM

Really, Fadel? Maybe if you had been in the Israeli prison, you'd have a clue. Do you know how they interrogate you? How they keep you awake for days and days, in a little cell, all alone? Do you know what kind of beatings you get? How you scream when they electrocute you? When an interrogator takes a kettle full of boiling water and pours it slowly, very slowly, on your head? Can you even imagine that? And then they come to talk to you, looking so nice. And before you know it, you've already told them something you can never take back, and they will use it against you, again and again and again. That's how it happens, Fadel. So simple.

Pause.

FADEL

So come, cross over to us. Join us, fight them. Work with me, we'll get our revenge.

SALIM

Never. You hear me, Fadel? Never. I'd rather be torn to shreds. I will never work for you again.

FADEL

Have it your way, ya akhi. Have it your way.

The Commander enters, Fadel sees him.

FADEL (CONT'D)

It's about time, isn't it? How long are these Israelis going to let you stay here? I'll be right here when you cross, you can tell me your decision then.

COMMANDER

Yalla, party's over.

(Arabic: Get moving)

SALIM

Salam, Fadel.

(Arabic: Goodbye)

FADEL

Salamat, Salim.

(Arabic: See you)

COMMANDER

Salamat, Salamat. Yalla, Get moving!

Fadel steps away from the fence and goes to wait with Wa'el, on the Gaza side.

SCENE 12

The Commander and the Soldier are standing outside the guardhouse. Salim is a few feet away from them, apparently not listening, but actually taking in every word.

COMMANDER

Any other guests coming to see him today? This is impossible, I have to close.

SOLDIER

I know. I have plans tonight, too. But what are we going to do with him?

COMMANDER

He's got to cross over. There's really no choice. I can't reach anyone, they probably won't call me back before tomorrow morning. And we can't stay here all night.

SOLDIER

No, no way. Especially after the complaint we got two months ago. You have to close.

COMMANDER

But what are we going to do with him?

SOLDIER

You want me to go over there and tell him there's no other option, and he has to cross?

COMMANDER

No, wait. Besides, if anybody has to tell him it's me.

SOLDIER

But, did you get what's going to happen to him if...

COMMANDER

I got it, I got it. But what can I do? Let him back into Israel? I'll get two years in prison for something like that. And I can't let him stay here after that complaint – I got so much flak for trying to be a little flexible. This has already gone on long enough to get me court-martialed.

SOLDIER

But did you hear his brother back there? He says they're going to kill him.

COMMANDER

(flirting)

I am always so impressed by your Arabic. Yeah, I got the gist of it. And I believe him. But it's their business, we can't get involved.

SOLDIER

That's true. But he's still here in our custody, we're responsible for him in a way.

COMMANDER

The prison service is responsible! They should have known where they were taking him. And a collaborator. You'd think they'd pick up the phone and take some responsibility.

SOLDIER

Oh, what do they care? They probably got what they wanted and now they don't give a fuck...

COMMANDER

We'll see. We'll see. It is getting too late. I'll go in to make a few last calls, even though I'm pretty sure no one's picking up.

He starts to leave, then returns.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Come help me. Maybe you'll get someone to answer.

They both go together to the guardhouse.

SCENE 13

Salim is left standing alone as everyone else walks away. He looks around. On the Gaza side are his brother and his men, standing by the fence. On the Israeli side are his wife and children, with Daud. Behind him are the soldiers.

Another 40 minutes goes by.

In despair, not knowing where to turn, he is left standing where he is, staring at the audience. A shout of pain comes out of him.

SALIM

Nai'ma, Nai'ma, Nai'ma...

Fadel, that liar. He's been that way since he was a child. Manipulating. And I always fall for it.

No, Nai'ma, I know you didn't betray me. You didn't cheat.

(He looks at Nai'ma. She is standing by the fence, laughing with the kids and Daud)

Ahhhhhh! Or maybe you did? If you did, I'd rather die.

After ten years, I can't take it anymore.

(he prays)

Just let everything be okay. Please. I just want a regular life, as regular as possible.

(a beat)

He can still come... If he comes, everything will be okay. He said he'd move us to America. We'll live in America, the children will learn English, I will learn English. We will start all over again.

No more Palestinians; No more Israelis. A clean start.

They brought me here by mistake. And he promised. So it's going to be okay. They'll never find us there.

And Fadel... Now he'll sit in prison, he'll see what it's really like in there. He thinks prison is paradise, but now he'll serve his time. Maybe now he'll see how they make you talk, how they make you inform. What they do to you in prison to break you. And just how alone you are in there.

A beat.

All the sleepless nights in a tiny tiny tiny cell, and interrogation after interrogation.

(MORE)

SALIM (CONT'D)

And beatings. And then came the promises. And the threats.

They threatened to take Nai'ma and the children back to Raza if I wouldn't testify.

They are not legally in the West Bank and it would be so easy to arrest them and throw them back in Raza.

And Na'ima can never go back to Raza after the way we left when we got married.

Of course, I knew she and Fadel were promised to each other since they were children, everyone knew. And you don't do things like that. I know that.

But she loved me, me! And I loved her! what's so wrong about that?

And why do I need to make this kind of choice? Who makes a man choose between his wife and his brother? Sell out my brother or lose my wife and stay imprisoned forever and ever in their interrogation rooms?

(a beat)

So I made a choice. I made a choice because I had no other options.

Yes, I signed a deal with the devil. But what else could I do?

(He glances back again, toward Israel and
Nai'ma)

Why hasn't he gotten here yet? Why? Nai'ma, Nai'ma. I'll forgive you for everything. I'll believe that you waited for me as a good wife should.

He must get here. He'll get here and take us far away.

(a beat)

But the statement! The statement!

If I signed it, maybe they don't need me anymore. Maybe it's as good as me testifying.

(he cries out)

Damn, those fuckers!

(he surrenders)

No, so he's not coming. He's not coming.

Nai'ma. Nai'ma. What have I done to us?

I guess they don't need me anymore. Maybe Fadel wasn't lying after all.

SCENE 14

Salim stays there for a few moments. Then the
Soldier approaches Salim from behind. He
doesn't see her. He is in his own pain.

SOLDIER

Hey –

She caught him by surprise, he jumps to his feet.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

The Commander told me to ask you if there's any progress. It's five to eight. This ends at eight, he's not going to let you stay any longer. You have to cross over.

SALIM

I need a little more time. Just a little bit.

(a beat)

Did anyone ask about me? Was anybody looking for me?

SOLDIER

On our side? No. There were all kinds of people here, but you talked to them, didn't you?

SALIM

Yes. But was there anyone else? An Israeli, maybe?

SOLDIER

No. Nobody.

SALIM

Okay. Thank you. Tell the Commander to wait just a bit longer. Just a bit.

SOLDIER

You have five minutes.

The soldier walks away. Salim heads towards the fence, to Nai'ma, calling her to come closer.

SCENE 15

SALIM

Nai'ma!

Nai'me comes to the fence on the Israeli side.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Did he call?

NAI'MA

Who?

SALIM

Him!

NAI'MA

No, no. Nobody called. We tried getting the Tulkarem municipality on the phone, maybe they could do something, but there's no answer. And that member of parliament, but we couldn't get him either. They said he was on vacation until next week. I don't know who else to call, Salim.

SALIM

Try him again.

NAI'MA

Again?

SALIM

Call him!

Nai'ma dials, she waits a moment.

NAI'MA

There's no answer. No one's answering.

SALIM

Again!

Nai'ma tries again, no answer.

SALIM (CONT'D)
(holding back tears)

Again!

NAI'MA

They're not picking up, Salim! They're not picking up! What is this for, Salim? Who am I calling? What good will it do?

SALIM

Who do you think? The Israelis, that's who. The Israelis, the Shin-Bet, those who promised to save us.

A beat.

NAI'MA

The Israelis? These are the people you trust? Them?! The ones who put you in prison? Who have let me see you through bulletproof glass for the past ten years?

SALIM

The ones who put me in prison, and the ones who let me out early. They promised to help.

NAI'MA

They promised and they promised. But what did you promise in return, Salim?

SALIM

What do you think?

Salim looks toward Gaza, to Fadel. Nai'ma follows his gaze.

NAI'MA

I can't believe it.

SALIM

Believe it, Believe it! What is there not to believe?

(a beat)

It was all for you, ya albi.

(Arabic: my heart)

To protect you. To come home to you. To live together and have a normal life. To see the children before they're all grown up. Before they can't recognize me anymore. To hold them, to smell them. For you. For us.

NAI'MA

What did they do to you in there, Salim?

SALIM

What did they do to me?

(a beat)

They crushed me, Nai'ma. They humiliated me and terrified me. They said that they would take away the thing I cared about most. They would have sent you and the kids back to Raza, and keep me in prison for years and years. And that would have been the end of everything.

(MORE)

SALIM (CONT'D)

But it was possible to prevent all of it— all they wanted was for me to testify against Fadel. Just testify against him and I could get my life back, get out of that terrible prison and go back to living.

NAI'MA

But what kind of life can we have now, Salim? After you've sold out your brother? How can we go on living? What normal life could we build while he sits in prison? Betraying your brother? Despite everything, he is still your brother!

SALIM

(losing his cool)

I don't understand, I don't understand – suddenly you're defending him? Now? Maybe you've changed your mind? Maybe suddenly he is who you really want?

NAI'MA

What are you saying, Salim?

SALIM

Yes, and that's nothing compared to what I heard from your dear Fadel. Why did you come here with Daud?

NAI'MA

What? What do you mean? What are you implying?

SALIM

I'm asking you one question. Why did you come here with Daud?

NAI'MA

Have you no shame? How was I supposed to get here? In what car? I can barely take care of the children, buy them clothes and books for school. And you dare complain about someone who's helping us? I don't know what we'd do without Daud's help.

SALIM

That's what I thought.

NAI'MA

Salim!

SALIM

I knew it. I knew it... It was all for you, Nai'ma. To be with you again. When we ran away together, it was pure happiness. Too bad it lasted so little time. I thought, imagined, how I'd come home and... well, it doesn't matter anymore, never mind.

(MORE)

SALIM (CONT'D)

(a beat)

Maybe try again. Call him. One last time.

The Commander comes out from his office, to the soldier.

COMMANDER

One minute.

The Soldier opens the gate to Gaza, they are getting ready to force Salim to cross.

NAI'MA

(calling, her hands shaking.)

No, there's no answer Salim. Nothing.

SALIM

Okay. Okay. I understand how this works now.

He looks at Nai'ma, but he can't really see her anymore. He had made his decision.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Fine. If they aren't answering, I'll do it myself.

NAI'MA

Salim, what are you doing?

SALIM

Take good care of the kids, Nai'ma.

A beat.

He turns to Fadel, makes a step towards him.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Take care of mom Fadel.

He stands there for a moment and then turns and walks away from Fadel, towards the soldiers.

Salim, don't.

NAI'MA

Salim keeps walking. He looks around, everyone is standing, looking at him. Then he makes up his mind, and start moving quickly towards the gate leading to Israel.

Stop!

COMMANDER

You can't go there, stop.

SOLDIER

Don't do this!

COMMANDER
(shouting)

Salim, don't!

FADEL

Salim keeps walking, faster now, the soldiers hold up their rifles.

Salim, come back!

NAI'MA

Stop!

COMMANDER
(shouting)

Salim keeps going. He runs towards the crossing's entry on the Israeli side and disappears.

The stage goes dark.

A loud gunshot is heard.

Nai'ma shouts. Silence. The only sound heard is Nai'ma crying.

End of play.