

IN FLAMES

Adaptation of Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*

Theatre Workshop in English 2022

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ACT 1: Nawal's Fire/ نار نوال

1. Notary

Day. Summer. Notary's office.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: For sure, for sure, for sure, I'd rather watch birds in the sky. From here, you see cars and the shopping center. When I was on the other side of the building, my office looked out over the highway. It wasn't the Taj Nepal, but I finally hung a sign in my window: Alphonse Lebel, Notary. At rush hour it was great publicity. Now I'm here on this side and I've got a view of the shopping center. A shopping center's not a gaggle of geese. Your mother's the one who taught me that geese live in gaggles. I'm sorry. I hate to mention your mother because of the tragedy that has struck, but life goes on, as they say. C'est la vie. Come in, come in, come in, you can't stay in the hallway. This is my new office. Right. Well... I would've preferred to meet you under other circumstances, but hell isn't paved with good circumstances. Death can't be foreseen. Death breaks all promises. I loved your mother. I'm telling you that, straight and narrow: I loved your mother. She often talked to me about the two of you. A bit. Occasionally. Just like that. She'd say: the twins. The twin sister, the twin brother. You know how she was, she never said anything to anyone. I mean long before she stopped saying anything at all, she already said nothing and she didn't say anything about the two of you. That's how she was. When she died, it was raining. In her country it never rains.



2. Last Will and Testament

Notary. Twin brother and sister.

ALPHONSE LABEL: The Last Will and Testament of Madame Nawal Marwan. The opening of the will takes place in the presence of her two children: Janine Marwan and Simon Marwan, both twenty-two years of age and both born at the Saint-François Hospital in Ville Émard.... That's not far from here... According to Madame Nawal Marwan's wishes and in keeping with her rights and the regulations, Notary Alphonse Lebel is named executor of her last will and testament... I want you to know that that was your mother's decision. I was against it myself, I advised her against it, but she insisted. I could have refused but I couldn't.

The notary opens the envelope.

The will is read.

All my assets are to be divided equally between the twins Janine and Simon Marwan, my off-spring, flesh of my flesh. I leave my money, my clothes and furniture.

Special requests: I leave my black fountain pen to my friend, Notary Alphonse Lebel. I leave the khaki jacket with the number seventy-two on the back to Janine Marwan. I leave the red notebook to Simon Marwan.

The notary takes out the three objects

Burial: To notary Alphonse Lebel. My notary and friend, take the twins with you, bury me naked, bury me without a coffin face to the ground. Against the world. As a farewell gesture, you will each throw a pail of cold water on my body. Then you will seal my grave. Let no stone be placed on my grave, nor my name engraved anywhere. No epitaph for those who don't keep their promises, no



epitaph for those who keep the silence. No stone, no name on the stone.

To Janine and Simon, Simon and Janine. Childhood is a knife stuck in the throat. It can't be easily removed. Janine, notary Lebel will give you an envelope. This envelope is not for you. It is for your father, your father and Simon's. Find him and give him this envelope. Simon, notary Lebel will give you an envelope. This envelope is not for you. It is for your brother, your brother and Janine's. Find him and give him this envelope. Once these envelopes have been delivered to recipients you will be given a letter, the silence will be broken and then a stone can be placed on my grave and my name engraved on the stone in the sun.

Long silence.

SIMON:

She had to piss us off right to the very end! That bitch! Fucking bitch! For ages now, we've been thinking, the bitch is going to croak any day now, she'll finally stop fucking up our lives, And then, bingo! She finally croaks! But, surprise! It's not over yet! Shit! She really calculated everything, the fucking whore! Just before she died, she asked herself how she could fuck up our lives even more and she figured it out! She could write her will, her fucking will!

ALPHONSE LABEL:

She wrote it. Five years ago.

SIMON:

I don't give a shit. You bet we're going to bury her face down! You bet! We'll spit on her grave.

ALPHONSE LEBEL:

Listen! She's dead. Your mother is dead. I mean she is someone who is dead. Nevertheless. Someone who was young, who was an adult, who was old and who died! You can't ignore that! I mean, the woman lived a whole life, for heaven's sake, and that has to count for something somehow.



SIMON: Who gives a shit if she's dead. She didn't have a heart; her heart was a brick. A brick, goddammit, a brick!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Your names are in her last will and testament—

SIMON: Big deal! I don't want her money; I don't want her notebook.... C'mon! What a joke! Her last wishes: "Go find your father and your brother!" Why didn't she find them herself if it was so fucking important?! Why didn't she worry more about us, the bitch, if she was so concerned about a son somewhere else? When she talks about us in her goddamn will, why doesn't she use the word my children? The word son, the word daughter! I mean, I'm not stupid! I'm not stupid! Why does she always say the twins? The twin sister, the twin brother, "the offspring of my flesh," like we were a pile of vomit, a pile of shit she had to get rid of! Why?!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Listen. I understand!

SIMON: What can you understand, you dickhead?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: I understand, it's not often we find out that the father we thought was dead is still alive and that we have a brother somewhere in this world!

SIMON: There's no father, no brother. It's bullshit! You don't know her!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: I know her in a different way.

Beat

SIMON: Anyway, I don't feel like discussing this with you!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: She had her reasons.

SIMON: I don't feel like discussing this with you. Look I've got a boxing match in ten days we'll go to a funeral home, we'll buy a coffin, we'll put her in the coffin, a stone on the earth and her name on the stone, and that's it.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Those are not your mother's last wishes!



SIMON: How can you take her seriously? C'mon! For years, she spent day after day at the courthouse, attending the trials of all sorts of sickos and murderers, then, from one day to the next, she shuts up, never says another word! Never! For years! Five years without a word.

(To himself, while Lebel continues)

Jesus Christ! Goddamn son of a bitching fucking shit, shit, shit....

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Sure, sure, sure, nobody understood why she stopped talking for such a long time, but the other day, the other night, before she died, they called you, and she spoke. You know that you can't deny it, I mean, it was a present she was offering you! The most beautiful present she could give you! The day and the hour of your birth, she spoke again! And what does she say? She says:

JANINE: "Now that we're together, everything feels better..."

ALPHONSE LEBEL: "Now that we're together, everything feels better....!" I mean that's no ordinary sentence! C'mon! The nurse heard her. He heard her. Why would he make that up? The facts are there: your mother is asking each of us to do something for her, those are her wishes, even someone sentenced to death has a right to his last wishes!

Simon exits. Janine leaves her envelope with the khaki jacket on the table.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Ok, I'll keep the envelopes. I'll keep them. Some things take time.

Janine stays. The scene disappears.



3. Graph Theory, Peripheral Vision

JANINE: Mathematics as you have known them so far were all about finding strict and definitive answers to strict and definitive problems. The mathematics you will encounter in this course on graph theory are totally different since we will be dealing with insoluble problems that will always lead to other problems. People around you will insist that what you are wrestling with is useless, that is exactly what people will find the hardest to forgive. You won't be able to argue in your defense, since your arguments themselves will be of an absolutely exhausting theoretical complexity. Welcome to pure mathematics, in other words, to the world of solitude.

Gym. Simon with Ralph.

RALPH: You know why you lost your last fight, Simon? And you know why you lost the last one before that?

SIMON: I wasn't in shape, that's why.

RALPH: You're never going to qualify if this keeps up. Put on your gloves.

JANINE: Let's take a simple polygon with five sides labelled a, b, c, d and e. Let's call this polygon Polygon k. Now let's imagine that this polygon represents the floor plan of a house where a family lives. And one member of the family is posted in each corner of the house, let's replace a, b, c, d and e by the grandmother, the father, the mother, the son and the daughter who live together in Polygon k. Now let's ask ourselves who, from his or her position, sees whom. The grandmother sees the father, the mother and the daughter. The father sees the mother and the grandmother. The mother sees the grandmother, the father, the son and the daughter. The son sees the mother and the sister. And the sister sees the brother, the mother and the grandmother.



SIMON: Okay, okay!

JANINE: That's what we call a peripheral vision problem. We call this the theoretical application of the family living in Polygon k . Now, let's remove the walls of the house and draw arcs between the members of the family who can see each other. The drawing this creates is called the visibility graph of Polygon k .

RALPH: There are three things you have to remember.

JANINE: So there are three parameters we'll be dealing with over the next three years:

RALPH: One: You're the strongest!

JANINE: One: The theoretical application of polygons...

RALPH: Two: No pity for the guy you're facing

JANINE: Two: the visibility graphs of polygons

RALPH: Three: And if you win, you become a pro!

JANINE: And three, polygons and nature of polygons. The problem is as follows: for every simple polygon, I can easily draw its visibility graph but, what is the shape of the house where the members of the family represented in this application live? Try to draw the polygon.

Gong. Simon attacks immediately and punches into his trainer's hands.

RALPH: You're not there, you're not concentrating,

SIMON: My mother died!

RALPH: I know, but the best way to get over your mother's death is to win your next fight. So go in there and fight! You'll never succeed otherwise.

Simon and Ralph leave.

JANINE: You'll never succeed. All graph theory is essentially based on this problem, which remains for the time being impossible to solve. And it's this impossibility that is beautiful.



4. The Hypothesis to be Proven

ALPHONSE LEBEL: I'm glad you've come back. Glad for your mother's sake.

JANINE: Do you have the envelope?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Here it is. This envelope isn't for you, it's for your father. Your mother wants you to find him and give it to him. She also left you this khaki jacket with the number seventy-two on the back.

Janine takes the jacket and is about to leave.

Do you believe your father is alive?

JANINE: In mathematics, 1 plus 1 doesn't equal 1.9 or 2.2. It equals 2. Whether you believe it or not, it equals 2. We all belong to a polygon. I thought I knew my place in the polygon I belong to. I thought I was the point that only sees her brother Simon and her mother Nawal. Today, I found out that, from the position I hold, it is also possible for me to see my father, and I learned that there is another member of this polygon, another brother. The visibility graph I've always drawn is wrong. Where do I stand in the polygon? To find out, I have to prove a hypothesis. I never saw my father's body or his grave. It is therefore possible, between 1 and infinity, that my father is still alive. Goodbye, Monsieur Lebel.

Janine exits.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Janine!

NAWAL: *(calling)* Wahab!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Janine! Janine!

Alphonse Lebel comes back into the office, takes out his cellphone and dials a number.

NAWAL: *(calling)* Wahab!

WAHAB: *(in the distance)* Nawal!

NAWAL: *(calling)* Wahab!

WAHAB: *(in the distance)* Nawal!



ALPHONSE LEBEL: Your mother met your father when she was very, very young.

NAWAL: *(calling)* Wahab!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: I just wanted to tell you, I don't know if you knew that. They were almost kids.

WAHAB: *(in the distance)* Nawal!



5. Something is There

Dawn. A forest. A rock. White trees. Nawal (age fourteen)

NAWAL: Wahab! Don't say a word. No. Don't speak. If you say a word, a single word, they could kill me. Shhhh! Don't say anything. Don't say anything.

She falls silent.

I ran all night. I knew I'd find you at the rock where the white trees stand. I'm going to tell you. I wanted to shout it so the whole village would hear, so the trees would hear, so the night and the moon and the stars would hear. But I couldn't. I have to whisper it in your ear, Wahab.

She whispers this in his ear.

I have a baby in my belly, Wahab! Isn't it amazing? It's magnificent and horrible, isn't it? It's an abyss, and there are no more words. When my grandmother told me, an ocean exploded in my head.

WAHAB: Maybe your grandmother is wrong.

NAWAL: Nazira is never wrong.

WAHAB: We won't hide it.

NAWAL: They'll kill us. You first.

WAHAB: We'll explain to them.

NAWAL: Do you think that they'll listen to us?

WAHAB: What are you afraid of, Nawal?

NAWAL: Aren't you afraid? (*beat*) Where will we be, you and me, in fifty years?



WAHAB: Listen to me, Nawal. This night is a gift. It might be crazy for me to say that, but I have a heart and it is strong. It is patient. You and I will remain, you and I and our child. Your face and my face in the same face.

NAWAL: Now that we're together, everything feels better.

WAHAB: We will be together. Go home, Nawal. If you feel scared, think of me like I'll think of you. Don't forget: now that we're together, everything feels better.

Wahab leaves.



6. Carnage

In Nawal's house.

Mother and daughter (age fourteen).

NAWAL: Grandma told me. She said: "You are expecting a baby"
It's in my belly.

JIHANE: Forget your belly! This child has nothing to do with you.
Nothing to do with your family.

NAWAL: I put my hand here and I can see his face.

JIHANE: It doesn't matter what you see. It doesn't matter what
Nazira told you. This child doesn't exist.

NAWAL: And when it arrives?

JIHANE: It still won't exist.

NAWAL: I don't understand.

JIHANE: You've gone too far Nawal. You're going to forget it.

NAWAL: A person can't forget her belly.

JIHANE: A person can forget.

NAWAL: I won't forget.

JIHANE: Then you will have to choose. Keep this child and this
instant, this very instant, you will take off those clothes
that don't belong to you and leave this house, leave your
family, your village, your mountains, your sky and your
stars, and leave me...

NAWAL: Mother.

JIHANE: Or stay and kneel down, Nawal, kneel down.

NAWAL: Mother.



JIHANE: Take off your clothes or kneel.

Nawal kneels.

JIHANE: Fatima will come and take this baby from your belly. She will take it and give it to whoever she wants.



7. A Knife Stick in The Throat

Nawal (age fifteen) with her grandmother, Nazira.

NAWAL: Now that we're together, everything feels better. Now that we're together, everything feels better. Now that we're together, everything feels better. Now that we're together, everything feels better. Now that we're together, everything feels better.

NAZIRA: Be patient, Nawal. You only have one more month to go.

NAWAL: I should have left, Grandmother, and not knelt, I should have given back my clothes, everything, and left the house, the village, everything.

NAZIRA: Poverty is to blame for all of this, Nawal. There's no beauty in our lives. No beauty. Just the anger of a hard and hurtful life.

WAHAB'S VOICE: Nawal! Nawal, it's me.

NAWAL: Wahab!

WAHAB: Listen to me, Nawal. I don't have much time. They're taking me away, far from here and far from you. (*Gives her a clown nose*) I brought you a present!

NAWAL: A clown nose? Where did you take it from?

WAHAB: Remember the travelling circus? Remember how hard you laughed?

NAWAL: I don't understand... You went back to the circus?

WAHAB: I sneaked into their campsite...

NAWAL: You are crazy!



WAHAB: I know! I almost got eaten by the lion and I had to negotiate with three snakes to walk into the clown's tent. He was sleeping, so I took his nose and ran!

NAWAL: Wahab... Wahab.

WAHAB: I love the sound of your laughter, Nawal. This is for you. And for our son. Tonight, childhood is a knife they've stuck in my throat. I will have to live without you. But no matter where I am, we will be together. There is nothing more beautiful than being together. When you give birth to our child, tell him how much I love him, tell him. (*He leaves*).

NAWAL: I'll tell him, I promise you I'll tell him. "No matter what happens, I will always love you." I'll tell him for you and for me. And I'll go back to the rock where the white trees stand and I'll say goodbye to childhood, too. And my childhood will be a knife stuck in my throat.

The sound of a gunshot is heard.

NAWAL: Wahab!!



10. Nawal's Burial

Cemetery day. Alphonse Lebel, Janine and Simon at a graveside. Antoine is in the corner, with a box in his hands. Alphonse Lebel answers the phone.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Hello, Alphonse Lebel, Notary. Yes, I called you. I've been trying to reach you for two hours! What's going on? Nothing. That's the problem. We were supposed to have one pail of water at the graveside, and it's not here. We're in the cemetery, where do you think we are? We're here for Nawal Marwan's burial. One pail of sand! Of course, it was understood. Clearly understood. Honestly! I mean, we're not difficult: no coffin, no tombstone, nothing. Simple. We're making it very simple, as she wanted to. That's right. One. No. Not three, one.

He hangs up.

SIMON: Why are you doing all this?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: All what?

SIMON: All this. The burial. The last wishes.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Because the woman in that hole, face to the ground, the woman I always called Madame Nawal, was my friend. My friend. I don't know if that means something to you, but it means a lot to me.

ANTOINE: I am sorry for your loss.

JANINE: Did you know my mother? Nawal Marwan?

ANTOINE: I was his nurse at the hospital. I called your brother when she broke her silence.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Antoine Ducharme?

ANTOINE: That's right.

JANINE: It's very kind of you to be here.

ANTOINE: I can still hear Mrs Marwan's voice ringing in my ears. "Now that we're together..."



JANINE: ...everything feels better”.

ANTOINE: Those were her exact words.

JANINE: She had been perfectly silent for five years.

ANTOINE: I know. Ever since your mother died, I’ve wanted to call you, you and your brother. In the course of all the time spent at her bedside, I got dizzy listening to her silence. One night, I woke up with a strange idea. Perhaps she speaks when I’m not there? Perhaps she talks to herself?

SIMON: Sure!

ANTOINE: So I brought in a tape recorder.

SIMON: You did what?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: You had no right to do this.

ANTOINE: I know, I know. But I promised myself I’d never listen to the tapes. Just record without ever knowing. Just record.

SIMON: Record what, for fuck’s sake!

ANTOINE: Silence, her silence. I recorded more than five hundred hours. All the cassettes are here. I came to give them to you. Please take them.

Janine takes the box.

JANINE: Antoine, what did you do with her all that time?

ANTOINE: Nothing. I often just sat beside her. And talked to her. Sometimes I played some music. And I danced with her.

SIMON: You danced with?

ANTOINE: We danced.

A member of the company arrives with one pail of sand.

ALPHONSE LABEL: At last!

Lebel, Simon and Janine pick up a pail, throw sand into the hole and leave.



ACT 2: Childhood on Fire/ الطفولة على النار

11. The Name of the Stone

Nawal (age nineteen) at her grandmother's grave.

She is engraving Nazira's name on the stone in Arabic.

NAWAL: Noun, aleph, zain, yé, ra! Nazira. Your name lights up your grave. I came into the village by the low road. My mother. was standing there, in the middle of the street. She was waiting for me, I think. She must've expected something. Because of the date. We stared at each other like two strangers. The villagers gathered around. My mother asked: *Why are you here?* "I've come back to engrave my grandmother's name on her tombstone." They laughed. "You know: how to write now?" I said yes. They laughed. One man spit on me. Another man said: "You know how to write but you don't know how to defend yourself." I took a book out of my pocket. I hit a man so hard, he passed out. My mother watched me until I reached the fountain. I've engraved your name grandmother, now I'm leaving. I'm going to find my son. I kept my promise to you, I'll keep my promise to him: "No matter what happens, I will always love you." Thank you, Nazira.

Nawal exits.



12. Sawda

Nawal (age nineteen) on a sun-parched road.

Sawda is there.

SAWDA: I saw you. I watched you from afar, I saw you engrave your grandmother's name on her gravestone.

NAWAL: Why did you follow me?

SAWDA: I wanted to see you write. To see if it really existed. The rumour spread so fast this morning. You were back, after three years. In the camp, people were saying: "Nawal is back, she knows how to write, she knows how to read.". I saw you hit the man with your book, I thought of all the words, all the letters, burning with the heat of the anger on your face.

NAWAL: What do you want?

SAWDA: Teach me how to read and write.

NAWAL: I'm leaving. I'm leaving the village. So I can't teach you.

SAWDA: I'll follow you. I know where you're going.

NAWAL: How could you know?

SAWDA: I knew Wahab. The night they took him away, he was shouting your name.

NAWAL: I want to find my son.

SAWDA: Take me with you and teach me how to read. I'll help you in exchange. We'll be stronger together. If you're sad, I'll sing.



13. Brother and Sister

SIMON: Your colleagues are looking for you. They keep calling me, everyone`s calling: “Janine has stopped coming to the university. We don’t know where Janine is. The students don’t know what to do.

JANINE: I’m fine. You can leave.

SIMON: No, you’re not fine and I won’t leave. You have left, and you’re all I have left. And you’re acting like her.

JANINE: Don’t shout.

SIMON: You’ve stopped talking. Like her. She locked herself in. You lock yourself in. You refuse to talk.

JANINE: Simon, come sit beside me. Listen. Listen for a bit.

SIMON: You’re listening to silence!

JANINE: It’s her silence.

SIMON: You’re going crazy Janine. You throw the tapes away. You go back to the university. You give your courses and you finish your Ph.D.

JANINE: I don’t give a damn about my Ph.D.!

SIMON: You don’t give a damn about anything!

JANINE. There’s no point in trying to explain it, you wouldn’t understand. One plus one equals two.

SIMON: I forgot; we have to talk to you in numbers!

JANINE: But there’s something in my mother’s silence that I need to understand.

SIMON: And I’m telling you there’s nothing to understand.

JANINE: Leave me alone, Simon. I’m your sister, not your mother. You’re my brother, not my father.



SIMON: It's all the same thing.

JANINE: No, it's not the same!



14. Orphanage

Nawal (age nineteen) and Sawda on road in the sun.

SAWDA & NAWAL: Aleph, bé, tâ, szâ, jîm, hâ, khâ, dâl, dââl, rrâ, zâ, sîn, shîn, sâd, dââd, tââ, zââ, ainn, rain, fa, kââf, kaf, lâm, mime, noun, hah, lamaleph, wâw, ya.

NAWAL: That's the alphabet. Twenty-nine sounds. Twenty-nine letters. Those are your weapons. Your bullets. You have to remember them. And how to put them together, to make words.

SAWDA: Look. We've reached the first village in the South. The first orphanage is here. Let's go ask.

Nawal (age nineteen) and Sawda in the orphanage in Kafr Rayat with a Doctor.

DOCTOR: You shouldn't come. The orphanage is empty now.

NAWAL: Why?

DOCTOR: Because of the war.

NAWAL: And where are the children who were there?

DOCTOR: The rebels arrived. They took all the children away.

SAWDA: Why did the rebels take the children?

DOCTOR: There must be a reason, but the story can go on forever, from anger to anger, from rape to murder, back to the beginning of time.

NAWAL: Which way did they go?

DOCTOR: They were headed south. To the camps.

NAWAL: I'm trying to find a child. A boy of four. He arrived here a few days after his birth from the North. A woman called Fatima took him away from me.

DOCTOR: I'm a doctor, not an administrator. Go look in the camps, down south.



NAWAL: If I could turn back the clock, he would still be in my arms... He turned four today. He knows how to walk; he knows how to talk and he must be afraid of the dark.

SAWDA: Where are you going? Where are you going?

NAWAL: South! Do you think there's a bus on this road?

SAWDA: Yes, it's the one the refugees take back to the camp.

NAWAL: Let's go!



15. Where to Begin

- JANINE: I don't know where to begin.
- ANTOINE: You have to begin at the beginning.
- JANINE: There's no logic.
- ANTOINE: When did your mother stop talking?
- JANINE: In the summer of '97. In August. On the twentieth. The day of our seventeenth birthday. Mine and Simon's. She came home and she refused to talk. Period.
- ANTOINE: What happened that day?
- JANINE: I don't know. At the time she was following some preliminary hearings at the International Criminal Tribunal.
- ANTOINE: Why?
- JANINE: They were related to the war in the country where she was born.
- ANTOINE: And on that particular day?
- JANINE: Nothing. I read and reread the minutes a hundred times, trying to understand.
- ANTOINE: You never found anything else?
- JANINE: Nothing. Just a little photograph. She'd already shown it to me. Her, when she was thirty-five, with one of her friends. Look.
- ANTOINE: They're back in your mother's country.
- JANINE: The trees are parasol pines. They're found throughout the region.
- ANTOINE: And there's something written on the burnt-out bus in the background, Kfar Rayat.



JANINE: One of the longest chapters of the documents I found concerns a prison built during the war in Kfar Rayat.

ANTOINE: Have you noticed that just above her hand, she has...?

JANINE: No, what is it?

ANTOINE: The butt of a gun. Yes, it's a gun! Her friend has one too, you can see the outline under her blouse.

JANINE: Really? I didn't notice this! What were they doing with guns?

ANTOINE: Who knows? What year was the prison built?

JANINE: 1978. According to the tribunal records.

ANTOINE: Good. Now we know that your mother, towards the end of the '70s, was in the vicinity of the village of Kfar Rayat, where a prison was built. She had a friend whose name we don't know and both of them carried guns. What are you going to do now?

JANINE: Buy an airplane ticket.



16. Lawns in the Suburbs

ALPHONSE LEBEL: I'm sorry about the construction work. They've even changed the bus route. All the buses on this line stop here and every time a bus stops, I think of your mother...

SIMON: Okay, fine. Can we get this over with? I've got a fight tonight.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Sure, we can settle the paperwork right away.

JANINE: Why do you think of our mother every time a bus stops?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Because of her phobia!

JANINE: What phobia?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Her... bus phobia. Here are the papers and they're all in order. Didn't you know?

JANINE: No!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: She never took a bus.

JANINE: Did she tell you why?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Yes. When she was young, she saw a bus full of civilians riddled with machine-gun fire, right in front of her. A horrible sight.

JANINE: How do you know that?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: She told me.

Alphonse hands them papers. Janine and Simon sign where he indicates.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: So these papers settle your mother's estate. Except for her last wishes. At least, in your case, Simon.

SIMON: Why in my case?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Because you still haven't taken the envelope to be delivered to your brother.

Simon glances at Janine.

JANINE: Yes, I've taken mine.



SIMON: I don't get it.

Sounds of the jackhammers.

JANINE: What don't you get?

SIMON: I don't get what you're up to.

JANINE: Nothing.

SIMON: Why didn't you tell me?

JANINE: Simon, it's hard enough as it is.

SIMON: What are you going to do, Janine? Run around everywhere shouting: "Papa, papa, where are you? I'm your daughter." This is no mathematical problem, for chrissakes. There is no solution. There's nothing left.

JANINE: I don't want to discuss this with you, Simon.

SIMON: ... no father, no brother, just you and me.

JANINE: Exactly what did she say about the bus?

SIMON: What are you going to do? Fuck! Where are you going to start looking for him?

JANINE: What did she say?

SAWDA: *(screaming)* Nawal!

SIMON: Forget about the bus and answer me! Where are you going to find him?

Sounds of jackhammers.

JANINE: What did she tell you?

SAWDA: *(screaming)* Nawal!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: She told me she had just arrived in a town...

SAWDA: *(to Janine)* Have you seen a girl named Nawal?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Travelling on a bus...



SAWDA: *(screaming)* Nawal!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Packed with people.

SAWDA: *(screaming)* Nawal!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Some men came running up, they blocked the way of the bus, doused it with gasoline and then some others arrived with machine guns and...

Long sequence of jackhammer noise.

SAWDA: *(screaming)* Nawal!

SIMON: Janine! Come back, Janine!

NAWAL: I was in the bus, Sawda, I was with them! When they doused us with gas, I screamed: "I'm not from the camp. I'm looking for my child, one of the children they kidnapped." So they let me off the bus, and then, then they opened fire, and in a flash, the bus went up in flames, it went up in flames with everyone inside, the old people, the children, the women, everyone!

SAWDA: There is no time left. Time is like a chicken with its head cut off, racing around madly



17. The Very Heart of the Polygon

Simon is dressing for his fight.

Janine, with a backpack, is holding a cellphone.

JANINE:

Simon, it's Janine. I'm at the airport, Simon. I'm calling to tell you that I'm leaving for her country. I'm going to try to find this father of ours, and if I find him, if he's still alive, I'll give him the envelope. I'm not doing it for her, I'm doing it for myself. And for you. But first, we have to discover our mother's past, her life during all those years she hid from us. I'm going to hang up and tumble headfirst into a world far from here, far from the strict geometry that has defined my life, to the very heart of the polygon. Simon, are you crying? Are you crying?

Simon's fight. Simon is knocked out.



ACT 3: Janine's Fire/ نار جانين

18. Life is Around the Knife

Sawda and Nawal (age forty) are leaving the village. Morning.

A Militiaman appears.

MILITIAMAN: Who are you? Where are you coming from? The roads are closed.

NAWAL: We've come from the North and we're on our way to Kfar Rayat.

MILITIAMAN: How do we know you're not the two women we've been looking for? Our entire company is looking for them. *(silence)*. You are putting ideas into people's heads!

Beat.

You see those shoes? I killed the man who was wearing them, looking him in the eye. He told me: "We're from the same country, the same blood," and I smashed his skull. The first time, you hesitate. You don't know how tough a skull can be. And you don't know where to stab your knife. The worst isn't stabbing the knife, it's pulling it out, because all the muscles contract and hold on to the knife. The muscles know that's where life is. Around the knife. The first time is hard. Then it gets Easier.

The Militiaman grabs Nawal and holds a knife to her throat.

I'm going to slit your throat and we'll see if the one who sings has a pretty voice, and the one who thinks still has any bright ideas.

Sawda takes out a gun and fires one shot.



The Militiaman falls.

SAWDA: Nawal, I'm afraid he's right. "The first time is hard, then it gets easier."

Sawda fires another shot into the Militiaman's body.



19. Kfar Rayat

Janine is in the Kfar Rayat prison. The guide is with her. She is taking photos.

GUIDE: I used to be a guide up north, I did the Roman ruins. My speciality. Now I do the Kfar Rayat prison. It turned into a museum in 2000, to revive the tourist trade. This is the most famous cell in Kar Rayat prison. Cell number seven. People make pilgrimages here. It was the cell of the woman who sings.

JANINE: The woman who sings?

GUIDE: A legend. She was a prisoner here for five years. When the others were being tortured, she'd sing. No one knew her name. They just had serial numbers. The woman who sings was number seventy-two. It's a famous number around here.

JANINE: Did you say number seventy-two?!

GUIDE: Yes, why?

JANINE: Do you know any of these two women?

GUIDE: No. Who are they?

JANINE: How long ago was this prison built?

GUIDE: 1978. The year of the massacres in the refugee camps of Kfar Riad and Kfar Matra. The soldiers...

JANINE: Do you know anyone who worked here?

GUIDE: The janitor at the school. She was a guard here back then. Where are you going?

JANINE: I need to speak to the school janitor.

GUIDE: Her name is Fatima. She will remember the massacres: the soldiers surrounded the camps. They killed everything in sight. A huge wound in the flank of the country.

Janine exits.



20. Friendship

Nawal (age forty) and Sawda

SAWDA: They entered the camps when everyone was asleep. They plunged their weapons into their sleep and they murdered their dreams! The dreams of men, of women, of children who were sleeping in the great cradle of the night!

NAWAL: What are you going to do?

SAWDA: I'm going into every house. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that's what they say!

NAWAL: So now you want to go into the houses and kill men, women and children!

SAWDA: They killed my parents, my cousins, my neighbours, it's the same thing.

NAWAL: Sawda, think about it. You are a victim and you're going to kill everyone who crosses your path, and then you'll be the murderer. You know how to sing, Sawda, you know how to sing!

SAWDA: I don't want to sing after everything I've seen and heard! They stormed into the camps like madmen. Everything was on fire, Nawal, everything went up in flames. One militiaman was preparing the death of three brothers. The militiamen pulled their mother by the hair, stood her in front of her sons and one of them shouted:

MILITIAMAN: Choose, choose which one you want to save. Choose or shoot all three of them. I'm going to count to three, and at three, I'm going to kill all three of them. Choose!

SAWDA: I could see her. Unable to speak, unable to think, shaking her head, looking from one son to the next!



MOTHER: What was the point of bearing them just to see their blood splattered against a wall?

MILITIAMAN: Choose, choose!

MOTHER: How dare you, look at me, I could be your mother!

MILITIAMAN: Don't insult my mother! Choose!

MOTHER: Nidal! Nidal! I choose Nidal!!

SAWDA: And she collapsed and the militiaman shot the youngest two. The two bodies lay at her feet. The mother stood up and she began to wail that she had killed her two sons. She kept screaming that she had killed her two sons!

NAWAL: Listen to what I'm saying, Sawda: in a situation like this, that woman's pain, your pain and mine, the pain of those who died that night, is too monstrous to be calculated.

SAWDA: So what can we do? What can we do? Just fold our arms and wait? Are we supposed to stick to our books and our alphabet where everything is so beautiful, so extraordinary, so interesting?! Words! What good are words if I don't know what I should do today?

NAWAL: Sawda: I think of my son every day. He must be twenty-five now, old enough to love, old enough to kill, old enough to suffer. So don't think I can't feel that woman's pain. It's inside me, like a poison. And I swear, Sawda, that I would be the first to grab the bombs, wrap them around me, and blow myself up with a joy you can't imagine. But I promised Nazira, my grandmother, that I would learn to read, to write and to speak so I could escape poverty and hatred.

SAWDA: So what can we do?



NAWAL: Let me tell you what we can do. We'll go after one of them. Just one. And we're going to hurt.

SAWDA: Who are you thinking of?

NAWAL: Chad.

SAWDA: The paramilitary leader? We'll never get to him.

NAWAL: The girl who teaches his children used to be my student. I'm going to replace her for a week. I'll teach his daughters.

SAWDA: And then?

NAWAL: The last day, before leaving, I'll fire two shots at him. One for you, one for me. One for the refugees, one for the people from my country. Two twin bullets.

SAWDA: How will you get away?

Silence

NAWAL: You have to go hide at Chamseddine's house.

SAWDA: Chamseddine...?

NAWAL: You have no choice, Sawda. You have to go on singing for me. And when my courage fails, I'll sing. And my voice will be your voice and your voice will be my voice.



21. The Khaki Jacket

FATIMA: Yes, I'm a school janitor, now. But I used to work at the prison.

Janine takes out the khaki jacket. The man grabs it from her.

JANINE: There's a number printed on the back. Number seventy-two...

FATIMA: The woman who sings.

JANINE: *(handing the photo)* Is that her?

FATIMA: Yes that's her! I saw that woman for more than five years. She was always in her cell. The woman who sings.

JANINE: Nawal? Nawal Marwan?

FATIMA: No one ever spoke her name. She was simply the woman who sings. Number seventy-two. The one who assassinated a paramilitary leader. Two bullets. They sent her to Kfar Rayat. All her friends were captured and killed. One of them reached the café where the militia hung out and she blew herself up. Only the woman who sings survived. Abou Tarek handled her. The nights when Abou Tarek raped her, we couldn't tell their voices apart.

JANINE: She was raped!

FATIMA: It was very common. And inevitably, she got pregnant.

JANINE: What?!

FATIMA: That was common, too.

JANINE: Of course, she got pregnant...!

FATIMA: The night she gave birth, the whole prison fell silent. She gave birth all alone, crouching in a corner of her cell. We could hear her screams and her screams were like a curse on us all. When it was over, I entered the cell. Everything was dark. She had put the child in a pail and covered it with a towel. I was the one who always took



the babies to the river. It was winter. I took the pail, I didn't dare look in it, and I went out. The night was cold. The river was frozen. I left the pail there and started back. But I could hear the song of the woman who sings. So my conscience was as cold and dark as the night. So I went back, I took the pail and I walked and walked, until I ran into a shepherd who was returning with his flock to the village higher up, near Kisserwan. I gave him the pail. I told him, "This is the child of the woman who sings." And I left.

Long pause.

JANINE: So she was raped by Abou Tarek.

FATIMA: Yes.

JANINE: She got pregnant and she had the child in prison.

FATIMA: Yes.

JANINE: And you took the child and instead of killing it, like all the others, you gave it to a peasant? Is that right?

FATIMA: Yes, that's right.

JANINE: Where is Kisserwan?

FATIMA: A little farther west. Overlooking the sea. Ask for the man who raised the child of the woman who sings. If you find him, tell him my name, Fatima.

Janine puts on the jacket.



22. Telephones

Janine is in the phone booth.

Simon is at the gym.

JANINE:

LISTEN, Simon, Listen! I don't give a damn about your boxing match! Shut up! Listen to me! She was in jail. She was tortured! She was raped! Raped by a torturer named Abou Tarek! Do you hear what I'm saying? And our brother is the child she had in jail. No! For God's sake, Simon, I'm halfway round the world, in the middle of nowhere, there's a sea and two oceans between us, so shut up and listen to me...! No, you're not going to call me back, you're going to see the notary, you're going to ask him for the red notebook and you're going to see what's in it. Period.

SIMON:

No! No! I'm not interested in that. I'm not interested in knowing who she was! I know who I am today, and that's enough for me. Now, you listen to me! Come home! Come home, fuck, right away! ¡Come home, Janine...! Hello? Hello...? Fuck!

She hangs up.



23. The Real Names

Janine at the peasant's house.

MALAK: How did you find me?

JANINE: A shepherd directed me to you. He said: "Go up to the pink house and you'll find an old man. His name is Malak." So here I am.

MALAK: And you said your mother's name was...

JANINE: Nawal Marwan.

MALAK: But I don't know your mother.

JANINE: You don't know Nawal Marwan? What about the woman who sings?

MALAK: The woman who sings?! Has she come back?

JANINE: The woman who sings is dead. Nawal Marwan was her name. Nawal Marwan was the woman who sings. And she was my mother. A woman called Fatima gave you her child in a pail.

The old man takes Janine into his arms.

MALAK: Jannane! I took care of you and your twin brother until your mother was released. It took many miracles for you to be alive. I gave you each a name. Sarwane and Jannane. Sarwane and Jannane.

JANINE: No! No, that can't be us. My name is Janine and my brother is Simon.

MALAK: Jannane and Sarwane.

JANINE: No! We were born in the hospital. We have our birth certificates! And we were born in the summer, not in the



winter, and the child born in Kfar Rayat was born in the winter because the river was frozen, Fatima told me, that's why she couldn't throw the pail into the deep water.

MALAK: Fatima was mistaken.

JANINE: Fatima wasn't mistaken. She took the pail, and there was only one child, not two, not two!

MALAK: Fatima didn't look carefully.

JANINE: My father is dead, he gave his life for his country, and he wasn't a torturer, he loved my mother and my mother loved him.

MALAK: Is that what she told you? Why not, children need bedtime stories to help them fall asleep. Now you listen to me: Fatima hands me the pail and she goes running off. I lift up the cloth, and what do I see, two babies, clinging to each other. I took the two of you and I fed you and named you Jannane and Sarwane. I took care of you two while your mother was in prison: Jannane and Sarwane, the offspring of the woman who sings!



24. Nawal Speaks

Simon opens the red notebook. Nawal (age sixty) is testifying before the tribunal.

NAWAL:

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen of the tribunal. I wish to make my testimony facing my torturer. About Tarek. I speak your name for the last time in my life. I recognize you, but you might not recognize me, because all the women were nothing but whores to you. You used to say, whore number forty-five, whore number sixty-three. I'm whore seventy-two. Perhaps my whore number will mean nothing, but there's one thing you haven't forgotten: the woman who sings. Now, do you remember? When you hanged me by the feet, the gun against my temple... in my mouth, on my sex, and your sex in my sex, once, twice, three times, so often that time was shattered. My belly growing big with you and left alone, all alone, you insisted that I be alone to give birth. Two children. Twins. You made it impossible for me to love them. Because of you, I struggled to raise them in grief and, later, in silence. How could I tell them about you? Time will pass, but you will not escape the justice that escapes us all: these children we gave birth to, you and I, are alive, they are beautiful, intelligent, and sensitive. I promise you that sooner or later they will come and stand before you, in your cell, and you will be alone with them, and you will lose all sense of being alive. You and I come from the same land, the same language, the same history, (*with **Simon** as he reads from the notebook*) and each land, each language, each history is responsible for its people, and each people is responsible for their traitors and their heroes. Responsible for their executioners and their victims. We've failed at everything, but speaking to you as I am today bears witness to a promise I have kept.

SIMON:

"Learn to read, to speak, to write, to count, learn to think".



(Reading from the notebook) My testimony is the result of this effort. To remain silent about your acts would make me an accomplice to your crimes.

Simon closes the notebook.



25. Red Wolves

ALPHONSE LEBEL: What do you want to do?

SIMON: I don't know what to do. What's the point?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: To know-

SIMON: I don't want to know.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Then you must do it for Janine. She can't go on living if she doesn't know. I'll help you; we'll go get our passports together, I'll go with you. Maybe what you learn will help you live.

SIMON: Do you have the envelope for my brother?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Of course! We're beginning to see the train at the end of the tunnel, Simon. Now we know Sarwane is your real name. Jannane is your sister's real name. Abou Tarek, the torturer, was your father. Now you must discover your brother's name. Why are you crying, Simon?

SIMON: It feels like a wolf... it's coming closer. He's red. And there's blood on his jaws.



THE MAN: Please, let me go! I'm not from around here. I'm a photographer.

NIHAD: Photographer?

THE MAN: Yes... a war photographer.

NIHAD: Did you take my picture?

THE MAN: I wanted a shot of a sniper... I saw you shoot... I came up here... But I can give you the film.

NIHAD: I'm a photographer, too. My name is Nihad. War photographer. Look. I took these.

Nihad shows him photo after photo.

THE MAN: Very nice...

NIHAD: No, it's not nice. People usually think it's shots of people sleeping. They're not sleeping, they're dead. And I'm the one who killed them! I swear.

THE MAN: I believe you.

Searching through the photographer's bag, NIHAD takes out an automatic camera equipped with a trigger cord. He looks through the viewfinder and fires off some shots of the man. He takes some heavy adhesive tape and tapes the camera to the end of his rifle.

THE MAN: What are you doing?

The camera is well-secured.

Nihad attaches the trigger cord to the trigger of his gun.

Don't kill me! I could be your father!

Nihad shoots. The camera goes off at the same time.

NIAHD: Kirk, I am very happy to be here at Star TV Show... You know, Kirk, a sniper job is a fantastic job. Excellent, Nihad, can you tell us about this? Yeah! It is a very artistic job. First, when you shot you have to kill immediately, not



to make the person suffer. Sure! Second, you shoot all the people. Fair and same with everyone. For me Kirk, every bullet I put in a gun is like poetry, and I shoot poetry to the people, and it's the precision of my poetry that kills people and that's why my photos are fantastic. And tell me, Nihad, you shoot everybody. No Kirk, no everybody... I suppose you don't kill children. Yes, yes, I kill children. No problem. They're like pigeons, you know. Thank you to you, Nihad. So Nihad, what is your next song? My next song will be "The Logical Song". This is something new in your career, Nihad. It will be a pleasure to hear your song, Nihad. No problem, Kirk.

He adjusts his earphones and turns on his Walkman.

One, two, one, two, three, four!



27. Desert

Alphonse Lebel and Simon in the middle of the desert.

SIMON: There's nothing in that direction.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: But the militiaman told us to go that way.

SIMON: He could've told us to pound sand, too.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Why would he have done that?

SIMON: Why not?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: He was very helpful. He told us to go find a woman named Chamseddine, the spiritual leader of the resistance movement in the South. He told us to head that way so we'll head that way.

SIMON: And if someone tells you to shoot yourself...

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Why would anyone tell me to do that?

SIMON: Great, so now what do we do?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: What do you want to do?

SIMON: Let's open the envelope I'm supposed to give my brother!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: That's out of the question!

SIMON: What prevents me from doing it?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: That envelope isn't yours. It belongs to your brother.

SIMON: Oh yeah, so what?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Look me in the bright of the eyes! Doing that would be like raping someone!

SIMON: Well, that makes sense. I have a precedent. My father was a rapist.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: That's not what I meant.

SIMON: Okay. Fine! We won't open the goddamn envelope! But fuck! We'll never find him!



ALPHONSE LEBEL: Chamseddine?

SIMON: No, my brother.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: Why not?

SIMON: Because he's dead! I mean, for Chrissake! At the orphanage, they said in those days the militiamen kidnapped the kids, we went to look in the camps, and they told us about the massacres. So, he must be dead. We went anyway to see a militiaman who came from the same orphanage and he told us he can't remember much, except one guy like him, who had no mother, no father, who took off one day and he figures he must've died.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: But if we want to get to the bottom of it, the militiaman told us to go see Chamseddine who was the spiritual leader of the resistance during the war. Your brother might still be alive, we found his name, that's a start. Nihad, Nihad Harmanni.

SIMON: Right, and there are as many Harmannis as there are Tremblays in the phone book.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: But still, we're pretty close to finding him. Mrs Chamseddine will tell us.

SIMON: And where are we going to find Mrs Chamseddine?



28. Chamseddine

Simon and Alphonse Lebel facing Chamseddine.

CHAMSEDDINE: Are you Sarwan?

SIMON: I am.

CHAMSEDDINE: I've been waiting for you. When I heard that the son of the woman who sings was looking for me, I knew that she had died.

SIMON: I'm looking for the son she had before us. His name was Nihad Harmanni.

CHAMSEDDIEN: Why are you talking about Nihad Harmanni?

SIMON: One of the militiamen knew him as a child. They joined the militia together, then they lost track of him.

CHAMSEDDINE: Did he tell you that Nihad was the son of the woman who sings, the one born of her relationship with Wahab?

SIMON: No. He didn't know anything about that. Never heard of the woman who sings.

CHAMSEDDINE: So how can you say that he is the son of the woman who sings?

ALPHONSE LEBEL: If I may say so, I think I can explain. Alphonse Lebel, notary and executor of the estate of the woman who sings. Now, Mrs Chamseddine, I can tell it to you the way it is: all the details add up.

CHAMSEDDINE: Speak!

ALPHONSE LEBEL: A real puzzle! First, we went to Madame Marwan's native village. That led us to Kfar Rayat. There, we followed some leads based on the arrival dates of several boys in the orphanage. Nihad Harmanni was the only one of our candidates brought to the orphanage from Madame Narwal's village. His age and date of arrival coincided perfectly with what we know about Nawal Marwan.

CHAMSEDDINE: Id the woman who sings chose to trust you, you must be noble and worthy. But please step outside. Leave us



alone. Sarwan, stay with me. And listen to me. Listen carefully.



29. The Voice of Ancient Times

Alphonse Lebel and Janine.

ALPHONSE LEBEL: He still hasn't said a word. He stayed with Chamseddine and when he came out, Janine, your brother had the same look in his eyes as your mother. He didn't say a thing all day. Or the next day. Or the day after that. He wouldn't leave the hotel. I knew you were in Kfar Rayat. I didn't want to disturb your solitude, but Simon refuses to speak, Janine, and I'm afraid. Maybe we pushed too hard to discover the truth.

Janine and Simon sit facing each other.

SIMON: Janine, Janine.

JANINE: Simon!

SIMON: You always told me that one plus one equals two. Is that true?

JANINE: Yes. It's true...

SIMON: It can never be one?

JANINE: What did you find, Simon?

SIMON: Answer me! Can one plus one equal one?

JANINE: Yes

SIMON: How? Explain it to me! Explain how one plus one can equal one! You always said I didn't understand anything. So, now's your chance. Please!

JANINE: Okay! There's a strange hypothesis in math. You can give me a figure, any figure. If it's an even number, you divide it by two. If it's uneven, you multiply it by three and you add one. You do the same thing with the figure you get. No matter what number you start with, you'll always end up with one. Give me a figure.



SIMON: Seven.

JANINE: Okay. Seven is uneven. You multiply it by three and add more, that makes –

SIMON: Twenty-two.

JANINE: Twenty-two is even, you divided by two.

SIMON: Eleven.

JANINE: Eleven is uneven, you multiply by three, you add one—

SIMON: Thirty-four

JANINE: Thirty-four is even. You divide by two, seventeen. Seventeen is uneven, you multiply by three you add one, fifty-two. Fifty-two is even, you divide by two, twenty-six. Twenty-six is even, you divide by two, thirteen. Thirteen is uneven. You multiply by three and add one, forty. Forty is even. You divide by two, twenty. You divide by two, ten. Ten is even, you divide by two, five. Five is uneven, you multiply by three and add one, sixteen. Sixteen is even, you divide by two, eight, you divide by two, four, you divide by two, two, you divide by two, one. No matter what number you start with, you always end up with.... No!

SIMON: You've stopped talking. The way I stopped talking when I understood. I was in Chamseddine's tent, and in that tent, I saw silence come and drown everything. Chamseddine said:

CHAMSEDDINE: Sarwane, you did not arrive here by chance. Your mother's spirit is here. One day a man approached me. He was young and proud. Try to imagine him. Can you see him? He is your brother, Nihad. He was searching for the meaning of his life. I told him to fight for me, for the refugees. He accepted. He learned how to use guns. One day, he left. "Where are you going?" I asked him.

NIHAD: I'm headed north.



CHAMSEDDINE: And what about our cause? Fighting for the people here, the refugees? The meaning of your life?

NIHAD: No cause. No meaning!

CHAMSEDDINE: And he left. I had him watched. That's when I realized he was looking for his mother. He searched for years, and never found her. He started to laugh at nothing. No more cause. No more meaning. He became a sniper. He collected photographs. Nihad Harmanni. A real reputation as an artist. He could be heard singing. A killing machine. Then the foreign army invaded the country. They came all the way north. One morning, they caught him. They kept him and trained him. They gave him work.

SIMON: What work?

CHAMSEDDINE: In a prison they had just built, in the South, in Kfar Rayat. They were looking for a man to take charge of the interrogations.

SIMON: So he worked with my father, Abou Tarek?

CHAMSEDDINE: No. Your brother didn't work with your father. Your brother is your father. He changed his name. Nihad became Abou Tarek. He searched for his mother, he found her, but he didn't recognize her. She searched for her son, she found him and didn't recognize him. He didn't kill her, because she sang and he liked her voice. Yes, that's right. The earth stops turning, Sarwane. Abou Tarek tortured your mother, and your mother was tortured by her son and the son raped his mother. The son is the father of his brother and his sister. Can you hear my voice, Sarwane? It sounds like the voice of centuries past. I can see that the stars have fallen silent inside you, Sarwane and your mother's silence. Inside you.

Nihad Harmani, known as Abou Tarek, at his trial.



NIHAD:

I don't contest anything that has been said at my trial over these past years. The people who claimed I tortured them- I did torture them. And the people I am accused of having killed- I did kill them. In fact, I would like to thank them all, the men I hit and the woman I raped, but essentially, I what I want to say is that my trial has been boring beyond words. Not enough music, no sense of showbiz. I was born with it. The people who watched me grow up always said this object was a sign of my origins, since, according to the story they tell, it was given to me by my mother. A little red nose. What does it mean?

He puts the clown nose.



30. Two letters / رسالتان

Janine gives the envelope to Nihad. Nihad opens the envelope. Nawal (age sixty-five) reads.

NAWAL:

Letter to the father: I am trembling as I write to you. I would like to drill these words into your ruthless heart. Remembering the names of all those who died at your hands. My letter will not surprise you. Its only purpose is to tell you: Look: Your daughter and your son are facing you. The children we had together are standing before you. What will you say to them? They know who you are. Jannane and Sarwane. The daughter and the son of the torturer, children born of horror. This letter was delivered by your daughter. Through her, I want to tell you that you are still alive. Soon you will stop talking. I know this. Silence awaits everyone in the face of the truth. The woman who sings. Whore number seventy-two. Cell number seven. In the Kfar Rayat Prison.

Nihad finishes reading the letter. He looks at Janine and Simon. He tears up the letter.

Simon hands his envelope to Nihad, who opens it.

Letter to the son: I looked for you everywhere.

Simon & Janine: I looked for you everywhere.

Ceci: I searched for you in the rain.

Arturo: I searched for you in the sun.

Ana: In the darkest of cities.

Oriol: In the South.

Moisés: In the North.

Ana: In the East.

Alessia: In the West.

Zínia: I searched for you while digging in the Earth to bury my friends.



Ceci: I searched for you while looking at the sky.

Oriol: I searched for you amidst a flock of birds.

Natàlia: For an instant, you were horror.

Zínia: For an instant, you have become happiness.

Isaac & Natàlia: Horror and happiness.

Isaac: The silence in my throat.

Zínia: You stood up and you took out that little clown nose. And my memory exploded.

Isaac: Because I hated you with all my being.

Natàlia: But where there is love, there can be no hatred.

Arturo: And to preserve love, I blindly chose not to speak.

Oriol: You are facing Janine and Simon.

Alessia: Your sister and your brother.

Ana: Listen, this letter will tell you that the woman who sings was your mother.

Zínia: I am now speaking to my son; I am not speaking to my torturer.

Arturo: Be patient.

Moisés: Beyond silence.

Ceci: There is the happiness of being together.

Zínia: Nothing is more beautiful than being together.

Chorus: Nothing is more beautiful than being together.

END OF THE PLAY!