

***Hopeless in Gaza***

A Brief Drama in One Short Act by

John Sadler

## **Dramatis Personae**

**Mandy** ó an aid worker; Ms. R. Serdiville

**Tom** ó an aid worker, Mr. J.Sadler

**Ghalia** ó a Palestinian student and activist, Ms. L [       ]

**Major Shanron** – IDF; Mr. W. Pickard

**Aron** ó a conscript member of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF); A.N. Other

## **Scene**

*Gaza City – Palestine, the office of a western based NGO responsible for the distribution of medical aid and supplies to refugees and victims of the violence; non-political, non-denominational. It is January, 2009.*

*On the podium*

**Shanron:** Antifadahó a rebellion or uprising. The Arabs call it something else but we call it terror, just terror. Hamas and their criminal supporters firing rockets into Israeli townships with the sole objective of inflicting mass civilian casualties. No, they haven't killed that many Israelis but that is because they're not very good at it, doesn't mean they don't have the will and their aim is improving. The democratic state has an absolute right to defend its citizens against attack. We do not seek a fight with the Palestinians. We have attempted all democratic means but the fact remains the region is run by a criminal cabal at war with their own representatives. We will not stand idly by.

*In the office with Mandy and Tom, sporadic gunfire and shelling in the near distance outside, inside the space is cramped and overheated; both are in T shirts and jeans/leggings.*

**Mandy:** God, this place is worse than Tesco car park on Saturday

**Tom:** Worse and a damn sight warmer, funny how you sort of get used to gunfire, like Radio One but even more annoying.

**Mandy:** It could get worse, Hamas fired more rockets; they say two Israelis were killed, including an eight year old. Don't they ever learn, all they do is bring down more reprisal and make our job so much the harder.

**Tom:** I know, but you can't altogether blame them, if I was young and Palestinian I'd want to fight back wouldn't you?

**Mandy:** Sure, but not if it gets more of my own people, usually the defenceless, killed in retaliation. Nearly fifteen hundred, hundreds more maimed, half of them children. God knows how many traumatised for life. Hamas can't take the Israelis on, not on equal terms, they're too strong. Palestinian casualties are mounting at a ratio of 100:1. They're the ones with tanks and planes. And, if it gets worse, we'll be pulled out. Half the aid agencies have withdrawn their people as it is, then what happens to the refugees here, to the young and the old, the sick, the helpless. Do the men with guns ever think about that, any of them, (*she is trying to stay detached but her frustrations are beginning to show*).

**Tom:** What are we supposed to do? We're not politicians and, thank God, not the military we just stick around to pick up the pieces they leave broken behind them.

*A particularly loud explosion nearby*

**Shanron:** Force, what is force, what is reasonable force? I define force as the measure of reaction required to achieve the strategic objective, to protect our citizens from attack. And that is our goal; to ensure our people can live and work in security. To us, each missile that rains down death upon our people is as abhorrent as 9/11 is to the west and we will do *whatever* is necessary to give them respite, to provide security. That is the duty of an elected government to protect the lives and livelihoods of its people.

What would you do?

**Mandy:** God, what the hell was that, a bomb?

**Tom:** Artillery round more like they'll be aiming for the rocket crews, or so they'll say; it's so bloody indiscriminate.

*Ghalia enters the office, an intense and angry young woman, she is dressed in dark jeans but also wears a headscarf*

**Ghalia:** Did you hear that?

**Tom:** Bit difficult not to.

**Ghalia:** Bastards are using artillery, big stuff I can guess how many that one just killed, don't they realise the boys with the rockets are long gone? They're just using us for target practice.

**Mandy:** Perhaps if we could persuade the boys to go and voice their protests somewhere else and with some means less violent than mortar rounds and rockets, the IDF might leave us alone and go and experiment on somebody else.

**Ghalia:** Fat chance, it's any excuse to kill more Arabs.

**Tom:** Yes, but they don't see it that way. They've lost people as well, women and children, chucking rockets about isn't going to solve anything. Israel has powerful friends in the west, oh yes they might wag their fingers but they're not going to stop them. Can't your fighters see that, they just bring down a rain of destruction on their own civilians. Don't they see that or don't they care?

**Ghalia:** I hate to see any child die, but I've seen dozen blown to pieces in the last few weeks, others splattered with the flesh of their brothers and sisters. We've many martyrs already the Jews must see we're not afraid of them that they can't terrorise us any more and that they can't kill all of us, however hard they try.

**Mandy:** No but they're making a fair attempt and the more you frighten them the more savagely they'll react, nobody is winning here, never will, not like this.

**Ghalia:** At least you've stayed many of the agencies are shutting up, leaving, we're being abandoned; the rest of the world doesn't care.

**Tom:** Actually they do care; some of them at least but aid workers have families too and getting killed in somebody else's war is not part of the job description. We all want to help you and we hate what the IDF does but attacking them just stirs up the hornet's nest.

*Another shell bursts nearby*

**Shanron:** When the state of Israel was founded sixty years ago we had to fight for our very existence. We've had to fight since and every time we do so solely to live, solely to build our nation, our ancient lands, the land God gave to us as Jews. We've made the deserts bloom where there was only dust, we've built cities where there were only shanties. We do not seek war but, as the Roman philosopher said, "we who seek for peace must prepare for war" It was true then it's true now. In 1948 the Arabs tried to destroy us, kill us all, just like their mentors the Nazis, they tried again in '56, '67 & '73 but we're still here and it's still a rough neighborhood.

**Ghalia:** See what I mean -have a nice day from Tel-Aviv. You know I'm the third generation of my family to live in this wasteland, we had land, grew olives, my people had been there for a thousand years, yet I've never seen the place. Some Israeli is squatting there, their government makes noises but allows it, their settlers aren't going to move; our homes have become an investment opportunity for Jewish speculators. What

are we supposed to do; wait for the UN to move whilst Israel builds more walls to keep us out of our own land?

**Mandy:** But rockets won't help, they'll always have more and suicide bombings, what possible good do they serve. Your young people blow themselves up with the sole purpose of killing as many innocent people as possible. How can you justify that? I know the Q'uran forbids it ó killing yourself, taking your own life is a mortal sin.

**Ghalia:** These people aren't killing themselves; they're martyrs for our cause. Turning yourself into a weapon isn't killing it's an act of war. Our martyrs are to us what their jet fighters and tanks are to them, a weapon and a mighty one, something they fear. The Jews fear death and they see that we do not. They begin to understand how their own terror turns on them.

**Tom:** Ghalia, since this dreadful war began only a couple of weeks ago, nearly a thousand of your people have died, many of them innocent children, a handful of Israelis and neither side has gained anything. You're worse off than ever ó the more frightened you make the Jews, the more violently they react. They think they're defending what they see as their homeland. I'm not saying they're right but blowing up a bus full of commuters isn't going to convince them otherwise unless you can both learn to talk this will just go on and on.

**Ghalia:** Remember Arafat, for thirty years after they drove us out we tried to get the UN to recognise our cause, that's a whole generation. Were they interested? Of course not, Tel Aviv sounds very loud in Washington. But, when Arafat and the PLO started hijacking planes and getting on CNN, guess what, suddenly we have a voice; suddenly we're being heard. That taught us that force works, the Israelis have been practising on us for half a century and we've about had enough.

**Mandy:** And what do you expect to win?

**Ghalia:** What belongs to us and don't talk to me about the Oslo accords what's that compared to the blockade, compared to Temple Mount? Sharon, with his whole gang showed what he had in mind for us in September 2000; him and hundreds of his storm-troopers; the third holiest site in Islam

**Tom:** And the most holy in Judaism

**Sharon:** Punitive measures; nobody in the IDF wants to make war on civilians on women and children but how can we respond. The terrorists hide behind their own people, site their launchers in built up areas. They're happy to sacrifice their own for PR. What choice do we have? We can only use the weapons we have, intended for conventional war. What else can we do, send in terror squads like thieves in the night. What we do we do in daylight and we do it because we must. Don't expect apologies, if people die and they will, tell Hamas, it's their war.

**Ghalia:** They've started moving troops into the city, doing house to house, the usual stuff, we're going to protest.

**Mandy:** You mean you're going to pelt them with stones and snipe from the rooftops

**Ghalia:** What else can we do? They drove us from our homes, shunted us into these ghettos and now they're killing us in the streets. We have to protest, the world has to see what's going on here, you understand that, you, at least, are our friends, you care about us, you've shown that just by staying.

**Tom:** God alone knows what bloody good we're doing.

**Ghalia:** You know what the Israelis are doing. Difference is the world will believe you if it won't believe us, they listen to people like you in the west, you're part of them, we're not, we don't exist, the west and oh yes, most of the Arabs, go on as though we don't exist. Tom, Mandy, help us, come with me, be seen, so you can tell.

**Mandy:** We can't Ghalia, we feel for you, we share your pain but we can only continue here, they'll only let us stay if we stay impartial, if we get involved they'll say we're political and we'll be pulled out, the work will suffer.

**Ghalia:** I'm not asking you to take sides, just to observe, just so you can tell your friends in the west what you've seen here. I'm not asking you for a manifesto, just to tell the truth; that's the best way you can help us. You can get past their lies and propaganda, you won't need guns, just your eyes and your hearts.

*Tom and Mandy exchange looks, then she rises and follows Ghalia, after a moments hesitation so does Tom*

*They all leave the office out into the crowded camp, a shell falls somewhere behind both Tom and Mandy flinch; Ghalia is leading her face taut but determined, she turns to them as a burst of automatic fire rakes the open space. Both Tom and Mandy crumple, piling in immodest death, Mandy moans, briefly raise her head, shudders and is still.*

*Ghalia stumbles a couple of paces till she is shot again in a sustained burst, she falls face downward, somehow she is not yet dead, drags herself painfully forward before giving up the unequal struggle, her eyes wide in defiance.*

*Aron comes onstage from the shadows, in fatigues and with a assault rifle covering the dead bodies. He approached Ghalia's corpse and turns the dead woman over with his foot; he prods her briefly with the barrel, satisfied she is lifeless, he briefly searches for ID, he leaves her sprawling and exposed before moving on to the other two dead where he repeats the process. His job done he crosses the stage to exit.*

**Shanron:** Like I said it's a rough neighborhood.

**END**



