

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Concerto for Humans and Semtex

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by Simon Luckhurst

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EXTRACT

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*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

**PART A: Omar Faissal is talking to Safia Ali in a café.**

SAFIA: I will not do this.

OMAR: It is good to see you, Cousin.

SAFIA: You have not come here because you wanted to see me.

OMAR: It *is* good to see you.

SAFIA: Ha!

OMAR: It has been a long time since we played by the oasis together.

SAFIA: There was never an oasis.

OMAR: I remember playing with someone at an oasis.

SAFIA: I will not do this.

OMAR: Maybe Rhozhia?

SAFIA: Rhozhia was not there, either. The oasis is in your imagination.

OMAR: I need you to do this.

SAFIA: I know what you need, Omar.

OMAR: You *have* to do it.

SAFIA: I will not do it.

OMAR: For God.

SAFIA: No.

OMAR: For God.

SAFIA: This is not for God.

OMAR: It is all for God.

(Pause)

OMAR: It may all be for God.

SAFIA: The great man has doubts?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Anyway, I will not do it.

OMAR: Remember what happened in the village.

SAFIA: You do not want me to attack the Sunni.

OMAR: This will be the same.

SAFIA: Do not try and twist this. You are making me do *your* work.

OMAR: We must avenge the dead.

SAFIA: Then there will be others with their own desire for vengeance.

OMAR: We must avenge the boys.

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

(Pause)

OMAR: Will you do it?

(Pause)

OMAR: Will you do it?

(Pause)

SAFIA: This isn't something you ask people, like will you accompany me on the bus?  
Will you buy cigarettes for me?

OMAR: No.

SAFIA: This is not a question like those questions.

(Pause)

OMAR: We have to stop them!

SAFIA: Not by doing what you are asking.

OMAR: It will only get worse.

SAFIA: Stop it!

OMAR: (*Whispering*) Will you do it?

SAFIA: You can whisper all you like. Shout from a tower. Advertise on Al Jazeera.  
But it is pointless.

(Pause)

SAFIA: There are more willing martyrs.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Why did you come to me?

(Pause)

SAFIA: You can't do it.

OMAR: Do you really think that?

(Pause)

SAFIA: You are the great general, marshalling his troops. You are coordinating attacks, aren't you? We are little soldiers for you, pawns in your stupid game of chess, moving here and there on the board, little bangs actually, bang here, bang there, bang here.

(Pause)

OMAR: I know there are more willing martyrs.

(Pause)

OMAR: It has to be done, Safia. We have to take the evil to them.

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: You think that will remove it from us? Evil is not like water in a shallow well. Evil is water in the sea. You take some out, more comes rushing in.

OMAR: But if you are wet, and I am wet, should not everyone be wet?

SAFIA: That is stupid logic.

OMAR: All right, is it *fairer* if everyone is wet?

SAFIA: It is better if everyone is dry.

OMAR: But is it *fairer* if everyone is wet?

(Pause)

SAFIA: You always tried to do this. Twist my words, turn what I know to be right into something questionable. When we were children and you wanted my toys, I think you used the same argument about my toys.

OMAR: You didn't have toys.

SAFIA: You *would* have used the same argument.

(Pause)

SAFIA: I won't do it.

OMAR: Let me tell you a story.

SAFIA: What, some hero at a siege who turned the course of a war with a noble sacrifice?

OMAR: Yes, a hero!

SAFIA: Why not you?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Of course.

OMAR: You will be sung about in Paradise.

SAFIA: If there is a Paradise.

OMAR: You will not be in hell.

(Long pause)

SAFIA: You should find someone more willing.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Someone with duty in their eyes.

OMAR: You used to have duty in your eyes.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Is that all you saw there?

*Safia looks away.*

(Pause)

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

OMAR: Let me tell you a story.

SAFIA: Peacocks and bathing in ass's milk and servants at my every whim.

OMAR: I will find a story you *haven't* heard.

SAFIA: I have heard them all.

(Pause)

SAFIA: I will not do it.

*Safia sounds marginally less convincing.*

(Pause)

SAFIA: You used to tell better stories.

OMAR: There are signs all over the world. Hurricanes and droughts and accidents.

God's will is being demonstrated everywhere.

SAFIA: Then you don't need me.

OMAR: What they did to the boys. One had his liver crushed.

SAFIA: I washed Ali. I prepared him.

OMAR: I know.

SAFIA: He wasn't just a boy.

OMAR: He was related to you.

(Pause)

OMAR: He was your nephew.

SAFIA: You are telling me what I already know.

OMAR: He was a good boy.

(Pause)

OMAR: Let me tell you a story.

SAFIA: A field of wheat, and an eternal scythe?

OMAR: I will find a story you *don't* know.

(Pause)

OMAR: It is much, much worse in Bagdad. Explosions, bombs, cars all the time. Shootings. Abductions. Torture, so much. I can't believe one country can exist like this.

SAFIA: It was bad before the Americans, too.

OMAR: Now it is worse.

SAFIA: It is seen more. It is talked about more, known more. But is it worse?

OMAR: Do the job I ask of you.

(Pause)

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: What other stories do you have? Have you done a survey, with those you have asked before, do you know which stories are the most successful?

OMAR: There are more willing martyrs.

SAFIA: The easy stories for them.

OMAR: Some are eager. They believe.

SAFIA: Do you believe?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Do you?

OMAR: Yes.

SAFIA: You don't believe.

(Pause)

OMAR: Did you see Ben?

SAFIA: He came to the village after you had gone.

(Pause)

SAFIA: He came to say goodbye.

OMAR: Did you see him?

SAFIA: I saw him, but I didn't speak to him.

OMAR: No.

SAFIA: He was scared.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Everyone is scared

*They laugh.*

(Long pause)

SAFIA: He was very scared.

OMAR: He did what was asked of him.

SAFIA: What *you* asked of him.

OMAR: It was his duty.

SAFIA: He killed seven soldiers.

OMAR: His duty.

SAFIA: Also three children, four mothers and a grandfather!

OMAR: It was the will of-

SAFIA: Don't say it!

OMAR: But-

SAFIA: Don't say that! Three children.

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

OMAR: Regrettable.

SAFIA: You are no better than the Americans.

*(Omar and Safia briefly argue in their own language.*

OMAR: Ssh!

SAFIA: Don't tell me what to say!)

(Pause)

SAFIA: Will Ben be there to meet me, up in Paradise, bathing in milk and being waited on by virgins?

OMAR: Perhaps.

SAFIA: Ben and all the other children you have sent there.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Now I know where all the virgins come from.

(Pause)

SAFIA: There is no Paradise for those who kill children.

OMAR: What other way do we have?!

(Pause)

OMAR: I have another story.

SAFIA: David and Goliath? I'm surprised you haven't brought that one out yet.

OMAR: Ah-

SAFIA: I don't believe it!

OMAR: It's an appropriate story.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Oh, poor Ben.

(Pause)

OMAR: Ben is a hero.

SAFIA: There are a lot of heroes now, aren't there, all lying in the ground.

(Pause)

SAFIA: And for every hero, how many sacrifices? Five, ten, thirty, a thousand?

OMAR: You would just lie there when they rape you?! You will not fight back?!!

*(Again Safia and Omar argue in their own language*

SAFIA: And you are a pimp!

OMAR: You are insolent!)

SAFIA: I will tell *you* a story.

(Pause)

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: There was once a young man from a village. He was handsome, and the girls all looked to him, but he was a good religious boy. He ignored their smiles, turned his head from them and instead prayed with the old men and listened to the sermons. He went away for a while. When he came back he looked the same, but he was not the same anymore, was he?

OMAR: It's not a good story.

SAFIA: Tell me why.

OMAR: You left too many things out. Like what he saw when he was away.

SAFIA: What did he see?

OMAR: What God showed him.

(Pause)

SAFIA: So you know what God wants?

(Pause)

OMAR: I know what he wants for *me*.

(Pause)

OMAR: You don't understand.

SAFIA: Because I am not as holy as you?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Because I am from a simple village?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Because I am a woman.

(Pause)

SAFIA: I can walk to the market place for you, or loiter by the front of an embassy, engage someone's trust, but I am not able to think for myself! I am not to question you.

OMAR: You are not to question God!

SAFIA: I am not questioning God.

OMAR: You don't understand tactical reality.

SAFIA: We kill Sunnis. They kill us. We kill Americans. They kill us. Not exactly chess, Omar, is it?

(Pause)

SAFIA: I live in a civil war with thousands dying around me, some are shot, some die more slowly, others are blown up. We have a 9/11 every month. I think I understand 'tactical reality.'

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

(Pause)

SAFIA: I will not do this.

(Pause)

OMAR: I went to the cemetery last night.

SAFIA: I did not see you there.

OMAR: It was late.

SAFIA: You can't risk going when you might be seen.

OMAR: You have tended the graves well.

SAFIA: Of course.

OMAR: Thankyou.

(Pause)

SAFIA: You are telling me that you will do the same for me.

(Pause)

SAFIA: No, you are telling me that you have already organised someone else to do it.

*Omar shrugs.*

(Pause)

SAFIA: When we were young we did not talk about these things. Our parents lived among us. There were *laws*. You played football, Ben played football, Ali, all the boys. We were hungry, we feared the Sunnis, but it was not like now.

OMAR: We must stop them.

SAFIA: Revenge only creates revenge. It is *hope* we need, not more bombs. There is no winning when we are fuelled only by hate.

(Pause)

SAFIA: We should walk away from this, sit down together, choose what to forget. Ben's work, all the killings, we must acknowledge them and seek atonement. All of us. Only then can we become whole again. Only then can we rebuild.

(Pause)

SAFIA: You, Omar, you can be the one to make the first step. You will be our leader here. You must bring *peace*.

(Long pause)

OMAR: God will not let me forget.

SAFIA: You bring *hate*.

OMAR: I cannot forgive them.

*Safia sighs.*

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: You must inflict pain.

(Pause)

OMAR: I would bring hope if there was any hope to bring.

SAFIA: Without you working for it, how can there be hope?

OMAR: Do you find hope in the cemetery?

(Pause)

OMAR: Did you find it in the village when they shot it up?

(Pause)

OMAR: Do you find it in what the Americans do?

SAFIA: I did at first, yes.

(Pause)

OMAR: You are making me really angry, Safia.

SAFIA: When they came I hoped we would live alongside the Sunnis. Build hospitals and schools. Is this such a bad thing to want?

OMAR: Not a bad thing to want. But a bad thing to be told to have.

SAFIA: Oh yes, terrible.

OMAR: It's not all they will demand for us.

SAFIA: What? Oh, malls and Christianity and films and short skirts?

*Omar acknowledges that Safia is right.*

SAFIA: It would kill you to have that.

OMAR: You don't understand.

SAFIA: You murder to prevent the construction of malls?

OMAR: You're twisting my words.

SAFIA: Is Islam so weak it will not withstand *malls*?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Are you not able to withstand those things?

OMAR: You don't understand!

SAFIA: I understand enough

OMAR: You have an obligation to your family.

SAFIA: I don't ask my family to become martyrs.

OMAR: No, you sweep their graves and silently weep.

SAFIA: I know I do not want to kill for you.

(Pause)

OMAR: (*Whispering*) You need to kill the Australian girl.

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: The Australian girl.

OMAR: One Australian girl.

SAFIA: It will not be just 'one Australian girl.'

OMAR: There will be others near her, yes.

SAFIA: More virgins for Paradise.

OMAR: Do not be insolent!

SAFIA: But you want that.

OMAR: Stop talking like this!

SAFIA: Today I will speak my mind.

(Pause)

OMAR: She is very important.

(Pause)

OMAR: Her father is very important.

SAFIA: To us?

OMAR: To Australia, and therefore to us.

SAFIA: But she is telling our story to the world.

OMAR: So there will be thousands of outraged Australians protesting to their government and calling for an end to the war!

SAFIA: You know it will not be like that.

OMAR: What, then? Headlines, at least? Concerned callers to the radio?

SAFIA: She said she would try and tell our story.

OMAR: *We* know what is happening.

(Pause)

SAFIA: I like her.

OMAR: You have a duty.

(Pause)

OMAR: You liked Ali.

(Pause)

OMAR: You must do this.

SAFIA: Another stone of hate dropped into a shallow well.

OMAR: Do it.

SAFIA: There has been enough killing.

OMAR: Not yet.

(Pause)

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: How much killing is enough?

OMAR: I will tell you another story.

SAFIA: I won't listen.

OMAR: This is a good story.

SAFIA: I have heard all your stories.

OMAR: This is a very good story.

(Pause)

OMAR: There is a young woman, from a small quiet village. She fetches water, she cleans her mother's house, she reads the Qu'ran. When she is of age she watches a boy. He seems assured and confident. She thinks he knows where he is going in the world. Possibly she even loves him.

(Pause)

OMAR: Then bad things happen around her. Houses are destroyed, people are hurt. People are killed. She watches these things and she is upset. When her parents die crises for days. When a boy from the village is shot her anger flows freely.

(Pause)

OMAR: The young woman hears stories.

SAFIA: (*Whispers*) She loves stories.

OMAR: She is drawn to them, like...

(Pause)

OMAR: She hears stories about those who resist. One of those is her young man. He comes back to her village. He shares her grief.

SAFIA: She understands he has changed. She understands he needs her help.

(Pause)

OMAR: He is hurt!

(Pause)

OMAR: She tells him that she wishes to fight for him.

(Pause)

OMAR: The young man asks for her help. She realises she can help him. A woman, saving a man! He has a job for her, and she makes him a promise.

SAFIA: (*Whispers*) She promises to help him.

OMAR: She promises to help him.

SAFIA: Yes.

OMAR: She knows she will be hurt.

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: She doesn't care she will be hurt.

OMAR: She knows she will be killed.

SAFIA: She doesn't care.

OMAR: She will do the job that is asked of her.

SAFIA: She didn't realise. Pain and death for her, yes. But to inflict suffering on those who are innocent...

OMAR: It must be done.

SAFIA: You are wrong. This is someone else's story.

*Omar is now very frustrated.*

OMAR: What do I have to say to make you listen?!

SAFIA: I don't like the end of your story. The young woman, this beautiful creature, becomes a hideous killer, inflicting the pain she herself has known.

OMAR: For a tactical end.

SAFIA: She doesn't care about tactics!

OMAR: For God.

SAFIA: Ha!

OMAR: For Ali.

SAFIA: Ali is dead.

OMAR: Because it will change things.

SAFIA: It will change nothing! This Australian girl has good intentions and honourable plans.

OMAR: It is not only her you will be harming. Her father is an evil man.

SAFIA: I will kill *him* then.

OMAR: You cannot come close enough to him.

SAFIA: What does this evil man do?

OMAR: Inflicts pain.

SAFIA: That is done all the time.

OMAR: Not like this man.

(Pause)

OMAR: He has destroyed too many good men.

SAFIA: Will this stop him?

OMAR: It will stop him.

SAFIA: How can we know?

OMAR: (*Upset*) Because I say so!

*Concerto for Humans and Semtex*

SAFIA: Have you met him?

OMAR: If I were to meet him, you would not see me again.

SAFIA: He would kill you?

OMAR: He would remove me, then hurt me, then put me away from the rest of the world forever.

(Pause)

OMAR: Did you like that story?

SAFIA: Is that the *real* story?

OMAR: Which is the real story, Safia?

(Pause)

OMAR: They are *all* real stories.

(Pause)

SAFIA: And now?

OMAR: You sit close to her.

SAFIA: Do I talk to her?

OMAR: You don't need to talk to her.

(Pause)

OMAR: You will find something to look at.

SAFIA: A boy with gentle eyes.

OMAR: If that will help you.

(Pause)

OMAR: There are no rules.

(Pause)

SAFIA: You have asked me to do something you cannot do yourself.

(Pause)

SAFIA: Have you tried, Omar?

(Pause)

SAFIA: Have you done as I have done, and strapped on the belt of explosives? Like this one?

*Safia reveals she is wearing a belt of explosives.*

SAFIA: Have you felt the hardness of the explosive?

OMAR: Be quiet!

SAFIA: She will not hear me.

(Pause)