

EXTRACT

War/Kiss

a ten-minute play
by
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Characters

PERIHAN

KARIM

Time

2008 to 2015.

Setting

Beirut and other parts of the Middle East.

WAR/KISS

TOGETHER: I'll never forget the first time I saw his/her face.

PERIHAN: (TO AUDIENCE) It was April 2008. A perfect lazy autumn afternoon. (AS SHE SITS) I was sitting in my favourite café having a late coffee. I was about to miss my third lecture of the day but I didn't care. The ficus tree across the road looked so beautiful in the afternoon sun and I wasn't going anywhere. So I gestured to the waiter. But not my waiter, this one was serving the other tables, but he came over anyway.

KARIM APPROACHES.

KARIM: Can I help you?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

PERIHAN: (TO AUDIENCE) And then time stops. I catch his soft hazel eyes and suddenly the world is full of infinite possibilities. How can one moment, one glance, hold so much promise, temptation, hope? I'm not sure how long I sat there looking into his eyes. Felt like eternity, forever in a second.

LIGHTS CHANGE

KARIM: Can I help you?

PERIHAN: Of course. Sorry. Turkish coffee.

KARIM: Medium sugar?

PERIHAN: Maximum sugar. An impossible amount of sugar. So much sugar I'll be thinking 'How did he get all that sugar into this small cup?'

BEAT.

KARIM: I don't make the coffee.

PERIHAN: Of course. Sorry. But please pass on my instructions to whoever does. About the sugar.

KARIM: Maximum. Sugar.

BEAT. **KARIM** EXITS.

PERIHAN: And he just left. I felt like a fool. I thought we had shared something. A moment of magic. For me. For him I was just someone stupid girl ordering a coffee. With lots of sugar.

KARIM: (TO AUDIENCE) I thought she was hot. How could I not think she was hot. Look at her. But I'm not going to let her know that. A girl like that has one hundred, one thousand men a day – wanting her. I was going to be the one who wasn't interested. Then *she* might be interested.

PERIHAN: I sat there. Trying to hide my extremely embarrassed red face. Eventually he comes back.

KARIM PUTS THE COFFEE ON HER TABLE.

PERIHAN: (ACTING COOL) Thanks.

BEAT. KARIM LEANS IN CLOSE.

KARIM: It's okay. I take maximum sugar too.

PERIHAN: And then he smiles – this cheeky, boyish smile – and if I wasn't already gone I am now, completely. I sip my coffee, slowly, and in about half an hour he's back.

KARIM: I am finishing now. Shall we go for a walk. It's a lovely afternoon.

PERIHAN: Yes. Yes it is.

KARIM HOLDS OUT HIS HAND. BEAT. PERIHAN TAKES IT. LIGHTS CHANGE.

PERIHAN: The walk leads to drinks, leads to another walk, leads to more drinks, dancing and after more magical moments than any one day should contain ... well, you know the next part. And for the next three weeks we are inseparable. I barely go to University and when I do all I do is dream of him. The rest of the time I sit at his café, drinking coffee with ...

KARIM: (PLACING COFFEE DOWN WITH A SMILE) Maximum sugar.

PERIHAN: Which is okay because I needs lots of energy because of all the ... *walks*. Long walks. Slow walks. Fast walks. Steamy walks. Walks in many different places. Uphill, downhill, all around. I never knew walking could be quite like this. And then one day I look at Karim and he looks at me and we don't even need to say the words. We know. We just know.

THEY KISS, A WARM TENDER KISS.

PERIHAN: And then in May, everything changed.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

PERIHAN: There's one thing I've left out of our little love story. You're thinking café, autumn afternoons, tree lined boulevards. Definitely Europe ... Paris, Rome, Prague? Somewhere steeped in history, culture, blood. Lots and lots of blood. Since good King Diodotus gave poor old Antiochus a thorough flogging back in 140 BC. You see I left out one crucial piece of information. My name is Perihan. It means "the Nile of Honey." Now you're getting it ... Oh shit they're in ... Close. This is May 7th, 2008 and we are in Beirut.

A LOUD EXPLOSION. LIGHTS DIM.

PERIHAN: Another war. Can't even remember what it was called. People die, bombs go off, everything stops. I hide in my room at the University. I pray that Karim will come. He doesn't. I wait two or three days till I hope it's safe. I run to his flat. (SEARCHING) Karim! Karim! Karim! (BEAT, TO AUDIENCE) But - he's - gone.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

PERIHAN: (AS IF GIVING A LECTURE) A short history of conflicts in the Middle East since 2003: (AT PACE) Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan, Gaza, Lebanon, Lebanon again, Yemen, Iran, Yemen, and we're only up to 2010. Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Egypt again, Iraq again, Lebanon again, Gaza again and Syria - East Syria, West Syria, North Syria, South Syria – Syria all friggin' over. I'm part of most of these. I travel around – a lot. Mainly looking for Karim but my cover is a logistics co-ordinator for *Medecins Sans Frontieres*. It's a NGO that basically tries to stop as many people dying in war zones as possible – while trying to stay alive ourselves. My job is to make sure there's enough beds, tents, supplies, food, water – for the patients *and* the doctors. Don't forget the doctors. People say I'm young to be doing this job but who else would be crazy enough to do it. In 2015 I'm in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Afghanistan used to have the title as the most screwed up country in the world until Syria came along, now it's running a very close second. And still dreaming of first.

LIGHTS CHANGE. WE SEE A MAN HUNCHED OVER IN DIM LIGHT.

PERIHAN: I'm picking up a load of tents with one of our drivers and beside the road I see a man on a rock. I go over to him. At first I'm not sure if he's asleep or dead. (TO MAN) '*Ahlaan ... Ahlaan 'akh*'

THE MAN DOES NOT MOVE.

PERIHAN: (TO MAN) '*Ahlaan*'

THE MAN RAISES HIS HEAD.