

Rubbish

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A Play by Ali Abdulnebbi Al Zaidi

Translated into English by Al

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Characters:

MOTHER

SHERIF^[1]: her son

AFAF^[2]: SHERIF's wife

A COSTOMER: a man

A few men coming in and out occasionally

The place is no more than a wide hall in a house. There is more than one room around the space. We see some dark, old furniture, the same colour as the curtains. There is a main door in the middle of the space leading outside the house. We see many men coming in and out as customers. There is a continuous movement around the place. We notice that most men are deformed or handicapped. We hear some shouts of men outside the house. Soon after we see a customer, a man, coming in and there are some men who are trying to stop him from going inside one of the rooms. The MOTHER appears from one of the other rooms after hearing the shouts.

MOTHER. What's going on? Where is Afaf? (*Looks at the customer*) Who is this? (*To the customer*) What do you want?

CUSTOMER. I... I... I am...

MOTHER. (*Firmly*) We don't have time for you... kick him out of here.

CUSTOMER. I have the same right as the rest of them!

MOTHER. You want to break the law in this place with your belated manhood, you and your, (*Sarcastically*) 'I am'!

CUSTOMER. I used to be one of the super heroes who had super manhood.

MOTHER. You have to repent and renounce your old manhood and leave silently. This place receives the leftovers of men, only.

CUSTOMER. Be reassured. I am a leftover too.

MOTHER. (*Sarcastically*) What a touching scene!

CUSTOMER. I am a leftover... believe me.

MOTHER. A leftover! OK then... You can be one of the leftovers of this house. Hey, you men, write down his name in the list... (*She laughs loudly and disappears inside one of the rooms... The customer enters another of the rooms.*)

(*SHERIF enters in a wheelchair. He is without legs. He starts looking around the house closely. He looks surprised about everything around him.*)

AFAF . (*Comes out of a room, speaks with sarcasm*) An honourable man!

MOTHER. (*Comes out of her room*) Another honourable man!

AFAF. Another customer, it seems. He wished to be added to the list too...

MOTHER. Leftovers, we have never seen such leftovers before!

AFAF. Mistakes, dear auntie. These men think that this house is the Human Society of the Dead.

MOTHER. (*Shouts*) Who threw his rubbish inside the house?

AFAF. To be added to those who are looking for their missing half in this hostel... mistakes...

(*SHERIF moves in different directions in his chair. He looks worried.*)

AFAF. We accepted men without arms, with one leg, with no tongue, paralyzed... But to accept half a man... that is very cheap, auntie, very cheap indeed.

(*SHERIF looks at them as if seeing them for the first time.*)

MOTHER. Give me the broom.



Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi. Photo: courtesy of the playwright.

- AFAF. A remarkable geometric shape. *(They laugh.)*
- MOTHER. *(Firmly)* Now, go away while you still have some dignity left. It's better than crawling away, I guess.
- SHERIF. I have beautiful memories here.
- AFAF. Ha! I sensed that. Crazy; he is crazy.
- MOTHER. *(Yelling at him)* Get out. You can go to the nearest infirmary.
- SHERIF. I thought that you would hold me off the ground and on your shoulders when you saw me. But they seem unable to carry dead bodies.

AFAF. We haven't seen you before.

SHERIF. It's an old story.

MOTHER. And who pushed your story toward us?

SHERIF. I know the road very well.

AFAF. Since when?

SHERIF. My whole life. I used to run around this house as a child, moving from one room to another, having fun, playing around, laughing. But when I grew up...

MOTHER. Go play somewhere else, you; little boy...

SHERIF. I don't know anywhere else.

AFAF. You are delaying us. We have work to do. Now, get out.

MOTHER. We'll push you, throw you out.

SHERIF. Don't you recognize me?

AFAF. Recognize you, should we?

MOTHER. Who are you?

SHERIF. (*Shouts with joy*) I am Sherif... Sherif...

MOTHER. Sherif? A name with no meaning for me, I don't remember.

AFAF. You are not allowed to repeat this word here again. Beware! They'll kill you. This is a forbidden word. It can cause all our death, even the other houses around us, the houses beside them, and the ones beside those...

SHERIF. Kill me?! I am Sherif. (*To Mother*) Your son, Sherif, mother!

MOTHER. Sherif?!

SHERIF. Have you forgotten me?

MOTHER. My only son was lost many years ago in one of those stories that used to be told by old mothers to their little children every night. A story that is called war.

SHERIF. I am your child, Sherif. What a joy seeing you, both, again. My lovely wife, Afaf.

AFAF. Sherif... Where have you been?

SHERIF. That's a long story. A mine has taken my legs off. And when I woke up from the coma I found myself a prisoner of a war that I didn't know why I was involved in.

MOTHER. You've changed a lot; your face, body, hair...

SHERIF. I lost a lot of blood.

AFAF. (*Sarcastically*) Congratulations, lucky wife, here comes your heroic husband, returning dead. What a joy.

MOTHER. (*Shouts hysterically*) Hey, everyone, look my son is back, back after ages of absence. Hey, men, let's celebrate his return. (*Yells as if at a funeral*) Hey people, the body of my son is back.

SHERIF. This is the shock of my return, I understand that. How happy I am to see you. How wonderful for us to find each other after all this time, to find a chest that can hold you inside and help you cry out all these years of loneliness and alienation. (*Foolishly*) How are you?

MOTHER. (*Firmly*) Why did you come back like this, Sherif? You should have returned as you left this house.

SHERIF. I didn't have the choice.

MOTHER. Your excuses are always unsuitable for your age, you, men!

AFAF. (*Looking at his missing legs*) Where are your legs?

SHERIF. I forgot them in this holy land of war.

MOTHER. You shouldn't have returned.

SHERIF. (*Coldly*) I came back for you, mother. Come here and hug me, hug your only son quickly. (*He tries to move towards her.*)

MOTHER. (*Shouts*) Get away!

SHERIF. (*Embarrassed*) How? How should I get away, when I came only for your sake? (*Addressing Afaf*) You, my dear wife, why this coldness? This is your lover, returning home. Come to me, Afaf, my dearly beloved... I'm back at our home; my childhood dream, my friends, my memories, and the good people of our street. I returned to make up for all these years of being away and for all they have deprived me off.

AFAF. Whatever they deprived you off is much less and easier to deal with than what they deprived us off.

SHERIF. Everything can return to normal, everything will be as it used to be and much better. Here I am back again.

MOTHER. Who are you trying to fool?

SHERIF. On my way here, I said “I will get rid of this cursed chair”. You are going to be my legs.

MOTHER. It’s better to get rid of us instead.

SHERIF. No one can get rid of his own mother.

MOTHER. I used to be your mother. I’m a different woman now.

SHERIF. Never mind, mother, it’s alright. I know you won’t believe that I’m back. Your happiness, along with the surprise, would make you unable to talk sensibly. They say in moments of shock speech become meaningless. I am a shock, a happy shock. I am back to you, mother: your loving son. Oh dear God, dear God, you used to deprive yourself of sleep so that I could grow up to be a good man. How happy I am to see you again. How proud I am of you and you, my dear wife, too.

AFAF. (*Mockingly*) Yes, people like you should be very proud. Men like you should eat and drink of their pride, and sleep on a bed of pride/

SHERIF. (*Interrupting*) You made me a man, mother.

MOTHER. A man! Who for? Where is your manhood (*Shouts at him*) In which grave have you buried your youth?

SHERIF. Wars. Their wars. I have nothing to do with it.

AFAF. Leave... It’s better if you leave this place, now.

SHERIF. Leave? Where to?

AFAF. To those who deprived you off your house and grant you this chair as a priceless gift instead, so that you can come back a semi-man. Go back and ask them about the address of your old house.

SHERIF. This is my house, my home. I am sure/

AFAF. (*Interrupting*) There is no door to your house; this building that you created of papers.

SHERIF. Don’t worry, my dear wife; I’ll buy a strong door. I won’t let the wind touch your dress again. Don’t worry.

MOTHER. Leave us alone, you are a stranger.

SHERIF. A stranger?! (*Yells at her*) Mother, I'm Sherif. Can it be that your motherhood has stopped working?

MOTHER. I don't know you, The Sherif that I used to know, left my house with two legs.

SHERIF. I said/

MOTHER. I don't know you.

AFAF. We said we know.

MOTHER. Leave now, far away. This place can't include more rubbish than it does now.

SHERIF. Where shall I go, if I am kicked out of here?

AFAF. Look for another shelter, for what is left of you. You won't need a large space. I think one meter square would be more than enough.

SHERIF. You weren't that cruel before/

AFAF. (*Angrily*) Before what, ha? Tell us, before what?

SHERIF. I don't know, what happened to you?

AFAF. What happened to all the beautiful, wonderful, pure and innocent women in our street, do you remember them? They used to be like angels who knew one road only, you know! Now they have walked all kinds of roads.

MOTHER. What happened to all good mothers in our street, who could never walk without abayas.[\[3\]](#) Do you remember them, they became without abayas and no clothes too and no/

SHERIF. I don't understand your vagueness here.

AFAF. Haven't you seen, what happened to our street?

SHERIF. Yes, the houses are all open now, how can you explain this? Someone with a thick long moustache calls with difficult-to-understand words. One of them was, Oh God, I knew her very well, she walked out half naked. She used to be an honourable woman. Our next door wife walked out too, but almost naked. Strange faces, I haven't seen before. I thought our street had turned into a market, maybe!

AFAF. More like a very specialized market.

MOTHER. With a lot of customers.

SHERIF. Men coming in and out of my house. I don't know them. Who are they?

MOTHER. Like you, Sherif. They found what they are looking for in this market after all the pavements felt bored of their heavy snoring every night.

SHERIF. Market! Market? What kind of a market?

MOTHER. It's the market of soft and white flesh.

SHERIF. In our street?

AFAF. In our street and in our house!

SHERIF. In... in... in... my house? Here?!

MOTHER. Yes, here, in this very room. (*Referring to one of the rooms.*)

SHERIF. My home? My room, here? How can I stand on my feet when silence has swallowed me? (*Screams*) Who am I? Who? Who? Who?

(*He stops for a while.*)

SHERIF. Is it me? And if it was me, who is this and that and those? And this house, is it the house? I was, as I used to think, the man of this place. I used to be a hero here, brave. I remember that very well. What happened? Oh, I feel I don't understand anything anymore. (*Frantically*) Am I him? Really him? Or am I not... really him? (*He starts moving in his chair around the place.*)

MOTHER. What's wrong with you?

SHERIF. Thinking.

MOTHER. Can you? Alright, what are you thinking of?

SHERIF. Let's get rid of this wife, mother. Let's kick her out of here, throw her away.

MOTHER. Afaf?

SHERIF. She is not Afaf anymore.

MOTHER. Are you conspiring with me against her?

SHERIF. She can't stay with me.

- MOTHER. *(Laughs)* You can't stay here with us.
- SHERIF. I am your son. How could you be against me?
- MOTHER. Leave aside these words from your war. Your wife is the source of our living. We eat out of her work. Can you provide some other source instead of her?
- SHERIF. As you see me...
- MOTHER. In a wheelchair... unable to move. Dead. Then let us live.
- SHERIF. I want to live too.
- MOTHER. Dead are dead, how could you live?
- SHERIF. I wish I had just a little bit of power.
- MOTHER. If you had had just a little bit of power, nothing of this would've happened to us.
- SHERIF. This is my house; you both shall leave, right now.
- MOTHER. Stop these silly readymade words of yours; they won't do any good.
- SHERIF. You fell into vice.
- MOTHER. *(Rejecting)* Please, call it surviving. When vice is the cause of our survival then it should be called virtue.
- SHERIF. Vice... It is the line between being a beautiful creature and the ugliest creature in this world.
- MOTHER. Vice... is when a person is the cause of the destruction of another person. This is what vice means. We are practicing our honour in our own honourable way.
- SHERIF. I am almost unable to recognize you. I don't know my own mother.
- MOTHER. There is no problem.
- SHERIF. Let's live together, you and me. Let's throw away this fallen woman and clean this house of the dirt that is growing in it.
- MOTHER. And starve to death. These are your solutions. How wonderful! What would you say if we wandered along the roads, you and me? I would push you and you would beg for food.

SHERIF. Let's purify ourselves, please.

MOTHER. They made a mistake and cut your brain off not your legs.

SHERIF. I am not crazy.

MOTHER. What is madness, then?

SHERIF. You can't be Sheriff's mother.

MOTHER. I should send you to an infirmary. Your condition is getting worse. They'll take care of you. You'll find many friends there. It would be nice to see some old friends there. Old warriors. You know them very well. Some lost their arms, others legs, others came back with no manhood left for them, while others came with no heads...

SHERIF. Do they do that really?

MOTHER. You'll see for yourself.

SHERIF. My brain is not harmed.

MOTHER. Who said so?

SHERIF. I doubt your motherhood.

MOTHER. That's another sign for your insanity.

SHERIF. Please say that you are not my mother.

MOTHER. What's the difference?

SHERIF. Why are you like this? Why?

MOTHER. What were you waiting for during all this time of absence? A house with no man, with no walls, two women in an everlasting night, alone, depressed. In our kitchen we hid hunger. In your white wedding room, there was unbeatable frost. A wife who was burning every second. What were you waiting for?

SHERIF. You should have waited for me.

MOTHER. Waited for you! We sold everything in this house, except for one bed that we used afterwards in our work. Even your clothes couldn't escape being sold. We waited, but you were very late, late; very late, man.

SHERIF. Let's forget what happened. And start all over again. Here I am, back again.

MOTHER. I wish that you didn't, child.

SHERIF. You have changed a lot.

MOTHER. Look at yourself.

SHERIF. War and absence, they changed me. But you...

MOTHER. War and your absence, hunger, need, loneliness, silly mottos and the misery of honour: this is what changed us.

SHERIF. I am Sherif. I need you, mother.

MOTHER. But I don't need you, Sherif.

SHERIF. Oh God, who is this?

MOTHER. I prayed a lot and asked God that you be brought back. I prayed till my prayers hated me: 'Dear God, please send him back to me, safe and sound. He is my only child and I have nobody else. If you wish to take him from me then take me with him, dear God.' (*She starts weeping*) And here you return a dead body.

SHERIF. Are you mocking me?

MOTHER. You don't need anyone to mock you.

SHERIF. Your look doesn't remind me of my mother.

MOTHER. And your look doesn't remind me of my son.

SHERIF. You have no memories at all.

MOTHER. Your absence erased all my beautiful memories.

SHERIF. That wasn't my choice.

MOTHER. What should I have done if I didn't have a choice?

SHERIF. I need to scream, to cry, to shout... I don't know... I just need this fire out of my chest.

AFAF. (*Appears form one of the rooms*) Why is this square shouting again?

MOTHER. Ask your loving husband.

AFAF. (*Sarcastically*) My husband! Oh dear husband! What were you up to?

MOTHER. People like me don't do deals with people like him. You can ask your heroic husband about the secret of this intimate meeting. (*She leaves to her room.*)

AFAF. Against me? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? If you came back with your two legs, you wouldn't do that? I smell a failing conspiracy.

SHERIF. We must be separated.

AFAF. (*Laughing loudly*) Of what?

SHERIF. Of me.

AFAF. Aren't we separated yet?

SHERIF. Everybody knows that you are my wife.

AFAF. And what if we separated, what'd happen?

SHERIF. You leave this house.

AFAF. Imagine, I am suggesting that we separate and you leave this house.

SHERIF. This is my house.

AFAF. At least you remembered that you have a house, at last... what a pain.

SHERIF. I wasn't taking a holiday.

AFAF. And what would having a holiday look like? You leave your wife after one month of marriage and stay absent, absent my groom. (*Yelling*) Stop talking now. Stop talking.

SHERIF. Please leave. Does this sound better? I am begging you.

AFAF. You dream a lot, you, square man.

SHERIF. (*Frustrated*) Don't say square. I beg you, leave, leave. Please leave, my dear, who was very dear.

AFAF. Dear! Where shall I go?

SHERIF. I don't know and I don't care. What matters to me is that I don't see you again.

AFAF. You ate all your food at my miserable table and now you want to throw me away like an old woman with a wrinkled face.

SHERIF. You are the shame that stained this house.

AFAF. *(Firmly)* You have to behave yourself in this place or you might find who will help you to behave. You have to reconsider your judgements here. Who shames this house, Sherif.? Our house used to be a river of beauty which everyone used to clean their dirt in. You were the reason why our chastity exploded to pieces. Who is it that shames you, oh so honourable Sherif? *(Screams)* Who, you square?

SHERIF. *(About to hit her)* Stop saying square, I said. I'll hit you. *(He tries to leave his chair out of anger, but in vain.)*

AFAF. Come on hit me, if you can, hit me! What miserable man you are. Look what they have done to you. Even in front of your wife, you are as weak as an ant.

SHERIF. You were unable to raise your head in front of me out of shyness, respect and kindness...

AFAF. I was fooled by your false manhood. They cut off your hands too. Try to come up to slap me on the face. *(She takes up his hands to slap her face. He withdraws his hand from her grasp.)*

SHERIF. I despise and refuse you, woman.

AFAF. Refuse! You can't refuse me if you are a man. How strange, how could you refuse me when you are scattered pieces of a memory of a man!

SHERIF. You spiteful woman...

AFAF. The harshness of the years took away our hearts, leaving us heartless.

SHERIF. What about our love? We used to be the most beautiful lovers. Do you remember our lovely nights? You used to love me like crazy and I loved you too. The moon was our witness who never lied. You can ask him about the truthfulness of that love. I love you. I love. I love. It's for that love of ours, I am asking you to leave, leave this house.

AFAF. When you went missing, I discovered that our love was a silly dream. Lies! Meaningless words!

SHERIF. Your language is a sharp knife that kills birds with no mercy.

AFAF. Those birds were slaughtered long ago. These emotions, my old husband, do not fit in our new world now. When hunger comes through the door, love escapes through the window.

SHERIF. Are you a woman made of stone?

AFAF. *(Firmly)* Get out now. Leave this house and our life now. Our work won't

be right with a man in here.

SHERIF. My mother will kick you out.

AFAF. You'll both starve to death.

SHERIF. Is there any more death than this?

AFAF. Words... You have nothing but words: words that don't feed or water anything. You can't understand what hunger did to us. It was a worm that ate our eyes.

SHERIF. Let's reach a solution.

AFAF. I am the source of living here. Your mother's job is to receive customers. You are nothing but an urgent caller, a dead caller, a dead moment, a buried age...

SHERIF. I'm the man of this house.

AFAF. *(Laughs)* You scared me, pillar of the house. You are an insect now, a bug, a fly that knows nothing but buzzing around, buzz, buzz, buzz *(She leaves to her room.)*

SHERIF. *(Alone)* Buzz, buzz, buzz... Where can I get the power to change everything from? A power that can clean this house? My house? I am a square, half a man, remains, a pile of bones...

(Pause)

(SHERIF, fully powerful, stands on his feet with no wheelchair holding a knife in his hands.)

AFAF. *(Begging in fear)* I beg you!

MOTHER. *(More afraid)* Please, son.

AFAF. We all make mistakes.

MOTHER. We were waiting for your return eagerly. We didn't sell your clothes. What a happy return. I know how happy you are now, returning to your mother and home. Afaf. I kiss your hands, please understand the situation.

MOTHER. We didn't have a choice.

SHERIF. Your excuses are not suitable to your ages, women!

AFAF. You are my loving husband. Do you remember our love? I love you. I love you. I love you. Our lovely nights together. I love you. The moon is our witness, and he never lies. You can ask him about these moments that were endless.

MOTHER. My dear son, when you returned our smiles returned to us.

SHERIF. Choose a way to die, both of you.

MOTHER. Would you kill your mother? We can forget everything and return as we used to be. Purify your house.

AFAF. I am Afaf, your loving wife. Did you forget me? I used to love you like crazy.

SHERIF. You are the shame that should be erased from the memory of everyone.

MOTHER. My son, be sensible.

AFAF. I'll be a servant at your feet. I won't say a word to any request. Please, just let me live.

SHERIF. No use, it's too late.

MOTHER. We are asking for forgiveness.

SHERIF. I am not a god!

AFAF. This is your house, you are the man here.

MOTHER. You are our saviour, salvation. We have been waiting for very long time for you.

AFAF. Please. Don't kill us.

MOTHER. Let's kick this woman out of our house and we can live together, you and me, Sherif. What do you say, kill her?

AFAF. Kick your mother out or kill her. She forced me to do all these things that I didn't want.

MOTHER. Don't believe her. You can't kick your mother out and leave a strange woman in your house.

AFAF. I am not strange. I am Afaf, his wife.

MOTHER. Get out of my son's house. Now, quick.

AFAF. I won't leave.

MOTHER. You will. (*They fight each other.*)

SHERIF. Stop it, enough! I will decide what to do.

AFAF. You'll kick your mother out, right?

MOTHER. Divorce her and start again. I will make you marry the most beautiful woman ever. Divorce her now.

AFAF. Your wise and mature mind is bigger than listening to this silliness.

MOTHER. What did you say?

AFAF. Please, decide my darling, whatever you wish, my husband.

MOTHER. *(Trying to approach him)* Let me hug you, my son.

SHERIF. *(Withdraws)* Stay away from me. I'll kill you both.

(He tries to stab them both. He fails; he freezes, his hand stops and the knife falls to the ground.)

SHERIF. I can't. I can't.

MOTHER. *(She comes out of her room)* What's wrong with you, square? You startle us. What is it that you can't do?

SHERIF. *(Realizes that he was dreaming)* Ha... nothing, nothing.

AFAF. *(Comes out of her room)* What's wrong? Talking to yourself?

MOTHER. He got fever, I think. Take him to this room, till we decide what we will do with him.

(AFAF pushes his chair to a room at the side.)

MOTHER. *(Alone)* There is no room for motherhood here. This heart of mine is polluted and I can't remember being a mother once. Am I a mother? What does motherhood mean? I don't know. I forgot. I'm a mother with no memory.

AFAF. *(Comes in a hurry)* Your son is dangerous here.

MOTHER. What shall we do?

AFAF. We should get rid of him.

MOTHER. What do you mean?

AFAF. Kill him.

MOTHER. (*Startled*) Kill him?! No. No. I don't want such a thing in my house.

AFAF. Why?

MOTHER. Our customers will escape if they hear about a murder here.

AFAF. It will be a secret; no one will know.

MOTHER. How?

AFAF. One of our customers will do it for us in return of a night of pure pleasure
and some money.

MOTHER. No. I will send him to an infirmary.

AFAF. His insistence on staying is a source of fear for me. I fear his betrayal.

MOTHER. Don't worry. Can't you see him? He's even lost the ability to stand.

AFAF. He wishes to get rid of us by any means.

MOTHER. He wanted me to kick you out.

AFAF. His kind facial features are completely changed.

MOTHER. As if they put different blood in his veins.

AFAF. He used to be kind and sweet, with a beautiful face. They deformed
everything in him.

MOTHER. They made a different thing of him.

AFAF. Why do they do that to them?

MOTHER. Others always decide for the coward.

AFAF. And your son?

MOTHER. Is one of those cowards.

AFAF. I used to think he was a hero.

MOTHER. They used to call everyone who was able to kill a hero, which is wrong.

AFAF. I used to think he was able to kill ten men with one charge.

MOTHER. Men's muscles are nothing but ornaments to their bodies.

AFAF. Let's send him to an infirmary, then.

(MOTHER leaves and comes back in a hurry carrying a big black rubbish bag.)

AFAF. What are you doing?

MOTHER. *(Referring to the bag)* Making a new wedding dress for my son.

(They go to the room where SHERIF is. We hear screams and shouts. They come out pushing the chair. SHERIF is in the rubbish bag trying in vain to fight.)

SHERIF. *(From inside the bag)* I am back, finally back, mother. You, my dear wife, Afaf, can you hear me? This house has always filled me with warmth. Is it invaded by cold too?

(Screams) Mother, haven't we got enough bags? I was born in bag and lived in a circle of bags. And here you are again, putting me a bag again. This house can't include my manhood anymore. Can you receive a man who was stained by war, my wife? Do you worry that your bed will be invaded by an old whiteness. You pure woman! You used to be a very small thing, who knew nothing but love. Love. Your words were so little 'my dear husband, my Sherif, my love, my soul'. Was your love killed by the long dagger of waiting? *(Screams)* My wife... Look back at me, you might remember this husband who is made of memories, dreams and crazy hopes. I am nothing now, except for a stray sharp edge that is lost looking for a piece of white flesh to settle down in. Mother... You used to be the mother of our whole street. In your lap, all children would hide when running away from their parents. You, pure woman, what a huge sadness has made you leave your motherhood for something else. Where is your shyness? *(Screams louder)* Take me out of this bag!

AFAF. Don't be afraid.

MOTHER. We won't hurt you... We'll just throw you away, out of our lives.

SHERIF. Where is my mother?

AFAF. Here she is, next to you.

SHERIF. No, this can't be my mother. No... Never.

MOTHER. What shall I do? This game must continue. You have to stay away, my son.

SHERIF. Where is Afaf, my wife?

MOTHER. You have to be reasonable. There is no room for emotions. This heart is replaced by a piece of wood.

AFAF. This is a waste of time.

SHERIF. Wait! This is a crime!

MOTHER. Crimes never cease to happen, nothing new about that! It became part of our everyday live a very long time ago; just like food, drink, laughing and crying.

SHERIF. Your world is strange... It wasn't like this before. I can't breathe inside this bag, let me out!

MOTHER. Our world... Women's world only.

SHERIF. This bag stinks.

MOTHER. We used to put the rubbish in it and throw it far away. We are doing the same thing now; what's changed!

AFAF. There is no use for this empty talk.

MOTHER. You have to join your brothers in the infirmary.

SHERIF. I am not insane. I am perfectly sane.

MOTHER. What's the use of a sane mind if it isn't thinking?

SHERIF. I think a lot.

MOTHER. If you think then you are on your way to insanity.

SHERIF. I admit my weakness to you, but this doesn't mean that I don't deserve to live.

MOTHER. You deserve to live, but not on our shoulders.

AFAF. Can you stay here and watch what is happening in your house silently?
Can you?

SHERIF. I am not clinging to this life. I just want to live the rest of my life by any means.

MOTHER. How trivial this is; and you are a man!

SHERIF. Stop calling me a man. My manhood left me long ago.

MOTHER. What we believe now, Sherif, can't meet what you have in your sweet memories of this chaste house.

SHERIF. My memories are amputated with what was amputated from my body.

AFAF. I am sorry that you are wearing clothes that don't fit you very well.

SHERIF. There is nothing left to be sorry about... Nothing.

MOTHER. Our house has a smell that you won't stand.

SHERIF. I'm used to the smell of dead bodies.

AFAF. You won't stay here to spread the dust of your memories in our eyes.

SHERIF. I gave up the chair of my manhood, Afaf.

MOTHER. How could we submit to your existence here, among us?

SHERIF. I don't want to leave like this, so that they'd say he refused as a man. No...
I have to realize this myself.

MOTHER. If the mind doesn't support manhood, the mind will stop and manhood
will be lost.

SHERIF. Did you believe what they used to say about me, mother? I was the man of
the men; the hero, strong, brave...

MOTHER. They fooled you.

SHERIF. I never listened to them.

MOTHER. And this is the disaster.

AFAF. It's time.

MOTHER. You have to understand our situation.

SHERIF. Please, stop.

AFAF. You are begging us to stay.

MOTHER. Your presence here should make you blind, deaf, and, and, and...

SHERIF. I feel so disappointed now. I can do anything here. I can clean, cook, beg.
Just let me stay, please.

AFAF. Work...?

MOTHER. How can you work with your chair?

SHERIF. I don't know.

AFAF. The damp of this house won't suit you.

SHERIF. I can serve both of you, please.

MOTHER. What a dead sympathy, deserted. I can't be a mother to him anymore. Well, I might try... I won't lose anything.

AFAF. What is he going to work at?

MOTHER. We have a vacancy that might be suitable for you.

SHERIF. Yes, just now, I heard my mother's voice.

AFAF. What is he going to work at, auntie?

MOTHER. A suitable job for him.

SHERIF. What is it?

MOTHER. You'll sit at the gate holding a small bag. Your job is receiving customers while they enter the house. And they will put the money in your bag before coming inside. We'll teach you what to say and how to call for them to come in... What do you say?

SHERIF. Just let me out of this bag... Yes, I agree (*shouts*) I agree, agree, agree.

MOTHER. Afaf help him out of the bag. (*Afaf helps him out.*)

SHERIF. Where is the small bag? Give it to me, mother.

MOTHER. Just a second.... (*She runs to bring the bag. He takes it from her in a hurry and pushes his chair to the front gate while the two women shout with joy.*)

Curtain.

Iraq, Nasriayah 1995.

The text was first published in 2005 in a book titled *The Return of an Un-Absent Man*

Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi was born in 1965 in the southern city of Al Nasriyah in Iraq. Al Zaidi has a diploma in Education from the Teacher Training Institute in 1987. He is a member of the Union of Iraqi Literary Men and Writers. He started his career as a playwright in 1984, writing about 40 plays until today. His plays were performed inside Iraq and outside, in several Arab countries. He received more than 30 recognition awards for his theatrical works as a playwright. He also wrote a number of articles in theatre that were published in several Iraqi and Arabic journals since the early 1990s. He published four collections of plays so far: *The Eighth Day of the Week* (2001), *The Return of the Man Who Wasn't Absent* (2005), *A Performance in Arabic* (2011), *The Divinities* (2014). Some of his other plays appeared in different books that included collections of Iraqi play texts such as *Cinders* (2013) and *The Suffering of the Diamonds* (2015), in addition to a text that was included in a collection of Iraqi plays translated into English entitled, *A Selection from Iraqi Theatre*, that was published in Iraq by Al Ma'moon Publishing in 2010. His play, *Rubbish*, was first written in 1995, receiving the Yousif Al Ani's Award for Play-Writing in Iraq, yet the play was withdrawn from performance due to its intriguing subject matter and daring presentation. After that the play remained as a reading text for trustworthy friends and colleagues for about ten years, until it was published as the first play among a group of five plays in Al Zaidi's *The Return of the Man Who Wasn't Absent* in 2005. The play was finally premiered in Iraq in Basra in 2012, and it was later given another performance in Lebanon in 2014.

Alyaa A. Naser (translator) received her diploma in English language teaching in 1996. She taught English language in Iraq for ten years. She had a B.A. in English language from Baghdad University in 2003. In 2006, she completed her master's degree in English Literature/ Modern Poetic Drama from Baghdad University, College of Education for Women. She taught English literature and drama for five years in the same college, as well as working as the coordinator of the department of English there, before starting her PhD studies in the UK in 2012. She is currently pursuing her doctoral studies in the School of English/ Sheffield University under the supervision of Prof. Steve Nicholson and Dr. Rachel Zerihan. Her Ph.D research is focused on *Contemporary Drama of and about Iraq (1990-2013)*. As part of her research, she has translated about twenty Iraqi plays so far, in addition to some prose poetry texts into English.

[1] Sherif is an Arabic male name, meaning 'honour'

[2] Afaf is an Arabic female name, meaning 'chastity'.

[3] Abaya is a traditional Iraqi black cloak that women wear over their normal clothes that covers their head and all their body till toes. It shows their faces and hands only. Traditional abayas are still worn by Iraqi women in rural towns and villages, and while visiting holy shrines of sacred Islamic figures around Iraq, as a sign of chastity.