

## The Cart

**The Cart A Play by Hamed Almaliki**

**Translated by Alyaa A. Naser**

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*(An Iraqi house, a poor one; there is nothing but eroded walls, worn curtains, remains of some furniture and a TV that has nothing on except news about the events in Tunisia and Egypt, a revolution that is known as the Jasmine Revolution. To the corner of the stage, there is a wooden cart that is full of old wilted vegetables. The sense of poverty and need controls the space. HANOON enters, carrying a can of fuel (petrol or gasoline). He is a middle aged man in worn clothes.)*

HANOON.                    *(Shouting)* Leave me alone, I said... You bitch, leave me or I'll burn myself.

*(His distressed wife FEDHEELA follows him, dragging four young children along, crying and screaming. They are their children.)*

FEDHEELA.                You, Hanoon, you've gone mad?!

HANOON.                    I said, leave me. Or I'll divorce you.

FEDHEELA.                Divorce me! And burn yourself. You loser, you're drunk; drunk, and don't know what you're saying. Every night you get drunk and you become a monster. You should be ashamed of yourself.

*(HANOON takes notice of the word 'drunk' and looks for the table where the TV is and sees the bottle of alcohol that is empty and a few bits of salad in a small plate. He gets nearer to the table and holds the bottle.)*

HANOON.                    *(To himself)* Oh, you son of a bitch, you finished the whole bottle!

FEDHEELA.                *(To her children)* Stop crying you, too.

HANOON.                    Can you imagine, drank the whole bottle and I'm not drunk yet! *(Gives a loud cry of anger.)*

FEDHEELA.                And what do you think a drunk looks like? Your heart condition is really bad and the doctor warned you not to drink anymore: you'll die in your sleep!

HANOON.                    You're stupid. Do you think that whatever the doctor says is true? Then why didn't he tell me not to push this cart in the street anymore!

*(He starts pushing his cart around the stage crazily; the cart makes a loud, annoying squeaking noise while screaming hysterically.)*

HANOON.                    *(Loudly)* And why didn't he say, "Don't push your cart again"!

FEHDEELA.                Stop it, you idiot; do you want to make a scandal? There are people living nearby, you know!

*(He pushes his wife away and pours the petrol on his head)*

THE CHILDREN.        *(Shouting together)* Dad!

FEHDEELA.                *(Shouts)* Oh, Dear lord... Help, the bloke's gone mad!

HANOON.                    You bitch, leave me to burn myself peacefully.

*(He tries to light a match and FEDHEELA and the children cling to his clothes.)*

THE CHILDREN.        Dad... Dad!

HANOON.                    You loser, leave me. This poverty has killed us all, long ago. We are a laughing stock to all. Leave me!

FEDHEELA.                Watching news has taken your brain away, you drunk.

HANOON.                    *(He is calm)* Drunk! Don't you know that even alcohol is banned now? Those who steal are very important and they put them on TV; and those who kill put on clean suits and the cameras take photos of them. But those who drink alcohol to forget about those who stole their living and who killed them are called drunks, and further they have banned it, so that they won't forget... Yes, you loser, so that he won't forget and stay afraid and hide in his wife's lap... That is why, loser, I said leave me. Let me burn myself. Do you think that Bouazizi, or whatever his name is, is braver than me!

FEDHEELA.                You crazy, you'll burn yourself and burn us too. Go to sleep. You are drunk and you don't know what you are doing. Oh, dear Lord... what's happening to us?

*(HANOON falls to the ground, drunk. FEDHEELA sleeps beside him so that she can prevent him from moving away.)*

FEDHEELA.                Go to sleep... oh dear, please have some rest... I beg you.

HANOON.                    I want to see the news.

FEDHEELA.                Loser, leave the news now. Have some sleep and keep silent for a while. Oh dear, you smell like petrol. *(In distress)* Oh dear... it was only a few drops of petrol I borrowed from our neighbour to keep us warm... How can we get any more now, you loser!

HANOON. I want to watch the news. Al Jazeera, let's see Al Jazeera... No this one wasn't fair with us... Al Arabia, yes, let me watch Al Arabia, oh no... since this beautiful reporter<sup>[1]</sup> was killed I stopped watching it. Alhurra... let's watch Alhurra... Oh no, they say it's American and I don't want anything that's American, what America has given or taken for me!

FEDHEELA. Oh, why don't you stop mumbling and try to sleep. You have lots of work tomorrow, pushing this cart of vegetables that you couldn't sell today. It's withered, so you might end up throwing it all in the bin. From where can we get money to buy other vegetables? Can alcohol help with that?!

*(While FEDHEELA is still murmuring about their miseries, HANOON is fast asleep and snoring.)*

FEDHEELA. Ha... you are asleep now? You may never wake up again. What a distress you are! He wishes to burn himself, as if we need more miseries! Don't you have mercy for yourself or for us? Why didn't you steal like everyone else did during the invasion; at least we would have a tent that might cover our heads if you had, and maybe it would have been better than this wet room that we can't afford to rent. What a hell we are living in! Let me take the children and sleep on the roof, and you stay here by your bottle and the news. It's just my luck!

*(She pulls the children over and leaves the room. A few moments later, while the body of HANOON is still lying on the ground, he rises artistically, as if his soul is rising from his body and leaving it forever. He is dead. The soul, HANOON, follows his wife and children, talking in Arabic from this moment on in the rest for the play.)*

HANOON. *(After his wife)* Fedheela... Fedheela, come here, please. My heart is beating so fast, I'm choking Fedheela. Please!

*(He turns around and sees his body lying on the ground, and is astonished.)*

HANOON. Who are you? Who am I? It's... me... I am Hanoon the owner of this cart. I lived ages pushing this cart through the roads of the city till my heart started to take its rhythm from the sound of the squeaking of its wheels. Can you cure me... and... and, till they banned me from drinking in case I... I... Who are you?

*(HANOON tries to touch his body to make sure that he exists, and he starts moving around and in a stable manner, since he is not drunk anymore. He runs towards the dead body on the ground and tries to move it, turning it over. He stops and shouts.)*

HANOON. Oh, dear God... this is... this is an illusion, madness... an excellent Iraqi madness... Oh, dear God, who is... and who... Fedheela... Fedheela...

*(He runs towards the door of the room, tries to open it, but the door doesn't open. He tries to knock loudly on the door.)*

HANOON. Fedheela, open the door, Fedheela. The wheel of my heart has stopped squeaking. You are my beloved, darling? I am choking... choking... choking.

*(He falls to the ground looking around in amazement, and he smells his clothes.)*

HANOON. I remember that I wanted to imitate Mohamed Bouazizi; that's why I poured petrol on myself that we borrowed from our neighbour, so that I could get rid of all the miseries in my life. Why can't I smell the petrol now?

*(He crawls slowly to the lying body on his hands and knees and smells the body, smelling the petrol.)*

HANOON. Hey, you... return my petrol to me, at least the smell, oh, sons of bitches. It's the country of petrol and we are begging for its smell. Return the smell, you son of a bitch. *(Screams)* Hey you, Fedheela, your husband is dead. Your husband is dead, Hanoon is dead before he burnt himself, before he could make a tenth of his dreams come true; before he became old, sitting on the edge of the road and watching his grandsons playing in the road; before he sees a country that is empty of carts, carts, the cart... Oh the cart... the cart...

*(He runs towards his cart and pushes it, but this time the wheels don't make the squeaking noise heard previously. He pushes the cart a side strongly and starts praying.)*

HANOON. Now I'm sure, Fedheela, I am dead, and my cart is dead with me too. It has stopped whining too, Fedheela. Oh, please, dear God, forgive me. I repent to thee. God is the greatest! God is the greatest! Here I am praying, I stand for the prayers and life can't stand in my country that is measured by how much prayers there are and what kind of prayers. God is the greatest; God is the greatest. I bear witness that there is only One God. You are my God. Please don't abandon us, we are the poor in the country of petrol. I bear witness that Mohammad is God's messenger. How patient you are my lord with those thieves of my country who stole the holiness of it and wear masks that hide the knives with which they cut heads off using Your name, dear Lord. Come to prayers, and come to life, God is the greatest. He is bigger than anything, then why do those little ones start laughing at Hanoon while he is pushing his cart, passing through the roads while they pass by him in their luxurious cars! Oh dear... their four-wheel-drive cars and my cart that is a soul-drive. I used to push this cart with my soul so that I could go back to Fedheela with a piece of bread for my children and some new used clothes and a bottle of alcohol for me to drink and forget the day that had just passed, when I passed by an explosion that didn't catch me, not because I needed to go back to my lovers, but because destiny wanted to give me another chance in a life that is full of humiliation and misery and mottos of God. You, God, have nothing to do with that. You, Fedheela, your Hanoon is dead, Your Hanoon is dead...



Aziz Khayoun in *The Cart* by Hamed Al Maliki. Photo: courtesy of the playwright.

*(Fedheela enters the room, worried. Hanoon looks at her, looking at her husband's body.)*

FEDHEELA. Damn you, since the first day we married and you snored like a car with a diesel military van. What has happened to you now? You are silent?! Hanoon! Hey you, Hanoon! Oh dear, help, the man isn't answering. Hanoon! *(She screams)* Hanoon... You, Hanoon... Hanoon!

*(She starts to push the body in the hope of making him move, screaming loudly. And when she is sure that he is dead, she starts weeping and slapping her face, chest and head. HANOON starts to imitate her*

*slaps. It is a very sad scene.)*

HANOON. Hey, you mad woman. I'm here by your side. Can't you see me? I am slapping my face just like you. *(Weeps)* Oh...

FEDHEELA. Oh... Oh... Oh... Dear Hanoon, don't leave me here... How can you leave me? For whom? Oh dear... what pain shall take me? Where shall I go of those sons of bitches. How can I raise your children? Hanoon don't leave me. Don't go! *(She starts reciting some traditional Iraqi lines of sadness, hysterically slapping her face and chest out of shock.)* Oh, Basra and Umara<sup>[2]</sup> are whining for you...

HANOON. You liar! Who would weep for a cart man? He lied all the years of his life, moving around the roads to show his goods. How could he buy a handful of life, lost between shelters and guns? Who would buy years that are scattered among the dreams of generals and broken hearts and...?

FEDHEELA. *(Still weeping and slapping and reciting)* We didn't have the chance to see him and he didn't see us, and we didn't say good bye.

HANOON. Stop it, Fedheela. Stop it. I didn't die now. I was dead since I was born in this burning furnace. Oh, dear God... Lord... If I had known that you destined me to push this cart with vegetables and sweep the roads...

FEDHEELA. *(She recites these hymns in a sweet, pained very sad voice, while HANOON listens with amazement.)* He is generous and hospitable. His family and uncles are brave and protect him.

HANOON. Hospitable! How can I host anyone, Fedheela? I have nothing except my goodness and stupidity. What a plate, that includes my goodness and stupidity. People around us philosophise misery and clap for those who rip away the doors of conscience and let the thieves of the night rob whatever chastity the soul has. Fedheela what family and uncles would protect me? I used to knock on the doors of the family to see those old men singing for the murderers and waving their flags of hypocrisy when that president passes by them with his luxurious car and his cigar burns whatever is left of dreams, silly you! *(He starts imitating the chiefs of the tribes in Iraq when they greet a visitor with traditional movements with their hands on their heads to hold their Iqual [headband] while FEDHEELA still weeps and cries over his body, without taking any notice of HANOON, hallucinating alone with words of pain and suffering.)*

HANOON. Fedheela... Fedheela. Take care of our children, please dear Fedheela.

*(She screams loudly, which startle HANOON and makes him jump.)*

HANOON. Damn you, woman!

*(A few men enter, wearing the 'chmagh', a traditional head scarf for men in Iraq. they lift HANOON's body on a flat log, saying, "There is no god but Allah, there is no god but Allah", and others paying respect, "a dead person should be buried quickly". FEDHEELA screams and her children follow her, walking behind the tomb, crying. HANOON watches with astonishment. The stage is empty, except for HANOON.)*

HANOON. They took me! Hey you, where are you taking me? What a philosopher you are! To pay respects to a dead man, they should bury him quickly. To pay respects to a dead man, you should ask why he died, after his death. What a philosopher you are, silly!

*(HANOON sits on the ground.)*

HANOON. They'll bury me and throw tons of dust on me. As if all the dust that used to cover me while alive wasn't enough. They'll take me to a hall that will barely fit me. Slap your face Fedheela, slap it. It's the wife only who will be sad for losing me. She alone has the right to cry and weep. The mother will cry by instinct from her soul, as the son is part of her soul, while the wife would cry for the love of her life that is to be buried in the ground; a wing that used to protect her, a wing that will be broken by the hoes of the burial and throw dust on it; and the two angels will come and ask me; what they should ask me about? About the life that I spent before? I tell you...

*(A teacher comes in, and a board descends from above in the background. The teacher wears a hat.)*

TEACHER. Dar, Daran, Door[3]. [A house, two houses, many houses.]

HANOON. Dar, Daran, Door.

TEACHER. What does the word 'house' mean?

HANOON. A home.

TEACHER. Shut up, a house... is a... house, like the one belonging to your damn parents, for example!

HANOON. Teacher... The house is a home. And if I don't have a house then I have no home! And if the house that we live in is rented, then that means that our home is rented.

TEACHER. Hush you, behind this board there are ears listening. Come here and write, Hanoon!

*(HANOON stands, imitating a first year child, and the TEACHER walks around him with a stick in his hand, reciting a sentence which HANOON tries to write down.)*

TEACHER. Contentment is an everlasting treasure. [Well-known Arabic proverb]

*(Hanoon writes the sentence, and revolts angrily.)*

HANOON. How can that be, sir? How? It's a lie, a lie. They want to convince us with this rubbish that they call life, and they should own these luxurious cars and fancy palaces and perfumes and have the dancers during the nights for their hungry lips. They have everything and for us there is only poverty and we should be content, as it is our everlasting treasure. How can that be, teacher?

TEACHER. Shush you, just below your seat there are eyes watching you, boy. And success is for those who work hard... [Another Arabic proverb.]

*(HANOON writes 'success for those who work hard' and thinks of the phrase and starts laughing.)*

TEACHER.           Why are you laughing, Hanoon?

HANOON.           Is there a governmental order that laughter is banned, teacher? This phrase makes me laugh, teacher. Success is not for those who work hard. It is for those who have good luck, and Hanoon has lived his whole life without any luck. And what luck can there be for a man who was born before a war and lived through a war and grew up in a war, as if he was fed on blood and gunpowder with his mother's milk. He listens to his mother's bed time songs alone with the sounds of bombs visiting his town to cut down trees and lives and the planet, these black signs of death on the walls. And he dies in a war that he couldn't understand anything of, except its last scene. A general and a gibbet and a silence as silent as graves. What luck there is when man's steps are just for others to pass on, teacher! They told us we wouldn't grow old, and here you are, very old!

*(The TEACHER starts to walk like an elderly man with a bent back and a stick that he uses as a cane.)*

HANOON.           Yes, you are old, teacher, and the monthly salary is not enough anymore. And you are still as you used to be, so scared of the ears that are listening and the eyes beneath the desks till the day when they came to your class and arrested you.

*(Four men come with civilian outfits and guns pointed at the TEACHER's head, and drag the TEACHER out.)*

HANOON.           They said that you were killed and buried and they found a mass grave with your body in it. They found your bones, and they recognized you from your hat and then buried you with respect. And everything was over then. I think they called a street after your name, or at least a school. They used the name of the holy figures on streets and schools and they forgot about those who died because of these holy figures, and we replaced Allawi with Ellawi.

*(A new TEACHER comes in. This time he walks with dignity, carrying the stick and hitting his palm in a sign of hidden anger. HANOON doesn't notice him.)*

HANOON.           What are the two angels going to ask me?

*(He sees the teacher and becomes happy.)*

HANOON.           Teacher!

*(The TEACHER grabs his own suit and tears it to reveal a military uniform with the rank of a sergeant. He turns his hat over to make it like a military beret and acts like a sergeant.)*

SERGEANT.        *(Commands)* Get ready.

HANOON.           *(Ready)* Long live the Ba'th.

SERGEANT.        Rest.



HANOON.                    *(At rest)* Long live the leader.

SERGEANT.                 Hanoon, get ready.

HANOON.                    *(Ready)* Long live the Ba'th.

SERGEANT.                 Hanoon! To the left; move!

HANOON.                    *(Marching to the left, chanting)* Allah, Home, Leader, Allah, Home, Leader. We didn't keep our God, we couldn't protect our home and we couldn't take off our leader. What a bunch of liars we are! Allah, Home and Leader[4]...

SERGEANT.                 Hanoon... Stop. *(HANOON stops)*

SERGEANT.                 Weapons aside!

*(HANOON looks around to search for a weapon to carry out the order.)*

HANOON.                    I have no weapon, my sergeant. We don't have any other weapons except for the one that's not working *(his words carry a sexual connotation)*. May God help you, Fedheela. *(He laughs.)*

SERGEANT.                 Hanoon. Don't laugh or you shall be punished.

HANOON.                    Punished, my sergeant? Throw me in a hole of mud, for example! How dare you, sergeant! I am a graduate, sergeant; a graduate with a bachelor, for God's sake!

SERGEANT.                 Bachelor... before you, I used to have a soldier with Haemorrhoids and I made him sit on a huge hot rock. What is a bachelor, then?

HANOON.                    A Bachelor is an academic degree and not a disease, I'm a graduate, can't you understand? A graduate!

SERGEANT.                 Oh, yeah. Listen to me, whether a graduate or not, you all eat dirt, so sit down.

*(HANOON sits on the ground and the SERGEANT starts walking towards him with pride, wielding his stick and starting to teach him how to fight.)*

SERGEANT.                 I'll teach you, the arts of war, Hanoon.

HANOON.                    Does war have arts, sergeant?

SERGEANT.                 Yes, Hanoon, in order to win!

HANOON.                    There is only one winner in war, sergeant, and that is death! Death is victorious at the very end. It chews up the lives of young men and drinks their blood as a toast to destruction and the fallen roses that were cut before their time. The winner in war, sergeant, is a taxi driver who carries a

tomb over his car; a tomb wrapped with national foil, I mean the flag. And the mothers, oh the poor dear mothers, who look through their windows. Each one starts to pray deeply that the cab won't stop at her doorstep. It doesn't matter if it stopped at her neighbour's door, or any other door, except hers. The winner is the coffin-maker and grave-digger. Everybody might win the war, except the soldier, as he is a death certificate walking on its feet.

SERGEANT.                When the enemy attacks, you have to be sure that he is going to kill you. If you don't kill him first, he'll kill you.

HANOON.                Just like me, there is an obsessed general just behind him, shouting at him, 'defend your home' ... He actually means 'defend my throne'. Sons of bitches, they mock us.

SERGEANT.                Hanoon, you have to die for your home.

HANOON.                And why can't I live for my home?

SERGEANT.                You should die for the sake of God.

HANOON.                And does God need my death for him to be worshipped?

SERGEANT.                You have a long tongue, Hanoon!

HANOON.                Because it is trained to shine the military boots of you and your general, so that you can both be happy with my discipline. Sergeant, take me to war.

SERGEANT.                (*Commanding*) Hanoon, be ready.

HANOON.                (*Stands ready*) Long live the Ba'th.

SERGEANT.                Hanoon, to war, march.

(*The SERGEANT starts his military march before HANOON and HANOON follows similarly.*)

SERGEANT.                (*Chanting*) We are walking, walking to war... [\[5\]](#) as a lover who is defending his beloved...

HANOON.                This is a lie, Sergeant... I am afraid.

SERGEANT.                (*Continues singing*) His beloved... beloved and we are marching to war...

HANOON.                My beloved will ride the car; my officer would drive his fancy car by the universities, where my beloved is, and hang his military jacket on the back seat, showing his military rank to impress my beloved...

SERGEANT.                (*Still singing*) This is the Iraqi...Iraqi... Iraqi... When he loves, he dies defending his beloved, so that no one can touch her, and here we are marching off to war...

HANOON. My beloved does not love soldiers... They are projects of death that are delayed ... Stop it! Enough! I said enough, Sergeant.

*(The SERGEANT leaves the stage and HANOON is alone again.)*

You two angels of death, do you want me to finish the story? After the war, there was another war. My age couldn't take any more insults from sergeants and officers. They said that my expiry date had passed, and wars love young men only. I made my cart and I hung my bachelor certificate on the wall of the toilet so that when I shit, I shit with honour. I pushed my cart and with it I pushed all my disappointment and my dignity and what was left of my age through these cold roads. And the war was over, and we had new teachers.

*(A POLITICIAN enters. Of course, he is the same person who played the TEACHER and the SERGEANT, but this time he is wearing a fine suit and carrying an elections fund.)*

HANOON. This time the teacher doesn't carry a stick, but a box, a transparent box. We are to put pieces of paper in it.

POLITICIAN. Good evening, Hanoon.

HANOON. You seem nice, teacher. Good evening.

POLITICIAN. Do you know me?

HANOON. You look like many people I've met in my life. They used to carry sticks; this is the difference between you and them.

POLITICIAN. I carry something else. It's... it's a box.

HANOON. A box?

POLITICIAN. Yes, a box, locked, with a small opening at the top.

HANOON. I hate the word 'opening', it reminds me of piles, and the sergeant would punish those with a Bachelor or piles, teacher. What's inside that box?

POLITICIAN. A game.

HANOON. A game?

POLITICIAN. Yes, a game. We are going to play it together, you and me.

HANOON. A game! What's it called?

POLITICIAN. You can call it whatever you like.

HANOON.                    Whatever you like? I haven't heard of such a game before. Whatever you like?

POLITICIAN.                (*Laughs*) That's why we came for you. You are ignorant; we are going to educate you.

HANOON.                    Educate us! How?

POLITICIAN.                With this game.

HANOON.                    A game that is called 'whatever you like'?

POLITICIAN.                (*Laughs*) Yes, whatever you like.

HANOON.                    What are the rules of the game?

POLITICIAN.                The rules are very easy, you just need to put a piece of paper inside the box.

HANOON.                    Paper?

POLITICIAN.                Yes, paper; just like that. (*He takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and insert it inside the box.*)

HANOON.                    Yes. And what happens after that?

POLITICIAN.                I rule.

HANOON.                    I put the paper inside the box, and you rule?

POLITICIAN.                Yes.

HANOON.                    Why?

POLITICIAN.                Just like that.

HANOON.                    I didn't get it.

POLITICIAN.                I... represent you.

HANOON.                    Where?

POLITICIAN.                In the parliament.

HANOON.                    Why you?

POLITICIAN.                Because I am a politician.

HANOON.                   And I am a jackass!

POLITICIAN.             Almost. (*Quickly realizes what he just said*) No... No... You are a citizen.

HANOON.                   And you?

POLITICIAN.             I am a politician, I'll teach you.

HANOON.                 So you are a teacher; but you don't look like my teacher, who was buried in a mass grave. And you don't look like my other teacher, that poor sergeant who ended up killed in the war and became a martyr. You are teaching me something else.

POLITICIAN.             Yes. I am teaching you a game. You elect me because I give speeches on TV and talk about politics. I'll teach you democracy and freedom and human rights and you point me on this paper, like that, and I will work for your service.

HANOON.                 What if you make a mistake?

POLITICIAN.             I'll let you demonstrate in Freedom Square in the middle of the city and you'll say whatever you like, even if you insult me.

HANOON.                 (*Surprised*) Really?

POLITICIAN.             Yes, really.

HANOON.                 Give me that paper. You are the teacher I used to look for, for such a long time. (*The POLITICIAN gives HANOON a paper and a pen.*) What's your name?

POLITICIAN.             Whatever you like.

(*HANOON remembers something and he looks for his cart.*)

HANOON.                 What about this?

POLITICIAN.             What about it?

HANOON.                 I inherited it from those who were before you.

POLITICIAN.             The age of carts is over, I'll replace it with a car; refrigerated trucks so that you can sell vegetables as in Europe.

HANOON.                 And my house, it's rented... I don't want to live in a rented home anymore.

POLITICIAN.             I'll build you a new flat: modern, one hundred percent, and the gas will come to you through pipes, as well as petrol.

HANOON.                    So we'll drink petrol then, instead of water?

POLITICIAN.            Yes. I'll make petrol comes to your house as water, and even the internet, you'll have all that at your house.

HANOON.                    Internet? Is that a cure for piles?

POLITICIAN.            *(Laughs)* Ignorant. I know this is because of ignorance, but it's not your fault. It's the fault of those who were before us, Hanoon. Write my name.

HANOON.                    *(Writes)* Whatever-you-like.... I elect Mr Whatever you like...

POLITICIAN.            Put it in the box.

HANOON.                    *(Puts the paper in the box)* The game starts now.

*(Voices of sirens of security cars and bodyguards shouting 'stay back, you, stay back idiot, stay away.)*

HANOON.                    What's this? What are these sounds?

POLITICIAN.            This is my procession. Bye now, Hanoon!

*(The POLITICIAN leaves and HANOON sits down.)*

HANOON.                    Gone with the wind, and me and my cart remain. My house is damper and its rent has risen steeply and my friend, whose name is Whatever-you-like, disappeared behind the green walls and I decided to play the game till the end. I went to Freedom Square and screamed at the top of my voice. *(He raises the Iraqi flag in the middle of the stage as if in the square.)*

HANOON.                    You, teacher... master... Whatever-you-like... where are you? *(The sounds of the sirens are very loud along with the sounds of many fast security cars running around.)*

HANOON.                    Come here. I want to... I want to ask you. Where is my refrigerated trunk? Where is my modern flat? I don't want to drink the petrol; I just want a small amount, so that I can keep my children warm in winter. Take all the petrol and give me what keeps me and my family warm in winter.

*(The sound of the POLITICIAN's procession is heard.)*

HANOON.                    Mr Whatever-you-like. I signed a contract with you and put it in the box, do you remember? Why don't you answer me? *(An explosion is heard.)*

HANOON.                    Mr Whatever-you-like is dead. A bomb exploded in his way and they say that he left a huge fortune that can cover a whole country. He didn't remain, any more than the home. What are you going to judge me on, angels of death?

*(FEDHEELA enters. As a poor Iraqi widow, she is dressed in black clothes, followed by her four children*

*with worn clothes. She starts lamenting her luck and her dead husband who left her alone and confused about how to raise her children. HANOON looks at her with very sad eyes.)*

FEDHEELA. Hanoon, please come to my aid, my legs are unable to carry me, Hanoon. Why did you have to leave me, Hanoon, my dear? What did you think of leaving me with your children all alone for? Today I went somewhere I never knew and I met a very important man, I think he is Whatever-you-like. Yes, this is what they called him, Master Whatever-you-like, the servant of the people. I said, "Master, I am Hanoon's wife. Hanoon spent his life pushing a vegetable cart to sell to the people. Hanoon was a servant of the people. He used to give food to the people. He brought them food". He said, "Hanoon was executed!" And I said, "Yes, he was executed. Since he was born he was executed!"

HANOON. And what did he say?

FEDHEELA. He said, "Let me see his photo." And I showed him your dear photo. He said, "Yes, I know him, he used to be my mate".

HANOON. *(With joy)* And?

FEDHEELA. And I said to myself, how this man could be Hanoon's mate? This is a very important man, and the drunk Hanoon is a vegetable-seller on the roads!

HANOON. No darling, he knows me, we had an agreement.

FEDHEELA. I said, oh dear God, maybe he thinks he knows Hanoon. Then I would have some help. The important man asked me to wait. And I waited for an hour, two, then three. The working hours were over and all the people left work and went home and that Whatever-you-like didn't come back. The policeman at the door of the green wall asked me what I was waiting for and I said, "The master". He said that the master had been executed. I said, "No, how can that be, I just saw him?" The man said, "The master<sup>[6]</sup> and his father and his brother, they were all executed. They are gone." I said, "No, I just saw him; they call him Whatever-you-like." The police man laughed and said, "Oh, you mean Al Haji<sup>[7]</sup>?" I said, "His name is Whatever-you-like?" He said, "Yes, Haji Whatever-you-like, what do you want from him?" I said, "I was hoping that he might help me get the social insurance money to support my children. My children are orphans and my husband Hanoon used to fight for this country, and sell vegetables and he never begged for anything that is not his right." He said, "Ok." He said, "You, Hanoon's wife; why don't you go home?" I asked, "Why?" He said, "The Haji himself is living off the pension of the social insurance from Europe and you want him to give the same to you? Go home! He left the building through the back door of the ministry."

HANOON. Mr Whatever-you-like has died, darling.

FEDHEELA. And I couldn't do anything; that's why I came back. What shall I do, my love? Can't you come back just to tell me how I can live without you, what I'm going to do with your children?

*(She starts weeping and crying again. HANOON starts crying again with her. A young man enters from the door. He is MOHAMED BOUAZIZI, the Tunisian man.)*

- BOUAZIZI. Hello.
- HANOON. Hello.
- BOUAZIZI. Mr Hanoon!
- HANOON. Who are you? I think I've seen you before!
- BOUAZIZI. The whole world knows me. Haven't you seen me on TV?
- HANOON. I am sorry I don't watch anything on TV except for the news. It is my favourite salad with drinks. Have you ever seen an idiot like me who drinks alcohol with the news for his salad?
- BOUAZIZI. That's weird! All men get drunk listening to songs of Om Kelthoom or Abdulwehab, or Olaia... Haven't you heard about Olaia?
- HANOON. Oh yes, she is the Tunisian lady who sings this song when she regrets her life.
- BOUAZIZI. Yes, I am from the same country as this singer. I'm a Tunisian.
- HANOON. Yes... Yes... You are the one who set himself on fire to...
- BOUAZIZI. Yes... Yes, I am.
- HANOON. I saw you during my salad... Sorry, I mean in the news.
- BOUAZIZI. I like your choices, what kind of salad do you prefer?
- HANOON. Al Jazeera sometimes, one plate of Al Jazeera with half a bottle of alcohol would be enough for me. But sometimes it gets boring so I change the plate. Al Hurra is good, but it is full of fat, and I'm already suffering from high cholesterol, that's why I changed it to Al Arabia. Al Arabia sometimes becomes so cold and tasteless, but that's only sometimes, that is why I have no other choice except for Al Iraqia. (*He laughs.*)
- BOUAZIZI. Why are you laughing?
- HANOON. Al Iraqia is unfermented, tasteless!
- BOUAZIZI. Unfermented? You mean just like bread?
- HANOON. (*Painfully*) We wanted Iraq to be a piece of bread. They gave us bread that is kneaded with blood and what is left of our young men were scattered on the pavement under the title of Jihad and false mottos.
- BOUAZIZI. How is Iraq today? I am worried about it, I am afraid that Tunis will be like Iraq.



- HANOON. Iraq, my friend, became whatever you like.
- BOUAZIZI. What?
- HANOON. You can say about it whatever you like, and I will believe you. All I know is that I used to have a vegetable cart to sell vegetables from. And today I have a cart but nobody is pushing it.
- BOUAZIZI. Me too. I used to have a vegetable cart.
- HANOON. I know.
- BOUAZIZI. And I'm a graduate.
- HANOON. Me too.
- BOUAZIZI. And a policewoman slapped me because they confiscated my cart.
- HANOON. Go to Freedom Square in Tunis and shout and ask for your cart. These are the rules of the game.
- BOUAZIZI. Even though I've shouted for the whole of my life, nobody cares. Only... they say that your country is democratic and it will allow me to shout.
- HANOON. These are the rules of the game of Whatever-you-like. Mr Whatever-you-like steals you and locks you outside the green walls and you shout for the whole of your life.
- BOUAZIZI. That's why I burned myself, I wanted to change the shouts into a revolution.
- HANOON. (*Quietly*) And what did you gain, idiot!
- BOUAZIZI. Pardon, I didn't get that!
- HANOON. What do you want from me, sir?
- BOUAZIZI. They told me that an Iraqi man wanted to burn himself and died of a heart attack, and I came to meet him.
- HANOON. I didn't want to burn myself for my country. I just felt that I was a pile of rubbish whose blood circulated on powerful orders and I decided to burn myself to make the world cleaner and to get rid of the smell of my dirty pain. If you can keep a secret, I was drunk; if I was aware of what I was doing, I would have taken a corner of my house just like my whole life, waiting for salvation and the end of my days.
- BOUAZIZI. Too bad, I thought that you were rebellious, like me!
- HANOON. I have been rebelling for most of my life. The result was waiting and failure and a

rented house.

BOUAZIZI. Then you should have burned yourself, since you came to this world.

HANOON. You're absolutely right... but they used to prevent us even from burning ourselves.

BOUAZIZI. And today?

HANOON. We can't find the petrol to burn ourselves. And if I found it as you did, nobody would listen to the pain of your tortured soul in the middle of many souls, flying to the sky every day, burned or cut and exploded into pieces. Their only fault is that they were at this place at this very moment looking for a living.

BOUAZIZI. What about your wife and children?

HANOON. Just like everybody else, they are waiting for the wrong moment, in the wrong place.

BOUAZIZI. What about your Bin Ali?

HANOON. We have many Bin Alis here; they are biting into what is left in this country, except for one son of Ali who bled on this land hundreds of years ago and people are still crying for him... Nothing is left here except crying... I am afraid that they will divide crying among us as shares, so that their game will be straight till the end. Bouazizi, take me with you...

BOUAZIZI. Where?

HANOON. I don't know... Anywhere. Take me... take me to wherever you like?

BOUAZIZI. Come... (BOUAZIZI drags HANOON by the hand and HANOON looks at his wife and children behind him.)

HANOON. Fedheela... don't stop the squeaking of the cart.

*(FEDHEELA looks up, as if hearing HANOON's voice. HANOON and BOUAZIZI leave the stage and FEDHEELA stands up, she wraps herself with her Abya around her waist with a belt of cloth and she holds the cart and starts pushing it around. We start hearing the squeaking of the cart again.)*

FEDHEELA. (Calls) Here you are; your best vegetables... vegetables... Where are you, people? I have the best vegetables... vegetables...

*(THE CHILDREN sit by the bed of their father and start shouting too.)*

THE CHILDREN. Vegetables... vegetables... Come on people buy our vegetables.

*(A very loud sound of an explosion, darkness. The squeaking of the cart continues.)*

Curtains.

**Hamed Al Maliki** was born in 1969 in Baghdad, Iraq. He graduated from the College of Fine Arts in Baghdad University in 1993, where he studied cinematic arts. He worked in journalism since 1993 as an editor and a professional photographer. After 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2003, he co-published the journal of The Independent in Iraq, for which he worked as a general editor. He wrote a considerable number of cultural and political articles that were published in several Iraqi and Arabic journals and online as well. He wrote a number of the most successful TV series for Iraqi television channels, including Alhub wal Salam (*Love and Peace*), Abo Tobar (*The Man with an Axe*), and Baghdad Phobia. For theatre, he wrote three plays so far: *Hymns of Being Lost* (2000), *The Guilty* (2009), and *The Cart* (2011). Al Maliki is considered among the prominent names in contemporary Iraq as a writer and an activist, receiving several awards as a screenwriter and scenarist. Since its publication online in 2011, *The Cart* has been performed in various Iraqi cities. The first official performance of the play was at the National Theatre in Baghdad on 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2013 as part of the opening ceremony of the First International Theatre Festival in Baghdad. The play was also highly acclaimed by theatre critics and Arabic audiences when it participated in *The Sixth Arabic Theatre Festival in Al Sharja, UAE, in January 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] He is referring to Atwar Bahjat, a journalist and correspondent of Al Arabia News Channel who was killed in Iraq in February 2006.

[2] These are two southern cities where such sad lines are initiated and known, and by saying that she is saying that the both cities are crying and sad for his departure.

[3] These are the first words that children should learn at school in Iraq.

[4] Allah, Home and Leader these are the three mottos that Iraqi Military forces and even school children used to chant as their most important things in life, even more important than their own lives.

[5] This was a very popular military song during the 1980s and 1990s in Iraq.

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[6] 'The master' was a title used to refer to Oday, the elder son of Saddam.

[7] Haji, is a title given to a Muslim person when s/he does the practice of Haj to Makka, it is sign of being a religious good Muslim.