

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Baghdad Zoo

by Kevin Dyer

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Based on the true story of what happened when the American and British invasion force entered Iraq. Baghdad Zoo, the biggest zoo in the Middle East, was abandoned, looted, and the animals stolen, killed for meat or left to die.

CHARACTERS.

- The soldiers at war.
- The Five Children under Leyla's table:
 1. Leyla. 11, the big sister.
 2. Amira. 10, middle sister.
 3. Sabeen. 8, youngest sister, the 'baby' of the family.
 4. Hakim. 9, brother to Leyla, Amira and Sabeen.
 5. Farah, 11. Cousin to Leyla, Amira, Hakim and Sabeen.
- The Soldiers at the zoo:

Soldier 49984.
Soldier 38389.
- The Animals:

Three Lions (Leo, Malik and Seren).
The Bear (Brownie).
The African Badger.
The Monkeys.
Two Peacocks.
The Gorilla (George).
Other animals - to be made up by the actors.
- The Lost People of Baghdad.

LOCATION.

Central Baghdad, especially the zoo in Al Zawra Park.

TIME.

Nine days in April 2003.

ONE

The soundtrack of war: planes, bombs, mortars, automatic rifle fire. This soundtrack is very loud at the beginning and runs under, to varying degrees, the rest of the play.

Under a table hide five children.

Over the top of them and around them are acted out snatches of battle, illuminated in flashes and flare light: a bomber pilot appears on top of the table; a pair of soldiers firing mortars; soldiers firing rifles; a soldier being shot, then someone coming to rescue them; people running for cover; etc etc etc. This is a collage of battle and a city in the middle of a war, with improvised words and other action as required.

All the time, five children hide, scared for their lives, under the table. They flinch at the biggest of the explosions. Sabeen holds tight to her teddy.

THE LOST PEOPLE:

(These lines are distributed as required, said or sung. The five children are still under the table)

On the first day...

The planes fly over and drop their bombs.

The man on the telly says he didn't care; we'd take whatever comes.

And the bombs come down.

On the second day...

More bombs rain down, and the airport and the palaces and the army bases are destroyed. The man on the telly is angry now.

And the bombs come down.

On the third day...

The man on the telly is sweating a lot and the city is on fire.

And the bombs come down.

On the fourth day...

The electricity stops, and the man on the telly isn't there.

And fathers are dying and mothers are lost and the water stops.

And the bombs come down.

On the fifth day...

The streets are empty and there is no food.

And the bombs stop.

And the streets are full of foreign tanks.

On the sixth day...

There are soldiers. Foreign soldiers. And the doors are closed and nothing works and if anyone goes outside they shoot them dead. And the children under the table have no food and no water.

On the seventh day.

The tanks turn off their engines and the guns stop and It is quiet. Very quiet.

Pause. The sound track stops, for a while.

SABEEN: I need the toilet.

AMIRA: Go on then.

(She doesn't go)

LEYLA: Go on.

SABEEN: The bucket's full. Shall I go upstairs?

FARAH: No in case a sniper sees you.

SABEEN: Shall I go outside then?

LEYLA: No! Use the one in the kitchen.

SABEEN: That's Mum's cleaning bucket.

LEYLA: Just use it.

SABEEN: And dad cleans the car with it.

HAKIM: The car's gone, burnt out. I saw it through the window.

AMIRA: Mum told us not to go near the window.

HAKIM: It had my football in it.

FARAH: The pitch has gone as well. Bomb hit it last week, the first day.

Pause.

SABEEN: I'm bursting.

LEYLA & AMIRA: Go on then!

She runs off.

AMIRA: Can you hear, how quiet it is?

HAKIM: Is it all over?

FARAH: It stinks in here.

AMIRA: Yeah, it's you.

FARAH: Shut up. no it isn't, it's Sabeen; she stinks of wee. I bet she's missed the bucket.

LEYLA: Stop it.

HAKIM: Leyla, when's mum and dad coming back?

LEYLA: I don't know. But they will. She said.

AMIRA: What if she doesn't find dad at the hospital?

FARAH: Hospital got hit on the second day. Direct hit.

LEYLA: Farah, will you stop it?

They go quiet.

LEYLA: *(Calling off)* Sabeen, you all right?

HAKIM: She's only in the kitchen.

SABEEN: *(Coming back)* I'm thirsty.

HAKIM: And me.

LEYLA: We all are.

HAKIM: Go back, try the tap.

SABEEN: I did.

AMIRA: We've got to get a drink.

SABEEN: It turns but there's still nothing in it. It just gurgles. I wanted to wash my hands.

LEYLA: Spit on them and wipe them on your leggings.

SABEEN: No!

FARAH: I read how the desert people drink their own, you know.

AMIRA: What? Wee?

FARAH: Not all the time. When there's a, you know, no water.

SABEEN: I'm not doing that. I'd rather die.

AMIRA: And me.

FARAH: Don't you get it stupid? We will die, if we don't get water.

AMIRA: Well, stupid, there's a whole bucketful out there, Farah. Go on, get drinking, just like the desert people. Like lemonade, very tasty.

LEYLA: I'm gonna whack you two if you don't stop it.

They sit there.

HAKIM: They should be here by now.

Pause.

FARAH: I think I should go home.

LEYLA: Your mum told you to wait; and I'm in charge, so stay put.

SABEEN: Leyla, my stomach hurts; it's got real bad pains now.

HAKIM: And mine.

FARAH: I think-

LEYLA: Well don't. Farah, we've had days and days of you being a pain and it's doing our heads in.
Hakim, go get a pencil.

HAKIM: Why?

LEYLA: Cos I say.

He goes and gets the pencil.

LEYLA: Amira, write a message on the bottom of the table. Go on. *(She dictates)* 'Dear Mum and Dad, we waited. And now we're hungry. We've eaten everything in the house apart from stuff in the fridge. That all went bad when the electricity went off. So... we've gone to get some more.'

HAKIM: Where're we going?

LEYLA: *(Continuing to dictate)* 'Back before dark.'
Sign it, Leyla.

AMIRA: Where're we going?

FARAH: Leyla, why under the table?

LEYLA: Cos if the soldiers come in I don't want them to find a message do I?

FARAH: Do your mum and dad always look under the table for notes then?

LEYLA: It's just in case.

FARAH: Just in case of what? We don't come back?

LEYLA: I'm not leaving a note saying dear American soldiers, 'We're five kids, on our own, so wait here then slit our throats when we get back.' OK?

Pause.

Leyla: OK?

FARAH: Cool.

Pause.

FARAH: Did you ask Amira to write it cos your handwriting is so crap?

LEYLA: I'm gonna kill you in a minute!
Come on. Amira, hold Sabeen's hand. We're going out.