

SOFIA

A play in one act

by

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Sofia

A large sign over the stage reads: СОФИА

At the back of the stage, a hand stenciled sign hanging above sliding glass doors reads “Welcome to Sofia International Airport”. To the left of the doors is a podium with a red crescent, with the words “Turkish Airlines”. To the right, is a podium with a blue owl, and the words “Greek Airlines”. Center stage is a bench made of 4 stackable plastic chairs held together with a 2” X 4” nailed underneath the seats. Stage left is a door with a big cigarette drawn on it—the smoking lounge. Stage right is a door with a bottle of a wine drawn on it—the duty free shop.

Behind the glass doors is a weedy tarmac. In the distance lies a rusting MIG fighter jet, propped up with cinder blocks.

Cast:

SALLAM HUSSEIN (S), 49, Iraqi-Canadian businessman, wears a cheap brown wool suit, with the requisite mustache and paunch, carries a briefcase and a small suitcase.

DAVID BICKERMAN (D), 31, American backpacker, wears a Rolling Stones t-shirt and ripped jeans. He carries an overstuffed red backpack plastered with stickers.

CHECK-IN GIRL, Young, attractive Bulgarian woman.

TWO BULGARIAN BUSINESSMEN, both around 40 years old. Each one wears a black leather jacket, a skinny black tie, and a canary yellow shirt.

Action takes place in Sofia, Bulgaria at the end of October 2003. It is a few days before the start of Ramadan. Approximately seven months after the US invasion of Iraq.

*Lights on.*

*Sallam walks on stage, sits down on bench. He puts the briefcase on his lap and opens it, takes out some papers and looks them over.*

*David walks on stage, sits down on opposite end of bench. He opens his backpack, takes out a plastic bag and drops it at his feet. The bag is full of glass jars and clanks loudly on the floor.*

*Both men are startled at the loud noise.*

David: Argh—crap!

*David peers into the bag. Sallam looks at him inquisitively.*

*David takes a jar of out of the bag and examines it.*

Sallam: Is that honey?

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David: Yeah, how did you know?

Sallam: They have best honey here. What kind is it?

D: I don't know—it's just something my aunt picked up when we drove to the country. Some woman sold it to us, right in the road.

S: May I try it?

D: Sure.

*David hands him the jar, Sallam opens it, sticks a finger in it and puts the finger in his mouth.*

D: Is it good?

S: Yes, this is the real thing. It is very good. You found the real Bulgarian honey.

*S returns the jar, D sticks his finger in to taste the honey.*

D: Tasty, like flowers. I guess my aunt knew what she was doing.

S: Are you Bulgarian?

D: No. But I do have some family here. It's a long story, but my uncle moved here in the 60's, so I have a cousin in Sofia.

S: Very nice. Bulgaria nice country.

D: And you? What are you doing here?

S: Business.

D: What kind?

S: I am in import-export business.

D: *(in voice of Don Corleone)* Like olive oil?

S: I buy cosmetics here, and sell in Mid East. And sometimes honey.

D: Cosmetics? The ladies here do wear a lot of make-up. I'm sure your business helps the overall skin health of this country by reducing the local's supply.

S: *(laughs)* Yes. And where I go, the ladies need cosmetics very much.

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David: So business is good?

Sallam: Women want to look good, and everyone likes sweets.

D: *(nods in agreement)* My cousins' friend gave me this—  
*(reaches into his bag and pulls out a large bottle of Jim Beam)*  
I wonder if there is a market for this stuff. Would you like to try some?

*Sallam shakes his head, no.*

D: Oh no, it's not whiskey, it's this thing they call "raku", homemade brandy. Bulgarian hootch. Would you like a taste?

S: Thank you, no. I do not drink alcohol.

D: Alright. *(He swigs from the bottle.)*

D: *(grimacing)* This is the most disgusting thing I've ever tasted! *(addresses S)* You're lucky you don't drink! Holy shit, I think I'm gonna go blind!

*David puts the bottle back in the bag, takes out a beer, cracks it open and takes a hearty swig.*

D: *(takes out another bottle of beer and offers it to S)* Bulgarian Beer? Not that bad.  
*(S shakes his head, No)* Oh well. You don't drink anything, not even beer?

S: I am Muslim. Alcohol is haram, forbidden for Muslims.

D: I didn't know that. I know plenty of Muslims who drink.

S: They are not real Muslims. Drinking is forbidden for Muslims.

D: OK... *(pulls out a pack of cigarettes)* Wanna smoke these fine Bulgarian cigarettes?

S: Thank you, no. I do not smoke. Smoking is forbidden for Muslims.

D: Are you sure about smoking? Turkey is Muslim and everyone there smokes like it's their national duty.

S: They are not good Muslims.

D: Suit yourself. All the Muslims I know drink and smoke.

*D stuffs the cigarettes into his backpack.*

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*Suddenly, a Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer (on a crackly speaker): ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia  
ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu an stanbula,  
hmmmf mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzzhhhhhhh  
battamghgggggg hhhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh... ZhZhZ  
hZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh.....gghit bullim zzzzzzzz hhhhhhhh.

*David and Sallam look at each other in consternation.*

D: Did they say something about Istanbul?

S: Only god knows. You go to Istanbul?

D: Yup. You?

S: *(nods)* I go to Istanbul to connect.

D: Hmmm...I hope the flight arrives sometime today. There aren't any flights tomorrow.

S: I pray flight not be delayed.

D: Why?

S: I have very small time to make connecting flight tonight.

D: Where are you connecting to?

S: Amman.

D: Jordan?

S: Yes.

D: Are you Jordanian?

S: No, I Canadian, from Toronto.

D: Canada? That's nice country, good people too. I got family there.

S: Very nice, very peaceful country, but very expensive to raise family.

D: That flight from Istanbul should have arrived already. *(looks out onto the tarmac)*. I don't see any planes.

S: Nothing? This Turkish Airline a calamity!

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D: The air field is empty. This entire airport is empty. What a weird place. Does everyone here go home at five?

S: The Communists still run this place.

D: That figures, the Communists are known for their reasonable work hours.

S: Reasonable hours for people who go nowhere.

D: Do many flights go in and out of here?

S: Not many. Sofia almost empty since state airline went out of business last year. Quite bad situation.

D: I noticed there's no Bulgarian airline when I was buying tickets.

S: Bulgarian airline was cheap and flew direct to Jordan.

D: What was it called?

S: Balkan Air.

D: Ha! What a lousy name. Balkan Air. Sounds like 'balkanization'. They might as well have called it 'ethnic-cleansing air'. I'm not surprised it went out of business with such a depressing name. The entire Balkans needs a re-branding these days. Bulgaria is a nice country, but I heard horrible things before I came here.

S: Well, this Turkish Airline expensive, and Istanbul very expensive city.

D: I love Istanbul, great town, it reminds me of my home town a lot—with all the bridges and crazy traffic—

S: Where from?

D: New York.

S: New York City?

D: Yup. New York freakin' City.

S: I like New York, very good place to visit. Been many time to New York.

D: You said you were from Toronto? You don't look like a native Canadian, where were you from originally?

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S: Originally from Montreal.

D: Montreal? OK. Were you born in Canada or did you emigrate there at some point? You seem to have an accent.

S: The accent? It's from north of Montreal.

D: Inuit?

S: No, mountains outside Montreal?

D: Mountains? I didn't know there were mountains outside Montreal?

S: Mont Tremblant. Ever hear of it?

D: Yesssss....ok. I've heard of Mont Tremblant. Were you born in Canada?

S: Canada? Of course not, silly. I tired from travel. Very tired. Forgive me.

D: So you are originally from Jordan?

S: No, Canadian. But live in Jordan.

D: So you're not Jordanian or originally from Canada?

S: *(reaches into his jacket)* I am Canadian. You want see my passport?

D: It's ok. I was just curious about your accent. I mean, we were all immigrants at one point or another in the States or Canada. I was just wondering where you were born?

S: Iraq.

D: Wow, you're an Iraqi!

S: Yes. Iraqi. Ever meet one?

D: You're the first one I've met in person. I've seen a lot of Iraqis on CNN these last few months.

S: Yes. Iraq in news a lot now. Too much.

D: Must be pretty rough being Iraqi these days.

S: Yes. Very bad.

D: The war must be really bad.

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S: Yes...war. Do you want fight?

*S puts up his fists like a boxer.*

D: What?! Fight? Why should we fight?

S: Well, I Iraqi and you American, we at war. So now we fight?

D: We're just two people sitting in an airport. People don't fight in wars as individuals, wars are between countries and armies, with generals, and slogans, and ideologies.... Is your family alright?

S: They are OK, thank you for asking. They safe in Jordan now, but I hear from other family in Baghdad the situation is horrible.

D: You know I'm against this war. So are many other Americans.

S: Why we at war then?

D: Bush, Cheney, the neo-conservative gang, and all those gung-ho Middle Americans who wanted vengeance after 9/11.

S: You know, you American kill many people, but Saddam was also bad, even worse. He killed so many, such a murderer for years and years and years. What happening in Iraq is un-Islamic. No Muslim could stand for it. All this terrorism is un-Islamic.

D: If Saddam was so bad, what would you have done if America hadn't overthrown him? What was the plan? For Uday and Qusay to run the country another 30 years after he'd die of old age?

S: Uday and Qusay bad Muslims. They were more sinful and more degenerate than Saddam. Still, it was very barbaric, how Americans show their bodies. No Muslim could stand for it.

D: Why didn't Iraqis believe the Americans when we said they were dead? Why did Saddam have to make the announcement for Iraqis to believe it?

S: Saddam is evil man, but was very powerful. Iraqis believe him because he is man of his word. He not always so bad, when he was younger, he had many good ideas.

D: What were his best ideas? Attacking Iran? Kuwait? Gassing the Kurds? All he's done was get Iraq into a bunch of wars that didn't end well. His rule's been a disaster.

S: You do not understand situation from American perspective. Arabs were great people in past, and Saddam want great Arab nation. That Iraq should be powerful and

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Sallam: (*cont.*) independent country. He built university, hospital, school, factory. So Arabs could make things ourselves, instead buying them from you. The Jews and Americans, all they want is take oil. What happens when oil gone? Will we go live on camel? Eat sand? Someday oil will disappear, if we cannot make things, we become like slaves.

D: I don't understand why you're bringing Jews into this. Israel didn't invade Iraq, America did. You should be more cautious of what you say.

S: I have no problem with Jewish people. They are very smart.

D: This war isn't about Jews. It's about oil, power, economics. There are people in America (mostly Bush supporters) who say things like (*in Texan accent*) "What's our oil doing under their soil?"

*Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu an stanbula, hmmm mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzzhhhhhhh battamghgggggg hhhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...

*Sallam and David strain to hear the message. S looks at his watch.*

D: There it is! Istanbul something something again. There's no one here to tell us what it says! What time is it?

S: Quarter seven.

*Both men reach into their pockets, and take out their tickets.*

S: This is bad.

D: Not horrible. Our flight is not technically late. Yet.

S: It is boarding at ten of.

D: You're on TA six three two? Sofia to Istanbul?

S: We board in five minutes and no plane here!

*S gets up and looks through the glass doors.*

D: See anything any thing on the runway?

S: Nothing! Everything empty. Except that garbage!

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*D gets up and looks through the doors.*

D: Where?

S: End of runway.

D: That old Russian plane?

S: Yes. Jews couldn't sell it to Arabs so they left it rusting here!

D: What do Jews have to do with that plane?! Do you think Jews delayed our flight or something?

*D sits on bench, finishes his beer, and puts it in the bag. S sits down close to D.*

S: May I ask you something? Were you in New York, when that happened?

D: You mean the World Trade Center? Nine-eleven?

S: Yes, that incident.

D: Yeah. I live a few miles away. Heard the planes go into the buildings. We got really bombed that day. Didn't see it coming.

S: How was it? Was it terrifying?

D: It was very strange, like a movie, but scarier, because it was real.

S: Yes, all the death of innocent people. Such tragedy.

D: Something positive did happen in New York afterwards—it became peaceful and quiet for a few weeks. We felt this kinship with each other, and with all the other cities under siege: we felt like Londoners during the blitz. The experiences of Moscow, Rotterdam, Dresden, Berlin, Belgrade, and Tokyo were no longer so alien and remote.

S: You exaggerate. 9/11 was one day. The wars you talk of continue many years.

D: Maybe. But after a few months everything went back to normal—the visitors returned, Christmas season arrived. The traffic came back. Nine-eleven became a memory, except for the people who lost family and friends, New York moved on...

S: Ok. Ok. You had this attack. Much death, much destruction. And then? Then what? You attack another country? Two other countries? Afghanistan? Iraq? Why? What did Afghanistan people do to you? How many Afghanistan people know

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Sallam: (*cont.*) what is World Trade Center? How many of them even know where is New York? So you invade their country? And Iraq? Did Iraq attack New York? Muslims all over world feel horrible about World Trade Center. We sent condolences and prayers to America. And what you do? You attack. Bomb. Invade. That is also terrorism. Why can you not see it?

D: I got three words for you my friend: Osama, Bin, Laden.

S: And who is this Osama? Did he fly planes into towers? Who is he? Some guy who fought Russians with American help twenty years ago. Saudi prince? And now, attack Iraq? Is Osama in Iraq?

D: You're right. The problem's that Bush and Saudi families are close friends, they can't attack each other. Iraq's different. Iraq's in the Mid-East, next to Saudi Arabia. It almost sounds like Iran, difference is only one letter. Iran has been an enemy of America for a long time. Everyone knows Iran is bad. And Iraq is next to Iran and only one letter different, and Iraqis are Arabs—like Osama, and Iraq has Saddam, who tried to kill the president's father, and he has a mustache like Stalin, and he supposedly likes Hitler, and wants to attack America with chemical weapons. So Iraq it is. I know most of these are stupid lies, but wars only start with stupid lies. Regular people don't want to go to war. War is for politicians—they need lies for motivation, to motivate people for war.

S: Oh, these Saudis. They are bad Muslims. Everything they preach at home as haram, they do as soon as they leave Saudi soil. When you are Muslim, you are not Muslim because you live in Muslim country, you are Muslim in your heart. They are traitors, always making deals, always kissing feet of Americans.

D: So Saudis are hypocrites. How many wealthy people you know who aren't hypocrites?

S: No Muslim, no Arab could do such act. It was too clever. Very suspicious.

D: What is suspicious?

S: The attack in New York. Nine eleven. It is very suspicious.

D: Okay. Let's say Osama was not behind it. The ringleader was Egyptian, Mohammed Atta, and the hijackers were all Saudis. How can you say Muslims didn't do it? They did. And they really succeeded at it.

S: It was too clever. The only people clever enough to do such thing are Jews.

D: Alright, now you are getting to be too much. Why on earth would Jews do it? There were many Jewish people who died in the buildings. New York is a very Jewish city. Even the guy, who owned the World Trade Center, Silverstein, is Jewish.

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S: Do you know about phone call to all the Jews not to show up for work that day?

D: On 9/11?

S: Yes, it was well known that many Jews who work in World Trade Center did not show up for work that day.

D: What?! That's some crazy internet rumor! You know I'm Jewish. Bet you didn't know that. What do you think—that we Jews have some kind of bat phone hidden on our bodies? A Jew phone which gets calls from the World Zionist Underground with our daily instructions? You're crazy!

S: Jews are very clever people. Always manipulate things for advantage. Very smart. Want America to attack Muslim people, stage terrorist act, make it look like Muslims did it. Let me ask you question: whose advantage is all this war? To who? To Americans? No. To Muslims? No. To Israel. Of course. Jews are the only ones who gain from this war.

D: I know people in Israel. I have family there. No one there wants war.

S: America attack Iraq because it is enemy of Israel. Israel never defeat Iraq—so they get big stupid America to do it. Iraq only Arab country at war with Israel, and no border so Israel could never give land to Iraq for peace. Iraqis know Arab must stand together. We at war with Israel because Iraqi people support Palestinian people. Mossad planned operation to make America fight Israel enemy. Jews always get someone to fight for them. Jews very clever.

D: That's a pretty crazy conspiracy theory. It's just not true. Osama, Mohammed Atta, these hijackers, they just had a good plan and executed it perfectly. They hijacked planes and flew them into buildings. That's it. Do you know how easy it was to get on domestic flights in America before nine eleven? You go on like boarding a bus. They just x-ray for guns. And, the last time somebody hijacked a plane was to go to Cuba or something. Everyone was always taught to relax, let the hijackers land the plane, make their statements, get their demands, whatever, and go home at the end. Nobody expected this, nobody expected them to fly planes into the towers. Nobody expected the towers to collapse. It was all unique, so original. It's dark to say it, but it was a brilliant plan, and they got very lucky. Why can't Muslims make a brilliant plan and get lucky sometimes? It's got nothing to do with religion.

*Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu atta, hmmm mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzzhhhhhhh battamghggggg hhhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...

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D: What are they trying to say? Did they say something about Istanbul? This is so convoluted.

S: You hear something?

D: A plane?

*A faint roar of a jet is heard. D and S run to the glass doors and look outside.*

D: Do you see anything?

S: Yes yes, over there. Praise Allah. I pray is our plane. If we get off ground quickly I can make my flight.

D: It would be nice to get there at a decent time. Call some friends, have dinner.

*The roar of a jet grows louder and louder. It becomes a deafening roar as the plane passes, and gradually recedes to complete silence.*

D: This is nuts. It didn't land. I thought it was coming in for a landing.

S: Unbelievable. Did you see markings? Was it Turkish plane?

D: Didn't make them out, it was a definitely passenger jet.

S: My God. What calamity. *(Looks around the terminal, it is empty.)*

D: That's odd. Even if a plane arrived, who's supposed to take our tickets? Could we be at the wrong terminal?

S: Impossible. *(checks ticket)* Everything is correct.

D: Except we don't have a plane! There are no planes here.

S: Curse these Turks!

*D sits down, S paces nervously.*

D: You know what I think? I think Saddam may have been the best leader for Iraq. You Iraqis seem to hate so many people: Saudis, Jews, Americans, and now Turks. Maybe you deserve such a hateful leader. You Iraqis have so much hatred that you need Saddam, you need him to organize this hatred.

S: Muslims hate evil and injustice.

D: How can you tell who's just or evil, because they are or aren't a Muslim?

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*Sallam sits down.*

S: If you are good Muslim then you are just and do no evil.

D: Then what about all these Muslims, like Saddam or Osama, doing evil?

S: They are not real Muslims.

D: Who decides that? Is there some kind of Muslim selection committee? Does it give out a special card? Do you also discounts at supermarkets with that card? Your own lane on the highway?

S: To be Muslim means you submit to will of God.

D: How do you know the will of God? I mean, I'm Jewish. We practically invented God. We should know what he thinks, right? Well, I don't really know what God thinks. But I know that there are millions of people, like you, who go around saying what God likes or doesn't like. You don't know what you are talking about. It's your personal preferences, God likes what you like. And he's just a big magical, invisible stamp of approval. Has God ever personally told you what he likes? Or are you just making it up, like about the Jews destroying the World Trade Center?

S: I cannot argue about this with you now, I am very nervous about flight. I do not have money to stay in Istanbul for days. Ramadan start soon and I want be with family.

D: I know a decent place in Istanbul for twenty five dollars.

S: Twenty five dollars is a lot of money.

D: Don't you have any money? These tickets were a few hundred dollars.

S: Yes, but if I spend much on travel, I do not make any money at end. What is all this effort for?

D: The thrill and adventure of hanging out in deserted Balkan airports. It could be worse—you could be in Baghdad.

S: If I were in Baghdad, I would be home. When you are home, whether it is good or bad, you feel at peace. I visit Baghdad over last twenty years, never stay. The city I remember is gone, destroyed by war. People have been killed, become ugly bad, because of poverty and war. Is impossible to live in Baghdad now if you live normal life somewhere else. Is impossible to go home now.

D: We need to find someone who works here. This is getting absurd.

S: Someone help us, please!



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S: What going on here?! (*takes luggage and sits on bench next to D*)

D: That was pretty funny. Bulgarian gestures.

S: What mean?

D: That girl, when they nod yes in Bulgaria, they mean no. And when they shake their head, No, they mean yes.

S: Oh yes. Always forget.

D: Same thing happened to me when I first arrived here...

S: (*puts his head in his hands*) Is horrible. I definitely miss flight to Amman.

D: Maybe you could exchange your ticket for Athens, and catch a flight to Jordan from there?

S: Greek Airlines never honor Turkish ticket. Greek and Turk always enemy.

D: I forgot we're still in the Balkans. Everyone has some unquenchable ancient hatred for everyone else in the Balkans.

*Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu atta, hmmm mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzzhhhhhhh battamghgggggg hhhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh... ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...gghit bullim zzzzzzzz hhhhhhhh.

*The TWO BULGARIAN BUSINESSMEN walk out of the smoking lounge. They are holding their bags in one hand, a beer in the other, and each have a lit cigarette dangling from their lips. They cue up at the Greek Airlines podium, check- in, receive their boarding passes, and exit through the doors onto the tarmac.*

*Check-in Girl takes her clipboard, closes the doors and walks off stage.*

*Roar of jet taking off. Then silence.*

D: What now?

S: I can't think about it anymore.

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D: There were two flights in and out of here tonight: Turkish Airlines from Istanbul, and Greek Airlines from Athens. That was the Athens flight, so the next one should be ours...I hope.

S: I sleep two nights at Istanbul airport now...

D: Wouldn't the airline give you a hotel? They're responsible for missing your connection.

S: Ha! Maybe in America. Here, they give you hotel if you pay for it. Otherwise, they give you a pillow, and say 'sleep on floor'.

*D rummages through his bag. He takes out a box of chocolates.*

D: Want one?

S: Thank you. *(takes a chocolate)* Maybe we Muslims learn thing from Jews. How to be so clever. Maybe all this horrible wars in Muslim country is because we are not clever enough. Not smart like Jews.

D: I don't know why you are talking about Jews like we're some kind of person. We're a people like any other. Some smart, others stupid. Some rich, some poor. Some religious, some secular. Some Americans, other Israelis, Canadians, French. Whatever. When I see Muslims, or Arabs, you remind me of Jews very much—you always think you're right, have crazy hand gestures, don't eat pork. Heck, you even look a bit like my uncle in Sofia. And with women, religious Jews and Muslims can find a lot to agree on, you know, about keeping the women separated and covered up. It's almost the same religion. Same God. Why all the hatred?

S: You no understand. We Muslims do not hate any people. We are angry—angry at Jews for what they do to Palestinian people, our fellow Muslim. We never hate Jews because they Jews, we hate Jews because what they do.

D: Oh jeez. I can see where this conversation is going. This is impossible. Look, if the Jews are so god-damned clever, why are there only 20 million of us? Why do we live in one of the smallest countries on the planet, with one billion Muslims wanting to destroy it? What's so clever about that?

S: Jews have Jerusalem and New York—very desirable real estate. Very clever. Many Muslims not admit it, but many think Jews deserve own country. Jews live in Middle East for long time. Jew and Arab like brothers. Maybe not close brothers. More like first cousins. And maybe Jerusalem once important Jewish city. I do not know. What we cannot accept is that our Muslim brothers treated unjustly. All these Jews came to Palestine escape from Nazis, from concentration camp. The camps were in Europe, not in Middle East. Muslims and Palestinians never put Jews in concentration camp. So is unjust that we punished for these crimes. And now Jews put Palestinian in camps, like

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S: (*cont.*) Nazis. Maybe Jews have a country in Palestine two thousand years ago, but we Arabs live there over thousand years. We not kick Jews out.

D: Yeah, well shit happens. History has its winners and losers. You Arabs could have accepted the partition of Palestine, instead you wanted the whole pie. And in the end you got nothing. That happens when you lose a war or two or three. You had a good winning streak a while back, and now it's done. Tough luck. Suck it up. You may get your groove back in a hundred years, a thousand. Never know. Look, Jews were losers for a long time, but then things turned around. Who knew that getting tossed into ovens would get everyone to feel sorry for us and give us a country?

S: You are very cynical for young man.

D: I'm not that cynical, just getting tired of this bullshit conversation.

*They sit in silence. They check their watches and look over their tickets.*

*Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu an stanbula, hmmm mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzzhhhhhhh battamghggggg hhhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh... ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh.....gghit bullim zzzzzzzz hhhhhhhh.

S: My business is ruined. I waste so much time and money, and make nothing.

D: The plane will arrive when the plane arrives. Cheer up buddy. We've still got each other.

S: What mean we have each other?

D: Just an expression. I'm trying to be optimistic, cheerful.

S: Are you being gay?

D: Gay?

S: Are you homosexual?

D: I was just making a joke.

S: We Muslims think all American are homosexual or drug addict or sex pervert.

D: Sometimes all three. But that's only Hollywood. We Americans think all Arabs are sheep-fuckers and suicide bombers.

Sofia

S: No. Only Turks and Saudis.

D: Ah. Now we are getting somewhere.

S: 'Building bridges' as your president Clinton said.

D: He was a sex pervert.

S: A great American.

D: Amen to that! I miss his cigar in the Oval Office.

S: You know Omar Sharif? He was big in Hollywood.

D: A great barrier-breaking-sheep-fucking-suicide-bomber.

S: I know you become angry at me, but whole suicide bombing thing was invented by Jews.

D: Oh really? When?

S: Do you know the story of Masada?

D: I know the story. Everyone killed themselves rather than be taken slaves by the Romans. That's not suicide bombing.

S: If they had bombs, they would tie them on each other and run into Romans.

D: Maybe. I bet you tell me the whole haggling in the bazaar thing was also invented by the Jews.

S: Yes. I thought it was common knowledge.

D: As a Jew, I profoundly apologize for bestowing such despicable habits on my Arab brethren. But you have really done my people proud by raising our bad habits to a new level of horror.

S: I am honored. The goal of Arabs is to someday be like Jews.

D: What do you mean by that?

S: To have someone else do the killing or dying for us. While we sit on pile of money and watch it grow.

Sofia

D: You think it's easy to become like Jews? Not everyone can be the Jews. It takes hundreds of years of shtetl in-breeding, a splash of Cossack gang rape, countless pinches of random humiliations, and a dash of genocide at the end for it all to come together so majestically.

S: I am very optimistic that you Americans can do all that to us Iraqis.

D: (*nods in agreement*) We've got our shoulders to the wheel!

S: I hope the murder, humiliation, terrorism you make in my country will make Arabs rich and smart like Jews. I hope my children become doctors and stockbrokers and have nanny to care each one of their children...

D: We've got our best boys on it. Doin' God's work over there. The Marines. Semper Fi. Too old to live and too young to die.

S: We Iraqis will do our best to help them die.

D: I must warn you, Marines are difficult to kill. They are designed that way. It's their training. So many of you Iraqis die every day and you only kill a couple Marines.

S: Don't believe everything you hear in your Jew media. Numbers lie. We will never stop. We will never give Americans day of peace in Iraq. Not in five years, not ten, not, twenty. Americans will die as long as they are occupiers of Iraq.

D: You're saying we won't win unless we do a bit of ethnic cleansing? Maybe we could put all you Iraqis in concentration camps and resettle your country with Texans?

S: I hope you joke. Is that real Jew inside you talking?

D: No. Just an American caught up in war. I don't really agree with that course of action, but if it's the only way to win this war...

S: What you want win, American? You want win no matter what? You come invade Iraq to kill Saddam, and in end you kill Iraq! You should leave us alone. You will be defeated. How much of blood, how much of money, how much of world you want destroy? HOW MUCH YOU WANT OUR OIL!?

D: (*in Texan accent*) What's our oil, doin' under your soil?

S: Take it. Take it and drink it. Bathe yourself with it. Cook with it. Have you ever really seen oil? Walk in puddles of it? Smell it? Oil destroys earth where it pumped. You ever see oil field? It turn planet into hell. Oil is curse. You American greed for oil will destroy you. You do not calculate the cost of blood you put in your car. That blood has cost, a very very large cost. And you are blind, all this cost adds up. And in the end, this cost will be paid...



Sofia

D: *(announcement still crackling in the background)* I'm starting to wonder if this is just a public service announcement, like 'put out your cigarettes'? Maybe the entire Istanbul flight is a hallucination. Maybe there is no Istanbul flight. Not today. Maybe there never was an Istanbul flight. I can't tell from the announcement which is which. Maybe there is NO SUCH THING AS ISTANBUL!!!

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu an stanbula, hmmm mrrrgg

*S sits down and looks at his watch.*

S: My plane to Jordan leaves in one hour.

D: How long is our flight to Istanbul?

S: One hour and ten minutes.

D: You may now stop praying for our plane to come. Maybe you can pray for your flight to Jordan to be delayed?

S: I pray to God for everything.

D: All the time?

S: Yes. Always.

D: Does he give you anything?

S: Now and again.

D: How do you know it's the prayer? Maybe you would have gotten it without praying?

S: Don't know, I never stop praying.

D: My God always delivers. Anything I ask for.

S: Yes?

*D reaches into his wallet, pulls out a \$20 dollar bill*

D: I ask Andrew Jackson for some food, wine, shelter. He gives it to me. One hundred percent of the time.

S: So you do not believe in God?

Sofia

D: Well... I believe man created God to give a sense of order to the universe. So maybe God does exist, like cars or computers. But it is man who is the creator of God. So when you submit to God, you just submit to other men.

S: This is not God. This is fantasy of egotist.

D: It's a tough call. You gotta die to find out whose god is real. And it's hard to pass that information on to all your non-believing friends when you're dead. Look, my dollar is quite a decent God. If I get sick, I throw money at doctors, if I get depressed, I throw money at drugs, whores or HDTVs. Money is my prayer, I put it on the table, and ask for things. And, if I have enough money, I get them. Besides, don't poor people all over the world pray to be rich?

S: Now you sound like Marxist.

D: You mean like Groucho Marx?

S: What?

D: Never mind, just an old joke. Seriously, religion is most useful as an excuse for killing people you don't like.

S: Islam forbids killing. It is haram.

D: What planet are you on? Every war now has Muslims involved—India-Pakistan, Chechnya, Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Algeria. Maybe there's a tribal war in Papau New Guinea or the Amazon with no Muslims, but in every other war there's at least one Muslim side. Many wars are going on now where both sides are Muslim. So, in case you were going to, don't give me that 'religion of peace' bullshit.

S: You do not understand Islam. They do not understand Islam.

D: They? Who are they? You include a lot of people....

S: It is horrible. I know. I not know what say. They cut people heads off and show it on television. They say this is Islam. The blow themselves up, kill women and children. Say this is Islam. It is not Islam. It is war. War make people do evil things. Things unacceptable, war make acceptable.

D: Yeah well... war sucks.

S: You against Bush? Will you vote against him next year?

D: Early and often.

Sofia

S: If Bush win again, that means American want war. This very bad. This war become very bad for Iraq and America.

D: There's no way Bush is getting re-elected. The Democrats could nominate a chimp and win. I don't know one person who likes him. I live in New York, so I have no idea what people in Iowa or Nebraska think. I hope he loses.

*D takes the second beer from his bag, and opens it.*

D: Yes'm. The world's fucked up. *(takes a hearty swig)* Does it get boring, since you're Muslim, being sober all the time?

S: I drink lots of tea.

D: Do you sleep well?

S: No, unfortunately.

D: It must be the tea. You ought to switch to whiskey.

S: If I want go to hell, I drink whiskey.

D: Most of your world is hell already.

S: Thanks to you, American.

*D toasts.*

D: You want me to tell you a super secret about Jews?

S: Something I do not know?

D: Of course. What Donald Rumsfeld likes to call 'actionable intelligence'.

S: What is it?

D: How to destroy Israel.

S: Israel is pretty powerful state. Arabs states are weak.

D: You're going about it in a stupid way. You're not being clever.

S: Coming from a Jew this should be priceless.

D: You can pay me for it.



Sofia

D: Maybe it was the Bulgarian hootch that wanted to tell you.

S: I will tell you secret also, if you tell me.

D: A valuable secret?

S: I do not know the value of your secret, so how I price mine?

D: Fair enough.

S: So?

D: Ok. Here it is: When you spew your hatred at the Jews, you only make us stronger. Cause you see, Jews lived off the discrimination from other people for centuries, it's in our blood. We had to live in filthy crowded ghettos, wear yellow stars on our jackets, get made into furniture, burned at the stake, gassed, and subjected to nearly every horror imaginable. The only Jews left after all this shit are the real clever or real determined ones. All the other Jews found it easier to die or worship some other crappy God. Being a Jew is being a witness to natural selection on crack. Every threat makes us stronger, makes us more Jewish.

S: So what should Arab do?

D: Here's the new Arab-Muslim strategy for the Middle East: First, you stop blaming Jews. Don't blame them in conversations, in the press, on television. Don't talk about them, ever. Stop cursing Jews whenever things don't go your way. Don't slit the throats of journalist Jews to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Stop blowing up Jewish children on school buses, hijacking Jewish planes, tossing invalid Jews off cruise-ships, and stop launching missiles at Jews when the world gets pissed off at you for invading Kuwait. Stop all of it!

S: And what? Let Jews run the world?

D: No, no my friend, thinking like this is why you Arabs don't have the right strategy to defeat Israel. You think of everything as win-lose. It's very primitive, not clever.

S: What is it to be clever?

D: Love. Love the Jews. Treat us like you want to be treated, buy and sell things with us, send us your women! Love the Jews as you love your prophet Muhammad.

S: Don't blaspheme.

D: Sorry. And you must be patient. You see, if you love the Jews, the hatred that isolated and nurtured Jewish identity for thousands of years will evaporate. Jews will lose our

Sofia

D: (*cont.*) inoculation, our invulnerability. We will become soft, and entitled. Imagine Israel with no enemies. All Israelis think they're the smartest person in the room. I assume they got these bad habits from Arabs, by the way. Now, imagine an entire country filled with pompous people, not threatened with extermination. Instead, the world Arab world celebrates their success, their material, scientific, and artistic brilliance and showers them with love.

S: So Israel win, Arab lose. Is that your secret!? How stupid you think we are!?

D: Calm down. Calm down. You must be patient. There are so many differences amongst Israelis—racial, religious, political, and economic—which are being ignored to deal with this big, scary enemy: The Arabs. Your hatred of Jews keeps Israelis together. And, most importantly: your hatred represses the Jews' own hatred for each other. If you turn your hate into love, many of these same Jews will realize how much they can't stand each other. This will lead to civil war, religious versus secular, left wing will versus right wing et cetera, et cetera. And in the end, Arabs will take Israel for nothing—the Jews will give it to you, and say “Good luck with it, you schmucks! We're outta here.” That's how you defeat Israel. Lucky for us Jews, you Arabs only know war, and you're not very good at it.

S: Ahhhh. This is very interesting. Ok my friend, I call Assad, Mubarak Saddam tomorrow. We schedule meeting.

D: Get on the phone and tell them this: love the Jew.

S: I sure they very happy at this news.

*CHECK-IN GIRL walks in from stage right. Now dressed in red mini-dress and cap. She walks behind the Turkish Airlines podium.*

*Casio tune plays on the loudspeaker.*

Announcer: ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh Hazbu mfug a sofia ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbesmerlik anto pruy n afa ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhbugzhebu atta, hmmm mrrrgg a buzzhit ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh saley but a mggfd...zzzhhhhhhh battamghggggg hhhhhhh mmatlaaaamggghhhhhhh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh... ZhZhZhZh ZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZhZh... ZhZhZhZhZhZhZh...gghit bullim zzzzzzzz hhhhhhhh.

*The TWO BULGARIAN BUSINESSMEN walk out of the smoking lounge. They hold their bag in one hand, a beer in the other, and each have a lit cigarette dangling from their lips. They cue up at the Turkish Airlines podium, David and Sallam cue behind them.*

D: So what about it?

S: What?

Sofia

D: You tell me.

S: My secret?

D: Yes.

S: I tired, later, we go on plane now.

D: What are you going to do in the plane? Hijack it?

S: Shhh. Are you crazy? Do not say word so loud. Is dangerous.

D: We had a deal. If you don't tell me I'll get you arrested. All I do is yell 'hijacker' and you'll be taken off the flight immediately. Never get to Jordan. Never leave Sofia. What do you think about that?

S: OK, OK, I tell you. It not real secret. Maybe. We Arabs really want to be rich like Americans, to live like Americans, we like America very much, but we want to do it ourselves. Our way. Not be slaves of American. We are independent people, so freedom is very important to us. You Americans talk about freedom, but only the freedom for everyone to obey American. We must be free Iraqis, not Americans. We know killing is bad. We do it to you so you leave our country. You must understand, you are not guests, you not invited. If you come as guest, we treat you well, no problem. Instead you come with army, and tell us what to do. We can not accept this. Your soldiers do not take off shoes when they go into Muslim home. They attack women and children, to look for Saddam and Osama. They humiliate Iraqis every hour, every day. Understand when Iraqi kill American soldiers. We nation of hunters, many generations, father and son. We have long tradition of hunting, animals and people. We patient, quiet, and always get victory in end. This how we win against America. As long as American in Iraq, you will be hunted. Every American will be hunted. Please understand that if you win, every small country will be in danger. Every small people will be in danger. If you win, every time America have dispute, you invade country. If you win, there will be endless war. Someday in future, in fifty years, in five-hundred years, America will not be so powerful. And someday bigger, more powerful country invade you. And you will have to fight for your freedom against a big and powerful enemy. And you will remember the history of us, Iraq, a small country that refused to lie down and live like slaves before powerful enemy. Someday our resistance will be example for you American. When Iraq win, means that someday in future, America win. If Iraq lose now, America lose in future. We will not lose.

*Sallam and David check in, receive their boarding passes and walk out onto the tarmac.*

*Doors close.*

*Check-in Girl takes her clipboard and walks off stage.*

Sofia

*Lights off.*

*Roar of jet taking off.*

*Epilogue:*

*Sallam and David made it to Istanbul that night. Sallam missed his connection to Amman, and ended up sleeping at the airport for two nights alongside a tribe of Sudanese businessmen. On Saturday, Sallam flew to Jordan and David to the United States. And, on the very next day, the first day of Ramadan, a suicide bomber blew himself up at an HSBC bank in Istanbul, killing 20 people.*

*This play is dedicated to all the victims of terrorism.*