

First Draft

SIN HOMBRES

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

by

CLARE MENDES

A 60-minute stage play

SIN HOMBRES

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CHARACTER LIST

ISOLDE	25	Excited ambitious party girl
DIANA	65	Contented married housewife
JAMIE	44	Disgruntled disillusioned lesbian
ZAHRA	18	Smiling vengeful Afghan woman
MATHILDA	33	Forgiving ambitious violence survivor

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SCENE 1

Darkness.

SFX: The sounds of war. Helicopters, gunfire, grenades. Continues under

*A woman emerges from the darkness and walks towards us. It is **ISOLDE**.*

ISOLDE: I don't like conflict. At the club on Friday night, when my friends went back to the bar to complain about their espresso martinis – not enough vodka, too much froth, and 'You call that a jug? It's only half full! said some guy who none of us knew – I just kept dancing. I think it was Cumbia.

*Isolde dances. **DIANA** lights up. She is setting a table for dinner.*

DIANA: Conflict? I'm not a fan. Though the other night Gary says to me, 'What would you think about putting up a pergola in the backyard? Then we can eat outdoors when the weather's nice.' 'Where's the Hills Hoist going to go?' I say. But that's the closest we'd ever get to an argument.

SFX: Sniper bullets rain down around Diana

*Diana ducks to avoid them. Also crouching to avoid the enemy, **JAMIE** lights up. She catches the invisible missile.*

JAMIE: Me, I like conflict. Bring it on! And if you take me on, be prepared for a fight. My little sister and I, we grew up fighting. But I tell you, we had some good times. If she wasn't working today, she'd be here with me. Absolutely. Sally would love this.

SFX: A bomb explodes

*Jamie cringes, scared. **ZAHRA** lights up, in a burkah.*

ZAHRA: What would she love? The drama, the mystery, the sense of adventure? Is it the excitement of the unknown that excites your sister? (*lifting the burkah to reveal her face*) If you ask me, conflict is over-rated. Leave the men to fight. Can I stay home and watch Netflix?

SFX: Soldier shouting

Zahra covers her ears. MATHILDA walks forward from the darkness.

MATHILDA: I agree. Leave the men to fight. They do it well.

The light reveals that Mathilda has a black eye.

MATHILDA: Though on Sunday, when he asked me why the chicken fillets were cold, something in me snapped. Who knew that a frying pan could be a weapon?

SFX: An invisible grenade wizzes towards Mathilda

Mathilda intercepts the grenade with her frying pan

MATHILDA: I probably enjoy conflict more than I used to.

Darkness descends

SFX: An avalanche of helicopters, gunfire, grenades, Continues under

Dawn. Sunrise lights up the world, illuminating the five women. We see that the floor of their world is covered in rubble. They each stand there, waiting for the war to stop.

Midday. The war is still going. Isolde checks her messages. Diana takes off her apron in preparation for dinner. Jamie starts pacing. Zahra turns on Netflix. Mathilda takes up position with her frying pan, ready for her partner.

Evening. Sunset rolls in. The war is still going. Isolde sits on a bar stool, waving to an unseen waiter to bring her an espresso martini. Diana starts to pack away the table she has set. Tired of pacing, Jamie sits down. Zahra puts her burkah back on, bored. Mathilda checks her reflection in the frying pan.

SFX: The avalanche of helicopters, gunfire and grenades whirs and fizzles to a stop.

ISOLDE: Do you hear that?

JAMIE: I can't hear anything.

ISOLDE: Exactly! They must be having a ceasefire.

DIANA: A ceasefire against whom? Who are they fighting against?

ZAHRA: Oh, they don't know! Or if they did, they can't remember. This war's been going on since Season Three of *American Idol*.

DIANA: But why is it going on?

ISOLDE: Perhaps it's to do with money.

ALL: Ah. Money.

ISOLDE: That's the cause of most conflict, isn't it?

JAMIE: I heard it was more to do with land.

ALL: Ah! Land.

JAMIE: Apparently they need more.

DIANA: More than what?

ISOLDE: What they've got now?

ZAHRA: Maybe they're fighting because they don't have anything else to do. It's possible that they are just very bored and lacking a sense of purpose.

ALL: Ah! Boredom.

MATHILDA: They're fighting because they want power. They don't know why they want it. They just know that they need it. They need to make the decisions. Pull the strings. They need to have total control. It's the only thing that makes them feel satisfied. Without it, they can't exist.

The women take this in.

ZAHRA: But this war has been going on for a long time. Wouldn't you think someone would say, 'Hey guys – it's fun, but we're not making any ground here. Time to come up with a Plan B.'

ISOLDE: At my office we have brainstorming sessions. Every Wednesday ...

ALL: Hump Day.

ISOLDE: Someone brings in a cake, usually gluten-free but usually chocolate –

ALL: Mmmm.

DIANA: I've got a recipe for a gluten-free *tira misu*.

ISOLDE: A cup of Earl Grey ... a bit of a chat ...

JAMIE: They're not going to solve their problems over morning tea! They like the problems. They created them. If they end the war, what will they do then? What will they have?

The women reflect on this.

DIANA: She's got a point. It'd be like taking a toy away from a child.

ZAHRA: Or a child away from her books and pencils.

ISOLDE: Like taking all the fun out of a party.

MATHILDA: Or all the trust out of a relationship ... maybe what they'd be left with is peace?

JAMIE: I don't think they've thought about peace.

ISOLDE: No, I don't think it's on their radar.

DIANA: But I guess we're all built differently, aren't we?

ZAHRA: It doesn't give you the right to oppress an entire population. Take away their freedom. *Solh* – that's how we say 'peace' in my language.

DIANA: My mother was Dutch. We say *Vrede*.

MATHILDA: I just know 'peace' – though I've never known it.

ISOLDE: In all of those Cumbia songs they say *la paz*.

JAMIE: La Paz?

ALL: La Paaaaz.

SFX: Silence. Then bring up helicopters, gunfire and grenades, deafening.

The women wait for the war to stop.

SCENE 2

The sun rises on a new day. The women start exploring this world they have landed in. It is full of beautiful yet purposeless items – trees, flowers, a fountain. A rack of sequined dresses. A towering, waving doll. An enormous chocolate cup cake with five stools around it. At the centre of it all is a large grandfather clock that ticks backwards. DIANA goes and looks out the window. The fighting has become quieter. Diana surveys the landscape, which has been flattened and devastated.

DIANA: Nasty business, war. (*calling*) I said, it's a nasty business! Why can't you all just be friends? Bunch of grown men. Stop your carry-on.

SFX: A series of bullets

DIANA: Stop it, I said!

SFX: A single bullet

That's right. Now put your guns down. Shake hands. There. All sorted? My Jeff would've had it sorted from Day 1. No, there wouldn't have been a Day 1 – Jeff would've said, 'Guys, it looks like a nice day. Thirty degrees and not a cloud in the sky. Why don't we go and play cricket?' Jeff runs the local cricket club. Coaches the Under 14 Girls, the Under 16s Boys, On his days off he's a volunteer driving instructor. He teaches refugees how to drive. They gave Jeff an Order of Australia, for services to the community. He'll be home any minute now, walking through that door.

Feasting on chocolate cake, ISOLDE turns to look at the vast, shimmering door. Diana starts to re-set her table.

DIANA: Dinner's always a special event. I take time with it. Before we got married Jeff said to me, 'I don't want to be one of those useless men who never learns to cook, Di,' but I come from that generation where you look after the people you love. Feed them. Clothe them. Cuddle them. (*to JAMIE*) If I want to do a rack of lamb on a weeknight instead of waiting till Sunday, that's my choice.

JAMIE is mesmerised by the waving doll. She starts waving back at it, powerless to stop.

DIANA: I don't even like him washing the dishes. 'I think I can stack a dishwasher, Di,' he says, but I just send him off to watch telly. If he cooks and cleans, what's my job? What's my purpose? (*checking the clock*) He'll be home any minute. Walking through that door.

Diana puts a vase on the table. She looks around for some flowers. ZAHRA plucks one from their strange garden and hands it to Diana – it is made of gold. Diana carefully puts it into the vase.

MATHILDA: (*looking out the window*) Is he short, with a bit of a pot belly? Thinning on top?

DIANA: Yes! That's my Jeff.

MATHILDA: He appears to be heading up the hill.

DIANA: (*beat*) Maybe he doesn't know we're here.

JAMIE: Trust me. He'll see us.

ZAHRA: He could use Google Maps. It's how we get to Pakistan.

DIANA: He just needs to walk through that door. Every night at six o'clock – that's what Jeff does.

ISOLDE opens the door. The handle comes off in her hand.

ISOLDE: I could probably fix this for you.

DIANA: That's okay.

ISOLDE: If you give me a screwdriver. I could have a go.

DIANA: I think he's not coming home for dinner tonight. (*to Mathilda*) If you said he's heading up the hill.

JAMIE: I would call that 'running'.

Diana takes this in. Then she starts to pack away the table.

JAMIE: What will you do with the lamb?

DIANA: There was no lamb. There was perhaps no dinner. If he's not coming home, he's not coming home.

MATHILDA: You could go to him. Walk out through that door.

JAMIE: Up that hill.

ZAHRA: Though that high up, she will struggle to get reception. How will she then come back?

ISOLDE: She probably doesn't want to come back. Do you? – Sorry, I'm Isolde.

DIANA: Diana.

JAMIE: Jamie.

ZAHRA: Zahra.

MATHILDA: Mathilda. Zahra ...

ZAHRA: Jamie.

JAMIE: Diana.

DIANA: Isolde.

ISOLDE: Mathilda.

ALL: It's lovely to meet you!

ISOLDE: We're friends now, aren't we? So you've got people to come back to. You can go up the hill another time.

DIANA: And I will! Jeff must have lost his way.

ZAHRA: So easy to do in a war.

DIANA: He'll come home when he's hungry. He always –

ALL: – comes home for dinner.

JAMIE: What address will you give him?

The women ponder this, looking around their strange world for clues.

MATHILDA: The sun's coming from that direction. So we must be east of somewhere.

ISOLDE: Or west of nowhere.

ZAHRA: We're nowhere near Afghanistan – that much is certain. We're in some place that is safe from war.

MATHILDA: Safe from violence. It would be impossible for someone to find you here.

ISOLDE: The air is fresh, cool. It feels like March is supposed to feel. Do you think we've somehow dodged climate change?

JAMIE: Someone's having a lend. That's what it is. Why else would they stick us in a place like this? My teenage bedroom didn't have this much crap in it.
Drawn back to the waving doll, Jamie is compelled to wave back to it.

ISOLDE: Unless they've put us here for a reason.

DIANA: You think we were put here?

ISOLDE: Well, I didn't catch the tram. One minute I was dancing, happy, slightly drunk – suddenly I'm here. I'll be late for work if I don't leave soon.
She contemplates the door handle in her hand.

ISOLDE: I'm already late. It'll be almost lunchtime when I get there. *(beat)* I mean, there's almost no point going to work. I'll just have to turn around and come back.

JAMIE: What address would you give them?

ZAHRA: We use a man called Mohommed. Regardless of where the funeral is, he will find it. Fifty rincas.

ISOLDE: La Paaaaz. 'Take me back to La Paaaaz,' I'll say.

MATHILDA: But they can't see us. If they could, they'd be advancing.

JAMIE: Really? They can't see that ridiculous fountain, that monstrous chocolate cake? That five-metre-high kewpie doll who smiles at everyone?
Mesmerised by the doll, Jamie waves back at it.

DIANA: Just tell them to look for the peaceful place. That should make us easy to find.
La Paaaaz.

ALL: La Paaaaz.

DIANA: Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to poach myself an egg and watch the latest episode of *Back Roads*.

ZAHRA: Is that on Amazon Prime? May I join you?

Zahra and Diana sit down to watch TV. Jamie and Mathilda sit down at the chocolate cake. Isolde steps forward.

Direct continuation to:

SCENE 3

As DIANA, JAMIE, ZAHRA and MATHILDA continue with their activities, ISOLDE takes in her new world.

ISOLDE: Don't ask me what I'm doing here! I'm thinking this is all just a dream. A very strange dream. I've heard there are some drugs that make you travel forward in time (*looking at the backwards clock*) – or back in time. But I don't take drugs, and I haven't taken a drug. I do have a bump on the back of my head – where my ponytail would normally be. Would that be enough to produce *this*?

ZAHRA: Come and watch *Back Roads*, Isolde! Not a engagement, marriage or scandalous affair in sight – but there are some quirky, compelling characters!

ISOLDE: Sure! I just need to say goodbye to my friends. – I was saying goodbye to my friends when the bump happened. I have real friends – flesh-and-blood. None of them are from Afghanistan.

ZAHRA: I've made bryani! I call it 'Zahra's Special Mix' – that means I killed this chicken myself.

ISOLDE: None of them are in their sixties.

DIANA: (*to Zahra*) Do you think if we hired one of those Winnebagos and drove to Coober Pedy, Jeff would come home for dinner more often?

ISOLDE: None of them are permanently angry ...

She watches as JAMIE paces up and down along the boundary of their world, threatening the unseen men on the other side.