

Signature

A One Act Play

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Bob Davidson
2015

Signature - Bob Davidson

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For Michelle

(written between 23rd and 29th December 2015)

Cast

Fiona

Ms Mitchell

The stage is quite bare. There is a table with a chair either side near centre stage and the area is lit by a low slung single light bulb. FIONA is standing motionless stage left. After a wee while Ms Mitchell enters. She is carrying a small bundle of papers and a laptop. She walks towards the table and sits down, placing the junk on the table...

MS MITCHELL

Well, you took a bit of finding...

FIONA

(quietly, almost in a dream or trance)

... am I under arrest? You have no right to bring me here...

MS MITCHELL

Just relax, please sit down. You're not under arrest. Only the police can arrest you and we are not, thank god, the police. Nor do we like them interfering. So as long as you're here the police can't touch you. So, please... sit down.

FIONA sits.

Now, you are Fiona Lewis are you not?

FIONA

Hamdani.

MS MITCHELL

Ye-es, married name Hamdani, but your maiden name was Lewis, is that correct?

FIONA nods.

MS MITCHELL

Father, Stephen and your mother was Moira Lewis, nee Robertson... Is that correct?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

... and you have no brothers or sisters. Is that right?

FIONA nods.

What were you doing in Cornwall?

FIONA

I wasn't doing anything in Cornwall.

MS MITCHELL

But you *were* in Cornwall? We found you in Cornwall...
(*she consults some papers*) in a rented room above a
grocers shop in Fowey to be precise. You can't deny you
were in Cornwall...

FIONA

I am not denying I was there. I admit I was in Cornwall. In
a rented room. And it was above a bakers...

MS MITCHELL

(*She makes a correction on the paper...*)
... above a baker's shop in Fowey?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

And why were you there?

FIONA

I needed to get away...

MS MITCHELL

Where no-one could find you...

FIONA

No! Well, yes... I needed some time on my own...

MS MITCHELL

...to hide?

FIONA

... to think.

MS MITCHELL

To think?

FIONA nods.

... and what was it you were thinking about?

FIONA

Mostly that I was cold and alone.

MS MITCHELL

Nothing else?

FIONA

No.

MS MITCHELL

What can you tell us about the explosion, Fiona?

FIONA

I don't want to talk about it.

MS MITCHELL

I'm sure you don't. But I need you to talk about it.

FIONA

Why?

MS MITCHELL

Well... *I* need to know what *you* know about the explosion.

FIONA

I would like to go now.

MS MITCHELL

You *can* go... after you've told us everything we need to know.

FIONA

How do I know I can trust you?

MS MITCHELL

... and why wouldn't you trust us? For goodness sake, Fiona, we're trying to help you.

FIONA

Where is this place anyway? How did you find me? Who told you where I was?

MS MITCHELL

No-one you know, told us where you were. We have... people...

FIONA

... what sort of people?

MS MITCHELL

... just people who work for us. A network if you like, here and overseas. There's no-where you can hide nowadays, Fiona. At least not for very long... Why... did you send your mobile phone to... (*she has another scan amongst some papers*) Shetland? The main post office in Lerwick... em, to be collected?

FIONA

I don't know.

MS MITCHELL

I think you do.

FIONA

I don't know. I.. I didn't realise I had.

MS MITCHELL

Yes.. it arrived there two days after you went missing. Two days after the explosion.

FIONA

So?

MS MITCHELL

You sent it there, Fiona... north, about as north as you can get at the same time you disappeared, as it turns out, south... about as south as you can get. That sounds a little suspicious to me, don't you think? It sounds to me like you were trying to throw us off the scent. Trying to cover your tracks. Lay down a smoke screen, whatever bloody metaphor you want to use. You knew we were tracking your phone...

FIONA

... you were tracking my phone?

MS MITCHELL

Well following the explosion, yes, yes we were. It's normal procedure, We didn't know where you were. *(She sighs, relaxing a little...)* Tell me about your parents...

FIONA

When did you start tracking my phone?

MS MITCHELL

I told you, Fiona from just a few hours after the explosion. Tell me about your parents...

FIONA

I don't believe you.

MS MITCHELL

Fiona, we have neither the desire or the resources to track everyone's mobile phone, despite what the more paranoid members of society might claim. Tell me about your parents...

FIONA

I loved them... both.

MS MITCHELL

Is that it?

FIONA

Isn't that enough? They're both dead...

MS MITCHELL

Yes. They died when you were... how old?

FIONA

Eleven.

MS MITCHELL

That must have been very upsetting for you?

FIONA

No, it was great. It was a huge laugh... Of course it was upsetting! Like this is upsetting. Like the whole bloody world's upsetting! Like you're upsetting! I am upset. It's official. Write it down (*she shoves a bit of paper towards MS MITCHELL and picks up a pen which she thrusts under her nose*) write it down! "Fiona is upset." I want to go... I want to go right now!

MS MITCHELL

Well you can't. Not until you tell me what you know about the explosion.

FIONA

Aw... the explosion again! You know about the explosion. You know more about it than I do. I do not want to talk about it. I told you that already. What is wrong with you people. You are supposed to tell me about the explosion. I came here in good faith. You sent me a letter or somebody sent me a letter. A letter was delivered to me requesting I attend at the council offices in Exeter. I go there and I am restrained by four men, and forced into Range Rover with blacked out windows. I'm brought here, where-ever the hell here is, and I'm told that I'm to meet with a Ms Mitchell who will explain the circumstances surrounding the death of my husband and baby boy. You want to know what I know about the explosion? Forty two days ago, the man I loved, his sister and my five year old son, died in that explosion. That is all I need to know.

MS MITCHELL

A child who was playing in the neighbouring garden and two pedestrians on the pavement adjoining the house, also died.

FIONA nods.

MS MITCHELL

Tell me about your husband.

FIONA

He's dead.

MS MITCHELL

How did you meet?... Fiona? I'm trying to help... I just need a little background. How did you bump into Akram?

FIONA

Bump into?...

MS MITCHELL
(scribbling a few notes)

Sorry... how did you and he meet?

FIONA

In theatre. He was a surgeon. I was a theatre assistant. I'm a doctor, but of Philosophy and there's not too many jobs going for them, so I applied for and got a job as a theatre assistant in Edinburgh Royal. That's where I met my man. He was charming. He could have, and sometimes did, charm the birds from the trees. Easily the most intelligent person I'd ever met and even then a brilliant surgeon.

MS MITCHELL

And Muslim.

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

... and that didn't bother you at all?

FIONA

No. Not in the slightest, why should it?

MS MITCHELL

... only mixed marriages and different cultures...

FIONA

... does it bother you, Ms Mitchell?

MS MITCHELL

No, no, go on... *(she consults her notes)* You said he was a brilliant surgeon...

FIONA

Yes. He was. He had beautiful hands. He said god had given him magic fingers and had told him he was to use them to heal the sick. He was just a wee boy in Iraq, just seven years old when god spoke to him. From that moment he knew he would become a surgeon.

MS MITCHELL

Do you believe god spoke to your husband?

FIONA

I don't believe in god.

MS MITCHELL

Yes, but do you believe that your husband believed that god spoke to him?

FIONA

I believe he was a wee boy at the time and I believe he was the most wonderful man I'd ever met. He was a decent man. He also happened to be religious. I didn't interfere. I had no right to interfere. None of us do.

MS MITCHELL

You believe that deep down, fundamentally, the world over we are all the same...

FIONA

Oh, no, Ms Mitchell, I believe deep down, fundamentally the world over, we are all wonderfully different. Thinking that we're all the same is when the trouble starts. I don't know where Akram got his magic fingers or his calling to be a surgeon or what made him a good man, a fantastic father, a wonderful friend. It was maybe just in him. There at birth, in that tiny baby. All pre-programmed. Destined to do all those things and to die at forty two.

MS MITCHELL

Did he have any hobbies, interests outside work?

FIONA

He played the piano. He was a good cook. He played with Jahmir. He fixed the car. There was nothing he couldn't do.

MS MITCHELL

Did he still have family in Iraq?

FIONA

You probably know the names and addresses of every one of them.

MS MITCHELL

Did he still have family there?

FIONA

Yes. You know he did. A sister and a brother.

MS MITCHELL

...and his parents?

FIONA

They died years ago.

MS MITCHELL

... a sister and a brother. So there was Akram and his two sisters and a brother? Four siblings in all.

FIONA

You know there were two other brothers! Why are you asking me all this when you already know the answers?

MS MITCHELL

I just need to establish how well you knew your husband.

FIONA

Why? What difference does it make now? Akram had three brothers and two sisters. His two older brothers were killed.

MS MITCHELL

In Syria?

FIONA

No, in Iraq.

MS MITCHELL

Are you sure about that?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

They both died on the same day in 2015 in a gas attack in Aleppo... not in Iraq, Fiona.

FIONA

No. They were both killed in an American air strike in Mosul.

MS MITCHELL

Did your husband tell you that?

FIONA

His sister. She managed to get out. To Dubai. Then she came over here to friends in London. She would visit us in Nottingham whenever she could.

MS MITCHELL

... and she was visiting on the day of the explosion?

FIONA

Yes. She was killed.

MS MITCHELL

Where were you, Fiona? At the time of the explosion?

FIONA

The Co-op.

MS MITCHELL

The shop?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

Why did you go to the Co-op?

FIONA

Akram asked me to buy tape.

MS MITCHELL

Tape? What kind of tape?

FIONA

Electrical tape... insulating tape. He was working on the Volvo. Fitting a new radio. He wanted Digital Radio in the car. He needed tape for the wiring or something.

MS MITCHELL

So you went to the Co-op, and bought electrical, or insulating tape and then...

FIONA

No, I didn't buy anything, they didn't have any.

MS MITCHELL

So what did you do?

FIONA

I began walking back to the house. I was just at the bus stop when the explosion happened.

MS MITCHELL

And how far is the bus stop from your house?

FIONA

I don't know...

MS MITCHELL

Well... fifty yards? A hundred yards? More...

FIONA

About a hundred yards... maybe less.

MS MITCHELL

So the explosion took place and what did you do?

FIONA

I didn't do anything...

MS MITCHELL

You didn't run towards the house?

FIONA

No.

MS MITCHELL

You didn't run for cover, for protection?

FIONA

Why?

MS MITCHELL

Well, was there any debris from the explosion as far as the bus stop?

FIONA

I was cut on the leg by a small piece of stone or brick or something...

MS MITCHELL

But you didn't run?

FIONA

No. I didn't do anything. I just stood there. Staring at where my house used to be.

MS MITCHELL

You knew it was your house and not one of the neighbouring ones?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

Even from a hundred yards away?

FIONA

Yes. You know where your own house is in a street and Jahmir's tricycle landed a few feet away. He'd been playing in the garden on it when I'd left, five minutes earlier. It was a plastic thing. Orange, like a digger. Akram had wanted to get him an electric powered one. But I wanted one he could pedal. He played for hours on that. In the house at first but he was desperate to get out into the garden. He'd pretend to dig holes and fill them up and growl away like an engine and make beeping noises when he reversed. He wasn't wearing his coat or hat when I left but I knew it would only be minutes before I was back and I'd get him all toggled up when I returned to the house.

MS MITCHELL

What did you do then?

FIONA

There were sirens, so I walked away.

MS MITCHELL

Why didn't you go to the house?

FIONA

It had blown up.

MS MITCHELL

Yes, but didn't you want to see if your husband and son were okay?

FIONA

There was no point, the house exploded.

MS MITCHELL

But surely you'd want to know?

FIONA

I did know...

MS MITCHELL

... but you couldn't have been sure...

FIONA

I knew. I was frightened I suppose... of what I might see.

MS MITCHELL

So you walked away?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

You just turned and walked away?

FIONA

Yes. I watched the smoke for maybe half a minute. A line of smoke across the road in front of the house. I took off Sarah's coat and laid it on the pavement and walked away. I kept walking until I was in the city centre.

MS MITCHELL

Nottingham centre?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

Fiona, you say you took off Sarah's coat?

FIONA nods...

Sarah is your husband's sister? The one who got out from Iraq?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

Why were you wearing her coat?

FIONA

It was cold.

MS MITCHELL

But why her coat?

FIONA

She had just arrived, off the bus from London. She came in the door as I was about to leave. She took off her rucksack and dumped it in the hall, took off her coat and I put it on. I went to the Co-op. The house exploded. They all died.

MS MITCHELL

Did you contact anyone immediately after? On the day of the explosion?

FIONA

Why do you want to know?

MS MITCHELL

Well, what were you planning to do? Where did you spend the night?

FIONA

Edinburgh.

MS MITCHELL

And you got to Edinburgh by what means?

FIONA

Bus.

MS MITCHELL

How did you pay for the ticket?

FIONA

I had some cash on me, just enough.

MS MITCHELL

And when you arrived in Edinburgh, what did you do?

FIONA

I went to a friends house.

MS MITCHELL

Uh-huh, and your friends name?

FIONA

I don't want to tell you.

MS MITCHELL

Was it a... (*she consults here papers again*) Mr Greg Findlay, of Cameron Gardens?

FIONA

Well you obviously know it was, so why are you asking?

MS MITCHELL

I'm only checking that we've got our facts right. So you stayed the night with Mr Findlay?

FIONA

You know I did.

MS MITCHELL

How did you come to know Mr Findlay?

FIONA

You know. You know we were at university together.

MS MITCHELL

We also know you were arrested together... (*she checks her notes*) ... at Faslane. A student CND protest when you handcuffed yourselves together and then to the main gates of the submarine base. Not the first time you'd been arrested either. Way, way back at Greenham Common. Taken into Police custody, a babe in arms, when your mother was arrested, for handcuffing herself to the fence. The fruit didn't fall far from the tree in your case.

FIONA

And what about you Ms Mitchell, how far from the tree did you fall... were your parents officious bastards too?

MS MITCHELL

What did you tell Mr Findlay when you arrived?

FIONA

Just that I needed somewhere to stay? He said I could spend the night.

MS MITCHELL

Did you tell him about the explosion?

FIONA

I didn't have to. He told me. It was on the news, on TV. It was all over Twitter and Facebook. A gas main they said. A tragic accident. The prime minister said that his thoughts and prayers were with the families of those concerned. I didn't believe him though. I'm sure his thoughts were somewhere else... I would have smelled gas though wouldn't I?

MS MITCHELL

Not necessarily.

FIONA

I didn't smell gas at all. You would think there would be a smell, a warning of some sort.

MS MITCHELL

Did Mr Findlay try to persuade you to go to the Police.

FIONA

No. He didn't, and I didn't want to.

MS MITCHELL

I can't understand why you didn't go to the authorities?

FIONA

I don't trust the authorities.

MS MITCHELL

But surely you must have realised that they would be looking for you... to confirm that you were okay?

FIONA

How could I be okay? How could anybody be okay when everything they know and love vanishes in front of their eyes? I can see it now... I can feel the blast of air on my face. I can see the two people on the pavement catapulted across the road and smash into the wall opposite, and I can see my wee boys tricycle crash onto the pavement in front of me... I can breath in the dust. How could I be okay?

MS MITCHELL

You spent how many nights with Mr Findlay?

FIONA

Well, you tell me...

MS MITCHELL

I honestly don't know.

FIONA

Just one. Greg took my phone from me and my credit card and we went to Waverly station and he bought me a train ticket to Truro for the following day. He took two hundred pounds from a cash machine that evening and gave me another two hundred the next morning on our way back to the station. He told me not to look at the newspapers and got angry when I began staring at the headlines in the newsagents at Waverley. There were photos of the house in ruins and a photo of Akram, Jahmir and me. A selfie I had taken when we were on the beach in Norfolk on holiday. He put me on the train and that was that.

MS MITCHELL

Are you still a member of CND?

FIONA

I don't know that I'm paid up, but I'm still against weapons of mass destruction if that's what you mean and always will be.

MS MITCHELL

And Stop The War Coalition, you are a leading light with them still?

FIONA

I was never a leading light, whatever that's supposed to mean, but I still support the coalition...

MS MITCHELL

Was your husband a member of Stop the War?

FIONA

No.

MS MITCHELL

No, just you?

FIONA

Yes.

MS MITCHELL

You were quite active though surely. Avoided any confrontation with the law but always prominent at rallies and demonstrations.

FIONA

If you say so...

MS MITCHELL

Did your husband ever return to Iraq after arriving in Britain?

FIONA

Yes, sometimes.

MS MITCHELL

Was this to visit family... I mean, did you go with him?

FIONA

No, he went alone.

MS MITCHELL

Did he ever visit Pakistan?

FIONA

No.

MS MITCHELL

Can you be sure?

FIONA

Yes, he would have told me. And why would he go to Pakistan? To attend some terrorist training camp or something? Is that what you're getting at? Oh yea, he went to Pakistan alright, maybe three or four times a year. Afghanistan too when he had the time, he was a fully paid up member of the Taliban... yea he used to go there all the time, in between operations. You people are sick. It's you who are paranoid, not the rest of us. He was a surgeon. The kindest man in the world. He saved many lives. That was his thing, saving lives, not killing.

MS MITCHELL

What did you do when you arrived in Cornwall?

FIONA

Nothing!

MS MITCHELL

Fiona... It's important that we know all the facts...

FIONA

... why? Why is it so important? So that you can tell the world or so that you can bury them so deep no-one will find them. Be careful what you wish for. The facts might be your undoing, Ms Mitchell.

MS MITCHELL

You arrived in Truro on the day following the explosion. It must have been quite late?

FIONA

I spent the night in a Travel Lodge and went to Fowey by bus, the day after. There was a card in a shop window with details of a room to rent. I noted the address and walked there, just around the corner. The flat was owned by an Austrian woman, Doris her name was. She was nice. She kept bees, and herself to herself. I wrote to Greg with the address and he sent me more cash through the post.

MS MITCHELL

And how did you spend your days? Did you go out? For walks or to the pub or for a coffee?

FIONA

No. I stayed in my room. I gave Doris money and asked her to buy me food and she let me use her laptop.

MS MITCHELL

... this laptop?

She slides the machine over towards FIONA who stares at it for a few stunned seconds...

So you were following the story on line?

FIONA

Yes. But it wasn't a story, not to me. It was the end of my life. Especially when I saw the funeral. Jahmir's tiny

coffin... Then the headline "Is This Woman A Terrorist?" and the photograph. Sarah's passport photo. Then the allegations about Akram and all the crap about links to al-Qaeda and I.S. All lies of course. Murdoch's media fairy tales, and I just thought, you bastards! And nobody gives a shit. They just lap it up because it suits them. Too lazy to think for themselves, fed all that crap day in day out and I wanted to die there and then. I did. I'd had enough of it all. There was nothing for me to live for you see. Nothing. I wanted to jump in the harbour, but I couldn't. I thought it would be like a betrayal. Akram would never have forgiven me. Life is precious. Saving, not killing.

MS MITCHELL

What do you think caused the explosion, Fiona?

FIONA

I don't know.

MS MITCHELL

Well, do you think it was an accident? A gas leak, maybe from the gas main running from the street to your house. When the Fire Fighters arrived at the scene they found the gas pipe ruptured. That's quite conclusive isn't it?

FIONA

Maybe.

MS MITCHELL

After the allegations about Akram and the headlines regarding Sarah, what did you do?

FIONA

Well, sometimes, I thought about what had happened. Other times I tried to block it out, but that wasn't easy. It could be the last thing I wanted to think about but it was always right there when I woke up. No matter how hard I tried I couldn't erase the memory and it would play and

play in my head. The brilliant flash and the noise like thunder. I could feel the tiny bit of rubble graze my shin. Like a wasp sting. I could see the trees across the road from the house sway in the blast and the bodies smashing into the wall and the plastic tricycle come spinning through the air towards me. And the line of smoke. And the taste of the dust. It must have replayed in my mind a thousand times or more. Then of course a few days after the funeral there was the next media bombshell with the headline "Is This Woman A Terrorist?" only this time it was my photograph, not Sarah's. And I was frightened... really frightened and I couldn't stop crying. I must have cried for hours until I fell asleep. And do you know what? When I woke up, I wasn't frightened anymore... I was angry. What do you think caused the explosion, Ms Mitchell?

MS MITCHELL

What? Em... well all the evidence would suggest that a leak from a gas pipe caused a build up of gas in your house which then ignited probably when someone switched a light on or something.

FIONA

Why would anyone switch on a light? It was daylight?

MS MITCHELL

Well, a kettle or a radio, anything. It just takes a tiny spark.

FIONA

Why didn't I smell any gas? Why didn't Sarah smell any gas?

MS MITCHELL

Well maybe she did and she just didn't mention it.

FIONA

She came into the house from the open air... she came into a gas filled house and didn't mention it?

MS MITCHELL

Possibly. The build up of gas could have been quite rapid. There was maybe a sudden build up over the two or three minutes you were away. Akram or Sarah could have flicked a switch and that would have been enough.

FIONA

Akram was in the garage, working on the car.

MS MITCHELL

Well perhaps he drilled through a gas pipe by accident and the electric drill caused the gas to ignite. There in the garage. That's maybe where it all started. There are dozens of possibilities...

FIONA

Drill through a gas pipe? Why on earth would he do that? There was an aerial photograph of the house in several of the papers and on-line. Two of the garage walls were still standing but the house was completely gone, just a pile of rubble.

MS MITCHELL

Listen, Fiona, I'm not an expert on explosions, I can only go on...

FIONA

... I think you are.

MS MITCHELL

What?

FIONA

What can you tell me about the explosion Ms Mitchell?

MS MITCHELL

I... I can't tell you anything other than all the evidence would seem...

FIONA

... to point to a "tragic accident".

MS MITCHELL

Yes.

FIONA

But you know that's not true. **DON'T JUST SIT THERE!** You know it's not true. What were you doing on the day of the explosion, Ms Mitchell?

If you like what you've read so far and would like to read the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson