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By
Meron Langsner

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This play received developmental staged readings under its working title, *b'Shalom* at New Repertory Theatre in MA, The Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Valdez, Alaska, and the Region I Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival

CHARACTERS:

ISSAM

GILAD

FOREMAN

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Over Here premiered at the 2014 NY Fringe Festival produced by Mortal Folly Theatre and Jaki Silver with the following cast:

Issam.....Mohit Guatam

Gilad.....Naren Weiss

The Foreman.....Mickey Ryan

Director: Katherine Harte-DeCoux

Multimedia Art: Tal & Omer Golan of OMTA

Lighting Design: Elijah Schreiner

Costume Design: Cara Grace Pacifico

Fight Direction: Nathan DeCoux

Stage Manager: Cindy Michelle Williams

Production Assistant: Cat Maliha

Original Music: Brook Pridemore

Marketing Design: Chris Wynne

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SCENE 1

ISSAM'S NIGHTMARE. PTSD.

It is the summer of 2002 in New York City. The smoke from the site of the Twin Towers is still rising, and the Second Intifada continues to rage in Israel.

ISSAM. It's very dark. There are buildings in the distance. The skyline that I grew up with. New York City. Manhattan. My family is with me. We are walking towards the city. Then suddenly, it's very bright. There's a great sound. The buildings fall one by one. My sister is screaming. Another voice; many voices, hatred and anger. The word Jihad rings through. I understand then that I will be identified with the perpetrators. We turn north, another city, Boston. Maybe there it will be safe. We run. We turn south, DC. The capital, it Must be safe there. I've never seen DC except in movies and postcards, but I recognize it in the distance. Like DC, I have never seen a mushroom cloud, except in pictures. Now I have seen one in nightmares too. Screaming again, on all sides. The word Jihad, again and again. Now there are other voices, aimed at us, thinking we are responsible. We turn northwest, towards home. But we know there will be no home to go back to.

I wake up.

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SCENE 2
REBUILDING

A construction site. Specifically a big mess in the middle of a construction site.

FOREMAN. Hey! Where are the new guys? Hey new guys! Yeah you. C'mere. *(Gilad, 25, a young Israeli, and Issam, 22, a slightly younger Palestinian-American enter. They are students engaged in Summer work. Though he speaks without an accent, Gilad occasionally has expressions and grammar influenced by his first language. Translations in brackets are for the information of the actors and should not be spoken.)* You see this mess? I said, you see this mess.

ISSAM. Yeah.

GILAD. Yes.

FOREMAN. Good. You can talk and walk. They're teaching you good in college. You gotta clean this mess. See all this? I want answers, you see all this?

GILAD. Yes.

ISSAM. Uh huh.

FOREMAN. All this, it's gotta go over there. See? All this, over there? Got it?

ISSAM. Got it.

GILAD. Yes.

FOREMAN. Good. You're learning good. You keep learning good like that, I might let one of you stay. Maybe, I'll even learn your name. But first you gotta stay. Now look, all this, over there. Right? All this, there. Easy. We got work to do. I'll be back later to check up on the two of you. Right? Right. This should keep you busy most of the day. Get to work kids. *(Foreman exits,*

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muttering about “freakin college kids.” Issam and Gilad take in the magnitude of the mess.)

GILAD. So. All this. There. Very complicated.

ISSAM. Good thing we had the freakin rocket scientist there to explain.

GILAD. Yes, and such a kind man too.

ISSAM. What did he mean about “letting one of us” stay?

GILAD. We’re day labor. They need us, we work, they don’t, we are sent away.

ISSAM. Damn. Looks like a bomb hit this place.

GILAD. No. Just a mess.

ISSAM. What?

GILAD. It doesn’t look like a bomb. Not at all.

ISSAM. Dude. Figure of speech.

GILAD. Oh, ok. I’m sorry.

ISSAM. You’re not from here are you?

GILAD. No.

ISSAM. Where are you from?

GILAD. Israel.

ISSAM. Oh. We should get to work.

GILAD. Ah yes. Of course. “All this, over there.” We should start with the big pieces, yes?

ISSAM. If you say so.

GILAD. Listen, up to you. I am here for the sun.

ISSAM. Alright. Let’s get that one.

GILAD. Very good. *(They begin to get to work.)* I’ve seen you around school no?

ISSAM. Yeah. I thought you looked familiar.

GILAD. I’m Gilad.

ISSAM. Issam.

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GILAD. Issam? (*Small pause as he switches languages.*) Atah Tehymahni? Morrocai? [*Hebrew: are you Yemenite? Moroccan?*]

ISSAM. Filistini. [*Palestinian*]

GILAD. Really? Allah kehfak. [*Cool. Hebrew/Arab slang.*]
Welcome to America.

ISSAM. I've been in America.

GILAD. Really?

ISSAM. Moved here when I was a kid.

GILAD. I was going to say. No real accent.

ISSAM. Yeah, you speak pretty good English yourself. For a foreigner.

GILAD. What foreigner? I have The Green Card. Do you have The Green Card?

ISSAM. I have The Passport.

GILAD. The Passport? Wow. How nice for you. (*They work in silence for a moment.*) Mi ayefoh atah? [*Hebrew: Where are you from?*] Where are you from?

ISSAM. I understood you the first time.

GILAD. I am just making the conversation. Not checking your papers.

ISSAM. Bethlehem.

GILAD. Really? You and Jesus.

ISSAM. That's right.

GILAD. Merry Christmas.

ISSAM. Shukran [*Arabic: Thank you.*]

GILAD. It's a long ride from here to Bethlehem. (*Gilad uses the Hebrew pronunciation.*)

ISSAM. Yeah, well I'm in New Jersey in the meantime.

GILAD. Ah. New Jersey. That's the accent.

ISSAM. Hey!

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GILAD. A joke.

ISSAM. How about you?

GILAD. Brooklyn.

ISSAM. No, before that.

GILAD. Tel-Aviv. Came here a couple years ago.

ISSAM. You like it?

GILAD. Do I like what?

ISSAM. New York.

GILAD. Eh. It's alright. Too many Americans.

ISSAM. You should try Hoboken.

GILAD. No. I hear too many stories about the "malls," and the "big hair." Very frightening.

ISSAM. Yeah well, welcome to America.

GILAD. Where is the big pot? They told me there is a pot. I want to melt in the big pot.

ISSAM. In the schoolbooks. Nowhere else.

GILAD. Eh. Too bad. It sounded nice. Like a jacuzzi.

ISSAM. *(looking around.)* This is a LOT of crap.

GILAD. Well, you know. We're skilled labor, we can handle it. Let's take this other big piece over there.

ISSAM. Can't you just show your bulldozing skills and get this cleared up in one shot?

GILAD. I'm sorry, I missed what you were saying. Did you hear a ticking? I hear a ticking. It seems to be coming from your chest.

ISSAM. Only if that girl by the fence will be waiting for me in paradise. *(They stop talking for a moment to check her out.)*

GILAD. That's a prostitute motek. *[Hebrew term of endearment.]*

ISSAM. Hey, worth a shot.

GILAD. So. You are hoping the construction people will let you play with explosives?

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ISSAM. See those rocks? I've got a whole arsenal.

GILAD. Don't make me occupy your work area.

ISSAM. Hey, see that line? That's the Gaza. Don't go there.

(Gilad considers. Then he goes there.)

GILAD. You know our policy. Facts on the ground, bitch.

ISSAM. I'll call the UN. You're oppressing me.

GILAD. Mah lo be'seder it'chah? [*Hebrew: What is not right with you?*] Call the taxi instead, you'll get reinforcements.

ISSAM. Do not think you can stand up to The Jihad.

GILAD. *(After a pause.)* How come over here we can get along?

ISSAM. Drugs.

GILAD. Drugs?

ISSAM. Absolutely. Somebody needs to drop a giant marijuana bomb on the Middle East.

GILAD. I can see it. The smoke clears...

ISSAM. The alarms are replaced by Grateful Dead tunes.

GILAD. Everyone's sitting around looking at each other with big smiles.

ISSAM. And then they say, hey let's go get falafel.

GILAD. Or ice cream.

ISSAM. Falafel.

GILAD. No no no, after the marijuana it's all about the ice cream. *(They laugh.)*

ISSAM. *(Mock serious.)* Falafel.

GILAD. Ice cream after then.

ISSAM. We've reached an agreement.

GILAD. More than can be said for back home.

ISSAM. See? Drugs.

GILAD. *(Puts on the accent.)* Ehh.. How you say... I think maybe we go for the beera *(Hebrew for beer.)* after the working,

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no? It is like a drug, but with the drinking. Maybe we find the falafel too.

ISSAM. *(Also with accent.)* Sorry... my The English... not so good...

GILAD. You speak beera?

ISSAM. Yes. It is like my mother tongue.

GILAD. You know. We are almost done here. Think we can go?

ISSAM. I don't know. The foreman said it should take us all day.

GILAD. Then we should take a break soon. I would hate to disappoint him.

ISSAM. Nice work ethic there buddy.

GILAD. I am here for the sun. If I finish early, I've still done my job.

ISSAM. Fair enough, but I want a good report so I can move to something better.

GILAD. Something better? Why do this if not for the sun?

ISSAM. There are other reasons.

GILAD. Like what?

ISSAM. You really wanna know?

GILAD. Tell me.

ISSAM. Forget it.

GILAD. No really.

ISSAM. *(Takes a moment.)* I wanted to be on Ground Zero building the new skyscraper. I was here when they came down, I want to do what I can to put up the new ones.

GILAD. You were there?

ISSAM. Scariest day of my life man. You can't imagine.

GILAD. I think I can actually. *(Awkward pause.)* A true New Yorker, wanting to build the new one. I just want to work in the sun.

ISSAM. You're gonna be on demolition if anything.

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GILAD. Hey. Visit Israel before Israel visits you.

ISSAM. *(Taking in their work.)* It looks like we're done.

GILAD. *(puts on the accent.)* It is eh... how you say? The time for the Miller. Yes?

ISSAM. You think we can get away with it?

GILAD. Have you seen our alleged boss since we got here?

ISSAM. You have a point.

GILAD. It's almost time anyway.

ISSAM. You're a bad influence.

GILAD. Yallah. Kadima. Beera. *[Come on. Let's go. Beer.]*

ISSAM. Good call. Yallah.

SCENE THREE
GILAD TALKS ABOUT THE ARMY

GILAD. In America, I don't like to talk about the army. I did my duty. And I am proud. I was in a combat unit. Tzahnhanim. Paratroopers. The elite. I did what needed to be done. But here, here they ask questions. "Did you ever kill anyone?" What kind of question is this? You should never ask anyone a thing like this. It's disgusting. There is a superman image they have of us. The all powerful Israeli Army. Lies. When you patrol, you work hard. And it's boring. You can die from the boredom. Hours and hours and hours. When you come under fire, then you are afraid for your life. This makes you miss the boredom. You do what you have to. You do it because you are a human. If you ever had to do this thing, to kill someone, it's not something you want to talk about. It's something you want to forget.

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SCENE FOUR
THE NEXT DAY

The same job site. There is a huge pile of bricks or boards or some such that is in disarray and must be piled neatly on wagons. Issam is working as Gilad enters.

ISSAM. Gilad! Habibi! [*Arabic term of endearment.*] You are gainfully employed for one more day! How nice for you.

GILAD. You had doubts? I should be offended.

ISSAM. Well, you know, one of you people doing work for yourselves, hard to imagine.

GILAD. What is the agenda for today.

ISSAM. (*Imitating the foreman.*) All this, over there. See? All this, NEATLY, over there.

GILAD. You are being groomed for management. Must be the Passport.

ISSAM. He was asking where you were. (*Issam takes him in.*) You alright?

GILAD. I'm fine.

ISSAM. Ok. (*Issam is working. He notices that Gilad is not.*) You wanna help me with this?

GILAD. Where is the boss?

ISSAM. Showed up, gave orders, took off. If not for the pile of crap I'd think we're filling a quota.

GILAD. Or one of us is if we believe him.

ISSAM. You sure you're alright man?

GILAD. I'm fine. Let it go.

ISSAM. (*Still good natured.*) Hey, not like I exploded on your doorstep. Y'allah! [*Roughly equivalent to "Jesus Christ!" in terms of usage here.*]

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GILAD. Hah eemah shel-ha zonah. [*Hebrew: Your mother is a whore.*] I can't deal with that kind of joke today.

ISSAM. Dude. What's wrong with you?

GILAD. Did you see the newspapers?

ISSAM. No.

GILAD. You didn't hear?

ISSAM. No.

GILAD. Haya piguah. [*Hebrew: There was an attack.*] Suicide bomber.

ISSAM. Shit.

GILAD. In Dizzingof. Near my grandmother's flat.

ISSAM. Shit. Have you heard anything?

GILAD. No. Spent two hours. Couldn't get through.

ISSAM. I'm sorry.

GILAD. Outside my favorite cafe.

ISSAM. Dude. Sorry.

GILAD. I don't want to talk about it.

ISSAM. Ok. (*Issam works in silence for a moment.*) Dude. I know you're worried and all, but I can't do this by myself.

GILAD. I think I'm going back.

ISSAM. Where?

GILAD. Israel. Miluim. [*Reserves.*] I'm overdue for reserve duty. I shouldn't be hiding here behind a green card.

ISSAM. You know where they'll send you.

GILAD. No, you never know.

ISSAM. Things are pretty busy in Bethlehem right now.

GILAD. I read the news.

ISSAM. I have family catching a lot of shit at checkpoints.

GILAD. Things are tough all over.

ISSAM. Just making "the conversation."

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GILAD. *(After a moment.)* Bombers have been coming from there they say.

ISSAM. They say a lot of things. You got a paper?

GILAD. There should be one in the trailer by now.

ISSAM. I'll be right back. *(Issam exits. Gilad works. The Foreman enters. He cannot pronounce foreign names.)*

FOREMAN. You're the other one. You're one of the new guys.

GILAD. I am.

FOREMAN. You're late. You can't be late.

GILAD. I'm sorry. I had a family emergency.

FOREMAN. You the foreigner?

GILAD. Does that matter?

FOREMAN. Just askin. I like to know who I'm workin with, you know what I'm sayin?

GILAD. Who am I working with?

FOREMAN. The best boss you'll ever have. You the Arab?

GILAD. No.

FOREMAN. They told me one of the new guys was an Arab. You don't look like no Arab.

GILAD. Issam is the other new one. He tells me he is from New Jersey.

FOREMAN. Issam. So he's the Arab.

GILAD. If you say so.

FOREMAN. You got an attitude with me kid? I don't want you having no attitude with me. I'm your friend here. I understand if you have a problem with the Arab. Them Arabs and the Jews, they just fuck everything up. Damn green cards. Don't know why we give them out at all.

GILAD. Issam does not have a green card.

FOREMAN. No kid, you gotta have a green card to be working here.

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GILAD. Issam told me he was American. New Jersey.

FOREMAN. He might think he's American, but they never really are, y'know? They don't teach you that in your college do they? You gotta watch out. Especially now. That Orange Alert shit. Could be anywhere. Had another guy, a good guy, late for work two hours yesterday cause they had another bomb scare on the subway. Can't live like that. No one can live like that.

GILAD. Life is hard all over.

FOREMAN. That's what I'm saying.

GILAD. They forgot to mention about this at immigration.

FOREMAN. What's that?

GILAD. I am your foreigner.

FOREMAN. You said you weren't no Arab. You fucking with me kid?

GILAD. I am Israeli. My green card says as much.

FOREMAN. No shit? So you're used to all this bomb scare crap. Shouldn't hold you up at all.

GILAD. You're the best boss I'll ever have?

FOREMAN. Fuckin A.

GILAD. My commanding officer in the army. He was the best boss I ever had. He was not an asshole.

FOREMAN. You just call me an asshole? You did not just call me an asshole.

GILAD. I am sharing my memories of the army. Would you like to hear more?

FOREMAN. You do your work kid. No room for a mouth on unskilled labor.

GILAD. I am practicing my English. It is an important skill. How is my English?

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FOREMAN. You practice your lifting and carrying. If you practice good, you stay another day. Am I clear? You just get that shit done, understand? You understand?

GILAD. I think so. It is very complicated. All this, over there? Is that right?

FOREMAN. Kid. You're funny. You might not even know you're funny on account of you don't speak the language. But funny doesn't get the job done. I'll be watching you. (*Foreman exits.*)

GILAD. (*To himself.*) Ben elef. [*Hebrew: son of a thousand (the whore is implied.)*] (*Issam returns. He is visibly shaken.*) The foreman. He is an asshole.

ISSAM. Yeah, well at least he isn't around much.

GILAD. He has charming views of us.

ISSAM. Whatever man.

GILAD. You saw the news?

ISSAM. Yes.

GILAD. Fucked up.

ISSAM. Be quiet.

GILAD. Not like it was your town.

ISSAM. Close enough. (*Takes a moment.*) You hear anything about your people yet?

GILAD. No. If I couldn't get through in the first couple hours I won't be able to know till afternoon at best. Same thing happens every time. It's routine already.

ISSAM. I have a cousin... he was studying to be an engineer. He left school.

GILAD. Sorry to hear that.

ISSAM. Haven't seen him for years and years. Good kid though, as I remember him. Heard from my mom we were starting college

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the same time. He was a little older than me. Used to beat on me a little when we were kids, but always got me ice cream.

GILAD. Glad he went to school.

ISSAM. He left school.

GILAD. You said you haven't heard from him in years.

ISSAM. I just saw him on TV. In the trailer.

GILAD. What are you talking about?

ISSAM. He's dead.

GILAD. They're talking about the victims on TV? *(Gilad starts to move towards the trailer.)*

ISSAM. No. *(Gilad stops. Stares at Issam.)*

GILAD. What is it then.

ISSAM. CNN was showing a tape from Al-Jezeera. *[An Arab satellite news agency based in Qatar.]*

GILAD. What is it.

ISSAM. My cousin is dead. He left school, and now he's dead. *(Silence.)*

GILAD. And he was on the news.

ISSAM. Yes.

GILAD. A tape played by Al-Jezeera.

ISSAM. That's what I said. *(Gilad stares at him.)*

GILAD. He was dressed all in white wasn't he.

ISSAM. Shut up. *(Beat.)*

GILAD. With a flag and a gun and an explosives belt. *(Beat.)*

ISSAM. I said shut up. *(Beat.)*

GILAD. Ben zonah. *[Hebrew: son of a whore.]*

ISSAM. Watch it.

GILAD. In Dizzingoff. You think maybe Times Square will be next? Every news agency in the Gulf would have a festival.

ISSAM. *(Quietly.)* He was a good kid. Always got me ice cream.

GILAD. A worthless fucking piece of shit terrorist coward.

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ISSAM. They bulldoze houses don't they. The families. My aunt and uncle and the rest of the cousins.

GILAD. Impressive checks are written from Saudi Arabia. What's the price on a kid today? Is it more if they kill an old woman? How is the brainwashing? I guess it's fun, promises of sex in paradise, fame for the family, a great honor for everyone. You're not a little embarrassed that making kids commit suicide to kill other kids is considered heroism? Do you think the pictures of schoolchildren with bomb belts are cute? You were in the city when the towers came down, do you want to build a bigger one so it's easier to hit the next time? *(They stare at each other.)*

ISSAM. Gilad. Watch it.

GILAD. Just making the conversation. Waiting for the news from home. You know how it is. News, weather, body counts, obituaries. *(Imitates a radio newscast.)* Khol Israel mi Yerushalyim: *[This is the beginning of a newscast "This is the Voice of Israel from Jerusalem."]* It is beautiful and sunny and 32 degrees Celsius, with a suicide bomber body count of only 14 today and peace talks still suspended. The UN has declared that the IDF *[Israel Defence Forces]* should hand out chocolates at the borders to terrorists as they enter Yerushalyim. Hundreds of assholes paraded in the funeral of the ben zonah who may or may not have killed my---

ISSAM. Coos emmek! *[Arabic expetive: your mother's genitals.]*
SHUT UP! *(Pause. Silence. They stare at each other.)*

GILAD. Am I making the provocation?

ISSAM. You're a piece of shit.

GILAD. My neighborhood is blown up by your family and I am the piece of shit?

ISSAM. He was desperate.

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GILAD. Tell me. What desperation allows you to do this. The assholes who flew planes into buildings here, were they desperate? Did your family dance in the streets when they got the news? If you personally had been close enough to the towers to die, do you think they would dance any less?

ISSAM. Fuck you! You think it's easy? I was scared to go outside for a month. In New York. I was catching shit in school. At the fucking PC capital of the universe. You think I liked it when I heard the rumors about Atlantic Avenue? You think it's not embarrassing to be identified with that shit? *[This is a reference to reports of celebrations of the 9/11 attacks in Brooklyn on Atlantic Ave.]*

GILAD. You're not part of that shit? You didn't just tell me your desperate cousin became a "martyr?"

ISSAM. He threw his life away after you people made it hell. I'm pissed to no end about it.

GILAD. You're pissed? Be pissed at the terrorist with the peace prize for your situation, don't scream at me. *[This is a reference to Yasser Arafat.]*

ISSAM. I didn't do it asshole. Don't take it out on me. I'm sick of all the shitheads over here trying to take it out on me, I don't need some other asshole making a special trip from over there doing the same. *(Pause. They take each other in.)*

GILAD. Over here we can get along. Right?

ISSAM. I like to think so. *(Pause.)* Are you going back?

GILAD. I have to wait for news. I may have a funeral to go to. *(They get back to work. They do not speak. Gilad puts things down and starts to go.)*

ISSAM. You going?

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GILAD. I'm getting fuck all done here. I'm gonna go home and try to get news. *(Pause.)* Watch the foreman. He's an asshole. *(He collects his things, starts to exit.)*

ISSAM. Gilad. I hope your people are ok.

GILAD. I hope your cousin rots in hell. *(Gilad deliberately knocks over a pile that they've stacked. He exits.)*

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