

CRY HAVOC

By

Tom Coash

(15 Page Sample)

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Cry Havoc

PRODUCTION HISTORY

South African National Arts Festival (Main Programme)
Interact Theatre, Philadelphia (World Professional Premiere)
Abingdon Theatre, NYC
West Coast Ensemble, Los Angeles
Bailiwick Theatre, Chicago
Humboldt State University, CA (World Premiere)
Western Kentucky University
Pittsburgh New Play Festival

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Abingdon Theatre, NYC
Ensemble Studio Theatre, NYC
Daylesford Theatre, Bermuda

HONORS FOR CRY HAVOC

Winner of the West Coast Ensemble National New Play Award
Winner of the Humboldt State University National New Play Award
Nominated for Best New Play, Barrymore Awards,
Theatre Alliance of Philadelphia
Awarded Ensemble Studio Theatre's "Next Step Playwriting Fellow"
Awarded Connecticut Artist Fellowship
David Mark Cohen Award, 2nd Place, ACTF/Kennedy Center
Finalist, Christopher Brian Wolk Award, Abingdon Theatre, NYC
Finalist, Playwrights First Award, National Arts Club, NYC

CHARACTERS:

Nicholas Field, British male, 30-35 years old. Gay, expatriate historian and translator of Arabic love poems. One of the many ascetic, itinerant British scholars one finds in almost any exotic locale. Loves Egypt for its mystery, chaos, warmth, excitement, and young men. Rumpled clothes and life style, brilliant mind. A bit naive. Excited and excitable. Speaks some Arabic. Has been in Egypt about six months.

Mohammed El-Masri, Egyptian male, 21-23 years old. Good looking, normally fresh-faced and full of life. A university graduate with a degree in British Literature. Speaks fairly fluent English. Has loved Nicholas very much and still does.

Ms. Nevers, British female, between 40-60 years old. Very efficient and manipulative British visa officer. Stiff upper-lip but with hidden reserves of passion. Extremely well read and professes a great love for all things British, even though she's spent a great deal of time living in foreign climes. She should never be seen as trying to seduce Nicholas but rather trying different tactics to get at the truth.

SETTING: Mohammed's small, cheap flat in Cairo, Egypt. The room contains one bed, a table, and two chairs. A cheap trunk containing clothes, etc. There are bloody hand prints (a Middle-Eastern sign for good luck "the hands of Fatima") on the wall over the bed. There's one window at the rear that looks down on a typical Egyptian street, up from which comes the sounds of children, traffic, donkeys, street-vendors, music, and the call to prayer. Full of life in other words. There is a bathroom offstage.

TIME: Present. The play takes place over the course of a couple weeks.

NOTE - The Arabic words are spelled out phonetically. The definitions and a pronunciation guide follow at the end.

Direction Note: In order to preserve the feeling of their own enclosed world, the actors should do set changes as much as possible. Mohammed and Nicholas should stay in character in a half light as they move around in the flat or move things for the next scene. No set change people if possible.

Dance, when you are broken open.
Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of fighting.
Dance in your own blood.
Dance, when you're perfectly free

Jelaluddin Rumi
(1207-1273)

SCENE 1

(Darkness. Soft Middle-Eastern music. Music fades. A child's laugh. Sounds of children playing in the streets. A dog barks in the distance. A muted policeman's whistle. Light traffic sounds. Softly in the distance, the first morning call to prayer...

Lights come up in the half dark flat. Mohammed is sitting on the bed, shakily trying to light a cigarette. It's apparent he is in deep physical and mental distress: torn, stained clothes, bruises, burns. Mohammed shouldn't over play the pain. He's stiff, aching, in a bit of shock; morning after pain rather than in immediate agony. The window shutters are closed.

Suddenly loud noises of dogs barking in the alley. The call to prayer fades as we hear footsteps rushing up the stairs, startling Mohammed, who painfully panics. Mohammed doesn't know what to do. Loud banging on door. He freezes. More banging. Then...)

NICHOLAS

Mohammed! Are you there? Mohammed!!

(Mohammed sags, relieved. Doorknob rattling.)

MOHAMMED

Nicholas?

NICHOLAS

Yes! Thank god! Open up!

MOHAMMED

(Painfully goes to open door)

Stanna swayer. Stanna swayer.

NICHOLAS

Are you all right? Oh my god, open the door!

MOHAMMED

Yes. Yes. Wait.

(Mohammed opens door. Enter Nicholas.

Mohammed sags, Nicholas catches him.)

NICHOLAS

Thank god! You're here!

MOHAMMED

You frightened me...

NICHOLAS

(Hugging Mohammed)

I can't believe you're here!

MOHAMMED

(In pain)

No, stop! Please!

NICHOLAS

What?! Are you all right? (Looking at Mohammed's condition)

MOHAMMED

The steps on the stair...I thought...

NICHOLAS

Oh my god!

MOHAMMED

Sshh! Please?

NICHOLAS

What did they do to you?!

MOHAMMED

Please! The neighbors..

NICHOLAS

Are you all right?

MOHAMMED

I'm dizzy...

NICHOLAS

Here...the bed...here, here...

MOHAMMED

I'm sorry...

NICHOLAS

Lie down...no wait..what do they say? Put your head down, or between your legs..I can't remember!

MOHAMMED

Please. (Sits on bed)

NICHOLAS

We've got to get you to doctor.

MOHAMMED

No!

NICHOLAS

You're bleeding..you're...

MOHAMMED

No Doctor!

NICHOLAS

Ok, ok!...Right...right...

MOHAMMED

No one must see me!

NICHOLAS

Ok!..Water then. Clean you up a little, then decide.

MOHAMMED

My hand...

NICHOLAS

Yes, ok, right. Bandages!

(goes into bathroom)

..bandages..I couldn't find you. I tried! I was frantic.

(comes out with small basin of water, cloth,

bandages)

Zeinab, downstairs, said they arrested you!

(Mohammed nods. Nicholas cleans Mohammed through the scene and bandages his hand)

I thought she was taking the mickey out of me. But, my god, the place is wrecked and you aren't here and you aren't here. Next thing I know I'm standing at the police station, tears running down my face. Marvelously effective that. "What's your relationship to this man?" Laughing! Standing there shattered, out of my mind. Acting like they never heard of you. I should go to the Mugamma and fill out a bloody form! I rang up everyone. Even rang the embassy for all the good that did. "What's your relationship to this man?" "What's your relationship to this man?"

MOHAMMED

What did you say?

NICHOLAS

What was I supposed to say?

MOHAMMED

What did you say?

NICHOLAS

That you were my student.

MOHAMMED

Student?

NICHOLAS

I didn't know what to say. Here..shirt off.
(Nicholas unbuttons Mohammed's shirt.)

MOHAMMED

Your student?

NICHOLAS

I was frantic..Jesus! Mohammed! These are burns! Are these burns?
These are cigarette burns!

MOHAMMED

Gently! (Sharp painful intake of breath)

NICHOLAS

Sorry, I'm sorry.

MOHAMMED

It's ok...

NICHOLAS

Jesus! Those fucking, fucking bastards!

MOHAMMED

Please...

NICHOLAS

Look at this! These need ointment or anti-something. You need the
doctor!

MOHAMMED

I'm ok.

NICHOLAS

You're not ok!

MOHAMMED

I told you...

NICHOLAS

My god, I want to kill those fuckers! Burn them with fucking cigarettes!

MOHAMMED

Please..your voice..

NICHOLAS

Throw a petrol bomb through their bloody window!

MOHAMMED

It's over. Please.

NICHOLAS

Six days! Gone. Disappeared!

MOHAMMED

I know.

NICHOLAS

And I couldn't do anything. Bloody useless.

MOHAMMED

You're not...

NICHOLAS

Why did they do this to you?!

MOHAMMED

Because they're fucking bastards? (hurts) Ssstt!

NICHOLAS

How can you joke?! You should be in hospital!

MOHAMMED

I don't want anyone to see me.

NICHOLAS

Everyone should see you. The doctors, the nurses!

MOHAMMED

No.

NICHOLAS

The newspapers! The UN!

MOHAMMED

No!

NICHOLAS

You can't just pretend that nothing's happened!

MOHAMMED

I will lose my job! A teacher arrested?!

NICHOLAS

Your students should see you!

MOHAMMED

My family shamed!

NICHOLAS

But..

MOHAMMED

Please! (pain)

NICHOLAS

Gently. It's all right. It'll be all right, little one. What do you want?

MOHAMMED

I want to get out of this place.

NICHOLAS

Water? Whiskey?

MOHAMMED

This country. This government. Now. Right now, just go.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Was it me?

MOHAMMED

You?

NICHOLAS

Me. Yes, me! That we're..?

MOHAMMED

You teach English. You translate love poems. I don't think this is dangerous.

NICHOLAS

Us! I mean us!

MOHAMMED

(Shrugs) No.

NICHOLAS

What did they charge you with?

MOHAMMED

They don't have to charge you with anything.

NICHOLAS

They must have arrested you for something.

MOHAMMED

This is Egypt, not England. They sometimes go to Imbaba, to the poor neighborhoods, drive down the street arresting all young men who show their faces! Just to keep them from protesting!

NICHOLAS

You were in Imbaba?

MOHAMMED

No!

NICHOLAS

Then what?

MOHAMMED

What does it matter!?

NICHOLAS

It matters if I'm to blame.

MOHAMMED

They arrested many.

NICHOLAS

Look at me! I'm trembling like a leaf. You're a bloody mess and I don't know what to do. I feel like I'm to blame. I'm useless. Totally bloody useless.

MOHAMMED

You're not useless.

NICHOLAS

I am!

MOHAMMED

You're not useless Nicholas. You're just British.

NICHOLAS

(Stops, laughs) Yes, well..right. Bloody useless Brit. Right Sorry. I didn't mean to...I'm sorry.

MOHAMMED

You are all that I thought of. In the prison. That somehow you would show your passport and rescue me.

NICHOLAS

I tried! I bloody tried! They had you somewhere doing god knows what, torturing you! And I couldn't do a thing about it!

MOHAMMED

It's ok. Ma'alisch.

NICHOLAS

I thought I would go mad.

MOHAMMED

Me also.

NICHOLAS

Why? Why did they do this?

MOHAMMED

(Shrugs)

My name is on a list.

NICHOLAS

List?

MOHAMMED

When I was at University. My name was put on a list.

NICHOLAS
At the university?

MOHAMMED
Yes.

NICHOLAS
What list?

MOHAMMED
The shit list.

NICHOLAS
You read (past tense) literature for god's sake.

MOHAMMED
I was also a writer.

NICHOLAS
A writer?

MOHAMMED
A writer of cartoons.

NICHOLAS
Cartoons?

MOHAMMED
Somebody didn't like them.

NICHOLAS
What cartoons?

MOHAMMED
For the school paper.

NICHOLAS
Political cartoons?!

MOHAMMED
They may have suggested that our government was not a "good" government.

NICHOLAS
Oh Christ..

MOHAMMED

Maybe they weren't comical.

NICHOLAS

Mohammed!

MOHAMMED

The paper was closed down, banned. The editors arrested. The police break the door to my house, they push my father to the floor, they slap me in the face. They say if I make another cartoon I will be kicked out of school. If I ever make trouble again, I will be thrown in the prison. My father will be thrown in the prison. So I stop. What could I do? I was frightened. I was frightened for my family! I am still frightened!

NICHOLAS

But you haven't done any more cartoons. Have you?

MOHAMMED

No! I stop, but my name stays on the list, you see?

NICHOLAS

And they just suddenly decide to arrest you?

MOHAMMED

Many are arrested. They made a sweep. From the cafes, from the homes. Many. It happens all the time. You know these things!

NICHOLAS

I don't know these things! Not when it happens to you! To us. there has to be a reason.

MOHAMMED

Khalass, enough! What does it matter!? This has nothing to do with you!

NICHOLAS

How can you say that?

MOHAMMED

You're safe! Yes? You have no worries. You are English. Something happens, you jump on the plane.

NICHOLAS

I'm not jumping on a plane!

MOHAMMED

More than three hundred were taken to the prison. Sitting in the halls, on the floors. Hoods over heads. Blindfold. Police kicking. Spitting. Hitting us with felaqas..clubs. Calling us abominations. Haram!

NICHOLAS

But why?

MOHAMMED

Maybe an article about government corruption in the foreign newspapers. They must make a distraction. Make new headlines.

NICHOLAS

What article?

MOHAMMED

Any articles! It doesn't matter. The elections. Iraq. Palestine. They don't need a reason!

NICHOLAS

I'm just trying to understand.

MOHAMMED

The minister has a bad dream? He gets frightened in the night? They get out the list. The government shopping list. Yes? Pick up a few of these...a few of these. The usual suspects, yes?

NICHOLAS

So, they did this for nothing?

MOHAMMED

To make a show! To act like they are doing something! The dissidents..the homosexuals..the cartoonists. Yes? To show the Imams that we're upholding traditional values. Egypt standing strong against evil western influences!

(Mohammed laughing and coughing)

NICHOLAS

Ok, ok...

MOHAMMED

Arrest the cartoonists. Beat the homosexuals. A fatwa on satellite dishes!

NICHOLAS

Please, Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

Protect us from American Idol!

NICHOLAS

You need to lie down. You need to be in hospital.

MOHAMMED

IL ham du lillah. I need a Johnny Walker.

NICHOLAS

Yes.

MOHAMMED

I need to be here in this room. I need you to just hold me.

NICHOLAS

But...

MOHAMMED

Please, I am tired.

NICHOLAS

Of course, all right...

(holding Mohammed, stroking his hair)

It'll be all right...everything will be all right.

(Lights down.)

(Cont)