

ICE FRONT

CHARACTERS

Officer One	A middle-aged man, wearing a uniform, dressed for cold
Officer Two	A younger man, similarly dressed
Elsie	A woman in her twenties, pretty, her smart clothes frayed
Erik	A man in his thirties, he wears a dusty suit and tie, knit cap with a pompom, and a paper clip on his lapel
Refugee One	A middle-aged man, wearing wet clothes
Refugee Two	A younger man, similarly dressed
Refugee Three	A woman, she carries a baby, wrapped in a fleece blanket depicting some kind of American children's cartoon.

Note: All three refugees wear stage make up on their hands and faces, giving their skin the appearance of cold, or the beginnings of frostbite.

SETTING

A snowy field, a bus, an apartment, and a train, in the City of Babylon

TIME

2,000 B.C.

At rise, lights up full on two OFFICERS standing on a snowy hill.

OFFICER ONE

Pyramus and Thisbe — the most beautiful of youths — lived in houses side-by-side, where it is said the Queen of Babylonia girded her high city with baked-brick walls.

OFFICER TWO

Their proximity made the first steps for their acquaintance, but love grew in time.

OFFICER ONE

And with the wedding torches —

OFFICER TWO

They would have been joined by law —

OFFICER ONE

But the parents forbade that which they could not forbid.

OFFICER ONE

When all observers were away, the young lovers would speak in signs.

As the OFFICERS continue to stare out at the snow field, OFFICER TWO with binoculars, the lights come up full on ELSIE and ERIK, seated next to each other on a bus. REFUGEE ONE, TWO and THREE are other passengers on the bus, who sit quietly, reading, distracted.

ELSIE

(Pointing at ERIK's lapel.) You shouldn't wear that paper clip in public.

ERIK

Keep looking forward.

ELSIE

And your cap? What if someone sees you?

ERIK

(Taking off his knit cap.) Let them see me.

ELSIE

But my father says —

ERIK

We shouldn't talk about this here, Elsie.

ELSIE

I heard it's illegal to wear a Kroner now. I have a friend who —

ERIK

Be quiet —

ERIK stands, as OFFICER ONE boards the bus.

OFFICER ONE

(To ELSIE) Guten Morgen. Wie geht es Ihnen heute?

ELSIE shrugs, as if she doesn't understand. OFFICER TWO scans the horizon through binoculars, freezing when he sees the REFUGEES.

OFFICER TWO

The wall common to both houses held a crack, formed when the wall was made.

REFUGEES pick up their belongings, suitcases, stroller, etc., and move past ERIK and OFFICER ONE to disembark the bus.

OFFICER ONE

(To ERIK and ELSIE) The lovers knew of this chink. *(Points to the paper clip on ERIK's lapel.)* But what does love not know? *(Writes a citation, handing it to ERIK.)* You lovers have grown accustomed to journey—

OFFICER ONE touches ELSIE's hair, as if to examine it. REFUGEE ONE, carrying two suitcases, a baby in a carrier, and a folded stroller, his clothes wet, his hands bright red from cold, approaches OFFICER TWO.

REFUGEE ONE

I am from Sudan.

OFFICER TWO

Often, when Thisbe stopped here, and Pyramus there, and the breath of each in turn had been snatched, they would say, "O envious wall, why do you stand in the way of lovers?"

OFFICER ONE exits the bus, and joins his partner.

OFFICER ONE

(Mocking) How much must we give that you might permit us to be joined?

OFFICER TWO

(Jeering) Might you lie open that we should kiss?

REFUGEE ONE

I came in a taxi. We walked the last mile.

OFFICER TWO

From their separate houses they say "Farewell."

OFFICER ONE

And each gives to the wall... kisses!

REFUGEE ONE throws his belongings towards the border —

REFUGEE ONE

You can keep my passport!

ELSIE and ERIK, now at a table, eating a simple meal.

ELSIE

But where will you go?

ERIK

They're training men in Sweden.

ELSIE

In Sweden? Where?

ERIK

They say hundreds are there.

ELSIE

How will you get there?

ERIK

They're going over in the winter, on skis.

ELSIE

You are not skiing to Sweden.

ERIK

I have to.

ELSIE

But how will I know if you're safe? I have to come with you!

ERIK

You have to stay here.

ELSIE

And do what? Post your shitty newspaper for you? Write a guest column called "Love in Wartime"?

Someone has to print it.

ERIK

Why can't you?

ELSIE

They need men, Elsie. The resistance needs fighters.

ERIK

I'm a fighter.

ELSIE

You're too young.

ERIK

I'm not too young for this! *(She takes his hand, puts it on her belly.)*

ELSIE

I know. I'm sorry —

ERIK

The snowfield, REFUGEE TWO stamps his feet in the cold.

REFUGEE TWO
(Carrying a garbage bag.) My name is Abdullah. (He raises his hands.)

OFFICER ONE
You don't have to do that here.

REFUGEE TWO
(Shaking uncontrollably.) I am from Yemen.

OFFICER ONE
Are you cold?

REFUGEE TWO
I am scared.

REFUGEE THREE
(Holding a baby.) I am from Mauritania! (She drops to her knees.) I seek asylum!

OFFICER TWO returns to ELSIE and ERIK, who are seated next to each other on a train. The REFUGEES, too, become the other passengers, assuming the same distracted, nervous posture as before. Underneath ERIK's folded winter coat, ELSIE and ERIK hold hands.

OFFICER TWO

(Walking up the train car.) It is illegal for anyone to deliberately and knowingly shield an illegal alien from detection by federal authorities.

ELSIE

(Wiping condensation, and looking out the window.) Where are we going?

ERIK

They are taking us North.

ELSIE

To where?

ERIK

I've only heard of the places. Here, take my coat.

ELSIE

But you'll need it.

ERIK

Please, take it. *(He helps ELSIE put on his too-big coat.)*

OFFICER ONE

Potentially, you put your families and parish, your very community at risk for prosecution and fines. *(He stops by a pair of REFUGEES, checking their papers.)* I hope it won't come to that.

ERIK

(Looking at her thin shoes.) And take my boots.

ELSIE

They're too big! What will you wear?

ERIK

It doesn't matter. Just do it.

ELSIE puts ERIK'S winter boots on, over her shoes. ERIK looks over his shoulder at OFFICER ONE. He tries to cheer her:

ERIK (con't)

Look, my socks don't match!

ELSIE

(She bursts into tears.) Will you please take my scarf? *(She gives the scarf to him.)*

OFFICER ONE

I see this more as a campaign to restore serious immigration enforcement.

ELSIE

I'm scared.

ERIK

And I have some money, here. Put it in your pocket, no, put it in your shirt.

ELSIE

But you'll need it.

ERIK

No, I won't.

OFFICER ONE

(To ERIK) I think it remains to be seen how popular immigrant enforcement is going to be, if it's going to be at all effective.

The snowy field. As they disembark, REFUGEES ONE, TWO and THREE build a wall of their suitcases, as OFFICER TWO speaks:

OFFICER TWO

After the dawn removed the fires of night, they met at this place.

REFUGEE ONE

(To OFFICER TWO) My name is Abdullah. I am from Yemen.

REFUGEE TWO

I am scared.

REFUGEE THREE

I seek asylum!

REFUGEE ONE

I came in a taxi. *(Looks back over shoulder.)* We walked the last mile.

OFFICER ONE

(On the train, to ERIK) Then, lamenting, they decide many things —

OFFICER TWO

(To REFUGEES) In the silent night they might try to depart from their houses —

OFFICER ONE

(To ERIK) And when they've left home

OFFICER TWO

(To REFUGEES) And relinquished the city —

OFFICER ONE

(To ERIK) They wander.

OFFICER TWO

(To REFUGEES) Lost in a wide field.

REFUGEE TWO

I am scared.

REFUGEE THREE

I seek asylum!

REFUGEE ONE

I did not make this decision lightly.

OFFICER ONE

(Shouting at REFUGEE ONE, from the train) You were thinking about it for weeks!

REFUGEE ONE

I think that I made the right decision in coming here.

OFFICER TWO

(To REFUGEES) Instead of going to the immigration office?

ERIK

Elsie, I need you to do something for me.

ELSIE

What?

ERIK

They won't take you to work at the camps if you're crazy.

ELSIE

But I'm not crazy. I want to go with you!

ERIK

Just pretend, Elsie. Act like it. You know, yell. This train is —

ELSIE

I know where this train's going.

ERIK

They'll take you somewhere else, I don't know where.

ELSIE

Why can't we stay together?

ERIK

When they take me, roll your eyes. Thrash around, make noises!

ELSIE

Erik! —

ERIK

It'll be okay.

As OFFICER TWO speaks, REFUGEE TWO and THREE slowly embrace, their movements echoing the secret gestures between ERIK and ELSIE.

OFFICER TWO

They are joyous of the pact. And light, falling slowly from sight, is seized by the waters. And night comes forth —

ELSIE

Where are we going? I've never been here.

ERIK

You're getting off first, go. *(Yelling.)* This one! Officer, get her away from me!

ELSIE

No, I won't leave you.

ERIK

(To ELSIE) There's no other way. *(To OFFICER ONE)* Entschuldigen Sie, offizier.

ELSIE

You said we shouldn't speak to them!

ERIK

(He grabs Elsie roughly by the shoulder.) Hier ist eine verrückte Frau, mein herr!

ELSIE

I'm not crazy! *(OFFICER ONE taking ELSIE by the elbow.)*

ERIK

Sie versuchte, sich zu verstecken — She's trying to hide!

OFFICER TWO

Babylonian Thisbe saw from afar by the moon's beams, and on timid foot she fled —

I am —
REFUGEE ONE

I seek —
REFUGEE TWO

I did not make this decision lightly —
REFUGEE THREE

OFFICER ONE walks ELSIE off the train.

OFFICER ONE
Pyramus, too late, saw footprints in the deep dust, certainly of a beast —

OFFICER TWO
(To REFUGEES) One night ruins two lovers!

OFFICER ONE
He gives tears to her, much loved, kisses to her garment.

REFUGEE ONE
The fruits of the tree are turned black from the spray of death.

REFUGEE TWO
And the roots, moistened with purple blood, tinge the hanging berries with color.

REFUGEE THREE
Thisbe returns, lest she deceive her lover, and seeks the youth with eyes and mind.

ELSIE pulls away from the OFFICER. REFUGEES slowly and quietly restack their suitcases. ERIK joins them.

ELSIE
Walking into an empty room, how many dangers have I avoided? ERIK? ERIK,
where are you? *(She searches)*

OFFICER ONE
She sees Pyramus' trembling limbs touch the bloody ground!

OFFICER TWO
Water —

OFFICER ONE
Trembling at the surface —

OFFICER TWO

Struck by a small breeze.

REFUGEE THREE

She beats her arms and tears her hair and hugs the body of her lover.

REFUGEE TWO

She bathes his wounds in her tears.

REFUGEE ONE

A mix of grief and blood.

ELSIE

What cause has torn you from me? Raise your hanging head!

OFFICER ONE

She speaks, and impales her heart with pointed iron.

OFFICER TWO

And yet, her wishes bound the gods.

REFUGEE ONE

A black color remains when the fruit has ripened —

REFUGEE TWO

And that which is left over from their funeral pyre—

REFUGEE THREE

Now rests in one urn.

ELSIE turns to face upstage. The OFFICERS resume their place on the hill. The REFUGEES stop their work, and slowly raise their hands.

REFUGEE TWO

I am scared.

REFUGEE THREE

I seek asylum!

ERIK

I didn't make this decision lightly.

REFUGEE ONE

(Looks back over shoulder, then faces the audience.) We walked the last mile.