

# Plays for Young Audiences

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## *Baghdad Zoo*

By  
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Based on the true story of what happened when the American and British invasion force entered Iraq. Baghdad Zoo, the biggest zoo in the Middle East, was abandoned, looted, and the animals stolen, killed for meat or left to die.

#### CHARACTERS.

- The soldiers at war.
- The Seven Children under Leyla's table:
  1. Leyla. 11, the big sister.
  2. Amira. 10, middle sister.
  3. Sabeen. 8, youngest sister, the 'baby' of the family.
  4. Hakim. 9, brother to Leyla, Amira and Sabeen.
  5. Farah, 11. Cousin to Leyla, Amira, Hakim and Sabeen.
- The Soldiers at the zoo:

Soldier 49984.  
Soldier 38389.
- The Animals:

Three Lions (Leo, Malik and Seren).  
The Bear (Brownie).  
The African Badger.  
The Monkeys.  
Two Peacocks.  
The Gorilla (George).  
Other animals - to be made up by the actors.
- The Lost People of Baghdad.

#### LOCATION.

Central Baghdad, especially the zoo in Al Zawra Park.

#### TIME.

Nine days in April 2003.

# ONE

The soundtrack of war: planes, bombs, mortars, automatic rifle fire. This soundtrack is very loud at the beginning and runs under, to varying degrees, the rest of the play.

Under a table hide five children.

Over the top of them and around them are acted out snatches of battle, illuminated in flashes and flare light: a bomber pilot appears on top of the table; a pair of soldiers firing mortars; soldiers firing rifles; a soldier being shot, then someone coming to rescue them; people running for cover; etc etc etc. This is a collage of battle and a city in the middle of a war, with improvised words and other action as required.

All the time, five children hide, scared for their lives, under the table. They flinch at the biggest of the explosions. Sabeen holds tight to her teddy.

THE LOST PEOPLE:

*(These lines are distributed as required, said or sung. The five children are still under the table)*

On the first day...

The planes fly over and drop their bombs.

The man on the telly says he didn't care; we'd take whatever comes.

And the bombs come down.

On the second day...

More bombs rain down, and the airport and the palaces and the army bases are destroyed. The man on the telly is angry now.

And the bombs come down.

On the third day...

The man on the telly is sweating a lot and the city is on fire.

And the bombs come down.

On the fourth day...

The electricity stops, and the man on the telly isn't there.

And fathers are dying and mothers are lost and the water stops.

And the bombs come down.

On the fifth day...

The streets are empty and there is no food.

And the bombs stop.

And the streets are full of foreign tanks.

On the sixth day...  
There are soldiers. Foreign soldiers. And the doors are closed  
and nothing works and if anyone goes outside they shoot them  
dead. And the children under the table have no food and no  
water.

On the seventh day.  
The tanks turn off their engines and the guns stop and  
It is quiet. Very quiet.

*Pause. The sound track stops, for a while.*

SABEEN: I need the toilet.

AMIRA: Go on then.

*(She doesn't go)*

LEYLA: Go on.

SABEEN: The bucket's full. Shall I go upstairs?

FARAH: No in case a sniper sees you.

SABEEN: Shall I go outside then?

LEYLA: No! Use the one in the kitchen.

SABEEN: That's Mum's cleaning bucket.

LEYLA: Just use it.

SABEEN: And dad cleans the car with it.

HAKIM: The car's gone, burnt out. I saw it through the window.

AMIRA: Mum told us not to go near the window.

HAKIM: It had my football in it.

FARAH: The pitch has gone as well. Bomb hit it last week, the first day.

*Pause.*

SABEEN: I'm bursting.

LEYLA & AMIRA: Go on then!

*She runs off.*

AMIRA: Can you hear, how quiet it is?

HAKIM: Is it all over?

FARAH: It stinks in here.

AMIRA: Yeah, it's you.

FARAH: Shut up. no it isn't, it's Sabeen; she stinks of wee. I bet she's missed the bucket.

LEYLA: Stop it.

HAKIM: Leyla, when's mum and dad coming back?

LEYLA: I don't know. But they will. She said.

AMIRA: What if she doesn't find dad at the hospital?

FARAH: Hospital got hit on the second day. Direct hit.

LEYLA: Farah, will you stop it?

*They go quiet.*

LEYLA: *(Calling off)* Sabeen, you all right?

HAKIM: She's only in the kitchen.

SABEEN: *(Coming back)* I'm thirsty.

HAKIM: And me.

LEYLA: We all are.

HAKIM: Go back, try the tap.

SABEEN: I did.

AMIRA: We've got to get a drink.

SABEEN: It turns but there's still nothing in it. It just gurgles. I wanted to wash my hands.

LEYLA: Spit on them and wipe them on your leggings.

SABEEN: No!

FARAH: I read how the desert people drink their own, you know.

AMIRA: What? Wee?

FARAH: Not all the time. When there's a, you know, no water.

SABEEN: I'm not doing that. I'd rather die.

AMIRA: And me.

FARAH: Don't you get it stupid? We will die, if we don't get water.

AMIRA: Well, stupid, there's a whole bucketful out there, Farah. Go on, get drinking, just like the desert people. Like lemonade, very tasty.

LEYLA: I'm gonna whack you two if you don't stop it.

They sit there.

HAKIM: They should be here by now.

Pause.

FARAH: I think I should go home.

LEYLA: Your mum told you to wait; and I'm in charge, so stay put.

SABEEN: Leyla, my stomach hurts; it's got real bad pains now.

HAKIM: And mine.

FARAH: I think-

LEYLA: Well don't. Farah, we've had days and days of you being a pain and it's doing our heads in.  
Hakim, go get a pencil.

HAKIM: Why?

LEYLA: Cos I say.

He goes and gets the pencil.

LEYLA: Amira, write a message on the bottom of the table. Go on. *(She dictates)* 'Dear Mum and Dad, we waited. And now we're hungry. We've eaten everything in the house apart from stuff in the fridge. That all went bad when the electricity went off. So... we've gone to get some more.'

HAKIM: Where're we going?

LEYLA: *(Continuing to dictate)* 'Back before dark.'  
Sign it, Leyla.

AMIRA: Where're we going?

FARAH: Leyla, why under the table?

LEYLA: Cos if the soldiers come in I don't want them to find a message do I?

FARAH: Do your mum and dad always look under the table for notes then?

LEYLA: It's just in case.

FARAH: Just in case of what? We don't come back?

LEYLA: I'm not leaving a note saying dear American soldiers, 'We're five kids, on our own, so wait here then slit our throats when we get back.' OK?

Pause.

Leyla: OK?

FARAH: Cool.

Pause.

FARAH: Did you ask Amira to write it cos your handwriting is so crap?

LEYLA: I'm gonna kill you in a minute!  
Come on. Amira, hold Sabeen's hand. We're going out.

They come out from under the table.

HAKIM: We could split up; that's what they do in the films

SABEEN: Yeah and it always goes wrong. 'Let's split up they say', and it always messes up. Like in Scooby Doo. Split up equals mess up.

AMIRA: Hold my hand. We stay together.

HAKIM: Yeah.

And they follow Leyla out the door.

## TWO

We see a zoo full of animals. We hear the noises of the zoo – loud, filling the air.

The actors play all the animals in the zoo. Lions, monkeys, a bear, a badger, parrots, fish, two kangaroos, a gorilla, peacocks, a stick insect, everything – a real kaleidoscope of wildlife. The Lost People watch.

THE ANIMALS: On the first day...  
Big shapes in the sky.  
Like birds.  
But their wings do not flap.  
They roar overhead.  
Not like lions; but a metal growl going on and on and on.  
And a big iron stone  
Falls from the bird that does not flap  
And hits this place  
And two lions are killed dead. *(Two lions die)*

And on the second day...  
More iron stones  
Fall from the birds  
That do not flap.  
And the people who bring us food and water run away.  
And we are thirsty. *(Some other animals die)*

And on the third day...  
More stones, no water in the bowl or food in the food place.

Hungry.  
Thirsty. *(Some other animals die)*  
And there is fire. *(They roar and panic)*

On the fourth day ...  
Big machines with tube things on the front and they go  
Boom! Boom!  
Need food, need water. *(Some other animals die)*

On the fifth day...  
People come running with sticks;  
Crack open our cages and take the birds and fish and little  
ones.  
And they are gone.

THE LOST PEOPLE:

In Baghdad Zoo the looters come  
and smash the glass and steal the fish  
and smash the locks and steal the birds  
and everything that could be cooked is taken. Apart from a lion,  
a bear,  
a badger dug deep in its hole and if anyone gets near him he'll  
claw them till they bleed,  
two peacocks,  
a gorilla, named George, silent,  
some monkeys,  
and two wild boars who if you touch them will bite a half moon  
of flesh clean out.

THE ANIMALS:

On the sixth day...  
We are hungry, we are thirsty.  
We are hungry, we are thirsty. *(Some other animals die)*

On the seventh day.

Pause. Sound track off for a while as before.

THE ANIMALS:

Quiet today.  
Very thirsty, very hungry.

They slump in their cages. By now there are just a few of the animals left – a lion, a bear, a badger dug deep in its hole, two peacocks, a gorilla, some monkeys, two wild boar. The boars grunt, the lions roars weakly, the other animals call.

## THREE

Enter the five children. They are on the street. They have just looted food from a shop. They are outside the zoo. They carry a couple of bags and some food and bottles in their hands.

FARAH: Your mum is gonna kill you.

LEYLA: Let's keep moving.

FARAH: Stealing stuff like that, she'll go mad.

LEYLA: Everybody else was doing it.

FARAH: She'll still kill you.

LEYLA: It's not like before Farah. Since we went under the table the world has gone mad. There are no shops open. There are no rules.

HAKIM: They weren't shop dummies lying in the streets, Farah. It wasn't tomato sauce.

FARAH: I know!

SABEEN: I'm starving. Let's eat, let's drink.

AMIRA: We will. We're just looking for somewhere safe, off the street.

HAKIM: Everything smashed up, us running about - it's like being in a computer game.

FARAH: Don't be a tosser, Hakim. It's nothing like a computer game. If you get shot here, you don't just go back a level.

Beat. They look.

SABEEN: He knows, he was just saying.

They start moving again.

AMIRA: And don't get all snotty Farah, you grabbed stuff too.

FARAH: Only cos you did.

LEYLA: Leave it, will you! Stick together, follow me.

SABEEN: Can I eat now, I feel all dizzy again?

AMIRA: Hold on Sabeen; soon.

FARAH: Where was the owner do you think?

AMIRA: He's dead, that's what the bloke with the stick said.

HAKIM: Is that true?

AMIRA: I don't know.

SABEEN: Are we there yet?

HAKIM: Who smashed the door down?

AMIRA: I don't know.

FARAH: Probably one of the blokes with the big sticks.

SABEEN: I'm scared, Leyla. And hungry.

*Leyla takes her hand, pulls her along.*

FARAH: I thought he was gonna whack us.

*We all hear the sound of gun fire. The children run to a gap in a tall wall.*

LEYLA: Come on, through here.

SABEEN: We can't. You have to buy a ticket. What about the keepers?

LEYLA: Just act normal. If anyone asks, we'll say we got lost or something.

SABEEN: We'll see Brownie, she's my favourite. Come on.

*As they step through the gap in the wall, a terrible smell hits them.*

AMIRA: What's that smell?

FARAH: *(Who is last and hasn't gone through the wall yet)* That'll be Sabeen.

LEYLA: Shut up!

HAKIM: It's meat, rotten meat.

AMIRA: Dead meat.

SABEEN: Dead animals.

And they stop and stare at the terrible sight in front of them: smashed cages, ruined buildings, dead animals.

THE LOST PEOPLE: And the sun was high and the sky was hot  
and the keepers were too frightened to come back.

SABEEN: Look at my bear, my poor bear.

FARAH: And the gorilla and the lions, they're all...

They look at the animals. Sabeen goes to the bear's cage and starts to give him the food they'd just looted.

HAKIM: What you doing?

SABEEN: Giving her some bread. Come on, Brownie. Hakim, you give some meat to the lions.

HAKIM: There's only one left.

Hakim throws something to the lioness. She eats it.

FARAH: Hey! That's our food.

SABEEN: I'm sharing it.

FARAH: You can't.

SABEEN: Who says?

AMIRA: I thought you were starving.

SABEEN: Come on Brownie.

AMIRA: Stop! We've got to eat it ourselves.

FARAH: Yeah, this is stupid.

AMIRA: I've been starving hungry too; we haven't eaten for two days.

SABEEN: Look at her, Ami', she's starving.

FARAH: So are we!

AMIRA: I'm so hungry but I didn't want to say, I've been trying to hold it in. And now; if we don't eat...

SABEEN: Leyla, tell 'em!

AMIRA: We can't give it away.

LEYLA: Everybody stop! Stop feeding them. Stop! Now all of you, sit down!

*She waits for them all to sit and be quiet.*

LEYLA: Now get the food out. Eat.

HAKIM: But-

LEYLA: Eat!  
Eat I say!

*The other children do as she says. They eat ravenously, but Hakim and Sabeen steal looks at Brownie and the other animals. The animals watch them.*

SABEEN: They're watching us.

HAKIM: There's no water in their bowls either. What're we gonna do, Leyla?

LEYLA: I'm thinking.

FARAH: It's all right for them to die. They're not human. An animal is not worth as much as-

LEYLA: Farah, shut up for God's sake!

*The children eat.*

*The Lost people come and stand behind the children, watching them eat. They touch them, as if caring for them – but the children are not aware of this. The Lost People sing or speak:*

THE LOST PEOPLE: In the streets of Baghdad

Round the corners  
Down the alleys;  
They are hunting.  
Tracking and chasing  
Running and racing  
To kill their quarry,  
Run them down and see them dead.

In the streets of Baghdad  
The animals are hunting  
Running round with their guns and their bombs.  
Showing no mercy.  
The animals are loose in Baghdad.  
There are no rules  
Nowhere to hide.  
The animals are loose in Baghdad.  
Running and racing  
To kill their quarry  
Hunt them down and see them dead.  
Hunt them down and see them dead.

They exit, howling with dismay – half animal, half human.

The children have finished eating.

LEYLA: Take one bit of food, just one, and put it in your pocket for emergencies. The rest is for the animals. Amira, Sabeen and me, we'll do the feeding. You two, go and get some water.

HAKIM: What do we collect it in? If I try and get the water bowl out the cage he'll bite my arm off.

AMIRA: Hak', that's not a mister, it's a missus, a lioness. She's got no no mane, and no dangly bits underneath.

They laugh.

HAKIM: Maybe if I ask nicely: Excuse me Missus Lion, please will you pass me your water bowl please?

SABEEN: Stop messing about. Go and get water. If you don't, they'll die. Please.

Hakim and Farah, not at all happy, go. The girls feed the animals.

SABEEN: Come on Brownie. It's me, remember? Me and my brother, we come and see you in the holidays.

LEYLA: Don't put your fingers near the bars.

SABEEN: Come on, this is cabbage. I know you like cabbage, I've seen you eat it before.

*She puts the cabbage in front of the bear.*

SABEEN: He's not eating it.

AMIRA: Push it closer with a stick.

*She does so. The bear snuffles at it.*

SABEEN: She wants it, but she can't.

LEYLA: *(To off)* Hurry up with that water.

JAMAIL: *(Off)* There isn't any; the taps're bust here too.

HAKIM: *(Coming back)* It's off everywhere. All the pipes in the ground are mangled where the tanks have been.

SABEEN: I got this in the shop, Brownie.

*She pours a bottle of water into a yoghurt pot and pushes it through with a stick.*

FARAH: *(Coming back)* That's not enough; they need gallons.

HAKIM: Yeah, she can drink a bucketful in one go. I've seen her, haven't we Sab'. She picks it up in her paws; she's dead clever.

LEYLA: We'll have to bring water up from the canal.

HAKIM: We can't, it's half a mile away.

AMIRA: And what in? Sabeen's yoghurt pot?

*Sound of more automatic gunfire.*

FARAH: Let's go home.

SABEEN: We've got to look after them, look at the peacocks they're too thirsty to even show off their feathers.

FARAH: I love peacocks.

HAKIM: Where are all the other animals?

AMIRA: Run away I suppose. Or dead. Or people have taken them.

HAKIM: What do you mean?

FARAH: To eat.

SABEEN: Leyla?

LEYLA: *(Reassuring Sabeen, but knowing Farah is right)* Course they haven't

HAKIM: Where's the zoo keepers?

AMIRA: They've run away haven't they? Too scared to stay.

SABEEN: It's all right, Brownie, we'll save you.

FARAH: We can't. Look at us. There's a war on; and we're just kids.

AMIRA: We have to.

LEYLA: People can't just put animals in a cage and then leave 'em, just cos things have gone a bit bad.

FARAH: A bit bad? There are planes and bombs and soldiers and people dead all over the place.

AMIRA: By the shop I saw a man with his face all-

LEYLA: Shut up, Amira.

AMIRA: Maybe Mum and Dad are-

LEYLA: Shut up will you!

HAKIM: Farah's right. It's more than a bit bad. Leyla, what are we gonna do?

LEYLA: I dunno. Maybe we go home, wait for mum and dad, then after the fighting's stopped-

SABEEN: That could be ages! *(Making the decision)* No, we have to look after them. That's what we do. There's no one else. We give them all the food; and we get them water; then we go get some more food; that's what we do.

Two soldiers burst on. They shout and gesture to get the children away from the bags.

49984: Teg kab! Teg kab! *(Get back! Get back!)*

38389: Uy! *(You!)*

49984: Pord tath! Pord ti! *(Drop that! Drop it!)* Evom! Evom yawa! *(Move! Move away!)*

38389: Won! I dess, won! *(Now. I said, now!)*

49984: Won. Tup roy sdnah ni eth ria! Pu! Pu! Pu! *(Now. Put your hands in the air! Up! Up!)*

38389: Pu! Pu!

The children understand, from the gestures of the soldiers what to do.

49984: Tire, yats ayaw. *(Right, stay away.)*

The children are clear of the bags. The second soldier looks inside, carefully, using the end of his rifle.

LEYLA: *(Taking a step towards the soldier)* It's for the animals. It's food. They are-

49984: Teg Kab! Kab! *(Get back! Back!)*

Leyla gets back, but then tries again, slowly.

HAKIM: Leyla, come back!

SABEEN: They're frightened, just like the animals. You have to not make eye contact and not move Quickly. Talk in a quiet voice.

38389: Staw esh gnyas? *(What's she saying?)*

LEYLA: We are just feeding the bear. Food. To. Bear.

She gestures until she is understood. The soldier understands.

49984: (To the other soldier) Tnod toosh. *(Don't shoot.)* (To Leyla) Tire. Tsuj tup ti oorth eth srab, neth teg tsol. *(Right. just put it through the bars, then get lost.)*

38389: Tahw od ouy neem? *(What do you mean?)*

49984: Sti la tire *(It's all right.)*

38389: Woh od ouy wonk? *(How do you know?)*

49984: Sti la thgir *(It's all right.)*

38389: Heay tub- *(Yeah but-)*

49984: Sti la thgir! *(It's all right!)*

The soldier gestures her to feed the bear.

Sabeen takes the food and feeds Brownie. She is gentle, caring.

SABEEN: I love you Brownie. Eat up, get better. It's gonna be OK.

Gunfire. Closer now.

49984: Og. Og. Teg tou fo ereh! *(Go. Go. Get out of here!)*

He shouts, like herding cows.

38389: Waah! Waaah!

The children run.

49984: Laf tuo. Og! *(Fall out. Go!)*

The soldiers move out. Then 49984 comes back and looks at the animals with pity and shame.

Then 38389 comes back.

38389: Emoc no, rof sdog case. *(Come on, for God's sake.)*

They go. The animals stand or lie there.