



Newport, Maine

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COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (2M 1W)

ZAN: A young middle-Eastern-American female student.

SAM: Zan's Boss; a tough but kind-hearted man in his mid-50s.

CABBY: A regular customer of Sam's; a New York Cab Driver.

SETTING

A diner in Brooklyn, New York.

TIME

A couple weeks after September 11, 2001.

MUSIC

***This Is My Song**, to the tune of Sibelius' **Finlandia**, is used (quite effectively) at the end of the show. It has been recorded and we can make that available as an mp3, to producers for a small fee.*

COUNTER INTELLIGENCE by Sheila Lynch Rinear 2M 1F. About 30 minutes. 1 interior. Contemporary 2001 costumes. (**Perfect for College/University, Community, Church, High School and Professional Groups.**) A Brooklyn diner's business has fallen off in the days following 9/11. When a customer implies that the "Saudi Arabian-American" student who works behind the counter might be the cause, the student counters with a very personal "pledge of allegiance." When a young waitress informs her boss about the mistreatment of her Middle-Eastern-American friends in the weeks following 9/11, her boss realizes business will never return to what it used to be until he, like many others, change their attitudes about what really threatens America. Sheila was inspired and supported in writing the play because of the visually emotional effect that 9/11 had on the students of her school district; she calls it "a monstrous violation on the young people of the world. These young citizens seem to want to reclaim the world in the name of peace." I believe the character of Zan, (the Saudi-Arabian/American student), knows how to start the reclamation process." This is a beautiful play about viewing the God of all the nations of the Earth as the God of each citizen of the world. Realizing that no person is very different at all from any other person. The play is also bolstered by a beautiful song "*This Is My Song*" adapted from Jean Sibelius' *Finlandia* and sung by a choir (recorded) and a solo voice, Zan's. (Makes a great DOUBLE BILL with Sheila's one-act play, "A Day Without Palestine.") (The play contains mild language) **Order # 3164**

COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

SCENE: Lights up on an established diner in Brooklyn. The news and weather for the New York City area are being shown on a TV monitor over the counter. The news/Anchorperson reports on the search for bodies still going on at Ground Zero. ZAN emerges from the restroom unenergetically blotting her face dry with a paper towel. She walks behind the counter, picks up her coat and retrieves a lipstick from its pocket. As she starts back to the restroom, she hears something on the TV that makes her pause, get down on her knees, drop her head, and raise her arms as if in prayer. SAM calls from the kitchen.

SAM: Make sure the coffee's going, will ya, Zan?

ZAN: Yeah. Okay, Mr. Sam. It's going.

(ZAN quickly jumps to her feet; goes and dumps coffee into the top of a coffee-maker; pours water through the top; hits the "on" button; smears lipstick onto her lips then dabs it onto her cheeks, rubbing it in, all the while using a knife's reflection for her mirror. Putting her lipstick away, ZAN stands tall, takes a deep breath then slumps, sighing. ZAN taps her fingers on the counter-top, then walks to the diner's entrance, opens the door. ZAN disappears for a moment then re-enters with a stack of newspapers. At the counter ZAN cuts the cord around the papers and stacks them neatly in a paper stand after she removes yesterday's untouched papers. ZAN glances over the headlines and then slumps onto a counter stool in a dark funk. SAM appears at the doorway between the kitchen in the back and the counter-front.)

SAM: So how many papers we sending back today, huh?

ZAN: Nine, ten...eleven.

SAM: How many we get delivered?

ZAN: Twelve.

SAM: Twelve.

(Grabs the phone)

That's it. I'm canceling it. The paper deliveries.

ZAN: I doubt they're open yet, Mr. Sam. Nothing but diners are open at 5:45 in the morning.

SAM: This is Brooklyn. Everyone's got insomnia.

ZAN: Ah, so if we're awake, those people on the other side of the river better be awake too, hmm?

SAM: Young lady, the New York Times never sleeps.

(SAM routs through the yellow pages of the phone book.)

ZAN: You should have your coffee first, Mr. Sam.

SAM: I would love to, but how can I have my coffee when it's not even finished dripping? Hmmm?

(ZAN goes to the coffee pot and talks to it.)

ZAN: You'd better hurry, if you know what's good for you, coffee pot.

(Turns to SAM)

Feel better?

(To SAM's shrug)

Okay, so while we're waiting for it to drip through sit down and listen to an idea I've had.

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SAM: You know, seems like I listen to lots of your ideas. Isn't that what your college professors get paid to do? Do I get paid to listen to your ideas? Hmmm? No. I get told to...

(Imitating ZAN)

...sit down and listen.

ZAN: *(laughs)* See. You are funny.

SAM: No, I am not funny. What I am is furious.

ZAN: Why?

SAM: Why? I spend my life building my business and in one day causa some middle Eastern geeks...sorry, no offense to you Saudi Arabian people...folks don't come outta their homes no more for breakfast. I'm gonna go belly-up. Bankrupt. Kaput.

(Turning TV off)

See, I gotta TV here. I'm asking myself, why aren't we all together here like usual watching the news. The news from "ground zero."

ZAN: Maybe it makes them too sad. Maybe they can't watch.

SAM: New Yorkers? Too sad to watch somethin'? Nah. I don't buy that for a minute. New Yorkers are tough. They're watching...but at home by themselves. That's what's sad.

ZAN: What do you mean?

SAM: They could be watching it here. See, for years they all come here and eat, kibitz, listen to the tube. Now what? They wanna stay home and watch it, eating their damned pop tarts and Cheerios? I say, let 'em. They wanna reject what I tried to build up...

(beat)

See, I wanted it to be for the breakfast folks like *Cheers* was to the boozing crowd. I don't know, it just doesn't seem fair that...

ZAN: *(she imitates SAM)* "... a business that got my kids through college so they'll have a better life than me can't even pay the rent, let alone give me a few bucks to take the wife to Atlantic City for a break once in a while."

SAM: Watch it, you. Most people mock their bosses get tossed out on their butts.

ZAN: I'm not mocking. No, I'm showing you that I recognize you have the qualities of what the kids at school call a "drama queen."

SAM: Hey, I'm not a frigging queer here, thank you very much.

ZAN: No, you're a drama "king." You act everything out like it's a story somewhere between a Greek tragedy and a TV sitcom. You are a very entertaining man, Mr. Sam.

SAM: You know, it's five minutes to six and I gotta listen to this sh...

(ZAN puts her hand up in time to stop SAM from saying "shit.")

SAM: Just bring me some coffee, it looks done. Will ya, please?

(ZAN pours SAM coffee.)

SAM: Okay, you say I'm entertaining. I'm so darned entertaining, where's my audience?

ZAN: You'll get them back. And I have an idea.

SAM: I wonder how big the audiences are in Atlantic City since those idiots decided to play Zambini Brothers Flying Circus with the Twin Towers.

(Slams his towel down)

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I get so dammed mad. Have you heard what the body count is today?

ZAN: I just know they haven't found anybody alive for two days now.

SAM: Shit!

(ZAN reaches under the counter for a coffee can that's got a sign on it: Dollars for your bad words. SAM throws some bills in and declares...)

SAM: Shit! See, I paid in advance.

ZAN: Do you truly like going to Atlantic City? You always come back grumpy about losing money.

SAM: I'd win lots bigger if Doris didn't always drag me off to the shows.

ZAN: She just wants you to relax and watch what is supposed to be entertainment. Miss Doris enjoys your company.

SAM: If she enjoys my company so much, why's she always asking me if she can go visit her sister in Florida?

ZAN: Everybody has "freaked out" in their own way since 9-11. Lots of people are leaving town...temporarily.

SAM: I hope that's all it is. I hope Doris isn't gonna get it in her head we should move to Florida.

ZAN: You wouldn't, would you?

SAM: What?**ZAN:** Move to Florida?

SAM: I would rather gargle with motor oil than move to Florida.

ZAN: Your wife loves Florida. She makes it sound so...so...easy-going... so relaxing.

SAM: Trust me, it's relaxing alright. I mean, some of the places are really classy, but the place where Doris's sister lives should change its name to "La-la-land."

ZAN: People go there to retire, right?

SAM: That's one way of putting it. Me personally? I think they go there to stop living. The major activity down there is grocery shopping and I tell you what is scary...the women get all dressed up...hair, nails, "outfits" just to get groceries, for cryin' out loud.

ZAN: Aren't you exaggerating?

SAM: No. I mean it, in the grocery stores you see women who should be enjoying hugging their grandchildren but, no. These gals'd rather hug their plastic surgeons.

ZAN: Now I know you're exaggerating...

SAM: No, these women have faces with no wrinkles and no expression, thanks to all the plastic surgeons down there making a fortune. Yeah, you see all kinds a shit down there.

(ZAN points to the can and while he continues to talk, SAM takes out some more money and tosses it into the can.)

SAM: Ya see guys with "sexy" unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts. Sexy, yeah, right. You can see their heart monitors when they leave the shirts open down to here. Who wants to see that?

ZAN: They do that on purpose? Open their shirts?

SAM: *(nodding)* And oh yeah, what else do they do on purpose? lots of guys "spike" their hair to cover their bald spots.

ZAN: That almost sounds creative.

SAM: Yeah, optical illusions are creative. I've seen women wearing so many ankle bracelets they look like that ghost in that Christmas story dragging all the chains.

ZAN: Women like jewelry.

SAM: Maybe. But these chicks are wearing them bracelets that thick so's you won't see their corn pads.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- Counter Intelligence by *Sheila Lynch Rinear*

ZAN: But you saw them.

SAM: (*drinks coffee, thinks*) In parts of Florida, absolutely nothing is ugly. It's not like I got fine artistic taste myself or nothing. It's just...

ZAN: You're scared you'll get like those people if you move there.

(*SAM looks at ZAN amazed...like she's read his mind.*)

ZAN: Has it always been like that down there?

SAM: Nah. Don't think it has. I tell you what it's like. It's kinda like the chicken/egg thing with those people and Disney World. I don't know which came first Disney World or the retirement villages.

ZAN: I do not understand why people go to Florida if it's like what you say.

SAM: For the warmth. To get away from the cold. To pretend they're not getting old. I bet you got a place like that in your country, hmmm?

ZAN: No. Not in Saudi Arabia. We have no need to escape the cold.

SAM: Didn't think of that. Could you please pour me some more coffee?

ZAN: See? When you say "please" I know you're not too hung over. Just a little.

SAM: Whadya? Documenting my life here or something? Don't tell me, you're doing another one of them psychology course "observation" exercises. Aren't cha? You think I can't spot that kinda stuff?

ZAN: No, no. I meant no disrespect, you know that.

SAM: Yeah, I do know that. I know that. That's why I hire you Arabic, Persian, Pakistani, and Indian kids. You don't got a disrespectful bone in your bodies. No, you're a goodkid, Zan. Just give me the damned coffee, huh?

ZAN: I was thinking how busy it always used to be here in the mornings. You used to need three of us.

SAM: You gotta rub my nose in it? Yeah we had packed houses. Any day I didn't run outa buttermilk pancake batter...

ZAN: "...was a bad and rare day."

SAM: And how many times did I use-ta send you, Boshnin, or Zahra...

ZAN: (*again finishes*) "...riding on your bikes to the co-op for orange juice."

SAM: (*lifting his mug like he's toasting*) Those were the days.

ZAN: So, I was thinking. We might get those days back.

(*Off SAM's glare*)

This sadness, grief, fear...I think is a temporary situation.

SAM: Temporary?

(*Blesses himself*)

That's real good to hear cause my priest says it's the end days we're living in. I say, "We're in a daze alright."

ZAN: (*laughs*) That's what I mean. You turn stuff...bad news... around and make it funny. We could do routines that'd bring customers back in.

SAM: Routines. Routines?

ZAN: In one of my courses on staff development, we watched a video about a group of workers in Seattle.

SAM: Seattle? Buncha new age, zombie, coffee-drinking computer freaks out there.

ZAN: Actually they had become, as you say, zombie-esque. Yes.

SAM: That's what I'm saying.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- Counter Intelligence by *Sheila Lynch Rinear*

ZAN: But one of them got the idea that if they started making the daily chores they did...the things they do over and over...if they made it all fun...?

SAM: Wait, wait, wait. I'm supposed to make flipping pancakes while I'm buttering toast fun? Yeah, I can see that. What a blast.

ZAN: But see, you can do both those things at once. If you like, let the people see you doing it...

SAM: Let them back in the kitchen?

(ZAN points to a panel between the front of the diner and the kitchen.)

ZAN: That lifts up. They could hear you singing. They could see you.

SAM: They could see me? They could see me sweating in their food? Is that what you want?

ZAN: No, you do those crazy dances and sing while you sling all the stuff together. They're pretty funny routines.

SAM: You think I do "funny routines?" See at this point I think just the fact I even open this place in the morning's a funny routine. Hilarious.

ZAN: I know you're sad about business falling off and all, but so were those guys in Seattle.

SAM: What? We're back in java-head land?

ZAN: They live on the coast and they..see...they work this fish market and toss fish around.

SAM: I tell ya what. I got a funny routine. How 'bout I give you a fishing pole and you go out and catch some customers. Hmm?

ZAN: That's almost kinda funny...

SAM: I didn't mean it to be.

ZAN: I know, but... We could wake 'em up in the morning like Letterman puts them to sleep at night.

SAM: Top ten lists? And junk like that?

ZAN: Great idea. Let's see: reason number ten you should come have breakfast at Sam's.

Sam shrugs and plays along.

ZAN: Cause if you don't you'll miss reason number nine.

(Stonefaced, SAM stares at her.)

ZAN: Nah, huh?

(SAM shakes his head.)

SAM: I'm not trying to say you Kids got no sense of humor or nothing. I just haven't seen much sign of it showing up. Yeah. That's what I'm saying.

ZAN: Okay. Forget the funny stuff. We could do something to music.

SAM: Oh this just keeps getting better, this idea of yours. Ya think cause we're only a borough away from Broadway we gotta do that horsesh...um, stuff, just to get customers?

ZAN: No. But like...I can juggle. I could juggle cups, or plates to perky, wake-up music or something.

SAM: Juggle cups and plates? You can juggle, huh?

ZAN: I could learn.

SAM: Like that movie Tom Cruise is waiting bar and stuff? He tosses drinks and shakers.

ZAN: I don't know that movie but I like Tom Cruise very much. Yeah, that sounds like what I had in mind.

SAM: Well you know what I had in mind, Miss Entrepreneur from NYU? I had in mind all these people who've been coming in here for thirty years eating my food and chewing the fat, showing me pictures of their kids in christening dresses and Halloween costumes...I had in mind they were my life-long friends that meant so

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- Counter Intelligence by Sheila Lynch Rinear

much to me I didn't ever have a hard time getting outta bed mornings to jump start their days. "Sam, how are ya?" "Sam, you the man!" "Sam who serves real ham, no spam." You know how many hundreds a times...no, thousands a times, I turned someone's day around before it even got started on a bad track? That's what I did and it kept me on track. I had in mind I'd be doing that five, ten more years. Then Doris and I could think about retiring.

ZAN: It might still happen.

SAM: No, cause this week I'm talking to a real estate broker who wants to sell this place for about a tenth what it used to be worth before frigging nine eleven.

(SAM notices ZAN's near tears.)

SAM: I'm sorry, little lady, I'm sorry. I get upset, too. I didn't mean to make you cry. If I sell, I'll tell them they gotta hire you and your friends.

(ZAN shrugs it off)

Why don't you go on and wash your face and get on to school.

ZAN: I'll wash my face, but I can't go on to school, Mr. Sam.

SAM: Why not? Anyone comes in, I can take care of 'em. No worries.

ZAN: I think I will wash my face off.

(ZAN runs to the restroom and SAM looks after ZAN and scowls. SAM walks to the TV and turns it on. We hear some lines about people coming from all over the country to help serve food to the 9/11 rescuers. SAM grunts, picks up a paper and scans the headlines. We hear the bell on the door jingle and CABBY enters, picks up a paper at the door, walks to the counter and slams his change down. As CABBY sits down reading the paper, SAM pours CABBY his coffee. CABBY looks up.)

CABBY: Thanks, Sam.

SAM: How ya doin', Cabby?

CABBY: How's anybody supposed to be doing these days, ya know? Ya do whatcha gotta, ya know?

SAM: I know and I'm glad you're not over...

(Points to the TV)

... over at Ground Zero moochin' free food.

CABBY: What d'ya mean?

SAM: Ya see anybody else here? I'm thinking maybe they're over there...

CABBY: Getting free omelets and shit like that? Saw a buncha folks walking over the bridge carrying bagsa stuff. I stopped and asked some of them they wanted a ride.

SAM: Good. So you're making some fares with all this stuff going on?

CABBY: Nah, when they said they were taking some donations to Ground Zero, I gave 'em a free ride.

SAM: Free?

(CABBY nods and shrugs.)

SAM: Cabby, yer going soft on me here.

CABBY: Waddaya gonna do? Everyone's hurting, ya know?

(Looks around)

So's ya already served the first batcha customers?

SAM: Yer all it probly be till lunch rush when you come back.

CABBY: Ya kiddin' me, right?

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- Counter Intelligence by *Sheila Lynch Rinear*

SAM: Wish I were. Guess everyone's afraid to leave home.

CABBY: Nah. That's not true. I saw somma the folks usually come in here over at the Jewish deli.

SAM: Yeah?

CABBY: *(quick)* Yeah, I mean the deli must be closer to their homes than your diner, hmm?

SAM: No, it's not. Who'd you see?

CABBY: I donno. Joe, Bet and Jack?

SAM: Sonnofa...

CABBY: Course, and take this right, Sam. The kids working the counter at the deli are American.

SAM: What's that suppose ta mean?

(Off CABBY's shrug)

I wanna know what you mean by that remark.

CABBY: Look, all I'm saying is...the kids who work at the deli do not go by names like "Zahra," "Boshnin," "Neema," and...

(ZAN emerges from the rest room and CABBY points to her.)

CABBY: ...and "Zan." You gotta admit...

ZAN: Hi, Cabby.

CABBY: How you doing, hon?

ZAN: I'll take your order as soon as I get my apron on, okay?

(CABBY nods. ZAN goes into the back. SAM leans into CABBY and asks through gritted teeth...)

SAM: You got issues with me hirin' kids know how to be respectful and show up on time?

CABBY: And will also let you pay them rock-bottom wages like no self-respectin' American kids'll take? Huh? See?

There are FIVE more pages that finish off the script.