



Source: Warren Hoge, 'UN leader picks up task closed to U.S.', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 09/09/06.

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As the audience file into the marquee erected in the field/village/bombed out suburb they place the prompts they have scribbled on the scraps of paper/notebook sheets/backs of envelopes into the cardboard box held out by the ringmaster/clown/dwarf. Some consist of a single word: pig/lift/horizontally, others of two words: splitting hairs/formidable woman/missing bolt, others supply characters: blacksmith's son/mysterious princess/illegal immigrant, others suggest fragments snatched from a newspaper or a novel: the rarest of events/stealing furtive glances/the ancient rivalry.

When the last person has taken her seat the ringmaster/clown/dwarf rushes backstage clutching the cardboard box and the lights are dimmed for the commencement of the show/spectacle/extravaganza which will begin perhaps with a fire-eater/juggler/acrobat followed swiftly by the lion-tamer/dancing seals/clowns and then surely by the stilt-men/trick cyclists/contortionist, though perhaps after all, not in that precise order for there is nothing to say that the stilt-men/trick cyclists/contortionist could not kick off the performance and the same goes for the lion-tamer/dancing seals/clowns. Yet whatever the order the performer variously known as Scheherazade/Scary/Mascara, though everyone knows none of these is her real name, will have approximately sixty minutes/one hour/3600 seconds, though it will feel considerably less, to select from the box delivered by the ringmaster/clown/dwarf to her dressing room/caravan/tent the prompt from which she will conjure tonight's aerial opera the term she prefers to use when referring to what in other circuses is generally called the high-wire act.

Pulling out some prompts which consist of a single word only: pig/lift/horizontally the myth of Pygmalion pops into her mind and she begins to imagine a story involving a statue/rubber doll/mannequin who springs to life taking her master in hand turning him from a shy odd job man/sales assistant/caretaker into a zealous executive/marketing manager/television director.

Pulling out some prompts consisting mostly of two words: splitting hairs/formidable woman/missing bolt and some others consisting of suggested dramatis personae blacksmith's son/mysterious princess/illegal immigrant,

she begins to imagine the story of an immigrant, a formidable woman, stowed away in the back of a meat lorry/trash truck/vegetable container in a ship's hold.

Then pulling out some prompts which read like fragments snatched from a newspaper or a novel: the rarest of events/stealing furtive glances/the ancient rivalry, she thinks of the longstanding and bitter enmity which grew up over time between the Montagues and the Capulets and of the possibly apocryphal story that the famous feud had its origins in an ancient rivalry for the hand of a beautiful princess from the East who one family wooed with the sword/wealth/title the other with the heart/flowers/poetry though in both cases the suit was unsuccessful.

Quickly, for time is short, she opts for the story about the illegal immigrant and at once sits down to apply her make-up: a dark line under the eyes suggesting a lack of sleep, yes, and begins to sketch in her mind's eye the ending of the story/tale/drama.

Just as the woman thinks she is about to run out of food/air/luck she finds the bolts securing her meat lorry/trash truck/vegetable container missing and slips out, insinuating herself unseen into the crowd of passengers milling about on the deck. And at once there is a tapping on her door. It is the ringmaster/clown/dwarf.

'Heavens, it is time', he says.

'What, already?'

'Yes', he says and quickly pulling on a shawl/scarf/bonnet 'That should do it', Scheherazade/Scary/Mascara, though everyone knows none of these is her real name, slips out of her dressing room/caravan/tent and into the marquee freshly erected in the field/village/bombed out suburb and in almost complete darkness feeling her way with her fingers' ends climbs the long swaying rope-ladder leading to the high wire and steps onto it, at once curling up into a ball—this is how she will begin her act—and waits for the lights to go up on the poster that has already been pasted up way beneath her reading ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Philip Terry.*