**Cut The Wire**

***A Musical Conflict of Religious Beliefs in Zones of Conflict***

***From the plays of Dr Bob Boland (drbobboland@hotmail.com)***

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***ACTORS***

***KAREN – A doctor, formerly married to BILL.***

***MUNDI – A widowed Muslim nurse. Mother-of-two. Lives in a conflict zone.***

***BILL – A Catholic folk musician, son of MIMI.***

***MIMI – An elderly woman of Irish extraction. Lapsed Catholic. Mother of BILL.***

***GRETA – A Jewish volunteer.***

***MAX – An operative working for a mysterious security organisation. American or British.***

***ROB – A member of a multinational banking corporation.***

*NB Any songs which go on too long can be shortened or sung a little faster.*

**Scene 1**

*Darkness.* *MIMI and BILL are onstage together*, *but cannot be seen. Each voice is distinctively audible but repeats its line over the others, building a crescendo one by one. Some are recorded, some are live.*

VOICE 1: *[Jewish]* Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is one.

VOICE 2: *[Buddhist] [chanting]* Om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum...

VOICE 3: *[Protestant]* Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory. Amen.

VOICE 4: *[Catholic] [starting very soon after VOICE 3 has, almost as an echo]* Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo. Amen.

*VOICE 5 sings the Islamic call to prayer.*

VOICE 6: *[Sikh]* There is but one all-pervading spirit, and truth is its name! It exists in all creation; it does not fear; it does not hate; it is timeless and universal and self-existent. You will come to know it through seeking knowledge and learning!

VOICE 7: *[Lucretius]* All other movements through the earth and sky
Which mortals gaze upon (O anxious oft
In quaking thoughts!), and which abase their minds
With dread of deities and press them crushed
Down to the earth, because their ignorance
Of cosmic causes forces them to yield
All things unto the empery of gods
And to concede the kingly rule to them.

VOICE 8: *[Taoism – NB 'Tao' is correctly pronounced 'Dow', rhymes with 'cow']* The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Constant Tao. The name that can be named is not a Constant Name. Nameless, is the origin of Heaven and Earth. The named is the Mother of all things. Thus, the constant void enables one to observe the true essence. The constant being enables one to see the outward manifestations.

VOICE 9: *[Marx]* Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

*The soundscape is loud and chaotic, with some moments of harmony and many of dissonance. It reaches a peak then suddenly stops. The stage is lit by a bright light.*

VOICE 10: Mrs Malone, I'm ever so sorry to have to tell you this, but according to the test results, you have about two months to live.

*A blackout to the sound of an explosion. Exit BILL and MIMI. A dull red light. MUNDI, choking on dust and injured, staggers to the middle of the stage.*

MUNDI: Layla? Yaseen? Where are you? Layla! Layla! Yaseen!

*Runs back the way she came.*

END

**Scene 2**

*BILL and MIMI sit in a villa in the Maldives.*

MIMI: You didn't leave your guitar **[Or other instrument]** in the taxi, now did you?

BILL: No, it's with the cases in the corner, look.

MIMI: Good. I want to have heard every song by the end.

BILL: The end of the holiday?

MIMI: Of course, yes. I'll miss the sound of home. It's the little things, isn't it?

BILL: The lashing rain. The howling wind. The soft roar of a crazy drunk man tenderly kicking over your wheely bin...

MIMI: I hope you're not going to sing any of *his* songs.

BILL: Mother! Of course not. They've got words in an innocent young boy like me wouldn't even dream of using.

MIMI: He's a choirboy compared with your auntie Mary. Mouth like a gutter, voice like a drain. I miss her.

BILL: We could have just stayed, ma. I'm sure there's lots of people who want to see you.

MIMI: The weather and the drunks are something I won't be missing.

BILL: It's... it's not long, mum.

MIMI: Pension only goes so far, love. And it won't be much but I want the grandchildren to inherit *something*.

BILL: I didn't mean the holiday.

MIMI: Go on with you. Eighty-seven years and four months? There's poor souls as didn't get a tenth, nor a twentieth of that.

BILL: Oh mum, as if the conversation wasn't sad enough already.

MIMI: It's true! Little story on the news this morning, they say three big explosions – homes destroyed, families gone. Course, it wasn't a country near us so they didn't talk about it long, just a few words then they got back to talking about train delays because of leaves on the track, and what that Kate Middleton wears for pyjamas. You know.

BILL: It's all right, ma. They'll be with God now. The news might forget them but not the Father.

MIMI: *[looks uneasy]* Mmm.

BILL: I, er... I'll be praying for you, mum.

MIMI: Of course those poor little ones in the explosions, they probably weren't part of the Church, were they?

BILL: Mother! It's... it's in God's hands now. We can pray for them. We'll light a candle on Sunday.

MIMI: And all their friends and cousins, their brothers and sisters, they'll all be praying too, just like you and me and Father Ewan. All those voices!

BILL: Well.

MIMI: Such a shame so many of them are going up to the wrong God!

BILL: It *is* sad, yes.

MIMI: Or the right God but in the wrong language.

BILL: Mm.

MIMI: Or the right God in the right language but in the wrong tone of voice.

BILL: Mum, why are you doing this? Why now? What's this about?

MIMI: *[thinks, and sighs]* I raised a good Catholic boy, didn't I? All these eighty seven years and two months, that was what I wanted. Didn't really think about the why and the wherefore. Faith will see you through, so to speak. Well, that was when I had life to be getting on with. This last little while – the last few months or years, I don't know – I felt myself fading. Not much left between me and the big question now, though, eh? I've been reading a lot. Googling a lot. Trying to get my eyes open before they close whether I like it or not. I always was one for leaving things until the last minute, eh?

BILL: You're not saying – you're not turning your back on Him, are you?

MIMI: See, I didn't know how to tell you or I'd have done earlier. Same as when I realised I was on my way out. Never liked seeing my boy hurting. How can I turn my back on Him if I don't know where He is? Or who he is? Or whether he ever was...?

BILL: We can answer this, mum. It's all right. You mustn't worry.

MIMI: I'm not worried.

BILL: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” You're fretting. I wish I'd brought some books with me...

MIMI: We're on holiday to relax. I did a lot of reading before we came out. Amazing what the internet'll tell you. Wikipedia's a lifeline.

BILL: I can't relax until we've talked.

MIMI: All right. But mark you, I've got a few conditions. It's my holiday. Take them or leave them!

BILL: Okay.

MIMI: One. We're keeping it light! It's a beautiful day. We're on my last ever holiday. If there is a God out there and he's worth following, he wants smiles on our faces. You like the thought of your friends talking about you with tears in their eyes? No. Laughter. Light hearts.

BILL: But -

MIMI: Ah! Take them or leave them!

*BILL thinks for a minute, then smiles.*

BILL: What's number two?

MIMI: Open minds, please. I didn't come five thousand miles to the Maldives to sit buried up to my neck in professors' books and philosophers' proofs. There's dozens of religions and billions of believers. There must be something to each of them. Now three. You get your spiritual discussion, I get my music. Deal?

BILL: *[fetching instrument]* Deal.

MIMI: The fourth condition is the most important, though.

BILL: Right. Better come out with it, then!

MIMI: I get to drink gin and tonics the whole afternoon.

*They laugh.* *Exit MIMI to the kitchen. When she's gone, BILL looks worried again. Sounds off of MIMI preparing tea.*

BILL: Please, father. Not now. Not so close to the end. Make things to go back to the way they were. It feels like... like someone's put a bomb under everything and I've got to find the wire. Help her see you. I trust in you, father, always. *[crosses himself]*

MIMI: *[O/S]* Play something nice!

BILL: Yes ma!

*BILL pensively tunes his guitar, then starts playing 'THE MEETING OF THE WATERS'. As he does, MIMI comes back in with a bottle of gin, some ice, two glasses and some tonic water. He immediately, artificially brightens up as she does so, and she sits, enjoying the song. The subsequent scenes unfolds downstage as we reach the third verse.*

BILL

There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet
As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet
Oh! The last rays of feeling and life must depart
Ere the bloom of that valley shall fade from my heart
Ere the bloom of that valley shall fade from my heart.

Yet it was not that nature had shed o'er the scene
Her purest of crystal and brightest of green
'Twas not her soft magic of streamlet or hill
Oh, no! It was something more exquisite still
Oh, no! It was something more exquisite still.

'Twas that friends, the belov'd of my bosom were near
Who made every dear scene of enchantment more dear
And who felt how the best charms of nature improve
When we see them reflected from looks that we love
When we see them reflected from looks that we love.

Sweet vale of Avoca! How calm could I rest
In thy bosom of shade, with the friends I love best
Where the storms that we feel in this cold world should cease
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace.

**Scene 3**

*Over the last two verses of the music, a nightmare scene unfolds. GRETA slowly and surreally witnesses the destruction of her home in an explosion. She leaves. MUNDI enters, having gone through exactly the same, searching an abandoned café for her loved ones. GRETA re-enters and watches her angrily for a little while. MUNDI turns to her.*

GRETA: Are you happy with what your sons have done?

MUNDI: My son is gone!

GRETA: Yes, but not to where you think.

MUNDI: He had nothing to do with what happened.

GRETA: You all pray to the same God. The same murderous God.

MUNDI: *My* God is a loving one, sister. I can't tell you what it is that anybody else prays to, but mine go to one who cares for all people. All of us are his beloved sons and daughters.

GRETA: Your God won't be satisfied until every drop of my people's blood is shed, and we have no sons or daughters left*.*

MUNDI: I've lost my son, too. And my daughter. They shouldn't have been at home when it happened. Please don't let them have been at home. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds...

GRETA: You'd be better off looking for them.

MUNDI: I don't know where to look for them. I don't know who you are. I don't know who did this. I don't know what I'm going to do. All I know is that mothers and fathers are losing their children all over the city, and that now I'm one of them, and... and that God is Great.

*GRETA goes to leave, but changes her mind.*

GRETA: Look... look. Just. Just tell me your name, all right?

*MUNDI looks up at her sceptically.*

MUNDI: Why? Are you going to tell the soldiers I'm here? So they find me and do what they always do to people like me?

GRETA: No! I know a lot of people around here. I've... got some influence. I just thought - if they're looking for survivors, and they find your kids... but if you don't want help, that doesn't bother me.

MUNDI: But you said they're going to grow up to be murderers and terrorists, like you think I am.

GRETA: *[sighs]* Yeah, well... until they grow up, children are just children. Raising kids around here is tough. I remember.

MUNDI: I'm Mundi. Mundi Rawashdeh.

GRETA: Rawashdeh?

MUNDI: Yes. He was my husband. He's gone now.

GRETA: I'm not doing this. Get away from me, I'm leaving.

MUNDI: He went ten years ago. I knew nothing about what he did. I barely knew who he was.

GRETA: You had his children.

MUNDI: And they never knew him either. My son, Raseen, he's quite tall for his age - he's 11 now – and he likes his red hoody, and Layla's my daughter. She's got beautiful long black hair and glasses, and she'll be looking after Raseen even though he'll be trying to look after her. Tell them mummy's coming back for them, and she's bringing them the moon. They'll understand. May I know your name?

GRETA: Greta.

MUNDI: Thank you, Greta.

GRETA: Stay here, and try and stay hidden. We'll come and get you.

MUNDI: I'll be praying.

GRETA: Great.

*GRETA tries to leave but bumps into MAX on the way out, who pushes her back into the room.*

MAX: You both need to get out, now. There's trucks on the way. Get in one, keep quiet, don't cause trouble.

GRETA: Get off me.

MUNDI: Who are you?

MAX: I'm the guy telling you the building's about to get blown up. Hurry up.

MUNDI: What are you, a bandit, a mercenary? I don't recognise your uniform, are you with the government? Have you seen my children?

MAX: *[Laughs]* No, I'm not with your government. Honestly, how hard is it to understand? Get. Out. Now.

GRETA: I'm Greta Elharar, and this lady here is the widow of Adama Rawashdeh. Tell us what's happening.

MAX: Really? It's my lucky day. Listen, I promise I'm not going to hurt you. I'm a friend. I'll take you both somewhere safe, where I can explain, and then you can help me stop this and I can help you find people. But first, please, *please* let's get out. There is a device right *there.*

*He points out a hitherto unnoticed bag. We hear BILL's guitar playing NOW THE GREEN BLADE RISES.*

MUNDI: Can't we defuse it?

MAX: What, just cut the wire?

MUNDI: No, I've actually done it before -

MAX: It doesn't work like that, sweetheart, let's *go.*

MUNDI: Come on, Greta. We have to trust he's sent by Allah - *[stops herself]* by the god who is good.

*MAX and MUNDI leave. GRETA looks back, loads a concealed gun, then follows them warily.*

**Scene 4**

*BILL plays the guitar. MIMI pours herself another G&T, and drops a slice of lemon in.*

BILL

...Up He sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for three days in the grave had lain;
Up from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
By Your touch You call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

MIMI: That one's wonderful. I do like that one.

BILL: Really? I like it too. I think it – well, to me it's all about how there's always hope with God. *[more to self than to MIMI]* And that Jesus is always there for us, even when we can't see Him and everything seems barren and desolate.

MIMI: It's important that we all have hope. To feel there's always somebody who loves you.

BILL: I'll always remember singing it after the Easter services with the family – you know how we all used to go down to the Malloys' house, and we'd sing all the old songs, and have dinner, play games...

MIMI: Remember Tom trying to teach you the guitar when you were wee. That was always the sign for the rest of us to go to the garden.

BILL: Set my music career back ten years, that did!

MIMI: Think what it did to the rest of us!

BILL: That's the wonderful thing about it, though. Two loud little lads and a half-broken guitar evacuating a house by doing to Simon and Garfunkel what a lorry does to a hedgehog – and we still look back on it and smile.

MIMI: A little ruefully, but yes.

BILL: That was when I felt God the strongest, when the family and friends were all together.

MIMI: Maybe that's what God always was – the love we felt when we were with the people we cared about.

BILL: I think it went a lot deeper than that, mum.

MIMI: As deep as the Buddhists, who listen until they hear the heartbeat of the everything, who feel the whole world drifting away and the peace of the unchanging universe carrying their every fibre and every thought, hm? Nirvana? Or as the Sufi in the ecstasy of the dance?

BILL: That's a lot of deep breathing and whirling. Maybe they're just dizzy?

MIMI: Dizzy? In that case let's keep at these G&Ts, I'm well on the way to enlightenment. They're strong! See, there's billions out there swear they've got hold of the real McCoy. Maybe they're all right?

BILL: I don't know. I don't know what they experience. I just know that there's no mistaking who I felt. I thought you felt the same.

MIMI: Not tempted by polytheism, then?

BILL: Not really, mum. Confusing! I'm a one job, one wife, one God kind of a guy.

MIMI: Such a shame about Karen.

BILL: She made a choice. It's sad but I'm not going to begrudge her. But anyway, no sneaking out of the debate! You won't get me that easily. What about “You shall have no other Gods before me”?

MIMI: You always were a competitive one. What about the saints? Christopher for travelling, Cecilia for music, Agatha for -

BILL: *[abruptly]* Saints aren't gods, you know that. They're close to God in heaven so we ask them to intercede with Him for us. And it works.

MIMI: Like the Egyptians used to pray to Sekhmet when they had toothache. Quite effective, I read!

BILL: Well, belief's a powerful thing.

MIMI: Indeed!

BILL: They say that if you keep repeating something and really believing it, your body starts to respond. Like self-hypnosis.

MIMI: Quite.

*She drains her gin and tonic smugly, and immediately pours another.*

BILL: I just don't understand why you want to throw away all those memories, or why you've suddenly decided that all those times we shared with our God and our family mean nothing to you. It's upsetting me, mum.

MIMI: Oi. Chin up, remember. Holiday. Those times mean the world to me, dear. They're the best, happiest times of my life. I want you to know that. *[sadly]* If nothing else, I want you to know that.

BILL: But God was always such a big part of them.

MIMI: What if God was in everything, Bill? That's what the Buddhists,the Jains, and the Taoists say. One with love, with peace. Do you think their families don't have the same joy? That they aren't filled with that same feeling of contentment and of being in the company of something, oh, far greater than themselves? No?

*BILL thinks*.

BILL: I've got an idea. I don't know much about the Eastern religions - I've never really needed to. But you seem to know all about them! So why don't you give me a whirlwind tour of what they're all about, and then when you've done that, I'll give my very best pitch for sticking with what you know.

MIMI: Oh, now that's not fair! You can't expect me to do that off the top of my head! I'm a sickly old woman after a lot of gin and tonics. You're supposed to be the one who can put on a show off the cuff.

BILL: Wait, a show?

MIMI: Yes! We've been gossiping in armchairs all afternoon! If something's worth believing in it's worth having fun with.

BILL: You want me to make religion entertaining for you?

MIMI: Go on then. Excuse me making notes.

*MIMI takes out a pen, and starts jotting notes on some scrap paper.*

BILL: Excused, well and truly! Let's see...

*Accompanies himself simply with chords.*

Tradition is tranquillity,

The Church gives you stability,

Philosophy's futility

You just need some humility.

Although we had a schism

Over divorces and baptism

We're like rainbows in a prism

With Jesus as the light.

His grace is our foundation

Our guaranteed salvation

His blood is liberation

That saves us from damnation

Through mercy and authority

And God's superiority

Our welfare's the priority

In His eternal sight.

Through the crucifixion

He cured our addiction

To sinning; our affliction

Ends in benediction

And through our confession

Of sin and transgression

We live His expression

Of love and His might.

It's not just superstition

Or hypnotic repetition

Our ritual is submission

That gentles our condition.

Morality, normality,

Community, formality,

An end to the finality

Of humanity's mortality.

Hope.

Life.

Way.

Truth.

MIMI: Stop it! Stop, stop! I'm already ill. You can't do this to me!

BILL: Well that's what happens when you ask a man to improvise two thousand years of tradition, division and redemption into a catchy performance, ma!

MIMI: Ridiculous. I liked it though. Summed it up nicely. Sort of. Anyway, it's my turn now. I can't rhyme like you I'm afraid.

BILL: I look forward to it. Need some chords?

MIMI: No, just gin.

*Pours and immediately downs a G&T. It is quite clear by this point how much she's drunk. She stands up theatrically.*

BILL: Steady.

MIMI: Not likely.

BILL: *[mutters]* Seriously just be careful -

MIMI *[performatively]* You want to know about the Eastern faiths? What are they? What's a Western faith, when it's at home? Something from home? Zeus and Jesus; Allah and Thor; Zoroaster; The Dagda; Ahura Mazda; Diana. They're all from the West.

Except they're not. The gods of the West were Huitzilopochtli; Yaya of the Taino; Nanook the Lord of Bears. Western philosophy is the philosophy of nature or the Supreme Inca or the shedding blood each night to ensure the rising of the sun – if the Spanish are to be believed. And *they* were good Catholics, though a little hungry for gold. And blood.

BILL: You know what I meant. Someone's stalling for time!

MIMI: Eastern philosophy is millions of thoughts from millenia of thinking, but as you asked I be quick, here's a few of the biggest ideas. The biggest is *dharma*, too big for translation. The Hindus, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and Jains, they all have some origins in ancient Vedic texts but they all see it differently. 'Duty' or 'order' or perhaps just 'all things'; the distinction is blurred when we're one with the world, as the way we ascend to understanding ourselves is to break down the walls between perception and reality and exist in harmony with the eternity of the universe. Our body's a vessel for a journeying soul.

BILL: What do you mean?

MIMI: Allow me to demonstrate the soul with a spirit. *[picks up the gin excitedly]* All our spirits are in this bottle. There's nothing between them. They're all together in the shape of the inside of the bottle. Now. *[Pours a shot]* Still the same spirit, but a separate from the whole. Now it's the shape of the bottom of my glass. Let's add a bit of the world. *[Pours tonic and drops in lemon]* Now it's a different shape again, looks different, tastes different, does different things. But it's still the same spirit. *[Swigs it, tries to talk, nearly spills G&T from her mouth, swallows, starts to slow down, looks a bit ill]* Then it was the shape of my mouth. Now it's the shape of my gullet. Soon it'll be all kinds of different things inside me I don't know about and don't want to know about. But the spirit's just the same as it ever was, and each times, it was just where it was meant to be, doing what it was supposed to do. Do you … are you understanding me?

BILL: I understand one thing – you've been drinking far too much.

MIMI: *[slowly sits down, feeling sick and dizzy]* Aahhh... So Hinduism's about, er, 3,000 years old at least, and, er, worships many gods who are all aspects of Brahman, the supreme god of everything, and life revolves around accumulating good... good karma and living successive lives getting... better and better... er... about a billion members...

BILL: *[going over to her]* Mum, something's wrong. Mum. Mum, you're not well.

MIMI: Tell me something I don't know... *[staring ahead and swaying]* Buddhism's more meditative... the material is nothing. Wealth is nothing. Property... nothing. Death, nothing. There can be one God, any god, many gods or none. It's about love and wisdom and the great wheel of eternity, the lotus flower at the centre of the still pond, the statue with hands gently in its lap and a compassionate smile.

*BILL finds an empty packet of medication, which MIMI has been slipping into her gin and tonics.*

BILL: Oh Mary mother of God.

MIMI: No cravings. No sadness, no anger, no desire. Peace.

BILL: I'm calling an ambulance. *[Goes to the back, uses phone, talks quietly while MIMI speaks over the top of him]* I need an ambulance right away. I've got a very sick old lady here, she was already ill and she's taken an overdose, please come quickly. Vihaamanaafushi island, the resort there. Yes please. Please hurry. *[hangs up]*

MIMI: Zen contemplates impossible questions... answerless riddles... so we realise... enlightenment is beyond truth and falsehood, the self and the other, yes and no. Taoism says the universe flows like a river through us all and that each one of us is the universe itself...

*BILL goes over to MIMI, who tries to stand up but falls to the floor.*

BILL: We're going to get you to the hospital, mum. Try to stay awake.

MIMI: Parting...

BILL: Not yet. Not yet.

MIMI: The Parting Glass. *[weakly starts to sing THE PARTING GLASS. BILL joins in once he realises what's happening]*

Of all the money e'er I had,
I spent it in good company.
And all the harm I've ever done,
Alas! it was to none but me.
And all I've done for want of wit
To mem'ry now I can't recall
So fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be with you all.

Oh, all the comrades e'er I had,
They're sorry for my going away,
And all the sweethearts e'er I had,
They'd wish me one more day to stay,
But since it falls unto my lot,
That I should rise and you should not,
I gently rise and softly call,
Good night and joy be with you all.

**Scene 5**

*MAX leads GRETA and MUNDI into a room.*

MUNDI: Where is this? I need to know if Raseen and Layla have been found. Please, please can you tell them to ask if they've been picked up? I need to know if they're safe...

GRETA: Why don't you tell us who you are and what you're doing?

MUNDI: Raseen and Layla first!

MAX: My name is Max. I've got an interest in seeing peace in the area.

GRETA: Won't happen. Not so long as there are people left who think that their God wants them to blow us up in our homes for not agreeing with Him.

MAX: Or, perhaps, people who want to blow you up in your homes, so they say their God gives them permission.

MUNDI: So you're just saying we're doomed to fight each other, forever?

MAX: It's not just a conflict of faith. It's the bitterest fight of all, an inheritance battle. You see, it comes down to the sons of Abraham – Isaac and Ishmael. It's about 4,000 BC. Abraham had been trying to have a child with his wife, name of Sarah, for ten years. Didn't work. Wasn't happening. So Sarah tells Abraham to have an heir by Hagar, their servant. Ishmael is born, the surrogate son. But what's this? Sarah's pregnant! Nine months later, you've got Isaac. Younger, but legitimate. Isaac goes on to be the forefather of the Jews, but Ishmael is promised that his sons will create a great nation of their own, and he disappears into the fog of history.

*MUNDI and GRETA exchange weary glances.*

MAX: Cut to about 4,600 years later, 610 AD. The Jews have been displaced and scattered long ago by the Roman Empire. A man who claims descent from Ishmael, Mohammed (pbuh), produces the Qu'ran, which he says he received directly from God via the angel Gabriel. His ten thousand followers achieve a near-bloodless victory in Mecca, and go on to capture much of the Middle East – because, of course, that's the will of Allah. So they say. So now, the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael both want what they think God promised them.

GRETA: Yeah, we do know this.

MUNDI: You don't need to explain our faith or our history to us. We know about Ishmael and Isaac, we know that Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac before God stopped him, we know that Isaac's sons were Jacob and Esau.

GRETA: The Jewish Torah's part of the Qu'ran. And the Bible, for that matter. You Christian? You look it.

*MAX laughs.*

MAX: So in Isaac's corner, we've got the Torah, Nevi’im, Keutuvim and the Talmud. In Ishmael's, the Qu'ran and the Hadith. None of them have changed in centuries. I've got my work cut out for me, haven't I?

MUNDI: It doesn't have to be this way, though.

GRETA: But somehow it always has been.

MUNDI: There was a long time when it wasn't. Córdoba and Muslim Andalusia in the eleventh century had Jews, Christians and Muslims living side-by-side.

GRETA: It wasn't as simple as that.

MUNDI: Then Jerusalem, before the wars!

GRETA: Again, it was a lot more complicated than that. A lot uglier.

MUNDI: All right, all right, but there are countries all over the world where we manage to live together peacefully!

GRETA: Only takes one punch to start a brawl.

MAX: It's a violent world, and over time man's found ways to turn that violence into systems that last the ages. Religions. Look at Cain and Abel, the very first murder. That was over who had the right way to worship God.

GRETA: Or envy, jealousy, brotherly rivalry... There's a Jewish tradition in the Midrash that they were fighting over a beautiful woman.

MUNDI: We say the same thing. Now please tell me if they found Raseen and Layla.

MAX: You see? Faith justifies our instinct to fight each other.

GRETA: Look, let's just cut to the chase. Why are you here, why are we here, where are this woman's kids?

MAX: I already told you.

GRETA: I want a straight answer. Who. Are. You?

MAX: I'm with a group that deals in intelligence and security, all right? The situation – the bombings and fighting, the instability, doesn't just affect you, it affects a lot of interests in a lot of countries. Your links to your communities might help us... or rather, *we* might help *you* broker some kind of ceasefire – at least in this district. All right?

GRETA: And what makes you think we want your help?

MAX: Well no-one was complaining when we evacuated you from a warzone. Guess that's a clue.

GRETA: How do we know we're any better off here?

MAX: You're alive, aren't you?

*MUNDI loses her temper*, *grabs MAX.*

MUNDI: Where are they? What have you done with them?

*MAX shoves her off, GRETA pushes her back.*

GRETA: It's *not* the time. Can't you people control yourselves for a *second*?

MUNDI: Control myself? Do you even know what I am, or what I do?

MAX: We know who your husband was...

MUNDI: I am a nurse! I work in a hospital. We treat people who've had awful, horrible things done to them that should never happen to anybody, and we don't care for a second what book they pray from, because they are somebody's child! They are somebody's love! They feel joy and pain and fear! They are Allah's creation! And every time I hear a bomb go off, I don't think about who planted it or who they thought they were planting it for, I think of the mothers and the fathers who lost their children and the poor children who lost their parents. And now that's me. Please.

MAX: Right. *[He sends a text message]* I'll tell my guys to start searching the crowds for them. But you've got to help me. I mean, I don't know how much of your husband's work you've carried on, but I know for sure you still have contacts.

MUNDI: Tell me what you need.

MAX: I need names, addresses. All the information I can get on people with influence, the resources you've got access to, strategic points. Friends. Enemies. Costs. Secrets. Anything and everything you've got.

MUNDI: You need all of that?

MAX: Your children, Mundi...

MUNDI: Yes, but... but whose children are you putting in danger? No. No, I have to know who you are.

GRETA: Everybody looks after their own first, don't they? That's our nature.

MAX: That's what you do, isn't it, Greta?

GRETA: Of course. I'm not ashamed.

MAX: Greta and her friends teach people, rescue them, train them, support them. Arm them, perhaps? Only her people, though.

MUNDI: Every night, I pray for us all to live in peace. Not my people, not yours, all of us.

MAX: You a Shiite or a Sunni?

Why is that so hard? Why can't we pray for each other?

GRETA: We've learned the hard way that if we don't look out for ourselves, nobody else is going to.

MUNDI: With that mindset, nobody helps anybody.

MAX: Hey, you're wrong. That's what our whole civilisation is based on – enlightened self-interest. Capitalism, baby!

MUNDI: My society is based on submitting to Allah and trying to be good to each other.

GRETA: The Jews want peace, same as you, but we're not going to beg for help from the same people who've spent all of history hunting and persecuting us.

MAX: That's where we come in.

GRETA: And why should I trust you?

MAX: Because we want the same things you do. Stability. Peace for your people. Democracy, prosperity. And we've got the resources and the backing to make it happen.

GRETA: It's easy to make promises. Harder to keep them.

MAX: You'd know about that, wouldn't you?

MUNDI: What?

GRETA: Who told you? How do you know?

MAX: I know a lot of things. I know how much debt your group is in. I know that you've been desperately trying to get international backing, and *[idly scrolls through phone]* I know I can get it for you by this afternoon.

*GRETA is silent.*

MAX: I know what it's like not to trust anybody. But I can make sure you're safe. I can make sure the work you do isn't destroyed by a single car bomb, that all the lives you save aren't snuffed out the next day because you can't be there.

GRETA: I...

MAX: I could have saved them for you.

*GRETA nods.*

MAX: I can make sure you don't fail them ever again.

*MAX offers GRETA a notebook and pen which she silently takes and moves to the corner.*

MUNDI: Only God can promise that, Greta.

MAX: You're testing my patience, Rawashdeh. Do you want security or not? Do you want democracy? Do you want your kids back?

MUNDI: I won't be fooled into doing evil things for evil men, thinking they're good. Not again.

MAX: How far do I have to go to get some simple intel out of you?

MUNDI: What do you mean by that?

MAX: I need your information, and I'm holding all the cards. You've got everything to lose. I don't want to threaten you. I want you to get your children back. Honestly, I do. But I'm protecting people too, and this goes way beyond Layla, Raseen, or you, Mundi.

MUNDI: Yes, it does. It goes all the way to Allah.

MAX: God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, didn't he? They say he was all ready to do it, too, but who knows? Maybe he wouldn't have gone through with it. *[starts writing a text]* It's easy to say you'd let your son die for your God, probably a lot harder to do it. *[sends]*

MUNDI: I'm not afraid of people like you.

*GRETA has stopped writing and is watching.*

MAX: Guess you aren't. But you're absolutely terrified for them.

MUNDI: They aren't here.

*There is a knock on the door.*

MAX: They're outside.

*MUNDI gasps.*

MAX: I keep my word.

MUNDI: I need to see them.

MAX: Then give me what I need.

*MUNDI is silent. MAX pulls out a gun and primes it, and points it at the door, while staring at MUNDI.*

MAX: Or Raseen gets to be Isaac. Come in!

*The door opens. It is ROB, smartly dressed in a business suit. MUNDI looks at him, confused. A moment later, MAX looks over, realises it isn't Raseen, and hastily lowers his weapon. ROB is unruffled.*

ROB: Something up?

MAX: Where are they? Did you bring them?

ROB: No, they're at the third camp.

MAX: But you told me...

ROB: Doesn't matter.

MAX: Sir, I told this woman I'd trade them for information.

ROB: Did you? Funny. No dice.

MUNDI: I need them back.

ROB: Good for you.

MUNDI: I need them back!

MAX: That's Greta over there. She's giving sharing some essential details on the Jewish networks in the region, in exchange for our help.

ROB: How much?

MAX: At least two million, to begin with, and long-term support.

*ROB laughs.*

ROB: Sure, why not? *[smugly, to GRETA]* It'll be great working with you.

GRETA: I don't like you.

MUNDI: Why are you playing these games? Are you trying to torture us?

ROB: Max, can you get rid of her? She's annoying me.

MAX: No, I told you, sir, she could be important.

ROB: Just do it.

*MAX holds his gun uncertainly. GRETA goes to the window and holds the notebook out of it.*

GRETA: If you hurt her you won't get a thing from me.

MAX: *[points his gun]* Don't!

ROB: Oh for pity's sake, Max, get a grip. We already know everything about them. Everybody's they've emailed, everybody they've called, their networks, their hiding places, their friends, their relatives, their children's fears in order – well, hers, anyway *[indicating MUNDI]*. Hell, I could tell you where she last ate if you want.

MAX: You knew?

ROB: Of course I knew.

MAX: Why didn't you tell me?

ROB: I had no reason to.

MAX: My job is security, sir. I can't do that without data. Without knowing what I'm doing!

ROB: Your job is to move people where we tell you to move them, and to take your pay and keep quiet.

MAX: You told me we were building a security network! You told me your company wanted to stabilise the place!

GRETA: How do you get all this information? Did you hack us? Are you working with Google?

ROB: Are we with Google? Greta Elharar. We *are* Google. We're JP Morgan, we're Apple, we're Exxon, we're BAE. Our investments move so quickly through them, who we *are* has lost all meaning. We're banks and hedge funds, pensions, loans and mortgages. We're every company on the stock market for fractions of a second at a time, we are computers that buy and sell whole companies quicker than you can take a breath. Our capital courses through every store you've every visited, every dollar collected or spent by every government in the world. It's the soul of the working world. Who are we? Who cares? Who cares what shape we've taken? We'll transform again in a second. How we make our profits is meaningless to me. I could lose us a hundred times the net worth of your entire life and nobody would even notice; I could make it back with a single click and I wouldn't even smile. You have any idea how small you are? You really think your homes, your wars, your lives matter to us? It's all just numbers on a screen. Bombs, flowers, war, peace, wisdom, love, death. It's all just dots on an endless chart. Drops in a river. Means nothing, it just keeps the wheel turning and the cash flowing.

MUNDI: I know you.

ROB: Yup.

MUNDI: You knew my husband.

ROB: Yup.

MUNDI: You used to bring him money... people... weapons.

ROB: Got people to do that for me now.

GRETA: Whose side are you on?

ROB: Mine. Whatever keeps the cash flowing. Capitalism, baby. Sides don't matter. None of you matter.

MUNDI: We'll tell people about you. Greta and I, we'll make sure everybody knows. We'll come together, despite people like you.

ROB: No you won't.

MUNDI: This is what I've been praying for, five times every single day since my daughter was born. We will join together. We will love God, whatever we call him, together. We'll live and breathe His mercy and His peace and we'll finally know He did not doom us to fight and kill each other. When Abraham was prepared to kill Isaac, Allah stopped him, and told him he would *never* ask him to sacrifice his sons in His name. We have the power to live happily together. We have the power to learn from each other, and to leave you and what you represent behind us. We can ignore you. We can forget you. We have the power to make yours mean nothing.

ROB: Good luck. That's never happened. Ever.

MUNDI: It will.

ROB: Not if that device goes off. *[Indicates bomb]* House full of terrorist sympathisers, little bit of collateral damage, won't even make the evening news. See ya.

MUNDI: Max!

*MAX hesitates, but then apologetically and wretchedly follows ROB, covering their exit with his gun. They slam the door and lock it.*

GRETA: Up to us, then.

MUNDI: And the God who's good.

GRETA: You going to pray for us?

MUNDI: Prayers feed us, they strengthen us and fortify us for action. But if we pray then do nothing, they're useless.

GRETA: Good. I need your help.

MUNDI: We'll need each other for what's ahead.

*MUNDI and GRETA work together to defuse the bomb as BILL's song, I AM READY FOR THE STORM comes in.*

GRETA: Let's find your kids.

*GRETA shoots the lock off the door and they leave. Blackout.*

BILL

The waves crash in and the tide tide pulls out
It's an angry sea but there is no doubt
That the lighthouse will keep shining out
To warn the lonely sailor
And the lightning strikes and the wind cuts cold
Through the sailor's bones to the sailor's soul
Till there's nothing left that he can hold
Except the rolling ocean

CHORUS
But I am ready for the storm, yes sir ready
I am ready for the storm, I'm ready for the storm

Oh give me mercy for my dreams
Cause every confrontation
Seems to tell me what it really means
To be this lonely sailor
But when the sky begins to clear
And the sun it melts away my fear
I'll cry a silent weary tear
For those that need to love me

CHORUS

*Instrumental passage in darkness. Over the top, we hear, faintly.*

MUNDI: Layla, Naseen! I'm here for you, I'm back. I've brought you the moon.

BILL

Distance it is no real friend
And time will take its time
And you will find that in the end
It brings you me, the lonely sailor
And when you take me by your side
You love me warm, you love me
And I should have realized
I had no reason to be frightened

CHORUS

**Scene 6**

*BILL is gently singing 'Ready for the Storm' to MIMI (it does not have to be the full piece if it is going on too long). She awakens in a bed or chair next to BILL and KAREN. She's very groggy and fragile.*

KAREN: Bill, she's waking up.

MIMI: Karen?

KAREN: Hello, Mimi.

MIMI: What are you... I thought... you and Bill...

KAREN: We did.

*MIMI thinks.*

MIMI: What are you doing here?

KAREN: I flew out as soon as I heard. They appreciated the help.

BILL: So did I.

MIMI: … What am I doing here?

BILL: Don't you remember?

KAREN: I wouldn't expect her to.

BILL: You got yourself drunk and took all of your medication at once.

MIMI: I, er...

BILL: You tried to kill yourself. Apparently... apparently you don't have long left now.

KAREN: Give her time, Bill. Go easy.

MIMI: Mmm. I think I remember.

BILL: Why, mum?

MIMI: Mmm. It, er...

KAREN: Rest if you need to, Mimi. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. You need to be very careful not to strain yourself.

MIMI: You... always were … my favourite doctor. Hm, hm. I, er... I don't feel too bad. I... we were talking about God, weren't we? Religion?

BILL: We were, yes. You were talking about how you'd got confused by all the other religions, and how you weren't sure about Jesus any more. I was trying to save you.

*MIMI chuckles.*

MIMI: You sang that little song, didn't you?

BILL: Yes.

MIMI: It was funny, that. Did he sing you that, Karen?

KAREN: No, I don't think he did. What's that then, Bill?

BILL: She told me to sum up Christianity as a song, then she laughed at me. Tough crowd.

MIMI: The toughest. You didn't talk much about how Protestants and Catholics though. Prots think you get salvation for free, we think you've got to work for it...

*KAREN glances at BILL.*

BILL: Through good deeds, confession, communion and the Church. But you already know about that, or you wouldn't have mentioned it.

MIMI: True.

KAREN: *[To MIMI]* Did you -

BILL: Just like I didn't mention all the times Christians have fought each other, either, because you know about that, too. You've lived through it. And I always thought that what got you through it was knowing that even when man isn't good, loving, peaceful, selfless – and when are we, really? - God always is.

MIMI: That did help me. I remembered that with my whole spirit.

BILL: Please just tell me why you did it, mum.

MIMI: I wanted to. Just drift away in the sunshine, with the music, and with you. Much better than struggling day by day in the rain. Getting weaker. Fussed over. Visitors all the time. Nice and easy. Nice and quick. Out here nobody feels as though they have to see me. Except you, Karen. Couldn't keep you away. Could I?

KAREN: *[smiles]* Did you say 'we', Mimi?

MIMI: You always were the perceptive one, lovely.

BILL: What?

KAREN: She said 'we', when she was talking about Catholics. 'We think you've got to work for it'.

BILL: Did you?

MIMI: I suppose I did.

BILL: You saw Him, didn't you? You died and were with the Lord in paradise and you came back!

MIMI: Nirvana. The 'I' dies away. We're one with the everything.

KAREN: Or Jesus Himself, who took a human shape, transcended death, and became one with God.

MIMI: The final, impossible question. Beyond truth and falsehood, the self and the other, yes and no, man and god. I never stopped believing. I love you, Bill. I love both of you. How could I love and not believe?

BILL: God is love.

MIMI: Yes.

BILL: And love is God.

KAREN: And truth.

MIMI: And music.

BILL: And family.

KAREN: Life.

BILL: Hope.

MIMI: All things, and their ending. Like a river flowing to the sea. Karen. It was so nice of you to come, Karen.

KAREN: I missed you, Mimi. I loved the talks we used to have, your way of looking at things. So often I remember a little joke you'd make, or an observation of yours comes into my head when I see something familiar. *[to BILL]* This family's never really left me in all the years we've been apart.

MIMI: You felt we were with you?

KAREN: Of course.

MIMI: That makes me feel better. I'm smiling, look.

KAREN: That makes two of us.

MIMI: Look after Bill, won't you? And Bill, look after her.

BILL: We'll look after each other. And God looks after us all. I wish I'd realised what you meant, mum. Why couldn't I understand? I'm sorry.

MIMI: *[running low on energy]* I wanted to say it in a song for you. They always seemed truer than words to me. But I couldn't write one that said what I meant. Not one that was good enough to sing to you. How's that for a last confession? For all the songs you sang me I couldn't sing the one I wanted you to hear.

BILL: Mum...

MIMI: *[fading]* Maybe that's what oneness is. Finally being able to say perfectly what's inside your heart.

KAREN: I hope so.

MIMI: I'll tell you if it is.

I'm happy.

Sing me to sleep, Bill.

BILL: I love you, mum.

*Bill sings THE BRIAR AND THE ROSE.*

I fell asleep down by the stream
And there I had the strangest dream
And down by Brennan's Glenn there grows
A briar and a rose

There's a tree in the forest
But I don't know where
I built a nest out of your hair
And climbing up into the air
A briar and a rose

I don't know how long it has been
But I was born in Brennan's Glenn
And near the end of spring there grows
A briar and a rose

BILL & KAREN
Picked the rose one early morn
I pricked my finger on a thorn
It had grown so high
It's winding wove the briar around the rose

I tried to tear them both apart
I felt a bullet in my heart
And all dressed up in springs and clothes
The briar and the rose

And when I'm buried in my grave
Tell me so I will know
Your tears will fall
To make love grow
The briar and the rose.

*MIMI dies. BILL holds her hand, grieving yet smiling.*

KAREN: She's in God, in love. In us, in everything. Goodbye, Mimi. You're with us forever.

*Pause. BILL draws a deep breath.*

BILL: I don't know what happens next. The end is never the end.

KAREN: The wheel keeps turning. The happiness of her time with us, the tears from her parting, they're seasons of the same cycle, aren't they?

BILL: And after the winter Jesus brings us life again. I'm glad God's with her, and I'm glad she's with us, and I'm glad you're with me.

KAREN: I'm glad too.

BILL: I think I know what she meant, now.

*Unaccompanied, they softly sing the last two verses of THE MEETING OF THE WATERS together.*

BILL & KAREN

'Twas that friends, the belov'd of my bosom were near
Who made every dear scene of enchantment more dear
And who felt how the best charms of nature improve
When we see them reflected from looks that we love
When we see them reflected from looks that we love.

Sweet vale of Avoca! How calm could I rest
In thy bosom of shade, with the friends I love best
Where the storms that we feel in this cold world should cease
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace.

***END OF MUSICAL***

**Songs List**

- Health to the Company

- Goodnight and Joy Be With You All

- Foggy Dew

- Tell My Ma

- Maid That Sold Her Barley

**Setpieces**

*-* Song version of final poem

- Max has captured Mundi and Greta because of their efforts in the peace process.

- Max arrives to defuse bomb

- Mundi tells the story of Isaac and emphasises that God did *not* tell Abraham to kill

 his children in his service.

- Mimi passes out, wakes up being treated by Karen

- Mundi learns that peace doesn't just require hope and faith, it requires work.

- Greta learns that being cynical of others stops you understanding them.

- Mimi has been actively taking pills with the G&Ts

- Max tries to extract the information from Gr and Mu