

Gundogdu Gencer

THE WORLD AT EIGHT



a play in two acts



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by

Gün GENCER

Can not be performed without the written permission of the playwright

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playwright

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CHARACTERS:

PENNY CAINE: TV Journalist and presenter, thirty-seven

BARBARA MACNAIR: Gynaecologist and obstetrician in her fifties

KHADIJA / 1. WOMAN: In her forties, but looks much older

AMINA / 2. WOMAN: In her thirties

AISHA / 3. WOMAN: Late teens

ROD

THE INTERPRETER

ISMAIL

THE HOODED MAN

THE GUNMAN

(ALL 5 MALE PARTS, i.e. ROD, THE INTERPRETER, ISMAIL, THE HOODED MAN AND THE GUNMAN CAN BE PLAYED BY ONE ACTOR. THE AFRICANS BEING BLACK, AND THE OTHERS WHITE SHOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE DIALOGUE IN THE OTHER LANGUAGE NOT BE TRANSLATED. THE MEANINGS GIVEN IN THE FOOT-NOTES ARE ONLY TO HELP THE ACTORS.)

(ANY RESEMBLANCE TO REAL PERSONS OR EVENTS IS PURELY COINCIDENTAL OR PROVIDENTIAL.)

ACT ONE

PENNY: Once the eye recovers from the grandeur of the sweeping plains, and the echo of distant gunfights, what strikes the Western visitor to the country is her women. Women keep this country going. Despite the two-year drought, despite the hunger, despite the constant battles between the Government forces and the guerillas for the control of the countryside, the women daily collect, gather, grind seeds and roots and suckle their swollen-bellied infants. The foreign aid to fight the famine is devoured by the gun-toting men on both sides to keep the fighting going. Quite literally, the food aid feeds the men, keeps them going, keeps them fighting. During the six years of guerilla war that has devastated the country the West has done nothing but add fuel to the fire by feeding these fighting men. Women get the crumbs to live by and to feed their starving babies. The key to putting an end to the fighting and to the poverty, most experts agree, lies with the women. This is not some ideological, some feminist agenda. The country's survival depends on it. It is within our power, and indeed it is our responsibility to facilitate structural change in the country. Unless women are given control over their lives, over their fertility, over the affairs of the country, Western aid is worse than band-aid. It promotes the misery, it entrenches and feeds the aggression. We've got to stop deluding ourselves that our generous aid helps with the suffering. It doesn't. What is needed is for our Government and other Western Governments to insist on a radical agenda of reform. Women's political rights must be secured. Birth control must be made freely available and easily accessible to every woman in the country. Food aid must be conditional upon these changes being implemented. Several projects to improve productivity and self-sufficiency are already in place. But they are a drop in this bottomless ocean of misery. What is urgently needed... **(THE PHONE RINGS. PENNY PICKS IT UP. WE REALISE THAT SHE WAS NOT ON CAMERA, BUT REHEARSING)** Hello, Penny here. Rodney! How are... Oh me God! Fuck me, I completely forgot. What's the time now? God! I know. The students... I'll have to apologise, won't I? I know. Look, I didn't have the

number, did I? Sorry. Helen's, yes. I thought I told you. Sorry. Well, any suggestions? The breakdown of the aid dollar? Yes, yes, how much of it is spent on administration, and how much of it comes back to our contractors... I know...A bit of an old chestnut though, if you ask me. Anyway, we'll... Right! The bistro? Right. No, I'm not. I was in the middle of... No, this will be my first. Bit scary... And depressing. I've been reading all week, I know all about it. The usual African story, but I think I've got a good angle on it. No, it's not bleeding heart stuff, mate. You wouldn't have the heart Rodney. Sure you'll hear it. We can shoot my intro before I leave. On Saturday... To Jo'burg first. Yep. You know Jim... You'll get your pikkies, mate, trust me. He is good, Jim, the best camera... Yeah, yeah, I know, I know you know...(LONGISH PAUSE) And what don't I know? Don't tell me! You're not scientific enough for that Rodney. No, no I'm kidding. Tell me. No! Sure I know MacNair. The Convalide hero. (LONGISH PAUSE) You're kidding! Fraud! When are you breaking it? I want to see it before I leave. Friday? Great. Anyway you can tell me all about it tonight. All right, all right, I'll wait till Friday. You know what I'm like. If I'm not the first to know, I get all fidgety. Of course I'm nosy. How else do you think I broke the holiday flats story? Sure... Sure Rodney. Anyway, I gotta go now. Bistro at about nine?... Right! Sure! (SHE GOES BACK TO HER REHEARSING)... The key is empowerment... Good one, that. The nurturing, caring women of the country to take charge of the country's so-far-tragic destiny.

(BARBARA MACNAIR'S SURGERY. THREE WOMEN AT THE RECEPTION. THE RECEPTION DESK FACES UPSTAGE, WITH A BLOND DUMMY (NOELENE) SITTING AT THE DESK. THE PHONE IS PERMANENTLY FIXED TO HER EAR, WITH THE COMPUTER SCREEN IN FRONT OF HER. DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECH BY PENNY, THE WOMEN LEAF THROUGH OLD MAGAZINES, NERVOUSLY LOOK AROUND. THE THIRD WOMAN GOES IN. HALFWAY THROUGH THE FOLLOWING SPEECH SHE COMES OUT, GOES TO NOELENE, SIGNS SOME PAPERS AND LEAVES. THE SECOND WOMAN GOES IN. THE

FIRST WOMAN IS LEFT BY HERSELF.)

PENNY: This is Africa, the dark continent. After centuries of colonialism, Africa is fighting for survival. The prognosis is not very good. Soil erosion, droughts, foreign debt, internal strife paint a very grim picture for the dark continent. For many of us, it is a distant problem, not much we can do, we say. The World at Eight team went to a distant corner in that distant continent, a remote corner of the remote, dark continent, into the sub-Saharan. This village, clinging to a meagre water supply is at the cross-roads. Quite literally. For centuries, they have been eking out a living. However, following the coup eight years ago, the President launched a bold campaign of modernisation. The price of coffee, the country's main export crop was at an all time low. The President, with other coffee-producing countries was one of the architects of the now-famous coffee cartel. In two years, the price of coffee tripled. We all remember how much coffee used to cost in the supermarkets three, four years ago. The country's economy flourished. Every village got into coffee production. Roads were built, schools, health centres. At the same time, stories of corruption began to circulate. The President's life-style became more and more ostentatious. Rumours of bribery were rife. The Popular Front, a peculiar combination of left-wing ideology and conservative peasant values began to emerge as a major force in the country. At first, the newly-prosperous peasants gave it little support. After all, bribery and corruption were nothing new. Now they were coffee-rich, and that was what mattered. The Popular Front's calls to abandon coffee production and a return to traditional crops sounded ridiculous. The Popular Front has been saying that growing coffee in the sub-Saharan was wrong, that it was ruining the country, not to mention its fragile ecology. But nobody really cared. Until recently... Until Brazil, the world's largest coffee producer broke the cartel three years ago. Brazil had her own problems. The IMF and the World Bank had been increasing the pressure on Brazil to restructure her economy. The financial markets were concerned, the Brazilian currency took a nose dive. Finally, Brazil broke the cartel. The price of coffee plummeted almost overnight. And almost overnight, the

President and his regime became the villains. Support for the Popular Front began to grow. The Government used force. Aided by the neighbouring Rabula, The Popular Front armed itself and became a guerilla movement. Of course Rabula has been the traditional enemy of this country. The Popular Front, until then called rebels or bandits by the Government were now also branded traitors co-operating with the age-old enemy. Caught in the fire are villages like this one. It took us weeks to obtain the necessary permits to enter this area. This is the first time a Western news crew has been allowed to report first hand what has been happening here. The World at Eight spoke to some of the villagers.

ROD: Cut! Brilliant Penny, plain fucking brilliant!

PENNY: Thanks, mate.

ROD: So you think you'll hang around for weeks waiting for the permission to get into the area?

PENNY: (ISN'T SURE ROD IS NOT JOKING) No!

1.WOMAN: (QUITE AGITATED BY THE LONG WAIT, SHE GETS UP AND GOES TO NOELENE) My appointment was at eleven, it's after twelve for God's sake! (GOES OUT, MUTTERING)

(AFRICA. AISHA, -PREGNANT-, IS POUNDING SOMETHING IN A MORTAR, SINGING)

AISHA: How long more, how long more, o how long

Shall my wildflowers wilt, o mother

Rain beautiful, o rain plentiful

O, how long more shall my sad face will

The stork circles, no, it's no vulture

My blood stirs, o mother, how it stirs

All the faces, all knowing faces

Turn away, stare away, spin away

My hands, soil, my rough, strong, working hands

My belly, o mother, my baby

Not to the soil my pretty baby

To my belly smile baby, baby

O mother, o baby, o soil

O belly, o baby, o thunder

O stork, o rain, o baby, baby

O blood, o mother, o baby, ooo...

(AMINA COMES IN, FOLLOWED BY KHADIJA. A TRANSISTOR RADIO IS HEARD, BLASTING IN THE BACKGROUND. AMINA'S BABY OCCASIONALLY LETS OUT A TIRED CRY.)

AISHA: O mother, o baby, o soil

O belly, o baby, o thunder

O stork, o rain, o baby, baby

O blood, o mother, o baby, ooo...

KHADIJA: Oh, my back. Amina, girl, help me.

AMINA: (HELPS KHADIJA) I can't straighten your back.

KHADIJA: Where's the goat?

AMINA: Tied tight.

KHADIJA: I can't see it?

AMINA: Your eyes are poorly mother Khadija, it's there, tied to the tree. I tied it myself.

KHADIJA: Go and check.

AISHA: O blood, o mother, o baby, ooo...

AMINA: (GOES OUT TO CHECK. FROM OUTSIDE) Here. I told you.

KHADIJA: Why was Ismail here then? Did the goat just come back?

AMINA: (COMES IN) She's been there all night. I tied her there myself last night.

(PAUSE) It wasn't Ismail!

KHADIJA: It was Ismail!

(THEY BOTH LOOK AT AISHA. AISHA SHAKES HER HEAD.)

KHADIJA: They've taken away our corn. Ismail's taken away our corn.

AMINA: The corn's hidden. It's safe.

KHADIJA: I heard noises last night. It was Ismail.

AMINA: No, my dear mother woman, your eyes are weak, there was no moon last night, you couldn't have seen. It wasn't Ismail. Ismail is no thief, Ismail is as straight as a swamp cane.

KHADIJA: Bent as a Government rifle.

AMINA: I know my brother. He would never do us any harm. I know. It couldn't be him.

(THEY BOTH LOOK AT AISHA)

AISHA: No.

KHADIJA: How would you know?

AISHA: He wasn't here last night.

KHADIJA: The night before? And the night before?

(AISHA LOOKS DOWN)

KHADIJA: My God! Woe to my sinful head! Woe, my God. You want Government troops to kill you, kill Amina and her baby? You stupid...

(AS SHE ATTACKS AISHA, SHE'S HELD BACK BY AMINA)

What d'you think they'll do when they become Government, huh? Your heroes, your snooty, your whingeing heroes, huh? Tell me girl bride, tell me what your Ismail would do if he became Government, tell me.

AMINA: He's my brother.

KHADIJA: Sitting in palaces, eating meat, drinking wine, that's what.

AISHA: He doesn't.

AMINA: He fights those.

KHADIJA: Oh Moussa, my wide-browed Moussa, my brave, my strong Moussa!
Why did you die and leave us to the likes of empty-headed Ismail? You
coward Moussa, the pupil of my eye, my mainstay, you coward Moussa!

AMINA: He died for us, for you, his mother, for me, for his son, so we wouldn't
starve. Don't blacken your son, pretty mother, don't throw mud on his
beautiful soul, pretty mother. Woe Moussa, woe my brave, woe my man!

KHADIJA: Brave is the one to survive, not to go and die like my idiot son, or like
your mushroom-headed brother Ismail.

AISHA: He's not dead.

KHADIJA: Not long to go. What is it with these men? Why do they have no brains,
no courage to live, no wisdom? What is it that I've done wrong? Oh
Moussa, the glint in my eye. Woe! Government bullets are cheap. My
stone-headed son, my beautiful Moussa!

AMINA: Bite your forked tongue, mother Khadija, hold your venom. Don't dry up
our hopes like your dried up insides. My Moussa, my man died for you,
for me, for his sons, for his unborn sons...

KHADIJA: And where are they now, huh? Your sons? All you have is that piddling
girl. Sons! Your straw wasn't even crushed and he went. You had him
two weeks... Before your straws were even warm. Two weeks!

AMINA: Three...

KHADIJA: Don't you miss his hard body?

AMINA: My man...

KHADIJA: His strong arms...

AMINA: He'd never...

KHADIJA: His smile, oh, his smile...

AMINA: Stop it mother, stop it, for Moussa's sake, I beg you. **(STARTS SOBBING)**

(AISHA THROWS UP)

KHADIJA: She's going to litter, help us God. She should be sewn up for good. As if we don't have enough beaks to feed. Fornicator!

AISHA: My Ismail will come back. **(STARTS SOBBING)**

AMINA: Of course he will, he's my brother. Shush! Shush! **(GIVES AISHA SOME WATER, AND WIPES HER MOUTH)** He won't leave Aisha like your bright-eyed Moussa left me, mother Khadija. Here. **(KHADIJA GRUMBLES, AMINA TO KHADIJA)** She's sick mother Khadija, sick, pretty mother. You would have a little dog's ear, wouldn't you, my pretty mother. **(KHADIJA SHAKES HER HEAD)** You know where it grows, just point it to me, I'll collect it. She's poorly, poor Aisha. My poor, poor little sister.

KHADIJA: You think it just spurts out of dry sand, do you? Dog's ear! There's none growing woman, not now, not for two years! None!

AMINA: You would have some dried, mother Khadija, I beg you, she is poorly. Oh wise, oh merciful pretty mother Khadija...

(AISHA THROWS UP VIOLENTLY. BARBARA COMES OUT OF THE SURGERY, GRABS NOELENE, PUTS HER IN A CUPBOARD, AS SHE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE, ROD'S PROGRAM STARTS ON TV. THE THREE WOMEN IN AFRICA GO ABOUT THEIR DAILY CHORES DURING ROD'S PROGRAM.)

ROD: (ON TV) ...Today The World at Eight brings you the exclusive story of a hero under a serious cloud. Only fifteen years ago, the name Doctor Barbara MacNair stood up to the giants of the medical world, the drug companies and won. She was the hero to so many women. Almost overnight the name Convalide became poison. Barbara MacNair had discovered that the morning sickness drug Convalide was causing birth defects, the rest,

as they say, is history. Since then Doctor MacNair established her own Institute, became a much respected public figure and even won a few honours. Now she must face what is arguably the worst ordeal of her life. Her new research has been branded fraudulent. She has been claiming for some time now that the new morning sickness drug, Traxon also causes birth defects. Traxon is still on the market, most doctors have now stopped prescribing it, although most people claim it is much more effective than the old Convalide and...

(ROD AND PENNY AT THE BISTRO, DRINKING. THE TV SOUNDS FADE AWAY; THE IMAGES REMAIN. BARBARA -VERY UPSET-, PREGNANT WOMEN, WOMEN THROWING UP, OPERATING THEATRE, ETC. THE PICTURES CONTINUE DURING THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN ROD AND PENNY)

PENNY: ...are you really sure?

ROD: No question. She'd been faking the results.

PENNY: This Peter Warner guy, is he reliable?

ROD: As reliable as they come. He's probably got a grudge against MacNair or something.

PENNY: I wouldn't mind checking his closet.

ROD: Does it matter? It's a great story.

PENNY: (SUBDUED) It is.

ROD: The ratings will go through the roof. No question. Cheers.

PENNY: Cheers.

ROD: He actually rang me and broke the story.

PENNY: How long had he been working with MacNair?

ROD: Five, six years. MacNair had him doing all the shitwork apparently. You know, lab books, keeping track of the results and all that. So he should know. And he does know what he's talking about.

PENNY: And you can tell?

ROD: I may not have the knowledge m'dear, but I have the brains.

PENNY: And "You don't have to swallow every medicine to know if they're any good".

ROD: Good old Stuart. Those were the days. Remember... We both joined, if not the same day, the same week... I was so overwhelmed. Bloody Stuart made sure I did.

PENNY: You came a week after me.

ROD: Really?

PENNY: He made me feel like a little school-girl.

ROD: I was shaking.

PENNY: No false modesty there, mate, he was the best TV journalist I've ever come across and he knew it.

ROD: The bastard used to work 18 hours a day. Not like our bloody Andrew.

PENNY: Andrew's all right.

ROD: He's an upstart.

PENNY: Well, he is the boss.

ROD: Not that I have any problems with him personally...

PENNY: No, you're just jealous.

ROD: ...coming in well after we did...

PENNY: Old boys club.

ROD: Come on.

PENNY: You joined after me.

ROD: A week?

PENNY: Well...

ROD: (DRINKS) So... You're leaving tomorrow...

PENNY: Afternoon.

ROD: All the shots and everything...

PENNY: Under control.

ROD: Be careful, huh?

PENNY: I was in Beirut, remember. This can't be any worse.

ROD: Still...

PENNY: Is this the new caring Rod image?...

ROD: I've always...

PENNY: Don't Rod, please, not to me, i know you too well.

ROD: I care about you.

PENNY: Come on!

ROD: Down with all caring SNAGS then. **(DRINKS. BARBARA KISSES HIM LIGHTLY ON THE CHEEK)** Don't you dare find a handsome African guy, huh?

PENNY: Who knows? To Africa! **(DRINKS)**

(AFRICA. THE THREE WOMEN ARE SITTING AROUND, DRINKING COFFEE. AMINA IS PREPARING BABY FOOD OUT OF A CAN.)

KHADIJA: Canned baby food! Who has seen this? It's a sin. *We* never had that stuff. It's Satan's work. God forgive you! Look at me! I have no teeth, my back is hunched, but I still get up at dawn and...

AMINA: Coffee was good this year. But prices go up. This can costs three times more this year. Lucky I stacked a lot when it was cheap.

KHADIJA: It'd go off.

AMINA: It doesn't. It's all in the can. All sealed. Does coffee go off?

KHADIJA: I wish it would. Coffee's worth goat-shit now.

AISHA: Some more? Mother Khadija!

KHADIJA: No, I don't like it without sugar. Haven't you got any milk?

AMINA: I milked the goat this morning.

AISHA: I'll go and get it. **(GOES OUT)**

KHADIJA: You've seen him?

AMINA: Who?

KHADIJA: Ismail. Wasn't he here last night?

(AMINA HANGS HER HEAD)

KHADIJA: You must tell him. He won't listen to me. The Government men are all over the place. This will be the first place they'll look. You must tell him not to come any more.

AMINA: How can I?...

KHADIJA: You talk to him...

AMINA: Hardly.

KHADIJA: Who puts him up to this? Who puts up all these men to this? To leave their wives and sons, and...

AMINA: He's got brains.

KHADIJA: What's that supposed to mean?

AMINA: Is this what you want? Tell me mother Khadija, is this life? Don't you want things to get better, for coffee to sell as much as did before?

KHADIJA: And your mushroom-headed brother will give us a better life?

AMINA: Someone has to try.

KHADIJA: I've seen too much, girl, too much. Nothing changes. If he sells the coffee for more, he'll put it in his pocket.

AMINA: Ismail's honest.

KHADIJA: They all were until they saw the money. **(PAUSE)** Anyway, you tell him.

AISHA: (COMES IN WITH THE MILK. SEEING THAT THE OTHER TWO HAVE GONE QUIET, LOOKS AT THEM) Milk? (PUTS MILK IN AMINA'S AND KHADIJA'S COFFEE, SITS DOWN.) I saw a jeep coming up the hill.

KHADIJA: Government?

AISHA: No. Maybe.

(KHADIJA GETS UP IN A HUFF AND GOES OUT)

AISHA: What was she talking about?

AMINA: Nothing.

AISHA: Please. If it's to do with Ismail...

(AMINA HANGS HER HEAD)

AISHA: She's not going to tell on him, is she?

AMINA: Of course not. **(SHE COMFORTS AISHA)**

AISHA: I'd die if anything happened to him.

AMINA: That's what Mother Khadija is worried about, too. The old woman is no fool, Aisha. She says this would be the first place Government men would look.

AISHA: We are careful.

AMINA: You just don't let the goat loose unless it's absolutely safe.

AISHA: I don't.

AMINA: Just make sure.

AISHA: Yes..

THE INTERPRETER: (FROM OUTSIDE) It's such an honour.

PENNY: (FROM OUTSIDE) Please, all I want to do is let the world know what is really happening in the country, and I appreciate your making the effort....

KHADIJA: (FROM OUTSIDE) *Ma pewih vy?1*

PENNY: (AS THEY ALL ENTER) What's she saying?

THE INTERPRETER: She wants to find out what you say.

PENNY: The world...

THE INTERPRETER: (TO KHADIJA) *Jeqemgha zimychnuz ejfewih, radje vy.2*

PENNY: (EXTENDS A HAND TO AMINA AND AISHA, AMINA SHAKES HER HAND, AISHA MOVES AWAY) Pleased to meet you.

THE INTERPRETER: *Fumochfoxonoqu nanmym ighpyn pewih.*3

AMINA: *Vam pa.*4

PENNY: I just want to spend some time here, see the way they live, get some perspective from the women's point of view, so that...

AMINA: *Mewa laghnech veh jih ragha, televizyonsy nywnych.*5

THE INTERPRETER: *Shiz nachryh veh televizyonsy ran pa.*6

AMINA: (SMILES) Kaffe ejfewih ny, veh jih vuzughon.7 **(TO PENNY)** Kaffe?

PENNY: (SMILES BACK) Yes, thank you, if it's not too much trouble.

THE INTERPRETER: *Abaf.*8. Yes.

PENNY: (MIMICS) *Abaf.*

(AMINA GOES OUT. KHADIJA IS WATCHING THEM. PENNY GOES TO AISHA)

PENNY: (SMILING) Baby? Pregnant, are you? That's lovely. Where's the father?
(AISHA LOOKS AT HER) Bab-by?

THE INTERPRETER: *Bebbez. Vuvujo mahpa pewih.*9

KHADIJA: *Wih vuvujo, leffe*10

PENNY: Pardon?

THE INTERPRETER: He's left.

PENNY: Left her?

THE INTERPRETER: Yes.

PENNY: Is he one of the fighters, do you know? The Popular Front...

THE INTERPRETER: They wouldn't tell us just yet. They have to be very careful, you understand. I think you should get to know them a bit first.

(AMINA COMES IN WITH THE COFFEE FOR PENNY AND THE INTERPRETER. THE INTERPRETER SITS ON THE GROUND, AS PENNY

IS ABOUT TO, AMINA SPREADS A CLOTH ON THE GROUND FOR PENNY.)

PENNY: (SMILES) Thank you. **(LOOKS AT THE INTERPRETER)**

THE INTERPRETER: *Jexigh11.*

PENNY: (MIMICS) *Jexigh.*

(AMINA SMILES BACK)

PENNY: (INTRODUCES HERSELF) Penny.

AMINA: Amina.

(THEY START DRINKING COFFEE. AISHA HOVERS, KHADIJA WATCHES THEM CAREFULLY. AS THE TV COMES ON, AMINA, PENNY AND THE INTERPRETER TALK SILENTLY.)

PENNY: (ON TV) I am standing here, at the very edge of the desert where life and death, where Government forces and the rebels face each other reminiscent of High Noon. The rebels call themselves freedom-fighters and claim that the Government which brought them so much affluence through coffee, is totally corrupt. It's hard for our Western eyes to imagine the desolation that is the norm in this part of the world. And it is this very desolation that makes the fight so desperate. **(KHADIJA, AMINA AND AISHA IN THE BACKGROUND, VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE CAMERA.)** The women, as usual, are caught in the crossfire. **(SHOTS OF THE WOMEN AS THEY ARE MENTIONED)** They go about their daily chores, raising children, conscious all the time, that the Government forces or the rebels might decide they should no longer exist. In this precarious existence, the bonds between the women become crucial for survival. These three women live without their men. Khadija's son Moussa was married to Amina who was killed in a horrendous Government raid. Nobody survived the attack. Although Moussa was probably fighting against the Government, nobody knows if all those killed, some twenty seven of them were in fact rebels. The Government says so. But in this land of ambiguities, it's not easy to determine who is on which side. Amina's brother Ismail is married to

Aisha, and Aisha is pregnant. There are no medical facilities here. The closest town is about a hundred kilometres away. It took us four hours in our four-wheel drive, but it is a long way if you have no transport. But somehow the women survive. **(THE AFRICAN SCENE DARKENS GRADUALLY)** Whether Ismail will ever come back, or even if he is alive, nobody can tell. It's too dangerous for Aisha to even acknowledge that he is alive, let alone that she sees him.. The women live in constant fear, for themselves, for their children, for the husbands and lovers who are out there, fighting for what they believe. Next week The World at Eight will be looking at the breakdown of the aid dollar. How much of the dollar that you so generously donate to aid organisations actually finds its way to feed the hungry mouths of these women and their children. This is Penny Caine for The World at Eight, reporting from Africa...

(COMMERCIALS ON TV. BARBARA MACNAIR'S SURGERY. THE SOUND OF COMMERCIALS GRADUALLY FADES OUT.)

BARBARA: (ON THE INTERCOM) I'm not to be disturbed Noelene. Half an hour... She can wait, she's not on her death-bed, is she? Thanks Noelene. **(TO PENNY)**...there's really nothing I can add to what I've said to your producer. Andrew?... Everyone knows the story with Convalide anyway. You can imagine that it didn't make the drug company very happy...

PENNY: The Swiss company...

BARBARA: Convalide was produced here. Under licence. They tried to dig up all sorts of dirt about me then and now they're at it again.

PENNY: They had billions at stake.

BARBARA: Two and a half billion dollars in the States alone, in compensation payments. So you can understand they never forgave me for that.

PENNY: Then the new drug...

BARBARA: Traxon...

PENNY: Traxon was produced by the Germans...

BARBARA: Right. And in fact, it turned out to be more effective than Convalide.

PENNY: For morning sickness...

BARBARA: It's basically a calmant, but it is marketed specifically for morning sickness, yes.

PENNY: And it is a completely new drug, not the old Convalide under a new name?

BARBARA: No, it's new. But the companies... It's all very incestuous, you know. If you have any expertise in shares and companies, you should investigate this. I'm not sure which company owns which one. Then there is the Dutch-based multinational...

PENNY: Universal. Is it true that you had done a consultancy for them... **(LOOKS AT HER NOTES)** Back in... 67?

BARBARA: **(SMILES)** You've done your homework. It's good to see competent young women... **(PAUSE)** I was just starting out. It was a good opportunity. They paid good money.

PENNY: If it was now...

BARBARA: I don't think so. Knowing what I know now...

PENNY: You mean the connection with the Swiss drug company...

BARBARA: **(NODS)** I was rather poor.

PENNY: You're not now.

BARBARA: No.

PENNY: The publicity you got exposing Convalide... You became an overnight celebrity, didn't you?

BARBARA: You don't have to believe me, but I never thought of the publicity, or the fame...

PENNY: You were genuinely concerned that Convalide was causing the birth defects.

BARBARA: There's never a one-to-one correlation in such things. It's like with smoking. We say it causes lung cancer, but there are people who've smoked all their lives, who don't contract cancer, and there are those

who've never smoked who get it.

PENNY: Now you are saying Traxon is the same...

BARBARA: It's a much more sophisticated drug of course. But if it causes just one birth defect, that's one too many and I think it should be withdrawn.

PENNY: Banned...

BARBARA: I think so. Have you got any children?

PENNY: No.

BARBARA: You've never...

PENNY: We're talking about you.

BARBARA: I am sorry. When you have children, it becomes much more real, much more... tangible. It's no longer a theoretical construct, but a living being. Can you imagine how a mother's or a father's life changes if they have a disabled child?

PENNY: Yes, but scientifically...

BARBARA: This may not sound scientific. Well, I know it isn't. Telling a mother who's just given birth that the baby has an arm or a leg missing... I had to do it. With Convalide... **(PAUSE)** I thought if I could save one child from being born with a birth defect using the reputation that I have, I should do what I did.

PENNY: Then Peter's... Dr Warner's accusations...

BARBARA: Peter's good, but firstly he is young, and secondly, well... he is a man...

PENNY: He says the experiment results were... faked.

BARBARA: I fast-tracked a few things. Every day Traxon was on the market meant the possibility of another deformed child being born.

PENNY: You explained this to Dr. Warner...

BARBARA: I tried to. But he was ... quite angry, righteous. **(PAUSE)** He's no longer with the Institute.

PENNY: He says you sacked him.

BARBARA: He decided he couldn't go on with me as the head of the Institute. I thought, after the accusations he'd made...

PENNY: You let him go.

BARBARA: Would you work with someone who calls you a fraud? **(PAUSE)**
When is the program?

PENNY: Next Wednesday night. I'll organise the technical crew for early next week.
How does Monday suit you?

BARBARA: Fine. The sooner this whole thing is cleared up, the better.

PENNY: Thank you Dr...

BARBARA: Please! Barbara!

PENNY: Thank you Barbara.

BARBARA: Penny.

(AFRICA. DUSK. AISHA AND ISMAIL UNDER SOME COVER, SPEAK IN HUSHED TONES)

AISHA: I miss you.

ISMAIL: I do, too. But you know I can't be here when the baby's born. They're going to be all over the place when the time comes. They'll know I'd be coming back for the baby.

AISHA: There is an amnesty, they say.

ISMAIL: You know what's happened to Hassan and Moustapha? **(AISHA IS SILENT)** from the seventh floor of the police headquarters. They said it was suicide. Both of them. The same day.

AISHA: You must be careful.

ISMAIL: You too. I miss you so much, but...

AISHA: There must be a way...

ISMAIL: Only when we win. **(AISHA IS SILENT)** It won't be long, believe me.
Ashraf says...

AISHA: Ashraf?

ISMAIL: I shouldn't have told you. Anyway, it won't be long, I promise you.

AISHA: He's the one, is he? The herdsman's nephew. He's the one you've been following. Snooty damned Ashraf.

ISMAIL: Forget I've ever told you that. Forget the name. Please. For all our sakes.

AISHA: All I want is you on my side. And your son.

ISMAIL: I wouldn't mind a daughter.

AISHA: I'll bear you a son. The most beautiful son in the province.

ISMAIL: O Aisha, my bride, my beloved. It will be over soon, believe me. Everything will be so different when we win.

AISHA: Just stay alive Ismail. For me.

ISMAIL: We shall win. Soon. Believe me.

(PAUSE. AMINA ENTERS, WATCHES THEM, UNSEEN, FOR A WHILE.)

AISHA: Promise me you'll talk to Ashraf. They don't know you. Just come back here. Tell Ashraf you have a family now.

ISMAIL: Everyone has a family.

AISHA: Please.

ISMAIL: I can't. There is not one man who isn't fighting. If not on our side, they're fighting for the Government.

AISHA: I don't want you to die.

ISMAIL: I won't. I have two good reasons to live. Three. The baby makes it three.

AISHA: Embrace me.

ISMAIL: O Aisha, the mother of my children. **(THEY EMBRACE PASSIONATELY.)**

(AMINA MAKES A NOISE TO BE NOTICED. ISMAIL GETS STARTLED AT FIRST, THEN SEES AND RECOGNISES AMINA. THEY HUG.)

AMINA: I missed you, silly boy.

ISMAIL: Sister. **(HE HEARS A NOISE)**

AMINA: I'll check. **(SHE GOES OUT AND COMES BACK STRAIGHTAWAY.)** Go!

ISMAIL: **(STARTS. TO AISHA)** I'll watch for the goat.

(AISHA CAN HARDLY LET HIM GO.)

AMINA: Don't wake mother Khadija.

ISMAIL: Take care of her for me, will you sister? **(LEAVES)**

AMINA: I will. Go.

(AMINA'S BABY CAN BE HEARD CRYING.)

KHADIJA: **(FROM INSIDE)** Amina, girl! the girl's crying! Amina!

AMINA: I'm coming, I'm coming. **(SHE GOES IN, AISHA LIES ON THE GROUND, DREAMING.)**

KHADIJA: **(FROM INSIDE. A LULLABY)** Pshhh, pshhh, baby girl, pshhh,
pshhh, baby girl

Sleep well, lovely girl, pshhh, pshhh, pshhh, lovely girl

Grow up, be a mother, pshhh, pshhh, pshhh, baby girl

And pshhh, pshhh, pshhh your little girl, lovely girl...

(ROD AND PENNY AT THE BISTRO, DRINKING. THERE'S A WILD-LIFE DOCUMENTARY ON TV. THE SOUND IS MUTED.)

ROD: I'm going to have to take over the MacNair story.

PENNY: **(QUITE UPSET)** Rod! You gave it to me in the first place.

ROD: I know.

PENNY: So?...

ROD: Andrew's decision.

PENNY: Fuck!

ROD: You try to see the Prime Minister. Apparently he's been educated here. At

least he would speak English.

PENNY: I've done my stint in Africa, Rod. I don't want to go back. It's too...

ROD: Still not sentimental, are we? C'mon mate, that story was just fucking top-notch stuff. It just needs the follow-up.

PENNY: When I saw those women...

ROD: God! Just another story, mate, just another bloody story, and you've got a brilliant angle on it. Just go for the jugular, that's what the whole thing is about. No room for wishy washy sentimentalism. No bleeding heart stuff. Once you're up that alley, you're gone.

PENNY: They...

ROD: We're like surgeons, as Stuart used to say. Once they're on the operating table, they're all the same. Frogs, rabbits, guinea pigs or people.

PENNY: I did keep my critical distance.

ROD: I know. If you let that slip, you might as well pack up. Look, you've already got the entree to the godforsaken place, you know the score.

PENNY: I know the score with MacNair, too.

ROD: Look, that is all small stuff, domestic trivia, not like your Africa story.

PENNY: Yeah, but...

ROD: The situation is reaching the boiling point, they say. You'd know better, of course.

PENNY: It has been boiling for years.

ROD: The rebels are planning a major offensive. Okufu is in deep shit. So far he's got the army on side, but who knows how long that will last.

PENNY: I don't mind...

ROD: Great. You've already got all the shots anyway. I hate needles...

PENNY: Well, then!

ROD: Cheers, mate! To Africa!

(AFRICA. THE THREE WOMEN ARE DOING DOMESTIC CHORES. AISHA'S PREGNANCY IS A BIT HEAVIER.)

AISHA: Ismail says it's soon now.

KHADIJA: Damn Ismail. Damn them all. Oh my back!

AMINA: Shush!

KHADIJA: Don't you shush me!

AMINA: Nobody must know Ashraf's involved. **(VERY SECRETIVE)** He's the head. The Government men don't know who the head is. So please...

KHADIJA: Does Aisha know?

(AMINA SHRUGS)

KHADIJA: He shouldn't trust her. She's too young.

AMINA: She's his wife.

KHADIJA: So? Oh, my back!

AMINA: Whoever cures her back gets mother Khadija's support. **(LAUGHS. BUT KHADIJA IS IN NO LAUGHING MOOD.)**

KHADIJA: What good have they done for anyone? You tell me. They don't work. They're up in the hills, playing little boys' games.

AMINA: Wouldn't you want coffee prices to go up again?

KHADIJA: And your insipid Ismail will do that? I'll laugh with my arse; anything else is too good for him.

AISHA: My Ismail will come back.

AMINA: Of course he will.

AISHA: He says, it's not long now. Perhaps even before the baby's born.

AMINA: Of course.

KHADIJA: People would think you're hatching a chest of jewels. Baby! I've had seven, girl, seven, all of them in the field. Nobody even noticed...

AISHA: Ismail says...

AMINA: It's her first, mother Khadija, be kind to her...

(NOISES ARE HEARD. IT IS PENNY AND THE INTERPRETER)

THE INTERPRETER: Helloooo!

AISHA: Ismail knows it's soon...

KHADIJA: It's that clod again, the interpreter, with the blonde woman.

AISHA: He knows. **(PENNY AND THE INTERPRETER ENTER. SHE CONTINUES AS IF IN THE SAME LANGUAGE)** *Veghewih Khadija umu, veghewih, uq zughpo uhfoz.*¹²

THE INTERPRETER: (LIGHT-HEARTED) *Zen mawe veghewih, jaiwghawem pa veq pa veghaghen.*¹³

(AMINA WELCOMES PENNY. KHADIJA SENDS AISHA AWAY)

AMINA: Hello.

KHADIJA: (TO THE INTERPRETER) *Echema vuz jam, numzete.*¹⁴

PENNY: (TO KHADIJA) *Nahravu.*¹⁵

KHADIJA: (UNWELCOMING) *Nahravu.* **(MOVES AWAY)**

AMINA: *Kaffee?*¹⁶

PENNY: *Wiz, juxigh.*¹⁷

AISHA: *Uzoghgho zuho, vuz ranam aixhampe.*¹⁸

PENNY: What's she saying?

THE INTERPRETER: She likes you.

PENNY: I like her, too. **(TO AISHA)** How's the baby? *Bebbez*¹⁹... Good?

AISHA: *Ewe, ewe, juxigh.*²⁰

PENNY: How are things here? Has there been much fighting recently?

THE INTERPRETER: *Shufochnu buh no, pewih.*²¹

AISHA: *Wuzompu*²²...

KHADIJA: (INTERRUPTS) *Wiz. Wiz vehchaw. Zawteneq wahempa radeneqem.*²³

(PENNY LOOKS AT THE INTERPRETER)

THE INTERPRETER: No. No fighting.

PENNY: Oh...

AISHA: Ismail pewih ze²⁴...

KHADIJA: (HITS AISHA. AMINA AND PENNY TRY TO HOLD HER BACK) *Nunzutu! Lahe qazugho!*²⁵

AMINA: *Zoq runegha unu, wudnu!*²⁶

AISHA: (IN TEARS) *Jaiwghawasaxem Ismaila, laihoohjoom jam, zisezuh!*²⁷

THE INTERPRETER: (TO PENNY) Just a domestic argument.

PENNY: Ismail's her husband...

AISHA: (PICKS UP ISMAIL'S NAME) *Ismail! Ismailen vamen!*²⁸

PENNY: Is he all right?

THE INTERPRETER: Oh, yes.

AISHA: *Jaiwghawasaxen Ismaila. Ashraf laghjem, faneqghajem zisuzuhowo. Roozynafe fyfywih vy zuho, Okufuwy fyfywih.*²⁹

PENNY: Ashraf? Okufu?

THE INTERPRETER: Okufu is the Prime Minister...

PENNY: I know. Who's Ashraf?

(THE INTERPRETER DOESN'T ANSWER. THE WOMEN FREEZE WHEN THEY HEAR PENNY MENTION ASHRAF'S NAME.)

THE INTERPRETER: A friend, I imagine...

AMINA: (A PAUSE) *Kaffe wuduwon.*³⁰ **(GOES OUT.)**

PENNY: (TRIES TO CALM AISHA DOWN) Here... Here... It's all right...
(FADE OUT.)

ROD: (ON TV) ...Last month we brought you the story of Barbara MacNair, the one

time hero who is now branded a fraud by one of her close associates. Peter Warner, her former research assistant has come up with new claims, further damaging Dr. MacNair's already tattered reputation. According to Dr. Warner, the lab experiments that were conducted on guinea pigs were... Well, to put it bluntly... cooked. Control groups are part of any proper scientific testing. Dr. Warner claims that there were in fact no control groups when the morning sickness drug Traxon was tested. The lab books show there were twenty two guinea pigs used for the tests and three of them were adversely effected by Traxon. Dr. MacNair made her claims about Traxon on the strength of these tests. Now, Dr. Warner, in an exclusive interview to The World at Eight, claims that there were only four guinea pigs, not twenty two, and only one of them was effected by the drug. What's more, there was no control group. The Medical Board is conducting its own investigation. If proved, Dr. MacNair faces being struck off the medical register for scientific fraud. Yesterday we spoke to the chairman of the Board, Dr... **(FADE OUT)**

(BARBARA MACNAIR'S SURGERY. BARBARA IS EXAMINING 3. WOMAN, THE OTHER TWO WOMEN WAITING OUTSIDE, NOELENE ON THE PHONE AS USUAL)

BARBARA: You might have to spend the last three months in hospital. You've had a bit of a trauma, but there's nothing to worry about, and I don't really think we might have to worry about a Caesarean section. **(BUZZES THE PHONE)** Noelene...

(NIGHT. AFRICA. THE HOODED MAN ENTERS VERY QUIETLY, APPROACHES THE SLEEPING PENNY)

ROD: (ON TV. FADE IN) We'll be back with this story and more after the commercial break.

(AS THE HOODED MAN QUITE EXPERTLY GAGS PENNY AND CARRIES HER OFF, COMMERCIALS, I.E. THOSE CURRENTLY RUNNING ON COMMERCIAL TV COME ON THE TV SCREEN)

1. WOMAN: (APPROACHES NOELENE) Look, I am running very late...

(AS PENNY'S MUFFLED VOICE FADES AWAY, THE COMMERCIALS ON TV GET LOUDER. THE STAGE DARKENS AND THE HOUSE LIGHTS SLOWLY GO UP. THE COMMERCIALS CONTINUE DURING THE INTERVAL.)

ACT TWO

(AFRICA. PENNY IS BEING QUESTIONED BY THE HOODED MAN. THE MAN CIRCLES AROUND PENNY. PENNY LOOKS MORE CONFUSED THAN HELPLESS.)

PENNY: You won't even tell me which side you're on. I don't know what you want.

(THE HOODED MAN LISTENS TO HER INTENTLY, BUT WITH NO REACTION.) I have all the necessary papers. Documents. *Vaghlaghah*.³¹ They were left in the village. You can ask the captain... Or you can go and collect them yourself... I am only a reporter... Neutral... I don't support the Government or the reb... the other side. Whichever side you're on, this will be very bad PR for you, you know. Do you understand me? **(THE HOODED MAN NODS.)** I'm sure it's all a mistake. Why don't you let me go? I was only talking to the women in the village. I'm not political... Where's Jim? Have you got him too? He's only the cameraman, he wouldn't... **(THE HOODED MAN SHAKES HIS HEAD.)** Look, if it's information you want, I haven't any. **(LOUDER, WITH EMPHASIS)** No information!

THE HOODED MAN: No shout. I no deaf.

PENNY: Sorry, it's just that I don't know how much you understand.

THE HOODED MAN: I understand enough.

PENNY: Good. Right. Why don't you tell me which side you're from. **(NO RESPONSE)** Which side? Government or the other side?

THE HOODED MAN: You no question me. I question you. No woman question me.

PENNY: Right... Right, I'm sorry. It's just that I don't know how I can help you.

THE HOODED MAN: You want help me? Why you want help me?

PENNY: You've been nice. You haven't hurt me...

THE HOODED MAN: I steal you, you want help me. Why?

PENNY: Look, I just want to go back, back home, back to my country.

THE HOODED MAN: You have boys?

PENNY: Sorry?

THE HOODED MAN: Boys... Children?

PENNY: No.

THE HOODED MAN: Why? You barren? **(NO RESPONSE)** Women in village have children. If no children, better they die. Sometimes children born, then they die. You friends with women in village?

PENNY: Yes. The poor women. All they are doing really is try to survive.

THE HOODED MAN: You think country will survive?

PENNY: Sorry?

THE HOODED MAN: Country. Everyone fighting, everyone dying. You think country will be... Okay?

PENNY: I am sure it will be, eventually. You have a very rich culture.

THE HOODED MAN: Culture? What you know about culture?

PENNY: Not much, I'm sure, but...

THE HOODED MAN: You know if man not there when son born, man is no man, son is no son.

PENNY: What do you mean?

THE HOODED MAN: Son bastard, if father not there when he born.

PENNY: Is that true?

THE HOODED MAN: I no lie to woman.

PENNY: So that's why poor Aisha was so anxious...

THE HOODED MAN: Ismail can't come.

PENNY: You know Ismail. Aisha's husband.

THE HOODED MAN: Aisha's man. Good man. Bad he can't come.

PENNY: So you must be with the freedom fighters. That's why the hood and everything...

THE HOODED MAN: Ismail fighting.

PENNY: I know. I think with Ashraf...

(FREEZE)

THE HOODED MAN: Ashraf!

ROD: (ON TV): There are still no new developments in the search for The World at Eight reporter Penny Caine. As you know, Penny was on assignment in Africa and was taken hostage three days ago. At this stage it's not even clear if the responsibility lies with the Government or the rebel forces. The Foreign Minister's office today issued a communique **(SOUND FADES, PICTURE OF ROD INTERVIEWING VARIOUS PEOPLE CONTINUES DURING THE NEXT SCENE.)**

(BARBARA MACNAIR'S SURGERY)

BARBARA: I can't say I'm particularly sorry.

ROD: I didn't think you would be.

BARBARA: What can I do for you?

ROD: You're aware of the new allegations...

BARBARA: By the Medical Board, yes. They seem to be determined this time.

ROD: You had no control groups in the experiments... Scientifically...

BARBARA: Yes, scientifically. Control groups, yes. Even the words are loaded. We control. What is it we control? Other people. Let us cut the jargon and look at what it really means. This is what it means. You give half the group what you believe to be right, to the other half, you either give nothing, or placebos. To make it more scientific, you make it double-blind. That means even you don't know whom you're giving the treatment until the results are at hand. Very scientific. You know who was the most impeccable medical scientist? Dr Mengele. He could not be faulted for his scientific methodology. Is that what we want? What happened to respect for human life, to compassion? What happens to the ones you deny the treatment? Forget about Traxon. That's a trivial drug anyway. But let's assume there's a new drug that you think might cure AIDS. You only give it to half the group. You condemn the other half to death.

ROD: But with that new drug, what if it has serious side effects? What if the cure is worse than the disease?

BARBARA: You tell them and let them decide. True freedom is the freedom to make mistakes, especially silly ones.

ROD: All of them would want it, if it gives them any hope.

BARBARA: So? Let them have it. Who am I to play God and say for the sake of science, I'm going to deny you this chance to survive?

ROD: That is getting into dangerous territory, if we have no regard for science.

BARBARA: We *are* in dangerous territory, and it's not because we have no regard for science, but because we see people as numbers, numbers on computers, numbers in a control group, it's because we have no regard for people as individuals. We want to control them. We want to control their lives, every little thing that they do. I'll give you a trivial example. Do you remember the old trains? They had swivel seats. You could just fling the seat and choose which way you wanted to sit, which direction you

wanted to face. The new trains... The seats... You must have noticed... Half the seats face one way, the other half face the other way, and they're fixed. I guess it's better than all of them facing one way, but my point is, the choices are reduced. If there's only one seat empty, and it faces a certain way, you can't change it. Whereas before, you could. You can't open windows these days, because our wonderful technology has given us air-conditioning. So, with every new technology, we've reduced the choices. Because it is more expensive to have swivel seats, and it doesn't look neat, opening windows messes up the air-conditioning. It's messy. Life is messy, my dear, you should see our insides. Come to the theatre one day if you can take it, I'll show you. Life is messy and that's what makes it so wonderful.

ROD: (COLLECTS HIMSELF) You know your Caesarean sections are 40 percent above the national average?

BARBARA: Yes.

ROD: Yes you know or yes they are?

BARBARA: Very incisive.

ROD: You are in serious trouble this time.

BARBARA: Compared to the trouble Penny is in, this is like a ride on the big dipper. I'll come up again.

ROD: Not according to the Medical Board.

BARBARA: Those fuddy duddies wouldn't be on the board if they had anything better to do, or if they were any good for something worthwhile.

ROD: They're the ones to decide your future.

BARBARA: What about Penny's future?

ROD: I'm handling this story now.

BARBARA: Story. They're all stories for you, aren't they? The Barbara MacNair story, the homelessness story, the famine story, the race-fixing story...

ROD: It's just the jargon. I'm sure you have your own jargon.

BARBARA: Have you heard anything about Penny?

ROD: No. About the Caesarean stats...

BARBARA: I know the Prime Minister.

ROD: You know Okufu?

(A LONG SILENCE)

BARBARA: Sam. He was my student.

ROD: I knew he was educated here, but...

BARBARA: He wasn't particularly bright but he was a very pleasant young man; he comes from a good family. With the tertiary fees, he'd have to be, wouldn't he? He's a doctor now. It's been, what, fifteen years. If you said at the time he'd become his country's Prime Minister, I'd laugh at you. All I hoped was that he'd become a good, caring doctor.

ROD: You know the atrocities that have been going on there... since he came to power... Caring? He's certainly not that, no question.

BARBARA: On a personal level, it's different. I don't suppose he'd still be practising medicine now. But if he did, I'm sure he'd be as caring as the next one.

ROD: That's schizophrenic..

BARBARA: We all have it, Rodney. All of us are capable of the greatest caring as well as the most inhuman violence, sometimes on the same day, sometimes simultaneously.

ROD: And you don't see anything wrong with that...

BARBARA: Wrong? Absolutely not. **(PAUSES)** Joke? **(ROD DOESN'T GET IT.)** There is no absolute wrong my dear. Absolutely not. All of us are faced with moral choices every day, and we don't always act the right way, or even the way we think we should. It could be offering your seat to an elderly woman on the bus. Your feet might be hurting that day, and you don't. Another day you might. We have the best and the worst in us all, believe me. I say I did what I did because I cared for my patients. I

didn't want them to bear deformed kids. I wasn't lying. Until Traxon, that was easy, there was no conflict. My moral choice was for the good of the women, as well as being right, scientifically, whatever that means. Now the Medical Board says the whole thing is not scientific, it's not right. I've still done the moral thing, but not in the accepted way. I have no misgivings.

ROD: (THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR HIM) About the Prime Minister...

BARBARA: Oh yes. We don't know if it's the Government people holding Penny hostage or the rebels... you said.

ROD: It looks like the Government.

BARBARA: I'll talk to Sam... The Prime Minister. If it is his men, he'll have Penny released, I'm sure.

ROD: That'd be great.

BARBARA: You've destroyed my reputation, and I can't say Penny is blameless, either, but...

ROD: I couldn't possibly...

BARBARA: I'm not asking for anything in return. It just makes me feel smug that I can still do the right thing for people who've harmed me so much. And I don't even have to work hard at it. One international phone call is very cheap for the inner glow that I get in return. I wouldn't do it for Peter, though, not for him. I still have old-fashioned concepts like betrayal.

ROD: Thank you.

BARBARA: I don't know if I'd do it for you, but I like Penny.

(COMMERCIALS START ON TV AS AMINA IS HEARD, SOUND OF THE COMMERCIALS FADES OUT, RATHER LIKE BEING MUFFLED BY AMINA'S SINGING.)

AMINA: (ROCKING HER DEAD BABY) Oh lele oh lele, my baby oh leleleee

Like a creek run dry, run dry, oh the light in your eye

My heart's a creek run dry, oh baby, my pretty baby

Let me die baby, open your eyes, oh leleleee

The apple of my eye, oh my baby, oh my little girl

Wake up baby, oh brown eyed baby, oh leleleee

Let me die, be blind, be damned, oh baby, oh baby

Her mother's jewel, come back, oh baby, oh leleee

Let the soil take me, let the floods take me, oh baby

Her mother's soul, her mother's breath, oh lele, leleee

Take me back to the day before, oh baby, my baby

When I rocked you, oh leleeeee, when you were warm, leleee

Oh lele oh lele, my baby oh leleleee

(THE HOODED MAN ENTERS. AMINA, STILL WAILING, DOESN'T TAKE ANY NOTICE OF HIM.)

KHADIJA: Stop there. You bird-brained hoon. This is not your father's meadow.
Stop, I said, stop.

THE HOODED MAN: Get out of my way you old cunt. **(PUSHES KHADIJA TO THE GROUND. KHADIJA GETS HOLD OF A SHARP IMPLEMENT. AISHA COMES IN. HE GRABS HOLD OF AISHA. TO KHADIJA)** Move back! **(KHADIJA BACKS OFF)** Where's the goat?

AISHA: Don't take the goat, please!

THE HOODED MAN: I'm not taking it. **(TO KHADIJA)** Let the goat loose!

AISHA: No!

THE HOODED MAN: Haven't you missed your man? Don't you want him any more? You got another one, have you?

AISHA: Please!

KHADIJA: May the sow who bore you burn in hell! Man, you call himself, do you?
Not even man enough to show your face.

THE HOODED MAN: (TO KHADIJA) Shut up! Let the goat loose, or the girl
will get it.

KHADIJA: What do you want? Ismail is a mother's son, just like you are. What do
you want from him?

THE HOODED MAN: I thought maybe his woman might have missed him. The
goat!

KHADIJA: How much do they pay you? What's your price to kill your brothers,
huh? **(SHE MAKES A MOVE TOWARDS THE HOODED MAN.)**

THE HOODED MAN: Shut up! I have no brothers. The goat. **(HE STARTS
HURTING AISHA)**

AISHA: Don't! Mother Khadija, don't!

KHADIJA: Can't you see she's pregnant? Don't you have a wife, don't you have
any sisters? What kind of a man are you?

THE HOODED MAN: Go get the goat or the bastard will get it too. **(HE AIMS AT
AISHA'S BELLY.)**

KHADIJA: God damn you! God damn you, and your bosses and your Government,
may your seven generations to come burn in eternal hell! **(GOES OUT,
MUTTERING)**

AISHA: No!

THE HOODED MAN: (AFTER KHADIJA) I'm watching. I want to see the goat
run to the hills, or the girl gets it.

(AISHA COLLAPSES, CRYING)

THE HOODED MAN: Your people kill women and children, pregnant women and
babies. We're not like that. We are only after the bandits.

**(AISHA KEEPS CRYING. AMINA IS QUIET NOW, SHE IS TRANSFIXED
AND JUST KEEPS SWAYING.)**

THE HOODED MAN: What's wrong with her?

AISHA: The baby had the runs and...

AMINA: Oh lele oh lele, my baby oh leleleee

Like a creek run dry, run dry, oh the light in your eye

My heart's a creek run dry, oh baby, my pretty baby

Oh lele oh lele, my baby oh leleleee

THE HOODED MAN: (LOOKING OUT) There it goes. How it runs, eh? **(TO AISHA)** He comes at night, doesn't he? **(AISHA DOESN'T ANSWER)** We know. We've known all along. We thought maybe he'll give up, maybe for his wife, for his son... He doesn't care, does he? If I had a pretty wife like you... **(LOOKS AT AISHA)** Maybe I'll see you another time, eh? **(LAUGHS LASCIVIOUSLY)**

KHADIJA: (ENTERS, DEFEATED) Let the girl go, you bastard!

THE HOODED MAN: I was going anyway. I'll see you soon. See you granny.
(GOES OUT.)

(PENNY WITH BARBARA IN THE SURGERY.)

ROD: (ON TV) Our Africa correspondent Penny Caine is free after a three day ordeal. This and other stories today at noon on The World at Eight...
(COMMERCIALS ON TV)

BARBARA: Our society is still rather prudish Penny. But I am a doctor before everything else. It is my patients and their well-being that counts before anything else for me. You are?...

PENNY: Sorry?

BARBARA: How old are you?

(ROD IS TALKING TO THE THREE WOMEN.)

1.WOMAN: (TO ROD) I owe my life to her.

PENNY: Thirty seven.

BARBARA: And you haven't had a child?

PENNY: No.

BARBARA: A lot of women are putting it off these days, we all know that.
Biologically, late teens, early twenties is the ideal age for childbirth.

PENNY: Well, you know...

ROD: (TO 1. WOMAN): When was that?

1.WOMAN: Nineteen seventy two.

BARBARA: I know Penny. At that age, nineteen, twenty, the body recovers quite fast, it's still quite elastic. But after thirty five, especially if it's your first child...

PENNY: I thought these days, with the medical science..

BARBARA: Yes, the dangers are reduced dramatically. That's not what I'm talking about. The body doesn't know about medical science, unfortunately.

ROD: (ON TV) And also today, fresh allegations against Dr. Barbara MacNair. Was the Convalide saint really a scalpel-happy devil incarnate?...
(COMMERCIALS ON TV)

BARBARA: Do you know how many marriages are ruined because the woman's body doesn't go back to what it was?

PENNY: You're not conned by the male image of women, are you, the trim and taut... It's all a male construct, you know, a male conspiracy...

ROD: (TO 1. WOMAN) You had the operation in seventy two?

1.WOMAN: No, that was the year after, seventy three...

ROD: (ON TV) Back in seventy two, when Doctor MacNair was a young research assistant working for Doctor Smithson...

BARBARA: Biology is no male construct my dear, anatomy is no male construct. It is real. But, let us not get into that. That was not my point. But sexually, I believe a marriage has to be satisfying to both partners.

PENNY: Yes?

BARBARA: And if the woman gives birth after thirty-five, that is, a natural birth, the odds are that the body will not fully recover, and the man is put in this awkward position of not enjoying sex as much as before, but not being able to do anything about it. Usually, it is all the way downhill from there. They don't even admit it to themselves, they present with all sorts of other reasons, complaints...

PENNY: Surely, it is not just sex...

BARBARA: Of course not. But if sex is no good, everything else falls apart. The man withdraws, the woman feels unwanted, lets go, becomes even less desirable, whereas...

PENNY: Whereas?....

BARBARA: A Caesarean section circumvents this problem. But our medical profession is unfortunately too prudish, too squeamish to even recognise the problem.

ROD: (ON TV) This comes fresh on the heels of the Medical Board accusing Doctor MacNair of rotting the system...

1.WOMAN: I used to go for regular check-ups...

PENNY: It is still dominated by the men...

BARBARA: I know. It is stupid, isn't it? Typical male behaviour. They sweep it under the carpet although it directly affects men's sexual life, too...

PENNY: So, your Caesarean sections...

ROD: (ON TV) Doctor MacNair has not denied so far, that she had been performing Caesarean sections far in excess...

BARBARA: I know it is higher than the national average.

Actually, they've got it wrong. The precise figure is 62 percent. To me this only proves the others are not doing their job properly.

PENNY: The fees...

BARBARA: Look Penny, I am rich, I have investments. If I stopped working today

I'd live comfortably till I die. I don't care about the higher payments for Caesarean sections...

PENNY: The accusation...

ROD: (ON TV) ... and a Caesarean section costs you, the tax-payer twice as much...

1.WOMAN: Doctor MacNair diagnosed me as having cervical cancer...

ROD: Those days, radical surgery...

BARBARA: If money is important for you , you tend to think it is as important for other people. It's usually people who have little money, who think everything is caused by greed, that money is the only reason one does things...

ROD: (ON TV) The financial incentive...

PENNY: The motive for financial gain...

BARBARA: Is there, I know, but believe me, that is not the reason. Now, the Medical Board is going to try to use this to prove that I am a greedy, rotten person. They'll probably try to strike me off. And they might well succeed. I just wanted you to know the real story, the real reason.

1.WOMAN: I had the operation. Doctor MacNair was wonderful. I never had any trouble...

PENNY: Why?

BARBARA: I know your secret Penny. I know what happened in Africa.

ROD: But your friend?...

PENNY: What do you mean?

BARBARA: Sam told me. President Okufu.

PENNY: I...

ROD: (ON TV) The new allegations concern the work done by the late Doctor Smithson at the time, with Barbara MacNair's assistance...

1.WOMAN: Yes, Susan...

ROD: Tell us what happened to Susan.

BARBARA: We all do things we don't want to remember, let alone acknowledge.
Your secret is safe with me.

1.WOMAN: We were next-door neighbours. Very close. We used to for check-ups together.

ROD: (ON TV) Doctor Smithson had this theory that only about half the patients who presented with the symptoms of cervical cancer...

ROD: And?

PENNY: What do you want?

BARBARA: I want to share *my* secret with you. I know it will be safe with you. It's only fair. It's been ages, even before the Convalide affair...

PENNY: Don't tell me.

1.WOMAN: Susan died in seventy three. Nobody really said it straight, but...

BARBARA: You didn't choose to share your secret with me, Penny, but I want to tell you mine. Perhaps you'll take a bit more time judging me this time.

ROD: (ON TV) You must be the judge...

ROD: She had cervical cancer...

1.WOMAN: I believe so.

PENNY: I never...

ROD: ...which wasn't picked up...

BARBARA: I was working with Professor Smithson at the time. He had this theory that half the patients who presented with cervical cancer symptoms did not in fact have cancer.

ROD: (ON TV) Doctor Smithson did nothing for half his patients who presented with exactly the same symptoms...

BARBARA: So he conducted this experiment. I helped him. He was very methodical, old Professor Smithson. We had our control group. Half the women who presented with the symptoms were treated. The other half?

That was the control group.

ROD: (ON TV)...that was the control group...

BARBARA: We did nothing for those women. And he turned out to be right. Some of them didn't really have cancer, although the symptoms were identical, but the others... There were thirteen women who died Penny, because we refused them treatment, and to refuse treatment, we lied.

1.WOMAN: I believe Susan was not told she had...

BARBARA: We told them they had nothing to worry about. I lied. Oh, I justified it to myself saying, 'we know the symptoms do not mean they have it, so I'm not really lying'.

ROD: (ON TV) ...and, as a result, thirteen women died over five years...

BARBARA: That was cold comfort when those women died. You know what happened to the esteemed Professor? Nothing. It was all above board. It was all very scientific.

1.WOMAN: Susan died the next year.

BARBARA: He had a theory and he went about proving it the scientific way.

ROD: ...and Doctor MacNair was working with Doctor Smithson at the time...

ROD: (ON TV) Surely, the responsibility lies squarely...

BARBARA: And I was part of that deception, those... murders.

1.WOMAN: She'd been wonderful to me. That's why, after all these years...

BARBARA: Perhaps you can understand why I did what I did a bit better now.

ROD: Thank you for your time.

PENNY: I thought he was on the other side... A guerilla...

ROD: (ON TV) It appears that the Convalide hero has a case to answer...

BARBARA: Yes, I know.

(AFRICA. AISHA IS IN A STATE OF TOTAL PANIC, AMINA TRIES TO

COMFORT HER.)

AISHA: They'll kill him. They'll kill my man, the father of my son. Amina, sister...

AMINA: Shush, shush... Ismail is smart, my brother is smart, he'll figure it out...

AISHA: I'll never see him again, my Ismail, my man...

AMINA: Shush sister, shush, shush...

AISHA: (MAKES FOR THE ROAD, AMINA HOLDS HER BACK) Let me go...

(KHADIJA COMES IN AND STARTS POUNDING SOMETHING IN THE MORTAR.)

AMINA: He'll figure out a way. Think of your son, think of the baby...

AISHA: (CRIES OUT) Don't come Ismail. Don't come and see your son Ismail. I love you. Don't see the goat, don't see me, don't see your son, don't come! Ismail! **(COLLAPSES, AMINA WITH HER. SHE'S HAD A MISCARRIAGE.)** My man...

AMINA: (LOOKS AT THE BLOOD IN HER HAND) Khadija, mother Khadija, she's bleeding to death, mother Khadija, some dog's ear, I beg you...

(AISHA PASSES OUT. KHADIJA TAKES SOME STUFF OUT OF THE MORTAR AND BRINGS IT TO AISHA)

KHADIJA: Here, bride, here, you'll be all right, here... You're young, you'll have another son, you'll have many more sons. Here, here...

AMINA: Shush sister, shush, shush...

(PENNY AND ROD AT THE BISTRO.)

PENNY: This is the last straw mate, the last bloody straw. How dare you?

ROD: You mean I should have suppressed it?

PENNY: You know what I bloody mean. That thing with Smithson was all above board...

ROD: I know...

PENNY: ...and you still...

ROD: The viewers have a right to know.

PENNY: And you decide that?

ROD: I cleared it with Andrew. This is an open society, mate, I think you've been in Africa too long...

PENNY: Don't you fucking patronise me. That was my story. You said... You bloody well know who's been carrying this show. Andrew couldn't be bothered anymore, and you...

ROD: You were away...

PENNY: Sunbathing in Tahiti...

ROD: The ratings have been...

PENNY: Fuck your ratings!

ROD: You think you'd get your contract without those ratings, mate, get real! You earn a whole lot damn more than the bloody Prime Minister! Who'd pay you that sort of dough without those ratings?

PENNY: I know what I'm bloody worth. You've been riding on my back all these years, I've had enough, enough of you, your ratings, your...

ROD: On your back...

PENNY: Don't you have any scruples, any... morality, anything... Answer me!

ROD: Don't you question me, mate. How many times... How many times have I fixed things up for you, how many times... And it's always, 'we mustn't hurt Penny's feelings, we mustn't fracture her oh-so-very fragile-ego' stuff. No more, mate. It's finished. That's all in the past. If you're in the game, you play by the same rules. Don't you tell me you don't like the rules. They're the same as they've always been. If you can't take the heat, get out of the fucking box.

PENNY: And leave it to jelly-fish like you?

ROD: I interviewed the Transport Minister, mate, so don't you think calling me names will unnerve me. You've never done the Africa story as you've

told me, have you? The breakdown of the aid dollar... You said you had that angle...

PENNY: I thought that could effect the donations... If people thought some of the money... I thought...

ROD: You thought... Let me tell you something for old times' sake, mate. We're not judges, we have no right to a conscience when we're in that box. The judges are out there, your little middle class family with 2 point 2 kids, not us. That is democracy. We show, that's all we do. If that's not enough for Penny-bloody-preacher-Caine, maybe she should go out and start social work or something.

PENNY: You!...

ROD: Better still, why not go and work as a volunteer in Africa? A bit tough, huh, over there? It's much better that you sit here and pontificate, sit in judgement of people like Andrew, people like me. So, don't you dare question me. When you have so much to answer yourself. Don't you dare, mate.

PENNY: So much to answer?... I got bloody kidnapped...

ROD: And I was stupid enough to save you.

PENNY: You?

ROD: How else d'you think you got out, huh?

PENNY: Not thanks to you!

ROD: I have contacts.

PENNY: Don't give me that bullshit, mate. I know how I got out and that's no thanks to you.

ROD: Come back to the real world, mate, where deals are made, where contacts work, where influences and favours...

PENNY: Just like in the movies...

ROD: Or TV.

PENNY: I'm out, mate, I've had more than a gutful of you and your bloody

program...

ROD: You got a better offer, have you?

PENNY: God, you're low life. No, I haven't got a better offer. Political Review had made me an offer last year... Half of what I get now. They said I could take it any time...

ROD: Political bloody Review. No one ever reads that. Your kind of people buy it to be seen with it, it's like a Louis Vuitton handbag. You get it for the label.

PENNY: You would.

ROD: Oh, fuck off!

PENNY: I'll go and get myself fumigated.

ROD: Don't come back!

(BARBARA MACNAIR'S SURGERY. SHE'S PACKING UP HER THINGS. NOELENE'S OUTSIDE WITH THE PHONE. THE PHONE RINGS.)

BARBARA: Yes? What do you mean? Doesn't anyone do their jobs properly any more? I said the seventeenth... Of course this month... Oh, you did, did you? No I can't on the fifteenth, that's tomorrow... I have things to do... I don't care about the discount... I said the seventeenth... No, tomorrow I have a TV interview, I can't change it. You'll try. Right. That's in August. You got that right. Amazing. We're in May. June, July, August. Right. End of August. You told me I could fly to the California straight from Tahiti. I don't want a stop-over, and I'm not interested in your special deal. Right. I'll fax you the details again. I want it precisely as I said. No I'll book my own in Tahiti. You fax back to confirm, otherwise ... Fine. Right.

(AFRICA. DUSK. AISHA IS LYING ON A BLANKET. SHE IS NO LONGER PREGNANT AND LOOKS RATHER GAUNT. AMINA IS DISHEVELLED, KHADIJA IS POUNDING SOMETHING IN THE MORTAR. ALL THREE ARE TENSE.)

AISHA: That was...

KHADIJA: No, my girl, that was no gun.

AISHA: There was...

KHADIJA: He won't come. He's stupid, but not that stupid. Amina, come, help me!

(AMINA GOES TO KHADIJA, RATHER LIKE SLEEPWALKING. AS KHADIJA WAS ABOUT TO TELL HER SOMETHING, SHE TURNS BACK AND GOES AWAY.)

AISHA: I'll do it, Mother Khadija.

KHADIJA: No, you rest. You... rest.

(A LONG SILENCE, ONLY BROKEN BY KHADIJA'S POUNDING.)

AISHA: (JUMPS UP) That's him, that's Ismail.

KHADIJA: I'll look. **(GOES OUT)**

(AMINA COMES, AND STARTS PLAITING AISHA'S HAIR.)

AMINA: My baby, leleleee...

KHADIJA: (COMES BACK IN) No. Must have been a rat or something. **(GOES BACK TO HER POUNDING.)**

(A LONGISH SILENCE. IT GETS DARKER.)

AISHA: He's not coming. He's never this late.

KHADIJA: I told you.

AISHA: He's not coming, Mother Khadija, he's safe, he's safe.

AMINA: My pretty, pretty baby, o leleee...

(KHADIJA GOES AND TUCKS THE OTHER TWO IN, KISSES THEM BOTH AND LIES DOWN BESIDE THEM.)

KHADIJA: Good night. Sleep tight. We have a lot of work to do tomorrow.
Enough of this laziness.

(PENNY AT A DESK, WRITING. BARBARA IS FINISHING HER PACKING

UP.)

BARBARA: (ON TV)... it has been quite an ordeal for me. I am, of course, very disturbed by the Medical Board's decision. I'll leave it to my patients to pass the final judgement on me. I'm going to have a break for a few months. Then, perhaps, my memoirs... I've been planning to write my memoirs for some time now. I am not a fraud and I think the truth will out eventually. I just want to thank all my colleagues, who over the last years, especially recently... **(FADE OUT.)**

PENNY: (WRITING) The fault... No... the responsibility.. No, the onus... The onus is really on the developed countries... **(THE PHONE RINGS)** Helen! Lovely! Perfect timing, mate. My writing's been so rusty, I've really been agonising... I desperately need a break. Sure... Eight it is... The bistro... You're kidding. Does he know I'm coming? Well, you never know... Thanks, Helen, see you soon... **(GETS UP, STARTS GETTING READY, TIDIES HER HAIR, PUTS ON MAKE-UP.)**

BARBARA: (HAS FINISHED HER PACKING UP, SHE COMES OUT WITH A CARDBOARD BOX, PUTS THE BOX ON NOELENE'S DESK.) I didn't know what to get you Noelene. It's been a long time... Ten, eleven years...**(TAKES OUT A SMALL GIFT-WRAPPED PARCEL FROM THE BOX)** I hope you like it. It's a bit difficult really, not knowing your taste. All the best. **(SHE PUTS THE GIFT ON NOELENE'S DESK, TAKES THE CARDBOARD BOX, AS SHE IS ABOUT TO GO OUT, AT THE SAME TIME AS PENNY IS GOING OUT...)**

(AFRICA. THE GUNMAN ENTERS, CARRYING A MACHINE-GUN AND SHOOTS AND KILLS ALL THREE WOMEN, I.E. KHADIJA, AMINA AND AISHA WHO HAD BEEN LYING ON THE GROUND, SLEEPING.)

(FADE OUT)

FOOTNOTES:

1What's she saying?

2She wants to talk with you, that's all.

3She says she is pleased to meet you

4Me, too.

5Ask her why she's here, is she a television person.

6What's more, she's a very famous television person.

7Does she want coffee, ask her.

8Yes.

9Baby. She's asking where the father is.

10No father, he's gone.

11Thanks.

12He knows, mother Khadija, he knows, it is soon.

13Who knows what, tell us, so we'll know too.

14Mind your own business, you dumbo!

15Hello.

16Coffee?

17No, thank you.

18Smart woman, look she's learnt quickly.

19Baby.

20Good, good, thanks.

21Is there fighting, she asks.

22Soon...

23Nothing. There's nothing. We're all all right.

24Ismail says...

25Dumbo! You retarded...

26The girl's pregnant mother, don't!

27I'll tell Ismail, you'll see, you old hag!

28Ismail, my Ismail!

29I'll tell Ismail so that he can tell Ashraf to get rid of this old hag! She's for the Government, I'll tell him, she's for Okufu!

30Let me make coffee.

31Documents.

Gundogdu Gencer

THE WORLD AT EIGHT



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