

THE DICTATOR

By Issam Mahfouz

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The set: A room which is empty except for some broken pieces of furniture and utensils on a table in the corner, an old ladder, a mirror with a few pieces of glass at the edge of the frame and a telephone with a cord that is cut.

(THE GENERAL is sitting in a chair alone with his eyes on the door.)

THE GENERAL: *(Calling out in a voice that sounds tired, as if he has been calling for a long time.)* Saadoun... Saadoun... Saadoun... When I get my hands on you, I'm going to hang you by your legs. *(Silence.)* How dare you run away from me? Aren't you afraid? The whole world is afraid of me. If the world still exists, it exists because of me. It's afraid because of me, Saadoun. Saadoun... *(The door opens suddenly and SAADOUN enters carrying a pair of boots.)*

SAADOUN: Yes, my General. *(THE GENERAL jumps out of his chair and advances toward SAADOUN.)*

THE GENERAL: *(Softly.)* Where were you, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: I bought you the boots.

THE GENERAL: What took you so long?

SAADOUN: Look, boots fit for a king.

THE GENERAL: Fit for a king?

SAADOUN: Sorry, for a general.

THE GENERAL: Good for you, Saadoun. You brought salvation to the world, you brought the boots.

SAADOUN: Long live the General. *(He kneels.)* Give me your foot *(He takes THE GENERAL's right foot.)*

THE GENERAL: *(Shouts.)* The right, Saadoun? *(He pulls his right foot away and extends his left.)* One should always start with the left. *(SAADOUN puts THE GENERAL's left foot in the boot.)*

SAADOUN: Does it fit?

THE GENERAL: It's hard.

SAADOUN: Of course it's hard. You're hard. Give me your other foot. *(SAADOUN puts the other boot on the right foot.)*

SAADOUN: How's that?

THE GENERAL: Ouch! My toe hurts. *(He kicks SAADOUN onto the ground. He looks at the boot.)* Shine it, Saadoun. *(SAADOUN gets up and kneels over the boots, shining them with his sleeve.)*

THE GENERAL: Can you see yourself in them?

SAADOUN: Yes, my General. I see my face pale with hunger. We haven't eaten for two days. Instead of buying bread we bought boots.

THE GENERAL: Freedom is more important than bread.

SAADOUN: What freedom? If one of us leaves, the other one has to stay here as a hostage. We haven't paid rent for two months. Instead of buying our freedom with the two piasters your mother sent, we bought boots.

THE GENERAL: One needs boots to knock on the doors of freedom.

SAADOUN: I understand, my friend.

THE GENERAL: Your friend?

SAADOUN: My master!

THE GENERAL: Your master?

SAADOUN: My boss!

THE GENERAL: Your boss?

SAADOUN: *(Thinking.)* My General.

THE GENERAL: Shine my boots. *(SAADOUN kneels and shines the boots with his sleeve. The sound of a cannon can be heard.)*

THE GENERAL: *(Rises suddenly.)* Did you hear that?

SAADOUN: I did.

THE GENERAL: A cannon.

SAADOUN: A long way off.

THE GENERAL: That's a cannon. A cannon. The whole world heard it.

SAADOUN: The world's hard of hearing, my General.

THE GENERAL: Especially your friends.

SAADOUN: I have no friends. You're my only friend.

THE GENERAL: Don't get casual with me. Get up and hang the map on the wall.
(SAADOUN hangs the map on the wall in a place he is apparently used to hanging it.)

THE GENERAL: How far have they advanced?

SAADOUN: The last we heard they were at the gates of Ashtar.

THE GENERAL: Mark it with a pin.

SAADOUN: I have no pins. *(THE GENERAL takes a pin off the collar of his jacket just as a tailor would. SAADOUN takes the pin and sticks it somewhere on the map.)*

SAADOUN: I've marked it.

THE GENERAL: Good for you. Mark all the states that have fallen. *(He gives SAADOUN a few pins.)*

SAADOUN: The State of Murjani *(He sticks a pin in.)* The State of Rihan. *(He sticks a pin in and hesitates.)*

THE GENERAL: You forgot the state of Ansar.

SAADOUN: The state of Ansar. *(He puts a pin in.)*

THE GENERAL: How many more?

SAADOUN: *(Counting.)* Four, plus the capital.

THE GENERAL: If the capital falls, all the other states will.

SAADOUN: Oh, if only the capital would fall, if only the capital would fall, my General.
(THE GENERAL walks toward the mirror. He looks at himself in the mirror.)

THE GENERAL: *(Suddenly.)* The cap. *(He looks at SAADOUN.)* The cap, Saadoun. Didn't you have anything left to buy the cap with?

SAADOUN: One lira.

THE GENERAL: Give it to me.

SAADOUN: I bought chocolate.

THE GENERAL: Chocolate? Hand it over. *(SAADOUN takes out a few pieces of chocolate from his pocket and gives them to THE GENERAL.)*

SAADOUN: Give me one.

THE GENERAL: No. That will teach you not to be late when I send you on a mission.

SAADOUN: I've learned my lesson.

THE GENERAL: And it will teach you not to take a nap every afternoon.

SAADOUN: Ah, sleep, how sweet sleep is, my General. Sleep. Last time was in front of the king's palace. There was a huge commotion, dancing and singing. The King's daughter appeared in the window. She saw me. I waved to her. She laughed. She disappeared and came back with a rope, a long rope knotted with flowers. I climbed the rope and was almost to the window. Then you shook me.

THE GENERAL: So that you'd answer the phone. It rang twice. You were asleep though your eyes were open. *(Suddenly.)* Did you search the room?

SAADOUN: Of course, as I do every day.

THE GENERAL: Your top button is shiny.

SAADOUN: Because I've been rubbing it a lot.

THE GENERAL: Maybe they switched a microphone for it at the cleaners.

SAADOUN: I haven't changed my shirt in two months.

THE GENERAL: Two months?

SAADOUN: Since the beginning of the coup.

THE GENERAL: The revolution.

SAADOUN: Sorry. The revolution.

THE GENERAL: What about the door?

SAADOUN: It's locked.

THE GENERAL: Open it and lock it again. (*SAADOUN opens the door and relocks it.*)

THE GENERAL: What about the window?

SAADOUN: Thank God, we don't have any windows.

THE GENERAL: The revolution is our only window.

SAADOUN: Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: So you believe in...

SAADOUN: The revolution?

THE GENERAL: No, the King. The King who deceived you.

SAADOUN: Deceived me?

THE GENERAL: Of course he deceived you. He deceived everybody. If people are hungry he throws cookies to them. If they're bored, radios, televisions, refrigerators and cars. He ties their hands with payments. And they think they're free, the dogs! Of course they're free. Free to bark, free to eat the leavings from the table. I came to save them, the dogs.

SAADOUN: You're a magician, boss.

THE GENERAL: Of course I'm a magician.

SAADOUN: In the *Thousand and One Nights* when the magician became angry with someone he changed him into a beast or vice versa.

THE GENERAL: Back to the *Thousand and One Nights* again.

SAADOUN: Its stories are beautiful, my General.

THE GENERAL: What a waste, the effort I spent on you, the time. (*Sternly.*) Saadoun, you're fired.

SAADOUN: Boss!

THE GENERAL: Your boss?

SAADOUN: My General.

THE GENERAL: You're fired, discharged from service. Take your stuff and leave. (*SAADOUN walks to the bag in which he keeps his things and puts it on his back. He walks toward the door, and then turns toward THE GENERAL.*)

SAADOUN: Don't desert me, my General. Did you forget that you saved me?

THE GENERAL: Of course I saved you.

SAADOUN: Then save me again, please save me! If you leave me they'll eat me alive.

THE GENERAL: Save you from whom?

SAADOUN: People.

THE GENERAL: Which people?

SAADOUN: All people.

THE GENERAL: Write their names for me.

SAADOUN: All of them?

THE GENERAL: All of them.

SAADOUN: Is that possible?

THE GENERAL: A nice game.

SAADOUN: Which game?

THE GENERAL: The game of names. Come, let's play it.

SAADOUN: How?

THE GENERAL: Say the first name that comes to your mind.

SAADOUN: Saadoun.

THE GENERAL: That's your name. Find a name of someone else.

SAADOUN: Nero.

THE GENERAL: Your names always rhyme with "hero." Change.

SAADOUN: Natus.

THE GENERAL: Is that a name?

SAADOUN: Gratus.

THE GENERAL: Bravo.

SAADOUN: Your turn.

THE GENERAL: (*Thinking.*) Pacificus.

SAADOUN: Beatus.

THE GENERAL: Aridus.

SAADOUN: Tractus.

THE GENERAL: Receptus.

SAADOUN: Lassus.

THE GENERAL: Taediosus.

SAADOUN: *(Yawning.)* Somnolentus. *(The phone rings. SAADOUN picks it up.)*

SAADOUN: Hello, this is the General's summer palace. Who? Masrour? Yes, *(to THE GENERAL.)* This is Masrour, my General. The rebels are tired because the siege has taken so long.

THE GENERAL: Tired? The bastards, the traitors! Do they think revolution is a game? The eyes of the world are watching them. Tell him to bribe them with whiskey. The King's palaces are full of whiskey, caviar and cigars.

SAADOUN: And dollars.

THE GENERAL: Don't embellish. Give him the message.

SAADOUN: *(On the phone.)* The King's palaces are full of whiskey, caviar and cigars.

THE GENERAL: And cars and television sets.

SAADOUN: And shirts and underwear. He hung up. Masrour hung up, my General.

THE GENERAL: You're fired. Get your stuff and leave. *(The same game, SAADOUN at the door with his bag.)*

SAADOUN: I'm your only servant.

THE GENERAL: My only servant? The world is 99.9 per cent full of servants.

SAADOUN: I served you loyally.

THE GENERAL: Discipline comes before loyalty. *(SAADOUN tries to open the door but then turns toward THE GENERAL.)*

SAADOUN: What about the telephone?

THE GENERAL: The telephone. Ah, yes, the telephone.

SAADOUN: This is the last time, my General. Forgive me. *(He approaches THE GENERAL and kisses his hand.)*

THE GENERAL: Oh, for shame. There's no need for that, Saadoun. *(He gives him his other hand and SAADOUN kisses it.)* I'm kind and humble.

SAADOUN: Just like the King.

THE GENERAL: The King? Do you think the King is kind and humble?

SAADOUN: That's what people say.

THE GENERAL: Have you met him?

SAADOUN: I've seen his picture.

THE GENERAL: How does he look?

SAADOUN: Not bad.

THE GENERAL: Like whom?

SAADOUN: Like you.

THE GENERAL: Stop kidding. Is he tall?

SAADOUN: Maybe.

THE GENERAL: What do you mean maybe? What about the picture?

SAADOUN: He was sitting in the picture.

THE GENERAL: Sitting? Where?

SAADOUN: In the middle. The Queen was standing, and his daughters were around him. The youngest girl was in his lap, and he was smiling,

THE GENERAL: How impolite. Did he have dimples?

SAADOUN: Dimples?

THE GENERAL: Have you forgotten?

SAADOUN: I spoke about dimples?

THE GENERAL: Yesterday.

SAADOUN: Maybe.

THE GENERAL: Maybe? Don't you remember?

SAADOUN: Of course, the dimples, dimples like yours.

THE GENERAL: God rest her soul, she used to love my dimples. (*Silence.*)

SAADOUN: Are you thirsty?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Hungry?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: It doesn't matter. We have nothing left to eat.

THE GENERAL: The boots.

SAADOUN: What about them?

THE GENERAL: Polish them.

SAADOUN: Yes, sir. *(He bends down in front of THE GENERAL's feet and spits on his boots to shine them. THE GENERAL kicks SAADOUN, making him fall on his back.)*

THE GENERAL: You spat on the boots?

SAADOUN: I spat to shine them.

THE GENERAL: On the boots, Saadoun? *(SAADOUN puts his bag on his back and walks toward the door.)*

THE GENERAL: And the revolution?

SAADOUN: That's right, the revolution. *(SAADOUN puts down his bag.)*

THE GENERAL: They're late. My men are late.

SAADOUN: Maybe he bought them.

THE GENERAL: Bought them?

SAADOUN: With cookies and chocolate.

THE GENERAL: Is it possible they sold me out for chocolate?

SAADOUN: They'd sell you out for a lot less, my General. Peter sold out the Messiah for supper.

THE GENERAL: Back to the Messiah!

SAADOUN: Thank God for your mother. If it weren't for her help from time to time we'd have died of hunger.

THE GENERAL: And the revolution would've ended.

SAADOUN: That would be the end of the world.

THE GENERAL: And I'd have had no boots.

SAADOUN: May God be praised for that.

THE GENERAL: What, my mother?

SAADOUN: No, the boots.

THE GENERAL: Imagine me appearing in front of my men without boots!

SAADOUN: That would be scandalous.

THE GENERAL: Especially since the King... *(The phone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(On the phone.)* Hello, Masrou. *(To the GENERAL)* Yes, the capital, my General, the capital has fallen and the tanks are in the palace grounds. Masrou wants to speak directly to you. *(THE GENERAL jumps up to take the phone but then he backs away.)* Go ahead, say something. *(Into the phone.)* The General is busy. Who am I? I'm his right hand. No, I don't lick his boots, I polish them. Hello. Hello. *(To the GENERAL)* Masrou hung up, my General.

THE GENERAL: (*Angry.*) Call him back.

SAADOUN: How? You know this telephone only receives calls.

THE GENERAL: He hung up. He really did that, the traitor?

SAADOUN: (*Happy.*) The capital fell, my General.

THE GENERAL: It's about time.

SAADOUN: Does that mean we won?

THE GENERAL: Of course we won. Did you ever doubt we would?

SAADOUN: Never, my General.

THE GENERAL: Bravo. Take a piece of chocolate. (*He throws SAADOUN a piece of chocolate and paces back and forth. He then stands in front of the mirror, looking at his own reflection.*)

SAADOUN: I'm happy, my General.

THE GENERAL: (*To himself.*) Can it be true?

SAADOUN: Of course it's true, my General. I heard it with my own ears.

THE GENERAL: It's true. He's my Massoud. I raised him myself.

SAADOUN: It's Masrou, my General, Masrou. Like the executioner in the *Thousand and One Nights*.

THE GENERAL: Who?

SAADOUN: His name is the same as the executioner of King Shahrayar.

THE GENERAL: Back to the *Thousand and One Nights*. (*SAADOUN picks up his bag and stands by the door waiting before THE GENERAL speaks.*) You're fired. Discharged. Pick up your stuff and leave. I can't stand you anymore.

SAADOUN: Do you need anything before I leave? (*THE GENERAL looks around.*)

THE GENERAL: The Marshal's baton, where's the Marshal's baton? (*SAADOUN puts his bag down on the floor and begins to search for the baton.*)

SAADOUN: Where did you last give your speech?

THE GENERAL: On the ladder. (*SAADOUN moves toward the ladder and finds the baton. He brings it to THE GENERAL who holds it in front of the mirror and begins to wave it.*)

THE GENERAL: Was the King taller than I am, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: Probably two inches taller. (*THE GENERAL tries to stand on his toes.*)

THE GENERAL: How do you know?

SAADOUN: From the picture. The picture of the King with the little girl sticking her tongue out.

THE GENERAL: Who was she sticking her tongue out at?

SAADOUN: Perhaps the photographer.

THE GENERAL: Why the photographer?

SAADOUN: Or the people.

THE GENERAL: Which people?

SAADOUN: The people at the photo shoot.

THE GENERAL: Were you among them?

SAADOUN: General!

THE GENERAL: Well, how did you know then that there were people at the photo shoot?

SAADOUN: I imagined it.

THE GENERAL: Your imagination is very accurate, Saadoun. Sticking out her tongue at people, he says. The daughter of a King. How shameful!

SAADOUN: She's young, my General, young and thoughtless.

THE GENERAL: Are you in love with her?

SAADOUN: Me, in love with the King's daughter? A wretch such as myself! I'm the General's servant. Long live the General.

THE GENERAL: Bravo. (*He gives SAADOUN a piece of chocolate.*)

THE GENERAL: And the King was laughing?

SAADOUN: He was smiling.

THE GENERAL: And?

SAADOUN: I'm tired.

THE GENERAL: Tired?

SAADOUN: Tired and sleepy.

THE GENERAL: The capital has fallen and the revolution has succeeded and you're sleepy. Saadoun, you're...

SAADOUN: (*Interrupting.*) Discharged from service, fired.

THE GENERAL: Saadoun!

SAADOUN: I thought...

THE GENERAL: Don't think.

SAADOUN: I meant.

THE GENERAL: Don't mean. Execute my orders. Mean what I mean. Think what I think. Understood?

SAADOUN: Understood.

THE GENERAL: Who's greater than I am?

SAADOUN: No one, my General.

THE GENERAL: Who's taller than I am? (*He stands on his toes.*)

SAADOUN: No one, my General.

THE GENERAL: Who suffered more than I did?

SAADOUN: I did, my General.

THE GENERAL: That's correct. Bring a pen and paper. (*SAADOUN brings a pen and paper. He squats on his heels and puts the paper on a piece of cardboard between his knees. THE GENERAL climbs two steps up on the ladder.*)

THE GENERAL: Declaration number one. Write!

SAADOUN: (*Writing.*) Declaration number one.

THE GENERAL: Fellow citizens, wretched of this new world.

SAADOUN: Wretched of this new world.

THE GENERAL: You who seek salvation.

SAADOUN: You from whom salvation is sought.

THE GENERAL: You who think about life.

SAADOUN: You who don't think.

THE GENERAL: You who do that of which you do not speak.

SAADOUN: You who speak of that which you do not do.

THE GENERAL: You who've toiled endlessly for nothing.

SAADOUN: Nothing.

THE GENERAL: (*Suddenly.*) Saadoun, your words are different from mine.

SAADOUN: No, my General, your words are my words.

THE GENERAL: Bravo! Write! You who reap the sins of your fathers.

SAADOUN: Reap and reap and reap.

THE GENERAL: You who dine on your fathers' acceptance.

SAADOUN: And it sticks in your craw.

THE GENERAL: You who drink your fathers' illusions.

SAADOUN: They stick in your craw.

THE GENERAL: You who die for the King.

SAADOUN: You who die.

THE GENERAL: You who are deceived, miserable and wretched, my friends and loved ones.
(The phone rings. SAADOUN rushes to pick up the receiver.)

SAADOUN: Hello! Who? Masrour! *(To THE GENERAL.)* It's Masrour, my General.

THE GENERAL: Ask him about the King.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Where's the King, Masrour? Yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* Masrour says the King has fled, my General.

THE GENERAL: Tell them to rip the King's pictures from the walls, the squares, the houses, the shops, the public and private places.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Rip the King's pictures from everywhere. Yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* Masrour says the orders were given and the pictures were seized, my General, but they were put up again. They seized them again, but they were put up once again. They would rip them down, but the pictures would reappear like magic until finally the soldiers started to cry.

THE GENERAL: Forget about magic. Put a soldier in front of every house and tell him to do battle with the pictures and go find the King.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Attack the pictures. Go find the King. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. *(SAADOUN hangs up. THE GENERAL paces nervously. He stands in front of the mirror.)*

THE GENERAL: Pictures! The people, those dogs, they love pictures.

SAADOUN: *(Approaches THE GENERAL.)* Speaking of pictures, your image in the mirror is wonderful, my General.

THE GENERAL: *(Rises suddenly, dismayed.)* The most dangerous thing in the world is pictures. Where are we with the declaration? *(SAADOUN goes back to his papers.)*

SAADOUN: *(He reads.)* Friends, loved ones!

THE GENERAL: Tear up the paper. The declaration needs to be tougher.

SAADOUN: Why not just start from "Friends, loved ones"?

THE GENERAL: No. Being casual from the beginning is a dangerous thing.

SAADOUN: That's a good strategy.

THE GENERAL: It's an old strategy.

SAADOUN: Alright, why don't we just flip the sentence around: "Loved ones, friends."

THE GENERAL: Never begin with “love.”

SAADOUN: But had it not been for our love of the world...

THE GENERAL: (*He interrupts.*) Love? Of course, love. But what matters is how you express yourself.

SAADOUN: All those who changed the world showed love.

THE GENERAL: The world changed more than it should have, Saadoun. Write! (*SAADOUN prepares to write. The telephone rings.*)

SAADOUN: (*On the phone.*) Hello, Masrou... Yes... (*To THE GENERAL.*) Masrou is awaiting orders, my General.

THE GENERAL: Decree number one: One color and cut of clothes for everyone, women and men.

SAADOUN: Which color? Red, my General?

THE GENERAL: No. Red is passé.

SAADOUN: What about black?

THE GENERAL: I'm against black.

SAADOUN: Yellow?

THE GENERAL: It's the color of disease.

SAADOUN: Blue?

THE GENERAL: The color of the heavens! I'm a general, Saadoun.

SAADOUN: Purple, my General. Purple.

THE GENERAL: Purple! Excellent. Purple.

SAADOUN: Decree number one: Make purple a universal color for everyone.

THE GENERAL: Decree number two: Nationalize emotions for the good of the state.

SAADOUN: Nationalize emotions for the good of the state.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution.

SAADOUN: Long live the revolution. (*SAADOUN hangs up.*)

THE GENERAL: The idea of purple was wonderful. How did you come up with it?

SAADOUN: I remembered the color of the dress of the King's little girl.

THE GENERAL: Ah, women. They're the source of evil in the world. Money and women. We should make that universal...

SAADOUN: (*Interrupting.*) You apparently haven't experienced love, my General.

THE GENERAL: Love! You say love. If I asked you what the cause of people's misery is, Saadoun, what would you answer?

SAADOUN: Poverty perhaps.

THE GENERAL: I've known many who were rich and miserable.

SAADOUN: Freedom?

THE GENERAL: I've known many who were free and miserable.

SAADOUN: Then you tell me.

THE GENERAL: The reason is... *(He points to his heart.)*

SAADOUN: The heart? *(The telephone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hello... Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* It's Masrou, my General. They captured the royal family.

THE GENERAL: And the King?

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* And the King? Yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* He's escaped, my General. It's as if the earth split open and swallowed him.

THE GENERAL: Turn the earth upside down and find him.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Turn the earth... Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* Masrou says it's not a good time to turn the earth, my General, because the crops haven't been harvested yet.

THE GENERAL: Then turn the season.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Turn the season. Long live the revolution. *(He hangs up.)*

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. Where were we?

SAADOUN: Speaking of love, my General.

THE GENERAL: Love... *(The telephone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hello... Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* Masrou is asking for instructions about members of the government and the prime minister.

THE GENERAL: Hang him.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hang him... Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* On what charge, my General?

THE GENERAL: On the charge of governing.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* On the charge of governing. Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* And the finance minister?

THE GENERAL: On financial charges.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* On financial charges... Yes... *(To THE GENERAL.)* And the secretary of justice, my General?

THE GENERAL: On judicial charges.

SAADOUN: Why is justice a crime?

THE GENERAL: I'm not discussing it.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) No discussion. Hang him on judicial charges. (*To THE GENERAL.*) The communications minister?

THE GENERAL: Hang him for communications.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hang him for communications. (*To THE GENERAL.*) The minister of education?

THE GENERAL: Hang all the ministers for communications.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hang all the ministers for communications. Yes. (*To THE GENERAL.*) What about the members of parliament, my General?

THE GENERAL: Have them issue a proclamation unanimously supporting the revolution.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Tell them they will unanimously support the revolution.

THE GENERAL: And the King. They must arrest the King.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Don't forget about the King! Long live the revolution. (*SAADOUN hangs up.*)

SAADOUN: The King. The King.

THE GENERAL: It's not time for the King yet.

SAADOUN: Ah, time, time. I always imagined time as a monster with canine teeth as big as a minaret who eats a thousand men for breakfast and two thousand for supper.

THE GENERAL: Why two thousand for supper?

SAADOUN: A heavy supper is good for sleep. When I find it difficult to sleep, my General... (*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hello, yes. (*To THE GENERAL.*) It's Masrouf, my General. The members of parliament support the revolution by a vast majority, all except one.

THE GENERAL: I said unanimously and I mean unanimously. Seize the parliament, arrest all of them.

SAADOUN: But, my General, it's only one vote.

THE GENERAL: That one vote is more dangerous than all the rest. Close the House of Parliament.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) The General orders the seizure of Parliament.

THE GENERAL: Put the members in cages and parade them in the public square.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Put the members in cages in the public square.

THE GENERAL: Let the people have a good look at them.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Let the people have a look at them.

THE GENERAL: Obtain a declaration from the people saying they support the revolution.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* The unanimous support of the people is required. Long live the revolution.
(SAADOUN hangs up.)

SAADOUN: In cages, like animals. *(He laughs.)*

THE GENERAL: Political animals.

SAADOUN: Who?

THE GENERAL: Your adversaries.

SAADOUN: Our adversaries.

THE GENERAL: Predatory animals with big appetites and bad teeth. *(THE GENERAL goes to the mirror and looks at his good teeth. He smiles.)*

SAADOUN: Do you think what we did was right, my General?

THE GENERAL: *(Rising.)* If we're good people then our deeds are always right. Are we good people or bad people?

SAADOUN: Good people, of course.

THE GENERAL: Then our deeds are right. *(The phone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hello, yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* It's Masrour, my General. He says the political parties opposed...

THE GENERAL: Suspend all the parties. Arrest their members. Destroy their houses. Seize their thoughts.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Arrest the parties. Seize their thoughts.

THE GENERAL: Hang the leaders. Seize their thoughts.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hang the leaders of the parties. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. *(SAADOUN hangs up.)*

SAADOUN: What if they didn't do anything wrong?

THE GENERAL: Who?

SAADOUN: Your adversaries.

THE GENERAL: *(Correcting.)* Our adversaries. The loser is always wrong.

SAADOUN: That's true, but...

THE GENERAL: But what?

SAADOUN: The Nazarene...

THE GENERAL: Which Nazarene?

SAADOUN: The one who was crucified.

THE GENERAL: They crucified him.

SAADOUN: But he didn't lose.

THE GENERAL: If he comes back he will certainly lose, unless...

SAADOUN: Unless what?

THE GENERAL: Unless he disguises himself in a uniform like mine.

SAADOUN: Your uniform is our savior, my General. Allow me to kiss its buttons. *(SAADOUN rushes to kiss the brass buttons of THE GENERAL's uniform.)*

THE GENERAL: You missed the bottom button.

SAADOUN: The top and the bottom. Oh, we've done it, my General. I feel like I'm in a dream. Who would have believed it? We were lost.

THE GENERAL: You were lost.

SAADOUN: Here but not here.

THE GENERAL: Alive but not living.

SAADOUN: Believing, believing, believing.

THE GENERAL: You were waiting.

SAADOUN: Waiting for whom?

THE GENERAL: Your faithful savior.

SAADOUN: Whose savior?

THE GENERAL: The wretched.

SAADOUN: General, my General.

THE GENERAL: Either live with your head up high or die like a noble man among the waves of spears sword-wielding soldiers.

SAADOUN: Where are our soldiers?

THE GENERAL: In the field turning seasons and changing places.

SAADOUN: And man. *(The phone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hello, yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* Masrouf says the merchants are withholding their support.

THE GENERAL: Arrest the merchants. Eliminate trade. Decree number four: Adopt the barter system, exchange only the necessary.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Cancel commerce... Yes. (*To THE GENERAL.*) Masrouf says the newspapers...

THE GENERAL: End newspapers, arrest the journalists.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Cancel journalism... yes. (*To THE GENERAL.*) Masrouf says the writers and artists have distributed a statement of opposition.

THE GENERAL: Put them under house arrest. Destroy all means of literature and art.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Arrest the writers and artists.

THE GENERAL: Find the King.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Find the King. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. (*SAADOUN hangs up.*)

SAADOUN: I didn't object to any decree.

THE GENERAL: Good for you.

SAADOUN: And I won't object to any decree in the future.

THE GENERAL: Good for you.

SAADOUN: I do have an observation concerning the writers and artists.

THE GENERAL: Keep it to yourself.

SAADOUN: It's unfair.

THE GENERAL: Unfair? Tell me what the meaning of literature is, what's it for?

SAADOUN: To better the world.

THE GENERAL: Excellent! And when the world becomes better there'll be no need for writers. What is more important, literature or the world?

SAADOUN: The world, of course.

THE GENERAL: Apologize!

SAADOUN: I apologize.

THE GENERAL: Say you're sorry!

SAADOUN: I'm sorry, my General. I always ranked last in my class. Things were often unclear to me.

THE GENERAL: And now?

SAADOUN: Now it's worse.

THE GENERAL: Give me an example.

SAADOUN: Your desire to kill a king who no longer rules.

THE GENERAL: You'll know the reason when the revolution ends.

SAADOUN: When will that be?

THE GENERAL: When the King dies.

SAADOUN: And when does the King die?

THE GENERAL: When he appears before me.

SAADOUN: Before you?

THE GENERAL: Of course, before me.

SAADOUN: I don't understand.

THE GENERAL: His fate is connected to mine.

SAADOUN: What if he doesn't come to you?

THE GENERAL: I'll go to him.

SAADOUN: You can't even get out the door.

THE GENERAL: I can't, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: If you had the courage you'd have gone out, you would've heard.

THE GENERAL: Heard what?

SAADOUN: The people cursing.

THE GENERAL: Cursing the General?

SAADOUN: And the General's soldiers.

THE GENERAL: The dogs, the traitors. They're nothing but lackeys of the King. Why didn't you answer them?

SAADOUN: I did. I told them the General was here to save them. From whom, they asked. From the King, of course, I said. Then they laughed.

THE GENERAL: You should've said he's here to save you from yourselves.

SAADOUN: Themselves?

THE GENERAL: Themselves, of course, the bastards.

SAADOUN: I told them the General suffers so that they might live happily. Instead of thanking him they curse him.

THE GENERAL: Good for you, Saadoun. Here. *(He gives SAADOUN a piece of chocolate.)*

THE GENERAL: The people are never in awe of amazement itself. Prophets always complained about people. That's how the world is. *(He paces nervously.)* The King's daughter lacks nothing and yet she sticks her tongue out at the world.

SAADOUN: Maybe...

THE GENERAL: Shut up. (*SAADOUN continues to chew his chocolate.*) When she stuck out her tongue did her father laugh?

SAADOUN: No. The King only laughs for big things like the ministers' speeches. The little things make him cry like a child losing a ball or failing an exam. His tears fall... (*SAADOUN wipes his tears.*)

THE GENERAL: Excellent acting. I no longer know which is acting and which is true.

SAADOUN: True what?

THE GENERAL: The truth, Saadoun...

SAADOUN: The truth, the truth... is that you're the General and I'm your servant.

THE GENERAL: Good for you, Saadoun. Here. (*He gives SAADOUN a piece of chocolate.*)

THE GENERAL: If only he'd appear before me.

SAADOUN: On a silver platter.

THE GENERAL: You're full of riddles, Saadoun. I can no longer follow you. Are you with me or against me?

SAADOUN: I'm your servant and secretary.

THE GENERAL: Where are we in the declaration, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: I tore the paper up.

THE GENERAL: Fine. From the beginning. "Dear people..." (*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hello, yes. (*To THE GENERAL.*) It's Masrour, my General. The referendum was unanimous.

THE GENERAL: Of course unanimous. Did you hear that? Give orders to keep the people under close surveillance as long as the King is at large.

SAADOUN: All the people?

THE GENERAL: All the people.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hello, Masrour, here are orders from his highness the General, arrest the people. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. (*SAADOUN hangs up.*)

THE GENERAL: Write. Where were we?

SAADOUN: At "Dear people."

THE GENERAL: Of course, people. They're a mass with no color or shape. It takes the shape of leaders and influential ... (*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: Hello. Hello. Hello. (*He hangs up.*)

THE GENERAL: Who was that Saadoun? (*SAADOUN shakes his head—makes a gesture indicating he doesn't know.*)

THE GENERAL: Where were we?

SAADOUN: At “the people.”

THE GENERAL: In order to arrive at their future, the people first must go through their present.
(*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hello, Masrou. Why did you hang up, Masrou? Yes... Who, Mansour! Yes... (*To THE GENERAL.*) It's Mansour, my General. He says that because Masrou committed such terrible deeds against the revolution ...

THE GENERAL: (*Interrupting.*) Dispose of him.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) The General gave the order to kill him. Yes... He's already been killed?

THE GENERAL: Bravo, Mansour. Ask him about the King.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) The General wants information about the King. Yes... The King was seen in the suburbs of Mizrara walking and reading, my General.

THE GENERAL: Capture him.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Capture him. Long live the revolution. (*He hangs up.*)

THE GENERAL: Where were we?

SAADOUN: At “the people”...

THE GENERAL: Speaking of the people, Saadoun... (*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Hello, Mansour ... Yes, Mashhour! Where's Mansour? (*To THE GENERAL.*) Mashhour says, my General, that because Mansour has committed such terrible deeds against the revolution...

THE GENERAL: Kill him.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) An order from the General... Yes... he's already been killed, my General.

THE GENERAL: Bravo, Mashhour. Ask him about the King.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) The General wants information about the King... Yes... Mashhour says that a pedestrian saw him on Main Street in the capital, my General.

THE GENERAL: (*Excited.*) Go after him. Go after him.

SAADOUN: (*Into the phone.*) Go after him. Long live the revolution. (*He hangs up.*)

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. (*Silence.*) Where were we?

SAADOUN: We're still at “the people.”

THE GENERAL: The people, the people... (*The phone rings.*)

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Hello, Mashhour ... Yes, *(To THE GENERAL.)* This is Mandour, my General. He says that Mashhour...

THE GENERAL: Kill him.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* He's been killed. Yes. *(To THE GENERAL.)* The King was seen near Shabeeb Palace with the mayor.

THE GENERAL: Go after him. Arrest the mayor.

SAADOUN: *(Into the phone.)* Go after him. Go after the mayor. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Long live the revolution. *(SAADOUN hangs up.)* We were...

SAADOUN: At... *(The phone rings.)*

SAADOUN: *(Into the Phone.)* Hello, Mandour ... Yes, Hassouna? Some peasants saw the King on the road to Harjoul, my General.

THE GENERAL: Follow him. Follow him.

SAADOUN: Follow him. Long live the revolution. *(The phone rings again. SAADOUN puts his hand on the receiver and doesn't lift it. To THE GENERAL.)* How many are left on the revolutionary council? *(THE GENERAL holds up two fingers.)* One is left. *(The ringing stops. Silence. The phone rings again.)* They're all gone. *(Silence.)* The people are seized. The soldiers are wreaking havoc. What do we do now?

THE GENERAL: We wait for the King.

SAADOUN: Wait for the King?

THE GENERAL: Wait for the King.

SAADOUN: Let's play the game of the bee and bumble bee. I carry you, then you carry me.

THE GENERAL: You go first. *(SAADOUN carries THE GENERAL on his back. They are back to back.)*

SAADOUN: Your turn.

THE GENERAL: *(Angrily.)* Whose turn, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: My turn. *(The curtain closes while THE GENERAL is on SAADOUN's back looking at the audience with a wicked smile on his face.)*

Act II

(SAADOUN prepares food in the corner. It smells of fried sausage. THE GENERAL paces anxiously. He circles around the telephone. He walks toward the door and comes back. Finally, he stands in front of the mirror and looks at himself.)

THE GENERAL: The telephone no longer rings, Saadoun. *(Silence.)* Saadoun.

SAADOUN: *(Without looking at THE GENERAL.)* Yes.

THE GENERAL: What day is it?

SAADOUN: (*He thinks.*) It's Tuesday.

THE GENERAL: Yesterday you said it was Thursday.

SAADOUN: If yesterday was Thursday then today must be Friday.

THE GENERAL: I didn't ask you to count the days.

SAADOUN: Yes, you did. I counted them and I got tired of counting. The days are all the same.

THE GENERAL: How can the world be changed by someone who does not care about days? Do you know anything about what happened to the world?

SAADOUN: Of course I do. The revolution succeeded. The General succeeded.

THE GENERAL: The King is at large, Saadoun.

SAADOUN: The food is ready.

THE GENERAL: I don't feel like eating. Clean my boots.

SAADOUN: Before eating?

THE GENERAL: Before eating and after eating. Remember, you're my servant.

SAADOUN: What if the sausages get cold.

THE GENERAL: I'm thinking about the world and he's thinking about food.

SAADOUN: I'm thinking about you, my master.

THE GENERAL: Your master?

SAADOUN: My General.

THE GENERAL: I'm distressed.

SAADOUN: So am I. But why am I distressed? The revolution succeeded. The world has changed. The General is at my side. I'm the General's servant. The General is master of this world...

THE GENERAL: Then why are you distressed?

SAADOUN: Because the General is distressed.

THE GENERAL: And why is the General distressed, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: Yes, why?

THE GENERAL: Think.

SAADOUN: You think for me.

THE GENERAL: The General orders you to think. Think.

SAADOUN: In the past I thought, and I suffered because of it. (*Silence.*)

THE GENERAL: Think.

SAADOUN: I thought.

THE GENERAL: Think out loud.

SAADOUN: If only she would stick her tongue out at the world. Her tongue was like a reed hanging in the wind. She stuck her tongue out at the world, and I thought of the world. I hadn't met you then. The world was in ruins. People were living in chaos. And the parties... the parties. When I first met the president, he was still a cell commander. It made me think of honey. It's been a long time since I had honey.

THE GENERAL: Honey! (*He laughs.*)

SAADOUN: The image of a beehive always came to my mind. We were in a meeting once and the President opened a book and started reading. I said, I wish we could get honey from the party. Everyone fell silent. They remained silent. I was afraid they were angry with me. I said the party has become like honey, brothers. The owner of the house suddenly frowned at me. He left the room and came back with a plate of honey. He put it in front of me. He said, eat. I was happy at first but looked into their faces and realized I was being tested. I knew what they were thinking. There was saffron in the honey. Bitter honey. They told me, this is the party. They carried me and threw me in the street. (*Silence.*) When they let me join the party I said, God has created the world upside down so that man becomes pleased when he straightens it out. The President laughed and gave me a piece of chocolate.

THE GENERAL: And the King was handing out chocolate. The people are arrested because they ate the King's chocolate.

SAADOUN: By the way, do you still have chocolate?

THE GENERAL: I'm going to ban chocolate and all kinds of sweets.

SAADOUN: You're hard on me, my General. You used to be different. When I first met you things were calm and the weather was nice. You put your hand on my shoulder and said, "Are you happy with your life?" I answered, "No", and began to cry. I couldn't do anything. I thought of doing many things but wasn't able to do them. I was alone when you put your hand in mine and told me, "Walk with me so we can save the world, Saadoun." I looked at you and didn't know that you had an army. But when I found out I followed you. I followed you like a dog. I loved you, my General, as much as I loved the whole world. When you're distressed I am distressed.

THE GENERAL: Really?

SAADOUN: Of course, my General, but why? You're with me. The whole world is with me. If you're with me, then why am I so distressed, my General?

THE GENERAL: Think.

SAADOUN: I have only bad memories now. A long time ago when I was small and the world was large, it made me happy to discover the world.

THE GENERAL: What did you discover?

SAADOUN: When the world got smaller I got bigger. When I no longer expected anything I grew sad.

THE GENERAL: What did you discover, what did you discover?

SAADOUN: Disasters, my Master, disasters. People above people. People below people. Houses on top of houses. Houses without people. Strange things. *(They hear knocking on the door. Silence. They stare at the door.)*

THE GENERAL: Could it be him?

SAADOUN: *(Walks toward the door.)* Who is it?

(Knocking continues. SAADOUN goes and opens the door, but there's no one there. He shuts the door.)

THE GENERAL: Who was it?

SAADOUN: No one.

THE GENERAL: Was there knocking on the door, or wasn't there?

SAADOUN: I think there was no knocking.

THE GENERAL: What do you mean there was no knocking? Did you hear knocking or not?

SAADOUN: I heard, my friend.

THE GENERAL: Your friend?

SAADOUN: My General.

THE GENERAL: If you heard the knocking then there must have been someone there who knocked. If the person who knocked does not exist, then you don't exist either. Is that logical or not?

SAADOUN: It's logical, my General, logical. But I do exist.

THE GENERAL: Prove it to me.

SAADOUN: You're talking to me.

THE GENERAL: Talking is not evidence enough.

SAADOUN: I wrote your memoirs.

THE GENERAL: Writing is like talking. There are so many writers who don't exist.

SAADOUN: But I exist, my General. I'm your servant.

THE GENERAL: That's true. Since the General's existence is beyond any doubt then the servant of the General exists.

SAADOUN: Is that true, my General.

THE GENERAL: Who else is with me?

SAADOUN: No one, only me.

THE GENERAL: Then you're my servant. What's your name?

SAADOUN: Saadoun, my General.

THE GENERAL: Saadoun what?

SAADOUN: Saadoun, your servant.

THE GENERAL: Have you been my servant for long?

SAADOUN: Since I was born.

THE GENERAL: Good for you, Saadoun.

(They hear knocking on the door again. SAADOUN pretends he doesn't hear. THE GENERAL looks at SAADOUN.)

THE GENERAL: Did you hear that?

SAADOUN: No.

THE GENERAL: I heard knocking.

SAADOUN: I didn't.

THE GENERAL: If I heard knocking then the whole world heard knocking. Open the door.

SAADOUN: You open it.

THE GENERAL: That's an order. *(SAADOUN walks towards the door then stops.)*

SAADOUN: Are you sure you heard something?

THE GENERAL: Of course I did.

SAADOUN: Perhaps your enemies have discovered your hiding place.

THE GENERAL: I have only one enemy.

SAADOUN: Who?

THE GENERAL: The King.

SAADOUN: How did the King know?

THE GENERAL: His heart led him. He caught my scent just as I caught his.

SAADOUN: My General.

THE GENERAL: Shut up. I can smell him. Open the door for him. *(SAADOUN opens the door and there's no one there. SAADOUN looks at THE GENERAL with malicious joy. THE GENERAL is bewildered. The phone rings. SAADOUN shuts the door and rushes to answer the phone.)*

SAADOUN: Hello. Hello. Hello. *(He hangs up.)* That's strange. No one's at the door or on the phone.

THE GENERAL: *(He goes to the door, opens it suddenly and finds no one. He shuts the door.)* That is strange.

SAADOUN: What sort of game is this?

THE GENERAL: His game.

SAADOUN: Is it possible?

THE GENERAL: What do you mean, "possible"?

SAADOUN: He's like God, he's everywhere.

THE GENERAL: There, you see! You yourself are admitting the King exists.

SAADOUN: I said he exists everywhere.

THE GENERAL: That means he may be with us.

SAADOUN: That's strange.

THE GENERAL: I don't find it strange. I know his game. He may have sneaked in and...

SAADOUN: General!

THE GENERAL: I smell him. *(He looks around the room and begins searching.)* Search with me. *(SAADOUN and THE GENERAL search around the room. THE GENERAL bumps into SAADOUN and stops suddenly. He stares at SAADOUN.)*

SAADOUN: I smell him as well, my General.

THE GENERAL: You're a liar.

SAADOUN: Me, my General?

THE GENERAL: Take off your shirt.

SAADOUN: My shirt?

THE GENERAL: I said, take off your shirt.

SAADOUN: Why?

THE GENERAL: Take it off, now. *(SAADOUN takes off his shirt and gives it to THE GENERAL. THE GENERAL sniffs it and throws it away.)* That's strange. Didn't you tell me that your name is Saadoun? *(SAADOUN is silent.)* Why have you followed me all this time? *(SAADOUN is silent.)* Where are you from? *(SAADOUN is silent.)* Answer me.

SAADOUN: From hereabout.

THE GENERAL: You said you were from thereabout last time.

SAADOUN: I said, "thereabout"? Maybe.

THE GENERAL: What do you mean, "maybe"?

SAADOUN: My memory became much worse in prison.

THE GENERAL: Who got you out of prison?

SAADOUN: You did.

THE GENERAL: Who stood by your side in court?

SAADOUN: I'm innocent, my General. They confused me with someone else. I had lost my ID card and they told me, "You did it." I said, "No". They beat me. I said, "No," and they beat me more. They dunked me in piss, pulled out my fingernails. (*SAADOUN shows THE GENERAL his fingers.*) I've been declawed, my General. I didn't know what I was supposed to do.

THE GENERAL: Who told you to say, "yes"?

SAADOUN: I forget.

THE GENERAL: Think. (*THE GENERAL points to himself.*)

SAADOUN: You?

THE GENERAL: Of course, me.

SAADOUN: What a magical word! I was supposed to say, "yes." I wish I'd known from the beginning. I thought the matter was real. I thought the case...

THE GENERAL: Which case?

SAADOUN: The court.

THE GENERAL: Which court?

SAADOUN: The government, the state.

THE GENERAL: Why did I save you?

SAADOUN: Because I'm innocent. And because... because I'm another person. It was supposed to be me, but it turned out to be him. I didn't understand.

THE GENERAL: Why didn't you understand? Who are you?

SAADOUN: I'm... I'm. (*THE GENERAL walks away toward the mirror and keeps glancing furtively at SAADOUN.*)

THE GENERAL: (*To himself.*) How clever, cunning. (*To SAADOUN.*) Where did we first meet?

SAADOUN: I forget.

THE GENERAL: Remember... on a street with an "s."

SAADOUN: Hussein?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Hassaan?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Hassanein?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Muhssin, Hassoun, Hassan, Mahaassin...

THE GENERAL: At the fork in the road to our friend's house. What was his name... It had an H?

SAADOUN: Muhammad?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Ahmad?

THE GENERAL: No.

SAADOUN: Mahmoud, Hamiid, Hamada. Anyway, he was already dead.

THE GENERAL: Dead?

SAADOUN: When I pulled you out from underneath the car...

THE GENERAL: What car?

SAADOUN: The car you were underneath.

THE GENERAL: Me, underneath? On the bottom? I was on top.

SAADOUN: One was under the other. Blood came out of your nose. Blood with no wound. You told me, "Let this country bleed."

THE GENERAL: That's strange.

SAADOUN: Someone was crushed. Only his hair remained on his head.

THE GENERAL: He died?

SAADOUN: He was dead but kept moving.

THE GENERAL: What a scene!

SAADOUN: I carried you on my shoulders.

THE GENERAL: Why did you carry me?

SAADOUN: Your friend turned out to be my friend as well, and we laughed.

THE GENERAL: I have no friends. You were following me. Watching me.

SAADOUN: I didn't know you.

THE GENERAL: Yes, you knew me. You knew I'd planned a coup d'état.

SAADOUN: You had no soldiers. You were retired.

THE GENERAL: At which fork in the road did the accident happen?

SAADOUN: At the one to the palace.

THE GENERAL: The palace? I see you. Admit it. You're him.

SAADOUN: Who?

THE GENERAL: The King.

SAADOUN: Strange.

THE GENERAL: Everything about you is strange.

SAADOUN: Me, the King?

THE GENERAL: Admit it, you're him.

SAADOUN: My father used to say, "If the King's well, we're well. Had I been the King I would've known what well is."

THE GENERAL: Stop beating around the bush.

SAADOUN: Is this a joke?

THE GENERAL: Imposter!

SAADOUN: Me deceive you? Is that possible? In school they used to call me...

THE GENERAL: (*Angrily.*) Enough. (*He walks away and stands in front of the mirror. To himself.*) He's a good actor, but I'm better than he is. (*Silence.*)

THE GENERAL: There's knocking at the door.

SAADOUN: I didn't hear anything.

THE GENERAL: Neither did I. (*To himself.*) The phone no longer rings and no one knocks on the door anymore, as if everything has disappeared. All that remains is his voice and mine. (*To Saadoun.*) You were the one who knocked on the door, Saadoun. Why did you stop knocking?

SAADOUN: I didn't knock.

THE GENERAL: Yes, you did. You were the one who was knocking, Saadoun, so I'd be confused about the truth. (*He walks toward the mirror and talks to himself.*) Capture him, General. It's time. Is it possible that now is the time? (*Loudly.*) What day of the month is it, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: May be 13.

THE GENERAL: (*To himself.*) That's the number. (*To SAADOUN.*) Thirteen what, Saadoun?

SAADOUN: May. Maybe April.

THE GENERAL: (*To himself in the mirror.*) April. April 13. April, the month of birth. It's time, General. Give me a sign. I wait for a sign from no one else but you, not from above or below. (*Loudly.*) Slogan, Saadoun.

SAADOUN: Long live the General. Long live the revolution.

THE GENERAL: Good for you. (*He looks for chocolate but doesn't find any. He looks again in the mirror.*)

THE GENERAL: Vicious. But you're more vicious than he is, General. (*He approaches SAADOUN.*) Saadoun!

SAADOUN: Yes.

THE GENERAL: I know you.

SAADOUN: You've known me for a long time.

THE GENERAL: Do you have a rope?

SAADOUN: A rope?

THE GENERAL: A rope. Any rope. *(SAADOUN looks around the room. He finds a rope and gives it to THE GENERAL.)*

THE GENERAL: Stretch out your arms. *(SAADOUN stretches out his arms and THE GENERAL ties them up.)*

SAADOUN: Is this a new game, my General? In prison we used to play the game of flies. One cigarette for five flies. *(THE GENERAL takes two steps backward.)*

THE GENERAL: In the name of the General. In the name of the revolution.

SAADOUN: In the name of the General. In the name of the revolution.

THE GENERAL: **Quiet.**

SAADOUN: Okay.

THE GENERAL: I command you to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

SAADOUN: Which truth?

THE GENERAL: Your truth.

SAADOUN: My truth?

THE GENERAL: That you're the King.

SAADOUN: You're mistaken, my General.

THE GENERAL: *(Angrily.)* Mistaken? Me, mistaken?

SAADOUN: No, never, my General.

THE GENERAL: Then confess.

SAADOUN: I did.

THE GENERAL: You confess to being the King?

SAADOUN: I confess, I'm the King.

THE GENERAL: Good for you. It would've been better if you'd said so from the beginning.

SAADOUN: You said I was the King.

THE GENERAL: And so did you.

SAADOUN: No, it was you.

THE GENERAL: Don't raise your voice in front of me. Have you forgotten who I am?

SAADOUN: No, I haven't.

THE GENERAL: I sacrificed in order for the revolution to succeed. You knew the state the world was in.

SAADOUN: I knew.

THE GENERAL: Had it not been for me...

SAADOUN: Had it not been for you...

THE GENERAL: Was it possible for the world to change if...

SAADOUN: They say they've gone up to the moon.

THE GENERAL: So what? Does that make them less miserable?

SAADOUN: No, my General.

THE GENERAL: And why is that? Because the King is in their heads.

SAADOUN: God damn the King. *(THE GENERAL bursts into tears. He kneels at SAADOUN's feet.)*

THE GENERAL: Confess. Confess you're the King.

SAADOUN: My General!

THE GENERAL: Are you afraid?

SAADOUN: I'm afraid for you.

THE GENERAL: For me?

SAADOUN: I'm afraid you'll regret that you believed me.

THE GENERAL: I do believe you. I believe you if you're the King.

SAADOUN: Is it possible for you to believe me?

THE GENERAL: That you're the King, of course.

SAADOUN: You said...

THE GENERAL: That means you're him.

SAADOUN: I no longer know who to believe, myself or the General?

THE GENERAL: The General. Of course, the General. *(SAADOUN does not speak.)*

THE GENERAL: You're a good man and the world is anxiously waiting. Don't you feel pity for the world?

SAADOUN: Yes, I do.

THE GENERAL: That means you're the King.

SAADOUN: No. *(THE GENERAL rises angrily.)*

THE GENERAL: Clean my boots.

(SAADOUN begins to kneel to clean the boots, but THE GENERAL walks away and then comes back.)

THE GENERAL: What time is it?

SAADOUN: I don't have a watch.

THE GENERAL: Where's your watch.

SAADOUN: Which watch?

THE GENERAL: Your watch.

SAADOUN: I never carried a watch.

THE GENERAL: I saw you look at it an hour ago.

SAADOUN: You're mistaken, my General.

THE GENERAL: You're saying I'm mistaken again.

SAADOUN: I'm sorry, my friend.

THE GENERAL: Your friend?

SAADOUN: My General.

THE GENERAL: You hid it because your initials are engraved on it. Where did you hide it?

SAADOUN: You are confusing me with someone else.

THE GENERAL: Someone else? Don't play games with me.

SAADOUN: I would never do that. I swear on your life.

THE GENERAL: Don't swear on my life. You're my enemy. You're the enemy of the revolution. You thought that if you were with me...

SAADOUN: I was with you because I... Because my existence with you...

THE GENERAL: Your existence negates the revolution.

SAADOUN: My General!

THE GENERAL: Your existence negates the future.

SAADOUN: I'm ready to withdraw from the game.

THE GENERAL: The Game? The revolution is a game?

SAADOUN: Fine. Fire me, or kill me if you like.

THE GENERAL: Get out of my face. *(SAADOUN puts his bag on his back and walks toward the door. He puts his hand on the doorknob and THE GENERAL attempts to say something. SAADOUN looks at him but THE*

GENERAL looks away and keeps glancing furtively at SAADOUN. SAADOUN puts his bag on the floor. He comes back and stands straight in front of THE GENERAL.)

SAADOUN: General, sir, I confess I'm the King. I'm the King of this land and its people. *(THE GENERAL's face gleams with happiness.)*

THE GENERAL: So you are the King.

SAADOUN: I'm the King.

THE GENERAL: And you've come to give yourself up.

SAADOUN: Yes, I've come to give myself up.

(THE GENERAL walks away then looks at SAADOUN.)

THE GENERAL: Don't expect me to have mercy on you.

SAADOUN: Let justice take its course. *(THE GENERAL walks away. He stops and stands prepared. He walks toward SAADOUN with firm steps. He stands straight up in front of SAADOUN.)*

THE GENERAL: You are charged with high treason.

SAADOUN: So be it.

THE GENERAL: You must officially surrender.

SAADOUN: Certainly. But since we're only enemies on a theoretical basis and you were my friend there's no need for formalities. It's enough to document this for the purpose of history. Write: "The King surrendered to..."

THE GENERAL: You write. *(He looks at SAADOUN aghast and confused. SAADOUN takes out a pen and paper and begins to write.)*

SAADOUN: "The King surrendered to..."

THE GENERAL: "the General on the 13th of April at..." What time is it?

SAADOUN: I don't have a watch.

THE GENERAL: Why don't you have a watch? That's okay. Write, "At dawn on April 13."

SAADOUN: It's still night.

THE GENERAL: Dawn is more suitable for revolutions.

SAADOUN: *(Writing.)* "At dawn on April 13."

THE GENERAL: "He was charged with high treason and sentenced to death by hanging."

SAADOUN: *(Stops writing.)* Hanging?

THE GENERAL: Of course.

SAADOUN: Your conscience is clear about this accusation?

THE GENERAL: My conscience belongs to the people.

SAADOUN: What if I ask you for clemency?

THE GENERAL: The case is no longer in my hands.

SAADOUN: Are you determined to carry out this sentence?

THE GENERAL: (*Softly.*) You know what the situation is. If the sentence isn't carried out, it will be as if I did nothing. Can you imagine? Think of the thousands of victims. It's impossible.

SAADOUN: Are you certain my death is necessary?

THE GENERAL: As certain as I am that I'm the General.

SAADOUN: I agree, but with one condition, that...

THE GENERAL: I don't know if I can.

SAADOUN: You can. You can.

THE GENERAL: Granted.

SAADOUN: Since I voluntarily surrendered, allow me to choose the way I die.

THE GENERAL: I have no objection to that.

SAADOUN: I don't like hanging.

THE GENERAL: It's the easiest way.

SAADOUN: No. A bullet is easier.

THE GENERAL: You know we don't have any guns. Wait, do we have a knife?

SAADOUN: Of course.

THE GENERAL: Get it. (*SAADOUN does not move.*) I told you to get the knife. Did you hear me?

SAADOUN: I heard you. Is the person in front of you Saadoun or the King?

THE GENERAL: The King.

SAADOUN: Then treat me like a King.

THE GENERAL: Your Highness, the King. Your Highness, the King. (*THE GENERAL's voice becomes deeper and more suitable to his role, i.e. subservient to the King.*)

THE GENERAL: Your Royal Highness. Your Royal Highness. If only you knew. I asked to see you a long time ago. There were so many things on my mind that I wanted to tell you. Oh, Your Highness... it was in early summer when I requested an audience. I waited three months for the approval to go from the supervisor to the secretary. It took another two months to go to the administrative office, and that's where my request sat. I used to invent a new lie to my wife every day. She was the one who had requested I see you. As soon as I did she began calling me, "The General." She could foresee the future. She was a great woman and had great hopes for me. She was ill so I lied to her. One time I said you were traveling, another time you were too busy or you were ill. I knew it was impossible to meet with you. Our lives turned into

waiting. She was afraid she'd die before you came to visit us. Your picture was always in front of her eyes. She lived by hope. When the doctor last visited us he was surprised to see she wasn't dead. It was probably hope that made her live longer. We had more children, and they, like us, lived on the illusion of hope. Every day she would speak of the food she was going to cook when the King honored us with his presence. Every day she changed the positions of the chairs. Once she said it would be better to receive you under the trellis where we'd roll out the only carpet we had. She'd talk to you and ask you questions and you'd respond. She memorized all your answers by heart. She had one request for each child. She wanted a suitor for the elder girl, a blue-eyed officer from the cavalry. She pictured all officers with blue eyes. She loved blue. (*Silence.*) Only when she was about to die, or maybe when she had lost hope, did she realize she'd been living an illusion. The children were seated around her, I beside her head. Even now I can't forget the distress that appeared in her eyes. She knew. She knew I had lied to her. She probably knew she had lied to herself. She forgave me because I believed the lie and, like her, I lived in an illusion. When I shut her eyes it was like shutting the eyes of all those who, like her, have lived in an illusion. (*He stops talking. He has an absent-minded gaze. He walks away from SAADOUN. Suddenly he stands in front of the mirror and talks to his reflection.*) Here he is right in front of you. He's going to his death. Are you satisfied? Are the people satisfied? Is the world relieved? (*He walks toward the ladder and climbs up two steps to where he usually gives his speeches.*) Comrades, the past is dying in front of you. The old illusion, the old hope. I will ban hope in the future, affection and hope. I will ban the illusion. I will cancel the King. Every person will become a king. I'll abolish government. Every person will become a government. There's no place for affection, brethren, no place for illusion. There is no place for hope or disappointment. I'll build our system. (*The phone rings. SAADOUN looks at him calmly to remind him that things have changed between them. THE GENERAL understands and steps down from the ladder. He walks toward the phone and picks up the receiver.*)

THE GENERAL: (*Into the phone.*) Hello. Hello. (*He hangs up angrily.*)

SAADOUN: Are you certain my death is necessary, General?

THE GENERAL: It is as necessary as life.

SAADOUN: Your life?

THE GENERAL: The lives of all people.

SAADOUN: Untie this rope from me.

THE GENERAL: What if you escape?

SAADOUN: Untie the rope.

THE GENERAL: Swear that you won't escape.

SAADOUN: I swear on my honor.

THE GENERAL: You swear on your honor.

SAADOUN: On the King's honor. Untie the rope. (*THE GENERAL unties the rope from SAADOUN's wrists. THE GENERAL takes a few steps back.*)

THE GENERAL: You swore on your honor. You surrendered. You confessed in writing. Where are you going?

SAADOUN: I want to look at myself in the mirror. I want to see what the King looks like.

THE GENERAL: The mirror is the King. Believe me.

SAADOUN: I believe you. Get out of my way.

THE GENERAL: I'm your friend. We were the best of friends.

SAADOUN: We were different. I was Saadoun and you were the General. (*SAADOUN arrives in front of the mirror, pushing THE GENERAL out of his way.*)

SAADOUN: (*Admiring himself.*) I look just like him.

THE GENERAL: I told you so.

SAADOUN: I thought of myself as anyone but the King.

THE GENERAL: And today?

SAADOUN: I am the King.

THE GENERAL: Thank God.

SAADOUN: (*He admires himself again in the mirror.*) A real king. I never in my life...

THE GENERAL: How old are you?

SAADOUN: Thirty-three.

THE GENERAL: That's strange. When I asked you two days ago, you said you didn't know.

SAADOUN: There was no time then, but now I've changed. Time and I are now tied together.

THE GENERAL: Your time is up, Your Highness.

SAADOUN: Choose the most horrible death for me.

THE GENERAL: Your Highness, please.

SAADOUN: A death with suffering.

THE GENERAL: You said something different before.

SAADOUN: Times have changed, General. No matter how large the King's suffering is, his sins will remain larger. I want to do penance for everyone's sins.

THE GENERAL: Don't make things difficult for me, Your Highness. I'm willing to swear that you suffered.

SAADOUN: You'd perjure yourself? (*Silence.*) Clean my shoes.

THE GENERAL: What? I'm the General.

SAADOUN: And I'm the King.

THE GENERAL: You're my prisoner. You're condemned to death.

SAADOUN: The final wish of a condemned man is sacred. Clean my shoes.

THE GENERAL: Yes, sir. (*THE GENERAL kneels down and cleans SAADOUN's shoes.*)

SAADOUN: Since everything is going to end, sing me the song you were singing when we first met.

(THE GENERAL attempts to rise, but SAADOUN holds him down.)

SAADOUN: Don't get up.

THE GENERAL: *(Singing.)* All my life I thought I was fine, nothing was wrong with me. I was walking with time, it pulled along. My friends asked what happened. Nothing, I said, my happiness darkened and died. When I saw you, destiny, giving to some and taking from others, I told the fire in my heart to go grey and my eyes to go blind.

SAADOUN: There's more.

THE GENERAL: It's finished.

SAADOUN: Everything is finished. *(THE GENERAL starts to rise and SAADOUN keeps him down as before.)*

SAADOUN: Don't get up. Since everything is finished, taking strolls, eating, singing, loving, playing chess... By the way, I'm an excellent chess player. What about you?

THE GENERAL: I didn't have time for play.

SAADOUN: All I had was time. The only thing I ever owned was time. I'm the king of time. *(THE GENERAL tries to rise and SAADOUN pushes his shoulders down.)* Don't get up. As long as I have time and since I'm losing everything else... memories, blue rooms, drinking in orchards, love, anger. Since everything is going to disappear: glory, fame, singing, music, poetry, pictures, waiting, window shopping, swimming in pools, lanterns, candlesticks, tents, palaces. *(Again THE GENERAL tries to rise.)* Stay. Since everything is disappearing: slavery, freedom, hope, gain, loss, displacement, disappointment, treason, fidelity, sacrifice, betrayal, love, hate. Since everything is disappearing, since the dream is disappearing, I'm disappearing, since my death will bring happiness to the people, bring the knife. *(THE GENERAL rises suddenly to get the knife.)*

THE GENERAL: Since... Since... *(He returns holding the knife.)*

SAADOUN: Allow me one last question.

THE GENERAL: Go ahead.

SAADOUN: Did you love her?

THE GENERAL: More than you can imagine, Your Highness.

SAADOUN: Since you loved her, clean the knife. *(THE GENERAL cleans the knife with his clothes.)*

THE GENERAL: I've cleaned it.

SAADOUN: Since everything is disappearing, clean it again. *(THE GENERAL cleans it again.)*

SAADOUN: Since the people are happy, stab me. *(THE GENERAL tries to stab SAADOUN, but his hand freezes. He tries again, and he is unable to stab him. Fear is apparent on his face.)*

THE GENERAL: *(In a broken voice.)* Help me.

SAADOUN: Help you?

THE GENERAL: Help me. Please help me. I'm afraid.

SAADOUN: You're afraid of me?

THE GENERAL: I'm afraid of killing.

SAADOUN: You killed thousands on the telephone.

THE GENERAL: Killing on the telephone is easy, Your Highness.

SAADOUN: Are you certain that killing me is necessary?

THE GENERAL: Of course it's necessary, Your Highness. Of course.

SAADOUN: Are you sure?

THE GENERAL: *(Pleading.)* Please.

SAADOUN: Since death is as necessary as life, strike.

THE GENERAL: *(He hesitates.)* Help me.

SAADOUN: Strike me. Remember that it was I who ruined the world. I'm the citadel of the old world. Remember the imprisoned people. Don't you want to free them? Remember yourself. Remember all the years you've lived waiting for this moment. Remember her eyes. Remember the eyes of all those who lived as she did. Remember the suffering, the misery, the disappointments. Remember the world. Remember the woman you loved, remember her. *(THE GENERAL gets irritated and stabs SAADOUN. SAADOUN falls slowly to the ground. THE GENERAL throws the knife down and stands, screaming.)*

THE GENERAL: I killed the King. I killed the King. *(THE GENERAL looks at SAADOUN, who signals for him to come closer. THE GENERAL walks to SAADOUN and kneels above him.)*

SAADOUN: Tell the world.

THE GENERAL: The world, of course, the world. *(THE GENERAL leaves SAADOUN suddenly and rushes to the door, then comes back to SAADOUN.)* Don't you have anything to say? *(Silence.)*

SAADOUN: *(Softly.)* I loved you, my General. I loved the world. I loved the girl who stuck her tongue out at the world. *(SAADOUN shuts his eyes. THE GENERAL looks at him and lets SAADOUN's body down slowly. He rushes to the door and tries to open it, but it will not open. He tries to open it again.)*

THE GENERAL: *(Knocking on the door.)* I killed the King. Open up. Who locked the door? I killed the King. I killed the King. *(The door does not open. He rushes to the telephone. Anxiously into the phone.)* Hello. Hello. *(He angrily throws the receiver down and goes back to the door, knocking on it with both hands.)* Let me out. Let me out. I killed the King. I saved the world. Open up. Let me out. *(SAADOUN lifts his head with a little smile on his face. THE GENERAL tires of knocking on the door and looks at SAADOUN. SAADOUN lies down again and shuts his eyes. THE GENERAL walks to SAADOUN, he shakes him, but SAADOUN does not move. THE GENERAL rises. He walks slowly to the mirror and looks at himself.)* You saved the world, my General, but the world doesn't like being saved. *(He strikes the mirror with his fist with all his might.)*

- THE END -