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CHAIN REACTION: A one-act play

Characters

- Raschid, the suspected terrorist, a 25-year-old psychology student from Yangon. Skinny, cleanly shaved and wearing round-shape spectacles. Definitely not looking the part with his preppy clothes.
- U Thein, a 45-year-old policeman, lean and muscular with a moustache. Wearing plain clothes. He tends to stutter when he gets too upset.

Place: an interrogation room (located in a police station in Yangon – but without any physical signs to indicate that it is a police station).

Time: 8 pm. Heavy rain outside, can be heard at times.

Lights on. Raschid is seated on a chair, hands tied at the back. There should be no reason for the audience to assume that he is being lawfully detained in a police station. For all they know when the play opens, he could have been kidnapped by a criminal gang.

In the background plays a soundtrack with some of the words uttered later in the play by U Thein and Raschid. “You leave me no choice”. “Just material damage”. “I want justice”. “I promise you”. “My Ma”. “Where is it?”

The soundtrack stops as U Thein enters the interrogation room, holding a phone in his hands. He faces Raschid.

U THEIN

Where is it?

RASCHID

(slowly raising his eyes to meet U Thein’s stare)

Where is *what*?

U THEIN

Don’t act cute with me, OK?

RASCHID

(with a weary tone, as if repeating the same thing for the hundredth time)

Have already told all these psychotic friends of yours. I have no clue what you guys are talking about.
Sorry.

U THEIN

(aggravated, bending with the phone in his hand)

See this message that we found in your phone after hacking into it: “All ready for action: *package* in place”. So, tell me, where is it?

RASCHID

(smirking) The package? At the post office, I suppose.

U Thein closes his eyes, trying hard to keep cool.

U THEIN

(Composed) If you have any intention to get out of here in one piece, I suggest you answer my question, OK? For the last time (slowly detaching the words) WHERE IS IT?

RASCHID

Since you're so smart, why don't you find it yourself in my phone?

U THEIN

Don't mess with me, you motherfucker. If you don't want to open your fucking mouth...

RASCHID

You'll pry it open? You'll torture me to death? Isn't this what you do every single day to my people?
And all with the blessing of your Mother Suu?

Raschid spits on the floor after pronouncing “Suu”. U Thein stands up and paces around the interrogation room for a while. Then he comes back to face Raschid and bends over him.

U THEIN

Now listen to me, terrorist shit...

RASCHID

I am no terrorist. I don't kill innocent people... Unlike you and your men when you invade our villages, massacre our children, rape our women!

(pause, then grinning)

Anyway, I suggest you go and sleep on it. No worries, man, this bomb's not going to kill anyone –

U THEIN

(interrupting him)

So you admit it now, you son of a bitch!

RASCHID

(continuing his sentence)

Only material damage.

(big smile)

Big material damage...

U Thein slaps Raschid. Raschid spits at him.

RASCHID

You can kill me if you want. I won't talk. This suits your kind anyway. Torturing people is second nature to the Bamar dogs.

U THEIN

Shut up!

RASCHID

I thought you wanted me to talk?

U Thein is about to slap Raschid again but restrains himself.

U THEIN

(calming down)

We don't torture anyone for fun. But one dead terrorist to save a hundred innocent lives, the maths don't play in your favour, sorry.

RASCHID

Torture me, kill me, display my body in the streets and tomorrow, you'll get bombs everywhere in Yangon. In your markets, in your temples, in your buses. *Everywhere*. Do you know why I joined the ARSA? (pause) I always thought they were wrong, even if you've persecuted us for generations.

U THEIN

(interrupting him)

Maybe if you hadn't slept with the British masters...

RASCHID

(ignoring U Thein's comment)

Then six months ago, you tortured my brother because you thought he had ambushed one of your men. It wasn't him but you didn't care. His face was so mutilated that we couldn't recognize him. Ma wanted to kill herself when she saw his body.

U THEIN

"*You* tortured my brother" "*You* didn't care" ... How'd you know I'm involved in this? How'd you know I support these crimes?

RASCHID

You're all the same! Sadistic Bamar dogs! No difference!

U THEIN

So what you want is justice for your brother, right?

RASCHID

(after a long silence)

I want justice for *all* my brothers and sisters! All the Rohingyas who die every day!

U THEIN

Listen, I'm sorry and I mean it. I'll find the people who did that to your brother and bring them to justice. I promise you.

RASCHID

(slightly hesitant)

I don't believe you.

U Thein brings a chair from the back of the room and sits down facing Raschid. He also takes a piece of paper and a pen and places them in front of Raschid.

U THEIN

I give you my word. Later, you'll tell me all you know about these criminals on this paper and I'll get them arrested.

RASCHID

(pushing away the paper) No need for paper! I know their names... Everybody knows their names. There's this tall guy called Giri...

U THEIN

(interrupting him)

OK, OK that'll be easier if you know their names, for sure... After you've told me where's the bomb, we'll get down right to it, OK?

RASCHID

Then there's U Thura and...

U THEIN

(interrupting him again, growing impatient)

First, we have to put a stop to your little mass murder, get it? So... where's the bomb?

RASCHID

You bring them here first!

U THEIN

(standing up)

Can't you see? There's no time now! But trust me, I'll be on top of this as soon as we're done with your bomb.

RASCHID

(hesitant, then defiant)

I don't trust Bamar dogs!

U THEIN

(grabbing Raschid's shirt)

Where is it?

RASCHID

(looking at U Thein with hatred)

You only know one thing. Destroy. Destroy our culture. Destroy our religion. Destroy our monuments. Destroy our people. Let us return the favour! (spitting on the floor)

U THEIN

(shaking Raschid violently)

WHERE IS THAT FUCKING BOMB?

RASCHID

I won't talk! Never! Do to me what you want. Beat me torture me kill me.

U THEIN

Shit! Why can't you just talk? You hear me, fucking asshole? Why don't you just tell me where's the bomb and we can both go home?

RASCHID

(spitting in his face)

Go fuck yourself!

U THEIN

If only you knew how much I hate to do this.

(addressing the audience while walking towards the other side of the room and grabbing a baseball bat)

But it's my job, right? I'm sure you're all wondering what the fuck this policeman's doing. You've seen it all before, haven't you? Then what happens next? The policeman beats the shit out of the terrorist scum, right? Or maybe the mum gets gang-raped? What would *you* choose?

Baseball bat in his hand, he's facing Raschid who looks at him defiantly. He raises the bat in the air and then throws it to the floor at the last minute.

U THEIN

No, no I won't get my hands all dirty on a bag full of Bengali shit like you. I know something else to get you to talk... Something less... dirty and much more... convincing.

Raschid does not say anything. U Thein grabs his phone and makes a call.

U THEIN

Have you arrested her? (listening to the answer). Oh, and you've sent me photos also? Excellent.

U Thein briefly browses the messages on his phone while Raschid observes him with a worried face. Then U Thein bends over Raschid.

U THEIN

(showing a photo on his phone to Raschid)

Look at your mother here... she's been taken into custody.

RASCHID

(enraged)

Leave my mother out of this!

U THEIN

You don't like the photo? Ah, sorry, we asked her to smile for the photo but she wouldn't.

RASCHID

Leave her alone! She knows nothing!

U THEIN

You bet! If she'd been more careful with her terrorist shit of a son, you wouldn't be sitting on this chair.

Raschid stares silently at U Thein.

U THEIN

Don't you want to see the other photos?

RASCHID

What... what other photos? What's happening on the other photos?

U THEIN

The ones that we'll take if you don't talk. When we search your mother and... who knows? in the heat of the action, my men might be tempted to go beyond the call of duty.

RASCHID

(exploding, trying to free himself from the chair)

Bastard!! Bastard!!!

(his voice starts trailing towards the end of the line)

She knows nothing! If you just touch one hair on her head, I promise, it's not one bomb that you'll get...

(begging now, almost crying)

Please, please don't harm my mother. Rape me instead!

U THEIN

(very calm voice) You just have to answer one simple question and your mum's free. Where did you put the bomb?

RASCHID

OK... OK... I'll tell you where it is. But first, you must release her.

U THEIN

Release your mother? You think you can still negotiate?

RASCHID

(after a pause)

The bomb's in the Sule Paya. Please release my mum.

U THEIN

In the Sule Paya?? Are you kidding me?

RASCHID

We wanted to give you a taste of your own medicine. See how you like it when someone razes your mosques, burns your books, murders your priests!

U Thein grabs Raschid by the collar.

U THEIN

What about not killing any innocents, bastard! This is evening prayer for fuck's sake!

RASCHID

Innocent people? Like you and your men, ready to rape my mother if I don't talk?

They stare at each other.

U THEIN

(now speaking in the phone, his back to Raschid)

Evacuate Sule Paya. Now! Yes, this is where the bomb is.

(He turns towards Raschid)

Where is it? The Sule paya is not exactly like a sandbox.

RASCHID

(hesitant)

In... in the toilets, at the top of the stairs. Woman toilets.

U THEIN

And when is it set to go?

RASCHID

In thirty minutes.

U THEIN

You'd better tell the truth. I warn you, if anyone dies, you, your mother and your entire village will be razed to the ground!

RASCHID

(aside to himself, while U Thein is busy on the phone)

Now they're going to leave Ma alone. By the time they realise that I've tricked them, it'll be too late, the bomb will have exploded... But they'll also know that I said the truth, only material damage... and this U Thein I believe he's not so bad, he won't harm Ma in the end, right?

Just as U Thein hangs up his phone, we can hear a loud bang, like an explosion somewhere. He and Raschid look startled. Then U Thein's phone rings and he picks it up.

U THEIN

(panting, voice trembling)

What? A bomb has exploded in the old train station?

RASCHID

(aside to himself)

So fast? I thought it was only in 2 hours?

(to U Thein, trying not to smile)

You were too late apparently.

U Thein hangs up. He is livid.

RASCHID

Why so upset? You would have preferred that we bomb the Sule Paya or what? That train station's empty at night. Just some *murderous* military equipment that will go up in smoke...

U THEIN

Monster! Place was packed! Full of families for the armed forces' charity concert!

RASCHID

(stuttering, eyes wide open)

I thought... But... Atallah promised me... Only material damage... No victims... That can't be true...

Raschid starts to cry. U Thein jumps forward and hits him repeatedly.

U THEIN

Don't lie! You knew!

RASCHID

(between sobs)

I swear, I didn't know anything! I'd never have done it!

U THEIN

You chose not to talk. I warned you!

RASCHID

Please, please... Don't harm my Ma...

U THEIN

You leave me no choice. (He grabs his phone). Burn down the entire village.

Lights off.

In the background, we hear again the same soundtrack heard at the beginning.

Lights on.

We are back to the beginning of the play with Raschid (unharmed) tied to the chair and U Thein entering the interrogation room. This time, however, the scene is unfolding simultaneously across multiple interrogation rooms. On stage, to create this effect, images of U Thein questioning Raschid are projected on a wall of TV screens.

U THEIN

Where is that fucking bomb?

Lights off.