

THE BLASPHEMER

by Daniel Curzon

Semi-Finalist, O'Neill
Playwrights Festival,
2016

CHARACTERS: (8)

KAREN RALSTON-RAJEEB, an American novelist in her 30s or 40s
KEVIN RAJEEB, her husband, a Eurasian (half Indian, half-British),
a musician, in his 30s or 40s

VARIOUS PERSONALITIES, played by three men, three women

STYLE: The script is a series of brief, fast-moving scenes in a DOCU-DRAMA style, realistically acted, played in pools of light and semi-darkness, with minimal scenery, props and costume changes — only enough to suggest the different characters and locations. Projections of the backgrounds and oversized names and/or identifications of the secondary characters could be used as a motif.

ACT I

PRELUDE: Open on a muezzin, a Muslim holy man, high up, as if in a minaret, giving the Call to Prayer in a haunting, hypnotic musical Arabic that wafts over the audience.

ACTOR
PLAYING

KAREN: (as *herself* to audience) The characters you will see before you (tonight, this afternoon) say the words of actual people. It took no nightmare to create them.

(Now the actor becomes KAREN and steps into:)

Scene 1

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

FRIEND: Congratulations, old thing! I really never thought you'd finish it. Remember a year ago what trouble you were having with chapter something or other — was it chapter nine?

KAREN: Oh, indeed I remember. . . . The trouble with all the chapters.

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FRIEND: And now you've even won a prize for it. Must be very proud of yourself.

KAREN: You know — I am, sort of.

FRIEND: Don't let all this go to your head now! Don't forget your roots. Sorry, I've really got to run. Ta! So nice to see you, Karen. (Exits)

PUBLISHER: (coming over) Ah, here's the party girl! I knew she was here somewhere. Karen. I want you to meet Harold Packard — the movie producer.

KAREN: The only one?

PUBLISHER: What? (then laughs) The only one! Yes, very good!

MOVIE

PRODUCER: I can't tell you how pleased I am to shake your hand, Mrs. Rajeeb.

KAREN: (wincing a bit at the overdone handshake) My pleasure, I'm sure.

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Or do you prefer your other name?

KAREN: Either is fine.

MOVIE

PRODUCER: So tell me, have you sold the movie rights yet?

KAREN: (looking at PUBLISHER) Have we?

PUBLISHER: Not so far. But lots of lovely bids have come in.

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Well, don't sell it until you talk to me. I've got thirty million below the line, and haven't begun to chat up my partners on this project. We produced *Misfit Angels*, as you probably know.

KAREN: (has never heard of it) Did you?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: We want to do a big book next, something with integrity. Something cross-cultural.

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KAREN: And you think my book would make a good movie?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Don't you? Everybody's talking about it.

KAREN: What did you think of it? Yourself, I mean.

MOVIE

PRODUCER: I thought it was marvelous. Real art. Very modern. Very modern and very artistic.

KAREN: Thank you. . . . (genially) You haven't read it, have you?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Well, not all of it. I've been —

KAREN:: How much?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: How much? I was thinking in the neighborhood of 400,000 for the rights, maybe with an option to begin.

KAREN: I meant how much of it did you read?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Quite a bit. I loved it.

KAREN No, how much?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: . . . Three pages.

KAREN: All in a row, or did you skip around?

MOVIE

PRODUCER: Listen, I'm a busy man. I don't have time to read big novels. You don't want my money?

KAREN: I didn't say that. Sure I want your money. I just thought it might be nice if you picked my book because you had experienced it yourself. So few people read these days.

- PUBLISHER: (jovially) Hey, we'll talk! Don't forget we get half that money, Karen!
(Takes MOVIE PRODUCER off) Come on, there's someone else I want you to meet — another one of our wonderful authors.
- KEVIN: (coming over to Karen, jocular) How you holding up, kid?
- KAREN: (ironically) Love it! Just love it! . . . I am so goddamned tired of all these compliments. I never thought I'd live to say that.
- KEVIN: Savor them. They may not come again. I recall your last two books.
- KAREN: Ah, here's the support I need. The supportive husband predicts future disaster even in the midst of my triumph!
- KEVIN: Don't get cocky, lady. Don't forget — I know what you do in bed.
- KAREN: Ouch! (teasing) Please, oh, please, don't expose my peccadilloes!
- KEVIN: I won't — for a share of the loot. I saw that Hollywood producer talking to you. How much?
- KAREN: (mocking herself) Oh, Harold and I were just tossing figures around. I think 400,000 or something like that came up.
- KEVIN: Dollars or pounds? Not rupees?
- KAREN: I was too polite to ask. Darling, I never suspected this mercenary side to you!
- KEVIN: We've been so cold-ass poor, no wonder!
- KAREN: (mock solemnly) I hope all this isn't going to change you, Kevin.
- KEVIN: What's success for if you can't get free of your friends and relatives?
- KAREN: Can I have a chaste little kiss? So good for publicity. Hubby kisses wifey.
(Waves at somebody across the room)
- KEVIN: (kissing her cheek, teasing) As long as you don't grope.

KAREN: Is this any way to talk to a raving hit? I only wrote the book to get respect — and maybe a few carnal favors from my fans — and this — this? — is the way I'm treated?

KEVIN: Well, maybe one grope. (Takes her hand and places it on his butt, squeezes it for her, then removes it) That's it. That'll have to do.

KAREN: Thank you. I needed that.

KEVIN: You're welcome. It'll keep you grounded.

KAREN: (playfully) Did anyone see?

KEVIN: (playfully) I don't think so.

KAREN: Thank god! My spotless reputation.

KEVIN: (insinuatingly) See you later, Mrs.? (winking) Huh? Huh? Later?

KAREN: I'm afraid you'll have to arrange that through my agent, sir.

KEVIN: Oh, you! I only want your autograph.

KAREN: (blowing him a kiss) See you around sometime, kid.

KEVIN: We'll see about that. (Blows her a kiss and goes off.)

FAN: (approaching in thrall) Excuse me, but are you Karen Ralston?

KAREN: Yes. I'm even Karen Rabeeb or sometimes Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

FAN: Your book is magnificent. I couldn't even go to work after I finished it.

KAREN: Really? . . . You don't like your job very much?

FAN: That too. But it was your work — your words — that touched me. You see, I was raised as a Muslim, and this is the first thing I've ever read where somebody had the nerve to critique it. I just wanted to thank you for being so . . . so . . . so . . . fair-minded.

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KAREN (embarrassed) Thank you. I appreciate that.

FAN: I don't know what else to say I'm so impressed. So I'm just going to back away and look at you as I go, if that's all right. (Does just what he said.) . . . Bye.

KAREN: (after the FAN is gone, after taking it in) My god, I love this! For once in my life, something is just like I hoped it would be! (Jumps up and down out of happiness.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

THE NEWS CONFERENCE

VOICE

OVER P.A.: The Blasphemer, by Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, contains a number of false interpretations about Islam and gives wrong portrayals of the Koran and the Prophet Mohamed. Its distorted image of Islamic principles lacks even the slightest artistic credentials.

(Lights up on a panel of three.)

FIRST

PANELIST: I am Suleiman Rashid, of the U.K. Action Committee on Islamic Affairs and former M.P. of the Parliament of Pakistan. We have called this news conference because Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb has written some satanic-minded comments about our faith and our religious leaders. Obviously she has fallen from grace as a writer to total moral degradation.

SECOND

PANELIST: And I am Professor Doctor Ali Gibreel Gandhi, Director General of the Islamic Academy, Cambridge, England. We have prepared a statement, and we will take questions later. (snappishly to FIRST PANELIST)
As we agreed, *yes?*

THIRD

PANELIST: (making sure he is acknowledged) And I am Imam Ibrahim Ali Musavi, of the United Imams of Great Britain. Thank you all for coming. We have some important points to make here.

REPORTER: Gentlemen, are you speaking as officials of your organizations or as individuals?

THIRD

PANELIST: (after a brief consultation with the other two) Both.

SECOND

PANELIST: (reading a prepared statement) “Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb has written a negative satire on life. Love is presented as either sentimentality or lust. Religious consciousness is shown only as superstition. It is obvious that Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb is not interested in presenting a sincere exploration of reality. We the undersigned find this particularly unacceptable since Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb was not raised in the Islamic faith and writes from ignorance. What she has taken upon herself to do is remove from the hearts of people any sense of reverence for angels, prophets, holy books, and hence any faith in God and the Hereafter. We deplore and condemn this vicious attack in the guise of a novel, and we call for its immediate ban and removal from sale and appropriate damages to be paid.”

FIRST

PANELIST: Just let me add that there is a scene in Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb’s novel where two characters fall off a mountain and still remain alive. This, I need not point out, cannot happen in real life. Therefore, Mr. Rajeeb is a practitioner of black magic who turns things upside down.

THIRD

PANELIST: And while we’re at it, let me say that at no time — at no time, I repeat — does this woman present a thoroughly good or decent human being. Obviously such creatures are not within her limited experience. It is her incapacity to understand or respond to human greatness that is her chief fault as a writer and as a woman. I wanted to get that into our official statement, but we were rushed.

SECOND

PANELIST: Now we are prepared to take questions from the press.

REPORTER: Have any of you actually read the book?

THIRD

PANELIST: I know what you're going to say. How can you not even have read the book and still be condemning it. Well, let me say to all my fine-feathered critics out there that I am pleased that I have not read it, nor do I intend to. I do not have to wade through a filthy drain to know what filth is.

REPORTER: But aren't you begging the question? You're assuming the book is filth.

THIRD

PANELIST: For me, the synopsis, the reviews, the excerpts I have seen, and the learned opinions of those who have read it — to say nothing of all your gloatings in our faces — have been more than enough evidence.

REPORTER: Dr. Gandhi, surely you as a professor of literature have read the book.

SECOND

PANELIST: I have had respect for Karen Ralston-Rajeeb's talent in the past. In fact, we were thinking of commissioning a book about the dilemma of non-Muslim wives of Muslims from her, but I am unhappy to report we can't possibly do that now.

REPORTER: You didn't answer my question.

FIRST

PANELIST: Let me answer for you. Yes, I have read Mrs. Rajeeb's unclean novel — every word of it. This is the most offensive, filthy, and abusive book ever written by any hostile enemy of Islam, and the matter should be taken up with Scotland Yard to prosecute because this is a clear violation of the Race Relations Act, and Mrs. Rajeeb has proven herself to be a criminal under the law. That is my answer to you, sir.

SECOND

PANELIST: (to REPORTER) And just let me add something to that. Have you, sir, read Mrs. Rajeeb's filthy novel? Have you?

REPORTER . . . No, actually I haven't.

SECOND

PANELIST: And yet you have the nerve to fault us for not having read it! So there you are!

REPORTER: I can ask intelligent questions about it even if I haven't read it, but you can't make judgments about it if you haven't read it!

SECOND

PANELIST: Don't try to get us off the track here, sir! We won't have it! Let's stick to the matter at hand. We have requested the 46-Nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference to ban this book and all other books by the publisher and to hold all appropriate earnings of the publisher until such time as they withdraw this profane and blasphemous title from circulation and see that all copies are pulped and never re-printed or published again.

REPORTER: You are saying, then, that you consider the book blasphemy? That is the charge?

SECOND

PANELIST: Most certainly. But you wouldn't know since you haven't read it, would you? (Laughs.) We are fully aware that your nation will try to get around this. We mere Muslims will have to beg and scrape and take our chances, or so you think. It is time for us to speak up at last. Isn't that what free speech is all about?

FIRST

PANELIST: Are there any other questions?

REPORTER: How can you call for the suppression of a novel and at the same time say you want free speech?

SECOND

PANELIST: Oh, I see. Karen Ralston is allowed to have free speech. We're supposed to settle for having our cherished beliefs trodden upon and held up to ridicule! All right for her but not for us!

REPORTER: I believe she can write what she chooses.

FIRST

PANELIST: I need hardly point out that this thing transcends national boundaries. Perhaps it would be more salutary if this author is allowed to enter into Islamic jurisdiction and prosecuted under relevant law there.

REPORTER: Excuse me, are you saying Mrs. Rajeeb should be extradited for trial?

FIRST

PANELIST: I am saying it is one of the options we have discussed.

THIRD

PANELIST: Let me assure anyone here who is in doubt — there are over one billion Muslims around the world who will not stand idly by and let this insult go unchallenged. For too long, the members of my faith have held their tongues and taken it from colonizers and imperialists, who wished to impose their culture and their religion on us. But no more, sir, I assure you, no more!

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

THE RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

KAREN: (mildly) I have a statement to give. (the paper shakes as he reads from it) I wrote my novel *The Blasphemer* to show the immigrant's dilemma — how he or she deals with the sense of self-hood when living in an alien culture, as both myself and my husband, respectively, have felt it. (not defiantly) At no time did I attempt to attack religion. They keep announcing that over a billion people in the world are Muslims. What can I do? Can I unmake Islam? It's not possible. So even if it were my desire, which it isn't, I would be foolish to think I was that powerful. All a writer can do is say: Here is the way you're told to look at the world, but actually there are also some other ways. . . . Thank you.

REPORTER: Come, Mrs. Rajeeb, surely you knew what you would provoke when you wrote your book? Your background must have told you that.

KAREN: Maybe I thought it would raise a few hackles here and there. I didn't expect this uproar. After all, the book is serious literature. Nobody pays attention to that. (Feeble smile.)

REPORTER: Can you tell us something about your background and why you wrote this particular book?

KAREN: You're supposed to write about what you know. I was born in California but raised in India. I lived there until I went away to school — in Britain, where I met my husband, a British citizen. Then we lived in the United States for the past four years. (Gestures toward him.) So, you see, I am conversant with life in different cultures.

REPORTER: Let me ask you this, Mrs. Rajeeb. Are you and your publisher prepared to acquiesce to the demands being made?

KAREN: (looks off to PUBLISHER) I don't think so . . . Simon?

PUBLISHER: Let me answer that. Absolutely, unequivocally, we will not back down in the face of such outrageous censorship. I speak for the Wembley Press and its Board of Directors.

(Applause from off-stage characters and from KAREN onstage.)

REPORTER: How is your family responding to all this?

KAREN: I'll let my husband speak for himself. (gently teasing him) He likes to do that anyway.

KEVIN: (coming forward) All three of us are holding up pretty well — very well. We have sent our young daughter to stay with — uh — with some people until this blows over. I want to say that I support my wife one hundred and fifty percent in this.

REPORTER: You are a professional musician in your own right, is that correct, Mr. Rajeeb?

KAREN: A terrific one! He has a symphony almost finished.

KEVIN: Don't we all. Thank you for the unsolicited testimonial. I just want to say to the general public that we are grateful for the expressions of support we have received. And if you want to send more, that'd be just fine with us!

(Steps back.)

REPORTER: Is it true that you are planning to move from your present home in London? Why is that so, and, if so, where are you going?

KAREN: It's possible that we may have to move, yes. We like it there — we've been there for three years — but maybe it's time to move on.(nervously) And, no, we're not prepared to say where we'll be moving next.

KEVIN: (stepping up again) We're entitled to a private life, are we not?

REPORTER: Have there been threats against you?

KAREN: (sweating) Not really. A few unpleasant telephone calls, that's all.

REPORTER: Mrs. Rajeeb, can you say you're sorry all this has happened? I understand the sales of your book have skyrocketed in the past week.

KAREN: Have they? I hadn't realized.

REPORTER: Surely all this new money hasn't escaped your attention?

PUBLISHER: (stepping forward) We have been so busy with the thr — (doesn't want to say "threats") I mean with . . . our public relations that I'm afraid we've been remiss in tabulating sales. But we are reasonably assured that readers are not being intimidated by — by anybody. The book is walking out of the stores. We'll be delivering Karen a nice big check tomorrow morning.

KAREN: Couldn't come at a better time. (Smiles.) Handy for our move.

REPORTER: You didn't answer my question, Mrs. Rajeeb. Would you mind saying if you regret any of this?

KAREN: (putting on a brave face) Regret? It's sort of exciting. After all, I've spent the last few years of my life sitting at a computer. So I have no regrets. No, no regrets. . . so far.

BLACKOUT

Scene 4

THE RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

KEVIN: (on telephone) Yes, Molly, Mommy's here. Do you want to talk to her? She's right here, working.

KAREN (at his writing, getting up, taking telephone) Hi, Molly. How you doing? . . . You did? . . . Are you getting along with Amanda? . . . You're not? . . . You want to come home. Well, we may be moving again, honey, did you know that? So you wouldn't exactly be coming home . . .

KEVIN: (whispering) Ask her about her dress.

KAREN (to KEVIN) What?

KEVIN: (whispering) New dress. She picked it out.

KAREN: (on telephone) What's this about a new dress? . . . You did! Is it pretty? . . . With ruffles . . . I'll bet it is. We hope to be able to see you sometime real soon, honey . . . Why can't we now? Because Mummy's made some enemies — you know, sometimes there are naughty boys at the playground and you want to avoid them? . . . Right, like Derek Whitmer. Well, Daddy and Mummy are working on these naughty boys, and we're hoping it'll all come out just the way we want it to, and we'll all be together again. Can you be a patient girl? . . . Can you — for Mummy and Daddy?

BLACKOUT

(Lights up)

(KAREN and KEVIN are together on stage, having just hung up the telephone.)

FIRST VOICE

ON P.A.: A ruling by Al-Azhar, Egypt's most venerated Islamic institute, was delivered today by the Grand Sheikh, Gad el-Haq Ali Gad el-Haq.

KAREN (to the loudspeaker) And what did he say?

FIRST VOICE

ON P.A.: The 1000-year-old Al-Azhar Institute, a combined mosque and university, is considered the main seat of Islamic theology.

KAREN (more insistently) What did he say!

(Suddenly a commotion.)

VOICES: Down with Karen Rajeeb! Karen Rajeeb, eat your words! Down with the blasphemer! Rajeeb! Rajeeb! Down with Rajeeb the bitch!
BLASPHEMER!

SECOND VOICE

ON P.A.: More than 1000 angry Muslims rallied in the city centre of the British city of Bradford today to protest about a novel which they believe attacks their faith. They cheered and chanted as a copy of the book *The Blaspheme*, by Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, was burned directly in front of police headquarters.

THIRD VOICE

ON P.A.: Over 8000 Muslims flocked from all over Britain today to partake in a rally and demonstration in front of Number 10 Downing Street to protest the continued publication and distribution of the controversial novel by author Karen Ralston-Rajeeb. The British Prime Minister is said to be preparing a statement.

KAREN: Oh, my God, what's happening!

KEVIN: (clutching her) Maybe the worst is over. They'll get it out of their system.

KAREN: Kevin, forgive me, but I don't think so. Not for a moment.

FOURTH VOICE

ON P.A.: Rioting broke out today in Islamabad, Pakistan. At least five people were killed and dozens seriously injured when police opened fire on a crowd of Muslim extremists who were ransacking a bookstore in the U.S. Information Centre in protest of the novel *The Blasphemer* by writer Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

KAREN: My God! People are being killed over my book!

KEVIN It's not your fault.

KAREN: But it is! Sort of. I wrote it!

KEVIN: You were sincere when you wrote it. . . . (a doubt beginning) Weren't you?

KAREN: I knew I was playing with fire. Yet I thought they might like the fire. Some people at least.

KEVIN: It's mild, but you were taking on a major religion.

KAREN: By American standards it's — it's —

KEVIN: It's a wonderful book.

KAREN: Did you ever finish it? (He doesn't answer.) You didn't, did you? You thought it was dull.

KEVIN: I had my music to work on and . . .

KAREN: Even my husband didn't read it! Practically nobody has read it, and yet there's all this controversy! Why do I do it? For this? God, I wish *they* thought it was dull!

KEVIN: You're not backing down, I hope.

KAREN: Backing down? No . . . I'm just sick that people are dying over it.

KEVIN: They're the ones who are killing themselves. Don't start blaming yourself. Yes? You can't control every fanatic in the world. . . . All right?

KAREN: Kevin, this has gotten out of hand. What's it going to do to us?

KEVIN: We're going to weather it, that's what.

KAREN: (fearful) Do you think so? . . . Do you? Give me your hand.

(They hold hands.)

FIRST VOICE

ON P.A.: There have now been riots in Pakistan, India, Iran, and three cities in Great Britain with substantial Muslim populations. A total of sixteen people have been killed and one hundred and twenty-seven hospitalized from injuries received while rioting against the now-notorious novel *The Blasphemer* by Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

KEVIN: You always wanted your name to be a household word, didn't you, darling?

KAREN: Hold me!

(KEVIN holds her. They are both frightened.)

KAREN: Don't leave me over this. Promise?

KEVIN: I won't. I wouldn't.

KAREN: (recovering a bit) . . . How's Molly doing? Did you talk to her?

KEVIN: She's fine. . . But the police said she shouldn't phone here anymore. Someone might trace the call somehow.

KAREN: Can we ring her up?

KEVIN: They said it might be better to wait a little while.

KAREN: I can't even talk to my child?

KEVIN: Just to be careful. We don't know what kind of equipment they might have to listen in or —

SECOND VOICE

ON P.A.: We bring you, via Tehran Home Service, the remarks of the President of Iran before a session of the Majlis, recorded earlier and here edited for broadcast. Here then is President Amir.

PRESIDENT

OF IRAN: (appears in person) In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, I wish to speak to you of a planned and organized effort now underway to undermine the sanctity of Islam and all that is sacred in our religion. Materialism and all kinds of political forces failed to break such holiness. So our enemies have chosen another, a more sinister, method to undo us. Just as an attack upon our frontiers should evoke a reaction from us, this attack upon our cultural frontiers should evoke a reaction from us to the same degree — if not more! A member of the American Literary Society was forced to write this book.

KAREN Nobody forced me! What American Literary Society!?

PRESIDENT

OF IRAN: Our enemies have deliberately created this so-called bestseller. There are good stories written by famous and talented authors with artistic value. However, by spending money, by advertising, by using the media, they have publicized this novel until the whole world is talking about it. The author, this Mrs. Rajeeb, meanwhile, assumes an aloof and cool attitude —

KAREN: (calling) I'm not aloof! Believe me! I'm not cool!

PRESIDENT

OF IRAN: The logic of Islam is clear. The Koran, from the very earliest days, has instructed Muslims not to befriend those who leave our faith. I trust none of you will befriend the wife or Mr. Rajeeb?

KAREN: (calling) You can't make me stay in your religion! I'm only half in it!

PRESIDENT

OF IRAN: Aside from being a sinner in the eyes of the law, religion, and humanity, this woman has dirtied literature and the arts! It would be fitting for the world's literary figures and scribes to banish this ugly, cursed, and evil person from their midst. To receive money as a paid hack to vilify others is one of the basest deeds a writer can commit!

KAREN: What's he talking about? Nobody paid me!

KEVIN: I know, I know. Calm down.

KAREN: We've got to stop this.

KEVIN: What do you suggest?

KAREN: I need to speak out. They're telling lies about me!

KEVIN: Do you really think you should?

SECOND VOICE

ON P.A.: The BBC is now able to bring you, via Tehran Home Service, the voice of The Ayatollah, the supreme spiritual leader of Iran.

AYATOLLAH: (in person, above) The benedictions and salutations of God and the Prophet of God upon the pure souls of the martyrs. Greetings to the everlasting epic-makers who have written their theoretical and practical epistles with the crimson of martyrdom and the ink of blood. Salutations to those who have become sincere sentinels to their faith and their community, whose complete sincerity has been attested to by the drops of their blood and the torn-off pieces of their bodies —

KEVIN: He can't be serious!

KAREN: Shh!

AYATOLLAH: Today, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, there are those who would root out our faith and its clergy. But God has always been the guardian of the sacred torch, and, God willing, He will continue to be so despite the tricks and ploys of world devourers! The Islamic Revolution has been an astounding success — in most respects and objectives. In the recent war, we achieved victory; the enemy achieved nothing by imposing such a degree of devastation. Nothing and no one will stop our revolution. And that is why today I issue a fatwa, my edict.

KAREN: (weakly) No!

AYATOLLAH: The author of the novel *The Blasphemer*, Karen Rajeeb, the woman who has written in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, the Koran — as well as her publishers — is hereby sentenced to death.

KEVIN: (loudly) NO!

AYATOLLAH: I call on all zealous Muslims to seek out and execute this woman so that no one will dare again to insult the Islamic sanctions. Whoever is killed on this holy path will be regarded as a martyr, God willing, and find his place in Heaven. Anyone who does not have the power himself to kill this author but who has access to her should and must refer the woman to those who will and must punish her for what she has done. May God's blessing be on you all!

(Lights out on AYATOLLAH.)

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KAREN: (looks at KEVIN, unable to speak, reaches out to him) Kevin . . . ?

KEVIN: (reaching out for her, not touching her, across the room from him)
Oh, my darling! . . . Oh, my poor darling . . .

KAREN: (numb) Now I'm completely alone, aren't I?

SLOW FADE.

Scene 5
IN THE WORLD

FEMALE TV

BROADCASTER: (to audience) Mrs. Karen Ralston-Rajeeb was in hiding under police protection last night and unrepentant about her novel, *The Blasphemer*, which provoked the Ayatollah of Iran to call for her execution.

POLICE

OFFICIAL: (to audience) Rest assured that we are doing everything in our power to see to it that, the author, an American subject married to a British citizen, is fully protected against this threat to her life.

PUBLISHER: (to audience) We're one hundred percent behind you, Karen! But we have had to close our office in London. There were just too many bomb threats. We have to protect our property and staff. You do understand our position, I'm sure. After all, the edict mentioned us too!

MODERATE

MUSLIM: We very much regret and denounce the Ayatollah's statement. Violent responses like this are not the correct religious response. It is a very dangerous development.

FANATIC (entering) Are you the one defending the blasphemer?

MODERATE

MUSLIM: There are — there have to be other points of view in the Muslim world —

- FANATIC: Those who love our enemies are our enemies. (Shoots the Moderate Muslim who falls dead. The FANATIC then kicks the body.)
- KAREN (to audience) I regret nothing. I am not sorry I wrote the book. I wish I'd written a stronger one! All I regret is the murder of innocent people on my behalf.
- FANATIC (to audience) Death is perhaps too easy for Mrs. Rajeeb. Her mind must be tormented for the rest of her life unless she asks forgiveness of Almighty Allah.
- FOREIGN
SECRETARY: (to audience) The death sentence is a matter of grave concern to the Prime Minister. It illustrates the extreme difficulty of establishing the right kind of relationship with a regime that has ideas that are very much its own.
- KAREN: (turning to FOREIGN MINISTER) Is that the statement? Is that all the British government has to say?
- FOREIGN
SECRETARY: You must realize, Mrs. Rajeeb, that very sensitive international relations are at stake here. And you started this! (Exits.)
- FAN: (entering to KAREN) Mrs. Rajeeb?
- KAREN: (very startled, putting her hands up to protect herself) Who are you? How did you get in here? Get out! Get out!
- FAN: It's all right. It's all right! I met you at your publication party. I'm a fan, remember?
- KAREN: (relieved) Oh, yes, now I recognize you. I thought you were an assassin. (Laughs nervously.)
- FAN: Oh, no, I just wanted you to know that I'm still supporting you. Don't give up. This is a positive outrage to civilized standards of behavior anywhere!
- KAREN: Thank you. Just call first next time, would you?

FAN: Are you going to remain here in America?

KAREN: Probably not, no. If you know where I am, then others . . .

KEVIN: (entering with a suitcase) I've packed for both of us. We don't have time to take everything. Someone will bring our things later.

KAREN: That's what they said last time. But they forgot my new manuscript. Is it part of the plan to keep me from writing anything else? . . . Am I getting paranoid?

KEVIN: Sweetie pie, you have every right to be paranoid. Let's get the hell out of here!

FAN: (calling after them) Good luck in England!

KEVIN: Shhh!

(He and his wife rush off together.)

MALE TV

COM'TATOR (in progress) . . . The Ayatollah's sentence of death on Karen Ralston-Rajeeb emerged as yet another well-calculated stroke by the founder of the Islamic Republic. On what has been officially declared a day of mourning in protest of the book, even members of the pragmatic wing of the political leadership have felt constrained to voice their support for the Ayatollah's fatwa. The Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, who met with Sir Geoffrey Howe in London last week avoided the issue of the execution order when . . . (Fade out)

FEMALE TV

WATCHER: What's on the telly, luv?

MALE TV

WATCHER: That same old Hajeeb or Bajeeb business. I'm gettin' real tired of hearing that day after day.

FEMALE TV

WATCHER: Well, it's real important, isn't it?

MALE TV

WATCHER: (amused) I guess it is — at least to those Muslims!

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

THE RAJEEBS' NEXT APARTMENT

(Lights up on telephone. It rings several times. No one answers. Finally KAREN appears and looks at it, afraid to pick it up. After another ring, she lifts the receiver.)

KAREN: (nervously) Hello?

FRIEND: (on telephone, in view, opposite side of the stage) Karen?

KAREN: Who is this?

FRIEND: Don't you recognize my voice? It's me!

KAREN: Oh, of course. I haven't seen you since the publication party.

FRIEND: Oh, I know I've been terrible not to call. First I didn't have your new number. It hasn't been easy keeping up with you. How's it going? Is it awful?

KAREN: Pretty awful, yes.

FRIEND: How awful for you! What's the worst part?

KAREN: Not being able to go outside. I thought it might be better here, but —

FRIEND: How long has it been?

KAREN: Seven weeks.

FRIEND: Don't you have a window at least?

KAREN: Yes, but there isn't much of a view. Besides I can't stand by it for very long or I think I should have stayed in the States.

FRIEND: You think someone might shoot you? There are more guns over here.

KAREN: That's what Kevin thought, but . . .

FRIEND: You don't know how I admire you, Karen Can't you maybe go for a drive? In disguise.

KAREN: Kevin and I don't want to use disguises.

FRIEND: Oh, it's too thrilling for words.

KAREN: I'm glad you think so.

FRIEND: You can use it for a book!

KAREN: I'd rather use my imagination.

FRIEND: You must know I'm very sympathetic. How is Kevin?

KAREN: . . . Great. He's out, seeing Molly. Under police protection.

FRIEND: Tell him I said hello, will you?

KAREN: I will.

FRIEND: Well, I'd better get off the line, hadn't I? You're probably as busy as a bee.

KAREN: Actually, very few call anymore. It was hectic for a while . . . Not now . . . And, my, it gets tiring praying five times a day.

FRIEND: You pray five times a day?

KAREN: I do now! (not really liking the caller but lonely) You got some time to talk?

FRIEND: I'd love to, Karen! Only I've got to do some things I've been putting off for ages.

KAREN: Oh, I see. (trying to keep the FRIEND on the line) Like what?

- FRIEND: Just boring old things. Shopping for some new tennis shoes. Then I'm meeting my sister for a new play. A matinee. Nothing much really. Not like your life!
- KAREN: (envious) Shopping, huh? . . . Tennis? God, I'd love to play tennis.
- FRIEND: Don't you get any movies or anything?
- KAREN: Yes, on video. I've seen sixteen movies. I don't want to see any more right now.
- FRIEND: At least you don't have to go out and be in all this traffic and all those crowds.
- KAREN: True. And I have books, the telly. I'm working — sporadically — on my new novel. I'm fine. I'm counting my blessings.
- FRIEND: You must be making a fortune. I hear about the sales all over the world.
- KAREN: Though what I'm going to spend it on I don't know. God, I'd love to go shopping. I don't even want to buy anything. I just want to be able to go out (wistfully) shopping again.
- FRIEND: Karen, I've really got to ring off, I'm sorry. It's been super talking with you. Call me sometime. You've got my number, haven't you?
- KAREN: I have.
- FRIEND: Let's chat like this again. Anytime. Though I'm not home as much as I used to be. I'm seeing somebody.
- KAREN: That's wonderful. I'm pleased for you. Who is it?
- FRIEND: Oh, I'll tell you about them sometime. Really interesting person.
- KAREN: Yes?
- FRIEND: Got to fly! It's been great getting back in touch. I just want you to know that I think you're right up there — with Socrates and Martin Luther and Galileo! Bye! (Hangs up.)

KAREN: (Looks at the receiver, shakes her head at the irony) Thanks. I needed that.
(Puts the receiver back. She sits in a chair, slumps.)

(Then as if to a sales clerk, sadly:)

Oh, miss, may I try on those tennis shoes you have on sale — the ones in your window? That window . . . No, I don't mind waiting. I'll just sit here and . . . enjoy the view. I don't mind waiting, don't mind at all . . .

BLACKOUT

Scene 7

ON A STREET

REPORTER: Excuse me. We're doing a survey about the Karen Ralston-Rajeeb affair.
Would you mind giving your opinion?

MAN ON

STREET: No comment. (Hurries away.)

REPORTER: (to another passersby) Excuse me! Excuse me! We're doing a survey on the Karen Ralston-Rajeeb affair. Would you mind talking to us?

2nd MAN ON

STREET: What do you want to know?

REPORTER: Do you think the Ayatollah is correct to issue his fatwa?

2nd MAN ON

STREET: His what?

REPORTER: His death edict on the author.

2nd MAN ON

STREET: No, that isn't right. I don't think he should do that. That's what I think. I wouldn't let them do that to me.

REPORTER: Thank you . . . Ma'am, could we speak to you for a moment? We're doing a survey on the Karen Ralston-Rajeeb affair.

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WOMAN ON

STREET: Yes?

REPORTER: Tell us your opinion of it, if you would.

WOMAN ON

STREET: I think they should leave that poor woman alone. Absolutely.

REPORTER: And why is that?

WOMAN ON

STREET: Why? Because she has a right to express an opinion as an American,, doesn't she? If she can't speak out, then who can?

REPORTER: Thank you for your opinion.

BLACKOUT

Scene 8

THE EXPERTS SPEAK

DISGUISED

EXPERT: (his face hidden) Thank you for inviting me to speak. I am a Third-World journalist now living in London. I'd rather not give my name. My voice is being disguised by this microphone for my safety.

MUSLIM

EXPERT: I am the Iranian Ambassador to the Holy See. I am here on behalf of the Ayatollah, who has asked me to explain his position on this matter. We have agreed that I will speak first. What you people in the West do not seem to realize is that we consider religion important. It is our life. We do not admire your so-called liberal attitude. Where has this attitude gotten you? Your society is a disaster! Crimes! Drugs! You preach to us?

DISGUISED

EXPERT: If you want to understand all this, you must realize that the entire Islamic system consists of the *Hodud*, or limits beyond which one should simply not venture. Islam does not recognize unlimited freedom of expression. Call them taboos if you like, but Islam considers a wide variety of topics permanently closed.

MUSLIM

EXPERT: How would those of you who still have some reserve of genuine belief feel if someone threw excrement on Jesus Christ as he hangs on a crucifix? You do not take your faith seriously and as a consequence you spit on it and let others spit on it. Well, we take our faith seriously and will let no one — no one — spit on it.

DISGUISED

EXPERT: The Western belief in human rights, which seems to lack limits and which, by the way, it is just a belief that people agree upon or don't agree upon — is quite alien to Islamic traditions. And not just on the fringes of Islam.

MUSLIM

EXPERT: This Rajeeb woman has questioned the authenticity of the Koran, the holy book that was directly dictated by Allah himself. (Blessed be his name.) Can you not understand so simple a matter as that? What is all this sympathy for this person!?

DISGUISED

EXPERT: Does all this mean that a majority of Muslims would approve of the death sentence passed on this so-called author? The honest answer is probably yes. To be sure, Muslim intellectuals, especially the tiny liberal and leftist wings, have been outraged, but the mass of Muslim poor, who feel their religion and culture have been humiliated in the West for too long, are unlikely to consider the complex issues involved in this very complex case.

MUSLIM

EXPERT: But I keep telling you it isn't complex at all. It's as simple as the nose on your face!

DISGUISED

EXPERT: (touching his nose hidden under his disguise) Muslim law appears to have undergone a change. The opinion of one man — the Ayatollah — seems to have replaced all the elaborate mechanisms and consensus of 1300 years of Muslim jurists.

MUSLIM

EXPERT: For those who know the sacred texts of the monotheistic religions, as I do, this case is very easy to understand in the sacred scriptures, in the Hebrew Torah, there

(cont'd.)

are numerous examples of sinners who are punished with death, for example for the sin of homicide or adultery — in the latter case by stoning. The sin of this writer is much graver than adultery because adultery has only a personal dimension while the writer's sin has a social dimension. It is treason to her husband's faith. It is treason to her husband!

DISGUISED

EXPERT: (to MUSLIM EXPERT) Do you mind if I ask you a question?

MUSLIM

EXPERT: Not at all.

DISGUISED

EXPERT: If Mrs. Rajeeb were in this room with us, or on this panel, unarmed, and you were armed with a pistol, would you pull the trigger? Would you personally shoot her?

MUSLIM

EXPERT: (after a hesitation) Yes, certainly I would. Why hesitate? Such an execution would prevent evil and corruption from spreading among young people. And this is good for all society. Honor demands it.

BLACKOUT

Scene 9

THE RAJEEBS' NEXT APARTMENT

KAREN: (entering) Well, how do you like this one? What is it — the eighth or the ninth?

KEVIN: This one's got a microwave.

KAREN: (bitterly) Oh, great. We need to save time cooking, don't we? We need more time on our hands.

KEVIN: And it's got a garden — and no tall buildings around it.

KAREN: (bitterly) Remind me to send a thank-you to Scotland Yard.

KEVIN: Karen, you aren't getting in one of your moods already, are you? We just got here!

KAREN: What moods? Why should I have moods? Just because I keep moving everywhere — apartment after apartment after apartment, and yet I can't go anywhere. I ride in automobiles with darkened windows and enjoy the sunshine in the garden by sticking my finger through the crack under the back door every month or so.

KEVIN: I hope you don't think it's easy for me either. You think I enjoy this?

KAREN: No, I don't suppose you do. Let's talk about it.

KEVIN: I don't want to talk about it. It just gets you angry.

KAREN: I'm very grateful you're sticking by me through all this. There — Are you happy?

KEVIN: You're making it worse than you have to.

KAREN: Easy for you to say.

KEVIN: (doesn't say anything) Do you want me to order food?

KAREN: Let's eat out tonight! Can't we? Let's try it. We'll wear disguises. A private room in a restaurant. The Queen goes out, doesn't she? They protect her, don't they?

KEVIN: We could ask. (calling) Peter?

POLICE

GUARD: (entering) Yes?

KAREN: We want to eat out tonight. Can you arrange a guard?

POLICE

GUARD: You'd be taking a terrible chance, Mrs.

KAREN: I know, but I can't stand being confined anymore. How do they protect the Queen? The royal family?

POLICE

GUARD: Begging your pardon, ma'am, but Her Majesty, although she has her enemies, doesn't have . . .

KAREN: . . . Quite so many as I do . . .

POLICE

GUARD: Anybody could be the — I mean, we simply can't have enough guards to guarantee your safety. It could be a waiter who does it. (Looks at KEVIN for confirmation.) Isn't that so, Mr. Rajeeb?

KEVIN: (Looks at KAREN.) Do you really want to take the chance, darling?

KAREN: (torn) No, I suppose not! "Here's your soup, ma'am." (Pretends to have an assault weapon, mowing a person down, makes gun noises.) POW! POW! POW!

KEVIN: Maybe we could invite some friends over.

KAREN: Do we have any left?

KEVIN: How about your publisher? He's over here, right?

KAREN: That's a good idea. The phone is a marvelous invention, but it just won't substitute for human warmth.

POLICE

GUARD: So you'll be dining in then?

KEVIN: Thank you, Peter. Yes, we'll be dining in.

(POLICE GUARD leaves.)

KAREN: Well, that was easy!

KEVIN: (calling her on her insensitivity) And incidentally, they could very well shoot *me* when they're trying to shoot you, and you know it.

KAREN: (sadly) Yes, darling, I know it. I'm sorry. . . I know it all too well.

BLACKOUT

Scene 10

THE RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

PUBLISHER: (entering) So good to see you, Karen! You remember my wife, Evelyn.

KAREN: Of course!

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: It's so nice to see you again.

KAREN: It's so good to see you! So good of you to come! . . . (calling to KEVIN)
Kevin, they're here!

KEVIN: (offstage) I'll be right there!

KAREN: Let me take your coats. (Helps them, very solicitous, hyped up more and more throughout the scene) Take a seat. What would you like to drink? We've got —

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: Just white wine for me.

PUBLISHER: I'll have the same.

KAREN: (preparing the drinks, a little high already) Hard to get this stuff over in those holy places, I hear! I sure know how to commit all the crimes, don't I? *Headline: Karen Ralston-Rajeeb Gunned Down with Alcoholic Beverage in Mouth.* (Takes a sip.) Shudder, shudder!

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: (uncomfortable, feeling endangered) Have you . . . Have you been all right here since you came? (Looks around for possible assassins.)

KAREN: Not to worry. The blinds are drawn. (Pretends to open them suddenly) Peek-a-boo! Here they are! The killers!

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: (jumps, very startled) Oh, you scared me!

KAREN: Just my little joke.

PUBLISHER: At least they seem to have stopped bombing the different foreign publishers. The last one was several months ago — the Italians.

KAREN: Ah, more money for me! Do you know how much I've made out of all this?

PUBLISHER: Nearly fourteen million.

KAREN: (telling him anyway) Nearly fourteen million dollars. I'm a success!

(Offstage KEVIN drops a plate or a pan, making a loud racket.)

PUBLISHER: (startled) Oh, Jesus, what was that!

KEVIN: (calling) It's just me!

PUBLISHER: (to KAREN) God, I thought I was going to swallow my Adam's apple.

KAREN: Don't. We have something better to eat. Pork chops with an orange glaze. Is that right, Kevin?

KEVIN: (can't hear) What?

KAREN: I decided on pork chops. Pork, get it? As long as I'm a sinner, I might as well do it up, right? . . . You're Jewish, aren't you?

PUBLISHER: Yes. But we eat pork.

KAREN: Oh, don't spoil it! (bitterly ironic) It's all part of my long-range plan to undermine the religious principles of the entire universe. More wine? (Refills all glasses.)

PUBLISHER: You haven't been drinking too much, have you, Karen?

KAREN: Oh, I try. But no matter how much I drink, the slightest little sound — a car backfiring, a shout in the street — sobers me right up. Funny about that. Kevin, come in here. We have company.

KEVIN: (offstage in kitchen) Just a few minutes!

KAREN I told him I'd cook the meal, but he insisted on supervising. We have so many sent in, you see, it's sort of a treat to prepare one yourself. And the ones you prepare yourself probably *aren't* poisoned. (to KEVIN) Easy on the poison, Kevin!

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: (still nervous, looking around for possible assassins) I'm sure . . .

KAREN: So tell me, Simon, how's the big world out there? And please let's talk about something else besides Mrs. Ralston-Rajeeb, the blasphemer. Believe me, I hear about me all the time.

PUBLISHER: All right. . . . What would you like to . . . ? (He's also uncomfortable and afraid, moving around, but trying to hide it.)

KAREN Any new book burnings? Ah, see, there I go. Can't get myself off my mind for even a moment. So let me re-phrase that: anybody else's book been burned lately?

PUBLISHER: You know, Karen, there's something I've always wanted to ask you. I never did. Do you mind?

KAREN: Mind? No, it's just so great to hear human beings in person. Human voices wake us and we drown — our sorrows. (She toasts them and takes a sip.) So what do you want to ask me?

PUBLISHER: You really don't mind? It's sort of personal.

KAREN: Fire away — so to speak.

PUBLISHER: When you wrote your book, with its multiple points of view and unreliable narrator and so on, and all its literary trappings and so on, did you think you were being — deep down inside, I mean — did you actually think you were being blasphemous?

PUBLISHER'S

WIFE: Yes, someone asked me that same thing the other day.

KAREN: Did they?

PUBLISHER: Were you?

KAREN: Is that a trap? Have you been hired by the Ayatollah? How is the old fart? He's quite old, I understand. Maybe he'll die and that'll get me off the hook. Should I be praying to Allah to let the antiquated old fossil croak? Am I being disrespectful? Dare I not call the Ayatollah an old fart? (Blessed be his name!) Is my book disrespectful? Are you having doubts, Simon, about what I did? What we did? . . . What you did?

PUBLISHER: No, not really. I just —

KAREN: Actually it's a very interesting question, one I've asked myself. What it gets down to is do I — does anyone? — have the right to mock — and, if so, what does he or she have a right to mock. No, I don't think my book is blasphemous. But one man's blasphemy is another man's good time. Do I have the right to satirize, to criticize, to make fun of other people's cherished beliefs? Can I mock the Pope? The Emperor of Japan? Feminism? People with dark skin? People with thin skin? Only what's safe? Obviously I can't. I thought maybe they'd burn my book — it goes with the territory. It's even fun. Yes, fun! How merrily a book burns! But they changed the rules and called for my execution — and your execution — or, rather, they just reminded me what their rules are. And do you know what this has done to me? This has made me look into my little God-empty heart, and you know what I see there? Stupidity. My stupidity. I was so arrogant, so full of myself — No, so sucked in by useless Western pewlings about freedom of expression that I thought I could go further than any other writer has dared to go and I could get away with it. Well, I couldn't . . . and I haven't, and I probably won't. The history of the world has shown over and over again that in any conflict between the humanist and the religious visions, religion will always triumph. In the war between politics and art, art will always *lose*. The pen is not mightier than the sword! . . . And so there you are! And here I am . . . (Gestures toward her prison) My mockery, my questioning — my whatever it was — was, was not worth it, Simon. It simply has not been worth it.

(They are embarrassed by his confession, by his hyped-up semi-drunkenness.)

PUBLISHER: Karen, is there anything . . .

KAREN: I'm sorry. I'm supposed to stand on a high hill or something and be a beacon of light in this darkness we call life, but I can't . . . I can't.
(breaking down) I'm a small coward, not a great woman, and I'm terribly afraid and I don't want to die even though I hate this goddamned, goddamned world . . . I hate it . . . I hate it! (Breaks down completely.)

KEVIN: (appearing with a tray) Music up! The appetizers are here!

(He takes in KAREN close to tears, the others' embarrassment. KEVIN is embarrassed too.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 11
IN THE WORLD

FANATIC: (to audience) There is, of course, a way out of this rat-like existence for Mrs. Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

KEVIN: (to KAREN offstage) Karen, come quickly! There's an announcement about you!

(KAREN enters, wiping his hands with a towel.)

KAREN: (to KEVIN) What?

FANATIC: (to audience) The Ayatollah has told us that God is all-forgiving, most merciful. I have been instructed to announce that Mrs. Rajeeb can win a reprieve from the sentence of death upon her by publicly recanting her insults and blasphemies and apologizing in front of the entire world. We await her decision.

KAREN: Never!

(Lights up on PUBLISHER.)

PUBLISHER: (on telephone, excited) Karen, have you heard?

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KAREN: I've heard.

PUBLISHER: It's a chance for you. You've got to take it.

KAREN: Do I?

PUBLISHER: It'll save your life!

KAREN: Funny, I don't feel apologetic.

PUBLISHER: It doesn't have to be sincere. Just say what they want.

KAREN: No.

PUBLISHER: I thought you said –

KAREN: No.

PUBLISHER: Karen, don't be stubborn. Don't be proud. This is your chance and you've got to seize it with both hands. I'd do it in a minute.

KAREN: Don't make me make pompous speeches about this, Simon.

PUBLISHER: Oh, I know it's not the job of the artist to make life more comfortable or more stable or more orthodox for society or governments or anybody, but you've made your point. Now we just want to keep you alive!

KAREN: I don't want to.

FANATIC: (to audience) The Ayatollah has graciously agreed to present Mrs. Rajeeb with a statement which she can sign. I hold a copy of it in my hand.

KAREN: What do you think I should do, Kevin?

KEVIN: I don't know. You have to decide.

AYATOLLAH: (above, reading) "I, the author of The Blasphemer, Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, because I have profaned the Prophet, the Koran, and God Himself hereby express my profound and heartfelt regret that I have permitted publication of my book, and I

(cont'd.)

herewith withdraw the copyright from all publishers worldwide, and express my humble apology, which I beg may be accepted by those I have offended and outraged.”

(He holds it out toward KAREN.)

KAREN: I won't sign that. I don't feel that.

FRIEND: (appearing from the shadows) Karen, don't be a fool. This is no time for grandstanding!

FAN: (appearing from the shadows) Sign it, Mrs. Rajeeb! We'll understand! We want you to live to write more books.

KAREN: But what will I write — what can I write if I sign this paper? Who'll ever trust me again?

KEVIN Karen, sign it! They found out where Molly is staying. They pinned a note on her dress. On her dress. Do you understand what I'm saying?

KAREN: (registering the horror in this) Oh, my god, no . . .

KEVIN: I didn't tell you before, but I'm telling you now. Sign it. . . Sign it!

CHILD'S
VOICE IN

DISTANCE: Mummy? . . . Mommy?

KAREN: (Holds out her hand for the paper.) Give it to me.

(The AYATOLLAH hands it to the FANATIC, who hands it to the PUBLISHER, who hands it to KAREN — all very elaborate.)

KAREN: I don't have a pen. Will blood do?

PUBLISHER: (Rushes over with a pen) I have a pen. (Gives it to KAREN.) Don't think about it. It's just words, mere words.

KAREN: Mere words? (Examines the paper, holds it as though she is going to rip it to shreds, then she motions to the PUBLISHER to turn around. When he does, KAREN uses the PUBLISHER'S back as a writing surface.)
There . . . I've signed it.

PUBLISHER: Thank God! (He quickly carries the paper back to the FANATIC, who carries it back to THE AYATOLLAH.)

FANATIC: (gloating, to PUBLISHER) Tell Mrs. Rajeeb we are most happy that she has come to her senses.

PUBLISHER: I will tell her. (Starts to tell KAREN.)

KAREN: (holding up her hand) Tell the Ayatollah that his pen is mightier than mine. (Hands back the pen to the PUBLISHER. She is crushed.)

KEVIN: (coming to KAREN) It's the best thing you could have done. You were very brave.

KAREN: Was I? That's odd. I don't feel brave.

KEVIN: They fight dirty.

KAREN: Oh, no, don't say that. Just different standards. (bitterly) You've got to stand up for what you believe in — like they do . . . like I did.

(Very bright lights up on KAREN — spotlights.)

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: Controversial novelist Karen Ralston-Rajeeb brought to a close her troubles with the Muslim world today when she signed a public apology expressing “profound and heartfelt regret” and “humble apology” for writing the novel *The Blasphemer* and has agreed to terminate its further publication and distribution in all countries . . . (Spotlights on KAREN begin to fade.) . . . Oh, this just in. It seems that the Council of Mosques and the Ayatollah have changed their mind and now find Mrs. Ralston-Sarajevo's apology unacceptable.

(Bright lights back on KAREN.)

KAREN: What!?

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: The apology has been rejected because it has been deemed, and I quote, as "falling far too short of what was needed."

KEVIN: Oh, my God! . . . Oh, Karen!

KAREN: (angrily) Good. I'm glad they rejected it! I should never have signed it! I take it back. Let them write whatever they want. Make it as sniveling, as ass-licking as you can possibly make it, then stick it up your collective religious assholes! You bastards! You fucking bastards! You'll never make me eat shit again, I swear it, on the life of my child! I SWEAR IT!

BLACKOUT

(Then lights up on:)

AYATOLLAH: (above) Indeed, I have seen the recent words of Mrs. Rajeeb. They are most interesting. Most literary. . . Will no one aid me? Will no one send this sinning, godless scoffer, this unregenerate, two-faced child of darkness to burn in Hell forever?

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Scene 1 IN THE WORLD

MALE TV

BR'CASTER: Good evening. A new development in the Karen Ralston-Rajeeb affair. Following rejection of the author's signed apology, the forces aligned against her, led by the Ayatollah of Iran, have now put a price on the novelist's head . . .

FANATIC: (to audience) We will pay 1 million, 500 hundred thousand dollars to anyone who will assassinate this desecrator. We will pay 5 million dollars if he is an Iranian citizen.

SECOND
MUSLIM

MODERATE: The murderous response of certain forces threatens the multiculturalism that some of us have worked hard to bring about in recent years. Most moderate Moslems feel confused and disoriented by the sheer ferocity of this response. We find it difficult to voice dissent. But please do not let this confirm a prejudice that all Moslems, and by extension other non-white, non-Christian people, are prone to be barbarous and brutal, delighting in inflicting medieval punishments on those they consider their enemies.

MALE TV

BR'CASTER: World reaction to the new development has been swift . . .

COMMUNICATIONS

CHAIRMAN: As chairman of the Horton Communications Conglomerate, I will pay, not 5, but 10 million dollars to the man or woman who will, not kill, but civilize this Ayatollah!

ISLAMIC
FOREIGN

MINISTERS: At our meeting in Riyadh yesterday we Muslim foreign ministers voted for Mrs. Rajeeb's book to be withdrawn and boycotted./ But we refuse to back the call for the author to be killed.

UNESCO

SPO'PERSON: A house of freedom, UNESCO is troubled whenever the fundamental right of the individual to express his or her thoughts is threatened.

WORLD
WRITERS'

SPO'PERSON: We of the World Writers Association call upon world opinion to support the right of all people to express their ideas and beliefs and to discuss them with their critics on the basis of mutual tolerance, free of censorship, intimidation and violence.

SPORT
MAGAZINE

SPO'PERSON: We at *Sport Magazine* say that those whose deep religious convictions prevent them from obeying the law of this land should and go live in a country where the conflict does not exist.

BRITISH
FOREIGN

MINISTER: Although I have not yet had an opportunity to read the book in question, I am reliably informed that it is extremely rude about Britain!

SPO'PERSON

FOR THE POPE: The Pope has asked me to reply to the demand that His Holiness join the crusade against *The Blasphemer*. The Holy Father will not become involved in this. After all, he is not a defender of the Muslim faith. Frankly, it is their problem, not ours. We have enough of our own, especially with all the books and films which cast doubt on Jesus Christ himself. We have never asked for Muslim help in such matters.

RAHVI HAB: As a representative of the Black University Lecturers Association, I believe that we are embattled in a war between the cultural imperatives of Western liberalism and the fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, both of which seem to claim an abstract and universal authority. Can not one side, or both, compromise?

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

ANOTHER APARTMENT OF THE RAJEEBS

(Lights up on KAREN as she puts on a holster, then places a gun in it.)

KAREN: (to the VOICES) All fine for you to say! (patting the gun once it is in place, ironically) Ah, can't get me now! I'm carrying my own gun. This should do it against one billion fanatics, shouldn't it?

(KAREN enters.)

KEVIN: Karen?

KAREN: (She swirls, draws the gun, and almost shoots him.)

KEVIN: (quickly) It's me!

KAREN: . . . Oh, my God! (taking the gun off) I can't wear this. I'll kill you. I'll kill the wrong somebody.

KEVIN: But you've got to have some protection.

KAREN: (holding up the gun) This isn't going to do it. . . . It won't be from up close; it'll be from far away, probably. And if they want to get me that badly, they'll —

KEVIN: We've lasted this long! The Ayatollah is sick.

KAREN: He is?

KEVIN: If he dies, maybe they'll cancel the fatwa.

KAREN: Did you hear that for certain?

KEVIN: There are rumors.

KAREN: How sick is he? Maybe we should fly him over here to be treated by the National Health; that'll be the end of him for sure.

KEVIN: We've got to hang on! We can't quit!

KAREN: Who's quitting? Did you see Molly? Is she all right?

KEVIN: They moved her. I can't tell you where. But she's safe. They won't find her this time.

KAREN: Why can't you tell me?

KEVIN: So you won't reveal it — to a guest, on the phone, inadvertently. . . . And so that you won't go there. They'll just use Molly to get you to leave here.

KAREN: Am I supposed to do nothing when they threaten my child?

KAREN: It's better this way. Safer.

- KAREN: You know I wouldn't put her in any more danger than she's in. Listen to me — I'm getting pompous! How we all put the best face on our selfish motives.
- KEVIN: You were thinking of going to her, weren't you? Before I went?
- KAREN: . . . I was . . . It was to save my daughter, but it was also to get out of my prison. My string of prisons.
- KEVIN: I don't really think they'll hurt a child. I've been talking to some people.
- KAREN: Just scare her to death by pinning a message on her dress. The bleeding fuckers! (Takes the gun, torn.) Should I use this or not? What can I do? What can I do?
- KEVIN: (angrily) I don't know! I don't know!
- KAREN: Kevin, what's happening to us? I can feel us beginning to break apart.
- KEVIN: No, we're not. We're not!
- KAREN: We've got to get out of here. How many times have we moved now?
- KEVIN: Twenty-three, maybe twenty-four.
- KAREN: We can't even remember. How many times can we keep moving? Until the day we die? We've got to do something else.
- KEVIN: Like what?
- KAREN: What if we change ourselves? What if a plastic surgeon comes here and alters our faces, alters whatever we need altered?
- KEVIN: Both of us?
- KAREN: It has to be both, don't you think? They'll recognize us otherwise. You've always wanted your nose to be a little shorter. This is your chance. I don't know what they can do for me when it comes to improving my looks, but maybe this is the step we —
- KEVIN: (joking) It'll take more than a shorter nose. A lot more.
- KAREN: (irritated) Do you think it's funny?
- KEVIN: A little, yes. *You* make jokes!

- KAREN: We can't just go on being targets, patient targets!
- KEVIN: I don't know. (Touches his face.) We've given up so much already. What will we look like?
- KAREN: We can afford the best, that's for sure! (putting on a voice) "Nothin' but the best for you, luv."
- KEVIN: But will it work? I've heard of people being scarred, being —
- KAREN: It's worth a try. I know I don't have any right to ask this of you.
- KEVIN: Doesn't it take time to heal? What if we're laid up or have bandages and we can't even see who's around us? What if we become disfigured and even more noticeable?
- KAREN: I don't think that happens anymore. Are you afraid of the pain? Is that it?
- KEVIN: It couldn't be worse than the pain we're having already. But what if we're still recognized afterwards? What if it just gives us a false sense of security? And then . . .
- KAREN: . . . You don't want to, do you?
- KEVIN: I didn't say that. Why do you always assume what I'm thinking!
- KAREN: I'm sorry! I didn't mean it. I've been under a little pressure, or haven't you noticed!
- KEVIN: *I* haven't been? At least you're working on something. I can't even write a note. I'm supposed to have the premiere next month. I'm not going to have the music finished!
- KAREN: And you won't be able to call it the Unfinished Symphony. There's already one of those.
- KEVIN: There's something about you, Karen, that needs —
- KAREN: Oh, no. Here it comes.
- KEVIN: Your bitter tongue. Your soul. You're very impulsive. Too impulsive. You wanted to rush off to Molly and now you want to rush into plastic surgery, and tomorrow off to something else!

KAREN: I'm not impulsive at all. I'm a slug.

KEVIN: In fact, it's your impulsiveness, your . . . whatever you want to call it that's gotten us into this mess in the first place.

KAREN: The inevitable lecture.

KEVIN: Yes, here it comes. If you hadn't been so damned ready to upset people, to impose your bloody-mindedness on everybody else, there wouldn't have been any of this. Why couldn't you just write a normal book, for shit's sake? When I write my music, I don't feel I have to dethrone Beethoven or wipe out Mozart or do any of the other snide, cynical things you seem to think you have to do!

KAREN: Well, has it ever crossed your mind that maybe that's why your music is —
(Cuts herself off)

KEVIN: My music is what? . . . My music is what?

KAREN: Nothing.

KEVIN: Second-rate?

KAREN: No.

KEVIN: That's what you were going to say. You think my work is second-rate.

KAREN: And you *hate* mine!

KEVIN: I don't hate it. I just hate what it's doing to us! It's just some old book, for Christ's sake!

KAREN: Do you realize what you're saying? I can't speak for music. I don't think you have the same problems. But I deal with ideas. Ideas you can see right out here. You're saying I should settle for a stagnant culture — a stable one but a stagnant one — vs. a cantankerous and a messy one — but an open one. An open one, with an occasional new thought!

KEVIN: I'm not telling you what to write.

KAREN: But you are, Kevin! You are telling me. You're all the people in the universe telling others not to take chances, to make changes.

KEVIN: You can take chances . . . only not . . .

KAREN: *This* chance? Only not the chance I want to take?

KEVIN: Oh, god, I don't know what I'm saying, what I'm doing. Don't listen to me. I'm worn out and I'm confused.

KAREN: . . . Sure?

KEVIN: . . . Sure. I thought I'd never say this, but men can be jerks.

KAREN: And women can be pricks.

(They laugh together, but there still is tension.)

KEVIN: (offering it) Do you want the gun?

KAREN: (shaking her head, after a moment) . . . No . . .

KEVIN: (putting it down) Well, it's here if you want it.

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

SAME RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: The Ayatollah of Iran died this morning in his sleep. The elderly spiritual leader suffered a heart attack following surgery to repair a blood vessel. This has led to speculation as to whether his death will mean an end to the edict which has placed a price upon the head of American novelist Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

PUBLISHER: (rushing in) Karen, Karen! Have you heard!

KAREN: (entering) What? What are you doing here? They'll follow you here!

PUBLISHER: I just had to tell you the good news. The Ayatollah has died.

KAREN: Couldn't you have called. . . He did? . . . And?

PUBLISHER: There's no official word yet, but everybody seems to think this will allow the forces over there to cancel the fatwa. It'll make them look more humane.

KAREN: So Karen's head might remain in place, after all? Karen's head! Karen's head!
Do you remember Mr. Dick in Dickens, obsessed with King Charles's head?

PUBLISHER: Of course.

KAREN: . . . Silly bugger, wasn't he?

PUBLISHER: You don't seem pleased by the news.

KEVIN: (entering) What is it?

PUBLISHER: The Ayatollah died! Karen may be saved! .

KAREN: Did anyone follow you here?

PUBLISHER: I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't thinking. I thought you'd be thrilled.

KAREN: Karen's head is very thrilled.

POLICE

GUARD: (entering) Have you heard the news, you two?

KAREN: We've heard. Thank you.

POLICE

GUARD: Maybe our job here is almost over, you think?

KAREN: I'm afraid to hope. . . But could it be? Oh, my God, could it be! (Gets animated.)
Oh, Kevin, what do you think?

KEVIN: It sounds like it could be the break we've been looking for!

KAREN: Maybe the Middle Ages have ended at last!

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: (voice over) The funeral of the Ayatollah of Iran took place this afternoon before
an estimated two million of his followers . . .

(Enter a procession carrying a coffin.)

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: (voice over) During the funeral an unfortunate event took place. In their grief, the
devotees . . .

(The devotees, wailing, approach the coffin and cause it to tip, spilling out a body.)

FEMALE TV

BR'CASTER: (voice over) . . . inadvertently caused the body of the Ayatollah to tumble from its coffin and fall to the earth, where it was accidentally trampled upon before it could be returned to its resting place.

(The devotees gather the fallen corpse and put it back in the coffin and hurry off.)
(Lights up on KAREN, watching all this.)

KAREN: (pointing to the procession, bitterly) Of course it's *not* funny. It's *not* hilarious. Such devotion can only earn our deepest respect.

BLACKOUT

Scene 4

IRAN

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: Well, are we going to lift the fatwa or aren't we? As the new Ayatollah, you should make the final decision.

NEW

AYATOLLAH : I'm not certain.

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: It might make us look better right now. Because of the hostages we are holding, even some of our friends are putting the screws on us.

NEW

AYATOLLAH: When will you get it into your head that other considerations, spiritual and moral considerations, to be exact, come before your petty politics?

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: When will you get it into your head that you can't do just anything you may want?

NEW

AYATOLLAH: I am not so unworldly, so inexperienced as you would have me. For one thing the fatwa has united the people of this country as nothing has united them since my predecessor took over years ago. More than the war they lost did. This kind of unity cannot be purchased . . . or ignored. (cynically) You know and I know we need a scapegoat.

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: You can hold people only so long on ideological grounds, even religious ones, and then they start wanting . . . radios or chewing gum or automobiles or ballpoint pens, and they will have them, you know? They will have them. They'll grow very angry with those who deny these things to them.

NEW

AYATOLLAH: But Islam is in danger! Islam is in danger!

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: Is that your decision?

NEW

AYATOLLAH: That is always my decision.

IRANIAN

PRESIDENT: Then, of course, that is my decision. . . . The fatwa continues. (Bows slightly to the NEW AYATOLLAH.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 5

THE RAJEEBS' NEW APARTMENT

FRIEND: (in the shadows) Karen, have you heard?

KAREN: (despondent, already knowing) Heard what?

FRIEND: (coming forward) Oh, I hate to be the bearer of bad news.

KAREN: Do you? . . . (ironically) You'd never know.

FRIEND: It's just terrible what they're doing to you! I hope you didn't get your hopes up.

KAREN: Me? . . . Certainly not. The last time I had my hopes up was when I was writing the first paragraph of my first book.

FRIEND: How's Kevin holding up?

KAREN: Kevin has left me.

FRIEND: Oh, no! Please!

KAREN: Mentally. It's just a matter of time before the body follows. . . I just hope it doesn't fall out of its coffin.

FRIEND: Karen, I'm sorry I haven't been able to do much for you. I really don't know what to do!

KAREN: Picket the nature of the universe for me.

FRIEND: (disappearing into the shadows) I feel I've failed you. Believe me, Karen, I don't want to fail you!

KAREN: (to herself) The Ayatollah is dead. Long live the Ayatollah!

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

IN THE SHADOWS

KEVIN: (alone) I don't want to leave her. I love her. At least I have loved her in the past. No, I still love her. I do! Love doesn't go in a minute. Do you want to know something? I didn't love Karen when I married her. I did it, in part, to spite my mother. I did it . . . why do we marry anyone? But gradually I learned to love her. I really, truly loved her. . . . (plaintively) Only now I'm learning not to love her all over again.

KEVIN's

MOTHER: (in the distance) I told you, Kevin. I told you it wouldn't work! I warned you! I warned you! . . . But you can always come home to me, if you have to.

JOURNALIST: (importuning KEVIN:) Mr. Rajeeb, I wonder if you'd be interested in selling your memoirs on this whole unfortunate business. I represent a very influential newspaper that would pay you a substantial amount of money —

KEVIN: We don't need any more money.

JOURNALIST: — if you would just be willing to let us in on what it feels like to be the spouse of a condemned woman under such unprecedented circumstances and tell how you two have managed to weather what must be extremely severe pressures on your marriage. Our readers are always looking for upbeat stories that — (KEVIN walks away from the JOURNALIST.) I'm sure that we could . . . Mr. Rajeeb?

WOMAN

CRITIC: (lecturing KEVIN from a distance) Of its nature, the novel is individualistic, eccentric, exploratory. It sets itself against public fictions. Unsurprising, then, if those who are protected by public fictions turn savagely on the novelist who dares to undermine these fictions. In that sense all serious novelists are subversive, and we must all be ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

MALE

COUNSELOR: (from a distance) A counter outside force can often result in a binding, a unifying growth within a married relationship. The enemy, you see, acts as a catalyst that brings the two parties, however deep their differences, into a mutually nurturing and supportive integration which can be one of the most satisfying dimensions of human love.

KEVIN: (emptily) . . . You don't say?

BLACKOUT

Scene 7

IN A GARDEN

KAREN: (sitting alone on a chaise longue with a book; a blanket is over her lap) The tenth month and counting! I'm afraid there's no more adrenaline left. This morning Kevin dropped a book on his bedroom floor, and it didn't even faze me. . . That's right, Kevin is still here. Wherever here is. We've moved again. Like the covered garden? Doesn't let in much sun, but I cannot be seen. I've been assured! One of our guards went up on top to make sure. Anybody up there? . . . See. (No answer) I don't even know if we're in England anymore. I think the powers that be keep sending out notices that I'm somewhere in London, but you could fool me. Maybe we can fool them. . . . Kevin is sticking by me. I'm very proud of him. He calls his mother often. I'd call mine too, but she's dead. So is my father. No, they weren't killed on my behalf. They died separately, slowly . . . back home. I miss them sometimes. My sister is afraid to call or write. I understand. Our names *are* similar; they could . . . I wonder if Molly will remember me. She's nine now. Kids remember things that late, don't they? I remember things that happened when I was three. A mosque fell on me. I was climbing on it, and it toppled and almost crushed me . . . No, I made that up. I don't remember anything. (Starts masturbating underneath the blanket) Did I tell you Kevin has his own bedroom here? We're very lucky to have so much room this time. I don't blame him. Would you want to sleep next to me? Who knows who might be under the bed, right? Kevin assures me that he still loves me. I still love him.

Everybody loves everybody. It's really all very touching. . . . We haven't slept together for several months now. I don't really mind. I have done what the Chinese philosophers say a person should do with their life: had a child, planted a tree, written a book. . . . Well, two out of three ain't bad. Maybe I'll plant the tree yet. (Masturbating) I'm not sure if I want to write another book. (faster) I remember when Kevin put my hand on his butt at the party. His sweet, lovely butt . . . Oh! . . . I want his sweet, lovely butt in my hand. Oh! Please! . . . (She sobs and climaxes at the same time) Oh . . . Oh . . . Kevin! Oh . . . (Sobs gently.) (The moment is sad, subdued, not comic.)

SLOW FADE

Scene 8

IN PARLIAMENT

FIRST M.P.: (speaking with rhetorical flourish) I must say that I think it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves whether Her Majesty's Government should continue to fund a security staff of four men, now that it has been a year since Mrs. Rajeeb went into hiding. Do we really need to put out this kind of money this late in the game?

SECOND M.P. : (speaking in kind) I realize that Mrs. Rajeeb's protection has become an expense and a nuisance and a serious hindrance to our normalisation of relations with our Muslim world neighbors, but I must also say that we cannot abandon Mrs. Rajeeb now. I mean how would it look if we backed down?

FIRST M.P.: Surely there are private sources that would be happy to pay for Mrs. Rajeeb's guards. I don't see why the Government should have to bear this burden forever!

SECOND M.P.: Are we not willing to save Mrs. Rajeeb any longer? Is it the money or has she simply become too much of an impediment to the great business of this world?

FIRST M.P.: I beg you not to misconstrue my words. Of course I want Mrs. Rajeeb to be protected. We are committed to protecting her and her family. But indefinitely?

SECOND M.P.: If she were out of the way, wouldn't that open up "avenues," as they say, to the offended parties? After all, what is one person against so many others, correct? Especially so many others with so much oil!

FIRST M.P.: You are completely distorting my intention!

SECOND M.P.: I'm sure I am, but wouldn't it be convenient if Mrs. Rajeeb died of natural causes about now? So convenient for everybody, except Mrs. Rajeeb, of course.

FIRST M.P.: Mrs. Rajeeb has made so much money from all this furor, it seems to me she can well afford to pay for her protection herself!

BLACKOUT

Scene 9

THE RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

KAREN: (entering) Are they going to cut the number of guards? (thinking he was there when he entered, looking for her) Kevin?

KEVIN: (entering) They're talking about it.

KAREN: They can't!

KEVIN: I don't think they will.

KAREN Even talking about it paves the way to . . .

KEVIN: They're just testing the waters.

KAREN I know! But *we're* in the waters they're testing!

KEVIN: You approve of free speech. People talking about what they want. Right?

KAREN: But their free speech may mean our deaths! I never approved of death!

KEVIN: Well, you draw the line one place; they draw it somewhere else. You like a messy world. Isn't that what you said to me?

KAREN: (her words thrown back into her own face) Kevin!

KEVIN: Excuse me. I'm going to work on my piece. Maybe I'll make my second deadline at least. (Exits.)

KAREN: Kevin!

BLACKOUT

Scene 10

THE RAJEEBS' APARTMENT

MALE TV

BR'CASTER: The House of Commons voted today to reduce the number of guards employed to protect controversial writer Karen Ralston-Rajeeb. Citing governmental expense and a lessening of the immediate danger to the author, who has been in hiding now for fifteen months, Arthur Hawkhurst, M. P. for Laidley, carried the day in a close vote that . . . (Fade out.)

KAREN: Only two guards now. Thought of hiring some of my own, but you know what? Those who want to get me would —

(Lights up.)

APPLICANT: (in KAREN's imagination) I'd really like to work for you, Mrs. Rajeeb. I believe in what you stand for. I can provide excellent references.

KAREN: Do you? Can you? . . . Or are you a liar? A murderer?

APPLICANT: Please! I —

KAREN: Get out of here! Get out of here! . . . Get out of here!

(The APPLICANT runs out.)

KAREN: (pointing to the TV) I used to be on every day. Now I'm almost never on. I'm non-news. Maybe that's good, actually. Out of sight, out of mind? Or is it out of sight, out of life? Hey, I'm here! I'm here! Don't forget me!

(Sounds of pretty original music being played in the dark — a violin.)

KAREN: Ah, that's charming. (She listens to more of the music, smiling.) He's working again. Thank god! I want him to have that premiere. That's lovely, Kevin. (Moves closer to the sounds) Can I come and listen? (No reply.) Have you written that part out, or are you just improvising? (No reply.) (Moves closer still.) I guess you want me to leave you alone. But it's so beautiful. I didn't realize how wonderful it was. It's not second — (Cuts herself off, goes closer.) I'll come and listen quietly. Just ignore me. (Moves nearer to the darkened spot) Why are you playing in the dark? Does it inspire you? . . . Kevin? (KAREN moves right next to the darkened area) Kevin? . . . It's you, isn't it? Can I turn the light on? (She flips a switch.)

(Lights up on KEVIN sitting and playing — or just the last note or so if the actor cannot play the violin.)

(KEVIN smiles at her.)

KAREN: It is you. Don't mind me. Don't stop. I just want to listen. There, I've gone and interrupted you. I'm sorry — (About to leave.) (Suddenly the ASSASSIN, his mouth disguised by a cloth, jumps out of hiding and scares KAREN — and the audience — almost to death by stabbing at KAREN with a large knife.)

KEVIN: Karen, look out!

(KAREN jumps out of the way just in time. The ASSASSIN says nothing, but he comes toward KAREN menacingly.)

KAREN: (backing away) Wait!

ASSASSIN: (gesturing hard at KEVIN to stay seated) Stay where you are!

KEVIN: (to KAREN) He made me play. I didn't want to! I . . .

ASSASSIN: Mrs. Rajeeb, you have lost.

(KAREN backs away, very frightened.)

ASSASSIN: It has taken us this long to find you, but now that we have . . .

KAREN: Help! Guards! Guards!

ASSASSIN: Your guards are dead. See their blood? (Shows the large knife with blood stains on it.)

KAREN: Oh, my god! (Still backing away.)

ASSASSIN: (approaching her) How does it feel to have me here?

KEVIN: We have a gun!

ASSASSIN: Unfortunately you don't. (Takes the gun from under his clothing, shows it.) Is this the one you mean? (He spills the bullets out onto the floor.)

KAREN: Oh, my god.

ASSASSIN: I believe you said that already. Not very articulate for one whose profession is words. Where's all your wit now?

KAREN: At least tell me you read my book, you wanker!

ASSASSIN: Goodbye, Karen Ralston-Rajeeb.

(KAREN sees that she is cornered.)

ASSASSIN: I'll use this. It'll make less of a noisy fuss. (indicating the knife)

(The ASSASSIN turns out the lights.)

ASSASSIN: (in the dark) How's that, Mrs. Karen Ralston-Rajeeb? How do you think it feels to have a knife stuck in your throat?

(Several moments of silence, darkness.) (Then a loud crash.)

(Silence.)

KEVIN: Karen?

(KAREN turns on the lights, holding the violin. She has knocked out the ASSASSIN, who lies on the floor.)

KEVIN: Karen?

KAREN: I hit him with this. (Holds up the violin.)

KEVIN: Thank god! . . . You know what this means?

KAREN: (a desperate joke) They're getting closer?

KEVIN: You might say that! (Checks the ASSASSIN carefully, takes the knife.) What do we do with him? . . . Should I stab him?

KAREN: Can you?

KEVIN: Yes! He pointed that knife at us and stood there and made me play the music. He said it would draw you in like a siren. And it did. Let's kill the son of a bitch!

KAREN: (standing over the body) . . . I don't think I can.

KEVIN: Well, I can! (He takes the knife from KAREN and jabs it into the ASSASSIN.) Oh, god, I don't think I did it hard enough. He's still alive. (Backs away, sickened.)

KAREN: We've got to get out of here right now. Whether we kill him or not, they know where we are now. Let's go! (KEVIN hangs back, fascinated by the body on the floor) Kevin, we've got to go!

(KEVIN looks up at KAREN, unable to move. He drops the knife and follows her in a daze.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 11

ON THE RUN

KAREN: (ahead of KEVIN) Come on, we'll go to a hotel. They won't know where, which one.

KEVIN: (stopping, seeing something) Karen, is that . . . ?

KEVIN: The guards. Don't look.

KEVIN: I can look. I've already stabbed a man tonight.

KAREN: (steering him away from the bodies) We've got to keep our wits about us. Mustn't panic.

KEVIN: We've got to be nice to each other. We've got to be nice to each other!

KEVIN: Yes, come on, Kevin!

KEVIN: We can't let them come between us . . . We can't . . .

KAREN: Please, Kevin, don't wait here. We don't know who else might be here.

KEVIN: I thought things were getting better, and then this!

KAREN: I know, I know. Come, please!

KEVIN: They're winning, aren't they, Karen?

KAREN: No! We had a close call, that's all. We'll get new guards. More guards!

KEVIN: It's just a matter of time. They'll wear us down. We can never have enough guards, never have enough —

KAREN: We'll be fine! Once we go into hiding again.

KEVIN: But there must be leaks. Somebody talked or somebody got to the — somebody got to the . . . They're going to kill you next time. They're really going to do it!

KAREN: Nobody got to anybody. They just traced this one house. Just this one house! Don't crack, Kevin. (Shakes him.) Don't crack now!

KEVIN: (Suddenly slaps her hard across the face.) You! . . . You! (backing away from her, sobbing, giving him a lethal look. KAREN rubs her cheek, dumbfounded.) (He screams.) YOU! (KEVIN breaks down and weeps. He tried to come near to touch her, to comfort her, but she won't let him get near, holding out her arm to keep him away as he helplessly half-circles her.)

KEVIN: Karen . . . Karen, I'm sorry . . .

KAREN: (weeping, keeping him away, her voice overlapping his) No . . . No . . . No . . . Stay away!

KEVIN: I'm terrified!

(KAREN hesitates, then embraces and comforts KEVIN.)

SLOW FADE

TV

BR'CASTER: Two of controversial author Karen Ralston-Rajeeb's bodyguards were found slain early this morning, following what police officials said was apparently a break-in of the author's most recent hiding place. The writer and her husband are missing and feared kidnapped or assassinated. Police are investigating. If you have any relevant information on their whereabouts, you may contact the number on your screen.

LIGHTS DOWN

Scene 12

A HOTEL FOYER

(Lights up.)

(KAREN and KEVIN enter.)

HOTEL

CLERK: May I help you? Do you have a reservation?

KAREN: No. (trying to hide her face and yet not seem to do so) But we'd like a room, please.

HOTEL

CLERK: Certainly. Double or twin beds?

KAREN: (looking at KEVIN) Uh . . . twin, please.

HOTEL

CLERK: Thank you! And may I see a credit card?

KAREN Uh, cash. I have cash! (Shows a wallet.)

HOTEL

CLERK: To cover incidentals.

KAREN: Can't you take cash now? (Offers cash.)

HOTEL

CLERK: (taking it) As you please. Would you mind signing in? (Offers form.)

KAREN: Do we have to? (She signs in.) Is that all right?

HOTEL

CLERK: (peering at signature) Perfect. We're very happy to have you with us, Mr. and Mrs. . . . ?

KAREN: Packard. Harold Packard.

HOTEL

CLERK: Here's your key, Mrs. Packard. (Hands it to her.) The elevator is right over there. (Points.)

(KAREN nods, looks toward the elevator.)

KEVIN: (guiltily) We'll bring up our luggage later. It's in the car. We have luggage. In the car.

HOTEL

CLERK: Very good, sir. If you need a porter, just let us know.

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KAREN: No, no porter. We can manage.

HOTEL

CLERK: As you wish.

(KAREN and KEVIN move away as the CLERK stares after them. He shakes his head at their odd behavior, but he doesn't recognize them and goes back to his work.)

(FADE as KAREN and KEVIN exit.)

(LIGHTS UP on:)

POLICE

OFFICIAL: It's possible they may have escaped and are in hiding somewhere. It's possible that some group is holding the couple, although we have received no verification of this, and no one has come forward to claim responsibility for their murder. Nor has anyone claimed responsibility for the deaths of the two bodyguards, and no assassin was found at the scene of the crime even though the blood of a third party was discovered there. But rest assured that we are leaving no stone unturned to get at the root of this case.

BLACKOUT

Scene 13

A HOTEL ROOM

KAREN: (gesturing as if she just heard the POLICE OFFICIAL on TV) They don't know we're here. That's something.

KEVIN: I wonder what happened to the one who got in our apartment.

KAREN: The one you stabbed? Is this really me talking? "The one you stabbed." Did you hear me? "The one you stabbed."

KEVIN: Maybe he got out and bled to death somewhere else.

KAREN: Maybe he recovered and is outside the door.

(Sudden knock on the door, making them jump. They huddle, frightened. They put their fingers to their lips to hush each other, remaining very quiet.)

VOICE

AT DOOR: Room service!

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KAREN: (whispering) Did you order room service?

KEVIN: (whispering) When you were taking a shower. We have to eat.

KAREN: I'm not hungry. And what if it's a trap?

(Another louder knock.)

VOICE

AT DOOR: Mr. and Mrs. Packard? It's room service!

KAREN: (to KEVIN) We can't live like this. (She flings open the door, half expecting to be killed.)

WAITER: (entering with two trays on a cart) There you are! I was beginning to think you'd gone out.

KAREN: (relieved but still nervous) No, we're still here.

WAITER: Well, this should hit the spot! (Pulls up the dish covers at the same time.) *Voila!*

(Both KAREN: and KEVIN flinch, thinking it may be a bomb.)

WAITER: Is something wrong?

(KAREN and KEVIN look at each other and smile, even begin to laugh a bit.)

KAREN: Nothing's wrong. Everything is just fine. . . Thank you.

KEVIN: Yes, thank you.

(KAREN and KEVIN begin to laugh very hard, out of hysteria and relief; then they tear into the food, eating eagerly and messily, as the waiter stares.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 14

ASSASSIN'S HOME

ASSASSIN: (at first he finishes assembling a bomb as his PREGNANT WIFE watches, both silent; then he begins to tape it to his body) This time I will not fail.

ASSASSIN'S

WIFE: You have barely recovered from your wounds yet.

ASSASSIN: What is this to me! (Dismissively touches the stab wound that KEVIN made.)
When I find them this time, I will not toy with them. That was a mistake. This
won't be. (Touches the bomb he is taping to his body.)

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: But you are not strong enough to try again.

ASSASSIN: I am strong enough. God makes me strong.

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: Let another do it.

ASSASSIN: I wish to be the one.

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: (worried about him) You must die as well?

ASSASSIN: I will die as well.

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: (Covers her mouth to keep herself from speaking.)

ASSASSIN: When I am a martyr in heaven, you will collect the reward. You and the child
will be taken care of..

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: It was not the money I am mourning for.

ASSASSIN: What I do is noble.

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: But you do not have to die! Someone else can do it!

ASSASSIN: Here is a letter in which I explain everything. Present this to the authorities after
. . . (Hands her a letter.) It is stained with my blood should there be any doubt
about who did this. They will believe you. It will be the same blood. (Touches
the bomb.)

ASSASSIN'S
WIFE: You cannot do this.

ASSASSIN: What?

ASSASSIN'S

WIFE: (keeping her voice quiet, but defying him) You cannot do this.

ASSASSIN: (looking at her, then looking away, quietly but firmly) . . . You will not tell me what I cannot do.

ASSASSIN'S

WIFE: But!

ASSASSIN: Enough. Do not make me raise my voice.

(The ASSASSIN continues taping the bomb to his body.)

(The wife is silent.)

ASSASSIN: Do not forget, when our son is born, the first words he must hear on entering the world. Whisper in his ears . . . Promise me . . .

ASSASSIN'S

WIFE: . . . There is no god but Allah, and Mohamed is his prophet . . .

(He smiles, pleased; the wife is sad.)

FADE

Scene 15

IN THE WORLD

FANATIC: We managed to penetrate the so-called security forces in Britain that have been protecting Karen Rajeeb from the punishment she so richly deserves. She managed to escape the last time, but there will be a next time. And a next time. And a next time.

RABBI: As Chief Rabbi of Adler House, I feel I must speak out on how we can end this horror. We have legislation proscribing the excesses of freedom of expression, laws against blasphemy, pornography, libel, incitement to race hatred, subversion, and breaches of national security. We need an international agreement to protect the supreme values of innocent human life and freedom! By outlawing the amplification of words which, as this whole experience has shown, can poison the atmosphere and become as lethal a threat to mankind as any physical pollution.

A WRITER: Dear Editor, with all that has been written and spoken about the Ralston-Rajeeb affair, I have not yet heard any non-Muslim voices raised in criticism of the writer herself. On the contrary she appears to be some kind of hero. But to my writer's mind she is nothing but a dangerous opportunist. This kind of sensationalism does indeed get an indifferent book to the top of the best-seller list, but what a cheap way of doing so! It also puts a severe strain on the very proper principle that the writer has an absolute right to write what he or she likes. But, no, I say! We all have a moral obligation to apply a modicum of censorship to our own work in order to reinforce this very valuable principle of free speech. Is this too much to ask?

BLACKOUT

Scene 16
HOTEL ROOM

(Lights up on KAREN and KEVIN in twin beds.)

KAREN: (throwing some remnants of food away) Do you think we'll ever get out of here?

KEVIN: Probably not.

KAREN: Someone's going to know it's us eventually — a desk clerk, a waiter, a maid.

KEVIN: You want to move?

KAREN: Again?

KEVIN: At least we don't have to pack. (Starts to get out of bed, only partially dressed.)
Let's go.

KAREN: Let's not. (after a moment) How do you feel?

KEVIN: (holding a towel or sheet in front of himself) Never nakeder. But I'm managing.
How about you?

KAREN: I'm a little cold.

KEVIN: Really?

KAREN: Aren't you? (Holds up the covers a little bit for him.)

KEVIN: (hesitantly) You're sure? (meaning getting into bed with her)

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KAREN: I'm sure.

KEVIN: (Gets in her bed, then snuggles under the covers.) Cozy?

KAREN: (snuggling) . . . Cozy. (sitting up fast) You aren't the assassin, by any chance?

KEVIN: Want to check me out?

KAREN: You mean . . . here? (She feels him under the covers.)

KEVIN: That's a start.

KAREN: I don't feel any weapon there.

KEVIN: Try over here. (He moves her hand to his crotch.) How's that?

KAREN: That must be it.

KEVIN: Yeah? Why do you say that?

KAREN: How shall I put it? Because I feel like it's going to explode. Just don't explode without me. (She turns to him and kisses him.)

KEVIN: My darling! My darling! I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry! Oh, Karen, I'm so sorry!

(They kiss passionately as the LIGHTS FADE.)

Scene 17

IN THE WORLD

MALE

FANATIC: With each day as the blasphemer eludes us, our shame grows. Are we not men?

FEMALE

FANATIC:

Can no one tell us where she is?

ASSASSIN: (wearing bomb) We must stand up for truth. Will no one join me to end this monster's life once and for all? Islam is in danger! We have won before and we will win again! Blasphemers must pay the price.

FEMALE

FANATIC: (stepping forward with a weapon) I will join you.

MALE

FANATIC: (stepping forward with a weapon) And I.

MALE/FEMALE

FANATICS: Death to all those who blaspheme!

(Two more FANATICS with weapons step forward, silently, swelling the ranks.
An imposing line is now organized and arraigned against their enemy.)

FADE

Scene 18

THE HOTEL

KEVIN: (getting dressed) We can't stay here any longer.

KAREN : (still in bed) Hit and run, huh?

KEVIN: (serious) You'd better get dressed.

KAREN: I think that made me pregnant.

KEVIN: (surprised) Can you tell?

KAREN: Not really. . . . I hope it makes me pregnant.

KEVIN: I don't. We don't need another hostage to fortune.

KAREN: Well, thank you very much!

KEVIN: You know it's true.

KAREN: (Starts to protest, then doesn't.) You're right. I know it's true. We can't have another child. . . . I'll pack. (Gets up, starts to look around.) We don't have anything to pack. . . . Nothing.

KEVIN: We could steal some sheets and pillow cases.

KAREN: I just had a vision. As we really are. We have nothing between us and them but these walls. (Touches the wall.) Absolutely nothing, is there?

KEVIN: . . . Just our love. . . Here. (Hands her some of her clothing.)

KAREN: (putting it on) Thanks.

KEVIN: Need anything zipped?

KAREN: Not really. . .

KEVIN: Where are we going this time?

KAREN: (Doesn't answer.)

KEVIN: Do you think we should get out of the country? Go back to the States? Turn ourselves back over to Scotland Yard?

KAREN: (Doesn't answer.)

KEVIN: (when she doesn't answer) Karen?

KAREN: (Still doesn't answer.)

KEVIN: (finishing dressing) There, I'm ready. But we really should have a plan before we leave here, don't you think? Not just burst out. Let's sit down and think it through.

KAREN: . . . Actually I have a plan.

KEVIN: Oh? Would you mind telling me!

KAREN: When we get downstairs, I'm going to go in one direction and you're going to go in another.

KEVIN: (remembering an article she forgot) Wait! I almost forgot this. (Gets it) And where do we meet up?

KAREN: . . . We don't.

KEVIN: What? You're not making any sense.

KAREN: We're going to separate.

KEVIN: Separate? For how long?

KAREN: For . . . For . . .

- KEVIN: (the realization dawning) You mean . . . forever?
- KAREN: Just until this passes.
- KEVIN: Then you do mean forever. (genuinely upset) I don't want to separate. . . . I want to stay with you.
- KAREN: If you're with me, they'll kill you too. If you're alone, they . . .
- KEVIN: (a sad realization) . . . won't.
- KAREN: It's best.
- KEVIN: It's not best! It's the worst! I'll never see you again.
- KAREN: We'll see each other again.
- KEVIN: If we separate now, I know we'll never —
- KAREN: You can't remain with me one minute longer. Don't you see? I don't want them to kill you, my darling. . . . Don't you see? I love you so much . . . (holding in tears) Don't you see?
- KEVIN: Oh, Karen! (He embraces her.) I see! Oh, I see! But I don't want to leave you. You can't be alone.
- KAREN: I won't be alone . . . (meaningfully) for long.
- KEVIN: (crying, hugging her desperately) Oh, Karen! Oh, darling! What can I do for you? What can I do?
- KAREN: I'm afraid there's nothing anyone can do. Goodbye, luv . . . (disengaging herself) But live for me. Finish your music.
- KEVIN: Oh, my God.
- KAREN: Wait a few minutes after I leave, and then you go. Go to the police. Say you will.
- KEVIN: Karen! Oh, Karen! This is horrible! (not wanting to let go, hanging onto her)
- KAREN: (quietly) Kevin, Kevin . . . (He holds his hands, then frees herself.) All right? All right? . . . Tell me you'll do that. (harshly) Tell me!

KEVIN: (Reluctantly, slowly he nods his head.)

KAREN: Don't look this way. (Moves away from him.) Don't look. Don't say goodbye.
Don't say . . .

(KAREN goes toward the door, looks back at KEVIN, then leaves.)

KEVIN: (his back to him) Are you gone yet? . . . Karen? . . . Karen?

(He runs toward where she exited, then stops.)

KEVIN: Forgive me. Forgive me. But I am so afraid. I am afraid!

(He places his arms around himself and cries hard, his tears turning to shivers, his body shaking.)

(Lights slowly fade.)

(Lights up on:)

SOCIETY FOR

TOLERATION: Allow me to say, for the Society for Religious Toleration, that what is needed very badly is a reasonable defense of what I call the 'virtues of fundamentalism'. There has been an unargued assumption on the part of the press, indeed on the part of almost everyone, that fundamentalism has no intellectual basis. But people should be allowed to defend the better side of fundamentalism! The courage and bravery of fundamentalism!

BLACKOUT

Scene 19

ON THE RUN

(We see KAREN running in the semi-darkness, perhaps on a street, almost out of breath. She stops for a moment. She is sweating.)

KAREN: (to herself) I must remain calm. I must not draw attention to myself like this.

BEGGAR: (emerging from the shadows) Can you spare some change?

KAREN: (startled) No! Leave me alone!

BEGGAR: Sorry! Have a good evening anyway. (Moves off.)

KAREN: (sweating) Maybe I should go back to the police? . . . They couldn't protect me before. . . . A cottage somewhere! The north? Some unobtrusive cottage in the highlands . . . I'll hole up again. I'll read. I promise I won't go shopping!
 (desperate) They can't kill me — it took so long to make all these cells, this brain. To fill it with these thoughts. To learn to walk. To read. . . . To learn to run. . . . Who am I fooling? I can't go anywhere. (yelling) I CAN'T GO ANYWHERE!

(A sinister figure emerges from the shadows.)

KAREN: I have no change.

ASSASSIN: (wearing the bomb, making himself clearly visible) Karen Ralston-Rajeeb?

KAREN: No.

ASSASSIN: Come to me.

KAREN: No!

ASSASSIN: I will come to you.

(Takes a step; there is a sudden explosion. The ASSASSIN disappears.)

KAREN: (cowering) What happened? What happened? (Moves closer to where the ASSASSIN was) You blew yourself up, you son of a bitch! (half laughs) You blew your fucking self up, you vicious son of a bitch, didn't you?

(Another threatening FIGURE appears. What follows takes place in KAREN'S imagination — an anticipation of the reality. Fog and shadows and lights swirl around her.)

FIRST

FIGURE: (from one side) Karen!?

SECOND

FIGURE: (from another side) Karen Ralston!?

THIRD

FIGURE: (from the audience) Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, we will find you!

FOURTH

FIGURE: (yelling) Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, I am here!

VOICES

TOGETHER: KAREN / RALSTON/ RAJEEB!

FIFTH

FIGURE: (quickly, very near KAREN) And what is your name, Ma'am?

KAREN: (standing up, yelling, offering herself to them defiantly) . . . I am Karen Ralston-Rajeeb!

(The moment holds, then:)

FIRST

FIGURE: (moving closer) You have been found guilty.

SECOND

FIGURE: (moving closer) A sentence of death has been issued.

KAREN: (making a joke) Has it been carried out yet?

THIRD

FIGURE: Are you not repentant, even now?

FOURTH

FIGURE: There is yet time.

THIRD

FIGURE: There is yet . . . mercy to be had.

KAREN: What is the condemned to say? Have you not written it out for me this time? No? Well, I have written it for myself. I know there isn't much time. Some notes. Just notes. (holding them up, referring to the notes at times) Yes, I apologize. I humbly apologize. . . . I apologize because I let you terrorize my mind and body to the point where I have almost forgotten who I am. I apologize for not being clear and passionate about my freedom, about my truth. As clear and passionate as you. I apologize because I have not shouted that your standards, your morals are not more humane than mine, are not more decent than mine! You act in the name of goodness? But you are murderers. I am a thinker. Yes, I apologize to my murderers because I only flirted with "blasphemy" against your orthodoxy. I apologize because I let you for a time tell me what I can write, what I can say aloud. I have no desire to be a martyr. I do not think I will go to heaven. Or hell. . . . I will say more. I do not believe that the Koran is the Word of God, with not one word ever to be faulted. That there is no god but Allah and that

(cont'd.)

Mohamed is his prophet. Nor do I think his name is blessed — and nothing else. It may be so for you, but it is not so for me. . . . Krishna is not my Lord and Master. It may be so for you, but it is not so for me. Jesus Christ is not my personal savior. I do not accept the Bible. It may be so for you, but it is not so for me. Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Karl Marx, no one but me is the Lord and Master of my thoughts. You dare impose your beliefs upon mine because they do not agree with yours? You dare to tell me no one can leave your religion?! You dare to tell me that I can only think what's been thought before? You dare to tell me what shall be in my own mind? . . . Oh yes, yes , I deeply apologize . . . but only because I have been vacillating, weak . . . and afraid. Until now. You can end my life, but you do not own me. And you cannot — and you will not — ever make me believe (passionately) WHAT . . . I . . . DO . . . NOT . . . BELIEVE!

(KAREN looks at the audience.)

(A shot rings out.)

KAREN: (taking her time, time has slowed down) They have won. That is their bullet that is speeding toward my brain. That is their bullet that will silence my tongue, this pumping heart. That is their bullet that is hurtling from the back of this theatre not toward the brain of Karen Ralston-Rajeeb, but toward the brain of _____ (The actor playing KAREN names herself and steps out of character). For it is in such brain-burned, fanatical cowards lurking there in the darkness with a gun that tyranny — cruel, mindless tyranny — speaks the final line.

(The actor holds out her hand toward the audience, an act of true bravery, for who knows who might be there to silence her?)

(The actor playing KEVIN now appears, stepping out of character as himself, standing beside the actor playing KAREN.)

KEVIN: (with head up) And I am _____ (Gives his real name.)

(Then other actors playing the other parts step forward, as themselves. All this should parallel the line of volunteer FANATICS earlier.)

(They all hold the moment.)

(Then to BLACK.)

End of Play

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES: To put some backbone into audiences by standing up to fundamentalists of all kinds, especially murderous ones.