

ASYLUM

by
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CHARACTERS:

LYNN - 50s/60s, white, no-nonsense and thinks she's doing good.

MIKE - 30s, white, asylum liaison, congenial to a fault

MOHAMMED - 19, Syrian, affable refugee

TIME: Now

PLACE: North London

*The living room of LYNN's house. Afternoon.
LYNN paces. MIKE sits. The former is tense. The
latter is quietly anxious.*

Inconvenient. **LYNN**

I know. **MIKE**

Inconvenient is what it is, Mike. **LYNN**

I agree. **MIKE**

Can't it be put off? **LYNN**

It could. **MIKE**

Until I'm back from my holiday. **LYNN**

At which point he's likely to get lost in the system. **MIKE**

And no one else is available? **LYNN**

You were eager. **MIKE**

I know. **LYNN**

If you've changed your mind - **MIKE**

I haven't. **LYNN**

No one would think less / of you - **MIKE**

Of course they wouldn't how ridiculous - **LYNN**

She paces.

But my holidays. I can't very well cancel. **LYNN**

You'd have a few days to get situated at least. **MIKE**

And you had a few months to sort this out for me sooner. **LYNN**

Waiting lists, eh? **MIKE**

And now I'm meant to leave a stranger in my house and take off for a week so then I could come back to - what? - the roof missing? **LYNN**

He's a refugee, Ms. Driscoll. **MIKE**

I know. **LYNN**

A youth in crisis. **MIKE**

I am aware. **LYNN**

Not a troubled youth with a criminal past. **MIKE**

She paces.

MIKE

I'm happy to pop in every day and check on things so you can enjoy your holiday.

LYNN

And have that good deed on my conscience - no thank you.

MIKE

Three days really is more than enough time to figure out if you two will get on.

LYNN

Who's worried about getting on? I'm not his caretaker. He's a lodger.

MIKE

Yes. In a way. But it's helpful for asylum seekers to feel like they are a part of something early on to make their transition to living in the city much easier.

LYNN

Am I meant to be his tour guide as well?

MIKE

After everything they've been through we've found that / the best way -

LYNN

I know what they've been through, Mike. For God's sake. I read the papers. I've seen the news. Dead bodies in camps. Mothers selling their babies. And that little boy washing up on the shore like that. I mean that was the limit. And what? I just write a letter to my stuffy MP? That wasn't going to cure my anxiety about not being able to do anything.

MIKE

And it's people like you that make our lives easier and their lives better because you're right.

LYNN

Unlike those smug bastards clicking like on all those Facebook campaigns thinking they can change the world from behind a computer. Please.

MIKE

Exactly. Collective outrage only accomplishes so much. Which brings us right back around to Mohammed.

LYNN

That's his name.

MIKE

Yes.

LYNN

Really?

MIKE

Yes. Why?

LYNN

Nothing, Just - I mean I know it's a popular name for them - but it does cause problems I'm sure. In some circles.

MIKE

What's in a name, eh?

LYNN

Oh yes of course. You're right.

MIKE

Look, no pressure - no obligation. Nothing to weigh on your conscience. We'll do whatever we can on our end. But why don't you have a quick chat and see how you get on?

LYNN

What now?

MIKE

He is just outside.

LYNN

Outside? This whole time? You've left him outside?

MIKE

Well - in the car. Just in case.

LYNN

My god you left him outside this whole time?

MIKE

He has my iPhone. Angry Birds Star Wars just came out.

LYNN

Sorry?

MIKE

He's alright.

LYNN

What an ambush.

MIKE

That's not how I planned it.

LYNN

Then why on earth -

MIKE

Because of his parents political involvement in the crisis.

LYNN

Ah - fighters I take it.

MIKE

They all are.

LYNN

Of course of course. Well - I mean - we can't have the poor boy sitting out there in this heat.

MIKE

The air-con is on.

LYNN

That's not an excuse to be impolite. Bring him in.

MIKE

Are you sure?

LYNN

No - but ambush, Mike. Ambush.

MIKE exits out and LYNN paces and mutters to herself in disbelief. We hear a car door open and shut. It takes longer than you would expect for them to re-enter.

MIKE ushers in MOHAMMED who isn't coming off as shy or scared, but eager and excited.

MIKE

Ms. Driscoll - please meet /

MOHAMMED

(going up to LYNN with this hand out)

Hello. My name is Mohammed. Thank you so much for meeting with me. Your house is very lovely on outside. And Mike - he tell me you are also very lovely. So I am Mohammed and you are Lynn, yes?

LYNN

Ms. Driscoll. My name is Ms. Driscoll.

MOHAMMED

Oh - ok - Hello Ms. Driscoll. I am Mo7ammed.

LYNN

Yes you said as much. Nice to meet you Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

(emphasizing the 'h' (7) sound)

No no - Mo7ammed. 7ammed. 7. 7. It is difficult sound.

LYNN

MoKHammed.

MOHAMMED

You'll improve. I'll teach. I'll help.

MIKE

Why don't I leave you both to it?

LYNN

Are you sure? You're welcome to stay.

MOHAMMED

Yes, Mr. Mike you can stay.

MIKE

I need to make a few phone calls anyway. You two get to know one another.

*MIKE and MOHAMMED exchange a quick look
that LYNN misses before MIKE exits.*

MOHAMMED

You have a very lovely home.

LYNN

You've said.

MOHAMMED

Outside and inside.

LYNN

Well there's more than this one room.

MOHAMMED

I know I can see from outside. I am sure it is lovely everywhere inside.

LYNN

It is. Can I offer you tea? Coffee? A biscuit?

MOHAMMED

No thank you. Mike and I had McNuggets earlier.

LYNN

I hope your trip over wasn't too tiring.

MOHAMMED

(very matter-of-fact and somewhat quickly)

It was fine. My uncle paid smugglers to take me by truck across the desert and then I crossed the sea to Italy and police eventually found me and sent me to Calais. And then after 5 months I couldn't stay anymore - it is not a good place Ms. Driscoll - not a good place - so I find an empty truck and I climb inside the space where the wheel is? Behind the axle? I was there for almost 2 hours - it was so cold I thought I would die. The driver stopped for petrol and I jump out and hide behind some trees. When the driver leaves I go into the petrol-station and I'm SO happy because the man behind the counter is Muslim like me! He tells me to go to police station and register with Home Office and they take me and they give me some money every week until they decide where I should go and now I am here and you are so kind and so generous to let me stay until I know where the universe will send me next.

LYNN

...

MOHAMMED

...

LYNN

I meant your trip from the centre.

MOHAMMED

Oh.

LYNN

But the rest was informative.

MOHAMMED

Oh. Oh! I'm so sorry I thought you meant my whole trip. So stupid!

LYNN

Hiding behind a wheel?

MOHAMMED

Yes.

LYNN

I didn't think that was possible.

MOHAMMED

I have strong hands. And arms.

LYNN

A lot of manual labour back at home?

MOHAMMED

(confused)

No.

LYNN

...

MOHAMMED

...

LYNN

Are you hungry? I'm afraid I don't have much in the way of food as I was meant to be on holiday in a few days. Well - I MEAN to be I should say.

MOHAMMED

Are you going somewhere fun?

LYNN

Somewhere with sun.

He chuckles.

LYNN

Sorry?

MOHAMMED

Fun - sun - like a poem.

LYNN

Quite.

MOHAMMED

Please let me make you lunch.

LYNN

That won't be necessary.

MOHAMMED

I have to - for your kindness. Special food. My mother's recipe.

No / really that's - **LYNN**

Minced lamb, onions, tomatoes, chilli and some yoghurt on the side. **MOHAMMED**

That does sound delicious but - **LYNN**

Ok I go to store with Mike and I use my allowance to make you special food. **MOHAMMED**

Mokhammed Mokhammed stop. **LYNN**

Mo7ammed. Mo7ammed. **MOHAMMED**

How about I stick to Mohammed and I can practice in private. **LYNN**

As you wish of course. **MOHAMMED**

I appreciate the lunch offer but it's not necessary, truly. **LYNN**

Ok another time. **MOHAMMED**

Sure - fine - another time. **LYNN**

You are very nice. **MOHAMMED**

Thank you. **LYNN**

A very nice lady. **MOHAMMED**

Yes - thank you. **LYNN**

MOHAMMED

You remind me of my mother. You both have kind eyes. I will treat you like my mother - with the same respect and affection.

LYNN

No you won't you will treat like what I am - your landlady. And you are my lodger.

MOHAMMED

Oh. And how is that?

LYNN

Affection not needed. Respect appreciated. And basically keep out of my way.

MOHAMMED

Oh. Ok. May I still make you lunch or dinner some time?

LYNN

Sure.

LYNN

...

MOHAMMED

...

LYNN

Shall we get your bags from the car?

MOHAMMED

I just have this backpack.

LYNN

Well, where are your clothes?

MOHAMMED

(pointing to what he is wearing.)

Here.

LYNN

Surely you have a change or two.

MOHAMMED

Just one more - in this backpack.

LYNN

They didn't give you anymore than that?

MOHAMMED

No.

LYNN

Ridiculous to treat refugees like that.

MOHAMMED

I'm not a refugee.

LYNN

(he tries to object but she doesn't catch him)

Asylum seeker then - disgraceful. I'm afraid I don't have much here as I only had one daughter -

MOHAMMED

Oh is she here too? Is she my age?

LYNN

...she's away at Uni...anyway, we'll have to sort something out - maybe a charity shop or some donations from the neighbours.

MOHAMMED

Thank you.

LYNN

Now you are aware that I'll be leaving.

MOHAMMED

No. When? Why?

LYNN

The holiday?

MOHAMMED

Oh yes! Sorry! Fun and Sun. When do you leave?

LYNN

In three days, which as I am sure you can imagine is quite -

MOHAMMED

Inconvenient.

LYNN

Yes - thank you!

MOHAMMED

But don't worry I can take care of everything.

LYNN

Well now I'm not sure that -

MOHAMMED

Please trust me I look after everything. I have great hearing and eyesight. I will treat this place like my home - oh may I do that as well? Is that what lodgers do?

LYNN

Yes - in their parts of the house.

MOHAMMED

Ok so you tell me which parts are mine and I will protect.

LYNN

They won't be yours as in you own them.

MOHAMMED

I know. I know this.

LYNN

I just want to be clear this isn't a permanent solution.

MOHAMMED

I know.

LYNN

But you should make yourself at home.

MOHAMMED

But it won't be my home.

LYNN

It's a grey area as a lodger isn't it?

MOHAMMED

I don't know.

LYNN

It is.

MOHAMMED

Do you not want me in your home?

LYNN

It's not that.

Then it is? **MOHAMMED**

It's just new. **LYNN**

New for me as well. **MOHAMMED**

I've never - you know - done this. **LYNN**

This? **MOHAMMED**

Taken in someone like you? **LYNN**

Oh. Oh! Like a man because you were all women in the house. **MOHAMMED**

Well I did have a husband. **LYNN**

Of course! Stupid! **MOHAMMED**
(laughs)

He's dead now - more's the pity - but I did have one. **LYNN**

Of course of course! **MOHAMMED**

I meant a refugee. **LYNN**

Please don't call me that. **MOHAMMED**

Apologies, I forgot. Asylum Seeker. More PC. Although they do mean the same thing. **LYNN**

I am not a refugee. **MOHAMMED**

I know. **LYNN**

I am not an asylum seeker. **MOHAMMED**

What? **LYNN**

Please don't call me these things. **MOHAMMED**

Well now I am just / confused - **LYNN**

I don't like these names do not call me them. **MOHAMMED**

Well I don't much fancy OAP, love, but it's the badge I wear. **LYNN**

But I am not a refugee! I am not an asylum seeker! **MOHAMMED**

What are you doing here then? **LYNN**

I am a political leader! **MOHAMMED**

You're a child. **LYNN**

I am a man! **MOHAMMED**

You can't be more than 19. **LYNN**

I am a man! **MOHAMMED**

I don't understand the problem with calling you a refuge - asyl - whatever! **LYNN**

MOHAMMED

My family are very rich! We could buy you up like that.

LYNN

Well then find your own place to live!

MOHAMMED

Do you want money? Is that why you invite people like me into your home?

LYNN

I'm doing you a favour - all of you.

MOHAMMED

All of you who?

LYNN

Well I can't very well say since I'm not allowed to.

MOHAMMED

You First World people are all the same - you have no feelings - you're all racists.

LYNN

Not just one minute!

MOHAMMED

Before I come here I was studying oil engineering at Damascus University. I was a college student!

LYNN

Well that's good.

MOHAMMED

Not 'manual labour'.

LYNN

Oh come now I didn't mean to imply that -

MOHAMMED

No you just assume. I come into your home and try to treat you like family and you make me feel like dirt.

LYNN

Yes well we're not family are we? I'm just doing a good deed.

MOHAMMED

Why?

Pardon? **LYNN**

Why do you do this good deed? For who? **MOHAMMED**

For you of course. **LYNN**

A lodger. **MOHAMMED**

Yes. **LYNN**

I am a person. **MOHAMMED**

So are lodgers. **LYNN**

A human. **MOHAMMED**

As are we all! **LYNN**

I am not a news story. I am not a refugee. I am not an asylum seeker. **MOHAMMED**

Fine then - educate me - you tell me what you are. Put me in my place. **LYNN**

I am a victim. Because my family is rich does not mean I am not a victim. Because we had power does not mean I am not a victim. Because I speak this way does not mean I am not a victim. Do you know I escaped with two doctors, a physicist, and a mechanic? They are also victims. We are victims. You are a victim. **MOHAMMED**

Oh do tell. **LYNN**
(guffawing)

You are a victim to your assumptions. You want to clean your soul and feel happy about yourself so you open your door to us - but just a little. **MOHAMMED**

LYNN

I see people in need and try to help only to be met with this kind of ungrateful behaviour. I am not your mother or your family and this is not your home - those are the plain facts.

MOHAMMED

Then why let me come in even this much?

LYNN

I was becoming a slave to routine and needed a bit of a shake-up. I live alone in such a big house and given the terrible plight of refugees - yes REFUGEES I will say the word - it seemed like a proper solution. So I give you a roof over your head until your life gets settled

MOHAMMED

You cannot offer a hand when four fingers are missing. It is something your people do not understand. Here - in this house. There - in my country. You don't want to be a slave and you don't want to be alone but your freedom comes with limits and your solitude has become like a drug for you. This is violent.

LYNN

I think you should leave now. Mike!

MOHAMMED

You are violent.

LYNN

Mike! Leave my house. Mike!

MOHAMMED

Your empathy only extends to dead bodies on beaches because you owe them nothing.

LYNN

Get out!

MOHAMMED

I am not your salvation.

*MOHAMMED leaves. The door remains open.
LYNN stands in place. Waiting for Mike? For -
something else? She waits. And waits.*

BLACKOUT