

# Looking at Other People's Houses

One act play by Hassan Abdulrazzak



Inside a bus. A foreigner WOMAN is talking on the phone. She does so for most of the play.

Her ten year old DAUGHTER is coughing in a tissue handkerchief but not covering her mouth properly.

A native MAN, perhaps wearing a surgical mask, is standing opposite them. Most of what the man says are thoughts in his head.

WOMAN  
*(on the phone)*

You no understanding. Me no like computer. Why council give us Dell? Dell is shit. Dell is very shit. Dell is like my ex husband. Very slow. Me no like it. Me want better.

*(to her daughter in her own language)*

Darling, try coughing in the handkerchief.

*(on the phone)*

Yes I am refugee. But that no mean I must eat shit. Eat shit and shut up. Take shit computer and say thank you very much. Me no lie. Dell is shit. Me no take shit. Me shit on shit. You understand me?

*(to her daughter in her own language )*

Darling, is your chest hurting? I'll get you some medicine.

MAN  
*(in his thoughts)*

Why do they have to be so loud? Why do we all have to hear their conversations? Why can't they wait until they get home before they natter on the phone?

WOMAN

Me want better.

MAN

What is she complaining about? Who is she talking to? Someone from her country? No, wait...

she's talking in our language. Badly of course. Why can't we get the ones that speak our language properly? I'm tired of hearing our language mangled in their mouths. All over the city, that's what you hear nowadays. No wonder our own kids can't speak properly if that's what they hear all around them. Oh shut up. Stop complaining. You sound like an old man. You sound like a racist old man. I'm not a racist. I'm definitely not a racist. When the war started in their country, I gave money. I donated. I don't make much but I donated.

WOMAN

Me no like apartment. Two bedroom is not enough. Too small. I have four children.

MAN

Four children! That's so irresponsible. Who brings so many children into the world when we are facing a climate change catastrophe? Our people are not having enough children. Some are not having any children at all. So many have turned gay. We're having a gay epidemic. Nothing against the gays. Nothing at all. I don't mind them. They don't bother me. But it's a fact, we're having a gay epidemic. It's not just me saying it. Where she comes from, they don't have gays. Well they do of course but not out in the open, you know what I mean? Even the gays get married and have children in their country. They have to, don't they? They have no choice. It's not like in our country where the gays do as they please. That's what separates us from them. The gays. I'm proud of our gays. They bring a tear to my eye.

WOMAN

Why can't council give us big house? Children need space. We have big house back home. Children feel bad in small apartment.

MAN

She lived in a big house in her country! And she's asking for benefits! That's outrageous. And on top of it all, she's complaining. And loudly, on the phone, in public! Unbelievable.

WOMAN

Children are crying. They miss home. They miss garden. Why council no give garden?

MAN

*(Still in his thoughts)*

We have a housing shortage you stupid cow!

WOMAN

*(on the phone)*

Housing shortage? Don't make me laugh. I walk at night. Me like walking. Me and my daughter, don't we darling? Me and my daughter walk long time. We look through windows. We see. We see how they live. So many new buildings in city with no light on. Empty apartments. Who own? Why leave empty? Why not give us refugee?

MAN

Her sense of entitlement is through the roof! Someone worked hard, love, to buy those apartments. If they leave them empty that's their business. They could set them on fire for all I care. It's their property. This isn't some communist country, you moron.

WOMAN

Why we have to use food voucher? It's so humiliating. Stand in line. Wait. Wait. Wait. Man look at voucher. Look at me, like me criminal. And the food is shit. A little fruit, a little vegetable. Lots and lots of pasta. It's like they want my children to be fat so they call them lazy. Daughter looks at her with anger.

WOMAN

You're not fat, darling. But your brothers are. Too much playing video games and munching on Mars bars.

MAN

I mean the cheek of this woman! She should be grateful we've taken her in but instead she's complaining about her computer, her apartment, her food. That's coming out of my taxes, love. My taxes! I'm feeding your children, your bastard four children, out of my taxes, and you're complaining? Shameless. Just shameless!

*(pause)*

OK, I'm not paying taxes right now. I know that. But I used to. When I had a job. I used to pay taxes. I never dodged them. I was proud to pay. I saw paying my taxes as my patriotic duty. Very proud to pay my taxes. Very proud. Fine, I claimed more than I should on expenses but everybody does, don't they? I mean who knows what the difference is nowadays between a social lunch and business lunch? Everything is business if you ask me. Everything.

WOMAN

My children need therapist. I call council, they say no. I tell council my children have nightmare. Dream bad dreams. They saw things they should never. Bodies in street. Dog

walking with baby arm in mouth. Horrible. My children need therapy. I need therapy. My country need therapy.

MAN

I need therapy just listening to you. God, give me patience. I don't believe in violence. Especially not against woman. That's what separates us from them. Their men hit their women. Not in our country. Well my neighbour throws things at his wife but he has mental problems so that's OK. Her husband probably hit her. Maybe that's why she divorced him. Or did he die in the war? Or was he a terrorist? Probably a terrorist. He hit her, he definitely hit her. Lucky for her I'm a civilised man, not like her husband, cause God be my witness I'm holding myself back. I'm trying to keep calm in the face of this shameless sponger and her rabid daughter who won't stop coughing.

The child coughs loudly.

WOMAN

*(to child in her own language)*

Darling, cover your mouth.

MAN

They brought the virus to our country. How else did it get here? The virus came from overseas. Everyone knows that. They brought it with them. And the child is not even wearing a mask! I can't contain my anger any longer. I want to say something to this...this...oh, have the courage to say the word man. We're fucked with political correctness.

WOMAN

Poor thing coughing all week. People think must have virus. No. I check every day.

MAN

Oh she has enough test kits to throw away when our own people can't get tested. Typical.

WOMAN

I buy kit with my money. Council no give. They should give but no give. Say kit shortage. Me no understand. They have companies that make kit. Lots and lots of money go to company to make kit. But there is shortage. Why? They say in my country oligarchs control everything but it is same here. Except here they don't call them oligarchs. They call them 'business people'. Why no

revolution here? Me no understand.

MAN

This bitch... there I've said it, I don't care... this bitch is agitating for revolution. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I shouldn't call her bitch. I am not like the men in her country. I respect women but she's making a mockery of things. She's unhappy about everything. We've given her so much and she's unhappy. Her child will probably grow up to hate this country, resent the likes of me. Hard working, tax paying, natives. Well I'm not working or paying tax right now but you know what I mean. It's the principle. I'm sweating. I want to take off my jacket but she'll notice I'm sweating. I sweat more when people notice I'm sweating. I hate her. I really hate her.

WOMAN

They say 'refugee welcome'. Ha! Make me laugh. There is how you say...split? Like personality split? Like schizophrenia. They do charity to help refugee and they send police to take people with no document out of country. Put on plane with chains like animal. One day charity, next day police. They're crazy.

MAN

Look at her child. Eyeing me with hatred. Resenting me because I'm a native and she's not. Well kid, it's not my problem you don't belong here. Probably picked on at school. Mother clearly can't teach her to speak properly so the kid gets picked on at school. Why come here? Why put your child through that? If only I could stop sweating.

Man tries to subtly wipe away the sweat. He fails.

WOMAN

They make bombs. They sell bombs. Bombs drop on our homes, on our heads. They make money from war. Then they say oh there is refugee crisis! Like it just happened, like nothing to do with them. You know how many document I show to come here? How many form I fill? Same questions again and again. How many interviews? How many camps? How many times I say no to drunk men with bad breath? I'm sorry. I give you headache. You are trying to help me. Thank you. You are a good woman. You understand me. How are your children? Is little one still play with penis? No, no, I was not shocked. I just didn't expect that at dinner table. Your home is so nice. You have nice garden. I love dinner in your garden. Boy play with penis at dinner table is small price to pay for sitting in nice garden.

The daughter coughs again harder, not covering her mouth.

MAN

Oh god, spit landed on my cheek! I'm going to be infected! This is not OK! God, I have to say something. I can't stay silent. Maybe it's acceptable in your country to let children run riot but here... No that makes me sound like a racist. If only I wasn't sweating like a pig, I would have said something. I don't want people to think I am a racist. Oh god, I must do something. We are in danger of being swamped by them. They are changing our values. The beautiful values that made our country a beacon to the world for so long. I have to stand up for what is right. Is the heating on? Is that the problem?

WOMAN

*(in her own language)*

Darling cough in the tissue. Don't make people upset.

MAN

I'm going to say something. I'm going to say something. I'm going to say something. I'm going to do something. Say something. Raise my voice. Do something. Stop sweating, man and do something. Be a man. Be a fucking man.

Man approaches closer. Finally woman addresses him directly.

WOMAN

*(to man)*

You want sit down?

MAN

What? Er...no. No, thank you.

WOMAN

Are you sure?

MAN

Yes, very sure.

WOMAN

We leave at next stop.

MAN

Oh do you?... It's a nice area.

WOMAN

It gets very busy after next stop.

MAN

Does it?

WOMAN

After next stop, too many people come.

MAN

Right.

WOMAN

*(to child, in her own language)*

Come on darling, let's go.

DAUGHTER

*(in adopted country language)*

But it's not our stop.

WOMAN

We walk.

DAUGHTER

I don't want to walk!

WOMAN

We look at window of houses.



DAUGHTER

I don't want to play that game. It's boring. We never get to live there.

WOMAN

*(in her own language)*

Don't embarrass me.

DAUGHTER

You're embarrassing!

WOMAN

You're just like your father!

DAUGHTER

I am not.

WOMAN

You are!

DAUGHTER

Dad is a wanker.

WOMAN

Shush!

DAUGHTER

All men are wankers!

Girl looks at man. Woman looks at man and smiles in an exaggerated manner. Man is flustered, doesn't know what to say.

MAN

Cute kid.

## WOMAN

Take seat, please.

Woman and child stand up and get off the bus.

Man looks at the empty seats for a long time. He takes out a cloth handkerchief and wipes the seat manically. He is about to sit down but is too frightened to do so. He remains standing, looking at the empty seat.

– END OF PLAY –