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THE CITY AND THE CITY

by
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Adapted by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BORLÚ: Detective in the Beszel Extreme Crime Squad
CORWI: A uniformed Beszel cop
MR. GEARY: American, father of murder victim Mahalia Geary
MRS. GEARY: American, mother of murder victim Mahalia Geary
SHUKMAN: An Assistant Medical Examiner in Beszel
NAUSTIN: One of Borlú's subordinates in the Beszel Extreme Crime Squad

JARIS: A member of a unificationist group based in Ul Qoma
DRODIN: A member of a unificationist group based in Beszel
BURIC: A member of Beszel's governing body
SYEDR: A member of Beszel's governing body, a hard-line nationalist

NANCY: Canadian, archaeologist and Mahalia's PhD advisor
YORJAVIC: A militant Besz nationalist
DHATT: An Ul Qoman detective, Borlú's counterpart
BOWDEN: Canadian, a professor of Ul Qoman archaeology
AIKAM: An Ul Qoman security guard
UNIF GIRL: Ul Qoman; a member of Jaris' unificationist group
UNIF BOY: Ul Qoman; a member of Jaris' unificationist group
YOLANDA: American, a student in Ul Qoma working at the dig
ASHIL: A Breach Avatar
RAINA: A Breach Avatar
SAMUN: A Breach Avatar
OTHERS: Various citizens or shadows of citizens; committee members; Breach avatars

CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

MAN #1: Borlú
MAN #2: Mr. Geary, Ashil, others
MAN #3: Shukman, Syedr, Bowden, others
MAN #4: Naustin, Buric, others
MAN #5: Jaris, Yorjavic, Samun, others
MAN #6: Drodin, Aikam, Unif Boy, others
MAN #7: Dhatt, others
WOMAN #1: Corwi, others
WOMAN #2: Mrs. Geary, Nancy, others
WOMAN #3: Unif Girl, Yolanda, Raina, others

NOTE: Most of the characters in this play are speaking either Besz or Illitan. The languages evolved separately from a common precursor language, and so the similarities allow for speakers to switch back and forth without a noticeable change in accent. However, there are certain lines that are set off with marks /like this./ This indicates that the speaker has switched to English, and will have a slight accent as a result.

ACT I

THE GEARYS - PART I.

*Lights up on Inspector Tyador
BORLÚ.*

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

The morning this all started, the morning we found her, there at the end of GunterStráz between the dirty brick buildings, I saw an elderly woman shambling away from me. I was struck by her motion, and I met her eyes. I wondered if she wanted to tell me something. In my glance I took in her clothes, the way she looked, her way of walking, of holding herself, and I realized too late that she was not on the same street as me. She was not in the same city. I should not have seen her. I want to relate the case from the beginning, but I can't do that. First you need to understand that this place isn't like other places. The rules are very different. That day, I broke the most important rule we have.

(The scene changes to the international terminal of the Beszel airport. Passengers and employees move with purpose. Constable Lizbyet CORWI enters. She wears a police uniform.)

BORLÚ

How's your English?

CORWI

I'll keep up, boss.

BORLÚ

You ever left Beszel, Corwi?

CORWI

Yeah. I've been to Romania. And Bulgaria.

BORLÚ

Not Ul Qoma?

CORWI

Not yet. You?

BORLÚ

Once. Turkey once. London. Moscow. Paris, a long time ago. And Berlin. I went there for a conference on "Policing Split Cities." They had sessions on Budapest and Jerusalem and Berlin, and us.

CORWI

Fuck.

BORLÚ

I know, right? That's what we said at the time. Totally missing the point. There they are.

(MR. and MRS. GEARY enter, holding carry-on bags. Borlú switches to English with a slight Besz accent.)

CORWI

How's *your* English?

BORLÚ

We're about to find out. /Mr. and Mrs. Geary? I'm Inspector Tyador Borlú of the Beszel Extreme Crime Squad. This is Constable Lizbyet Corwi. I, we, are very deeply sorry for your loss. May we take you to your hotel?/

MR. GEARY

No, thank you, Inspector. We'd like to... We'd like to do what it is we're here for. We'd like to see her.

BORLÚ

/Of course. Please./

(The scene shifts to the coroner's office. Assistant Medical Examiner SHUKMAN wheels in a gurney carrying a body under a sheet.)

Corwi leads the Gearys to it.
Shukman lifts the sheet.)

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

Nothing is still like the dead are still. The wind moves their hair and they don't respond at all. Skin smooth in the cold morning air, unbroken by gooseflesh. Sad to look at, really.

MR. GEARY

Yes, that's her. That's my daughter.

(Shukman lowers the sheet and exits. Corwi brings the Gearys back to Borlú.)

We were hoping to talk to her friend Yolanda. And Professor Nancy, her advisor. Can we do that?

BORLÚ

/Not right away, Mr. Geary. They are not here in Beszel. They are in Ul Qoma./

MRS. GEARY

You know that, Michael. You know how it works here.

MR. GEARY

Yes, I'm sorry. I just want to talk to her friends.

BORLÚ

/We'll have to get you escorted across. We are waiting on the paperwork to take you through. A day or two, I think./

MR. GEARY

May... Mahalia tried to explain it to us, but... I mean, we're *here*. In the *same city*. Why can't--

BORLÚ

/That's the problem, Mr. Geary. It is *not* the same city./

CORWI

/Usually visitors have orientation training, but yours is a special case./

MR. GEARY

So, what, are you supposed to babysit us until they let us cross over?

BORLÚ

/We are here to help. Visitors to Beszel, and Ul Qoma, often have a difficult time adjusting./

MR. GEARY

You couldn't just give us a map? Tell us where we can and can't go?

BORLÚ

/I'm afraid it is more complicated than that./

MRS. GEARY

Because of the... what do you call it? The Breach?

BORLÚ

/Yes, Mrs. Geary. Because of Breach./

MR. GEARY

Is there anything you can tell us about... about what happened?

BORLÚ

/Why don't we get you to your hotel, Mr. Geary. I'll be happy to tell you everything I can./

Mr. and Mrs. Geary exit.

THE CRIME SCENE.

The scene shifts to a park in a run-down part of Beszel. Lights from police cars swirl. The body now lies on the ground, still covered by a sheet. Shukman and Detective NAUSTIN enter. Shukman crouches over the body and starts to work. Naustin hovers nearby.

*Corwi stands off to the side,
taking notes.*

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

Everything I can. There wasn't much I could tell them. Most they wouldn't understand. And some... Some I couldn't tell anyone. We're back at the beginning now. It started the way these things usually start. Someone found a body.

BORLÚ

Constable.

CORWI

Inspector Borlú.

BORLÚ

The kids. How did they find her?

CORWI

Heard some animals. Ran like hell when they saw what it was, made the call.

(Borlú nods to Corwi, crosses to
the body.)

BORLÚ

Shukman.

SHUKMAN

Tyador.

BORLÚ

Time?

SHUKMAN

Twelve hours-ish. She wasn't killed here.

BORLÚ

Uh huh. And whose call was it to move her off the ground?

SHUKMAN

Talk to Naustin.

(He continues his examination as
Borlú questions Naustin.)

BORLÚ

Detective Naustin. Go through it.

NAUSTIN

First impressions? Hooker. This area, beat up, naked? And all
that makeup? Hooker.

BORLÚ

Fight with a client? Won't do what he wants, he lashes out?

NAUSTIN

Yeah.

BORLÚ

I don't know. If it was just the body wounds, maybe. But
this...

(Borlú lifts the sheet to
reveal the face. The cheeks
have been slashed. Makeup
has been slapped on quickly.
There is a great deal of
blood.)

Shukman, what is this?

SHUKMAN

Facial lacerations. Post mortem, I'm guessing. Looks like he
wanted to cut her face off.

BORLÚ

That's different.

NAUSTIN

Maybe.

BORLÚ

Alright. Do the rounds of the local girls. Ask a uniform who
knows the area. Let's get a photo circulated, put a name to
her.

(Borlú lowers the sheet as Naustin exits. A pair of medical technicians enter. Under Shukman's guidance they place the body on a stretcher. Shukman and the med techs exit with the body.)

BORLÚ

Corwi, right?

CORWI

Yes sir.

BORLÚ

Do you know this area?

CORWI

I know a bit. It's what you'd expect: street theft, high kids smacking the shit out of each other, drugs, hooking.

BORLÚ

Murder?

CORWI

Two or three in my time. Drugs stuff. The gangs are usually pretty smart at punishing each other without bringing in the ECS.

BORLÚ

So? What do you think?

CORWI

Um... It's just a guess, you know, we should keep in mind other possibilities. Her makeup is all earths and browns. It's been put on thick, but not by someone who knows how. And her hair isn't dyed. Check out GunterStráz, or any of the girls' hangouts. Two-thirds blonde, and the rest are black or blood-red or some shit. And it's clean. Cleaner than mine, anyway.

BORLÚ

Okay. Got any contacts here still? Go round the project, see what you can turn up.

CORWI

You'll square it with my commissar? Am I being seconded?

BORLÚ

Let's not call it anything yet. Right now I'm just asking you to focus on this. And report directly to me.

(Borlú hands Corwi a business card.)

Cell phone, office number. Just keep an eye on things.

CORWI

Naustin's probably right. Probably a cocky sadist trick, boss.

BORLÚ

Probably. Let's find out why she keeps her hair so clean.

(A shadow appears; a silhouette of a WOMAN, at the corner of Borlú's vision. He looks for a moment, then looks away with a start. The shadow disappears.)

Shit.

CORWI

Alright, boss?

BORLÚ

Nothing. Thought I saw somebody.

(Pause. Borlú looks back in the direction of the shadow.)

Corwi, you know the area. Is there any chance we're looking at breach?

CORWI

Doesn't seem likely. The area is mostly total.

BORLÚ

Some of GunterStráz, though--

CORWI

It's a hell of a risk.

BORLÚ

Yeah. Alright. I'm going to have Shukman work up a photo. I want you to get some posters up. We need an ID.

CORWI

You got it.

(Corwi exits.)

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

Four teenagers out late. Probably up to no good. They hang out at a skate park for a couple hours at least. At some point during that time - and don't ask for anything more exact from these kids - one of the girls sees a van come up onto the grass nearby. She doesn't think much of it because people come there all the time to do business, dump stuff, what have you. After a while, the van speeds off. The van is gray. The kids don't know from vans. After an hour of groping, or whatever, the girl mentions the van to the others and they go check it out. Sometimes you get old stereos, shoes, books. Instead they find her.

(The scene shifts to the street. Pedestrians avoid Borlú and each other without looking. In the background, shadow images pass back and forth: Traffic in the other city.)

I didn't know the area. Not well. Beszel, my city, half of everything I passed, seemed to lean in and loom over us. New billboards had appeared in the last few months. An American tech company called Sear and Core. "To Beszel, And Beyond." I'm told that sounds clever in English. I walked past local structures and those elsewhere, came to a crosshatching. On the Besz side, the buildings were antique shops. Doing well, as well as anything did in the city for some years. The shops' neighbors in the other city, in Ul Qoma, could have been anything. How could I know?

THE CORONER.

The scene shifts to the coroner's office. The body is on a table, covered by a sheet. Shukman enters.

SHUKMAN

Twenty-four, twenty-five year old woman. Decent overall health, apart from being dead. Time of death, midnightish the night before last, give or take, of course. Cause of death, puncture wounds to the chest. Four in total, of which one pierced her heart. Some spike or stiletto or something, not a blade. She also has a nasty head wound, and a lot of odd abrasions.

BORLÚ

Odd?

SHUKMAN

Some under her hair. She was whacked around the side of the head. Hit her on the left of her skull. I'd say it knocked her out, or at least down and groggy, then the stab wounds were the coup de grace.

BORLÚ

What was she hit with?

SHUKMAN

Something heavy and blunt. Could be a fist, if it was big, I suppose, but I seriously doubt it. And there's this.

(Shukman uncovers the
victim's head. Borlú leans
in to look.)

The abrasions are about the size of pencil-points pushed into the skin. Not deep. Covers an area about a hand's breadth. Deeper in the center than at either end.

BORLÚ

Signs of intercourse?

SHUKMAN

Not recently. So if she's a working girl maybe it was a refusal to do something that got her in this mess. She was covered in dirt, dust, grass stains, all the stuff you'd expect from where she was lying. And rust.

BORLÚ

Rust?

SHUKMAN

All over. Lots of abrasions, cuts, scrapes, postmortem mostly, and lots of rust.

BORLÚ

Defensive wounds?

SHUKMAN

No. Came quick and unexpected, or her back was turned. There's a bunch more scrapes and whatnot on the body, consistent with dragging her along. The wear and tear of murder.

(Shukman takes the body off.)

THE PHONE CALL.

Corwi enters.

CORWI

Boss. We got lucky. We found the van. Owner claims it was stolen on the night, but he never reported it. The van was filled with all kinds of shit. Looks like trash picked up from everywhere. The owner claims none of it is his. And he's got an alibi for the night. Gamblers' Anonymous meeting.

BORLÚ

Go talk to him. Find out why he didn't report his van being stolen.

(Corwi exits.)

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

The posters went up everywhere; the leads we got from them went nowhere. A may-or-may-not-be working girl, who no one recognizes, dumped in plain sight, from a stolen van, into which was carefully placed a load of crap, for no reason, and the only thing we know is that none of it was the murder weapon. All that garbage had done was roll into the dead girl and rust her as if she, too, were old iron.

(Borlú's cell phone rings. He answers it. A shadow (JARIS) appears.)

BORLÚ

Borlú.

JARIS

Inspector Borlú? I have information for you.

BORLÚ

Have you spoken to our info line?

JARIS

I can't. That's kind of the point.

BORLÚ

How did you get my number?

JARIS

Google, Borlú. Your name's in the papers. You're in charge of the investigation into the girl. Do you want my help or not?

(Borlú looks around, maybe even at the shadow, but he sees no one.)

BORLÚ

Of course.

JARIS

I knew her. Look. I want to help you but not because you're a cop. I don't recognize your authority. But if Marya was killed then some people I care about may not be safe. I might not be safe. So this is all I know. She was a foreigner.

(MORE)

JARIS (cont'd)

I knew her from... politics. She was committed. Just not to what I thought at first.

BORLÚ

You said her name was Marya?

JARIS

That's what she went by when she was here.

BORLÚ

Where are you calling from?

JARIS

Come on, Borlú. You know where I'm calling from.

(Pause.)

You know where I'm calling from and that is why you won't bother asking my name. Do you have any idea how close we are right now? It is lunatic, an insult, that I am speaking to you from another country.

BORLÚ

But... she was here. In Beszel.

JARIS

I'm telling you, she wasn't. Not officially. She was here in Ul Qoma. Talk to the fringe political groups, the unificationists, the nationalists. Both sides. They'll know who she is. The whole underground knew her.

BORLÚ

Wait. How could... If you're in Ul Qoma, how did you know she'd been killed?

JARIS

That's the real question, isn't it? That's where the line gets crossed. Borlú, if you really are that stupid then I am wasting my time. How do you think I found out? I saw your fucking poster.

(Jaris hangs up, and the shadow disappears.)

BORLÚ (NARRATION)

The information was an allergen, a kind of trauma in my head. My informant should not have seen the posters. They were not in his country. He should never have told me. But he did. I was complicit. It was done.

END OF SAMPLE.

For more information or to read the full script, please contact the playwright at walsh.christopher@gmail.com.