

## TERROR by Jeni Whittaker

### CASTLIST

The play is written for a cast of six taking more than one character each. Six is probably the least number who could manage the play, but seven or eight could also tackle it with different doublings. It is thus a versatile play for an exam piece.

The suggested cast doubling is as follows:

LUCY/ ANNA/ JESSICA AND CHORUS ONE  
ALISON/ LILY/ BRAD AND CHORUS FOUR  
SUE/ TOY AND SWEETSTALL HOLDER AND CHORUS THREE  
MOTHER/ BAGLADY AND CHORUS SIX

HARRY/ BOOKSTALL HOLDER AND CHORUS TWO  
KEITH/ RODNEY AND CHORUS FIVE

The minimum number is then 4 girls and 2 boys. The number of boys could stretch to 3 and the number of girls to 6.

LUCY, ALISON & SUE are teenage girls, 15 to 17 years old. Lucy and Alison are 'typical', but Sue is different, more thoughtful and not afraid to stand up for what she believes.

ANNA and KEITH are boyfriend and girlfriend, getting engaged to be married. They are in their early twenties. Keith is a bit laddie and perhaps not as ready for the next step as Anna.

HARRY is a University music student. He has his guitar with him, which he plays at times throughout. [Could be another instrument, if you like.]

LILY is a young free spirit. She may work or be a college student, but she's a music lover and falls here for Harry.

RODNEY is a military officer who has been invalided out of the army having lost a leg [he wears a prosthetic and all he has to show his lack of leg is a slight stiffness when he walks]. He has lost the limb in one of the modern war-zones, most likely Afghanistan. He is late forties.

MOTHER is harried, in charge of two lively children JESSICA and BRAD, very close in age - around seven.

THE BAGLADY is a mysterious character, looking distinctly down-and-out with a plastic bag full of stuff in each hand, but with a sybilline streak: an oracle or seer.

There are stall-holders too, whose characters as such are not important.

The Chorus are the terrorists who have made the bomb they will set in the shopping mall. They could be of any persuasion. This is NOT about Islam extremists; it could be set in any country and the terrorists could be standing for any cause. It is kept deliberately vague. The point of this play is to show the ordinary people whose lives may be interrupted, or stopped, by the explosion.

## EXTRACT ONE

***The scene shows part of a shopping mall. Tables for a café on one side. Two little stalls, one selling sweets and cheap toys, another second-hand books. In between the stalls are the entrances to shops. Top Shop is one.***

***At the sides of the playing area are two rails with pegs, or long benches - whatever you find easiest. The different character indicators are hung/placed on these. Hats, bags, scarves, a stick, a jacket - whatever is quick and easy to put on as well as being appropriate for a particular character. One item/indicator for each character. Different walks, stances, complete the alterations that actors make to change character.***

***Before the main set is revealed we see the Chorus, dressed in black and composed of the whole cast, in a bubble of light .***

CHORUS

ALL First, connect the timer.

ONE Some tape .... good. A nice neat job.

TWO The detonator.

FIVE Careful, careful. No mistakes now.

THREE The wiring: red to red, white to white.

FOUR Tape. Leave the ends. Battery.

FIVE Slowly, slowly ... Good.

ALL I know what they'll say. Tomorrow.

SIX 'An inhuman act.'

ONE & TWO 'The lives of innocent women and children.'

ALL And yes. There are moments, when ...

THREE ... when you see pictures ... afterwards.

FOUR But they're wrong.

ALL They're all to blame.

FIVE They're all ... implicated.

SIX All the waste and suffering ...

ALL And today they're going to pay.

ONE Set the timer. One and a half hours ...

ALL ... twelve-thirty.

TWO Just a flick of the switch.

THREE Into the bag ...

ALL Now... Let's go shopping.

***The group move apart, but remain visible. Three girls detach themselves from it, choose their indicator props. They become Lucy, Sue and Alison.***

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## EXTRACT TWO

***A bag lady wanders through and settles with a sigh at one of the café tables.***

***Anna and Keith enter looking pleased. Anna admires the ring on her hand.***

ANNA Thank you, Keith. It's lovely. Didn't I tell you? Very me. Very US, actually. Unpretentious. Can't wait to show Elsa.

KEITH Your sister won't like it.

ANNA Exactly. She'll think it should be diamonds. She'll feel sorry for me. Silly girl.

KEITH **offended** I don't want your snotty sister thinking I'm a cheapskate.

ANNA Who cares what *she* thinks? I don't think so. I love it. It's ...

KEITH **only slightly mollified** ...different, as you said before. Shall we go home now?

ANNA Oh, not yet. Let's mooch some more. There're always little stalls out on a Saturday. It's fun just to look.

***She sees him sigh and hugs him.***

Oh, come on love. There's plenty of time before your match starts on the TV.

***The three girls from Top Shop enter carrying bags.***

ALISON Told you you'd find something, Sue.

SUE It was in the sale, that's why.

LUCY You looked good in it though, didn't you? Change your mind about next weekend? It'd be a shame to waste that dress.

SUE It's the kind of dress you can wear to any number of things. It's useful.

ALISON **groaning** My mum says that kind of thing. I've only got to be told something's useful and I don't want it any more.

***The bag-lady gets up and crosses the stage, bumps into Sue. The bag-lady steps back and stares at Sue.***

BAG-LADY No legs. That's what I saw. You. With no legs.

***Sue laughs nervously.***

LUCY What're you on about? Frightening my friend like that. Get out of it.

BAG-LADY And you. Staring at the ceiling. But your head's not attached.

LUCY Ugh. That's horrible.

BAG-LADY It will be. Horrible. ***She shakes herself, cringes and whines.*** Sorry, me dears. I don't know what came over me. It went all dark. Then there was a horrible noise and a wind. Such a wind. Think I'll get out of here.

ALISON Oh no, you don't. You're not getting away that easily. You stay here and explain yourself or I'll call the police. Or a security guard. There's always a security guard in a mall, isn't there? ***She looks around vaguely.***

LUCY I can't see anyone.

SUE ***to the Bag-Lady*** It's all right. No one's going to hurt you. ***Turns to the other two. Urgently*** Can't you see? She's not in her right mind. Perhaps she's had a shock. Or escaped from somewhere. I'll take her over to the café and buy her a drink. Try to find where she lives.

ALISON For god's sake, Sue, she doesn't live anywhere, it's obvious. She's a BAG-LADY. Carries her belongings round with her and lives on the streets. Leave her be and let's get out of here.

LUCY We've got what we came for anyway.

SUE ***ignoring them, to the Baglady*** Come with me. Can I buy you a cup of coffee?

***She and the Bag Lady make their way towards the café area. The Bag Lady's eyes are wide and she walks as if in a daze. She allows herself to be led meekly.***

***The Choric movement where hats/ bags/props are changed at the edges of the grid recurs, in slow motion, then speeded up. Back to slow and freeze,***

***facing front.***

CHORUS

ALL Eleven o'clock  
ONE The Mall's filling up.  
TWO Hustle bustle.  
ALL Hustle bustle.  
THREE Little do they know.  
FOUR They have no idea.  
FIVE Savour the power.  
SIX Knowing what's to come.  
ONE Wiping the smiles off their faces.  
TWO AND THREE Then they'll pay.  
ONE Then they'll understand.  
ALL We have the power.

THREE There are children.  
FIVE So?  
THREE I'm not happy hurting children.  
FIVE Hasn't stopped *them*, has it?  
SIX You think they think about the children they might hurt?  
THREE But we're here. We can see them.  
ONE You won't be here when it goes off.  
THREE No...  
ONE So...  
TWO And the children may have gone by then.  
THREE Of course.  
FIVE Stop thinking.  
ALL Stop thinking.

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EXTRACT THREE

***When she's gone, the Baglady looks around and her eye falls on Harry, playing his guitar.***

BAGLADY Music of oblivion. The repertoire of destruction. ***She gets to her feet and makes her way over to him.***

***A small group of people listen to Harry's music. They include Lily and Rodney. There is a smattering of applause as Harry finishes a number.***

HARRY Thank you.  
RODNEY You've got talent, young man. At the University, are you?  
HARRY Yes.  
RODNEY ***wistfully*** I don't suppose you know Nick - Nick Barter - reading Politics.  
HARRY I'm afraid not. It's a big place.  
RODNEY Still, you may know of him anyway - always got a lot to say for himself, has Nick. Always haranguing - looking for a platform. He'd have made himself heard around the campus, you can bet your life. Opinions about everything, has Nick. Immigrants, the trouble spots of the world... What our country should or should not be doing.  
LILY Think I might have met him. Or someone like him. He was in the Mall a few days ago, handing out leaflets. He had a lot to say. A gloomy view of present events.  
RODNEY That sounds like him. It's the sort of thing he'd do - collar people, try to

change their minds - hand out information. We didn't see eye to eye on everything, but still ... my son, you know. In case you wondered.

BAGLADY **suddenly fighting her way through people to reach Rodney** You know. You understand. You were a soldier, weren't you?

RODNEY How do you know that? I was an officer. **He indicates his lame leg.** Invalidated out. **Tapping his leg.** This isn't real, you know.

LILY Amazing. I'd never have guessed. But I *would* have guessed you were a military man, like this lady says. It's the way you stand.

BAGLADY **plucking Rodney's sleeve for attention** Listen. I'll tell you what I see. A din. An explosion. Rubble. Falling stuff. It's unclear. Dust. And smoke. Choking. People falling. Screaming. You can get them out. Organise them. You're an officer. They'll listen to you. But hurry. Hurry. **Her voice rises and she grips Rodney even more urgently by the arm.**

RODNEY **trying and failing to loosen her grip** Now, now, woman, get a hold on yourself. No need for this. **He looks around for help.** Someone! Give me a hand here!

**Lily and Harry take the Baglady one by each arm. The Baglady flails out wildly at them, using her plastic bags as weapons. Other bystanders join in, all admonishing and trying to prevail with the Baglady. The latter disappears from view for a little, overwhelmed, then fights her way out, facing front.**

BAGLADY **pointing out into the audience in different directions** There! Didn't you see? The boy over there! The girl over there! What are they doing? Mixing among us as if they were part of us! But they're not! They've chosen another path. They pass through like wolves, brushing by, scarcely touching us in the arrogant safety we assume is our right. Not even wolves but the shadows of wolves. The bright light of the mall dilutes their darkness. But look closer. See where they go. They are danger. They are terror. Soon they will show the sharpness of their teeth.

**Throughout this, Rodney, Harry and Lily have been trying to grab hold of the Baglady's bags, to take them from her. Weaving in and out, amongst them, are the other cast members, without touching. Finally the Baglady is overpowered, face down, and sat on by Harry and Lily. All is suddenly quiet.**