

Screenplay Treatment of
HOW HIS BRIDE CAME TO ABRAHAM

by Karen Sunde & Thomas Hoover

It's 1990 and ABE, a bright Israeli Defense Forces 2nd Lieutenant worn by grueling duty in South Lebanon, is home on leave for the funeral of his "best pal" Gramma. Just as Abe's sister and his buddy BEN tell him they're engaged, a suicide bomber explodes himself in a market nearby; the boys race to aid the victims, then fall onto their bus back to the Lebanese border, still filthy and shaken, and try to sleep off the sense that their combat zone is safer than home.

Meanwhile, up north in Beirut, SABRA, a Palestinian named for the refugee camp where, as a child, she witnessed her family's massacre by militia, and later the deaths of her foster brothers (one in combat with Israelis, the other by torture) dresses as a male fighter, wraps her head entirely in a *kaffiyeh*, and takes leave of her foster mother for a quest on their behalf. She's on the journey of her life, and under her disguise, her eyes glow with the thrill of it. She's determined to go "home" (though she's never been there) to Jerusalem.

Along a lonely road near the border in the rugged no-man's-land of their Security Zone, Abe and Ben patrol with their small squad, in search of mines. But Ben, joking, stumbles onto a trip-wire and an explosion engulfs them, taking Ben's leg off and severely lacerating Abe's foot. Amid the screaming shock and horror, Abe orders the squad to stop Ben's blood flow, and rush him back to base, while Abe remains hidden in undergrowth in searing pain, fighting a losing battle for consciousness.

Nearby, but unseen and terrified by the explosion, is SABRA, her face and head still hidden in her *kaffiyeh* – like any Arab infiltrator sneaking toward the Israeli border. She hides, sleeps, then when all's quiet, continues, darting from cover to cover. Abe awakens to see this *kaffiyeh*-clad Arab looming above, unaware of him hidden, drinking from a canteen. When he challenges "Halt," clicking his rifle to ready, instead of freezing, the Arab dives on this disabled Israeli, and they fight ferociously until Abe yanks the *kaffiyeh* and finds, instead of a battle-hardened male, a long-haired beauty.

On the most horrifying day of Abe's life, what is this vision?! Sabra revealed, feels naked before her life-long nemesis, an Israeli with a gun, and swiftly kicks his bleeding foot, then leaps down a sharp ravine, but Abe, yowling, slides after her, landing in pain, breathless, and again training his weapon on her. Stand-off. She is like the trapped fox; he, the wounded lion. She taunts

him, flaunting her upper hand by revealing a hidden door in the hillside. Startled and uncertain, Abe nevertheless orders her to open the door, and, when nothing explodes, pulls up on her and throws himself across her back, demanding she carry him into this earth womb.

Will it provide a safe haven? It's wondrous and strange, a cave with a spring. It seems like a field hut, but Sabra says it's her home, that he (meaning Israelis) took it from her, that she's "come for the apples," but, in fact, it's a clandestine way-station she was told about on the way to the border. Abe is dizzy, his vision wavering, and he fears what Sabra will do if he loses consciousness. His radio crackles, terrifying Sabra, but Abe hears his home base is under siege from artillery and rocket fire, and cannot mount a rescue.

Abe, though near delirium, knows he must hold Sabra there – to aid him, since he cannot walk, and to prevent her bringing others to attack him. Sabra, even more frightened than he, begs him to let her go before more soldiers come, but he warns that in darkness, heat-seeking Israeli rounds find and kill anyone moving toward the border. She's crazy to risk being out there. Dashing out quicker than Abe can fire, Sabra makes a run for it, but is swept back by severe, perhaps mystical, wind and lights, and she returns, bearing an odd trophy: Abe's blasted, bloody boot.

Through the night – until a bombardment from the on-going conflict blasts a hole in the cave's roof and he shields her from falling rock with his body – Abe and Sabra fling bitter Israeli/Arab accusations at each other. Still, when Sabra bathes his foot, Abe is mystified by this "Shabbat Angel" he prayed his Gramma to send him. Is she real, or is she an hallucination born of his shock? Then, though every ounce of him fights it, he sleeps, deeply.

At dawn, escaping up the cliff, Sabra has forgotten something, and returns to the cave to extract a bomb belt from hiding. But when Abe cries out in his dream, she jumps, then sees, peaking from under the fallen rocks, Abe's radio, crushed and silent. Sabra, relieved, a huge weight lifted, smiles, and carefully places the bomb belt back in its cache.

Abe awakens with a start – she's gone! – then finds three breakfast apples by his head. Sabra, her fears calmed by the crushed radio, is content to help Abe into sunlight, where she bandages his foot. She wonders why she cares for his wound no differently than if he were her relative. When he questions her, saying You've done this before? she's annoyed at his naivete, but their stark hostility has melted with the dangerous night they've shared. At dusk, as Abe tries to repair his lifeline radio, Sabra's returning with gathered fruits when shots ring across the clearing between them. He yells at her to drop, and then crawls out to help her to safety. Twice he has kept her from harm.

Cut off, for there's no hope now – the radio's battery is destroyed – they huddle by firelight, sheltered from night firing, and Abe admits: except for wanting news of Ben, he's as glad as she that the radio is silent. Then, while a violent storm overwhelms the bombardments, Abe shares his trauma from the horrible mine explosion and urges bits of Sabra's story from her, until their appreciation of one another's vulnerability creates the aura of a hidden Eden.

When Abe looks at Sabra's palm lifeline, declaring hers "a good hand that will build a strong life," she suddenly weeps uncontrollably. Dismayed, he comforts her, kissing her hair. Startled, she looks up, and as he's apologizing, she leans in and quickly kisses his face. He's stunned. It is a child's thanks for his caring words to a girl whose life is filled with horrors, and, danger forgotten, she runs laughing to stand in the rain's downpour from the hole in their roof. They sleep through this night like babes.

Morning woods, picking berries, Sabra is startled – by parts of an exploded body and, blown free, pieces of a radio. She finds the battery, and it looks undamaged; should she bring it to Abe? She quickly drops it where it was, and moves off without it. Next shot, in the field, Sabra stops moving with her berries, turns back. Next shot, she's running, with the battery, across the field, and offering it to Abe. Later, when his radio springs to life again, he quickly switches it off without calling anyone – and when Sabra says "It's working?" he answers, "I'm not ready" (for the radio to work).

Leaning on her, in quiet possession of their Eden-valley, Abe lets Sabra take him to a pond, and as she enters the water, Sabra solemnly tells him she's grateful he came to her, but now he must not be afraid to leave her. He demands to know about her life, and as she ducks underwater and floats, she's able finally to relate tortures that left her foster brother dying that were done to him by Israelis hunting his militant brother. Abe is doubtful of her story, but deeply troubled by it. There is so much she's still hiding from him. At sunset, Sabra quotes from the Bible where God calls Abraham, and Abraham says "Here I am."

That night, with the radio working, Abe learns that Ben has lived through surgery, and Abe's squad is about to come for him. But he balks. While Sabra watches him quietly, he puts off his squad— "Don't come now. Wait until morning." When they protest, he says "I've found shelter."

So the two have one more night together. As they star-gaze, Sabra tells Abe her mother's story of the bird in a terrible desert who dreams of an olive tree and learns to fly. When Abe tells her he's from Jerusalem, Sabra shouts with joy. He describes the wonders she should see there. They seem in a child's

dream of happiness. She asks if he's married. No? Good. She's going to make love to him. He hesitates, confused, but she assures him it's important to her; he doesn't understand it now, but he will. Thrilled, but alarmed, Abe still resists, saying she'll shame her family. She says it's no shame; just once she wants life. Then, like innocents, they give way to their passion.

At dawn they are entwined as she stirs and extracts the hidden bomb belt, takes his pistol, then slips outside, dons the belt and fastens her jacket over it. When she returns to take just one more look at Abe, he's awake, shocked by the bomb he thought he saw, and grabs her foot, exploding in fury as the pistol goes flying. She's a terrorist who's made a fool of him; she's planted a bomb to kill his buddies when they come for him! All his previous horrors are sweeping back over him, What sickness made her "hit" on him?! Limping, he drags her outside in search of trip wires. But as they grapple, he feels the belt and suddenly realizes *Sabra's the bomb*. Stunned, he lets go of her. Why is she strapped up to kill herself? Why?! As Abe falters, Sabra grabs his rifle and radio.

For the first time, Sabra admits she's Palestinian, on her way to Jerusalem, to touch her dream and make it live. He shouts – When were you in Jerusalem? Never. While his radio insistently calls Abe, the story of Sabra's family's expulsion erupts from her, and flows, right up to the camp called "Sabra." Then, though Abe protests these "war stories" that get told over and over and changed, and he has some too, he's afraid to hear the rest.

Still, he insists Sabra tell him the part she's afraid to tell, and then the massacre of her baby sister, her toddler brother, and her mother, is relived. When Sabra stops speaking, and Abe can find his voice, he repeats his Gramma's prayer for strength from her concentration camp in Germany, then begs Sabra to stay with him. He realizes he is deeply in love with her, and she cannot deny her love for him. But now an Israeli APC is racing toward their position and they have only minutes.

He'll take her to Jerusalem.

He can't!

She's going to kill people!

She won't if they let her pass; she'll warn them. They'll know Jerusalem is her home; why else would she die just to get there?

She's insane!

Is she? If he were her, what would he do?

He'll marry her. They'll make a child. They'll find all the things she's dreaming of. She begs him to be still; he's talking magic! It can never happen. Does she believe he loves her? Then he can make it happen.

Finally, as Abe’s squad nears, they eagerly plan to meet later in Tyre, and he persuades Sabra to deactivate her belt. One shy moment: if she had not expected to die today, would she have made love with him last night? Her answer is swift: Of course not! And as Abe laughs, saying he doesn’t even know how to feel about that, Sabra hesitates—

“It’s no good, is it?” If she doesn’t go to Jerusalem on her own, as a Palestinian, she’ll have failed her loved ones, who need their joy back. While fear seizes Abe- “It’s too late to go!” Sabra pulls away, smiling... she’ll run fast, she’ll get there, she won’t forget him, she married him here!

Then Abe’s radio comes alive. His rescuers are closing in fast. Sabra bolts, climbing the hill as the sound of vehicles approaching grows louder. Abe stumbles after, screaming for her to come back.

As Sabra heads across the open field, Abe hears an Israeli soldier yell, “HALT. OR I’LL SHOOT.” Sabra keeps running as Abe screams “DON’T SHOOT, DON’T SHOOT!” But Abe’s scream is unheard as a fusillade of bullets hammers out.

Miraculously not yet hit, Sabra slips her belt off into her hand, and tosses it high as she runs. As bullets fly all round her, a gigantic fireball erupts that illuminates Abe’s stricken face. SABRA...! he screams, and startled birds keep rising from earth to the sky.

Abe collapses in total despair as billowing smoke and fire engulf the field. But at the far edge of the blazing field we see a tiny move, then a blackened figure stumbles up...and runs.

At sunset, when exhausted soldiers have still found “no remains,” a glimmer pierces Abe’s devastation – does he dare hope?

THE END



212.366.1124 ksunde@thorn.net
130 Barrow Street 412 New York NY 10014