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*Dramatic Publishing*

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.” —*Jawaharlal Nehru*

# Collateral Bodies



Drama  
by  
**Erin Rachel Kaplan**

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**“Art is not a mirror held up to reality  
but a hammer with which to shape it.”**

**—Bertolt Brecht**

**Collateral Bodies** – Drama. By Erin Rachel Kaplan. Cast: 7w. *Collateral Bodies* explores the human rights violations that happen specifically to women, also known as “femicide.” The experiences these women relate are experiences that are currently being lived by many in places all over our world: sex-trafficking, rape, female circumcision, bride burning, domestic violence and incarceration. The stories told here are fictional yet based in truth from research, interviews, documentaries and historical texts. As the play opens, all of the women are brought back to life by the Woman in White so that they may tell the stories of their lives—who they were and how they died. They are Hope, Rajeev, Omid, Esperanza, Nadiya and Asha, women from six specific cultures—American, Mexican, Indian, Iranian, Somali and Eastern European—whose lives were ended in various ways simply for being female. The goal of this piece is to enlighten spectators about the state of women in our “modern” world and give an impetus for action against the atrocities presented in the play, so that the next generation of women have a better chance at life. These women are motivations, meant to empower us to stand up, act, make our voices heard. We, and our actions, are their legacy. *Bare stage. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 15 minutes. Code: CN7.*

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# COLLATERAL BODIES

By  
ERIN RACHEL KAPLAN

This excerpt contains: strong language,  
sexual situations and violence.



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(COLLATERAL BODIES)

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would first like thank my wonderful family for all their love and support through the years. *Collateral Bodies* belongs not just to me, but to them, and to all of the women and men who participated in readings, performances and talk-backs and who helped bring this script to where it is today. To them, I am eternally grateful.

Most of all this is play is for all the women and girls represented herein and all those in the world whose voices are silenced by hate, war, femicide and the culture wars against women. My sincerest hope is that someday plays like this will no longer be needed.

\* \* \*

RESOURCE LIST: Please see end of script for a list of organizations working to fight the human violations discussed in this play, where people can go to donate time or money or to produce the show as a fundraiser for those agencies.

*Collateral Bodies* premiered at the 45th Street Theatre from April 15-17, 2010. The production was directed by Daphnie Sicre with the following artists:

### CAST

Esperanza . . . . . Brandi Bravo  
Omid . . . . . Mai-Kim Dang  
Rajeey . . . . . Misty Easler  
Hope . . . . . Meissa Hampton  
The Woman in White . . . . . Iliana Inocencio  
Nadiya . . . . . Evy Lutzky  
Asha . . . . . Pratiba Premkumar

### PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager . . . . . Courtney Cooke  
Sound Designer . . . . . Saundrell Davison  
Costume Designer . . . . . Ginger Dominguez  
Assistant Costume Designer . . . . . Cielo Azul Godden  
Assistant Director . . . . . Amos Margulies  
Set & Light Designer . . . . . Christopher Goslin  
Marketing & Publicity Director . . . . . Kathi Elizabeth  
Assistant Stage Manager . . . . . Heidi Schoenenberger

You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.

— Jawaharlal Nehru

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

It is the wish of the playwright that this performance be done with the following provisions made:

- Each program will contain somewhere within its pages the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- All statistical information should be updated at the time of performance to reflect the current conditions.
- At each performance there will be informational resources available after the performance on the topics discussed in the play. It is encouraged that organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and The World Organization of Human Rights be invited to engage with the audience after the performance as well as local organizations promoting ideas suggested and supported by the play. Informational tables will be set up outside the performance venue to encourage audience members to take actions that address the issues in the play.
- A counselor trained in sexual abuse and rape counseling will be available for anyone who finds themselves in need and will be located in the lobby in a place that will assure privacy—this will be noted in the program.
- The program will note that the cast will be out of costume and makeup and in the lobby when the audience exits. They will be available for the audience to speak with and will allow the viewers to see the women as actors in order to create some distance from the world of the play.

- The following statement will be included as it is written below in either the
  1. Program within the first two pages
  2. As an additional handout to the audience
  3. Read by an actor prior to lights out and before the action of the play begins or
  4. Read as an announcement by the stage manger before lights up

“Before we begin we would like to warn you that the stories told in the following 60 minutes are based on research, interviews, documentaries and historical texts. They are fictional, and yet based in truth. These women could very well exist and the experiences they relate are experiences that are currently being lived by many, in places all over our world. The topics and materials discussed in this play are at times graphic, violent and disturbing and are not recommended for young children. While the stories you are about to see are tragic and can lead to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, we encourage you to look at them in a different light. These are people who have lived lives that were ended in various ways simply for their being female. This play is not meant to sadden, it is meant to empower. These women are motivations for us all to stand up, act, make our voices heard. They are the impetus to create a petition, raise money, raise awareness, to write your congressman and senator, to vote with your conscience instead of your pocketbook, to start a rally, to start a rebellion, to start a revolution. Do not let these women and the many thousands that they represent die in vain. We, and our actions are their legacy.”

# COLLATERAL BODIES

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**HOPE:** A 38-year-old white woman. Despite her youth, she looks much older. You can tell that she was once very pretty but that life has grayed and lined her face. She speaks quickly and deliberately and there is little emotion in her voice, she has told this story before.

**RAJEEY:** A 22-year-old Somali woman. She is stunningly beautiful. Her belly is still swollen from pregnancy. She is constantly touching it throughout her monologue.

**OMID:** A 19-year-old Iranian woman. She is distant when she speaks of her own experience and is political in her own way and as she begins to open up, finds her voice and her anger.

**ESPERANZA:** A 17-year-old Mexican girl. Her appearance is very traditionally Mexican—extremely beautiful with a dark complexion and long, dark hair that she touches often as she speaks.

NADIYA:\* A 23-year-old blonde Ukrainian woman. She looks older than she is and has a distance in her eyes and face and speech.

ASHA: A 26-year-old Indian woman. She is articulate, sharp and very pretty. Her experience is more recent and though she wants to tell her story, it is sometimes difficult for her to do so.

WOMAN IN WHITE: A woman of indeterminate age, race and nationality. She is the “mother” of the other women, supporting them, helping them to feel safe and connecting them to one another. She is always present on stage, though she never speaks.

NOTE: Each character should have an inventory of signature movements that correspond with the following words in the text: woman, blood, rape, tears, heart, home, scream, escape, pain, love, remember, hit, beat, child, baby, family, cry, body. These movements should be specific, subtle and reflective of how the character relates to that word. Once “awake” every time this word is said by another character on stage this movement is to happen. The individual movements will be chosen at the discretion of the actors and director.

\* This story was constructed in large part from excerpts of interviews with “Katya” and “Tania” that were aired in the film *Sex Slaves* written and directed by Ric Esther Bienstock and originally aired February 7, 2006, on PBS’ “Frontline.”

ESPERANZA. I made it about a mile when I saw a man walking out from behind a car. He said hello to me and I looked down and kept walking, just as Celia told me to. He started to follow me. Then another three men

came out of the darkness and began to yell at me—I don't remember what they were saying, all I could hear was my heart beating in my ears. They chased me, I don't know for how long—I did not make it far before I realized that I did not know where I was running. They surrounded me.

RAJEEY.

Knife came down

NADIYA.

They didn't see us  
as human beings,  
but just as whores,  
just as flesh that  
they could use.  
That's all...

HOPE.

He raped me.

ESPERANZA. I screamed and one of the men—the tallest of the four, put his hand on my neck and began to choke me. He told me that screaming would only make it worse.

HOPE. He went out on the third day and I managed to free myself. My wrists were bleeding badly. I got all of mine and MB's things and told her that we had to go. *(Pause.)* Randy came home. He chased me out of the house and into the garage. I was cornered. I knew that this was it. I was going to die right here and now. I'd leave MB alone with no mother and no one but Randy to care for her. I couldn't let that happen. I grabbed the gun he kept hidden in the bottom of the tool set and pointed it at him. He laughed. He said, "You wouldn't. You useless, good-for-nothing piece of shit. You don't have the guts." He took another step and I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger. I didn't know what I was

doing, I'd never fired a gun before. I just closed my eyes and just kept pulling the trigger until it was silent. When I finally opened my eyes, Randy was lying in a pool of blood. I didn't know if he was dead or alive, I only knew that this was my last chance. I went back into the house, grabbed MB and ran.

HOPE.

That was the third time  
I escaped prison.

ASHA.

I had our  
daughter.

ESPERANZA.

*La ciudad de los  
sueños.*

ASHA. I had our daughter, Tara late one morning. I named her this because it means star, and she was my shining star. My hope. I prayed that when we had the baby they would fall in love with her as I already knew I was, and begin to once again, love me for bringing her into the world.

RAJEEY. I was looking forward to being a woman, getting married and having children.

ASHA. This was not the case.

HOPE. There was nothing more to do.

ASHA. Vasu's mother was furious at me for having a little girl. She said that if Tara was anything like me that she would never get married and end up living on the streets like a common prostitute. Tara was only a few days old and already the abuse was beginning. I could not allow this to continue. So one evening when I was preparing the dinner for our family I told my mother-in-law that she could say whatever she wanted to me, that I had finally learned to ignore her hateful words but that I would not tolerate her abusing Tara. Vasu left the house to pick up some papers for work. The moment

his car rounded the corner his mother told me that I had gone too far, talking back the way that I had. She beat me. I cried out for Vasu, but he was gone. We were alone—her, me and the baby in the next room. I was lying on the floor of our kitchen in tears.

RAJEEY. It took me many months to heal completely, but after a few weeks they completed the ceremony. I was looked at by other circumcised women in my town—they told me that I was beautiful—and when they decided I was healthy they brought me down to the river and bathed me.

Not long after I healed I was to be married to a man in my community. He was a nice and kind man. I knew that he would love me and care for me and that we would have many children together.

ASHA. Tara, my star.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. (*whispering*). Remember child. My body.

*(The next six speeches overlap.)*

OMID. When we went to the trial many things happened.

HOPE. I was arrested the next day.

OMID. I was asked about my relationship with the man in the car and the men who attacked me

HOPE. They took me in for questioning. They told me that Randy was dead.

OMID. They yelled at me and insulted me and constantly asked me why I had not told my husband where I was going.

HOPE. Randy was dead. I started to cry.

OMID. When it was time to hear the sentence of the men who raped me, I thought these people shouldn't even live. They ruined my life and the lives of everyone in my family. My father was scared that my sisters would never be able to find husbands now and my brothers were disgusted by me.

HOPE. "Miss, you put an entire round of bullets into him from five feet away—you can't tell me you're surprised!" I told them what had happened, that I thought he would kill *me*.

OMID. The moment of the verdict came and I could feel that justice would be served, but it wasn't.

HOPE. They asked me to write it all down and I did.

OMID. The men who raped me each got three hundred lashes, my cousin was given ninety—and I,

HOPE. What I never knew was that I shoulda had a lawyer in there the whole time...

OMID. *I* was sentenced to death by public stoning.

HOPE. Turns out, I was writing a confession.

OMID. The judge told me that I was an adulteress and that the penalty for my crime *my crime?! was death.*

ESPERANZA.

NADIYA.

ASHA.

Flesh that they  
could use

City of Dreams

I was a prisoner

HOPE. I was locked up awaiting trial for two years.

ASHA. A prisoner

HOPE. I didn't have any money. So I had a state-appointed overworked and underpaid public defender. I probably would've been better doing the lawyering myself. I saw

my lawyer a whopping total of two times before the trial began.

I told him about how Randy was coming after me, he said it didn't matter because at the time I killed him he wasn't doing anything to me. I said that I knew he was gonna kill me, that I could tell, that I saw it in his eyes. "That's ridiculous, miss, we can't use that in a trial."

NADIYA. The pimp had two friends. That clinic belonged to them. They would take all the girls for check-ups there if, for example, someone would get really sick. They took me there for my abortion. When the doctor asked me if I wanted to have an abortion I wanted to say "no," but my pimp was there, staring at me and so I just kept silent. I just couldn't say "yes." After I had the abortion I cried so hard. I couldn't recover. They didn't take me to the clients for five days. They wouldn't let anyone see me. I was bleeding and was very sick... I would just dream of a baby at night. I dreamt of nursing a baby. My breasts were full of milk.

RAJEEY. Sometimes I would wake in the nights and have dreams that it was happening to me again. I would wake screaming and crying begging them to stop. I'd have dreams where I was bleeding again, but the bleeding would not end. I would hold myself in my hands and try to stop it, but it would only bleed more.

I was married, and on the night before my wedding my mother and the other women prepared me for my duty as a wife. I was going to be with my husband for the first time.

They then reopened me... *(pause)* it was not as bad as it was in the river but... *(Pause, she winces to herself and takes a deep inhale.)*

OMID. I knew what would happen to me. It happens to women here in Iran, not frequently, but too often, it is done in Iran, Iraq and many other countries. It is a terrible form of punishment—there is no single executioner. Many people gather around the victim and everyone becomes her killer. I had seen one once... it becomes something of a sport. *(Pause.)* It was awful—and now it would happen to me.

NADIYA.	HOPE.	RAJEEY.	ASHA.
Like whores,	Escape from		
like flesh that	prison		
they could use		Knife came down	
			Prisoner

HOPE. I sat in there and listened to them talk about how I was a vicious murderer, how I robbed a good man of his future and a little girl of her father. Fucking bullshit. My lawyer never once brought up the years of abuse OR the fact that I had tried to call the police in the past. He never mentioned the threats or the beatings or the times he'd scream at me in public places (full of witnesses I might add). He said that none of it mattered, that I was gonna be found guilty anyway and should just accept a plea.

OMID. I could feel that justice would be served, but it wasn't.

HOPE. I had no idea what I was doing and here was this lawyer, who had gone to school for this and everything

and I figured that he must be right. Before the trial ended he convinced me to plead guilty—I never even testified in my own defense. The *plea* was Murder I—twenty-five to life. I took it.

ASHA. We do not leave, we do not divorce. Life.

HOPE. MB was taken from me. I didn't even get to say goodbye to her when they hauled me out of the courtroom. Instead of escaping this time, I died inside. They took my little girl. The only thing I lived for.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*whispering*). Remember child.  
My body.

HOPE. My sister took her in and began raising money for my appeal.

RAJEEY. The first time I was together with my husband... (*pause*) it was strange. He did try very hard to be gentle with me but I was in pain. I knew that I was honoring my duty as a wife and was happy for that, but I had no good feelings in my body when it was happening. It was like I was not completely there. I could not really feel anything other than the pain inside me.

Before I was done, I would *feel* things there. I would feel something living there, it would twitch or tingle and I never really knew what it was or how it happened. I was afraid of it, but it always felt exciting. My tingle was gone. I wanted it back. I wanted to twitch, I did not want pain anymore. I wanted to talk with my body again as I used to as a girl. My body used to move. It would talk to me. Now it was silent. I did not know how to wake it up.

ESPERANZA. They took me into the desert. Everything was dusty. I wanted to run, but everywhere I looked all

I could see was this dry dust, cactus and a few desert trees. If I was able to get away, I would end up lost in the desert. So I did not run. They had not taken me very far when they began to touch me, to tell me all of the things that they would do to me, how much they liked my long, pretty dark hair. They led me by my hair, dragging me further into the desert. Then suddenly we stopped. One of them—I could not see who—it was too dark, hit me. I fell to the ground. Then one by one they took turns raping me.

HOPE.

They didn't see  
us as human beings,

OMID.

but just as whores,

RAJEEY.

just as flesh that  
they could use.

NADIYA.

This is not justice

ESPERANZA.

Over and over  
and over again.

OMID.

Pink crosses...

ESPERANZA.

Every inch of  
me hurt.

ASHA.

So combustible...

ESPERANZA.

I was covered  
in blood,

RAJEEY.

Human beings...

ESPERANZA.

Covered in dust—

HOPE. Our bodies.

ESPERANZA. I longed for the rain. I wanted to be clean again.

RAJEEY. Knife came down.

ESPERANZA. I knew that soon it would be morning. I could not see the sun rise, my eyes were swollen shut, but I could feel the sun's rays beginning to caress my body. The men did not stop. It lasted hours. I could feel my pulse beating hard through every inch of my body. Even though my voice could not cry out, my body was yelling at the top of its lungs to stop them—but they would not. My body was too weary to fight. I could not see what they were doing because my eyes were shut. I'm glad for it. One of the men sat on top of me and cut off my left nipple.

RAJEEY. Knife came down.

ESPERANZA. I could not scream out loud, there was nothing left in me but I could feel the warm wet tears streaking down my face, cleaning off the blood, like warm rain.