**The Shield**

## By Dave Carley

## [dcarley@sympatico.ca](mailto:dcarley@sympatico.ca)

**Synopsis:**

He emigrated to escape violence and make a better life for his family. And that’s how it started out for the taxi driver, but that’s not how it ended. And his daughter must now learn how to carry on.

**Cast:**

FATHER – 40s

DAUGHTER – university age

**Accents:**

It would be logical that FATHER has an accent. At most, it should be suggested. I have not written the part with an accent because I don’t want to particularize the ethnicity of the speaker. The story he and his daughter are living and telling is universal and has happened in many ways, in many places, to many people.

**The set:**

Bare, one or two chairs only, suggesting a car.

FATHER sits on a chair, facing audience. DAUGHTER stands facing him as he talks, sometimes at his side, sometimes behind.

There can be exterior traffic and headlights during FATHER’s monologue – but less traffic and less light as FATHER drives further into the isolated suburban area…

The lighting on FATHER and DAUGHTER should be fairly tight.

There is music as the lights come up… FATHER comes in over the music; he is already talking to his fare as the play begins.

**Production history:**

*The Shield* was first produced as part of the Occupy Wall Street arts festival in 2012, using an occupied park in New York City.

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**FATHER:**

… There’s guys driving cabs here who were doctors there. Teachers. Professors. Me, nothing much. A field, goats, some olive trees. My wife looked after that, cleaned house for the judge. I took the bus into the city, worked as a janitor at my cousin’s factory, whatever he wanted.

… So you won’t hear me complaining about driving cab because this is a step up for me. A step sideways at least. I own half this car. I drive nights because my partner can’t see in the dark.

… Days, he drives old ladies to their doctors, but old ladies don’t tip much. I get the drunks and a couple times a week I’m cleaning up puke in the backseat… but the tips are better, I get more fares, on a good night I’m always driving…

… We came because of economics. When you get right down to it, we all did, you, me, your ancestors. We came here for work. For some reason it’s bad to say, “I’m here because I want to make money.” I work 12 hours a day, my wife goes out to clean - my daughter goes to university all day then she studies half the night. Aren’t we the people you want more of?

… Because, no offence, a lot of people born in this country are lazy…

… I don’t know this area so well – left on Clinton?

… Lazy is lazy and let me tell you, where I’m from, lazy ones are dead ones.

**DAUGHTER:**

… He was always here, at breakfast. He’d have breakfast with me, see me off to school, then sleep all day, till I came home. Then he’d get up and I’d have another breakfast with him. That was his life, our life, sleep all day, drive all night. Two breakfasts. Then try and stay awake Sundays so we could do things, like the Boardwalk or the island. At breakfast he would tell me about the night before, about the people he’d driven. A memory game, he could remember every fare but it wasn’t boring, he’d give them funny names:

- elephant lady

- burping man

- the man who had to sit on a newspaper because of germs.

**FATHER:**

… We have been here seven years in July. I got sick of it back there. Everyone at each others’ throats… the Kurds fighting the Shiites, who are killing the Christians, who despise Armenians, who were massacred by Turks, who hate Greeks, who hate Macedonians – Kosovars – Serbs - Croats, it goes on and on until you’re halfway round the world in hate…

…And, my town – it was no better, only we didn’t make the papers. There, some people don’t talk to each other because of religion. Others, because of something their family did a hundred years ago, or who they voted for in the last fake election. Then my wife starts fighting the judge’s wife because she withholds pay after my wife knocked over a stupid vase. We can’t take the judge’s wife to court because guess who’s deciding the case. And my cousin works me like a dog, he treats his own flesh and blood as slave labour and he’s right, that’s exactly what we are, cheap, reliable, always one more of us if someone gets sick - or sick of it. The last straw? My neighbour decides he owns ten feet of my field and again the problem: how can I go to the judge to get justice when my wife and his wife are fighting over a vase?

…Too much fighting, too much, no way to get ahead, my daughter wasn’t going to live in the middle of all that.

… So I started the process.

**DAUGHTER:**

… We’re fixed, of course. “Fixed, I love that word”. Compensation, a brilliant thing about this country. You get killed on the job - they support you. A fund for my education too, a big fund. It was front page in one of the papers, people took up the cause… it was… that was - overwhelming. All of it was overwhelming. I can go to school forever if I want. I can get educated for me, my mother, every woman in my family back to Eve…

… He was proudest of that, it’s what he drove a cab for, the education…

… To become a pharmacist, that’s my plan right now, as soon as I get – as soon as I can feel – feel better. A pharmacist is not quite as good as movie star, which is what I wanted to be when I was 14, or a rock singer, 15, or a movie star again, 16… then three years of wanting to be an o-b-g-y-n.

…Most days now I just want to get to the end of the day. Especially Sundays.

**FATHER:**

The man I own this cab with, he came here a decade ago, I wrote him, he told me the trick. We applied as refugees. We helped the truth, I’m ashamed about the lies, but that was his advice. I said everyone in our town was a different religion from us and we were threatened.

… I sold the field to the guy who was claiming it, sold it cheap, he was thrilled. My slave-driver cousin? He personally came, packed his car with our bags, drove us to the airport. On the way out of town, we went by the judge’s, his wife came out, waved us to stop, she was crying, she gave my wife money. It was like a conspiracy to make us regret.

And my wife – she *was* regretting. I had to keep saying, “Remember why, remember why.”

… So what happens? My daughter turns twelve the day she arrives here. Four seconds after she gets off the plane she becomes a woman. Like you touch down on this continent and – wham - puberty. And immediately she and my wife are at each other’s throats. My own house is a war zone, worse than what I left.

… Left? Really?

**DAUGHTER:**

… They’re talking about forcing all drivers to have shields. But most cabbies are like Dad – they want to talk with their fares. The shields are a thousand bucks… plus you have to spend more to change the car’s heating and cooling… but… I think it should be law. And I think the government should pay for the shields. Sorry Dad. He hated that kind of attitude. “The government should pay.”

**FATHER:**

… My daughter, she’s 20 now, the last seven years, it’s like Beirut at home, and they wonder why I keep putting in extra hours? It’s peaceful in this car. I don’t have two women fighting over how short a dress can be. And tattoos. She got a butterfly, somehow it landed on her. Right on the small of her back. What’s she want a butterfly *there* for. Who’s she putting it there to see? I only saw it because one day we went to the boardwalk and when she was leaning forward, putting her rollerblades on, her shirt slipped up and I yell, “What’s that butterfly doing there?”… And she’s saying, “Daddy it’s just a little tattoo, everyone has them.” My wife, never passes up a fight, “Only prostitutes have tattoos, my daughter’s a prostitute, we come fifty thousand miles so our daughter can be a whore.” War starts, so much for our quiet day on the boardwalk.

… Left again?

… There’s a club out here?

… But I know she’s got to fit in, I just wish she doesn’t have to fit in with *everything*. I’m not complaining. She’s going to university, she’s got plans, she’ll get a good job.

**DAUGHTER:**

… Mom and I have responded in different ways. Because of language. It was me who had to speak to the media, just like it’s me telling you how those – *(Points.)* those beasts – have ruined our lives. After the killing, it was up to me to tell people about Dad, why he came here, how he loved it here, how he loved being in a country where there was no fighting… how he loved the idea that I could be growing up here… As long as I kept talking about it I was OK, but after a while no one wants to hear you talk and then…

**FATHER:**

… Here?

… And, what was I saying…

… Here.

… There’s nothing here…

… What are you -

… Look

… Look just get out…

… Get out.

… I’m going to pull over here, look, just get out, I don’t want trouble…

… Please, please, no you don’t need to – put that down - I’ve got a daughter

… Take this, here, here’s my watch, take it take it

… Take this, it’s everything I’ve got, just get out…

*(FATHER’s head falls forward.)*

**DAUGHTER:**

… He didn’t want a shield. He liked to talk too much.

…Seven years. We had a nice apartment, it was clean. We were working hard, then those two guys who have made nothing out of their lives and will never make anything out of their lives, who are the seventh or seventieth generation of making nothing out of their lives, who see that as a *virtue,* slit his throat out behind some mall and for what? Seventy bucks. And they’re so stupid they don’t see that Dad parked right under a security camera, that my Dad’s final act in this country is smart, he outfoxed them.

… As will I. Mom is desperate to go home, back there, back to the land where hate lasts for centuries but we’re not, we’re staying, because this, this is my Dad’s dream for us. And me, I’d rather be here too. There’s hate here, yes - but at least it’s quick.

# The End