

SCRIPT

# GIRLS AT CHECKPOINTS

Part of the 'Dear Children, Sincerely ...' project



written by  
**RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA**

(devised with Ashling O'Shea and Piumi Wijesundara)

Based on interviews conducted through  
the DCS theatre research project

stages  
theatre  
group

*Girls at Checkpoints*

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**Girls at Checkpoints – part of the DCS project**

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A Stages Theatre Group presentation

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First performed at  
The International Festival for Women Theatre Makers  
Mercury Theatre, Colchester  
United Kingdom  
June 2017

**An Introduction to  
the *DCS Project***

**‘Dear Children, Sincerely...’  
a conversation across generations**

**What is the *DCS Project*?**

**“Dear Children, Sincerely... a conversation across generations”** (or the *DCS project*) is a research theatre project begun in Sri Lanka in 2015 by Stages Theatre Group. *DCS* collects the stories and experiences of the generation born in the 1930s and takes them to the present-day audiences in the form of storytelling and live performance.

Under the *DCS project*, short performance pieces are created from extensive conversations conducted with senior citizens, with each performance piece not more than 15 minutes long. These stories stand alone as individual performance pieces and can also be linked together to create longer theatrical productions.

Between 2015 and 2020, through the *DCS project*, over 70 senior citizens of Sri Lanka were interviewed and performance pieces created from these conversations.

The *DCS project* has also been implemented in Rwanda, Palestine, Pakistan, the UK, Serbia and DRC.

## **An Introduction to *Girls at Checkpoints***

*Girls at Checkpoints* explores three true cases of violence against women inflicted at military checkpoints during, and after the civil war in Sri Lanka. The play was inspired by a DCS interview conducted in the north of the country, with a senior citizen.

*Girls at Checkpoints* was created during a ten-day ARIADNE theatre residency that explored the creation of theatre through oral histories.

This play, written by Ruwanthie de Chickera, artistic director of Stages Theatre Group Sri Lanka, follows the stories of: the (infamous) brutal gang rape of young Krishanti Kumaraswamy, during the Civil War in Sri Lanka; the (briefly reported) prolonged daily molestation of two children, sisters, at a navy checkpoint, after the end of the Civil war; and the (unreported) sexual abuse of a woman journalist during her coverage of the Sri Lankan conflict.

The play was performed at the ‘2017 International Festival for Women Theatre Makers’, at the Mercury Theatre Colchester, in June 2017 with an international cast.

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website [www.stages.lk](http://www.stages.lk)

# **Girls at Checkpoints**

**Characters** *in order of appearance*

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| JOURNALIST     | a young Tamil journalist and narrator of this story<br>a woman who finally broke her silence |
| LITTLE GIRL 1  | an eight-year-old school girl<br>the little sister with a big secret                         |
| LITTLE GIRL 2  | a ten-year-old school girl<br>the big sister with a heavy burden                             |
| MOTHER         | mother of Krishanti Kumaraswamy<br>she just sent her daughter to school                      |
| KRISHANTI      | a nineteen-year-old school-girl<br>sitting for her A-Level examinations                      |
| ARMY SOLDIER   | a soldier at a military checkpoint   |
| FOREIGN FRIEND | a curious foreign correspondent<br>excited to be in a real war zone                          |

## **Scene Breakdown**

|                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Scene 1</b> | <b>Preparation</b>              |
| <b>Scene 2</b> | <b>Walk to Checkpoint I</b>     |
| <b>Scene 3</b> | <b>Lunch Packet I</b>           |
| <b>Scene 4</b> | <b>Examination</b>              |
| <b>Scene 5</b> | <b>Walk to Checkpoint II</b>    |
| <b>Scene 6</b> | <b>Lunch Packet II</b>          |
| <b>Scene 7</b> | <b>It's better to Walk Away</b> |



## **Scene 1**

### **Preparation**

*Journalist enters, sits on a chair and faces the audience directly.*

#### **Journalist to audience**

During war, the landscape gets dotted with checkpoints. And when a landscape gets dotted with checkpoints, it gets dotted with men holding guns. It also gets dotted with women's secrets.

Secrets can be hidden. Secrets can also be broadcast. In certain villages in my country when a woman was 'taken'... she would be burned on her arms, her belly, her back or shoulders. These places because they can be seen... when wearing a sari.

My people are modest... there are things we just don't talk about.

This is a play about three women's stories. One story that everyone knows. One story just a few heard of. One story no one yet knows.

All three stories took place at checkpoints. All three stories are true.

The story everyone knows is the story of Krishanti Kumaraswamy. A 19 year old Sri Lankan school girl who was raped and killed by six army soldiers in 1996 – as she returned home from sitting her first A level exam paper...

The second story – the story very few people know - is the story of two little girls (sisters) who had to pass a navy checkpoint on their way to school, and every day, for a year, were abused by the officers at this checkpoint. This was in 2011, after the war had ended.

The story no one knows... is my story. It took place during the war. Between these two other stories.

Maybe I will have the courage to share it with you today.

But first, the story of the little girls...

*Journalist wraps shawl around waist. She transforms to Little Girl 1 and runs to sister.*

## **Scene 2**

### **Walk to Checkpoint I**

*Little Girl 1 and Little Girl 2 are getting ready to leave for school in a frenzy.*

Little Girl 1: Akka!

Little Girl 2: Ready then? Come then. Come. Come. Come. Every day you are late no...  
(*checks her*) You have everything? Sure? (*pauses*) Okay... (*pause*) Sure no?

Little Girl 1: Tie my shoelace.

*Little Girl 2 ties her sister's shoelace. She takes her by the hand and leads her out of house.*

*Then she pauses.*

Little Girl 2: Your water bottle. You have that?

*Little Girl 1 is quiet. She looks guilty.*

*Little Girl 2 sighs. They both go back to retrieve the water bottle.*

*They turn to leave again.*

*They pause again.*

Little Girl 2: Then your science book? What about your science book?

Little Girl 1: Don't have science today.

*Long pause.*

*They are reluctant to move.*

Little Girl 1: (*softly*) I don't want to go to school ....

Little Girl 2: (*Drags her sister by the arm*) Come! We're going to be late! We're going to be late!

Little Girl 1: (*Dragging her feet*) I have a stomachache... Akka... I don't want to...  
Akka... my stomach is paining akka. Cant go to school today. Can't go akka.  
Please. (*She suddenly pulls her arm away, fiercely*) I don't want to go!!

*Little girl 2 stops. She looks helpless and angry.*

Little Girl 2: Alright then! Go home so! I'll go alone ... So go!! Go now so!! (*pause*) Is that what you want?

Little Girl 1: (*Rethinking, reluctantly*) It's only a small stomachache.

*The girls hold hands again and move onwards slowly, until they see the checkpoint.*

*They both stop.*

Little Girl 2: *(in a small, broken voice)* they're all there today akka...

*The little girls stare at the checkpoint ahead of them.*

*Transition to Krishanti and Mother.*

*Krishanti is getting ready to leave home for her exams. Her Mother tries to help.*

Mother: Krishanti!

Krishanti: Yes Amma...

Mother: Krishanti baba did you pack everything now?

Krishanti: Yes Amma. Last night I packed.

Mother : You were up all night no? I told you to wake up early. You have to be fresh baba. First paper of A Levels no? I wish your appa was here to see you...Have you taken all the papers?

Krishanti: Yes...

Mother: Admission card?

Krishanti: Yes amma... everything.

Mother: How many pens?

Krishanti: Five pens, three pencils, one sharpener.

Mother: Eraser?

Krishanthi: You must not erase, you must cut clearly. Amma...

Mother: Ok, Ok... Now come and pray. Come quickly.

*Mother starts praying at the small shrine within the house. Krishanthi interrupts her.*

Krishanti: Shall I take the eraser then?...

Mother: Shhh! Pray now... Pray that you get good grades ... now baba...

Krishanti : I only have four minutes...

Mother : Think of appa and pray...

*A quiet moment when both Krishanti and Mother pray.*

*Krishanti finishes her prayer first and turns to leave.*

*Her mother kisses her head over and over again.*

Mother: Now, don't worry ok? Don't worry about anything. You're going to do great my smart, smart little girl. You have studied hard. You will pass this like all your other exams. Top marks. Smart Girl.

Krishanthi: Ok amma.

Mother: Now take your time... read all the questions... twice ok? Remember what...

Krishanti: Okay Ok Amma... I will.

*Krishanti turns to leave.*

*Mother suddenly rushes after Krishanti.*

Mother: Baba Krishanti! You left your lunch packet. Aiyo... I've been up all morning making this! Bless you kunju...

*Transition to narrator/journalist.*

### **Journalist to audience**

Of course I had heard of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy ... Krishanthi was gang raped and killed in 1996 on the day of her first A level exams. It became one of the most infamous cases in the 30-year war.

I, myself, was a journalist working on the war. And I used to travel to the war zones with my foreign correspondent friends.

*Journalist and Foreign Friend are in a moving bus.*

Foreign Friend: Oh my gawd! Thank you *so* much for this. I've been trying *so* hard to get here. It's, like, *impossible* for people like me to access these areas you know....

Journalist: It's pretty impossible even when you are from here. Trust me.

Foreign Friend: Well, of course... ya, I get it. I mean, does it make a difference if you're like Tamil or Sinhalese... I mean it must make a difference right? ... Or doesn't it?

Journalist: Well... if you're Sinhalese, you can get about almost anywhere -

Foreign Friend: Seriously...? Wow. That's like...

Journalist: But if you are Tamil, like me, you have to be careful. Or you need one of these. BBC ID. It's a magic pass...

Foreign Friend: You work for the BBC? You never told me that!

Journalist: Long time ago. For a very short time. It wasn't great actually. But this card was worth it. This has real power.

*Girls at Checkpoints*

Foreign Friend: Ya. I get that. I use my old contacts too. Sometime shamelessly ... You know... name drop.. *(pause)* So is there anything I need to, like, absolutely *know*? Any do's or don'ts? You know...

Journalist: So I have been meaning to tell you... you need to tell Nick to stop flashing around that big camera. Especially at checkpoints.

Foreign Friend: It's not that big.

Journalist: *(firmly)* No Really. Not at checkpoints.

Foreign Friend: OK. He'll be pretty bummed. But I'll tell him.

Journalist: Please.

*Bus runs into a pothole.*

Foreign Friend: Whoa... this is *rough*! My body's gonna be shattered tomorrow ... Was that, like, a crater do you think? Like a bomb crater?

*Bus comes to a sudden halt.*

Foreign Friend: What's happening? What's happening?

*Journalist is craning her neck.*

Journalist: This is not a normal checkpoint.

*They both try and listen to a soldier (offstage) who has boarded the bus.*

Foreign Friend: Gosh this is the first female solder I have seen.

Journalist: Do you have your pass with you?

Foreign Friend: What language are they speaking? What language are they speaking?

Journalist: Shhhh! They're speaking Sinhalese. This is not a normal checkpoint... You have your passport on you right?

Foreign Friend: Yep. All here. What's she saying? What's she saying? Why is she speaking to you in Sinhala?

Journalist: They always only speak to us in Sinhala.

Foreign Friend: Gosh her eyes are so cold...

Journalist: She is saying... I think she is ... *(Trying to follow instructions)* Foreigners go ... there ...? And locals go... where ? *(looking out the bus window)*

Foreign Friend: *(panicking)* Hang on! She *separating* us? Is that like, safe? Can we tell her that you are responsible for me? Can you tell her that?

*Journalist is separated from foreign friend.*

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Journalist: No no no... I'm with her. We are together. I'm local Tamil but BBC.  
*(frantically reaching for her card).*

Foreign Friend: Where they taking me? To that bus? *(she looks out the window horrified)* I am not going *there*.

Journalist: I'm with her. I'm a journalist. BBC. See? BBC. Check my bag. No cameras. Yes. Local but...

Foreign Friend: What did she say? Look at her eyes ... Look...

Journalist: That bus? You want me to go there? That bus? That one? *(to her friend)* She says that bus is to check people.

Foreign Friend: Ya. I saw that. I am *not* going there. *No way*. Did you tell her I'm an American citizen? Say CNN or something.

Journalist: She wants you to go in the other direction.

Foreign Friend: Oh good. *(pause)* But what about you?

Journalist: I am a journalist... here see? BBC. I am with her. Stop pushing me. You can look at my bag here. Don't push! OK, ok, I will go.

*(pause)*

Why is it covered in black cloth?

*(Turning to audience)*

Journalist I felt such a sense of fear as I looked at that bus covered in black cloth.

I started my long walk towards that checkpoint with a great sense of dread. But I imagine it was nothing compared to the terror felt by the two little girls who had to walk every day towards that navy checkpoint ... where they knew what was awaiting them.

*Transition back to two little girls walking towards checkpoint.*

Little Girl 2: Come. *(pause)* Is that fatty one there? Look and tell...

Little Girl 1: *(staring at checkpoint)* Beardy one is also there akka ...

Little Girl 2: He is so smelly!

*They pause.*

Little Girl 1: Akka ... toffee uncle is there. *(Whimpering)* I don't want toffees today...

Little Girl 2: If he gives today, don't take Ok? Maybe he will keep it for someone else.

*Pause. They inch forward.*

Little Girl 1: I don't eat the toffees akka *(mumbling and whimpering)*

*Girls at Checkpoints*

Little Girl 2: I know... I also don't.

Little Girl 1: Toffee uncle is calling akka...

Little Girl 2: Is the fatty one there?

Little Girl 1: Amma also didn't like the toffee. She spat it out.

*Little Girl 2 turns on her younger sister angrily.*

Little Girl 2: What? Did you give her? Did you give her one of those!?

Little Girl 1: *(scared)* ...Only one... and she didn't swallow ...

Little Girl 2: Where did you say you got it from?

Little Girl 1: She didn't ask...

Little Girl 2: *(infuriated)* What if she found out? Ah? What if she finds out and comes here? Ah? You want them to kill Amma and Appa? Is that what you want?

*Little Girl 1 is almost crying.*

Little Girl 2: Promise? Promise you won't give them another one ok? Promise?

*The sisters lock fingers in a pinky promise.*

*They look at the checkpoint.*

Little Girl 1: Akka, I don't want toffees today akka... I have a stomachache akka...

Little Girl 2: One of us will have to. *(pause)* Do you want me to go first? Is that what you want? You want me to go?

*Little Girl 1 looks down.*

Little Girl 2: OK then, I will go.

*But she does not let go of her sister's hand. The two sisters reluctantly move forward holding each other's' hands tightly.*

## **Scene 2**

### **Lunch Packet I**

*Transition to Journalist.*

#### **Journalist to audience**

Just like those two little girls. Krishanthi Kumaraswamy was also stopped at a checkpoint on her way to school. This was her usual route.

But on that day, the soldiers stopped her, searched her bag and then put sand into her rice.

Sand in her rice... In Hindu culture, food is a gift from God, and should be treated with great respect.

*Transition to Krishanti. She reaches the checkpoint, with a soldier in it.*

*The soldier stops her.*

Soldier: Exams? A levels?

Exam card?

*He notices Krishanthi is impatient. He taunts her.*

Ahhhh... you're late no?

Open the bag.

Ahhhh... what's this ? *He takes out the lunch packet.* Smells nice. Your mother cooked this for you. Nice no? (*He opens it up and smells it.*) See how lucky you are?

*He hands her back her bag, but keeps the lunch.*

You can go. This is mine now.

*Krishanthi does not leave.*

What? You don't want to share? I'm hungry no. You don't want to share with a hungry soldier? Too important now are you? A level girl? Too big now?

*The soldier then picks up a handful of sand and puts it into the lunch. Then he hands the packet to her.*

There you go. Eat now. Eat your A Levels.

*Krishanti takes her destroyed rice packet and then throws it on the ground at the soldier's feet, turns on her heel and walks away.*



Soldier        Did you see that? Saw what she did? Little bitch...

**Journalist to audience**

I often wondered... if Krishanti hadn't thrown that packet of rice at the soldiers... would what happened to her, not have happened?

It's impossible to say. Just like it was impossible for me to predict, what was about to happen to me in that checkpoint... inside that darkened bus.

### **Scene 3**

#### **Examination**

Journalist & Krishanti: Examination

*Journalist enacts checkpoint assault scene parallel to Krishanti's answers to her A/L paper...*

Krishanti

One. When a person is pinned against a wall by their neck and lifted up, they are in danger of ...

- (a) being suffocated
- (b) being choked
- (c) their windpipe crushed
- (d) their spirit broken

Two. When they push your legs apart and pull down your trousers you expect them to

- (a) rape you
- (b) hurt you
- (c) search you.
- (d) search you again. And again.

Three. When you think the worst is over ...

...you will be turned around and opened up.

Four. The most humiliating moment is when

- (a) you cry out loud.
- (b) you fear you might soil yourself
- (c) you have to turn round and face them.
- (d) they all step away and watch you pull up your trousers, pick up your bag and leave...

*Journalist drags bag behind her and moves to take a seat center stage.*

## **Scene 4**

### **Walk to the Checkpoint II**

*Transition to Krishanti's mother waiting at home vs. Krishanti and Soldier second encounter.*

*The soldier is waiting for Krishanthi as she walks back to the checkpoint.*

Soldier:        There! She's coming.

*Krishanthi tries to walk by the soldier. He stops her and hands her the lunch.*

Soldier:        You forgot something. You must be hungry no?

*Krishanthi tries to get away.*

Soldier:        You left your lunch. A level girl.

*Krishanthi tries to move forward.*

Soldier:        This is yours no? Your mama made it for you no? You have to eat it.

*Krishanti stares at Army Soldier with contempt.*

Soldier:        Ohhh.. She wants more sand in to it! *(he pours more sand into it)*

Soldier:        What? You want me to feed you? Does your amma feed you? Here. Open your mouth. Open your mouth.

*The soldier has Krishanthi in a tight bind, he is cramming his fist down her mouth. She struggles, she chokes.*

*They freeze.*

## **Scene 5**

### **Lunch Packet II**

*Transition to Journalist.*

**Journalist to audience.**

September 7<sup>th</sup> 1996. Krishanti Kumaraswamy was raped and killed by six soldiers and policemen. She was killed, her body cut up and buried. Her mother, brother, and friend who went looking for her were also killed, their bodies cut up and buried.

As a journalist, of course I had come across the story.

*Transition back in the bus.*

## **Scene 6**

### **It's better to Walk Away**

*The Journalist sits in silence next to her Foreign Friend. They are back on the moving bus.*

Foreign Friend: That was so embarrassing! They were so rude. Just opened up my bags! Threw things about!... Tampons flying, like, everywhere!

Oh my god. I hope not all check points are like this.

You think Nick managed to catch any of that on camera?

*Journalist looks straight to the audience.*

Journalist: I was not able to tell my foreign correspondent friend what had happened to me. I could not find the words. So I said nothing. For many years.

I thought about my own silence the day I read about the two little sisters who kept their awful secret. And kept returning to their abusers everyday.

I realized that wars are dotted with checkpoints... and with women's secrets.

*Both journalists switch up shawls to transition into two little girls.*

*The two little girls are walking away.*

Little Girl 1: They gave two toffees today.

Little Girl 2: Don't throw it now. We'll bury it later.

*They turn round briefly.*

Little Girl 1: Bye uncle... Thank you uncle.

*The two little sisters exit.*

**END**

## **Production Credits**

*Girls at Checkpoints* was first performed at the **Mercury Theatre in Colchester, United Kingdom** on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018, for the ‘**The International Festival for Women Theatre Makers**’, with the following cast and crew:

### **CAST**

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Journalist, Little Girl 1, Mother</b>        | Piumi Wijesundara     |
| <b>Little Girl 2, Krishanti, Foreign Friend</b> | Ashling Edward O’Shea |
| <b>Army Soldier</b>                             | Ewoot D’ Hoore        |

### **DESIGN TEAM**

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Director</b> | Ruwanthie de Chickera |
|-----------------|-----------------------|

### **PRODUCTION TEAM**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Photography</b> | Nic Blower                                     |
| <b>Video</b>       | Nic Blower                                     |
| <b>Producer</b>    | Arts and Research Council, University of Essex |

The following artists contributed to the making of this script:

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Writer</b>                        | Ruwanthie de Chickera                      |
| <b>Devised in collaboration with</b> | Ashling Edward O’Shea<br>Piumi Wijesundara |
| <b>DCS Researcher</b>                | Angelica Chandrasekeran                    |

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website [www.stages.lk](http://www.stages.lk)



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