ENEMY SKY

**By Constance Congdon**

**September 29, 2017**

CAST

{3M; 4W)

JAVED ULLAH, a Pakistani Muslim man, age 60+

ROSE BUCHANAN, a college professor, age 60+

BASMA ULLAH, a Pakistani woman, age 60+

KALIL JOHNSON, a 26 yr old African American man, former student of ROSE’s

EMILY BENSON, a Provost at the college, age 30 +

SABAH RAFIK, age 22, granddaughter to JAVED, born and raised in Northern Pakistan.

OFFICER SCZCEPANEK

A campus policeman, male, age?

PLACE

Outside, in Amherst, MA, in a former common area, in a “faculty ghetto,” a cluster of old houses where faculty live. Although an interior bedroom and an office on campus can be seen, they are represented simply, with chairs.

TIME

Early morning, a little past pre-dawn, November 9, 2016

SCENE ONE~

[In the dark, voices from two people in a drone operational metal trailer, somewhere in Arizona. The voices are from headsets and mics and the voices have that scratchy quality that comes from electronic broadcasting]

VOICE ONE

I got them. What are they doing?

VOICE TWO

They’re getting into that Toyota again. Wait. More are coming. See those two guys?

VOICE ONE

What are they talking about?

VOICE TWO

I don’t know. But I bet they’re up to no good.

VOICE ONE

Go west about a meter. See what I’m seeing?

VOICE TWO

Oh my god. The motherlode! This is a meeting!

VOICE ONE

Mos def.

VOICE TWO

Wait until the Toyota arrives.

VOICE ONE

Why do all these fucking people pack into one vehicle?

VOICE TWO

Because they are all niggers, that’s why. Streets or sand—they’re all the same.

VOICE ONE

Hey. This is all recorded.

VOICE TWO

I stand by what I say.

VOICE ONE

Check for women and children.

VOICE TWO

They can have weapons and bombs, too.

VOICE ONE

Toyota has arrived.

VOICE TWO

Okay.

VOICE ONE

Okay.

VOICE TWO

Rifle, rifle, rifle.

[Silence. Then both voices cheer!]

VOICE ONE

GOT EM!

[Lights up on JAVED, a Pakistani Muslim, wearing a skull cap, watching the sky above him with attentive apprehension. He is dressed in somewhat business-like but inexpensive clothing. The porch light at ROSE’s house turns on and she enters, wearing her flannel, unsexy nightgown, with a jacket thrown on. She was up late, fell asleep, then woke up and has come outside to get some fresh air. They nod to each other. It seems JAVED is about to say something, but starts to leave]

ROSE

Don’t go. Please. I need the company.

What were you looking up for?

JAVED

Just a. . .habit, I guess.

Birds.

ROSE

Wuuuuuu. Still hungover. From food. Too much stuff I never eat because it’s bad for me. But who could blame me? We were going to have the first woman President of the United States! And then. . .

[overcome with the loss]

I’m still really, really—

[gets ahold of herself]

Listen, from women being imprisoned and tortured because they wanted the vote, to *now*, when a woman was threatened with imprisonment and tortured by accusation, character assassination--

[JAVED just looks at her]

You’re not a supporter of her.

JAVED

I can’t vote.

ROSE

Oh. And you’re a Muslim, right? Sorry, I have just done and said things you can’t possibly approve of. And I know I’m being insensitive right now and ignorant--

JAVED

I’m from Pakistan.

ROSE

Oh, right. And Pakistan is Muslim--I do know that. I do know some. . .

JAVED

Benazir Bhutto became the first woman leader of a Muslim nation. I was inappropriately in love with her. And in 1988 and she was *actually* assassinated. With bullets.

ROSE

What happened. . .to her? I seem to remember. . .

JAVED

She was in a motorcade and there were bombs, but she was shot in the back of the head—three shots. Bang, bang, bang. There was no investigation. It was Musharif’s doing. “Democracy is the best revenge,” she had said years before. But I wanted a different revenge. That was ten years ago. I’m still not over it and don’t expect to be.

ROSE

Okay, I’m naïve. I’m a naïve American.

JAVED

You are waking up in the world we all live in. You are the Roman Empire. And now you have a leader who will kick me out as soon as possible.

ROSE

Okay. Right. I mean. . .you’re right.

JAVED

I didn’t mean to be so. . .

ROSE

It’s okay.

[beat]

JAVED

You don’t remember me.

ROSE

No. . .

JAVED

I was here twenty-five years ago. On a grant. Javed Ullah.

ROSE

Javed?

JAVED

Yes.

ROSE

Oh my god! I don’t have my glasses. You’ve—

JAVED

--aged.

ROSE

Twenty years?

JAVED

Twenty-five. You’ve stopped doing those blotches of pink in your hair.

ROSE

Turquoise. Then everybody started doing it.

What happened to your full beard?

JAVED

You liked my beard.

ROSE

I did. But I’m going to throw up now.

[end of scene one]

SCENE TWO~

[a little later. ROSE is sitting on the porch of her apartment, in the one chair, an old rocker. She’s still in her nightgown]

ROSE

[about herself]

Pathetic. Why am I so pathetic. *No control*. I feel bad, so why don’t I just eat everything in the house?

[JAVED enters from inside Rose’s apartment, hands her a Coca-Cola]

JAVED

It’s room temperature.

ROSE

You remembered!

[she moves slightly and the chair rocks]

Oh, can’t rock. Ooooo. . .

I’ve been sober for—well, almost since you left. And I didn’t go back out. I just ate. And last night. All sorts of stuff.

[she takes a sip of the Coke]

I’d say sit down, but there’s only one chair and I’m afraid to move right now.

JAVED

Drink the Coke. And then you can scrub the toilet with it like they do on YouTube.

[ROSE is not doing well with this image]

JAVED

I’d better go.

[ROSE grabs some part of his body]

ROSE

Don’t.

[end of scene 2]

SCENE THREE~

[Rose’s porch light is off. JAVED enters onto the porch from inside, holding his shoes. He’s got his trousers on, messily, but no shirt and no skullcap. He sits down in the rocker to put on his shoes. ROSE enters from the same place, dressed in same nightgown but also in Javed’s shirt.]

JAVED

There’s where my shirt went.

ROSE

I’m keeping it hostage.

JAVED

Why?

ROSE

Because I don’t want you to leave.

JAVED

Give me my shirt.

ROSE

[mimicking police report]

Elderly Pakistani man, shirtless, picked up near campus. . .

JAVED

*Rose—*

ROSE

[giving him his shirt]

You don’t need to leave. It’s fine. Javed. You’re. . . older. And Aladdin doesn’t always work the way—

JAVED

[Aladdin is the name of his penis]

You remember that name? I called him “Mr. Aziz.”

ROSE

*Aladdin* and I got to know each other pretty well back when you and I knew each other. I don’t invite a gentleman inside me unless I know his name. I mean, what kind of girl do you think I am?

JAVED

A nice girl. A wonderful girl.

ROSE

Now come back in and have some coffee. And help me deal with the disaster that has just befallen my country.

[Long pause]

JAVED

I can’t do that.

ROSE

Javed, I enjoyed the sex. It’s not all about penetration, you know. For women.

JAVED

It’s not about the sex. Can anyone hear us out here?

ROSE

I don’t care.

JAVED

I can’t help you feel better about your god-forsaken country.

[He puts on his skullcap and exits, leaving ROSE standing on the porch]

[end of scene 3]

SCENE FOUR~

[A little later. No need for porch lights because the sun is up and fully awake. ROSE enters from her apartment to her porch. She is dressed casually, carries her laptop which she almost drops when she sees A Pakistani woman, BASMA, wearing a loose version of a hijab, sitting in the rocker]

ROSE

H-hello.

BASMA

[sings the beginning of the Adele song]

“Hello from the other side. . .”

You had sex with my husband.

You’d better get another chair because I’m not leaving. And I don’t want to go inside where I might smell the sex still lingering in your apartment. I’ll hold your laptop.

[ROSE hands BASMA her laptop and exits into her apartment. BASMA opens laptop, works briefly on the keyboard and finishes, closes the laptop just as ROSE comes out with another chair]

ROSE

I’m Rose.

Mrs.—

BASMA

“ULLAH.”

ROSE

I—

BASMA

Call me Basma.

This is a beautiful area. I went to school in New York City. I hear they finally let women into your school.

ROSE

I didn’t go here. I teach here.

BASMA

If you were a student here and still hadn’t graduated, you being very, very dumb would have sapped all of their government grant money trying to educate you. You may still be very, very dumb, certainly about your personal life. I think you are.

ROSE

I didn’t know he was married.

BASMA

Would it have made a difference?

ROSE

No.

BASMA

Honesty. You do have some shred of virtue.

ROSE

He seemed upset. Is he alright?

BASMA

I have no idea.

ROSE

Did you…..

BASMA

Throw him out?

Murder him?

Cut off his. . .tongue?

ROSE

I’m really sorry. I have to go inside now.

BASMA

Don’t move.

[ROSE stands still. BASMA yells]

I’M NOT GOING TO MAKE A SCENE.

ROSE

Can we keep our voices. . .

BASMA

DOWN? SHOULD I USE MY INSIDE VOICE? BECAUSE I CAN’T GO INSIDE TO SMELL MY HUSBAND’S SEMEN??

ROSE

Oh god. Look, Mrs. Ullah. He didn’t produce semen and we barely had sex because—well, we were both—I’d gotten sick and he found a Coke in one of my cupboards because he remembered that Coke settled my stomach because we knew each other before, like 30 years ago, and I was sick because I was devastated by the election results.

BASMA

You were devastated? I am *afraid.*

He consoled you. I’m *inconsolable.*

ROSE

I’m sorry.

BASMA

You wanted Hillary and yet you behave like her husband?

What kind of feminist are you?

ROSE

I’m really—

BASMA

A bad feminist?

ROSE

No, I don’t think so. I’m a good feminist. I’m just a bad person. Now and then. Look, I’m. . .

BASMA

--sorry? You liberal Americans are so good at that. It’s the one word you use so much. You should put it on a t-shirt, so that “I’m Sorry,” could make its useless way across your always visible bosom. So you could attract *more* men.

ROSE

I don’t wear t-shirts like that. I dress very conservatively.

BASMA

And yet, you were in your nightgown!

ROSE

How did you know that?

BASMA

I could see you from our window, in that house. See that upstairs window? That’s the attic.

ROSE

Oh god.

BASMA

We also live in this “faculty ghetto.” The arrogance of that name. These beautiful houses. With cupboards built into the walls. I just discovered the attic. I never lived anywhere with an attic. I think I’ll move up there and hide with my shame.

ROSE

I haven’t seen you. Wait—I have. And I saw Javed! But I didn’t recognize him. He’s gotten—

BASMA

Old. Because so much has happened. . .

ROSE

[trying to bond]

Yes, to the world.

BASMA

Yes. “The world” has happened to some of us, more than to others. Do you know what I’m talking about?

ROSE

[a mine field]

Ummmm. No?

BASMA

Was he handsome? Back then?

ROSE

Oh my god. Beautiful. With this full black beard.

BASMA

So you had him then, in his prime. And now again in his, what do you call them over here? His “golden years.”

ROSE

I didn’t “have him.” He couldn’t sustain an erection, *produce* an erection. Okay? Which was fine. I just enjoyed the cuddling and the—

BASMA

STOP!

ROSE

I’m sorry. I am sorry. I’m so--

BASMA

Put that on a t-shirt and then. . .choke on it!

ROSE

. . .okay.

BASMA

And, of course, I know who you are, that you and Javed had a fling, whatever you call it. We’ve been engaged since we were twelve.

ROSE

I thought he was single. Back then.

I actually had. . .hopes, you know.

BASMA

You had “hopes”? “Hopes”?? Well, now I have less regard for you, if that is possible. I didn’t expect him to be a virgin until we got married, but for a woman to think that he wasn’t engaged by then. . .that a man like that wouldn’t have been spoken for? Is that the phrase you use? Our families matched us and, because of that, I was free to be educated. As long as I kept myself pure. But all that was before we got married. But now we are married and have been for thirty years! And you got him again!! You, harlot, have book-ended my relationship with my husband with your white girl powers of seduction.

ROSE

Alright. You’ve said your piece and I’ve heard you, and, I’m sure, all of the residents of this cluster of aged houses have heard you, too. Now I am going *inside* and shutting the door.

BASMA

Javed is gone. He didn’t come home. He went out of the house after prayer, to see the sunrise and try to think of what we’re going to do now, now that there is this Hater of Muslims in power. Javed visited you and now he’s gone.

ROSE

He’ll be alright. This bubble that we live in here. I mean the town is a safe bubble. Now, good-bye.

[ROSE exits into the house and shuts the door]

[BASMA doesn’t move]

[end of scene four]

SCENE FIVE~

[BASMA is still sitting on the chair on the porch, but is slumped over. ROSE comes out of her apartment and sees her]

ROSE

Oh, no. . .

[ROSE approaches carefully]

BASMA

[without moving]

I’m not dead.

[ROSE is startled]

*Then* what would you do? Pakistani woman in traditional dress found dead in faculty member’s rocking chair on her front porch. Were you hoping I was dead?

ROSE

Good God, no! I just want you to go away!

BASMA

No.

ROSE

He’s not here! We didn’t—we barely had sex. Okay?

He might have come home!

BASMA

The only entrance is over there and I’ve been watching. Well, there’s back entrance but it’s blocked by a children’s play area. You have to squeeze by large plastic toys, most of them with wheels. And small bicycles. If you move them, they roll away. It’s awkward. And we didn’t want to complain and call attention to ourselves. I’ve barely left the house since we got here two months ago.

[she sighs and stands]

ROSE

I’m really--

BASMA

--oh, be quiet! And I’m sorry, too.

ROSE

Oh, you have *nothing* to apologize for.

BASMA

I am Arab and Arabs are a vengeful people.

[BASMA exits, quickly, into her house. ROSE waves, but too late and too lame.]

ROSE

“Vengeful people?” I don’t think that.

[sits, opens her laptop, something is wrong. . .]

What the fuck??

WHAT THE HOLY FUCK!!!

[end of scene five]

SCENE SIX~

[On the porch. ROSE and an IT man, a 29-year old former student, KALIL. He’s in his pajamas or whatever he slept in. She has gotten him out of bed. ROSE is out of her nightgown and dressed in yoga pants and a worn t-shirt with some old political slogan on it]

KALIL

I told you. This is why you should have a Mac. Almost impossible to hack. You get it free from the college. Why don’t you do it?

ROSE

Okay, okay. But right now, I can’t get into my computer and I have a new draft in there.

KALIL

Didn’t you e-mail the draft to yourself? That’s what you always told us to do.

ROSE

Noooooo. I got distracted last night because of the—, of the—

KALIL

Trumpocalypse?

ROSE

You’ve already come up with a—

KALIL

Joke title for it?

You always said humor is a weapon against tyranny.

ROSE

Stop quoting me and fix this!

KALIL

Be nice to I T Man or I T Man take revenge. Will replace hack with malware.

Okay, I’m going to have to take this to. . .

ROSE

That bad?

KALIL

No. But I can’t do it all sitting here on your porch. I need to go to I T at the college.

ROSE

What am I going to do?

KALIL

Do you have those arcane objects? Made from trees? Rectangular? You open them and WHOA! shit happens! Can you say “b-b-book.”

ROSE

Don’t torment an old lady.

KALIL

You’re not old and you always denied the lady word.

Are you in trouble?

I heard the conversation with that loud woman in a sari and head scarf thing.

ROSE

Oh my god. You live way upstairs.

KALIL

It had been a lovely cool night, so I had my window open. The moon was bright. And I saw him.

ROSE

You mean--?

KALIL

Your “date.”

ROSE

Oh *god*. And me in my nightgown.

KALIL

No. You hadn’t arrived yet. He was coming to visit you. He headed to the porch, then stopped, and came back out, then went that way again, then came back out and stood, looking up at the sky.

ROSE

Oh no. This is complicated! I don’t want complications! I just want my computer back. And then take it to bed. And stay there.

KALIL

Professor Buchanan. Life is complicated.

ROSE

Just fix my fucking computer. And call me “Rose.” You know I hate that “professor” shit.

KALIL

You can’t deny who you are or whom you have become.

ROSE

Christ! Is that one of my sayings?

KALIL

No, you’re not the source of all wisdom.

[He exits with the laptop]

ROSE

I Know. That. Yo.

[KALIL re-enters and stands still]

KALIL

Don’t say “yo.”

Nobody says “yo,” anymore, particularly old white ladies.

ROSE

I can go back and flunk you in two courses and kill your Phi Beta Kappa status.

KALIL

I’m absolutely leaving now.

[end of scene six]

SCENE SEVEN~

[ROSE is at door to JAVED & BASMA’s house]

ROSE

Basma? I know you’re in there! MRS. ULLAH!!!

[From behind her, outside, too, comes JAVED]

JAVED

Stop yelling.

ROSE

Your wife fucked up my computer!! And now it’s in the lab or whatever and they’re trying to extract whatever malware, ***curse*** she put on it!

[JAVED doesn’t look very good. He’s been roughed up]

What happened to you?

JAVED

BASMA! Open the door! Open the door!

BASMA

[from inside]

You are both infidels! Now go away! Go back to your love nest!!

ROSE

Basma! I told you nothing happened!

JAVED

[to ROSE]

You told me it was fine. And now you call it “nothing”?

ROSE

I’m sorry I met either one of you! And on this terrible day!

BASMA!! IF THEY CAN’T FIX MY COMPUTER, I’M—I’M—I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M GOING TO DO!!

[to JAVED]

This is all your fault, you know. Someone saw you at my door, *before* I came outside and we met “accidently.”

[ROSE exits]

[BASMA comes to the door, sees JAVED]

What happened? Come in, husband. You randy idiot.

[She opens the door and he exits into their house]

[end of scene seven]

SCENE EIGHT~

[It’s some time later. ROSE is sitting in the other chair, the stable one, on the porch. She’s on the phone]

ROSE

Yes. Yes. It had nothing to do with the demonstration, officer—what is your name?

“Sczcepanek”--didn’t you come and unlock my office for me whenever it was?

Yeah. Thank you for that, by the way.

No, the noise? It was just faculty members in the common area, whatever you call this sad piece of grass. And we were upset because of the election.

You know, because that fascist won!

Oh, sorry. You probably voted for him!

Because you are, forgive me, working class! Such a misleading word because everyone “works.” “Blue Collar.”

No, that’s not an ad hominem attack—how do you know that word?

Bigot! I’m not a bigot! And I’m going to call the college Chief of Police.

I’m sorry, too.

Yes.

Okay.

Okay.

I realize that and I’ll apologize to my—to the others in the complex.

Oh. Okay. I don’t know them all, anyway. I’ll just be careful about noise.

Thank you.

[Call is finished. She talks to herself]

What age am I? Fourteen? Is the President of the College going to ground me?

[KALIL enters with laptop. He’s dressed for a day at work]

KALIL

Whoever did this, did a number on your files.

ROSE

What about my essay? And all the footnotes? That would be so so bad if anything--

[he hands her the laptop]

KALIL

We recovered everything, even the porn.

You are definitely heterosexual.

ROSE

No, I’m a gay man. Always have been.

[finds her files]

Whew!

[sees something on the screen]

What’s this?

KALIL

Oh, it’s a message and a gif she embedded. We thought you’d like to see it. Then you can go to preferences and delete it.

ROSE

[about the message—she’s really seeing it]

Jesus!

KALIL

I know. . .right?

ROSE

This is meant for me.

KALIL

I don’t think that whomever was messing with your laptop just “forgot” to delete this.

ROSE

It was her.

KALIL

Who?

ROSE

Mrs. Ullah.

KALIL

That old Muslim lady?

ROSE

Needs to be watched. She’s a menace!

KALIL

You mean, like she’s a terrorist?

ROSE

No. No, Kalil. She’s just a pissed-off wife of someone I. . .met.

KALIL

Well, she’s pissed off about something other than adultery. These are the corpses of some—I can’t tell the age—children and women. She blames you for these?

ROSE

I get so sick of being blamed for every dead innocent in the world. And a lot of people are killed by earthquakes..I mean, we don’t cause earthquakes!

KALIL

Well, actually, we sort of do. With fracking.

ROSE

No, we’re on a separate tectonic plate, so our fracking just causes earthquakes in. . .like, Oklahoma City.

KALIL

You told us that Oklahoma City was built in a day. It was on land belonging to First Nation People. It deserves to go.

ROSE

Almost a day. Streets laid out and buildings, in the process of being built.

KALIL

By white people.

ROSE

Some houses being built.

KALIL

By white people.

ROSE

But there are two million people there now.

And, yes, mostly white, yes.

KALIL

And the huge tornados hit them all the time. And so, has anyone of those people said, “Maybe we don’t belong here?” Maybe this is all an evil land grab and we’re going to be cursed for it forever?

ROSE

Well, no. They probably don’t say that.

KALIL

Well, the holy rollers down there are all the time preaching about the end of the world. Don’t any of those Bible beaters ever say it’s not about men fucking each other or women killing unborn babies, it’s because we fucked the earth?

ROSE

[she hasn’t been to church, ever]

No, they don’t say that. But I haven’t been to church in a few years. . .

KALIL

Me, neither. And my grandma blames *you*.

Hey. You taught me well. And then I had to go read those deeply upsetting books. And take that course. And become a Black Studies major. And be constantly depressed and angry and wouldn’t have a job if I hadn’t gotten the computer science double major which nearly killed me. And didn’t sleep or have sex. Except that one time. And I fell asleep on top of the girl.

[corrects himself]

*Young woman.* “Kalil! Get off me, you douche!”

ROSE

That didn’t really happen.

KALIL

Yes, it did. And no alcohol was involved. And it was consensual after me begging a little. You remember. . .no, I don’t sleep and tell. But back to my life here, still here at Potted Ivy League College. My grandma blows her stack, “You going to one of the best schools in the nation and what you studyin’? Black history. I can tell you black history right here. You go to that damn white school and you learn something that can get you a good job, son! We tryin’ to escape black history!”

ROSE

Kalil, this isn’t all my fault.

KALIL

You were my mentor and I listened to you!

ROSE

So that is my fault, too?

KALIL

What is “that”?

ROSE

I don’t know. I’ve sort of lost track of. . .

KALIL

Anyway, as long as I’m on this roll, I want to get this all out.

My internship turned into a job so I stayed because there are no jobs that pay enough for me to live anywhere but here. And now I’m almost thirty and have never been any place and I’m surrounded by hot twenty-year old girls who are basically transients and it’s looked down upon for staff to date the students. You can even get fired. “Don’t touch the students.” We got that talk.

ROSE

Everybody gets that talk. “Please don’t touch your students. There are lawsuits in this valley for a million dollars and that’s on language alone.” Twenty-five years ago we got that speech.

KALIL

But you did touch us—you hugged us. We hugged you. We missed our moms.

ROSE

Look, I’m a short, fat, old woman. If I were a short, fat old man, it would be different. If I were a man, at all, I’d be in trouble. My colleague Frank. When students hug him, all he can do it just pat them mechanically on the shoulder. He’s Italian and a great hugger. But no. Not worth the risk. I remember one fall. Beginning of the term. Frank and I were standing by the student center when a group of graduating seniors saw us. And they literally ran to us and hugged us and we were so glad to see them. And there’s Frank standing still—pat, pat. Pat, pat. Whereas I am getting mauled with affection and able to hug them back.

Every age. There’s always something. Yeah, the end of the Sixties, we thought: “Okay. We know how to live. Now.”

KALIL

The “Nope Train” leaving the station.

[they both do the “Nope Train” movement, using their arms as chugging train wheels and, saying, with increasing speed:]

KALIL AND ROSE

NOPE, NOPE, NOPE, NOPE, NOPE. . .

ROSE

Even Nope Train can’t lift this feeling.

KALIL

Yeah, it’s bad when the Nope Train doesn’t work.

ROSE

Is Donald Trump still going to be President?

KALIL

I’m afraid so. And I’m afraid.

[beat]

That photograph on your laptop? They weren’t dead because of an earthquake.

ROSE

No. That is War. Somewhere. But why show it to me? We’re not responsible for every death—

KALIL

You said that.

ROSE

Hey, you’re an American, too.

KALIL

Yep.

ROSE

Just because you’re black, you don’t get by without some blame.

KALIL

I’m not doing anything—listen to how defensive you’re getting. “Blame”? Uh-oh.

ROSE

Okay. I feel accused everywhere. Brown people, black people, Asian people—

KALIL

The color coding stopped working for you right there, didn’t it. Brown, Black, Yellow—ooooooooooppps. Then what’s next RED? RED MEN??

ROSE

Oh god, how can I end this conversation?

KALIL

I’ve got to get to work.

[end of scene eight]

SCENE NINE~

[BASMA and JAVED talking. They are in their apartment].

BASMA

What else did they do to you?

JAVED

Just roughed me up.

BASMA

What? What does that mean?

JAVED

They threatened me and pushed me around.

BASMA

Call the police! They’re supposed to protect us.

JAVED

I didn’t want—

BASMA

You didn’t want? Well, none of us “want” these things to happen to us, but when they do, these things, these humiliating things, we speak up about them!

JAVED

I just want to be able to do my work. And not every day will there be this volatility. People are upset. I’m clearly Muslim, so they attacked me. I just kept saying, “I work at the college!” “I’m a professor.” And some of that got through because they slowed down a bit. And then one of the vets ran over and stopped them.

BASMA

Who were they then? Not the veterans marching.

JAVED

NO. They were students.

BASMA

What?

JAVED

Student age. Young men. They could have been locals, I guess.

BASMA

What are we going to do? I miss Islamabad.

JAVED

I have this grant and I’m teaching and I think I’m being a positive image for people. Besides, if I leave, I doubt I will ever be allowed to come back.

BASMA

I’m wearing this traditional hijab because you asked me to. And I agreed because I thought it would ease your pain, that by making myself into a traditional Muslim woman, you would feel as though you hadn’t completely disappeared, that all the violence and bombing wouldn’t own it, *your identity*. Who we are. Islamabad is trying to become Delhi. Only better! Girls in pony tales. Cappuccinos. Beautiful malls. Shopping! Expensive cars. Well, cars, in general. Superhighways. I could be myself there.

JAVED

I know. I’m sorry.

BASMA

People keep apologizing to me. I’m clearly a problem. Just by being alive, I’ve become a problem. By being alive and being Muslim and being a woman—

JAVED

I’m sorry.

BASMA

T-shirts, anyone? “I’m sorry” t-shirts?

JAVED

Basma, you’re scaring me a little. You’re not making sense.

BASMA

I have tried to become traditional. I did read the Qa’ran—well, some of it—years ago. Since I was a young woman, I have tried to ignore all the women-hating verses, saying to myself, “The Christian Bible, the Jewish Tanach have them, too.” I’ve changed myself. Compromised myself. I was raised secular. At Barnard. At Barnard. The difference! And women weren’t expected to wear skirts or dresses. The first time I walked into the women’s room and found a young girl, barely clad, washing her pet dog in the sink, I realized that a team of white horses was galloping into the future and I’d better get on the wagon or be left in the dust. Then I come home and discover that the horses have been slaughtered and the wheels of the wagon and the wagon itself are cut up for firewood. And the fires also contain things that should not be burned, one of them, **me**, unless I reverse my modern makeover and return to a time I don’t recognize. I stayed in Islamabad. Islamabad is a fortress for me. And then I met you. I was a happy old maid. Everyone had given up on me. And I was going to be “Auntie,” to the rest of the world.

JAVED

I miss speaking my language.

BASMA

What? You never said that before. I could try to—no, my language is just not good enough to converse like an adult. I dress in this traditional manner for you, Javed. I wear this hijab for you. And it’s all right. My wardrobe is simple. Although we never go anywhere, so. . .

JAVED

No, no, Basma. I only meant that so much of who I am is still locked in my language. But your English is better than mine. Use it. It’s almost unaccented. How did you do that?

BASMA

I started listening to the radio when I was young. And not the BBC. And my father wanted nothing to do with “Received Pronouncation.” He didn’t want me to sound British. He loved Edward R. Murrow, Erik Severeid, Walter Cronkite, even Dan Rather. He’d write a news story and have me read it like I was one of them. “In other news, Basma’s Abu insists she brush her teeth. And that’s the way it is.”

JAVED

You have had this whole life before we married. And now you feel *compromised?*

BASMA

And you were married with that lovely traditional wife and had those children and then those grandchildren. . .

JAVED

I can’t bear to speak his name. He was heading into manhood and he would have had a wedding, but not in that place. Or anywhere near there. It’s because I chose that polytechnic closer to home. . .

BASMA

I told her we had been engaged since we were ten years old.

JAVED

What?! Why?

BASMA

Because I wanted her to think you never loved her. That you were always mine. That what you had with her was lust only. No love. That you were using her like a whore.

[JAVED stands and stares at her]

BASMA

I know that look. You’re leaving again. Javed! Why are you always leaving me? It’s not right! You bring me to this completely foreign postcard town where I have to pretend to be a respectable Muslim old-fashioned woman for some reason or something you’re trying to prove to whom? Am I an example? Is that all? We’ve been here two months and I’ve barely left our apartment. Except for you to drive me to that very, very expensive market with all those rich pretending to be poor parttime vegetarians who are so nice to me that I feel slightly unclean and a little handicapped? Disabled? “Here, missus, the spice section is this way, watch your step, you might trip over your robe I’m sorry it’s called a what?” And the malls here? Pathetic. And the highways? Little roads going through more picturesque villages with self-consciously poorly-dressed white people selling honey? “Jam?” No chutney, anywhere. And filling their courtyards with their old belongings and selling them? In front of their houses? I come from a city of ten million people! I catch a glance of myself in a mirror, and think, who is this woman? My mother? No, my grandmother!

JAVED

All my life I have done what people expected me to do. And I can’t do this. I can’t do this, anymore.

BASMA

I’m what was *expected* of you?

[he exits, leaving her standing there.]

[end of scene 9]

SCENE 10~

[later in the day, KALIL enters the parking area. ROSE is sitting on one of her chairs, on her porch]

KALIL

They burned the flag.

ROSE

Who burned the flag?

KALIL

Students.

ROSE

Which students? From which school?

[KALIL postures as if to say, “who else?”]

Oh. Yeah.

Well, as Frank says: You can salute the flag or burn it. They’re both protected under the First Amendment.

[still disappointed]

*None* of our students?

KALIL

Happened on that “other” campus. Far inside the Tofu Curtain.

ROSE

I believe that that school may be the actual epicenter of the entire Tofu Nation.

KALIL

Oh my god, they are “Other.” We’ve made them the “Other.” Let’s not tell them, they’d like it too much. Rich white kids saying, “We’re the Other! We’re the Other!” And, anyway, there’s a counter-protest. VFW guys in a motorcade. Wanna go see?

ROSE

Hell, yeah.

[They exit]

[end of scene 10]

SCENE 11~

[Sound of motorcade, mainly trucks and people trying to sing the National Anthem but in different keys and unsure of the lyrics. Then a switch to “My Country “tis of thee.”]

[BLUE LIGHTS from a police cruiser are flashing. They light up JAVED’S face]

JAVED

I’m just walking. Walking. I’m upset, so I’m walking. I’m upset about my life. The world is terrible, but my personal happiness. . . My only grandson was killed in a drone strike in Waziristan. His friend’s cousin was getting married. And the drone came and--. . .They didn’t hear it because of the attan being danced and the music. And they didn’t see it because this one was silver. Black ones they can see. Except at night. And they thought at the wedding, “we’re safe because of the overcast day because they don’t come then *because* they can’t see us and can’t be sure of an exact target. It’s sunny days we dread.” *No one was a terrorist*. ISIS hasn’t bothered that village for almost a year. Why do I say “us” because **I** live in a city, far from the tribal areas. I think “us” because I watch the skies. I can’t help it. Even here, I’m watching. What are you doing? *I’m respectable*. I have a granddaughter who’s coming here to visit. I teach at the college! No, the other one! The traditional one!

[end of Scene 11]

SCENE 12~

[ROSE is sitting in a chair, across from another chair. She is in an anteroom, waiting to see the president of the college. A well-dressed woman enters. This is Emily Benson.]

EMILY

Hello, Professor Buchanan.

ROSE

I came right over, so I’m not dressed. . .up or anything.

EMILY

I think we’ve met. I’m Emily Benson.

ROSE

Oh. Yeah. We met at that meeting—

EMILY

About sexual harassment. Workshop.

ROSE

Yes. You know, I had some issues with the definitions of harassment and the whole asking permission to even touch another human being and—

EMILY

I know. You were very vocal. And I got your Push Back document—

ROSE

Okay, I don’t like *that* term. It implies a sort of violent act. Pushing. And as long as we’re in this area of terminology I have come to hate--no, I hated it from the beginning--and that is—I’ll give you an example. Calling me to come and meet with you referred to as “reaching out.” Calling someone about a meeting is *not* “reaching out.” “Reaching out” brings up an image of someone actually reaching out with their hand, like to help or to comfort. Calling someone up or sending an e-mail about “can you come to the President’s Office and meet with. . .whomever,” that is not about helping or, certainly, a comforting gesture. That’s not to say you aren’t kind or going to be, Emily. I’m just using this as an example of the general ramping up or set dressing that our language is going through right now. It’s a—here you go, something from that meeting— it’s a “microaggression.” My objections are now **seen** as me pushing, implying that your agenda was roughing me up. Like bullying. It was a *discussion*, a form that we in the academy, practice, teach, and, at the very least, encourage.

EMILY

You’re here—I’ve asked you here—to discuss Javed Ullah.

ROSE

Oh. Is this about—something recent? Or—he was here before, twenty-five years ago, you know.

EMILY

And you knew him then.

ROSE

Yes.

EMILY

And he is your neighbor now.

ROSE

Yes. I didn’t realize that until we ran into each other in the, you know, common in the group of houses I live in. He lives there, too, but I didn’t know it.

EMILY

You had an altercation.

ROSE

Yesterday?

EMILY

Yes.

ROSE

I did. I did. There was a misunderstanding.

EMILY

What was the content of that misunderstanding?

ROSE

Oh god. Um. I was upset because of the outcome of our recent Presidential election and I came outside to get some air and Javed saw me and I got physically sick, not because of alcohol—

EMILY

Well, that’s all right. I drank heavily that night, too.

ROSE

Anyway, Javed took care of me.

EMILY

But there was yelling. I heard there was quite a lot of yelling. Was Mr. Ullah drunk and disorderly or did something happen that was sexually inappropriate?

ROSE

Oh my god, where did you hear this? Javed is a MUSLIM. Muslims do not consume alcohol. Ever. And whatever happened in that other category is none of anyone’s business!

EMILY

Professor Buchanan. Rose. Rose. I apologize for those questions. Actually, what the real issue here is this. The FBI has inquired about Mr. Ullah. And they are not certain he should remain in this country. Of course, we don’t want him to have to leave. And we have so many foreign students that are threatened by what the new leader of our country has promised to do about all immigrants without American passports.

ROSE

Listen, Javed Ullah is a sterling individual who would *never* betray this county. I should have married him back then. Then he’d be an American.

EMILY

Not necessarily. My partner immigrated here. To marry me. We met at a conference in Paris. Those things never work out, but, in our case, it did. This was eight years ago. She is from Afghanistan. Some of her family have lived in Iran, some of them are classified as “radicals.” Most of the family have lived in Marseilles. For years. We are working with an immigration lawyer and it’s very expensive.

ROSE

Is Javed, actually, in danger?

EMILY

He was picked up at the Veterans’ demonstration as being possibly hostile. He was babbling in Arabic. Or-or some Urdu-based—oh dear, I don’t know what language he would have been speaking. Anyway, he needs a lawyer. We have a board member who has volunteered his time. You might be asked to come in as a character witness.

ROSE

He has a wife.

EMILY

He answered as “unmarried.”

ROSE

He must have been confused. Are you—they—whomever worried about his mental state?

EMILY

I think he’s distraught. His grandson was killed recently.

ROSE

What? He didn’t say anything—

EMILY

The board member who’s serving as his lawyer had this conversation. . .

ROSE

Where?

EMILY

In the police department. They have him in a holding cell until somebody decides if he needs to be arrested or further detained or deported.

ROSE

No. I meant, where did this bombing occur?

EMILY

In Pakistan. In what used to be called “the tribal areas.” Mr. Ullah’s grandson was at a wedding. He was dancing. At this wedding. It’s a dance called the attan. It has lots of drumming. And they didn’t hear the drone.

ROSE

Is—was his grandson working with ISIS?

EMILY

I don’t think so.

ROSE

Why was he targeted?

EMILY

He wasn’t. He was at a wedding. No one was with ISIS.

ROSE

But they do so much research before they strike. I mean, this is Barack Obama.

EMILY

I’m trying to deal with that.

ROSE

Excuse me, I’m feeling nauseous.

EMILY

I know. Me, too.

ROSE

Whew, okay, it passed. You know I’m trying to finish a book.

EMILY

Real life has a way of interrupting fiction—is it fiction?

ROSE

No, it’s an extended essay on where confessional poetry has gone and poetic analysis of the new metaphysical. . .poets of which I’m supposed to be one.

EMILY

Off the record, Rose, feel free to come to me about any of this. But don’t e-mail or call me. Only face-to-face. I have lost my trust in. . .so many. . .things...

ROSE

Right.

[end of scene 12]

SCENE 13~

[JAVED is in a waiting area at the town police department. We can hear the VOICE OF ANOTHER PRISONER, FROM A CELL]

JAVED

[under his breath, in Urdu, something from the QU’RAN]

VOICE OF OTHER PRISONER

Hey, Mr. Isis! Speak American! You’re here. Say something American! I bet you don’t know anything in American. Come on, speak up! Say something--

JAVED

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

VOICE OF OTHER PRISONER

Wooo. Too much. Shut up now.

[ROSE enters]

ROSE

Javed. What the hell are you doing?

JAVED

Leave me here. I don’t want to go anywhere.

ROSE

The college is springing you out of here. Let’s go.

JAVED

I don’t want to go.

ROSE

It’s important that you be sane, okay?

You have people who love you, Javed.

Your daughter is arriving. She called Basma.

JAVED

I don’t want to be married to Basma, any more. And that girl is my granddaughter.

ROSE

What is going on?

JAVED

I have done what other people have wanted me to do all my life and I am fed-up with it. I’ve lost everything, except my heart and it is broken. I want to be happy, Rose. I’m going to divorce Basma.

ROSE

So all of this. This crazy political ranting and acting like a terrorist?

JAVED

I was never “acting like a terrorist”! Can’t a Muslim man be just ordinarily unhappy? If I do anything but walk a straight line, I’m a terrorist? You know, people have lives beyond politics. People fall in love. People fall out of love. People get sad and it’s beyond politics. Politics is a demon that tries to **own** every bit of our lives.

ROSE

So all your weird behavior--it’s all some mid-life crisis?

JAVED

When I saw you, when we first got here, I thought, I want her and I want the way she made me feel. Back then. All those years ago.

ROSE

Can’t we just buy you a red sports car or something?

JAVED

Always joking, Rose. It’s a way to avoid intimacy.

VOICE OF OTHER PRISONER

Where’s MY therapist? Huh? I. . .need. . .

[quiet snoring. He’s fallen asleep]

ROSE

The college has supplied bail for you, so you can go home. I guess they’ve decided and the judge or the president of something, the college or the nation, is okay with you. You’re on a list now, but you can go home.

JAVED

“Home”? Back to Islamabad? They’re sending me back? Cancelling my visa? What about my research grant?

ROSE

So now you care about life.

JAVED

I always cared about life. Just not the life I’ve had to lead. And I can’t go back home, right now.

ROSE

No, they meant you are out of jail and can go back to your apartment. And I guess meet your classes as planned.

JAVED

I don’t think I can go back to the apartment. Basma is there and. . .I can’t live with her anymore.

ROSE

Look, can you slow this mid-life crisis down and just take baby steps? Talk to somebody. Get some therapy.

JAVED

I’m going to divorce Basma. I’ve decided.

ROSE

How do you do that? Just say, “I divorce thee” three times?

JAVED

Of course not! There’s paperwork. So much paperwork. It’s Pakistan, after all.

ROSE

Why can’t you wait? Do you know how many couples there are who are miserable, but they wait. Until—

JAVED

--one of them dies? I come from a culture of arranged marriages, did you forget? And those are always about staying together to make a family and a home and share a life, love or no love. Love grows, as you share a life. It’s the opposite of a western marriage: fall in love, get married, make a family, grow apart and have an acrimonious divorce.

ROSE

But you guys can have more than one wife.

JAVED

Yes, as you so elegantly put it, us “guys” can have another wife. But it’s always somebody’s great-grandfather or some uncle that’s done it. I don’t know of anyone who has been polygamous. I’ve known men with mistresses. . .

What time is it?

[ROSE shows him her phone]

I’ve missed Mahgrib.

ROSE

Who’s Mahgrib?

JAVED

It’s a prayer. It’s not a person.

ROSE

Let’s get out of here. It doesn’t smell good.

JAVED

Man in the next cell was disorderly. And very drunk so he’s been sick all night. Evidently, being drunk is not a crime, but being disorderly is.

VOICE OF THE OTHER PRISONER

Fucking Isis Terrorist!! Get blown up by your own bomb!

JAVED

I can’t go back to the apartment.

ROSE

You’re coming home with me. I guess.

Where will your daughter stay?

JAVED

*Granddaughter*. She’ll stay with Basma.

ROSE

But she’s not Basma’s granddaughter.

JAVED

This is how families operate, Rose. They take care of each other.

ROSE

Where is she coming from?

JAVED

London.

ROSE

Where is she in school?

JAVED

She’s married.

ROSE

Is her husband coming? Does your, I mean, Basma’s apartment have room?

JAVED

He’s dead.

ROSE

Oh my god.

JAVED

He was old. He was an old man. And not well when he married my granddaughter.

ROSE

What?? How old was she??? Your son married her off to an old man???

JAVED

I did it.

ROSE

WHY?

JAVED

Her father was killed in the war in Bangladesh. My son. And her mother. . .her mother died giving birth to her brother. Thanks to Allah, she wasn’t alive to know how he died. My mother had her hands full with Muhammad, and Sabah wasn’t helpful She was rebellious.

ROSE

So you married her off??

JAVED

He was British and not well. And he had lots of money, so a dowry wasn’t necessary.

ROSE

How old was she?

JAVED

She was fifteen. And educated. She wanted—she wanted to get out of Pakistan.

ROSE

Alright. I’m done. I’ll drop you at the Marriot Courtyard. And—and don’t talk to me. Again.

JAVED

Rose—

ROSE

I’m out.

JAVED

She has a British citizenship. That’s why we did it. And now she can do whatever she wants.

ROSE

I don’t care!! I don’t care!!! I can’t understand your fucking culture!!! And I hate it!!! The treatment of women!!! I’m out, Javed. Good-bye. I mean, come on, but DO NOT TALK TO ME. You can walk to the campus from the Marriott.

JAVED

You don’t understand.

ROSE

AND I DON’T WANT TO. SILENCE!

[ROSE exits]

[end of scene 13]

SCENE 14~

[A YOUNG WOMAN (SABAH Rafik) in camo enters. She has her head wrapped in a sort of turban. She carries an AK and has a YPJ badge on her shirt]

SABAH RAFIK

Babah!! This is the truth of what happened. When showed the photos of the dead, the U.S Army said the women were already dead and had been killed by the backward tribal men of their own families, that these were honor killings. That the dead children were collateral damage due to a strike on Taliban militants, that suicide vests had been found in the rubble. That we shouldn’t gather for weddings or for funerals, for our own safety. Because, because all Muslim men in Waziristan between the ages of 17 and 70 are assumed to be terrorists. And how can they or their drones tell how old a boy is? “Oh, stop! He’s only 16! We have to wait another year!” This version of what is happening, minute-by-minute, in my homeland is the version of reality in the United States. When they were allowed to go back to a village, after it had been cleared of militants, the roofs of all the buildings had been removed so that the drones can see who is inside. To target. You can hear them above. They sound like the fluttering wings of the black, lethal birds which they are. And who is pulling the trigger? A young man in Arizona, gripping a controller that could be for a video game. “Rifle, rifle, rifle,” he says right before he pulls the trigger. “Rifle, rifle, rifle,” to let everyone else in the room know it’s going to happen. Death. From a black bird with a missile to deliver. “Rifle. Rifle. Rifle.” Press. Silence in the building near the First Nation Reservation. Across the world, legs, arms, bodies, heads fly up, confetti, made of flesh.

I wish you could see me now, in my uniform, with my AK. This is how I will look when I join the women and men as member of the YPJ. The soldiers are Kurds and women are the best fighters. You know why? Because ISIS, the terrorists, the infidels of Islam—they believe that if you are shot by a woman, you won’t go to heaven. You’ll go to Hell. So instead of being a glorious Jihad hero, you are a disgrace. You were killed by a woman.

Now I am going to find you, my baba, my grandfather. And you will turn your back on America and stop being a house Muslim serving the oil industry, appearing to be pro-west, advancing their ineffective pro-war-on-terror scam!

My brother was massacred by a missile from an evil metal bird made in America. So we are surrounded, Baba! Isis killing us and America killing us. Where do we go? And you are doing nothing!

[end of scene 14]

[END OF ACT ONE]

**ACT TWO**

SCENE 1~

[Stage is dark, sound of battle with mortars and machine gun fire. Light illuminates a sort of tunnel? Area? SABAH enters, crouched, carrying her AK. She is dressed in camo. She’s fighting with the Kurds and being shelled by ISIS forces.]

SABAH

Keep your head down and follow me. They’re only 500 meters away.

[JAVED enters, crouched, following SABAH. There’s a huge explosion and SABAH and JAVED hit the ground]

SABAH

I just need to get to my mortar and fire in that direction. We have to hold this position.

JAVED

What do want me to do?

SABAH

You have to come back to Pakistan, Baba. My honored grandfather.

JAVED

But—but I’m too old to fight like this.

[SABAH stands. There’s a light behind her]

SABAH

They’re children. But they are lethal children. You’re a teacher.

JAVED

Get down!

[More gunfire. She kisses her AK]

SABAH

I’m changing my last name to “Kalishnakov.”

JAVED

I don’t remember getting here. Sabah, this is a nightmare, isn’t it?

SABAHH

No, Baba, this is reality. All the rest of it, all over the world, THAT is the dream. Wake up!!!

[She exits. JAVED exits the best way he can]

[End of scene 1]

SCENE 2~

[January 20, the day of Trump’s inauguration, ROSE sits on her porch, looking at her I-Pad. BASMA enters from ROSE’S apartment, the scarf that would be the hijab around her shoulders. She is carrying two cups of coffee, one for each of them, and sits in the other chair]

BASMA

I put in that Almond milk. How do they make milk from a nut?

ROSE

I don’t know.

[we hear TRUMP’s inaugural speech from her I-pad]

BASMA

Turn it off? I can’t stand to listen to him. My anxiety races. Every day, I expect to hear from immigration. My visa is still good for another five months. But that doesn’t seem to mean anything.

ROSE

Have you heard from Javed today?

BASMA

No. Have you?

That wasn’t a comment.

ROSE

I know.

He’s been meeting his classes. I guess. This is good coffee.

BASMA

It’s from that store, that expensive store. It’s made in Malagua and is a product of free trade. We had it. I bought it. Javed thought it was too expensive. It’s good to sit outside. That house—that old house, smells of cat pee or something. I can’t find the source, but some days it’s bad.

ROSE

You can call physical plant about that. They’ll come over and try to fix it. These are all college houses. Every time someone would die, the college would buy the house. The point is, physical plant is responsible for maintenance. Look at your directory? You should have a list of numbers on the refrigerator on one of those magnetic pieces of magnetic plastic they can print on.

BASMA

I live in a very modern world, Rose. And I’ve had plenty of time to stare at that directory on the refrigerator on one of those magnetic pieces of magnetic plastic they can print on.

KALIL

[entering]

I stopped by the department and got your mail. Suzy let me take it. And here--this looks like a personal letter from someone named “Szzzpanek.”

ROSE

Oh god. That’s that campus policeman who called me a bigot.

KALIL

What?

ROSE

He called about the noise. Here. You know, day after Hillary didn’t win? I’ve lost track of time. Trauma does that.

KALIL

Accept. Breathe. Move on.

ROSE

*Accept?*

KALIL

She didn’t win. Okay.

ROSE

But she *did* win. She won the popular vote. Just like Al Gore did. That is supposed to be winning.

KALIL

Give up “supposed to,” accept what is.

ROSE

That we have a fiendish child for a president?

KALIL

Listen, white lady. I know about living with anger. Do I bitch to you all the damn time about how racist this country is?

ROSE

No.

I do.

KALIL

Right.

It’s like the whole world is and has been mounting an attack, a personal attack on you. You rant and fume. And state the obvious, as if no one else has thought those things. You’re trying to own all of it. And you know why? So YOU aren’t to blame somehow. All that ranting are stones in this tower you can sit on top of and look down at all the rest of us benighted folk.

ROSE

You’re angry, then?

KALIL

Stop listening to my emotions and hear what I’m saying!

ROSE

[about the letter]

Uh-oh. I can’t read this. Read it to me.

KALIL

Dear Professor Buchanan, although I don’t owe you an explanation, I wanted to explain to you why I voted for Donald Trump.

[KALIL coughs, takes a drink of ROSE’s coffee]

BASMA

Let me read it.

[ROSE nods and KALIL hands her the letter].

BASMA

It’s handwritten. No one does that anymore. I hope I can read the handwriting. No, no, I can do this.

[reads]

“I was at that sexual harassment meeting. You probably didn’t see me because I was at the back. Or maybe you thought I was on duty in case something happened that needed a police presence. I was actually on my lunch break and I went to hear what people had to say. But the meeting spent a lot of time deciding which pronouns people wanted to be referred to as”—

[Lights up on OFFICER SZCZEPANEK. He is ‘speaking’ the letter. BASMA’s reading of it, becomes silent altho’ we can see her lips moving]

“--Like, my name is Bradley and I prefer “her and she.” My name is Samuel/Suzanne and I want to be referred to by “they” because I don’t think my sexuality should be nailed down or in a box supplied by the patriarchy-constructed” whatever. By the time all that got settled, I had to get back to work. And that is one of the reasons I voted for Trump. He never plays those sexual identity games. He knows he’s a man and he’s not apologizing for it. And he says what he’s actually thinking instead of some prepared minced-over careful not to offend anyone kind of thing Hillary said. In that final debate, she got real, well, a little real. But Trump still won. He schooled her. But she refused to be schooled. She just doesn’t listen. She comes in with what she and her people think she should say and delivers that. And she’s corrupt and her husband? Scandal and corruption. They’re professional politicians and we don’t need that. We need a change and Donald Trump might be like a bull in a china shop, but the china shop? We don’t need a **china** shop, anyway. We don’t want or need fine things to eat off of. We need jobs and a balanced budget and he’s a businessman, not a lawyer who went into politics. We don’t need any more politics. We need leadership. And we **don’t** need millions of immigrants from Syria or wherever. We need to close our gates and take care of the people who actually live here, here and now. All that liberal do-gooderism has got us lying down, ready to be walked over. And I am sick of all that self-righteous accusatory bullshit they spout. What pronoun or noun do I want? American. I am Russell Sczcepanek and I’m an American. No hyphen. Just American. You can show this letter to anyone and I’ll probably get fired, but I had to just say what was in my heart and not edit myself like I’ve had to do all the goddamn time.”

[Lights down on SZCZEPANEK. BASMA’S voice no longer silent]

BASMA

Sincerely, Officer Russell Szczepanek.”

ROSE

When is this dated? Oh, before yesterday. Well, the Presidential inaugural speech promised everything Officer Szczepanek would want.

ROSE

How about merry-go-round rides and Coca Cola in all the drinking fountains?

[sound of a cell phone—everybody looks]

BASMA

It’s Javed.

[turns the phone off. A beat. Another cell phone rings. It’s Rose’s. She looks and then turns it off]

[long beat]

KALIL

At least, talk to the guy.

[cell phone rings—it’s KALIL’S. He looks at it, answers it]

KALIL

[on his phone]

Hey, Gramma. Yeah. I saw it. No, I’m not protesting—I’m staying home and catching up on my laundry.

Of course, I use those Downy sheets, whatever.

Yeah. . .

[KALIL exits, still talking on the phone]

BASMA

He could just walk over, like he did those first few days.

ROSE

Have you had anything to say to him?

BASMA

No. He left **me**. He came over for his clothes and things. And the car. It was a rental. I’m sure he returned it to save money. We stopped going to the overpriced market because of that. He’s very, very tight with his money. I sat there, silent, cursing myself for becoming attached to him, allowing my life to be submerged into his. But I had no children, and my parents raised me in Europe, so I had no family, really. It was as if I had lived on the moon and now was coming home to a planet I knew nothing about. And, here is the part I feared—getting old by myself. I fell. And Javed took care of me. I’m afraid, Rose. I’m afraid of no one being there to take care of me.

[beat]

ROSE

Basma, if you could stay in this country, you could stay here. With me for a while until you find someplace you want to live.

BASMA

That is so kind of you. After what I did to your computer?

ROSE

It was easily fixed. Well, sort of. And it forced me to switch to a Mac. What was that? That horrible photo? Of all the dead. .

BASMA

Sabah sent it to Javed. It was a photo of the dead at a wedding that was bombed by a drone.

ROSE

Oh god, was it. . .his grandson?

BASMA

No. It was another wedding. It’s happened more than once. There’s a general warning for men to not gather because it is observed by the drones as being a meeting of terrorists. But she sent it for. . .to. . .upset Javed. She wants him to come home to Pakistan and do something. Teach orphan boys so they won’t be grabbed by the ISIS groups that take them in and indoctrinate them.

ROSE

How is he supposed to do that?

BASMA

Bring American money and himself. He is her grandfather and she sees him as very powerful.

ROSE

Yes, he married her off when she was 15 to some guy she didn’t know! An old, sick guy!

BASMA

He did that to get her out of Pakistan and married to a citizen of the United Kingdom, so she could have an English passport. And be safe. And he succeeded. And Sabah became quite attached to her elderly husband whom I don’t think ever consummated the marriage. He was a kind, old muslim man. They do exist. And he was born in Manchester, where his father was teaching. You see, Rose, I do admire him. I admire Javed. And I have come to love him. And I thought he loved me. After his wife died, he was lost. You know “women grieve, men replace.”

ROSE

Look, I have another bedroom. It’s messy with book storage and, well, everything storage, but most of that stuff I need to get rid of. Really.

BASMA

You know, I sent you that photo to hurt you somehow. To hit you back. And messing with your files. . .that was random but that was me hitting you again.

ROSE

We don’t have time to dwell on the past. What time is it? Okay. We’ll drive to the march.

[She reaches into her bag and pulls out two pink “pussy caps,” hands one to Basma. Basma puts it on]

BASMA

You know what would be better?

[She takes her shoulder wrap and makes it into a hijab, then puts the “pussy cap” on top of that]

That makes more of a comment.

ROSE

Oh my god, you *will* be photographed with that.

BASMA

No, let me do this even better. I’ll make a real hijab. Iconoclastic! Do you have bobby pins?

ROSE

I haven’t even heard those words in like forever.

BASMA

I’ll meet you at the car.

[ROSE exits. BASMA goes into her house]

BASMA

Javed? Wait! Stop!! JAVED!

[crashing sound, door broken, body crashing down]

[lights down]

SCENE 2~

[Lights up. JAVED enters the common from the house he and BASMA share. His clothes are messed up and his hand is wrapped with BASMA’s now bloody veil. He’s breathing hard and fast. He sits in ROSE’S rocking chair on her porch to catch his breath. ROSE re-enters, wearing her pink pussy cap]

ROSE

Where’s Basma?

JAVED

What?

ROSE

What happened to you?

JAVED

What is that? On your head?

ROSE

It’s a pink pussy hat.

JAVED

Do you know what is most wrong with this country? Everything is anger or a joke. There is no dignity! No one is allowed to be dignified. Benazir Bhutto was always dignified. Even in death, she collapsed into her car and was driven away. Three bullets in quick succession into the back of her head, exiting through her exquisite face. But we never saw those horrific photographs! No, that would not be our memory of her. Because no one took the photographs! For Rupert Murdoch to publish around the world so he can make even more money on exploiting tragedy.

[he grabs the hat off of ROSE’S head]

This is not the color of the private parts of most women in the world!

ROSE

Where is Basma? That is her scarf!

JAVED

*Hijab*. That she wears for me. To please me. She’s not real muslim. She never was. She is secular. Religiously secular. She has tried but not succeeded in becoming a muslim woman. She was raised in Europe, as just another brown-skinned girl.

ROSE

This scarf has blood on it!

JAVED

I was so angry! She wouldn’t talk to me! No one would talk to me! I was ostracized. I am a man! Not some dog who’s been bad.

ROSE

Javed. Where is Basma?

JAVED

Only your student Kalil would talk to me. And he had to pretend I was his grandmother!

ROSE

Javed--

JAVED

What terrible thing had I done? Except not to love my wife and in such a strong way that being around her tortures me. Because of my failure. I have always done what was expected of me. But I can’t anymore.

ROSE

***Javed. Where is Basma?***

BASMA

[enters, holding bandages]

Here—I found these in a bottom drawer in that cupboard in the hallway.

[She wraps his arm and wounds. ROSE just watches, looking at BASMA’S face, expecting to see some injury. JAVED reacts to the pain]

ROSE

Basma—are you all right?

Basma? Look at me.

BASMA

Rose. This my husband.

JAVED

The door. . .what about the door?

BASMA

I called physical plant. They are sending someone over.

JAVED

May—may I come home?

ROSE

Basma?

BASMA

Rose! You can’t fix everything!

[to JAVED]

If you’re dizzy, lean on me.

[They exit into their house. ROSE watches them go]

[end of scene 3]

SCENE FOUR~

[EMILY BENSON’s office. ROSE waits in the chair]

EMILY

I don’t want anything. Except the location of Javed Ullah. And his wife.

ROSE

I don’t know. I honestly—

EMILY

Stop. I wouldn’t tell me, either. Anything I know I would have to report.

ROSE

What can I do?

EMILY

You could become involved, active, instead of just Ramblin’ Rose who’s everybody’s friend. To live by the side of the road and be a friend to man isn’t enough.

ROSE

What are you saying? The college designed that area that way. It’s supposed to be a common, but there’s no lawn, anymore. So it looks like, but it’s not, a road.

EMILY

It’s a phrase my father used. “To live by the side of the road and be a friend to man.” That means to not be involved, really. No risk. But still be able to exert your privilege, yes, I used that word, as a “right-thinking person” and be morally superior without taking the *consequences.*

ROSE

Was your father an activist?

EMILY

He was a Lutheran minister. He held the fort on the high ground. While the rest of us have to deal with WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING.

ROSE

I don’t get how this applies—

EMILY

TO YOU, ROSE? We have a situation. Yes, I’m being loud! And I don’t care who hears this! Because there is no privacy, anymore, anywhere! We have a person of interest and he’s disappeared. And you facilitated part of that.

ROSE

Javed? Disappeared? He and his wife had an altercation and he broke the door or something. And she was helping bandage him the last I saw them.

EMILY

Evidently, he fell over some children’s bicycles or something. That area is just chaotic. And inappropriate as a place to house faculty. And there are some staff members living over there, too.

ROSE

Now, wait. We don’t want to lose that egalitarian, classless spirit that our little ghetto embodies.

EMILY

The Sixties are over, Rose. It’s time to grow up. If you hadn’t had sex with him, none of this would have happened.

ROSE

We didn’t have sex. We just cuddled. He was upset. Well, I was. Because we didn’t get a woman president.

EMILY

Whether you hooked up or not isn’t the point.

ROSE

Look. We knew each other before, like decades ago. And, yes, we *hooked up* then, back then. We *hooked up* a lot. I was in love with him. He was that great love affair in which I harbored those destructive feelings. HOPE. I had hopes, yes. Of a partnership that would last. He still is the smartest man I’ve ever known.

EMILY

Your contract is coming up for renewal.

ROSE

. . .what?

EMILY

You don’t get to be passive. You helped create this problem.

ROSE

What am I supposed to do?

EMILY

I don’t know. Something. Do something.

ROSE

Nobody over the age of 30 uses the term “hooking up” to mean having sex.

EMILY

I’m 35. Cut me some damn slack. Know this--you may have fucked my chances for career advancement. Because all this shit happened on my watch.

ROSE

You’re already provost of a good college. What more do you want?

EMILY

There’s always more. Take you, for example. Where is that big volume of fine poetry? A chapbook, here and there. Self-publishing down at Collective Copies. Your best poetry you spoke out loud to your students. Observation, revelation—you had those with your students. And your students leave and become lawyers and occasionally remember you, but very little of what you said. Actually, not renewing your contract would be the best thing that’s ever happened to you.

ROSE

After I finish this book, I’m writing an article for a major journal.

EMILY

On—

ROSE

Poets who write post-modern meta poetry. Like Susan Howe.

EMILY

Will it include your poems?

ROSE

Well, no. But my bio will be there. In case people want to look up my work.

EMILY

Online.

ROSE

Well, there are some links. I haven’t really done a lot on the website--posted much work.

EMILY

You’ve been busy with your students.

There’s always more, Rose.

ROSE

Are you. . .firing me?

EMILY

Can’t. But contract time…

ROSE

I thought we were friends.

EMILY

Who can you call at three AM?

[ROSE thinks]

ROSE

Kalil. And. . .the police?

[ROSE has nothing more to say. She exits]

[End of Scene 4]

SCENE FIVE

[Back to Rose’s porch. They are both sitting in the chairs. They are both drinking Coke]

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

So this is the drink that got you in trouble?

ROSE

Just the fetching of it. And his kindness. I’d forgotten. It wasn’t cold. Tastes better when it’s cold. But it can settle your stomach better if it’s room temperature.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

[he chuckles]

Ice cubes.

ROSE

What?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Ice cubes. Because of ICE.

ROSE

Immigration police?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Okay, thanks for the coke, but we have a problem. They are aware of Mr. Ullah and are suspicious--they think he has ties to militant Islamists.

ROSE

They have talked to you? These ICE mother fuckers?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

You are hopeless! Can you, at least, acknowledge the dangers that so many, immigrants bring to our country?

ROSE

We were immigrants!! We brought diseases that wiped out most of the native populations, even before we started killing them with guns and small-pox-infested blankets!

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

What do you mean, “We”? My family was in Poland, trying to not starve.

ROSE

In between killing as many Jews as possible.

KALIL

[entering with a cheap fold-up chair]

I love the smell of white guilt in the morning.

[puts up the folding chair he brought and sits in it, indirectly asks “why didn’t you just get one of these?”]

CVS—seven dollars. Really, Rose. So simple.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Your president, Barack Obama, deported the most people in the history of this country! And since ICE was formed in two-thousand something, he was using those “mother fuckers,” a lot!

KALIL

Two and a half million, in fact.

ROSE

Kalil? What!?

KALIL

You told us to never be afraid of the truth. That we can and must handle the truth.

ROSE

That’s about writing, not reality.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

This kid was your student?

ROSE

He’s not a “kid.”

KALIL

And, yet, again, any hope for fruitful discussion is stalled in the endless discussions of correct terms and the barely-hidden accusations implied within them, as we slide into the abyss, arguing like children trying to undermine or top the other. “Well, my dad has diabetes!”

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Here’s the damn Coke.

[He gives it to KALIL who puts the glass very neatly into the cup holders these chairs have]

I gave it to the *young African-American man*—

KALIL

[knowing this will be irritating]

Caribbean-American.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Bad people are coming into this country and trying to blow it up! They succeeded in New York City. What does it take to wake you people up!!

ROSE

We rebuilt. And we will again and again and again.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Wait until you lose someone in one of those blasts, then you’ll be screaming for ICE.

ROSE

I lost a student in one of those towers. She would be 37 by now and achieving such great things.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Then how you stand there and not be grateful for immigration control that, under Trump, **would have** kept those terrorists out?

ROSE

Because my student and her parents were undocumented and all of them would be deported now.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

And all of them taking jobs that legal Americans could have? Americans that were born here! And are struggling! Well, she deserved to die in those towers!

[ROSE pelts him with her ice cubes, then looks for something else—**grabs a chair and throws it at him**. It hits him]

ROSE

Get the fuck out of here!!!

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

[nursing where the chair hit him]

What you just did is actionable.

ROSE

[giving him two middle finger salutes]

HOW ABOUT THESE? Are they actionable!

[OFFICER SZCZEPANEK has exited. KALIL fetches ROSE and sits her in the rocking chair]

I’m fucked, aren’t I.

KALIL

Probably.

ROSE

[no regret]

I could’ve killed him!!

KALIL

[handing her the glass with Coke in it that KALIL retrieved from OFFICER SZCZEPANEK]

Here. Don’t worry. The Coke surely eradicated all the police cooties.

ROSE

[Rejecting the glass]

No.

[thinking back on what OFFICER SZCZEPANEK said]

BASTARD!!

[end of scene 5]

SCENE SIX~

[ROSE is sitting in the same “cell” that she visited JAVED in. EMILY BENSON is there]

EMILY BENSON

What—in the hell—were you doing?

ROSE

He said that Jo-li Park deserved to die when the towers went down. This was before you came to this college. She was undocumented. So were her parents. God, I hope they have citizenship now. I need to get her parents’ contact information from alumni affairs--

EMILY BENSON

Rose. You’re imprisoned.

ROSE

Can you look them up? Oh, Kalil can do it. Oh, my phone. They took my fucking phone.

EMILY BENSON

Are you in shock? Wake up. You are in **jail**.

ROSE

I know. I—I do know that.

EMILY BENSON

Listen to me. Because you’re a faculty member, you can’t just do things with impunity. Because you’re a faculty member, you are NOT omnipotent. The world is NOT your classroom. Your academic freedom does not include assaulting a police officer. And, here’s the thing you may have the biggest problem with: You are NOT omniscient. You don’t know everything.

ROSE

I—I deserved that.

EMILY BENSON

You still don’t get it. What you think about deserving or not deserving it has no agency now. You are, most certainly, fired. That means you have no health plan. And nowhere to live. Because your apartment is college property, your belongings will be moved out to some location you need to decide on. From here. Because the college is not bailing you out. Or supplying you with a lawyer.

[EMILY BENSON exits. Beat. Re-enters]

Discussion, debate, no matter how heated it becomes can NEVER turn violent! We are trying to hold on to civilization over there, in that beautiful little campus. CIVIL ization. Okay? Turning out young people who value the *choice* of being civilized.

[She exits, re-enters, really pissed this time]

And whatever role model you WERE or HAVE BEEN is gone, Rose!!! And you, only you, destroyed it!!!

[She exits]

[end of scene 6]

SCENE SEVEN~

[back at the “ghetto”. SABAH is standing there. She is no longer in camo. You can see she’s made an effort to look “normal.” KALIL enters, carrying her bag]

KALIL

The keys are under the turtle there.

SABAH

I couldn’t afford the Marriot.

KALIL

I mean, who can?

SABAH

My grandfather could.

KALIL

He had no option. Your—ah—whatever Basma is to you--kicked him out.

SABAH

They’re back together. In Canada. In some refugee place, filled with Haitians. I haven’t the energy or the money to go there. I told him I was here, so he has to figure out . . .what to do. He has to figure out what his choice is going to be.

KALIL

You mean, where to live?

SABAH

Where his loyalties are. You’re one of the American liberals, aren’t you. Without loyalty, suspicious of loyalty, because it would commit you to a point of view.

KALIL

But..but I’m Black.

SABAH

Are you muslim?

KALIL

I toyed with the Nation of Islam but dropped it.

SABAH

Required loyalty. Absolute loyalty.

KALIL

And my grandmother is a take-no-prisoners Baptist.

SABAH

Your greatest American, Mujahid Abdul Halim, was assassinated because his loyalty was questioned.

KALIL

You mean, of course, Malcolm X who was murdered on the orders of Elijah Muhammad and *Elijah Muhammad* was the one who was disloyal to the precepts of the Nation of Islam. See? I’m not some empty, pampered little Black Boy who doesn’t know his history. I majored in Black Studies!

SABAH

[about the Ullah’s house]

Is there a bed in there?

KALIL

With sheets. They left it like that.

SABAH

Come, lie down with me. And let’s not talk. I need you to do something for me. Can we just be human together? I’m sick of history. So sick of it.

[KALIL and SABAH exit into JAVED and BASMA’S house. OFFICER SZCZEPANEK enters, sees SABAH’s bag, sees who it belongs to, calls on his shoulder phone]

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

We have a suspicious package. Yes. That’s right. In front of the Ullahs, whatever, that couple who are conveniently gone now—their house. Nobody’s here. All right.

[OFFICER SZCZEPANEK backs away from the bag. Lights down]

[end of scene 7]

SCENE EIGHT~

[The ghetto is cordoned off. Someone in those total protective bomb suits like in THE HURT LOCKER, enters. He has a bomb detector and approaches the bag. He very carefully, unzips the bag and looks inside. He removes the expected contents of a young woman’s bag. Finds the Qu’ran, opens it. HUGE EXPLOSION. BLACKOUT]

[end of scene 8]

{TRANSITION—SIRENS, ETC}

SCENE NINE~

[in an area they would go to after the GHETTO had been blown up. Flashing blue lights continue through the scene]

[KALIL and SABAH are wet, nearly naked and wrapped in blankets. OFFICER SZCZEPANEK enters, carrying SABAH’s bag, intact. He drops it in front of her, exits]

SABAH

Hey, somebody went through my bag!!

KALIL

Are there any clothes?

[She hands him some and takes some herself. They begin to get dressed. OFFICER SZCZEPANEK re-enters, hands SABAH her Qu’ran, intact]

SABAH

Did you read it?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

I’m Catholic. Read the Bible?

[She doesn’t answer, but he doesn’t expect her to]

Any other belongings missing?

SABAH

I’ll have to check my bag when I get. . .somewhere?

[SABAH and KALIL are still getting dressed, KALIL adapting SABAH’S clothes to cover his body somehow]

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

This area is uninhabitable. That includes your apartment, Kalil.

Your stuff is fine. It’s fine. Physical plant is checking the conditions of **all** the water heaters, **all the gaslines**. We don’t want another—this cluster of houses is too old, anyway. They should just bulldoze it. But I know the administration and the trustees. Trustees are the worst. Your house, your grandfather’s house, was built in 1789 or some ridiculous time ago. So they’ll want to restore as much as they can.

SABAH

Where do we go? I came to stay in my grandfather’s “house.”

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

When you’re ready, I’ll drive you to—

KALIL

The Marriott?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

No. We can’t afford that. You’re being moved to a dorm. Probably into separate rooms.

KALIL

How can I get my clothes? I can’t wear this everywhere.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

I’ll go by your apartment when they let us in. I’ll get some things. In the meantime, I have a couple of vouchers from the college and I’ll drive you both to Target.

KALIL

Thank you.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Look, about what I said. About her student. I regret what I said. Yes, I’ll tell her.

[end of Scene Nine]

SCENE 10

[JAVED and SABAH. SABAH has a backpack, filled with enough stuff that it’s believable that she can leave whenever she wants to]

SABAH

We went into an ISIS stronghold that the previous unit had bombed and then laid out the corpses, one-by one, next to each other. You know what I saw? A line of sneakers on these big rangy feet, leading up to bodies of adolescent boys. Illiterate male children, taken in and taught to read using only one book—the amended Qu’ran, supplied by the Mujuhaddin, with only the jihad passages, none of the love or the wisdom. And they feed these starving, homeless boys food and hatred. And they keep coming. Someone has to counter that. Someone has to go to these places like Waziristan and educate these children. Why are you teaching whatever your teaching to these privileged kids and not home?

JAVED

In a nearby city, a few miles from here, there is a library that is designed so that if there is a major war or terrorist attack, the rare book room lowers into its own concrete bunker. And seals. So whomever survives can have all this literature. And knowledge.. untouched by fire or flood. As a boy, I survived Partition. I saw my grandfather die, hacked by a sword held by a Sikh on horseback. I am convinced that nothing gets better. Only different. Understanding, clemency is like a river that is constantly changing course. I believe that a tributary of that river is here. I’m staying on its banks. And I think you should, too, Sabah. Or find another one.

SABAH

There is an apocalypse breeding in the tribal areas and now it’s moving everywhere, popping up everywhere. It could be HERE any moment. It probably is here. I’m not asking you to go teach in a classroom. You’re almost famous. We want to set up schools and you could head all that. People would give us money and we need it. I wrote a letter to Bill and Melinda Gates. But we look like children playing at war. We need someone to be our spokesman, our leader, while we lead ourselves, of course.

JAVED

My advice to you is for you to get out of all of that, while you can.

SABAH

But we’re the good guys, Baba.

JAVED

Remember the Afghani Freedom Fighters?

SABAH

No.

JAVED

President Ronald Reagan hosted them in the Oval Office. There’s a famous photo of them, all crowded, sitting on these blue silk couches. Reagan said they were heroes. *Because* they were fighting the Russians. But once the Soviet forces retreated, America cut off their funding. Suddenly, they were on their own. And who came in to fill the gap? Osama Bin Laden. And these freedom fighters, these heroes became the mujuhaddin. The enemy, SABAH! The one you’re fighting! It’s a big circle that folds in on itself and crushes anyone inside of it!

SABAH

What are we to do?

JAVED

Don’t ask me! I lived through Partition! You weren’t even born. I’ve done enough. Let me enjoy my time left in the academic bubble, protected by grants, surrounded by American liberals.

SABAH

I have a meeting in New York with a foundation. . . I have time to get to the train. It’s only a few blocks. I’ll walk.

JAVED

You always have a home with me. Always.

SABAH

Home—what is that, Baba?

[says good-night in Pashto]

[She exits]

BASMA

[enters from where she has been waiting]

On the other hand, I *am* going back. To Islamabad. To what I hope is an apartment near a Starbuck’s.

[beat]

I am purposely making a joke, to make things easy for you. Because I thought that’s how wives act. That is how my mother acted. Because she adored my father.

[beat]

I have come to love you, Javed. I don’t know why you don’t love me. Do you love me?

[JAVED is silent]

All right. Then I have a really hard question for you. Why didn’t you send your grandson to any one of the excellent polytechnics in Lahore or anywhere, far away from the tribal areas. To a school where no friend would have family in Waziristan.

JAVED

The tuition differences for the schools is significant.

BASMA

I knew the answer. I just asked that question to hurt you.

[long beat, then JAVED nods, then exits, leaving BASMA sitting by herself].

[end of scene 10]

SCENE 11~

[ROSE is in jail, wearing her street clothes. She’s sitting and waiting. KALIL walks in]

ROSE

Oh, honey. I’m so sorry. . .about everything.

KALIL

Here’s the receipt for your bail. And I’m not sorry about anything.

ROSE

What?

KALIL

I got—I hooked up with Sabah. And it was so. . .phenomenal! I could love her, Rose. I really could. And it’s not desperation. Well, maybe a little. But she was a virgin, Rose. That old guy that Javed made her marry, he never consummated, you know. He was a sweet old guy and I think she cared for him. And then, she was 20 something and got politically involved and she’s a handful and impulsive so maybe guys just didn’t approach her. And she was all about anger at the patriarchy.

I came to see you. I needed to see you.

You look okay.

ROSE

My life will never be the same.

KALIL

But you didn’t want it to, right? You’ll be a hero now, assaulting someone for saying what he said.

ROSE

I miss my front porch.

KALIL

Well, that’s just too bad, isn’t it!

See, that’s what happens when you let immigrants in. First Nation people know about that. My people know, too. All these white people from Europe getting more than we got. Oooo, the poor Irish. The most vocal racists. The Scots-Irish, straight over from Ulster, bringing their white hoods with them!

ROSE

Are you. . .angry. . .at me?

KALIL

Why not? You act like you own this place. It was never yours.

ROSE

Listen, I’m a descendant of someone who fought, as a Patriot, in the revolutionary war. How do I know? Because he died in battle and his name is on a stone in Somerset, Kentucky.

KALIL

Ohhh. Kentucky. And his descendants would have fought for the Confederacy.

ROSE

“Robert Campbell, Union soldier, age nineteen, died in camp.”

KALIL

And if my family hadn’t been slaves, I would have a history like that, too. I probably do, but there are no records because we were non-people, have been non-people for most of our history in this country we built! And your family probably owned slaves, everybody did back then. Everybody was responsible for that steady stream of ships you could smell for miles before they reached the harbor. Why? Because they smelled like death.

ROSE

I-I don’t think we owned slaves.

KALIL

Or sold them? At the local farmer’s market? Let’s see, two pecks of strawberries, four live chickens, and a black child, old enough to work hard and to breed.

ROSE

I didn’t know you felt this way.

KALIL

I got educated, Professor Buchanan. At your urging. And I thank you for that. And—and how can you know all your history and have no family?

ROSE

They disowned me in the late Sixties because of my politics. Even though I was right.

KALIL

And you never. . .?

ROSE

No. Stubborn parents give birth to stubborn children. And they had me late in life, so there was never time to make up before they died. My father reached out to me. But I didn’t go home because I would have to come home as a Communist, even though he didn’t know what that word meant.

KALIL

[sitting next to her]

What are we going to do, Rose. How can we move forward?

ROSE

I don’t know.

KALIL

I’m going to go see what’s holding up your release.

[He exits. ROSE sits there. She hums a bit of “Amazing Grace.)

How many trips did he make on his ‘smelling-of-death’ ship before he had his revelation and wrote that song? How many trips did it take?

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

[entering]

Your arraignment is scheduled. Here’s the paperwork and I said I’d take it to you. Your lawyer. . .had to go back to teach a class.

You need to sign.

ROSE

Do I get my job back?

I’m waiting for an apology.

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

For what? You assaulted me!

ROSE

What you said was hate speech!

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

You people will never understand us. And, according to the Hate Speech laws, what I said was fine and in my rights to say it.

[KALIL enters and ROSE leaves with him]

And you know you say terrible things about us—in private.

[end of scene 10]

SCENE ELEVEN~

[ROSE is at a storage unit with her belongings, looking into boxes, smelling, being repelled by the smell of smoke]

ROSE

Oh, god.

[JAVED enters]

JAVED

Okay.

We didn’t go to Canada. We went to Dutchess County, New York state, to stay with Basma’s old, old friend from college. We decided to get the divorce. And she’s back in Islamabad. Here’s a letter to you. From her.

ROSE

I’ll read it later. Where have you been?

JAVED

How are you doing?

ROSE

Well, this is a storage unit and I’m thinking I’ll bed down here until I can get a place. I’m out on bail so I can’t leave the area and the Marriott is too expensive. There’s a Super 8 further away, but still in the area because I can’t leave.

JAVED

I want you to live with me. They gave me other housing, near the college. The other side of the campus. It’ll be a relief to get back into the classroom. We need to go to the mall and get you some things.

ROSE. . .

JAVED

Don’t worry. We can live well enough. We’ll be all right.

ROSE

“We.”

JAVED

I know. But I think it can work.

ROSE

I have a brother in Des Moines. We haven’t spoken since our father died.

[long beat]

I’m not used to having someone in the bed with me.

[long beat]

I’ve seriously destroyed my life, Javed.

And all my stuff smells like smoke.

JAVED

We’ll keep this temporary storage. If that’s. . .

ROSE

Okay.

[JAVED embraces her. She hugs back and won’t let go]

ROSE

See? You’re already pulling away.

JAVED

No, I’m not.

I had a twitch.

[He goes back to the hug].

We can’t just stand like this forever.

My Visa will have run out.

That’s a joke. Kind of.

[ROSE lets go. Awkward pause]

JAVED

Kalil and Sabah aren’t a couple or anything.

ROSE

Doesn’t surprise me. It was one of those disaster romances. Like a shipboard romance but with the ship sinking.

JAVED

Like us.

ROSE

What do you mean?

JAVED

The ship is sinking. I have no idea what’s happening anywhere, and, here’s the main thing—I don’t want to know.

Oh, and we’re old.

Are we a romance, Rose?

ROSE

Maybe.

JAVED

I want us to be. I’ll start taking Viagra.

ROSE

Wait a bit, for Christ sakes, and let me settle a little. I’m unemployed

JAVED

Will you open Basma’s letter? I want to hear what she said.

ROSE

It’s private.

JAVED

No, it’s not.

ROSE

She may say things about you that—

JAVED

I think she pretty much covered those areas.

ROSE

Oh, all right.

[ROSE opens the letter and starts to read, and as she does lights come up on BASMA in a Starbuck’s who takes over the reading, making it a direct address]

BASMA

I’m living with a cousin I barely knew. It’s fine. All her kids are gone. And her husband is feeble. I help her take care of him. I wear a scarf, a sort of casual hijab. It got so that my head felt unprotected without it. The Pakistani government is using drones for crowd control, so I find myself looking up too many times a day. I miss Javed. Terribly. And I even miss our house. So much room! Don’t say anything to him. I want him to be happy. I’m happy enough. And I have a latte.

[crumples up that note. Writes another]

ROSE

[reads what BASMA finally sent]

“I’m sorry I didn’t say goodbye, Rose. Please come to visit me in Islamabad. They have a Marriott.”

JAVED

What else?

ROSE

That’s all. Look.

JAVED

What? No gossip? Wisdom?

ROSE

“Love, Basma.”

JAVED

Okay.

ROSE

You aren’t expecting to marry me just to get citizenship, are you?

JAVED

Doesn’t work that way.

ROSE

What will we do when your visa is up?

JAVED

You will apply for a visa and we’ll go somewhere else.

ROSE

I wouldn’t be admitted to your country because I’m a felon. I’m a bad hombre. La mala mujer.

JAVED

Then I’ll reapply for a renewal of my visa and just stay here. I don’t want to live anywhere else. We’ve become a sanctuary city.

ROSE

Amen. An *atheistic* amen to that.

[JAVED looks at her, as if to say, what other cause are you going to get in trouble for?]

Hey. I have a prison record. I’m not silenced. Nope. I’ll never shut up. Never.

JAVED

Okay.

[end of scene 11]

SCENE 12~

[OFFICER SZCZEPANEK appears in some place that the audience doesn’t expect]

OFFICER SZCZEPANEK

Damn hippies never let us do what’s right! Them and all their do-gooder programs which never help any of the hard-working people who make this country. And WE pay for them. All this liberal nonsense will break this nation! And give away the pieces to anybody with a sad-assed story! And to the people of color! See? They’ve brain-washed me so I barely speak. What about MY FREEDOM OF SPEECH? And what are we doing about our enemy? We’re playing Whack-a-Mole with terrorists! While back home we’re losing our country! What in the hell are we going to do? And, by the way, read my lips: HE’LL BE RE-ELECTED!

**END OF PLAY**