

Abraham's Daughters

by

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ABRAHAM'S DAUGHTERS
Casting Breakdown and Requirements
characters

MAXINE	A woman, thirty-nine. Jewish-American.
HUDA	A woman, forty-four. Palestinian Muslim.
RACIE	Maxine's daughter. Eighteen.
AMAL	Huda's daughter. Nineteen.
ABRAHAM	A man in his seventies. Jewish-American.

time/place

In Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and in Nablus under Closure, June, 1993. Stone-colored paths that create a sense of terracing. Two distinct downstage spaces with a threshold between them. The two spaces are Abraham's condo in Tel Aviv and Huda's home in Nablus. Huda's home also has a roof where Amal and Racie have scenes. The threshold area in the center is used for the grave outside Jerusalem at the beginning and the end and MAXINE "marks" the threshold with books/stones during the first act. At the top of the second act, the threshold might be the checkpoint.

scene breakdown

ACT I

Prologue: Jerusalem/Nablus - Tuesday morning

Scene 1: Tel Aviv/Nablus, Tuesday afternoon

Scene 2: Tel Aviv, Wednesday

Scene 3: Tel Aviv, Wednesday afternoon

Scene 4: Tel Aviv, Thursday

ACT II

Scene 1: A checkpoint, Friday.

Scene 2: Nablus, the same day.

Scene 3: Huda's home, Nablus, the same day.

Scene 4: Nablus, sundown.

Epilogue: Jerusalem

notes for actors

Ellipses (...) are used for when characters run out of words to say, to express the ineffable. Words should not be added to them.

Asterisks (*) indicate the next speaker's cue when it overlaps before the end of a line. If there is an asterisk at the beginning of your line, check the line before you for your cue which is the asterisk somewhere in the middle of the line.

<< words inside these brackets >> have not yet been translated into transliterations of Hebrew or Arabic, so they are still in English, but won't be in the play. Arabic and all other non-English words are written in *italics* with phonetic spelling, emphasis on the **bold** syllable(s).

acknowledgements

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prayer transliterations and translations

The Mourner's Kaddish (for Jews)

Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash sh'mei raba (amein)

May His great Name grow exalted
and sanctified

b'al'ma di v'ra khir'utei

in the world that He created as He
willed.

v'yam'likh mal'khutei b'chayeikhon uv'yomeikhon

May He give reign to His kingship in
your lifetimes and in your days,

uv'chayei d'khol beit yis'ra'eil

and in the lifetimes of the entire
Family of Israel,

ba'agala uviz'man kariv v'im'ru: Amein.

swiftly and soon. Now say: Amein.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varakh l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya

May His great Name be blessed
forever and ever

Yit'barakh v'yish'taback v'yit'pa'ar v'yit'roman
v'yit'nasei

Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted,
extolled,

v'yit'hadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha.

mighty, upraised and lauded be the
Name of the Holy One.

B'rikh hu,

Blessed is He,

l'eila min kol bir'khata v'shirata

beyond any blessing and song,

toosh'b'chatah v'nechematah, da'ameeran

praise and consolation that are

b'al'mah v'eemru: Amein.

uttered in the world. Now say:
Amein.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya

May there be abundant peace from
Heaven

v'chayim aleinu v'al kol yis'ra'eil v'im'ru
Amein

and life upon us and all Israel.
Now say: Amein.

Oseh shalom bim'romav hu ya'aseh shalom

He Who makes peace in His heights,
may He make peace,

aleinu v'al kol Yis'ra'eil v'al kol yoshvey teyvel
v'im'ru Amein

upon us and upon all Israel and upon
all the world, now say: amen.

Muslim Prayers for the Dead

The four pillars of the prayers are called The Tak'bir. When chanting the Takbirs, the hands come up, palms forward with index fingers close to the ears, and then the hands are put back in the prayerful position used while standing -- the mourning prayers are all done standing up -- and the hands are over the chest with the right hand covering the left on the chest.

First Tak'bir:

Allah Akbar.

God is Greater.

Surah Al Fatiyah (basic beginning of all Muslim prayer):

Bismi Allahi alrrahmani alrraheemi

In the name of Allah, the most merciful
most kind

Alhamdu lillahi rabbi alAAalameena

Praise be to Allah Lord of the Worlds

Alrrahmani Alrraheemi

The most Merciful, most Kind

Maliki yawmi alddeeni

Owner of the day of Judgement

Iyyaka naAAbudu

You alone do we worship

waiyyaka nastaAAeenu

You alone do we ask for help

Ihdina alssirata almustaqeema

Show us the straight path

Sirata allatheena anAAamtha AAalayhim

The path of those you have favored

ghayri almaghdoobi AAalayhim wala alddalleena

Not the path of those who earn your anger

Nor of those who go astray

Second Tak'bir:

Allah Akbar.

God is Greater.

Ibrahimiyyah

Al-la-hum-ma sal-li ‘a-la Mu-ham-ma-din
was ‘a-la ah-li Mu-ham-mad.

Kih-ma sal-lay-ta ‘a-la Ib-ra-hi-ma
wa ‘a-la ah’-li Ibrahim.

In-nay-kih Ha-mee-doom Majeed.

Al-la-hum-ma ba-rik ‘a-la Mu-ham-ma-din
wa ‘a-la ah-li Mu-ham-mad.

Kih-ma ba-rayk-ta ‘a-la Ib-ra-hi-ma
wa ‘a-la ah-li Ib-ra-him.

In-nay-kih Ha-mee-doom Majeed.

Third Tak’bir
Allah Akbar.

Du’aa for the deceased (female version):
Allahumaghfir li-hay-yeen wa may-yitina
wa shaa-hi-dinaa
wa ghau-ibinaa wa sghierinaa wa kabeerinaa
wa thakarinaa wa unthaanaa.

Allahuma man ah-yayta-hu minaa fa-ah-yeehi
alaal islaam, wa man tawa-faytahu minna fata
waffahu alal lymaan

Fourth Tak’bir:
Allah Akbar

Janaaza Du’aa (prayers for the dead for a woman)
Biesmiella hir’ ragh’ maa ni ragheem

Allah hum’ma an’ta ghalaq ta’haa

The Abraham Prayer

O Allah, send prayers on
Muhammed and the family of
Muhammed.

As you sent prayers on Abraham
and the family of Abraham.

Certainly You are praise-worthy and
glorious.

O Allah, send blessings on
Muhammed and the family of
Muhammed.

As you sent blessings on Abraham
and the family of Abraham.

Certainly You are praise-worthy and
glorious.

God is Greater.

O Allah forgive our living and our
dead
our present and our absent, our
young and our old, our males and our
females.

O Allah, if You give us life then
make our lives an Islamic life,
and if You cause us to die then
make us depart from this world with
lymaan.

God is Greater.

In the name of Allah the Beneficent
and the Merciful
You have created her

wa a day ‘ta haa lil Islam
roow ga haa fa haa nag noe waaqi
foo na bie baa bie ragh ma ‘ti ka nar
jee magh fi ra tiek

and You have guided her to Islam
and now You have taken her soul
so here we are standing by the doors
of your mercy desiring forgiveness

Bowing to the left say:
As-sa-la-moo ‘A-lay-koom wa rah-mah-tul-lah.

Peace of God be unto you.

Bowing to the right say:
As-sa-la-moo ‘A-lay-koom wa rah-mah-tul-lah.

Peace of God be unto you.

Additional prayers for the dead:
Announcement for Salaah of Janaaza (Mourner’s Prayer) for a Woman:

As’salaatu a’laa haa ‘thi hil’mayta’til haa’thirah
As’salaatu janaaza ra’hi’ma’kumul’laah

The Salaah on this present dead
female will be performed
The Salaah will be performed
May Allah have mercy upon you

Niyyat for a Woman (announces the intention to pray for a dead woman)

Na’way’tu u’sol’lee fardas salatil janaaza a’laa
haa’thihil may’yi’ta’til haa’di’ra’ti,
ar’ba’a tak’bee’raatin’ jamaa’a’tan lil’laahi ta’aalaa

I intend to perform Salaah of four
Tak’birs on the present female
deceased in congregation facing the
qibia for the sake of Allah the Most
High

Abraham's Daughters

Prologue

(MAXINE and RACIE daven over a grave and recite the Mourner's Kaddish. Simultaneously HUDA and AMAL kneel and pray Muslim prayers for the dead on the other side of the grave. ABRAHAM enters.)

(ABRAHAM speaks over both sets of mourners whose prayers are heard softly underneath him. The prayers rise and fall, and we hear what is written in bold type. Whenever Huda/Amal say "Allah Akbar" they bring their hands up palms forward so that their index fingers are almost at their ears and then bring their hands down again. The hand position for praying Muslim prayers as women has their right hand folded over their left up high at their chests.)

MAXINE/Racie	Abraham	Huda/Amal
Y'it gadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba	God promised to make Abraham the father of nations. I am Abraham.	Allah Akbar. Bismi Allahi alrrahmani alrraheemi
b'al'ma di v'ra khir'utei		Alhamdu lillahi rabbi alAAalameena
v'yam'likh mal'khutei b'chayeikhon uv'yomeikhon	and this promise has hung before me, a dazzling jewel, all my life. And still I have no sons.	Alrrahmani Alrraheemi Maliki yawmi alddeeni Iyyaka naAAabudu waiyyaka nastaAAeenu
uv'chayeu d'khol beit yis'ra'eil ba'agala uviz'man kariv v'im'ru: Amein.		Ihdina alssirata almustaqeema Sirata allatheena anAAamtha
Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varakh l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya Yit'barakh v'yish'tabach v'yit pa'ar v'yit'roman v'yit'nasei	When I was a boy, I enlisted in the army, fought in World War II. The father of nations should know something of war.	AAalayhim ghayri almaghdoobi AAalayhim wala alddalleena Allah Akbar. Al-la-hum-ma sal-li 'a-la Mu-ham-ma-din

MAXINE/Racie	Abraham	Huda/Amal
V'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha B'rikh hu. Amein.		was 'a-la ah'li Mu-ham-mad. Kih-ma sal-lay-ta 'a-la Ib-ra- him. In-nay-kih Ha-mee- doom Majeed.
l'eila min kil bir'khata v'shirata toosh'chatah v'nechematah, da'ameeran b'al'mah, v'eemru: Amein.	After the war, I joined the Haganah, the Jewish army, and I fought to make a Jewish State.	Al-la-hum-ma ba-rik 'a-la Mu-ham-ma-din wa 'a-la ah- li Mu-ham-mad.
Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya		Kih-ma ba-rak-ta 'a-la Ib- ra-hi-ma wa 'a-la ah-li Ib- ra-him.
v'chayim aleinu v'al kol yis'ra'eil v'im'ru: Amein.	All this time I was searching for my Sara, even though I had a perfectly nice Sara waiting for me back home in Flushing New York.	In-nay-kih Ha-mee-doom Majeed. Allah Akbar. Allahumaghfir li-hay-yeen wa may-yitina wa shaa-hi- dinaa wa ghau-ibinaa wa sghierinaa wa kabeerinaa
O'seh shalom bim'romav hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu		wa thakarinaa wa unthaanaa. Allah Akbar.
v'al kol Yis'ra'eil, v'al kol yo'shvei tey'vel v'im'ru: Amein.	I found a beautiful Hagar right here in what was then called Palestine. But when Sara wrote, "come home and fight for me," I did. You see Jacob Weinstock had asked her to marry him and I couldn't let her marry Jacob, a father of tribes, when I, Abraham, would be the father of nations.	Biesmiella hir' ragh' maa ni rhagheem Allah hum'ma an'ta ghalaq ta'haa was a day'ta'haa lil Islam wa an taw wab fa ta ga haa fa haa nag noe waaqi foo na bie baa bie ragh ma 'ti ka nar jee magh fi ra tiek.

MAXINE/Racie	Abraham	Huda/Amal
		(bowing left:) As-sa-la-moo 'A-lay-koom weh-wrah-mah-tul-lah. (bowing right:) As-sa-la-moo 'A-lay-koom weh-wrah-mah-tul-lah.

ABRAHAM

And I remembered that God asked Abraham to leave his homeland, and I realized that being in Jerusalem could be interpreted by God as being in my true homeland, so I went back to Flushing, and Sara became my home away from home.

Finally, Sara, we've come to where we always dreamed we'd be: Yis-ra-el.

MAXINE

She's gone Daddy. You have to accept that.

ABRAHAM

I accept.

MAXINE

Then why are you talking to her?

ABRAHAM

I talked to her for forty-five years. Sometimes she listened, sometimes she ignored me. What's wrong with talking to her now? I have a story to tell.

MAXINE

It isn't yours to tell.

HUDA

Your daughters' stories.

RACIE and AMAL

And your granddaughters'.

MAXINE

It doesn't make any sense, and it shouldn't be repeated.

RACIE and AMAL

Why not?

ABRAHAM

I love this story.

RACIE

Even if it kills you?

AMAL

Think of it as a fable told to children.

HUDA

(to AMAL)

You didn't grow up with fables. I told you facts.

MAXINE

Then it's just a story, like a luxury, that's all.

AMAL

Like a story where a single seed might grow?

RACIE

Unattended.

MAXINE

Like a seed that grows into a stalk?

ABRAHAM

I like that.

RACIE

Is that supposed to be a phallic image?

MAXINE

Racie, be good.

RACIE

Why can't I ask a question? Isn't it good to ask questions?

ABRAHAM

Let her ask her questions, Maxine. Phallic isn't all bad, you know?

MAXINE
 You always take her side.

ABRAHAM
 I'm her grandfather. Phallic made her.

RACIE
 What are we supposed to imagine now, a stalk?

ABRAHAM
 A story you may have heard as a child.

AMAL
 So we should listen as children?

MAXINE
 Only children would believe it.

RACIE
 I'm not a child anymore.

ABRAHAM
 Plus it's phallic. Not for children.

AMAL
 To which story?

ABRAHAM
 My story.

MAXINE
 Your story?

ABRAHAM
 My story. At the end of my life.

(RACIE and MAXINE go to ABRAHAM's condo
 as HUDA and AMAL go to HUDA's home.
 ABRAHAM places a stone on the grave.)

ABRAHAM
 No more "next year in Jerusalem." You can rest now, at home. I've kept my promise to you, and
 now God's promise to me will be kept.

scene 1

(RACIE and MAXINE unpack in Tel Aviv as HUDA and AMAL pack in Nablus out of/into the same boxes.)

MAXINE
God's promise?

RACIE
He would be the father of nations.

MAXINE
I guess that makes me the promised land.

RACIE
His country.

MAXINE
Racie...

RACIE
What? He's your father, and even you don't spend any time with him.

MAXINE
He's your grandfather. Family.

RACIE
I'm surprised I even know what a family is. I didn't grow up with one.

MAXINE
Rachel, that isn't true, and you know it.

RACIE
I might have thought we were a family, but obviously that isn't true.

MAXINE
You're being unfair.

RACIE
No. I could have had a family, but you didn't want to work at it. You didn't want to --

MAXINE
That's enough.

RACIE

I didn't even want to come here.

(AMAL holds up an embroidered hijab.)

AMAL

But Mama what about this one? She embroidered it herself.

HUDA

Hmmm?

AMAL

All these tiny stitches, such patience she had sewing one after another until a pattern appears.

HUDA

She wore that when I was a little girl. She wore that until '67. I had always thought my father -- I don't know. Even though my father died in '48, it wasn't until '67 that I think she gave up on his returning. Or maybe he didn't die in '48, just disappeared, so many people did. And I think she thought he would come back, he would find her, because after '67, she never wore it again.

AMAL

Don't you want to keep it?

HUDA

You keep it.

AMAL

I will then.

(AMAL replaces her hijab with this one.)

RACIE

So why did I have to come?

MAXINE

Because he is your grandfather. If you don't have a sense of family, then it's time you got one.

RACIE

I guess it's just your timing that bothers me.

MAXINE

We should have made weekly trips out to Great Neck, but we didn't. We made some. A couple times a year. But it was always so hard on you. There were never any other children around, and you had to sit still and behave yourself.

RACIE

But why? Aren't grandparents supposed to be fun?

MAXINE

My mother never had the patience for little children.

RACIE

How did you stand it?

MAXINE

I grew up fast.

AMAL

What is it?

HUDA

Nothing.

AMAL

Does it bother you that I'm wearing it?

HUDA

No, you're beautiful.

AMAL

I could take it off.

HUDA

You should wear it all the time.

AMAL

But you're crying.

HUDA

Because you look so much like her, like she looked when... , the way I remember her from... when I was a child. It's almost like she is here. In you. My Amal.

MAXINE

Tel Aviv's not such a bad place. It's like Florida. High rises, palm trees, air conditioning, and everyone's a Jew.

RACIE

Not everyone.

MAXINE

Everyone except the help.

RACIE

You mean the trash collectors and the maids?

MAXINE

I don't think there's a place in the world that doesn't have some people who collect trash and clean houses. I'm hiring someone for Daddy later today.

RACIE

I'll take a walk then, and see if I can find something to do in this place.

MAXINE

You know Grandpa might want to take a walk.

RACIE

Oh, and I'm supposed to take him?

MAXINE

I know you don't believe in husbands or wives or the conventions of marriage these days,

RACIE

I'm all for marriage, queer marriage.

MAXINE

but try to imagine someone you love very much for many years leaves or dies --

RACIE

That's easy. Daddy. He left because of you.

MAXINE

We are not discussing why your father left. Imagine you're getting older, facing the rest of your life alone. I know that might be hard, but you can try.

RACIE

It's not hard for you. You're all alone, and who knows how long you've got.

MAXINE

I'm talking about your grandfather. He would love to get to know you better.

RACIE

He just moved to the opposite side of the world. It's not like I'm coming back to visit.

MAXINE

Oh Racie, I hope you will.

AMAL

What about this?

HUDA

Sell it. Sell everything. I can't think now.

AMAL

But that's exactly why we should wait, at least a few days.

MAXINE

You had a choice. You could have spent the summer with your father and his new girlfriend* at the beach --

RACIE

*Some choice.

HUDA

I just want it to be over Amal.

AMAL

I'm not going to sell her jewelry box.

HUDA

Why not? It's been empty for years.

AMAL

No, it's not. She still has this.

HUDA

What?

AMAL

I don't know, some kind of medal.

HUDA

From a soldier?

AMAL

I don't know. Here. It's a beautiful box. She would have wanted someone to keep it.

HUDA

We can't keep everything.

AMAL

We've survived worse than this. We can't throw everything away.

HUDA

So keep it.

AMAL

And the medal?

HUDA

I'll keep that.

MAXINE

You might enjoy yourself.

RACIE

It's hot as hell and there's nothing to do.

HUDA

I'm not trying to force you to sell it all, Amal, but we need the money. *You know we --

AMAL

*Look at all these pictures. Tell me who everyone is, and I'll make a little note and put them in a scrapbook with their names underneath.

HUDA

Yes, all right. Tomorrow. I want to finish this box.

MAXINE

You can walk to the beach. You can go to the pool.

RACIE

It's a retirement community with old people smelling like old people.

MAXINE

People come to Israel as tourists all the time. The Mediterranean's right outside.

HUDA

That's strange. I thought for a moment I could smell the sea. I thought I heard waves and then a bird. Wouldn't it be nice to be a bird, Amal?

AMAL

I want to know their names. I hardly know anyone in your family.

HUDA

Because they're all dead now.

MAXINE

We can see the country, witness history in the making.

RACIE

Get blown up in a bus.

MAXINE

So don't ride a bus. Did I say you had to ride a bus?

AMAL

And what about them?

HUDA

Who?

AMAL

These men here.

HUDA

That's my grandfather with his cigar. And that must be my Uncle. He died in Jordan.

RACIE

You don't know what's going on here. You don't even read the papers.

MAXINE

I know enough. There are Chagalls and the Dead Sea.

AMAL

If you were a bird, would you fly back home?

HUDA

Do you know why I named you Amal?

AMAL

Because I was your last hope.

HUDA

If you're just going to stare at those pictures, we'll never get this all packed up.

AMAL

But it's history.

MAXINE

Rachel, this is a dream your grandparents have had for years.

RACIE

"Next year in Jerusalem." I can hear them at the seder table. But we're not in Tel Aviv. And as far as I can tell it's Miami Beach except the movies were released six months ago, and no one speaks Spanish.

MAXINE

Rachel...

RACIE

What kind of promise did he keep? It's a little late for Grandma, don't you think?

MAXINE

It's never too late. At least she was buried here. That's what he wanted.

RACIE

But why? Why couldn't she be buried at home where she lived?

AMAL

Look at the house in the background. Where was this house?

HUDA

That's our house in Jerusalem. You've seen pictures of our house before.

AMAL

I know. I just wanted to hear you say it. Our house in Jerusalem.

MAXINE

They lived through the Holocaust.

RACIE

They weren't in any camps or anything. They were at home. In America. Perfectly safe.

MAXINE

Your grandfather fought in that war. He saw starving people, and then he went and fought for Israel. And when he came back home he lived through the whole Red Scare, the Communist Purge -- things you're too young to know about.

RACIE

Grandpa's a Communist?* Cool.

MAXINE

*He's a moral man, a good man. He's lived through a lot. I think he wants to live in Israel the way *goyim* dream of one day living in heaven.

RACIE

Can't you say Christians? What about lesbians? Do you call us all dykes?

MAXINE

Racie, you're not a -- Ok, Christians.

HUDA

Are you going to stare at the past all day or help me with the packing?

AMAL

I'm staring into the future.

RACIE

You have a responsibility to teach me to be a tolerant human being and I resent your use of derogatory slang in my presence.

MAXINE

Racie, -- ok, ok, you're right. But if you haven't learned by now, you're not going to be terribly influenced by my language.

RACIE

Ha ha.

MAXINE

Ask your grandfather. You've got the whole trip to ask him about it.

RACIE

That's the only thing to do around here.

HUDA

You're dreaming.

AMAL

That's the real reason you named me, isn't it? So that I could make a better future, so that I could live to move back into our home in Jerusalem.

MAXINE

We'll have fun, I promise. It'll be just like a vacation.

RACIE

Yeah, some vacation.

AMAL

I dream of our home.

MAXINE

We won't get to spend that much time together after this.

AMAL

I dream its smooth walls. Touch every stone.

MAXINE

Once we get home, you leave for college.

AMAL

One day I'll tell them we have returned.

MAXINE

I am so proud of you.

RACIE

Mom.

AMAL

Are you listening? Mama?

MAXINE

The trip will fly by and before you know it, we'll be home shopping for school. Now help me finish this box.

AMAL

She got a letter today.

HUDA

Let me see that.

AMAL

It's from B'tselem, some Israeli agency.

HUDA

Why didn't you mention it before?

AMAL

I forgot. The funeral and all...

HUDA

Let me see.

AMAL

I can't imagine it's anything good.

HUDA

Amal, give me the letter.

AMAL

It isn't addressed to you.

HUDA

It isn't addressed to you either.

(HUDA takes the letter. RACIE and MAXINE exit with any empty boxes. AMAL picks up a packed box and carries it off. HUDA stands alone with the letter. She opens it. There is a letter inside and another envelope.)

HUDA

To Whom It May Concern, I am searching for a Palestinian woman by the name of Hagar Barakat. She used to live in Jerusalem in a house in the Arab quarter. I am not sure how to

HUDA (cont'd)

locate her now. If there is anyone who could help me find her, I would appreciate that help. As I will be making *aliyah* in the next few weeks and settling in Tel Aviv, I look forward to supporting your organization. Please give the enclosed letter to her if she can be found.
Sincerely, Abraham Abramowitz.

(HUDA opens the next envelope and reads.)

HUDA

My dearest Hagar...

(ABRAHAM enters.)

ABRAHAM

It has probably been many years since you have thought of me, but I have thought of you...

HUDA

Really?

ABRAHAM

Often. I was unable to write to you for many reasons,

HUDA

Hm-hmm.

ABRAHAM

the first being I had no idea how to reach you, and even now I don't know if you will ever get this letter.

HUDA

She didn't get it.

ABRAHAM

I'm sure you've had a good and fruitful life,

HUDA

Hmph.

ABRAHAM

and I too have had my own...

HUDA and ABRAHAM

in America,

ABRAHAM

but it is time for me to make *aliyah* and return to Israel...

HUDA

Palestine.

ABRAHAM

as it is my homeland.

HUDA

Mine too.

ABRAHAM

I will be moving there in a few weeks, and I enclose my address,

HUDA

Tel Aviv.

ABRAHAM

so you may contact me if you choose.

HUDA

Wait a minute, when was this written?

ABRAHAM

Of course I will understand...

HUDA

A month ago.

ABRAHAM

... if you decide not to...

HUDA

So he's here now.

ABRAHAM

...if you see things differently...

HUDA

In Tel Aviv.

ABRAHAM

...after all the time that has past...

HUDA

Waiting for your visit.

ABRAHAM

...since 1948 so much has happened...

HUDA

Since '48?

ABRAHAM

but of course if you ignore this letter, I won't know if you ever received it, and I'll continue to look for you when I get there.

HUDA

Persistent.

ABRAHAM

So I'm asking for a response which you can send or bring yourself...

HUDA

A man who expects a miracle.

ABRAHAM

Since you'll always be welcome in my home...

HUDA

Generous.

ABRAHAM

so that either way I'll know that you are well...

HUDA

Optimistic.

ABRAHAM

or not well, Heaven forbid...

HUDA

Realistic.

ABRAHAM

or interested...

HUDA

Interested in what?

ABRAHAM

or not interested in speaking to an old man who has believed for many years that you are the most beautiful woman who ever thirsted in the desert.

HUDA

He is trying to be romantic? Poetic? Passionate?

ABRAHAM

With love and respect,

ABRAHAM and HUDA

Abraham Abramowitz.

HUDA

An American Jew. So this is his medal. From 1948. You kept it all these years.

scene 2

(MAXINE enters condo in Tel Aviv talking on a cordless phone. HUDA in Nablus begins to move toward the threshold between her space and Tel Aviv.)

MAXINE

Mrs. Gottlieb? I'm so glad I caught you. It's Maxine, Abraham's daughter from 4B. No, no everything's fine, but considering we just got here, and we don't really know anyone, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind stopping by with your husband for *shiva*.

(to HUDA at the threshold)

Come in, come in. Don't be shy. I'll just be a minute.

(HUDA enters Abraham's condo.)

MAXINE

The entranceway just needs a little dusting.

(to Mrs. Gottlieb)

Just for a little while. So we'll have a *minyan*.

(to HUDA)

The kitchen's that way.

MAXINE (cont'd)

(to Mrs. Gottlieb)

Oh that's very kind. Of course we'll be delighted to welcome whoever you find. But we're three here ourselves, and with the two of you, we're half-way there already, and we're Reform Jews, so if an orthodox *minyán* is ten, we'll be fine with half of that.

(to HUDA)

The powder room...

(to Mrs. Gottlieb)

Please, just bring your husband. There'll be plenty to eat. We've got enough food here to feed an army.

(to HUDA)

Bedrooms..

(to Mrs. Gottlieb)

No, Mrs. Gottlieb, it's just an expression. The army was not invited.

(to HUDA)

I'll just be one more minute.

(to Mrs. Gottlieb)

Oh no, I didn't mean to imply that we wouldn't want the army. I just thought a little Nova, a little prayer. Yes, from the deli you suggested. Good, so we'll see you tonight.

(to HUDA)

We're still unpacking, but I'm only here for the next two weeks to help him settle in. I asked for someone who speaks English. You do speak English, don't you?

HUDA

Yes.

MAXINE

Good. What did you say your name was?

HUDA

I didn't. I think --

MAXINE

I am so sorry. I'm Maxine, Mr. Abramowitz's daughter. I'll give you the tour. It's a mess right now because I'm here with my daughter, but most of the time the second bedroom won't be used. You won't have to do much more than light dusting every once in a while in there.

HUDA

I think you've mistaken me for someone else.

MAXINE

You're not here for the job?

HUDA
No.

MAXINE
You weren't sent by the agency?

HUDA
No. I think maybe we should talk.

MAXINE
Then who are you?

HUDA
That is what I want to talk to you about.

MAXINE
I think you should go.

HUDA
But I haven't even told you* why I'm here.

MAXINE
I wasn't expecting anyone, and we're in mourning here. I have a lot of unpacking to do.

HUDA
*In mourning? Has something happened to Mr. Abramowitz?

MAXINE
My father? You know my father?

HUDA
No, but I wouldn't wish him any harm.

MAXINE
Are you threatening me?

HUDA
No. I am praying for his good health.

MAXINE
I'm sorry. He's fine. I'm not used to Israel. It's a very strange place for me. I've been jumpy. I mean, there are boys out there. Boys. Carrying automatic weapons. It's unnerving, you know?

Yes. I know.

HUDA

And it's late in the afternoon,

MAXINE

I know.

HUDA

and I feel so far behind.

MAXINE

It took me all day to get here.

HUDA

What did you say you came for?

MAXINE

I have not said. You haven't given me the chance.

HUDA

Please, I've been rude. Have a seat. Can I get you something? A drink?

MAXINE

Yes, water would be fine.

HUDA

(MAX is off and on with a tray of drinks.)

I have seltzer. I have lemonade. I have Orangina. Please. I have to set up the bar anyway.

MAXINE

Thank you.

HUDA

(A tray of hors d'oeuvres.)

Hummus?

MAXINE

You are kind.

HUDA

MAXINE

Not really. I ordered trays of this stuff.

HUDA

I eat when I am, how do you say? Like buzzing bees inside.

MAXINE

Nervous?

HUDA

Yes. I eat.

MAXINE

Please. Go ahead.

HUDA

And you?

MAXINE

I get nervous. All the time.

HUDA

Won't you eat?

MAXINE

Celery, they say, takes more energy to digest than it has calories, so it's like negative calories.

HUDA

So you struggle like I do.

MAXINE

Everything I do is a struggle.

HUDA

You understand.

MAXINE

Please, tell me why you've come.

HUDA

I am also in mourning. My mother has recently died.

MAXINE

I'm sorry. The hardest thing is losing a mother. We buried my mother yesterday outside Jerusalem. There is an old cemetery there. It was beautiful. Crowded, but beautiful.

HUDA

My mother would have loved to have been buried there. Near our home in Jerusalem.

MAXINE

You're from Jerusalem?

HUDA

As my family used to joke, I was made there. We are refugees.

MAXINE

I'm sorry again. So where do you live now?

HUDA

In Nablus. About an hour north of Jerusalem.

MAXINE

I've never been here before, and I don't really know the country.

HUDA

It's part of what is known as The Occupied Territories. We live in a refugee camp.

MAXINE

A camp?

HUDA

Since we lost our home in Jerusalem, we have no where else to go.

MAXINE

But that was decades ago.

HUDA

Yes, many years.

MAXINE

So you are from Nablus?

HUDA

My mother had a home in Jerusalem. One day, I will return there.

MAXINE

And this is why you've come?

HUDA

No. I'm not being clear. I'm. My name is Huda. Huda Sa'id. My mother was Hagar Barakat. She died recently. We have been mourning her. My daughter and I. We have been going through her things, and yesterday a letter came.

MAXINE

And?

HUDA

From an Israeli Peace Organization. B'tselem. One of the groups that works with the refugees to end the Occupation.

MAXINE

There are Israelis working for the refugees? Arab refugees?

HUDA

Palestinian refugees, yes. They document human rights violations. It is Israeli. B'tselem.

MAXINE

I don't speak Arabic or Hebrew.

HUDA

That is the name of the agency. B'tselem.

MAXINE

I wasn't raised with a lot of religion.

HUDA

They sent me a letter that your father sent to them trying to locate my mother.

MAXINE

My father knows your mother?

HUDA

I think it might be easier if I could speak with him. Perhaps he could join us?

MAXINE

Mrs. Sa'id?

HUDA

Yes.

MAXINE

It's very nice to meet you, but my father isn't here. If there's something in the letter he needs to know, I could give it to him.

HUDA

No, no, he sent the letter.* What I mean to say is --

MAXINE

*My father sent a letter to you?

HUDA

To my mother.* It seems that he knew her, and --

MAXINE

*But your mother has died. I'm so sorry.

MAXINE and HUDA

I'm not so sure I/you understand.

HUDA

Your father knew my mother.

MAXINE

What do you mean? They were friends?

HUDA

In '48.

MAXINE

In the middle of the war?

HUDA

I think more than friends.

MAXINE

What do you mean more than friends?

HUDA

I think your father knew my mother in the biblical sense.

MAXINE

Like I said, we're not that religious.

HUDA

What do you mean?

MAXINE

We don't take the Bible literally.

HUDA

I mean that I think I am the result of a union between my mother and your father.

MAXINE

Ah... No.

HUDA

I know it sounds impossible, but...

MAXINE

Mrs. Sa'id, maybe you'd better come back* another time,

HUDA

*I have always had a feeling that...

MAXINE

when my father is here perhaps, *and he can help you sort this out.

HUDA

It is difficult to explain. But when I read the letter...

MAXINE

What letter? Can I see this letter?

HUDA

I think it would be best to wait for Abraham.

MAXINE

"Abraham." I see.

HUDA

Please understand, I travelled six hours to get here.

MAXINE
Well he isn't here.

HUDA
Checkpoints. Searches.

MAXINE
You could come back tomorrow?

HUDA
It would be best if I could see your father.

MAXINE
I'm sorry.

HUDA
We live in a big prison.

MAXINE
We just arrived.

HUDA
It is easier to travel to the United States than to get here from Nablus.

MAXINE
I still feel the time difference.

HUDA
I didn't ask for this letter.

MAXINE
I think you should leave now.

HUDA
I don't know if it's true about him being my father.

MAXINE
It's impossible.

HUDA
But I need to speak to him directly.

MAXINE

It's ridiculous.

HUDA

I just need to meet him, to see for myself. If it's possible. If it could be true...

MAXINE

I don't believe it for a minute.

HUDA

I have a World War II medal I think he gave to my mother.

MAXINE

It doesn't prove anything.

HUDA

The letter proves something. He knew her. He loved her. Even now, he wants to see her.

MAXINE

Please.

HUDA

He has the right to know she's dead.

MAXINE

Of course, and I will tell him, after you leave.

HUDA

I have the right to see him, to talk with him. I came all this way.

MAXINE

I'm sure you're a very nice woman, and I'm sorry you came so far for nothing, but my father isn't here, in fact, he's left the country.

HUDA

He stepped out, didn't he? He went for a walk by the sea.

MAXINE

I have a lot of packing to do, now that he has decided to leave.

HUDA

If your father had another daughter, before you were born, would you not want to know her?

MAXINE

You don't know my father.

HUDA

Of course not. How could I? But wouldn't you want to meet a person who could be your sister, find out who she is, to have a sister?

MAXINE

You are mistaken.

HUDA

Doesn't your father have a right to get an answer to his letter?

MAXINE

You can write to him. I will give you his address in the states.

HUDA

I have this address. You would deny him this?

MAXINE

My father didn't have any other children.

HUDA

I was born in '49. In a refugee camp where I learned to whisper the name of my people. And still I thought I knew who I was. And now I discover that I might be related to you, that we might share a father. I grew up without a father. Many of us did. With the war. There were many losses. So it wasn't strange to grow up without a father. It was strange to grow up without a country. Finding a father, a possible father, is not the same as going home, but it's close. It feels like, like there is a bird inside me, poking at me with her beak, trying to fly, to break free.

MAXINE

Please go.

HUDA

It is the truth. You can not take it away from me. I know what it means to live my entire life pretending there is nothing wrong. Everything here is wrong. But you and I can make things right between us. Please don't send me away.

MAXINE

I'm not going to ask you again.

HUDA

You cannot erase me. I will prove to you that we are related. Your father will recognize me. He will tell you about his love for my mother. He will tell you the truth, whatever it was. Ask your father. Ask him about Hagar. Hagar Barakat. Ask your father about Hagar.

(HUDA exits. MAXINE stacks the unpacked books to make a wall — the other side of the books are stone, so we see MAXINE building a stone wall.)

scene 3

(MAXINE continues building the wall as ABRAHAM enters from a high path.)

ABRAHAM

Maxine? Maxine, you won't believe the day I've had! This city is the most amazing place I've ever been. I took a car to Jerusalem. I went to the Wailing Wall, not such a long ride, not as bad as going into Manhattan from Great Neck. I ran into two old friends, haven't seen them in I-don't-know-how-many-years. Since grade school. They are coming to *shiva*. And one of them, Marty Fine, now they call him Mordecai, so Mordy Fine, he has a son who lost his wife a few years ago, huh? Huh? A widower. On his way to shiva tonight. May Sarah rest happily knowing there is a widower coming to meet you. And maybe you'll stay. We'll find you a nice place, not far off, we can all be together. A family. Maybe he has children. Sure he does. The nations over which I'll preside. Uch, remember how upset I was, that I couldn't settle in the Old City and had to settle for this. This is everything.

MAXINE

Daddy...

ABRAHAM

Maxine...

MAXINE

I didn't come to Israel to find a husband.

ABRAHAM

You have something against love? Look at this place. He gave me a tour. Unbelievable. Everywhere we went there were flags. Jewish flags flying from the rooftops, the windows, and I was proud. I am proud. The sight of it all. God is here Maxine, and he loves us.

MAXINE

Where do you want the menorah?

ABRAHAM

You'll find a place for it. You should see the menorah at *Sharon's* house -- we went past -- it can be seen for two miles -- enormous -- and a flag there too!

What? You're doing a beautiful job. You're a wonderful woman Maxine. I am proud of you. It must not be easy to walk away from a marriage, but if you weren't happy, you have to move on. I understand. Or at least I am understanding. So?

MAXINE

Nothing. I unpacked.

ABRAHAM

Any mail come today?

MAXINE

Why do you ask?

ABRAHAM

I was out. Now I'm back. Thought I'd ask.

MAXINE

Are you expecting something in the mail?

ABRAHAM

Maybe.

MAXINE

Like what?

ABRAHAM

What is this? A game? Did we get any mail?

MAXINE

No, but... Dad?

ABRAHAM

If your mother could have been here to see all this... She would love this place. It's so alive. So in bloom. The flowers in the squares. The markets full of fruit. And bargains! She would be down there right now haggling to her heart's content.

MAXINE

Can I ask you something?

ABRAHAM

I can just picture her.

MAXINE

Then why didn't you ever come here with Mom?

ABRAHAM

I wish we did. We should have.

MAXINE

But was there any reason you might have avoided Israel?

ABRAHAM

Avoided it? Never. We were always so busy. With you. And working. Time goes by faster than you think, Maxine. When you're older, your days become minutes.

MAXINE

So when you were here fighting... You didn't... It wasn't... I know you never like to talk about the war, but I wanted to ask you if ...

ABRAHAM

I don't like to talk about the other war. This war, this was... Do you remember how you went away to college, and it was one thing to go and live in a dorm and pretend to be a grown-up, and then you graduated from college and we helped you find an apartment in the city with your friend, what was her name?

MAXINE

Adele.

ABRAHAM

Right. And then you were truly on your own. Even though you had spent four years in school. It was the next step that made you who you are.

MAXINE

I guess. So you're saying... ?

ABRAHAM

World War II, that was like college for me. I was a kid, and it grew me up. But when I came to Israel, joined the Haganah, I had my own regiment you know. I was in charge. Then I was a man.

(RACIE enters.)

RACIE

I hate this place.

MAXINE

Rachel.

RACIE

I do. I hate it here.

ABRAHAM

What happened?

MAXINE

Don't worry Dad. I'll talk to her.

ABRAHAM

What? I can't hear what she has to say? I want to know what happened.

RACIE

I was out. I walked around. I ended up in that big square.

ABRAHAM

Ben Yehuda?

RACIE

And there are soldiers. Everywhere. Groups of them. With guns. And soldiers alone. With guns. They sit on park benches and girls fawn all over them. At first I was like, well, I can deal with this, even though it made me nervous. You know, the guns. But then I saw regular people walking through the square. As if today was any other day. And they had guns. Big guns. And they were my age. Maybe even younger. They looked totally American. They looked like people I know. Wearing concert tshirts. Or tshirts with the American flag on them, and some of the tshirts said, "don't worry America, we've got your back". As if. And they were everywhere: in the cafes, on the benches, waiting for the bus. Oh oh oh and there was this one girl, and her pocketbook was one of those canvas bags painted to look like the American flag, and she was sitting on a park bench with her flag-bag leaning up against this huge gun. The gun wasn't even attached to anyone. I mean, most of them keep their guns slung over their shoulders. But this gun. I could have probably gone right up to the bench and picked it up and walked away with it. I almost did. I thought of it. And she wouldn't have noticed, and either would the soldier whose gun it was, because they were sitting there completely oblivious in the middle of the square making out. Making out. Right next to the gun and her stupid American flag-bag.

MAXINE

So this is why you're upset?

ABRAHAM
I understand Maxine.

MAXINE
Because you saw guns?

ABRAHAM
She's a nice American girl.* She's not used to guns.

RACIE
*Don't call me nice!

MAXINE
Racie, the Israelis have a right to defend themselves.

RACIE
Against what?

ABRAHAM
They are big guns. M-16s.

MAXINE
We're surrounded by Arabs here.

ABRAHAM
She was scared that's all.

RACIE
I wasn't scared. I'm offended.

ABRAHAM
You'll get used to it.

RACIE
I don't want to get used to it. I don't understand why it's okay to live in a world that needs guns.
I thought this was supposed to be a safe place, a homeland.

MAXINE
The guns make it safe.

RACIE
I don't feel safe.

MAXINE

I feel much better knowing there are people walking around who could defend us if we need it.

RACIE

But they could just go off.

ABRAHAM

But you agree that we have the right to protect ourselves, yes?

RACIE

Protect ourselves from what?

MAXINE

Racie, don't be like this.

ABRAHAM

Leave her alone Maxine. She's young. She doesn't understand.

RACIE

I do so understand. I was told this was a special place.

ABRAHAM

The promised land.

RACIE

And what does it promise?

ABRAHAM

When we landed in the plane after the sun came up over Israel, when they played Hatikva, I felt as if I could cry for happiness. The first time I came here, in '46, it was still Palestine. And even when it was declared to be Israel, it didn't feel the way it did when we got off that plane, and I knelt down and kissed the ground,* I knew I had finally come home.

RACIE

*Gross.

MAXINE

Racie...

RACIE

You really believe that Grandpa?

ABRAHAM

I may have spent most of my life in America, but this is my land. I fought for it, I won it fair and square.

RACIE

Seems like we're still fighting for it.

MAXINE

And we have every right to keep fighting.

RACIE

So what does it promise?

ABRAHAM

The freedom to be who you are. Without explanation. No apologies. To be proud of who you are.

RACIE

So I can walk outside and scream at the top of my lungs, "hello Israel! I am a LESBIAN!" ...?

MAXINE

Rachel!

RACIE

Will Israel embrace me?

ABRAHAM

Oy guvult.

RACIE

Well?

ABRAHAM

You're a Jew. Whatever else you are, you don't even know yet*, but from the moment you were a twinkle in your mother's eye, you were a Jew. You can be proud of being a Jew. **

RACIE

*I don't know yet? **So you think that Judaism is a biological imperative and sexual orientation is only a choice?

MAXINE

Rachel, that's enough.

RACIE

Okay, then what's with all the Jewish flags? Why do we need to hang flags everywhere? Why do we have to keep announcing ourselves?

MAXINE

You of all people should be able to understand the impulse to want to announce yourself.

RACIE

That's different. People don't understand lesbians. People despise us. There are hate crimes.
(realizing the similarities)

Oh.

MAXINE

Oh? That's all you have to say for yourself? You could apologize to your grandfather.

ABRAHAM

She doesn't have to apologize to me. She's learning. That's what family discussion should be about, right?

MAXINE

Racie, can you give me a hand in the kitchen?

ABRAHAM

Leave her alone, Maxine. I'm trying to make a point here.

MAXINE

Fine.

(MAX exits.)

ABRAHAM

You think I don't know what's going on in the world, but I know. My life isn't over yet, meshuguh. You are going into politics I hope.

RACIE

I haven't decided.

ABRAHAM

Good. Take your time.

RACIE

Well? Aren't you going to answer my question?

ABRAHAM

Which question? The one about being a lesbian? Or the one about why isn't this a safe place?

RACIE

Both.

ABRAHAM

First I have to ask you some questions. Okay?

RACIE

Okay.

ABRAHAM

When you interviewed for that job you had last summer as a camp counselor in Maine, did you tell then, "hello, I'm a lesbian?"

RACIE

No, but --

ABRAHAM

Ah, ah, I'm asking the questions here. A simple yes or no will please the court.

RACIE

I didn't know I was on trial here.

ABRAHAM

It's a nice trial -- you get to be the jury.

RACIE

I'll try to be careful not to hang myself.

ABRAHAM

Good. Second question: is your what-did-you-call-it? your "sexual orientation" written on your face or on your birth certificate?

RACIE

No.

ABRAHAM

Imagine for a moment that it is.

RACIE

Huh?

ABRAHAM

Imagine a world, or a place in this world, where there is written, stamped perhaps, on your face, or tattooed say, on your arm, so it can be seen, the way a schwartzeh's* skin is seen, the way a

RACIE

*Grandpa, we don't say that!

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Jewish man is supposed to have a bigger nose, imagine that what you say you are is written on your face.

RACIE

But it's not.

ABRAHAM

But imagine it is. Or imagine it's part of your name, like Lipschitz, a Jewish name if there ever was one.

RACIE

Okay, I'm imagining.

ABRAHAM

Would you want to live in a place that recognizes you as good, or would you want to live in a place where they consider you to be bad, someone to laugh at, or worse, something they mistrust, follow through the department stores, detain on the corner for small infractions or imagined infractions, or worse, an object they hate and want to destroy?

RACIE

Do you really want me to answer you?

ABRAHAM

Yes.

RACIE

Okay, I see your point.

ABRAHAM

For the record.

RACIE

I would rather live in a place that accepts who I am.

ABRAHAM

Thank you.

RACIE

But that doesn't mean I don't believe it would be better to work in a world that is unsure of who I am and to try to prove to them that I am as individual and as upright as I prove myself to be so that they can decide for themselves what a lesbian is, by the example I set.

ABRAHAM

After even half a lifetime, setting examples gets tiresome. And it's dangerous. It can wear you down. And this is why, after a long and happy life in the U.S. of A., land of the free, home of the brave, after working and paying taxes there and doing exactly as you said, I decided it was time, for me -- I'm not asking you to stay, only visit -- it is time for me to live as a citizen, to make aliyah and to dedicate the rest of my days to the Jewish State.

(ABRAHAM starts to dance and sing.)

ABRAHAM

Oh-oh say shalom bimromah, hoo yah say shalom aleinu, vi'al kol Yis'ra'el, v'imru, v'imru amein.

(MAX enters.)

RACIE

Grandpa's showing me how to dance like a lesbian.

MAXINE

Is she bothering you?

ABRAHAM

She is the apple of my eye, whatever she thinks she is.

MAXINE

Racie, try not to --

ABRAHAM

What? She's helping me. She makes me think about everything I say. She makes me defend my choice to live here, and that makes me feel more... dug in to the place. Makes me feel as if this really is my home. Not just some idea I dreamt up however many years ago. So don't stick your nose in Maxine. We were perfectly fine without you, weren't we?

MAXINE

I was alone here all afternoon, and neither of you seem to realize just how exposed we are. There are people, I don't know what they want, maybe they're trying to infiltrate Israel*, and they'll do, I don't know, maybe anything or just about anything, to get in here.

ABRAHAM

*What?

MAXINE (cont'd)

People have records of who you are Dad.* They know you fought in the war here, in '48, and

ABRAHAM

What are you talking about?

MAXINE (cont'd)

they're looking for you*. And I don't know how safe this place is with all the guns in the street,

ABRAHAM

*Wait a minute. Who is looking for me?

MAXINE (cont'd)

but maybe we should think about a gun for the condo. Maybe we should think about that.

ABRAHAM

I want to hear from the beginning a full account of what went on here today in my absence.

MAXINE

People*. Arabs. They came here today.

ABRAHAM

*What people?

MAXINE

Said they knew you, wanted to speak to you.

ABRAHAM

How many people?

MAXINE

They made claims. I think the whole thing is a scam.

ABRAHAM

What claims?

MAXINE

Probably something that happens all the time to unsuspecting newcomers. Americans who never think a minute about their own safety. You know, people like us, who take things for granted. Well, I don't know this place. I don't know what people want from us. I don't know how they got your name or how they know you live here, but it isn't safe. I won't be here to guard this place every day. I won't be here to help you. And I don't know what to do about it.

ABRAHAM

Why didn't you say something?

MAXINE

I am saying something. I'm saying something.

ABRAHAM

Okay, slow down. Who was here?

MAXINE

A woman.

ABRAHAM

You said people.

MAXINE

Okay, a woman*. An Arab woman.

ABRAHAM

*Well that sounds threatening.

MAXINE

If you're going to make fun of me --

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry. Tell me the whole thing, beginning to end.

MAXINE

Racie, will you excuse us a minute?

RACIE

Why?

MAXINE

Because this is private.

RACIE

But I want to hear.

ABRAHAM

Oh let her stay Maxine.

MAXINE

I'm asking you nicely.

RACIE

It's about our safety, you already said, and I deserve to know what's going on around here. I'm not a baby.

ABRAHAM

I don't see what the problem is Maxine.

MAXINE

It was for your benefit I was asking her to leave.

ABRAHAM

What? I have something to hide from her?

MAXINE

I don't know. Maybe you do.

ABRAHAM

Sit. Listen. Secrets I don't got.

MAXINE

Fine. This woman, an Arab woman, she gave me her name, but I'm sure it was false. Huda something or other*. They wouldn't have even let her upstairs except I had mentioned I was expecting someone to the front desk, because I was interviewing people to find you some help, and I only let her in because... **

ABRAHAM

*Huda? You're sure it was Huda? ** Maxine, what was her name?

MAXINE

I don't remember.

ABRAHAM

How old a woman?

MAXINE

I don't know. My age, only older.

ABRAHAM

Ten years older. Twenty years, thirty?

MAXINE

Daddy, she was around my age. A little older. What? You think you know her?

ABRAHAM

It's possible.

MAXINE

How? How would you know her?

ABRAHAM

What did she want Maxine?

MAXINE

She wanted to speak with you. She had some kind of letter*, probably forged, I didn't read it, she said it was private, that you'd written to her mother.

ABRAHAM

*A letter? She had a letter? Didn't I ask you earlier if there was any mail?

MAXINE

This wasn't mail written to you. This was a letter you'd written to someone else.

ABRAHAM

This was the answer to my letter. Hagar.

MAXINE

Yes, that was the name... You know her?

ABRAHAM

Hagar Barakat.

MAXINE

Daddy?

ABRAHAM

What? It's a crime to know a person? A Palestinian person?

MAXINE

This woman threatened me. She said you were her father.

ABRAHAM

Well maybe I am.

RACIE

Whoa! This is really great!

MAXINE

Daddy, I am not kidding around.

ABRAHAM

Let me get this straight. Did she ask for money?

MAXINE

No.

ABRAHAM

Did she take the television set?

MAXINE

No. Why are you --

ABRAHAM

Did she hold a knife to your throat?

MAXINE

No, but -- Don't you see? If you're her father, then she has some kind of claim, to the land, she's half-Jewish, she's running a scam. It's clearly something these people do with people like us.

RACIE

What do you mean "these people"?

MAXINE

Racie, if you're going to sit here, then don't interrupt.

ABRAHAM

Anything is possible Maxine.

MAXINE

What's possible?

ABRAHAM

This is the land of the covenant.

MAXINE

It's a scam.

ABRAHAM

Maybe, but it's also possible she's my daughter. Does she look like me?

MAXINE

Daddy, don't be ridiculous! Of course she's not your daughter. She's an Arab. And she's much too old, probably fifty.

ABRAHAM

So now she's older? A moment ago, you said --

MAXINE

And you don't have any other children.* I can't even believe you would consider it. It's -- It's --

ABRAHAM

Who says I don't have any other children? You don't know that. I am Abraham, father of nations. Nations, Maxine. I should have children coming out of my eyeballs by now.

RACIE

Pretty cool if you ask me.

MAXINE

Ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

ABRAHAM

But it is possible.

MAXINE

Possible? What is possible? I was married for twenty years, and now I'm not. My baby girl* is eighteen and angry and about to leave for college. My father leaves home and moves to Israel. Is it possible I'll never hear my own mother's voice again? How will I mourn her when her grave is in this strange place? Is it possible that Israel feels so strange to me, a Jew? What kind of Jew does that make me?

RACIE

*Mom...

ABRAHAM

All good questions with difficult answers, but it is definitely possible that I have children you never heard of, children I've been praying for, children I've waited to discover all these years.

(Phone rings.)

MAXINE

Thank you, Father of Nations. Very comforting.

(Phone rings. Knock on the door. Doorbell.)

RACIE

(on phone)

Hello? * Okay. Send him up.

(to ABRAHAM)

The rabbi's downstairs.

MAXINE

*I'll get that.

(MAXINE exits to the door.)

ABRAHAM

Our last night of shiva. I'll miss it. I miss you Sarah.

RACIE

I love you Grandpa, even if you have other children.

ABRAHAM

I love you too Rachel. Even if you end up a lesbian.

(MAXINE enters.)

MAXINE

The Gottliebs from 7J are here.

ABRAHAM

You just left them out there? In the foyer? Go greet them Rachel.

(RACIE exits.)

RACIE

(off)

Hello Mr and Mrs Gottlieb.

ABRAHAM

Change into something nice Maxine. Marty Fine's son'll be here any minute.

MAXINE

I don't care about Marty Fine's son.

ABRAHAM

Do something with yourself Maxine. Please.

(exiting to foyer)

Hello neighbors! Welcome, please! Come in, come in.

MAXINE

There's a woman chasing after me. A bird beats in her chest.

scene 4

(MAXINE is startled to see HUDA and AMAL.)

HUDA

We have come to see Abraham.

MAXINE

He isn't here.

HUDA

Then we will wait for him to return.

MAXINE

He isn't coming back.

HUDA

We will wait anyway.

MAXINE

I'll call the police.

HUDA

No. You won't.

MAXINE

I won't? You know I won't?

HUDA

Yesterday when you asked your father about my mother, he told you the truth.

MAXINE

I didn't ask.

HUDA

Then call the police. Do you know what they will do to us?

MAXINE

What do you want?

HUDA

I want to meet Abraham.

MAXINE

You have the wrong man.

HUDA

I want to know the man who loved my mother.

MAXINE

I don't know who that is.

HUDA

I want to meet my father.

MAXINE

I don't know your father.

HUDA

Then I will wait for him. I want to introduce him to my daughter.

MAXINE

My father is not your father.

HUDA

I want to know him. I want to know how this came to be.

MAXINE

You've made a mistake.

HUDA

I want to understand what part of him is related to me.

MAXINE

How can you be related? You have nothing in common.

HUDA

I want to know what the possibilities are for the future.

MAXINE

You have no future here. This is not about your future.

HUDA

Already this has changed my life. I am standing here in Tel Aviv with my daughter.

MAXINE

Obviously it's not impossible for you to get here. You came yesterday. You are not a prisoner.

HUDA

You don't know what it is to live under Closure. There is a curfew, soldiers, checkpoints, and it is a very, very long walk.

MAXINE

You walked here?

HUDA

We started on a bus, but there were many places we had to stop and walk. We risked our lives to come here.

AMAL

It wasn't so terrible. Knowing our purpose, I think we floated.

HUDA

This is my daughter, Amal.

MAXINE

I'm sorry Amal, but your mother is deluded. My father is not the man she is looking for. I wish you would go.

AMAL

I work in a hospital. Most of our patients are children. Most of them are wounded in the Intifahda, and --

MAXINE

This has nothing to do with me.

HUDA

If you truly doubted us, you wouldn't mind if we stayed. You would feel secure knowing your father would send us away in the end. You wouldn't feel so threatened.

MAXINE

I don't have to explain myself to you.

HUDA

I won't ask you to. Let's go, Amal.

(HUDA and AMAL move to an upstage path.
MAXINE hugs herself and exits.)

AMAL

You're not giving up are you?

HUDA

Who said anything about giving up. Do we have any more water?

(AMAL hands HUDA the water in an old army canteen and HUDA sits on the path to rest. ABRAHAM enters from an opposite high path. HE sees AMAL standing -- it may seem to him that she is alone -- on the opposite path, lower. AMAL, wearing the embroidered hijab that was Hagar's, drinks from the canteen.)

ABRAHAM

Hagar. The first time I laid eyes on you, before I even knew your name, you were standing in the market with your sisters. Looking at cloth for a dress. You picked one out, but the price was too high. You argued with the merchant. You even tried to flirt with him a little which made your sisters laugh and blush. I remember thinking I would just walk over and offer to buy it for you, but as soon as I got close, close enough for you to feel my eyes, you dropped the cloth and ran off with your sisters. But I found you. I followed the maze of the high Old City walls. I travelled into the quarters I didn't know at all until I found yours. You wore that same embroidered scarf. You made it yourself. And you were thirsty. You drank from my canteen. You drank and you drank and you said the water was sweet from my well.

(RACIE enters and throws her hands over ABRAHAM's eyes. AMAL sits down with HUDA effectively vanishing from ABRAHAM's sight.)

RACIE

Grandpa, guess who?

ABRAHAM

Sssh! She was just here.

RACIE

Who? Where?

(ABRAHAM begins to move down the path to find AMAL. RACIE follows.)

RACIE

Is this a game?

(ABRAHAM moves across from HUDA and AMAL. RACIE goes to the bottom of the path and climbs back up toward HUDA and AMAL who rise when they see her.)

RACIE

Hi!

HUDA

Hello.

ABRAHAM

Oh, I didn't mean to disturb you. I thought you were -- someone else.

ABRAHAM

I thought I saw...

AMAL

We've been waiting for a man who lives in this building. Abraham Abramowitz. Perhaps you know him?

ABRAHAM

Yes, I know him.

RACIE

But that's --

ABRAHAM

You have something to discuss with him?

RACIE

But Grandpa...

ABRAHAM

Some business?

HUDA

It's a personal matter. We will wait until he returns.

ABRAHAM

You look as if you have waited a long time already.

AMAL

We don't mind.

HUDA

We've come a long way. You are an American.

ABRAHAM

Yes, I am. And where are you from?

HUDA

I was born in a refugee camp. In '49. My family is from Jerusalem, the Old City.

ABRAHAM

It isn't easy, is it? Life is filled with strange turns. I was a soldier in '48. I remember when we lost the Old City.

(to AMAL)

And who made your beautiful head scarf?

AMAL

It was my grandmother's.

ABRAHAM

Don't be shy. I'm a very nice man for an American.

AMAL

I was only thinking of my grandmother. We buried her a few days ago.

ABRAHAM

Hagar. Hagar Barakat. It is good you wear her scarf. You keep her alive this way.

HUDA

Abraham.

ABRAHAM

It's a terrible thing to lose a mother, but now you have a father. You are born again in Tel Aviv. Let me look at you. Strong. Determined. With your mother's eyes. What is your name?

HUDA

Huda. Huda Sa'id.

ABRAHAM

Huda. Don't cry. There's nothing to cry about now.

HUDA

Only happiness. Here is your letter, and I think this belonged to you as well.

ABRAHAM

My war medal?

HUDA

You can take it as proof.

ABRAHAM

I don't need proof. I recognized you right away. And, and --

HUDA

My daughter, Amal.

ABRAHAM

Amal. Yes. In Hagar's scarf. There is no mistaking you. I always knew this day would come. Amal. Huda! Amal! Welcome to my home. We must celebrate. A feast! Please come in, come in. What's wrong. Ah, Rachel, this is my Rachel, my granddaughter everyone likes to call Racie. Racie, Amal. Cousins! Racie, Huda, your aunt! Huda, Racie, your niece! A celebration! A feast! My God has kept his promise! What is it?

HUDA

We already met your daughter.

RACIE

You'd better go in and talk to Mom, Grandpa.

HUDA

I didn't mean to upset her, but ...

ABRAHAM

(crossing the threshold into the condo and exiting)

Maxine? Maxine!

RACIE

She'll get over it. She's only tough on the outside.

AMAL

Like the sah-bear. We used it to mark property lines around our homes and to keep the goats out of our yards. Once you plant a cactus, it always grows back no matter what. Israelis use the word the same way we do: for people who are hard on the outside and soft on the inside. But in Arabic it means patience. Like the cactus, we will always return.

(MAXINE and ABRAHAM enter inside the condo.)

MAXINE

Absolutely not!

ABRAHAM

You're being ridiculous.

MAXINE

I'm the only one thinking of the family here.

ABRAHAM

They are family.

MAXINE

They're Arabs.

ABRAHAM

So?

MAXINE

This is Israel, Dad. There's a war going on.

ABRAHAM

You think everyone who's an Arab is an enemy?

MAXINE

You want to take chances with your life, go ahead. But not with mine, not with my daughter.

ABRAHAM

You have no faith in people.

MAXINE

You don't even know if they're really related.

ABRAHAM

I know my own flesh and blood. They are family!

MAXINE

Mom's dead ten minutes, and you're ready to adopt a whole new family?

ABRAHAM

This happened long before I married your mother.

MAXINE

Whenever it happened, you can't expect me to be happy about it.

ABRAHAM

The least you can do is help me serve them a nice meal. They came all this way.

MAXINE

There's nothing to serve.

ABRAHAM

There's plenty of food in there. I'm asking them in. Go make a nice table.

(MAXINE exits.)

ABRAHAM

Thank you God.

(ABRAHAM blows a big kiss to God and then moves toward the threshold where HUDA, AMAL and RACIE are waiting.)

ABRAHAM

Come in, come in. A feast is in the making. Would you like something to drink? A little iced tea? A Coca-cola?

HUDA

Thank you.

ABRAHAM

Sit. Be comfortable. Relax.

HUDA

Please don't go to any trouble.

ABRAHAM

No trouble at all. Racie, serve drinks.

AMAL

I can help.

RACIE

It's okay, I'll be right back.

ABRAHAM

So tell me everything. I want to hear all about you and and you and your mother. I used to worry how she survived the war. But she must have, to look at the two of you, and I wanted to help her, the whole family really, you must know that. But there was nothing I could do. And I never realized there was a... I didn't know we bore any fruit, so to speak, eh? So please, tell me.

HUDA

I don't know where to begin.

(RACIE enters with drinks for everyone.)

ABRAHAM

Thank you Racie.

HUDA

Thank you.

AMAL

Thank you.

ABRAHAM

So?

HUDA

My mother's story? Amal, why don't you start? You know it as well as I do.

ABRAHAM

Good, yes, it's very important to be able to tell these things. A sense of history. Come on Racie, have a seat.

AMAL

She always thought she would be able to return. She always said she would never have left if she had known she would not be able to return. She left everything behind. The house was furnished.

ABRAHAM

Yes, I remember the house.

AMAL

The fields were full of fruit.

ABRAHAM

They had a house in Jerusalem, in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and their fields were just north of there from Herod's Gate. Your father, I mean, her father, your great-grandfather, he took me out to see them. Orchards and flowers, roses. There were almond trees and olive trees.

AMAL

She was married the day the British left.

ABRAHAM

May 14th. I was mobilized the week before. I had warned them. I tried to get them to leave before the fighting started, but they refused. And she wouldn't speak to me before I left. Every time I stopped by she would cry and run away. I thought it was the war, and the fact of her upcoming marriage, but she must have known she was pregnant by then. When were you born?

HUDA

In your calendar? January, 1949.

ABRAHAM

I wish she had told me.

AMAL

The wedding was made in haste as the war began. Her wedding night spent on the move. They slept in caves and walked all the way to Gaza where he put her on a boat. It cost three and a half months of his salary. It was a small boat on the sea for nine days with one rower who constantly asked them all to pray.

HUDA

She saw only heaven and sea.

AMAL

She had nothing to eat, and she was very sick.

HUDA

Sick with me, of course. And when she got to the shores of Beirut, she kissed the soil.

AMAL

She was trying to get to the West Bank where my grandfather, I mean her husband, had a cousin who could look after her while the fighting went on. But her purse was stolen and she ended up in a refugee camp.

HUDA

Where I was born.

AMAL

Yes, and after a while she was able to find someone to take her by car to Damascus,

HUDA

and after Damascus, she went to Amman, and...

AMAL

and after Amman finally to Nablus.

HUDA

I was six years old by then.

AMAL

The cousin's house in Nablus was very crowded, so they went to live in the refugee camp.

HUDA

If I had looked more like my father, I mean the man my mother married, or if I had been a boy, maybe his cousins might have been kinder to us.

AMAL

Nana was very angry when she first went to the market and saw the relief workers handing out food. She asked them, "why give us flour? why give us butter?"

AMAL and HUDA

"Why not let us return to our homes where we can make these things for ourselves?"

HUDA

She always said there was more than enough food sitting at home,

AMAL

as if nothing had spoiled from the day that she left.

HUDA

She would describe the persimmon ripe and ready in a crystal bowl on the dining room table.

ABRAHAM

I remember that bowl.

(MAXINE enters with a platter of appetizers. SHE stands at the edge listening.)

AMAL

As if she could go there and eat from it. But every day is worse than the day before.

HUDA

More houses destroyed.

AMAL

More refugees created.

HUDA

More fruit trees cut down.

AMAL

To build settlements.

HUDA

To swallow more land.

AMAL

But peace is for everyone.

HUDA

We need to recognize each other.

AMAL

She was always hoping we would be able to return.

HUDA

We are still hoping for that today.

(MAXINE enters with food.)

MAXINE

Well, here it is! Right, Dad? As soon as Racie and I clear out, you can have full run of the place.

ABRAHAM

They are certainly welcome. Maxine, this is Huda and her daughter, Amal. Huda, Amal -- Maxine.

HUDA

It's very nice to meet you.

AMAL

Thank you for your hospitality.

MAXINE

Home at last?

HUDA

That's not what we meant.

MAXINE

Oh? I thought I heard you say you were hoping to return.

HUDA

Yes, of course we are, but as a people.

MAXINE

But doesn't that happen one step at a time? You move back and then someone else and then someone else until the whole country's full of you?

ABRAHAM

Maxine, that's enough.

RACIE

I understand. It's like tokenism. You don't want to be the only ones allowed in. You want to come as a group.

AMAL

Yes.

HUDA

We didn't come here to take over your house.

AMAL

We only came to meet you, to introduce ourselves. And only because we got your letter.

HUDA

We thought we might find a sense of kinship

MAXINE

Kinship?

AMAL

This is very good hummus. The way I like to make it, with the olives mixed right in.

MAXINE

It's store bought. I didn't make it.

ABRAHAM

Your story reminds me of my own grandmother's journey out of Russia. Although she didn't take a rowboat. I guess you see me as the equivalent of a Cossack.

HUDA

It's not your fault you were born to one side and we the other.

ABRAHAM

But you blame the Israelis, and I was fighting with the Israelis when you were forced to leave. The story goes that Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael into the desert.

AMAL

In our version, Abraham sends Sara and Isaac out -- everything's reversed.

HUDA

But whoever is cast out is provided with a well and a nation of her own.

MAXINE

But of course you don't believe that. Just because his name is Abraham and your mother's name was Hagar --

RACIE

And Grandma's name was Sara, don't forget that.

HUDA

I am not trying to say that we are those people. I wasn't trying to say that at all.

ABRAHAM

But we are those people.

MAXINE

My father plays games. Whatever our names are, we are not fundamentalists. We do not interpret anything literally.

ABRAHAM

It isn't fundamental. It's the way things are.

MAXINE

And who am I? Isaac? You want to cut my throat on an altar?

ABRAHAM

Maxine, enough!

RACIE

So you don't want to live here with us?

MAXINE

Of course not. They want to live here without us.

ABRAHAM

I am asking you to be kind.

MAXINE

Then you be kind to me. How am I supposed to understand this? I'm supposed to leave here in a week and go thousands of miles away. You're a new widower. I can't even anticipate your needs in this country much less meet them, and suddenly you're embracing a brand new daughter from an entirely different culture? How am I supposed to be kind?

ABRAHAM

Because you are loved. By me, by your mother. And we raised you to be kind, we expect you to be kind, especially now. And what could be better than for me to find a daughter in a different country, a sister and a niece for you, family for Rachel, someone we can learn from, someone we can share with. Please Maxine. Please Huda, tell me more.

HUDA

There is an old Arabic saying that goes, sometimes it is better to only speak of camels.

MAXINE

You have camels?

HUDA

That is not what I meant.

AMAL

I don't mean any disrespect, but almost everything in our lives has at least something to do with politics.

MAXINE

You see!

ABRAHAM

But you're an attractive young woman. Don't you ever go out dancing?

AMAL

Dancing is considered an expression of identity. So it's not allowed. A few years ago we had a cultural center that used to give dances, but the Israelis insisted it was a front for political activity, so they closed it down.

MAXINE

Was it a front?

AMAL

Only if you consider dancing political.

HUDA

There is the question as to whether or not we as Palestinians have our own culture. If the Israelis can prove that we are the same as any of the other Arabs, then we could be absorbed into another nation. But we do have our own culture, and dancing is a part of it. So dancing is an expression of who we are, separate from Jordanians or Egyptians. They think that if we are not allowed to dance, we will forget our culture and become disconnected from who we are, that they will be able to break us up, force us to leave. It's a long story...

MAXINE

So there are no camels to discuss. Why don't you tell us why you think my father is your father?

HUDA

It is only speculation. I have no proof.

ABRAHAM

It's a feeling* Maxine. Don't you have cooking to do?

MAXINE

*A feeling?

ABRAHAM

Leave it alone Maxine.

MAXINE

When is your birthday?

ABRAHAM

We've already discussed that, and her birthday, if you must know, makes her my daughter as much if not more than any feeling I have for her or she for me. Are you satisfied Maxine?

HUDA

This isn't the easiest thing to imagine. If my mother was still alive, it would bring her great shame.

ABRAHAM

There was nothing shameful in it at the time, I assure you. I introduced myself to your family. I became friendly with your father.

HUDA

I don't mean to imply that she was ashamed of you, it's just that our culture doesn't accept this sort of thing so easily.

ABRAHAM

If I had known she was pregnant, I would have stayed.

HUDA

I am sure this is why she never mentioned it to me. She was an honorable woman.

MAXINE

But you believe your honorable mother screwed my father* out of wedlock and conceived a child. An American soldier in the Haganah throwing your family out of their home?

ABRAHAM

*Maxine, that's enough!

MAXINE

What? You want to call it something else? Go right ahead. It sounds like you raped her. Is that what you want people to think?

ABRAHAM

We were in love.

MAXINE

Mrs. Sa'id, I don't mean to offend you, and maybe I'm misinformed, but I thought in your culture a family would stone a woman to death for sex out of marriage, any kind of sex.

HUDA

In the middle of the war, people have other things to worry about.

ABRAHAM

I was a friend of the family. I knew Hagar's father.

HUDA

The man I thought was my father was killed in the fighting. So I never had a father.

ABRAHAM

Until now.

MAXINE

It must be very hard to live without a father. But that doesn't mean you can claim mine.

ABRAHAM

Maxine, it was a different world. I was living on a Kibbutz. We were farming the land. We had Palestinian neighbors. We made friends.

MAXINE

But I thought you were in the Haganah.

ABRAHAM

Think Maxine! I was in Tunis at the end of World War II. I was young. I knew if I went back to Flushing, I'd marry Sara and we'd have children. And I'd be working to support them. I had never been to Palestine -- that's what we called it then. So I went. I found a place on a kibbutz not far outside Jerusalem. It was beautiful. From '45 until '47 I was just an American man who had fought in the war. I fell in love, and yes, I fell harder maybe because her name was Hagar. I believed we were meant for each other. It was easy to imagine we were destined to be together. She believed it along with me. We thought our love would bring our people together. Maybe it still can.

HUDA

When I would ask my mother about my father, sometimes she would tell me about a man from Nablus who she didn't know very well. There was no wedding photo. I could tell she didn't want to talk about him. But then there were other times when she would smile and stare into my

HUDA (cont'd)

face so hard, and she would tell me about my father with such a soft expression on her face. He was a man she loved. Of course she never said he wasn't the man she married.

ABRAHAM

Thank you.

MAXINE

Flattery might get you anywhere with him, but it doesn't fly with me.

HUDA

I don't know how to explain what I feel, what I've felt most of my life: that my father was not my father, that my real father would arrive one day from somewhere else, quite unexpected. A man I could admire. A man I might love.

MAXINE

Wanting doesn't make it so.

ABRAHAM

That's enough. Is this how it is with two? Must there always be such fighting?

RACIE

They could get a paternity test Mom. There are ways to figure these things out, you know.

ABRAHAM

If she says she's my daughter, she's my daughter. And I won't hear any more talk about it.

MAXINE

You're a fool.

ABRAHAM

Maxine, apologize. Huda and Amal did not come here to be insulted.

HUDA

It's all right.

ABRAHAM

No, it's not all right.

RACIE

Mom, just apologize.

MAXINE

Okay, I'm sorry. It's a lot to take in all of a sudden.

ABRAHAM

Please don't go.

HUDA

Thank you, but --

ABRAHAM

I only want to make things better for you. I know you must have suffered terribly all these years, and we should be more considerate of your situation. Maxine is not herself these days. She's going through a divorce. Her mother just died.

MAXINE

He's right. I am sorry. I'll put out the food.

(MAXINE exits.)

ABRAHAM

And you, Huda. What about you? Your life?

HUDA

I married. I had six children.

ABRAHAM

Six children! This is wonderful!

HUDA

Five boys and Amal.

ABRAHAM

Five boys! Did you hear that Racie, you have five more cousins.

RACIE

I look forward to meeting them.

ABRAHAM

And your husband, what does he do?

(HUDA turns away.)

AMAL

He died. Four years ago.

ABRAHAM

I'm so sorry.

AMAL

He was a farmer. He had a truck to take our produce to the market. It was a small flatbed truck with high wooden fencing to hold everything. When the Intifahda started, the shih-**bahb** used to hide in the back of the truck and throw stones at the soldiers. My father put a lock on the truck, but they would climb in anyway. First the soldiers tore up the back, so he made a new one. Then one night he heard them destroying the back of the truck again. He went to ask them to stop, and they arrested him for being outside during curfew. He was in jail for six months. When he got out, he started again to rebuild the back of the truck. Then one night he heard the soldiers. This time he was afraid to go outside. He didn't want to be arrested. He could hear them destroying his truck. They started to call his name. They pounded on our door demanding he come out, but he was afraid. Then they set his truck on fire. When he saw the flames he went out. And they shot him.

ABRAHAM

I don't know what to say. I'm very sorry.

RACIE

(to AMAL)

How can you stand it? This is how Israeli soldiers act? They taunt and jail and kill and —

(to ABRAHAM)

I told you I hated it here!

MAXINE

Our feast is ready.

HUDA

We appreciate you going to all this trouble for us.

AMAL

Thank you. I'm sure we'll enjoy it.

RACIE

Don't be too nice to her. It makes her suspicious.

ABRAHAM

Well then, shall we all go in to the feast?

HUDA

Only if you all promise to come to Nablus so that we can return your hospitality.

ABRAHAM

Of course we will come. We will come to Nablus!

(RACIE leads HUDA and AMAL off.)

MAXINE
You can't be serious.

ABRAHAM
Why not?

MAXINE
It isn't safe.

ABRAHAM
Was it safe for them to come to us?

MAXINE
That's not the point.

ABRAHAM
It's only fair we go and pay our respects.

MAXINE
I don't think any of this is fair.

ABRAHAM
We will go and that is final.

MAXINE
To the West Bank? The Occupied Territories? Are you out of your mind?

ABRAHAM
We're American Citizens, Maxine.

MAXINE
You are making aliyah.

ABRAHAM
I still have my American passport.

MAXINE
Last I heard, they weren't bullet-proof.

ABRAHAM
Stones, Maxine. It's a bunch of kids throwing stones.

MAXINE

You think the Israelis will protect us?

ABRAHAM

We'll visit Hagar's grave. Meet my grandsons. Grandsons, Maxine, did you hear? I have five grandsons!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

Scene 1

(At Rise: MAXINE , RACIE and ABRAHAM stand at a checkpoint.)

MAXINE

This is ridiculous.

RACIE

You think everything is ridiculous.

OFFSTAGE SOLDIER ON BULLHORN IN HEBREW

<<Stand in line!>>

MAXINE

What is he saying?

ABRAHAM

He wants us to stand in a line.

MAXINE

What kind of line?

ABRAHAM

Just a line Maxine.

MAXINE

We're going to be shot.

ABRAHAM

Just stand in a line.

RACIE

You know when I said the trip was kind of boring? I take it back.

MAXINE

I don't understand what is taking so long and why he took our passports. What will we do without our passports?

ABRAHAM

He'll give them back.

MAXINE

How do you know?

ABRAHAM

It's a procedure. It's orderly. He takes the passports. He makes sure they're not fakes. He'll give them back.

RACIE

Look, that one's a woman.

ABRAHAM

She's his captain. You can tell by the uniform.

RACIE

Cool. She's in charge. Did you wear a uniform like that?

ABRAHAM

Not exactly. No.

MAXINE

What are they doing now?

ABRAHAM

What does it look like Maxine?

RACIE

They're searching our car.

MAXINE

That's my purse. My make-up case. Those are my pills. Does he really have to search through everything.

ABRAHAM

It's a good thing Huda and Amal refused to ride with us. I don't know what would have happened.

RACIE

Can you imagine walking this ? In the dark? I think I would faint.

ABRAHAM

They didn't walk. I gave them money for a car.

MAXINE

You gave them money?

ABRAHAM

How much should they suffer Maxine? Would it make you happier if they walked?

RACIE

This is my grandfather. He fought for you in '48. He was in the Haganah!

MAXINE

Rachel, that's enough.

RACIE

What? They should know. You're a war hero. They should respect you.

ABRAHAM

They probably didn't understand what she said.

RACIE

I heard that most of the soldiers are from New Jersey.

ABRAHAM

No, the settlers. I think there are settlers here from Jersey.

RACIE

If I had to live in New Jersey, I might become a settler.

MAXINE

What is taking them so long? This is ridiculous. Are we just supposed to stand here and melt?

(MAXINE moves out of line. Sound of a gun's safety being removed.)

OFFSTAGE SOLDIER ON BULLHORN IN HEBREW

<<I told you people to stand in line!>>

(MAXINE freezes, sees gun pointed at her.)

OFFSTAGE SOLDIER ON BULLHORN IN HEBREW

<<Raise your arms above your head.>>

(MAXINE raises her arms without understanding the language -- she can assume he is saying this because he motions with his rifle.)

MAXINE

I was just a little thirsty. Thought I'd get some water from the car.

ABRAHAM

Slowly move back to us Maxine. He wants you to stay in line.

(MAXINE slowly moves back to the line.)

RACIE

This is a little bit too exciting now. I think I'm going to be sick.

ABRAHAM

You're not getting sick. Just stay where you are.

RACIE

But my stomach...

MAXINE

Racie? Rachel? Are you there pumpkin?

RACIE

I'm here Mom.

ABRAHAM

Two more steps back.

MAXINE

There's a soldier with a gun pointed at my breast, and I want you to know Dad that whatever happens to me, it's your fault. I want you to live with this for the rest of your life. I want to state for the record that you are being very selfish.

ABRAHAM

Good. You made your point. Now don't move.

MAXINE

I also want to say that if Racie endures any psychological stress as a result of seeing her mother's remains splattered about, I expect you to pay for her therapy.

(RACIE raises her hand as if to ask a question in school.)

RACIE

Excuse me, but would you mind if I --

(RACIE turns away and vomits as SOLDIER fires gun into the air causing MAXINE to throw herself over RACIE and ABRAHAM to raise his hand in a stop gesture.)

MAXINE

Oh my God, are we dead? Were we shot?

ABRAHAM

Stand up Maxine. Rachel, are you all right now?

RACIE

I'm alive.

MAXINE

What's going on?

ABRAHAM

No one shot at you. He fired into the air. I think his captain is giving him hell for it too. Very undisciplined.

MAXINE

Oh look. They're arguing.

RACIE

I think it's just a lot of testosterone. I bet if they did a study, they'd find that men are more willing to fire more quickly than women are -- it's in their hormones.

MAXINE

I think we should turn around and go home. I feel as if I've had twenty cups of coffee today, and it isn't even noon.

ABRAHAM

That's adrenaline.

MAXINE

Whatever it is, I want to go home.

ABRAHAM

We've come this far, Maxine. We're not turning around now.

RACIE

You see what I mean Mom? Testosterone. He wants to see what his seed has sprung. His five grandsons!

(ABRAHAM sees the SOLDIERS
motioning for them to get back in the car.)

ABRAHAM

All right already. Everyone slowly back in the car. They'll hand out the passports when we're seated.

Scene 2

(AMAL appears on a high path as MAXINE, ABRAHAM and RACIE greet her.)

AMAL

Hello! Welcome to Nablus. You made it.

(AMAL rushes down to them.)

AMAL

I hope it wasn't too difficult a trip.

ABRAHAM

It was fine.

AMAL

Good.

RACIE

That isn't really true.

ABRAHAM

Nothing to worry about.

AMAL

Your car should be safe there, but I brought you a keffiyah to put on the dashboard just in case.

RACIE

But I'm sure it's much harder for you than it is for us.

ABRAHAM

What's this for?

AMAL

You have Israeli plates.

ABRAHAM

It's a rental.

AMAL

But you don't want anyone to smash it up, so just to be safe.

ABRAHAM

Ah, I see. This marks it, yes?

AMAL

Put it on the dashboard.

(ABRAHAM exits with keffiyah.)

MAXINE

The truth is Amal, it was hell. And I hated every minute of it. I don't know how you manage. I'm still recovering.

(ABRAHAM enters.)

ABRAHAM

Done.

AMAL

Yesterday was the first time I ever left.

ABRAHAM

But that's not possible.

AMAL

Under Closure, anything is possible, Djetthi -- I can call you Djetthi, can't I?

ABRAHAM

Of course you can!

MAXINE

What's she calling you?

ABRAHAM

Grandfather.

AMAL

My mother's still making preparations, so I thought I would give you a tour of the town first, if that's all right.

MAXINE

Oh everything's all right with him today. When we were shot at everything was all right.

ABRAHAM

We weren't shot at.

AMAL

There was a problem?

MAXINE

I don't know how you can let her call you grandfather. You don't seem to have the slightest paternal instinct. A gun goes off and you don't even flinch.

ABRAHAM

That bullet didn't have anyone's name on it.

MAXINE

You don't know.

RACIE

It was nothing, Amal. She's making a big deal out of --

MAXINE

I almost jumped out of my skin to keep you safe. What did he do?

ABRAHAM

I say we take a tour of the town. Lead the way Amal.

(AMAL leads them up a path.)

ABRAHAM

How do you say granddaughter in Arabic?

AMAL

Haufeeyduh.

ABRAHAM

Lead the way, haufeeyduh.

AMAL

The streets are a bit deserted because today we have a self-imposed Closure.

ABRAHAM

Self-imposed?

AMAL

Yes. Instead of being shut in by the Israelis, we choose certain days to make Closure on our own. This way we are controlling our own oppression.

RACIE

But aren't you just making things worse?

AMAL

We need to have some control over something, and this way we show our solidarity.

RACIE

But aren't you breaking that by giving us this tour?

AMAL

Yes, but we won't stay outside long. There are some things that are more important than politics.

ABRAHAM

Like family?

AMAL

Yes, family.

MAXINE

It sounds ridiculous to me.

ABRAHAM

Maxine.

MAXINE

Okay.

AMAL

Here are the ruins of a demolished house. You can see the bulldozer's tracks. More than guns, I think, the bulldozers have done more damage than anything else.

MAXINE

How do we know that whatever was here before wasn't destroyed for military purposes?

AMAL

Of course that's the reason always given. You don't know.

ABRAHAM

I can't imagine Israelis setting up a checkpoint here. It isn't strategic.

MAXINE

You want to believe her. I want to know the truth.

AMAL

That used to be our movie theatre, and you can see most of the shops are boarded up now. There is nothing to sell here.

RACIE

It's so quiet. Like a ghost town.

AMAL

There's someone. Over there, see? She's been picking cactus fruit.

MAXINE

Cactus is edible?

AMAL

It's delicious! Cactus is not considered property. Anyone can pick it. It is the only fruit that grows here without chemicals or pesticides. The Palestinian National fruit.

MAXINE

How can you have a national fruit if you're not a nation?

AMAL

But we are a nation. It is only a matter of recognition. And land. This is UNRWA. United Nations Relief and Works Agency. It's been here since 1950 to provide education, health services and housing. There are 7 camps. We live in camp Oskar. There are almost 10,000 people in our camp. There are 3000 people who get special relief (like money or food) for

AMAL (cont'd)

hardship. And when Closure goes on for more than five days, the administrators also give good and care to the people in the town.

MAXINE

But you said yourself it's self-imposed.

AMAL

Only one day a month. The rest of the time it is random and can last for any amount of time. It is up to the Israelis.

RACIE

But what does it mean?

AMAL

That we can't go out.

ABRAHAM

See the lookouts, Maxine?

AMAL

We can't go to work.

MAXINE

What? Where?

AMAL

We can't buy food. The shops are all closed.

ABRAHAM

Over there, a soldier on the roof. And on that one.

AMAL

House arrest for everyone. Now we are entering the camp. You can see that we have no sewage system*, so everything runs in the streets. It is good we had no rain last night, or it would be like a flood.

ABRAHAM

You've never been out of the West Bank your entire life?

AMAL

Well, I've been to Tel Aviv. But there is no freedom of movement here. Even to plant a tree we must obtain a license.

ABRAHAM

But the Intifahda hasn't been happening forever. How old are you?

AMAL

Nineteen. I was thirteen when it started. But the controls by the Israelis were in place before that. And why would a girl of thirteen or younger need to leave her family? To go where? The only place I ever wanted to go was Jerusalem. I lie awake at night dreaming of it. I have seen pictures, but even the pictures are never as wonderful as the way it looks in my mind. I can hardly believe how close we came yesterday.

ABRAHAM

But Jerusalem is south, that way, and Tel Aviv is that way, west, by the sea.

AMAL

But before we turned toward the sea, we took the Jerusalem road. I have dreamed of Jerusalem as a magical place, without shutters on the windows or gates on the doors. I dreamed that the cactus there would not have thorns. Of course it is only a dream. I know our home is gone. The streets must have changed. The old mosque where my great-grandfather prayed was destroyed.

MAXINE

If it gives you any comfort, I'm sure the Temple where my great-grandfather prayed is gone too.

ABRAHAM

Maxine, please.

AMAL

It's all right, Djetthi, we are both without a homeland.

MAXINE

What do you mean?

AMAL

You are from America and yet you are Jewish. Doesn't that make you part of a diaspora?

MAXINE

Well, yes, but...

AMAL

I am part of one too. So here we are.

Scene 3

(HUDA enters and ushers EVERYONE into her home. There are five photos of Huda's sons in frames on a garlanded altar. The frame of her husband is also there, separated from the sons. Other than this, there is HAGAR's jewelry box, some plastic flowers in a plastic pot, two CSX gas canisters, and a plastic tray with drinks. There are stacked plastic chairs for seating and a few low pillowed benches for sitting and sleeping, low tables on one of which an old record player.)

HUDA

Hello and welcome to our home. Arabic coffee? Coca Cola?

ABRAHAM

Hello Huda. Thank you.

HUDA

I am so glad you could be here with us.

ABRAHAM

(with coffee)

Thank you. I am glad too. I am anxious to meet my sons. You were terrible to me last night to make me wait so long to even hear a word about them. But I see photographs! Mmm! This coffee is good! Have some coffee, Maxine. It's delicious.

MAXINE

Just what I need.

HUDA

I have been so excited to make you feel welcome, I could hardly sleep all night.

MAXINE

We are happy to be here Huda.

HUDA

You don't have to say that.

MAXINE

I wouldn't lie to you. I am happy to be here. It was a difficult trip.

HUDA

I'm sorry. Did something happen?

RACIE

Yes. When they stopped us at the checkpoint, they kept repeating “all this for your own safe”.

HUDA

But you made it, and that is what is important.

ABRAHAM

Exactly.

HUDA

So, it is a humble home, but I hope you will be comfortable here. Cushions or a chair? I have prepared some food, some of Amal’s favorite dishes. I hope you will enjoy them.

ABRAHAM

I’m sure we will.

HUDA

Amal, **fee**-al mut-bachh.

(in the kitchen)

(HUDA and AMAL exit to kitchen.)

MAXINE

What if they poison us? Did you ever think of that?

ABRAHAM

Maxine, this whole trip all you say is this or that is ridiculous, and now I understand why. Because your mind is ridiculous. The way you think!

MAXINE

There might be a plot to kill Jews one by one by luring them to the West Bank, and --

RACIE

Mom, you don’t get it at all, do you?

MAXINE

And you do? Did we tell anyone we were coming here today? Does any other person in the world know where we are? No.

ABRAHAM

That isn’t true. We were recorded at the checkpoint.

MAXINE

And the Israeli soldiers are going to come looking for us later? I don’t think so.

RACIE

Can't you calm down?

(AMAL enters with a tray of food and small plates and utensils.)

AMAL

This is a vegetable dish we call "upside down". It's made with eggplant and carrots.

HUDA

And this is Arabic beef. And this is called *sumac*. Please help yourselves.

(AMAL exits for more food.)

MAXINE

Sumac? As in poison sumac?

ABRAHAM

You have an overactive imagination Maxine.

HUDA

Is something wrong?

ABRAHAM

Not at all. It looks delicious.

HUDA

It's made with onion, olive oil, spice and almonds. You can eat it with your hands. We do. And there is yogurt and tabouli.

(AMAL enters with a roast chicken.)

AMAL

And this is chicken.

RACIE

This is great, Mom. Dig in!

MAXINE

I'm getting there.

AMAL

And we have a special surprise for dessert.

ABRAHAM

Try to enjoy yourself Maxine. Delicious! Huda, you are a wonderful cook.

RACIE

Yes, it's really good.

HUDA

Amal helped too.

ABRAHAM

You too Amal, my haufeeduh, you are another great cook, thank you. But where are my grandsons? Aren't they joining us for the feast?

HUDA

I didn't know how to tell you, yesterday.

ABRAHAM

Tell me what? What?

(HUDA can't answer. AMAL stands up.)

HUDA

No. I'll tell him. It's usually not so difficult. It is difficult, but... with you... Oh, Babba!

ABRAHAM

It's all right, Huda. Everything is going to be all right.

HUDA

I'm sorry.

ABRAHAM

How do I say daughter in Arabic?

HUDA

Tiflah.

ABRAHAM

Tiflah, it's all going to work out. One day you will return to Jerusalem. Please, tell us. Please.

HUDA

There are people who come by sometimes, to document what has happened, and I am asked to speak, and I tell them what I know, but to sit here with you, to give you this news... They are dead. You must have felt that by now.

ABRAHAM

My grandsons? All five of them?

HUDA

All.

ABRAHAM

I understand Hagar being dead, she lived a long life, she had a family... But children. They were children. What is this world that we cannot raise our children?

MAXINE

I am so sorry, Huda. I didn't mean to be so rude.

HUDA

Maxine, I think I would like to be your sister, because it is not good to be on the wrong side of you, but our lives are different, I don't know if you will ever understand what I've been through.

(HUDA gets up and goes to the photos. Each is a picture of one son. There are five photos of happy healthy young boys, and on the other side are five photos of wounded bloody dead boys. These are martyr photos. Around the photos are garlands in the colors of the Palestinian flag - green, white, red and black.)

HUDA

Mohammed was the oldest.

ABRAHAM

Handsome.

HUDA

Then Arafat,

MAXINE

You had a son named Arafat?

HUDA

Everyone has a son named Arafat. It is not uncommon.

ABRAHAM

This one's a fighter, like me. See the resemblance?

HUDA

then Yusif,

ABRAHAM

He was a dreamer, eh?

HUDA

He was always the one bringing home something to fix. Very bright. The dreamer was Hasan.

(pause)

And my youngest Najib.

ABRAHAM

A fine bunch of sons. I'm so sorry Huda. Please tell me what happened.

HUDA

Mohammed was going to school at the university. He was a very smart boy. But the soldiers used to pick on him. "Where are you going, Mohammed?" they would ask.

AMAL

The soldiers assume all boys are named Mohammed, because many are.

HUDA

They demanded to see his papers for no reason. They stopped him every day and questioned him insisting he was with Hamas when he was not.

AMAL

Hamas is a fundamentalist organization.

MAXINE

You mean terrorists?

AMAL

Some people would use that term. Other people would call them freedom fighters.

MAXINE

You see?

HUDA

No one in my family ever belonged to Hamas. But he would come home with bruises and crying and tell me, "if they already think I am Hamas, why not be Hamas?" I begged him not to join. He tried to take backroads to school to stay away from the soldiers, but this only made them suspect him more. He was listed as Hamas before he ever joined. Villagers were enlisted to report on all his activities, so he took up arms and hid for two years.

AMAL

Our house was watched closely. Once the sun set, no one could go out. No one could visit. Sometimes soldiers fired bullets into the house to see if they could excite him to come out, but he was never here. One of those bullets hit Arafat. He was the friendly one. The peacemaker.

HUDA

Our first martyr. And Mohammed could not come to his funeral. For two years I never saw him. Then on a feast day he tried to visit. He hid in a house across the street. The soldiers surrounded the area. In the morning they threw gas into the house to force everyone out. And even though he was armed, he didn't shoot.

AMAL

He did not want to endanger the people who sheltered him.

HUDA

They all came out with their hands up. The sergeant didn't know his face, but an informer identified him.

AMAL

As if they would only shoot him.

HUDA

The family was handcuffed and made to stand by the wall of the house. Mohammed stood beside them. They shot them all. They shot them so full, their insides emptied out. He was twenty.

AMAL

Afterwards they took pictures of him and passed them around. They said, "we will do this to you if you join the *intifahda*."

HUDA

They left his body near the martyr cemetery in Janeen, so we had to go and get him. We were followed and watched the whole time. A week after the burial, people were still mourning by his grave. With flowers and palm leaves as is the custom. Then the soldiers took everything off the grave and would not let us near it again.

AMAL

With all this, my other brothers grew up very angry.

HUDA

Even Najib was arrested for throwing stones at the soldiers twice before he was eleven.

MAXINE

So you blame the Israeli soldiers?

HUDA

It is not about blame. Do you know what this is? It's a canister of gas. Don't worry. It's empty.

(RACIE takes it.)

RACIE

Made in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

HUDA

It was a present from the Israelis. Do you know what this is?

(HUDA picks up the plastic flowers from
the altar.)

HUDA

This is my present to the Israelis.

MAXINE

Flowers? You can't be serious.

HUDA

Why not?

MAXINE

If someone did that to my daughter, I would hate them, kill them, try to rip them apart.

HUDA

Yes?

MAXINE

You're trying to trick me, aren't you? You think I'm ridiculous.

HUDA

Not at all.

MAXINE

I get it. You want me to prove how shallow and cruel I am, so he'll see you as better, prefer you to me.

ABRAHAM

Maxine, it has nothing to do with that.

MAXINE

Of course not. Because you've always been so fair.

(to HUDA)

He was a judge. He spent his whole life being fair.

ABRAHAM

Trying to.

MAXINE

Do you know what it's like to be the daughter of a judge?

HUDA

I have no more sons to lose. I offer them flowers in the hope of peace.

MAXINE

What about you Amal? How do you feel about all of this?

AMAL

I don't want to see any blood, either from us or from them, but we must stay alive.

RACIE

(with gas canister)

And what about this? This was made in America. Don't you hate us?

AMAL

We make distinctions between Americans, Israelis, the Israeli government, the American government. We aren't fighting America. We want America to support us in our struggle for peace and for statehood.

MAXINE

Do you practice that speech in a mirror at night?

AMAL

Do you think I like the fighting? Do you think I want to live this way? In a refugee camp? When we try to improve things, the soldiers come and tear it apart. If we plant something they rip it out. They control everything there is, even our water supply

MAXINE

I can't just sit here and listen without asking questions. I am sorry your sons are dead, but it seems to me that they died for specific reasons. Reasons the Israelis can defend.

HUDA

You can think what you want Maxine. I can't make you understand this.

MAXINE

I understand that you need to make sense of their deaths. But what makes you think you deserve your own state?

ABRAHAM

They are a People. They were thrown off their land and --

HUDA

You don't need to defend us.

ABRAHAM

Of course I do. You need defending. This is — this is monstrous. Unbearable. Inconceivable.

MAXINE

Then why don't they go and live in Jordan or Lebanon. There are Arabs there.

HUDA

Jordanian Arabs. Lebanese Arabs. We are Palestinias. There is a difference.

MAXINE

What's the difference?

HUDA

Racie, where do you live in America?

RACIE

New York.

HUDA

New York City?

RACIE

I grew up in New Rochelle, but I'm moving to the city in the fall to go to college.

HUDA

And you think of yourself as a New Yorker.

RACIE

I guess so.

HUDA

And what if people came to your island and said you had to go and live in the South. That you were the same as the people in the South.

RACIE

But I'm not. At least I don't think so.

HUDA

Do you think I can tell the difference between an American from the South and an American from New York?

RACIE

I don't know. Have you met a lot of people from the South?

MAXINE

Fine, you made your point.

HUDA

They fought in a war against each other. Right?

MAXINE

I bet it's a lot more complicated than that.

HUDA

Not really. Amal, <<shall we clear away the dishes?>>

(AMAL gets up and takes a tray out.
RACIE gets up to help.)

RACIE

I'll help you.

AMAL

I can do it.

(AMAL exits.)

MAXINE

Can we go now? Are you satisfied? Your "grandsons" don't exist. Do we have to sit through any more of this? Dad?

ABRAHAM

I was just wondering what things would have been like if my grandsons knew that their grandfather was a Jew. I should have come here years ago.

HUDA

You cannot blame yourself for any of this.

ABRAHAM

I would like to see the graves.

HUDA

We could do that.

RACIE

I can stay with Amal I'll help her clean up.

ABRAHAM

Let her stay Maxine. She should get to know her cousin.

HUDA

I'll just get my purse.

RACIE

I hate Israel. I hated it before, but now... Look at how they're treated. Look at how they live. And when we drove past that big evergreen forest? It was just like Amal said. All those trees planted to make a forest, but I could still see the rows of cactus that had been planted years before to create property lines for Palestinian homes. Every year I sent my allowance to plant trees in what I thought was "Israel" to "make the desert bloom" and what I was really doing was covering bulldozed ground where Palestinian homes used to be.

MAXINE

You don't know that.

RACIE

Cactus doesn't grow in straight lines by accident. It was planted there.

MAXINE

Does it matter how it got there?

RACIE

Yes. This wasn't empty land. This was someone else's property marked with cactus. This whole place is one big lie.

MAXINE

No one is asking you to live here.

RACIE

That's not the point. If I was going to create my own nation on disputed land where someone else was living, the first thing I would do would be to bring them gifts.

ABRAHAM

That sounds very diplomatic.

RACIE

So why didn't anyone think of that? Why did we have to just take it?

ABRAHAM

You're not an Israeli. Don't be so quick to judge what they've done.

RACIE

Then maybe I should become one.

MAXINE

Rachel!

RACIE

At least stay here and find out what it's really like, from their perspective.

ABRAHAM

You could stay with me and go to Hebrew University or Tel Aviv.

MAXINE

She will do no such thing.

(HUDA enters with her purse.)

HUDA

Shall we go?

(ABRAHAM, MAXINE and HUDA exit.
AMAL enters to clear more away.)

RACIE

Why do you wear that head scarf on your head?

AMAL

It's part of our religion. It's called a *hijab*.

RACIE

But don't you wonder why you have to wear it? I mean, aren't veils and *hijabs* all about keeping women down?

AMAL

Down where?

RACIE

Below men.

AMAL

You're a feminist.

RACIE

Yeah and a lesbian too. Does that bother you?

AMAL

Are you making a pass at me?

RACIE

No, you're my cousin.

AMAL

Half-sister actually.

RACIE

No. Our mothers are half-sisters. We're cousins. But we could be sisters if you want. I'd like it.

AMAL

You would?

RACIE

But tell me why you wear it?

AMAL

My *hijab*? Everyone wears them.

RACIE

So you're trying to fit in?

AMAL

What do you mean?

RACIE

To be like everyone else, to conform...

AMAL

I never thought about it like that.

RACIE

But if you didn't wear it, what would your friends think?

AMAL

That I was angry, changing, rebelling, but they would understand me, I think. When I was a little girl I knew that all the older girls got to wear *hijab*. I wanted to be like them. To me, once you wear *hijab*, you are saying you are a woman. Some girls were allowed to wear them when they were little, but my mother made me wait, and on the day I finally got to wear it, it was a special day. My friends and I celebrated.

RACIE

And don't you question what it's really for? What it stands for as part of your religious law?

AMAL

If I didn't wear it, I think I would feel undressed.

RACIE

Sounds like a conspiracy to me.

AMAL

Now you sound like your mother.

RACIE

I do?

AMAL

Racie, this is a part of my culture. Maybe being American you can't understand what it means to me, but you should try. If not, we don't have any way to know each other. We won't ever be related. Here, put one on and see for yourself.

RACIE

My mother says we never will be, that we can't be. She says we have nothing in common.

AMAL

But what do you have in common with your family? Are they all lesbians like you?

RACIE

No.

AMAL

Then what do you have?

RACIE

I don't know.

AMAL

In my family, my mother and her cousins share more than different ways of cooking.

RACIE

You mean recipes?

AMAL

We share with each other what is happening in our lives. Everyone gets born, goes to school, gets married, has babies. We share that. You are starting college in the fall.

RACIE

Yeah, but you don't go to college.

AMAL

But I would love to hear about it. I want to know what college is like in America. I have a friend going to college in Germany and she writes to me about her life and I write to her about mine. I don't have to have her life in order to be close to her.

RACIE

You make it sound easy.

AMAL

If you share your life with people and they share their life with you and when good things happen you celebrate with each other and when bad things happen you cry with each other, isn't that what a family is for?

(HUDA, MAXINE and ABRAHAM enter.)

HUDA

The road is blocked. There is some kind of trouble.

AMAL

Racie, let's go up on the roof.

(RACIE and AMAL exit.)

MAXINE

Is it safe for them up there?

HUDA

As safe as anywhere else. I'll bring more coffee.

(HUDA clears the rest of the food and exits.
RACIE and AMAL enter the roof.)

RACIE

Nice roof! This is where you sleep?

AMAL

Sometimes when it's hot or I want to be alone. That is where the hospital is, where I work. And there is the graveyard.

MAXINE

So we can't see the graves. So we'll never know for sure, whether her sons or her mother ever existed.

ABRAHAM

I knew her mother. I loved her mother. Why is it so hard for you to accept this?

MAXINE

Why is it so easy for you?

(HUDA enters with coffee.)

AMAL

The University where my brother went is over there.

RACIE

Why don't you go?

AMAL

I am lucky to have a job. And women take part in the Intifahda too. We don't just sit at home and cook all day.

HUDA

Maxine, you haven't told me anything about yourself, your life in America.

MAXINE

There's nothing to say.

RACIE

How do you know who you are?

AMAL

What do you mean?

RACIE

You say you're a Palestinian, but how do you know?

AMAL

I was raised this way. Don't you think of yourself as an American?

(RACIE shrugs.)

AMAL

But you think of yourself as a feminist and a lesbian.

RACIE

I guess so.

MAXINE

You should have picked someone else if you were out looking for a father.

HUDA

I didn't pick him.

MAXINE

He's not that interested in having daughters.

ABRAHAM

That isn't true.

MAXINE

Well, he was never much interested in me.

ABRAHAM

What are you talking about, Maxine?

MAXINE

She wants to hear about my life in America. Well, I work as a lawyer, and my husband left me for a younger woman. My mother we buried three days ago. My daughter leaves for college in a month. And my father has left me for another country. All my life he wanted a boy.

ABRAHAM

What?

MAXINE

I always felt like I had to make up for the fact that I wasn't a boy. And I could never do that. I couldn't even give him a grandson. And don't think I didn't try.

ABRAHAM

I never expected --

MAXINE

You know when Mom got sick, and I spent most of my time taking care of her, that wasn't for her, that was for you, so you would notice me, be proud of me. But what difference did it make?

ABRAHAM

You did everything you could. We all did. People die Maxine. It doesn't mean you failed her.

MAXINE

You can try to be the best there is, but he won't care because you're not a boy.

(Muslim call to prayer begins.)

RACIE

What's that?

AMAL

The call to prayer. The Sabbath is starting.

RACIE

Same as ours. Friday night. The sun is hotter than I'm used to.

AMAL

That's another reason for the hijab. It keeps the sun off our heads, the back of our necks.

MAXINE

I thought helping you move here, things would be different. It was supposed to be just — I was hoping to — get to know you.

ABRAHAM

You know me.

MAXINE

In a different way. But I can see —

ABRAHAM

See what?

MAXINE

You want to make a whole new family with strangers to avoid a friendship, a friendship with me.

ABRAHAM

I had no idea you felt this way.

RACIE

I just want to know what's what. I want to know who you are and who I am, not because I think you're a terrorist...

AMAL

Freedom fighter.

RACIE

My parents are getting divorced, my grandfather moved here, I just met you and your mother, and I'm supposed to go to school in the fall in the city. I have this once in a lifetime chance to introduce myself as someone only I don't know who.

AMAL

I don't think the chance happens only one time. I think we define ourselves every single day. Look, there's the Israeli patrol

(RACIE picks up stones from the roof.)

RACIE

I wonder what it would feel like -- You know, don't you? You're a part of all of this. A freedom fighter.

AMAL

Stones don't jump up to the roof.

RACIE

They don't jump down either. Bastards!

(RACIE hurls a stone.)

AMAL

Quick! Get down.

MAXINE

What you're asking me to do is help you leave me, and good girl that I am, I was actually trying to help you. Well, no more.

ABRAHAM

So we'll spend more time together. We have the rest of your visit, Maxine. And you can return, every year, whenever you want, you know.

MAXINE

Of course. Now. In front of Huda.

HUDA

We can't insist on a relationship, Maxine. We can only appreciate the time we have.

MAXINE

You don't know how hard I've tried. You don't know what it's like to be his daughter.

ABRAHAM

What's it like?

MAXINE

You were always so silent. Years of silence. And when you did speak you were always taking someone else's side. Mom's side. Racie's side. And now your side.

HUDA

I'm not asking him to choose between us. I know what it's like to have no father at all. Whatever time I can spend with him is a gift.

MAXINE

So I don't appreciate him.

ABRAHAM

Girls, girls.

MAXINE

We're grown women.

ABRAHAM

Then act like it. What did you expect from me? I thought I was a good father.

MAXINE

I'm not a nation.

(RACIE and AMAL enter, excited.)

AMAL

Mama, it's time for the dessert!

(to ABRAHAM)

We're going to celebrate your birthday.

(to RACIE)

Come on.

(RACIE and AMAL exit to get the cake.)

MAXINE

It isn't his birthday.

HUDA

We didn't know when your birthday comes, but we have missed so many of them, and yesterday you said I was reborn, and, in a way, I am. So I wanted to do something for you, something to mark the occasion, the day you became my father.

(AMAL enters with the cake and RACIE carries plates and forks. THEY all sing HAPPY BIRTHDAY except MAXINE.)

ABRAHAM

Where did you learn the American version?

AMAL

We have sitcoms you know.

HUDA

Make a birthday wish!

ABRAHAM

There is only one thing to wish for.

(ABRAHAM wishes and blows out the candles. ABRAHAM humming begins a hora taking RACIE's hand. AMAL joins them. ABRAHAM takes HUDA's hand, and HUDA holds out her hand for MAXINE.)

AMAL

I know this dance.

RACIE

It's Jewish. It's called the hora.

AMAL

It is like our debke.

RACIE

Your what?

AMAL

Palestinian dancing. Here. I'll play some music.

MAXINE

I thought music was illegal here.

HUDA

No. Not music. Only dancing. Dance Maxine. Dance with us.

AMAL

You see, Racie, this is how you know who you are!

RACIE

And what does this make me?

AMAL

A Jewish Palestinian!

ABRAHAM

If she can be a Jewish Palestinian, I can be a Palestinian Jew. Give me a keffiyah! Can I learn to be a good father Maxine?

MAXINE
 You're a good dancer, Dad.

ABRAHAM
 So dance with me.

(MAXINE joins ABRAHAM in the center of the circle. THEY dance together with the others circling. Then MAXINE leaves ABRAHAM and joins the circle of women who dance around ABRAHAM.)

ABRAHAM
 Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

(Skirmish outside with children and soldiers. AMAL turns off the music.)

ABRAHAM
 What is going on out there?

HUDA
 Sssh!

ABRAHAM
 I will not be silent now. My sons are martyrs. My daughters act like strangers. Enemies.

MAXINE
 Daddy!

ABRAHAM
 I have been silent for too many years.

HUDA
 Abraham, don't. It isn't safe.

ABRAHAM
 People of Nablus, Soldiers of Israel,

SOLDIER (off IN HEBREW)
 <<Get back inside old man.>>

ABRAHAM
I am not afraid of you.

MAXINE
(to HUDA)
What do we do?

HUDA
What do you usually do when he is like this?

MAXINE
He is never like this.

HUDA
Let's go in and watch from the window.

ABRAHAM
There is a grave with my name on it.

MAXINE
Dad, this is crazy!

HUDA
Please, Maxine, come with me.

ABRAHAM
Not in Nablus -- my grave is in Hebron.

MAXINE
But what about my father?

HUDA
What about mine?

ABRAHAM
In a mosque. In a synagogue. Where we all pray together.

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)
Go home old man!

ABRAHAM
I am Abraham. Father of Nations!

AMAL

The soldiers are all yelling at him.

RACIE

What are they saying?

AMAL

Go home old man. You're going to get hurt.

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)

Get back old man!

ABRAHAM

Let the children come and gather round me.

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)

You're going to get yourself hurt.

ABRAHAM

I can't be hurt dancing. Not with my children. We should all be dancing!

RACIE

The soldiers are yelling at him, only I don't understand what they say. Amal starts to translate, and I see my grandfather with the children running back and forth all around, and the soldiers trying to get them off the streets. The children chant and throw stones from the road. My grandfather starts to sing. He sings and snaps his fingers and dances. He tries to embrace everyone, even the soldiers. I say to Amal, "he's crazy!" And she says to me, "no, he's a peacemaker!" And we are proud of him. She takes my hand, and we stand on her roof and smile.

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)

Go back inside, Abu!

RACIE

The boys, they are called sh'**babb**, they are young, younger than I imagined. And angry, but they all hold up their hands and make peace signs. Amal tells me this is not the sign for peace but the sign for victory, and then one of them with a stone hits a soldier in the eye. He starts to bleed. He is angry now too.

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)

Move back inside! Abu! Stop or I'll shoot!

RACIE

Amal says they are shooting rubber bullets, but rubber bullets can kill. When Grandpa goes down, my mother and Huda rush out of the house to pull him back inside. But the fighting goes on, and another bullet comes, and another.

ABRAHAM

But we are a family now! Don't you see? Mishpocheh! Mishpocheh!

SOLDIER (off in HEBREW)

<<You can't protect them old man.>>

MAXINE

Daddy, Daddy please come away from there.

HUDA

I should never have asked you to come.

SOLDIER (off IN HEBREW)

<<Watch out Abu! Watch out!>>

ABRAHAM

All of these boys are mine. And the girls too. Maxine. Huda. We are a family!

MAXINE

No! Please! Stop it! Stop!

HUDA (in ARABIC)

You have to kill him too? You have to kill and kill and kill —

SOLDIER (off IN HEBREW)

<<I warned you.>>

HUDA (in ARABIC)

<<He is a Jew, you idiot!>>

MAXINE

He is an American!

HUDA (in ARABIC)

<<He is a Jew and you shot him!>>

MAXINE

How will you explain this to your government?

SOLDIER (in HEBREW)

<<I didn't know what side he was on!>>

MAXINE

What did he say?

HUDA

He said he didn't know what side he was on.

ABRAHAM

I am a father to everyone.

MAXINE

And the soldiers just walk away?

HUDA

They are only soldiers.

MAXINE

They can't leave us here like this. With him? Like this?

epilogue

(MAXINE and RACIE stand on one side of the grave davening. AMAL and HUDA on the other side. ABRAHAM stands between them unseen/unheard by them. Muslim and Hebrew prayers are heard softly.)

ABRAHAM

When I first came here in 1945, I stood at the gates to the Old City of Jerusalem. I put my hands on the stones. I thought, "this is mine. This is my birthright and my homeland and my destiny. I will return to this, and it will still be here, and it will still be mine."

MAXINE

This may be what you wanted, but I didn't want this.

ABRAHAM

These stones withstand weather and war, the changes of history, beyond what anyone is ever asked to endure.

HUDA

You must have been my father, or I wouldn't feel this way.

ABRAHAM

I should have been a stone for the stones are impartial. It does not know Jew from Palestinian. Supporting whoever comes to rest here. Always here.

AMAL

At least someone in my family gets to go home.

RACIE

I'll write to you.

AMAL

And I will write back, cousin.

MAXINE

Huda, will you ever forgive me?

HUDA

Forgiveness is a work in progress. Will you call me sister?

MAXINE

Sister.

HUDA

He would have liked that.

MAXINE

I know.

HUDA

He was a good man, your father.

MAXINE

Our father. Our father, Huda. Our father was a good man.

ABRAHAM

We are all the beginning of nations.

END OF PLAY