

Fanna fi Hayati: **Sex Work, Love, and the Sacred**

Avery Grace¹

Fanna (Arabic: فناء): in Sufism is the "passing away" or "annihilation" (of the self). Fanna means "to die before one dies", a concept highlighted by famous notable mystics such as the Prophet Mohammad, Rumi and others. There is controversy around what Fanna exactly is, with some Sufis defining it as the annihilation of the human ego before God, whereby the self becomes an instrument of God's plan in the world. Other Sufis interpret it as breaking down of the individual ego and a recognition of the fundamental unity of God, creation, and the individual self. Persons having entered this enlightened state obtain awareness of the intrinsic unity between Allah/god/"the one," and all that exists.

fi (Arabic: في): preposition meaning but not limited to in English: by, in, within, at, among, and during.

Hayati (Arabic: حيوي): one of many Arabic words for "love," but in this case more alluding to, "my life." It expresses the truth of an eternal bond – that two people share the same life, and will continue to do so. In Arabic song, "hayati" can be heard as an expression of deep romance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

None of this work or the requisite experiences to write this play would be possible without the inspiration, input, and labor of Trea Grace (they/them pronouns), who first was called to bring sex work into their own life and then later by extension, I was able to bring it into my own. Their openhanded and openheartedness, and willingness to share, made my portions of the experiences enveloped in this play possible.

Being a survivor, I was personally reluctant about this doorway-possibility, but Trea's courage and commitment to their personal authenticity was a beacon that allowed me to see over time what sex work was for me, and thus heal from trauma and help others to do the same. As a result of their great work, our shared work, and the experiences I was enabled to have, I thus had material to communicate the themes of this play. Being that the play is semi-autobiographical and draws on both our individual and collective experiences, this play is no one's and everyone's. No one owns it, but it could not have come into existence without Trea, their feedback and insight, and our mutual collaboration. Thank you, and I love you. I also wish I had been more capable of honoring the gifts you gave, in both our personal and working relationships, in a more prompt and effective manner.

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DEDICATION:

This work is dedicated to our sex worker brethren and ancestors, and the tireless, sacred work you do—often in the shadows and at your own peril—for the liberation of humanity's eros and authenticity. May decriminalization and reverence come swiftly so you may know peace and respect.

CAST:

Dani- trans feminine partner, an aspiring writer/artist who met Farzin while he was studying in the U.S.

Farzin- Name is Farsi/Persian for “learned one”; left Iran for university and met his now-partner Dani while in the U.S.

Client 1- cisgendered male BDSM sex work client

Client 2 cis-gendered male client for escort work

Ren- butch lesbian elder; Farzin’s university colleague

SETTINGS:

-Dani and Farzin’s shared apartment living room in some Northeastern City

-Dani’s sex work incall space

TIME:

The present.

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

Actors may/will likely need intimacy and physical conflict coaching, as well as potential education and training about the BDSM community and activities therein. The author is willing to offer the latter, both as a stand alone workshop, but also in the rendering of the relevant scenes. For scenes including physically intimate or quasi-sexual content, and/or physical violence, a professional coach will need to be consulted.

PRE-PLAY: MC (playwright and/or director):

Good evening and thank you for coming. We would like to welcome you to the show as well as share some relevant information with you. Many of the themes of this play may be provocative and/or unfamiliar for you. Some trigger warnings: there is discussion of sexual abuse, kink/BDSM, transgender identities, sex work, and religious trauma. If these topics make you uncomfortable, good! You are in the right place. If they are familiar and do not make you uncomfortable, good! You are also in the right place. If these themes are familiar and you are comfortable with them, you are in the right place

Do take care of yourself in the manner you find most fitting if the themes or action of the play activate you beyond a space of “safe enough”.

In line with the theme of consent, at a point in the play there will be active audience participation, akin to a choose-your-own-adventure book. You, the audience, will decide what will happen in the play at a specific juncture. We offer this information to prepare and invite you to reflect on the questions that will be posed, to be vocal, to vote according to your authentic interests, needs, and/or wants. Regardless of how others may vote.

The result of your vote will determine the course of the play. The play you see tonight may be different from the same play another night. Thank you, and enjoy the show!

MCs exit, house lights go down in preparation for the first act.

ACT 1

Setting: their apartment living room, Farzin is busy cleaning up the apartment. Shaking his head in humor as he gathers lingerie and other clothing from around the apartment. As he cleans, he finds a book of poetry on the ground. It has a certain magnetism. It distracts him and he piles the clothes onto the sofa. He then sits on the couch, looks one more time towards the drawer, and then reads while waiting for Dani to come home. A recording of first poem stanza in Farzin's voice plays in background:

*“What happens when your soul
begins to awaken
your eyes and your heart
and the cells of your body
to the great journey of Love...”*

Recording is interrupted as Dani opens the door and enters. She slumps on the couch next to him, pauses as if forgetting he was there, then gives an uncharacteristically quick kiss and is still somewhat distant.

FARZIN

[eyes Dani perceptively as silent moments pass]

So... [pauses, kisses her hand] how did the proposal go?

DANI

[exasperated sigh] I think it went fine. Well, great, actually. But I'm just not sure if the general public is ready for... I don't know, interested in... *a creative non-fictional, semi-autobiographical account of transness*

[said faux flippantly and quickly but with underlying pain]

Or maybe they're just tired of it. It's an undertold-overdone story. That place seems to be meant for the Janet Mocks and the Laverne Coxes anyhow

[dismisses the idea of them with her hand]

It doesn't seem like there's space for someone as...liminal, as me.

[gestures to self]

I'm not one of those "born in the wrong body" kinds of stories.

[said with more energy but painful sarcasm]

But, you know, *if I keep up my streak I'll be one more rejection closer to the 100 I'm supposed to be shooting for!*

[swings arm with closed fist in front of herself sarcastically]

[pauses, puts her face in her hands for a moment]

[sighs] I just can't... I just I can't seem to figure out how to manifest myself so that folks get that being trans isn't about being a woman or a man. [pregnant pause] I have so much to say but it feels like no one's listening.

[looks up]

Except for you, my dear Farzin.

[kisses him]

FARZIN

It saddens me to hear this. You *do* have a genius—and a beauty—that not many see. It's strange to me...the way the universe almost refuses to acknowledge you. It's as if something's blocking you.

[pauses to caress Dani, albeit distantly]

It's their loss, but I also know it's your great pain.

DANI

[sighs again while looking off] Yeah, maybe... [pause, then turns to Farzin]. I mean, that's sweet. You're sweet. But...*ugh!* Let's just change the subject. There's nothing I can do about it now.

[some action of shaking off the experience, turns to Farzin]
Anyways, what were you reading?

[Farzin looks down and reads a poem from the book]

FARZIN

[looks between Dani and the book as he reads]

“What happens when your soul
Begins to awaken
Your eyes
And your heart
And the cells of your body
To the great journey of Love?

First there is wonderful laughter
And probably precious tears

And a hundred sweet promises
And those heroic vows
No one can keep.

But still, god is delighted and amused
That you once tried to be a saint.

What happens when your soul
Begins to awaken in this world
To our deep need to love
And serve the Friend?

Oh, the Beloved
Will send you
One of His wonderful wild companions—
Like me”.

DANI

[closes eyes]

Mmm, that just what I needed.

[opens eyes]

Who was that, Rumi?

FARZIN

No, not Rumi. Hafiz. Most Americans know Rumi better, but I appreciate Hafiz's...elegant simplicity. Rumi is too verbose for me. *And* a tad too well known. *Overknown*, you might say. It would seem that I'm one for the lesser known.

[winks and adds some playful gesture]

DANI

[Dani rubs Farzin's body with her foot]

[delighted] Mmm...does that make *me* one of god's wonderful wild companions? Or are *you* the wild, wonderful companion sent for me?

FARZIN

I'm not sure. Perhaps both?

DANI

[leans back in relaxation exhaling deeply, Farzin rubs her calves as she relaxes/speaks]

[looks over at the pile of clothes, chuckles]

Oh, haha. Thanks for cleaning up in here.

[sinks down]

Mmmm...poetry is by far my favorite way to learn about you. About what your childhood was steeped in.

[Farzin gets up wordlessly, serves Dani tea in an unspoken, familiar way as she speaks]

These Sufi poets, they speak about what I've felt for a long time but had no words for. About god and love. [looks off] Yeah,

[smirks]

I've gotten *much* more out of it than those times that I tried to read the *Quran* on my own when we were first dating.

[laughs]

The poetry, it's so...*erotic*.

[Farzin hands her fresh tea then begins to pour for himself]

Mmm, thank you, love. You always seem to know what I need before I know it.

FARZIN

[Farzin sits back down with his own tea]

No surprise that the poetry speaks more to you. I don't know a single person besides you that ever read the Quran like *that*. Certainly not in Iran. Too secular. And besides, it's not like you learned Arabic.. You *have to know* Arabic to really get its meaning. But,

[nods towards her while smirking back]

it was a sweet surprise finding that under your bed when you first had me over.

[looks down at his tea cup bashfully for a moment]

Or, when I was finally ready to come over...

DANI

[claps hands with laughter]

Haha! Oh my god, you were so *bashful* at first. Curious, enamored, but didn't know it yet but, oh...*petrified!* I had to invite you what, three times? Before you finally came...

FARZIN

[laughs in kind and looks down and nods head while speaking]

Yes, it was all very new for me. I mean, from where I am from, just being invited home by a woman would already be a *large deal*. And of course, being invited home by *your* kind of woman, well, that...

DANI

Well it certainly didn't take you three times in other ways, ha!

[nudges him playfully, he looks embarrassed]

Sorry, I couldn't resist.

[play shoves his shoulder]

But also, somehow I knew *you* couldn't resist. I saw the way you looked at me at the library...at least we had that in common. It's not like we met at a nightclub or a bar or something.

FARZIN

[snaps back to attention] My first months in America? Bars? It's hard to write a dissertation at a nightclub. Besides, I just...I had no idea I would find the love of my life.

[he leans in and they kiss briefly]

DANI

[gulps remaining tea down and puts cup down rather abruptly]

To be honest, I never would've seen this coming either! I never had any idea that I'd—number 1—fall for a man that wasn't already openly queer—and two—a man who'd had a traditional upbringing. *Never* thought I would've gone for *that*. And *certainly* didn't think that one would've *gone for me!*

[puts hands in the air and scrolls like a marquee]

Now open for all to see, the transwoman and the upstanding Persian scholar...

FARZIN

[watches Dani's "performance"]

At the same time, it's not like it was an easy road. I know you had to endure my share of challenges...being with you, at first.

DANI

To say the least. I don't think you'd even knowingly met a trans person before you came here.

FARZIN

"Knowingly," I think is the most important word, I've learned.

DANI

[laughs slightly]

Ha, look at you—always learning

[winks]

It's even your name! Farzin, oh great "*learn-ed one*"! [said with jest]

But, it's true. Loving you wasn't easy, for a time.

[pauses]

Or rather, loving your baggage. But I'm proud of you. *And*, there were some times where I certainly wasn't so certain we'd work out.

[pauses intently]

Walking with me on the streets in the city is different than walking me into your family's living room.

FARZIN

Yes.

DANI

[playfully pushes him on the shoulder]

God, you were so frightened by what your family and your colleagues...everyone!...Would think. But, the greatest expression of your love for me by far has been you coming out in your own way, risking your family. Loving me just as I am.

FARZIN

It's true. I was afraid. I tried to fit—no...force—you into a box. A box neither of us chose. [holds both Dani's hands with his] As always, I will be forever sorry for what it took to fully own my love for you

[looks down then off into the distance].

I'm grateful that you chose to stay and shepherded me, in a way. You're very skilled at that.

[touches the back of Dani's hand to his forehead]

I'm glad we were able for us both to come to a shared understanding that could be freeing.

DANI

As always, thank you for saying that. And as always, you know I'm only interested in "sorries" if they're followed by you being yourself, *and* not doing the same things twice. I've gone through too much shit in my life to be smaller for someone else's comfort.

[intense pause, she speaks to the world as a whole]

You, have to be bigger to be with me.

[gestures to self, then reaches over to hold Farzin's hand]

But yes, grateful for our hard won goal: that we will do everything we can to support the fullest authenticity for each other and ourselves. To hold hands as we walk our individual paths, while they are parallel. *That...this*

[gestures to him then herself]

...feels like the truest essence of actual love to me.

I think Rumi, and Hafiz would approve. Don't you?

FARZIN

I imagine so

[they kiss]

That is how I can love you, how I want to love you—how you need to be loved. How you deserve, to be loved. [pauses] I feel like mystics like Rumi and Hafiz prepared me to love you.

DANI

Oh?

FARZIN

Their poetry, it guides me. To love the way they talk about love...in Persian, their verses are our everyday speech.. I've heard them since before I was born. I was immersed in love before I could speak.

[pause]

In Islam there is a concept of "*fanna*". Have you heard of this?

DANI

I don't recall. I don't think so.

FARZIN

Not many people who are not Muslim have heard of it. In English it means something like... "annihilation". Odd, yes? Not the best translation. [says with a smirk] Another way to think of it is "effacement," or "effacing yourself". [searches Dani's face] Still maybe not so clear...

[Dani's eyebrows raise in surprise or confusion]

DANI

Perhaps not unclear, just...harsh to the ear.

FARZIN

Yes, I think so. I don't think either of these terms are especially likable by Americans, yes?

DANI

Haha, no, I don't think so. I think you're spot on.

FARZIN

Yes. Yes, in other words, I think the love that Rumi and Hafiz speak of asks that we lose parts of ourselves. The parts that block us. Lose them, so we can love others more. [said emphatically and with authority] Parts of us must to be effaced for our love to flow freely—like removing rocks from a stream so it may be a river.

[Dani makes wave motion with her hand-arm while she listens]

My struggle with your gender at first, is just one example. I had to lose that in order to fully

be with you.

DANI

Beautiful.

[Dani leans in and they kiss]

[Farzin stands, takes her cup and goes to refill their teas. He takes the pile of clothing with him]

DANI

[speaks as Farzin walks across to room] Oh, speaking of Rumi and Americans being more familiar with him, I was reading about his life recently—did you know that he was *ostracized* for loving his teacher?

[Farzin places the clothes atop the drawers, then looks attentively at Dani while he pours tea]

He left *all* of his conventional commitments—a stable career as a teacher and scholar...he even left his family to spend hours, days, even months in communion with his teacher. Shams, I think his name was...

FARZIN

[continues at Dani while he pours tea and speaks]

Of course I know this story. Any Persian kid who grew up back home knows it.

DANI

[Playfully and inquisitively, looks at Farzin and speaks in a sultry tone]

...do you think they were... lovers? *I* can't imagine spending that much time away from you without it being something more...*intimate*.

[makes playful sensual gesture to Farzin]

FARZIN

[awkwardly] There were rumors then, there are rumors now. Of course, no one knows—but I think what Rumi is saying is that when love is true it goes beyond conventions. Beyond even sexuality.

[Farzin finishes pouring the tea, then goes to put the clothing away in the drawer. Before he can, he looks in the drawer and is clearly surprised. He pulls out leather wrist cuffs]

FARZIN

Um...what is...*this*...?

DANI

[Looks up at Farzin, then has a surprised look on her face]

Oh! That...that is...

[pauses]

The story with that is...

[pauses again, looks down, sighs, then looks back to Farzin]

I have something to tell you.

FARZIN

...Oh?

DANI

[Short silence then looks slightly at the drawer herself, then back to Farzin]

Yes. Um, please. Come sit.

[Farzin puts the cuffs back into the drawer which remains ajar, and leaves the tea as he walks back to the couch and sits down]

So, you know, it's felt almost impossible to find my path around work and in a certain way, in life. Like the experience with that agent earlier today.

[pauses]

I've felt caged, lost. I thought that getting to finally be who I was was enough but...it turns out that's just the "starting line" of another circle! Another cycle!

[raises arms in frustration]

FARZIN

I've seen you pace like a caged animal. I've seen the same depression in your eyes. Like at a zoo.

[pauses]

But what is...*that*?

[points to the drawer]

DANI

Let me explain more and I'll tell you.

[pauses as if selecting her words very carefully]

This finding my path. [said sarcastically] Or *not* finding it...I don't know if it's just who I am, or...I just know that I can't stay doing the same things I've always done. [speaks exasperatedly] I've tried so many different things...

[gestures to Farzin]

You know.

[pauses]

Well, finally, I've experienced some...inspiration I guess you could say. What seems like a calling of sorts.

[Farzin leans in]

I never really thought this would ever be a part of my life—especially given what I've been through...

FARZIN

[Shifts slightly uncomfortably in his seat but leans forward in attention] Oh?

DANI

[sits down. Slightly exasperatedly, breathes deeply before speaking]

I had this thought...it's been backed up by my dreams, by a kind of...knowing, you could say. I haven't shared it with you yet, but it's come to me again and again and I...I can't not listen.

[breathes deeply, Farzin looks expectantly]

...I feel called to be...a *sex worker*.

[silence]

FARZIN

[Shifts uncomfortably in his seat again, looks away, other subtly exacerbated movements]

...what, uh...what does that mean?

DANI

Honestly? I'm not sure yet. But that...those...cuffs...are part of it. I was just exploring...but alone!

[pauses, looks at Farzin intently and holds his hand]

I hope you didn't think I was betraying you!

FARZIN

I didn't...I don't know what to think.

DANI

You know I've been hurt by sex. I've feared my own sex even.

[looks away and then back at Farzin]

I know I make myself out to be so confident, so sensual, but, you know the truth. My fears. The places where I freeze...where I shut down.

[forlorn pause]

Of all the things in my life, it's been one of my biggest burdens...to be cut off from the erotic.

[looks into the distance past Farzin, then snaps out of it and looks back at Farzin]

...they're the same, you know. The erotic and creativity. It's felt like I've had no muse.

[gets up, turns from Farzin. Slowly rubs her own body in self soothing, then turns back to speak]

I don't know what all this means. I just know that I'm being asked by *my* experience of god to experience myself in the world through sex. And that this will be part of my healing. And my power.

FARZIN

But...what if you get hurt again?

[heavy pause]

What if you don't find yourself powerful?

DANI

Look, I don't know how it's supposed to go—I don't know. I could be a...a dominatrix. I mean, you know I like a little control here and there...

[playfully nudges him, he stoically doesn't respond in kind]

I feel like the power dynamic might give me a sense of safety...

[shrugs shoulders]

It might be a good place to start. But who knows, it could even be, like...companionship. People and their stories...you know I'm eternally fascinated by them.

[silence]

I'm not really sure the form it's supposed to take...but I'm open.

[pauses, nods towards the drawer]

I bought some...items when I was thinking about it.

[more silence. Dani looks expectantly at Farzin]

...So?

FARZIN

[Looks down then back up at Dani, inhales and exhales deeply]

I...I'm not really sure what to say.

[his facial expression shifts, then says with a hint of an accusatory tone]

How long have you been thinking about this?

DANI

I can't say for sure. I confess I was afraid to tell you. I was afraid to tell you before I was certain that...that it was something I truly needed to do.

[looks down then back up]

And honestly, I was afraid of your reaction.

[looks to the side, fiddles with her hands]

I'm not as fearless as I put on, you know.

FARZIN

I mean, yes. I'm surprised. But I'm more *hurt* that you didn't tell me sooner. I feel like I've always more than accepted you. Or am at least willing to do what I need to do to *become* more accepting.

[puts one hand over his own mouth, then gestures at Dani]

I am more hurt that you didn't trust me. Seemingly without a reason.

DANI

[looks down and then back up]

I'm sorry. Part of me knows that it's just my distrust, not your trustworthiness. It's really hard for me sometimes. There's a lot of stigma out there about sex work. I didn't know how you'd react...

[pauses, looks off]

I don't know how *anyone* will react.

FARZIN

What I am most worried about is that all this is just...what's happened to you. You know, you hear about people who do that kind of work because they are victims. I wonder if this could just be that. You know, how do you say, a replay?

[pauses]

And, I don't really know how *I* feel about this. I mean, the thought of you with another person...with other people...

[looks away with a slight look of disgust]

DANI

[reaches again for Farzin's hand]

I know. I'm really scared too. I know it's a stretch of the premise of our relationship. I know it'd be asking a lot of you. But, my authenticity, my path, is asking more. More of both of us.

[Long silence. Flustered, Farzin stands shaking his head, turns away]

FARZIN

I just...I just don't know...

DANI

[reaches up to try and hold Farzin's hand while remains sitting, but Farzin doesn't take her hand]

Look, I know this isn't going to be easy. But, this sort of thing was hard even for someone like Rumi.

FARZIN

[Farzin breaks, and whirls back to face Dani]

[speaks an obscenity in Farsi], how could Rumi speak of any of this? He never had to deal the possibility that the person he loves is thinking of being a...*companion*. I mean, let's call it what it is...a prostitute! That someone he loved is going to sleep with other people! Who knows how many! For money!

[pauses]

You said you were not betraying me, that you were exploring alone. But soon enough you will—soon enough it will be with others!

DANI

[reactive tone] *First* of all, this isn't simply for money. It is a calling. It's sacred. Secondly, what would be wrong if it was? That's just your monogamous...*programming*, talking! People, especially femme people, fuck other people for no money at all! All the time!

[points at Farzin with her hand]

I fuck you for no money!

[Farzin's face starts to grimace with reactive anger]

Sex work is work. *Real work*. But it is so much more than that for me.

[looks somewhat abashed, pauses briefly and breathes audibly to calm herself]

I'm sorry. Look, I love you, so it's different. I'm sorry about the money comment. I didn't mean to suggest that they're the same.

FARZIN

But you said it.

DANI

I said it, but it wasn't what I meant. This is rubber hitting the road feminism! What I'm getting at is that this is a much bigger issue than just you and me.

[pauses]

Perhaps one that you can't understand.

[Breathes, collects herself, gets up to do so and then sits back down]

FARZIN

Perhaps I can't.

[sits back down on couch, farther from Dani, rigid, armored]

DANI

[stands again, turns away, and then turns around to speak, somewhat accusatorially]

No, you know what, you're right—Rumi didn't have to deal with this, at least not from what I know. But his family and community did! Him, leaving in his way. Becoming something they didn't understand.

[pauses]

They thought he abandoned them.

[folds arms across chest]

I think it was the other way around.

[pauses and points at Farzin]

And you know, they might have even killed Shams, his teacher, out of jealousy and spite, I've read—that's one of the rumors too. [said snarkily] *I'm sure every Persian kid who grew up back home knows that.*

FARZIN

You don't need to be rude.

DANI

Rude?!

[punctuates end of sentence with a finger jab at Farzin]

You're shaming me for wanting to be a sex worker! Oh wait, *I'm sorry*, a prostitute! Rumi's people, they couldn't handle him becoming who he was destined to be. You know why? Because it didn't fit their needs anymore. But you know what, it wasn't their needs he wasn't meeting. It was their fears. They sought to consume him, cage him, rather than setting him free.

[pause]

Rather than facing and *effacing* their own fear.

FARZIN

Perhaps they did, but that doesn't mean you have to be rude...this is hard. You must understand this.

DANI

Holding up a mirror isn't being rude. Your beloved Hafiz speaks of his mirror all the time! You've read it to me again and again. *How does it go?*

[stomps over and grabs the poetry book Farzin was reading, flips through pages and stops on one]

“Look how a mirror will reflect with perfect equanimity all actions before it
There is no act in this world that will ever cause the mirror to look away
No act in this world that will ever cause the mirror to say no
The mirror, like perfect love, will just keep giving up itself to all before it”

[slams book shut and tosses it into Farzin's lap]

You see? Maybe you should try it rather than just reading it sometime, oh Farzin, oh “*learn-ed one*”!

FARZIN

You are asking me to be like a saint!

DANI

[stabs her finger into his chest again to punctuate her speech]

No, I'm asking you to try. I'm asking you to grow. To try and love in the way that you profess yourself as wanting to love. [long pause] I'm asking you for *fanna*.

[looks penetratingly at Farzin, who breaks the gaze, looking away]

And you know what else? Speaking of saints, it wasn't until long after Shams was gone that Rumi was even able to bring himself to mention Shams in his poems at all. Years! His greatest professed love! *It took even a Sufi poet of love that long* just to bring his inner and outer lives together in spite of already leaving so many things. After already having talked about love for so long.

[Farzin silently looks back at Dani and then away again]

What about that time? What about that space? Between what he professed, and what he was *able and willing* to do?...What he was willing to face inside of himself...

FARZIN

I...I don't know what to say.

DANI

[Farzin is silent. Dani breathes and calms down, then reaches and holds Farzin's hand tentatively but tenderly]

Look, I'm sorry. What I'm saying is...I know this is going to be a process. It's going to be a process for me too...

FARZIN

But you don't know what this is like.

DANI

[drops Farzin's hand with a surprised face]

You don't know what *this* is like! Having to tell your greatest love that you're being asked to take up something that could risk them leaving! Stop thinking of your own fears for one second and imagine what *that* is like!

[pauses]

You see, *I know* I'm not going to leave you because of this work...

[pauses]

but I don't know that you won't leave *me* because of it.

FARZIN

[Silent, somewhat resigned. Remains quiet for a moment, mulling]

Ugh, you're right. UGH! Damn it, I don't know I don't know I don't know...I need some time to think!

[hands on head]

Of course. Of course I want to support you. I just don't know if I can do...this. I want to love like that, I do.

[puts hands down and looks at Dani]

I just don't know *how* yet.

[silence as they look at one another]

DANI

If it's any consolation, the other thing I want to say is that this has nothing to do with our

relationship, or my happiness in it. I love you. There's nothing you can do to make this love go away.

But this is about spiritual challenge. And I see it separate from what we have. What do the sufis call it? A spiritual challenge?

FARZIN

A challah.

DANI

Right, a *challah*. From what you've told me, *challahs* don't often make sense in a certain way, right? They're a mystery. I may not be an official Sufi *per se*, and this might not have come from a specific teacher, but that's how this feels.

[continues to tenderly stroke his hand]

I know it's going to take time. I *want* you to take your time.

[pause]

And not to be callous, but this is something that I feel I have to move on this soon...

FARZIN

How soon?

DANI

Soon. I don't have a timeline, but I can't *not* do this. I want to start figuring it out, start finding my own way. But I'm not going to start working tomorrow. And I want to do it in the right way. Safely, and on my own terms.

[kisses his hand]

And I want you to be with me while I do this. I want you to be able to be with me.

[Farzin lifts his head for a prolonged stare into one another's eyes]

(house lights dim)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Setting: their apartment, late evening; stage is split vertically into two levels: the bottom is their apartment, the top the sex work space in which Dani receives clients. Top remains darkened as we initially focus on Farzin below. Lights come up on a semi-li broody lower level as Farzin waits for Dani to return from one of her first sex work appointments. Farzin paces and mutters in clear distress, then sits in silence away from the door in their apartment. He stares at the sky and then gets on his hands and knees in a partial Islamic prayer prostration.

FARZIN

[looking up] Allah...I...I don't know if I can do this. How am I to do this? Am I to do this?

I know...I know the stories...the stories of the ways, you *test* us. Ask us to be more than we have been. But...but, show me. I don't know how—I don't yet believe I can. No matter how much I want to. No matter how much I love her...no matter how I want to love her...

[places head to the floor, breathes heavily and deeply several times. Starts to slow his breathing and is quiet in this position for a few moments before we hear the click of the lock on their front door. Farzin gets up quickly so as not to be seen prostrated, and sits on the couch before Dani opens the door]

DANI

[looks in before entering and then walks with a subtle caution]

[Said hesitantly] Hi...

[Silence. Dani walks over to the couch and sits next to Farzin. Reaches for his hand. He allows her, but is rigid and stiff]

I'm glad to be home with you. [More silence]

FARZIN

[pause and then in a slightly quiet yet mildly tense tone] I'm glad you're back too.

[long pause]

[hesitantly]...h...how was it?

DANI

[breathes deeply and then says hesitantly]

It was...

[exhales]

...interesting... good, in a way. [pause] I'm not sure what you want to know...

[Silence]

FARZIN

[breathes deeply and audibly in and then out once]

I'm not sure either.

[More silence, neither looks at the other]

DANI

[Rubbing his hand with both hers]

What are you feeling?

FARZIN

I'm not sure it'd be helpful to say.

[medium pause]

I don't want to dissuade you.

DANI

Please, tell me. It would be easier to know than not knowing.

FARZIN

Well, because you ask, I...

[closes eyes]

can't get past these feelings I'm having, I...I don't want to have them, but...

[pause and reopens eyes]

I can't help it.

DANI

[slightly pleadingly] Tell me more?

FARZIN

[gestures upwards with hands, illustrates the physical sensations with his arm movements]

It's like, a rising of heat in my body—it flushes upwards, races into my hands. It fills my face...it, how do you say...overwhelms me And, all the while, I can't help...I...can't stop...
[breathes deeply] imagining that every time you come back...his...whoever's...mouth on your neck...

[gestures to own neck while speaking]

Or when we are together...them, whoever...with you...when I, when we...are intimate.

It feels like you, that this [gestures back and forth between them] is not mine.
[puts one hand over his eyes and breathes heavily outward]

Even if you shower. Even if you tell me what's happened. That it's just a job. All I feel is...
[looks down] disgust.

[looks back up]

[Dani leans back slightly away from him, though still sits]

And I don't know how to stop. I've tried to not think about it. I know you've told me it means nothing about our relationship, that it's just work. I've tried to see the meaning it has for you but...

[closes and then reopens eyes while gesturing to self with hands]

...I am losing my mind.

[Dani stands and slowly and visibly pours them both a drink, hers is much larger than what she pours for Farzin]

DANI

[still standing, not facing Farzin yet, sighs, puts one hand on her forehead with closed eyes while holding her drink]

[said with a fierce but empathetic directness] I know you've been feeling this way the whole time, even though you're only telling me now. I've felt this from you. The whole time, though you've tried to hide it...I know you.

[shakes head and turns to face him]

At least you're finally saying it.

[takes long swig of drink, then looks at him while standing]

I also know this is happening for you because of love. No matter how...misguided. No matter how... patriarchal.

[chuckles to self sarcastically]

[sighs, looks down, takes another drink, and then looks back to Farzin]

It's been difficult for me too. *Harrowing, actually.* To sense that this was happening. You've felt distant ever since I started. You, we [gestures back and forth with hand]...haven't been the same.

[grimaces and shakes head side to side to punctuate each sentence]

You don't look at me the same way. You don't touch me in the same way.

[pauses, tears up slightly, closes eyes]

You don't even serve me tea in the same way.

[cries some, then collects herself, looks back at Farzin]

And you weren't telling me about it. You haven't been honest...and it's been *terrifying*.

[hands Farzin a drink]

I know you try to observe and not drink, but...perhaps now's a time that god would understand.

FARZIN

[takes drink from Dani, sips, then gulps it down before speaking, coughs]

[exasperated] I know. I haven't known how to talk about this. I didn't want to discourage you. I thought I could manage it on my own but I'm finding that...I...I...[appears resigned] can't.

[pleadingly] And I don't want to feel this way. I want to support [gestures up and down at Dani's body and then at the doorway] ...all this

[looks up at the sky, and then down and covers his face in shame]

I just don't know how to not to feel this way. It's like someone else is inside my body. In my head, making me feel things even if I don't believe them. It's like I am possessed.

DANI

[walks back and forth some, takes another drink, turns abruptly to face Farzin. Gestures at him with her drink]

So, you're envisioning things. Would it help if I told you what I experienced? What exactly I got out of it? [pause] It might help you.

[Takes a final swig, walks over and pours herself another]

FARZIN

[wipes hands over eyes and down face in anticipation]

I don't know. I don't know...if it would be better or worse than I imagine.

DANI

[penetrative gaze] Are you willing to try?

FARZIN

[offers his glass to Dani who fills it, Farzin takes another drink]

I...think so. I hope so. But...I'm scared.

DANI

[pauses for a moment and then sits back down next to Farzin]

[pauses as if being very deliberate in her speech/word choice] Before what I'm about to tell you, you need to know, not just hear me, but know, that anything that happens in these sessions, even the sex, *isn't for* me—it's service.

And, I'm finding that honestly, in essence, it's...how could I put it...it's *universal love*. By the hour.

FARZIN

I don't understand.

DANI

What Rumi or your beloved Hafiz talk about, it's not very different from sex work. It's actually the exact same. Sex work is a practice of loving. The clients that come to me, they're suffering. They ache. They're in pain. They ache for something they don't, or can't, have in their lives for one reason or another. [pause] Simply put, they can't be their full selves and experience their full erotic life.

FARZIN

Hmm...

[seems to lighten slightly, takes another drink]

I hadn't considered that.

DANI

Well, how could you? You were too worried about you, and about you and me.

So that aside, for me, I have to find pleasure. The pleasure I feel is not what you think. It's not what, say, you and I would have. The pleasure is more spiritual in nature.

FARZIN

But it's...sex...

DANI

There's sex and then there's *sex*. Sure, you can press on a body in a certain spot long enough to create a sensation that seems like pleasure. But that's not true arousal. That's not truly erotic. Not like when there is soul-love and trust involved.

FARZIN

So what you're saying is that this whole thing isn't pleasurable for you?
[takes another sip]

DANI

I'm not going to say that it isn't pleasurable for me *at all*. It's just not in the way that you seem to be thinking. The way your fear speaks to you about it.

The pleasure I'm speaking of isn't...physical. For the most part. [pauses to consider next words] What I'm saying is that I've come to a place where I try to allow myself pleasure where I can—whether that be physical or spiritual.

FARZIN

Mhmm...

DANI

Physically, it's not ever the same as if it was on my own terms. If it was truly for me. Even when someone wants me to experience pleasure, wants to please me, *even then*, my pleasure is somehow for them. Because I'm providing a service. The service of allowing them to be pleasurable to someone else

[pauses, looks down then off into the distance]

They're still using me, consuming me...

[Takes a drink]

...to feel enough, enough in their...masculine fragility, or whatever other reason they might seek to please. [laughs] They don't even usually know why, frankly. That's not selfless service on their part, and that's not genuine pleasure on my part. We are not equals, as much as we pretend to be. [pauses] I'm essentially a performance artist who writes, directs, acts, and improvises—all in an hour

FARZIN

So you are saying, that for the pleasure to be genuine...that it has to come from you and be for you, in a way? Is this right?

DANI

Yes! You're starting to get it, I think. Think of it as giving with a full heart. And receiving in the same way. [takes a smaller, more relaxed drink, pauses] When I am there it is service and in that service, I try to find the enjoyment I can. That's my freedom, and my healing.

FARZIN

[skeptical facial expression] It's hard to feel it, but I think I can see more of what you're saying.

DANI

With this last client, and a number of others, what I've really gotten out of it is a chance to practice loving people whose bodies are like the one that hurt me. Loving them unconditionally in that space, for that hour. [shrugs] Or two.

[takes another sip of her drink]

The simple fact is that people go to sex workers because they're unfulfilled. And I don't mean just sexually. It's fulfilling to me to give to them, because I can see their pain. My gift of being with them effects not just them and their life, but ripples out to the other people in their life, believe it or not.

[finishes drink]

FARZIN

What if they are married? What then, doesn't that contradict somehow?

DANI

Let me ask you—would you prefer that we be in our relationship and be resentful, unhappy, and unfulfilled? What if something you needed I refused, or was unable to give you? Do you think that'd make for a happy, sustainable relationship together?

FARZIN

I suppose not...

DANI

The clients I see who do have partners, they're usually just as stuck, repressed, and afraid. They don't have what we have—a commitment to doing our own work to promote the others' authenticity and freedom.

[Farzin takes a large gulp in response to Dani's assertion]

And just to say it again, and to be as clear as I can be...it's not like making love with you, or having pleasurable sex between equals.

FARZIN

Despite...seeing it more clearly...it's...it's still hard.

DANI

I'm sure. And I wanna add, that for me personally, it's like...exposure therapy. If you will. [pauses] Really, you're the only man I've been able to trust. I've lived my whole fucking life afraid of most men...but still wanting them in a way. Or at least not wanting to be scared of them. Or their bodies.

[stares into space for a moment]

My body has been on-guard for so many years...

[looks back]

FARZIN

[moves closer to her to comfort her]

I know. I remember when you couldn't even sleep in a bed with me. Or anyone else, for that matter. You'd stay awake all night. But you'd still do it because you wanted us to be together.

DANI

Yes, I would. And now I can't sleep without you it seems
[smirks, then pauses]

I want to tell you more about this last client and maybe one other...would that be okay?

FARZIN

[looks into his drink then back up]

I'm not sure.

DANI

If you can, I think it will help.

[holds his hand]

I think you can do it.

[stands, pours, hands Farzin another drink, he promptly gulps it down, then holds out his glass for a refill. Dani pours him another]

FARZIN

[drinks again, coughs from the abrupt alcohol consumption]

Okay. Let us try.

House lights dim into darkness, actors exit in preparation for second act.

[10 minute intermission]

ACT 2, SCENE 1

*Setting: **director's notes** both tiers of the stage are alight now. The top is the incall sex work space, with Dani first seeing a domme client, then in the latter half of the scene transitioning to be with an escort client. Farzin sits half lit on the bottom tier of the stage, delineating him as still at their apartment while Dani is at work. He is weathering his feelings first through pacing, muttering, and other physical motion. Audience can hear abrupt sounds of disgust, interspersed with, "I don't think I can do this I don't think I can do this I don't think I can do this"...before 1st client arrives. He is quiet and lights darken on him during the majority of the scenes taking place above. Farzin is lit and audible again between scenes with clients 1 and 2, while Dani changes and prepares backstage.*

An audible recording of Dani's response to client 1 via email starts to play, in which she is confirming with the client what he wants, needs, etc. Dani comes onstage during the recording, and the questions align with her simultaneously setting up the space with relevant toys, props, etc.

Recording (in Dani's voice): "I applaud your desire and willingness to explore submission. It takes great courage to give yourself what you've wanted for some time. Whatever your reasons, no doubt they will come forward during our time together. I am writing to confirm our session, as well as ensure that I am clear as to your interests and desires.

My understanding is that you are interested in being used for my pleasure, whether that be through play such as canes, paddles, whips, etc, but also, being used as an erotic object. Is this correct?

You have some minimal experience, but you will require further training. As well, I am confirming that you are able to receive visible marks on your body that may last several days, and are interested in leather, straps, high heels, and other traditional BDSM garments.

Inform me if I have omitted anything. I look forward to turning you inside out, and using you to my pleasure in a manner that is affirming. To you, and for me.

*Eagerly,
-Mistress”.*

Following the recording, Marilyn Manson’s cover of Johnny Cash’s “God’s Gonna Cut You Down,” plays in the background (2:40 total). Dani ceases setting up the space and starts putting on the last of her dominatrix wear. She fiddles with her make up, frenetically arranges last minute details in the space.

She psyches herself up in the mirror but is clearly nervous. Before sitting in a chair opposite the “entrance”/door client 1 will arrive through from the left side of the stage, she takes a shot of alcohol from a carafe on a small table against the wall behind her chair, gasps, then sits down, and composes herself. She abruptly remembers to hide the shot glass, gets up quickly and hides it in the drawer, then sits back down and recomposes herself.

Dani is miked so audience can hear her whispers without injuring other actor’s hearing.

There is a chair between Dani and the doorway, facing the “entrance,” which client will sit in later during scene. Music fades out as song concludes, Dani sits in “her” chair with legs crossed, holding a cane in her lap, staring at the door awaiting client. Scene begins:

[Knock at door]

DANI

[said sternly] Come in!

[client enters room and stands in front of Dani]

DANI

As you were instructed, place your tribute at my feet, remove your clothes to your undergarments and sit.

[client does as Dani asks while she looks on silently. Client gets on his knees to offer a white envelop, counts out the cash at her feet to make sure it is all there. He then stands, walks back near entry door and removes clothes in silence, then sits in a chair in center of the room, facing away from Dani and towards the door]

DANI

[while client has back turned and is changing, Dani collects cash, quietly places it in drawer with shot glass, then reseats herself. Once client sits, shortly after she gets up and walks to the back of the client, her steps in high heels very audible. She places her hands on the chair back and leans down to speak into client's ear]

You will call me Mistress. Nothing more.

CLIENT 1

Yes, ma'am.

[Dani slowly circles and inspects the client while speaking with a cane in her hand]

DANI

[smacks ground on side of chair with a cane, audience can hear a "swoosh" and impact sound, client jumps in surprise]

You will punctuate every response with, "Mistress". Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress. I'm sorry, Mistress.

DANI

Good. Now, if you wish me to be your Mistress, if you wish to submit to me, I have... conditions. Other stipulations.

[grabs client's chin and pulls his face up to have him look into her eyes]

One: You will not look at me unless instructed to do so. Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

Yes, mistress.

DANI

Very good.

[lets go of his chin and pushes client's view downwards so his eyes remain downward cast]

Two: You will not touch me unless instructed to do so.

[continues to circle the client]

Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress.

[continues to look at the ground]

DANI

Three: You will not do *anything* unless instructed to do so, and not *until* you are instructed to do so.

Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

[still looking down] Yes, Mistress. Nothing until you say so, Mistress.

DANI

[crouches down, holds client's chin in one hand while looking at him in the face though his eyes remain downcast]

I will give you this last gift of seeing me directly in the eyes before we fully enter your training.

CLIENT 1

Thank you, Mistress.

[client looks up]

DANI

The final points you need to know are that I will respect you. In submission there is great power. Your abdication allows me to full embody the power that I have, and for that I am grateful to you. Though you occupy a space of submission, this is, nevertheless, a mutually respectful and satisfying relationship. I will see to it that this is so.

[Dani stands and begins to lightly yet sensually, touch client's chest, back, etc]

With respect, there is concern for safety. As we proceed with your training, if there is ever anything that feels too much but that you do not necessarily need to stop completely, you will say, "yellow". Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress. Thank you, Mistress.

DANI

Say it.

Client 1

Yellow.

DANI

[hits client lightly on exposed leg with cane, client jumps]

Yellow, what?

CLIENT 1

Yellow, Mistress!

DANI

Excellent. Yellow means slower. Now, beyond that, if there is anything that is too painful, overwhelming, or triggering in some way, you *will* say, “Mercy, Mistress”. Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress.

DANI

Say it. Show me that I can trust you to know yourself enough that I may take you to your edges.

CLIENT 1

Mercy, Mistress!

DANI

Perfect. With formalities out of the way, my work and my delight will be to turn you inside out. To come to know everything about you—from the depth of your fascial tissue to the depth of your soul. So, tell me...

[pauses in front of him, puts hands on either of his thighs while staring at him]

...are you just like the others?

CLIENT 1

Wha...what, Mistress? I don't understand, Mistress.

DANI

Are you like the others? Those who harm? Those who take advantage? You were assigned male at birth. You have the embodiment of one that is conditioned for it.

Client 1

I...I don't understand. I'm not sure, Mistress.

DANI

Exactly. We will explore your awareness. Or lack thereof.

[circles again, then places her hands firmly on his shoulders from behind, leans in and speaks into his ear after a pause]

Why are you here? Why do you wish to submit to me?

CLIENT 1

[stammers] I...I don't want to be in control. I'm always in control. I'm...tired, Mistress.

DANI

I doubt that is all. Control is only tiring if I *takes*, rather than gives. How does *your control* take?

CLIENT 1

I...I'm bad when I'm in control.

DANI

Bad, hmm? Tell me. Tell me how you are "*bad*". Tell me how you take.

CLIENT 1

I...I don't know, Mistress. I...I...think of myself first. I...I feel...bad. I don't always consider others, just my own wants....I don't want to be like this but...I don't know how not to be...

I don't know how to give my control away...except like this, Mistress.

DANI

Insufficient. So you wish to give me your control?

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress.

[Dani stands client up and spans him. Sits him down and slowly puts a collar and leash on him]

DANI

[crouches, pulling his face closer to hers with the leash until she's speaking into his ear]

I will tell you what you are actually asking of me. You say you want me to *take* your control. But what you really want me to take is your privilege. To prevent you from doing harm, to bring you back into the fold. With the rest of us.

[loosens grip on leash so they are no longer close, speaks as she stands up again]

You want me to take your guilt. Your shame. What you really want...is redemption.

CLIENT 1

[quietly, near tearful] Yes...Mistress...

DANI

You want redemption. For the harms that you have committed, that are in yours bones... even if they were committed through ignorance. That, and the harm in the bones of those before you.

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress. Whatever you say, Mistress.

DANI

Men like you, you are born into this world and you get to have everything, anything, you want, when you want it. And even if you don't get it, you take it...especially if it is not given to you.

[stands tall and with authority looking down on client]

I am here to tell you that I will not stand for this.

[pulls his head close to her by the leash, whispers into his ear]

And neither will you.

Client 1

No, Mistress. I mean, yes, Mistress.

DANI

I also want you to know that I see your great pain from benefitting from the pain of others, from your privilege...as does everyone like you. I see that you suffer, in spite of your privilege. Because of your privilege.

In spite of the harm that those with bodies like yours inflict on bodies like mine.
[grabs client by the chin, looks him straight in the eyes again]

To kill the pain you must kill the source. So, I'm going to destroy you. And put you back together. Fashion you into something, into someone more...equitable. Do you understand?

CLIENT 1

[stammering] ...I'm not sure I know what that means, Mistress [breathes a deep sigh]
Whatever you desire, Mistress.

DANI

I will build you out of pure intersectional feminism.

CLIENT 1

[stammering] ...yu...yu...yes, mistress. I feel frightened, Mistress.

DANI

[loosens tug on his leash, stands fully up and looks down on him]

You need not be frightened. It actually is what you desire, whether you realize it or not. But no matter. You don't need to understand. While you are here, and perhaps—if you prove worthy—while you are not here, you are mine. All of you. Anything you are, is mine.

[licks lips, sensual facial expression made of erotic desire]

And I will use you for justice, and for pleasure. However I see fit.

CLIENT 1

Yes, Mistress. Thank you, Mistress.

[Dani slowly caresses and further studies the client]

DANI

In your discipline you will experience love, and I will guide you to your atonement. One. Experience. At a time. Let the training begin... [said with a devious smile]

CLIENT 1

Th...th...thank you, Mistress.

[Dani seductively has her submissive stand by the collar, and leads him into a “back room” delineated by a screen which is back lit. As Dani and Client 1 move behind the screen and slowly begin periodic impact play strikes, the stage tier below with Farzin lights up, and we see him going through a trunk in their closet from which he pulls out different BDSM items of attire, whips, a dildo, etc. He throws the items back into the trunk, clearly in disgust and slams the trunk top closed. Farzin returns to the couch with his hands in his head and then starts to speak out loud]

FARZIN

“*Al-Fatihah*...all praise is due to god alone, the sustainer of worlds, the most gracious, the dispenser of grace...unto thee alone do I turn for aid. Guide me the straight way—the way of those upon whom thou hast bestowed thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned by thee, nor of those who go astray...”

[Farzin makes a gesture of creating a bowl with his hands. He breathes and speaks the next two pieces into his hands and “rubs” them down his body in an act of cleansing]

“*Al-Falaw*...I seek with the Sustainer of the rising dawn, from the evil of aught that he has created, and from the evil of the black darkness whenever it descends, and from the evil of all human beings bent on occult endeavors, and from the evil of the envious when they envy”

[breathes and rubs the words onto himself in a downwards, cleansing motion; gets on his knees and repeats the same physical process]

“*An-Nas*...in the name of God, the most gracious the dispenser of grace, say: I seek refuge with the Sustainer of men, the Sovereign of men, from the evil of the whispering, elusive tempter who whispers in the hearts of men—from all temptation to evil by invisible forces as well as men”.

[final bowl/rub down cleansing motion, then Farzin looks to the sky and pauses]

Especially the evil forces inside of me... God, save me from my envy. From my possessiveness. [pause]...from my fear.

[after an extended moment of pause, begins to quietly weep]

[Bottom stage tier goes dark again and we see Dani continue impact strikes and then begin to converse with the client above]

DANI

[between impact play strikes and with more forceful, loud tone] What is it that you truly want!

[client whimpers yet is silent, Dani hits harder in response to the silence]

I said, what is it that you truly want? As said, you will be rewarded with your truthful desires, but you must speak them and make them known!

[punctuates the question with the hardest hit yet]

CLIENT 1

Ah! I! I want to be fucked! I want to feel what it's like to be owned! To not be in control!

[Dani ceases her strikes. Client starts to cry and sob]

DANI

[moves to front of submissive to look him in the face while kneeling]

You can have all the things you want, if you allow yourself. With me, if you ask. What you've come here to learn, is consent. [pauses] In this place, I only celebrate your desires, your truth. Beyond relinquishing and destroying privilege, I do not allow shame here. All that you feel and want, is beauty.

[comes close and hugs submissive while kneeling, whispers in his ear]

Thank you for you. [pause] As I said, you can have *anything*, as long as it is authentic. And as long as you ask. [stands from her kneel, steps backward slightly] So. Ask.

CLIENT 1

Please...fuck me, Mistress. Please...*Please*.

DANI

It would be an honor. And a delight.

[Audience sees Dani move behind the client and slip obviously out of some attire, and prepare to fuck him. Client winds down his sobbing in preparation as back lights drop just before audience can see her fuck him. Lights come on on bottom tier, as we see Farzin continue to weep and struggle. After a time, lights come back on behind the top tier screen, with Dani holding the client from behind as they lay on the bed, clearly post sex act]

CLIENT 1

Thank you, Mistress.

DANI

Thank you for becoming more of yourself. It's a beauty to behold. [as she caresses him]
Now, savor. Feel the sensations of your pleasure and your becoming in your toes and feet, your hands, even your face. Then you will go forth as the most authentic you thus far.

CLIENT 1

Yesssss, Mistresssss... exhales audibly, sighs, and melts into Dani.

Lights behind curtain go down. Client exits stage from behind the darkened screen, several moments pass, Dani comes out from behind lit curtain/other room, client having left, she takes the hidden shot glass out, pours herself a drink from the ornate carafe, and sits down in chair]

DANI

[breathes heavily, head in one hand]

[sigh] *Fuck.*

[Takes a drink. Pauses. Starts to cry. Finishes drink, looks over at table to a book near the carafe. Reaches for book, and then hesitantly reads to herself as her sobs wind down]

“What happens when your soul
Begins to awaken in this world

To our deep need to love
And serve the Friend?

Oh, the Beloved
Will send you
One of His wonderful wild companions—
Like me” ...”

[puts down book, looks to sky]

These are all my wonderful, wild companions...god? The one's through whom I would heal?
Or am I just healing them at my expense?!

[continues to weep]

Is this power truly for me, or just another service for...for someone else?

[pauses, takes a final swig]

And what about my wonderful, wild companion at home? Will he be there after all this?

[pause] Through all this...?

[Lights dim totally on top half of the stage giving Dani an opportunity to shed dominatrix wear and strip down to lingerie in preparation for second client scene. Lights come back on bottom of the stage where audience can see and hear Farzin struggling with his own feelings and fears as he sits on the couch. He rises and walks over to a table and begins to pour himself a drink, stops just before pouring as he sees a laptop on the table. He looks left and right, then up, then slowly takes the laptop and sits on the couch facing the audience. He opens it. He reads the following, accentuating certain parts that he finds disturbing:

FARZIN

“Re: Our Date Tonight- I’m so looking forward to meeting you, Dani. The spirituality of your work is so clear from how you express yourself—[said in disgust/resentment] *it’s hard to express my excitement*. I’m looking forward to sharing both ideas, experiences, and *so. Much. More*. Your physical beauty is clearly only matched by your inner beauty, and *I can’t wait to cultivate more intimacy with you* [last phrase said in raised voice to a scream]. -J.”

[Farzin screams in angst and throws laptop to side of the couch. Hangs head in his hands as he weeps. After a short time, his weeping turns to anger]

FARZIN

How...how could she?! I! *I* was the one who noticed! I was the one who honored her inner beauty...! First! When no one did, when no one would!

How can this *client* [said with sarcasm] *imagine* that he could know anything of her depth?! Without having met her even! All you see, *friend*, is the syrupy kindness of her work face!

[Farzin stands to look at himself in the mirror while gesturing to his own body and speaking.
Speaks to the mirror and periodically stares into space past the audience, but in their direction as if still speaking to himself/the ether]

He’s never sat in the pit of conflict with her! Never ripped out his own heart out to cut away the pieces that blocked him from loving her! I have!

[gestures to himself in the mirror/towards the audience. Starts pacing around the apartment while speaking further]

How dare he. How dare he presume! And, “this is only work,” she said. But this...this is more than work. This is...this is too close. Too close to what...what *we* have. [pause] I agreed to support, to shed the parts of me that stood in the way! Not to be replaced by some presumptuous, doting *client*! I didn't agree to *this*...

[Farzin's anger converts to grief. Stop pacing, stands. He begins to cry while speaking]

How could she?! How could she...something so...similar. *So similar*...

[Farzin weeps while standing. Finally sits, puts his face in his hands, and weeps uncontrollably, the deepest yet]

[Lights dim on him]

Director's Notes: a moment of pause after Farzin weeps and lights fully dim on him, Neko Case's, "Hold on, Hold on," begins to play in the background. Lights go up on top half of the stage as Dani comes on, making last minute preparations. Song fades out as Dani completes her preparations for date with client 2 (0:35).

[Dani looks in mirror, clearly nervous and staccato in her movements. Checks and rechecks her make up, bra, brushes off her dress which is sensual but classy. There's a knock at the door. After a final check and adjustment to her outfit, she comes to the door this time, much warmer and inviting in her tone and actions than with Client 1]

DANI

Welcome! We finally meet! I'm *so* glad you're here! I'm Dani
[hugs and kisses him on the cheek]

CLIENT 2

Yes! *So nice* to meet you finally. Thank you for having me! I brought you this.
[hands her flowers, a gift of some kind]

DANI

Oh! *Well, thank you*. For all of *this*...

[After a moment of pause, client then realizes he hasn't paid for the visit and reaches into his pocket and places a visible but nondescript white envelop on a small table near the door]

Thank you so much. Look around, make yourself at home. I'm just going to put these

beauties in a vase.

[walks across stage to put flowers in an empty on the table, sneaks a look into the envelop to count money as client looks at a painting on the wall, satisfied she then slips the envelop into a drawer and sits down on loveseat as client talks]

CLIENT 2

You're very welcome. Truly, my pleasure. I wanted to express my appreciation up front.
[walks around slightly, gestures to painting on the wall]

This is a beautiful piece.

DANI

Ah, thank you! Someone I love dearly chose that for me.

CLIENT 2

[pause, looks away from painting towards Dani while still standing]

Like your partner, I hope.

[pauses with a slight grin]

I've really been looking forward to meeting you.

DANI

[slightly aloof] Oh? And why is that?

[Dani places her hand on the seat next to her, invite client to sit. Caresses his shoulder lightly but playfully as they speak]

CLIENT 2

[sits] Oh, well, certainly your beauty which was clear from your pictures. But more so your words—how you wrote. It was like you were speaking to me [pauses] It was clear how big your heart is.

DANI

Well, thank you. It's good to be seen.

CLIENT 2

It's clear that this is more than a job for you. You're sincere. And sincerity is hard to find in "the hobby," you know? Some providers, to them it's just a job. In and out. No pun intended.

Well, maybe a small pun [smirks].

[Dani laughs slightly]

DANI

You're right though, on all accounts. I agree that not all providers see this as a calling and a privilege. Some do it because they have to. Others do it without knowing why.

CLIENT 2

I haven't done this often. But I came here, came to you, because I want it to be more than a transaction. I want connection. Intimacy. And I guess love, in its own way.

[pauses]

An expansive definition of love, of course. Professional. Nothing weird.

DANI

[slightly aloof] Of course. All divine human needs...and besides, boundaries are sexy.

[winks]

CLIENT 2

[Playfully points finger]

Yes, these may be all divine needs, but not all people are capable of holding and offering them. I can tell that you're different.

[pauses]

I could see it even through a computer screen.

DANI

[Said playfully] You're too kind. Stop it.

CLIENT 2

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I feel like you saw me, and I feel like I see you. You saw me and didn't judge me. You understand that even though this is a professional relationship with boundaries, there's still intimacy. [pause] It's still deeply meaningful. You saw me and cared, even before we met...and that meant—that means—the world to me. [pauses, looks down then back up] I haven't experienced that type of care for a long time. Not since my partner passed.

DANI

[looks away uncharacteristically, almost invisibly collects herself before speaking]

I'm so sorry to hear of that. Then I can see why you came.
[reaches to hold his hand]

I'm glad that you did.

CLIENT 2

Can I confess something?

DANI

Of course. Do you want to get more comfortable?
[starts to slowly unbutton client's shirt]

Why don't you take some of this off?

CLIENT 2

[puts hand on Dani's to stop her] I'd love that, but not yet. I'm eager to know one another. We have plenty of time to come to know one another in that way.

[Dani looks subtly surprised, client continues]

I want to say that I've never been with a woman...like you before. But I first and foremost mean that, like, as I was saying earlier...a woman like you who sees me in my entirety.
[motions to himself sincerely. Then, smirks]

And, I've also never been with a woman like you in the way that you were probably expecting me to say.

[winks playfully]

DANI

Well, you wouldn't be the first!

CLIENT 2

No doubt, I'm sure. But, yes—I've had the desire, the fantasy, for a really long time. But never the opportunity. Never found the right time... [looks intently at Dani] the right person. And not, like, you know, in a fetishy sort of way or anything. [client appears bashful and awkward, looks away and then back] I'm sorry, I'm just realizing... [pause] I hope my words earlier don't make it seem like I'm obsessed or delusional or something. It's not like that. Though I bet you get that all the time.

DANI

No, no, I think I understand. I mean, I do, understand. You're correct though—I do get that from time to time. And I understand that too. It comes with the territory of being trans, for better or worse. It is what it is.

[pause]

But you get used to it. Or don't let it get to you. I've heard some doozies, that's for sure. Would you like to hear a poem I wrote about trans experience?

CLIENT 2

Of course!

DANI

This I called "Altar". All of the quotes are verbatim, by the way:

"Hi sexy I do love trans, it's one of my fetishes."

"I just want to have fun, Baby.

I'd like to play with you, would love to see your cock, Baby".

"I'm very curious, you're trans, correct?

Are you able to enjoy receptive intercourse?

One of my fetishes is feminine swallowing.

Any interest? ::wink wink::"

What they

Don't tell you

When you're trans—

Well,

Trans feminine

That is—

Is that

You become

An unconsenting
Repository:

A barf bag.
A urinal cake.
A diaper—
Of fetish,
Kink and
Secrets.

An object.

*“Mouth open always, Mistress.
I would love for you to make me
Cross dress and service your gorgeous
Girl cock, like a slut.
After spanking me soundly, of course.
A ball gag would only get in the way
And deprive you of my cries and moans.”*

Another name
For where you place
That which you hide,
That which you cherish,
And fear, is
An altar.

I am an altar.

An alter for
Your buried shame
Your unspoken fantasy,
That which you
Do not speak
To your wife,
Your children,
Your family,
Your priest.

A flesh and blood
Confessional booth, I am
Custodian,
Guardian,
Priestess
Of liberation.

Your liberation
From the colonial
Oppression of
Your desires.

Liberation through
Being oppressed.
A tits and dick
Bodhisattva,
Revered—

Whilst used.

CLIENT 2

I, uh...I don't know what to say. I'm speechless. [pregnant pause] People, guys, *say* that stuff to you??

DANI

Honey, that's PG.

CLIENT 2

Jesus.

DANI

Like I said, you gotta grow some skin. In my case, poetic skin And, if I'm totally honest...I don't always mind the attention, even if it's...of mixed quality, shall we say.

CLIENT 2

Uh huh...

DANI

[speaks jokingly and gestures to her body] I mean, trans people are sexy! What's not to like??

CLIENT 2

I'd have to agree!

DANI

[sitting closer to him, almost cuddling]

Looking past the superficiality though...being fetishized...it's like connecting to the gift of appreciation and admiration underneath...bizarre wrapping paper. If you know what I mean.

CLIENT 2

I haven't had that experience given my body, obviously. But I think I can start to imagine
[smiles and puts his arm around her]

DANI

There you go, getting more comfortable I see. I hear tale that you're here to have a new experience, and you're looking for something deeper.

CLIENT 2

Well, yes, of course.

[looks off and then back]

I'd been married for a long time. My wife and I didn't have sex so much anymore even before she got sick...and then the focus really wasn't on sex at all...but also, I don't think she would have approved of or accepted my desires and curiosity. No one in my life really would I don't think.

DANI

I'm so sorry to hear that. All of that.

CLIENT 2

I would much rather be open about who I am and what I need, but I was afraid that that wasn't possible. I was afraid that it would mean something worse if I was to be fully open...
[trails off, pregnant pause]

To be clear, I'm not here because I didn't love my wife. I would be here as well, even if she were still alive. [pause] I'm just glad I don't have to lie to her about it.

DANI

I understand.

CLIENT 2

I'm here because I want to love myself. Because I can't not be myself anymore. And I couldn't be my full self in that relationship alone. Or elsewhere for that matter. But now...

[pauses in grief, but also possibility]

now, I can. I think her spirit would approve, even if she may not have in life.

[moderate pause, looks down then up]

Do you believe in that sort of thing? Spirits, ancestors, or that we can be better partners after death than we were as simply...people, in life?

DANI

[slightly astonished look at the depth of the conversation] I do. Very much.

CLIENT 2

So, you know. You see...

[points finger lightly at her]

I knew you were different. Thank you.

DANI

For what?

CLIENT 2

For being you. For helping me create this

[opens arms to show a container, then gestures between the two of them]

to...access myself

[puts hand on his own heart]

Finally. After all this time. [emotional pause] Maybe for the first time...I guess it's never too late to become more of yourself, huh?

[slightly tears up, wipes, collects himself]

DANI

I have to say that I'm, uh, a little astonished. Most men hardly know why they're coming to me, much less able to see that sacredness of my work. I often have to educate them. Or try unsuccessfully.

CLIENT 2

Sure.

DANI

Their own internalized oppressions keep them from seeing it. They think they're here for sex but really, they're here for almost everything and anything else. Sex is just the excuse they shouldn't need that gets them through the door. Permission. A smokescreen.

[pause]

They need touch, closeness, intimacy...and of course, sometimes sex. But who doesn't? It's not like life serves all our needs on a platter, on order, you know?

CLIENT 2

I know *very well*.

DANI

It can be very exhausting, the education, the drawing out...But it's also the reward, to me. To see others blossom.

CLIENT 2

I can only imagine. And that blossoming...it leads to further pollination...

DANI

Exactly! I was trying to explain that to my partner recently. How serendipitous!

[client begins to slowly caress her, she slowly leans in as he kisses her on the cheek. After receiving touch for a moment, Dani breaks the caress, looks at client]

This is why I do this work, it's the love that I have to give. My small sliver in this world.

[Client leans in and kisses her on the neck. Dani allows it, and afterwards slowly leans in and kisses him on lips]

CLIENT 2

[after making out for a moment, client breaks the kiss]

[playfully and sincerely] On behalf of the oppressed oppressors, I, we, thank you.

[they go back to kissing for some moments]

DANI

Shall we, migrate to somewhere more comfortable?

CLIENT 2

That'd be delightful.

[they stand, Dani leads him by the hand to behind the screen. They lay down on the bed, house lights dim, audience can see them removing clothes and then soft core play, then after a minute or two, lights come back up while they remain behind the screen]

DANI

Hmmmm, this is delightful...

[short time passes, they roll apart but still close enough for him to lightly caress her while she speaks]

CLIENT 2

Please, tell me more, what else is it like to be you in this work?

DANI

Well, I've found that I am a conduit for spirit—each time I see a client, I empty myself out as much as possible, while still being as much of myself as possible. If that makes sense to you...

CLIENT 2

Seems very zen, in the true sense of the word. Self with a big “S,” versus self with a little “s”.

DANI

Something like that, yes. [pauses for a moment as if contemplating whether to say the next sentences] There's a Sufi concept called *fanna*. Have you hear of it?

CLIENT 2

[Eagerly] No, I haven't. Tell me.

DANI

Well, despite the poor translation, it's an... annihilation, but not in the way you might usually think of it. It's an annihilation of one's self, like, one's small self, rather. But as a pathway to

greater remembrance of union with the divine...

[pauses bashfully while caressing back]

Sorry, I don't usually get this esoteric with new friends.

CLIENT 2

[stops caressing but still has hand on her]

Oh, don't be. This is *fascinating*. I mean, when do you get to have conversations like this?
And naked no less...

[chuckles]

I feel like I've heard of this idea, but the word I know is *agape*. I was raised somewhat Christian and so have a little more familiarity with that. It's like, embodying the self-giving love of god.

An expression of the most unselfish human love.

DANI

Yes, similar! Or maybe they're just different words for the same sentiment!

[client slowly kisses her and worships her with his mouth]

CLIENT 2

This is amazing. I never thought that I'd be able to have conversations like this,
that...combine sacredness and sexuality.

DANI

Well, here it is, here I am!

[leans in to kiss him again, says seductively]

Here it is. Here *we* are...

CLIENT 2

So the remaining question I have then, though, is what about eros? Attraction, desire. Where does that fit in with *agape*? And *fanna*?

DANI

I'm not sure. I suppose that's what we're here to explore...

[they make out for a short time then Dani whispers seductively]

We can report back to the masses once we find our answer..

[Dani closes the gap between them and they kiss. Lights on top tier of the stage slowly darkens while Dani and client slowly and erotically still make out/move. Actors eventually exit the stage under cover of total darkness. Light on lower tier comes up, illuminating Farzin doubled over, holding his knees while sitting on the couch, raging without words and then descending into a weep. He eventually starts speaking aloud to himself]

FARZIN

“Wayfarer
Your body is my prayer carpet,
For I can see in your eyes
That you are exquisitely woven
With the finest silk and and wool
And that pattern upon your soul
Has the signature of god”.

[sits in silence following recitation, then explodes:]

Fuck this (in Farsi/Persian)! Allah, how can you ask this of me? Why do you dangle what I thought was the perfect match, the perfect person, and then...this?! Ask me to accept and love...this?!

[looks up and screams]

Why?!

[collapses on couch and rocks more while light dims to end scene]

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Setting: House lights come up and we return to Dani and Farzin sitting on the loveseat in their apartment mid conversation after Dani had come back from a client appointment.

DANI

[Farzin is silent and somewhat distant]

So now, I hope you see, or can at least feel, what it's like for me when I'm doing sex work. It's not for me, necessarily, but I use it for me. I use it to learn. Learn to be powerful, to be vulnerable— after what's happened to me. To be appreciated. To be seen. [said with conviction] And to get paid. Paid to be femme. Paid to be trans. Valued. For the first time, in a material way. [pause] It is the ultimate subversiveness.

[Silence for a time]

FARZIN

[looking past Dani, and recites following poem, then looks back at her]

“Wayfarer
Your body is my prayer carpet,
For I can see in your eyes
That you are exquisitely woven
With the finest silk and and wool
And that pattern upon your soul
Has the signature of god”.

DANI

Rumi? Or more Hafiz?

FARZIN

Hafiz...it was the best I could do to...try not to go insane with jealousy while you were with that last client. Somehow I knew that that appointment was...different...

DANI

[pauses as if deciding what to share or not]

It...was. If I can be fully honest, it was beautiful, and I was more than a little frightened to tell you about it. I'm still frightened, if I'm actually being totally honest.

[pauses as if giving herself an internal pep talk]

But, I have to be. I have to live in truth. What else do I have, do any of us have?

FARZIN

[pauses]

I want to live in truth as well.... [hesitates] so first, I have a confession.

DANI

Oh?

FARZIN

I knew this appointment would be different because...I read your emails with him. While you were away.

DANI

What?!

FARZIN

I'm sorry! I couldn't help myself! I was...alone, I felt alone, even from god. I drank. And...I saw...your computer, sitting there. The temptation was too much...I was looking for relief. Some kind of relief.

DANI

That's no excuse!

FARZIN

I know! I've never done that before! I regret it completely! Both because of violating your trust and...*torturing myself*. [long silence] I am *so* deeply sorry.

[hangs head in shame]

DANI

[gets progressively louder and confrontational as she speaks] Now, *I* don't know what to say. You said you supported me. Trusted me. You said you would grow to love me how I needed to be loved. *You told me* you would face yourself. Face your shadow. Do your work. But no. Instead, you do this!

[stands in a rage, steps back from him]

FARZIN

I know! There's no excuse. Even hearing you now, I feel both assured and unassured. I know you more, the work is not what I thought. And, yet, clearly I did not trust you...This is my problem!

DANI

[said coldly, solidly with conviction] I have done *nothing* to earn your distrust. I have been honest and taken the risk to be so. Every. Step. Of the way.

[punctuates last three pieces of dialogue with her finger] And it's not just your problem.

You've made it *our* problem.

FARZIN

You're right. I was...*I am*...insecure. I'm so afraid...afraid that an eventual someone may come. Someone...special, like today. Someone less insecure than me. That you may enjoy your work more than you enjoy me....

[puts hands over mouth and nose]

That you may leave. And that I may have to face these feelings anytime...have to face them all the time. That it won't get easier...

DANI

Stop.

[Farzin looks up slightly taken aback and shaken out of his spiral]

Let me be perfectly clear—the only thing that would make me leave, that would keep me from enjoying you, would be you continuing to break my trust.

FARZIN

Then I am more ashamed than before. And more frightened.

DANI

I am not interested in your shame. Or your fear. I'm interested in you never doing that again. Ever. I am interested in you trusting me. Because *I am trustworthy*.

[pregnant pause]

FARZIN

Yes, you are. You are trustworthy. But, I mean, if I want to be in full truth...I still doubt I can do this. I go back and forth between, “can I do this,” to, “am I being asked to love this, love like *this*?” Like, *fanna*. Is this *fanna*? Or am I just rationalizing my pain to stay with you, denying my lack of capacity? [turns head and shakes head] I don't know...I don't know....

[silence]

I don't want to hurt you. I love you. And, I'm terrified.

DANI

I think *fanna* is...shedding what's not true. It would be untrue for me not to do my work. *And*, it may be untrue for you to be okay with my path. But that's not up to me. It's up to you. And god. Maybe it's not even up to you...but I certainly can't tell you.

[sits back down, takes one of his hands]

And I want you to live in truth. And I want to be together...[tears up slightly] *In-sha-allah*.

[pause as she wipes her eyes and collects herself]

And I will say, I believe it has to get easier. My fear of you leaving has gotten easier with each experience I come back from. And you're still here. I hope the same will be true for you with each of my leaving and more importantly, each time I come back.

FARZIN

I am glad it's been easier for you, though I'm not sure if it should be.

DANI

What do you mean by that??

FARZIN

I fear it has gotten harder each time for me. That the darkness inside of me grows, is fed, with each time. I've screamed, wept, broken trust, drank. What more can I do wrong? [starts to lightly cry]

DANI

No one ever said *fanna* was comfortable. "Annihilation," remember? Not a comfortable word. Or experience

[she puts her hand on his back as he doubles downwards while crying lightly].

In fact, I read a Rumi poem recently about this that I wanted to share with you. It goes:

"First I was raw, then I was burnt, now I am on fire".

It sounds beautiful when you read it, but I can't imagine that the burning part was delightful...even if the outcome might have been ecstatic. Or alchemical.

[long pause]

I guess the real question is [looks into distance but with hand on Farzin's back], how much *fanna* can we take? Can you take? How much is kind? And how much is...

[trails off]

FARZIN

...torturous? Or...wise?

DANI

[tears up]

I suppose so. Even if one is doing it to themselves [while looking back at Farzin fondly, then face shifts to seriousness]

What *I can* tell you though, is that even if it is part of your *fanna*, if you break my trust again in such a way, we are done. This [gestures to her and him and the space in between], is done. I know we don't experience *fanna* in a vacuum, but I refuse to be the rocks that you crash against.

FARZIN

But isn't that love? Being the rocks against which we both crash...?

DANI

[pauses, gets up, starts to put on her coat, speaks as she turns her head to look back as she opens the door]

Even the rocks get tired, no matter how beautiful the sea is.

[Walks out the door off stage]

[Farzin stays seated looking in a soft gaze past the audience in shock, stage lights dim slowly, he exits stage under dark, ending end Act 2]

[10 minute intermission]

ACT 3, Scene 1

Setting: stage lights come up. Dani unlocks the apartment and enters having been gone for an indeterminate amount of time, everything seems to be as it was but Farzin is not at home.

DANI

Farzin? Farzin? Are you home?

[No answer. Dani takes off her coat, goes to make herself a cup of tea. Eyes the carafe/liquor bottle, goes to pour it but then puts it down and sticks to tea. Pours two cups, and brings both to the coffee table as she seats herself on the sofa that she and Farzin usually share. There is a book on the seat next to her. Dani picks up the book, visibly takes a folded piece of paper out. She places it next to herself and first turns to the book, "reading" silently as a recording of the poem in Dani's voice plays overhead]

“O, the Friend
Has done me a great favor
And has so thoroughly ruined my life,
What else do you expect
Seeing god would do?
Out of the ashes of this broken frame
There is a noble rising son pining for death,
Because,
Since we first met, Beloved,
I have become a foreigner

To every world
Except that one
In which there is only You
Or—Me.

And from that I cry for more loneliness.
I am lonely.
I am so lonely, dear Beloved,
For the quintessence of
Loneliness,

For what is more alone than god?"

[puts book down, soft gaze stares into the direction of the audience, looking at nothing]

DANI

[Tears up slightly, wipes them away]

Me too, my love. Me too.

[pauses, then picks up the folded piece of paper that had acted as a bookmark. Begins to "read" it, and a recording of the words are played aloud in Farzin's voice. As the recording starts, a small portion of the right side of the lower tier of the stage lights up. We see Farzin sitting at a bus stop without luggage. Only the bench, street lamp, and bus sign are visible in the darkness]

FARZIN (via recording)

"Dani, my love,

I'm sorry to have left before you returned. I didn't know when you would be back, though I assumed we were not finished.

What is also not finished, is me—*my* obstacles to supporting and loving you. *My fanna*.

Is *fanna* ever finished? I don't know the answer. I do think though, that there is some amount, some level of it, for one to shift. For me to shift. I've grown, but I don't believe that I've grown enough to match *your* expansion.

In the same way you refuse to shrink, I also refuse to be small. I refuse to lose you in smallness. I refuse to lose myself in smallness. I read another take on love, something other than our Beloved Sufi poets. It goes like this: "love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own and another's spiritual growth".

Ironically it's from a book, *The Road Less Traveled*. I can see you smirking now...but it speaks my intention. To know love as a verb...to see where I am loveless even if I am caring.

[Farzin puts hands over face, wipes his face, and his eyes while at the bus stop as this section of the recording plays]

And so, I go. To do my work. To get bigger. To claim more of myself so I can stand alone. So I can stand with you. Think of it as a form of inner pilgrimage, if you will. My *hajj*. I've never taken the formal *hajj*—I don't know what it means besides what I've read, what I've been told. I don't know what to do. I just know that it changes you. The Mecca I need is inside.

I offer myself to be changed. I will live the questions. I will be back. I hope to both be and not be, the same man that you love. *In-sha-allah*. God willing.

Only god knows. In being you, you have been my lamp—so that I may further light my own lamp, and my own way.

Remember, you are not alone. I am not alone. If we are apart, may we cry for loneliness... for in it there, is god. Or so this "learn-ed one," has read...

All love,
-Farzin."

[Dani sits back into the sofa, puts the letter down, cries a slight bit more, then lays on the couch. She places the note and open book over her heart, and holds them there with her hands as she falls to sleep. Lights dim to end the scene]

ACT 3, Scene 2

Director's Notes: Lights come up on upper tier of stage. A masculine of center, butch lesbian sits on a couch in another apartment. She picks up the phone and calls Farzin (the sound of a cell phone ring plays over speakers). Right side of lower tier lights up with Farzin still at the bus stop. He answers.

REN

[in faux British voice] Why hello, dawling. How doth thou?

FARZIN

[pauses for an extended period of time]

Not well.

REN

[code switches back] What happened?

FARZIN

I, uh...I...Dani and I had a big fight.

[holds head in hands]

REN

Of sweetie, I'm sorry—what happened?

FARZIN

I'm...I'm not sure. I think I've made a mistake. I'm not sure...I'm not sure what to do.

[holds head as if heaving a tension headache]

I just know that I have to change...something.

REN

I'll be right over [moves to hang up the phone, stops] With take out.

FARZIN

Oh, I...I'm not at home.

REN

Where are you?

FARZIN

I'm at a bus stop.

[looks up at stop sign]

The number 12. 14th and Birch.

Sound of bus stopping plays over loudspeakers.

REN

[leans forward in her seat] Don't get on that bus. Walk three blocks South. Get on the 8

[pauses, speaks authoritatively]

And get over here.

FARZIN

[resigned] I... [pauses] okay. I'll be there.

REN

Good.

[she and Farzin both hang up their phones]

Lights go down briefly. Under cover of darkness Farzin goes to upper tier. Lights come back up, he stands at door, knocks.

REN

Come in!

[looks to Farzin as he enters, she stands]

Get over here! [gestures him forward, they hug. After embracing she points to styrofoam containers of food] Come [points] come. Eat!

[points to punctuate]

FARZIN

Ashkaruk...

[puts hand on heart]

My thanks.

REN

Of course. Look, you're not just my colleague. You're my friend. Sit [gestures] Tell me what happened.

[sits herself, begins to eat]

FARZIN

[sits, starts to eat a little, pauses]

I...well...I think I may have...messed things up.

REN

[between bites] What do you mean?

FARZIN

How do I say...well, I... [Ren raises her eyebrow whilst chewing] wait, I'm not sure if I've told you...or what I should say.

REN

Told me what? Try me.

FARZIN

I don't think I've told you. Dani...Dani has become...a sex worker
[pauses and looks expectantly at Ren as if anticipating a negative reaction]

REN

Well. Now things are interesting

[smirks]

Lookatcha! It looks like you've seen, no...were *expecting* to see a ghost! Or something!
[pauses while lightly pushing Farzin's shoulder]

What did you think I was gonna say?

FARZIN

I mean...I don't know...I suppose I expected...
[pauses, looks into distance]

I expected your judgement.

REN

Dawlin', please... come now. This isn't my first rodeo. You think I care?

FARZIN

I mean...I clearly do...

REN

How's that?

[pushes Farzin's shoulder again]

Cmon, brother! It's no big deal! I mean, look, I know it's not me. But if a gold star like me feels like it isn't a thing well...even you can, my Persian prince

[winks]

FARZIN

Um...

REN

Cmon! I'm just playing with you! Lost in translation, I guess. I'm just trying to run out the bulldagger-tough-bro stereotype, you know?

[pushes Farzin playfully in the arm]

I mean, I'm just saying it's no big deal. I'm not sayin' it's easy. It's just easy for me to say. Because it's not me.

FARZIN

Bull...dagger?

REN

Nevermind. Anyways, so she does sex work now. It just means she's realizing her queerness more.

FARZIN

How could she be queer? She's dating me.

REN

[puts hand on his shoulder]

Honey, you're in love with a trans sex worker. That makes *you* queer!

FARZIN

[pauses for a long while]

Well, I...what does that mean?

REN

Hell if I know! I've been me for decades and I'm still tryin' to figure it out! But what I can tell you is that being yourself and allowing and supporting others to be themselves is about as queer as it gets.

FARZIN

This is where I fear I've made my mistake. I've tried to support Dani, but...[looks sheepish/bashful] I failed.

REN

Why do you think that?

FARZIN

I couldn't hold it in. I couldn't love it all...I wasn't actually okay with her sex work. I...I read her emails. I drank and had outbursts...

REN

Well, that's a tough one. Rather than dwelling on what you didn't do perfectly, maybe a better thing to ask is...what do you love about her?

FARZIN

I love everything about her.

REN

Do you love the things about her that her clients love about her?

FARZIN

I, uh...suppose so.

REN

Well?

FARZIN

The sun, well, the earth needs it to be warm, right? Some part of the world needs her to shine in it. I know this, but...it seems impossible. But as you say, who I am to keep her from shining? Who am I to take the light from someone else?

REN

Look, my friend, I'll tell you that most everyone we know is actually looking to do just that. Whether they know it or not. Whether they admit it or not.

FARZIN

Do what?

REN

Cage others' light.

[scoffs]

As if we could. But you know what happens when you try to do that?

FARZIN

No, what?

REN

The heat of the light starts to form cracks. Kind a like the opposite of what Leonard Cohen said. The cracks aren't just what lets the light in, but it's the light that cracks the cage.

[gestures]

The light begets light and goes outwards. Like a prism. Not just inwards.

FARZIN

Sage. [pauses] Sage. Sage. Sage.

REN

Stop it.

[punches Farzin in the arm].

FARZIN

No, really. I mean sage. Not you. I mean, you too. But what you just told me, about the light and the cracks...

REN

Leonard Cohen?

FARZIN

Um, sure, but I'm sorry to tell you that that first part...

REN

About the cracks being the way the light gets in?

FARZIN

That. *That*, actually was written by the Sufi saint, Rumi.

REN

Huh. No kiddin'?

FARZIN

Try and cage
the light.

Watch
as the light
crack its cage
letting in more, light.
Like a beach ball under water.
Rumi, Leonard Cohen, both
were right and wrong.
Dualities aside the
light always
wins.

Wins—as
if there were
anything to win,
or lose for that matter.
Expansion in the contraction.
Yang within yin, yin
within yang, all
just the same
light, and
Death.

Our sacred
beloved, death.

Everything dies and
everything is born anew.

REN

Beautiful. What was that?

FARZIN

I don't know.

[pauses, looks somewhat astonished]

I don't know where that came from. I quote others' poetry constantly. In Iran, we basically speak in poetry. But I've felt like I have no poetry to give. I have wondered what my poetry is.

[pauses]

I suppose...that was it.

REN

Know what your poetry really is?

FARZIN

What?

REN

Trying as you did. With Dani. Facing yourself. That is your poetry.

FARZIN

I had no thought about that... it never felt enough.

REN

With love it never does. It never will.

FARZIN

I have to go.

[pauses, looks down]

REN

Go? Go where? Home?!

FARZIN

Yes.

REN

Now?

FARZIN

It can't wait. I may not...be able to save things but at least...at least now I know what I have to say.

REN

Okay. Go.

[when Farzin pauses, then points to the door]

Get!

FARZIN

[starts to walk out without saying goodbye. Stops, turns his head back to face Dayna]

Thank you. For everything.

REN

[rolls eyes] You're welcome.

FARZIN

[puts hand to heart and slightly bows, then turns towards door wordlessly and leaves]

Ren continues to eat styrofoam take out, looks off into the distance. We hear the sound of the bus stopping, door closing, then it speeding off. Lights come down to end the scene.

ACT 3, Scene 3

Character soliloquies: *both Dani and Farzin come on, stand on separate parts of the lower tier of the stage and address the audience directly:*

DANI

What would, what could, you do for love? For a radical love that freed another (or “another,” if you’re polyamorous, *chuckles*), as well as yourself?

FARZIN

How far would you be willing to go? What would that look like, for you? What would you have to face and transmute, inside yourself?

DANI

Have you already done this? How have you done this well? In what ways are you not doing that now? Could you do it better? Can you, in this lifetime?

Would our situation would work out for you? Why or why not?

FARZIN

What outcome for our

[gestures to her and Farzin]

or your

[gestures to audience]

lives, do you think is the most realistic? Possible?

FARZIN

Or, perhaps you fancy yourself a realist—what would be the outcome of this in your life?

DANI

Or do you want, need, to see an alternative, how something could go—if we were operating as our highest selves?

FARZIN

Or perhaps you have no idea, have no pre-existing models. Maybe you want to explore the unknown.

[House lights come up for an active vote from audience that determines the play's ending for that show]

DANI

We will now take a vote from you all, on the ending of this play and the issues explored therein. We encourage you to vote authentically, regardless of how others may vote. We suggest you all close your eyes while voting to facilitate this.

Please choose one of the following two options:

Ending 1: We reconcile

Ending 2: We do not reconcile

[repeat the options, then ask audience members to vote for only one of the options. Dani and Farzin take a count, but do not announce the “winning” outcome. Thanks audience for their participation, both leave stage, house lights go down for final scene]

ACT 3, Scene 3, Ending 1- they reconcile

Setting: “their” former apartment, though Dani is the one that lives there now. Farzin has either moved out permanently or temporarily, we don’t know. Audience is not clear on exactly how much time has passed since the last scene. Dani prepares for Farzin’s visit, and scene begins with a knock signaling his arrival]

DANI

[fiddles nervously on loveseat, turning a different colored book than the one through rest of play, waiting. Stands upon hearing the knock]

[takes a deep audible breath] Coming!

[Checks her makeup, fixes her skirt in the mirror, hurries over to door. Takes deep breathe again before opening it. Farzin stands in the door]

DANI

Hi.

[pause]

It’s good to see you.

FARZIN

[pause] It's good to see you too.

[they embrace awkwardly, but for a long time, then separate]

I brought this.

[hands her a bottle of liquor]

DANI

Oh, thank you. I don't drink anymore...but I appreciate the gesture.

FARZIN

[nodding head in mutual understanding and respect]

I also no longer drink. I just wasn't sure where we were to start...given where we left off.

DANI

I understand...

[pause, looks at the bottle then at Farzin]

It both did and didn't so us much good, huh?

FARZIN

Yes, I think so.

DANI

Perhaps tea? [after she realizes that Farzin doesn't know if he's welcome to enter yet or not]

I mean, come in, come in!

[gesturing welcomingly]

Tea?

FARZIN

Yes, please. Tea sounds wonderful.

[enters, removes his coat and sits on the loveseat while Dani prepares the tea]

...I still take it the same.

DANI

[said jokingly but nervously]. I figured. It hasn't been *that* long for your whole palette to change.

FARZIN

[said almost under his breath] Perhaps not in linear time...

DANI

What was that? I couldn't hear you.

FARZIN

Nothing...it was nothing. Never mind. What I really mean is, I hope...it's been a long enough time for other things to have changed.

DANI

Hmm...right out of the gates. Well, at least you've gotten more direct.

[finishes steeping the tea and walks to the loveseat, hands Farzin his cup then seats herself]

FARZIN

Thank you.

DANI

Of course.

FARZIN

So...how have you been?

DANI

I've been...well, honestly...I'm not sure how to answer that question.

FARZIN

Oh?

DANI

Well...time apart...*our*, time apart...has shown me some things. Things I couldn't see before.

[Farzin nods in acknowledgement and is attentive. Dani looks down, then back up at Farzin]

I've realized that perhaps...perhaps, I was a bit...self righteous. Especially when things got heated.

[Farzin looks down and then back to Dani, but remains quiet]

It's hard to explain. I've been spinning about exactly what happened and how to explain it to you.

FARZIN

I understand. Very much, I believe.

DANI

I think...I think I felt so intensely because I felt...assaulted. The difficulty you had with my doing sex work. Every feeling you had, every action—actual betrayal or not—felt like an affront. Felt like an obstacle to me becoming more of myself.

[Farzin quietly takes Dani's hand, she starts to cry lightly]

Any obstacle felt like a betrayal of the commitment we'd made to each other. I realize that wasn't totally fair...or true.

FARZIN

I see.

[looks away/past Dani after speaking, then resumes gaze on her]

Where did this understanding come from?

DANI

I don't know...time apart, I suppose? Such a cliché...But, you know the age-old adage that you don't realize what you have until it's gone?

FARZIN

I've heard it.

DANI

But, you being gone...it brought me to a crossroads.

FARZIN

What kind of crossroads?

DANI

The same that every relationship comes to, I suppose.

[Farzin makes a face of confusion as Dani looks off then back]

...you can either see the other person in their entirety and accept them...or you can drop and run. There's a song that goes

[closes her eyes and sings]

"I can hit the road and run my life away, but I choose you...every day"

[opens her eyes, pauses, looks at Farzin]

Wherever you go, there you are.

FARZIN

Said as a true sage. [smirks] Or sung.

DANI

[laugh-cries, sniffles]

You really were doing your best. I could only see what you weren't doing perfectly, where you weren't meeting *my* expectations...rather than the things you were doing well....

[looks down at teacup]

I just...couldn't see. I was so...righteous....so...well...silly to say, but, I felt *right*...So *right* that I couldn't see how much love and dedication that struggle took despite it's...messiness, on the outside.

FARZIN

[looks down, tears up as well]

Well, it *was* messy. I felt like I knew that, and tried to make that clear to you. I tried to own it...[looks down] But...you couldn't hear me.

DANI

I see that now...I'm sorry.

FARZIN

You know something that I've realized? That it's okay. We're both messy. This is it. This is life. This is *fanna*.

[pauses in contemplation]

I also, had realizations while you were gone.

DANI

Yeah? Tell me.

FARZIN

I realized that all my problems had to do with the fact that I couldn't surrender.

DANI

Tell me more.

FARZIN

Well, because of my faith, my whole life, I've known devotion. That devotion always involves surrendering, as completely as possible. But, if I'm honest with myself, my faith was much more of a...how do you say? A foxhole path than a guiding one.

DANI

[in acknowledgement] Mmm...

FARZIN

In our case I pledged devotion...but I didn't surrender. I didn't surrender to your god-given path, or to who you were becoming. I realized that for this to work, for any actual, unconditional love...there has total and on-going surrender.

DANI

That's....that's incredible.

FARZIN

I'd like to do something.

DANI

Oh?

FARZIN

I don't know if it will change anything between us but...it's what I wish I had done.

DANI

[nervously but with anticipation] Um, okay....yes.

FARZIN

Please, stand up.

[Dani stands, faces Farzin. Farzin stands facing her, then gets on his knees in traditional Muslim prostration. He puts his head to the ground and lifts his hands towards Dani. Brings them down and up five times. Pauses at the end of the gesture, then stands again and looks at Dani in silence]

DANI

That was...beautiful. Thank you.

FARZIN

It's all that you ever deserved. I honor the god in you. And I would like to surrender.
[long silence as they continue to stand and look into one another's eyes]

DANI

I suppose the question is...what now?

FARZIN

I suppose so.

FARZIN

We've been to hell and back. And here we are. Scathed. But together...What do you think that means?

DANI

I'm not sure. But there's a poem that I found that I want to share with you.

FARZIN

[nods] Please.

[they both sit back down]

DANI

“Listen to the story told by the reed,
Of being separated.

‘Since I was cut from the reed bed,
I have made this crying sound.

Anyone apart from someone they love
Understands what I say.

Anyone pulled from a source
Longs to go back.

[Farzin starts to cry as Dani reads]

At any gathering I am there,
Mingling in the laughing and grieving,

A friend to each, but few
Will hear the secrets hidden

Within the notes. No ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit,

Spirit up from body; no concealing
That mixing. But it's not given us

To see the soul. The reed flute
Is fire, not wind. Be that empty.

Hear the love fire tangled in the reed notes,
As bewilderment melts into wine.

The reed is a friend
To all who want the fabric torn

And drawn away. The reed is hurt
And salve combining. Intimacy

And longing for intimacy, one
song. A disastrous surrender

[Farzin wipes his nose, still teary]

And a fine love, together. The one
Who secretly hears this is senseless.

A tongue has one customer, the ear.
A sugarcane flute has such effect

Because it was able to make sugar
In the reed bed. The sound it makes

Is for everyone. Days full of wanting,
Let them go by without worrying

That they do. Stay where you are
Inside such a pure, hollow note.

Every thirst gets satisfied except
That of these fish, the mystics,

Who swim a vast ocean of grace
Still somehow longing for it!

No one lives in that without
Being nourished every day.

But if someone doesn't want to hear
The song of the reed flute,

It's best to cut conversation
short, say goodbye, and leave".

FARZIN

[Blows his nose. Smirks and chuckles]

All this conflict and talk of love and finally some Rumi.

DANI

[teary eyed, playfully] I knew it wouldn't be lost on you.

FARZIN

I have some Rumi for you as well.

[walks to his jacket, pulls out a small, different book than before, sits, and begins to read]

“Faithful friend
Come
Come closer

Let go of “you” and “I”

Come
Quickly

You and I

Have to live

as if
you and I

never heard
Of a “you”
and
an “I”.

[Closes book, there is a silence between the two]

DANI

I'm speechless.

FARZIN

Well, perhaps, when you're ready, you can tell me more about “the reed”. And the reed will have my full love, attention, and support.

DANI

That sounds like a good start...

Characters remain staring into one another's eyes as the stage lights dim, ending the play.

End of Ending 1

ACT 3, Scene 3, Ending 2- they do not reconcile

Setting: Their apartment. We see Farzin alone, continuing to drink while Dani is out. Dani comes back after a walk/breather; their heated conversation of betrayal not yet concluded. He finishes a drink as she enters, and is clearly inebriated in his speech and action.

DANI

[takes off coat as starts to speak after closing the door]

Had to take a break.

FARZIN

[snarkily] Clearly.

DANI

As I was saying...

FARZIN

[inebriated slurring/slightly combative, puts hands up to stop Dani]

No, wait. I have something to say first. What do you mean I did this to myself?

DANI

Well, what I meant was...

FARZIN

You asked me for fanna! And I accepted! I promised and I pledged that I would do all I could to love you the way you needed to be loved!

And I did! I fucking did!

[angry pause]

Clearly it wasn't good enough for you!

DANI

Wow, you've had a lot to drink. But you know what, fuck it. Yes, you promised—and look at the job you've done! Reading my emails, angry outbursts...*drunken rages*.

It hasn't felt safe or stable to be with you since I started sex work.

[pause]

Since I started becoming who I actually am.

[gets up and pours herself a large drink. Doesn't pour or offer one to Farzin]

FARZIN

Look, yes, you're right...I certainly have my part—my dishonesty, my distrust...and the resulting distrust for you...

DANI

Um, yes...

FARZIN

But I tried! I did everything I could! Everything! Everything that was in my power and ability!

You, you Dani, this [gestures between them to signify the relationship], ask perfection of me! Asked that I be more than what I am! Without any compassion!

DANI

[almost spits out what she was already drinking, collects herself, and then gulps whole drink down before continuing]

[stands, speaks somewhat enraged] Without compassion?! I stood by, was allowing of your imperfection repeatedly, tolerated your snooping, your lying. All I did was become myself. Just myself! pauses] All I asked—no, offered—was that you grow. Or acknowledge that you couldn't, so we could get on with our lives. Separately, if need be.

I never made you do anything. You're not a victim. You're a volunteer.

[pause]

Every day, every moment.

[pause with face of indignation]

You've always had an out, so don't you dare blame me for your pain. Or your shame.

FARZIN

[Defensively, voice starts to raise to match Dani's] Have I?! Do you know what's it's like to suffer and not be able to leave! I never wanted to! Nor do I think I can!

[pauses]

Don't you see, I'm just human!

[gestures to self]

I have flaws. Some of them, deep, yes. But I'm just human...

[puts hands down in a sense of resignation, but then becomes activated/angered again and points finger at Dani]

And you can't accept that.

[keeps pointing to Dani] Your fierceness asks for god's love, not human love. It leaves no room for humanity. How can you asked to be loved by another person, if loving the best way someone knows how, is not enough?

DANI

Because sometimes—often, really—someone's best, it's simply not enough. A few wise folks said both that, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions," and that, "love will tear us apart". Intention is not the same as impact.

[intentionally pauses, takes a drink then looks directly at Farzin]

[said somewhat snarkily] Sometimes we have to leave behind those who can't fly with or as high as us....or aren't fully committed to doing so. Whatever it takes.

FARZIN

Oh, I see. You're so clear, so high, so perfect! Your pursuit of you...*even if you dress it up as your authenticity* [makes air quotes and is said snarkily in reaction], it's just ego—look what's it's done to others. To me! [pause] How arrogant of you!

DANI

To you! You did that to you! Again, I've never forced you to be with me. I've just told you who I am. It's always been up to you to decide if that was okay for you.

FARZIN

As if it were that simple.

DANI

And I'm kind of at the point in which I don't care either way, if this is okay for you or not. Abandon me! Leave! Forsake your work! Blame me! Whatever you need to do to deflect from your *own* responsibility.

FARZIN

How can you say that?! After all I've done for you. After all we've been through together.

DANI

All you've done for me?!

[slaps Farzin]

How dare you say you've been here serving *me* this whole time!
[steps back with some shock on her face]

FARZIN

[Dazed and astonished for a moment at being struck. Reflexively strikes her back. She falls to the ground. Farzin immediately sits on his haunches to see if she's okay]

Allah! I'm so sorry! I...I didn't mean to do that. It just...it just happened. It was a reflex.

[Dani holds her cheek, closes her eyes, but not in pain. Opens them and gives Farzin a look of death]

DANI

How dare you. All of it. How dare you. I've seen that I can be myself. And it's obvious I can be myself easier without you. Without this.

[Dani gets up, turns, leaves, and slams the door. Farzin stands, stunned and speechless for some time. He sits in shock, stares into space. He sits down, still in shock, then breaks down. Speaks through his tears]

FARZIN

Everything is fucked, Please, help me, guide me. Is there any redemption for this? For us?

[After some time of pleading and weeping on the floor, he picks up the book of poetry that has fallen during the scuffle and after a moment sits, turns it to a random page, reads]

FARZIN

[after a shocked pause, starts to cry again. Through his tears starts to read aloud]

“You have
Not danced so badly, my dear
Trying to hold hands with the Beautiful One.

You have waltzed with great style, my sweet, crushed angel
To have neared God’s heart at all.

Our Partner is notoriously difficult to follow, and even His
Best musicians are not always easy to hear.

So what is the music has stopped for a while.
So what if the price of admission to the Divine is out of reach tonight.

So what, my sweetheart, if you lack the ante to gamble for real love.

The mind and body are famous for holding the heart ransom,
But Hafiz knows the Beloved’s eternal habits. Have patience,
For He will not be able to resist your longings
And charms for long.

You have not danced so badly, my dear,
Trying to kiss the Magnificent
One.

You have actually waltzed with tremendous style,
My sweet, O my sweet
Crushed
Angel.”

[Farzin begins to weep, throws the book to the ground]

[House lights go down, after some moments of darkness, they come up again. Farzin is sitting on the couch looking mildly nervous. Some furniture/items such as wall hangings, etc are absent demonstrating the passage of time though we do not know for how long. Dani has moved out but is coming back to retrieve some items. There is a knock at the door.]

FARZIN

Yes! Coming!

[near jogs to the door. Takes a deep breath before opening the door slightly abruptly]

[speaks awkwardly] Uh, welcome! [pause] Come! Please. Come in.

DANI

Hi. Thank you.

[steps in, stands somewhat awkwardly at the entrance of the apartment]

FARZIN

I'm sorry, can I take your coat?

DANI

Yeah, thanks.

FARZIN

Um, the rest of your things are here

[points to a box on the floor]

DANI

Thank you.

FARZIN

Would you sit for a short time? Can I offer you tea?

DANI

Um, sure...

FARZIN

Thank you. Come. Come.

[indicates to the sofa, Dani walks silently and sits down. Farzin heads to chest of drawers and begins to pour tea he's already prepared in anticipation. They are both silent and Farzin brings two cups of tea to the couch, gives one to Dani and seats himself]

Thank you for sitting.

DANI

You're welcome [remains silent afterwards] I have to be somewhere so I don't have a lot of time.

FARZIN

I understand. I simply wanted at least to talk about what happened...
[pauses]

We haven't spoken about it.

DANI

No, we haven't. Honestly, I'm still incredibly hurt. And angry. I know I had a part in it...but the betrayal, the drinking...
[pauses painfully, stoically]

...the violence...

FARZIN

I understand.

DANI

Do you? I'm not sure that you can. There was, and is, a lot that you can't understand.

FARZIN

I under...

[pauses, puts his head down]

I'm sorry.

DANI

Need I say more.

FARZIN

No. I think not.

[pause]

Perhaps then, if you're willing to give me the gift of listening, I may say some things.

DANI

I don't have tons of time.

FARZIN

Okay.

[pauses intently]

As I said, I don't want to leave things...as they were.

DANI

We can't take back what happened.

FARZIN

No, we cannot. But I think...I think in the spirit of *fanna*, we might be able to find love within the tragedy.

[pauses again]

Within the violence.

[Dani continues to look on despite Farzin looking at her expectantly, Farzin breaks the silence]

I...love you. I will always love you.

DANI

Look, if you're going to try and reconcile...I'm not...available, to get back together...

FARZIN

No, no. That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm just trying to express love.

DANI

[guarded] To what end?

FARZIN

Simply to give voice to what is there. If someone is done, they need not say so. If we have to say we are done...we're not done.

DANI

Oh, I'm done. I was done the moment you laid a hand on me.

FARZIN

[sighs] That is fair.

[pauses, looks down then back up]

I am eternally sorry for harming you.

DANI

What did I tell you about sorries?

FARZIN

Yes.

[pauses]

You did. As to your stipulations about sorries...I can promise you that it will not happen again.

DANI

It shouldn't have happened at all.

FARZIN

No. It should not have. That being said...

DANI

Mhmm...?

FARZIN

That being said...I believe that love continues, even after tragedy. *Fanna* is the removal of that which stands in the way of love.

DANI

Don't...don't try to bypass my feelings.

FARZIN

No. I only speak for myself. My love never changed, in the face of everything. Sex work. My jealousy. My fear. Our violence...

[pauses, looks down]

Even if my love was...misguided in its expression. The core was, and is, love.

DANI

I loved you too. But given the choice, I needed to love me.

FARZIN

I never would have asked you to not love yourself. Or not be yourself.

DANI

You did in so many words. And in some ways with your words.

[pause]

Your inability to accept me pitted loving you against loving myself.

FARZIN

I...I don't wish to argue. I wish only to speak the truth as it is for me.

DANI

As I said, I only have a little time...

FARZIN

I will be brief. Or try to. Forgive the...academic verbosity...

[Dani is silent]

Mmm, perhaps, a poem?

DANI

As always.

[looks at her watch]

FARZIN

Yes.

[pulls out a piece of paper, clears throat, begins to read]

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror
up to where you're bravely working.
Expecting the worst, you look, and instead
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.
Your hand opens and closes opens and closes.
If it were always a fist or always stretched open
You would be paralyzed.
Your deepest presence is in every small
contracting and expanding.
The two as beautifully balanced and coordinated
as bird wings.

[folds up paper, puts it back into his jacket pocket]

DANI

[silence, considers her words]

More Rumi.

FARZIN

How did you know?

DANI

I know.

[pause]

Our expansion and contractions were certainly mirrors.

FARZIN

I think we were brave to try.

DANI

Try what?

FARZIN

All of it.

DANI

Mmm. [softens some]

FARZIN

I suppose I asked you here...truly...because I wondered how we might harmonize...even in our separation.

DANI

I already knew that. Did you forget? I know you.
[pause]

How do you propose we...harmonize, coordinate?

FARZIN

I don't know. But it might help us. If we try.

DANI

Do you believe we are two wings of the same bird?

FARZIN

I do. I believe we took great flight. And regardless of what seems to be the ending, I believe we are still connected.

DANI

I know we are.

FARZIN

Perhaps all that remains...is to open our hands again.

DANI

I'm certainly tired of holding a fist. A fist is what got us here, after all.

FARZIN

I can say, that I am always present for you...even if we are not together.

DANI

I did expect..something of the worst before I came. I'm not sure I can say that my own face is joyous yet, but...I am here with you.

[pauses, tears up]

I too will always be here.

[cries]

And I grieve the loss of us.

FARZIN

As do I.

[pauses]

May I hold you?

DANI

I...I guess so.

[Farzin embraces Dani as she weeps. Farzin is also teary eyed}

[house lights come down, concluding ending 2]

End of Ending 2
