

HAQI THE PARROT

A 10-minute play

by

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CHARACTERS

- MARWAN Middle-aged man. Slightly unkempt and unshaven. Born and raised in NYC, but his parents immigrated from Lebanon. He speaks some Arabic and has a pet parrot, Haqi.
- ABDUL Middle-aged man, Pakistani-American. Refined & genteel. Born and raised in upstate NY. Parents immigrated from Pakistan.
- HAQI A beautiful parrot that speaks. Female. Can be represented by an actor, a puppet or a projection of a parrot in the background.

SETTING

New York City. Washington Square Park. Chess-playing area.

TIME

Summer, 2017.

SCENE [1]

(We're in Washington Square Park in lower Manhattan. Marwan and Abdul are seated around the public chess tables. They brought their own chess pieces and they're setting them up for a game. Haqi the parrot sits on Marwan's shoulder. Abdul has a small carry-on suitcase next to him.)

(Note that the two characters are playing chess throughout the play, but only the start of the game and checkmate are marked in the dialogue. Actors can make chess moves at their discretion outside these two points.)

HAQI

Qaaaaa.....qaaaaa.....qaaaaa--

MARWAN

(Softly as he feeds her a seed)

Shhhh....

(a pause)

MARWAN

They'll catch who did it.

ABDUL

Well they closed off every entrance and exit, so they'd better!

(They continue to set up chess pieces on the chess board)

MARWAN

Who do you think did it?

ABDUL

How should I know? Let's see. There's always the usual suspects, you know, the ex-lover, the current lover, the jealous third wheel--

MARWAN

Or it might be a random killer.

(Abdul makes the first chess move. He then pulls out rolling paper and a bag of pot and begins to roll a joint.)

ABDUL

Random killers don't usually strangulate their victim. Strangulation is a very intimate act, bro. The killer had to have known her.

(Marwan pulls out a brown bag. From the bag he pulls out a bottle of Arak, a bottle of water, two small Arak glasses and one piece of tupperware in which he had packed some ice.)

MARWAN

(Shrugging)

Yeah...who knows. Sad story. Anyway, what's been going on with you? I never knew you to smoke weed!

HAQI

Qaaaa.....qaaaaaal.....qaaaa....

(Both men ignore her. Marwan is setting up the glasses of Arak. Haqi attempts to dip her beak into it.)

MARWAN

(Softly)

Tsshhttt....Not for you.

(Abdul chuckles while still rolling his joint.)

ABDUL

Ha! She loves that licorice flavor, doesn't she...That shit is strong you weird little bird. What sorrows are you trying to drown?

(Both chuckle. Awkward beat.)

ABDUL

Yeah, I mean I still love Arak but I haven't eaten all day, bro. I just need a good doobie right now...take off the edge--

MARWAN

What edge? You have a nice life, man! You're semi-retired. You travel...go see your daughter and the grandkids, and you have Alissa. She's beautiful!

(Abdul lights up his joint and takes a deep puff)

ABDUL

...yeah

MARWAN

(Playful)

what's she see in you anyway? Your hairy ass?

ABDUL

(Playful)

fuck you

MARWAN

Hey remember our NYU days? Skipping class and hangin' out here?

ABDUL

And people would come watch us play and place their bets on the winner?

MARWAN

(Grinning)

On me, you mean.

ABDUL

(Playful)

Yeah whatever. Fuck you.

MARWAN

Ha! Good times.

(Abdul is pensive for a beat or two.)

ABDUL

yeah...good times indeed.

HAQI

Qaaaal.....qaaaa.....qaaaaaa.....

MARWAN

She was a good soul, man.

ABDUL

ha?..What?...yeah

(a beat)

She was...

MARWAN

Hey man, is this murder in the train station freakin you out? I know you for what now? 25, 30 years? And I know when something is upsetting you.

ABDUL

What?...

(a beat)

C'mon man. Who wouldn't be upset over a murder? I mean c'mon!

MARWAN

Okay...okay...

(Awkward beat)

ABDUL

I mean look. You have to admit it's a bit weird. A bit too close to the bone. Here I was all packed up and ready to go to the Catskills...all ready for the memorial, thinking this time I'll have some closure, you know?

MARWAN

Yeah..

ABDUL

I arrive on time. I'm about to catch my train. I'm emotionally present and feeling upbeat....and then? Someone gets murdered?!

MARWAN

Yeah...

ABDUL

I mean, what the fuck bro?! Someone gets murdered on the day that I'm going to the Catskills for Bahar's memorial! The one day in the year. The one year where I'm finally starting to move on.

(A beat)

HAQI

Qaaaa.....qaaaaalllll.....qaaalllll

(Abdul is annoyed with Haqi for the first time. Shoots her a look.)

ABDUL

I mean, and this is New York. Murders happen all the fucking time, bro. But this time, NYPD decides to shut down the entire station? And cancel the trains?! I mean when does that ever happen?! Just my fucking luck.

(Awkward beat)

MARWAN

Dude, Bahar was my friend too. I miss her too!

(awkward beat)

Haqi misses her also, don't you Haqi?

(Haqi is still sitting on Marwan's shoulder cracking seeds. Marwan gives her a new seed.)

ABDUL

Yeah well. It's been five years, I know.

(A beat)

I guess I'm stuck here in The City for now....

(A beat)...)

So, back to your question, that's why I'm rolling bro.

(Abdul takes a puff from his joint)

And this train station murder, isn't it just like--

MARWAN

No man. It's not. It's not at all like Bahar's and don't you think it. C'mon, we don't need to dredge up those details. Not good for the head.

(A beat. Marwan attempts to lighten the mood.)

And...we have Haqi here. Cover your ears Haqi. This conversation isn't for you.

ABDUL

Both killed in a public place. Both...injury to the neck.

(Flies into the tree branch above)

HAQI

Qaaaaalll.....qaaaaaallll....

(Abdul reflexively reaches for the parrot)

ABDUL

Hey...careful there....

MARWAN

Oh don't worry about her. No matter how far she flies she always comes back.

(A beat--with a chuckle)

I couldn't get rid of her if I tried.

ABDUL

You know what? Gimme some of that Arak. Empty stomach or not...I don't care. I'll pretend we're 20 years old again and can handle the partying.

MARWAN

(Looking concerned)

Dude....

(Marwan fixes a glass of Arak for Abdul. Abdul takes a big slurp of it.)

ABDUL

You're not worried about cats? Or some asshole might kidnap her? Bird-nap her?

MARWAN

(Chuckling. Looking up.)

Nah. She's a high flyer. She sits in trees and watches people below, getting all up in their business.

ABDUL

(Chuckling)

I guess she knows a lot of secrets. Strange little bird. Haqi the parrot. "Love" the Parrot.

MARWAN

No. No. Haqi doesn't mean love in Arabic, man. What happened to Mr Linguistics, ha? Mr genius? I mean I know you ditched linguistics for finance and big money.

ABDUL

Oh fuck off.

MARWAN

Yeah but c'mon. You know a little Arabic. You know Haqi doesn't mean love.

ABDUL

Al-H-A-Q. H-A-Q.

(Marwan playfully corrects Abdul's pronunciation.)

MARWAN

Hhhhaaa...

ABDUL

(Exaggerated playfulness)

Hhhhhhaaaaa. Is it what the Idiot's Guide to Arabic describes as a chocking sound?

MARWAN

No man. That's Ein. Another letter. Eeeiiiinnnn.

ABDUL

Eeiii...ok, never mind.

MARWAN

Ok c'mon man. Back to Haqi. You have to know what her name means, at the very least. I've had her for a decade. Do you know how many conversations she's heard us having? And you say her name like white people say it. It's not Haki. It's the letters Haaaa and Qaaaaaf.

ABDUL

Qqqqaaaaf

MARWAN

Qaf. Qaf.

ABDUL

Qqgaaafff

MARWAN

You have the letter Qaf in Urdu?

ABDUL

Yeah man. But I can't do that Arabic gutteral shit.

(Both chuckle. Marwan holds up his Arak glass)

MARWAN

Yeah. No one can say it like we do. Qqgaaafff

ABDUL

Qqgaaaffffff...At least I sound a little better than some white dude saying it.

MARWAN

I wouldn't go that far, man.

(More chuckles)

ABDUL

Fuck you. Whatever....anyway, you named her Haqi from Al Haq?

MARWAN

Sort of. What's Al Haq in Urdu?

ABDUL

Not sure. But I know in Arabic Al Haq means right--as in legal right. Human right. You know...the right to something...

MARWAN

...yeah, exactly. So I derived the name from Al Haq, but not so much as in "right"....more like...truth.

ABDUL

Al H-A-Q-I-Q-A

MARWAN

Wow! Look at you! Still Mr Genius. Yes, that's Arabic for truth.

ABDUL

I remember that from classical Arabic--

MARWAN

ok

ABDUL

So your strange little bird is named Truth?

MARWAN

Well, more like a play on words. You could say Haqi technically means "my right" -- if you want to be all fancy and grammatically correct. But, I'm not fancy like that. Haqi to me means truth. (Looking up at Haqi in the tree)...Yeah, she's my truth, man.

(A beat or two. Abdul seems forlorn. Marwan watches him silently.)

HAQI

(From the treetop)

Beeeeee.....beeeee.....

(Both men ignore her)

ABDUL

Ha. Truth. My truth. You know what happened to my truth, bro?

(Marwan says nothing. A beat.)

ABDUL (Continued)

My truth is that Bahar was having an affair before she was killed.

MARWAN

What? What makes you say that?

ABDUL

She was. Yes, she was. I overheard her one time speaking to him on the phone.

MARWAN

Speaking to whom?

ABDUL

I never found out...

MARWAN

So how do you know it was an affair?!

ABDUL

C'mon bro. A man knows these things. She was on the phone with him and I know when her voice drops in that flirty sexy way--like the way she used to talk to me--and...and---

And what? MARWAN

Never mind... ABDUL

(Silence)

I'm sorry man. I didn't know. MARWAN

ABDUL
(With forced playfulness)
Yeah well.....Checkmate! So fuck you.

Hey! MARWAN

(Both chuckle somewhat nervously and immediately start re-assembling their chess pieces on the board.)

HAQI
(Still in the tree)
beeee.....beeeeee

ABDUL
And I even overheard her talk about me. To him!

MARWAN
Saying what?

ABDUL
She hated me, bro. She never forgave me for the affair. She---

MARWAN
You mean from when you cheated on her in college? Like, more than a quarter of a century ago?

ABDUL
I don't know.

(Both lost in thought.)

ABDUL
Huh!

MARWAN
What?

ABDUL
You know what she always used to call me?

MARWAN

What?

ABDUL

I mean, it's intimate bro. I'm not being an asshole or anything. I just miss her so much.

MARWAN

I get it dude. I get it. I miss her too.

ABDUL

Whenever she was in a good mood, she'd pick up her favorite bottle of Malbec--high altitude from Argentina--

MARWAN

Oooo....fancy

ABDUL

And she'd pop it open and turn around to me and say: "Let it breath"....like, you know, a warning for me not to pour a glass just yet...

MARWAN

Aha...

ABDUL

And she'd go take a shower and come out all dressed in---

MARWAN

Dude

ABDUL

(Takes a minute)

Then she'd pour two glasses and she'd hand one to me and....

(pantomiming)

...cheer

(Both get lost in the imagery. A beat.)

ABDUL

(Still pantomiming)

and...she'd look straight into my eyes...those strange green eyes of hers looking straight into mine....and...and she'd say----

ABDUL / HAQI

Qalbi! / Qaalbee...

HAQI

Qaaallllbeeee.....qaaallllll.....qaaalllll.....qgaaalllbee

(Marwan looks mortified. Abdul takes an instant to process before he realizes what just happened. Marwan realizes that Abdul now knows. Abdul abruptly stands up. His chair falls back with a loud noise. Marwan reacts by standing up abruptly and defensively.)

ABDUL

Son of a bitch!

CURTAIN