

falling babel

by SEVAN

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CHARACTERS:

ISSA MARDOOK - 20, Middle Eastern. Sweet, good-natured, selfless. Enamored of American life and pop culture - outdated though his points of admiration may be. Thinks of others before himself. Of a lean build. Looking for any thread of escape from the madness of the war.

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (PFC) LUKE JENSEN - 21, Caucasian. Colorado-born army brat force fed military life. A dude, but possessing of charm, sensitivity and humor that goes against the stereotype of an army grunt. Military build but not a knuckle-dragging jarhead. Also looking for any thread of escape from the madness of the war.

HAYAT MARDOOK - 20, Middle Eastern. Issa's twin sister and the more mature of the two. Quick-tempered, smart, suspicious, overprotective, and loving. She falls on the other side of opinion regarding the occupation war - she blames Americans.

TIME: An occupation war in the Middle East after the troops announce their withdrawal.

PLACE: Issa and Hayat's modest ground-floor apartment in a city in a Middle Eastern country. The focus is on what would be considered the living room area and a separate section as Issa's bedroom. Other doors should lead to the kitchen, bathroom, and Hayat's room (which are unseen spaces).

NOTE: / indicate interruptions and overlaps.

NOTE: The twin-speak is an amalgamation of 5 languages. There is no "right" way to speak it. The actors should come to a consensus based on their own linguistic abilities.

1. OUR HOUSE

ISSA's bedroom sparsely furnished with walls covered in posters of American singers and actors. A somewhat nervous ISSA watches LUKE respectfully rifle through his room.

LUKE
(holding out a CD)
ABBA?

ISSA
(covering)
It's my sister's!

LUKE
Right. This is a crazy collection.
(rifling through the CDs)
Aerosmith, Sting, Blondie, Donny Hathaway. Got anything more recent?

ISSA
It's hard to come by American music here.

LUKE
It's called the internet?

ISSA
It used to be regulated by the government.

LUKE
Good thing we saved the day.

ISSA
And then you bombed the network towers.

LUKE looks at him.

ISSA
Sorry.

LUKE
Mhm.

ISSA
Are you looking for anything specific?

LUKE
(not really paying attention to him)
I'll know it if I see it.

ISSA
All the soldiers before you never found anything. . . Not that I have anything. . . weird or - anything.

LUKE

(seeing the stereo)

Jesus how old is this thing?

ISSA

Not sure.

LUKE

I think my dad had one of these when he was in high school. It actually work?

ISSA

(moving to it)

Of course!

LUKE

(lifting his gun)

Hold it! What are you doing?

ISSA

(freezing)

I was going to turn it on.

A moment.

LUKE

(lowering his gun)

Alright.

ISSA gingerly moves to turn on the stereo which picks up in the middle of GNR's "Welcome to the Jungle" (start at :56). It's a tad loud. ISSA bobs his head to the music.

ISSA

It was broken when I found it. But I fixed it. Works like new.

ISSA bobs some more. LUKE starts to slowly join in. I mean, it's a damned good song, why wouldn't he?

ISSA

It's good, right?

LUKE

Sure, man! Sure!

(He turns off the stereo. He looks closely at the posters on the walls.)

I take it you like America, Issa (ee-sah).

ISSA

Issa (eye-sah).

LUKE

Right. I take it you like America.

ISSA
Ever since I was 7. First time I saw Magnum P.I.

LUKE
What?

ISSA
Tom Selleck? The moustache?

LUKE looks at him in confusion.

ISSA
I loved the way people spoke, and all those trees and water.

LUKE
You ever been?

ISSA
I wish.

LUKE
So you want to go?

ISSA
Of course! I see America all the time in films and TV shows and the news.

LUKE
I'm sure your news loves us.

ISSA
(trying to gloss over the comment)
You see The Breakfast Club? Great movie. Molly Ringwald is very cute.

LUKE
Jesus Christ you need some new references.

ISSA
Where are you from?

LUKE
America.

ISSA
No, no - I mean, where in America. New York? California?

LUKE
All over the place. But mostly Colorado.

ISSA
Oh. Where is that?

LUKE
Kind of in the middle.

What is it like? **ISSA**

Lotsa trees. Mountains. Blue skies. **LUKE**

Sounds incredible. **ISSA**

Sure. **LUKE**
(pointing to wall of pictures)

Who are these people? **ISSA**

Some school friends. Mostly family. These are uncles, aunts, this is a cousin, another cousin, more cousins.

These? **LUKE**

My parents. **ISSA**

They seem nice. Where are they? **LUKE**

They are not here. **ISSA**

I figured that. They close by? **LUKE**

They are - not here. **ISSA**

Yeah, I got that but - oh. . . sorry. **LUKE**
(turning to him and seeing his face)

I still have my sister. **ISSA**

The ABBA fan? **LUKE**

Uh, yes. This one is her. **ISSA**

Pretty. You guys look alike. **LUKE**

We are twins. **ISSA**

LUKE

No shit!

(taking the picture off the wall and
holding it to the side of ISSA's face)

Well, fuck me, man. Looka that. Same eyes, lips, nose -

ISSA

No no - my nose is a little crooked to the left, and hers is to the right.

LUKE

(staring at ISSA's face)

Hnh - I'll be . . .

ISSA

(breaking the gaze and taking the
picture)

She's annoying, but she is all the family I have left.

LUKE

What about those uncles, aunts, and tribes of cousins?

ISSA

Most escaped to Europe or Australia. Others disappeared.

LUKE

Maybe they'll come back now that things have gotten better.

ISSA

Maybe.

LUKE

Why the hell did you two stay here?

ISSA

Hayat can't leave our parents - their memories. And this is my home - I have faith that things will get better. I mean, they already have right?

LUKE

Right. Sure.

ISSA

You're new here.

LUKE

New-ish.

ISSA

You do not seem like you want to be here.

LUKE

Didn't have a choice.

ISSA

Oh?

LUKE

Father's a sergeant. Made sure I was assigned here - easy way for him to keep an eye out on me. I would have preferred something a little less hot and dusty. No offense.

ISSA

No, you are right. It is very hot and dusty here.

LUKE

Well maybe you'll all be able to clean it up and make it pretty again.

ISSA

God willing.

LUKE

Allah.

ISSA

Excuse me?

LUKE

You all say "Allah."

ISSA

I say "God." Although technically it is the same thing - God and Allah.

LUKE

This is a Muslim neighborhood.

*ISSA reaches into his shirt and pulls out a cross.
At some point a key jingles in the lock and
HAYAT walks in carrying plastic bags of
groceries. She is wearing an abaya and a hijab.
She looks at the door and shakes her head and
marches to ISSA's room.*

LUKE

Fuck me...

ISSA

(Covering the cross)

Shh. . .he'll hear you.

LUKE

Get the fuck out. Since when?

ISSA

My whole family has been Christian since long ago.

LUKE

How does that work?

ISSA

Sorry, I do not understand. Aren't all Americans Christian?

LUKE

Yeah I mean I guess. But I'm surprised you didn't get run out with the rest of them.

ISSA

Those still left keep it secret. We pretended to convert to survive. So in the street I am Sunni. I go to Mosque. I fast. But in here, I light my candles, I say the Our Father, I celebrate Easter.

LUKE

Shut the fucking front door!

ISSA

You have funny sayings.

LUKE

Nothing about you makes sense. You just kinda defy / expectations don't you?

HAYAT

(as she approaches the door.)

ISSA! Ya *kelb!* How many times have I told you to lock the front door!
(seeing LUKE and the gun she drops the
bags - cucumbers, tomatoes, lemons
and bulghur come tumbling out)

What's going on? Why are you here?

LUKE

(gun at the ready)

Ma'am. Please calm down.

ISSA

(moving in between them)

Hayat! It's ok!

HAYAT

Issa! *Nimina ishytah? Hoshoreh dibbilem?*
(Who is this? What does he want?)

LUKE

What is she saying? What are you guys saying?

ISSA

Livarillem. Amin khosser.
(It's OK. He's a friend.)

LUKE

Hey. Hey! Stop with that. Issa who is this? What's she sayin'?

HAYAT

Khosser? Hoshoreh Khosser? Noonsileh verellakh amih.
(Friend? What friend? Don't say anything to him.)

ISSA

Everything is OK, I promise. Hayat,
bishimeh deyamess!
(Hayat, calm down please!)

HAYAT

Ok? OK?? *Amireh zakhareem*, Issa!
(He has a gun, Issa!)

LUKE

(cocking the gun)

Hey!

ISSA

No! Please, it is alright! This is Hayat! My sister! From the picture. Look - her nose.

HAYAT

My nose?

*LUKE takes a moment to register her face, then
puts down the gun.*

ISSA

Hayat - it's OK. He is an American. His name is - sorry, what's your name?

LUKE

Private First Class Luke Jensen, ma'am. Sorry - I didn't recognize you with your head all covered. I'm not going to hurt anyone.

HAYAT

Why are you here?

LUKE

Just routine checks.

HAYAT

Aren't you all supposed to be leaving?

LUKE

Soon.

HAYAT

So these checks are now pointless.

LUKE

We're going through all the houses one last time to make sure.

HAYAT

Maybe you should have done it right the first time.

(to ISSA)

You should not have let him force his way in.

LUKE

Actually, I asked - nicely.

HAYAT

Yes, I'm familiar with your manners .

LUKE

Well we are the good guys.

HAYAT

Of course you are.

LUKE

You know, here to help you.

HAYAT
By pointing your guns at innocent people.

LUKE
And we did win the war.

HAYAT
Which you started.

LUKE
And cleared out the insurgents.

HAYAT
And overstayed your welcome.

ISSA
(staving off an argument)
We were talking about music. And America. And Colorado.

LUKE
And Molly Ringwald.

HAYAT
(confused)
Breakfast Club?

LUKE
(reaching down and gathering some
produce - handing it to her.)
Here you go, ma'am.

HAYAT
(still suspicious but taking what is
handed)
Hayat.

LUKE
Hayat. What is this stuff? Looks like sawdust.

HAYAT
Bulghur.

LUKE
Huh?

HAYAT
Cracked wheat.

LUKE
Why?

HAYAT
For *tabouleh*.

What now? **LUKE**

A salad. **HAYAT**

My favorite. **ISSA**

You don't know much do you? **HAYAT**

ISSA runs over to quickly gather all the other items, shoving them haphazardly into a bag and then into her arms.

ISSA
Everything's OK, Hayat. I promise. Just go put these away. I will come help you in a little bit.

HAYAT
(eyeing Luke)
You sure?

Yes yes. **ISSA**

HAYAT slowly backs out of the room.

LUKE
Nice to meet you. Sorry if I scared you.

Once she is gone ISSA closes the door behind her. HAYAT listens at the door for a little more before going into the kitchen.

LUKE
A little jumpy isn't she?

She's protective. **ISSA**

LUKE
So what's that you guys were talking? I got the basics of the lingo down, but I couldn't recognize a single word you two said.

ISSA
(hesitant)
Uh, it's - a different dialect. You know how it is - every little village is different.

LUKE
Weren't you born here?

ISSA

Yes, but my, uh, parents weren't.

LUKE

Hnh. You're pretty good, you know that?

ISSA

(fearful)

Excuse me?

LUKE

Just now - calming her down. You ever think of working as a translator?

ISSA

No - I work in the market repairing and selling used radios and TVs. I'm good at fixing broken things.

LUKE

My squad lost our last translator - well, he kinda up and disappeared actually. Been hard to find a replacement - not too many good English speakers here. Hours are long, pay's OK, but you get to hang out with me and my buds. At least until we ship out. We could start on your music re-education. Whattaya think?

ISSA

Yes, of course. Yes! That would be great. Amazing. I could start soon - tomorrow - right now even!

LUKE

Hey slow down, man, slow down. I don't make the decision - most I can do is give the base your name. You just gotta impress them at the interview. You don't completely creep me out, so that counts for something.

ISSA

You are very different from the other soldiers.

LUKE

How you figure?

ISSA

You are not angry like all of them. And you listen. It's good.

LUKE

Yeah, well - lucky we found each other then, Issa.

LUKE extends his hand - ISSA shakes.

ISSA

Yes - very lucky, Luke.

Aerosmith's "Same Old Song and Dance" plays.

2. BREAKING BREAD - BRICKS OF RED

The song shifts to coming out of the stereo. HAYAT is bringing food to the table, clearly annoyed. LUKE and ISSA are seated.

You shoulda seen him - like a pro. **LUKE**

I just talked. **ISSA**

Just talked? **LUKE**

Can you turn off that music, please? **HAYAT**

I like this song. **ISSA**

You saved our asses is what you did. **LUKE**

Language. **HAYAT**

Tell her. **LUKE**

Another time. **ISSA**

LUKE
All these village leaders were real angry. Yelling at us in their broke-ass / English: "You go! *Amreekahns* go now!" (laughing) "*Amreekahns*."

Language. **HAYAT**

HAYAT pauses to throw him a dirty look.

LUKE
And this one manages to calm them all down and convince them we were there to help.

I was only doing my job. **ISSA**

LUKE
Five days and they already want to promote him to training the other translators.

HAYAT
I didn't plan any side dishes to go with your gun.

Want me to move it? **LUKE**

No - I like a little gunpowder with my meals. **HAYAT**

She disappears into the kitchen.

LUKE
(setting up the gun up against the wall
next to the front door)
Touchy touchy.

ISSA
(whispering)
Let's change subjects.

HAYAT re-enters and sees them.

LUKE
(whispering back)
What's she so pissed about?

Food. **HAYAT**

*She brings the plate down hard on the table.
LUKE sits. She goes to ISSA's room and turns
off the stereo. She comes back and sits. HAYAT
and ISSA put their hands together in prayer.
LUKE starts to eat.*

Excuse me. **HAYAT**

Huh? **LUKE**

HAYAT
I know you think you are in some Godless country full of heathens, but in this house
we like to say grace before we eat.

Ok. **LUKE**

So put the fork down. **HAYAT**

LUKE
(doing so and folding his hands)
Thought this only happened in movies.

He bows his head.

HAYAT

For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.

HAYAT & ISSA

Ameen.

LUKE

(delayed)

Amen.

They start to eat. It's quiet.

LUKE

This is good. What is this?

HAYAT

Khoresht.

LUKE

(to ISSA)

A little help.

ISSA

A stew. With rice.

LUKE

Ah. Gotcha. Like pot roast.

HAYAT

No. It is not "pot roast" - it is *khoresht*.

LUKE

Got it. *Khoresht*. [he butchers it]

HAYAT

Layshoor bajeneh veef ahmer neh reh nimyam wen-neer?
(Why is it necessary for him to be eating with us?)

LUKE

Hunh?

ISSA

Ergom ahm cheererell anukhear lemev nov neem ahter doolahr.
(Because he got me a job which means we have more money.)

LUKE

White person in the room.

ISSA

Osh neem eteros wit-hal ahmer sikharabem.
(So we are showing him some appreciation.)

LUKE

Can't understand you.

HAYAT

Ahm-eh neh cheerereen neer bakhnoo reh indoo.
(He is going to get us in trouble being here.)

LUKE

Guessing you're talking about me?

ISSA

Sen khezem bah nyom.
(You worry too much.)

LUKE

Goobley gobbley blah blah.

HAYAT

Sen nill khezem nuhan.
(You never worry enough.)

LUKE

Yo!

HAYAT

Why are you here? In our house. Again.

LUKE

You invited me to dinner.

HAYAT

I didn't. He did.

LUKE

Ok - he invited me to dinner.

HAYAT

Shouldn't you be packing your bags and getting out of my country like your government promised it would / three months ago?

LUKE

A lot of moving parts to organize.

ISSA

This is very good rice.

HAYAT

Those parts moved pretty quickly when you invaded us.

LUKE

We didn't invade.

HAYAT

Then?

LUKE

We rescued you.

Ooff! **HAYAT**

Isn't this good rice, Luke? **ISSA**

"Ooff" is the best you got? **LUKE**

What do you see when you go to all these "broke-ass English" villages? **HAYAT**

They are just like / us, actually. **ISSA**

Sometimes scared people. Mostly a bunch of angry ones. **LUKE**

And why do you think that is? **HAYAT**

Because your country was overrun with terrorists. **LUKE**

Try capitalists. **HAYAT**

That's a dig at Americans, right? **LUKE**
(childishly)

What do you think? **HAYAT**
(mocking him)

Duh. **LUKE**

And why do you think they're STILL so scared and angry if you got rid of all the 'terrorists'? **HAYAT**

I would like to say something. **ISSA**

Stay out of this. **HAYAT/LUKE**

My people took action to reclaim our country. And you intruded like a bunch of cowboys coming in to save the disorganized natives. **HAYAT**

You guys were being ruled by some asshole dictator. You barely had any rights. **LUKE**

HAYAT

Where were you before? When the secret police were rounding up families? When the president lived off caviar and we fought for bread?

LUKE

We're here now.

HAYAT

After we overthrew the government - on our own - without you. Then you came in to 'help' and radicals started coming out of the shadows.

LUKE

And we got rid of them, too.

HAYAT

No, you only think you did. You may be able to bomb bodies but not an ideology. One your presence created - that only antagonizes them more.

LUKE

I'm so tired of hearing this. Either we're causing problems or stopping them. Which one do you want.

HAYAT

We want -

LUKE

No. Not we. You.

HAYAT

What does it matter? The damage has already been done, so do what your people do best and leave before it gets really bad then throw up your hands and say: Well, we tried. Those animals just can't be domesticated. And then -

LUKE

Hold on.

HAYAT

And then -

LUKE

Hold on!

HAYAT

And THEN pretend as if your own actions didn't cause the problem in the first place!

LUKE

Issa help me out here, man.

HAYAT

He doesn't have a say in this. He's always been blinded by his love for America. But I know there is more to your country than those posters hanging on his walls.

ISSA

I choose to see the good in people.

HAYAT

I see the truth in them.

LUKE

Casualties and setbacks are expected in a war.

HAYAT

Oh my god - you sound like the perfect diplomat.

LUKE

We've lost people too, you know.

HAYAT

Young people who should be at home working to better their own country. You expect us to follow to your models of democracy and you can't even run your own country successfully. Maybe you should try deposing your own leader. Let me ask you something: What do you think is going to happen to us?

LUKE

Us who?

HAYAT

Me. And him. Everyone may smile at you when you walk by but that means nothing. The two of you are inviting the wrong set of eyes. You may want to think you're doing good work, but you have no idea. Being in this house with us. You don't think people ask me where he goes when he leaves the house and isn't at work at the market?

ISSA

What? Who is asking you these things?

LUKE

That's not possible.

HAYAT

It doesn't matter.

ISSA

It concerns me - so it does.

LUKE

Gimme their names.

HAYAT

I took care of it.

ISSA

Took care how?

HAYAT

Leave it alone.

LUKE

He walks far enough outside of the town before we pick him up. His face is covered everywhere we go. There's no way anyone knows it's him.

HAYAT

I thought the country was supposed to be so safe now. Why cover his face?

LUKE

Better safe than dead.

HAYAT

Did you run out of helmets?

LUKE

No one is going to ever find out that he's working for us. For all anyone knows I am in here doing a search.

HAYAT

For an hour? There aren't many ways to add 1 plus 1.

LUKE

Jesus if you don't want me around why even extend the dinner invite?

HAYAT

(to ISSA)

To show "appreciation."

LUKE

You got a damned interesting way of showing it.

HAYAT

Oh, I'm sorry, maybe I should cover my head and sit on a stool in the corner waiting on you. Or better yet, why don't you ask your government to write a brochure for how we should behave. You can throw it from the airplanes as you fly away.

LUKE

You may not think we care, and fine, there are some soldiers who don't. But not all of them. I've seen soldiers take bullets for women and children. I've seen guys give away their food packs and money to people they can't even talk to. I watched a buddy get his legs fucking blown off trying to protect an old man from a car bomb. All to keep you safe - to make this country safer and better for you. So how about YOU give us a little credit / for that? How about a little -

A brick flies through the window. Various response of "shit" "get down" and "oh my god." LUKE runs for his gun and surveys out the window before opening the front door and running out.

ISSA

(going to HAYAT)

Are you alright?

HAYAT

(brushing him off)

Do I get to say "I told you so" now?

ISSA

Probably just some neighborhood kids playing.

HAYAT
(showing him the brick)
Interesting new way to play futbol.

ISSA
I'm sure it was an accident.

HAYAT
Stop being so naive. Please.

LUKE comes back in.

LUKE
You guys alright?

ISSA
Yes.

LUKE
Too dark. Couldn't see anybody.

HAYAT
Watch where you're stepping. There's glass all over the place.

LUKE
Fuck.

He bends down to pick up some pieces.

HAYAT
Leave it alone before you cut yourself. Issa get the broom from the kitchen.

ISSA exits. HAYAT looks at LUKE.

HAYAT
(handing him the brick)
1 plus 1.

A tense rebab plays.

3. TIE MY HANDS

*ISSA stands nervously as LUKE paces around
him.*

LUKE
You ready to try again?

ISSA
Yes.

LUKE

You sure? Coz you keep messing up.

ISSA

You just taught it to me today.

LUKE

You learn this and the other guys are gonna be real impressed.

ISSA

I know.

LUKE

I mean you can't be letting Lil' Wayne down.

ISSA

I know I know.

LUKE

You already earned your translator stripes, but the guys WILL bust your balls if you don't -

ISSA

I KNOW.

LUKE

Alright take it easy there champ. Ready?

ISSA nods.

LUKE starts to beatbox.

ISSA

Wait wait wait wait.

LUKE

I knew it.

ISSA

No no - I can do this. Just start it with me.

LUKE beatboxes them in.

ISSA & LUKE

(LUKE eventually drops out and goes
back to beatboxing)

Yeah, some say tragedy is hard to get over
But sometime that tragedy means it's over, soulja
From the academy league of rollers
I deny bein' down, though they seem to hold us.

My shoulders are strong, I prove them wrong
I ain't doin' nothin' but movin' on, let the truth be known
But they talk that freedom matters
And didn't even leave a ladder, damn.

I knock on the door, hope isn't home
Fate's not around, the luck's all gone
/ Don't ask me what's wrong, ask me what's right
And Ima tell you what's light.

The phone rings.

Nooo! **ISSA**

You almost got it that time. **LUKE**

ISSA picks it up.

Damn phone. *Allo?* **ISSA**

Nothing.

Allo? **ISSA**

Who is it? **LUKE**
(whispering)

Allo Allo Allo? **ISSA**
(shrugging his shoulders)

LUKE
You know they have these things called cell phones now, right?

ISSA
Rebuild the cell towers you bombed first and then -

ISSA's face changes to confusion. He hangs up. .

What was that? **LUKE**

Nothing. **ISSA**

Doesn't look like "nothing." **LUKE**

ISSA

Just a wrong number. Let's, uh, let's try again.

LUKE

(skeptical)

Sure.

LUKE starts to beatbox again. Sounds of a tense daf and tombak overtake him.

4. THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Banging on the front door blends with the drums until only the knocking is heard. There is now a wooden board over the hole in the window.

LUKE (O.S.)

Issa?

The banging and beating continue.

Issa! Open up!

LUKE kicks the door open and runs in gun drawn.

LUKE

Issa? Hayat?

LUKE runs into ISSA's room. As he does HAYAT comes out of the bathroom and sees the front door.

LUKE

Issa?

LUKE walks to the bed and picks up a bloody t-shirt and stares at it.

LUKE

What the fuck. . .

HAYAT runs into the room.

HAYAT

What are you doing here?

LUKE

(showing her the t-shirt)

Where is he?

HAYAT
(grabbing it from him)

You shouldn't be here.

LUKE

Hayat please tell me what's going on. Issa didn't show up at work and I didn't see him at the shop - no one would tell me where he was. They just looked away from me.

HAYAT

They took him.

LUKE

They WHO?

HAYAT

Whoever hates the Americans today.

LUKE

(heading out the door)

Let me see him, dammit!

HAYAT

(barring the door)

They beat him, Luke. And left him on the side of the road. Thank God a neighbor found him and came to get me.

LUKE

I can help. Let me help.

HAYAT

Just leave us alone, Luke. I will not let him end up like our parents. He is all that is left to me and I want him back, do you understand? If you are such a good friend you will not let him go back to that job. Those people will not stop, Luke. After only two months they did this. Next time they might kill him.

ISSA comes out of the bathroom, shirtless, bloodied, and partially bandaged. One hand is on his ribs - the other holds a first aid kit. He hears the commotion and walks to his room.

LUKE

I'm not going to tell him what to do - he can make his own decisions.

HAYAT

Then forget it.

LUKE

Just let me see him.

HAYAT

No.

LUKE

Dammit! Please!

I said no!

HAYAT

I hope all this shouting isn't for my sake.

ISSA
(entering the room)

Oh Jesus. . .

LUKE

Go back to the bathroom. I'll be there soon.

HAYAT

Are you OK?

LUKE

Just get out, Luke!

HAYAT

Why don't you make me?

LUKE

Stop it!

ISSA
(he winces)

Can you two ever be in a room and not fight?

LUKE

She started it.

ISSA

Yes, Luke. Very adult. Thank you.

HAYAT

I'm trying to keep you safe.

ISSA

Hayat, *lajeesereh. Polochin livaril.*
(Hayat, please. Everything is OK.)

HAYAT

Let me at least put the other / bandages on.

ISSA

You've done enough - get some sleep. I can finish by myself. *Eem sirekh sen.*
(I love you.)

HAYAT

Eem sirekh sen, oh. If you need anything you call for me.
(I love you, too.)
And you - we are not done discussing this.

*HAYAT kisses ISSA on the forehead then leaves.
ISSA walks behind her and shuts the door -
putting his hand to his ribs again.*

You good? **LUKE**

Should I lie? **ISSA**

Only if it makes you feel better. **LUKE**

I'm fine. **ISSA**

Sure? **LUKE**

ISSA
(clearly not - then breaking down)
Yes. I'm fine. It's fine. I'm fine.

LUKE pulls him into a reassuring hug.

LUKE
Hey, hey. It's alright, Issa. You're here now. Right, man? It's all over and you're breathing and your sister is giving me shit so the universe is still balanced.

ISSA
(laughing then wincing)
Do not make me laugh.

LUKE
Shit - those cuts look bad. Tell me you at least got one good punch in.

ISSA
I could not see or move - they covered my head and held me down.

LUKE
Sit down. Lemme clean you up.

ISSA
I can do it.

LUKE
Hey now - four years of high school football. I know how to heal a beating on the field.
Sit.

ISSA
Really, Luke you are not responsible for -

LUKE
Sit! It's an order.

ISSA sits. LUKE grabs the kit and rifles through picking out what he needs and starts patching ISSA up.

LUKE

(after a moment)

Who did it?

ISSA

I don't know. On my way home from work someone threw a hood over my head and dragged me away.

LUKE

I don't understand how anyone could know. We've been so careful.

ISSA

It only takes one person to see my face or to watch where I am going. Then a whisper becomes a rumor then a fact then - this.

LUKE

I'll tell someone at the base.

ISSA

No! Do not!

LUKE

Issa, man, they can help. They're always looking to make sure this area is secure.

ISSA

I'm begging you not to say anything. That would only make things worse. Even suggesting there are any problems means more soldiers and they might go after Hayat next time. Just let it pass and say nothing. / It never happened. // None of it. ///

LUKE

/OK, man!
//OK!
///Calm down!

ISSA

Promise me, Luke!

LUKE

Fine! I promise - just breathe for fuck's sake before you pop a vein.

ISSA calms down a little and LUKE returns to cleaning him up and placing bandages. After a moment:

LUKE

I don't get why you're still working at that market anyway.

ISSA

I have an obligation to my boss and the people I help. And once you all leave what would I do for work? Besides, it's a good cover.

LUKE

This wouldn't have happened if I didn't drag you in.

ISSA

Most everyone who works for the Americans understands that one day either the job or their life will end.

LUKE

But it's better now. We made it better.

ISSA

Some things are. But - some damage you can't fix.

LUKE

Well then why the hell did you even take the damn job, man?

ISSA

Because for most of my life I have dreamed of being in America. To be an American. To be free of fear. To actually live life. This is the closest I can come to that. So I could sit at home and forget that something called "life" actually exists or I can take advantage of whatever little pieces of happiness I can find because at the end of the day they make - everything bearable.

LUKE

Issa, man, no job is worth it.

ISSA

This one is.

LUKE

I can find you something else to do / on the base.

ISSA

New subject please.

LUKE

Fine. Whatever.

(a moment)

Christmas is next month. What are you and Hayat gonna do?

ISSA

We do not celebrate Christmas anymore.

LUKE

What - no tree or presents?

ISSA

We no longer find joy in the holiday.

LUKE

Wow. Well. Time to find it again - we're doing something.

ISSA

We?

LUKE

Yeah - WE - me, you and Hayat. Come on! It's Christmas, man!

ISSA

Our parents died Christmas week.

LUKE

Shit. . . nice, Luke. New subject?

ISSA

Yes, please.

LUKE

OK. Well. Alright - so. . . *Eem sirekh* sen.

ISSA

(a little startled)

What?

LUKE

Eem sirekh sen. I been around you guys long enough to know that what you two speak is nothing I've heard around here before. So spill.

ISSA

I can't say.

LUKE

Come on, man! I'm cleaning up your blood here.

ISSA

Hayat would kill me.

LUKE

Tell me. Tell me tell me tell me tell me - I could do this all night. I'm an only child, so I usually get my way,. Tell me Tell me tell me tell me tell me.

ISSA

It is not a language anyone can understand or learn. No one speaks it but Hayat and me.

LUKE

Interesting. Go on.

ISSA

It started out as just a few words and phrases when we wanted to share secrets as kids, but as we got older we started to translate everything we could. It used to drive our parents nuts - especially in church because people thought we were possessed.

LUKE

Wow. Teach me.

ISSA

No way.

Come on - it sounds cool, man. **LUKE**

Hayat would not approve. **ISSA**

Hayat ain't here - and she ain't gotta know. **LUKE**

I don't even know how to teach it - it is just something we know. **ISSA**

Just tell me certain phrases. **LUKE**

ISSA thinks - unconvinced.

Come on, man. It'll be our special little thing. **LUKE**

I know I will regret this. What do you want to know? **ISSA**

Shit yes! OK OK - let's start with the basics: Hello. **LUKE**

Bichin. **ISSA**

Bitchin'?? **LUKE**

Bee-chin. **ISSA**

Oh. OK. *Bichin.* Sweet. How about "thank you"? **LUKE**

Ferom sen. **ISSA**

Ferom sen. "You're welcome"? **LUKE**

Dekhmaroon. **ISSA**

Dekhmaroon. "Fuck off"? **LUKE**

There is not really a way to directly translate that. **ISSA**

Well something close then. **LUKE**

Uh. . . *Fechen omeh.* **ISSA**

FECHEN OMEH! **LUKE**

SHH! **ISSA**

LUKE
(whispering)
Sorry, sorry. What about what you guys said: *Eem sirekh sen.*

I love you. **ISSA**

Nice. . . *Eem sirekh sen.* **LUKE**

A pregnant pause. Then:

LUKE
So would *fechen sen* be “fuck you”?

ISSA
(laughing)
Yes - yes I suppose so.

LUKE
Sweet. You’re all patched up.

ISSA
Thank you.

LUKE
No prob, man. Anything for you. Um - *Dekhmaroon.*

ABBA’s “Fernando” plays.

5. TEA FOR TWO

The garden. A small table. Two chairs. HAYAT sits in one of them a glass of tea in her hand. Her eyes closed. Taking in the warmth of the sun. She is softly singing “Fernando.”

LUKE walks on in gear. He sees her and watches her for a moment. He smiles.

He gives up a small cough.

HAYAT
(startled)

Jesus!

LUKE
(chuckling)

Sorry. Was trying not to scare you.

HAYAT
Did you break the door down again?

LUKE
It was unlocked.

HAYAT
Issa - one of these days. . .

LUKE
I knocked but no one answered.

HAYAT
Then you should have gone away.

LUKE
I heard you singing.

HAYAT
Spying?

LUKE
Occupational hazard.

HAYAT
Well, I'm glad I put my bomb-making materials away after breakfast. Why are you always here?

LUKE
I'm not here THAT much.

HAYAT
Yes you are. Don't you have a job?

LUKE
I told you things were better. There's less for us to do. And I'm usually here on my downtime.

HAYAT
That's a lot of free time for people with such an important job.

LUKE
We're efficient.

HAYAT

And they just let you roam around doing whatever you want?

LUKE

Told you - it's / better.

HAYAT

Better. Yes yes - I heard you. I could have a secret gun, you know.

LUKE

Squad is nearby. We don't go too far away from each other.

HAYAT

So bothering me is your new job.

LUKE

Comes with great benefits.

HAYAT

Are you - are you flirting with me??

LUKE

What? No NO I was trying to be - you know - be - never mind.

HAYAT

(half to herself - half to him)

No wonder it's taking your military so long to leave if you have all this time to do nothing but go around and pester people instead of doing your jobs or packing your suitcases and getting out, I mean, God forbid you should just let us get on with our lives or anything.

An awkward moment. An awkward glance.

HAYAT

Issa isn't here. He's at the market. Working. His job. You know: A job.

LUKE

I know.

HAYAT

(eyeing him)

Ok. So then?

LUKE

Came to see you.

HAYAT

(sigh)

So much for relaxation.

LUKE

Well I can go if you -

HAYAT
(getting up and walking off)

Sit. I'll bring you some tea.

LUKE

You don't have to.

HAYAT

I know.

She walks off. He sits. Takes in a deep breath of the garden. He closes his eyes and feels the sun. HAYAT walks in with a tray with a glass of tea and bowl of sugar cubes on it. Sees him. Watches him. She smiles a little. Then drops it.

HAYAT

Tea.

LUKE

This place is pretty beautiful.

HAYAT

It was my mother's pride. She planted everything from that fig tree to that jasmine bush.

LUKE

(helping himself to the tea)

Guessing you take care of it now.

LUKE starts to methodically put sugar cubes in his tea. Many of them. Too many.

HAYAT

When I can. Issa helps sometimes. But I prefer doing it by myself. It relaxes me. I like to come out here and focus on the earth. It keeps me -

HAYAT stares at the sugar cubing circus. LUKE feels eyes. Looks up. Stops. Smiles. Stirs.

LUKE

Ferom sen.

HAYAT

What did you say?

LUKE

Thank you. Right? That's thank you?

HAYAT

(under her breath)

I'm going to kill him.

LUKE

Don't be mad at him. I made him teach me. Besides, it sounds pretty. And it's impressive you guys came up with a whole language.

HAYAT

(eyeing him)

I'm not coming to work for the army.

LUKE

Oh, god, no. I'd never suggest that.

HAYAT

Why? Because I'm a woman?

LUKE

Jesus, do you have to turn everything into an insult and an argument? Can we just sit out here and drink this tea and talk like normal people?

HAYAT

Fine.

LUKE

Maybe a little smile?

HAYAT

Don't push it.

LUKE

Yes, ma'am.

HAYAT

So why did you need to see me?

LUKE

Just chat. Get to know one another. I see Issa all the time. And you keep away from me.

HAYAT

I do not.

LUKE

Yes you do. Since Issa and I are practically best friends there's no reason why we can't be friends.

HAYAT

We have nothing in common.

LUKE

Who says we need to?

HAYAT

It's usually a good place to start friendships.

LUKE

Ok then. Favorite color: red.

Blue. **HAYAT**

No no - at the same time. So I know you're not picking a different answer on purpose. **LUKE**

Why would I lie? **HAYAT**

Humor me. **LUKE**

Fine. **HAYAT**

Favorite animal. Go. **LUKE**

Peacock. **HAYAT** Horse. **LUKE**

Hm. Ocean or forest? Go. **LUKE**

Ocean. **HAYAT** Forest. **LUKE**

We're doing so well. **HAYAT**

Hush. Lemme think. . .Got it! Favorite time of day. Ready? Go! **LUKE**

Twilight. **HAYAT** Twilight. **LUKE**

LUKE dons a shit-eating grin. HAYAT is genuinely surprised.

Lucky guess. **HAYAT**

Not at all. **LUKE**

Ok then. Why? **HAYAT**

LUKE
The blue hour. The only time when you can't see any shadows. When you can't tell whether night or day is approaching . When you're not sure what you're supposed to be doing. So you just kind of stand there and watch the horizon to make up it's mind so you can make up yours. This half-life of blues, reds, and purples. Sometimes yellow. You just sit there watching the world transform.

My mom taught me about twilight - took me with her when she went to watch. I kept doing it after she passed. The twilights here are pretty amazing. It's the only time I've seen green thrown into the mix. I keep taking pictures but none of them look as good as the real thing. Suppose it wouldn't be right if you could capture that moment. Like it's meant to be a secret. A privilege that you should be honored to be a part of. That a good enough answer?

She picks up her glass and looks out, smiling as she drinks. LUKE does the same but pulls a smug/self-congratulatory face. He turns to see HAYAT catching him. He clears his throat and looks out, sipping. She smiles and sips again.

Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas" plays.

6. SANTA LUKE IS COMING TO TOWN

Lights up in the house and in ISSA's bedroom. He sings along to the song now coming out of the stereo. There is general clattering from the kitchen.

We see LUKE through the window approach the door. He slowly opens the door looking at the Arabic scrawled in what looks like blood. He looks around to make sure the coast is clear. He puts the backpack he is carrying on the floor next to the door. He creeps about pinpointing where ISSA and HAYAT are then sneaks into the bathroom. He comes back with a wet towel and quickly wipes off the front door. He checks and double checks to make sure there is no trace then shoves the towel in his backpack. He closes the front door and looks out the window before drawing the curtains.

*He takes a breath and walks into the kitchen.
HAYAT yelps.*

Luke!

HAYAT

Sorry sorry!

LUKE

Jesus Christ stop scaring me!

HAYAT

LUKE

I said I was sorry! Put the spoon down!
(dragging HAYAT out)

HAYAT

I have to keep stirring or the *roz* is going to stick to the bottom of the pan.

LUKE

This won't take long.

HAYAT

If Issa leaves that damn door open one more time I swear I am going to bake his head.

LUKE

(stopping)

What does that mean?

HAYAT

It's a saying.

LUKE

Yeah right ok.

HAYAT

They walk into ISSA's room.

ISSA

Luke?

LUKE

(pointing to the stereo)

Really?

He turns if off.

ISSA

What's wrong? What happened?

LUKE

Listen to this guy - stop being so gloomy Issa, man. Chill out. It's Christmas tomorrow. Which means it Christmas Eve tonight. And I got the night off. Which means we're celebrating.

HAYAT

Oh no we're not. It's too / dangerous.

LUKE

Dangerous - yeah yeah. But the curtains are closed and there's no chimney for Santa to squeeze his fat jolly ass into, so no tip off.

ISSA

He has a point.

HAYAT

Did he have a point a last month when / you were -

LUKE

Nope nope nope - no living in the past. Not even the future. We deal with the present.
And speaking of presents -

*LUKE reaches into the bag and pulls out a small,
fake, pre-decorated and lit Christmas tree.*

LUKE

Voila. Freshly stolen from the barracks. Madame, if you don't mind.

*He shoves it into HAYAT 's hands. She puts it in
the nearest empty space she can find.*

LUKE pulls out a bottle of rum.

LUKE

Egg nog minus the egg but plenty of nog - carefully stolen from my father's stash.

HAYAT

We don't drink, Luke.

LUKE

Why not? You're not Muslim.

ISSA

Are you sure you're a Christian?

LUKE

Yeah - why?

HAYAT

No rum.

LUKE

Suit yourself - more for me.

HAYAT

(grabbing the bottle from him)

More for no one.

LUKE

You know how to kill a mood Hayat, I swear.

*LUKE reaches into the bag again and pulls out a
small gift wrapped box.*

LUKE

For you, Princess Poo Poo.

HAYAT

What is this?

LUKE

A Christmas present. You're supposed to open it. It's the tradition.

HAYAT

I know that, but -

LUKE

Just open it!

*HAYAT opens the box and pulls out a silver
angel wing ring.*

HAYAT

It's beautiful.

LUKE

Just something I found in one of the markets. Will probably turn green any day.

HAYAT

This is very thoughtful and generous. Thank you.

HAYAT hugs him. LUKE gives ISSA a thumbs up.

LUKE

Careful, Hayat. I think you might actually start liking me.

HAYAT

(pulling away and giving him a playful
slap)

Don't count on it.

LUKE

(pulling out his iPhone)

Ok - picture time!

HAYAT/ISSA

No - no way. / Oh no.

LUKE

Can't break tradition. Every year we take a family picture back home - then we wait until my Uncle Jim gets shitfaced / and decorate him in tinsel, garland, and lights.

HAYAT

Language.

(after LUKE is done:)

I can't take a picture like this - I'm a mess.

LUKE

(handing ISSA the phone)

Blah blah blah - move it . Issa - one of me and Princess Poo Poo.

HAYAT

Stop calling me that. And keep your hands above my shoulders.

Just shut up and smile.

LUKE

ISSA takes the picture.

Now one of me and the punching bag.

LUKE
(taking the phone from ISSA and giving
it to HAYAT)

*HAYAT goes to take the picture and LUKE turns
quickly and plants one on ISSA's cheek.*

Luke!

ISSA
(wiping his cheek)

Gotcha!

LUKE
(laughing)

HAYAT just shakes her head.

Ok ok - for real this time.

LUKE

Alright - say "Cheese!"

HAYAT
(aiming the camera)

Cheddar!/Cheese!

LUKE/ISSA
(smiling broadly)

She takes the picture.

Now all three. On the bed - let's go.

LUKE

My God, Luke, enough. One picture is the same as the next one - it's all the same people.

HAYAT
(chuckling exasperatedly)

You'll thank me for these Kodak moments later on dark nights when you miss me.

LUKE
(setting them up for a selfie)

In your dreams.

HAYAT

Every night. OK, Aaaaand - hands off my butt, Hayat.

LUKE

HAYAT
What - My hand is nowhere near-!

Camera snap.

LUKE
Perfect!

HAYAT
Luke!

LUKE
Tell her, Issa.

ISSA
(dryly)
You can't win with him - he is always right and always gets his way.

HAYAT
(to LUKE)
You are so strange.

LUKE
That's the nicest thing you have ever said to me. And now - we sing.

ISSA
Oh no no no.

LUKE
Yeah! Come on - we're supposed to sing Christmas Carols: Jingle Bells, Rudolf the Little fucking Drummer Boy.

HAYAT
You two sing. I need to finish making dinner. Luke, you stay for a bite, OK?

LUKE
No need to ask me twice. Any chance of some sawdust salad?

HAYAT
Lord give me strength with this one. I would appreciate some help setting the table. From both of you.

LUKE
Hey, I don't live here.

HAYAT
(returning to the kitchen)
You want to eat - you help. And you! Front. Door.

ISSA
Sorry.

LUKE

(off ISSA's look)

What? What are you grinning at me for?

ISSA

That was very nice of you. You didn't have to do all this.

LUKE

Sure I did. Besides, don't kid yourself, I did it for me.

*He grabs ISSA around the neck and starts to
roughhouse.*

LUKE

Come on, say "Uncle."

ISSA

Ouch! Luke, I am still a little bruised.

LUKE

Then say "Uncle."

ISSA

What for?

LUKE

It means you give up. Say it.

ISSA

That makes no sense.

LUKE

(roughing it up more)

Say "Uncle"!

ISSA

Fine! UNCLE!

LUKE

Now sit down.

ISSA

But -

LUKE

We can go another round.

*ISSA throws his hands up and sits on the bed.
LUKE goes to the door, closing it, before
reaching into the bag and pulling out a gift.*

LUKE

You think I was gonna forget about you? Open it.

This is not necessary. **ISSA**

The two of you, I swear. **LUKE**

I cannot accept this. **ISSA**

You do enough for everyone else, so how about you let someone else do something for you, huh? **LUKE**

I do not even have anything for you. **ISSA**

Just open the damned thing. **LUKE**

ISSA rips into the package and holds up a thick CD wallet stuffed with mix CDs.

More than 72 hours of hits from the last ten years. Those should bring you up to speed. **LUKE**

Wow. **ISSA**
(stunned)

Sorry it's nothin' fancy. **LUKE**

It's perfect. Really perfect. The best gift ever. *Ferom sen.*
(Thank you.) **ISSA**

Dekhmaroon.
(You're welcome.) **LUKE**

LUKE grabs ISSA and pulls him into a tight hug. It goes on for a little too long. They breathe together.

HAYAT can be heard softly singing "Noel."

It has been a while since she sang out loud. **ISSA**

We should probably go help. **LUKE**

Probably. **ISSA**

Yeah. **LUKE**

They keep hugging. ISSA hugs him tighter.

The singing continues and eventually fades out into a ghostly echo.

7. SIBLING REVELRY

Nighttime. Keys jingle in the lock. ISSA comes in quietly, closing the door behind him but not locking it. He creeps to his room and goes in quietly. He turns on the light and sees HAYAT sleeping on his bed. He goes to her quietly and wakes her.

Hayat? **ISSA**

Hm? What time is it? **HAYAT**

11. Why aren't you in your bed? **ISSA**

HAYAT
I was waiting for you. I got worried. Where were you?

ISSA
One of the soldier's in the squad celebrated his 21st birthday today. They invited me to a party.

HAYAT
You smell like smoke.

ISSA
They love their cigarettes.

HAYAT
You shouldn't smoke.

ISSA
Ok, mom. Come on. Go to your bed so I can sleep.

HAYAT
(shifting over)
Come here.

We're not kids anymore.

ISSA
(laughing)

Down.

HAYAT

Ridiculous.

ISSA
(sighing)

*She wraps her arm around him and rests her
head on his shoulder.*

I'm worried about you.

HAYAT

Don't be silly. I'm fine.

ISSA

I know what is best for you.

HAYAT

No. You don't.

ISSA
(sitting up)

Yes, I do.

HAYAT

What is really going on here?

ISSA

A moment.

You will never be one of them.

HAYAT

Them who?

ISSA

The Americans.

HAYAT

I'm not trying / to be like them.

ISSA

I can see it - in the way you walk. The way you pick up your fork. The way you argue with me.

HAYAT

So what? What's wrong with wanting to be like them?

ISSA

HAYAT

Are you embarrassed to be one of us?

ISSA

I can be both.

HAYAT

Neither side will accept that. And no matter how much you try to pretend to be American you will never be one.

ISSA

You just don't like them,

HAYAT

You're right.

ISSA

Our people aren't any better.

HAYAT

Most. Not all.

ISSA

It's the same with the Americans.

HAYAT

They are the reason our people are changing for the worst.

ISSA

The other morning this old man, teeth missing, his back hunched over, started to cry. Luke thought someone in the squad had hurt him. You know what the old man said: "Look at my granddaughter. Look." And this little girl with these puffy cheeks was smiling - laughing - as one of the soldiers played peek-a-boo with her.

HAYAT

You always see only the good things.

ISSA

We have to have some hope.

HAYAT

I promised Mama and Baba that / I would look after you.

ISSA

They are dead. They don't get to dictate our lives anymore. It's not fair to you. And it's not fair to me.

HAYAT

So why do the Americans get to dictate how our lives change? That's not fair either.

ISSA

The world changes - everything changes. At least now we have a choice to change with it.

Not everyone likes this change. **HAYAT**

No they don't. **ISSA**

So what do we do? **HAYAT**

We live. We breathe and we live. **ISSA**

She hugs him.

Don't leave me alone. **HAYAT**

Never. Come on crazy. **ISSA**
(pats the bed)

Lie down.

She lies down. He joins her. They hold one another.

An Oud and Cello version of 'Ahlam Babliyaa' plays.

8. TEA FOR TWO, PART TWO

Daylight - a few moments before the blue hour. HAYAT and LUKE sit at the table - glasses of black tea steaming. Their heads are back. Eyes closed. They breath in and out for a while.

So how long - **LUKE**

Sh. **HAYAT**

Breathing.

My ass is starting to fall/ asleep. **LUKE**

I said "sh." **HAYAT**

Breathing. LUKE opens his eyes to make sure HAYAT's are closed then reaches to the glass of tea lifting it carefully and trying to drink it without making any noise. He burns his tongue.

HAYAT
(eyes still closed)
Americans. No patience.
Pant.
(opening her eyes)

LUKE
Say what?

HAYAT
Pant. Like a dog. It will help the burning.

LUKE eyes her. HAYAT doesn't flinch. He starts to pant. A few more pants. HAYAT starts laughing.

LUKE
Aw man, I knew you were playing me!

HAYAT
You are too easy.

LUKE
You got a mean streak, lady.

HAYAT
Just letting you try your own medicine.

LUKE
Good to know you got a sense of humor.

HAYAT
Oh I'm very Eddie Muprhy.

LUKE
Riiiiight. Oo - by the way -
(fishing in his pocket and handing her a small envelope)

Here you go.

HAYAT
What's this?

LUKE
Why do you always ask that? Why not just be pleasantly surprised? A little suspense in life won't kill you.

She opens the envelope, takes out pictures and smiles. LUKE smiles.

LUKE

See how much better it is when you don't know what's gonna happen next?

HAYAT

We look so -

LUKE

Happy?

HAYAT

Yes.

LUKE

Been a while, huh?

HAYAT

I love seeing him smile.

LUKE

He smiles all the time.

HAYAT

Not like this. He means it here. He's not trying to cheer anyone up or make me feel better.

LUKE

We're a lot alike.

HAYAT

(highly skeptical)

Oh?

LUKE

After my mom died, Dad kinda shut down. I spent a lot of time taking his mind off of it - trying to make him laugh.

HAYAT

I did not want to ask before out of respect but -

LUKE

A drunk driver. I was 9. She was on her way to pick me up from a football game. He came out of nowhere and sideswiped her. My dad was deployed. I was waiting on the field for 3 hours before a neighbor came to get me. They didn't let me see her at the hospital. The guy who hit her died that night. Didn't even get to rot in a prison cell. My mom died the next morning.

HAYAT

I'm so sorry, Luke.

LUKE

That's life right?

HAYAT

I know.

Yeah. Suppose you do. **LUKE**

Thank you. **HAYAT**

For? **LUKE**

HAYAT
Trusting me with that story. And for my brother. I still have my doubts about you don't worry. I think he's picking up too many bad habits from you and the others. Trying too hard to be someone he is not. But you're good to him. For him.

LUKE
And you're good for me. Both of you.

HAYAT looks at him quizzically.

HAYAT
Sen eteros ayel byogesh.
(You are such a mystery.)

LUKE
Osh eteros sen.
(So are you.)

HAYAT
Sen dukhmah gyoman.
(You learn quickly,)

LUKE
Eem loyd dukhmah ahter gyoman fi sen eem dukhmah.
(I would learn quicker if you taught me.)

HAYAT
(guffaws)
I think my brother teaches you enough. You don't need my help.

LUKE
But it'd be nice.

HAYAT
Hm. Can I ask you something?

LUKE
Can I stop you?

HAYAT
What do your friends think of all this?

LUKE
The war?

HAYAT

You spending so much time in this house. With Issa.

LUKE

They love the guy. He makes them laugh. And he's good at what he does.

HAYAT

You mean to say that not a single soldier in the squad, or any other squad, would object to being "friendly" with us natives.

LUKE

Am I being roped into a political discussion?

HAYAT

Not at all. I am just curious.

LUKE

And you want to make sure Issa is really safe.

HAYAT

Well . . .

LUKE

Nothing's happened to him in four months.

HAYAT

True.

LUKE

And nothing will. The guys have his back and they know he has theirs.

HAYAT

And you would rescue him if there was any trouble.

LUKE

You bet.

HAYAT

Because if you let anything happen to him -

LUKE

Hey - Hayat - look - nothing's gonna happen to you guys as long as I am around. Got it?

She eyes him. Then smiles.

HAYAT

Got it. But what happens after you're not around anymore? What happens after you all finally / decide to -

LUKE

Sh - look. Blue Hour.

He looks up at the sky. She looks at him and smiles.

9. A LITTLE CIVIL UNREST

All three are in the living room sitting on the floor in front of the couch. LUKE sits in the middle. ISSA's head is on one lap, HAYAT's on another. LUKE has his free hand on ISSA's chest. "Summer Highland Falls" plays on the stereo that has now been moved to the floor next to them [an edited instrumental version if possible so as to avoid lyrical distractions].

LUKE

When I was 10 my dad beat me for spilling a glass of OJ on the couch - he broke my right arm.

ISSA

What?

LUKE

Snapped it right in two.

HAYAT

How is that the best memory of your father?

LUKE

It's the only time he ever apologized to me. He acted like a dad and not a sergeant telling me to suck it up. Didn't last long though - never broke another bone but sure as hell left some nice fat bruises.

HAYAT

Weren't people curious about all your injuries?

LUKE

He told everyone I was a klutz. I'm an army brat - you don't talk about family business anywhere anytime. . . It's all good though. Figured he couldn't let go about my mom dying, and didn't want the same happening to me. It was easier to just make him happy to spare us both. So anytime he wanted me to do something I jumped to it. Do the dishes? Jump! Mow the lawn? Jump! Join the army? Jump!

HAYAT reaches up and pulls LUKE's hand to herself - clutching it tightly.

HAYAT

I am sure he truly loves you.

LUKE

Sometimes love isn't enough.

A self-reflective moment.

LUKE

(turning off the music.)

OK - enough of this depressing shit. I didn't come here for therapy. Knock, knock!

Oh god. **HAYAT**

Come on, say "Who's there?" **LUKE**

Absolutely not. You have the worst jokes I have ever heard. None of them have been funny. **HAYAT**

How dare you? They're all gems. Now: Knock, knock! **LUKE**
(faux gasping)

I refuse. I'm not doing this. **HAYAT**

Knock, knock! **LUKE**

Nope. **HAYAT**

Knock, knock! **LUKE**

Oh, for god's sake - who's there?! **ISSA**

I dunnup. **LUKE**

I dunnup who? **ISSA**

Ew - that's gross. **LUKE**

What? **ISSA**

That makes no sense! **HAYAT**

Wait for it... **LUKE**

Hold on - **ISSA**

He's at the 20- **LUKE**

Dunnup who- **ISSA**

The 10. **LUKE**

Oh my god! **ISSA**
(laughing)

Touchdown! **LUKE**
(jumping up and doing a ridiculous
dance)

I still don't get it. **HAYAT**

Oh man - Dunnupwho. Done a poo. **LUKE**

Not funny. **HAYAT**
(thinking about it - getting it)

Well not now that we had to explain it! **LUKE**
(sitting back down)

Is this what Americans do all day? Stand around telling unfunny jokes. **HAYAT**

And heeeeeere we go, folks. **LUKE**

God forbid we should have honest moments here. **HAYAT**

Please, don't get all serious, Hayat. **ISSA**

Can't you just enjoy yourself? Be a kid again - make farting noises with your hands and get into pillow fights. **LUKE**

We don't have the luxury of being kids. **HAYAT**

If I can do it - so can you. **LUKE**

Forget it. **HAYAT**
(leaving)

ISSA

Hayat -

LUKE

(jumping up and getting her)

No no no. Come on. I'm sorry. OK? Sit back down. You wanna talk - let's talk.

HAYAT reluctantly comes back and sits on the edge of the couch.

Nothing.

LUKE

So talk!

HAYAT

I'm jealous.

ISSA/LUKE

What?

HAYAT

You have this ability to block out everything that is going on and just laugh. Not a day goes by when I don't think about something that could happen to me, or Issa, or you.

LUKE

You worry for no reason.

HAYAT

That is so easy to say when you walk around in a uniform with a gun.

LUKE

You tryin' to say that what we do isn't dangerous?

HAYAT

Of course not. I just don't think you have ever taken a moment to really look at it from our side.

LUKE

I know how hard it's been for you guys.

HAYAT

(putting a hand on his face)

But you don't. Not really. Not completely.

She plants a kiss on his head.

HAYAT

(planting a kiss on ISSA's head)

Don't stay up too late.

HAYAT heads to her bedroom.

LUKE
(turning to ISSA)

What was that?

ISSA knowingly shrugs.

LUKE
Seriously - I have no idea where that came from.

ISSA lowers his head saying nothing.

LUKE
Oh what?

ISSA
Nothing - nothing.

*He gets up and takes the stereo to his room.
LUKE follows.*

LUKE
Not you too.

ISSA
She has a point.

LUKE
Oh this should be interesting - do tell.

ISSA
I don't want to fight with you.

LUKE
No - really - apparently I'm missing something here.

ISSA
American soldiers killed my parents. It was an accident - a misunderstanding. A shopkeeper thought one of the soldiers was trying to kidnap his daughter - she had fallen and hurt herself. The man panicked and started shouting. My father tried to get in between to help calm the situation. To this day I don't know if a door slammed too hard or a window broke or what, but all of a sudden there was one gun shot. And then screams. Then more and more gunshots. By the end of it just bodies all over the market.

LUKE
Fuck. Fuck! I am so sorry, man.

ISSA
Most people here need someone to blame - to help make sense of the violence and death. But we are all responsible - for creating fear, for not standing up, for not asking questions, for just acting without thinking. We will get nowhere just pointing fingers at each other. But - despite all the good I have seen, there are days when, like Hayat, I wish you had all just stayed out of our country.

LUKE

You're not the only ones to suffer because of this war.

ISSA

I never said that.

LUKE

I've seen just how insane all this bullshit is.

ISSA

And at the end of the day that is all you can do - just witness.

LUKE

Tell you what - you take my gun and go riding around worrying if the fucking helmet you're wearing might actually stop a bullet from cracking your head open. Walk through neighborhoods where you can feel the anger hitting you in waves and looking at everyone as a possible enemy - then you can come talk to me.

ISSA

I HAVE been there with you.

LUKE

With your face covered.

ISSA

You don't think that makes me a bigger target?

LUKE

Not as big as me.

ISSA

This is not a comparing game, Luke.

LUKE

Sure fucking sounds like it. You're acting like some god damned martyr.

ISSA

And so are you!

LUKE

We're here to help dammit!

ISSA

You want me to bow down to the great conquering hero?!

LUKE

I never said I was - !

ISSA

Thank you oh great and powerful American!

LUKE

Fuck off Issa!

ISSA
Please help us ignorant towelheads!

LUKE
I hate being here!

ISSA
So do we!

LUKE
I'm dying in this place!

A moment for the frustrations to quell.

ISSA
(sitting next to him)
Soon - you'll get on a plane and go back home. And we will still be here.

LUKE
I just want to forget.

ISSA
(putting his arm around LUKE)
Me too.

10. WHO CAN IT BE NOW?

The lights come up in the living room. The telephone rings.

HAYAT (O.S.)
La7za la7za! (Wait wait!)

HAYAT comes out of the kitchen drying her hands. She picks up the phone.

HAYAT
Allo?

Nothing.

HAYAT
Allo?

Nothing.

HAYAT
Meen? (Who is it?) Allo?

Nothing. She hangs up. She walks back to the kitchen. The phone rings again. She stops.

Looks over her shoulder. Goes back. Lets it ring one more time before picking up. She listens for a few seconds.

HAYAT

Meen? Meen huna? (Who is it? Who is there?)

Nothing.

HAYAT

Aljubna. Kulkum. (Cowards. All of you.)

She hangs up. She stares at the phone. It rings. She lets it. Then she unhooks the phone. She stands in the silence. She looks around. She shakes.

Silvertide's "California Rain" starts to play as the lights come up in ISSA's bedroom.

11. IMAGINE

LUKE is in his tank top. ISSA is barefoot in gym shorts and a t-shirt. They are dancing around wildly passing around a cigarette. At some point LUKE drops his trousers and pulls his tank top over his head to be a complete doofus.

LUKE

Now THIS is the shit!

ISSA

What?

LUKE

I said: THIS IS THE SHIT!

ISSA

Yes - YES - THE SHIT!

LUKE

YEAH MAN!

ISSA

A LITTLE TOO LOUD NO?

LUKE

HELL NO!!!

ISSA

I'll just turn it down a little.

WHAT??

LUKE

ISSA lowers the volume - the song continues to play until it ends.

I don't want to bother the neighbors.

ISSA

Neighbors - right.

LUKE

(throwing himself on the bed out of breath)

It's good though.

ISSA

What's your favorite?

LUKE

Childish Gambino is very cool. Even though I don't really understand everything he says.

ISSA

You will.

LUKE

It seems like it is difficult what he does. His rhythms are hypnotizing.

ISSA

Definitely not ABBA.

LUKE

Definitely.

ISSA

All the CDs are good, right?

LUKE

Very!

ISSA

Right! Gimme the cig. God damn it's hot. My balls are sticking to my thighs. It's good, yeah?

LUKE

Yeah yeah I said yeah.

ISSA

Good.

LUKE

You're all sweaty.

ISSA
(shoving LUKE's arm off)

LUKE chuckles, then rubs his sweaty face and head on ISSA.

Come on!

ISSA

Got a towel?

LUKE
(chuckling)

Please?

ISSA

Pleeeeeeease?

LUKE

ISSA goes to a drawer and pulls out a towel - throwing it to LUKE.

Thanks.

LUKE

He dries off. Pulls his pants back up. ISSA sits back on the edge of the bed.

Drag?

LUKE
(offering the cigarette)

You finish it.

ISSA

...

LUKE

...

ISSA

So?

LUKE

So?

ISSA

You gonna gimme an answer or avoid?

LUKE

Not now.

ISSA

Issa. **LUKE**

Luke. **ISSA**

Issa. **LUKE**

We're having fun. **ISSA**

Avoid. You've been sulking. I know you. **LUKE**

I have not. **ISSA**

Sulking. **LUKE**

Hayat should be home soon. **ISSA**

Avoooooooooid. Sulking avoider. **LUKE**

Nothing.

LUKE
(nudging ISSA)
Come to America.

ISSA
...

LUKE
Seriously. I don't get to be my dad's son without some benefits. I know people - can get some asylum paperwork started for you and Hayat. You'll get a hearing. You'll state your case. I can get you both out of here.

ISSA
Can't claim asylum from a country that is 'liberated and free'.

LUKE
We're good at spinning. Let me spin it for you and they'll be rolling out a red carpet for you both as heroic allies.

ISSA
And then?

LUKE

Hayat can go to college and quit bitching about opportunities lost. I can get the fuck out of the army and we can get a place. And then we can play music AS LOUD AS WE WANT!!!

Nothing.

LUKE

So?

ISSA

I don't know.

LUKE

What's to know? This is everything you wanted. It's all you talk about. The three of us against the world - away from all this bullshit.

ISSA

America doesn't have its own bullshit?

LUKE

Hey you're the one who loves it so much.

ISSA

Loving something doesn't mean you have to be blind to it.

LUKE

The country is big enough. We can find a place away from the bullshit. We'll be living life for once.

ISSA

Living life...

LUKE

Exactly. So?

ISSA

...

LUKE

Please let me do this for you.

ISSA

...

LUKE

(moving closer to ISSA)

Close your eyes.

ISSA

Why?

LUKE

Do - it.

ISSA does.

You're in America. **LUKE**

Colorado? **ISSA**

Doesn't matter. Wherever you want. **LUKE**

California. **ISSA**

Done. You're in California. What are you doing? **LUKE**

This is silly. **ISSA**
(opening his eyes)

WHAT are you doing? **LUKE**
(putting his hand over ISSA's eyes)

I'm standing at the ocean. **ISSA**
(thinks - then:)

Are you alone? **LUKE**

No. You are there - playing in the sand. Hayat is running in the water. **ISSA**

Weather? **LUKE**

Summer. But not too hot. **ISSA**

Keep going. **LUKE**

At some point LUKE moves his hand and ISSA's eyes are closed. Maybe a tear or two falls from his closed eyes. At some point LUKE also closes his eyes. Maybe a tear falls, too. Maybe.

ISSA
The sun is almost coming up. The sky is orange. And purple. A few people are also there, but they are far away. We live close by so we come here at this time of day a lot, but it still feels new to me each time. It's how we start the day. We all go to school: I'm studying engineering. Hayat is doing something with politics or medicine - maybe both.

You still don't know what you want to do, but we force you to go to class anyway. We're in a small apartment. No. A house. With a garden. Weekends we invite neighbors and friends. We listen to music. We laugh. We meet new people. I go to a concert every month - week. I love spending weekends in the cinema and music store. Sometimes we smoke too much. Sometimes we drink too much. We drink - I try a drink. I drive a car - with the windows down. I sing loudly and no one cares. I walk down streets and I get to keep my head up. I sleep in a soft big bed. I dream. I can dream again. I don't wake up in the middle of the night. I don't hear guns or bombs or screams. I don't smell smoke. I don't smell broken stone. The air is salty and sweet - it smells like the ocean and - the sky. It smells like the sky is supposed to smell.

ISSA takes in a deep breath.

Beautiful. **LUKE**

A moment.

Do it. **ISSA**

Yeah? **LUKE**

Yes. **ISSA**

LUKE pulls ISSA into a hug.

Thank you, man. Thank you. **LUKE**

12. THE FRONT DOOR

Keys jingle in the front door, but the door swings open freely. HAYAT enters through the front door with bags of groceries, kicking it closed behind her. She makes her way to the kitchen to drop off the bags before going to ISSA's room.

HAYAT
Dammit. Issa! Enough with this door! How many times do I need to tell you to lock it?
(She goes to and opens the door to
ISSA's bedroom.)
Can you at least pretend you're an adult? Or at least try not to drive me crazy?
(She looks around.)
And can you please be here when I'm trying to yell at you!?

She shakes her head, sighs, chuckles. She turns off the light and walks out, closing the door behind her.

HAYAT

(under her breath)

Bake your head - that's what I'm going to do.

She undoes her hijab as she walks to her bedroom and opens the door. She steps in, sees something to the side and is startled.

HAYAT

No!

Her door is slammed just behind her. We hear the sounds of a muffled struggle then silence. [OR WE HEAR NOTHING BUT SILENCE.]

The lights fade to night slowly. The house is dark. Night sounds bleed in.

Keys jingle in the lock. ISSA walks in.

ISSA

(opening the door)

Oooh - now look who's not locking the front door.

He turns on the light as he goes into the kitchen. He turns on the light in there.

ISSA

Not locking the door AND not putting away the groceries. Tsk tsk. I'll have to report you to the landlord if standards keep slipping.

He comes out and goes to her room. He knocks on the door.

ISSA

(whispered to the door)

Hayat? You sleeping? It's only 7.

He puts his ear to the door. He grins. He preps. He throws the door open.

ISSA

(trying to scare HAYAT)

AHHHHHHHH!!!!

He starts to laugh then turn on the light.

ISSA

Got you!

He stops and takes in the room. It's disheveled.

Hayat?

ISSA

He runs into his room and turns on the lights.

Hayat?

ISSA

*He runs out and goes to the bathroom turning
on the lights.*

Hayat?!

ISSA

*He runs back out in full panic mode. He goes to
and opens the front door.*

Hayat! HAYAT!

ISSA

He runs out.

HAYAT!!!

ISSA

Intense dombaks drum.

13. SEARCH AND RESCUE

*Quick daylight. ISSA paces. Luke stands like an
official soldier.*

So?

ISSA

They'll do their best.

LUKE

But what does that mean?

ISSA

Sit down, Issa.

LUKE

She could be anywhere.

ISSA

Issa -

LUKE

Anyone could have her!

ISSA

I need you to sit down, man.

LUKE

ISSA sits.

The base will do it's best, but - look, man, it might take time.

LUKE

How long?

ISSA

Hopefully not long. The truth is - I don't know if she'll be a high priority. To the army she's just another civilian.

LUKE

She's my sister!

ISSA

I know.

LUKE

I work for the army. That has to mean something. It has to help.

ISSA

I'll do what I can to push her up the list. But it might be a few weeks.

LUKE

Weeks? Weeks?!

ISSA

Issa, man, stop yelling.

LUKE

How are you not upset?

ISSA

I'm trying to stay calm which is what you should be doing as well. We're not gonna find her acting crazed.

LUKE

They need to look for her. Now!

ISSA

They will, man. They will.

LUKE

ISSA heads to the door.

Where are you going?

LUKE

ISSA

She's my sister. I am not going to sit around and be calm and wait for someone else to do their job. You all talk about how you want to help, but when it matters most no one wants to lift a finger. You'll spend days with paperwork and questions and strategy.

LUKE

(intercepting ISSA)

Don't play into their game. They want you alone so they can take you too.

ISSA

Good. Let them. Let them take me.

LUKE

(puts a hand on him to hold him back)

You're not going to help anyone dead.

ISSA

(getting in LUKE's face)

Get your hands off me.

LUKE

(not stepping back)

Make me.

They struggle. LUKE gets ISSA in an arm-lock.

LUKE

Now calm down.

ISSA

Let me go!

LUKE

Not until you calm down.

ISSA

GET OFF!

LUKE

CALM DOWN!

A minor struggle. Then ISSA relents. LUKE releases him but stands in front of the door.

LUKE

I'm gonna head back to the base. I promise I'll talk to someone - my dad even - and get this sorted out. Ok?

ISSA

Fine.

LUKE

And you need to not do anything stupid. Got it?

Fine. **ISSA**

Fine is not good enough. You promise me. Or I swear I'll get you locked down on base. **LUKE**

Go ahead / and try. **ISSA**

ISSA! Cut the bullshit. Promise. **LUKE**

I promise. **ISSA**

LUKE starts to head out.

And what happens if you don't find her. **ISSA**

We - I will. **LUKE**

And if not? **ISSA**

We can't / think about - **LUKE**

If not. **ISSA**

I'll do my best. I promise. **LUKE**
(a slight hesitation)

Your best. Fine. Go do your best. Have your people do their best. **ISSA**
(guffaws)

LUKE heads out.

ISSA angrily chuckles, mutters, paces. He finally sits.

Lights change from day to night to day four times.

14. SPECIAL DELIVERY

*Slow and deliberate knocks. ISSA doesn't move.
More knocking. ISSA doesn't move. The door
opens and LUKE lets himself in.*

Where have you been?
ISSA

We got put on heavy rotation.
LUKE

Right.
ISSA

But I figured I should swing / by and check on you.
LUKE

Where is my sister?
ISSA

They're still / looking.
LUKE

If this were a soldier he would be found already.
ISSA

That's not / true.
LUKE

ISSA
Yes it is. Four days. Four and not a sign. Not a word. Nothing. So either the great American military is a complete joke or you've already found her and not told me what is happening. So which is it Luke?

LUKE
Look - I'm not sure if what I found / means anything but -

ISSA
(jumping up to him - desperate)
What did you find out? Is she safe? Where is she, Luke? Where??

LUKE
I didn't find her, Issa.

ISSA
Then what. I can see it in your eyes. What is it?

*LUKE removes his backpack and pulls out a
letter, handing it to ISSA who grabs it like a
wild animal and reads it.*

LUKE
This shit's usually just empty threats or lies.

ISSA
(eyeing Luke)

What else?

LUKE

...I need you to not overreact understand? This doesn't mean anything. Not a thing.

LUKE pulls a box out of his backpack. ISSA grabs the box. Opens it. Horror washes over his face.

ISSA

Oh god.

*ISSA doubles over and wretches out of sight.
LUKE grabs the box and puts it back in his backpack.*

LUKE

(going to him)

Dammit. Hey man - I need you to breath ok?

ISSA

(scrambling away from him - feeling sick again)

Oh god. Oh god oh god. No no no no.

LUKE

We don't know if that belongs to her ok? We don't. I need you to focus on that.

ISSA

Of course it's her. Look at the ring. Look at the ring, Luke!

ISSA wanders trying to get his bearings.

LUKE

It's not! That's why I brought it here, so you could see it's not. And even if it is then it means she IS alive. Got it? I need you to focus on that.

ISSA

This is all because of you.

LUKE

What?

ISSA

This is your fault! It says so in the letter. What did you do? Did you force yourself on her?

LUKE

How the fuck can you even ask me that?

ISSA

Then why would they take her? It's not because of me or they would have taken me. So it's you - that's why they took her. You!

LUKE

No one's to blame here, man. This is us against them. This is what they want. For us to turn on one another.

ISSA

There is no US. There is YOU and there is ME. We are not the same. And what is the base going to do with this? What does your sergeant father have to say about all this?

LUKE

I don't know.

ISSA

What do you mean you don't /

LUKE

This was sent directly to me. No one else has seen it.

ISSA

You didn't tell them?

LUKE

I didn't know / what to -

ISSA

Why didn't you tell them?

LUKE

I don't know, man! Ok?! I don't.

ISSA

You're supposed to know. It's why we count on you!

LUKE

This isn't my fault! I didn't do anything! This isn't her. It's not. They're lying! Playing games god dammit!

ISSA

How selfish can you all be? How oblivious to anything that isn't right in front of your faces? Anything that proves you wrong - that makes you the bad guys!

LUKE

(going to ISSA)

Please, man, you / gotta believe me.

ISSA

Get out of here. Don't ever show your face to me again. Ever.

LUKE

Don't fall into their trap, man.

ISSA

Get out.

LUKE
Please...

ISSA
(gets close to his face)
Get. Out.

A moment. LUKE gathers everything and leaves - slamming the door behind him. ISSA struggles to cope. He goes into his room. He finds and plays GNR's "Welcome to the Jungle." He tries to get lost in the music. He can't. He looks around. He starts tearing everything down in his room - all the posters. All the photos. He knocks over his crate of music. He pulls the stereo cord out of the wall and throws the stereo to the ground. He stands in the silence, breathless, then sinks to the floor and sits there.

15. WHEN LILACS LAST BLOOMED

Moonlight pours through the window. A knock at the door.

ISSA
It's open!

LUKE cracks the door open.

ISSA
It's always open...

LUKE
(he walks in)
Where are you man?

ISSA
Here.

LUKE
(bumping into the couch)
Dammit.

LUKE turns on a light. ISSA shields his eyes. He is sitting on the ground in front of his bedroom, a bottle next to him. He is drunk.

ISSA
That's bright.

LUKE

Jesus...

ISSA

Oh - it's you. Hello you. Hiii. Where have you been?

LUKE

It's been a - crazy - couple of days, but - well I need -

ISSA

You're not supposed to be here though, right? I said - didn't I say - what did I say?

LUKE

I know - I know but - we need to talk about something.

ISSA

Thing - yes - no - things - things things things.

LUKE

What's going on?

ISSA

I'm - sad. I have sadness.

(showing him the bottle)

This is how you do sadness. Right?

LUKE

You're not making any sense.

ISSA

Shhhhhhhh. SH! You're ruining the silence.

(letting the silence settle)

Some one left me a note. On the door. That one. The one I never lock. For me. Hospital they said. Wrote. I ran there to be with her. But they didn't tell me. The note didn't tell me.

He swigs. He starts humming 'Fernando'.

ISSA

Hayat. Is. Dead.

LUKE tries not to react.

ISSA

You didn't know, did you? Of course you didn't know. What do you know?

LUKE

(walking over to him)

Why don't you give that to me?

ISSA

(hugging the bottle)

No. Noooooope. That's how you Americans say "no" right? Nope. This is mine. You get your own. I did not realize how warm this makes you feel. It burns.

LUKE

At least let me help you to the couch or something.

ISSA

Here is better for me. Right here.

LUKE

(going to ISSA)

Come on. Get up.

ISSA

(brushing him off)

No! Don't touch me. This is where I am supposed to be. Right. Here.

*LUKE sits on the arm of the couch and looks at
ISSA. A few moments pass.*

ISSA

Go away, Luke.

LUKE

I'm / sorry.

ISSA

No! Don't say "I'm sorry." I'm so tired of hearing that. Say "I'm happy." Or "I'm sleepy." Or I'm stupid. I'm forgetful. I'm selfish. I'm sad. I'm angry. I'm hopeless. I'm alone. I'm everything - everything - everything. . .nothing.

Some silence.

LUKE

What happened?

ISSA

(taking a swig)

The elevator went down. Into the basement. Not up. Down. Down down. So many bodies. Waiting. I had to find her. With all those faces looking at me. Waiting for me. But I found her.

(he crawls to LUKE and sits up on his
knees. Matter-of-factly:)

They cut her here [putting a finger on LUKE's cheek]. And here [LUKE's right arm]. Here [LUKE's left thigh]. Here [across LUKE's stomach]. Here [across LUKE's neck slowly]. These were opened [putting both hands on LUKE's chest]. And this [taking LUKE's left hand and showing it to LUKE] - this was gone. And all the blood here [putting his hand on LUKE's crotch]. So much blood. But they left her nose.

*He caresses his own nose. He sits back on his
legs and falls over - knocking the bottle.*

ISSA

Uh oh. Oops.

He starts to lick up the puddle.

ISSA
Tastes like fire. And metal. And dirt.

LUKE
Come on, man. Don't do that.

ISSA
Like pain.

LUKE
(going to him.)
Stop that.

LUKE pulls on him.

LUKE
Stop it. Stop it!

They struggle and ISSA lands a punch.

ISSA
That's what I do! I hurt people. I do stupid things and people go away. I never learn.
Never learn.

*LUKE tries to say something, but looking at
ISSA in his condition he can't.*

LUKE
(going to him)
Come here.

LUKE tries to pull him into a hug.

ISSA
No. Get away.

LUKE
Come here.

ISSA
Leave me alone. Alone. Alone. Alone.

*LUKE manages to get around ISSA and pins him
in a reverse bear hug.*

LUKE
I'm here, man. I'm right here.

ISSA
Alone. Alone. / Alone. Alone. Alone.

LUKE
(shaking him)
I'm right here. Right here. Right here. Right here. Right here.

They keep repeating as LUKE rocks him to quiet him down. ISSA eventually does. Then he latches onto LUKE's arms.

ISSA

Why does everyone leave me, Luke?

LUKE can't answer. He's trying to hold it together. A rebab plays something mournful.

LUKE helps ISSA up and walks him to his bed, putting him in and covering him. He moves to the couch and sits down. Staring out. The lights shift to daylight.

16. THE LAST GOODBYE

The next morning. LUKE sits there looking out. A few moments pass. ISSA comes out of his room - looking bedraggled. He sees LUKE and takes a moment before moving to sit next to him.

ISSA

What time is it?

LUKE

Almost noon. How're you feeling?

ISSA doesn't - can't - answer. He merely shrugs offhandedly.

ISSA

Fine. . . if I said / anything that -

LUKE

You didn't.

ISSA

What did I say?

LUKE

Not much. Don't worry.

ISSA

You know I / found -

LUKE

I know. You said. I know.

A somewhat tense moment.

LUKE
Listen - I came by last night / because -

ISSA
(getting up)
I'm going to make some tea.

LUKE
Right.

ISSA stops halfway.

ISSA
You should go.

LUKE
Don't worry about the base.

ISSA
I need you to go.

LUKE
...

ISSA
I need to be alone. I'm sad, angry, hurt, confused and want someone to direct it at.

LUKE
I'm right here.

ISSA
I don't want to hurt you. So - you have to go.

LUKE
I'm leaving.

ISSA
Good. In a few days - maybe a week. We can talk. Or you can -

LUKE
Issa. I'm leaving.

ISSA
...

LUKE
They're shipping us out in 48 hours. Well - 36 now.

ISSA
...

LUKE

Guess they decided it was finally time and there was nothing left to do. Came as a surprise to most of us. Some of the guys are pretty happy. Some of them are - well - I mean. Yeah. 36 hours.

ISSA

...

LUKE

Please say something to me.

ISSA starts to laugh.

LUKE

Issa?

The laughter intensifies.

LUKE

Come on.

ISSA

Hayat would love this. She would absolutely love this.

LUKE

...

ISSA

She was right. They all are.

LUKE

It's not like I /want to -

ISSA

It's not safe. You can't go. You have to stay. You have to fix things and make them better like you said you would. You wanted to come here and help us so help us. Tell them what happened. They'll see that things are not safe. They cannot leave us like this - not now. It's not safe. It's not. Tell them - tell them they took her and killed her. I worked for them so they owe me this. They owe me something.

LUKE

I will - I'll try - but I don't make these decisions / so the best -

ISSA

No - of course not - why would you. Just following orders, right? You're all just following orders, right? You came to help us clean our country and now you think it's all clean and right and shiny and so now you can follow orders and leave. Now, people are dead and you can leave. The right people are dead. And you can leave. You get to go back home. To the mountains. And the blue skies. And the trees. You get to have so much.

LUKE

Stop it! Look -

Go home. **ISSA**

Look! You still have the hearing. **LUKE**

I'm supposed to be the naive one. Not you. **ISSA**

They're going to have the hearing. I'll make sure of it. **LUKE**

Who will be left to listen? **ISSA**

I'll tell my dad. Everything. **LUKE**

It's too late. Too late because you didn't care. You don't care. **ISSA**

LUKE rushes him and jacks him up against a wall. A moment.

You don't care. **ISSA**
(on the brink of a complete emotional breakdown)

LUKE releases him, fighting back his own emotional breakdown.

You really don't think I care? **LUKE**

You came into this house. You changed this house. And now you go. So - go. **ISSA**

I will get you out of here. **LUKE**

Go. **ISSA**

I'll make sure they find a way to bring you over. **LUKE**

Go. **ISSA**

I'll make them keep their word. **LUKE**

ISSA

Go.

LUKE

I'll make - I'll tell - I will - I know I will - I'll do it. I can do it. I can do anything.

LUKE looks at him, then throws his arms around him and hugs him. ISSA doesn't hug him back which only makes LUKE try to hug him closer - like he's trying to absorb him.

LUKE

Close your eyes. Close them! See the ocean? See it. See us. Me. And you. The waves are crashing. There is no wind. There is no moon. There is no sun. We can stay in that moment forever. The world doesn't have to change. We can stay in that moment. It's still there waiting for us. It is. I'll give that to you. We'll have that. We will. We will.

A few more moments then LUKE releases him and looks at ISSA who can't look at him. LUKE grabs his head to force his focus onto him. He puts his forehead against ISSA's and breathes. He lets him go and heads to the front door - opening it - pausing - as if he would say something or turn back around. But he keeps walking - leaving the door open behind him.

ISSA stands in the silence for a while - taking in the empty house - the silence - and how utterly alone he is. He turns to see the open door. He walks to it. He might very well walk right out of the house - instead he closes the door, placing his hand against it.

He slides his hand to the lock - and locks the door. The sound of it echoing deeply.

END OF PLAY.