

# MAHIDA'S EXTRA KEY TO HEAVEN

a play by Russell Davis

© copyright, Russell Davis, 2004  
**revised: January, 2010**

2009-10 Season: 4/9-4/25/2010  
Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey  
33 Green Village Road  
Madison, NJ 07940

The Susan Gurman Agency  
245 West 99th Street  
New York, NY 10025

212 749 4618  
(FAX) 212 864 5055  
[Susan@GurmanAgency.com](mailto:Susan@GurmanAgency.com)

characters:

MAHIDA  
a young woman

THOMAS  
a young man

EDNA  
Thomas' mother

RAMIN  
Mahida's brother

setting:

Several locations in a small town by the ocean.

time:

The recent past.

---

**Scene One**

*A bench under a street lamp. Nearby is another street lamp and a pier that goes out over the water.*

*MAHIDA, a young woman, sits on the bench. She has a suitcase with her. She wears a long coat, or 'manteau.' Her head is covered with a scarf.*

*It is late at night.*

*Not too faraway is the Canadian border.*

*THOMAS, a young man, appears. He stops by the lamp at the edge of the pier. He sees MAHIDA.*

*MAHIDA stirs on the bench.*

*THOMAS leans against the railing. He looks out across the water to the mainland beyond.*

*He steps back into the light.*

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You're not waiting for the ferry, are you?

*No response.*

THOMAS                    The ferry?  
                                  That comes here during the day?

*No response.*

THOMAS I don't think actually there's another ferry.  
*(checks notice board at end of pier)* There's one tomorrow. At five in the morning.

*Pause.*

THOMAS I'm sorry. I don't know if you're waiting.  
Sorry to bother you.

*MAHIDA stirs on the bench. She adjusts the scarf on her head.*

*THOMAS lingers at the end of the pier.*

THOMAS I don't like to be bothered either. I understand. If I'm sitting somewhere at night.  
By the water, you know.  
But you have a suitcase, you know. I see a bag there.  
Somebody supposed to meet you here? I don't know, some time ago?

*No response.*

THOMAS Good. I guess I'll continue walking then. Back up to the house I'm staying.  
Good night, then.

*THOMAS turns to go.*

*MAHIDA quietly weeps.*

THOMAS Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.

*THOMAS starts to approach the bench. MAHIDA stirs in alarm. THOMAS halts.*

THOMAS Okay.  
I'll just stand here, okay?

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    Do you speak English?

MAHIDA *nods.*

THOMAS                    Well, good. That makes this easier, speaking English. Could you tell me if there's something you need?  
                                  What might be wrong?

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You're alone, right?

MAHIDA *nods.*

THOMAS                    Maybe I should wait over here, huh? By the railing. Just look out over the water. In case you decide to speak.

*THOMAS goes to the railing. He leans against it. He looks out.*

*MAHIDA adjusts herself on the bench.*

MAHIDA                    Excuse me. Will there not be a ferry?

THOMAS                    A ferry?

MAHIDA                    Yes.

THOMAS                    No. No, I said so. There's no ferry.

MAHIDA                    Oh. No ferry.

THOMAS                    I'm sorry. Not till tomorrow.

MAHIDA                    Okay.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                   How well do you speak English?

MAHIDA                   Yes, I speak English. I speak English well.

THOMAS                   Okay.

MAHIDA                   I need sometimes to check.

THOMAS                   Check?

MAHIDA                   Double-check, yes. I thought I should double-check about the ferry.

THOMAS                   Sure.

                  Sure, I like double-checking too. If I locked the car. Closed the windows.

*Pause. He looks out across the water.*

THOMAS                   Nice night, huh?  
                  Pretty night up there.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                   I like this pier. This spot.

                  I come here a lot when no one else is around.

                  I like that ferry too. What you're waiting for. I've been on when there's hardly anyone else. Like in the afternoon. Or now. It would be real nice right now, I bet, on that ferry. Going across the water, don't you think, back to the land way over there? Through all this darkness. This quiet.

                  I like empty campuses too. And beaches. Beaches are very good in winter. This town too. I don't know if you know it, but this is actually a busy place in the summer. I'd say it bustles. But, you know, I like it better now. Being out here, wide awake, thinking. Like some kind of sentinel. Hearing little sounds. What you don't notice during the day. And what I notice sometimes, I think, is peace. I can feel peaceful, or joyful, I guess, out here at night. Like maybe I notice better that the world here, all the sky above, is actually probably infinite. I feel some kind of

THOMAS(contd.)      infinitude. Right in my thoughts. My chest. I get stirred. And suddenly, you know, I feel I belong. It's all infinite. There's actually a huge, invisible space, or ocean, around us. Much more than what we see. An enormous, inconceivably large, mental space. All this freedom to move. Which makes me wonder. How did we get trapped like this, or educated otherwise, I guess, thinking there was something, anything, we could possibly ever have such arguments over? How could there be any conflicting claim, or fear, with all this immense space between each one of us?

*Pause.*

THOMAS              I'm sorry.  
                              It's hard to articulate sometimes. What I can think.

*Pause.*

THOMAS              Do you think I could sit maybe? At the other end of that bench?

*No response.*

THOMAS              No, I guess. I'm probably not much your idea of company.

*He leans against the railing. He looks out.*

THOMAS              Have you ever been to Wyoming?

*No response.*

THOMAS              Do you even know what I mean by that? When I say Wyoming?

MAHIDA              *(nodding)* Yes.

THOMAS              Okay.

MAHIDA              I know Wyoming is a state.

THOMAS                   That's right. A state.  
                              Have you been there?

MAHIDA *shakes her head.*

THOMAS                   How about other states?  
                              What other states have you been?

*No response.*

THOMAS                   Well, my uncle lives in Wyoming. He's a painter. He likes to be  
alone. I guess I get it from him, this thing about empty spaces.  
Wyoming, in fact, is where I noticed I have trouble with sleep. I  
get restless. Can't stay in a room sometimes. Any place inside.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                   In Wyoming once I heard a yelping sound at night. My uncle  
said that's coyotes. They make that sound when they surround a  
deer that's too old, or injured, to keep up any longer.  
I thought it was a horrible sound.  
Not what I expect out by myself at night.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                   I'm sorry. Talking like this about coyotes at night.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                   Maybe my mother's right.  
I should learn how to talk to people.

MAHIDA *stands.*

MAHIDA                   Would you like to sit?

THOMAS                   Hm?

MAHIDA                   Please. You have been standing a long time.

THOMAS                   Well, no. I'm fine.

MAHIDA                   Well, I will stand then too. Over here.

THOMAS                   You're going to stand?

MAHIDA                   Yes. I will keep you company. Standing.

THOMAS                   Uh huh. What's the matter with sitting?

MAHIDA                   Pardon?

THOMAS                   We could keep company sitting. Right on that bench.

MAHIDA                   Oh, no, I don't think so.

THOMAS                   Really, it's quite simple. You'd rather stand?

MAHIDA                   Yes, I think so.

THOMAS                   You don't like that? If we sat together?

MAHIDA                   Well, of course. But someone could see us.

THOMAS                   Who's going to see?

MAHIDA                   Please. I can stand too. It's my turn to stand.

THOMAS                   Okay, well. I won't sit either. I mean, not without you.

MAHIDA                   Good. This bench will be our border.

THOMAS                   Our border?

MAHIDA                   Yes, we have a border, like so, between us.

THOMAS                   A border, huh?

MAHIDA                   A friendly border, yes.

THOMAS                   Well, sure. This is good then, I guess. This border.

MAHIDA                   I think so too. We will respect our border.

THOMAS I certainly will. Anything you wish.

MAHIDA Thank you.

THOMAS You're welcome.

*MAHIDA & THOMAS stand either side of the bench.*

*Pause.*

THOMAS You do speak English. You speak very well.

MAHIDA Thank you.

THOMAS Sure.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA It's such a pretty border, yes, don't you think?

THOMAS What, our bench?

MAHIDA Yes, I think it's very pretty. This little painted green bench. By the water.

THOMAS Well, yeah. It's pretty.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Borders are so peculiar sometimes, I think. What do you think?

THOMAS About borders?

MAHIDA Yes.

THOMAS Well, I don't know. I don't think much about them.

MAHIDA Oh.

THOMAS You think that's bad?

MAHIDA I don't know how you could not think about borders.

THOMAS Well, of course, I think about them.

MAHIDA But deeply.

THOMAS I should think deeply, more deeply, about borders?

MAHIDA Yes, I think so.

THOMAS Fine. I'll give it some thought. I will. I'll do some further thinking about borders.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I think about borders all the time. What is the boundary, I wonder, between what lasts and what does not? What are my real thoughts, and not my thoughts? What is honest, or dissembles? Blesses or curses? What is the boundary, do you know, between these things? What decides? And what possible border could there sometimes be, I wonder, when there is all the infinite space, as you say.

I heard you. How you are stirred.

And so I look at our bench here. It makes me glad. There is a border. A little railing to hold on to. A path to take. Because, of course, someday we can let go. Be free to enter all the infinite space around with no border, no sense of limit. But I do believe, for now, it is important not to let go of this railing we have. It is important not to presume.

I hate it when I presume.

*Pause.*

THOMAS You presume?

MAHIDA Yes, I'm sorry.

THOMAS What have you presumed?

MAHIDA Oh, I presume all the time. I notice it more and more.

THOMAS Uh huh. Well, I think I'm pretty presumptuous myself.

MAHIDA Yes?

THOMAS Sure. I walk around in a state of presumption. This big bloated state. We all do. Little presumptions, profound ones, silly ones.

MAHIDA Yes, I think so.

THOMAS Well, sure.

MAHIDA I'm learning how to be more careful. With my presumptions..

THOMAS Uh huh. And how's it going?

MAHIDA Oh. Well, it's a battle, of course.

THOMAS Uh huh. Any particular presumption?

MAHIDA Oh, nothing particular exactly.

THOMAS That's good.

MAHIDA It's hard, of course, to talk about this. One's presumptions.

THOMAS Yeah.

MAHIDA They're so embarrassing sometimes. So fleeting, so personal, so sneaking up on you.

THOMAS Uh huh.

MAHIDA And then, of course, there are intuitions. That is very different..

THOMAS Intuition?

MAHIDA Oh, yes. There are moments, I think, of insight. Clarity, or compassion. I appreciate very much to have such moments, don't you? I like to be guided.

THOMAS Guided?

MAHIDA Yes, I would like to feel so much each step is guided.

THOMAS By what?

MAHIDA I don't know. By these moments of insight, I think. This feeling I can have.

THOMAS Right.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Perhaps I'm talking too much, I'm sorry.

THOMAS No. No, I agree with this.

MAHIDA You do?

THOMAS Very much, yes. About intuition. Or presumption. I'm glad, really, to hear what you say.

MAHIDA Thank you.

THOMAS Sure. You're welcome.

*Pause.*

THOMAS What is your name?  
May I ask?

MAHIDA Mahida.

THOMAS Uh huh. Mahida.

MAHIDA Yes.

THOMAS I'm Thomas.

MAHIDA Thomas, yes.

*Pause.*

THOMAS Are you waiting, Mahida, may I presume? For the ferry?  
Or was someone supposed to meet you here?

*No response.*

THOMAS I'm sorry. You don't seem anxious to answer direct questions sometimes.  
Do you come from a land, I guess, where it's not right to ask particular questions? In public maybe?

MAHIDA *fidgets with her coat.*

THOMAS In your land do you have to repeat a question, I don't know, maybe three times before expecting an answer?

*Pause.*

MAHIDA *(quietly)* Yes. Yes, I am waiting for the ferry.

THOMAS Oh.

MAHIDA I'm sorry. It's embarrassing to wait like this for a ferry.

THOMAS Well, no, I'm sure there's an explanation.

MAHIDA I looked too at your schedule.

THOMAS On the notice board?

MAHIDA Yes, it said ten o'clock, I thought. I was sure. I was praying this last ferry would still come. It was just late, I hoped.

THOMAS No, I don't think so. That's just Sunday night.

MAHIDA Sunday night?

THOMAS Yes. Lots of folks go back to the mainland late Sunday.

MAHIDA Oh.

THOMAS They live and work there during the week. I'm sorry.

MAHIDA I should learn to read these things better.

THOMAS Well, no, I get confused by columns too.

MAHIDA But I presumed.

THOMAS                    No, actually, there're lots of people here almost every night waiting for the wrong ferry.

MAHIDA                    *(smiling)* There are not.

THOMAS                    No, I've seen them.

MAHIDA                    Please.

THOMAS                    So would you mind, please, if I ask what you're doing here? Waiting for the wrong ferry?

MAHIDA                    No, you should inquire, I know. If I am in trouble. That is courteous and kind.

THOMAS                    Okay.

MAHIDA                    I understand, thank you. But, no, I am not in trouble, I don't think so. I am just upset now with my brother.

THOMAS                    Your brother?

MAHIDA                    Yes.

THOMAS                    Where is he, your brother?

MAHIDA                    I don't know. He left me.

THOMAS                    What, waiting for the ferry?

MAHIDA                    No, he made me walk. He ordered me out of the car.

THOMAS                    You had to walk? From where?

MAHIDA                    I don't know. It was a couple of miles, I suppose, three or four.

THOMAS                    You walked three or four miles with a suitcase? At night?

MAHIDA                    No, it was perhaps five o'clock.

THOMAS                    Five o'clock? That's almost dark.

MAHIDA                    My brother is angry. He doesn't mean, I'm sure, to be so angry.

THOMAS                    I see.

MAHIDA                    He wants me to leave the United States. To come home with him.

THOMAS Uh huh. You don't want to do that?

MAHIDA Not with my brother, no.

THOMAS Okay. Why not?

*Pause.*

MAHIDA My brother was not like this before. He is changed. Altered. Now I feel each step I take sometimes, he wants to boss or order. This is upsetting if I am here to get my education. If he thinks like some people now a brother should force a sister.

*Pause.*

THOMAS We don't have to talk about this, you know. About your brother.

*Pause.*

THOMAS You don't have to go home either, you know. Wherever that is. I'm sure we have room for you here. All sorts of room for a person like you.

*Pause.*

THOMAS But don't get me wrong. I'm not exactly a happy member of this country either. In fact, this country has embarrassed me, my country, deeply. I mean, we were talking about our tiny personal presumptions, you and I, but the presumptions of some of the folks who govern, or run our businesses, are massive, and I personally believe responsible for how torn apart the world is right now. Making it such a dangerous place to live.

If there's a fire out there, they say, you don't put it out by pouring gasoline on it.

That's what I think.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You want to stand over there by the railing?

MAHIDA                    Hm?

THOMAS                    Come on. Let's lean on the railing. Look out across the water.

*THOMAS goes to the railing.*

*Pause. MAHIDA goes to the railing.*

*They lean against the railing, some distance apart.*

THOMAS                    Nice night, huh?  
                                  Pretty, I think, up there.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    I really like it right now. How no one else is around.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    Tomorrow will be nothing like this. It'll start to bustle. First  
thing in the morning. Cars'll line up. All waiting for your ferry  
out there. Coming from the island further out.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You seem quiet.  
                                  Ever since we mentioned your brother.

MAHIDA                    I'm sorry.

THOMAS                    No, I understand. It's okay.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    I'm just thinking about destiny.

THOMAS Really, destiny?

MAHIDA Yes.

THOMAS What about it?

MAHIDA Do you feel destined in some way?

THOMAS Oh, gosh. I don't know.

MAHIDA You're not so destined, you think?

THOMAS No, I can feel pretty destined.

MAHIDA Yes?

THOMAS Sure, I feel that way. Destined.

MAHIDA For something great, or memorable, do you suppose?

THOMAS Well, I don't know who else is going to notice, but I can feel it, sure. Not all the time, I mean, but I get glimpses, I do, of some sort of destiny.

MAHIDA I feel it too. This destiny.

THOMAS You do?

MAHIDA Oh, yes.

THOMAS You feel it strongly?

MAHIDA I think so.

THOMAS Hm. I don't know if I feel it that strongly.

MAHIDA It's a nice feeling.

THOMAS Well, sure. So tell me then. What is it, your destiny?

MAHIDA Oh, how should I know?

THOMAS Well, I thought you might have some idea.

MAHIDA I know a few steps ahead, that's all.

THOMAS Okay, but what about a general direction?

MAHIDA Well, yes, I'm studying literature right now.

THOMAS Uh huh.

MAHIDA At university.

THOMAS So you're destined for something in literature?

MAHIDA Yes, I hope so.

THOMAS Well, I bet you find it. This destiny.

MAHIDA Thank you.

THOMAS Sure.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA What about your destiny? Your general direction?

THOMAS Well, I'm hoping I'm destined probably to be a painter.

MAHIDA You will be a painter?

THOMAS Yeah, I'm kind of at loose ends right now. This is hard. I'm wondering if I have to go back to school, some kind of graduate program, to be a painter.

MAHIDA Oh, yes.

THOMAS What do you think? Should I go to graduate school, or just set out on my own?

MAHIDA Oh, dear, I would have no opinion.

THOMAS Sure, you do.

MAHIDA How could I have an opinion? I know nothing of your painting. Or of such a graduate school.

THOMAS Well, you might have a feeling, I bet, about my destiny. What direction to take.

MAHIDA No, I'm afraid I would be very misleading.

THOMAS                    No, I can't imagine that, you misleading.

MAHIDA                    I'm terrible, I'm sorry, with advice.

THOMAS                    No way.

MAHIDA                    Please, you must never believe any advice I give.

THOMAS                    Why, what happens to people who heed your advice?

MAHIDA                    They come to no good, I'm sure.

THOMAS                    I can't imagine that.

MAHIDA                    Well, hopefully you will not have to learn the hard way.

THOMAS                    I'm always learning the hard way. I can't seem to help myself.

MAHIDA                    Oh, dear, well, me too.

THOMAS                    You learn things the hard way?

MAHIDA                    I think so.

THOMAS                    That can't be true.

MAHIDA                    Of course, it is.

THOMAS                    No, a person who learns the hard way looks exactly like me. All tussled and disheveled.

MAHIDA                    You are not disheveled.

THOMAS                    Sure, I am. I feel it all the time.

MAHIDA                    Oh, stop.

THOMAS                    No, I'm disheveled. And you are not. You're actually rather prim, you know. And proper.

MAHIDA                    I'm proper?

THOMAS                    Yes, I can feel a properness in you.

MAHIDA                    I'm sorry.

THOMAS No, it's very nice, this properness. It's restrained, it's quiet. It's actually rather ethereal.

MAHIDA Oh?

THOMAS Yes, this properness you have, it's ethereal, I think. Other-worldly.

MAHIDA Well, thank you. You too are ethereal yourself.

THOMAS No, I'm not, come on. I'm tussled and disheveled. I'm dirt poor.

MAHIDA That can be ethereal.

THOMAS Nope. I'm not ethereal.

MAHIDA Yes, you are, I know.

THOMAS You probably don't even know what that word means, you're using it so wrong.

MAHIDA I know the word ethereal. I use it very correctly.

THOMAS Pah.

MAHIDA Fine. I'm not ethereal either.

THOMAS Good. We're both ordinary then. Not a shred of destiny.

MAHIDA Yes.

*Pause.*

THOMAS I'm just teasing.

MAHIDA Yes, I know.

THOMAS You're very tempting to tease.

MAHIDA Thank you.

THOMAS Sure.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You're not expecting, are you, to stay out here all night? Till that ferry comes?

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    You know there's no hotel, really, or inn, this time of the year? Nothing that's open.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    Look. You can't stay out here. There's no way. I can take you to my mother's. I'm visiting my mother's. She wouldn't mind. She's asleep. I can set you up on the couch.  
                                  Would you like to meet my mother? Stay overnight with her?

*MAHIDA goes back to the bench. She stands by it.*

MAHIDA                    I don't know. Thank you.

THOMAS                    No?

MAHIDA                    I'm concerned, no, about my brother.

THOMAS                    Concerned?

MAHIDA                    He's upset, yes. He could still be somewhere.

THOMAS                    What, on the island?

MAHIDA                    I don't know.

THOMAS                    Oh.

MAHIDA                    He probably has taken the last ferry, I'm sure, but perhaps not. I can't be sure if my brother is not in the darkness somewhere. Perhaps watching me. Maybe over there by the buildings.

THOMAS                    *(uncomfortable)* Oh?

MAHIDA                    In the shadows, yes, I don't know.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I'm sorry. It's upsetting, as I say, I have been two years in this country, this is embarrassing.

THOMAS No, it's just a problem. A legitimate problem.

MAHIDA I'm sorry.

THOMAS Look, you think you're embarrassed? I offered to introduce you to my mother.

MAHIDA I can't go to your mother's.

THOMAS Why? You're going to stay out here?

MAHIDA Yes, I think so. If I stay out here in the open.

THOMAS What, you'd sit up all night on a bench in the cold for your brother? In case he's somewhere? Lurking in the darkness.

MAHIDA I don't know.

*THOMAS goes to the bench. He sits at one end.*

THOMAS I'm going to sit here, for a moment, on our border.

*Pause.*

THOMAS *(quietly)* What the hell is troubling your brother?

*Pause. MAHIDA stands by her suitcase near the bench.*

MAHIDA My brother showed up at my dormitory this morning. I did not know he was in this country. It was a shock to me. And then he packed this bag. Put everything he thought I should have and took it out to the car. And I thought, sure, he can take what's in that bag. To the airport, or wherever he expects we should go. I'm staying here. And then I thought, no, something's wrong. There must be some trouble I don't know. We should talk. We'll

MAHIDA(contd.) talk together in this rented car. So I got in and suggested, Come, Ramin, let's take that ferry. A boat going nowhere. And so we sat on the deck, talking. And when the ferry landed, we went for a drive. I was so hopeful we could begin again to understand each other, to be so close and proud to be with each other.

But it became impossible all over.

My brother thinks because our father has died, he must now be in charge. Command what I must do. But it is my father who sent me here. Instructed me to finish university. I want to follow my father's wishes. Not what my brother now decides.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA My brother left me abandoned on this island. To make my own way back to school.

Or else he is watching somewhere, over there, waiting to see how I will handle this.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I could, of course, go over there somewhere and call out, Ramin. Ramin, please help me. I am a woman all alone, I know, in the world. Your sister. Please, come out and be nice.

But he will only take it as a sign I will go back with him.

THOMAS *gets up from the bench.*

THOMAS I think what I want to do is tell you how to get to my mother's house. It's not far.

Would you let me tell you?

*No response.*

THOMAS You walk this way along the water. Past the end of the square. The first street on the left is Pleasant Lane. My mother lives there. Number ten. Okay? You go up the steps of number ten and let yourself in the front door. It's not locked. My mother has this thing about locking, but I didn't lock it.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    So I'm going to start walking, okay? Take a different way home. And you should probably hang out here for awhile. Half an hour maybe. Then just get up like you're going for a walk. Make your way to number ten Pleasant Lane.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    If you're not going to do this, tell me. And I'll stay here. Over by the railing and keep watch or something while you rest on this bench. I'm good at this. I can keep watch all night.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    I have to head back to the mainland myself. We can talk about that tomorrow. About getting you where you have to go. Your university.

MAHIDA                    Thank you.

THOMAS                    You're welcome.

*Pause.*

THOMAS                    Should I leave you here?

MAHIDA                    Yes.

THOMAS                    You're going to my mother's?

MAHIDA                    Number ten Pleasant Land. Yes.

THOMAS                    Okay. Good, then.

*THOMAS lingers. He looks out across the water.*

THOMAS                    My mother's going to tell you I don't talk.

MAHIDA Pardon?

THOMAS My mother insists I'm a lousy talker. Talking's important to her. She says I'm surly. Just warning you.

MAHIDA Surly?

THOMAS Yes, but you can tell her tomorrow that's not true. You heard me talk.

MAHIDA Yes.

THOMAS You've seen the talker in me.

MAHIDA Yes, I did. Thank you.

THOMAS Sure. You're very welcome.

*THOMAS bows. He heads off, walking.*

*MAHIDA sits on the bench. She listens. She looks warily into the distance.*

*Something seems to move in the shadows.*

\* \* \*

---

## **Scene Two**

*A living room. The next morning.*

*MAHIDA is asleep under a blanket on the couch.*

*EDNA stands at the bottom of a staircase. She holds a note. She regards MAHIDA on the couch. She looks at the note. She regards MAHIDA's suitcase nearby.*

*She goes to the couch. She looks down at MAHIDA's shoes. They are arranged side by side so that the heel of one shoe is lined up with the toe of the other. EDNA reaches down and rearranges them so the toes are pointing in the same direction.*

MAHIDA *stirs.*

EDNA *sits in a chair.*

MAHIDA *sits up, dazed. She sees EDNA.*

MAHIDA Oh. I'm sorry.

EDNA Good morning.

MAHIDA Yes, good morning. I'm so sorry.

EDNA About what?

MAHIDA To be in your house. Like so.

EDNA It's all right. This note was left on my door. It says you're from Iran.

MAHIDA Yes. Yes, I am.

EDNA Iran, huh? It says you missed your ferry.

MAHIDA Yes, I'm sorry.

EDNA Couldn't read the schedule, no?

MAHIDA No, I don't think so.

EDNA How long have you been in this country?

MAHIDA I have been two years now.

EDNA I see. At university?

MAHIDA Yes.

EDNA And what do you study?

MAHIDA Literature.

EDNA Really? Iranian literature?

MAHIDA No, just literature. All kinds.

EDNA Oh. You're a good student, I expect?

MAHIDA Well, I have to work hard, yes. The university sponsored me to come to this country to study.

EDNA You were sponsored, huh?

MAHIDA Oh, yes. My father had to obtain many letters, or affidavits, from business connections, particularly in this country.

EDNA I see.

MAHIDA It took quite a long time.

EDNA So now you're here, yes, for literature?

MAHIDA Yes, I am.

EDNA And what is it you're going to do with all this literature?

MAHIDA I hope someday, I think, to be a writer.

EDNA Oh?

MAHIDA Yes, I would like to be a novelist, I believe.

EDNA Well, I guess you better get married.

MAHIDA Oh?

EDNA There's not much dependable income in novels.

MAHIDA Well, of course, it can be a struggle.

EDNA Take a look at my son.

MAHIDA Your son is a writer?

EDNA No, he has plans, I think, to be a painter. He fancies his uncle.

MAHIDA Yes.

EDNA You know about his uncle?

MAHIDA Well, he told me. A little.

EDNA Uh huh. Well, I'm glad he told you a little. He doesn't tell me a thing.

MAHIDA No?

EDNA Oh, no. He's quite surly around here.

MAHIDA Really?

EDNA Yes, not at all respectful. Or helpful.

MAHIDA How could that be? He seems such a gentleman.

EDNA A gentleman?

MAHIDA Oh, yes.

EDNA I've never seen that. My son the gentleman.

MAHIDA I'm sorry.

EDNA Yes, he doesn't know at all how to talk to his mother. How to keep company. I mean, he comes here, what, maybe once a year and stands around, restless, and then has nothing to say. Not a word. I ask about his friends, those folks at school. If anyone's married now. Any babies. Who's doing what kind of job, contributing, you know, to the workings of our country. This great land. And he gets surly. This is not communication, he says, this conversation. Who cares if people are married, who has a toddler now, a dog, or making lots of contribution to the land? And I say, How can you talk like that? How can you say, Who cares? And he says, Mother, stop. I'm trying to figure out, really, something else. And I say, What else? What else is there to figure? How do you expect to get by in this world? You're turning into a good for nothing. You'll not be any painter. No Rembrandt or Monet. I've seen what you work on. The most you'll do is paint houses, if they allow that. Because frankly you can't go painting houses in the middle of the night the way you don't sleep. It's unnerving to have a son around who doesn't know how to sleep and who's always off in a corner by himself.

*Pause.*

EDNA How's the weather in Iran?

MAHIDA The weather?

EDNA Yes, I hear it can be very hot over there.

MAHIDA Yes, it's hot. But also very cold.

EDNA Really?

MAHIDA Yes, we have mountains and very cold winters. As well as deserts.

EDNA Well, we have those here too. Deserts.

MAHIDA Yes.

EDNA Our deserts are hot.

MAHIDA Yes.

EDNA Are you intending then to marry an Iranian? A husband who will let you write? Do they do that in Iran? Do they let you write?

MAHIDA I'm not sure, no, of my plans now.

EDNA Or are you actually thinking of staying here in this country?

MAHIDA I'm just planning, first, on learning to write.

EDNA Well, actually, I'm sure we could use a translator. There's a desperate need for that. Lots of translating, I've heard.

MAHIDA Yes, I can translate.

EDNA Well, good, then. You'll probably be fine.

MAHIDA I hope so, yes.

EDNA Do you have any brothers or sisters? I hear families are large over there in the Middle East.

MAHIDA Oh, yes. In fact, my brother is here.

EDNA Really?

MAHIDA Yes, it is a complete surprise to me. He says our father applied for him sometime ago to visit this country. They have a lottery for this at the Swiss Embassy in Tehran.

EDNA Oh, your brother won a lottery?

- MAHIDA Yes. I believe so. He has been attending the University of Science and Technology in Tehran.
- EDNA Oh, yes, over there?
- MAHIDA Yes, he was hoping one time, I know, to attend a religious school. Perhaps in Qom, we thought, but my father thought that was silly. My brother doesn't know how to apply himself.
- EDNA Ah, religious? He wanted one of those madrassas, I expect.
- MAHIDA No, actually, we don't have those in Iran. Madrassas.
- EDNA No? Well, one of those places, you know, where they learn to memorize the Koran, I hear. Make fatwas or something, lots of car bombs.
- MAHIDA Pardon?
- EDNA Listen, I'm sorry, by the way. About all that stuff going on over there in the Middle East. All that turmoil. The fuss and bother. We're trying to do our best, you know.
- MAHIDA I understand.
- EDNA Our politicians, all our soldiers. Our best. We're trying to ease your transition into the modern world.
- MAHIDA Thank you, yes.
- EDNA Or post-modern, whatever they call it now. It's just such a problem sometimes, don't you think, catching up? What a business. After all these centuries. Africa, the Middle East. Only the Asians. The Asians seem rather good, I think, at catching up. Sometimes, actually, I wish my son were Asian. They have a good work ethic. Good family practice. My son should study Asian, probably, since this country obviously doesn't seem to work for him. He's quite critical, you know. It's appalling.
- MAHIDA He criticizes this country?
- EDNA Oh, yes, right to my face. Or he doesn't actually criticize. He's just surly. Gets surly when I bring up the subject of our country. There're very few subjects I can bring up that won't make him surly. I can't think of one. It's quite distressing.

*Pause.*

EDNA                   He talked last night, you say?

MAHIDA                Yes.

EDNA                    About what?

MAHIDA                Oh, well, we talked about how pretty it is at night. How quiet. Or infinite. Also about destiny, intuitions. About presumptions. We do not want to have presumptions, either of us.

EDNA                    Presumptions?

MAHIDA                Yes, we do not want to presume.

EDNA                    Presume what, may I ask?

MAHIDA                Oh, just anything. About ourselves. About other people. About what's real or not real.

EDNA                    This is what my son talks about?

MAHIDA                Oh, yes.

EDNA                    Real and not real?

MAHIDA                Well, I think so.

EDNA                    He already knows what's real. He's been told. What's he talking like that for?

MAHIDA                He's thinking.

EDNA                    Thinking, is he? You call that thinking?

MAHIDA                Yes, I do.

EDNA                    Listen, I think you should be a little more careful. Don't they teach you in Iran to be careful about men?

MAHIDA                Yes?

EDNA                    Well, you don't want to get tangled up in what Thomas considers thinking. It's not thinking at all. It's balderdash. Makes him surly, all this thinking. You seem like a perfectly nice Middle

EDNA(contd.) Eastern woman and you're going to turn out surly yourself if you have much more to do with Thomas, I warn you.

MAHIDA Okay.

EDNA Good, then. Because I can tell, as a mother, you seem to like him. He's been respectful or something to you. And he left this nicely written note. Invited you here on this couch. And I want the best for my son, I do, but mixing cultures between a man and a woman is a bad thing. It leads to no good, I know, unless you happen to be Asian, and even then it's still mostly a problem. It has to be.

MAHIDA Okay.

EDNA Well, good. That's said.  
I imagine you want some breakfast. I'll make you breakfast so we can get you back to that university on the mainland.  
Would an omelette be good for you?

MAHIDA Yes?

EDNA A cheese omelette with toast? And juice?

MAHIDA Yes, thank you.

EDNA Good. I'll let you get ready.

*EDNA exits through the dining room door.*

*MAHIDA looks down at her shoes. She sees they've been rearranged. She puts them back the way they were before: heels lined up with toes.*

*THOMAS appears on the staircase. He knocks on the balustrade.*

THOMAS I'm sorry.

MAHIDA *(turning)* Pardon?

THOMAS Real sorry. I heard my mother just now. From the stairs.

MAHIDA Oh, I don't mind.

THOMAS                    May I come in?

MAHIDA                    Of course.

THOMAS *steps into the room.*

THOMAS                    (*restless*) I keep forgetting how embarrassing this is. But I can't suppress it. There's no point trying to suppress what my mother has to say. You're just going to have to hear. Until we get you out. The next ferry leaves in forty minutes, so we should eat pretty soon.

MAHIDA                    Okay, yes.

THOMAS                    I'm really not surly, you know that? I promise.

MAHIDA                    I understand.

THOMAS                    I mean, I obviously fall silent. If I can't think and talk all at once like she does.

MAHIDA                    No, myself too.

THOMAS                    I have those moments, sure. Especially around here. Because she confuses me, my mother. I don't understand, frankly, how we're related. What the underlying, unseen similarity is. But that's not surly.

MAHIDA                    Please. I think it's funny, actually, your mother.

THOMAS                    You do?

MAHIDA                    Yes, I giggled a little.

THOMAS                    Giggled?

MAHIDA                    Inside, yes. It's not a problem, I can tell. In a couple of years I think you and your mother will be fine. You might learn to talk to her, who knows, and she could learn to listen.

THOMAS                    (*doubtful*) This is so hopeful.

MAHIDA                    Never give up on a mother. It is unwise.

THOMAS                    Unwise?

MAHIDA Yes, you may be destined to have her all over again.

THOMAS What do you mean, destined all over?

MAHIDA If there is a next life, I think so.

THOMAS I could have to do this again?

MAHIDA It could be.

THOMAS Fine. I'll not be surly.

MAHIDA Good.

THOMAS I'll figure out a way to talk.

MAHIDA I think so.

THOMAS Maybe I should just smile more often, that's all, in this house. Smile. Not be so perturbed and particular.

THOMAS *regards the room.*

THOMAS I don't know. Maybe we should stick around a little. Take a later ferry. Not rush like this, huh? Maybe take a walk outside.

MAHIDA Yes?

EDNA *appears at the dining room door.*

EDNA Thomas?

THOMAS Yes, Mother?

EDNA Are you ready too for breakfast?

THOMAS Yes, of course. I'd like that. *(smiling)* Breakfast.

EDNA Well, it's almost ready. We're having omelettes and toast.

THOMAS Thank you, Mother.

EDNA Oh, dear.



*Pause. THOMAS kneels down. He rearranges the shoes so they are lined up toe to heel again.*

THOMAS I'll join you in the kitchen.

MAHIDA Okay.

THOMAS Good. I'll see you there.

*THOMAS exits to the staircase.*

*MAHIDA puts on her shoes. She looks out the window.*

\* \* \*

---

### **Scene Three**

*A back porch. Later that morning.*

*MAHIDA sits, reading through a sheaf of papers in her lap.*

*THOMAS comes out onto the porch. MAHIDA looks up.*

*Pause.*

THOMAS What are you reading?

MAHIDA Oh, nothing so much.

THOMAS Really, tell me.

*Pause.*

THOMAS Is it something you wrote? A story?

MAHIDA I don't know.

THOMAS You don't know if it's a story?

MAHIDA I struggle sometimes, yes.

*Pause.*

THOMAS I didn't know you brought along a story.

MAHIDA I was trying to write, yes, in my room at college. When my brother showed up.

THOMAS Uh huh. I don't suppose you'll let me see it?

MAHIDA Oh, no.

THOMAS Why don't you read to me a little?

MAHIDA No, please.

THOMAS You know there's no way I'm not going to like it.

MAHIDA Why don't you show me, please, instead a painting?

THOMAS Me? A painting?

MAHIDA Yes. I would love to see something you have done.

THOMAS I don't have any paintings here.

MAHIDA There's no drawing here, not even a sketch?

THOMAS This is my mother's house.

MAHIDA But you grew up here. You could have left something.

THOMAS Come on. Why would I have anything here? My mother is a serious gun-toting American conservative.

MAHIDA Your mother is gun-toting?

THOMAS Well, sure, I've seen her do that, tote a gun.

MAHIDA Oh, please.

THOMAS No, she has them around somewhere. In this house. Her father taught her, he did, how to shoot.

MAHIDA I think you are teasing.

THOMAS No, I'm not. I wish I could tease. My mother is very proud of the father she had. His whole family. How he taught her to shoot. How he called her his little Annie Oakley.

MAHIDA Annie Oakley?

THOMAS Well, yes. That's an American sharpshooter.

MAHIDA Okay.

THOMAS From the Wild West.

MAHIDA Well, I am surprised, I am, to think this of your mother. What you tell me.

THOMAS Well, I'm sorry. It's what I have to tell.

MAHIDA I still think there must be something in this house. Some sketch, or drawing, you left.

THOMAS She would have tossed it out.

MAHIDA No, I don't believe you. I think you are being shy.

THOMAS I'm not shy.

MAHIDA Then I do not understand how you cannot show me.

THOMAS Look, I'll show you when we get to the mainland. I'll show a couple of paintings.

MAHIDA Good. I'll show you too. On the mainland.

*Pause.*

THOMAS All right. There is something. I remember I gave her something.

*THOMAS leaves the porch.*

*MAHIDA looks at her papers, nervous.*

*THOMAS comes back on the porch. He holds a large bowl. He presents it to MAHIDA.*

THOMAS I made this. I gave it to my mother.

MAHIDA Yes? You are a potter too?

THOMAS I can do pottery, yes.

MAHIDA It's very nice. I like it. Does your mother like it?

THOMAS Well, sure, it's still on the table. My mother likes what she can put things in. What's literal. Serve vegetables. Mash potatoes.

MAHIDA I like it no matter what she puts in.

THOMAS Thank you.

*MAHIDA holds the bowl.*

THOMAS So would you read me a little?

*Pause.*

THOMAS I showed you my bowl.

MAHIDA This is not fair.

THOMAS Why, because I made a bowl? There's nothing so personal about a bowl?

MAHIDA Well, no, it's personal. It's very nice. It's lovely to hold, this pot. Here. Perhaps you should take it back.

THOMAS Okay.

*THOMAS takes the bowl. He puts it on a chair.*

THOMAS You don't have to read.

MAHIDA I'm sorry to be so nervous.

THOMAS You're not nervous. You're just modest.

MAHIDA No, I'm quite uneasy.

THOMAS Look, then, let's just wait. You can read later.  
Maybe on the ferry.

MAHIDA Okay. The ferry.

*Pause.*

THOMAS You sure?

MAHIDA *fidgets.*

THOMAS I'm going to close my eyes, I think. If you read now, you read. Otherwise I'll just think a bit. We'll think together on this porch. Then we'll get up. Take a walk out of town.

THOMAS *closes his eyes.*

MAHIDA *regards him.*

*Pause.*

MAHIDA *(reading)* "When I woke this morning, I saw there was a stream in my room. And I thought, why is this stream in my room? I will ask my father. He will know. And then I realized, no, my father is dead. So I decided to walk down this stream myself to see where it led. I followed it down the stairs. It got wider and wider, until I came to a bridge. At the foot of the stairs. A stone bridge, which I thought I should cross. There looked to be some sort of meadow over there. Some place safe, I thought, from our house. But along the balustrade of this bridge were ravens. They seemed to whisper. And I thought, well, they'll fly away if I cross this bridge. But they didn't. They fell silent instead. It's quite disturbing to be stared at by so many ravens. I was halfway across when one of them asked, Where are you going? And I said, I don't know. There seems to be a meadow over there. And

MAHIDA(contd.)

then the raven said, Why are you going if you do not know where you will go? And I said, But I feel I must cross this bridge. I feel compelled. And so the raven said, Why don't you fly across this river instead of walking on a bridge? And I said, I'm sorry, I don't know how to fly. At which point I looked over the balustrade into the river below. And, sure enough, I could see the reflection of the bridge and the sky above, but I couldn't see myself. Where has my reflection gone, I thought, this whole last year or so? Who has taken it? And then in the water I noticed a wolf looking down from the bridge. I turned but next to me was just the raven. And I asked this bird, Why is your reflection a wolf in the water? And the bird said, Why do you have no reflection at all? I said, I don't know. And the bird said, Then neither do I know. And I said, But, no, I believe you do know. You're not telling. But the raven didn't answer. All the ravens rose and flew away and I was left by myself on that bridge. With no reflection still in the water. And I thought perhaps I must forget about this meadow ahead. I should go back to the house. There's no danger there, I'm sure, nothing which could stalk or haunt. But then I saw the wolf. Up ahead in the meadow. And so I quickly crossed and shouted, Are you the wolf that was the reflection of the raven? But then I noticed there was no shadow to this wolf. I said to him, You have no shadow on the ground. And then I thought, perhaps I'm invisible to this wolf. I see no reflection in his eyes. But then I heard the wolf say, I see you. You think you have no reflection. And I said, I know. I said, Do you think we should travel together? You have no shadow. I have no reflection. Perhaps it would be good, don't you think, to travel for awhile together?"

*Pause.*

THOMAS

What does the wolf answer?

MAHIDA

I don't know yet.

THOMAS

Hm. I think they should travel together. Go through that meadow. Find what's on the other side.

MAHIDA

Yes?

THOMAS

I think they're both quite ethereal.

MAHIDA

Ethereal?

THOMAS Well, they're missing these physical pieces. Like a reflection. There are large cracks, it seems, in what should be a more solid physical appearance. At least on this earth.

MAHIDA *puts aside the papers.*

MAHIDA I don't know what to do with it. I have all these ideas. I hope when I am more mature I will know.

*Pause.*

THOMAS I'm not sure, maybe, one should trust that raven.

MAHIDA No?

THOMAS Isn't it disturbing, she says? To be stared at by ravens?

MAHIDA Yes, it is.

THOMAS Well, sure, they eat carrion. Maybe they look at her like she's carrion, or maybe they ate her father, who knows?

MAHIDA Oh, dear.

THOMAS I don't mean to be graphic, no. But why trust something that eats carrion while crossing such a bridge? And what if this wolf is actually her own brief momentary reflection and she doesn't know? What if she's running to meet her own reflection over there in the meadow?

I'm sorry. I don't mean to interfere. I'm just saying what I could think.

What passed through my thoughts. About ravens.

MAHIDA You don't interfere at all. I like what you say about ravens. I will think about it.

THOMAS It's very beautiful, whatever you do with it. You know that. Very logical.

MAHIDA Logical?

THOMAS Sure. There's a logic at work.

MAHIDA

What logic?

THOMAS

A basic logic, you know that. Everything makes sense. What the raven says, if you trust it or not. How the wolf appears. What this danger might be.

Everything, I think.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA

Well, thank you. Thank you for saying that.

THOMAS

I mean that.

MAHIDA

Yes?

THOMAS

It makes beautiful sense.

MAHIDA *smiles. She shifts awkwardly.*

\* \* \*

---

#### **Scene Four**

*The living room. Late morning.*

**The sound of knocking.**

*Pause. More knocking.*

*EDNA appears at the stairs. She regards the front door. She goes to it. She opens it.*

*RAMIN stands outside on the steps.*

EDNA

Yes? May I help you?

*No response.*

EDNA                    I said, May I help you?  
                              Do you speak English?

*Pause.*

RAMIN                  I am here to see my sister.

EDNA                    Your what?

RAMIN                  I have a sister.

EDNA                    Oh, really?

RAMIN                  In this house, yes.

EDNA                    Ah.

*Pause.*

EDNA                    You must be Mahida's brother. Who's visiting this country.

*Pause.*

EDNA                    I thought you went back already. On the ferry.  
                              The ferry yesterday. That's what I was told.

*RAMIN steps through the door.*

EDNA                    Here. What are you doing? I haven't invited you in.

RAMIN                  I am come for Mahida.

EDNA                    No, we haven't done talking at the door.

RAMIN                  I will talk here.

EDNA                    Really?

RAMIN                  I want to see my sister.

EDNA I see. Well, she's not here.

RAMIN Of course, she is.

EDNA No, I'm afraid she's gone for a walk. You seem to have missed her.

RAMIN What walk?

EDNA What do you mean, What walk? She and my son went out the back. For a walk.

RAMIN Out the back. Very well.

EDNA Yes, some time ago. Who knows when they'll be back.

RAMIN I shall wait then.

EDNA What?

RAMIN I should like to wait. For my sister. For her return.

EDNA What, in here?

RAMIN Yes, I am very good at waiting. Very patient, you'll see. You will hardly even notice. How quiet I will be as all the pictures on your wall. As quiet as these knickknacks I see on your shelf. I will be very still. Like the carpet on your floor. Like the calm before the storm. I will be only in the periphery of your eye. Almost invisible, I'm sure.

*Pause.*

EDNA Well, fine, I suppose. Take a seat over there. Till your sister comes back.

*RAMIN takes a seat by the wall in the living room.*

*EDNA closes the front door.*

*Pause.*

EDNA May I get you something? Some tea, I suppose.

RAMIN

No, thank you.

EDNA

I see. Perhaps a biscuit then? A bun or muffin?

RAMIN

No, thank you. No muffin.

*EDNA takes a seat in the living room. She regards RAMIN.*

EDNA

You're not going to be surly, are you now? In this house? Because that's one thing we can't have here. Any more surliness, you understand?

*No response.*

EDNA

You certainly seem rather different from your sister.

*Pause.*

EDNA

I asked your sister about her siblings. Over there in your land. At breakfast this morning. And she told me what a wonderful toddler you were. Of all her siblings you were the most playful. Attentive to your mother. That's what she told. Of course, that probably seems all rather long ago to you. Distant. You look so big now. And my son too. He was once all playful and silly. Quite the toddler, I remember.

*Pause.*

EDNA

Your sister told me how she was named. Got that name of hers, Mahida. Do you remember? After a close business associate of your father. Some man he worked with from India. She says your father was very progressive. Quite generous.

*Pause.*

EDNA

Your sister told me how talkative and charming the people can be in your land. What good hosts they are. How they love to

EDNA(contd.)                   converse. About metaphysics and history. About poetry. What pride they take in making sure you're comfortable as a guest in their home, or just in general in their land. Your sister says it's amazing, it is, the misconceptions we have of what actually happens over there in the land you're from.

*Pause.*

EDNA                                You're not married, are you?

*Pause.*

EDNA                                If you expect to sit waiting in my house, you'll have to answer some questions. Make a little conversation. Or else I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave. Wait out there somewhere in the street for your sister.

RAMIN                               I'm not married.

EDNA                                Hm. But your two other sisters, they're both married? Back in Iran.

RAMIN                               Yes. They are married.

EDNA                                That's nice. And yourself? Will you marry?

RAMIN                               Allah willing.

EDNA                                Pardon?

RAMIN                               If Allah wishes.

EDNA                                Of course. If Allah wishes. On the other hand, I was just wondering if you had a personal preference.

RAMIN                               My personal preference is immaterial.

EDNA                                Pardon?

RAMIN                               I do not prefer personally.

EDNA                                Oh?

*Pause.*

EDNA                   What are you doing, by the way, in our country?

RAMIN                 I have come for my sister.

EDNA                   Really? All the way here to pick up your sister?

RAMIN                 Yes.

EDNA                   No other reason, then, for your visit here?

RAMIN                 I will find my sister.

*Pause.*

EDNA                   Mahida tells me you actually go to a university in Tehran.

RAMIN                 No, actually, I travel.

EDNA                   Travel?

RAMIN                 I am travelling, yes.

EDNA                   Oh? So you're not going to that university in Tehran? As your father asked you?

RAMIN                 No. I am studying now sometimes in Lebanon. I have visited too Haqqania.

EDNA                   Pardon?

RAMIN                 *(slowly)* Haqqania. It is a madrassa they have.

EDNA                   Ah. A religious school, you mean?

RAMIN                 A most famous one, yes.

EDNA                   I see. But your sister says they don't have madrassas in Iran.

RAMIN                 No, in fact. It is near the Khyber Pass. In Pakistan.

EDNA                   Oh. Pakistan.

RAMIN

Yes.

EDNA

But your sister said this morning Iranians don't generally go on visits to Pakistan.

RAMIN

They don't visit, you say?

EDNA

Well, I don't know. She was explaining about Shiites and Sunnis, I believe. How hard it is for you to mingle, or something.

RAMIN

I see.

EDNA

But you go anyway to Pakistan, do you, or Lebanon? You mingle, yes, or visit over there?

*No response.*

EDNA

Well, I'm sorry, yes, I am. All that stuff going on over there in your part of the world. Pakistan, the Middle East. All that turmoil. We're trying to do our best, you know. Our level headed best, I can assure you, to catch you up with all we've discovered to be good in this world.

*Pause.*

EDNA

Are you glowering at me?

*No response.*

EDNA

You seem to glower. I can't be sure.

RAMIN

I think you should be more careful. What you say.

EDNA

I should?

RAMIN

Oh, yes.

EDNA

Really? But this is my house. I should say what I think in here.

RAMIN

Yes. But I am here too. In your house.

EDNA Well, as a guest.

RAMIN You can call me, if you like, a guest.

EDNA You're not?

RAMIN I am waiting for my sister.

EDNA Well, that's a guest.

RAMIN If you wish.

EDNA Well, what else could you be? An intruder?

RAMIN I could be, yes, an intruder. Or a guest. As you wish.

EDNA What are you trying to be? Rather enigmatical with me?

RAMIN No, I am a guest, as you say. Or an intruder, who knows? And outside this house, of course, is eternity. What we know will never end. The big wind of what is to come.

EDNA The big wind, eh?

RAMIN Yes, I believe so. These things which mingle now, as you say. Become compounded perhaps.

*Pause.*

EDNA So. What do they teach you, then, in Lebanon? Or in your travels? What is it they make you learn?

*No response.*

EDNA They busy teaching you, I suppose, some more perfect world, I imagine? Than whatever we've managed to arrange for ourselves here? You learn for yourselves, do you, what used to be, what once was in that bygone civilization of yours?

*No response.*

EDNA Is it true you memorize that Koran of yours? Every hour of the day. Each moment you have that book open. Is that what all that rocking is about, memorizing? The one book, I hear, on your reading list. Besides whatever else you're up to.

*Pause.*

RAMIN You should learn to think before you speak. It would be better, I'm sure.

EDNA You say, think? I think.

RAMIN No, I see no evidence of such thinking. Before you speak.

EDNA Well, how would you know? I see no evidence from you either.

RAMIN *(smiling)* No?

EDNA Of any thinking, no, as you say, before you speak. I imagine you're probably rather inculcated, in fact.

RAMIN Inculcated?

EDNA Oh, yes.

RAMIN Well, that is funny. You to say I am inculcated.

EDNA Well, yes, ours is a thinking society.

RAMIN Oh, you think so?

EDNA Pardon?

RAMIN I said, Do you really think so? This is such a thinking society? What you do to this world, you call that such thinking?

*Pause.*

EDNA Listen. Mahida told me herself you don't think. Never have. You just embrace. Embrace something or other. Like soccer. You had the talent to be a soccer star, she said. Or the imagination to be an artist, or a singer. You're like a free spirit, I hear. Some kind of ball of fire. But as soon as it gets hard, or

EDNA(contd.)            your father said something, you jump to something else.  
                                 That's what your own sister says.  
                                 So don't talk to me about thinking, how our country is  
                                 thinking.

*Pause.*

EDNA                    (*restless*) I'll say this for Thomas. At least he's stubborn, that's for  
                                 sure. He's always wanted to draw and nothing I've said has ever  
                                 deterred, or given him pause. Nothing I could say about his  
                                 father's example, or his uncle. These people who never think,  
                                 you know. How to support a family. Just abdicate from any  
                                 thought like that. And Thomas has the same refusal. To give any  
                                 thought to what practical, what's real, you know, in this world.  
                                 And why that university he went to gave him all that support,  
                                 you know, those loans and scholarships, I'll never understand.  
                                 I'll never understand the purpose of any of that.

*EDNA has exited into the dining room.*

*Pause. She returns.*

EDNA                    You sure you wouldn't want some tea?  
                                 That bun or muffin?

*No response.*

*EDNA stands by a small table. She opens a drawer. She closes  
it.*

EDNA                    So, tell me. I'm curious. What is it about that one book on your  
                                 reading list?  
                                 That Koran of yours, you say.

RAMIN                  I read other things.

EDNA                    Oh, yes?

RAMIN                  In fact, what you call the Old Testament. The New Testament  
                                 too. I read all prophets. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus,

RAMIN(contd.)      peace be upon them. They are all prophets. Before Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, who is the Final Prophet.

EDNA                    I see.

RAMIN                  Do you memorize too your scripture?

EDNA                    Do I memorize?

RAMIN                  Yes, what do you commit to memory? What thoughts do you wish to attain?

EDNA                    Attain?

RAMIN                  Learn by heart, yes.

EDNA                    Oh. Well, I've memorized, of course, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. The Lord's Prayer. I'm particularly fond, I believe, of the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

RAMIN                  Hm. Then you must know the Book of Samuel.

EDNA                    Samuel? Well, yes, of course.

RAMIN                  I, too, as a boy, heard the voice of God.

EDNA                    The voice of God?

RAMIN                  Like Samuel.

EDNA                    Oh, you mean like Samuel when he was a little boy. Woken up like that three times by the voice of God saying, Samuel?

RAMIN                  Yes.

EDNA                    That happened to you, that voice of God? When you were a toddler.

RAMIN                  Yes. When I was little.

EDNA                    Oh. And what did you do? Were you like Samuel who ran, you know, into the bedroom of Eli the priest, saying, Here I am. You called? And Eli saying, No, I didn't call. Go back to bed.

RAMIN                  Yes. Exactly like Samuel.

EDNA                   Hm. And whose room did you run into? When you heard such a voice?

RAMIN                 I thought it was my mother who spoke.

EDNA                   Oh? She told you, like Eli, go back and answer God?

RAMIN                 Yes, she did.

EDNA                   But how could that be? How could God sound to you like your mother, like some woman?

RAMIN                 God can do as He pleases.

*Pause.*

EDNA                   Hm. Must be nice, I suppose. Imagining like that you hear the voice of God. As a toddler.  
                          Anything in particular, you imagine, he told you? This voice of God. When you finally answered.

*No response.*

EDNA                   Nothing you'd divulge, I suppose.

*No response.*

EDNA                   You do have a rather nasty look sometimes. Just a glimmer, or glint, that's all. I'm sure you can't mean it. At least not in somebody else's house.

*RAMIN stands. He goes to a window.*

EDNA                   I thought it was Allah who talked to you people. Not God.

RAMIN                 Allah is the name of God among Muslims. And among Arab Christians.

EDNA                   Yes, right.

RAMIN I am honored to be the agent of Allah. Or you can call him God. Who will destroy all misconceptions concerning Him.

EDNA Well, yes.  
I believe that too, actually. About misconceptions. What He will destroy. We're in for quite a bit of destruction, I do believe. Any moment now.

RAMIN Ah. I'm surprised.

EDNA Really, by what?

RAMIN To hear you believe that. I thought there was no God anymore in this country. It is a post-Christian society, I hear them say.

EDNA Well, that's nonsense.

RAMIN Really? You see God here? In your country?

EDNA Of course, I do. There's lots of God in our country. In Him we trust. It's right there on our money.

RAMIN (*grinning*) Ah, your money.

EDNA What's so funny?

RAMIN God is in all this your money buys? There's God in your television programs? Your Hollywood? Your advertisements on your buses or magazines? These photographs and posters with young men and women, even boys and girls, touching each other while they wear only underpants? This is God to you? To advertise like this? Everywhere I walk in your country, everywhere I look, I see something to make people think of sex, or to take a drug. To suggest these things. This is what you want your children to see? How they should grow up? With all this false allurements?

EDNA Well, no, of course not.

RAMIN This enticement? You might as well hand your children now a new alphabet coloring book. The letter "A" could be a picture of adultery or anal sex.

EDNA Oh.

RAMIN How to do these things. The letter "B" could be bellyache or buggery. "C" would be copulation or cancer. This would at least be truthful. How can you teach a child to be deaf and blind to

- RAMIN(contd.)      what is all around? What surrounds them in your country? What must surely infect how they think, what they choose. And what you now want to surround all the rest of the world with.
- EDNA                      The rest of the world?
- RAMIN                    Oh, yes. You think what you do stops here on these shores? This is your freedom? Your sprawl? To spread out across the whole world? To change what we see in our own lands, what is in our own thoughts, or the thoughts of our children and women?  
                                Hah.  
                                This is your supply side economics? Your foreign investment laws?  
                                This is more than an invasion, I think. Some soldiers who come by for a century or so. No, this is an attempt to remake the world. To change forever the very face of the earth. The ground we stand on. To manipulate all the minds of men and to brush aside all opposing culture. To make us all in your image. What your land here has become.
- Pause.*
- EDNA                      Hm. I do believe you sound rather resentful.
- RAMIN                    Resentful, you think?
- EDNA                      Yes. Rather excessive, I would say, in your criticisms. Just because we have a few aberrations here in our country, some misconceptions, as you say, that doesn't mean there's no God, no. Every place on earth, every land, has problems with its misconceivers. Misguided politicians, or leaders, you know that yourself. You have, or those sheikhs have, over there seventy-five offspring. Who else is spreading themselves like that all across the world? It's a matter of degree. To what degree is a nation of people misconceived. And as far as that goes, for all the problems, there is no question, I'm afraid, what's Western is the least, by far, misconceived. On this earth. In comparison, everything else is positively benighted. This country is the light of the world. What we have here. And if that light is misconstrued, or made murky, by certain reprobates in our land, nevertheless, this nation is still the basis, in fact, upon which the human race is most likely to proceed. Otherwise it's all dogs and darkness and barbarians out there. It's as simple as that. And if we don't pay attention to that, what's howling out there at our gates, well, then

EDNA(contd.) I'm sorry, we're in for it all over again, another one of those huge collapses, an apocalyptic dark age, I say.

*Pause.*

EDNA Well, now, you've got me started, you have. Defending my country. Right here in my own house. My very home.

EDNA *regards* RAMIN.

EDNA Yes, as I say. You do seem to have a rather nasty look sometimes. Just a glint, that's all. And then it disappears.  
Are you aware of it?  
This look of yours? Which then seems to disappear?

*Pause.*

RAMIN You too, I think, have a nasty look. A glint yourself.

EDNA A nasty look?

RAMIN Oh, yes. Very hard and narrow. Like a cowboy, I think. When there were still Indians in this land.

EDNA We have Indians.

RAMIN Perhaps.

EDNA What do you mean, Perhaps? What kind of talk is that, perhaps?

*No response.*

EDNA Well, you know what I think, perhaps. I think, perhaps, I have had enough company for now. I think, also perhaps, I have no idea why you're in this country. What could bring you here. After all this talk with you, in my very own home, I still have, perhaps, no idea at all what it is you're doing here.

RAMIN I'm waiting for my sister.

EDNA Yes, you said. But I still can't fathom why.

RAMIN You can't fathom?

EDNA No, I can't. I've lost patience with this, with what can't be fathomed. All this perhaps. And I would like it now, in fact, for you to leave. If you're going to wait for your sister like this, perhaps you just better do it outside.

RAMIN I don't think so, no.

EDNA Really?

RAMIN It's awkward actually, outside.

EDNA Awkward outside?

RAMIN Yes, standing around. You know this.

EDNA Why? Because there are people out there, maybe passing by?

RAMIN Yes. That is so.

EDNA Well, maybe I should write you a note then. Would you like a note?

RAMIN A note?

EDNA Yes, a piece of paper. I'll write something on a paper, saying, yes, it's okay for you to wait outside until your sister comes back.

*EDNA heads for a small table. She opens a drawer.*

EDNA Would you like that? If I gave you a note?

*No response.*

EDNA A note, yes, in case anyone asks? Should someone want to know what you're doing out there. You could show my note.

RAMIN I think that would be unwise.

EDNA What would be unwise?

RAMIN To think I could accept such a note.

EDNA Oh? You're telling me what's unwise? Right here in my own house?

RAMIN Yes, that could be.

EDNA Well. There's really not much choice here, is there? Either you wait outside with a note. Or without a note.  
Did you hear?

*No response.*

EDNA Listen. I think you should understand that you just can't come into someone's house, for whatever reason, and then lurk around and harbor these nasty looks of yours. At least not in this country.

We don't put up with that sort of thing.

*Pause.*

*EDNA removes a revolver from the drawer of the table.*

EDNA I will ask you now, one more time, to leave my house.

*No response.*

*EDNA levels the revolver at RAMIN.*

EDNA You are an intruder in my house. I will call you an intruder. I will tell the sheriff, and everyone I know in this town, you intruded into my house.

I will do this.

If you do not leave right now.

*RAMIN watches EDNA. He does not move.*

\* \* \*

---

**Scene Five**

*A hilltop above the ocean. Late morning.*

THOMAS *sits on the ground. He draws in a sketch book.*

MAHIDA *sits a few yards away, looking out over the ocean.*

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    My brother suggested he goes someplace now in Lebanon. He is frequently there. Some school, or religious course, to become a cleric, I could not tell.

*Pause. THOMAS continues to sketch.*

MAHIDA                    I would be surprised if he, in fact, did go. How could Ramin go to Lebanon to a school? Or Pakistan? What could compel him? Because if he goes, then someone else is paying. My father only paid for Ramin to go to the University of Science and Technology.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    It is terrible no longer to be sure what a brother tells you.

*MAHIDA looks out to sea. She is restless.*

*She turns. She regards THOMAS.*

MAHIDA                    I'm glad you found that sketch book in the house.

*Pause. MAHIDA goes to THOMAS.*

*She looks over his shoulder.*

MAHIDA                    It's very nice. This is very fast how you did this.

THOMAS Thank you.

MAHIDA Also very Persian. *(smiling)* Are you trying to be Persian?

THOMAS Well, no, I don't know.

MAHIDA This is so intricate, this frame, your border. All the ornate foliage.

THOMAS Uh huh.

MAHIDA These patterns, I think, with creatures along the edge.

THOMAS Well, yeah, I suppose it could be Persian. Some Persian paper border. But nobody would be fooled, huh? I mean, in Persia.

MAHIDA Oh, I don't know. So many things can be Persian.

THOMAS Nah, it's just a sketch.

MAHIDA Oh, no. It's very detailed. Are you always so detailed?

THOMAS Nope. Just trying something different.

MAHIDA Well, I think this is a special raven. It's wonderful how hard it is to decide if this is a good raven or perhaps not. What this reflection could be. What lies up ahead with a bird like this.

THOMAS Thanks.

THOMAS *continues to sketch.*

MAHIDA *looks out to sea.*

MAHIDA Thomas?

THOMAS *(looking up)* Yes?

MAHIDA I'm sorry. I'm troubled just now. I don't know. I can't seem to keep my mind still.

THOMAS About what?

MAHIDA *takes out a scarf. She unfolds it. She covers her head.*

MAHIDA It's a beautiful day, don't you think?

THOMAS Well, sure.

MAHIDA Yes, I know, to be here like this. Above the ocean. I am so grateful to have found this day. To have such thoughts.

*Pause.*

THOMAS Yes, but you're troubled. You just said so.

MAHIDA I don't know.  
I feel I have been a little bit stupid.

THOMAS Stupid?

MAHIDA If Ramin came to me, out of the blue, for a reason. Maybe for help. And I did not see this reason.

THOMAS What reason?

*THOMAS puts aside the sketch book. He stands.*

MAHIDA I think Ramin likes to talk. That could be all, just talk.  
But this is not how he used to be, this talk.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I feel it, Thomas. Something creeping up, I think. Behind this talk.

*THOMAS goes to MAHIDA. He takes her arm.*

*They look out to sea.*

\* \* \*

---

**Scene Six**

*The living room. Noontime.*

RAMIN *sits in a chair by the wall, waiting. The front door opens.*

THOMAS & MAHIDA *enter. They see RAMIN. RAMIN stands.*

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Ramin?

*No response.*

MAHIDA Ramin. This is Thomas.

THOMAS *(to RAMIN)* How do you do?

*No response.*

MAHIDA Ramin, Thomas is the man who offered to help me last night. When I was left alone on this island. Perhaps you saw. There was no ferry. Not even a hotel, or inn, for me to stay.

And so Thomas talked to me and told me later to come to this house. It is his mother's house. Thomas is visiting his mother. I could be allowed, he said, to sleep on the couch right here. And so I slept. I had a good rest. A good breakfast too with Thomas and his mother. I read to Thomas some of my writing, what I told you I was working on. And Thomas has showed me some drawing. Yes, Thomas, you were drawing?

THOMAS Sure.

THOMAS *steps forward with his sketch book. He opens it. He lays it on the coffee table nearby.*

MAHIDA Yes. I like how Thomas can draw. Thomas and I are back just now, in fact, from a walk outside of town to a hilltop above the ocean.  
Pretty soon we're hoping to take the ferry. Thomas has offered to make sure I get back safely to the university.  
I have a class in a couple of hours.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Those are the facts.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA What is it you're thinking?

*No response.*

THOMAS *goes to the dining room. He exits.*

RAMIN *goes to MAHIDA's suitcase by the door. He picks it up.*

THOMAS *appears again at the dining room door.*

THOMAS (to RAMIN) Where's my mother?

*No response.*

MAHIDA Ramin, where is Thomas' mother?

RAMIN His mother has gone out.

THOMAS Out?

RAMIN (*putting down the suitcase*) Yes.

THOMAS That's not possible. My mother would never go out. With a stranger in the house.

RAMIN I am not a stranger.

THOMAS What?

RAMIN I have introduced myself to your mother.

THOMAS My mother would still not go out. She would not leave you here.

RAMIN Oh, why not?

THOMAS Look, it's not just you. It's anybody. My mother is very particular. There's no way she would leave you here. Someone she just met. My mother likes to hover. If a carpenter or plumber comes in, she hovers. The electrician. She has this house specifically so she can hover over whoever comes in.

I know. I'm her son. It's embarrassing.

*Pause.*

RAMIN Well, that may be so. You are embarrassed. But she went out. She went out, she said, for food. We need lots of food, she said.

THOMAS Lots of food, huh?

RAMIN I believe so. So many people now for lunch.

*THOMAS circles the room. He stands by the front door.*

THOMAS My mother is way too suspicious. Too territorial to ever just go out for food. Without locking up this whole house. You see each of these windows here? These windows would not be open, no, if my mother left the house. Because it might rain. It'll drizzle. They'd be locked. This light too would not be on.

*THOMAS turns off the light by the door.*

THOMAS And as for you, she would have asked you, I know, to wait out on the street. Until she came back.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Ramin. Where is Thomas's mother?

RAMIN *(shrugs)* She went out.

*THOMAS circles the room again. He stands by the dining room door.*

MAHIDA Thomas?

THOMAS What?

MAHIDA Please don't get angry.

THOMAS What do you mean, Don't get angry?

MAHIDA I want you not to get angry.

THOMAS Something's wrong, I think, with my mother.

MAHIDA Please. We must think very carefully now.

THOMAS What?

MAHIDA I said, Don't get angry.

THOMAS Don't get angry? Am I getting angry?

MAHIDA Yes. I think so.

*Pause.*

THOMAS Sure. Sure, that's probably all this is. Just getting angry.

RAMIN Oh. I'm very sorry. So sorry.  
I forgot. She left a note.

*RAMIN takes a folded piece of paper out of his pocket. He hands it to MAHIDA.*

RAMIN Please. Show his mother's note.

MAHIDA *goes to* THOMAS. *She hands him the paper.*

THOMAS *opens it.*

THOMAS *(reading)* "I've gone out for food. Make yourselves at home. Ramin will be joining us for lunch. Mother."

*Pause.*

THOMAS Are you toying with us?

RAMIN Toying?

THOMAS Why did you just now show this note?

RAMIN It was in my pocket.

THOMAS She gave it to you to put in your pocket?

RAMIN No, of course. I believe she left it over there by the table. By the light that was turned on. But, as you can see, all the windows are open. She left them open. There was a breeze and I saw the paper blow to the ground. And I wondered how will her son see this note on the floor. So without much thinking, I folded it up and put it in my pocket. To keep it safe. Until just now when I remembered.

I'm sorry. I understand now why you could not believe she went shopping.

RAMIN *regards* THOMAS.

RAMIN You still don't believe? Your mother went shopping? You shouldn't look so wary. You should learn to trust better, I think. All the peoples of this world.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA *(in Persian)* Ramin. What have you come here to do?

*No response.*

MAHIDA                   What is it, Ramin? You have come here to do?

RAMIN                    What have I come to do?

MAHIDA                   Yes.

RAMIN                    I am only here, you know this. To bring you back.

MAHIDA                   You expect me to come back?

RAMIN                    Yes. We should both go back.

MAHIDA                   You have no other business?

RAMIN                    What business? What business could there be for me in this country?

MAHIDA                   And what about what has happened here?

RAMIN                    Nothing has happened here.

MAHIDA                   No?

RAMIN                    No, his mother will be back, safe and sound, I told you.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                   I see. Why should I believe you?  
                                  You want me to believe, don't you? If I should come back with you.

*No response.*

MAHIDA                   You told me in the car yesterday you have left university. And I don't know if it is true what you say, but it makes me sad. To realize you would even think to go like this against our father's wishes.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    If you are going now to be a cleric someplace, what do you expect me to believe? That you, Ramin, would spend so many years memorizing and learning to interpret the Holy Book?

*No response.*

MAHIDA                    I fear what you may have heard. What you were told perhaps somewhere. How to skip all this study. Gain God's favor. Some other way.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    Ramin.

RAMIN                     Yes, dear sister?

MAHIDA                    What is it you want me to think? I am confused how you are here.

RAMIN                     I know very well what you should think.

MAHIDA                    Oh?

RAMIN                     You will be sorry, I know, to bother with such questions to your brother.

MAHIDA                    Ramin.

RAMIN                     You will be sorry soon, I'm sure.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                    How have you become like this? So much the opposite of our father?

*MAHIDA goes to the coffee table. She closes the sketch book.*

MAHIDA                    Last night, Ramin, as I lay on this couch, I could not sleep. Thinking of you. Thinking what has happened to my brother?

MAHIDA(contd.)      Who is speaking to him? Who could these people be? And do they love Ramin the way I love Ramin? How I have always loved him?

*Pause.*

MAHIDA              I prayed to know you are safe. I prayed this with all my heart. Until I realized, yes. You came to see me. My brother put aside some trouble, or plan. To see me. How could I not see this before?

                            That is how I finally fell asleep. How I got rest.

                            But then I became worried again. Today outside on the walk. I couldn't keep my mind still. And so I asked Thomas, Please, leave me alone. I must be alone for awhile on the top of this hill. And so I looked out alone across the ocean and once again I wanted to know, with all my heart, that no harm can come to you. You are safe. And then, Ramin, the sweetest thought came. I saw Mother reading from the Book of Samuel. We were children. And you ran the next night to our mother, saying, Did you call? I heard you call? And our father, Ramin, he was so charmed. Touched, I believe. That his son could confuse his own need for his parents' attention for the voice of God.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA              I don't know why, Ramin. I thought of that while I stood, looking out across the ocean. Why it gave me peace. Made me realize there is no lie here on earth which can possibly touch you. Turn you away from who you are. What you are created to be.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA              You may not hear me now, I know, Ramin.  
                            But I can pray, I know, you will hear perhaps later.

*MAHIDA reaches for RAMIN. He steps away.*

RAMIN                Well, perhaps, we should all sit. Make conversation, then. While we wait all together. For this man's mother.

RAMIN *sits.*

*Pause.*

RAMIN No one will care to sit?

MAHIDA Ramin?

RAMIN Yes, dear sister?

MAHIDA Where is Thomas' mother?

RAMIN I told you she is shopping.

MAHIDA Please, Ramin.

RAMIN It is true. You would doubt your brother's word?

MAHIDA Yes, Ramin. I doubt.

RAMIN You must not doubt what I know is best for you. What is true. What you will thank me for later.

MAHIDA (*gently*) Ramin, I will only thank you first to tell me where his mother has gone.

*RAMIN abruptly stands, lifting a tray from the coffee table with him. He heaves the tray across the room. It crashes into the shelf of knickknacks.*

*In the confusion, he swiftly steps forward and seizes THOMAS, completely surprising him. He holds THOMAS helpless in an armlock, his back bent over the sofa. He stares into THOMAS' face.*

RAMIN How do you like it? How do you like it, my fellow American? How swiftly I can cast aside all your defenses. How I too can invade your home. Where you hope to live. How I am come now right here into the heart of your country. Like you have slipped into the heart of mine.

MAHIDA (*quietly*) Ramin.

RAMIN (to THOMAS) How do you like it? To be this close to one small face of what will cause your destruction? Tear apart all the fabric of how you live. You have no way ever now to protect yourself from this.

MAHIDA Ramin.

RAMIN (to THOMAS) No way to close every crack from which I could come. No way to dismount now the back of this tiger you ride.

*MAHIDA reaches forward and touches RAMIN on the shoulder. He turns on her, releasing THOMAS. He takes MAHIDA by the throat, lifting her and holding her against a wall.*

*THOMAS slips to the ground in utter pain.*

RAMIN (hissing) Mahida!

MAHIDA (struggling to breathe) Yes?

RAMIN (hissing) You must never doubt what I know is true. You will thank me later for what I know is true.

MAHIDA (breathing) Yes?

*RAMIN releases MAHIDA. She slides to the floor, her scarf slipping off.*

*RAMIN takes MAHIDA by the hair. He leans down into her face.*

RAMIN (slowly) I will no longer waste my time now. In what life remains, with a sister who will not listen.

*RAMIN goes to the front door. He hesitates. He takes EDNA's revolver out of his pocket. He lays it on a windowsill. He exits.*

*Pause.*

*Both MAHIDA & THOMAS continue to lie on the ground.*

MAHIDA Thomas?

THOMAS *(faintly)* Yes?

*MAHIDA sits up, holding her throat.*

MAHIDA I think your mother is upstairs, Thomas. Ramin has left your mother upstairs.

THOMAS *(faintly)* Yes?

MAHIDA You are all right?

THOMAS *(faintly)* Yes, I am.

*MAHIDA stands. She goes to THOMAS. She helps him sit up.*

MAHIDA Thomas? May I go upstairs? May I find your mother?

THOMAS *(faintly)* Okay.

*MAHIDA takes THOMAS' hand. She holds it.*

MAHIDA Thank you, Thomas, so much. You listened to me. Thank you.

THOMAS *(faintly)* I did?

MAHIDA You did not get angry. Thank you.

THOMAS *(faintly)* You're welcome.

*MAHIDA stands. She goes to the stairs.*

\* \* \*

---

**Scene Seven**

*Two days later. Early evening. The upper passenger deck of a ferry.*

*EDNA sits on a bench. Her face is partially wrapped. Her jaw appears to have been broken. MAHIDA sits with her, holding hands. She has a sketch book and pencil beside her.*

*Some distance away THOMAS leans against a railing, looking down at the water.*

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                      Thank you for coming with us. We did not want to leave you alone.

*EDNA nods.*

MAHIDA                      Thank you also, so much, for understanding how sorry I am, please, for what Ramin has done to you.  
   How my brother came like that to your house.

*EDNA nods.*

MAHIDA                      I am sorry too for all those questions. How they detained us.  
   I am very sorry for these last two days.  
   I know. I have said this.

*EDNA nods.*

MAHIDA                      They will find my brother. Or he will find himself, I know. He cannot escape what is best.

*Pause. MAHIDA shifts awkwardly on the bench.*

*EDNA holds out her hand. She takes the sketch book and pencil. She writes on the back cover. She hands it to MAHIDA.*

MAHIDA *reads the cover. She looks up at EDNA.*

MAHIDA (surprised) Thank you.  
Oh, thank you for writing this.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I, too, am thinking so much.  
I, too, must begin again.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA You have spoken sometimes of toddlers. How your son was once a toddler.  
I have heard you.  
I remember Ramin when he first learned to walk. I would hold his hand. I helped him cross the room.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA This morning I remembered we were on bicycles once. Ramin went past me going down a hill. And I saw his front wheel begin to wobble. It wobbled more and more until I saw him crash at the bottom of the hill.  
Ramin was okay. He encountered no serious mishap.  
But I will always remember how helpless I felt going down the hill. When I saw his wheel in front wobble like that.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA I want to tell you this is the Ramin I know.  
There is a Ramin I trust. Ramin I love and adore. And if he has now wandered somehow across some boundary. Some borderline to consider some things I never thought possible. Whatever the reason is and whatever in the world could prompt such things. Whatever, or whoever, could propel him, nothing can take away from me, or anyone, the Ramin who could look up at me after crashing his bicycle like that at the bottom of a hill

MAHIDA(contd.) and say, "Dear sister, how can you weep like so?"  
It was Ramin who had no care for himself. No care for cuts or bruises, any broken bones.  
It was Ramin who comforted me because I was weeping.

*Pause.*

THOMAS *looks up from the railing. He looks out across the water.*

EDNA & MAHIDA *watch* THOMAS.

MAHIDA May I ask you?  
Have you seen what Thomas has drawn?  
What he drew this afternoon while we waited for you at the doctor's?

EDNA *shakes her head.*

MAHIDA I like it very much. What your son can draw.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA Here. I will show you. What Thomas has drawn.

MAHIDA *opens the sketch book. She holds it open for EDNA.*

MAHIDA Do you see? There is a wolf and a little girl with a shadow. This wolf has no shadow on the ground like the girl. They are standing before a high stone wall. At the end of a meadow. I think they have come to a place where they can go no further. Their way is blocked by a locked gate in this wall.  
See the gate with a lock?  
But in the tree over here, above the wolf, is a bird. A friendly white dove who has the shadow of a raven. Right here in the air above the wolf. And in the beak of the dove, she has a key. But in this shadow, the shadow of the raven, there are two more keys. Maybe even more.

*Pause.*

MAHIDA                   What do you think of that?  
                                  How your son can draw?

EDNA *nods.*

THOMAS *turns from the railing.*

THOMAS                   *(softly)* Mahida?

MAHIDA                   *(hearing him)* Yes, Thomas?

THOMAS                   Come, please. Come bring my mother.  
                                  Come and see.

MAHIDA                   Yes?

THOMAS                   Come see how quiet. How still.  
                                  Let's come and see this ocean.

MAHIDA *stands. She helps EDNA up.*

MAHIDA & EDNA *walk toward THOMAS.*

THOMAS *takes EDNA's arm. MAHIDA takes her hand.*  
THOMAS, EDNA & MAHIDA *stand by the railing. They*  
*look out across the ocean.*

**End of play.**

\*   \*   \*