

I will not close my eyes
to what you've seen
or who you are
or who you are going to be.

How can I sleep seeing what you see?
This war has made a monster of me.

Philip Mom,
I had a boy
I had his mother
in my hands—
and he was so much more than me
so much more
and I killed her with my bare hands.
So, Mom, what does that make me?

Beat.

Colleen I won't ask.
I won't look away.
I will listen.
I will listen.

Philip Listen—

Wissam My name's Wissam.
Wissam, I'll write it for you.

He closes the door to Philip's room and writes his name in Arabic across the back of it.

Wissam Wissam.
And your name?
Your mother named you to mean something.

End of Opera

Playwrights Horizons, Inc. in association with Shakespeare Theatre Company produced the New York premiere of *Noura* in 2018

World premiere produced by Shakespeare Theatre Company

Artistic Director: Michael Kahn

Executive Director: Chris Jennings

Originally workshopped and developed with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics at Georgetown University in the Davis Performing Arts Center, directed by Derek Goldman and dramaturgy by Maya E. Roth.

Noura was further developed at McCarter Theatre Center within their LAB play development programs and was produced by McCarter in Princeton, NJ as the 2017 LAB Spotlight Production. Emily Mann, Artistic Director, Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director.

Characters

Sometimes characters are referred to by their Iraqi names, sometimes by the names they took when immigrating to America.

Noura/Nora *An architect. Originally from Mosul, Iraq. Now an immigrant living in New York City. (Mid- to late forties.)*

Tareq/Tim *Noura's husband. Charismatic and gentle. A former surgeon, originally from Baghdad. Now a hospitalist working in an E.R. in New York. (Mid- to late forties.)*

Rafa'a *Noura's childhood neighbor from Mosul. A close friend of the family and a surrogate uncle to Yazen. Elegant and private. An OBGYN. (Mid- to late forties.)*

Maryam *A young physicist from Mosul. Now in her first semester of graduate studies in California. Unapologetic. (Mid-twenties.)*

Yazen/Alex *Noura and Tareq's son. Intelligent and astute but still a boy. Very American. (Eleven-fourteen years old.)*

Noura's family are Christian Iraqi and Rafa'a is a Muslim Iraqi.

Notes

The set is an expression of Noura's world as an architect. The set can breathe and manifest as her conscious and unconscious needs manifest. There is a larger than expected dining table; it accommodates everything.

There is also a simple but magnificent Christmas tree. Presents beneath it. The rest is sparse. Perhaps minimalist. Perhaps they haven't quite moved in.

A (!) indicates a cue for the next character to speak, cutting off the line before.

A (—) indicates a character cutting themselves off, or in search of finishing their thought.

Truth is a pathless land.

—Krishnamurti

Scene One

Outdoors, cold. Noura wears a blanket or winter coat over her pajamas.

When she thinks her mind speaks aloud. We hear her secret thoughts throughout the play. Sometimes they come as a cacophony of whispers in Arabic, sometimes as tangential thoughts. We hear phrases of the Hail Mary in Arabic dropping softly; then she takes a breath.

Silence.

Noura Is it silent? Snow?

If it is silent, it is the loudest silence I have ever heard.

I felt snow once. On the coldest day in Mosul. Blessed mother, you came like a friend.

We wait for so long, forget how to dream, then a door opens
or closes—

Now, everything is possible again.

She laughs.

Tareq Are you awake?

Nora?

He teases her, over-pronouncing her name.

Darling Nora.

Scene Two

Inside.

Noura You're hoping I answer to that name, so you put a darling with it.

Tareq *Habibi*, your passport now says Nora.

Noura You changed my name against my will—call me by my real name.

Tareq It's hardly any different / no one

Noura Then why change it?

Tareq I love Nora.

Noura Say it right, nobody ever said it as sweet as you.

Tareq Oh I see. *Noura*, when I need something sweet from you, sing *Noura* in your ear.

Noura Yes like this.

Tareq *Noura, let's make a baby.*

Noura Oh my God. Now?

Tareq Now. Here. On the table. On top of our passports. I want an American baby, with your eyes and my incredible ability to cook. One that smells like you and fights like you but has my sweet disposition.

Noura So sweet. Is Yazen still sleeping?

Tareq I want a girl. To dress up and smell good.

Noura Is that sexist?

Tareq Or selfish. Our son can't lift his head from the computer long enough to see I'm turning grey. She'll be a physician, look after us in our old age. Nothing sexist about that. It's honorable.

Kiss me, Noura.

She shoves an electric toothbrush in her mouth instead.

Talking while brushing her teeth.

Noura Which for Yazen? Backgammon or Legos?

Tareq He wants PlayStation so he can be like other boys.

Noura It's violent.

Tareq Boys here don't play backgammon. Let's at least give him the Lego guys with guns, we can't keep him innocent forever, it's just play.

She sings his name:

Noura *Tareq.*

Tareq *Noura.*

She kisses him now that her teeth are brushed.

Tareq You told me you stopped smoking.

Noura It's Christmas.

Beat.

Tareq You know why I love Christmas?

He whispers something in her ear.

Noura You have a surprise for me?

She reaches for her iPhone/Facebook then shows him the screen.

Noura Just look at her.

Tareq How long is she staying?

Noura She didn't say. It's her winter break.

Tareq Are we going to take her in?

Silence.

How? You won't even buy a couch. I know you want to sponsor every Iraqi orphan. Once we open that door, you know it will never close.

Noura Not every orphan, one. From Mosul. From my grandfather's church.

Tareq She can't bring Mosul back.

Noura She's lucky to be alive. The least we can do is help with her school.

Tareq I need distance.

Noura From what?

Tareq Tomorrow will be beautiful, we'll feed her. Over-feed her. Then follow her on Facebook.

Noura She'll stay a week, at most two. She's got school. In California. You might like having a girl around the house / you just said

Tareq This generation, they're hard, they're refugees. I just want to prepare / you

Noura We're refugees.

Tareq She's not family.

Scene Three

Rafa'a buzzes then lets himself in.

Noura Here we go! Tareq Yazen!

Noura quickly exits to get dressed for the day. Both men watch her go.

Rafa'a (to Tareq) Shh! Wait, wait!

Yazen!

Yazen enters.

Yazen Rafa'a! I thought you couldn't /

Rafa'a What's today?

Yazen Errands in the morning, then I pick the movie.

Rafa'a No. What day is today?

Yazen Christmas Eve.

Rafa'a And what did I promise I would put in your hand on Christmas eve?

He triumphantly holds up a hard drive.

Ta da! Downloaded! Straight from the Cloud. All of it.

Tareq (to Rafa'a) Is the data good? Did you check?

Rafa'a It's here.

He presents the hard drive to Yazen.

Yazen That's it?

Rafa'a It's EVERYTHING. One terabyte. Straight from Mosul!

Yazen How? Someone got into Grandpa's house again?

Rafa'a Not someone, our old neighbor. I told him, this time, photograph every page of every book in her house. Now all of it is here.

Tareq Noura's been talking about her library for more than a decade!

Rafa'a Wait until you see the picture of her mother he found stuck in a book. *Mashallah*. I was in and out of her house my whole life and I never saw a picture of her mother.

Tareq I want to give it to her right now!

Rafa'a There's more . . . a day or two later the neighbor was paid to burn every book on our street. And he did it. The same guy.

Yazen Why?

Rafa'a Why what?

Yazen Why would the neighbor burn Mom's books?

Rafa'a He was paid.

Yazen But you know him.

Rafa'a Yes. He burned my books too.

Yazen Just for money?

Tareq No, Alex—

Beat.

Yazen He still sent you the file.

Rafa'a At great risk. Encrypted on Telegram. Noura's entire family library—all from the Cloud!

Yazen All in my hand!

(*To Rafa'a*.) What about your books?

Rafa'a I'll read your mother's.

The men hear Noura enter.

Yazen Morning, Nunu!

Tareq Shhh, Alex. Wrap this, for tomorrow.

Noura begins breakfast/tea where Tareq left off.

Tareq So Shark Tank?!

Rafa'a I see why you're addicted.

Tareq We have to go into business! Forget medicine.

Rafa'a Medicine is business.

Tareq But I want to invent something!

Rafa'a Something medical?

Tareq No. In restaurants / I've seen

Yazen They have that already, Dad.

Tareq Not in homes. If the markets hold, in three years / I could build

Noura Toast and tea.

Noura arrives carrying a tray.

Tareq Alex, move the books please.

Noura I'll move them later.

Tareq attempts to move her renderings.

Tareq How can we eat with your mess all over the table?

Noura You'll rearrange my mind if you touch them.

Tareq I'll buy you a desk.

Yazen She never leaves things in the same place.

Noura My desk is in my mind. I have organization you cannot see. (*She prys*) "Blessed God, thank you that we even have food, if we eat off books, it's more than millions of refugees have, make us grateful lord. Amen."

Rafa'a (*to himself*) *Bismillah. Il Rahman al Rahim.*

Beat.

What's all this? Still re-designing Baghdad?

Noura I'm thinking to stop tutoring.

Tareq You don't need to work. My income could double now that I'm a citizen!

Yazen She can't stop working.

Tareq Why? What do you know?

Yazen I saw her drawing—equations all over the margins—it looked like Noah's Ark. *He starts to unroll one of the sketches on the table.*

Noura Stop snooping.

Yazen Mom, it was in my room /

Noura It's wherever I can find space to think.

Yazen On my homework?

Noura I work at your desk some days when you're at school.

Yazen Then don't get mad if I look through your stuff.

Noura It's not an ark, Yazen. (*To Rafa'a*.) Yes, I would like to stop tutoring.

Rafa'a Go back to being an architect. Take the A.R.E.

Noura I thought you were on your way to a birth?

Rafa'a The baby came. In a cab.

Tareq You still get paid for that?

Rafa'a My first Face Time delivery! Now I'm free for errands / like you hoped.

Tareq Thank / God.

Noura Are you bringing Kate tomorrow?

Rafa'a No.

Yazen Dara?

Rafa'a No.

Yazen Who are you bringing to Christmas?

Rafa'a I thought I would just come myself.

Noura We've been cooking / for three weeks.

Tareq Twice as much food as last / year.

Noura Think about bringing someone, Rafa'a. Just a friend.

Yazen I miss Reem.

Tareq Reem moved back to London.

Yazen But /

Tareq Enough.

Yazen Mom, I'm starving.

Noura Yazen, you can do it.

Yazen I need more than toast /

Noura When we break our fast tonight you will feel / so strong.

Tareq Give the boy an egg.

Noura He's old enough to understand.

Tareq Suffering?

Noura Compassion. It's Christmas Eve. We fast.

She pulls out her iPhone/Facebook.

Tareq Alex, love, go get your shoes on. I don't want to have to rush.

Tareq, Yazen, and Rafa'a *prepare to leave.*

Rafa'a You're gonna need boots, Yazen.

Noura still on her phone.

Noura (*to Rafa'a*) Whoever she is, you can bring her.

Yazen She needs more people to eat all the food.

Noura You can invite someone too, Yazen.

Tareq (*over Noura's shoulder*) Please stop watching that stuff. Forget it.

Tareq whispers in her ear. It brings her up for air.

Noura It's evening in Baghdad soon – it's already Christmas in New Zealand, we have to call your sister when you / get back before

Tareq Give everyone my love. I'll call Nadia while I'm out. (*To Yazen*) Here, a cheesestick. Because it's already Christmas in New Zealand!

Noura We have to post something before they leave for Mass. They need to know we're thinking about them.

Tareq, Rafa'a, and Yazen *exit.*

Yazen Bye, Mom!

Noura Quick, Yazen, here, in front of the tree. Hide your cheesestick.

She takes his picture with her phone.

You get to meet Maryam tomorrow.

Yazen Is she the nun?

Noura A nun? No. Why?

Yazen You said she lived in a convent.

Noura As an orphan. She grew up there. The nuns were her mommies.

Yazen Does she like PlayStation?

Noura She's probably never seen one.

Yazen makes a sound of disappointment.

Noura Love you.

Yazen Love you.

Noura exits. Noura finishes posting Yazen's photo.

Finally, **Noura** is alone.

Silence.

She thinks visually:

She studies the dining table, adjusts something, likely a chair. She wraps up in her blanket and steps outside.

Scene Four

She lights a cigarette. A deep inhale.

Noura I need more chairs. For tomorrow.

A touch of snow begins to fall. Magic.

Men want to make babies till they're eighty—

A young woman approaches Noura. She wears an overstuffed backpack and carries some shopping parcels. Noura in her own world. Then—

Noura Oh God! Oh love, Maryam?! What are you doing here? Today?

Maryam We get to meet. Finally.

Noura Maryam! Little darling! How could I not recognize you? I've been staring at your beautiful "face book." You're different. What, you've been eating your way through America?!

Please come / in.

Maryam No, finish your cigarette. I don't mind, I've never seen snow before.

Noura Not in Mosul? Of course not, it's your first winter in America!

Maryam It's magnificent. The nuns described it, but we couldn't imagine snow.

Noura Taste it.

Maryam What?!

Noura sticks her tongue out to catch a snowflake. Maryam follows.

Maryam I thought I would hate the cold but I think the opposite, I think I love it.

Noura It's anonymous.

Maryam How?

Noura In the heat, everybody knows your business. What you're wearing, how you walk. In the cold nobody cares. You can go anywhere in your own world.

She catches herself staring.

Elhamdullah ya binti.

Maryam *Shukran ya Noura.*

Noura Come in! Come in!

She puts out her cigarette.

No more messaging, you're finally here in person.

Maryam The ticket was too much really.

Noura Next time I'll come to California.

They enter the home. Maryam stays just inside the doorway. She knows her way out before she steps into a room.

Maryam Wow!

Noura What?

Maryam It's empty. I mean modern. Most / Iraqis

Noura I know, the curly furniture.

Maryam You're an architect, right?

Beat.

You stopped?

Noura Can I take your coat?

Maryam moves directly toward a photo.

Maryam Your family?

Noura My father as a boy. And this, do you recognize? Sister Rana.

Maryam My head mother? As a girl?

Noura Before the convent, she was engaged to my father. **Maryam** What?

Noura But she wanted to become a nun. So, years later, he married her little sister instead. This one, with her head turned, defiant. My mother.

Maryam Sister Rana was your aunt?

Noura She wanted me to become a nun.

Maryam Of course, it's her mission. She was my world.

Noura She talked of you. We spoke each month for twenty-six years.

Maryam Her death was unspeakable. I'm sorry. I was there.

Silence.

Noura What's this?

She refers to the parcels. Maryam is still carrying.

Maryam Presents for your son. Yazen? Sorry, I should have texted / first

Noura Of course not, this is your home. Open the refrigerator, eat, eat everything, don't ask, just be at home. Where's your suitcase?

Maryam shrugs. She continues to look through the apartment.

Maryam I'm staying with a friend from school.

Noura A friend? Why not stay here?

Beat.

It's good you've made friends. I was so lonely at first.

How long have you been here?

Maryam A week.

Noura And you didn't call me?

Beat.

What a blessing you are! Maryam, I have so much I want to tell / you! We

Maryam picks something up off the dining table.

Maryam You have American passports?

Noura They just came this week!

Look, Alex, Tim and Nora. It took eight years. I can't tell you the pressure, Tareq was working at Subway sandwich, can you believe it? A surgeon working in a kitchen. He's in E.R. now, not surgery, but, it's coming together, I'm happy! Today, I'm like a girl again.

How's the dorm?

Maryam Great.

Noura I thought having girls around—I looked for a group—I mean to go from a convent to California. I looked for a Catholic school, so you would feel more comfortable, but no, you / wanted

Maryam Stanford's great.

Noura Yes, it is. I'll make tea.

Maryam How did you even find me?

Noura You mean on Facebook?

Maryam I never use my last name.

Noura I looked at every Maryam from Mosul. To make sure you escaped.

Beat.

Maryam Sister Rana talked about me?

Noura *Habibi!* Tell me, you posted about an internship?

Maryam Yes, weapons contracts. I started working on a proof of concept. I mean it started as just theory when I was in Iraq but, then the D.O.D. awarded me this internship and have hinted at a job after I graduate.

Noura But you're studying physics?

Maryam Yes. Thermodynamics.

Noura Why the military?

Maryam They pay people to do physics.

Noura How will you stay after your student visa?

Maryam The D.O.D. could hire me.

Noura Even now? Visas are impossible. We just this month got our citizenship, it took eight years.

Maryam I'm not worried.

Noura I'll make tea.

She goes to put the kettle on.

Maryam What are you working on? The drawings?

Noura Oh, it's a house, for Tareq. You can open them—

It's a fantasy. For his family. To live all together, like the old houses, with a garden in the middle. He wants apartments for his five sisters, they all have kids, it'd be impossible to build.

Maryam Why impossible?

Noura There's forty-three of them. And, this is modern, more like a ship—

She walks her through the renderings.

The lower level, a huge communal kitchen, bedrooms going all the way up to the roof. On the ground floor, each family's sitting room opens to the courtyard, so on big occasions if you open the interior doors, it makes a giant circular room. I wanted all Mouslawi marble, like this piece, going inside to out.

Maryam To keep cool.

Noura I don't know—

Maryam What?

Noura With the garden at the center, to get from room to room, you travel around the courtyard, so the daily pattern is circular, right?

Maryam I see.

Noura So the family stays connected to each other and private from the street. But aren't they isolated? All the life is inside, behind walls. If you're not in the family, it's inaccessible.

Maryam Nobody builds courtyard houses anymore.

Noura They do in Paris. It's the latest trend. Have you seen in some parts of America, they have yards? They use grass. It touches the neighbor's grass—without a boundary.

Maryam To build there? Here?

Noura Nowhere. It's for his imagination. He still wants to provide for his sisters.

Maryam Where are his sisters?

Noura Scattered. Germany, New Zealand, Sweden.

Beat.

Maryam In Baghdad they're tearing down homes. You don't even buy the house anymore. You just buy the land. Like in Dubai.

Noura We can't live in Baghdad.

She goes to finish making tea. Maryam looks at the books. If she opens one, she leaves it exactly as she found it.

Noura You must be a genius if they want you for a job already!

Maryam I translated for so many U.S. contractors in Mosul. But thank God for your sponsorship. I couldn't have afforded it / otherwise.

She takes off her coat. She is visibly pregnant.

Noura Of course we're fasting today, but tomorrow we've cooked everything Mouslawi. Tareq's from Baghdad, so we usually do both. But for you, I wanted only Mouslawi—

She sees Maryam is pregnant.

Beat.

Noura You must be hungry.

Maryam Don't worry—I'm fine.

Noura I'll make something.

She tries to go.

Maryam I don't want food.

Noura Breakfast, lunch, something—

Maryam I don't need.

Noura *goes anyway.*

Silence.

She returns with nothing.

Noura I'm sorry. Are you okay? Who did this?

Maryam Nobody. I'm / fine

Noura It happened in Mosul?

Maryam I'm only six months. Maybe I should have mentioned it first.

Noura It happened here? Did you tell the police?

They arrest people here / take their DNA.

Maryam Noura, I'm just pregnant, I wanted the baby.

Noura You got married?

Maryam I chose to have a baby, not a husband, a baby.

Noura I've been talking to Iraqis, engineers, men with citizenship. They won't marry / you now

Maryam I don't want to get married. I have school, my whole life.

Noura How? You can't just do that.

Beat.

Maryam Sorry, but I don't see it that way. Come on, I don't have to explain to you. *Daesh*, when you see them face to face.

I'm an orphan, I want someone of my own.

Noura You have total freedom now, I never had, how are you going to—

A child can't save you, Maryam. You don't know.

Maryam Everyone I know is a refugee, or dead.

Noura Exactly, why bring a child into this world?

Maryam I'm alone.

I've never been so alone. In Iraq, there are people, all the / time.

Noura But you can't go back home now, unmarried, with a child, you won't be accepted.

Maryam Are you kidding? Would you go back? To Mosul? It's gone. The people are unrecognizable.

You wouldn't survive a day in Mosul now.

Silence.

Whispers overwhelm Noura and fill the room with Arabic gossip: (Ha tha Eeb), (Kan El-Mafroudh Et sa' goudou El-Dhe jil), (Rah Ten 'Qa'itl)

Maryam Are you alright?

Noura You felt alone? Why didn't you call me?

Maryam I can see now I make you really uncomfortable. God, you've been out almost eight years. You live in New York, your husband works at a hospital. I didn't know you were going to be so old world. You seemed progressive online.

Noura Old world? What does that even mean? I tutor math in an inner-city high school, I'm not naive. You were raised in a convent. I'm just surprised, you don't, you're not, shy.

Maryam I'm not embarrassed, no. I've been stared at my whole life. Every girl without a father is.

Okay, forget it. Look, those are presents, for Yazan, you said he was eleven? Thirteen? Anyway, I'll leave them here, they were too big to carry back on the subway, that's why I dropped by.

Noura Where are you staying?

Maryam With my classmate. Up. Somewhere. The Bronx.

Noura You won't stay here?

Maryam I'm already there.

Noura You would rather stay with your friend?

Maryam Please can you give them to Yazan for Christmas?

Noura You are still coming for Christmas dinner?

Maryam Why don't I text you.

Noura You are still coming. You have to. Spend the day, the week.

Maryam Let's text, see how it goes.

Noura We are all expecting you.

Maryam I'm not sure you were expecting *me*.

Noura Please come, you must come. We are your family, while you are here.

Maryam We'll see.

She leaves.

Noura is *unmoored. A terrifying silence.*

Scene Five

Rafa'a *enters with an armful of presents. Noura doesn't notice him.*

Rafa'a Noura?

Noura We didn't even begin, and she's finished?

Rafa'a Hello?

Noura *jumps.*

Noura You scared me.

Rafa'a Don't you feel the cold? Your door's open.

Noura She left the door open?

Rafa'a Who?

Beat.

What's wrong?

Noura Who can talk without tea?

Rafa'a I'll make it.

Noura Everything straight to the point—I feel beaten up.

Rafa'a Have you seen a ghost?

Noura No.

I don't know.

I've seen Maryam.

Rafa'a From Mosul?

Noura She came early, from California.

Rafa'a Good! She's all you talk about.

Noura There was nothing. No conversation, no tea.

Rafa'a She's American already?

Noura Don't make fun.

Rafa'a Maybe she likes coffee?

Noura The way she talks! She didn't compliment me once.

Rafa'a OK. What did she say?

Noura I don't know. She wants something of "her own."

Rafa'a At least she camel! This is great. Noura?

Silence.

Noura She's pregnant.

Rafa'a Oh.

Noura She's not married.

Rafa'a No? (*Beat.*) That's all?

Noura That's all?

There's nothing worse! Tareq will reject her outright. She's meant to come for Christmas, all the Mouslawi food, I wanted her to stay, for summers, be part of our family. He goes on and on, he wants a full house, a daughter, babies. Now, she's pregnant.

Rafa'a That sounds perfect for him.

Noura Can she even come for dinner now? What will I say?

Rafa'a What do you want to say?

Noura She's got slut written all over her.

Rafa'a Whoa! Do you hear yourself? Why are you so worried about Tareq rejecting her? You've rejected her already.

Noura I haven't.

Rafa'a You've just described in one word you find her shameful.

Noura Isn't she?

Rafa'a Are you asking me?

Noura I am.

Rafa'a Depends on what you think of shame. Is being pregnant shameful?

Noura Don't turn this into a medical argument, not today. I'm trying to hold myself together, okay? I wanted to welcome her, she shows up pregnant and unapologetic.

Rafa'a So it's the lack of apology? It's okay to be pregnant if you are sorry?

Noura If Tareq rejects her, that's it. It's over.

Rafa'a That doesn't mean she shouldn't come. It might be good for both of you to sit with a young Iraqi refugee over Christmas. I can't think of anything more "Christmassy." Welcoming into your home a pregnant woman who has no place to go.

Back in a bit.

He exits.

Noura sits with herself.

A revelation. Noura rearranges something. Then grabs her purse and coat and leaves the house.

Scene Six

Noura alone battling PlayStation aggressively and with utter release.

Noura I've got it, I've got it... YES!

Tareq PlayStation?!

Noura It's *Borderlands*! I bought all new presents. One of my students got me started. He says I'm a natural!

Tareq What? *Borderlands*?

Noura It's a surprise!

Tareq A huge surprise, it's the most violent / game.

Noura We're too protective. He asks about violence. What am I supposed to tell him?

Tareq Tell him the truth.

Noura ISIS are selling girls your age and sawing off the heads of your neighbors?

Tareq He's American now, Nora.

Noura So is ISIS.

She ends the game. She puts the PlayStation joystick into a festive box under the tree.

Tareq trying to delay, finally goes to put on his lanyard.

Noura About dinner tomorrow, Maryam—

I thought you weren't working today?

Tareq Night shift.

Noura Mass is at night. You used to always get Christmas / off.

Tareq You want me home for Christmas *Habibi*? Not only will I be here, I will be home before your eyes open and on the pillow next to you will be my gift.

He whispers something in her ear.

Noura Hmm.

Tareq What does my Nummi like? What can I find to make your heart dance?

Noura Nothing, I don't need anything.

Tareq Not what you need, what do you want?

Noura I want nothing you could possibly buy at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve. A present is something you plan, with thought, not going to the store the night before and buying the first thing you see. I don't like those kinds of presents. They feel obligatory. You never plan for me. So then you buy something too extravagant to make up / for it.

Tareq You might have to wait until tomorrow to find out.

Noura We need flour before / tomorrow.

Tareq I bought fifteen pounds / a few weeks ago?

Noura I've been baking *claecha* all month—for Yazen's teachers, the school, neighbors, we have hardly any left.

He cuddles up to her.

Tareq *Noura*, did you plan a present for me? Or are you just going to stuff me with cookies?

Noura Maybe.

Tareq Want to know what I want?

Beat.

Noura A daughter.

Tareq How did you guess?

Noura Who smells like me and cooks like you.

Tareq You do know.

Noura My love, about tomorrow, Maryam / she's not

Tareq We're used to big families, doesn't this feel empty to you?

Noura You feel empty?

Tareq No, I feel safe for the first time in my life. It feels so different to feel safe.

He kisses her. She showers him with affection. He stops. She is left wondering.

A whisper of Arabic comes into the room.

Noura There's something I want to tell you.

Tareq What?

Silence.

Noura Is there something I need to know?

Tareq Like what?

Noura After all these years insisting we have only one child?

Tareq Noura, our circumstances were different / we couldn't afford

Noura I mean since we've been in America. Six, seven years ago you didn't even hint.

Tareq I was barely earning /

Noura I'm old enough to be a grandmother.

Tareq In New York that's when women start trying.

Noura My body is / different.

Tareq I don't want to regret having one child. I had five sisters. I need a girl.

Noura Well, raising a girl here is different from back home. She's not going to grow up like your sisters.

Tareq I never thought I would be lonely. It's the hardest thing about being here.

Noura Tomorrow you won't be lonely. You'll see. It might be the most beautiful Christmas we've ever had.

They hold each other. It is love and decades of partnership.

Tareq What is it you wanted to tell me?

Is it the right time?

Noura wraps up in her blanket and collapses on the floor in front of the Christmas tree.

Noura Ten minutes.

She cat naps. Tareq prepares to leave, then watches her again. He sets an alarm on her iPhone. Rafa'a and Yazen return from the movies.

Tareq I've set the alarm so she doesn't sleep through mass.

Yazen proudly hands Tareq a very small exquisitely wrapped jewelry box.

Yazen (*whispering*) Here, I wrapped the hard drive for Mom.

Tareq Oh, love! It doesn't look like her whole library, does it?

Yazen It looks like jewelry. She's gonna flip.

Tareq She's gonna flip.

Tareq kisses Yazen.

Rafa'a You trying to avoid mass?

Tareq A half-shift. The money was triple.

Rafa'a You can always ask /

Tareq What?

Beat.

Rafa'a Let me drive you. You'll spend half the night on the bus.

The men leave together. Yazen tucks the jewelry box in the tree then smuggles into his mom on the floor. He plays a video game on her iPhone.

Scene Seven

Time passes. A song begins somewhere in the house then drifts away. Maybe she is dreaming it. Perhaps the phone alarm goes off. Yazen smuggles in closer. She gently pats him or strokes his hair. She sits thinking.

Noura hums a lullaby in Arabic. Then stops. Silence.

Noura Who do I love?

Yazen Me.

Noura Who else do I love?

Yazen Daddy. Nanna. All our family. All over the world.

Noura Who the most?

Yazen Me.

Silence.

Noura What are you thinking? I can feel your brain moving.

Yazen About tomorrow. Morning.

Noura Your presents?

Yazen Mmm.

Noura Do you think you'll have any presents under the tree?

Yazen Lots!

Noura No! Why lots?

Yazen Because you love me lots.

Noura That's true! But what do presents have to do with how much I love you?

Yazen Nothing. They're just fun, Mom. And you like giving presents even if you give too much.

Noura Well, I could return some of them.

Yazen Mom!

Shhh. Stop talking.

You can pat my head. And sing that song.

He smugles in closer.

Yazen You like surprises?

Noura Mmm.

Yazen You thinking about tomorrow?

Noura I've been thinking about this day a long time.

Beat.

Yazen Did you wrap the new house for Dad?

Noura It's tucked in the tree.

Yazen That one's for you.

Noura Mmm.

She takes her iPhone from him and looks at the time.

Okay, come, we're late already.

Yazen Can't we stay home? Just us?

Noura No.

Yazen I don't want to go to church. For three hours.

Noura Yazen.

Yazen But can I sleep in bed with you and Dad tonight? For Christmas?

Noura Yazen, you are a giant. And you kick.

Yazen And I definitely don't want you to be grumpy on Christmas.

Noura Definitely not grumpy.

She gets up.

Okay, *yallah*.

Yazen No. I'm not. I just, I don't want to do the pageant.

Noura I don't know why the kids have to be there so early. Are they doing a rehearsal?

Yazen I couldn't find my costume, it's not where I put it.

She goes to get his costume.

Noura I ironed it. You had it in a pile of gym clothes.

She helps him put it on over his street clothes.

Yazen Mom, I can do it.

Noura Which one are you?

Yazen The one bringing frankincense.

Noura But what's his name?

Yazen I don't know, I forgot. It doesn't matter.

Noura It matters.

Yazen Mom. Don't get too into this. Okay. We are not going to break out in Aramaic. All I say is: Behold the baby. I bring you frankincense—

She analyzes him.

Noura Well, I don't like your costume. You look like a Disney movie. Not a Chaldean King.

She takes out a keffiyeh/shemagh, her father's, from amongst the presents under the tree. Yazen opens the present.

Yazen Oh, Mom, you do it.

Noura begins to wrap his headress.

Noura You.

My father.

My father's father.

My father's, father's, father . . .

An eye to protect you.

She pins a gold amulet on him.

Yazen Mom, why do you hate PlayStation?

Noura I don't hate it, Yazen. I don't like violence. I don't wish that for you.

Yazen It's fantasy /

Noura To you it's fantasy. I carried a gun.

To work. In my purse, in the car. It's an awful feeling. Guns don't make you strong they make you paranoid.

Yazen Of what?

Beat.

Noura You look like a king, Yazen!

Yazen Alex.

Noura Alex, you look like my dad, your jida.

Yazen Did jida carry a gun?

Noura Never. Never.

Yazen I won't either, Mom.

He wields his frankincense like a lightsaber.

Frankincense power!

Noura Okay quick, outside. I need to get ready.

He runs into her, hugging her tightly.

Noura My sweet boy. My everything boy. Yellah.

There is no more time. She grabs her purse, her rosary; in an attempt to be more festive she quickly puts on heels or lipstick. Before she leaves, she looks back at her space. The set grows, it breathes, it changes somehow. Maybe we see elements of what the house could become, in Noura's imagination. Or how it holds her memories of Mosul, Christmas dinners, a table full of family. Perhaps she touches the marble slab on the table. Then exits. The set continues to breathe. Perhaps the song we heard earlier comes back in full, an Aramaic lullaby said to have been sung by Mary to baby Jesus.

Scene Eight

A light suddenly goes on. Rafa'a, Noura, and Yazen return home from Midnight Mass. Three a.m. Yazen grabs a tin of cookies and makes for his bedroom. Noura motions for him to eat at the table instead. She prepares tea. Gathers food.

Noura There's pacha in the oven.

Rafa'a Finally!

Yazen Mom.

Noura You liked it last year.

Yazen I can't face intestines at three in the morning.

Noura To break your fast, you need meat.

Yazen Jesus, Mom! Nobody fasts on Christmas Eve! Can't you be American for once?!

Rafa'a Hey /

Noura It's late. He's starving.

They watch him eat.

Rafa'a You make a good king, Yazen. Very believable.

Care to share one? Wise man?

Yazen *shares one cookie.*

Rafa'a The only other time I've been in a church, I think I was fifteen. The year your grandfather said I couldn't eat *pacha* unless I fasted and went to Christmas mass first. He said it wouldn't taste right.

Noura It does taste better when you're starving. And cold.

(To Yazen.) Okay, you can go.

Yazen exits to his room taking the tin of cookies.

Tareq won't eat it either.

Rafa'a He's Baghdadi.

Silence.

You and I are from Mosul. We are wired to hang on.

Noura Are we wired to hang on?

She removes a precious amulet from around her neck, she kisses it then begins wrapping it.

Rafa'a Oh.

Noura Yazen will be upset I'm not wearing it.

Rafa'a For Maryam?

Noura It's a charm for girls. For protection. I'm not a girl anymore.

She then tucks the wrapped amulet into a branch of the Christmas tree.

Rafa'a Have you prepared them for tomorrow?

Beat.

Why not?

Noura She might not come. In fact, she probably won't come at all.

Rafa'a Of course she'll come. She'll come for the food.

Noura It's three a.m. I haven't heard from her. God knows where she is, with her "friend." She left angry. Shocked that I was shocked.

Rafa'a How bad were you?

Noura Just shocked, embarrassed. She was raised by the most courageous nuns for God sakes. They defended her with their life. How could she be so proud? Like she owes nobody. She has no right to behave this way. I paid for her to come—

Looking at her phone.

She hasn't texted, she said she would, but she hasn't.

Rafa'a I've never heard you bitter.

Noura Bitter / I'm not bitter.

Rafa'a How long have we known each other? I knew your father / better than my own.

Noura You don't need to even / say it.

Rafa'a I do. I'm worried about you.

Noura It's new, I just saw her for the first time.

Rafa'a And you're gonna let her walk in here tomorrow and not tell Tareq just see what he does? That's not fair to her. To any of us.

Noura Tell him what? That she's—what? Make him crazy? I need her to come.

Rafa'a I know.

Noura What do you know?

Beat.

Rafa'a You need to let go. You need to pick up your tennis racket and hit some balls.

Noura I've already let go. You came here a long time ago, Rafa'a, with your wealth. I came here with nothing. The charities dressed me, like a child, chose my furniture, my apartment. And I had to be grateful and forget.

Rafa'a Yes, but now you built your own life. This is / you

Noura It's not just Maryam. I am trying to hold one small piece of my past together. If I let go it dies / with me.

Rafa'a There is no going back, Noura.

You can live amongst Arabs, or Christians, or Iraqis anywhere in the world it will never be the community it was, not again / so

Noura Don't you feel a great loss?

Rafa'a Yes! You used to be an architect who loved flamenco dance and the Gypsy Kings. Now, just last week in fact, I heard you tell Fresh Direct you were a Christian, immigrant from Iraq.

Noura Because they hear my accent they want to know where I'm from. Not what music I like.

Rafa'a I'm just saying if you want to hold on to what Iraq was, maybe you need to remember who you were.

Noura Who was I?

Beat. Rafa'a looks at her.

Noura I still smoke. When nobody's looking I smoke.

Rafa'a I know.

Noura It's what I do for me. And only me.

Rafa'a I won't say anything.

Noura Come on, you're a doctor. Why not lecture me on smoking rather than my obsession with my dying identity?

Rafa'a They're the same. As a Muslim, I feel it too, maybe more.

You think Muslims are okay with what's happening? Look at us. We all took part. Iraq had a chance—we fought for ourselves, not each other. Nobody survived. Let it go, Noura. How we grew up, is never coming back.

Noura Would you defend nothing? My grandfathers were Al Naqqar, they carved half of Mosul. 1800-year-old churches, all Mouslawi marble now blown / up

Rafa'a What, then, you want to carve out a Christian territory in the Nineveh plains?

Noura Well.

Rafa'a Really? Noura! What does isolation get you?

Noura Safety, space . . .

Rafa'a So you won't live with Muslims now too?

Noura My people were driven out! We're the original / Iraqis.

Rafa'a Original what? They burned my books too, Noura. Mosul wasn't hell only for Christians / look at it now

Noura Why can't you admit, there was a genocide in our hometown! / My people.

Rafa'a Noura! The baby that came in the cab this morning? You know why? Because the father wouldn't get his wife to the hospital on time. He delayed, and delayed, because I was the doctor on call—he didn't want a Muslim to be the first to touch his son.

It's everywhere, Noura. It's not how we grew up. But, I'm telling you, it's everywhere like an infection. There is no safe space. Are you telling me we have to be careful now too? Go back to our tribes?

A hundred people used to visit your father on Christmas. Christian and Muslim neighbors, not just family. Eid, you came to our house, Christmas I came to yours.

Look who's here tomorrow: myself and Maryam, one Muslim and one pregnant, Christian refugee. Maybe New York is the one place we can still celebrate together!

Noura Not for long.

Rafa'a Forget about *pacha*, mountains of *kibbi*, *dolma* / weeks of preparations

Noura You love it. It's the only reason you've been showing up for Christmas / your entire life.

Rafa'a I also wouldn't care if we went out to dinner. Because as good as the food might be I am really just here to see you.

Noura Of course the people are the / most important

Rafa'a You didn't hear me. How this fills me is not a kind of full that food can provide. Our bodies can survive on nuts. We can't be human without compassion. And this is one of the many things you give me. Radical hope and forgiveness.

Noura What do you mean?

Rafa'a Do you believe any of it, Noura?

Noura Believe what exactly?

Rafa'a Being saved. That there is a force so loving, so merciful that any harm done in this life could be forgiven.

I think a lot about this. Childbirth can be very forgiving.

Isn't forgiveness the most radical part of Christianity?

Noura Forgiveness?

Rafa'a Yes. Noura, you could just forgive her.

Noura For what? Maryam? For being pregnant?

Rafa'a For not having tea with you.

Forgive her inability to see how much you need to love her.

Noura *dissolves*.

Noura What do you know?

Rafa'a Can you simply speak it, Noura?

Endless silence. He waits for her to speak.

Noura How?

Rafa'a Like this, I'll show you—

Beat.

I've loved *once*, Noura.

I was silent too because I thought, in our circumstances, it would be dishonorable. I simply never told her.

Noura You protected her.

Rafa'a We grew up in each other's houses. I would never have asked her to convert to Islam. She would have been rejected by her family.

Noura Yes. Do you regret?

Rafa'a It's not regret. But I'll never forgive myself.

Noura For not marrying?

Rafa'a No, for my silence.

Noura Why? Why was silence the wrong choice?

Rafa'a Because silence burns the heart. It doesn't give faith or forgiveness a chance to work.

He waits for her to speak.

Noura I do need to pick up my tennis racket / and

Rafa'a All these years in America and I can't talk straight with you. I'm still stifled. What keeps me from speaking? At my age?

Noura Maybe the desperation of love lessens in middle age as you grow older?

Rafa'a It doesn't lessen.

Noura We've never spoken like this before. Aren't you afraid of what could come?

Rafa'a How do you mean?

Noura In letting go of the burden of silence—you open a door. Or maybe you close a door. Either way it's a place from which you never return.

Rafa'a "Truth is a pathless land."

Noura Who said that? I've heard it before.

Rafa'a Guess.

Noura Gandhi? Dalai Lama?

Rafa'a Krishnamurti. You loaned me the book.

Noura You took it off my table!

Rafa'a You said you loved the book.

Noura Well.

Rafa'a That's why I read it. It made for longer talks.

Beat. He offers her his hand.

Forgive me.

Noura Rafa'a, I'm so afraid she won't come.

Rafa'a Why?

Could she take his hand? She moves away instead.

Noura I'm the one that needs forgiveness.

Tareq *enters from work with two five-pound bags of flour.*

Tareq Four in the morning? This is crazy. We can't all be exhausted tomorrow.

Rafa'a *begins to gather his coat.*

Noura We've been waiting. It's time for *pacha*. Scotch or tea?

Tareq Nothing. Only my pillow! I won't lie. I broke my fast with a Reuben sandwich! I have to sleep. I want to be ready for Yazen early. Goodnight, my friend, see you tomorrow.

Rafa'a Tomorrow.

Both men leave at the same time. Noura is left alone.

Quietly, from off stage:

Tareq Noura, I feel the cold from here.

Noura I know. Rafa'a left the door open.

Tareq Why?

Noura For the Christ child to come.

Tareq How long? Until Christ comes?

She steps outside. She lights a cigarette.

Noura Tareq?

Noura, *constructing in her mind, even while the foundations of her world shift.*

Are you awake? I want to talk.

What happens to the set around her?

Tareq?

She finishes the entire cigarette then walks back inside into:

Scene Nine

Christmas Day pre-dinner:

Christmas wrapping is littered around the tree. The aftermath of Yazen opening a few presents. Noura, Yazen, and Tareq busy preparing. Tareq has stuffed a chicken. Yazen is rolling dolmas, getting ready for the big Christmas dinner. Tareq is infinitely more comfortable and in charge with food. He comes alive in a unique way while cooking. He hums along to Arabic Christmas music with the radio. Noura checks her phone often.

Tareq How many years has Rafa'a come for Christmas?

Noura Since I can remember. Since I was three.

Tareq He wasn't sick yesterday.

Noura *grabs her phone. Looking for a message.*

Yazen Rafa'a's sick?!

Noura He didn't text. He texted you?

Tareq An hour ago.

Noura Why? What is it?

Tareq He's not coming. But it would have to be serious for him not to come. A tradition as old as that.

Noura He has to come.

She checks through her phone again. Frustration.

I've left Maryam three messages. Nothing. But she's posted on Facebook.

Tareq *Habibi*, if it's just us it's okay.

Noura *changes the station from Christmas music to Arabic Christian programming. Loud coverage of latest ISIS atrocities blares into the room.*

Tareq Please, turn it off, I can't stand this propaganda / not on Christmas

Noura They're the only ones praying for the refugees / today.

Tareq Nora, that channel's not even Iraqi, it's evangelical, out of Texas.

Noura You don't care? How many in Erbil, trapped in malls, freezing / on Christmas?

Tareq Of course I care, but can't I have a day? My whole year is saving other people's lives. I would like a chance to live mine / for once.

Noura *checks her phone again.*

Tareq She said she was coming three weeks ago. Why are you so worried?

Noura All this effort to be together / now nobody's

Tareq We're together! It's Christmas, if it's the three of us who cares?

Noura Look at the *dolma*.

Tareq His *dolma*'s fine, Alex is doing great.

Noura He doesn't like *dolma*, so he's sloppy, like he doesn't care / to do it correctly.

Yazen I'm not sloppy / I just

Noura I want to be capable of one tradition.

Tareq We're capable. You're capable.

Noura Then where is she?

Tareq I just don't know?

Noura Fucking ISIS!

Tareq What are you talking / about?

Noura They ruin everything.

Tareq Alex. To your room.

Noura Yazen, you have to listen, it's your country, you come from these people. Yazen / come.

Tareq We are not these / people.

Noura Yazen, you have to know what's really happening.

Tareq No. This has nothing to do with Yazen.

Noura Did we defend each other? Did we speak up? No! Now everything is gone. Why can nobody admit we did this to ourselves?!

Yazen Mom.

Tareq Nora, stop. You can't compare those psychopaths to the rest / of us

Noura We're the same! Animals fighting for a place to belong and our survival depends on us destroying the people we know. *Joeh'reen'na. Aou'jai'na. Adh'jaina!*

Yazen escapes to his room.

Tareq How are we the same? Nora, you would feed a dog before you fed yourself. Numi? We only cook like this once a year, don't destroy / dinner

Noura *Hi Khethbeh.* We've spent a month preparing to cook the Mosulawi way, so it won't be lost, on who? How many have we lost because we cannot accept who they are? I'm sick, *Amni Khalsani.*

She lets go, dropping a massive platter of food.

Tareq Noura, *Ya Thoul!* The waste. Keep yourself together.

Noura It's not Nineveh! It's not history for God sakes! Yazen wants pizza—let's order pizza!

Tareq Why is it all or nothing with you? That's exactly what they want. For you to feel helpless. I've been cooking for three weeks, now you're throwing all our hard work away because of what?

Noura We did it this way when every neighbor was stopping by, no presents, just a parade of love! Today we have nobody. Nobody.

Tareq Numi. Iraq is not over. Muslims all over Baghdad are lining bridges with Christmas lights in solidarity.

Noura And what are we doing? In solidarity?

Tareq Trying to celebrate our holiday as a family. Celebrate the citizenship we waited for, for eight years, our new lives.

Noura Congratulations, Tim, on becoming an American—Congratulations, Alex, good job! We're American now! What, we're "safe" because we're Christian? Is that why they let us in? So easily? Changing our names, is a lie—

Tareq Working at Subway sandwich? You supporting me while I took the boards, this was easy? You can still have your career, Noura, I can't. I can never return to surgery, my hands shaking. Fuck it. What's wrong with feeling safe? I'm grateful there's a place we can reinvent ourselves, a place we can forget.

Noura I don't want to forget! I'm trying desperately to remember who the hell I am. You think they are so easy on Muslims? The people at immigration? I hated their questions. If I were dark, they would have asked me.

Tareq Asked you what?

Noura If I hurt somebody! If I did anything wrong. They only asked if I had been raped. They looked so sorry for me, a Christian, Iraqi, a white woman. They never asked what part I played in fucking up my own country.

Beat.

Tareq (a genuine question) What part did you play Noura?

She takes a breath. Arabic whispers rush into the room. It's now.

The door buzzer rings.

Maryam and Rafa'a enter. Rafa'a wears the same clothes from last night, now disheveled.

Scene Ten

Noura My God! You came! Thank you. Thank you!

She kisses Maryam.

Tareq The mess, I'm so sorry / We were just

Noura (to Maryam) Tareq, this is Tareq my husband. Rafa'a, our dear friend.

Maryam Yes. (To Tareq,) Pleasure to meet you.

She goes to shake Tareq's hand. Throughout, Noura attempts to clean the mess and set the table.

Tareq You're from Mosul?

He doesn't shake her hand, instead Tareq kisses her three times, the Iraqi way.

Noura Yazen! Come meet Maryam!

Rafa'a (to Tariq) I'm from Mosul too.

Rafa'a *teasingly kisses Tareq the Iraqi way*.

Rafa'a (to Maryam) We're very happy you came.

Rafa'a *shakes Maryam's hand*.

Maryam Rafa'a?

Rafa'a Yes.

Maryam You're Muslim.

Beat.

Rafa'a You need me to register?

Noura We grew up together.

Maryam What's your family name?

Beat.

Rafa'a Noura said you were at university there in physics—did you know Dr. Shaheen?

Maryam Of course he was a fixture, famous.

Rafa'a He was my mentor.

Tareq Your family how are they?

Maryam I don't have family, I was raised at the convent / St. Georges.

Tareq Oh of course, of course, Nora said. When did you leave?

Maryam When the neighbors burned the convent and killed the head mother.

Silence.

Yazen *enters*.

Yazen Maryam!

Tareq Our son, Alex. Noura Yazen!

Yazen I've heard so much about you.

Maryam I've heard a lot about you, too.

Yazen We waited to open your presents.

Tareq Come, may I take your coat?

Maryam Yes. Sorry I am empty handed I dropped by yesterday with presents.

She takes off her coat, again revealing her pregnancy.

Tareq Oh wow! Okay.

Maryam (to Noura) You didn't tell them?

Beat.

Noura No.

Maryam Okay. I'm pregnant, six months. I don't know the sex. I wanted it to be a surprise.

Tareq I'm surprised.

Maryam I'm not married. I'm still in school. I wanted the baby. I was not coerced or raped. I am really excited about being a mom and having this child. I don't need you to find me a husband. Hope that addresses all your questions. I already have a job offer so I will be able to support the child during and after my schooling—

Rafa'a Terrific, what's the job?

Maryam With the Department of Defense. I build weapons contracts.

Yazen Cool! Do you like PlayStation?

Maryam I'm mean at Minecraft.

Yazen Want to play?

Maryam Of course. (*On their way out*.) You want me to call you Yazen or Alex?

Maryam *and Yazen exit together*.

Tareq This is the Iraqi orphan we saved from ISIS?

Noura We are paying only her rooming fees. She got a full scholarship for school—we paid for her flight and room, through the church.

Tareq So I'm paying for the college bed she sleeps around in, like American sluts do?

Noura Actually, I paid for her flight and dorm fees. She is in an all-female dorm.

Tareq Well, if she has a job working for Halliburton, let's stop paying for her fucking bed.

Noura I need this dinner, please, be generous. You know nothing about what she's been through, I want you to know her.

Silence. Tareq pours himself a drink. Noura begins to bring food to the table for dinner. As Noura goes in and out, the men steal moments of privacy.

Tareq Where were you an hour ago? What, you never went home?

Rafa'a I went home.

Tareq But not to bed?

Rafa'a Sometimes I can't sleep.

Tareq You didn't go drinking, did you?

Rafa'a I don't drink.

Tareq I know you don't. That's why I asked.

Noura enters.

Noura (to Rafa'a) What have you been asking me to make you for the last eight years? That not a single New York bakery will make?

She exits.

Tareq Shall I get you a fresh shirt?

Beat.

What happened to you?

Rafa'a I think I should make a move.

Tareq What? Your O.B. practice is one / of the best.

Rafa'a Move cities, not careers.

Tareq London?

Rafa'a No.

Noura enters carrying a plate of fresh bread.

Noura Samoon! / Merry Christmas, Rafa'a.

Rafa'a My God! Would you look at that, she finally made *samoon*!

Noura Last night. I didn't know what to do. I made bread.

Tareq A perfect Christmas / present.

Yazen Yeah, I had five for breakfast.

Maryam Samoon?!

Noura There are other things. We made other things

Yazen Like "face."

Noura Tareq?

Beat.

Tareq Maryam, would you like to sit down? *Et'fadi'ahlee*.

He offers Maryam a seat at the dinner table. She accepts.

Maryam Samoon is the one thing I miss.

Noura I want you to feel at home. There's *Kubba Hal mud*, *Kubba Mosul*, *Macclobi*, chicken / *biryani*

Yazen And lamb "face."

Rafa'a No *dolma*?

Noura I had *dolma* but /

Tareq Food fight!

Noura I dropped it.

Maryam This looks, smells, wow!

Rafa'a It's not Christmas without / *dolma*.

Tareq Maryam, in New York people just go to restaurants on Christmas.

Yazen Dad, that's not true.

Tareq It's true, they don't do what we do.

Yazen Jackie's mom cooks more than this.

Tareq How do you know?

Yazen I've eaten the leftovers at her house. It goes on forever.

Rafa'a Sparkling cider for us. (He pours for Yazen.) Maryam? Sparkling juice?

Noura For me too please. Yazen, why don't you pass Maryam the chicken first.

Yazen picks up a single drumstick with his fingers and puts it on Maryam's plate.

Rafa'a Don't put so much on her plate, you'll scare her.

Tareq She looks starving. We have *pacha* and for our guest of honor—

He approaches her with an entire pot of lamb / *pacha*, a cooked head, "face" on top.

Maryam Oh God, are you really going to offer me the head like back home?

Tareq I insist, *pacha*! you have to have

Yazen No dad, don't give her the face dad.

Tareq and Maryam go back and forth in Arabic. "Beh'el'afahLa." Tareq offering. Maryam declining. "Mah'ag'der, Sud'deq Ma'ag'der, Ani Hanneh." Everyone is loading Maryam's plate with food.

Noura Tareq!

Tareq Okay, no "face."

Beat.

Maryam I'm so curious, you speak mostly English, in the house?

Noura Tareq insisted when we first moved.

Tareq For Alex.

Yazen So I wouldn't grow up sounding like a foreigner, now they only speak Arabic when they're telling secrets.

Tareq Of keeping secrets.

Noura Sorry, it's hot. New York apartments are hotter than Baghdad.

Rafa'a What kind of secrets do they tell, Yazen?

Noura Yazen, look the snow started.

Tareq So, Maryam, do you know who the father is?

Silence.

Noura *makes the sign of the cross, blessing dinner. But, instead of prayer, it's suddenly a tarantella of sound.*

Maryam Does it matter?

Noura The girl's alive. Isn't that / enough?

Maryam I never had a father. I'm what everyone's afraid / of.

Yazen *Afraid of you?*

Maryam *(to Yazen)* Yes. A woman without a guardian. I'm un-restrainable.

Rafa'a Why isn't everyone doing it, having a baby?!

Tareq Then get married.

Rafa'a I might simply father.

Maryam Exactly.

Tareq Why are you so afraid of / marriage?

Maryam *(to Rafa'a)* What's your work?

Rafa'a Obstetrics.

Maryam A doctor. Then they'll let you make decisions for yourself.

Rafa'a And not you?

Maryam Everywhere I go I'm just a scandal.

Yazen I want to sit next to Maryam.

Tareq Alone it's hard, even with two parents / it's hard.

Maryam I didn't have parents.

Tareq Didn't you have twenty mothers, sisters, whatever? No one's alone looking after children in Iraq. Here, you'll pay a college tuition / just for day care.

Noura Together we couldn't afford day care in New York / I tutored

Tareq She had to stop work and tutor from the house, to be with Yazen. Maternal benefits were better under Saddam / than here.

Rafa'a Oh my God, are we praising Saddam / now?

Tareq I work in the E.R. I see how this country works. It's not as charitable / as you think.

Maryam I don't want charity.

Tareq Is the father going to take responsibility?

Maryam Why?

Tareq Does he even know?

Maryam No.

Tareq Oh my God, you didn't tell him?

Maryam It wasn't easy to get pregnant.

Tareq What's that supposed to mean? It wasn't fun?

Maryam It took months for it to work, then it took months to get rid of him.

Silence.

Yazen We could be in our game killing creepers.

Maryam Right, Alex.

Noura It's the language! This dinner in Arabic how different would it be? Circling each other for hours. Gossip thickening underneath each word. In Arabic we wait, we dance, but English doesn't dance, it flies like an arrow.

Tareq Yazen, the wine / please.

Rafa'a This country will make you forget. Make you move / on.

Tareq Yazen . . . Noura It makes me hold on. Maryam, I've been here eight years, still every time I close my eyes I see / violence

Tareq She wants to relive / going over

Noura Like I'm still trying to protect / the people

Tareq Who? You don't have family left there to protect.

Noura She's alive! She was with my aunt when she was killed. And she survived.

We're the only people who survived exactly the same thing. And we're finally together. Who else could possibly understand what we've seen?

Tareq *Habibi*, then let's celebrate /

Noura I am celebrating Maryam.

(To Maryam.) I understand your need for life. Not outside you like an opportunity—inside you, building lungs, building feet, eyes. You needed to make life. Because everything else inside you is—

Maryam Yes.

Silence.

Tareq We have to have another child.

Beal.

Yazen Even the snow is silent.

Noura The loudest silence I have ever heard.

Yazen (*to Maryam*) Did it ever snow in Mosul?

Rafa'a It did when we were young. Not often / but

Maryam Never.

Yazen Have you never been sledding?

Maryam I've never /

Yazen Can we?

Tareq After we eat.

Noura Of course we'll go sledding / with Maryam after we eat!

Tareq You know what's better than winter? Summer!

Yazen When we go sledding, Mom likes to go behind me, never in front. Her laugh is the biggest laugh you have ever heard. And it gets bigger when she goes / down hill.

Noura *gets up to be closer to Maryam leaving the men to talk.*

Tareq (*to Rafa'a*) What was the name of that beach? All-inclusive package, flight, hotel.

Yazen For spring break?

Tareq Just me and Mommy. (*He reaches for Noura.*)

Yazen What?

Rafa'a That's illegal.

Noura (*to Maryam*) We made love during the war—it's all we could do, until Yazen was born.

Tareq We've never been away together. My parents would rise from the grave / if I said I wanted a weekend alone with my wife.

But when we try to be intimate now—I still feel impossibly hungry in ways I can't control. Why now? They don't have words for this.

Maryam PTSD.

Tareq None of us had that until we came here.

Rafa'a We had it, we didn't know it.

Yazen We have PTSD?

Noura No. I'm not reliving a trauma, I can question how we love. Why we mother.

Maryam Me too now. You can't think about it. Don't think about it.

Tareq What?

Maryam Back home.

At the Kurdish border, there was a woman in my tent, we fled so fast, she didn't even have shoes. I told her to sleep. Her kids running crazy all around her. We were half dead, but we were lucky. All of us, praising God we were so lucky. Finally we got water, the minute she closed her eyes, she's screaming "I left!" "I left!"

She's uncontrollable.

We're trying everything. "It's okay, Mama—you left. You're alive. Your children, look at them, everywhere, alive."

"I left Yousif!" she says. "God. God. I left Yousif in his crib. Sleeping. I forgot him. Forgot! Now they have him. *Daesh! Daesh!*"

There is no God. (*To Noura.*) Be glad you can close your eyes at all.

Beal.

Yazen She left her son?

Silence.

Rafa'a We thought it was hell before—

Noura I left. I just left.

Tareq ISIS is a different kind / of awful.

Maryam They're not "ISIS," they're Iraqis!

Tareq They're worse, you know they're worse, Iraq never used / to be

Maryam I don't know what Iraq you're talking about! Everyone's out for themselves, they profit from fear!

Tareq *stands.*

Tareq I feel like dancing. Enough sitting. (*A pop song comes to mind.*) "Shake it off. I shake it off. Shake it / off. I shake it."

Rafa'a It's why most of us left.

Maryam When did you leave?

Rafa'a I became irrelevant. A man delivering babies? I was suddenly taboo.

Maryam But when?

Rafa'a My grandmother was one of the first female O.B.s in Mosul. My mother was an O.B. Then me. I'm just saying, as a man there was room for me to serve. Then the people changed. The middle class turned tribal. I moved.

Tareq And now you're moving again?

Noura What?

Yazen Moving where?

Rafa'a California maybe?

Noura Are you kidding?

Yazen Why?

Tareq Where?

Rafa'a You know, Maryam, I tried leaving them once. They followed me across the world, my two best friends.

Noura (*to Rafa'a*) Can you simply speak it, Rafa'a?

Rafa'a Can you?

Maryam It's in the blood now.

Tareq What is?

Maryam They say Iraqis, are rooted. Not anymore. Now, we're always running.

Yazen We're rooted.

Noura And we ran.

Tareq Nora, we escaped.

Noura No, I ran away.

Tareq (*to Maryam*) She got us here, told militias at the door I was gone, packed our bags / in thirty minutes

Rafa'a What about you, Maryam?

Maryam I saved my own life /

Tareq I held Yazen / she shut the door.

Rafa'a My God!

Yazen You look like my / *nanna*

Rafa'a She's Noura at seventeen.

Tareq Threw her gun in the glove compartment / I drove!

Maryam Forget about it

Yazen Can we go sledding / now?

Maryam I should never have told you that story, it's opened / a door—

Noura It's now! The most beautiful Christmas we ever had. This family, my true family! What if we all stopped running? Tareq screams in his sleep, sometimes we can't even make love. Let the world know! Can it be just that? Spoken of? Rafa'a loves me / that's why he's leaving.

Tareq God, Noura.

Rafa'a Noura.

Noura Can it all be spoken?

It took so long to get here. How many wars? Continents?
I was thinking I had to come to it whole—I didn't
we come with what we carry and it's constructed, salvaged
with what's here, with what's given—
This Christmas table is the fruit of generations of keeping alive

not just the food, it's you, your child, our child—

Did it take Mosul being destroyed to find each other at this table?

Could we have gotten here any other way?

Our survival here is stifling—walls, constant concrete—but we were blown open—
and if you stay in the emptiness just enough, a pattern comes
tangled with the old, but new, new urban tissue
a new pattern of life.

You think you come for the food, you think you're hungry
but really, it's Christmas!

It's the darkest day of the year
like Iraq—

and we come, even in the dark
we circle, believing
something can be born.

I haven't loved any of you for all that you are.

In trying to keep you alive, I forgot.

There are so many days I feel utterly extinct

I fight for what's left.

I have to stop, this once, love perfectly, this table
before we're apart, thrown again
running, running—

Silence.

Yazen Mom?

*Everyone looks at Noura. Noura steps away from the table. As far as she can get.
Maryam follows her.*

Noura I don't know—

Maryam What?

Noura What did you hear?

Maryam I understand.

Noura You do? What did I say?

Maryam We're blessed. And afraid.

Noura Of what? You're not afraid of anything.

Maryam My mother died in childbirth. It's the only thing the nuns would tell me.
So of course, now I'm afraid.

Noura No. That's not. You will not die. The hospitals here have everything.

Maryam This child is the only life I've ever had to hold onto!
I feel like an animal.

Now that I can finally touch what I want, I'm so afraid of death.

Noura Maryam. Birth is the most powerful pain. The only pain you are meant to feel. It is a pain you are equipped for. You are designed for. Do not try to dull it. Feel everything. Remember everything. Hear me, giving birth was my most intense joy. It's your whole body preparing you for every minute of motherhood.

Tareq gets up from the table.

Tareq Nora.

Rafa'a Tareq, I want to leave you all / together.

Tareq Good. Forget it.

Yazen What about Mom's present?

Rafa'a You give it to her, *Habibi*. It has to come from / you.

Tareq Nora.

Rafa'a Maryam, I'm glad I finally got to meet you.

Maryam Yes / glad to meet you.

Tareq Maryam, we'll have you for dinner again soon.

Maryam I'm—oh—yes, of / course.

Noura She barely / ate.

Rafa'a No. Don't go just cause I'm / going.

Noura We were talking.

Tareq Another time. The snow might get / worse.

Rafa'a Noura, Christmas is perfect.

Noura I'm not ready.

Tareq (to Maryam) Later this week?

Maryam Yes, the snow is coming heavily / now.

Noura Your gift! A gift for you.

She rushes to get Maryam's gift, she puts the wrapped necklace into Maryam's hand.

Maryam Thank you, and for dinner. **Yazen** Why is everybody going?

Tareq It's time. Noura needs—

Does Noura try to hand Maryam other presents? A bag of sweets? It's too fast. Too awkward.

Maryam Alex, don't worry, we can keep building in our game.

Maryam follows Rafa'a out.

Noura Maryam.

Scene Eleven

Silence.

Tareq Alex, how about you go to your room for a bit. Do your PlayStation.

Yazen exits.

Silence.

Noura goes to the table.

Tareq Leave the mess. It's OK. Let's stay messy.

Silence.

You're right. We're not just surviving anymore. We're not dead.

Silence.

God, let's just get away together.

He stands, arms outstretched.

Let's take a dance class!

He flirts. Just a subtle movement in his shoulder suggests . . .

Anything is possible.

He suddenly remembers something.

Tareq Nora I have your gift! We all got it for you and it wasn't last minute, it took months, years of planning!

He hands her the hard drive Yazen wrapped in a jewelry box.

Something to inspire you.

She smiles. Looks at the package. So small it must be jewelry.

Noura In a minute.

She puts it down on the table.

Tareq What's eating you? I knew about Rafa'a, I don't care, I trust us. God, what's in you ready to explode? I want it. Is it in your heart? Where's my wife?

They are on the verge of something explosive and powerful.

Noura I have to have a cigarette.

It's only one. Please. Don't get on me.

She steps outside.

Tareq You really know how to kill a moment, Nora.

A long silence.

Tareq talking to her from inside.

Tareq I don't want you sending that *qah beh* any more money.

Noura Let me finish this one / cigarette.

Tareq All that you did to give her a new life and she throws it away, like every American girl sleeping her way through college. Let her fend / for herself.

Noura She deserves a chance / she works hard.

Tareq She's arrogant, why are you defending her?

Noura She's bright, her professors / moved her up a year.

Tareq What does it matter how bright she is? She's not smart enough to keep her legs together. I won't support / her.

Noura We can help her, the baby. They could spend / summers here.

Tareq I don't understand you. You took it into your head you were going to save an Iraqi orphan. You've been sending money to the convent for how long now?

Noura I told you I was supporting / the education of

Tareq She wanted to get pregnant? No one was watching her for the first time in her life. Of course she doesn't know who the father is, she should have saved everyone the trouble. Most of all her tortured kid.

Noura Why can't she want a child?

Tareq When you're a twenty-year-old orphan running from medieval madmen, whisked off to an American university, the last thing you want is a burden.

Noura *brings her cigarette inside.*

Noura I've never heard you so spiteful.

Tareq She has a hold on you. I hate seeing you attached. To someone I don't trust, she could hurt you.

Noura How can this girl hurt me?

Tareq Pick another orphan to save. Fly over to the refugee camps. Three-year-old girls being sold as brides? Help a baby. Doesn't have to be this slut.

Noura Stop with that word.

Tareq We have to protect ourselves. She's a stranger. All we know about her is her behavior, not her parents, her lineage.

Noura We are not in Iraq any more fearing if we are going to get kidnapped or sold by our neighbors. Sadly, she wants nothing from me.

Tareq Then let her go.

Noura I won't.

Tareq You have to.

Noura I think she's brave / fearless.

Tareq For sleeping around?

Noura For keeping her child.

Tareq By herself? Better not to be born. Her mother should have done the same.

Noura *Shame.* I am sick of it. We are so unforgiving. It's the worst of who we are. If she is shameful I am more so.

Tareq Stop.

Noura We made love before we were married.

Tareq Stop, Alex / will hear.

Noura Are we ashamed now? Two middle-aged parents talking after twenty years of marriage? You think at his age he isn't talking with his friends about sex? They see more on their phones than I've seen my whole life.

Tareq Stop talking, Noura.

Noura I can't. I'm confused, by how much you seem to hate this girl, this woman who walked into our house today. So, she's pregnant, so what? It's Christmas. We can't feed a refugee? She's from Mosul, I have nothing left in all of Mosul. You work at a hospital, for God sakes everyday you help broken people, addicts, crazies, whole bodies cut open in front of you, and you can't be in the room with immorality? Because she doesn't act helpless? Or embarrassed for not being a virgin? I wasn't a virgin / and you married me.

Tareq You were too easy. I think about it still.

Noura I've never touched another man in my life. We were promised from seventeen. I have love letters you wrote to me when you were fifteen.

Tareq You were supposed to reject me.

Noura What do you mean? My father agreed to it before he died—you begged me to marry / you.

Tareq You were supposed to reject my advances.

Noura After we were engaged? Reject what?

Tareq Every man is expected to try. Women are required to reject, to show the strength of their chastity.

Noura You begged to kiss me every day. I did reject you.

Tareq Until you didn't.

Noura You begged to make love to me as a test? At seventeen years old I failed your morality test? Am I supposed to never be stronger than you—only in my sexual restraint?

Tareq You've never been restrained. Not once in your life.

You don't even wait for me to make advances. It's belittling.

The way you moved was like you'd been taught. You could have faked it. No wonder I've been unable . . .

Noura Belittling?

Tareq I have never reconciled what you are. What you want.

Noura What am I?

Tareq I don't know.

God, I can hear myself, I sound awful, conservative. But when did you depend on me for anything? Do you ever need me?

You're impenetrable. Either completely silent, or digging up the darkest, I can't keep reliving.

Have I ever, once, behaved like you? The way you express yourself, you never think of the consequences.

I knew you didn't have a mother to teach you. Of course, I wanted to marry you, I was always going to marry you, but didn't everything change when we made love? You practically ran away in shame.

Noura I didn't run away.

Tareq I wanted to protect you.

Oh my God, how did we survive in Iraq? Shame around every corner. It was a long engagement, your father was dying, you went back to Mosul, I stayed in Baghdad, you were back and forth, five years, for university, your father died—it was a long engagement—and in that time I forgave / you.

Noura Forgave me what? Am I a slut if I show you any affection whatsoever?

Tareq That is not what I said.

Noura It's my true nature!

Tareq Don't make up this horrible scenario—

Noura Am I supposed to not be in love with my husband?

You didn't seem to hate it so much all these years. Making love to your wife. Now I know how disgusted you are on the inside.

Tareq That is not what I said. I love you! My God, you didn't hear me, I forgave you and I love you anyway / but

Noura But I am not honorable?

Tareq No you are not.

Silence.

Where does Noura go now? Outside? How can she find the furthest corner of the space?

Tareq You are always pushing me back there.

I encourage you to get a better job, take your A.R.E., you turn me away. I say okay, don't work, take a dance class—you refuse. Whatever I want, you want something else. Look at this place—how many years and there's still no couch?

You wanted to leave Iraq, I didn't. Now we're here, I am moving forward, you're moving, I don't know, you make no friends, only on Facebook—sometimes you're more Christian, more Iraqi. Noura, if we stayed we would be dead.

I refuse to continue to feel guilty about leaving. You lost everything, your department, your job. Death threats at the hospital, a bullet with my name on it.

I didn't want to go, but once I did, I walked away forever. And I chose to move forward, just us.

He tries to hold her.

I chose us.

He moves to kiss her, hold her.

Noura I'm confused. You want me to kiss you back?

They are utterly honest.

I'm not honorable? After twenty years of marriage?

Tareq I'm sorry. Everything hurts. I left too, every memory, my books, my practice, my—

This girl winds me up, she reminds / me

Noura Of what? Of me?

Tareq No. She reminds me how far Iraq has disintegrated. When did we become a nation of tribal, selfish, fucking individuals? It's not her sexuality. It's that she doesn't need anyone. Her idea of family is fatherless? What about the other half? Am I not a good father?

It's the most vulnerable of questions.

I'm tired of feeling ashamed for being an Arab. For being a man.

The day I changed my name. Iraq was finally behind me.

Silence.

Noura We changed our names, to make them safe and pronounceable and reliable. We're losing too much / we're losing each other.

Tareq You don't need me as much as I need you.

Noura You're not wrong, I was ready, at seventeen, ready to make love and I didn't feel you testing me, I felt you loving me with a desperation, like I was your lifeline and you were mine. / I did need you.

Tareq You know what I see when I close my eyes? Body parts by the bag full. I can't tell where one limb begins and another one ends, who even belongs to which body part, we would race to match parts with charred / clothes.

Noura I knew that, I wanted to be strong / for you.

Tareq But if I saved a child's limb, they lost their parent instead. Saving is a sick negotiation.

Noura Yes, and I knew I would spend every day protecting you because you trusted me too with your virginity, your vulnerability. Tareq, I have never seen shame in that night because from it came so much. From it, what was born of / it was

Tareq Was what?

Noura Let me speak / it.

Tareq When I wake up screaming, the nightmare is you wheeled into the hospital, Yazen so new, so small in your arms. And I have to choose between my wife and my son. The hospital, the whole country whispers down my spine, "the child, you are responsible to save your son!" But in my nightmare, I am selfish. I let him die and never tell you. And a father who doesn't protect his child is a monster.

Beat.

Noura I know that nightmare.

Tareq What do you mean?

Noura You hate this girl because I love her?

Tareq Do you love her?

Noura Like a mother.

Tareq Why? You just met her.

Noura I'm attached to her.

Tareq Well, she is not attached to you.

Maryam enters.

Scene Twelve

Maryam Noura.

Tareq and Noura stunned.

Tareq Okay.

Noura *Ya Maryam!* Come in. Dear, sit. Please—

Maryam I got all the way to the subway, I didn't even feel the cold, the snow was so beautiful. Then I opened your present—

She interrupts herself, holding out a necklace in her hand.

Noura, I can't accept this.

She tries to hand Noura back the necklace.

Noura Maryam, we can have tea now / all of us talk.

Maryam I appreciate you're trying to do something kind for a fellow Iraqi / but

Noura It's small, from my / mother.

Maryam I'm not having a girl / and I don't believe

Noura It wasn't for the baby / Maryam

Maryam I just don't want anything to change how I relate to my child!

Noura It was for you.

Maryam puts the necklace firmly on the table.

Tareq How old are you?

Maryam I don't even know.

Noura She's twenty-six.

Maryam What?

Everyone looks at Noura. Deafening silence.

Noura You were born January, eighteen, 11:08 a.m. It was the coldest day on record in Mosul. I brushed snow from your cheek. You didn't feel the cold, even then.

Endless silence.

Maryam goes to exit.

Noura You're leaving?

Maryam Just stop! It's better if we don't talk anymore. Better for both of us.

Noura I would like to know you /

Maryam No.

Noura Your child.

Maryam Don't.

She is gone.

Scene Thirteen

Silence. Not even the sound of breathing. Nobody can speak. Noura is in physical pain, she tries to stay standing. Tareq, same. The silence goes on forever. Maybe they're not going to say anything about it ever again. Then simultaneously:

Noura You had to see her.

Tareq Noura.

Noura Would any of us know our own child if we passed them on the street? I thought of that every time I saw a girl. Dark, light, they were all her, all / ours.

Tareq Ours, Maryam?

Noura Yes.

Tareq God, Noura, what . . . ?

Noura What kind of mother abandons her child before the milk comes in?

Tareq Noura, what did you think was going to happen today?

Noura It was a chance / to

Tareq To what?

Noura Should I have left my dying father? You? To raise her in a village somewhere? The stigma on her worse than that of an orphan? The stigma on you? I would have ruined your family.

Tareq What about today, Noura?

Noura It was her or you. Am I a monster for choosing you? The whole country whispered down my spine to give her up.
We have a daughter.

Tareq Stop. Just because it's true doesn't mean you speak it.

Noura I was sure after we were married I could bring her back. We both so wanted a girl. But the war, you insisted after Yazen, no more children.

Tareq So you kept it? Twenty-six years a secret?

Noura The nuns came and took her from my arms. I didn't even name her. I was silent. *Silent.*

Tareq I can't. You did the only thing you could do.

Noura I could have done more. Did I never think of leaving? Just take / her

Tareq Where? You did more than what's expected—most women have an abortion.

Silence.

Noura Is that what you would have wanted?

Tareq I don't know. I would have married you anyway.

Noura You pity me?

Tareq *goes to comfort her.*

Noura Stop. It makes me feel small. Don't look at me like I'm a victim.

Tareq Nobody left that country in one piece. If you need help, there is therapy, even the church, fine, you can heal / from this, Noura.

Noura I am not a victim, Tareq, I am a coward.

Tareq You couldn't help it.

Noura For how long can we blame our situation? I gave up our child. Yazen's sister.

Tareq What could / you do?

Noura You have a daughter. What do you feel?

Tareq Noura, this is acute. There isn't time right now to feel.

Noura I've just lost the one woman who could have been mine!

She wants nothing to do with a woman like me. What does that say about me?

If we were not silent, my God, what might we be?

She goes for her coat and purse.

I've never been restrained? I never think of the consequences?

Every day I worked to get her back.

To go home.

Iraq is not home anymore.

What little I carry

from as far back as Babylon

I've already given to Yazen, to Maryam

and to our grandchild, my blood, that's all that's left

the rest is gone. Gone.

Millions and millions of people are flooding out with nothing

they're leaving behind the beginning of time

leaving houses and libraries and languages older than Aramaic.

No wonder so many of us are drowning.

the responsibility is impossible to bear

it's the weight of being erased

of not belonging anymore. Anywhere.

She goes to leave. Snow begins to fall in the house. Over the furniture. The Christmas tree. Through the empty walls. She sees it clearly, like a mystic in rapture.

Oh Blessed Mary—

I'm so angry. All the time. Every day I try to do the right thing and it's wrong? Was it wrong?

I had a life! Endless love, endless cousins, neighbors, but did I ever have a private thought to wonder who I was? Twenty-six years I've lived in exile from myself.

Maybe it had to be violent? To wake me up?

What if America did a good thing?

Ripping us apart without thought—that was our chance—internet, cell phones, all of us, even your grandmother on Facebook looking for words to express herself! I wanted to rebuild Iraq! I wanted to be part of something! Three thousand years of culture destroyed and what did I do? Tareq?

Tareq Noura you have to move / on.

Noura How strong? How flexible to have survived together since the beginning of time, until now? Now? A woman without a desk?

Tareq You're killing / yourself.

Noura Do we live for each other or for ourselves? I need a country in between.

Tareq What are you talking about?

Noura I don't know.

She stands on the table, reaches for the snow.

Tareq What are you doing?

Noura I don't know.

Beat.

Yazen!

Tareq Are you kidding?

Noura I don't want to take a dance class. It's not an opportunity I'm looking for. I need a sacrament, for exile. You want me to move on? I am moving on.

Tareq Not like this!

Noura Yazen!

Tareq *Ah 'hehki. En 'ti Mait'ya Men-El-Jou'e. Khal 'ini Aw 'wah 'kel'ki.*

Noura I'm not hungry.

Tareq You didn't eat.

Noura I did.

Tareq I was watching you.

Noura What I need is not at the table.

Tareq gathers food for her fast. Yazen enters in snow pants, carrying a sled.

Yazen This place is a mess! Oh my God, Mom?!

Noura gets down. Who she is meant to be necessitates leaving. But Yazen is everything. She stands between worlds, pulled to the point of breaking.

Tareq Yazen, do something about it for your mother!

Yazen OK. But then, we're going sledding. The snow is NOW!

Noura Yazen, I don't know how to tell / you what I've

Tareq Yazen, the present / for your mother.

Yazen Mom you didn't even open your present! It's the biggest surprise of your life!

Noura Not now, Yazen, there's something I want to tell / you

Tareq *desperately offers Noura a plate of food.*

Tareq I haven't seen you sit down this whole time. Will you sit please?

Noura I can't sit.

Yazen Mom, you look hungry, just eat so we can go /

Tareq No one's going! Let me feed you Noura. Let me offer what I am.

Noura Alex! There's something you need to know.

Tareq How Noura? How?

Noura Let me find it—

Yazen Mom, the snow is perfect now.

Noura I—

Silence.

I don't know how to let go and hold on at the same—

Silence.

Resolve.

Blackout

Production Notes

Al Naqqar is both Noura's surname and a reference to the profession of her grandfather and great-grandfathers. It refers to someone who excavates stones in a quarry, cutting them for use in the construction of homes and other buildings. It can also mean the art of engraving or carving of the stones themselves. Mosul is famous for a certain type of marble with which Noura's family worked as marble carvers and builders.

Tareq refers to himself as an Arab in the line, "I am tired of feeling ashamed for being an Arab, for being a man." While many Christian Iraqis of both Chaldean and Assyrian descent do not refer to themselves as ethnically Arab, some Iraqi Christians of a certain age and education who live in cosmopolitan areas considered themselves Arabized. Tariq's line is of course playing upon the tense relationship to being seen as an Arab man in contemporary America. However, with this line he is also challenging Noura's ideological relationship to her literal identity versus the more inclusive identity in which she was raised. It could also be a call to the tension between his Baghdadi Christian identity and her Mouslawi Christian identity.

It must be said that Noura and Tariq have a deep and connected marriage in which they love each other profoundly. Their marriage is knit together with an ancient sense of shared history and yet filled with a modern understanding of commitment, choice, and shared roles. This was not an arranged marriage and Tariq cannot be interpreted as repressive or misogynistic. The reveal of his innermost fears must remain fluid and vulnerable. He is in pursuit of greater intimacy with Noura and ultimately is trying to share his most honest self with her.

Glossary of Arabic Terms and Phrases

A'ā Yes.

Adh' yahna Arabic for "Our babies."

Ah'hebki (feminine) Arabic for "I love you."

Al Khansa Literally "gazelle" in Arabic. Also, the nom de plume of a female poetess and contemporary of the Prophet Mohammad who wrote *Al Muallaqat* poems (considered the best poems of the pre-Islamic era). The Prophet Mohammad enjoyed her poetry and asked her to recite her words at his gatherings. She is also known as "Umm Al Shuhada" or "Mother of Martyrs" since her poetry focuses on grief, loss, and praise of those who die in battle.

Ammu Uncle.

Ani Hamel Arabic for "I'm pregnant."

Amni Khalsani Arabic for "I'm done" or "I'm sick."

Aou'jat'na Arabic for "Our streets."

Baba Father.

Beh'el'ufah Arabic for "You're welcome."

Bismullah. Il Rahman al Rahim. Arabic for "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." It is the opening phrase in the first chapter of the Holy Quran.

Chal Chal A verb in Iraqi dialect (*kalkala* in classical Arabic) meaning "to engulf."

Che Mali Wali A traditional Iraqi song whose title is translated as "Because I Have no Ruler/Protector."

Claecha/Ek'leecha Traditional Iraqi cookies with date filling made during the holidays.

Dolma/Doul'mah Rice stuffed vegetables including onion skins and vine leaves.

Elhamdullah ya bini Arabic for "Thank God, my daughter." Can be said to a relative or non-relative.

En'ti Mai'ta Mer-El-Jou'e (feminine) Arabic for "You're dying of hunger."

Ei'yadh'ahlee Arabic for "Do me the honor."

Ghada Tomorrow.

Habitit/Habibti Darling or sweetheart (male/female).

Haram "Sin" or "forbidden." Can also be used to mean "what a pity."

Ha'ha Eeb Arabic for "It's shameful."

Hi Khetheh Arabic for "It's a lie."

Hisar Embargo.

Huda A woman's name meaning "God's way," "enlightenment," or "the way."

Il-Hamdu Lillah "Praise be to God" or "Thank God."

Il-Mawt Yilwig Il-Ghub An Iraqi proverb meaning "Death burns the heart."

Joeh'reen'na Arabic for "Our neighbors."

Jidu Arabic for "Grandfather."

Kam El-Maf'oudh El'sa'qouda El-Dhe'fi Arabic for "She should have an abortion?"

Khal'tini Aw'wah'kel'ki (feminine) Arabic for "Let me feed you."

Kibbi/Kib beh/Kubba A traditional appetizer made of ground lamb and bulgur wheat, stuffed with parsley and onion. It is shaped into an oval and fried.

Kunya An honorific term used to refer to parents relating to their first-born son.

La No.

La lla ha lla Allah An Arabic phrase meaning "there is no God but God."

Mac'loubi An "upside down" chicken and rice dish containing stewed meat, rice, and fried vegetables.

Mah'Ag'der Arabic for "I can't."

Mashallah/Ma-Sha'Allah Arabic phrase meaning "God has willed it." It is also used as an expression of joy, praise, or thankfulness.

Nanna "Grandmother" or "Granny."

Numu Arabic word for "Baby." Also means a person full of light or happiness.

Pacha/Pacha A traditional Iraqi dish made from sheep's head, stomach, and trotters. The parts are boiled and eaten with bread. Also known as boiled sheep's head, with the cooked sheep's head served atop the dish.

Qah'beh Arabic pejorative for "Whore."

Qif Stop.

Rah Ten'Qat'il Arabic for "She'll be killed."

Sammura A term of endearment which means "good companion" or "conversation partner."

Samoon A popular flatbread from Iraq made with whole grains and sesame seeds.

Sheikh A tribal elder.

Shem'magh Keffeya A traditional Arab scarf. "Shem'magh" is the Iraqi word for the garment.

Shlonich "How are you?" in Iraqi dialect. Literally translated it means "what color are you?"

Shukran Arabic for "Thank you."

Sud'deq Arabic for "Honestly" or "Really."

Ta'ial Come here.

Thoula Arabic for "Fool."

Tis'ah Nine.

Umma "Mother of."

Wayn Allah? "Where is God?"

Ya Waylee An Arabic lament meaning "Woe unto me."

Yabni Arabic for "My son."

Yaboo A call of tragedy or disaster.

Ya'ini "I mean."

Yallah/Yah'lla Arabic for "Come on!" or "Let's go!"

Youn Ruddi "Mother answer me."

Yumma "Mommy."

Yumma Weledi An Arabic lament meaning "Oh my little one."