

Nermina Kurspahić

## **CONSEQUENCES**

**A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS**

**Translated from the Bosnian by Valida Hadzimuratovic-Carroll**

**Revised and adapted for the American stage by H.B.J. Clifford**

## **Cast of Characters**

### *At the Muslim cemetery:*

**ZUHRA**, often called “Zu,” a spirited young woman in her late twenties, employed as a translator and interpreter

**AKI**, a man of middle years, clever but not strong; a “merchant” with friends in high and low places

**WOMAN MOURNER**, about 60 years old

**MUSLIM PRIEST**, celebrant of a memorial service

**MEN AND WOMEN**, mourners at the cemetery

### *At the country house:*

**MOTHER**, in her early sixties, grandmother of **MALIK**

**UNCLE**, her brother-in-law, the widower of **MOTHER**'s late sister. He is a man in his late sixties, whose son Vedo lives in Australia with his own wife and children.

**MALIK**, a troubled 18-year old boy, **MOTHER**'s grandson, and **ZUHRA**'s nephew

**ADA**, a young woman, a medical doctor, and **ZUHRA**'s best friend

### *At the restaurant:*

**FRENCHY**, a bureaucrat on assignment from U.N. headquarters; close to **ZUHRA**

**JASNA**, a horticulturalist, close friend of **ZUHRA** and wife of **KASIM**

**KASIM**, a medical doctor, husband of **JASNA**

Two **WAITERS**

### *At the first nightclub, an upscale watering-hole:*

**DANNY**, a student from Vienna, on an extended holiday

**NECA**

**LEJLA**

**SANELA**

**SENO**

and

**NINO**

**BARTENDER**

**NIGHTCLUB MANAGER**

} Girls in their twenties, **DANNY**'s guests and fashionista wanna-bes

} Young men in their late teens and early twenties, friends of **MALIK**'s

### *At the second nightclub, a less upscale establishment:*

**NIGHTCLUB OWNER**, a well-fed mid-level gangster type in his mid-forties

**GENTLEMAN**, older, with political and military connections

**WAITRESS**, who doubles as a pole-dancer

**ROCCO**, a middle-aged man with a short fuse

Two **POLE DANCERS**, young, female, and extremely athletic

*“Words have meanings, and actions have consequences.”*

– Proverb

**ACT ONE**

**Scene 1**

*EXTERIOR: A Muslim cemetery in the town of Kovachi in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a year or two before the present day. DAY, under an overcast early-afternoon sky. About thirty people, more men than women, are standing among the white tombstones. Some of the women are wearing headscarves. MUSLIM PRAYERS (“fatiha”) and CRYING are heard. A middle-aged MUSLIM PRIEST, wearing traditional ceremonial clothing, stands upstage right on a small rise, in a subtle yellow spotlight, surrounded by a group of men.*

MUSLIM PRIEST

A prayer, now, for our sons and daughters. May Allah grant them eternal Paradise.  
And may Allah grant us patience, and teach us to forgive. Not to forget, but to forgive.

*As he speaks, AKI enters from stage right and joins the group of men  
around the MUSLIM PRIEST, standing slightly apart from them.*

*The MUSLIM PRIEST continues.*

We must make peace with our neighbors We must look beyond our past, because the future,  
we will have to live with our neighbors.

*His words and the spotlight on him fade as the CHIRPING of a cell phone is heard. A second spotlight comes up, this one on a ZUHRA, standing at the edge of the crowd downstage left. She is formally dressed in a long dark-blue coat, black leather gloves, and black leather high-heeled boots. She is wearing dark sunglasses and a wide-brimmed dark-blue suede hat instead of a headscarf. She unclips the cell phone from her large leather shoulder bag and flips it open. Meanwhile, at the sound of the phone, AKI detaches himself from the downstage left side of the crowd of men around the MUSLIM PRIEST and crosses downstage to a position just upstage of ZUHRA, who is speaking into her phone.*

ZUHRA

*(annoyed)*

What is it? No. No, I can't talk now.

*(pause)*

No, it can't. I told you. You'll have to do it alone.

I'll call you later.

*She flips the phone shut and is clipping it back onto her shoulder bag when AKI, approaching from behind, takes her by the elbow. She spins around, startled, as he addresses her with an ingratiating grin.*

AKI

Why, there you are, Zu! Where have you been, my dear?

ZUHRA

*(glares at him with contempt)*

If you can't say something original, don't say anything.

You could poison someone with all the stupidity that comes out of your mouth.

AKI

*(chuckling, unaffected)*

Well, it won't hurt you. You've got more venom than a pitful of vipers.

ZUHRA

Don't waste my time. What do you want?

*As they speak, the group around the MUSLIM PRIEST dissolves. The MUSLIM PRIEST, the men around him, and the other people in the cemetery separate. A few men and women drift among the tombstones, while the others EXIT upstage left and right.*

AKI

Nothing at all, my dear. We're in the same boat.

My brother's buried here, you know.

ZUHRA

Then why didn't you didn't get here earlier?

*(glancing upstage)*

The ceremony's over.

AKI

By God, you're a fine one to be giving advice! Why weren't you up there?

Why are you standing here all by yourself?

ZUHRA

*(angrily)*

Shut up! I don't have to explain myself to cowards – or war profiteers.

AKI

No need to be insulting. What's got your panties in a knot today?

*ZUHRA turns away from him. She digs a cigarette case  
and a lighter out of her shoulder bag and lights a cigarette.*

ZUHRA

*(inhaling deeply, then exhaling a long stream of smoke, visibly calmer)*

What the hell do you think? I –

*She stops suddenly, apparently remembering something.*

What time is it?

*Aki glances at the watch on his right wrist. Shakes it. Curses.*

AKI

Fuck this watch.

ZUHRA

Now what? Don't tell me you've forgotten how to tell time.

AKI

Don't be an idiot. My watch has stopped.

*(gesturing broadly behind them and toward the sky, with his right hand)*

Does this look like seven to you – morning or evening?

ZUHRA

*(peering at his wrist)*

Is that the one you were bragging about?

The Rolex you stole from that American?

AKI

Yes, my new Rolex. He was showing it off all night long.

Here, take a look...

*He takes off the watch and hands it to her.*

*ZUHRA takes the watch from him and turns the flexible band inside out,*

*peering at the back of the case. Then, abruptly, she laughs harshly.*

ZUHRA

God, how naïve can you get!

*(she hands him the watch, still turned inside out)*

Or have you forgotten how to read English? “*Made in Taiwan.*”

Whatever were you thinking?

*ZUHRA goes on laughing through AKI's reaction.*

AKI

That cheap motherfucker! He's rolling in cash but he can't even afford a real Rolex.

ZUHRA

So what? You and your crew can always sell him a real Bosnian!

Bosnian art, jewelry, rugs, clothing... anything he wants.  
All genuine, all bought by you, dead cheap, from our poor.

AKI

Our poor don't need genuine anything. Except maybe genuine bread.

ZUHRA

*(coldly)*

Your empathy for the needy is breathtaking. Long live socialism! Thanks to you and your "humanitarian projects" hunger's been disappearing almost as fast as Bosnian art. I don't know what we'd do without you. Wait to die of natural causes, probably. Or be murdered by the *chetniks*

AKI

*(angrily)*

Don't talk to me about the *chetniks*! I fought against them... and –  
*(glancing behind him at the cemetery's white tombstones)*  
– you know they killed my brother.

ZUHRA

But since then you've made your peace with them.  
As far as I can see, you all seem to get along just fine.

AKI

It's strictly business. We're not friends. We just... cooperate.  
*(shrugging)*

What can you do, that's the luck of the draw.

ZUHRA

Luck? No. You always have a choice... But I'm wasting my breath.  
You've already made your choice.

AKI

*(conciliatory)*

Zuhra. Zu. Listen to me. I'm trying to survive, that's all.

*(pause; then, suggestively)*

These jobs – there could be something in them for you too, you know.

ZUHRA

I'm not interested in these jobs. Any of them. You know what I need.

AKI

I know, I know. I'm working on it. But I need another installment.

You know how it is. Everyone wants it up front.

ZU

*ZUHRA reaches into her bag and brings out a wad of currency.*

*Without looking at AKI, she hands him the money.*

ZUHRA

Here. You'll get the rest when the job's done.

And don't even think about screwing me over.

That would be really dumb, even for you.

AKI

*(pocketing the cash and stepping away from her)*

Don't worry, my dear. Don't worry about a thing.

ZUHRA

I'm... dead serious.

AKI

*(moving farther away)*

All right. I got it. Don't worry...

*AKI EXITS* rapidly, stage right. In the background, the few remaining people are leaving the cemetery. *ZUHRA* stands alone, smoking, watching them go. Then, when almost all of the mourners have gone, she approaches the tombstones, stopping at two located close together upstage center. She takes off her dark sunglasses and caresses each of the stones. Then, suddenly, she falls to her knees between them.

ZUHRA

*(softly, suppressing her sobs)*

I miss you. I miss you so much!

*An older WOMAN MOURNER* appears from behind one of the tombstones.

*ZUHRA*, startled, gets hastily to her feet and puts her sunglasses back on.

WOMAN MOURNER

Did I frighten you, my dear? I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to.

ZUHRA

It's – it's all right. I – I just drifted away for a moment.

WOMAN MOURNER

*(smiling sadly)*

And how could you not?

Sometimes I don't even know if I'm dead or alive any more...

*They stand in silence for a moment.*

*Then the WOMAN MOURNER* nods toward the tombstones.

WOMAN MOURNER

Who are they? Your husband, and...?

ZUHRA

No. My – my brother, and my best friend...

WOMAN MOURNER

What can we women do? This is our fate.

*(sighs heavily)*

You know, all of my men are here. My husband, my brothers, my sons.

It's just me, now — me and these six empty spots in my heart.

ZUHRA

*(taking the WOMAN MOURNER's hand)*

I'm so sorry. It must be so hard for you.

WOMAN MOURNER

It's hard, yes. But it could be worse.

ZUHRA

Worse? What could possibly be worse than this?

WOMAN MOURNER

The fires of hell, and eternal suffering in the afterlife.

ZUHRA

*(taken aback)*

Oh. I see. But – what about *this* life? Every horrible thing, and the people who did them, and who are still doing them. The murderers

*(she motions towards the tombstones)*

and the collaborators and all the rest of them – what about *them*??

WOMAN MOURNER

They'll all be held accountable for what they've done.

In Hell's fires. For all time.

ZUHRA

*(mistrustfully, more a statement than a question)*

How can you be so sure?

WOMAN MOURNER

Allah is all-knowing and all-seeing.

He rewards good with good, and bad with bad. He will judge them all.

ZUHRA

I'd like to believe that. But... It's not enough.

*ZUHRA turns away and leaves.*

WOMAN MOURNER

*(staring after ZUHRA, but speaking more to herself)*

May Allah have mercy upon you, my child.

**End of Scene 1**

## Scene 2

*A war-damaged country house. INTERIOR. It is clear that the house was once beautiful and comfortable. The walls of the sitting room show bare oblongs where paintings once hung. A rug, once beautiful but now threadbare, is centered on the parquetry floor. The room contains a few antique side chairs, tables, armoires, and an elegant sideboard with ormolu trim. A tapestry-upholstered armchair and ottoman sit downstage right, and there is a pair of armchairs in front of a set of French doors upstage center, through which the remains of a once-beautiful garden can be seen. An older lady, MOTHER, is sitting in one of the armchairs. Her clothes are simple and plain, and her hair is worn informally, but a suggestion of former beauty and elegance is present in her manner and bearing. However, the air she projects most strongly is one of distraction, with more than a hint of a disconnect from consensual reality. UNCLE, a man of similar age, is sitting in the other armchair, which is set at an angle to MOTHER's chair. Although poorly dressed, he conveys a strong impression of gravity, authority, and old-fashioned courtliness.*

MOTHER

*(anxiously)*

Where is she, then? She should've been here by now.

UNCLE

There, there, my dear. You know how far she's coming from.

It takes time. And the shooting has stopped, so there's no need to worry.

MOTHER

I just hope nothing's happened to her...

Look and see; maybe she's there already, coming up our lane...

*UNCLE gets up and opens the French doors, placing a comforting hand on MOTHER's shoulder as he passes by. He takes half a step outside.*

UNCLE

Here, you come and see, too.  
She's not here yet, but she will be any minute now.

MOTHER

*(turning around in her chair to face him)*

But how do you know?

UNCLE

I just know. That's the way it is.  
You'll see – just as I sit down she'll come through that door.

MOTHER

*(increasingly alarmed)*

How can you be so sure? You don't know what's going to happen!

You can never be sure she'll come back.

That's how it was with – with *them* as well.

*(she sobs)*

UNCLE

*(tenderly)*

Come now... Don't mention that. It was a different time. We were at war.

MOTHER

*(nervously)*

And we're not at war now?

UNCLE

No, my dear. We're not at war.  
People aren't being killed. People do come back.

MOTHER

Will *they* come back too? Will they?

UNCLE

*(gently)*

No, not *them*. You know they won't.

MOTHER

*(confused)*

I don't know that. I don't know anything anymore.

Except this: I know that anyone who's ever gone out has never yet come back.

UNCLE

Now, my dear. That just isn't so. Look at me, for example.

I went out two months ago. Me, do you remember?

And I came back in a half an hour. And look at Zu.

She leaves every day and still comes back. Malik, too.

Sometimes he comes back right after school.

MOTHER

If only she would come! Go look again, won't you please?

UNCLE

*(shaking his head)*

She'll get here when she gets here. Until then . . . *(abruptly changing the subject)*

Did I mention I got a letter from Vedo?

*UNCLE takes a worn and much-creased letter*

*from the inside pocket of his suit coat.*

UNCLE *(continuing)*

Look here. He says they're doing well, out there in Australia. He and his wife are working at a hotel. He says that in a year's time he'll have a very responsible position. Imagine that! That man he's working for has a chain of hotels, and they're all connected to each other by computers. He promised to give Vedo the job of looking after all of those computers. Just

think of it! And here, he was on the waiting list for that job forever . . . See, he sent us some pictures . . .

*UNCLE shows MOTHER the photos.*

UNCLE

Here they are in front of the hotel. See what a handsome building it is!

That's where they're living just now.

But next year they're going to buy a house of their own . . .

*UNCLE brings the photos closer to MOTHER, fanning them out right under her nose.*

UNCLE

See how my grandchildren have grown! They're going to school now...

MOTHER

*(distractedly)*

If only they'd come back.

*UNCLE moves the photos away from her, wrapping them carefully in the letter and putting the packet back into his inside coat pocket.*

UNCLE

Listen to me. You can't go on so about this. They had to leave.

And you should go out once in a while, too. It would do you good.

You remember what the doctor said? A nice walk and some fresh air,  
even a little bit of it, would be just the ticket.

We could go to the Bosna River Springs. You remember how pretty it is there?

All that water, the trees, the green growing things...

MOTHER

*(dully)*

Maybe it's gone now.

UNCLE

Gone? Whatever do you mean? I saw it on the television.

You did too, just the other day...

The river is still flowing, and the park and the trees are all still there.

MOTHER

Maybe those were old films, and they're just showing them now to fool us.

UNCLE

*(visibly annoyed)*

Old films? I think not. People were there for the May Day Celebration.

You saw it with your very own eyes.

MOTHER

I don't believe it still looks like that.

UNCLE

*(increasingly frustrated)*

What don't you believe? That the water still flows?

That the trees still stand tall? Or that the grass is still green?

MOTHER

I don't believe there were that many people there.

I don't believe anything any more.

UNCLE

*(crossing to MOTHER and speaking in a conciliatory tone)*

Very well, then. We don't have to go to the River Springs.

We can just sit right here in our own garden.

Do you remember how we used to spend hours and hours in it?

You and me, and Zu and Haris and Ada . . . even Hamo.

*UNCLE moves to a position behind MOTHER's armchair  
and looks out through the French doors into the garden.*

UNCLE

*(continuing)*

Please come out and see. Your roses have all gone quite wild.  
And do you remember how, before the war, you used to bedevil us all  
with your demands for new slips and seedlings?  
Before he died, Hamo tried to bring you some all the way from England.  
Those slips and seedlings almost got him arrested at the airport in Zagreb...

MOTHER

*(firmly)*

Hamo did not die.

UNCLE

*(sighing heavily)*

Here we go again... How many times have we gone over this?  
A thousand times, two thousand, a hundred thousand...

MOTHER

*(looking up suddenly)*

A million! And I still don't believe he's dead!  
He left to go to Grbavica that day and he said he would be back.  
He always does what he says he's going to do, and –  
and that's what he's going to do!

UNCLE

This is maddening. Listen to me.  
Hamo went to Grbavica that day to pick up some papers from Haris' apartment.  
You know that. And you know the *chetniks* blockaded Grbavica that day.  
Many of the people who were unfortunate enough to be there were killed,  
or exiled, or sent to the camps. Vanished...

MOTHER

Yes, vanished!. So why are you saying Hamo isn't alive anymore?

He might still return... one day.

*MOTHER utters another sob and buries her face in her hands.*

UNCLE

*(more calmly)*

Let's not argue anymore, my dear.

Do you remember how Haris used to go out to the front lines  
to try to find out what had happened to his father?

*MOTHER looks up again and nods, slowly.*

UNCLE *(continuing)*

And do you remember what he found out? What he told us?

*MOTHER shakes her head slowly.*

UNCLE *(continuing)*

I think you do. I think you know the *chetniks* took Hamo,  
and 300 others, and killed them all.

MOTHER

*(quietly, her shoulders sagging)*

But perhaps he survived.

UNCLE

*(gently)*

You know that's not possible.  
Hamo is gone, with all of the others.

MOTHER

But – but, their bodies... They –

*UNCLE crosses to MOTHER's armchair, kneels beside her, and takes her hand.*

UNCLE

No, their bodies were never found. And yes, some people are still looking.  
And... I know how hard it is for you, not knowing where Hamo is buried...  
or even if he was buried. At least you know where Haris is buried.

MOTHER

*(sniffing)*

What kind of consolation is that? We know who killed Haris,  
and where his grave is, and we know who took Hamo away... and now what?  
What about Zuhra, and Malik... What's left for them? Nothing...

*MOTHER sobs more loudly. UNCLE takes a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his suit coat, shakes it out, and hands it to her. She takes it and starts drying her tears.*

UNCLE

Please don't cry. Zu's a grown woman, and Malik hardly remembers his father.  
And even if, as it seems, his mother has left him, too, he still has us.  
You're his granny, Zu is his aunt, and I –

*MOTHER's grandson, the eighteen year-old MALIK, enters noisily through the STAGE LEFT door of the sitting room.*

UNCLE

There you are! We were just talking about you.  
Your grandmother was getting worried.

MALIK

*(flopping into an armchair downstage right)*

Yeah? Come on, old man. Give me a break.

UNCLE\

(to MOTHER)

Just listen to how he speaks to me!

(turning toward MALIK)

You know, young man, I could almost be your grandfather. You –

MALIK

(interrupting)

But lucky for me, you aren't. So shut up...

Is there any food in this house?

MOTHER

Oh, dear. There might be something left from lunch. I don't know...

UNCLE

There was one little piece of meat, and two morsels of spinach pie.

MALIK

You mean you ate it all? You old glutton, you!

Fuck it!

*MALIK brings both of his fists down viciously on the arms of his chair.*

MOTHER

Calm down, Malik, dear. Zu will be here any minute.

Maybe she'll have something from the market.

MALIK

You think? And what am I supposed to do until she gets here? Die?

Why don't you get up and cook something?

I'll bet you've been slouching in that chair all day...

UNCLE

Shame on you! Is that how you address your elders?  
Especially your grandmother, who raised you...

MALIK

*(turning on UNCLE)*

She didn't raise me! Zu did! And why are you butting into my life anyway?  
You're not my father, or even my grandfather –

MOTHER

He's your grandfather's cousin – have you forgotten? –  
and that makes him a member of this family.

MALIK

*(to MOTHER)*

I don't care. As far as I'm concerned, he's just your freaking brother-in-law.  
And if your sister were still alive, he wouldn't be here.

*(turning suddenly to UNCLE)*

Go bug your own son and his kids!

UNCLE

*(quietly)*

I may do just that. You know, Malik, I've only stayed here because of your grandmother, and  
Zu... and because of you, too. I like to think I've had a hand in your upbringing.  
I believed I was ... needed here.

MALIK

You aren't. Just go.

UNCLE

*(resigned)*

They have been calling me, you know.  
Vedo and the children – they miss me.

MALIK

*(laughs nastily)*

Jesus Christ, give us a break! *(mimicking)* “Vedo and the kids” –  
They don’t have any use for you! They left you here because you were in their way! They  
left you here around *our* necks!

MOTHER

Don’t talk like that, Malik. Uncle is a great friend, and a great help to me.

*(smiling at UNCLE)*

He always has been, ever since we were children.

MALIK

You know what? I think your “friendship” is freaking perverse.  
I don’t know why Zu puts up –

UNCLE

That’s quite enough, you young rascal!

*(walks over to him)*

MALIK

*(springing out of the armchair)*

What? You gonna hit me, you old perv?

Okay, bring it on!

MOTHER

! Malik, stop it! That’s quite enough!

MALIK

Enough, no shit! I’ve had enough of you both.

I want some *chevapi*. Just give me some money so I don’t starve to death.

MOTHER

(to UNCLE)

There's money in the sideboard. Please give him some.

MALIK

(to MOTHER, as he crosses to the sideboard)

I'll get it myself. I don't need him to give me my own money.

UNCLE

It's not your money, you young punk. It's *our* money.

It's money your Aunt Zu earns from her translating work.

At least you can show some respect for that.

MALIK

I should show respect? What about *you*, you fucking old freeloader?

*As MOTHER and UNCLE react, aghast, to MALIK's vulgarity,  
ZUHRA enters quietly, through the STAGE RIGHT door of the sitting room.*

ZUHRA

What's all this commotion?

Can't we have even one day without some kind of uproar? Quiet, everyone !

Malik, what's going on?

MALIK

(*disingenuously*)

Nothing, Auntie. I was hungry and I asked for some money for some *chevapi*.

And he attacked me. He said I'm rude and impolite, and –

UNCLE

That's absolutely not true!

He called me a – an old *perv*, and a – a freeloader, and he said I should go to Australia.

MALIK

He's lying, I swear it on my mother's eyes. I never mentioned Australia!

UNCLE

Indeed you did! You said I should go out to my son  
and his children, and you called me a – a freeloader.

MALIK

*(with open disdain)*

He's a bigger liar than... All I said was –

ZUHRA

Can it, Malik. This is your Uncle's home, too. but if he wants to go to Australia,  
we won't stop him. Although I'm not sure how welcome he'd be out there...

UNCLE

More welcome than you think, perhaps.  
Vedo is always asking me to come out, and I – I ...

ZUHRA

Never mind, Uncle. It's not important.  
What matters is that you're here, and that you're part of our family.  
And that's that.

MALIK

Auntie Zu, could you give me some money, please?

UNCLE

Outrageous! He just took some!

MALIK

The old fart's lying, I swear! I only –

ZUHRA

*(stopping him)*

How much do you need?

MALIK

*(docilely)*

Whatever you want to give me.

ZUHRA

*(opens her purse and hands him several banknotes)*

Here.

MALIK

Thank you, Auntie!

*(he kisses her on the right cheek, then on the left)*

Gotta go. My homeboys are waiting... Bye!

*MALIK exits, through the STAGE RIGHT door.*

UNCLE

*(shaking his head)*

You spoil him, Zu.

And I think you should pay more attention  
to what he does with all that money you give him.

ZUHRA

*(flatly)*

He's family, Uncle. Just like you. It's not his fault he has no father  
and his mother deserted him.

I don't want him to want for anything – attention, love, *or* money–

*(pointedly)*

any more than you do.

UNCLE

As you wish. But still, you should pay more attention to...

ZUHRA

*(ignoring him, crossing to MOTHER, who is still seated in her armchair)*

Mama, how are you?

MOTHER

Zu, dear! Let me give you a kiss, now that you've come back to us.

*ZUHRA bends down, and MOTHER kisses her on each cheek.*

UNCLE

She's been worried sick every since you left.

When will you come back, and when will you come back, over and over...

ZUHRA

Please don't worry, Mother. And don't upset Uncle.

You know I have to go out – to work, to walk – but I always come back, don't I?

UNCLE

That's what I kept telling her.

You know, Zu, we really should get her out of this house, so she can start living again.

Perhaps she could visit Haris' grave... Zu, have you been there?

*At UNCLE's words, MOTHER becomes noticeably more anxious.*

ZUHRA

I was there today.

UNCLE

Were there a lot of people at the cemetery?

ZUHRA

No more than usual.

UNCLE

*(to MOTHER)*

See? You could've gone too.

You would have been... inconspicuous.

MOTHER

*(visibly agitated)*

I – I couldn't. I can't... I just can't.

UNCLE

I'm sorry, my dear. Don't worry about it.

*(turning to ZUHRA)*

Zu, was the priest there today?

ZUHRA

*(absently, toying with the flowers in a vase on the sideboard)*

He was there.

UNCLE

And what did he say?

ZUHRA

*(still toying with the flowers)*

Nothing, as usual.

*(turning to face UNCLE and MOTHER)*

Excuse me, please. I have a headache.

And I have a lot of work to do.

*ZUHRA exits, through the STAGE LEFT door.*

UNCLE

*(shaking his head)*

Look at her! No wonder Malik has no manners...

*He turns to MOTHER, who is now sobbing quietly.*

UNCLE

There, there, my dear. We don't need to worry about the younger generation right now.

*He crosses to the sideboard, opens one of the lower cabinet doors,  
and takes out a large leather-bound photo album.*

UNCLE

*(crossing back to his armchair and sitting down,  
hitching his chair closer to MOTHER's)*

Let's visit some happier times.

*(he opens the album)*

Look. Here we are in the garden.

Here you are, laughing, wearing that ridiculous hat.

And here are Haris and Ada . . . with her ex-husband, that rotten *chetnik*, as well.

*MOTHER shows some interest in the album, and her sobbing grows softer.*

UNCLE

And here's Hamo...

*MOTHER catches her breath and presses UNCLE's handkerchief against her mouth. The lights go down slowly on MOTHER and UNCLE, sitting in their armchairs upstage center, until they are visible only in silhouette against the French doors into the garden. Then the lights come up, more quickly this time, on a previously unseen platform UPSTAGE LEFT. The platform is the floor of a second-story bathroom, whose downstage wall is a shadowy scrim. The area behind the scrim, half-dark, contains a white cast-iron claw-footed bathtub*

*on a low platform. ZUHRA is lying in the bathtub, among a sea of foamy bubbles. She is smoking and listening to Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun." Her cell phone, lying on a chair next to the bathtub, rings twice. She reaches over, flips it open, and glances at the display. Then she flips the phone shut and drops it on the floor next to the bathtub.*

**End of Scene 2**

**Scene 3**

*SUMMER AFTERNOON, some years earlier, in the garden that we saw from indoors in Scene 2. Stage right is the back of the house: a pair of formal French doors upstage open onto a broad flagstone terrace, with a row of double-hung sash windows, some of them open, between the French doors and a less formal door, clearly that of the kitchen, farther downstage. The terrace is flanked by banks of flowering shrubs, on either side of three broad, shallow, gently curved steps leading down to the lawn. The plants and flowers are obviously well cared for, and their colors are frankly spectacular. Garden chairs and a table sit just off-center on the terrace. In the background, a tall brick wall, with ivy and other creepers, with the tops of hills visible in the distance beyond. ADA, a young woman of about 24, wearing a floppy straw sun-hat and a sun dress, is trimming blooms from the rose bushes downstage right and placing them in a broad, flat straw basket. Her trimming takes her up the terrace steps and toward the bushes near the kitchen door.*

ADA

*(inhaling deeply)*

Mmmmm... What divine fragrances!

Roses, jasmine, honeysuckle . . . cinnamon, honey, almonds...

*(pausing, then approaching the open kitchen windows)*

Honey? Almonds?

*(rapping on the ground-floor window)*

Hello in there! Are you baking again?

Hello... Is anyone there?

*MOTHER enters from the kitchen door.*

*She is casually but elegantly dressed, wearing just a touch of lipstick, and seems quite happy.*

MOTHER

There you are, Ada. My, what a sharp little nose you have!

*(kisses the younger woman on both cheeks)*

ADA

*(returning the embrace)*

My nose has nothing to do with it!

The whole garden is positively vibrating with the aroma...

You'll have all the neighbors here before you can say Boo!

MOTHER

That's fine with me. I've made enough to feed a small army...

*ZUHRA enters the terrace through the French doors, carrying a serving tray with a pitcher and glasses. ADA takes the tray from her and sets it on the terrace table, then turns and embraces ZUHRA.*

ZUHRA

What's this I hear about feeding an army?

ADA

Can't you smell it? Your mother's testing our will power – again.

We're going to swell up like balloons!

ZUHRA

*(gently)*

Mama, are you are baking, again?

*(sniffing the air)*

Honey, almonds, cinnamon... The Devil's playground!

Mama, you're building a bomb – a five-thousand-calorie bomb!

Don't you remember? I asked you before: NO MORE CAKE!

You'll be the end of us!

MOTHER

Really now!

Well, for your information, you're not the only young lady in this world, my dear.

Or the only person in this house.  
If you don't care for my cakes, you don't have to eat them.

ZUHRA

*(pouring tall glasses of lemonade and handing them to ADA and to her mother,  
as the three of them sit down at the table)*

It's not a matter of liking them. You know we love them.  
We love all your cooking!  
Your dishes are simply irresistible – true culinary masterpieces.

ADA

Especially the sweets. Those little egg pastries with butter, nuts, and honey . . .  
and the cream cakes, and the fruit tarts with your mysterious secret ingredients. Mmmm . . . I  
write a thesis about the tarts alone!

ZUHRA

Be quiet, Ada! Mother – dearest – darling Mother –  
can't you see what just talking about your cooking is doing to us?  
If we actually have to eat it, why, Ada and I will turn into perfect little cows!

MOTHER

Don't exaggerate, Zu. A little healthy food won't hurt you.  
Everything in moderation, my dears.  
Eat a little less, if you must. But don't starve yourselves!

ADA

That's the ticket! Eat in moderation – and avoid all food!

MOTHER

No, no, no, God forbid! If you knew anything about real hunger . . . I spent the Second  
World War in this house, and I know what it's like when there's no food at all to be had.  
Why, one day, just before the war begun, I threw a piece of bread – not just plain bread, but  
bread spread with berries and cream – across the fence. Yes, that fence, right over there! Just

to see how high I could toss it! But you know, as soon as the war began – within days, I tell you! – we started to run short. How I missed that piece of bread! I even went out into the street looking for it . . .

ZUHRA

*(patiently)*

Yes, Mama, we know that story. We won't throw away your cakes.  
But it really would be better for us if you didn't make them quite so often.

MOTHER

*(standing and picking up her glass of lemonade)*

I'm sorry, Zu. I cannot and will not take orders from you.  
Don't try this with me again. And I'll pray that later on you don't regret these cakes – and all the other ones you've refused to eat.

*MOTHER disappears into the house. ZUHRA and ADA sit at the garden table, pouring the lemonade from the pitcher into their glasses and drinking.*

ADA

She could be right, you know. Maybe we will regret it one day.  
And not just the cakes. I have a strange feeling – it's irrational, I know –  
but a lot of things seem to be slipping away . . .

ZUHRA

You're working too much.  
It won't help you get over the divorce any faster, you know.  
Especially not your job. Nothing but sick people – sick people and dying people!  
You need a vacation.

ADA

It's not the job, Zu. I feel . . . scared, and weak.  
And that's just not me! I've always been able to figure things out  
and solve the problems. But now . . .

*ADA shakes her head, fighting back tears.*

ZUHRA

*(firmly)*

As I said: A vacation. A real one.

Outside your own circle. WAY outside it!

ADA

And where would that be? Where won't I have this creeping sense of – something – awful about to happen? Tell me where, Zu! Where does fatigue melt away and turn into strength? Where does work make you happy, instead of exhausted? Where can we sleep without nightmares full of the demons of the past?

*ZUHRA is plainly taken aback, and has nothing to say.*

*This is more serious than she thought.*

ADA

*(noticing her silence)*

Oh, my dear! Forgive me! I'm so sorry . . .

Things are a bit messy at work just now, that's all, and I expect you're right about the damned divorce . . .

ZUHRA

*(over the rim of her glass)*

Have you heard from him?

ADA

No. And I don't want to. Not from him, or about him.

ZUHRA

Still, you do know he left for Pale?

ADA

Ask me if I care. Or, better yet, don't.

*(getting up, taking her glass with her, crossing to the rose bushes)*

You know, I really do love this garden.

This garden, this house, and most of all you – the only things  
that almost make me feel happy.

ZUHRA

*(smiling, playing along)*

Then let's enjoy the moment. Maybe with a plateful of those sinful cakes.

Guilt-free synthesis of flesh and goodies!

ADA

*(laughing)*

I knew it! You were just waiting for an excuse, you hypocrite!

But because I'm democratic at heart, I won't challenge your right to be a glutton.

But I'd still appreciate it if you'd give one small thought  
to the imminent consequences of your actions.

ZUHRA

*(laughing, on her way to the kitchen)*

Thank you, my dear. I hereby promise I'll consider the consequences!

*(turning serious)*

But don't count yourself out! Even you, with all your boring medical common sense – even  
you still have a room for a spot of hedonism.

*ZUHRA returns to the terrace table with a plateful of freshly baked honey cakes,  
which ADA attacks almost before ZUHRA has set it down*

ADA

*(licking her fingers)*

Ooh! Ahhhhh! Sensory overload!

Straight to the cerebral pleasure centers. So much for logic and rationality!

ZUHRA

Pleasure, my foot. A feeble little fulfillment, maybe, that'll turn into guilt soon enough. And don't worry – there'll be plenty of material to get your whole brain spinning. And, knowing you, it'll probably trigger some nerve that wears a white coat, and you'll feel compelled to analyze the situation in a purely medical terms.

ADA

*(taking a pill-bottle from the pocket of her sun dress and sets it on the table)*

Well, since you mention it, I did bring you these.

The dosage is stronger, so please read the instructions.

ZUHRA

*(deflated)*

I knew it. Even this harmless little gastronomic slip wasn't safe from Doctor Ada –.

*(then, quickly, as Ada starts to say something)*

Don't say it – I understand.

*(only half-mockingly)*

And. Will. Obey.

– Did you notice how early the roses bloomed this year?

ADA

I don't care about the roses. I want a promise from you.

ZUHRA

You've got it, okay? Now, have you given any more thought to moving in with us?

You see the situation. The world's going mad, and it would be better for you if you were here. You said it yourself: This is where you feel most comfortable.

ADA

You can go on ignoring the problems if you want to.

But, trust me, they won't go away on their own.

ZUHRA

As if I don't know that. All right, I'll read the bloody instructions.

*(She picks up the pill bottle and glances at the label, then sets it back on the table.)*

There. Now answer my question.

ADA

I really don't know. The situation's getting almost . . . surreal.

Don't people have any common sense left in them?

Everyone at the hospital's overworked, and now we have these new monitoring shifts.

People are behaving . . . strangely. Some of them I don't even recognize anymore.

And I swear it: sometimes the walls actually seem to be closing in!

ZUHRA

Well, I don't want to alarm you any further, but there could be something to it.

And you definitely need a change.

Haris thinks you should come stay with us, you know.

And maybe he'll come home, too.

ADA

*(snorting)*

That's just what you need!

The four of you, plus Haris with his wife and kid, and then me.

ZUHRA

*(shrugging cheerfully)*

The more, the merrier! And you know we all love you.

Mom, Dad, crazy old Uncle... and Haris... all of us!

ADA

*(laughs ironically)*

Especially his wife!

ZUHRA

*(shrugging again, this time dismissively)*

I really couldn't care less about her.

If she doesn't like it... Well, tough..

ADA

You're quite sure? All right, then, I'll think about it. And yes, I do love this house.

Its harmony, the land it sits on. . . I've always felt safe here.

Away from the world, away from the ugliness outside.

And everyone who lives here seems so. . . different from the people outside.

And I love you all... especially you.

ZUHRA

So you'll come, then?

*(picking up the pill-bottle from the table)*

Here, I promise I'll take every single pill you bring me... And more!

*ZUHRA kisses ADA on the cheek and they laugh*

ADA

Promise? You'd better!

And you'd better understand it means a different regimen, too!

More rest, the right exercise...

ZUHRA

Don't press your luck, doctor!

You know how I feel about being regimented.

And a little wholesome untidiness wouldn't hurt you, either.

ADA

As if life isn't untidy enough as it is.

Promise me at least that you'll be more careful with your body.

ZUHRA

All right, you win, doctor. But I promise you this, too:  
I'll do whatever I can to melt at least a little of your unwholesome rigidity.

MALE VOICE

*(from offstage right, behind the French doors)*

Hellooo . . . Anyone home?

ADA

Haris??

ZUHRA

Yes, it's Haris! He's here!

*(getting up and running to the kitchen door)*

Mama, Haris is here!

MOTHER

*(offstage, from the kitchen)*

Yes, dear, I know!

VOICES

*(from behind the French doors, excited, overlapping)*

Welcome, my boy, welcome!

When did you get in?

Are you tired?

How was Costa Rica?

Where's Zu?

Outside with Ada...

MOTHER

*(offstage, from the kitchen)*

Come inside, and bring Ada with you. Haris is here!

ZUHRA

*(running back to Ada)*

Come on, let's go in. Haris is back!.

ADA

*(gets up slowly)*

Not . . . Not right now.

*(gazing around the garden)*

I could stay here forever.

ZUHRA

Well, then, do it!

That's what I've been suggesting all along.

ADA

*(continuing, as if she hasn't heard Zuhra, as indeed perhaps she hasn't)*

If I could freeze this space, this moment in time . . .

ZUHRA

*(exasperated, taking Ada by the shoulder)*

Well, you can't.

And by the way, you should know that Jasna wants to  
redesign the vegetable garden.

ADA

*(snapping out of her reverie)*

Oh, no! No way! That would be a crime!

Promise me you won't let her touch it.

ZUHRA

*(smiling, pleased that her trick has worked)*

Very well, I promise.

The carrots will stay where they are..

VOICES

*(again, louder, from the salon behind the French doors)*

Hey, you two, aren't you coming in?

Ladies, join us, please!

Zuhra, Ada – Haris is waiting for you!

ZUHRA and ADA

*(crossing to the French doors)*

We'll be right there.

*As they reach the doors, ZUHRA goes inside but ADA hangs back, taking one last look around the garden, as if to imprint every leaf and blossom on her memory.*

**End of Scene 3**

**Scene 4**

*Sunset. A hill above the city. Now the terrace is upstage left, overlooking the valley and the lights that are starting to come on. As the scene plays out, the sky darkens until only the city lights, twinkling in the distance, can be seen. On the terrace: several tables for four, set back from the stone wall at the edge of the terrace, and separated from the inside of the restaurant by a tall glass wall. Motion, lights, and lively conviviality inside, but only faint snatches of music and laughter can be heard outside. The table located farthest downstage is set with bottles of wine and four glasses. The FIRST WAITER puts the finishing touches on the arrangement of a cheese platter and a plate of cold-cuts. Satisfied with his work, he retreats to a position behind a trolley behind the table and starts to toss a salad in a large wooden bowl. Three good-looking, well-dressed middle-aged people – JASNA, her husband KASIM, and their friend FRENCHY – are seated at the table. KASIM raises his arm toward the glass double-doors leading to the interior of the restaurant and makes a champagne-cork-popping gesture. A SECOND WAITER bustles onto the terrace with a stand, bucket, and bottle, and sets them up at the side of the table opposite the FIRST WAITER, who is still busy with the salad and salad plates.*

JASNA

*(glancing at her wristwatch)*

She's late again. Did you call her?

FRENCHY

Half an hour ago. She said she was on her way.

JASNA

*(fretting)*

I hope she hasn't forgotten . . .

KASIM

Relax, she'll be here!

*(turning to Frenchy)*

What about you, Frenchy? Things still a zoo at work?

FRENCHY

Not really. Actually, we're in a bit of a lull at the moment. Some of the programs in my department are over, and we're waiting for new orders from Brussels.

*The SECOND WAITER finishes with the champagne stand, uncorks the bottle, wraps it in a towel, and pours a taste for FRENCHY.*

FRENCHY

*(taking a sip and nodding approvingly)*

But I'm sure we'll be back to the madhouse soon enough...

*The SECOND WAITER places the bottle in the stand and retreats to the interior of the restaurant. He is almost bowled over by ZUHRA, in evening dress and make-up, bursting through the double doors.*

JASNA

*(oblivious, staring out over the valley)*

I can't wait to tell her...

FRENCHY

What? Tell her what?

ZUHRA

*(gaily, coming up behind the people seated at the table)*

My darlings!

*FRENCHY, startled, stands and kisses her on the cheek.*

JASNA

*(with undisguised relief)*

There you are! I have so much to –

*ZUHRA takes the empty seat next to JASNA, cutting her off with an embrace and a kiss. She leans past JASNA to blow a kiss to KASIM, seated beyond JASNA. The first WAITER places helpings of salad on crescent-shaped plates and serves them to the four at the table, then wheels the trolley back into the main restaurant.*

ZUHRA

*(glancing at the champagne bucket)*

Ah, the good stuff! What are we celebrating?

FRENCHY

*(pouring champagne for everyone)*

Damned if I know. But Jasna insisted –

JASNA

Now that Zu's here, there's no need to rush things. Relax!

*(gesturing toward the valley, where the sunset is fading  
and more of the city's twinkling lights are visible)*

Look at the city . . . the lights . . . How many places like this are there in the world?

Such a beautiful sight!

ZUHRA

*(taking a deep sip of champagne)*

Beautiful? What are you saying? Emptiness, that's all it is. Emptiness, with a little glitter.

Ruins, pretending that their shimmering can postpone their inevitable extinction. And you call it beautiful?

JASNA

*(hurt)*

Really, Zu. Must you be so morbid? The city's not what it used to be, but it's still there, and it's still alive . . . Down there, people living and loving . . . Hundreds, thousands of them!

ZUHRA

Living and loving. And dying. And where's the city? What's left? A few walls, a few ghosts . . . Wrecks that'll fall apart any second, into piles of garbage and filth. Where are your precious people? Nothing but shadows – poor haggard souls – and your precious city's just a cemetery for the living dead.

JASNA

*(angrily)*

That's quite enough! Yes, there's a lot of ugliness, but there's beauty underneath. Beauty, and harmony, and strength, and – yes – even love.

FRENCHY

*(calmly)*

Zu, my darling, I'm afraid that on this point, I have to agree with Jasna.  
I see this city with a foreigner's eyes, and I am not insensitive to its suffering.  
But, even with all of that, it still has energy.  
An indefinable, but strangely comforting, energy radiates from it . . .

ZUHRA

“Comforting energy”? Hah! More like an evil spell.  
A spell wrapped around this poor, bleeding city by some hateful sorceress.  
She leaves her droppings everywhere and survivors pick them up and eat them – poisoning themselves and everyone they meet...

FRENCHY

My, aren't we picturesque this evening! Really, Zu, you need to switch to decaf. Or, better yet, have some more champagne.

*(he suits his actions to his words, refilling her glass)*

Honestly, now: If this city didn't have something special, do you think that I, and

*(wryly)*

so many others like me, would be here?

JASNA

*(mockingly)*

Honestly, now, you'd all be at home in Paris, London, New York, and Tokyo!

ZUHRA

*(bitterly)*

Don't make me laugh, Frenchy! The beauty you're so fond of here isn't architectural or energetic. It is audible, though: the sound of money. And the least you could do is be honest about it.

FRENCHY

*(stiffly, insulted)*

The money to be made here might attract some people. But I happen not to be one of them. Did it ever cross your mind that some people may have come here because of human beauty . . . or because of the beauty of one certain human?

KASIM

*(who has been drinking steadily, observing the preceding exchanges)*

All right, everyone. We get it. Some people like this scenery, and some don't. Some people tend to make things look better than they are, and some see things as worse than they really are. Some people are even in love . . . and that needs to be respected.

FRENCHY

*(relieved at the interjection, which has lowered the level of tension around the table)*

Bravo, Kasim! That's it, in a nutshell.

ZUHRA

*(playing along, if a little reluctantly)*

Bravo.

*(lifts her glass in a semi-mock toast)*

Here's to beauty, and here's to love.

*(laughs, as Kasim clinks glasses with her) . . .*

Apart from that, are we celebrating anything specific?

JASNA

*(coughs and glances meaningfully at KASIM)*

May I?

*(as KASIM nods)*

Well, we invited you because you two are our best friends, and . . . well . . .  
we wanted you to be the first to know that we're going to Africa . . .

*(ZUHRA, astonished, looks from Jasna to Kasim and back)*

JASNA *(continuing)*

It seems a bit sudden, I know, but Kasim's been negotiating with the U.N. for quite some time now. All of the background checks and tests went well, so the only thing we don't know for sure is the country we'll be going to. But it'll probably be Sierra Leone –

ZUHRA

Sierra Leone!

KASIM

Yes, Sierra Leone. The war's not over, and they need doctors,  
especially in the interior . . .

ZUHRA

*(furious, to Jasna)*

Just tell me one thing. How does this – this African *mission* – fit with that little valentine you were reciting just now? Oh, wait – I have it! Here, the war is over, right? We don't need doctors, we don't need anything, right? All we need is

*(viciously)*

the *beauty* of a city in ruins! Is that your excuse for deserting us?!

JASNA

*(calmly)*

You're mixing apples and oranges, Zu, and you've got it all wrong. I don't love this city one iota less –

ZUHRA

*(contemptuously)*

Don't give me that! You love it as much as ever – this romantic relic – but you're deserting it? Leaving it all behind? Ah, I have it: You're leaving it for *us*, so we can take care of it for you while you're gone! The city, *and* your precious fantasies! What should we do with *that*? Water it, and prune its little leaves? Make everything just a little bit prettier while you're away?

JASNA

*(sighing)*

What's the matter with you, Zuhra? You really just don't see it, do you? We've decided to go to Africa for a while so that Kasim can do a little work and make a little money. I might be able to a job while I'm there, too...

ZUHRA

*(drily)*

Of course you will. Landscape architects are just what Sierra Leone needs.

JASNA

*(patiently)*

In case you hadn't noticed, I'm not using my degree here, either.

And Sierra Leone does need translators and interpreters...

ZUHRA

Oh, really? Last I heard, "dilettante" wasn't a recognized language.

KASIM

Stop it now, both of you. Listen, Zu, I'm sorry we didn't tell you about the trip earlier. But we wanted to be sure all my background checks were okay. Naturally, the mission is a professional challenge. But – I have to admit it – money's an even bigger reason. The way we all live here – Jas and I can't really offer our children very much. I want to make enough money to give them an education.

ZUHRA

Last I heard, they hadn't dropped out of school. Have they?

JASNA

Of course not! But we want the *best* education for them.

ZUHRA

Oh, I see. The kind of education they can't get in their beautiful, strong, radiant, mystical, energetic homeland.

KASIM

Zu, I'll put this as plainly as I can: Love for your town or country is one thing.  
But a real assessment of the possibilities is another.

ZUHRA

*(triumphant)*

Well, there you are, then! We agree completely!  
Lost beauties and unique magical spells are just a load of claptrap.  
*(she takes a sip of champagne and twirls the glass thoughtfully)*  
Of course, how do I know that's how you really feel?  
How do I know it's not just a convenient excuse for going to . . . Sierra Leone?  
*(setting the champagne flute on the table with a decisive bang)*  
Not that I care, particularly. Go, and I wish you well of it.  
But please, spare me the fairy tales.

JASNA

*(absently, not to anyone in particular, looking out again over the valley,  
now almost completely dark, with only the twinkling lights of the city below)*  
You know, I really think this is the prettiest town in the whole wide world.

KASIM

Enough about that, Jas. What's more important is that Zu and Frenchy  
are our dearest friends in the world. And

*(to Zuhra and Frenchy)*

we'll miss you dearly while we're away.

FRENCHY

And we'll miss you too. Won't we, Zu? But perhaps we'll see each other  
in another part of the world . . . maybe sooner than we think. And . . .

*(looking down at the table and then out across the valley,*

*before returning his gaze to his friends)*

on the subject of departures . . . you might as well know that I'm leaving soon, too.

I've been asked to go to Switzerland –

KASIM

Switzerland! You clever dog –

FRENCHY

*(ignoring him)*

And you should also know that I've invited Zu to come with me.

JASNA

*(genuinely pleased, giving ZUHRA a hug)*

But that's wonderful! Zu, when are you leaving?

ZUHRA

*(shaking her off, not ungently)*

Who said I'm leaving?

FRENCHY

*(stepping in quickly)*

Zu's been invited, but she hasn't said Yes or No.

*(turning to ZUHRA)*

I hope, my dear, you'll give me your answer soon...

JASNA

C'mon, Zu! What's to think about?  
You and Frenchy were made for each other!

KASIM

Let it go, Jasna. It's their decision, not yours!  
Let's just enjoy this glorious evening . Who knows when we'll all be together again!

JASNA

Soon, I hope.  
*(to ZUHRA and FRENCHY)*  
You could come and visit us in Africa.

ZUHRA

*(sweetly)*

Africa, of course! How could I possibly appreciate the wretched misery  
right here at home without a first-hand look at Sierra Leone?

JASNA

But, my dear – we won't be going into the worst of the areas.  
After all, Kasim will be working for the U.N., and we'll be under their protection.

ZUHRA

*(snorting)*

U.N. protection? Then you should really be worried.  
We know how well *that* works!

KASIM

You make a point . . . but as a physician I can't let myself think like that. Human suffering  
demands relief, no matter where, or whose. And providing that relief is what I was born to do  
– although, mind you, I'm not sniffing at the mere monetary compensation that comes with  
the job!

ZUHRA

Well, thank God for that. How clever you are, wrapping all your needs and desires into one tidy package! What's your secret? I'm sure we'd all like to know how to shoehorn such different things into such a harmonious whole.

KASIM

There's no need to be so cynical, Zu.

ZUHRA

Cynical, *moi?* *Au contraire!*

I'm sincerely fascinated, and I'd dearly love to know the trick..

*ZUHRA's cell phone rings and she picks up. The others pay belated attention to their food, as the lights on them dim slightly and a spot on ZUHRA comes up.*

ZUHRA

*(into the phone)*

Yes? . . . What?! . . . . At the house? . . . Yes, yes, of course. I'm very interested. But I should see it first, and talk to the owner. . . . Fine. What about the package? . . . You're sure? . . . Good. I'll be there.

*ZUHRA closes her phone and drops it into her bag.*

ZUHRA

*(getting up from the table)*

I'm so sorry, my dears, but I must leave you for a while.

The press of business, you know!

*The others rise. ZUHRA turns first to JASNA.*

ZUHRA

Take care of yourself, you hopeless romantic! . . .

*(embracing, with a kiss)*

And take care of that big lug!

*FRENCHY shakes hands with KASIM, and then embraces JASNA.*

*KASIM takes the opportunity to approach ZUHRA. .*

KASIM

*(hugging ZUHRA)*

I'll miss you, you know. Your spirit, your strength . . . and your infernal attitude! But there's something I want you to do. Come to the clinic before we leave, and let me run a few more tests . . .

ZUHRA

Why? So we can get some more rotten results?

What would be the point?

KASIM

I'm speaking as your physician, Zu. Don't kid around with this.

Have you told anyone yet?

ZUHRA

No. I haven't. And you'd better not, either.

KASIM

*Moi?* Don't be silly. All my other flaws aside, I do have a shred of professional ethics.

Apart, of course, from being your friend.

ZUHRA

Then stay that way.

*FRENCHY and JASNA approach them.*

FRENCHY

Zu, are we going?

ZUHRA

You stay a while. I have to see someone. I won't be long.

FRENCHY

I'll take you – then we'll both come back.

ZUHRA

No, it's all right, thanks. I'll get a cab.

*(hugs him again)*

Don't let all that champagne go to waste.

FRENCHY

As you wish, my dear. And please – think about Switzerland . . . s

ZUHRA

*(kisses him on the cheek)*

You'll have my answer soon enough. I promise!

*ZUHRA leaves through the upstage doors into the restaurant's main rooms.*

*The others cross to the edge of the terrace and stand for a moment, JASNA and KASIM arm-in arm, gazing down at the city, which is now visible only as a tattered carpet of scattered lights. FRENCHY, ignoring them, follows ZUHRA with his eyes.*

KASIM

A bit chilly for this time of year!

May I suggest we adjourn to a table inside?

*KASIM offers JASNA his arm and she takes it, turning back for one last look at the view from the terrace, as she and KASIM cross upstage toward the double doors. FRENCHY follows them, but not before casting a thoughtful, almost worried glance down toward the city lights.*

**End of ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**

**Scene 1**

*INTERIOR, NIGHT. An upscale, disco-style NIGHT CLUB. Clouds of cigarette smoke, strobe and laser lighting, loud Bosnian rap music (by Edo Majka). Upstage left is a semi-circular bar, well populated, separated from the main floor by a set of curving stairs. The crowd is young and stylish. Some of them are using a raised dance platform upstage right: a glass floor divided into squares, lit from below in shifting colors. DANNY, a casually but very fashionably dressed young man, sits at a table on the main floor, downstage right, under a pool of stable light. His tablemates are NECA, LEJLA, and SANECA, three girls in their early 20s, wearing what appear to be name-label sports clothes and hanging on his words. All four of them are drinking Cokes from glasses. Upstage, MALIK and two of his friends, NINO and SENO, are lounging at the bar, drinking beer from glasses and paying close attention to DANNY and the three girls.*

DANNY

No, that can't be right. Nike doesn't make stuff like that.

They're very strict with their quality standards.

*(setting down his glass and leaning toward LEJLA, who is sitting to his left,  
beyond NECA, who is at his immediate left)*

Here, Lejla – let me see that shirt again.

*LEJLA leans forward, past NECA, extending her arm  
and laying the long sleeve of her shirt in front of DANNY's chest.*

DANNY

*(pinching up the fabric and rolling it between his thumb and forefinger)*

I'm sorry. It's probably from Turkey or Hungary. They make a lot of "replicas" there. A real shirt like that one would cost a lot more – in Vienna, maybe as much as 200 Euros.

*(he feels the fabric again).*

No, definitely a fake.

*He takes a sip of his Coke and looks around,  
as if to see how many people are paying attention.*

*(louder, getting into stride)*

These knock-offs are a huge problem for the clothing companies. For instance, brands like Nike and Benetton – and even Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and the rest – are losing out big time. That's why you need to be careful. Pretty soon the big companies will start weaving tell-tale threads into their fabric, just like with money, so buyers

*(glancing across at LEJLA)*

can be sure they haven't been taken for a ride.

NECA

She wasn't taken for a ride. She knew exactly what she was getting!

She bought the shirt at the street market, and she knows they don't have originals there!

*They all laugh.*

LEJLA

*(angrily)*

Liar! You know I never buy anything at the street market.

How rude can you be? I told you – my father got this shirt for me in Rome,  
and these Ray-Bans, too.

*She unhooks the sunglasses from the collar of her shirt  
and hands them across to DANNY.*

LEJLA

Here, Danny – you're the expert. Are these real or not??

DANNY

*(taking the sunglasses and trying them on, then taking them off and  
holding them in his hands, turning them this way and that)*

Quite real. But these look like last year's model.

SANELA

*(from DANNY's right, taking her sunglasses from the top of her head  
and handing them to DANNY, as LEJLA snatches hers back)*

What about these? My sister sent them to me from New York.  
She said they cost a small fortune.

DANNY

*(taking the sunglasses and inspecting them)*

Ah, well, now! These are definitely the thing. I have a pair myself, only mine  
have blue lenses. Blue's the color for men these days – for everyone, actually –

LEJLA

*(jumping in, glad for the change of subject and a chance to regain face)*

That's right, it is! My mother just brought over the new Perla catalogue.  
The whole collection's in shades of blue. In fact . . .  
*(she stands, hauls an unprotesting NECA to her feet,  
and takes NECA's seat next to DANNY)*

. . . she bought me this bra . . .

*(lifts up her shirt, as NECA takes her seat)*

Just look at the quality of this thing!

DANNY

*(carefully touching the side of one cup)*

Hmm . . . Yes, yes, the material's great. Natural fiber's the hot new thing.

SANELA

*(ostentatiously, feeling left out, and showing it)*

Whatever. I think Perla's highly overrated.

Lisca makes better lingerie, and it looks better, too.

*(she lifts her sports shirt as high as her neck)*

Just look at this lovely bra I got the other day, and it only cost a hundred deutschemarks!

My sister said that in New York they cost at least \$200.  
*(leaning over, arranging her chest in front of DANNY's face)*

Here, look.

DANNY

*(stroking the fabric of her bra, letting his hand wander farther  
than he did with LEJLA's)*

Umm . . . Great. You can really feel the quality.

*The action at the downstage table SLOWS, the pool of light dims slightly,  
and a broad spot comes up on the upstage bar, where MALIK, NINO,  
and SENO are watching DANNY and the girls.*

MALIK

*(angrily, tossing back the last of what is not his first beer  
and signaling for another one)*

Just look at that Austrian asshole! What does he think he's doing?

I swear, if he touches Neca, I'll break his neck!

NINO

No shit! If you don't, I will. He comes over here for two months  
and acts like his shit don't stink. Who the fuck does he think he is, anyway?

SENO

C'mon, you guys, let it go. He's got a few dumb girls listening to his stories about  
his cologne and his underwear. So what? No one's forcing them to sit with him.

MALIK

*(dangerously, taking a deep gulp of his next beer)*

Watch it, Seno. Neca may be a clotheshorse, but she's not dumb.

NINO

*(stepping in hastily)*

You're right, Malik. It's Danny who's the dumb one.  
Just look at him, dude! Frontin' with all this culture shit, like he knows everything...

MALIK

*(deflected, forgetting about Neca)*

Yeah. It's him. Like he's gonna enlighten them or something.  
Piece of shit. Come on. Let's see what he's made of.

*MALIK and NINO, with SENO following close behind, descend the stairs  
and cross to the table where DANNY and the girls are seated.*

MALIK

What's going on over here?

NECA

*(unsuspecting)*

Hi, Malik! You know our friend Danny, from Vienna?  
He's here on vacation –  
*DANNY rises and extends his hand.*

MALIK

*(with contempt, ignoring DANNY's hand, as DANNY sits back down)*

I don't give a fuck why here's here. What I want to know is, what's up with the pawing?  
This is a respectable club – no pimps allowed.

DANNY

*(glancing up, insulted)*

What? Are you imputing that I'm a pimp?

MALIK

I'm not imputing anything, asshole.. But I'll amputate your arm  
if you don't keep your fucking mitts to yourself, you got that?

DANNY

*(getting up)*

What the – Who let you in here, anyway?

NINO

*(hand on DANNY's shoulder, pushing him back into his chair)*

Sit down, asshole. You haven't answered his question.

DANNY

Well, this is unheard of! These two hoodlums –

NECA

Stop it, Nino. You too, Malik!

I'll never forgive you for this –

NINO

Shut up, Neca. This isn't about you.

*(pushes DANNY, spilling beer on his shirt)*

DANNY

*(losing his balance, stepping back and landing against MALIK,  
but more worried more about his shirt)*

Oh no! My Versace! You hooligan –

MALIK

What was that? "Hooligan"??

*(pushing DANNY back toward NINO)*

NINO

And didn't you just say the originals are stain-resistant?

*(laughing, actively pouring his beer onto DANNY's shirt)*

Let's see what this Versace does.

MALIK

*(flicking a lighter)*

Let's see if it's flammable.

*Now the girls are standing. NECA and LEJLA step into the quarrel,  
while SANELA moves away downstage right, followed by SENO.*

NECA

*(screaming)*

Malik, stop! Nino, make him stop!

LEJLA

*(to MALIK)*

You monster!

No wonder your own mother left you!

MALIK

*(raises his fist to LEJLA)*

Can it, you slut! One more word out of you  
and you'll be picking your teeth out of your fat ass!

NECA

Shame on you, Malik! How can you be so vulgar!

I'm ashamed to know you!

*NECA gathers her things from the table, gets up, and leaves, shouldering NINO  
out of her way as she crosses to the stairway leading up to the bar  
and the nightclub's main door, with SENO close behind her.*

*DANNY tries to follow them.*

MALIK

*(grabbing DANNY by the shoulder and spinning him around)*

You running away?  
*(punching him on the jaw)*  
Fuckin' fuck-face!

DANNY  
*(to LEJLA and SANELA, as NINO spits on him)*  
Help! Get help!

*LEJLA and SANELA run up the stairs to the bar.*

NINO  
Shut up, you faggot pussy!

LEJLA and SANELA  
*(to the BARTENDER standing behind the bar, polishing a glass)*  
Help, please help!  
That crazy man is attacking us!

BARTENDER  
*(coolly)*  
Who's attacking you? I don't see anyone...

SANELA and LEJLA  
No, no – not us...  
*(gesturing)*  
Our friend, over there –

BARTENDER  
Oh, him! Can't that fine-looking young fellow defend himself?

LEJLA  
He's – he's not from around here.  
He's not used to this kind of stuff.

BARTENDER

*(polishing his glass, holding it up to the light)*

If he's going to be spending any time here, he'd better get used to it.

LEJLA

God in heaven. You're something else!

*Tugging SANELA along with her, LEJLA turns to a tall man, well-dressed in a sharp white suit and sunglasses, who has been standing near the bar, apparently giving instructions to a pair of waiters.*

LEJLA

Please, sir – are you in charge here?

*The NIGHTCLUB MANAGER glances at her and waves the WAITERS away.*

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(taking off his sunglasses and giving the girls a slow once-over)*

Indeed I am. And what can I do for you, young ladies?

LEJLA

*(gesturing toward the downstage table)*

Please, can you protect our friend from those maniacs?!

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(following her gesture, recognizing MALIK and NINO)*

Oh, *those* maniacs! Not a problem.

*(putting his arms around LEJLA and SANELA, and steering them toward the bar)*

Meanwhile, let's all have a little drink, shall we.

*He seats the girls at a small round table near the bar  
and snaps his fingers at the BARTENDER, who approaches.*

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(to the BARTENDER)*

Ask Malik and Nino to come up here, would you?

Tell them I have something for them.

*The NIGHTCLUB MANAGER sits down with LEJLA and SANELA as the BARTENDER  
descends the stairs and crosses to MALIK and NINO. He whispers something to MALIK, who  
whispers back, angrily, and then turns to DANNY. .*

MALIK

You're getting off easy this time, asshole.

But if I ever catch you here again, or anywhere near those girls,  
you're dead meat. You got that?

DANNY

*(to the BARTENDER)*

Would you be so good as to call the police?

This – *person* – ruined my shirt. It cost 200 euros!

MALIK

*(to DANNY)*

You want the cops, you piece of shit? I'll give you the fucking cops –  
and your fucking shirt!

*(ripping at DANNY's shirt, tearing it viciously)*

There you are!

*(taking a wad of cash from his pants pocket and throwing it at DANNY)*

Here, asshole. Buy yourself a new shirt.

You can find a better one at the flea market!

*NINO grabs the money before the startled DANNY can do anything with it.*

*NINO stuffs the money into his own pants pocket, takes a small automatic pistol from his waistband, and pushes the barrel up under DANNY's jaw.*

NINO

*(to MALIK)*

You're giving this asshole money? Are you out of your fucking mind?

Don't give him shit!

*(turning to DANNY)*

Listen, shit-face, get out of here while you still can.

And don't even think about calling the cops, or you'll wake up dead.

Go on, beat it!

DANNY

*(gathering the shreds of his shirt around him and walking away,*

*trying to preserve a little dignity )*

You're crazy, all of you . . . Crazy!

*His nerve breaks, and he runs up the stairway, past the bar – oblivious to LEJLA, SANELA, and the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER, who are still sitting at the small table near the bar – and out of the nightclub.*

*The BARTENDER casually follows DANNY's flight, then turns to NINO and MALIK.*

BARTENDER

You really shouldn't have pulled the gun.

NINO

Yeah? What should I have done – wait for the asshole to turn me in?

This way he won't open his mouth. Not unless he's even dumber than he looks.

WAITER

*(shrugging)*

Whatever.

*(to MALIK, nodding his head toward the bar)*

You want to come up? The boss says he has something for you.

*They cross to the stairs, as NINO tucks the automatic back into his waistband and MALIK smooths down his hair. As they climb the stairs, MALIK notices LEJLA and SANELA sitting at the table with the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER, now with an ample stock of drinks in front of them.*

MALIK

*(walking faster, reaching the table and addressing the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER)*

You've got something for me? And –

*(jerking his head toward LEJLA and SANELA)*

– what are *they* doing here?

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(standing and hugging him)*

Now, now, Malik. You frightened the young ladies,  
so now we're taking care of them.

MALIK

*(viciously, to LEJLA and SANELA)*

Way to go, *ladies!* Now get the fuck out of here!

LEJLA

Who are you to tell us to leave?

This gentleman asked us to sit at his table.

SANELA

That's right. We're with him, and you're not invited.

MALIK

*(shrugging)*

Suit yourself. But we have business –

*(to the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER)*

– don't we?

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(smiling and rising)*

I'll be right back, ladies. Meanwhile, have another round, on me.

*The girls laugh and lift their glasses in a toast to him, as the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER turns to MALIK and puts his arm around MALIK's shoulder, walking him away from the table.*

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

Listen, a batch of prime Afghanistani just came in.

MALIK

Yeah? How much?

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

For you, the usual. And I have new needles. You can try it right now.

*The NIGHTCLUB MANAGER turns upstage toward a closed door. MALIK signals to NINO to follow him, and the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER waves to LEJLA and SANELA, who wave back and return to their drinks. As the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER unlocks the door and ushers MALIK, and NINO through it, the moving lights on the rest of the stage dim slightly and freeze. The guests at their tables and on the dance floor also freeze, in tableau, and the music stops. Simultaneously, the lights come up on the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER's office: smallish, lined with file cabinets and bookcases, but with room enough for a desk facing downstage and a sofa with a glass coffee-table along one wall.*

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(taking a small paper-wrapped parcel from a drawer of the desk)*

Here's a quarter-key.

MALIK

Don't fuck with me, man! Get down to it.

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(laughing ironically)*

Me? Fuck with you? Never.

*(taking another packet from the desk drawer)*

And here are your needles.

NINO

*(watching)*

They better be clean.

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

You have my word. But here – see for yourself.

MALIK

That's enough, Nino.

*(taking another wad of cash from his pocket  
and handing it to the NIGHTCLUB MANAGER)*

Here. And close the door behind you, okay?

NIGHTCLUB MANAGER

*(taking the money and pocketing it)*

But of course. Privacy is yours.

*The NIGHTCLUB MANAGER leaves, through the door back into the main area of the nightclub. As he crosses toward LEJLA and SANELA, who are still at the table near the bar, NINO and MALIK prepare to shoot up. They take lengths of surgical tubing from their pockets and strap their arms . . . and inject themselves. NINO crosses to the sofa and sits down, but a moment later slumps down along the cushions. MALIK, perching on the downstage edge of the desk, slips to the floor. All of the lights, which have been fading slowly during this part of the scene, snap to black.*

**End of Scene 1**

## Scene 2

*INTERIOR, NIGHT. Another nightclub, even louder and smokier than the one in the previous scene, and quite a few notches more downscale. The music is head-banging turbo-folk. Two mostly naked girls are gyrating gymnastically, each around a metal pole set in the middle of a runway-type stage that extends from up right to down left. Other girls, wearing rather more make-up than clothing, are serving drinks to patrons seated at small round tables on the floor in front of the runway. A raised platform with gambling tables is set upstage behind the runway. The entrance to the club is midstage left. The customers are almost all male, of all ages and apparent economic backgrounds. Soldiers – American, Canadian, Italian, and Russian – in camouflage uniforms are standing in small groups here and there, watching the runway performance and the waitresses. Other soldiers are wearing uniforms with the insignia of the Federal Army and the Serbian Republic. English and Bosnian can be heard from the civilians, some are gambling, while others are kissing and pawing the girls. There's a lot of commotion – raised voices and laughter – around the roulette table, from a crowd of players that includes AKI. Random words can occasionally be heard over the music.*

### VOICES

I won!

Me, too! Come to papa, you lovely little chips!

Gentlemen and ladies, place your bets.

Hey, hands off my chips!

Fuck off!

All bets are down.

You're cheating!

I said fuck off, you shit!

I ordered a drink, honey. Sometime this century, hunh?

*An older GENTLEMAN enters through the stage-left doors. He is smoking a cigar. He radiates self-confidence and even a touch of arrogance. Some of the customers become quiet when they notice him. The NIGHTCLUB OWNER – a mafia-type in his mid-40s – comes*

*down from the roulette area and approaches the GENTLEMAN. A few of the waitresses and a couple of waiters follow him and stand close by, expectantly.*

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(escorting the GENTLEMAN to a table near the downstage pole dancer)*

Good to see you again, sir. Please, sit down.

What will you have this evening?

*The GENTLEMAN waves one hand nonchalantly, but doesn't speak.*

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

The usual, then?

*The GENTLEMAN nods and the OWNER motions the waiters closer.*

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(nodding toward the pole dancer)*

Bring her down here as soon as she's done.

*(to the GENTLEMAN)*

May we offer you some hors-d'oeuvres?

GENTLEMAN

*(shrugging and waving one hand again)*

As always, your hospitality is impeccable. But first, there's something you must tell me:

Who was that young man you sent to me last Tuesday?

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

Milos? He's – he's a cousin of one of our waiters. Nice boy.

Came down from his village about a month ago.

Why, is something the matter?

GENTLEMAN

Are you sure he couldn't speak any other languages?

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(confused)*

I'm positive. Why, is something wrong with him?

GENTLEMAN

*(sighing)*

I was afraid of that. Why do you send me such low-caliber boys?

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(nervously)*

Sir, please – has something happened?

GENTLEMAN

Nothing much. He showed up at the gate with that scraggly little beard of his.

The guards thought he looked suspicious and asked him to stop.

When he didn't, they had to shoot.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(very confused now)*

But – but – you said that as long as he didn't talk,  
he could go right on through!

GENTLEMAN

What I *said* was that he shouldn't mention my name.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(hesitantly)*

So . . . What happened then?

GENTLEMAN

As I said, he seemed suspicious, and the guards fired.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

Fuckin' hell! – Pardon me, sir. Was – was he hurt?

GENTLEMAN

No. He died.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(stunned)*

Oh – oh, no! Where – where is he now?

GENTLEMAN

At the morgue. There's no connection with me – at least, that's what I hear from defense headquarters – so that's all I can tell you, except that there was no identification on him.

*One of the waitresses arrives with drinks. She sets them down in front of the men, glances at their faces, and retreats quickly.*

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

I – I have to inform the family. He was a relative of mine, too . . .

We have to bury him . . .

GENTLEMAN

*(picking up his drink and taking a sip)*

I can't help you with that. Not my jurisdiction.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

So – What should I do?

GENTLEMAN

Nothing right now. Wait till our people get out a press release.

*(he takes another sip of his drink)*

Rumor has it he was armed.

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

Armed? That's not possible!

He couldn't even look at a picture of a gun, let alone carry one!

GENTLEMAN

Is that so? In that case, I think the official word will be  
that he stepped on a land mine. Now, about those hors-d'oeuvres –

*The NIGHTCLUB OWNER, distraught, turns around, motioning the waitress over, as a middle-aged man walks into the club. It's ROCCO, and he's been drinking. A holstered gun hangs from his belt.*

ROCCO

*(to the NIGHTCLUB OWNER)*

I heard Aki's here. Where is he?

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(glancing nervously toward the gambling area)*

He's, uh, he's around somewhere.

What's the problem?

ROCCO

*(waving a watch in front of the NIGHTCLUB OWNER's face)*

What's the problem?!

The *problem* is, that fuckin' Muslim sold me this fuckin' watch.

This fuckin' Rolex! And it's fuckin' broken!

NIGHTCLUB OWNER

*(relieved)*

Is that all?

*(nodding toward the roulette table)*

He's up there. But hey, no fights in here, okay.

That's all I need now. And that's all you need too.

You're on that list, remember?

ROCCO

*(heading for the roulette table)*

Fuck the list. And fuck you.

*He comes up behind AKI, takes him by the shoulder,  
and shoves the barrel of his gun into AKI's back)*

Come here, you piece of shit.

AKI

*(calm and collected, not turning around)*

Is that you, Rocco? What's the matter?

You know you aren't going to shoot me in here.

ROCCO

No, I'm not gonna shoot you. I'm gonna slit your fuckin' throat!

*(dangling the watch in front of AKI)*

What is this piece of shit you sold me, hunh?

AKI

*(with a show of surprise)*

Your Rolex? Why, is something the matter with it?

*AKI turns around slowly and moves away  
from the roulette table, carrying his drink.*

*ROCCO follows him warily.*

ROCCO

Don't give me that shit, you fuckin' thief.

My money back or I'll kill you.

AKI

*(still unruffled, reaching for the watch)*

Take it easy, now. All my goods are guaranteed.

Give it back and I'll get you a new one.

ROCCO

*(snatching the watch from AKI's reach)*

New one, my ass. I want my fuckin' money!

And if you don't want your throat cut, right here and right now,  
you'll fuckin' give it to me!

*AKI takes his wallet from his jacket pocket  
and counts a handful of bills out of it.*

AKI

*(handing the bills to ROCCO)*

Relax. Here's half. I'll get you the rest tomorrow.

ROCCO

Don't lie to me, you fuckin' asshole. I've had enough of your fuckin' lies.

And what about that buyer for my house? You said it was a done deal.

Where's that fuckin' cunt you were telling me about?

AKI

I swear on my mother, I'm not lying!

Here, I'll call her right now.

*ROCCO watches as AKI takes out his cell phone and punches the numbers.*

AKI

Hello? Zu? . . . Yes, it's me. I'm here with the owner of the house . . .

Yes, the one you liked . . . He wants to know if you're still interested.

Yes . . .

*(turning half-aside and lowering his voice)*

Yes, behind the pot on the porch.

*(turning back toward ROCCO and speaking louder)*

So do you want to see the house?

Great, that's great . . . I'm sure you will. He's a really nice guy.

ROCCO

Can the crap and tell her to meet us there.

AKI

Zu? We can meet you there now . . .

– Yes, right away. So we'll see you there? Good! *Ciao, bella!*

*AKI flips the phone shut and pockets it, picking up his drink.*

*ROCCO takes the drink from him and pours it out onto the floor.*

ROCCO

Forget the fuckin' drink. We're outta here!

*ROCCO pushes AKI toward the door, ignoring a relieved glance from the NIGHTCLUB OWNER as they pass. The GENTLEMAN, engrossed in his drink, his hors-d'oeuvres, and the WAITRESS, ignores them. As ROCCO and AKI leave, the lights fade slowly, from the edges of the stage toward the runway in the center. They linger for a moment on the downstage POLE DANCER, who has struck a pose astraddle the pole – head thrown back, almost horizontal, long hair hanging almost to the floor – before they drop to black.*

**End of Scene 2**

**Scene 3**

*EXTERIOR, NIGHT. A city street, illuminated by one dim light on a lamp-post standing in front of the stone steps leading up to a dilapidated house. ZUHRA is sitting on the top step, next to a large terra-cotta pot containing a scraggly shrub, smoking a cigarette. She finishes the cigarette, gets up, walks down the steps, tosses the butt into the gutter, looks at her watch, looks inside her shoulder bag, mutters something under her breath. From upstage, around a nearby corner, comes the sound of a sound of car stopping. ZUHRA turns and walks toward it, as two car-doors slam shut and, a moment later, AKI appears from around the corner, with ROCCO following close behind him, much less drunk than in the preceding scene, and with a guarded look on his face. As soon as she recognizes AKI, ZUHRA turns back downstage, climbs the steps, and nonchalantly sits back down, lighting another cigarette.*

ZUHRA

*(as AKI and ROCCO approach)*

You're late.

AKI

Sorry, Zu.

Rocco here took the scenic route.

ROCCO

Bullsh— er, good evening.

Traffic was pretty heavy. Sorry.

ZUHRA

*(standing)*

Well, you're here now. Let's get this done.

I don't have a lot of time.

ROCCO

*(climbing the steps and unlocking the door)*

This is a very fine house, you know. At least, it was once.  
It's a bit weathered now, but it's still in very good condition.  
And the location is great. Close to downtown, but away from all the bustle.

AKI

(to ROCCO)

You're all set, then. You two can take it from here.

ROCCO

(suspiciously)

Where do you think – uh, where are you going?

ZUHRA

Come on, I want to see the house.

Aki, you'll be back, won't you?

AKI

Of course, of course. Before you know it.

Just one or two quick things to take care of.

*AKI hurries back up the street and disappears around the corner.*

ZUHRA

(taking a long drag on her cigarette)

Well, then – Rocco, is it? – Let's have a look, shall we?

*ZU and ROCCO go inside. As the door closes, the set rotates 90 degrees. We see now that the upstage wall of the house was a scrim, which disappears as the lights come up inside, revealing the interior of the house. ZUHRA and ROCCO are talking as they walk through the central hall of the house.*

ROCCO

And here, this is where the kitchen used to be, and this was the pantry. . . .

*(as they turn and climb the central staircase)*

Watch your step, the stairs are a little wobbly. Here's the main bedroom.

The view's great – the whole city in the palm of your hand.

Just a few things need to be fixed up.

ZUHRA

*(brushing aside a film of cobwebs)*

A lot of things need to be fixed up. Everywhere!

ROCCO

It's not that much work, really.

Your husband should be able to handle it easily.

ZUHRA

*(curtly)*

I don't have a husband.

ROCCO

*(flirtatiously)*

No kidding . . . . A fine-looking gal like you?

I don't believe it . . . . Why not?

ZUHRA

*(even more curtly)*

I don't need one.

ROCCO

*(undeterred)*

You don't?

But surely you can see how helpful it would be to have one around?

Especially here...

*ZUHRA is silent, ignoring him, staring at the walls and ceilings.*

*ROCCO, encouraged, continues.*

ROCCO

If you had a real man here, he could fix all of this for you . . . and more.

ZUHRA

*(snapping back to the here-and-now,  
and starting back down the stairs to the main hall)*

I'll hire a handyman.

ROCCO

*(following here, rebuffed, but not ready to give up)*

You can't buy everything.

I'd give you a hand, anytime.

ZUHRA

*(considering)*

Well, why not? I was planning on paying someone anyway.

You'll do as well as anyone.

ROCCO

*(reconsidering, his bluff called)*

Well, maybe not. My former neighbors . . .

They were never very friendly.

ZUHRA

Oh? Why was that?

ROCCO

Well, they were jealous . . . of my success.

ZUHRA

Really. And what is it that you do?

ROCCO

Before the war, I used to trade in medicinal herbs.

ZUHRA

So, you're a pharmacist?

ROCCO

Not exactly. My late grandfather, may God bless his soul,  
was a famous botanist.

*(crosses himself)*

Maybe you've heard of him: Jovo of Romanija?

*(continuing, as ZUHRA shakes her head)*

Well, I inherited his talent. That, and the land where he grew his herbs.

So now, I have fields full of them: mint, chamomile, goldenseal . . .

ZUHRA

How wonderful!

Medicinal plants and natural remedies are quite the thing these days.

You could probably do really well if you went into exports.

ROCCO

As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I'm doing,  
through my pre-war business connections.

If only this fuc – er, horrible war had never happened!

ZUHRA

Horrible, yes, it was.

Were you involved at all?

ROCCO

I was drafted.

But they found out I could heal people, so they stationed me at the hospital.

If only you knew how many soldiers and civilians I was able to save!

*(recklessly)*

Even some of your kind . . .

ZUHRA

*(faking surprise)*

My kind? You mean Bosnian Muslims?

That would make you, what, a Good Samaritan, wouldn't it?

And where exactly did you do this noble work?

ROCCO

On the Romanija mountain, not far from my fields.

ZUHRA

*(thoughtfully)*

The Romanija mountain . . .

That's where my brother was.

ROCCO

*(briskly, changing up the tone)*

Was he? There were a lot of people there, going a lot of different places.

All sorts of things were going on.

ZUHRA

*(undeterred)*

Perhaps you knew him. They called him the Professor.

His name was Haris.

ROCCO

*(very apprehensively, pacing)*

Doesn't ring any bells, sorry.

So, anyway, about the house – how much are you offering?

Remember, I'll need the money up front –

ZUHRA

*(taking a photo from her bag and placing it under his nose,  
stopping him in his tracks)*

Maybe this will refresh your memory.

ROCCO

*(taking the picture, glancing at it, and then jumping back)*

What – What is this? What kind of picture is this?

*ZUHRA turns quickly and takes a gun from her shoulder bag.*

ZUHRA

*(levelling the gun at ROCCO)*

What kind of picture? You know goddamned well what kind!  
It's a picture of *you* – with my brother's head, you sick bastard!

ROCCO

*(swaying from side to side)*

Who – who are you? What kind of scam is this?!

ZUHRA

*(keeping the gun on him)*

Stand still. This is no scam. It's called documentary evidence.  
Evidence of you, you rotten *chetnik*, showing off your trophy to a pack of reporters.

One of whom just happens to be a friend of mine.

*(coldly, controlling herself, with an effort)*

And your trophy just happens to be my brother's head.

ROCCO

*(starts to bend down to pick up the photo)*

Wait, let me see that again –

ZUHRA

Don't you move! Do you hear me?

Not one millimeter!

ROCCO

Listen, please ! That's not me!

I swear – I swear on my mother's grave – it's not me.

I never killed anyone!

ZUHRA

*(lowering the gun fractionally)*

On your mother's grave? Well, then.

There must be some mistake.

ROCCO

*(breathing more easily)*

I'm sure that's what it was. Mistakes do happen.

You know that whole change-of-identity thing?

When people think you're someone else.

ZUHRA

I've heard of it.

ROCCO

That's what happened. It must have been!

Some people have been mistaking me with Lubura.

I'm sure that's who it was.

ZUHRA

You're sure, are you?

I'm afraid that's a luxury we can't all share.

*(as ROCCO starts to turn away from her)*

I said don't move!

ROCCO

*(stopping in his tracks and turning back toward her)*

What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?

Put down that gun!

*He starts to walk towards her. ZUHRA fires. ROCCO falls towards her, clawing at her. She steps back quickly and fires three more shots, as AKI bursts through the front door, shouting and cursing. He runs over to ROCCO, kneels down, and feels for a pulse. AKI rapidly goes through ROCCO's pockets, taking ROCCO's money and his papers.*

AKI

*(glancing up at ZUHRA, who is standing motionless, still holding the gun)*

Well done – I had no idea you were such a good shot!

Now give me the gun and let's get out of here.

*ZUHRA ignores him, still standing –stiff, silent, and expressionless –  
upstage of ROCCO's body.*

AKI

Zu, come on! Snap out of it!

Quick, before someone calls the police!

*AKI crosses to her and tries to pry the pistol from her fingers.  
She offers no resistance, but her fingers are still clenched immovably around the gun..*

AKI

Come on, Zu! Move!

We don't have much time!

*AKI tries to pick her up bodily, her gun hand squeezed between them, but slips. As they fall to the floor, the gun discharges. AKI rolls away, jumps to his feet, and checks himself for damage. Finding none, he turns back to ZUHRA.*

AKI

Zu, get up! We've got to get out of here!

*No response. He steps closer, and a horrified look spreads over his face  
as he looks back down at ZUHRA.*

AKI

*(kneeling beside her)*

Zu? Zu?? Oh, no. Oh, God. Zu! Oh, fuck!

ZUHRA

*(raising her head a little)*

Aki . . . Go now.

AKI:

Zu, fuck, I'm sorry. So sorry . . .

*He hesitates. ZU shakes her head slightly, pushes him away, and falls back. AKI feels for a pulse. There is none. POLICE SIRENS wail from offstage as AKI takes a handkerchief from his pocket, wipes the fingerprints off the gun, and puts it in ROCCO's hands. The SIRENS get louder as AKI picks up ZUHRA's shoulder bag. He spots the photo on the floor, picks it up, glances at it, wipes it with his handkerchief, and drops it on ROCCO's chest. The crime scene won't stand up to analysis anyway, so a few more inconsistencies won't make any difference.*

AKI

Zu, I'm so sorry. Fuck.

*AKI disappears down the back stairs of the house and the lights dim, as POLICEMEN'S VOICES are heard at the front door. The last spots hold for a moment on ROCCO and ZUHRA, lying motionless on the floor.*

**CURTAIN**

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