

# Unburdened

Rehan Ansari

Birds that Swim

&

Rehan Ansari

2012

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**Editor's Note:**

Rehan Ansari's translation of *Feeta Chalta Rehta Hai* by Zehra Nigah appear on pages 57-58.  
Rehan Ansari's translation of *Rakkasa* by Hafeez Jullundhuri appears on pages 80-81.  
Agha Shahid Ali's translation of an untitled ghazal by Ghalib appears on pages 81-82.  
The Cleric's speech on page 58, 59 is based on Maulana Tahir ul Qadri's lecture on Quran TV (a pre-recorded programme) that aired on the afternoon of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 in Lahore. Earlier in the day militants attacked the Sri Lankan cricket team.

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## Detailed Synopsis

Unburdened is set in the time just before and after President Obama's Inauguration. Robin, a half-Pakistani journalist from Toronto, is sent on a newspaper assignment to Karachi, a place he has never been before.

In Karachi, Robin stays with his elderly aunt and uncle, Attiya and Saad, who have survived a complex and unhappy relationship that began amidst the violence of the Partition of India in 1947. Robin finds mysterious the root of Saad and Attiya's inconsolable and hard-to-define sadness. In Karachi he plans to convince them to go to Delhi, a city they never went back to after 1947. Robin hopes a visit to India will be a catharsis for them, or at least a good story.

While in Karachi Robin and Katherine communicate frequently over the phone, skype and text and the grace of their intimacy long distance is a stark contrast to the dissonance between the older couple.

Robin is drawn into the culture wars of Talibanization in a personal way: he becomes attracted to Nazia. Nazia is hemmed in: the more successful she is as a musician in Pakistan the more nervous she gets about the right-wing forces targeting artists. In contrast to Robin and Katherine's communication, Robin's dialogue with Nazia is almost always at cross purposes, he struggles to get the point of view of the Pakistani woman.

In the second half of the play Robin is at the site of a militant attack and subsequently he says he understands 'why they fight and why they fight like that.' The signs of war in Karachi (in the local media, in graffiti, in conversation) enter Robin's dreams and cause an unexpected turn. Robin realizes that in Toronto universities and newsrooms through the 90's he had to hold his tongue through events that to him were 'battles' in the same war, like the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War, the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York, events pre and post 9/11. He focused on his career but now finds himself in anguish about being caught in the middle, silenced in a conflict between Islamists and western liberals. This anguish comes out as crises in conversations with Saad and long-distance conversations with Katherine.

Katherine offers to move to Pakistan with Robin. Saad finds out he is dying and tells Robin that he is burdened worrying about Attiya and what will happen to her after he is dead. In the penultimate scene at a dinner party Attiya recalls her life in Delhi. Robin and Katherine realize that in rescuing Attiya from someone Saad thinks was her abductor at Partition Saad may have killed someone she had become intimate with. Attiya disappears. It turns out that she has left Saad for Toronto and moved into an old people's home with a friend. This move by Attiya triggers reconciliation between Saad and his estranged son.

At the end it is open to interpretation who feels burdened or unburdened.

## Characters

**Robin Khan-McKay** Personable, has a physical grace that also makes him easy to like. It doesn't matter what the actor who plays Robin looks like except that the actor has to believe that Robin's self-regard is of someone who knows he is likeable. Robin is a journalist in his early 40s born and raised in Toronto. His mother is from Pakistan, his father is white (they are separated). He is a nephew of Saad, from Robin's maternal side. Robin went to university in Toronto in the late 80s and early 90s, and since then has spent his time rising through the ranks of print media in Toronto. He has hardly ever visited Karachi, this is his first big trip.

**Katherine (Kat)** Attractive, an internet specialist in her late 30s, also from Toronto; in a decade-long relationship with Robin. Katherine's mother is French Canadian and her father is Jewish, both from Montreal. Her parents are separated, and it doesn't sit easily with her. She feels that unhappiness comes easily to people and it's better to be part of a couple than be alone and unhappy. This idea of hers gets tested over the course of the play. From appearances Katherine and Robin look like a couple who are doing well in their work and life, and their relationship with each other. They live together in a house on **Queen West**; Katherine works in information architecture. She is where she wants to be professionally, has no current work-related anxieties. Robin and Katherine talk several times a day over the phone often about the mystery of Saad and Attiya's unhappiness with each other. The grace of Katherine and Robin's intimacy long distance is a stark contrast to the dissonance between the older couple, although the latter are almost always physically in the same space.

Most of the play is seen through Katherine's eyes (the action is reported back to her by Robin).

About the fact that Katherine is half-Jewish and Robin is half-Muslim: the idea is to explore a relationship where one partner from a Jewish heritage, and not prejudiced towards Islam, can be an interesting critic of their loved one who in turn is moved by the contemporary Pakistani Muslim situation (that encompasses both Pakistan and the Pakistani **diaspora**). Both are aware that the **Askhenazi** Jewish experience has parallels with the Post-Partition north Indian Muslim experience.

**Saad Qasmi** In his 70s but robust, could be 15 years younger in his energy. He is talkative. Married to Attiya. Saad has pale skin, speaks an unaccented English, he could pass as white Canadian. He is obsessed with honesty, both public and private. According to Robin, Saad is withdrawing from the world, because no country and no friend is ethical enough. Though Saad will never describe himself as a religious man he can be described as someone caught between Deen (God's ethics) and Duniya (the world and the messiness of living in it). An idiomatic expression in **Urdu** made up of these two nouns conveys this human condition. It's a tragic term and Saad personifies that tragedy for Robin. It's a spiral of loneliness and his descent began with his experience of Partition. Saad and Attiya's lifestyle in Karachi has become bare, to Robin's surprise, it's as if they are regressing to their original refugee identity. Attiya and Saad fled the anti-Muslim riots of **Delhi** to Karachi in 1947. They moved to Toronto in the early 60s. They retired in Karachi at the beginning of 2001, to be close to their son who has also moved back to Pakistan although Saad is currently estranged from him (not hard to see why since he is a difficult man). In marrying Attiya, a woman abducted during Partition violence, Saad made a gesture based on ethics not love. Growing up, Robin spent significant time in Saad and Attiya's home in Mississauga (the suburbs of Toronto) and heard lots of stories from Saad.

**Attiya** In her 70s, spritely, very alert, well matched to Saad' s energy, though usually quiet as Saad is usually *loquacious*, as compact as he is expansive. She must look like a South Asian woman, but her voice is all over the accent register, sometimes sounding cockney, sometimes an Irish brogue, sometimes CBC, and sometimes north Indian. She can also mix it all up, all the languages of her history into whoops and whistles. She mixes up metaphors with the same energy with which she mixes up accents. She values work and the independence that comes from earning one' s own livelihood above any politics or any other affair or theory of the world. This focus on earning her own keep though she is a senior citizen on a plump pension is a neurosis of the same order as Saad' s obsession with ethics. Her neurosis is rooted in her experience of Partition, and its aftermath. In the play her voice comes together/she finds her voice in Act 5 (in her biggest speech of the play in Scene 5.3). In this speech she refers to the Partition ethnic cleansing of Delhi' s Muslims and the ruin of an 800 year old urban Muslim majority city, a Grenada of culture). She names streets which had the most violence, and then she names the ghostly/ghoulish names of streets which Delhi in some incredible historical irony possesses (names that Attiya speaks in Urdu and then Robin translates in his exclamatory remarks). The speech conveys Attiya' s loss and her subconscious effort to remember something she usually represses.

**Nazia** is in her mid-20s, a musician based in Karachi, ethnically *pashtun*, gaining international recognition in a contemporary political atmosphere where the Taliban are intimidating artists, particularly popular woman musicians. In private she is vivacious, mischievous, the life of the party, a very mobile face and expressive body, with long dark hair, but when she sings, and when she is in public, she keeps her body very still. Nazia is hemmed in: she struggles with making money as a musician in Pakistan, though she is famous, and frustrated in her attempts to take advantage of the music scene in the bigger economy of India. The cold war between India and Pakistan does not allow Pakistanis visas to work in India. On the other hand a move to the west for Nazia would mean distance from her musical roots in Pakistan. In dream sequences that represent Robin' s imagination Nazia becomes the young Attiya. This is because Nazia who is the contemporary young Muslim woman in the play is struggling to find the freedom and physical mobility in today' s Pakistan that the young Attiya once had in pre-Partition India.

People referred to and not physically present in the play:

**Mo Ahmed**, a friend of Saad' s; **Cousin Kamal** (a first cousin of Robin from the maternal side, so Kamal is a nephew of Saad); **Robin' s Father**; **Robin' s Mother**; **Katherine' s Father**; **Katherines' s Grandfather**; **Son** (Saad and Attiya' s son who is never named)

## Set

The set is a two-bedroom apartment in Karachi. Most of the action is in the living room and dining room, which are one space, and the kitchen, which is apart and to one side of the stage/or at another level. The characters are identified with a part of the set that signifies their territory. Centre stage is a modest dining table with three wooden chairs. The chair at the head of the table is where Saad always sits. Stage right is Robin's bed. Stage left is Saad's favourite sofa and a side table that holds his books and newspapers. Downstage right is Attiya's kitchen, downstage left is Katherine's drafting table and chair and lamp representing Toronto. Nazia appears all over the stage: in her room, at a party driving a car.

Somewhere on the set there will a screen or multiple screens (either back projection or front projections). Whenever Robin looks at his phone for newsfeeds the screen(s) display news alerts on events in Pakistan. The screens also display Robin's text messages sent and received. The news alerts and text messages are in bold in the script. Images, and links, mostly sent between Katherine and Robin are displayed as well.

The news headlines, both political as well as cultural, from the war on terror 2008-2010 are collapsed into the timeline of the play (a span of 12 weeks), but not necessarily chronologically. They are shown in bold type.

There is usually not a quiet space anywhere in the apartment. One can hear television almost always, or Saad and Attiya talking (sometimes to themselves, sometimes yelling instructions). There are also noises from the street, usually from street vendors. Attiya almost always carries a phone with her (the hand-set), and is the first to respond when it rings.

Whenever two characters are speaking on their mobile phones they will be present on stage. Everybody uses mobiles except Saad and Attiya (who use a handset).

When Katherine, who is in Toronto, is present on the stage and apparently observing the action in Saad and Attiya's Karachi apartment, but seemingly visible only to Robin, it means that the scene is being reported back to Katherine by Robin. Robin and Katherine can also carry on a parallel dialogue, which means it's the conversation they have after the action. This is an oft-repeated device in the play. Conversely if Katherine is not present in a scene that means Robin has not told her about it. In other words the action of the play, with Katherine observing, is what she has been told by Robin has happened; on a few occasions the audience sees what Katherine has not been told.

Scenes One to Five are short scenes in which Robin interacts with all the characters. The scenes are short to convey, from Robin's point of view, simultaneity of interaction and a relentlessness of the experience of 4 important people in his life engaging him continuously.



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## The Play



Nazia            Whatever. (*pause*) Listen to this rap. (*Rights herself up. Performs an energetic and zany rap.*)

Mard e momin Mard e Haq Zia ul Haq Zia ul        Haq

Zee Aul HAQ, Z-Z-Zeeeul HAQ

Mard e MoMoMo MIN, MMM' maHAQ

Robin            Soldier of god, Man of Islam?

Nazia            You got Urdu! (*Has a drink*) You may be able to get some things around here.  
(*Sings*) Mard e momin Mard e Haq Zia ul Haq Zia ul Haq...

Can you in Amrika get more gangsta than        that?

(*Sings*) Mard e... (*Stops*).

Hmm, though Zia WAS Amrika.

Robin            What do you mean?

Nazia            (*Yells*) I have seen Charlie Wilson' s War. You' re Amrika if you get Amrikan money.

*The party crowds in around them.*

Robin            Let me guess: you are Betty and Veronica?

Nazia            (*Upside down again*) She is Celine I am me.

Robin            (*Looks at his watch*) This sucks. I gotta go.

Nazia            Hey... take my number!

*She takes Robin' s mobile and types in her number.*

*DARK*







Saad            I would think once, twice, four times before getting married. It' s a difficult, difficult thing. Some people say that it' s no point being miserable, but I believe that if you get married-- first of all DON' T, but if you DO-- then you marry for life

*Saad goes to dark, still on stage.*

*DARK*

## Scene 1.6

*Living Room*

Robin (To Katherine). I want to talk to him about everything (*pause*). Why did he leave Delhi, what was his life like there what did he wear, did he enjoy his life, did he ever anywhere ENJOY his life?! What'd he think of Karachi, did he like it when he got there, I mean, here (*pause*)? What made him stop liking Karachi? What made him leave? And Canada? What made him leave Toronto I mean we know why but why?!

Kat It's not like he has never talked before.

Robin But I want him to begin a story and end it! I want to see if for once she'll talk. She hovers around when I ask him questions, she never answers anything I ask, never! (*long pause*). In the 70's I remember him going out into Toronto wearing a maroon jacket, and parrot green shirts, and bowties he'd carry off so well, and his friends have told me how he'd spend a whole night at the roulette table.

Kat I'm sure Attiya was always Attiya though.

*They laugh.*

## Scene 1.7

Robin (*Robin's phone rings. Robin turns to Saad*) Sorry, I have to take this

*Dark on Saad and Katherine. Enter Nazia, driving a car through Karachi traffic. Robin picks up his phone to hear Nazia yelling at him.*

Robin Why didn't you like the story?

Nazia Just don't publish it.

*Robin moves through several emotions: from plaintiveness to reasonableness, tries to bully, ends in exasperation.*

Robin But why?

Nazia Look, please

Robin (*Sounds professional*) The focus of the story IS your song. But to write about it I have to tell that story about the concert. Just read it, have you read it? (*pause*) (*exasperation*) How can I not tell the story of the concert? (*pause*) (*reasonable*) That makes all the difference.

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Nazia *(Quoting the story, sarcastically mimicking a North American newscaster)* “The story of her first public concert is as much a private tragedy as a public one for Nazia. As she sang the song that has made her famous, the INCREDIBLE lament that is the BLUESY number, a bomb went off in the neighbourhood.” *(pause)* Oh dear, people killed right when the dari song was sung. That’s awful.

Robin I knew I shouldn’t have sent it to you to read.

Nazia You promised. That’s why you sent it.

Robin How else will the audience there get it?! How do I COMMUNICATE how personal this Taliban business is for you?! It all seems so far away in Canada. It is far away! People don’t get it, this blowing up of markets and hospitals and hotels and these killings. All this makes this place weirder and weirder for us, who can explain it? It doesn’t happen there so they don’t get it. But they will get you, you are a young woman, you…

Nazia Please, Robin. Just write about the music. It’s not my problem that they get us. Or you.

Robin It’s also the news, it happened, someone else will write it.

Nazia I don’t want you to write it like anyone else.

*Nazia EXIT*

### Scene 1.8

*Robin receives a text message. Katherine Enters.*

Robin Oh fuck.

Government allows Taliban to have Shariah in Swat Valley

Katherine What?

Robin Islamabad has caved in to the militants in Swat.

Katherine So what does that mean, isn’t that the back of beyond?

Robin No. Swat is a valley, 60 miles from Islamabad. *(He texts dexterously as he talks)*

Katherine Are you texting?

Robin No. *(Holds the phone up to his ear)*

Katherine Ok. Bye



Robin He says he doesn' t want to be close to him. Oh... (*In exasperation Robin gestures towards the pans*) Why don' t you throw some of these out? Make yourself some room. You' ll trip over something.

Attiya (*In a high pitched voice*) Why? I' ll need one of these one day, and then what will I do?

Robin There is so little room in the kitchen please be careful you don' t burn yourself at the stove.

Attiya Then I' ll go up in flames. (*pause*) Here, take this tea for him I' ll bring yours. And get married. I have lived with him (*she gestures towards the living room*). What else are you going to do?

### Scene 2. 2

*They go to the other room, Robin is ahead of Attiya. He is talking to Kat.*

Robin He won' t replace his computer now, he keeps having these boys come and fix it. He won' t buy anything that will outlast him (*pause*).

Kat *Sighs.*

Robin I' d love to take him to Delhi. I want to drag both there. She' s game. It' s more important for me than for them, who knows what is important for them. It would be a great story.

### Scene 2. 3

*Saad starts talking, somewhat impatiently as if Robin has taken too long to appear.*

Saad I don' t know why I bother playing bridge with these people, what they play is not bridge (*pause*). What else am I to do? How much can I read? My head hurts now.

*Robin passes him the tea pulls up a chair and sits near Saad who reclines on the sofa, a customary pose.*

Robin How is your walk?

Saad I don' t do it as regularly now (*pause*). I am not well

Robin Are you happy with your doctor here?

Saad He is good but I look up all the medicine on the internet and I send the reports he gives me to my doctor in Toronto. I pay both. Grimaces. I am not on Canadian Health Insurance anymore so it' s expensive.

Attiya        He left OHIP before his feet left the ground                      of Canada.

*Robin laughs.*

Saad            It' s the law. (*Makes a show of ignoring Attiya*) It' s not the doctor here that' s the problem, it' s getting to the doctor. I fired the guy who I had hired to drive me. Then I sold the car. It' s made life simple (*pause*) (*Smug smile*). But the bus is not on time, last time it was 15 minutes late. My doctor here is nice he sees me even if I am late.

*Saad looks uncomfortable, Robin looks up from his tea, looks Saad in the eye.*

Saad            My angiography failed. The probe couldn' t get through.

*Attiya walks in, sits down. For the first time the three of them are together.*

Robin          (*Flustered*) Did they estimate how much the                      arteries are blocked?

Saad            Four of them are seriously blocked, 60                      percent in one... and...

Attiya          There are only four.

Saad            There is another, a smaller path...

Attiya          (*Cuts Saad off her voice booming*) All the paths to Mr. Saad' s heart are blocked.

*Robin laughs then tries to compose himself. Attiya cackles. Saad grimaces, Robin laughs again. A thin smile crosses Saad' s face.*

## Scene 2. 4

*Robin on the phone with Katherine, in his bedroom lying in bed, it sounds like they have been talking a long time. Their communication over the phone—the amount of time spent long distance—has affected their interactions. Their relationship has gone through long distance periods before as well. They sometimes go off on monologues, then have a dialogue, then have monologues. The phone allows them to express things at length but also not necessarily address what the other has said right away. Frequent power breakdowns affect cell phone communication; sometimes in mid-conversation the phone disconnects. Everybody is used to this. Robin is laughing when the scene begins then suddenly turns serious. Katherine is at work. It' s night in Karachi and day in Toronto.*

Robin            I talked to dad yesterday about how Saad and Attiya met after Partition. Remember that story? After all these years dad told the same thing, the same facts, so maybe it' s as true as it gets.

*Saad and Attiya EXIT*

Kat Did he marry her out of responsibility? (*pause*) Robin, don' t lose yourself in a field of unresolved tragedy.

Robin Hey, where did you learn that?

Kat You forget I am Jewish

Robin Half Jewish

Kat The less to rub your face in with

Robin I like what you rub my face in...

*Phone disconnects. Robin calls her again.*

Robin How long have you been saving that to tell me... a field of unresolved tragedy!

Kat Don' t lose yourself that' s all

Robin Your Jewish half will get this city, there are so many older people here who seem to be hankering for some old world, and young people who are driven by anxieties that come out of somewhere ELSE. (*In a soft voice*). Hmm, you won' t like the Zionism of the city. (*A little louder than his normal voice*) Your other half certainly shouldn' t.

Kat Keep parsing me.

Robin You won' t be able to stand it, the fucking illogic of this place. You' d hate it. Hospitals don' t make sense, housing doesn' t, parks don' t, roads don' t, traffic, the elite, the poor, they all work on a suicidal logic... it' s not logic. Its faith! The country also began as a promised land.

Kat So it' s not my semitically rounded ass that they' ll have a problem with?

Robin That' ll fit right in, in fact... (*Talking slow as he is figuring out his thoughts; his hands are also down his pants*) There is something the matter with people here. Their excitement with alcohol, sex and music. I know I am from the great white north. Fine. I am not used to seeing so much EMOTION. There' s a buzz about how they are here. For them a visit to a liquor store would be heaven. We enjoy it more. They don' t enjoy it. They don' t sip they gulp

Kat I hope you won' t marry me out of responsibility. (*Pause*) You feel the burden of all these years?





Robin I am back to living in their Mississauga basement. (*He gestures at the small windows*). It's still impossible to know the time of day (*pause*).

*As Robin talks he puts on his pants and walks out of the bedroom. He goes to the dining table. Saad is seated there. Robin sits next to him. Katherine seats herself at the other end of the table from Saad and Robin.*

Robin We were at breakfast. I didn't want fried eggs again, or I wanted to make them myself. How do I tell her that?! Out comes Attiya carrying fried eggs and toast.

*Attiya enters, leaves the food by Robin and EXITS.*

Saad I am surprised at you, you were home last night, how do you keep up with things

Robin Whatdoyoumean?

Saad You didn't watch Obama on Larry King.

Robin Uh huh. Why, what did he say?

Saad Obama said it wasn't important whether he was Muslim or Christian.

Robin I'll read about it, he says these things well.

Saad (*Irritated*) Don't you think as a journalist you should watch the man speak for himself.

Robin (*His voice rising*) I know the men that Obama has hired, a lot of them are around my age, they are all Clinton Administration Lite, neocon po-lite, still out to remake the middle east.

*Saad gapes at him.*

Saad You think you can do better?

Robin I am not saying that, I am skeptical of this call of change.

*Picks up the International Herald Tribune lying on the table.*

I am not arguing this, the Foreign Editor of the New York Times is, here read.

*Robin places the newspaper next to Saad's breakfast; Saad stares at Robin.*

This is Obama's team: Dennis Ross, the Clinton administration Mideast peace envoy, James Steinberg, Dan Kurtzer, Dan Shapiro, and Martin Indyk. Two ambassadors to Israel in that list (*pause*). What have they succeeded at that they should continue? It doesn't even look good. Not one Arab, or Persian, or Afghan. Not one Muslim. They can't convince themselves that one Muslim could be for American interest? (*Long pause*)

*Saad leans over; opens his eyes wide.*

Saad            You think you can do better, Do YOU think            YOU can do better?

*Silence (pause).*

Saad            Do you?

Robin           Look they are all one kind of guy, you would           think after 8 years...

Saad            (*Cuts Robin off*) Well?

Robin           Yes...

Saad            (*Cuts Robin off*) You told me what I needed to           know.

*Saad turns away from Robin.*

*Turns away, Saad goes into darkness. Saad EXITS.*

*Robin turns towards Katherine's side of the table. Saad picks up a paper to do the crossword, sits on his favourite sofa in his usual way (leaning back, legs crossed at the ankle).*

Kat            That's one fucked up exchange. Did not know you had this steam to blow anymore. Why didn't you try out that Al Qaeda line of yours?

Robin           Which one?

Kat            "The problem I have with the State Department is that it's got too many Jews and the problem I have with al Qaeda is that it's got too many Muslims."

Robin           (*Giggles*)

Kat            Who are you, anyway? You don't want to join either so why bother your pretty head? I am glad he asked you that question.





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Attiya Madras.

Robin Karnataka?

Attiya Bombay!

*Robin comes closer to her, standing beside her so that his face is next to hers.*

Robin And then?

*Attiya's fingers sketch out in the air the western borders of the map of Undivided India (the current Pakistan).*

Attiya Pakistan.

*Attiya sketches out the rest of North India.*

Robin United India!

*Attiya's fingers make a big circle around the whole map.*

Attiya Humpty Dumpty.

Robin (*Shrugs. Soto voce.*) Had a great fall...

*Katherine and Attiya go to dark.*

## Scene 2.7

*Robin is in his room. Picks up the phone. Enter Nazia in her room, dancing in front of a mirror.*

Robin What are you doing?

Nazia Dancing.

Robin Where?

Nazia Here. (*Long pause*) Dancing alone. In front of the mirror.

Robin You don't sound like it you sound like at a club... (*pause*)...happier than at a club.

Nazia What are you talking about? I AM happy. Listen to this raag

Robin (*enthusiastic*) Sure.

Nazia            I am not so sure. Morning raags scare me.

Robin            Please sing it.

*Nazia sings a note or two of a morning raag. Robin fades to dark. It' s just before dawn.  
Sound of Morning Azaan.*

Nazia            It used to comfort me. Now it scares me. Pause. It feels like they are coming  
for me.

*Nazia EXIT.  
DARK*





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Saad My God.

*Robin smiles, is attentive and enthusiastic.*

Robin ...passed out, yes he was passed out. So he passed out on the plane?

Attiya Bay Hooooosh (*long pause*). Even if he was awake they wouldn't have gotten anything out of him to French questions. They did not ask him, even in French: Are you Pakistani, are you Muslim...

*Saad stands up.*

Saad What IS a Muslim? Does anyone know? What do they know ...

Attiya They asked how he was but he was unconscious so they took him to the hospital...

*Attiya moves about in the room.*

Robin And then?

*Lights go off. Power failure. Attiya shrieks*

Attiya AAAAYYY. Gone.

Saad Turn on the light.

Attiya AAAaaa where is it?

Saad I gave it to you last night (*pause*). I GAVE it to YOU.

*Robin goes and gets the battery powered lamp.*

Saad How many times do I tell you carry it with you in the evening, the power has no schedule. HOW MANY TIMES but you always look for it AFTER the light goes. ALWAYS. Look...

*Shows the handle, demonstrates its portability. Attiya comes into the penumbra of light to stand near Saad.*

Attiya Hansel and Gretel. (*Cackling, raucous laughter*).

Robin What happened to Kamal?

Attiya Yesterday there were some Muslim girls at the wedding and they were saying...

Saad Muslim? There you go again, which country are you in? In this one they' re only Muslim.

Attiya The girls were saying that it is their duty to kill *kaffir*.

*Robin is startled.*

Robin *Kaffir?*

Saad Infidel.

Robin They said that! Really?!

Attiya I told them that the French kaffirs did not ask Kamal who he was before they took him to the hospital. And he is Pakistani!

*The house phone (the handset) rings.*

Attiya Aaayaaayyay. Where' s my phone?

Saad If not on your ear in front of your eyes.

Attiya Aaay.

Saad You carry it around your neck check for it there.

*Robin goes with the lamp and retrieves the phone.*

Attiya It dieeeeeeeed.

Saad Obviously. You forgot to charge it (*pause*). I tell you charge it at night, charge it at midday.

Attiya How do I know who called, it may be important, I have MISSED it.

Saad Who (*pause*)? They' ll call again.

*Saad and Attiya EXIT*

### Scene 3.2

*Katherine Enters. Robin and Katherine watch Nazia perform a text message she has sent Robin.*

Rehan Ansari

Nazia And here' s *Hazrat Umar*. *Hazrat Umar* said, "I will be harsh and stern against the aggressor, but I will be a pillar of strength for the weak. I will not calm down until I put one cheek of a tyrant on the ground and the other under my feet. For the poor and weak I will put my cheek on the ground. "

Kat It' s like something *Sir Lancelot* would say. Who was *Umar* really? An early Companion right?

Robin Ya. From the original band of brothers he became head of an empire. Formidable warrior...

*Robin rubs his nose, so that inadvertently the next few words come nasally.*

Robin ...chauvinist but just! But who knows...

Kat A band of brothers can run an empire! What an incredible rise.

Robin If a father and son can run the White House, a band of brothers the state department, all it takes is a bunch of likeminded people to run something (*pause*). Guess what *Obama* has done, he took a *Yalie*, *Harvard Law Review* man, who is a *hafiz* of the *Quran*, so an *M*, made him his Muslim ambassador to the Muslim countries. *M* to the power of 3.

Kat Maybe he' ll be brother enough for the State Department someday SOON.

*They laugh*

### Scene 3.3

*Katherine is on stage observes, mostly sits, and looks straight at the audience, but not impassive her face shows her responses to the exchange between Robin and Nazia. Robin calls Nazia. Dawn.*

Robin What was that sms about? (*pronounces 'Sir' dramatically*) *Sir Umar* and... and something...

Nazia Hey I' m praying, call me back, in ten...

Robin How can you? In this time and day (*pause*)?! You' re serious aren' t you? How can you right now (*long pause*) pray towards *Mecca*?! Look at the kind of people who are the guardians of the *Kaaba*? If the *Kaaba* is theirs, how can it also be yours?

Nazia The *Kaaba* is the *Kaaba*. It has nothing to do with the guardians.

Robin Ugh...before the *Saudis* had the *Kaaba*, it was with the *Ottomans*.

Nazia I didn' t know that.

Robin Wikipedia it.

*Robin talks rapidly.*

Robin The British won the war against the Ottomans, carved them up and gave the Saudi peninsula and the Kaaba to their clients this one tribe... Now we are beholden to this family because they have the Kaaba.

Nazia The Kaaba is God' s. You leave my religion alone.

Robin You are **Hazrat** Nazia, Sir Nazia, the bestest of the Companions of the Round Table.

Nazia Do YOU know what the war is about?

Robin Finally, you are going to tell me!

Nazia Orange juice

*Robin laughs.*

Nazia You people love your orange juice, you call it fresh squeezed, it comes in tankers from Brazil. They separate all the pulp from the juice and transport that water all over the world and then put it back in.

Robin Put what back in?

Nazia It doesn' t matter. You call it freshly squeezed orange juice and it sells the most in your supermarkets.

*Robin talks slowly, dismissiveness turning to a shadow of understanding.*

Robin What the fuck?

Nazia You people have robots flying around the frontier killing people and think you are not fighting a war (*pause*). Orange juice!

Robin Where did you learn this?

Nazia Saw a documentary, was it Discovery Channel? A *maulvi* said this as well.

Robin What?! Who?

Nazia I don' t know I heard it on TV.

*Nazia EXIT.*

*Robin walks up and down meditatively. Kat appears. Robin quotes a poem*

“Allow me to remark  
That ghosts have just as good a right,  
In every way to fear the light,  
As men to fear the dark.”

Robin           And don’ t think you are people of the light because you are light skinned.

Kat              How could I forget?

*They laugh.*

Kat              Hey get on Skype.

*Robin sees her image on Skype. Kat is smiling and then rocks back and forth. It slowly dawns on Robin that she is simulating the rocking motion of sex.*

*Robin goes to Dark.*

**Scene 3.4**

*Robin dressed in a jacket, with a travelling bag, a coat hanger, walks out. Robin EXIT  
Katherine reads a text message from Robin.*

Kat              *(reads aloud)* Click for loving. Repeat after me. I don’ t want I may need.  
You’ ll have to figure it out. Click on From Trinity-Bellwoods to Keamari. I  
hear your foot-falls on paved stone. Walking on one continuous sidewalk, scratch  
that! Foot path.

*Kat looks at her phone as she receives a breaking news text and reads out aloud.*

**Cricket teams attacked! Sri Lankan team bombed, rocketed in Lahore.**

*She calls Robin. No answer. Calls again. Leaves a message on Robin’ s answering service.*

Kat    What’ s going on, where are you?

*DARK*

**Act 4**  
**Scene 4. 1**

*Robin witnesses a militant attack upclose in a landmark middle class restaurant. Seated in a restaurant for breakfast, a window seat, he hears a crash, then sees the windows smash as he falls to the floor. He looks out and feels another blast, and sees figures with automatic weapons across the street. The only part of this attack that is shown on stage is the sound of machine guns, an explosion, ambulance sirens, and television news. The light on stage is green night vision light (recalls the night-vision light used by US forces, as shown on television).*

*That night Robin dreams:*

*Nazia is covered by a black trash bag (her hooded figure recalls both Guantanamo Bay prisoners, detainees in detention centers in Buffalo and Brooklyn, as well as the burkha). She struggles to get out of the bag, as a figure (Saad) in a mask (baklava) holds the ends of the bag entrapping her. The audience can see Nazia's facial features pressed against the plastic material of the bag. Robin is restless in his sleep lying in his bed, wakes up like a sleepwalker and rushes over to 'save' Nazia. The other figure retreats as Robin holds Nazia from the waist, his hands caress her face, she holds his hand in affection, his hands then move to her breasts, it's unclear if she restrains him or not, he holds her by the waist again, she tries to move away from him. Robin retreats as she tears herself out of the bag as she chants: 'Press a button, press a button, press a button...'*

*Nazia whirls to a poem. This is a choreographed movement piece.*

Nazia            Press a button press a button pressabuttonpress press press press a button...

                  And a Noah's flood of Colours and Light!

                  Passes the eyes

                  A Dancing girl

                  Wearing shoes and nothing else

                  And acoustic boys

                  In slow whirls

                  The same headlines, blood relatives

                  And an analysis that's ONE everywhere

                  Commentaries of obeisance, News of worship,

                  The drone of politics

The separations of love  
Praise of god and prophet and sufi  
The pandemonium of opinion!  
The news, all day and night  
All the colour is that of water  
All the tones are all-knowing  
And then  
One headline starts ticking  
A 100, a 1000, countless, uncounted  
Living loving fleshy humans  
Have passed from life to news ritual  
We press a button  
God' s flood of Light and Colour  
Passes Noah' s eyes

*Nazia shakes her head from side, recalling the final gesture of the Islamic prayer: the movement of the head from right to left.*

One headline starts ticking  
One headline starts ticking  
One headline starts ticking

*Song ends. Robin tossing and turning in bed. EXIT Nazia. ENTER Saad dressed as a Deobandi cleric.*

Cleric           When they reached that spot and camped the prophet forbade them from using local flour to make...

*Robin sits up bolt upright in his bed.*

Robin           ...Pizza! (*pause*)

Cleric        He told them to throw out the pizza dough. Not just that. He made them throw out the pizza that was already made... (*pause*)...The startled companions asked why. One among them whispered that the prophet was refused water by the people back when he came through here and was a nobody (*pause*) an immigrant (*pause*) a refugee. (*Long pause*)

*DARK*

Act 5  
Scene 5.1

*The television is breathless, describing the Lahore attacks. Robin sits stares right out at the audience, exhausted after the events of the day. ENTER Katherine.*

Kat           *(middle of conversation)*...It looks like the B-team went to Lahore, the A- team went to Mumbai. What is it? Why so quiet?

Robin        When you see things up close and personal                   it' s different.

Kat           I know I am not going to like what you have                   to say.

Robin        I can see why they fight and why they fight                   like that.

Kat           The world is not perfect and we are not its                   main decision makers...

Robin        ... until a bomb blows off in our art deco, then our world becomes imperfect. Kat, we people set the terms for the war: we want this oil this water this territory and we will fight like this and this is how you will fight and behave. A child here can understand that this is gross, unfair. Between my saying this and your understanding lies a bomb blast *(pause)*. I can understand it. It is a compelling argument. What do you do against compelling arguments?

Kat           So what are you gonna do? Either set off more bombs or stop all of them?

Robin        I have kept Pakistan at bay all these years... Who wants to come here ... but there is something going on there that makes me feel something all the way in Canada, something about shame and humiliation, it' s like a bird flu...

Kat           Someone gives you bird flu, and I don' t mean the birds, it' s a mutation because of some environment or some people, so fine you have it, you are not mad to get it, but now get rid of it... *(Long pause)*

Robin        Saad is reading  $E=mc^2$  *(pause)*. He showed me a line: Einstein did more for humanity than any prophet. You should see how he says it *(pause)*. It' s this kind of thinking that has fucked me up *(pause)* This desire *(pause)* to do good for humanity *(pause)* for such an ordinary man...

Kat           Parochialism can cause mental health problems. So does thinking for all. You think that bombing makes a point and that more bombs will make more points? *(pause)* Ok fine, you are right.

Robin        No

Kat           No?

Robin Not that they are right. I THINK they are right. (*pause*) You want ? (*Talks rapidly*). They' re like Luke and Han. Skywalker was spiritual, wasn' t he, and Solo shot first asked questions later, so he was mercenary... oh I don' t know I' d have to see the films again. (*pause*) I can' t give analogies, things are too poor here to give analogies with, maybe it' s like Sergio Leone land: I spoke to a reporter from here went to where Kasab, the Bombay attacker, is from. The poverty of his parents is bewildering.

Kat Don' t ruin it for me.

Robin Why don' t you come here?

*Saad enters. Kat remains on stage. For the rest of the scene Saad and Robin speak to each other, interspersed with Katherine' s monologues and dialogues with Robin.*

Saad Why are you here, Robin?

Robin I don' t know what you mean.

Saad What brings you here?

Robin Y' know, stories.

Saad These? (*Gestures at the television*) Here? This can' t be important to your audience there.

Robin I pitched them, I said it' s important to see the other point of view. But you are right, they don' t get it.

Saad (*About to speak. Stops. Starts again*) You are taking some horrible risk aren' t you, you are not supposed to do that. Why are you doing such a difficult thing, always the difficult thing. (*pause*). Who is your competition? You will have to be twice as better.

Robin I don' t take risks. When do I do the difficult thing?! No, I don' t. (*Raises voice*). It' s not about being twice as good. (*pause*). Tell me something new.

Saad New?

Robin I have never told you how many times you say that. You' re a generation that had a hard time explaining the back story. (*Pause*) At the bank, you couldn' t give your opinion about what you thought of the world. I don' t want to be that. My time is different. (*pause*) The war is twenty years old now! I was in college when the Rushdie thing happened, the Persian Gulf War, the... the.. they, the first time they bombed the World Trade Center, all the bombings of Baghdad...

Saad They can' t be fought against.

*Robin smiles and turns to Kat.*

Robin That' s his Deoband roots.

*Robin addresses Saad, stares at Saad.*

Robin Who is talking about a fight, I am not talking anti-imperialism?! (*Talks rapidly*) When that London carpenter, the Brazilian guy, was chased down the Tube and shot and killed the news editor immediately wanted to put down the headline: Terror strikes London.

*Saad cocks his ear.*

Robin I argued that the Yard has not issued a statement in 4 hours, it means it' s a mistake. They would be crowing about it if they' d found a bomber' s belt. (*Saad moves away*) The news editor yelled at me, 'you just want to show the west to be wrong!'

Saad Is he wrong? Do you think (*waves at the windows*) they are innocent?

Robin They won' t let me tell that story either. They wouldn' t let me tell a story like Cousin Kamal' s. His entire building in Jersey was raided for weeks in December ' 01. I know there wasn' t anyone there, not even a thought of militancy. Now 9 years later, they won' t let me tell the story of his son either.

Saad (*Worried tone*). What? What' s wrong with him?

Robin He is going the other way. He is religious and (*pause*) quiet. That' s Cousin Kamal' s words: my son is going the other way. But the kid saw his dad pushed around by men in uniform, in New York! I visited Kamal in Buffalo, do you know how thick the walls were at that fucking detention center in Batavia. He looked so small in that window. Like a rabbit.

*Attiya enters. Looks around the corner.*

Attiya He is small anyway.

Saad (*In a small voice*). Look, he was the wrong man at the wrong time in the wrong place.

Robin If that had been done to my father, or you. (*pause*) Y' know when New York was attacked the editor said in the morning meeting, 'we' have been attacked. 'We' in Toronto?! I had to shut up

Saad I am glad I won' t live in the times you have to live in.

- Robin            You are from where they fought imperialism, with swords, words, that' s self-confidence, where' s yours?
- Kat                *(Glares at Robin then looks into the audience)* What I miss about my grandfather is the taste of Jaffa oranges. He was a quiet man and he peeled me oranges though they were easy to peel. Israel for me is easy to peel oranges. *(Ends with a hard look at Robin).*
- Robin            *(Addresses Kat)* I know, my love.
- Saad              Are you going to champion Shariah now?! *(pause)* 500 years of nonsense, a 100 of those years run through our family. I... stopped it
- Attiya looks fiercely at Saad. The phone rings, she picks it up leaves the room.*
- Robin            *(Registers Saad' s last comment, and goes on, breathless)* It' s about right and wrong. You have to be twice as good as them is what you have exactly said. I am from here in Canada; I don' t want to be twice anything. I see something about how we are with this war and I want to be able to say it.
- Kat                You are not the only one boxed in. Pause. How' s it so unusual to not be able to say something at work?
- Robin            *(Stops in his tracks, looks irritated, then shrugs, addresses Kat)* I am in the business that deals with the truth.
- Kat                Amazing that instead of feeling physically threatened, you feel like that.
- Robin            I do. I feel threatened in Toronto. For you the threat will be some unknown, for me it is something I am steadily getting more familiar with.

*Robin addresses Saad.*

- Robin            From the time at U of T, my first class, history of western philosophy, I heard that the Arabs passed on Aristotle from the Greeks to the Renaissance, what the hell does that mean, hello West here' s a message from your past, now go and be all you can be... It' s like this every day in the opinion pages. And Professor McCarthy, y' met him, argued within days of the Persian Gulf War that the war was a just war, and he argued it in a chapel on campus. An *Al Taliban* drone would like to have taken out that chapel, my philosophy teacher at the podium, me in the audience and all the rest. *(pause)* We still don' t count THEIR dead. Can you count how many cities we bomb with names like Kabul and Baghdad? We talk of bombing Tehran! How many newspapers in Cairo and Karachi say: Is it time to bomb London and New York? *(Long pause)* In our papers some part of me gets shamed every day!

Saad Why are you putting all this together like this?

Robin I am not. They are. (*Gestures at the television, and out the window*) In their way. And I am not allowed to report on that. Nope. (*pause*) We gotta get out of this war. (*pause*) We do. Ohmigod.

Kat (*Looks at the audience*) People change and what if they don't change in the way we want them to change. (*pause, looks at Robin*) I don't want to be silent in your change. (*pause*) It is easy to break up Robin, we can do that anytime at any age. There are so many intimacies I don't share I don't want to. Relationships are also about not sharing so that they last. (*pause*) You can't bring all you have to bear on another. (*pause*) Why do we take what someone says as the facts of the matter? We hear a couple of stories and we think that's what has happened. We tell different stories about the same things when we need to. I imagine you are faithful to me. Do you know the statistics for infidelity these days? (*Long pause*) I want you there for now.

Robin Let's save ourselves. Every line drawn on the map in this vicinity is English, American. We think we can do anything. Someone feels THEY can and won't let us do whatever. (*Fingers his phone. Katherine and Robin both look at their phones at images that Robin sent Katherine. Audience sees these images on screen(s)*) At the corner of the Mall and Queen's Road in Lahore one becomes liberal, and a paid up member of the empire *khud b' khud*. In Karachi look at Bunder Road, it is Victorian in sandstone.

Kat *Khud b' khud?*

Robin 'Spontaneously.' I like this word... For some people this all doesn't work, this law holding up this commerce, they have no place in our buildings, they want something else.

Kat It's traumatic to not be able to talk. But when you are in trauma you don't know that you are not talking.

Robin We better ask them, you think the Toronto Star can or the Globe and Mail? If I can't even talk to you, I am just talking there is no one listening, can't I just talk to you, can't I just talk to you incorrectly!

Saad I am ill. What will become of her when...? (*pause*) Who will...?

*Attiya enters. She has come in from outside the house. Attiya yells.*

Attiya He is coming! He is coming!

Saad (*Yells back at her*) Who? Who for god's sake?

Attiya Our son.

Saad But he is not due to come.

Robin *(to Attiya)* For his birthday?

Attiya Birthday!

Robin *(Makes an effort to perk up)* Let' s have a party! I' ll cook.

Saad You?! What? Don' t be silly.

Robin My mother' s pulao. I' ll call the bootlegger.

Saad Dear god.

Robin Don' t dear god me, I' ll get your favourite Sancerre.

*Attiya smiles.*

*Saad, Attiya and Katherine go to DARK*

## Scene 5.2

*Nazia is moving about her room, looking in a mirror. She then seats herself to leaf through a big GRE vocabulary textbook.*

Nazia Listen to this bhajan. *(Sings)* This for Shiva... *(Sings/hums)*... I like this god but what an ascetic? ...A-S-C-E-T-I-C *(she flips through her vocabulary book)*. He lives in the mountains. He is powerful but wears rags. Gods should be like that! *(pause)* When he gets angry he dances. *(pause)* Even when he destroys its organic, it' s a natural process, it' s not just... *(pause)* Men should be like that.

Robin So the Taliban are not Shivites in the mountains...

Nazia *(Cuts him off)* Look at this music. *(Sings a few notes from a bhajan)* Sounds like jazz. *(Sings a note)* This same culture that has this, produces Bollywood, I mean WTF! ... Look at the arrangements the compositions the melodies of these raags. *(pause)* I can understand us doing Bollywood but them? *(Sings a few lines of a kitschy bollywood song)* *(pause)* When I go to India the first few days are wonderful its better than home. It' s like listening to bhajans. But by the last few days I don' t like it. I don' t like all these gods that just remind me of men: Shiv Krishna Ram. *(Pause)* Shiv has two wives...

Robin One, one, it is the same woman!

Nazia (Talks over Robin) Krishna fools around all the time and women have to prove themselves to Ram over and over again. Same thing as we have. *(Pause)* What does baleful mean? Use it in a sentence.

Robin Baleful?

Nazia For my GREs, I am not good in English. Show me how good YOU are.

Robin His reputation for war mongering was such that when Vice President Cheney looked at the globe on his desk with his baleful eyes, the President, who was the one standing, shuddered.

Nazia Makes no sense to me, *(in an American accent)* I am a Pakistanian remember. Baleful is war mongering?

Robin Who for you has baleful eyes?

Nazia *(Fear in her voice)* Mulla Omar.

*Nazia EXIT.  
DARK*

### Scene 5. 3

*Robin cooks in the kitchen, Attiya assists. Saad Enters. Kat enters.*

Saad I' d like to see you make your mother' s *pulao*.

Robin That' s a recipe for disaster.

Saad What does it have?

Robin *(Begins to read from his blackberry; he takes some pride in being able to pronounce the Urdu)* *Pulao* (5-6 cups) Pot full of water add ginger; full onion sliced; 1 full garlic with skin; 3 or 4 cinnamon sticks; 7 full *illaichi*; 1/2 tsp long; 1/2 tsp full black pepper; 5 bay leaves; 4 flowers; 3 full tsp *sabuth dhaniya*; 3 full tsp *saunf*; 1 tsp *zeera*; 2 tsp salt; lamb/goat -shoulder pieces - 1 Kilo. Cook on medium flame for 2 hrs. Phase 2... Fry..

Saad Oh never mind. *(pause)* I' ll make tea. Here' s how Frye showed me, one afternoon in his house.

*Note: Saad takes some amount of pride in referring to Northrop Frye' s company. Robin has the opposite attitude. He thinks Frye probably was no real friend of Saad' s and viewed Saad as little more than a curiosity.*

- Attiya North Thorpe Fried.  
 Saad (*Flinches but makes a show of ignoring Attiya*) Boil the water. Pour some in the pot to warm the pot but when you throw it out, this is key. You dry the pot. Then put in the tea leaves
- Attiya (*Persists*) Tell the story of your father' s religion. Fry that story.
- Robin What is it?
- Saad Just before I came to Canada I gave up praying. 15 years in Karachi I prayed behind Maulana Thanvi of Jacob Line and one Friday I found out he had accepted the 'gift' of a girl from one of his disciples. (*pause*) I gave up praying.
- Attiya He met Fried when we lived on Brahmaputra.
- Saad Burnhamthorpe ROAD.
- Attiya North Thorpe Fried told him...
- Saad Yes some years later I met him through a friend and Frye was a minister or he used to be one. I was ready to give it up.
- Robin What?
- Attiya Religion.
- Saad I asked Frye why he became a cleric. I told him where I was from and what I had gone through and he told me that what was good enough for my father was good enough for me.
- Attiya He gave up praying
- Saad I wasn' t going to pray behind a man like that. If Islam is his, then it' s not mine.
- Attiya Too far. You go too far! Fried!
- Attiya and Saad exchange angry glances, she trembles. Robin panics as he sees they are very angry. The bell rings. Robin says a number of things rapidly in an attempt to underplay what' s happened.*
- Robin I' ll go see the door, look, someone is at the door, it' s my friend Nazia. (*pause*). She is a singer, if she sings it' ll be fun tonight.
- Saad I want to be alone, I am not well.

*Robin goes comes back with Nazia.*

Nazia           Helllllooooooos.

Attiya           How are ya?

Nazia           *(Laughs)* I am good and you?!

Attiya           How' s the weather?

Nazia           The meterological department of Karachi city says it is likely to be sunny.  
Attiya           We come from a place where it' s likely to be cold. Before that we came from  
                  where it was likely to be bloody!

Robin           OoooooooooKay. *(To Nazia)* Hey did you get                   the visa?

Nazia           I don' t want to talk about that.

Robin           Oh no! you didn' t get it, what about the                   concert?

Nazia           Bombay is scared; this peace concert was a bad idea. So soon after the attacks!  
                  But I needed to go there for these meetings with producers. I don' t even know  
                  if they' ll like my music. Oh god when am I going to make money?

*Robin leaves for the kitchen where the pulao is being made, he and Attiya are taking turns making it.*

Attiya           You want to root for a place where we were                   uprooted.

Nazia           I' ll go wherever I can make some money.

Attiya           I was the first girl to get permission to work. I got a job in Delhi my father  
                  lived in Gannor. A 100 miles away. I saw an ad in the newspaper for the Royal  
                  Air Force.

Nazia           Was it war time?

*There is the sound of sizzle from the kitchen; and everywhere in the apartment is the aroma of the characteristic complex mutton stew in which the rice of the pulao is brought to a boil. Everything that has occurred in the apartment so far since Robin' s arrival, all his questioning, Saad and her responses has had Attiya at an emotional edge and now the aroma of the pulao, the smell of a recipe from her Delhi of half a century ago, tips her over. As Attiya speaks she brings in memory, current Indian history, proper nouns, personal insights that amaze Robin.*

Attiya           Have you seen North block and South block? Where the Viceregal Lodge used to be?  
                  Where they killed Indira Gandhi?



Robin I am having daymares! I want to be able to speak when the thing is happening not 50 years later. (*pause*) But they don't let you. I'll tell you what happened to me. The waves of the blast... industrial air, greasy...warm, someone putting a mask on you that fits your face right away. Reminds me of all the times I am not heard. Everyone else starts screaming. Except me. (*pause*) Not right after the *fatwa*, not right after the towers go down, not when the aerial bombing of Baghdad is announced, nor right after the crackdown in Brooklyn and Queens, not right after the London bombing, or Madrid, or the Mumbai attacks... Right after is when there is no space for me. One side bombs the other reacts, and I have to keep my peace.

Kat Most of us here plumb emotional depths. Robin, we wade into our emotional waters with therapists. You have gone there and dug political. There must be professionals for that!

Nazia Lets have something to drink. Open all those bottles Robin. Let's sing. Attiya, do you sing?

*Saad Enters. His mood is changed or he makes an effort to be light-hearted—he may have been listening to Attiya offstage.*

Saad (*To Nazia*) I'll sing something for you young lady, it will be a change. I don't know why women are always asked to sing. (*To Robin*) Do you know what discretion is?

Robin Subtle. Slight.

Nazia Opposite of ostentatious?!

Saad You can do whatever you want as long as you get away with it.

Robin (*Delighted*) No way! Are you going to sing?

*Saad sings a poem.*

Saad (*Sings*) Drink, let me drink

Life let me live

Drink, let me drink

Life let me live...

Nazia (*Sings the refrain*) I'll think about atonement/On the Day of Judgement.

Attiya (*Sings*) I'll think about atonement/On the Day of Judgement.

Nazia (Sings) I' ll think about atonement/On the Day of Judgement.

*Saad and Attiya sing together.*

Saad/Attiya But until then let me drink and let me live.

*Attiya does a slow whirl.*

Attiya And dance dance let me dance.

Nazia Dance let me dance.

Saad The clouds roll over from the west

It is now time to drink, time to drink.

Dance, dance, dance my love.

Sing and Dance your loveliness. (*Long pause*)

And make an enemy of this world and... (*pause*).. Islam

Robin What?!

Saad This world: *Duniya*. And god' s ethics: *Deen*. The dancer makes an enemy of both. That is how the song goes. But don' t take my word for all this.

Robin Sing it in Urdu.

Attiya We came up with the English version a long ago.

Saad Who here knows poetry about wine?

*Nazia responds in the negative, so does Robin. Saad recites a ghazal by Ghalib.*

Saad I too could recall moonlit roofs, those nights of wine

But time has shelved them now in Memory' s dimmed places  
*Raises his hand.*

With wine, the palm' s lines, believe me, rush to Life' s stream-

Look here' s my hand, and here the red glass it raises.

*Nazia and Robin are stunned by Saad' s performance. Attiya is unmoved. Saad changes his tone.*



*Another dream. Saad dressed as a Taliban commander looks at the audience. Nazia comes into the audience. She rubs against people. She crosses several rows, then progressively touches more people, more intimately: holds a hand or touches a face, or hair. The commanders voice (Saad) speaks.*

Saad            This is just a taste of heaven

DARK

### Scene 5.5

*Saad enters living room yelling.*

Saad            Attiya! Attiya! Robin!

*Lights.*

Robin            (*Rushes in, He has just woken up*) Is she not            here?

Saad            Of course she is not here. She' s left. She has            left...

Robin            Huh?!

Saad            For Toronto. She says, (*holds up a note*): I can join her or I can stay with the son and he' s coming over.

*Saad walks around, then sinks into his chair. Saad looks defeated. It begins to look like relief. Mumbles for the first time in the play.*

Saad            She has never written a letter to me before.

*Saad EXIT.*

Robin            He left meekly with the son... (*pause*). He didn' t show up that night he came the next day. Let' s see how long he stays with him...

Kat              Robin, I have heard enough.

Robin            I know what you are going to say.

Kat              You' ll never know who did what to whom            when they won' t tell you.

Robin            We live with it so we have to know!

Kat              We live with things we don' t know the beginning of... (*pause*) There is something about this Islam business.

Robin Islam business or Islam? I know what your father says about Pakistan.

Kat There is more I haven't told you. (*pause*) Are you having sex with Nazia or are you fucking with her?

Robin I have left her...

Kat You were never with her.

Robin That's why I have left her.

Kat I'll come there.

Robin What?

Kat I'll come there. For three years, two years whatever. I can work from there, I can work from anywhere.

Robin What will your family say? I mean...

Kat My father will send me the news about bombing and anti-women laws the news that I will see in the newspaper anyway that he will make sure I see again.

Robin He never stopped?

Kat He never stopped.

Robin How will we deal with this place together?

Kat You want to take a stand. I'll be there. (*pause*) Here, let's do it. It's for both of us. I feel bad, you made your case. We should not go fighting in a place we are not prepared to live in. So here's your chance to do something about it.

Robin Saad told me he has killed a man

Kat Attiya's abductor!

Robin He didn't say.

*Long Pause.*

Kat Why would he talk about killing just anyone?

Robin Ya.

Kat Robin. What do you want to do?

Robin                                    *(Looks out at the audience. Long pause.)* I' m                                    coming back.

Kat                                    You are bringing it all back with you aren' t                                    you?

*DARK*

*End*

## GLOSSARY

### Introduction

**Karachi**—The largest city, the main seaport and financial centre of Pakistan. In 1947, the character of the city was drastically changed with the settlement of Muslim migrants and refugees from India.

**Partition**—In 1947, the Colonial Indian state was divided along religious lines into the Dominion of Pakistan (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and the Union of India (later Republic of India).

**Taliban**—An Islamist militant and political group that ruled large parts of Afghanistan as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from September 1996 until the NATO invasion in October 2001.

**Talibanization**—refers to the process where the populace at large is persuaded or coerced to follow the severe practices of the Taliban.

**Islamist**—In contemporary media parlance, someone who has a severe interpretation of Islam and militantly intolerant.

**Western Liberals**—Generally speaking liberals who support democracy, constitutionalism, free and fair elections, human rights, capitalism, and free exercise of religion.

### Characters

**Queen West**—A street that runs through downtown Toronto.

**Diaspora**—The settled area of a people outside their established or ancestral homeland.

**Askenazi**—The Jews descended from the medieval Jewish communities along the Rhine in Germany from Alsace in the south to the Rhineland in the north.

**Delhi**—The largest metropolis by area and the second-largest metropolis by population in India. The capital city, New Delhi, lies within its reaches.

**Urdu**—The national language of Pakistan and widely spoken in India.

**Pathans/Pashtun**—An Eastern Iranian ethnic group primarily located in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of the American led War on Terror has been fought in the Pathan-majority areas.

### Act 1

#### Scene 1.1

**Brangelina**—Pop culture reference to the Hollywood power-couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

**South Waziristan**—A mountainous region on the north-west of Pakistan that is reputed for its extreme conservatism, violent feudalism, and the influence of the Taliban.

**Urdu**—The national language of Pakistan and widely spoken in India.

**Pathans/Pashtun**—An Eastern Iranian ethnic group primarily located in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of the American led War on Terror has been fought in the Pathan-majority areas.

**Zia ul Haq**—One of the most infamous dictators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He imposed martial law over Pakistan after ousting and executing Prime Minister Bhutto in 1977. His rule was characterized by a militant Islamist national ideology and extreme oppression of political opponents. His US-backed regime laid the seeds of Talibanization.

**Charlie Wilson’ s War**—A 2007 American film about U. S. Congressman Charlie Wilson who worked with the CIA to launch a program to organize and support the Afghan *mujahedeen* -Islamic rebels - in their resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

**Betty and Veronica**—Two main characters from Archie Comics, a popular American comic series which was originally published in 1941 and continues to be published today.

Scene 1.2

**Islamabad**—The capital city of Pakistan.

**Shariah**—The moral code and religious law of Islam.

**Swat Valley**—A picturesque valley in the north of Pakistan that is largely populated by Pathans and is known for its great natural beauty.

**Mardan**—Known as the City of Hospitality, Mardan is the second most populous city in the same province as the Swat Valley.

Scene 1.4

**Grammys**—The American music awards ceremony.

**Taylor Swift**—Pop culture reference to a young American country music singer.

**Alicia**—Pop culture reference to American R&B icon Alicia Keys.

**Jay-Z**—Pop culture reference to the successful American hip hop artist Jay-Z.

**Bronx**—A borough of New York City whose population comes from a rich diversity of nations and cultures. The area is often characterized as economically poor.

**Sinatra**—Pop culture reference to hugely popular American singer and actor Frank Sinatra who was active the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Scene 1.5

**Karela**—A bitter fruit, also known as Bitter Melon, that is popular in South Asian cuisine.

**Roti**—A South Asian bread that is an integral part of cuisine.

Scene 1.6

**Delhi**—The largest metropolis by area and the second-largest metropolis by population in India. The capital city, New Delhi, lies within it.

Scene 1.7

**Dari**—Dialects of modern Persian language spoken in Afghanistan and one of the two national languages of Afghanistan. The other is Pashto.

**Taliban**—An Islamist militant and political group that ruled large parts of Afghanistan and its capital as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from September 1996 until the NATO invasion in October 2001.

Scene 2.1

**Ranchore Lines and Jacob Lines**—These are storeyed neighborhoods in Post Partition Karachi that filled up with refugees from India. Analogous to the prewar Lower East Side in Manhattan

Scene 2.3

**OHIP**—Refers to the Ontario Health Insurance Plan which all residents in the Canadian province of Ontario have a right to. It covers access to basic health care.

Scene 2.4

**Zionism**—A form of Jewish nationalism that supports the existence of the Jewish nation state of Israel.

Scene 2.5

**Mississauga**—A suburban city immediately to the west of Toronto. It is considered to be part of the greater Toronto metropolis.

**Larry King**—An American television and radio host who hosted the popular TV interview program *Larry King Live* from 1985 to 2010.

**Al Qaeda**—A global militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in Peshawar (Pakistan) sometime between August 1988 and late 1989.

**Orwell**—Literary reference to renowned British author George Orwell.

**Hemingway**—Literary reference to renowned American author Ernest Hemingway.

**Talibanization**—Refers to the process where the populace at large is persuaded or coerced to follow the severe practices of the Taliban.

**Rupee**—The national currency in Pakistan.

Scene 2.6

**Bengal**—A region in the northeast region of the Indian Subcontinent around the Bay of Bengal. Today, it is mainly divided between the sovereign land of People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal.

**Madras**—Presently known as Chennai, it is the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (on the southernmost point of India).

**Karnataka**—A state in south west India.

**Bombay**—The former name of the major Indian city of Mumbai on the west coast of India.

**Humpty Dumpty**—An egg-shaped character from an English nursery rhyme who falls from a wall, breaks into pieces, and cannot be put back together again.

Scene 2.7

**Raags**—Melodic modes used in Indian Classical music.

**Azaan**—The Islamic call to prayer which is called out from the mosque five times a day.

Act 3

Scene 3.1

**Darya Ganj**—A neighbourhood of Delhi inside the walled city of Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi).

**Purana Qila**—A citadel (or fortress) that lies within the city of Delhi.

**Amritsar**—A city in the north-western part of India, a spiritual center for the Sikh religion, and just across the border from the Pakistani city of Lahore.

**Baluch Regiment**—A regiment of the British Indian Army from 1922 to 1947. After the Partition of India it was transferred to the Pakistan Army.

**Hansel and Gretel**—A well-known German fairytale where two young children are lured by sweets through the forest and into the home of an old woman who eats children.

**Kaffir**—An Arabic term used by Muslims for someone who is non-muslim. More radically used to identify someone as an “Infidel” or a person who doesn’t follow Islam.

Scene 3.2

**Hazrat Umar**—Also known as Farooq the Great and one of the most powerful and influential Muslim rulers in history and an icon of Sunni Islam. A close companion of the Prophet.

**Sir Lancelot**—A legendary British knight from the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> century whose tales of romance and battle are famous in British literature.

**Hafiz**—A term used by Muslims for people who have completely memorized the Qur’an.

**Qur’an**—The central religious text of Islam, which Muslims consider the verbatim word of God.

Scene 3.3

**Mecca**—A city in Saudi Arabia that is known as the birthplace of the Prophet and the site of the composition of the Quran. Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam and a pilgrimage to it known as the Hajj is obligatory upon all able Muslims.

**Kaaba**—A cuboid-shaped building in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and is the most sacred site in Islam.

**Ottomans**—Refers to the Ottoman Empire which was one of the largest and longest lasting empires in history. With control of lands around the Mediterranean Sea, the empire was at the center of interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds for over six centuries.

**Hazrat**—An honorific Arabic title for a person

**Maulvi**—A Muslim religious scholar or leader.

**Lewis Carroll**—A British author most famously known for his story Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Scene 3.4

**Keamari**—A neighbourhood near the port in Karachi.

**Trinity-Bellwoods**—A neighbourhood in downtown Toronto, Ontario.

Act 4

Scene 4.1

**Guantanamo Bay**—The Cuban location of a controversial detainment and interrogation facility of the United States where many enemies prisoners of war are held.

**Burkha**—A full-covering outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their entire bodies in public places.

**Lahore**—The capital city of the province of Punjab. It is the second largest city in Pakistan and one of the most densely populated cities in the world.

Act 5

Scene 5.1

**Mumbai**—The Indian city formerly known as "Bombay". The city has experienced several bombing attacks over the last two decades.

**Art deco**—An artistic and design style that began in Paris in the 1920s and flourished internationally throughout the 1930s and into the World War II era. It can be observed in the architecture of many buildings worldwide.

**E=mc<sup>2</sup>**—A literary reference to the internationally successful book *E=mc<sup>2</sup>: A Biography of the World's Most Famous Equation* and *Electric Universe* by David Bodanis.

**Sergio Leone**—An Italian film director, producer and screenwriter from the 1960s who is most associated with the "Spaghetti Western" genre.

**Luke Skywalker and Han Solo**—Lead characters from the popular 1970s/80s American film trilogy, Star Wars.

**Kasab**—Refers to one of ten militants who traveled from Karachi, Pakistani to Mumbai, India on November 26, 2008 to carry out an attack that killed 166 people.

**Rushdie**—Refers to Salman Rushdie, a British Indian novelist and essayist whose work is concerned with the many connections, disruptions and migrations between East and West. His fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), was the centre of a major controversy, provoking protests from Muslims in several countries, some violent. Death threats were made against him, including a *fatwa* (religious opinion) issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, on 14 February 1989.

**Persian Gulf War**—A war waged by a UN-authorized coalition force from 34 nations led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. It included an extensive campaign of bombing in Baghdad, Iraq.

**First WTC attack**—Occurred February 26, 1993 when a truck bomb exploded in the underground parking of the North building.

**Deoband**—A city in the north of India famous for the Deoband seminary, one of the most important in Sunni Islam.

**Batavia**—A town outside Buffalo the houses a detention centre for undocumented immigrants.

**Jaffa**—A region in Israel.

**Pulao**—A complex mutton and rice dish which recipe has not changed since Attiya's youth (the '40s).

**Sancerre**—A French wine

Scene 5.2

**Bhajans**—Hindu devotional song

**Shiva**—A Hindu deity.

**Raags**—Melodic modes used in Indian Classical music.

**Ascetic**—Someone who pursues a lifestyle of abstinence from various worldly pleasures with the aim of pursuing spiritual and religious goals.

**Shivites**—Devotees of the god Shiva.

**Bollywood**—The informal term popularly used for the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai (formerly Bombay).

**Shiv, Krishna, Ram**—Three major male Hindu gods.

**Mulla Omar**—The spiritual leader of the Taliban.

Scene 5.3

**Herman Northrop Frye**—A Canadian literary critic and literary theorist, considered one of the most influential of the 20th century.

**Maulana Thanvi**—A cleric from Deoband, India who became a major cleric in Post Partition Karachi.

**Burnamthorpe Road**—A road in Mississauga, Ontario.

**Indira Gandhi**—An Indian politician who served as the third Prime Minister of India for three consecutive terms (1966-77) and a fourth term (1980-84). She was the second female head of government in the world and she remains as the world's second longest serving female Prime Minister.

**Gol Daak Khana**—A landmark in Delhi (a post office)

**Wellesley Road**—A road in Delhi.

**Hazrat Nizamuddin**—The shrine of a major Sufi saint in Delhi.

**Karol Bagh**—A neighborhood in Delhi.

**Fatwa**—A religious opinion issued by a cleric.

**Ghalib**—The greatest Urdu poet, no small achievement in a language that is celebrated for its poetry and poets. He lived in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Delhi, and was witness to the cataclysm in Delhi during the Indian Rebellion of 1857-1858.