

# **ALBION**

**a new play by Edward Mast**

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**CHARACTERS in order of appearance**  
(can be doubled by a cast of eight - 4f, 4m)

**Fireworks**  
**Salam/Vendor, male, middle aged**  
**Leyla, a young woman**  
**a crow**  
**Dana, a young woman**  
**the Stone**  
**Officer/Ethan, a policeman**  
**a scanner**  
**Jonathan, a young man**  
**Maryam, an older woman**  
**Nina, a little girl**  
**Elias, an older man**  
**Old Man/Adnan**  
**Soldier**  
**a cellphone**  
**three Resistance Fighters**  
**a rooster**  
**Nouba, Elias' wife**  
**Leith, Elias' son**  
**Nidal, friend of Leith**  
**Urshalam, a city**  
**Damoun, a middle-aged man**  
**Rula, Damoun's wife**  
**Dina, their young daughter**  
**Soldiers**  
**Walls**  
**Rifles**  
**Bullets**  
**Nathan, a young scholar**  
**Joel, a young scholar**  
**Workers**  
**Guard**  
**Benjamin, a very old man**  
**water**  
**Ahmo, an old man**  
**Ground**  
**Bulldozer**  
**several Men and Women in Balata**  
**Nekat/Suha, an adult woman**  
**Ammar, an adult man**  
**Gate**  
**Stars**  
**Alma, a very old woman**  
**Simon, an adult man**

**SUGGESTED DOUBLING for 4 f, 4 m**

**(One possible configuration, grouped around eight characters chosen as primary. Other groupings are possible--including more mixing of genders--to make use of the talents of the particular cast.)**

**Leyla**

**Maryam**

**Suha/Nekat**

**Dana**

**Second Resistance Fighter**

**Nouba**

**Dina**

**Alma**

**Nina**

**Third Resistance Fighter**

**Rula**

**2nd Woman**

**Bride**

**Vendor/Salam**

**Soldier**

**Leith**

**Joel**

**Nathan**

**Jonathan**

**Crier**

**Bilal**

**Benjamin**

**Elias**

**Old Man/Adnan**

**Damoun**

**Ahmo**

**Groom**

**Simon**

**Crow**

**Ethan**

**First Resistance Fighter**

**Nidal**

**Guard**

**Plus: Walls, Water, Trees, Ground, Stars, Rooster, Workers, Wedding Guests, Soldiers, Bulldozer, Urshalem, and the Stone.**

## SETTING AND COSTUMES

Neutral stage with a defined playing area. All settings and setpieces--which may be simple or vastly elaborate--will be brought on, set up, and removed during the show by the eight performers. When not in a scene, performers may be visible around the edges of the performing area. Costume and character changes will be sometimes hidden, sometimes in full view of the audience.

Costume and setting are contemporary, except where noted.

The "H" in the word "Habiru" is pronounced as a "kh": softly guttural, as in the German *ich*.

When enacting non-human characters or providing onstage voices, sounds or other effects, performers will also wear masks. These masks may be elaborate or simple. One mask in particular--singled out by color or design--signifies whichever actor is providing voice for the stone.

Somewhere upstage is a signboard on which are hung or projected the titles of each scene. The title of each scene remains visible throughout the scene.

*I have given you a land for which you did not work; you live in cities you did not build; you eat from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.*

Joshua 24:13

*Awake, awake, O sleeper in the land of shadows . . . return, Albion, return . . . .*

Blake, Jerusalem

## INDEPENDENCE DAY

## ACT ONE

(Performers stand facing us. All wear neutral contemporary clothes. They gaze up and out over our heads. They stare impassively, and calmly say these words:)

### PERFORMERS (individually)

Boom.  
Boom.  
Boom.  
Bang.  
Pop. Pop. Pop.  
Boom.  
Boom.

(Suddenly all but one of them raise their arms and cheer!

One of them -- Leyla -- stands still in their midst.

All others break away, applauding and celebrating as loud music blares over loudspeakers. One steps to a microphone and speaks as if to vast crowd.

As others move away and around, Leyla stands unmoving at center, gazing out over our heads.)

### PERFORMER

The desert is behind us. The wilderness behind us. The age of bondage is past. Joshua triumphed. Jephtha triumphed. Gideon and Samson triumphed. Saul and David completed the triumph, the Kenani have been beaten back, the Habiru are victorious and this land of milk and honey is ours!

(Loud cheering and music. Leyla gazes.)

### PERFORMER

Why do we carry shovels on this day?

(Some of the performers pin little shovels on their shirts.)

## PERFORMER

To commemorate those pioneers who came with Moses out of slavery, wandered forty years in the wasteland, and came here, not to fight, but to plant. Why do we blow horns?

(Over the loudspeaker, a short horn fanfare.)

## PERFORMER

To commemorate the Battle of Midian and the horns our forefathers blew in the night, which put terror and confusion in the hearts of the enemy hordes that came to crush our young nation. And why do we take off our shoes?

(Some remove right shoes, hold them up.)

## PERFORMER

To commemorate the first day of victory, when Joshua and his army took off their boots and said "We stand on this holy land, our homeland."

## ALL (except Leyla)

We stand on this holy land our homeland.

## PERFORMER

Eretz Habreet, ha-Muvtakhat, our Promised Land!

(Crowd cheer over the loudspeaker as all cheer loudly and passionately, continuing as music also blares over loudspeakers.

Leyla does not cheer. Stands neutrally. The crowd disperses offstage, still cheering. Leyla is left alone, gazing and silent.

Another performer enters as Vendor with pushcart.)

## VENDOR

You are not at the parade, young miss.

## LEYLA

I will be.

## VENDOR

No accusation. Not everyone goes. I, for example, will not. I must earn a living, even on Independence Day. Do you have need for produce?

## LEYLA

Maybe. I don't remember seeing these.

## VENDOR

Of course you don't. Why would you? With so much to remember already. Who would blame you?

## LEYLA

Do these grow around here?



VENDOR

They are grown in my own little paradise garden, the which I invite you to visit someday. But the seeds now, the seeds are from far far away.

LEYLA

From where?

VENDOR

From oh, farther than you would remember I think. How many would you like?

LEYLA

Mmm well, if they're any good --

VENDOR

You won't find better.

LEYLA

-- I might find use for a couple of dozen. How much for two dozen?

VENDOR

(starting to put some in a bag)  
Fifteen and fifty.

LEYLA

Fifteen and fifty for gold-plated maybe. For seven and fifty, I might consider.

VENDOR

Seven and fifty? The lady wants my family to starve. For fifteen total, we can survive.

LEYLA

I'm sure some nice tourist will give you that price. I, however, might pay eight.

VENDOR

Eight. Eight, she wants to pay.

LEYLA

Eight-fifty.

VENDOR

You know, you're lucky to find these today. I'm not a vendor, I work with cement. But nobody hires on Independence Day, so you gain from my misfortune.

FIREWORKS  
(from offstage)

Boom.

MORE FIREWORKS

Boom.

(Another young woman--Dana--enters at the side, calling.)

DANA

Leyla! We're missing the parade.

LEYLA

I'm coming, just a minute.

VENDOR

You're in a rush, it's settled then: thirteen.

LEYLA

(sniffs one)

For two dozen not quite ripe, you want--

VENDOR

Ooh, for a moment I took you for a judge of produce. I see I was mistaken. These are at peak, you may eat them this afternoon though they will last some days. If you want to learn the true taste of this treasure, I might betray my children and offer you two dozen for twelve.

LEYLA

Nine.

VENDOR

At this point my wife would have me break off negotiations. Fortunately for you, she is not here, and in the spirit of the day, oh this special day, I make you a final and special offer: for twelve I will give you two and one half of a dozen. Are we agreed?

(Dana has moved closer, stands watching.)

LEYLA

Nine sounds better to me.

VENDOR

Nine. The price of chewing gum. Or a single application of your lipstick, or some other of the many small pleasures you so easily afford.

LEYLA

Oh now I look wealthy, do I?

VENDOR

Your look, well to look at you one might hardly know. You live in this city with Habiru. You dress like them. You might even wish you were one of them. But you are not. You are merely Kenani like me. Isn't that so? Though here in this city, even Kenani like you are better off than some. For example, the children from whose mouths these treasures must sometimes be taken. But of course, that parched and depleted place they live is far far away, and no one has memory for them anymore. With so much already to fill the memory. As you say.

LEYLA

(pauses, frowning)

I didn't say that. You did.

(An actor enters, squats and screeches as a crow.)

raaak! CROW

(She has gotten out coins, hands some to him.  
He fills a bag.)

Two dozen. LEYLA

VENDOR  
And a half. You will enjoy them.

CROW  
(bending over with the strain of getting their attention)  
raAAAAAK!

VENDOR  
(as he folds up and prepares to exit)  
A pet?

(Leyla scowls at the crow, shaking her head.)

VENDOR  
May your house be spacious then. Perhaps on another day of misfortune we'll meet  
again and you can regale me with your enjoyment of my produce.

(Exit.)

raAAAAK! CROW

Go away! LEYLA

DANA  
You gave him twelve fifty.

LEYLA  
I know. He got me feeling guilty. The way he calls me Kenaaaaani.

DANA  
They all do that. Come to the city and use that word like it's some great honor.  
How'd he get here anyway? I thought the borders were closed.

LEYLA  
Maybe he's not from the Zone.

DANA  
Oh come on. Didn't you hear how he talked? Reservation boy.

CROW  
La kaaaaaAAAAAAT ATTU!

(Leyla reaches down to pick up a stone to  
throw at the crow. A Masked Actor has

entered, kneels down, opens the palm of his hand on the ground near her feet, holding a stone which she snatches up. He remains kneeling there, invisible.)

LEYLA  
(preparing to throw)  
I said go away!

(The crow hops away and off. She lowers her arm but does not drop the stone.)

LEYLA  
Stupid noisy things.

DANA  
Let's go. We're missing the whole parade.

LEYLA  
Okay, I'm done.

DANA  
Is your Aunt making zakla?

LEYLA  
Yeah.

DANA  
My mother says she does it wrong.

LEYLA  
Wrong how?

DANA  
Too much marjoram instead of mace.

LEYLA  
Will you tell that to my Aunty?

DANA  
Not for any money.

LEYLA  
Anyway, I like how she does it . . . hey.

(While they speak, the Masked Actor has touched Leyla's elbow, gently lifting her arm up in front of her: she looks down at the stone, still oblivious of the Actor.)

LEYLA  
Look at this.

DANA  
What?

LEYLEA  
Just look.

(As Dana looks at it, the stone speaks – with several voices.)

STONE  
Thikrah.

(They don't appear to hear it.)

DANA  
It's scratched up.

LEYLEA  
In straight lines.

DANA  
So it's scratched up in straight lines.

LEYLEA  
Like hieroglyphs. Both sides.

(The Masked Actor speaks again, but this time is joined by several voices from offstage, whispering in chorus.)

STONE  
Takant shimm kamarash  
tihatam kimoon kibukim.  
Thikrah.

(Leyla stares at the stone; it is unclear whether she hears the voice or not. Dana, apparently, does not.)

DANA  
What about it? (pause) Leyla?

LEYLEA  
What?

DANA  
Are you alright?

LEYLEA  
Yeah. Yeah. What if this is some kind of writing?

(An Officer, carrying a rifle, enters to them. Leyla quickly sticks the stone in her bag.)

OFFICER  
Everything okay here, ladies?

DANA  
Yes, Officer.

OFFICER  
You too?

LEYLA  
Yes.

OFFICER  
You're not at the parade.

LEYLA  
We're buying vegetables.

OFFICER  
Hm. You are Kenani?

(Dana nods.)

OFFICER  
Check your passbooks, please.

(Leyla is a little slower than Dana at pulling out a thing resembling a passport. The Officer pulls out a small electrical scanner; checks the barcodes on each passbook.)

SCANNER  
Beep. Beep.

OFFICER  
Dana Sarris. Leyla Danyal.  
(hands passbooks back; to Leyla)  
Miss Danyal. You put a thing in your bag?

(Leyla does not answer.)

OFFICER  
Did you put something in your bag just now?

(Leyla does not answer.)

OFFICER  
May I see your bags please?

(Dana hands him her purse. He inspects contents, hands it back.)

OFFICER  
Yours please.

(Leyla does not move.)

OFFICER  
Yours please.

DANA  
Leyla.

LEYLA  
Why do you need to see my bag?

OFFICER  
I'll ask again. Your bag.

DANA  
Perhaps she doesn't understand, officer. Leyla?

OFFICER  
Perhaps she's hard of hearing. One last time I ask. Next time will be downtown.

(Leyla is silent.)

OFFICER  
Let's go then.

DANA  
Wait wait wait, Leyla what are you doing?

OFFICER  
Please don't interfere.

(He takes Leyla's arm. She does not pull away, but does not move to walk with him.)

OFFICER  
Resisting arrest?

DANA  
No. She doesn't mean to--

OFFICER  
Quiet. (to Leyla) Please don't make me force you. Come on now.

(Takes her arm. She doesn't move.)

DANA  
Leyla please. Officer I don't understand --

(Enter Jonathan, a civilian young man.)

JONATHAN  
(pleasantly)  
Excuse me. What's going on here?

OFFICER  
This Kenani is resisting arrest.

JONATHAN

Oh now it's alright, Ethan. I know her.

OFFICER

We are supposed to be on the alert, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

I know this lady. We're in classes together. Her name is Leyla. Leyla, meet Ethan. Ethan, meet Leyla. And Dana, as well.

OFFICER

How do you do.

DANA

Hello.

JONATHAN

They are both perfectly safe. You can relax. The war's over, remember?

OFFICER

(pauses; then to Leyla)

It's Independence Day. I trust Jonathan; he seems to trust you. Please deserve his confidence. Good afternoon.

JONATHAN

See you soon.

(Officer leaves.)

DANA

Thanks, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

You're welcome. What happened?

DANA

Trouble seeker here refused to open her bag.

LEYLA

Why do they have to search us?

JONATHAN

You heard what happened in Shilo this morning?

DANA

Yes we heard.

LEYLA

So we're all suspects now?

JONATHAN

They have to be alert, as he said. If you'll only persuade your brethren from the Free Zone to act with some restraint--



DANA  
(coldly)

They're not our brethren. (to Leyla) Are you coming?

LEYLA

In a minute.

DANA  
(grimly)

Fine. I'll see you when I see you.

(Dana leaves.)

LEYLA

You don't have to be insulting.

JONATHAN

I didn't mean to be. Is calling you Kenani an insult?

LEYLA

When by it you mean women in veils and boys with bombs, yes it is.

JONATHAN

You're very progressive.

LEYLA

For a Kenani, you mean.

JONATHAN  
(smiling a little)

Maybe by accident I did. I apologize.

LEYLA

Thank you. You're very gracious.

JONATHAN

For a Habiru, you mean. You're in some kind of mood today, resisting officers.

LEYLA

I'm not in a mood, I'm just stupid sometimes.

JONATHAN

This will make me look great when you go for your interview. "Sorry, she's being detained."

LEYLA

I won't make you look bad, I promise.

JONATHAN

Please don't. I only have so many strings I can pull.

LEYLA

I stay out of trouble, you know that.

JONATHAN  
Except for today. What happened?

LEYLA  
Today I found this.

(She takes the stone from her bag, holds it out to Jonathan. The Masked Actor reaches forward, conveys the stone to Jonathan's outstretched hand.)

JONATHAN  
(inspecting it)  
And?

LEYLA  
I just didn't feel like handing it over to him and the Officials. That's all. Why should I have to? It's nothing. There's no ancient Habiru temple buried here.

JONATHAN  
We don't know that. Listen, I have a friend at the Museum. He'd be interested in this. I can take it to him, if you like.

CROW  
(from some distance)  
RAAAAAAK!

LEYLA  
No. Thanks. It's nothing.

JONATHAN  
You sure?

LEYLA  
Yes.

(She holds out hand casually for it; he hesitates just an instant before passing it back--by way of the Masked Actor, who conveys it to Leyla's hand.)

JONATHAN  
Okay then. Shall we watch the parade?

LEYLA  
Of course. Are you driving my way after?

JONATHAN  
Sure.

LEYLA  
If you give me a lift you can come in and meet my Aunt.

JONATHAN  
You think I'll be welcome?

LEYLA  
I don't see why not.

JONATHAN  
(significantly)  
Don't you?

LEYLA  
(significantly back)  
No. I don't.

(They walk off--but as Leyla starts to put the stone in her bag, the Masked Actor touches her hand and speaks.)

STONE  
Takant shimm kamarash  
tihamat kimoon kibukim.  
Thikrah.

(She hesitates, looking at the stone--until she notices Jonathan stopping to stare at her. She puts the stone in her bag and they go off.

\* \* \* \* \*

## MARYAM'S KITCHEN

(A child--Nina--sits at a small table fiddling with bowls full of something. A woman--Maryam--moves about setting up chairs and props, creating the kitchen simultaneously with preparing food and instructing Nina. Props and furniture are supplied, removed and enacted by other actors throughout the scene.)

Then what? NINA

MARYAM  
(helping her)  
Then fold in the spices.

Which ones? NINA

MARYAM  
Thyme and cardamom.

NINA  
(mixing)  
My mommy says you use the wrong spices.

MARYAM  
(coolly)  
Oh?

NINA  
Too much thyme.

MARYAM  
No kidding. Maybe where your mother is from they don't appreciate the flavor of thyme. Where I come from, however, we use the traditional amount.

NINA  
The way you make zakla, too?

MARYAM  
(pauses a beat)  
Your mother talks a lot about my cooking.

NINA  
Unh-unh. Not much.

(Enter a man: Elias.)

ELIAS

Hello hello, one house.

MARYAM

One house. All finished?

ELIAS

(to Nina)

Get your things.

NINA

We're in the middle.

MARYAM

That's alright dear. I'll be able to finish.

NINA

You sure?

MARYAM

You were a great help.

NINA

Kay.

(Nina runs off to assemble jacket, etc.  
Maryam continues to putter as Elias sits.)

ELIAS

Thanks for watching her.

MARYAM

Of course. Did you get your permit?

ELIAS

Me? No, only Habiru get permits on Independence Day. Or most other days, for that matter.

MARYAM

Oh well. Bring her back anytime.

ELIAS

You're a lifesaver.

MARYAM

Are you doing well otherwise?

ELIAS

Sure.

MARYAM

Nouba feeds you well, does she?

ELIAS

Sure. Why, am I thin?

MARYAM

No no, just wondering if you were pleased with her taste in, oh, spices, so forth . . .

ELIAS

Oh sure, sure, she's the best. Next to you.

MARYAM

Hm. That's nice.

ELIAS

Yes, very nice. So. So.

MARYAM

So?

ELIAS

I don't suppose Leyla has decided anything yet?

MARYAM

Such as?

ELIAS

Oh, her plans. You know.

MARYAM

Yes, I know, I just thought maybe a day might pass without your bringing it up.

ELIAS

I'm only concerned.

MARYAM

Hm.

ELIAS

Our families are twice related, you know--

MARYAM

And who knows, sometime a day might pass without your bringing that up either.

ELIAS

You don't give it much attention. My brothers-in-law won't come to this house.

MARYAM

Then they'll never have to suffer through my choice of spices.

ELIAS

Your what?

MARYAM

Nothing. Leyla will do what she chooses to do.

ELIAS

Keep the village together. She belongs with her family.

MARYAM

You mean with her father.

ELIAS

Of course I mean with her father.

MARYAM

And what if she chooses not to be packed away at puberty like one of his pets?

ELIAS

Wonderful ideas to be planting in her head.

MARYAM

They don't need planting. She has eyes and ears. All it took was a little resistance and he turned out to be what I always thought he was.

ELIAS

Which was what?

MARYAM

A mindless loudmouth with big knuckles. I'm glad my sister divorced him.

ELIAS

You are very casual with the family good will.

MARYAM

Oh stop it. I will not purchase good will with my niece's future. She may stay here as long as she likes. She keeps me company.

ELIAS

Well I hope you two are good company for each other.

MARYAM

(stops, looks at him; annoyed)

Elias, do you really mean to threaten me like that?

(They stare at each other. He might be about to relent, but Nina runs in.)

NINA

Ready!

ELIAS

(rising)

Okay.

LEYLA

(off)

Hello Aunty.

(Enter Leyla and Jonathan. Leyla and Elias regard each other.)

NINA

Hi Leyla!

LEYLA

Hi. Hello Uncle.

ELIAS

Hello. (to Maryam) We'll be on our way. Say goodbye, Nina.

NINA

Bye bye! Bye bye!

MARYAM

Goodbye Elias.

ELIAS

(looking Jonathan up and down, with a significant look to Maryam.)  
Mm-hm.

(Elias and Nina leave.)

LEYLA

Found some koosa.

MARYAM

Oh good.

LEYLA

Aunty, this is Jonathan. Jonathan, this is my Aunty Maryam.

JONATHAN

How do you do, Maam.

MARYAM

Hello.

LEYLA

Jonathan, can you stay and eat?

(Jonathan hesitates, waiting for Maryam to respond; Maryam is busy, but notices the silence. Speaks without much conviction.)

MARYAM

Yes, by all means, Jonathan. Stay.

JONATHAN

Aaah, thanks, but I better go.

LEYLA

Sure?

JONATHAN

Yes I think so. (to Maryam) I hope you'll talk some sense into your niece, though. Tell her stop tackling officers.



MARYAM  
(stops puttering)  
What happened?

LEYLA  
Thank you, Jonathan.

JONATHAN  
I'll be going. You sure you don't want to talk to my friend at the Museum?

LEYLA  
No thanks. Bye.

JONATHAN  
See you. Nice to meet you, Maam. Uh . . . one house.

MARYAM  
Mm.

(Jonathan leaves.)

LEYLA  
You weren't very friendly to him.

MARYAM  
I was perfectly civil.

LEYLA  
I wish you would be more than civil to him.

MARYAM  
He probably makes jokes about Kenani.

LEYLA  
So do you.

MARYAM  
I'm allowed. What did he mean, tackling officers?

LEYLA  
Oh, I stopped one from opening my bag.

MARYAM  
You did what?

LEYLA  
I was just sick and tired of them treating us like thieves.

MARYAM  
Sick and tired? In prison you will get sick and you will get tired. What got into you?

LEYLA  
I didn't want them fiddling with this.

(Masked Actor enters, places stone in her hand as she lifts it.)

MARYAM

What is it?

LEYLA

Just a stone. But see, there's some kind of . . .

(She gives the stone to Maryam--that is, the Masked Actor passes it to Maryam's hand. As Maryam stares at it, the stone speaks.)

STONE

Rejom sa walkhast abnu.

(Maryam stares at the stone. It drops from her hand - into the hand of the Masked Actor who conveys it to the ground, holding it on his upturned palm. Maryam stares at it.)

LEYLA

Aunty? What's wrong?

MARYAM

(pauses, then:)

For a stone you almost got yourself arrested?

LEYLA

It's not just any stone --

MARYAM

Have you turned stupid today?

LEYLA

(picks up the stone)

Why should they search us anyway?

MARYAM

Because they can. Don't forget it.

LEYLA

I'm in no danger of forgetting.

MARYAM

See that you don't. Here. Sometimes I wonder what they taught you at that fancy expensive college.

(Leyla has removed her jacket, putting the stone in its pocket. She goes, scowling a little, to help with preparing food. They mix and chop and stuff vegetables throughout the following. In particular, Leyla carves the insides out of koosa: small zucchini.)

MARYAM

And what do you mean by "more than civil" to that young man. Is he special?

LEYLA

Oh don't worry. Not like that.

MARYAM

How then?

LEYLA

Nothing. Never mind.

(They work for a moment in silence.)

MARYAM

Don't puncture that.

LEYLA

I know how to do it.

(Silence as they work.)

MARYAM

You weren't very friendly to Elias.

LEYLA

I was perfectly civil.

MARYAM

More than civil is called for. He's family.

LEYLA

Family wishes I didn't exist.

MARYAM

They do not.

LEYLA

Yes they do. Because I upset their old caravan laws. Fine: I don't exist.

MARYAM

Don't be so quick to turn your back on them.

LEYLA

Me, turn my back on them?

MARYAM

You have to make allowances.

LEYLA

Fine. I should let my father call me a disobedient strumpet. I should move to some reservation township where the women walk behind donkeys. I should wear a sheet, I should ride a camel, I should get promised the way my parents were.

MARYAM

I didn't say that.

LEYLA

To one of his idiot nephews, no less. I'm afraid they're going to have to make allowances for me. Maybe they want to pretend they're still in some grand old empire, but I'm not some camel-rider who doesn't wear shoes.

MARYAM

Neither am I. And neither is your father.

(Pause; they work; Leyla pouts.)

LEYLA

I know.

MARYAM

He had his reasons for moving back to a reservation.

LEYLA

Like what?

MARYAM

I don't know. Men are crazy. Maybe he wanted to feel like he's still Kenani.

LEYLA

(muttering)

Like that's some great honor.

MARYAM

I would just as soon not hear that kind of talk.

LEYLA

Very progressive.

MARYAM

Oh, "progressive" now. You're gonna puncture that.

LEYLA

I won't puncture it.

(Pause while they work.)

MARYAM

I went through the same thing, you know.

LEYLA

What?

MARYAM

When I was your age, my grandpa Adnan wanted me to marry someone from that family.

LEYLA

I don't understand. Why do they keep trying to marry us to them?

MARYAM  
(shrugs)

Who knows? “Keep the village together” They still say that. What village? The sky fell when I said no. And again when I said no again, and no again . . .

LEYLA

Were they mad?

MARYAM

Pf, were they mad. You think you're the first to be called a disobedient strumpet? For a while I was the Name Not To Be Spoken. They didn't even like it when you came to visit me.

LEYLA  
(little smile)

Nobody else knew how to cut my hair right.

MARYAM

Matter of fact, it's looking a little raggedy . . .

LEYLA  
(a little grimace to herself)

Thank you, Aunty. So what happened: how long did they stay mad?

MARYAM

Well, Grandpa finally disappeared, so they kind of calmed down.

LEYLA

Disappeared how?

MARYAM

Nobody knows. It was too late for your mother, but I was off the hook for a while. They didn't get over it, though. After a while they started saying Keep the village together. Some genetic malfunction with males, I'd say.

(Pause while they work.)

LEYLA

I wish you'd be nicer to Jonathan anyway.

MARYAM

Why him particularly?

LEYLA

Because he likes me. And he has connections.

MARYAM

Oh?

LEYLA

Yeah.

MARYAM

What sort of connections?

LEYLA

He knows somebody at the Ministry of Security.

MARYAM

Of Security?

LEYLA

Yes. He got me an interview.

MARYAM

Well that's just wonderful. Ministry of Security. Why don't you go join their army?

LEYLA

It's not like that. It's a good job. I don't want to be a housemaid or work in a shoe factory all my life.

MARYAM

You want to work for Eretz Habreet instead.

LEYLA

If I work for the government it will go on my record almost as if I was in the army. I'll be eligible for permits. I'll have opportunities for a change.

MARYAM

We'll see about that.

LEYLA

Yes we will. Maybe it's time to learn how to belong here, instead of always talking about Kenaaaaani and the return of the Empire, like Moabites or Chaldeans or something. Fat lot of good that empire did us when our glorious ancestors started a war and then ran away when someone blew horns in the dark.

MARYAM

Stop talking like that please.

LEYLA

Well it's true. No wonder they don't treat us like citizens here. We're too busy waving swords and making threats and moving to old villages and acting like I'm my father's property, and if that's what being Kenani means, then I wish they'd pass that Renaming Law so we wouldn't be Kenani anymore.

MARYAM

I asked you to stop talking like that in this house.

LEYLA

Do you disagree?

MARYAM

Agree or disagree, don't talk like that.

(Pause. Leyla has been working furiously. She stops, grimaces at the work in her hand.)

MARYAM

What's wrong?

LEYLA

I punctured it.

MARYAM

(nodding, confirmed; but then chooses not to rub it in)  
Let's trade for a while, hm?

(Leyla nods glumly. They trade places and jobs, working in silence for a moment.)

LEYLA

Would it be easier if I went away?

MARYAM

Of course. It would have been easier for your mother to stay married. It would have been easier for me to marry one of your father's cousins. Many useless destructive things are easy. Here.

(Hands her something else to prepare.  
They chop and mix in silence.)

MARYAM

What spices does your mother use for zakla?

LEYLA

Aunty, we're not having this conversation.

MARYAM

I'm only asking . . .

LEYLA

We're not having this conversation!

\* \* \* \* \*

**NIGHT**

(An old man enters. Maryam and Leyla do not see or hear him.)

OLD MAN

Thikrah.  
Rejom keet lay wikargamak.  
Hawat wakathneek.  
Thikrah.

(While he speaks, Maryam leaves and masked actors remove the kitchen set, wrap Leyla in a nightrobe, help her lie down on a pad downstage. All leave. Leyla sleeps. The old man kneels down beside her.)

CROW  
(offstage)

La kaaat attu!

OLD MAN

Thikrah.

(Two soldiers enter quietly. As they approach Leyla, the old man leaves. The soldiers wear the same uniform as the Officer earlier. One wears a face-covering dark mask. He stands away. The other squats down beside Leyla. Touches her arm.)

SOLDIER

Don't shout.

(Leyla starts awake.)

SOLDIER

We were told you would cooperate.

LEYLA

What are you doing here?

SOLDIER

We would just as soon not wake your aunt.

LEYLA

What are you doing in this house? How did you get in?



SOLDIER

You found a stone today. Where is it please?

LEYLA

Get out of here. You have no business here.

SOLDIER

We were told you're one of the good ones. Tell us where you put the stone and we'll be on our way.

LEYLA

Get out.

SOLDIER

(pauses)

You know we're authorized to take measures.

LEYLA

Arrest me then. I haven't done anything.

SOLDIER

Just tell us where you put it.

LEYLA

I'm a citizen. Do you have a search warrant?

SOLDIER

If you want, we can continue this at headquarters.

(Leyla is silent.)

SOLDIER

Or you can answer us now, and there won't be any record.

(pause)

Or we can search your home. If it comes to that, we don't take special care about personal property.

(pause)

Your choice.

LEYLA

(pauses)

It's in the pocket of that coat.

(Another actor holds out coat as if hanging on a peg. Soldier rises, looks in the jacket pocket. Checks all pockets, dumps jacket out, shakes it, drops it on the ground. Sighs a little, looks at the other; then turns to Leyla again.)

SOLDIER

That was pointless.

LEYLA

That's where I put it.

(Soldier gazes at her.)

LEYLEA  
It's where I put it!

(Leyla rises, goes to look in jacket herself.)

LEYLEA  
I put it in this pocket. It can't just disappear.

SOLDIER  
Time to end the charade. Other suggestions where we might look?

LEYLEA  
It was in my pocket. Search the house if you want. Who told you I had it?

SOLDIER  
(stares at her a moment; glances at the other; then)  
Sit back down please.

(Leyla sits down on the mat. The Soldier  
kneels beside her.)

SOLDIER  
We don't have fancy tools. No racks. No electrodes or cattle goads. Not even  
boxes with spikes like your Kenani ancestors used. No human sacrifice, either. All  
we've got are simple things. Bags. Rooms. Rope. Hoses. So we're portable.  
Understand?

(Leyla is silent.)

SOLDIER  
Really. Really. Really. I recommend you tell us. Where is the stone?

(She's silent.)

SOLDIER  
Here.

(He reaches for her hand, takes it, holds it in  
both of his hands.)

SOLDIER  
If you shout, we'll have to involve your aunt in this. Now. Where is the stone?

LEYLEA  
I put it in the pocket of that jacket.

(We can't see what Soldier does, but she  
winces with some pain, pulls hand away.)

SOLDIER  
Where's the stone?

LEYLA  
I told you.

(He stares, nods, then takes her hand again.)

LEYLA  
I told you!

MASKED SOLDIER  
Wait. Stop it please.

(The Soldier lets go her hand. The masked soldier rises, moves forward. The Soldier stands. Pause.)

SOLDIER  
Five minutes.

(The Soldier leaves the room. The masked soldier kneels beside her. Pause.)

LEYLA  
You can take that stupid mask off, Jonathan.

(The masked soldier gazes at her, then removes his mask. It is Jonathan.)

JONATHAN  
Smart girl. Yes, I told them you had it. I also told them you'd give it to me, with time. But they're in a hurry.

LEYLA  
Did you tell them I was one of the good ones?

JONATHAN  
(takes a beat)  
I came along to try and help you.

LEYLA  
Help me? How?

JONATHAN  
(pauses; squats down beside her, looking at her; then)  
Have I ever told you about my great-great-great grandmother?

LEYLA  
What?

JONATHAN  
My great-great-great grandmother. They say she could make anything out of a lentil. She could make lentils taste like sharp cheese. Or like candy or strawberries. Her husband was a painter. My great-great-great grandfather. His name is in books. He could do anything with a brush.  
(pause)  
My great-great-great grandfather and my great-great-great grandmother were buried

in sand up to their necks while their young children watched. They had seven young children, of which two escaped by pretending they were dead. Like the rest. I am told--this might be an exaggeration, family history, you know--that they walked five hundred miles. And found some other children whose parents had been taken away. And all those children grew up wandering in the wilderness, until finally they came here and were able to build some safety and some freedom, after thousands of years, and not just for themselves. And you want to take that away.

LEYLA

No I don't.

JONATHAN

You heard about the bombing this morning. Did you also hear that they found another corpse? A Kenani body buried sloppily near a Habiru house? Do you support using bodies as protest?

LEYLA

No. I think it's disgusting.

JONATHAN

Cooperate than.

LEYLA

I did. The stone was in the pocket of my coat. It's gone now.

JONATHAN

Leyla please. I have intervened as well as I can.

LEYLA

What's so important about this piece of rock?

JONATHAN

Nothing. I don't even know for sure. Just give it to us and all this will be over.

LEYLA

No it won't, will it. I've seen your face now.

JONATHAN

It's not too late. There are many possibilities for you.

LEYLA

Like what?

JONATHAN

We are always looking for people who know how to cooperate.

LEYLA

(takes a beat)

What do you mean, cooperate?

JONATHAN

Jobs at the Ministry are not for just anybody.

LEYLA

I see. (slight pause) Was that what you always had planned for me?

JONATHAN

You've demonstrated loyalty before. Demonstrate now. Tell us where the stone is.

LEYLA

I did.

JONATHAN

Leyla, please, please.

LEYLA

I put it in my pocket.

JONATHAN

Leyla, do you understand what's going to happen here?

LEYLA

I've told you all I know.

JONATHAN

Please--

CELLPHONE

Beepbeepbeep!

JONATHAN

(pulls a cellphone from his hip, answers it)  
I need more time. If you'll just wait. I swear to you. No. No. Just wait.  
(stops, listens for a moment. Looks at phone, puzzled.)

Hello?

(listens again; hears nothing. Rises, goes toward the door, calling out.)

Hey. What's the matter with this?

(Suddenly two others leap on, seizing Jonathan. He tries to shout, but they gag him and begin binding him to the chair. They are camouflaged, with faces hidden behind scarves. Leyla watches them, speechless, as they finish with Jonathan. Then one of them turns to her.)

FIRST

The other two are down. Your mother is safe. Are you injured?

LEYLA

No.

FIRST  
(to other)

Prisoner?

SECOND

No time for that.

(First nods, pulls out a pistol, aims at Jonathan.)

LEYLEA  
Wait.

(First lowers pistol.)

LEYLEA  
He's my friend.

FIRST  
You want us to spare him?

LEYLEA  
I don't want you to kill him. He was my friend. I know him.

(First looks at Second, who considers, nods. First addresses Jonathan.)

FIRST  
This one pleads for your safety. If we let you live, will you change your ways?

(They chuckle.)

FIRST  
Of course not. You will continue to hunt us down like roaches. So you will come with us, I think. And your associates. Perhaps you are taping or transmitting our voices at this moment. Hello, invisible listeners.

(Enter a third one with hidden face, with Maryam, whose lips are tightly pursed.)

FIRST  
She's alright?

THIRD  
Yes.

MARYAM  
(angry but barely collected)  
Leyla have they hurt you?

LEYLEA  
No. (to First) Who are you?

FIRST  
We are from the 500 Names. We watch, and sometimes we can interfere. What did they want here?

LEYLEA  
Aunty, the stone disappeared.

MARYAM

They came here for that?

LEYLA

It's what they wanted, but it vanished.

MARYAM

It didn't vanish, it's in the wastebasket where it belongs.

(Masked Actor brings on a wastebasket; Leyla rushes to it, picks out the stone which the Masked Actor holds ready for her.)

MARYAM

All this is for that stone you brought into this house. I should have thrown it farther.

FIRST

A stone. Hm. May I see?

(Leyla hands it to him--Masked Actor conveys it to his hand.)

MARYAM

By all means look at it. In fact, keep it please. It has caused quite enough trouble here already. What did they want with it?

LEYLA

I don't know.

(While they speak, the Masked Actor holding the stone has been speaking quietly.)

STONE

Wanap.  
Kulha withan barepht,  
sheerah lash arda brakam.

(First one, staring at stone, begins to tremble.)

LEYLA

What's wrong?

(He tries to look away, can't; trembles more; drops the stone--Masked Actor takes it from his grip--makes a kind of choking sound, then a distorted but audible word.)

FIRST

Thikrah. Thikrah. Thikrah.

(One of the others goes to help him; but before anyone can stop him, First convulsively draws a knife, steps to Jonathan, stabs him in the throat. Leyla screams, the

other two grab First and restrain him, though he struggles furiously. They drag him offstage. Maryam and Leyla are shocked. Second returns.)

SECOND  
You will need to come with us.

MARYAM  
Absolutely not.

SECOND  
You are not safe.

MARYAM  
And we are safe with you?

SECOND  
Assemble some things and come with us. Now please.

MARYAM  
You leave, before I call the Officials.

SECOND  
These *were* the Officials. Quickly!

(Maryam is silent.)

SECOND  
Or you can wait for them to arrive, with their bulldozers.

(Maryam glares at him, leaves.)

SECOND  
(to Leyla)  
Assemble some things.

(Second drags off Jonathan's body.)

\* \* \* \* \*



## OUTSKIRTS

(Early morning on a deserted road. Leyla and Mariam huddle together on a suitcase. They are wrapped hastily in coats and blankets. Second stands near them.)

SECOND

We can take you where necessary.

MARYAM

No thank you.

SECOND

I recommend Balata. You will be safest there.

MARYAM

In the Free Zone? Safe?

SECOND

We have more support in there.

MARYAM

No thank you.

SECOND

You will be taken if you stay here.

MARYAM

Thanks to you.

SECOND

They would have killed you both.

MARYAM

Would they?

SECOND

Yes. Your house will be demolished. You would both have disappeared.

MARYAM

You are a prophet, I take it?

SECOND

(pauses; stiffly)

No prophecy is required. Just acquaintance with their policy. I have such acquaintance, having a brother and two sisters who were officially disappeared under similar circumstances.

(spits, pointedly)

However: as a member of the 500 Names, I overlook your insult. I repeat my advice and offer you our help.

MARYAM

Thank you. We'll make our way. You endanger us by your company.

SECOND

Alright then.

(Takes the Stone out of his pocket, tosses it on the ground--that is, Masked Actor hands him the stone, conveys it to the ground.)

SECOND

That was yours.

LEYLA

Do you know what it is?

SECOND

I don't know. I don't want to. Take it away. Don't leave it lying around.

LEYLA

That word he said. Thikrah. Do you know what it means?

SECOND

No. Don't want to either. Find one of the Keepers if you want to know.

LEYLA

What's a Keeper?

MARYAM

We don't want to know. Good day.

SECOND

Goodbye. We are all one house.

(Leaves. Leyla picks up the stone. They sit. Leyla fumes. Maryam nods a little, pointedly calm.)

LEYLA

What now?

MARYAM

You're asking me? I thought you might have a suggestion, having managed our affairs so brilliantly up to this point.

LEYLA

What'd I do?

MARYAM

Oh nothing. Resisting arrest, bringing that stone into our house, probably just a coincidence.

LEYLA

Alright alright. We should find out what it is.

MARYAM

Too late for that, I'd say.

LEYLA

Aren't you curious?

MARYAM

Of course. I'm curious what death is like, but in no rush to find out. Maybe we should turn ourselves in and ask the Officials.

LEYLA

That's a good idea.

MARYAM

I was being sardonic.

LEYLA

We haven't done anything. It was some sort of crossfire between officers and insurgents. If we run and hide, we'll be fugitives. But if we tell them the truth--

MARYAM

Did they look like they would sympathize?

LEYLA

Maybe they weren't really from the Officials.

MARYAM

Who else?

LEYLA

I don't know, some kind of Kenani plot . . .

MARYAM

Thank you, thank you, we've discussed this enough. Drop the stone.

LEYLA

He said not to leave it.

MARYAM

Too bad. Drop it. It's done enough damage. Let someone else have the pleasure of deciphering it.

LEYLA

(looks at it; then)

Okay. You're right. Where?

MARYAM

Oh let's pick a very special spot, how about right there.

(points to a random place on the ground.  
Leyla tosses the stone--Masked Actor  
conveys it, holds it just above the ground.  
Leyla shivers. Maryam takes a blanket off  
her lap, puts it around Leyla's shoulders.)

LEYLA

Where do we go now?

MARYAM

Elias and Nouba. They're closest.

LEYLA

They won't help us.

MARYAM

Course they will. They're family.

LEYLA

If you really think so.

MARYAM

(rising to go)

I do. Are you alright?

LEYLA

(head is drooping a little)

Did you ever see anything like that before, Aunty?

MARYAM

(sits again)

Don't think about it. Come on, let's go.

(They rise, lift suitcase.  
The stone speaks, softly.)

STONE

yasmeen yasmeen yasmeen yasmeen yasmeen

(Leyla stops.)

MARYAM

What's wrong?

LEYLA

What's that smell?

MARYAM

What?

LEYLA

A sweet smell.

STONE

yasmeen thikrah yasmeen thikrah yasmeen

LEYLA

Don't you smell it?

STONE

yasmeen thikrah yasmeen thikrah yasmeen

MARYAM  
(might be listening for a moment, but then:)  
No. .

(The stone falls silent.)

MARYAM  
I do not.

(Silence.)

MARYAM  
It's getting light. We shouldn't be walking the streets..

(She starts to go. Leyla stays.)

MARYAM  
Leyla?

LEYLA  
Okay.

(She starts to follow. Maryam goes off, but  
Leyla dawdles.)

STONE  
yasmeen thikrah yasmeen

(Leyla makes sure Maryam is gone; goes  
back, picks up the stone and pockets it.  
Follows Maryam off.)

\* \* \* \* \*

**ELIAS & NOUBA. NIGHT.**

(Elias and Nouba's house. Elias, Nouba, their son Leith, all in nightclothes or hastily dressed. Maryam and Leyla with suitcase. Dark; lit by a small lamp.)

NOUBA  
You're sure they didn't hurt you?

LEYLA  
I'm fine, really.

NOUBA  
You must be chilled through. Leith: bring some tea.

(Leith disappears, comes back in a while with little cups on a tray.)

MARYAM  
That will be lovely.

ELIAS  
Anything saved from the house?

MARYAM  
Just what we're carrying.

NOUBA  
Mm. No bruises?

(Maryam and Leyla shake heads.)

NOUBA  
You were lucky. It could have been much worse.

MARYAM  
It could have.

NOUBA  
Good thing you came to us.

MARYAM  
We're lucky you were here.

NOUBA  
Mm. So I guess family is good enough, for a change.

ELIAS

Nouba . . .

MARYAM

Don't start, please.

NOUBA

I'm just noticing: when there is trouble, suddenly the runaway lipstick girl needs our help.

ELIAS

Dear, please.

MARYAM

Nouba, don't make me start on what your brother's like.

NOUBA

We don't approve of some things my brother did, but I might be short-tempered too, if I had such a daughter.

LEYLA

Too bad I wasn't a son.

NOUBA

An obedient daughter would have been fine, I imagine. But of course, all the young know better than the old. I suppose Leyla believes with those teenagers in Balata or Ashkar who blow themselves up, or the ones who dishonor their cousins' dead bodies by burying them as protests.

MARYAM

Nouba, she does no such thing.

NOUBA

And now you endanger us by coming here.

ELIAS

Nouba, that is really enough. (to Maryam) We're glad you came here. (to Nouba, firmly) Aren't we.

NOUBA

(pauses)

Well now at any rate she should go to her father's house.

MARYAM

She will not go to her father's house.

NOUBA

Keep the village together.

MARYAM

Our families are not a village, thank goodness.

NOUBA

This is not a time to be stubborn, Maryam.

MARYAM

Me stubborn? For one thing they will look with her father before even looking here. And for another thing she's not going there. That's settled.

NOUBA

Well you people always go your own way, don't you.

MARYAM

Guess we do. You should be thankful your family didn't marry more of us.

LEYLA

Aunty?

MARYAM

What?

LEYLA

Maybe she's right.

MARYAM

About what?

LEYLA

You'll be safer without me. I won't go to my father's house, but maybe I should make my own way.

MARYAM

Out of the question. Perhaps if I hadn't given my promise to my sister, I would be stupid and careless enough to consider that. As it stands, however, don't even think it. You are coming with me. If we have to, we'll go to Rabbath.

LEITH

In Ammon?

ELIAS

You shouldn't try the borders now. And they'll look for you here.

NOUBA

You can go to Rula and my brother Damoun, in the city of Urshalam. Urshalam is big enough, you can stay hidden for a while.

ELIAS

That's good.

MARYAM

Okay then.

ELIAS

Leith, who can drive them?

LEITH

I'll ask Nidal.

ELIAS

Good.



LEITH  
Maybe he'll let me drive.

NOUBA  
You let him drive, if he will.

LEITH  
But he has a Volvo.

NOUBA  
Doesn't matter what kind of car.

ELIAS  
Nidal has a Volvo?

NOUBA  
I don't care what kind of car! You let him drive. And tell him to drive carefully.

LEITH  
Right.

ELIAS  
This will all blow over. You haven't done anything.

MARYAM  
I hope they don't take any action against you.

ELIAS  
They won't know you came here.

MARYAM  
I mean just because you're related.

ELIAS  
They won't bother us. We're citizens.

LEYLA  
We are, too.

(Pause.)

LEITH  
I'll go ask Nidal.

ELIAS  
I'll come.  
(as they go)  
How do they afford a Volvo?

LEITH  
We could too, if we wanted.

ELIAS  
Oh keep dreaming.

(They're gone.)

MARYAM

I'd like to call my children.

NOUBA

That might be dangerous. We'll let them know you're safe.

MARYAM

I appreciate that, Nouba. I don't know what we'd do if you weren't here.

NOUBA

Maybe when this is all over, Leyla will see things differently.

MARYAM

We all hope so. Don't we, Leyla?

LEYLA

Oh yes maam I certainly hope I see things differently.

NOUBA

(coolly, as they go)

You will have some of that attitude shaken out of you before too long, I imagine. Pf.  
College girl.

(They leave.  
A rooster crows.)

ROOSTER

RRR-r-R-faYAK!!

\* \* \* \* \*

## CAR

(Leith and another young man--Nidal--sit in two chairs facing us. Leyla and Maryam sit in two chairs behind them. Nidal drives. The road is twisty and narrow; Nidal drives very fast and recklessly: all lean about as the car swerves. Leyla and Maryam clutch their seats as they weave back and forth.)

NIDAL  
Have you been to Urshalam before?

MARYAM  
Yes.

NIDAL  
Beautiful, huh?

MARYAM  
Mm.

NIDAL  
What's your favorite part?

MARYAM  
To be truthful, I don't care much for the city.

NIDAL  
You don't?

(Bad swerve.)

MARYAM  
(shakes head)  
Too much buying and selling all the time.

NIDAL  
Huh. What about you?

LEYLA  
I like it but I've only been there a couple of times.

LEITH  
I like Karmul better.

NIDAL  
You like Karmul?

LEITH

Yeah. There's more going on there.

NIDAL

More than Urshalam? You're crazy.

LEITH

What's to do in Urshalam?

NIDAL

All kinds of things.

LEITH

What, museums?

NIDAL

Yes museums, but there's restaurants and clubs.

LEITH

Not like Karmul. And you can buy good stuff in Karmul.

NIDAL

You can buy anything in Urshalam. I bought this jacket there, for practically nothing. Is this a find, or what?

LEITH

You call that a find? You come with me to Karmul, I will show you some clothes.

NIDAL

You are so full of it!

LEYLA

Could you watch the road please?

NIDAL

Sorry.

LEITH

Urshalam is practically a Habiru town anyway.

NIDAL

Oh and you just want to hang with Kenaaaani.

LEITH

I'm just saying Kenani are not very welcome there these days.

NIDAL

Just because people like you make a deal of it. When the Renaming passes, we'll all be the same.

LEITH

Oh all the same, when they pay us the same for the same job, maybe I'll believe it.

NIDAL

Yeah all the same! Except those idiots in the Zone. Whyncha go hang with them if

you wanna be so bigdeal Kenaaaaani? Sit on your ass all day and smoke sasheen and eat government food cuz you're too lazy to get a job or grow your own food. Shee! Makes me ashamed to be a Kenani when I think about them.

LEITH

Makes me ashamed to be Kenani when I hear you talk.

NIDAL

You are so full of it!

LEYLA

Watch the road!

NIDAL

I'm sorry but Leith is full of garbage.

LEITH

It's not garbage!

NIDAL

It is!

LEITH

You want garbage, I'll give you garbage! You want to go hang out in some Habiru museum--

NIDAL

Don't give me that garbage!!

LEYLA, MARYAM & LEITH

WATCH THE ROAD!

NIDAL

Okay okay you don't have to shout. Shee.

MARYAM

My niece gets carsick.

LEYLA

I don't get carsick.

MARYAM

You got carsick all the time.

LEYLA

When I was a little girl! I haven't been carsick in years.

MARYAM  
(muttering)

Sooooo many years.

LEYLA

(that little grimace to herself again)  
Many years, thank you Aunty.

NIDAL

Hey, you folks got your passbooks in order?

MARYAM

Yes and no.

LEITH

Might want to avoid showing them.

NIDAL

Okay. We'll go in the South Gate. The street's wide there. We'll get through, don't worry: you guys hardly look Kenani at all.

LEITH

What's that supposed to mean?

NIDAL

It's a compliment! Anyway they don't stop people at that checkpoint.

LEITH

Checkpoints. Ff.

NIDAL

Givem a break. They gotta be careful.

LEITH

Of what?

NIDAL

Insurgents and stuff.

LEITH

Oh right.

NIDAL

And they're surrounded anyway.

LEITH

Oh, sure, they're shaking in their boots. You know how many gears on a Chaldean tank?

NIDAL

Yeah yeah.

LEYLA

How many?

LEITH

Four: three in reverse and one forward in case the enemy attacks from the rear.

(Leith and Nidal laugh loudly; Leyla smiles; Maryam is not amused.)

NIDAL

Hey: you know what's wrong with a Moabite firing squad?

LEYLA  
What?

NIDAL  
It's in a circle.

(Leith and Nidal laugh hilariously; Leyla chuckles. Nidal looks at them)

LEITH  
Hey there it is.

NIDAL  
Urshalam. Beautiful.

LEITH  
Ugly town.

NIDAL  
Don't start.

LEITH  
I'll shut up. Just drive.

NIDAL  
Okay.

LEITH  
Okay.

(They drive in silence.  
Maryam, Leith, and Nidal rise and disappear with chairs. Leyla sits staring at the city. Masked actors kneel beside her, looking out at Urshalam with her.  
Urshalam speaks to her, with several voices.)

URSHALAM  
Anaku Urshalam.  
Pananu yamask.  
Pananu Noor Salaam.  
Pananu Noor Safrohn, Naseem Dawadi, Noor Zaytoon, Tal Jebus, Abeen Brak.  
Anaku Yamask Noor.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CITY OF MANY NAMES

(Family room of a pleasant apartment. Damoun and Rula, husband and wife; Dina, their five-year old; Maryam and Leyla. Rula brings tea/coffee.)

DAMOUN  
All this for a stone?

LEYLA  
Apparently.

MARYAM  
Probably some mistake.

DAMOUN  
Well we know how they are about admitting mistakes. You're safe here.

(Dina, hiding behind a chair, has peeked out. With no warning, Damoun whips around, points at her.)

DAMOUN  
Ut! Dina!

(Dina giggles, hides behind another chair. Damoun smiles, turns back to guests.)

DAMOUN  
I must tell you, Leyla, that your reputation precedes you.

LEYLA  
I expect so.

DAMOUN  
You have chosen not to live in Ashkar with your father.

LEYLA  
Yes.

DAMOUN  
Why, may I ask?

LEYLA  
(wearily, trying to be polite)  
Maybe we could discuss this another time?



MARYAM

It's complicated, Damoun.

DAMOUN

Is it perhaps because he's impossible to live with? Ut! Dina!

(Dina has peeked out--he whirls, points; she giggles, hides behind another chair.)

DAMOUN

That, at least, is my impression of him, I'm afraid. Neither, of course, would I care to live in one of those reservation townships. And your mother is in uh . . .

MARYAM

Rabbath, in the country of Ammon. We have cousins there.

DAMOUN

Hm. And you're not with her because . . . ?

LEYLA

My mother's family supports her choice. They're dubious about mine.

DAMOUN

Uh-huh. That's a shame. I've only met your mother briefly, but she struck me as a smart woman. Too smart, in fact. I never quite understood that marriage. He's my cousin of course, and therefore dear to me, but did she see something in him that I . . . did not?

MARYAM

They were promised.

DAMOUN

Ah yes of course, promised, by our grandfathers. Lovely medieval custom. Did those two old men even like each other?

MARYAM

No, near as anyone could tell. But they were set on keeping our two families together.

DAMOUN

Why?

MARYAM

No one knows.

DAMOUN

Probably some transaction involving goats. They left your poor mother in a predicament. I fear my cousin your father might be one of those men who take out their humiliation on their families.

LEYLA

What humiliation?

DAMOUN

Well not his personally, but of his fathers and grandfathers, at the Battle of Midian and so forth. A whole Kenani army running away because the Habiru blew horns in the night. Conquered by Joshua's armies and later conquered again by David and his armies. That sort of thing can be hard on some men. Shamed because they weren't there, or shamed because they were.

(He rises. Dina has peeked out ever so carefully. As he speaks, Damoun casually walks over to stand right in front of her, with his back to her.)

DAMOUN

We mustn't be too unkind to them, but all the same, that's no reason why your father should treat you like a sofa or a farm animal, just for an ancient law that makes you his property. You're perfectly right to refuse these village traditions. Let them keep their traditions in their government-supported wastelands. For the rest of us, it's time to enter the present century. By the way, has anyone seen Dina?

(Dina almost explodes with the effort of containing her giggles. She fails; spurts a little chirp. Damoun turns, points.)

DAMOUN

Ah-haaaa, there she is.

(The delight is more than she can bear. Dina rolls on the ground, tortured with giggling. Damoun smiles, bends down, tickles her a little; speaks to others as she twists and spins to escape.)

DAMOUN

We have only one room for you, I'm afraid. I hope you'll be comfortable.

LEYLA

Of course.

MARYAM

I hope we don't put you out too much.

DAMOUN

Certainly not. You're welcome. Enjoy your tea, please. I'll make some arrangements.

MARYAM

Thank you so much.

(Damoun leaves.)

LEYLA

I'm glad all that family's not so bad.

MARYAM

Course not. Nouba's perfectly nice too, if you don't get on her bad side. Or talk

about cooking. She can get crabby about her cooking.

LEYLA

Unlike anyone in this room.

MARYAM

I beg your pardon. I have my opinions--

LEYLA

That's true.

MARYAM

--and they are based on long experience--

(Rula enters. She speaks very quietly.)

RULA

Excuse me. You need to go.

MARYAM

Where?

RULA

Go away. Now.

LEYLA

Why?

MARYAM

Have we done something?

RULA

(shakes head)

Just go. Take your bag. Go out this door. The alley leads to the street that way.

MARYAM

I apologize if we've caused inconvenience--

RULA

You haven't. You need to go. They'll come for you here.

LEYLA

How will they--

RULA

Please. There's no time.

LEYLA

Who'll tell them?

(Silence. Rula avoids their eyes.)

RULA

They judge him by how long he takes to report you.

LEYLA

You're not serious.

RULA

Do you have any money? Here.

(gives them some bills and a bag)

Also some bread.

MARYAM

We won't run. We'll stay and ask him just what he thinks he's doing.

RULA

You don't understand.

MARYAM

I understand just fine.

RULA

You have no time!

(Offstage but visible, two actors hold up a plank as door: another bangs a riflebutt on it.)

RULA

(loud whisper)

Now! This door!

LEYLA

Aunty let's go.

(Banging on door continues; Maryam takes a stern breath, then leaves with Leyla.)

LEYLA

Thank you.

RULA

Hurry.

(They are gone. The door is kicked open. Officers come in.)

OFFICER

Where are they?

(Rula is silent.)

OFFICER

Where?

(Rula is silent. Officer points; they disperse offstage to search, one of them going out the same direction as Leyla and Maryam. Rula stands silent a moment, then picks up tea

tray to clean.  
Enter Damoun and Dina. Dina wanders  
about.)

DINA  
Where they go?

DAMOUN  
I heard officers. What happened here?

(Rula fiddles with tray.)

DAMOUN  
Where are Maryam and Leyla?

(No answer.)

DAMOUN  
What happened?

(No answer.)

DAMOUN  
Will you answer me?

(No answer. Damoun sits. Dina looks  
pouty; kneels puts her head in Damoun's lap.  
Damoun looks at Rula, nods his head.)

DAMOUN  
Go ahead. Go ahead. Live in the past.

(Silence. Rula leaves, returns, comes and  
goes, clearing the room as he speaks. He  
raises his voice whenever she's offstage.)

DAMOUN  
Do you like your house?

(pause)

Your washing machine? The car we drive?

(pause)

Do you like our daughter's future?

(pause--Rula is in the room now)

You know, in your regressive tradition, I could walk out. I could throw you out. I could beat you. Is that what you want? To make me one of them? You want me to beat you?

(pause)

Well I won't.

(pause)

I won't.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NARROW STREETS

(Leyla and Maryam move quickly; other performers block their way, creating passageways for them to run through. Whistles, shouts behind them always.)

### PERFORMERS

Wall.  
Wall.  
Passage.  
Steps.  
Wall.  
Arch.  
Wall.  
Wall.

### LEYLA

(already out of breath)

What do they want?  
What do any of them want?  
Who cares if I'm Kenani?  
I give it up!

### MARYAM

Stop it.

### LEYLA

Make me Habiru!  
What do I care?

### MARYAM

Keep moving!

(Officers are closer.)

### PERFORMERS

Wall.  
Wall.  
Wall.

(They are trapped and exhausted. The sound of officers close behind them.)

### LEYLA

That's it. We're trapped.

MARYAM

Here, I'll help you up.

LEYLA

Are you crazy? We can't climb that.

MARYAM

If I can climb it, you can.

LEYLA

I'm not moving! It's all a misunderstanding and I'm not running anymore.

MARYAM

Leyla --

LEYLA

We haven't done anything wrong! If we run, we're making it worse. I was going to work for the Officials! Hey! We're over here!

MARYAM

Oh my good lord . . .

(Soldiers run on opposite, stop when they see them.)

LEYLA

We give up. Here we are. We haven't done anything.

(She raises her hands; Maryam does also.)

MARYAM

We surrender! We give ourselves up!

(The soldiers look at them; then lift rifles.)

LEYLA

Wait! We're giving ourselves up!

(takes stone out of pocket, holds it up)

Here's the stone! Take it!

MARYAM

Take it!

LEYLA

Take it!

(The soldiers take aim, pull triggers.)

RIFLES

BANG!

(All freeze as the bullets leave the barrels and travel, unhurried, directly toward Leyla and Maryam. The bullets are carried -- on a tiny pole? -- by an actor. They move across,

closer and closer to the frozen women; they are ready to enter the women's chests, when they stop. And the wall behind them speaks:)

Doorway. WALL

(Another man has entered behind the wall, opened a side door. He tugs on Leyla and Maryam, who almost fall through as he closes it behind them.  
The bullets move again, bounce off the wall.)

Crack! BULLETS

(The wall shifts around and the soldiers disappear; we are inside.  
The man wears thick heavy-rimmed glasses. Has a variety of pen-like objects in his pocket-protector. They stare at him, still exhausted.

MAN  
Hiya. Some ruckus, huh? Yokay?

(Riflebutts pound on the wall.)

MAN  
Mon. We better hussle.  
(turns to go; turns back)  
Yotta know first. I'm Habiru.

MARYAM  
You are?

MAN  
Yup. Didn wanchata think I was lyin later. Habiru. Tsit. Yr juss gonna haffa truss me. Whaddya think?

(They stare at him; at each other.)

MAN  
Sgo.

(He pulls a powerful penlight out of his pocket protector, gestures them to follow as he goes off into darkness.)

\* \* \* \* \*



## UNDERGROUND

(The walls have become an intricate dark passageway, and with his flashlight the Man leads Leyla and Maryam through.)

LEYLA

Why are you helping us?

MAN

Cammie Nathan.

LEYLA

Nathan, why are you helping us?

NATHAN

Owadanno, I spose I like ta prove wunsna while we're not all pistolgoons like them. Whadda they afta you for anyway? Jdo something, or they juss suspect youv knowing somebody they suspectov doing something?

MARYAM

You're not from here.

NATHAN

Good ear. Mfrom overseas. Came back to check out this homeland thing. Youd think they'd like that. Go figure.

MARYAM

Where are you taking us?

NATHAN

My office.

(The narrow passageways open out to reveal a larger room, lit by a few small lamps. Three people sit on crates, doing minute work: brushing, dusting small objects, taking notes. When Nathan enters, one of them leaps up with precise movements, training an automatic weapon on them.)

NATHAN

Juss me. Hi.

THE ARMED ONE (Joel)

Yeah. Who're they?

NATHAN

On the run.

ARMED ONE

Could be spies.

NATHAN

Oh well. They showing up?

ARMED ONE

(checks a small lit screen)

Nope.

NATHAN

So relax.

(Armed One sits down, gets back to work.)

NATHAN

Radar detector. Case yr carrying beepers or something. Sorry. Yotta know, if yer spies, you'll never be seen again. You spies?

(Leyla and Maryam shake heads.)

NATHAN

I figured.

LEYLA

What is this place?

NATHAN

We call it Moo-ow. Mobile Underground Archeological Unit.

ANOTHER

(without looking up from work)

University.

NATHAN

Or University. Depending whom yask. Though every wunsna while I remind my associates

(raising voice, to them)

that this is not what you'd call an accredited institution.

ANOTHER

(without looking up)

Yeah yeah.

NATHAN

Mattarafack mossa my coworkers refuse to attend those institutions. And by now the feeling is mutual.

MARYAM

Which institutions are those?

NATHAN

Archeology, like I said. I came to Eretz Habreet for graduate stuff. Great place for it: everybody wanted to work here. All those layers of history, yknow. I signed on what I thought was a dig. But I'm Habiru, so I got reassigned. To something they thought I'd really like. They were wrong: I didn't like it. So I figured I'd quit and go study but it's not that easy. Archeology's serious stuff around here. So I founded this place. We recover archeology that isn't what you'd call approved.

LEYLA

By who?

NATHAN

Whaddya mean who? The Officials. Who else? A freelance archaeologist is about as welcome in Eretz Habreet as a Kenani with a hand grenade. Scuse the simile, but it's exact.

MARYAM

Fine, fine.

NATHAN

Soonerrrr later they'll check their chartsa these catacombs and figure out our location and we'll hafta mobilize and relocate. Thus the name. Anyway I like it: Moo-ow.

LEYLA

Are you a resistance organization?

NATHAN

Maybe. Don't gemme wrong here: I'm all in favor of this homeland thing. We all are. Just don't want the local Habiru wrecking it. Hey: tea or something? Yhungry? Have a seat.

(They sit; Nathan fiddles with a hot plate.)

NATHAN

So I spose you guys think we should all pretty much dry up and blow away, huh? All us Habiru? Fold up and go back where we came from, wherever that was?

LEYLA

Not necessarily.

NATHAN

No? What do ythink?

LEYLA

I think that the Habiru have done a lot of good to this country.

NATHAN

No kidding. Learn that in school? (to Maryam) That what you think?

MARYAM

I think you're here to stay.

NATHAN

(laughs appreciatively)

Whether you like it or not?

MARYAM

Those are your words.

NATHAN

Well it's probly true. Whether anybody likes it or not. So what can we do for you? Where ya running to?

MARYAM

We aren't running to anywhere.

LEYLA

We were trying to turn ourselves in.

NATHAN

Wasn workin too well.

LEYLA

No.

NATHAN

House probably demolished, huh?

MARYAM

Probably. We might try to go to Rabbath, in Ammon.

NATHAN

Cross the border? You'll have to go to the Free Zone.

MARYAM

We'd like to avoid the Reservations.

NATHAN

Well you might not have a choice. Balata's right on the border to Ammon, and we know some people there who might help.

LEYLA

Isn't Balata dangerous?

NATHAN

Plenty dangerous. Guess some people just won't stay caged up and starving without getting all pushed outta shape. Headache, huh? But we got room to maneuver. Scuse me a minute. Hey Joel, can we contact Salam?

(Nathan confers with Joel, one of the workers.  
Leyla takes out the stone.)

MARYAM

(harsh whisper)

Put that away! How did you get that?

LEYLA

I'm going to ask if he can read this writing.

MARYAM  
Are you crazy?

LEYLA  
Why not?

MARYAM  
They'll turn us in. Hide it. Put it away.

LEYLA  
He could have turned us in already if he wanted to.

MARYAM  
He hasn't seen that yet! I said put it away!

(Leyla grudgingly puts the stone away just as Nathan returns.)

NATHAN  
Got it. We'll hook you up with a friend of ours. Crosses back and forth from the Zone practically every day. Got a route even we dunno. Sound good?

MARYAM  
Yes. Thank you. When can we go?

NATHAN  
Pretty quick. We'll set a meeting place--

LEYLA  
Can you read this?

(She takes out stone: Masked Actor conveys the stone to Nathan's hand. Maryam glares at her, and she glares back. Nathan peers at the stone, frowns.)

NATHAN  
Joel.

(Joel steps over, looks at it.)

NATHAN  
Wherja get this?

LEYLA  
Is it writing?

NATHAN  
Think so.

LEYLA  
Can you read it?

NATHAN  
Unh-unh. (to Joel) Whaddyathink?

JOEL  
It's the same.

LEYLA  
What is it?

NATHAN  
Benjamin?

JOEL  
Maybe.

LEYLA  
Who's Benjamin?

NATHAN  
He might know this. If you want, I can take this n showm.

LEYLA  
If I can come too.

NATHAN  
You wanna come?

MARYAM  
No thank you she doesn't.

LEYLA  
Yes I do!

NATHAN  
No kidding. You interested in this stuff?

LEYLA  
Yes.

NATHAN  
(to Joel)  
Let's show her.

JOEL  
Lotta trouble.

NATHAN  
Cmon.

JOEL  
We could go the easy way.

NATHAN  
Flip you for it.  
(pulls out a coin)  
Heads, the high road; tails, low road. Kay?

(Joel shrugs assent. Nathan flips.)

NATHAN  
Low road. Excellent.

JOEL  
(not happy)  
Oh, excellent.

NATHAN  
Whaddy, getting lazy? Besides, it's nighttime.  
(to Maryam)  
This okay with you?

MARYAM  
My niece is a modern young woman. I say No Absolutely Not, she goes ahead anyway.

NATHAN  
Wanna come? Or you can stay here n rest a while.

MARYAM  
Send her off with you?

NATHAN  
Just checking.

LEYLA  
Are you sure you want to go to all this trouble for us?

NATHAN  
Course I am. It's what I do in life: show rocks. Sgo.

(Nathan leads Joel, Maryam and Leyla underground.)

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE LOW ROAD**

(Performers create the various following situations.

An officer sits by himself in a dark place. Reads a book, his automatic rifle across his knees.

Two men grab him, silence him: Nathan and Joel. Nathan pulls a syringe out of his pocket protector: the officer slumps to the ground.)

Okay. NATHAN

(Leyla and Maryam come out. Joel kneels beside the officer, preparing a larger syringe.)

How long? JOEL

Half hour. NATHAN

I'll give him an hour. JOEL

Why an hour? NATHAN

Just in case. JOEL

Cmon, with an hour he'll have a headache for a week. Half hour's plenny. NATHAN

Fine. JOEL

(Joel grimaces, injects officer. Nathan leads with his flashlight; Leyla and Maryam follow, with Joel behind. The officer disappears as they crouch through a difficult passageway.)

Where're we going? LEYLA

Don't step there. NATHAN



(Shines flashlight on ground. The others step around the spot.)

LEYLA

What is it?

NATHAN

Don't worry. Just don't step there.

MARYAM

Wonderful. Brilliant.

(They move on, crouching much of the time.)

NATHAN

We're getting close to the original center of ancient Urshalam. Jussa second. Joel?

JOEL

Got it.

(A beam of light crosses their path. Joel steps to one end, pulls out a small device: a few electrical beeps, and the light goes off. Nathan gestures them onward.)

NATHAN

This town's been conquered thirty times or so. Swwhy they call it City of Many Names.

LEYLA

500 Names?

NATHAN

Nah: just thirty or so. Step over this please.

MARYAM

What?

NATHAN

This.

(Shines light down on trip wire.)

NATHAN

Don't touch. Holjer skirt please.

(They gingerly step over.)

MARYAM  
(grimly calm)

Is it much farther?

NATHAN

Almost there. Joel?

JOEL  
Mm.

(They walk up to an electric fence which buzzes and flashes. Nathan pulls another device out of his pocket, hands it to Joel, who goes to work on two different points on the fence.)

NATHAN  
Gonna wanna stand back a minute.

LEYLA  
What were some of the names?

NATHAN  
Ohhh, Noor Salaam was one. Noor Safrohn. Tal Jebus. Abeen Brak. I donnom all. Been aroun fthousansa years. Original Kadeem city got buried long time ago. Other stuff built on top.

LEYLA  
Was there an earthquake?

NATHAN  
Mm-mm. Just conquest. And then more conquest. Got it yet?

JOEL  
Almost.

LEYLA  
Why do they have all these precautions?

NATHAN  
Cuz they're not ready yet. I'll show you.

(The fence stops buzzing and flashing. Joel steps to the middle, opens a gate. They enter. The fence disappears. They move toward a large block of sand-colored stone.)

NATHAN  
There it is.

LEYLA  
What?

NATHAN  
That.

LEYLA  
What is it?

JOEL  
A section of the original shrine of Ibrahim.

NATHAN

The first altar he built to his old mountain god.

LEYLA

Really?

NATHAN

Maybe. First ancestors of the Habiru, if so.

LEYLA

Is it fragile?

NATHAN  
(shrugs)

Chunka stone.

LEYLA

Why don't they want anybody to see it?

NATHAN

Cuz they're not done. Meer.

(Nathan draws them to one side of the block, points his flashlight at the bottom. Joel stands aside, watching for trouble.)

NATHAN

See that?

LEYLA

What?

NATHAN

Two different shades of dirt. This lighter shade's from right here. This darker shade's from forty-one miles away. Where this rock comes from.

MARYAM

I don't understand.

LEYLA

Forty miles away?

JOEL

At Shekmu. When Ibrahim first came from Chaldea, he went to Mount Gerizim in Shekmu. That was where he almost sacrificed his son on a stone. That was where he built an altar to the mountain god. This altar here.

LEYLA

When did it come here?

NATHAN

Oh, about six months ago now, Joel?

JOEL

About that.

NATHAN

I helped bring it myself. Helpdom dig it up with camel's hair brushes and such. Packed it n styrofoam n plastic in a big crate, just like you're sposeta with a precious antiquity. But the truck drove at night, and they didn take it to a laboratory or a museum. They brought it down here instead.

LEYLA

Why?

NATHAN

To prove Habiru were here first. They wanna build a new Habiru capital building, right here, above this spot. Designed like a temple. Urshalam was the capital of Kenaan, and now they wannit to be the capital of Eretz Habreet, so the Officials wannu unveil solid archeological evidence that Habiru were here before Kenani. But the dirt here's not old enough, so whadda they do? Rewrite the Habiru history books, dig up a piece of solid archeology and move it here in secret, mix the dirt, and when they're ready ,poof! They discover it! Habiru first! Who's gonna argue with dirt?

(pause; chuckles, but angry now)

Fuckers. Tryna change history with shovels.

(pause)

Don't gemme wrong. Homeland and everything. But whaddathey needado this for? Habiru own the place. Whassa difference?

LEYLA

This is why you quit.

NATHAN

Yeah. Yeah.

(pause.)

There was another old rock here. I never saw it, but Joel did. It was more archeology they hadda get rid of.

JOEL

It had writing on it.

LEYLA

Like my stone?

JOEL

I think so.

LEYLA

What was it?

(The Masked Actor holds the stone near Leyla.)

STONE

Thikrah.

NATHAN

Proibly an altar built by the Kadeem.

LEYLA

Who're Kadeem?

NATHAN

People who really built Urshalam. They disappeared, which is probly juss as well. Bloodthirsty bunch, parently. Human sacrifice. Worshipped Bahal and stuff, you know, one of those gods who killed his own mother and got killed by his own daughters. Or somthen like that. I don't know much about it. Not sumpm they teach about. Hey. You okay?

(Leyla has started breathing hard to stop from weeping. She fails; wipes away a couple of tears.)

STONE

Thikrah.

NATHAN

Wassamatter?

LEYLA

Nothing.

NATHAN

Dudn look like nothin.

LEYLA

I don't know. Where is that altar stone now?

NATHAN

Probly gathern dust or decomposn somewhere, I'm fraid. Wadn the sorta thing they wanneda leave lyin around.

MARYAM

We should go back.

NATHAN

Kay. We cn do that.

LEYLA

No.

MARYAM

We shouldn't have come. Altars and rotting stones, nothing but trouble . . . .

LEYLA

I don't know what's wrong, honestly, but it's passing and I don't want to go back.

(Nathan looks to Maryam, who grudgingly nods.)

NATHAN

On we go. It's okay, yknow. Smy fault. Ts easyta forget sometimes. We can get upset about what people are going through, but still it's them goin through it, not us.

LEYLA  
 (takes stone from the Actor)  
 Are you sure he can read this?

NATHAN  
 Dunno. Do iz best. Hey, cn I see it for a minute?

LEYLA  
 Why?

NATHAN  
 Juss look at it.

(Leyla hands it to him -- conveyed by  
 Masked Actor. Nathan stares down at it.)

NATHAN  
 Hm.

LEYLA  
 What?

NATHAN  
 Nothin.

(hands it back, by way of Masked Actor)  
 Never cn tell about these old stones. Sometimes they kinda open up and reveal  
 emselves, if yern the right place. Guess this idna right place. Oh well. Benjamin'll  
 know all about this.

(to Joel)  
 Stand watch?

JOEL  
 Sure.

NATHAN  
 This way. Almost there. You'll like Benjamin. He's one a the good ones.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ARCHIVES

(A deeply hidden archive stacked with artifacts and record. Masked actors hold books, records, ancient documents. One lamp. Enter Nathan and Maryam and Leyla.)

NATHAN

I dunno. Might not have an official name. They call it The Vault. Deepest sanctum of the official Habiru Archives. Keep all sorts a stuff here they don't want anyone poking around.

LEYLA

Dangerous things?

NATHAN

Nah, not most of it. I'm tellin'ya, they just don't like takin' chances.

MARYAM

No guards?

NATHAN

Nobody knows I know it's here. There's an alarm system, but nobody bothers Benjamin. Cepp me.

(Enter an old old old man: dressed in dark pants, white shirt, and dark tie. His glasses are impossibly thick. He is not, however, physically hampered: he moves about with fair energy. He is carrying a bone.)

NATHAN

Hey.

BENJAMIN

Hello my friend. Look what they've just brought me.

NATHAN

A bone.

BENJAMIN

The femur of a proto-human; homo habilis I believe, possibly as much as a million years old, and found near Ashkelon.

NATHAN

Wow.

BENJAMIN

Early humans in Eretz Habreet. Very exciting discovery.

NATHAN

Can you prove they were Habiru?

BENJAMIN

I doubt it, but I'm sure they'll make us try.

(Nathan and Benjamin share a grim chuckle.)

NATHAN

Benjamin, this is Maryam and Leyla.

BENJAMIN

How do you do, ladies. You are . . . Kenani, yes?

MARYAM

Yes.

BENJAMIN

I'm glad. I like it when Nathan brings people here, especially young people, to show you that all of us are not crazy.

NATHAN

Benjamin is the Keeper of the Vault.

BENJAMIN

And have been since it was built, as you might guess from my complexion.

LEYLA

When was this built?

BENJAMIN

Just after the Independence.

LEYLA

Were you here then?

BENJAMIN

Oh yes.

NATHAN

He was one of the originals.

BENJAMIN

Yes I know, how can I still be alive? Avoiding sunlight helps.

LEYLA

Were you born here?

BENJAMIN

No. I was born near Tanis in Goshen. I came here when I was a teenager to make a place for my family and my fiance.

(As Benjamin speaks, he goes to his shelves --that is, to masked actors who hold out objects to him--and rummages, pulling out objects to illustrate what he's saying. Some he just holds up, some he hands to the others



to touch. The others follow him as he leads them through the archives, which change shape around them.)

BENJAMIN

But the Enslavement came then--the soldiers, you know, entered my village the week after I left. My family was taken and lost, every one. My fiance was able to escape and she joined me here some years after. A picture of her.

(a little folder, opens it for them.)

From very long ago. I take advantage of my position here to preserve a few personal momentos.

(puts it back; brings something else out)

This doll might have been my cousin's. I don't know for sure. They found this in that mountain of toys that was left piled up inside the compound at Goshen. So I have no way of knowing for certain it was hers. But I keep it just in case.

(takes it back from them)

You must not be too hard on us. We wanted to leave no margin for the return of this. None. But some of us thought we were fighting for the right to live here, not for the right to throw others out. We had dreams of building Utopia. Some still do.

LEYLA

You fought in the War of Independence?

BENJAMIN

Yes dear. I wasn't part of the massacre at Jericho, but I did fight. Quite possibly against your grandparents. Or great grandparents, good lord, what year is it?

LEYLA

Could you tell me please, were you at the Battle of Midian?

BENJAMIN

Mm. When we blew our horns so loud that the enemy fled in confusion?

(chuckles as he rummages in shelves)

You are wondering, I would guess, how your long-dead ancestors could have been so foolish and cowardly? You may put your mind at ease. There were no horns blown. Well, someone might have blown a horn, I don't remember. But the Battle of Midian . . . yes, here we are.

(brings out a cannon shell, undetonated; lets Leyla hold it.)

This is a 75 millimeter howitzer shell, of the type your ancestors used. And this . . .

(a larger shell)

is a 150 millimeter shell, of the type we used. The Battle of Midian and the war itself were won not by noise but by artillery, and by our howitzers which had longer range and delivered larger shells. We also, as it happens, had more soldiers and more rifles. I know this is not how the story is told, but the truth is that we simply had your ancestors all outnumbered and outgunned.

(takes the shell, returns it as he continues)

From early on, our Officials have been magnificently clever in making conquest look like defense.

NATHAN

Gotta hannit toom.

BENJAMIN

It makes for an unfortunate precedent in their handling of some citizens.

NATHAN

Benjamin doesn't much like the way Kenani are treated.

BENJAMIN

Many of us don't, you know. We would not choose to herd people onto squalid reserves where they don't even have the right to vote or drink water from the rivers. You wait. Someday Habiru will stand up and make it stop.

NATHAN

So whenever I have a question I juss can't get a lead on, Benjamin makes some time for me.

BENJAMIN

Any time of the day or night. Which is it now, anyway?

MARYAM

They make you live here?

BENJAMIN

Oh no, but I'm most content here. I've had to say goodbye to so many things in my life, you know. But here in my little garden, I get to keep everything. Nothing lost or left behind. Paradise, of sorts.

NATHAN

If you're a packrat.

BENJAMIN

(smiles)

Like me.

NATHAN

So listen: Leyla found a stone with some markings I can't read. Thought maybe you'd reconizem.

(Leyla takes out the stone, hands it to Benjamin--the Masked Actor conveys it to Benjamin's hand.)

BENJAMIN

Oh I doubt I will, if you couldn't.

NATHAN

That's true, I probly know, oh, one percent of what you know.

BENJAMIN

Now now, you embarrass me in front of our guests.

STONE

Ad loheem shatoy kaleem

BENJAMIN

It does look like writing.

(He looks at the stone for a moment. Then:)

BENJAMIN  
I can't read it.

NATHAN  
(a beat)  
Zat so.

BENJAMIN  
I'm sorry. (pause) Perhaps I should hang on to it. I can check it against some records, but I'll have to locate them.

NATHAN  
You don't know where they are?

BENJAMIN  
(shakes head)  
Not offhand. It will take some time.

NATHAN  
Huh.

BENJAMIN  
And you're probably in something of a hurry.

NATHAN  
(puzzled)  
Yyyyyyeah. I guess we are. (to Leyla) Okay if we leave it for a while?

MARYAM  
We'd be happy to leave it permanantly.

NATHAN  
Nah, we'll get it later. Fanybody cn figure it out, Benjamin can. Okay? We'll check back.

MARYAM  
Or not. May we go now?

NATHAN  
Sure thing. (to Leyla) Ready to go?

LEYLA  
(hesitates; then)  
No. I'm not. (to Benjamin) Do you know what it says?

NATHAN  
Uh . . .

BENJAMIN  
Truthfully I do not.

LEYLA  
Just tell me. I'll keep it secret. What it says or what it is.

BENJAMIN

I can't.

LEYLA

Then I want it back.

MARYAM

Leyla--

LEYLA

Please. I want it back.

NATHAN

Okay, okay, relax, no problem. He'll give it back. Benjamin?

BENJAMIN

(pauses)

I'm afraid I'll need to keep this.

NATHAN

Whaddy mean?

(Benjamin pauses; goes to a box; pulls out a handgun: an old-fashioned Civil-War variety revolver. He holds it by the barrel.)

NATHAN

Hoho, what's that from, the battle of Kish?

BENJAMIN

Actually it was issued to me when I first started here. One of my duties has been to keep it fully operational.

NATHAN

No kidding. Cn I see it?

BENJAMIN

I really will need to keep this stone.

(pause)

Please don't put me in an impossible position.

NATHAN

Wwwaddy mean? We asked her, and she wants it back. Idn that what you said?

LEYLA

Yes.

NATHAN

Okay then. I'll make a rubbing of it or something, you can check it out later. Okay? Cmon. Let's uh . . . Benjamin?

(Benjamin looks at them, waiting perhaps for someone to speak or change their mind. Finally he lowers his eyes, sadly; then reverses grip on pistol, points it at them.)

BENJAMIN

My apology will do no good, but I'm very very sorry. You will not be able to understand.

NATHAN

Unnerstan what?

BENJAMIN

You have no way of knowing what it is to have no place to go.

NATHAN

Benjamin . . . it's a rock.

BENJAMIN

I wish you could understand. My whole family, you remember.

NATHAN

Me too. I lost family too. Benjamin, this is a piece a rock with some scratches on it.

BENJAMIN

(shakes head)

Please don't force me to hurt anyone. I'm sorry if this means you won't feel welcome here anymore. But I can't let you take this out of here.

LEYLA

Keep it. I don't want it. Just tell me what it says.

BENJAMIN

Truly I don't know exactly what it says.

LEYLA

But you know what it is.

(Silence.)

LEYLA

I didn't want this. I didn't choose this. I was no trouble. You tell them that. You could have had everything and I would have walked along behind without knowing any better. I was no trouble until they made me trouble. You tell them that.

NATHAN

This is nuts. This is crazy. Benjamin . . . .

(Shaking his head, Nathan steps toward Benjamin slowly.)

BENJAMIN

Nathan, please don't. I'm quite serious.

NATHAN

It's okay. No big deal. Let's forget all about this.

BENJAMIN

Please don't.

NATHAN

Cmon, it's me. It's Nathan.

BENJAMIN

I know who you are. Stand back please. I do mean it.

(Nathan is quite close, but does stop now.)

NATHAN

(distinctly)

I am afraid I do not believe you.

(Nathan lifts hand, reaches out, lightly touches pistol; tugs it, then pulls it out of Benjamin's hand. Benjamin stays rigid.)

NATHAN

There, see? I was right. Probly not even loaded, huh?

(checks the magazine of the pistol; frowns, looks at Benjamin, disturbed; then turns to the others)

Kay. We're outta here. Everybody gets to calm down now.

(takes the stone from Benjamin, hands it to Leyla)

There. Let's go. Benjamin, we'll see you later. We'll talk. Okay?

(no response)

Okay. Let's go.

(Benjamin hasn't moved. As he watches Nathan usher them toward the exit, a switch appears near him. With sudden decision, he reaches up, pulls it. A loud klaxon sounds. Nathan stops, turns to stare at him, astonished. The klaxon continues, then stops abruptly. Benjamin looks around, surprised. Joel rushes in.)

NATHAN

Jget it?

JOEL

Not fast enough. The signal went out.

NATHAN

They coming?

JOEL

It'll take them a few minutes to figure it out.

NATHAN

(takes a bitter breath)

Arright. Get these two out fast; use the high road. Getem with Salam right away. Then get back and decamp. Move the unit.

(to Leyla and Maryam)

I won't be seeing you again. Lemme know if you find anything about that.

MARYAM  
Where are you taking us?

NATHAN  
To the Free Zone.

MARYAM  
No.

NATHAN  
No choice.

LEYLA  
Good. To the Zone and the boys with bombs. That's where you've left us. That's where we'll go.

(Another klaxon starts up: muffled, distant.)

LEYLA  
(to Benjamin)  
Remember what I told you.

(She turns and starts away; Nathan gestures to Joel to go; Joel leaves with Leyla and Maryam. Nathan stands a moment, then turns to look at Benjamin. Benjamin stands, silent. Nathan stares at him, bewildered and astonished.)

NATHAN  
It's a rock.

(Benjamin makes no response. Nathan looks at him, then turns, leaves. Benjamin doesn't move. The klaxon continues. Lights down on him. Then sound down to silence.)

**end act one**

## ACT TWO

EDGE

(Outside on another deserted road.  
Leyla stands. Maryam sits.)

LEYLA

Naomi.  
Alexandra.  
Beatrice.  
Victoria.

MARYAM

I hate sitting on the ground.  
I've always hated it.

LEYLA

Blanche. That would be best.  
Goodbye Leyla  
Silly name. Everyone mispronounces it anyway. Leela. Lyla.  
Good riddance.  
Something simple. Invisible.  
Linda.  
Sue.  
Jane.

MARYAM

I must be getting stupid with age. Letting you go with that man. Should have know better.

LEYLA

I never asked to be Kenani. What's Kenani? I thought it was some kind of second best, but in fact it's not even allowed. Live somewhere else. Or don't live. That's the choice. Or live invisible.

MARYAM

Or get rid of that piece of stone, so this trouble will stop hounding us.

LEYLA

It's just a rock.

MARYAM

With a radar device inside, to judge by the luck it brings us.



LEYLA

(stops, pulls out stone)

Fine. Fine. It's a broken rock. It responds to gravity. If I throw it away it will stay. Do you want to do it?

MARYAM

No. I don't want to touch it.

LEYLA

Alright then. Here.

(Leyla tosses it offstage -- conveyed by the Masked Actor who takes it from her hand. Leyla stares after the stone.)

MARYAM

Good. Finally. I feel better already. This time leave it there please.

LEYLA

Alright. It's done. I can't see it. Simple. I didn't ask for this.

(Pause.)

LEYLA

We can't go back.

MARYAM

No.

LEYLA

Not ever.

MARYAM

No.

LEYLA

What happens to us?

MARYAM

We disappear.

LEYLA

In Rabbath.

MARYAM

I hope so.

LEYLA

Will Nouba and Elias tell my dad where we've gone?

MARYAM

I'm sure they will. Maybe not till we're safe there, but they will.

(Leyla nods. Is silent.)

LEYLA

Did you ever meet the rest of Dad's family?

MARYAM  
(guardedly)

At the wedding.

LEYLA

What did you think of them?

MARYAM

Ohhhh, well . . . it was long ago. They might have changed since then.  
(reaches over, brushes hair away from Leyla's face.)

This doesn't mean you'll never see him again.

LEYLA

Doesn't it?

Take a last look, Aunty. When you turn invisible, you don't turn visible again. Maybe the world disappears too. When you're invisible do you lose your sight? Your smell? Your touch? When was the last time I tasted anything? Everything's silent. Take a last look.

Those 500 Names. Is this what happened to them?

MARYAM

They just like to play with guns.

LEYLA

Maybe there are 501 names now

MARYAM

Oh very clever. 500 boys and one girl, lined up against an army.

LEYLA

Get me out of here fast then, Aunty. Invisible hurts. Invisible turns my stomach.  
(turns, shouts back the way she came)

I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS!

(Enter the Vendor from the first scene.)

VENDOR

I recommend caution in drawing attention to yourselves.  
One house, one house to you both.

MARYAM

We are all one house.

VENDOR

We have met, young miss? You bought produce from me, did you not?

LEYLA

Yes.

VENDOR

Happy coincidence. How did you enjoy the koosa?

LEYLA

It's hard to remember.

VENDOR

Much has happened since then, I suppose.

MARYAM

You are Salam.

SALAM

Indeed so.

LEYLA

I am--

SALAM

Never mind that, though thank you. If I am asked, under pressure as it were, it is better I don't know. I heard about Nathan and his group. I hope they are well.

LEYLA

So do we all.

SALAM

Indeed. This way then, ladies.

MARYAM

To the Free Zone?

SALAM

Yes maam. To the reservation at Balata.

MARYAM

Noplace we'd rather go.

SALAM

(lightly)

I live in the Free Zone, you know. Are you sarcastic at my home, maam?

MARYAM

(as they go)

No no. Far from it. Far far from it. No indeed.

(They go.)

\* \* \* \* \*

**PIPELINE**

(Inside a large underground pipeline.  
Leyla kneels next to water which moves past  
her--say, a rippling fabric.)

WATER

Tehaspeen maho watruhas  
tal shameen karahs

(Leyla stares at the water, dips her hand in it.)

WATER

tal shashmeen atasookh  
rabeeb nasakh kabak boom

(Salam and Maryam enter. They crouch, he  
in front, Maryam behind.)

SALAM

Come miss. It is a temptation, I know.

(Leyla joins them as they move forward,  
crouching sometimes, sometimes on hands  
and knees.)

LEYLA

What is this?

SALAM

Water, we call it here.

LEYLA

No, this place.

SALAM

What does it look like? A pipe for draining water out of Balata.

LEYLA

Who's taking water out?

SALAM

The Officials, of course. How else would they make the desert bloom? Drain the water from the reservations, which makes it appear that Kenani don't know how to farm, and meanwhile irrigate Habiru valleys and fields, and take photographs of little desert spots and then flood them with water and show the world that all this was desert before it was conquered. Clever!

LEYLA

I never heard a thing about this.

SALAM

Imagine that! Concealing such a thing from you. I am shocked. But they must have their reasons, and fine ones too.

MARYAM

He is a wit, our guide.

SALAM

Oh no, I'm not clever. Not like them. And in fact, how fortunate for us that the Officials are so clever. They have so cleverly hidden this pipeline that we could not possibly know about it.

LEYLA

You come this way a lot?

SALAM

I am forced to do so sometimes. There is no work in the Free Zone..

LEYLA

I thought the Peace Treaty made all that better.

SALAM

(snorts a chuckle; then)

I don't interfere in politics.

MARYAM

You must excuse my nosy niece.

SALAM

Oh you mustn't apologize. The situation here is fertile for curiosity. Why, for example, would they rather give us canned food then let us plant fields? But don't get me started. Onward please.

LEYLA

Are you a member of the 500 Names?

SALAM

What is that? Some religious organization? I am doing this as a favor for Joel and Nathan. Here now. The difficult segment approaches its end and we can stand upright. This luxurious route has taken us underneath the military cordon around the Free Zone, so we should be safe from that. However: the cordon of razor wire is currently being replaced by a wall of concrete and guard towers, and this wall keeps moving inward to cover more Kenani land. We will have to cross a small zone near this wall, which of course is heavily guarded. For this short distance, we must be invisible.

LEYLA

That we can do.

SALAM

Watch my signals carefully please. If for any reason we are separated, you must make your way to the township, and there you must find Samirah. Say that name please.

LEYLA, MARYAM

Samirah.

SALAM

But we will be fine, and Balata is close.

LEYLA

Is Balata where you live?

SALAM

My home is elsewhere. Actually I haven't been in Balata for some time. I hope the township is still there.

MARYAM

Towns disappear here?

SALAM

Oh yes. Overnight sometimes. By the way: I think this is yours.

(Salam pulls out the Stone: that is, a Masked Actor conveys it to his hand.)

LEYLA

Where did you get this?

SALAM

You must have dropped it, by accident of course. I thought it might be memento of some importance.

MARYAM

It's a rock.

SALAM

Is that all? Hm. It has scratches on it that look like writing. So I imagined you might want it back.

(Leyla sighs a little, takes it -- the actor conveys it to her hand.)

MARYAM

This is not good news.

SALAM

How puzzling. But there is never much good news in the Free Zone. Here we are: I will go first, then signal you to follow. When I signal, move quickly please.

(They go off.)

WATER

seek shalamah lekbed akrasah  
arba dayeed lekbed shadeem

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE FREE ZONE**

(An old man--Ahmo--enters carrying a hoe.  
He stands, looks down.)

**GROUND**

Matpadam tahat arda  
matah Bahal

(Ahmo scrapes at the ground with his hoe.

Enter Salam, moving furtively and leading  
Leyla and Maryam. Salam sees Ahmo. He  
mutters a curse under his breath; gestures  
Maryam and Leyla to stay behind while he  
steps toward the old man. Salam always has  
his eye on a point beyond us, presumably the  
guard towers.)

**SALAM**

Hello old man! What are you doing?

**AHMO**

(keeps scraping)

You can look, you can see.

**SALAM**

There's a tower right over there.

(points out past us)

They can see you from the wall.

(No response.)

**SALAM**

Look up there. They will see you.

**AHMO**

I hope so.

**SALAM**

You have seeds in your pocket?

**AHMO**

Perhaps.

**SALAM**

Whatever you do they will trample down.

**AHMO**

Me too then.

SALAM

That's silly talk.

AHMO

Tired of digging in the dark.

SALAM

Of course you are, it's terrible, let's talk, let's not stand here where they will see us, come on. Come with us.

(No response.)

You just make it harder. This is no way to resist. Just because Bahal the god came back, doesn't mean you will.

(Ahmo stops scraping, pulls out a few seeds from his coat pocket, tosses them on the ground. He uses the hoe to cover them with dirt. He moves to another spot, starts scraping with the hoe.)

SALAM

They will simply demolish your house. They will probably demolish the houses of your family.

AHMO

Take me home then.

SALAM

Okay.

AHMO

Take me home.

SALAM

It's right over there. Balata Township.

AHMO

No! Not there! I'm not from there.

SALAM

Okay, where then?

(Ahmo stares at him, blankly.)

SALAM

We'll take you there. Where you from, friend?

(Ahmo still stares.)

SALAM

What's wrong? Are you okay?

AHMO

Where are you from?



SALAM  
I'm from Tirzah. Do you--

AHMO  
No you're not.

SALAM  
Yes I am. I live there, honest.

AHMO  
But you're not from there.

SALAM  
Where then?

AHMO  
You're . . .

(He stares; frozen.)

SALAM  
What?

AHMO  
Thikrah. Thikrah.  
(sees Leyla and Maryam)  
Where are they from? You. Where are you from?

LEYLA  
We live in Ir Lishon.

AHMO  
No you don't.

LEYLA  
Not any more.

AHMO  
Ir Lishon. I know that place. You . . . no. They grew . . . oranges. And . . .  
jasmine. Noor Yasmeen. Noor Yasmeen it was called. But you're not from there.  
You can't be from there if you live there now. Can't be from . . . what was the  
name? I just said the name?

LEYLA  
Noor Yasmeen.

AHMO  
Noor Yasmeen. You . . .  
(gazes at them; his face clouds over)  
But you don't care. You are practically Habiru. What do you care?

LEYLA  
Yasmeen. I smelled jasmine. (to Maryam) Do you know that name?

MARYAM

No one grows jasmine. I've never seen jasmine there.

LEYLA

I smelled jasmine. Do you know that name?

(Machine tread noises approach.)

SALAM

Okay, seriously now, we have to go, right this moment. That is a bulldozer. Or a tank.

(Ahmo hears the noise too. He lies down near the first seeds he planted.)

SALAM

Come come, stop it.

AHMO

Tell them to stop it.

SALAM

This is stupid, this is stupid. You will just get hurt. Or they'll take you to prison.

(Salam goes to Ahmo, tries to drag him up. Leyla steps forward, pulls Salam away.)

LEYLA

Leave him alone.

MARYAM

What are you doing?

(Leyla lies down beside Ahmo.)

SALAM

Oh this is clever. This is very very clever.

LEYLA

It's okay. I'm invisible.

SALAM

Get up.

LEYLA

If they treat me like a rat I might as well bite like rat.

(With less gentleness, he wrenches Leyla up. Speaks to her with urgency and directness.)

SALAM

Miss. It is my understanding that you are implicated in the deaths of officers.

LEYLA

What did you say?

SALAM

Your names and faces are on their computers. If you are taken here, they will check.

LEYLA

Who told you that?

SALAM

Go please. Right now! That way. The township. You will have time. Find Samirah. (to Maryam) Madam?

(He drags Leyla to Maryam, who pulls Leyla away and off. Salam returns to the old man.)

SALAM

They're coming.

(A distant loudspeaker voice says something unintelligible. Salam turns toward it, lifts arms, shouts to be heard over the approaching noise.)

SALAM)

He's just an old man! He doesn't mean anything! He's just a crazy old man!

(turns back to Ahmo)

Poppa, Grandpa, Uncle, you're somebody's uncle, we have to go.

(The sound of treads loud and close.)

SALAM

Fucking seeds. Fucking wall. Please. Please. For your family. This is useless. It has no point! No one will know! Are there cameras here? Am I from a newspaper? What will you accomplish! Do you hear me? Will this stop them? Will this stop them?

(The tread noise almost drowns him out. Salam can't stand back any longer; steps forward, tries to pull the old man up again, but the old man resists. They struggle, until Salam lets go, turns to face the approaching treads, lifts his arms -- to surrender? to resist? -- and shouts:)

SALAM

Will this stop them?

(Lights black out suddenly, tread noises out.)

\* \* \* \* \*

**BALATA**

(A woman enters banging a hammer on a pot lid and calling out.)

WOMAN

Congratulations!  
 Congratulations!  
 Congratulations on this happy day!

(A man passes in front of her with a tray of food. He holds it high as if to show it to someone far away, calling out as he passes offstage.)

MAN

Congratulations on this happy day!  
 Congratulations on this happy day!

WOMAN

Happy day!  
 Happy day!  
 Congratulations!

(quieter voice)

Come forward please, There are not good hiding places here.

(Maryam and Leyla enter.)

MARYAM

We are all one house.

WOMAN

(does not turn to face them)

We are all one house. Have you come for the wedding?

MARYAM

We're looking for someone named Samirah.

WOMAN

You have come for the wedding.

(Another woman passes with a tray of food, holding it high, calling out.)

ANOTHER WOMAN

Congratulations. Happy day. Congratulations.

WOMAN

Something for these two please.

No thank you -- MARYAM

Take it please. WOMAN

(The other woman hands some of the food to Maryam and Leyla, then leaves.)

Hold it up so they can see in that tower. WOMAN

(Maryam and Leyla do.)

Say congratulations. WOMAN

Congratulations. MARYAM

Louder. WOMAN

Congratulations! MARYAM

Congratulations! LEYLA

Happy day!  
Happy day!  
Congratulations! WOMAN

(She bangs on the pot lid; waits, watching; then lowers the lid and hammer.)

Get down. WOMAN

What? LEYLA

(The Woman crouches quickly.)

Get down. Quickly! WOMAN

(She grabs Leyla's arm and pulls her down; Maryam does the same.)

Bang. RIFLE  
(offstage)

BULLET  
(passing close over their heads)

Fsssssss!

LEYLA  
Why are they shooting?

WOMAN  
To get our attention.

LOUDSPEAKER  
(offstage)  
NO GATHERING. MOVE ALONG.

WOMAN  
Come.

MARYAM  
Where?

WOMAN  
Come.

(Man and Woman rise, pull Leyla and Maryam off with them.)

LOUDSPEAKER  
Curfew.  
Curfew.  
There has been activity.  
Curfew until further notice.  
Remain inside your buildings.

\* \* \* \* \*

## LITTLE PARADISE

(As they walk and the scene is changed, night also falls: an actor holds up stars hanging from a stick, and another holds up a moon hanging from a stick. Actors stand in place holding tomatoes and vines as the garden also. The garden is small. The actors will become other characters in the scene.)

The Woman enters with Leyla and Maryam. They walk through a little gate --portrayed by an actor.)

GATE

Squeak.

WOMAN

Welcome. We can be safe here, as much as any in Balata. Because we are surrounded by buildings, they seem to regard this as "inside" during curfew. I can therefore show you my little paradise garden, of which I'm unattractively proud. It is small, of course. We are only allowed this much space to grow, for each housing block.

LEYLA

Why?

(Suddenly all, including Leyla and Maryam and the actors playing gate and garden, cover their ears and bend over, screaming high-pitched loud and long.)

ALL

AAAH!

(They trail off, rise slowly.)

WOMAN

You must excuse the interruption. They find it necessary to practice their jet maneuvers over our homes. Day and night. Prepare yourselves: it will swing around again now.

(All cover ears, bend over, scream high-pitched loud and long.)

ALL

AAAH!

(They rise up slowly.)

ACTOR  
Boom.

ACTOR  
Boom.

WOMAN  
They also test their weaponry nearby. Day and night. On occasion they fire jet missiles into our windows, but we are safe I think for the moment. You were asking a question.

LEYLA  
Why only this little garden?

WOMAN  
Oh yes. Their rules about gardens. Those jets provide some answer. The ones who send them frown on us growing too much. They prefer we depend on the canned goods they graciously supply. But we indulge ourselves. My particular specialty is thyme. May I cut some for you?

MARYAM  
That would be lovely. Though some people don't like too much thyme.

WOMAN  
Too much thyme? Impossible. Too much marjoram, maybe.

(As she sets the hammer and potlid on the ground, several of the actors break away from the garden and enter as women and men. They sit, informally, as if this is their home too. The Woman cuts spice and hands it to Maryam and Leyla.)

WOMAN  
We do not have your names?

MARYAM  
We have not been asked.

PERFORMER  
Boom.

PERFORMER  
Bang.

PERFORMER  
Boom.

WOMAN  
You will excuse the noise I hope. You may call me Nekat and I ask you now. Your names?

LEYLA  
Invisible Woman.



MARYAM  
 (with a stern glance at her)  
 Maryam Hayyib. This is my niece Leyla Danyal.

WOMAN/NEKAT  
 Your names sound familiar. Hayyib and Danyal. You are from where?

MARYAM  
 Ir Lishon.

NEKAT  
 Ir Lishon. Hm. There is a wonderful bakery there called . . . Samia? Yes?

MARYAM  
 Not that I know of.

NEKAT  
 Hm. Perhaps I'm mistaken. Not many people come to Balata on purpose. You came here because . . . ?

MARYAM  
 We are trying to cross the border into Ammon.

NEKAT  
 Into Ammon?

MARYAM  
 My sister and some cousins live in Rabbath.

NEKAT  
 Crossing the border.

MARYAM  
 We had some trouble in Ir Lishon.  
 (pause)  
 With the Officials.

NEKAT  
 What reason?

MARYAM  
 None.

LEYLA  
 They had no reason. We're citizens of Eretz Habreet.

NEKAT  
 Citizens? How nice for you. We of course are mere subjects, so we have no idea what citizenship is like. Perhaps because you are citizens you were able to escape?

MARYAM  
 Perhaps.

Mm. NEKAT

(Pause.)

LEYLEA  
We were taken by the 500 Names.  
(Pause.)  
The 500 Names. Do you know about them?

NEKAT  
(pauses)  
Some religious group?

MARYAM  
Excuse me, my niece speaks out of turn. We just want to cross the border into Ammon. We were told Samirah could help us. Can you help us find her?

(Nekat regards them.)

LEYLEA  
Do you know Salam? He told us to ask.

WOMAN  
Many people know Salam.

LEYLEA  
I see.

MARYAM  
Leyla, our gracious hosts seem to have questions about us. Perhaps they don't realize that we have questions too. Perhaps they think we're from so far away that we don't know the name Nekat means Joke. They may even think we don't know that guests do not bring food to a wedding, but to a funeral. Or perhaps it's just that manners are very different here.

PERFORMER  
Boom.

NEKAT  
(regards her coolly for a moment; then smiles)  
As to Samirah, there is no secret. Some may forget. We are in the habit of forgetting, these days. We smoke the saseen which Eretz Habreet so thoughtfully provides us.

MARYAM  
You know where she is?

NEKAT  
She is in Jahmah.

LEYLEA  
Where's that?

NEKAT

Prison. A place very unlike here. We are surrounded by walls, our every movement is watched and guarded, but this is the Free Zone, not prison. We are occasionally detained in something called prison, perhaps to remind us how free we are here.

LEYLA

What did she do?

NEKAT  
(chuckles)

“What did she do.” You are not from here, I see. Ammar?

MAN/AMMAR

Yes?

NEKAT

Why were you in prison?

AMMAR

Administrative detention. Questioning.

NEKAT

How long?

AMMAR

Eighteen months.

NEKAT

Did they find out anything?

AMMAR

No. So they only held me three more months and let me go.

NEKAT  
(mildly)

Ask anyone you will see here. You need not ask 'if': only ask how long.

(pause)

In Urshalam there is a man named Damoun Danyal. Is he by any chance a relation?

LEYLA

(waits for Maryam to answer, then goes ahead)

Yes. We saw him yesterday--

MARYAM

Just a moment. We have sat her long enough. We are not from here, as you say. Where I come from we would not let two women wander by themselves and then bother them with nonsense questions. Nor would we test them by asking them to speak badly of family. Damoun is a cousin. He has a wife named Rula and a three year old child named Dina. Any more than that you have no reason to ask. I think we've said too much and been too polite to people who have no trust for us.

NEKAT

I see. Do you hear that? No trust for you. Hm.

There were times, you know, when the Uprising was alive, when all Kenani were one front. Women and children, young and old, every township on every reserve, all

Kenani united to resist the Habiru Officials. All except you. Citizens of Eretz Habreet Proper. Within your borders and your cities, you kept quiet. Our children shot and mangled by the soldiers of Eretz Habreet, and you sit silent. Now the Uprising's quiet, and we are walled onto leftover slugs of land, and the government denies us the right to plant, and this parched and wasted ground is bit by bit appropriated to build new Habiru colonies, and we stand watching our houses crushed and the stones taken to build Habiru houses, and they install new pipelines while our children contract diseases from unclean water and are barred from their hospitals, and still they murder our children, and even now you are quiet. All you citizens of Eretz Habreet, still, still, silent. And tell me why, again, we should give you trust?

LEYLA

Because we're still Kenani. Whether we like it nor not.

NEKAT

Oh yes. And when they put into effect the Law of Renaming, and that name Kenani is taken from you. What will we then have in common?

(Silence.)

NEKAT

As regards the wedding. It is true one of our children was shot and killed here recently, rest his soul. He was working in a field that was planned for appropriation, and one of the Habiru colonists took offense. But there is no funeral here. Funerals are illegal in Balata. We are all potential disturbers of peace, you see, and at funerals feelings might run high.

(pause)

So there is no funeral here.

(Silence.)

PERFORMER

Boom.  
Boom.  
Boom.

NEKAT

You may be interested to know that another man has been hurt. Just today.

LEYLA

How?

NEKAT

The soldiers tell us he had a heart attack. From fear, perhaps, since he was lying down in front of a bulldozer. Your friend Salam was with him. Salam is under arrest, which is most unusual for him.

MARYAM

Is the old man alright?

NEKAT

He is alive, as far as we know. He would be better off if he were taken to a hospital, but the nearest such facility is in Urshalam, to enter which of course we are not allowed. He will go to a smaller military clinic which is a mere 25 miles away.

They will be able to question him there if he recovers consciousness. We will wait for his return. And we will keep our wedding clothes near at hand.

LEYLA

What was his name?

NEKAT

Nisam. From a place that is now called Tsel Zikaron. There were two women seen with him also. They ran away, of course.

(Pause.)

MARYAM

You do well not to trust us. We bring sorrow. It's time for us to go.

NEKAT

Go where?

MARYAM

How do we cross the border into Ammon?

NEKAT

It is simple enough. Go out that gate, the border is 600 yards away. They won't stop you.

MARYAM

What do you mean won't stop us?

NEKAT

Lift your arms, call out We're leaving! We won't return! They will guide you through. Only remember one thing: do not turn back. If you turn back they will shoot. If you keep walking away and promise never to return, they will guide you through.

LEYLA

Why?

NEKAT

Because they want you to go. They want all of us to go. They want this ground without us on it. That's what the checkpoints and jet planes are for. We ruin their dream by existing here. The razor wire and helicopter bullets and murdered children tell us a simple thing: go and live, or stay and suffer and die. Any sane creature would go. It's your duty as a mother or a possible mother. It's your duty as a mammal. Protect yourself and go.

LEYLA

But you don't go.

NEKAT

Yet. Not yet. For some small time I am stubborn. But I am made of flesh, which can be torn by metal. I can be scared unto madness for my children. For the children of others. I can wish for my children to grow up away from confinement and torture and despair. I can be crushed. My heart can be worn down. I tell you for you to believe: there is no shame in going. They have built a world for us to be gone. No shame. Just don't turn back once you start.

MARYAM

I thank you for your honesty. We will be careful. Leyla?

LEYLA

Just a minute.

PERFORMER

Boom.

Boom.

LEYLA

Listen. What if I want to stay.

NEKAT

Stay or go as you choose.

LEYLA

What if I want to be one of the 500 Names?

(Nekat stares at her, exchanges a look with the others.)

LEYLA

I've never carried a weapon or anything like that, but maybe I'm ready to be one of the 500 Names.

(They stare at her; then, as if on cue, Nekat and the others laugh.)

NEKAT

We don't know anything about that. (giggling) And neither, apparently, do you.

MARYAM

No she doesn't. My niece has not slept enough. We'll be on our way.

NEKAT

No no no here now. My home is not large but we will make space for tonight, and you can plan tomorrow.

MARYAM

What if we're agents?

NEKAT

If you are agents, you are either brilliant or incompetent.

My name is Suha. I am Samirah's sister. There is actually no secret about why she is in prison. She was arrested for entering the Habiru colony, up there.

(points off and up)

Mizpah Yishuv.

LEYLA

Why did she go there?

NEKAT/SUHA

With our grandfather's body.

MARYAM

Very nice. A brilliant protest he made I'm sure.

SUHA

It was no protest. Samirah and two others were taken while trying to bury him. He was born there, when it was a village called Noor Janaan. You may arrest me for saying that if you choose. We don't use our dead for protest. We take the risk to bury them where they were born. They go down into the earth like Bahal. You have perhaps heard of Bahal?

LEYLA

Not much.

SUHA

But enough to hear he was a god of human sacrifice? Isn't that what is said?

(They are silent.)

SUHA

Mm. It pleases them to say that in Eretz Habreet. (pause) There was a time, and there was not, when the earth was to be made.

(Her voice is joined by another. She does not change attitude or appear to notice.)

SUHA & ONE VOICE

So Bahal's mother, whose name was Tiamat, lay down and Bahal made the earth from her body.

SUHA & TWO VOICES

And when that earth he made became old and dry, Bahal lay down himself, and his daughters made the earth new from his body.

SUHA & THREE VOICES

And the same with their children, and their children, and their children, and so on down to us.

SUHA & FOUR VOICES

They called themselves Children of Bahal, and when they died they made the earth new with their bodies.

SUHA

There was no human sacrifice. In any case, it's just a myth.

MARYAM

You're not a believer?

SUHA

If Bahal existed, wouldn't he have delivered us by now? It's only a myth, but what it says is true. Someday Kenani will live in Noor Janaan again. And when they do, the earth will still be alive. Because our grandparents will be there. Us too, probably, by that time.

AMMAR  
(rises)

He had no bride. The Earth is his bride.

(He goes. The other man rises.)

MAN

He had no children. We are his children.

(He goes. Leyla, Maryam and Suha are alone.)

SUHA

I repeat: you're welcome to spend tonight in my house. It's safe enough: the bulldozers will not arrive on so little notice, though it's not without precedent. Of course if you are agents with some sort of broadcasting device, I might wake up in jail. Oh well.

PERFORMERS

Boom.  
Boom.

(The stars are hung and circled a little over Leyla's head.)

STARS

Takant shimm kamarash,  
tihatamat kimoon kibukim.

LEYLA

You're planning something for tonight.

SUHA

Dinner, perhaps?

LEYLA

No. When we're asleep. Will you bury the murdered boy at the colony tonight?

(The stars fall silent.)

SUHA

(pauses; evenly)

The boy was born in Balata. He is buried already. The Officials wanted neither protest nor autopsy. He will rest here in Balata.

STARS

tahat arda matah Bahal

LEYLA

How did he die?

MARYAM

Leyla. (to Suha) You must excuse her. We have had the most difficult time. She does not always understand that she is a GUEST in someone's HOME . . .



SUHA

You needn't apologize.

(pause)

It is a lovely night. Such as only exist in our country.

(pause)

Of course I can't be certain. I've never been anywhere else.

(pause)

When the Officials appropriate land, they first declare the land 'under-utilized', then take it away. The boy was planting illegally, to prevent this.

LEYLA

And they killed him for that?

SUHA

Not the Officials. He was shot to death by one of the Habiru pioneers from the colony up there. The land of course is scheduled to be given to them, and our planting might interfere.

(Pause.)

LEYLA

Is that what you're planning for tonight?

(The stars hang over Suha's head now.)

STARS

takant shimm kamarash

MARYAM

You don't need to answer my niece's rude questions--

SUHA

I would not be surprised. If there are those who intend some. Activity.

LEYLA

At night, under cover of darkness.

SUHA

Such things happen. There is less chance of patrol at night. There are so many fields scheduled for appropriation. They can't patrol all of them every night, so if some were to be planted, the Officials would have to find some other excuse. Which of course they will. They'll discover that we're too close to such-and-such a colony. Even though such-and-such a colony has not been built yet; but that's a minor complication. And we will lose our fields, and then perhaps our homes. But nonetheless some may resist. At night, under cover of darkness. Not with hope of success, of course. But for fun. For history. At least, it is possible that such people exist.

LEYLA

How can I join them?

(Silence.)

LEYLA

You laughed at me when I offered to carry weapons. Will you laugh at me now?

SUHA

You know, some of the fields in question are patrolled. By officers and by armed Habiru pioneers.

LEYLA

I understand.

SUHA

Furthermore it is not easy work. By night, without noise, means without tractors or other machinery. Have you ever held a mattock or a hoe?

LEYLA

No. But don't you need all the hands you can get?

SUHA

Please do not include me. I'm speaking hypothetically.

LEYLA

Can you arrange for me to come along and help?

SUHA

Does your niece always put herself forward like this?

MARYAM

She does what she will. I'm not her mother. In fact I'm invisible to her. Leyla, this is not a game.

LEYLA

I know that.

MARYAM

This is not a cause for these people. They don't do it to make their fathers proud of them. They have no choice. They would choose differently if they could. You are asking for this in the dark. Is it really what you want? Do you really believe you understand what you are choosing?

LEYLA

I don't know. It's not what I want. I don't want any of this. I'm afraid. I wish I were home. If I had a home I'd go there. I don't have a safe place on earth, unless I'm invisible. If I vanish I'm safe all over the world, unless I walk in the sunshine and someone sees me. Is that safe? I just want to wake up in the morning and still be here. Look in the mirror and still see a face. That's all. I'm too young to disappear.

(Maryam pauses; rises, extends hand.)

MARYAM

The stone please.

(Leyla hesitates.)

MARYAM

Please.

(Leyla takes out the stone, hands it to Maryam: masked actor conveys to Maryam's hand. Maryam picks up the hammer. Kneels on the ground, sets the stone on the ground. Raises the hammer to hit it. Stays frozen, hammer poised.)

LEYLA

Aunty.

(Silence.)

LEYLA

It's only a stone. A rock with markings.

MARYAM

If it's only a stone I can smash it. If it's only a stone I can make it dust and nothing will change. I'm a homeless outlaw with a house of rubble. My niece is tortured and almost shot and killed more than once. My niece is talking about weapons and facing men with weapons. And leaving me powerless to help her. If not for this stone, would we be here? I am trying to get my niece across the border to safety, and this stone wants you to stay here in danger.

(she lowers the hammer somewhat but not altogether)

They will not succeed. You know that. Their midnight adventures with mattocks, their pistols and molotov bombs will bring them nothing. You know that.

LEYLA

I don't.

MARYAM

The world has forgotten us. Years and decades and even our neighbors have forgotten. The Habiru have hydrogen missiles they will not hold off using.

LEYLA

They're not all like that.

MARYAM

No they're not. They are people with hearts of their own, and some will truly be concerned or friendly or guilty. Until they are pushed or scratched. Then they'll band together, as they always have. As we would in their place.

(lowers the hammer)

Your uncle, my husband, he was like you. Too young to disappear, I guess. He had to go his own way.

He did not die in a traffic accident, you know. The Habiru doctor recorded it that way. Because they put him back near the car when it was over.

LEYLA

What was he doing?

MARYAM

Carrying messages. That's all. Never a weapon in his life. Just messages. I am told he was kicked to death.

LEYLA

Oh Aunty. Uncle Yosef? You never told anybody?

MARYAM

I never told you.

LEYLA

Why?

MARYAM

I was afraid it might bring you to this.

LEYLA

That sweet man. That gentle sweet man.

MARYAM

The moment I saw that stone I thought of him. When I see this stone I hear his voice. And others like him. Who ended the way he did. Leyla. When you came to me, when you first lived at my house, I had a dream. It was just a dream, I was asleep and everything. But still. In this dream I was standing by your bed. And your great-grandfather, rest in peace. My grandpa Adnan came and sat next to me, and he watched you sleep. And he spoke to me in some strange language I didn't know. But I understood him. He only said one thing. He told me, "Protect her song."

That was all. "Protect her song."

(She hands Leyla the stone - conveyed by masked actor.)

MARYAM

Say one word now and I'll stay here with you.

(They sit for a moment. Then Leyla speaks to Suha without looking at her.)

LEYLA

You're one of them. Aren't you.

SUHA

(considers)

I may be able to put you in contact with certain people.

LEYLA

(pauses)

My aunt and I would like to cross the border into Ammon. Is it really as simple as walking out there?

SUHA

Yes.

LEYLA

No shame.

SUHA

If shame is all that stops you, go at once.

LEYLA

We would like to put all this behind us. We would like to be unnoticed. We would like to blend in once and for all.

(Leyla grabs up the hammer, lifts it to smash the stone in her hand.)

LEYLA

We would like to disintegrate. We would like to become nameless refugees. We would like to wear black, and live out our lives in shadows.

(Readies the hammer. Can't. Maryam gently reaches over, takes the hammer away.)

MARYAM

Even I couldn't do that.

(Leyla stares, then holds the stone out to Suha.)

LEYLA

Will you keep this for me?

(Masked Actor conveys the stone to Suha. Suha gazes at the stone as she speaks.)

SUHA

If that's what you want.

LEYLA

It doesn't belong to me anymore. Keep it somewhere hidden. Or find someone who can make it disappear. Like us.

(Silence.)

SUHA

I believe I know one who can show you the way.

(Suha leaves.  
Maryam lifts an arm, reaches out gently.  
Leyla shifts over and they sit holding each other, lightly.)

MARYAM

Your mother will be glad to see you.

LEYLA

Me too her. Of course, there's the rest of them . . .

MARYAM

They'll be glad too.

LEYLA

Glad for the chance to work me over, you mean.

MARYAM

You'll be fine. You can handle it.

LEYLA

I'm not so sure.

MARYAM

You handle me, you can handle them. Anyway, I'll be there too. Hm?

LEYLA

(suddenly can't talk much, leans her face into Maryam's arm)  
Yeah.

(Maryam holds her and rocks her just a little bit.

Suha returns with a very old woman: Alma. Alma moves very slowly, and does not open her eyes, ever. Suha helps her sit, then sits herself to one side.

Stars hang above once more.)

STARS

takant shimm kamarash

ALMA

Hello dears. We are all one house.

MARYAM

One house.

ALMA

To you as well, young woman. One house.

LEYLA

One house.

ALMA

The border for you. Mm? No shame. They make it hard to stay. They work hard to make it so hard. No shame. Your family name?

MARYAM

Why?

(Alma is silent. Takes the stone out of her pocket, rubs the surface with her hand.)

ALMA

There is writing on this stone. Do you know what it says?

LEYLA

No.

ALMA

Mm. Your family name?

STARS

inabb larhag ilnayim

LEYLA

(hesitates, then)

My father's name is Danyal. My mother's family is Hayyib.

ALMA

Mm. Hayyib and Danyal. And you came here from where?

LEYLA

We lived in Ir Lishon.

ALMA

Ir Lishon. Oh yes. Noor Yasmeen. How did your family come there?

MARYAM

We don't know.

ALMA

No of course you don't. But those names are not from Noor Yasmeen. Danyal and Hayyib. From uh. Let me see. The Danyals and the Hayyibs lived in . . . Beit Thikrah.

LEYLA

Beit Thikrah?

ALMA

Yes.

LEYLA

Where is that?

ALMA

Nowhere anymore. Where the village of Beit Thikrah stood is now the city of Ir Tanak. And none of your family live there, nor any of the families I knew.

LEYLA

What happened to Beit Thikrah?

ALMA

The Conquest, which Habiru call the Independence. Beit Thikrah was obliterated. All the villages were. All the people in them killed or driven away or moved to the reservations. Beit Thikrah, Beit Salam, Noor Basma, Noor Bayan . . . The stones of Beit Thikrah were used to build Ir Tanak. And the name itself became illegal to say. The names of all the villages became illegal. You're not secret police are you? I thought not.

LEYLA

Thikrah. Does it mean something?

ALMA

Thikrah means "remember".

LEYLA

And Beit Thikrah?

ALMA

House of Remembrance, dear. All the names mean something. Noor Yasmeen means Jasmine Light. Beit Salam means House of Peace. Beit Thikrah: House of Remembrance.

STARS

Beit Thikrah.  
Beit Salam.  
Noor Basma.  
Noor Bayan.  
Thikrah.  
Thikrah.

LEYLA

Is Beit Thikrah one of the 500 Names?

ALMA

Mm. I don't think there were ever quite five hundred. Four hundred surely and more. I don't know when they began to be called five hundred. Maybe when those boys with guns took to calling themselves that.

LEYLA

Four hundred villages.

ALMA

And more.

LEYLA

And you know all the names?

ALMA

Oh yes.

LEYLA

How?

ALMA

I am one of the Keepers, dear. I was chosen when I was a very little girl for my good remembering. Me and the others. The names were illegal to be written or sung or spoken, so they had to be kept in memory. Also the names of families, as many as we could.

LEYLA

Do you pass them on?

ALMA

We choose others in turn. And they keep them and pass them on until the time comes we can say them out loud again. Not easy. Lots of people can remember the names of four hundred villages, but all the other names. Those dead, killed, those lost. Who can remember all those? It's too many. Every Kenani has stories that have been erased, and most lead back to some village destroyed and forgotten. Some we can remember. But most . . . .



LEYLA

Do you know what the writing on the stone says?

ALMA

I wondered if it says Rejom sa walkhast abnu.

LEYLA

What's that?

ALMA

The beginning of the message of Bahal.

LEYLA

Is that the language of the Kadeem?

ALMA

Kadeem. Kadeem is a Habiru word that means "ancient". The Kadeem were simply the first Kenani. We are the Kadeem. Yes dear. Kenani have always been here. You don't hear this much because Kenani are always conquered, and who likes to brag about that? Egyptian, Akkadish, Sumerite, Parsee, Habiru. They all conquer, they all move place to place, they all write history. Kenani stay in one place, we write no history. All we have are the names. Thousands of years worth. More or less.

LEYLA

Do you speak the language?

ALMA

Only the one sentence. Anything else I heard when I was too little to remember.

LEYLA

Before it was outlawed.

ALMA

Before it was outlawed, yes. I think it's the language on the stone. But I never learned to read it. Perhaps if I were in my home village. When you stand in your home village, much becomes clear. But none of us live there now, of course. Here you go. Keep this for your journey. Wherever it may take you.

MARYAM

(rises)

You may keep that stone. Please do. Thank you for the knowledge. We are glad to know.

LEYLA

Aunty . . . .

MARYAM

We have barely come through terrible danger, barely with our lives, we are in sight of safety in that direction, across the border, and that stone, that stone that sings to me my dead husband's pain, that stone wants us to go back that way, into Eretz Habreet, into the very danger we barely escaped and will not escape again. Leyla. I am not your mother, but you were given into my care. The border is that way and we are going to cross it. It's time for us to go.

(Leyla doesn't move.)

MARYAM

We thank you for everything. Your hospitality. Your information. Your trust. We will think of you and wish you well. You may depend on that. Say goodbye. Leyla. Tell them goodbye.

LEYLA

Goodbye. Thank you.

SUHA

You are welcome.

MARYAM

This direction?

SUHA

Yes. Keep walking once you start. Hold your hands up.

MARYAM

Alright then. Are you ready?

(Leyla has not moved. Considers; rises, moves toward the exit, stands.)

LEYLA

If you want, Aunty. I'll go. If that's what you really want.

(Maryam and Leyla stand at the exit. Silent.)

SUHA

No shame.

(Pause.)

MARYAM

They will crush you at last. You know that. You will fail. You will bring more Kenani to death and to heartbreak. There is no hope. None.

(pause)

But you and my niece are too much for me. And that stone.

(turns back to face them)

Grandpa Adnan said that word. Thikrah. Before he disappeared.

(She holds out hand, gesturing for the stone. Masked actor conveys it from Alma's hand to Maryam's; then Maryam holds it out and it is conveyed to Leyla's hand.)

MARYAM

Where is this village Beit Thikrah? And how do we get back there?

\* \* \* \* \*

## HOME

(Night.

Upstage is a house, or rather some suggestion of a house under construction. Open woodwork. Unfinished walls and a little rough wood unfinished porch.

Leyla and Maryam enter. They move with some stealth. They shine their flashlight carefully, only very close to themselves. They look at the house for a moment. Silence.)

They're asleep.  
MARYAM

Or not home.  
LEYLA

Or no one lives here. It's not all built. Look.  
MARYAM

A new house?  
LEYLA

I don't know.  
MARYAM

Our house was here?  
LEYLA

So they said. Pass two stop signs which were houses also once. Follow the road to the end. This spot.  
MARYAM

(A voice speaks out of darkness)

Hello.  
MAN

(They start, shine light on him. He's sitting down next to the unfinished house. He clicks on a little clamp lamp.)

MARYAM

Peace.

LEYLA

Peace.

MAN

(looks at them a moment; then)

We are all one house.

(Almost involuntarily, they step back from him.)

MAN

Please don't run off. (pause) You look very convincing. No one else will notice you, I don't think.

LEYLA

(warily, trying to brazen it out)

Have you "noticed" something about us?

MAN

I have, I'm afraid. But then I'm different. I've been expecting you.

(rises, steps toward them)

I think what you're looking for is here.

(goes to a spot downstage; presses with his foot in the dirt.)

Right here. (looks at them) What was his name?

LEYLA

What do you think we're looking for?

MAN

(pauses)

My name is Simon. I built this place. Such as it is. I've been waiting for you. I wasn't sure you'd ever come. You used to live here, isn't that right? Your family I mean. When it was Beit Thikrah. Am I right?

(Pause.)

MARYAM

The family name was Hayyib. His name was Adnan.

SIMON

Adnan Hayyib. Hm. I couldn't find that out. Without revealing it, of course. To the wrong people. Adnan Hayyib.

(The old man from Leyla's dream enters, invisible to them. Stands at one side.)

ADNAN

Inabb larhag ilnayim.

Namaru kisall.

(He goes.)

LEYLA

You know about Beit Thikrah?

MARYAM

Does everyone here know that name?

SIMON

No. Nobody does, I don't think. Or else they don't speak it.

LEYLA

What do you know about Beit Thikrah?

SIMON

It's one of the 500 Names. Isn't it?

(pause, while they take this in)

I came here for, you know, the unused land, because they needed carpenters and housebuilders like me. (chuckles, refers to house) You wouldn't think it to look at this, but that's what I do. Where I was born, overseas, it's too crowded now, and believe it or not, Habiru still aren't welcome there. Still. You'd think, after all the Enslavement, people would change, but oh well. So I left my wife and my two children and came here to build a beautiful house for them to come live in.

(turns, walks up toward the house)

That was over a year ago. It doesn't take that long. I should be finished by now. But they told me this was empty land.

(pause)

I was digging around for my foundation. Found a ring of stones from the base of a wall. Someone's house. Yours. The Hayyib's.

(pause)

And of course this. From more recently. It was shallow. They were in a hurry, whoever did this. I reburied him deeper.

(pause)

The rest was easy to find out. Easier for me than for you, probably. I'm Habiru. So they figure I won't care. That's the worst of it. That's the most horrible of all. They think none of us will care.

MARYAM

Where is your family?

SIMON

Still there. In Sardis. They wonder what I'm doing. I write them letters full of lies and trivia. Trouble with bricks and materials, I say. They probably think I've deserted them. I have, in a way.

MARYAM

You've taken up with someone?

SIMON

No. But I don't want to bring them. I don't want to go back. Because I've found out what Habiru have done here. In this whole country, for decades, what Habiru have done. And I wish I were not one of them. It makes me wish I were not Habiru.

(pause)

How do I tell my family that?

LEYLA

You never see them?

SIMON  
(shakes head)

I'd like to see them again. (pause) I'd like to learn how to belong here. Maybe when I learn all 500 names, I'll belong. Maybe not. Maybe I'll always be an invader.

(He sits on the unfinished porch. Turns to them.)

SIMON  
When I redug that, I didn't know what to say. I spoke some Habiru words over him. Are there Kenani things to say for him?

LEYLA  
They say "He goes down into the earth like Bahal."

SIMON  
Mm. "He goes down into the earth like Bahal."  
(pause)  
I can leave you alone here for a while. If you like.

LEYLA  
That's alright.  
(pause)  
There weren't 500 villages. Four hundred at least, maybe more.

SIMON  
You know the names?

LEYLA  
No. I know where we can learn them.  
(pause)  
My name is Leyla. That's my aunt Maryam.  
(pause)  
Don't try to stop being Habiru. I tried to stop being Kenani, for a long time. It was awful.

(Maryam has been staring at the grave. She has stepped forward to stand directly atop it.)

MARYAM  
Matab ribat atiroot.  
Matab kalit kinyat.

LEYLA  
Aunty?

(All other actors, with masks, have gathered and are sitting around the edge of the playing area, watching and hearing her.)

MARYAM  
Rejom sa walkhast abnu. Namari kisall.

LEYLA  
Aunty, what are you doing?

(Maryam looks at her, smiles radiantly.)

MARYAM  
Mazell talyab beit albi. Albi-on.

(Leyla, astounded, takes out the stone, walks down and hands it to her--directly, with no actor conveying it. Maryam looks at the stone, reads it; frowns; mouth drops open.)

MARYAM  
Rosemary.

LEYLA  
What?

MARYAM  
It's a recipe. A list of ingredients for zakla. I've been leaving out rosemary. How in all the world could I forget rosemary?  
(shakes her head, then shrugs a little)  
Oh well. At least Nouba's been getting it wrong too.

LEYLA  
Aunty, how were you able to speak that language?

MARYAM  
Don't you know, dear?

LEYLA  
How should I?

MARYAM  
Because I'm speaking it now. You are too.

LEYLA  
(gapes)  
I am?

MARYAM  
(nods)  
See? He doesn't understand us. (to him) Do you understand what we're saying?

(Simon, sitting upstage, stares at her, uncomprehending.)

MARYAM  
This must have been their garden, right here. Grandpa talked about it. His garden in Beit Thikrah. I could never remember till just this moment.

LEYLA  
House of Remembrance.

MARYAM

Before it was destroyed. The whole village. And two boys hid in a cistern for a week or more. Our two grandfathers when they were boys. Hayyib and Danyal. Nobody else survived. The two boys escaped and made a promise.

LEYLA

To keep the village together.

MARYAM

To keep the village together. With their children and their children's children. But no one remembers. Till we come here.

LEYLA

Is that why this is happening? Because we're here?

MARYAM

Yes. We'll forget again when we leave. But we're home. This is a gift, because we've come home. Beit albi. House of my heart. Albi-on. Where my heart was born.

LEYLA

Can we stay here?

MARYAM

Oh no. I don't think so. I don't think we'll escape this time.

LEYLA

Escape from what?

MARYAM

He will bring them to take us, you know.

LEYLA

No he won't. You heard what he said.

MARYAM

Oh yes I heard him. Every word. In a moment, he will walk to us, and look sad, and say "I'm sorry, but I must call the Officers."

LEYLA

Why?

MARYAM

They all do. My love, don't you see yet? This is what they are afraid of. This is what they want us not to have. Do you understand now? This is what they fear.

LEYLA

Just this?

MARYAM

Yes. Nothing but this. I'm so sorry my love. I'm so sorry.

(They stand quiet for a moment.)



LEYLA

I shouldn't have brought us here.

MARYAM

Oh don't be sad for that. No no. I'm not. We could never have escaped, really.

(looks around her)

This was his patio. He had a special chair, and . . . uh . . . Loobna sat there because she liked the shade . . . .

LEYLA

Will they keep us together? When they take us?

MARYAM

I don't know. I hope so.

LEYLA

Me too. Me too.

MARYAM

(stands beside her, takes her hand)

She liked the shade, he said, because she had pale skin and didn't like the sun. Imagine. Not liking the sun. But her skin was so pretty, he said.

(Simon rises. They look up at him.)

He walks downstage to them.

Looks sad.

Opens his mouth.

Finds the words, and asks:)

SIMON

Will you teach me that?

(They stare at him.)

Lights down on them.)

**end act two  
end albion**



## APPENDIX: translations of Kadim passages

### Note:

**This is provided only as a guide for actors. The translations are NOT to be put in a program or anywhere else for the audience to see.**

(Spellings are mostly phonetic, with i = ee, a = ah, kh = softly guttural.)

p. 5

CROW: La kaaaaAAAAAAT ATTU! = Hey! Look! Pay attention!

p. 7

STONE: Thikrah = remember [remembrance]

STONE: Takant shimm kamarash / tihamat kimoon kibukim/Thikrah  
= the speech of heaven and earth, / the speech of ocean deeps and stars/remember

p. 26

OLD MAN: Thikrah. / Rejom keet lay wikargamak. / Hawat wakathneek. / Thikrah.  
= Remember. / I have a word to speak to you. / A message for you.  
/ Remember [remembrance].

p. 33

STONE: Wanap. / Kulha withan barepht, / sheerah lash arda brakam.  
= See then. / Your voice lives in the clouds, / and thunders in the depth of earth.

p. 33

FIRST: Thikrah. Thikrah. = Remember. Remember.

p. 40

STONE: yasmeen = jasmine

p. 44

ROOSTER: RRR-r-R-faYAK!! = RRR-r-R-wake UP!!

pp. 49

TIR LABANU:

Anaku Tir Labanu = I am called White Hills now.

Pananu yamask. = I have been called many names.

Pananu Noor Salaam. = I have been called Light [city] of Peace.

Pananu Noor Safrohn, Naseem Dawadi, Noor Zaytoon, Tal Jibus, Abeen Brak.  
= I have been called Saffron Light, Golden Breeze, Olive Light, City of Jibus,  
Stones of Lightning.

Anaku Yamask Noor. = I am called the City of Many Names.

p. 86

WATER: Tehaspeen maho atruhas / tal shameen karahs / tal shashmeen atasookh, /  
rabeeb nasakh kabak boom

= Lift the water and bathe, / dew of heaven, blood of earth,  
/ dew that heaven shed, / showers shed from the stars.

p. 88

WATER:

seek shalamah lekbed akrasah /

arba dayeed lekbed shadeem

pour forth peace in the midst of earth / increase love in the midst of the fields

p. 89

GROUND: Matpadam tahat arda / matah baal

= I will go down into the earth / like [in the place of] Bahal

p. 106

STARS: Takant shimm kamarash, / tihamat kimoon kibukim.

the speech of heaven and earth, / the speech of ocean deeps and stars :  
tahat arda/ matah bahal = down into the earth/ like Bahal

p. 118

ADNAN: Inabb larhag ilnayim. / Namaru kisall.

= I will go now to the depths of heaven. / This was my bright courtyard.

p. 120-1

MARYAM:

Matab ribat atiroot.

Matab kalit kinyat.

Rejom sa walkhast abnu. Namari kisall.

Mazell talyab beit albi. Albi-on.

=

This is truly my home.

This is my palace of cedar and gold.

The word of trees, the whisper of stones. This was his bright courtyard.

This is the house of my heart. Where my heart was born.

\* \* \* \* \*