

Scene One



Lights come up.

High ceilings, parquet floors, crown molding. The works.

Upstage—a dining table. Behind it, a swinging door leads to a kitchen.

Upstage right—an open doorway leads to a hall that disappears from view.

Upstage left—a terrace and windows looking out over further buildings in the distance. Through which the season will show in each scene.

Downstage—a living room. A couch and chairs gathered together around a coffee table.

The stage left wall is covered with a large painting: A vibrant, two-paneled image in luscious whites and blues, with patterns reminiscent of an Islamic garden. The effect is lustrous and magnetic.

Below, a marble fireplace. And on the mantel, a statue of Siva. Along one or more of the walls, bookshelves.

To one side, a small table on which a half-dozen bottles of alcohol sit.

Downstage right—a vestibule and the front door.

(The furnishings are spare and tasteful. Perhaps with subtle flourishes of the Orient.)

On stage: Emily—early 30s, white, lithe and lovely—sits at the end of the dining table. A large pad before her and a book open to a large reproduction of Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja.

Emily assesses her model...

Amir—40, of South Asian origin, in an Italian suit jacket and a crisp, collared shirt, but only boxers underneath. He speaks with a perfect American accent.

Posing for his wife.

She sketches him. Until...

AMIR: You sure you don't want me to put pants on?

EMILY *(Showing the Velázquez painting)*: I only need you from the waist up.

AMIR: I still don't get it.

EMILY: You said it was fine.

AMIR: It is fine. It's just...

EMILY: What?

AMIR: The more I think about it...

EMILY: Mmm-hmm.

AMIR: I think it's a little weird. That you want to paint me after seeing a painting of a slave.

EMILY: He was Velázquez's assistant, honey.

AMIR: His slave.

EMILY: Until Velázquez freed him.

AMIR: Okay.

EMILY: I mean how many times have we stopped in front of that painting?

AMIR: It's a good painting. No idea what it has to do with what happened last night. I mean, the guy was a dick.

EMILY: He wasn't just a dick. He was a dick to you. And I could tell why.

AMIR: Honey, it's not the first time—

EMILY: A man, a waiter, looking at you.

AMIR: Looking at us.

EMILY: Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are. Not until you started to deal with him. And the deftness with which you did that. You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you and what you really are.

AMIR: The guy's a racist. So what?

EMILY: Sure. But I started to think about the Velázquez painting. And how people must have reacted when they first saw it. They think they're looking at a picture of a Moor. An assistant.

AMIR: A slave.

EMILY: Fine. A slave.

But whose portrait—it turns out—has more nuance and complexity than his renditions of kings and queens. And God knows how many of those he painted.

AMIR: You know what I think? I think you should just call your black Spanish boyfriend and get him up here to sit for you. He's still in New York, isn't he?

EMILY: Honey, I have no idea.

AMIR: You don't have to rub it in, babe.

I know all men are not created equal—

EMILY (*Gesturing for him to take the pose*): Could you do the thing?

AMIR (*Adjusting his arm*): Way to make a guy feel wanted — If anything, I guess I should be grateful to José, right? Broke your dad in. I mean at least I spoke English.

EMILY: Dad's still traumatized. He brought up that Thanksgiving on the phone the other day.

(*Assessing her sketch*)

Anyway—I don't know what you're so worried about. It's not like anybody's gonna see this.

AMIR: Baby. Jerry Saltz loved your last show.

EMILY: He liked it. He didn't love it. It didn't sell.

AMIR: Selling's not everything.

Amir's cell phone RINGS.

EMILY: Selling's not everything? You really believe that?

Emily grabs the phone and tosses it to him.

AMIR: It's a client...

EMILY: Fine. Just...stay where you are?

AMIR (*Into the phone*): What?

(*Listening*)

Paolo, I'm not your therapist. You don't pay me to listen to you. You pay me to listen to me.

Yeah, but you're not listening.

You're going. To kill. This deal.

(*Emily approaches, to adjust him*)

Honey...

(*Continuing into the phone*)

The point is, they buy it? They own it.

They do what they want. That's how it works.

(*Checking...*)

Paolo. I'm getting another call. It's about the contract. I gotta go.

(*Switching over*)

You enjoying your Cheerios?

Well, what the fuck else was keeping you from calling me back?

I don't care that it's Saturday morning. You're paid six figures to return my calls.

(*Breaking away and going to a contract on the table*)

Paragraph four, subsection three. Last sentence.

Why are those three words still in there?

You missed that? No. What actually happened is I told you to fix it and you didn't.

Then behave like it.

(*Hanging up*)

Fucking career paralegal.

EMILY: Wow.

AMIR: I don't catch his little fuck-up? It costs the client eight hundred fifty grand.

EMILY (*Sketching*): It's actually kinda hot.

AMIR (*Coming over to see the sketch over her shoulder*): You're so good.

(*Pointing at the picture of the Velázquez painting*)

What's his name again?

EMILY: Juan de Pareja.

AMIR: It's a little fucked up. Give me that at least.

EMILY (*Sexy*): I happen to know you like it a little fucked up.

They kiss.

AMIR: I should call Mort.

EMILY (*As Amir punches numbers*): You want more coffee?

Amir nods. Emily exits.

AMIR (*Into the phone*): Hey, Mort...

Good, good. So listen, I talked to Paolo again.

Seller's remorse.

It's a moot point. His board's gonna vote against him.

What do you want me to do?

Okay. I'll feed him the line on litigation. He doesn't have the stomach for that. By the time I'm through with him, he'll go into PTSD every time he sees my name on his caller ID.

Emily returns with coffee.

AMIR (CONT'D): She's right here...

(*To Emily*)

Mort says hi.

EMILY: Tell him hi.

AMIR: She says hi...

We have plans for Labor Day, Mort.

Don't worry about it. Enjoy the weekend...

Sounds good. See you then.

EMILY: Hamptons?

AMIR: Honey, Jory and Isaac.

Bucks County.

It's taken forever to make that happen...

EMILY: I know, I know.

It's got me a little freaked out. Isaac's a big deal.

AMIR: And he is going to love your work.

EMILY: How is Mort?

AMIR: Obsessed with the idea that meditation is going to bring down his cholesterol.

EMILY: Haven't seen him in ages.

AMIR: I barely see him. He hardly comes in. A couple of hours a day at most when he does show up.

EMILY: Pays to be the boss.

AMIR: I mean, basically, I'm doing his job. I don't mind.

EMILY: He loves you.

AMIR: He depends on me.

EMILY: Okay.

He spent I don't know how much on that birthday present for you?

AMIR: Couple grand at least.

EMILY: Excuse me.

AMIR: Honey, I really am pretty much doing his job.

EMILY: So he gets you a book. Or a bottle of scotch. Or takes you to dinner.

Why'd he get you a statue of Siva?

(*Beat*)

He doesn't think you're Hindu, does he?

AMIR: He may have mentioned something once...

You realize I'm going to end up with my name on that firm?

EMILY: Leibowitz, Bernstein, Harris, and Kapoor.

AMIR: My mother will roll over in her grave...

EMILY: Your mother would be proud.

AMIR: It's not the family name, so she might not care, seeing it alongside all those Jewish ones...

From the kitchen: the intercom BUZZES.

*Amir looks over, surprised. Emily puts down her pencil.
Heads for the kitchen.*

EMILY: That'll be Abe.

AMIR (*Surprised*): Abe?

EMILY (*Disappearing into the kitchen*): Your nephew?

AMIR: Oh, right. Wait...

EMILY (*At the intercom, off stage*): Yes?

Send him up.

As Emily now returns...

AMIR: You're not gonna let this thing go, are you?

EMILY: I don't like what's happening. Somebody's gotta do something about it.

AMIR: I went to see that guy in prison. What more do you two want?

There's a KNOCKING on the door.

Amir puts on his pants on his way to the door.

He opens it. To find...

ABE—22, of South Asian origin. But as American as American gets. Vibrant and endearing. He's wearing a Kidrobot T-shirt under a hoodie, skinny jeans, and high-tops.

As Amir is buckling his belt.

ABE (*Looking over at Emily, back to Amir*): Should I come back?

AMIR: No, no.

ABE: You sure?

AMIR: Yeah. I'm sure. Come in, Hussein.

ABE: Uncle.

AMIR: What?

ABE: Could you just call me—

AMIR (*Finishing his thought*): I've known you your whole life as Hussein. I'm not gonna start calling you Abe now.

Abe shakes his head. Turning to Emily.

EMILY: Hi, Abe.

ABE: Hi, Aunt Emily.

Abe turns to Amir, lighthearted.

ABE (CONT'D) (*Pointing*): See? How hard can it be?

AMIR: Abe Jensen?

Really?

ABE: You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name? It's in the Quran. It says you can hide your religion if you have to.

AMIR: I'm not talking about the Quran. I'm talking about you being called Abe Jensen.

Just lay off it with me and your folks at least.

ABE: It's gotta be one thing or the other. I can't be all mixed up.

EMILY (*Off Amir's reaction*): Amir. You changed your name, too.

ABE: You got lucky.

You didn't have to change your first name.

Could be Christian. Jewish.

Plus, you were born here. It's different.

EMILY: You want something, sweetie? Coffee, juice?

ABE: Nah. I'm good.

AMIR: So what's up?

EMILY: I'll let you gentlemen talk.

AMIR: No need. Everybody knows you're in on this.

(To Abe)

So you've been calling her, too?

ABE: You weren't calling me back.

AMIR: Why are we still talking about this?

I'm a corporate lawyer. In mergers and acquisitions—

EMILY: Who started in the public defender's—

AMIR: That was years ago.

(Beat)

Your man should have been more careful...

ABE: Imam Fareed didn't do anything.

Every church in the country collects money. It's how they keep their doors open. We're entitled, too.

He's running a mosque—

EMILY: He's got the right.

Just because they're collecting money doesn't mean it's for Hamas.

AMIR: What does any of this have to do with me?

EMILY: It doesn't matter to you that an innocent man is in prison?

AMIR: I don't know Patriot Act law. The guy's already got a legal team. Those guys Ken and Alex are amazing.

ABE: They're not Muslim.

AMIR: There we go.

ABE: What?

AMIR: What I thought.

I'm not gonna be part of a legal team just because your imam is a bigot.

ABE: He's not a bigot. He'd just be more comfortable if there was a Muslim on the case, too...

AMIR: More comfortable if he wasn't being represented by a couple of Jews?

ABE: No.

AMIR: Really?

ABE (Beat): He liked you. He said you were a good man.

AMIR: Well, he might not feel the same if he knew how I really felt about his religion.

ABE (Offhand): That's just a phase.

AMIR (Taken aback): Excuse me?

ABE: That's what Mom says Grandma used to say about you. That you were working something out. That you were such a good Muslim when you were a kid. And that you had to go the *other way* for a while.

AMIR (Dumbfounded): The *other way*?
(Considering)

Sit down, Hussein. I want to tell you something.

ABE: So just tell me.

AMIR: No. I want you to sit down.

Abe sits.

AMIR (CONT'D): When was the first time you had a crush?

ABE: I thought you wanted to tell me something.

AMIR: I'm getting to it.

Your first crush...

ABE (Glancing at Emily): Umm...

Fifth grade. A girl named Nasleema...

AMIR: I was in sixth.

Her name was Rivkah.

EMILY: I thought your first crush was Susan.

AMIR: That was the first girl I ever kissed. Rivkah was the first girl I ever got up in the morning thinking about. One time she went away to Disney World for a week, and I

was a mess. Didn't even want to go to school if I couldn't see her.

(Remembering)

She was a looker. Dark hair, dark eyes. Dimples. Perfect white skin.

EMILY: Why didn't you ever tell me about her?

AMIR: I didn't want you to hate my mother...

(Off Emily's perplexed look)

Just wait...

(Back to Abe)

So Rivkah and I'd gotten to the point where we were trading notes. And one day, my mother found one of the notes.

Of course it was signed, Rivkah.

Rivkah? my mom says. *That's a Jewish name.*

(Beat)

I wasn't clear on what exactly a Jew was at the time, other than they'd stolen land from the Palestinians, and something about how God hated them more than other people...

I couldn't imagine God could have hated this little girl.

So I tell my mom, *No, she's not Jewish.*

But she knew the name was Jewish.

If I ever hear that name in this house again, Amir, she said, I'll break your bones. You will end up with a Jew over my dead body.

Then she spat in my face.

EMILY: My God.

AMIR: *That's so you don't ever forget, she says.*

Next day?

Rivkah comes up to me in the hall with a note. *Hi, Amir,* she says. Eyes sparkling.

I look at her and say, *You've got the name of a Jew.*

She smiles. *Yes, I'm Jewish,* she says.

(Beat)

Then I spit in *her* face.

EMILY: That's horrible.

ABE: Man. That's effed up.

AMIR: So, when my older sister goes on to you about *this way* and the *other way*, now you'll have a better idea of the *phase* I'm really going through...

It's called *intelligence*.

Pause.

EMILY: I'm surprised.

AMIR: By what?

EMILY: I don't know. Your mother was very open with me...

AMIR: Let's just say I made it abundantly clear not to mess with you.

EMILY: I thought she liked me.

ABE: Seemed like it to me.

EMILY: She kissed me on her deathbed.

AMIR: You won her over. You were openhearted, gracious.

EMILY: You make it sound like there was some whole battle going on.

AMIR: Well...

EMILY: About what?

AMIR: White women have no self-respect.

How can someone respect themselves when they think they have to take off their clothes to make people like them?

They're whores.

EMILY: What are you saying?

AMIR: What Muslims around the world say about white women—

ABE (*Coming in*): Not everyone says that.

AMIR: Have you heard it or not?

ABE: Yeah.

AMIR: And more than once?

ABE: Yes.

AMIR: And from your mother?

Abe nods.

AMIR (CONT'D): I rest my case.

Pause.

ABE: Imam Fareed is not like that. If you got to know him better, you'd realize. He's actually your kind of guy. Once a month, we're doing a Friday prayer that's mixed.

EMILY: And—he let me sit in his mosque and sketch every day for weeks.

AMIR: He was probably hoping you'd convert. Who knows, you probably will.

EMILY: Don't be dismissive.

AMIR: I don't understand what you see in it.

EMILY: In what?

AMIR: In Islam?

EMILY: When we were in the mosque in Cordoba...Remember that? The pillars and arches?

AMIR: Those were great.

EMILY: Remember what you said?

AMIR: I'm sure you're going to remind me.

EMILY: That it actually made you feel like praying.

AMIR: That's kind of the point of a mosque, honey.

EMILY: And that Matisse show you loved so much? He got all that from Mogul miniatures. Carpets. Moroccan tiles.

AMIR: Fine. I got it.

EMILY: There's so much beauty and wisdom in the Islamic tradition. Look at Ibn Arabi, Mulla Sadra—

AMIR (*Coming in abruptly*): But the thing is? It's not just beauty and wisdom.

Pause.

ABE: Uncle. Don't think of him as a Muslim if you don't want to. Just think of him as a wise man. Who so many people depend on.

AMIR: I hear you, Huss. I really do.

ABE: So come to the hearing next Thursday.

AMIR: Next Thursday's a busy day at work.

ABE: An old man who didn't do anything wrong is in prison.

AMIR (*Rough*): And there's nothing I can do about it.

EMILY: Honey...

Silence.

ABE: I should probably head out.

AMIR: I didn't mean to snap at you...

ABE: Just think about it?

AMIR: Okay. Fine.

Abe hugs his uncle...

EMILY: You okay, sweetie?

ABE: Yeah. Fine.

I really should go.

(With a kiss)

Bye.

EMILY: Bye.

He leaves.

Once he's gone...

AMIR: It will never cease to amaze me. My parents move to this country with my sister, never make her a citizen. When she's old enough? They send her back, marry her off in Pakistan. She has kids with the guy, and lo and behold—he wants to come here. And what do they do? Spend all their spare time at an Islamic center.

EMILY: His heart's in the right place, Amir.

AMIR: Okay. I know.

EMILY: Is yours?

AMIR: What is that supposed to mean?

EMILY *(Coming right in)*: I mean, why would you have worked in the public defender's if you didn't care about justice?

AMIR: Public defenders have the hottest girlfriends.

EMILY: I'd like to think there was some part of you that *believed* in what you were doing. I mean, I don't know...

AMIR: No... Of course.

EMILY: But when it comes to the imam, it's like you don't care. Like you don't think he's human.

AMIR: You and Hussein wanted me to see him? So I went.

I went to talk to him in prison. And the man spent an hour trying to get me to pray again. He's been in prison four months and all he can do—

EMILY *(Cutting him off)*: You told me. So what? So a man who has nothing left but his dignity and his faith is still trying to be useful in the only way he knows how?

I mean, if he feels he needs one of his own people around him—

AMIR: I'm not one of his own people.

EMILY: You are. And in a way that's unique. And that can be helpful to him. Why can't you see that?

AMIR: Can we stop talking about this?

EMILY: We never talk about this. Not really.

Silence.

Amir stares at his wife for a long moment. Something stirring.

EMILY (CONT'D): Amir. I love you.

Lights Out.

Scene Two



Two weeks later.

Emily sits at the dining table. With a cup of morning coffee, the day's paper open before her.

Amir stands opposite her.

EMILY (*Reading*): "The defendant, surrounded by a gauntlet of attorneys, struck a defiant tone. He spoke eloquently of the injustices he'd experienced, and what he called an 'unconscionable lack of due process.' Amir Kapoor of Leibowitz, Bernstein, Harris supported the imam, stating, 'As far as anybody knows, there isn't a case. And if the Justice Department has one, it's time they started making it.' "

(*Beat*)

I don't think you look like counsel for the defense.

AMIR: That's because you know I'm not.

EMILY: It's because it doesn't say you are.

AMIR (*Taking the paper*): "The defendant, surrounded by a gauntlet of attorneys, struck a defiant tone." And then she quotes an attorney. Me. Implying that I'm one of the gauntlet of attorneys. She doesn't quote another attorney.

EMILY: But she says you're just supporting him.

AMIR: I don't see a *just*. There's no *just* supporting him.

EMILY: It's implied.

AMIR: I think it reads very clearly that I was supporting his defiant tone. That I was supporting him being defiant.

EMILY: Isn't he justified?

AMIR: That's not my point, Em.

EMILY: Maybe it should be.

AMIR: The man's basically an alleged terrorist.

(Off another look at the paper)

Amir Kapoor supported the imam...

EMILY: Even if it does make you look —

AMIR *(Leaping in)*: So it does?

EMILY: I don't think it does. But even *if* it does, why is that a bad thing? What you did is right. You're standing up for due process.

AMIR: It's just...

EMILY: What?

AMIR: Don't you think people are going to think...

(Beat)

I guess they'll look at the name; if they know anything at all—

EMILY *(Over)*: Amir.

AMIR: —they'll know the name isn't Muslim.

Beat.

EMILY: Amir. What's going on?

(Beat)

If this bothers you so much, call the *Times*. Have them retract.

AMIR: But the thing is, I did say this.

EMILY *(Proudly)*: I remember.

AMIR: But after clearly saying I was *not* counsel for the defendant.

(Beat)

Why did they have to mention the firm?

Pause.

EMILY: Baby.

You did the right thing. I am so proud of you. So was Abe. And you'll see. Mort's gonna be proud of you, too.

AMIR: Mort's not the one I'm worried about.

EMILY: This is going to be good for you at work.

AMIR: Good for me?

EMILY: Look at Goldman.

AMIR: Goldman?

EMILY: Sachs.

Jamie? He took all that philanthropy so seriously...

AMIR: What does your douche-bag banker ex-boyfriend have to do with this?

EMILY: Isn't that how it works?

Isn't that how all you guys cover up the fact that all anybody cares about in your world is making money?

AMIR: I have to get going.

(Still caught up by the paper)

"...supported the imam..."

EMILY: Honey, honey. Look at me. Stop it.

The intercom BUZZES.

Sudden silence.

EMILY *(CONT'D)*: That's Isaac.

AMIR *(Off Emily's shift)*: Yeah?

EMILY: Well, I mean he's here.

AMIR: Okay.

EMILY: What?

AMIR (*Disgusted*): Nothing.

EMILY: Do you want to keep talking about this?

AMIR: I need to go.

EMILY: Are you annoyed with me?

(*Beat*)

Honey, this is a big deal. I have a studio visit with a curator from the Whitney.

AMIR: And who do you think made it happen?

EMILY: Really? Now? Can we talk about this tonight?

AMIR (*Curt*): There's nothing to talk about.

Amir exits to the bedroom.

Emily goes to the intercom.

EMILY: Hi. Yes. Send him up.

(*To Amir, off stage*)

I mean, I'm sure no one'll see it. It's buried in the back...

AMIR (*Returning*): Don't.

EMILY: Don't what?

AMIR: I know your mind is elsewhere.

EMILY: I just...I think you're overthinking this.

AMIR: Let me get this straight: Some waiter is a dick to me in a restaurant and you want to make a painting. But if it's something that actually might affect my livelihood, you don't even want to believe there could be a problem.

EMILY: What does one thing have to do with the other?

KNOCKING at the door.

Beat. Tense standoff.

Amir checks his pockets.

AMIR: I left my phone in the bedroom.

He exits again.

Emily gathers herself as she heads to the door...

And opens it to show...

ISAAC—40, white, smart, attractive. A curator at the Whitney.

ISAAC: Hi.

EMILY: Hi. How are you?

ISAAC: Great.

EMILY: Find it okay?

ISAAC: Quick ride up Madison. Couldn't be easier.

We hear SOUNDS offstage of Amir slamming around in the bedroom. Looking for his phone.

EMILY: Amir's on his way out...

Amir reenters.

The tension between him and Emily still palpable.

AMIR: Isaac.

ISAAC: Hello, sir.

AMIR: Good to see you.

(Beat)

Thanks again for a wonderful weekend in the country.

ISAAC: Was our pleasure.

AMIR: I—uh—gotta run. I'm late for work.

ISAAC: You'll probably still get there before my wife.

AMIR: Always do.

(To Emily, coldly)

See you later.

EMILY: Bye, honey.

(To Amir, intimately)

It's gonna be fine. You'll see.

Amir exits.

Beat.

ISAAC: Is this a bad time?

EMILY: No. No.

ISAAC: You sure?

EMILY: Yeah.

ISAAC: I mean—okay.

EMILY: Can I get you some coffee, tea?

ISAAC: Sure. Coffee'd be great.

EMILY: Milk? Sugar?

ISAAC: Black is fine.

Emily heads for the kitchen.

Leaving Isaac onstage. He takes a look around. Perhaps just a hint intrusively.

He picks up a book off the shelf.

Emily returns with a mug.

ISAAC (CONT'D): Constable's great, isn't he?

EMILY: Love him.

ISAAC: It's one of the things I love about going to Frieze every year. My little pilgrimage to see the Constables at the Tate.

(Putting the book back)

You ever been?

EMILY: Tate, yes.

Frieze, no. Though my dealer suggested I go this year.

Isaac takes the mug.

ISAAC: Thanks.

So I've spent a lot of time thinking about our discussions since last weekend.

EMILY: About me being a white woman with no right to be using Islamic forms?

I think you're wrong about that.

ISAAC: I think I might be wrong, too.

Beat.

EMILY: What happened?

ISAAC: Well, I found a few images of your work online...

EMILY: You read Jerry's review.

ISAAC: Yes, I did.

I don't always agree with Jerry. But he did have some compelling things to say...

(Turning to the painting above the mantel)

This is the one you wanted me to see?

EMILY: This is the one in the apartment.
There are more at the studio.

Isaac inspects the paintings for a long beat.

ISAAC: Mm-hmm...

I have to admit...

It has presence...

(Stepping back, assessing)

The surface tending toward the convex...

It's a bending of the picture plane, isn't it?

EMILY: Exactly.

ISAAC: Which is why Jerry was talking about late Bonnard.

EMILY: The mosaics in Andalusia are bending the picture plane
four hundred years before Bonnard. That's what I mean.
That's what I was saying. The Muslims gave us Aristotle.
Without them, we probably wouldn't even have visual
perspective.

ISAAC: That's quite a statement.

EMILY: And I can back it up.

(Beat, then off Isaac's reaction)

What?

ISAAC: I don't know...

It's the earnestness. The lack of irony. It's unusual...

EMILY: Irony's overrated.

ISAAC: Can't say I disagree with that.

EMILY: But?

ISAAC: You know what you're going to be accused of...

(Off Emily's silence)

Orientalism...

I mean, hell. You've even got the brown husband.

EMILY: Fuck you, I think.

Beat.

ISAAC: Good.

Because that's what they're going to say.

Beat.

EMILY: Yeah. Well, we've all gotten way too wrapped up in the
optics. The way we talk about things. We've forgotten to
look at things for what they really are.

(Beat)

When you're at Frieze this fall, after the Constables, you
need to go to the Victoria and Albert. The Islamic galleries.
Room forty-two. Remember that. It will change the way
you see art.

ISAAC *(Warmly)*: Them's fightin' words.

Beat.

EMILY: The Islamic tiling tradition, Isaac? Is a doorway to the
most extraordinary freedom. And which only comes
through a kind of profound submission. In my case, of
course it's not submission to Islam but to the formal
language. The pattern. The repetition. And the quiet that
this work requires of me? It's extraordinary.

ISAAC: You sound like a midcentury American minimalist, try-
ing to obliterate the ego.

EMILY: The Islamic tradition's been doing it for a thousand years.
Pardon me for thinking they may have a better handle on it.

(Beat)

It's time we woke up. Time we stop paying lip service to Islam and Islamic art. We draw on the Greeks, the Romans... but Islam is part of who we are, too. God forbid anybody remind us of it.

ISAAC: Huh.

EMILY: What?

ISAAC: No, this is good.

EMILY: Yeah.

Lights Out.

Scene Three



Three months later.

Lights come up. On the terrace, Amir. A drink in hand.

He drinks. Drinks again. Stares down into the bottom of his glass. Burning.

Beat.

Then all at once, he SMASHES the glass on the terrace floor. Shards fly.

Beat.

The burst of violence doesn't seem to have soothed him. He comes into the apartment. Going to the bar for a glass, and another drink.

Finally, we hear—KEYS...

The door opens and Emily enters with grocery bags.

EMILY: Hey, honey.

AMIR: Hey.

Where were you?

EMILY: At Gourmet Garage. Getting a few things. For tonight.

AMIR: Tonight?

EMILY: Isaac and Jory. You didn't forget, did you?

AMIR: That's why it smells so good in here.

EMILY: I made pork tenderloin. And guess what...

(Pulling something from the bag)

...they had La Tur! And that liver mousse you love so much.

AMIR: Great.

EMILY: Can't be bad news, right? "I'm coming to your house to eat your food and tell you you're not in the show." Nobody does that, right?

AMIR: So you're in.

EMILY: God, I hope.

Emily approaching him. Sexual.

AMIR: Honey.

EMILY: What?

AMIR: We've talked about this.

(Beat)

It doesn't help.

EMILY: I miss you, Amir.

AMIR: I know.

Beat.

EMILY: So I'm assuming you forgot the wine.

AMIR: I did. I'm sorry.

EMILY: Amir.

AMIR: I said I'm sorry.

Beat.

EMILY: What's wrong?

AMIR: Nothing.

EMILY: Something's wrong.

Pause.

AMIR: I had a meeting with a couple of the partners today. I mean, if you could call it that. I'm in my office, red-lining a contract due at six. Steven comes in. With Jack. Sits down. Asks me where my parents were born.

EMILY: Pakistan.

AMIR: I said India.

~~That's what I put on the form when I got hired.~~

EMILY: Why?

AMIR: It technically *was* India when my dad was born.

EMILY: Okay.

AMIR: *But the names of the cities you've listed are not in India, Steven says. They're in Pakistan.*

My father was born in 1946. When it was all one country, before the British chopped it up into two countries in 1947.

And your mother was born when?

1948.

So it wasn't India anymore, was it? It was Pakistan?

My clock is running, and I'm wasting time on a fucking history lesson.

Turns out, Steven's trying to ascertain if I misrepresented myself.

EMILY: It sounds like you did.

AMIR: It was all India. So there's a different name on it now. So what?

(Beat)

He knew about my name change. Your birth name is not Kapoor, Steven says. It's Abdullah. Why did you change it?

EMILY: Didn't he already know?

AMIR: I never told them.

EMILY: They must have run a background check.

AMIR: I—uh—had my Social Security number changed. When I changed my name.

EMILY: You did?

AMIR: Yeah. It was before I met you.

EMILY: Is that legal?

AMIR: They do it all the time. When people go through identity theft.

Steven must have been digging around. He has it in for me. I knew I never should have gone to that hearing.

EMILY: That was months ago. What does that have to do with anything?

AMIR: A lot, honey. A lot.

Beat.

EMILY: Have you talked to Mort about it?

AMIR: I can't get ahold of him.

The intercom BUZZES.

EMILY: Wait a second. What time is it?

AMIR (Checking his watch): Ten past.

EMILY: What're they doing here?

I still have to get ready.

AMIR: Go get ready. I'll get it.

Amir heads for the kitchen.

AMIR (CONT'D) (At the intercom, off stage): Yes? Send them up.

EMILY (As Amir reemerges): You gonna be okay?

AMIR: I'll be fine.

EMILY: You sure?

AMIR: Yes. Go.

EMILY: Can you get the appetizers? They're on the counter in the kitchen.

AMIR: I got it.

Emily exits.

Amir goes to the door. Turning the bolt to prop the door. Then takes the bags into the kitchen.

We hear NOISES outside the door. Then the door creeps open.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Amir?

Just as Amir emerges—

AMIR: Come on in, Jor.

Enter:

Jory—mid- to late 30s, African American—is commanding, forthright, intelligent. Almost masculine.

We've seen Isaac before.

Both shed their coats as Amir gets to them.

ISAAC (Shaking hands): Good to see you again.

AMIR: Good to see you, too.

JORY: Hey, Amir.

AMIR: Hi, Jory.

Did we say seven thirty?

ISAAC: I was sure she said seven.

JORY (To Isaac): I told you.

AMIR: She's still getting ready.

JORY: No worries.

AMIR: More time to drink, right?

JORY (Showing a box): We brought dessert.

AMIR: Magnolia Bakery? Thank you.

JORY (Heading off): This should go in the fridge.

ISAAC (To Amir): I was at the Knicks game last night.

AMIR: You were?

ISAAC: Aren't you a Knicks fan?

AMIR: I'm sorry to say.

ISAAC: No dishonor in it.

AMIR: No dishonor. But lots of pain.

ISAAC: I'm a Cubs fan. Don't get me started on pain.

Jory returns to hear:

AMIR: Oh, the Bartman.

ISAAC: I mean, I didn't think he should be killed.

But I had friends...

AMIR: Killed?

JORY: Who's Bartman?

ISAAC: Honey.

AMIR: The fan who stole the ball out of a Cubs outfielder's hand...

ISAAC: Moisés Alou. Eighth inning.

AMIR: And denied the Cubs a trip to the World Series.

ISAAC (To Jory): You don't remember this?

JORY: It's ringing a bell.

(Beat)

Smells great in here.

AMIR: Em's making pork tenderloin.

(To Isaac)

You eat pork, don't you?

JORY: Every chance he gets...

ISAAC: Gotta make up for all the lost years...

Could I use your restroom?

AMIR: Down the hall on the right.

ISAAC: I remember.

Isaac crosses to the hall. Exits.

AMIR: What are you drinking?

JORY: You have scotch?

AMIR: Still have that bottle of Macallan that you gave me.

JORY: I expect more from you, Amir.

AMIR: We'll finish it tonight.

On the rocks?

JORY: Neat.

AMIR: You're not kidding around.

Amir begins to prepare the drink...

JORY: You hear about Sarah?

AMIR: What about her?

JORY: She got her terrier back.

AMIR: How?

JORY: She hired a dog investigator who kidnapped it back from Frank.

AMIR: Lord.

JORY: Frank's gonna sue her.

AMIR: On what grounds?

JORY: Just to make her life miserable.

AMIR: The two of them.

JORY: Tell me about it.

(Taking a drink from Amir)

She and I ran into Frank at the courthouse.

AMIR: Oh, you were in court today?

JORY: Proctor insurance arbitration.

AMIR: How'd it go?

JORY: Fine. We're just dancing around the number now. They have to pay and they know it. They just need a little time to get used to the idea.

AMIR: Mort there?

JORY: Steven took it over. He has me on it now.

AMIR: But Proctor's Mort's.

JORY: Was.

AMIR: Why is that not a surprise?

JORY: Mort couldn't be bothered. Rather be meditating.

AMIR: Yeah, instead of taking his Lipitor.

JORY: You know he took me to lunch and tried to teach me to meditate? I actually tried it a couple of times. Ended up gaining five pounds. I just kept thinking about food. I'd get frustrated, give up, and pig out.

AMIR: What's up with the offer from Credit Suisse?

JORY: I'm not gonna do it.

AMIR: Didn't they come back with two hundred more?

JORY: They did.

AMIR: I told you that move would work.

JORY: You were right.

AMIR: But I don't think you can get more...

Beat.

JORY: The partners are countering.

AMIR: I doubt it's two hundred more.

JORY: I've put down roots.

Beat.

AMIR: Kapoor, Brathwaite.

JORY: What?

AMIR: You and me. On our own. In business.

Steven and Mort got ahead underpricing the competition.

Back in the day, when they got started.

JORY: Well, downtown WASPs didn't want to be doing mergers and acquisitions.

AMIR: Yeah, fine. That's why Jews were doing it. And then mergers and acquisitions became all the rage. And guys like Steven and Mort became the establishment.

We are the new Jews.

JORY: Okay...

AMIR: We go about it the right way? We'll get to where LBH is now in a quarter of the time it took them.

JORY: You coming up with this on the fly?

AMIR: This afternoon.

That firm will never be ours. It's theirs. And they're always going to remind us that we were just invited to the party.

JORY: I don't think it's a bad idea.

(Beat)

Amir—

Just as...

...Isaac returns from the bathroom, holding a book.

ISAAC: Who's reading this?

...Sorry, am I interrupting?

JORY: Well...

AMIR: Just talking shop.

Just as Emily enters, looking lovely.

EMILY: I'm so sorry.

(To Jory)

Nice to see you.

JORY: Nice to see you, too.

ISAAC: Hey, Em.

EMILY: Hi, Isaac.

ISAAC: I'm sorry, I thought I heard seven.

EMILY: Look. As long as you don't mind waiting for dinner...

AMIR: Honey, they got cupcakes from Magnolia.

JORY: Banana pudding, actually.

EMILY: Oh, my God. I love that stuff.

JORY: It's like crack.

AMIR: You want something to drink, Isaac?

ISAAC: Scotch'd be great. On the rocks...

AMIR: Honey?

EMILY: Port.

JORY: Port? Before dinner?

EMILY: I know I'm strange. I just love it so much...

Amir gets started on the drinks.

ISAAC (To Emily): So who's reading *Denial of Death*?

EMILY: I am. Since you suggested it.

AMIR (To Isaac): She's been raving about it.

ISAAC: The only reason people remember this anymore is because it's the book Woody Allen gives to Diane Keaton on their first date in *Annie Hall*. And tells her: "This is everything you need to know about me."

AMIR: Denial of death.

JORY (To Isaac): You should've given me a heads-up, too.

ISAAC: You think?

It's an amazing book. I actually got the title for my new show from here...

AMIR: What's the title?

Amir hands out drinks.

ISAAC: The title... Well, first let me say—

It's been generations and generations of consumerism and cynicism.

JORY (Over): Get comfortable.

ISAAC (Continuing): ...And an art market that just feeds the frenzy. But something's shifting. There's a movement of young artists who are not buying into it anymore.

They're asking the question—how to make art sacred again. It's an impossibly heroic task they've set for themselves. Which is why I'm calling it...

(Gesturing to Jory to hold her criticism)

Impossible Heroes.

(Off Jory's reaction)

She doesn't like it.

JORY: It sounds like a segment on Anderson Cooper's 360.

AMIR: About Paralympic athletes.

JORY: The impossible heroes.

ISAAC: Very funny.

How about you, Em? What do you think of the title?

After all, it's your show now, too...

Beat.

EMILY: You're kidding?

ISAAC: The work you're doing with the Islamic tradition is important and new. It needs to be seen. Widely.

EMILY: Isaac, that's amazing. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Ensuing congratulations overlap...

JORY: Congratulations, Emily.

EMILY: Thank you.

AMIR: That's incredible. I'm so proud of you, honey.

ISAAC *(Lifting his glass)*: A toast is in order. To—

AMIR *(Over)*: To your show. And to Emily in your show.

ALL: Cheers...

All drink.

AMIR: So...how many?

ISAAC: What?

AMIR: Of her paintings?

EMILY: That's my husband. Always talking numbers.

ISAAC: I've got room for four or five.

AMIR: Five. That sounds great.

Laughter.

ISAAC *(Pointing to the canvas above the fireplace)*: I definitely want *that* one. The couple I saw in the studio. And I've been thinking about the *Study After Velázquez's Moor*. But I'm not sure...

JORY: Moor?

Haven't heard that word in a minute.

EMILY: I did a portrait of Amir a few months ago...

After an episode we had at a...

Noticing Amir's reaction to her bringing up the story, Emily shifts gears...

EMILY (CONT'D): I'd just been to the Met and seen the Velázquez painting.

Emily goes to the bookshelf in the corner.

JORY: Which one?

EMILY: *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*—who happened to be of Moorish descent.

(Returning with the book)

This is the original portrait.

JORY *(Recognizing)*: Oh. Of course.

EMILY: It's a study after the Velázquez. I'm using the same palette, same composition. But it's a portrait of Amir.

AMIR: Your very own personal Moor.

EMILY: *Muse* is more like it...

ISAAC: I think I'd rather stick with the abstract pieces. Keep the impression of your work consolidated. But I'm tempted. I mean, it's a stunning portrait. Quite a tribute to you, Amir, if you ask me...

AMIR: You think?

ISAAC: Standing there in your black suit. Silver cuff links. Perfectly pressed lily-white dress shirt...

(To Emily)

...which is so magnificently rendered. You can almost smell the starch on that shirt.

AMIR: Not starch, Isaac. Just ridiculous thread count.

JORY: People do not stop talking about your shirts at the office.

AMIR: Really?

JORY: Sarah was joking you must spend half what you make on shirts.

EMILY: Wouldn't be far from the truth. Charvet, always.

JORY: How much do those run?

Amir seems reluctant to reply.

EMILY: Six hundred.

JORY: Dollars?

ISAAC: So there you are, in your six-hundred-dollar Charvet shirt, like Velázquez's brilliant apprentice-slave in his lace collar, adorned in the splendors of the world you're now so clearly a part of...

And yet...

AMIR: Yeah?

ISAAC: The question remains.

AMIR: The question?

ISAAC: Of your place.

For the viewer, of course. Not you.

It's a painting, after all...

Pause.

AMIR: I like the stuff she was doing before.

ISAAC: The landscapes? Not a huge fan.

JORY: Isaac.

ISAAC: What? She knows that. I think it's smart she moved on. It's not as fertile a direction for her.

AMIR: I think the landscapes are very *fertile*.

EMILY: Amir...

AMIR: What?

EMILY: We both know why you like the landscapes.

JORY: Why?

EMILY: Because they have nothing to do with Islam.

ISAAC (*Before Amir can speak*): What she's doing with the Islamic tradition has taken her to another level.

A young Western painter drawing on Islamic representation? Not *ironically*? But in *service*?

It's an unusual and remarkable statement.

AMIR: What's the statement?

ISAAC: Islam is rich and universal. Part of a spiritual and artistic heritage we can all draw from.

(To Emily)

I loved that thing you said in London. At the Frieze Art Fair. About humility and the Renaissance...

EMILY: Right. The Renaissance is when we turned away from something bigger than ourselves. It put the individual at the center of the universe and made a cult out of the personal ego.

ISAAC: Right.

EMILY: That never happened in the Islamic tradition. It's still more connected to a wider, less personal perspective.

ISAAC: I'm using that in the catalogue.

EMILY: Stop it.

ISAAC: I'm serious. You've got a major career ahead of you.
I'm just one of the first to get to the party.
Emily Hughes-Kapoor. A name to be contended with.

AMIR: Hear, hear.

Toasting...

JORY: Kapoor.
Where in India is that name from?

Pause.

AMIR: Why are you asking?

JORY: Did I say something wrong?

AMIR: No, no...

Steven came into my office today and asked me the same thing.

JORY: He did?

Awkward pause.

EMILY: You know—it's a pretty common Punjabi name.

ISAAC: I'm headed to Delhi day after tomorrow. That's in Punjab, isn't it?

AMIR: Not really, but... Same country... So... Why not?

Laughs.

EMILY: What are you doing in Delhi, Isaac?

ISAAC: Sothi Sikander has deigned to offer me a studio visit.

EMILY: How exciting. I love his work.

(To Jory)

You going, too?

JORY: Ezra has school.

ISAAC: Jory's being polite. It's not because Ezra has school. I have a... little bit of an issue when it comes to flying.

JORY: That's one way of putting it.

ISAAC: I hate flying.

It's a primal thing.

The thought of not being on the ground... opens up this door to like every fear I have—and the hysteria around security only makes it worse.

AMIR: It's a nightmare at the airports.

JORY: And now there's a whole new attraction. You get to decide between being ogled over or felt up.

ISAAC: Felt up. Definitely.

JORY: Why is that not a surprise?

ISAAC: It actually calms me down.

(To Amir)

What's that like for you?

AMIR: What?

ISAAC: Security at airports.

(Awkward beat)

I mean, you hear stories...

AMIR: Wouldn't know. I cut right to the chase.

EMILY: He volunteers himself. Goes right to the agents and offers himself up.

JORY: What? To be searched?

AMIR: I know they're looking at me. And it's not because I look like Giselle. I figure why not make it easier for everyone involved...

JORY: Never heard of anyone doing *that* before...

AMIR: On top of people being more and more *afraid* of folks who look like me, we end up being *resented*, too.

EMILY: Those agents are working hard *not* to discriminate...
Then here's this guy who comes up to them and calls them out...

AMIR: Pure, unmitigated passive aggression. That's what my wife thinks.

ISAAC: Maybe she's got a point.

JORY: I think it's kind of admirable, Amir. If everyone was so forthcoming, the world would be a very different place.

ISAAC: It's racial profiling.

JORY: Honey. I know what it is.

ISAAC: I can't imagine you'd like that if it was you?

AMIR: It's not her. That's the point.

JORY: ...And it's probably not some Kansas grandmother in a wheelchair.

AMIR: The next terrorist attack is probably gonna come from some guy who more or less looks like me.

EMILY: I totally disagree. The next attack is coming from some white guy who's got a gun he shouldn't have...

AMIR: And pointing it at a guy who looks like me.

EMILY: Not necessarily.

ISAAC (*To Amir*): If every person of Middle Eastern descent started doing what you're doing...

AMIR: Yeah?

ISAAC: I mean, if we all got used to that kind of...*compliance*?

We might actually start getting a little too comfortable about our suspicions...

AMIR: So you do have suspicions?

ISAAC: I mean, not *me*, I'm just saying—

AMIR: Look. Hell. I don't blame you.

ISAAC: Wait. What?

EMILY (*To Amir, abruptly*): Could you get me a glass of port?

Emily hands Amir her glass. As...

Her cell phone RINGS—on the coffee table.

Emily checks it. Without answering.

EMILY (*To Amir*): It's Abe.

AMIR: Abe?

EMILY: Your nephew?

AMIR: What's he calling you about?

EMILY: Did he call you and you not call him back?

AMIR: Yeah.

EMILY: So he's calling me.

You gotta work on that, honey.

(*To Jory and Isaac*)

You guys hungry?

JORY: Getting there.

EMILY (*Getting up*): I'm starting us with a fennel salad.

(*To Jory*)

You eat anchovies?

JORY: Love them. And I *love* fennel.

AMIR (*Pouring a drink*): Her fennel-anchovy salad is a classic. A fucking classic.

JORY (*To Isaac, but indicating Amir*): See, honey.

An exemplary instance of spousal support. He never compliments me on my cooking.

ISAAC: I do most of the cooking.

JORY: Because you don't show me any love when I do.

ISAAC: Look. You make a good omelet.

JORY: I haven't made an omelet in ages.

ISAAC: Might be the best thing about them.

EMILY (*Getting up, for the kitchen*): I can't believe you just said that.

JORY (*To Emily*): Would you like some help?

EMILY: Thank you, Jory. I would love some.

ISAAC: Just keep her away from the ingredients.

Emily and Jory exit.

ISAAC (CONT'D) (*To Amir*): So...

I'm sorry if I brought up something sensitive...

Between you and Emily, I mean...

AMIR: You didn't.

ISAAC: Oh.

AMIR: It's not a secret. Em and I don't see eye to eye on Islam. I think it's... a backward way of thinking. And being.

ISAAC: You don't think that's maybe a little broad?

I mean, it happens to be one of the world's great spiritual traditions.

AMIR: Let me guess. You're reading Rumi.

ISAAC: Amir...

Actually. Yes, I've been reading Rumi. And he's great. But that's not what I'm talking about.

Do you know Hanif Saeed?

AMIR: I don't.

ISAAC: He's a sculptor, he's Muslim, he's devout. His work is an amazing testimony to the power of faith. He carves these monolithic pillar-like forms—

AMIR (*Interrupting*): Have you read the Quran, Isaac?

ISAAC: I haven't.

AMIR: When it comes to Islam? Monolithic pillar-like forms don't matter...

Just as Emily and Jory return with the salad and bowls...

AMIR (CONT'D): And paintings don't matter. Only the Quran matters.

EMILY: Paintings don't matter?

AMIR: I didn't mean it like that.

EMILY: How did you mean it?

AMIR: Honey. You're aware of what the Prophet said about them?

EMILY: I am, Amir.

JORY: What did he say?

AMIR: He used to say angels don't enter a house where there are pictures and/or dogs.

JORY: What's wrong with dogs?

AMIR: Your guess is as good as mine.

ISAAC: Every religion's got idiosyncrasies. My ancestors didn't like lobster. Who doesn't like lobster? What's your point?

AMIR: My point is that what a few artists are doing, however wonderful, does not reflect the Muslim psyche.

ISAAC: *Muslim psyche?*

AMIR: Islam comes from the desert.

From a group of tough-minded, tough-living people.

Who saw life as something hard and relentless.

Something to be suffered...

JORY: Huh...