

MOVING MOUNTAINS

An Immigrant's Inferno

by

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A THESIS

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In an effort to improve my skills as a writer- specifically a playwright- I used this thesis to create my first two act play. My thesis begins with detailing the steps I took in creating this play- starting with why I chose to write this story, at this time in my life, as well as my artistic influences. Next, I walk through what my writing process was like this year- first draft ideas, how the story evolved, and ended up taking the final shape that it is (for now). Then, I explain parts of the writing and research process that I would have done differently, with the added hindsight of having now written a play before. Subsequently, I talk about the “failed” efforts on my advisor and my behalf to stage a read-through of the play, and what it revealed about the nature of timing and art. Finally, I discuss the "so, what?" of this project, and how this play has me in my future career as a writer (and actor, and director too). In conclusion, I outline what might come next for this film project. With this explanation of my project, I will have outlined how the process of assimilation in America- exemplified by my family, and 1st wave Arab immigrants (1878-1924) as a whole- caused deep seated issues in immigrant communities and their descendants, that still are being worked through to this day.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank Malek Najjar for his endless support and encouragement throughout the years. Everyone deserves a teacher who believes in them, Malek was that man for me. Shukrahn¹, Malek- I wouldn't have been able to make this work of familial love without your counsel, mentorship, and support throughout all these years, throughout my collegiate career.

I also want to thank my cousin, Michael Moses. Without his tireless hours of research, and passion for the history of our family, none of this story would have been possible. His kindness should be taught in schools! We had never met before this project, but I said I knew Sarah Moses Steratore- my grandma- and the rest was history. He helped make all of this possible with his timelines, research, and personal anecdotes he'd collected/coalesced over the years. Shukrahn, Michael- I hope we get to meet and talk about this play, and our family- in person- someday.

Finally, I want to thank my mother. A lot of this play is true to my own life, and part of Ryan problems with Sada's handling of their heritage mirror my own with my mother about our family's handling of our Syrian/Arab American identity. Every decision has a cost and only by acknowledging them can we hope to reconcile the difficult choices of the past with the difficult choices we face in the present. My family had difficult choices to make, life or death choices, choices that would end up affecting hundreds of people (all the future Moses' and their descendants). I had questions, I wanted answers, and I got them; and all I have to say is, shukrahn. Shukrahn to great, great grandma Sada, Bubba, my Mom, and all the amazing,

¹ *Shukrahn*- Thank you [Arabic]

wonderful, and powerful women of the Moses/Steratore families. Thank you for making the hard choices that got us here and keeping us alive.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Project	6
Why Write?	10
How Should I Write?	12
Artistic Influences	13
What Did I Write?	15
What I Learned	17
World Building Tools/Early Drafts & Outlines	86
Moses Family Tree	86
Notes from Cousin Michael	87
Map of Safita	87
Early Ideas	88
Early Character Outlines:	89
Early Plot Outline [Unfinished]	90
Pictures	91
Bibliography	94

Introduction

Project

What is family to you? It's a tough question, but one I think is important enough to have an answer for. I set out to find my answer to that question with *Moving Mountains: An Immigrant Inferno* because, throughout college, I began to doubt what the word meant anymore. I used to think that family was blood, it's the knowledge that the person you call brother, mother, sister, daughter, etc. was the closest thing to another you that you could have in this world. You trust them because they trust you, tell the truth and watch out for one another- otherwise what hope did we have? However, during/right before I came to college, this fundamental belief was challenged. With some key conversations with my mother, and help from my Arab American theatre arts professor, I discovered that a basic fact I had assumed most of my life was a lie. I wasn't just white, like I thought my whole life, at least not entirely- my mother was half Syrian, or an Arab American, and so was I.

I apparently never knew who I was- and none of my loved ones cared enough to tell me!? That is what I thought, but nowadays, I see they were well-intentioned. They were trying to protect me, respect my mother's actions, or they were simply ignorant to my lack of knowledge, etc. But I wasn't ready to admit that yet. What I was ready to admit was that I was livid- how could people do this to someone they love? At times I would scream, shout, cry: in the shower, at the gym, anywhere I could be left with my thoughts for a second. All I would ask myself was why? What could possibly justify such cruelty (at least that's what I saw it as, at the time)?

The answer was I had no relationship with my Bubba's² family because of a gradual estrangement, which was spurred on by my grandfather's desire to preserve his own Italian American heritage (a similarly persecuted group in the early 20th century). Whether we're talking about being called slurs or not seeing her mother's Arab side of the family nearly as much as her father's Italian side growing up, my mother repeatedly had an integral part of her identity, heritage, and history neglected- or starved for attention- because it was seen as an undesirable triviality within her own home. All this implicit shame, and neglect, that was passed down to my mother surrounding her Syrian heritage made her feel inadequate/unable to nurture mine- and any of the feelings I might have had about it. So, my mother- unconsciously, and only after decades of negative reinforcement- decided that it would be best if the Arab part of herself wasn't passed down to me. She hurt herself, so badly, in the hope that her pain would pass over me. It was a good dream, in some ways, but it wasn't my reality.

The reality was I was born in Pittsburgh, PA, on September 22nd, 2002- one year and eleven days after the twin towers fell in New York City, and Flight 93 had been forced to crash an hour and 21 minutes away from where I was born, Mercy General Hospital. When I was growing up, the nation was terrified of Brown people- as it largely still is. The largest terror attack on US soil had just been carried out the previous decade, and people wanted to retaliate, but they didn't know who to target; so, they decided to target all Arabs. Assault, unwarranted and intrusive surveillance, alongside being blamed for the actions of strangers were the only thing that Arabs, of any denomination, could expect to receive upon being discovered in this country- we were prisoners in our own home.

² Bubba- a childhood term for Grandma

As you can imagine, this environment was not a very welcoming one to my mother who, as previously stated, was already struggling with her own many implicit, negative assumptions surrounding her Syrian heritage. She did not know what to do, she barely felt qualified to think about it for herself. So, she took what she saw as a burden off my shoulders- I wouldn't have to be Syrian, I could just be Ethan. However, I would always be Syrian to the outside world- even though my mother tried her best to protect me from it. Nobody ever put together that I was Arab, but my mom's skin color, my curly hair, and off-white skin tone made me a target for mockery and derision. Many of Ryan's stories in the play come from my own real life experiences at the playground and/or the lunchroom. However, I had been bullied from a young age, so I tried not to focus on the odd and pointed nature of many of those comments. In truth, I only connected the offensive nature of these comments with my unknown ancestry after my mother unknowingly revealed to me, over dinner, the missing piece to the puzzle I had been trying to put together my entire life, why wasn't I like all the other white kids? The answer was I wasn't like every other white kid, on top of being white, I was also Syrian- an Arab American. At first, it felt like a betrayal, a bitter pill to swallow- I didn't know what to think. The news was so big that it really took a while for it to settle in- plus I also came out of the closet to my father around that time, it was a hectic summer. Eventually however, I began to ponder what the implications of having to hide such basic and integral parts of our identity meant for me and my family. What else did I not know? Why had things come to this?

The answer to the second question was love- love and shame- with a pinch of fear. By the time the war on terror seemed to have left the forefront of the public's consciousness, Syria devolved into a bloody civil war. This left my mother with an impossible choice, much like Sada- a common theme I found myself repeating as I wrote this play. Sada and my mom wanted

nothing more than to keep our family safe- so that one day we might be able to take advantage of all of life's opportunities. They didn't hide things from me, or my great grandpa Abraham, out of spite, or hatred; instead, my mom chose, once again, to not to shine a light on her identity, in an effort to not predetermine mine. But I still wasn't ready to hear that yet, and I didn't have time to stick around- I was heading cross-country to college.

After I touched down in Eugene, I met Malek- my advisor and mentor. As I said, I largely came across the country to achieve some sense of distance- I needed time to think about everything that had happened back home, and what I wanted it to mean for me moving forward. It was in this state that I met Malek who, with his patience and enthusiasm for his students as people, kept asking questions about Pittsburgh, my family, etc. We eventually discovered that my grandmother's maiden name is a very common last name in Lebanon. Fast forward to almost three years later and- along with the help of my mom, and cousin Michael- I learned that my family wasn't Lebanese, from what Michael has record of, but was instead Syrian (they just lived close to the border between what would later be called, Lebanon and modern-day Syria)! It was through his research recommendations and conversations that I began to realize just how impersonal my story actually was- there were so many Arab Americans born in US that did not know their identity for one reason or another. Coerced assimilation and attempted self-assimilation were very regular occurrences in my community. Not only was it common- but it was also a necessary method of survival. So, Mom, if you're reading this, I hope you know I'm not mad at you- I realize it wasn't on purpose and I'm sorry I was so angry when you were only scared.

All of this new information was wonderful, but I still was dissatisfied- with every answer, ten questions rose in its place. If Bubba's family is from Syria, why do we only celebrate Italian

traditions? Why was great grandpa Abe the last person who knew how to cook Kibbeh? Michael, Bubba, and my mom all tried their best to offer answers, but they only knew so much- even Michael with all his years of research into our family's past couldn't answer everything I wanted to know. I wanted to know, "Are we beholden to the past's choices, or are we capable of making our own? What is tradition? Is it worth keeping? And if so, how?"

However, the questions I was asking couldn't be answered with the past alone. I wouldn't be able ascertain the answers I sought from bones or ancestral heirlooms- at least, not completely. I would need to really need to sit down and have a conversation, with myself, about what my family's history means to me, and what it will mean for my actions today, and tomorrow- and what better way to have a conversation with yourself than writing?

Why Write?

Like I said, writing- or narrative writing, to me at least- is an author having a conversation, in some form or another, with themselves. Whether that be through characters, about ideals, or themes clashing, writing offers a window into the mind of the writer(s). If it is done well, narrative writing should seek to encourage debate while offering a substantive answer to the posed question which, at least, should offer an inclination for how the author proposes achieving their desired outcome. In other words, if your story- particularly your ending- doesn't have anything to add to the conversation your novel finds itself within, why did you write it? Why did you carve the space out of the collective mass of nothingness just to create more nothing?

So when I set out to write a story about my musings on family, ancestors, and legacy, I did so because I wanted to carve out a space for the questions I needed answered for me. At the same time however, I began to realize the inherent universality to some of the question. And it

was then that I began to realize the opportunity to help others in similar situations that I had laid before me. Through my writing, and their reading, this play could help others in ways that I never dreamed of.

On top of the ethical and artistic obligations I began to feel, I also just love narratives/stories. Now I realize that “narrative” is a very broad term, but what I mean by “narrative” is a story, or the art of storytelling; for any reason or purpose- whether that be for entertainment, instruction, or any mix of both. I love narrative in every form: books, tv shows, movies, musicals, comics, etc. I love them because I see their power, almost every day- I believe they might be our last form of persuasion/communication that can break through humanity’s natural proclivity toward stubbornness. So, as distrust in media only grows with each passing year in America, I believe that stories hold some of the last hopes we have as a nation to really engage in rhetorical debate, with an actual hope of changing hearts and minds.

With that being said, I love stories enough to be critiquing the cultural/content creators whose stories reach the most eyes and ears- i.e. Hollywood, Broadway, etc. And as I further cultivate my discography of media that I intake, I’ve begun to have some notes. The notes primarily lie with my issues regarding the lack of stories represented in mass media. Unique, challenging, and thought-provoking stories that really try to strike at the key questions of living in the 21st century don’t seem to be as popular or getting the attention they should be- and if they are it’s often because an artist tricked executives into signing on or compromised their visions for the sake of funding.

So when I came up with the idea to write my 1st play for my thesis, I set out to answer the questions I had been asking, but I felt weren’t being answered. I didn’t have delusions of grandeur, I was sure these questions had been asked a billion times, in a hundred different forms,

answered in better ways than I could imagine, but I will tell you the same thing I told my roommate Trevor, “If you don’t write it, there’s never a guarantee that anyone will”. I wanted to write something for my younger self, something that if I had been lucky enough to find on a dusty old shelf at the library could have made me feel seen or heard in a place that I never thought possible. Stories are a conversation, but they’re also a mirror- I wanted to give myself and Arab Americans, like me, that mirror so we could see ourselves and realize we belong.

How Should I Write?

Once I decided that I would write a story, I had to decide what to write about- and how I would tell the story. I had plenty of ideas, but didn’t know where to start- my phone has entire folder dedicated to writing down pitch ideas for scripts, skits, songs, etc. However, my father always told me that, “When you’re faced with many roads, always keep in mind where you need get going”- which means that if you don’t know what to next, remember where you need to end up. I wanted to write a story about being an Arab in America, like me, that offered a solution to the isolation and depression caused by being from a place that despises your very existence.

I looked into many different outlets/mediums. I thought of a musical, but I can’t write compositions, so now wasn’t the right time for that. Maybe a book I said, but that was too long form for my first writing endeavor past 15 pages. Film then? Nope, I didn’t want to write another screenplay this year- after I had already made, filmed, and produced one because that felt like I was wasting an opportunity to challenge myself in a different creative direction. That left me with my first dramatic love- when it comes to theatre- playwriting.

Playwriting as a medium has a long and storied history of activism, running through its prosceniumed walls. Much like American history itself, the history of the American theatre is more deeply involved with the dynamics of immigration and exile than that of any other modern

major nation- that goes for Arab American theatre as well. Arab theatre in America began as soon as there were Arabs in America. Pioneer Arabic immigrants- peddlers, shop keeps, and their families- mainly Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian, fled from the economic and political hardships of the late Ottoman Empire. Once they landed on America's shores they got to work. "Most of the early examples of such theatre were performed in the home language, here Arabic, and most sought to connect the community to its roots in the homeland by presenting plays about Arabic history and culture" (Basiouny 2009).

This tradition of home entertainment and storytelling culminated in amateur community, based performances of Arab American farces about their struggles of adapting to America. After 9/11 however, we see a large uptick in negative portrayals and overall cultural association with being Arab. This inspired an entire new generation of artists like: Najila Said, Heather Raffo, Leila Buck, and other Arab Americans- mainly woman- have brought about a rich cultural renaissance that asks questions of Arabs, Americans, and people in general that are not only thought provoking, but also simultaneously as devastating as they are often hilarious. My hope is to be able to add my own creative spin on this emerging trend of Arab American authorship, throwing my hat into the arena- so to say. As a queer Arab American, I believe my voice/perspective to be a unique one, one that hasn't been heard from too much in our [Arab] theatrical spaces. I write, specifically a play, in the hopes of furthering this tradition and hopefully inspiring future authors along the way.

Artistic Influences

When considering what influences shaped me as a playwright, I think it's important to first discuss August Wilson. August Wilson was a Pittsburgh playwright, born and raised in the Hill District downtown- 10 minute walk from where my family now lives, the Strip District. His

American Century cycle attempts to codify the 20th century Black experience in set of 10 plays, each taking place in its own subsequent decade- starting in 1900's all the way until 1990. Each play is set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, except for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. As a playwright, his work has influenced me the most because of his unique blend of beautiful scene descriptions, mixed with rich, deep, emotional text that builds upon itself with each page. Specifically, *Gem of the Ocean* and *Jitney*, which is about- accordingly: a found family learning at the feet of a wise elderly woman, and the innerworkings of an independent city transportation service station called a jitney- offered the most to me in terms of play-based inspiration. Both lent me so much knowledge, and insight into how conversations between generations can reveal so much about family history, individuals- whilst also exemplifying bigger cultural issues or concerns, that persist to this day. *Moving Mountains* is my attempt to capture that energy for the Syrian/Arab American community. Wilson's works gave me hope that it might be possible to capture and explain the dignity and pathos of my own community to the outside world- the same way he did for Black America. I hope to write something a tenth as powerful and nuanced as Wilson's works someday- here's to starting me on the journey to get there.

Other influences for this play would include *Incendies* by Denis Villeneuve- of *Dune: Part I and II* fame. This adaptation of Wajdi Mouawad's play of the same name, is masterful in its exhibition of the lengths that Arab mothers, and women, have had to suffer in order for Arab Americans to have the freedoms and opportunities we have today. The character of Nawal gave me the most inspiration for the character Sada in terms of demeanor and overall strength of character. I sadly could not interview my great, great grandma for this project, but Nawal somehow made me feel like I got to see some part of, if not, some version of what her life must have been.

I also want to thank the subtitled elephant in the room, Dante Alighieri and his *Divine Comedy* Trilogy. Specifically, Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* were the two books I drew the most influence from in the series, which is not much. The only way I would say the books are similar to the play is the mentor-ward relationship between Sada and Ryan, told exclusively from Ryan/Dante's perspective. Both works also include some pontificating on the Christian after life(s), but while Dante's work is Virgil giving a very nuanced and detailed description of the topography of Hell/Purgatory, Sada doesn't know what is going on in Limbo. So, by the second act of *Moving Mountains* Ryan is less of a ward to Sada, but a new partner in an adventure that has been ongoing for a LONG time.

Small thanks as well to "Catechism"- or the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine- as was taught to me by my mother and sister. All my reference for liturgical information and theological doctrine that I reference in this play comes from both of them. To top it all off, seeing as how I am now an ex-catholic, I'm glad to start feeling like I'm finally getting something out of this whole "catholic religious education" process!

What Did I Write?

If you read the prospectus for this thesis, you will see that its final shape is very different from the initial outline my professor and I formulated my junior year. I wanted to perform the piece as a solo-performance, or a "one-man" show to begin with, but as I began researching and writing that version of the play, I saw that it wasn't telling the story I was wanting to write. The ideas of what I could perform didn't inspire me because of the singular nature of them- it was all about my performance; and I was beginning to feel that the inherent nature of solo-performance itself was turning what was supposed to be an endeavor about finding a place and story for

myself and my family, into a narcissistic endeavor. I didn't want this to be all about me; I wanted my story to be a mirror that others could see themselves in.

After, I scrapped the solo-performance aspect, the project really began to open up in terms of its implied scope for a practical production's purposes. Suddenly, there was supernatural elements, time travel, super powers, etc. However, all these elements were truer to the stories I've wanted to write ever since I've read the Bible, watched Justice League Unlimited, or went outside and wondered what was just beyond the perception our eyes- so I am glad they now exist.

I also initially wanted the play to be more autobiographical, possibly a conversation taking place about topical issues that took place for Syrians in Appalachia in the early to mid 1900's. However, I felt the opportunities and constraints imposed by historical fiction on my creative process, and the story as a whole, wouldn't help me tell the story I wished to tell- which ended up being the story of familial reconciliation.

The story of *Moving Mountains* is the story of Ryan Addams, a recent Arab American high school graduate, whose desire to reconnect with their long lost family, inexplicably, drives them to "Limbo"- which they think is Purgatory. Once there, Ryan meets their great grandmother, Sada Braheim/Moses- who is named after my real great, great grandmother- who begins to show them their family's "real" history. Along this journey, Ryan and Sada must reconcile a belligerent generational divide, differing ideals, and a lack of perspective that threatens to tear their whole family apart. It's a story about decisions, their consequences, the wisdoms of time- and youth- and what can we expect to do next with what we know now.

What I Learned

Most of my regret surrounding any aspect of this project is mostly misallocated energy. I spent the initial phase of my preparatory period, trying to coalesce way too many dramaturgical resources for this project. I wish I had realized that the inter-personal nature of the subject matter, allows me to have less sources because I had a family historian- Cousin Michael- who had enough background information that I didn't need to use greater research to create a picture of Sada, like I initially had feared. His work allowed me to circumnavigate a lot of potential headaches that could have come from having to choose between different historical examples/inspirations- instead I got enough of an outline of a woman that I could write a story about what I already knew.

Instead of worrying so much about research I didn't end up using, I wish I had put more thought and prep into what a potential UO production of this play might have looked like. I was busy with multiple other projects, a job, and school, so I don't begrudge myself too much for this, but I am still regretful that I didn't get to stage a readthrough of the play here. I wanted to have a chance for my friends to see this play on its feet and for my family to maybe fly out and see us be immortalized in our own little ways, but ultimately, I'm not sorry that we decided to forgo a readthrough at this time and place.

Ultimately, despite Malek and my best efforts of contacting and pitching the play to actors and Arab students at UO- we could not find anyone who would either be available or fit the roles in the ways that I imagined. Therefore, we felt it best to let the writing speak for itself and let readers imaginations do the job that circumstances wouldn't allow for us to do- this time around. My hope in the future is to submit a scene, or act, of this play to Golden Thread Productions for their ReOrient Festival of Short Plays- which they hold annually. I also would

love to continue working on it, in hopes of one day having a fully realized production- with lights, sounds, and all the wacky supernatural hijinks I wrote on the page!

However, for now, *Moving Mountains* will have to be what it is, a great learning experience and base from which I can build upon as a writer. I learned a lot from the entire experience, and I couldn't be more thankful to everyone involved for encouraging me to undertake this endeavor.

I started this paper by asking you a question that I didn't have an answer to, "what is family?" Want to know my answer? To me, family is care, perseverance, and love. To be a family, you must: care for one another, persevere in the name of each other, and ultimately- most importantly, love one another. I was worried I didn't know what family was anymore when I left for college, but I had always known. I had been learning the meaning of the word my entire, as was taught to me by my family. They made decisions, certain ones I disagree with, but I understand why they did it- and I respect the core motivations behind it. We do lots of crazy things for love, and I can see that's what it was- an act of misguided love.

At different parts of this process, a small part of me wished I didn't have to experience the confusion, the anger, and the hurt that inspired this play; but sometimes you need to figure things out for yourself, so you can realize you've been right where you needed be all along. I hope that this play offers you- like it did for me- an opportunity to look inside yourself. That is the ultimate goal for any of my writings. I write in an effort to help others on their own journeys of self-discovery, so that they can avoid asking the same questions as me- in the hope that they will ask better questions than mine.

I'm thankful for this process because it made me a better writer, child, and friend because of how it made me recognize my place within the great tapestry we call history. It's a wonderful

story, and an even more wonderful feeling once you begin to see your place within it. This story did that for me, I hope it helps you find your place too.

Moving Mountains

An Immigrant Inferno

Written by Ethan Kemper

This work was inspired by my grandma [Bubba], Sarah Moses Steratore. This play is for her, my mom, my cousin Michael Moses & the entire Steratore/Moses family.

“God helps those who help themselves.”

- *Frank Steratore Sr., Husband to Sarah Moses Steratore*

With Special Thanks to: Malek Najjar
You helped make this possible, thank you 🧡

Characters (in order of appearance):

Cast: 2m, 3f

Same Color = Same Performer

Ryan Addams: Ryan Dante Addams is a recent Arab-American high school graduate who is going to WVU in the fall. This spring, Ryan uncovered that their mother was Syrian/Lebanese and has been doing archival research alongside his second Cousin Phil. The two have made a lot of progress due to Ryan's passion and Phil's collection of documents and photos. Ryan is a hard-working, idealist, but is running out of patience with the secrets in their family.

Phillip Moses: Cousin Phil is a nautical archaeologist who works off the coast of the Near East (Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, Syria). This past spring he was contacted by his cousin, Monica's son, Ryan- asking if Phil had any documents indicating there were any Moses left in the Old Country. After contacting the old world Moses' and doing some research, the pair have come very close to uncovering the missing link- aka the immigrant- who might link the two branches of the family tree. However, Phil is uneasy about continuing Ryan and his' work- Arabs researching the old country in America is not a perilous game.

Monica Addams: Ryan's mother. She didn't tell Ryan about his Arab heritage due to him being born 11 days after 9/11. She is the grandchild Sarah met in her final memory.

Bubba: Ryan's grandmother and Phil's Aunt. She agreed to not tell Ryan, but has been guiltily sitting on this secret for nearly 2 decades.

Sarah /Sada/Moses: Our Virgil to Ryan's Dante. Sada has been through much in her life and afterlife. She must bring depth and wisdom—bought through real-world experience—that Ryan cannot match. She is cynical and stubborn, but deep down, she is simply afraid to lose all that she has fought for. Vito Corleone in a floral dress: "Anything is worth doing for the sake of this family."

Monica Braheim: Sada's mother and the pregnant woman running at the start of scene 7

Nora: Elderly Palestinian woman who kept Sada safe before passing from TB before reaching America.

David Braheim: Sarah's hothead, protective older brother- first member of the Musa clan to come to America.

Habeeb Musa: Sada's lifelong love and husband. A steel mill worker, and Republican ward committeeperson- Habeeb was a pillar of his community (and the light of Sarah's life in America). His constant optimism and love for humanity softened her hard heart. They had 3 kids together and opened a general store in America together before he passed away

prematurely due to Tuberculosis in 1935- 30+ years before Sarah would join him in Limbo. Sarah has not seen Habeeb throughout her time in Limbo.

Abraham Moses: Second son of Phillip and Sarah Moses, Abraham Moses was the most into the cultural history of the Moses' and Turkmani families. He spent his childhood idolizing his father (learning Arabic to be closer to him, etc.). However, after Phillip's passing, Abraham loses touch with his mother- who was always colder to him than the others. He tries to maintain their relationship, but Sada does not allow it.

Act 1

Scene 1

MOSES PICNIC PAVILION

It's a beautiful sunny day somewhere in Northwestern Appalachia, at the Moses family reunion. This reunion is held at the local park pavilion. It has an outdoor eating area, with picnic tables, and a kitchenette building- the two structures are connected by a shared overhead triangular roof cover.

RYAN- an 18 year old Arab American- is carrying a bin of empty heat canisters back to the kitchen for disposal. As they pass through the saloon doors, into the empty kitchenette, they ditch the cold cans, and pick up a pair of rubber gloves. As they clean they look through the raised cover of the serving counter. They see: BUBBA & AUNT ELIZA are playing cards, PAP & CALEB are arguing about politics, etc. As Ryan sees each of them, a few of them stop and take the time to see them too. Some wave, some smile, but most go about their day- none the wiser about how much them simply being here means to the young man.

Ryan: Hey Uncle... Yes let me just-
(turning to respond to UNCLE offstage)
-okay. Yeah, just come hang with Josie and after we finish cleaning!

After the interruption, Ryan closes the shutter- so they can focus on dish duty. They grumble and sing to themselves as they begin stacking clean plates to the side. Ryan looks up, expectantly.

Ryan: Josie, don't make me do this by myself...

Then, the saloon doors swing open. A scruffy, bearded man- with glasses- hesitantly steps into the kitchen. He observes Ryan as they do the dishes. He forces a small smile before making their presence known with a cough.

Phil: Hey.

Ryan: (shocked) Hey.

Ryan drops a plate into the sink. They run and hug their cousin, PHIL.

Phil: (strained) Watch out, my knee is still-

Ryan: -I'm sorry. How are you? How've you been?

Phil: Good, good. The conference in Cleveland was cancelled so I suddenly found myself with a weekend and nothing to do, so-

Ryan: -I'm just shocked, you said you definitely couldn't make it here-

Phil: -Yeah, well, things change...

Ryan: It's so crazy that you're finally here, man! I can't believe we only met like three months ago.

Phil: Technically we met you at your christening, but you were zero. And your Mom & I didn't know each other very well, but who *actually* knows their second cousins at the end of the day?

Ryan: (*pausing at the mention of Mom*) Right... I'm sure we had plenty of fascinating conversations, regardless.

Phil: Yeah!
(*a beat*)
You shit in my hand.

Ryan: Bismillah!

Phil: (*hysterical*) Ha! Your Arabic is improving! Soon you'll speak in '*alsinat alnaar*³. I remember trying to teach your mother...
(*Ryan clears their throat*)
I feel like I'm picking up a pattern here- what's wrong?

Ryan: Nothing... Mom and I aren't talking right now.

Phil: What? Why not? The way you described the email, it seemed like you all were excited about the reunion, the possibility of all of us getting to-

Ryan: I lied!

Phil: About what?

Ryan: All of it...

³ '*Alsinat alnaar*- tongues of fire (Arabic)

Phil: (*rubbing their head*) So, they didn't give you my contact information?

(*Ryan shakes their head*)

They didn't invite me to the reunion?

(*Ryan shakes their head again*)

Welp.

Ryan: I'm sorry.

Phil: Why?

Ryan: Crap, wait right there!

Ryan runs off-stage for a moment before returning with a journal.

Ryan: This is why.

Phil: (*chuckling [fml]*) You dragged me back here, across the Atlantic, for your college admissions essay?

Ryan: No!

(*takes the notebook back*)

I'm using my admissions essay as an excuse to get some real work done.

Phil: (*Ryan crosses stage*) What do you mean?

(*Ryan raises a knowing eyebrow at Phil*)

No! No, you can't use our research from this summer!

Ryan: Why not? It's just sitting in your basement Phil- what are we going to do with it, if not this?

Phil: We? No, Ryan that is not how this works.

Ryan: You know that's bull-

Phil: I don't know anything. That's not how anthropology works.

It's ninety percent theories, and that's only once you have a mountain of evidence to back it up- key word in that sentence being *you*. You don't have any research Ryan, it's mine.

Ryan: I have contributed at least a large mole hill's worth of information-

Phil: Ryan!

(*a beat*)

I will admit, you've pieced together quite the amount of evidence for 2 month's worth of research, but a passion project, filling in the gaps of your family tree is not something you just share with the world.

Ryan: Why not?

Phil: Nobody cares. The only history we tolerate is a great man's- maybe, occasionally a woman's. But a peasant farmer from Haji Land? Nobody cares about that, they never will.

Ryan: You don't know that.

Phil: You think you're the first person to try something like this? To try and explain all the pain and confusion we feel everyday as Arab Americans? You, in all your infinite wisdom surrounding being Brown in America.

(Ryan looks at the floor)

Face it Ryan, you're out of your depth.

Ryan: I know. If there is anything I know, it is that; I know nearly nothing about being Arab. I didn't have a Mom who made kibbeh or a Dad who read the Quran- my Mom didn't even have the decency to tell me we were Arab until this summer!

(a beat)

I'm drowning Phil, and this feels like the only life raft I got right now. Someone has to say something about this family Phil. If no one does, it'll be like none of this ever happened at all.

Phil: I still don't see what there is to write about her? Him? Them? Whatever it called themselves!

Ryan: Let me take care of that.

(Ryan opens their notebook)

So, this summer's research was a continuation of your on-going attempt to stitch together the two disparate parts of our family tree, right?

Phil: Ryan, why are you talking like that? You were there.

Ryan: I'm just doing a refresher in case anyone isn't caught up. Anyway, once you called me onboard-

Phil: -Stupidly acquiesced to opening one of your 25 unanswered emails.

Ryan: -I uncovered a letter from Great Grandma Moses' brother, Abe. Inside and out, it was addressed to someone named Sarah Braheim. According to other letters I could find, also addressed to this mysterious Sarah B., this young woman: left home before she finished puberty, her father was a sheriff, her mother a caretaker, and her brother a pickler in a tin mill. Maybe he worked with Uncle Abe?

Phil: Could be. Pap wasn't always the most faithful to Granny in the beginning, so it would check out that he was having a rendezvous with another, mysterious woman... But what does this have to do with connecting the old and new world branches of the family tree?

Ryan: (Ryan holds up a finger) Because of this, right there. (Phil reads the highlighted section)
Abe knew her from the old world, "Not a day goes by that I do not dream of the ocean itself splitting in two, so it may usher forth our reunion, habibti." Someone call James Cameron, this would KILL for Titanic 2!

Phil: Her name was Sarah, she came here when she was young, and her brother might have worked in a tin mill... Great! With all that information we only have to investigate every Arab female who has lived in this country between now and 1890.
(Ryan looks disappointed)
Look, I'm not trying to be a dick, Ryan. I just know how hard these research projects can be- especially niche one's like ours. You won't always like what you find either. It's a lot.

Ryan: I know, but if she knew Grandma or Grandpa Moses as kids or young adults, we finally might be able to track down our ancestors in the old world! It's worth the risk.
(a beat)
I will admit I am a bit worried about how this will be entertaining for college admissions, or anyone else for that matter. Seeing as I'm writing about a person I know nothing about.

Phil: Don't worry about that, nobody actually cares about the people in history.

Ryan: What?

Phil: Name me one fact about George Washington.

Ryan: He crossed the Delaware?

Phil: That's an action, try again.

Ryan: First President of the United States.

Phil: That's a title, a fact about his *person*?

Ryan: (a beat) He couldn't tell a lie?

Phil: And that's Propaganda.

(*Ryan sits with this for a moment*).

Actions, titles, and lies- they're the only aspects of a person's history bothers to remember. So don't worry about if you know nothing, nobody will actually care. All they'll ask is, "was it a good story?"

(a beat)

It's the record of life, stripped of all individuality. You see the outline of a human being, but without any of the parts that someone who really loved them would recognize.

Ryan: That's... awful. You live your life the best you could, never truly knowing its purpose, and in the end all you leave behind is an outline of obligation and responsibility?

Phil: It's a nightmare.

(*Ryan is silent*)

Ryan, I didn't come here today just to talk.

Ryan: What is it?

Phil: Please just sit.

Ryan: (chuckle) I already am.

Phil: Look, I want you to know this. This summer, letting you in on my research, it's been some of the most fun I've had in my life. It's certainly the closest I've felt to this family in a decade.

Ryan: Why do I feel a "but" coming up?

Phil: But I need you to stop. All of this family historian nonsense, while you're still ahead. //I know You've had this dream of becoming an archaeologist-

Ryan: What are you talking about? //Don't act like I'm crazy for thinking I can get a couple degrees-

Phil: //-And going off to Lebanon with me to discover broken pots from 100 years ago-

Ryan: -"Cultural material" You know they have a name, Phil.
//Don't act dumb like the rest of the family- this is your job.

Phil: That is not my job.

Ryan: (sarcastically) Just because mine happens to be in the ground instead of under the sea it suddenly doesn't make it worth finding?

Phil: Ryan, that is not the point.

Ryan: Then what is?

Phil: You don't want my job!

Ryan: (a beat) Why are you saying this?

Phil: I'm sorry.

Ryan: I told you about how I got into Northwestern, how I'm gonna study anthropology, and get us the additional permits we need for the research about on family-

Phil: You can't throw away your life because you had some fun with a cousin you barely know!

Ryan: (a beat) What did I do wrong? Just a week ago we were on WhatsApp talking about the beaches in Beirut- how you'll "have to take me some time."

Phil: I don't think it's healthy for you to change your life plans so suddenly for the sake of a relationship with a stranger-

Ryan: (sharp) Have you ever considered that what you think doesn't matter?

Phil: Everyday.

(a beat)

You don't know me, Ryan. I'm not someone to look up to. I'm a failed social scientist whose naive pet project is threatening to destroy their family, once again.

Ryan: Phil...

Phil: Ryan, enough. We're done, okay? I won't have you involved with anymore of this bullshit. Take what you will from me this summer, but that's it- leave it the past, bury it- deep if you must.

(Ryan stands up)

Ryan?

(Ryan keeps walking)

Ryan!

(Phil rises to his feet as Ryan exits through the swinging door that separated the kitchen from the rest of the pavilion/reunion. Right then, BUBBA walks in).

I'm trying, Sarah.

Scene 2

EXT. FOREST (OUTSIDE THE PARK)

Ryan has stopped running, and thunder can be heard growing in the distance- as storm clouds brew in the horizon. Ryan huffs and puffs- exhausted. A yellow light begins to glow just off-stage left, accompanied by soft orchestral music. Ryan begins to investigate but spots something in the distance.

Ryan: Huh?

Ryan begins to move closer before they are suddenly snatched away by two arms- one has a gold band adorning its wrist. Ryan is dragged off-stage left.

Ryan: WOAH!

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

EXT. LIMBO (White Void)

Ryan screams in the darkness. After a while, and with a loud thud, the stage lights come back on. Now, Ryan is lying face down, on the ground, prone, & groaning. They get to their feet.

Ryan: (groaning) Hello?

Ryan looks around, surprised, as their voice echoes throughout the space; however, space isn't quite the right word. What

surrounds Ryan is a void- an endless void. It's all white, never ending, forever, and ever. Ryan looks around for signs of ANYTHING- a person would be particularly nice. Just then, Ryan hears a hum, and a whistle. Someone is singing a song. They turn their head around, only to be met by a woman standing right in behind them. Ryan falls, and then is examined by this woman. She had dark brown, bouncy, curly hair that seemed to defy gravity. Beneath those amber curls, she wore a white paper collar, atop a long, dark, thin gown- flowing from the nape of her neck to the tips of her toes.

Stranger: mrḥbābk. Bhaak trak? hl ant aṣm aū abkm aū rbmā bṭī' al-fhm qlīlā? rbmā tsbb dlk al-sqūṭ fī iṣābt fī al-r'as...⁴

The woman continues waiting for their response, but receives none, so she begins to move along.

Ryan: Wait! Ouch!

Ryan moves to get to their feet, but suddenly realizes they can't. A jolt of pain shoots through them. It's their hip, and it hurts- bad. Suddenly, the stranger offers a hand, but Ryan shakes their head- choosing to stay on the floor. The stranger nods along before kneeling down and pushing Ryan on to their side.

Ryan: Ah, AH- Please be careful!

Stranger: (rolls eyes) (a beat) I'm afraid you dislocated your hip.

Ryan: You can speak English?

Stranger: I can do a lot of things- if you let me help you, habibi.

The stranger stares at Ryan, waiting for permission. Ryan is unsure, but after a moment nods their head. She goes in to reset the joint, and as Ryan braces themselves for the pain, they're instead greeted by a soft pair of hands and a gentle tune, hummed by this wise woman. After she is done, she stands.

Stranger: Now you.

⁴ In English: "Hey there. Are you deaf, mute, or maybe just a little slow? That fall must have caused a head injury..."

Ryan is hesitant, but feels compelled to do as they are told. They await the shock to their system that they felt before, but instead there is... nothing. They begin to walk and test out their hips, it's good as new.

Ryan: Wow, that's impressive.

Stranger: You're easily impressed. Well? 'Asyilatun⁵?

Ryan: What?

Sarah: Questions?

Ryan: Oh, so many. Where are we?

Sarah: That's complicated

Ryan: Who are you?

Sarah: Also complicated... I have been called many things... but you may call me Sarah. *Sarah* ⁶*Braheim*.

Ryan: Wait... Did you know Sarah Moses?

Sarah: *(soft smile)* Yes.

Ryan: You knew my grandmother?

Sarah: *habibi*, I am your grandmother's grandmother.

Ryan: *(eureka)* Holy crap! Sarah *Braheim* and Sarah *Moses* were the same person?

(a beat)

And my grandma's a junior!? I'm sorry, I know it's not polite to ask, but how is this possible? How old are you?

Sarah: 128.

(a beat)

Why do you ask?

(a beat)

Is something wrong?

Ryan: Have you seen *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*?

⁵ *'Asyilatun*- Questions? (Arabic)

⁶ *Braheim*- Abraham (Arabic)

Sarah: You are face to face with your long lost relative and the second question you ask is if I've seen the 9th best Brad Pitt movie⁷.

Ryan: Obviously that is a no, if you rank it that low in his filmography- You know what! Enough discussing America's favorite silver fox- and his surprisingly diverse, and critically acclaimed discography. I only mention the film because... well you don't look like a baby, but you certainly aren't the average 128-year-old either.

Sarah B. stares at Ryan, judging. Meanwhile, an older woman crosses from the opposite side of the stage- Ryan doesn't see her. She is in her early seventies and looks serious.

Sarah Moses I: (tapping Ryan's shoulder) This better?

Ryan: (startled) Bismillah!
(a beat)
(confused) Bubba? What are you doing here?

Sarah Moses I: Ryan, it's me.

She begins to laugh as Ryan looks around, before annoyedly realizing their mistake. After a moment, Sarah Moses retreats off-stage. Ryan gets up, and is confused as to where Sarah went. Suddenly, a young child appears behind them.

Child: (yelling) Boo!

The child begins to laugh hysterically at Ryan. She begins humming the same song from earlier. Ryan, after overcoming their initial fright, is left confused as they stand back up.

Ryan: Sarah?
(ignored)
Sarah.
(grabbing Sarah's arms)
Sarah! Can you please tell me what is going on? And why do you now look 12!

Sada: First off, who is Sarah? My name is Sada, SADA!
(a beat)
Also, you're booring!

⁷ According to IMDB.com

Ryan: (*Sada runs offstage*) Sada, stop. This isn't funny.

Sarah: (*suddenly*) Who's that?

(*backing up*)

Okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Adjusting to Limbo is hard enough already, I shouldn't make it worse with my "jokes."

Ryan: What? (*Sarah B. freezes*).

(*a beat*)

What did you just call this place?

Sarah: I really wish I had just stuck to the script for this one-

Ryan: Bubba, what are you talking about?

Sarah: (*annoyed*) Ryan, this is going to be tough to hear. Why don't you come with me and sit down.

Ryan: (*grabbing Sarah's arm*) Where am I? What happened?

(*notices Sarah's gold bracelet*)

What did you do to me?

Sarah: I didn't do anything. Please, just sit and I'll explain everything.

(*Ryan reluctantly sits*)

When you started running from the family reunion-

Ryan: -How do you know about that?

Sarah: I watch all of your lives here.

(*a beat*)

Just the important stuff! I mean do you know how hard it is to watch dozens of different shows all at once?

Ryan: Okay, I get it.

Sarah: (*small smile*) And today was important. Education is such an important accomplishment, and I couldn't pass up the chance to watch you on this monumental family day... Sadly after you ran away things took a turn for the worse- or should I say a fall? A tumble?-

Ryan: (*to Sarah*) A shove?

Sarah: (*looking at the floor*) You really tripped and hit your head next to the bank of the river... And a storm is coming. Soon.

Ryan doesn't get what she is referring to. Sarah sighs before looking sadly at Ryan as she touches his shoulder.

Ryan: What do you mean?

Blackout

Scene 4

Riverbed (Forest)

Lights up

The entire stage is blacked out except for a spotlight on Ryan's body. He can't move and is laid out at the edge of the stage, as stiff as a board. They try to get up, to fight it, but the only thing that he can manage is calling for help.

Ryan: Someone? Anyone? Help!

We hear the sound of rushing water, it's close, very close. The spotlight gets smaller as the sound grows louder. Ryan is precariously close to falling over the edge of the stage. Sarah walks into the light, with a look of regret. She kneels down to touch Ryan's temple.

Sarah: You're right on the river's edge, Ryan. If you don't wake up soon...

The rushing water gets louder until Ryan realizes it is going to swallow him.

Scene 5

EXT. LIMBO (White Void)

It is suddenly quiet. Ryan now regains autonomy over their body once again. Sarah tries to comfort them, but they scamper away.

Ryan: Stay away from me!

Sarah: Ryan, I'm sorry, but it was the only way you would understand the gravity of the situation.

Ryan: What situation? I just went for a walk in the forest, since the only person in this family I feel like I can talk to anymore says I'm not good enough.

Sarah: That's not true. Your cousin is a lot of things, but an arrogant man- he is not.

(a beat)

Why was finding out who I am so important to you?

Ryan: (a beat) You said you see weddings, birthdays, big stuff right?

(Sarah B. nods)

How much do you see?

Sarah: Mostly the ceremony, the reception after- big moments in the day-

Ryan: Were you there on Kevin's wedding bus?

(Sarah shakes her head)

Kev's a huge fan of country, if you didn't know; he had his first guitar signed by Eric "The Chief" Church when he was 14... He also loves, Toby Keith-

A snippet from 'The Taliban Song' by Toby Keith starts to be heard overhead. Ryan and Sarah both jump because of the sudden interruption.

Ryan: Stop that, stop playing that!

Sarah: (music stops) I'm sorry, but that wasn't me... I'm sorry, continue?

Ryan: What else is there to say? My cousin, on what was supposed to be the happiest and one of the proudest days of his life, was singing along with some white guy- who thinks we ride camels and is just praying for the day our people are bombed back into the stone age... It was then I realized something.

Sarah: Toby Keith's an asshole?

Ryan: Yes, but another thing as well. Am I the only one of my friends who feels like this? Then I realized that I was the only one of my "white friends" who felt like this. My black and BIPOC⁸ friends always talked about little shit that bothered them like this. They called them microaggressions. It's when something seemingly small, maybe even stupid, causes you a lot of hurt. My mom had let the genealogical cat out of the bag- or so to speak- a week before Kevin's wedding. So

⁸ BIPOC- Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color

you, and all of my newfound family, were on my mind when that song came on...

(a beat)

I just realized that for all the people on that bus, growing up never looked like having a hard time answering questions about their family. Everyone knew, "They're Americans, they're from America..." But not me- even though we look basically the same. No, when I was at lunch it wasn't a question about if I thought the Steelers would win that weekend? It was, "Hey Addams, you Cuban or something- your mom is dark as hell- and something about you doesn't look right... What do you think?" "Shit, maybe he's Filippino or something, don't they speak Spanish there?" "Yeah What's your Mom's name again? Monica? More like Myni-"

Sarah: I got the picture.

Ryan: And I could never say anything. I'd just have to sit there and... laugh. I have to say something, Sarah.

Sarah: Of course.

(a beat)

Any real, good American should know where they came from.

Ryan: Yeah, well Phil disagrees. To him, the only way I can "make something worthwhile of myself" is by putting all this behind me.

Sarah: Have you considered that he might be right?

Ryan: *(a beat)* I shouldn't have had said anything

Sarah: *(a beat)* Cmon. I have something to show you- nothing like before. But before we begin, close your eyes.

Ryan: Why?

Sarah: Because I'm your elder and I said so.

Sada enters again from offstage, Ryan doesn't notice her

Ryan: You know we look the same age, right?

Sarah: Listen, you JUST got here, your soul needs time to adjust.

Ryan: My soul? Adjust to what?

(Sarah B. *sighs and points at Sada*)
AHHH!!! Stop that

Sada: This is literally just the beginning.
(*pointing to Ryan*)

As you adjust to Limbo, your soul gets more... flexible. Do you wish you could be a little younger? Older? Wanna get rid of that bum hip that bothered you in your 70's? Limbo can do it.

Ryan: So what are we? spirits? Xenomorphs?

Sada: Your parents put you through all that Sunday school and for *what*? A person is composed of two things, their body & their soul. This place is a chance for the soul to sort itself out without the body's baggage.

Ryan: Wait, does that mean...

Sada: (Ryan *covers their body*) What are you doing?

Ryan: I just feel so naked all of the sudden.

Sada: Will you stop that! You've still got your body.
(Ryan *relaxes*).

Not sure how permanent that will be, but all we can do about that is wait and see!

Ryan: (anxious) Sada what are we doing? I can't just sit here and wait and see if I die!

Sada: That's the only thing you can do.
(a beat)

Don't worry, the story will make things go faster- I'm sure.
Now close your eyes!

Ryan does as they're told, begrudgingly. Sada sets out a candle and blanket before sitting down and guiding Ryan to the seat next to her.

Ryan: So will you give a signal, or-

Sarah: Now!

Sada grabs Ryan's shoulder as she begins to chant the Lord's prayer in Arabic and Ryan screams. Wind begins to gather, and the ground itself begins to shake. Lights begin to flash on & off until utter darkness.

Blackout

Scene 6

EXT. Safita⁹ 1905 (Village Square)

Lights Up

Ryan is a heap pile on the floor, covering their most vital organs. The new environment has a road sign pointing towards Damascus and Safita (maybe a cactus). Sarah B. enters from offstage and paces around him for a moment.

Sarah: (Ryan looks up) BOO!

Ryan: You are the devil!

Sarah: No, just an American woman.

Ryan: (Sarah giggles) I always hate the doors- where are we?

Sarah: Byrge Safita, just north of Tripoli, 1912.

(Ryan kisses the floor)

What are you doing?

Ryan: Give me a second...

(Inspirational music cues)

I'm finally home. This feels like... a Lebanese rite of passage-

Sarah: You're not Lebanese.

Ryan: (Music cuts off) What?

(a beat)

Oh, okay... So in 1943 after- get this- a SECOND world war-

Sarah: -I lived through the Wilson Administration, I am well aware of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

(a beat)

Yarhamukallah! We are not Syrian, or Lebanese, or whatever you want to call it. We are American. I made sure of that.

Ryan: (sheepishly) Okay. Yeah, sorry.

Sarah: It's okay, just don't let it happen again.

(a beat)

⁹ Safita: A Syrian village, a day's ride from the coast, right above the border with modern day Lebanon

Anyway, try to keep up! Cuz this story is an Odyssey worthy of any Greek! I was born in a village in southern Syria. And like the larger province itself- ever since I could remember... It was a dump. Even the people seemed to reflect the rot in the town's core.

A slide show of burning illustrations and real world photos of impoverished Syrians circa 1910.

Sarah: Future dullards, bigots, and Turks were the only company I could expect to keep.

Ryan: Wait, are we talking about the same place?

Sarah: (annoyed) Yes, why?

Ryan: Southern Syria? Home to Damascus, Beirut? Seat of the Umayyads? Phoenicia proper? The Paris of the East-

Sarah: -Please save all questions for the end! So- as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted- there was nothing for me in Safita. So after much beginning and pleading- along with a trial trip undertaken by my eldest brother- my parents sent me to America. I had just turned 20 years old, and my parents had saved up everything they could, I was of course scared, but deep down I was ecstatic. I would not waste the opportunity set in front of me. However, before I could bite into the apple of life and cross the Atlantic, my ship needed to refuel in Marseille. Hearing about the wondrous city from loud-mouthed sailors at the docks, I knew I needed to go. After hitching a carriage ride to the city I found a city worthy of Damascus' fame.

(Ryan listens to the noise)

There were so many people, each speaking languages and tongues that I couldn't hope to comprehend. And they all wore different clothes that seemed to scream their image to the world. But they all had one thing in common, hope.

(Sarah is lost in the memory)

So many of them had a smile as they walked and talked without care in their mind... After that brief stop in Paris, I was put back on that boat to meet my brother in America.

(Looks into the horizon)

Before that, however, as I stood at the bow of the ship and gazed at Lady Liberty, I made myself a promise. I was reminded of the sacrifice this moment required. My family had not just given me an opportunity, but a life, & I refused to waste it.

Ryan: (*Looks up from their notebook*) I get that.

(*Sarah raises an eyebrow*)

I mean, I get wanting to be worthy of the opportunities afforded to you, because you see so many people go without them.

Sarah: (*A beat*) Anyway, Once I was released from Ellis Island, I finally saw what the new world had in store for me. Unlike in *Al Bilad*, America was a bastion of modernity. There were streets of gold, kindness unseen since Christ himself, and enough bread that nobody ever went hungry... It was wonderful. By the time I was permitted entrance, I felt like I was greeting an old friend. I was no longer forced to be Sada, the Phoenician from Damascus. Now, I was Sarah, a good American.

(*Ryan looks concerned*)

I promised that my descendants would never know the indignities I overcame. So, once I touched down on the mainland, I got to work making the most of this "dream in America" —as only good Americans can.

Sarah B. winks to Ryan and the audience as a patriotic anthem-reminiscent of the title card/intro of American Dad- begins to play. Sada walks back on stage, in a newsie outfit, and begins to silently tell everyone to 'read all about it!'.

Sarah: And oh boy! Did I work? I saved every nickel and dime I could from my youth. As others back home lavished in decadence, I built our empire.

Ryan: (*Interrupting abruptly*) Wait a minute, I'm sorry what year was this? This would have been... 1915?

(*Music stops/Sada leaves*)

No, that can't be right, Syrians were starving.

Sarah: I'm sorry!? Who's telling whose story now?

Ryan: Bubba. I'm not trying to be rude, but-

Sarah: Well you are failing.

Ryan: BUT I've done the research, and-

Sarah: Ryan, trust me- this is what happened- and it's best for everyone if you see that.

Ryan: No it didn't!

(*drawing on their notes*)

In 1915 Syrians weren't "lavishing in decadence", they were starving from the Allied blockade-

Sarah: Ryan-

Ryan: -They were washing horse dung from the street-

Sarah: -Stop-

Ryan: -to eat the leftover straw-

Sarah: (*Abruptly*) ENOUGH!

(*a beat*)

I don't know where you learned that filth, but it is Turkish propaganda meant to inspire dissent in Arabs abroad. Real Americans-

Ryan: Will you shut up with that?!

(*Sarah slaps Ryan*)

(*a beat*)

What does that even mean?

Sarah: (*Closing the open space*) What does what mean?

Ryan: "Real Americans". You've used the phrase A LOT now. What does it mean?

Sarah: (*A beat*) It means Americans who can see that this country is a shimmering island floating in a shit sea. A place here is a precious, delicate, gift. One we have to fight for and defend, no matter the cost.

Ryan: (*chuckling*) You know, growing up, that is all we learned in school. That America was this diamond in the rough, the bastion of democracy... 'A City Upon A Hill'.

(*A beat*)

What a load of horseshit-

Sarah: Language! And keep your voice down- you never know who might be listening.

Ryan: What are you talking about? Who is listening, what are you still afraid of!? Did the feds get here?

Sarah: The feds can kiss my ass. I'm not worried about them- I'm worried about you.

Ryan What?

Sarah: I will not sit idly by while my great, grandchild get themselves killed-

Ryan: Technically, I'm your great, great... Wait Bubba, what are you talking about?

Sarah: Do not call me that!

(a beat)

I am not your grandmother- I love my granddaughter but she has been too lenient with you.

(a beat)

I know you've done more than just download a translation app...

Ryan: I don't know what you're talking about.

Sarah: Yes, you do- You're going to make me say it?

(Ryan does not)

Besmillah, you really don't know?

(Ryan shakes their head)

Sit down habibi.

Safita fades into Limbo as Ryan takes a seat. Sarah takes a deep breath.

Sarah: Your recent interest in your cousin Phil's research has attracted some unwanted attention... for the both of you.

Ryan: What do you mean?

Sarah: I mean that as of yesterday you've been submitted for review as a candidate for the Suspected Terrorist Center watchlist

Ryan: (A beat) You're kidding?

(Sarah shakes her head)

Holy shit.

Sarah: (A beat) I'm sorry you had to hear this from me, but I thought you of all people would know!

Ryan: What about me screams FBI counter surveillance?

Sarah: I don't know- you're always helping your mother with her telephone.

Sarah B. starts miming troubleshooting a telephone. It's bad. Silence falls over Limbo. Ryan gets up and starts wandering.

Ryan: *(Laughing)* So it doesn't even matter if someone finds me or not, does it? I'm already dead- I'm a dead man walking.

Sarah: Not necessarily
(Ryan looks confused)
This stuff happens all the time. Unless they find you purchasing explosive materials, you get 3 strikes.

Ryan: And how many do I have?

Sarah: Two, *Al-Hamdulillahi*. First one wasn't your fault. You couldn't help that you were an Arab born during that September.

Ryan: *(Ryan shakes their head)* Those fucking towers-

Sarah: *(hushed)* Ryan!

Ryan: What? What have those two, metal dicks ever done for me? I'll tell you what: "random" airport screenings, "pin the tail on Addams ethnicity"- those assholes fell over so hard they caused my own mother to hide who I was from the world- and myself. So yeah, good riddance.

(a beat)

What about Phil?

(Sarah B. won't look at Ryan)

Sarah. How many strikes does Phil have?

Sarah: By the end of today, if it all goes to planned, he'll have three.

Ryan: What do you mean, "if it all goes to plan"?

Sarah: *(a beat)* When you begin your journey here you learn that our view of the corporeal world isn't necessarily "universal". Here we aren't bound by concepts like "linear time". The day is laid out before you as if it were a menu. Just choose which point you like best and... go.

Ryan: *(Sarah B.'s hands do a *pop* gesture)* Wait so what's going to happen to Phil when gets his third strike?

Sarah: *(a beat)* He will get a call from a new member of his diving crew saying that they're "ready to load out." He'll

have to abandon his hunt for you and then head to the Pittsburgh International Airport- where he will be apprehended, thanks to the aforementioned crew member being an informant (for the Suspected Domestic Terrorists division of the FBI).

Ryan: (a beat) We have to go save him.

Sarah: (Ryan *gets up*) Ryan, stop.

Ryan: What's going on, Sarah! I'm tired of all the guessing.

Sarah: *Bismillah*, I'm sorry habibi- we can't leave yet. Your body won't allow us.

Ryan: (Ryan *stops in their tracks*) Why not?

Sarah: I'm sorry but this place isn't made for the living. A soul is eternal, incorporeal- it doesn't change with time. However, your body does and *you* cannot push a body through time.

Ryan: Has anyone ever even tried?

Sarah: Once, they wrote a whole book about it. Although they didn't include that part in the final draft- it's a shame, it really helps pick the mood back up after that DOWNER second act-

Ryan: SARAH!

Sarah: Sorry! Look, unless your Mom met an archangel while you were in the uterus, you can't do it: no one else has tried and lived to tell the tale, so ergo it's impossible. The costs of failure here are too high to pay.

Ryan: Says who?

Sarah: Me.

Ryan: (a beat) Let me be the judge of that, what's the cost?

Sarah: (Sarah *rubs her face*) You could certainly travel through time, but the information you'd discover... it would be pointless.

(Ryan *doesn't understand*)

You would sever the very link between your body and soul.

(Sarah motions to where her spine met her scalp)
You'd be stuck here a lot longer than potentially (*insert actual run-time of the play*). Is that something you want to risk?

(Ryan shakes their head)

(Sarah smiles) I'm glad you agree. You might be the first person ever to make it out of here alive- it'll be quite the story to tell if you get out)!

Ryan: (Ryan puts their head in their hands) I changed my confirmation name to Dante as a joke!

(a beat)

Wait, wont the water wake me up once I swallow a little bit of it? I'll have to cough it up.

Sarah: (snappy) Ryan!

(a beat)

"Limbo" isn't like a laundromat. You do not get to take out your clothes whenever you want. It's more like the dry cleaners. It will allow you to leave once your soul is primed and pressed to its exact standard. Then you will be ready.

Ryan: (exasperated) And it doesn't have some emergency eject-

Sarah: No.

Ryan (a beat) When will I be ready?

Sarah: That's up to you, but I'll let you know.

Ryan: (*puzzled*) You know Catholics have a name for this place, *Purgatorio*. It was a place where the flawed- but ultimately good people- could atone for the *sins* they'd committed in life.

(Sarah doesn't know where this is going)

At the end of it all they would be proclaimed saints (with a lowercase "s"). It's kind of a nice concept isn't it? That everyone who makes it here will be a saint?

(a beat)

And if what you said- about time not being corporeal is true- you're a saint, Sarah. Already in heaven.

Sarah: I can only see each day as they come, habibi.

(a beat)

I am sorry to disappoint.

*Ryan purses their lips, and tilts their head, at that comment.
Sarah cannot seem to read his face.*

Ryan: *(Ryan purses their lips)* Either way, I like to think they're right about that...

Ryan relaxes at the edge of the stage. Motions for Sarah to join them- she obliges. They sit and stare at the edge of eternity, it's a quaint, quiet, kind moment. Ryan wishes he didn't have to make it end.

Ryan: Though I'm not sure anymore because they obviously got so much wrong.

(Ryan gestures to the void)

There's no mountains with boulders, or faces down in the mud; some "former things" cannot seem to "pass away". Even old habits, like lying, seem to follow us wherever we go.

(Sarah looks back over to Ryan)

Why are you keeping me here, Sarah?

(Sarah will not meet their gaze)

Let me go. It's not too late to stop this.

Sarah: You're right. You can stop this whenever you want, Ryan. Just take Phil's advice, drop this familial anthropology nonsense and live the life our family wants for you.

Ryan: And if I don't?

(Sarah is silent)

And if I don't?

Sarah: *(a beat)* You'll turn out just like Phil.

Ryan: What is so wrong about that? He followed his dreams and learns more about the world around him everyday!

(Sarah is silent)

What is so bad-

Sarah: He's also a part-time looter and smuggler!

Ryan: *(a beat)* No he isn't.

Sarah: *Ya' iilihi* will you listen to me? I am trying to tell you the truth. Yes, your cousin is a nautical archaeologist, but looters and scavengers have flooded the markets with relics for cheap.

(whispered)

Hezbollah is not exactly able to enforce "UNESCO standards".

(Ryan sees her point)

So, he sells some of his discoveries on the black market. How else do you think he keeps financing trips back to *al-bilad*¹⁰.

Ryan: He said that his company financed those trips...

Sarah: For someone so smart you are incredibly stupid, *wulid*. Archaeologists are contractors, if they work for a company that is not based out of Lebanon... Unless we're talking Oregon.

Ryan: (a beat) Why are you telling me this?

Sarah: Because *habibi*, this pain you're feeling now is nothing in comparison to what Phil is going to go through.
(Ryan looks at Sarah perplexed)
Your cousin is going to be picked up and interrogated by the FBI *min 'ajl almasih*¹¹! Our people are not treated kindly once in the custody of the government...

Ryan: Which is all the more reason you need to let me go and save him!

Sarah: Banish that thought from your mind, child! Your cousin is gone, the stubborn fool never listened to his elders.

Ryan: (a beat) *Eight years.*

Sarah: (confused) What?

Ryan: It took cousin Phil *eight years* to find a record with your maiden name on it.

(a beat)

I took us all Summer to piece together that you & Great Grandma Moses "knew" each other- turns out you were the same person! That's what pisses us off, you just don't get it do you?

Sarah: Get what?

Ryan: Why we're more than just a little fixated on finding ANYTHING about you! Who are we supposed to be if we don't know you! You know, at first I assumed it was always out of your control; nobody asked to be an Arab in America. But then I actually meet you and all you have to say to me is that you

¹⁰ *Al-bilad*- the country/land (Arabic)

¹¹ *Min 'ajl almasih* [min-aj-leil-mess-hi-ee]- for Christ's sake (Arabic)

wanted this? You wanted us to forget, for everything that every mattered to us to just, what, fade away into

Sarah: Why can't we be American!?

Ryan: Because- to them- we NEVER WILL BE!

(a beat)

Qualify it with "-American" if you must, but when they look at us they see Arabs, they know we're different. Hell, we are different! Within our veins runs the same blood of old Damascus- no city has more ethos, more history! It's literally the world's oldest inhabited city-

Sarah: -You're not answering the question.

Ryan: (*undeterred*) We CREATED civilization- the Tigris, Euphrates, Sumer, Ur, Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenicia- do I need to go on!?

(Sarah *is silent*)

Who the fuck are *they* to ask us to change? What gives them the right?

Sarah: (*small*) When you hold the keys, habibti you call the shots- and who they get taken on.

Ryan: Keys? They wouldn't have "keys," if not for us..

Sarah: But they do habibi. The simple, brutal, truth of the matter is they do.

Ryan: (*sits down*) Why didn't you share any of your traditions with us?

Sarah: This country did not like people who refuse to assimilate, Ryan-

Ryan: I know that! I'm not asking why we didn't pray the rosary in Arabic, but why did you let them- why didn't YOU... let us keep something, anything about our traditions?

Sarah: Traditions? What Syrian traditions do you still wish we practiced, Ryan? Women wearing hijabs to cover their faces in public? Parents having the final say over their children's marriage. I have seen what those Christians and Muslims, especially the Druze, have done to each other in the name of 'tradition'-

Ryan: The Druze aren't even Muslims! Your argument has crawled so far up your own ass that you don't even know what you're arguing anymore! Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived in the Middle East for CENTURIES, without major incident; yet, you don't want to acknowledge that-

Sarah: -Because you don't understand that "peace" is, and always was, a waiting period.

(a beat)

Conflict isn't something to run from habibi, there is no point running from the inevitable... Take a look outside and you'll know this to be true. I have lived through crisis and I have lived through prosperity, child; It came to me in that order; and, for you, I am afraid it will be the opposite. The country I left you and your parents is gone, and something is coming to replace it. I don't know what, but a storm is coming. It comes for us: the outcasts, the margins... 'Real Americans' won't be on those margins. So, we will fight, and we will claw, and we will win, no matter the baggage we leave behind.

Ryan: There was nothing but the storm.

Sarah: What?

Ryan: "Nothing." Your "storm" or "the baggage we left behind" was everything. The storm was our name, where we are from, who we used to be- It was everything that came before; and, all that we could have become! Without it we don't know anything: who to love, hate, spurn, adore- NOTHING!

(a beat)

Even right now, where I am livid; and, I have practiced this moment, way too many times, thinking about exactly what I would say to you. Yet, despite all that, I find out that words simply cannot. The words I have, cannot, and will not convey the daily damage your thoughtless blade wrecks on my insides. I don't know if that's a failure of language as a whole, or just the toolbelt I've been given, but maybe if someone had actually bothered to teach me how to speak, how we really spoke, taught me the words I actually wanted to use, then I wouldn't feel so goddamn lost searching for them my whole life!

(a beat)

Why?

Sarah: To protect you from being lynched!

(Pleading)

You don't understand, habibi. It was a different time. Police murdered pregnant women as they woke from their beds because their husbands peddled *fruits* too close to the street.

(grabbing ahold of Ryan)

What even is an American at the end of the day? If we couldn't say we're not American, then neither could they.

(a beat)

I wouldn't let them hurt you.

Ryan: (*Looking at Sarah*) You just did it yourself.

Sarah: (*Ryan begins to leave*) 'Ana saburu¹²!

Ryan: Wa'ana aydan¹³. (*So am I*).

Sarah: (*panicked*) Wait! Where- Why are you going?

Ryan: I'm going to try and find a way out, and see if it's too late to try and help Phil.

(*Ryan starts to move, but stops*)

And If you really didn't want to hurt us, Sarah, you could have told the truth. I don't need a refresher in American history, I know that story all too well. I wanted to know your story; because, I hoped it'd be the missing piece in this fucked up tapestry I guess I'm call, 'Me'.

Sarah: (*Ryan starts to leave again*) Ryan, stop! You won't know what to do out there without me!

Ryan: (*a beat*) I don't know what to do here with you.

Ryan exits.

Phillip/Ryan: (*offstage*) Come find me when you're ready to talk.

Sarah B. stands with her thoughts, space, and time. So much space and time.

END OF ACT 1

¹² 'Ana saburu- I am being patient here

¹³ Wa'ana Aydan- So am I

Act 2

Scene 7

EXT. LIMBO (Hours Later)

Ryan is wandering in the void, and it is starting to get cold. As they shiver, they begin to remember the lessons Sarah taught them.

Ryan: In Limbo, your soul gets more flexible. In Limbo, you can do [anything].

The white lights begin to dim as a pastel blue hue surrounds Ryan. Their breath begins to slow as they compress the barriers of their soul, until the pressure that has been exerted inward begins to push out from this newly compressed center. An orangish-yellow hue begins to radiate out, representing the outward pressure. This "aura" grows larger, and larger until it overtakes the blue, and eventually fading away on itself. They feel warm now.

Ryan: (surprised) Holy shit.

(fist pump)

Okay. I'm not getting anywhere by standing here. So, I guess there is nothing left to do but...

(looks offstage)

Try.

Ryan looks offstage toward whatever lies beyond the horizon. There is nothing out there, literally nothing. It is just white—or not white, but simply the absence of color. It almost calls to them as they stare. A hum of a song begins to play as they walk forward.

Unknown Voice (offstage): *(hum/sing)* [Sabahulnoor] Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, hayati! Tusharaqu alshamsu alā wajhihā ālyawma¹⁴.

Ryan: What is that?

(listens)

Is that? No it can't be.

¹⁴ *Sabah el noor* (lyrics in English)- Good morning, good morning! Good morning, little one. The sun is shining on your face today! (Repeat)

Unknown Voice (offstage): *(hum/sing)* Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, hayati! Tusharaqu alshamsu alā wajhihā ālyawma.

Ryan: Mom?

Monica (offstage): *(hum/sing)* Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Hayati! Tusharaqu alshamsu alā wajhihā ālyawma.

Ryan: Mom! What are you doing here?

Monica (offstage): *(hum/sing)* Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Sabah el noor, Hayati! Tusharaqu alshamsu alā wajhihā ālyawma.

Ryan: Mom- hold on- I'm coming!

Ryan's orangish light begins to return behind them. This time however, it's much more chaotic, unstable. As it gets brighter and brighter, Ryan's face contorts in pain and strain. Sarah then walks onstage.

Sarah: Ryan, stop!

Ryan: Mom is over there!

Sarah: No she isn't Ryan.

(Ryan ignores her)

Ryan-

(the orange light returns)

Stop!

(Sarah puts a hand on Ryan's shoulder)

Please.

Ryan stops their channeling, slowly. As they do so, the song they heard slowly crawls to a stop. Sarah looks over to Ryan.

Ryan: What was that?

Sarah: What did you hear?

Ryan: An old nursery rhyme.

(a beat)

My mother sang it to me, in English, every morning. So, what was *that*?

Sarah: *(Ryan points to the void)* I don't know.

(Ryan is perplexed)

You wanted honesty, here it is. I hear the noise too, but it's not the same for me as it is for you.

Ryan: Go on.

Sarah: You heard your mother's song, I hear my family's joy.

Ryan: What?

Sarah: (*looking into the void*) I can't quite make out what it is exactly, but it sounds like a party- and everyone is there.

EVERYONE: my mother, father, brother, kids, nephews, and nieces... They all sound so happy.

Ryan: Why?

(*Sarah is silent*)

Sarah, why are we hearing these things?

Sarah: I don't know. Every soul who lived here must have heard it- it's a siren song of sorts.

Ryan: Why?

Sarah: It's mesmerizing-

Ryan: No, why would anyone program that into this place?

Sarah: I wondered that at first as well, but it's pretty apparent after a while.

(*motions to the void*)

It's just this. Silence, silence and time. Time with your thoughts... and all your mistakes.

(*Ryan looks over at Sarah*)

I'm sorry, Ryan. You were right- about all of it.

Ryan: (*shocked*) What?

Sarah: (*honest*) I was scared. I didn't want to waste the chance I had been given... a chance that so many others were more deserving to have.

(*a beat*)

I wouldn't allow my past wounds to fester upon my arrival. My language, my accent, my name- all of these were ammunition for them. So, for my family I emptied the chamber.

Sarah begins to falter, but Ryan drops to a knee and places a hand on her shoulder. Sarah raises her head and smiles. They

feel this small show of support, allowing it to wash over her. The smile fades as she tries to return to her apology.

Sarah: I figured skin color wouldn't be an issue, we were not dark enough to be suspicious at a glance- what got people's attention was my accent, my dress-

Ryan: Your hair?

Ryan grabs a strand of their own curly hair. The pair burst into unexpected laughter.

Sarah: *(Ryan motions to their hair)* Yeah.

(spontaneous laughter)

I should have realized the futility of that endeavor from the start. I just thought if I hid us well enough... everything would be okay.

(a beat)

I'm sorry, Ryan. I failed you.

Ryan: *(a beat)* Why did you lie about it to me, to all of us?

Sarah: The best lies are the ones that you actually believe.

(a beat)

What real story is there to tell? My life was a simple tale of three men: my father, my brother, and... Phillip.

Ryan: Cousin Phillip?

Sarah: *(a beat)* No. Phillip was my husband's name...

Ryan: *(a beat)* Why doesn't the family talk about him?

(Sarah is silent)

You know you're more than them, right Sarah?

(Still not a peep)

I'm sure they were great Sarah, but nobody remembers them. We know you

Sarah: *(smiles)* How I wish that were true, or that it made me feel any better.

(smile fades)

Alright, this has been embarrassing enough already. So, let's get you back home and you can forget all about this nonsense-

Ryan: *(shocked)* Wait, that's it?

Sarah: What do you mean?

Ryan: What happened to all that stuff about soul drycleaners vs soul laundromats?

Sarah: (*confused*) Ryan... I was lying.

Ryan: I didn't think all of it was a lie! I thought I had to learn some kind of lesson or something..

Sarah: (*laughing*) Ryan, I brought you here. The only person you had to learn a lesson from was me- and it turns out I was wrong. It's as simple as that.

Ryan: So why are you here then?

Sarah: I didn't completely make it up- at least I don't think I did. I think the rule only applies to the souls that come here... "naturally".

Ryan: What do you mean, "you think"?

(*Sarah looks at Ryan*)

You don't know? My own grandma is gonna get me killed... Is time still moving forward outside of here?

(*Sarah shakes her head*)

So can you show me more stories?

Sarah: What?

Ryan: Show me more stories! The real stories.

(*Sarah is unsure*)

Please! If we have all this time now tell me stories- what was Safita like, really?

Sarah: Ryan, be serious-

Ryan: I am! If you're truly sorry, you'll show me your life!
Your real life.

Sarah ponders this assertion and sees it has some merit, so she dusts herself off, stands tall, and walks over to Ryan. She offers a hand for him to stand. When they grab her hand, Sarah smiles with a bittersweet grin.

Sarah: (*pulling*) Be careful what you wish for habibi.

Blackout

Scene 8

EXT. Deir el Qamar 1880

Lights Up

The sound and lights on stage whirl abruptly and chaotically, tearing Ryan and Sarah B. apart. Ryan picks themselves up and looks around, and Sarah B. is nowhere to be found. There is lots of smoke and shouting.

Ryan: (concerned) Sarah? Sarah?! Sarah!

Sada: She's gone. For now at least.

Ryan: Where are we?

Sada: You want to know what Syria was actually like before I left? Here it is, Deir Al Qamar, 1880.

A pregnant woman runs across the stage to grab both Sada and Ryan's hands to lead them to safety. At the same time, a red light takes over the stage and creepy strings begin to be strummed.

Ryan: (whispering to Sada) Can she see me?

Sada: (whisper) She's dragging you around town, I hope so.

Ryan: (a beat) How is she not freaking out at me right now? I'm wearing a graphic tee.

Sada: (whispering) These are still my memories. You look like whatever I say you do. Now shut up and take notes if you can, we're not coming back here.

Ryan: (whispering) What, why?

Sada: (whisper) Pay attention.

Ryan does as they're told. However, they are getting distracted by the sound of slaughter going on around them. Men, women, and children can all be heard being killed/cut down- just offstage.

Ryan: What's happening?

Sada: The Druze¹⁵.

Ryan: What?

Sada: A sect of "Muslims" who live in the Shouf Mountains, and across the holy land. They are massacring the Maronites.

(Ryan doesn't understand)

As Western medicine and trade came to Syria, the Maronites- with their proximity to the coasts- prospered due to this influx of foreign wealth; their population boomed. Meanwhile the Druze population stagnated, trapped deep in the mountains they called home.

Ryan: *(violence offstage increases)* What kind of people would do such a thing?

Sada: The starving kind.

(a beat)

There's no bad apples here, habibi- everyone feels their actions are justified. The Maronites needed more land to accommodate their growing populations, so they squeezed the Druze out of every bit of land they could; and they did, until the only thing left to eat for the Druze was the salt you could suck from rocks...

(looking at Ryan)

and straw. Try to remember that before you judge what you see.

Ryan: Why are we running then? Our family is from Safita and last time I checked our family is Catholic- not Maronites.

Sada: *(grumbling)* It is now- believe me- I know.

(gesturing to her mother and herself)

But right now we live in Deir al Qamar¹⁶ and we're Orthodox.

Ryan: Same color, different shade- what's your point?

Sada: A cross is a cross, to them, it always will be.

At that moment, Sada, Sada's Mom, & Ryan stop at the edge of the stage to knock on a monastery's door. Sada's Mom knocks faster, and faster as the noise of the clashing mobs continues to grow closer. Ryan looks around for an alternate escape route, but

¹⁵ Druze- an Abrahamic, monotheistic, and syncretic religion; commonly mistaken as a sect of Islam- it is not

¹⁶ *Deir al Qamar*- Lebanese town that was burned/destroyed during a religious civil war- between Druze and Maronite Christians.

there is none. Meanwhile, Sada sighs before closing her eyes. Ryan decides to shield Sada as the murderous mob comes crashing in, right as the stage goes dark.

Blackout

Scene 9

EXT. LIMBO

Lights Up

Ryan is still maintaining his defensive position atop of Sada- awaiting the pile of bodies and blades to initiate first contact... The only problem is Sada isn't there, so- very suddenly- the physics of gravity begin to apply once more as they hit the floor with a humph.

Sarah: *(walks onstage)* Have fun? The truth sets you free?

(Ryan shakes their head)

I hope you understand now why I didn't open your stay here with that, regardless of the deception-

(Ryan gives Sarah a big hug)

Okay, habibi... You can let go of me.

Ryan: *(Ryan does not)* I thought we were dead, I thought YOU were dead!

Sarah: *(moving Ryan)* It was a scary time, Ryan.

Ryan: *(a beat)* I understand if you don't want to keep going- this all seems like a lot-

Sarah: *(through a smile)* No, no, this is good. If it allows you to feel even a bit closer to our family, then it will all have been worth it.

(stands up)

Okay, what do you want to see next?

Ryan: Oh, um... What happened next, in real life?

Sarah: My mother's knocking was heard. An American, Presbyterian preacher was offering sanctuary to all he could- my mother was one of the lucky few who happened upon the door... She was so thankful that she asked him to baptize her and me on the spot.

Ryan: Just like that?

Sarah: Just like that. For her, on that day, that man was God-
he heard and she followed.

(a beat)

So what's next?

Ryan: (*flipping through notes*) You said your parents made you
leave around 12?

Sarah: I think so? My family never celebrated birthdays, so I
had to do some maths to give you a number.

(*Ryan looks over*)

It wasn't a lie, mind you, just an educated guess.

Ryan: Wait, Bubba said your birthday was Valentine's Day?

Sarah: (*smiles*) Abraham thought of that one, and Phillip
insisted the kids should be able to celebrate.

(a beat)

Sorry, where were we?

Ryan: Phillip?

Sarah: (*snappy*) Before that, please.

Ryan: Coming to America at "12"?

Sarah: Yes, right.

(*offering a hand*)

Are you ready?

Ryan: (a beat) You're gonna send me through //the storm again
aren't you

Sarah: (*grabbing Ryan's hand*) //I'm gonna send you through the
storm again.

*Ryan doesn't scream or move this time, simply closing their eyes
as the storm passes.*

BLACKOUT

Scene 10

EXT. Steamer (Sailing to America)

LIGHTS UP

*Once the whirling stops, Ryan opens their eyes and looks around.
However, instead of Damascus, they are sailing on the open sea.*

Seagulls can be heard, as waves lap, and the hull smacks the surface of the sea.

Ryan: *(a beat)* Sada! Sarah!

Sarah B. walks onstage.

Sarah: *(Lurch from Addams Family)* You rang?

Ryan: *(Ryan pulls out their notebook)* You've seen the Addams Family?

Sarah: No time for that, being aboard an American steamer crossing the Mediterranean all I had was time to think. Time to think about all that I had left behind- who?

(a beat)

I wasn't lying when I said dullards and Turkish soldiers were most of my company in Safita. However, there were others. *(A slideshow plays of Sada, her friends, and family in Safita)* My father worked for the governor of Damascus, and subsequently Constantinople. His role was to keep the peace in Safita, but my father made sure they were not like their Turkish bosses. They tried to negotiate when they could and only used their pistol when necessary- that's what they told us at least.

Ryan: *(Sada's lost in the images)* Do you miss them?

Sarah: Everyday.

(Ryan places a steady hand on Sada's shoulder)

Okay, now that the hard part is out of the way we can truly begin! I wasn't lying earlier when I said the children spoke rumors about the mainland. The stories were so wonderful that I could hardly wait!

(a beat)

This is what made our stop in Normandy all the more tedious...

Slideshow of Normandy at the time, the pictures should be quaint and nice, but underwhelming to a child who crosses the Mediterranean.

Sarah: Trees, shrubs, & grass as far as the eye could see- despite my best efforts not to. Anyway, the boys on the boat told me the real prize was Paris, so I called a carriage and made my way to the city.

Scene 11

EXT. Paris

The sounds of hooves on gravel/concrete begin to play in the background. A miniature of the Eiffel Tower is brought onstage, alongside some cute cafe tables, with placemats, etc.

Sarah: As we got closer, I noticed the strangest thing. The roads started as dirt, then gravel, and then... pure black.

(Ryan looks over)

I'm sorry, but that's what it was! Just as soon as you'd blink your eye, the road transformed from the tiny grey stones that I had known to a smooth, ink-black, flat surface that was nearly noiseless as you drove.

Ryan: (revelation) Concrete!

Sarah: Yes! Oh, you should have heard the silence- when you bunk with 100 other children for a week you'll appreciate it as much as I did.

(Paris fashion at its finest appears on screen)

And that was only the beginning. Everywhere I looked I saw something new and most wonderful. They wore plumes as tall as a horse, dresses that swallowed them whole, and so many beautiful faces: men & women alike. Despite being so far from it, I felt finally at home.

Scene 12

RET. EXT. Steamer (Sailing to America)

The sounds of waves crashing against the hull of a ship are heard outside. The pair are now aboard a civilian passenger vessel, bound for Ellis Island, NY. Small bunk beds are brought onstage (both sides).

Sarah: Alas, we only stayed for two days before we all were packed into the boat once more. However, I began to worry on the boat- what if America couldn't live up to Paris? What if I had found my place in the world and walked away?

(sits on bed)

Luckily, one of the older women on board, Nora, had taken a liking to me.

Nora walks on stage, with several books in her arms, and smiles at Sada before dotting on her as only a grandmother can.

Sarah: *(smiling)* Nora was from Gaza and made the trip to finally reunite with her husband before the birth of their second grandchild. Her family had done well enough for themselves in America that they decided to move the whole family there. At night she would tell me the most wonderful stories with me. I'd ask her to recite all the tales she knew and every night she would still find a new one to tell me.

(Sada picks up each book as she mentions them)

The Tanakh, New Testament, Quran- even Gilgamesh!

(smiling) I was in heaven... Well, as much heaven as there can be when the man next to you won't stop coughing up his lung!

(a beat)

Nora's health went quickly after the cough started to spread. She always was such a helper, so as soon as that bedmate began to show signs of decline. In hindsight, she was a dead woman, but that didn't make her dying in my arms any easier.

(Sada holds her necklace for a moment)

I'm sorry that story wasn't relevant.

Ryan: Yes it was.

Sarah: *(nods her head)* Right, anyway, without Nora the rest of the ride would have been difficult enough... But not even Nora could have prepared me for what came next, Ellis Island.

Scene 13

INT. Ellis Island (Operating Room)

The room changes as it begins to resemble historical images and unclean operating rooms from Ellis Island (Think Azkaban)! Sada is not comfortable in this space, she doesn't feel as if she can truly exist here.

Sarah: I wasn't lying earlier when I said the amount of people and languages overwhelmed me, it just wasn't in Paris. This little naval base off the coast of New York City became my nightmare: no sleep, no privacy, and endless panic.

(a beat)

When I first got there, they put us through a long march to the main hall.

(a beat)

I had to stop to catch my breath and readjust my suitcases when, out of nowhere, these men in masks whisked me away to a side room full of medical instruments and no windows whatsoever... Their hands were so dirty and they were touching everywhere, saying things I could not understand...

Ryan puts his hand on Sarah's shoulder, but she recoils. He pulls back as he tries to catch her eye, "I didn't mean to hurt you." Sarah nods before turning her head and leaning into the hand.

Ryan: Why don't we talk about meeting up with your brother?

Sarah: *(smiles)* Yes. I'm afraid that won't be much easier though...

Scene 14

EXT. Washington, PA (Pittsburgh)

The setting is now Pittsburgh, PA (circa 1912). There is a large set of stairs leading to a building just offstage, a newspaper stand, etc.

Sarah: My brother found work as a pickler in a tin mill. It wasn't great work- long hours, and all that- but it paid the bills. For our family that was unheard of. So, I made my way to the address my parents had given me, 555 Washington, PA.

(sits atop steps)

I sat atop these steps for hours. and saw the American dream play out before me. Cars would litter the street, alongside mothers who'd shepherd their children down the sidewalk, past vendors and neighbors alike...

Sarah B. smiles for a moment, but it does not last. Ryan places an arm around them in comfort. After a quiet moment, a young Lebanese man in a smudged undershirt and worn overalls comes on stage. Once he locks eyes with Sarah all the noise of Washington is gone- it's just the two of them. Ryan feels a bit out of place suddenly, but holds their tongue... For the first 5 seconds anyway.

Ryan: *(whisper)* Who is that?

(Sarah doesn't respond).

Sarah?

(Young Man waves & Sarah smiles).

Sarah! Wanna tell me what's going on here?

Sarah: Um

Young Man: I'm sorry Dave, I didn't mean to bother you. You left this at work today.

(hands Ryan a hat)

I also was hoping you'd want to catch the Allies [Al-ees] game if you weren't busy?

(a beat)

Well?

Ryan: (*points to themselves*) Who, me?

Young Man: Yes, Dave! Are you okay? You look like you just saw a ghost.

Ryan: (*playing along*) Yes, I'm sorry. It's been a long day- what are the Allies?

Young Man: (*confused beat*) Oh! Haha Dave, The baseball club just changed their name to the "Pirates" last week. Quit busting my balls now, will ya?

Ryan: (*Young Man playfully hits Ryan's arm*) Haha, you know it's just because...

(*looks at Sarah*)

I love you!

Young Man: (*beat*) David... Is everything alright?

Ryan: Um-

Young Man: (*bearhugs Ryan*) David Braheim, this is a huge first step for you! I'm so proud of you, and the progress you've made in opening up to me brother.

(*to Sarah*)

If you know anything about this man, surely you can attest?

Sarah: ...

Young Man: (*to Ryan*) Dave, you do know this beautiful, young lady, right?

Ryan: (*chuckling*) Yes.

Young Man: Care to introduce us?

Ryan: Of course...

(*to Sarah*)

Sarah, care to introduce yourself?

Sarah: (*Ryan pushes her forward*) Hi, yes! I'm Sarah, Sarah Braheim.

Young Man: (*tenderly bows and takes her hand*) A pleasure, Sarah. My friend's call me Habeeb, the government knows me better as Phillip Musa- or "Moses" as far as they're concerned.

(*to Ryan*)

I'm sorry for interrupting your reunion together, I totally forgot you told me your sister was expected to arrive today. I'll scalp your ticket to somebody outside, don't worry about it.

Ryan: Thanks, Habeeb, but it's okay- I'd actually love to still join you if I can.

(*Sarah begs Ryan to not leave*)

Actually, could you wait for me a minute?

(*Habeeb nods*)

Thanks.

(*to Sarah*)

What?

Sarah: (*whisper*) That's your great, great grandfather- don't "What!?" me!

Ryan: (*whisper*) Yeah, and he just invited me to a ball game.

Sarah: (*whisper*) You can't do that!

Ryan: Why not?

Sarah: (*pulls them to the side*) I didn't go to that game, so who knows where you'll be by the time the memory starts collapsing?

Ryan: Okay so what exactly happened here that you remember?

Sarah: What is there to tell? I sat outside my brother's apartment for a while then he and the love of my life showed up.

(*Ryan motions for more*)

Then he introduced himself, I went in, and the two shared a cigarette on the step as I got settled in for the night.

Ryan: How do you know all that if you weren't there?

Sarah: (*points up*) I sat there and watched it all. I didn't want to unpack yet.

Ryan: Okay, so why does Phillip think I'm your brother?

Sarah: Why should I know? No one else has ever been in my memories before! Look, we need to go inside and move on.

Ryan: No.

Sarah: *(a beat)* What do you mean "no"?

Ryan: I mean that, if you want to say I can't go to the game because it's dangerous, fine. I understand; but, don't tell me I can't smoke a stogie with my grandpa.

Sarah: Ryan, please!

Ryan: *(walking to Habeeb)* If you want to go Sarah, don't let me stop you.

Sarah is downtrodden, all she can do is glare at Ryan, from behind, as he walks away. Ryan walks back to Habeeb, who is waving Sarah in for the night.

Habeeb: *(softly)* I'm gonna marry that girl someday.

Ryan: *(confused)* What?

Habeeb is in the midst of a full-body yawn.

Habeeb: *(stretching)* Hate to ruin a good idea, Chief-
(packing his cigarettes away)
But your sister has the right idea. I am wiped, and we need to be back at the mill in 9 hours, so- on second thought- no game for me. I'm heading home to bed.

Ryan: *(possessed by Dave)* What did you just say?

Habeeb: That I'm going to bed-

Abe: *(puts hand on Habeeb's shoulder)* Before that.

Habeeb: *(a beat)* I'm gonna marry her-

Dave: *(Ryan punches Habeeb square in the nose)* Talk about my sister again, and I'll fucking kill you, Phillip.

Habeeb: *(a beat)* Fight it all you want, Dave-
(Dave lets Ryan go, doing the same to Habeeb)
-but I'm in love.

(waves to Sarah)
And someday I'll give her the world..
(to Ryan)
See you tomorrow, asshole. Go sleep, whatever this is off..
(to himself)
I know I will.

Ryan: (to Sarah) What just happened?

Sarah: You tell me?

Ryan: I don't know, something came over me and- and... I-
(tearing up)
I don't know what happened to me. One moment I'm fine, the next I was filled with all this rage at the thought of him-

Sarah: (hugging Ryan) Hey- Hey!
(a beat)
Obviously you're discovering some new things about this place that I haven't, but I don't think that was you back there.

Ryan: What do you mean?

Sarah: If my memory serves me right, that was exactly what Abe did that night to Habeeb when I first got to his place.

Ryan: Your brother punched great, great grandpa in the face! Didn't he just say they were friends?

Sarah: The best- that's why my brother didn't want him anywhere near me!

Ryan: (Sarah slaps Ryan's knee as she rises) And he still married you?

Sarah: (not laughing) Of course he did!
(a beat)

He was the best man I knew.
(Habeeb comes back onstage, the pair go on a stroll)
And he wasn't wrong in his prediction either.
(Habeeb puts his jacket atop a puddle).
We only ended up dating a year before he called his shot.
(Habeeb gets down on one knee, pulling out an apple)
(to Ryan) There wasn't much family to invite so we had our wedding that very night.
(Sarah hugs Habeeb and they head upstage to an "altar")

Scene 15

EXT. Washington, PA (Pittsburgh)

The large set of stairs, newspaper stand, etc. are replaced by a fireplace backdrop & a cozy rug and couch/chair- a truly delightful home. Also, who should walk out in an oversized meter, but none other than Nora, now being styled as Habeeb's mom.

Sarah: *(laughing)* His mother had to read the traditional Orthodox rites since his father was still in *al-bilad*.

Ryan: Is that even allowed in the liturgical rite-

Sarah: *(abrupt)* No one cares unless you're a king or a politician!

(a beat)

Plus Pennsylvania recognized Common law marriages until 2005, so it doesn't matter. Regardless of the liturgical legitimacy, I was now Sarah Moses. That was one of the most magical nights of my life, in that tiny living room, next to the love of my life.

Sarah B. and Habeeb share silent vows and exchange rings before her mother-in-law pronounces them husband and wife. They kiss and hug before Habeeb and his mother head offstage. Sarah walks downstage back to Ryan, all the while twiddling with her ring finger.

Sarah: Now that we had two incomes- and my business sense- we really took off. We bought our first apartment two years into our marriage, a house half a decade after that. We even bought a store!

(Ryan laughs)

What? It was the 20's, things were good! Then, of course, they weren't.

Habeeb comes back out with a fedora, dress shirt, slacks, and a protest sign. He waves at Sarah before picketing on his side of the stage.

Sarah: Luckily the government still needed Tin so Habeeb didn't lose his job, but still nothing sat quite right with him about the Depression. He would ask me-

Habeeb: (to Sarah) "It doesn't make any sense, Sada! How can you come halfway across the globe, work as hard as you can, fail, and the banks and courts still won't cut you a break."

Sarah: (to Ryan) And I'd tell him
(to Habeeb) "They don't feel they owe us anything, Phillip-remember the Turks? It's quite the opposite."
(laughing)
And he would say-

Habeeb: "-That's not good enough! You & I deserve just as much as any bank or corporation."

Sarah: (a beat) Then he'd get real quiet.
(Habeeb lowers his sign before heading offstage)
He went down to the courthouse the very next Sunday. He couldn't take off Saturday's initially because of work but, after the factory gave us the weekend, you can guess where Habeeb was every Saturday, too. Down at the courthouse, helping Syrians fight for freedom- one translation at a time...
(bittersweet smile)
Perhaps I should have talked to him more about it. Maybe I would have gotten more time...
(Ryan moves to comfort Sarah but she turns away)
Regardless, nothing that can be done about that now.
(a beat)
After a while he became a committeeman for our congressional district, a very prestigious honor- to him.

Habeeb is back but this time in a nice suit with his fedora- it's very suave. He is waving to imaginary constituents, shaking hands, etc. He goes to help a woman with her moving box.

Habeeb: Allow me madam!

Sarah: (Habeeb runs offstage) Yes, the whole neighborhood loved Habeeb. He was a constant figure in their lives.

Sarah B. looks offstage after Habeeb, before Ryan joins her. After a moment, Ryan must close their eyes and hold their head- all the while stumbling to catch themselves. When their balance was found, something seemed different- more childlike.

Ryan/Abraham Moses: Ommi, is 'ab gonna be home soon?

Sarah: (Frozen) No, not tonight, habibi.
(Sarah touches Ryan's cheek)

I'm sorry, I can't imagine how hard this must be for you...

A light goes out in Sarah's eyes as Ryan comes back to their senses- the moment she had with Abraham is gone.

Sarah: At least, that's what I wish I said. What I actually said was, "Don't be stupid, asking questions that you already know the answer to."

Sarah's eyes bemoan a guilt that threatened to swallow her whole.

Ryan: *(moving on)* What was he doing out so late?

Sarah: Ha! That's the worst part, he wasn't messing with some other woman or gambling away our earnings. He was a hero: he helped Arab speakers defend their rights in court, he lobbied for greater union protections- despite being a business owner himself. He was every bit the man I fell in love with- and more.

(a beat)

And I began hating him for it.

Habeeb: *(bursting in from offstage)* Hi honey, I'm so sorry I'm late again-

Sarah: *(to Habeeb)* -Where have you been?

Habeeb: *(a beat)* What?

Sarah: Do you know what time it is? What time your firstborn stays up till in hopes of seeing you?

(Sarah hits Habeeb's shoulder)

Where are you Habeeb?

Habeeb: *(hugging Sarah)* I'm sorry, *habibti*, what can I say? The dossier isn't given until we get there and I can't just leave them-

Sarah: -What kind of man can leave his wife and child, but not a stranger?

Habeeb: *(defensive)* I'm sorry, but where in your good book does it say that Christ's compassion has limits?

Sarah: Do not quote scripture to me like I am some case you're trying to win, Habeeb! I am your wife, I need you to listen to me!

Habeeb looks ready to walk out but calms himself after a moment.

Habeeb: Okay. What do you want?

Sarah: (a beat) Nevermind.

Habeeb: No, what is it?

(a beat)

habibti, look, this city, the Republican party, my committee, our neighbors, Washington needs me-

Sarah: -I need you, Phillip!

(a beat)

Why do I have to come last, after all that? Or your son!

Sarah suddenly gestures to Ryan as Habeeb and him make eye contact. Ryan swears he almost sees something akin to recognition in Habeeb's eyes- but as soon as it might have been there, it's gone. Habeeb slowly walks over to Ryan, grabbing their hand and leading them towards Sarah. Once there, he gently reaches for her hands as well, before pulling them both into a hug. At first he is supporting her, but gradually Habeeb collapses into Sarah.

Habeeb: (sobbing) I'm so sorry, honey. What do I need to do?

Habeeb falls to his knees at Sarah's feet as the scene freezes before Ryan and her. Sarah is still staring at Habeeb.

Sarah: Ya lak min 'ahmaq jamil¹⁷, habibi... Things got better for a while, at least.

Ryan: What do you mean?

Sarah: Jid¹⁸ found the balance. I didn't want to rob him of his joy, I just couldn't sacrifice mine- at least not yet.

(Sarah begins to walk as Habeeb is frozen)

He was a wonderful husband... You see it, even when it broke his heart, he listened. And it wasn't just that, he was the best

¹⁷ Ya lak min 'ahmaq jamil- You beautiful fool (Arabic)

¹⁸ Jid [jz-eh-don]- Grandpa (Arabic)

father. We already named our first born after him- it was my idea. What mother wouldn't want her son to be like, Habeeb?
(a beat)

Passionate, kind, and just. Was he too much of a dreamer? Perhaps, but I didn't cross the sea so my children would keep their feet in the sand. Our second son wanted to name after me, "Abraham..." He adored his father, and wouldn't stop following him around, asking him as many questions as he could about al-bilad. He even taught him Arabic, it was his eyes that allowed you to see all of this.

(Sarah gestures to the scene)

His name never sat right with me, saying it tasted like charleston chew- the instant it went from gum to paste in your mouth... It wasn't his fault, I don't know why I was so hard on him in comparison to the others.

Sarah stares at Ryan, but he feels the opposite of comfort- its pressure. Constant, uniform, crushing pressure. It only gets worse as Sarah gets closer, until she touches him- snapping him out of this trance.

Sarah: We had three more kids after that, Ruth, was our final child- our second daughter.

Sada runs out on stage and begins to play with Habeeb, now representing Ruth. The pair are very close and you can tell Ruth is having the time of her life.

Sarah: She was his favorite, the kids would never know it- but I did. She had the same joy in her eyes as him- and deep down I think he knew it. I could have watched them play in the front yard for eternity.

(a beat)

Which is what made the fact that it was only eleven years, all that much harder.

(Ryan looks over, unsure of what she means)

By '35 Habeeb's health had taken a turn for the worse.

Habeeb begins to cough mid-way through playing with Ruth and collapses to the floor. Ruth runs offstage to find an adult.

Sarah: He always had a cough, I attributed it to the stogies he couldn't give up. However, the tin mill Habeeb worked at was later subject to a lawsuit- it was a couple months after my passing; they found that over the mill's 60 years of operation, 60% of workers- past or present- had contracted Tuberculosis from fume inhalation.

(Sarah bends down to grip Habeeb's hand)
(to Ryan) The worst part was how much he loved that stupid job.
(to Habeeb) I told him to quit so many times, but he didn't want to leave his coworkers- his "friends". Why didn't you listen?

Habeeb: (Habeeb's hand squeezes Sarah's as he laughs) I'm sorry, habibti.

Sarah: Damya, no you're not.

Habeeb: You know me too well.

Habeeb goes to wipe a tear from Sarah's cheek. She moves away, but eventually obliges. Habeeb looks at Sarah and Ryan at this moment as Ruth comes back onstage and hugs Ryan's hip.

Habeeb: (to Ruth) Hi, honey- don't worry it's gonna be alright.
(to Ryan and Sarah) Promise me something, both of you?
(Ryan nods their head as Sarah closes their eyes)
(to Sarah) Sada-
(Sarah glares)
Don't lose your light, there is still so much to give.
(to Ryan)
Make sure Ommi never forgets, okay?
(Habeeb takes Ryan's hand)
Promise me.

Abraham/Ryan: I promise.

Habeeb: (to Sarah) Ana bahebek¹⁹, habibti... Ana... bahebe...

Sarah is silent as Habeeb's grip goes limp, Ruth begins to cry too many tears as Ryan holds her tight. After a moment, Ryan whispers something in her ear before pulling out a coin. Ruth runs offstage.

Ryan: (matter of fact) I'm not gonna ask if you're okay-

Ryan begins to hold their head as a searing pain rips through it. He then stands back up, but something is different.

Abraham/Ryan: Ommi²⁰?

¹⁹ Ana baheb(a/e)k- I love you (Arabic [Syrian])

²⁰ Ommi- Mom[my] (Arabic)

(Sarah sits up at the sound of this voice)
Madha sanafeal ala-

Sarah: English!
(a beat)
Please.

Abraham/Ryan: What are we going to do now?
(Sarah keeps her back turned to him as she walks)
Omm-

Sarah: English-

Abraham/Ryan: (abrupt) -fine, Mom!
(a beat)
Say something. Anything, please.

Sarah: What is left to say, *abn*²¹?

Sarah sits back down, leaving herself- and Abraham- to their respective griefs. Abraham begins holding his head as Ryan regains control. Ryan wants to help Sarah right now, but Abraham's trauma feels personal to him now, so he hesitates.

Sarah: He LEFT me, all alone. He promised me everything in life and only once did he lie... He promised he was gonna marry me, he promised he'd help build my home for me, he promised our children would be greater than I could ever imagine... but he also promised he'd never leave me alone... He was my *ealam* ("ah-lah-moon" [world]) and he left me all alone."

Ryan tries to reach out to Sarah, but she runs offstage. Now, it's just Ryan in Limbo- the void. Ryan waits for a moment before rushing to find an exit. We're still in Sarah's memory despite her leaving- this is not normal.

Ryan: Sarah. Sarah? Sarah!
(No response)
Fuck, fuck, fuck! What should I do? How do you even begin trying to escape someone else's memory?

Moses: Stop, habibi.

Ryan freezes in their tracks. As they turn around they see Moses (Sarah). She is significantly older, in her late 60's/early

²¹ *Abn*- Son (Arabic)

70's. Her outfit is loose and baggy, comfortable. She wears glasses and has her hair in a bun.

Ryan: Bubba?

Moses: (*laughing*) Your Bubba's bubba.

(*stumbles*)

Everything is fine. I'll get you out but give me a minute. I'm just... tired is all.

Ryan: (*Sarah's breathing is very heavy*) Sarah?

(*Sarah collapses into Ryan, who cradles her*)

Sarah, Sarah! Keep talking to me, what's wrong?

Moses: (*weak*) I just don't think I see the point of this anymore...

Ryan: What do you mean, what's the point? You're teaching me so much!

Moses: (*chuckling*) I'm glad, but no habibi- I mean this.

(*Sarah gestures to the wider limbo*)

What is the point of all this pain and suffering? All this *memory*, if it never ends? I can't keep doing this after you're gone, Ryan. I'm tired.

(*a beat*)

And even if there was something at the end of this "hellbow", you were right.

(*to Ryan*) All I ever managed to do with my life was pass on my pain, why would I deserve eternal happiness?

Ryan: Because you were right.

(*Sarah raises an eyebrow*)

Don't be a dick about it.

(*They both laugh*)

No, but really, for all your mistakes, you always held what was most important in mind.

Moses: What was that?

Ryan: Staying alive.

(*a beat*)

You lived. Every single one of us owes you everything.

Moses: Ryan, what I did-

Ryan: -What, it wasn't perfect, so what? I don't care, Sarah. You faced war and genocide before most kids face a bad report card. You completed a voyage that, 400 years ago, people would have assumed ended with you- being eaten by sea snakes! You built a new life- a new world- for yourself and your family halfway across the goddamn globe! An entire ocean away from the only life you'd ever briefly known. You're my goddamn hero, Sarah.

Moses: (*dismissive*) Ryan, after Habeeb died, I made too many mistakes to be anybody's hero. I failed his final wish, I lost my light. I failed to continue giving to my children, I did not teach them the language of their forefathers... I was a horrible grandmother.

Ryan: Respectfully, no you were not.

Moses: (*confused*) Yes, I was Ryan. I was there, I would know.

Ryan: And? So was I.

(*Sarah's now really confused*)

Okay, not really, but this is like the one period of your life I know about. Everyone in the family knows about Bubba's grandma Moses, she won't shut up about you.

Sarah doesn't know what to say as she sits up in shock. Ryan helps her to her feet as he tells her what they remember.

Scene 16

EXT. Moses (Supply Store); Washington, PA (Pittsburgh)

As they share memories, The Moses store slowly begins to build according to the memory plans that Ryan is laying out with each passing phrase. Shelves adorned with different groceries, building supplies, guns, etc. (if you could have bought it as a civilian in 1955- Sarah has it).

Ryan: We've all heard the stories of the days spent in Moses. The candy isles you'd stock fresh every chance you could get so Bubba and great Uncle Abe could always take a couple for free.

(*Sarah can't help but smile*)

Or how you would always put out fresh food for the neighborhood cats?

Moses: (*rolls her eyes*) I said I had given up, I wasn't heartless.

Ryan: They even remember before his death, that the one time they heard you speaking Arabic was after Grandpa had come home drunk from a wedding and he had fainted from the wine and you were shouting "gibberish"-

Moses: (*unamused*) -I was saying *The Lord's Prayer*?

Ryan: And sometimes Bubba said that Abe would lead her to the back cage where you kept the firearms, all just so you would chase them around the store with a broom!

Moses: I was so worried for those two, I thought they might have had some sick perversion with the things. Didn't they know they're dangerous?

Ryan: Yes, because you raised a good son, who told them- just like their *Aljada*. They just wanted to be with you, and when you were "too busy" they had to get creative.
(*Ryan playfully elbows Sarah's arm, she smiles- reluctantly*)
And that isn't even my favorite story that I ask Bubba to tell me...

Ryan looks up at Sarah, attempting to speak, but ultimately decides against it. Instead, he points behind Moses as Sarah B.- representing young Bubba, in her mid 20's- walks out onstage, with a child holding her hand.

Sarah Jr.: (to Moses) Grandma, this is your granddaughter, Monica.

Monica, played by Sada, hides behind her mother as Moses sneaks a peek at her grandchild. Bubba steps aside to encourage Monica to say hello, but she remains silent as Moses bends to greet her. The two stare at each other for a moment.

Moses: (to Monica) *Smallah*

Monica reaches out a hesitant hand that eventually squeezes Moses's nose before giggling and hiding behind her mom again.

Sarah Jr.: (laughing) What did you say, Grandma?

Moses begins to chase Monica around the store, making monster noises and wild arm movements. Monica runs away in joy, awaiting

the play that is in store. Sarah turns to her namesake, before running off to catch her grandchild.

Moses: She's perfect, praise be!

Sarah and Monica have an endearing game of tag for a bit before Monica runs offstage, soon followed by her mother. Sarah tries to go after them but finds herself suddenly very out of breath as she approaches going offstage. Ryan reinserts himself into the scene.

Ryan: I'm sorry that's as far as I've ever gotten in that story.
(a beat)
You really met my mom?

Moses: *(Sarah catches her breath before nodding her head)* Yes, only that one time unfortunately. Until now
(Ryan smiles)
How did you do that by the way?

Ryan: I just started thinking back on all the stories I was told, or at least how I remembered them. I also wanted something.

Moses: What?

Ryan: (a beat) Have you ever strip mined a mountain?

Moses: No. Have you?

Ryan: No, but my buddy Nick back home did. For a couple years there, that was how he'd spend his 9-5's. He told me all about it- it's a hell of an operation. One day, there's a mountain, minding its business- not bothering anybody. When, all of a sudden, an entire cliff of monolithic rock and stone is gone in a puff of smoke, gunpowder, and hellfire.

(snaps)

Just like that.

Moses: Oh...

Ryan: Yeah, and the mountain don't like it one bit. Its screaming and crying, shaking from the impact of the blast- whole things threatens to collapse at certain times.

Moses: So what happens next?

Ryan: The only thing miners can do when they're witness to such a force of nature, sit back and watch. If there's anything left standing when it's done, you go in and try to find what's worth keeping.

Moses: I think I meant the mountain.

Ryan: Not too many people ask that part of the question... I imagine, if I was the mountain, that I'd want to run someplace safe.

(to Sarah)

But I can imagine- with everything that's happened- that it's hard to even stand right now, let alone run.

(a beat)

Doesn't mean it's impossible though, nothing really is- it's just a matter of trying in the right way. Nobody has tried to move a mountain before, maybe all it'll need is a little push.

Moses: (smiles) That reminds me of something, something funny- how God was right AND wrong in the end.

(Ryan looks confused)

In the beginning, when God was truly alone- it seems to me that he put so much of the weight of the world on his shoulders that, by the time he showed Adam and Eve the garden, he had it in his head that the only thing stopping this entire world destruction was him. So he did what he thought was best. He hid the fruit of forbidden knowledge because he thought he knew best. He felt that he KNEW that consuming the fruit would destroy everything he had built. He was right of course- it did- but also it did not.

(a beat)

We destroyed the garden, that sucks- I've only heard good reviews; but was it truly a perfect paradise? I don't think so, we never seem to recognize how flawed it all was.

(Ryan raises an eyebrow)

Don't worry, He isn't listening... I think. Anyways, my mother always told me that "the garden [of Eden] was heaven. To be in the garden was to be an angel, fully swaddled in God's love."

(a beat)

I hated when she'd said that. She would always say it as she'd tucked me in at night- I knew it was coming, I dreaded it. I swear, I could feel my bones fusing, the way my legs and arms were always too hot, and itchy- pain, I was in pain. All the while, my mother would stand there, smiling. Do you want to know why?

(Ryan nods)

She thought she knew me, better than I knew myself. She was playing God and wanted her tribute. She wasn't curious to what I wanted- she knew best; and, she did at times, just not nearly as much as she thought she did.

(chuckling)

Now, all I have left to me is the sick feeling I'd get watching my own mother smile.

(to Ryan) I'm so sorry I tried to play God with you, Ryan. But thank you for being my Adam. I didn't think I had much left to learn.

Ryan: *(smiles w/ tears)* Thank you.

Moses: For what?

Ryan: For still fighting. All of this pain, and torment, this struggle... It still has a chance to mean something in the end.

The pair embrace. Sarah steps back after a moment

Moses: Alright, that's enough emotion! I know we technically do have eternity here, but let's get you back- the family has to be worried sick.

Ryan: Oh yeah, shoot...

Ryan and Sarah are silent for a second before locking eyes in panic.

BOTH: *(Ryan and Sarah both lock eyes)* BISMILLAH, PHIL(LIP)!

Ryan: Okay, yeah I got to go.

Moses: *(Ryan begins to search for an exit sign until Sarah stops them)* Before you go, what are you going to do next, after this?

Ryan: I, honestly, don't know. Maybe it's time see the world- might be time to look for a new home?

Moses: Wait, what!?

(a beat)

Oh, Ryan, that's not today's takeaway-

Ryan: I know- I hate it as much as you do. But listen, I mean really listen to the words they're saying- it's horrifying.
(Moses can't help but agree)

And they've been talking for centuries. Look, I was scared my American Dream might be over, but you showed me that I can still wake up- there's a whole world out there just ready and waiting to be explored.

Moses: (*Sarah smiles, but it doesn't last*) I'm just scared, habibi- if you leave what does that make all of my work for?

Ryan: (*a beat*) I don't know, but I'm not going to throw away the mountain, Sarah, not while we still have a chance to save it. This country, its opportunities, its freedoms- they're a landscape. A backdrop for ideas. If people don't like that environment anymore, that's fine- we don't have to like them, or what they're becoming. So we'll give it a push- just like you did.

Moses: Ryan, it's not that simple-

Ryan: -Nothing ever worth doing is, but that doesn't make it impossible, Sarah. We just have to take this one step at a time.

Moses: This?

Ryan: The journey. Our family's journey, the one that has been ongoing for a while, but we'll see it to the end.

(*a beat*)

We're going to move that mountain, Sarah- I promise.

Lights and sound begin to flash and blare as the whole space begins to shake. Before this ritual can finish Ryan stops Sarah one last time.

Ryan: Wait!

(*guilty*)

I don't want to leave you here all alone again.

Moses: (*Sarah smiles before touching Ryan's cheek*) Ryan, for one second, stop worrying about us and just live *your* life.

Ryan: I can't do that. Not if I don't know you're going to be okay.

Moses: (*a beat*) Hey, that is my job... but I promise you, I will be fine.

Ryan: When will you find out?

Moses: That's up to me, but I'll let you know.

Moses winks and laughs as Ryan rolls their eyes, ending with a sincere smile being shared between the pair. Ryan and Sarah both resign themselves to the darkness as the lights go out.

Scene 17

EXT. FOREST (OUTSIDE THE PARK)

We return to the forest once more, with nothing having changed a bit- it's as if Ryan never left. Ryan comes back onstage, and they are now standing across from Cousin Phil.

Phil: Where have you been?

Ryan: Someplace wonderful.

Lights dim and the pair head offstage as we return to...

Sc. 18 [Epilogue]

EXT. LIMBO (White Void)

Sarah B. is simply sitting in quiet contemplation, center-stage, she begins to hear rustling- from just offstage. She gets up to begin checking the root cause, but before she knows it- out walks Habeeb.

Moses: Ana bahebak, habibi! What are you doing here?

Habeeb: Ana bahebek, habibti... What are you talking about? I've been looking everywhere for you after they told me you had arrived- by the way I lost my watch, how long has it been?

Moses: *(astounded)* 57 years...

Habeeb: Oh, wow, okay... Do you mind if we do a little walk & talk on the way back? I told everyone I'd just be a minute... 57 years ago, so I can't imagine they're anything but pissed right now.

Moses: *(Sarah smiles, jumping on Habeeb's back)* Wait, who's everyone?

Habeeb: We've all been waiting for you, habibti. Home hasn't been the same without you.

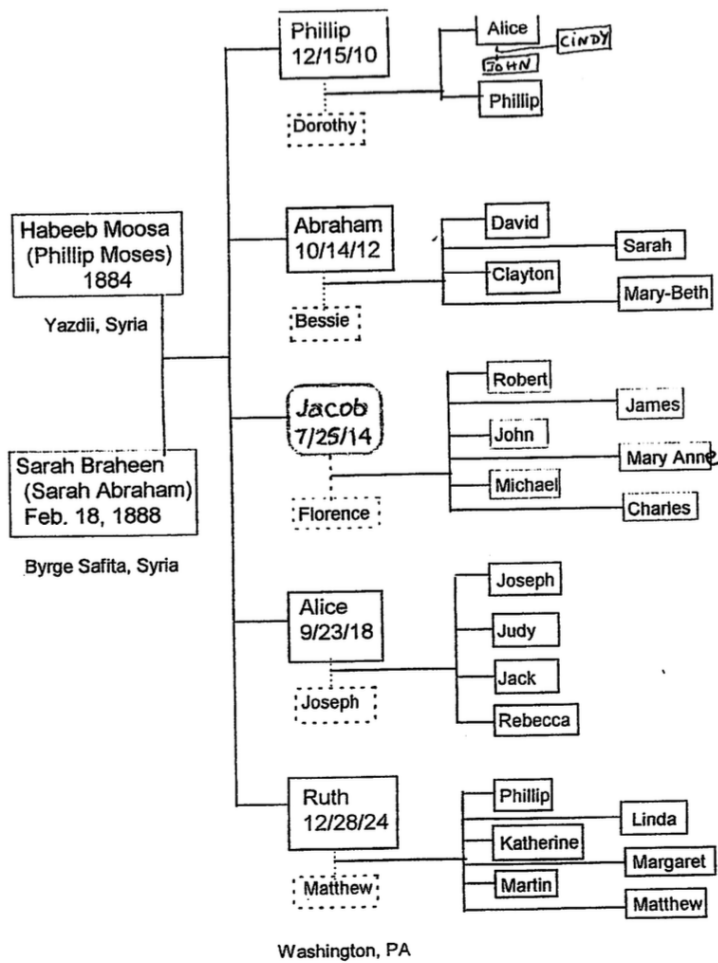
The End.

Your Best American Girl by Mitski plays over bows

World Building Tools/Early Drafts & Outlines

Moses Family Tree

SARAH FAMILY TREE
Moses Family Tree



Notes from Cousin Michael

The Safita area is in the heart of the Valley of the Christians, and mainly, if not 100%, would be Syrian Orthodox Christians, with the St. George Monastery being the main religious base there.

If your ancestor was Habib Musa al Turkmani, that means his FATHER was Musa al Turkmani. Every Syria child, whether female or male, carries their father FIRST name as their own MIDDLE name. This naming tradition makes it easy to identify the father.

TURKMANI refers to an ethnic group originally from Turkmenistan, in Central Asia, near China. They are all Muslims. They speak the language TURKIC, which is the root of the modern Turkish language. They are Asians, and not Arabs ethnically.

Map of Safita



Potential Lines or Scenes

Lines:

Ryan

- "Then show me... I'm literally talking to my dead great, great, grandmother right now- don't act like I'm asking for a miracle!"
- "Great! WE SURVIVED! Thank you... *now what?*"
- "I'll find my own way home! I've done it without you before, what'll be so difficult this time around?"
- "TIME OUT! (*time stops*) Al-Hamdulillahi I hated this part of Back to the Future"
- "Look, I don't know how ANY of this works, but I don't think the man we saw today would have dreamed of leaving you behind if he could help it."
- "Oh, *Aljada* (aljadatoo [Grandma]) you were *never* searching alone *hugging Sara/Sada"
- "Nothing. I'm just- I'm just really glad you're all here."

Sada

- "I see bits and pieces. Usually the big stuff: Weddings, christenings, I was there when you were born."
- "I still remember the feeling at the front of that ship as I'd sneak out of the passenger hold to see the night sky... I made a promise to myself at that moment, alone, scared, and soaked atop the deck of that ship."
- (to audience) "Free to go ANYWHERE in that wonderful city, without fear of sectarian violence or governmental abuse. I learned there and then that the Europeans could be much more benevolent than the Turks..."
- "(to Ryan) And the WOMEN, they were so BEAUTIFUL! Made up, perfumed, and while not primed to perfection And not a hijab or head covering in site, unlike Al-bilad, which seemed to hate us for even existing... These woman were FREE."
- "There is no such thing as factual when it comes to a story. And I KNOW you know this, but history is just that: a story, OUR story. So who cares if they weren't "genetically" "ours"? How much of my genetics do we still even share? 1/4th?
 - [Me (*begrudgingly*): an eighth]

- The important thing is that their- OUR story reminds us of that eternal truth.
- [Me (*begrudgingly*): What? (A beat) What is it?]
- That people- just like you & I- are capable of the most incredible things."
- "No, no, no. There is no AFTER this for me, I stay here and watch over all of YOU."
- "*Jd* (jzedon [grandpapa]) was a fickle- "free spirit." He saw too much out there to ever settle for the likes of us."
- "My name? My "NAME" to you is NOTHING! You don't even know if I'm REAL. How much do you want to bet that you're bleeding out on the concrete back at the reunion? That this is all some grand hallucination so that you come to grips with YOUR death? Because I'll tell you what- the chance isn't zero. So don't pretend you know me or MY name when the truth is you know nothing *wulid* (*wulada* [boy])"
- "He LEFT me, all alone. He promised me everything in life and only once did he lie... He promised he was gonna marry me, he promised he'd help build my home for me, he promised our children would be greater than I could ever imagine... but he also promised he'd never leave me alone... He was my *ealam* (alamun [world]) and he left me alone."
- "So why isn't he here!? Why would the man I loved leave me to search for all these answers, alone."
- "I still remember the feeling at the front of that ship as I'd sneak out of the passenger hold to see the night sky... I made a promise to myself at that moment, alone, scared, and soaked atop the deck of that ship."

Scenes:

- "On one occasion, Phillip came home after having drunk some wine, most likely at a wedding or social gathering. When he walked past the coal stove in the kitchen, the combination of the heat and the wine caused him to pass out. Grandma thought he had a heart attack, and called a doctor. According to Aunt Alice, Grandma was telling him she loved him in Syrian and was quite upset. When the doctor arrived and explained to Grandma that Phillip was not ill and just had a bit too much to drink, Grandma changed her tune and began using other choice Syrian words."
 - Michael Moses

Early Character Outlines:

Characters:

Great Great Grandmother: Sada Abud (Sarah Abraham) (~1880-1968) (*1896)

- Family had her leave Damascus at 12-20y/o to join her brother, Dave in America (1910)
 - Stopped in Paris to surprise her older sister Helen by buying nice Parisian clothes
 - Never returned physically, but sent money home
- Presbyterian
- Landed at Ellis Island
 - Unknown reason for initial exodus (ask Michael about clarification about Brothers)
- Opened Grocery store in Washington, PA
 - Great, serious business mind
 - "A man came into the store and bought a can of soup, of which he ate a part, then, refused to pay for. Sada wouldn't let the man leave without paying, even though he pulled a weapon on her."
 - "Sada happened to learn of a farmer who was trying desperately to get rid of several goats for which he had no use. Grandma took them off his hands, and hauled them in a truck to the Italian neighborhood, where they sold out quickly, making Grandma a nice profit."
 - "open 7 days a week, from 6:00 A.M. to Midnight, every day of the year, except Christmas."
 - "sat in a high-back chair behind the cash register, and was extremely sharp about all business transactions."
 - Lived in an apartment above the store with her and Habib's family
 - Ran it for 33 with the help of her children Mose and Abe after Habib passed
- No formal education
 - Couldn't read or write English
- Serious demeanor
 - Didn't have a birthday until her kids determined it was Valentine's Day
 - Saved every penny she ever had
 - Never spent anything on herself
- She planted fresh plants and produce for consumption
- Controlling (prolly stemming from Anxiety)
 - Didn't want her children and grandchildren to speak Arabic
- Sweetest grandmother
 - Stricter mother
- Extended credit at her store for clients (new innovation in the area)

Great Great Grandfather: Habib Mousa Turkmani (Phillip Moses) (1880-1935)

- Mother died after his birth
 - Father enlisted other family members to raise Habib
 - Raised by his aunt Umte Nuzha
- Greek orthodox
 - Took kids to Greek Orthodox Church
- Emigrated in 1910 to Pittsburgh
- Worked with David in the Pittsburgh mill
 - Phillip is said to have remarked, when he first saw Grandma, that he was going to marry her, a comment which Dave did not take kindly to.
- Worked in the tin mills as a pickler,
 - involved rather dangerous work
 - "dipping hot tin in sulfuric acid to remove impurities"
 - Unknown whether his respiratory issues were present beforehand, but no doubt as to if they were present afterwards (had to quit eventually)
- Opened Grocery store
 - Peddled goods with Sada to save up enough money to buy the grocery store
- Community leader
 - Republican ward committeeman
 - Wholesale market haggler
 - Court interpreter
 - Taught his son [Abraham] how to read and translate Arabic
 - Popular at weddings
 - "A woman, Hazel Anderson, who frequented the store, said the party really never started until Phillip got there."
- Extrovert
 - Played the Oudt (Recorder)
 - Rumored he was a pretty good singer too
 - Danced the dabke (Syrian circle dance)
 - Great fisherman & hunter
 - "[Habib] would sneak off to the \$0.05 movies with some of the kids,"
 - "[Habib] invited the hobos who hopped off the train into the store to warm themselves in the winter."
 - "not well-received by Grandma, who was more serious about the business."
- Liked his Italian cigars
 - when Grandma found them, she would immediately throw them out the window.
 - But their affection for their children and each other was strong and deep.
- Passed away from Tuberculosis in 1935 at age 50

Early Plot Outline [Unfinished]

Plot Outline:

Given Circumstance:

Setting: 2024 Rural PA/OH

- Ryan (18): Recent HS graduate & Syrian American whose cultural identity has been hid from them their entire life (until 6 months ago over Christmas dinner).
- Phil: Ryan's cousin they met after reaching out through Facebook. Tried to compile the Moses family history, but realized the record stopped after their great aunt Sara Moses.
- Sada/Sara B./Sara M.: The three different forms of Ryan's great-great grandmother. All represent the different people Sada has become throughout her life in an effort to conform and assimilate to American life. Still grieving the premature death of her husband Habeeb, Sada cannot move on from Limbo without grappling with the totality of her life- her legacy, the good and the bad.

Plot

Act 1

- Moses Family Reunion
- Ryan & Phil talk about the recent summer and discovering that Ryan is Syrian
- Phil says it's been fun, but Ryan needs to stop & move on
- Ryan is taken aback/betrayed by his cousin's change in mindset and eventually runs away from the reunion in response.
- While running Ryan is transported into Limbo by Sada who explains the rules of this new place to Ryan/ audience
- Sada admits she know why Ryan ran away. She claims she can only see big moments, but that was one of them. Finally she offers to show the history of the Moses
- Ryan agrees and is taken through a very sanitized and Pro-American version of Sada's immigration narrative.
- Ryan then raises some concerns with the counterfactual nature of her story before Sada reveals that this version, the version for "Real Americans" is the way their story NEEDS to be.
- Ryan is confused as to what Sada is still afraid of. She then reveals that she knows about Ryan & Phil's recent research- and it's scaring her. It is revealed that the FBI feels the same way. That's why they recently flagged Ryan's computer (If they flag it two more time Ryan could face a raid or detaining from the Feds).
- Ryan is horrified, but then asks about cousin Phil's status with the Burea and Sada reveals that this recent flagging on both Ryan and Phil's computers is Phil's 3rd strike and he will be arrested to be detained for questions later that afternoon. And that Ryan will drown in a flash flood if no one finds his real world body soon.
- Ryan wonders internally how Sara knows all this if she can only view "the important stuff" before putting together that Sara is lying about how much she is letting on.
- Sada indirectly exposes herself by explaining how time is laid out before her each day so she knows exactly what is going to happen that exact day.
- Ryan then asks why they can't fast forward to see if someone finds their body before the River floods

- Habeeb: Sada's husband and soulmate. His personality is one of hope, joy, and quiet determinism. He was a beacon of community and a wonderful father. He enjoys a good party and an accompanying wine. His life as a republican ward committeeman and steel mill pickler led to an early grave.
- Bubba (Sarah): Ryan's living grandmother. Ryan's one connection with his mother's family before connecting with Phil. She is caring, compassionate, and patient- always wanting to do right by Ryan and the family. It killed her not to share her family with Ryan, but their mother said she cannot.

- Sada reveals that Ryan is the first person to ever make it here while alive, so it would tear his body apart most likely.
- Ryan confronts Sada's deceit with knowledge he's acquired in Sunday school about saints and purgatory. Sada tells him to be careful what he wishes for.
- Ryan is then taken to Byrge Safita one last time where they witness a Druze-Maronite massacre
- Ryan asks why they were shown this. Sada says if they wanted the truth, here it is. The truth is prosperity is finite and if left unprotected the world will pick it to the bone like the vultures we are.
- Ryan asks her what makes them so qualified to inherit prosperity? Sada responds she isn't, but she was given it and won't spit in fortunes face fore the sake of moral superiority.
- Ryan says he doesn't spit in the face of his privilege by asking why prosperity is limited to so few
- Sada refers to the previous scene of murder in the streets. "That is why. They will take it & consume until the only thing left is each other."
- Ryan absorbs this before calling Sada a coward for failing to be brave for their family, and their own personal, sake. They lost so much in order to live, but "what is life when all the rest has gone."
- Ryan then leaves Sada to find a way out of Limbo/ Purgatory alone.

Act 2

Pictures

Habeeb [Phillip] Musa [Moses], & Alice Moses in *Moses* (Family Store)



Sada Braheim w/ her parents the last time before leaving Safita



Sarah & Phillip Moses on their wedding day



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