

Plays for Young Audiences

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Iqbal

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-I-

Darkness. Spotlight on Fatima. She stands beside a filthy pulled curtain. She speaks to the audience.

FATIMA

When I was little. I used to wonder. About dreams. Where they came from.

Lights rise on five other children. They stand in a line on the other side of the pulled curtain. MARIA [age 8] is first, an anxious MOHAMMED [age 11] second, followed by ALI [age 13], TWIG [age 10] arm in a sling, and finally SALMAN [age 14].

FATIMA

My grandmother told me that they came from heaven, falling to earth when we called them.

ALI

Last night I dreamt I was an elephant.

FATIMA

But the dreams we call, are not always the ones that arrive.

ALI

A huge elephant.

MOHAMMED, who speaks with a stammer, twists his legs, holding himself. He really has to pee.

MOHOMMED

W-what is taking her so long? I have to pee!

ALI

FATIMA

(to audience) Still, what's worse, she would say, is to receive no dreams at all.

Behind FATIMA, a tiny window slowly comes into view. A single metal bar rests in

*the middle. Past it you can just see open sky
and the branches of an almond tree.*

FATIMA

Of course, I haven't seen my grandmother, my entire family, since I was eight years old. *(pause.)* I am now eleven.

FATIMA

I haven't dreamed in months.

FATIMA turns around. She looks up at the window.

ALI

There were these men. They want my tusks. But I stomp free. And I'm about to get away when...

SALMAN

Let me guess.

All eyes turn to SALMAN.

SALMAN

When you're stopped by the edge a cliff, overlooking the ocean. You're trapped.

As SALMAN speaks, FATIMA reaches up to the window, but it's just out of her reach. She eventually gives up.

SALMAN

So you jump. Right into the sea. And you swim, like no elephant should. Because you're not an elephant. Not anymore. He's a great white whale, the size of a hundred elephants, swimming free. Into the sunset.

Pause.

SALMAN

I told that dream two weeks ago. You stole it.

ALI

I didn't steal anything. I just...borrowed yours.

MOHAMMED

That's it! I'm coming in w-whether you like it or not!

Enter KARIM [17]

KARIM

What's going on in here?

MOHAMMED

Fatima.

KARIM

(storms over to the curtain.) Enough's enough, Princess.

FATIMA

Just a few more seconds.

KARIM

We've heard that before. Out.

The curtain creeps open. FATIMA steps out. MOHAMMED bursts forward, shoving the mousy Maria aside, almost knocking her down.

FATIMA

Who do you think you are? Pushing her like that? Don't just stand there, Karim, tell him.

KARIM

Obey the line, Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

But I'm in p-pain.

SALMAN

Suck it up, you b-big baby.

MOHAMMED steps aside. FATIMA kneels down to MARIA. MARIA buries herself in the folds of FATIMA's dress.

FATIMA

(soft.) You can go in now, Maria.

MARIA

(shakes her head “no”)

FATIMA

You don't want to?

MARIA

(“no.”)

FATIMA

Are you sure?

MOHAMMED

Who cares! Out of the way!

MOHAMMED throws open the curtain. A cowbell rings.

MOHAMMED

(horrified,) WHAT? NO!

KARIM

You heard the mistress. Back to work.

MOHAMMED

(Squirming) You have to let me go first.

KARIM

Fifteen minutes. Not a second more. Rules are rules.

MOHAMMED

(to FATIMA) See what you did.

FATIMA

It wasn't Mohammed's fault, it was mine. Just let him go. We won't tell Khan.

KARIM

What's to tell? He'll do as told.

FATIMA

What if we work extra hard? And when the master returns, we'll tell him it was all because of you. You and your... leadership.

SALMAN

His what?

FATIMA

Even if they won't say, I will. Please?

KARIM

(pause.) Fine, Mohammed, go. But just Mohammed.

MOHAMMED dashes in. The other children return to their looms. KARIM pulls FATIMA aside. MARIA follows.

KARIM

Did you really mean it? That you will tell the Master what a good leader I am?

FATIMA

I said I would.

KARIM

Very good. But when you do, say something like this: "Not only does Karim lead. But does so with an iron hand...no *fist*...say fist." Can you remember that?

FATIMA

Very well.

KARIM

And remember to look scared when you say it.

FATIMA

I'll do my best.

KARIM

(re:MARIA) And take her with you. Maybe even get her to cry. Like she was even more scared of me than you.

FATIMA

You leave her be. Or I won't say anything at all.

KARIM

No, Fatima, you must. *(lowers voice)* I need this. Remember last night? How angry he was?

FATIMA

Did he do that to you? (*points*) The bruises? On your arm?

KARIM

I'm not like the rest of you. I've earned my place. I just need you to remind him, that's all.

Refreshed, MOHAMMED throws open the curtain. He notices FATIMA, KARIM, and MARIA.

KARIM

(*to MOHAMMED*) What are you staring at? Onward, Slug!

HUSSAIN KHAN'S WIFE is heard calling.

MISTRESS HUSSEIN

KARIM! (*clap, clap*) COME, BOY!

KARIM

COMING!

FATIMA and MARIA follow MOHAMMED towards the looms. KARIM quick whispers to FATIMA.

KARIM

So, we agree, Fatima? Iron fist?

FATIMA nods. KARIM exits.

MOHAMMED

What was that about?

FATIMA

What it's always about. (*short pause.*) Work. He wants us to work.

A couple of dogs are heard barking loudly.

All the children dutifully go back to work. Enter HUSSAIN KHAN, a sizable man. He is flanked by KARIM and a BOY, twelve or so, we haven't met yet. HUSSAIN KHAN ushers the new arrival to an empty loom.

HUSSAIN KHAN

(to the BOY) This is your loom. This is your pattern.

HUSSAIN KAHN retrieves a slate and some chalk, begins to write.

HUSSAIN KHAN

This is your slate. Do you understand?

The BOY nods. HUSSAIN KHAN begins to draw a series of lines.

HUSSAIN KHAN

This is your debt. Every line is a rupee. I'll give you a rupee for every day you work. Every day at sunset, if your work is good, I'll erase one line. If the work is not, I *add* a line. When all lines are erased, you'll be free. How soon that happens is up to you.

HUSSAIN KHAN motions to KARIM. KARIM latches the rusty shackle onto the BOY's ankle. The BOY immediately starts to work. HUSSAIN KHAN begins to exit. KARIM nudges FATIMA towards KHAN.

FATIMA

(timid.) Sir?

HUSSAIN KHAN turns to FATIMA

FATIMA

Just wanted to say we...we worked hard today. And it was all because of Karim.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Karim?

FATIMA

It is always because of him that we work so hard. For you. Because he leads us with a...with an iron fist. That is all I wanted to say.

HUSSAIN KHAN shoots KARIM a disapproving look. KARIM hangs his head. HUSSAIN KHAN looks at rest of the children.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Let's take a look then, eh? See how the great Karim has led you today.

*HUSSAIN KHAN looks over the looms,
beginning with ALI.*

HUSSAIN KHAN

I see what you mean. Some of you have made real progress.

Rubs his fingers over the threads.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Not hard to do, when the work is so sloppy.

*HUSSAIN KHAN takes his chalk, and adds a
single line to each of the children's slate.*

HUSSAIN KHAN

(to the children) You will refrain from speaking to the new boy. Not a word, not even a glance.

*HUSSAIN KHAN stares the children down.
He turns to KARIM*

HUSSAIN KHAN

Karim. Follow me.

*HUSSAIN KHAN exits. A frightened
KARIM just stands there, not yet ready to
follow. FATIMA matches eyes with KARIM.*

FATIMA

(soft) I tried, Karim.

KARIM

I know you did.

Silence. Then...

HUSSAIN KHAN (O.S.)

(fierce.) NOW!!!!

BLACKOUT.

*An eruption of TELEVISED APPLAUSE.
In the dark we hear the applause define
itself as a sporting event. The voice of*

PAKISTANI ANNOUNCER comments on a
CRICKET MATCH in progress.

The voice of HUSSAIN KHAN angrily
shouts at the screen.

II

A dim light slowly rises on the children.

The BOY sits alone on one side of the room,
his foot still chained.
The rest of the children sit on their pallets,
listening to the ruckus their master is
making.

ALI

(*re: KHAN*) What's he watching?

KARIM

It's a cricket match.

Interested, the BOY stiffens.

ALI

Who's playing?

MOHAMMED

What do you know about cricket?

ALI

I'll show you. Twig, gimme your broom.

ALI grabs the broom.

FATIMA

You two shouldn't play around. You'll make too much noise.

ALI

Don't worry. Mohammed won't hit a single ball.

ALI and MOHAMMED step to the side.
They set up a makeshift wicket and begin to

play. ALI bowls to MOHAMMED who swings and misses.

ALI

See? (to FATIMA) Now toss back the ball!

BOY

(jumping to his feet.) Wait!

The BOY stands frozen, listening intently. The Children watch him, unsure.

BOY

(suddenly beaming). Aamir Sohail? Saeed Anwar? It's Pakistan! Pakistan is playing!

The BOY moves closer to the sound of the game, tries to get a better read on the details.

BOY

And now hear... Yes, it's Srinath. Anil Kumble. It's India. *(to the Children.)* It's Pakistan versus India!

Nothing.

BOY

It's Pakistan versus India! *(listens)* And Pakistan is winning.

The BOY is so immersed in the game he forgets his foot is chained. It's pulled taut, stopping him. Still he listens on, enthralled.

As the BOY listens. The children congregate away from strange boy. MOHAMMED and ALI continue their game, as all quietly discuss...

MOHAMMED

Where did he come from?

SALMAN

I want to know what the shackle's for. Maybe he's a numskull.

TWIG

What's a numskull?

SALMAN

You're a numskull.

TWIG

Seriously, I want to know.

SALMAN

At the brick factory. The slow workers. Chaining them was the only way to keep them focused.

ALI

I was watching him work. He's fast.

TWIG

Real fast. That was my loom. What if I'm being replaced?

MOHAMMED

What if we're all being replaced?

SALMAN

Karim, what did Khan tell you?

KARIM

That's between me and my Master.

SALMAN

(re: IQBAL) Maybe we should ask him.

KARIM

Master Khan made himself very clear. No one is to talk to the new boy. I've given you fair warning.

SALMAN

Is that supposed to scare me?

KARIM

Are you telling me you're man enough to defy the Master's hand.

ALI

Well, if we want answers, somebody has to be man enough.

FATIMA rises. She walks over to the mysterious BOY as the rest watch.

What's your name? FATIMA

Iqbal. Iqbal Masih. IQBAL

Iqbal. Well, my name is – FATIMA

Fatima, right? And you're Ali. Salman. Karim. Twig. Mohammed.
(*pause.*) (*points*) It's your feet. IQBAL

What? MOHAMMED

It's why you keep missing the ball. Your feet. Spread them a part. Like Azhar Mahmood. IQBAL

IQBAL shows them.

He's one of the best batsmen around. IQBAL

Unsure, MOHAMMED just stands there.

At least give it a try. What do you have to lose? IQBAL

MOHAMMED gives it a second. Then gives a new stance a try. He nods to ALI.

ALI bowls. MOHAMMED swings and connects. The ball flies knocks into a pair of plastic buckets, banging them against another. The children freeze and listen...

HUSSAIN KHAN bursts into robust laughter in the distance. A collected sigh of relief.

MOHAMMED

Th-That was close.

FATIMA

Someone should stand guard.

SALMAN

Twig, go stand guard.

TWIG

Why me?

SALMAN

You're the skinniest. You make the least noise when you move. Now go.

*TWIG complies, listens at the door.
SALMAN looks to IQBAL.*

SALMAN

So, let's hear it, new boy. What's your story?

IQBAL

I was brought here to work. Same as you.

FATIMA

How old are you?

IQBAL

Twelve maybe. It's hard to know for sure.

FATIMA

How long have you been working?

IQBAL

I was sold two or three summers ago. (*Pause.*) My father is a good man. Really, he is. He never cursed. Not once. Even when my brother got worse.

FATIMA

Your brother was sick?

IQBAL

(nodding) One day a doctor finally arrived with medicine that could make him better. Only he wasn't alone. There was another man.

SALMAN

Let me guess. Well dressed. Wealthy.

IQBAL

He pulled some money out from his belt.

FATIMA

For the medicine.

IQBAL

And enough to survive until next Harvest.

SALMAN

Your father took it, of course.

IQBAL

(shaking his head.) He refused.

FATIMA

But what about your brother?

IQBAL

He didn't get better. We lost my sister the year before. So, one morning he told me. Our family would be in debt. And I would have to help to pay it off.

The televised sound of an ERUPTING CROWD. We hear HUSSAIN KHAN cheer in celebration. The Children wait for him to settle.

FATIMA

After the flood, we lost everything. A week later I was brought here.

KARIM

Thank the stars you were. The both of you. You could do much worse.

SALMAN

Enough boot licking, Karim.

KARIM

You should know, Salman. What other Masters are capable of.

SALMAN

(angry) Not another word about that.

KARIM

Very well, you tell it. Tell us what it was like at the brick kiln.

SALMAN says nothing.

KARIM

See there? Even the mighty Salman can't argue. We owe our lives to the man. *(to IQBAL)* As long as you know your place, you'll do fine. Play by the rules. Your debt will be a thing of the past.

But the debt is never paid.

FATIMA

What did you just say?

IQBAL

Didn't you know? The debt is never erased. No matter what you do.

MARIA takes hold of FATIMA's hand.

KARIM

The Master is a man of his word, I assure you.

FATIMA

Once he erases the lines, we go home. That's how it works.

IQBAL

(to SALMAN) Is that how it worked at the Brick kiln?

SALMAN

We had to make a thousand bricks a day but we got one hundred rupees for that thousand.

IQBAL

Was the debt paid?

SALMAN

Some days it was too rainy. Sometimes the clay was too sandy.

IQBAL

Have you ever seen anyone pay it off? Ever?

They can't answer. Suddenly, a small whistle from TWIG. The children all scurry back to their pallets and feign sleep. IQBAL doesn't move. The door is flung open. HUSSAIN KAHN enters.

HUSSAIN KHAN

What's this I hear?

HUSSAIN KHAN scans the room. He sees all the children laying still, except for IQBAL.

HUSSAIN KHAN

I know I heard more than one voice.

IQBAL says nothing.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Talking to yourself, were you?

Again nothing.

HUSSAIN KHAN

When the Master says eat. You eat. When the Master says speak. You speak. And when the Master says sleep...

IQBAL remains stone-faced. HUSSAIN KHAN approaches him. Concerned, FATIMA quietly raises her head to look.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Maybe I take the back of my hand. Close your eyes for you?

IQBAL remains still. HUSSAIN KHAN smiles.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Enjoy it, young one. You'll break soon enough.

HUSSAIN KHAN turns to go. FATIMA retreats her head back to the pallet. HUSSAIN KAHN exits. IQBAL finally exhales. BLACKOUT.

- III -

Lights rise. Later that night.

IQBAL sleeps sitting up. FATIMA is on her pallet, perched up on her elbows watching.

IQBAL's limp body starts drift to one side. FATIMA slinks over. She carefully reaches out and steadies him.

She starts to return but IQBAL slowly starts to drift the other way. FATIMA rights him again.

She backs away, only to have IQBAL drift yet again. FATIMA reaches out, when –

IQBAL

Boo!

FATIMA clutches her chest, startled. IQBAL chuckles.

FATIMA

That wasn't funny.

IQBAL

I'm sorry. I couldn't help it.

FATIMA

I was trying to help you. See if I make that mistake again.

IQBAL

No, I'm glad you did. You really saved me.

FATIMA

You were never asleep. You were just faking.

IQBAL

Only the last time. And the time before that. But the first time...

FATIMA is not amused.

IQBAL

I'm sorry. I thank you.

FATIMA

Why would you say that?

IQBAL

I should know better. You were being kind and I made a stupid joke.

FATIMA

Why would you tell us we would never go home?

IQBAL

Say again?

FATIMA

Earlier tonight. You said we could never leave this place. You said we were trapped here.

IQBAL

I never said that.

FATIMA

Didn't you say we would never pay off our debt?

IQBAL

That doesn't mean you can't leave. It's not stopping me.

FATIMA

I don't understand.

IQBAL
(whispers) Fatima, can you keep a secret?

IQBAL waves her in closer.

IQBAL
Come closer.

FATIMA
More jokes?

IQBAL
No jokes. This is serious.

FATIMA draws herself closer.

IQBAL
(whispers.) I'm going to escape.

FATIMA
(loud.) Escape?

IQBAL
Shh. Yes. One day Khan will sell me anyway. I'm going to save him the trouble.

FATIMA
You're crazy. Khan would never allow it.

IQBAL
Men like Khan may seem powerful, but deep down, their souls are weak. That's what my father keeps telling me.

FATIMA
You still see your father?

IQBAL
In my mind. There I see him all the time.

FATIMA
You remember his face?

IQBAL

I remember everything about him. Him getting up before dawn. Going to the stream to wash. Walking to the stable, his hair still wet.

FATIMA

Sometimes, if I try hard enough, I can remember the sweet laddu my mother made. But her face....after awhile, there' just so much you forget.

IQBAL

Not me. I remember everything. Everything that's ever happened to me. The first time I ever saw a bus. The crazy American music my first master played. It would thump.

FATIMA

Thump?

IQBAL

Like this.

IQBAL imitates the beat, which sounds a lot like bad techno.

IQBAL

We'd dance at our looms.

*IQBAL dances a little, as he "thumps."
FATIMA laughs.*

IQBAL

But the Master put a stop to that. Like so many things.

FATIMA

Was he bad to you?

IQBAL

No worse than the others. At least he fed us. I remember the smell of spicy mutton he gave us twice a week. And of course beatings he gave us twice a day.

FATIMA

That's awful. Why remember that?

IQBAL

If I forget, it's like I was never here. If I don't remember me, who will?

Short pause.

IQBAL

Anyway, I won't have to deal with Masters of any kind much longer.

FATIMA

Why not?

IQBAL makes a gesture with his hands, a bird flying away.

FATIMA

Right. I forgot. Your big escape.

IQBAL

I never said it would be big. Just soon.

Pause.

FATIMA

The chain. You've tried it before, haven't you? Escaping.

IQBAL

Khan can use a thousand chains. I won't be stopped this time.

FATIMA

What makes you think this time will be any different?

IQBAL

Because it has to be. *(short pause.)* It will be.

Pause.

FATIMA

Can you at least tell me when this escape of yours is supposed to happen?

IQBAL

Trust me, Fatima. In here *(a point to his head.)* it's already begun.

Lights fade

- IV -

Lights rise on the children at work. Sweaty and exhausted. SALMAN takes a moment to wipe off his brow.

KARIM

No time for any of that, Salman.

SALMAN

How much faster can we go in this heat? *(flicks a handful of sweat at KARIM)* See that? I'm melting.

KARIM

All morning with this whining. What's gotten into you?

MOHAMMED

The sun. This summer's been the worst.

TWIG

Even worse than last summer.

KARIM

What do you know about it, Twig? You weren't even here yet.

TWIG

It was hot where I was, too.

KARIM

And where was that?

TWIG

C'mon. Don't make me say it.

KARIM

How about you show us then? Here -- *(knocks over a waste basket)* Get to it.

FATIMA

Stop picking on him.

KARIM

It's only right to pick on a picker.

TWIG

I'm not a Garbage picker anymore.

They're stopped by the cowbell.

Yes!

ALI

F-finally.

MOHAMMED

The children eagerly remove themselves from their looms.

The children line up before the curtain. KARIM unlocks IQBAL's chain and gives him a hard nudge.

Washroom.

KARIM

IQBAL glares before joining the washroom line. Maria is the first to go in. As they wait....

Hey! Can I play? Please?

TWIG

Fine, Twig.

SALMAN

TWIG

Okay, last night I dreamt that I was a Prince. A Prince on a quest. For the Golden Quail of Calcutta.

The what?

ALI

It's a statue.

TWIG

MOHAMMED

I thought you said it was a quail.

TWIG

No it's a golden statue.

ALI

Better if it was actually a quail.

MOHAMMED

Or better yet a falcon.

ALI

Or a phoenix.

MOHAMMED

The f-flaming phoenix of the S-Saharah!

ALI

YEAH, that's better than some boring statue.

TWIG

What do you know, Ali. You didn't see the movie.

SALMAN

Wait, Twig. Is this a dream or is it a movie?

TWIG

Well, it's kind of a dream about the movie.

MOHAMMED

H-He can't do that.

ALI

And when have you ever been to the movies, garbage picker?

TWIG

I snuck into a cinema once with my sisters. It was wonderful.

ALI

That's cheating.

TWIG

Look who's talking, elephant stealer.

The curtain pops open. MARIA steps out.

KARIM

Go on in, Twig. You better keep it moving. Only ten minutes today.

TWIG rushes in.

FATIMA

I thought it was fifteen.

KARIM

The Master is tightening the leash. I told you clients are coming next week, and these clients are coming all the way from America.

FATIMA

Across the ocean just for some dusty carpets.

KARIM

Not just any carpet. (*motioning to IQBAL*) The pattern that one's been given. It's not like the others. They call it a Blue Bukhara.

FATIMA

A blue ba-what?

KARIM

Bukhara. Only two or three are made each year.

FATIMA

Where did you hear that?

KARIM

Hussain Khan told me everything this morning. A carpet like that is worth a fortune, and not just anyone can make one. No, you need someone special. Like him. He's already made one before. Now he's making one for Hussain.

FATIMA

But if the carpet is worth so much...

KARIM

It means that many more lines will be erased from his slate.

FATIMA

(*to IQBAL*) But you said the lines can't be erased.

KARIM

He's a tricky one. It's all part of his plan. He lies to you about your slates. You start to worry. Your work suffers. He wins the Master's favor while you all win fresh strikes on your slate. It's sabotage.

MOHAMMED

Sabotage? What's that?

SALMAN

It means he wants us to fail.

TWIG opens the curtain, feels the tension.

TWIG

What's going on?

SALMAN

Karim says the new boy's a snake.

KARIM

The value of that rug, he'll be free in a matter of weeks.

FATIMA

Is that true?

IQBAL

(pause.) Yes. It's true.

KARIM

He freely admits it! Shameless.

IQBAL

After I finish the Bukhara, I will be sent away. But I won't be sent home. I'll be sent to another Master. Some other factory. Just like the other times.

FATIMA

What other times?

IQBAL

I've made the Bukhara before. But not a single master freed me. How do you explain that?

The children look to KARIM.

KARIM

Maybe all your other masters were crooks.

SALMAN

And Hussain Khan is a Saint?

FATIMA

You're saying you can make this special, what do you call it?

KARIM

Bukhara.

FATIMA

You can give Khan that and it's still not enough to free you? To send you home? But...but if that's true...where does that leave the rest of us?

FATIMA looks to IQBAL for an answer. He doesn't have one.

Pause. The cowbell rings.

IQBAL walks away.

The Children simply stand there.

SALMAN

It's best we just stay away from him. All of us.

Pause. SALMAN heads back to the loom. The other children follow. Except FATIMA. She eyes the curtain. She opens it, sneaks a look at her window.

KARIM

Times up, Fatima!

FATIMA closes the curtain. She returns to work with the rest, as the lights fade.

- V -

Lights rise on later that night.

As the rest of the children sleep, FATIMA sits with MARIA. FATIMA sighs, exasperated and exhausted, and proceeds to plead...

FATIMA

Please, Maria. Can you at least try? Try for me?

MARIA looks away, equally frustrated.

FATIMA

Maria. Look at me me. *(she does.)* Soon it will be morning. That means we get up and get to work. If we don't sleep, that's means we wait a whole day. Another long, hard day until we can try again. Do you understand?

MARIA nods.

FATIMA

So, we agree? You and I must get some sleep?

MARIA nods.

FATIMA

Now?

MARIA nods.

FATIMA

Good. So then lay back down...

*FATIMA eases MARIA's head down to the pallet.
MARIA complies.*

FATIMA

And close your eyes.

MARIA closes her eyes.

FATIMA

Now, I will sing one more. But just one. And that has to be it.

MARIA nods. FATIMA sings a Pakistani lullaby (to be researched and discussed.) IQBAL hears the singing. He awakes. FATIMA finishes the lullaby. MARIA lays still, quiet. FATIMA carefully rises. She takes painstaking steps towards her own pallet. As she does MARIA pops up, wide awake. FATIMA eventually feels MARIA's eyes. She turns and looks. MARIA looks back, apologetically shrugging her shoulders. FATIMA stifles a scream. Desperate, she kneels down to MARIA.

FATIMA

What am I going to do with you?

IQBAL

Is...Is everything alright?

FATIMA

(thinks whether or not to respond.) Everything's fine.

IQBAL

(to MARIA) Is it really?

FATIMA

Yes.

IQBAL

I was talking to the little one.

FATIMA

Her name is Maria. And don't bother. She won't answer. *(off IQBAL.)* She doesn't talk. Never has.

IQBAL

Never?

FATIMA

Not even her name. I started calling her Maria. She lets me.

IQBAL

How do you understand her?

FATIMA

Her eyes.

IQBAL

Is she okay? Maybe I can help.

FATIMA

You can't.

IQBAL

Why not?

FATIMA

Because you're the problem. You're the reason she can't sleep.

IQBAL

Me?

FATIMA

She has ears, you know. What the others say about you. You scare her.

IQBAL

But I'm just a boy. *(to MARIA)* Really, I am.

MARIA says nothing.

IQBAL

One day I'll show you. The both of you. We'll go far away from here.

FATIMA

Far away from here. And how are we supposed to do that?

IQBAL

I told you how. *(makes the bird with his hands.)* You two will just have to come with me.

FATIMA

Come with you?

IQBAL

Where we can do whatever we want. We can play, have fun. Go fly a kite, if we like. *(to MARIA)* Would you like that?

MARIA looks to FATIMA, unsure.

IQBAL

(to MARIA) You do know know what a kite is, don't you?

MARIA shrinks into herself, embarrassed.

FATIMA

(to MARIA) It's a toy. One you cut out of paper.

IQBAL

Or cloth. Any color you want.

IQBAL draws on the floor. MARIA makes her way over to look. FATIMA follows.

IQBAL

And you tie it to a long string. And you run and run until the wind catches it and *woosh*. And if you're lucky, the wind will be strong enough to blow the kite right out of your hand.

FATIMA

If you're lucky? How is that lucky?

IQBAL

That means the Angels like the kite so much, they keep it.

FATIMA

Who told you that?

IQBAL

My father. When the wind took my kite. That's what he told me.

FATIMA

And you believed him?

IQBAL

Why wouldn't I?

FATIMA

Because it's the silliest thing I ever heard.

IQBAL

Believe what you want, but Maria can decide for herself. *(to MARIA)* Right, Maria?

MARIA nods, enthusiastic.

IQBAL

So it's settled. You, me, and a kite. It's a promise.

FATIMA

No. No, you can't say that. *(erasing the kite.)* It's a rule. We don't talk that way.

IQBAL

What way?

FATIMA

Make plans. Dream about the future. In fact, we don't dream at all anymore. The only dreams we have are the ones we make up for ourselves.

IQBAL

Like Twig's Golden Quail.

FATIMA

It's just a silly game. But at least it's ours. The future -- that doesn't belong to us. So why talk about it?

IQBAL

But don't you think about it? About someday leaving this place?

FATIMA

See that window? Through it you can see a branch of the almond tree just outside. Yes, I look up and wish I could escape, too. But I know it's just a wish.

IQBAL

For you maybe.

FATIMA

For all of us. This is our life, Iqbal. Whether we like it or not.

IQBAL says nothing.

Lights fade.

- VI -

Lights rise. The Children scramble to get themselves together. They each carry

makeshift easels and position them in a straight line. TWIG sweeps the floors. KARIM struts around like a crazed ringleader.

KARIM

Let's move, let's move. They will be here any second.

The Children take the respective carpets and drape them across the easels.

KARIM

You know the drill. Everyone line up.

The Children line up next to their carpets. TWIG lines up next to them. IQBAL, however, doesn't comply. He stands quietly by himself.

KARIM

(to all) You are not to speak. Even if spoken to. Let the Master do all the talking. Now, chins up. Smiles wide. Teeth, everyone, teeth!

SALMAN

I hate this.

FATIMA

It will be over soon.

Enter HUSSAIN KHAN. He speaks to two CLIENTS, businessmen from the U.S.

HUSSAIN KHAN

...Here you will see what I mean when I say extraordinary. You'll even have the chance to meet some of my apprentices.

HUSSAIN KHAN slowly makes his way down the line, respectfully patting each child on the head.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Don't be mistaken. They may look like children. But they are also artisans. Disciplined craftsman. You won't find finer in all Pakistan.

CLIENT 1

You make quite a case. This is some of the best work I've seen.

CLIENT 2

And we've seen our share.

The two CLIENTS inspect the carpets, eventually making their way to IQBAL's carpet.

CLIENT 2

I assume this carpet here...

HUSSAIN points to IQBAL's carpet.

HUSSAIN KHAN

My dear friends, this is the Blue Bukhara. One of only a handful in the region.

The CLIENTS admire the Bukhara.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Of course, where I'm willing to strike a deal on the others, I'm afraid the price of this vision, well, that is just not negotiable.

BUSINESSMAN 1

There is no denying. It is exquisite.

BUSINESSMAN 2

A child did this?

KHAN notices that IQBAL isn't in line with the others. KHAN snaps his fingers at IQBAL. IQBAL calmly lines up next to the Bukhara, his hands behind his back.

HUSSAIN KHAN

(motioning to IQBAL) Yes, that would be this child there. A prodigy this one is.

BUSINESSMAN 2

To say the least. *(to IQBAL)* What's your name, son?

IQBAL says nothing.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Don't be shy. Answer the man.

IQBAL remains quiet.

BUSINESSMAN 2

That's alright. He doesn't have to --

HUSSAIN KHAN

Nonsense. The boy has a tongue. And manners. *(to IQBAL)* Now, you've been asked a question.

IQBAL says nothing.

HUSSAIN KHAN

There will be no asking a third time. Answer him.

IQBAL moves his hands from his back, revealing a knife.

BUSINESSMAN 2

Do we have a problem here?

With that, IQBAL thrusts the knife into the Bukhara, ripping a huge gash into it. GASPS abound.

HUSSAIN KHAN

Hell child!

HUSSAIN KHAN violently grabs IQBAL by the collar. He feels the stares of the CLIENTS, stops short.

HUSSAIN KHAN

(to the CLIENTS) Please, allow me to escort you out. And we can reschedule a viewing.

*HUSSAIN KHAN exits with the two
BUSINESSMEN.*

*The children are left alone. A moment of
stunned silence. Then, it starts...*

SALMAN investigates the ripped carpet.

SALMAN

No one will pay top dollar for a rip like that. It's useless.

TWIG takes a look for himself.

TWIG

This is bad.

SALMAN

You have no idea.

FATIMA

(re: the Buhkara) Why? Why would you do this?

*IQBAL looks to FATIMA. He calmly hands
her the knife. We hear the voice of
MISTRESS HUSSAIN.*

MISTRESS HUSSAIN

Throw him in. Throw him in and LET HIM ROT!

*Heavy footsteps approach. HUSSAIN
KHAN storms in. He sees the knife in
FATIMA's hand.*

HUSSAIN KHAN

What are *you* doing with that? Give it here.

*HUSSAIN KHAN angrily snatches the knife
from FATIMA. IQBAL pushes HUSSAIN
KHAN away from her. IQBAL and
HUSSAIN KHAN square off. HUSSAIN
KHAN quickly grabs IQBAL by the neck,
and jerks him off stage. Helpless, the
children watch them go.*

FATIMA

Where is he taking him?

Where do you think?

SALMAN

The SCREECHING sound of a HEAVY METAL GRATE opening...

(soft.) The tomb.

FATIMA

The GRATE falls. BANG! The sound echoes.

BLACKOUT.