

# Forgiving John Lennon

William Missouri Downs

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

KATIE

(35 to 50)

(A White art professor, originally from London, older than Charlie)

AISHA

(30 to 40s, but in many ways ageless)

(A Black Muslim woman from Somalia. A poet.)

CHARLIE

(30 to 45)

(A White English professor, originally from New York City)

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**PLACE**

New Rushford, New England

(A quiet liberal arts college town)

**SETTING**

Charlie and Katie's comfy living room. An older house with lots of books, modern art and knick-knacks. On the practical side: A front door and entry to the kitchen are needed.

**TIME**

Late spring, the hour before the sun sets.

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No intermission. Running time 1:20

"Surprisingly funny"

- *Detroit Free Press*

"The great triumph of the piece is the grounding of abstract, philosophical talk in a literally life or death situation."

- *The Telluride Colorado Watch*

"An extremely intelligent and dark play, one that stares into a divide not as neatly bridged as we might like to believe."

- *The Detroit Rogue Critic*

"Downs' new play tests all the current shibboleths about political correctness and multiculturalism."

- *Detroit New Monitor*

"A very insightful script that will likely have tongues wagging on all sides of the political spectrum."

- *Michigan Encore Magazine*

# Forgiving John Lennon

*(KATIE enters. She's an tenured art professor and earth mother.)*

KATIE  
*(Fading English accent)*

Goddamn Hamilton College! I knew they'd let us down.

*(CHARLIE enters. He's an untenured English professor. He carries a ratty 1950s suitcase. They are coming from a poetry reading at the University.)*

CHARLIE  
*(Calling out the front door)*

Got your case! Door's open, just come in when you're ready.

*(KATIE quickly spruces up the place.)*

KATIE  
Do you know what's wrong with Hamilton? It's overrun by officious academics.

CHARLIE  
I might remind you that we are also officious academics.

KATIE  
What's she doing out there?

CHARLIE  
Talking to some odd looking man in a car.

KATIE  
Don't bring up that it didn't go well.

CHARLIE  
I must admit some of her poems were not what I expected.

KATIE  
The dean was snoring.

CHARLIE

Wasn't it Orwell who said, "A poetry reading is a grisly thing."

KATIE

Research?

CHARLIE

On three by five cards as requested.

KATIE

Where?

CHARLIE

On the thing.

*(KATIE sees the index cards on the "thing" and hides them in a drawer.)*

KATIE

And groceries?

*(CHARLIE opens a bottle of wine.)*

CHARLIE

Ah crap. I knew there was something else.

KATIE

Charlie, I don't ask much-- Wait. If we're going to have a true cultural exchange you can't drink in front of her.

CHARLIE

One glass can't harm diplomatic relations.

KATIE

This is exactly what Giovanna was talking about.

CHARLIE

Giovanna?

KATIE

Dr. Oosterwyck.

CHARLIE

Oh, right. You know "Relationship Facilitator" is such an officious title.

KATIE

She said that maybe you should listen once in a while.

CHARLIE

I am listening, dear, step seven, and compromising, step three, by having only one glass.

KATIE

Thank you.

CHARLIE

Although to be honest, I still don't understand how "compromising" can be step three and "listening" step seven. Don't you need to listen before you compromise?

KATIE

One glass.

CHARLIE

You'll have nothing to report to Dr. Oosterwyck. Unless of course our guest artist wants to spark up, in that case all bets are off.

KATIE

That's not going to happen-- Oh! Is the little one taken care of?

CHARLIE

Curled up with the officious lesbians next door.

KATIE

Please, stop. *(She plants a quick kiss on his cheek)* Please.

*(AISHA enters. She's about 30. She's African and wears a dark, modest, sack-like Jilbab and a dull linen headscarf.)*

KATIE

Aisha! Welcome to our humble home.

*(English is not Aisha's first language. She occasionally stumbles. She has a slight French accent.)*

AISHA

Thank you for letting me be part of your family tonight.

KATIE

Oh, it's not a problem it's our problem-- I mean our pleasure. Isn't that right, honey?

CHARLIE

Oh, yes, a total pleasure.

KATIE

Make yourself comfortable.

CHARLIE

Something to drink? Chardonnay?

*(KATIE gives CHARLIE the evil eye.)*

AISHA

Thank you, I do not drink alcoholic beverages.

CHARLIE

*(Holding up the wine)*

Would you mind if--

KATIE

*(Wishing he wouldn't)*

Sweetheart...

AISHA

Please, it is your house. Drink till you are drunk. I am okay with that.

CHARLIE

*(Delighted to Katie)*

She's okay with that.

KATIE

Would you care for something non-alcoholic?

AISHA

Please.

KATIE

I think I have some flavored bottled water? Grape? Kiwi?

AISHA

Does not matter.

KATIE

Right back. *(Quietly to Charlie)* Say something nice.

*(KATIE runs to the kitchen. An uneasy beat.)*

CHARLIE

*(Lying)*

...Your poetry reading, ah, went... well. They were spellbound.

AISHA

I saw some sleeping.

*(During the following, without AISHA seeing, CHARLIE downs the small glass of wine, pours a new one, finishes it and pours another to make it look as though he's still on his first glass.)*

CHARLIE

Oh, you must understand, college students today often have to work, sometimes they get a little tired and doze.

AISHA

And snore.

CHARLIE

Yes, occasionally.

AISHA

Perhaps it is because they are consuming too much alcohol.

CHARLIE

*(Amused)*

Yes. But you must admit it was well attended - for a late afternoon reading with little advance notice. At least, what, a hundred?

AISHA

Fifty-three.

CHARLIE

Are you sure?

AISHA

There were seventy-four lights in the lecture hall, ten doors, fifty-three people, and one-hundred-and-forty-seven empty seats. When I'm tense I sometimes count things - I find it calming.



CHARLIE

When I'm tense I sometimes--

AISHA

Drink alcohol.

CHARLIE

Cheers.

*(CHARLIE gulps from the glass of wine and tops it off.)*

AISHA

You have a nice house.

CHARLIE

Yes. It's a hundred years old. It's what we call here in the States "colonial".

AISHA

Someday I would like to live in a house and teach at a college.

CHARLIE

Katie and I have never regretted our decision to go into academia. Although, to be honest, with our degrees - Tibetan lit and pottery art - there wasn't much we could do. Though, I must say I sometimes get tired of all the grading and committees.

AISHA

Committees?

CHARLIE

Yes, I sit on four committees. I'm currently chairing the Integrity Planning Committee, the Library New Carpet Selection Committee and the Sternberg Committee - one of the most prestigious on campus.

AISHA

And what does the Sternberg committee do?

CHARLIE

We investigate the need for other committees.

AISHA

I do not understand.

CHARLIE

President Sternberg's wife decided that the faculty was spending too much time in committee meetings so she created a committee to make sure all the committees are necessary.

*(KATIE enters with two tiny bottles of water and a squirrel-shaped bowl of nuts.)*

KATIE

Here we go. And I don't know, are nuts okay?

AISHA

Yes, I like nuts.

KATIE

Forgive my ignorance; I didn't know if there were any dietary restrictions. Isn't it... ah... ah...

AISHA

Ramadan.

KATIE

Yes.

AISHA

Has the sun gone down?

CHARLIE

Let me check.

*(CHARLIE peeks out the window.)*

CHARLIE

Ah, maybe a half hour to go.

AISHA

Close enough.

*(Very thirsty, AISHA opens the bottle and drinks.)*

KATIE

Wait. You haven't eaten all day?

AISHA

Or drank.

*(AISHA drinks again.)*

AISHA

...ah ...Grape.

KATIE

Yes, it's Grape-Berry Blast.

*(AISHA downs the whole bottle.)*

KATIE

It's all natural. And no calories. Most flavored waters have calories, this one doesn't. *(Reading the label on her bottle)* Oh and calcium. Lots of calcium.

AISHA

Calcium tastes good. May I have another?

KATIE

Oh, sure, have mine. It's Kiwi Kaboom.

*(AISHA drinks.)*

KATIE

I'm afraid we didn't think this through. We were supposed to have dinner at President Sternberg's tonight before your commencement speech but with Mrs. Sternberg being sick... *(With a pissed-off glance to Charlie)* And there's not much in the refrigerator.

AISHA

These nuts will do.

*(AISHA helps herself. She nibbles like a bird - one peanut at a time. Beat.)*

KATIE

Please, take them all.

*(KATIE hands AISHA the bowl.)*

CHARLIE

I was just telling Aisha that the students obviously enjoyed themselves.

KATIE

Yes. Your poetry was sublime. My favorite was, ah, how do you pronounce it, "Qworegoys?"

AISHA

Close.

KATIE

It was exquisite. Isn't that right?

CHARLIE

Yes, although I had absolutely no idea what it was about.

*(KATIE shoots CHARLIE an evil eye.)*

KATIE

What it was about was totally clear.

CHARLIE

*(Challenging Katie)*

Then what was it about?

KATIE

*(She has no idea)*

Ah... Men's tennis.

CHARLIE

Men's tennis?

KATIE

Yes.

CHARLIE

Aisha, do they even have tennis in Somalia?

AISHA

No, that poem is not about tennis, it is about rape.

KATIE

*(Shocked)*

...Oh?

AISHA

As you know, when a man is raping you, you can defend yourself by grabbing his balls and squeezing. Twisting very hard also helps.

KATIE

*(uncomfortable)*

I think something was lost in translation.

AISHA

You must of course curl up as tight as you can because he will kick and beat you. But if you squeeze and twist his balls very very hard, in less than a minute, he will pass out. It's called a Qworegoys. Thank you for the nuts.

*(She puts the bowl down. An uneasy beat.)*

CHARLIE

...Well. Okay. Ah. Sleeping arrangements.

KATIE

Yes, I'm so sorry but it being graduation everything is booked. And we had such short notice we didn't know what to do.

CHARLIE

So, tonight after your commencement speech we thought we'd give you our bedroom.

KATIE

And we'll take the guest room.

AISHA

Not necessary. I will sleep here.

*(AISHA tests the sofa cushion.)*

KATIE

No. We insist.

CHARLIE

Yes, you're the guest of honor.

AISHA

But what about your child?

KATIE

Child?

AISHA

When I came in I heard you say something about a "little one."

KATIE

Oh, that's our dog.

CHARLIE

Don't worry, we wanted you to be comfortable so the neighbors are taking her tonight.

AISHA

Is your dog vicious?

KATIE

Oh no. It's just that we read that Muslims consider dogs unclean and we didn't want you to... ah... make you sleep in a house that you thought was... what is the word I'm looking for?

CHARLIE

Impure.

KATIE

Didn't Muhammad order all dogs killed?

CHARLIE

Yes. Isn't that in the Koran?

AISHA

No. It is in the Hadith.

KATIE

The Hadith?

AISHA

The second most important book in Islam. There it is written that Muhammad said that dogs cannot be kept as pets. And that all black dogs must be killed because they are of the devil. Dogs disturbed Muhammad deeply. What type of dog is yours?

KATIE

Mutt mostly.

CHARLIE

Part Dachshund

KATIE

Part Chow Chow.

CHARLIE

Don't know how they pulled that off - her parents must've had a ladder.

*(CHARLIE thinks that's funny but AISHA doesn't laugh.)*

AISHA  
And what is its name?

KATIE  
Ah... Sweetheart.

CHARLIE  
*(Clearing his throat)*  
Ah... Blackie.

KATIE  
But she isn't totally black. Isn't that right.

CHARLIE  
Yes. She has some white too.

KATIE  
Lots of white.

CHARLIE  
Yes, paws mostly.

KATIE  
And a spot on her chest.

CHARLIE  
Large spot.

AISHA  
I would not worry about the dog warning in the Hadith.

KATIE  
No?

AISHA  
It was most likely written by Abu Hurayrah.

KATIE  
I'm afraid I don't know enough to...

AISHA  
He is like Paul in your Bible - The one who screwed everything up.

*(KATIE watches as AISHA take one nut.)*

KATIE

I'm so sorry but I must get you something to eat. *(To Charlie)* Do we have time enough before her speech to order out?

CHARLIE

Din Ho Barbecue is super fast, but being graduation who knows.

KATIE

Wonderful idea. *(To Aisha)* We have this little Chinese place just around the corner. Do you eat Chinese?

AISHA

I would love to taste some... ah... local culture.

CHARLIE

Their pan-fried flat noodles with vegetarian barbecue is consistently good.

AISHA

Sounds okay.

KATIE

My phone's out of charge could I use yours?

*(CHARLIE digs out his I-Phone and hands it to KATIE. During the following she looks up the number and dials.)*

AISHA

*(To Charlie)*

So you love your dog and order out, does that mean that you are, like your refrigerator... ah... Khadija?

CHARLIE

Khadija?

AISHA

Ah... What is the word I am looking for... Barren?

KATIE

Barren? Oh, no. We chose not to have children didn't we sweetheart?

CHARLIE

Yes. It was a cognizant choice.



AISHA

I've heard that is one of the problems in America. The well-educated have no children while all the stupid people do. Is it the same in England?

KATIE

*(On hold on the phone)*

I don't know about that, but we considered and decided--*(On phone)* Yes, is this Din Ho's? ...We'd like one order of pan-fried flat noodles with vegetarian barbecue for delivery.

*(The party on the line barely speaks English - Katie must slow things down.)*

KATIE

No. One order. ...Pan-fried flat noodles... no, noo-dles... No. Long pasta. Flat pasta... Yes, noodles. Yes. And vegetarian barbecue. ...no, veg-e-tarian. ...Yes, bar-be-cue. Thank you.

CHARLIE

Come to think of it I'm a little famished too, I'll take a couple of egg rolls.

KATIE

*(Not happy with him)*

And two egg rolls... Egg. Roll. ...No not spring rolls, egg rolls... Like, the chicken and the egg... No, two... Like one, two... Yes, I'll hold.

*(CHARLIE takes another sip.)*

AISHA

*(To Charlie)*

Do you get drunk every night?

KATIE

Oh no, my husband doesn't drink that much.

CHARLIE

No, it's more recreational.

AISHA

Rec-re-ational?

CHARLIE

For fun, enjoyment.

AISHA

Not because you're suicidal?

KATIE

Oh, no my husband's not suicidal at all. We love our life.

AISHA

And your house because it is colonial.

KATIE

Yes. And our jobs.

AISHA

Because you serve on committees.

CHARLIE

Well, that's something that we just tolerate.

KATIE

*(Waiting on the phone)*

Not me. I enjoy it. When I serve on a committee I'm deciding the future, or doing important things like promoting cultural diversity. *(Back to the phone, getting flustered with the non-English speaker)* Yes? ...570 North Elm. ...No, Five. ...Seven. ...No, seven. Zero... North. Elm... Elm like the tree. Not Eel, Elm. ...No I don't want an order of fried Eel. The street we live on is named Elm. Yes. ...Thirty minutes to an hour? Really an hour? Fine, it'll have to do. Namaste.

*(KATIE hangs up and puts the I-phone on the table.)*

AISHA

Cultural diversity?

KATIE

Well, sometimes here in the States, they have this uncanny habit of seeing things only from their own point of view.

AISHA

You are aware of this?

CHARLIE

We professors generally are.

KATIE

So, we do things to try and make ourselves more accepting of other cultures.

CHARLIE

And more accepting of marginalized people.

KATIE

So we write grants to bring in writers and artists, such as yourself, to give commencement speeches.

CHARLIE

And do poetry readings--

AISHA

It is not working.

KATIE

Well, ah, it doesn't work all the time.

AISHA

No, it is not working at all.

KATIE

...I suppose we could do better.

AISHA

This is a big country and I'm not so big. I could talk to many and what difference could it make?

KATIE

One person at a time - That's how I've always felt about art. If it affects just one person.

AISHA

Then you are ignorant.

KATIE

*(Stunned)*

...Excuse me?

AISHA

I am using the wrong word?

CHARLIE

That depends on what you're trying to say.

AISHA

I am trying to say that you have not got a brain in your head.

CHARLIE  
(Amused)

Well, I guess that's the right word.

AISHA

One person at a time will lose. And fifty-three is not much better. And so you are ignorant.

KATIE  
(To Charlie)

Honey, I think I will have a glass.

CHARLIE  
(Delighted)

But of course.

(With great joy, CHARLIE pours  
KATIE a glass of wine.)

AISHA

Would you like to hear my impression of your country?

CHARLIE

Oh, yes. Tell us.

AISHA

My first impression was at the airport--

KATIE

Oh, I'm so sorry about the airport fiasco.

CHARLIE

It must've been miserable after such a long flight.

AISHA

It wasn't that long. Only three days.

KATIE

Wait. You were traveling for three days?

AISHA

Three days, two hours and eight minutes. Plus they questioned me in Dulles for six hours and ten minutes. Your State Department was worried about me. Gave me lots of advice. Many warnings. And then Hamilton College--

KATIE

I'm so sorry. Our colleagues at Hamilton promised they'd pick you up.

(MORE)

You were supposed to give a workshop there this morning and then-- I don't know why they cancelled. *(To Charlie)* We need to call them.

CHARLIE

They left three messages on my office phone, but I refused to listen - I will not reward such rudeness with a prompt reply.

AISHA

It is okay, it gave me time to think and count. My first impression was that there are far fewer fat people than I had been told. I counted only twenty-seven percent fat people at Dulles. My second is that your money is odd. It does not always state its worth. What is a "dime?"

CHARLIE

Ten cents.

AISHA

Then why does it not say ten cents on it so that someone from another country knows?

CHARLIE

Ah... You're right. I've never thought about it before.

AISHA

I also did not know that you were so religious. There was even a place to pray in the airport.

KATIE

Yes, America is a very religious country.

CHARLIE

At least we say we are - I'm not so sure we are in private.

AISHA

And what religion are you?

CHARLIE

I was raised Catholic but I'm what might be called a lapsed Catholic.

AISHA

Lapsed?

CHARLIE

Meaning I'm no longer active. A life in academia and theological certitude seldom go hand in hand.

KATIE

What my husband is trying to say is that we work so hard sometimes we just don't have time to practice our faiths.

AISHA

Then you have not been circumcised?

CHARLIE

...uh. Excuse me?

AISHA

You know. Down there.

CHARLIE

Ah. ...Well. ...I guess if we're going to have a true cultural exchange I should be open to all questions. Yes. I have been circumcised.

KATIE

It's official, Americans will tell you anything.

AISHA

Are all Catholics circumcised? Like Jews?

CHARLIE

Not necessarily. But most Americans are... You know, for health reasons.

AISHA

Health?

CHARLIE

Yes, it makes it... ah... Easier to wash...

AISHA

Do Catholics wash it often--?

KATIE

I think we should choose a new subject.

AISHA

You are uncomfortable?

KATIE

*(lying)*

No. Not at all.

AISHA

You are also a circumcised lapsed non-Catholic Catholic?

KATIE

No, I was raised Protestant.

CHARLIE

Katie's a lapsed Lutheran.

AISHA

I like this word "lapsed."

CHARLIE

You can be a lapsed anything. A lapsed Catholic, a lapsed Lutheran. I have a friend who is a lapsed vegetarian. I suppose you could even be a lapsed Muslim.

AISHA

No, there is no such thing as a lapsed Muslim in my country. It is not allowed.

*(An uneasy beat.)*

AISHA

Katie, I studied your lapsed religion. I read Martin Lutheran. He pounded ninety-five complaints into a door.

KATIE

Yes, Martin *Luther*.

AISHA

I like the number ninety-five. Good number. Easy to remember. When I lived in France I--

CHARLIE

France? We love France.

AISHA

I've lived many places. During the fighting in Somalia my father took us to live in Saudi Arabia. My father had connections and fake passports. But two years later we were deported. So we were forced to move back to Somalia. Then when I was married I lived in France.

CHARLIE

Where did you live in France?

AISHA

Just outside Paris.

KATIE  
 We love Paris!

CHARLIE  
 The museums.

KATIE  
 The restaurants.

CHARLIE  
 What's your favorite restaurant?

AISHA  
 I have not been there.

KATIE  
 ...But you said...

AISHA  
 I lived in a dish community outside Paris.

CHARLIE  
 Dish community?

AISHA  
 A community for Muslims full of satellite dishes.

KATIE  
 Oh.

AISHA  
 What is Paris like?

KATIE  
 It's... spectacular.

AISHA  
 I hope to see it someday.

(*An uneasy beat.*)

CHARLIE  
 I hope you don't mind me saying this, but living in so many places you speak English quite well.

AISHA  
 Thank you. When I was growing up in Somalia the local library had forty-two books, six in English - Mostly Disney books.

(MORE)



Including *The Little Mermaid*, *Song of the South* and the *Book of the Mormons*.

CHARLIE

(Amused)

Really, the Mormons showed in Somalia?

AISHA

No one could understand their book, so the local militias did not consider it a threat. The only other English books were a translation of Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* and Voltaire's *Treatise on Tolerance*. I read them both twenty-four times. And I counted the words. *Treatise on Tolerance* has 45,434 words. *Notes From Underground* has 244,146.

CHARLIE

Don't suppose you counted the number of words in the book of the Mormons?

AISHA

268,163.

CHARLIE

Good to know.

AISHA

May I ask a question?

KATIE

Of course.

AISHA

Why am I here?

KATIE

To read your poetry and give a commencement speech.

AISHA

I mean the true reason.

CHARLIE

Oh... Well...(To Katie) Sweetheart?

KATIE

Well, ah... Last spring we had what might be called an "incident" on campus.

AISHA

Incident?

KATIE

It happened at the campus radio station. A student named Marcel had a show called "Marcel in the Morning."

CHARLIE

He saw himself as a new Imus in the morning only for college students.

AISHA

Imus?

CHARLIE

It's a radio talk show.

AISHA

Oh. Like Dr. Laura.

KATIE

Yes, sort of like Dr. Laura.

CHARLIE

Dr. Laura?

KATIE

That radio talk-show woman who hands out advice without a degree. She's on Sirius radio.

CHARLIE

Oh right. The one who made those culturally insensitive remarks.

KATIE

That's her. *(To Aisha)* How would you know about Dr. Laura?

AISHA

While waiting for your State Department to clear me, I listened to Dr. Laura in the holding room. Dr. Laura reminded me of a similar radio program in Mogadishu hosted by a local cleric named Abdul Abdul Hasan. He and Dr. Laura's politics are similar.

CHARLIE

*(Amused)*

I'm sure they are.

KATIE

Well, it seems that Marcel suggested, live on air, that all the Muslim students here at Durant College, of which we only have a few--

CHARLIE

Though their numbers are growing.

KATIE

That they wear "identifying markers." And there were other inappropriate remarks about Muhammad.

CHARLIE

Several jokes about women wearing Burkas looking like Ninjas if I remember correctly.

KATIE

*(Curt)*

I don't think we need details, darling. *(To Aisha)* It was all an April fools hoax of course.

AISHA

April fools?

KATIE

It's a day here in the States where they do funny things for no reason.

CHARLIE

In my youth I often put bags of burning feces at the neighbors' doors and threw toilet paper in their trees.

AISHA

Why?

CHARLIE

...I don't know why. Just because.

AISHA

*(Confused)*

Just because. Okay.

KATIE

By the time Marcel admitted it was a joke, at the end of the broadcast, the damage was done.

CHARLIE

This, of course, caused quite the administrative panic.

KATIE

They were sure they had a crisis on their hands.

CHARLIE

So a committee was formed to determine what needed to be done in order to counter close-mindedness on campus.

KATIE

Including homophobia.

CHARLIE

Heterosexism.

KATIE

Ableism.

CHARLIE

Classism.

KATIE

And sizeism.

AISHA

Sizeism?

KATIE

Yes, prejudice against people of size.

AISHA

Tall people?

KATIE

No. Ah...

CHARLIE

Large people. People with big waists.

AISHA

You mean fat people like at the airport.

KATIE

Only we don't call them fat.

AISHA

Why not?

KATIE

We just don't.

AISHA

Not the right word?

KATIE

It's just... hard to explain.

AISHA

Just because?

KATIE

Yes, just because.

CHARLIE

Soon everything got blown out of proportion as it always does in academe.

KATIE

All because of Little Miss Piggy.

AISHA

Piggy?

KATIE

Our school mascot.

CHARLIE

Durant College was founded by this wealthy intellectual who felt that we should stress scholarship not sports. So back in the 50's when we finally got a football team, Mr. Durant, on his deathbed, insisted that our mascot be a pig.

KATIE

And because there was gobs of money attached the board of trustees quickly agreed.

CHARLIE

Everything on campus is Durant, Durant Classroom Building, Durant Library--

KATIE

Your commencement speech tonight is in the Durant Concert Hall.

CHARLIE

Mr. Durant even donated a large copper - I guess it's copper--

KATIE

Must be, it's green.

CHARLIE

This big green pig that he said must sit at the entrance to the stadium. It had its intended effect - we've never had a winning team.

KATIE

After Mr. Durant died the board of trustees changed it to a Wart Hog.

CHARLIE

They reasoned that having an African species as our mascot might attract Black players to the team.

KATIE

It didn't work. Today, some sixty years later, Mr. Durant's seven-foot anatomically correct green pig is frequently the source of pranks by the various fraternities.

CHARLIE

They stick cigars in its mouth and it's--

KATIE

*(Cutting him off)*

Other orifices.

AISHA

Why? Wait. Let me guess... Just because.

CHARLIE

Yes!

KATIE

Then this fall Phi Beta Kappa decided that they'd weld wings to it.

CHARLIE

The football team is so bad... When pigs fly, get it?

AISHA

...No.

CHARLIE

And in the process damaged its infrastructure so badly it had to be replaced. Re-enter Marcel.

KATIE

Upset because we cancelled his radio show, he filed a complaint with the E.M.E.C.

CHARLIE

The Ethnic Minorities Equality Committee.

KATIE

Stating that Mr. Durant's mascot was offensive to Muslims students because Islam considers pigs unclean.

CHARLIE

Like black dogs-- Now that I think about it, I wonder how Muhammad's feels about Wart Hogs?

KATIE

(Curt)

I don't think this is the right time, darling. (To Aisha) The important thing is that pigs are potentially offensive to many religions.

CHARLIE

Including, but not limited to, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Rastafarians.

AISHA

Is Marcel Muslim?

KATIE

No, but most of the complaints that are filed with the Ethnic Minorities Equality Committee are filed by white students.

AISHA

But aren't they in the majority on campus?

KATIE

Yes, but they feel it's important to look after their minority, ah, brethren.

CHARLIE

Then the Student Muslim Association demanded a special place on campus for daily prayer. But the chair of the Space Allotment Committee, a Christian, said there was no room.

KATIE

So he was relieved of his responsibilities.

CHARLIE

Which resulted in a hostile workplace action.

KATIE

But then Stigma--

AISHA

Stigma--?

CHARLIE

--Students Against Mental Health Victimization Committee--.

KATIE

--Stepped into the debate and things got complicated.

CHARLIE

To keep it all out of the paper, President Sternberg's wife decided that the Faculty Senate chambers could be signed out for daily prayers.

CHARLIE

But then Click--

KATIE

--Campus Life Youth for Christ Club--.

CHARLIE

Charged that the administration was giving Muslims preferential treatment.

KATIE

The topper came when a group of newly arrived Muslim students refused to eat in the dining room unless they installed pork free microwaves.

CHARLIE

That's when someone called the A.C.L.U.

KATIE

The American Civil Liberties Union.

CHARLIE

And the A.C.L.J.

KATIE

The American Center for Law and Justice.

CHARLIE

Then the football team went on strike.

KATIE

And it all went to hell in a hand basket.



AISHA

So where is it now?

CHARLIE

Still in committee.

AISHA

No. I mean, ah, Little Miss Piggy.

CHARLIE

Oh. She's still out front the bleachers, the wings are gone but the scars remain.

KATIE

The upshot is that we've been ordered by the administration to make our classes more Islam-friendly.

CHARLIE

For example, in my lit class I spoke about how Islam rescued Aristotle by saving his manuscripts during the Dark Ages.

*(KATIE shows off one of her own paintings hanging on the wall.)*

KATIE

And I created this. I call it "Matrice Zéroïdale" It celebrates how Islam invented the concept of zero.

CHARLIE

And get this, I even managed to work into one lecture how, a thousand years ago, Islam invented sherbet.

AISHA

Sherbet?

KATIE

It's like ice cream.

AISHA

Yes. I have heard of it. But Islam invented sherbet?

CHARLIE

Yes, I read in "Les études de L'histoire du Moyen Age" that the word sherbet comes from the Arabic "sharab." Which lead to the Italian word "sorbetto," the French word "sorbet" and the English word "sherbet."

AISHA

Sherbet was invented in the desert a thousand years ago?

CHARLIE

*(a nervous laugh)*

...I guess. I don't know the particulars.

KATIE

Then I read one of your poems on line and thought, you might be able to save the day.

AISHA

But I am not a famous poet.

KATIE

No, but Charlie and I thought perhaps, if we could get you to come, we could really make a difference in the students' lives.

CHARLIE

To be honest, it became kind of a competition. Who could write a grant to bring in the most diverse person?

KATIE

Chemistry brought in a physicist from, um, was it Bangladesh?

CHARLIE

Don't ask me, I couldn't understand a word he said.

KATIE

Then just a few weeks ago the chair of music thought she'd won. She wrote an N.E.A. Grant and got Wynton Marsalis to visit campus.

CHARLIE

But if you think about it, Wynton Marsalis? Did she really think that his regressive notions on jazz were going to open the students' minds to anything?

KATIE

She tried sweetheart.

CHARLIE

But Wynton Marsalis?

KATIE

The truth is my husband is the one who turned it into a competition. He stood up in front of the committee and said that we were ignoring the eight hundred pound gorilla in the room. And that was Islamophobia.

AISHA

Islam-o-phobia?

KATIE

Yes. I guess you'd define it as an irrational fear of Islam.

AISHA

I see. And what is the word for an irrational fear of Lutherans?

KATIE

...Ah. Sweetheart?

CHARLIE

...Ah... Don't know.

AISHA

Do you condemn Martin Luther for being a Catholic-ophobe?

KATIE

...Well, I wouldn't call Luther a Catholicophobe. Is there such a word?

AISHA

Then what is the word for an irrational fear of Catholics?

CHARLIE

I don't know. Mormonism?

*(CHARLIE laughs at his little joke.)*

KATIE

*(Displeased with Charlie)*

Please forgive my husband. His sense of humor is legendary on campus. *(Pointed towards Charlie)* And often gets him in trouble.

CHARLIE

Only with the closed minded.

KATIE

The important thing is we tried to get you to come and it didn't work out but then suddenly three days ago everything fell into place.

CHARLIE

Us getting you here, if I may brag, is a bit of a coup on my part.

KATIE

I've arranged to have a photographer there tonight. I'm sure you and my husband will be on the front page of tomorrow's *Durantean*.

AISHA

But you had to cancel someone else's commencement speech, no?

CHARLIE

Yes, but I'm sure Wynton Marsalis will understand. He's a big boy.

KATIE

And being our first ever Muslim commencement speaker, (*To Charlie*) I'm positive the tenure committee will be duly impressed.

AISHA

And so you think by reading my poems and giving my speech tonight I will help with this, ah, Islamophobia?

KATIE

One small step in our attempt to celebrate diversity and human understanding.

AISHA

Like your marriage: incompatible religions, incompatible countries--

KATIE

What? Not at all. We're completely compatible.

CHARLIE

I often think, if Katie and I can cohabit, anyone can. Am I right?

KATIE

You're right. Because we respect, tolerate, and even embrace our common humanity and never question our differences.

CHARLIE

*(Getting a buzz from the wine)*

You know, I can't help but think that a new day is coming when forgiveness rather than accusations will be the law at universities. For example, I've always admired John Lennon but growing up Catholic my parents wouldn't allow me to listen to him because he said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Do you know who John Lennon was?

AISHA

Yes, I know John Lennon. I admire his poems.

CHARLIE

Poems? Oh, you mean his lyrics. His poems were put to music.

AISHA

Oh. This I did not know.

CHARLIE

I read a few years back that the Pope forgave John Lennon.

AISHA

Before or after he put a fatwa on him?

CHARLIE

What? No, Popes don't do fatwas.

KATIE

*(To herself)*

Not anymore.

*(CHARLIE hears this.)*

CHARLIE

No. He just condemned Mr. Lennon for being rather... arrogant. That's all.

AISHA

John Lennon was then assassinated, yes? Just like the people at Charlie Hebdo.

CHARLIE

Charlie Hebdo?

KATIE

The Paris humor magazine.

CHARLIE

Oh, right-right-right.

AISHA

They too died because they were, what did you say? Arrogant.

KATIE

Oh no, that was totally different.

CHARLIE

Yes. Completely different. John Lennon was assassinated by a delusional psychopath obsessed with Catcher in the Rye. The Charlie Hebdo people were killed by religious fanatics obsessed with the Kor--

KATIE

Charlie! *(To Aisha)* What my husband is trying to say is that... that...

CHARLIE

What I'm trying to say is that that simple act of clemency, inconsequential as it was, has done more to make me feel Catholic again. Tolerance and forgiveness, that's what matters. Am I right?

KATIE

You're right.

AISHA

So, Katie, I see that you agree with the Koran - if a woman obeys her husband she will enter paradise.

KATIE

What? No. I don't obey my husband.

AISHA

But you agree with him about John Lennon.

KATIE

Well, yes, but that's just a chance thing. We often disagree. Don't we honey?

CHARLIE

I'd say we disagree more than we agree.

KATIE

And I don't obey him--

*(CHARLIE'S I-phone, sitting right next to him, rings.)*

CHARLIE

Get that will ya?

KATIE

Oh sure--

*(KATIE starts for the phone but stops.)*

KATIE

It's closer to you.

CHARLIE

Could you at least see who it is?

KATIE

As I said, it's closer to you.

CHARLIE

Fine.

*(CHARLIE checks the caller ID.)*

CHARLIE

Dr. Terry Bankhammer - Our colleague at Hamilton College who is so pretentious as to have "Dr" placed into his caller ID, is calling with apologies no doubt. Shall we let him suffer a little longer?

AISHA

You are not going to answer?

*(CHARLIE hits the button killing the ring.)*

CHARLIE

He can leave a message.

*(KATIE is still upset by the "obey your husband" comment.)*

KATIE

I think you can see that women here in the West don't obey their husbands.

CHARLIE

Or agree with them. Isn't that right?

KATIE

That's right. *(Catching herself)* I mean...

AISHA

You're funny. How did you meet?

CHARLIE

We were both students at the University of Minnesota - The Golden Gophers.

AISHA

Excuse me?

CHARLIE

Their mascot. Minnesota is the golden gophers. It's much better than a pig. No religion is offended by gophers.

KATIE

I wanted to strike out on my own, so I announced to my father that I was going to grad school in the States. He tried to argue me out of it but I wasn't going to have him tell me how to live my life.

CHARLIE

She had no idea what she was getting herself into.

KATIE

*(defensive)*

Not true.

CHARLIE

She arrived in January with only a raincoat. A few days later she stepped into the Weisman Art Museum to get warm when her eyes settled on this handsome undergrad with hair down to his shoulders. Can you imagine me in dreadlocks? I was a sight.

KATIE

I was completely unimpressed. But one thing bugged me about him, he had this smudge on his forehead. I thought I'd be nice and let him know. So I said did you know your forehead is dirty. And he turned to me and called me "uninformed". It was Ash Wednesday. I'd totally forgot.

AISHA

Ash Wednesday?

CHARLIE

The first day of Lent - the Priest places the sign of the cross on your forehead and says: "Remember thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."

AISHA

Why?



CHARLIE

...Ah. Frankly, I don't remember why. Sometimes I think just to depress the hell out of you on a Wednesday.

KATIE

I thought he was a typical ugly American and wanted nothing to do with him.

CHARLIE

She was pissed off.

AISHA

Pissed off?

CHARLIE

Yes, pissed off, in other words, angered.

KATIE

Then, two years later we met at an art installation of mine entitled Féminin Formulaire.

CHARLIE

I couldn't take my eyes off her.

KATIE

His hair was more reasonable, but I knew who he was.

CHARLIE

I thought I'd be diplomatic so I asked her out for a spot of tea.

KATIE

I refused.

CHARLIE

I persisted.

KATIE

I used our age difference as an excuse.

AISHA

Age difference?

CHARLIE

Katie is six years, three months and two days older than me.

AISHA  
*(Amazed)*

Six years...?

KATIE  
 Yes. Not only do women here in the West not obey their husbands but we sometimes marry men who are younger, perhaps even less mature.

AISHA  
 Then you are a cougar?

KATIE  
*(Dumbfounded)*  
 ...What?

AISHA  
 An older woman who hunts younger men is a cougar, am I correct?

*(CHARLIE laughs into his drink.)*

KATIE  
 And where, pray-tell, did you hear that term?

AISHA  
 Dr. Laura. While in the holding room at the airport. She talked extensively about cougars.

KATIE  
*(covering her embarrassment)*  
 How nice.

AISHA  
 When you go to a bar to drink alcoholic beverages and pick up boys, do you wear what I've heard called a pushup bra?

*(CHARLIE shakes to hold the laugh in.)*

KATIE  
 I think this is a subject for another time.

CHARLIE  
 Oh come on Katie, if we're going to have a true cultural exchange--

KATIE

*(Changing the subject)*

How rude we are. All we do is talk about ourselves. Aisha, how did you meet your husband?

AISHA

No, please finish, how did you come to marry an ugly American.

CHARLIE

Three years later, we bumped into each other at the Strawberry Fields Memorial in Central Park.

KATIE

He was a little more civil this time. Asked me to a performance of Mozart's Der Schauspieldirektor.

CHARLIE

And after a fantastic night at the mid-Manhattan Comfort Inn--

KATIE

*(Incensed)*

Stop it! Just stop it!

*(A tense beat. CHARLIE takes a drink.)*

AISHA

...So you were married by a priest?

KATIE

What? No. I insisted on a Protestant marriage.

CHARLIE

That's news to me.

KATIE

We were married by a lapsed Lutheran who had become a Buddhist monk - But that's not important - What is important is that you understand that I do not obey my husband... okay?

AISHA

Okay.

CHARLIE

And the Pope did not put a fatwa on John Lennon.

AISHA

Okay.

(A tense beat.)

CHARLIE

(Attempting to restart)

Ah... How did you meet your husband?

AISHA

I met him the day of my wedding. My father was unhappy with me. He said I asked too many questions, so he sent me away to marry a man named Al-Hijazi Al-Sharif in France. I am his second wife.

KATIE

Second?

AISHA

In Islam a man is allowed up to four wives.

KATIE

I guess I knew that, I just didn't...

AISHA

Until recently France quietly tolerated multi-Muslim marriages. Diversity is good, right?

CHARLIE

Right.

KATIE

So this was an arranged marriage?

AISHA

A "transaction" is what my father called it. But the French authorities would have been... pissed off... is that right, "pissed off?"

CHARLIE

Yes, pissed off.

AISHA

If they had known I was only fifteen.

KATIE

You were fifteen years old when you married?

AISHA

My husband is... (She adds it up) Thirty-two years, ah, eight months and, ah, ah, six days older than me. What is the male version of a cougar?

*(Disturbed by this, KATIE helps herself to another glass of wine.)*

KATIE

Do you, like, live together - The three of you?

AISHA

No, he had some money and three apartments.

KATIE

Three?

AISHA

One for me, one for her and her sons and one for himself. I failed to give him a son so I was not his favorite.

KATIE

I see.

CHARLIE

I can tell where you're going with this, sweetheart.  
*(warning)* Let's not rush to judgment.

KATIE

I'm not, dear, just wondering--

CHARLIE

Aisha, you agreed to this arrangement did you not?

AISHA

I do not understand.

CHARLIE

This three-way, this ménage à trois, you agreed. It's part of your culture.

AISHA

...Yes. But--

CHARLIE

Then who are we to judge? Tell me, who are we to form opinions or draw conclusions?

KATIE

Charlie, she was fifteen.

CHARLIE

And Romeo and Juliet were fourteen and twelve. I swear, if Shakespeare were alive today he'd be wearing a radio ankle-bracelet and not allowed to walk to the corner market for some spotted dick without first checking with his parole officer. And if Plato and Aristotle were alive they'd be president and vice president of Nambla--!

*(Please Note: Nambla or N.A.M.B.L.A. Stands for North American Man/Boy Love Association, and organization that promotes pedophilia.)*

AISHA

Spotted dick?

KATIE

It's a English pudding that contains dried fruit. My husband, like most Americans, can't stand how it tastes but loves to order it just so he can say it. And speaking of food, where is that order?

AISHA

And Nambla?

KATIE

Ah...

*(CHARLIE'S I-phone rings. This time it's right next to KATIE.)*

KATIE

Saved by the bell. Sweetheart will you get that.

CHARLIE

"It's closer to you."

*(Pissed, KATIE goes for the phone.)*

CHARLIE

Make sure it's not Doctor Bankhammer.

KATIE

*(Off the caller I.D.)*

It's Shane.

CHARLIE

Oh god I don't want to talk to him.

*(She hits the button and stops the rings.)*

AISHA

You do not answer your phone very much.

KATIE

It's one of Charlie's grad students. He calls all the time. Working on the last draft of his thesis.

CHARLIE

I told him to call day or night, but I'm a professor, I didn't mean it.

KATIE

He's going through writer's block.

AISHA

His writing is blocked?

CHARLIE

Well, I guess that's one way to think of it.

AISHA

Censorship?

KATIE

Oh, no. We don't have censorship.

CHARLIE

So to speak

KATIE

This is America.

CHARLIE

But there is still censorship.

KATE

Example?

CHARLIE

My cruise missile comment.

KATE

I don't think we should bring that up--

AISHA

Cruise missile?

KATE

Yes... Ah, my husband, radical-freethinker-that-he-is, made an analogy in his lecture class.

CHARLIE

I said that suicide bombers were really just low-tech versions of American cruise missiles. And if you think about it I'm right. They both commit suicide, cause terror, they're just doing to us what we've been doing to them for years.

KATIE

Some R.O.T.C. cadet got his knickers in a twist. My husband refused to withdraw the statement. So, the student filed charges with the P.S.C.C.

CHARLIE

The--

AISHA

Wait. Let me. The Professor Student Complaint Committee.

CHARLIE

Close. The Professor Student Cooperation Committee.

KATIE

Then he told a joke about Jews in Afghanistan and more students complained.

CHARLIE

But most laughed.

KATIE

In the end charges were dropped. But Charlie had to agree to stay on subject and not make any more analogies.

CHARLIE

At least not analogies that compare American war technology to misguided martyrs.

KATIE

*(Terse)*

During lectures on Beowulf. I think that's where they got you, sweetheart.



CHARLIE

*(Getting a little drunk)*

I was accused of being unwoke.

AISHA

You mean like asleep?

KATIE

In a way. It's how we say someone is unaware.

AISHA

Unaware of what?

KATIE

Inattentive to social issues. Being woke means we're open to things like our white privilege.

CHARLIE

We're also into diversity, equity, inclusion, and against racism, imperialism, and colonialism.

AISHA

But you're white.

CHARLIE

Yes. And I hate that about myself.

AISHA

You hate yourself?

CHARLIE

I would've done anything to be born non-white.

AISHA

And Katie, do you hate yourself too for being white?

KATIE

Well, in someways, yes.

AISHA

Why would you want to be woke if it made you hate yourselves?

KATIE

It's not a bad hate, it's a good hate.

AISHA

I come from a place full of hate, it is never good.

KATIE

Maybe hate isn't the right word. We 'doubt' ourselves.

CHARLIE

*(Getting a little drunk)*

It's time, it's time that we start not only doubting but also apologizing. I mean really apologizing. Not just me but Americans in general. All of Western Culture. Including England.

AISHA

For?

CHARLIE

For our attitudes, our domination of the world. For exporting our culture! For being arrogant--.

AISHA

Like John Lennon.

CHARLIE

Yes. But also self-indulgent, hypocritical, and unwilling to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. Cheers.

*(He takes a gulp.)*

KATIE

And how do we do that?

CHARLIE

Easy. I'll start. Aisha, I want you to know that I personally apologize for the Crusades. Katie, would you care to apologize for British colonialism?

KATIE

I think you've had enough, sweetheart.

AISHA

You do not agree with your husband?

KATIE

No, but yes. I think all cultures need to get along. Each have advantages.

AISHA

What is one of my culture's advantages?

KATIE

...Ah.

Yes? AISHA

Well. Ah. Ah. Ah. Hair. KATIE

Hair? AISHA

Yes, you get to cover it. KATIE

You'd like to cover yours? AISHA

Oh, yes. There are days. Sometimes I can spend an hour, I kid you not an hour, trying to make something of this mop of mine. KATIE

Then I have a gift for you. AISHA

Oh, well that's awfully nice, but... KATIE

*(AISHA walks over to her old suitcase.)*

What, oh no. You shouldn't. KATIE

*(AISHA takes out a second plain Hijab.)*

This is for you. AISHA

That is so kind but-- KATIE  
*(uncomfortable)*

Please. AISHA

Well... Thank you. KATIE

AISHA

It's called a Hijab.

CHARLIE

That's not the one that goes over the face.

AISHA

Oh no, that is a Nikab.

KATIE

Well, that's so nice of you.

AISHA

Put it on.

KATIE

Like, right now?

AISHA

To be honest, your hair does not look good.

KATIE

*(Stung)*

...Okay.

*(During the following AISHA puts the Hijab on KATIE.)*

AISHA

When I was a little girl my mother often beat me because I refused to wear my Hijab. Then one day I was walking near our mosque. A local cleric came in the other direction. He walked with much authority. Right down the center of the road. In my village, women are not allowed to walk down the center. But I did. When I failed to get out of his way, his assistant beat me. It, ah, pissed me off.

*(AISHA finishes adjusting the Hijab.)*

AISHA

What do you think?

CHARLIE

Nice.

AISHA

*(To CHARLIE)*

Do you now appreciate her mind?

CHARLIE

I've always appreciated Katie's mind.

AISHA

But are you thinking less impure thoughts about her?

CHARLIE

Not really.

KATIE

*(changing the subject)*

It's so nice, thank you.

*(KATIE starts to take it off.)*

AISHA

No. Please. I insist.

*(During the following AISHA adjusts KATIE'S Hijab.)*

AISHA

Then one day I decided I would challenge him--

CHARLIE

The cleric?

AISHA

Yes. I would walk right down the center of the road and he would move to the right and I would move to the left and we would pass as equals.

CHARLIE

Wait, that's what happens in Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*.

AISHA

Yes, that is where I got the idea. For a week I studied the cleric. I planned exactly where I would force him to move half way. But, then it occurred to me that, like most women in Somalia, he would not see me. Then one day I thought about Elvis.

KATIE

Elvis? You mean Elvis Presley?

AISHA

Yes. The king.

KATIE

You know about him?

AISHA

Oh, yes. In Somalia Elvis is more popular than Jesus.

KATIE

*(Amused)*

Okay.

AISHA

I thought about Elvis and his rhinestones. So I saved up every thing I could for months until I ordered through the mail a small box of rhinestones. I spent two days sewing them to my Hijab. I ah... wait I know this word. I... I bedazzled it. Is that right?

KATIE

*(Amused)*

Yes.

AISHA

This I thought would get me noticed, no?

KATIE

*(Suddenly getting it)*

That was your poem about the "sparkles."

AISHA

Yes.

KATIE

I get it now.

AISHA

I practiced walking straight for a week. Making sure I would not flinch. Is that not the right word, flinch?

CHARLIE

Yes. Flinch.

AISHA

The next morning I put my plan into action. But as I left, my mother found my rhinestone Hijab. She punished me for a month by locking me in my room.

KATIE

That's so sad.

AISHA

When you are Muslim and a woman, being locked in your room is not much of a punishment. A year later to stop my protests my father sent me to France to be married.

KATIE

That's so unfair--

CHARLIE

Now wait a minute. If you think about it, every society has its rules. I'm sorry that your mother and father punished you. But this is just what we're talking about. To understand another culture is critical. Did you know that for the Malagasy people in Madagascar it's taboo to eat a blind hen or to sleep facing westwards? Or that the adolescent boys of South New Guinea are told that if they absorb the sperm of their elders via anal copulation they will be stronger.

KATIE

Oh for god's sake.

CHARLIE

But I'm okay with this. Why? Because I don't judge.

AISHA

Because you are woke.

CHARLIE

That's right.

AISHA

*(Holding up the bottle of water)*

May I have another Grape-Berry Blast?

KATIE

Oh, yes, of course. *(To Charlie)* Don't say anything while I'm a way!

*(KATIE takes off her Hijab as she exits to the kitchen.)*

*(CHARLIE waits for KATIE to leave and runs over to AISHA.)*

CHARLIE

Ready? These two Jews are flying over Afghanistan when their engine conks out.

AISHA

What are you doing?

CHARLIE

Telling a joke. Two Jews crash in the desert. One turns to the other and says, "It's a miracle; we survived!" "What are you talking about?" says the other, "If the Taliban catches us, they'll kill us!" You with the joke so far?

AISHA

Yes, two Jews crash in the desert.

CHARLIE

So, they decide to try to sneak out of Afghanistan. They begin to walk – all day and all night without food or water. Two days later they're starving and dehydrated. On the third day, they're almost dead when they come upon an Afghan village. "I can't go on," says one Jew to the other "let's just confront our fate." "Wait," says the other "I just came up with a brilliant idea. Let's tell them we're Muslim." "No, I won't lie," says the other Jew. "But it's our only chance at survival." Just then, an Afghan villager walks up. "Hi, I'm Mahomet," says one Jew. The other says, "Hi. I'm Levi and I'm Jewish!" The villager looks at the desperate men and smiles. "Levi, the Jew, you look tired and sick; let me get you food and cool water. And Mahomet, happy Ramadan."

*(AISHA doesn't laugh.)*

CHARLIE

Get it?

AISHA

...Yes.

CHARLIE

It's a joke. It's funny. And as you can see it doesn't hurt anyone's feelings. It's woke. It's a woke joke.

AISHA

Ha ha.

*(KATIE enters from the kitchen with water.)*

KATIE

*(Worried)*

Charlie, I was looking out the kitchen window and there was this man on the sidewalk.

CHARLIE

What's this now?



KATIE

He was looking at the house. I thought it was the delivery person but he was just standing there.

CHARLIE

Looking at our house?

KATIE

Yes.

*(KATIE peeks out the front drapes.)*

KATIE

Wait. He's moving on.

CHARLIE

Who was he?

KATIE

Don't know, some guy.

CHARLIE

And he was just standing there?

KATIE

Yes.

CHARLIE

Obviously a fan of perfect Colonial architecture.

KATIE

*(Covering her concern)*

Perhaps I'll call to see where our food is.

*(KATIE dials the phone.)*

AISHA

I enjoyed your woke joke very much. Thank you.

KATIE

Oh god no, you didn't tell the Jews in Afghanistan joke.

CHARLIE

She laughed. Am I right?

AISHA

Ha ha.

KATIE

*(On Phone)*

Yes, did your delivery person come by? ...No? We ordered flat noodles and they're not here. *(Again, the party does not speak English)* ...No. Flat. ...No, no, not "flag." Flat.

AISHA

*(To CHARLIE)*

And this was the joke that got you into trouble?

CHARLIE

Yes. Can you believe it?

KATIE

*(On phone)*

No. Flat. Like... Ah... Ah... Horizontal.

CHARLIE

You know if I were smart I wouldn't have told that joke in class but in the free speech zone.

KATIE

*(On Phone)*

570 Eel Street-- I mean Elm. Soon? Thank you. Namaste.

*(KATIE peeks out the window again.)*

AISHA

Free speech zone?

CHARLIE

It's a place on campus where you can stand and state an opinion.

AISHA

Can't Americans do this anyway?

CHARLIE

We do, but we also sometimes make a special spot for it.

KATIE

What are we talking about?

CHARLIE

The free speech zone on campus.

KATIE

And where is this?

CHARLIE

Near the Ag building.

KATIE

I've never seen it.

CHARLIE

Down around the corner. You have to take a right at Mrs. Durant's Fountain and then follow the path down the alley to the area between the Ag building loading dock and the power plant.

KATIE

*(Still not believing it exists)*

Huh.

CHARLIE

They built it during the Vietnam War so students could voice opposition.

KATIE

The Free Speech Zone, okay.

CHARLIE

You've walked right by it a dozen times. There are several cement seats and this podium work of art type thing.

KATIE

Okay, I believe you.

CHARLIE

I was just saying if I was smart I would've told the joke there.

KATIE

Yes, that would've been smart because no one knows where it is.

CHARLIE

No, it's used quite often. Just the other day I was having lunch at the fountain when I heard someone yelling, so I followed the path and found this feminist, standing at the podium all by herself, shouting graphic details about clitoridectomy.

KATIE

Charlie, perhaps--

AISHA

What is this word "feminist?"

KATIE

Oh. That's a woman who... who supports other women.

AISHA

Are you a feminist?

KATIE

Yes, yes I am. I've spent over a decade fighting for women's rights.

AISHA

And so you are also a... What is the word... liberal?

KATIE

Progressive.

AISHA

So you fought against apartheid.

KATIE

I've given money. I also have a gay pride flag on my refrigerator.

CHARLIE

*(Picking up where he left off)*

As I was saying, needless to say, I was shocked. Soon a few people joined me as she went on about how there were like five countries where this awful thing is still occasionally practiced.

AISHA

Thirty-two.

CHARLIE

Excuse me?

AISHA

Thirty-two countries. And it is not occasional.

CHARLIE

Okay. I stand corrected. But as she shouted all I could think was are we much better? Look at the pressure we put on young women in this country to have plastic surgery, breast implants.

KATIE

Sweetheart, maybe we should talk about her speech.

CHARLIE

*(not listening)*

I know this girl, sixteen years old, breast implants.

KATIE

*(Not pleased)*

You can say it, it was my niece.

CHARLIE

Brenda.

KATIE

Brooke.

CHARLIE

Sixteen.

KATIE

Eighteen.

CHARLIE

And she's cut open so plastic silicone sacks can be inserted into her chest wall. I swear if this was happening in some third world country, National Geographic would be there with a camera crew filming a PBS special on the bizarre cultural practices of the Boo-roo-vee people.

KATIE

Boo-roo-vee? What the hell are you saying?

CHARLIE

I mean people unlike us. And we'd all cling to our TVs saying my god we have to send someone down there to educate them. But it happens here and so no one questions. Oh, and get this, in the end Brenda--

KATIE

Brooke.

CHARLIE

Didn't like'em - Too diminutive. So six months later she had them redone. And this time her mother joins her. Dual augmentation. Shared an operating room. After which they threw a party and invited all their girlfriends to celebrate their cleavage. Can you imagine what National Geographic would have made of that!

KATIE

Sweetheart, they do live in California--

CHARLIE

My point is--.

KATIE

Yes, what's your point.

CHARLIE

We have just as many bizarre primitive cultural quirks as you do--

KATIE

What my husband means is--

CHARLIE

So I feel totally comfortable questioning the logic of breast implants in my class--

KATIE

Which, knowing my husband, he would do during a lecture on Emily Dickinson.

CHARLIE

But I'm uncomfortable bringing up female circumcision because it would prove me a hypocrite.

AISHA

And what are the punishments for not having these implants? Would her family beat her, or disown her, or kill her?

CHARLIE

There are no prescribed punishments, but there are social punishments. Cultural punishments. A flat-chested girl is told by Hollywood and Instagram that she's less desirable. What's the difference between that and the Boo-roo-vee people?

KATIE

Would you stop saying that.

CHARLIE

It comes down to one basic fact - criticism of a person's culture is counterproductive. It's saying that the American McDonalds, grab-and-go culture is more evolved. When in fact there's nothing the west can teach other cultures.

AISHA  
Nothing?

CHARLIE  
Absolutely nothing.

AISHA  
I disagree. I think you do not criticize other cultures because you lack something important.

CHARLIE  
And what is that?

AISHA  
Balls.

*(This time it's KATIE'S turn to laugh into her drink.)*

AISHA  
Am I using the wrong word?

KATIE  
*(amused)*  
No, you got that right.

CHARLIE  
*(Stung)*  
I, ah, respectfully disagree.

AISHA  
Then, even though we are not at the free speech zone, please state a criticism of my culture.

CHARLIE  
*(Uncomfortable)*  
Well, ah... I don't have one readily available at this time.

AISHA  
Is it because my culture is so closely tied to religion?

CHARLIE  
Not at all.

AISHA  
But you would be okay with me being critical of your American culture?

CHARLIE

I'd be totally open to it.

AISHA

And Catholicism?

CHARLIE

Especially Catholicism.

AISHA

Good, because I do have a criticism.

CHARLIE

I'm all ears.

AISHA

Then I want you to know that I agree with Voltaire who said, "God surely cannot have been born of a girl, nor died on a gibbet, nor be eaten in a piece of dough."

CHARLIE

*(uncomfortable)*

See, we disagree, but we can still be friends.

AISHA

Your turn.

CHARLIE

To?

AISHA

State a criticism of Islam. Make it a good one.

CHARLIE

...Well, I... I can't say I have one.

KATIE

And we are thankful, lets change the subject--

AISHA

*(To CHARLIE)*

I think you do.

CHARLIE

Well, I don't.

AISHA

Then you are stupid.



CHARLIE

Okay, I think we've had enough of this--

KATIE

Perhaps we should talk about your commencement speech--

AISHA

I thought an American university was one big free speech zone.

KATIE

It is. But you have to know when to use speech and when not.

AISHA

It sounds to me that the one thing that you are not allowed to say is that there are certain things you are not allowed to say.

CHARLIE

No, it's that in a healthy progressive society certain conflicts should be avoided at all costs. Like, in France, did you hear what happened to Brigitte Bardot--

AISHA

Brigitte Bardot?

KATIE

She's an actress.

CHARLIE

She was fined thousands of Euros for inciting hatred against Muslims.

AISHA

What did she do?

CHARLIE

She published on her website a letter that condemned the slaughter of sheep in some Islamic festival. But what's the problem? Is not the sheep put to good use? They eat it, right? Or give it to the poor or something. Who cares if it's sacrificed in some religious ceremony or coldly dicing up in a Tyson meat packing plant! What difference does it make?

AISHA

And so you achieve tolerance by fining people?

KATIE

You achieve tolerance by controlling freedom of speech.

AISHA

But I was critical of Catholics.

KATIE

That's different; my husband is woke about his religion.

AISHA

And I am unwoke about mine?

*(The phone rings, CHARLIE picks it up and hangs up.)*

CHARLIE

I'm getting another bottle.

*(He starts for the kitchen.)*

KATIE

Charlie--

CHARLIE

In vino veritas.

KATIE

*(Insistent)*

Wait.

*(CHARLIE stops.)*

KATIE

*(Beat)*

...Aisha, you must understand, the joke wasn't the only time my husband's been brought up on charges.

CHARLIE

I don't think we need to go into this.

KATIE

You see I was hired first. My husband thought he could make a living as a writer. *(Cutting, to Charlie)* But two articles in Mother Jones Magazine hardly pays the electric bill.

CHARLIE

Details aren't necessary.

KATIE

A tenure track job opened and Charlie was a spousal hired. But then, his mouth kept getting him in trouble. The final straw came when he--

CHARLIE

Katie, don't--

KATIE

He suggested that... *(She clears her throat)* Islam is not always a peace loving religion.

CHARLIE

I was misconstrued.

KATIE

No, you said it. And of course he had to do it during a lecture on the *Scarlet Letter*. He has a nasty habit of getting off the subject.

AISHA

I've noticed.

KATIE

Aisha, please understand, this whole tenure thing seems quite absurd to me. It doesn't exist in England. But here, if you're not granted tenure you're fired. And if Charlie goes it would be... difficult to get by on only one salary... we might even lose the house.

AISHA

There is a chance you won't get it?

KATIE

Deans, presidents, and department heads think twice about granting tenure to professors who have been brought up on charges. Add that to one drunk driving conviction--

CHARLIE

I hadn't even started the engine! I was just sitting in the car!

KATIE

And you can see why our future is less than perfect.

*(Beat.)*

AISHA

That's why I'm here. So you can show that you are woke. Not Little Miss Piggy.

KATIE

Yes. But... We are a bit concerned about your speech. What're you going to talk about?

AISHA

Aesthetics and poetry.

KATIE

And that's a lovely topic and I'm sure informative-- It's just that... that...

CHARLIE

What my wife is trying to say is that we thought perhaps you could talk about the times in your life that people have been prejudiced against you because you're Muslim.

KATIE

My husband got some figures off the web about jobs, housing, and educational discrimination against Islamic people in the west. He put them on three by five cards

*(KATIE opens the drawer and takes out the index cards.)*

CHARLIE

But I think the key is personal stories. They always seem to touch an audience more than just facts and figures.

KATIE

Do you have any personal stories about discrimination?

AISHA

Let me think. Yes. I could talk about the time that I was forced to leave school.

CHARLIE

Oooo, perfect.

AISHA

I was fourteen.

CHARLIE

And you had to leave school because you're Muslim?

AISHA

Yes.

CHARLIE

Any way you could work that in to your speech?

AISHA

A local Cleric ordered my school closed because he said education made girls uppity.

KATIE

...Aisha, ah, I'm not sure you understand what we're after here.

AISHA

Or I could talk about how I was beaten.

CHARLIE

Better.

AISHA

I was beaten because I left my house without permission. While my husband was at work, I would sneak out to this Internet café. He caught me. And beat me.

CHARLIE

Aisha--

AISHA

Perhaps I could talk about my circumcision.

KATIE

*(Stunned)*

...You've been...

AISHA

Yes.

CHARLIE

Aisha, we are not asking a lot--

KATIE

Charlie.

CHARLIE

What?

KATIE

Stop. She's been--

CHARLIE

I know, I heard. Is female circumcision mentioned anywhere in the Koran?

KATIE

Charlie, really--

CHARLIE

She brought it up! *(To Aisha)* Is it mentioned in the Koran?

AISHA

No.

CHARLIE

It dates back before Islam doesn't it?

AISHA

Yes.

CHARLIE

I rest my case! If you want to disfigure your body with circumcision or breast augmentation! That's your culture and it must be respected!

AISHA

So we have the right to our backwardness.

CHARLIE

As we to ours!

AISHA

No matter who it hurts!

CHARLIE

Damnit! *(Beat)* Aisha, please understand, my PhD is in Tibetan lit. I have no future. So whatever grievance you have I need you to set aside for a moment and play the part.

AISHA

What part?

CHARLIE

The part of a put upon sub culture that we in the west are marginalizing!

*(Pause.)*

AISHA

After my marriage failed, I was forced to go back to Somalia in disgrace. My family locked me in the house. The last person to speak to me a year ago was my grandfather. He told me the story of Adam and Eve. He said I could not be forgiven because of Eve's transgressions. There were ten things, he said, women suffer because of their disobedience. First there was blood. Next painful childbirth. Marriage to strangers. A lesser share of inheritance. Fewer rights in divorce. Seclusion in the house. Head covered in public. Testimony not equal to a man's. But the one that most affected me was...

(MORE)

Lack of merit. Merit, he said, has a thousand components, only one of which belongs to a woman. Nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine belong to men. All I could think was... *(Beat)* What bullshit.

*(CHARLIE and KATIE are speechless.)*

AISHA

Is that not the right word, "bullshit?" And now you want me to count the ways that you have discriminated against me.

CHARLIE

...What the hell type of Muslim are you?

*(The phone rings.)*

CHARLIE

I believe it's closer to you.

KATIE

No, it's closer to you.

CHARLIE

It's almost equal distance but in fact slightly closer to you!

AISHA

Please allow me.

*(AISHA looks at the caller ID.)*

AISHA

It is from someone named Stern-berg.

CHARLIE

Shit! President Sternberg!

*(Both KATIE and CHARLIE dive for the phone. CHARLIE gets there first.)*

CHARLIE

*(on phone)*

Hello... Yes... President Sternberg. I'm so sorry that Mrs. Sternberg is not feeling well-- What? ...Who has been trying to get hold of us? *(Looking at Aisha)* ...Yes, she's sitting right here. ...What? ...Is this a joke? .

Sweetheart?

KATIE

(*CHARLIE waves her off. Beat.*)

CHARLIE  
(*on phone*)

..Yes. ...I understand.

(*He slowly hangs up.*)

KATIE

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Aisha... How did you get here?

AISHA

Mogadishu, to Cairo, to Frankfurt, to--

CHARLIE

And what did you do in Frankfurt?

AISHA

I waited.

CHARLIE

What did you do during the long layover?

AISHA

I counted--

CHARLIE

No, you did more. You went to an Internet café.

AISHA

...Yes.

CHARLIE

And what did you do there?

AISHA

I sent e-mails.

CHARLIE

And whom did you send those e-mails to?



KATIE

Charlie, what--?

CHARLIE

Who did you send them to?!

AISHA

...Clerics.

KATIE

And what was in these e-mails?

AISHA

The truth. As I see it.

KATIE

What's going on?

CHARLIE

She questioned Muhammad and criticized Islam. She sent them ninety-five reasons why Islam is wrong.

KATIE

Oh my god.

CHARLIE

President Sternberg just cancelled her commencement speech. He's running back to the airport to bring back Wynton Marsalis.

KATIE

How did this...?

CHARLIE

The president's office got a call from the president of Hamilton College. Some one named Sheikh Omar Bakri-- (to Aisha) Does that name sound familiar?

AISHA

He would not share the street.

CHARLIE

He issued a fatwa.

AISHA

A fatwa is simply a religious order; it does not mean a death sentence.

CHARLIE

In this case it does. The fatwa calls for her death and death to anyone who "houses" her.

KATIE

But that would mean...

CHARLIE

Us.

KATIE

Oh my God.

CHARLIE

Were we followed?

KATIE

There was a man out front. An Islamic looking man.

CHARLIE

Aisha, we tried to help you. We wrote grants!

*(CHARLIE runs over and peeks out the drapes.)*

AISHA

I am sorry if I caused trouble.

CHARLIE

Better make sure the back door is locked.

*(CHARLIE grabs his cell phone and exits to the kitchen.)*

AISHA

Perhaps you could take me to a hotel.

KATIE

*(fraught)*

Aisha...

AISHA

*(desperate)*

Please.

KATIE

...I can't.

AISHA

I have nowhere to go.

KATIE

We can't endanger ourselves.

AISHA

As a woke person.

KATIE

What are you talking about?

AISHA

Will you fight for me?

KATIE

I'll... do all I can, but there are limits...

AISHA

As a woman...

KATIE

As a woman, what?

AISHA

Will you help me as a feminist.

KATIE

I don't understand.

AISHA

*(anxious)*

After I got your invitation, many feminists helped me. In my hometown they secretly pooled their money to bribed the authorities. One even dressed as a man and drove me to the airport. Now, I need your help.

KATIE

But this is different, this is...

AISHA

How? How is it different?

*(This next line is painfully difficult.)*

KATIE

This is... cultural.

*(Doorbell - KATIE jumps.)*

KATIE

Charlie!

*(CHARLIE enters on his cell phone. He has a fresh bottle of wine to use as a weapon.)*

CHARLIE

Don't answer it! *(On his iPhone, panicked)* Is this the police? ...There's someone at our door!

AISHA

I think--

CHARLIE

You've said enough! Quiet!

*(CHARLIE inches to the window and peeks out the drapes.)*

CHARLIE

*(On the phone)*

He's around five foot four.

*(Doorbell.)*

CHARLIE

*(On the phone to the police)*

Oh shit, he rang our doorbell! Wait, I've got a better view now. Oh crap, he's wearing a hoodie. Hold on.

*(Fearful, CHARLIE moves to another part of the drapes and peeks out.)*

CHARLIE

*(On the phone, nervous)*

Ah. He's carrying a bag. A small bag, just big enough for a gun... Wait, he's also wearing a baseball cap. It reads... *(beat)* Din. Ho. Barbecue-- *(Beat)* Shit.

*(Doorbell. KATIE and CHARLIE breathe a sigh of relief.)*

CHARLIE

Ah, officer, I'm so sorry. We ordered Chinese... It's the delivery person. ...no, we're fine. ...Thank you.

*(CHARLIE hangs up and starts to open the door.)*

KATIE

Wait! It could be someone wearing a disguise. *(To Aisha)* Who were you talking to in the car?

AISHA

Car?

KATIE

Before you came in, Charlie said you were talking to someone in a car?

AISHA

Oh, this person asked me to move my car because it blocked his driveway. I told him I did not own one. Nor do I know how to drive.

*(Ding Dong.)*

*(CHARLIE and KATIE take a breath. Slowly, CHARLIE cracks the door open. He holds the wine bottle as if it is a weapon. A hand comes through the door holding a greasy paper bag.)*

DELIVERY PERSON (OFFSTAGE)

One order Sweet and Sour Pork, one order Gong Bao Chicken, white rice, and two orders of fried Eel.

CHARLIE

*(To Katie)*

Eel?

KATIE

I'll get my purse.

CHARLIE

*(To the delivery person)*

Don't come in, stay.

*(He hands the hand money and takes the bag.)*

CHARLIE

Keep the change.

*(CHARLIE closes the door and puts the greasy bag on the coffee table. They sit. They all stare at the bag. No one eats.)*

*(Pause.)*

AISHA

Perhaps it's best if I go.

*(KATIE and CHARLIE are too stunned to talk. AISHA picks up her old suitcase and starts for the door. There she stops. Beat.)*

AISHA

John Lennon said, "I believe in God, but not as one thing, not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. I believe that what Jesus and Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest said was right. It's just that the translations have gone wrong." That is my new religion - one which will never lapse.

*(AISHA opens her suitcase and takes out a Hijab that's bedazzled with rhinestones. She takes off her plain Hijab, for the first time we see her beautiful hair. She puts on the rhinestone hijab but leaves a lot of her hair showing.)*

*(AISHA exits.)*

KATIE

*(Suddenly hit with regret)*

Aisha!

*(KATIE runs to the door.)*

CHARLIE

Don't do it! Katie, please. Do not go after her!

*(KATIE stops, puts her head against the front door, frozen, not knowing what to do.)*

CHARLIE

*(Worried)*

She didn't spend the night. We didn't "house" her, the fatwa doesn't apply to us.

*(Beat. They are both emotionally drained.)*

CHARLIE  
*(To himself)*

We're safe.

*(Beat.)*

CHARLIE  
*(Trying to convince himself)*

We're safe.

*(Beat.)*

CHARLIE  
*(Softly, not sure)*

We're safe.

*(Beat.)*

CHARLIE  
*(A whisper)*

We're safe.

*(The lights fade.)*

*(In the darkness, we hear John Lennon's Imagine.)*

*The End*