

The Wild Wedding



The Wild Wedding

A Play by Falah Shaker

Translated by Alyaa A. Naser

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Editor's Note: The original play contained only two characters. The translator was added by Alyaa A. Naser when the play was given its first English language performance at Sheffield University, England, in June of 2014. AS.

Characters

Translator

Son

Mother

Prologue:

Translator: When you choose to travel on foot, you suddenly discover that this may be the worst decision that you have ever made in your life because you can't see the light to follow. In translation, you are never fully blind or able to see clearly. (*Turns on desk lamp.*)

When I first read a text I see it clearly; then when I start translating, things start to get blurred, sometimes it gets even dark, as if the lights start to fade away. Sometimes it gets even painful, when I can feel what is being said but I can't describe it clearly in the second language.

It's just like walking in a dark room – you 'think' you know where everything is but somehow things have changed their places and you keep on stumbling and falling. 'Thinking' is not enough to walk through a dark room. You need to know, and to know, you need this light, but you have no other way except keep walking. Although here I am talking about the worst scenario.

In many occasions, the walk can be smooth and full of beautiful scenes around, and this is when I start doubting: should I follow this light or there must be something wrong. Of course sometimes I am wrong and the journey is as beautiful as it appears.

Scene one:

*The events take place on an old dilapidated boat used for river transport on the banks of the Tigris.
Sound of boat creaking.*

Son. You are lying.

Mother. I came here for you.

Son. You are lying.

Mother. Why don't you believe me? I came for you.

Son. You are lying.

Mother. I am here. Can't you see me?

Son. You are lying.

Mother. Oh My God. Can't you believe in my existence here, by you?

Son. You are lying.

Mother. Do you doubt my intentions? You might be able to do that, but you can't deny my presence. Are you denying that I am actually here?

Son. You are lying.

Mother. You are giving me a headache.

Son. I love you...

Mother. Oh... me too. Let's leave this place.

Son. I love you.

Mother. Listen, my boy, this boat is deserted and sinking. It might go down any moment. Let's leave it, let's leave this boat first, and when we are safe we can talk about your affection as you wish. Let's go.

Son. I love you.

Mother. Why don't you move? Why do you want us to die? Don't you love that we'll be living together?

Son. I love these mosquitos.

Mother. What?!

Son. Their bites make me feel my hand.

Mother. There are a lot of insects here. You'll get sick because of one of those bites.

Son. They never leave me alone.

Mother. Who?

Son. They bite me... Hug me...

Mother. The insects?

Son. I love them...

Mother. I must save you. Let's leave.

Son. You want the money?!

Mother. Let's get out first... then...

- Son. You came to ask me to show you the place for the money.
- Mother. I came to save you.
- Son. Because of the money.
- Mother. No... because I am your mother.
- Son. Not because you love me... but because you are my mother.
- Mother. No because I... I.... Here...
- Son. You don't love me, you want the money.
- Mother. I'm not here for the money.
- Son. Let's burn it!
- Mother. What?
- Son. Let's burn the money so that you can be here for me.
- Mother. Burn the money? Burn all that you have gained in your life?
- Son. So that you can be here for me.
- Mother. Just for that? Is there any sensible person who would burn a whole fortune for such an idea?
- Son. You were always treating me as insane, so why are you asking me to be sane now?
- Mother. You weren't insane; you almost drove *me* mad. And here you are trying to make me crazy again now.
- Son. You don't love me.
- Mother. Oh, here we are again.
- Son. You've never looked in my eyes before.
- Mother. Your eyes?
- Son. You were my mother, but you never looked in my eyes.
- Mother. I *was* your mother?

Son. I'll give you the money if you look in my eyes with love once.

Mother. (*Despondently*) Look in your eyes?

Son. For one minute and you'll get all the money.

Mother. I can't... I...

Son. You were my mother and you can't look me in the eyes. Don't be my mother, just look at me for the money.

Mother. I can't.

Son. Your money... (*Tempting her*)

Mother. You are trying to wake me from my death...

Son. Look into my eyes...

Mother. It'll kill me... if...

Son. Your money.

Mother. You'll show me where it is?

Son. I've never lied.

Mother. Don't look at me now. Not for the money... Well, maybe for it... Oh, I have to face what terrifies me... Oh, the color of your eyes... I've never noticed it before!



Shatha Salim as the Mother in the 2007 production of *The Wild Wedding* in Jordan and Baghdad in 2007. Photo credit: Falah Shaker.

Scene Two:

Mother. Will... No...No. Will, you lied to me. No. Will, please don't make me a whore, I am still young... Not all three of you... Not all of you.

She spits; slaps imaginary slaps; is lifted from the ground and falls back again; screams; hits out several times. No rapists are actually present, but the audience should be under the illusion that they are. The mother keeps on fighting; she collapses and faints. Long moments of silence. The son moves toward her and tries to wake her up.)

Son. Jemeela, you went mad.

Translator: Jemilla: an Arabic name meaning beautiful.

Son: Or you imagined you went mad. You haven't gone to heaven. You are still on this earth and breathing.

Mother. Don't touch me, you filthy American.

Son. Jemeela, I am an Iraqi; a son of an American.

Mother. You are not. You are their son; all three of them.

Son. And you?

Mother. I am an accident.

Son. My mother.

Mother. You don't have a mother.

Son. The sea...

Mother. The sea might be your mother. There are American marines, sleeping on the sea in their battleships. It was a mermaid or a fairy that threw you into my belly to get rid of her shame.

Son. Your hair is the sea...

Mother. What?!

Son. The sea is my mother... the sea is your hair.

Mother. I was drowned long ago... When you arrived I died.

Son. I was in your belly. You vomited me out. You didn't love me. Why did you vomit me out? You should have left me to rot there. Why? Why don't you love me?

Mother. You can only be the fruit of injustice and torture. Nobody can love the result of injustice and torture.

Son. When the woodcutter cuts down a tree, why should he kill the bird in it?

Mother. I know. It's not your fault. But what can I do? I couldn't be your mother. You were merely torture that tore me up from inside... You were a pain in my womb... that prolonged the torture of that rape forever.

Son. Should we kill the bird to show the cruelty of the woodcutter, or should we hang the bird to show how the tree keeps silent while it's being cut down?

Mother. I don't have the power to face the axes of their hands... Three against a child of thirteen; a child whose dress ballooned to resemble the dream that she had of being a mother. No, I couldn't love you. It's not your fault and it isn't mine. I won't ever be able to love you. These are my reasons.

Son. Then why did you let me be born, a fruit of their sinning and your torture?

Mother. Did I think I wanted this?

Son: I wasn't born by my own will.

Mother. (*Screams*) It wasn't my will either. Carrying you was another rape for me, maybe even more severe and shameful. (*She speaks quickly and in pain.*) Your movement in my belly was driving me mad... I tied a whip around myself to suffocate you... I tied a whip around myself so tightly that my eyes grew dark and I fainted... I carried all the weight of the world on my belly... turned myself around ... threw myself from the bed to the ground many times... My belly was close to splitting open on the hardness of the ground. I bit myself out of pain and anger, but you clung to me... you didn't die. You wanted to stay to make the pain, scandal, shame, and torture complete.

Son. And I arrived...

Mother. And my childhood departed with your arrival. I suddenly found myself an old woman suffering from shame and torture.

Son. I was your torture.

Mother. And my shame.

Son. And you?

Mother. Me? What?

Son. Me, what?

Mother. What do you mean?

Son. What about *My* torture. *My* insanity?

Mother. What do you mean?

Son. You weren't the reason for my torture and insanity?

Mother. No, I wasn't...

Son. You weren't, because you *are* my torture and insanity...

Mother. We are victims. Victims have no choices.

Son. I was your victim.

Mother. And I was theirs.

Son. Who is my father?

Mother. Our executioner.

Son. And who is our executioner?

Mother. Your father.

Son. I want to be pitied.

Mother. I am let down and in agony. I can pity no one, not even myself.

Son. (*Sits down*) Why don't you let me pity you?

Mother. You are lying.

Son. Yes, lying... I can't pity you because I love you.

Mother. I wish that you hated me. I wish you had disappeared. Then I might have been able to forget what happened... but you clung to me, begged me to love you ... and I go mad whenever I feel love for you. I feel the pain of being raped all over again. Do you realize how much pain and humiliation your love is giving me?

Son. Is there any humiliation in love?

Mother. Yes, when you love with no dignity.

Son. But I am mad and I can do what I like. Aren't I mad?

Mother. I wish you were: you would give me a rest.

Son. I am sane then?

Mother. I wish you were: you would give yourself a rest.

Son. And you?

Mother. An eclipsed moon in the day-light... I wanted you to be mad so that I could hate you because you are the fruit of their sin.

Son: Am I mad?

Mother. A mother can never hate her own child no matter whom the father is, unless there is some defect in the child, a reason to hate him.

Son. Sane, then?

Mother. I called you mad, so you were not sane any more.

Son. But I'm not mad.

Mother. Between your sanity and insanity I lost my conscience.

Son. I'll sell it back to you.

Mother. My conscience?

Son. Be my mother for one night... You'll buy it back with a few hours...

Mother. What a cheap conscience that I can buy it with few hours of repentance.

Translator: I never stop doubting myself and the words I am using, personally speaking. In translation, these doubts become louder: I do try a lot of alternatives and read them aloud; I try to make sense of feelings rather than words themselves. I never feel sure about anything when producing a new version of the text, but I do believe doubt is a virtue, especially here, as it allows more space for interpretation. And thank God, theatre is all about this space of interpretation, or at least, I think so.

The son is smoking.

Mother. You didn't smoke before.

Son. I don't, and I don't like to smoke. But since I am alive and I can, why shouldn't I? My sickness and coughing might draw your attention to me, even if just for a moment. You might feel pity for me. I can't ask a victim to love... but I can give myself the right to ask pity from one victim to a more victimized one. This pity might give me the illusion of love, and this illusion may be enough for me.

Mother. Happy are those who are able to adopt an illusion and believe it.

Son. I don't know you.

Mother. What?

Son. You don't know me.

Mother. How?

Son. Can't we save a drowning person even if we don't know him?

Mother. I should save myself first.

Son. Let's start.

Mother. Start what?

Son. To forget.

Mother. I am the memory itself.

Son. Oh...

Mother. What's wrong with you?

Son. I am lost... I am looking for my family... Can you show me the way to Al Resheed Street, please?

Mother. What's this?

Son. That's how we start. We are strangers meeting for the first time.

Mother. Strangers?

Son. We might love each other if we forget who we are.

Mother. This is insane.

Son. Where is sanity if the mother hates her own son?

Mother. I am not your mother.

Son. Strangers then. I am lost. I am looking for my family. Can you show me the way to Al Resheed street, please? And I want to go to the market too.

Mother. It's... It's...

Son. Oh, I understand, thank you... Sorry to waste your time.

Mother. I had a lot of time, yet I lost it with my torture.

Son. You are still young, and I am sorry if I am keeping you... I'm a teenager; we love women who are our mother's age.

Mother. Your mother is my age?

Son. No, you are a little older, but you are prettier!

Mother. Thank you.

Son. Do you have children? (*She is startled.*) Oh I guess... You are not married yet... That doesn't matter. Many women don't get married, and that is better... because you can love any child as if it were yours... but if you were married...

Mother: I am...

Son. Then you'd love your child more than any other child in the world, and this is selfishness, total selfishness to love your child more than the world. That's why marriage can hurt the conscience. All the children in the world are yours and you can love them all.

Mother. All?

Son. I am one of them... My name... My name is...

Mother. I am not...

Son. Fereed.

Translator: The name means unique, and also sound like the Arabic word that refers to one part of a pair of anything.

Mother. A lovely name.

Son. My mother used to call me "Ferda."

Mother. Ferda?

Son. One of a pair! (*Indicates that this means one individual shoe. They laugh loudly.*)

Mother. You are smart.

Son. But not beautiful.

Mother. Who says so? Oh my child, on the contrary ... you are... you are beautiful.

Son. Really? Why don't they love me then?

Mother. Who dares not to love you?

Son. Are you telling the truth?!

Mother. Yes... I... I am... (*She screams to end the game.*) I can't... I can't.... I can't love you... Can't even imagine how to.

Son. (*Screams*) But I love you.

Mother. You love me? You've never called me Mum.

Son. What?

Mother. Say 'Mum' (*He tries to say 'Mum' with an enormous, effort and screams.*)

Son. What?

Mother. Why don't you say it?

Son. Because you've never played with me.

Mother. Played with you? You and I were never children before. We are victims, and victims lose their innocence.

Son. Play with me!

Mother. Don't be silly.

Son. I'll say it. I'll give you money.

Mother. I can't.

Son. (*Closes his eyes*) Where are you? Where are you? (*He collides with her.*) Why aren't you hiding yourself?

Mother. And where is this "myself" to hide?

Son. It is here.

Mother. Where?

Son. (*He points to a swing.*) On the swing.

Mother. I fell down long ago.

Son. No, you flew. It's here... here.

(*He takes her hand and they go to the swing and sit on it.*)

Mother. I am scared... scared... How dare you! Leave me!

Son. (*Laughs*) You'll get used to it. No, don't be afraid. Just enjoy.

Mother. I am flying... flying.

Son. Take me with you.

Mother. Come ... Come here.

Scene four:

Mother. (*She sings to him.*) .) Hush little baby don't say a word... mama's gonna buy you a mocking bird... and if that mocking bird don't sing... mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring... (*She is startled and moves away.*) Will... Will... (*To herself*) You'll get raped... Get away ... Get away from me... What a betrayal... What pain and suffering returns when you forget your sadness for a while... No I don't want to forget my pain... (*In pain*) but that's impossible... Even if I were happy in forgetting how my pains grew through the years... I don't have the right to forget... I am only entitled to insanity. (*She moves forward to her son and he surrenders to her completely.*) Get away. Get away from me, you everlasting memories. You are my suffering. Get away. Go. Go away from me! Let me breathe or I will be suffocated with your revolting smell ... The smell of whisky that is mixed with blood... The smell of that yellow light swinging over my torn clothes... (*She sees his large, tired eyes. She leaves him and runs away.*) Oh, your eyes can never leave me... His eyes... Your eyes live in my disturbed mind.

Son. (*With broken voice; in pain*) Why don't you keep going?

Mother. No use.

Son. You can't be an executioner, you are used to being a victim.

Mother. No use... No use... Even if I wanted ... My shame swims in my blood... My despair is eternal...

Son. You might have made a mistake. You were deceived, but nobody deceived me to justify all this despair I have now.

Mother. It is sufficient that I am a victim. Get lost. Get lost so that I can try again.

Son. I can't... I love you.

Mother. Don't ask for love from a person whose heart was ripped from her chest and who died long ago.

Son. A shadow...

Mother. The leaves of the tree are dead and the dream of a new spring has gone. If the dream of a home is killed in the heart of a woman, she is left for anybody to use ... and then the whole world, with all its havens can never be a good home for her.

Son. An illusion of a home.

Mother. Dead people can never believe illusions. She is dead.

Son. Who?

Mother. Me.

Son. You?

Mother. I.

Son. And your need for money is dead too?

Mother. This is going to bring my life back to me. It is the price for all I've sold.

Son. And who bought it?

Mother. The one who paid.

Son. How much? I can buy you?

Mother. How dare you! I am your mother.

Son. He bought you to be his wife, and I want to buy you to be my mother.

Mother. I don't have what you want to buy.

Son. Then you don't have anything.

Mother. I am your mother.

Son. What is the price?

Mother. Their iniquity and sin.

Son. That is cheap.

Mother. What do you want?

Son. I want you to buy me as a son.

Mother. I don't have...

Son. I'm not worth anything.

Mother. I don't have what you aren't worth.

Son. You don't want to.

Mother. And even if I wanted to, I can't.

Son. You want your money?

Mother. Yes.

Son. I'll sell it to you.

Mother. Sell it?

Son. With my suffering.

Mother. Your suffering.

Son. All the suffering that you caused me. Take it back.

Mother. Take it back?

Son. You sold a lot of days being that translator's wife, to get this money. I will give it back to you for one night.

Mother. One night?

Son. For one night when you will suffer as I have suffered; cry as I have cried. I want to see my tears in your eyes and laugh at them. I'll become free of your love.

Mother. Become free?

Son. It is not an impossible condition, you know. Let's start!

Mother. How?

Scene Five:

Son. In the barn... As soon I was born I was locked in the barn... I was a prisoner there with a very cold bottle of milk or a very hot one... You wanted me dead.

Mother. It was...

Son. *Your* mother who hated *your* shame, or *my* mother who hated *my* shame?

Mother. Whose shame?

Son. Anybody's... Two years or three. It was a long age that I spent there, lying on the breath of your freedom. You wanted my death. You locked me in the barn. (*Suddenly he screams in a very hostile way.*)

In the barn I got used to its darkness, and if a ray of sunlight entered from the outside, it scared me. There was a huge furnace that you wanted to throw me in, but your father stopped you. He deprived me of bread. He hated me. He wanted me dead. But the Americans were always his guests on the farm: that is why he couldn't. He feared their punishment... their punishment and yours... He raped you in his own way too, when he thought that his friends were loyal and real friends. In that barn, I got one meal a day at noon. Six years alone. I scratched a hole in the walls with a nail to see my father. Everything frightened me. If my mouth was filled with saliva and I felt it on my lips, I was startled. If one of my hands touched the other, I screamed with horror. You came to me with no feelings. You didn't love me and didn't hate me. You were like a wall or a door...or... If you hated me, I would be happy, because at least I would be alive in your eyes... and if you loved me... I would die of happiness. You were stupid. You wanted me dead, but you didn't know how! It was so easy. If you really wanted to kill me, you needed only to love me just a little bit and I would have been dead long ago... There was nothing in the barn, nothing. Just a very small mirror that showed one eye only... I loved my eyes because they were the only thing I could see of me. In winter, I used to sleep at the bottom of a closet covered with my fear and an old military jacket.

Son. What I was really afraid of was my shadow that walked with me. I tried to catch it so many times! It walked away whenever I got near it, and I got tired and fell asleep with open eyes, in fear that my father would come and I wouldn't be able to see him. Even Hanan, the cousin who let me down:

Translator: Hanan, an Arabic name meaning love, sympathy and compassion,

Son: She left for heaven and didn't tell me that she was going to die... She came... She was the only one who talked to me... She read the opening of the Holy Quran "Al Hamdu Lilah" but I used to memorize the story of virgin Mary. She encouraged me to talk and learn how to count on my fingers. She told me about the kings of Arabia. Sindbad had a story ... He wasn't in a barn... There was nothing but the sound of the sea... I knew it, even though I didn't see Sindbad sailing on the sea... The sea is water over water. I didn't get to wash. I wasn't dirty. Why should I accept my shit? Her son died when he was a baby... That's why she loved me... Hanan didn't love me, but she loved her son who died...

Son. Sindbad sailed and took his ships with him... and I asked, "What is a ship?"

Mother. It's a car that walks on the sea.

Son. And a car?

Mother. A box of metal.

Son. And a box?

Mother. He took his sword.

Son. What is a sword?

Mother. With his soldiers and guns.

Son. What is the gun? And what are the soldiers?

Mother. He reached the shore.

Son. The shore is the home of the sea.

Mother. And the battle started.

Son. She hit me... Why did they hit each other for land . . . ? I own the barn... My mother hit me to take over the barn... Where shall I go? The sea is very large... If anyone got near me, I would lift up my hands in fear that I would get hit... Nobody... Not even a toy... I scratch the walls to hear a sound... I kick the walls to play... I played with a potato to make myself hungry and eat it... Alone... And between you and me there was a wall as thin as a finger... I bit my fingers to knock down that wall to see you... (*The Mother ceases to be Hanan and she collapses crying.*)

Translator: At school, they taught us that life is a ship and hope is its sail. That's why I

assumed that as humans, we are supposed to work hard to support our sails and

take our ship to the safe harbour, where the happiness resides. I was about

fourteen when I wrote a composition, titled "A Ship with Broken Sails". I wrote it

with such honesty and all my heart that I could never read it again. Now, I look

back at the things which made me write such a piece, they are so trivial, compared

to a number of broken sails I had to deal with later. Yet, what made it special was

that it was the first sail ever broken in my life. I sometimes feel it was unfair to

discover the mighty power of the wind, at that age, which pushes the sails of our

ships and breaks them all the time. Was it fair to have a little sail of my still very

young ship broken? I don't know.

Scene Six:

Son. Don't cry... Don't cry for my suffering... I wasn't suffering as I am now.

It wasn't your fault. Don't bother your conscience with suffering. I was bad... Unlovable ... You couldn't love me.

Mother. Oh Will. I don't know how I can love you. I am trying to rise up to you, as in my dream.

Son. I shouldn't have been born to all that pain. I was bad. I used to pee under the bed, break the door to get out. You needed to hit me as you used to do.

Mother. I love you... I love you, Will. But I don't know how to love you. You are bigger than my dream. We won't ever be apart... Death... No, there is no death as long as I love you.

Son. And if you hated me, then I deserved it. I was a loser, trying to make you love me, and that was enough to make you hate me. Let your conscience be at rest. When that translator married you I was happy making breakfast for you. What a job. I couldn't have wished for more.

Mother. Oh, Will, your military service is about to finish. What about me? I will go with you... Why not? To Michigan. I'll live in your wonderful farm. Tonight is... the farewell night. You'll come back for me next year. I'll be fourteen... Tonight... Yes, I'll come to say good bye.

Son. I spat in your coffee so that our souls should be united. I put a pin in my finger and put a drop of blood in the coffee so that we would become brothers in blood and get married like Indians. I built a house for you on sand so that you could leave that translator and live in it by yourself.

Mother. Oh God. I look very young. Thirteen... I needed to look a little bit older... Oh, where is my mother's lipstick? I am sure I picked it out of the bin. I wear perfume and enlarge my eyes with lemon drops. I'll brush my teeth with wood ash and if I wear my mother's shoes and carry her handbag... I'll look like a woman... a real woman. I am coming. I am a woman, Will.

Son. I knew that you got married to get rid of the torture of your family and stop the shame of the past... and for his money too. I used to imagine him dead, kill him in my mind and kill myself, so that you could get rid of us and be happy. It was painful to wake up in the morning and find I was still breathing, I was a loser and I still am.

Mother. I'll miss Iraq. But I'll write to them every day. Here I am. Jemeela. I can go anywhere in America. Oh Will, it is so difficult that this is your last day here. Yes I know you are coming next year but how can I wait a whole year away from my breath? I am afraid that I might be killed, because of your love.

Son. My failure pushed you. You used to scream at the translator: "I don't want him here! I can't breathe while he is here!" The poor man tried to keep me but you deprived him of his rights as your husband. You moved to another room, to another bed.

Mother. Oh Will, I want to fly to you, but I can't walk in my mother's shoes. Will... Will... What are you doing? You are drunk. No, don't drink any more... Don't, Will... Please... Don't make me, Will, I don't drink... I can't... (*She seems to be suffocating.*)

Son. You sent me to the hospital: the mental hospital where people lose their minds. There was nobody there but enemies; nobody, except Liza. She was the only one who pitied me and hugged me.

Mother. Will, stay away from me. Leave me, Will. Why are you whistling? Your friends... Stay away from me all of you... I am... Stay away...

Son. She was mad. If she wasn't mad she wouldn't have hugged me. Her madness made her love me. Oh, when I hugged her. I wished that it was you instead. (*He touches her. She, startled, screams.*)

Mother. Don't touch me, you bastard. You are nothing but a bastard rapist.

Son. I am not mad. Why did you lock me in a hospital?

Scene Seven:

Mother. You didn't deserve a hospital and the money that was spent on you. They should have put you in the madhouse and got rid of you forever.

Son. I won't go.

Mother. You will go.

Son. You are jealous of me because my mother is more beautiful than you and you are a chief nurse in a hospital that is full of mad and sick people, and you are as mad as they are. You are jealous because my mother is beautiful and I am not mad.

Mother. Your mother? You don't have a mother, you bastard. She never came to visit you since you were thrown in here. You are nothing but a shameful bastard with no father.

Son. My mother told me that my father is an American... Saeed, the translator.

Translator: Saeed: an Arabic name meaning happy.

Mother. Still you are tainted.

Son. I want to get out of here.

Mother. Don't worry, you will. I'm leaving. Today is Eid night and tomorrow the ambulance will come to take you.

Son. Home?

Mother. No, to the madhouse.

Son. I won't go.

Mother. It's not your choice.

Son. Eid night!

Mother. Everybody has come to see their children. But nobody, not even Ezraeal, has come for you.

Translator: Ezraeal is the name of the angel of death according to Islam. He is the angel who is responsible for taking the soul at the time of death.

Son. I sent a necklace of shells to my mother. She'll be so happy with it, and she'll come.

Mother. The ambulance will be here before her and even if she came you wouldn't recognize her.

Son. No, I will recognize her... She is... She is... *you*.

Mother. I am not your mother.

Son. And *you*?

Mother. I was merely an accident. I didn't choose you. I am *not* your mother.

Son. And *you*?

Mother. I am not what I used to be since you arrived.

Son. You haunt me.

Mother. When?

Son. In my heart... at every beat... You run away from yourself in my blood... I wrote a letter for you.

Mother. It doesn't concern me.

Son. I wrote a letter for myself.... I couldn't read it... I wanted to destroy what I had prepared... to kill my senses... the eyes I don't see... the hands... I don't feel... the mouth... no... the nose... I wanted to be paralyzed to force you to love me, pity, have mercy, or do your duty... any one of these to make you care for me... But I used to fear you more than I feared being paralyzed.

Mother. Feared me?

Son. Yes... The dream of seeing you is more beautiful than meeting you. You torture me to madness.

Mother. And you torture me to madness.

Son. Why, if you weren't there with me in the hospital? We were all mad. That is why I couldn't stand it. I set it on fire and ran away. I entered the house while you were away. I killed the translator, Saeed, and took the money.

Mother. You stole it.

Son. Saeed was a victim.

Mother. Victims leave behind victims.

Son. He wasn't your son. He was nothing but a sin.

Mother. All those whom I know are my sin. We are the children of torture, his babies, here right now.

Son. We are here in a lost boat full of children's toys.

Mother. We have never been children before... Give me the money. I should leave Iraq; that is my only salvation.

Son. And me?

Mother. I am your mother, you'll leave with me.

Son. You married Saeed, the translator, for his money.

Mother. No, to be your father.

Son. My father is the sea... The marines... My father is three battleships; they all invaded your harbor... This boat is our home... The water is our house ... our grave.

Mother. Where is the money? Show it to me. I'll do what you want.

Son. Were you raped in the prison? In Abu Ghraib?

Mother. (*In pain*) I wish I was there. (*Changes the subject*) Whereabouts in the boat did you hide the money?

Mother. You are the end of virginity; the end of innocent hope. I know it's not your fault; neither is it mine... You are a bitter fruit that I choke on... And I stop breathing... as long as I am in Iraq.

Son. That's why you and Saeed, the translator, sold everything. You wanted to leave me alone.

Mother. No... We were...

Son. (*Enraged*) You are lying. I know you are lying. I have been living in this boat for years and you never came to visit me. I used to walk around the house at night. Through the window, I whispered "Mother" and you were sitting by the fireplace watching TV and he used to sit by you and kissed you now and then.

Mother. You were spying on us... Is that why you killed him?

Son. I was freezing and my mother was knitting wool to keep my fake father warm in winter... What a loneliness used to tear at my ribs so that the cold could enter my heart. I wanted to die but not before seeing you and holding you, before being buried in water.

Mother. I'll do whatever you want. The boat is going to sink. Just show me the place where you hid the money and we'll leave together.

Son. I knew you would come for the money. I bought as many toys as I could. (*He scatters many toys that are not suitable for a woman, some of which are girls' toys*) We'll play together. You left your childhood behind...

Mother. We'll play. We'll have fun. I promise. But where is the money? The boat is sinking!

Son. You are lying. If you don't play with me now, you'll leave me forever.

Mother. We will both leave this life if we don't leave this boat.

Son. Let's play first.

(The sound of splintering wood increases and we hear sounds of shooting and gun-fire.)

Mother. (*In horror*) Later. The boat is sinking and the police are coming. The Americans will arrest you. They'll take the money. Come on, tell me where it is?

Son. Let's play cops and robbers! But who is the cop and who is the robber?

Mother. (*In anger*) You are a bastard, a thief and a murderer!

Son. I'll be my father, a cop, and I'll arrest you.

He moves toward her, taking seriously the role of someone who would arrest her. Truly afraid, she tries to run away, and turns to another side of the boat that is increasingly breaking up, with the sound of splintering wood louder still. The part on which she stands falls down. He runs to her and holds her hand. We can't see any of her except her hand that he holds tightly, and we hear her making gasping sounds.

Son. (*In terror*) Don't run away to the water; we haven't played yet.

Mother. (*Gasping*) I am... I am... sinking...

Son. Get out. Let's play for a little while... No, we won't play... I'll give you the money... Come on, get out (*He is still holding her hand tightly.*)

Mother. I can't breathe... I am ...

Son. *(Eagerly and in pain)* Mo... Mo...

Mother. What? What... are you saying?

Son. *(Screams as loud as he can.)* Mother... Mother...

The sound of the word remains as a loud echo. He falls with her into the water and his voice echoes as a loud recording, mixed with the national anthem of the United States of America.

Translator: "What does a language 'feel' like? Arabic or English?"

To explain that to you, I think I should say that it feels like milk and tea!

We are born and the first thing we put in our mouths is milk, right from the very first few minutes of our lives, we don't know whether it is tasty or not, we just suck it, or we die. With times, it becomes part of our lives.

Some would enjoy drinking milk until the very last day, without questioning whether there is something else which might taste better. This is how Arabic feels to me; it is milk that kept me alive since the first day of my life.

But somehow, as I grew up, I tasted tea, the English language (not the English tea!), and I quite liked it. Actually I found in tea all what I was looking for in milk, away from the whiteness that leaves no space for other colors. Eventually, I stopped enjoying milk alone or tea alone; the combination of both became inseparable and essential for me.

What is more enjoyable than a cup of tea with a generous dash of milk!

(He turns off lamp on desk.)

Curtain

Felah Shaker was born in 1960 in Iraq. He lived most of his life in Basra south of Iraq. Shaker has written about 30 plays and a number of TV series. He studied Philosophy and Applied Arts in the University of Baghdad during the 1980s. As one of the most recognized playwrights in Iraq, his plays were awarded in many occasions, and some were performed in German, Swedish, French, Dutch and Kurdish. Shaker is a well-recognized member of The Union of the Arabic Dramatists, Iraqi Artists League, Iraqi Union of Artists and the Iraqi Union of Dramatists. He published two books in the form of philosophical dialogues; *The Kingdom of Alienation* (1983) and *The Punishment* (1983). He left Iraq to Syria in 2006, then moved and settled in Kentucky, U.S.A., where he now lives with his family. Among his well-known plays are *One Hundred Years of Love* (1995), *On the Heights of Love* (1997), and *Heaven Opens its Gates Late* (1999), which received the award of the Golden Te'need Prize for creativity in the Tunisian International Festival of Carthage in 1999. *The Wild Wedding* was first performed in the Thirteenth Arabic Festival for Theatre in Jordan in 2006, receiving the award of the best play in the festival. The play was also performed inside Iraq in the same year, then later in Tunis, Egypt, Morocco and Sweden. It was also adapted and performed in Oman in 2011, and it received its latest production during Al Doha Theatre Festival in Qatar in 2013.

Alyaa A. Naser received her diploma in English language teaching in 1996. She taught English in Iraq for ten years. She has a B.A. in English language from Baghdad University. In 2006, she completed her masters degree in English Literature/ Modern Poetic Drama from Baghdad University, College of Education for Women. She taught English literature and drama for five years in the same college, as well as working as the coordinator of the department of English there, before starting her PhD studies in the UK in 2012. She is currently pursuing her doctoral studies in the School of English/ Sheffield University under the supervision of Prof. Steve Nicholson. Her Ph.D research is focused on *Contemporary Theatre of and about Iraq (1990-2013)*. As part of her research, she has translated about twenty Iraqi plays, in addition to some prose poetry texts into English.



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