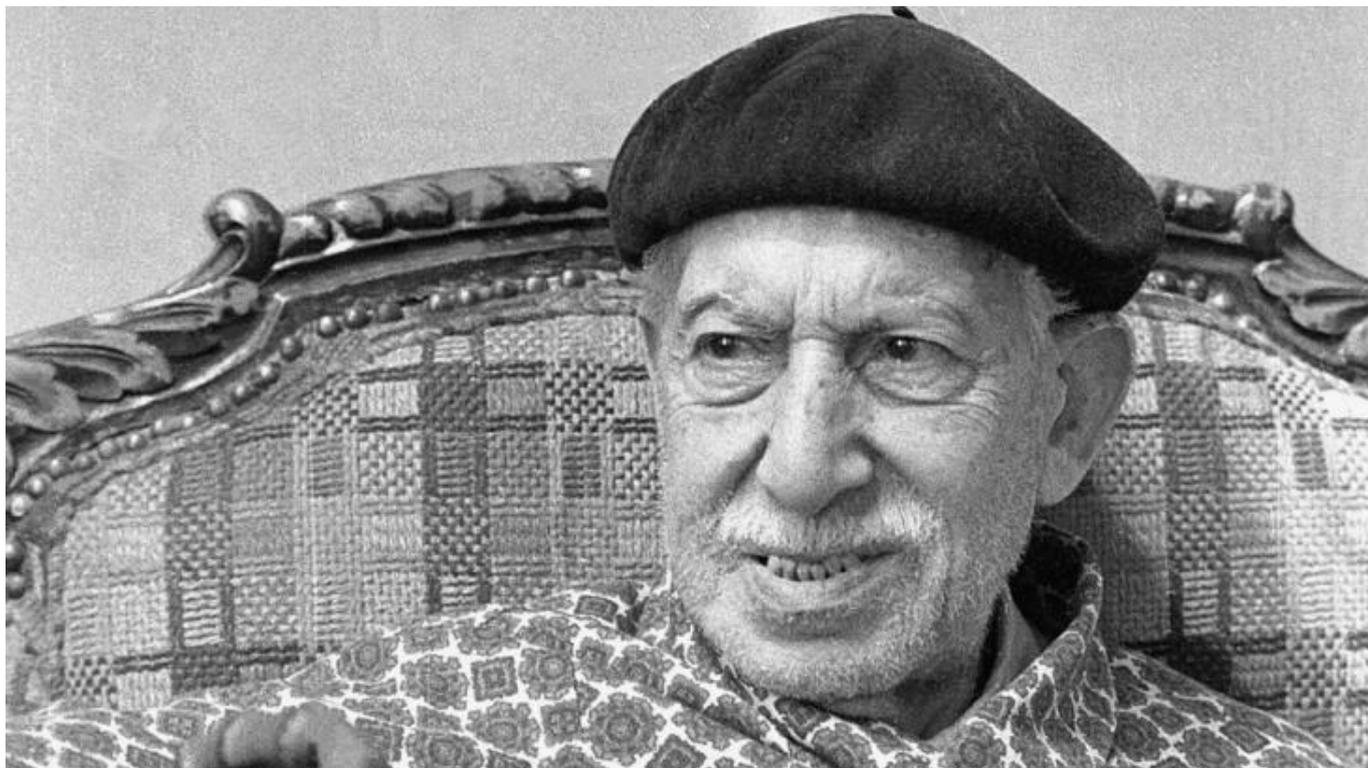


## *Secrets of a Suicide*



***Secrets of a Suicide?* By Tawfiq al-Hakim**

**Translated by Maha Swelem**

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### *Translator's Notes:*

One could not state that choosing an Egyptian play to translate was *the* big challenge. The bigger challenge was to choose only one out of such a huge collection of works by Egyptian playwrights. When browsing and reading different works by different authors, I decided upon choosing a play that belonged to what was called, “the golden age in theatre” during the 1950s and 60s in Egypt. But by reading more plays and also, researching the history of theatre in Egypt, I felt that there were periods that were not discussed or analyzed enough by scholars, one of which was the 1920s and 30s era in Egypt. As an Egyptian, I always wanted to shed light upon the Egyptian society during that specific time period. Hence, came the choice of Tawfiq al-Hakim’s *Ser al-Muntaherah (Secrets of a Suicide)* for two main reasons: First, to focus on the middle class in the Egyptian society in the late 1920s and second, to show, through this play, the extent of Western influence on intellectuals and writers together with the educated Egyptian upper middle class portrayed in the play. Al-Hakim’s play reflected these ideas clearly and portrayed the struggles that this class faced during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. But it is important to note that the culture of the upper middle class in the 20’s and 30’s was the product of a number of historical and cultural events that started to emerge since the early nineteenth century.

Since Mohamed Ali's rule of Egypt (1805-1849), great attention was paid to education and sending students abroad. But before Mohamed Ali there was a Western presence in Egypt embodied in the French, Italian, British and Greek populations. Yet, the influence of Western culture had more influence when students were sent abroad to finish their education at European universities.

Those students wrote diaries and journals about life abroad and the different cultural aspects they were exposed to. In addition to that, many of those students reached leading positions in many fields whether in education, military or arts after they came back home. At the turn of the twentieth century Cairo University was established, followed by the University of

Alexandria. Both universities sent students abroad and also hosted foreign professors to teach in Egypt. European missionaries built schools and teachers from Europe came to teach young students. As a result, an openness in the Egyptian society came about and the Egyptian culture became a sponge that absorbed the best of what the Western cultures could provide. This sponge produced generations of educated people who belonged to upper middle class and middle class, who adopted Western clothes, languages and general social behaviors. This was the world where the events of al-Hakim's *Ser al-Muntaherah* took place and to which the main characters of the play belonged.

### **Al-Hakim**

Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) was born to a well-to-do family in Alexandria. His father, who worked in the judicial system, was a strict man and very careful with his money to the extent that Tawfiq never had a toy to play with in his childhood. Yet, he had the best education a family could afford. When he was young his father took him to the theatre, where he fell in love with actors, plays and performance. His first experience in writing was in 1918 when he wrote *The Unwelcome Guest* which criticized the British occupation of Egypt. When he was studying in law school, he started writing for some theatrical troupes whether individually or in collaboration with other writers. He never published any of his earliest plays as he considered himself a young writer who was still learning his craft and also out of fear of his parents' anger. When Tawfiq's parents discovered his relationship to the theatre, they decided to send him to Paris to obtain a master's degree in law. But in Paris, he fell deeply in love with the theatre and he befriended many artists of the time. He also fell in love with a young woman who was his neighbor but that love never came to fruition. It can be claimed that that failed love experience had left a deep mark on him that reflected itself in his portrayal of women in many of his works. When Tawfiq came back to Egypt, he worked as a prosecutor in the countryside which was considered a punishment because he was politically outspoken. A great example of his political criticism was his novel, *Diary of a Countryside Prosecutor* which was published in 1937 and was translated into French in 1939.

Tawfiq al-Hakim is called "the pioneer of the modern Arabic theatre." The great Egyptian poet, the late Salah Abd al-Sabour said about al-Hakim's literary works that they were, "born in a vacuum." Also, one of al-Hakim's translators stated that he was, "A One-Man Egyptian Theatre Tradition," which summarizes al-Hakim's impact on the Egyptian and also Arabic theatre. It could be suggested that Al-Hakim's early plays were characterized by their existential nature. They discussed philosophical ideas about age, time, and human inner conflicts. By the 1930s his works, which varied between novels, plays and short stories were more critical of the society as well as the government and its system which paved the way for the following generations of writers especially those of the 1960s.

### Why *Secrets of a Suicide* ?

This play was published in 1929 when Egyptian theatre was going through a very sensitive time. During the “Nahda” period which extended between the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, cultural aspects were attributed to two main social forces. The first was the separation from old tradition and overused values, thus followers of this movement were called “modernists.” The second was the opposite force which called for adhering to traditions and religious values and its followers were called “traditionalists.” In general terms al-Hakim was considered a modernist since he received part of his education in Europe and was influenced by Western culture. His literature was speaking to readers and theatre goers who belonged to his class and had similar education and cultural tendencies. Thus, it was attractive for the translator to choose a play that could shed light on Egypt at that period, or to be more accurate, a faction of the Egyptian society. In addition to that, there was a philosophical aspect which appeared in the hero, Dr. Mahmoud Azmy who lost touch with his real self and who he was meant to be.

As a matter of fact, al-Hakim called this play a comedy and insisted on that, but I believe that tragicomedy would be a better description of the genre this play belonged to, Badawi stated, “Al-Hakim’s keen sense of humour ... is once more felt throughout, even though at times it shades into grim irony, as when, In Act I, the doctor and the young woman seem to be at cross- purposes, each using same words but with entirely different meanings.”<sup>[1]</sup> Badawi also added, “The sight of the ... middle aged doctor ... sitting in front of a large mirror attended by his coiffeur and flanked by two attractive young women who look after his manicure and other beauty needs is certainly funny, but it is difficult to think of it without remembering the gruesome medical forensic report on the state of the suicide’s corpse.”<sup>[2]</sup> In addition to that, the nature of Egyptians in general had always been that they treated hardships and heartbreaks with joking about them and being cynical about the gloomy conditions they go through. I think this aspect appealed to al-Hakim’s sense of humor which stemmed from his Egyptian natural sense of humor. Therefore, to categorize the play as a pure tragedy, tragicomedy, or even a comedy would not truly describe the manner of cynicism which was planted in the play and was married with the horrible tragedy of a young girl who killed herself in front of the reader/ audience’s eyes.

The subject matter of the play itself was universal. It certainly was not confined to the deeply rooted Egyptian traditions, and thus rendered it easier for a western audience to watch and follow the events without any sense of alienation. Al-Hakim discussed a purely human dilemma that could face any hero in any play. Middle age and a miserable married life could lead men to desperation or to take action that could negatively affect everybody around them. Al-Hakim was less interested in the tragedy of the young woman who committed suicide and more interested in the effect of that event on the hero. He threw at the reader and audience the question of man and his desperate attempts to defy age and time. He stated, “Do you know what is the basis of Egyptian tragedy as I conceive it? Its basis is ‘time’ ... its basis is the terrible struggle between ‘man’ and ‘time’. Read the *Book of the Dead* , and you will be aware of this immediately...”<sup>[3]</sup> The presence of the mirror in most of the scenes, put the hero, together with the audience/reader into a confrontation with themselves and forced them to take a good look at their inner selves as well as their realities. Thus, in terms of performance, due to the philosophic nature of this play; it could be performed on a Western stage without facing much difficulty.

### Language and Style of the play

Al-Hakim used to write in simple standard arabic, which he called a “third language.” It was a mixture of

colloquial and classical arabic. He believed that literature should be written in a manner and language that can be understood by the majority of arabic readers and that could be easily spoken on stage. This type of language made the play easier to be translated and also very adaptable to performance on stage. The only difficulty was the presence of a number of idioms and proverbs that could be translated into similar expressions used in a Western culture. Al-Hakim did not want his readers to be lost into the difficulty of the language and to concentrate their efforts on analyzing the human conditions as well as the social and/or political criticisms presented in his plays.

In the case of *Secrets of a Suicide*, man versus age and time was the main idea and the reader should pay attention to such an intellectual approach rather than put his/her whole attention into trying to understand the written words. Although there had been a difference in class and stature between the doctor and his manservant/ nurse, yet al-Hakim played around this by giving the character of Selim less lines and thus the linguistic differences were blurred.

When it came to style, al-Hakim was concerned with writing an Egyptian tragedy on an Egyptian basis which he indicated as man vs. time. Structurally, he did not care much about the plot, but rather the impact of a major event on the main characters. To this effect, he said, "In fact, I still retain the spirit of the coup de theatre, but the dramatic surprises are no longer in the plot as much as in the thought."<sup>[4]</sup> It's clear that al-Hakim did not pay enough attention to stage directions. This would give an opportunity for any director to imagine the setting and costume the way he/she wanted. The eyes are fixed on the hero and what kind of thoughts and emotions go through him rather than his surroundings. It's also known that al-Hakim concentrated in writing his plays on the reader rather than the theatre audience. He wanted to produce pieces that were read and collected by readers more than his ambition for his plays to be performed on the stage which set him apart from his fellow playwrights. This might be the reason for leaving much of the details to the reader's imagination lest he fall into the pit of the detailed description and end up with a novel rather than a play.

### **The Title of the Play**

The original Arabic title of the play was *Ser al-Muntaherah* which if translated word for word will be, *The Secret of the Girl Who Committed Suicide*. For me, this title did not sound dramatic enough to be chosen as a title for a literary work or a theatrical performance. I had changed the title to *Secrets of a Suicide* for two main reasons. When I was researching al-Hakim and his body of works, I found that M.M. Badawi in his book *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* had mentioned this play among the rest of al-Hakim's works. Badawi translated the title as *The Secret Suicide*. For me, this translation did not express the real meaning of Aziza's suicide in the play. Aziza's suicide was not a secret or performed in secret. She threw herself out of the window when Dr. Azmy was with her in the same room. Her body landed on the street where a crowd gathered to watch the dead body. If this play were performed on stage, then this would mean that Aziza had killed herself in front of all the audience, so where is the secret in all that? But *Secrets of a Suicide* gave a more accurate description of the connotations and repercussions of Aziza's act. Her suicide was the main action instigator in the play. Her suicide was a turning point in Dr. Azmy's life and through it his journey as a hero took place. In addition to that, we would discover why and for whom Aziza had killed herself towards the end of the play. Aziza's suicide hid within its folds a number of secrets that Azmy together with the reader/ audience would learn along the course of the play.

### **Women in the play**

Tawfiq al-Hakim was often accused of being a woman hater. The reason for such an accusation was that his strong female characters were always portrayed as the villains. These were mainly older women usually in their mid-thirties and early forties who were hungry for life and were never satisfied with their current life circumstances. The other type of female presence in his plays, were young women in their late teens, mainly seventeen or eighteen. Most of the time, they acted as the instigators of the action. They usually caused an event to take place and then leave the field for the other characters to face their realities and suffer the consequences. Their presence is not constant throughout the work, but without them, al-Hakim's plays wouldn't have existed.

In the case of *Secrets of a Suicide* Aziza was an eighteen-year-old girl. Her actions and attitude towards the middle-aged Dr. Mahmoud Azmy, put him under the illusion that she was in love with him. When she committed suicide by throwing herself from a window in his office, after confessing her love to him, Dr. Azmy was transformed into a kind of rock star. He could not believe that such a young, beautiful girl would kill herself for his sake. He saw himself in a new light and acted accordingly which elicited the envy of his wife and the disgust of the dead girl's mother which resulted into his own downfall.

On the other hand, there is Iqbal, Dr. Azmy's wife. A middle aged woman, who vehemently denied her age and introduced herself as a much younger woman, caused her husband's torment by always pointing out the age difference between them and her husband's "incapability." She saw herself as a precious jewel that Azmy did not deserve to own. Although the couple, who had an only son, live comfortably; yet Azmy was always put down by his wife's harshness and her expression of disgust by his old age and disheveled looks. This resulted into a very unhappy marriage that was void of any emotional link between husband and wife. The third woman in this play was Aziza's mother. She represented an Egyptian mother who, in spite of her deep grief for her daughter's death yet has never lost touch with her faith.

She dealt with her ordeal with patience. But, when she witnessed the drastic change in Dr. Azmy's looks and behavior, she acted as an eye-opening agent to Iqbal who used the information that was, unknowingly, fed to her by the mother as a weapon to exact her revenge on Azmy and turn him back to the same point where he started at the beginning of the play.

### **Connotation of names in *Secrets of a Suicide*?**

I kept the names of the characters as they are in the Arabic original. The main reason was, perhaps a sense of nostalgia to the homeland and all what's related to the Egyptian-Arabic culture. Second, to introduce the reader/audience to the culture through familiarizing them with some of the names used by the Egyptian society and making their ears get used to the Arabic language and how it sounds. Also, to prove to the reader/ audience that there are a number of human issues that are universal, and that East and West can always meet midway in the vast land of "humanity"; i.e., to erase the line that separate the "us" from the "other." The writer of this paper had found it necessary to give a general idea about the literal meaning of each name not only to create familiarity with them, but also because names played an important role in the play both as indicators of the nature of each character and also in the dramatic twist that took place after Aziza's death.

Mahmoud Azmy: Mahmoud is an Islamic name. It means a person who is utterly appreciated and thanked amongst people. Azmy: comes from determination.

Aziza: the precious one.

Iqbal: the fortunate one.

Salim: intact, undamaged.

Whether the choice of names was intentional on al-Hakim's part, is not known. But there is a double role that the name Mahmoud plays which will appear later in the drama.

### Conclusion

There is so much to be said about Tawfiq al-Hakim and his works. He defined several stages in Egyptian literary history. He formed his distinct literary persona early on in his career. His choice of a simplified standard arabic language to write with; as well as his blunt social and political criticism set the standard for generations to follow. I believe the secret of al-Hakim as being still highly regarded as a literary icon is, as he had put it in his own words, "I always move in two worlds and base my thought on two pillars. I think that man is not alone in his existence. I believe in man's human nature. I think his greatness is that he is a human being, a human being with his weakness and defects, his limitations and errors."<sup>[5]</sup> His impact did not only appear in Egyptian literature, but also in Egyptian newspapers, and even in current Egyptian media. His approach for social criticism and his bluntness and sarcasm was, and still is, considered a school for media performance that was not present up till 2011. After thirty years since his death, al-Hakim's impact is still very evident in Egyptian media and performance. The only difference is that al-Hakim always stated his case so elegantly and eloquently, a craft that still needs to be learned, but that is a totally different matter.

### *Secrets of a Suicide*

**By Tawfiq al-Hakim**

**Translated by Maha Swelem**

#### **Act I**

*An elegant examination room in a doctor's clinic. Dr. Mahmoud Azmy is sitting at his desk busy writing. Dr. Azmy is over fifty years old but is energetic and keeps some of his youthfulness. Salem who is both Azmy's nurse and manservant enters. [Dr. Azmy will be referred to as Mahmoud throughout the play].*

**Mahmoud:** Salem!... close the doors and do not open to anyone whomsoever...

**Salem:** And if that young lady came...

**Mahmoud:** If that young lady came... do not open! ... Understood?

**Salem:** What about the patients?

**Mahmoud:** Sick or healthy, all the same.... Understood?...

**Salem:** Understood... ( *under his breath* ) I can't get it...

*Exits Salem and the doctor resumes his writing... the phone rings...*

**Mahmoud:** ( *answering* ) Hello, yes, I'm Dr. Mahmoud Azmy, yes... the lecture is at 6:00 pm sharp. Well, if the phone and door stopped ringing, then I'll be able to finish writing this last part... what?... Oh, yes, yes I'm one-hundred percent certain... *I exaggerate* in stating that age has a great impact on body and psyche?!... Ok... let's wait and see... in no time I'll be able to convert you, my friend... see you soon, bye. ( *puts the phone down... the doorbell rings ...* ) Oh... now the door!!

**Salem** ( *enters* ): Doctor...

**Mahmoud:** Yes!!... I know...

**Salem:** It's the barber...

**Mahmoud:** And you opened the door for him of course, right?

**Salem:** Of course, your appointment is today as usual...

**Mahmoud:** Didn't I make it clear not to get anyone in whomsoever?

**Salem:** But the barber isn't...

**Mahmoud:** Isn't the barber a person?

**Salem:** No... I meant that he's not a visitor or a patient...

**Mahmoud:** No actually worse, you know why? ... because he's the only person who can make me miss today's lecture... get rid of him, now.

**Salem:** Doctor you haven't shaved your beard for three days...

**Mahmoud:** ( *writing* ) I can survive another day without shaving...

**Salem:** Four whole days without shaving?!...

**Mahmoud:** Can you tell me how the universe will be disturbed if I didn't shave my beard for four days?...

**Salem:** Also your hair, it's really grown long and needs trimming...

**Mahmoud:** What needs trimming is your *tongue* !...

**Salem:** Mrs. Azmy stressed that I remind you of such things...

**Mahmoud:** Alright, you did a great job at reminding me... now relax, ok?

**Salem:** But Doctor...

**Mahmoud:** Won't you just leave me to finish my writing?

**Salem:** So, I'll just let the barber go empty-handed?

**Mahmoud:** He can work on your beard and head if you want to...

*Exits Salem and Mahmoud resumes writing.*

**Salem** (*comes back in quickly*): Sir?

**Mahmoud:** Now what?!

**Salem:** As I was about to close the door behind the barber, the elevator stopped at our floor and there was lady inside. (*doorbell rings*) ... here she is...

**Mahmoud:** Shhhh... don't move... we're not here... no one is here. (*a moment of silence then the doorbell is pressed so hard and the ringing becomes very loud*)

**Salem:** It's getting louder...

**Mahmoud:** So what...

**Salem:** I'm afraid our neighbors won't like it...

**Mahmoud:** Them being annoyed is better than *me* being disturbed... *doorbell rings and knocking escalate*

**Mahmoud:** I said, don't move... Where are you going?!

**Salem:** I'll have a peek...

**Mahmoud:** Do Not Open the Door...

*Salem exits and comes back after a few seconds*

**Salem:** I had to open...

**Mahmoud:** You idiot!... God damn you!...

**Salem** (*out of breath*): It's my lady at the door!...

**Mahmoud** (*lifts his face*): Your lady?... What brings her here now?

**Iqbal** (*calling from outside*): Well, well, well! What's the meaning of closing the clinic up like that?!...

*Enter Iqbal, a 35-year-old lady. She is good looking and wears elegant expensive, fashionable clothes. She seems to take good care of her looks*

**Iqbal** (*to Salem*): Who's with him in the room?

*She keeps looking with her eyes prying every corner. She goes towards the window curtains and looks behind them.*

**Mahmoud** (*calmly*): Looking for me?

**Iqbal**: Answer me honestly, are you here alone?...

**Mahmoud** (*smiling cynically and looking around the room*): Me?... I don't know... you've seen with your own beautiful, wide eyes, haven't you?

**Iqbal** (*taking off her gloves*): That's strange...

**Mahmoud**: And what's stranger is you popping up here at my workplace acting like a police detective!...

**Iqbal**: Does it really hurt your feelings that I've come to your clinic at this hour?

**Mahmoud**: Without a sound reason?

**Iqbal**: Nothing in this world is without a reason...

**Mahmoud**: So what's the reason? Is Jamal sick again?

**Iqbal**: No Jamal is doing just fine, besides if he were sick I would have called for Dr. Asaad as usual...

**Mahmoud**: Then what's happened?... has he come back from school and had his private lesson?...

**Iqbal**: Yes... I left him at home with his tutor Mr. Abd el-Azim...

**Mahmoud** (*examining her with his eyes*): And you... well, you look so fine ... you look so fit, lean and elegant...

**Iqbal** (*coldly*): Yes... very fit and elegant...

**Mahmoud**: So what's in the world happened?!

**Iqbal**: Do you wanna know what's in the world happened?

**Mahmoud** ( *cynically* ): Ahh... it's my beard, I haven't shaved in three days.

**Iqbal**: I don't give a damn about your beard, today.

**Mahmoud**: Today?

**Iqbal** ( *haughtily* ): What good will grooming do to an old man like you, anyway?

**Mahmoud** ( *smiling calmly* ): That's how I always see it too... and you know I'll never claim otherwise. ( *pointing at his simple clothes and his disheveled looks* )

**Iqbal** ( *continuing* ): And for he whose hair turned all white... dye won't be of any help.

**Mahmoud**: You know that I've never thought of dying my hair.

**Iqbal** ( *still continuing* ): That who has passed fifty years of age today.

**Mahmoud** ( *smiling* ): Yeah, Autumn. Coming closer to the end.

**Iqbal**: Exactly... nineteen years age difference between you and I...

**Mahmoud** ( *forgivingly* ): Well, there is a little mistake in the math, my dear... but, it's ok...

**Iqbal** ( *continuing* ): married for fifteen years...

**Mahmoud**: Yup, that's correct, undisputably, but if you came all the way from home to just to give me this piece of information then, let me tell you that you've wasted this afternoon for nothing, and deprived yourself of the pleasures of visiting your friends and other pleasantries as well.

**Iqbal**: You are ignoring the importance of this piece of information...

**Mahmoud**: How so?

**Iqbal**: This clinic suspiciously closed like that, and you're apparently waiting for someone...

**Mahmoud** ( *smiling* ): Waiting for you...

**Iqbal**: No, you're waiting for someone else... the one you favor over me...

**Mahmoud**: The patients...

**Iqbal**: Then tell me, how come a doctor closes his door in their faces like you did?

**Mahmoud**: Honey, we are rich... we don't need patients... besides, I'm a consultant, not a physician.

**Iqbal**: Yes... we're rich... And that's exactly why some of them find you a good catch... don't you dare

think otherwise?

**Mahmoud:** No, I don't think ...

**Iqbal:** Despite what these women tell you...

**Mahmoud:** I don't conduct private conversations with them...

**Iqbal:** I worry that they can play with your mind...

**Mahmoud:** Don't worry... I know them better than you do...

**Iqbal:** If you really "know" them, then how come that girl plays you like that...

**Mahmoud:** Which girl?...

**Iqbal:** Nothing remains a secret in this town...

**Mahmoud:** Oh, that girl... she's crazy and I told you about her since the first time she came... Besides if you really trusted me you'd understand that I'm precisely closing my door in *her* face.

**Iqbal:** So how has this rumor come about?

**Mahmoud:** What rumor?

**Iqbal:** That you're gonna marry her...

**Mahmoud:** Marry her?... Why?... What about you?...

**Iqbal:** You'll divorce me... or keep her and become polygamous.

**Mahmoud:** And you believe this?!... after all those years we've been together?

**Iqbal:** What if this really happens?

**Mahmoud:** An old idiot would do this, but not me... right?

**Iqbal:** I've heard whispers here and there that this girl is in love with you and that she swears she'll never marry anyone but Mahmoud!

**Mahmoud:** Mahmoud?!

**Iqbal:** Yes... that's the name she mentioned, either to have Mahmoud or die.

**Mahmoud** (*cynically*): Poor thing!

**Iqbal:** Though she has three sisters who are married to three respectable men, all younger than you, what does that idiot see in you... Believe me when I tell you that her own sisters will laugh at her and the pit she threw herself in by having you ...

**Mahmoud:** Sure...

**Iqbal:** That girl is a blind idiot for sure.

**Mahmoud:** Of course...

**Iqbal:** However, who really knows her secret?... I don't get what she sees in you though?... You have no youth, no good looks, no fitness, no elegance, no sense of humor, no eloquence, and no...

**Mahmoud** (*interrupting her*): etc... etc...

**Iqbal:** Actually, you have nothing worthy of loving...

**Mahmoud:** I have something...

**Iqbal:** what's that?

**Mahmoud:** My beloved wife, you...

**Iqbal** (*continuing*): Putting these hollow compliments aside... there is nothing to be loved about you except your wealth... that's all that you've got...

**Mahmoud:** Well at least that's what you like about me...

**Iqbal:** And that's what that girl likes about you too...

**Mahmoud:** I'm surprised, she comes from a well to do family herself...

**Iqbal:** And so what?

**Mahmoud:** You're right it makes no difference to women...

**Iqbal** (*after a moment*): And what if she's just an idiot who's fallen in love with you...

**Mahmoud:** So what do you want me to do for an idiot like her?...

**Iqbal:** What if she managed to play you...

**Mahmoud** (*suddenly frowns and goes back to his pen*): Iqbal!... I'm out of patience... please...please don't waste my time anymore with this nonsense... I have serious work at hand, more important than talking about love and such...

**Iqbal:** Mahmoud... my dear husband...

**Mahmoud:** God! What changed you so?

**Iqbal:** You're the head of a happy family...

**Mahmoud:** The head of a family, husband, father and everything you want me to be... I know my duties way more than you do...

**Iqbal:** Remember that if you attempted to marry that girl, it will be such a scandal... for me...

**Mahmoud:** Is that all what you worry about?

**Iqbal:** That's not easy, to be said that you preferred another woman over me and married her while I'm still that young...

**Mahmoud:** Please put some trust in that old man's sensibility... that's me...

**Iqbal:** What guarantees that you're sensible?

**Mahmoud:** A whole lifetime that we've shared...

**Iqbal:** I can't deny that... and I truly testify that you've been sensible all those years... but a person can forget at one point and do something foolish...

**Mahmoud** (*convincingly*): That's utterly wrong...

**Iqbal:** However, I know people and heard about others who were like you...

**Mahmoud** : No one is like me...

**Iqbal:** All men are the same...

**Mahmoud:** I'm a middle-aged man, I have life experience, and I don't care much about materialistic things, age has its limitations...

**Iqbal:** I don't believe in such limitations...

**Mahmoud:** Of course... since you're a woman, you cannot believe in those limitations...

**Iqbal:** Yes... women judge by their instincts, that's the only true law...

**Mahmoud:** If you can spare some of your precious time in a lecture room, I'd have invited you to come ... I'm going to lecture today about the relationship between human psyche and age...

**Iqbal:** You want me to listen to one of your lectures... no... no my dear sir... my seamstress has been

waiting for me for an hour now...

**Mahmoud** (*looking directly at her*): Of course... your seamstress...

**Iqbal**: Yes... my seamstress... Why are you staring at me like that?

**Mahmoud**: I'm just wondering for whom is all the dressing up and the makeup.

**Iqbal**: You can't ask a woman such questions...

**Mahmoud**: You're a wife and a mother of a boy who's more than ten years old...

**Iqbal** (*trying to control herself*): Don't you know that I'm still young...

**Mahmoud**: Yes... forever young... I'm well aware of that...

**Iqbal**: (*bursting with anger*): My age is none of your business... I didn't come to discuss my age... You, come on now, talk a little about yourself, and your age, and your white hair, your ugliness and your lack of any sense of humor!...

**Mahmoud**: Back to my lack of humor!

**Iqbal**: Yes, if you wanna talk, talk about yourself, not others...

**Mahmoud**: Don't get angry... take it easy...now show me your lovely smile...

**Iqbal**: Look in the mirror, see those crow's-feet around your eyes...

**Mahmoud**: I admit that you're always young... and that you broke all age and time laws, is this better?

**Iqbal** (*angrily*): I'm leaving...

**Mahmoud**: So soon? ...

**Iqbal**: Where's my car?...

**Mahmoud** (*cynically*): Are you looking for it inside this room?...

**Iqbal** (*moving towards the window*): No... down the street... I can't see it from this height

(*moving towards the door*) but... I can't leave unless I make sure...

**Mahmoud**: Are you going back to that same subject?...

**Iqbal**: Just one last word... write it down so I can be sure...

**Mahmoud:** Sure of what?

**Iqbal:** That you won't do it...

**Mahmoud:** I won't do it...

**Iqbal:** No... in writing... ( *she goes to the desk, takes a pen and paper* ) Here... write it down.

**Mahmoud** ( *taking pen and paper* ): Write what? God have mercy!

**Iqbal** ( *dictating* ): Write... I, Mahmoud Azmy, do promise that I will never have another wife except Iqbal as long as I live...

**Mahmoud:** Don't you trust me?... Isn't there any mutual trust between us?...

**Iqbal:** Write...

**Mahmoud:** Women!...( *writing* ) I, Mahmoud Azmy...etc..

**Iqbal:** Also write, "In case I did marry another woman, I will immediately pay fifty thousand pounds in cash..."

**Mahmoud:** Fifty thousand pounds?...

**Iqbal:** Is it too much?...

**Mahmoud:** On the contrary... it's such a low price to sell me for...

**Iqbal:** Now sign...

**Mahmoud:** Signature, date and everything you want... anything else?

**Iqbal:** No... give it to me ( *she takes the paper and puts it in her handbag* ) Now you...

**Mahmoud:** Now, I'm free?!... is that what you mean?...

**Iqbal** ( *moving towards the door* ): See you later...

**Mahmoud** ( *following her with his eyes* ): See you soon .. my lady... Phew!...

*He sits back at his desk and resumes writing.*

**Salem** ( *enters* ): Doctor...

**Mahmoud:** What do you want?

**Salem:** If the doorbell rang...

**Mahmoud** ( *raises his head violently* ) Shut up! I have other stuff to do... Are you gonna waste the whole day talking about the doorbell?!

**Salem:** I won't open... understood... ( *under his breath* )... I swear I can't get it...

*Once Salem exits, the doorbell is heard... Mahmoud raises his head, looks at the time and then resumes writing. Salem appears at the room doorway, Mahmoud doesn't notice him and Salem decides to leave. Knocking on the door gets worse. Shattering glass is heard followed by the voice of an angry young woman shouting. Knocking goes on and is escalating.*

**Salem** ( *outside* ): Hey, wait... wait... God grant you patience.

**Young woman** ( *shouting from outside* ): Open before I break this door.

**Salem** ( *outside* ) The doctor is not in...

**Young woman** ( *outside* ) You're lying... he's in ...

*The door opens and then is slammed closed.*

**Salem** ( *enters* ): I opened sir... Or to put it right...

**Mahmoud** ( *still writing* ): Yup, I got the idea.

*Aziza, a young woman enters despite Salem's efforts to prevent her. She is eighteen, beautiful and elegant... She looks at Mahmoud and then addresses Salem*

**Aziza:** Not here, huh? So this is his statue then? A beautiful marble statue... right?

**Mahmoud** ( *still writing, without looking up* ): You can go, Salem and get us two Turkish coffees.

*Aziza sits on a chair quietly waiting for Mahmoud to start talking. After a moment or two, Mahmoud raises his head, but just to scratch his beard thinking...*

**Aziza** ( *impatiently* ): And finally?!...

**Mahmoud** ( *looking at her* ): Are you talking to me, my lady?

**Aziza** ( *controlling her anger* ): What's the meaning of all this?...

**Mahmoud:** What "all this?"

**Aziza** ( *trying to calm herself* ): These closed doors, as if we're in a fort!...

**Mahmoud:** Were the doors closed?...

**Aziza:** Didn't you hear me knocking them down?...

**Mahmoud:** Did you?... Brava!... I congratulate you on your conquest!...

**Aziza** ( *controlling herself* ): I'm surprised since you know that I'm gonna visit you at this hour and yet...

*A moment of silence.*

**Mahmoud** ( *inattentively* ): And how are you feeling today?...

**Aziza:** Couldn't be worse...

*Mahmoud raises his head again and examines her with his eyes.*

**Aziza:** You don't believe me?...

**Mahmoud** ( *still looking at her but also making fun of her* ): True... you couldn't be worse... you're in danger...

**Aziza:** If you could just know how weak I feel.

**Mahmoud:** Really... very weak... to the extent that you were able to break the door...

**Aziza:** Don't make fun of me... you can see that I'm pale...

**Mahmoud:** The moon is also pale...

**Aziza** ( *smiling* ): So you're saying I'm as beautiful as the moon?

**Mahmoud:** Don't you own a mirror?... Every woman has a small mirror in her handbag... ask it as you women believe that your mirrors are more truthful than your doctors.

**Aziza** ( *looking at a wall mirror hung in the office* ): I can't see what you're telling me...

**Mahmoud:** That's not my fault...

**Aziza** ( *looking at him* ): I see that your face is as beautiful as the moon...

**Mahmoud** ( *shocked* ): Oh God forgive us!...

**Aziza:** Believe me when I say that your face is ...

**Mahmoud:** *My face...*

**Aziza:** Your face is more youthful than mine...

**Mahmoud:** *My face is more youthful than yours?!...*

**Aziza:** Of course...

**Mahmoud** (*pointing at his face*): You mean *this* face?...

**Aziza:** Do you have another one?...

**Mahmoud** (*pointing to his face, then to hers*): So my face is better looking than yours?

**Aziza:** Yes...

**Mahmoud:** May God forgive you my lady... you've humbled me...

**Aziza:** You don't think so?

**Mahmoud:** I'm now certain that you're sick my lady...

**Aziza:** I've told you time and time again I hate the term, "my lady"...

**Mahmoud:** My "young" lady then...

**Aziza:** No, not even this...

**Mahmoud:** My precious patient...

**Aziza** Ok if you want to, but I prefer to be called by my name...

**Mahmoud:** And what's your name?...

**Aziza:** You don't know my name?... that's impossible... I talk to you on the phone every single morning, and I mention my name. My sister called me by my name hundreds of times in your presence and my mom too when she used to come here with me...

**Mahmoud:** I'm so sorry... it slipped my mind...

**Aziza:** To that extent?...

**Mahmoud:** People at my age tend to be forgetful.

*Aziza is angrily silent.*

**Mahmoud:** My memory is even weaker than you are... don't you believe me?

**Aziza** ( *controlling her anger* ): You're not easy to talk to ... believe me...

*Silence.*

**Aziza**: Since when have you been forgetting my name?...

**Mahmoud**: I can't remember...

**Aziza**: Even that...

**Mahmoud**: Yes...

**Aziza**: But I just talked to you on the phone this morning...

**Mahmoud**: And what did you say?

**Aziza**: Apparently you forget everything that has to do with me...

**Mahmoud**: I admit it...

**Aziza**: Alright ( *a moment passes* ) I told you this morning, "Hi that's Zizi, I'm coming to see you today around six thirty."

**Mahmoud**: Zizi is a beautiful name

**Aziza** ( *frowning* ): Stop that ...

**Mahmoud** ( *looking at her* ): You're upset?

**Aziza**: Yes... that's the first time I get upset with you and even hate you...

**Mahmoud** ( *exaggerating his movements cynically* ): Just like that, out of the blue?!

**Aziza**: You can talk to me in a better way... as I'm talking to you...

**Mahmoud**: Because you're a nice lady...

**Aziza**: Who would believe that someone as decent as you would treat me like that?...

**Mahmoud**: That's a first, I guess...

**Aziza**: You used to say sweet words to me... remember the time I came complaining about a headache? You took good care of me... I was surrounded by your warmth and care. I still remember what you told me that day...

**Mahmoud**: We memorize sweet words to recite for the patients...

**Aziza:** I wish I was a patient...

**Mahmoud:** So now you confess that you're well.

**Aziza:** You're being harsh on me... very harsh...

**Mahmoud:** That's the way the likes of you should be treated...

**Aziza:** The likes of me?!

**Mahmoud:** Yes... people who come to a doctor's office just to waste his time!...

**Aziza** (*angrily*): Thank you, Mahmoud...

**Mahmoud** (*frowning*): Please, call me "Doctor"...

**Aziza** (*resentfully*): You don't like me to call you by your name?...

**Mahmoud:** No

**Aziza:** Why not?...

**Mahmoud:** Because the only person who has the right to call me by my first name is *my wife* ...

**Aziza** (*lowering her head*): Oh... I apologize...

**Mahmoud:** You didn't know I was married?...

**Aziza:** I know...

**Mahmoud:** And that I'm also a father.

**Aziza:** I know...

**Mahmoud:** And despite all this you barge in here to play this farce...

**Aziza** (*shocked*): Farce?... What do you mean?...

**Mahmoud:** I wish you don't underestimate my intelligence, young lady...

**Aziza:** What are you getting at?...

**Mahmoud** (*pointing at his temples*): Do you see this white hair?...

**Aziza:** ?

**Mahmoud:** And these wrinkles, do you see them?

**Aziza:** ?

**Mahmoud:** They indicate something that is beyond idiocy and ignorance...

**Aziza** ( *startled and makes an effort to utter her words* ): You are insulting me...

**Mahmoud:** I'm just defending myself...

**Aziza** ( *sensing danger* ): What do you mean exactly?

**Mahmoud:** I think I'm clear enough...

**Aziza:** What you are accusing me of is horrible...

**Mahmoud:** I'm not accusing you of anything... Just take it easy and let's just leave it all... What time is it? ( *looking at his watch* ) Oh, it stopped... Would you tell me what time it is?

**Aziza** ( *trying to control her tears* ): Me?... Playing a farce?...

**Mahmoud** ( *adjusting his wristwatch* ): Playing a farce... or a tragedy... it's all up to your nature and capacity, and how a talented actress you are... We need to wrap this up as I'm running really late...

**Aziza** ( *in a low choking voice* ): Thank you...

**Mahmoud** ( *still checking his wristwatch* ): You're welcome...

**Aziza** ( *tears are flowing down her cheeks* ):...

**Mahmoud** ( *raises his head and sees her* ): I surrender... you are really good at this... Now dry those tears... let's get ready... I have a lecture in half an hour... if you really would like to help me, then give me a ride, I need to go to the school of medicine... My wife took her car to the seamstress and my chauffeur is sick today... Maybe God sent you just to do this favor for me... It's a favor for science... Is your car outside?

*Looks out of the window*

*Aziza is listening in silence*

**Mahmoud** ( *coming back from the window* ) Miss... please tell me!... What's the color of your car?...

**Aziza** ( *raises her head* ): Can you just tell me why you believe that I'm acting a farce or a tragedy?...

**Mahmoud:** We're through with this...

**Aziza:** I have the right to ask...

**Mahmoud:** I'm really running out of time...please... understand I have very serious work to do and there is no time...

**Aziza** (*insistently*): You will not leave this office unless you tell me first... Do you hear me?

You're not leaving... You are not leaving...

**Mahmoud:** Are you threatening me?...

**Aziza:** Yes... I am... don't underestimate me and what I can do...

**Mahmoud:** What can you do?...

**Aziza:** You don't know me...

**Mahmoud:** Of course... who can really understand women?...

**Aziza:** Now tell me what's my true intent in acting a...

**Mahmoud:** You wanna know my reason? ...it's very simple, very clear and very reasonable: Your intent is the same as that of any young girl who's trying to play a rich, middle-aged man like me.

**Aziza** (*trying to get ahold of herself*): Rich?...

**Mahmoud** (*smiling*): Yes... because for women a poor, middle-aged man has no use whatsoever.

**Aziza** (*bursting*): You're a bastard...

*Mahmoud is taken aback... his face changes... he tries to get a hold of his feelings. Salem enters holding a tray with cups of coffee on top. He goes to Aziza, but she doesn't move... He whispers, "Coffee" but she keeps still... Salem looks at his master who seems preoccupied... Salem hesitates... He decides to leave the tray on a small table and looks at both of them on his way out of the room.*

**Mahmoud** (*after a moment of silence*): That's the first time in my life I'm called a bastard... *Aziza is sitting still.*

**Mahmoud** (*after a moment of silence*): What else, what other words would you like to call me my very polite lady?

*Aziza doesn't budge*

**Mahmoud:** I see that this situation is taking too long... Please notice that I'm past that age when I can waste my time in such trivialities... If I were younger, in my twenties or thirties, this might have been accepted... but at this age... It's impossible...

**Aziza** (*her voice changes*): And do you think that a woman like me can tolerate this?

**Mahmoud:** Are you gonna cry again?!

**Aziza** ( *controlling herself* ): You're wrong... I'm so calm ( *pointing at the tray with the coffee* ) Can I have my coffee? ( *Takes the cup* ) Thank you...

**Mahmoud** ( *sneering at her while she's sipping her coffee* ): Careful lest your tears drop in the cup.

**Aziza:** My tears are none of your business... I said I'm calm...

*Silence*

**Aziza** ( *after a little while* ): Can I say a word? Just one word...

**Mahmoud:** Two if you desire my lady...

**Aziza:** What do I have to do to prove to you that I'm not acting any farces? I am serious... I really need you, you're the only person who can...

**Mahmoud** ( *cynically* ): Is that the 'one word'?

**Aziza:** Please answer my question...

**Mahmoud:** If we open this subject we won't see the end of it...

**Aziza:** Please answer...

**Mahmoud:** Now? Impossible... Tomorrow if you insist... I know you'll come tomorrow...

**Aziza:** No... you're wrong... I'm not coming tomorrow...

**Mahmoud:** Then the day after... or the day after that...

**Aziza:** I promise you... You'll never see me again...

**Mahmoud:** Ok... then I'll answer you right away... shoot...

**Aziza:** I already did! What should I do to make you believe me?...

**Mahmoud:** What you should do so I can believe you?...

**Aziza:** Yes... What should I do?

**Mahmoud:** Nothing...

**Aziza:** Leave joking aside... I'm dead serious...I'm so miserable and sad...

**Mahmoud** ( *cynically* ): WOW!!

**Aziza**: When will you believe me?... speak... *please* !...

**Mahmoud**: Maybe in the afterlife!... because I don't believe any female in this world we live in..

**Aziza**: I can't count on you, then... I'm so disappointed in you!...

**Mahmoud**: Exactly... I advise you not to waste your time with me...

**Aziza**: So you won't rescue me? You won't rescue me from my suffering...

**Mahmoud**: I need *you* to rescue me and my time... please miss!

**Aziza**: Alright.. ( *whispering* ) I won't bother you anymore.. I won't bother anybody anymore!

( *She takes the other cup of coffee* ) I don't think you're gonna drink this...

**Mahmoud**: Please, go ahead...

**Aziza** ( *sipping the coffee slowly* ): Thank you!...

**Mahmoud**: Now miss, the curtain has to fall on this sad story...

**Aziza** ( *very calmly* ): Quickly...

**Mahmoud**: Why are you looking at me like that?...

**Aziza**: Faster than you can imagine ( *whispering* ) I should have expected so from the start...

**Mahmoud** ( *smiling* ): So today was your last chance?!

**Aziza** ( *whispering* ): Exactly ( *she puts down the cup and stands up* )... last chance...

**Mahmoud**: Time to leave?

**Aziza** ( *extending her hand to his* ): So long... anyway...

**Mahmoud**: When?... tomorrow?...day after?...

**Aziza**: No.. don't worry... This time... it's not me who's gonna make the appointment...

**Mahmoud**: Neither am I.. I believe

**Aziza**: You're right... neither you ( *moves towards the window* )

**Mahmoud:** The door is this way, miss.

**Aziza:** I know...

**Mahmoud:** But you're going towards the window...

**Aziza** ( *while opening the window widely* ) I know... Mahmoud...

**Mahmoud:** I told you not to call me by my first name... it's unbecoming!...

**Aziza:** I'm sorry... I was calling my chauffeur...

**Mahmoud:** Your chauffeur?...

**Aziza** : ( *looking out of the window* ) Yes... he has the same name as yours...

**Mahmoud:** I see... but do you think that that chauffeur of yours, with whom I have the *honor* to share the same name, will hear you from this height?...

**Aziza**( *looking out the window* ): It's true, we're really so far from the ground.

*She climbs on a chair and then stands over the windowsill.*

**Mahmoud:** We're on the fifth floor... now come down lest you'll slip...

**Aziza:** I'm not playing around...

**Mahmoud:** Get away from the window...

**Aziza** ( *smiling mysteriously* ): Can't you believe that I'm dead serious about what I say and do?...

**Mahmoud:** I believe that women are frivolous ( *the phone rings and he holds the handset* ) Stop wasting time... Hello?... Yes... it's time?... I'll be right there ( *hangs up* )

**Aziza** ( *still smiling* ): It's time for what?

**Mahmoud** ( *angrily* ): For me to leave.

**Aziza:** No, it's *my* time to leave...

**Mahmoud:** I didn't write a conclusion for my lecture... If people would just realize how a scientist's time is wasted... now let's go... Or I'll leave you here...

**Aziza** ( *standing on the windowsill* ): Go and leave me here.

**Mahmoud** ( *impatiently* ): What the hell are you saying?... Is this one of your games?... Please stop all of

this... get away from the window or just throw yourself... do anything but please hurry... You need to understand, I have a lecture and people are waiting...

**Aziza:** Goodbye.

**Mahmoud** (*impatiently*): How many times did you say that... *He turns his back to her, faces his desk to collect his papers.*

**Aziza** (*screaming*) Mahmoud... I'll love you forever.

*She throws herself out of the window*

**Mahmoud** (*still busy collecting his papers*): Love me... that's great... that's really something... *He looks back, he doesn't find her. Dr. Azmy drops the papers and runs towards the window screaming .*

**Mahmoud:** Miss... Miss... she threw herself... She threw herself... she threw herself... *He looks outside the window. A crowd gathering down the street is heard, some are shouting and others screaming, whistles of policemen, sirens and total chaos.*

## Act II

*Same as in Act I. All doors are closed. There is a police officer at each door. A prosecutor is examining the window through which Aziza threw herself. He is measuring the height of the window and how far it is from the room's floor. An officer is standing next to him while, a registrar is sitting at the desk and writing down everything that is taking place in an official report. A knock at the office door, followed by an officer entering carrying an envelope and handles it to the registrar.*

**Registrar** : The coroner's report...

**Prosecutor** : What did he find out? Read it...

**Registrar** (*takes a look first then starts reading*): Incomplete rigorous mortis... beginnings of decomposition, bloating, inner abdomen wall is greenish, blood coming out of nose and mouth. Multiple skull fractures and brain hemorrhage. Massive intracranial hemorrhage. On opening the chest cavity, massive pleural effusion and blood were found. After removal heart and lungs, the first to the fifth were found to be vitally broken. On dissecting the neck, tissue and vertebrae were found intact. A foamy viscous fluid was found in epiglottis and trachea. The peritoneal cavity was found void of blood. Digested food was found in the stomach and intestinal contents were liquified. The autopsy conclusion is as follows: The previously mentioned injuries were the result of a heavy impact with a solid object, possibly a fall to the ground from a height. Death came as a result of neurogenic shock and post cranial concussion. Time between death and autopsy is twelve hours.

*Loud banging on the door*

**Officer** (*opens the door slowly*): No one is allowed in...

**Iqbal** : Let me in...

**Officer** : It is not allowed...

**Iqbal** : I need to talk to Mr. Prosecutor... it's urgent...

**Prosecutor** ( *to the officer* ): Let the lady in...

**Iqbal** : My husband is in a very bad shape, Mr. Prosecutor... he didn't have a wink all night... me too... though I was to go home, I still couldn't sleep because of what happened... that horrible accident...

**Prosecutor** : We're about to be done here... Please have a seat in the next room...

**Iqbal** : With the family of the diseased?!... Impossible!... I can't forget how they stared at me last night... As if we killed their daughter...

**Prosecutor** : Alright have a seat in this chair here...

**Iqbal** ( *sitting down while exhaling a deep sigh* ): Oh, why do I have to go through all this...

**Prosecutor** : I need to ask you more questions... Do you know if your husband and the diseased had a relationship?...

**Iqbal** ( *sighing* ): I heard people talking...

**Prosecutor** : How did your husband deal with that girl?

**Iqbal** : I don't know...

**Prosecutor** : So why do you think she threw herself out of the window?

**Iqbal** : I don't know... I wasn't here when it happened...

**Prosecutor** : When you came yesterday and found the doors closed, did you ask your husband about that?...

**Iqbal** : Yes I did, he said he did it so that the girl won't come in...

**Prosecutor** : Did you know how she managed to come in?

**Iqbal** : Salem told me after that horrible incident that she broke the glass part of the door...

**Prosecutor** : Yes... one last word please... how much do you know about your husband's private life?

**Iqbal** ( *protesting* ): My husband's private life?... My husband doesn't have one, sir... he's a straightforward man, a good husband and father, and it's merely fate that threw that girl in his way...

**Prosecutor** : My apologies... I didn't mean anything by this question except...

**Iqbal** : Sir, I hope you realize the state I'm in right now... a woman like me has become an item everyone is talking about in an overnight ( *as if talking to herself* ) That idiot has ruined our family...

*A knock on the office door*

**Officer** ( *talking to prosecutor* ): Mother of the diseased...

**Prosecutor** : Let her in...

**Iqbal** ( *jumps to her feet* ): I'll wait somewhere else...

*She moves towards the same door from which Aziza's mother is entering. They both exchange sharp glances...Iqbal leaves...*

**Prosecutor** ( *notices the mother drying her tears* ): Oh please madam, take it easy...

**Mother** : Do you still need me here?...

**Prosecutor** : We are through... but I need to know one more thing... did you know Dr. Azmy from before?

**Mother** : Of course... I came here with my late daughter a number of times as she was suffering from recurrent headaches...

**Prosecutor** : And afterwards? Did they form a type of a relationship?

**Mother** : Yes...

**Prosecutor** : Did your daughter talk to you about that relationship?

**Mother** : No.. but I overheard her talking to him on the phone multiple times and always mentioning him by his first name, Mahmoud... I once heard her say, "It's either I marry

Mahmoud or just die."

**Prosecutor** : Thank you, madam.

**Mother** : Can I leave now?...

**Prosecutor** : Don't you feel you need to ask Dr. Azmy one last question?... ( *to officer* )... bring Dr. Azmy in...

**Mother** : What will I say?..( *crying* )... there is no use, what happened was more than enough..

**Prosecutor** : Patience...

*Dr. Azmy comes in looking exhausted and in pain...*

**Prosecutor** : Have a seat, doctor...

*Azmy takes a seat, his head is hanging down*

**Prosecutor** ( *to Mahmoud* ): I need to know something... You said that the diseased climbed that chair to reach the window, why couldn't you hurry towards her and pull her in and prevent her from throwing herself?...

**Mahmoud** ( *raising his head* ): Mr. Prosecutor, I told you: I didn't believe she was serious... You can't imagine how I feel now... It all happened so fast, it shook me from head to toe, I'm in dismay... I still can't believe what I saw with my own eyes...

**Prosecutor** : Did she tell you that she was going to throw herself for your sake?...

**Mahmoud** : Yes... she did...

**Prosecutor** : And of course you thought she was bluffing...

**Mahmoud** : Certainly... It didn't come to my mind that such a beautiful, young woman would kill herself for me... I still doubt it... did she really die?...

**Prosecutor** ( *pointing at the autopsy report* ): Read this...

**Mahmoud** ( *going through the pages of the report* ): Autopsy

*The mother sighs heavily*

**Mahmoud** ( *as if talking to himself* ): Yes... yes... Isn't that amazing... The girl who was here yesterday, nicknamed Zizi, now is a mixture of rotting flesh and other frothy fluids...

**Mother** ( *losing her control over herself* ): Stop it... Oh God!... Please stop!...

**Mahmoud** ( *looking at her in pain* ): I'm sorry, I'm really sorry... though no apology is ever enough... I can feel your pain, please believe me... and... how can I put it into words?!...

**Prosecutor** ( *whispering to registrar* ): Ok that's it ...

**Mother** : That's God's will...

**Prosecutor** : We are done here... but before we all leave ... do you two have anything to add?...

**Mother** ( *weeping* ): No Sir

**Mahmoud** ( *his head hanging down* ): No...

**Prosecutor** ( *shaking hands with both mother and Mahmoud* ): Patience madam, and you too doctor...

*All exit except Mahmoud and the mother.*

**Mother** ( *starting to walk out* ): Excuse me...

**Mahmoud** ( *in pain* ): Please stay for a little while... I need to express to you how I feel... but I can't find the right words... I can't express enough... the pain is so harsh... I'm the cause of all this...

**Mother** : It's not your fault... It's God's will...

**Mahmoud** : My conscience tells me that I am guilty, I should have believed her... ( *as if talking to himself* ) She had noble feelings, and what she did was beautiful... she did it for *me*. The one who did not believe one word she said.

**Mother** : There is no use now... she's gone, she belongs to the afterlife now...

**Mahmoud** ( *looking at the window* ): Yes... she's gone through this window... this window overlooks the afterlife...

**Mother** ( *moving towards the door* ): Good bye, sir ( *weeping* ) I lost my young daughter, she's nothing now, I'll never see her again... ( *weeping* )...

**Mahmoud** ( *painfully* ): Patience madam, take it easy... you're adding to my pain... she's dead, but she's here... the dead are all around us... there is no difference between them and us in the eyes of eternity. They still have an impact on our lives as if they're still here... If you can just imagine how I see your girl now?... How she managed to change the course of my life since yesterday.

**Mother** ( *looking at him* ): I believe you, doctor. Good bye.

**Mahmoud** ( *seeing her out* ): See you soon, madam... we share the same feelings... we can make things easier for each other.

*Exit mother.*

*Enter Iqbal at the same moment, they don't talk to one another...*

**Iqbal** ( *coldly* ): You did good by complementing that mother, she's going through the worst thing ever...

*Mahmoud sits down thinking, he doesn't budge.*

**Iqbal** : Though she wasn't decent enough towards me although I'm the lady of the house. ( *Mahmoud makes a slight movement* ) I think she sees me as her daughter's competitor... ( *Mahmoud turns and looks at her* ) Why are you staring at me like that.

**Mahmoud** ( *dryly* ): Why are you here?

**Iqbal** : Why am I here?!... don't you need me next to you in such circumstances?...

**Mahmoud** : Next to me.. Is that all what you can do?...

**Iqbal** : What else can I do?

**Mahmoud** : Go home and have some rest...

**Iqbal** : What about you?...

**Mahmoud** : Mind your own business...

*A moment of silence...*

**Iqbal** : God!!... why the long face?... what has changed in the universe...

**Mahmoud** : Can't you see what's changed?

**Iqbal** : No, I can't...

**Mahmoud** : Then it's no use talking to you woman...

**Iqbal** : I could swear you've lost your mind...

**Mahmoud** : Enough I say...

**Iqbal** : You're behaving so strangely today... I understand that one can get affected by such incidents... but even that has its own limits... I advise you...

**Mahmoud** : I'm not taking any advice from you...

**Iqbal** ( *continuing* ): Go home, and change those clothes...

**Mahmoud** : I'll change them all into black...

**Iqbal** : In mourning? For whom?

**Mahmoud** ( *continuing* ): I'll never take the black off...

**Iqbal** ( *cynically* ): And leave your beard to grow, I reckon...

**Mahmoud** : I will...

**Iqbal** : You'll make a joke out of us...

**Mahmoud** : I don't give a damn...

*A moment of silence.*

**Iqbal** : Is it that girl...

**Mahmoud** : Yes, it's that girl...now what do you want?...

**Iqbal** : Nothing...

**Mahmoud** : Now, please leave me alone...

**Iqbal** (*feeling sorry for him*): Where has your composure gone and your clean cut, pure past? I told you before that this can all disappear in a second...

*Mahmoud doesn't budge...*

**Iqbal** : Didn't you reprimand me yesterday for not trusting you enough?... Here I am, trusting you... so what do you do with this trust?...

*Mahmoud starts to feel uneasy ...*

**Iqbal** : Now you know that I was right all along?... Mahmoud, talk to me... Honey?

**Mahmoud** (*as if talking to himself*): Mahmoud... honey...

**Iqbal** (*looking at him closely*): What's wrong with you?...

**Mahmoud** : These were her exact last words!!...

**Iqbal** (*controlling her anger*): Her last words!!

**Mahmoud** : Before she was gone...

**Iqbal** (*whispering*): To hell...

**Mahmoud** (*angry*): Iqbal...

**Iqbal** : I can't take it anymore...

**Mahmoud** : Iqbal...

**Iqbal** : You don't scare me with this angry face and loud voice...

**Mahmoud** : Get out of my face...

**Iqbal** : Oh, how angry we are...

**Mahmoud** : I said get...

**Iqbal** : Mahmoud!

**Mahmoud** : Never say my name again...

**Iqbal** : Don't I have the right to?

**Mahmoud** : No... you don't... Not anymore...

**Iqbal** : What's happening? That's the first time you treat me like that...

**Mahmoud** : Go home...

**Iqbal** : Don't you love me anymore... remember our anniversary...

**Mahmoud** : Enough with the history lessons now... I'm tired...

**Iqbal** : I see...

**Mahmoud** : You should shut up and respect whatever I'm going through...

**Iqbal** : Respect what?!!

**Mahmoud** : Or just go...

**Iqbal** : Here, I've shut up... and respected whatever you're going through... It's my destiny to sit and watch such tragi-comedies... but we've been watching for so long that we forgot about ourselves... I haven't eaten since yesterday... what a wonderful life... why did God send us that accursed girl?

**Mahmoud** (*angry*): Shut up woman...

**Iqbal** : I'll never shut up you unfaithful husband ...

**Mahmoud** : I forbid you to talk...

**Iqbal** : How wonderful of you to make a dead woman share our life together... a dead woman...

But I guess you appreciate her more than your own living wife...

**Mahmoud** : Yes, I do... I appreciate and respect her...

**Iqbal** : So what did I gain from the promise I made you write down and sign?... I can't even ask for the fifty thousand pounds, why didn't I think of that... That you'll have another woman in your life... a dead woman?!...

**Mahmoud** : Enough...

**Iqbal** ( *after a moment* ): Can't you see that by doing that you're breaking the sacred bond of marriage?...

**Mahmoud** : I don't give a damn... I have more sacred things to take care of, a duty towards a human being who gave up her life for me and asked for nothing in return... A whole youthful, young life... can't you get it?...

**Iqbal** : I don't care...

**Mahmoud** : Of course you don't ... because you're so selfish, you don't care except for yourself, and what you gain... I'm at a sensitive point in my life and a person to whom I should show all due owe and respect for what she's done... and you, o' great wife of mine what did you sacrifice?... Anyone on this earth, what's the utmost can one give to another?... All riches of the earth are nothing compared to a human life...Who would give up a young, beautiful life for nothing in return?... She did...

**Iqbal** : Remember that you're the head of a wonderful, happy family... don't ruin everything...

**Mahmoud** : Again, all what you're talking about is *your* happiness... I told you that I don't give a damn about you woman. From now on I'm not yours... Do you get it?... I've been a slave to your satisfaction for fifteen years, I've spent my youth and my whole life slaving for you... Now what do you want from what has remained of my life? What's left is mine and I'll give it all up to the woman who gave her whole life up to me... do you understand?... Her whole life... her youth, her beauty, her hopes, everything went out through this window... You can't get what a great act that girl did... just imagine... if I asked you to throw yourself out of this window for my sake... how will you react?... of course... you're staring... admit it, that she's done something great and that she possessed the most noble, precious heart...I... I'm taking this oath now, from this day on I'm committing the rest of my life to that girl... and to honor her memory...

*Iqbal is listening silently*

*Silence. The noise of newspaper vendors*

**Newspaper vendors** : The accident, the accident, read about the suicide!...

**Iqbal** ( *talking to herself* ): Oh, what a scandal!...

### Act III

*Dr. Azmy's house. Magnificent reception area that has a number of doors in the corners. A huge glass door is situated in the middle. It is covered by Damascus curtains... Aziza's mother is sitting and looking around in astonishment... Iqbal enters through one of the side doors...*

**Iqbal** ( *warmly* ): Oh hello, welcome, welcome!

**Mother** ( *returning Iqbal's hug* ): I want to thank you for your visit last week Mrs. Iqbal and I apologize that I wasn't at home that day.

**Iqbal** ( *sitting close to her* ): I just wanted to talk to you..

**Mother** : I know what you wanted to talk to me about...

**Iqbal** ( *sighing* ): Yes... all the people in Cairo know...

*Iqbal looks disheveled and resentment covers her face.*

**Mother** : Only God knows Mrs. Iqbal, that I wouldn't have set foot in this house except to see you only...

**Iqbal** : You have all the right to...

**Mother** : But understand how you feel... if I were in your place...

**Iqbal** : Yes?...If you were in my place what would you have done?...

**Mother** : Well, he's a very strange man...

**Iqbal** : And very intolerable.

**Mother** : How long have you been together?

**Iqbal** : Fifteen years...

**Mother** : And this has always been his behavior?

**Iqbal** : On the contrary... He was such a straightforward and sensible husband...perfect in every sense

**Mother** : So what happened to him?

**Iqbal** ( *as if talking to herself* ): I don't know.

**Mother** : Can a person change so drastically at this mature age?

**Iqbal** : Why not?... Here we have a living example...

**Mother** : And forgets everything about his past life?

**Iqbal** : In a second...

**Mother** ( *sighing* ): You're right... he seems to have forgotten everything, even that horrible incident

**Iqbal** ( *bitterly* ): He's forgotten his whole past... everything... he's another man...

*A maid enters carrying a tray with two cups of coffee on top. She offers one of them to the mother.*

**Iqbal** ( *to the maid* ): Where has your master been all that time?

**Maid** : He's in the bathroom madam...

**Iqbal** ( *addressing the mother* ): Of course... the bathroom... always the bathroom...( *to the maid* ) And the barber? ... and his assistants?

**Maid** : They haven't arrived yet...

**Iqbal** ( *to the maid* ): Alright leave the tray on this table and you can go..

*Exits maid*

**Mother** ( *surprised* ): The barber and his assistants?

**Iqbal** : Yes... the barber is very famous, and he is assisted by two young women, one for pedicure and the other for manicure...

**Mother** : You're kidding!...

**Iqbal** : No, I'm not... He decided to stay home today doing nothing but sitting in the bathroom all day long, then comes the barber, followed by the tailor... The barber colors his white hair with all kinds of dyes... and administrates lotions for his wrinkles, masks, electric shock waves to make his face look younger again...

**Mother** : Oh God almighty!...

**Iqbal**: Yes, he wants to be young again after reaching this age...

**Mother** : That's really something!...

**Iqbal** : You won't recognize him if you saw him now... when was the last time you saw him?

**Mother** : Five months ago

**Iqbal** : Oh at the wake...

**Mother** : Yes... I only get his news through gossip...

*They put their cups down*

**Iqbal** : You didn't go to his clinic...?

**Mother** : Just once...

**Iqbal** : Of course you saw the huge portrait of your daughter at the entrance...

**Mother** : Yes... that's what I specifically came to talk to you about...

**Iqbal** : My dear... that portrait is being visited by wave after wave of women and girls, nonstop.

**Mother** : Yes, I've recently learned about that...

**Iqbal** : Yes, that's the talk of the town, even newspapers wrote about the beautiful young lady from a well-known family who killed herself for the prominent Dr. Azmy's sake. Hasn't anyone shown you those papers?...

**Mother** : Yes, they've shown them to me...

**Iqbal** : Can you imagine all high society women and young ladies running to the clinic just out of curiosity... To see the man for whom the lovely girl has killed herself?... Of course, you can now imagine how these women flirt with him?

**Mother** (*bitterly*): How wonderful...

**Iqbal** (*also bitterly*): Isn't it?... A learned scholar, who has passed fifty years old, turns into Don Juan!...

**Mother** : So how can you cope with all that?

**Iqbal** : What can I do about it?... I've been thinking for some time now... you see, we have a son... I'm ready to tolerate anything for Jamal's sake... but even if I wouldn't... (*she hesitatingly looks at a mirror on the wall*) Who would marry a woman like me?... (*sighing*) A broken woman!...

**Mother** : Oh, don't underestimate yourself Mrs. Iqbal, you're still beautiful... a rose may wither but its scent remains...

**Iqbal** (*staring at herself in the mirror*): No... I've withered away... You said it... I'm done for...

**Mother** (*staring at Iqbal*): How old are you Mrs. Iqbal?

**Iqbal** (*hesitating*): I'll be thirty shortly...

**Mother** (*enthusiastically*): You're still very young, why the despair then?

**Iqbal** (*bitterly*): You think so?...

**Mother** : Do you doubt it?... No Iqbal, you shouldn't doubt ... All I want to say is...

**Iqbal** (*looking at her interestingly*): Talk... and please be frank...

**Mother** : I just see that you look a little...well, you haven't been taking good care of yourself lately, I

mean you look different from the day when that horrible event happened...

**Iqbal** : You're right...

**Mother** : That day you looked so elegant, your face was radiant, you looked really in her thirties,

I mean twenties...

**Iqbal** ( *taking a look at herself and her slightly disheveled clothes* ): You're absolutely right... I haven't been taking good care of myself lately, that's why I look like an old lady!...

**Mother** : But your husband is twenty years older than you, right?... And yet look at him, he's a young man again...

**Iqbal** : That's another issue...

**Mother** : Don't say that... do what he does...

**Iqbal** : No, I can't...

**Mother** : So how could he then?

**Iqbal** : I don't know, that what puzzles me... I really can't, not these days...

**Mother** : But you used to take real good care of yourself...

**Iqbal** : I don't know, I can't find it in me to even put some makeup on, I don't know why?

**Mother** : That man really broke you...

**Iqbal** : I'll be honest with you, the way he looks now and how youthful he's become has filled me with sorrow for myself and I feel that I've grown even older than him...

**Mother** : And all those young ladies around him, as you were saying...

**Iqbal** : Yeah...

**Mother** : Yes... he doesn't care except for other women... yes... now I see...

**Iqbal** : Do you believe it? that's the same man who used to refuse to color his white hair and he would even send the barber away every time he comes to him.

**Mother** : I used to see that white hair even in his unshaved beard.

**Iqbal** : I used to be so proud of how I looked and how I dressed...

**Mother** : Of course...

**Iqbal** (*sighing*): Anyway... I'm so happy that you've come to visit...

**Mother** : Me too Mrs. Iqbal...

**Iqbal** : I hope that we see each other more frequently...

**Mother** : I hope so too...

**Iqbal** : You're the only one who can understand what I'm going through... I feel so relieved by talking to you..

**Mother** : You can confide in me... I hope I can restore your self-confidence to you...

**Iqbal** : Self-confidence?!

**Mother** : Yes... you have to believe in your youth and beauty, don't give in... don't let him break you!... It's really saddens me to see you in this desperation, have courage and stand up to that man, remind him of the age difference between you two...

**Iqbal** : I did that, numerous times, but to no avail...

**Mother** : No avail?...

**Iqbal** (*nodding her head*): No avail... there is something in a person that is stronger than age... now I'm certain..

**Mother** : What a stubborn man he is, isn't it enough what he's done to my daughter?... I swear to you Iqbal that I'm talking to you as if you were my own daughter.

**Iqbal** : The feeling is mutual, thank you...

*Maid enters to take the tray*

**Maid** (*while taking the tray*): The doctor has come out of the bathroom...

**Mother** (*cynically*): Happy bathing to him...

*Exits maid ...*

**Iqbal** (*to mother*): Would you like to see him?

**Mother** : Me? ... I have nothing to say to him... it's not enough for him that he was the reason for my daughter's death, but also he treats her memory in such a way. All what I want is for him to remove my child's portrait from his clinic, and to stop making a spectacle out of her to other women... That's all I

came here to ask of you...

**Iqbal** : Of me? I don't have the authority to remove the portrait from his clinic.

**Mother** : Can't you talk to him?...

**Iqbal** : No, he'll make fun of me...

**Mother** : So what shall we do about this?

**Iqbal** : *You* talk to him...

**Mother** ( *looking at her watch* ): Will he be able to see me now?... I really have to go... You know I live far from here... we haven't hired a chauffeur yet for the car... It was my daughter's car... she used to drive it herself when her chauffeur eloped...

**Iqbal** : Her chauffeur eloped?...

**Mother** : Yes, he eloped with a woman and since then my daughter refused to hire anyone else... she was so proud of him and used to speak highly of him...

**Iqbal** : Was he a young man?

**Mother** : Mahmoud?... yes, he was a handsome, young man...

**Iqbal** : His name was Mahmoud?...

**Mother** : Yes... he was a very energetic and hardworking employee...

**Iqbal** : You say he eloped with a woman? And your late daughter knew about that, of course... didn't he show up again?...

**Mother** : He did... after she passed away... he was weeping and expressed his sorrow about the way he acted.

**Iqbal** : The way he acted?... And what did he mean by that?...

**Mother** : Maybe it's just his way of paying his condolences...

**Iqbal** ( *as if whispering* ): May be it was something more than that... anyway... thank you so much my lady... thank you...I'm starting to really get the picture...

**Mother** : I can see that your face has suddenly lighted up!...

**Iqbal** ( *revitalized* ): I'm really happy that you came today... really happy...

**Mother** : The feeling is mutual... I'm also happy that I made your acquaintance.

**Iqbal** ( *talking to herself happily* ): No, I'm the happy one... yes... now this man inside will see that everything has to come to an end... now it's my turn... and I'll laugh from the bottom of my heart... and I'll have my vengeance...

**Mother** ( *astonished* ): What's happened?

**Iqbal** ( *Jumping to her feet* ): You'll know tomorrow, and then you'll say that Iqbal is invincible.

**Mother** ( *Also jumping to her feet* ): What do you mean?

**Iqbal** ( *sits her down* ): No... please stay for a few moments so you can enjoy the view of how young my husband has become.

**Mother** : Now...

**Iqbal** : Yes... now... and I'll leave you two together for some time...

*Iqbal goes to the huge glass door and opens it a little bit. Mahmoud appears seated in front of a big mirror and is surrounded by the two young assistants each attending to a part of him...*

**Mother** ( *takes a look* ): Well, well, well.

*Mahmoud doesn't notice her .*

**Iqbal** ( *pointing at him* ): A sultan surrounded by his harem!

**Mahmoud** ( *hears her and looks in her direction* ): Shut the door... can't you see I'm busy taking care of myself?

**Iqbal** ( *cynically* ): The holy hour that is!

**Mahmoud** ( *noticing the mother* ): Oh welcome, welcome, how are you doing, mother?

**Mother** ( *whispering in disdain* ): He's calling me mother!

**Iqbal** ( *to Mahmoud* ): Put all this aside for now.. And come over to welcome the lady who's paying us a visit.

**Mahmoud** ( *leaving his seat and removing the towels around his neck* ): Of course!..

*Mahmoud enters the reception area while beckoning to the two young women to wait for him.*

*Iqbal closes the door after him and leaves both Mahmoud and the mother alone. Mahmoud is wearing a red, silk robe de chambre. He is clean shaven, his moustache is trimmed. His wrinkles are all gone...*

**Mahmoud** : I'm so happy that you are calling upon us today...

**Mother** ( *staring at him* ): I came to see Mrs. Iqbal...

**Mahmoud** ( *Now adopting a new manner of speech that is full of youth and liveliness* ): Only Iqbal?...

**Mother** : Yes, she's the only one who can spare me some of her time...

**Mahmoud** : What about my time?..

**Mother** ( *hiding her cynicism* ): I think you have more important things to do with your time..

**Mahmoud** : But still... it doesn't mean I can't spare you some of it... sometime...

**Mother** : Thanks...

**Mahmoud** : How ironic!... How come you visit Iqbal and you don't care to see me?... What has changed you towards me?

**Mother** : I'm not the one who's changed...

**Mahmoud** : Neither am I...

**Mother** ( *cynically* ): Really?

**Mahmoud** : Do you notice anything changed about me?...

**Mother** ( *still cynical* ): Don't ask me...

**Mahmoud** : Then whom should I ask?...

**Mother** ( *pointing at a mirror hung on one of the wall* ): Ask the mirror, It's capable of giving you the right answer..

**Mahmoud** ( *looking in the mirror* ): Well, I'm taking a little better care of my looks, you see..

**Mother** ( *cynically* ): A little?!...

**Mahmoud** : We can't deny that I used to look so disheveled, I looked...

**Mother** : No sir, it's not a matter of how you used to look like...

**Mahmoud** ( *interrupting in disdain* ): Anyway... I'm happy that you're visiting us today...

**Mother** ( *in bitter cynicism* ): Really?!...

**Mahmoud** ( *notices her attitude and gets nervous* ): Especially after...

**Mother** : After what happened...

**Mahmoud** : What happened?... ( *looks around nervously* ) Where's Iqbal?...

**Mother** : I'll wait for her on my own... You just go ahead with your routine... I can see how busy you are... Besides, the two young ladies are waiting for you...

**Mahmoud** ( *looking at his watch* ): No, I can wait with you for... about... half a minute or so...

**Mother** : I can see you can't bear talking to me...

**Mahmoud** ( *inattentively* ): How can you tell...?

*He notices what he's just said and coughed in embarrassment...?*

**Mother** : It is clear... doesn't need a genius to notice...

**Mahmoud** ( *nervously* ): I'm sorry... I seem to be preoccupied.

**Mother** : No doubt about that...

**Mahmoud** : You can notice?...

**Mother** ( *making her cynicism very evident to him* ): It's not only me who can notice that... The whole city can see that you are always preoccupied...

**Mahmoud** ( *seriously* ): Preoccupied with my work at the clinic of course...

**Mother** : That and other things as well...

**Mahmoud** ( *anxiously* ): Maybe ... ( *to himself* )... That's unbearable...

**Mother** : I don't think you have anything to say to me...

**Mahmoud** : Like what?...

**Mother** : I'm in no place to remind you...

**Mahmoud** : Good... It's a blessing that we humans are forgetful...

**Mother** : I wish you sir a long life and I ask God to render me the same kind of patience and forgetfulness that He blessed you with...I just have one request...

**Mahmoud** : I'm at your disposal...

**Mother** : My daughter's portrait has no use anymore in your clinic...

**Mahmoud** : What do you mean?...

**Mother** : I mean that it doesn't belong there... Please take it off the wall...

**Mahmoud** : Take it off?... But it's a big part of my life!...

**Mother** : Your life doesn't need her... but I need to keep her portrait in a respectful place... and please don't force me to say more than that, excuse me, I have to leave...

**Mahmoud** : Leave?... (*he runs towards one of the side doors and calls out*) I qbal... Iqbal...

**Iqbal** (*comes in hurriedly*): You're already leaving?..

**Mother** (*extending her hand*): Yes...

**Mahmoud** (*extending his hand to her*): Good bye, aunt..

*The mother doesn't shake hands with him, instead she waves her hand without even looking at him and exits...*

**Iqbal** (*seeing the mother to the door*): Please come again... and I'll pay you a visit soon...

**Mahmoud** (*looking in the mirror and pets his hair*): Hope she'll never come again... ever... it will be a blessing if she never comes again...

**Iqbal** (*back to Mahmoud*): Did you speak to her?

**Mahmoud** (looking at Iqbal): Do you know why that Witch came ?

**Iqbal** : Witch?...

**Mahmoud** : You feel bad for her because I called her a Witch? I can't understand the secret behind you two becoming such good friends!! (*Iqbal looks at him angrily*) Why are you looking at me like that?...

**Iqbal** (*cynically*): Do you call a mother who just lost her daughter a "Witch"?

**Mahmoud** : I hope she just goes to hell, that "mother". Is it because her daughter killed herself for my sake that I'm obliged towards that "mother"?

**Iqbal** : What did she say to you?...

**Mahmoud** : She was talking to me as if she were my mother in law... I was so thankful when *your* mother died, and here we are again, another mother in law pops out from nowhere. She thinks she can control me and meddle with my own business...

**Iqbal** : Tell me... what did she say?...

**Mahmoud** ( *about to leave* ): I don't have time for this... ( *looking at his watch* ) Oh God!... Please!... It's time to go to the clinic...

**Iqbal** ( *stopping him before he goes back inside the room* ): Wait... I have to talk to you...

**Mahmoud** : No... My work is more important than talking to you...

**Iqbal** : Just one word then...

**Mahmoud** ( *opening the door* ): Impossible... enough time is lost... what a miserable day to have to spend it with old people?!...

**Iqbal** : And I'm one of them?!...

**Mahmoud** : I'm not exactly saying so...

**Iqbal** : Bastard!...

**Mahmoud** : There is no need for anger, my dear lady...

**Iqbal** : If you could just imagine how I despise you...

**Mahmoud** : Experience taught me that when women say "despise"... They mean "adore"...

**Iqbal** : Shut up!

**Mahmoud**: Even this word indicates love, women will never change.

**Iqbal**: It's enough that *you've* changed...

**Mahmoud** : It's all in your head... I haven't changed a bit... I'm always like that... Maybe I didn't take enough care of how I looked... but that's all...

**Iqbal** : That's all!... no... that is not all...

**Mahmoud** : You don't believe me?... Suit yourself... I don't have to prove anything to you or anybody!... But no one is so harsh in their words towards me like you are.. And that old witch...

**Iqbal** : Yes, because no one else knows that you're over fifty except the two of us.

**Mahmoud** : I told you never to mention this number...

**Iqbal** : which scare you...

**Mahmoud** : How do you know that I'm over fifty?... did you read my birth certificate?... It's been lost for a long time, I've looked for it to prove to everyone that they're wrong about my age, but I just can't find it...

**Iqbal** : Luckily ...

**Mahmoud** : On the contrary it is my bad luck that I can't find it...

**Iqbal** : Despite all that... you know your real age...

**Mahmoud** : Yeah, my real age is about 35... 38.. Max.

**Iqbal** ( *laughing at him* ): Oh please... spare me... one cannot deceive himself to that extent

**Mahmoud** : Think whatever you want.. Let's say I'm 39! Happy?...

**Iqbal** : Is that the truth you stand by in front of your conscience and God?

**Mahmoud** : Don't mix my belief and faith into this, I didn't commit any crime... I've always adhered to the laws set by God and those set my conscience.

**Iqbal** : And age?!

**Mahmoud** : What?

**Iqbal** : What about the laws of age and time?

**Mahmoud** : Who's that idiot who says that there are laws for such things?...

**Iqbal**: Oh I beg your pardon... that idiot is you.

**Mahmoud** : Me?

**Iqbal** : Don't you remember the lecture you were about to deliver that day?

**Mahmoud**: I confess that Heaven's grace have rescued my good, scientific reputation at the right time...

**Iqbal** : Amazing, I swear that's all amazing...

**Mahmoud** : Whatever, now let me go please...

**Iqbal** ( *stopping him* ): Just wait a minute..

**Mahmoud** I can't.. Patients are waiting...

**Iqbal**: Patients ( *laugh at him* )...

**Mahmoud** : Of course... who else waits for a doctor except patients?...

**Iqbal** : All this elegance, trimming, dying, perfuming and make-up for your patients?...

**Mahmoud** : I'm a sensitive doctor, I like to make my patients happy, the more the doctor takes care of himself, the better the patients will feel...

**Iqbal** : Is that a new medical rule?

**Mahmoud** : Sure!.( *starting to leave* )... Bye for now!...

**Iqbal** : I said wait a minute.

**Mahmoud** : I need to call Salem, my nurse, at the clinic...

**Iqbal** : Tell him you're gonna be late...

**Mahmoud** : Hello, operator... Hello... yes 50250,... thanks hon...

**Iqbal** : Hon...

**Mahmoud** ( *winking at her* ): Nice operator...

*Iqbal nods her head and suppresses her anger.*

**Mahmoud** ( *on the phone* ): Hello... Salem.. Has any of the patients arrived?.. ( *in a lower voice* ).. Do you get it you idiot? Who? Oh, I remember now, tell her to wait. I mean tell *him* to wait... yes half an hour max...

**Iqbal** ( *her eyes fixed on him* ): Who's waiting for you?

**Mahmoud** ( *looking in the mirror* ): A patient with a very pale face...

**Iqbal** ( *sighing* ): Maybe she has heart problems... all of your patients have heart problems..

*She keeps staring at him...*

**Mahmoud** ( *looks back at her* ): Why are you staring at me?...

**Iqbal** ( *after a little while* ): Oh God... God... All of this because a woman killed herself for him?...

**Mahmoud** ( *smiling* ): It's a big deal...

*Starts to leave...*

**Iqbal** : Mahmou... my dear husband!...

**Mahmoud** : What do you want?

**Iqbal** : I wanna ask you a question...

**Mahmoud** : If it's urgent then shoot, fast... You know I'm running out of time...

**Iqbal** : Well, yes it is...

**Mahmoud** : Ok hurry...

**Iqbal** : Do you love me?

**Mahmoud** : Is that the urgent question? Oh... women... Women!...

**Iqbal** : I'm serious... I want to know now... tell me where is my place in the middle of all that you're filling your life with, that endless chaos?...

**Mahmoud** (*laughing*): filling my life!...

**Iqbal** : Do you like the word?... yes... Tell me, where's my place?... I really need to know...

**Mahmoud** : Your place is... (*sneering at her*) well that's a subject open for discussion later, when I come out of the 'chaos'... See you... Bye!...

**Iqbal** : Mahmoud... wait...

**Mahmoud** (*irritated*): No... I won't wait... I can't grant you all that time... you don't deserve this much... You're suffocating me...

**Iqbal** : What if I say I'm in love with you, Mahmoud?... (*he shrugs*) ... Don't shrug me off...

**Mahmoud** : Even you... that's amazing... it's really chaotic... this house is for my relaxation and rest not to hear love poems from you...

**Iqbal** : You're such a bastard...

**Mahmoud** : What made you utter those words of love today?...

**Iqbal** : I don't know...

**Mahmoud** : Just less than a year ago, when I'd say that I loved you, you would answer, "have some respect to your old age, man."

**Iqbal** : You're not old...

**Mahmoud** : I know... I don't need the likes of you to tell me...

**Iqbal** : Yes... you don't need the likes of me to tell you... but you're wrong... because I really love you, a new type of love that has nothing to do with the past... I'm not just your wife anymore, I'm a woman who's deeply in love with you.

**Mahmoud** : Wonderful! Just wonderful!... All women say the same thing to me now... every single one of you has turned into a Juliet... Even you who used to be so arrogant... look at yourself now...

**Iqbal** : Don't make fun of me... I love you more than any other woman... because my love is unconditional...not because another woman killed herself for you... and not because you've become better looking... turn into a disheveled, old man again and I'll still be in love with you,

Nothing will change...

**Mahmoud** (*frightened by her words*): No.. No... I don't want to be a disheveled, old man ever again for your sake...

**Iqbal** : I feel a pain that no other woman can bear... because we are worlds apart although we share the same space... I feel that you consider me a relic from the past... You're banishing me from your present life ...as if I'm twenty years older than you and that I'm not fit to live the present with you.

**Mahmoud** : Well, you said it...

**Iqbal** : What you're saying is horrible, Mahmoud... do you really see me that vicious?...

**Mahmoud** : Do you want the truth?... yes... your mere presence reminds me of old age. Seeing you and being close to you drowns me coldness and the stink of old age...

**Iqbal** : You're so harsh, Mahmoud...

**Mahmoud** (*looking at his watch*): I can't stay and listen to you anymore...

**Iqbal** : You just can't imagine what a horrible thing you're saying...

**Mahmoud** (*irritated*): Stop it!... I've had enough... let me go... God!...

*He moves towards the door*

**Iqbal** : Poor me, I was trying to hide the painful news from you... I didn't want to hurt your feelings, though I really can... I actually can drop a bomb that can shatter this phony youth of yours to pieces...

**Mahmoud** : Shut up you witch...

**Iqbal** (*trembling*): What did you say?

*Mahmoud shrugs at her and moves towards the glass door.*

**Iqbal** : Me? A witch? (*Mahmoud is about to leave when she bursts out*) You... wait, you idiot... You who thinks himself a teenager again, listen to me because now, I'm gonna talk and nothing can stop me...

**Mahmoud** (*looks worried*): What do you want to say?...

**Iqbal** : The girl didn't kill herself for your sake...

**Mahmoud** : Are you crazy?...

**Iqbal** : Zizi killed herself for Mahmoud, her chauffeur...

**Mahmoud** (*trembling with shock*): Her chauffeur?...

**Iqbal** : That's the truth...

**Mahmoud** : Iqbal...

**Iqbal** : What's wrong?...

**Mahmoud** : Your joke is ridiculous...

**Iqbal** : See what the shock did to you?... how unfortunate for you because I'm not joking...

**Mahmoud** (*his tone changes*): Who told you this nonsense?

**Iqbal** : Her chauffeur is a *real* young man... *real young* and *handsome* ...His name is Mahmoud, she cared for him a lot, she truly loved him... but he eloped with another woman... she couldn't take the shock so she decided to kill herself...

**Mahmoud** (*lowering his head in shame*): Who told you this?...

**Iqbal** : Her mother, when she was just here...

**Mahmoud** (*raises his head nervously*): Oh.. her mother... The old witch... of course...

**Iqbal** : Of course, a beautiful, young woman like her kills herself for a beautiful young man, not for an old man like you!

**Mahmoud** (*sits down and starts thinking*): Are you trying to make me believe this?

**Iqbal** : I'm trying to make you believe the reasonable thing, which is that she killed herself for Mahmoud, the young man, her chauffeur who never left her side most of the time he'd been working for her...

**Mahmoud** (*raising his head*): Then why did she come to me and confessed her love for me?...

**Iqbal:** She certainly wanted to avenge her wounded pride... She wanted to betray her beloved the same way he betrayed her and you were an easy prey since she came to your clinic everyday...

**Mahmoud :** So all her tender words were mere lies? What about her tears that fell down her cheeks in front of my own eyes?

**Iqbal :** All of that was for the other Mahmoud, not you...

**Mahmoud** (*bursting out*): Shut up!...

**Iqbal** (*gloating*): She loved him... he was her first love... But he betrayed her... she always loved him... She wanted to die when she learned that his heart belonged to another woman, hurt like that, she wanted revenge... She thought, if she pretended that she killed herself for another man... a respectable, highly esteemed man... That girl was real smart ... She kept true to her love by dying for it... and had her revenge by making him believe that she did not kill herself for him... Maybe it was more than that... maybe they had an affair... maybe they slept with each other and she was afraid of scandal and wanted to marry you to hide what she did, and when she couldn't, she killed herself

**Mahmoud :** What a wonderful myth you've woven... that's your sick imagination that is talking right now...

**Iqbal :** That' the closest thing to the truth... you're delusional, I'm telling you the truth that will be as bright as the sun if you really looked inside yourself...

**Mahmoud :** I'm sorry to disappoint you, woman... If you think that you can plant suspicion in my mind, you're wrong, you have failed...

**Iqbal** (*laughing victoriously*): I've never felt as victorious in my life as I do now... It's enough to look at your pale face and this nervousness in your quivering lips and teary eyes, everything in you screams that the truth has prevailed and that there is no denial...

**Mahmoud :** I'm not that stupid to believe a woman like you...

**Iqbal :** I could swear that you believe me...

**Mahmoud** (*trying to control his anger*): Damn you!...

**Iqbal** (*triumphantly*): Now you can go to your important rendezvous, go and finish dressing up, go and meet whomsoever you want to... Now, you feel that this great structure you've built was just a mirage, that a young girl has made a fool out of you. She deceived you and made a joke out of you. I think I've taken out of your time more than what I deserve... you certainly have forgotten about your patients, who are complaining from their hearts, waiting at the clinic... I wonder how they'd feel after they discover that they founded their adoration for you on a mere myth? Why the long face, young man?... Go now, the crowd is waiting for you... I won't hold you any longer...

**Iqbal** (*waving at him dismissively*): Au revoir... Bye bye...

**Mahmoud** (*jumping to his feet*): Lies... mere lies. !... (*grabs her arm*) You hear me? Mere lies...

**Iqbal** (*in pain*): Let go of my arm!...

**Mahmoud** (*shaking her violently*): You're sick... Vicious!...

**Iqbal** (*in pain*): Let me go, Mahmoud... are you crazy?.

**Mahmoud** : Who can believe this nonsense? I won't... I will never believe it...

**Iqbal** : Let go of me... your nails are cutting into my flesh...

**Mahmoud** (*throwing her to the ground*): You liar! You slut!...

*Iqbal falls screaming to the ground.*

#### Act IV

*Dr. Azmy's clinic same as Act I, the room is now very elegant and more suitable for romantic rendezvous than a doctor's office. A huge portrait of Aziza at in the entrance.*

*A woman enters from one of the doors. She is elegant and good looking, she barges in while Salem follows her trying to prevent her from entering...*

**Salem** (*better dressed than before*): Please be patient..

**Lady** : I have been patient for hours, is this his private room?...

**Salem** : Please no one is allowed in here as long as he's out...

**Lady** : I'll wait for him here...

**Salem** : Please wait in the waiting room with the other ladies...

**Lady** : I'm not like them, I'll wait here, alone despite your ugly nose...

**Salem** : Despite what?...

**Lady** : Sure... do you think you've got a Roman nose?...

**Salem** : Why not, my nose is even better looking than a Roman one... Even in noses there are local and imported?...

**Lady** (*laughing while walking around the room*): This room is beautiful!..

**Salem** : My lady, please wait in the other room...

**Lady** : I said I'll wait here until he comes...

**Salem** : He's not coming today...

**Lady** : What if I assure you that he will come?...

**Salem** : He won't...

**Lady** : I have a medicine, whoever takes it tells the truth ( *she gets a one-pound bill out of her handbag*)  
This bill...

**Salem** ( *shouting* ): My lady...

**Lady** : This is for you.. Now tell me, will he come in today as I said, or he won't?...

**Salem** ( *hurriedly* ): Oh God forbid, who dares to contradict you my lady? You're as true as this  
Egyptian pound...

**Lady** ( *stands in front of Aziza's portrait and examines it* ): Is this her portrait?..

**Salem** : Yes my lady...

**Lady** ( *examining the portrait* ): Her mouth is a little wide..

**Salem** : Yes... you are right...

**Lady** : I don't like her nose...

**Salem** : Yes... it's not Roman enough!...

*He hears the door opening.*

**Lady** ( *alert* ): Is that him?...

**Salem** ( *pleading* ): If you want me to be your slave I will, but please just wait for a little while in the  
other room so I can have time to announce your presence to him.

**Lady** : Ok, I trust you...

**Salem** : Yes... trust your humble servant...

*He leads her to the same door she entered from and shuts it after her... Mahmoud comes through another  
door...*

*Mahmoud looks different, he sits at his desk and puts his head in his hands...*

**Salem** ( *moving closer to him*): Doctor..

**Mahmoud** ( *without looking at him* ): What do you want?...

**Salem** ( *attentively* ): Mrs...

**Mahmoud** ( *interrupting him* ): I'm not seeing anyone...

**Salem** ( *whispering in objection* ): It's her first time here, she came to...

**Mahmoud** ( *aggressively* ): I said I'm not seeing anyone...

**Salem** ( *taken aback by the surprise* ): That's odd... you're not seeing anyone!... then what will I tell her?!...

**Mahmoud** : That I'm not feeling well...

**Salem** ( *hesitating* ): Should I say this to her only, or to everyone else?...

**Mahmoud** : All of them...

**Salem** ( *shocked* ): All the ladies?!... ( *Mahmoud doesn't move* ) What's happened?

**Mahmoud** : Close that door and don't answer it.

**Salem** : Are we back to closed doors?

**Mahmoud** ( *ordering him* ): I said close the door.

**Salem** : Alright... I'll close the doors and just give in...

**Mahmoud** : Now leave me alone...

**Salem** ( *talking to himself* ): So the good days are over now?... ( *he exits then comes in as if he remembered something ...* ) And if they asked when they could come back?...

**Mahmoud** : I'm not seeing anyone today...

**Salem** : Just today?...

**Mahmoud** ( *pounding his forehead* ): Today, I want peace and quiet...do you hear me?..

**Salem** ( *looking at him* ): Sir, you really look...

**Mahmoud** : Give me the ether....

*Salem nods in obedience and exits. Mahmoud sits still. He raises his head and jumps to his feet trying to regain some of his energy, but he goes back and sits at his desk, putting his head in his hands as if trying to fall asleep but can't, he raises his head and stares at Aziza's portrait.*

**Salem** ( *entering with a small ether bottle in hand* ): The ether, sir...

*Salem exits in a hurry as knocks are heard on the door... Mahmoud doesn't move except for his fingers playing with the small ether bottle without opening it...*

**Iqbal** ( *outside* ): What's your master doing?

*She enters. She is as elegant she was in Act I. she looks vibrant and youthful. Mahmoud doesn't notice her and is still playing with the ether bottle...*

**Iqbal** : Good evening... doctor?!

*Mahmoud raises his head, looks at her but doesn't answer.*

**Iqbal** : Why are you staring at me from head to toe?

**Mahmoud** ( *with a sore voice* ): Why are you here?...

**Iqbal** : I was passing nearby on my way to my seamstress, so I decided to come up and check on you...

**Mahmoud** : The seamstress?...

**Iqbal** ( *smiling slyly while taking off her elegant gloves* ): Of course honey.

*Mahmoud goes back to playing with the ether bottle while Iqbal takes a look at herself in the mirror on the wall while whistling happily...*

**Mahmoud** ( *raising his head in irritation* ): What's got into you today?

**Iqbal** ( *still looking in the mirror* ): Nothing... I'm always like that...

**Mahmoud** : Always like that?

**Iqbal** : Why? Do you notice any change in me? ( *Mahmoud looks sadly at her, but doesn't answer* ): I haven't been taking good care of myself for some time... that's all...

*Mahmoud doesn't answer*

**Iqbal** : Yes... God damn delusion...

**Mahmoud** ( *pressing his teeth* ): What delusion?..

**Iqbal** : I imagined I was old. And *you* imagined you were young!

**Mahmoud** : I Imagined?...

**Iqbal** : Of course... but everything is back to normal, and here you are, in less than a day your respectful, good old age has come back to you...

**Mahmoud** : Stop it...

**Iqbal** : Here's the mirror, take a look...

*She opens her handbag and gets a small mirror out, she gives it to him. He snatches it and looks at it, then he throws it in the middle of the room in irritation.*

**Iqbal** : What did the mirror do to you to deserve breaking?...

**Mahmoud** : I have work to do... a lot of work... I can't spend my time in such trivialities...

**Iqbal** : It'll do you good if you have some rest from all this work... You see you're sick...

**Mahmoud** : I'm in perfect health...

**Iqbal** : Your face is pale and your eyes are red.

**Mahmoud** : Red, green, it's none of your business. I feel great...

**Iqbal** : I bet you didn't have a wink of sleep all night...

**Mahmoud** : Who told you so? I slept like a baby.

**Iqbal** : Stubborn...

**Mahmoud** : Go mind your own business lady...why do you care about me?...

**Iqbal** : You're right... I really don't give a damn about you...

*She walks around the room, whistling then sees Aziza's portrait and looks at Mahmoud.*

**Iqbal** : Is this portrait still here?!

**Mahmoud** (*without moving*): It's none of your business..

**Iqbal** : You'd have done good if you looked for Mahmoud, the chauffeur, and gave it to him.

**Mahmoud** : I will.

**Iqbal** : He's the only person who's entitled to have it...

**Mahmoud** : Whatever...

**Iqbal** : Yes... also all this furniture, those pillows and throw-ons that really don't belong to a respectful clinic!... it's about time you get rid of all that, the farce has lasted long enough!

**Mahmoud** : Can't you just shut up?...

**Iqbal** : I admit I'm afraid of you, you were so harsh on me last night... Look... these are the marks your fingernails left on my neck... (*Mahmoud doesn't budge or look*).

**Iqbal** : But I forgive you... you were trying to defend your dying youth...

**Mahmoud** : You're such a dirty liar. I'll never believe you...

**Iqbal** : You won't believe me?

**Mahmoud** : Never...

**Iqbal** : So if you don't believe me, why all the change that came about you in less than a day.

**Mahmoud** (*unconvinced*): You're wrong. I haven't changed.

**Iqbal** : Your voice tells it all...

**Mahmoud** (*bursts out*): Shut up... I'm tired of you and your absurdities...

**Iqbal** : Absurdities. You're right... calm down then...

**Mahmoud** : I'm calm in spite of you, woman.

**Iqbal** : Then smile, laugh, be happy as you were yesterday, in the bathroom.

**Mahmoud** : I'm not taking orders from you...

**Iqbal** (*whistling and humming*): Don't you wanna be as happy as I am?...

*He glares at her angrily*

**Iqbal** : Suit yourself (*looks proudly in the mirror*): As for me, I'm so happy

**Mahmoud** (*staring at her in angry silence then says*): And why all the happiness, today?

**Iqbal** (*turning to him*): And you, why all the sadness today?

**Mahmoud** : Who said I'm sad?

**Iqbal** : You're so sad as if you found your lost birth certificate... (*Laughs loudly*)

**Mahmoud** (*putting his fingers in his ears*): Don't laugh that loudly at my workplace...

**Iqbal** : Your work place is closed today... that's strange... where are all the patients! Where is the great crowd?... Oh, all is gone... all the dreams have vanished!...

**Mahmoud** : This concerns me only...

**Iqbal** (*cynically*): Of course (*looking at her watch*).

*The phone rings...*

**Mahmoud** (*answering the phone*): Hello... he's not here.. No... not here... (*Hangs up*)

**Iqbal** (*cynically*): Why are you lying?...

**Mahmoud** (*tiredly*): Shut up. Why don't you shut up?...

**Iqbal** (*looking at his face*): You look so tired...

**Mahmoud** (*surrendering*): Yes. I need some rest...

**Iqbal** : I told you so, last night.

**Mahmoud** : I need to be away from the clinic for some time...

**Iqbal** (*slyly*): Yes... for some time... to hide from prying eyes...

**Mahmoud** (*raising his head*): What do you mean?

**Iqbal** : And yet, I think there is no need for that... everybody still thinks that the late young lady killed herself for your sake... and who will tell them otherwise? You don't need to worry at all when it comes to me...

**Mahmoud** : Stop this cynicism...

**Iqbal** : I'm serious. I see you can go on deceiving people, don't worry about a thing, I can be as silent as a grave...

*Mahmoud looks at her*

**Iqbal** : Why are you looking at me like that? Can't you see that I'm serious?

**Mahmoud** ( *staring at her angrily* ): Go on deceiving people?...

**Iqbal** : Can't you do that?...

**Mahmoud** : Stop!...

**Iqbal** : Ok... I understand... You know... you're right...

**Mahmoud** : Understand what?...

**Iqbal** : I understand now that it is *you* who needs to believe this myth, not the people around you... It's you who needs to boost your self-esteem first, but alas, this can't happen now, you poor thing!... It was a wonderful dream that lasted for some months but then the sad truth has to come out...

**Mahmoud** : I said enough with this nonsense!...

**Iqbal** : This nonsense is the truth and you know it...

**Mahmoud** : I won't believe a word you said unless I see that other Mahmoud with my own eyes...

**Iqbal** : The other Mahmoud? Her chauffeur?...

**Mahmoud** : Yes, and talk to him face to face...

**Iqbal** : Talk to him?...

**Mahmoud** : Yes... so I can see the truth with my own eyes!...

**Iqbal** : You're tormenting yourself for nothing...

**Mahmoud** : Who said it's for nothing?...

**Iqbal** : You've lost all hope... this means that you believe me... so what's the use of trying to find the other Mahmoud?...

**Mahmoud** : Just out of curiosity... that's all...

**Iqbal** : Save it, comfort lies in despair. I advise you to leave Cairo for some time and go to your ranch in the countryside... Some fresh air does good for people your age, and revives their vigor, you know good old peaceful ranch life...

**Mahmoud** : People my age?...

**Iqbal** ( *Walking back and forth in front of the mirror* ): Of course... people your age...

**Mahmoud** : And you?

**Iqbal** ( *looking at him* ): Me?... what about me?

**Mahmoud** : Won't you go with me?...

**Iqbal** ( *She's back to looking in the mirror and takes a white makeup kit out of her handbag. She touches up the marks on her neck* ): No...

**Mahmoud** : So I'll go all by myself?...

**Iqbal** : You want me to leave my seamstress and all my new dresses and go with a man who's...?

**Mahmoud** : Who's as old as I am, say it...say it...

**Iqbal** : No I just can't entomb myself in the countryside before my time...

**Mahmoud** : You mean entomb yourself with me...

**Iqbal** : You know that I'm still young... and so if you have the least percentage of a sane mind, you'd have realized that a woman as young as I am should not spend even five miserable minutes with you. But you can't see but yourself. And you're a fool who was played by a young girl both in her lifetime and even after her death... yes... see how the dead can manipulate the living... She played you... she opened the door for all the other women in town to play you as well. All those women come to take a look at you, the same way anybody goes to the zoo to watch a strange looking creature.

**Mahmoud** : Thank you...

**Iqbal** : I don't mean to insult you, I just want to open your eyes to the truth. You're done for... you should set your eyes towards the tomb. Look at the wrinkles covering your face... how can such a face make any woman truly happy?...

**Mahmoud** : Any woman?

**Iqbal** : Yes... there is no woman on this earth who would.

**Mahmoud** : Even you?!...

**Iqbal** : Yes... even me... to be honest with you. I'm as good as any other woman, all what I see in you is an old man who's done for. I can't deny it. It is a fact that no serious person can argue about. And any woman who would tell you otherwise is a mere liar...

**Mahmoud** : Even you?

**Iqbal** : I told you I'm as good as any other woman...

**Mahmoud** : What about what you confessed to me last night?

**Iqbal** : I was lying to you like the other women do...

**Mahmoud** ( *bitterly* ): Even you were lying to me?

**Iqbal** : I'm not a saint.

**Mahmoud** : So you don't have any love in your heart for me?...

**Iqbal** : love... you're asking for the impossible...

**Mahmoud**: All of this comes out of *your mouth* , Iqbal?

**Iqbal** : I'm sorry, but I'm an honest person... I'm amazed that a man your age still thinks of love...

**Mahmoud** ( *nodding* ): So you want me to believe that I'm done for?...

**Iqbal** : I really wonder why you want me to love you, especially today, you're drowning and your eyes are set on my heart to rescue you, but actually if you took a look inside that heart, you'll find nothing but ash, cold ash, you can't make it glow with heat as you did in the past...

**Mahmoud** ( *exhausted* ): Thank you.

**Iqbal** ( *leaving* ): Let's agree that just talking about love is funny!..

**Mahmoud** : Funny?!...

**Iqbal** : Yes, very... Can't you see it? ( *looking at her watch* ) it's six o'clock now... I really have to go... my seamstress is waiting... ( *takes her handbag and takes a quick look at the mirror* )

*Iqbal starts to leave, but she looks at the portrait...*

**Iqbal** : Don't forget to give this picture to its real owner. Unless of course, you haven't had enough of her sneering at you... au revoir.

*She utters a loud, cynical laugh and exits waiving at Mahmoud.*

*Mahmoud doesn't budge.*

**Salem** ( *enters just as Iqbal is leaving* ): Doctor!... the barber is here.

**Mahmoud** ( *without looking at him* ): Get out of my face... Get Out Of My Face!...

*Salem leaves astonished. The lady starts to come in from another door...*

**Lady** ( *encouraged by Mahmoud's presence alone, she barges in* ): You're finally alone, doctor... may I?...

**Mahmoud** ( *raises his head and looks at her* ): Who are you?..

**Lady** : A fan... I mean, I'm a patient!

**Mahmoud** : You said you're a fan?

**Lady** : A fan of your skill, as a doctor of course.

**Mahmoud** : Oh... my skill!

**Lady** : I'm... I'm sorry

**Mahmoud** : It's your first time here, I recon...

**Lady** ( *examining his face for a moment* ): Yes... first time...

**Mahmoud** : Why are you staring at me like that?... Do you want to examine me?

**Lady** : You're the doctor, not me...

**Mahmoud** : I can't see anyone today... didn't the nurse tell you?

**Lady** : Why?

**Mahmoud** : Because I'm so tired...

**Lady** : You really look very tired... I think I should leave you as quickly as possible...

**Mahmoud** ( *interested* ): Wait a minute please... does it show?... I mean that I'm tired...

**Lady** : Yes, your eyes... au revoir...

**Mahmoud** : What about my eyes?!

**Lady** : There are dark circles all around them and wrinkles...

**Mahmoud** : Dark circles and wrinkles?

**Lady** : I... I mean...

**Mahmoud** : Don't try to be nice... I can see your disappointment... you thought I was younger... be honest... I won't be mad...

**Lady** : Actually... I saw your picture in one of the magazines...and you looked...

**Mahmoud** : Younger?...

**Lady** : Anyway, it's a matter of taste, that's all...

**Mahmoud** : Whose taste?...

**Lady** : You know it all better than I do, doctor... what I heard from the other women... that's strange... really strange... what rumors can do... people's talk... how inventive women can be... they exaggerate everything...

**Mahmoud** : Exaggerate...

**Lady** : Well, society is always like that... this isn't the first time...

**Mahmoud** : Women Exaggerate, and the object of exaggeration is *me* of course...

**Lady** : I didn't exactly say so, doctor...

**Mahmoud** : But you imagined me differently...

**Lady** : Yes... but... anyway... there is no use talking about this since you're tired... au revoir, doctor!...

**Mahmoud** : I don't want to waste your time... but just a minute please... grant me one more question!...

**Lady** : Please doctor, don't embarrass me ... I should leave now!...

**Mahmoud** : So soon?!...

**Lady** (*looks at the portrait*) : Poor, little girl... It's unbelievable!... Life is full of wonders!... au revoir, doctor!...

*She leaves hastily... Mahmoud is left alone in the room, he is frozen in his place.*

**Mahmoud** (*talking to himself*): True... it's unbelievable!!..

**Salem** (*enters in hesitation*) : Why did she rush out like a lunatic?!... Doctor, that lady barged into your office without my knowledge, I swear!... You've done well by kicking her out...

**Mahmoud** (*as if talking to himself*): I didn't kick her out... she ran off...

**Salem** : Well, I didn't know about her except now when I saw her coming out...

**Mahmoud** (*whispering*) : She ran away from me!... yes, she ran away from me!...

**Salem** : I hope you're not blaming me...

**Mahmoud** : No... you go and see to your work (*stands up, sighing*) And I'll see to my real work!...

*He goes to the portrait and takes it off the wall. He throws it out of the same window from which Aziza threw herself...*

***Curtains Close***

[1] Mohamed Mustafa Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Paul Starkey, "Philosophical Themes in Tawfīq Al-ʿAḳīm's Drama," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8 (1977), 137.

[4] Ibid., 136.

[5] Marvin Carlson, ed., *The Arab Oedipus: Four Plays* (New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publ., 2006), 38.

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