

FAMILIAR LAUGHTER

BY

IKRAM BASRA

A short play

SCENE 1

The stage is dark, and we hear sound of aircraft landing in the background.

Lights up we see Irfan Ullah, 32, in suit and tie and sitting on a bench a few feet from a security counter. He has a wheeled carry-on bag and laptop bag. A low platform is attached to the security counter. Officer 1 is looking at papers. Officers 2 & 3 are seated at a table and talking to one another.

OFFICER 1

(Looking at a paper, speaking to the room)

Mr. Ullah

(Few seconds pass)

Mr. Ullah

(Gets up from his seat, looks at Irfan and points to his paper)

Are you Mr. Irfan Ullah?

IRFAN

I am. My name is Irfan Ullah.

OFFICER 1

Yeah, I have been calling you Mr. Ullah. Please answer when you are called.

IRFAN

gets up and goes to the security counter.

IRFAN

I am sorry I did not realize you were calling my name. People don't call by last name in Pakistan.

OFFICER 1

But you heard your last name. Twice.

IRFAN

I have been speaking and listening in Urdu for the last few weeks, I couldn't recognize your accent

properly.

OFFICER 1
What's Ullah? Is it some tribe?

IRFAN
It's a very common surname. Irfan
Ullah. It means God's wisdom.

OFFICER 1
Mr. Ullah what do you do in United
States?

IRFAN
I teach Urdu, and I work as translator
sometimes.

OFFICER 1
Can I see your ID, please?

IRFAN
(Passes his ID card to the officer)

OFFICER 1
Is this your current address?

IRFAN
Yes, that is my address

OFFICER 1
What is that?

IRFAN
It's 589 Coral (pronounces it corral)
Street. Paterson.

Officer 1 begins entering his full address on the computer
while looking at Irfan.

OFFICER 1
Can you please spell Coral Street?

IRFAN
It's C-O-R-A-L

OFFICER 1
C-O-R-A-L or C-O-R-R-A-L?

IRFAN
I think it is one R, but I have seen

it spelled with two Rs also.

OFFICER 1

And what's your phone number?

IRFAN

It's 207 552 8616

OFFICER 1

Can you please repeat?

IRFAN

207 552 8616

OFFICER 1

I do not believe that 207 is
Paterson's area code.

IRFAN

Oh, I am on friend's mom's cell phone
family package. Its 20\$ per month
only. Otherwise, it's more than 50.

OFFICER 1

Where does your friend's mom live?

IRFAN

I think she lives in Maine.

OFFICER 1

How long have you been out of the
states?

IRFAN

Almost seven weeks

OFFICER 1

Why so long?

IRFAN

I had vacation, and I wanted to spend
time with my mother who is sick.

OFFICER 1

What's wrong with her?

IRFAN

She has chronic back issues, and it is
hard for her to walk.

OFFICER 1

Who was taking care of her when you were here?

IRFAN

My brother.

OFFICER 1

Where was he during summer?

IRFAN

He had to go to another district for his job.

OFFICER 1

Is he married?

IRFAN

Yes, and he has two kids.

OFFICER 1

And where do they live?

IRFAN

In the same house, we have joint family system. They all live together.

OFFICER 1

What's your address in Pakistan?

IRFAN

9 N.B., District Faisalabad. Punjab. Pakistan

OFFICER 1

What's 9 N.B.?

IRFAN

It's a village

OFFICER 1

What does N.B. stand for?

IRFAN

Northern Branch

OFFICER 1

Mr. Ullah, have you ever been part of any militia?

IRFAN

No. I have never been a part of any militia ever.

OFFICER 1

Any organization like this?

IRFAN

No.

OFFICER 1

Do they exist where you were in Pakistan?

IRFAN

They do not. I was in Punjab

OFFICER 1

How far is the Afghan border from your village?

IRFAN

I don't know the exact distance, but it's pretty far.

OFFICER 1

How far is Kashmir from your village?

IRFAN

It's also very far.

OFFICER 1

Have you been there?

IRFAN

No, I have not.

OFFICER 1

Are you sure you are not a part of any militant group? Are you a part of any group of any kind?

IRFAN

People add me in their WhatsApp groups

all the time, otherwise no.

OFFICER 1

(In a strict tone)

I am asking you a serious question.

IRFAN

No, I am not part of any such group,
and I was never part of anything like
this.

OFFICER 1

(Gestures that the bag should be on the platform.)

Open your bag please.

(Irfan places the bag on the platform and opens it.)

OFFICER 1

What is this?

IRFAN

It's a sweet dish.

OFFICER 1

(Opens the box and smells it)

Open and taste it.

(Irfan, with his two fingers, takes a small bite of the
dish).

OFFICER 1

And what is this?

IRFAN

It is a gift from Pakistan.

OFFICER 1

For whom?

IRFAN

For my American friend.

OFFICER 1

(Opening the wrapping further)

What's your friend's name?

IRFAN

Brian

OFFICER 1

(Removing all the articles from the bag and setting them on the counter).

Can you spell his name?

Officer 1 is typing on the computer while looking at Irfan.

IRFAN

B-R-I-A-N

OFFICER 1

Mr. Ullah can you please stand on that line in the corner?

(Irfan moves toward the line. Officer 1 starts chatting with another officer).

OFFICER 1

You know Adam got a new Ford, $\frac{1}{2}$ ton four-wheel drive!

OFFICER 2

(Nodding yes)

Its huge! I'm glad he dumped that piece of junk he was driving.

OFFICER 1

Yeah, you could hear him coming from a mile away.

(Both laugh hard. Lights down.)

SCENE 2

Lights up on Irfan, standing alone at the middle of the stage.

IRFAN

Sir, it's a very common Muslim surname.

(Pause)

I don't know the exact distance but
it's pretty far.

(Pause)

No sir, I have never been a part of
any militia.

(Pause)

C-O-R-A-L

(While standing in the same place, he turns as though to
answer questions coming from different directions)

Sir, you are the fourth person asking
me the same questions, and I am afraid
I will say something I don't mean. I
have been traveling for many hours,
and I am afraid I might answer
something wrong.

Irfan Ullah means God's wisdom.

It's a gift from Pakistan for my
American friend.

My family lives together in the same
house.

My mother is sick. She can't walk
well.

(The speed of his movement and the pitch of his voice
increase as the scene continues.)

207 552 8616

It's Maine's area code.

I teach Urdu. I translate.

Madam, it's a very common Muslim
surname.

A sweet dish.

I don't know the exact distance. It's
far.

(Pause)

It's very far.

No sir, I have never been a part of any militia.

It's one R

God's wisdom.

A gift from Pakistan for my American friend.

They live together in the same house. My brother and his wife take care of my mother.

She is sick.

IRFAN, CONT'D

207 552 8616

Yes, Maine

I teach Urdu.

A Pakistani sweet dish.

I don't know the exact distance. It's far away.

God's wisdom.

SCENE 3

The stage is dark. Spotlight up on Irfan who is standing in the middle of the stage. He is naked. Officer 3 is behind him wearing latex gloves.

OFFICER 3

(Appears from Irfan's back)

Spread your legs a little and bow down.

(Irfan spreads his legs and bows down. Officer searches him from behind and pushes Irfan's neck further down.

OFFICER 3

COUGH

IRFAN

(Coughs)

OFFICER 3

Cough harder.

IRFAN

(Coughs hard)

OFFICER 3

Keep your hands up and stand straight.

(Irfan complies. Spotlight down.)

OFFICER 3

(Turns on a flashlight between him and Irfan, so only their faces are visible)

OFFICER 3

Open your mouth.

(Irfan opens his mouth. Officer opens Irfan's mouth further by gripping his teeth with his hands. Satisfied, he searches Irfan's underarms and ears. He turns off the torch, and the stage is dark.)

SCENE 4

Irfan is outside under an awning, still at the airport. It is raining. His shirt buttons are undone, and he is repacking his bag which is on the floor with things here and there around him.

Irfan buttons his shirt, tucks it in, and puts on his belt. He is rewrapping the gifts, a lotion bottle from this person's luggage rolls off the stage towards the audience. As he goes to pick it up, his phone rings from behind. It takes him a few moments to find the phone among the scattered belongings, and during this time, the phone keeps ringing.

IRFAN

Salam brother.

(Short pause)

Yes, I have reached safely.

(Short Pause)

Seven hours ago.

I'm sorry. I couldn't call before.

(Short Pause)

Yes, please give him the phone

(voice changes to address a child)

Hey, buddy, are you not asleep yet?

(Pause, Nodding)

Sorry, who is Peter Parker?

Oh, yeah, Spiderman! No, I have not met him.

Yes, yes, I remember, Superhero costume.

I will bring it next time.

Sleep now.

Sweet dreams!

(Lights out.)

THE END.