

**Under the Shadow.
A dialogue.**

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[Note: this draft is a dialogue between an Arabic woman and a Jewish man about trifles-- daily things which lead both of them to touch the "political conflict," the cause of their pain, without dealing deeply with that pain. I don't look at this as a completed work; it is the beginning of an idea which needs to be developed. Thus I prefer to refer to it as a draft. AN.]

Scene One

(The curtain is closed; we hear voices of a man and a woman talking. The curtain opens: a man who seems about 50 and a woman, roughly 35, appear on the stage while continuing their conversation)

She: The problem is not a problem of place.

He: What then is the problem?

She: It's the problem of cleansing.

He: What cleansing?

She: I mean, to be cleansed by water.

He: I don't understand you.

She: I mean, if we do that thing, we must cleanse ourselves.

He: What thing?

She: Don't you understand yet?

He: No. I don't. *(He smiles)*

She: Come on, you do understand, and just pretend you don't.

He: I really don't understand.

(She feels embarrassed, looks at him with a childish shiny smile.)

She: That thing. Oh god, please don't make me say it, we aren't used to talking about those things like "you" are.

He: Now you're starting again with the "we" and the "you"! Come on! Can't you tell me what "that thing" is?

She: That thing which happens between a woman and a man when they are alone.

He: Oh, you mean to kiss, to embrace, to...

She: Yes, that last thing, that is "to."

He: You mean to make love. Is it hard for you to say it directly? But why should we cleanse ourselves after that?

She: Don't you take a shower afterwards?

He: Of course we take a shower.

She: So, don't you cleanse yourselves after that?

He: What do you mean?

She: I mean that we....

He: Stop it with the "we" and the "you".

She: Oh man! You yourself just said "we," so why it is forbidden for me?

He: OK, let's not to say "we" and "you". Please go on. I am sorry.

She: OK, we. I mean, I know that when someone does that thing he should cleanse himself by reading some verses from the Qu'raan. Don't you read a verse from the Torah?

He: For what? I take a shower and that's all.

She: We... I mean that we read blessings like "*shhadteen*" seven times and say a couple of words to ask God to cleanse us from that thing.

He: Oh god! You use up so much water.

She: You see? This is the problem.

He (sighs): Yes, it is. You'll waste all the water in the country. Now I understand how wise Moshe was.

She: Who is Moshe?

He: Moshe Rabino, our prophet.

She: So what is it that's Moshe's business now?

He: Now I can understand why Moshe suggested to your prophet Muhammad to cut down on the number of prayers. Instead of fifty a day, you now pray only five. And for that you should thank Moshe!

She: Oh god, from the beginning you've been managing us! Poor Muhammad!

He (laughs): Why? You should be glad.. . Moshe convinced Muhammad that fifty times will destroy your life.

She: So who gave your Moshe the right to intervene between Muhammad, God bless him, and God?

He: Moshe wanted to help you. If he hadn't gotten himself involved, you'd be suffering now.

She: Please stop talking about them as if you and they were playmates. They are not your friends.

He: Take it easy. Moshe wanted to make life easy for you.

She: To make it easy? From the beginning you had an economic brain.

He: Isn't that good? Imagine that you would now be praying fifty times a day: how could we meet each other? You'd be busy all the time.

She: Oh. OK, thank God for Moshe.

He: And you must thank me for the compromise of cleansing yourself just three times a day instead of seven. Because that would be a big problem.

She: What would happen?

He: They would blame you for stealing the water off the land, and if I'd agree with you they would blame me for betraying the country.

She: Then what can we do?

He: We must find an agreement.

She: Agreement? What kind of agreement?

He: An agreement. Who knows? But with all the stupid things you do, why should you cleanse yourself?

She: That is what we must do, and please don't give me trouble about it.

He: You can compromise. Instead of seven just do it three times.

She: Absolutely not, it won't work.

He: OK., what about five times?

She (thinking): Five times? OK.

He (pleased): Then when we can do it?

She: Do what?

He: That thing, which you must cleanse yourself after.

She (smiles): After we get married.

He: Married?

She: yes

He: Why we should be married?

She: How we could do that thing without get married?

He: Like everyone else. It's so easy.

She: Oh, easy. Easy for you, but not for me.

(They feel themselves talking a turn in another direction; both of them remain silent for a moment)

She: Let's talk about something else. I like our friendship. It's wonderful

He: In your eyes, what the meaning of friendship?

She: It is like what has happened between us.

He: Do you mean, talking?

She: Yes, it's good, no?

He: Yes it's good.

She: Come on, let's enjoy every moment and let's leave alone all the talk about the future.

(With a tone of ridicule)

He: Yes. Let's enjoy every moment. And let's leave this burned-out place and go to a café.

She: No, I can't go to any café.

He: Why not?

She: My people will be there.

He: So, what's the problem?

She: They will see me.

He: And then?

She: They will gossip about me.

He: Listen to me. You make me furious with all your worries. I can't bear to talk with you as if I were stealing something from you.

She: Come on. Please, you must understand; it's very hard for me.

He: OK, I can go find some place which has no sign of your people.

She: There is no such place.

He: Say right up front that you don't want to walk with me. Just a moment ago you talked about making love, and now you don't even dare to go for a walk.

She: I'm not sure, I'm just guessing.

He: Let me guess that there is a place without your people. I have the right to guess too.

She: OK go look.

(The man is gone, and she is looking very worried)

She: I don't understand what is happening to me. Do I love him? Yes I do, but why? Without his reasons, does he love me? Yes he does because otherwise why would he put up with me, why would he call me all the time? Still, I feel that sometimes he looks at me with uncertainty. Ah. Maybe not; should I ask him? Shit. If I just could speak

(The man enters the stage)

He: Come on, let's go, I have found a simple and nice place, and there is no sign of your people.

(They leave)

The curtain closes.

Scene Two

(On the stage we see a few shuffled tables and chairs. The man and the woman enter the café and sit down. We hear a voice singing "Salma ya Salama," an Arabic song. The woman blushes and shrinks away, intending to run. The man holds her back.)

He: Where are you going? What's happening to you?

She: You have said that there won't be any of our people here.

He: What I have told you is the truth

She: Don't you hear the Arabic song?

He: That's an Iraqi song. Did you forget we have Iraqis and Moroccans in this country too? Calm down please.

She: But...

He: Please, no "buts." I have checked the place and none of yours is there.

(She feels observed; her eyes are restless looking around. Off the stage we hear the voice of two men. One of the men says: "Come on Raffle, we are finished ". The other man answers, "It's not enough that all of them called me Raffia! What's happened to you, man, can't you remember my name?" The first man laughs and says "Hi Ahmad, I am sorry, but you accept that name man" She whispers to Him:)

She: let's go, don't listen to them. Both of them are my people.

He: I'm not moving.

She: Move now. I don't want to make a scandal here

He: Go alone

She: I can't believe it; do you mean that you expect me to walk alone in this place?

He: I know that I am idiot to walk with you. I knew that my shoes are bigger than yours

She: This is no time to talk about shoes. We will talk about the size of your shoes at your house.

(His expression is happy)

He: Are you serious, are you coming to my house?

She: Yes, but you know my condition, (pointing at him with her finger), no touching. Do you promise?

He: Shit. Yes, I promise.

(She remembers something, and walks away with hesitation)

She: But if I go to your house, what will I say to my family.

He: Say you stayed with a friend, oh please, don't make such a big deal out of it.

She: Let's wait for another time.

He (angrily): Just tell me, do you really love me?

She: Yes, I do love you.

He: How? Hypothetically? Sometimes I forget your shape. We just talk over the phone, you are only a voice; it's hard for me.

She: (sadly) I myself don't understand what is happening to me. Something frightened me, not you, something inside me. I still remember your first embrace, but something bound me like a hanged person.

(She holds his hands)

He embraces her. They leave.

The curtain closes

Scene Three

(On the stage two chairs, the woman and the man are sitting on the chairs. The woman is absorbed in her thoughts, one hand on her chest; the man is looking at her)

He: What's happened? Where are you running to? You look horrible, why?

She: I feel that you started to push me, and I know why.

He: Push you?

She: Yes, and I am sure now that its because of the spices

He: What herbs?

She: The cinnamon

He: Cinnamon?

She: The cinnamon and the almond.

He laughs

He: What are you talking about?

(She looks at him with a knowing gaze)

She: From the moment I gave you the cinnamon and the almonds you started keeping your distance from me.

He: What does that have to do with anything? I was just very busy.

She: Busy? Haven't you got a few minutes to call me?

He: I swear, I was glad to get your gift, but I was really busy.

She: Did you taste it?

He: Come on, do I. have I the time to prepare drinks with cinnamon?

She: Oh yes. All there was to it was to just put it in hot water, and that is all

He: Do you think that I have time to sit and wait for the water to boil?

She: Yes, you don't have time, you have more important things to do and that would be wasted time.

He: There you go again with the "you" and the "we".

She: You. You want everything to be done so quickly: Instant coffee, hamburgers, even hummus, you love it because you can have it ready-made.

He: What are you talking about now?

She: Then tell me honestly, why haven't you prepared my cinnamon drink?

He: I told you that I didn't mean to not have it, I was just busy.

(She gets up as if she had discovered the solution of a riddle)

She: Oh. May be you are afraid to drink it

He: Afraid? Why?

She: I don't know, who knows, may you have a different attitude toward cinnamon.

He: Oh god, yes, it's a bad metaphor for us

She: Then, why didn't you tell me?

He: Because there isn't any bad metaphor.

She: Then why did you just tell me there was?

She: To get you to stop this silly discussion.

She: OK I will stop

They look at each other

He: And now that we are we finished with the cinnamon, will you come with me to the theatre? I have a performance

She: A performance?

He: Yes, I have written a play about a guy who makes bombs.

She: Is he from our side or yours?

He: Are you crazy? From yours, of course.

She: Why you are so sure? Do you think that only our side makes bombs? And who gave you the right to write about us?

He: Who should give me the right to? I don't need permission from anybody; nobody can forbid me to write, and I have my good reasons.

She: Good reason? You exploit our pains and say that your intentions are good.

He: Of course they are good. If I don't write about it, who will?

She: We.

He: The fact is that nobody from yours did, and it does not matter who writes. And don't you notice that since this morning you just keep saying "we" and "you."? Is it just because I haven't drunk your cinnamon?

She: Do think it's so simple No gift was more important that the one I have prepared by myself. Did you think I was going to give you an intellectual gift?

He: oh, please stop. I promise you that I will drink your cinnamon.

She smiles.

She: But be sure that it will not get poured out, because it will cause a scandal.

He: OK, and now will you come to the performance?

She: It is difficult for me to walk at night.

He: How come you said that you would live here?

She: who told you that?

He: oh god, you are making me crazy now.

She: Will you let me live with you?

He: I know that you want me to lose my mind. You haven't even agreed to come to my home for a visit, you are just tricking me. Maybe you are too tired. Go to sleep, and I will call you tomorrow.

She looks at him without any expression and they leave the stage.

The curtain closes.

Scene Four

The curtain is open, on the stage there are two chairs. The woman holds a plastic bag containing a cheese, the man holding a can of Tashaa Ahooz¹ We hear the sound of chewing.

She: What are you eating?

He: Tashaa Ahooz butter.

She: Luxury food.

He: Yes, it is so one stays healthy and contributes to the gross national product.

She: Do you contribute to your national product at 90% percent?

He: I encourage it 100%.

She: Then why don't you eat it 100%?

(They continue to eat and he ignores her question)

He: What are you eating?

She: A 100% cheese. Pure cheese, home-made, not from the supermarket.

He: You always have the time to prepare food.

¹ 'Tashaa Ahooz' is a Hebrew word meaning 90%, and is associated with a kind of cheese.

She: Always. I have time for everything.

He: you waste your time.

(she ignores his remark)

He: Is your cheese tasty?

She: Excellent. Would you like to try it?

He: No thanks

She: Why?

He: No particular reason.

She: Are you afraid?

He: Is there anything to be afraid of?

She: Maybe you don't want to taste our products.

He: Of your products I only like the *hummus* and the *zaatar*²

She: All of you keep talking about our *hummus* and *zaatar*, on TV, in the papers, everywhere.

He: You have to be proud, at least you have something to be proud of. Don't you see how much we do for you?

She: Yes, when it comes to *hummus* and to *zaatar*, but not when it comes to the cheese

He: We must go with what we know. We have tried only the *hummus* and the *zaatar*, while the cheese is still under scrutiny.

She: What about my cinnamon, then? Did you try it?

He: You and your cinnamon again. I did promise you to drink it, but I got scared because you kept pushing me to do it all the time

She: Why?

He: Don't know

She: OK, don't worry

She stretches her hand from behind her back

She: Give me your hand; let's stop discussing the cheese and the cinnamon.

Please bring your chair a little bit closer

He stretches out his hand, but the hands don't reach far enough, and the chairs fall down.

The man gets angry.)

He: See? You always make those nasty suggestions; you meant to get me to fall down.

She: But I fell down too.

He: But you intended to do that.

She: You are just looking for an excuse to quarrel.

He: No. That's not true. You spilled my can of the 90%.

² *Hummus* and *zaatar* are two kinds of Arabic food.

She: If it had been like my cheese it would not have spilled.

He: Get lost. Stupid woman.

She: Stupid?

(Hurt, she looks at his hands. She is amazed)

She: Oh god, I have never noticed the freckles on your hand, never. What are these spots?

He: from the sun.

She: do you want me to believe that it is from the sun? Then why don't I have spots like that?

He: Because you stay at home most of your time.

She: And you all the time at the office. Where do you ever walk in the sun?

He: I have walked all my life under the sun, in many places.

She: Where, *iaabni*³?

He: At the beach, when I was younger, I liked the sea and I sunbathed.

She: Is that all?

He: No, it isn't, but what do you want to know? What are you looking for?

She: I'm not looking for anything. I know a lot of people who go to the beach, but they haven't got the same freckles

He: It's because I am blond.

She: Oh, yes, that's a good reason, you can't adapt the hot summers of this land.

He: But you can. I know that you like the Bedouins⁴ who can be burned by the sun without being hurt.

She: What is bad about that?

(Now the light and shadow start to focus on the man when he speaks and on the woman when she speaks)

(She in the light and he in the shadow)

She: He wants to convince me that his freckles only come from the sun? Maybe ... Oh God, oh God. He is not like them. He loves me ... does he want to convince me that all his freckles come from being the sun? Oh God. Could it be that it happened in the desert?

(He in the light and she in the dark)

He: Why is she scrutinizing me? I hate it when people try to pry into my life, but I don't think that she is like that. She is kind and she loves me, she is kind

³ *Iaani* in Arabic means 'for example'

⁴ Bedouin--an Arab of any of the nomadic tribes who live in deserts

despite her cinnamon, oh God, no she is not kind, why is she interested in my freckles? I'll never tell her about the desert.

(He in the shadow and she in the light)

She: Oh God! What if it were true that he had been in the desert? That would be a sign that he is a liar. Was he in the desert with those men? No, no, that's impossible. But why did he mention the Bedouins? And how does he know that they can live under the hot sun? So. He had been there. What kind of idiot I am? Everyone knows that the Bedouins can live under the hot sun. But why does he remember them in particular? He must have been there.

*(She puts her head between her hands and begins to walk in circles.
He in the light and she in the shadow)*

He: I have nearly forgotten that I was there. I didn't want to remember ... I still remember that Bedouin who looked in my eyes as if it had been he who chose me: "Why did you do this?" He didn't spill any words, but I read them in his eyes. He cried, shouted, I wanted to kill him but I ran away, ran away without direction, he was an old man. I finished off all the others except for him. Oh God, his eyes pursued me. She has only seen the spots on my hands and she has those doubts; what if she sees my whole body?

(He in shadow and she in light)

She: If he was there, then it is sure that he did what they did. No. He is not like them, he has told me that he has so many spots because he is blond, that's a logical reason. In any case I must be sure; I will try to let him fall again, I will tell him that I know and that I am sure that he was there. They're in the desert. And if that is true it will be the end of our relationships.

(He in the light, she in the shadow)

He: I was ready to forget that desert. And that Bedouin from whom I run, runalmost

(Music accompanies the rhythm of his words)

He: I don't want to remember, I don't want to remember

(His voice gets louder and louder in a quick rhythm)

He: Enough, enough, I can't be there any more

(He covers his ears and his eyes)

He: Enough, oh, the hands. The legs, the heads, the eyes that look at me, oh the eyes, go away.

(She in light and he in the shadow)

She: How can I tell him? I will tell him straight in his face

(The light lights both of them while one screams, accompanied by a high-pitched drum)

She: You were in the desert

The curtain closes.

Scene five

(The curtains open while the man on the stage opens a bag and takes out a uniform and army boots, put them front of him, and starts to talk as if her were talking to his clothes)

He: I try to get myself out of them *(he points to the clothes in front of him)*, and she, this witch comes to return me back again to those horrible memories. I am sure now that she is a witch. Yes. Now I am sure. If not, why did she send me that cinnamon? It was good that I haven't drunk it, it has a strong, good scent, but the way she told me to prepare it, and the time it would have taken to prepare it proved that it is a witch trick; she is definitely a witch. I'm sure she knows every thing about me.

(He turns to the audience)

He: When I was in the desert. For all of us. I thought that we would be the happiest people in the world. After we took the desert, everything was secure, we wanted to come to the big desert to tan, and now we have, we have enough sun for all the blond people to get a tan, and to all have the same kind of freckles ...I returned back home when the dream about the tan was destroyed in

my soul. We had enough chances to all get tanned, and we got the freckles, but just a few years passed, and we found ourselves in the desert again, and then we had the freckles all over the body, I would like to get rid of them, To pick them off of my body, but no, there is no way, their eyes pursue me, capture my nightmares, I haven't had a moment of relief. My son also wanted to sunbathe, I told him not to be in a hurry, because there will be enough time for him to get a tan, it never will be finished, but why should he or we tan? The blond color is beautiful too, isn't it? Why can't we be pleased with our color? But it seems that the longing for the desert and the suntan became like a symptom of an illness. I told my son: "You know something, my son? You are so handsome with your colors." He said, "Father, it is my duty." I said to him "Please my son, don't go," and he said, "Why have you gone? After you tanned, now you want to forbid me to get the same suntan." I said to him "I swear, my son, I liked my homeland, and so you can't see any place on my body without freckles, there is no room for one more freckle." But he was a stubborn boy, and he went.

(In pain he cries, holding the clothes and the shoes)

He: He went to the desert to sunbathe, and this is what he left behind.

*He embraces the relics of his son and breaks down weeping.
The curtains close.*

Scene six

(The curtain opens, the stage is painted black; alone, the woman is pacing the stage. When she speaks, she turns to the audience from time to time)

She: When I first saw him for the first time, he was very charming, and I was very attracted to him. He is not so handsome, or to be more honest, he is not the handsome man that I have once dreamt of. He has the same color they all do, his eyes are blue. All my life I hated blue eyes, but suddenly I fell in love with a man whose eyes are blue. He attracts me, his smile is terrific. Oh, and his voice, maybe it was the voice that made me fall in love with him, his voice is like glue, *(she turn to the audience)* you can't stay away when you hear him. And we the Arabs have many classic poems which say that the ears fall in love more than the eyes. This is true in my case. When I saw him the first time, he was eating *hummus* and *zaatar*, so I knew that we were similar, and I said to myself

in my heart that finally I can talk with someone; the *hummus* and the *zaatar* unite us. I said to myself, a man whose smile is wide and charming, and who eats *hummus* and *zaatar* will be OK...

She (sighs) ; But he only likes the *hummus* and the *zaatar*, not my cinnamon. Anyway, we have eaten together, and we have talked about many things, but I was so confused by falling in love with one of them. The first time he embraced me, I felt like I got an electric shock in my veins, and I belonged to him, but soon after I sent the cinnamon to him, I felt that there were some things that weren't comprehensible to me. Maybe he doubted me. Maybe he thought that I was going to poison him--could it be? Oh God, what is this stupid thinking, why should he be suspicious of me? No, no. It's impossible, what are these awful thoughts I hatch in my mind? I am sinking into delusions. Freckles? So what's the problem? Let him to have freckles, lots of people have freckles, I have kissed his freckled hands many times. Then why am I thinking about them now? And suppose he had been in the desert, never mind, he is very kind now, even though he doesn't like my cheese and my cinnamon.

(Hurt, she looks deep in her thoughts, shrugging her shoulders, her lips murmuring some unheard words; the words are getting louder)

She: He has never told me about his past, but I have never told him about my past either. All that I remember is that he told me that his son went to sunbathe and he didn't return, oh poor man. Poor man? Oh no, he is not a poor man, why did he let his son go? Oh God, I am so tired, I am so tired of all the stupid things. If I want to live comfortably I must end this relationship with him. And that is all. Tomorrow I will tell him it's over.

She leaves the stage, the curtains close.

Scene seven

(Like in Scene Five, the man is sitting on the ground, embracing the uniform. She enters the stage, stares at the things on the ground, sees the army boots, approaches him and shakes his shoulders)

She: Oh God, are these the shoes that made us quarrel?

He: Shoes?

She: Don't you remember that you once said to me that your shoes are bigger than mine?

He: Yes, I remember

She: And do you remember that I told you that my shoes are not different than yours except in size?

He: Yes.

She: Do you remember when you told me that big shoes left a big trace on the ground, and made one hold one's head high?

He: And I told you that small shoes take up less room on the ground and make one's head lower down. Yes I remember it all.

She: And then I suggested that you should walk with bare feet, do you remember? And then you got very angry and nearly hit me. I wanted to sacrifice myself for you, but you were not ready to compromise, to walk barefoot. But now I understand what is going on.

She approaches the shoes.

She: Now I understand what kind of shoes you meant

He: Please, don't talk to me about shoes; those are not my shoes.

She: Then whose shoes are they?

He: Do you remember when I told you about my son?

She: Yes

He: They are his; it is because of them that I lost my son.

In pain.

He (shouting): What do you want to know Yes, I was in the desert, I have done what all of them have done, what do you want from me, I did all the terrible things that your imagination can come up with. I suffered very much, but it's over, I have changed, is it forbidden to a man to change? You can help me change, it's enough what I have faced during all those nights, it's enough, it's much more, for I lost my son, the only thing that I've ever loved. You have known me without knowing all these things about me. Help me to go my new way, give me your hand, help me stand up again.

(He stretches out his hand toward her, she hesitates, looks at him, his face is so miserable, she continues to look at him, then approaches him very slowly.. . the continue to stare at each other while the lights turns to shadow)

Curtains close.

End