

# Jahzara's Triangle

John Bandler

A young Turkish scientist is suspected of blowing up his professor's laboratory. The event seems linked with a missing Chinese student, a Guantanamo detainee, and Barack Obama. In unraveling the mystery, reporter Jahzara Jones finds her sanity, her career, and her life on the line.



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# Jahzara's Triangle

A stage play in two acts, 114 pages

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JAHZARA'S TRIANGLE -- A STAGE PLAY IN TWO ACTS

PLOT SUMMARY

A young Turkish scientist is suspected of blowing up his professor's laboratory. The event seems linked with a missing Chinese student, a former Guantanamo detainee, and a possible attempt to assassinate Barack Obama. In unraveling the mystery, reporter Jahzara Jones finds her sanity, her career, and her life on the line.

CHARACTERS

JAHZARA JONES, female, early thirties  
MURAT TAHSIN, male, late twenties, Turkish Cypriot  
LESTER KALOTAKIS, male, mid-fifties, Greek American  
DARIAN MARCHANT, male, early forties  
CANDY QUILL, female, early twenties

TIME

The present

SETTING

A college campus

PLACES

The sitting room and library in the college president's mansion

ACT I

Scene 1: Interior of a mansion -- Saturday afternoon  
Scene 2: Interior of a mansion -- Sunday morning

ACT II

Scene 1: Interior of a mansion -- Saturday evening  
Scene 2: Interior of a mansion -- Sunday morning  
Scene 3: Interior of a mansion -- Sunday evening

ACT I SCENE 1: INTERIOR OF A MANSION -- SATURDAY AFTERNOON

A plush interior, partitioned. Stage right, a comfortable sitting room with coffee tables, chairs, couches, vases, lamps, telephone, perhaps a piano. Stage left, a library with bookcases, boardroom table, matching chairs, telephone. Separate doorways to each space. Periodicals like Time Magazine are stacked on tables in both areas. Imposing portraits of college big-wigs hang on the walls.

Downstage right, a FLOOR LAMP.

MURAT wears well-worn shoes, crumpled slacks, an indifferent sweater. JAHZARA wears a tailored business jacket and skirt. A purse hangs from a strap over her shoulder.

The curtain opens to reveal MURAT in the sitting room, reclining on a couch, staring into space. A doorbell rings. MURAT rises, walks towards the door. JAHZARA appears in the doorway.

For a moment, they stare at each other.

JAHZARA

Barack Obama?

MURAT

(steps back)

Barack...Obama?

JAHZARA

Yeah...

MURAT

No, I'm afraid not. Murat Tahsin.

JAHZARA

(looks around)

Moo-rut what?

MURAT

(gutteral voice)

Tach-sin.

JAHZARA

You're having me on.

MURAT

No, madam. Truly.

JAHZARA

Hey...

MURAT  
My first name is Murat. My family name is Tahsin.

JAHZARA  
Ah...

MURAT  
Yes, madam.

JAHZARA  
Let me guess...

MURAT  
Guess?

JAHZARA  
Secret Service... Protective Detail.

MURAT  
(suspicious)  
I'm...not...sure.

JAHZARA  
Go on! Be sure.

MURAT  
Am I supposed to be?

JAHZARA  
You kidding me?

MURAT  
I'm sorry, madam. It is not my intention--  
(beat)  
Are you with the task force, madam?

JAHZARA  
The task force...

MURAT  
Of course you are. Please come in. Professor Kalotakis  
should be here shortly. Surely, he can explain everything.

MURAT steps out of the way. JAHZARA  
enters. They move to the sitting room.

JAHZARA  
Kalotakis.

MURAT  
Yes, madam.

JAHZARA  
English Department?

MURAT

Yes, madam. The Department of English.

JAHZARA

Cut the "madam" crap, okay?

MURAT

(apologetically)

Professor Kalotakis is the chairman of the president's task force. The university's task force.

JAHZARA

Of course he is!... Task forces. Ad hoc committees. Steps to academic heaven. Nirvana...

MURAT

Sorry.

JAHZARA

Don't be.

MURAT

Thank you.

JAHZARA

Go on...

MURAT

I beg your pardon?

JAHZARA

The president's task force?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

To look into...?

MURAT

Professor Kalotakis was called away.

JAHZARA

Away...?

MURAT

I mean, the professor will be delayed.

JAHZARA

I get the hint. Now, what about President Obama? You know. Barack Hussein Obama.

MURAT

I don't know...

JAHZARA

Cut the bull, cowboy. Is Obama staying here tonight, or not?

MURAT

No one told me that President Obama would also be meeting with us.

(looks at himself)

I am not appropriately dressed...

JAHZARA

No offence, buddy, but if you're Barack's welcome party... You don't sound like "Department of English" and, no, you don't look like "community channel." So, all kidding aside, who are you covering this story for?

MURAT

Oh dear, oh dear, I don't think I should be talking to you.

JAHZARA

Look, Murat...

MURAT

(hopefully)

Perhaps you are here to interview Professor Marchant, my supervisor.

JAHZARA

Darian Marchant is your supervisor?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

Tell me...

MURAT

He's done many interviews. Also for TV.

JAHZARA

You done any interviews?

MURAT

I must defer to him.

JAHZARA

Name, rank, serial number...?

MURAT

I've said too much already...

JAHZARA

Hey, they haven't riveted a bar code to your arm, have they? One of those... What do they call them?

MURAT

An RF-ID?

JAHZARA  
Yeah, one of those RF-ID things.

MURAT  
I'm afraid not.

JAHZARA  
Pity.

MURAT  
You are interested in RF-ID technology?

JAHZARA  
Not per se. It's just that scanning your vitals into my database might be more fun than this.  
(beat)  
Forget it, pal. Poor joke.

MURAT  
(serious)  
Don't worry. Those devices will one day--

JAHZARA'S BlackBerry belts out a TUNE.  
She takes it from her purse, looks at it for a moment then puts it to her ear.

JAHZARA  
(into the BlackBerry)  
Obama wouldn't possibly... Not after... Tomorrow, eh...?  
Then, I guess I can take the night off.

JAHZARA ends the call and returns the BlackBerry to her purse. She finds a suitable chair, sits down, and makes herself at home.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Your accent, cowboy. It's not Greek.

Awkwardly, MURAT also sits down.

MURAT  
Turkish.

JAHZARA  
You're Turkish.

MURAT  
Turkish Cypriot. I'm from Cyprus.

JAHZARA  
So... Kalotakis. He fancies himself the expert on Cyprus.

MURAT  
I looked him up--



JAHZARA  
(stares at him)  
Well, well, well! Kalotakis. Marchant. Fascinating...

MURAT  
(avoids her gaze)  
I was warned about leaks.

JAHZARA  
Of course you were.

Awkward silence.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Been here long?

MURAT looks at his watch.

MURAT  
About, oh...approximately eighteen minutes.

JAHZARA  
I meant, in the States...

MURAT  
Oh. I see. Three years. Almost.

JAHZARA  
You're...?

MURAT  
I'm...?

JAHZARA  
What do you do?

MURAT  
I'm an engineer.

JAHZARA  
Right.

MURAT  
I'm one of Professor Marchant's research associates.

JAHZARA  
Okay...?

MURAT  
Excuse me, but I think I've said enough. I think we should wait for him.

JAHZARA opens her purse and takes out a PAGE torn from a newspaper.

JAHZARA

(reads)

"Fireball guts lab. Obama visit cancelled."

JAHZARA continues to read silently,  
then--

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

That's your lab, right?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

(still looking at the PAGE)

"One person still missing."

MURAT

She sat next to me. In her own cubicle.

JAHZARA

(looks up)

Were you...?

MURAT

Was I...?

JAHZARA

Hurt?

MURAT

Thank you for asking. Fortunately, I was out with the other students. In a different building. Presenting.

JAHZARA

At night?

MURAT

Dry runs, for an international conference. The usual last minute preparations.

JAHZARA

(glances at the paper)

Veronica?

MURAT

Veronica Chou should have been with us.

JAHZARA

She's still missing? Right now?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

And Professor Marchant...?

MURAT  
Professor Marchant...I believe...

JAHZARA  
You believe...?

MURAT  
...was on his way home.

JAHZARA  
I see. The gutted building was empty. Good thing, no?  
Except for your unfortunate Veronica Chou.

MURAT looks down and shakes his head.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
So...the controversial "SAILS Project." Professor Marchant's  
project. You part of it?

MURAT  
(bright)  
I do have the great honor to participate.

JAHZARA  
Hoax? Or on the level?

MURAT  
Yes. No, I mean...

JAHZARA  
Hey, I get it. You're in deep.

MURAT  
Then--

JAHZARA  
He's known for far-out science. I'm just figuring the odds  
of your thing panning out.

JAHZARA rises, goes to the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to the FLOOR LAMP)  
Now, guys, before we jump one heartbeat further, my name's  
Jahzara Jones... But you already know that.

She addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
And...at this very moment...right now...I'm in the author's  
imagination. In a curious way, I'm speaking for both of us.  
Get it...? No? By the end of Act One, we'll shake some  
logic out of this script. Hey, we don't want you folks  
walking out... Anyway, you can't. I bolted the exits!  
(beat)

Me? Who am I? Whole lot more than a sidekick. Hey, the bitch that "casting" finally springs on you...

Defiantly, JAHZARA pulls up her skirt, just a bit.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

A good start, don't you think?

She lets go of her skirt and points at MURAT.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

See that guy? Wrong vibes for a protagonist, you say? Think again. This is his story too. So don't lose track of him. And watch out for my intrepid play-writing buddy, one Lester Kalotakis, professor of English. Soon-to-be ex-Professor of English. Sure he'd like to slide me 'round the board, but there's rules. And this opus ain't finished yet.

She points at the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

You believe a Greek mother would call her son "Lester"?

Two MEN enter the library. LESTER, in a suit and tie, has a briefcase and a carry-on bag on wheels. DARIAN is casually dressed and empty-handed.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

The spiffy one's Lester. Hey, time to zip it up.

JAHZARA joins MURAT and sits next to him on the couch. They chat inaudibly.

In the library, LESTER parks his carry-on bag and drops his briefcase onto the boardroom table. DARIAN heads for a shelf and browses through a book.

LESTER

Fucking albatross.

DARIAN

My, my. Such language for a man of such learning.

LESTER

Not now! Not ever!

DARIAN

Right you are, Lester.

LESTER

I know plenty about you, Marchant. Plenty.

DARIAN  
So, can I go home now...?

LESTER  
Too much, in fact.

DARIAN  
Don't choke on it!

LESTER  
I'm going to bury you.

DARIAN  
Tonight? Do us both a favor. Postpone it to some cold, wintry--

LESTER  
Give it a rest!

DARIAN  
Pistols at dawn it is!  
(beat)  
Hey, it'd have been gracious if you'd thrown me a hint. I'd have finished proofing my will...

LESTER  
Stuff it.

DARIAN  
Hate to disappoint you, old man, but you've no mandate to bury anyone. Besides, your salary, your entire department's, comes straight out of the overhead I haul in. You're hooked on it.

LESTER snatches his briefcase and strides into the sitting room. DARIAN follows.

LESTER  
If it isn't--? Jahzara! Long time!

JAHZARA stays seated. MURAT leaps to his feet.

JAHZARA  
Professor Kalotakis... No doubt, still flailing against the university's addiction to funding by the military-industrial complex.

(beat)  
Life must agree with you. You gained weight.

LESTER goes to embrace her. But she remains seated. He's embarrassed.

LESTER  
What brings you here?

JAHZARA  
Guess.

LESTER  
Please...

JAHZARA  
Obama. And the new Presidential Library.  
(holds up the PAGE)  
Now that I'm in this sanctum, though... Tomorrow's  
headlines.

DARIAN brushes past LESTER and shakes  
JAHZARA'S hand.

DARIAN  
Pleased to meet you... Darian Marchant.

JAHZARA  
Jahzara Jones. The Times.

DARIAN  
Of course.

JAHZARA  
So... Darian Marchant. Scientist. Engineer. Inventor.

DARIAN  
Businessman.

JAHZARA  
Proponent of the "SAILS Program."

DARIAN  
Right.

JAHZARA  
"SAILS." S-A-I-L-S. Nevertheless, an unfortunate acronym.  
(to LESTER)  
A red flag to a purist.  
(to DARIAN)  
"SAILS" stands for what? "Self-Absorbed, Intellectual...?"

LESTER  
Well put!

DARIAN  
"Self-Assembling Intelligent...Intelligent...Life-support...  
Systems... SAILS."

JAHZARA  
Ah...

DARIAN  
(gestures at MURAT)  
My assistant.

JAHZARA  
He coined the description?

DARIAN  
Actually, I did. And the acronym. My apologies, I just  
meant that I'm introducing you to my assistant, Dr. Tahsin.

JAHZARA  
We're already buddies. Totally.

LESTER  
Look, Jahzara. This is a private meeting.

JAHZARA  
(to DARIAN)  
Time Magazine covered your SAILS program.

JAHZARA points at the magazine on the  
coffee table.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Something about the Pentagon's clean energy initiative.  
Still, I'd like--

LESTER  
This meeting, here, tonight. I'm ever so glad to see you,  
etcetera-etcetera...

JAHZARA  
Etcetera-etcetera what?

LESTER  
You know...

JAHZARA  
I'm not your student any more, Lester. I don't have to fill  
in the blanks.

LESTER  
Needless to say...

JAHZARA  
(to DARIAN)  
Professor Kalotakis was my teacher, my thesis advisor, and  
the giver of my bountiful grades...

(to LESTER)  
What else were you to me, Lester? Refresh my memory.

LESTER moves close to JAHZARA.

LESTER  
I must talk to you.

JAHZARA  
Your wife. How is she?

LESTER points towards the library.

LESTER  
Now!

LESTER walks into the library, waits.

DARIAN settles on a chair and chats  
with MURAT inaudibly.

JAHZARA starts out in LESTER'S  
direction, but swings around and  
approaches the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
Keep in mind, folks, we're scripting this drama well after it  
actually happened. And Lester still craves control, to have  
me locked up, in his mind, if not his heart...  
(looks towards the library)  
But I have free will. Don't I, Lester?  
(back to the AUDIENCE)  
If I act a bit bad-ass now and then, the better he looks.

JAHZARA addresses the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to the FLOOR LAMP)  
Confidentially, gentlemen, off the record, but our Lester  
wants a Leonardo DiCaprio type, or better, Quentin Tarantino,  
to play his role. He, Lester, once boasted in class that  
when he watches a Tarantino film-noir, his literary neurons  
fire off like Henry Miller's cock in a bordello.

LESTER  
(to JAHZARA)  
Are you coming?

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
At least my lines are pretty clean. Strike that, ladies and  
gentlemen. They're dumb. Literary maestro Lester can't fake  
everything.

LESTER  
Hey!

JAHZARA  
Okay, okay!  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
Talk to you later.



JAHZARA hurries towards LESTER in the library. They stand and talk inaudibly.

Spotlight on DARIAN and MURAT in the sitting room.

DARIAN  
So...what's the young lady smoked out of you?

MURAT  
You mean...Miss Jones?

DARIAN  
Sometimes, Murat, sometimes...

MURAT  
I gave her my name.

DARIAN  
Uh-huh?

MURAT  
I told her that I work in your group--

DARIAN  
Right.

MURAT  
I explained to Miss Jones that I originally come from Cyprus...

DARIAN  
Anyone else been by? Snooping?

MURAT  
Miss Jones seems to be alone.

Pause.

DARIAN  
(looks around)  
Nice place.

MURAT  
Very nice indeed.

DARIAN  
I suggested it... Last minute. Keep the buggers off balance.

(points to LESTER and JAHZARA)  
Did you buy all that?

MURAT  
I...

The baloney. DARIAN

I'm not sure I-- MURAT

"What else were you to me, Lester..." Wow. She crucified him. What do you think? DARIAN

I think-- MURAT

Yeah, it sounded all too obvious to me too... A bit overdone. DARIAN

MURAT and DARIAN continue their conversation inaudibly.

Spotlight on JAHZARA and LESTER in the library.

You look good. LESTER

Yeah, you keep saying that. JAHZARA

You used to like it. LESTER

Once. JAHZARA

Hey... LESTER

So. Out with it! JAHZARA

No. Yes, well, you do look better than ever. LESTER

Main thing, I guess, you still remember what I look like. JAHZARA

Never give up, do you...? (softly) LESTER

LESTER and JAHZARA continue their conversation inaudibly.

Spotlight on DARIAN and MURAT in the sitting room.

MURAT

I believe that Miss Jones knows Professor Kalotakis very well.

DARIAN

Too biblical. Too obvious, Murat. They're up to something. Remember, stay silent about our work. Direct all enquiries to me.

MURAT

I have no intention--

DARIAN

The explosion. The fire. Nothing. Add nothing to what's already on the record. Above all, don't speculate. About President Obama. About our work.

MURAT

As we agreed, sir.

DARIAN

(holds up his finger)

Our mission comes first...

MURAT

I understand the situation.

DARIAN

Veronica Chou...?

MURAT

I confirmed only...that she disappeared.

MURAT and DARIAN continue their conversation inaudibly.

Spotlight on LESTER and JAHZARA, still standing in the library.

JAHZARA

I asked you about your wife...

LESTER

You know her name.

JAHZARA

I sure do.

LESTER

We divorced.

JAHZARA

The kids. Your house and in-ground pool. Your Volvo. She kept those, of course.

(beat)

So how's tricks with what's-her-name, the buxom Betty Boop?

LESTER

I rent, close by.

JAHZARA

Huh! But still screwing Betty's daughter, I'll bet.

LESTER

Don't--

JAHZARA

So Betty threw you out. Better find yourself something else to believe in, Lester, other than your genitals and university task forces.

LESTER

Still dialing it in tight.

JAHZARA

Uh-uh. Don't do dials. Nowadays, I push buttons.

LESTER

So... What are you really after?

JAHZARA

How about, you've screwed enough maidens to last the most virile Greek a lifetime.

(pause)

Pity you're not the most...

LESTER

Don't!

JAHZARA

...virile of Greeks.

LESTER

Just in here, okay?

JAHZARA

What's on your mind, professor?

LESTER

Don't smart-mouth me out there.

(points at DARIAN and MURAT)

Not in front of them. Agreed?

JAHZARA

(sing-song)

I smell a story.

LESTER

Give it a rest.

JAHZARA

One. A lab blows up. Two. A Chinese student vanishes. Three. Obama's Presidential Library. Need I continue?

LESTER

Please. Please be a good girl and say your good-byes.

Pause.

JAHZARA

By the way, Lester, Darian's sidekick looked you up. So did I. You really should update your website.

LESTER

Come on! I'm, you know, super busy.

JAHZARA

Then stop volunteering for time-waster assignments. Committees! You've slipped three years, minimum. People, your literary peers, they'll think you're dead.

LESTER

(affectionately)

My number hasn't changed.

JAHZARA

Tell me, Lester, are you dead?

LESTER

You could have called.

They look at each other in silence.

JAHZARA

I'll bet Darian Marchant's publication list is up to the minute, probably twenty papers "in press" as we speak.

LESTER

Damn you.

JAHZARA

Focus. Darian's lab: gutted. Arson? An accident? A coincidence?

LESTER

A conspiracy, perhaps?

JAHZARA

A cover-up.

LESTER

Come, come.

JAHZARA

Fraud, Lester. Fraud.

LESTER

Fraud.

JAHZARA

That's why you're here. Your task force, remember? To quietly figure out what can safely be tucked under my alma mater's vast and overused rug--

LESTER

Ridiculous!

JAHZARA

Oh, yeah? You could do worse than reserve yourself a cosy nook under that rug. If there's any room.

LESTER

Why not throw in a failed assassination attempt?

JAHZARA

Brilliant, Lester. Brilliant! Assassination. Now why didn't I think of it?

LESTER

Leave. Right now.

JAHZARA

Headline: "Failed Assassination Scuttles Obama Library."

LESTER

If you don't leave, we'll find another venue.

JAHZARA

Bummer. I'll have to track you down again.  
(off LESTER'S look)

What?

LESTER

Don't make me call Security.

JAHZARA

(looks at DARIAN and MURAT)

Let's go. The boys will think we've settled in for the night or something. You'd like that, wouldn't you?

JAHZARA goes to the sitting room.  
LESTER follows her, briefcase in hand.

LESTER sits down on a chair. DARIAN  
and MURAT remain seated.

But JAHZARA breaks away and approaches  
the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the FLOOR LAMP)

Take this down, gentlemen. There's not a Greek prick on the face of God's earth that doesn't crave, well, you know... Our Lester was no exception. Is no exception. OH!

JAHZARA falls to her knees and revels  
in an unbearable pain. Then--

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

It's because of what I did to him. No. You don't know what  
I did to him. Nor what he did to me to make me do what I did  
to him.

JAHZARA pulls herself together, joins  
the group. MURAT rises to his feet.

DARIAN

(to JAHZARA)

All done?

JAHZARA

Maybe.

DARIAN

Anything fit to print?

JAHZARA

We touched on metamorphosis, postmodernism, and  
deconstruction, as per late twentieth-century literary  
theory.

DARIAN

Any conclusions?

LESTER

I've agreed to let Miss Jones sit in for a bit.

DARIAN

Oh yeah? Where?

LESTER

Here, with us.

DARIAN

Out of order! Whatever happened to our "private" intramural  
meeting?

LESTER

I make the rules.

DARIAN

And I object.

LESTER

You may sit down, Jahzara.

DARIAN

(looks at his watch)

Look here, Lester, without Miss Jones's charming but undeniably distracting presence, we could have this little matter wrapped up in an hour.

LESTER

The whole weekend's set aside.

DARIAN

Perhaps for you.

LESTER waves JAHZARA to sit down. She sits. MURAT sits down too.

Through the library doorway, enter CANDY QUILL, a waitress, in a lightweight coat, hair gathered in a pony-tail. She unbuttons and takes off her coat. She's in a white blouse, black skirt, both a shade too tight.

The scene continues while CANDY, in the library, lays her coat on the table and unhurriedly looks around. She spots LESTER'S carry-on bag, goes to it, checks its luggage-tag. She picks up her coat. Exits.

LESTER

By God, we're going to use the time.

DARIAN

(to JAHZARA)

If it's an interview you want, Miss--

JAHZARA

Who's in charge here?

DARIAN

I don't have the time--

LESTER

Meaning?

DARIAN

My calendar, Les, old boy. I've better things on my calendar.

LESTER

Dates, I presume? Pun intended.

DARIAN

Yep.



LESTER

Unlike a tenured professor of English literature?

DARIAN

You said it, Sir Speedy.

JAHZARA

Now, now, boys.

DARIAN

(to JAHZARA)

Welcome to our mini faculty meeting, Miss Jones, where one's heavenly company, and two's a hellish crowd.

JAHZARA

My friends call me "Jahz."

LESTER

(to DARIAN)

Jahzara convinced me she'd straighten a few tongues--

DARIAN

I'll bet.

JAHZARA

To promote fair discussion.

LESTER

I deputized her.

(off JAHZARA'S look)

No. I guess, she kind of deputized herself.

DARIAN

The hacks over in Administration won't go for it.

LESTER

Leave Administration to me.

DARIAN

They're all yours, buddy.

JAHZARA

Don't get too stilted, boys...

DARIAN

(to LESTER)

By God, Lester--

LESTER

It's settled then, gentlemen. Let's move on.

Pause.

DARIAN

(to JAHZARA)

So, Miss Jahz...

So. JAHZARA

What's your thing? DARIAN

Like? JAHZARA

Like your...what-do-you-have-in-mind "thing." DARIAN

How about a drink? JAHZARA  
(settles back)

I second the motion. DARIAN  
(lifts his arm high)

All in favor...? (no other arms are lifted)

No abstentions...? Motion passed. Murat, go see what's in the fridge.

Of course. MURAT

MURAT gets up and walks out.

DARIAN'S CELL PHONE rings. He pulls it out of his pocket and flips it on.

Hello...? I told you where... Yes, Bronwen. Yeah... Whoa. Wait a moment. DARIAN

DARIAN looks at JAHZARA and LESTER. He gets up. Holding the CELL PHONE to his ear, DARIAN walks out of the room.

Bronwen? JAHZARA

His wife. LESTER

Ah... JAHZARA

Yes. LESTER

Know her? JAHZARA

LESTER  
Mmm.

JAHZARA  
Nice?

LESTER  
You do have a dirty mind.

MURAT returns before LESTER and JAHZARA  
can explore the issue further.

JAHZARA  
Hi, Murat.

MURAT  
Miss Jones. Professor. There's a lady in the kitchen. She  
will prepare whatever we request.

LESTER  
Ask her to come in.

MURAT  
I did.

LESTER  
Well?

MURAT  
She's been instructed not to disturb us. She gave me this  
for you to fill in.

MURAT hands LESTER a slip of paper and  
a pencil.

LESTER  
I'll be damned! A Faculty Club chit! Well, well, well.  
Okay, what'll it be?

JAHZARA  
Diet Coke.

MURAT  
Orange juice, please.

LESTER scribbles on the chit, and hands  
the chit and pencil to MURAT.

LESTER  
Ask Dr. Marchant to write in his order.

JAHZARA  
Let me.

JAHZARA takes the chit and pencil from MURAT, and exits. LESTER and MURAT watch her go.

LESTER

(to MURAT)

Have you met Miss Jones before?

MURAT

No, sir. This is the first time.

MURAT sits down. LESTER fumbles with his briefcase, and pulls out a sheaf of papers. He shuffles the papers until he finds what he wants.

LESTER

(studies a sheet)

Ph.D., Istanbul?

MURAT

The Technical University of Istanbul.

LESTER

Istanbul. Been there. You know, the Greeks still call the place Constantinople.

MURAT

I hope you visited Saint Sophia.

LESTER

What attracted you here?

MURAT

To Saint Sophia?

LESTER

To the United States.

LESTER takes out a pen and makes notes as the discussion continues. MURAT pulls himself to edge of his chair.

MURAT

Professor Marchant gave a seminar in my university.

LESTER

When?

MURAT

Some years ago, four to be almost exact. I was completing my thesis--

LESTER

(reads)

"Paradigms for Self-organizing Systems that Thrive on the Edge of Chaos."

MURAT

Yes, sir.

Pause.

LESTER

Go on. Go on. Continue.

MURAT

It was then that he invited me to join him in America.

LESTER

Does "thrive" mean what it means in plain English?

MURAT

It does.

LESTER

What exactly, in your own words, is a self-organizing system?

MURAT

(still excited)

It is a system that evolves, seemingly without external directives.

LESTER

Uses...?

MURAT

Yes...?

LESTER

Go on...

MURAT

Where?

LESTER

Continue with the story!

MURAT

Oh, I see. Excuse me. Applications may be unlimited, sir. Useful devices could form themselves, or it could correctly be stated: such devices could self-manufacture themselves, from internally programmed instructions--

LESTER

Out of some kind of chemical brew?

MURAT

Yes.

LESTER  
An intelligent soup? With the right kind of DNA-like ingredients, of course?

MURAT  
You could say that.

LESTER  
Fascinating.

MURAT  
Yes.

LESTER  
What about evolving alternative life forms? New animals perhaps?

MURAT  
A cup, a bottle, a transistor--

LESTER  
Bombs?

An awkward silence.

MURAT  
Perhaps...

LESTER  
It goes without saying, I presume, that if successful, the commercial prospects are...?

MURAT  
Wide open...

LESTER  
What, then, about this edge-of-chaos...?

MURAT  
You're asking what edge-of-chaos implies?

LESTER  
Right.

MURAT  
If not correctly programmed, the devices--

LESTER  
I get it. The devices might blow up.  
(beat)  
And you've mastered this process?

MURAT  
(sits back in his chair)  
I am a theoretician.

LESTER

Indeed.

MURAT

I can simulate certain edge-of-chaos processes.

LESTER

Professor Marchant's team includes chemical engineers, biotech scientists...

MURAT

Yes.

LESTER

His student, Veronica Chou. She was a chemist?

MURAT

Yes.

LESTER

She understood...?

MURAT

Yes.

Pause.

LESTER

Where is she now?

MURAT

I don't exactly know.

Pause.

LESTER

Is Dr. Marchant an expert in your field?

MURAT looks around as if to check whether anyone might be listening in.

MURAT

He's published papers--

LESTER

I didn't ask you that.

MURAT

Many papers.

LESTER

I didn't ask you that either.

MURAT

He does have certain expertise.

LESTER  
In this field? In your field?

MURAT  
(carelessly)  
He has enormous talents, I believe, in a great many fields.

LESTER  
Other fields?  
(off MURAT's nod)  
Okay. You've told me what I needed to know.

MURAT  
(not sure whether to be pleased)  
I have?

LESTER  
Now, when Miss Jones returns, you are to say nothing of what we've spoken of. Nothing. Understood?

MURAT  
I understand.

LESTER  
We'll evict Miss journalistic Jones soon enough.

MURAT  
I see.

LESTER  
(to himself)  
Oh to dump a bucket of water...

MURAT  
That's not a good idea.

LESTER  
What?

MURAT  
She won't like that.

LESTER  
You bet.

MURAT  
You know, Professor Kalotakis, what I've told you isn't really so very secret.

LESTER  
Well then, Dr. Tahsin...

MURAT  
Yes, sir?



LESTER

Add nothing. Elaborate on nothing.

MURAT

Nothing.

LESTER

Not in front of Miss J.

MURAT

Professor Marchant has explained everything to me already.

LESTER

Good. You'll explain that to me too. Everything, including how much you make. From all sources.

MURAT raises his hand and is about to object, when JAHZARA, purse strung over her shoulder, returns. She is carrying a tray with glasses: Diet Coke, orange juice, scotch on the rocks, wine. She lowers the tray onto a coffee table, puts down her purse, remains standing.

JAHZARA

Haven't done this in a while. Enjoy...

Glasses are lifted to lips, sips taken.

LESTER

Darian--?

JAHZARA

On another call.

LESTER

His...?

JAHZARA

Can't say.

Glass in hand, JAHZARA approaches the AUDIENCE. MURAT and LESTER continue their chit-chat inaudibly.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

Our Darian just broke up with his wife. Back there, over the phone, right in front of me. Wife of some fifteen years. How bad did he take it? The instant he clicked off, he asked me out. Well, not exactly out. He asked what I was doing later tonight. "When tonight?" I asked. "Right after I'm tossed outta here, or 'later' later?" Whatever, he replied. Tonight, as late as I wanted would suit just fine.

"Don't you have better things to do?" I asked. "Besides," I said, "I don't do well as a trophy in a pissing contest."

JAHZARA raises her glass, toasts both the AUDIENCE and the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

Cheers.

She turns away for a moment, then swings back to the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

By the way, that "lady" Murat connected with...you know, in the kitchen? You saw her in the library. That's Candy. Candy Quill. Waitress, bar-woman, and occasional girlfriend to washed-up pros. She surprised Murat rummaging in the fridge. "Can I help you?" she said, or some such thing. Well, Candy was still mopping the floor when I got there.

JAHZARA returns to the group, sits on the empty couch, sips from her glass.

LESTER

(to JAHZARA)

Do you know where President Obama is right now?

JAHZARA

Can't tell.

LESTER

Your "can't tell's" are mounting up...

JAHZARA

Can't tell...

MURAT

Such information, where important people are to stay, isn't advertised, is it, Miss Jones?

JAHZARA

No more, say, than a President endorsing his teenage hooker's favorite brand of mattress.

Behind his hand, MURAT politely suppresses a chuckle.

LESTER

Still want us to believe you were searching for Obama...?

JAHZARA

Yeah.

LESTER

Clean, now.

JAHZARA

Yes, Lester, that's what I want you to believe.

LESTER

(to JAHZARA)

Where are you staying?

JAHZARA

(to LESTER)

Whatever happened to your sure-fire Pulitzer?

(to MURAT)

One summer, to shoehorn Professor Kalotakis into the popular media, I researched quips, notes, and quotes on naive students, treacherous teachers, and the art of sleeping with capitalists.

LESTER

(looks at his watch)

Perhaps it's time...

JAHZARA

(to MURAT)

Integrity on sale.

LESTER

(to JAHZARA)

Finish your drink.

JAHZARA

(to MURAT)

No reasonable offer refused.

LESTER

Jahzara!

JAHZARA

(to MURAT)

That's why you and Professor Marchant are here.

LESTER

Jesus!

JAHZARA

At the Grand Bazaar: if you can, sell... If you can't, sell yourself. Right?

MURAT

(with firm sincerity)

I do believe, Miss Jones, it makes sense.

JAHZARA

To...?

MURAT

To offer only what people want.

LESTER  
(fires a knowing look at  
JAHZARA)

Indeed!

JAHZARA  
Question is, Murat, and this is what Professor Kalotakis is  
dying to know...are you and Marchant on offer...for cash or  
charge or, perhaps...doggie-style?

Silence. MURAT frowns. LESTER and  
JAHZARA stare each other down. JAHZARA  
finishes her drink.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to MURAT)  
Would you...?

MURAT  
Yes...?

JAHZARA  
Get me another, please?

MURAT  
Of course.

LESTER  
(to MURAT)  
Don't bother. She's leaving.

JAHZARA  
(to MURAT)  
Please!

MURAT rises slowly. Looking at him,  
JAHZARA fingers her neck.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Your collar...

MURAT  
I beg your pardon?

JAHZARA  
Your collar.

MURAT seems pleased with the attention.  
He fumbles with his collar and exits.

JAHZARA spots a sheet on the floor.  
She picks it up and reads.

LESTER  
Gimme that...

JAHZARA  
(arm out to parry LESTER)  
Interesting... Aha.

LESTER  
Give it me.

JAHZARA  
Smart dude.

JAHZARA hands LESTER the sheet. LESTER  
shoves the sheet into his briefcase.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
You shouldn't be seeing these guys.

LESTER  
Must be done. Terms of reference.

JAHZARA  
I mean, alone.

LESTER  
This is preliminary...

JAHZARA  
They'll do you in.

LESTER  
Why are you doing this?

JAHZARA  
You used to be real cute, once upon a time...

LESTER  
Let it go.

JAHZARA  
Uh-uh. I want this story.

LESTER  
No.

JAHZARA  
You can't bring yourself to admit it. If you dare name names  
this time, including yourself, this may be your Pulitzer.

LESTER  
Miss Jones!

JAHZARA  
(sweetly)  
Yes, Lester?

LESTER  
We'll...

What? JAHZARA

Let's...talk about it. LESTER

Oh? JAHZARA

Yeah...swing by later. LESTER

You or me? JAHZARA

Huh? LESTER

Cut that little-boy propositioning crap-- JAHZARA

Me, damn you! LESTER

Don't jump the line. Darian's ahead of you. JAHZARA

Fuck Darian! LESTER

Right. JAHZARA  
(agreeably)

Shaking with anger, LESTER stands up.

That's it! LESTER

Are you going to show me the door? JAHZARA

LESTER storms out as DARIAN enters.  
Will a fight break out? It doesn't.  
They move around each other.

Out! LESTER  
(points to the door)

I'm waiting for my drink. JAHZARA

DARIAN picks up his drink, scotch on the rocks, sinks into a chair, RATTLES the ice. He takes a sip, then raises his drink towards LESTER'S briefcase.

DARIAN  
He's probably recording us.

JAHZARA  
If he is, he'll sure have to do some fancy finger-work to pick out what he wants without looking real stupid.

DARIAN  
Incriminate the incriminator, huh?  
(toasts JAHZARA)  
"This is Darian Marchant and I approve this message."

JAHZARA  
By the way, that goes for me too. The recording bit. And looking stupid.

DARIAN  
Right...

JAHZARA  
Sorry about your wife.  
(pause)  
I heard you... Back there...

DARIAN  
Yeah...

A brief silence.

JAHZARA  
Why don't you just ignore all this?

DARIAN  
My wife?

JAHZARA  
The inquisition.

DARIAN  
Just as soon as I find out what he knows.

JAHZARA  
Lester?

DARIAN  
Trouble is...

JAHZARA  
Lester knows nothing.

Right. DARIAN

Then...? JAHZARA

Murat's the problem. He's susceptible, what with his brother's less than happy domicile at Guantanamo Bay. DARIAN

Murat's brother? Guantanamo? JAHZARA

Yunus Tahsin. DARIAN

Tahsin. Tahsin. Of course. JAHZARA

Yunus Tahsin is suing. DARIAN

Suing! The wires services said nothing. JAHZARA

They will. DARIAN

Where's brother Yunus now? JAHZARA

Turkey. DARIAN

Pause.

So... A hush-hush project. An explosion. A missing Chinese student. An ex-Gitmo detainee. An aborted visit by Barack Obama. Let me guess. Homeland Security. JAHZARA

Yes. DARIAN

Pause.

I need more... JAHZARA

Ask. DARIAN

I will. JAHZARA



DARIAN

On second thoughts...  
(takes a drink)  
Ask me.

JAHZARA

You'd rather I didn't speak to him.

DARIAN

He won't give you what you want.

JAHZARA

Oh?

DARIAN

He can't.

JAHZARA

Got him over a barrel, huh?

DARIAN

You could say that...

JAHZARA

You, the college, the FBI, Homeland Security?

DARIAN

...in a manner of speaking.

JAHZARA

Meaning, he's got something on you.

JAHZARA gets up and walks downstage.

DARIAN drinks by himself. He is joined  
by MURAT with more drinks.

JAHZARA

(to herself)

Question is, what did Murat Tahsin really have over Darian  
Marchant? Over me? Over everyone.

JAHZARA addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

He's unearthed something humongous, wants it for himself,  
incinerated his trail? Maybe. He's figured out that  
Darian's SAILS project is on the wrong track? Wants out?  
Maybe. Or he and Darian, together, are burying some huge  
flop. Then there's that Veronica Chou. Still missing.  
Meanwhile, I'm busy riveting us, me and our three quarrelsome  
boys, onto this triangle thing. Four-sided... Loosen up!  
This script's just a trial balloon. Did I say...four-sided  
triangle? Weird, right...? Wait.

(counts on her fingers)

There's Murat, Darian, Lester. That's three... Me makes four. What about Murat's "lady in the kitchen"...? Icy-hot Candy, the waitress who doesn't wait. Quite grown up since I first met her. Okay, Candy makes five, for a five-sided triangle. Hell, what do I know about triangles? Or geometry? I'm just an English major, with a minor in race and colonial studies, delivering my daydreams and those of a formerly employed professor of English literature.

(points backstage)

Back there, catching up in the kitchen: Lester and Candy Quill. Could clue you in, but Lester won't give me the nod. So, flash forward to tomorrow.

(turns towards the empty library, thoughtful)

It isn't that nothing too scintillating happens tonight. It's that Lester would rather gloss over the moments of humiliation. Anyway, he finally booted me out.

(to the AUDIENCE)

"And don't come back," Lester made sure to add.

(calls out to MURAT and DARIAN)

Okay, guys, pack it in. Go take a leak, or something.

MURAT and DARIAN take a final drink, rise to their feet, and wave at JAHZARA. Then they exit.

JAHZARA makes as if to leave too, but turns to address the AUDIENCE again.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

One more thing. This is a real story. Hey, I'm real.

JAHZARA addresses the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(defiantly)

And I'm back here tomorrow. Tomorrow's when Murat convinces me that everything's real. Dreams, stuff about chaos, multi-dimensional universes, and unscrambling coded messages.

(suddenly remorseful)

Murat. Murat.

JAHZARA exits through the doorway to the sitting room. Same one as MURAT and DARIAN left through.

A few moments later, also through the same doorway, CANDY enters the sitting room. Cleans off the coffee tables, straightens the magazines, picks up the tray. Puts it down. Picks up Time Magazine, flips through the pages. Finds something. Reads briefly.

Puts the magazine down neatly in the pile. Picks up the tray again. Exits.

Moments later CANDY enters through the library door, checks the boardroom table, straightens the magazines. Goes to LESTER'S carry-on, stops for a moment. Takes the handle of the carry-on. Pulling it, CANDY exits.

Dark.

SCENE 2: INTERIOR OF A MANSION -- SUNDAY MORNING

Bright sunshine.

MURAT looks more coordinated than yesterday, smartly dressed, new shoes. JAHZARA'S dressed casual, in a skirt. MURAT'S mood and voice shift, often suddenly, between composed and excitable. He avoids catching JAHZARA'S eye. She works at catching his.

In the library, MURAT sits at the boardroom table, glancing through a book. On the table, there's a pile of books, an open LAPTOP that's on and running, a pad of paper filled with math formulas, a coffee mug.

JAHZARA enters.

JAHZARA

Hey, what gives?

JAHZARA slings her purse onto the table, sits down opposite MURAT.

He shuts his book, rises, sits again.

MURAT

Hello.

They stare at each other across the table, silent. They're thinking of yesterday's first meeting. Neither wants the other to look stupid.

JAHZARA

On your own...

MURAT

Yes.

Silence.

JAHZARA

(awkward)

When I'm on my own, I dance...

MURAT

Nice...

Silence.

JAHZARA

To music.

Very nice... MURAT

What do you do? JAHZARA

JAHZARA picks up MURAT'S pad of paper.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Other than scribbling things nobody understands.

When? MURAT

JAHZARA drops the pad.

By yourself. At home. JAHZARA

I don't--? MURAT

Do you sing in the tub? Cross-dress? JAHZARA

Oh no... MURAT

So...? JAHZARA

I conduct... MURAT

...Electricity? JAHZARA

Beethoven's Ninth... MURAT

'Course you do. What else. JAHZARA

Well, I also read... MURAT

JAHZARA  
I meant "what else" what else, not..."what else." Get it?  
Wasn't a question.

MURAT  
(noncommittal)

I see.

JAHZARA

(gently)  
Well then... What do you read?

MURAT

(points at the shelves)  
Newspapers. Books. If only I understood, cover to cover,  
any ten of these books.

JAHZARA picks up the book MURAT was  
browsing.

JAHZARA

Lawrence Durrell? I did a paper on Durrell once.

MURAT

(points to his pad)  
I prefer that.

JAHZARA

Right. Durrell was a bit of a racist. So, self-assembling  
mechanisms... Let's see... Thriving on the edge of chaos?

MURAT

You heard about my thesis?

JAHZARA

I kind of peeked at a sheet of paper Lester dropped. Skimmed  
through your bio.

(pause)

Well...?

MURAT

More?

JAHZARA

Yes.

Pause.

MURAT

My thesis--

JAHZARA

About you.

Pause.

MURAT

Well, I'm interested in...spirit.

JAHZARA

The spirit, huh?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA  
Revelations. Miracles... Dreams...?

MURAT  
They exist...

JAHZARA  
Whoops.

MURAT  
Truly!

JAHZARA  
Of course they do. In our imaginations. That's why they're called dreams.

MURAT  
No. I mean they really exist.

JAHZARA  
(sceptical)  
Like, for-real real?

MURAT  
(indignant)  
They are real.

JAHZARA  
(points at the FLOOR LAMP)  
Real as a lamp?

MURAT  
(seriously)  
As real as the sun. As real as cluster bombs. Isn't it obvious, Miss...?  
(off JAHZARA'S look, sheepish)  
Miss Jones.

JAHZARA  
Real.

MURAT  
Yes...

JAHZARA  
Real, like getting it off with eager virgins after you blow yourself up in a crowded disco?

MURAT  
(ignores the inference)  
When we dream, we inhabit multi-dimensional domains.

JAHZARA  
Domains?

MURAT  
Universes. Universes that seem fantastic but exist.

JAHZARA  
Privately roaming...?

MURAT  
We reverse time.

JAHZARA  
Rattling around...?

MURAT  
We restart events...

JAHZARA  
And break laws...?

MURAT rises to his feet.

MURAT  
You're laughing at me.

JAHZARA rises to her feet too.

JAHZARA  
Shit, no!

MURAT  
Does anyone need to know how to bind books in order to appreciate a story? Or to understand what motivates a computer...?

JAHZARA  
Motivates?

MURAT  
The word...seems wrong to you?

JAHZARA  
(off his look)  
Okay, okay! I'm not laughing at you. How about ethics, moral codes...?

MURAT  
Are you referring to your dreams, to my dreams, or to me?

JAHZARA  
Hey...

MURAT  
Or perhaps...to my brother?



JAHZARA  
(raises her hands, shakes her  
head slowly)

Hey, look...

MURAT  
You know about my brother.

JAHZARA  
I don't--

MURAT  
No?

JAHZARA  
Not that much.

MURAT  
You've had time enough to research him.

JAHZARA  
Well, I confess I did a bit of on-line stuff last night. I  
guess it had to come out.

(beat)  
Is he...your brother...anything like you?

Pause.

MURAT  
(flash of anger)  
How close are you to Professor Kalotakis?

A long silence.

MURAT (CONT'D)  
Your...Lester, as you call him. How close?

Silence.

JAHZARA  
Damn! Damn! Damn!

MURAT  
(in a formal voice)  
In the universes you or I think we know, two apparent  
realities are never the same.

JAHZARA  
Damn it, Murat!

Silence. MURAT seems to expect her to  
continue, elaborate. Then--

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
He lives in Turkey, right?

MURAT points at the LAPTOP, and speaks distractedly.

MURAT

I just talked to him...

JAHZARA

So... What's he up to? I mean, what does he do now?

Pause.

MURAT

(in a cool voice)

I hypothesise that whatever we conceive, or can conceive, has either already happened, or will one day surely happen.

JAHZARA

(nods "yes")

Prophetic.

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

And frightening.

Pause.

MURAT

My brother now delivers pizzas.

JAHZARA

That's okay. Cool.

MURAT

Cool?

JAHZARA

Someone has to.

MURAT

What's so cool about delivering pizzas, Jahzara? He too had dreams.

JAHZARA

(fumbles for a response)

Yeah. Hey, that's okay too.

MURAT takes a deep breath. Then , in a formal voice, as if rehearsed, all in one breath...

MURAT

I think that...to make any sense of dreams, their events must be unscrambled, logically sequenced like the coded messages they represent.

Clarified, inverted, if you like, with respect to what is known...what is possible...what we have yet to discover...

Puzzled at the shifts in MURAT'S voice and mood, JAHZARA waits for more. But, out of breath, MURAT seems to have finished his train of thought. Then...

MURAT (CONT'D)

...of truth.

Pause.

JAHZARA

So...

MURAT

Yes?

JAHZARA

No if's, and's or but's?

MURAT

The problem is, Miss Jones, most of the time, our thoughts occur to us contaminated, badly. Wrongly ordered...

JAHZARA

A veritable mess, huh? Like that polymer soup of yours, but out of which robots, toilet bowls, and pizzas will one day spring to life.

MURAT

Yes...

JAHZARA

Heaven 'n' hell...?

MURAT

(eagerly)

Coexist.

(pause)

You don't agree?

JAHZARA

I mean, in which order were they created? Heaven 'n' Hell.

Silence.

MURAT

That depends...

JAHZARA

I get it! It depends on which way time was running when H 'n' H were first thought of by those Neanderthal clowns. Hell 'n' high water. Which appeared first? Right?

Maybe.

MURAT

JAHZARA circles the table, stopping close to him.

JAHZARA

Have you mentioned your...these hypotheticals...to your boss?

MURAT

Not in detail.

JAHZARA

Afraid he'd laugh?

MURAT

Like you?

JAHZARA

I'm not poking fun at you. I'm just puzzled.

MURAT stands up, pushes back his chair.

MURAT

The truth is usually very simple, Jahzara, but almost always unobservable to us, directly.  
(off her look)

Lies lead to...complexity.

JAHZARA

Are you, like, lying right now?

MURAT

You're the reporter...

JAHZARA

...who makes things up?

MURAT

Deceptions are detectable because... Because they're manufactured. Once machines can flawlessly decipher lies...

JAHZARA

...I'll be out of business.

MURAT

For sure.

JAHZARA

Is this about your project? About the explosion? About some kind of cyber-warfare?

Awkward silence. JAHZARA stares at him. He looks away.

MURAT

You asked me what I do...

JAHZARA

So I did.

MURAT

I don't speak with anyone.

JAHZARA

About...?

MURAT

This.

JAHZARA

Do you talk to yourself?

MURAT

I think.

JAHZARA

(patiently)

When you're alone, you think you talk...?

MURAT

I think about the things I just told you about.

JAHZARA

You don't talk to friends...?

MURAT

I work on English.

JAHZARA

English girlfriends?

MURAT

No, English. I practice it aloud.

JAHZARA

You've not discussed your "spiritual" ideas...this "truth" or lie-detector stuff with anyone?

MURAT

Just you.

JAHZARA

Just me?

MURAT

Just now.

JAHZARA

Because...?

MURAT

Because you asked me.

JAHZARA

You think about... You don't, for all this... Help me...

(pause; he remains silent)

You don't have any math for this truth stuff, do you?

MURAT

That's the problem.

JAHZARA

What is?

MURAT

Without mathematics, it's, it's...

JAHZARA

Hit or miss?

MURAT

Exactly.

An uncertain silence.

JAHZARA

(suddenly shy)

You tell me, now. Truthfully as you can. I had this silly dream last night, after we met, that is, after I eventually dropped off...

MURAT

(gently)

Yes?

JAHZARA

You don't want to hear my silly dream.

MURAT

I do. Yes, I do.

Pause.

JAHZARA

It was cloudy, overcast, grey. I was standing by a kind of concrete structure, multi-storey, with its windows bombed out. Way on the horizon, I saw this unwavering stab of light, weird, like I was standing on a train-track, and an express was bearing down on me. Going real fast, like, my way. The train was, the light was. Something. Stupid, huh? Well, before I could figure anything out, cars, motorcycles, people, were streaming past me, away from this light. Like a step ahead of doom. Didn't wait. Didn't think. I headed straight for this campus place, down in a valley. They were making out like they hadn't seen it. The light.

What they were in for. But I knew. I knew. Jeez, it was gonna snow. Yeah, really! It was gonna heat up, way up, same time as it was going to snow. Right. And that brightness was going to frazzle everything to ash. As I drove into the valley, I met people I knew, people I didn't--

MURAT

Was I there...?

JAHZARA

(briefly touches his arm)

Funny you should ask, Murat. No... No one listened to me. Wait, though... Wait. I wasn't actually talking to them. They seemed unaware of me. Totally. I was just kind of watching them shuffle around like zombies. Then the sky lit up. Some girl I knew... Yeah, this girl, she started frying right in front of me, kind of browning, all crispy like some godforsaken KFC chicken. But I felt nothing. No pain.

(pause)

Damn! I really thought this shit was heading somewhere.

A long silence.

CANDY enters the sitting room. She's in a fresh waitress outfit, tight black skirt, white blouse, hair in a ponytail. She carries a coffee mug. She sits on a couch, stretches out, sips from the mug. Reaches for Time Magazine, finds the page she wants, reads. CANDY makes herself at home until the end of the scene.

MURAT

It was.

JAHZARA

Oh?

MURAT

Yes. In a roundabout sort of way, you're trying to warn me about something...

JAHZARA

Am I?

MURAT

...You're asking me to listen to you.

JAHZARA

So...?

MURAT

So...?

JAHZARA

The bombed-out building. That's a tad obvious. So is the campus. What about the light? People fleeing?

MURAT

Streaming.

JAHZARA

The light?

MURAT

The people, escaping.

JAHZARA

From...?

MURAT

The truth.

JAHZARA

What truth? This is so pathetic... How about that snow, then, and the girl? Who was the girl?

MURAT

Perhaps...me.

JAHZARA

You?

MURAT

Perhaps the girl you called "crispy" represents me.

JAHZARA

Yeah, and I'm garlic toast from the twilight zone. Enough of this deconstructionist crap.

MURAT

Deconstructionist...?

JAHZARA

Listen to me.

MURAT

I am listening to you.

JAHZARA

This might come as a kind of shock, but I've been thinking. I seriously suggest you get yourself a lawyer.

MURAT

Whatever for?

JAHZARA

Yes. It's real possible you're being set up.



MURAT  
By Professor Kalotakis?

JAHZARA  
For example.

MURAT  
The task force?

JAHZARA  
(nods)  
For example.

MURAT  
You want me to share what I know with a lawyer?

JAHZARA  
To save yourself.

JAHZARA takes her BlackBerry from her purse.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
I have a friend in New York...

She scans the BlackBerry for a number. Looks up, holds the BlackBerry as if ready to make a call.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Michelle. She'll talk to you.

MURAT  
That will make certain people very unhappy.

JAHZARA  
Fuck them.

Silence.

MURAT  
Why?

JAHZARA  
I can think of a hundred good reasons. As can you. A gutted building's only one.

MURAT  
I mean, why do you care?

JAHZARA puts down her BlackBerry.

JAHZARA  
Why do I care? Shit! You figure it out.

MURAT

Everyone says you're after a story.

JAHZARA

All in good time.

(beat)

I have a plan.

MURAT

Don't you want to know what I'm guilty of first?

JAHZARA

(looks around)

Shut up, and listen for a moment. Deep-pocket Ernie pays Bert to invent something special. Okay? So Bert invents it. Realizes it's much bigger than anyone imagined. Wants Ernie to reach back into that deep pocket, or else. Got it?

MURAT

Yes.

JAHZARA

Ernie refuses...

MURAT

Okay, Ernie refuses.

JAHZARA

So Bert destroys the invention...

MURAT

I'm still listening...

JAHZARA

Come on, Murat!

MURAT

Okay. What if your Bert hides his invention and pretends it's destroyed?

JAHZARA

Why hide it?

MURAT

Why not?

JAHZARA

He could reinvent it anytime.

MURAT

Perhaps the problem was time.

JAHZARA

Bert was in a hurry?

MURAT

No, but time was of the essence.

JAHZARA

You're starting to sound like...

MURAT

Your lawyer friend, Michelle?

JAHZARA

Oh, God... You said the problem "was" time, instead of "is" time. The problem. So, was time really of the essence?

MURAT

Timing was...or is, almost everything...

JAHZARA

Oh, my God.

A long silence.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

Wanna know something...?

MURAT

Yes?

JAHZARA

While we're all ears...or any time we're this close...  
(looks away)

Damn!

MURAT

What is it?

JAHZARA

(looks at him)

When you're just three feet away...

MURAT

Yes?

JAHZARA

Do us a favor.

MURAT

(savors the word)

Us...

(looks away)

I talk too much...

JAHZARA

Hey! Look at me.

MURAT  
(looks at her)  
I do.

JAHZARA  
Like when?

MURAT  
Like, when you're not looking at me.

JAHZARA  
What do you look at?

MURAT  
(points)  
Your...clothes?

JAHZARA  
(points at her eyes)  
Look at me now, Murat. Otherwise...

MURAT  
Otherwise...?

JAHZARA  
Don't you like me?

MURAT  
Staring isn't polite.

JAHZARA  
Screw polite.

MURAT  
You're too...

JAHZARA  
Look at me.

MURAT  
(looks away)  
You're so--  
(beat)  
I'm sorry... I might...

JAHZARA  
Weep?

MURAT  
I weep when I'm happy.

JAHZARA  
Great.

MURAT  
When I feel something beautiful.

So...weep!

JAHZARA

Now?

MURAT

Why not?

JAHZARA

Right now? I don't...

MURAT  
(small laugh)

JAHZARA  
Murat, dear, if I'm to make it onto your conquest-list before the end of the century, you'd better get on with it.

I still don't...

MURAT

JAHZARA takes MURAT'S face in her hands.

You called me Jahzara.

JAHZARA

Jahzara...

MURAT

Yes?

JAHZARA

Jahzara. I like the way you say it.

MURAT

Keep looking...

JAHZARA  
(drops her arms)

How you talk...

MURAT

Yes...?

JAHZARA

MURAT raises his hand to touch her face.

Your voice...

MURAT

In the sitting room, CANDY still reads Time Magazine.

DARIAN enters, dressed as he was yesterday.

He approaches CANDY from behind, puts his hand on her shoulder. He looks down as if studying what she's reading. He's really studying her. CANDY remains seated, continues reading.

JAHZARA draws closer to MURAT.

JAHZARA

So...?

MURAT strokes her cheek.

MURAT

You're...

JAHZARA

Yes?

MURAT

...soft.

JAHZARA

How soft?

MURAT

(sheds a tear)

Soft, like the petal of a rose.

JAHZARA wipes away a tear from MURAT'S face.

JAHZARA

What color rose?

MURAT

Pink.

JAHZARA takes his hand, turns her back to him, pulls him towards her. He puts his arms around her, kisses her neck.

JAHZARA

Gently. Gently...

MURAT explores JAHZARA with his hands.

MURAT

Princess Jahzara.

CANDY still stares into the magazine. DARIAN keeps his hand on her shoulder.

Briefcase in hand, LESTER appears in the doorway behind CANDY and DARIAN.

He wears his suit, tie undone, looks disheveled. He's had a bad night.

LESTER

(to CANDY and DARIAN)

Morning!

CANDY reaches for DARIAN'S hand.

CANDY

(to DARIAN)

Hi.

LESTER stands in the doorway, a forlorn look on his face.

Curtain.

ACT II SCENE 1: INTERIOR OF A MANSION -- SATURDAY EVENING

Time shifts back to yesterday, late evening. The lights are on. The library is empty. (Remove MURAT'S books, the pad of paper, and the LAPTOP from the boardroom table.) A couple of bottles, cognac, and some glasses stand on the coffee table. (Remove CANDY'S coffee mug.)

CANDY and DARIAN are in the sitting room. CANDY is in jeans, tee-shirt, running shoes. Her hair, released from its ponytail, hangs loose. DARIAN hasn't altered his appearance.

CANDY and DARIAN lounge on the couch, close, perhaps too close, occasionally bumping shoulders. Both have been working on cognacs for quite a while.

DARIAN can't take his eyes off CANDY. She plays with her hair, enjoying his attention.

CANDY

You're...famous.

DARIAN

(quietly)

I guess...

CANDY

God, I mean...like, real famous.

DARIAN

Mmm.

Pause.

CANDY

Rich?

DARIAN

Not nearly enough...

CANDY

Love your car... Love that midnight blue.

They continue sipping their cognacs.

In a nightie, as if ready for bed, JAHZARA enters through the library, approaches the FLOOR LAMP and addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

Hi. Enjoy the intermission?



Well, this ain't Lester's show any more. Uh-uh. Someone's gotta gin up the ante. Crunch our five-sided conspiracy triangle into gear.

(pause)

Me? I have my hand in things, too. So, as of a considerable while ago, this story's been out-sourced to yours truly. Curious about my nightie? Well, I'm actually in my hotel room. Yes, I know. This is last night. I kind of rushed the last scene with MURAT and me. To understand my story, flash back, rewind to last night. Okay? Lester and Murat left for the evening. Darian and Candy had this place to themselves. Let's watch. Hit "play."

She sits down and watches CANDY and DARIAN along with the AUDIENCE.

CANDY

Can I say something?

DARIAN

Sure.

CANDY

You won't blow a fuse?

DARIAN

Consider it pre-blown.

CANDY

You scare me.

DARIAN

Not me, Miss Quill. You got the wrong guy.

CANDY

No, sir.

DARIAN

Because of my car...?

CANDY

Since I first saw ya.

DARIAN

Yeah? Where?

CANDY

Faculty Club.

DARIAN

Nah!

CANDY

Yeah. You were, like, swarmed by all these big-shots in grey suits. Out-of-towners, like always.

Not always. DARIAN

Right. CANDY  
(laughs)

You see? DARIAN  
(laughs too)

There was this one time... CANDY

One time...? DARIAN

Yeah. You were with a woman, must 'a been your wife. CANDY

No! DARIAN

Sure. CANDY

Horrors. How ever could you tell? DARIAN

She frightened me too. CANDY

Mmm. DARIAN

When you paid, you didn't charge your department account. CANDY

Aha! Good for me. DARIAN

Anyway, married types hardly ever smile at each other. CANDY

Have no fear, lady. You won't catch us that way any more... DARIAN

Us? CANDY

Bronwen. DARIAN

Oh. CANDY

DARIAN  
She just dumped me.

CANDY  
(takes a sip)  
Shit!

DARIAN  
Right.

CANDY  
Should 'a kept your hands off your horny secretaries.

DARIAN  
Mustn't call 'em that.

CANDY  
What? Horny?

DARIAN  
No. Secretaries.

CANDY  
Hey, bartenders are still bartenders.  
(beat)  
Every prof's brushed up against my tits, patted my ass, or  
swore I was special. Not you. How come?

DARIAN  
Maybe I don't dip into the kindergarten.

CANDY  
You puttin' me down?

DARIAN  
How old are you?

CANDY  
Twenty-three.

DARIAN  
Must be rough at the bar, I guess, a pretty girl fending off  
the beer-breath losers. Those manic depressives.

CANDY  
You don't remember, do you?

DARIAN  
What?

CANDY  
Couple 'a years ago. Barroom's crowded. I decide to ignore  
our Lester. He'd ticked me off some... Anyway, he leans  
over the bar, grabs my arm. Remember...?

DARIAN  
(shakes his head)  
Not sure...

CANDY  
...what you did...?

DARIAN  
I've rubbed that bugger the wrong way so many times.

CANDY  
You said, "Hey, man, take it out on your dog."

DARIAN  
Really?

Pause.

CANDY  
You act like you never see me. Always. Except that once.

DARIAN  
I guess...

CANDY  
What?

DARIAN  
What...?

CANDY  
What will you do now?

DARIAN  
Now?

(off her look)  
My wife? That depends on a lot of things. Like, whether there's an after-life...after wife.

(raises his glass)  
Cheers. Here's to my after-life...after wife.

They laugh, rub shoulders. DARIAN  
slides his arm around her.

DARIAN (CONT'D)  
What if it's a liaison...?

CANDY  
(leans closer)  
The after life?

DARIAN  
The couple.

CANDY  
Which...?

DARIAN

Don't tell me you lost track... That couple at the table.

CANDY

You mean...the pair? They're, like...not married to each other? That it?

DARIAN

Right. Suppose they're like us. Kind of unattached.

CANDY

Do they...this unattached couple, really like each other?

DARIAN

'Course they do.

CANDY

(giggles)  
Lovebirds. Well, then. They'd "uddle"...

DARIAN

Huh...?

Her voice fluctuating, CANDY acts out what she's describing...

CANDY

Yeah. Don't you think? They'd, like, go all serious on each other. Then, all of a sudden they'd turn giggly. Then serious. Then...it's all eyes. And eyelashes. And, while they huddle, or cuddle, their talk's kind of a muddle.

DARIAN

They'd sound pretty pissed.

CANDY

Like us.

They continue to sip their drinks.

DARIAN

Bronwen thinks she's going to be rich.

CANDY

Bronwen.

DARIAN

My ex. Well, not quite.

CANDY

She gets your fancy car?

DARIAN

It's not widely known, but she owns my company.

Bad luck!

CANDY

On paper.

DARIAN

On paper, like, you mean...paper money?

CANDY

No. On paper, like...on toilet paper.

DARIAN

No kidding! Bad luck for her.

CANDY

At a loss to say more, she laughs.  
After a few moments...

CANDY (CONT'D)

Will you...tell me what you do? I mean, your research, and all, and your company? Clue me in?

DARIAN

Right now?

CANDY

I'll take a rain check.

Pause.

DARIAN

Tell me...

CANDY

Yeah?

DARIAN

Do I still scare you?

CANDY pulls the coffee table close,  
leans back into the couch, puts her  
feet on the table.

CANDY

Absolutely.

DARIAN joins her feet on the table with  
his.

DARIAN

Great. Wouldn't want it any other way.

They laugh together, clink glasses.

DARIAN (CONT'D)

Until a really pretty girl sweeps in. Pretty. Like you.  
(beat)  
D'you mind?

CANDY

No.

DARIAN

I mean, it's okay to call you..."girl"?

CANDY

Long as you add "pretty."

CANDY leans into DARIAN'S shoulder.  
Arm around her, he pulls her closer.

CANDY

I've done something awful. Real awful.

DARIAN

Never!

CANDY

When Professor K peeks into his case tonight, he's gonna get  
the heebie-jeebies.

DARIAN

Lester...?

CANDY

Yeah.

DARIAN

So...?

CANDY

I got a bunch of his crappy papers...

DARIAN

What's between you two...?

CANDY

Nothing much... Other than he came on to me while he was  
still banging my mom.

DARIAN

Where was your dad?

CANDY

Long gone.

DARIAN

So...what happened?

CANDY  
Everything. Just about.

DARIAN  
All this, when? A couple of years ago?

CANDY  
Oh no. More than that.

DARIAN  
Shit!

CANDY  
No big deal.

CANDY slips her feet off the table,  
sits up, and takes a sip of cognac.

CANDY (CONT'D)  
Darian...?

DARIAN  
Yes, Candy...?

CANDY  
I need five hundred bucks...

DARIAN  
Five...

CANDY  
Real, real bad.

(off his look)  
Okay. I wore down my brakes.

(pause)  
Really. Way...way down? Metal to metal? Anyway, my  
neighbors are complaining about the noise.

DARIAN pulls out his wallet, hands it  
to her. She goes through it, takes out  
some bills, hands it back. They talk,  
do a lot more touching inaudibly.

JAHZARA rises and addresses the  
AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA  
Once upon a time, car tires squealed 'round every corner.

She turns the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to the FLOOR LAMP)  
Forget that time, dudes. It dates you.



JAHZARA looks back at CANDY and DARIAN, who have progressed beyond petting. Her back to the AUDIENCE, head down, CANDY is now on her knees between DARIAN'S legs.

JAHZARA turns to the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

Candy, a 500-buck-a-night hooker? Whatever. Keep your eyes on me. We've an important agenda. Lester never figured out who ran off with his papers. Never guessed how I'd entangled myself with Murat. Nor what it would cost me. And us.

She addresses the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the FLOOR LAMP)

Oh, yes. Small postscript to Miss Quill's no-big-deal revelation. Lester used to get her summer jobs in his department... Yup, caught 'em. Year after I graduated. Dropped in on Lester. Still had his office key. Candy? Candy was spread across his desk. I knew that position well. Real well. Lester? Well, he wasn't exactly doin' those pushups just for exercise.

JAHZARA looks towards the empty library.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the empty library)

It was all in the mind, you told me... Literary research. You needed a character study for your upcoming novel.

She turns to the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

I know. Candy was a minor. Borderline. I'll swear.

Dark.

SCENE 2: INTERIOR OF A MANSION -- SUNDAY MORNING

Bright sunshine. The sitting room is empty. In the library, MURAT, DARIAN, and LESTER sit at the boardroom table.

On the table lies LESTER'S briefcase. An open bottle of scotch, glasses. Coffee pot. Coffee mugs. Box of Kleenex. (Restore to the table MURAT'S pile of books, his pad of paper, and his LAPTOP.)

(CANDY and JAHZARA need time to change costumes. They'll enter the sitting room later.)

LESTER'S back is aching. His jacket's slung over a chair, his tie's loose. He sneezes, uses the Kleenex. He's had a bad night, and is clearly expecting a bad day.

DARIAN

(to MURAT)

You're natty this morning, Murat.

LESTER

(sips scotch)

Let's get started.

DARIAN

(to everyone)

Special occasion?

LESTER

Damn it, Marchant...

LESTER opens his briefcase and pulls out a stack of papers.

DARIAN

(to LESTER)

Could've wrapped this up last night, Lester. If you hadn't stormed out.

(beat)

Nothing untoward at home, I hope.

LESTER

(coughs, pats the papers)

It's all here, gentlemen...

DARIAN

You look kind of...drawn. Backache?

LESTER

...Finally.

DARIAN

So be a rogue. Treat yourself to a new mattress.

LESTER

Got the call.

DARIAN

Should've answered it. Today looks like it sucks to be Lester Kalotakis.

LESTER

Stuff it, Marchant, I'm not in the mood.

(takes a sip of scotch)

Cause: hydrogen. Conclusively. Set off by a spark.

DARIAN

Good thing the building was empty.

LESTER

(to DARIAN)

Moreover...a week beforehand, you formed a company: Deep Void Corporation.

DARIAN

Glad you like the name.

LESTER

All coincidences, you say?

LESTER squirms in his chair. His back is killing him. He takes another drink.

LESTER (CONT'D)

What does Deep Void plan to produce?

DARIAN

What would you like it to produce, Lester?

LESTER

Who are your shareholders? Your advisory board?

LESTER turns painfully to MURAT.

LESTER (CONT'D)

(to MURAT)

What's your percentage?

(MURAT says nothing)

I hope you have a work permit.

DARIAN

(to LESTER)

Perhaps Murat doesn't plan on working.

(beat)

How did you know about the advisory board?

LESTER

(to MURAT)

We take a dim view of unauthorized private enterprise.

DARIAN

It's legitimate.

LESTER

My colleagues and I... This university...

DARIAN

(looks at MURAT)

Any crisis can jump-start a business.

LESTER

Any?

DARIAN

Like...9/11.

LESTER

My demise...your opportunity?

DARIAN

Why not?

LESTER

9/11. Explain.

DARIAN

The Crucifixion bolsters the New Testament, art and architecture, and plagues of touristic gift shops outside every holy site.

MURAT points at his pad of paper.

MURAT

I hope to simulate the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Pause.

LESTER

Another conspiracy theory...?

MURAT

Their collapse was almost free-fall.

DARIAN

(to LESTER)

Murat's sideline, I assure you. Unsuccessful, albeit noble.

MURAT

Free-fall. Why free-fall?

LESTER

You anticipate a market opportunity, then...

DARIAN  
(to LESTER)  
You're repeating yourself.

LESTER  
...Just a few days before one of our buildings blows up?

DARIAN  
Entrepreneurs, Lester, are to be admired for their foresight  
and handsomely rewarded. Not reviled.

MURAT  
Or tortured.

DARIAN  
Torture. Bedrock of life, love, and sustainable religion.  
Torture the revered. Revere the tortured.

Awkward silence. DARIAN and LESTER  
stare at MURAT.

LESTER reads from a sheet.

LESTER  
(to MURAT)  
You attended a conference in Dubai.

MURAT  
I attend many conferences.

LESTER continues to study the sheet.

MURAT now openly expresses annoyance.

LESTER  
(sarcastic)  
Tokyo, Beijing, Singapore...

MURAT  
Tel Aviv, Istanbul, Vienna...

LESTER  
You travel more extensively, I must say, than some of our  
esteemed full-time faculty...

MURAT  
Perhaps, sir, with respect, sir...they have little to say.

LESTER  
Dubai... You stayed, how many days?

MURAT  
Most recently?

LESTER  
Most recently.

MURAT  
Some of the places...

LESTER  
Yes?

MURAT  
I took them in on the same trip.

LESTER  
Dubai.

MURAT  
Yes?

LESTER  
How many days?

MURAT  
Three.

LESTER  
According to record, four days are unaccounted for.

DARIAN  
This is all very dramatic, Lester--

LESTER  
Shut up, Marchant.  
(to MURAT)

Well?

MURAT  
Perhaps I visited a nearby country.

LESTER  
Pakistan?

MURAT  
Iran is closer.

LESTER  
Indeed. Who covered your expenses?

DARIAN  
(to LESTER)  
Don't play coy, Lester.

LESTER  
(to DARIAN)  
Apparently, in your Dubai session, the two of you engaged in a shouting match with your audience. Something about withholding vital information. Stealing ideas. Apparently, Professor Marchant, you make a habit of it.

DARIAN

Please note: two "apparently's" don't a certainty make.

LESTER

(to MURAT)

Share your room with anyone?

DARIAN

Don't answer that, Murat.

Silence.

MURAT

My brother.

LESTER

Ah! Yunus Tahsin, the Guantanamo detainee. He's on your team too, Marchant?

DARIAN

How did you guess that Deep Void is to have an advisory board? Angling for a seat--?

LESTER lifts his arm to silence DARIAN.

LESTER

(to MURAT)

You hinted at torture.

DARIAN

So did I.

MURAT

(to LESTER)

You do take a dim view of that too, don't you, sir?

LESTER

Don't you dare play me for an idiot.

LESTER sneezes and works his nose with a Kleenex.

DARIAN

(to LESTER)

Then quit carrying on like one, Les. Murat's simply referring to your handling of this inquisition. Go get some sleep. You're having a tough time hanging onto the rails.

JAHZARA enters the empty sitting room. She paces, deep in thought.

MURAT

It's obvious, isn't it?

LESTER  
(angrily)  
What is?

MURAT  
"Enhanced interrogation" of "terror" suspects is a profitable business.

After an awkward silence, the MEN  
continue talking inaudibly.

Spotlight on the sitting room, where  
JAHZARA is still pacing.

CANDY enters the sitting room, carrying  
a bulky folder and a hundred-dollar  
bill. She places the folder and bill  
on the coffee table and sits down on  
the couch.

CANDY  
(to JAHZARA)  
Hi.

JAHZARA looks at CANDY in surprise.  
Shakes her head. They stare at each  
other, at a loss for words. Then--

JAHZARA  
Nice. You too.

She joins CANDY on the couch. They  
both work at being friendly.

CANDY points at JAHZARA'S clothes.

CANDY  
Nice. Yeah. Love it...

JAHZARA  
Thanks.

Pause.

CANDY  
Long time.

JAHZARA  
Mmm.

Awkward silence.

CANDY points to the hundred-dollar bill  
on the coffee table.



CANDY  
Found it on the floor.

JAHZARA  
The bill?

CANDY  
Yeah. Hundred bucks.

JAHZARA  
Not mine. Definitely.

CANDY  
One of the boys, then...?

JAHZARA  
Hey, keep it. A hundred bucks!

CANDY  
Couldn't do that. No.

JAHZARA  
Okay.

CANDY  
Yeah.

JAHZARA  
So... Okay.

Silence.

CANDY points at the folder.

CANDY  
You can take a peek.

JAHZARA throws CANDY a questioning look and picks up the folder. She slips out a few sheets and reads to herself.

JAHZARA  
You found this on the floor too, Candy?

CANDY  
Not...quite.

JAHZARA  
Then...?

CANDY  
Lester's briefcase.

JAHZARA  
Oh...

Yeah... Oh.

CANDY

Pause.

JAHZARA  
(waves a sheet)

Know what this means?

CANDY

Kinda...

JAHZARA

Want me to warn them?

CANDY

Sure... Darian's student. Friend o' yours?

JAHZARA

Well...kind of.

CANDY

No offence... But that dude's so behind the eight-ball.

JAHZARA

Scientists, right?

CANDY

If there's, like, several lines to a free buffet, I'll bet that dude joins the longest.

Silence, while JAHZARA reads. She pulls out more sheets and flips through them while CANDY drinks from her mug.

CANDY (CONT'D)  
(with concern)

You still pissed?

JAHZARA

About...?

CANDY

You know...

JAHZARA  
(overly indignant)

Hell, no!

CANDY

So... Great. I guess...

JAHZARA

Yeah.

CANDY  
Then... You and Lester--?

JAHZARA  
(shakes her head)  
No...

CANDY  
(shakes her head)  
No...?

JAHZARA  
(shakes her head)  
No.

CANDY  
Cool. You're real nice, you know... Rich?

JAHZARA  
No. Definitely not.

CANDY  
I mean, like, you must make plenty per hour.

JAHZARA  
Not the hours I work.

JAHZARA points at the hundred-dollar bill.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Hey, you really should keep that bill...

CANDY  
Nah. Well...

CANDY rolls up the bill. Decides to hold on to it.

JAHZARA holds up the sheets of paper.

JAHZARA  
Why...?

CANDY  
Felt like it.

JAHZARA  
Won't let Lester gaff ya, huh?

CANDY  
We can handle him. We girls.

While JAHZARA flips through the folder, they continue talking inaudibly.

Spotlight on the library, where LESTER is still fidgeting, working with the Kleenex, sipping scotch.

MURAT

(to DARIAN)

I believe that if we give Professor Kalotakis exactly what he wants, he'll leave us alone.

LESTER

Indeed!

DARIAN

(to MURAT)

If you're thinking of reopening our deal, Murat, this is one heck of a way--

LESTER

Deal? What deal?

MURAT

I should begin at the beginning.

LESTER prepares to take notes.

LESTER

Best place. Best place.

MURAT

However, I signed a non-disclosure agreement--

LESTER writes as he speaks.

LESTER

But higher things are at stake, right? Twin Towers high.

MURAT

Forced--

DARIAN

Murat!

LESTER

'Course you were, boy. 'Course you were.

MURAT

Circumstances...

LESTER

Yes, indeed. Forced.

DARIAN stands up.

DARIAN

Step outside, Murat.

LESTER  
No, no!

DARIAN  
Now!

LESTER  
Go on, Dr. Tahsin, go on.

DARIAN  
Up, up!

MURAT leans back in his seat.

DARIAN  
Step outside, Murat.

LESTER  
Stay right here. Right here.

MURAT  
(to DARIAN)  
Please leave us, Professor Marchant.

LESTER  
Forced indeed. Yes. This, I must hear.

DARIAN is annoyed with MURAT. He tries to pour coffee from the pot but the pot is empty.

MURAT  
(to DARIAN)  
I need some time.

LESTER  
(to DARIAN)  
Leave us.

DARIAN  
Guys...?

LESTER  
(waves DARIAN away)  
Go, go.

DARIAN  
(tries to remain cool)  
Okay, Murat, get things off your chest... I'm getting myself a coffee.

DARIAN strides to the door and exits.

Silence. After a while, MURAT and LESTER continue talking inaudibly.

Spotlight on the sitting room, where JAHZARA is still flipping through LESTER'S folder.

CANDY

I like Darian.

JAHZARA  
(with awe at CANDY'S familiarity)

Darian.

CANDY

Don't you?

JAHZARA stuffs the sheets back into the folder.

JAHZARA

And you want to show it.

CANDY

Last night, I kinda... I kind of, you know, got to know him.

JAHZARA lays the folder on the coffee table.

JAHZARA

He's married, Candy.

CANDY

Right.

JAHZARA points to the folder.

JAHZARA

Hey, then give it him directly. Show 'em what they're up against.

Pause.

CANDY

He laughed it off.

JAHZARA

You showed it him already? Darian?

CANDY

"Take it away," he said.

JAHZARA

Why me...?

CANDY

We gotta help him.

JAHZARA  
I'm a reporter.

CANDY  
So? Great. I trust you.

JAHZARA  
That makes you stupid.

They continue talking inaudibly.  
Spotlight on the library.

MURAT  
Professor Marchant is right.

LESTER  
About...?

MURAT  
But I must.

LESTER  
(confused)  
Must?

MURAT  
Yes.

LESTER  
(still confused, humoring  
MURAT)  
Yes, yes. I see. You must... Otherwise he'll steal you  
blind. Right?

MURAT  
Do you believe in scientific progress?

LESTER  
Who doesn't?

MURAT  
At all costs?

LESTER  
No, sir.

MURAT  
Who are the loudest proponents of sufficiently slow progress  
in areas of vital concern?

LESTER  
You're asking me?

MURAT  
Those who profit the most.

LESTER  
Like Darian Marchant...?

MURAT  
Overly rapid progress in vital areas--

LESTER  
Like what? Medicines? Drugs?

MURAT  
--lead to unemployment...

LESTER  
Surely--

MURAT  
Imagine the most bloated industries collapsing...

LESTER  
Bloated.

MURAT  
Their leaders--

LESTER  
The fat cats. I get you: you're proposing... You'd consider  
choking off scientific progress?

MURAT  
Never.

LESTER  
Then...? Professor Marchant?

MURAT  
I am talking about the gatekeepers of the funding of what is  
commonly called advanced research.

LESTER  
Gatekeepers.

MURAT  
The political gatekeepers.

LESTER  
Odd label. Aren't they supposed to promote progress?

MURAT  
They give the most money to the least productive projects.

LESTER  
Aha! Unlike vital areas like your supervisor's?

MURAT  
Similarly to corporate bail-outs, the gatekeeper politicians  
throw the most cash at the least efficient organizations.



LESTER  
(sarcastic)  
Now why would they do that?

MURAT  
To slow things down, of course. In this case, their death.

LESTER  
Whose death?

MURAT  
Their own.

LESTER  
To save face? Do I whiff justifiable sour grapes, here?

MURAT  
The deaths of the inefficient organizations themselves are inevitable.

LESTER  
(consults a sheet)  
Listen, I'm in a position to cut a deal... Who's behind all this...?

(waits; no response)  
Behind you. Our levelled building. Darian Marchant. Deep Void Corporation. The lot.

Silence.

MURAT  
The United States.

LESTER snuffles into a Kleenex tissue.

LESTER  
Consider carefully, Dr. Tahsin.

MURAT  
Your Federal Government.

LESTER pats his papers.

LESTER  
Let me rephrase myself. This material, my task force, this college will sink you, your academic career. Your response?

MURAT  
Your National Security Agency.

LESTER  
Elaborate...

MURAT  
(looks directly at LESTER)  
The event...can be replicated... Any building. Anywhere.

Silence. LESTER grabs a Kleenex.

LESTER

Do I...? Correct me if I'm wrong. Are you suggesting a threat against our president? Or is this a confession?

They continue a heated debate inaudibly.

Spotlight on the sitting room.

Coffee mug in hand, jovial, DARIAN enters the sitting room, ready to harness today's events to his advantage.

When CANDY sees him, she leaps to her feet, delighted, her own mug in hand.

CANDY

Hi again. When will you, like, show me how you create new stuff 'n' things?

DARIAN

New stuff?

CANDY

I'm off work tomorrow.

DARIAN

Sure, my dear. Long as you promise me a ride in your jalopy. After you fix those...you know...brakes.

(raises his mug)

And brew more of this.

CANDY

(seductively)

If that's all it takes...

DARIAN

Oh, and find Lester some painkillers.

Deep in thought, DARIAN sits down on the couch next to JAHZARA and drinks from his mug.

CANDY exits, taking the hundred-dollar bill with her.

JAHZARA

She goes for you.

DARIAN

(distracted)

Yeah. Like...wow...

JAHZARA  
A good roommate.

DARIAN  
You bet.

JAHZARA  
High-brows turn that bitch on something fierce, I hear.  
Better stock up on Cialis.

DARIAN  
Absolutely.

Silence.

JAHZARA  
I have this plan... A perfect way to get him, them, off your  
backs. Fast. Lester's dithering. The college. Everyone.

DARIAN  
It's already in progress...

JAHZARA  
Don't kid me.

DARIAN  
By tomorrow, he'll be on his knees, pleading to get back to  
teaching his class. Our Lester. Trust me.

JAHZARA  
Lester's precious task force...summarily disbanded?

DARIAN  
Disbanded, discredited, trashed.

JAHZARA  
No way. But, if so, why not walk out on him right now?

DARIAN  
Vanity. Let's say, I crave the attention.

JAHZARA  
Murat's susceptible. Your words.

DARIAN  
Lester knows nothing. Your words.

Silence.

JAHZARA  
Candy found this hundred-dollar bill.

DARIAN  
Oh? A hundred? Good for her. Something about a brake job.

JAHZARA  
I don't get it.

DARIAN  
You don't have to.

Silence.

JAHZARA points at the folder on the  
coffee table

JAHZARA  
What about Lester's precious papers?

DARIAN  
Mishandled.

JAHZARA  
Know what's in them?

DARIAN  
Small-time. Off-beam. You can give it a rest.

JAHZARA  
Like hell.

(pause)  
Tell me... Tell me it was an accident.

DARIAN  
What?

JAHZARA  
Say it.

DARIAN  
Murat hasn't convinced you? There are no accidents. No such  
animal exists.

JAHZARA  
Just say it!

DARIAN  
It's easy to get stuck on him, Jahzara. He has this way  
about him...

JAHZARA  
You're feeding him to the sharks.

DARIAN takes her hand.

DARIAN  
You're easy to get stuck on too. Real easy.

JAHZARA pulls her hand away.

JAHZARA

I know. You asked me out.

DARIAN

It's Candy. Right? Candy bothers you.

JAHZARA

Veronica Chou's alive. Right? Back in China.

DARIAN

Step lightly. There's enough clodhoppers on this case already.

JAHZARA

Why's Murat so...?

(searches for the right word)

DARIAN

Obstinate?

JAHZARA

Apocalyptic.

DARIAN

Think beyond.

Spotlight on the library.

MURAT places what looks like an aspirin PILL on the boardroom table. He rises to his feet, pulls a CELL PHONE out of his pocket. Places the CELL PHONE carefully on the table beside the PILL.

LESTER, his eyes on MURAT'S PILL and PHONE, rises to his feet and backs away from the table. Fearful or skeptical? It's hard to tell. When he speaks, LESTER is wary, as if humoring a madman.

MURAT points at the PILL.

MURAT

In a higher dimensional space, our entire visible universe fits into a pill that size.

LESTER works a Kleenex tissue.

LESTER

Folded? Crumpled? Or...sliced and stacked?

MURAT remains quiet, thoughtful.

LESTER (CONT'D)

Dare I say, Dr. Tahsin...that would make your pill...rather heavy?

MURAT

(as if to himself)

A well-placed, quantum-scaled opening.

LESTER

Sorry, I--

MURAT

A single pinprick... Just one... Imagine. Unlimited information. Energy in perpetuity.

LESTER

(frowns)

A wrongly-placed pinprick?

The library TELEPHONE rings three times. The sound makes LESTER jump.

MURAT speaks firmly, with conviction.

MURAT

(eye on the PHONE)

Following such a pinprick, the center of the sun would seem hospitable.

LESTER'S back is killing him. He's sure MURAT is nuts and a powder keg. He badly wants to give up, clear out.

LESTER

Indeed... Your agreement. Your nondisclosure thing. You and Marchant...?

MURAT raises his arms skyward.

MURAT

It's everywhere. Energy. All around you. Right next to you. And it's free!

Spotlight on the sitting room, where again the library PHONE rings three times.

JAHZARA

Beyond apocalyptic...?

DARIAN

(nods his head)

Wait. Wait for the blow-back.

JAHZARA turns her attention to the library, where the PHONE just rang.

JAHZARA

Lester's the bait. And Candy? I just don't get it.

DARIAN

Murat dreams of flying, Miss Jones. Merely confessing it, I guess, won't make our enemies sprout wings--

JAHZARA'S BlackBerry rings. She takes it from her purse, looks at it briefly.

JAHZARA

(to DARIAN)

My publisher.

JAHZARA puts the BlackBerry to her ear.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(into the BlackBerry)

Tom... Tom!... TOM!!

She listens, becomes increasingly agitated, and jumps to her feet. She glares at DARIAN, who is quietly sipping his coffee.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(into the BlackBerry)

General who?

She holds the BlackBerry at arm's length and stares at it.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

He hung up.

DARIAN

I guess he's not anxiously awaiting your report.

BlackBerry in hand, JAHZARA paces.

Spotlight on the library, where CANDY enters carrying a tray, two glasses of water and a bottle of Tylenol.

CANDY

Excuse me.

LESTER

(waves CANDY away)

Not now, not now, not now!

CANDY glares at LESTER, turns, and exits.

LESTER, exasperated, continues arguing with MURAT inaudibly.

Spotlight on the sitting room, where  
JAHZARA is still pacing.

JAHZARA  
I was right... Murat needs a lawyer... His trust is  
misplaced...

DARIAN  
In me? Or in you?

JAHZARA stops pacing.

JAHZARA  
You fucking... Who's sponsoring you?

DARIAN  
You're starting to sound a lot like your Hellenic mentor.

JAHZARA  
What agencies?

DARIAN  
(sympathetically)  
I agree. Nothing's ever what it seems.

CANDY appears in the doorway to the  
sitting room. She is still carrying  
the tray, the glasses of water, the  
bottle of Tylenol. She is nervous,  
teetering, listening in.

JAHZARA punches a number into her  
BlackBerry, puts it to her ear.

JAHZARA  
(into the BlackBerry)  
Cut me some slack, Tom... NO... YOU STOP!... YOU listen to  
ME!

LESTER and MURAT hear the commotion,  
and rush into the sitting room.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(into the BlackBerry)  
WHAT...?

In disbelief, JAHZARA listens to her  
BlackBerry.

CANDY bangs her tray down onto the  
coffee table and the glasses crash to  
the floor.

JAHZARA puts away her BlackBerry.



Both house TELEPHONES ring. When they stop...

LESTER

Nut-cases. Loony tunes and nut-cases.

JAHZARA

(to LESTER and DARIAN)

Don't deal me out yet, boys.

JAHZARA scoops LESTER'S folder from the coffee table and strides towards the exit.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

My choices have just expanded.

CANDY scurries out after JAHZARA.

DARIAN takes LESTER by the arm.

DARIAN

Lester. You and I better talk.

Dark.

SCENE 3: INTERIOR OF A MANSION -- SUNDAY EVENING

Darkened. The sitting room, the library, the tables: all are untidy.

Time shifts between the present and a future THREE YEARS NINE MONTHS hence. As JAHZARA slides in and out of reality, her mood swings, and the present and the future alternately clarify and overlap. MURAT treats her with affection.

Outside, SIRENS are whining, and HELICOPTERS roaring. The glare of airborne SEARCHLIGHTS sweeps the rooms.

In the sitting room, facing the AUDIENCE, MURAT slouches back in the couch. His LAPTOP sits on the coffee table in front of him, its screen facing him. His CELL PHONE and his "aspirin" PILL lie beside his LAPTOP.

The doorbell rings. MURAT stays seated, shuts his eyes, smiles in anticipation of who's about to enter.

The front door slams shut. Moments later, JAHZARA appears in the library. She is carrying a bottle of VODKA from which she takes occasional sips.

Early in this scene, time is fuzzy; it wavers uncertainly between the present and the future.

LESTER is heard from off-stage.

JAHZARA addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

I had a plan, right? Right? Well, my plan didn't include the cops, the FBI, nor any "Police Line Do Not Cross" tape... I wanted to warn Lester, but things blew up out there. Totally. Besides, I'd kissed off my job already. So, I'd barely hit "send" on how I'd cock-sucked my way to graduation-

-

LESTER (O.S.)

Not true, Jahzara!

JAHZARA

I'd have confessed to anything. Anything.

LESTER (O.S.)

You were a good student.

JAHZARA

Anything! And in that same e-mail, I added how you'd published stuff I'd ripped off and dressed up as my thesis.

MURAT points at his LAPTOP.

MURAT

This is it. Kalotakis's paper.

LESTER (O.S.)

"Durrell and Miller: A Post-colonialist View."

MURAT

Kalotakis doesn't credit you.

JAHZARA

Poor Lester.

LESTER (O.S.)

All needless, futile, while Darian money-bags Marchant gets off scot-free.

JAHZARA takes a few sips of VODKA and address the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

Candy, bless her blonde heart, promised she'd chip in if need be... And I swore I'd go public on Darian, but wasn't quite sure what we'd pin on him, when Candy rips my BlackBerry and Lester's folder out of my hands and takes off. I chase after her. That's when a circus of sirens cuts us off... All of us... I forgot to mention that Darian and Lester had been tailing us too. Anyway, men in suits sweep the four of us into some campus security hole. There, after we're stripped clean, a cheese from the NSA yells "National Security" over a speakerphone. Tells us to stay put, that's Darian, Lester, Candy and me. Orders the suits and uniforms to get lost... Laces into me. What the fuck am I up to? What did he think I should be up to, I ask. "Scrubbing washrooms," he says. I'd be lucky to spend the rest of my life scrubbing washrooms. Then Lester lets loose. "The torture of Dr. Tahsin's brother," Lester begins. "Alleged torture," the general yells. "Extraordinary rendition," Lester says. "Whatever. It fuels Dr. Tahsin's obsession with the annihilation of humanity. A delusional genius," Lester rambles on, "wavering on the brink of insanity." Clearly, Dr. Tahsin had blown up Darian's lab. Lester's conclusion: "Case closed."

(pause; lowers her voice)

Funny, when I first stumbled into him, Murat seemed sort of insignificant.

MURAT

Jahzara...

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

Your Jahzara might do better offering the Osama bin Laden gang a burial-cave on Mars. Oceanfront. Prime.

MURAT

Perhaps they're out there too.

JAHZARA

Who?

MURAT

The Jihadists.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

I gave up everything to a schizo, who's making mathematically sure, on the Pentagon's own payroll, that the next generation of mass murderers can wipe out our solar system. How do I know this? I planted Lester and me into most scenes. The rest of this story I made up, am still making up...

(looks up)

News helicopters. Army helicopters. Might as well be UFOs from hyperspace.

MURAT

They sent you to negotiate. So...negotiate.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

General "Quick-draw" clicks off just as I was saying, "He trusts me." "Quick-draw" comes back for a second and says, "Hold that thought." Goes off line again. Finally, comes back, says, "Okay, make the boy happy. Go. Move your ass."

(to MURAT)

Negotiate what, Murat?

MURAT looks at his LAPTOP.

MURAT

The program is running...

JAHZARA

I'm supposed to keep you happy.

MURAT

My calculations are correct.

JAHZARA walks over to MURAT and puts her bottle on the coffee table.

JAHZARA

Are you firing off messages?

MURAT  
I've spoken with Veronica Chou.

JAHZARA  
(finger to her mouth)  
Shh! They're taping us.  
(reconsiders)  
I guess it doesn't matter...

MURAT  
Veronica's in China.

JAHZARA  
(whispers)  
Safe?

MURAT  
Of course.

JAHZARA  
Then, what the hell--?

MURAT  
She took the secret with her.

JAHZARA  
What secret?

MURAT  
Well, one version of it.

JAHZARA  
The Chinese...?

MURAT  
Transferred ten million...

JAHZARA  
Oh, God, shut up!

MURAT  
...to an off-shore account.

JAHZARA  
SHIT!

Abruptly, JAHZARA darts around the stage, poking into nooks and crannies for microphones. Finally, she examines the FLOOR LAMP, which convinces her that the building is bugged. Seemingly resigned to being spied on, she returns to MURAT. They stare at each other.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
You sold out to the communist Chinese?

MURAT

They transferred the funds to Cyprus. My brother's account.

JAHZARA

Damn it, Murat! I can't take this shit any more--

MURAT

Don't you see? This way, the Chinese get what we want them to get--

JAHZARA

We...?

MURAT

Aren't we...on the same team?

JAHZARA

We...?

MURAT

To compensate my brother for Guantanamo...

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

All I ever wanted was an interview with Barack Obama.

MURAT

President Obama has taken years...

JAHZARA

(to MURAT)

Why me...?

MURAT

You should have ducked out. Actually, Professor Marchant and I... Let's say, you helped move things along.

JAHZARA

(incredulous)

Move? Candy. Lester. Darian. Me... I helped move the Pentagon along too? And the NSA? Like, General Quick-draw?

MURAT

He was as surprised as you are.

JAHZARA

You got me sacked, Murat.

(beat)

On second thoughts...

MURAT

The Pentagon saves face for its investment.

JAHZARA

Deep Void?

MURAT

Deep Void gets funded...

JAHZARA

Deep Void's a front, right?

MURAT

(affectionately)

I'm really glad we met.

JAHZARA

(softly)

Are you?

MURAT

Princess Jahzara.

JAHZARA

Say it again.

MURAT

Princess Jahzara.

Outside, SEARCHLIGHTS are glaring, SIRENS whining. For a moment, the ear-shattering LOUDNESS of the HELICOPTERS interrupts the conversation. When the roar fades, MURAT looks upward.

MURAT (CONT'D)

(loudly)

Doors have opened. New doors.

JAHZARA

(gestures)

So... What's with the artillery?

MURAT

Someone out there wants to unite me with heavenly virgins.

JAHZARA

Don't say that...

MURAT

They fear progress.

JAHZARA

Darian Marchant. Everyone.

(beat)

What's your room like?

MURAT

My room?

JAHZARA

Where you live.

Like any other. MURAT

Messy? JAHZARA

Tidy. MURAT

A mother's darling.  
(beat)  
Here, loosen up. JAHZARA

JAHZARA offers MURAT her bottle of  
VODKA. He takes the bottle, toasts her  
and sips from it.

Princess. MURAT

Why me? JAHZARA

Because you're beautiful. MURAT

Darling. (sadly) JAHZARA

MURAT returns the bottle of VODKA to  
the coffee table.

I need a spokesperson. MURAT

You need a lawyer. Real bad. Real fast. JAHZARA

A kind of...creative writer. A Director of Communication. MURAT

JAHZARA picks up the bottle, raises it  
to her lips, drinks. Then--

Michelle's tough. JAHZARA

I need someone who can smell roses. MURAT

You're nuts. Did anyone ever tell you that? JAHZARA

An awkward silence.



MURAT

What's the world's fastest growing economy?

JAHZARA

China.

MURAT

Have you noticed how perfectionist the Chinese are?

JAHZARA

Creepy, isn't it?

MURAT

My world will improve on China.

JAHZARA

Your world...

MURAT

Where nobody goes hungry.

JAHZARA

A tasty supper for everyone.

MURAT

Why not?

JAHZARA

Even for those Gitmo jump-suit types...? Just before they're fed into a black hole?

(beat)

Okay. I get it... Cars won't ever need gassing up...

MURAT

Exactly. In fact, we focus a beam of evolutionary instructions into our adjacent hyperspace through a sub-quantum pinprick...

JAHZARA

I haven't the faintest idea--

MURAT

Analogy, Jahzara! Analogy. Think of a syringe, jabbed into the ground, allowed to trail. Pipe your request to the oil deep below to organize, refine, siphon itself into your fuel tank. On the move. Clean, convenient, on demand.

JAHZARA

Presto! New from the Coca Cola Company. Diet Coke through a hyper-straw. Self-bottled in hyperspace.

MURAT

Under license, etcetera.

JAHZARA snaps her fingers.

JAHZARA

Hold it! Bert...you, has just invented, or is about to invent, some kind of chemical process, far out, that deep-pocket Ernie wants... Someone has to grease the wheels, keep Ernie's cash flowing. But you don't plan on giving up the secret. Okay...? Now, who's Ernie?

MURAT puts his finger to his lips.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

What's a newly unemployed, English major good for, anyway.

MURAT

I requested you.

JAHZARA

Talk sense!

MURAT

You're sworn to secrecy.

JAHZARA

Okay. For starters, who in hell's name is running this show?

Pause.

MURAT

I am...

JAHZARA

You?

MURAT

Me. And I can replicate what happened to Marchant's lab anytime... The explosion.

JAHZARA

Oh, Jeez.

MURAT

At will. They believe it.

JAHZARA

Who? General Quick-draw? The Pentagon's Joint Cheeses?

MURAT

(waves)

They. Out there.

JAHZARA

Them? Don't fool yourself. They're here because of Obama. The Secret Service. Remember?

(to the AUDIENCE)

He can blow things up at will... That's sick, right? Can't be just because of his brother. It's some kind of deep-seated psycho-shit. Maybe worse. God, what could be worse?

JAHZARA looks towards the empty library  
as if someone was there.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Bear with me now, Lester, dear. I know this hurts.

JAHZARA turns to the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
If I leave, I leave with nothing. Those crews out there?  
They're here to protect him. Oh, dear Lord, I'm insane.

JAHZARA goes, kneels on the sofa next  
to MURAT, and puts her arms around him.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Do you like my perfume?

MURAT  
(smells her)  
Pink roses.

JAHZARA  
Smooch.

They kiss deeply. Then--

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
This ten mil of yours, that off-shore account...

MURAT  
Yes?

JAHZARA  
You're gonna help yourself to some of it, right? For  
expenses...

A TELEPHONE rings three times.

JAHZARA stands up.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Kill that thought. Your brother. What's his thing...?

MURAT  
He exists.

JAHZARA  
Is he nice?

MURAT  
He's been on CNN.

JAHZARA

(to herself)

Come to think of it... This yarn's made up. Guantanamo Bay. Torture. Siphons from hyperspace. A bogus plot on Obama's life. All so that the mighty NSA can feed the Chinese some science fiction bull. Make the reds believe they're getting value from Bert, my death-wish-mad Turk. It's a hoax, a hoax and I'm buying into it. Or a flop. Whatever. It's okay, though. General Quick-draw. The yelling.

Both house TELEPHONES ring. When they stop...

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to MURAT)

You and Darian try to work your con on Lester, then I crash in. Now, we're all working for the Government. Don't say it... You can predict the future too.

MURAT

That's no problem.

JAHZARA

No shit.

MURAT

But there's no changing the past.

JAHZARA

Pity.

The LAPTOP rings. MURAT looks at it.

MURAT

(to JAHZARA)

Professor Marchant.

To answer the call, MURAT attends to the keyboard with his hands, then he sits back.

We now hear DARIAN'S voice over the LAPTOP'S speakers.

DARIAN (O.S.)

(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)

Enough, Murat. Okay? Enough, now. Stop this mind-fucking insanity. You've upped the ante. We got what we want. The investigation will stop cold. Okay. But you're still pissing everyone off. Not okay. Pull the plug now: your computer, your phone, your brain. Mosey out, empty-handed, arms real high...for the cameras. Just remember, there's a pretty damn influential lynch-party out here.

The HELICOPTERS are suddenly LOUDER.  
When the noise recedes...

DARIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)  
You still there, kid...? Smile at Jahzara for me, will you?

MURAT smiles at JAHZARA. While DARIAN continues speaking, she kneels on the sofa and straightens MURAT'S collar.

DARIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)  
Jahz...? Pull him out. Easy.

JAHZARA  
He won't budge.

DARIAN (O.S.)  
(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)  
Take care of her, Murat.

MURAT shows no intention of leaving.

JAHZARA  
(to MURAT)  
You must be starving. Want me to rustle something up?

DARIAN (O.S.)  
(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)  
Move it, guys. This isn't the time.

JAHZARA  
(to MURAT)  
I'm a good cook, you know.

DARIAN (O.S.)  
(over the LAPTOP'S speaker)  
The FBI's already subpoenaed everything except Lester's laundry.  
(beat)  
They figured out the code.

JAHZARA rises to her feet.

JAHZARA  
What code?

MURAT points to his CELL PHONE.

MURAT  
A certain ring tone.

MURAT shuts his LAPTOP, rises to his feet. Exits quietly with the LAPTOP.

JAHZARA, bottle in hand, teeters  
towards the AUDIENCE.

While she speaks, LESTER slips into the  
library. He is dressed in a bathrobe  
and slippers, and is holding an open  
OUZO bottle, a shot glass, and some  
papers. He sits at the boardroom table  
and spreads out his papers. He pours  
himself a drink, glances at the papers,  
finds a pen, and makes some notes.

The SIRENS and HELICOPTERS go silent.  
The SEARCHLIGHTS go out. These events  
signal a time shift of our story three  
years and nine months into the future.

JAHZARA addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
I'm dying for a Rolling Stones classic, but we can't afford  
the royalties.

LESTER  
Fees.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
Whatever. But if anyone has "Happy Days are Here Again" on  
his cell, switch off. That's the ditty. The code. Didn't  
find out about it 'til later. "Happy Days." Key to the  
greatest power and control man has ever seen. Well, was  
supposed to have seen. "Happy Days are Here Again."

LESTER  
You miss him.

JAHZARA  
(to LESTER, tearful)  
Yeah.

While JAHZARA sobs, CANDY, dressed in  
her lightweight coat, hair loose,  
enters through the doorway to the  
library. She's carrying a teddy bear.

LESTER  
(to CANDY)  
How's Aris?

CANDY  
(to JAHZARA)  
Asleep.  
Coming, dear?

JAHZARA addresses the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE, gently)  
That's my son. Aris. Imagine. Candy Quill baby-sits my kid while I mess with our script.

LESTER  
(to JAHZARA)  
We're about finished for the night, don't you think, dear?

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
He's three, ladies and gentlemen. Three, with the cutest eyes you've ever seen.  
(to LESTER)  
Got the stomach to go through my ending again, Lester?

LESTER  
Not tonight.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
It's the bottle. Science writing and booze don't mix.

LESTER  
Para-science.

JAHZARA  
Do it, Murat. Get this lousy script to intelligently self-assemble itself...

LESTER  
(gets up)  
I'm done for the night.

JAHZARA  
(to the AUDIENCE)  
Lester gave up on casting Leonardo DiCaprio as Lester Kalotakis.

LESTER takes CANDY by the arm and ushers her back to the door. CANDY is still holding the teddy bear.

LESTER  
(to CANDY)  
Let's go see the baby.

LESTER and CANDY exit.

JAHZARA continues addressing the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

Being here, where it all started for me... Hey, it's Candy who sneaks us into this place. To the college we're persona non grata.

We still don't hear the sound of SIRENS and HELICOPTERS. And the SEARCHLIGHTS remain extinguished.

We're still in the future, a future three years and nine months hence.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(to the AUDIENCE)

Let's catch our breath. Murat never got to demolish this building. Pity, you say? Heard of Herbert Hoover setting people up? Well, the only authentic part of this saga that ran on the internet, full color, high res, is still to come.

Angry, JAHZARA points at the FLOOR LAMP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

You've seen the clip? Big deal.

She cups her ear.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

I'm your fucking screen-saver?

(to the AUDIENCE)

Where was I...? Right. The rest of the takes and NSA wire-taps were classified. Everything in sight was seized, classified, locked down. Murat's tidy apartment included.

She paces the stage.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

I did say "takes" not "tapes," but what do I know about hidden cameras or data harvesting? "We have yet to confirm your role," General Quick-draw yells at me. "My role," I yell back. "My role? To blow up the world? Or fall for your National Security crap about a plot against Obama?" "Consider yourself lucky, Miss Jones," he says. "We're letting you off lightly." Lightly. As in: "Choir Boy 'Lightly' Molests Priest." Bad line, Jahzara. Hit "delete."

From off-stage, we hear MURAT speak to her. He's actually in her imagination.

MURAT (O.S.)

Why are you talking to yourself?

JAHZARA

Darian sold you out.



JAHZARA turns away from the AUDIENCE,  
approaches the couch where MURAT sat.  
She acts as if he's there. He's not.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

(tearful)

Who else is there to talk to, dear?

MURAT (O.S.)

There's me.

JAHZARA

(looks around the room)

No.

MURAT (O.S.)

Yes.

JAHZARA

You're flitting about in one of your multidimensional  
domains. Somewhere, real close by. I can feel you.  
Thinking. Practicing your English. Send me a message.

MURAT (O.S.)

I still can't reverse time.

JAHZARA

Come back. Promise me you'll come back.

MURAT (O.S.)

I can't.

JAHZARA

Your son is waiting for you.

MURAT (O.S.)

Aris.

JAHZARA

Aris.

JAHZARA approaches the AUDIENCE.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

Ground zero is everywhere, Murat said. Packed into space,  
all around us.

MURAT (O.S.)

Limitless resources. The trailing syringe, remember?

JAHZARA

(to the AUDIENCE)

Overly rapid progress in vital areas. A fanatic? Like hell.  
No one ever claimed responsibility. It's the agencies, the  
corporations, the government... A fucking covert op. Free  
energy? Self-assembling life-support systems?

And the world's shit handily recycled through an infinite hyperspace...? They saw their energy systems, their transportation machines, their economies in tatters...

JAHZARA turns as if to look at MURAT,  
but MURAT is not actually there.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)

Manageable progress. That's what they wanted. That's why they killed you.

(pause)

"Optimal advance requires a steady wind," says Darian Marchant, Chairman and CEO, Deep Void Corporation. Yeah, and a steady flow of cash. Besides, you were a nightmare, a security nightmare. He said. Darian. The bastard!

LESTER returns to collect his papers,  
the bottle, the glass. To clean up.  
He's jealous of JAHZARA'S memories of  
MURAT.

LESTER

Done with tonight's ending?

JAHZARA

(with longing)

There's so many loose ends, Lester.

LESTER

They'll wait.

JAHZARA

There's so many. So many.

LESTER

The romance. The squishy stuff. Keep it in check.

JAHZARA

He loved me.

LESTER

Let go of him, Jahzara.

JAHZARA

There's Aris.

LESTER

(with regret)

Great kid.

JAHZARA

Yeah.

LESTER  
(ready to exit)  
Oh, that pill. Marchant still isn't sure what it was made of.

JAHZARA  
Robots, toilet bowls, and pizzas.

LESTER exits.

Time returns to the present. This is signalled by the blaze of SEARCHLIGHTS and the roar of HELICOPTERS.

His LAPTOP in hand, MURAT enters the sitting room and returns to the couch. He opens up his LAPTOP.

JAHZARA downs the contents of her bottle of VODKA and tosses it away.

The noise of the HELICOPTERS fades to background.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
(to MURAT)  
Make them go away. Make us invisible.

MURAT snaps his fingers.

With a flourish, JAHZARA shuts the cover of MURAT'S LAPTOP.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Well, baby, there's one thing I won't leave this place without.

JAHZARA reaches under her skirt, works off her panties, and steps out of them. She lifts her panties for MURAT to see.

JAHZARA (CONT'D)  
Know what's next?

MURAT  
I believe so.

JAHZARA tosses her panties aside.

JAHZARA  
Ready?

JAHZARA turns out the light. The stage darkens. She approaches him. They kiss. He stays seated while she works to undo the zipper of his pants.

When he's ready, she lifts her skirt  
and straddles him. They make love.

There is a CRACKLE, like lightening.  
The lights go out.

There is total darkness. Blackout.

For a moment, the HELICOPTERS roar,  
then silence.

JAHZARA

(screams)  
Come back! COME BACK!

The front door SLAMS shut.

Deafening, a volley of automatic rifle  
FIRE reverberates through the air.

Then silence.

Curtain.

END

**Genre:** Comedy-thriller, with elements of science fiction, fantasy, and love story

**Further Reference:**

<http://www.bandler.com/scandal/>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211016170240/http://bandler.com/scandal/> (accessed May 27, 2023).

John Bandler Plays: <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/27422>

**Public Readings:**

A first-time public reading, The Players' Guild of Hamilton, Inc., July 9, 2009. Featuring Barb Fisher, Matt Willson, Al French, Scott Bloxom, Jennifer Graham, and Gail Edwards. Supported by Nancie Mleczko, Moe Dwyer, Beth Bandler, and John Bandler.

A public reading facilitated by the Dundas Little Theatre, The Garstin Centre for the Arts, August 17, 2013. A full-cast, staged reading, followed by Q&A, featuring Andrea Adcock, Gregory Cruikshank, Genevieve Jack-Sadiwnyk, Tyler Brent, Bruce Edwards, and Elaine Hale. Supported by Dineen Baran, Nancie Mleczko, Beth Bandler, John Bandler, and John Vlachopoulos.

**Themes:** Counter-espionage, military-sponsored research, terrorism, and the tension between the arts, the sciences and commercial opportunism.

**Pitch by John Bandler in the voice of Darian Marchant (2013):** She's in over her head. Miss Jahzara Jones. Fantasizing an interview with Barack Obama. Crashing her two-bit English prof's inquisition into the who, the why and the wherefore of the untimely gutting of my research lab. Falling for no less than suspect numero uno, my over-the-top associate. And she caps it all by dragging the CIA and National Security onto campus. Searchlights. Helicopters. The works. So? She turns me down. Am I sore? No matter which way, I'm ahead. While the feds get on with their dirty work, I make money hand over fist, land obscene contracts, as well as Candy, our Miss Quill, who'll do just about anything that obeys the laws of physics for a guy with a real brain. Think I'm kidding? As for our charming Jahzara Jones, she's in over her head. Way in. This is Professor Darian Marchant and I approve this message.