

CHARACTERS

FARIBA, late 30s

AHMAD, 50s

SETTING

A barren graveyard in Afghanistan. 2012.

THE SECRET KEEPER

A barren graveyard.

No headstones or plaques. Mounds of dirt serve as unmarked graves.

Silence. Stillness.

After a few beats, FARIBA (late 30s) enters, wearing a black burqa.

She looks around cautiously to make sure no one is present. Then she drops to her knees, and begins examining the graves.

AHMAD (50s) enters and observes her for a few moments. Then:

AHMAD

Can I help you?

Fariba falls back, surprised.

AHMAD

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to / frighten-

FARIBA

Get away from me.

AHMAD

But I-

FARIBA

Get away!

AHMAD

(pause)

You don't even know me.

FARIBA

Anyone who visits this place, I don't want to know.

AHMAD
You are here.

FARIBA
That's different. I-

She stops herself. Then she gets up, and begins to leave.

AHMAD
I'm not a visitor. I work here.

She stops.

FARIBA
You bury them?

AHMAD
Yes.

FARIBA
That's horrible.

AHMAD
...it can be.

FARIBA
Even when they're in pieces, you...?

AHMAD
Yes.

FARIBA
And you cleanse the body? The pieces?

Ahmad nods.

FARIBA
Why?

AHMAD
Because it is my job. No one claims the bodies. Many don't have families.

FARIBA
They don't have families? Or their families are too ashamed?

Ahmad doesn't answer; it's probably the latter.

FARIBA

They don't deserve this.

AHMAD

Every child of Allah deserves to be buried.

FARIBA

I disagree.

AHMAD

(friendly)

Then we can agree to disagree.

Pause. Ahmad gestures to the pile of dirt where Fariba was digging.

AHMAD

Are you looking for something?

FARIBA

The graves - they're not marked.

AHMAD

Yes they are.

FARIBA

Where?

Ahmad points to his head.

AHMAD

Here.

FARIBA

You? You remember where they're buried?

Ahmad nods.

FARIBA

There must be hundreds.

AHMAD

112 since I started. Eight years ago.

(pause)

Are you looking for someone?

FARIBA

No - no.

AHMAD

So you just came to browse?

FARIBA

Yes.

AHMAD

Strange for someone who thinks they don't deserve to be buried.

Pause. Fariba looks at him, decides to engage.

FARIBA

Anwar Maradi.

Ahmad processes it in his brain for a second, then he gestures to a nearby grave.

AHMAD

He is there.

Fariba looks at Ahmad. Then she reluctantly brings herself to Maradi's grave.

FARIBA

You know what he did?

AHMAD

Of course. That's why he's buried here.

FARIBA

No - I mean his attack, what *he* did.

Ahmad processes it.

AHMAD

The market? Three years ago?

Yes. FARIBA

28 victims. AHMAD

23. FARIBA
(correcting him)

Ah. AHMAD

Fariba looks at the grave.

Didn't it bother you to bury him? Knowing what he did? FARIBA

I don't think about what they do. AHMAD

How can you not? FARIBA

It's how I manage. I become sad when people cut down a tree, let alone kill each other. AHMAD

Then how can you bury them? FARIBA

I look at them as people. People who were full of hope. AHMAD

Someone who blows up a market, or children playing soccer - they are full of hope? FARIBA

Yes - once. AHMAD

When? FARIBA

When they were children, perhaps. When their parents loved them. AHMAD

FARIBA

The victims - they have parents, too. Parents who loved them - who raised them better than this...

Pause.

AHMAD

Your child? He was victim?

FARIBA

She. Habiza. She was eleven. I sent her to the market for spices. Cardamon, salt...

AHMAD

I am sorry for your loss.

FARIBA

Thank you.

Pause. A beat.

AHMAD

May I ask... If you feel so strongly about these men, the bombers - why did you come?

FARIBA

I don't know. I wanted to see.

AHMAD

And your husband - he allows...?

FARIBA

He doesn't know.

(pause)

Ever since she died, I'm so angry. All the time. At my husband, my children. The world.

(she stops herself)

Do you have children?

AHMAD

...no.

FARIBA

To lose them, is the worst thing on Earth...

(gesturing to the grave)

I thought that maybe if I came, if I saw, it might make a difference.

AHMAD

Has it?

FARIBA

No. She's still gone...

Pause. They stay with each other.

FARIBA

How do you bear this? The pain, the suffering?

AHMAD

It's very calm. And it makes me live my life better.
(gesturing to the dirt)

To realize, in the end, this is all we are.

FARIBA

Isn't it depressing?

AHMAD

No. There are many jokes.

FARIBA

Jokes? Here?

AHMAD

Yes - whenever there is an attack, my coworkers come to my desk. They say:
(trying to deliver a joke)
"Ahmad, get ready, there is another attack!"

Pause.

FARIBA

That doesn't sound funny.

AHMAD

We've been at war 30 years. Humor is how I survive.

FARIBA

No. I mean, what you described - it doesn't sound funny. "Get ready, there is another attack"?

AHMAD

For the Afghan government, this is high humor.

They share a smile.

Fariba begins to leave.

FARIBA

I'm sorry I wasted your time-

AHMAD

Oh, not a waste. It is nice to spend time with the living.

FARIBA

Yes. I don't suppose you get much of that here.

AHMAD

As-salam alaykum.

FARIBA

Wa alaykum asalam.

Fariba starts to exit, but then she turns back to Ahmad.

FARIBA

Can I invite you for tea?

AHMAD

I don't think that would be appropriate.

FARIBA

With my husband of course. And my family.

AHMAD

I would not be welcome at your home.

FARIBA

Don't be silly. I insist.

AHMAD

No, you - you wouldn't want me.

Fariba looks at him.

FARIBA

Why not?

AHMAD

Nothing. As-salam alaykum.

FARIBA

No - tell me.

AHMAD

I don't think that would be a / good idea-

FARIBA

Why? Why wouldn't I want you?

Pause. Ahmad looks at her.

AHMAD

If you knew why I am here. Why I do this.

FARIBA

You told me - because everyone deserves to be buried.

AHMAD

No.

(pause)

Because my son deserved to be buried.

Fariba looks at him, confused.

FARIBA

You said you didn't have any children.

AHMAD

I don't. Not since that day - eight years ago.

Fariba's eyes grow wide.

FARIBA

Your son. He...?

AHMAD

No one would bury him. They wanted him to rot. But I raised him. Well. And I loved him. Still. Even after what he did.

So now I bury the bombers for their parents. For the ones who can't bear to acknowledge, to forgive...

A beat.

AHMAD

So: would you still like to invite me for tea?

Pause.

Fariba and Ahmad look at each other. For the first time, the anger begins to drain from her eyes.

FARIBA

Yes.

A beat.

END OF PLAY