

Arabs in Theatre:
Plays, Roles, Production

Catherine Bullard
Advisors George Berg and Cara Gabriel
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ABSTRACT

For my honors Capstone, I sought to examine the Arab in theatre from multiple perspectives. I translated *A Bridge to Eternity*, by Palestinian playwright Ghassan Kanafani, from Arabic to English, studying the role of the Arab as a writer. For the second stage of my project, I studied physical theatre at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre in Blue Lake, CA to learn new ways to approach producing *Bridge* as a nonwestern, nontraditional theatrical piece. I worked with Professor Javier Rivera to implement my studies in my own performance as an actor in his production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Federico Garcia Lorca, in which I researched and played a Moorish character, studying the perception of Moors and Muslims in theatre. I then worked with Dr. Cara Gabriel to produce *Bridge* with the New Works Festival for the Department of Performing Arts Senior Capstone. During the production process I produced several drafts of adaptation for the script, and used physical storytelling methods I learned at Dell'Arte in rehearsal, studying the relationship between the Palestinian crisis and Kanafani's work. The culminating performance is the English language premiere of Kanafani's play.

THE ARAB PLAYWRIGHT

This is the first draft of the translation I completed after working with Professor George Berg during the spring semester 2009. Kanafani's Bridge to Eternity is originally a radio play. I later adapted this translation for the stage.

A Bridge to Eternity

Scene One

The sudden honk of a car horn and screeching tires, followed by a girls' scream.

GIRL: Get out of the way, you idiot!

BOY: *Calmly* I'm fine. *Blood seeps from his shoulder, staining his shirt.*

GIRL: Oh my God, you're bleeding! Are you okay? You lunatic! Let me take you to the hospital.

BOY: Like I'd trust you to get me there. In thirty seconds you managed to injure not only my shoulder but also my pride. *He gets up to leave.*

GIRL: You can't go, you're hurt!

BOY: It's not that bad.

GIRL: Have you even looked?

BOY: I know when I will meet death. My appointment is for later. Goodbye.

GIRL: Your appointment with death? Jesus, did you hit your head, too? Stop, I'm taking you to the hospital.

BOY: *He pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket and stuffs it under his shirt.* This is all I need. *The pressure of the handkerchief is too much.* Let me lean on you.

The car door opens and then shuts. The car pulls away.

GIRL: Where did you think you were, the botanical gardens? This is a city, you have to be careful.

BOY: I was thinking about something serious.

GIRL: Usually that's not life threatening.

BOY: What I'm thinking about is.

GIRL: *Scornfully* Suicide?

BOY: Well, it obviously didn't work. You're not scraping me off your tires. It wasn't meant to be, but this was. Our meeting isn't a coincidence. You think it is, but the truth is...

GIRL: What?

BOY: The truth is, everything has been orchestrated. By hitting me, you sidetracked my thought of suicide. My death waits elsewhere.

GIRL: Do you always talk this way, or are you trying to scare me?

BOY: You just don't understand, not that anyone else does. When I talk like this it's not to scare you. I mean everything I say, completely. Fully.

GIRL: And what are you saying?

BOY: Neither of us wanted this to happen. You didn't want to hit me, and I didn't want to survive it. Now we're here and our anticipated roles have changed.

GIRL: If you have an appointment with death, why did you try to kill yourself?

BOY: I don't know why I even bother. What's your name?

GIRL: Rejah.

BOY: *Chuckling*. Rejah, imagine that. Rejah, you interrupted a desperate man on the road to death... Didn't I say that everything in life is set up? My name is Faris.

REJAH: Why did you want to commit suicide?

FARIS: Let's change the subject, okay?

REJAH: When it comes down to it, and I don't know why, but I believe you about this appointment and our roles and everything.

FARIS: We still don't have to get into it any further.

REJAH: Why?

FARIS: If I tell you... if I tell you, your blonde hair will shoot up like electric wires.

REJAH: You're trying to scare me.

FARIS: I'm not trying to scare you, and we're not talking about this anymore.
Distract me, I want to tempt fate again.

REJAH: Tempt whom?

FARIS: Tempt fate. I'm going to give you another opportunity to stop me from killing myself.

REJAH: Hey, get your hand off the door! Oh, God.

Shrieking car tires as she stops again.

FARIS: So here we are all over again... Why don't you just leave? Who sent you?

REJAH: No one sent me; you're the one who jumped in front of my car.

FARIS: Some lunatic got in the way of your car, was injured, and goes his own way... So what? Why are you still here?

REJAH: I don't know, but you yourself said I have a role in your life, and I'd say you're right. I can't just abandon you here, bleeding.

FARIS: *Sighs* Okay, Ms. Rejah, but I will tell you grave things. *A beat.* I'm a man who won't live long.

REJAH: Are you sick?

FARIS: I've been healthy my whole life. Take another look at the wound you caused. It's totally healed. There's still a lot of blood, though... it looks like I slaughtered a cow.

REJAH: *in a high voice* How? You healed without a trace... *afraid* I hit you only a minute ago... *she begins to stutter as the music rises little by little with the words* How did that happen? It's impossible! *The music almost drowns out her voice as she screams.* Who are you? Who?

FARIS: *Distractedly, like he is crying* I am a poor creature, Rejah... This was all planned; I would have killed myself had I not found you.

REJAH: Who are you? Who are you?

FARIS: *Crying* I am a poor creature. There is no use for me... I've told you from the beginning. Let me leave. Rejah, let me go.

REJAH: *As if she has woken up* No.

FARIS: Even you can't help me. Life is dictated in a confounding manner, and I am doomed.

REJAH: *In an attempt to encourage him* Don't talk that way. Life isn't what you imagine. You aren't helpless.

FARIS: *cutting her off* You say that, but you don't know. You almost passed out when you saw my wound, can you imagine that much terror every day of your life? Don't even try. I can see you're well off. Don't waste your time on me, you have a better life to lead than this.

REJAH: *Preserving her calm* Have you always been this fearful?

FARIS: Not at all, but when all the ways before me were shut, I had nowhere to go but death. But I am a human unable to die when I desire... do you know of anything worse?

REJAH: *severely* Why do you talk endlessly of death? Don't you have anything else to say?

FARIS: Death is in every part my life, since that fateful night...

REJAH: What night?

Faris begins to reflect, absently following his thoughts.

FARIS: *In a remote voice, and with light music* I had been reading before bed, and I turned the light out at about midnight. The rain was pouring down in torrents outside and the thunder was only getting louder. The trees swayed in the wind. I thought one was going to fall on our house.

Storm noises. The sound of the door knocking intermittently.

FARIS: It seemed at first that the voice... the wind... I didn't know what the knock was.

The knock on the door intensifies. The flashback begins to take over; Rejah recedes upstage.

FARIS: I finally got up. There was only darkness in the crack below my door. It was blisteringly cold. *Surrendering to flashback* Who are you?

VOICE: *With deep echoes* Open, Faris, open... I will tell you something...

FARIS: Who are you?

The door creaks open, but the speaker remains unseen.

VOICE: You are Faris?

FARIS: Yes... who are you?

VOICE: Today is Tuesday, Faris.

FARIS: Yes...

VOICE: You will live to see six more Tuesdays, but you will not see a seventh...

FARIS: *With fear* But... who... who are you?

The music comes in violently while Faris continues to demand...

FARIS: Who are you? Where did you go...?

Scene Two

FARIS: And then he vanished. I searched for him, but the streets were empty.

REJAH: Did you see his face?

FARIS: I couldn't see anything, he was just a shadow.

REJAH: And that was the beginning of your problem?

FARIS: Yes.

REJAH: So now you wait for this appointment with death.

FARIS: You think it's crazy.

REJAH: Do you have any proof that this happened?

FARIS: You think I'm delusional. All the doctors do, too. Every time I see them, always the same word: Delusional. Delusional. If I argue with them it only further confirms their diagnosis.

REJAH: No one believes ghost stories anymore, Faris.

FARIS: Before this month I was right there with everyone else. I would've thought I was crazy. But I am a man that cannot die, Rejah... Do you want to confirm it again? Give me a mirror.

REJAH: Why do you want a mirror?

FARIS: Surely you have one. I don't need it for long.

REJAH: *She retrieves one from her purse. Here. Faris shatters it.* What are you doing?

FARIS: Open your eyes wide.

Faris drags the mirror down his forearm. Rejah screams.

FARIS: Look at it now.

REJAH: *Terrified* It stopped gushing.

The music raises bit by bit.

FARIS: Just a moment.

REJAH: Oh my God. There's no wound, not a trace.

The music rises.

FARIS: I don't ask you anything, Rejah, except that you believe me. I have to find someone to believe me before I die. No one can carry this alone.

REJAH: Why do you keep trying to kill yourself if you can't die?

FARIS: To atone for my sin.

REJAH: What sin?

FARIS: The sin that certainly deserves an ugly death. There is no other way.

REJAH: And you live this way?

FARIS: The voice returns every night at the same time. He doesn't always speak. Every night I say the same thing to myself: no, no, I will not reply to the knocking. But I always do.

REJAH: Every night? Every night, you poor villain? What terror you live with!

FARIS: Terror no human can imagine and no human has suffered. I've done everything I know to do to make him leave me. I began to think I was hallucinating, like all the doctors said, so I kept looking for some sign the man may have left. And one morning...

REJAH: What?

FARIS: Remember the snow last week? There were footsteps, sunken into the snow... it was that particular night that he said new things that he had not said the other nights...

REJAH: What did he say?

As Faris begins his story, he is accompanied by music and traces of sounds that increase in order to ___ in sequence.

FARIS: Before I went to bed that night I decided I had figured it out... I decided to invite him to talk to me so that I could figure out who he was. When the knock came, I stood there without opening the door. I couldn't go through with my plan, I was too afraid.

The sound of the knocking on the door, and the sound of the thunder and wind. The knocks on the door grow violent.

VOICE: Listen to me, Faris, listen... I want a word with you.

FARIS: No... I won't listen to you this time.

VOICE: Listen to me Faris, listen.... I want a word with you.

FARIS: Come back in the morning when I can see who you are.

VOICE: Listen, Faris.

The sounds of the dialogue mix with and become obstructed by the sounds of the snowstorm.

FARIS: Answer just one question...

VOICE: *In anger and without pause* Listen, Faris, listen. I want a word with you.

FARIS: To hell with you and your word!

VOICE: Listen, Faris...

FARIS: Why do you come here to tell me this, night after night?

VOICE: Listen, Faris, Listen... I want a word with you.

FARIS: Why? Why? Why?

The music grows over the voice of the wind, rain.

FARIS: Why? Why?

VOICE: Because you killed your mother, Faris... you killed your own mother.

Silence. Then a violent musical crescendo.

Scene Three

REJAH: You killed your mother? You killed your mother and you call yourself a poor creature? And you wanted my car to kill you? You can't accept your punishment, that's all it is!

FARIS: Punishment?

REJAH: For the murder.

FARIS: Rejah...

REJAH: What do you want with me now? I have seen you now; you are bared to the core.

FARIS: *Indifferent but also beseeching* I am repugnant to the core, I told you that without reluctance, I say that to myself a thousand times a day...

REJAH: What do you want from me then? *Beat of silence.* It seems my role in your life is finished.

FARIS: Rejah...

REJAH: There isn't anything to say. I don't want to help you. No one wants to help you dodge the consequences of your actions. You are being judged, haven't you ever thought of that?

FARIS: Certainly I thought of it... dwelt upon it... but I never asked you for anything.

REJAH: You are avoiding your judgment. You're rejecting your lot.

FARIS: I never said anything different, I begged only that you help me achieve my own death as a person who lived in the world, in a community, with or without the rest of mankind... do you understand, Rejah?

REJAH: *Angrily* I don't care about understanding. And I wasn't helping you die. Why don't you get out of this car and leave my life? I'm in a hurry. Best of luck.

The sound of the car door opening.

FARIS: I'll go, but you won't be rid of me. I'll become your property. You'll think of me even in your expensive house, surrounded by the things you own whose weight you will never feel.

REJAH: Anything else?

FARIS: I want to say many things to you, Rejah. I do not want to be alone. I am a murderer and no one trusts me. I will die as a man beset by illusions, not a man haunted by shame... that is my real fear. Perhaps death is the fair penance for my crime, but the road to it isn't fair.

REJAH: You're crazy. Close the door. I'm leaving.

The car door closes, and the car drives away.

FARIS: *to himself* But you won't go far... you won't go far...

The music changes with the scene

REJAH'S FATHER: Rejah, your story is extremely strange... do you truly believe it?

REJAH: Dad, I told you I spent more than an hour with him... he cut his own arm right in front of me.

FATHER: Rejah... you're a smart girl, right? Do you believe all these hoaxes?

REJAH: I hit him in the car and ripped up his shoulder. His shirt was soaked with blood.

FATHER: And the wound healed?

REJAH: Completely... it disappeared without even a trace.

FATHER: You took him to the hospital?

REJAH: I tried.

FATHER: And he said to you that he was a man who couldn't die?

REJAH: Yes.

FATHER: And you saw, with your own eyes, the sides of the wound draw together and heal?

REJAH: Like I said two minutes ago... and the blood was still fresh on his skin and shirt.

FATHER: And what about the story of the ghost that visits every night?

REJAH: I told you the story ten times! You're mocking me! *The father guffaws.* You don't trust or believe in me...

FATHER: *Insensitively* Your imagination... maybe mine is too small. What you described doesn't happen in the real world.

REJAH: You think I'm delusional?

FATHER: Perhaps you're tired from exams. This is just a result of the academic pressure you're under. Are you going to your classes?

REJAH: I go to those lectures not because I'm interested in them but for you, and still I face this ridicule?

FATHER: Have you eaten today?

REJAH: You're not taking me seriously.

FATHER: *Mockingly but affectionate* Just go to bed... we can laugh about this in the morning. We'll roar.

REJAH: Fine. Just think about something.

FATHER: What?

REJAH: You should take me seriously, treat me sincerely, and stop looking at me like I'm crazy. Can you think about that?

FATHER: Think about...

REJAH: Great, good night.

She leaves and a door slams offstage.

FATHER: *to himself* Poor girl... poor girl. *A beat of silence.* I have to do something, I can't stop thinking about this. I'm going to call a doctor. *He dials.* Hello? Hello, Dr. Said? Yes, Dr. Said, can you come to my house now? Rejah, she's not doing too well... perhaps you'll be able to help her. *The music comes in lightly and rises gradually.* She's in bed now. Thanks.

The music rises to indicate the changing scene.

DR. SAID: Well, I did every test I knew to do, and there's no sign of anything wrong with her.

FATHER: And the story of the ghosts and the man that can't die and the wound that healed and his role in fate? Do you have an explanation, Doctor?

SAID: Maybe it's symptomatic of some kind of mental stress, but with your healthy family history I'd say it'll go away after Rejah gets some rest, and if she stays away from Faris. He's a strong influence, and Rejah believes completely in his fantasy. You should do something about him. Do you know if Faris lives near here?

FATHER: Rejah has his address...

SAID: We'll pay him a visit, like we're lost or something and need directions. And after a few hours...

FATHER: What?

SAID: I'll search him for drugs and we'll restrain him until he consents never to bother Rejah again.

FATHER: And if he refuses?

SAID: If he declines? What do you think? You're a rich man and Rejah is a rich girl, and no one knows where this story might end...

FATHER: Okay... okay... but what are we going to do?

SAID: You'll hand him over to the police and charge him with perjury.

Scene Four

FATHER: Well, look who finally decided to roll out of bed! Do you feel better today?

REJAH: Yes.

FATHER: Dr. Said said you were rude to him last night.

REJAH: I ... I felt like we were going through a lot of trouble over nothing. I just needed some sleep. But thanks for caring. And don't worry about me.

FATHER: No... no. It seems like you want to say something else...?

REJAH: Like what?

FATHER: Last night I listened to your story again, sincerely, and without any judgment...

REJAH: What story?

FATHER: Faris' story.

REJAH: Faris? Oh... no, it was a stupid story... it was ridiculous. I was really bored.

FATHER: You made it up?

REJAH: I met a person named Faris... but the rest of the story I made up.

FATHER: There's no ghost, no self-healing wound, no man with a crazy appointment with death?

REJAH: Of course not!

FATHER: So, goodbye and good riddance?

REJAH: Of course.

FATHER: Do you have his address?

REJAH: Whose?

FATHER: Faris'.

REJAH: I... No.

FATHER: But you said yesterday that you did.

REJAH: I told you that? Oh... It was just part of the story.

FATHER: Too bad. He would've gone to the police station and got the sentence he deserved...

REJAH: Faris? Faris punished? The police would prosecute Faris? *She laughs.*

FATHER: *Confusedly* Why are you laughing?

REJAH: I'm laughing at the idea of the punishment, of Faris' punishment... I have to get to school.

FATHER: You're going to school?

REJAH: I have a meeting.

The door opens and closes.

FATHER: Thank God... The whole thing blew over quickly. *Scary music begins.* Faris. Ghosts. Doctor Said. Forms in the night. Good God, everything is over.

Around the scene the music continues to crescendo, with the rising talking, and takes shape as an interstitial between one scene and the next. The music begins to carry the failure of hope.

REJAH: *Despondent, pleading* I've been studying with you for two long years and nothing that I've ever done would make you treat me this way. Why don't you believe me?

KAMIL: Is talking about ghosts and wounds that heal in seconds part of the doctoral process...? *He guffaws bitterly, his laughter dissolving with the music as it crescendos.*

REJAH: I'm sorry I wasted your time, Professor, but I deceived my father, for perhaps the first time in my life, and it's killing me. What should I do, Professor?

PROFESSOR: Rejah, you're an outstanding girl. All your life you've thought deeply and understood much and possessed such eloquence... but it seems to me that you have some sort of illness.

REJAH: Believe me, Professor, believe me...

PROFESSOR: And did you tell me the truth, Rejah?

REJAH: And did you want me to trust you?

PROFESSOR: You know, this Faris kid probably duped you with that shirt of his. It probably already had blood on it. *A moment of silence.* Go to bed and relax.

The music crescendos.

REJAH: I'm satisfied. It appears that I am delusional.

PROFESSOR: I feel like there's something else... I don't believe your story, not because I don't want to trust you but because it can't be true... Why don't you go to a psychologist?

The music crescendos and the scene changes.

MALE VOICE: You're going to hear her tell this absurd story... whether she tells it or not, don't worry about that, just know that soon no one will believe anything she says.

The music rises.

FEMALE VOICE: *Scornfully* The wound healed like magic... and then did a rabbit pop out of his hat? *Boisterous laughter.*

MALE VOICE: Hey, Rejah... You're a smart and beautiful girl. What went wrong? What happened?

The music rises. The door opens and the Father enters, the music descending and suppressed

FATHER: *Afraid* Rejah... Rejah... what's wrong?

Rejah is silent, then a gush of tears.

FATHER: Rejah... come on, what's wrong?

REJAH: *Tearfully* I lied to you, Dad... I lied to you... I lied to you...

FATHER: You lied to me?

REJAH: Yes... I lied to you. *Crying.* Faris is a real person, Dad. The story is all real. Believe me that I saw it all... Faris is a person... of flesh and blood... why didn't you believe me? Why?

FATHER: One more time, Rejah? Say that again.

REJAH: Trust me, Dad... just trust me.

FATHER: Rejah.

REJAH: Oh, God... Oh god...

FATHER: Rejah... Rejah, what's wrong?

REJAH: Oh God... *The music begins* I take back everything I said. I take all of it back. I have to see him. I have to see him.

The door opens and slams, and the constant sound of thunder and wind with a violent knock on the door.

FARIS: You came early in the night, you awful ghost... is there something new to tell me about my death while you hide in the rain and darkness?

REJAH: Listen to me, Faris. Listen... it's Rejah.

FARIS: *Startled* Rejah? Rejah?

The bolt slides open on the door and the door opens.

REJAH: Faris... you didn't expect it to be me!

FARIS: Rejah... Rejah here? In my house? *He laughs crazily and the music begins.* Rejah... Rejah with me. *He yells* Rejah with me to protect against the ghost! I'm speechless. *He guffaws and the music crescendos.*

Scene Five

REJAH: *shivering* Your house is cold, Faris... I'm going to freeze.

FARIS: Sorry, I don't spend much time in here. Seems like a waste of money to heat the whole thing. Most nights I sleep outside.

REJAH: Why?

FARIS: When I stare at a ceiling all night I can't stop thinking. I get so easily overwhelmed. When I'm outside it's better. When it rains I feel clean.

REJAH: Do you have a coat I can wear? I left mine at the house.

FARIS: Why did you leave your house?

REJAH: I don't know... I don't understand why I'm drawn to you. After you cut yourself I had to get away from you. I went back to my house and tried to tell my father about what you'd told me – the loneliness, the guilt. But he didn't believe me. I realized I'm the only one who wants to understand you and I feel...

FARIS: Don't you want to go home? You're shivering like a twig... I don't have a coat or any food...

REJAH: *Whispering* We are greater than cold... you know that...

FARIS: I am learning that.

Silence.

REJAH: So you stay in this cold house, dwelling on your death and guilt, all alone. Do you work? Do you do anything?

FARIS: I think a lot. It doesn't come to much. Makes me feel like a spectator.

REJAH: You're not a spectator.

FARIS: *Laughing* We all are... if we're not committing the sins ourselves, we watch delightedly while someone else does. He *laughs uproariously, hysterically*.

REJAH: Why in the world are you laughing?

FARIS: If I don't laugh something worse will happen.

REJAH: My father wants to arrest you.

FARIS: And why didn't he?

REJAH: Because I saved you. I told them that I tore up your address.

FARIS: *Subdued laughter, then he falls apart* Mighty Rejah....

REJAH: Mighty?

FARIS: Isn't it true?

REJAH: When you said my name you spit it out.

FARIS: Out of affection.

REJAH: What do you want?

FARIS: Time is short, Rejah, very short. Only six days remain. We don't have any time.

REJAH: I love you.

A solo violin, tormented love

FARIS: I told you time was short from the very beginning, Rejah.

REJAH: You said it all the time: I don't feel anything but hopelessness, I am a man condemned to die.... But who cares, Faris?

FARIS: You love a dying man, Rejah, a dying man.

REJAH: Kiss me.

FARIS: What?

REJAH: Kiss me.

FARIS: You're making this feeling bigger than it really is. I don't want to waste time, but I...

REJAH: But you don't want to drown me in sorrow, right? You don't want to hurt me? Well, I'm drowning now, Faris. *A moment of silence and the violin crescendos. A strong knock at the door.* That's my dad. *Shouting* Hold on a second.

FARIS: No... it's the ghost.

VOICE: *In stereo, as if from far away.* Open the door, Faris, open the door... I will have a word with you.

REJAH: Oh my God.

FARIS: You have to be quiet.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... Open the door... I will say something to you.

FARIS: Every night... every night... the same time, the same moment... the same voice, same words. Don't you want to come with me to open the door?

REJAH: No, I don't want to go with you. I want you to stay with me.

FARIS: I can't.

REJAH: You will stay with me.

The voice shouts over the wind.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris. Open the door and I will have a word with you.

FARIS: You worthless ghost, I'm finished with the words in your throat and finished with you.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... open the door.

FARIS: You don't scare me, Shadow of my sleep, you don't scare me.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... open the door... I will have a word with you.

FARIS: Why only one? I live with this word, here in this house...

VOICE: Open the door, Fa –

FARIS: Wait.

The door slides open.

VOICE: You're Faris?

FARIS: I'm Faris.

VOICE: You will live to see *Faris begins to laugh maniacally while the voice continues without regard* one more Thursday.... But you will not live to see the next Thursday.

A burst of yelling explodes from Rejah, while Faris continues laughing and the voice rises and vanishes into the wind and the music rises for a few moments

FARIS: Rejah, Rejah, you poor thing... Rejah, are you okay? It's all done, Rejah... *A moment of silence*

REJAH: *disoriented* Where am I?

FARIS: *With a brittle laugh* You saw my ghost, my little fairy tale...

REJAH: You poor thing... Now I feel like I will die after six days...

FARIS: No, not you. Maybe you'll die after a month or a year or a hundred years. When you look at people you see truth. I only see guilt. That's why I have to go so soon.

REJAH: You will die in forty-four hours....

FARIS: Please stay with me. *Silence* It's getting colder. Why don't you go home?

REJAH: How can I do that? I want to stay with you. I have to do something...

FARIS: I was doomed from long before I met you. I killed my mother, I killed my mother! Don't you understand?

REJAH: How did you kill her, Faris?

Scene Six

FARIS: Why do you want to know?

REJAH: It's part of your story. I want to help you, Faris, and it's not about money or social status or anything else. You and I are greater than that. *Silence.* I am ready to help you, Faris, even if you don't believe me.

The music begins in a solo.

FARIS; *Dreamily* My mother was an old woman, and after the death of my father we were alone. His death was a jolt. When he died the bank tried to reclaim our house. We had to fight not for ownership but for a few more days inside our own home while we tried to think of where else we could go. It seemed like even the stars went out during that time. I began to realize things weren't going to change, so I looked for work.

The music crescendos gradually.

I found a job in a town across the mountains. I had to tell my mother as soon as I could. My mother had hidden herself away in her room, which she rarely left. She was always sleeping.

The music rises a little and Faris enters the Mother's room.

FARIS: Wake up, Mother, wake up...

MOTHER: Faris? Can't it wait for the morning?

FARIS: No, I want to tell you something now.

MOTHER: What?

FARIS: I found a job.

MOTHER: Thank God! Oh, Faris! That's wonderful! When do you start?

FARIS: As soon as I can, Mother. We'll have enough money to feed us and keep you comfortable. We can get our house back. We can have a car.

MOTHER: I don't want any of that, Faris... I will die soon, and none of that matters to me. What I want is for you to live your life.

FARIS: There's one thing. The job isn't here.

MOTHER: How far away is it?

FARIS: I'll have to fly there. I can send you money.

MOTHER: A distant place?

FARIS: There are no jobs here. I have to go somewhere else if we want to keep this house.

MOTHER: And me, and me, and me, Faris? *Begins crying* I am old and crippled, Faris.... Your mother is an old and crippled woman, Faris. And you want to leave her?

FARIS: *With anger* You say that all the time, but you're not crippled, Mama. You are not sick. Are you going to let this delusion control your life? Are you going to die in this bed?

MOTHER: Do you think I want this? I am fighting for your sake, but I can't withstand much. Will you really leave me here? Will you?

FARIS: Delusion, delusion, delusion ... can you help me here? Just this once? I will go for two months. Just two months. It's the chance of a lifetime, Mother... The chance of a lifetime.

MOTHER: *Crying* And my life, Faris, and mine? Isn't it true that you said you'd stay with me until I die?

FARIS: What do you want me to do, Mother? You know how many debts Father had... tomorrow they'll throw us into the street. What will you do then; tell them we have to stay in this house because you're crippled?

MOTHER: What do you want? What do you want, Faris? Condemn your poor mother to die alone? Do it. Kill me now if you want. Kill me.

FARIS; *Hastily* I don't want that at all, I don't want that at all. *Cries* Fine, I won't go. I will stay here with you. I'll stay.

The music rises a little.

FARIS: For two weeks I tried to stay. All the while the bank knocked at our door louder every day.

REJAH: And was your mother really crippled?

FARIS: No.

REJAH: What did you do after that?

FARIS: I decided to take the job. I couldn't tell my mother. Early one morning I packed and prepared to leave. I'd written my mother a note. But when I came downstairs, I saw she was already awake.

With his words the music begins to rise. The door opens and there are footsteps.

FARIS: Good morning, Mother. You're up early.

MOTHER: So are you. Where are you off to?

FARIS: I'm looking for work. And you?

MOTHER: You told me to walk a little and stretch out my legs. I can walk a little now, maybe sell some food... then I'll come back here.

FARIS: *Cheerily* That's great! So you're not caught up in those delusions anymore?

MOTHER: Delusions? What delusions?

FARIS: You're a woman without them. A woman who finally has some vigor... shall we dance?

MOTHER: I'm done with the crutches... When you come back I'll make you breakfast, okay?

FARIS: No, don't wait for me. I'm late; I have to get across town for an appointment.

MOTHER: As you wish... don't you want to eat something now?

FARIS: Come on, stop. I have to go.

MOTHER: I hope you find some work.

Faris exits. The music rises.

FARIS: I shut the door and looked around. It was eight in the morning on a Thursday. *The sound of a clock striking eight with light music.* Within ten minutes I was downtown. At nine I was on the plane.

Scene Seven

REJAH: You left your mother in the house all by herself? How could you do that?

FARIS: I didn't want to, Rejah.

REJAH: You left her without a goodbye?

FARIS: If I'd said goodbye to her face I never would have been able to leave. You're a rich woman. You couldn't possibly understand. You don't know what it's like to be

so hungry you can't sleep, or to know that at any moment your house might be taken away.

Silence.

FARIS: After I left, I wrote to her every day. I apologized in every one. I told her I would return soon. She never did write me back, not a single word through all those months. I thought maybe she was too busy to write, or perhaps she was angry, but I knew she wanted me to come home.

Music

I finally went home one day... and you know the rest of the story.

REJAH: What? She was dead?

FARIS: No. I couldn't find her.

REJAH: Then what?

FARIS: Nothing, that's the whole story. I've told you everything.

REJAH: That's impossible. How did she die?

FARIS: I don't know. I would have taken her with me, but she doesn't know anyone else here. We have no relatives here. So I went home and waited for the poor woman for days, three days, then I looked for her all over our hometown. It was like when she finally decided to walk she walked out of this life and into the next. No one knew where she had died, or where her body was buried, no one knew where or when or how... an old woman found dead in the street, without a name, no relations, and no one could say where she was buried. Some unmarked grave.

REJAH: You think she died of grief?

FARIS: I don't know what else it could be. I searched for her everywhere. One day, two days, three... that's when I saw the ghost for the first time.

REJAH: And you stopped looking for her?

FARIS: How could I keep going? In the whole city, no one had seen her. I argued with them like a crazy man... all spectators, all of them. Won't the ghost punish me for her death? Because I killed her, Rejah. Don't waste your time trying to change it.... I killed her. I killed my mother.

REJAH: Maybe you're right.

FARIS: Don't say maybe. It is certain. And I have to die for it.

Scene Eight

REJAH: I don't know, Faris. It looks bleak, but I don't think it's hopeless.

FARIS: How?

REJAH: You never found her grave. She might not be dead. In any case, we have to find out soon. Your guilt won't wait for us.

FARIS: Why are we an "us"?

REJAH: I don't know Faris, but it's stupid to deny it. You and I have eternal love.

FARIS: Eternity, eternity, eternity... Don't you know that eternity is short?

REJAH: I love you, Faris. I love you.

FARIS: Why do you want to torture yourself? Is this fun to you? How can a woman love a man who definitely knows that he will die tomorrow?

REJAH: I love you with something strong within me... stronger than any logic that tries, night and day, to stop me.

FARIS: No, no, Rejah. You don't love me. It's just idle talk. *A beat of silence* Allow me to lay it out for you: you don't love me. You pity me.

REJAH: Those are despicable words.

FARIS: Despicable and relevant. You pity me and want me to die, somewhere deep down, because it's dramatic and passionate and theatrical. It's glorious.

REJAH: I want you to die?

FARIS: Of course! Don't you know why? Because my death is your only road to life... or else I'll keep worrying you like I'm doing right now.

REJAH: I love you. I love you, Faris. Why can't you say it back?

FARIS: Careful. You think you're in love, but you just don't want to go back to your old life, to return to your temporal world and your house, your friends, university, professors. They'll suck you into their universe, dismiss you, kill you with their skeptical eyes... but if I die they'll believe you. My death is your triumph.

REJAH: *Crying* Crazy.... Crazy... crazy.

FARIS: Don't cry..

REJAH: I gave everything for your sake, Faris. Everything. I left my house and father and friends for you, and even with all that proof that I love you, you don't want to give anything to me.

FARIS: You didn't leave them.... They alienated you.

REJAH: I left them. For your sake.

Scene Nine

REJAH: I have chosen you, Faris. I am still here, and I won't take a single step back.

FARIS: You should go home. I'll be dead in a few hours.

REJAH: Why do you always talk like this? I'm leaving now. I'll return in the evening.

FARIS: I'll be newly dead.

REJAH: Tomorrow we'll both laugh at this.

Rejah leaves. Music starts.

FATHER: Excuse me, Sir? I'm a bit lost. I'm looking for my daughter. She disappeared yesterday. She never went to her classes and didn't come home. Can you help me?

OFFICER: No.

Scene Ten

Sound of knocking on the door.

REJAH: Listen, Faris, Listen.... Listen...

FARIS: *from afar* Rejah?

REJAH: Listen... listen... hurry and listen.

FARIS: Just a minute, just a minute, I'm coming now. Just a minute.

The door opens.

REJAH: Faris... my dear Faris... you didn't kill your mother. You didn't kill her. You didn't kill her.

FARIS: I didn't kill her?

REJAH: No.

FARIS: You mean she's not dead?

REJAH: No. No. She's quite dead. But you didn't kill her.

FARIS: How?

REJAH: She died early on the day of your departure. You told me that you left the house at eight o'clock that morning. The morgue said that she died at 9:30 on the same morning.

FARIS: That... that doesn't change anything.

REJAH: How doesn't it change anything, you idiot?

FARIS: How could it?

REJAH: Because she died before you left the city. She didn't even know you were leaving. She died in the market: an unexpected heart attack. You were still on your way to the airport. You didn't kill her, you poor lost man. You didn't kill her. She wasn't angry with you. You didn't push her too far.

FARIS: You're convinced?

REJAH: I read the autopsy report time and time again. I have no doubts. Aren't you happy?

FARIS: I don't know... I don't know... my chest is heaving like the sea... hold me, Rejah.

REJAH: It's all in your head, Faris... You didn't kill her. I understand the doubts of a son... but you have to let go. You didn't kill her. Say that to yourself.

FARIS: I didn't kill her.

REJAH: Say it again.

FARIS: I didn't kill my mother. Oh my God. That changes everything...

REJAH: It changes everything. Tonight if there are more ghosts I will spit on their faces and I'll tell them they're liars... liars... liars.

FIN

ARABS ONSTAGE

I studied the way Arabs are portrayed onstage through my participation in the Department of Performing Arts' production of Federico Garcia Lorca's *House of Bernarda Alba*, directed by Professor Javier Rivera. He made the directorial choice to have La Poncia, the housemaid, be a Moorish woman in a household of Christians. To achieve this goal we worked with costuming and accent, as well as character back-story. I used *Acting with an Accent* by David Alan Stern and the generous coaching of Sarah Albanawi to achieve the correct Moroccan accent.

I found that studying this character's zeal for life amidst the dreariness of Bernarda Alba's home forced me to make connections between my experiences abroad in Morocco and my understanding of the dramatic form. I aimed to bring those insights to the bulk of my Capstone, which was translating, adapting, and co-directing *A Bridge to Eternity*.

PRODUCING ARAB WORKS IN WESTERN THEATRE

This is the final draft of the adaptation performed on Thursday, April 22 in the Katzen Studio theatre. I co-directed the performance with Patrick Crowley, a DC-area director. This performance was part of the DPA Senior Capstone New Works Festival. I had to adapt the script both to be suitable onstage but also to be driving and interesting for a Western audience. I utilized the gestural storytelling techniques taught at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, which I learned during the summer 2009 month-long intensive, "Effort, Risk, Momentum, Joy". Please see the DVD for the actual Bridge performance.

A Bridge to Eternity
By Ghassan Kanafani
Translated and Adapted by Catherine Bullard

Cast:

Rejah – female, mid-twenties

Faris – male, mid-twenties

Father – Rejah's father, late fifties

Dr. Said – female psychiatrist, fifties

Mother – Faris' mother, late forties

A Ghost – *the word in Arabic is "jinn", which in Arab/Muslim mythology is a step down from an angel. Like a trickster spirit.*

Scene 1

COMPOSITION ONE: Full ensemble, minus the ghost, stands around the borders of the stage, swaying slightly. The ghost enters and takes center. With a small movement, she sets the ensemble in motion, careening around the stage. Rejah and Faris cross center in the chaos, turn, just miss one another, and walk to other sides of the stage. The ghost ascends to her post and watches. Blackout.

Scene 2: A street

Blackout. The sudden honk of a car horn and screeching tires, followed by a girls' scream.

GIRL: Get out of the way, you idiot!

Lights come up.

BOY: *Calmly* I'm fine. *Blood seeps from his shoulder, staining his shirt.*

GIRL: Oh my God, you're bleeding! Are you... you lunatic! Are you okay? Let me take you to the hospital. Holy shit, you stupid fuck!

BOY: Don't touch me! Like I'd trust you to get me there, anyway. In thirty seconds you managed to injure not only my shoulder but also my pride. *He gets up to leave.*

GIRL: You can't go, you're hurt!

BOY: It's not that bad.

GIRL: Have you even looked?

BOY: I don't have to look. I have an appointment with death, and it's not for weeks.

GIRL: Your appointment with death? What? Did you hit your head, too? Stop walking. Hey, stop! There's no one around for miles. I'm driving you to the hospital.

BOY: *He pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket and stuffs it under his shirt.* This is all I need. *The pressure of the handkerchief is too much.* Let me lean on you.

GIRL: What are you doing all the way out here?

BOY: I was thinking about something serious.

GIRL: Are you kidding me? You were thinking so hard you forgot to look before you crossed? Thinking isn't usually life threatening. You're lucky I didn't kill you.

BOY: What I'm thinking about is life threatening.

GIRL: *Scornfully* Suicide? Suicide?! You were going to have me kill you? That's manslaughter, you creep!

BOY: Well, it obviously didn't work. You're not scraping me off your tires. It wasn't meant to be.

GIRL: I can't believe... that's what this was for? You were going to kill yourself?

BOY: I knew it wouldn't work. That's not what this is about anymore. Our meeting isn't a coincidence.

GIRL: You need to get to a hospital, pal...

BOY: You think this is a random moment, a bad afternoon for both of us...

GIRL: Look, I'll call 911.

BOY: Rejah, the truth is...

GIRL: What?

BOY: The truth is, this was all orchestrated.

GIRL: How do you know my name?

BOY: I knew you'd be here. And now that you are, I don't know what to do.

GIRL: How did you know I'd be here?

BOY: Please. My name is Faris. Now we're even.

GIRL: Do you always talk this way, or are you trying to scare me?

BOY: You just don't understand, not that anyone else does. When I talk like this it's not to scare you. Neither of us wanted this to happen. You didn't want to hit me, and I didn't want to survive it. And now we're here. *to the sky, laughing* What now?

GIRL: If you have an appointment with death, why did you try to kill yourself?

FARIS: Let's change the subject, okay?

REJAH: *Not unkindly* Calm down.

FARIS: Calm down? You're here. What does that mean? What happens next?

REJAH: When it comes down to it, and I don't know why, but I believe you. I was supposed to be here. So were you.

FARIS: We still don't have to get into it any further.

REJAH: Why?

FARIS: If I tell you... if I tell you, your blonde hair will shoot up like electric wires.

REJAH: You're trying to scare me.

FARIS: I'm not trying to scare you, and we're not talking about this anymore.

REJAH: You yourself said I have a role in your life. I'd say you're right. At the very least, I can't just abandon you here, bleeding.

FARIS: *Sighs* Oh, that's no big deal.

REJAH: Are you kidding, you're covered in blood.

FARIS: It's not that easy. Take another look at the wound you caused. There's still a lot of blood... it looks like I slaughtered a chicken. But it's totally healed.

REJAH: *in a high voice* Oh my God! You ... I hit you only a minute ago... How did - that's impossible! What are you?

FARIS: *Distractedly, like he is crying* I am a damned creature, Rejah... This was all planned; I would have escaped had I not found you.

REJAH: What would you have escaped from?

FARIS: *Crying* I am a damned creature. I'll never be free of this burden. There is no use for me... Let me leave. Rejah, let me go.

REJAH: *Calm* No.

FARIS: You can't help me. This was ordained before either of us was born. I am doomed.

REJAH: *In an attempt to encourage him* Don't talk that way. Life isn't what you imagine. You aren't helpless.

FARIS: *cutting her off* You say that, but you don't know. You almost passed out when you saw my wound; can you imagine that much terror every day of your life? Don't even try. You don't know what it's like to know that you are completely out of your own control. I can see it in your face: you've never known this kind of life. When all the ways before you are shut, you have nowhere to go but death. And I can't even go there. I have to wait.

REJAH: *severely* Do you talk about anything but death? Don't you have anything else to say?

FARIS: Death is in every part my life, since that fateful night...

REJAH: What night?

Faris begins to reflect, absently following his thoughts.

FARIS: *In a remote voice, and with light music* I had been reading before bed, and I turned the light out at about midnight. The rain was pouring down in torrents outside and the thunder was only getting louder. The trees swayed in the wind. I thought one was going to fall on our house.

Storm noises. The sound of the door knocking intermittently.

FARIS: I didn't know what the knock was.

The knock on the door intensifies. The flashback begins to take over; Rejah recedes upstage.

FARIS: I finally got up. There was only darkness in the crack below my door. It was blisteringly cold. *Surrendering to flashback* Who are you?

VOICE: *With deep echoes* Open, Faris, open... I will tell you something...

FARIS: Who are you?

The door creaks open, but the speaker remains unseen.

VOICE: You are Faris?

FARIS: Yes... who are you?

VOICE: Today is Tuesday, Faris.

FARIS: Yes...

VOICE: You will live to see six more Tuesdays, but you will not see a seventh...

FARIS: *With fear* But... who... who are you?

The music comes in violently while Faris continues to demand...

FARIS: Who are you? Where did you go...?

Sequence fades back to present.

FARIS: And then she vanished. Completely vanished. I searched for her, but the streets were empty.

REJAH: Did you see her face?

FARIS: I couldn't see anything, she was just a shadow.

REJAH: So now you wait for this appointment with death.

FARIS: You think it's crazy.

REJAH: Do you have any proof that this happened?

FARIS: You think I'm delusional. All the doctors do, too. Every time I see them, always the same word: Delusional. Delusional. If I argue with them it only further confirms their diagnosis.

REJAH: No one believes ghost stories anymore, Faris.

FARIS: Before this month I was right there with everyone else. I would've thought I was crazy. But I cannot die, Rejah... Do you want to confirm it again? Give me a mirror.

REJAH: Why do you want a mirror?

FARIS: Come on. I don't need it for long.

REJAH: *She retrieves one from her purse. Here. Faris shatters it.* What are you doing?

FARIS: Open your eyes wide.

Faris drags the mirror down his forearm. Rejah screams.

FARIS: Look at it now.

REJAH: *Terrified* It stopped gushing.

FARIS: Just a moment.

REJAH: Oh my God. There's no wound, nothing.

The music rises.

FARIS: I don't ask you anything, Rejah, except that you believe me. I have to find someone to believe me before I die. No one can carry this alone.

REJAH: Why do you keep trying to kill yourself if you can't die?

FARIS: To atone for my sin. The voice returns every night at the same time. She doesn't always speak. Every night I say the same thing to myself: no, no, I will not reply to the knocking. But I always do.

REJAH: Every night? What terror!

FARIS: Terror no human can imagine and no human has suffered. I've done everything I know to do to make her leave me. I began to think I was hallucinating, like all the doctors said, so I kept looking for some sign the woman may have left. And one morning...

REJAH: What?

FARIS: Remember the snow last week? There were footsteps, sunken into the snow... it was that particular night that she said new things that she had not said the other nights...

REJAH: What did she say?

As Faris begins his story, he is accompanied by music and traces of sounds that increase.

**** PHYSICAL COMPOSITION 2 THROUGHOUT FLASHBACK****

FARIS: Before I went to bed that night I decided I had figured it out... I decided to invite her to talk to me so that I could figure out who she was. When the knock came, I stood there without opening the door. I couldn't go through with my plan, I was too afraid.

The sound of the knocking on the door, and the sound of the thunder and wind. The knocks on the door grow violent.

VOICE: Listen to me, Faris, listen... I want a word with you.

FARIS: No... you have to listen to me this time.

VOICE: Listen to me Faris, listen.... I want a word with you.

FARIS: Come back in the morning when I can see who you are.

VOICE: Listen, Faris.

The sounds of the dialogue mix with and become obstructed by the sounds of the snowstorm.

FARIS: Answer just one question...

VOICE: *In anger and without pause* Listen, Faris, listen. I want a word with you.

FARIS: To hell with you and your word!

VOICE: Listen, Faris...

FARIS: Why do you come here to tell me this, night after night?

VOICE: Listen, Faris, Listen... I want a word with you.

FARIS: Why? Why? Why?

The music grows over the voice of the wind, rain.

FARIS: Why? Why?

VOICE: Because you killed your mother, Faris... you killed your own mother.

Silence. Then a violent musical crescendo.

REJAH: You killed your mother? You killed your mother and you call yourself a victim? And you wanted my car to kill you? You can't accept your punishment, that's all it is!

FARIS: Punishment?

REJAH: For the murder.

FARIS: Rejah...

REJAH: What do you want with me now? I have seen you now; you are bared to the core. *Beat of silence.* It seems my role in your life is finished.

FARIS: Rejah...

REJAH: There isn't anything to say. I don't want to help you. No one wants to help you dodge the consequences of your actions. You are being judged, haven't you ever thought of that?

FARIS: Certainly I thought of it... dwelt upon it... but I never asked you for anything.

REJAH: You are avoiding your judgment. You're rejecting your lot.

FARIS: I never said anything different, I begged only that you help me achieve my own death as a person who lived in the world, in a community, with or without the rest of mankind... do you understand, Rejah?

REJAH: *Angrily* I don't care about understanding. And I wasn't helping you die. Why don't you find someone else to hit you? I'm in a hurry. Best of luck.

FARIS: I'll go, but you won't be rid of me. I'll become your property. You'll think of me even in your happy house, surrounded by the things you own whose weight you will never feel.

REJAH: Anything else?

FARIS: I want to say many things to you, Rejah. I do not want to be alone. I am a murderer and no one trusts me. I will die as a man beset by illusions, not a man haunted by my crime... that is my real fear. Perhaps death is the fair penance for my crime, but the road to it isn't fair.

REJAH: You're crazy. I'm leaving.

She exits.

FARIS: *to himself* But you won't go far... you won't go far...

Scene 3: Rejah's Living Room

REJAH'S FATHER: Rejah, your story is pretty strange... I just can't believe you're serious. Do *you* even believe what you're telling me?

REJAH: Dad, come on, I know it's weird, but why would I lie to you? I told you I spent more than an hour with him... he cut his own arm right in front of me.

FATHER: Rejah... you're a smart girl, right? You know that if a man cuts himself in front of you he's going to bleed for at least –

REJAH: Yeah, Dad, I get it, but that's why I'm telling you this story, because it scares me.

FATHER: Okay, let's go over the facts.

REJAH: Again?

FATHER: You wanted me to listen.

REJAH: I hit him with the car and ripped up his shoulder. His shirt was soaked with blood.

FATHER: And the wound healed?

REJAH: Completely... it disappeared without a trace.

FATHER: And you tried to take him to the hospital?

REJAH: Right.

FATHER: And he said that he was a man who couldn't die?

REJAH: Yes.

FATHER: And you saw, with your own eyes, the sides of the wound draw together and heal?

REJAH: Like I said two minutes ago... and the blood was still wet on his skin.

FATHER: And what about the story of the ghost that visits every night?

REJAH: I've told you this story ten times! You're mocking me! *The father chuckles.* What, do you think I'm lying? You don't trust me...

FATHER: *Insensitively* Your imagination... maybe mine is too small. Rejah, what you're describing can't happen. It defies logic. It defies science. It had to have been a trick, or something.

REJAH: You think I'm delusional?

FATHER: I didn't say that. I know you're tired. It's the exams. This is just a result of the academic pressure you're under. Are you going to your classes?

REJAH: Don't baby me. Of course I am, but I don't know why, since obviously I'm not meant to be a doctor.

FATHER: If you studied more and didn't make up these little fantasies –

REJAH: Look, I don't want to argue about school again, Dad. I've got bigger things on my mind.

FATHER: *Mockingly but affectionate* Just go to bed... we can laugh about this in the morning. We'll roar.

REJAH: Dad, don't you think it's peculiar that I ran into him, of all people? Or that he got hit by me? Doesn't that strike you as odd?

FATHER: It's more odd that you're making up these stories during exam week.

REJAH: Fine. I'm going to bed. Do you even realize how you're looking at me?

FATHER: How?

REJAH: You're looking at me like I'm crazy. How do you think that makes me feel?

FATHER: Rejah.

REJAH: Good night.

She leaves and a door slams offstage.

FATHER: *to himself* Well. *A beat of silence.* I have to do something, I can't stop thinking about this. I'm going to call a doctor.

He picks up a phone.

Scene 4: Rejah's Living Room, an hour later

The Father sits, waiting. Dr. Said enters and the Father stands up quickly.

DR. SAID: I did every test I knew to do, and there's no sign of anything wrong with her.

FATHER: What kinds of tests did you do?

DR. SAID: Well, I started with the routine stuff: heartbeat, pulse, blood pressure. I looked at her tonsils, under her eyelids. She's physically healthy.

FATHER: Of course she is, I knew that.

DR. SAID: Hold on. She shows signs of huge amounts of stress. It's nothing dangerous for a woman her age, but her heart rate was up and she seemed flustered. When I walked into the room she asked me if I thought she was some kind of delusional mess.

FATHER: I'm sorry. She knows better.

DR. SAID: And I knew that, so I asked her why she was angry. And she told me this story....

FATHER: Of the ghosts and the man that can't die and the wound that healed and his role in fate? That's the one she told me, that's why I called you. Do you have an explanation, Doctor?

SAID: Not without further sessions with her. I didn't want to push her too far, Hassan, since she's clearly agitated. Now's not the time to ask more questions.

FATHER: She's talking like she's crazy.

SAID: I'm sure she's not crazy. It could be a lot of things. She could've talked to a friend about destiny and death right before falling asleep studying and thought this all really happened. Who knows.

FATHER: Well she's never done anything like this before. Can't you prescribe something? A sedative?

SAID: Your family has no history of mental illness, so my professional opinion is that you leave this one. See if there's a change after she's had some sleep.

FATHER: What if she wants to see this Faris guy again? If he even exists.

SAID: I'm not her mother, but I wouldn't let her. At least for now. He disturbs her.

FATHER: Clearly. She scared me, coming in here raving. It's not like her. Listen, Doctor, I really want to talk to this Faris guy and see what's going on. I have a bad feeling.

SAID: It's nothing. It's exam season and everyone at the university is half-insane from lack of sleep and caffeine. Don't get too protective.

FATHER: I feel like Cecilia would have done something.

SAID: You can't assume you know, Hassan. You and Rejah are doing well. You're in a new house, and you're moving on. Don't let this throw you backwards.

FATHER: I know, I just miss her. I think Rejah does, too. I'm concerned about her.

SAID: Look. If things get out of hand, we can reach Faris through the university and talk to him. I'll volunteer to be there.

FATHER: I'm sure he's at least on drugs.

SAID: If he is we'll find out.

FATHER: I don't want Rejah mixed up in that.

SAID: Hassan, if a druggie is harassing your daughter, the police will be happy to assist you. They know how rich your family is. Pardon my frankness.

FATHER: That's another thing. Rejah is a rich girl who gets a lot of attention at the university. I worry about her.

SAID: You don't need to. You have a lot of resources at your disposal. If anything happens we can always get him on drugs.

FATHER: But what if he's not on drugs?

SAID: This kid is running around whipping young girls into a frenzy over nothing. We'd be doing the community a favor.

FATHER: You think?

SAID: Let's cross that bridge when we get there.

FATHER: Got it.

Scene 5: The living room, the next morning

The Father has fallen asleep in his chair. Rejah enters and wakes the Father trying to get out of the house.

FATHER: Well, look who finally decided to roll out of bed! Do you feel better today?

REJAH: Yes.

FATHER: Dr. Said said you were rude to him last night.

REJAH: It all started to feel so stupid. Like we were going to a lot of trouble over nothing. I just needed some sleep.

FATHER: Are you going to go to class today?

REJAH: I don't know why I wouldn't.

FATHER: Are you going to tell everyone at school about your little story?

REJAH: What story?

FATHER: Faris' story. You know, the Unbreakable Man.

REJAH: Faris? Oh... no, it was a stupid story... it was ridiculous. I just got really bored.

FATHER: You made it up?

REJAH: I met a person named Faris... but the rest of the story I made up.

FATHER: That's not like you.

Rejah stands uncertainly.

REJAH: I have to go to a study group.

FATHER: Are you sure you're okay?

REJAH: I'm fine, I just have a lot of exams coming up.

FATHER: When I talked to Dr. Said last night I wondered to her if you might miss your mother.

REJAH: I have to go.

She makes a move for the door, half-heartedly.

FATHER: Rejah, stay here. I know you miss her. I do, too. And now that it's been about a year it's getting tough again.

REJAH: Dad, I don't want to talk about this right now.

FATHER: But remember how good you're doing. We're in a new house - that you seem to like, right?

Rejah doesn't answer.

FATHER: (cont'd) ... and you're doing well in school, you have good friends... Just think about the good things. That's what your Mom would've wanted.

REJAH: I have to go.

Rejah exits in silence.

Scene 7: The street

COMPOSITION 3: Rejah searches for Faris amidst a crowd of people, moving as recklessly and perilously as in the first composition. Rejah sees Faris and struggles to reach him. He vanishes inside a doorway. The crowd clears.

Rejah knocks.

FARIS: You've come early, Ghost... do you have something new to tell me about my death while you hide in the rain and darkness?

REJAH: Faris... it's Rejah.

FARIS: *Startled* Rejah? Rejah?

The bolt slides open on the door and the door opens.

REJAH: I wanted to talk to you.

FARIS: Rejah... In my house? *He laughs crazily.* Rejah with me to protect against the ghost! I'm shocked. I didn't think you'd find me.

REJAH: I knew where to find you, somehow.

FARIS: Well come in, please.

REJAH: *shivering* Is your heat broken?

FARIS: Sorry, I don't spend much time here. Seems like a waste of money to heat the whole thing. Most nights I sleep outside.

REJAH: Why?

FARIS: When I stare at a ceiling all night I can't stop thinking. I get so easily overwhelmed. When I'm outside it's better. When it rains I feel clean.

REJAH: Do you have a coat I can wear? I left mine at the house.

FARIS: I don't get cold. Sorry. Why did you leave your house?

REJAH: I don't know. I tried to tell my father about what you'd told me. How you feel lonely and guilty. But he didn't believe me. He barely cared. And then some quack psychiatrist showed up to ask me if I missed my mother, and no one wanted to talk about you anymore. I realized I'm the only one who wants to understand.

FARIS: Don't you want to go home? You're shivering like a twig...

REJAH: I don't care, Faris. Don't you know I don't care about the cold?

FARIS: I know.

Silence.

REJAH: So you stay in this cold house, dwelling on your death and guilt, all alone. Do you work? Do you do anything?

FARIS: I think a lot. It doesn't come to much. Makes me feel like a spectator.

REJAH: You're not a spectator.

FARIS: *Laughing* We all are... if we're not committing the sins ourselves, we watch delightedly while someone else does.

REJAH: Why are you joking about this?

FARIS: If I don't joke something worse will happen. Do you know that feeling?

REJAH: Yes. My father wants to interrogate you. I heard he and the doctor talking. They think you're on drugs.

FARIS: You know I'm not, don't you?

REJAH: Of course I know. You're in pain. You're trapped.

FARIS: Not all the time. It's hard, though. Knowing the end is coming. Knowing that this house will stay standing after I go, just like it stayed after my mother died.

REJAH: This is where you lived?

FARIS: Yes. We lived here together. And now I wait here for my appointment. Only six days remain.

REJAH: And then the Ghost comes for you?

FARIS: I suppose so.

REJAH: Faris, you can fight. You have to.

FARIS: It's not in my power.

REJAH: You have to. I love you.

FARIS: I told you time was short from the very beginning, Rejah.

REJAH: You said it all the time: I don't feel anything but hopelessness, I am a man condemned to die.... But who cares, Faris?

FARIS: You love a dying man, Rejah, a dying man.

REJAH: Kiss me.

FARIS: What?

REJAH: Kiss me.

FARIS: You're making this feeling bigger than it really is. I don't want to waste time, but I...

REJAH: But you don't want to drown me in sorrow, right? You don't want to hurt me? Well, I'm drowning now, Faris. *A moment of silence and the violin crescendos. A strong knock at the door.* That's my dad. *Shouting* Hold on a second.

FARIS: No... it's the ghost.

VOICE: *In stereo, as if from far away.* Open the door, Faris, open the door... I will have a word with you.

REJAH: Oh my God.

FARIS: You have to be quiet.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... Open the door... I will say something to you.

FARIS: Every night... every night... the same time, the same moment... the same voice, same words. Don't you want to come with me to open the door?

REJAH: No, I don't want to go with you. I want you to stay with me.

FARIS: I can't.

REJAH: You will stay with me.

The voice shouts over the wind.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris. Open the door and I will have a word with you.

FARIS: You worthless ghost, I'm finished with you.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... open the door.

FARIS: You don't scare me, Shadow of my sleep, you don't scare me.

VOICE: Open the door, Faris... open the door... I will have a word with you.

FARIS: Why only one? I live with this word, here in this house...

VOICE: Open the door, Fa –

FARIS: Wait.

The door slides open.

VOICE: You're Faris?

FARIS: I'm Faris.

VOICE: You will live to see *Faris begins to laugh maniacally while the voice continues without regard* one more Thursday.... But you will not live to see the next Thursday.

A burst of yelling explodes from Rejah, while Faris continues laughing and the voice rises and vanishes into the wind and the music rises for a few moments

FARIS: Rejah, are you okay? *A moment of silence*

REJAH: *disoriented* Where am I?

FARIS: *With a brittle laugh* You saw my ghost, my little fairy tale...

REJAH: Now I feel like I'm going to die after six days...

FARIS: No, not you. Maybe you'll die after a month or a year or a hundred years. When you look at people you see truth. I see only guilt. That's why I have to go so soon.

REJAH: Don't say that.

FARIS: Please stay with me. *Silence* It's getting colder. I was doomed from long before I met you. I killed my mother, I killed my mother! Don't you understand?

REJAH: How did you kill her, Faris?

FARIS: Why do you want to know?

REJAH: It's part of your story. *Silence.* I am ready to help you, Faris, even if you don't believe me.

Scene 8: The house, showing signs of use.

FARIS; *Dreamily* My mother was an old woman, and after the death of my father we were alone. His death was a jolt. When he died the bank tried to reclaim our house. We had to fight not for ownership but for a few more days inside our own home while we tried to think of where else we could go. It seemed like even the stars went out during that time. I began to realize things weren't going to change, so I looked for work.

The music crescendos gradually.

I found a job in a town across the mountains. I had to tell my mother as soon as I could. My mother had hidden herself away in her room, which she rarely left. She was always sleeping.

The music rises a little and Faris enters the Mother's room.

FARIS: Wake up, Mother, wake up...

MOTHER: Faris? Can't it wait for the morning?

FARIS: No, I want to tell you something now.

MOTHER: What?

FARIS: I found a job.

MOTHER: Thank God! Oh, Faris! That's wonderful! When do you start?

FARIS: As soon as I can, Mother. We'll have enough money to feed us and keep you comfortable. We can get our house back. We can have a car.

MOTHER: I don't want any of that, Faris... I will die soon, and none of that matters to me. What I want is for you to live your life.

FARIS: There's one thing. The job isn't here.

MOTHER: How far away is it?

FARIS: I'll have to fly there. I can send you money.

MOTHER: A distant place?

FARIS: There are no jobs here. I have to go somewhere else if we want to keep this house.

MOTHER: And me, and me, and me, Faris? *Begins crying* I am old and crippled, Faris.... Your mother is an old and crippled woman, Faris. And you want to leave her?

FARIS: *With anger* You say that all the time, but you're not crippled, Mama. You are not sick. Are you going to let this delusion control your life? Are you going to die in this bed?

MOTHER: Do you think I want this? I am fighting for your sake, but I can't withstand much. Will you really leave me here? Will you?

FARIS: Delusion, delusion, delusion ... can you help me here? Just this once? I will go for two months. Just two months. It's the chance of a lifetime, Mother... The chance of a lifetime.

MOTHER: *Crying* And my life, Faris, and mine? Isn't it true that you said you'd stay with me until I die?

FARIS: What do you want me to do, Mother? You know how many debts Father had... tomorrow they'll throw us into the street. What will you do then; tell them we have to stay in this house because you're crippled?

MOTHER: What do you want? What do you want, Faris? Condemn your poor mother to die alone? Do it. Kill me now if you want. Kill me.

FARIS; *Hastily* I don't want that at all, I don't want that at all. *Cries* Fine, I won't go. I will stay here with you. I'll stay.

The music rises a little.

FARIS: For two weeks I tried to stay. All the while the bank knocked at our door louder every day.

REJAH: And was your mother really crippled?

FARIS: No.

REJAH: What did you do after that?

FARIS: I decided to take the job. I couldn't tell my mother. Early one morning I packed and prepared to leave. I'd written my mother a note. But when I came downstairs, I saw she was already awake.

With his words the music begins to rise. The door opens and there are footsteps.

FARIS: Good morning, Mother. You're up early.

MOTHER: So are you. Where are you off to?

FARIS: I'm looking for work. And you?

MOTHER. You told me to walk a little and stretch out my legs. I can walk a little now, maybe sell some food... then I'll come back here.

FARIS: *Cheerily* That's great! So you're not caught up in those delusions anymore?

MOTHER: Delusions? What delusions?

FARIS: You're a woman without them. A woman who finally has some vigor... shall we dance?

MOTHER: I'm done with the crutches... When you come back I'll make you breakfast, okay?

FARIS: No, don't wait for me. I'm late; I have to get across town for an appointment.

MOTHER: As you wish... don't you want to eat something now?

FARIS: Come on, stop. I have to go.

MOTHER: I hope you find some work.

Faris exits. The music rises.

FARIS: I shut the door and looked around. It was eight in the morning on a Thursday. *The sound of a clock striking eight with light music.* Within ten minutes I was downtown. At nine I was on the plane.

Scene 8: The house, present time

REJAH: You left your mother in this house without a goodbye?

FARIS: If I'd said goodbye to her face I never would have been able to leave. You're a rich woman. You couldn't possibly understand. You don't know what it's like to be so hungry you can't sleep, or to know that at any moment your house might be taken away.

Silence.

FARIS: After I left, I called to tell her, but she didn't pick up. I called every day, and she never answered. I wrote letters and apologized over and over. I told her I would return soon. She never did write me back, not a single word through all those months. I thought maybe she was too busy to write, or perhaps she was angry, but I knew she wanted me to come home.

Music

I finally came home one day... and you know the rest of the story.

REJAH: What? She was dead?

FARIS: No. I couldn't find her.

REJAH: Then what?

FARIS: Nothing, that's the whole story. I've told you everything.

REJAH: That's impossible. How did she die?

FARIS: I don't know. I would have taken her with me, but she didn't know anyone else there, there are no relatives. So I went home and waited for the poor woman for days, three days, then I looked for her all over our hometown. It was like when she

finally decided to walk she walked out of this life and into the next. No one knew where she had died, or where her body was buried, no one knew where or when or how...

REJAH: You think she died of grief?

FARIS: I don't know what else it could be. I searched for her everywhere. One day, two days, three... that's when I saw the ghost for the first time.

REJAH: And you stopped looking for her?

FARIS: How could I keep going? In the whole city, no one had seen her. I argued with them like a crazy man... all just spectators, all of them. Won't the ghost punish me for her death? Because I killed her, Rejah. Don't waste your time trying to change it.... I killed my mother. And I have to die for it.

REJAH: I don't know, Faris. It looks bleak, but I don't think it's hopeless.

FARIS: How?

REJAH: You never found her grave. She might not be dead. In any case, we have to find out soon. Your guilt won't wait for us.

Lights come up on the Father, in his home. Dr. Said enters.

FATHER: Thank you for coming. She's been gone for hours.

SAID: Did you call her professor?

FATHER: She never showed. Where could she be? Did she say anything to you that might help?

SAID: Where does Faris live?

FATHER: That's what I thought, too.

SAID: I'll call the university and ask if he's enrolled there. I know some people that might give me his address.

Lights dim on the Father and Doctor and come up on Faris and Rejah.

FARIS: Why are we an "us"?

REJAH: I don't know Faris, but it's stupid to deny it. You and I have something eternal.

FARIS: Eternity, eternity, eternity... Don't you know that eternity is meaningless?

REJAH: I love you, Faris.

FARIS: Why do you want to torture yourself? Is this fun to you? How can a woman love a man who definitely knows that he will die tomorrow?

REJAH: I love you with something strong within me... stronger than any logic that tries, night and day, to stop me.

FARIS: No, no, Rejah. You don't love me. It's just idle talk. *A beat of silence* You pity me.

REJAH: Those are despicable words.

FARIS: Despicable and relevant. You pity me and want me to die, somewhere deep down, because it's dramatic and passionate and theatrical. It's glorious.

REJAH: I want you to die?

FARIS: Of course! Don't you know why? Because my death is your only road to life... or else I'll keep worrying you like I'm doing right now.

REJAH: I love you, Faris. Why can't you say it back?

FARIS: Careful. You think you're in love, but you just don't want to go back to your old life, to return to your temporal world and your house, your friends, university, professors. They'll suck you into their universe, and you'll start to forget me... but that's the only way you can go on. My death is your triumph.

REJAH: That's crazy. I gave everything for your sake, Faris. Everything. I left my house and father and friends for you, and even with all that proof that I love you, you don't want to give anything to me.

FARIS: You didn't leave them.... They alienated you.

REJAH: I left them. For your sake. I have chosen you, Faris. I am still here, and I won't take a single step back.

FARIS: You should go home. I'll be dead in a few hours.

Lights up on Doctor and Father.

SAID: Hassan, sit down.

FATHER: What is it?

SAID: You need to calm down. There's no one by the name of Faris at the university.

FATHER: What does that mean?

SAID: It means either she met him randomly or she's somewhere else. Think. Where else might she go?

FATHER: I don't know, that's why I called you!

SAID: You said she's been sad lately about her mother. Hasn't it been a year?

FATHER: It's been a year and three days. Do you think...

SAID: Get your coat.

Lights up on Faris, Rejah.

REJAH: I just thought of something.

FARIS: What?

REJAH: Faris... my dear Faris... you didn't kill your mother.

FARIS: What do you mean?

REJAH: You couldn't have. It's not in your nature. You wouldn't have done anything that would've caused her to die of grief. It's not your fault. It's not.

The Doctor and Father arrive by the door to Faris' house.

FATHER: Our old house.

SAID: I think I hear her.

FARIS: You're convinced?

REJAH: It's all in your head, Faris... You didn't kill her. I understand the doubts of a son... but you have to let go. You didn't kill her. Say that to yourself.

FARIS: I didn't kill her.

The Doctor and Father enter. Behind them trail the Mother and the Ghost.

FARIS: I didn't kill my mother.

REJAH: I didn't kill my mother.

REJAH: I didn't kill her.

*The Ghost places a sheet on Faris and he ascends with her. Rejah sinks to the ground.
The Father and Doctor come to her. The Mother watches.*

FIN