

The Perfect Sameness of Our Days

## Character List

### SOLDIER

A young man. 19-24

### GARDENER

An older man of Middle Eastern heritage. 48 - 55

### SERGEANT

A police sergeant. 40's

### OFFICER

A young police officer 20's

### MRS. IZADI

An older woman of Middle Eastern heritage. The GARDENER'S wife.  
48-55

### MRS. GREGORY

A young woman. The SOLDIER'S sister. 24 - 28

### CROWN

A male voice. (Note: Must be the same voice as the Sergeant.) 40's

### DISPATCH

A voice. (Note: Can be taped.) N/A

Abstract: Two tortured souls, both victims of war in their own way, meet in an urban lot.

In 2 acts

## ACT I

An abandoned urban lot. Gently sloping from upstage to downstage. Scattered here and there is the detritus of congested city life.

Upstage left is a tree. It has seen healthier days.

Downstage center right is a crudely dug hole.

As the lights come up, night is slowly turning to day. After a time a SOLDIER appears upstage left. From his tattered and filthy state, it's clear he's been on the street for some time. He is crouched, peering, carefully reconnoitering the area. After a long time, he makes a sudden move, diving for the hole.

Again, a pause. Soon the top of the SOLDIER'S head appears. He scans with the telescopic sight on his weapon in all directions until he is satisfied that no one is approaching.

Taking three bundles out of his kit bag, he starts to place them in a perimeter around the foxhole, Each bundle has a long strand of wire coming from it. He carefully unreels each wire back to the foxhole, where he connects each one to what looks like a firing box. Then he covers the wires with dirt.

As he works, he repeatedly checks the area ahead and behind.

A two way radio comes to life.

## CROWN

Crown to Tango, Delta, Foxtrot ...

(Pause)

Crown to Tango, Delta, Foxtrot...

The SOLDIER just misses answering the radio before it asks again.

CROWN (cont'd)

Crown to Tango, Delta, Foxtrot....copy? Over.

SOLDIER

Copy, Crown. Tango, Delta, Foxtrot, copy. Go for Tango. Over.

CROWN

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot. Report. Over.

SOLDIER

Stand by, Crown. Over.

CROWN

Standing by. Over.

The SOLDIER hurriedly consults a map.

SOLDIER

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot to Crown. Over.

CROWN

Go for Crown, Tango. Over.

SOLDIER

Coordinates ninety three, two twenty three, four, grid nine. Over.

CROWN

Copy that, Tango. Unit report. Over.

SOLDIER

I am alone, Crown. Over.

CROWN

(Pause)

Repeat, Tango. Over.

SOLDIER

I am separated from my unit. Over.

Pause.

CROWN

We have no further reports from your unit, Tango. Over.

SOLDIER

No further reports?

(Beat)

Over.

CROWN

Just you, Tango. Looks like you boys were in the shit last night. We have you plotted on the business end of hill one one four. Copy Tango? Over.

SOLDIER

Copy Crown, Over.

CROWN

Hill one one four is secure, Tango. But we have activity three clicks north of your current position. Over.

SOLDIER

Copy Crown. Awaiting further orders. Over.

CROWN

Copy Tango. Your part in this is over, son. You just keep your head down and prepare for immediate dust off. We're on our way. Copy Tango? Over.

SOLDIER

Copy Crown. Standing by for dust off. Over.

CROWN

Crown out.

The SOLDIER looks at the radio for a moment, then puts it down. Grasping a pair of binoculars, he makes slow careful visual sweeps of the area. Finally satisfied that no one is approaching, he squats in his foxhole and waits.

Long pause.

Upstage right, A GARDENER quietly enters. He is an older man of Middle Eastern heritage. He is carrying a hoe and a large watering can. He walks toward the tree upstage.

SOLDIER

(pointing his weapon)

Freeze!

GARDENER  
(startled)

What?

SOLDIER

Freeze!

GARDENER

Do not shoot me!

SOLDIER

Then don't fucking move! Grab sky. Now!

GARDENER

What?

SOLDIER

Grab some sky!

GARDENER

What is grab sky?

SOLDIER

Put your fucking hands in the air! Now!

The GARDENER quickly raises his hands. The  
SOLDIER approaches him warily.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

If you move, if you twitch, if you even breathe heavy I'll blow your head off.

GARDENER

No...

SOLDIER

All that'll be left is a little pink cloud where your brains used to be.

GARDENER

Please no...

SOLDIER

You got me, Ali?

GARDENER

What? What?

Do you understand me? SOLDIER

No. GARDENER

What?! SOLDIER

Yes! GARDENER

What is your major fucking problem, Ali? Do you understand me?! SOLDIER

(panic stricken)  
Yes! No! What do you wish me to say? GARDENER

How hard can this be, numb nuts? If you move I will kill you. Do you understand me?! SOLDIER

Yes. GARDENER

Yes what? SOLDIER

Yes, I understand. GARDENER

Understand what? SOLDIER

I understand not to move. I will not move. GARDENER

Or what? SOLDIER

What? GARDENER

SOLDIER

What will happen if you move, Ali?

GARDENER

(Beat)

You will kill me.

SOLDIER

Good. Finally.

They stare at each other for a long moment.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Alright. Now slowly, very slowly, take three steps toward me. Keep your hands in the air.

The GARDENER does not move.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Get the shit out of your ears, Ali. Take three steps, slow steps, towards me. Now.

GARDENER

I do not wish to die.

SOLDIER

Move.

GARDENER

I do not want to die. I do not wish to die with a pink cloud head.

SOLDIER

Yeah? I'll bet you don't. Three steps toward me. Move!

GARDENER

You will kill me.

SOLDIER

I'll kill you if you don't. Look, Ali try to keep up. The test here just got more difficult. We're moving it up a level. Here's the deal. I tell you what to do...

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

And if you don't do it immediately then I kill you.

GARDENER

I do not wish to die.

SOLDIER

Good. Then get your ass over here. Now.

GARDENER

Just...just take my money and I will go.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

Please, take my money. I will go and I will not report this.

The SOLDIER points the gun at the GARDENER's head.

SOLDIER

Move! Now!

The GARDENER, frightened, staggers forward three steps.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Hands on your head.

The GARDENER obeys.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Kneel.

The GARDENER kneels awkwardly, hands still on his head.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

You got anything I should know about?

GARDENER

What? I do not understand...

SOLDIER

Fuck it, Ali. I'm just gonna do you. Say goodnight bitch.

GARDENER

No!

The SOLDIER kicks the GARDENER in the back forcing him to the ground. The GARDENER starts to pray softly yet intensely. The SOLDIER places the gun to the back of the GARDENER'S head and pulls the trigger.

It clicks. Instantly The SOLDIER places his foot on the GARDENER'S head. He pulls the clip from his weapon, tossing it away. He searches himself for another clip. Not finding one he looks first at the foxhole then back at the GARDENER.

Pause.

SOLDIER

You must be the luckiest motherfucker on planet earth today. Really, no shit.

(Beat)

Guess it just wasn't your time, huh?

GARDENER

Please...please just take my money. Please.

The SOLDIER pulls the GARDENER back to his knees by the neck. He then places the GARDENER hands back on top of his head. Pulling out a knife, he pulls the GARDENER'S head back and lays the blade at his throat.

SOLDIER

Stop jabbering. Now... here's the deal. I'm going to search you. Have you got anything in your pockets that could hurt me?

GARDENER

No. No.

SOLDIER

You wouldn't be fucking with me Ali, would you buddy?

GARDENER

I am true. I have nothing.

SOLDIER

Good. For your sake I hope so.

The SOLDIER quickly yet carefully performs a pat down search.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Lie down.

The GARDENER does so. Squatting over him with a knee in his back, the SOLDIER searches his lower body. When he's done he pulls the GARDENER back up to his knees. The GARDENER quickly places his hands back on his head. The SOLDIER jumps into the foxhole, finds another clip and slides it into his weapon.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Well Ali, you're true to your word.

GARDENER

I am true.

SOLDIER

So far.

(Beat)

Now you and I are gonna have a little chat.

GARDENER

Talk?

SOLDIER

That's right.

GARDENER

I would like to talk to you. I would like that.

SOLDIER

We'll see. First things first. You gotta get secured here, chief.

GARDENER

Secured?

The SOLDIER pulls the GARDENER'S hands down from his head and binds them in front.

Then he pulls the GARDENER out of his kneeling position and has him sit cross-legged. The SOLDIER considers his work for a moment then rechecks the GARDENER'S bonds. Finally he backs up and sits at the edge of his foxhole.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Why this?

SOLDIER

Why what?

GARDENER  
(indicates his bonds)

This.

SOLDIER

Cause you're a prisoner.

GARDENER

A prisoner?

SOLDIER

Yeah. Can't you tell?

GARDENER

Why?

SOLDIER

Because I have the gun, that's why. That's the way it works pretty much worldwide. If you got the hardware, you get to ask the questions.

GARDENER

But why...

The SOLDIER levels his weapon at the GARDENER'S head.

SOLDIER

Shut up.

(Beat)

Maybe you were coming back from your vacation last night or maybe you're just a sound sleeper but a lot of good men died taking this hill. And I've got some answers coming from you. And I want them. Right now.

GARDENER  
Men are dead?

SOLDIER  
Yeah, they are.

GARDENER  
Where?

SOLDIER  
You're pretty goddam mouthy. I ask the questions. Got it?

GARDENER  
Yes.

SOLDIER  
What is your unit's exact location?

GARDENER  
Unit?

SOLDIER  
Unit. Where are they? And what are you doing here?

GARDENER  
What is unit?

SOLDIER  
Your unit. The other soldiers, your brother ragheads, your fellow insurgents, the radicals...

GARDENER  
I do not understand, I am a...

SOLDIER  
Hey!  
(Beat)  
Ali, don't you fucking people worship your ancestors or some such shit?

GARDENER  
We revere those of our kin that have come before us.

SOLDIER  
Would you like to go visit? Say hi?

GARDENER

Visit?

SOLDIER

Have some tea and dates, have a little family reunion?

GARDENER

I do not...

SOLDIER

Cause I'm going send you off to meet your goddam ancestors right this fucking instant if I don't start getting some straight answers out of you! Now, where is your unit?

GARDENER

Is unit family? Is the meaning family?

SOLDIER

Family?

GARDENER

My home is beyond the ridge.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

Over this hill and the next is my home. Where I live.

SOLDIER

Where you live?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

With your family?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

Why would you think I give a shit about that? I spent the entire night on this hill fighting for my life. Good men died to take this hill. Now tell me, where is the rest of your unit? Soldiers. Other soldiers. Where are they?

GARDENER

Soldiers? I am not...

SOLDIER

Are they behind us? Are they behind us?

GARDENER

I am a gardener.

SOLDIER

Will you answer my fucking question? Where is the rest of your unit?

GARDENER

I am not a soldier. I have not a unit.

SOLDIER

Jesus...

GARDENER

I am a gardener. This is my orchard.

SOLDIER

Maybe one time, Ali, but not now. This is hill one, one four. We fought for it, we died for it, our blood is on it and now it's ours.

GARDENER

Hill one one four? No. This is my orchard.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

I am not a soldier. I have no unit. I have no weapons. All I have is tools for my work. I am a gardener.

SOLDIER

Don't fuck with me. Just don't fuck with me. Do you think I'm stupid? Do you?

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

Do you think I'd just fall for some trick? You're a forward scout. That's why you're here. I happen to know your goddam raghead buddies are all around this hill...

GARDENER

No...

SOLDIER

Yes! And you know what? They might get me, they just might. But, since you're my prisoner, you're going too. I swear by God and all that's holy, the last thing I'm gonna do is put a bullet through your head.

GARDENER

Please. No...

SOLDIER

Oh yeah, that's what's gonna happen. Then you and the whole Ali family can get together on the other side. One big fucking family reunion.

The radio crackles to life.

CROWN

Crown to Tango, Delta, Foxtrot. Over

SOLDIER

Don't you move.

The SOLDIER picks up radio handset. The sounds of combat can be heard coming through the radio.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot to Crown. Over.

CROWN

Tango, bad news. We're getting heavy fire incoming our position and we're having trouble getting a dust off out to you. Over.

SOLDIER

Copy that, Crown. Holding one unfriendly here. Over.

CROWN

Outstanding, Tango. MI will want to interrogate. Hold prisoner and position. We'll get to you ASAP. Over.

SOLDIER

Copy that, Crown. Over.

CROWN

Crown out.

Pause.

SOLDIER

Well, we're going on a little trip, you and me.

GARDENER

A trip?

SOLDIER

Yup. We're headed out as soon as the dust off shows. All we gotta do now is wait.

GARDENER

Dust up? What is a dust up?

SOLDIER

Dust off, Ali, Dust off. A chopper. Whirlybird. Helicopter.

GARDENER

I am going into a helicopter?

SOLDIER

You sure are. MI wants to have a little discuss with you.

GARDENER

I do not understand. What is MI? Why must I go into a helicopter?

SOLDIER

Military Intelligence. MI. They're gonna ask you the same questions I just asked you but they ain't gonna be so nice about it. And you're going into the dust off cause you're a prisoner.

GARDENER

Why am I a prisoner? I come to my orchard to work and now I am a prisoner? Why?

SOLDIER

Shut up. You aren't my problem anymore.

GARDENER

I do not know anything about you. I know nothing about your war.

SOLDIER

Save it for the big boys.

GARDENER

I do not understand...

SOLDIER

You know what? I don't either. But orders are orders and I'm a soldier and that's what I do. I follow orders.

GARDENER

But...

SOLDIER

Orders are orders. You're going. That's it.

GARDENER

I do not want to go. I do not want to go anywhere. I only wish to work in my orchard.

(The SOLDIER shrugs)

Call them on your box and tell them I do not wish to go.

SOLDIER

Call them?

GARDENER

Yes. On the box you just talked into.

SOLDIER

That's a joke right?

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

Did you hear the explosions, Ali? Did you hear the gunfire? Their position is under attack so they might be a little distracted right now.

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

No? No what?

GARDENER

I heard only your voice. When you talked into the box.

SOLDIER

Then you need to clean the camel shit out of your ears.

GARDENER

I do not own a camel. There are no camels here.

SOLDIER

Forget it. Forget it. It's a figure of speech. A joke.

GARDENER

A joke?

SOLDIER

Forget it.

Pause.

GARDENER

What will happen to me? When we go in the air?

SOLDIER

I dunno.

Long pause.

GARDENER

What is your name?

SOLDIER

My name?

GARDENER

Yes, please.

SOLDIER

What's it to you?

GARDENER

So...what to say ...so I may know how to call you.

SOLDIER

Why do you care?

GARDENER

It is good to call a person by his name. So I may know you.

SOLDIER

What the fuck makes you think I want you to know me? Why would I care if you know me or not?

GARDENER

I care.

SOLDIER

So?

GARDENER

To know you.

SOLDIER

Yeah? Why?

GARDENER

If this is to be my last day, I only wish to know who I share it with.

SOLDIER

Nobody said anything about this being your last day.

GARDENER

Still, it is possible, is it not?

Pause.

SOLDIER

Yeah. Yeah it is.

GARDENER

I know.

SOLDIER

Maybe mine too.

GARDENER

What is your name?

Pause.

SOLDIER

Jim.

GARDENER

Jim. Jim is your name?

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

But that...that is the name you wish? The name of Jim?

SOLDIER

Yeah.

GARDENER

Jim. Jim is a good name.

SOLDIER

Yeah it is.

(Pause)

You wanted a name, Ali. That's the name. Soldiers are trained to never give their real name to the enemy.

GARDENER

But you wish to be called Jim.

SOLDIER

Yeah, fine.

GARDENER

Then Jim is your name.

Pause.

SOLDIER

Well?

GARDENER

Pardon?

SOLDIER

I guess I'm supposed to ask your name now, since we're getting all friendly like.

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

No?

GARDENER  
You have given me a name.

SOLDIER  
Yeah, I guess I did.

GARDENER  
Ali is a good name.

SOLDIER  
Look, you know, we call all you guys Ali. I didn't mean it as an insult or nuthin'. It's just, just...we need a name to call the enemy so we call you Ali.

GARDENER  
I see.

SOLDIER  
No disrespect.

Pause.

SOLDIER (cont'd)  
So?

GARDENER  
So?

SOLDIER  
Is Ali your name?

GARDENER  
Ali is a good name.

SOLDIER  
C'mon!

GARDENER  
It is a fine name. Many of my people are named Ali.

SOLDIER  
Aw...wait, wait I get it. You're trained not to tell the enemy your real name. Right?

GARDENER  
Trained? No...

SOLDIER

Bullshit.

GARDENER

I am not your enemy, Jim.

SOLDIER

No? Really? Wish you were around to tell that to your boys last night. You coulda told everyone what good chums we all are. A lot of blood got spilt on this hill, Ali.

GARDENER

Where?

SOLDIER

Where? Over beyond the ridge was the worst of the fighting. All night long. That's where.

GARDENER

The ridge behind us?

SOLDIER

Yeah.

GARDENER

My house is there.

SOLDIER

Near the ridge?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

So?

GARDENER

Every day I have my breakfast. When my breakfast is done, I kiss my family and come here to do my work. When the noontime comes I walk home to my wife, to my lunch and my prayers. Then, when the mid day heat has passed I return.

SOLDIER

What a lovely tale, Ali. We sharing daily schedules here, buddy?

GARDENER

I slept well last night, in the dark quiet.

SOLDIER

Great.

GARDENER

I walked here today. Early. At dawn when the light comes to my home.

SOLDIER

So what?

GARDENER

There was nothing.

SOLDIER

Nothing? What do you mean?

GARDENER

There were no bodies, Jim. There were no signs of war.

Pause.

SOLDIER

Don't fuck with me, Ali. This isn't a good day for it.

GARDENER

I tell you only what I know to be true.

SOLDIER

See this is what I get for going against my training. I'm here talking with you, listening to your shit and next thing I know you're trying to get into my head and fuck with me.

GARDENER

Come, let us go to the ridge together.

SOLDIER

Not a chance.

GARDENER

We shall go there and see what we shall see...

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

And then we shall talk about these things.

SOLDIER

Shut up.

GARDENER

I only wish to see these things as you have described them. I only ...

SOLDIER

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

They stare at each, the SOLDIER glaring and the GARDENER returning his gaze, but with a touch of concern coloring his expression.

Long pause.

GARDENER

How long..

SOLDIER

I just fucking told you to shut up!

Long pause.

GARDENER

(Softly)

Will we be here long?

SOLDIER

I dunno. They get here when they get here.

GARDENER

It is hard, yes?

SOLDIER

Hard?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

What's hard?

GARDENER

Your war.

SOLDIER

Yeah, yeah it is. It's damn hard. Look I'm sorry I bit your head off back then. It's been a long night.

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

And I'm tired. I'm so fucking tired.

GARDENER

I can see.

SOLDIER

But..

(Beat)

It is what it is. But if I'd a known what this shit was about when I signed up...

GARDENER

Signed up?

SOLDIER

Yeah, you know, enlisted.

GARDENER

You chose to be a soldier?

SOLDIER

Yup.

GARDENER

You have not always been a soldier?

SOLDIER

No. I don't think anybody is the same thing all the time. You always been a...what...gardener?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

Naw...

GARDENER

Yes, Jim. Always. And my father and his father before him. Before all memories and forever we have had this soil. We have tilled this earth for our livelihood. And it has been good to us. To me and mine beyond memory.

SOLDIER

Did you ever wanna be something else?

GARDENER

I am a gardener.

SOLDIER

But you didn't have a choice.

GARDENER

Why would I have a choice?

SOLDIER

Because that's what life is about, man. Choices. You're a grown man and you can do what you want.

GARDENER

No. My place is here. There is a comfort to know where you belong. To be at home, in a place that has your history and your memories. To be a man and to belong to this place. And to respect and be respected by your family and your neighbors and your God. What is the word...

Beat.

SOLDIER

Duty?

GARDENER

Yes. Like an obligation? Am I correct?

SOLDIER

Yeah. Yeah you are.

GARDENER

And my duty is here.

Pause.

SOLDIER

So's mine. Ali.

GARDENER  
It is?

SOLDIER  
Yeah, it is. Here. Today.

A faint boom is heard in the distance.

SOLDIER (cont'd)  
Did you hear that?

GARDENER  
No.

The SOLDIER quickly picks up his binoculars and does a careful visual sweep. The GARDENER looks intensely at him as he does so.

SOLDIER  
That explosion?

GARDENER  
I heard nothing.

SOLDIER  
It sounds closer.

GARDENER  
We did not finish what we were saying.

SOLDIER  
I don't follow.

GARDENER  
About being a soldier. You were not always a soldier?

SOLDIER  
Naw, I went to school but I sucked at it. I wanted something different, wanted some adventure, wanted some money.

GARDENER  
You did not do well at school?

SOLDIER  
It just wasn't for me.

GARDENER

And your father was very angry and beat you, no doubt.

SOLDIER

Haven't seen my real father since I was six. Had two stepfathers, lots of uncles. Mom liked action. Anyway, they didn't give a shit about me and the feeling was mutual. So they let me alone.

GARDENER

Your father did not guide you?

SOLDIER

Uh, no.

GARDENER

So you became a soldier then? You...enlisted...to be a soldier. Why? Do you like this?

SOLDIER

No I don't.

(Pause)

I joined the army because I didn't have anything else going. No job, no nothing. And...

GARDENER

And?

SOLDIER

And I wanted a car.

GARDENER

You went to war for an automobile?

SOLDIER

Yeah, I did. But it was some ride. A '73 Vette Stingray. Oh God it was beautiful. It looked like a shark, Ali, really no shit. And do you know what the really cool thing was? I made the damn thing myself. I took my army enlistment bonus and bought, scrounged and stole everything I needed. All my life, since I was like eight or so, I've loved machines. Cars especially. One of my stepfathers got Hot Rod magazine and I'd swipe it and get under the covers late at night with a flashlight and just devour the thing. Read it from cover to cover. I've been a gearhead most all my life. So, yeah, you're right, I joined the service for that car. Just for the money. I guess that makes me a mercenary. But at the time it was the most important thing in my life.

GARDENER

The most important thing? There was no woman for you?

SOLDIER

Naw, they scared the hell out of me.

GARDENER

A woman is an endless mystery.

SOLDIER

Ain't that right.

(Beat.)

To tell the truth, I was in love with my Vette. And there was lots to love, believe you me. I guess that maybe it's like when you have a kid or something. It's just crazy making how wrapped up you get, how concerned you get. I made my baby from the ground up. The chassis I got from a parts yard for a song. Just had to give the guy fifty bucks and arrange for transport. It was a little fucked up for sure, I guess the guy who owned it before lost a street race in a pretty spectacular fashion. You know, I learned to do things to make my baby. I learned to weld, learned it by hanging around metal fab shops until they got sick of looking at me. I learned hydraulics, learned some electronics. It's amazing how much you can stuff into your brain when you're revved up about something. Anyway it took me about a month, a month of twelve hour days you understand, and the chassis and the engine and all the guts were ready to go. Got some ass kicking tires too. A set of Goodyear Polysteel Radial P225's. They looked lethal. Then there was the engine. I couldn't put the one in I wanted. Couldn't afford it. I wanted a monster. I wanted to build one like I built the chassis, from the ground up. I got one of those old engine blocks, one from the 50's or 60's, either a 258 or 327 cubic dispersment. Then I'd have put on high compression heads. I bet I coulda gotten three hundred horsepower out of those suckers. I mean, if I was using high octane racing gas. Vroom! That sucker would have been lightning with tires. Now if I went the full boat, I'd have tracked down a vintage fuel injection unit. They had them on certain Vettes in the mid 60's. It looked really, really cool and kinda dangerous when you opened the hood.

(Pause.)

But I had to settle because of the money. I wound up with the 350 V8 it came with. But the problem is that was when they started with all the pollution controls shit and that just robbed all the horsepower outta high performance. That and fucking unleaded gas.

Pause. The GARDENER gazes at the SOLDIER but says nothing.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

In the end I guess my favorite thing on her was the body. I spent so long on that thing. It was another junkyard special, kinda banged up. But, I don't think I've ever been happier in my whole life then when I was making that thing. OK, making is the wrong word. Maybe crafting. Cause it's so elaborate, there are so many stages you have to go through. First you have to prepare the fiberglass, lay it and mold it using resin and hardener. Then the paint. First the primer, which is sort of like a neutral first coat. Next is the undercoat, Finally there's the paint itself. But I didn't just paint it one color. No. What I did was use pearl paint...

GARDENER

Pearls? Like the jewels of the sea?

SOLDIER

Naw. It's just a name for the kind of paint. It has little flakes of mica in it. It makes the color sort of dazzle. You know...twinkle. But here's the kicker, I used several different colors, one after the other. Finally I put on a very, very light coat of black. It was so beautiful. Depending on the angle you looked at it from you'd see little flashes of blue, purple, red, green.

(Sighs.)

I can still see her in my head. Wish I had a picture to show you.

(Pause.)

You don't understand a goddam thing I've just said, do you?

GARDENER

Many things you said about the automobile I did not understand but I take your meaning.

SOLDIER

Take my meaning?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

Which was?

GARDENER

You are a soldier for money.

SOLDIER

No. That wasn't my meaning at all...

GARDENER

Meaning is the thought behind the words. You are a soldier for money because you have no persons, no...people...

SOLDIER

Huh?

GARDENER

No family.

SOLDIER

Bullshit.

GARDENER

I speak the truth to you.

SOLDIER

What would you know about the truth?

GARDENER

I heard the yearning in your voice. You speak of the automobile as I speak of my daughters. As a parent full of pride speaks of a child.

SOLDIER

(dismissively)

Yeah, right, OK

Pause.

GARDENER

Where is your automobile now?

Pause.

SOLDIER

Gone.

GARDENER

Gone?

SOLDIER

About three weeks after I finished painting it I got drunk and slammed it into a mailbox and then a lamppost. I totaled it.

GARDENER

Totaled...it?

Destroyed it. SOLDIER

I am sorry. GARDENER

Pause.

Yeah, so am I. Big time. SOLDIER

Pause.

We will go soon, yes? GARDENER

I dunno. SOLDIER

What place are we to go to? GARDENER

Probably the forward fire base. Fire base Crown. SOLDIER

Fire base Crown? GARDENER

Yeah. SOLDIER

And I will be questioned? GARDENER

Yeah. SOLDIER

And in this place, they will hurt me? GARDENER

Pause.

I dunno. SOLDIER

I believe you do, Jim. GARDENER

SOLDIER

Do what?

GARDENER

I believe you know what will happen to me in that place.

SOLDIER

I don't know a damn thing. And every day I know less and less.

GARDENER

What will happen to me at your firebase?

SOLDIER

Why do you keep asking me the same question over and over?

GARDENER

Because you know the answer.

SOLDIER

You want an answer? Here's your fucking answer. We've lost lots of people, Ali. Men and women. Good people. People with futures. People who joined up because they just wanted to do their time and get a little money so they could get an education or start businesses. Or just chase their dreams. People like me. And a lot of them are no longer here. They are dead, Ali. Dead. And those of us who are still here are really angry about that. Really angry. We're angry about what your raghead brothers have done to us. We're sick of saying goodnight to our buddies and discovering them dead in the morning, slit open ear to ear.

GARDENER

I am sorry for your friends...

SOLDIER

Sorry? Well, sorry don't mean shit to the dead. Put yourself in our place, Ali. Thousands of miles from home with an enemy that can appear and disappear at will. Once, you've seen the shit come down, it makes you hard, man. Shit that would have made you blow chunks before you got here becomes standard operating procedure. People can become used to anything. I know I have. And when you've had a friend, a buddy, someone you care about, someone who was very much alive a second ago, suddenly stone dead at your feet, well, you'll do anything to anybody to make sure that doesn't happen again. Anything.

GARDENER

Anything?

SOLDIER

Anything. You know what I mean.

GARDENER

No, I do not.

SOLDIER

You know.

GARDENER

Tell me.

SOLDIER

Ah...

GARDENER

When we go up into the sky and travel to your base and they question me, will they hurt me, Jim?

Long pause.

SOLDIER

Yes. Yes they will.

Pause.

GARDENER

Why? What will that accomplish?

SOLDIER

(Pause)

I used to know.

GARDENER

How will it help you?

SOLDIER

I don't know anymore.

GARDENER

You will hurt people for no reason?

SOLDIER

There used to be a reason, I remember there was a reason. A reason for all of this.

GARDENER

What?

SOLDIER

I don't remember.

The explosion of a mortar is heard. It is closer than the last one.

SOLDIER

Jesus!

GARDENER

(Startled by the SOLDIER's reaction)

What?

The SOLDIER dives for the radio.

SOLDIER

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot to Crown. Over.

There is no reply.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot to Crown. Over.

There is no reply.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Tango, Delta, Foxtrot to Crown. Over.

A long electronic hiss is heard. Then the pops of a microphone being triggered, once, twice, three times. Suddenly there is silence. The SOLDIER grabs his weapon and binoculars and scans the perimeter. The GARDENER watches with a look of confusion on his face.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Mother pus bucket!

GARDENER

We are leaving now? To your base?

The SOLDIER stares at the GARDENER incredulously.

GARDENER (cont'd)

It is time to leave now?

SOLDIER

(Resuming his visual sweep.)

No.

GARDENER

No?

SOLDIER

Are you always this slow on the uptake?

GARDENER

Pardon?

SOLDIER

I can't raise Crown on the radio.

GARDENER

Your base?

SOLDIER

Yeah, and that boom you just heard was a mortar. Pointed this way.

GARDENER

Boom?

SOLDIER

Don't start.

GARDENER

You speak to me of these things yet I do not hear them.

SOLDIER

You ain't gonna have to worry about hearing them pretty soon.

GARDENER

No?

SOLDIER

No. Cause soon you're gonna be tasting them. Judging from that last one, Crown has been overrun. Which means that your chums are headed up this hill.

GARDENER

I do not understand.

SOLDIER

There isn't much to understand. The enemy is approaching. Well, my enemy is approaching. And when they start walking those mortars up and down this hill, it will be over.

GARDENER

You must go. You must go now.

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

You will stay here? With your enemy coming you will stay here?

SOLDIER

Yes.

GARDENER

Why?

SOLDIER

Why do you care?

GARDENER

Because...

SOLDIER

Why?

GARDENER

I am concerned for you, my friend.

The SOLDIER stares at the GARDENER.

SOLDIER

Yeah?

GARDENER

Yes.

I am touched Ali, I am.

SOLDIER

The rumble of battle is heard in the distance. The SOLDIER turns to face it, listening intently.

What is it?

GARDENER

Nothing.

SOLDIER

What do you hear?

GARDENER

Nothing.

SOLDIER

Tell me.

GARDENER

Pause.

I hear the end.

SOLDIER

You must go.

GARDENER

The SOLDIER breaks his reverie, gazing at the GARDENER for a moment. Suddenly he steps forward and cuts the GARDENER'S bonds with a knife.

You go.

SOLDIER

The GARDENER rubs his wrists for a moment. The SOLDIER returns to his reverie, facing the sound of combat.

Jim...

GARDENER

Go now.

SOLDIER

GARDENER

Why do you do this? Why do you stay here if your enemy is coming for you?

(Beat.)

Why?

SOLDIER

Duty.

GARDENER

Duty is not honored by dying foolishly.

The SOLDIER shrugs.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Come.

The SOLDIER turns to face the GARDENER. He stares at him for a few moments, then picks up his rifle, aiming it at the GARDENER. The GARDENER steps back a pace, shocked.

GARDENER (cont'd)

No...

SOLDIER

No?

GARDENER

Please...

SOLDIER

Don't lecture me about my duty, I know all about duty.

The SOLDIER stares at the GARDENER for an instant then, with a quick motion, flips the rifle to the GARDENER who catches it and holds it awkwardly.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

There you go, man. You're such a fucking expert on duty? Do yours.

GARDENER

What is this? Do what?

The sounds of battle grow louder.

SOLDIER

Your buddies are on their way. Ali. Be a hero. Shoot.

GARDENER

No...

SOLDIER

They'll give you extra rations of figs in paradise. Shoot.

GARDENER

This is madness.

SOLDIER

One way or another it ends today.

GARDENER

Jim...

SOLDIER

Do your duty.

The SOLDIER grabs the muzzle of the rifle and puts it to his head.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Do it!

The GARDENER drops the rifle. They stare at each other for a long time. The SOLDIER turns away toward the sound of combat.

SOLDIER

It ain't so easy, this duty shit, is it?

The GARDENER continues to stare at the SOLDIER.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

It doesn't matter. If you can't do it, they will.

Long pause.

GARDENER

I am afraid of your war.

Yeah?

SOLDIER

I am afraid for you.

GARDENER

Don't be.

SOLDIER

I have been to war.

GARDENER

You were a soldier?

SOLDIER

Not a soldier. It is truer to say that I have been in war.

GARDENER

When?

SOLDIER

Long ago. It is all so distant to me now. Like a dream. But a living one. Can you smell in your dreams, Jim? Taste? Feel? I can do those things. But only of war, nothing else.

(Pause.)

It was summer. My only concern was my orchard. The trees were blooming but the small little things that can bring badness to your crop were my worry. Too much heat from the sun or perhaps not enough. And the rain. Always the rain. The gift of life from the heavens. These things were much on my mind...

Beat.

SOLDIER

That's it?

GARDENER

It was a terrible time.

SOLDIER

It always is.

GARDENER

When the soldiers came...

(Pause)

When the soldiers came it was as if our lives had, in a sudden manner, been declared worthless. As if nothing of value had meaning any more. It was as if the beasts of the pit had come to reign supreme over us. And there was the killing..

SOLDIER

(Still staring into the distance.)

Yes...

GARDENER

Almost as if it were a delicious poison to those monsters, an evil drug that they could not get enough of. So more and more of the innocent were sacrificed to satisfy their craving. An evil unholy thing it was.

SOLDIER

Yes...

GARDENER

I never knew the smell of blood before that time.

SOLDIER

I know it.

GARDENER

It creeps over you like a sickness. It cloy with its ghastly sweetness and heralds death.

SOLDIER

I know it well.

GARDENER

It is the most horrible thing, it clings to you like sin. It marks you forever.

SOLDIER

It is sin.

GARDENER

I feel as if I shall never be clean...

SOLDIER

You won't be.

GARDENER

I want to be.

SOLDIER

So don't we all.

GARDENER

And when those animals went into retreat because they were too afraid to fight, they went through the town and the outlying farms. And they...

The GARDENER stops and looks away.

SOLDIER

What did they do to you?

GARDENER

You are a soldier...

SOLDIER

Yeah. So what happened?

GARDENER

(distantly)

They were so very cruel.

SOLDIER

Oh.

GARDENER

I cannot escape the smell of blood. Why does it smell so sweet? So disgustingly sweet?

SOLDIER

Whose blood?

GARDENER

Blood.

SOLDIER

Your blood?

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

Your family?

GARDENER

I wish I could be clean, if only for an instant...

An explosion booms out.

SOLDIER

They are closer. Soon it will be time.

GARDENER

(Staring at his hands.)

If only for an instant...

SOLDIER

What happened to your family? Your wife, your children?

GARDENER

My wife was away when they came. She was visiting her sister.

SOLDIER

The children?

GARDENER

The children...

SOLDIER

The children.

The GARDENER stares at the SOLDIER for a moment, then looks at his hands, working them as if trying to clean them.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Ali...

The GARDENER stares at the SOLDIER.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Did they kill the children?

Pause.

GARDENER

(Softly.)

No.

SOLDIER

Good.

GARDENER

In the end they should have.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

My beautiful girl children...

(Pause)

The swine were merciful. The first thing they did when they entered our home was beat me until I was broken, almost senseless.

SOLDIER

And...

GARDENER

But not enough. They did not beat me enough. For my sins of pride and weakness I was forced to witness their violation. Not fully, I was too beaten for that. Like a nightmare, I saw it. As if shadows and light, far and near, came together in my mind to do an ugly dance. And the sounds of that night I cannot release from my head. An unending dance of horror that steals my sleep and forces me to humility. To obedience.

SOLDIER

I'm sorry.

GARDENER

Yes...

SOLDIER

But how were you proud? How were you weak?

GARDENER

The pride of a father for his beautiful girl children. The three of them like sunflowers, each of a different age. Child, girl, woman. Almost a woman. But really, always my children, always my girls. It is the curse of a father, they never grow up, no matter how old they become.

SOLDIER

A father's pride is no sin, Ali.

GARDENER

Perhaps not.

SOLDIER

It wasn't.

GARDENER

But my weakness was. What value has a man if he cannot protect his women? The shame of it. The shame of it was unbearable.

(Beat)

What would I tell my wife, their mother?

SOLDIER

I don't know.

GARDENER

Nor did I.

Another explosion. Louder and more intense.

SOLDIER

Here we go. Get down.

The SOLDIER grabs the GARDENER and drags him into the foxhole. Grabbing the firing box, he crawls out and stands next to the foxhole

GARDENER

What is it, what are you doing?

SOLDIER

It's time...

GARDENER

Time for what?

Another explosion is heard.

SOLDIER

The end.

GARDENER

This is madness.

SOLDIER

Yes. Yes it is.

GARDENER

Jim...

SOLDIER

Be brave. It will be over soon.

GARDENER

Jim...

Another explosion is heard.

SOLDIER

(Staring into the distance)

Can you hear the end? Can you hear it coming for me?

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

No?

GARDENER

The war was a long time ago. There is no war here now.

The SOLDIER looks down at him curiously.

SOLDIER

After all this you would still try to trick me, Ali? I thought better of you than this.

GARDENER

Jim, listen...there is no war. There are no bodies here. You are having imaginings of a long time ago. This is an orchard, my friend. No one wishes to hurt you here.

SOLDIER

I wish I could believe you but I've been trained not to. Every problem I've had in the last twenty four hours has been because I have gone against my training. Back to basics for me.

The GARDENER attempts to get out of the foxhole. The SOLDIER pushes him back with a foot on his shoulder.

GARDENER

Jim, please...

The SOLDIER scrambles for the previously discarded weapon. He gets it and resumes his position next to the foxhole.

SOLDIER

You got a strange way, Ali, considering you're on the winning side here. Tell you what...

(He levels the rifle at the GARDENER'S  
head)

Why don't you stay out of it?

GARDENER

Stay out of what? I do not understand.

SOLDIER

(Distracted, looking into the distance)

OK, fine. Keep your head down.

There is a long pause as the GARDENER watches the SOLDIER. The SOLDIER lets the rifle fall to the ground.

GARDENER

My friend...

SOLDIER

Enough, Ali...

GARDENER

Answer me one thing.

SOLDIER

Please...

GARDENER

Just one thing.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

Where is your war? Where is this war you desire so much?

The SOLDIER stares down at the GARDENER with an odd, serene expression as he picks up the box with the wires connected to it. The sound of explosions are heard. They are distant to start but continuous. There is a strange melody to them, as if they were, in fact, a terrible sort of music. The SOLDIER turns to face them, entranced.

SOLDIER

Ah...

GARDENER

What? What do you hear?

SOLDIER

The music...

The explosive chorus grows louder.

GARDENER

You must listen. There is no music. There is no war. You have a sickness in the balance of your mind. We must get you help.

The explosive chorus grows louder.

SOLDIER

(Smiles)

No...

The explosive chorus grows louder.

GARDENER

Then answer me. Tell me. Where is your war, Jim? Tell me! Where is this war?

As the explosive chorus grows to an almost unbearable volume, the SOLDIER triggers the arm switch on the firing box. A red light is seen. Suddenly the explosive chorus stops.

SOLDIER

Right here.

The SOLDIER triggers the firing box. A bright explosion sweeps the stage.

Blackout

End of Act 1

## ACT II

A short time after the explosion. Smoke drifts through the site. The SOLDIER lies on his side where he fell. He is bleeding.

Unseen at first, the GARDENER stands up shakily. He has light wounds on his face.

He takes a moment to assess the situation. Then he see the SOLDIER on the ground.

GARDENER

Jim...

Going over to the SOLDIER, he checks his condition. Then he scrambles back to the foxhole and gets a canteen of water. As the SOLDIER awakens, the GARDENER put the canteen to his mouth then uses the water to try and clean up his face. Gradually the SOLDIER opens his eyes.

SOLDIER

(After staring at the GARDENER for a moment)

Ali...

GARDENER

How are you?

SOLDIER

I gotta tell you, I didn't expect to see you here.

GARDENER

Why not?

SOLDIER

Cause I thought that last one was a keeper.

GARDENER

A keeper?

SOLDIER

Yeah.

GARDENER

You thought...you thought you were going to die, my friend?

SOLDIER

It seemed that way to me.

GARDENER

(Looking at the blood on the SOLDIER'S  
stomach)

You are injured.

SOLDIER

(Wincing as he attempts to move his legs)

Looks that way.

GARDENER

You may die still.

SOLDIER

That's a possibility.

GARDENER

Are you afraid?

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

You are not afraid of death?

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

I see.

SOLDIER

When I went to war I resolved not to be afraid.

Pause.

GARDENER

Ah.

SOLDIER

Ah? What did that mean?

GARDENER

It is such an absolute thing, death.

SOLDIER

Yes. Yes it is.

GARDENER

And I believe this. If you would not run from death you would seek it.

SOLDIER

(Sharply)

What are you saying?

GARDENER

I have said it.

SOLDIER

That's bullshit.

GARDENER

It is the truth.

(Pause)

SOLDIER

Are you saying I'm trying to kill myself.? I think your buddies will do that for me, don't you?

GARDENER

There is no war. There are no enemies. You are troubled in your mind.

SOLDIER

Yeah?

(Indicates his abdominal wounds)

How'd this happen then?

GARDENER

You know how it happened.

SOLDIER

Yeah? I do?

GARDENER

The box you have tried to hide from me. That box in your hand.

SOLDIER

It's a firing box, so what?

GARDENER

For explosives.

SOLDIER

Obviously.

GARDENER

Which you set off to hurt yourself.

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

This is standard defensive perimeter equipment. I'm not playing your game, Ali. You are trying to trick me.

GARDENER

No, my friend, no.

(Gently)

You are tricking yourself. You are in my orchard. You can be at peace here if you let yourself.

The SOLDIER looks away and says nothing.

GARDENER (cont'd)

I am going for help.

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

I will be back soon.

The SOLDIER reaches into his waistband and pulls out a pistol. With difficulty he points it at the GARDENER.

SOLDIER

I said no.

The GARDENER stares at the SOLDIER.

GARDENER

Do you assume I wish to die because you do?

SOLDIER

Stay with me.

GARDENER

You are my friend. I am going for help.

SOLDIER

Stay with me until the end.

GARDENER

Or you will shoot me?

SOLDIER

I...

The GARDENER picks up the discarded rifle and aims it into the air. He pulls the trigger. There is a click.

GARDENER

My friend, my friend. You have no bullets. There is no war. This is an illusion, a dream that the sickness in your mind has created. I have no idea why my God has brought you here to me. But he has and you are now my responsibility. Try to rest and be easy in your mind. I am going home to get help for you before it is too late.

SOLDIER

Please...stay...

The GARDENER turns to go. The SOLDIER, pulls out a pistol and, in obvious pain, turns and fires. The pistol goes off with a roar and the shot rebounds off the tree upstage. The GARDENER falls to the ground.

Long pause.

The GARDENER gets to his feet slowly. He looks at the tree then at the SOLDIER.

GARDENER

Why did you shoot my tree?

SOLDIER

I'm sorry.

GARDENER

This orchard is my livelihood. It is how I support my family.

SOLDIER

I didn't mean to.

GARDENER

No?

SOLDIER

I was aiming at you.

GARDENER

Oh.

SOLDIER

I want you to stay.

The SOLDIER aims the pistol at the GARDENER again.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

I'm not kidding.

GARDENER

I know.

SOLDIER

Come sit by me.

The GARDENER does not move.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

I'm asking nice here.

The GARDENER returns and sits by the SOLDIER.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Tell me about your orchard, Ali.

GARDENER

We have subjects more...what is the word...pressing...to discuss.

SOLDIER

I don't want to think about it right now. Tell me about your orchard. What do you grow?

GARDENER

It is difficult to think and speak with a weapon pointed at me.

SOLDIER

Don't I know it.

GARDENER

But that will not keep me from saying what must be said.

SOLDIER

Oh?

GARDENER

I believe you know that.

SOLDIER

(Harshly)

Do I?

GARDENER

I believe so, yes.

SOLDIER

I don't want to hear it. I am here and they are coming and soon it will be the end. Just stay with me for a little while. Please.

GARDENER

Who is coming?

SOLDIER

You know who. The enemy, your buddies, your pals, your, I dunno, your tribesmen. Whatever the hell you people call each other.

GARDENER

Why?

SOLDIER

Why?

GARDENER

Yes, why? Why are they coming for you?

SOLDIER

Look around. It's a war. This is what happens in war. I got the short end this time. It happens. I'm OK with it.

GARDENER

Many years ago there was war here...

SOLDIER

You told me. I'm sorry...

GARDENER

It was a long time ago.

SOLDIER

Yeah?

GARDENER

And there is a war here today.

SOLDIER

I'm glad you finally started to notice. You were starting to worry me.

GARDENER

I could not help but notice, my friend.

SOLDIER

Good.

GARDENER

Because you are the war.

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

The war is in you.

SOLDIER

Jesus Christ...

The SOLDIER looks away.

GARDENER

And only in you. There are no bodies here, there were no battles fought last night. This land has been at peace for a very long time. The war is in you, Jim.

SOLDIER

Fuck you.

GARDENER

Cursing me does not change the truth.

SOLDIER

No, it doesn't.

GARDENER

What troubles you?

SOLDIER

Ah...

GARDENER

Tell me.

SOLDIER

Who the fuck are you, the great raghead father confessor? Get out of my shit.

GARDENER

I am here and I will listen.

SOLDIER

I'm pointing a gun at you and you want to be my mental health counselor? You're fucking crazy.

GARDENER

What else is there for me to do?

SOLDIER

I don't want to talk about it, I want to forget. Tell me about your orchard. What do you grow here?

Pause.

GARDENER

I have a plan for you.

A plan? SOLDIER

Did I speak wrongly? GARDENER

Maybe. A plan? SOLDIER

An...idea? An idea for us. GARDENER

Yeah, idea is better. So what's the big idea? SOLDIER

I will speak to you of my orchard... GARDENER

Alright... SOLDIER

And you will speak to me of your war. GARDENER

Bull... SOLDIER

Your war. GARDENER

No. SOLDIER

Tell me what troubles you. Only I will know. GARDENER

Why do you care? SOLDIER

Pause.

Because I do. GARDENER

The SOLDIER considers the GARDENER for a long time then appears to come to a decision. He lowers the gun.

SOLDIER

Fine. Alright.

(Pause)

But you first. Tell me about your orchard. It sure doesn't look like much of an orchard.

GARDENER

Yes, there has been some damage here. But the trees will be fine.

SOLDIER

That tree will be fine? It looks fucked up to me.

GARDENER

It is in need of care but apricot trees are hardy.

SOLDIER

You grow apricots?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

Why apricots?

GARDENER

Because of tradition. For thousands of years this fruit has been our sustenance, our income, our salvation. My father taught me these skills.

SOLDIER

Sounds kinda boring.

GARDENER

No, my friend, no. This orchard connects me to my ancestors, to my history and to my people.

As the GARDENER speaks, the lighting on the tree upstage right starts to warm.

GARDENER (cont'd)

My orchard started with seedlings, planted carefully. Yet from the beginning of their lives they create illusions, because the tree starts to fruit very rapidly. But it takes almost five years of careful care for good fruit, fruit suitable for the marketplace, to develop.

Much like having a cat, one must have a good relationship with your trees. Not enough attention, they will fail to produce in abundance. But part of me senses that the trees do not care to be attended to too much. To me it seems as if it offends their dignity. In the summer the early harvest comes. My trees will fruit up to three times in the harvest season.

As the lights warm up the tree seems to come alive. It flowers slowly as the GARDENER speaks.

GARDENER (cont'd)

When the trees flower they do so modestly, as a woman does when she first shows you her affection. Soon my orchard is filled with white and red, as the trees celebrate life. The colors are a promise from the tree to give more. And it does, my friend, it does. It is not only a food, as a medicine the oil of the apricot has been used for centuries to help treat the sick. And the fruit, and I can tell you this as we are both men, always reminds me of the delicate, most secret part of a woman. Imagine the joy of this place at the harvest. To be surrounded by these shy females in their full ripeness. Is that not paradise for a man?

The tree is warmly lit and in full flower.

GARDENER (cont'd)

But what I love the most is the ritual of my orchard. At each point in the season I know what has been done, what needs to be done and what will come. Sometimes in the orchard I feel as if I am thousands of years old, with all the experience and knowledge that come of that great age. There is a peace to this place. A comfort of knowing. The peace, the perfect sameness of the day and the days without end.

The GARDENER pauses and looks into the distance.  
Long pause.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Until the day the soldiers came...

The blossoms on the tree disappear and the light fades quickly. Pause.

SOLDIER

But you're still alive. That counts for something.

GARDENER

(Distantly)

Am I?

SOLDIER

Yeah, you are.

GARDENER

Yes. Yes, of course.

SOLDIER

Am I? What did you mean by that?

GARDENER

Nothing. I misspoke of myself.

SOLDIER

Ah.

GARDENER

(Quickly)

But what of you, my friend?

SOLDIER

Does the memory of the soldiers hurt you?

GARDENER

(Pause)

It does. Very much.

SOLDIER

Memories can do that.

GARDENER

Yes...

SOLDIER

It's like punishment.

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

But it's an evil punishment, an unjust punishment. Sometimes you're just an innocent bystander.

GARDENER

Yes...

SOLDIER

But sometimes not.

(Beat)

Sometimes you are guilty.

(Pause)

As guilty as sin. No matter what though, even if you escape the law, you cannot escape the memories. It's like God knows how to punish you more effectively than any one. In the morning, in the nighttime, in your dreams. Especially your dreams. It's a dark, relentless justice. You can't escape.

GARDENER

No, you cannot.

SOLDIER

(Stares at the GARDENER for a moment)

What did you say about your orchard? That you love it because of the sameness of the days there? It's just as true about memories. The perfect endless torture of your memories. Morning and night, as regular as clockwork. Until it becomes too much. Until all you want is those accusing voices to stop. Until they finish the job and deposit you tits up into your grave.

Pause.

GARDENER

Did your memories bring you here, Jim?

SOLDIER

Yeah.

GARDENER

Why?

SOLDIER

Because...

(Pause)

Because I am guilty and deserve punishment.

GARDENER

You have made that judgment about yourself?

SOLDIER

Yes. Yes I have.

GARDENER

Is that our place? Is that your place?

SOLDIER

Huh?

GARDENER

Is not the act of judgment the providence of the one true God?

SOLDIER

I don't know.

GARDENER

I believe it is so.

SOLDIER

But He judges me night and day and I can't take it anymore.

Pause.

GARDENER

(Softly)

And why does He judge you?

SOLDIER

Because I am a coward.

GARDENER

Every man has his shameful moments, his moments of weakness and disgrace. This judgment is one you bring on yourself, my friend.

SOLDIER

What would you know about it?

GARDENER

I know. I know from my own experience.

SOLDIER

Yeah, I'll bet. Got the apricots in late one year? A few rotted, did they?

GARDENER

God would bless me if it were that simple.

SOLDIER

I wish He would bless me. I'd settle for just a little break.

Pause.

GARDENER

Tell me of your war...

SOLDIER

(Pause)

I was so young...

GARDENER

Yes...

SOLDIER

All of it, all of the shootings and killings are hazy to me now. I was so young...

GARDENER

Go on...

SOLDIER

I only remember that one night anymore but I remember it completely. That one horrible fixed moment. It seems like it filled my brain up so full that there is no room for anything else, I remember it so vividly. Every detail, the sounds, the colors, the tastes, the smells...

GARDENER

Tell me...

SOLDIER

Ah...

GARDENER

Go on...

SOLDIER

It was almost night...

(Pause)

That few minutes before night. When the sky is streaked with all those rich colors. Like a painting. Like a modern art painting. That evening it looked so beautiful. And kinda comforting too. Nothing that alluring could possibly hurt you. But that comfort was so short lived because it vanished with the sun. You know, I used to feel the same way about night when I was a kid. I know a lot of kids were scared of the dark but not me. I always felt the darkness was my friend. Wrapped up in bed, hidden head to toe by the bed covers. I always felt safe.

(Beat)

Where was I? Oh yeah. We were deployed on this hill. It wasn't even really a hill. Just like a big dirt mound really. Not a mountain, barely even a hill. No cover to speak of, just sand and some hardscrabble rock. We'd been marching all day, looking for the enemy.

(Pause)

Looking for the enemy, what a fucking joke. We're marching around, making all the noise of a Mardi Gras parade. All we needed was some beads to throw. Meanwhile the enemy was stalking us. They had to be. Those people had lived there all their lives. It was their home, for Christsake. They knew every fucking sand dune and date tree. We couldn't get out of our own way. Turns out, I found out later, that we had been marching in circles for eleven hours. It was insane. So there we were, tired and thirsty, night is falling and our idiot CO gives out the command, dig in. We're spending the night. Doesn't call on the radio to get us a position fix because the radio's fucked due to the blowing sand. The back up doesn't work because it needed a part. A three dollar part. And it needed that part for weeks.

(Beat)

So we're going camping. Then my sarge comes up to me and says you're on the perimeter. And that just chilled me right to the bone. So he says dig in on the northern slope and I do. And wouldn't you know it, I'm on point. Just right out there. The number one guy. Ain't got a radio and I say to him I ain't got a radio and he says so what, no one does. So I say what if something happens? He says just start shooting, that'll get everyone's attention. I start digging. The way it ends up, my hidey hole is away from everyone else, I can't see a soul and I can't communicate with anybody unless I start shooting. In which case they'll probably start firing back in my direction. Good situation, huh?

(Pause)

It's dark. Desert dark. No light from any source at all. Like you were already wrapped in your shroud. And then it started. The little things. Little noises. Are they real noises or just brain tricks? Frightened brain tricks? I dunno. I just know that I'm almost frozen with it, with the desert cold, with not knowing what to do. If I fire at the noises, the whole camp gets up and starts shooting and if there's nuthin' there then I'm a big pussy. If something is out there and I don't shoot...

(Pause)

I was caught. And then the noises started to...I guess intensify is the right word. I knew they were out there. I knew in my heart of hearts they were coming. And I wanted to fire, I wanted to fire, I wanted to...but...but...

(Long pause)

I was scared.

(Pause)

I was scared.

(Beat)

I was so scared.

And at that moment all my training, all that bullshit military discipline went right out the window. All I could think about was me. Me, me, me. It was only one thought and I couldn't control it, it just took over me. I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to fucking die. It was like I'd suddenly become quick frozen, like a package of lima beans. Then I could hear them for real, their breathing, the weird scratching sound of feet on sand, coming closer and closer. Suddenly I could move again. You know what I did? I burrowed straight down in that hole. Like an animal. I clawed at that fucking sand and threw it over me. Then I just lied there, my heart pounding in my ears, my hands bleeding, sand in my mouth.

(Pause)

They came. Holy shit they came. They roared right past me like I was invisible. They were making that battle cry where they kind of click their tongues and shriek at the same time and it scared the piss out of me. I pissed all over myself. Like a baby. But I didn't move. Even when one of them tripped and fell in my foxhole. He stomped on me. And he used his rifle on my shoulder, sunk his bayonet into my shoulder to steady himself and jumped back out again. I didn't make a sound.

(Beat)

I remember what you said about those sounds, those horrible sounds that you heard when those soldiers attacked your family. It was exactly the same for me. The screaming, the cursing, the...the...gurgling. Why does death always sounds so wet? I know I was wet. Wet from piss, from blood. Wet from my tears. I was soaked to the skin. Just the way a coward should be.

(Pause)

I don't know how long I was there. I think I sort of fell asleep. I could feel the sun on my back at one point. Then, later I think, a hand grabbed me and pulled me up. He was shouting, this guy's alive, this guy's alive...

The SOLDIER breaks down. Long pause.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

They put me on a stretcher and shipped me out. I never saw what happened, never saw the aftermath. Never saw what I was responsible for. I kept my eyes scrunched up tight. A hundred and thirty three good men died on that hill. I killed one hundred and thirty three of my brother soldiers.

(Beat)

You know what happened to me?

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

They gave me a medal. Two medals really. A Purple Heart and a National Defense Service Medal. I've never worn them.

GARDENER

But...

SOLDIER

But what?

GARDENER

What has brought you to this place?

SOLDIER

The war. I was a coward once. I did not do my duty. And it haunts me, Ali. The memories, the guilt, the shame. And I vowed that I would fight from then on. And I would fight to the death. Until I was no more. Until I ceased to exist. Until the memory of my horrible shame was erased by my death. There have been so many wars since then, so much killing and pain.

GARDENER

Ah.

A loud explosion is heard.

SOLDIER

And it looks like my time has come.

GARDENER

It has?

SOLDIER

I don't want to die in their hands, Ali. I don't want to go that way. Not that way.

GARDENER

At the hands of your enemy?

SOLDIER

Yes.

GARDENER

I see.

SOLDIER

Do you?

GARDENER

You are ashamed and wish to be released from your burden?

SOLDIER

Yes.

GARDENER

Shame can be unbearable.

SOLDIER

Yes it can.

Pause. The GARDENER stares at the SOLDIER intently.

GARDENER

How may I help you, my friend?

The SOLDIER engages the safety on the pistol. Then he gently tosses it to the GARDENER.

SOLDIER

I want to go out like a soldier. Like a man. Like a real man.

GARDENER

I am to kill you?

SOLDIER

Technically you are the enemy, Ali, it would be fitting.

GARDENER

No.

SOLDIER

It would be right...

GARDENER

Jim...

SOLDIER

...and I would be honored if you would do this deed for me.

The GARDENER stands and looks at the pistol then down at the supine SOLDIER. He appears to be struggling with a decision. Finally he raise the pistol and points it at the SOLDIER. The SOLDIER smiles, closes his eyes and rests his head on the dirt.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

(softly)

Thank you.

GARDENER

Jim...

SOLDIER

Do it...

Pause.

The GARDENER struggles with his decision. Suddenly he brings the pistol down from the firing position and tosses it upstage.

GARDENER

I am sorry...

SOLDIER

Ali...

GARDENER

I cannot.

SOLDIER

Why?

GARDENER

My faith forbids it. I am sorry.

SOLDIER

Ah...

The SOLDIER turns away from the GARDENER. He is sobbing quietly. The GARDENER watches. After awhile the sobbing stops and there is silence.

GARDENER

Perhaps...perhaps you are meant to live.

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

How do you know?

SOLDIER

I can no longer live with the shame. Not a day longer.

GARDENER

No?

SOLDIER

No.

GARDENER

You can live with many things. I have done so. You can do so too.

SOLDIER

What the hell are you talking about?

GARDENER

You are troubled, my friend. But you are not the only one. Who among us, among all of us on this earth, are not troubled? Who among us has not sinned? Who among us is not guilty ...

SOLDIER

Stop...

GARDENER

Or frightened or fearful or ashamed.

SOLDIER

So?

GARDENER

But we press on. We continue because it is the path given to us by the one true God. We adapt, we continue, we survive the best we can until, in His wisdom, we are called home. It is the only way.

Pause.

SOLDIER

We?

GARDENER

Pardon?

SOLDIER

You said we. What the fuck would you know about what I'm feeling? What the fuck do you know about guilt or shame? Go on smart ass, tell me.

GARDENER

I know.

SOLDIER

How?

GARDENER

We are not speaking about me...

SOLDIER

Tell me!

GARDENER

I have been to this place where you are now. I have survived.

SOLDIER

Oh really? Then tell me.

GARDENER

In my time of shame, in my time of weakness and lack of faith, I have sinned. Yet I have continued. You can too, my friend.

SOLDIER

(Shouting)

Tell me! Tell me, you fuck, tell me!

The GARDENER is silent. They stare at each other for a long moment.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Ok don't. Fuck you then.

Pause.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Alright. Answer me this, Mr. Morality. If you won't help me, will your great and holy one true raghead God make you keep me from doing what I want to do? Huh? Will he?

GARDENER

(Beat)

No.

SOLDIER

Good. Then get the hell out of here.

The SOLDIER, in obvious pain, starts to pull on the wires of the other two charges, dragging them from their burial place to himself.

GARDENER

What are you doing, Jim?

SOLDIER

Why do you care?

GARDENER

Because you are a human being, as am I.

All I want to do is to die with some honor. Maybe wash away some of this terrible disgrace. I can't even manage that. I can't even get you to help me with that. Some friend you are.

GARDENER

You asked me to kill you.

SOLDIER

Yeah, sure did.

GARDENER

I cannot do that.

SOLDIER

Doesn't matter now, Ali.

GARDENER

And why not?

SOLDIER

Because today I will die like a man. When your buddies come up the hill, they are getting a very special surprise.

GARDENER

But what if...

SOLDIER

What?

GARDENER

...they do not come?

SOLDIER

It don't matter.

GARDENER

Why does it not matter?

SOLDIER

Because...

The SOLDIER, having dragged the charges to himself, stretches out painfully. He places one charge on his chest and another on his groin. In his hand he cradles the firing box)

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Because in precisely ten minutes, I am going to detonate these charges. They come, they don't come, I don't care. I've had it. I meant what I said. One way or another, this ends today.

GARDENER

You are not.

SOLDIER

Yup.

GARDENER

You are not going to do this terrible thing.

SOLDIER

I most certainly am.

(Sighs)

And now that I think of it I should have done it long ago.

GARDENER

No.

Pause.

SOLDIER

Then help me. Tell me what happened.

GARDENER

I cannot.

SOLDIER

Oh I see. It's fine for me to spill my guts but you're shy?

GARDENER

I told you only so you might understand that you are not alone in your suffering.

SOLDIER

Really? So talk.

GARDENER

I...

SOLDIER

Eight minutes. Why won't you tell me?

Pause.

GARDENER

Because of the loss, because of the shame, because of the guilt.

SOLDIER

I understand.

GARDENER

And I have hidden those dreadful memories for so long now.

SOLDIER

But you can't escape, can you?

Pause.

GARDENER

No...

Pause.

The GARDENER sit down. He gazes at the SOLDIER and slowly, unconsciously wrings his clenched hands.

SOLDIER

Six minutes.

GARDENER

I misspoke to you earlier...when I told you of the soldiers...

SOLDIER

Misspoke?

GARDENER

Yes.

SOLDIER

You mean lied?

GARDENER

No...yes...in a certain way ...

SOLDIER

Why?

GARDENER

I do not know. To protect myself?

SOLDIER

From who? From me?

GARDENER

From myself.

(Pause)

Do we not all do that? Do we all not make for ourselves an inner picture of ourselves that we believe in? A picture we believe in that we present to the world? One that has all of our virtues, all of our goodness yet none of our flaws or weaknesses? And do we not protect this illusion of ourselves desperately, even in the face of the truth? Yet the picture is a construct, an illusion, a much cherished dream. And we suffer when it is torn down and we are forced to confront the reality of our deeds...

SOLDIER

The truth...

GARDENER

Truth is a river, fast moving and all powerful. You can dam the banks for a time, yet that only prolongs the inevitable. When the dam breaks, and it will break, it takes all before it. All the careful lies we have constructed about ourselves are swept away. All that is left is ruin. And shame...

SOLDIER

Tell me the truth.

GARDENER

(Looking down and compulsively wringing his hands)

The soldiers came...

SOLDIER

And...

GARDENER

And those animals defiled and destroyed all that I loved.

SOLDIER

Ali, what happened?

GARDENER

I was struggling to consciousness when I heard their footsteps. They were laughing. The animals were laughing! Laughing at the horror they inflicted on my beloved daughters. They were laughing at my weakness...

SOLDIER

Fucking monsters...

GARDENER

Yes. Yes! That is it exactly. Like foul beasts from the pit. Too spineless to fight men as soldiers should but happy to inflict their brutality on the innocent.

(Pause)

As they left I started to hear their weeping. Softly at first, then deeper and fuller, sobbing and tear drenched. Their cries spoke to me and I forced myself to listen. I had to listen. It was my duty to listen. And to look. At their blood and at the terrible shame of their nakedness. My adored ones, my delights...my daughters. Defiled and abused and left like garbage. I could not move from the anger and shame of it. Then...then...

SOLDIER

(Softly)

Yes?

GARDENER

Then their voices came together, melted together, joined into one complete fury. And that fury damned me. It damned me for my weakness and for my inability to protect those I so dearly loved. It shrieked at me, that voice did, until it touched my soul. And deep down in there, in the quiet of my soul, I knew what must be done.

SOLDIER

What do you mean?

GARDENER

I did, as a father, what I had to do.

SOLDIER

What...

GARDENER

I freed them from their shame.

Pause.

SOLDIER

Ali...what happened to the children?

GARDENER

(Staring at his right hand)

With this hand, I brought them peace.

SOLDIER

What did you do?

GARDENER

With this hand...

SOLDIER

What-did-you-do?

GARDENER

I killed them.

SOLDIER

No...

GARDENER

I killed them. I went to each of them in turn and placed my hand around their throats and pressed...

SOLDIER

Oh my God...

GARDENER

I looked into their eyes, each in turn. For the briefest of moments they looked afraid. Then they realized what I was doing, the final gift I was giving them and they ceased to struggle. They went to paradise peacefully.

Pause.

SOLDIER

(Softly)

Why?

GARDENER

What was left for them but everlasting shame? They could not be married. They were forever befouled. They would be shunned for the remainder of their days.

SOLDIER

It didn't matter. This is the twenty first century Ali, it didn't matter.

GARDENER

It matters to us. It matters very much. It is our way and nothing can change that.

SOLDIER

It mattered to you.

GARDENER

No. To us, to us...

SOLDIER

It mattered to you.

GARDENER

It was the way it had to end.

SOLDIER

No it wasn't.

GARDENER

There was no other way.

SOLDIER

For you, there wasn't. If you had asked them I'll bet they would have disagreed. But you didn't, did you?

GARDENER

(Compulsively wiping at his hands)

I...

SOLDIER

Did you?

GARDENER

(Softly)

No.

SOLDIER

At the moment of their greatest need, all you could think of was yourself.

GARDENER

No...

SOLDIER

You were ashamed.

GARDENER

No, no, no! I did what any father would do.

SOLDIER

You were ashamed of your own weakness. You were ashamed because you were a victim. And you couldn't deal with it, could you?

GARDENER

I...

SOLDIER

Could you?

GARDENER

I did what I believed was the correct thing to do.

(Pause)

But...

SOLDIER

But what?

GARDENER

(Studying his hands)

I do so wonder sometimes...

SOLDIER

Yeah, what?

GARDENER

Why it is...why it is I never feel clean...

SOLDIER

Don't pretend. You damn well know why.

The GARDENER starts to sob, rocking slowly back and forth. The SOLDIER watches.

Long pause.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

Two minutes.

The GARDENER looks up.

GARDENER

What?

SOLDIER

(Holding up the firing box)

Two minutes.

GARDENER

You will still do this thing?

SOLDIER

I will.

The faint sounds of sirens are heard.

The GARDENER stares at the SOLDIER for a moment, as if making a decision. He reaches for the explosive charge in the SOLDIER's lap.

SOLDIER (cont'd)

No you don't! Don't you dare. You have no right trying to stop me.

GARDENER

I will not try to stop you.

SOLDIER

Good.

Pause.

GARDENER

I want to join you.

The GARDENER and the SOLDIER stare at each other.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Please...

The sound of the sirens grows louder.

Silently the SOLDIER hands the GARDENER one of the explosive charges. The GARDENER sits cross legged with the charge in his lap. He bends forward until his head is over the charge.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Farewell, my friend.

SOLDIER

Maybe...maybe this was the way it was meant to end.

(Beat)

Ten, nine, eight...

The SOLDIER and the GARDENER are both mouthing silent, intense prayers.

The sirens are very loud now. Revolving blue lights can be seen off stage right. The sound of brakes squealing follows. Excited voices can be heard.

SOLDIER

Five, four, three...

The GARDENER hugs the explosives charge tightly.

A POLICE SERGEANT and a POLICE OFFICER enter. Behind them are two women, MRS. IZADI, an older woman of Middle Eastern descent and MRS. GREGORY, a younger woman.

SERGEANT

There they are.

OFFICER

What are they doing?

SERGEANT

The same thing they're always doing. Ladies, stand back.

(To the SOLDIER and the GARDENER)

Gentlemen, no sudden movements, please.

SOLDIER

No! No! No...

MRS. GREGORY

Billy!

The SOLDIER triggers the firing box. There is a click. He triggers it again and again, desperately. The SERGEANT grabs the box and pulls it away. The OFFICER grabs the GARDENER and quickly handcuffs him. The SOLDIER struggles, panting and grimacing like a trapped animal. The SERGEANT pins the SOLDIER's arms and checks him quickly.

SERGEANT

Jesus. He's been injured.

(To OFFICER)

Check yours.

The OFFICER quickly checks the GARDENER.

OFFICER

Superficial facial cuts so far.

(To GARDENER)

Sir, are you injured? Are you hurt?

GARDENER

No.

SERGEANT

(To GARDENER)

How did this happen?

GARDENER

An explosion.

(Indicating the explosives charges)

These are bombs.

SERGEANT

Fuck! Pull them back. Now!

OFFICER

Sir, wait...

The OFFICER gingerly examines one of the charges.  
There is a rip in the side of the charge.

OFFICER (cont'd)

Sir, this is sand.

SERGEANT

What?

The OFFICER lets some sand pour out of the charge.

OFFICER

It's filled with sand.

SERGEANT

What about the other one?

The OFFICER examines the second charge.

OFFICER

Sand too.

SERGEANT

We're going to need bomb disposal anyway.

(To the SOLDIER)

Bill? Bill...Can you walk?

The SOLDIER says nothing.

OFFICER

I think we can get him to the street, sir.

SERGEANT

Good.

(The SERGEANT keys his radio.)

Unit 42 to dispatch...

DISPATCH

Forty two.

SERGEANT

Current location Congress and 33rd St. We require paramedics and bomb disposal this location. Over.

DISPATCH

Roger that, forty two. Ambulance enroute. Disposal notified. Over.

SERGEANT

(To OFFICER)

Get him to the street.

OFFICER

Yes, sir.

The OFFICER puts on gloves and gently brings the SOLDIER to his feet. He places his hand over the SOLDIER's stomach wound and presses.

OFFICER

Come with me. Small steps. You can do it.

The OFFICER escorts the SOLDIER slowly upstage right. MRS. GREGORY watches in tears.

MRS. GREGORY

Billy...

SOLDIER

Hi sis...

MRS. GREGORY

You weren't supposed to leave the hospital, Billy.

(Looking at the SOLDIER's blood stains.)

What did you do? What did you do?

The SOLDIER shrugs as the OFFICER leads him slowly away. The OFFICER and SOLDIER exit upstage right. MRS. GREGORY collapses into tears into MRS. IZADI's arms. MRS. IZADI stares over her shoulder at the GARDENER.

SERGEANT

(To the GARDENER)

Let's go.

The SERGEANT pulls the GARDENER to his feet and leads him upstage to the women.

SERGEANT (cont'd)

(To the GARDENER)

Sit here, please.

The GARDENER sits cross legged on the ground.

MRS. IZADI

Karim...

GARDENER

Wife...

SERGEANT

Ladies, I'm sorry we meet yet again under these circumstances.

MRS. GREGORY

Yes...

SERGEANT

How many times is this in the last couple of months? Three, four?

MRS. IZADI

Sergeant, I do not know...I do not know how it happens, how they keep finding each other.

SERGEANT

But they do.

MRS. GREGORY

I called you people as soon as the hospital called me.

SERGEANT

I understand, ma'am, and we thank you for it. Do you have any idea how he got away from the hospital?

MRS. GREGORY

No.

SERGEANT

We had reports that there was an explosion in this neighborhood and those injuries he has are blast injuries. He must have had some explosives. Do you know how he got the explosives? Or where he might have found them?

MRS. GREGORY

No.

SERGEANT

Ok.

MRS. GREGORY

I thought when he entered the hospital that would be the end of it. I thought the VA would give him the help he needed.

SERGEANT

It's out of their hands now. I'm a vet too, Mrs. Gregory, but he's a menace to public safety and he needs to be in a confined treatment facility.

MRS. GREGORY starts to weep and is comforted by  
MRS. IZADI.

MRS. GREGORY

What...what happens now?

SERGEANT

He'll be taken to Bellevue and have his injuries treated. He'll be in the high security psychiatric ward until the docs there evaluate him and hopefully find a course of treatment.

MRS. GREGORY

We tried our best, my husband and I, when he came home. But there was no controlling him. Our apartment is so small and with the children about we, we...

MRS. IZADI

The choices are difficult, my dear. I know...

The OFFICER enters.

OFFICER

Sir, he's in route to Bellevue now. Disposal is ten minutes out.

SERGEANT

Good.

GARDENER

(To MRS. IZADI)

MRS. IZADI

Shhhhh, you.

GARDENER

My hands, my hands are numb.

MRS. IZADI

(To SERGEANT)

Can he be released, Sergeant? Please?

SERGEANT

Of course.

The SERGEANT nods to the OFFICER, who uncuffs the GARDENER.

SERGEANT (cont'd)

Mr. Izadi. Please don't move. It is dangerous here. Do you understand?

GARDENER

Yes.

SERGEANT

Mrs. Gregory, would you like us to take you to the hospital?

MRS. GREGORY

I can't...I can't. The children will be home from school soon. There will be no one there to see to them.

MRS. GREGORY weeps.

SERGEANT

I understand. Please don't blame yourself. Sometimes things happen that require us to make hard choices. I see it everyday.

(To OFFICER)

Grab a uniform out there and have her transported home immediately.

OFFICER

Yes sir.

MRS. IZADI

(To MRS. GREGORY)

I am so sorry, my dear.

MRS. GREGORY

Thank you Giti. I hope we can see each other again on a happier occasion.

MRS. IZADI kisses MRS. GREGORY tenderly on the cheek.

MRS. IZADI

I too. Kiss your darling children for me. Goodbye.

The OFFICER and MRS. GREGORY exit.

MRS. IZADI (cont'd)

And what of Karim, sir?

SERGEANT

He appears to have a few facial cuts, Mrs. Izadi. Do you want him transported to Bellvue for treatment?

MRS. IZADI looks down at the GARDENER.

MRS. IZADI

Karim, look at me.

The GARDENER looks up at MRS. IZADI. She carefully examines his face.

MRS. IZADI (cont'd)

It is minor. It is nothing.

SERGEANT

Are you sure?

MRS. IZADI

I believe we have been enough trouble for one day. May I take him home?

SERGEANT

Please allow me to arrange for your transport.

MRS. IZADI

No need. We can walk. Perhaps it will do him some good.

SERGEANT

Yes ma'am.

(Pause)

Mrs. Izadi...

MRS. IZADI

Yes?

SERGEANT

Perhaps, perhaps it might be better if he were more closely supervised too.

MRS. IZADI

We watch him as closely as possible. But my husband is convinced that this place is his orchard. We always know where to find him. Unfortunately others do too.

SERGEANT

I understand. But this is a tough neighborhood and I am concerned that something might happen to him.

MRS. IZADI

Thank you.

(Pause)

Sir...

SERGEANT

Yes, ma'am?

The OFFICER enters.

MRS. IZADI

We did have an orchard once. Beautiful trees for as far as the eye could see. Far, far from here...

SERGEANT

I understand.

MRS. IZADI

He was a different man then. A stronger man. Before the war.

(Pause)

Before the soldiers came...

SERGEANT

You don't have to tell me...

MRS. IZADI

I just wanted you to know that.

SERGEANT

Of course.

OFFICER

Sir, Mrs. Gregory is enroute home.

SERGEANT

Thank you.

(To MRS. IZADI)

Is there anything more I can do for you, ma'am?

MRS. IZADI

No, Sergeant. Thank you for all your help. I am deeply sorry for the trouble.

SERGEANT

Not at all.

(To OFFICER)

I'm going to the street to get Disposal in here. Keep this area secured. Report back to me after they arrive.

OFFICER

Yes sir.

The SERGEANT exits.

MRS. IZADI

Karim...

GARDENER

Yes, wife?

MRS. IZADI

It is time for us to go home now.

The GARDENER stands.

GARDENER

Ah, Giti. There is still daylight left. There is still time to work and there is much to do here.

MRS. IZADI

Not today. You have done enough already today. The girls are worried sick about you.

GARDENER

(Pause)

The girls?

MRS. IZADI

Yes. You have worried them to a sickness, running off like this.

GARDENER

(Pause)

The girls...

MRS. IZADI

Yes, the girls.

GARDENER

(Pause)

There is much work to be done here.

MRS. IZADI

Come, husband. Let us go home.

GARDENER

I would have been home earlier but I met a young man here.

MRS. IZADI

Ah...

GARDENER

He was deeply troubled.

MRS. IZADI

Yes.

GARDENER

I tried to help him. I talked to him. I hope he will be well soon.

MRS. IZADI

Karim...

GARDENER

He seemed familiar to me. As if I had met him long ago.

Pause.

MRS. IZADI

Memory can play tricks, husband.

MUSIC UP : Samuel Barber: Adagio for Strings.

Long pause.

GARDENER

(Distantly)

Yes. Yes, it can.

MRS. IZADI

Come, we must go now.

As MRS. IZADI attempts to lead the GARDENER offstage, he turns to look at the tree. The tree starts to glow warmly. The GARDENER gazes at it.

GARDENER

Just a moment Giti...

Transfixed, the GARDENER approaches the tree.

MRS. IZADI

Come now.

GARDENER

(As he examines the tree)

I have good hopes for this season. The tree is old but can still bear fruit. With care it will provide for us for a long time.

Pause.

MRS. IZADI

(Sadly)

Yes...

GARDENER

(Patting the tree)

Tomorrow, old friend.

MRS. IZADI grasps the GARDENER's hand and starts to lead him off stage right.

GARDENER (cont'd)

Giti, my tools...

OFFICER

I'll get them, sir.

The OFFICER retrieves the tools and hands them to the GARDENER.

GARDENER

Thank you.

OFFICER

No problem, sir.

As the GARDENER handles the tools, the OFFICER speaks to MRS. IZADI.

OFFICER (cont'd)

I am so sorry for your trouble.

MRS. IZADI

Thank you.

OFFICER

I couldn't help but overhearing you talk to my Sergeant and I was wondering something...

MRS. IZADI

What?

OFFICER

What war was he in?

MRS. IZADI

What war?

Yes, ma'am.

OFFICER

Pause.

Does it matter?

MRS. IZADI

Pause.

The OFFICER slowly shakes his head, embarrassed. MRS. IZADI looks at the OFFICER for a moment, then nods. She and the GARDENER exit slowly. The OFFICER stands guard duty as the lights slowly fades. The lights on the tree stay warm and bright until the stage is almost dark, then they too start to fade. The last to fade is the music.

Curtain.

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