Bros / Les boys / Ախպերներ[[1]](#footnote-1)

**By Art Babayants/**

**Արտ Բաբայանց**

*To my dear friends Narek Harutyunyan and Romik Danial*

*and to everyone else who generously taught me what true hospitality is*

Structure

[Scene 1. Welcome Home! 5](#_Toc37068628)

[Grindr Interlude A. Middle Eastern Stuff. 12](#_Toc37068629)

[Scene 2. Yargooshta Dance. 14](#_Toc37068630)

[Grindr Interlude B. Hockey Dad 20](#_Toc37068631)

[Scene 3: First Love. 22](#_Toc37068632)

[Grindr Interlude C. Normal. 25](#_Toc37068633)

[Scene 4. Family Life. 27](#_Toc37068634)

[Grindr Interlude D. Big Eyes. 33](#_Toc37068635)

[Scene 5. Last Kiss. 35](#_Toc37068636)

[Grindr Interlude E. Bored. 40](#_Toc37068637)

[Scene 6. Birthday Boy. 42](#_Toc37068638)

[Grindr Interlude F. Atheist. 48](#_Toc37068639)

[Scene 7. Arrival. 50](#_Toc37068640)

[Grindr Interlude E. Any pics? 54](#_Toc37068641)

[Scene 8. Mudhut 57](#_Toc37068642)

[Epilogue 62](#_Toc37068643)

**Notes and Acknowledgements**

**Note on Characters**: all characters change in every scene. Overall, the play requires a minimum of four performers capable of playing men and women. Cross-gender casting for certain scenes is also encouraged. Alternatively, each character can be performed by a different actor, which will require up to 20 performers. This larger cast can also be used in the dance sequences (Scene Two and Scene Seven).

**Possible Character Allocation for a Cast of Four**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Scene*** | ***Performer One*** *(male, in his mid-20s)* | ***Performer Two****(male in his 30s, tall)* | ***Performer Three*** *(male, in his early to mid-40s)* | ***Performer Four*** *(female, in her 30s)* |
| ***Scene One*** | *-* | *MAN TWO* | *MAN ONE* | *-* |
| ***Scene Two*** | *Dancer* | *MAN ONE* | *MAN TWO* | *Dancer* |
| ***Scene Three*** | *YOUNGER ONE* | *-* | *OLDER ONE* | *-* |
| ***Scene Four*** | *SON* | *HUSBAND* | *-* | *WIFE* |
| ***Scene Five*** | *POET* | *-* | *VISITOR* | *-* |
| ***Scene Six*** | *MAN* | *POLICEMAN* | *-* | *POLICEWOMAN* |
| ***Scene Seven*** | *MAN B1* | *MAN A* | *MAN B2* | *WOMAN* |
| ***Scene Eight*** | *MAN B1* | *DRUNK MAN* | *MAN B2* | *WOMAN* |
| ***Epilogue*** | *Singer*  | *MAN/HOMME* | *Singer* | *WOMAN/FEMME* |

**Note on Languages**: while the play can be performed entirely in English, some scenes and monologues can also be performed in Persian, Armenian, French and Russian as indicated in the text. Depending on the geographical context of a performance and performers’ linguistic ability, some scenes can use a mix of two or more languages. Language choice ideas throughout the script are suggestions only.

***THANKS***

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L'expérience de la pure hospitalité, si elle existe (…), doit partir de *rien.* On ne doit *rien* présupposer de connu, de déterminable ; aucun contrat n'est imposé pour que l'événement pur de l'accueil de l'autre soit possible.

Jacques Derrida, *Responsabilité et Hospitalité[[2]](#footnote-2)*

*On déballe des vérités
Sur des gens qu'on a dans le nez
On les lapide
Mais on le fait avec humour
Enrobé dans des calembours
Mouillés d'acide.*

Charles Aznavour

# Scene 1. Welcome Home!

*Dark street. A taxi stops. MAN ONE gets into the car. MAN TWO is the driver.*

MAN ONE: Barev! [Hello!] Nork-Marash[[3]](#footnote-3), *(switches to English)* please. *(Looks for a seatbelt)*

MAN TWO: *(lighting up a cigarette)* Eench es usum? [What do you want?]

MAN ONE: *(the smoking makes him cough)* A ….seatbelt?

MAN TWO: A seatbelt? *(Laughs gregariously)* Akhper jan[[4]](#footnote-4) [dear brother], I’ve been driving since I was seven. *(Starts driving)* You don’t trust me?

MAN ONE: I just…

MAN TWO: Are you Armenian?

MAN ONE: I am.

MAN TWO: Where are you from?

MAN ONE: Canada.

MAN TWO: First time here? Welcome home, akhper [bro]!

*A major bump of the road – both react to the car jolt.*

MAN ONE: Thank… you!

MAN TWO: Fucking potholes! The government does nothing to fix them. Fucking crooks! I bet it’s different in America.

MAN ONE: Canada… You’d be surprised.

MAN TWO: Ah yes, Canada.

MAN ONE: Is this why all the street lights are off?

MAN ONE: No, bro. They turn them off between midnight and 6 am. Saving electricity. It’s too expensive otherwise.

*While talking, MAN TWO puts on a very loud pseudo-folkloric pop song and starts singing along.*

MAN ONE: (*smiles*) My tatik (grandma) used to love this… kind of… music.

MAN TWO: Of course. This is Kah-REN! The famous Kah-REN. You listen to him in America?

MAN ONE: Canada.

MAN TWO: Where was she from?

MAN ONE: Who?

MAN TWO: Your grandma.

MAN ONE: North-East.

MAN TWO: Which village?

MAN ONE: Tsakuri.

MAN TWO: Vai, jan! [[5]](#footnote-5) Tsakuri?!!! *(Stops the car. Forces MAN ONE into a traditional Armenian kiss on the right cheek)* I am from Tsakuri, brother! My parents are from Tsakuri!!! My grandparents are from Tsakuri!!!! And you’re from America!!! Ai-ai-ai! *(Starts driving.)*

MAN ONE: Canada.

MAN TWO: What was your gradmother’s name?

MAN ONE: Rose.

MAN TWO: Like Gaghik’s third cousin?

MAN ONE: Who?

MAN TWO: Gaghik! You know Gaghik? Gaghik?! *The* Gaghik? Everyone knows Gaghik!

MAN ONE: I don’t think so.

MAN TWO: How old are you, bro?

MAN ONE: Sorry?

MAN TWO: I am 29. You?

MAN ONE: 45.

MAN TWO: *(speeds up abruptly*) Forty- five?!!!! You don’t look it, bro.

MAN ONE: Thank you?

MAN TWO: Are you married?

MAN ONE: Oh, boy.

MAN TWO: Huh?

MAN ONE: Why does everyone ask this question here?

MAN TWO: How many kids?

MAN ONE: I am not married.

MAN TWO: What? You’re forty- five – no wife, no kids?!

MAN ONE: Maybe, I don’t w…

MAN TWO: Bro, you know what? I have a cousin. I will introduce you. She is gorgeous!

MAN ONE: *(Ironically)* And from a good family?

MAN TWO: Of course, she is. And she has these big beautiful eyes, nice legs too. You’ll love her. She is finishing university now, training to be a surgeon.

MAN ONE: And yearning to move out?

MAN TWO: (*Laughs.*) I like you. I’ll call her now. What’s your name? *(Whips out a cellphone while driving.)*

*Another road bump.*

MAN ONE: Thank … you! I have someone… back home.

MAN TWO: In America?

MAN ONE: *Canada*.

MAN ONE: Armenian?

MAN ONE: Er… no, not Armenian.

MAN TWO: Hey, brother. She *has* to be Armenian.

MAN ONE: Ok.

MAN TWO: Then your children will be Armenian and your grandchildren. Your parents will be proud of you, brother. We are the first Christian nation on Earth, man. We have to keep it going! See you don’t even speak the language. Shame!

MAN ONE: It’s a left here.

MAN TWO: Oops! *(Turns left)* Why didn’t you tell me, bro?

MAN ONE: I’m new here…

MAN TWO: My wife is from a good family too. From the North. You know what they say – never marry a girl from the North. (*Laughs at his own joke.*) I have two boys – love them to death. You know, I come home from work, my kids are running to give me a hug. There’s nothing better – my young one makes me laugh. Ai, bala! [Oh, the little one!] A man without a woman and a son is nothing.

MAN ONE: Right turn here, please.

MAN TWO: This is what the country needs – more family, more children, more grandchildren. Everyone is emigrating. To fucking Russia. You should move here. We’ll find you a nice Armenian girl. My cousin is not from the North. Don’t you worry!... You’re forty-five! You must have a son.

MAN ONE: Okay.

MAN TWO: What?

MAN ONE: I can’t.

MAN TWO: Huh?

MAN ONE: I…

MAN TWO: Are you sick?

MAN ONE: Mmm?

MAN TWO: Is your American lady sick?

MAN ONE: What? Why?

MAN TWO: Is she not pretty?

MAN ONE: Who?

MAN TWO: Armenian girls are not always hot. What about chicks in America? Lots of blondes?

MAN ONE: Huh?

MAN TWO: I like blondes. You like blondes? Like Russian chicks? You wanna marry an Armenian girl but fuck Russian girls, right? They are hot. Good fuckers too *–* my bro tells me that. He goes to this – how do you say this in English? Sauna?

MAN ONE: Yes.

MAN TWO: He says they have awesome chicks there. Ukrainian, I think*…*

MAN ONE: Ok.

MAN ONE: Me, I don’t even have time to see my wife. It’s hard here… *(His cellphone rings, he picks up without slowing down or stopping)*. Aaaaawe! Barev!!! Barev, akhper jan! (Hello, dear brother.) How are you? No, still working. What do you mean more money? No, man! What am I? Baron Rothschild? I drive this freakin’ taxi, bro. Twenty-four seven. No weekends or holidays. I can’t…

MAN ONE: It’s up the hill here.

MAN TWO: (*accelerates*) No. You screwed it up, bro. I just can’t.

MAN ONE: All the way up.

MAN TWO *(sharp turn)*: How much does he want?!!! He said that? Fuck!

MAN ONE: Slow down, please. There’s a left and a right. *(Two sharp turns)* Jeeeeeesus!

MAN TWO: Yeah, yeah! No!!! Ok, bro, talk later. Yeah, you tell him that. What a faggot! Faggot!!!

*Another road bump.*

MAN ONE: Can you stop here, please!

MAN TWO: *(still on the phone)* What?

MAN ONE: Stop here. I’ll walk.

MAN TWO: Don’t be a pussy, bro! I’ll drive you all the way.

MAN ONE: It’s ok. It’s not far. I’ll walk.

MAN TWO: Hey, bro. No problem. I’ll drive you. *(Continues into the phone).* Yeah, tell him he is a FAG! *(Another turn)*

MAN ONE: Pleeeeeease!

MAN TWO: *(into the phone)* He needs to suck it up. Suck it up! Listen, wait a minute. *(He puts down the phone, stops the car, the engine still running)* What’s your problem, bro?!!

MAN ONE: *(hastily)* Here is good. My uncle’s house is right there. I’ll walk. (*Takes out his cash*.) Is six hundred ok?

MAN TWO: No problem, bro! *(Turns on the light inside the car)* Such a faggot! FAGGOT! *(Hits the dashboard in anger).*

MAN ONE: *(leans towards MAN TWO, hastily counting money)* Fifty, a hundred, plus twenty and twenty and… *(switches to very small coins – his hands are shaking*) 5, 10, another 5…

*MAN ONE stretches his left hand with the money towards MAN TWO. His hand is shaking. He accidentally drops a coin between the other man’s legs and, without thinking, he reaches over to pick it up. Awkward pause.*

MAN ONE: Oh, boy!

MAN TWO: (*As MAN ONE is searching down there*) Hey, chill, bro. Relax, dude. What’s up with you?

*MAN ONE finally finds the coins and sits back. His face is completely red, though. He suddenly notices that his hand is on MAN TWO’s left knee. He is seriously blushing and panting.*

*Beat.*

MAN TWO: What?! *(Suddenly realizing what is ‘wrong’ with MAN ONE.)* Fuck man!

*MAN ONE says nothing.*

MAN TWO: Fuck man! *(He moves back and suddenly throws a strong punch hitting MAN ONE in the face. Then another one and more and more)*. Get out of here! You asshole. Fuckhead! Get out! Get out before I go tell your uncle.

*MAN ONE rolls out of the car, bleeding. MAN TWO shuts the door and drives away – the loud music fades away. Dead silence.*

*As MAN ONE struggles to get on his feet, the sound of the music slowly fades in – the taxi slowly rears all the way back. The music is impossibly loud. MAN TWO stops the car, turns off the music, comes out of the car, slams the door, spits out his cigarette. MAN ONE is leaning against the fence trembling. MAN TWO slowly walks towards him, uncomfortably close.*

*Beat.*

*MAN TWO places his hands on MAN ONE’s shoulder and forcefully pushes him down to his crotch.*

*Light change.*

# Grindr Interlude A. Middle Eastern Stuff.

*The stage floor catches a projection of a Grindr conversation – the following scene is meant to be read by the audience. Meanwhile the performers are changing the set trying to navigate around the Grindr lines appearing on the floor at the most inopportune moments.*

A: Hey, whazup?

B: Hey. Not much. U?

A: Same.

*Pause.*

A: Horny?

B: Yep. You have a face?

A: Discrete here. Sorry. ☺

B: Discreet?

A: Yeah.

B: Sorry. Need to see a face.

A: I can’t. Discreeete here.

A: You there?

*Pause.*

A: Still horny?

*Pause*.

A: Heeeeeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy

*Longer pause.*

A: (*slowly typing)* What’s with the Middle Eastern stuff?

B: What Middle Eastern stuff?

A: Yr profile says Middle Eastern, habibi?

B: Habibi?

A: Yeah.

B: I am Canadian.

A: Come ooooon, you are not. ☺ I am. LOL.

*Pause.*

A: Tell me what you’re gonna do to me, habibi.

B: I am not habibi. Bye!

A: Send me your dick pic. I wanna suck your muslim dick.

B: I am not muslim. Bye!

A: But you’re from the Middle East.

B: My parents are Armenian.

A: Oh, you are not an Arab? Why did you write Middle Eastern then?

B: There’s no other category. Also, race is a social construct.

A: Hm… ok….. Fuck meeeeee, habibiiiiiiiiiiiii!!!!!!!!!!

*Lights up. Scene change.*

# Scene 2. Yargooshta Dance.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Summer. An outdoor café in Yerevan, Armenia. A table. Two men are having Armenian coffee[[7]](#footnote-7). There’s background folkloric music.*

MAN A: You know, when I first crossed the border from Iran to Armenia… it was… how do I describe it? Have you been to Iran?

MAN B: Iran? You know what *my* country thinks of Iran, jan.

MAN A: Yes, your country that brings peace, freedom and democracy to other people?

MAN B: Yes, that one. My Dad is Iranian though and mom – Iranian-Armenian, though – that’s why I can still understand Farsi. They didn’t share much else with me.

MAN A: Ha-ha, listen to your elder, then!

MAN B: So Armenian!

MAN A: You see – the Iranian side is kinda yellow, dusty, with no trees. Literally, none. I mean I was born in Tehran and it’s an amazing city. But I also went to an Armenian school ‘cos you know, we were (*laughs*) all “extremely Christian.”

*Both cross themselves in an exaggerated fashion mocking the gesture.*

MAN B: Did you guys have special prayer rooms in Iranian schools – like we do in the American universities?

MAN A: You do?

MAN B: Yep. Also, some washrooms have a basin for Muslim students to wash their feet before prayer.

MAN A: Hell no! They wouldn’t create anything like that for Christians in Iran. No way, José!

MAN B: Nice. You’ve learned the lingo of my country. It’s hilarious.

MAN A: Not that I care. I am no longer a believer.

MAN B: Me neither. The New York Armenian Sunday school washed off of me pretty fast. So, the border?

MAN A: Ah, yes. As you approach the border – it’s in the very north of Iran, it’s mountainous and completely deserted. And then you see the Armenian side there – and it’s all green! Very green, lush, soooo many trees – the slopes covered in greenery. And it has a large Armenian flag flying in the wind – but it’s not even the best part… Suddenly, you hear people talking Hayren [Armenian] – and it’s everybody. Everybody! It kind of wraps around you – it’s no longer your secret home language. It’s out; out in the open, you don’t even need to check if everyone understands. They all just do. It’s a given! Mandatory even. Plus, the letters – you see that weird sixteen-hundred year old alphabet everywhere and it’s suddenly real! It’s on every building.

MAN B: Instead of Iranian?

MAN A: You know in Iran we use *Arabic* writing, right?

MAN B: Pah-lease...

MAN A: I thought New-Yorkers know everything.

MAN B: *(annoyed)* The border, please.

MAN A: What?

MAN B: The Iranian-Armenian border.

MAN A: Ah yes. I was twenty-two when I decided to move to Armenia and get my Armenian citizenship. Basically, because Armenia was much less conservative than Iran. My boyfriend still laughs at me when I say that.

MAN B: Your boyfriend is from here?

MAN A: Yes. He thinks Armenia was not the right country to move to for an Armenian. Whatever... When I was crossing the border for the first time – it still gives me goosebumps… When I crossed the border – for the first time in my life – I realized I was no longer a minority. Yeah! You know how good it feels! *(Giggles.)* And you know when I felt that again? Only in one other place.

MAN B: I have no idea. You’re too worldly for me, jan.

MAN A:I had the same feeling when I went to Mikonos.

MAN B: *(proud of his knowledge)* The gay Mecca in Greece?

MAN A: Have you been?

MAN B: No.

MAN A: Your loss. You see, there are boys everywhere, ridiculously hot boys, holding hands, kissing around, dancing, as if it’s nothing special. Nobody even flinches. For the first time in my life, gay boys like me, every-freaking-where!

MAN B: Damn! You should have come to New York. You would’ve felt the same. I’ve never experienced that sense of discovery. (*Sips his coffee*). In my family, we even drink coffee like here in Yerevan.

MAN A: Really? We mostly drank tea in Iran.

MAN B: No-no-no. One needs to drink coffee so that your aunt would have a chance to read the coffee grounds for you.

MAN A: I know I know. I got a lot of this here – from my boyfriend’s mom. (*Performs reading the grounds*). Vai, astvatz! [My goodness!] I see a beautiful girl there and a lot of money in your bank account. Coffee never lies, jan! Never!

MAN B: Yes, that. I was always annoyed – why would she always see a beautiful girl for me? Never a beautiful boy?!

MAN A: (*performing shock*) A boooooooooooy?!

*Both cross themselves and spit over the shoulder. Laugh.*

MAN B: When I moved here, I first came as part of Birthright… Oh, no, it’s not like in Israel, where it’s more like a two week tourist experience of the “homeland”… financed by conservative New York Jews. Oops! My Jewish friend told me that – I swear I don’t make this up. (*Laughs*).

MAN A: I wish Birthright Armenia were financed by rich people or something.

MAN B: Wouldn’t that be nice? Anyway, basically, you fly over here, brush up your language and volunteer for the poorest of their communities…

MAN A: *Our* communities?

MAN B: Yeah. I mean I had never seen that level of poverty but you know what really struck me – no depression, no drugs and no drunks, although everyone drinks, of course. I mean their homes are falling apart but they would still go out all the time and dance in the streets. In New York, I’d be popping pills non-stop, when depressed, I mean. Seriously!

MAN A: *(ironically)* Jesus would have never approved of that.

*Both cross themselves jokingly. Laugh.*

MAN B: One time, it was like Friday evening or something, I was right here – in the main square when I suddenly heard that music and then I see about forty… I am not kidding you, FORTY men dancing, all together, in a huge circle. You know the Yargooshta dance?

*Shows him a Yargooshta move.*

MAN A: I think so.

MAN B: It’s the one when they dance in pairs and then make a circle? There was this one random guy just walking home from work and then he notices the circle, sorta squeals with joy, throws his backpack on the pile in the centre and just steps in it … and the circle takes him in as if he always belonged there. Just a regular guy! Not a dancer! And then you see those forty handsome men of all ages and walks of life, dancing together this powerful … warrior dance their ancestors passed over across the millennia… it’s hard not to be feeling anything. I mean I was petrified of them and I was dying to be part of that circle. That’s how I decided to join the Youth Dance Group here in Yerevan.

MAN A: Dance group? So gay?

MAN: I know, right? You know Yargooshta?

MAN A: Hmm…

MAN B: I’ll show you.

MAN A: No-no-no. You know, a proper Iranian girl like me isn’t supposed to be dancing in the streets like … some dirty Christian. *(He crosses himself jokingly).*

MAN B: I’ll show you, jan.

MAN A: What? Here, in the street?

MAN B: Ah, don’t you worry. In Armenia, you can dance, sing, kiss, drink alcohol, smoke in the streets. You know that. (*Ironically*) Just don’t be gay.

MAN A: (*still performing ‘a proper Iranian girl’*) Noooooooo. I can’t.

MAN B: Come on. All Armenian men dance. Be masculine! Dance!

MAN A: (*still in character*) Oh, my mother told me not to talk to men either.

MAN B: Oh, please! Stand up!

*He moves the chairs. Prepares the space. He starts showing the moves.*

MAN B:Hit my hands! Like a hi-five but much stronger.

MAN A: (*still in character*) Vai-vai-vai! This is so harsh for a young aristocratic woman from a good Persian family.

MAN B: (*laughs*) Hit my hands! *(Raises his arms and opens his palm toward MAN A to hit them as they do in Yargooshta).*

*MAN A pretends to hit his hands still performing the role.*

MAN B: Harder!

MAN A: No!

MAN B: The purpose of Yargooshta is to start your blood going and get rid of fear before a battle. Hit me harder!

*MAN A hits again, a bit harder this time.*

MAN B: Harder!!!!

*Games aside, they now both raise their arms – MAN A hits MAN B’s hands as hard as he can. Yarghoushta starts. MAN B encourages MAN A to follow his moves counting in Armenian: ‘meg, yergu, yereg, chors’ [one, two, three, four]. They get into it more and more. First they dance as a ‘fighting’ pair as Yargooshta requires, then other people join them and it turns into a circle dance. There is a lot of excitement now. The music gets much louder too.*

MAN A: (*remembering something as they continue to dance*) So, the dance group?

MAN B: Huh?

MAN A: The dance group you joined.

MAN B:Fun, right?

MAN A: What happened?

MAN B: They had this very patriotic artistic director.

MAN A: What?

MAN B: Artistic director.

MAN A: (*getting out of breath*) A-ha!

MAN B: Very patriotic.

MAN A: Right.

MAN B: Meg-ergu-ereg-chors…

MAN A: Yes?

MAN B: So, he figured it out.

MAN A: Figured?

MAN B: He figured out what I was.

MAN A: What you were?

MAN B: One day, he just started yelling at me…

MAN A: Yelling?

MAN B: Yelling. In front of everyone else.

MAN A: Yelling what?

MAN B: You’re not Armenian!

MAN A: I can’t hear you!

MAN B: You’re not Armenian!!

MAN A: What?!

MAN B: You’re not Armenian!!! *(He stops dancing. Spewing out the words.)* Get the fuck out of here!! Get the fuck out of here! Go back to your America! Hay ch’es, ay gyots!! Hay ch’es, ay gyots!! Hay ch’es, ay gyots!! [You’re not Armenian, faggot!]

*He yells the last words out. Pause. Everyone has stopped dancing and is staring at him in horror. Lights go out.*

# Grindr Interlude B. Hockey Dad

*As the Grindr conversation appears on the floor, cheesy romantic music slowly fades in and the performers are changing the set dancing around the lines of the floor.*

A: Hey, man!

B: Hello.

A: Hockey dad here.

B: Hockey dad?

A: Married here.

B: Ah… Discrete? No face?

A: Yeah.

B: Ok.

A: Looking to suck some dick, man.

B: Ok.

A: First timer here, man.

B: Ok.

A: Bi-curious here, man.

B: Ok.

A: Looking to suck you off, man.

B: Ok.

A: I don’t kiss or cuddle, though. Hate that shit, man.

B: Ok.

*Pause.*

A: Right now?

B: Ok.

A: Your place?

B: Ok.

A: Are you straight too, man?

B: No.

A: Bi?

B: No. Why?

A: If you’re not straight or bi, I am not interested, man.

B: Oh?

A: Just looking for other normal guys here. Not into fems, man.

*Pause.*

A: Looking for masc buddies in a similar situation. Can cuck your wife too, man.

*Pause.*

B: Hm… Go, Leafs go?

*Lights change. So does the music.*

# Scene 3: First Love.[[8]](#footnote-8)

*Night. Bed. Two hairy legs are seen from under the blanket. Two more slowly appear from under the blanket. The bodies and faces are invisible.*

YOUNGER ONE: *(very tenderly)* Are you sleeping? Coo-coo! *(His foot tenderly caresses OLDER ONE’s legs).*

*OLDER ONE hugs him tighter in his sleep.*

YOUNGER ONE: *(his foot continues the caressing, whispering)* My bear! My big bear! Mmmmm… I am your little bear cub… It’s good that you’re sleeping and can’t hear me, babe. And if you did, you wouldn’t understand English anyway. Babyyyyy…. You should know something: when I was a baby, I was a very very very happy one. Mama jan would constantly show me off because I was the happiest baby on the block. Always with an adorable smile on my face. Everyone thought I was a girl. ’Cos girls are supposed to smile and look pretty. And I was both: smiley and pretty.

*OLDER ONE’s hand comes out from under the blanket and scratches his leg. Then it travels to YOUNGER’S leg.*

Awwwwwe! *(Almost breathless).* Baby, I am only 21. Not 30. I was just afraid you won’t talk to me. A forty-year old talking to me? Me, who has never ever touched another man’s body. Never touched another man’s lips… When everyone else was dating… you know… learning how to be human with another human, practicing how to talk, smile, kiss, cry, break up and then meet, talk, smile… I was being busy – getting bullied by my classmates… and teachers. Mostly by teachers. I think that’s when I stopped smiling or maybe even earlier?

*OLDER ONE’s hand comes alive again: it moves the blanket up YOUNGER ONE’s leg revealing more and then rests on his thigh.*

*YOUNGER ONE:* (*appreciates the tenderness of human touch)* This! This is the most beautiful thing that has happened to me.I feel I haven’t smiled since I turned eleven. When I realized that something was wrong. 'Cos my dad would be like: “Look at that girl or this girl. Isn’t she just vah-vah-vah!” Of course, I would fake it – fake it to death. Because I was so scared.

*YOUNGER ONE’s hand comes out from under the blanket and grabs the other man’s hand.*

YOUNGER ONE: One day my sister was using my computer and she opens the browser history, right? Guess what she saw: hairy-bears-meet-cute-cubs-dot-com. Yeah, right. My “biology homework”.So, she goes and tells my mom and my mom immediately runs up to me asking all kinds of questions. Not asking really, more like: *(in hysterics)* Vai-vai-vai, jan! What is that? What does it mean?!

You know – total hysteria. So, I lied on the fly: Mama jan, what do you mean? I am just growing up and I need to compare myself to other male bodies. It’s super normal for a teenager!

*His body shakes with laughter – the other man reacts.*

OLDER ONE: (*whispers through sleep*) Jan…

YOUNGER ONE: Ah sorry! Sorry, jan! *(Pauses.)* Jan, say *jan* again. Please… please… (*Kisses the other man’s lips).* Jaaaaaaan… it’s the most delicious word on earth, I swear. When all the girls were ranting about how much they hated being … you know, “Come over here, akhchik [girl] jan!”, I was secretly thinking that I wanted to be… catcalled. Harassed. I couldn’t bear to be alone in my bed crying myself to sleep. I was imagining how it would feel to be…touched … explored by another man’s hands, even violent hands, wandering hands, rude hands…

*OLDER ONE turns around. Then shivers as if it’s unpleasant or cold and then his leg wanders back, finds YOUNGER ONE’s leg and brings it closer to him.*

Before you tapped me online, before you said jan to me, I had been… so empty. I had no male friends – men meant danger. My own father meant danger. This whole city meant danger. There were no books about me, my condition. Until I started learning English – and I saw another world, full of news… about me. About you, jan. English became my language of freedom and the tongue of my future. But English doesn’t have *jan* in it. English wasn’t able to make me smile again.

*YOUNGER ONE’S hand explores OLDER ONE’s body under the blanket. The OLDER ONE turns on his back.*

You are like electricity – energizing my body, my soul. Even if it’s once a week and only at my place and never at yours – it still brings the smile back to my face. Even if it’s only when you’re sleeping. I touch you and I smile. *(He dives under the blanket.)* Since I first touched your beautiful, powerful, magical, scrumptious, delicious, delightful, omnipresent, fervent and long-lasting… (S*uddenly YOUNGER ONE’s face appears from under the blanket between the OLDER ONE’s legs.)* tool…

*YOUNGER ONE gently pushes his face into OLDER ONE’s hand and keeps shifting his head making the other man’s fingers caress his face and neck.*

*YOUNGER ONE:* My soul is singing, sounding fervently.
I know in front of my song of today -
Facing the red sparks of my soul as well -
Each single soul is a radio station,
Wherever it is!
Every soul which lives, each soul which exists,
And is carrying upon its own wings
The same great concept, the immense concept
Of these fervent days, -
The radiant concept of these fervent days.
Every single soul,
Which is today with its wings of iron
Ringing and rustling -
And is searching for new rest and lulling
In the uproar of million rebel wings...[[9]](#footnote-9)

*Sound of a cellphone message coming in.*

YOUNGER ONE: *(stops, looks for the phone)* Jan. Your phone. *(Searches under the blanket and fishes out a cellphone).* Jan! You’ve got a message.

*Sound of a few more messages come through. Many many more. YOUNGER ONE is now glued to the screen.*

YOUNGER ONE: (*shaking*) Vai-vai!!!!! Sa eencha? [What is this?] (Reading.) “I can’t wait to … (*hiccups*)… your big dick again.” Who are all these guys?! *(Weeps.)* Jaaaaaaaaaan!

*Lights go out.*

# Grindr Interlude C. Normal.

*A Grindr conversation appears on the floor. It can be accompanied by music. The performers are changing the set.*

A: So you grew up here in Angina?

B: Born and bred. You?

A: I moved from another province a month ago.

B: Cool. This is a shitty city.

A: Phew. I am so glad you said that.

B: Yeah. I can’t find anyone normal here.

A: Anyone normal?

B: Yeah. Someone to build a relationship with.

A: I think you just found someone.

B: Ha-ha-ha! I want a normal relationship.

A: So you’re not gay then?

A: I am. But I want to have a gay heterosexual family.

*The actors changing the set suddenly pause and react to the last Grindr line. As the Grindr conversation resumes, they continue reacting to the lines, oftentimes replicated the audience’s reaction.*

A: Whaaaaaa????????

B: You know what I mean.

A: I do?

B: I mean with heterosexual family values.

A: A gay family with heterosexual family values?!

B: Yep.

A: And with a heterosexual house?

B: Yep.

A: And a heterosexual dog?

B: You got it.

A: And two heterosexual kids?

B: Stop it.

A: With a heterosexual kitchen sink?

B: LOL.

A: Soooooo… how do we start our heterosexual gay family?

*Pause.*

A: ???

*Pause.*

B: Wanna take a shower together and jerk off?

A: As long as it is a heterosexual shower.

B: Send me your location. See you in ten.

*Lights off.*

# Scene 4. Family Life.

*City apartment in Yerevan. Table and chairs in the middle. WIFE storms in putting on her gown.*

WIFE: I don’t know how long I can take this!

HUSBAND: (*from another room*) No need to yell. How many times I told you I had a problem?

WIFE: I know, I know. There must be some way, though.

HUSBAND: It’s all in God’s hands.

WIFE: You should stop mentioning God every five minutes. He might get annoyed.

HUSBAND: You should stop teasing me every morning.

WIFE: I am not teasing. I have no time for teasing.

HUSBAND: What are you doing then?

WIFE: I am checking. Verifying!!

HUSBAND: Checking while I am sleeping?

WIFE: Yes, checking if it gets hard.

HUSBAND: Every morning?

WIFE: Every single one. Diligence in those matters is key.

HUSBAND: If it does, you’ll be the first to know.

WIFE: I better be. I need love like everyone else.

HUSBAND: Love is God and God alone.

*HUSBAND comes in. He is a priest, in full regalia. He is combing his hair.*

WIFE: Did you wake up Raffi?

HUSBAND: Let the young man sleep. He needs energy for his university exams.

WIFE: I seriously doubt he even goes to university. I think he gets his grades for free just because he smiles at people.

HUSBAND: Jan, he had a rough past. We knew that when we decided to adopt him.

WIFE: When *you* decided…

HUSBAND: When you make someone part of your family, you are not there to judge them. You’re there to accept them, understand and guide them. We need to be more Christian –

WIFE: (*opens the window*) Ahhhhhhh! Look, no smog today! I can even see Mount Ararat! It arises in the distance overlooking my home city: tall, strong, and fully erect. Unlike some people.

HUSBAND: It’s all in God’s hands.

WIFE: *It* needs to be in *my* hands.

HUSBAND: Impotence is not a joke, sweetheart.

WIFE: I was not joking either. It’s been years since I saw anything fully erect. Except Ararat and our President’s ego, of course. Coffee?

HUSBAND: Yes, jan. I have to …

WIFE: Are you meeting with Vahé[[10]](#footnote-10) today?

HUSBAND: Yes, after the church gathering. I need to discuss the Easter procession with him. You know how we all love Easter. Did you buy the eggs for the colouring?

WIFE: You guys have become really close. Closer than we are.

HUSBNAD: Vahé is a strong man. With a vision.

WIFE: And a nice butt.

HUSBAND: Vai, jan!

WIFE: What? I am married but I am not dead. *(Walks off to make coffee).*

HUSBAND: (*crosses himself*) Jan!

WIFE: I am happy you’re not cranky any longer. You used to get so annoyed about everything. I thought I was marrying the calmest person in the world – instead I ended up with the crankiest Father in the country.

*He picks up his morning newspaper to read.*

HUSBAND: You need to refocus, jan. It is not all about you. It not all about me either: since the time we adopted Raffi I have been busy taking care of him and you. And not thinking about my own problems. I refocused.

WIFE: Can you believe it’s been five years already.

HUSBAND: Good five years.

WIFE: I don’t know why I am so cranky. I feel like I finally have a normal family even though Raffi is twenty already and I never got to know him when he was a little boy. You realize that before we got Raffi, people were constantly talking about us: Married for so many years and no kids – what’s wrong with them?

HUSBAND: People always talk.

WIFE: Yes, gossiping about your neighbours is our cherished national tradition.

HUSBAND: Refocus.

WIFE: Ok. And then remember? When you visited that orphanage outside of Yerevan for the baptism of the new building. You said there were way too many children there and nobody wanted to adopt them. For a Christian country, we’re not doing that well, are we?

HUSBAND: We like scolding Turks for the genocide but not taking care of our own ilk.

WIFE: A ***hundred-year*** old genocide! *(She brings in the coffee and dates. She is already fully dressed and ready to go to work.)* Want a date?

HUSBAND: With you? I’d take two.

WIFE: (*sits down*) Kids grow up fast. Especially when you don’t have to change their diapers.

HUSBAND: Diapers are the simplest problem a parent has to deal with.

WIFE: I know I get cranky every now and then. But I actually love you. We do have a perfect family!

HUSBAND: (*goes back to reading*) We do.

WIFE: Except your little problem.

HUSBAND: (*suddenly discovers something in the paper*) Vai-vai-vai!!!

WIFE: What happened? Did *it* go up?

HUSBAND: The football cup! 5:0. Arsenal lost.

WIFE: Ah, yes, that is the end of the world!

HUSBAND: It is!!! You don’t get it because you’re a woman!

WIFE: The country is at war with the Azeris, the national currency is at peril, the President is a crook, I am being paid peanuts for my work and he is concerned about some *Arse-anal* losing.

HUSBAND: Arsenal!

WIFE: (*ironically*) Refocus?

HUSBAND: Did you record the game? I was in the church last night.

WIFE: I thought you were all watching it in the church. Like all good Christian men are supposed to.

HUSBNAD: I was with Vahé. I completely forgot that it was on.

WIFE: Completely forgot about football? Unheard of. I think we’re going to have an earthquake tomorrow. Eight points at least!

HUSBAND: You didn’t record it!

WIFE: When would I have time to do that? I cook, I go shopping, I do the dishes, I clean, I do the laundry, I go to work and after work I join the protesters in the main square. I am practically Rosa Luxemburg!

HUSBAND: Maybe Vahé recorded it.

WIFE: Whether he did or not, I can’t care less. Rosa needs to rush to spearhead the next national revolution. (*Calling*.) Raffi! University!!! *(She gets up.)*

*In comes Raffi, the son. He is shirtless and gorgeous.*

WIFE: Raffi jan! We talked about this.

RAFFI: Mama jan, bari luis! [Good morning!] Bari luis, papa jan!

*RAFFI kisses his mom.*

WIFE: Coffee on the table! Food in the fridge. Mama at work. Bye!

RAFFI: Mmmmm. I heard you argue again.

HUSBAND: When you get married, you’ll understand.

RAFFI: What if I don’t want to get married.

WIFE: You’re like your father then. Bye!

RAFFI: Bye mom!

HUSBAND: Bye, jan! God be with you!

WIFE’S VOICE: Tell *(pointing the sky) Him* that. He seems to be ignoring me. (*Leaves*.)

*RAFFI listens to the door shut.*

RAFFI: (*sipping his coffee*) Forgive me Father, for I have sinned.

HUSBAND: I have to go.

RAFFI: What time are you coming back?

HUSBAND: I don’t know.

RAFFI: Are you seeing Vahé tonight?

HUSBAND: Church business.

RAFFI: Daaaaaaaad?

HUSBAND: Stop it.

RAFFI: You don’t like it?

HUSBAND: What?

RAFFI: When I call you dad? Should I call you Father?

HUSBAND: Remember what Mom said – university!

RAFFI: I don’t want to.

HUSBAND: I have to go. (*He is ready to leave.)*

RAFFI: Father! No goodbye?

HUSBAND: I am late, Raffi.

RAFFI: Everyone is always late in this city. Since when is this a problem?

HUSBAND: A priest shouldn’t be.

RAFFI: Still, no goodbye?

HUSBAND: Bye, Raffi!

RAFFI: I need your blessing for good grades. *(He comes close to HUSBAND, lowers his head for a blessing).*

HUSBAND: (*hesitates*) God be with you!

RAFFI: Amen! (*Crosses himself*.)

*HUSBAND kisses his forehead like a priest would. RAFFI quickly slides his head up and his lips touch HUSBAND’s lips. Pause. HUSBAND grabs RAFFI’s buttocks. Prolonged passionate kiss. Blackout.*

# Grindr Interlude D. Big Eyes.

*A Grindr conversation appears on the floor. Again, it could be accompanied by music. Actors changing the set can react at the text appearing on the stage floor. Alternatively, they can start reacting to the audience’s reactions.*

A: So what are you looking for here? LOL

B: A date.

A: LOL. That’s unusual. Everyone is just looking to fuck. … LOL

B: I am not like everyone then.

A: Cool. I am Asian, btw.

*Pause.*

A: Ha-ha! Is that ok?

B: Is that ok to be Asian? I don’t know. 60% of the planet is Asian.

A: True that. LOL

B: I am Asian too.

A: LOL. You are not. You’re white.

B: White?

A: You have big eyes. U r totally white. R u Jewish or something?

B: I am West Asian.

A: Huh? WTF is West Asian?

B: Well, you’re East Asian and I am West Asian.

A: Seriously, WTF?

B: West Asia: Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel. Should I continue?

A: OMG! THAT’S HOT!!!!.. Have a dick pic? … LOL

B: LOL. After you.

A: I thought you were looking for a date. LOL. I am five inches. Is it ok? Uncut.

B: LOL. I am uncut too.

A: Uncut? Oh, shit. Bye!

B: What?

A: Can’t deal with uncut.

B: What? Why?

A: Middle Easterners are cut. That’s why I tapped you.

B: What? Only Muslims or Jews are.

A: Happy hunting… habibi!

*Scene change.*

# Scene 5. Last Kiss.

*A bench in an urban park facing upstage. A couple is sitting on it. The audience can’t see their faces.*

POET: *(finishes a poem)*

I would write

the most beloved

poem

transparent seagulls on the horizon,

red-red sunset,

you and me,

me and you.

about allegorical love,

but words are atoms, Lily,

fire atoms,

chew a successful end:

noiseless and noiseless.

Somewhere

the end of the matter of pain,

In the city

we find,

we are meeting ...[[11]](#footnote-11)

VISITOR: That’s so beautiful. Can I kiss you?

POET: You’re beautiful. You’re so impossibly handsome. I want my vowels to speak to your gorgeous sad eyes.

VISITOR: Ah stop it! All Armenians have gorgeous sad eyes. You are a poet. You probably say that to every guy you meet.

POET: I probably do. (*He stretches his hand over VISITOR’s shoulder to sit in a relaxed ‘bro’ position but his hand gets behind VISITOR’s head, his fingers start slowly and carefully caressing VISITOR’s neck).*

VISITOR: Mmmmmm… I wish we could be alone.

POET: So do I.

VISITOR: I can’t have you over ‘cos I am staying with my uncle.

POET: I know.

VISITOR: …and you can’t host because your crazy mom is always home.

POET: Sounds like a sad and typical problem of poor bohemians – no one has a place to make out.

VISITOR: Could you tell her I am just a friend?

POET: And then she walks in on us doing hanky-panky under the blanket?

VISITOR: Would you ever tell her?

POET: What?

VISITOR: That you like boys.

POET: (*removes his hand*) Never.

VISITOR: Why not?

POET: Because…

VISITOR: Everyone should come out.

POET: I like your beautiful spirit and your first-world courage.

VISITOR: First-world?

POET: I don’t want her to suffer. She has suffered enough: went through the war, the economic blockade of the 90s, the aftermath of all that. We had no electricity. No heating, no water for years. The whole city was out in the winter – cutting down trees in all public parks – to have firewood for furnaces. And she raised me all by herself… guess how much government support she was getting as a single mom, right? None! … Why would she have to suffer more, for God’s sake?

*Pause.*

It’s not all about *me* after all.

VISITOR: Can I kiss you?

POET: (*moves away from him*) I need to move out of here. I’ll probably go to Russia. Everyone is going to Russia. There’s no hope here.

VISITOR: You should, since you speak that language too. It’s going to be easier, I think. But if you learn English, you can move to North America and then find me there. Can I kiss you?

POET: Stop it.

VISITOR: What? Are you ashamed of me?

POET: It’s a public place. It’s not romantic here.

VISITOR: You took me to an abandoned plant to jerk off together. That was so romantic!

*Moves closer to him.*

POET: I wasn’t planning to, but your smart hazel eyes seduced me.

VISITOR: (*moves closer to his ear, whispers*) Only my eyes?

*Licks his ear playfully and quickly so that no one can see.*

POET: (*jumps on his feet*, *looks around in panic*) What’s the heck is wrong with you? Don’t!

VISITOR: Why?

POET: We’re in the Music Conservatory Park. There are people there in the conservatory. Windows. Security. They might see.

VISITOR: (*laughs*) Music Conservatory? The last place to worry about.

POET: Why?

VISITOR: Ha-ha! I can assure you they are all totally gay there.

POET: No. We can’t here. (*Looks around*.)

VISITOR: (*laughing*) Oh my god! You are all shaking. Why so much fear? *(Stretches his arm towards POET.)*

POET: Don’t.

VISITOR: What? It’s just a kiss, for god’s sake.

POET: You won’t understand.

VISITOR: Try me.

POET: You’re not from here.

VISITOR: And you’re overreacting.

POET: I am not.

VISITOR: You kiss so well. Soooo well. It’s rare.

POET: Kissing is writing poetry with your lips.

VISITOR: And your tongue.

POET: And your tongue.

VISITOR: *(stands up to stretch)* Yeeeees. Some guys don’t like to ki…

POET: (*all of a sudden*) Last year…

VISITOR: What?

POET: (*sits downs, tries to calm himself down*) Last year… there was…

VISITOR: Yes?

POET: Last year, here….

VISITOR: Are you ok?

POET: … a large drunken mob … attacked a gay student, right here… They beat him to a pulp. He died in hospital after.

VISITOR: What?!

POET: You wouldn’t understand.

VISITOR: In front of the conservatory building? Did you know him?

POET: No. It is irrelevant.

VISITOR: *(in shock)* I am so sorry. I understand, though. I think I do.

*Pause. VISITOR sits down. Then moves closer to POET.*

VISITOR: I’m flying back tomorrow.

POET: I know.

VISITOR: Early in the morning.

POET: I know.

VISITOR: My vacation is over.

POET: I know.

VISITOR: Can I still kiss you? Last kiss.

*POET remains silent, turns his head toward VISITOR: a tear runs down his cheek.*

POET: You are so beautiful! So fatally beautiful!

VISITOR: Can I kiss you?

*Silence. Both slowly move closer to each other. Pause. Both carefully stretch their arms so that they would reach the other person’s shoulder, if they were just sitting like ‘bros’. Pause.*

 *Their hands slowly and carefully start caressing the back of each other’s neck.*

*A moment of tenderness and impossibility.*

*Lights fade out – the Grindr conversation appears.*

# Grindr Interlude E. Bored.

*A Grindr conversation appears on the floor. Actors changing the set can react at the text appearing on the stage floor as well as to the audience’s reactions.*

A: Show cock

B: Hello to you too.

A: Cock?

B: No. Human.

A: How big?

B: average.

A: Boo! u party?

B: No.

A: 420?

B: What?

A: Weed.

B: Not interested.

A: have poppers?

B: No.

A: smoke?

B: No.

A: shrooms?

B: No, thanks.

A: Wanna open a couple of beers and punch each other?

B: What?

A: Kick each other?

B: Kick?

A: fighting is hot. Gives me a boner.

B: Oh.

A: Or you could strangle me?

B: I don’t think we’re looking for the same thing.

A: I’m bored to death bro. Need to have fun – let’s fight it out.

B: Everyone’s bored to death in this place.

A: No shit, man. You party?

B: NO!

A: u r no fun. Party and play?

B: No.

A: what u lookin for?

B: A relationship.

A: awesome I want that 2

B: Great. What’s your name?

A: John here! u party?

*Scene change.*

# Scene 6. Birthday Boy. [[12]](#footnote-12)

*Knock on the door. Another one, louder.*

POLICEMAN’S VOICE: (*from behind the door*) Police! Did you call?

POLICEWOMAN’S VOICE: (*from behind the door*) We’re responding to your call. Please, open up.

*Another loud knock. Silence. Sound of the door opening slowly, very slowly.*

POLICEMAN’S VOICE: Why is it so dark in here?

POLICEWOMAN’S VOICE: Where’s the switch?

MAN’S VOICE (*weak, stumbling*): Don’t, please. … Don’t. …It hurts. To look at the light. Oh, shit (*a stumble is heard, then a fall*).

POLICEMAN: (*turning on his flashlight and directing it at the man’s feet, legs, then shirt – it’s covered in blood)* Shiiiiiiiit! What happened to you?

POLICEWOMAN: What’s your name?

MAN: …Armen.[[13]](#footnote-13)

POLICEWOMAN: (*softer voice, aside to the policeman*) Oh, one of those khachiks.

MAN: I can hear you.

POLICEMAN: What’s your last name?

MAN: Ter-Shakhnazaryan.[[14]](#footnote-14)

POLICEWOMAN: Oh, boy. That’s a weird name. I need to write it down. Can you spell it for me? I need the lights on. Sorry! *(Flips the switch).*

*MAN’s face is covered in blood. It is dripping onto his shirt.*

MAN: *(squinting, in pain)* Ouch ouch ouch![[15]](#footnote-15)

POLICEMAN: Where do you keep the towels? Man, you’re bleeding.

*He steps out to search for a towel.*

POLICEWOMAN: What was your name again?! (*Takes out a notebook*). Moscow South-West District, April, 20th…

MAN: Ter-Shakhnazaryan.

POLICEWOMAN: Are you not Russian?

MAN: I am Armenian.

POLICEWOMAN: What are you doing here, in Moscow?

MAN: (*sobbing*) Teaching English.

POLICEWOMAN: You speak English then?

MAN: I do.

POLICEWOMAN: Age?

MAN: 30.

POLICEWOMAN: So, it was you who called?

MAN: Yes.

POLICEWOMAN: *(writing things down*) 30 year old, called at midnight, allegedly attacked at the door of his apartment building. *(To MAN)* Who were they?

MAN: I don’t know. They were just… I think they’d been following me. I am not sure.

POLICEWOMAN: They? Who?

MAN: I think there were three… or four of them. I didn’t see them.

POLICEWOMAN: How do you know there were three of them?

MAN: I don’t. (*POLICEMAN gives him a towel to wipe off the blood*.) When I was on the ground, they were… kicking me in the face. It felt there were three… or more of them. Different boots.

POLICEWOMAN: Boots?

MAN: Yes, like Dr. Martins. It hurt like shit. I don’t know… I wasn’t quite there.

POLICEWOMAN: Were you not conscious? How do you know there were three people there? What age were they?

MAN: I don’t know. They were young. They sounded young.

POLICEWOMAN: So you heard them speak? Did they talk to you?

MAN: They were yelling.

POLICEWOMAN: I need more.

MAN: (*sobs*) Fucking “‘khachik’! Get out of Russia! Blacky! Caucasian pig!...” something like that.

POLICEWOMAN: I see. (*To the policeman*.) Must be one of those neo-Nazis.

POLICEMAN: Oh, I didn’t realize I thought all Caucasians were …

MAN: (*suddenly cries*) Why did they pick me?! What did *I* do?

POLICEMAN: Shhhhh… It’s 1 am. Your neighbours will hear. Did you scream? Cry for help?

MAN: I didn’t. I was kinda… They had hit me on the head, from behind. With a bat or a bottle. I remember falling.

POLICEWOMAN: You seem like a normal dude. Why would they attack you?

MAN: I don’t know…. I might have seen them by the subway exit, actually. I was coming back from work and I was a bit… tipsy.

POLICEWOMAN: You were drunk?

MAN: No, I don’t drink much. It’s my birthday. April 20th – we had a party at work and I was walking home from the subway… that’s where I think they might have spotted me… Ah… (*Touches his bleeding wound on the forehead*).

POLICEMAN: (*to the WOMAN*) I think we need to call an ambulance. He’s bleeding bad.

POLICEWOMAN: I hope he’s insured.

POLICEMAN: Bro, I know it’s shitty but you need to understand. Shit happens. It’s April 20th, after all. I mean I can’t believe it’s happening here but …

MAN: Sorry?

POLICEMAN: Yeah… You don’t know man. It’s April 20th.

POLICEWOMAN: (*to POLICEMAN, in a low voice*) I think it’s the rite of passage shit then? “Kill a khachik”[[16]](#footnote-16) right?

MAN: I can still hear you.

POLICEMAN: Sorry, man. (*To POLICEWOMAN*) He needs to go ER – call an ambulance, ok?

*She takes out her cellphone and leaves to make a call.*

MAN: What’s with April 20th?

POLICEMAN: Nothing, man. It kind of happens every year. Not your fault.

MAN: What happens?

POLICEMAN: Hey, bro. They are just kids really. You don’t need to press charges, though. They are just kids.

MAN: Charges? Why …?

POLICEMAN: Listen, if you decide to come to the police station tomorrow and press charges, we’ll have to officially issue a search warrant. Tonight, we can just report it as an accident but it’s not a big deal. Unless you show up tomorrow and make it… official.

MAN: I just needed help. I didn’t know who to call.

POLICEMAN: Totally, man. The thing is … if you officially report it tomorrow, it’s like a blemish on us. It means we’re doing a shitty job here, you know what I mean? We won’t get paid extra then… and my pay is already shit. I am not a politician – you know they get paid big bucks, not us. And I have a family to feed, man. You get it?

MAN: I need water.  *(Tries to stand up and fails).*

POLICEMAN: (*helps him*) Man, you shouldn’t be moving really. I mean those dudes that beat you up are not from our neighbourhood. We have a nice neighbourhood – all the foreigners live here. It’s safe.

*MAN says nothing.*

POLICEMAN: They are probably from the east of the city. This is a safe neighbourhood, you know. Lots of foreigners. Some Black Caucasians too.

MAN: *(trying to stop the bleeding)* Black?

POLICEMAN: *(tries to help him with the towel)* Yes, people from the Caucasus – we call them black or Black Caucasian. Or sometimes *black-assed*. You guys don’t look Russian… I mean Slavic. I mean… (*Hurriedly.*) I don’t mean you, bro. You are totally cool. You teach English and everything but you know the others – those who come from the ex-Soviet republics – they are not here legally. You’re different. You’re not a *khachik*.

MAN: It hurts.

POLICEMAN: What?

MAN: Please, don’t use that word. *(Beat)* It means a crucifix.

POLICEMAN: In Turkish?

MAN: Noooooooo! In fucking Armenian – it’s a reference to Jesus. Shiiiiiiit!

POLICEMAN: You ok, man?

MAN: They were kicked me in the back too (*Points at his lower back*). It got just pinched there… (*He starts sliding to the floor*).

POLICEMAN: Oh shit!

*POLICEWOMAN comes in.*

POLICEWOMAN: The ambulance is here. They’ll take you … *(Sees MAN on the floor*). What the fuck did you do? What the fuck did you do?

POLICEMAN: Shut up, Olga! Help me!

*They both bend over MAN.*

POLICEWOMAN: The ambulance is here, man.

POLICEMAN: Hey? Dude?

MAN (*suddenly grabs his hand*): April 20th?!

POLICEMAN: Phew…

MAN: What *about* it?

POLICEMAN: Come oooon, man.

POLICEWOMAN: Oh, please. Just tell him – they were celebrating.

MAN: What?

POLICEWOMAN: Not what. Who.

POLICEMAN. Today is Hitler’s birthday, bro. Happens every year.

*Lights go off.*

# Grindr Interlude F. Atheist.

*A Grindr conversation appears on the stage floor. The actors changing the scene reacting to it: they might want to split into two groups: those supporting the ideas of A and those supporting the ideas of B. They could engage the audience too.*

A: So you’ve moved to Canada from Nigeria?

B: Yes. You?

A: I immigrated too. What are you looking for?

B: Cuddles.

A: Just cuddles?

B: Yes, cuddles, kissing… Well… maybe oral.

A: Ok.

B: No anal, though.

A: You don’t like it?

B: No.

A: Have you tried?

B: No.

A: Then how do you know?

B: I know. It’s unnatural.

A: Unnatural?

B: The parts don’t fit.

A: Interesting. So cuddles only, eh?

B: Yep... And sucking. ☺

A: How about tomorrow. Morning?

B: Tomorrow is Sunday. I can’t.

A: You can’t on Sunday?

B: Of course, not. Church.

A: Ah… I see. I forget that people go to church.

B: It’s the only community I have here.

A: Do they know about you?

B: Of course, not. My church hates gays.

A: Yay! Mine too!

B: Oh, I thought you were Muslim.

A: Everyone thinks that.

B: You look Muslim.

A: I am atheist.

B: What?

A: I don’t believe in God.

B: How come?

A: I just never did. My parents never talked about it. The concept was unfamiliar to me.

B: Wow! It must be so sad to grow up without God.

*Pause.*

B: Hello?

*Pause.*

B: Suck meeeeeeee!!!!!! Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!

*Lights change.*

# Scene 7. Arrival.[[17]](#footnote-17)

*Small city somewhere in the middle of Canada. A group of four is meeting at a local coffee shop in the middle of winter.*

MAN A: Barev! Barev! [Hello!]

WOMAN A: Barev!

MAN B1: Barev!

MAN B2: Barev!

*A traditional exchange of Armenian kisses on the right cheek accompanied by a simultaneous hand- shake. They put their plastic coffee cups down.*

MAN A: Welcome to Angina!

*WOMAN says nothing. Man B2 says nothing. This continues throughout the scene.*

MAN B1 (*he speaks fast, excitedly)*: Oh, that’s how you pronounce it!!! Why would anyone call a city that, right?

MAN A: That’s how white Canadians pronounce it. So I just imitate them.

MAN B1: White Canadians? What about blue ones? Brrrr… It’s so freaking cold here. *(Taking his unseasonably light coat off)*: We had to wait for our bus for thirty minutes. The first one never arrived, the second one is late.

MAN A: Bus? No-no-no. You need to have a car here. I bought a car as soon as we arrived.

MAN B1: *(he finally tastes his coffee)* Yikes! What is this?

MAN A: You need to brew your own coffee here. It’s not Yerevan.

MAN B 1: Ah, Yerevan jan! In Yerevan, I walked everywhere or took the metro. I miss Yerevan. I mean, here – good luck walking. It seems like they don’t clean the streets in the winter – I mean if they cleaned streets like that in Yerevan, the population would start a revolution and overthrow the government… yet, again. (*Pause*). Are you from Yerevan?

MAN A: *(proudly)* Yes, born in Yerevan. Baptised in Echmiadzin.[[18]](#footnote-18)

MAN B1: *(laughing)* Oooo! The Holy See!

MAN A: It was important for my parents - my grandfather was a priest.

MAN B1: I am so sorry.

MAN A: Why?

MAN B1: Never mind. I looooooove priests. He does too. *(Winks at B2).*

MAN A (*doesn’t get the humour*): When did you land, akhperner?

MAN B1: A week ago. Oh my god! So happy to have found you – who knew that there’d be some Armenians here. It’s such a joy to be speaking Hayren. I am getting a headache from English.

MAN A: I hate English too. You can’t like your second language. It’s unnatural.

MAN B1: I looooove it, actually. And it’s my fourth! Armenian, Persian, Russian and now English. Not bad, eh? Oh, he speaks French too. *(Points at B2).*

MAN A: So, you’re not from Armenia.

MAN B1: I am Armenian. And Iranian. And hopefully, Canadian soon. Although I wanna be honest with you, I have lived in four countries before but I have never EVER seen anything like this place.

MAN A: How so?

MAN B1: I don’t know. It’s weird. People don’t hold hands. They don’t hug either. Also, food – it’s just fast food everywhere. Who eats that shit, right?

MAN A: My wife cooks for me. We don’t really eat out.

MAN B1: Ehh… We love cooking too… It’s something else. I can’t quite put my finger on it. I mean the streets are empty. We went walking at 11 am – it’s empty. Went walking at 6 pm – still empty. We went out at 11 pm – where the hell is everybody?

MAN A: Yes, but we can afford a house here – it’s pretty cheap. Can you afford it anywhere else in this country? Only white Canadians can. Where are your kids going to play?

MAN B1: You’re funny. Who needs a house to have kids? I grew up in an apartment in the centre of Tehran – did I turn out all right?

MAN A: (*doesn’t* *notice the humour again*) So you’re Iranian then. I thought you guys were brothers.

MAN B1: (*winking*) All Armenians are brothers, akhper jan.

MAN A: Where are you planning to work here?

MAN B1: I don’t know yet. I used to be a human rights activist in Armenia. So, I went to this activist … place here. Like an organization or something – for human rights. It’s hilarious! The saddest office I’ve ever seen. Colourless! And when I said that – they were all like: OMG! It’s a judgement free environment here!

*MAN B2 makes an attempt to stop MAN B1.*

MAN B1: *(not listening to his partner)* Seriously, such *passive* … no! passive *aggressive* activists. (*Nobody is reacting to his humour*). Sorry, I talk too much. What about you?

MAN A: I have a normal job – IT.

MAN B1: That’s normal? I am sorry, jan.

MAN A: I like it. We like it here in general. Sure, it’s not Yerevan but…

MAN B1: Yeah. We are trying to like it too. I mean we’re lucky to have found you on the immigrant forum – cos how the hell do you make friends here? Everyone only talks about the weather… that’s not how you make friends, is it?

MAN A: We didn’t make friends. All our friends are back home. We don’t really talk to anyone much and no one invites us, anyway.

MAN B1: But this is home now, no? Home with no friends?

MAN A: Yeah. That’s normal here…. (*the next question he asks at the same time as MAN B1 asks his question)* So are you guys cousins?

MAN B1: *(in sync with MAN A’s question)* What makes you like this place?

MAN A and MAN B1: What?

MAN A: Are you guys cousins?

MAN B1: What makes you like this place?

MAN A: It’s quiet here. Normal.

MAN B1: Normal?

MAN A: Well, like in Armenia. People are normal. Not like in Montreal or Toronto or Vancouver. The families are normal and here they don’t teach my kids how to be… *(he is clearly disgusted)* you know.

MAN B2: To be what?

MAN A: You know what I mean, akhper jan.

MAB B1: I think I do but I’d like you to say that.

MAN A: So are you guys cousins?

MAN B1: What do schools teach your kids here?!

MAN A: They teach them how to be …

*They all freeze. Light change. A heartbeat fades in and a Grindr conversation appears on the floor.*

# Grindr Interlude E. Any pics?

A: (*as if it continues the previous line*) gay?

B: Very gay. You?

A: Guilty! Any pics?

*An empty photo frame appears on the floor. MAN B2 see it and rushes to take off his shirt, lie down and ‘fill’ the picture frame with his torso. As the dialogue progresses and moves up, his body moves up too attempting to stay in the frame.*

A: Hot! Have we met?

B: A few times. But every time you’ve blocked me.

A: Sorry. Must’ve been drunk… or high. Show more?

*Another picture frame appears on the floor. The same actor slides down to fit that picture but this time his rolls on his stomach and lowers his pants so that his behind is in the frame. Techno music gets louder.*

A: Mmmmm. Nice bubble butt! Just like my previous cuddle buddy’s.

B: Cuddle buddy’s?

A: Yeah, we would meet, chat, cuddle, smoke our heads off.

A: Was he unhappy?

A: He was always happy. Superpositive. In public.

B: And then he would come to your place to smoke his head off?

A: Smoke… and other things. He was depressed.

B: Depressed? Why?

A: Have a face?

*B sends a picture frame: the same actors quickly slides to the new frame and fills it with his crotch area. Then he slowly undoes the button on his jeans.*

B: Mmmm. Nice face!

A: Depressed?

A: Everyone is bored and depressed here. That’s normal. Show face!

B: Is everyone on drugs here too?

A: Pretty much. Don’t fucking judge.

B: Sorry.

A: Face!

*Another picture frame appears on the floor. The same actor slides up – his face enters the picture. He creates a fake ‘smouldering’ look. The techno music gets louder.*

A: Oh yeah. Hot! You kinda look like him.

B: I do?

A: He was ethnic too. We totally clicked.

B: Was? What happened?

A: Nothing.

B: Bye then!

A: Ok ok. We were supposed to meet in his house. On a weekend. He had a great house – beautiful!

B: And?

A: I arrived and his front door was open.

B: And?

*Pause*.

A: And? What happened?

B: Man… it’s weird… I took a picture. Are you sure you wanna see it?

A: I think so.

*B sends an empty picture frame: MAN B1 lies down and his full body enters the frame. He is smiling. He slowly removes his belt and then slowly wraps it around his neck. He then stretches up his hand holding the belt - MAN A approaches him, takes the belt end and pulls it up. MAN B1 suffocates with a smile on his face.*

*Light flash.*

# Scene 8. Mudhut

*Loud night club music barges in - maybe YMCA by Village People. Scene change. Everyone starts dancing. MAN A – he is now playing DRUNK MAN – is dancing far apart from WOMAN, MAN B1 and MAN B2. During the opening dialogue he slowly moves closer to their table.*

WOMAN: *(sits down, exhausted, speaking at the top of her voice due to loud music)* Oh my gooooood, guys! Your first REAL gay club!!! See, I told ya there’s cool spaces here. Are you having fun?

MAN B1: Jaaaaaaaaaaaaaan! I am loving it. We haven’t danced for a year. Cheers to the only gay club in the province!!!!!

MAN B2: Cheers to the best … and only city in the province!

MAN B 1: Cheers to Angina! You know, when I tell people where I now live, they all go like: What? You live in WHERE?

WOMAN: Right? Why would you give a city a name of a medical condition?

MAN B1: A toast! To my husband! And to the country that married us! Officially, I mean! G’natz![[19]](#footnote-19) [Cheers!]

WOMAN: I drink to you! You move here all the way from another side of the planet – to be together. Love ya!

MAN B2: We drink to *you*. It’s so good we met you – I had no idea you’d be so much fun to hang out with.

ALL THREE: G’natz!

MAN B2: So, what’s with all the girls here? Is this a lesbian night?

WOMAN: Yeah, in my dreams it is.

MAN B1: No?

WOMAN: In this town, straight girls come to the gay club.

MAN B1: What? Why?!

MAN B2: So weird.

WOMAN: To be safe. They get harassed in straight clubs.

MAN B2: Harassed?

WOMAN: Yep. By straight boys. Very drunk straight boys.

MAN B1: It seems like all the drunk straight boys are here too.

WOMAN: Well, they tend to show up a bit later.

MAN B1: Look at that guy over there!

WOMAN: Don’t. One should only treat drunk straight boys like wild animals – if they catch your gaze, they are gonna come for you.

*Everyone laughs.*

WOMAN: Also, I don’t want any trouble.

MAN B2: Oh my god, it’s the *straightest* gay club I have seen!

MAN B1: (*appreciates the joke*) Oh, my husband! (*Kisses MAN B2 on the cheek*.)

MAN B2: Honestly! What’s wrong with this place?

ALL THREE: Angina! *(They toast to Angina not noticing a man towering over their table.)*

*Everyone laughs. The DRUNK MAN is staring at MAN B1 and B2. WOMAN notices that and stops laughing.*

WOMAN (*to DRUNK MAN, carefully*): Are you ok?

*DRUNK MAN attempts to speak but says nothing. He is trying to collect his thoughts.*

MAN B1: I think someone had too much to drink.

DRUNK MAN: When…? *(Breaks off.)*

MAN B2: What is he saying?

WOMAN: I can’t hear anything… anything. What?

DRUNK MAN: When are you gonna blow…

MAN B2: Sorry?

WOMAN: OOO! I think it’s something to do with blowing?

MAN B1: *(excitedly, to MAN B2)* Heeeeey, girlfrieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeend!

MAN B2: (*laughing)* I’m pretty sure he plays for the other team, darling.

WOMAN: Yeah, me too.

DRUNK MAN: *(intensely)* When are you gonna blow…

MAN B1: What?

WOMAN: Sorry?

DRUNK MAN (*finally exhales*): When are you gonna blow us up?

*MAN B1 and B2 are confused.*

MAN B1: What are you saying?

DRUNK MAN: When are you going to blow us up?!

MAN B1: I don’t understand.

DRUNK MAN: When are going to blow us up?!

*MAN B1 and B2 are still confused.*

MAN 1 and MAN B: (*to each other)* Sa incha? [What is it?]Ch’em haskanum. [I don’t understand.]

DRUNK MAN: (*suddenly yells while looking at them*) Allah Akbar!

*WOMAN opens her mouth to responds only to be interrupted.*

DRUNK MAN: Allah akbar!!!

WOMAN: *(trying to avoid conflict)* I am sorry but we don’t speak Arabic.

DRUNK MAN: Allah akbar!!!!

WOMAN: (*trying to avoid conflict*) No a-ra-bic, ok?…

DURNK: Allah… (*Hiccups*.)

WOMAN: Oh boy!

DRUNK MAN: (*confused*) What

WOMAN: NO A-RA…

DRUNK MAN: … is your religion?

MAN B1: What does he want?

WOMAN: Yeah, hard to explain. Sorry you have to hear this.

MAN B2: Does he need help?

WOMAN: He thinks we’re Muslim. Never mind.

DRUNK MAN: What is your religion?!

WOMAN: *(to DRUNK MAN, politely)* I am atheist.

MAN B1: Does he know that word?

DRUNK MAN: What is your religion?

WOMAN: Atheist. I don’t believe in god, ok?

MAN B2: Should we go, please?

MAN B1: We’re not going. This is our first night out after a year in this shitty city. This is our… honeymoon!

DRUNK MAN: What is your religion?

MAN B1: We do not have a religion. At all. Why?

DRUNK MAN: What is your mother’s….

MAN B1: Sorry?

DRUNK MAN: What is your mother’s religion?

MAN B1: Why would we he think we’re Muslim?

MAN B2: We should’ve shaved before coming here. Your beard is too long.

DRUNK MAN: What is your mother’s religion?

WOMAN: (*calmly*) My mother is atheist too.

MAN B1: What’s wrong with him? Does he know it’s a gay club.

MAN B2: *(pulling him down)* Sit down. He is definitely not gay.

WOMAN: And he probably didn’t have much success with girls tonight.

MAN B2: It’s way too loud here.

*The music starts changing to the Yarghooshta dance music mixed with the night club techno.*

DRUNK MAN: (*getting progressively more annoyed and aggressive*) What is your grandmother’s religion?!

MAN B1: (*naively*) My grandma was the village priest’s daughter…

*DRUNK MAN starts pushing MAN B1.*

WOMAN: *(stands between MAN B1 and DRUNK MAN)* And what is YOUR religion?

DRUNK MAN: *(to MAN B1)* Go back to your mudhut! you fucking a-rab…

*He raises his fist and slams it on the table in front of him. WOMAN immediately steps into the fight protecting MAN B1. As the fight emerges, techno Yarghooshta music gets louder – the punches are stylized, they look like Yarghooshta dance movements. Grindr conversations emerge on the floor, they are now full of empty picture frames meant to be filled with bodies. The youngest male actor takes off his shirt and rushes onto the floor to “fill up” the empty frames in the Grindr messages with his body. As the pictures slide down, he scrambles to move his body down to fit the picture.*

*The ‘fighting’ dancers continue to attack each other while getting more and more violent. Then they all switch – another male actor takes his shirt and rushes down to fill the Grindr frame with his body while the dance continues above him. Then they switch again. The chaos augments: the dancers notice the naked torsos on the floor and start kicking them. The music gets louder and the strobe lights cover the stage: the dancers’ shoe-soles start landing on the Grindr faces and bodies.[[20]](#footnote-20)*

*Blackout.*

# Epilogue

*Tôt le matin, tout est très calme et sombre. Bruit d'une voiture qui s'arrête. Bruit d’une porte qui s’ouvre et puis se referme. Une femme monte dans un taxi. Nous ne voyons pas le chauffeur, qui est un homme, mais nous pouvons voir les réactions de la femme aux paroles du chauffeur. [[21]](#endnote-1)*

FEMME: Bonjour! Uber pour Karineh?[[22]](#footnote-21)

HOMME: Oui, bonjour, mademoiselle!

FEMME: Ah merci! Comment ça-va ce matin?

HOMME : Merci, mademoiselle! Moi, ça va bien. Vous?

FEMME: Pas pire. Matinée chargée?

HOMME: Pas trop. C'est très calme aujourd'hui, pas de circulation. Nous allons arriver à l'aéroport dans une vingtaine de minutes.

FEMME: Parfait. Moi, j’veux pas être en retard pour mon vol.

HOMME: Vous, vous visitiez le Québec?

FEMME: Juste quelques jours. Pour le travail.

MAN: Est-ce que je peux vous demander ce que vous faites?

FEMME: Moi? Je travaille au théâtre.

HOMME: Au théâtre?!!!!

FEMME: Oui.

HOMME: Vous travaillez au THÉÂTRE?? Incroyable!!!!

FEMME: Pourquoi incroyable?

HOMME: Incroyable! Moi, j'ai toujours eu tellement de respect pour les gens du théâtre! Tant de respect! Vous, êtes-vous comédienne ?

FEMME: Je le suis plus. Maintenant, plutôt metteuse-en-scène.

HOMME: Une metteuse-en-scène !!! Vous savez, en France, si quelqu'un fait du théâtre, il a beaucoup de respect, surtout s'il… pardon… elle est metteuse-en-scène.

FEMME: Oh, vraiment? (*Des rires).*

MAN: Oui, ils sont comme des intellectuels publics. Comme… des gens intelligents. Vraiment intelligents, perspicaces. Tout le monde les écoute.

FEMME: (*rires*) Ça, c'est hilarant.

MAN: N'est-ce pas le cas en Amérique du Nord?

FEMME: (*riant*) Quand je dis que je fais du théâtre, ici on me demande si je veux aller travailler à Hollywood.

MAN: Oh, man! ... Je suis tellement honoré d'avoir une metteuse-en-scène dans ma voiture.

FEMME: Eh bien, merci. (*Rit encore*). Alors, vous…. toi, tu vas beaucoup au théâtre?

HOMME: Pas ici. Je le faisais en France.

FEMME: Es-tu de là?

HOMME: Moi, je suis né en Algérie mais j’ai vécu en France où j’ai fait du théâtre.

FEMME: Vous l'avez fait?

HOMME: Oui. J'ai fait du théâtre une fois.

FEMME: Une fois?

MAN: J'étais effectivement sur scène! Une fois.

FEMME: Une fois? Où ça ?

HOMME: En prison.

FEMME: En prison?!!!

HOMME: Oui, j'ai passé deux ans en prison. (*Avec fierté*.) La Santé - la plus grande prison d'Europe? Vous devez la connaitre, évidemment.

FEMME: Moi?!

HOMME: (*encore plus fier*) ​​Elle est bien connue mondialement, mademoiselle!... Avec tous les grands banditos, vous savez. Les trafiquants de drogue, les meurtriers, les violeurs. Les criminels de qualité… Pas moi. J'étais là pour… vous savez – les folies de jeunesse.

*FEMME ne réagit pas.*

HOMME: Oui, la fameuse La Santé! Nous, nous avons mis en scène un des grands maîtres français. Jean Genet!

*FEMME ne réagit pas en entendant le nom de Genet.*

MAN : « Chaque fête du sang délègue un beau garçon
Pour soutenir l’enfant dans sa première épreuve. »

WOMAN : *(continue la citation*) « Apaise ta frayeur et ton angoisse neuve,
Suce son membre dur comme on suce un glaçon. » En fait, lui, il était un prisonnier quand il a écrit ce premier poème.

L'HOMME: (*avec fierté*) Pfffft! Il était prisonnier à La Santé, mademoiselle! La Santé, elle était énorme - je veux dire que ça c'était dans les années 70… et puis, un jour il y avait cette vieille dame, une actrice française qui est apparue et elle a commencé à faire du théâtre avec nous. Et tous ces «gros bandits» l’écoutaient. Ils aimaient vraiment l'écouter. Ils n’écoutaient pas les gardiens de prison mais ils l’écoutaient. Ben oui, moi, j'ai beaucoup de respect pour les gens du théâtre.

FEMME: C'est fascinant. Quel rôle as-tu joué, est-ce que je peux te demander?

HOMME: J'ai joué un rôle d'homosexuel. Moi, je n'avais même pas rencontré de gay dans ma vie.

FEMME: Huh. C'est intéressant.

HOMME: Hein?

FEMME: Plutôt triste.

*Pendant qu'il parle, le côté droit de la scène s'allume et nous pouvons voir les paroles de l’HOMME lues par un comédien parlant à travers un microphone.*

FEMME: Comment c'était? Le rôle, je veux dire.

HOMME: C'était incroyable! Apprendre à comprendre une autre personne. Vous-savez, moi, je suis musulman. Mon peuple est musulman.

FEMME: Attends, attends. Moi, j'essaie juste de comprendre tout ça: je suis dans un taxi, je parle d'un spectacle de Jean Genet, dans une prison française, où un musulman a joué un rôle de gay.

HOMME: Mais non. À la Santé! On n’était pas seulement dans une prison française, mademoiselle. La Santé a bien changé ma vie.

FEMME: Bien sûr. La Santé! Chu vraiment désolée. Moi, j’ai juste… en fait, je viens de penser – quelle coïncidence! Ça me gratte la tête depuis des jours. (*Elle commence à chercher quelque chose.*)

HOMME: Vous-dites?

FEMME: Ben… Il y a ce courriel icitte … que je viens de recevoir d'un de mes étudiants acteurs.

HOMME: Était-il aussi en prison?

FEMME: (*trouve son cellulaire*) Qui? Quelle? Non. Pas du tout. Mais moi, je pourrais bien finir là-bas si j'y réagis ... hm ... de manière inappropriée. J’imagine. (*Commence à chercher le courriel sur son cellulaire*).

HOMME: Eh ça serait pas mal ça, la prison a bien changé ma vie!

FEMME: Écoute, ça me gratte beaucoup la tête. Je ne sais pas comment répondre à cela. Ici! (*Elle lit.*) «Bonjour bla-bla-bla…» Il fait une erreur d’orthographe en écrivant mon nom, évidemment. Et voilà! Quoi qu'il en soit, «hier, vous nous avez dit que dans votre classe de jeu d’acteur, nous devrions être prêts à jouer n'importe qui, y compris les LGBTQ. Moi, je suis chrétien et les LGBTQ vont à l'encontre de mes croyances. J'espère que vous respectez cela. Je dois abandonner votre classe maintenant. Bye!"

HOMME: Bye?

FEMME: Oui, c'est ainsi qu’on conclue une lettre à son professeur ces jours-ci.

HOMME: Bon débarras, mademoiselle. C'est un fondamentaliste. Je connais le type. Pour vous dire la vérité, cette dame à La Santé, elle ne se souciait pas beaucoup de ce que nous pensions du personnage que nous devions jouer. Je ne me souviens pas de son nom. Elle était petite. Je ne sais pas ce qui lui est arrivé mais ce qu’elle a fait était incroyable. Elle nous a fait apprendre les paroles, comprendre les personnages et porter des costumes.

FEMME: Quelle pièce avez-vous jouée?

HOMME: « Le Balcon ». C'était drôle avec les costumes - parce que nous, nous n'étions pas autorisés à porter que des robes de prison. Le chef, il a dû obtenir une autorisation spéciale pour nous les faire porter… ben, du ministre de la Justice! Ben non, du président de la République! Je vous jure. Certains devaient jouer des prostituées – imaginez-ça, les bandits de qualité qui jouent des prostituées? En jupes? Vous connaissez « Le Balcon »?

FEMME: Oui.

HOMME: Tout le monde est venu le voir: les gardiens de prison, les autres gars. Même les membres de la section VIP sont venus nous voir jouer….

FEMME: Oh my god! Il y avait une section VIP?!

MAN: Les VIPs l’ont vraiment adoré. Ils ont aimé tout ça. Et moi, je me dis toujours… mmm… Moi, je suis Allah, en fait.

FEMME: Je comprends. J'ai déjà travaillé avec des Algériens. En fait, je peux dire *shukran*. [Merci beaucoup].

HOMME: Shukran !!! Vous parlez arabe?

FEMME: Pas du tout. Moi, j'ai travaillé récemment avec une comédienne algérienne. En fait, elle n'était pas arabe. Plutôt berbère.

L'HOMME: (*ralentit soudainement*) Toi, tu connais les Berbères! Moi, je suis berbère… Je n'ai jamais rencontré de passager ici qui connaissait les Berbères.

FEMME: Vous êtes originaire d'Afrique du Nord, non? Et les Arabes, ils vous ont envahis.

HOMME: Comment tu connais ça? D'où viens-tu?

FEMME: Moi, je suis d'ici mais je suis arménienne.

HOMME: Arménienne? C’est pourquoi tu le connais !!! Attends, attends-toi! J'ai une chanson arménienne ici sur mon cellulaire. Ah, c'est parti.

*Une chanson très triste chantée par deux hommes commence. La lumière montre les deux comédiens chantant à travers un micro sur l'arrière-scène. Les deux portent des jupes sexy et des soutien-gorge révélateurs.*

HOMME: Mon meilleur ami en France, il était arménien. Je connais le génocide.

FEMME: Ah bon. On s’obsède de ce sujet-là, les arméniens.

HOMME: 1915?

FEMME: Oui. Et plusieurs fois avant ça.

HOMME: Oui, toute ma famille est berbère mais on ne parle pas la langue.

FEMME: Moi, j’parle pas vraiment arménien non plus.

HOMME: Je connais tout ce que les Turcs vous ont fait… à votre peuple… Je ne veux pas forcer ou offenser, je suis désolé d'avoir mentionné…

FEMME: Ça va.

*La voiture s'arrête.*

L'HOMME: Tu sais, certains d'entre nous, musulmans, nous aimons parler de nos propres souffrances - comment nous avons perdu des territoires et comment nous devrions les récupérer. Mais on doit admettre que nous avons également obtenu ces territoires par l'invasion et les effusions de sang. Ce n'est pas tout noir ni blanc. C’est pourquoi les musulmans… nous n’aimons pas parler du génocide arménien ou des Berbères.

FEMME: Personne n'aime parler des choses dont il n'est pas fier, mais tout le monde aime l'auto-victimisation.

HOMME: C’est ça. De plus, les Berbères sont tous divisés: certains essaient de revendiquer la langue, d'autres ne veulent même pas en entendre parler. Ils veulent déménager à Paris et parler français parce qu'ils pensent que cela les rend civilisés !!! Quand même, tout ça porte aucune importance, en fait. Aucune!

FEMME: Pourquoi pas?

HOMME: Parce que… tu sais… toi, tu es arménienne et moi, je suis berbère… Mais ce qui compte vraiment c'est… Ce qui compte c'est… que…. ici ... je veux dire ici ... les gens ici sont généralement gentils ... mais, au fond, pour eux, nous sommes tous… grosso modo…on est tous que des Arabes sales. Peu importe ce qu’on fait ou dit. Tous!

*LA FEMME garde le silence. Pause.*

HOMME: Je vais vous aider avec les valises.

*La FEMME marche à l’arrière-scène où la lumière révèle un autre microphone pour elle. Elle se tient derrière le microphone en tournant son dos au public. Elle se tourne soudain vers le micro et la chanson s'arrête.*

FEMME: (*très proche du microphone*) Je m’excuse… ça peut vous choquer un peu ...

MAN: (*très proche du micro*) Oui?

FEMME: Est-ce que je pourrais vous faire un câlin?

HOMME: (*sourit*) Un câlin? D'une dame du théâtre ??? !!! Je suis tellement honoré!

FEMME: Non. C’est moi qui suis honorée. *Shukran*!

MAN: Pas du tout, jan. Pas du tout.

*Ils s'étreignent. Les deux autres hommes à l’arrière-plan s'étreignent aussi.*

 *Les lumières s'éteignent.*

**La fin.**

1. Pronounced *akh-pehr-NEHR*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Autour de Jacques Derrida. Manifestes pour l’hospitalité.* Paroles d’aube. 1999. P. 112.

“The experience of pure hospitality, if it exists (…), has to start from nothing. We must not presuppose anything known, determinable; no contract should be imposed for the pure event of welcoming the Other to be possible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In Armenian, word stress is always on the last syllable, like in French: bah-REV, nork-Ma-RASH, etc. Nork Marash is a neighbourhood in Yerevan, Armenia’s capital. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pronounced *akh-PEHR jahn*. *“Jan”* is a term of endearment in Armenian, Persian, Turkish and many other languages of the Caucasus and West Asia. *Jan* typically follows the first name or can be used separately. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vai : exclamation of surprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This scene can be performed entirely in Persian. Alternatively, it could be a mix of languages, for example, Man A could speak Persian only and Man B – English only. If performed in a Canadian Anglophone context, this scene can be done entirely in French – a minority language. Alternatively, MAN A could be speaking French only, while MAN B could use a mix of English and Armenian. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Turkish coffee is called Armenian coffee in Armenia and Greek coffee in Greece. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This scene can be done as a mix of English and Eastern Armenian. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. An excerpt from Yeghishe Charents’ poem *Towards the Future*:

Երգում է հոգիս, հրեղեն հնչում։

Գիտեմ՝ այսօրվա իմ երգի առաջ—

Իմ հոգու կարմիր կայծերի հանդեպ—

Ռադիո-կայան է ամեն մի հոգի,

Ո՛ւր էլ նա լինի.—

Ամե՛ն մի հոգի, որ ապրում է, կա

Եվ կրում է իր թևերի վրա

Նո՛ւյն խորհուրդը մեծ, խորհուրդը հսկա

Օրերի այս վառ,—

Այս վառ օրերի խորհուրդը պայծառ։

Ամե՛ն մի հոգի,

Որ իր երկաթե թևերով այսօր

Զնգում է, շաչում—

Եվ փնտրում է նո՜ր հանգիստ ու օրոր

Միլիո՛ն թևերի ըմբոստ շառաչում... [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Pronounced *vah-KHEH*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A poem by Vardan Smbatyan/Վարդան Սմբատյան. In can be performed in English or in Armenian:

կգրեի ամենասիրուն

բանաստեղծությունը

հորիզոնին թափվող ճայերի,

կարմիր-կարմիր մայրամուտի,

իմ ու քո,

իմ ու քո

ալեգորիկ սիրո մասին,

բայց բառերս ատոմներ են, Լիլի՜,

հրե ատոմներ,

ծամում եմ մինչև վերջ`

անաղմուկ ու անտրտունջ։

Ինչ-որ մի տեղ

կավարտվի մատերիան ցավի,

Աստծո աչքերում

մենք կհանդիպենք,

մենք կհանդիպենք... [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This scene can be performed entirely in Russian. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Pronounced ar-MEN. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Pronounced: tehr-shakh-nah-zah-RYAN. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. If the scene is performed in Russian, Russian sounds of pain should be used here: Ai-ai-ai or oi-oi-oi! [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Pronounced KHA-chik in Russian. From the Armenian *khachkar*: crucifix. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This scene can be performed entirely in Eastern Armenian. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Pronounced *ech-mee-a-DZEEN*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Pronounced: gueh-NATZ. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This scene can be staged as a Grindr interlude with a dance/fight sequence. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Early morning. It is very quiet and dark. Sound of a car stopping. Sound of a door open. Then closing. A woman gets into a cab. We don’t see the driver, who is male, but we can see the passenger’s reactions to the driver’s words.*

WOMAN: Bonjour! Uber pour Karineh?

MAN: Oui, bonjour, mademoiselle!

WOMAN: Ah merci! Comment allez-vous ce matin?

MAN : Merci, madame! Moi, ça va bien. Vous?

WOMAN: Pas pire. Busy morning?

MAN: Not really. It’s very quiet today, no traffic. We’re going to get to the airport in twenty minutes or so.

WOMAN: Wonderful. I don’t want to be late for my flight.

MAN: You were visiting Québec?

WOMAN: Just a few days. For work.

MAN: Can I ask what you do?

WOMAN: I am a theatre artist.

MAN: A theatre artist?!!!!

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN: A THEATRE artist?? Incredible!!!!

WOMAN: Why?

MAN: Incredible! I have sooo much respect for theatre people! So much respect! Are you an actor?

WOMAN: Not really, not anymore. I direct.

MAN: A director!!! You know, in my country, if someone does theatre, they have a lot of respect, especially if they are a director.

WOMAN: Oh, really? (*Laughs*).

MAN: Yes, they are like public intellectuals. Like… smart people. Really intelligent, insightful. Everyone listens to them.

WOMAN: (*laughs*) That’s hilarious.

MAN: Is this not the case in North America?

WOMAN: *(laughing)* When I say I do theatre, I get asked if I want to go work in Hollywood.

MAN: Oh, man!... I am so honoured to have a theatre director in my car.

WOMAN: Well, thank you. (*Laughs again*). So, do you go to the theatre a lot?

MAN: Not here I don’t. I did in France.

WOMAN: Are you from there?

MAN: I was born in Algeria. And I used to do theatre too.

WOMAN: You did?

MAN: Yes. I did theatre once.

WOMAN: Once?

MAN: I was on stage.

WOMAN: Where?

MAN: I was in prison.

WOMAN: In prison?!!!

MAN: Yes, I spent two years in prison. (*With pride*.) La Santé – the biggest jail in Europe? You must know it.

WOMAN: Me?!

MAN: *(even more proud)* It’s world-famous!... With all the big banditos, you know. The drug dealers, the murderers, the rapists. The quality criminals. Well, not me. I was there for …you know – les folies de jeunesse.

*WOMAN says nothing.*

MAN: Yes, it was the famous La Santé – the health prison! Heh. We staged this French playwright. Jean Genet?

*WOMAN does not react to the name.*

MAN : “Chaque fête du sang délègue un beau garçon
Pour soutenir l’enfant dans sa première épreuve. »

WOMAN : *(picks up the citation*) « Apaise ta frayeur et ton angoisse neuve,
Suce son membre dur comme on suce un glaçon. » He was actually a prisoner when he wrote this first poem.

MAN: (*with pride*) He was a prisoner at La Santé, mademoiselle! La Santé was huge – I mean it was back in the 70s… and then one day there was this old French actress that showed up and she started doing theatre with us. And all those ‘grosses bandits’ listened to her. They actually liked listening to her. They wouldn’t listen to the prison guards, and they listened to her. You know I have a lot of respect for theatre people.

WOMAN: This is fascinating. Who did you play, can I ask?

MAN: I played a role of a homosexual. I hadn’t even met a gay person in my life.

WOMAN: That’s interesting

MAN: Huh?

WOMAN: Actually sad.

*As he speaks, the upstage right becomes lit and we can see MAN’s lines being read by an actor speaking into a microphone.*

WOMAN: How was it? The role I mean.

MAN: It was amazing! Getting to understand another person. You know I am Muslim. My people are Muslim.

WOMAN: Sorry. I am just trying to process all this: I am in a taxi-cab, talking about a Jean Genet production in a French prison, where a Muslim man played a gay role.

MAN: In la Santé, not just a French prison, mademoiselle. The prison kinda changed my whole life.

WOMAN: Of course. La Santé! I am so sorry. I am just…. It’s been eating me for days. *(She starts looking for something.*) I wasn’t planning to share this but hey, what the heck…

MAN: Huh?

WOMAN: There’s this email I just received from one of my student actors.

MAN: Was *he* in prison?

WOMAN: (*finds her cellphone*) Who? What? No. But I might well end up there if I react to it… hm… inappropriately. I think. *(Starts looking for the email on her phone).*

MAN: Well, the prison kinda changed my whole life.

WOMAN: Yeah. It’s been eating me big time. I don’t know how to respond to this. Here! (*Reading*) “Dear bla-blah-blah…” He misspells my name, of course. Anyway, “yesterday you told us that in your acting class we should be prepared to play anybody, including LGBTQ. I’m Christian and LGBTQ go against my beliefs. I hope you respect this. I have to drop your class now. Cheers”

MAN: Cheers?

WOMAN: Yeah, that’s how you conclude a letter to your teacher these days.

MAN: Good riddance, mademoiselle. He is a fundamentalist. I know the type. To tell you the truth, that woman at La Santé didn’t care much about what we thought about the character we’d have to play. I can’t remember her name. She was petite. I don’t know what happened to her but what she did was amazing. She made us learn the lines, understand the characters and wear costumes.

WOMAN: Which play did you do?

MAN: Le Balcon. It was funny with the costumes – because we were not allowed to wear anything but prison robes. They had to get a special permission for us to wear… from the president of the Republic, I think! Or the Minister of Health? Some had to play prostitutes – you know the quality banditos playing prostitutes? In skirts? You know Le Balcon?

WOMAN: I do.

MAN: Everyone came to see it: the prison guards, the other guys. Even the VIP section came down to see us perform….

WOMAN: Gees. It had a VIP section?!

MAN: The VIPs really liked it. They all like it. And you know what? I follow Allah.

WOMAN: I’ve worked with Algerians before. I can say Shukran. [Thank you very much].

MAN: Shukran!!! You speak Arabic?

WOMAN: Not really. I worked with an Algerian actor recently actually – she wasn’t an Arab, through. She was Berber.

MAN: (*suddenly slows down*) You know the Berbers! I am Berber… I have never met a passenger here who would know about the Berbers.

WOMAN: You’re indigenous to North Africa, right? Arabs invaded you.

MAN: How do you know that? Where are *you* from?

WOMAN: I am from here but I am Armenian.

MAN: Armenian? That’s why you know!!! Wait… wait… wait! I have an Armenian song here on my phone. Here we go.

*A very sad song sung by two men comes in. The light shows the two male actors singing into one mic upstage. They are both wearing sexy skirts and revealing bras*.

MAN: My best friend in France was Armenian. I know about the genocide.

WOMAN: Oh, yes, we wouldn’t shut up about that.

MAN: 1915?

WOMAN: Yes. And many times before that.

MAN: Yeah, my family is all Berber but we don’t speak the language.

WOMAN: I don’t really speak Armenian either.

MAN: I know what the Turks did to you… to your people… I don’t mean to pry or offend, I am sorry to have mentioned…

WOMAN: It’s ok.

*The car stops.*

MAN: You know, some of us, Muslims, we like talking about our own suffering – how we lost lands and how we should gain them back. But we need to admit that we got those lands through invasion and bloodshed too. It’s not all black and white. That’s why Muslims… *we* do not like talking about the Armenian genocide or about the Berbers.

WOMAN: No one likes talking about things they are not proud of but everyone likes self-victimization.

MAN: Plus, the Berbers are all divided: some are all trying to revive the language, others don’t even want to hear about it. They want to move to Paris and speak French because they think that makes them civilized!!! But you know, none of this matters. None.

WOMAN: Why not?

MAN: Because… you know… you’re Armenian and I am Berber... But what really matters is … how should put it?...what matters is… that…. here… I mean here… They are all lovely people but… in the end, we’re *all* dirty Arabs to them. No matter what we do or say. All!

*WOMAN says nothing. Pause.*

MAN: Here we are. I’ll help you with the luggage.

*WOMAN goes upstage where light reveals one more microphone stand for her. She stands behind the stand facing backstage first. She suddenly turns to the mic, the singing stops.*

WOMAN: (*very close to the mic*) I am so sorry. It might sound strange...

MAN: (*very close to the mic*) Yes?

WOMAN: Can I give you a hug?

MAN: (*smiles*) A hug? From a theatre director???!!! I am so honoured!

WOMAN: No. I am. Shukran!

MAN: Not at all, jan. Not at all.

*They hug. The other two men hug too. Lights go out.*

**La fin.**  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
22. Elle parle avec un accent québécois ou franco-ontarien. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)