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ZELIHA

by

Allan Havis

a play in twelve scenes for 3 actors

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Setting - A Manhattan Upper Westside Apartment

Time - November 2016 to mid-January 2017

Characters –

Dorian lawyer, age 50, friend of Andrew’s

Andrew. architect, age 55, recently divorced

Zeliha clothing designer, age 27, from Istanbul

PROLOGUE – *optional*

(ZELIHA is getting dressed in an undisclosed location. There is folkloric guitar or some string instrument music in the background. Lighting is dark, we barely see her features. There is some suggestion that she knows the audience is watching her but she doesn’t address this with any punctuation. She might proceed to apply some makeup in a mirror or in an invisible mirror)

SCENE ONE

(DORIAN enters ANDREW'S apartment, the front door left unlocked and has a mug of coffee in his hand and the New York Times folded under his arm. ANDREW is at drafting table studying a drawing. ANDREW is aware that DORIAN has entered)

DORIAN

If the dead had to dress up for my wedding, I would urge them to go semi-formal. You look very sick, Andrew.

(Throws the newspaper on a table)

ANDREW

Just a mild fever.

DORIAN

Your forehead is damp. Let me check for a fever.

(His hand grazes Andrew's forehead and Andrew recoils ever so slightly)

You are hot, my boy. Weren't you going to take a two week vacation earlier this month?

ANDREW

Yes. But then . . .

DORIAN

You were sick? Not sick? Landmark Commissioner?

ANDREW

I'm way behind. Landmark is aboard. We failed to get the variances.

DORIAN

I know the rumor.

ANDREW

What rumor?

(Looking up finally at Dorian)

DORIAN

You're leaving New York.

ANDREW

What the hell are you talking about?

DORIAN

Your partners are dishonest. The firm's merging with McCain Flanders. The Walmart of architecture.

McCain Flanders?
ANDREW

You're moving to Boston.
DORIAN

Not true.
ANDREW

You're in denial. Are you the only Jew at McCain Flanders?
DORIAN

Dorian, knock it off.
ANDREW

You must be very ill today.
DORIAN

(Pause.)
Your star has fallen. After a dozen years of luck. Your designs were always stylish. Your renovations were brilliant. More breathtaking than your new buildings. Your commissions get magazine covers. And then the axis of the world shifts. Like a fairy tale curse. Trumpets from the clouds.

Have you been drinking?
ANDREW

Yes. And all of this was leaked online.
DORIAN

There is no leak.
ANDREW

Google it. On Twitter or Snapchat or DudeWheresMyApp.
DORIAN

My email account was hacked.
ANDREW

Coincidence?
DORIAN

Did you read my email?
ANDREW

DORIAN

No. Never. Well. Sometimes. Jamal, my Jamaican lover is a . . .

ANDREW

. . . consummate hacker.

DORIAN

Jamal is also a caveman. Do you know what cavemen are like today? They tear flesh with bare hands. They paint on the wall with their blood and urine. They drag bodies across the cold stone floor to prove a debating point.

ANDREW

My firm is not merging, Dorian, regardless what email you read. And promise me . . .

DORIAN

. . . I won't hack your computer again. I promise.

ANDREW

Or I will kill you.

DORIAN

Andrew, I just have these impulses. Jamal makes me lose my self-control. He is nearly seven feet tall with a missing finger. This challenges his sense of balance. It's so strange to take him onto the dance floor. But he really knows how to Zumba with open hips.

ANDREW

That's how you met. Zumba?

DORIAN

You disapprove of a lawyer who likes to dance at clubs? You probably disapprove of gay marriage.

ANDREW

I disapprove of prenuptials. That's why you never got to the altar.

DORIAN

I don't obsess about money. I don't love money, Andrew.

ANDREW

You encourage others to love money.

DORIAN

I'm an attorney.

ANDREW

Rita walked away with everything.

DORIAN

Don't blame me.

ANDREW

I don't.

DORIAN

Liar. Liar. Pants on fire.

(Pause)

I had nothing to do with your mediations when you two separated.

She put on weight. You lost weight. She got your stock portfolio. You kept the cottage on Long Island. It always works out in the end. Marriage in America is really like a renewable five-year lease.

ANDREW

You've lost weight.

DORIAN

I'm dieting. I'm starving. In my closet are some of the finest silk suits from 2014 and I cannot fit into any pair of trousers.

ANDREW

Silk suits, Dorian?

DORIAN

I like your renderings of the Chester Art Museum.

ANDREW

Thank you.

DORIAN

You broke new ground with this one. Which rock star funds the Chester? Madonna or Cher?

ANDREW

Younger generation, Dorian.

DORIAN

Katie Perry or Taylor Swift?

ANDREW

I'm trying to concentrate on this design . . .

DORIAN

Sorry. I really like the way you play with volume by the river bank, the negative space past the parking lot, and curvaceous sculpture garden. And the two dramatic cantilevers.

ANDREW

One cantilever. Two different elevations.

DORIAN

Still in love with chiseled cornices against tinted glass? Textured relief can be so spiritual under a wall of reflection.

(Pause)

Andrew, are you dating? Do you date? Do you use that word? I notice that you're dying your hair.

ANDREW

I just comb it back.

DORIAN

Thinning some too. I keep asking. About the women.

ANDREW

No.

DORIAN

No, what?

ANDREW

No, I am dating.

DORIAN

You're lying.

ANDREW

Okay. I'm dating. Yes. Every weekend. I joined a six month dating service from Groupon.

DORIAN

That's the best joke of the week.

(Pause)

Your ex still pines for you. She told me so last month. I hear too much from the mad princess. She phones late nights. Just have coffee with her.

ANDREW

If I spend five minutes with Rita, she'll kill me. Do you want that on our conscience?

DORIAN

Nonsense. She's doing Birkram yoga these days and the heat has taken out all of her anger

wrinkles. She looks smashing in yoga pants, Andrew.

ANDREW

She has a license to carry a gun. A Glock, I'm told.

DORIAN

That's something I didn't know. At least it's not a semi-automatic rifle. She just got a fortune from her grandparents. She expected you to love her despite her flaws. Everyone has a change of heart, Andrew. Her brother was beat up in a mugging. Three weeks ago. Prospect Park. Sunday afternoon. A superficial knife wound to his arm.

(Pause)

I don't know what to say about Rita's pain, Andrew. I went to high school with Rita. She had a crush on me for a whole year. And I introduced you to two. You must remember that. When she was ascetic and thoroughly into public service for foster youth. She was valedictorian and spoke about the staggering poverty in America. She eviscerated her parents during high school commencement. Rita was never a Jewish American Princess, Andrew. And even if she were, you owe her big time. Look at me, Andrew. Divorce doesn't free you. You owe her and I'm very scared that she's going to harm herself irrevocably.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

(Andrew sits at his desk. We hear the Skype tone of a phone call about to start. Andrew speaks to an unseen listener via Skype in confiding voice)

ANDREW

Look. Richard, I will visit next summer. I promise. My aunt, the opera singer, moved to Assisted Living a few years ago and in her roll top desk was a letter from Istanbul. My grandfather had a brother living in Turkey. My cousin Sebastian – a London stockbroker - went to Istanbul two years ago to look up the family line. A Jewish Agency in Istanbul helped Sebastian with the address. Sebastian met our older cousins. My grandfather's nephew Nissim who was 80 years old before he died. Nissim's sister Ora is alive and blind. They spoke no English but Sebastian was able to communicate with Ora in Spanish. You know, Ladino. Close enough. I see in the New York Times that Spain is giving the Jewish diaspora the option of securing Spanish citizenship if they can prove ancestry from Spain, speak Spanish, and pass a Spanish cultural history exam. I can apply to this program. I'm fluent. I've letters that link to the Turkish family. I can travel Europe as an

architect with two passports. Better tax base. Better building opportunities. I got to leave New York for my health. Soon.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

(The next day. The doorbell rings. Andrew goes to the door from his desk. Looks through the eyehole and then opens door. Zeliha is holding a suitcase and has her coat draped over her shoulder.)

ZELIHA

Yes, yes. Hello. Andrew? You are Andrew. I'm Zeliha Beniso. Your cousin.

ANDREW

I thought you were coming next week?

ZELIHA

No. This is the day. The right day. So close to my birthday. I have a bigger bag downstairs. A big black suitcase. I had to change airlines but this is the day. I am so happy to see you. So happy. You look so young. But you're not young. What a special day, Andrew.

(Awkward silence)

Should I go? I can come back later. Tomorrow? Next week?

ANDREW

Come in. Let me take that. You look exhausted.

(He reaches for the suit case and she relents. She then puts her hands along her coat and folds the coat with great care.)

How was your flight?

ZELIHA

Not bad. We stopped in London. An unscheduled stop, I think. Is that strange? I think it is strange. Mechanical problems. The pilot said. The pilot had no hair. But I think we had bad passengers and the police was at the gate. So strange, Andrew. So very strange.

ANDREW

British Airlines?

ZELIHA

No. Turkish Airlines. All the terrorism fears. ISIS and Jihadists and jets getting shot down. Even the old men in wheelchairs have to get strip searched. Rough search. Lots of pushing and shoving. So sad, Andrew. Old people are wearing diapers and must be humiliated like they are dirty babies.

ANDREW

Well, you are safe and you are here. So welcome. You look like our photos.
(Awkward hug)

ZELIHA

Thank you. Thank you. I like your cologne. It is cologne?

ANDREW

No.
(fake laugh)
Your English is good.

ZELIHA

No, no. I struggle with English. You must be patient. Please be patient with me. Speak slowly, Andrew.

ANDREW

Sure.

ZELIHA

Did you vote today?

ANDREW

Yes.

ZELIHA

Big vote. Who did you vote for?

ANDREW

Not Trump.

ZELIHA

You think he's an asshole?

ANDREW

Yes. Are you hungry, Zeliha? Is that how you say your name?

ZELIHA

Zeliha. Yes. I am always hungry. Food goes through me like a tube. Are you hungry?

ANDREW

No. I'm not hungry.

ZELIHA

I think Trump is an asshole too. The biggest asshole in the world. Can I smoke? I'm dying for a cigarette.

ANDREW

Please don't. Not inside. You can smoke on the fire escape.

ZELIHA

You have a balcony!

ANDREW

Would you like a sandwich? A salad? Some can soup?

ZELIHA

Is that a joke? Can soup?

ANDREW

Yes. It is a joke. I can't cook. And I have can soup

ZELIHA

Andy Warhol liked tomato soup. This I know. He liked Campbell's soup. Do you like Andy Warhol, Andrew?

ANDREW

No.

ZELIHA

Why not? Because he is dead? He was shot. Because people thought he was albino? Is that the right word? Very white?

ANDREW

Yes. Albino.

ZELIHA

Was he albino?

ANDREW

Was Warhol albino?

ZELIHA

I think he suffered from St. Vitus' disease caused by scarlet fever. I read so much.

ANDREW

I didn't know that.

ZELIHA

It's true. I read all the time. That left his skin blotchy, so he probably looked like an albino because of the makeup he wore.

ANDREW

Fascinating.

ZELIHA

You have to read People magazine, Andrew. My sister is a nurse. Big fat nurse. She told me about St. Vitus. Andy Warhol was so cool. He made people look cool. Even the dead look cool.

(awkward silence)

Next I go to Florida. After you. Next week, Andrew. Time flies. You know I have many cousins. Thirteen cousins. Six by marriage.

ANDREW

Yes. I know.

ZELIHA

Thirteen is not a lucky number.

ANDREW

No, it is an unlucky number.

(He manages a warm smile)

ZELIHA

You were married once?

ANDREW

Yes. Did you emailed me your itinerary?

ZELIHA

No. I hate email. Do you like email? You can't be certain, you know.

ANDREW

Certain of what?

ZELIHA

The email goes to someone else. We can't see it travel. Who touches it. We can't see the servers. You know that. Hacking. Spying. Junk mail too. Who touches the email, Andrew? Who looks at your email? Do you get spam mail? We get so much junk in Turkey.

ANDREW

We die from spam.

ZELIHA

Yes. Yes. We die from the virus in the email. So much virus. Is this a work day for you?

ANDREW

No. It's Saturday. This is my *pied-à-terre*. A little small.

ZELIHA

Thank you for letting me visit.

ANDREW

My pleasure. I have a cottage on the east end of Long Island. Montauk.

ZELIHA

Two homes? So rich. I owe you so much. Yes. I will pay you back. I brought photos. Do you like photos? Photographs . . .

ANDREW

Photos of family?

ZELIHA

No. Photos of Istanbul. You're an architect. I took photos of the most exciting buildings and plazas in Istanbul. You see Europe in Istanbul and you can see Russia. You see the Islamic mysticism in Istanbul. Byzantine beauty. You see layer on layer of civilization in Istanbul. Old Constantinople. Now Istanbul. I did this for you, cousin Andrew. One of the most glorious cities in the world. I should show it to you.

ANDREW

Yes. A beautiful city.

ZELIHA

Beautiful but the sky over Istanbul is falling.

(Broad smile)

I will have a sandwich. You will make me sandwich? A sandwich with cheese and with oil and vinegar. I love wine vinegar. I don't know why. But I do. In my country we call vinegar – *sirke*. That was my nickname when I was a girl, and I was a cute little beast.

ANDREW

Why did people call you *sirke*?

ZELIHA

No one thought I was sweet, Andrew.

ANDREW

That's funny.

ZELIHA

No. It isn't funny. I cried for years.

ANDREW

I'm sorry, Zeliha.

ZELIHA

You know, when you cry for half your life the world never forgives you. The world follows you like a stray dog, Andrew. If you leave a trail. If you cry like water falls. Where is Niagara Falls?

ANDREW

It's near Canada.

ZELIHA

But Niagara Falls is in New York? And Viagra Falls is in Virginia?

ANDREW

There is no Viagra Falls. Certainly not in Virginia.

ZELIHA

I'm stupid. Forgive me. I'm so stupid, Andrew.

ANDREW

New York is a state and also a city. The state is as big as a small country near Turkey, Zeliha..

ZELIHA

Yes. Yes. I know. Can we drive to Niagara Falls? The photos are wonderful. I want to ride the *Maid of the Mist*.

ANDREW

Well, we could. But my Volvo is the shop under repair. We would have to rent a car. And it would be a 12 hour drive. And it's horribly cold in Niagara Falls this time of year. Maybe if you are here in the summer, not in November.

ZELIHA

A hot New York summer?

ANDREW

Yes. In the hot summer, places like Niagara Falls can be wonderful.

(Goes to kitchen to prepare a cheese sandwich)

What kind of cheese do you like?

ZELIHA

Goat Cheese. Any soft cheese? French cheese? I am an easy girl, Andrew. Put any

cheese on a plate. A little plate. Overripe cheese makes me trip. You know, hallucinate.
And I am a space mouse.

ANDREW

(Laughing)
You don't look like a space mouse.

ZELIHA

I have a tail that floats in the air. A space mouse has a tail. Do you understand?

ANDREW

You have a tail?

ZELIHA

Yes. A little tail. Give me your hand and I'll let you feel it.

ANDREW

Very funny.
(Focused on finishing the sandwich for her)

ZELIHA

Well, years ago I had the tail clipped so it could be controlled. Now it is just a little funny, stubby thing. Come here and give me your hand.

ANDREW

What do you want to drink?

ZELIHA

Wine? Warm red wine? When wine is cold, your luck can turn bad. I can go to the store and bring back a bottle?

ANDREW

I have red wine. Merlot or cabernet? These are California wines.

ZELIHA

What is open?

ANDREW

I'll open any bottle you like, Zeliha.

ZELIHA

Put down the bread and come here, my cousin. Be a brave man.

(He does. Andrew is uncomfortable)
Give me your hand.

(He presents his hand. She stands up and turns to show her derriere)
Don't pull away. Andrew. You have to trust me.

ANDREW
This is weird, Zeliha.

ZELIHA
What is weird?

ANDREW
Whatever you're doing.

ZELIHA
You have a space cousin from Turkey.
(She laughs sweetly)
I'm holding your hand. I want you to feel a little bump.
(She puts his hand inside her waist band)

You have cold hands, Andrew. Now. Do you feel that bump?

ANDREW
No.

ZELIHA
Here. Do you feel this bump?

ANDREW
Yes.

ZELIHA
Yes?

ANDREW
It's not much of a bump.

ZELIHA
That is my tail. I was more than alive because it was a part of me. A secret part.
Something that I share with special people. You're making a face, Andrew. Please don't
laugh at me. You know that I love you.
(He pulls away his hand. She reaches for that hand with care)
What was my tail? What was me? What was once real? Still a part of me. It's memory
now. I have to respect memory. Even when we die, all that is left is memory. And
someone's love.

END OF SCENE