

## *January*

The Friday before the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, Tareq lived in the kitchen. The next day he and Juliette would drive to Mark and Samantha's for dinner, and Emily would join them there. Juliette would tell the children with words that there would be a wedding. He would tell them with food.

With Tareq busy preparing an Egyptian feast, Juliette began work on the Berlin article. As he cooked, she worked at the dining room table, asking him occasional questions about Berlin and sharing the research process with him. Over the course of the day, the aromas became increasingly alluring, and she offered to switch writing gears from travel to food. Sometimes Tareq gave her a taste of something in process; other times he shoed her back to her computer.

By late afternoon, the scents were irresistible. Juliette closed her computer for the day and joined Tareq at the oven. "This all looks wonderful," she said as she surveyed the dishes that sat on the counters, crowded the kitchen table and even perched on the two kitchen chairs. His smile spread across his face like honey.

"The only thing missing," he said, "is bread. Tonight we must have this," he pointed disappointedly to a bag of pita bread from the supermarket. "But," he triumphed, "I have asked Emily to bring some Egyptian bread from a bakery in New York. She assures me it is near her flat. We are safe!"

"Are you sure I can't eat some of this now?"

"Dinner is at 8." He looked her up and down. "And appropriate attire, please," he teased.

"8?" She asked. "What am I supposed to do until then?"

"Take a long bath." She rolled her eyes, but a hot bath sounded good.

Around 7 o'clock he appeared in their room. By then she was out of the tub and reading in bed, wrapped in her robe. "Everything okay?" she asked from over her book.

"Of course," he replied, taking some clothes from the closet.

"Where are you going?"

“Mystery,” he replied, his eyes full of surprise. “See you at 8.”

*This is the man I married, she thought, and I am the better for it.*

At 7:59, she began down the stairs. “May I come now?” she called.

“Yes. All is prepared.”

When she reached the dining room, they both gasped – she because the dining room table was beautifully set, and he because she was equally beautifully set. She had taken his instructions to heart and wore a simple black dress, the cartouche and the signet ring around her neck.

He pulled back her chair as she sat, and then disappeared into the kitchen.

“Let me help you,” she called.

“No, no, I am fine.”

He reappeared with two bowls of something that looked like stew. “This,” he announced, “is fatta. I have made it almost correctly. The bread is not quite right, but it will do for this evening.” He presented her with a bowl and then stood expectantly, waiting for her first approving mouthful.

“This is delicious, Tareq. I’m not just saying that.”

“Of course!” His joy in his accomplishment was irrepressible. He took his own portion to his seat to relish it himself.

“To us,” he said, lifting his spoon toward her. She followed suit, and they clanked their spoons together.

“Is that what you do in Egypt?”

“No.” He shook his head. “It is what I do here.” He smiled with his mouth, his eyes, his whole being. And then he explained that fatta was a special dish, prepared for special occasions, and often served when celebrating a woman’s first pregnancy. He would bring this to Samantha the next day.

“Oh, Tareq, she’s going to love that. Really. Especially now that she can eat again!” Juliette took another bite, and then lowered her voice. “Not to rain on any parades,” she ventured, “but this doesn’t seem like the sort of thing that travels well.”

“It does not,” he agreed. But he had already found the solution in the myriad containers in the kitchen. He would transport everything separately and assemble the dish when they arrived.

“But maybe with a little less mess?” she teased.

“Do not worry,” was all he said, tipping his water glass to her. “Do not worry.”

When they packed the car the next morning, Juliette was sure that Tareq had used every container in the kitchen. “It’s like we’re going to feed an army,” she joked.

“No,” he replied. In his experience, no army ate this well.

“Well maybe it’s more like Thanksgiving, then,” she mused, “Egyptian style.”

“Yes,” he nodded firmly. “I like that.” He closed the trunk gently on the delectables that had been carefully arranged to prevent any spillage or other unforeseen tragedy.

“I’m glad I kept the Volvo,” she chuckled to herself. “I used to need the space for sports equipment and spare kids. Now it’s essential for your career as a chef!”

They picked Emily up at the station near Mark and Sam’s and arrived with the cargo intact. Emily passed on apologies from Kenji, who had drawn the unlucky assignment at the bookstore and was working the entire holiday weekend. Emily helped Tareq carry all the containers into the house, but then Tareq banished everyone except Juliette from the kitchen. Emily set the table, and then Tareq began to serve. He filled the table with plate after beautiful plate, and then appeared at Samantha’s side with the first bowl of fatta. “This is for you, Samantha,” and he explained fatta to her. She reached for his hand in appreciation and took a spoonful. She liked the fatta, but even if she hadn’t, she would have eaten the whole bowl.

When they had finished dinner, Tareq stood up. “I must excuse myself,” he said to Emily, Mark and Samantha. “Your mother has something to discuss with you, and I must repair the damage I have done to the kitchen.”

“You can stay, Tareq,” Juliette told him.

“No, this is a matter for your family. And there is dessert to consider!” He nodded at Juliette and walked back into the kitchen.

“What’s going on?” Mark asked.

“I want you all to know,” Juliette said, looking at each of them, “that we’re very happy...”

“Have you set a date?” Emily burst out.

“A date for what?” Mark asked.

“For a wedding,” Samantha filled in the blank.

“A wedding?” Mark exclaimed in a tone that was confused but not necessarily disapproving. “You?”

Juliette nodded.

“And Tareq?”

“Of course,” Emily and Samantha uttered at the same time, rolling their eyes as though they were twins, not sisters-in-law.

“This is great, Juliette,” Samantha congratulated her, taking her hand across the table. “Really, I couldn’t be happier for you.”

“Me, too, Mom,” chimed Emily. “Me, too.”

Mark remained silent and then added, “Me, too, Mom. I guess I’m just sort of shocked. When’s this all going to take place?”

“We want to wait until the baby is born. And it depends on Tareq’s visa, too.”

“So summer?” Emily pressed.

“I hope so,” Juliette said. “We hope so.”

“But isn’t this all a bit sudden?” Mark protested.

Emily protested back. “Mark, how long did you know Sam before you knew you’d marry her?”

“Six weeks,” he answered honestly. There was no use pretending otherwise. He had always told his sister everything, for as long as he could remember. He had called Emily the day after he met Samantha and told her that Sam might be “the one”. Six weeks later, he told her he was sure of it.

“And five years later, you two ran off and got married. Why the long wait?”

“Well, we wanted to finish school, get jobs, and generally get organized.”

“Exactly. Mom, here,” Emily pointed to Exhibit A, their mother, “has finished school, gotten a job, gotten married, raised two children, been widowed and, I think we can agree, organized herself fairly well.”

Samantha could not contain herself. Emily could be as entertaining as she was persuasive. She giggled under her breath and told Mark he should listen to his sister.

“And, at Mom’s age – no offense – I think she pretty much knows what she’s doing. And if she’s gotten a second chance, she should take it.”

That seemed to settle it. “Mom, I’m happy for you,” Mark said as sincerely as he could. He knew that Emily liked Tareq and that Samantha had no objections, but he wasn’t as sure. “Just give me a second to catch up.”

Juliette reached across the table and rubbed his hand. “It’s okay, honey. It’s been a big year. For all of us.”

At this, Emily bolted from the table and swung open the door to the kitchen. “It’s safe to come back now, Tareq. Mom’s told us. We’re all on board with it.” She winked at him.

Tareq emerged from the kitchen with a tray of halva in his hand, and Emily held the door open for his grand entrance. “Let me take that,” she said once he was through the door. “You go kiss the bride.”

“With pleasure,” he responded, handing over the tray. He walked behind Juliette’s chair, placed his hands on her shoulders and leaned over to kiss her cheek.

“That’s it?” Emily scrunched up her face in mock disappointment.

“For now,” he replied peacefully and returned to his place next to Juliette, where he would remain. He took Juliette’s hand under the table and fielded congratulations from Mark and Samantha. The feeling of family made his eyes glisten.

“Go ahead and cry, Tareq,” Emily told him, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and kissing him on the cheek. “In this family, we cry when we’re happy. Or at least I do.”

By the time the congratulations were completed, it was nearly time for Juliette and Tareq to go. “Thanks for eating so unfashionably early,” Samantha said to Tareq as they were putting away the leftovers.

“Not at all.”

“I feel so much better these days, but I still crash by 8 o’clock.”

“I am happy to accommodate,” he assured. He wanted to kiss her cheek, but held back. But then he touched her arm. “Samantha,” he spoke formally, “I am honored to have cooked fatta for you.”

“And I was honored to eat it.”

“I am glad.”

“Tareq,” Juliette bumped into him casually, “we better get going if we want to get home before it’s too late.”

“Yes,” he replied, packing up what had been washed. “However, I am afraid these containers will remain here.” He opened the refrigerator to reveal the stockpile that Mark, Samantha and Emily would enjoy the next day.

“That’s fine,” she said taking his arm happily and closing the refrigerator door. “We know where they live.”

As they said their goodbyes at the door, Tareq shook Mark’s hand firmly, smiled at Samantha, and then put his arm around Emily’s shoulder. At the car, he opened

the door for Juliette and closed it behind her. He took his own seat and then waved to Mark and Emily, blowing them each a kiss.

Once they were home, Tareq lit the fireplace while Juliette made tea. They settled cozily in the living room, each appreciating all that the day had given them. But her family was not the only consideration, and they both knew this.

“Tareq, how are we going to tell your family?”

“I have been wondering about this.”

“Any ideas?”

He was silent.

“Tareq, I love you. But I have to be honest. I can’t convert. I’m sorry.”

“Of course.” His face was as somber as she had ever seen it.

“I mean, if I have to, to make this work for your family, I could. I guess. But it would be superficial. I don’t feel it. For me, that is. For you, I love all of you. But it’s just not how I was raised. It’s not who I am.”

“I understand.”

“And at our age, is it necessary? Or how necessary is it? It’s not like we’re going to have children to raise where we have to pick a religion for them, or figure out something else.”

“It is not necessary. A Christian woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to change her religion.”

“Really?” That was news to Juliette. “But what about your family? Just because it’s not required doesn’t mean they’ll approve of me.”

“Juliette, this is my burden.”

“No, Tareq, it’s our burden. Ours together. Is there any chance they’ll accept me? Any chance they won’t disown you?”

Tareq closed his eyes. Twice in his life he had fallen in love with a Christian woman. When he was young, when he and Yasmeen were young, their cultures had had the power to pull them apart. Now he was more than 50 years old. His father had passed away years earlier. His mother, in her 80s, would not understand, would not accept Juliette. He knew this. Tareq was her only son. He was meant to live his life in a certain way.

But his sisters? Would they who had watched his heart break over Yasmeen decades before deny him the happiness he now knew? He began to weep inside. His face remained stoic, but inside, he wept. Love posed such difficult questions.

Juliette could see his grief, his agony. She knelt before him and took his hands in hers. "Tareq," she whispered.

"I still love the way you say my name," he smiled, but it was the smile of someone rising above a deep pain.

"Then I'll say it again. Tareq."

"I love you, Juliette. You are my wife."

"I am."

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The clock on their time together was running out. They shopped for gifts for Tareq to take back to Cairo, and he made his round of goodbyes. Marian said the library wouldn't be the same without him, and she looked forward to his return. He thought about saying something to Fran, but decided he'd let Marian explain for him. When Tareq told Earl about his departure, Earl's face fell into shadow. "I'm going to miss you, Tareq. I'm not afraid to admit it," Earl took several short breaths to douse his emotions. "Give you a ride home for old time's sake?"

The two men walked through the store's front door, and this time Tareq flipped over the "be back soon" sign as Earl found the key on the carbiner that he kept attached to his belt. "I will be back," Tareq said to Earl, "in a few months, I believe."

"For spring!" Earl regained his composure with the thought of bags of top soil, flats of flowers in small, green plastic containers, and hoses piled where the snow shovels now stood. "I'll show you how to plant a garden in this climate."

"I would like that," Tareq replied, climbing into the passenger seat of Earl's enormous pick up truck. "I will grow the herbs I cannot find in the grocery store."

"You moving in, Tareq?" Earl drove away from the town. This time Earl wasn't just surveying the scene, Tareq knew, and he wasn't being nosy either. Earl cared.

"Yes," Tareq replied.

"Glad to hear it," Earl replied. "I've never seen Ms. Grant this happy, and I'm always glad to talk with a man who appreciates tools."

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"Let's make this quick," Juliette resolved, her hands fixed to his lapels. "You have to go, and if we keep standing here, I'm going to be a weeping mess here in the terminal."

Juliette and Tareq stood still amidst the hoards of travellers coming and going. The airport was noisy and fluorescent and cavernous – everything that home was not. Tareq put his hands on Juliette's shoulders to shield her for the moment and then nodded, tears welling in his eyes. He arranged the pashmina around her neck one more time and kissed her goodbye. He smiled at her from the security line as long as he could and then waved his hand high and blew her a kiss. And then he was subsumed in the crowd and beyond Juliette's view.

## *The New Year*

Winter was colder without him. Juliette kept his coat and boots in the closet, and his gloves rested near hers in a drawer. She wore his coat once when she shoveled the porch steps, but it was too big and made the task more difficult. She hung it back in the closet to await his return. The weather would be warm by then, but the coat would be waiting nonetheless.

Juliette and Tareq returned to their habits from November. She messaged him at 6 am. He replied as quickly as he could, but the Internet connection in Cairo was not as reliable as in Berlin, and sometimes she had to wait to hear back from him. Sometimes they even used the landline and talked the old-fashioned way.

With the benefits of the modern age sometimes eluding them, and the time zones conspiring against them, they wrote letters. Tareq's arrived on the same thick paper he had used for his first letter, not even 12 months earlier. Juliette loved his handwriting, especially its formal curves and elegantly crossed t's, executed in what she now knew was a fountain pen. His letters were always short. Juliette's letters to Tareq were typed on the computer, printed out, and then signed. They were full of details about Samantha, Mark, Emily and sometimes Kenji.

The topic of his visa was again paramount, but the hurdles this time appeared to be minimal. In a fairly short time, he was able to purchase a plane ticket. As for the café, he explained to his mother and his sisters that he planned a return trip to the United States and thought that his eldest nephew should manage it in his absence. He was quite young, everyone acknowledged, but Tareq would train him until May. After that, he would supervise from a distance.

For her part, Juliette continued working on the article about Berlin and took on additional assignments. Most importantly, though, she looked to the future. She started a list of places they could visit in the warmer weather; the possibilities abounded, and the list grew and grew. But even as she thought about those adventures, she worried about how Tareq would occupy himself in their small town. She occasionally scanned for apartments to rent in the city, but always landed back in the farmhouse that now felt like a home.

Juliette regretted that Tareq was not back in time for the birth of Sam's and Mark's baby. Sarah arrived healthy and on time in mid-April. Juliette was certain that Mark and Emily must have been the most beautiful babies in the world, but when she saw Sarah, she also knew that she was the most beautiful creature she had ever

beheld anytime, anywhere. Holding Sarah on the anniversary of Mark's death shifted all the focus to life.

Tareq wasn't there to admire Sarah's perfect little fingers with her, but he would be back soon. In the meantime, Juliette counted the days, checked yet again that the closet offered ample room for his things, cleared out drawers, and looked forward to watching him make coffee.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Juliette said "See you tomorrow" over a wobbly video call. She was wobbly herself as she said it, feeling the onset of a virus. He could hear the illness brewing in her voice and told her not to come to the airport if she were unwell. "But what will you do then?" she protested. Public transportation between the airport and their house was not a realistic option. He told her not to worry, he could take a taxi to Mark and Samantha's. They would figure it out. She promised to take care, they exchanged *I love yous*, and slept well in the knowledge that their separation was ending.

Tareq slept better than Juliette, whose fever worsened. It was just a 24-hour bug, she was confident, but it was the wrong 24 hours. She wouldn't make it to the airport. The next morning, she called Emily and asked her to meet Tareq.

"Happy to, Mom," Emily told her.

"It's Newark," Juliette's voice creaked like the stairs in the house.

"I'll take the train to New Jersey and then grab Mark's car."

"Thank you," Juliette coughed weakly. She hung up, rolled over, and fell back to sleep.

As the plane landed later that day, Tareq braced himself for immigration. Armed again with the email correspondence about his name, he got into the relevant line and waited patiently for his turn. He could feel the anxiety rising within him, but he knew that the most important thing was to remain calm. He must approach the immigration officer as though he went through this routine everyday, just as the immigration officer did.

Tareq heard the officer say "next" and walked across the line on the floor to the booth. He pushed his passport to the officer, who looked to be about Tareq's age. The officer flipped through Tareq's passport. He lingered on the photo page, glancing back and forth between Tareq's face and the photo in the passport. "Your eyes are green," the officer stated blandly.

"Yes," Tareq replied.

"In the photo, they look brown," the officer observed. Tareq remained silent. His eyes often looked brown in photos, but he did not know how to explain this to the officer.

"Reason for visit?" the officer moved on from Tareq's eyes.

“To be with friends,” Tareq replied. It would be beyond imprudent to tell the truth. He and Juliette had an appointment with an immigration lawyer the following week, but the immigration officer did not need to know this.

“You have a return ticket?” the officer said into the passport.

“Yes.”

“May I see it?” he looked up at Tareq, expressionless.

Tareq produced his return ticket, which he had no intention of using.

“Address while you’re here?”

Tareq recited his and Juliette’s address by heart.

The officer stamped a mark into Tareq’s passport. “Welcome to America, Mr. Kha...”

“Khalifa,” Tareq enunciated his name.

“Mr. Khalifa,” the officer replied with a half-smile.

Tareq kept his face polite and self-possessed, took back his passport and walked away quickly. He found his luggage, two bags this time, and exited into the arrivals hall. He let go of his bags, took a deep breath and felt his shoulders relax. He was searching the crowd for Juliette when he heard Emily’s voice.

“Tareq!” she called warmly. He pivoted to find her walking energetically toward him.

“Emily,” he opened his arms. “How good to see you.”

“You, too!” They kissed each other’s cheeks briefly in greeting. “Mom’s home sick, so you’ll have to settle for me.”

“Happily,” Tareq replied, and sincerely. Emily was dear to him. “She is still unwell?”

“She’s better. I’ll text her now to let her know you’re here okay.”

“Thank you, Emily.”

“You made it through fast this time,” Emily said with relief for them both. “Mom prepared me that I might need to wait for awhile. But poof! There you were. I haven’t even started on the snacks!” She opened a bag to reveal Tareq’s favorites. “We’ll eat in the car.”

They started toward the exit. “Can I take one of your bags?” Emily offered.

“No,” he replied. “I am fine. Please send your mother a text message.”

“Okay, but I need to get away from that first,” she pointed over to a smoking section. “That’s disgusting,” Emily condemned.

“I used to smoke,” Tareq admitted off-handedly.

“You did?” Emily made no attempt to hide her surprise.

“Yes.”

“But then you quit?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“Your mother asked me to.”

“Really?”

“Yes. In Berlin. She asked me to stop. So I did.”

“That easily?”

“Of course.”

“It’s not that easy for most people.”

“I know this. But when your mother asks, it becomes easy.”

Emily loved her father. She respected him as well. But she could not imagine her father ever making such a significant change for her mother simply because she asked. “Thank you, Tareq.”

“For what?”

“For quitting smoking.”

“You are welcome.”

“And you’ll be happy you did because Sam would never, ever let you near that baby if you even smelled like you’d been near a cigarette.” They both laughed, but Tareq knew that while Emily’s statement was funny, it was also true.

“The weather is much warmer now,” Tareq said with relief as they walked to the car.

“Memorial Day’s next weekend,” Emily replied. “First official weekend of summer! And we’re meeting up at Sam and Mark’s. You’ll get to see the baby then.”

“I look forward to it.”

The highways cooperated with them that evening, and soon they arrived home. Tareq pulled his suitcases up to the porch as Emily opened the door. “Mom, we’re here!” she called up to Juliette, but neither she nor Tareq heard a reply. “She might be sleeping,” Emily reduced her voice to a whisper. “Wanna check? I’ll text Sam to let her know we’re home, and then I’m going to call Kenji. He’ll be glad to know you’re here safe and sound.”

Tareq gave Emily’s shoulder a squeeze and then climbed the stairs, enjoying every squeaking step. He was home again. He entered their bedroom quietly and found Juliette sound asleep, her phone in her hand. He sat next to her on the bed, caressed her forehead and then relaxed: her fever was not high. He would risk disturbing her rest. He nudged her shoulder gently and called her name. “Juliette, I am home.” She turned her head toward him and smiled weakly. They sat quietly together, Tareq running his fingers over her forehead and Juliette healing under his touch.

Several minutes passed, and then Emily appeared at the door. “Sorry to disturb you two,” she intruded mildly. “Tareq, here’s one of your bags.”

“Emily, you should not have carried that. It is heavy.”

“It’s fine, Tareq,” Emily replied. “My way of helping you move in!” She was glad to perform this service. “But now I’m heading out. I should get Mark’s car back.”

“It’s too late to drive.” Juliette and Tareq spoke to Emily in tandem, and all three of them laughed.

“It’s not too late, guys,” Emily protested. “And it’s not that far.”

“It is too late,” Tareq insisted, “and if you go, I will not be able to make you coffee in the morning. Stay here tonight.”

“Listen to Tareq,” Juliette said weakly.

“I think I’m going to lose this one,” Emily acknowledged. “See you in the morning.”

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The following days were wonderfully ordinary. Juliette got over the flu, returned to her computer and did the laundry. Tareq explored the garden in spring, made koshary, and scouted the house for projects that needed to be done. They laughed and loved.

Tareq unpacked over several days. He was, Juliette observed as she helped him place his things alongside hers, a man of few material possessions. A galabeya now hung in the closet. A few more shirts and pairs of trousers appeared than last

time, two dark jackets, and a pair of sandals he'd not brought in winter. But he owned little to nothing of the clothes Juliette associated with men: no cargo shorts, no polo shirts, no faded blue jeans. His clothes were formal, or at least long and long-sleeved. But no neck ties.

Besides the scant wardrobe, he had brought with him only the minimum of what he needed to place himself in New York and to remember Egypt. Two accordion files held the core documents of modern identity, papers and various proofs of existence, past and present. "May I look?" Juliette asked, and he handed her everything, including an additional folder that contained letters and other written mementoes, mainly in Arabic, a few sheets of music, and some drawings in crayon and colored pencil. "When they were young," he explained, "my nieces and nephews gave me many drawings."

A separate envelope contained a handful of photographs. "Who are these people?" she asked, and Tareq introduced her to his family in the photos: his mother, sisters, their husbands and children. Some aunts, uncles, cousins. In the older photos, his father also appeared. They sat formally posed in some images, but others were more candid. Some chronicled significant events, others captured moments of everyday life, significant now in their own way. Several photos were from his time in Damascus, and Mark appeared in some of them. No photos of Aleppo landed in New York with him. Perhaps, Juliette thought, none existed.

"And this one," he handed her a separate envelope. She pulled out the photo inside, her face roughly in profile, the water of the Nile around her. Its corners were now worn and creased. "This one is my favorite."

Most of his books and recordings were left behind; these were largely replaceable. But a few had made the cut: a handful of books no longer in print, some self-produced CDs bought from musicians heard at impromptu concerts, and the signed album of Oum Kalthoum that Juliette had bought for him in Berlin.

Other three-dimensional objects were scarce among his immigrating belongings. "A slide rule?" Juliette asked curiously as she removed it from its case. She hadn't seen a slide rule in ages, and she was fairly sure that neither Mark nor Emily would even be able to identify the tool for what it was.

"This is what I learned with," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "My phone and my computer have calculators." He had also brought a nearly-ancient compass, a few drafting tools and some pencils. All of these were as easily replaceable as the books and CDs left behind, but these items were an extension of himself, or at least an extension of some memories that were too integral to abandon. Even if he never used these items again, he wanted them nearby.

Other traces of youth and childhood emerged from the cases: a small wooden box with marbles and string, a collection of miniature building blocks suitable for creating tiny civilizations, a hand-carved menagerie. A set of finger cymbals, a wooden recorder and a scattering of guitar picks comprised what to Juliette looked like a random collection of musical objects.

“This is heavy,” Juliette said with surprise, lifting a box from the smaller of the two suitcases. “What’s in here?”

Tareq’s eyes glimmered. “Open it.” Juliette pulled back the lid of the box and saw Tareq’s chess set.

“The men at the café are okay with your taking this along?” She wanted to know.

“I left another there.” Tareq had done his duty. “This one belongs here, with you.”

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By the following Monday, a day to remember many things, Tareq was rested and Juliette was worried about Memorial Day traffic. “But we will see Sarah!” Tareq exclaimed. That made the trip worth the while. He could not remember the last time he had held a baby, but thought it might have been when his youngest niece was an infant. She was now 17.

As they left the house, Tareq stopped on the front porch and patted his pockets. “Forget something?” Juliette asked.

He kept patting until he found a small package. “I have brought gifts for Samantha and Sarah. From Cairo.” He opened a tiny, ornate box to reveal two turquoise pendants, each on its own chain.

“Oh, Tareq,” Juliette approved, “these are beautiful. And the color!”

“Blue is auspicious. You must give this to Samantha.” He handed her the box.

“You can give it to her yourself, Tareq.”

“I would prefer that you give it to her from us,” Tareq insisted. Juliette agreed, but said she would also let Samantha know that Tareq had selected these gifts.

“I feel fortunate to see the baby today,” he continued. “Today is her 40<sup>th</sup> day. In Egypt, this is important.”

“Really? That’s a nice coincidence.”

“Seven days is more important,” he continued, pursing his lips in disappointment that he hadn’t been there 33 days earlier. “This is *sebou*. But some people also celebrate 40.”

“Your timing is perfect, Tareq.”

When they arrived at the house, Emily and Kenji met them at the car. Emily opened Tareq’s door almost before he could get to it himself and hugged him tight. Kenji opened Juliette’s door, and Tareq nodded his thanks to Kenji for doing so on his behalf. Tareq liked Kenji. They walked together to the house, a few steps

behind Juliette and Emily, and watched the two women, their arms around each other's waists and heads together.

Mark greeted them at the door with Sarah in his arms to a chorus of oohs and aahs. Emily pulled Tareq back. "Note to self," she cautioned, "before you hold the baby, wash your hands and be sure to tell Sam that you washed your hands." Tareq nodded. "Parents of newborns are germophobes. I shouldn't laugh. I'll probably be that way, too."

In the foyer, Samantha greeted Tareq warmly. "So good you're back, Tareq. We're so glad to see you."

"And I am glad to see you," he kissed her on each cheek. "But please excuse me. I must wash my hands before I am near the baby."

"Thanks, Tareq," Samantha said with appreciation. "A lot of people forget. I know I'm probably obsessive about it, but you know, she's my baby." Samantha put her arm across Tareq's shoulders and pointed toward the kitchen. "Plenty of soap at the sink," she said. Tareq glanced at Emily en route to the kitchen to confirm he was following the script correctly. She nodded.

Tareq did not know what it was like to utter the phrase "she's my baby", but he was eager to know what it felt like to be a grandparent. His hands washed, he sat down next to Juliette in the living room, and Samantha walked toward him with Sarah in her arms.

"Did he wash his hands?" Mark appeared out of nowhere.

"Yes, he did, honey," Samantha reassured him with a *do-you-really-think-I'd-forget-that-part?* tone in her voice. "In fact, he washed them without even being asked." Samantha looked at Tareq approvingly. "Now let's let Tareq have the baby."

When Samantha placed Sarah in Tareq's arms, he felt a rush of humanity throughout his body. He stared in awe at the 10 pounds of miracle before him, and Sarah returned his stare with eyes that were just learning to focus. Tareq felt a type of love he had not known was within him.

"Look at her fingers," Juliette told him. "They're so teeny and perfect. Her finger nails." Tareq lifted Sarah's entire hand with his index finger. "She doesn't really grip yet," Juliette explained. "But give her a few months and then you're going to rethink your beard." They laughed so loudly that Sarah's eyes opened fully and she let out a cry. "Too loud!" Juliette chided them both.

"No," Tareq countered. "It is a tradition in Egypt to startle a baby to ward off evil spirits." Sarah relaxed again in his arms and seemed happy. But after a few minutes, her face scrunched up and she let out the most plaintive of wails. Now Tareq was the one who was startled. "What is wrong?" he asked Juliette.

"Nothing's wrong," Samantha reassured him. "She's just hungry. This is the routine with a baby: happy, cry, feed, sleep. Repeat. Throw in a few diaper

changes, and you pretty much have it down.” Samantha took Sarah in her arms and hugged her close. “I’ll go feed her.”

When Samantha left the room, Juliette motioned to Mark. “Mark,” she insisted on his full attention, “you need to get Sam out of the house.” Mark looked worried. “I mean it. I remember this part of being a mother.” She smiled and rested her hand on his. “Tareq and I aren’t that far away. We’ll come back next Saturday,” she looked at Tareq to confirm, “and we’ll stay with the baby while she naps. You and Sarah go out somewhere, even if it’s just for an herbal tea.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Mark sighed. “We’re both happy, but we’re so tired. And all we talk about is the baby.”

“I remember,” Juliette empathized. “So go out for tea and read the newspaper together,” Juliette suggested half-jokingly. “And then as Sarah gets bigger, we’ll work our way to dinner and a movie.”

“Thanks, Mom. You’re the best.”

Some visits are best kept short, and at Samantha’s next yawn, Juliette announced that she and Tareq needed to head home. Juliette knew that Samantha needed sleep more than she needed their company. As Juliette rummaged in her purse for her keys, she found the box with the pendants. “Samantha! I almost forgot!” she exclaimed, handing her the miniature box with its intricate carving and inlays. “This is from Tareq. And from me.”

“You may open it later,” Tareq suggested. “After you have rested.” Samantha put the box on a table by the front door. After one last round of hugs, Juliette and Tareq left for home.

As they drove north, they could see darker clouds gathering in the already dark skies. “You can smell the storm coming,” Juliette said to Tareq as she got out of the car at home. “Do you smell it?” Tareq looked up to the sky and breathed in the air. He could distinguish the odor of the damp gravel from the scent of the pine needles, and the humidity in the air pressed in close. But he wasn’t sure he could identify the smell of a storm on the way.

The storm bellowed in over night, and the next morning, a distant clap of thunder woke Juliette with a start. Tareq dozed undisturbed, and Juliette picked up a book off her nightstand. She could go downstairs, find the paper, and make some tea, but she preferred to read in bed and wait for his eyes to open. Soon they did. The first thing he saw that morning was her arm propped up on the bed, a book in hand.

“Good morning,” he yawned.

She put the book down and rolled toward him. “Good morning.”

“I dreamt about the baby.”

“She’s beautiful.” Juliette confirmed that Sarah was worth a dream.

“What do we do today?” he queried.

“Funny you should ask.” Juliette’s tone was more organized and directed than the early hour deserved. “I have a list.” She rolled back toward her bedside stand and found the papers by the lamp.

“A list?”

“Yes. I’ve been putting together a list of all the things we can do to orient you to the area.”

“A list?” He still wasn’t sure he had heard her correctly.

Juliette handed him two printed pages of destinations and things to see, organized by geographical distance. He propped himself up on his pillow to get a better view. “These here,” she pointed to the first page, “are all in New York City.” Tareq took the sheet and scanned the many options. “And this page,” she handed him a second piece of paper, “has places that are more than an hour away and maybe need an overnight stay.”

“It will take years to work through this,” he observed.

“That’s the idea,” she put her head down on his pillow and kissed him. “I’ve got work to do today. I’m sorry. But you start by looking this over and let me know what things appeal to you most.”

Just then a clap of thunder boomed so violently that the house shook. “Come closer,” Tareq said, wrapping his arm around her. “Come closer.”

The storm persisted throughout the day with brilliant displays of lightning and cracking rounds of thunder. On days like these, Juliette’s favorite place was the screened-in porch off the kitchen. Its poured concrete floor was not elegant, but the porch was deep enough that most of it stayed dry, even in a driving rain. The eastern exposure kept the porch cool on sunny days, and a large Japanese *Stewartia* tree did its part, too, branching out benevolently to provide welcome shade. The tree was nearly as old as the house itself, the previous owner had told Juliette proudly, and bloomed all summer long. Juliette had bought the house for the porch and the tree as much as anything else.

Tareq joined Juliette on the cushioned sofa that lazed against the exterior wall of the house. The earth immediately adjacent to the porch was covered with irregularly shaped pieces of slate tile that formed something bigger than a path but smaller than a patio. Each piece of slate was edged unintentionally with grass that pushed its way between the pieces of flat stone. The strip of grass beyond the slate was barely wide enough to mow without disturbing a bank of daylilies that delineated the end of the garden. Beyond the daylilies, the garden gave way to a slope to the creek below. The creek was not visible from the porch, but it gurgled up noisily in summer.

The storm created a symphony of water and wind. The creek rippled its high-pitched staccato; the wind replied with crescendos of rustling the leaves that drowned out the stream entirely and then receded again to make room for the sound of rushing water. The scent of drenched soil and wood accompanied the music of the storm. There was plenty of mud in New York, Tareq thought to himself, but hardly any sand.

A sudden gust of wind swayed the *Stewartia* tree harshly, and both Juliette and Tareq grabbed each other's hands as they listened to the branches rapping against their bedroom window above.

"Earl told me to trim back those branches," Juliette muttered to herself. "I guess he was right."

Tareq nodded at first, then giggled, and then laughed from deep in his chest.

"What's so funny?" Juliette asked, her eyes fixed again on her computer screen.

"I like all the branches," Tareq said, wrapping his arms around her shoulders. "I could climb that tree to our window," he said, nodding his head back to point to the tree with his chin. "I could be like Romeo."

"No balcony," she eyed him jauntily. "Besides, you own the stairs."

Tareq wasn't sure what Juliette meant. Since returning to the United States, he had become acutely aware that he didn't know vernacular American English as well as he knew UN office English. The most familiar and simple of words could take on whole new meanings. He could usually ferret out the meanings easily, but he still found himself listening as an outsider. He had heard Emily say she *owned* a project at work; this conveyed a pleasant sense of independence and personal responsibility that she enjoyed greatly. But then Samantha had used *own* to chide Mark playfully when he didn't want to admit he had made an error. "You have to own that one, sweetheart," she'd said to him as he hid his face in her shoulder. Neither of these seemed related to the definition of *own* Tareq knew.

"Juliette, I do not own any stairs."

"Well, not yet, I guess," she hit *save* on her document. "But I talked to Mark about it. He said it's not his area of law, but he thinks I should wait until we have a marriage certificate. I think he thinks it will be easier then. Then I'll make you joint owner of the house. So you'll own the stairs soon enough."

"Juliette," Tareq eyed her uncertainly. "I do not know..."

"What don't you know?"

"Juliette," he stammered.

"Look, if anything happens to me, I want you to have the house."

"Nothing will..."

“You can’t say that,” she pressed her index finger to his lips. “I wish we could say that, but we can’t. Believe me, I know.” He nodded and nestled his head on her shoulder.

Juliette and Tareq spent most of the day cuddled up together on the porch, laptops in hand. Juliette mainly edited a nearly-finished piece, but jumped now and again to a new story she was working on. Tareq worked through Juliette’s list of things to see and do, but sometimes found himself counting the number of daylilies that eclipsed the view of the stream.

“So what’s it going to be?” she asked as she closed her computer that afternoon.

“It cannot be only this,” Tareq sighed at the sheets of paper in his hand. “I am not a tourist.”

Juliette’s face took on the storm outside. “I understand,” she rubbed his hand. She knew he needed to find a purpose, some form of meaningful employment. But she hadn’t expected him to worry about it so soon. “But it’s summer. It’s vacation time. Let’s have a honeymoon now.”

Tareq believed Juliette was right: they should enjoy their summer. “Storm King,” he replied with resolve. “The idea of such a vast, outdoor sculpture garden appeals to me.”

“I love Storm King,” she enthused. “I used to go there every year. Anything else?”

“Corning,” he added.

“I haven’t been there in ages, but I remember really liking it. There’s a museum, and also an area where you can watch glass being made.”

“I would like to go to Corning soon.” He sounded as though he needed to leave right away.

“Is there a rush?” she asked.

“The website says that an artist is visiting from Egypt. I would like to see his work.”

“How long is he there?”

“Through July. Look.” He handed her his laptop so she could see for herself.

“How about 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend?” she suggested. “We could visit the museum, maybe drive around the Finger Lakes. And I bet Corning has some fun fireworks.”

“There are lakes there?”

“Yes, lots of them. It’s one of the things the region is best known for.” She handed the computer back to him. “Do you want to find us a place to stay? Should be plenty online.”

The next morning, Tareq opened his eyes to the tree outside the window. He reached to his left, but Juliette's side of the bed was already cool. *She's already downstairs working*, he thought to himself. *Let's have a honeymoon now*, she had said to him. But she would still work in between the honeymoons.

Tareq reached to his right and took her list from the bedside stand. His handwritten notes in the margins made him restless. He folded the papers in half and slid them under the book he was half through reading. Corning and Storm King would be honeymoon enough, he thought to himself, at least for this summer. His life was not a vacation.

He lifted himself from the bed and dressed with as much purpose as possible. When he got downstairs, he could see Juliette's computer open on the dining room table, but the kitchen was empty. He turned his head left and right, listening for her. Then the front door opened, and Juliette appeared with the morning's paper.

"Juliette," he said to her, leaning against the counter with his back to the coffee maker, "I cannot stay here any longer." Juliette looked alarmed, and Tareq realized again that while he was fluent, he was living in a language that was not his mother tongue. "I will go to the town," he added quickly. "I wish to walk."

"It's hot outside," Juliette grimaced. "Sure you don't want to drive?"

"It is not hot outside," he chuckled at her. "And I wish to see Earl and Marian." He paused. "And Fran."

"They'll be very happy to see you."

"I will make some coffee," he gave her a kiss. "And then later we will meet for lunch at the diner."

"Noon," she replied. "At the diner."

Later that morning, Tareq kissed Juliette twice at the door, grabbed his cell phone and returned to the road he knew well from winter. As he walked, he made note of the changes around him. The gray skies were now blue and strewn with clouds that lolled casually in the air. Dense green foliage, dotted with blossoms, obscured the brown, craggy branches, and the once quiet streams now babbled beyond view. Evidence of human life graced the road as well, with an occasional bicyclist or car passing by.

The town was livelier, too. People waited outside at the train station rather than inside their cars, and the sidewalks were busier. Some windows were open, and Tareq could hear a mishmash of music, radio news programs, and fragments of conversations. It was still one of the quietest examples of human habitation he could imagine, but winter had, reassuringly, made way for spring and summer.

When Tareq set foot into the hardware store, he splayed his fingers reflexively at the smell of the bags of fertilizer stacked by the front door. He should grab a bag, he thought; the daylilies in the back were growing thickly, but the plants in the

front of the house, with its unprotected western exposure, needed help. And shears. Big enough to trim back tree branches. He was sure Juliette owned none.

“Tareq!” Earl called out from behind the counter, extending his hand. Tareq walked toward him quickly and extended his own hand. “It’s great to see you, Tareq! How long you been back?”

“Only a few days,” Tareq replied. “It is good to see you, as well.” They chatted as old friends as Earl toured Tareq through the shop’s aisles to point out some new products he was now carrying. Earl attended to a few customers who came and went, but as far as Earl was concerned, Tareq’s return was the main event of the day.

Around noon, Juliette looked first in the window of the diner and, finding no trace of Tareq there, went to the hardware store. She could hear Earl and Tareq toward the back of the shop discussing the pros and cons of various sanding machines.

“Ms. Grant!” Earl greeted her enthusiastically when he spied her walking down the aisle. “Bet you’re glad to have this guy back in town!”

“I am, Earl. I am indeed,” she took Tareq’s arm. “Can I borrow him? We’re going to the diner for lunch.”

“Absolutely,” Earl agreed. “Just send him back when you’re done with him.”

Tareq and Juliette left with a wave and headed for the diner. Tareq opened the door for Juliette; the red frame around the large pane of glass was just as he remembered it, and he welcomed the sound of the jingling bell. The brass door handle was more weathered than he remembered, or perhaps the tarnish was just more visible in the strong light of summer light.

Fran caught Tareq from the corner of her eye as they entered and greeted him with a terse but friendly, “Tea?” She waited a moment for his response. “And spaghetti or a hamburger?”

“Hamburger,” he replied, “with everything.”

After lunch, Tareq walked Juliette to the car. He ran his hand once along the length of her bare arm as she sat down into the now blistering interior. “You’ve got to admit this is hot, right?” she jibed from behind the wheel.

“Of course,” he nodded. “Almost hot enough for air conditioning.”

“Just you wait, Tareq,” she swatted back with a grin. “Summer’s not even really here yet.”

His eyebrows arched as he closed her door, and then Tareq crossed the street to the library. The path leading up to the front door was now knee-high with irises, and the small patches of grass on either side of the path were neatly mown. Flower boxes full of impatiens, courtesy of the Garden Club, no doubt, festooned the library’s windows. Tareq could see through the windows that someone had put in

fresh white lace curtains, and a man he vaguely recognized was taking advantage of the clear day to give the library a fresh coat of paint.

Tareq entered quietly and was startled to see people in the library. Other than the Garden Club's holiday party, he didn't remember seeing anyone in the library in winter. But now a mother and two girls read quietly in the children's section, and an older man sat with his feet up in the library's living room, flipping through magazines.

Tareq started to take his shoes off, but then stopped to count the number of people he could see. Marian had never remarked on, let alone objected to, Tareq's practice of removing his shoes in what felt to him like a home. But in winter it had only been Marian and himself in the library; now he considered how these strangers might react. He deliberated a moment, then stepped out of his shoes and placed them to the side of the door.

He could hear Marian working in the shelves behind her desk. Rounding the shelf's corner, he took her by surprise. "Tareq!" she exclaimed and then retreated to a library voice. "You're back!" she whispered.

"I am," he shook her hand. Marian was as he remembered her, her flat-ironed hair curving neatly around her full face. "And I believe I have work yet to do."

"Can you pick up where you left off?" she queried enthusiastically, her joy at seeing him again straining under her whisper.

"Of course. My desk?" he asked, pointing to the table nearby. "Is it ready for my return?"

"You bet it is." She pointed her finger to the shelves near his table. "Everything's just as you left it." Tareq's eyes swept over the shelves and saw that she told the truth: his careful stacks of papers and note cards stood untouched, and the books looked to be precisely in the order he had left them.

Marian couldn't bear the burden of speaking so quietly, so she motioned Tareq to a small conference room at the back of the library. She closed the door quietly and then asked at full voice, "What's next?"

"I believe that I completed the biographies of the authors," Tareq rubbed his forehead, "and the synopses. But a list of translations," he shook his head, "I know already that I cannot write such a list from here." The library had no English-language versions of any of the books in Arabic, and Internet resources were limited.

"I think you're going to need to go to the city," Marian told him. "I'm pretty sure they've got a strong Arabic collection at Columbia." Marian watched Tareq's heart leap at her suggestion. "I'll make a phone call to make sure they'll let you in," Marian told him slyly. "You know how librarians can be about their collections."

"I do," Tareq gleamed at her. "I have found them to be welcoming."

“We are indeed,” Marian agreed. “And protective. Now when would you like to go to New York?”

“Tomorrow,” Tareq answered easily.

While Tareq reacquainted himself with the work he’d done months earlier, Marian arranged for his visit to Columbia the next day. Before he left that afternoon, she handed him a map and a train schedule for getting to Columbia University along with a letter for getting into the library once he was there.

Tareq clenched the papers in his hands as he left the library, lingering on the front steps while his eyes adjusted to the sunlight. He was scanning the street up and down when he heard a voice call his name from the direction of the diner.

“Tareq!” a man said again, and this time, Tareq saw that it was Bob from the church, accompanied by Betty, the piano teacher. The three met in the middle of the road before walking back to the sidewalk.

“I knew that was you!” Bob said with delight. He put his hefty arm across Tareq’s slender frame. “I just heard from Fran that you were back in town! She said you were at the library. Betty and I were just coming over to see you!”

“It is good to see you, Bob,” Tareq looked at Bob warmly, “and you, Betty. I trust you are well?”

“Very well,” Betty replied cheerily. “I’m moving next week to be closer to my son.”

“How nice,” Tareq replied. He liked the idea of Betty being with her family.

“Betty here’s downsizing,” Bob elaborated, “and wants to find a home for her electronic keyboard. I thought maybe you’d want it.”

“Tareq,” Betty said sweetly, “I’d be very happy for you to have it.” Her eyes twinkled up at him from beneath the brim of a weathered straw hat. “Once a piano player, you know, always a piano player.” The offer left Tareq speechless, but the look in his eyes made Betty’s whole face shine. “Wonderful!” she said. “Bob will bring it by.” She reached out and took Tareq’s hand. “Play it in good health, my dear.”

Tareq kissed her on each cheek. “Thank you, Betty. I will.”

“I’ll bring it by in about an hour,” Bob offered. “Same place?”

“You remember?” Tareq asked with surprise.

“You betcha. But here’s my card. Call me so I have your number.” Tareq took the card and nodded. “In an hour?” Bob raised his eyebrows to ask for a final confirmation. “See you then?”

“See you then,” Tareq replied, the colloquial phrase flowing slowly but easily from his mouth.

Bob was true to his word and arrived precisely 60 minutes later. Tareq heard the car’s crunch on the gravel, put on his shoes and went out to meet him. Together they unloaded the keyboard and stand from Bob’s car. As they walked up the front steps, Juliette appeared at the door.

“Hello there!” Bob said to her brightly, “you must be...”

“Juliette,” she introduced herself. Bob balanced the end of the keyboard on his foot and reached out to shake Juliette’s hand.

“Bob,” Tareq added, “I would like you to meet my wife.” Tareq put his arm around Juliette’s waist and drew her to his side.

Bob smiled at Tareq first with a you-sly-devil grin, but then his expression metamorphosed into paternal, congratulatory approval. “Very nice to meet you,” Bob beamed at Juliette. “I’m sure you’re a far better dinner date than me!”

“I don’t know, Bob, from what I hear, I think you’re fair company,” Juliette wrapped her arm around Tareq’s waist now and pressed her fingers to his side.

“Let’s get this thing inside,” Bob said, picking up the keyboard again, and Tareq led the way to a stretch of empty wall in the dining room. “Oh jeeppers,” Bob muttered to himself. “No bench.”

“I will use a chair for now,” Tareq said. “It is fine.”

“Okay then,” Bob said, still with a hint of disappointment. “But if I see a bench that needs a home, I’ll pick it up for you.”

“Thank you, Bob,” Juliette said before Tareq had the chance. “We really appreciate it.”

After Bob left, Tareq pulled up a chair from the dining room table to the keyboard. He played a few scales to put his fingers in working order. “What would you like me to play?” he asked her.

“The *Moonlight Sonata*,” she replied, walking up behind him. She leaned over, and as he began to play, she put her right hand on top of his.

“What is it?” he asked, thinking she wanted him to stop.

“Keep going,” she told him, “I want to feel what it’s like when you’re playing.” He nodded and finished the piece with her hand resting on top of his own.

## *Dog Days*

Tareq was wide-awake well before dawn the next day. He turned his head to a still, dark sky, then got up from the bed carefully so as not to wake Juliette. He blew her a kiss at the door and started for the staircase, but then turned toward the guest room instead. Since his return from Cairo, he hadn't been in that room at all. He pushed the door gently and walked to the window. The patch of sky visible from this window appeared even darker than the swath of black framed in their bedroom window, and the stars shone brightly. But no Sirius, Tareq observed; that constellation had fallen out of view for a season. The Dog Days of Summer had arrived, both in Cairo and in New York.

Tareq closed the guest room door fully and headed downstairs to visit the new keyboard. It was a compelling reason to stay home that day, he thought to himself, but as he reached for a chair, he saw the papers Marian had given him the previous day. He reviewed them, double checked the train schedule, and shifted his gears from the keyboard to the library.

Tareq took an early train and left the house before Juliette was even fully awake. On the train, he took a cue from Emily and sat by a window that looked back at the station as the train pulled out. But there was no one to wave to on the platform; he'd seen himself off that morning. He texted Juliette that he was on his way and then made himself comfortable with a newspaper and pen and finished the crossword that he and Juliette had started the day before.

About an hour later, he nearly missed his stop. When he and Juliette went into the city, they took the train all the way to Grand Central Station; when his train arrived at 125<sup>th</sup> Street, he almost forgot to exit. He found the right bus; it was so crammed that he feared he wouldn't be able to figure out when to press the button to stop. He set the timer on his phone for 10 minutes; based on the directions Marian had printed out for him, the bus ride would be 11 minutes long. In 10 minutes, he'd signal the bus to stop. That would put him close enough.

Once on campus, he had no trouble finding his way. The library's heavy door swung open wide with a modest push, and Tareq proceeded to the information desk to present the credentials that Marian had prepared for him. As he handed the papers across the high desk, his stomach twinged, and he realized that he half-hoped that the letter from Marian would be insufficient. Now that he was in New York, at Columbia, he didn't want to spend the day at the library. But permission was granted swiftly, and he entered the elevator that would take him to the Arabic Collection.

The librarian on duty in the Arabic Collection eyed him dubiously over lime green eyeglass frames and explained the protocols for requesting materials. She was clear and methodical, and struck Tareq as the sort of person who wants to say things only once. He paid close attention to her instructions, and it began to sink in that he might spend nearly as much time waiting for some books to appear as he would spend looking at them.

Fortunately some more common volumes sat on shelves that he could peruse on his own. He made his way through the list, making notes about which volumes had been translated into English. Some books had multiple translations; he made a note of that, too. Marian would be pleased, he thought, at the sheer number of translations available, but he would have to tell her that he could not provide an opinion on them all.

The day dragged on, despite numerous successes. Tareq stepped out briefly for lunch, but didn't relax long. The library's summer hours were short, and the wait time for some of the books was long.

When the library closed, Tareq took a brief stroll around campus, making a mental catalogue of where he would linger the next time he was there. As he meandered, a text chimed from Juliette asking if he'd be home in time to sit on the porch and watch fireflies that evening. "Yes," he texted back. He found his way back to the correct bus stop, deferring more exploration until the next trip.

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When Tareq had a full command of the itinerary for Corning, he presented it to Juliette one night at dinner. He sat down with a stack of print outs, and before she could look at them, he took the sheets from the top and folded them away from her view. "These are the maps," he said inconsequentially, putting them far to the side. "These are about the museum," he placed a few sheets in front of her. "This is where we will stay." He placed those sheets next to the first stack. "And this is about Selim. We will meet him at the museum."

While she perused the plans, he picked up the maps and started clearing the table. By the time he returned with coffee, she had looked everything over. "This is great, Tareq. What a nice place to stay. And Selim." She paused to confirm she was saying his name correctly. Tareq nodded. "Selim looks very interesting."

"He works in the same glass-making tradition that began in Egypt thousands of years ago. But more modern designs. Let me show you." Tareq clicked on a tab on the computer with images of Selim's work.

"Beautiful," Juliette admired. "And we get to meet him?"

"Yes. At noon on the 5<sup>th</sup>. The museum is closed on the 4<sup>th</sup>."

“That’s a holiday,” Juliette said. All of a sudden, she wasn’t sure Tareq knew that. “It’s Independence Day. You know, the American Revolution.”

“Barbeques, parades and fireworks,” Tareq shared his knowledge. “I have been reading.” He clicked on a different tab for the city of Corning. “There is a concert that evening as well.” He pointed to the screen. July 4<sup>th</sup> wasn’t Juliette’s favorite holiday, but this year, she thought, it might shape up to be something special.

With Tareq’s and Juliette’s plans to be away for the 4<sup>th</sup>, the kids insisted on a barbeque the weekend before at Sam’s and Mark’s. Tareq and Juliette had visited them frequently since Memorial Day, and Samantha was getting used to the idea of leaving the baby in their hands. On the Saturday before the 4<sup>th</sup>, though, they all stayed together. Kenji made his grandmother’s special teriyaki chicken and Mark flipped the burgers. Mark explained to Tareq that as a man in the United States, he was going to need to learn to barbeque for himself, and Sam gave him a set of tongs, skewers and spatulas that rolled neatly into a portable case. Emily toured him through the varieties of potato salad, explained the importance having a red, white and blue fruit salad, and handed him a packet of sparklers.

“Are there any movies we need to watch for this holiday?” Tareq asked Emily as she lit the sparkler in his hand.

“Nah,” Emily replied, taking a step back to appreciate the glittery light.

“Yeah there is,” Samantha interjected. “*1776*. The musical.”

“You’re right, Sam!” Emily couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of that herself. “Have a copy? Or we can watch it online?” Samantha shrugged her shoulders.

“We definitely have a DVD of that cartoon song about the Constitution.” Mark now joined the conversation. “Remember? *We the People*...” he began to sing off-tune.

“Put your lawyer brain away, big brother,” Emily put her hand over his mouth. “Today’s about the revolution, not about the rules.”

Once the mosquitoes thickened, Juliette was ready to go home. Tareq packed up his new tools, they hugged and kissed all around, and then drove home, this time Tareq at the wheel. By the 4<sup>th</sup>, he would be more than ready to take to the American highway system. The challenge, he found, was paying attention with so few cars on the road. Driving on empty streets allowed the mind to wander.

As they pulled into the driveway at home, the gravel was loose beneath the wheels and some stones pinged against the car’s underbody. “Tareq,” Juliette took his arm as he pulled the key from the ignition, speaking with all the love and respect she felt for him. “It’s okay if I open the car door for myself.” His head jerked back and his brow furrowed. “Really, it’s fine. How about this: I’ll get my own car door, and you can get the front door.”

“When no one else is here,” he conceded. “But in front of the children, I will open the car door as well. This is a matter of respect for their mother.”

“Deal.” She opened the door and helped him retrieve everything from the trunk. At the front door, she waited as he opened it for her. They deposited the dishes and new toolkit in the kitchen, and then she took him in her arms. “Thank you,” she said. “I know you respect me, doors or no doors.”

“And the children?”

“They know you respect me too, Tareq. They do.”

“I love them, Juliette. I am not their father, but I love them.”

“I can see that, Tareq.”

“Do you know how I know that I love them?”

“How?”

“Because I worry!” he exclaimed with a chuckle and collapsed into his chair at the kitchen table. “I do not like Emily driving alone at night!” He shook his head in amazement at the parental concerns he had absorbed into his sense of self. “I worry about her making a living. I worry that Mark works too much, like his parents before him. I worry about Samantha. I worry about the baby!”

“To worry is the privilege of parenthood,” Juliette replied, rubbing his shoulders.

“Do you think they love me, too?” he looked up at her.

“Yes, Tareq. I think they do.” Juliette spoke haltingly.

“But it is still hard for Mark.”

“It is,” Juliette acknowledged. “But he’s got Sam.” Juliette massaged Tareq’s neck and then sat down across from him.

“They are remarkable people, Juliette,” Tareq complimented her. Juliette shrugged her shoulders casually, but she agreed with him wholeheartedly. “How did you raise them to be so?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she sighed. “Sometimes I think I just stayed out of the way.”

“I know you did not just *stay out of the way*,” he contradicted her playfully. This was not credible, both because of her personality and because children needed parents to be in their way, in the right way. “Tell me. What did you do?” There was no mention of what Mark had done. Tareq knew all too well that Juliette had raised their children largely on her own.

“Well,” Juliette let out a deep breath. “I’ve always tried to love them for who they were, not for the someone I somehow wished they would be.” Juliette caressed Tareq’s hand. “And when we had an argument, if they were right, I conceded. I might hate agreeing with them,” she threw him a knowing glance, “but if they had

the upper hand in logic and information, I found the humility to say, *You're right.*" She rummaged through memories of Emily and laughed aloud. "You know the first time I lost an argument to Emily? I think she was probably three years old! Is it really that important to wear socks? Not always." Juliette and Tareq both laughed. "And power," she continued. "You have to give a child an appropriate amount of power. That way, when you exercise *your* power, they know they have some of their own."

"You sound like a colonial governor," he chuckled.

"I do?" Juliette was alarmed at the characterization.

"Except with you, you are willing to relinquish power and settle for influence."

"I suppose that's right," she concurred. "Love is powerful, but it isn't about power."

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July arrived with a heat wave that reminded Tareq of Cairo and made Juliette wilt. They gave up on work in the days before the 4<sup>th</sup>, opting instead for stints on the porch with fresh, icy lemonade. Juliette sat with her computer on her lap, but without pretense of writing. She read news items aloud to Tareq, found old photos to show him for fun, and poked at information about Corning. Tareq roamed the Internet for websites about music and music theory. He found many games to teach music to children; learning would be so different for Sarah than it had been for him as a child.

Tareq navigated back to his email just as Juliette peered over his shoulder. "Is that one from Rana?" she asked with surprise. The words darted from her mouth before she could worry about sounding nosy.

"Yes." Tareq replied nonchalantly, but he reached for her hand with care.

"Why is she writing?" It was too late to worry about sounding nosy.

"She plans to visit Cairo and asks to see me," Tareq related the facts.

"Tareq," Juliette turned his shoulders to her. "Tell me about Rana." Her voice was insistent, but not unduly concerned.

"Rana?" Tareq tried hard to avoid the subject, but Juliette's eyes were fixed.

"Yes," Juliette repeated. "Rana."

"What is the word you used for Emily?" Tareq bored his fingers into Juliette's collarbone.

“Wheedle,” Juliette remembered. “And Emily’s not the only one in the family who’s good at it.”

“You did not mention that,” he pursed his lips and ran his tongue over his upper teeth.

“Too late now,” Juliette held up his ring that was still hanging on a chain around her neck. “You’re stuck.”

“Happily,” he replied. He clasped his hand around hers, the ring in her palm, and kissed her. For a brief moment, he was sure he had changed the subject.

“So tell me about Rana,” Juliette kissed him on the forehead.

Tareq sighed and resolved to get the conversation over with quickly. “I believe...” he began, but then paused, closed the computer, and looked down at his knees.

“What do you believe, Tareq?” Juliette lowered her head to his and looked up into his eyes.

Tareq ran his hand over her hair with a chuckle. “I believe she may have been in love with me.” He ejected the words quickly from his mouth.

“I see,” Juliette raised an eyebrow. “And?”

“And nothing,” he put his hands on her face and kissed her forehead to end the topic.

“I don’t think so,” Juliette pressed.

“And *nothing*,” Tareq insisted, bending his neck backwards and then from side to side. His voice sounded like a rubber band stretched to its limits. “Juliette, she is too young.”

“How young?”

“I do not know. Maybe 20 years younger?”

Juliette paused. “Young enough that you might have had a family with her.”

“I did not love her, Juliette,” he pulled her close. “And I did not want a family with her.”

“I’m being silly, Tareq, I know that,” Juliette rested her head on his shoulder. “But if you had married someone younger, you could have children of your own.”

“I do not need children of my own.” His voice was heavy; this was not an easy admission. A part of him felt he was supposed to want to father children. “But,” he continued, “I do want to be a parent now, with you.” He pulled her face into view. “I am happy, Juliette. I am. Emily, Mark, Samantha, Sarah. *You*. I am happy.”

“I am, too, Tareq. Very happy.” Juliette wiped her watery eyes and sniffly nose. “So what are you going to tell Rana?”

“I will tell her that I am in New York. And I may suggest that my cousin meet her at the airport.”

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By Tareq’s calculations, the drive to Corning would take four to six hours, depending on where they stopped and for how long. Tareq packed up the car after breakfast and called up the staircase that it was time to go. Juliette came down with her purse, tying her hair back on the way. “All set.”

The day was bright and streaked with clouds that accentuated the cerulean blue sky. The landscape was greener than anything Tareq could think of, with commanding vistas punctuated by cloistered turns. As they went west, the terrain flattened, but the green only seemed to intensify. Tareq’s desert was far behind him now.

They arrived in Corning by mid-afternoon and checked into a quaint bed and breakfast. In Juliette’s opinion, the photos that Tareq had shown her online had undersold the establishment. “Look at this balcony,” she called out to him. He joined her on the small terrace that looked onto a stream running through a dense wood. A wicker sofa, accompanied by a low table and two additional chairs, faced out toward the trees. “It’s so quiet,” she said. “I think we’re the only ones here.” She went back into the room and turned on the kettle. “Tea?” she called to him from inside.

He turned to her with a smile and walked her way. “Thank you, no,” he replied, shutting the balcony door and drawing the curtains closed. He found her in the dark. “Perhaps later.”

They ate dinner at the inn and then inquired about that evening’s concert. The proprietor gave them directions and a few tips on parking. “Be sure to bring the bug spray,” he told them. Juliette and Tareq looked at each other and shook their heads simultaneously. The proprietor smiled in a way that let them know this was a common reaction and handed Juliette a bottle. “Stick this in your purse,” he said, “and enjoy the evening.”

By the time Juliette and Tareq arrived for the concert, the stadium was filling with people young and old. The concert was scheduled for 8:30, and some families were arriving with a child already asleep in a stroller or over a parent’s shoulder. Juliette took Tareq’s hand as they made their way single file through the crowd and picked what she thought would be a good spot for seeing the fireworks at the end of the concert.

That night, Tareq got more than his fill of John Philip Sousa, tubas and trombones. Music conveyed so much about a culture, he thought, and marching band tunes were something he did not instinctively grasp. Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian*

*Spring*, however, seemed fitting for the place he now called home. *The 1812 Overture*, which concluded the program, was a rousing segue to fireworks.

“So how was your first 4<sup>th</sup> of July?” Juliette asked as they left the stadium and began hunting for their car.

“I liked it.” The food, the music, and the fireworks had all been enjoyable. “But I do not know how to celebrate independence.” His hand found its place on her back.

When Juliette opened her eyes the next morning, she looked across Tareq’s side of the bed to see him sitting on the balcony. His back was to her, a paper in one hand, his other arm resting across the top of the sofa. She slipped into some clothes and joined him in the fresh air.

“Good morning,” he said, “you have slept well.”

“Yes. And long. It’s almost 9.”

“We are not expected before noon. Tea?” he offered.

“Sure.” He handed her his cup. The morning sun was cool and angled, and the moisture was still visible on the grass below the balcony. The stream sparkled a short distance away, and a mixed choir of birds entertained anyone who would listen. Juliette sat down next to him, pulled her legs up on the sofa, and relaxed into his shoulder. She returned his tea to him and closed her eyes.

“Back to sleep?” he asked.

“No. Just happy,” she sighed.

After breakfast they left for the museum. They had about an hour before their appointment with Selim, so they explored the museum’s gallery devoted to the origins of glass. Many of the objects came from Egypt, including a miniature standing figure of a man, his skin bright blue, dating to the time of Tutankhamen.

Just before noon, they returned to the main entrance to meet Selim, who was already waiting for them by the information desk. Tareq walked directly to him, recognizing him from the photo on the website. The two men greeted each other like old friends, speaking animatedly in Arabic. “Selim says his English is not strong and he would prefer that I translate,” Tareq explained to Juliette. She smiled and nodded at Selim, and they followed him to his studio.

Selim showed them some works in progress and described his methods. He waited patiently as Tareq translated for Juliette and answered their questions with interest. The earliest glassmaking came from Egypt, he wanted them to know, and he was proud of being a recent arrival to an endeavor that was thousands of years in the making. He worked mainly in fused glass, he explained, because he loved the element of surprise. With fused glass, the kiln was a third partner in the artistic

process, along with the artist and the glass itself. Selim loved the kiln, he told them, because he could never be entirely sure what it would do.

From the kiln, Selim walked them to a table with several finished pieces. He held up one bowl to the light and pointed out various elements. Tareq explained that Selim called the bowl his Aleppo Bowl because he had met his wife in Aleppo.

Juliette's expression was electric. "Really? Did you tell him that you lived there? And that we saw the Aleppo Room in Berlin?"

"Yes, I explained this."

"The bowl is beautiful."

Selim nodded again at Juliette and then at Tareq, and the two men fell into a longer conversation. The next thing Juliette knew, Selim was placing the bowl in her hands and nodding in a way that was almost a bow.

"He would like us to have this," Tareq explained. "As a wedding present."

Juliette was at first speechless, but then protested to Tareq. "This is too much, Tareq. We can't accept this."

"I believe we must, Juliette. To refuse the gift..."

"Would be an insult," she completed his thought. "I understand. But Tareq, really, this is extraordinary."

"It is."

"Thank you, Selim. Shukran," Juliette said to Selim, mirroring his nodding bow. Then she turned to Tareq. "What can we do in return?"

"Be happy and appreciate the bowl."

"I don't think he could know how much this means to us."

"I believe he does. He told me his wife is Christian."

They checked out of the inn after breakfast the next day. Tareq took the driver's seat again, and they joined the main highway, but not in the direction from which they had arrived. "Tareq," Juliette nudged, "I wasn't paying attention, but I think home is the other way."

"We are not going home yet."

"No?"

“No,” he shook his head and widened his eyes with mischief. Juliette had seen this look many, many times now.

“Is this a kidnapping?” she teased.

“Of sorts.” His voice was more serious than she had anticipated.

“Where are we going?”

“You will see.” About an hour later, they pulled into a state park north of Corning. The signage at the front of the park showed a variety of activities, both on water and on land.

“Oh,” she said, “I think I know what this is about.”

“Today,” he announced, “you will learn to swim.”

Tareq had picked this lake carefully. Swimming was allowed only under the watchful eyes of a lifeguard, and a rope with buoys made clear where the swimming boundary ended. A beautiful waterfall accented the view in one direction, and the area was extremely clean, almost pristine. The lake was shallow, so the water would be neither deep nor cold. Dark he could not control.

They pulled up to the parking lot near the small beach. Tareq got out of the car and went around to open her door; this time, he knew, she needed a little extra help. He escorted her to the trunk to get their gear.

“I didn’t bring my suit.”

“I did. And towels. And sunscreen.” He caressed her fair skin gently and then pulled a bag out for her.

*That’s what the extra bag was for*, she thought. She had noticed it in the car before. “You thought of everything.”

“I believe I did.” Tareq opened the bag and pulled out a rash guard in turquoise blue, its tags still boasting the power of its SPF. “Emily ordered this for you. She said it was like the blue of your pashmina.” Emily did not yet know about the dress that was the original inspiration.

“Emily knows about this?”

“Of course. She is a most helpful ally.” And again, that smile, that look of mischief that in the end, Juliette always found irresistible. “We can change over there,” he pointed to a building a few yards away. They walked to the changing rooms, and he gave her a hand a tug before he went his way and she went hers. “You will be fine,” he reassured. “I promise.”

Juliette was not at all certain she would be fine. But she trusted Tareq. And while Mark had always told her that she *should* swim, Tareq was going to show her *how*. The least she could do was put on her suit and try.

He was waiting for her when she emerged from the changing room, suit and rash guard on, towel wrapped around her waist. He put his hand on her back and guided her to the water. They put their towels and bag on the grass, and Tareq tucked the car key into a pocket in his swimsuit.

“Your swim trunks and rash guard are all black,” she said, noting the obvious.

“Yes.”

“If you go under the water, I won’t be able to see you.”

“I will never be that far away.”

They neared the water’s edge. “At first,” he informed her, “we will go only where we can walk.”

“We’ll just wade?” she asked. He nodded. “Okay,” she said nervously. “Okay.”

“Then we will swim.”

“I don’t know how.”

“I know this.” Still standing on dry land, he explained to her the mechanics of swimming, showing her how to stroke with her arms in circles. “And kick. Either like this,” he motioned his hands like a flutter kick, “or like a frog. Do you understand me? Or should I lay down on the ground to show you?”

Juliette laughed. The idea of Tareq flat on his stomach on the grass by the lake, moving his legs like a frog, had a certain appeal. “Don’t bother,” she told him. “I know how it’s supposed to work. And besides, I didn’t bring the camera for evidence.”

Her sense of humor reassured Tareq he had not pushed too far or too hard. He returned his hand to her back. “Come. I can show you more easily in the water.” They walked back and forth along the edge of the lake, his hand at her back, first just to their knees, then to their thighs, and then to their waists. “The water is nice on a hot day,” he told her, not opening the topic for debate.

“Yeah,” she agreed reluctantly. He could see she was anxious, so he kept her walking. After a few more trips up and down the shoreline, he stopped directly opposite the lifeguard’s elevated chair. He put out his forearms under the water, palms up, and told her to lie down across his arms.

“But my face will get wet,” she protested.

“Yes.” Her eyes objected, but then she gave in, laying her body across his arms. She craned her neck back to keep her head out of the water.

“No,” he told her. “You must allow your face to touch the water. I am holding you. Nothing can happen.” She did as he instructed her, bobbing her face in and out of the water until it no longer frightened her.

“Now, move your arms as I showed you.” That part was easy, she thought to herself.

He saw her growing confidence, so told her to kick. “But then won’t I swim off your arms?” she asked. He could hear her beginning to panic.

“No, I will hold you.” He shifted his arms and curled his fingers around her waist. “Now you can stroke and kick but not move.”

Juliette found the courage to kick her legs slightly. “Stronger,” he told her. She kicked with more force, but still not enough to actually swim. “Stronger still,” he encouraged her further. At last, she kicked hard enough to create a splash. “You are ready,” he announced with confidence.

“No, I’m not,” she contradicted with equal confidence.

“Now hold my hands,” his statement was definitive. She stood up in the water and took his hands.

“You see the float behind me,” he gestured with his head toward a round raft equipped with a short ladder. “We will swim there,” his expression was kind but made clear that he would entertain no objections. The float was not many strokes away. “I will walk backwards, and you will kick.”

“But you’ll hold my hands.”

“At first.” As he walked backwards, she kicked with increasing force. “You are doing well,” he encouraged her. “Now we will let go, and you will add your arms.” She shook her head as he nodded his. “I will always be within reach,” he reassured her. He dropped her hands and said, “Stroke! Kick!” He spoke to her in a tone that was aggressive and demanding.

Juliette stroked with her arms and kicked with her legs. Her movements were clumsy and uncoordinated at first, but then she found the rhythm that created forward motion. Tareq swam slowly next to her, his eyes fixed on her.

“Wonderful!” he exclaimed. “You are swimming!”

She was just about to say, “No, I’m not,” when she realized that she was, in fact, swimming. They swam together to the float and held onto the side.

“You did it!” he congratulated her.

“We did it,” she congratulated them both. She looked around her. The lake, which had seemed so big, was in reality rather small.

“There’s the lifeguard,” he pointed out, “and our things on the grass, and the car.” And beyond that, the horizon of possibility.

They climbed up the short ladder and sat on the side of the raft until the sun had warmed them through. “Ready to swim back?” she asked. “I don’t want to get home too late.”

“Ready,” he agreed, and as they swam back to shore, Tareq thought of all the swimming lessons they had given each other. They had done it.

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Throughout July, Tareq returned frequently to Columbia. Even now, the campus was full of activity, with faculty, students, and researchers using the holidays to best advantage. Tareq knew that the summer environment had to be quieter than it would be once the regular school year commenced, but in comparison to home, it was a veritable beehive.

Tareq’s work at the library was now well in hand. In his mind, the work was actually done. On one particularly hot, bright day, he left the Arabic Collection at lunchtime with no intention of returning. He got a sandwich and then let himself wander around the campus. He meandered at first, but then admitted to himself that he had a destination.

“Excuse me,” Tareq approached a young man sitting on a bench beneath a sprawling honey locust tree. “Where is the music building?” The late-teen did not answer; as Tareq drew nearer, he noticed the young man’s earbuds. Tareq touched his arm to get his attention; the young man removed one of the two earbuds and looked up at Tareq through shaggy bangs.

“Yup?” he said, still nodding his head back and forth to the beat of the music he could hear in one ear.

“I am looking for the music building,” Tareq asked again.

“Right behind you,” the young man pointed over Tareq’s shoulder.

“Thank you,” Tareq nodded.

“No problem,” the adolescent replied as he returned the earbud to his open ear and closed his eyes.

Tareq turned around to face the building. He thought a moment, and then walked to the main door and opened it confidently. He entered the foyer and stood still, listening. Hearing nothing, he turned his attention to a message board that was filled with paper notices in all colors and sizes, tacked to the brown cork with an equally diverse array of pins and thumbnails. Most of the announcements were from the last semester, but Tareq read them all anyway and thought about bringing Juliette to the campus for a concert once the message board had been refreshed.

As he was reviewing information about student recitals, Tareq heard a piano bench scrape noisily across the floor. The sound seemed to come from the adjacent corridor. Tareq bit his lip and then walked toward the sound. A few steps down the hall, he heard someone practicing the piano. The scale was familiar, but to Tareq felt out of place. The minor key drew him to the closed door of a practice room.

Tareq stood outside the door and listened. He remembered learning the words *Phrygian dominant scale* as a child from his piano teacher who proudly explained that this mode was common in Egyptian music. The teacher had made Tareq repeat the term in English as well as in Arabic. The mode wasn't unique to Egypt, the teacher allowed, but he wanted Tareq to appreciate it as a part of his heritage. As a boy, Tareq had wanted to laugh at his teacher's statement, but now the simple sequence of notes made him weep inside, and then made him knock on the door.

"Yes?" the pianist asked as he opened the door. "Something wrong?"

"No," Tareq replied. He felt he should say more, but his voice hid behind his thoughts.

"Can I help you?"

"I am Tareq," he managed to introduce himself, "I heard you play."

"Hi. I'm Tom," the man replied, offering a handshake. "I'm an adjunct here. Musicology. You?"

"I am researching in the Arabic Collection," Tareq replied.

"Super," Tom effused. "I get in there myself now and again."

"You do?"

"Yes," Tom told him, leaving the practice room and joining Tareq in the hall. "I'm interested in Arabic influences in American popular music. You know," he strummed an air guitar, "like Dick Dale." Tareq's eyes registered nothing. "King of the Surf Guitar?" Tareq shook his head. "Some people know him from the soundtrack to the movie *Pulp Fiction*." Tareq shook his head again. "Where you from?" Tom inquired.

"Egypt."

"Wow. You play an instrument?"

"The piano," Tareq heard himself reply.

"Fantastic," Tom exuded. "Mind if I pick your brain about a few things?"

The image of someone picking his brain did not sit well with Tareq, but he replied politely, "Not at all."

“Wanna go for a coffee?” Tom suggested. Tareq nodded sincerely.

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In August, when Tareq returned to Columbia, it was for music and conversation, not literature. He and Tom now met regularly, with Tom serving as an eager guide to music in New York City.

“Your food or my food?” Tom asked Tareq one day at lunchtime.

“I do not know,” Tareq replied. “What is your food?”

“BBQ,” Tom said invitingly. “Texas style.” That didn’t answer the question for Tareq, but he accepted. “Great,” Tom continued. “It’s near a music store I think you’ll like. We’ll kill two birds with one stone.” Tareq trusted Tom that killing two birds at once would be a good thing, at least this time.

When they got to the music store, Tareq was happy to see that Tom had not exaggerated. Bins of sheet music occupied shelves in rows so narrow that browsers had to squeeze by one another. Near the front of the store, racks displayed different types of paper for composing and notation. In a glass case behind the cash register was a display of metronomes, electronic tuning forks and transducers. Small baskets of picks, reeds, and chord changer clips were scattered throughout the store in no apparent order, but the customers all seemed to know their way around.

“Looks like you’re starting a music library!” Tom slapped Tareq on the back when he found him with a nearly foot high stack of scores at the register.

“I left most of my sheet music at home,” Tareq explained. “Thank you for bringing me here.”

“Any time, Tareq buddy,” Tom could see that this trip to the music store meant more to Tareq than it did to him. “Any time.”

At breakfast the next morning, Tareq showed Juliette his music, holding each piece up for her to see and then placing each back into the bag rather than on the table. He had learned this lesson as a child; liquids near sheet music had a tendency to spill.

“What are you going to play first?”

“*Rhapsody in Blue*,” he announced, handing her the score for inspection.

Juliette leafed through the many pages. “I don’t really read music,” her voice sounded vaguely concerned, “but there’s a lot of black ink here.” Juliette looked up at Tareq. “Doesn’t that mean it’s difficult?”

“Yes,” he confirmed. “But I have always wanted to play it.”

They cleaned up their breakfast and then headed to the dining room, Juliette to her computer and Tareq to his keyboard. He opened the score and tried to play, then closed it again and warmed up with some scales. He opened the *Rhapsody* again and put his fingers to the keys. He didn’t like the sound of the music on the electronic keyboard, and he was disappointed in his fingers, too.

Juliette observed the tension mounting in his arms and shoulders. “What’s the matter?” she asked, pushing an *I told you so* back down her throat.

“It does not sound good on the keyboard,” he sighed. “And my skills are not what they were.” He sighed even more deeply.

“It’s okay, Tareq,” she rose from her seat and joined him at his chair. “It’s been a long time since you’ve played regularly.” She wrapped her arms around his shoulders to comfort him, but he shrugged them off. Then he banged all ten of his fingers down on ten different keys at once.

“That’s going to help.” As soon as Juliette heard her words, she remembered once saying something similar to Emily. It hadn’t helped then, either.

“No!” he retorted under his breath. He flipped his hands back and forth before his eyes, glaring first at his palms and then at the back of his hands. He pulled at each of his fingers. And then, taking a deep breath, he said with a forced calm, “I should be able to play better than this. I used to be able to do this.”

“Tareq, it’s been a long time,” she replied, gently messing up his hair. “A very long time. Be patient with yourself.”

He stared at the piano to compose himself and then ran the back of his hand along the full length of the keyboard. When he got to the highest note, he reached up for Juliette’s hand and kissed it. “You are right,” he conceded and rested his cheek in her hand.

“In English people say *practice makes perfect*,” Juliette told him. She hugged him around the neck again, and this time he relaxed into her embrace. “But you know, I’m not sure that’s true. Perfect isn’t possible.” She kissed the top of his head. “But practice is.”

## *Composition*

After Corning, Storm King topped Tareq's priorities from Juliette's list. Just the name alone was enough as it reminded him of Hadad, the god of storms. He did some research, even consulting Marian, to see if there were a connection, but he found none.

"Tram or on foot?" he asked Juliette as he was reviewing the online map of the Storm King grounds the day before their visit.

"Hmmm, foot," she replied, her eyes not wavering from her computer.

"Then we should anticipate a full day there," he carried on, "according to the website."

"Hmm," she nearly droned, engrossed in the document she was editing.

"And Saturday?" he asked. "Or should we put this off until next year?" He waited for a response. "Juliette, did you hear me?"

"Hmm," she replied.

Tareq got up from the table and walked around to where she was sitting across from him. He put his hands on her shoulders, craned his neck around her and put his face in front of hers. "Juliette," he called her to attention, "Storm King on Saturday, all day, no tram?"

"I'm sorry, Tareq," she took off her reading glasses, "I wasn't paying attention. I'm sorry."

"It is alright," he kissed her kindly. "Meet the deadline so we can go."

She took one of his hands from her shoulder, kissed it and then looked him straight in the eye. "And yes, that all sounds right. We should eat beforehand. Once we're in the park, we'll walk away from the picnic area and won't get back that way until we've gone full circle. Don't enter the park hungry."

The next day, the sky was cloudy in a way that threatened showers but not worse, so they stuck to their plan, umbrellas at the ready. When they arrived, theirs was

the only car to turn from the road into the main entrance. In the days leading up to this excursion, Tareq had read about many of the sculptures, and he knew where he wanted to go first: the *Storm King Wall*. “We should park at the south lot. That will take us to a picnic area, and then we may walk from there.”

They parked the car, enjoyed their picnic, and then headed to an area on the map marked as The South Fields. They walked slowly down a curving trail dotted with sculptures. Juliette and Tareq could hear the interstate highway, but the trees filtered the whirr of the outside world, and no other visitors were in sight.

Soon they glimpsed a low wall made of irregular stacked stones that cut a straight line across the field. It had one visible opening, located at the intersection with the path. The wall continued uninterrupted on either side of the path, disappearing both left and right into some trees. From the map they could see another opening in the wall near a grove by a lake, and they walked in that direction. The map did not deceive them; when they arrived at the small forest, they were able to walk through the wall and follow another route visible in the grass. This new way was faint; few feet had trod here. They followed it as far as they could and came upon a vast, open field with undulating waves of earth that pulsed across many acres.

Tareq looked at the map. “This is *Wavefield* by Maya Lin.” He pulled out his phone to search for more information. “Seven waves, each 400 feet long. The waves are between 10 and 15 feet high, as in the open sea.” The mounds of green earth did evoke the sea, they agreed, but also the mountains around them.

From *Wavefield*, they turned back to the wall and followed it to the edge of the lake. The wall appeared to dip beneath the surface of the water and then emerge again on the other side. “It looks like it continues under the lake,” Juliette commented. “There’s a barrier even if you can’t see it.”

“Unless you can swim,” Tareq corrected. She nodded at him, and then turned to look out over the lake. In the water’s dark, mirror-like surface, she could see the obstacles that they had overcome to stand together in that place. They were alone; Tareq kissed her as freely as if they were at home.

They continued around the edge of the lake, where there was no path on the map, and met the wall where it picked up again. Unlike the section on the other side of the lake, this part of the wall snaked around and under densely planted trees. Juliette and Tareq could hear a rain shower burst above them, but the summer leaves sheltered them. By the time they arrived back into the open field, the rain had subsided.

They followed a new route now, this one lined with trees planted in pairs, evenly matched along the way, like happy couples greeting them as they walked by. Juliette and Tareq accepted these companions, Tareq’s hand at her back and Juliette’s head on his arm, remembering walks in Cairo and Berlin. They would do this every year, Juliette thought to herself. This would be a tradition. Toward the top of the hill, they looked back at the valley and saw the rain clouds parting in the distance.

“We’re almost to my favorite,” Juliette told Tareq. She led him to a large, low, flat stone with a boulder to one side that was cracked in two pieces. The boulder was hollow; the opening was big enough to seat a child. “This is *Momo Taro*,” she said. “By Isamu Noguchi. I’ve been visiting this sculpture for years.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because you can touch it,” she replied without having to think about her answer. “Most art you can’t touch. But this one you can. You can sit on it or stand on it. And if you’re small enough, you can even nestle yourself into the empty peach pit.”

“Peach pit?”

“The legend of Momo Taro,” she continued. “He sprang from a peach pit to become the son of an elderly couple.” She walked over to the hollow that looked like it might have held the pit of a fruit. They sat together near the pit and took in the sprawling vista. The stone was cool in the heat of the day.

“Tareq,” Juliette opened the door to this conversation hesitantly, “I’ve wanted to ask you for a long time now. What did your family say when you were in Cairo?”

“They are happy for me.”

“They are?”

“Of course.”

“What did you tell them?”

“That I am staying in the United States. So they are happy for me.” He waited for her condemnation of this half-truth, but she said nothing. “Juliette,” he continued in a tone that made clear that this was a carefully considered strategy. “This is a story they can tell others.”

“And?”

“Later I will tell them I have married. This they can also tell others.” He searched her eyes for a reproach, but found none. “And then later, I will tell them I have married you. And this they will not need to tell others.” He looked again, but she continued to listen without criticism. “And then I will send them a photo.”

“And they’ll see that I don’t look Muslim,” she noted, fearing she’d found a flaw in the plan.

“Of course. But they may believe you are Muslim if they wish.”

“The truth’s going to come out eventually.”

“Yes. Eventually. But slowly. It will seep into the ground like gentle rain. The sort of rain that helps the plants to grow. It will not wash away the fertile soil.”

This was the sort of approach you could expect from a security officer, she thought. Tactical, designed to minimize conflict, save everything good that could be saved, and lay the groundwork for the future. All combined with a diplomat's skill of letting everyone walk away from the table with what they needed to tell their constituents.

"I am not ashamed of you, Juliette." He didn't know if he needed to say this, but her silence made him uneasy.

"I know," she reassured him. "I've never thought that. I would never think that."

"But you are unhappy?"

"I don't know," she thought out loud. "I don't like things being this way, but under the circumstances, I think you're wise." He moved closer to her on the stone slab and put his arm around her. They sat with each other and with their thoughts. "I'm not sure what else to do," she sighed.

The fading light alerted them that the museum would close soon, so they left *Momo Taro* for home. As they passed through the museum's main building on their way back to the parking lot, they saw a sign near the door that read "Ben and Beth's Wedding Reception". Tareq and Juliette looked at each other in mutual recognition of an idea. "At Storm King?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Just us and the kids?"

He nodded.

"We could just walk down to *Wavefield* and have the ceremony ourselves."

"Yes."

The next day Juliette researched how to obtain a marriage license in the State of New York. She sat in her favorite spot in the screened-in porch with a view of the daylilies; she respected flowers that bloomed in the heat of summer. She sank into the sofa's ample cushions and propped her legs on the coffee table. "Tareq, did you bring your birth certificate?"

"Of course," he called to through the open door in the kitchen. "Why?" he asked, appearing in the doorway with a cup of tea.

"We need it to prove you're over 16," she replied into her computer. "It says right here that that's the legal age of marriage consent in New York." She pointed at the screen with her right hand and extended her left hand to him.

He placed the tea on the table and cuddled up next to her, stroking the gray in his beard. “Do you think they will need it when they see me?”

“And then we need proof of identity,” she kissed the gray and picked up the teacup. “Your passport will be fine for that.”

“My passport is in English and Arabic. My birth certificate is only in Arabic.”

“That could be a problem,” she scrunched her mouth up to one side. “We can call the lawyer tomorrow. He’ll know what to do.”

“Is that all?” Tareq peered over her shoulder now, reading the website for details.

“I need to provide Mark’s death certificate.” She said this with a flatness of emotion that took her aback. She thought it ought to hurt to say the words *death certificate*, but it did not. “And then we need someone to officiate, and two witnesses.” Two witnesses would be easy, she thought. Samantha could serve that function, and maybe Kenji. Kenji was starting to feel like a permanent part of the family album, so Juliette felt it would be okay to ask. She couldn’t find anything in the legalese to indicate that the bride or groom’s children shouldn’t be witnesses, but that felt odd. She felt no pain at the phrase *death certificate*, but didn’t want to ask her children to sign her marriage license with Tareq.

But who could officiate? She couldn’t imagine a clergyman conducting the ceremony. The information she found online said that judges could perform weddings, but that felt too impersonal. She posed the question to Tareq, but he shrugged his shoulders. The process of marrying in Egypt was so different than in the United States that he was at a loss to offer any advice.

“I’ll call Emily,” Juliette stated with confidence as she reached for her cell phone on the table. She was sure that Emily would have some clue, some point of reference. And Emily did not disappoint.

“Oh yeah,” Emily launched in. “I went to a wedding last year where the bride’s sister did the wedding. The whole thing. In New York, apparently anyone can be ordained by some organization.... I’ll find out.”

“Thanks, honey,” Juliette said, “and you’re okay with the idea of our just showing up at Storm King, finding a spot, and having the ceremony?”

“I love it. It’s not what I would expect, but I love it.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s not exactly the traditional route,” Emily observed. “You don’t usually make it up as you go along like this.”

“Maybe I’m growing up,” Juliette told her daughter. “Learning to improvise.”

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Tareq and Juliette were each at their keyboards in the dining room a few mornings later when Emily called to say that pretty much anyone could obtain the legal right to perform a wedding in the State of New York. Emily reviewed the process with Juliette in detail and then asked, “So who’s going to officiate?”

“I don’t know, Em,” Juliette rubbed her head as she got up from her computer and then flopped onto the sofa in the living room. “I haven’t gotten that far.”

“What about me?” Emily asked.

“You?” Juliette said with surprise.

“That bad an idea, huh?” Emily giggled.

“No, no. It’s a wonderful idea. Would you? Really?”

“I’d love to! Just clear it with Tareq.”

Juliette held the phone to her chest and called for Tareq. He appeared from the dining room and tossed his head back slightly in acknowledgement. “Emily says that she can get the qualifications necessary to officiate at our wedding. She wants to do it. But she wants to make sure you’re okay with it.”

A smile spread across Tareq’s face that was the sum of joy and reason. Very little could make more sense. “Of course,” he beamed. “Tell her of course.”

Juliette returned to the phone. “Tareq and I both say thank you, honey.” Emily’s squeal escaped over the phone and Tareq could hear her, even at a distance. He walked over to Juliette and took the phone from her hand.

“Emily.”

“Yeah, Tareq?”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Here is your mother again.” Tareq returned the phone to Juliette and walked through the foyer to the kitchen. He looked down at the desk along the way and ran his hand over the spot where he had seen Rana’s card months ago. He released the memory and walked into the kitchen. Standing at the coffee maker, he stared out the window, trying to wrap up his emotions into a package he could hold. But they defied him. His feelings were too big, too wide-ranging, too free to be held in one spot. He let his happiness swirl around him and waited for Juliette to hang up the phone.

“I’ll just call Mark,” Juliette said popping her head into the kitchen and then returning to the dining room table. “Make us some coffee?” Tareq nodded, grabbed some beans and took the grinder from the cupboard.

Mark answered on the first ring, and Juliette put him on speaker. She filled him in on all the plans to the accompaniment of the coffee grinder. “And Emily is going to officiate!” she saved the best for last. “Your sister has it all figured out.” Juliette laughed and explained how Emily was going to gain the credentials to perform a wedding in the state of New York. By now the smell of coffee was wafting toward her.

“Mom, are you really sure about this?” Mark questioned her. “You read the papers. Have you even thought that maybe all Tareq wants is a green card? Or the house? He doesn’t even have a job.”

Juliette looked up and saw Tareq in the archway between the kitchen and the dining room, a cup of coffee in each hand.

Juliette’s anger at Mark started in her ankles and pushed its way up through her knees. When it reached her hips, the outrage lifted her from her chair and expanded into her torso. When it hit her throat, she said calmly, “Mark, I have you on speakerphone. I’m going to hang up now. I need to speak with Tareq.” She hung up the phone and placed it on the table without a sound.

Tareq stood motionless in the doorway, his eyes fixed on Juliette. His expression was an apoplectic intersection of grief and disbelief. “Tareq,” Juliette moved toward him, but he turned away from her. He put the coffee cups down on the table in the kitchen, continued on to the foyer, put on his shoes and walked out the door.

Juliette stood frozen at first and then ran. By the time she got to the front door, Tareq was halfway down the driveway. “Tareq!” she called to him. He raised one hand in the air to let her know he had heard his name, but he did not turn around. “Tareq!” she called again. The shock was giving way to panic. “Stop!” she called out. He stopped, stretched his arms, shoulders and neck, and rotated his head in a circle. And then he kept walking.

“Tareq,” Juliette was now yelling from the front porch. “I said *stop*.” The anguish in her voice forced him to stop and turn 180 degrees.

“What is it?” he asked her. He looked in her direction, but not at her.

“You know what it is. We need to talk.”

Tareq didn’t want to talk. He wanted to be furious, and he wanted to be alone with his rage. “To talk?” he asked. “What is there to talk about?”

“I’m angry, too,” she said, walking down to him. The gravel hurt her bare feet. “Please talk with me.” He filled his cheeks with air and then exhaled slowly. Eventually he nodded and walked back to the house with her. “Thank you,” she said, taking his hand.

They joined their coffee cups at the kitchen table; the coffee was still warm. “Tareq,” Juliette began, “Mark’s out of line. But I don’t think he meant what he said. He’s angry about his dad being dead. I think he may be angry at the dad who was alive. Let me talk to him, okay? Just give it some time.”

Tareq loved how Juliette loved her children. But this wound was severe. “Juliette,” he choked up as he looked down at his coffee, “if the children do not accept me...”

“Then what?” Juliette asked. Her voice was impatient. “Your family certainly doesn’t accept me. They don’t even know I exist.”

Tareq drummed his fingers against the butcher-block surface. He wanted to fidget with something, but there was nothing on the table other than the coffee cups. He pushed his seat back with a sharp shove and banged up against the countertop behind him. “Ouch,” he said involuntarily. He rubbed his neck and then put his face in his palms, retreating into a world of his own. After a few moments, he returned from his thoughts. He leaned against the wall and then stretched out his arms to her. “You are right. Do what you know is best with Mark.”

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Tareq’s days were now as full of music as Juliette’s were full of words. They worked together in the dining room at their respective keyboards. He accompanied her work with gradual improvement with the *Rhapsody in Blue*. She accompanied his practicing with the clicks of her computer. And sometimes Tareq took paper, lined out a musical staff, and wrote music of his own.

Tareq returned to the city, too, heeding repeated invitations from Tom for more BBQ and more conversation with an ever-widening circle of musicians. These invitations were always welcome, and Tareq learned a new word: *gregarious*. Tom knew an endless stream of people and had energy for them all.

“Tareq, this is Adam George,” Tom introduced Adam enthusiastically on a New York sidewalk on one drippingly humid day. “Adam, meet Tareq Khalifa. Tareq’s moved here from Cairo.”

“Great to meet you, Tareq,” Adam extended his hand warmly.

“I am happy to meet you as well,” Tareq shook his hand.

“Adam’s a musician, too,” Tom went on, “and he’s doing some work these days with immigrants from the Middle East.”

“Music therapy,” Adam interjected, “mainly with kids.”

Tareq spoke to him next in Arabic, but saw the confusion on Adam’s face and stopped. “Do you speak Arabic?” Tareq asked.

“Not a word!” Adam laughed out loud. “But my family is from Lebanon.”

“Lebanon? But you do not speak Arabic?”

“I’m third generation. I was born in Brooklyn. Some people would say I barely speak English!” Tom and Adam laughed uproariously, and Tareq laughed at their laughter. “But Tom’s the one with the real language barrier,” Adam went on. “He’s from Texas. He’s more of a foreigner in New York than you are, Tareq.” Adam put his hand on Tareq’s shoulder. “I bet there are more people in New York right now from Egypt than there are from Texas. What d’ya think, Tom?”

Tom nodded. “I’ve certainly found more Middle Eastern coffee shops than Texas BBQ places.” Tom and Adam laughed again like this was the funniest joke in the world.

Over lunch the three men talked about music and musicians from all around the world, and Tareq asked Adam questions about his work with refugees. Adam asked Tareq questions, too, and they both knew there was much more to say.

As they were finishing up, Tareq’s phone rang. “Excuse me,” he said, “It is Juliette. I must answer.” As Tareq listened to Juliette, Adam and Tom watched Tareq’s expression change from joy at hearing her voice to shock, then to consternation and then to a quiet calm as he hung up the phone.

“I must go to New York Presbyterian Hospital. Do you know where that is?”

“Yes,” they both responded in a split second. “I’ll take you there,” Tom offered. “Me, too,” Adam said.

Tareq arrived at the hospital before Juliette and asked to see Mark Laroche. “Are you a relative?” the nurse at the desk asked him.

“I am to marry his mother,” Tareq responded.

“Where’s his father?”

“He is deceased. His mother is coming.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to take a seat,” she told him sympathetically but firmly.

Tareq did as he was told and started to dial Juliette’s number, but then realized she was driving. He called Emily; Juliette had already reached her, and she was on her way. “And Samantha?” Tareq asked Emily.

“She’s still at her family’s summer place,” Emily told him. “But Mom talked to her. Mom told her to stay put until we knew more.”

Eventually Juliette called again. She had just parked the car and was walking to the emergency room entrance. She was still talking to Tareq on the phone when he saw her push open the glass entrance door. Juliette hung up as the door closed behind her and walked into Tareq’s arms.

“They will not tell me anything,” Tareq’s voice was pained. “I am not related by blood.”

“Regulations,” Juliette exhaled. “Welcome to the United States.” She walked to the front desk, presented her identification, explained that Mark’s wife was out of town, and asked for permission to see her son. The nurse offered to take Juliette to see him. “And my fiancé?” Juliette pointed to Tareq, but the nurse shook her head. “Okay. Give me a second.”

“Tareq, they won’t let you in,” she confirmed. “But maybe wait here for Emily?” Tareq nodded. This gave him a job he could do. “I’ll call if they let me use the phone in there.” Juliette disappeared with the nurse behind a pair of swinging doors.

By the time Juliette reemerged, Emily and Kenji had arrived. Juliette noticed Emily first, seated between Tareq and Kenji. Emily’s right arm looped through Kenji’s, and her head rested on his shoulder. Her left hand held Tareq’s right. All three sat with their eyes closed.

“Tareq,” Juliette whispered. All three of them opened their eyes.

“Mom!” Emily jumped up. “Is he okay?”

“Yeah,” Juliette said with relief. “They’re calling it a *psychogenic blackout*.”

“A what?” Emily asked for all of them.

“I don’t really know, honey,” Juliette said honestly. “A friend from work saw him black out at lunch and brought him here. They’ll run some tests, but they think he’s just under too much stress, not sleeping enough, not taking care of himself. He just blacked out.”

“Did you call Sam?” Emily asked.

“Not yet,” Juliette replied. “The doctor said she’d call her directly. I told her Sam’s out of town and that we’d take him home as soon as they’ll let us. Sam can get back here tomorrow. But we can try her in a minute.”

Tareq stood up and offered Juliette his seat next to Emily. “I will find coffee.” He wanted something to do. “Kenji, will you help me?”

Several hours later, Mark was ready to be discharged. Emily and Kenji hugged him in the waiting room and then said goodbye.

“Hey, Tareq,” Mark greeted Tareq sheepishly after Emily and Kenji were beyond earshot.

“Hello, Mark,” Tareq replied with restraint.

“Let’s get you home, Mark,” Juliette broke the tension. “I think we all know we need to talk, but now is not the time.” They drove to Mark’s house, arriving well after the summer sunset. “Where’s the dog?” Juliette asked as Mark opened the door to the dark, empty house.

“Sam’s got her,” he replied.

“You go to bed,” she ordered him. Tareq stood by Juliette’s side and said nothing.

“But...” Mark objected.

Juliette shook her head. “Not after today. We can talk tomorrow.”

Mark saw both the resolve and the fatigue in his mother’s face. He looked at Tareq, too, who met his eyes impassively. “Okay. Once a mother, always a mother, huh?” Mark chuckled his father’s chuckle.

Juliette nodded and gave him a look he remembered from the time he had gone skiing without permission and had ended up breaking his leg. He had told her he was just staying at a friend’s house for the weekend. The plan was working until he had to call her from a hospital in New Hampshire.

“That’s right, sweetheart. I’m still your mother.” She rubbed his shoulder. “Go to bed. Tareq and I will figure out where to sleep.”

Juliette and Tareq watched Mark walk down the hall, enter his and Sam’s bedroom, and close the door behind him. “Hungry?” she asked Tareq. He shook his head. “Me neither.” She wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her head in his chest. “Let’s just go to sleep,” she said, looking around the living room. “Only question is where.” The only bed in Sarah’s room was a crib, and the small third bedroom had a twin bed, but functioned mainly as an office. “How do you feel about sleeping bags?”

“That is fine,” he said into the top of her head with a kiss.

“Let’s look over here.” Juliette led them to a closet in the hall from which they retrieved sleeping bags, blankets, and extra pillows. They laid the blankets down on the floor and put the sleeping bags on top. Juliette fluffed the pillows. “Oh, and the bag is in the trunk.”

“The bag?” Tareq asked.

“Yeah. I just had a feeling,” she sighed wearily. “I brought our toothbrushes and a change of clothes.”

“You thought of everything this time,” he pushed the hair away from her forehead.

“Once a mother, always a mother,” she chuckled softly.

Tareq fetched the bag quickly, and soon they settled into the sleeping bags on the living room floor.

“It’s been decades since I’ve slept on the floor,” Juliette said as she cuddled up next to him. “Are you comfortable enough?”

“I have slept far less comfortably than this,” he replied.

Mark rose early the next morning and staggered toward the living room. When Tareq heard him, he sat up quickly and placed his finger over his mouth, pointing at Juliette who was sleeping soundly. Mark nodded groggily and turned into the kitchen. Tareq pulled himself up from the floor and joined Mark at the kitchen counter, where Mark was trying to make coffee, his back to Tareq.

“Let me do that,” Tareq said with a steady voice.

“Thanks, Tareq,” Mark accepted the offer and sat down at the table.

Tareq made coffee with the unfamiliar machine and sat down next to Mark, a cup for each of them in his hands. The two men stared at each other.

“I know you love my mom,” Mark began. This was more than just an olive branch.

“I do.”

“You dropped everything and came to the hospital,” Mark acknowledged. “Mom said you got there before she did.”

“I did.”

Mark rotated the coffee cup in his hand. “I know I haven’t been the most supportive,” Mark admitted, his head bent over the black liquid. Tareq offered no comment. “But I’m glad for you two. Really,” Mark continued, raising his eyes to Tareq without lifting his head. He hoped this would be a sufficient apology, but he could see from Tareq’s face that these few words would not heal the breach. He didn’t know what to say next, so he went back to the beginning. “You met her in Cairo, right? That time she went to meet Dad? And he got caught up in Gaza. Right?”

“Yes.”

“And then you showed her around Cairo until he got there?”

Tareq nodded, remembering the first time he had seen Juliette, arriving at the airport in Cairo. “With your father absent, I felt it was my duty.”

Mark nodded. “Makes sense, I guess.” Tareq offered no evaluation of the sense, or lack thereof, in his actions toward Juliette when they were in Cairo. “I remember

Mom telling me when she got back that she went on a boat on the Nile. I couldn't believe it," Mark continued nervously. "Was that with you?"

"We sailed on the Nile," Tareq confirmed, his lips loosening as he smiled with the memory. "This is a normal thing to do with tourists. I did not know then that she did not like the water." Tareq spoke quietly. "But it was safe. I would never risk her safety." Tareq looked at Mark directly to make sure he understood this. "And one day she came to my café. My café, which is for men only! But your mother walked right in. She had no fear of that water." Tareq leaned back in his chair and let out a muffled laugh.

"I bet," Mark leaned back, too.

"And then," Tareq shrugged his shoulders so slightly that Mark barely noticed, "she beat me at chess!" Tareq's eyes widened, and Mark could not help but smile.

"I didn't know she even knew how to play chess," Mark thought out loud.

"Oh yes," Tareq affirmed. "That was when..." Tareq caught himself abruptly. He would not tell Mark that he had fallen in love with his mother when his father was still alive.

Mark met Tareq eye to eye and completed his thought. "That's when you fell for her, right? Over a game of chess." His tone was half-way to an accusation. "So maybe this isn't all so sudden after all." Tareq's face betrayed nothing, but a realization spread over Mark's face like a spotlight. "You've been in love with her since Cairo, haven't you?" Mark sounded like an investigator solving a case. "I get it now."

"What do you get?" Tareq asked, his voice as flat and smooth as a river stone.

"When Mom got back from Cairo, she made a lot of changes. She changed her career, dropped a lot of things so that she and Dad would have more time together," Mark spoke slowly, still recovering from the day before. "She even convinced Dad to sell the apartment in New York and move upstate. I knew *something* had happened in Cairo. But I didn't know what. Did Dad have an affair he regretted, and now she was doing everything she could to make it work? Or had she..."

Tareq interrupted him. "In all the years I knew your father, he never had an affair. And those were many years. He was dedicated to his work."

"Sometimes more so than to his family," Mark sighed. "But he was a true believer, and I admired that about him. Even now." Mark paused to consider the pros and cons of his father's choices. "But when Mom got back from Berlin," he lurched back to his train of thought, "she was different. Happier. And it seemed to have a lot to do with you, Dad's old colleague, the one she'd met in Cairo. She was very casual about it, you know how she can be, no big deal, just a friend sort of thing. But now I get it. I get what had happened in Cairo."

"Maybe," Tareq said quietly. "Maybe."

“And just so you’re aware, Emily gets it, too.” Mark wanted Tareq to know that he was cornered.

“Emily?” Tareq asked, his voice toneless.

“Yeah. Emily knows everything,” Mark looked at Tareq aggressively at first, but then rolled his eyes in resignation. “It’s like she’s psychic or something.” He took a gulp of his coffee. “I think she knew long before Berlin. She probably knew the moment Mom got back from Cairo.”

Tareq kept his face expressionless. In his work, he had guarded against surprise attacks. But there was no strategy that could protect him from Mark’s need to know the truth.

“Yes, Mark,” Tareq surrendered. “I fell in love with your mother in Cairo. I suppose it was when she beat me at chess.” His forehead wrinkled as he made the admission. “And with the men of my café looking on.” Tareq remembered the sound of the men’s playful jibes, and the corners of his mouth curled slightly. “First I lost the game, and then I lost my heart.”

Mark relaxed at Tareq’s frankness, and his eyes softened. “Well, Tareq. And why not?” He let his own guard down. “Always good to love a woman who can beat you at chess.”

“Always good to love a woman who can beat you at chess,” Tareq repeated with a chuckle. Some defeats were actually victories.

The two sat across from each other in silence as the sun began to rise. “And then after the chess game?” Mark started up again.

“We walked,” Tareq closed his eyes. “We talked.” He opened them again. “And I saw that your mother was not what I first believed. When I first met her, I thought she was another idealistic American, ready to fix my country, ready to fix the whole Middle East!”

“Sort of like my Dad?”

“Your father was a good man, Mark. He was loyal. He was brave.”

“You make him sound like he walked out of Arthurian legend.”

“No, no. He was real. But for me, please do not be angry that I say this, for me the problem sometimes with Americans is that they do not know history. Or they know it but do not adequately feel its weight. They walk quickly and confidently when they ought to move slowly, with caution. They breathe easily when they ought to groan under the burden of the past. They believe they can make everything new. They think that by changing the future they can also change the past.”

Mark listened quietly. He had heard history professors make similar observations, but somehow Tareq's words sank in differently.

"And because they do not feel the weight of history, they do not understand the risks. Did you know that your mother took a bus to Gaza by herself?" His tone now channeled the anger he felt that night. "*How could she be so reckless!* I thought." And then his voice softened. "But I knew she did this because she wanted to see your father, and I envied that."

"And then?" Mark wanted to know more.

"Your father did not come. And your mother and I, we walked and talked some more. We talked about life. And she and I, we talked about love. And fate. And in those walks I learned that more than anything, your mother is honest. She is honest with herself and honest with me."

"Honesty's the key, isn't it?" Mark said for them both. He had long appreciated his mother's honesty, and now he appreciated Tareq's as well.

"I fell in love with your mother," Tareq said both to Mark and to himself, "because she provoked me to tell the truth. The truth about myself. This can be brutal. But sometimes I think this is the highest form of love. She dug into me."

"Like an archaeologist uncovering the pharaoh's tomb!" Mark raised his hands in the air at the discovery.

Tareq let out a single, brief laugh. Americans loved to make Egypt jokes. "She said to me one night, *What is your fate, Tareq?* She did not need to know the answer, but she made clear to me that I needed to know the answer for myself. She made me think, your mother," Tareq shook his head.

"She does that to a lot of us, Tareq," Mark put his head in his hands.

"I was avoiding my past," Tareq began to say more, but stopped.

"Like what?" Mark asked. Tareq squinted his eyes at him. What was the phrase Tareq had learned? *Loaded questions*. Some questions were like pistols. But Tareq wasn't sure Mark even knew that he was armed.

"Like Yasmeen," Tareq stated squarely. And then he told Mark the story of Tareq and Yasmeen. The full story – at least as fully as he was capable of telling it – a story he had never told anyone else in such completeness. He told this Mark first about the letters, the ones Mark's father had seen arrive over the years, the ones Tareq had left unanswered. But still the letters had arrived, with news of her life, her child, her present, her future. "Why did she send me these letters?" Tareq asked Mark the son, just as he had asked Mark the father years earlier. "Did she think I wanted to know what I could not have?"

"She wanted to keep in touch, Tareq. You know. In case something happened."

“This is precisely what your father told me,” Tareq said in disbelief. “So I was supposed to respond to her letters, your father believed, in case some day Yasmeen was once again free to be with me?”

“Something like that,” Mark replied.

“But this is where you do not know history. Yasmeen is Christian Armenian. I am Muslim. It is forbidden. ”

“So what did you do?”

“We decided to elope,” Tareq answered the question. “We would fly away. Marry abroad.”

“You were going to elope?”

“Yes. Just as you and Samantha did.”

“That was a mistake,” Mark admitted. “We should never have done that. We had no idea how hurt both our moms would be.” Mark’s regret was evident. “We just didn’t want a big ceremony. We thought it would be easier if we just ran away and got married. You know?”

Tareq did know. The idea of eloping had seemed easy to him and Yasmeen as well.

“Where were you going to go?”

“Berlin.”

“Berlin?” Mark asked in surprise. “The same Berlin where you met Mom last fall?”

“Yes. My cousin – the same cousin who lives there still – had moved there for his education. I was certain he would understand and would accept us.”

“Then what happened?”

“She came to me to say goodbye. She loved me. I know she did. But she loved her parents, too. She could not break their hearts to join her heart with mine, even if that meant breaking my heart.” Tareq’s eyes misted over with the memory. “It was all arranged. We had our passports ready. We would leave the next day.” Tareq put his elbows on the table and rested his head in his hands. “But no,” he said into his palms. “She came to me,” Tareq looked up again. “Her parents had told her that it was all arranged. Something else was all arranged. She would marry a physician. *Wasn’t she lucky?* they told her. *Wasn’t she happy?*” Tareq’s voice wavered; the grief had power, even decades later. “She was not happy. But we both knew that our happiness was not what we were meant to value. This was not about happiness. I was Muslim and studying music to become a composer. Her parents had chosen for her a Christian Armenian with a promising future, who would marry their daughter...”

“Who would marry the woman you loved,” Mark reassessed.

“Who would marry their daughter, who was the woman I loved.”

“And then?”

“We parted. I do not know how. I do not remember it clearly. For many years I could see only her shadow as she walked away. She walked backwards at first, facing me. The pain was too great, and I looked down. When I looked up again, she had turned around. I could no longer see her face.” Tareq replayed the moment in the past and then reeled himself back to the kitchen table. “And then I left Aleppo. My teachers, they begged me to stay. You see,” he lowered his voice modestly, “I had just received a commission to compose a piece. It was my dream.”

“And you left?”

“Yes. I told my teachers it was a family matter. They, of course, thought I meant family in Cairo.”

“And what did your parents think?”

“My parents?” Tareq let out a forlorn laugh. “They were elated. When I came home to study political science at the university, they thought I was at last making a sensible decision. A decision that would bring me security, stability, a normal life.”

“Joke was on them, huh?” Mark chuckled.

Tareq shook his head in disbelief. How these American children could make such remarkable statements about their parents! He would never quite understand. But there was truth in Mark’s words. Tareq’s parents had, on one level, gotten what they wanted. But on many levels, they had not. Tareq had not married. He had not had the children they longed for. He had not stayed safely at home, but instead had taken a job that put him in very real danger.

“And then I studied, and I worked. I studied some more. But politics, not music. And I retired.”

“And you got letters from Yasmeen.”

“I received letters from Yasmeen.” Tareq sighed heavily. “And then one day your father called from Gaza. Your mother was coming to Cairo to visit. There were problems at the camp, and he would be delayed. *Can I ask you a favor?* he said in a way that I knew he had not considered the possibility that I might refuse. *Can you meet her at the airport and get her to her hotel?* I can still hear his voice.”

Tareq rose from the chair and stood in the middle of the kitchen. “But he did not come, your father. Delays and delays. So your mother and I, we walked and we

talked. And I liked her,” he closed his eyes in a moment of reverie. “I liked being in Cairo with her.”

“I think you loved being in Cairo with her,” Mark stated sympathetically. “I think you loved her already, back then.”

“I did,” Tareq agreed. “Mark, I fell in love with your mother in Cairo. This is all that happened.”

“No it’s not,” Mark contradicted him. “She fell in love with you, too.” Mark and Tareq looked at each other in silence, and Tareq returned slowly to his seat at the table. “And then you said goodbye.” Mark filled in the rest of the story.

Tareq could hear the compassion in Mark’s voice. Grief seized Tareq’s face as he remembered the moment that he knew that Juliette loved him and that she would leave. “Yes,” Tareq replied, pouring the weight of the world into a single word.

“It’s kind of scary, isn’t it?” Mark thought out loud.

“What is?”

“Loving someone that much.”

“It can be,” Tareq concurred.

“Now that I have Sarah, I understand that,” Mark wiped his eyes before the tears could start. “I was so scared I wouldn’t be able to love Sarah enough. But you know what? It’s not that hard to love your kid. You just have to want to. You have to want to be there.”

“I want to be here, Mark,” Tareq made clear. “I have made a decision to be here.”

“Tareq?” Mark looked directly at Tareq.

“Yes, Mark?”

“Would you accept my apology?”

“Yes.”

Later that night, Tareq and Juliette lay curled up in their own bed at home. Juliette was nearly asleep. “Juliette,” he called quietly over her shoulder. “Are you still awake?”

“Hmm,” she replied, “What is it?”

“I would like to tell you why I left Aleppo.”

“You already told me about that. Remember? Back in Cairo. You said you left music school because you weren’t very good.”

“Yes, I remember.” He paused. “But that was not true.”

She turned on the light by her side of the bed. “What are you talking about?” The lamp cast odd shadows on his face.

Tareq rolled onto his back and let out a deep sigh. He recounted to her all that he had explained to Mark that morning, including the very real success he had enjoyed as a composition student in Aleppo.

“So you walked away from the commission, too?” she asked incredulously. “You lost Yasmeeen and your composition together?” He said nothing. “But you love music, I know how much you love music.”

“I do love music,” he agreed.

“And did you ever compose anything again?”

He contemplated her question. Had he ever composed again? What was his life if not a variation on a theme, a cadenza in someone else’s symphony and an improvisation of his own? To live one’s life was to make music, at least of a kind. *We are all waves*, he thought to himself. Waves of energy, of light, of sound.

“Not on paper,” he said at last, “and not for anyone to hear in a concert hall. But I compose. I am composing right now.” She drew her head back so he could see the confusion on her face. “Right now, for example,” he explained, “I am composing the most beautiful love song the world has ever known.”

“I’d love to hear it.”

He curled up next to her again and hummed into her ear. At first the tune sounded like his favorite song by Oum Kalthoum. But then it wandered and became his own melody, and he enveloped Juliette in a song composed just for her. Had he become the other composer, he understood, he would never be writing this song. This was his fate.

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“The Dog Days of Summer end tomorrow,” Tareq explained to Juliette over dinner a few weeks later, “when the constellation Sirius reappears in the sky just before sunrise after many weeks below the horizon.”

“I’ve heard the term Dog Days, but I can’t say I knew what it meant.”

“In ancient Egypt, the rising of Sirius was very important. It coincided with the annual flooding of the Nile and signified the beginning of a new year.”

“So we marry the day after new year’s?”

“We do.”

“And you’re going to make me get up early tomorrow morning to see this, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

Tareq was true to his word, nudging Juliette well before sunrise. The sky was clear, and he pulled her gently across their bed to the window. Tareq stood behind Juliette, his arms around her waist. Juliette clasped her hands over his and rested her head back along his collarbone. They studied the sky outside the window; Sirius was clearly visible, and the other stars danced for them just above the horizon. Soon they would be gone for the day, but just for the day.

“We need a balcony,” she announced.

“We do?”

“Yes. On this side of the window,” she pointed away from the *Stewartia*, in full bloom, “where it won’t disturb the tree.”

Tareq leaned them both forward to get a better look out the window, this time to see the ground.

“Okay,” he concluded. “It will need to be a narrow balcony. But it is possible.”

“It only needs to be big enough for two people to stand and look at the stars.”

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The day before their wedding ceremony, Mark arrived mid-afternoon to pick Tareq up. Emily was with him. It had all been decided: Emily would stay overnight at the house with Juliette, but Mark was taking Tareq back to his house to spend the night with him, Sam and Sarah. They would all meet at Storm King the next day for the wedding and then have dinner together at a nearby restaurant and inn. Emily had made the dinner reservation for them all and booked rooms for everyone except Juliette and Tareq, who wanted to return home on their wedding night.

Tareq did not like the plan, at least not the first part. It was too much driving for Mark, and Tareq didn’t want to be without Juliette. Juliette explained it all to him again. “You have to stay at Mark and Sam’s the night before the wedding. It’s tradition.”

“It is tradition for the groom to stay at the home of bride’s son the night before the wedding?” he asked in disbelief.

She shook her head with equal incredulity. “You know what I mean. The groom can’t see the bride on the wedding day.”

“But he must see her on the wedding day in order to wed her,” he countered, knowing he had logic on his side.

“I mean before the wedding.”

“But Juliette,” he pleaded with a look that clearly communicated *we’ve been married for months*. He wasn’t going to say this aloud in front of Mark and Emily, but he knew Juliette understood him.

“Tareq,” she intoned, giving him a withering look that replied equally clearly, *Who’s the local in this relationship? Who knows the traditions around here anyway?* “Work with me on this. I’ve got a surprise.”

“Okay. OKAY. I leave you then. But not for long.”

“No, fortunately not for long.”

“Come on Tareq,” Mark confirmed the defeat. “You know you’re beat this time. I’ve got your bag and everything in the car. It’s going to be fun. You and me. And, well, no bachelor party. But it’s going to be fun.”

Tareq relented, fully aware of the fortune that was his. A wife, children, a grandchild. What did it matter if he slept away from her for a night? He kissed Juliette a temporary goodbye, told Emily that she really had not been of much help this time, and got into the car with Mark.

When they arrived at Mark’s house, Sam greeted them at the door, the baby in her arms. Sarah was fussy, and Tareq could see Sam’s exhaustion. “I didn’t cook,” she apologized as they walked into the house. “There’s a Lebanese place that delivers, so I went with that. Is that okay? It’s the closest thing I could find to Egyptian.”

“Of course,” Tareq replied. “Let me wash my hands. Then may I hold the baby?”

“Your hands are clean enough,” Sam declared. She handed Sarah over to Tareq with relief and watched him cradle the wailing infant in his arms.

For a moment, Sarah fell silent. “A change of scenery will do you good, little one,” Tareq cooed. “Look at my face rather than your mother’s.” His eyes darted jocularly toward Samantha.

“That’ll work,” Sam chuckled. But it did work, for a few minutes at least, and then Sarah started up again.

“Any more ideas, Tareq?” Mark queried.

“Yes,” Tareq replied authoritatively, pulling his phone from his pocket. He fumbled with the screen one-handed. “No baby can cry when she hears the Mother of Egypt.” He tapped his phone awkwardly with his thumb until the sonority of his

homeland filled the room. Tareq swayed to Kalthoum's deep, resonant voice, and Sarah fell silent again. Within minutes, she was fast asleep.

"How did you do that?" Sam asked, as if Tareq were magic.

"It was not me," he informed her, slowly placing the baby in the port-a-crib nearby. He caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers and whispered to her in Arabic. "There!" he said softly, and then turned to the slumbering infant's parents. "We will eat in peace."

And they did eat in peace – a peace that was comprised of banter, chatter, and meaningless disagreements. But as they finished their meal, the baby stirred. "She's hungry again," Samantha sighed. "At least that means she's growing. It's got to be a good sign! I'll go feed her. You two clean up the kitchen?"

"And when you have fed her, I will rock her to sleep," Tareq volunteered.

"Oh, Tareq. It's okay. You've got to sleep. Tomorrow's your big day!"

"I insist. I will rock her to sleep on the night before my wedding."

Tareq and Mark cleaned up the kitchen, Tareq humming the song he had played for Sarah. With the dishes away, Tareq absently folded and refolded a kitchen towel in his hands as Mark put leftovers in the refrigerator. Tareq stared at Mark, thinking back to the many days and nights he had spent with this man's father when Mark was growing up. Tareq was with Mark the father when this boy, this man, played Little League, performed in school plays, won debate contests, was accepted to university. It seemed impossible that tomorrow he would wed this young man's mother. Fate was not only strange, it was inscrutable and unsettling. It placed you where you were meant to be by knocking you off your feet. It confused you while it fulfilled you. It emptied you of all you ever knew, or thought you knew, and filled you with the inexplicable.

Mark closed the refrigerator door and took the towel from Tareq's hand. "All done, I think," Mark looked around the kitchen and then his eyes landed on Tareq's face. "Tareq, I don't want to pry or anything," Mark spoke as sensitively as he could, "but sometimes I wonder, do you think about what my dad would say if he were here? If I were in your shoes, I think that's what I'd be wondering."

"Sometimes."

"I'm not sure it matters."

"Perhaps not," Tareq agreed, "but if your father could speak to us now, what do you think he would say? You are his son. Surely you have an idea."

"You spent more time with him than I did," Mark sighed. "And as adults. Maybe you know better than I do."

Tareq receded into memories of conversations with Mark the father. He had probably exchanged more words with that Mark than with anyone else in his life.

“We talked a lot, your father and I,” Tareq leaned against the countertop. “About politics. Books we read. Articles in the newspaper. He spoke often of you, Emily and your mother. I knew all about your activities at school,” Tareq recalled. “But we rarely spoke about *life*,” Tareq lingered on the word, “or love. Perhaps we never spoke of it.” Tareq paused and ran his hand along his cheekbone. It had been months since Mark’s memory had struck him with any force. “So I do not know what he might say.” Tareq closed his eyes and tried to see Mark standing with them in the kitchen. “I believe he would be surprised to find me in your home. *Hey, Tareq, What’re you doing here?* He would ask in a friendly way, your father. *I hear Juliette is getting married again. How did you end up invited to the wedding?*”

At that, Mark and Tareq laughed heartily, and Samantha hushed them from the door to Sarah’s room. “The baby’s nearly asleep.”

Mark and Tareq suppressed their laughter as best they could, doubled over, their hands over their mouths. “And then I’d say,” Mark continued in a stage whisper, “*Well, Dad, Tareq here’s the lucky guy.*”

“And he’d say to you, *No son, not Tareq. He is not a lucky guy. He always lost to me in cards!*”

At this they laughed so loudly that Sarah went into a full wail, and Samantha could not get their attention from down the hall. When she entered the kitchen, the two were embracing, laughing so hard they were in tears. They did not notice her arrival.

“Mark,” Tareq put his hands on Mark’s shoulders and looked him in the eye. “I love your mother very much. And I love you and Sam and Sarah, too.”

“And we love you, Tareq,” Samantha added. Mark and Tareq straightened up immediately. Tareq wiped the back of his hands against his eyes, drying the tears as fast as he could.

“You don’t need to do that Tareq. Your secret’s safe with me,” she wrapped her arm gently around his shoulder. “Besides, you’re the baby whisperer around here, or at least you’ve got the right connections. And I need some sleep. Can you get her to stop crying for me?”

“I will try,” Tareq was eager. “And you must teach me how to change a diaper.”

“You don’t have to do that, Tareq,” Samantha told him.

“I would like to learn,” he insisted. Samantha took Tareq’s arm in appreciation, and they went off together for diaper training. It was easier than he thought. Just three points of material around a solid object. He could handle that. Putting the baby’s clothes back on was more of a challenge – how to get the little feet into the little leg holes and little feet-shaped pieces of fabric at the end? All without destroying the equilibrium that came from having a dry diaper.

He took out his phone and found more Oum Kalthoum, turning the volume very low. He danced with Sarah throughout her room, humming gently. He could feel the vibrations of his humming against her head beneath his chin. There was a unison of being that was nearly indescribable, and he thought of an article Mark had once read aloud to him from the science section of a newspaper.

“Get this, Tareq,” Mark had started. “This is nuts.” The article was about particle physics and explained how nothing was solid. “Turns out we’re all waves of energy,” Mark was reading, simultaneously impressed and confused. “We’re all just pulsing energy. We only *seem* solid, but actually there’s space between our waves.”

“I believe this is what Einstein and Heisenberg and Bohr all understood,” Tareq remembered telling Mark.

“You know about this stuff?” Mark had asked, astonished. “You’re a man of hidden talents!”

“Physics and music are closely related,” Tareq had explained. “When I was studying composition in Aleppo, I learned, too, about physics. About waves. Waves of energy and light and sound.”

He looked down at Sarah’s head resting on his chest. “And now I share my waves with you,” he whispered to her. “I will hum my being into yours, I will merge my waves with yours. Together we will blend the past with the present, and I will join the stream of your family.” He sat down in the chair and rocked slowly back and forth. The baby’s breathing became calm as she drifted into deep sleep. Tareq followed her there.

Tareq awoke in darkness to Sarah’s morning cry as she lay on his chest. He began to rock her gently, but also helplessly. He didn’t know what to do with a baby first thing in the morning. But in less than a minute, Samantha appeared at the door.

“Tareq!” she exclaimed. “It’s 5 am! She slept through the night. That’s a first! I couldn’t believe it when I heard her crying and looked at the clock!”

“I am not sure this is sleeping through the night,” he laughed.

“Well around here it is. I haven’t set an alarm since she was born – she is my alarm. I can’t believe I made it from 11 to 5.” He could see that despite Samantha’s delight in having slept six solid hours, what she wanted most was to have her baby in her arms. He handed Sarah to her and rose from the chair. “I will go to the other room and sleep a little longer. I have time?”

“Yes. We don’t need to leave for a few hours. Get some more sleep. Today’s going to be a big day!”

Every day was a big day now, he thought to himself. Every day was so big it exploded. In waves of light and energy and sound. But their wedding day was

different. Years later, he still pondered why, but he knew that it all revolved around seeing her, his Juliette, walking toward him in a turquoise blue dress he remembered so well. The first time she had worn that dress, in Egypt, they knew they must part. But on that day, their wedding day, they knew that only death would part them again.

Their wedding itself was simple with only Emily, Kenji, Mark, Samantha and the baby attending. They gathered together at the edge of *Wavefield*, having crossed through the wall together. The day was hot and humid, and the late afternoon sun cast long shadows.

Kenji and Samantha served as witnesses, and Emily performed the ceremony herself. She began with the language required by the State of New York, but then turned to the poem that Juliette and Tareq had chosen as their vows. She read to them the words of William Butler Yeats:

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread upon my dreams.

Emily reached out with one hand to Tareq and with the other to Juliette, and gave their hands to each other. "Love is not a dream," she told them what they already knew, "but to love is to dream together. Tareq, do you promise to tread softly upon my mother's dreams?"

"I do."

"And Mom, do you promise to tread softly upon Tareq's dreams?"

"I do."

"Do you take each other for this life, whatever this life might bring?"

Tareq wrapped his arms around Juliette's waist, his hand at home on her back.

"I do."

"I do," Juliette echoed.

Emily paused and then asked Tareq, "You have the ring?"

"Yes, yes," Tareq said, reaching into the pocket of his flowing galabeya. "I do!" He lifted Juliette's hand, kissed it and placed the ring on her finger. It was a delicate braid of three threads of gold. As he gave Juliette the ring, he said, "One for you, one for me, one for us."

"And Mom?"

Juliette nodded. She took Tareq's signet ring from her other hand and returned it to his hand. "For you," she said, "and for me, and for us." Tareq took both her hands in his, kissing the ring now back on his finger.

Juliette raised herself on tiptoes and whispered, "Do you remember the poem you gave me?" He nodded alongside her face. "*Love has not killed these lovers*. Love has not killed this Juliette." She stood back to take in his eyes upon her. They kissed briefly. There would be time for that later. But more pressing matters were at hand: Sarah was beginning to fuss in the heat, and she needed to eat and sleep.

They left *Wavefield* and walked back through the narrow opening in the wall. Tareq thought back to Berlin. In marrying Juliette, he knew he had found a way between two worlds, a way that had led him home.

Kenji and Emily walked a short distance behind them. "Get a picture of that," Emily said to Kenji, and Kenji snapped a photo of Juliette and Tareq walking ahead of them, Tareq's hand resting on Juliette's back.

When they entered the restaurant that evening, the hostess did a double take: Juliette in her elegant gown, Tareq in his galabeya, Emily, Kenji, Mark, Samantha, the baby.

"Just your typical American family," Emily joked quietly to Tareq, hoping the woman wouldn't hear.

"And I am the head of this family," he joked back to Emily. Emily put her arm through his in agreement.

Once they had ordered, Samantha excused herself to feed the baby. "I may not be back, honey," she said to Mark. "Just bring some food up to the room." Mark brushed Sam's arm sweetly as she walked away with the baby, and then turned to Emily to congratulate his sister with a playful punch in the shoulder. "Well done out there, Em. You should do this sort of thing more often."

"Well, I would have done your wedding if you two hadn't run off like that," Emily replied. She was teasing, but the current of disappointment was visible on the water's surface.

"Emily, I said I was sorry. And I am. Really."

Emily hugged her brother. "I know. Low blow. Sorry."

"And anyway, you completely forgot the music! You know, Tareq here could have been a famous composer. And you didn't even have music at his wedding."

"We couldn't exactly carry a boom box into Storm King without people noticing," Emily retorted.

"Do not let your brother discourage you," Tareq intervened. "Today was perfect."

“Thanks, *Dad*,” she smirked, kissing his cheek. “I always knew I was your favorite.” She shot Mark a glance that said it all, and they broke into laughter loud enough to turn heads at the other tables.

Emily’s words washed over Tareq like an ocean wave. He loved Emily as though she were his own, but he did not entirely understand her. How could she call him *Dad*, even playfully? His heart overflowed, but his mind did not fully grasp her ability to expand boundaries so easily. It was one thing for him to think of her as his daughter; he had no other daughter, no daughter who had died, who existed only as a memory. But Emily had a father, a father who had lived and breathed and loved her dearly. Was she not cruel to the memory of her father?

Americans don’t understand history, he could hear himself saying. They don’t feel the weight of the past. But now, he considered, perhaps that wasn’t always a weakness. He knew that Emily had not forgotten her father. But he also knew that Emily was not going to allow her father to burden the future. She had plenty of room to call Tareq *Dad*.

Tareq and Juliette left the next generations at the inn and drove home, to their home. The crepe myrtle trees were just beginning their summer ruckus, bright reds and pinks visible even as the night overtook the garden. Tareq parked the car and put his hand on Juliette’s arm as she began to open her door. “May I open the car door for you this time?” he asked with a smile.

“Of course,” she replied, also with a smile. She waited for him to come around to her side of the car, and then they walked to the house together. When they reached the steps of the front porch, he paused.

“After you,” he said.

She shook her head. “With you.” Once inside, Juliette closed the door behind them. “You know,” she said, taking him by the waist, “someone once told me that in Egypt, it’s not a wedding without dancing.”

“Really,” he said. “Is that so?”

“I have it on good authority.”

“Then I suppose we must.” He found his phone in his pocket and scrolled through the playlist. “I like this one.” He took one of her hands to his heart and wrapped his other arm around her close. “*It’s a Wonderful World*, Juliette. Wonderful.”

They danced until the song concluded. “Close your eyes now,” she told him, “and come with me.” He closed his eyes without question. She put her hand on his back and guided him to the dining room. “Okay,” she told him, “open your eyes.”

Along the dining room wall stood a full-size, upright piano with a proper bench.

“Juliette!” he exclaimed. “When did this happen?”

“Yesterday!” she exclaimed. “But just barely. You wouldn’t leave the house! I told them I’d call once you were gone so they could bring it over, but you wouldn’t leave!”

“Juliette,” he sighed as he walked to the piano. “Thank you.” He ran his fingers silently over the keys.

“You’re welcome, Tareq,” she walked up behind him and put her arms around his waist, resting her head between his shoulders. “Give it a try? They said they tuned it before they left, so I think it’s ready to go.”

“Yes, but first...” he turned around to embrace her and rocked them back forth in time to a song that was in head. “Juliette, you tread softly on my dreams. Thank you.” He kissed her with his eyes alone and then sat down at the piano. He adjusted the seat height, familiarized his feet with the pedals, and then played a few scales to confirm that the instrument was in tune.

“What are you going to play?”

“I know,” he declared and went to the foyer for his bag. Juliette could hear him rummaging through its contents, and then he returned with a few sheets of paper. He sat down on the bench and carefully placed the sheets of music on the piano’s small ledge. Juliette looked over his shoulder at the handwritten musical notes on the staff paper. “This is for you.” His eyes handed her the gift.

“What’s it called?” she asked. He hadn’t written a title at the top.

He turned around and found a pen that was lying on the dining room table and then wrote the words *Tareq and Juliette* across the top. “It is a happy ending,” he said to her with a smile, and then he played the piece he had written just for them.