

Jabber  
A Play Written by Marcus Youssef

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Marcus Youssef

## **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

*Jabber* was commissioned by Geordie Productions under the artistic direction of Dean Fleming. It was developed with the dramaturgical support of Playwrights Workshop Montreal and the financial support of the Cole Foundation. Originally produced by Geordie Productions, *Jabber* first toured high schools and colleges across Quebec and Eastern Canada from September 2012 until April 2013, with the following cast and crew:

Fatima Mariana Tayler

Jorah/Girl Ian Geldart

Mr. Evans/Melissa David Sklar

Directed by Amanda Kellock

Dramaturgy by Emma Tibaldo

Set and costume designed by James Lavoie

Lights designed by Ana Cappelluto

Sound designed by Amanda Kellock

Geordie's production of *Jabber* subsequently toured to Young People's Theatre in Toronto in November 2013, and was presented as a spotlight performance at the International Performing Arts for Youth (IPAY) showcase in Pittsburgh, PA, in January 2014. It then toured Maine and Vermont in November 2014. At that time Aris Tyros replaced Ian Geldart as Jorah.

## **CHARACTERS**

FATIMA, a teen girl

JORAH, a teen boy

MR. EVANS (Mr. E), the school counsellor

MELISSA, a student at the new high school

GIRL, Melissa's Friend, another student at the new high school

Melissa and her friend should be played by the actors playing Jorah and Mr. E. In addition to these, at times the three actors also comment on the action, noted in the text as One, Two, and Three. The actor who plays Jorah plays ONE, Fatima plays TWO, and Evans plays THREE. The device is simple. The three actors begin the play by acknowledging that they are actors, using their real names, ages, etc. They then tell the story both as the actors and as the fictional characters. When they start playing their fictional characters, they simply begin to do so, and continue to switch back and forth throughout the piece. There are endless ways for the actors to accomplish this. My guess is that in most cases, the simpler the better.

All teenagers are about sixteen years old.

## **SETTING**

A high school, Jorah's house, Fatima's house, the "duct."

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

Generally, the text and Facebook messages have been projected, as if the characters are sending them live. This has worked well. Geographic names references should be changed to reflect the location(s) of each production. At some point, cultural references might need to be updated as well. Contact the author for further information or suggestions.

## **SPECIAL THANKS**

Dean Fleming, Emma Tibaldo, and Amanda Kellock, for their invaluable contributions to the development of this play. Barry Cole, Amanda Fritzlan, Sumayya Kassamali, Guillermo Verdecchia, Zak and Oscar Youssef.

## Scene 1: Let's Say

ONE

Hey. I'm (*actor name*).

TWO

Hey. I'm (*actor name*).

THREE

I'm (*actor name*).

TWO

Let's say we're in a high school.

ONE

Oh look, we are.<sup>1</sup>

TWO

Let's say I'm not twenty-four<sup>2</sup> years old. But sixteen.

THREE

And I'm not twenty-seven. But thirty-four<sup>3</sup>.

TWO

Old.

ONE

Let's say her name is Fatima.

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<sup>1</sup> When performing in a theatre, cut this line.

<sup>2</sup> Change to reflect actor's actual age.

<sup>3</sup> Ditto.

TWO

Let's say when kids hear that, sometimes they ask –

ONE

Fatima, huh? Is it okay if I call you fat?

THREE

Let's say she's learned to laugh. And say –

FATIMA

Sure, no problem. Is it okay if I call you a-hole?

ONE

Let's say when we say "a-hole," you know what we mean.

TWO

Let's say Fatima's only been in Canada for a couple of years –

ONE

Let's say the country she's from is, like, nine thousand kilometres away –

TWO

And there was some kind of war –

THREE

Or revolution –

ONE

Or whatever –

THREE

Let's say her parents just forced her to switch schools and come to this one because of something that happened at her old school –

ONE

Something bad.

FATIMA

Not bad, just stupid. I was walking with my friends. Seema and Hama and Lindsay. Lindsay's a white girl, but she hangs out with us. We call ourselves the jabbers. Cause of the hijab. Ha ha.

So we're walking, and ignoring people on the street who look at us – they always do. When we get to school, there's a bunch of teachers standing around and, like, four police cars and a pile of cops. Standing around the wall outside the gym. Staring and pointing and talking into their walkie-talkies.

They sent us home. For our "own safety." My parents totally freaked out. They were, like, "You are not safe, you must change schools!" I was, like, "What are you talking about? It was just some graffiti." "No! It was a threat, Fatima. You must remember: these people are full of hate!"

I told them, "Hama and Seema's parents aren't making them change schools. And there's no jabbers at St. Mary's, not even one." My mom's, like, "What is this, a jabber? Three years in Canada and you don't sound like our daughter, you sound like one of these stupid girls we see in the mall."

I said, "A jabber is what we what we call the dumb thing you make us wear on our heads." Bad idea. My father went crazy, goes, "You are disrespecting God!" (*to God*) Sorry. I'm lucky my father didn't kill me. He said, "You are my daughter. I will do whatever necessary to protect you from these animals."

By forcing me to come here, a subway and two buses from where we live. St. Mary's. Where's there's no Seema, or Hama. No jabbers at all.

Let's say today is my first day.

ONE

Let's say my name is Jorah –

TWO

Let's say Jorah's in grade 10 –

THREE

Let's say he's that guy that people are a little afraid of –

TWO

Rumours –

ONE

He did something –

THREE

Or something happened to him –

TWO

Something bad –

THREE

Let's say maybe none of those rumours are true –

TWO

Or maybe they are.

ONE

Let's say today he got in trouble –

THREE

Again.

TWO

He was in history class –

ONE

They were studying the Holocaust –

TWO

And the teacher was telling them about what happened to Jewish people in World War Two, how the German army put them in gas ovens.

THREE

Jorah wasn't paying attention.

ONE

He was looking out at the window, at a kid playing on the soccer field with a little ball.

TWO

And the teacher noticed Jorah not listening, and that pissed him off, because Jorah never listens. So he called him out, in front of everybody –

## **Scene 2: History Class, Earlier**

THREE

What do you think of that, Jorah?



JORAH

Huh?

THREE

The Nazis taking people – real, living human beings – and baking them alive in ovens.

JORAH

You mean, like pizza?

THREE

I beg your pardon?

JORAH

Little mini dudes, all covered in cheese.

THREE

Do you even know what you're saying?

ONE

It was one of those things that came out of Jorah's mouth.

THREE

Not because he hates Jewish people –

TWO

But more like –

ONE

Whatever.

THREE

And because he hates how teachers always look at him, like he's already done something wrong.

ONE

Let's say Fatima was in the class –

THREE

And on their way out, Jorah noticed her looking at him.

TWO

And he stared at her, for a while.

ONE

Because of her scarf.

*JORAH stares at FATIMA.*

FATIMA

I know what they're thinking. You know how you can catch somebody's eye, just for a second, and you can see exactly what's in their head? Same as you, probably. "Whoa. What's with the scarf? I bet she has to wear it. I wonder if she's a terrorist. I bet she's really, like, timid and shy."  
*(to JORAH, challenging)* Hi.

JORAH

Yo.

FATIMA

*(to audience)*

I'm not shy. But it's also, hijab, it's part of who I am.

ONE

Let's say we're actors –

TWO

Let's say there's three of us –

ONE

And about two hundred of you.<sup>4</sup>

THREE

Let's say I'm a guidance counsellor. Let's say my name is Evans, but kids call me Mr. E. Let's say I like my job, and most kids pretty much like me.

### **Scene 3: Hallway, After School**

*At some point FATIMA comes to speak to EVANS (MR. E).*

EVANS

Mr. Porteous.

JORAH

Mr. E.

EVANS

Aren't you're supposed to be waiting for me in my office?

JORAH

Is that a trick question?

EVANS

No.

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<sup>4</sup> Change to reflect the approximate size of audience

JORAH

Then yeah, I am.

EVANS

Mind telling me why you're not there?

JORAH

You're not going to like my answer.

EVANS

Really?

JORAH

You're going to think I'm, like, testing your authority. But I'm not.

EVANS

Try me.

JORAH

Okay. I got this massive zit. On my butt. It's huge.

EVANS

So?

JORAH

And when I go to your office, your secretary lady – Mrs. Gaspo –

EVANS

Gasperini.

JORAH

That's worse, dude. She always makes me sit down while I wait.

FATIMA

Mr. Evans.

JORAH

If I sit on the zit, I swear, my butt's gonna explode.

EVANS

*(to FATIMA)*

Excuse me.

JORAH

I'm not lying. I'll show you –

FATIMA

Uh, the principal told me to come see you.

*JORAH starts to take off his pants.*

EVANS

*(to JORAH)* Stop it! My office. Now! *(to FATIMA)* Fine, no problem. You too. I'll be right there.

#### **Scene 4: Counsellor's Office, Waiting**

*JORAH enters, FATIMA waits.*

JORAH

Where's Evans?

FATIMA

I don't know.

JORAH

Of course.

*He sits.*

FATIMA

How's your butt?

JORAH

Fine. Oh. (*gesturing to her scarf*) Are you allowed to say "butt"?

FATIMA

I just did.

JORAH

You're new.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

If you're planning on blowing up the school, I'm in.

FATIMA

Excuse me?

JORAH

A lot of kids would thank you. You'd be a hero. You know what, I'll help. I'm ready. Just give me the signal. Nobody'll suspect me cause I don't look like a terrorist.

FATIMA

Like me.

*Beat.*

JORAH

I'm just kidding around.

FATIMA

Ha ha.

JORAH

I shouldn't even joke about blowing up the school. They probably have microphones in here. Get myself locked down.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

What's your name?

*FATIMA ignores him.*

JORAH

Oh, I get it. You don't want to blow your cover.

FATIMA

Sorry?

JORAH

You'd be a crap terrorist if you told people your real name. It's cool.

FATIMA

Ha ha. Fatima.

JORAH

Fatima.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

Mind if I call you Fat?

FATIMA

No. Mind if I call you a-hole?

JORAH

That's funny.

FATIMA

Thank you. I get to say it a lot.

JORAH

"A-hole."

FATIMA

What?



JORAH

Nothing.

FATIMA

You think because I'm Muslim, I can't swear?

JORAH

A-hole's not exactly a swear. You got, like, some wicked forehead zits? Covering up some major pus bombs? That why you got the head thing?

FATIMA

My scarf?

JORAH

Yeah.

FATIMA

It's part of my religion.

JORAH

It's called a Taliban, right?

FATIMA

Taliban? Oh my god. Now that's funny.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

Taliban are the guys who are fighting in Afghanistan. It's called a hijab.

JORAH

Oh. Do you wear it all the time? I'm just asking.

FATIMA

Yes. Sort of.

JORAH

In the shower?

FATIMA

No.

JORAH

In bed?

FATIMA

I only have to wear it in public. I don't wear it at home.

JORAH

Is it to stop you from turning guys on?

FATIMA

Oh my God.

JORAH

Isn't that it?

FATIMA

It's to show humility. Before God.

JORAH

Is it, like, those Taliban guys might think you're so hot, they'd see your hair and just, like, lose control?

FATIMA

...

JORAH

I saw this old Chuck Norris movie where they catch a bad, like, Muslim Taliban dude and tie him up and force bacon down his throat. It was pretty funny.

FATIMA

Huh. I saw this movie once about this dumb white boy who talked about a lot of crap he wasn't smart enough to understand. Oh hang on, that wasn't a movie. That's what's happening right now.

*EVANS enters.*

EVANS

Sorry, I'm late. I trust Jorah is behaving.

FATIMA

Not really.

JORAH

What? We're just getting to know each other.

EVANS

Here's the form. I'm sorry, I haven't had time to give you a proper welcome. Let me assure you that you're safe at St. Mary's, and we're going to do everything we can to make your transition a smooth one. Right, Jorah?

JORAH

For sure. What happened?

FATIMA

Nothing. By the way, if you say any more weird, racist, or insulting things to me, I will use my terrorist skills to kick you in the crotch so hard you'll be down on your knees begging for your life. Just sayin'. (*exiting*) See ya.

*Beat*

EVANS

She just called you racist.

JORAH

I asked about her scarf.

EVANS

Jesus.

JORAH

We were just joking around.

EVANS

There's a pattern here.

JORAH

What are you talking about?

EVANS

Murdering Jewish people in ovens is like making pizza.

JORAH

I was joking.

EVANS

Mr. Levy is Jewish. He had family members executed by the Nazis. So, shocking though this may be for you to hear, for Mr. Levy a joke about Jews being murdered in the Holocaust isn't actually all that funny.

JORAH

He was giving me attitude.

EVANS

Because you weren't paying attention.

JORAH

He's boring.

EVANS

I could suspend you. Ask your mother to come in.

*Beat.*

EVANS

How is she, your mom?

JORAH

Fine.

EVANS

Really?

JORAH

Yeah.. I'm sorry, okay? Is that what you want me to say?

EVANS

What I want isn't the point.

JORAH

Oh.

EVANS

Actions have consequences.

JORAH

So you keep saying.

EVANS

Look. I know what you've been through.

JORAH

No you don't.

EVANS

It's your anger, Jorah. Like we've talked about. You need to be very careful. Because of who you are. And what people know. The girl with the headscarf – (*mispronouncing her name, but trying not to*) Fatima – you know why she transferred here?

JORAH

No.

EVANS

You should find out.

JORAH

That it?

EVANS

For now.

*JORAH gets up to leave.*

JORAH

Worst thing I can imagine ... Being a teacher. By the way, her name is Fatima.

*JORAH walks downstage, as if to do a monologue.*

JORAH

*(to audience)*

Blah blah blah blah blah.

### **Scene 5: Fatima's Home**

THREE

Let's say Fatima felt a little confused after her run in with Jorah.

TWO

He was kind of a dick.

ONE

But also kind of funny and smart.

THREE

Let's say she went home, and her parents asked her about her first day.

*FATIMA arrives home. Speaking to her parents, on her way to her room.*

FATIMA

It was fine, thank you. I'm going to my room. Homework. I've got a ton!

*FATIMA's in her room, she goes directly to her computer.*

FATIMA

My parents think I talk like that to everybody. "You are always right, all I want to do is absolutely every little thing you ask."

We moved to Canada three years ago. I was thirteen. You climb on a plane, fly for two days, and you land in the middle of winter. I'd never seen snow in my life. I spent a lot of time on my computer. Convinced them I needed it in my room – for homework. They don't know how easy school is in Canada. It is.

*(looking at the computer)*

There's a webcam on a building in our country. In Cairo, the city where we're from. The streets are packed. Twenty million people there. That's like five Torontos. In the distance, you can see the corner of the girls' school I went to before we left. I keep it open. Sometimes I see friends I had there, just walking down the street, holding their books, laughing and talking. I like it better here. Most of the time. My father wanted me to go to a girls' school here, but we couldn't afford it. Thank God. He drives a taxi. In our country he was an engineer.

I spend a lot of time in my room. Looking at the webcam. And on Moogle. Or TeenChat.

I don't talk. I just watch. Teenagers, from all over the place, just hanging out. They're all white. That's how I learned to speak English. Watching them: girls, talking to guys that they know. And



guys they don't. I watch them. Flirt and smile and make faces. "Oh my god, what? No! I love you. You can't tell them!"

It's shocking, what these girls do. In their own houses, with their parents in another room.

*(she turns back)*

*(calling out)* I told you, homework! *(to audience)* They're not as smart as they think.

I watched this blonde girl. With a friend, talking to some guy. She took off her shirt. Sat there, in her bra, going, what do you think, do you like them, ohmigod, they're so small! In her bra. And then ... She took pictures. And texted them to the guy who watched. Is that normal? Not for jammers ...

*She gets a Facebook message.*

JORAH

Look, sorry if I was dick. Uh, is that okay to say to you? Ha ha. Friend me, but only if you want. Maybe I'll see you around.

## **Scene 6: Outside School, Next Day**

JORAH

Hey, Fat.

FATIMA

That's not my name.

JORAH

Joke. Evans called you "Fateema."

FATIMA

Right.

JORAH

You didn't friend me.

FATIMA

I was busy.

JORAH

Is that a different scarf?

FATIMA

I have more than one.

JORAH

Good thing. Otherwise it'd start to reek. But it's, uh, it's nice.

FATIMA

I have to go.

JORAH

Yo, I'm sorry if I pissed you off yesterday. I didn't mean anything. I was just joking around.

*Beat.*

JORAH

All right?

FATIMA

Sure.

JORAH

Evans said some big deal thing happened at your old school.

FATIMA

Maybe.

JORAH

That why you transferred here?

FATIMA

It was nothing.

JORAH

Must have been pretty bad to make you want to come to this dump.

FATIMA

I guess.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

Graffiti. On the wall of the school.

JORAH

That's it?

FATIMA

It said, "All Muslims must die."

JORAH

Whoa.

FATIMA

Yeah. My parents went crazy.

JORAH

Did it freak you out?

FATIMA

I guess.

JORAH

I'm not like that, eh? I mean I know I got a reputation and stuff, but I'm not into being against people and the racism stuff. I want you to know that.

FATIMA

All right.

JORAH

If it had said "all teachers must die" that would be different. I'd be good with that.

FATIMA

Uh ... okay.

JORAH

Joke.

FATIMA

Funny.

JORAH

Thanks. You make any friends yet?

FATIMA

Sure. A couple.

JORAH

Liar. I've seen you.

FATIMA

It's the scarf. It weirds people out.

JORAH

Yeah.

FATIMA

You're basically the only one who's talked to me.

JORAH

What do you have next?

FATIMA

Uh, math. We both do.

JORAH

Gonna skip. Go down to the duct.

FATIMA

Oh yeah.

JORAH

It's the place the bad kids like me go.

FATIMA

That what you are – bad?

JORAH

That's what I hear. You want to come?

FATIMA

I shouldn't.

JORAH

It's a pretty cool spot. Nobody'll be there. There's a little river, sun shining through the trees. Kind of like a park. See, I'm not all bad.

FATIMA

I can't miss class.

JORAH

O-kay ... See ya round.

*Beat.*

FATIMA

You always wear your hoodie like that?

JORAH

I don't know. I guess.

FATIMA

Makes you look like that guy in *South Park* ... Kenny.

JORAH

Shut up.

FATIMA

It does.

JORAH

That's a snowsuit. And who watches *South Park*?

FATIMA

Me. Sometime you should try pulling it down.

JORAH

Whatever.

FATIMA

Then people could see your face.

*Maybe she goes to help him.*

JORAH

Okay, fine.

*He does, reluctantly.*

FATIMA

For a big a-hole, you're actually kind of cute.

*(A moment. Jorah leaves. Fatima speaks to the audience)*

FATIMA

In grade 7, my parents found a book of mine in my room. I'd written "I love Jeff Payette" all over it, a million different times. I didn't even know Jeff Payette. He was in grade 8 and every girl in my class had a crush on him. My parents said that if they ever caught me alone with a boy they'd lock me in my room and never let me out. Can you imagine? Sometimes, all I want is to be just like everyone else.

### **Scene 7: Still at School**

TWO

Let's say Jorah split and went down to the duct.

THREE

And Fatima went to class, where Ms. Anderson, the math teacher, asked her to get up in front of everybody and explain why she wears a hijab.

FATIMA

I said, what? In front of everybody? I tried to be honest. I was, like, it's part of who I am, and it also reminds me of where I come from. She said, "Don't you think wearing it means that men in your culture think they can control you?" I said, "I don't know, don't you think those disgusting sweaters you always wear mean that people think you're a pathetic dork?" Except I didn't actually say that. I said, "I don't really see it that way. But I understand your point."

THREE

Let's say on her way out Fatima got ambushed by a couple of grade 10 girls.

ONE

Let's say when we put on these wigs, we're those girls.

THREE



Let's say we know that's kinda weird.

*They put on wigs.*

MELISSA

Hey.

FATIMA

Hi.

MELISSA

We love your scarf.

GIRL

It's so pretty.

FATIMA

Thanks.

MELISSA

Quick question.

GIRL

At your old school –

MELISSA

Did you really get attacked by skinheads?

FATIMA

Uh, no.

GIRL

That's what we heard.

MELISSA

They chased you down with metal pipes.

GIRL

Beat you over the head.

MELISSA

You were in the hospital.

GIRL

And have massive brain damage.

MELISSA

Shut up. She's exaggerating.

FATIMA

It was just some graffiti.

MELISSA

That's good.

FATIMA

I guess.

MELISSA

Better than being hit with a pipe.

GIRL

What did the graffiti say?

FATIMA

“All Muslims must die.”

GIRL

Eww. That’s so racist.

FATIMA

Yeah.

MELISSA

Weird.

FATIMA

Anyway ...

MELISSA

We noticed you talking to Jorah.

GIRL

A lot.

MELISSA

Do you like him?

FATIMA

Sure. I mean, I guess.

MELISSA

*(assuming FATIMA will know what she means)*

I'm Melissa.

*FATIMA doesn't know what that's supposed to mean.*

MELISSA

Don't tell him I talked to you, okay?

FATIMA

Why not?

MELISSA

He'll freak.

GIRL

Yeah. He's an okay guy, but ...

MELISSA

All the stuff that happened.

FATIMA

What?

MELISSA

He didn't tell you?

GIRL

Of course not. It'd freak her out. He knows that.

MELISSA

Friendly advice: be careful. He's not always as nice as he seems.

FATIMA

What do you mean?

GIRL

We gotta go.

FATIMA

No, hang on. What are you talking about?

MELISSA

See ya.

FATIMA

Bye.

THREE

Let's say that night, Fatima was up in her room, like usual –

ONE

She told her parents she had a big history assignment, about the Holocaust –

TWO

Let's say that, despite what the girls told her, she decided to become Jorah's friend.

### **Scene 8: Fatima and Jorah, in Their Own Rooms**

*JORAH and FATIMA text or instant message each other.*

JORAH

yo

FATIMA

hi kenny

JORAH

shitup.

JORAH

shutup i mn

FATIMA

ha =) whr u?

JORAH

home

FATIMA

me2 skype?

JORAH

k

*They can now see each other and are speaking over Skype or some kind of video chat. .*

FATIMA

Ta da.

JORAH

Hey. Nice scarf.

FATIMA

Thanks. I tied it Jordanian style.

JORAH

What's that?

FATIMA

Duh. A country. Jordan. It's near where I'm from.

JORAH

Which is, like, what? Mongolia?

FATIMA

Oh my god. That is so ignorant. Mongolia is next to China. Do I look Chinese?

JORAH

No.

FATIMA

Exactly. I'm from Egypt.

JORAH

Oh. Like with pyramids and stuff. What?

FATIMA

It's not just pyramids. It's one of the world's oldest civilizations.

JORAH

Yeah, you ride camels.

FATIMA

Oh my god. We invented math. And paper. And condoms.

JORAH

Seriously?

FATIMA

I shouldn't have said that.

JORAH

It's cool. But you do ride camels. I've seen pictures

FATIMA

Only tourists ride camels. They're nasty. They spit everywhere and try to throw you off. More people ride donkeys.

JORAH

Damn.

FATIMA

Yeah. But we had a car. If you have enough money, you get a car. Or motorcycles. With whole families riding on them, like, four or five people hanging on. And no traffic lights. Not really any laws at all. People just drive and honk. When we moved here, it was so embarrassing. My father would go crazy fast, honking at everybody, and speed through red lights. He got, like, three tickets in a week.

JORAH

Cool.

FATIMA

I guess. That your room?

JORAH



Yeah.

FATIMA

Your parents there?

JORAH

No. Yours?

FATIMA

Always.

JORAH

They're strict.

FATIMA

You have no idea.

JORAH

It's like some Muslim thing.

FATIMA

Yours just let you do what you want?

JORAH

Pretty much.

FATIMA

Lucky.

JORAH

I guess.

FATIMA

Some girl asked me about you today.

JORAH

Who?

FATIMA

Wanted to know if I liked you.

JORAH

What did you say?

*Beat*

JORAH

Okay, I see.

FATIMA

I'm not even allowed to date guys.

*He laughs.*

FATIMA

What?

JORAH

“Date.” You sound like you’re in grade 5.

FATIMA

Shut up. If my parents knew I was even talking to you, they’d kill me. And they’d kill you too.

JORAH

They'd have to find me first.

FATIMA

They would. They'd track you down.

JORAH

Seriously?

FATIMA

Oh yeah. They'd go all ISIS on you.

JORAH

Ha ha. You could stand up to them. Tell them it's different here. You have a right to do what you want.

FATIMA

It was Melissa who asked me about you. About us.

JORAH

Oh.

FATIMA

Did you go out?

JORAH

Not really. For a while.

FATIMA

She said something weird.

JORAH

No doubt.

FATIMA

That I should be careful.

JORAH

Of what?

FATIMA

You.

JORAH

I dumped her.

FATIMA

Why?

JORAH

Because she bored the crap out of me.

FATIMA

Uh ... okay.

JORAH

So she's pissed. That's all. Besides, it's the sort of thing you'd only talk about to someone you really trust, you know. Like, if you were going out.

*Beat*

JORAH

But we're not.

FATIMA

That's true, we're not.

JORAH

Right.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

You're really pretty. And not just pretty. Smart too.

*Beat.*

JORAH

And I got to say: the whole Muslim thing? It's kind of super-hot.

FATIMA

*(to audience)*

He's really sweet. Right? And every girl in this dumb school, if they think some guy's sweet, they can just tell him and, if he likes her, then they hang out, and ... But me? I'm at home hiding in my room pretending to do homework, doing every little thing I'm told.

ONE

Let's say Fatima and Jorah hung out at school a lot.

TWO

And Jorah would try to get her to come to the duct.

THREE

But she'd say, I can't. I can't miss class. My parents would freak.

TWO

Until a couple of days later, when she changed her mind.

### **Scene 9: The Duct**

JORAH

Nice, eh? It's a river that runs under the whole city. They covered it up, except for this spot. Here you can see out, but nobody can see in. Evans followed me here once, but I hid up in there, and he never found me.

FATIMA

Wow.

JORAH

Relax, it's all good.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

It's just one class. Nobody cares. You know that, right?

FATIMA

Okay.

JORAH

Trust me. I know.

FATIMA

I bet you do.

JORAH

Shut up.

FATIMA

If we got marks for skipping, you'd be like a genius.

JORAH

I'm not stupid.

FATIMA

I'm just bugging you!

JORAH

Very funny.

FATIMA

Ha ha ha.

JORAH

That's where I live, right up there. (*he gestures towards his apartment*). My whole life. You look really good right now, in the sun, the shadows, they make you look ... pretty.

FATIMA

Good line. But not really.

JORAH

I googled how to talk to Muslim girls. It said to tell you I saw your hair, so that means you have to marry me. Melissa's dumb friend, she walks right up to me, goes, "She's Muslim, you know." I'm, like, "Yeah," and she goes, "Yeah, dumbass. That means you'll never get any."

FATIMA

Gross.

JORAH

Is she right?

FATIMA

... I guess it depends what you mean by "any."

JORAH

I don't know.

FATIMA

Me neither. It's weird how people act like know something about Islam, when they don't have a clue.

JORAH

I don't.

FATIMA

I know.

JORAH

I'd guess you're not supposed to be this close to a guy.

FATIMA

You're smarter than you look.



*Something happens, they are touching?*

JORAH

Does this mean we're going out?

*Something that tells us yes.*

**Scene 10: Outside Mr. E's Office, a Few Days Later**

EVANS

Fatima. How are things going?

FATIMA

Uh, fine.

EVANS

You're adjusting all right?

FATIMA

Sure, yeah.

EVANS

I know you weren't too happy about coming to St. Mary's.

FATIMA

It's okay.

EVANS

You've skipped a couple of classes.

*Beat*

FATIMA

Are you going to tell my parents?

EVANS

I'm supposed to.

FATIMA

Please don't.

EVANS

What would they do?

FATIMA

Kill me.

EVANS

What do you mean by that? Would they -- hurt you?

FATIMA

Huh?

EVANS

How harshly would you be punished?

FATIMA

I don't know.

EVANS

It's important. I need to know what you think they would do.

FATIMA

I've never skipped a class before in my life.

*Beat.*

EVANS

Can I ask you a personal question?

FATIMA

I guess.

EVANS

Are you and Jorah going out?

*Beat*

EVANS

I know that, when you're new to a school and when something traumatic has happened, like the graffiti incident, you can feel the need to fit in.

FATIMA

I'm fine.

EVANS

Jorah's not a bad person, don't get me wrong. But I'm not sure he's right for someone like you.

FATIMA

What do you mean "someone like me"?

EVANS

Do your parents know about your relationship?

*FATIMA doesn't answer.*

EVANS

I've known Jorah for a long time. He's been through a lot. It's not his fault, but ... I think you should be very careful. Really. (*beat*) For now, just for a bit – why don't you try giving Jorah a little more space?

*Beat.*

EVANS

Will you think about it?

FATIMA

I have to go home.

EVANS

Look – do yourself a favour. Ask Jorah about his dad.

FATIMA

His dad?

EVANS

Yes, his dad.

### **Scene 11: Each at Home, in Their Own Spaces**

FATIMA

hey

JORAH

tay

FATIMA

what

JORAH

thinking

@ u.

FATIMA

me2

JORAH

sup?

*Now they videochat. .*

FATIMA

Hi.

JORAH

Smile.

FATIMA

What?

JORAH

Just do it. Please?

*She smiles.*

JORAH

Nice.

FATIMA

What?

JORAH

Screenshot. You look awesome.

FATIMA

Thanks.

*Beat. Jorah checks his phone.*

FATIMA

Thanks for being ... cool.

JORAH

Always.

FATIMA

You know what I mean.

JORAH

Not really.

FATIMA

Patient. With me. You know.

JORAH

You're welcome.

FATIMA

I've never done this before.

JORAH

No!

FATIMA

Shut up! Back home I wouldn't have even thought about it. There would have been no way. But here ... it's like everyone can do whatever they want.

JORAH

You're not like anybody I've ever known. That's ... it's what I like about you.

FATIMA

It's what I like about you too. Hey, so, the weirdest thing happened today.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

Something I overheard ... somebody was talking about your dad.

JORAH

What did they say?

FATIMA

Nothing I could understand, just ...

JORAH

What? Was it Melissa?

FATIMA

No.

JORAH

Who?

FATIMA

Some other kids.

JORAH

Just standing there talking about my frigging dad?

FATIMA

Kind of.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

Don't be mad. I just – overheard them.

JORAH

Saying what?

FATIMA

I couldn't understand it.

JORAH



Who was it?

FATIMA

I told you –

JORAH

What did they look like? Were they in our grade?

FATIMA

Why does it matter?

JORAH

Melissa.

FATIMA

No, Jorah, it wasn't.

JORAH

Who else?

*Beat.*

JORAH

People think they know. They think they know about him, and me. But they don't. They don't know anything.

*Beat.*

FATIMA

You can trust me.

*Beat*

FATIMA

I've never – what – we're doing this? If my parents found out, I'd be dead. For me to do – even this – with a boy, it's the most shameful thing they could imagine. And I know you don't understand, but if I'm going to do that, I need to know who I'm doing it with..

JORAH

You're not like your parents right?

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

Totally different.

FATIMA

Yeah, I mean, in a lot of things.

JORAH

Me too. I'm different than my dad too.

FATIMA

Tell me.

*Beat.*

JORAH

He's inside.

FATIMA

Inside what?

JORAH

Duh. Jail. That freak you out?

FATIMA

No.

JORAH

Liar.

FATIMA

What did he do?

JORAH

Stuff.

*A long beat.*

JORAH

I was in grade 7. I was in my room, and they were fighting in the kitchen, and I was on the computer, and so I put my headphones on. Didn't hear it. Except one thing, at the end. A smash. I looked down the hall. Mum was holding her face, and there was broken stuff on the floor, and he was pacing back and forth. He was crying, and throwing shit, and yelling he was sorry. All at the same time.

I ran outside. Went to the duct. It's where I always went.

At school, I had to go to all these counsellors. They'd always ask me questions, like, "How do you feel?" I'd be, like, "I don't know."

After, people looked at me different. I'd catch a teacher staring at me. Kids too. Like I was dangerous. Like they had a reason to be scared. I changed schools but people hear, they find out. It was all over the news. If you google our name, it's what comes up.

He got three years, with no parole, because they said it wasn't the first time. That there was a "pattern of abuse." Which I guess is true. But honestly, until I heard the ambulance that day, I hadn't ever really noticed. Just sat in my room, with my headphones on, not really thinking about much at all.

FATIMA

Oh, Jorah.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

I don't know. I'm so sorry.

JORAH

Shit happens.

FATIMA

I guess. Did he ever ... hurt you?

JORAH

No. I mean, I don't know. Not really.

FATIMA

I don't know what to say.

JORAH

Nobody does.

FATIMA

That must be so hard.

JORAH

Whatever. I guess.

FATIMA

Jorah.

*Beat.*

FATIMA

I won't tell anyone.

*Beat*

FATIMA

Trust me.

*She texts.*

JORAH

Okay.

*FATIMA blows a quick kiss.*

FATIMA

I trust you.

JORAH

I trust you too.

FATIMA

I know what it's like to have people think you're a freak.

*FATIMA blows another kiss.*

FATIMA

To want to be like everybody else.

*She starts to remove her hijab.*

FATIMA

I trust you. Oh my god.

*She shows more of her hair.*

JORAH

Fatima –

FATIMA

I trust you.

*FATIMA is now showing all her hair. She makes the sign of a heart.*

*Music. FATIMA is alone onstage.*

THREE

Let's say that night Fatima had a dream.

*In the dream, they start to make out, tentatively at first, then passionately. Jorah pushes further. She tries to signal enough, or to stop him. He keeps pushing. Music builds. It is big, epic.*

FATIMA

Stop!

### **Scene 12: A Series of Texts**

JORAH

yo

*Fatima doesn't respond.*

JORAH

u n calc?

*Fatima doesn't respond.*

JORAH

wn2 chill

*Fatima doesn't respond.*

JORAH

wru

FATIMA

;)

JORAH

;)?

### **Scene 13: At School in the Hallway**

MELISSA

Jorah's looking for you.

FATIMA

Oh, thanks.

MELISSA

How are things going?

FATIMA

Fine.

MELISSA

You sure? He's having trouble finding you.

FATIMA

No, everything's good.

MELISSA

I'm glad. I'm not jealous, you know. You guys are such a cute couple. I really want you two to work.

### **Scene 14: The Next Day**

JORAH

Hey.



FATIMA

Hi.

JORAH

I've been trying to find you.

FATIMA

Yeah, sorry, I just ...

JORAH

I brought you something.

FATIMA

Oh?

JORAH

A surprise.

FATIMA

Cool.

JORAH

That was all right, last night.

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

Nothing.

JORAH

You have really pretty hair. Joke. Here. *(handing her a print of a photograph)* It's the screenshot.

*JORAH moves in for a kiss that FATIMA rejects.*

JORAH

What?

FATIMA

You can't show this to anybody.

JORAH

I'm not. I'm giving it to you.

FATIMA

I could get in so much trouble.

JORAH

You trust me, remember?

FATIMA

You don't understand.

JORAH

What?

*Beat*

FATIMA

Last night, after, I had this dream, that we were ... making out.

JORAH

Sounds fun.

FATIMA

It wasn't. I kept telling you to stop, but you wouldn't.

JORAH

It was a dream.

FATIMA

I shouldn't have taken off my scarf.

JORAH

Why not? I didn't ask you to.

FATIMA

I know.

JORAH

You did it. You wanted to. You want to.

FATIMA

I know!

*Beat.*

JORAH

What's the big deal?

FATIMA

My whole life, that's what.

JORAH

Your whole life?

FATIMA

And my family, and my religion. What I did is a sin –

JORAH

You're talking like we slept together –

FATIMA

A sin against God,

JORAH

Showing me your hair?

FATIMA

You don't understand. For someone like you, it's impossible.

JORAH

Someone like me?

FATIMA

Yes.

JORAH

An a-hole with a criminal dad.

FATIMA

That's not what I meant –

JORAH

Right.

FATIMA

You don't understand –

JORAH

All I do is try to understand.

FATIMA

I couldn't sleep, I was up all night, and I know that's weird, but all the girls you go out with, like  
Melissa –

JORAH

Melissa?

FATIMA

We're too different.

*Beat.*

JORAH

I guess Melissa was right.

FATIMA

What do you mean?

JORAH

About me not getting any. Weird thing is, for the first time in my life I didn't even try. (*shows her the photograph*) "The most beautiful girl in the world." That's what I wrote on it. (*he rips up the photograph*) There. Now you're safe.

FATIMA

I'm sorry.

JORAH

One thing. I want to know -- which kid was talking shit about my dad?

*Beat.*

JORAH

You owe me.

FATIMA

It wasn't a kid.

*(to audience)*

Last summer we went back to Egypt to see our family for the first time. I'd forgotten what it was like to walk around the streets and not have people stare at me like I'm a freak. I was normal again, just like everyone else. That felt really weird.

### **Scene 15: Outside Mr. E's Office**

*This is a climactic scene. It should feel heightened, symphonic, and kind of mythic – the moment past and present come together. You might consider breaking the convention and having One, Two and Three act out some of the almost-violence as they narrate it, somewhat blurring the distinction between character and storyteller.*

THREE

Let's say when Jorah started thinking –

TWO

About how Mr. E has no right to tell people about his family, and what's gone on with him –

ONE

No f-ing right at all.

THREE

And let's say when Jorah started thinking that, he couldn't stop, because of the injustice of it, and a feeling in his gut, and the voice in his head that kept talking about it, over and over again.

TWO

Let's say he spent most of the afternoon planning his ambush –

ONE

Let's say it was almost the end of school.

THREE

Let's say Jorah was waiting outside Mr. E's office, where they've got the really hard chairs.

FATIMA

What are you doing?

JORAH

Nothing, I just want to talk to him.

FATIMA

You can't.

JORAH

Really? Cuz this is a free country. But maybe you don't realize that.

FATIMA

It doesn't have anything to do with your dad.

EVANS

Jorah. Is everything okay?

JORAH

Awesome.

TWO

Let's say Jorah started talking to Mr. E –

THREE

And pretty soon he was yelling –

ONE

Let's say Mr. E tried to calm him down, and pretty soon there was a bit of a crowd gathered around –

TWO

Let's say Jorah's made threats so somebody called the principal –

ONE

Because they'd all heard stories about what happens when an angry kid goes psycho in a school –

ONE

And let's say that Jorah cocked his fist –



THREE

And Mr. E put up his hands –

TWO

And let's say he was just about to pound the crap out of Mr. E –

THREE

When he got a flash, or a picture, in his head –

TWO

About what used to happen –

ONE

A while ago –

THREE

At his home –

TWO

When was hiding in a corner, not wanting to look, but not being able to help it –

THREE

Watching his dad beat the crap out of his mom.

ONE

Let's say Jorah didn't hit Mr. E –

TWO

But punched the metal locker instead –

THREE

Hard enough to dent it –

ONE

And hurt his hand pretty bad.

THREE

Let's say the principal was the first one to get there –

TWO

The gym teacher was behind him, trying to catch up –

THREE

Because the gym teacher was kind of out of shape –

TWO

They were both running up the hall, calling his name, and yelling –

THREE

In that way adults do –

TWO

When they think things are about to get bad.

THREE

Let's say Jorah yelled back –

ONE

“A-hole” –

THREE

And a few other things too –

ONE

That are a little more real.

TWO

He took off in the other direction –

THREE

With the gym teacher and principle in hot pursuit –

TWO

And Fatima, in the hall, watching them go ...

### **Scene 16: The Duct**

THREE

Let's say Jorah ran straight to the duct, because that's where he always goes.

*FATIMA arrives. JORAH's texting on his phone.*

FATIMA

Hey. That gym teacher didn't stand a chance. Too fat.

Your hand –

JORAH

Don't you have to get home?

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

See ya.

FATIMA

Who are you texting?

*Beat.*

JORAH

My dad. He gets out this week. He keeps texting me. "I want to see you. You're my son."

*Beat.*

FATIMA

Whoa.

JORAH

What do you think I should do?

FATIMA

I don't know.

JORAH

I thought you knew everything.

FATIMA

No.

JORAH

We had these counsellors. They were always, like, your father is a violent man. You're going to want to forgive him, but you can't. That will just encourage him. It'll make it more likely that he'll do it again. But people aren't always what you think they are.

FATIMA

You should talk to somebody.

JORAH

But not you.

FATIMA

Yeah. For sure. I mean, as friends.

JORAH

Because I got mad? Because I punched a locker? Because my dad's an a-hole? Because you showed me your hair?

FATIMA

No, it's not about you. Can't you see? It's because of me. It's about me.

*An awkward moment.*

FATIMA

Talk later?

*JORAH doesn't respond.*

### **Scene 17: The Next Thing Jorah Did**

THREE

Let's say the next thing Jorah did he felt like he was doing it because of love.

ONE

Let's say that night Fatima got a text from Melissa.

THREE

It said –

TWO

Check Facebook. Now!!!!

THREE

Let's say Fatima followed the link.

TWO

It was a new page.

ONE

“My Muslim ex-girlfriend takes off her hijab!”

THREE

Let's say Jorah had recorded their chats.

TWO

Not really for any reason –

ONE

More like just because it felt like a secret –

TWO

And because sometimes he hates how girls treat him –

THREE

Like he's already done something wrong –

ONE

Under the video was a caption –

THREE

It said, "Actions have consequences" –

TWO

Let's say the page spread fast –

ONE

And let's say Fatima told Mr. E, and he got Facebook to shut it down.

THREE

Let's say Mr. E called Fatima's parents. Let's say Fatima's parents freaked out, and Mr. E talked to them for a long time –

TWO

Let's say as he was talking to them, Mr. E was thinking about a Muslim family in another part of the country who murdered their two daughters because they thought they had dishonoured their family by being sluts.

ONE

Let's say there's almost two billion Muslim people in the world.

THREE

Let's say they're not all the same.

FATIMA

I showed my parents. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. I said, "All I did was blow kisses and show him some hair." I was crying, but I was, like, "What's the big deal? Is that really so bad? Do you know what girls do online?" They said, "No, we don't." Of course not. I was, like, "Well, you should look sometime." Next day they told me my punishment. No more computer in my room.

THREE

Let's say Fatima's parents surprised her.

TWO

Let's say some kids might have downloaded the video, but it didn't go viral.

ONE

Let's say Fatima's parents let her go back to her old school and reunite with Seema and Hama and Lindsay.

TWO

Let's say when people talked about the video, they exaggerated, and rumours spread that made it sound way more explicit than it was.

THREE

Let's say Fatima decided to ignore them and focus on her friends, and after a while the rumours kind of went away.

TWO

Let's say sometimes people do bad things, that they regret.

THREE

Let's say a couple months later Jorah texted Fatima.

JORAH



I'm sorry.

TWO

Let's say Fatima took two days to answer.

FATIMA

Oh?

JORAH

Stupidest think I've ever done. I was mad. I'm soooooooooooooo sorry.

THREE

Let's say there's something about the way he texted, like, twenty-five *O*s so that made her agree to meet him, at the duct.

### **Scene 18: The Duct**

JORAH

You get in trouble?

FATIMA

Yeah.

JORAH

I'm so sorry.

FATIMA

You said that.

JORAH

Are you okay?

FATIMA

Good to be back with the jabbers. You?

JORAH

I saw my dad.

FATIMA

Really?

JORAH

First time in three years. I never visited him when he was inside.

*Beat.*

JORAH

He said he was really sorry. He told me sometimes people do things they wish they could take back. Then he asked me to talk to my mom. Ask her if she'd see him. So they could talk.

FATIMA

Did you?

JORAH

No. Sometimes it takes more than sorry.

FATIMA

Yes.

JORAH

See you around?

FATIMA

Don't know.

JORAH

As friends?

FATIMA

Maybe.

JORAH

Thing is, I have seen your hair. So we have to get married.

FATIMA

That's a joke, right?

JORAH

Yeah.

FATIMA

Very funny.

JORAH

Ha ha.

THREE

Let's say they may have gotten together again after that.

TWO

Or maybe not.

ONE

And let's say –

THREE

The end.

*Music rises.*

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Marcus Youssef's dozen plays and performance events have been produced in theatres and festivals across North America, Europe and Australia, from New York to Dublin to Berlin. His awards include Rio-Tinto Alcan Performing Arts, Chalmer's Canadian Play, Arts Club Silver Commission, Seattle Times Footlight, Vancouver Critics' Choice Innovation (three times), as well as numerous local awards and nominations for best new play, production, and director in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. Marcus has been artistic director of Vancouver's Newworld Theatre since 2005, where he also co-founded Progress Lab 1422, a collaboratively managed, six-thousand-square-foot studio and production hub. Youssef has served as an assistant professor at Montreal's Concordia University and implemented Canada's first joint Bachelor of Performing Arts degree program at Capilano University. He was the inaugural chair of Vancouver's Arts and Culture Policy Council, teaches regularly at the National Theatre School of Canada and Langara College's Studio 58, and is an editorial advisor to *Canadian Theatre Review*. Youssef lives in East Vancouver with his partner, teacher Amanda Fritzlan, and their sons Oscar and Zak.