

Arabian Dreams
By Tanya Mishell

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Cast of Characters

LEILA - Princess of Ghazala, loved, respected (late teens/early 20's)

YEMINA - Female student in Ghazala, a romantic, assistant at the academy (late teens/early 20's)

RAZI - Female student in Ghazala; rational and practical (late teens/early 20's)

SAHLAH - Female student in Ghazala; flirty and playful (late teens/early 20's)

DAHLIA - Female student in Ghazala; innocent and sweet (late teens/early 20's)

HESSA - Leila's mother and Queen of Ghazala; teacher at the woman's academy (30's or 40's)

FADIL - Leila's father and King of Ghazala; wise, respected by his country (30's or 40's)

DUMAN - The best swordsman in Ghazala; military leader and honorable man (age flexible)

SAMIR - New young king of Zumarrad; conflicted about starting a war (20's)

MAKEEN - Male assistant and good friend to Samir; wants war (20's)

BACKGROUND ACTORS – Optional, as few or as many as you like (age flexible)

DANCERS – Optional, as few or as many as you like (age flexible)

Setting

A very long time ago in an Arabian land.

ACT I

Scene 1

Long ago, somewhere in an Arabian land. Only SAMIR and MAKEEN are talking in SAMIR's royal quarters in Zumarrad. These actors can be in front of the curtain, or illuminated in the front or side of the stage, as the majority of the story takes place in Ghazala.

MAKEEN. Everything is in place Samir. The soldiers are ready to invade Ghazala on your command.

SAMIR. Right . . .

MAKEEN. Well?

SAMIR. (Hesitant:) I will give the order soon.

MAKEEN. But the troops are waiting.

SAMIR. (Raising his voice, angry and frustrated:) Then let them wait!

MAKEEN. It is senseless to put this off. You are the new king of Zumarrad, and this invasion was well planned before your father's death.

SAMIR. War was what my father enjoyed most. I happen to find battle very wasteful.

MAKEEN. The king was a determined conqueror. He wanted Ghazala.

SAMIR. Taking over other countries is too expensive. I want to make life better for Zumarrad's people, and I can't do that if we're always at war. Besides, Ghazala is too small to bother with.

MAKEEN. It was the prestige of owning such a country your father was after. And now that their canals are complete, fresh water from the river reaches all areas of their land. It was wise of him to wait. The value of that tiny country is now unsurpassed, and we - did not have to lift a finger.

SAMIR. (Thoughtful, guilty:) It took them years to finish that project.

MAKEEN. Their people are brilliant. Ghazala has progressed in ways no other country has. You cannot blame your father for wanting it as part of his empire.

SAMIR. Father always wanted more land.

MAKEEN. This conquest would not be just about land. Ghazala has a wealth of animals and agriculture. If that is not reason enough to invade there are, of course . . . the women.

SAMIR. You believe in too many fairytales.

MAKEEN. It has been said that their charm is surpassed only by their wit, that they swordfight as good as any soldier, and speak about philosophy with ease. Many men have traveled far to find a bride in Ghazala.

SAMIR. You are the only one thinking of a bride, Makeen.

MAKEEN. And all you think of is work.

SAMIR. Work is simple. Women . . .

MAKEEN. Maybe one day, women will make sense, and we will be able to understand them.

SAMIR. A war would be easier.

MAKEEN. Great. I will give the order.

SAMIR. Not yet.

MAKEEN. Your father would have conquered Ghazala by now.

SAMIR. (Stands; gets in MAKEEN'S face:) Do you see my father standing here?

MAKEEN. (Matching his stance:) I'm not sure I see his son standing here!

SAMIR. (Backing away, thoughtful:) He and I were always very different.

MAKEEN. Still, you must carry out his wish and assert yourself as Zumarrad's new leader. This invasion will do both. As far as the women are concerned . . .

SAMIR. Not that again.

MAKEEN. People say it is impossible to be bored in the presence of one of these goddesses.

SAMIR. Never mind the . . . goddesses . . . how can you talk of women one moment and of war the next?

MAKEEN. (Bragging:) I am a lover *and* a fighter.

SAMIR. You have not changed since we were young. You were always lifting the girls' veils, and then blaming it on me.

MAKEEN. You were heir to the throne - nobody was going to punish you! My father was a mere soldier. I would have been cleaning up after the animals as punishment – for months!

SAMIR. It would have served you right.

(SAMIR sighs, troubled.)

MAKEEN. (Softening somewhat:) You must follow through with the plan, otherwise you will be seen as weak. (Someone hands MAKEEN a rolled up scroll. He looks at the seal before handing it to SAMIR.) It is a message from Ghazala's King.

(MAKEEN hands SAMIR the message, which SAMIR reads, rolls back up, and holds, thoughtful).

MAKEEN. Well?

SAMIR. (Pauses, then decisive:). Ensure the soldiers are ready. In the meantime, you and I will travel ahead of the army. We have never been there, so no one will know who we are. I want to see Ghazala for myself.

MAKEEN. (Sarcastic:) Why?

SAMIR. Before I go through the expense of a war, I want to know what could possibly make this land so special.

(SAMIR and MAKEEN exit.)

ACT I

Scene 2

Ancient times at an academy in Ghazala. Arabian décor. Optional background actors and optional music. Curtain may open to reveal Ghazala or lighting may change for this purpose. Female students at the academy are on a break, talking and laughing.

YEMINA. (Claps for attention:) All right ladies, break time is over, time to study.

SAHLAH. Here is a question for the great philosophers . . . why should we study? And why, Queen Hessa, would you spend your days teaching at our academy, instead of enjoying a life of leisure? I hear there are lands where the women do nothing at all. Some of these kingdoms even have harems.

HESSA. (Amused:) We are not that kind of a kingdom. You will fare much better passing your time in an academy than in a harem, Sahla.

YEMINA. I love to learn. One day, I will be a teacher as well.

DAHLIA. I would much rather cook than study.

HESSA. (Kindly:) You may cook all you wish Dahlia . . . by choice, and in freedom.

SAHLAH. (Good-natured teasing:) Even better, after you have been properly trained.

(Others laugh, but not maliciously.)

RAZI. Yes, we tasted your last attempt at baking. Neither Egyptians nor Romans would have eaten the concoction, even in a famine!

(Collective chuckling. SAHLAH puts her arm around DAHLIA protectively.)

DAHLIA. What is a famine?

RAZI. We studied that last year, remember?

YEMINA. I believe some people should review their notes, so our good fortune is not taken for granted.

RAZI. Our charmed lives could come to an end if we go to war with Zumarrad.

SAHLAH. (Flirty and playful:) No doubt they've heard of the women, and want us for themselves.

YEMINA. What is it with men and war anyway?

RAZI. A need for power, otherwise known as ego.

DAHLIA. Maybe one day, men will have no more egos, and there will be no more war!

(All students look at her with esteem, hold in laughter, and then burst out laughing.)

HESSA. (Puts an arm around DAHLIA:) May the heavens hear your words my dear girl. (Turning to YEMINA:) Yemina, which are the lessons for today?

RAZI. (Interrupting:) Mathematics.

DAHLIA. Philosophy.

SAHLAH. (Makes sword fighting stance:) And sword fighting! Yes!

DAHLIA. (Admiringly:) But no one can compete with Leila.

HESSA. My daughter does love her sword. . . she is also missing from my class - again - has anyone seen her?

HESSA. (Aware that LEILA's friends are covering for her:) I see. Well, please study for another hour, and then it's home to your families and chores.

(HESSA begins to walk out.)

YEMINA. Oh, professor, we need new gowns for the feast.

SAHLAH. (Flirty:) I want mine with a little less fabric.

RAZI. It is odd to celebrate with a possible war upon us.

HESSA. We may be concerned, Razi, but we will not live scared. Our yearly festival will happen as planned. About the new dresses, I will need to consider the expense.

SAHLAH. Come on, professor. You know you're the boss. Can't you just get us the clothes?

HESSA. (Amused, knowing SAHLAH is right:) I will see what can be done.

(Students begin having fun, neglecting their schoolwork.)

YEMINA. (Walking out with HESSA:) Your studies, ladies.

SAHLAH. (Fun continues:) Doing them right now!

(Leisure continues and then they exit. Optional music and fading out.)

ACT I

Scene 3

In or around LEILA's home. DUMAN is standing holding his sword, thinking. LEILA enters with her own sword. No background actors.

LEILA. Greetings professor Duman!

DUMAN. Greetings Princess Leila - I see you are skipping your mother's class again.

LEILA. Please professor, just for a while. I need the practice.

DUMAN. (Amused:) Trust me, you do not need the practice.

LEILA. Alright then, I want the practice.

DUMAN. At least now we have honesty.

LEILA. We are wasting valuable time talking.

DUMAN. Tell me, just how many hours a day do you spend training with your sword?

LEILA. (Doing some moves with her sword:) Bliss knows no time.

DUMAN. Does your mother know what you are doing when you are not in school?

LEILA. Of course, what else would I be doing?

DUMAN. There are other things in life.

LEILA. I respectfully disagree.

DUMAN. You are your father's daughter. He loved his sword ever since we were boys. He hates war, but always said that he had to be prepared for it.

LEILA. Those do sound like father's words. It seems now he may not have a choice. I assume if there is a war, you will lead the army again.

DUMAN. I have not been informed.

LEILA. Everyone knows the great Professor Duman is the best with the sword in all of Ghazala.

DUMAN. The wars your father and I fought were a long time ago. In the last 25 years of peace, our victories have turned into exaggerated tales of fantasy.

LEILA. You are too modest professor. I was brought up on the chronicles of yours and father's glory; the legendary adventures of King Fadil and the great Duman in the field of battle.

DUMAN. Your father knows that glory always comes with a high price to someone. He will do everything possible to avoid a war.

LEILA. (Taking a fighting stance:) Just in case, you should practice.

DUMAN. There is something I must tell you.

LEILA. (Annoyed:) More talk?

DUMAN. You need to hear this. (Hesitates:) For I will no longer be your teacher.

LEILA. (Joking:) Why not? Are you scared? (Joking) Have *I* now become the best in the land? (Laughs and does some stances with her sword) I did knock the sword out of your hand a few times, remember? (Laughs some more).

DUMAN. (Serious:) I have seen this coming for a long time. You have made me proud ever since your first lesson at the age of six. And now, the student has surpassed the teacher. My job here is finished.

LEILA. Finished, what do you mean?

DUMAN. I have taught you all that I know. I shall speak to your mother and father soon. You - are now the best swordfighter in our land.

LEILA. But . . . I was only joking. It is not possible . . .

DUMAN. It has been, (bowing towards LEILA:) a privilege.

(LEILA is hesitant, pauses, and finally walks out. DUMAN is left alone, smiles kindly as she leaves, and then looks concerned. Exits.)

ACT I

Scene 4

King's quarters at Ghazala. FADIL is reviewing papers looking worried. LEILA enters, quiet and thoughtful, and stands for a few moments before her father sees her. No background actors.)

FADIL. (Sees LEILA, cheers up, goes to her and hugs her:) My dear, how were your lessons today?

LEILA. I just finished a lesson with professor Duman.

FADIL. Love for the sword runs in our family. May you always use it in honor, and only as a means to protect peace when you must. (He pauses, noticing LEILA is unusually quiet:) Is something worrying you my child?

LEILA. (Hesitant:) The professor needs to speak with you and mother.

FADIL. It is impossible for you to be having trouble in your learning; that I know for sure.

LEILA. It is not my place to say.

FADIL. In other words, you do not wish to tell me.

LEILA. It is not my place to say.

FADIL. You are silent and calm when you need to be. That quality will serve you well as queen.

LEILA. I am not really royalty, father.

FADIL. You are, and will always be, my princess. You were a gift from the heavens, and therefore, you are royalty.

LEILA. (Laughs slightly:) Do the heavens always leave their gifts in a baby basket at your door on a rainy night?

FADIL. Only the very special ones.

(He hugs her.)

HESSA. (Walking in, greeting them both with hugs:) Hello my dears.

LEILA. Hello mother.

HESSA. (To LEILA:) We missed you in class today.

LEILA. (Hesitating:) I'm a bit tired; I'm going to lie down.

(LEILA exits.)

HESSA. Is there something on her mind?

FADIL. Young people; I have given up trying to figure them out.

HESSA. Hmm. How was your day?

FADIL. Productive. There was a meeting with the council, and then I visited the new field being planted.

HESSA. How did that go?

FADIL. I offered to help with the labor, but the supervisor would not allow it.

HESSA. Why not?

FADIL. Because of what happened the last time I helped.

HESSA. (Amused:) As I recall, you planted dates where the figs belonged and grapes where the legumes should be.

FADIL. I was only trying to help.

HESSA. The olive tree never produced fruit again.

FADIL. I did not touch the olive tree!

HESSA. (Amused:) For the sake of our food supply, you had better leave the planting to the experts.

FADIL. Fair enough. How are things at the academy?

HESSA. Studies are good . . . and, new gowns are wanted for the festival.

FADIL. What happened to the gowns from last year?

HESSA. Those have been worn.

FADIL. Can they not be worn again?

HESSA. Fadil, was it not you who said, “a nation must always look successful, in order to be successful?”

FADIL. Yes, but . . .

HESSA. We could not possibly wear the same dresses two years in a row.

FADIL. May I speak?

HESSA. Of course; this is your kingdom.

FADIL. I am not so sure about that.

HESSA. Did I mention the fabric from last year's frocks would be used for curtains? So there really would be no waste.

FADIL. (Reluctant:) I suppose not.

HESSA. And is it not you who hates waste, more than a plague of locusts? (FADIL tries to speak:) As you can see, your wisdom dictates that new dresses be made.

FADIL. My wisdom?

HESSA. It is the words you speak that make you a great king.

FADIL. (Obviously in love:) It is the words you speak that made you queen.

HESSA. Then it is agreed. I will contact the seamstress.

FADIL. (Cranky:) Did I agree to something?

HESSA. You do not need to agree darling. I am in charge Ghazala's budget, remember?

FADIL. And you do a wonderful job . . . now, can we discuss something besides women's clothing?

HESSA. You seem a bit cranky.

FADIL. (Extremely cranky:) I am not cranky!

HESSA. You could use a day off.

FADIL. (Looks at her puzzled:) A what?

HESSA. A day off.

FADIL. (Truly puzzled:) I do not understand.

HESSA. Some people believe in taking time off once in a while.

FADIL. What do they do with this - time off?

HESSA. They relax.

FADIL. Are you making this up?

HESSA. You need some rest.

FADIL. Now is not a good time. The issue with Zumarrad is of great concern.

HESSA. The ladies were discussing it today at school. There was a question as to whether we should feast at a time like this.

FADIL. Our yearly feast celebrates freedom and peace, and we have always honored our traditions. (Sighs concerned:) I was worried about war when the canals were complete. Still, they were needed for progress. While Zumarrad's king was alive, he rejected all my offers of friendship. I have never met his son, but I expect he will be of the same mind.

HESSA. What if you are wrong?

FADIL. (Puzzled:) Me? Wrong? (HESSA is amused:) Nevertheless, our army cannot compete with theirs. We must find a way to avoid an attack. Such an event would be . . . (Shakes his head with concern:) disastrous.

HESSA. (Comforting:) I know you must have something in mind already.

FADIL. I have invited King Samir to the festival, and offered our friendship once more. If he is unwilling to make peace, and as last resort, I proposed that he present his best swordfighter against our best, as a way to settle this matter and avoid a full-scale war.

HESSA. A one-on-one swordfight. That is a very ancient custom.

FADIL. An old fashioned practice, but it saves lives and resources.

HESSA. Has King Samir accepted?

FADIL. (Pensive and concerned:) I have not received a message yet. (She leans her head on his shoulder. He becomes hopeful, turns to her and holds her hands:) So, let us ensure that the feast is grand, with music, food and atmosphere that are nothing short of intoxicating.

HESSA. We will do our best.

FADIL. You look the same today as you did the first time I saw you.

HESSA. You caused quite a stir for marrying a dancing girl instead of that princess who was chosen for you.

FADIL. I had no choice but to follow my heart.

(He hugs her.)

HESSA. All will be well. I am praying for peace every day.

FADIL. I hope for peace also, but just in case, we must be ready.

HESSA. Who do you propose for the swordfight, should it come to that?

FADIL. Duman of course. He is still the best in the land.

(They exit.)

ACT I

Scene 5

King's quarters in Zumarrad. SAMIR is talking with MAKEEN. No background actors.

MAKEEN. (Agitated; holding the invitation:) This is ridiculous! An invitation to their yearly festival - and another plea for peace? You are not considering it ...?

SAMIR. I have decided nothing yet.

MAKEEN. Friendship is not an option. Ghazala is too wealthy not to conquer. And this nonsense of a one-on-one swordfight has not been done since the time of our great grandfathers!

SAMIR. There is no need to waste lives and resources, when victory can be decided between two men and two swords.

MAKEEN. Are you forgetting that our best swordfighter is ill? That leaves you, second best, to do the fighting.

SAMIR. Unlike you, I do more thinking than talking, and I am thinking all of this through.

MAKEEN. Do you presume to be better with the sword than their best? They excel in everything except size of land and army. You will likely lose!

SAMIR. If I fight, I will win.

MAKEEN. (Sarcastic:) That is your big plan. You just assume you are going to win? Honestly Samir, there are times I think you are downright stupid.

SAMIR. I could have you killed for saying that.

MAKEEN. Go ahead! With your plan, I'll be dead anyway! Do you really think that if we go to this festival with no army, King Fadil will let us walk away unharmed? We will be instant prisoners!

SAMIR. He is known to be a man of his word.

MAKEEN. We should launch an attack as we always do, and just finish this.

SAMIR. I have heard everything you said, and I am ignoring you. For now we will leave the army behind and ride most of the way. They will just assume that we are two visitors. I want to see this little place before investing in a war, so we will walk as we approach Ghazala.

MAKEEN. By all means, let us walk toward our certain doom.

SAMIR. Do you remember speaking of the women, or as you called them, goddesses?

MAKEEN. What do they have to do with our certain doom?

SAMIR. They will be there.

MAKEEN. When do we leave?

SAMIR. You really do amaze me. One mention of a woman and you forget all about war.

MAKEEN: I'm not very consistent, am I . . .

SAMIR: Glad to see you admit it. Just make sure that we are ready to go.

MAKEEN. I am ready to see you take a beating in this swordfight; do not expect any help from me.

SAMIR. I can fight my own battles Makeen, thank you.

MAKEEN. Good. Because I will be feasting in Ghazala before I die – soon!

SAMIR. Then will you be quiet?

MAKEEN. Maybe my death will come quickly, by one of the goddesses with her sword.

SAMIR. Women with swords. That is a fairytale.

(They exit.)

Optional dance (possibly with swords as a prop) before next scene.

ACT I

Scene 6

Inside or outside in Ghazala. DUMAN is troubled. No background actors.

DUMAN. (Walks in anxious and upset. He looks at the sky while speaking:) Why would you place this burden upon me? There is to be a battle between the best swords of each land. How do I tell my friend that his daughter is now the rightful one to fight? My life was made to be taken in battle, but not hers. (Pausing:) It cannot be. I will not tell Fadil that Leila is the best in the land, and I will not tell her about the planned swordfight. This battle must be mine.

(DUMAN exits after a thoughtful pause. YEMINA comes out onto the stage, having heard DUMAN. She thinks about what she heard and exits.)

ACT I

Scene 7

DAHLIA, SAHLAH and RAZI are reading and doing miscellaneous tasks. Background actors optional, but towards the back and very quiet. YEMINA enters.

YEMINA. We have a problem.

DAHLIA. Queen HESSA says there are no problems; only challenges to break through.

(YEMINA gathers the group and whispers.)

SAHLAH. That - is a problem.

RAZI. Does anyone have any ideas?

DAHLIA. I have an idea.

(RAZI and YEMINA look shocked. They all gather around in a circle to listen to DAHLIA, who whispers to them.)

YEMINA. That - is brilliant.

RAZI. She thought of that all on her own?

DAHLIA. Why are you surprised?

SAHLAH. (Approvingly:) Because you are not as innocent as you look.

DAHLIA. (Enthusiastic:) Thank you!

YEMINA. Who will tell Leila? Should we even tell her?

RAZI. It scares me too, but she deserves the truth. Professor Duman is planning to battle in the swordfight, even though Leila is now the best.

SAHLAH. The king and queen will not allow her to fight.

RAZI. This must be Leila's decision, even if it scares us.

YEMINA. It's a matter of security. If the king is not told, we will be breaking the law.

RAZI. Our laws at least make sense. Who knows what will happen if Zumarrad invades.

SAHLAH. We know how they treat the people they conquer.

(Brief silence; everyone is thinking.)

YEMINA. Well?

RAZI. What good is all this education, if we do nothing when it truly matters?

SAHLAH. We must tell Leila. Whatever the outcome, we will be making history.

RAZI. I would rather make history than fall victim to it.

YEMINA. Keeping this from the king and queen is illegal.

RAZI. I think keeping this secret is necessary.

DAHLIA. (Excited:) I like illegal better!

SAHLAH. You are showing good promise of being very bad.

DAHLIA. (To SAHLAH, hopeful:) Will you teach me more?

RAZI. (Sarcastic:) There's a class not taught at the academy.

SAHLAH. (Puts her arm around DAHLIA:) Stay close to me. You will be an expert in no time.

(They all exit.)

ACT I

Scene 8

Evening outside in Ghazala. Citizens (background actors) talking and sitting together. LEILA enters and says hello to some people in a casual manner. She then walks toward the front of the stage alone and is admiring the stars. SAMIR enters, looking around with curiosity. Walks around some and then bumps into LEILA.)

SAMIR. My apologies. I seem to be quite lost.

(Both are shy.)

LEILA. I did not know it was possible to get lost in Ghazala.

SAMIR. It is my first time here.

LEILA. Oh . . . welcome! Are you here to see friends?

SAMIR. Um . . .

LEILA. You chose an odd time to visit. We could be on the brink of a war with Zumarrad.

SAMIR. (Uncomfortable:) It seems to be all people are talking about.

LEILA. We have not seen battle for some time. Everyone is a bit on edge.

SAMIR. Hmm . . . (Looking up:) the stars seem so bright here; and the air is so fresh.

LEILA. (Speaking with love for her country:) My mother calls our climate the miracle of Ghazala.

SAMIR. Really. . .

LEILA. (Looking up:) It is nearly perfect year round; and we get just enough rain exactly when we need it.

SAMIR. (Studying LEILA:) You love your country very much.

LEILA. Doesn't everyone love their home? I have never traveled, but somehow I know this is the happiest place in all of creation. What is your home like?

SAMIR. (Hesitates for a moment:) Big. So, what do you know about Zumarrad?

LEILA. It is a powerful empire. They have refused our friendship for years.

SAMIR. (Very uncomfortable:) Is that so . . .

LEILA. We believe the late king was waiting for us to finish the canals before trying to invade.

SAMIR. (Quietly; guilty:) Making Ghazala all the more valuable . . .

LEILA. Excuse me?

SAMIR. I mean, Zumarrad cannot be all evil.

LEILA. You must have heard what happened to the countries they invaded; the lands, the people!

SAMIR. (Interrupting her; uncomfortable:) I know what happened. (A few moments of silence:) May I . . . ask your name?

LEILA. I'm Leila; Fadil's daughter.

SAMIR. King - Fadil's daughter?

LEILA. (Amused:) Yes, but around here royalty is more of a tradition. My parents insist that we not be prideful.

SAMIR. Pride always comes before a fall.

LEILA. (Chuckling:) My father says that. He is very wise. Did you hear that from your father?

SAMIR. (Sarcastic chuckle:) No.

(LEILA and SAMIR are quiet, still looking at the stars. YEMINA, SAHLAH, RAZI, and DAHLIA enter. YEMINA keeps looking back. They have not seen LEILA yet.)

RAZI: Yemina, come on.

YEMINA. (Looking back:) I'm coming.

RAZI. Do not look back. You do not even know who that was.

YEMINA. (Still looking back:) He must be new here.

SAHLAH. He could be a spy from Zumarrad.

RAZI. Be serious. Zumarrad does not need spies to know its army is a hundred times bigger than ours.

SAHLAH. He was looking at us like we were rare jewels.

DAHLIA. (To YEMINA:) He was watching you most of all.

RAZI: He was drooling!

YEMINA. (Still looking back:) I know nothing of him.

RAZI. Exactly. So quit looking back.

SAHLAH: (Playful, to RAZI:) There is nothing wrong with a little romance in life.

RAZI: There is nothing wrong with a little common sense in life.

(SAHLAH starts to say something. DAHLIA sees LEILA.)

DAHLIA. There's Leila.

SAHLAH. (They pull LEILA away from SAMIR:) Who is that?

DAHLIA. We also saw a stranger.

RAZI. Only that one was drooling.

SAHLAH. (Looks at SAMIR up and down, studying him. SAMIR is still looking at LEILA:) I think this one is too. Who is he?

LEILA. (A bit suspicious:) Now that you mention it, he did not say much about himself.

SAHLAH. (To LEILA:) We need to talk to you. It is important.

DAHLIA. Yemina was going to tell her.

(YEMINA is daydreaming. SAHLAH moves her hand up and down in front of YEMINA's face and snaps her fingers trying to get YEMINA's attention, but cannot.)

RAZI. (To LEILA:) We need to go. I will tell you on the way.

(The girls start pulling LEILA away.)

SAMIR. (To LEILA:) Must you leave?

LEILA. I am afraid so. There is an inn just ahead where you can rest. They will give you a place to sleep and bread with olive oil.

SAMIR. Thank you . . .

LEILA. If you find yourself swimming in the river, you have gone too far.

SAMIR. It was nice to meet you . . .

(LEILA is pulled away by her friends and they exit. MAKEEN enters.)

MAKEEN. (Sarcastic:) Thank you for waiting!

SAMIR. (Still looking LEILA's way:) You are too slow, my friend.

MAKEEN. I just saw the most amazing woman.

SAMIR. You too?

MAKEEN. (Talking about YEMINA:) She moved like the wind.

SAMIR. (Talking about LEILA:) She spoke with such eloquence.

MAKEEN. (Both are thinking:) I have never felt this way before.

SAMIR. Neither have I.

MAKEEN. Do you suppose we are ill?

SAMIR. (They both hold their own stomachs and foreheads trying to see what is wrong:) I hear there is an inn nearby. Hopefully after some food and rest we will feel like ourselves again.

MAKEEN. (Daydreaming:) Hopefully you are wrong. (They begin walking out, MAKEEN first. SAMIR stops and turns back quietly:) Are you coming?

SAMIR. Yes, it's just, the people here . . .

MAKEEN. (Longingly:) I noticed.

SAMIR. They care deeply for their country.

(SAMIR pauses, thoughtful. They exit.)

ACT I

Scene 9

SAHLAH, RAZI, YEMINA, DAHLIA, and LEILA are troubled, sitting together. No background actors.

YEMINA. Leila, you do not have to do this.

LEILA. It is my duty. I must be the one to fight if I am the best in the land.

SAHLAH. As the future queen, it is your duty to stay alive. We should not have told you.

RAZI. You can still change your mind.

LEILA. I will not change my mind.

DAHLIA. I am scared for you.

LEILA. I must do what is right for Ghazala.

SAHLAH. We cannot lose you.

LEILA. Is my life more important than anyone else's? What of the lives of our countrymen and their families? Should they meet the same fate as the other victims of Zumarrad?

YEMINA. Zumarrad's king could still accept our peace offer.

SAHLAH. That would take a miracle.

DAHLIA. I believe in miracles.

SAHLAH. (Smiling kindly:) Of course you do.

LEILA. My parents must know nothing of this (she pulls out a rolled note) I wrote this to them in case . . .

YEMINA. Please do not speak like that.

SAHLAH. (After a few moments of silence:) Words are difficult at a time like this.

YEMINA. You? Speechless?

LEILA. (Mood lifting in the group, some smiling and slight laughter:) Not for long, I'm sure.

YEMINA. If this is going to work, the rest of our plan is critical.

DAHLIA. (Excited, silly, stepping forward:) I - am completely ready!

RAZI. (Sarcastic:) We are going to die.

SAHLAH. How dare you show such little confidence in my pupil? She will carry it off brilliantly.

DAHLIA. I will! I promise!

RAZI. (Laughing slightly:) Now would be a good time to pray.

SAHLAH. Now *would* be a good time to pray.

(They all get silent and gather in a small circle with their heads bowed).

ACT I

Scene 10

Outside or inside. DUMAN and FADIL are talking. No background actors.

FADIL. Well, my friend, I expect you are ready for battle, but my hope is still for peace.

DUMAN. Peace has been ours for a long time . . . it is a miracle that Zumarrad has not invaded yet.

FADIL. We have seen many miracles. Think of the odds we overcame in the past.

DUMAN. We were much younger in the past.

FADIL. Meaning *you* are much older now.

DUMAN. (Chuckling:) All those years fighting off our enemies together - and then, blissful quiet - for a while.

FADIL. I trust you completely with the future of Ghazala.

DUMAN. Your confidence is appreciated. And it is an honor to have been a teacher to your daughter . . .

FADIL. Oh yes! She said you wanted to speak with me.

DUMAN. (Hesitating:) I have never seen such a devoted student.

FADIL. You honor me with your words. But I will not keep you any longer because you need your rest. And if the peace offer is rejected, I pity your opponent!

DUMAN. (Thoughtful:) I want very much to protect Ghazala.

FADIL. What is it Duman? Feel free to speak anything on your mind.

DUMAN. (Long pause:) Again, I am grateful for your confidence in me.

FADIL. (Pauses also:) If you remember, fear before battle is natural. All will be well.

(FADIL exits.)

DUMAN. (Assertive and no longer troubled:) Yes it will.

(DUMAN exits. DAHLIA enters mixing something in a large bowl, looking mischievous. She exits.)

ACT I

Scene 11

The yearly feast at Ghazala; background actors encouraged. All are on stage except LEILA, DUMAN, SAMIR, and MAKEEN. Optional music/dance before dialogue.

FADIL. My fellow citizens: Welcome to our yearly celebration of freedom. This is a challenging time, but Ghazala's people have never lived in fear. Your being here is proof that our courage is the strength of our country. And now we feast, as we are grateful for another year of prosperity.

(Audience claps. FADIL starts to speak when SAMIR and MAKEEN enter. Clapping ceases, and audience starts to whisper).

FADIL. (To SAMIR:) Are you King Samir of Zumarrad?

SAMIR. I am.

(Citizens gasp and grow concerned.)

FADIL. People of Ghazala, King Samir is here at my invitation. He is our guest this evening. (To SAMIR:) I am King Fadil. Please accept my condolences on the loss of your father.

SAMIR. (Surprised:) Thank you.

FADIL. Please sit, both of you. I have always hoped our countries could be friends.

MAKEEN. That will not be possible. (SAMIR tries to quiet MAKEEN:) At the very least, this ridiculous one on one fight must happen. We cannot just - be friends.

FADIL. (To SAMIR:) And why not? You would be remembered as a peacemaker – as the king who changed your country's history.

MAKEEN. Yes, by making it weaker.

(SAMIR looks at MAKEEN with reproach.)

SAMIR. (Feeling guilty:) There is no need for anything to happen now. You are here with your countrymen . . . we will leave you in peace for tonight.

FADIL. But we wish for you to stay and share our table, our food, our hospitality.

MAKEEN. Tonight we leave you to celebrate; but tomorrow, there must be combat between two men; unless you prefer an invasion.

SAMIR. (To MAKEEN:) Be quiet. (MAKEEN roles his eyes, giving up:) (To FADIL:) King Fadil, please continue your feast. Perhaps tomorrow we can . . .

LEILA. Why wait until tomorrow? (Leila enters and lunges at SAMIR with her sword. SAMIR takes out his sword and tries to defend himself, shocked.)

SAMIR. What is this?

LEILA. This is the last you will see of our country that you want so badly!

MAKEEN. (To SAMIR, pleased with himself:) I told you about the women, remember? I mentioned the swords?

LEILA. (To MAKEEN, extremely angry; yelling:) Your king is a pompous fool!

MAKEEN. (To SAMIR:) And such intelligence.

FADIL. (To LEILA:) Have you gone mad? I am trying to make peace here!

LEILA. This man wants only war father. (To SAMIR:) Did you think you could spy on us without being noticed? Or maybe you suppose that all women are simple minded? I sent out my own spies after you pretended to be a visitor. (To FADIL:) He has an entire army at our borders, father, ready to invade.

FADIL. I *know* that - and I am trying to make peace here!

LEILA. (Pauses for a moment:) Oops!

FADIL. (To HESSA:) Children! They grow up, and think they know everything!

SAMIR. (To FADIL:) I will not fight her. It would not be fair.

LEILA. He is right, father. What will his people say when he loses - to a woman!

SAMIR. (To LEILA:) I lose to no one.

LEILA. Only because there is no one your own size to fight! What honor is there in crushing those who cannot stand up to your army?

SAMIR. That was not always the case . . .

LEILA. You cannot own everything and everyone. Ghazala will never be yours!

(LEILA lunges at SAMIR again.)

FADIL. Leila, I forbid you to fight!

LEILA. Forbid? Mother, did you hear that?

FADIL and SAMIR. You are not fighting!

(FADIL and SAMIR look at each other, surprised that they agree.)

LEILA. Yes, I am fighting!

FADIL. Enough! Where is Duman? This fight belongs to him if it belongs to anyone.

LEILA. The professor is drunk.

FADIL. That is impossible. I have known Duman all his life; he drinks only water.

LEILA. Not tonight.

SAHLAH. Tonight he *is* drunk.

SAMIR. I demand an explanation!

FADIL. (Looking around and throwing up his hands:) *I demand an explanation!*

YEMINA. (To FADIL:) Sir, a few days ago I overheard the professor in the gardens. He was deeply troubled.

FADIL. Go on.

YEMINA. You see, Leila surpassed him in sword fighting abilities, but he did not want to risk her life. When we told her, she insisted in taking his place for the good of Ghazala. We did not tell you and the queen because we felt it was Leila's decision, and we knew you would never agree to it.

RAZI. And, we got him drunk so he could not fight.

FADIL. How could you possibly manage that?

YEMINA. Professor Duman sampled some of Dahlia's cooking.

(MAKEEN sees YEMINA and goes to her, forgetting all else. They spend the rest of the feast together.)

FADIL. Voluntarily?

SAHLAH. Our dear Dahlia has been known to make some mistakes with her recipes.

FADIL. (To DAHLIA, reproachful:) What kinds of mistakes?

DAHLIA. (Fearful, backing away:) There was grape juice in the cake.

FADIL. What sort of grape juice?

DAHLIA. The fermented sort . . . ?

(DAHLIA hides behind HESSA who protects her.)

FADIL. (To HESSA:) What are you teaching at that school?

HESSA. I teach women to think for themselves.

FADIL. What they did was - well I think it was illegal!

HESSA. The law must serve a greater good, my king.

FADIL: Did I say that?

HESSA. (Pleased with herself:) No, that was me.

YEMINA. Sir, professor Duman ate the cakes by his own choice.

FADIL. How many of these cakes did Duman eat?

DUMAN. (Comes in drunk:) I ate 'em all! They were so moist! That girl can really, really cook!

FADIL: You *are* drunk.

DUMAN. (HESSA is pulling DUMAN away:) I am ready to fight! Let me at him! Where is my sword?

HESSA: You will not need it tonight, professor. Now lie down.

(HESSA finds a pillow for DUMAN, who lies down.)

SAMIR. What kind of kingdom is this?

LEILA. We are unlike any kingdom you have ever known. There is equality for all, and everyone is fed, housed, educated, and protected. Most importantly, we don't take over countries at will. As a result, our lives have mostly been calm and peaceful, at least until now.

SAMIR. (Walking towards LEILA, softening:) I would like to learn more about this fascinating . . . kingdom. (To FADIL:) Unlike my father, I always believed war to be a waste of resources. And I hate waste.

FADIL. So do I.

SAMIR. (To FADIL:) King Fadil, on behalf of my countrymen, we accept your offer of friendship. (Turning to MAKEEN:) And as for you - There will be no more arguments about conquering.

MAKEEN. (Mesmerized, looking at YEMINA:) Conquer, don't conquer, I don't care . . .

FADIL. (To the crowd:) Let us all celebrate with our new friends.

(The two kings bow. Others greet SAMIR, and he then joins LEILA. Feasting continues briefly. Everyone is happy. Optional fade-in music and optional dancing. Then all exit.)

ACT I

Scene 12

Some time has passed since the festival. Everyone is on stage. All are happy and talking. Background actors optional.

SAMIR. Makeen, I trust you to govern Zumarrad until I return, and to make sure the changes I want for the people take place. When do you leave for home?

MAKEEN. Very soon. (Turns to YEMINA and takes her hands:) And I will be taking a rare jewel back with me.

SAHLAH. (To YEMINA:) We will miss you.

YEMINA. I will be back to visit after setting up the ladies' academy in Zumarrad.

HESSA. (To FADIL:) Darling, now that all is settled, let us go and have our weekend.

FADIL. Our what?

HESSA. Our weekend. Remember, your idea for some days off?

FADIL. My idea?

HESSA. You did agree that after Leila and Samir were married we could have some days of fun.

FADIL. Do I have a choice? (HESSA shakes her head no:) Then I guess we're off. (HESSA and FADIL hug LEILA and say goodbye all around.)

RAZI. (To YEMINA:) I will see you very soon! I am moving to Zumarrad to be with my new love as well.

SAHLAH. Since when are you a romantic?

(END OF SAMPLE)