

THE BUTCHER

CHARACTERS

Massoud Esfahani	<i>a butcher, 44</i>
Sholeh Esfahani	<i>his wife, 43</i>
Jane Horvath	<i>a housewife, 29</i>
Wes Horvath	<i>her husband, 42</i>
Deborah Niefeld	<i>a writer, 32</i>

SETTING

Springfield, Virginia, 2003.

BACKGROUND

Inspired by a genuine event documented (though only moderately) in the *Washington Post* in 2006.

SCENE ONE

Dawn. A muezzin's call to prayer rings out through the darkness. The last notes of the chant reverberate, and then there is only silence.

When the sun rises a beat later, it rises on a kitchen in Springfield, VA. JANE is setting the table. Warily.

JANE

Breakfast is ready.

Her husband, WES, enters.

WES

Honey, I can't find my watch.

JANE takes the watch out of her apron pocket and hands it to WES.

JANE

You left it by the downstairs sink. You wanted me to polish the/ wristband.

WES

Right! Yes. Thank you. That looks terrific.

JANE

You know, for a person who hates losing things...

WES

I know. I literally wouldn't even know the time of day without you.

JANE

Some days, I'm not even sure you know what century it is.

WES

You're so good to me. Thank you, Jane.

They kiss. WES sits. JANE sets a casserole on the kitchen table.

WES

Is this still Grandma Joan's egg-and-sausage bake?

JANE lifts a large square of casserole onto his plate.

JANE

You love it, I thought.

WES
No, I do! Thank you. I just thought we'd finished it already.

JANE
Not yet.

JANE slides a small portion onto her own plate, then returns to the counter and begins cleaning. WES waits for a beat while she works before speaking.

WES
Jane? Do you mind...?

JANE
Oh, right. Yes.

She sits. They fold their hands and lower their eyes to pray.

WES
Jesus Christ, we thank You for the bounty You have given us. We invite You to be a guest at our table and to bless this food we are grateful to receive. We offer You our hearts, and we ask You to help us heal.

JANE looks up.

WES
(without interruption)
To guide us and show us the way and to help us remember Your mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

WES looks up to see JANE staring.

JANE
Amen. Sorry.

WES
You all right? You got up so early this morning.

JANE
Yes, I'm fine. I was just restless. Couldn't sleep.

WES
It's amazing to me how you can look so beautiful with so little rest. Look at you.

JANE
Ugh. Stop it.

WES
Seriously. I wish you could see yourself the way I see you.

WES digs into his breakfast. JANE doesn't touch her food at all.

WES
So, what's your plan for the day?

JANE
Grocery shopping, maybe the library, and then... something. I don't know yet. I need to get out.

WES
Good. Go. Get out. That's good. You should treat yourself to something.

JANE
Sure. If I can think of something. Hard to know what, though.

WES
You should just pray on it! Which reminds me... did I tell you about the thing at work yesterday with the new guy, Jerry?

JANE
I don't think so, no.

WES
So he's got this customer who's thinking about buying a fleet of SUVs for his staff. I mean, this is a *really* big sale. It could totally make Jerry's month. So he's nervous, right? Because he wants it. But the guy's being a complete fanatic about the financing terms. He won't compromise. So he comes to my office -- Jerry -- and he says *I need help*.

JANE
This happens to you like sixteen times a week.

WES
I know, but this was different. *I* was different. I just got this feeling about Jerry. That he needed something more. And I really wanted to help him. So instead of just running some new numbers like always, I just sat there for a minute. I kind of just... let the room get quiet. And then suddenly I felt it. I said *You know what, Jerry? Let's just forget the deal terms for a second. I said Let me ask you something. Have you talked to God yet today?*

JANE
I can't believe you did that.

WES
I know! But it felt good. I mean, at first Jerry just looked at me like *You have got to be crazy*, but then he actually realizes I'm serious.

And I can feel it sort of washing over him, and then he just says -- you know, quietly -- *No, not yet*. So I tell him *Let's do it*.

JANE

And so... what? You did?

WES

Right there in my office we bowed our heads. And when Jerry looked up, I could just see it, plain as day: he'd accepted the Lord Jesus into his heart. He didn't even say one word. He just got up, walked out, and in two minutes, Jerry had cut the deal.

JANE

Wow.

WES

I know, right? Praise Jesus! It was one of those times when you really feel like you're living your purpose. You know?

JANE

Maybe. Sure. Of course. But... do you think...

WES

What?

JANE

Well, do you think maybe Jerry felt like he *had* to do it?

WES

Do what?

JANE

Pray. Because --

WES

What? Why?

JANE

Because you're the boss.

A quick beat.

WES

And?

JANE

And... he could have been scared you would fire him, maybe, if he didn't.

WES

Well, first of all, Jane, you know I would never do that. And second of all... I think I know a real moment of grace when I see one.

JANE

Right. Of course.

WES

Anyway... the point of the story is prayer. The power of prayer. Jerry submitted himself to Christ, and everything good followed from that devotion.

(a quick beat)

Are you sure you're all right?

JANE

I'm fine, Wes. You don't have to worry. It's a beautiful story. Really.

WES

Are you sure?

JANE

Yes, I'm sure. Do you want seconds?

WES

No. Thank you. I have to go. But it's really good stuff.

JANE

Your favorite recipe.

WES

Grandma Joan was a genius.

He gets up and starts poking around for his keys.

JANE

You don't have to work this weekend, do you?

WES

Uh... no. Why?

JANE

Well... so... I heard about this great butterfly garden out in the Shenandoahs? It's tended by these Franciscan monks?

WES

Okay.

JANE

And I thought maybe we could, you know, find a B&B and go out to the country.

WES

Well, that sounds nice, but... I thought we said we were going back to Bible group this Saturday.

JANE

I know. We did. But I was thinking maybe we should just... try to get away somewhere instead. Together.

WES

Jane, it's been five months.

JANE

It has not, Wes. It's only been, like, three and a half.

WES

Well, however long it is, it's not the same without you.

JANE

Things aren't the same any more in a lot of ways, Wes.

WES

But they can be. If we pray on it. We can... get back to --

JANE

I do pray.

WES

I don't mean alone. I mean in a prayer circle.

JANE

Do you honestly believe if we pray with those people at Bible/ group I'll just magically be able --

WES

Those people?

(cutting her off)

I'm not saying that, Jane.

JANE

They said it was one in a million, Wes. Doctors who/ actually know.

WES

I'm just saying we need help. To get back to how things were between us.

JANE

I just thought we should try something different for once. Something fun.

WES

This isn't about fun. It's about healing.

JANE

I thought you *liked* going out to the country. You used to say all the time how much you loved to hike and be in nature. To wander.

WES

And you used to love Bible group. You would insist we go out for ice cream with Mike and Vicki afterward so we could all keep talking.

JANE

We only did that twice.

WES

Bible group is where we fell in love. And I thought --

JANE

I need this, Wes! Or if not this, something a lot like it. I mean, maybe not this weekend, but soon.

A beat.

JANE

Sorry.

WES

No. Don't be. Sure. Yes. I hear you.

JANE

Do you?

WES

Really. And look, we don't have to decide anything now. We can talk about it more at dinner.

JANE

Sure.

WES

I'm late anyway.

JANE

Right.

A quick beat.

WES

I love you, you know.

JANE

I love you, too.

WES

Really.

JANE

Really me, too.

WES

I just want you to be with me is all.

JANE

And I want you to be with me, too.

WES

Well, then... okay. Good. And we'll talk more tonight, right?

JANE

Right.

He gets up and begins assembling his things, but still can't find his keys.

WES

Darn it. Where are my keys?

JANE

In the bowl by the front door. You put them there yesterday when you came home so you wouldn't forget.

WES

I would be totally lost without you.

JANE

You'd figure it out, believe me. Now go.

WES leaves. A beat later, JANE slides her uneaten square of casserole neatly back into the dish.

SCENE TWO

A few hours later in a small halal butcher shop, also in Springfield. MASSOUD stands behind the counter, sharpening his knives, when his wife, SHOLEH, enters.

SHOLEH

Hello, Massoud.

MASSOUD

Sholeh. What are you doing here?

SHOLEH

What, I can't come to say hello to my husband?

SHOLEH takes off her jacket, revealing a new college sweatshirt.

MASSOUD

Of course, yes, but... what are you wearing?

SHOLEH

What? I bought it at school. George Mason Patriots.

MASSOUD

You are a crazy woman.

SHOLEH

Why did you marry me, then?

MASSOUD

Maybe I like you this way.

SHOLEH

I have school spirit. That's not crazy. My school is good. Opening your mind is good. I tell you this all the time. Crazy is a man who won't listen.

MASSOUD

I listen! What?

SHOLEH

Like about carrots. Last week I told you all about beta carotene, Vitamin A. And then kale, too. And Swiss chard.

MASSOUD

What do you want, Sholeh? I gave you a place for vegetables. Nobody buys them.

SHOLEH

Nobody buys them, Massoud, because you don't sell them. If you told them how good vegetables are for the body, better than meat, they would buy them.

MASSOUD

This is ridiculous.

SHOLEH

What, you think your wife is stupid?

MASSOUD

No, of course, I --

SHOLEH

Then say what you think is ridiculous.

MASSOUD

A man is made of meat, Sholeh. We eat meat because we are meat. This is the truth.

SHOLEH

You are wrong, Massoud. There are many things I know that you do not know.

MASSOUD

There are many things you forget, too.

SHOLEH

You're here all day. Here in this shop. You might as well still be in Iran. You never go out. You never see.

MASSOUD

What don't I see? I see everything I need to see right here.

SHOLEH

You don't see your son.

MASSOUD

I see him.

SHOLEH

Do you? Did you see him this morning, Massoud? At school? Did you see him insult his own mother?

MASSOUD

What is this? What are you talking about?

SHOLEH

Today is the day he has class in the same building I do, so I saw him. With his new friend. The angry one. From his protest group. So I say his name to say hello, you know? *Hello, Sameer.* And he pretends he doesn't hear me.

MASSOUD

Maybe he *didn't* hear you.

SHOLEH

No, Massoud. I was right next to him. He pretended. So then I touch his shoulder. *Sameer*, I say. *Hello*. And then he turns his head and looks at me, looks at this sweatshirt, and then tells me he wants me to leave him alone with his friends.

MASSOUD

No. He is a good boy. He would not say this.

SHOLEH

Yes, he did. And then he turns away from me, he walks back to his friend, and he spits.

A long beat.

MASSOUD

What do you mean, he spits? At you?

SHOLEH

On the ground.

MASSOUD

On the ground? This is nothing.

SHOLEH

Maybe.

MASSOUD

No maybe. Sameer would not spit at his mother.

SHOLEH

He was angry. He had anger in his eyes. I saw it. Because of this sweatshirt.

MASSOUD

He was embarrassed, Sholeh. Because you are his mother, and you try to be his friend.

SHOLEH

He resents me, Massoud. This is not good!

MASSOUD

What do you want me to do? Forbid him to --

The door opens. It is JANE. MASSOUD and SHOLEH immediately fall silent.

JANE

I'm sorry. Are you open?

SHOLEH
Yes. Come in. Please. Welcome.

JANE enters. MASSOUD exits to the back room.

JANE
Is this a good time?

SHOLEH
Yes, yes, yes. It's just... nothing. How can I help you?

JANE
I'm looking for something different.

SHOLEH
Different than what?

JANE
I want to make my husband something he hasn't had before. A new flavor of... I don't know.

SHOLEH
Your husband likes new flavors?

JANE
Well... no, actually, he doesn't.

SHOLEH
Men are so stubborn. They don't listen to their wives.

JANE
Wes likes meat. So I thought...

SHOLEH
Meat's fine, yes. But without vegetables...

JANE
We need something special. And it's got to be good, too. So good he can't resist.

SHOLEH
Have you ever made white spinach lasagna? Very romantic.

JANE
I was thinking more unusual. Like... something from... well, where are you from?

SHOLEH
Iran.

JANE
Oh, Iran! That sounds perfect.

A quick beat.

SHOLEH

Okay. I'll give you a recipe. It's a stew from my mother.

JANE

Family recipes are the best! I love it already.

SHOLEH

This is very good, this stew. My husband wants it all the time. First, you need saffron. Do you have it?

JANE

No.

SHOLEH

Here. This is the most beautiful spice in the world.

JANE

It's so delicate.

SHOLEH

Yes. But also: no. It defies the tongue. Everyone tastes saffron in a different way. The great poets throughout history? All of them fail to describe it.

JANE

Wow. I can't wait to try it.

SHOLEH

And you need turmeric, too. And cinnamon.

JANE

Oh. That I have.

SHOLEH

You do not have this cinnamon. This is not too loud, like the American kind. This cinnamon is soft. And oh! Chai. You need chai with this stew. Do you drink chai?

JANE

Once, I think. Sort of... spicy?

SHOLEH

Let me guess: Starbucks? I love Starbucks. I study there sometimes. But that chai is like mud with a bucket of sugar. I will give you real Iranian chai. It's completely different. Now, the vegetables. You need onions, tomato, pumpkin, and some prunes. Do you like prunes?

JANE

My mother used to make me eat them, you know, when...

JANE clutches her stomach.

SHOLEH

Very good for constipation, yes. But your mother will not have to make you eat *these* prunes. Now: we need some meat.
(shouting to her husband)

Massoud!

(to JANE)

He will help you.

MASSOUD

(from offstage)

What do you want?

SHOLEH

(to JANE)

Why does he not just come to me when I call him?

(to MASSOUD)

I need you! Come here!

(to JANE)

Does your husband come when you call him?

JANE

No.

MASSOUD

(entering, to JANE)

Can I help you?

SHOLEH

I am already helping her. I'm giving her the recipe from my mother for the stew you love.

MASSOUD

(to JANE)

Oh, this is good. You will definitely love this.

SHOLEH

She knows she will love this. I told her already.

MASSOUD

How do I know what you tell her? So I tell her again. So what?

SHOLEH

Just give her the lamb.

MASSOUD

Don't tell me what to do. I know what I am doing.

SHOLEH

(to JANE)

Do you hear this?

MASSOUD

(to JANE)

Do you want the lamb?

JANE

Well, actually... is there a choice?

SHOLEH

(to JANE)

Do not let my husband tell you what you want!

JANE

No, it's just... we eat lamb all the time, so if you can make the stew with something else...?

MASSOUD

Of course. Yes. You can make it with goat. This is the way my mother made this stew when I was a boy. It's very authentic. Very traditional.

JANE

Oh, traditional is good for Wes.

SHOLEH

(to MASSOUD)

You never told me this, about your mother. She made this stew with goat?

MASSOUD

Yes.

SHOLEH

Twenty-five years now I've been making you this stew and you never said? Why did you not tell me this?

MASSOUD

I like it the way you cook it, too, Sholeh. Very much. It's just different. And you work so hard to feed me, to keep the house clean... I am grateful.

JANE

(to SHOLEH)

He loves you.

SHOLEH

I know this.

(to MASSOUD)

But Massoud, you should not keep secrets.

MASSOUD

I will not keep secrets. I promise.

SHOLEH

(to JANE)

Massoud is right. You will like it with goat very much. Your husband, too. I'll get the recipe.

MASSOUD

Thank you, Sholeh.

JANE

Yes, thank you!

SHOLEH disappears into the back.

MASSOUD

(to JANE)

You have made a good choice. The goat is a sacred animal. When you eat goat with your family, you erase your sins. This is why, when we slaughter the goat, we are halal. Do you know this word?

JANE

No, I don't.

MASSOUD

Halal is the law. Halal is true love. Halal makes us human.

JANE

I don't understand.

SHOLEH returns with the recipe, but stays out of MASSOUD's sight to watch him work unnoticed.

MASSOUD

All animals kill so they can live. We are animals, too, but halal makes us different. We don't kill with our instincts, like a tiger. We kill with our minds. And we don't kill from hatred, either. Or to be selfish, to satisfy our own hunger. We kill to give food to our families. Do you see?

JANE

We have to kill sometimes.

MASSOUD

Yes.

JANE

But halal makes it... sacred.

MASSOUD

Correct.

JANE

This is a nice way you have.

MASSOUD

This is the only way.

SHOLEH

(fully entering)

Put the meat in a package for the nice woman, Massoud.

MASSOUD

Yes, Sholeh. Of course.

He wraps the goat loin.

SHOLEH

Here.

She hands JANE the recipe.

SHOLEH

You take this. Tonight, you make this stew, and some nice chai, and you will talk, and your husband will listen. You'll have a very special dinner together.

JANE

I hope so. I really do.

SHOLEH

Believe me.

JANE takes the meat from MASSOUD, then looks around.

JANE

Where do I pay?

SHOLEH looks at MASSOUD, who nods.

SHOLEH

This is a gift. If you and your husband like it, you'll come back and buy something else.

JANE

No. Please. I can't --

SHOLEH

Yes, you can.

MASSOUD

You must.

The door opens, and all three of them turn to see who's arrived. Whoever it is, however, remains out of sight.

MASSOUD
(to the door)
Can I help you?

SCENE THREE

The butcher shop, hours later. It is now covered in blood: the floor, the walls, the display cases, the shelves. There is police tape across the door. MASSOUD is cleaning, slowly. SHOLEH pulls blood-covered vegetables off the shelf and throws them into a trash can. A long, silent beat while they work.

SHOLEH

There is so much blood.

MASSOUD continues to clean, silently.

SHOLEH

Massoud?

MASSOUD

Yes, there is.

SHOLEH

Is the slaughterhouse like this?

MASSOUD

This is... different.

SHOLEH

I hate this stupid *marmoulak* who does this.

MASSOUD

I know, Sholeh.

SHOLEH

Who is he, Massoud?

MASSOUD

I tell you already. A customer.

SHOLEH

Who is he? Tell me again.

MASSOUD

I don't know him.

SHOLEH

You have never seen him here before?

MASSOUD

Sholeh, stop. You have to stop thinking these things. Think about something else instead.

SHOLEH
I am thinking about Sameer.

MASSOUD
What? What about him?

SHOLEH
How do we tell him about this?

MASSOUD
We... tell him, and then we take him to the mosque to pray with him.

SHOLEH
This is your answer for everything.

MASSOUD
This *is* the answer for everything.

SHOLEH
Why did he need your shop for his terrorism?

MASSOUD
The man says he isn't a terrorist. He does this for Allah.

SHOLEH
You think Allah *tells* this man to do this?

MASSOUD
No!

SHOLEH
Then what?

MASSOUD
This man is crazy...

SHOLEH
But what, Massoud?

MASSOUD
But... everything does come from Allah.

SHOLEH
I don't care where it comes from. I care where it comes to. Your shop.

MASSOUD
This is our shop, Sholeh.

SHOLEH
Why does he come here, Massoud?

MASSOUD

Maybe he needs the meat saw!

SHOLEH

Sameer can never come here again. It's not safe.

MASSOUD

Sholeh, stop this. We need to clean.

SHOLEH

We need to get away from here.

MASSOUD

Why? Where should we go?

SHOLEH

Anywhere else. Away from here. Home.

MASSOUD

I go nowhere. You can go home. I will clean by myself.

SHOLEH

It will never be clean here!

MASSOUD

No. I will clean this tonight, and tomorrow it will be like nothing ever happened.

SHOLEH takes off her blood-covered gloves to reveal that her hands are stained with blood, too.

SHOLEH

Look at this, Massoud! This does not go away!

MASSOUD

I have blood on my hands every day, Sholeh. You know this. I have good soap for blood. I will show you.

SHOLEH

I am not talking about my hands. I'm talking about my heart! I am talking about Sameer's heart.

MASSOUD

What about it?

SHOLEH

Did you forget why I came here to talk to you? What Sameer did this morning at school? He is angry, your son.

MASSOUD

Even if he is, so what?

SHOLEH

If he sees all this blood, and he thinks Allah wants things like this?

MASSOUD

Why would he think this?

SHOLEH

You just said, Massoud! Everything comes from Allah.

MASSOUD

You know what I mean, Sholeh.

SHOLEH

Do they teach this at the mosque?

MASSOUD

You would know if you still went!

SHOLEH

My faith is private.

MASSOUD

Do you think maybe *this* is why Sameer is angry? His mother gives up her religion?

SHOLEH

Sameer barely goes to the mosque any more, too! Do you think maybe *he's* given up *his* religion, Massoud? And is this what makes *you* so angry?

A long bitter silence.

SHOLEH

You clean this up. All of this. Yourself. I am going home.

SHOLEH exits.

SCENE FOUR

The shop, a few hours later. MASSOUD is cleaning, alone, when DEBORAH enters.

MASSOUD
Sorry. The shop is closed today.

DEBORAH
Oh. I'm... not a customer. I'm here about what happened.
(noting the blood)
Wow. This is really a mess. Is everybody okay?

MASSOUD
Yes. We are fine.

DEBORAH
Good. I was worried. You know, I've been thinking about stopping in here for weeks, because I could totally tell: this is a fantastic shop. It reminds me of this great little market I used to visit when I was covering this military exercise in Kabul.
(extending her hand)
Deborah Niefeld. I'm a writer. Nice to meet you.
(they shake)
Anyway, now -- because I procrastinated -- when I finally do show up, this is how I see it for the first time. But I will come back, I swear. And I won't judge it by how it looks right now, either. I promise to be positive. Because I think people should know the real you, your real shop, and not just focus on one incident. Don't you agree?

MASSOUD
I... agree. Yes. Excuse/ me, but --

DEBORAH
And this isn't the sort of thing that happens here, is it?

MASSOUD
No. Never.

DEBORAH
Of course not! You serve people. You sell good food. You've got families coming in to buy lamb, or lavash, or --
(looking at the shelves)
Oh, you've got *lokum*!

MASSOUD
You know this candy?

DEBORAH
Yes, I love it! You have to let me buy this from you.

MASSOUD takes a different box off the shelf.

MASSOUD
If you like *lokum*, you should try *ahbisa*. It's older than *lokum*. This is where *lokum* comes from.

DEBORAH takes the box from MASSOUD.

DEBORAH
And this is the real thing? Not some American knockoff?

MASSOUD
This is what I ate when I was a boy.

DEBORAH
Thank you. I can't wait to try this. And really, your store is terrific. Or... is this your store? I never asked.

MASSOUD
Yes.

DEBORAH
And you were here at the time?

MASSOUD
I am always here.

DEBORAH
And do you mind talking about this? I just... really want to understand what actually happened.

MASSOUD
What, so you can... write something?

DEBORAH
Well, *if* I write something, I don't want it to be half-true. The beat reporters leave out all the nuance. And we all know they're biased, right? But I want to make sure nothing about what happened here gets misconstrued. Know what I mean?

MASSOUD
I think... yes.

DEBORAH
Good. Thank you! So...

DEBORAH takes out her recorder.

DEBORAH
Can you tell me what happened? Step by step.

MASSOUD

Yes. I have just finished with a customer when he comes in. He asks me for chicken, and I tell him I have to go get it from the freezer. He says fine, yes, so I go. And when I come back... the display case is covered in blood. And he's standing there, with this look in his eyes like a lamb, like a little lamb, and he says to me *I am not a terrorist. You must know this. I did this for Allah.*

DEBORAH

So he just...?

MASSOUD

Yes.

DEBORAH

But how? With what?

MASSOUD

(indicating the meat saw)

The saw.

DEBORAH

Why do you have that here? What's it for?

MASSOUD

To cut frozen meat.

DEBORAH

So it's strong enough to...?

MASSOUD

Yes.

DEBORAH

Hunh. And why didn't anybody stop him?

MASSOUD

It happened too quickly. Are you writing a --

DEBORAH

So why do you think he did it? Sorry for cutting you off.

MASSOUD

I don't know why.

DEBORAH

What did he look like? Did he look like he could have been on drugs, maybe?

MASSOUD

No. His eyes were clear. No drugs.

DEBORAH

So was this some kind of half-insane, half-religious thing, like *Ashura*? With the blood and the swords and --

MASSOUD

No. Why do you say this?

DEBORAH

You said he mentioned Allah.

MASSOUD

This is just what he said. What he did was not religious.

DEBORAH

Well, I don't know about you, but I mean... I've seen a lot of people do extreme things. And it's kind of hard to tell after a while what's sacred and what's crazy. I mean, think about yourself for a second. You're a halal butcher, and --

MASSOUD

What do you mean? This is an insult.

DEBORAH

Wait. Just listen. You're a halal butcher. It's an important religious practice for you, I get that, believe me. I mean, my own mother taught me to use kosher pullets for my matzoh ball soup. So I realize you're not deranged. But wouldn't some people say that all your concern about cleanliness in an age of refrigeration and antibiotics is a bit nuts?

MASSOUD

No! Who says this?

DEBORAH

And haven't some animal rights groups called halal butchering a form of torture?

MASSOUD

This is not crazy, this is not torture, this is beautiful! What's crazy are these big American slaughterhouses. The butchers all go to their churches on Sundays to pray and to listen to their teachers talk about peace and love, and then on Monday they destroy a thousand cows like nothing. They smash them on the head. They stab their throats. They hang them by their hooves. And all the other cows just stand there, watching. Does their God tell them to do this? To just take whatever they want? This is savage. This is America. But this is not my shop. This is not what I do. What kind of thing are you writing?

DEBORAH

What do you do? How is it different? Tell me.

MASSOUD

First, I give the animal water. I watch him drink until he is full, then I lay him down facing Mecca so his sacrifice is holy. He does not see the knife, and he does not ever see any other animals suffering. He doesn't even smell their blood. I say a prayer for him, to state my good intentions for taking his life. And he can hear it in my voice, I know this, my gratitude for what he gives. And then I hold him tight, like a hug... and I slit his neck. This is difficult. To cut the skin is easy, but to go deep enough, you need strength. You need to believe it. There is only one pull of the knife, too. This is important. The knife must be absolutely sharp. There is less pain this way. And after I do it, I hold him there tightly, I stay there beside him, until his life has gone away. This is a wonderful thing. I am privileged to do this. This is halal. We do not slaughter. We accept the gift.

SCENE FIVE

Evening, WES and JANE's kitchen. The table is set for a candlelit dinner. JANE works at the stove, stirring a pot, when abruptly: a moment of pained grief. She gives into it briefly, then gathers herself and returns to the stove before WES comes home from work.

WES
(from offstage)
Jane! I'm home.

JANE begins making a few last-second adjustments to the table: lighting the candles, propping up the napkins, etc., then smooths her apron and dries her cheeks before WES enters the room. He is carrying a bouquet of flowers.

WES
Oh. Hi, honey. What's all this?

JANE
I... did something.
(noticing the flowers)
What are those for?

WES
I felt bad about this morning.

JANE
Thank you, Wes. That's... thank you.

She kisses him.

WES
You're welcome, honey. And I'm really sorry. I prayed over it all morning. I couldn't even get any work done.
(indicating the set table)
So... what did you do exactly?

JANE
Can you put those in a vase?

JANE begins clearing a space on the table for the flowers. WES begins looking from cupboard to cupboard for a vase with no luck.

JANE
They're in the dining room, Wes. In the breakfront.

Oh, right.

WES

WES exits. JANE lifts a lid off a pot on the stove, inhaling deeply.

What did you do?

WES

(from offstage)

JANE closes the pot quickly.

Nothing. You'll see.

JANE

WES returns with the flowers, which are now neatly tucked into a vase, and sets them on the table.

This is Wednesday. Steak night, right?

WES

Will you pray with me?

JANE

Jane, what is all this? This isn't... you aren't/ about to --

WES

This is just something different, Wes, but it's good, trust me.

JANE

She eases him into a chair, retrieves a covered dish and sets it on the table, then sits beside him and takes his hands. They both bow their heads.

Heavenly Father, have mercy on us. We believe in You, and we believe that Your word is true. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that He died on the cross so that we might now have forgiveness for our sins. We know that without You in our hearts, our lives are meaningless. Please, Jesus, forgive us for every sin we have ever committed. We give You our lives and we ask You to take full control from this moment on. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

JANE

Amen. Honey... that was --

WES

Hold on. We're not done. Close your eyes again.

JANE

WES closes his eyes. JANE removes the cover on her casserole dish.

JANE

Now just... breathe in.

He does.

WES

What is that? Is that dinner?

JANE digs a fork into the casserole dish, producing a bite.

JANE

Open your mouth.

WES

What if I don't like it? You know I don't --

JANE

Just trust me.

He opens his mouth. She feeds him a bite. He chews slowly at first, then with relish.

WES

Wow. I have never tasted anything like this. Is this one of Grandma Joan's?

JANE

It's a two thousand year-old recipe from the middle east.

WES

What?

JANE

It's a dish even Jesus might have eaten.

WES

Jane, this is killing me. Tell me what it is! And give me some more.

JANE

Goat stew.

WES opens his eyes and stares blankly at JANE for a beat.

WES

You're kidding me, right?

JANE

No.

WES

But... I don't understand. Why would you do that? Why did you just do that? You... tricked me into eating goat meat.

JANE

I wasn't trying to trick you. I was --

WES

You know I don't like weird food.

JANE

I was doing a ritual.

WES

What's that supposed to mean? What ritual? I didn't ask to be part of/ any ritual.

JANE

It has to do with sin. Erasing our sins.

WES

I have no idea what in the heck you're talking about. I just walked in the door. This is supposed to be dinner. Where did you even get goat meat?

JANE

It's a *halal* meat market. Do you know/ about *halal*?

WES

You got this from some random religious butcher? How do we even know it's safe?

A long beat. JANE turns away.

WES

Jane, say something.

JANE

This isn't how I wanted this to go.

WES

This isn't how you wanted *what* to go? What is all this?

JANE

He wasn't random, Wes. He was amazing! He and his wife both. They gave me all of this. The ingredients, the recipe, the stories they told me about it. Their whole way of being was just so beautiful. They were completely in love. With food, with God, with each other. The whole store felt like some kind of temple.

WES

I don't even get that. Didn't it make you suspicious, people giving meat away? Why would they do that?

JANE

What it made me was grateful! Incredibly grateful. Look... let's just start over again for a second.

WES

Yes. Please. Because none of this makes sense to me.

JANE

Not everything in life makes sense, Wes. And I like that. It's exciting.

WES

Can you just tell me what in the heck you're talking about? And why you fed me goat meat on steak night? And what all this is for? The candles, the fancy napkins, the --

JANE

I had something big happen today, and I thought we should celebrate.

WES

What? What happened?

A beat.

JANE

You have to understand, Wes: the ten minutes I spent with that butcher and his wife made me feel more like my whole self than I have in months.

WES

I get it. You liked them.

JANE

I didn't just like them. I belonged there. They gave me real fellowship. That was their gift. And I --

WES

Why do you want *their* fellowship? You can't --

JANE

Will you please just let me finish? Thank you.

A beat.

JANE

I felt at home. I didn't want to leave. I was just standing there, listening to the butcher talk to another customer, the one who came in right after me, and their language, it all sounded like music.

And then all of a sudden the butcher disappeared. Into the storeroom, I think. To get something. And as soon as he was gone, that customer walked behind the counter, stepped up to the meat saw, and laid his own arm down right across the metal. Like he was laying down a baby.

WES

What? Why?

JANE

Wes, I am telling you, he was so reverent. Like he'd mounted a pulpit. He said some kind of short prayer, I think, and then all of a sudden, completely out of nowhere, he just... lowered the saw blade right down through his wrist.

WES

No.

JANE

And he looked straight at me the whole time, Wes. Right in my eyes. He was completely calm, all the way through.

WES

Tell me this did not actually happen.

JANE

And he lifted up his... his stump, like an offering, and he pointed it right at me.

WES

Sweet Jesus.

JANE

And his blood hit me. Right in the heart. And he said *I am not a terrorist. I did this for Allah.*

WES

I don't believe this.

JANE

He spoke. To me. Then he walked right out the door like he was walking into God's own arms, and I'm telling you... Wes, it was the single most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

WES

What? How is that beautiful? That is disgusting.

JANE

No, Wes. That's what I'm saying. His... conviction was --

WES

This is totally absurd. Did he... do something to you? Did he hurt you?

JANE
No, he didn't hurt me. It was almost like a baptism.

WES
What?

JANE
Like some kind of sacrament.

WES
The man wasn't a preacher, he was a terrorist! I don't care/
what he said.

JANE
No, he wasn't, Wes. He was --

WES
What in the heck are these people thinking?

JANE
You don't understand.

WES
I don't get why you're defending this maniac. Walking into a
store and just cutting his own arm off?

JANE
It was only his hand.

WES
Oh, well, it was only his hand, that's a whole different
story. Everybody cuts a hand off now and then.

JANE
He did it for God.

WES
That's insane! God doesn't want us to go around cutting off
body parts and terrorizing people. God helps us find our way.
And you know that! Are you absolutely sure you're okay?

JANE
Yes!

WES
He didn't hurt you?

JANE
No.

WES
Well, then, how could you bring that... terror home and feed
it to me? How could you do that?

JANE

It's not terror, Wes, it's a gift! It was awe-inspiring! And I did it because we need change. *I need/ change.*

WES

What do you mean, change? What kind of change? The/ butterfly garden? Is all this about going to the country?

JANE

I don't know.

(when he's done)

No! It's not that simple. I've been praying about it for months now, and I still don't know.

JANE takes off her apron, revealing a blood-stained sweater. She's not making a statement with it; she's just hot.

JANE

But I never meant to hurt you, Wes. With the goat meat. I just wanted to make some kind of/ gesture.

WES

Jane. Stop! Look at yourself.

A long beat while they both consider her sweater.

JANE

I was anointed. I don't know what it means yet, Wes, but I believe it. And it feels... true.

SCENE SIX

Two days later, in a coffee shop on the campus of George Mason. SHOLEH is drinking a cup of chai and failing to study when DEBORAH approaches her.

DEBORAH
Excuse me. Are you Sholeh Esfahani?

SHOLEH
Yes.

DEBORAH
Oh, good. I found you. I'm Deborah Niefeld.

DEBORAH hands SHOLEH her card, then waits for a reaction that doesn't come.

DEBORAH
I'm... the one working on a story about what happened in your shop?

SHOLEH
How do you know about that?

DEBORAH
Your husband. He didn't say anything?

SHOLEH
No.

DEBORAH
Huh.

SHOLEH
He told you to come here to talk to me?

DEBORAH
Well, no. He said not to. I had to find you myself.

SHOLEH
(mostly to herself)
Ugh.

DEBORAH
But I'm a writer. That's what I do.

SHOLEH
What do you want?

DEBORAH
I'd like to get to know you. You're a student here? What are you studying?

SHOLEH

Nutrition. Why do you want to get to know *me*?

DEBORAH

Well, I want to understand how people who lived through what you and your husband lived through were affected by it. What that man's actions did to you. And in order to do that, I need some sense of/ who you are.

SHOLEH

You should not write about that man. People do not need to think about things like that.

DEBORAH

Why?

SHOLEH

I don't want to talk about this.

A quick beat.

DEBORAH

Well, I guess that'll make your husband happy. Good luck with the shop.

DEBORAH starts to leave.

SHOLEH

Wait. What do you mean it will make my husband happy?

DEBORAH

I don't want to interfere.

SHOLEH

Tell me. Why doesn't Massoud want me to speak to you? What did he say to you about what happened?

DEBORAH

Well... he gave me the general details. But then he talked a lot about America. About how savage it is. How a thing like this could really only happen in a country where Christian butchers can slaughter --

SHOLEH

This is not an American thing, what happened! Or an American man who did it, either. It's not even an American shop.

DEBORAH

Can you say more about that?

DEBORAH sits beside SHOLEH and casually places her recorder on the table between them, turning it on.

SHOLEH

I don't know what to say.

DEBORAH

Look... I have been writing about stories like this for a long time, and if there's one thing I've learned, it's that all we ever hear from are men. I have interviewed so many men about incidents like this I can't stand it any more. We need to hear from women. Please talk to me.

A quick beat, then a decision.

SHOLEH

My husband's shop is not an American shop. In America you go to the store, you say hello to people, you smile, you buy milk and bread and apples, and you go home to your family.

DEBORAH

Like on television?

SHOLEH

Not on television. I do this. I do this when I go to the store. This is how I like it.

DEBORAH

What about when somebody tries to take advantage of you? Like... if a car salesman sold you a lemon, wouldn't you have to stand up for yourself?

SHOLEH

No. There's too much standing up. People should just be polite and say *No, thank you*. But Massoud's shop is always like Iran.

DEBORAH

How?

SHOLEH

In Iran there is so much arguing. *No, I don't want to pay this much. You have to pay this much. These vegetables are old. They are fresh. You are a liar.* I cannot stand this! I like it to be nice to go shopping. No anger. No shouting about Allah like this man.

DEBORAH

So what's wrong with people shouting about Allah? What could happen?

SHOLEH

You are a smart woman. You know what could happen.

DEBORAH

Do you think that man in the shop was dangerous?

SHOLEH

I told you! I don't want to discuss this.

DEBORAH

Well, okay then, Sholeh, what do you want to discuss?

SHOLEH

Only Massoud calls me Sholeh. My American name is Shirley. You call me that.

DEBORAH

Okay. Help me understand that. You give up your Iranian name. And you could have chosen anything. But you went with Shirley because... it sounds like Sholeh?

SHOLEH

Yes. To stay close to who I am, but... to belong to America.

DEBORAH

Fascinating. Do you happen to know the story of Purim? It's a Jewish holiday.

SHOLEH

No.

DEBORAH

It's about this Persian king. He gets drunk, abuses his wife, kicks her out, and then chooses a new wife, Queen Esther, who's Jewish, but pretends she isn't, because that wasn't exactly the safest time and place in human history to be a Jew. And in fact, right after they get married, the king decides to *kill* all the Jews in his kingdom. His prime minister says it has to be done. So then Esther says *Wait a minute, husband, I have a secret to tell you: I'm Jewish. Do you really want to kill your own wife? I don't think so.* So the king kills his prime minister instead.

SHOLEH

Ugh. I hate that. Why does every old story end with killing?

DEBORAH

My point is... you're sort of like Esther. Eventually, you need to tell the world *This is who I am*. And I'm saying this woman to woman. I mean... this is even true for me, too. I spent years just reporting the news. Telling everybody else's story but my own. And now here I am... trying to be heard. And I think maybe you should be heard, too.

SHOLEH

I don't know.

DEBORAH

Come on, Shirley. Talk to me. Tell me about your son. What's he like?

SHOLEH

Sameer is a student. He studies computers, here at school with his mother. He is a good son. But... he is very much like his father. He believes what he believes. There are no questions, only answers.

DEBORAH

Answers about... what?

SHOLEH

About this man in the shop. Today, Sameer said America makes people crazy like this all the time.

DEBORAH

Why do you think he said that?

SHOLEH

He learns these things from his friends at school. He belongs to this radical politics group. I don't like it. Whenever he comes home from a meeting, he is like a total stranger.

DEBORAH

And... what kind of group is this exactly?

SHOLEH

To protest the war in Iraq. The George Mason Ex-Patriots.

DEBORAH

Oh.

SHOLEH

My son the revolutionary! It's scares me. I just wish he would go play soccer instead. Go to the movies. Have fun with his friends.

DEBORAH

Talk to a girl.

SHOLEH

Yes! Why not? Massoud says he thinks Sameer should study Koran more. But I say too much Koran is not good.

DEBORAH

Maybe if you read it with him. Shared some of these feelings you're sharing with me.

SHOLEH

No. No, no, no, no, no. Massoud says the Koran helps Sameer understand where he comes from. To be proud of his heritage. But Sameer comes from America! He was born here in the United States! He should be proud of that!

DEBORAH

Kind of hard, though, sometimes, isn't it? I mean, America's all... white bread and reality television.

SHOLEH

Yes, this white bread is terrible, I agree. But I love television! Every night new stories to make people happy.

DEBORAH

Or to make people buy things.

SHOLEH

You are very wrong, I think.

DEBORAH

Still, compared to Iran, American culture seems --

SHOLEH

What do you know about Iran? Nothing. You do not know Iran. You don't know what Massoud and I lived through.

DEBORAH

Well, I have seen my share of --

SHOLEH

And Sameer does not know Iran, either. He and his friends say they hate this country, how it does things all over the world to make people angry. But if they had to live *there* instead? In Iran? Sameer should love what America is and stop trying to change it. He should listen to his mother. Because she loves him. And she's doing the best she can.

DEBORAH

So then, what do you --

SHOLEH

No! We are finished. I have nothing more to say. Thank you.

SHOLEH exits, leaving her George Mason sweatshirt draped over the chair.

SCENE SEVEN

The shop, a bit later. MASSOUD is alone. He is affixing a new sign to his display case: "No customers allowed behind the counter."

JANE opens the shop door. She is carrying a small paper bag.

JANE
Is it okay to come in? Are you... back in business?

MASSOUD
Yes. Please. Come in. Of course.

JANE
Thank you.

She enters.

MASSOUD
What can I do for you? Are you okay?

JANE
Yes, I'm fine. How are you? How's your wife?

MASSOUD
We are good. Very good.

JANE
I'm glad to hear that. I've been praying for you both.

MASSOUD
Thank you.

JANE
No. I should be doing the thanking. You were so generous to me, you and your wife, and I wanted to tell you how much it meant to me. I just had to come back here.

MASSOUD
It was nothing.

JANE
No. Really. You don't understand. Look. I brought you something.

JANE reaches into her bag and pulls out a thin, very old, wood-handled knife.

MASSOUD
What is this, a boning knife?

JANE

It was my Grandma Joan's. You would have loved her. She fed twelve children, day in and day out, from this tiny little kitchen, and she always made every single meal into a sacrament. Like you. So I want you to have it.

She holds the knife out to MASSOUD. He stares at it, but does not take it.

JANE

I know it's not much any more. You've probably got better blades than this all over the place here. But I wanted to give you something that mattered as much to me as the things you gave me mattered to you.

MASSOUD

I gave you a little goat meat.

JANE

No! You gave me so much more than that. You have no idea. You and your shop have changed everything for me. My whole life's so much clearer now. God is so much clearer. I know what He wants from me.

MASSOUD

What does he want?

JANE

Well, He wants me to give you this, for starters.

MASSOUD

I cannot take it.

JANE

He led me here. Helped me find you. God wants us to be connected.

MASSOUD

It belongs in your family, not mine.

JANE

And He wants me to learn from you. He wants you to teach me everything you know.

MASSOUD

This is impossible.

JANE

He wants me to be your apprentice.

MASSOUD

You don't know what you're asking. You're not making sense.

JANE

But I am! For the first time in my life, I finally am!

JANE begins moving through the shelves, looking at all the groceries and peering into the display cases.

JANE

Look at all this! So many new things to discover. So much I've never experienced, never thought of. And you know all this! You've mastered it. Doesn't God tell you to share your wisdom? Doesn't He want you to spread the good word?

MASSOUD

My words and your words are different.

JANE

But that's just it! What does it matter which words you use? It's all the same. I've been praying for years to let Jesus into my heart, and a man praying to Allah was the one who finally saved me! God chose him as the instrument, instead of my pastor, and it just doesn't matter.

JANE puts her hand on MASSOUD's chest.

JANE

You have Jesus inside you. You're doing His work here.

JANE is interrupted by the chime of shop door opening. It is SHOLEH.

SHOLEH

(seeing JANE's knife)

What are you doing?

JANE

I'm trying to give your husband a gift.

MASSOUD

I don't want it.

JANE

But you have to take it!

She slaps the knife on the counter.

JANE

(to SHOLEH)

And I brought something for you, too.

JANE pulls a folded piece of paper out of her pocket.

SHOLEH
Why for me?

MASSOUD
For the groceries.

JANE
Not for the groceries, for everything!
(to SHOLEH)
I wanted to tell you how much everything meant to me. Your recipe especially. We have a tradition about recipes in my family. We've been eating the same dishes for generations. So, since you shared a recipe with me, I wanted to share one with you.

JANE hands the paper to SHOLEH.

SHOLEH
What is this?

JANE
Roast suckling pig. I know it's a whole lot of work, but --

SHOLEH tries to return the paper, but
JANE doesn't take it.

SHOLEH
We don't eat this.

JANE
Sorry?

SHOLEH
The pig is not *halal*. It is *haraam*.

JANE
What does that mean?

MASSOUD
Haraam is forbidden. Islam does not allow this.

JANE
Why?

SHOLEH
We have different ways than you.

A beat.

JANE
Well, can we at least pray together? Please.

JANE takes SHOLEH by the hand and pulls her toward where MASSOUD is standing, then takes his hand as well.

JANE

I want to give thanks.
(closing her eyes)
Dear Lord Jesus, we --

MASSOUD and SHOLEH immediately take their hands away from JANE's.

MASSOUD

No! Stop this.

JANE

What?

SHOLEH

This is not how we pray.

MASSOUD

This is a sin, what you try to make us do.

JANE

What's sinful about praying?

MASSOUD

To pray to your Jesus is the worst blasphemy there is for a Muslim. Do you understand?

JANE

There's nothing wrong with Jesus.

MASSOUD

(to SHOLEH)

Do you hear this, Sholeh? This is what I'm saying. These Americans, they never know anything.

JANE

Then teach me. Talk to me!
(to SHOLEH)
Is it wrong to want to talk?

SHOLEH

Yes! I am so tired of talking about things like this. No more. So if you want to talk, you can talk to this person.

SHOLEH gives JANE the card she received from DEBORAH.

SHOLEH

She is writing a story about what happened here.

MASSOUD

You know about this woman?

SHOLEH

Yes, Massoud, I know. She found me at school this morning.

JANE

What kind of story?

SHOLEH

I don't know. But she wants to hear all these crazy things you're saying, believe me, so go. Leave us.

JANE

You know, you can send me away if you like, but you really can't deny the truth. The Holy Spirit's inside you. Jesus is working inside both of you. I can feel it.

(looking around the shop)

It's a holy place you have here. You have real love together, and real faith. I hope you both realize that. You're blessed.

JANE exits. SHOLEH crumples up the recipe and hurls it after JANE. MASSOUD crosses to SHOLEH, but she backs away.

MASSOUD

Sholeh, forget this woman.

SHOLEH

Why did you not tell me about this writer?

MASSOUD

I didn't want to make you upset.

SHOLEH

You lie, Massoud! That's not why.

MASSOUD

I didn't lie. I just thought --

SHOLEH

You told me you would not keep secrets.

MASSOUD

I remember.

SHOLEH

Why did you do it, then?

MASSOUD

I talked to this woman after you left the shop yesterday. She asked about what happened, and I thought... maybe if she writes about this, she should know what a real Muslim thinks. She should know that this man who does this isn't like us.

So I tell her everything. I answer all her questions. But then she starts to say these terrible things about halal, about Islam, and I realize... I am a fool. This woman is a curse. She has dangerous ideas. I didn't see it. So I forbid her to talk to you. I wanted to protect you. Because I love you.

SHOLEH

I am not some child, Massoud! I do not need you to protect me.

MASSOUD

Sholeh, these things she was saying, you have to understand, they were --

SHOLEH

She told me that if I was a good mother, I would read the Koran with Sameer.

A beat.

MASSOUD

This is confusing.

SHOLEH

What is confusing?

MASSOUD

She tells me I'm crazy to practice Islam, then she says this to you?

SHOLEH

She told you that? You're crazy to be a Muslim?

MASSOUD

Yes. This is what she says.

SHOLEH

She told me a very different thing.

MASSOUD

She makes no sense.

SHOLEH

No. She is very wrong, this woman.

A beat.

MASSOUD

What she says about Sameer, though... I tell you this myself.

SHOLEH

That I am a bad mother?

MASSOUD

No, Sholeh. That to study Koran is a good thing.

SHOLEH

He studied Koran his whole life, Massoud! Now look at what he does. Look how he talks to me.

MASSOUD

He studies computers now. Maybe this is the problem.

SHOLEH

No, Massoud. Computers do not make him angry.

MASSOUD

He's a teenager, Sholeh. All teenagers are like this. They all say angry things.

SHOLEH

About their homework, their teachers, their girlfriends. Not about America.

MASSOUD

Sameer does not talk about this.

SHOLEH

How do you know that? Do you see him when he goes out with his friends to his protest group? And maybe you are right. Maybe he is just an angry teenager. But how do you know that his anger will not get worse? Or get him in trouble?

MASSOUD

What trouble?

SHOLEH

Massoud! How can you not see this?

MASSOUD

See what?

SHOLEH

This is not a good time to be a Muslim who protests America.

MASSOUD

Sholeh, please. You worry too much.

SHOLEH

We need to protect our son.

MASSOUD

How?

A quick beat.

SHOLEH

Do you remember when we said to each other we must come to this country?

MASSOUD

Yes, Sholeh, I remember.

SHOLEH

The little demonstrations getting bigger and bigger? One person yelling for Allah, another person throwing a stone, then suddenly everybody screaming in the streets, for God, for Khomeini? All the little anger becoming violence?

MASSOUD

You always think/ about this.

SHOLEH

Everybody fighting, destroying things, killing people.

MASSOUD

I remember the killing. Why are you talking about this? What does this have to do with Sameer?

SHOLEH

In Iran, they all said America is evil. But *they* were the ones who did evil. And we said no, America is free. And we came here to be free, too. But we made a mistake.

MASSOUD

What mistake?

SHOLEH

When we came here, we said to each other all the time *We must let go*. You remember? We tried to let go of everything. Our house, our clothes, our friends. And it was hard, but we were young then, eighteen years old, and married only two months, so we did not have many things to let go of.

MASSOUD

When we came here, we left everything behind.

SHOLEH

No. Not everything.

MASSOUD

What do you mean?

SHOLEH

Look, Massoud. Look at this shop. This is Iran. This is just like a shop from Iran, no? When we came here, we carried Iran with us, just a seed, and we planted it here in America, and this is what grew, this shop. We should not have/ done that.

MASSOUD

How can you say this? This shop is everything. It's all we have.

SHOLEH

This is all you have. Sameer has school. His friends. I have my nutrition classes, the YMCA, I have --

MASSOUD

Without the shop, you have nothing. The shop gives us everything. A house to live in. Food to eat. How would we live without this shop?

SHOLEH

We would live *free* without this shop.

MASSOUD

This is the only place I *am* free.

SHOLEH

Without people who cut off their hands for Allah.

MASSOUD

One time, this happens.

SHOLEH

One time?

(grabbing JANE's knife)

Have you already forgotten this strange woman with a knife talking about Jesus? This is not a safe place for Sameer! We have to make some kind of change.

A beat.

MASSOUD

What do you want me to do?

SHOLEH

You can learn computers, like your son.

MASSOUD

You cannot be serious.

SHOLEH

You could make money for us!

MASSOUD

Sitting at a desk, staring at a stupid box? In an office? Wearing a tie?

SHOLEH

Yes! You could make a new life, without all this violence.

MASSOUD

Stop it, Sholeh.

SHOLEH

Without all this craziness coming here to --

MASSOUD

STOP!

A long beat.

MASSOUD

I am a butcher, Sholeh. This is who I am. I cannot change this. I cannot change my soul. Do not ask me this. I am a butcher, and I am a Muslim, and I am Iranian, and I belong in Iran, and I still miss my country, even after all this time. I miss our true home.

SHOLEH

This is our home now. America.

MASSOUD

No, it isn't. This is where we live, but it's not our home. This is Sameer's home, but it will never be ours. You forget this, Sholeh. You forget how much you loved Iran. The Alborz mountains, your Uncle Firouz and his music, the smell of the markets. I can never let go of this. I don't want to.

A long beat.

SHOLEH

How many customers came in today, Massoud?

MASSOUD

Why do you ask this?

SHOLEH

How many?

MASSOUD

Tomorrow. They will start coming back again tomorrow.

SHOLEH

How do you know that?

MASSOUD

They are still too afraid of what happened. They want to stay away from trouble. But soon --

SHOLEH

How do you know, Massoud?

MASSOUD

I know because I trust Allah. He will provide for us, just like he did when we came here and had nothing.

SHOLEH

I believe you are the one who provides for us, Massoud. You are the one who built this shop, who feeds our family. I am glad you have faith, but you cannot ask Allah to do the work for you, to bring back your customers. You have to do it yourself.

MASSOUD

I will do it, Sholeh. I promise you.

SHOLEH

With Allah to help you, yes.

MASSOUD

I am happy to hear you say this.

SHOLEH

I still have my faith, too, Massoud. Even though I don't go to the mosque. Even after all these years here in America. It is different now, yes. Of course it is changed. But this is what faith does. It grows, like fruit. But it does not go away.

A beat.

MASSOUD

Sholeh...

SHOLEH

I know. I know. I should tell this to Sameer.

MASSOUD

Yes, my wife. You should.

SHOLEH

I will.

MASSOUD

He will learn very much from you, Sholeh. Like I always have. You're a smart woman. And a very good mother.

SHOLEH

I hope so.

SCENE EIGHT

WES and JANE's kitchen, later the same day. JANE is alone, reading the Bible -- and still wearing the bloody sweater -- when WES returns home.

WES
(offstage)
Jane?
(entering the kitchen)
There you are.

JANE
Wes. Why are you... here?

WES
You didn't answer the phone. Are you okay?

JANE
Yes. Are you?

WES
I got worried. Pastor Franklin called me to ask why you didn't show up for the appointment I made for you.

JANE
Oh.

WES
I had to tell him you were sick.

JANE
You lied to Pastor Franklin?

WES
No, I didn't. You are sick.

JANE
I have never felt better.

WES
You had a terrible experience and you're not dealing --

JANE
Isn't today your big end-of-the-month sales meeting?

WES
Yes, and I really need to be there because they're all way behind on their numbers, but this is more important.

JANE
So go be at your meeting. Your people need you.

WES

I don't care about them, Jane, I care about you. You know, I've been reading all morning about terrorists. How they don't actually do these things to hurt people physically. All they want to do is break people's minds. So I did a little looking, and I found this Episcopalian minister out in Falls Church who actually specializes in this sort of thing. And I thought maybe --

JANE

What sort of thing?

WES

He calls it terrorism recovery. It's like... post-9/11 post-traumatic stress disorder.

JANE

No, thank you.

WES

We could go together.

JANE

I appreciate it, Wes, but I'm not interested. Now if you need to go...

WES

Do you want me to reschedule you with Pastor Franklin? Or I could also call Mike and Vicki, too. Maybe set up --

JANE

I don't need you to take care of me, Wes. I'm not a child!

A beat.

WES

I'm just... trying to help.

JANE

I know. I'm sorry. But it's important for me to go through this my own way.

WES

I feel like you're shutting me out.

JANE

I'm not. I'm just not sure you and I see things the same way.

WES

What things? The attack? There's/ only one way to see it, as far as I can tell.

JANE

It wasn't an attack.

(when he's done)

You're only seeing the blood, Wes. I'm seeing the blade.

WES

What does that even mean? Seeing the blade. And of course I see the blood. You're shoving it in my face all the time with that sweater. Can we at least take that to the cleaners?

JANE

No! Wes... this isn't the sort of mark that just comes out with soap. This is permanent.

WES

So then let's throw it away.

JANE

Wes, please. Go back to work. I'm fine. I swear.

A beat.

WES

I feel like I'm losing you.

JANE

You're not losing me. You actually have more of me now than ever. The real me.

WES

And what about our life? The dreams we had? Are they all just gone?

A beat.

WES

Jane... say something.

JANE

I don't know what to say.

The doorbell rings.

WES

Are you expecting somebody?

JANE

Yes.

WES

Who?

JANE

She's a writer. She's doing interviews about what happened.

WES

You didn't tell me about this. Is this why you didn't go see Pastor Franklin?

JANE

No. Now, I really need to get the door.

WES

I don't think some writer is who you should be talking to.

JANE

Well... I do.

WES

Are you trying to hide something from me?

JANE

It's nothing you need to worry about. Trust me. Now, if you want to go back to your meeting, great. I can tell you all about it later.

WES

I want to stay. I'm staying. I want to hear this.

JANE

Wes, no. I need to --

A knock at the door.

WES

You tell me I don't pay attention? Well, I'm ready to listen.

JANE

Wes, this is *my* interview. It's about me, not you.

WES

Okay, and?

JANE

So if you won't go... you/ really can't interrupt.

WES

Absolutely.

(when she's done)

No. I won't. I promise.

A look between them, then another knock. JANE takes a step toward the door... but WES steps in front of her.

WES

(indicating her sweater)

Don't you think maybe you should take that profane thing off first?

JANE
Will it make you more comfortable if I do?

WES
Yes. And probably this writer person, too.

A quick beat, then JANE takes off the sweater and sets it aside.

WES
Thank you.

JANE
But I'm not getting rid of it, Wes. Just so you know.

Another knock. JANE exits.

JANE
(offstage)
Hi, come on in.

DEBORAH
(offstage)
Thank you. Thanks for having me.

JANE
(offstage)
No, thank you for coming.
(as they enter)
I'm really glad to have a chance to talk.

DEBORAH
Well, good. Because I've got lots of questions.

JANE
Deborah, this is my husband, Wes.

DEBORAH
(to WES)
Nice to meet you.

JANE
He's going to sit quietly and observe, if you don't mind.
Though if you do mind, we can absolutely --

DEBORAH
No, that's totally fine. Not a problem.

JANE
Oh. Okay. Well... then... let's sit. Would you like some
chai? I can --

DEBORAH

No. Thank you.

(taking out her recorder)

Do you mind if I...?

JANE

Not at all.

DEBORAH

Good. Thanks. So the first thing I really want to ask you is why you called me. I mean, I'm glad you did, 'cause I didn't have to track you down myself. But I'm curious about why. Why are we talking? What do you want me to know?

JANE

Well, I'll tell you. I've been praying over everything that happened the last few days, and I'm finally starting to realize... I lived through something significant, and I think people really ought to know about it. I believe God put me there, in that precise place at that exact moment, so that I'd witness to people about everything I experienced. So that's why I called you.

DEBORAH

Interesting.

JANE

That's why I went back to the butcher shop yesterday, too.

WES

You what?

JANE

I went right back to that dear man and his wife and I tried to help them see it, but they weren't ready. But it's okay, it really is, because they *will* be, I believe that. God will find them.

WES

I can't believe you did that.

JANE

(to DEBORAH)

But I'm so glad I did, because they were the ones who led me to you. A writer! Which is just so exciting. Exactly what I needed, God gave me. Because you can help me give testimony.

DEBORAH

About what, exactly?

JANE

About how I became a Christian.

A beat.

DEBORAH

Oh. So... I'm actually writing about what happened in that shop.

JANE

But that *is* what happened in that shop.

WES

What?

DEBORAH

I don't understand.

WES

I don't either.

JANE

You weren't there, neither of you, so you didn't see. His rock-solid absolute conviction through all that horrible, unreal noise and that complete... violation. I was in awe. I could feel it -- finally! What it means to be living your purpose. He showed me how to worship for the first time in my whole entire life.

WES

Seriously?

JANE

Yes, Wes, seriously.

WES

I can't believe you're saying this!

JANE

You said you were going to just listen.

(to DEBORAH)

Sorry.

DEBORAH

No, it's fine. So you're saying he seemed... focused?

JANE

Devout.

DEBORAH

Okay, devout. Except how do you know that he wasn't just disturbed?

WES

Well, of course he was! A rational person doesn't --

JANE

No, he was not disturbed at all. He was fearless.

DEBORAH

Well, but... you do have to admit that probably most people would agree with your husband: that it's not exactly a sane thing, what he did.

WES

Thank you.

JANE

(to DEBORAH)

I don't have to admit anything. This is my story.

(to WES)

Will you please just go back to the dealership, Wes. I'll call you later.

WES

I think I need to stay.

DEBORAH

Wait a minute. Dealership. Your last name is Horvath. You're Horvath Automotive. My mother bought her last car from you. She said somebody actually prayed over the paperwork. Some kind of new car blessing?

WES

It's a service we offer some of our customers.

DEBORAH

Even if people don't want you to?

JANE

(to WES)

That's what I was saying about Jerry.

WES

Jerry was grateful.

DEBORAH

Oh, I have to know more about this.

WES

Look: here's the deal. Nine out of ten people bring somebody with them when they go buy a car. And the ones who don't? Usually know exactly what they want. But every now and then, somebody comes in alone, like your mother probably did, and you can just tell: they're scared. And all I want to do is let them know they aren't alone. So sometimes, if they're having any doubts about whether or not to buy something, I say *Let's ask God*. Because maybe it isn't the right thing for that person to buy a car that day. And I want God to stop us if it's not. Genuinely. So, yes. Sometimes I do actually pray with my customers. It's the Christian thing to do. You have a problem with that?

DEBORAH

My mother is Jewish.

JANE

Okay, excuse me, but can we go back to --

WES

Look: my wife and I have both been saved./ We live by the principles we learn from the teachings of Jesus.

JANE

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.
(when he's done)
Washed in the blood!

WES

Excuse me?

JANE

You just said it. We've been saved. Washed in the blood.

WES

What are you talking about?

JANE

You remember that day at the church when I got saved? I never saw you so proud of yourself. Everyone patted you on the back, and you loved every minute.

WES

I was happy for you!

JANE

For me? Maybe a little, but really? You were happy for you. You had convinced me. But then, when I got washed in the blood at the butcher's the other day, you were --

WES

You can't compare what some crazy terrorist did to you in that hellish shop to being wrapped in the arms of our Savior.

JANE picks up her Bible and flips to a particular chapter and verse.

JANE

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.

(to DEBORAH)

Do you know that?

DEBORAH

Book of Revelation.

JANE retrieves her sweater.

WES

Jane, what are you doing?

JANE

(putting on the sweater)

They have come out of great tribulation and been washed in the blood of the lamb.

WES

(to DEBORAH)

Will you look at what that terrorist did to my wife?

DEBORAH

(to JANE, indicating the blood)

Is that... his blood?

WES

She's been hanging onto that sweater like a security blanket.

JANE

(to DEBORAH)

Do you know what Pastor Franklin told me the day I was saved? That as soon as I accepted the Lord Jesus, I could enter the kingdom of heaven. And you have no idea how much I wanted to belong to God.

(to WES)

And to belong to you, too, Wes.

(to DEBORAH)

So I did it. Oh, with all my heart, I did it. I kneeled. I prayed the prayers. And then... nothing happened. The whole church, they're all singing and dancing and crying these huge weeping tears of joy, but I'm sitting there and I just know... Jesus has not actually entered my heart. I was completely alone. And I thought *This is my fault. What do I do?* And I thought *Please, somebody see this, stop it.* But nobody did. And I couldn't just say *Wait, I need help*, because everyone's so caught up. I couldn't do anything.

(to WES)

Even you didn't see it. You had no idea anything was wrong. And all our so-called friends -- the Bible group, Mike and Vicki -- they all kept smiling the same enormous, perfect, accepting smiles, week after week. And I started to hate them. For not seeing. For making me pretend. I am so sorry, Wes, but being around them was like... being a part of this gigantic fraud.

WES

You... never said.

JANE

I feel like I told you in ten thousand different ways, and you never paid attention. But it's all fine now. All that's over. Thanks to the gift I was given in that shop.

DEBORAH

This is amazing. I have so many questions I want to ask you. You have a fascinating perspective.

WES

(to DEBORAH)

Okay, you need to turn that recorder off.

JANE

I need to be heard, Wes.

WES

I hear you. And I actually care about you. This woman does not. She's not even a Christian.

JANE

Even more reason for me to testify!

WES

She's mocking you, Jane. She doesn't actually think you're fascinating. She thinks you're crazy.

(to DEBORAH)

Do you even believe in God at all?

DEBORAH

Why does it matter what I believe? I want to know/ what your wife believes.

WES

Answer the question. Do you believe in God?

A beat.

DEBORAH

I'm a writer. We... believe in stories.

WES

Uh-huh. I thought so. And what story are you planning to tell about what happened in that shop?

A beat.

DEBORAH

I don't know. Maybe... a mentally ill religious fanatic did a terrible thing, and it hurt people.

JANE

Is that... really what you think?

DEBORAH

You know what? Yes. That is what I think.

JANE

But I told you. He was enraptured! He wasn't ill.

DEBORAH

Yes! He was enraptured. His religion made him delusional.
That's my story.

JANE

But it can't be.

DEBORAH

Yes, it can be. It is. That's what I'm saying.

A beat. JANE picks up DEBORAH's
recorder and hands it to her.

JANE

I'll pray for you.

DEBORAH

(taking the recorder)

But not if I don't want you to, right?

JANE

Please just go.

DEBORAH

Gladly.

DEBORAH exits. A silence between JANE
and WES. JANE moves toward WES, but he
steps away from her.

WES

Don't.

JANE

I'm really sorry.

WES

How could you do this to me?

JANE

I tried to spare you! Why do you think I didn't tell you she
was coming? You've been having a hard time.

WES

Yes, I've been having a hard time! You're supposed to be my
guiding light, and you're/ turning dark.

JANE

I don't want to be. I never wanted to be. I want darkness. I
want us to get lost together.

A beat.

JANE

We tried a long time to have a baby, Wes. We kept going and going in the exact same direction when it was absolutely clear: God didn't want us to serve Him in that way.

WES

You don't know that.

JANE

Yes, I do. And I also know that deep down, in your real heart of hearts, you still keep thinking that if we just pray harder or believe more deeply, God in His infinite mercy will grant us a miracle. Am I right?

WES

Oh, come on! Why is the thought that I might actually pray for a miracle for my wife, who I love, a bad thing?

(picking up Jane's Bible)

Remember the wonders He has done, the miracles, and --

JANE

Stop. Do not quote Bible verses at me. Be a man. Talk like a real human being. Like my husband. Are you still secretly holding out hope?

A beat.

WES

Yes.

JANE

You can't do that, Wes. Hope is weak. We need belief. Hope is soft, like flesh. Belief is a knife.

WES

I have no idea who you even are right now.

JANE

I'm a butcher. I've been washed in the blood, and it made me a butcher. And this is a beautiful thing.

SCENE NINE

DEBORAH is standing behind a podium draped with the logo of the American Humanist Association.

DEBORAH

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me. I'm very excited to be able to give the Thanksgiving lecture this year. I just love being here. I like being among people I don't have to explain myself to. Such a relief, right? We're all of such similar minds. It feels easy.

A quick beat.

DEBORAH

Unlike all those awkward Thanksgiving dinner conversations we're about to have. You know... when Aunt Phyllis makes some crass remark about your dress and you decide to ignore it, or Uncle Peter cracks a racist joke and you don't call him out on it. Or here's the big one: when your grandmother says *Why don't we ever see you at church any more?* and you just swallow every word you feel like saying and instead tell her how busy things have been. All those moments when we're all going to pretend that we aren't who we really are. That's what I've been pondering.

A quick beat.

DEBORAH

I remember this one meeting I had with my rabbi when I was twelve. I was preparing for my bat mitzvah. And he could totally tell something was bugging me. So he asks me, directly *What is it?* And I get up the courage to just admit *I'm not sure I believe all the things I'm supposed to believe.* And for a few seconds, it's just out there. And I almost feel like maybe it's going to be okay. Except then he says *Debbie: do you know what this is? This is temporary insanity.* That's what he actually said to me. He accused me of being crazy. And he said *You'll get over it. And you'll still be a Jew. You'll always be a Jew, no matter what. You can't change who you are.* He made me feel like I'd been diagnosed. Like I was sick. And it scared me.

A quick beat.

DEBORAH

But do you know what I hate to admit about it? I also wanted him to be right. I wanted to be cured. I thought it would be easier to just be like everybody else. Because it is! Just like it's easy to be here with all of you.

A beat.

DEBORAH

But I *wasn't like* everybody else. Not my rabbi, not my parents, not my grandparents. I was different. So I very quickly learned to do what I think most of us learned to do: pretend. Which brings me right back to those moments at Thanksgiving. Those moments that eventually drive any respectable person into therapy. I mean, your rabbi tells you you're deluded often enough, and eventually...

A beat.

DEBORAH

Do you all know the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders? The DSM-IV? You might have seen it sitting on a shelf in your therapist's office. It's sort of like the owner's manual for the human mind. A complete catalogue of every single thing that can ever go wrong with your sanity. Now, I want to read you the definition of delusion.

(reading aloud)

Delusion is: "A false belief about reality that is firmly sustained despite incontrovertible proof to the contrary."

(no longer reading)

Like, for example... if you thought God told you to cut off your own hand, that would be delusional, right? Except here is the last part of the definition:

(reading aloud again)

"Unless the belief is an article of religious faith."

(no longer reading)

So basically, according to the best scientific thinking about the human mind, a delusion stops being a delusion the second you mention God. You can tell people a sparrow in your back yard keeps turning into a space alien and any reasonable person thinks you should be institutionalized, but if you chomp down on a holy wafer that's "transubstantiated" into the body of Christ, you're perfectly normal? It doesn't make sense. The fact of the matter is: we allow religion to corrupt our psychology. Compromise our reason. We let religion scare us into acting like we don't know what we actually do know. But we can't do that any more.

A beat.

DEBORAH

I've spent the last ten years or so all over the world. I've been covering everything from rebel incursions to sectarian violence to war crimes to a whole host of atrocities. As a reporter, I've done thousands of interviews, usually with men in positions of authority, and I have to tell you: the ones with the worst grip on reality are always, without fail, the religious leaders. I mean, the generals, the press liaisons, the military attaches... they all lie, sure, but they're still perfectly aware what's real and what isn't.

A beat.

DEBORAH

The imams, on the other hand -- the rabbis, the priests, the tribal heads -- they all claim things to be true that just patently aren't. And I spent ten years not calling any of them on anything. I took dutiful notes and recorded exactly what they said to me and reported all their stories until one day, I was interviewing this cleric. And he and I were standing right beside this abominable thing. This mass grave. There were at least eighty bodies. And I asked him whether he knew who they were, and he said *Who?* And I pointed. I showed him. I said *Them. The dead.* And he stared for a long, long moment at this huge heap of bones and skin, and then he turned back to me, with these completely vacant eyes, and he said *I see no dead. This is a village of God and of peace.* He was completely, terrifyingly delusional.

A long beat.

DEBORAH

I've been thinking about delusion pretty much ever since. About how critical it is that we change the definition. We need to be able to tell that cleric *This is not God's city, it's ours. This is not peace, it's death.* We need to make him see it. But we can't do that if we aren't brave enough to tell our own grandmothers we're not going to church any more. If we can't say to our rabbi *I'm not sick, I'm an atheist.* We have to have courage. The truth will set us free... but the truth begins at home. And this is why, beginning this very Thanksgiving, I am never -- for the good of the whole entire world -- ever pretending again. And I hope neither will you.

SCENE TEN

The butcher shop. MASSOUD is alone, the shop still without customers, when WES enters.

Can I help you?
MASSOUD

I don't know.
WES

What do you need?
MASSOUD

I don't know that either.
WES

Do you want to buy something?
MASSOUD

No, I do not want to buy anything. Are you the owner of this business?
WES

Yes.
MASSOUD

Do you force your ideas on all your customers?
WES

I don't/ understand.
MASSOUD

Or was it just my wife?
WES

I don't know what you're talking/ about.
MASSOUD

Is this a standard business practice for you? Conversion?
WES

Who is your wife?
MASSOUD

My wife is a decent woman. A good/ Christian.
WES

Who is she?
MASSOUD

WES

Or at least she was until she walked out of your store covered in some stranger's blood.

A beat.

MASSOUD

How is she doing?

WES

Don't pretend to be concerned about her after what you did.

MASSOUD

What did I do?

WES

You're not just a butcher, are you?

MASSOUD

I am a businessman.

WES

I'm a businessman, too, mister. I have a very successful automobile dealership, and nothing like what happened here has ever happened in my place of business. I never let anybody just walk into the showroom and --

MASSOUD

I didn't let him! He did it himself.

WES

You didn't stop him.

MASSOUD

You think I wanted this? I have his blood all over my store. I have to buy a new meat saw. My customers don't come any more. I might lose my business.

WES

So what? I'm supposed to feel sorry for you?

MASSOUD

I don't care what you feel.

WES

Maybe it's a sign.

MASSOUD

What do you mean, a sign?

WES

You know exactly what I mean. God doesn't approve of what you're/ doing here.

MASSOUD

You think God talks like a baby? With signs? God is complicated.

WES

Oh, I understand God, believe me. I know what he wants. And I know one thing he doesn't want is for some strange butcher to take advantage of another man's wife!

MASSOUD

I did no/ such thing.

WES

You do it all the time, don't you? A woman trying to put food on the table for her husband takes pity on your shop and comes in here to look for a deal on a steak. But no. You won't sell her a steak. You probably don't even have steak. But you do have goat, don't you? And whatever else you eat. So you tell her it tastes just like beef. You say *Don't worry, your husband will never notice*. And she goes home and puts that... flesh into a casserole dish and then all of a sudden she's a totally different woman. She starts saying I don't listen. I don't pay attention. I don't --

MASSOUD

All women say this!

A beat.

WES

Excuse me?

MASSOUD

All women say this, that men don't listen. My wife says this all the time.

WES

So?

MASSOUD

So, they say we don't listen, but we do. When your wife comes here, she wants something different. My wife tells her lamb, but your wife says *No lamb, we eat lamb all the time*. So I listen. I tell her about the goat. And she says yes, this is what she wants. Something special for her husband. So we give her the goat. We don't convince her. She asks for this.

A beat.

WES

You know, she actually told me to close my eyes and then shoved it in my mouth without telling me what it was.

MASSOUD

She should never have done this.

WES

No, she shouldn't.

MASSOUD

Do you see? We agree.

A beat.

WES

What I really can't stand is when you set limits, and they act like they totally accept your terms, but then they go behind your back and do whatever the heck they want anyway.

MASSOUD

Women always think they know better than men.

WES

But they don't.

MASSOUD

No. But... now my wife, she starts to say things I have to think about. Things about America and our family and our shop. Things I don't really understand.

WES

Yeah, well how could you, right? You aren't American. You don't really know what it's like.

MASSOUD

I thank God for this. I don't want to be American.

WES

What's wrong with being American?

MASSOUD

You're all so empty. All you care about is money. Things. Eating. You never stop eating. It's like you can't get full. You sit at your tables and eat, eat, eat without talking, without --

WES

Not in my house we don't! We say grace. Do you say grace before you eat?

MASSOUD

Yes, of course! A short prayer before and after.

WES

After?

MASSOUD

This is our tradition.

WES

Huh. Well, you know, my family's traditional, too. The traditions just aren't so extreme.

MASSOUD

Praying is not extreme.

WES

Cutting your hand off is.

MASSOUD

We don't do this.

WES

Yeah, but some other Muslim did.

MASSOUD

He wasn't --

MASSOUD interrupts himself.

WES

What were you just about to say, that he wasn't a Muslim?

MASSOUD

No.

WES

No, he wasn't a Muslim, or no, you weren't going to say that?

MASSOUD

I don't know. What do you want?

WES crosses to the meat saw.

WES

Is this what he used?

MASSOUD

Stay away from that!

WES

Relax. I'm not going to do anything.

MASSOUD

You're not allowed behind the counter.

WES

He got behind here. Why can't I?

MASSOUD

This is dangerous! Please.

MASSOUD moves toward WES.

WES

No! You owe me this. Do you hear me? You owe me at least one moment to think.

MASSOUD

Why?

WES

My wife walked out of here a different woman than when she walked in. I need to understand what she lived through or I might lose her. Please.

A beat, then MASSOUD steps back.

MASSOUD

Be careful.

WES turns his focus back to the saw, losing himself in it for a long moment.

WES

What do you think he was thinking?

MASSOUD

How do I know?

WES

Jane said he looked square at her while he did it. Not at the saw, not at his arm. At her.

MASSOUD

I didn't see.

WES

Do you think maybe, right in the last second, he might have had doubts?

MASSOUD

I don't know what I think. I wish I did.

WES

I mean... I try to live like Jesus tells me to live, but if I thought he wanted me to...

MASSOUD

No. I could not do this.

WES

Neither could I.

WES steps away from the blade. MASSOUD slips in behind him and unplugs it.

WES
I'm sorry about all this. It's just... really been hard.

MASSOUD
For me the same.

WES
Wasn't very Christian of me, though.

MASSOUD
I forgive you.

A beat.
WES
Do you ever feel like God is the only thing really helping you find your way?

MASSOUD
All the time.

WES
I remember this one time from my childhood. I was wandering far out into the cornfield. Stalks taller than me. And then all of a sudden, I realized I was completely lost. I'd been walking without noticing where I was for like an hour. And I couldn't see the weather vane on the barn any more. That was always my reference point. So I yelled out for help, but... nothing. And the sun was going down. I was totally terrified. So I did the only thing I could think of: I kneeled down and I prayed, over and over again. *The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd.* Till I started to feel... God was there. And he told me, very clearly, to get up and walk a straight path, without turning, till I found my way out. So I did. And the whole way I felt... led. And by the time I got home, I knew: I had found how I wanted to live for the rest of my life. And I never looked back.

MASSOUD
This is beautiful.

WES
Thank you.

WES and MASSOUD sit together.

WES
So do you and your wife have any children?

MASSOUD
One son.

WES

You're blessed.

MASSOUD

Yes. But it's difficult, too.

WES

It's everything I've ever wanted, to have children. I grew up in a big family. My father was a farmer, and he and my mother made two things: corn and kids.

MASSOUD

My father had a farm, too.

WES

Yeah?

MASSOUD

He raised sheep.

WES

Isn't that something? Here we are, two farm boys living in the suburbs, where there hasn't been a farm in... forever.

MASSOUD

Nothing but shopping malls.

WES

Oh, I hate the mall.

MASSOUD

Good. Yes. I hate this, too.

A beat.

WES

You know, when I was a boy, we had a couple of sheep on the farm for a while, too. Two little lambs. They would nuzzle up to each other whenever it got cold. But my sisters would never let our folks do anything with them. They were too cute to slaughter. So they just slowly got older and older, and then...

A look between WES and MASSOUD.

WES

They lived their entire lives without really being part of the farm. Without meaning anything to anybody.

MASSOUD

To God, though.

WES

I hope so.

MASSOUD

We have to hope. We must.

WES

It's all we have.

End of play.