

## **The Incident**

### **The Doctor**

Is your mother there?

No.

Where is she?

Shopping.

How about your father? Is he home?

No. He doesn't live here.

Where does he live?

Iran.

Really? Is that where you were born?

Yes.

So you're a Middle Easterner?

Yes.

What time did your mother go shopping?

I think about an hour ago.

For what?

Clothes.

Great. We'll have plenty of time to talk then. Do you recognize my voice?

No.

Are you sure? Think carefully now.

...No. I don't remember your voice.

This is your doctor. Doctor Rogers. You've been to my office for your checkups.  
I've known you for a long time. Do you remember me now?

...Yes.

### **The Mother**

Doctor?

Bahleh, Dohktohr. That is what you will be. I just know it in the bottom of my heart.

But how do you know, mah-mahn?

A mother always knows these things. And a good son listens to what a mother knows in her heart.

### **The Doctor**

I'm calling because your mother asked me to. You see, she's been very busy lately and couldn't take time off work to bring you into my office. So she asked that I call and speak to you over the phone. She is very concerned about you. But before we get into the examination, I need you to state your name and age so that I may check it against my official records.

My name is Omid.

How old are you, Omid?

I'm twelve.

Perfect. I called just in time. Your mother was smart to have gotten in touch with me when she did, otherwise there might have been problems. She's concerned about the changes you're going through and since your father isn't around to talk to you about them, your mother asked that I phone. We're just going to talk, that's all. You don't need to be nervous. Are you nervous Omid?

...No.

Do you know what changes I'm talking about?

Not really.

You're at that age when a boy stops being a boy and begins to become a man. It's called puberty and you can tell that you're going through it when you notice changes in your body. Your voice will get deeper, you'll begin to grow hair in places where you've never had any hair, and most importantly, you'll start having thoughts. Sexy thoughts. That's what I want to speak to you about today.

### **The Incident, Revisited**

Do you know why you're here?

Yeah.

Can you tell me why?

What? You actually want me to tell you the truth?

Of course.

Fine. Mr. Mead has way too much time on his hands and no sense of privacy. He read my memoir piece—which he assigned, by the way—and shit a brick. He probably thought I was that troubled kid the movies tell him he's supposed to help. Probably spent

his whole career looking for that student, the one he can “save” and maybe justify wasting his life in the public school system. So he came to you, went behind my back to make sure you talk to me.

I’m hearing that you feel betrayed.

No shit.

Omid, please watch the language.

Sorry. But this is ridiculous. The assignment was to write a memoir. He encouraged us to be honest. Now I’m sitting in your office being psychoanalyzed.

Don’t misunderstand. This isn’t a punishment. I can see how this is difficult to talk about, but we have to take what you’ve written very seriously. We are not only responsible for your academic success, but for your health as well.

Does this mean you’re going to call my mom?

Not unless we have to.

Why would you have to?

If we feel that you pose a danger either to yourself or to others.

Why do you keep using the plural? Who else is listening to this?

No one. It’s just a figure of speech. Listen, Omid, I’m not a disciplinarian; I’m a psychologist. I’m here to listen to your problems, to help any way I can.

Just don’t get my mother involved.

Fair enough. You will be starting college next year, so let’s talk like adults. You seem very concerned about your mother.

It’s been the two of us for a while now.

So your parents are divorced?

No. My dad lives in Iran. I haven't seen him in eight years.

Why hasn't your father immigrated?

You should ask the U.S. Government. They won't give him his papers.

But you and your mother are U.S. citizens?

Yeah. We were naturalized about two years ago.

So I don't understand the trouble. Your father should be allowed into this country.

We have a house there, by the Caspian. My mother says someone has to look after it. Plus, she doesn't like to talk about the past. History is meant to be buried, she says.

It must be difficult for you. Not having seen your father in eight years.

Not really. It's been so long. I've learned to deal.

That's brave of you.

Brave? Are you kidding? What's brave about it?

I imagine not having your father around must present certain...

Emotional problems? No daddy around to show me how to hold a wrench and put up drywall, no one to watch sports with and think up words for a woman's breasts.

Maybe he'll turn out all gay, right? That's what you're wondering.

Are you?

Am I what?

Are you gay?

### **The Mother**

There are wolves in this country Omid and they are wild. They want to take you from me. Never must you let them, heechvaght. If something happens to you, I will die. I didn't escape war to give you to them, so when you get off the school bus, come direct to home. Don't talk to anyone. If someone asks for help, run. They are lying and wanting to hurt you. Most people are not good. Lock the door. Don't open it for anybody, especially a man, even if he says he's a friend. I have no men that are friends. If a woman says that she is me, just listen to her voice, you will know the truth in your bones. Answer the phone when I call you because I need to hear your voice. Otherwise I will have thoughts. You can watch the TV for one half hour. Then homework. Inside the TV is a machine that takes time for how long you watch. I will check when I come home. So never lie to me Omid because Ghodah will never forgive you. Remember to fill the kettle at six o'clock so when I come home at six thirty the tea is ready.

Why do you always have to work so late?

Because when I was born Allah stamped my head with the sign of a donkey, and I've been working like one ever since. At least in Iran I sat behind a desk. Here, all I have are my hands. But this is the same story with anyone who leaves their country; only in our hearts do we understand the difference that our tongues will not translate.

### **The Doctor**

How tall are you?

Four feet five.

How much do you weigh?

One hundred and five pounds.

Very good. Now I need you to take off all your clothes. You can place the phone down if you need to, but don't hang up.

Do I have to take off my underwear?

You're wearing briefs?

I think.

You must take them off.

### **The Mother**

But there are three people I have loved in my life, just three that I have loved without any limit—bozorgh—big like the whole donya. My father, my mother, and you.

Donya, really bigger than the whole world?

Yes—except for Ghodah-yeh-mahn, who sees everything. Now, who do you love more, your baba or me?

Of course you, mah-mahn.

How much more do you love me?

More than the whole world.

Then you know everything I tell you, I tell for your good. For your success.

I know, mah-mahn.

So you must listen, Omid-jahn, you must always listen to everything I tell you.

I know, mah-mahn. I know.

**The Doctor**

Have you taken your clothes off?

Yes.

What do your legs look like?

I don't know how to describe them; they're just legs.

Do they have hair on them?

Yes.

Is the hair very thick?

Not really.

How far does the hair reach? To your privates?

Yes.

Very good. Is it thick and curly there?

Curly.

What color is it?

Black.

Do you know any other words to describe your private area?

Yes.

What are they? What are the other words you know?

Penis.

Very good. Do you know any other ones?

Yes.

Go ahead and tell me.



Dick.

Is that what the boys in school call it?

Yes.

Have you seen the dicks of the other boys at school?

No.

Not even in the locker room when you change for gym?

No.

You can look. It's okay. You should look – to compare, to make sure that you're normal.

...Okay.

It's important to be normal in this country, Omid. If you're not normal, then you must pretend. Otherwise people will get ideas about you. You're going to have enough trouble as it is, coming from where you do, so you have to try and act like everyone else, otherwise people will try to hurt you.

### **The Incident, Revisited**

You don't have to answer if it makes you uncomfortable.

I'm fine.

But your expression....

I'm not uncomfortable.

No?

It's none of your business, but if you have to know: I'm not gay. But sometimes I have thoughts.

Such as?

Fantasies, you know, the kind normal people have.

Do you want to talk about them?

No. Especially with you.

This is your first time? Speaking with a psychologist?

So?

Well, you're very guarded. It makes me think that you feel vulnerable. But please understand that you are safe here with me.

Spare me the sappy clichés, okay? So I've never spoken to a psychologist before, so what?

That's fine.

Actually, if you think about it, I'm kind of like your virgin. You're my first psychologist. You can probe the recesses of my mind with your throbbing knowledge of Freud. And you don't even have to buy me dinner.

Why don't we switch gears and look at the essay you've written? There are several passages that I'd like to talk about.

It's not an essay.

Oh? What should I call it then?

It's a memoir. A memoir has to be real, whereas an essay is just ideas. One deals with reality as experienced by a flesh and blood person, while the other is a way of interpreting some perceived reality.

You've certainly thought about this.

I wouldn't have if I'd known Mr. Mead was going to stab me in the back.

I hope I can change your mind about that. I'd like to read a few passages to you and I only ask that you listen. Then maybe we can talk about it. Is that all right with you?

Like I have a choice.

### **The Mother**

This country will save you and destroy you at the same time. Everything I know, I left behind. Here I change the dirty diapers of other people's children. In Iran, it was the other way around. Why I did this? Am I deevaneh?

No, mah-mahn, you're not crazy. You sacrificed that life for me. So that I could have a better one.

Other women care for their nice figures, spending money on beauty, buying expensive clothes, going out with men, getting their pleasures, but not me. I live only for you.

I know, mah-mahn, I know.

Then prove to me you know. You must get A! B is not good enough. Harvard looks at scores even in grade six. Take serious. Work night and day. Become a dohkthor! That is the only choice for people like you. Americans will never think of you to be like them, no matter how many praises you place at their feet; to them you are a stranger, always. This is not their fault; it is only the way of white people. It is in their skin to think better of themselves. History told us this. Just look what they did to the blacks! But if you become a dohkthor, you will hold their lives in your hands. To save

them from their pains will be your grace, because pain is only understood in one language.

Yes, mah-mahn-jahn. I promise to be a doctor.

The day people call you Dr. Azadi will be the day that all this tiredness will fall from my body and it will be like I am born again. I will know that day my life has been of worth.

Inshallah, mah-mahn. Inshallah.

### **The Doctor**

Do you masturbate?

I don't know.

Do you know what it means?

...No.

Don't be embarrassed. This is why your mother asked me to call, so that I can explain it to you. Masturbation is a form of pleasure you experience by stroking your dick. You know how you pet a cat? How you run your hand over the length of its body and it stretches out to your touch, getting longer?

I had a cat, but it died.

Do you remember petting it, hearing it purr?

Yes.

It purred because it liked to get stroked. Your dick likes to get stroked the same way. Stroked until you come.

Come?

The stuff that makes babies when it gets inside a woman.

...Oh.

Masturbating is important. I do it three, four times a day. Both of my sons do it too, and they're younger than you are. If you don't start masturbating, someone will find out and try to hurt you. In America, it's a way of life, a way to protect yourself. It's natural. Your mother doesn't want you hurt and neither do I. As your doctor, I care about you Omid. Understand?

Yes.

Good. So before we get started, you'll need a ruler. Do you have a ruler in the house?

Yes, in my room.

I want you to put down the phone and go get the ruler. But come right back; I will wait. And, Omid? It's very important that you do come back because now that we have begun the examination, it wouldn't do at all to stop. So don't think about hanging up the phone; otherwise, I will be forced to tell your mother that you were a bad boy and didn't listen to me. Now what are you going to do?

I'm going to get the ruler.

And then?

And then I'm coming right back with it.

### **The Incident, Revisited**

*Duty is a tree: it has roots and branches and it cannot be moved unless it is cut down. No matter what happens to you, my mother says, you cannot forget your duty.*

*My mother and her friend came home shortly after I hung up with the doctor. My ear felt hot from holding the receiver against it for so long. I was eager to tell her that I had done everything the doctor asked. I was certain that she would be proud.*

Dohkthor?

*It was how she said the word that let me know everything I needed to. There was fear, confusion, anxiety—so that I knew, instantly, that I had been tricked. I have always been keen to the sound of fear in my mother's voice. Too many nights spent sitting on her bed, crying, which is the only way we ever prayed. But when she spoke that one word—dohkthor—I felt, in a matter of seconds, a drop, a very slight one, like a penny thrown into a fountain, in the bottommost part of my heart. Looking into my mother's eyes, I noticed how her eyebrows were raised, like swords into battle. For an instant, while she continued to look at me, I felt caught, paralyzed by the thought of having been fooled. But it wasn't quite the feeling of folly...it seemed more grave to me, more tragic. But I couldn't think of that just then standing before my mother and her friend, the silence quickly gaining momentum between us. I would have time to think about what had happened later, when I would question myself in understanding the shades of shame and disgrace, and then, their modes of battle. So I lied. I told her that I was mistaken. Something about a secretary calling to confirm an appointment that quickly dispelled my mother's fears. I was lucky that her friend stood next to her. She let it pass. I made them tea and served it with dates.*

You write very well, Omid.

Thanks.

Do you write often?

Yeah. It's what I like to do.

So I have a question about this passage. Is it duty that kept you from telling your mother the truth? Is that what you are trying to communicate here?

Is that too foreign an idea? Family is everything to us.

Of course. But don't you think the truth would have been more appropriate? Isn't honesty also the duty of a son to his mother?

You don't understand. It wasn't a decision so much as instinct. I knew it in my bones without having to think about it. To tell her the truth would do nothing but harm.

I understand that you care about your mother, but shouldn't she have the chance to hear the—

Jesus! You Americans and your fucking confessions! Not everybody needs to dredge up every little thing that happened in their childhood? The past is dead.

Watch your language please. You are still in school.

Sorry. I lost my temper.

Does that happen often?

What?

Losing your temper.

No. Then again, I've never been psychoanalyzed.

Omid, my point is this. Even though you think your mother is going to be hurt by hearing the truth, more damage will be done in the long run if your relationship is built on lies, especially ones so profound.

You don't get it, do you? It's not just that. Everything would be destroyed. How are you going to be a doctor, she would say, if you don't even know what a real doctor sounds like?

### **The Mother**

Mah-mahn, when is baba coming here from Iran?

You are old enough to hear what I am about to tell you. Your baba has wronged me from the moment we were married, from even before we were married. He is a deceitful man who married me with nothing, nothing but lies.

Mah-mahn, what does he look like? Sometimes I forget his face.

Bald like an egg! And he wears such suits, hundreds of ties...like he is royalty. But the most important thing about your baba, Omid, he has always been bee-or-zeh, without any skills. When I wanted to buy my first car in Iran he said, "Anyone who wants me must want me just the way I am." Can you believe that? A man that stupid! I was talking about one thing and he another. I said I don't want the car to show off! I want the car to use, to own my comfort. Why should everyone else own a car and not us? That is the kind of man your baba is, Omid, always living his life for show, for everyone else. He thought I wanted the car to drive around town and show off to everyone. Can you believe it? This man I married just two weeks after I meet him—he tells me these things...nah, Omid-jahn, your baba and I have always been as different as night and day.

But mah-mahn, do you love him?

Don't ask stupid questions Omid. This has nothing to do with love. It is only a matter of vazeefeh, of duty.



**The Doctor**

Doctor Rogers?

Yes, Omid, I'm here. Did you find the ruler?

Yes.

Are you circumcised, Omid?

I don't know.

Do you know what circumcision means?

Is it like a religion?

No, not really, although certain religions require it, like the Jews. You're not Jewish are you, Omid?

No.

Good. What are you?

Muslim.

Oh, that's pretty much the same thing. I'm Catholic myself, Omid, and I'm not circumcised, neither are my two sons. To be circumcised means to have the foreskin removed. Is there extra skin on your penis that you can pull back?

No.

Just goes to figure. You're circumcised.

I don't remember.

You don't remember what?

I don't remember losing any skin.

You didn't lose it. It was cut away and you don't remember because it probably happened when you were very young. Are you right handed or left handed, Omid?

Right.

I want you to hold the ruler in your right hand and measure your penis for me. Is it hard?

What?

Is your penis hard? Has it swollen?

No.

Okay, go on and measure it. We'll take two measurements, one when you're soft and one when you're hard. Go on and tell me how big your dick is.

### **The Mother**

At school, you must only have an ear for study. Do not listen to the other children. Never eat anything they want to give you. Share your own food, but don't take anything from them. Never drink from the same bottle. Their ways are different. Here, it is normal for girls to kiss boys; they do things that you must never do until you marry. Parents here are happy when their children go together, but not me, Omid. I will kill you if I find that you are doing these things. Remember we are not like them. Here adults teach their children these private things between men and women, and these same children run out to do it just when their parents don't see. But until I was twenty-four, I thought babies came out of bellybuttons. That was decent. Here it is like a sickness.

### **The Incident, Revisited**

How long did the calls go on, Omid?

I don't know. They went on for a while, I guess. It's not like I kept the dates in a diary or anything.

Did he ever ask to meet you?

No. He had a wife and two kids. He just liked to talk dirty to me. And I learned to talk back.

Did you talk about anything else?

He told me he thought that his wife was cheating on him, but that he didn't care as long as someone was hitting her spot. He said he thought that I would get along with his sons, that we would be good friends.

What did you say to that?

I said okay. But I was never going to meet them.

Did you ever tell him the truth? That you knew he wasn't your doctor?

Yeah.

What did he say?

That he wouldn't call anymore if I didn't want him to but that it would be sad not hearing from me. He said he'd come to think of me as a son.

### **The Doctor**

Now I need you get hard for me, Omid.

I don't know how.

Massage your groin. Run your fingers through your pubic hair. Pull on your dick. Think about me being right there with you. Imagine my hands on you. I'm standing behind you, pressing up against you. Can you feel me?

...Yes.

Good. How do I feel?

...Okay.

Just okay? I don't feel good? I don't feel really good?

...Yes.

Say it then, Omid. Tell me I feel really good.

You feel really good.

And hard? Do you feel how hard I am?

...Yes.

Say it.

And hard. You feel really hard.

Good boy. Now I'm taking my dick out. I'm wearing jeans. They're black and tight across my groin. I take your hand and put it on my dick so you can feel what a hard dick is like. Can you feel it?

...Yes.

It feels hot doesn't it?

...Yes

And good. It feels good to have your hands on my dick. Now I want you to spit in your hand and rub it all over your dick. Work it so that your dick is nice and moist, and then stroke it. You remember how to stroke, don't you? Stroke it like you would a

cat, feel it beneath your hand getting hard. That's right. Keep stroking. Are you getting hard?

...I think so.

Good, keep rubbing it for me. This is so natural, Omid. Go nice and slow at first, but you've got to move your hand faster. Spit on it again. I'm spitting in my hand too. That's nice. Good. You're learning how to be natural. A boy becoming a man. Now rub the spit on your dick. I should be able to hear it. Good. Hold the receiver down next to your dick so I can make sure you're doing it right. That's good, Omid. You're doing great. I'm going to tell your mother how good you are. How well you listen to your doctor. That's right! Keep rubbing it. That's it. That's it. It's got to be hard now. Nice and hard and big and ready. Take the ruler and measure it. Tell me how big it is.

### **The Mother**

Then there was a sound in my head loud like the bombs that fall in Tehran, vah mahn me-donestam, and I just knew that all the doors in Iran had been closed to me. It was like Allah spoke inside my head. He told me to go. You have a son, He said. For him you must live. Because this was the time when the war was loudest. When all you could hear were the cries of mothers for their sons, wives for their husbands, and old men crying which, Omid-jahn, is the saddest sound in this world because to hear it means that everything is lost. But I had you, and that was all I needed to get the courage to leave that country where everything was breaking. My family begged me not to go, but I didn't listen. Only one road I saw for me, the road to EhmRicA. And under this road Omid, the only sun was your shining face. With fifty dollars, that is all we had when we came here.

But Ghodah held us in His hands like a mother cat, her baby in her jaws, held us just that carefully. Do you remember Omid, do you remember how hard we prayed those first years in this country?

Yes mah-mhan I remember. I was eight years old then, when we first came here. And every time I think about those years I remember the house by the Mystic River that leaned over too far to the right. And that door in the kitchen that opened onto the backyard.

I remember that too. The door that wasn't a door. Only in EhmRicA do you find doors that are half made of glass.

Remember mah-mahn how the panes would creak at night in the wind?

And I was thinking that someone was trying to break in. But you said that the door was trying to speak. It was only later that we found the mice that were scratching, getting in from beneath.

That's why the church gave us Soulmahz, right? To kill all the mice. Sometimes I remember that night she was run over and that feeling of my stomach mixing in itself comes back, and I get very depressed.

Omid-jahn, I remember too the night she died. Just for one small cat, you cried for three days. Those were hard years. No car, no language, no money. But it is no use for thinking after things that are dead.

And do you remember mah-mahn how you said Soulmahz had many lives because she escaped from underneath two different cars before the third one hit her in the head? And then her brain, which I remember was yellow like sickness, coming out of

her, and she turned around and squished up her eyes. That was the first time I started thinking about Ghodah because Soulmahz was the very first thing I lost.

No Omid-jahn, she is not the first thing you lost. Only the first thing you remember losing. I cried too because your tears, Omid-jahn, have always made me cry. I remember how Soulmahz waited so nicely till our food shopping was finished. And when we pushed the carriage full of food across the street, she was always there waiting. That night was different, Omid. And I tell you on the bridge not to put her down when you first pick her up. She jump from your hands into the street, and the car with those two lahtha—those trouble boys—driving too fast hit her, just before we crossed to go home.

But mah-mahn I remember you said “Omid, put her down so we can see how nicely she crosses the street.”

Nah! Omid! Why would I say that? Why would I talk like a deevahneh. You should never put words into your mother’s mouth.

### **The Doctor**

You’re a good boy, Omid. You’ve done everything I’ve asked. Your mother will be very proud of you. Does that make you happy?

Yes.

Good, I’m glad. It wasn’t so bad now, was it Omid? When do you get home from school?

Around three.

And is your mom home then?

No, she gets home around seven.

Okay. I'll be sure to call when you're alone so that we can do this again until it becomes natural for you. That way, we'll all be more comfortable. Your mom doesn't want to know about what we do. Only that we do it. What you and I did stays between a boy and his father. Do you understand, Omid?

Yes.

And since your father isn't here, this is your only option. This or being unnatural. You don't want to be unnatural, do you Omid?

### **The Incident, Revisited**

*I knew that he wasn't a real doctor when my mother first came home and I saw her expression when I told. When he called the second time, I wanted to tell him that I knew the truth and that he hadn't fooled me, but he was good at making me listen. It was hard to say what I wanted with him going on and on and never a moment for me to just say, I know you're not my real doctor. But he was nice to me, and I was alone then in the afternoon, and he said it would be okay if I wanted to pretend he was my real father. Like I was born in an American hospital but this evil nurse who couldn't have any children of her own stole me away and sent me to Iran where I was given to strangers. He said that could have happened. He told me that he loved me like a father should love his son, and this on the second time we spoke, and it made it okay to talk to him and soon it became our game. He asked me what I thought he looked like and I said I think you look like MacGyver and he said that yes that was exactly what he looked like. MacGyver*



*was my favorite and I used to pretend that he was my real baba and this was mostly at night before I fell asleep when I believed that by thinking about my dreams, I could control them. Sometimes we would talk about the show and how MacGyver escaped and saved all those people and he would tell me to imagine that MacGyver saved me too, from a building with a bomb that was going to explode and he said that his arms would be around me and they would be strong and that I would smell his sweat which wasn't spicy but more like motor oil and he would hold me on his lap and I could feel him beneath me and then we would go home and he would still be holding me and his arm would be around my neck and I would put my head on his chest and his hands would go where I would feel good to receive them. When he spoke like that his voice would become deep and fast, more—he said—like the language of men.*

Omid, I read this passage because I found it the most disturbing. You understand that this man is sick, right?

Yeah.

And when he said that you're like a son to him, it was just a way for him to keep you from telling what happened? His feelings for you were not normal, he was taking advantage of—

Listen, you don't have to do this. I totally understand what happened and I'm okay with it. He never touched me. It was just stories between us. I was a kid who did what adults asked. Then I grew up. I'm not like little Suzie whose uncle comes over every Christmas and sits her on his lap and rubs up on her, or little Davey whose father gets drunk and stumbles into his bed. I learned to play his game and that's it. I know

how to fight back. He wanted to talk sex, so I did. I learned, and then I wasn't fooled anymore.

How so?

By making him think he got me hard. By pretending to give something I never gave. He was the one that was fooled. Not me. I did what was asked of me, or so he thought. Then, it became a way to pass the time. I endured it at first to see whether I could, but then it wasn't so much about enduring at all. Now, it's in the past. All that matters now is the future. That I go to college then medical school and save us from the wolves. That's what matters.

So you want to be a doctor? For your mother?

It's everything she's ever wanted of me.

But what about your happiness? What about what you want from life?

It's not a matter of happiness. It's a matter of duty.

### **The Mother**

You want to be what? To write words no one will pay you to read? No, you must be a dokhthor. They are men of grace. They give relief.

Mah-mahn, I had a dream last night, of Soulmahz.

That cat?

Yes, the one hit by the car on the bridge. I was on my bed studying and saw her run past in the hallway. When I called her, she didn't come. So I got up and followed her. As I stepped out of my room, she was sitting there in the hallway, looking up at me. She had something fleshy in her mouth. It looked like a piece of skin. When I reached to

pet her, she let the fleshy skin drop to the floor and opened her mouth to meow. But instead of a cat's meow, she sounded like a ringing telephone. That's when I woke up.

Why are you telling me this? What comes from remembering this? No Omid, it is foolish to think after things that are dead.