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# Heartland

وطن

By

GABRIEL JASON DEAN

With cultural dramaturgy and  
Dari translation by Humaira Ghilzai

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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CAST:

NAZRULLAH .....Owais Ahmed  
HAROLD ..... Mark Cuddy  
GEETEE ..... Mari Vial-Golden  
YOUNG GEETEE (V.O.) ..... Alivia Domenico

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director ..... Mark Cuddy  
Director ..... Pirronne Yousefzadeh  
Scenic Design ..... Meredith Ries  
Lighting Design ..... Seth Reiser  
Costume Design ..... Dina El-Aziz  
Sound Design/Music ..... Pornchanok Kanchanabanka  
Dramaturg ..... Jenni Werner  
Cultural Consultant ..... Humaira Ghilzai  
Language Consultant ..... Malalah Ahmadzai  
Stage Manager ..... Stephanie Kesselring

The New Repertory Theatre production ran from Jan. 12 to Feb. 9, 2019.

CAST:

NAZRULLAH ..... Shawn K. Jain  
HAROLD ..... Ken Baltin  
GEETEE ..... Caitlin Nasema Cassidy

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director ..... Jim Petosa  
Director ..... Bridget Kathleen O’Leary  
Scenic Design ..... Afsoon Pajoufar  
Lighting Design ..... Chris Brusberg

Costume Design ..... Becca Jewett  
Sound Design/Music ..... Lee Schuna  
Cultural Consultant ..... Humaira Ghilzai  
Stage Manager ..... Renee E. Yancy

The VORTEX production ran from Jan. 17 to Feb. 9, 2019.

CAST:

NAZRULLAH ..... Kareem Badr  
HAROLD ..... Lowell Bartholomee  
GEETEE ..... Kacey Samiee  
YOUNG GEETEE (V.O.) ..... Genevieve Schroeder-Arce

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director ..... Bonnie Cullum  
Director ..... Rudy Ramirez  
Scenic Design ..... Anne Marie Gordon  
Lighting Design ..... Patrick Anthony  
Costume Design ..... Delena Bradley  
Sound Design/Music ..... David DeMaris  
Prop Design ..... Helen Parrish  
Cultural Consultant/Dialect Coach ..... Humaira Ghilzai  
Language Coach ..... Hasti Ahmadi  
Stage Manager ..... Tamara L. Farley

The InterAct Theatre Company production ran from March 29 to April 21, 2019.

CAST:

NAZRULLAH ..... Yousof Sultani  
HAROLD ..... Tim Moyer  
GEETEE ..... Nazli Sarpkaya  
YOUNG GEETEE (V.O.) ..... Coralie Anne Holum Lyford

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director ..... Seth Rozin

Director .....	Evren Odcikin
Scenic Design.....	Dirk Durosette
Lighting Design .....	Maria Shaplin
Costume Design.....	Katherine Fritz
Sound Design/Music.....	Michael Kiley
Prop Design.....	Kate Wheary
Cultural Consultant/Dialect Coach .....	Humaira Ghilzai
Stage Manager .....	Tom Helmer

*Heartland* premiered off-Broadway in New York City at 59E59 Theatres, produced by Geva Theatre Center, running from March 18 to April 10, 2022.

CAST:

NAZRULLAH.....	Owais Ahmed
HAROLD.....	Mark Cuddy
GEETEE .....	Mari Vial-Golden
YOUNG GEETEE (V.O.).....	Lola Chenzy

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director (Geva).....	Mark Cuddy
Producing Artistic Director (59E59).....	Val Day
Director .....	Pirronne Yousefzadeh
Associate Director.....	Gulshan Mia
Scenic Design.....	Meredith Ries
Lighting Design .....	Seth Reiser
Costume Design.....	Dina El-Aziz
Sound Design/Music.....	Kate Marvin
Dramaturg .....	Jenni Werner
Cultural Consultant / Translator.....	Humaira Ghilzai
Intimacy Coordinator.....	Rocío Mendez
Stage Manager .....	Veronica Aglow
Stage Coordinator .....	Codey Leroy Butler
Casting Directors .....	Paul Fouquet, Karie Koppel

# Foreword

In 2018, *Heartland* premiered at Geva Theatre Center amid an escalation in violence in the war in Afghanistan. It would be four years before I would reunite with Gabriel Jason Dean and this remarkable play, during which the United States completed its withdrawal of troops. Then in 2022, seven months after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and just as we began preview performances off-Broadway at 59E59 Theatres, the Taliban decided against opening schools to girls past the sixth grade, renegeing on a previous promise.

Long before we sat in previews together, Gabriel and I had chatted casually at theatre gatherings and had run into each other at performances of our colleagues' productions. We first discussed the possibility of collaborating almost a decade ago over breakfast tacos in Austin where he told me about *Heartland*. When he shared the premise, my interest was piqued, particularly as Gabriel explained the role Harold—and the United States—played in the rise of the Taliban. As our collaboration began, I was struck by the way Gabriel can walk the artistic tightrope of both holding to a vision with confidence while also maintaining a sense of curiosity and openness to the possibility of transformation.

This kind of openness in one's artistry requires an ability to look within, unflinchingly, at our motives and our biases. Perhaps most telling in the evolution of the play is the way Gabriel continually complicated Nazrullah's capacity for forgiveness while deepening Harold's remorse. He candidly named how certain storytelling tropes and his own white gaze could result in a narrative that offered Harold an easy redemption, unearned and facilitated all too selflessly by Nazrullah. He recognized, too, that Geetee, the sole female character, was missing the sense of purpose driving her to teach schoolgirls in Maidan Shar. We held



each other accountable and maintained rigor and candor as we continued to examine and reexamine the text, facing our own limitations as we continued to excavate the words on the page for possibility. What I find remarkable is that Gabriel always treated the play as a living document; the immense differences in the production drafts from 2018 and 2022 are indicative of this.

In those four years between the first and most recent productions, the national conversation about the war in Afghanistan drastically changed, and with it, perhaps, the appetite to discuss the responsibility the United States holds for instability in the region and the fate of young girls in Afghanistan. How fitting that Gabriel's play is such a thoughtful and thorough examination of the history we are so rarely taught in schools, the history in which America is not the hero, but rather, is as complex, flawed and capable of cruelty as the humans who inhabit it.

A new play is a living document in rehearsals, and now, this publication captures it at this moment in time. Though rigorously researched, the play is neither a history lesson nor is it a news report. The brilliance in Gabriel's writing is that as readers and as audience members, we experience the sociopolitical through the characters we come to love. And like any real love, we love them for everything they are, warts and all.

My hope is that in the years to come, as students study this play and theatres continue to produce it, we are able to fight the forces here in America that wish to omit the uglier parts of our history so that we can face it and ourselves, and seek forgiveness through consistent and thoughtful action. Alongside that, I hope that in Afghanistan, young women and girls can, once again, seek out and receive the education they so richly deserve.

—Pirronne Yousefzadeh

# Heartland

## وطن

### CHARACTERS

NAZRULLAH: 27; Afghan; math teacher at the Blue Sky School in Afghanistan.

GEETEE: 29; Afghan-American; Harold's adopted daughter; English teacher at the Blue Sky School in Afghanistan. A recorded voice of 9-year-old Geetee is also required.

HAROLD: Late 60s; American; retired professor at the University of Nebraska.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

This play is about what is omitted. And therefore, it feels right to furnish it minimally. Resist treating it as realism. It is not. In this world, space and time crash effortlessly into each other. No intermission, scene breaks, transitions or projected translations. If possible, the audience should be able to see each other. Above all, keep it simple.

For non-Dari speakers, rather than letting the language intimidate you, use it as an opportunity to find actors in your community who are familiar with Dari (or Persian). If that proves impossible, look for native speakers to serve as dialect and language coaches. For further guidance, the author can be contacted through Dramatic Publishing.

Language is a bridge, not a barrier.

### SPECIAL PUNCTUATION:

/ indicates interrupted and overlapping dialog.

< > indicates a slight pause, a beat for the actor.

— at the end of a line indicates the next line should flow without pause.

(*Silence.*) indicates space and opportunity for the unspoken.

**Dari** is formatted in **bold** and followed by unspoken translations in both English (if necessary) and Perso-Arabic script. The exceptions to this are the following elementary Dari words that are repeated often throughout the script:

Nay (No)	نی
Bale (Yes)	بلی
Baba (Father)	بابا
Tashakor (Thanks/Thank you)	تشکر

# Heartland

وطن

August 2014

*(The war rages on.*

*Lights reveal HAROLD, seated in his recliner, wearing a tropical-themed shirt, an Omaha Storm Chasers baseball cap and flip-flops. He has a copy of Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea on his left and Atiq Rahimi's Earth and Ashes on his right.)*

HAROLD *(speaks into a tape recorder)*. Santiago and Dastaguir are at the end of their lives, unable—no, unwilling, *undone*, yes—undone by the struggle of their existence. They both must depend on stronger, younger men to survive. And you'll notice both writers, Hemingway, an American ex-pat and Rahimi, an Afghan exile, both are employing a strict minimalism, which I think suggests that ummm what does it suggest? It suggests perhaps that ...

*(He stands, revealing his tightly-whities.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. Yes ... *yes!* When one struggles to exist for so long, against the weight of war, the cruel nature of reality, all that's left is ... the naked poetry of direct and precise language. Aha! But ... *but* ... for both these writers, their greatness isn't in what they write but rather in what they can't—no, scratch that, don't, no no no, *choose*, yes choose, that's the word—what they *choose* not to write.

You're on a roll, professor, keep professing! You see, here's the thing: Hemingway, writing in English and Rahimi in Dari—they cut out everything—*everything*—but the heart of what must be said. And in this editing—no this, this omission, essentialism? No, this *absence*. Yes, absence!—they leave us with a more visceral emotional presence.

*(HAROLD speaks directly to a high-school portrait of his daughter, GEETEE.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. What's that? No, it's not sentimental. Anything but sentimental. The emotional heft of this absence is a way of fighting against the pressures of reality, of of of of ... hold on ...

*(He retrieves another book and thumbs through it.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. Yes! *The Sun Also Rises*. Right here! As Hemingway says of, of, "holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure ... " *It is the space between the words where the ache lies.*

*(He stops the recorder.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. Hot damn, Harold, you still got it! *(Remembering, he records again.)* Note to self: Lecture for September twenty-fifth, 2014.

*(HAROLD stops the recorder and speaks to the portrait of GEETEE.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. You see, Geetee, if Santiago had the muscle ... no, he had the muscle. What he needed was the right equipment. It's always about the damned equipment. Never have the right tool when you need it. If he had the

right tool, the right weapon—he was prepared, but he needed a weapon for for for fighting those sharks, then imagine it.

*(NAZRULLAH, dressed in dirty jeans, a ripped T-shirt and a well-worn patriotic trucker hat, enters. He is barely standing. He totes a small leather bag. He removes his shoes as he watches HAROLD.)*

HAROLD *(cont'd)*. My God, imagine it. And, you see, Geetee, that's the tension Hemingway creates—the reality of the old man adrift, alone, alone in dark waters, out among the sharks versus, versus the potential of ... if he had the right weapon, if you could just get home ... if *he* could just get home.

NAZRULLAH. Hello.

HAROLD. Huh?

NAZRULLAH. Hello. / My name—

HAROLD. Oh, oh! Right, right. Come in, come in.

NAZRULLAH. OK. Yes. / Good.

HAROLD. You were supposed to be here between eight and noon. It's now two o'clock and the house is an oven.

NAZRULLAH. Ehh ...

HAROLD. Oh, you don't speak English.

NAZRULLAH. / Little.

HAROLD. I speak some Spanish, so we'll do the best we can.

NAZRULLAH. Spanish ...

HAROLD. *Si, un poco.*

*(HAROLD notices NAZRULLAH noticing his tighty-whities.)*

HAROLD. Oh, right.

*(HAROLD slips on cargo shorts from the floor.)*

HAROLD (*cont'd*). Now the condenser's on the east, no, the west, is that west?

NAZRULLAH. / Is east.

HAROLD. Who cares. Anyway, it's on *that* side of the house and the HVAC, I'm sorry to say, is in the attic. It's probably a hundred twenty degrees up there by now. That's why I booked you to arrive early. So you don't have a damned heat ... uhhhhh ... you know, the thing where you get hot and pass out? Anyway, I was looking out for you, pal. Gotta be on time! I got plenty of water. *Agua?*

(*HAROLD tosses NAZRULLAH a bottled water. NAZRULLAH downs it.*)

HAROLD (*cont'd*). Yeah, it's a scorcher out there. Now, um, listen, I know it's an old unit, but if it can be fixed, I want to repair it, not replace it. I know how these things work. Don't try to up-sell me. (*Indicating his brain.*) *Yo no tonto.*

NAZRULLAH. Sorry ... I am not—

HAROLD. No apology necessary. Just get the thing blasting again, and we're all *bueno muchacho*.

NAZRULLAH. Talk fast. Like Geetee.

HAROLD. Excuse me?

(*NAZRULLAH goes to the photo of GEETEE.*)

NAZRULLAH (*rehearsed*). My name is Nazrullah. I am with Geetee in Afghanistan.

HAROLD (*realizing*). You're not Mexican.

NAZRULLAH. Nay.

HAROLD. You're Afghan.

NAZRULLAH. Bale. Nazrullah.

HAROLD. Oh, that's embarrassing ... I thought you were ... I should've ... **bobakhshane**. I'm so sorry. I'm really not culturally illiterate. It's just ... I'm waiting for a repairman ... **mechanique?**

... بیخشین.  
... میکانیک؟

NAZRULLAH. **Nay, mechanic naystom.** Nazrullah with Geetee. I am here to—

نی میکانیک نیستم.  
(No, I'm not a repairman.)

HAROLD. Wait. How do you know my daughter?

NAZRULLAH. I teach with her in Afghanistan. You and me, we meeting on the a-skype, remember? Nazrullah?

HAROLD. Nay.

NAZRULLAH. You are for sure? My name / is—

HAROLD. You've thoroughly established your name. I've never heard of you.

NAZRULLAH. Your ... (*Indicates brain.*) **maghz.**

... مغز.

HAROLD. What about my brain?

NAZRULLAH. Your brain is a-sleeping.

HAROLD. Sleeping? Young man, this isn't funny. **Khanda dar nayst.**

خنده دار نیست.  
(Not funny.)

NAZRULLAH. / Not joke.

HAROLD. Did someone from the university send you?

NAZRULLAH. / Nay.

HAROLD. The Center?

NAZRULLAH. Nay, nay ... I am here because Geetee ... you send to her the birthday card.



HAROLD. What?

NAZRULLAH. Geetee has the birthday in August.

HAROLD. I'm well aware.

NAZRULLAH. But the birthday card you send, it was April.

HAROLD. **Chee maygee?**

چی میگی؟

*(What are you talking about?)*

NAZRULLAH *(through his teeth)*. This is why I am come to care for you.

HAROLD. Care for me? / What—

NAZRULLAH. Your sleeping brain! *(To himself.)* **Mard e peer, tu bisyar sar shakh astee.**

مرد پیر، تو بسیار سر شخ استی.

*(Old man, you are very difficult.)*

HAROLD. **Mard e jawan ...** get out of my house. **Barai as khaname.**

مرد جوان ...

*(Young man.)*

برای از خانیم.

*(Get out of my house.)*

NAZRULLAH. But I wish / to help—

HAROLD. Whatever sick pleasure you're deriving from torturing an old man—

NAZRULLAH. / No torture—

HAROLD. Coming into my house and speaking about my daughter—

NAZRULLAH. I wish no disrespect.

HAROLD. **Ma ba police zang mayzanom.**

مه به پولیس زنگ میزنم.

*(I'm going to call the police.)*

NAZRULLAH. No call police! Please Mister Banks—

HAROLD. *Doctor Banks—*

NAZRULLAH. Mister Doctor Banks ... please no police.  
The last wish I hear Geetee say, her **wasiyat**—Geetee wish to come home to care for you.

—وصیت

(*Dying wish.*)

HAROLD. Geetee wasn't coming home. Not to me.

NAZRULLAH. *Yes, it is true, she was.* And she ask me to come with her!

HAROLD. Nay—

NAZRULLAH. Please, believe me. You are confused.

HAROLD. Goddamn it, I am not confused! My daughter was not coming back to this house! Now, I'm only going to say this one more time—get the hell out of here or I will call the police!

NAZRULLAH (*finally losing it*). **Khafa sho, bara-yay yak sanya, wa khob gosh bey-tay!!!**

خفه شو، برای یک سانیه خوب گوش بته!!!

(*Shut up for one second and listen to me!!!*)

(*NAZRULLAH forcefully seats HAROLD.*)

HAROLD. Do it. I don't care if you kill me.

NAZRULLAH. <> *Kill you?*

HAROLD. You didn't plan for that, did you? You're really doing me a favor, young man. You tell whoever sent you that Doctor Harold Banks welcomed his death. **Az marg e khod khosh mayshom.**

از مرگ خود خوش می شوم.

(*I will be happy for my death.*)

NAZRULLAH. **LOTFAN KHAFASHO!** Geetee sent me! I do not wish to *kill you*. I am not warlord.

لطفان خفه شو!

(PLEASE SHUT UP!)

HAROLD. I don't know *what* you are.

NAZRULLAH. *I am a man!* < > I am a man ... who come all this way to honor Geetee's wish ... and and and you disrespect me so? Taliban treat me better than this.

HAROLD. So go back to them!

NAZRULLAH. Doctor Banks, *listen*. (*Rehearsed*.) My name is Nazrullah. I am with Geetee in Afghanistan. I am here to care for you like Father because Geetee wishes it. I give all my money and borrow more for document to pass into United States.

HAROLD. A false document?

NAZRULLAH. Yes.

HAROLD. Young man, / that is—

NAZRULLAH. *Please*, let me speak. < > I land in Los Angeles and am held and question of everything. But I know story to say. I repeat. The same. Again and again. For days. I think I will be arrest and sent back, but ... my document is good, so they let me go. I take a ride in the freight truck. Driver is very nice. He give me this hat. He leave me in the Wyoming province. And I walk here to you.

HAROLD. You expect me to believe you walked to Omaha from Wyoming?

NAZRULLAH. Bale.

HAROLD. In this heat?

NAZRULLAH. Bale.

*(Elsewhere on the stage, GEETEE enters, wearing a chadar. She begins to write on the wall in chalk: "12 December 2013.*

*I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.” NAZRULLAH pulls a very tattered book from his bag.)*

NAZRULLAH (*cont'd*). *The Old Man and the Sea*. Your book she say. And she promise to bring it back to you. I read it. I like it very much. Maybe I catch big fish someday.

HAROLD. Not in Nebraska. <> **Lotfan, ketab ra barem betay.**  
 لطفن کتاب ره به رایم بتی.  
 (*Give me the book, please.*)

*(NAZRULLAH offers the book to HAROLD.)*

HAROLD (*cont'd*). Young man ...

NAZRULLAH. Nazrullah.

HAROLD. Nazrullah ... you should've led with the book.

*(Lights shift to ...)*

## December 2013

*(GEETEE in Afghanistan. NAZRULLAH, now dressed in more traditional Afghan attire, enters.)*

NAZRULLAH. **Salam.**

سلام.  
 (*Hello.*)

*(GEETEE is startled.)*

GEETEE. **Bo bakhshi?**

ببخشی؟  
 (*Excuse me?*)

NAZRULLAH (*reading the board*). I caaan ... shaaa-keh offa ... ev-reee-ting ahs I ... wuh-riiiteh ...

GEETEE. **Shoma ijaza inja nadarane.**

شما اجازه اینجا ندارین.  
(You not allow here.)

(NAZRULLAH looks at her, then looks away.)

NAZRULLAH. **Ee sinf e ma ast.**

ای صنف مه است.  
(This is my classroom.)

GEETEE. **Shoma ki hastane? Shoma ki hastane?**

شما کی هستین؟ شما کی هستین؟  
(Who are you? Who are you?)

NAZRULLAH. **To ki hasti?**

تو کی هستی؟  
(Who are you?)

GEETEE. **Ma moalim, to bego ki hasti ya ma mizanom cheeqh barai komak.**

مه معلم، تو بگو کی هستی یا چیغ میزنم بری کمک.  
(I the teacher. Say who you are or ... I shout for help.)

NAZRULLAH. **Chee? Nay, nay—**

چی؟ نی، نی—  
(What? No, no—)

GEETEE. *Who are you??*

NAZRULLAH. Lady, lady ... calm. Is OK. I also teacher. Also.

GEETEE. You teach here?

NAZRULLAH. Bale.

GEETEE. I've never seen you.

NAZRULLAH. **Ma na fameedom.**

مه نه فامیدوم.  
(I don't understand.)

GEETEE. **Heech waqt nadidam tora.**

هیچ وقت ندیدم تو ره.  
(Never see you here.)

NAZRULLAH. Ehhh ... *not* here. I in Kabul for university?

GEETEE. / OK—

NAZRULLAH. Ehhh ... but ... returning ... Blue Sky School.  
So many the pupils. I teach ... **reyaziat**.

... ریاضیات.

GEETEE. Ohhhh, *you're* the new math teacher.

NAZRULLAH. Bale, mathematics. English word. Math!

GEETEE. Madina failed to mention that you're a man.

NAZRULLAH. Madina is ... (*Indicates "frantic."*)

GEETEE. Uh-huh. You do know this is the girls' side of the school.

NAZRULLAH. **Bale. Ma dokhtar-aw-raw ham dars maytom.**  
بلی. مه دختراره هم درس میتم.  
(*Yes, I teach girls also.*)

GEETEE. You teach the girls too?

NAZRULLAH. Ehhh ... I the *only* math teacher.

GEETEE. I see. Well, my class is in thirty minutes, so—

NAZRULLAH. **Ma na fameedam.**

مه نفامیدم.

(*I don't understand.*)

GEETEE. **Bad dars maytom.**

بعد درس میتم.

(*I teach next.*)

NAZRULLAH. Sorry. I ... **wakht**.

... وخت.

(*Early.*)

GEETEE. Early.

NAZRULLAH. Bale. Early. < > You talk America, but not ...  
face of America.

GEETEE. Oh, yeah, I was born here, but grew up in the U.S.

NAZRULLAH. **Amreekaw-ye zada.**

آمریکای زده.

GEETEE. I don't know what that means.

NAZRULLAH. Joke.

GEETEE. What does it mean?

NAZRULLAH. Ehh ... the Afghan hit by America.

GEETEE. That's supposed to be funny?

NAZRULLAH. **Bale, Amreekaw-ye zada.**

بلی، امریکایی زده.

*(He slaps his hands together, laughs.)*

NAZRULLAH *(cont'd)*. Eh... born Afghanistan, live America ... ?

GEETEE. Right.

*(NAZRULLAH slaps and laughs again. She doesn't.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. ... I was adopted.

NAZRULLAH. **Ma na fameedom.**

مه نه فامیدم.

*(I don't understand.)*

GEETEE. I was in a refugee camp in Pakistan. My adopted father—an American—was there and he found me.

NAZRULLAH. Found you?

GEETEE. Yeah. I was sick. I was very young. I don't remember much of it.

NAZRULLAH. And is why you are come here ... find family?

GEETEE. No, I'm here to teach.

NAZRULLAH. But what of your family?

GEETEE. My parents died during Russian occupation.

NAZRULLAH. Ah. < > I lose my mother and father to Russians.

GEETEE. < > I'm sorry.

NAZRULLAH. You have brother? Sister?

GEETEE. Well ... I don't actually know.

NAZRULLAH. < > Maybe I your brother!

*(NAZRULLAH smiles ear to ear.)*

NAZRULLAH (*cont'd*). Is joke. I not your brother.

*(GEETEE finally smiles.)*

NAZRULLAH (*cont'd*). There are many like us here. **Yateem.**  
 یتیم

GEETEE. Orphans?

NAZRULLAH. Bale, orphans. Dari is good.

GEETEE. I understand and read OK, but speaking ... oh,  
 I struggle, like every minute of the day. Your English is  
 really good.

NAZRULLAH. Study at school. But most from the films.  
*(His best impersonation.)* Bond. James Bond.

*(GEETEE laughs.)*

NAZRULLAH (*cont'd*). I see too much James Bond films.  
 Roger Moore the best, agree?

GEETEE. I don't know who that is.

NAZRULLAH. *The Spy Who Love Me?*

GEETEE. Sorry, I haven't seen James Bond.

NAZRULLAH. Ach, this is tragedy. James Bond is very,  
 very good.

GEETEE. Clearly transcendent.

NAZRULLAH. ... .

GEETEE. I, uh ... I should prepare for class.



NAZRULLAH. ... .

GEETEE. Get ready for the girls.

NAZRULLAH. Ready, yes.

GEETEE. Soooooo, you should probably go.

NAZRULLAH. Ah, go. Bale, yes.

*(He begins to awkwardly exit. GEETEE watches him for a moment.)*

GEETEE. Oh, by the way, my name is Geetee.

NAZRULLAH. My name is Nazrullah.

GEETEE. Nice to meet you, Nazrullah.

NAZRULLAH. Nice to meet you, Geetee.

GEETEE. <> I'm sorry I freaked out on you before. With all these new security increases, I'm pretty tense.

NAZRULLAH. I not know the word ... tense?

GEETEE. Ummm ... **fishar**?

... فيشار .

NAZRULLAH. **Bale, fishar** ... tense.

... بلى، فيشار ...

*(They make eye contact, then NAZRULLAH quickly looks away.)*

GEETEE. I'm not Muslim. It doesn't make me uncomfortable if you look at me.

NAZRULLAH. Bale ... chadar ...

*(Still looking away, NAZRULLAH indicates that her chadar has slipped down, revealing her hair.)*

GEETEE. Oh, sorry. I really struggle with this chadar. I don't like things on my head. I always hated hats. Better?

NAZRULLAH. Yes. OK.

GEETEE. Would you like some chai? I just made it ... **jadid ast.**  
... جدید است.

*(It is new.)*

NAZRULLAH. Is no ... proper. Man. Woman. Alone. With chai.

GEETEE. But ... right. OK. Sure.

NAZRULLAH. We are to be seen together and *(Makes a cutting-his-throat gesture.)*

GEETEE. Oh ... uh—

NAZRULLAH. Is joke! Is joke! I have the chai.

GEETEE. Oh, um, weird joke, but OK.

*(She pours the chai, gives it to NAZRULLAH.)*

NAZRULLAH. Tashakor.

*(He drinks, tries to be polite, but she can tell that something is wrong.)*

GEETEE. The chai's no good?

NAZRULLAH. Is, uh ... ehhhh ... ehhhh—

GEETEE *(taking the chai from him)*. You don't have to drink it.  
I'm struggling with my chai.

*(NAZRULLAH puts down the cup of chai.)*

NAZRULLAH. You say this word struggle much times.

GEETEE. I guess I do.

NAZRULLAH. The struggle ... in the Arabic ... it mean jihad.

GEETEE. Like holy war jihad?

NAZRULLAH. Taliban make war. Jihad is no war ... is struggle. Inside.

GEETEE. Hunh. So I just said to you that I'm in jihad with my chai?

NAZRULLAH. Yes. A little.

*(They laugh.)*

NAZRULLAH. Jihad is struggle ... to ... be better.

GEETEE. You mean like, striving?

NAZRULLAH. Striving?

GEETEE. Yes.

NAZRULLAH. Good word. Striving. < > You write these words?

GEETEE. What? Oh. No, these aren't my words.

*(GEETEE writes "Anne Frank" under the quote on the board.)*

NAZRULLAH. Awn Farahnk.

GEETEE. Anne Frank.

NAZRULLAH. Anne Frank?

GEETEE. Yes, very good, exactly. Anne Frank. I'm teaching the girls English with her diary. Do you know it?

NAZRULLAH. Nay.

GEETEE. Um, well, Anne was a teenage girl. And she was in hiding during World War II in Europe. And she kept a diary chronicling her thoughts and feelings. It's really a very beautiful and hopeful book. I'm teaching it to the girls because I think it could help give them perspective on their history. But I don't know if they're actually learning anything from me.

*(NAZRULLAH laughs.)*

GEETEE. That wasn't a joke.

NAZRULLAH. **Ma na mifamom.** Talk fast.

مه نه ميفاموم.

(*I don't understand.*)

GEETEE. Oh, right. Sorry. I get excited. Too much chai.

(*NAZRULLAH nods but doesn't understand. He picks up the copy of The Old Man and the Sea sitting on the table.*)

NAZRULLAH. This book?

GEETEE. Oh, no. That's a different book. That belongs to my dad.

NAZRULLAH. Your baba ... he write?

GEETEE. No, Harold isn't Ernest Hemingway. He *wishes*, but no, my dad's a scholar. **Moalim.**

معلم.

(*Teacher.*)

NAZRULLAH. Here at Blue Sky?

GEETEE. No, he's on the board, but he's never taught here. He *did* teach in Afghanistan though. In the 1970s. He was a Fulbright Scholar. He taught Ernest Hemingway to Afghan students. He wrote a book about that. So, yeah, actually he is a writer. Just not a Hemingway kind of writer.

(*NAZRULLAH nods.*)

GEETEE (*cont'd*). He teaches comp lit and Dari and Pashto at the University of Nebraska. He's retired though. Mostly. Just teaches one course now and then. It's his baby. *The Beauty of Violence: Writers in Exile.*

(*NAZRULLAH nods.*)

GEETEE. Oh, crap, I'm talking fast again. Sorry. You didn't understand any of that, huh?

NAZRULLAH. Eh ... you have pride for family.

GEETEE. Oh. Yeah. I got pride for my pops ... my baba.

NAZRULLAH. This book is good?

GEETEE. Well ... it's really masculine and depressing. But, yeah, it's good. Harold loves it.

*(NAZRULLAH nods.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. Geez, I'm talking about my dad a lot.

NAZRULLAH. Pride for pops.

GEETEE. Yeah. It's Christmastime back home and ... we have this tradition. We always eat at Golden Buddha Chinese on Christmas evening. It's the only place actually open in Omaha.

*(NAZRULLAH nods.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. I can't tell you how nice it is to talk to, well, *at* somebody, in my own language since I left Omaha. Besides Madina, and she's ... well ... like you said ... *(Repeats NAZRULLAH's gesture for "frantic.")*

*(They share a laugh.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. Ummm, since you read English too ...

*(GEETEE retrieves The Diary of a Young Girl along with a Dari-English dictionary. NAZRULLAH catches himself fixating on her. He looks away.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. Take these.

NAZRULLAH. Anne Frank? Nay, nay, I can no—

GEETEE. Take them. We have other copies.

NAZRULLAH. Nay—

GEETEE. Read Anne Frank for yourself. Use the dictionary to translate. It'll help with your bad English. < > You understood that was a joke, right?

*(NAZRULLAH extends the books back to GEETEE.)*

GEETEE *(cont'd)*. Really, I insist.

*(GEETEE places her hands on his hands, gently pushes the books back to NAZRULLAH. He quickly withdraws.)*

NAZRULLAH *(sternly)*. I cannot take this book.

GEETEE. Why not?

NAZRULLAH. Not book for me.

GEETEE. OK. Sorry.

NAZRULLAH. Not book for me.

GEETEE. Yeah, I get it.

NAZRULLAH. Anne Frank for Afghans ... is ... is ...

GEETEE. Is what?

NAZRULLAH *(sternly)*. Is not Afghan.

GEETEE. < > Yeah, OK, well, Madina approved it, so when you're headmaster of Blue Sky, you can ban Anne Frank. But right now, I'll continue teaching her.

NAZRULLAH. < > I go.

*(NAZRULLAH quickly exits.)*

GEETEE. Yeah. You go. I'll ... drink my disgusting chai.

*(GEETEE sips her chai. It is, in fact, disgusting. Lights shift ominously, and as GEETEE exits, she sees ... )*