O Lord! By Ali Abdel-Nabi Al-Zaidi

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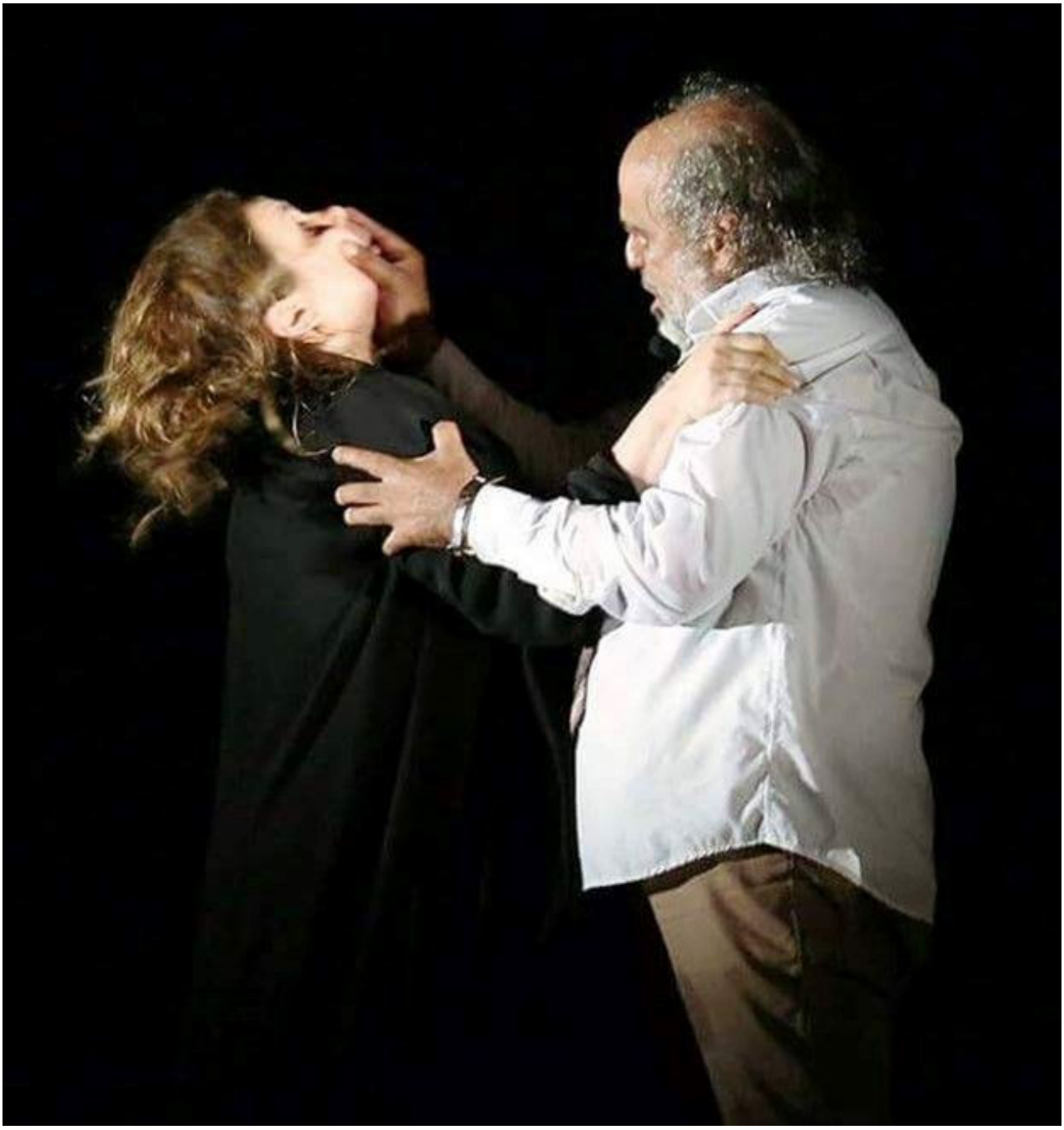

Ya Rab! By Ali l-Zaidi, National Theatre, Baghdad, 2016. Printed with permission of the production staff

O Lord!

By Ali Abdel-Nabi Al-Zaidi

Characters:

Mother, in her fifties.

Moses, in his sixties.

A large valley surrounded by mountains on all sides, strange in its appearance, called the Holy Valley Tuwa.

Mother enters, covering her body with an abaya, a black women's cloak, barefoot, carrying a large bag on her head. We hear her voice before she appears, speaking loudly on her mobile phone, then setting the bag aside.

Mother (*Standing in the middle of the valley.*) Yes... I have arrived at the place. It seems terrifying. Tell all the mothers, I will not return without good news for them, cool water for their weary hearts. Yes, yes, I will call you later... (*She hangs up and surveys the valley.*) Everything here invokes fear: a valley of stone, my prayers made of stone, my fasts made of stone, and my supplications made of stone. (*She shouts.*) And I am a mother whose blood flowing in my soul has turned into stone! (*She raises her head towards the sky.*) I have come to you, O Lord, with a thousand tears and grievances in my heart. I blame you as if blaming my own soul. How can my soul not respond to my prayers?! I am your guest now, O Lord, and I have learned that the host hears even the breaths of his guests. And now what if I am both a guest and mother? Yes, a mother, alas for her! (*She shouts louder.*) O Lord... speak to me, as you spoke to Moses here in this valley. Respond to the heart of this mother who has lost her children one after another, heart by heart and laughter by laughter, only one son remaining, waiting for immigration and the sea's rafts of death... No third choice. (*Firmly.*) You can see, O Lord, that I have taken my sandals off out of respect just as I would in my own home, and I have come to your holy valley, Tuwa, knowing that you will speak to me. I know I am not a prophet, but the heart of a mother, as you know, equals a thousand prophets! The mothers have sent me to you, O Lord, and I am the most grief-stricken among them, the most insane. There must be a solution for the fate of our children, O Most Merciful of the Merciful! (*She screams.*) Shall I uncover my head? You will see how my hair has gone grey so that my children would grow up. But when they grew up, instead of their beloveds waiting for them, the rafts of hell waited for them in your seas, or explosions waited for them in the streets of madness. This killing, drowning, cannot continue. What fate is this that makes our children, who we protected when they were only tiny things, into fish food in the seas? What trifling fate is it that we wake up in the morning with nothing but the fragrance they left in their beds when they are gone? O Lord, we want them to grow up, not to die. I speak to you as the mother who has grieved the most, who buried her children without limbs, buried them in kilos, one kilo, two kilos, three! The biggest of them, I didn't find a single bone, so I slaughtered a lamb and buried its bones instead, and I visited its grave — I mean the lamb's bones, O Lord. What can I do? There is only one son left, and I want him to live and love and grow up and be buried whole. (*Takes out papers from her bag.*) O Lord! Where are you? These are the signatures of the mothers... look at them. I didn't forge a single signature. Thousands of signatures, whatever threshold we were supposed to meet to stop this, we have never had enough signatures, O Forgiving One. You must find a solution. (*Firmly:*) I will now say something important. (*She speaks forcefully.*) In my name and in the name of all mothers, we will give you a deadline, O Lord. You have twenty-four hours to command

“it shall be so” and it will be, or we will declare a strike from praying and fasting. (*She shouts.*) Yes, that's what we have decided, we will strike from prayer and fasting, O Lord, and no mother will lift her hands in prayer to you after today, oh, closer to us than our own veins. Our conditions are clear... stop the killing that devours our children and stop their emigration away from our embrace. They leave our homes and don’t return while they are still in the prime of life dreaming of a spring that won’t come. (*Loudly*:) We mothers want our children to reach at least fifty years of age. Fifty years... is that difficult for you, O Most Merciful of the Merciful? We do not ask for the impossible, and after that, do as you please. (*Madly*:) Strange! (*She shouts:*) Aren’t You capable of everything as You say? Do something, O Lord, for I am in your holy valley, Tuwa. (*She cries.*) O Lord, O Lord, can you hear me, O Lord, my Lord, O Creator of the heavens and the earth, where are you? O Lord...

Moses (*Enters, leaning on a staff, wearing old clothes.*) Don't shout. Enough, woman. What do you want?

Mother (*Surprised.*) Are you... Are you... Are you God?

Moses I seek forgiveness from Allah.

Mother I thought you were Him.

Moses You must leave the Valley of Tuwa.

Mother What concern is it of yours? I took off my shoes and entered the valley.

Moses You don’t have the right to enter…

Mother It isn’t your right to give.

Moses Silence is the master of this place. This is a sacred valley, only those permitted by the Most Merciful may enter!

Mother I have waited my whole life for permission.

Moses Then you must return to your home.

Mother I won't return until God speaks to me.

Moses He will not speak to anyone.

Mother It's none of your concern. It's my Lord.

Moses He has spoken to no one here except me.

Mother Except you?! And who are you?

Moses Moses.

Mother And who is Moses?

Moses (*Assertively.*) The Prophet!

Mother (*In disbelief.*) Prophet Moses?! You?!

Moses I have lived in this sacred valley for a long time.

Mother You live here? It's unbelievable. Prophet Moses living in a valley and leaving paradise?

Moses This is my paradise, which God planted with the sweetness of His words, and suffused with the faint odor of His presence, spreading peace and love throughout.

Mother It can't be. How can I meet a prophet who lived in a distant time?

Moses Before God, it is all one time... A time where nothing exists except mercy, O mother.

Mother O mother? And you know me too?

Moses Yes, I know you... And I have been sent to negotiate with you.

Mother Who sent you?

Moses The Almighty God!

Mother God? Negotiating with me? But I didn't ask for a prophet... I want only God to hear the prayers of mothers, and I am authorized by them... That's all.

Moses You're a mother wearing the cloak of a madwoman.

Mother Madness, O Moses... The killing of our children in the prime of their life.

Moses You have the right to turn into a madwoman, but you have no right to incite mothers to madness.

Mother (*Shouting.*) O Lord... I didn't ask for a prophet. I wanted You, the All-Hearing.

Moses Be careful... The valley is monitored by cameras.

Mother Cameras in the valley? (*Looking around.*) O Lord, I am a mother who came to this place with all her sincerity and devotion, with all her wails and mourning.

Moses That's enough... You must stop immediately along with all the women striking from their prayers and fasting.

Mother (*Firmly.*) We will proclaim our strike until our demands are met.

Moses It's not right... You must seek God’s forgiveness.

Mother (*Yelling at him*.) Is it right that the blood of our loved ones is so cheap?!

Moses And how can a creature stop loving their Creator who gave them everything?!

Mother We love God more when we strike from prayer and fasting!

Moses This is rebellion, not love.

Mother God has given us the right to rebel in order to live with honor!

Moses I take it as a conspiracy to overthrow...

Mother (*Interrupting.*) I recognize that you are a prophet, but you have no right to stand between us and God.

Moses (*Yelling at her.*) I just want to understand... What do you want?

Mother Mercy!

Moses He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.

Mother I know... But not in our homeland.

Moses His mercy is everywhere.

Mother Where is it? Where? (*Firmly*.) I'm in a hurry. Listen, O Prophet... Twenty-four hours is the deadline we gave to God, and then we declare our general strike.

Moses Twenty-four hours? It's the worshipers' deadline for the worshiped. It's as if I live in the age of myths or hear a fable. (*Quietly.*) O mother... God cannot be threatened.

Mother You understand it as a prophet as you wish, and we understand it as mothers as we wish... (*Her mobile phone rings, she answers.*) Yes, yes... What do you want? I'm still in the place. I'm negotiating. With whom? With the Prophet Moses. What's wrong with you? Yes, he's the prophet... God sent him to negotiate with me. (*Shouting.*) Don't laugh, and leave your questioning now, your job is just to monitor comments on the mothers' strike page on Facebook. Respond to all of the comments , do you understand?! (*She hangs up. To Moses*:) Mothers can't wait any longer.

Moses The Mothers' Facebook page? What a mockery is this! This could evolve into a military coup. You don't understand what you're doing. This is an invitation to return to paganism or idol worship, like Pharaoh who said, "I am your supreme lord."

Mother *(Smiling.)* Do demands for rights always turn into rebellion?

Moses This is a dangerous development that could lead to the extinction of mothers from the Earth forever.

Mother We will become extinct as long as the earth consumes our children every moment.

Moses *(Exclaims.)* O God...

Mother *(Shouting.)* Bags, bags, bags... Bags, O Moses! Nothing but luggage leaves with our children. Nothing remains here but their toys, their clothes, and the scribbles they left on our walls before they departed. *(As if reading from a wall:)* "Memory of my mother, father, siblings, and me on Eid." "The rose's fate is to wither, and our home's memories never fade."

Moses *(Raising his head.)* How can I negotiate with all this pain? A mother plastered with memories of a home reduced to walls. *(Strikes the ground with his staff.)* Demands are rejected, O mother. Negotiations are over; you must leave from here.

Mother Rejected? What's wrong with you? Cruelty doesn't enter the heart of a prophet, as they say.

Moses My heart contains nothing but purity.

Mother *(Looking at the staff.)* Then try doing something with your staff, Moses.

Moses My staff? It works by the will of God.

Mother Tell it to split the earth in half... one half for murderers to live in, and the other half for us to live peacefully with our children.

Moses *(Points to the staff.)* It seems to be out of commission right now. It always seems to need a Pharaoh.

Mother (*Mockingly*:) Even your staff has turned into scrap, O prophet!

Moses I told you it works by the power of the one God, not by my power.

Mother Try again... Chaos must stop in my homeland.

Moses Rather, mothers must stop this chaos.

Mother *(shouting)Youbooee*![i] Is there anyone who lives in peace and has never said "God is Great"[ii]? What is happening, Moses? Say something. We are mothers who have nothing but the refrain "God is Great" since our children were born and our souls are longing for our children. What have we done to deserve all this hell?

Moses Since Adam's soul was placed on this earth, that has been the question.

Mother And no one answered it.

Moses I object to the idea of a strike.

Mother Did God send you to negotiate with me or to object?

Moses The relationship with God is supposed to be without conditions and above assessment. .

Mother We feel that God has lifted His hand from this land, turning it into hell.

Moses Hell... It is a burning hospital to treat the disease afflicting all of you!

Mother We will scream, refuse, and protest against this hell...

Moses The sea will swallow you as it swallowed...

Mother *(Interrupting angrily.)* Hasn't the sea swallowed us already, Moses? Haven't you seen or heard? Even the fish of the seas wept for them and were more compassionate and warmer than this homeland! We did not ask God for the impossible; we want our children to warmly sleep in our arms and dream dreams as innocent as they are.

Moses *(Painfully.)* And I too... my mother found no place gentler than the sea to place me in.[iii]

Mother (*Takes out a large mortar, grinding with it.*) Our children come out of our wombs and their heads are burning white... their hair all white, white, white... Do you understand? All of us have become insane in this country, a big hospital with nothing but mothers mad about their children. *(Stops pounding with the mortar. Shouting*:) Look at our misery, look at our wretched faces, O prophet... *(Puts on one of the cloaks and performs the role of Mother 2.A group of people appears, bringing a coffin and exiting. Mother 2 looks crazy, sitting at a coffin with her son's remains, Moses is watching)*

Mother 2*(Crazily, ululating, laughing, dancing, approaching the coffin.)* Finally, my eye, your mother told them you would come back, my son, and no one believed this crazy woman. Even the streets complained about her feet.[iv]*(Screams:)* Come and watch my son return to my arms in the clothes of his wedding. *(Ululates.)* "Congratulations on your wedding, O son," they thought I was crazy, crazy, and now he returns to my soul... *(Takes out a red dress from the sack, wears it over her clothes.)* I vowed that when my son returns to my arms, I will wear a red dress the color of his blood, "Sweet, very sweet, amazing." *(Recovers.)* They brought his shirt with fake blood stains, and they said, “We found this on the edge of the sea.” I curse every sailor in the universe who stole my son's laugh... *(Ululating, dancing around the coffin, then stops.)* They finally brought you. (*Firmly with the coffin.*) Come on, wake up from your sleep. Be a man and rise. Rise and embrace your mother instead of this meaningless pampering. I will give you a new shirt without a single drop of blood. (*Shouting.*) They brought your shirt without your perfume, my life! (*A group of people appears, lifting the coffin and exiting.*) Where are you taking it? Wait! (*Shouting.*) They brought your shirt with nothing but sea salt, my soul... Congratulations on your wedding, my beloved... Here's joy, and another joy... (*She laughs and dances wildly*. *Shestops performing the role of Mother 2 and takes off the red robe.)*

Mother Hah... What do you think?

Moses Death is the norm of life... In your homeland there is nothing worth living a long life for, there is nothing but tears.

Mother It's beyond our control, O Prophet, and it is God who destined us to be in this homeland.

Moses I understand, but striking from prayer and fasting is rebellion against God's authority in this world.

Mother I don't understand these terms, I don't know their meanings. I'm just a mother like all mothers, wanting to warm myself with the breath of my youngest child.

Moses Beware, O mother, beware, for this place is monitored with cameras by Him, the Almighty. Beware... “And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam’; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.”[v]

Mother Ask this land where we have been prostrated our entire lives **…**Yet in the end, we were expelled from Paradise because we prostrated to God alone!

Moses “We have certainly created humankind into hardship.”[vi] God has said so.

Mother (*Smiling.*) Why, why in hardship?

Moses (*Exclaiming.*) The dust of your streets is kneaded with pain.

Mother No human has lived on this earth in such hardship except us! What did we do to deserve this? Is there a solution, O Prophet? Say something, do not remain silent... (*Takes out her mobile phone, presses a button to show Moses a video*.) Look, look at this tragedy... Look. (*Sounds of mothers screaming, mourning*.) Did you see, O Prophet?

Moses I did. (*Confused.*) Yes, I did. (*Withdraws.*) Oh... What is happening here? How can I be a reformer when all I possess is a staff abandoned by life and consumed by time? And this land, this homeland... needs a new miracle, one as big as the children’s laughter that has stopped, awaiting an all-clear signal that never comes. How can I sow hope in a land where nothing grows but graves? Lord... I found people here living in a vast graveyard they call a country. I am perplexed, or a bewildered Prophet who doesn't know what to do? How does one negotiate this grief in the guise of a mother? How?

Mother You do not know what has happened to us!

Moses (*Shouting at her.*) All the women of the earth will be punished because of your thoughts, and Paradise will not be under their feet.[vii]

Mother We do not want Paradise under our feet... Let it be wherever it is, just let our children live their lives with their mothers. They are our flowers. Have you heard of a Paradise without flowers?

Moses And who are you to speak for the mothers of your homeland?

Mother Me? Wait a moment, O Moses, wait. I will show you a special permission of those mothers... (*Opens a large bag, takes out a large collection of women's cloaks.*) They sent their cloaks with me so that Allah might see them, poor women. (*Shouts while tossing the cloaks.*) This one and this one and this one and this one and this one and this

one and this one... I will spread them here in the valley. (*Holds a cloak.*) This cloak belongs to Abdullah's mother. Abdullah never slept except in his mother's arms. He slept until he was killed by the shell. (*Holds another cloak.*) And this cloak belongs to Saeed's mother.[viii] Saeed was never happy. He lived with his mother in a clay room, and when his body was torn apart, his mother found no grave to shelter what remained of him. (*Holds another cloak.*) And this cloak belongs to Salem's mother, the sanest mother in our city. They brought her son's head to her, and this wise woman turned into the craziest woman in our city. (*Points to another cloak.*) And this one belongs to Jaber's mother. O poor son, he left his mother's embrace to sleep in the embrace of the sea. And this one belongs to Ahmed's mother, and this one belongs to Ali's mother, and this one belongs to... Look, (*Shouts*:) these are mothers in the form of cloaks, each cloak carrying the scent of their children who were torn apart by explosives here and suicide belts there.

Moses Who is this mother, O Lord? There is nothing in her soul but sorrow, and I have turned from a prophet into a spectator who possesses nothing but tears and questions. I am all Yours, O Lord... Please grant me the ability to answer even one of her questions. (*Pauses, then pulls himself together.*) O mother... I cannot understand what prayer and fasting have to do with what has happened to you.

Mother No one listens to the cries of our tears... We have found no one to protest against except God... Perhaps He will send rain to extinguish the fire in our hearts, O Prophet, and stop this farce.

Moses God is not a party to your conflict. For your people, killing is a picnic adorned with blood and hollowed words, creating a thousand justifications in your minds. God has nothing to do with this.

Mother God created the killers!

Moses And He created you too.

Mother He shouldn't have created those monsters and made them live with gentle souls.

Moses There must be contradictions in creation... There must be hungry and satiated, there must be killer and slain.

Mother Has killing not been chasing us for a thousand years, O Prophet?

Moses (*Yelling at her.*) I told you, death is the norm of life.

Mother (*Yelling back.*) Death is a norm, but not killing, not slaughter, not burning, not drowning. Death is a norm, but separating heads from bodies is not a norm.

Moses (*Withdraws alone, looks at the staff, speaks to it in a whisper.*) Do something, please, anything. One movement from you might make these mothers reconsider their strike. What's wrong with you? (*Stops, raises his head.*) O Lord... Tell the staff to do

something according to Your will and let it be anything, stopping killing for one day, or one hour, or one minute. I implore You. O staff... No use... (*Firmly with the mother.*) Return, O mother, to your homes before the Almighty swallows you in the land of this valley.

Mother I will not return until I take an oath from God that there will be no more emigration or slaughtering of our children from today onwards!

Moses I am here to negotiate with you.

Mother Our conditions are clear.

Moses (*Raising his head, shouting.*) O Lord... I can't bear the words of the people of the earth. O Lord, I am overwhelmed by the fire that spews from this mother's mouth. O Lord... Could it be that You created life only for it to be a knife prepared to slaughter this world? Could it be that You destined sorrow to prevail over joy and reduced all colors to just one dark hue? I have long known that Your throne, glorified be You, trembles for the cry of a single orphan... What now makes it completely silent in the face of an orphaned homeland? (*Shyly.*) Glory be to You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us.

Mother Silence... Nothing but silence.

Moses Perhaps your hands can silently ask for something.

Mother (*Gesturing with her hands.*) My hands are tired, O Moses!

Moses Your stubbornness, O mother, will ensure that your prayers are never answered by God.

Mother When were they ever answered before that they should be answered now? When? I forget my hands raised to the sky for hours, until they ache, and pigeons build their nests in the comfort of my palms. I forget my mouth for weeks as it pleads to keep my children safe from slaughter, and I forget my tears for years as they flow, hoping they would be dried by just one word from Him. (*She yells.*) Tell me, what should I do for God to answer my prayers?

Moses Job endured afflictions for many years.[ix]

Mother (*Shouting*.) And we endure a thousand calamities while He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful!

Moses Jonah lived, prayed, and fasted inside the belly of a whale.

Mother It means nothing before great whales that have devoured all our young.

Moses Jesus was crucified in the most horrible manner.

Mother Every day, our streets are a ceremony of crucifixion for our loved ones in the most horrible manner!

Moses And Jacob, whose eyes turned white from grief?

Mother All mothers' eyes have turned blind, and their hearts and souls have turned gray together.

Moses And the well of Yusuf...

Mother (*Laughs.*) Much easier than this darkness.

Moses O mother, I cannot comprehend the fire in your words.

Mother O prophet, I cannot comprehend the coldness in your words.

Moses I still carry my staff... It may work at any moment.

Mother A sword of wood!

Moses (*Rising, speaking to the staff.*) No, you will see it work. It will work at any moment. (*To the staff*:) Speak, do something, by the permission of God stop the killing, stop the fires and bullets and smoke and explosions, O staff. Dry up the seas and bring their children out safely, unharmed. What is wrong with you? I do not want you to be a serpent crawling on the earth...[x] I want you to be a balm that soothes the hearts of those mothers. What has happened to you? (*Raising it high.*) O staff... I am Moses the prophet, commanding you to extinguish every fire on earth... (*Raising it higher, then stopping.*) Oh, how disappointed I am.

Mother (*Sarcastically.*) Are you confident that you are the Prophet Moses?

Moses You doubt everything, even my existence.

Mother Then how come your staff isn't working?

Moses And who do you think I am?

Mother I don't know.

Moses (*Raising his voice.*) You must have faith and not let Satan strip it away, O mother. Perhaps God wishes to test your patience and that of mothers through the loss of their loved ones.

Mother Did they ever tell you about a mother who sang or danced at her son's funeral? Have you heard of such madness? (*Shouting.*) We, the insane, did that... (*Her mobile rings, and she answers.*) Yes... What do you want? I am still in the Valley of Tuwa, His word... Yes, I spoke to Him, but He did not respond. What should I do? Be a little patient. Tell me, how many mothers are there now? Oh... more than a million mothers... Yes, yes, go now. (*She hangs up.*) It will be a strike of cloaks and black garments, tears. Worship will stop until further notice...

Moses You stand in a sacred valley... You must speak with kind words, for God hears what He wills from His servants.

Mother And when does He will? Tell me, please... When does He will?

Moses I do not know.

Mother Then go... Leave me here alone with those cloaks.

Moses We haven't found a solution, O mother.

Mother And we won't, O prophet.

Moses I fear for you the anger of God.

Mother There is nothing new... Anger is spreading in our streets in the form of explosive devices, designed to kill our children... And you come to warn me of impending anger?

Moses How can I negotiate with this mother? What a dilemma! She's a stubborn woman, O Lord. (*Changing the subject.*) Perhaps your children are now in paradise.

Mother (*Laughs.*) And what are they doing there?

Moses They live a happy and luxurious life, rivers flow beneath their feet, wide-eyed maidens and eternal youths, food of their desire, and fruits...

Mother (*Interrupting.*) You are wrong, O prophet... The true paradise for our children is in our warm embrace!

Moses You must now pray to the mothers... and stop them from the idea of striking against prayer and fasting, for this contradicts the essential idea that the creature worships the Creator

Mother The decision has been made by consensus between the mothers of the homeland and cannot be reversed. Cease the death of our children in this way or we strike until our demands are met.

Moses You have removed God from your heart, and whoever does that turns their heart into nothing but a pump.

Mother Our hearts left with our children who left without notice.

Moses (*Raising his head.*) It is difficult to negotiate with a woman like this, O Lord. (*Calmly.*) Faith, O mother, is to thank God when He gives you nothing.

Mother Say something else, Moses.

Moses Faith is...

Mother (*Interrupting.*) How can we continue to believe and resist the sight of our children turned into sheep slaughtered, skinned, roasted, and consumed every moment, while God Almighty watches our little sheep?

Moses God Almighty is beyond what you describe, what kind of mothers are you? There is nothing in your bodies but your hearts, which speak, scream, cry, decide, and have left the mind dry, lifeless. What happens to this universe? God always wants good for His servants!

Mother Where is this good, O prophet? Where? Where do I find it? In which market is it sold? Four children are all I have in this world, three of them burned by explosions, and the remains of their limbs scattered, and you simply speak of good?

Moses Death in this way is a dramatic, affecting, but mothers' minds do not comprehend that God wants good by returning children to their rightful place!

Mother We have turned from flesh and blood mothers into strange tales of sorrow and blood.

Moses And I, too, my staff, have stopped working and turned into a spectator with nothing but applause!

Mother You are an unemployed prophet.

Moses And unemployed in negotiation.

Mother You can watch more, wait, O spectator, watch me for a moment...

Moses But I am unable to applaud.

Mother Just watch, for free, let the one who does not buy watch our goods without applause...

Moses withdraws, watching, the Mother wraps her cloak around her waist, performing the role of Mother 3, bringing a set of "cups" - containers - of water, placing them in at center.

Mother 3 I have a thousand cups of water.[xi] Every day I sprinkle them behind my children, one cup so that they return safely from the homeland, one cup so that they walk on their feet in the streets of the homeland, one cup for their souls that the homeland wants to steal, one cup for their hearts, stopped every moment by the homeland's bullets, one cup for their faces, washed with the smoke of the homeland, one cup for their dreams that escape every day in the homeland. (*She cries out.*) All these cups are witnesses that I have never forgotten to sprinkle water behind my children so that evil is expelled from their path, and my heart cools and is reassured so that they return swiftly to my spirit. They haven't returned for years, but as long as their cups are here and I sprinkle water behind them, there must be joyful news that warms the heart. Oh, my sorrow... All the news has stopped... And turned:

She mourns, hitting her head with her hands.

O mother, remember me,

Witnessing a wedding's spree,[xii]

Deprived of wedding's glee,

My henna turns to blood, tragedy I see.

Candle of youth's bright fire,

Who will quench its desire?

My henna is my blood,

My brow lies still in the mud.[xiii]

She stops performing the role of Mother 3.

Mother Ha... What do you think, O spectator?

Moses My soul hasn't heard of these water cups at all, nor seen the secret of those cloaks, nor understands all this pain! What is happening in this land where my staff has failed me and there are no other goals left for me? Split, O sea, to contain the worries of those mothers.[xiv]

Mother (*Smiling.*) You were asleep in heaven, O Prophet, unaware... While we pray every day amidst a blaze.

Moses (*Withdrawing.*) What prophecy in me is helpless to wake from its slumber? What dead manhood resides in my soul now? What remains of the dry heart beats within me? What story do I hear? What myth? What pain, what hell, what trivialities, what lies? What homeland? (*Stops. To the mother*:) I feel the need to understand this death surrounding you.

Mother Speak to God, tell Him to stop this farce.

Moses And how will He stop it?

Mother You ask me how He will stop it? Is He not God who says to death "Be," and it is, and to life "Be," and it is, and to our children "Return safe," and they return, and to killing "Stop," and it stops? What has happened? Don't tell me that God is no longer capable of everything!

Moses (*Yells at her.*) These are the limits set by Allah, so do not approach them. He is capable of everything.

Mother We don’t need everything, just one thing.

Moses Stop, seek forgiveness and repent to God.

Mother What have I done wrong to seek forgiveness? And what have I done to repent for? I have lived a long life as punishment in a prison where there is nothing but the forbidden, loss, hunger, bullets, and waiting. I seek forgiveness though I've done nothing, and I repent though I don't know what to repent for! My life has passed between seeking forgiveness and repentance. (*She cries out.*) I'm tired, do you know what it means to be tired? Wait a moment, please... (*Answers her phone.*) Do not ask me anything, O mother, and listen to me well. Tell all the mothers to prepare for a million-person protest where we call for a strike from prayer and fasting. Yes... we will declare sacral disobedience if our demands are not met by God Almighty! (*Raises her head.*) My Lord, forgiveness. (*Continues her call.*) This is the last solution, yes... and listen to me also: do not leave the Facebook page for a single moment, share all strike slogans with pictures because we are at a historic crossroads, a historic moment, do you know what 'historic' means? Oh, yes... I don't know either, never mind... yes, act now, O mother, act... (*Hangs up.*)

Moses What historic moment are you talking about?

Mother About today.

Moses Yesterday was Pharaoh and his soldiers...

Mother (*Interrupts him.*) Today, fear and his soldiers are here.

Moses Perhaps my mother is one of those mothers!

Mother (*Points to the cloaks.*) Yes... your mother, O Moses, is one of those cloaks.

Moses (*Surprised.*) My mother?

Mother They took you from her and placed you in the sea… They took away her life, O Moses, and you did not know.

Moses I still smell her scent.

Mother But our children did not get their fill of a mother's scent... because God did not save them from the sea as He saved you.

Moses I suggest you pray here... and raise your hands to Him with a burning heart... and wait.

Mother The last prayer you mean?

Moses A final attempt.

Mother I will pray. (*Stands to pray.*) I will try, so that you don't reproach me on Judgment Day, asking about my prayers and fasting. I will pray, and after that, I have nothing left for you, for I am weary, truly weary. I will try to say: *La ilaha illallah*...[xv] but after that, I want

You to dry my tears, Subhan Allah... but after that, You extinguish the fire of this heart with a single word from you, Alhamdulillah...[xvi] but after that...

Moses (*Interrupts her.*) Pray, O mother... pray.

Mother (*Bows down*.) I am praying as you see...

Moses Pray as people pray!

Mother (*Prostrates.*) This is my prayer... I don't know anything else.

Moses (*Yells.*) Stop, I've never seen anyone pray like this.

Mother (*Stops.*) Only grieving mothers pray like this.

Moses With all this madness.

Mother Every mad person has their own prayer.

Moses I will go mad too. (*Shouts.*) What is happening here? All streets throughout the world are valleys of Tuwa, sacred places that are tainted by even a single drop of blood. No, no, no... silence cannot prevail over a new history of slaughter, and Pharaoh is multiplying in your streets. I will speak to God. Indeed, I will plead with Him for the sake of the mothers...

Mother This is the solution... speak to God, please, He hears from His prophets.

Moses He has never denied me a request.

Mother Go ahead, what are you waiting for? Tell Him about us, our waiting, our stations, our trains that never stop...

Moses I will do that. (*Raises his head*) My Lord... I am Moses, the Prophet whom You spoke to in this valley, making me Your spokesman and prophet and Your sign on earth, and making my staff a miracle with which I conquered Your enemies. I come to You today imploring You to stop the river of blood in the land of mothers. Send Your rain upon the streets so it may cleanse and prepare for the prayer of love that You taught us. There is no salvation except through You, for the sake of those weary hearts. O Lord, stop this bleeding, give a sign or speak to me with a single word, tell me, "I will do it." I am Your prophet Moses, whose prayers You have always answered; it is inconceivable that You would not answer me now. It is inconceivable! O Lord, say something, please... O Lord. *(Stops in disappointment.*)

Mother What happened?

Moses Nothing.

Mother Even you, O Prophet?

Moses Even I, O mother!

Mother What do you mean?

Moses He did not answer my prayer.

Mother And you are a Prophet?!

Moses Yes... and I am a Prophet.

Mother So how about us, mere cloaks walking the earth?

Moses I don't know.

Mother Hasn’t Allah sent you to negotiate with us?

Moses All in vain. I will abandon this task... it seems the curse of killing has settled here and won't stop.

Mother You witness it, O Prophet... we have no choice but to strike from prayer and fasting.

Moses (*To himself.*) No choice... death is a law of life but turned into a law for death! Azrael[xvii] no longer takes souls as usual... graves relinquished their boundaries, and Munkar and Nakir[xviii] ceased their lengthy questioning... It is inconceivable for them to question bodies whose souls have been torn into a thousand pieces.

Mother (*On the phone.*) Listen, O mother... unfortunate news: Allah did not answer our demands. Let's begin by declaring our strike from prayer and fasting until our rightful demands are met. Next Friday will be under the slogan: "O Lord: Save Our Children, Or No Prayer/Fasting." (*Hangs up.*)

Moses (*To himself.*) O Lord: Save Our Children, Or No Prayer/Fasting!

Mother Go, O Prophet, to your paradise and leave us alone with the, go...

Moses I will not go.

Mother What do you mean?

Moses I will stay here.

Mother But you are a Prophet living in paradise.

Moses Paradise, as I see it, is to share in these cloaks' demands.

Mother What do you mean to say?

Moses I will be with you.

Mother With us? How?

Moses (*Raises his head.*) Your pardon, O Lord. I have spent my entire life close to those tormented souls on earth. I will not return to paradise until this pain ends. I cannot live in a paradise where rivers flow beneath it,[xix] while here is a homeland where hellfire runs below. It is not possible... (*Firmly to the mother.*) Listen... I will join you in striking from prayer and fasting!

Mother How will you join us while you are a Prophet?

Moses I will pause my prophethood for a while to stop this farce.

Mother Aren't you afraid of Allah's anger upon you as a Prophet?

Moses He will not be angry with me. He knows there is nothing in my heart and soul except Him.

Mother (*On the phone.*) Yes... listen, O mother... the Prophet Moses will join us in the strike. (*Shouts.*) Moses will be with us! Post urgently on Facebook: Moses the Prophet joins the mothers in striking from prayer and fasting until the killing of our children stops... (*Hangs up.*)

Moses (*Loud.*) O Lord, I plead to You to stop this killing.

Mother (*Loud.*) Mothers want to stop the bloodshed.

Moses O Lord, stop this darkness.

Mother There is no one for us except You, O Lord.

Moses There is no one for us except You.

Mother and Moses (*Shouting together, scattering the cloaks around them.*) Stop this death, O Lord. Stop the fire, stop the sorrow, there must be a solution, we beg You. Stop the dismemberment of our children. O Lord, Your mercy, Your compassion, You who created us and are responsible for our protection. O Lord, O Lord, O Lord... (*They continue shouting, then they leave the valley, but their voices turn into thousands of voices, indicating a massive protest flooding the streets.*)

The End

[i] A wailing sound Iraqi woman make when hearing bad or sad news, especially death.

[ii] "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) is a common expression used by Muslims in various contexts, including when receiving terrible or sad news.

[iii] Similarly to the biblical story, in the Islamic tradition Moses's mother leaves him in a basket on the Nile in order to protect him from the danger of the Pharaoh who killed new born Israelites, and the basket is recovered by the Pharaoh's wife, who adopts Moses.

Quran 20:39 and 28:3-4, 7-9. Here and throughout the play Moses's being cast into the river (imagined as the sea) in order to escape mass death and his forced separation from his mother are paralleled with the experiences of the mothers and their children.

[iv] The grieving mother has wandered the streets waiting for the return of her son.

[v] Quran, 2:34. Iblees (or Eblīs) corresponds with the biblical figure of Satan.

[vi] Quran, 90:4.

[vii] From Prophet Muhammad's hadith, "Heaven lies beneath the feet of your mother."

[viii] In Arabic, Saeed means happy.

[ix] While the story of Job in the Islamic tradition is similar to that of the biblical story of the Book of Job, in the Islamic tradition Job is steadfast in his suffering and does not entertain the same doubts that the biblical Job does.

[x] As in the biblical story of Moses, in the Quran the staff of Moses miraculously turns into a serpent. Quran, 28:31.

[xi] A practice among mothers in Iraq involves sprinkling water behind their children as they leave the house, believing it protects them from evil and misfortune and ensures they will return

[xii] "Spree" here refers to the wedding procession and celebration, the Zaffe (or Zaffa), a Middle-Eastern tradition of bringing the newlyweds into their reception hall surrounded by music and dance.

[xiii] These are famous verses written by poet Kadhim al-Karbala'i and recited in memory of Al-Qasim, son of Imam al-Hassan, who was killed in the battle of Karbala in 680 CE. The verses express his wish for his mother to remember him when she witnesses a wedding ceremony. He died young, and his mother did not have the chance to see him marry. Instead of the tradition of henna adorning his hands during weddings, his blood stains him, and his body rests beneath the soil.

[xiv] Referring to the story of Moses in the Quran, 26:63.

[xv] "There is no god but Allah": a fundamental declaration of faith in Islam, known as the Shahada. Muslims recite this phrase to affirm their belief in the oneness of Allah and the central tenet of Islam that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah.

[xvi]*Subhan Allah* means "Glory be to God" or "He be glorified and exalted," declares God to be above any fault, shortcoming, corrupt notions, or false idea. *Alhamdulillah* means "Praise be to God."

[xvii] The Angel of Death is present and the name Azrael appears in both Christianity and Judaism. However, Azrael is more established in Islam, where he is one of the archangels alongside Mikhail (Michael), Jibril (Gabriel), and Israfil.

[xviii] In Islamic belief, Munkar and Nakir are two angels who are tasked with questioning the deceased in the grave about their faith and deeds.

[xix] A reference to Quran, 9:72.