



**PILGRIMS MUSA
AND SHERI IN
THE NEW WORLD**

BY YUSSEF EL GUINDI



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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For Anita Montgomery, Kurt Beattie, and Gian Carlo Scandiuzzi

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Anita Montgomery and L.B. Morse came up with a lovely effect at the end of the play. Anita wanted a transcendent moment right after Abdallah delivers his last line. Something to give the moment an extra button. Together they came up with lighting the floor with little lights. As the last line was delivered and the lights went down, the floor lit up with “stars.” The characters stood/sat there silhouetted against the stars. It was a lovely and very brief moment. But it was also so idiosyncratic to the production that I didn't include it in the stage directions. I mention it as something to consider recreating in any future production. If it doesn't feel right to you, or if you feel this effect has been overlaid in other productions of other plays, then never mind. Then again, if it does feel right, go for it.

In answering some of Anita Montgomery's and Michael Butler's questions about the characters, I mentioned a couple of things to them that might be useful here:

Abdallah is going on his Hajj to give thanks for his good fortune in America. I think it is Gamila who is trying to connect with her religious and country origins, in her effort to carve a place for herself in America. I would say she is experiencing a tension similar to Musa, but in reverse. That is, where Musa has the impulse to lose himself, reinvent himself in this new land, Gamila is seeking the safe harbor of traditions to navigate the somewhat choppy waters of the American culture. At least, a part of her feels she is obligated to do so. It is only after her confrontation with Musa in the penultimate scene does she feel this weight, this need, fall away.

Gamila probably arrived when she was 10, 11. I'm not married to a particular age. But I think she has a regular American accent. If the actor wants to color some words with an accent, that's fine too. But I think if you arrive at around the age of 10 and go through an American high school, you're going to come out with an American accent.

Abdallah should be very affable, large; a raconteur. He has a sense of humor and is someone who will smile first and asks questions later. Yes, these are the survival skills of a foreigner in a strange

land, but I also think he is a genuinely open and generous character. Especially given the place from which he now talks to the audience.

A small note: try and avoid making Tayyib a scold. It's more effective if his sense of humor comes through. I think he has genuine affection for Musa.

I am tempted to be as loquacious about Sheri as she is about herself. But I will just say, avoid turning her into a caricature. In that first scene, Sheri and Musa are in flirtatious mode, which by its nature is all gossamer and nerves, where your heart's in your throat, etc., and you're trying to be light and casual. The humor arises from that tension — because the audience knows the stakes. They come to appreciate, as the show progresses, that what's at play is everything for these characters.

Finally, my thank-yous: to Allen Fitzpatrick, Karen Skrinde, and Shana Pennington Baird for creating such a lovely and productive environment at the Icicle Creek Theatre Festival, where I was able to workshop the play. To Anita Montgomery for her great talents as a director and dramaturg. To that first cast that brought the play to life for me: Carol Roscoe, Shanga Parker, Anthony Leroy Fuller, Sylvester Foday Kamara, and Kimberly Sustad. To Kurt Beattie and Gian Carlo Scandiuzzi for championing new plays. And to Michael Butler and his cast, Rebecca Schweitzer, Gabriel Marin, Dorian Lockett, Carl Lumbly, and Lena Hart, for giving the play a second life.

PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN THE NEW WORLD was produced at ACT Theatre (Kurt Beattie, Artistic Director; Gian Carlo Scandiuzzi, Executive Director) in Seattle, Washington, opening on June 23, 2011. It was directed by Anita Montgomery. The set design was by Jennifer Zyel; lighting design was by L.B. Morse; the sound design was by Brendan Patrick Hogan; the costume designer was by Melanie Taylor Burgess; the production stage manager was Erin B. Zatloka; and the dramaturg was Christine Sumption. The cast was as follows:

SHERI Carol Roscoe
MUSA Shanga Parker
ABDALLAH..... Anthony Leroy Fuller
TAYYIB..... Sylvester Foday Kamara
GAMILA Kimberley Sustad

PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN THE NEW WORLD was produced at Center REP (Michael Butler, Artistic Director) in Walnut Creek, California, opening April 25, 2013. It was directed by Michael Butler. The set design was by Michael Butler; the lighting design was by Ray Oppenheimer; the sound design was by Lyle Barrere; the costume design was by Michael A. Berg; and the production stage manager was Jasen Jeffrey. The cast was as follows:

SHERI Rebecca Schweitzer
MUSA Gabriel Marin
ABDALLAH..... Dorian Lockett
TAYYIB..... Carl Lumbly
GAMILA Lena Hart

CHARACTERS

SHERI

MUSA

ABDALLAH

TAYYIB

GAMILA

All offstage characters are performed by members of the company.

PLACE

A large American city.

TIME

Present.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

Ahlen: Hello.

Alhamdulillah: Thank God.

Ana asaf: I'm sorry.

Ana mishader atnafas: I can't breathe.

Ammar adeen: Apricot drink.

Argukee, laazem nitkalleem: Please, let us talk.

Hamd'illah asalam: Welcome.

Inshallah: God-willing.

Inti magnoona?: Are you crazy?

K'abh: A cookie, very similar to Russian tea cookies.

Muhim: Important.

Moomkin nu'ad shwaaya?: Can we sit for a moment?

Salaam 'alaykum: Peace be upon you.

PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN THE NEW WORLD

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Street lighting partially illuminates a small studio apartment. It's somewhat ragged in appearance, with a small single bed and a rolled-up mattress on the floor. Perhaps also a couple of chairs and a table. There is a brief muffled sound of footsteps from the apartment above. Then:

MUSA. *(Offstage; accent.)* One more flight.

SHERI. *(Offstage.)* Geez. For a three-story walk-up, it feels like I'm climbing a high-rise. You must have the penthouse, huh.

MUSA. *(Offstage.)* Good exercise.

SHERI. *(Offstage.)* Not after eight hours on my feet. You've got it lucky. You sit on your tush all night. *(The sound of a key being inserted. The door opens. Musa and Sheri enter. Sheri wears a waitress outfit.)*

MUSA. Here we are. Home. My little kingdom. *(There is a muffled sound of a door slamming from the apartment above. Musa briefly looks up.)*

SHERI. This is too sad. My panting like this.

MUSA. You smoke?

SHERI. I gave it up.

MUSA. I have hookah.

SHERI. What's that? *(He hits the light switch. But no light.)*

MUSA. Damn. I get fuse. Wait a moment. (*Musa walks to the fuse box. Sheri looks around.*)

SHERI. (*Half to herself.*) Kingdom, huh?

MUSA. What?

SHERI. Nice place.

MUSA. I finish in one moment. (*Sheri sits. She grimaces, massages the pain in her stomach. Musa enters and heads for the light switch.*)

Wiring not good here.

SHERI. At least you have the street light. It's — nice. (*Musa switches on the light: an overhead bulb.*) Ow. That's light alright.

MUSA. I have to get lamp shade.

SHERI. I think so. Nobody looks good in that light. (*Slight beat.*) Home sweet home, huh.

MUSA. It's cheap; not nice.

SHERI. It's alright.

MUSA. I sleep here, that's all. Later, when I save enough, I buy a place.

SHERI. (*Seeing the mattress.*) Who else sleeps here?

MUSA. Abdallah. He's gone. He make the Hajj.

SHERI. The what?

MUSA. Trip to Mecca. Pilgrimage.

SHERI. I know that. I saw a special on TV. People dressed in white, going around that ...

MUSA. (*Points to calendar photo on the wall.*) *Ka'bah.*

SHERI. Yeah. Have you done that?

MUSA. One day I will.

SHERI. (*Walks over to look at the photo.*) It looks so intense. With all those people. Like Woodstock, you know. On steroids, without the music. Well, maybe not like that. But it looked like everyone was so into it. I'd love to be able to lose myself in something like that.

MUSA. Yes ... I dream of it sometimes. (*Slight beat.*) You still want drink?

SHERI. Sure. So is your roommate coming back soon?

MUSA. (*Goes to tiny kitchen area.*) He move out when he return. The man make lots of money. Big time now. He wants bigger place. I have alcohol if you want.

SHERI. Great. That's what I thought you meant.

MUSA. Scotch.

SHERI. I'll take it.

MUSA. This Somali friend, he give me Johnny Walker as payment after I help him take merchandize across bridge a few times. Says he not believe in money between friends.

SHERI. That's a good one. I must remember that.

MUSA. (*Getting bottle, pouring drinks.*) I say, I have no problem getting money from friend. He say, no no, money is the devil, and a good friend would not bring the devil into a friend's life. I say, I have strong faith, give me this devil, I will fight it. He say, better not risk it.

SHERI. Alcohol is okay though.

MUSA. I say, so you corrupt me with drink? He say now you test your faith with drink. Money is like invisible evil. But drink, you know what it is. I give you good way to prove your faith.

SHERI. Some friend.

MUSA. You want ice? Water?

SHERI. Nothing, just like that.

MUSA. I say, so am I not supposed to drink this gift? Leave it as temptation? Ah, he says. (*Hands her the drink.*) That is up to you. That is the point.

SHERI. A real joker. What does he do?

MUSA. Sells suitcases on Broadway. I take him and his merchandize every few weeks across bridge.

SHERI. (*Toasting.*) Well: here's to temptation. And the faith to resist it.

MUSA. Yes. (*They drink. She grimaces.*)

SHERI. Kick.

MUSA. Want water in it?

SHERI. I'm not a big scotch person.

MUSA. I have soda drink. (*Sees her clutching her stomach.*) You okay?

SHERI. Just something I ate. (*Regarding overhead bulb.*) You really need a lamp. Or lamp shade or something.

MUSA. I can turn it off.

SHERI. You don't have a lamp? Candles? That would soften the place up. I saw some candles in that corner store window.

MUSA. We try with just kitchen light. (*He goes to turn off the overhead lamp.*)

SHERI. He's open kinda late, isn't he? For this neighborhood.

MUSA. He not very good man. Stays open for junkies. He knows they want things at night. I say, why you do that? You Muslim. This is not good. (*Turns on kitchen light.*) He say nothing. Says it's business. (*Goes to the bathroom.*)

SHERI. Well, they don't have to buy his stuff. If he wants to stay open, let him.

MUSA. But it's not right. Not being a good Muslim. (*He turns on the bathroom light. With this new lighting — including the street light — their faces will still be clearly visible.*)

SHERI. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

MUSA. What?

SHERI. We're all sinners.

MUSA. But some sins are obvious. You can say no.

SHERI. Like scotch?

MUSA. This is a weakness. God understands weakness.

SHERI. Sounds like a slippery slope to me.

MUSA. Slippery slope?

SHERI. Little weaknesses? Adding up?

MUSA. Yes.

SHERI. (*Regarding new light.*) Better. Now I won't feel like I've walked into an interrogation room or something. Where all this bad skin (*Touches her cheeks.*) gets shown up.

MUSA. You have nice skin.

SHERI. Now it's more like I'm in a setting for a murder mystery or something, with these shadows. Very moody.

MUSA. Is okay?

SHERI. Someone in a trench coat would fit right in, if he knocked on the door. And maybe a lady in the shadows blowing smoke rings. (*They look at each other.*) Speaking of which, are you like — safe? Should I be worried?

MUSA. About what?

SHERI. You know — with me in your apartment. — And with this now looking like a set for a movie where the lady you see in the first few minutes gets taken out by the man she shouldn't have gone so casually up to his apartment with. I mean — what kind of good girl accepts an invitation for a drink at two A.M. From a guy she's just met a couple of times.

MUSA. I give you lift three, four times. We are night birds, you and me. This is when we wake up.

SHERI. Yeah, and you shouldn't be playing hooky; you should be out there earning money.

MUSA. I make up for it tomorrow. This is the afternoon for us. This is when we work, and you have just finished.

SHERI. So I don't come off looking quite as ... I can still come off

as the good girl, huh? At two A.M. Drinking scotch. With somebody I don't know so well.

MUSA. You like mystery books? I learn English by reading crime books. (*Goes to a small pile of books by his bed; he has trouble pronouncing authors' names.*) Raymond Chandler. Dashiell Hammett. One good thing about corner store is he has box full of books for a dollar. Crime is easy way to learn. And yes: you could be girl in book like this. Sometimes, in my taxi, I pretend I am like American tough guy, investigating something.

SHERI. (*Picks up book.*) What's this one?

MUSA. Oh. Not mystery. This is translation of Qur'an.

SHERI. A holy book, right?

MUSA. I learn English also this way too, since I know original.

SHERI. (*Reading from random passage.*) "Allah knows what the heavens and the earth contain. If three men talk in secret together, He is their fourth; if four, He is their fifth; if five, He is their sixth; whether fewer or more, wherever they be, He is with them."

MUSA. (*Wanting to take the Qur'an from her.*) Maybe this is not the time.

SHERI. (*Holding onto the Qur'an.*) This is a kind of mystery book too, right?

MUSA. Not really.

SHERI. It's a whodunnit, isn't it?

MUSA. We know who done it, God.

SHERI. Why is it titled "She Who Pleaded"?

MUSA. It is the name of the *Sura*.

SHERI. What?

MUSA. Chapter. The title of the chapter.

SHERI. Well, no, we don't know who done it. If you think of God as the top cop, and we're like the sinners being investigated. And maybe the angels are like the people he sends down to investigate our deeds. Then it is a kinda mystery.

MUSA. (*Tries to take book, but she holds on to it.*) He knows everything, he doesn't need to investigate.

SHERI. I don't know, people can get pretty sneaky.

MUSA. He knows sneaky.

SHERI. Some things might slip by. He's a busy guy.

MUSA. This is interesting idea but not true.

SHERI. How do you know?

PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN THE NEW WORLD

by Yussef El Guindi

3M, 2W

Anyone who has ever looked for love knows the dilemma. Do you make a safe, sensible match? Or take a risk on an exciting someone who might — just might — be the One Great Romance of your life? Musa, an Egyptian immigrant, and Sheri, a very quirky Caucasian waitress, must negotiate the twists and turns of not only love but cultural expectations in this charming romantic comedy with a delightful twist.

“... a comic charmer and a humane reminder that most of us are pilgrims of one kind or another in this big, complicated, rewarding land we share.”

—**The Seattle Times**

“Smart, funny and thought-provoking, Yussef El Guindi’s PILGRIMS — winner of last year’s prestigious Steinberg new American play award — blends the familiar tropes of cross-cultural romantic comedy and gritty working-class one-night stand (with glimmers of a maybe-future).”

—**San Francisco Chronicle**

“A Romeo and Juliet story — an Annie Hall story, a West Side Story story — for Americans in the 21st century. And perhaps for all people in this back-and-forth, from-one-home-to-another, permanently globalized world.”

—**The Stranger (Seattle)**

Also by Yussef El Guindi

BACK OF THE THROAT

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