



# THE PROFANE

BY ZAYD DOHRN



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
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THE PROFANE  
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The New York City premiere of THE PROFANE was produced Off-Broadway by Playwrights Horizon, Inc. (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director) in 2017. It was directed by Kip Fagan; the scenic design was by Takeshi Kata; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Matt Frey; the sound design was by Brandon Wolcott; the production stage manager was Shane Schnetzler. The cast was as follows:

RAIF ALMEDIN ..... Ali Reza Farahnakian  
NAJA ..... Heather Raffo  
AISA/DANIA ..... Francis Benhamou  
EMINA ..... Tala Ashe  
PETER OSMAN ..... Ramsey Faragallah  
CARMEN ..... Lanna Joffrey  
SAM ..... Babak Tafti

THE PROFANE was originally commissioned by Chautauqua Theater Company (Vivienne Benesch, Artistic Director; Sarah Clare Corporandy, Managing Director), in association with the Chautauqua Writers' Center.

The play was developed with the support of New York Stage and Film & Vassar's Powerhouse Season in summer 2015.

## CHARACTERS

RAIF ALMEDIN, 40s—a first-generation immigrant novelist.

NAJA, 40s—his wife. A dance instructor.

AISA, 24—their elder daughter. A bartender.

EMINA, 21—their younger daughter. A college student.

PETER OSMAN, 40s—a business owner.

CARMEN, 40s—his wife.

SAM, 22—their son. A college student.

DANIA, 22—their daughter-in-law (double-cast with Aisa).

## SETTING

ACT I: Fall. The Almedin family apartment in New York City.

ACT II: Spring. The Osman family home in White Plains.

## NOTE ON CASTING

The Almedin and Osman families are American. They may look Middle Eastern (Iranian, Syrian, Palestinian), or white (Bosnian, Albanian), or black (Sudanese, Somalian), but except for Peter, Carmen, and Dania's accents, there is nothing conspicuously "foreign" about any of them.

# THE PROFANE

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*The Almedin family apartment in New York City.*

*The place is dominated by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves—an entire private library, holding thousands of books.*

*The apartment still manages to look elegant, even spare, because there is very little else: a sitting area with some chairs and cushions, some vases of flowers, a few framed paintings or photographs.*

*Raif Almedin sits at his desk in the study, reading and drinking scotch.*

*He shakes his head, scoffs, and tosses the book into the trash can.*

*He rummages through his desk for a hidden stash—an old crumpled pack of cigarettes. He takes one and puts it in his mouth.*

*He finds an ancient book of matches, strikes a few. He finally manages to light one.*

*Suddenly, the sound of a key in the door, and Emina and Sam enter, carrying overnight bags.*

EMINA. Hello?

*As Raif hides the cigarettes:*

Hello...? Mom? Pa...?

SAM. Maybe nobody's home...

EMINA. Yeah, maybe—

SAM. It's funny. I should feel relieved, but I'd just gathered up all my courage to—

*Raif comes out of his study.*

RAIF. Hey, welcome home!

EMINA. Jesus, you scared me...

RAIF. Good to see you too.

*He kisses her on both cheeks, holds her at arm's length, looking her over.*

EMINA. What?

RAIF. You look beautiful... And smart.

EMINA. Pa. This is Sam.

SAM. Hello, sir. It's an honor. / I'm—

*Sam holds out his hand, which Raif pointedly ignores, keeping his focus on Emina.*

RAIF. I didn't expect you for another hour. At least. How'd you get here so fast?

*Sam stands there for a moment, his hand extended, before giving up.*

EMINA. We're not too early, I don't think. What's that smell?

RAIF. Oh, matches. I was trying to light the stove...

*(Off her skeptical response.)* What? I use the stove.

EMINA. Since when?

RAIF. To make coffee. And burn leftovers sometimes. Here—

*(Opening a window.)* Happy? Fresh air.

*(Showing his glass.)* You guys thirsty? Can I get you / a—

EMINA. Uh, we don't—

RAIF. No, water, or...

EMINA. I'll get it. You guys talk. Sam...?

*Emina exits to the kitchen, ignoring Sam's attempts to keep her there.*

*An awkward pause.*

RAIF. (*Re: his drink.*) You know what W.C. Fields says? “Always carry a bottle of whiskey in case of snake bite. And always carry a small snake...”

*Beat.*

I’m not much of a welcoming committee, I realize. When my wife gets home, you’ll be drowning in hospitality. *Smothered* by it, in fact, so you should just try to enjoy / the calm before the—

SAM. I’m glad, actually. Sir, if you don’t mind, I’d like to speak with you / in private about—

RAIF. Don’t call me Sir.

SAM. Mr. Almedin—

RAIF. Raif. Or / anything, but—

SAM. Uh. I have something kind of important I / have to—

RAIF. Is she pregnant?

*Beat.*

SAM. No—No...

*Laughs.*

No, this isn’t—About Emina. I mean, it affects her, of course. But it’s really—about me. My parents—I’ve been wanting to ask / your advice about—

RAIF. She told me already, you know. About your family.

SAM. Yes, but not this.

*Emina reenters, with a glass of water.*

EMINA. Pa, do you guys not eat anymore?

RAIF. What?

EMINA. The fridge. It’s empty.

RAIF. Oh, your mother just went out shopping...

EMINA. But I mean, what do you eat for breakfast? / Baking soda?

RAIF. With no kids around, it’s—a little more free-form... We don’t have big meals in the same / way we used to—

EMINA. What about Aisa?

RAIF. She eats out, mostly. Grabs something, with friends, I suppose...

EMINA. Huh. I've been imagining... While I was alone in my dorm room, you guys would still be having big festive / salons like—

RAIF. Once in a while.

EMINA. Mom on a diet?

RAIF. No, she eats. Here and there. You get to be our age, sweetheart, you don't need the same kind of massive caloric intake anymore. You get fatter just *inhaling*.

*Beat.*

SAM. So. Mina, should I take our bags...?

EMINA. Sure—

(*Pointing down the hallway.*) Last one on the right.

SAM. Okay. Nice to meet you, Raif. Thank you, for having me... I'll just—

*Sam takes the bags and exits down the hallway.*

*Emina waits until he's gone.*

EMINA. Okay, what?

RAIF. Nothing.

EMINA. What is it, Pa? You think I don't know you?

RAIF. What'd I say?

EMINA. You don't have to say anything. I know what you're thinking. Can you at least try—to keep your prejudice in check? / For the weekend?

RAIF. Excuse me, what *prejudice*?

EMINA. (*Laughs.*) Uh... Okay...

*Raif goes to the bookshelf, takes down a well-worn edition of the OED, leafs through it.*

And the funny thing, it's not even American prejudice, which would be about like—money. Which they have. More than / we do, in fact, but—

RAIF. What do they do, again?

EMINA. His father sells restaurant equipment.

RAIF. Ah.

EMINA. Uh-huh...



RAIF. What? Good.

EMINA. (*Laughs.*) Yeah, see—What is that?

RAIF. (*Finding the definition.*) “Prejudice: An uncritical opinion, not based on reason or experience.” All right? Now one thing I have, Emina, is experience. So this? This is a *judgment*.

EMINA. You don’t even know him—

RAIF. I don’t have to know *him*, I know his people—I know where he comes from.

*The sound of a key in the door stops both of them, and Naja enters, with canvas bags from the farmer’s market. She has the elegance and bearing of a professional dancer, which she was for many years.*

NAJA. Ah! Mina—

EMINA. Hi, Ma...

*They kiss each other on both cheeks.*

NAJA. You look skinny.

EMINA. Good to see you, too.

NAJA. (*To Raif.*) Why didn’t you tell me they were home?

RAIF. How was I supposed to / tell you?

EMINA. We just got here. A few minutes ago—

NAJA. So call my cell! We have the one weekend, I don’t want to waste / it.

EMINA. We literally just walked in.

*Sam has returned from the bedroom.*

Hey. Ma. This is Sam.

SAM. It’s a pleasure, Mrs. Alme—

NAJA. Naja. Please. We’ve heard so much about you.

*He holds out a box of desserts tied with a ribbon.*

(*Taking them.*) Ah! Not really. How did you know?

SAM. I heard a rumor...

NAJA. Oh my God. I haven’t had these in years...

SAM. There’s a grocer, near our home. They make the best in the neighborhood—

# THE PROFANE

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3M, 4W

Safe in the liberal fortress of Manhattan, Raif Almedin is a first-generation immigrant who prides himself on his modern, enlightened views. But when his daughter falls for the son of a conservative Muslim family in White Plains, he discovers the threshold of his tolerance. In this sharp and timely tale, two families are forced to confront each other's religious beliefs and cultural traditions, and to face their own deep-seated prejudice.

*"Critic's Pick! [An] eloquent, frequently comic new drama... By turns warm and wary, combative and conciliatory... THE PROFANE is deeply invested in a question about the state of our own Union: Can we live together, and be good to one another, for the long haul? ... [THE PROFANE] simply does one of the things theater does best: It gets us thinking about how to be human together."*  
—**The New York Times**

*"Zayd Dohrn astutely captures the disconnect between our ideals and our desires in THE PROFANE, his perceptive and challenging new play... All of the characters are drawn with intricate complexity: a web of contradicting ideals, impulses, and behavior—they feel like real people."*  
—**TheaterMania.com**

*"Zayd Dohrn...continues to use the world around us to create timely plays that don't rely on easy happy endings to complex beginnings. He engagingly develops his story without making anyone a villain. [THE PROFANE is a] relatable and welcome inside look at the lives of a group of Americans who currently find themselves the unhappy center of harsh new approaches to battling terrorism."*  
—**CurtainUp.com**

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