

# The Fate of A Cockroach

A Modern Adaptation By

**Ray Alcodray**

(Adapted from the plays "Fate Of A Cockroach" and "Not A Thing Out of Place" by Tawfik Al-Hakim)

## Cast of Cockroaches

King

Queen

Minister

Savant

Priest

## Cast of Humans

Adil

Samia

Youssef

Doctor

Ray Alcodray  
1420 Dacosta  
Dearborn, MI 48128  
U.S.A.  
313 563 4126  
info@arabtheater.org

The play opens in the Cockroach kingdom. A place behind the wall of the home of Adil and Samia somewhere in the occupied lands of the Middle East. Lights Up

**KING:** Come along – It's time for a day's work.

**QUEEN:** It's not even dark yet!

**KING:** It will be any moment.

**QUEEN:** Has the blinding light of day completely disappeared?

**KING:** Almost.

**QUEEN:** Until it disappears completely, let me be, and don't bother me.

**KING:** What laziness! What a state!

**QUEEN:** I wasn't sleeping you know. You must remember I have to make myself up. This beauty doesn't come without a little effort. Don't forget, I'm Queen!

**KING:** Heaven help all husbands. I'm the King.

**QUEEN:** I'm exactly the same as you.

**KING:** There is a difference.

**QUEEN:** And what might that difference be pray tell.

**KING:** My whiskers.

**QUEEN:** Hah! Just as you have whiskers, so have I.

**KING:** Yes, but my whiskers are longer.

**QUEEN:** That is a trifle of a difference.

**KING:** So it may seem to you.

**QUEEN:** You mean to you. It's your sick imagination that always makes it appear that there exists some difference between us.

**KING:** The difference is real – it can clearly be seen by anyone with eyes to see. If you don't believe me, ask the Minister, the Priest, the Savant, or any of the worthy gentlemen of the royal court.

**QUEEN:** The court!

**KING:** Please withhold the sarcasm! I have a growing feeling that you've begun a campaign to belittle my worth.

**QUEEN:** Your worth?!

**KING:** Yes, and to diminish my authority.

**QUEEN:** Your authority? Your authority over whom? Not over me at any rate. You are in no way better than me. You do not provide me with food or drink – I feed myself as you do – do you deny it?

**KING:** In the whole of the Cockroach Kingdom, there is no cockroach that feeds another. Everyone strives for his own daily bread.

**QUEEN:** Then I am free to do as I like?

**KING:** And who ever said you weren't?

**QUEEN:** Let me be then. It is I that will decide when to be lazy and when to work. When to sleep, and when to get up.

**KING:** Of course you are free to do as you like, but only within your capacity as Queen. It is important that you set a good example to the subjects.

**QUEEN:** And where might they be? In my whole life, I've never seen anyone around you but those three: the Minister, the Priest, and the learned Savant.

**KING:** They are enough.

**QUEEN:** But if you are King, and a true leader, you should be surrounded by more of the people.

**KING:** Have you forgotten the characteristics of your own species? We are not like those small creatures who gather together at the slightest of pretexts.

**QUEEN:** Don't remind me of the ants! How could you! One like you, claiming to be King, and yet you are unable to solve the ant problem which terrorizes us!

**KING:** Um.

**QUEEN:** Is that all you have to say?

**KING:** What do you want me to say?

**QUEEN:** They are a continual threat to us! A Queen like me, in my position with all my beauty, and elegance, can't even take a step without trembling for fear that I might slip and fall on my back – and woe to me should I fall on my back – and quickly become easy prey for the army of the ants.

**KING:** Be careful not to fall on your back.

**QUEEN:** Is that the only solution you have?

**KING:** What solution do you seek to a problem that is as old as time?

**QUEEN:** Only one. That you shut up and speak not of your whiskers.

**KING:** Please do not speak to the King in that tone! Seek to entreat your queries with kindness and humility.

**QUEEN:** Then I would only ask kind sir, this humble question of your royal highness – who made you King?

**KING:** I made myself King.

**QUEEN:** And by what devious means and measures did you place yourself on the throne?

**KING:** Means and measures? Pardon my saying so, but your question is stupid.

**QUEEN:** I must confess, over this, I am stupid.

**KING:** The answer is much simpler than so called "mysterious means and methods." One morning I woke up and looked at my face in the mirror – or rather in a pool of water near the drain. You know this drain well my love – it's the one where we first met. Do you remember?

**QUEEN:** Of course I remember, but what is the connection between the drain, your face, and the throne?

**KING:** Have patience and you'll find out. I looked at myself in the mirror – something we all do everyday, perhaps every hour, in order to assure the beauty of one's face.

**QUEEN:** Please stay on the subject.

**KING:** I looked at my face in the mirror – by chance, that is to say by sheer accident...meaning that it was not intentional or an act of vanity, I swear to you.

**QUEEN:** That's neither here nor there – now you looked at your face in the mirror and what did you discover?

**KING:** I discovered something that surprised me and aroused a certain feeling of.....

**QUEEN:** Feeling of dejection?

**KING:** Not at all. A feeling of admiration, for it was at that time I first noticed and delighted in the length of my whiskers. I immediately rose up and challenged all the cockroaches to compare their whiskers with mine, and that if it was apparent that mine were the longest then I should become King over them all.

**QUEEN:** And they accepted the challenge?

**KING:** No. They conceded it to me there and then, saying they had no time for whisker measuring.

**QUEEN:** And so you automatically became His Majesty on the votes of so few.

**KING:** Yes.

**QUEEN:** And did they tell you what your privileges and duties might be?

**KING:** No. They merely said that as I was pleased with the title and rank, I could do as I liked. So long as this cost them nothing and they were not required to feed me, then they had no objection to my calling myself what ever I wanted. And so they left me, each going his separate way for his daily bread.

**QUEEN:** And I became Queen.

**KING:** Commonsense logic.

**QUEEN:** And your Minister?

**KING:** His own talents nominated himself for office of Minister much as mine for the throne.

**QUEEN:** Well we all know the talent you possess with the length of your whiskers, but what talent does the Minister possess?

**KING:** His consummate concern with proposing disconcerting problems and producing unpleasant news.

**QUEEN:** And the learned Savant?

**KING:** The strange information he has about things that exist nowhere but in his head.

**QUEEN:** And the Priest?

**KING:** The incomprehensible things he says.

**QUEEN:** And you put up with this?

**KING:** Out of necessity my love. They are in need of someone to whom they can pour out their absurdities, and I am in need of someone who will call me "King."

**QUEEN:** All of which was brought about by your long whiskers.

**KING:** And am I to be held responsible? I was born like this.

**QUEEN:** Maybe there was someone with longer whiskers than you and yet he never thought of declaring himself King.

**KING:** Very likely, yet it was I who thought of it.

**QUEEN:** And a stupid idea it was.

**KING:** You understand nothing!

**QUEEN:** I understand more than you think!

**KING:** You are a conceited cockroach!

**QUEEN:** And you are a –

**KING:** Hush! The Minister's coming. Have some self respect in front of him and know your place in the presence of the King.

**QUEEN:** To hear is to obey, your Majesty.

**KING:** Better.

**QUEEN:** Kings like you are submissive only to subjects who learn to maintain their rights.

**KING:** Enough!

**MINISTER:** My Lord King! Help, my Lord King!

**KING:** What is it?

**MINISTER:** A calamity! A great calamity has befallen me my Lord!

**KING:** Goodness gracious! (aside to Queen) I told you his hobby was to bring unpleasant news. (loudly) Yes? Tell us, delight our ears!

**MINISTER:** No delight will you find, dear King, for it is my son. My only son your Majesty.

**KING:** What is it? What's wrong with him?

**MINISTER:** He has been taken in the prime of his youth – in the Spring of his life!

**KING:** Killed?!

**MINISTER:** As good as gone, your highness.

**KING:** The ants?

**MINISTER:** Not yet, but soon.

**QUEEN:** There you see, the ants. It's always the ants.

**KING:** Ah those ants! Tell us what happened and be more explicit.

**MINISTER:** My son was walking along the forbidden wall that overlooks the great cavern – a stroll for amusement's sake, like anyone else his age, a perfectly innocent stroll of course, because we all know what a well behaved person he is. He's exceedingly serious with no inclination towards foolishness or unwarranted adventures, all of those nonsensical pastimes of the young.

**KING:** Neither here nor there – what happened!

**MINISTER:** His foot slipped and he fell to the bottom of a great cavern which has now become a prison of sorts to my son. You see, while he his young and full of hope, no matter how hard he tries, he is unable to scale the wall or find an opening through which to escape.

**KING:** But we cockroaches are capable of scaling vertical walls.

**MINISTER:** True my Lord, but there is something unique about this wall that makes it impossible. Perhaps the learned Savant can help us understand.

**QUEEN:** What a terrible tragedy!

**MINISTER:** I fear the worst. It is only a matter of time before the ants come and....and....oh woe is me....my only son.

**QUEEN:** Truly a great catastrophe!

**MINISTER:** Not only a catastrophe for me Sire, but I fear for the whole of our species.

**KING:** The death of your son?

**MINISTER:** The aggression of the ants against us all, a fate sure to be met by my son.

**KING:** Get a hold of yourself, this is not the time to panic. As long as he is alive, there is hope.

**QUEEN:** (to the Minister) He understands what you mean perfectly well, it is a *solution* everyone awaits.

**KING:** Are you accusing me of neglecting my duties?

**QUEEN:** I merely point out the necessity for finding an answer to the problem of the ants.

**KING:** And is the problem of the ants a new one? Speak Minister.

**MINISTER:** No your Majesty.

**KING:** Then you know it is as old as time itself.

**MINISTER:** Yes your Majesty.

**KING:** We grew up, our fathers, our grandfathers, and our grandfather's grandfather's, with the problem of the ants in the land.

**MINISTER:** Truly your Majesty.

**KING:** Seeing as how you all know that, why do you assign me the task of solving it? Why, out of all the cockroach fathers and grandfathers that preceded me, am I alone charged with finding a solution?

**QUEEN:** Because before you came along no one had been so delighted with the length of his whiskers.

**KING:** Shut up.

**QUEEN:** Mind what you say.

**KING:** (between his teeth) Your Majesty. Kindly note that we are not alone.

**QUEEN:** Go ahead and fulfill your official functions!

**KING:** Speak Minister.

**MINISTER:** Before you, your Majesty, we lived in an age of barbarism. We had neither King nor Minister. Then you came along, with your sense of organization and sound thinking, and ascended the throne.

**QUEEN:** Her Majesty is primarily concerned with practical results. I want to see the fruit of this "*thinking and organization*" the Minister speaks of. Come dear King, and produce a solution to the problem, and that of the Minister's son and his impending doom.

**KING:** Come along Minister – suggest something!

**MINISTER:** Put forward an opinion? Me?

**KING:** Yes. Speak quickly. It's one of the duties of your position to put forward an opinion and for me to analyze it.

**QUEEN:** And make fun of it.

**KING:** Perhaps his opinion will be sound.

**QUEEN:** I don't think so – I've heard his opinions.

**KING:** Perhaps you're right.

**QUEEN:** Why then did you appoint him.

**KING:** I told you a thousand times, I did not appoint anyone. I accepted him because he had no rivals.

**MINISTER:** I also volunteered to act without a salary.

**KING:** Talk seriously Minister, and don't waste the State's time.

**MINISTER:** I will seek to solve the problem of the ants, and we must all work together to extricate my son before they seize him.

**KING:** Agreed. Now continue.

**MINISTER:** I've got it!

**KING:** Speak.

**MINISTER:** I think we can overcome the ants by using the very same weapon they use.

**KING:** And what is that weapon?

**MINISTER:** Armies. They attack us with huge armies. If we are able to mobilize ourselves and assemble in great numbers, we'd find it easy to attack them - to scatter and crush them under our great big feet.

**KING:** Stupid idea.

**QUEEN:** Why do you criticize before you've had a chance to discuss it?

**KING:** It's absurd. Tell me how many there will be in the cockroach army?

**MINISTER:** Let us say twenty. Surely twenty cockroaches assembled together could crush a long column of ants – nay we could trample underfoot a whole village!

**KING:** Of that there is no doubt, but has it ever happened in our long history, that twenty cockroaches have assembled in a single column?

**MINISTER:** No.

**KING:** No.

**MINISTER:** It has not, but we can try, we can maintain hope...

**KING:** How can we try! How can we maintain hope? We are different from ants. The ants know the discipline of forming themselves into columns, but we do not.

**MINISTER:** Perhaps by learning and training...

**KING:** And who will train us?

**MINISTER:** We can find someone who will undertake it.

**KING:** Brilliant. Tell me then, once we find this trainer, after how many generations will the species be trained to walk in columns?

**MINISTER:** That information, your Majesty, does not fall within my official capacity. I have merely given my opinion as to a plan of action. It is for others to talk about the details. Our learned Savant must be asked of such things.

**QUEEN:** He is right.

**KING:** Call for him, we are waiting.

**MINISTER:** I will ask him to come immediately, Your Majesty. (Savant appears). My dear Savant, we were just seeking your counsel on an important matter.

**SAVANT:** Good.

**MINISTER:** The matter in question is about the problem of the ants.

**SAVANT:** What about them?

**MINISTER:** We want a decisive solution to them.

**SAVANT:** And what have I to do with this? This is a political problem. It is for you to solve in your capacity as Minister and His Majesty in capacity of King.

**KING:** (baffled) A political problem?

**SAVANT:** Anyway, it is an old problem, and does not fall within the realm of science or scientists.

**KING:** But the Minister has turned it into a scientific problem.

**SAVANT:** How?

**QUEEN:** Yes, how?

**KING:** Two things. First, the Minister wants the cockroaches to be taught to walk in columns.

**SAVANT:** That can never happen.

**MINISTER:** But it must, we can't go on having the ants attack us.

**SAVANT:** What exactly is required from me?

**QUEEN:** To assist us with your knowledge. All hope now lies with science.

**SAVANT:** Define exactly what you need of me. In science, all things must be precisely defined.

**QUEEN:** Define things for him Minister.

**KING:** Yes, define things for him Minister.

**MINISTER:** You know that the ants attack us with their armies. If we could mobilize twenty, or even ten cockroaches against them, we could easily defeat them.

**SAVANT:** Then mobilize ten.

**MINISTER:** Yes, but who will do so!?

**SAVANT:** You and His Majesty naturally. If the King can't order ten cockroaches to assemble together, then what authority does the King hold?

**KING:** Are you insane to speak to me like that?

**MINISTER:** The problem is how to gather them together!

**KING:** Tell him! Tell him!

**QUEEN:** Inform us Savant. Has it ever happened that ten cockroaches have gathered together in one spot?

**SAVANT:** Yes. I once saw, a long time ago, in the early days of my youth – several cockroaches together in the kitchen round a piece of tomato.

**QUEEN:** Tomato?

**SAVANT:** Yes.

**KING:** An extraordinary idea – a tomato!

**MINISTER:** We begin from here.

**QUEEN:** And you say that science can not solve this problem?

**SAVANT:** What has science to do with this? This was no more than a general observation.

**KING:** Ah, the modesty of a true Savant. The idea is useful. If we were to get our hands on a tomato, then a number of cockroaches would gather around it.

**SAVANT:** The real problem then becomes how to get a hold of a piece of tomato.

**KING:** How is it that we sometimes get hold of a piece?

**SAVANT:** By sheer chance.

**QUEEN:** And when does sheer chance occur?

**SAVANT:** That is something that we can not predict.

**KING:** We have therefore arrived at the solution of one problem by presenting ourselves with another.

**MINISTER:** But wouldn't any kind of food work?

**SAVANT:** Precisely. For though we can not make a particular food available, we can however, find food.

**QUEEN:** Oh for heaven's sake – can't we get cockroaches together without food?

**SAVANT:** Neither cockroaches nor any other species.

**MINISTER:** That's true! The armies of ants themselves assemble around food, carry off food, or store food.

**KING:** So from a theoretical point of view, the only method for gathering cockroaches is food.

**SAVANT:** That's correct. But it's all for naught. You see assembling around the food won't make a bit of difference – they'll just eat their fill and leave.

**KING:** True. Remember how after I was installed King, a number of subjects gathered around a piece of sugar we found – it was sheer good fortune – and I seized the opportunity of this gathering to give a speech from the throne. I rose to my feet to speak, with them having filled their bellies, and hardly had I uttered two words, had they left me shouting into thin air!

**QUEEN:** Is there no cure for this oh Savant?

**SAVANT:** It is ingrained in our psyche.

**KING:** There must be a reason.

**SAVANT:** I have put much thought into this and have hit upon a reason. The fact is, there is a strong link between the assembling of cockroaches in one place and the occurrence of an enormous catastrophe.

**MINISTER:** You mean the moving mountains?

**SAVANT:** Exactly.

**KING:** And the annihilating and choking poison rains?

**QUEEN:** And the floods.

**SAVANT:** These natural phenomena have been confirmed from a scientific point of view. If a number of cockroaches gather together in one place, and there is a bright, dazzling light, mountains that have neither pinnacles nor peaks, move and trample upon our group, utterly squashing them. At

other times there teems down a choking rain or a flood of enormous magnitude through which none can survive.

**QUEEN:** But what is the reason for this Oh Savant? What does it all mean?

**SAVANT:** Science has not yet arrived at an explanation. All that science can do is record these phenomenon in the hope that some day a link will be discovered that leads to new scientific law.

**KING:** So it is fear of such calamities that has made our species from time immemorial, afraid of assembling together.

**SAVANT:** Exactly. The fact that each one of us goes off in his own direction is the manifestation of that instinct and so called natural defense mechanism.

**KING:** A solution – we want a solution!

**MINISTER:** Soon my son will be torn to pieces by troops of tiny ants who will carry him off as a feast to their villages!

**SAVANT:** My sincere condolences.

**KING:** And that brings us to the second need for a scientific solution. We must also determine how to extricate the Minister's son from a situation that beguiles us all.

**SAVANT:** I'm listening.

**KING:** The Minister's son, in an act of folly, now lies at the bottom of the great - and universally feared - uncharted cavern. It seems the walls of this cavern are un-scalable, even by our great species. An anomaly of all known natural laws.

**SAVANT:** You must give me time to examine the matter. All discovery must be taken one step at a time, on a proper basis. First we must know ourselves, by discovering what is around us in this vast cosmos.

**MINISTER:** Oh learned Savant, you will be surprised to know what a true mystery of science lies on the other side of this wall near which we stand.

**SAVANT:** Dear Minister, you will be surprised to know that I too was once young and filled with folly as your son. I have scaled the forbidden wall many times, and know that it is only by sheer luck and good fortune am I here to discuss the same, not having made the same mistake as your son.

**KING:** Savant – you have disobeyed the law of the land and openly admit the same during an official meeting?

**QUEEN:** Enough! Tell us Savant – what of this cavern?

**SAVANT:** My dear King and Queen, respected Minister, yes I do admit to climbing the wall, for although walls can be erected to keep something out or by corollary keep something in – they can not, no matter how well constructed – put a barrier on the thoughts of an individual. It was my scientific brain that drove me to violate the law and seek satisfaction of the mind.

**ALL:** And what did you find?

**SAVANT:** I saw the vast chasm you speak of – but after some observation, concluded it most probably is a large lake. (the others react to this – "ooh" – "what" – "impossible" – etc.) Though the strange thing about it is that it is sometimes without water, and at other times full.

**KING:** And why is that?

**SAVANT:** Sadly, I do not know. The observation has a correlating factor, however.

**ALL:** Yes!

**SAVANT:** Namely, the lake was full of water in the glare of daylight, but empty in darkness. And so my dear Minister, if there is any consolation in this observation, it is less likely that your son will succumb to the army of ants but rather that he be overcome by the rising tide of the lake.

**KING:** At such a moment, therefore, there is still hope.

**MINISTER:** Yes!

**QUEEN:** I wish I could see it.

**KING:** Hope?

**QUEEN:** The lake you fool!

**KING:** I too would like to see it.

**SAVANT:** I am at your disposal.

**KING:** Shsh! Wait! Someone is coming!

**BLACKOUT**

## Act 1 Scene 2

The bedroom of the house of Adil and Samia.

**SAMIA:** Are you up Adil?

**ADIL:** Of Course.

**SAMIA:** Did the alarm go off? I thought we set it for six?

**ADIL:** We did. But as usual I got myself up before the alarm. It waits until I get up by myself and then rings (alarm goes off). There, it's ringing.

**SAMIA:** No harm done, as long as...

**ADIL:** As long as I'm ringing in its place.

**SAMIA:** And that you wake up on time. (getting out of bed).

**ADIL:** For you, that's all that matters. (heading towards bathroom).

**SAMIA:** Where are you going?

**ADIL:** To the bathroom of course.

**SAMIA:** Not so fast. I'm first.

**ADIL:** As usual, I get up before you yet it's you that gets the bathroom before me.

**SAMIA:** That's only right.

**ADIL:** How is that right? I woke up before you, therefore, it follows that I should be allowed to use the bathroom first, it's my right. And from today forward, I'm putting my foot down.

**SAMIA:** Don't waste my time and start this nonsense again. Have you forgotten our talks with the Doctor already? Don't let the stress of this crazy occupation push you over the edge. Now relax, and move out of my way. I've got to get ready for work.

**ADIL:** What about my work?

**SAMIA:** What about it?

**ADIL:** You're in no more of a hurry than I am. And you're right, I am extremely stressed, which is why I can't sleep anymore. Besides, I've got to shave and you don't.

**SAMIA:** Well I've got to do make up, and that's more important than shaving.

**ADIL:** You're going to work in a factory. But before you even get there, you will spend at least 3 hours in the sun, roasting at a checkpoint. What exactly is the point of getting made up?

**SAMIA:** What a stupid thing to say.

**ADIL:** Give me an answer!

**SAMIA:** Don't waste my time. Please get away from the bathroom and let me in.

**ADIL:** Not today. Today I'm a new man.

**SAMIA:** Here we go again.

**ADIL:** Today I stick to my rights. My rights as a husband, no, my rights as a man.

**SAMIA:** You're rebelling?

**ADIL:** Um hm – yes.

**SAMIA:** You're going to say "yes."

**ADIL:** Yes.

**SAMIA:** I warn you. This is a warning. I will....

**ADIL:** What? Call the Doctor again? What a threat. He's crazier than I am. Anyone who moves to this hell hole is missing a brain.

**SAMIA:** Then move! Get out yourself!

**ADIL:** How!? We're trapped with nowhere to go. All we have left is hope, and even that is in short supply these days.

**SAMIA:** Get out of my way.

**ADIL:** Over my dead body.

**SAMIA:** Is that so? Alright then! (she pushes him out of the way roughly).

**ADIL:** Are you crazy?

**SAMIA:** You're the one that wants to use force. Everything can be settled peacefully, but that pride of yours gets in the way of clear thinking. Bye! (enters bathroom and locks door).

**ADIL:** Open it! Open up!!! Samia, this is no way to behave! It's not a question of force. You only know how to take your way by might, and that can't work. Open up!

**SAMIA:** (inside bathroom) Stop annoying me and go away! I'm in here and that's the end of it.

**ADIL:** It's a matter of principle. Do you know what principles are?

**SAMIA:** Go away. I haven't even read the morning paper.

**ADIL:** What the hell are you talking about? What does that have to do with anything?

**SAMIA:** Find something useful to do until I've had my bath. Dammit!

**ADIL:** What? What's the matter?

**SAMIA:** Who bought this toothpaste? I hate this kind of toothpaste.

**ADIL:** I'm sorry dear, that must be my fault. It's always my fault. (walking away) Why am I so weak with her? I mean, is it really a weakness? It must be that I spoil her too much. I spoil her because she's a woman. A weak woman - the weaker sex.

**SAMIA:** Who are you talking to?

**ADIL:** (forcefully) Look here Samia! Open up. I want to say something important to you.

**SAMIA:** But I haven't had my bath yet. Can't it wait?

**ADIL:** I want to know, I want a simple explanation – who am I?

**SAMIA:** What are you saying?

**ADIL:** I'm asking you who I am.

**SAMIA:** You're Adil of course!

**ADIL:** Adil who?

**SAMIA:** My husband Adil, that's who.

**ADIL:** Is that all?

**SAMIA:** What else do you want me to say? I mean do you want your surname, your date of birth? What “what else”?

**ADIL:** I’m not asking about who I am, I’m asking about *who* I am – my true identity.

**SAMIA:** This is really starting to scare me.

**ADIL:** You don’t know who I am, but you get all of my salary and all I get are the payments; hair salon, dresses, shoes, I could go on and on.

**SAMIA:** Speaking of dresses, I have a new one at the tailor – can you pick it up for me?

**ADIL:** And I always have to run your errands.

**SAMIA:** Well I have to work!

**ADIL:** Do you know my true identity?

**SAMIA:** Apparently not – you tell me.

**ADIL:** I represent the struggle of the world.

**SAMIA:** Excuse me?

**ADIL:** I’ve discovered the only good in life is gained through hard work and striving. Except in your case. Somehow you’ve managed to take all of what I have without lifting a finger. My whole salary disappears, while I see nothing of yours.

**SAMIA:** Just don’t forget to pick up my dress, I’ve got a busy day.

**ADIL:** And I don’t? I’m in just as much of a rush as you are. I’ve got work too you know? I suppose only your job is work and mine must be play?

**SAMIA:** Please Adil – I’ve got a headache from your constant chatter.

**ADIL:** I mean what’s the point? You can’t get to work until you pass the checkpoint. And you can’t pass the checkpoint until you’ve sat in line in the hot sun for hours, sweated like a pig and your fresh clothes are soaked with sweat and no longer fresh. This whole bath and makeup thing are a complete farce. We both get to work late every day, regardless of who took their shower first.

**SAMIA:** True, but We must maintain our dignity and hope. It defines the line between sanity and insanity under occupation.

**ADIL:** How does one maintain sanity when all hope is squeezed out? I find myself under a double occupation – both outside and inside my own home.

**SAMIA:** For God's sake, let me have my bath in peace! Find something else to do than other than sitting outside the door and making a tyranny of my time – you know, read the paper, fix the beds, make breakfast....

**ADIL:** Do you want breakfast?

**SAMIA:** More than I want to hear all this talk.

**ADIL:** Ah.... (sitting on bed with head in hands)

**SAMIA:** Why are you so quiet? Adil! (does not reply) What are you doing out there? (stands in front of her photo – staring) Why don't you answer me? Are you still in the room?

**ADIL:** Yes, I'm still in the room.

**SAMIA:** What are you doing?

**ADIL:** I'm looking at your picture - with longing. (he makes a gesture of wanting to strangle her)

**SAMIA:** Oh, that's sweet. Really it is. But this isn't the time for that, I've already told you to go and find something useful to do.

**ADIL:** Like what?

**SAMIA:** Go get your stupid letter ready for Youssef to pick up so that he doesn't have to step in, and can just be on his way. I don't want him here any longer than necessary. He's creepy. (Adil has picked up some paper and pen and begins a short note, puts envelope, seals, etc. during this next exchange).

**ADIL:** What's wrong with Youssef?

**SAMIA:** Please. He's as hard to understand as you are, maybe more. Him and that ridiculous game you play with him.

**ADIL:** It's not his fault.

**SAMIA:** But he's not even a real postman anymore!

**ADIL:** Somebody has to deliver the mail!

**SAMIA:** Delivering the mail that never arrives?!

**ADIL:** Every day he must go through the routine to pick up and deliver the mail. It's not his fault that he is held up at the checkpoint like everyone else.

**SAMIA:** You're as crazy as he is. Are you listening to me?

**ADIL;** I'm listening. (to himself) This is not natural. It must be that I'm not a normal person.

**SAMIA:** What are you whispering?

**ADIL:** (knocks on door) I'm not normal! Did you hear that? - I'm not normal!!

**SAMIA:** Are you ill? You know I'm worried about you Adil – the stress of the occupation is taking its toll – and not just on you. Please calm down and try to find something to keep you busy until I can finish in here.

(walks over to cell phone)

**ADIL:** (mimicking wife) "please find something to do and.." Oh, I've found something to do alright! (into phone) Youssef? What are you doing? You're late, aren't you delivering the mail today? You're on your way back? They turned you away again? I hate those soldiers, all organized in ranks, waving their fingers and looking down their noses. If only we could get organized, what a resistance we could mount! Yeah I know, crazy idea. What surprise? What! Getting married?? (looks back at bathroom) But who will deliver the mail? Will you still be by to pick up my letter? Just this last time. For me - please. Good because it's important and has to go out today! Listen Youssef, about getting married....(Samia comes out of bathroom)...never mind, I'll see you when you get here. (hangs up phone).

**SAMIA:** Who were you talking to?

**ADIL:** A friend. A lady.

**SAMIA:** A lady? Do I know her?

**ADIL:** No. She's a new friend – a very pleasant person.

**SAMIA:** Is she married?

**ADIL:** Not yet.

**SAMIA:** Really Adil, this is no time to let your imagination run away with you. After five years of marriage, I know you too well.

**ADIL:** And who am I?

**SAMIA:** Don't ask me that question every other moment. I still haven't had my bath or done my hair, in fact I haven't done much of anything but have this ridiculous discussion with my husband. And now I come out here only to find you not doing what I asked, but instead having some idle chitchat on the phone with an imaginary friend!

**ADIL:** Any other orders?

**SAMIA:** Excuse me?

**ADIL:** Anything else you want me to do?

**SAMIA:** Pass me a towel will you. (Adil complies) And the bathrobe. (Samia heads into bathroom with Adil following behind)

**ADIL:** (at the door) You have the soap and sponge I'm assuming?

**SAMIA:** (turning at door) Yes. Now get out.

(Adil sits with head in hands, and no sooner does Samia scream)

**ADIL:** What, what is it?

**SAMIA:** (flinging open door and stepping out) Adil – Adil! Come quick! Come and look!

**ADIL:** What is it? What happened?

**SAMIA:** It's In the bathtub...

**ADIL:** A cockroach?

**SAMIA:** Yes! Of course it's a cockroach. But how did it get in there?

**ADIL:** (gets a little chuckle out of this) The same way they get into any house. Through the cracks in the wall.

**SAMIA:** You still haven't fixed those cracks! Ooooh, you make me so mad. Well don't just stand there, go get the insecticide from the kitchen, it must be killed.

**ADIL:** Killed?

**SAMIA:** Certainly. And the bath must be cleaned at once. But first it must be killed.

**ADIL:** And who will be entrusted with the killing?

**SAMIA:** You of course. You failed to repair the cracks in the walls, and you must be responsible for the result.

**ADIL:** Look, I'll never fix the crack in the wall, because it gives me great pleasure to see you fall apart for a change.

**SAMIA:** That is not funny.

**ADIL:** The truth is, I will never fix the crack in the wall, because as long as there is a space big enough for something to get in, there must be a space big enough to get out. And that gives me hope.

**SAMIA:** What the hell are you talking about? Just get the damn thing out of there so I can take my bath.

**ADIL:** Wouldn't it be better if he climbed out on his own because killing it would make a mess in the bath tub.

**SAMIA:** That would be preferable, yes.

**ADIL:** Then I could deal with it far away, where no one can hear that awful cracking noise when I crush it. Humph? (Samia nods yes) Then please go and get me a paper towel and the insecticide from the kitchen, and I will take care of it for you. (Samia turns to head towards kitchen, Adil immediately makes a dash for the door and slams it shut, locking himself in the bathroom. Samia realizes she's been duped, and dashes back to the bathroom, yelling through the door.)

**SAMIA:** Adil! You open this door this instant!

**ADIL:** No. I won't open this door until one thing happens.

**SAMIA:** What?

**ADIL:** This poor fellow has the chance to save himself. And if he gives up trying, if he loses hope, only then will I do what you've asked. But until then, please find something to keep yourself busy.

**SAMIA:** But what if he can't do it? What if he can't get out? This could take the whole morning! I mean what if the walls of the bathtub are too slippery?

**ADIL:** It looks like he's trying. Oh!

**SAMIA:** What?

**ADIL:** He slipped back down. No sooner does he try, then he slips back down. And yet he goes on trying again and again. This is fascinating. Now wait, it's repeating the attempt. He's climbing, climbing, come on little fella....Oh my God!

**SAMIA:** What – what!? Did he make it?

**ADIL:** He's fallen all the way back.

**SAMIA:** That's it. I'm calling the Doctor. (heads over and picks up cell phone).

**ADIL:** You know something Samia?

**SAMIA:** What?

**ADIL:** I was wondering. Is it possible that someone can believe in something happening, even if one hasn't seen it with one's own eyes? Can that happen?

**SAMIA:** Adil...

**ADIL:** Would you believe me....

**SAMIA:** Yes. (thinks he's having a change of heart)

**ADIL:** Would you believe me if I told you that it always happens at the same place, even if you haven't seen it?

**SAMIA:** What do you mean?

**ADIL:** It seems that every time he gets to the same place - about two thirds of the way up the tub - he falls back down again.

**SAMIA:** You crazy son of a bitch! I thought you were talking about us! (starts dialing again).

**ADIL:** Us? What does this have to do with us? I'm' talking about a cockroach.

**SAMIA:** Hello Doctor? Please tell him this is an emergency. (there is a knock at the door)

**ADIL:** There's someone knocking at the door!

**SAMIA:** Doctor? Oh thank God. It's Adil. Yes, he's over the top this time. (another knock then buzzer)

**ADIL:** There's somebody ringing the bell!

**SAMIA:** (heading over to open door) I can't explain, he's locked himself in the bathroom...it's a long story. The razor? Yes. I mean he has one in there, it's a bathroom for God's sake! A note? (sees letter) Yes – he did write a note, but I thought that was for the postman – oh my God! You don't think.... (opening door, Youssef bursts in dressed for a wedding, carrying flowers and the mail bag, causing Samia to scream)

**YOUSSEF:** Surprise!!!! (Samia screams)

**ADIL:** Ouch! (cut himself on razor in bathroom).

**SAMIA:** You crazy fool, what the hell are you doing! (in phone) Sorry Doctor, it was just the postman, I mean not really the postman, but someone who likes to believe he's the postman

**ADIL:** Somebody help me, get me a towel!

**YOUSSEF:** Where's your husband?

**ADIL:** Youssef? Is that you? I'm here in the bathroom.

**SAMIA:** He's in the bathroom for God's sake! (in phone) Doctor please come right away I think I'm having a nervous breakdown....

(just then, Adil opens the door, with a half shaven face and razor in hand with some blood dripping on his face. Goes to hug Youssef and greet each other, Samia sees the razor screams and faints).

BLACKOUT

## Act 2 Scene 1

Scene is now the interior of the bathroom. Adil sits center facing the bathtub with Youssef. They are both watching the cockroach. The Doctor is observing them, with Samia pacing back and forth, and in and out of the bathroom. Adil's face is still half shaven, with a gauze bandage where he cut himself.

**ADIL:** Up you go.....up.....up.....one more step.....(cockroach slides back down) Oh!

**SAMIA:** Adil! You're ignoring the Doctor!

**ADIL:** Stick to it, struggle for your life! They want to kill you with insecticide! (stands and walks to mirror, picks up razor to continue shaving).

**SAMIA:** Are you going to open up to the Doctor – yes or no?

**ADIL:** No.

**SAMIA:** You're saying "no"?

**ADIL:** Yes.

**SAMIA:** Are you saying no or yes?

**ADIL:** No and yes.

**SAMIA:** For God's sake, speak intelligently! You've really gone mad.

**ADIL:** (repeats like a parrot) Gone mad.

**SAMIA:** (to Doctor). Doctor, there's a limit to one's patience..

**ADIL:** One's patience.

**SAMIA:** Where's it all going to end?

**ADIL:** End.

**SAMIA:** My nerves are shot!

**ADIL:** Shot.

**SAMIA:** And you're behaving ridiculously!

**ADIL:** Ridiculously.

**SAMIA:** This is unbearable – answer me! Answer me!

**ADIL:** Answer me – answer me.

**YOUSSEF:** (responding to cockroach failing again) Oh! He got so close. We have to leave it in God's hands now. (speaking to cockroach) May the Almighty keep you and give you strength.

**SAMIA:** (throwing up her arms and turning to Doctor) It's hopeless! There's no longer any point trying to reason with him. Now we have a cockroach and a parrot in the bathroom.

**DOCTOR:** Go and get yourself a cup of tea to calm your nerves, and let me speak to your husband. (Samia leaves, and Doctor heads over to Adil. Adil has moved to the mirror to finish shaving.). Adil, I want to have a few words with you – can you hear me?

**ADIL:** I'm listening.

**DOCTOR:** Good. I'd like to talk with you about your situation.

**ADIL:** My situation?

**DOCTOR:** The situation of us all.

**ADIL:** The situation is clear and needs no explaining.

**DOCTOR:** Well, I'm not so sure. I think something out of the ordinary has occurred today, and I'd like your help to understand what exactly that might be.

**ADIL:** Everything is fine.

**DOCTOR:** Fine?

**ADIL:** Naturally.

**DOCTOR:** I see. (Doctor is doing some note taking throughout this scene and mumbles as he writes). Through the pressure of occupation - nothing out of the ordinary....

**ADIL:** Not a thing out of place.

**DOCTOR:** (writing) Not a thing out of place. I see. No thoughts or feelings you'd like to share?

**ADIL:** Not really...well except for...

**DOCTOR:** Go ahead.

**ADIL:** No - forget it.

**DOCTOR:** Please continue.

**ADIL:** It's just that certain things remind me of other things.

**DOCTOR:** What things - what reminds you?

**ADIL:** (still holding and wielding razor as he talks) Tell me Doctor, when there's a watermelon right there in front of you all nice and shiny, there's really no way to find out whether it's ripe inside except by cutting it open with a knife.

**DOCTOR:** (a little disturbed at this) What's the connection?

**ADIL:** I mean, how can you know what's in somebody else's head?

**DOCTOR:** Do you mean in the way of ideas?

**ADIL:** Who mentioned ideas? Look. If you've got a watermelon in your hand, what do you do with it? Play football with it?

**DOCTOR:** No, of course not.

**ADIL:** Right. Then my brother wasn't wrong.

**DOCTOR:** Your brother?

**ADIL:** My brother was a barber. One day he's looking at a customer's head, the poor fellow was a lot like you – but bald – like a watermelon.

**DOCTOR:** And?

**ADIL:** And so what, slice it.

**DOCTOR:** What do you mean 'so what'? The Customer's head - slice the customer's head?

**ADIL:** Isn't that the way to see if it's red inside?

**DOCTOR:** With a razor?

**ADIL:** At the time he happened to have a razor in his hand.

**DOCTOR:** And what happened after that?

**ADIL:** They carted him off to the hospital.

**DOCTOR:** The customer?

**ADIL:** My brother.

**DOCTOR:** Your brother – but why?

**ADIL:** Why do you think? They said he was mad.

**DOCTOR:** And the customer?

**ADIL:** He was carted off by ambulance.

**DOCTOR:** And have you ever done it?

**ADIL:** With a razor? Don't be silly, I'd use a knife. (Adil is done shaving now. Puts down razor, wipes face with a towel, and heads back to the bathtub. Doctor is frantically writing down notes). I don't believe I introduced you to my good friend Youssef.

**DOCTOR:** Pleased to meet you.

**YOUSSEF:** Same here.

**ADIL:** Youssef is getting married today.

**DOCTOR:** Wonderful to know there's still room for love in war!

**YOUSSEF:** I'm meeting her today at the bus station, but I have to deliver the mail first.

**DOCTOR:** On your wedding day?

**YOUSSEF:** Oh I'm not worried, she'll wait, she loves me.

**DOCTOR:** (beginning to sense something is wrong). I see.

**YOUSSEF:** (interrupting) By the way, there are plenty of letters for you, you know. Just choose the letter you fancy from my bag.

**DOCTOR:** I would prefer a letter addressed to me, thank you.

**YOUSSEF:** Are you new to this town?

**DOCTOR:** I recently arrived, yes.

**YOUSSEF:** In this town, we don't have enough time to deliver the letters to all of the people by name, so everyone who comes along simply takes his pick – be it addressed to him or not – it's really no concern of ours. The

important thing is to deliver all of the mail by end of day, and not to be late no matter what.

**DOCTOR:** You mean take a letter that isn't even yours?

**YOUSSEF:** One or two, whatever your fancy.

**DOCTOR:** I see (starts writing again).

**YOUSSEF:** Every letter here can be yours if you'd like. Open any letter and you'll find they contain such amusing things – don't you want to be amused?

**DOCTOR:** Is this how you are dealing with people's letters?

**YOUSSEF:** And how else would you deliver the mail?

**DOCTOR:** My dear Youssef, this is what is called "chaos."

**YOUSSEF:** Not at all. The chaos you are referring to is something all together different.

**ADIL:** That sort of chaos doesn't happen here at all – not where we live. (wryly to Doctor) Would you like me to give you a shave - crop a bit off the old watermelon?

**DOCTOR:** No thanks, I've already had one.

**YOUSSEF:** Then grab yourself a couple of letters out of my bag. Would you like me to choose one for you? Humph? Take this one, it has a women's handwriting on it – I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

**DOCTOR:** What an extraordinary thing! I have an idea. Let's try a different game. One of my choosing. One that will help us to create a dialogue to explore the way we feel and think about different subjects.

**ADIL:** What shall we play?

**DOCTOR:** Let's play the game of the donkey and the philosopher. (to Adil) To start, you'll be the philosopher....

**ADIL:** No, I'll be the donkey.

**DOCTOR:** But Why?

**ADIL:** Because the donkey has the bigger brain.

**DOCTOR:** How's that?

**ADIL:** Have you ever seen a donkey having a shave at the barber?

**DOCTOR:** No.

**ADIL:** Isn't that clever of him?

**DOCTOR:** Yes.

**ADIL:** Right then, I'll be the donkey.

**YOUSSEF:** What about me? I want to play.

**DOCTOR:** Alright then, Adil will be the donkey, and you'll be the philosopher.

**YOUSSEF:** No thanks, I don't want to be the philosopher.

**DOCTOR:** Don't be silly, the philosopher is intelligent.

**YOUSSEF:** Do you take me for a fool?

**DOCTOR:** You don't believe me? You can ask anyone – is a donkey more intelligent than a philosopher - and he'll tell you...

**YOUSSEF:** I'll tell you myself. Have you ever seen a donkey going off to mail a letter?

**DOCTOR:** No.

**YOUSSEF:** Is that intelligent or not?

**DOCTOR:** Yes.

**YOUSSEF:** Right then, I'll be the donkey.

**ADIL:** But I want to be the donkey.

**YOUSSEF:** You be a donkey as well, we'll both be donkeys. What's wrong with that?

**DOCTOR:** It's no good. One of you must be the donkey and one of you must be the philosopher, that's how the game is played!

**ADIL:** I'm no good for the philosopher, I've got too big of a brain.

**YOUSSEF:** So I'm empty headed?

**DOCTOR:** No, it's not that, it's just...

**YOUSSEF:** Wait a minute! What time is it!?

**ADIL:** Almost noon.

**YOUSSEF:** I have to go, or I'll be late for my fiancée! But how will I recognize her?

**ADIL:** She'll be the pretty one by herself, getting off the bus and looking right and left. (Youssef runs out of the house with mail bag in hand. Adil turns to Doctor)

**DOCTOR:** Does he get the girl or not?

**ADIL:** His fiancée was meeting him at the bus station at noon – 2 years ago. He was delayed at the checkpoint and she was forced to wait hours at the station. While waiting, she spotted a mailman on the platform. Mistaking him for her fiancée - excitedly ran towards the man – only to startle a suicide bomber disguised as a mailman. Naturally, in the chaos he blew up himself and the platform they were on. If Youssef had arrived on time, she would not have made that mistake. Of course that day, the mail was never delivered, and neither was his bride. Everyday he attempts to make it to the station on time to reinforce it wasn't his fault, and everyday he gets held up at the checkpoint. God help us all when they remove the checkpoints – we won't know how to live with ourselves. And now you know the reason why he will never quite be philosopher nor donkey for the rest of his life.

**DOCTOR:** I see. And what about your brother – the one with the watermelon? Has he been affected in the same way?

**ADIL:** Make some sense will you – it's not even the season for watermelon!

**DOCTOR:** How extraordinary!

**ADIL:** Now come along with me Doctor, and I'll explain things to you. (leads him over to the bathtub while the Doctor continues to write). Look in here and tell me what you see.

**DOCTOR:** Nothing. There's no water in it.

**ADIL:** Yet even so, there *is* something there.

**DOCTOR:** Who am I to criticize your cleanliness?

**ADIL:** You don't see something moving?

**DOCTOR:** Oh, yes of course, a cockroach.

**ADIL:** A cockroach – well done! This humble cockroach is the very core and essence of all life.

**DOCTOR:** From what point of view?

**ADIL:** Its behavior. Look carefully and tell me what it's trying to do.

**DOCTOR:** Of course, it's trying to get out of the tub.

**ADIL:** Marvelous! We're there. We're at the heart of the matter.

**DOCTOR:** (writing) I see. I think I'm beginning to understand. Understood! It's all quite clear now.

**ADIL:** Now I shall explain my attitude to you.

**DOCTOR:** There's no need – I've understood completely.

(Samia enters cautiously)

**SAMIA:** Is everything alright Doctor?

**DOCTOR:** Fine. Everything is fine. Your husband is in splendid health, there's not a thing wrong with him. (to Adil) I'd like to have a word in private with your wife, you don't mind do you. Now be a good sport and give me a few minutes alone will you? (Adil acknowledges and leaves. Doctor speaks to Samia). If you'll come over to the bath with me, I'll explain everything.

**SAMIA:** Is anything wrong Doctor?

**DOCTOR:** I want to ask you certain things. My questions may seem be a little embarrassing in that they may touch on some personal issues, but the situation demands that I ask them.

**SAMIA:** Of course Doctor, please continue.

**DOCTOR:** What's your opinion about your husband's personality?

**SAMIA:** Personality?

**DOCTOR:** With respect to his strengths and weaknesses?

**SAMIA:** I believe his personality to be weaker than mine.

**DOCTOR:** Does he know it?

**SAMIA:** Certainly. I always remind him I'm the boss of him and that he must obey my orders.

**DOCTOR:** Right! (writing) Now I'm certain my diagnosis will be accurate. This situation came on when you wanted to do away with the cockroach did it not? And his response since then has been to save it from your hands.

**SAMIA:** What do you mean?

**DOCTOR:** In his inner consciousness, I believe your husband has identified himself with the cockroach in the tub, and his behavior is a result of that personal concern and affection he holds for it.

**SAMIA:** Do you really think so Doctor?

**DOCTOR:** There can be no other explanation. I am not a specialist in psychiatry, but I have made a private study of it as a hobby.

**SAMIA:** Can this be treated?

**DOCTOR:** The treatment is really quite easy and requires no more than your persuading your husband that there is no similarity between him and the cockroach.

**SAMIA:** And how am I going to do that?

**DOCTOR:** By showing affection for the cockroach. This is essential, because any hurt done by you to the cockroach would in your husband's view, be a hurt done to him personally.

**SAMIA:** And you believe he's a normal person?

**DOCTOR:** Perfectly sane and balanced in all things except one – that of the fate of the cockroach. However, there's no need to worry. With a little patience and kindness, he'll be able to quickly sort things out for the best. Shall we try?

**SAMIA:** Yes.

**DOCTOR:** First off, we need to go along with him and participate in what he's doing. I'll send him in. (exits to get Adil. A moment later, Adil enters).

**ADIL:** Have you finished your private talk? (he heads to tub for a look).

**SAMIA:** Yes. The Doctor was advising me....

**ADIL:** (interrupting) Look Samia – he’s still struggling with the same perseverance. I’ve tried to catch it taking a break or giving up, but never, not once....

**SAMIA:** (Looking at bathtub with feigned interest) It certainly is courageous.

**ADIL:** Yes! What courage!

**SAMIA:** I’ve begun to love it.

**ADIL:** (looking at Samia) Love it?

**SAMIA:** Yes. Doesn’t courage deserve love?

**ADIL:** A moment ago you wanted to destroy it with insecticide.

**SAMIA:** I was wrong. (beat) Look at its whiskers – they’re beautiful.

**ADIL:** Its whiskers are beautiful?

**SAMIA:** I think so.

**ADIL:** You’re making fun of me.

**SAMIA:** No, I swear to you. Adil, I’m being absolutely serious now.

**ADIL:** I’ve looked at it carefully all morning, and haven’t been able to find anything beautiful about it.

**SAMIA:** You’re being modest.

**ADIL:** Modest? Me? What’s the connection? I don’t get it - what’s this confusion all about?

(Doctor enters room)

**SAMIA:** Nothing at all Adil. Everything is in order. All that’s happened is that through my talk with the Doctor, I’ve come to understand your point of view completely.

**ADIL:** And what is my point of view.

**DOCTOR:** That this cockroach should come to no harm.

**ADIL:** And do you know why?

**SAMIA:** Yes. As long as this cockroach goes on struggling to get out of its impasse, it is not right that we should destroy it. On the contrary, we should support it in its struggle. I'd even sacrifice myself for it.

**ADIL:** Please Samia, there's no need to make fun of me.

**SAMIA:** I'm not making fun. The struggle of this cockroach stirs up a feeling of respect and admiration in me, perhaps even more respect and appreciation than I have for you, isn't that so Doctor?

**DOCTOR:** Yes, of course, of course.

**SAMIA:** I find that it has an extremely strong personality.

**ADIL:** Listen Samia, don't get things mixed up. The fact that a cockroach has such strength and determination is reasonable, but to say it has a personality is going too far.

**SAMIA:** I insist it has a personality, maybe even stronger than mine!

**ADIL:** Are we back to making fun?

**SAMIA:** I swear to you Adil – I'm absolutely serious.

**ADIL:** Samia – when words lose their normal dimensions, then everything loses seriousness. I've begun to feel that both you and the Doctor are attempting to ridicule me and my ideas.

**DOCTOR:** On the contrary.

**SAMIA:** Adil, there is no disagreement between us, and I've decided not to take a bath today to prove I won't attempt to harm it. Doesn't that please you?

**ADIL:** Of course it pleases me. Thank you. But what's with all of the tenderness?

**SAMIA:** I haven't always been nice to you.

**ADIL:** Well, that's your right as a wife, and it is my duty as a husband to endure.

**SAMIA:** From now on, you will not have to endure, I shall not make you endure.

**ADIL:** What the hell has come over the universe?

**SAMIA:** I was unfair to you. I admit it.

**ADIL:** Then you won't go into the bathroom before me?

**SAMIA:** No, never. I've turned over a new leaf.

**ADIL:** You won't tell me to get breakfast?

**SAMIA:** No, I promise.

**DOCTOR:** I have a question for you Adil. Have you ever thought of rescuing it from its predicament?

**ADIL:** Rescuing it?

**SAMIA:** Yes, why don't you rescue it? At least give it a little help, a piece of string, or the end of a towel....

**ADIL:** Why should we do that?

**SAMIA:** To get it out alive! Don't you want it to be saved?

**ADIL:** You two must have come to the conclusion that I belong to the cockroach species.

**DOCTOR &  
SAMIA:** NO!

**SAMIA:** We're completely convinced there's no connection between you and the cockroach. Not the slightest similarity.

**ADIL:** Well thank God for that! Now perhaps you can see that I'm a human being like everybody else! But sometimes I think that's worse than being a bug. The truth is, I find myself unable to attain the magnificent level of purity reached by the cockroach.

**DOCTOR:** What do you mean– the magnificent level?

**ADIL:** I mean I appreciate it, and respect it, and I understand it.

**DOCTOR:** You've completely bewildered me Adil.

**ADIL:** In order to understand, you must walk in the cockroach's shoes. First of all, imagine you're a cockroach...

**DOCTOR:** A cockroach?

**ADIL:** Please don't look at me like that. Are you ready to do this?

**DOCTOR:** (willing to go along) Yes.

**ADIL:** Now you have to be natural - let yourself go, and try to forget you're a Doctor. Imagine yourself in a deep well with walls of smooth marble that you find impossible to scale. Are you completely relaxed, and identifying with the hero in the bottom of the tub?

**DOCTOR:** Hero?

**ADIL:** Yes, now you are that hero.

**DOCTOR:** Indeed.

**ADIL:** In his place, what would you do?

**DOCTOR:** Give up!

**ADIL:** But it hasn't. And while all of us can be tired of watching it, it does not get tired of trying. This is a hero by definition.

**DOCTOR:** But what hope has it of surviving, why don't you intervene?

**ADIL:** I can't.

**DOCTOR:** If it were able to scream, and it screamed for help, wouldn't you take pity on it?

**ADIL:** That's crazy to even ask that question.

**DOCTOR:** You have asked me to put myself in his place, and so I have. Now, I ask you to imagine that it is screaming and begging for help, and you are unable to hear or understand its language.

**ADIL:** Then likewise, it would not hear or understand me.

**DOCTOR:** But the difference is, you are interested in its struggle for life, while it is not interested, nor even aware of yours! Therefore you have an obligation to help in a way that it does not.

**ADIL:** I see what you mean.

**SAMIA:** Are you finished Doctor?

**DOCTOR:** The fact is Samia, we've understood the situation wrongly, leading me to a completely erroneous conclusion about Adil's state.

**ADIL:** You actually thought there was some sort of kinship between me and the cockroach!

**SAMIA:** Well don't blame me Adil.

**DOCTOR:** Nothing against you Samia, but I've become completely convinced, thanks to your husband, that I understand the true meaning of his behavior.

**ADIL:** Yes, now that you've walked in its shoes (referring to the tub).

**DOCTOR:** A complete honor for me.

**SAMIA:** And so now Doctor, it would appear that you've become like him. (referring to Adil).

**ADIL:** Doctor – come quick!

**DOCTOR:** What is it?

**ADIL:** He's gone!

**DOCTOR:** Impossible – but what could have happened?

**SAMIA:** (spotting the cockroach on its back in the corner) The cockroach is dead.

**ADIL &  
DOCTOR:** What!

**SAMIA:** See for yourself. He's on his back in the corner surrounded by an army of ants. If he's not dead, he soon will be. (goes to stomp on it)

**ADIL &  
DOCTOR:** WAIT!!

**DOCTOR:** It appears he made it out of one predicament surviving only on hope, only to wind up in another situation void of hope – on his back no less. Let us observe the complete fate of this fellow at the hands of his kinsmen.

**SAMIA:** I'm convinced that whatever illness Adil has must be contagious.

**DOCTOR:** What an extraordinary site, the ants are now carrying off the cockroach and taking it towards the wall. Perhaps to their house or village!

**ADIL:** Take note of the large ant in front – do you see it?

**DOCTOR:** Yes! It is dragging the cockroach by its whiskers! While the others are taking up the rear and distributing the work with extraordinary discipline.

**ADIL:** But look Doctor – the hole in the wall is too small for the size of the cockroach. How can they get it through?

**SAMIA:** Don't be afraid men! Nothing is too difficult for the genius of the ants!

**DOCTOR:** (both look at Samia) We'll soon see. (telephone rings, the men pay not attention to the phone)

**SAMIA:** No really, I'll get it. Hello? One minute please... (Samia hands phone to the Doctor). It's for you Doctor.

**DOCTOR:** Oh, yes of course! Must be my next appointment. If you'll excuse me, I'll take this in the bedroom.

**ADIL:** Now where do you suppose he's off to?

**SAMIA:** You can bet he'll be spending the rest of the day writing his memoir of the fate of a cockroach.

**ADIL:** He's going off just like that, without even taking a closer look at the ants? I can't believe it!

**SAMIA:** Adil, now that we've finished with the heroism of the cockroaches, and started with the genius of the ants, there are a few things that you'll need to take care of today. Adil! (he snaps out of viewing the ants) Adil, do you hear me? There are my clothes and dresses all crumpled up in the closet – start with sorting and hanging them one by one. When I come back from work, I'll expect to find everything neatly organized, sorted out, pressed – understood!

(Adil remains silent and lowers his head, lights fade to black)

Not a single dress crumpled or creased.....

**End of Scene.**

## Act 2 Scene 2

(The Cockroach Kingdom. Priest begins talking in the blackout)

**PRIEST:** Can you hear me? Do you hear what I'm saying!

(Lights Up)

**KING:** Come join us oh venerable Priest! What is it?

**PRIEST:** I have just passed by a most sad sight.

**MINISTER:** Sad sight?

**PRIEST:** A processions of ants carrying a cockroach. The cockroach it seems was dead or at least motionless. An ant was dragging him by his whiskers – it was awful. There was nothing I could do but ask the gods to have mercy on him.

**QUEEN:** Do you know who it was?

**PRIEST:** No.

**MINISTER:** My son! (breaks out blubbering).

**PRIEST:** Your son!

**MINISTER:** (lowering head in sorrow) Yes.

**PRIEST:** May the gods grant you comfort. I shall pray for you both.

**MINISTER:** Thank you.

**KING:** We were just now discussing what we should do about these catastrophes, for the time has come to search for a remedy. Have you any suggestions oh Priest!

**PRIEST:** I have only one suggestion.

**KING:** Do not say to offer sacrifices!

**PRIEST:** There is nothing else.

**MINISTER:** Do you see, Majesty? We've entered into yet another difficulty, the search for sacrifices and who will go looking for them. I personally am not prepared to do so – my psychological state does not permit me to.

**SAVANT:** I am certainly not prepared to do so, because I naturally do not believe in such methods.

**PRIEST:** Apostasy is rife in the kingdom!

**QUEEN:** Do not say such a thing, Oh Priest! You know well that I am a firm believer.

**KING:** Yes, we are believers, but the question of these sacrifices has become tiresome. In the past we have offered some of the sacrifices you demanded but they gave no result.

**PRIEST:** The result is not in my hands – I simply offer the sacrifices and the gods are free to accept or refuse them.

**SAVANT:** Your gods always refuse the sacrifices – only the ants accept them.

**MINISTER:** Truly. We noticed that with the piece of sugar you demanded as a sacrifice – it was the ants who ate it.

**KING:** Listen, Oh Priest – ask the gods to help us without it costing us anything.

**PRIEST:** Do you want them to serve you for free?

**MINISTER:** And why not? Does not our King undertake his official duties for free?

**QUEEN:** And myself included – I the Queen – no one has given me anything, not even my dear husband. I strive for daily bread like him, without any difference at all.

**SAVANT:** Nor I of course – no one has laid down any salary or wage for me.

**MINISTER:** Nor I. I am the Minister of the kingdom and all my official functions are performed for no wage.

**KING:** Then why do you demand wages for your gods?

**PRIEST:** I will not demand anything.

**KING:** On the contrary, you must demand that they help us, but on the condition that such help is free and for nothing – simply “god sent” as it were.

**PRIEST:** I can’t put conditions on the gods.

**SAVANT:** Do they stipulate the fee to you, or do you volunteer it?

**PRIEST:** There’s no stipulation or volunteering, but anyone who asks something of someone should offer something in return as a temptation.

**SAVANT:** So it's a question of tempting...

**PRIEST:** Describe it how you will, but I cannot make a request of the gods while empty handed.

**SAVANT:** And do you think the gods are concerned with what you have in your hands?

**PRIEST:** What kind of question is that?

**SAVANT:** Have the gods ever listened to you?

**PRIEST:** Naturally.

**SAVANT:** When?

**PRIEST:** Once, while I was lying ill in a corner, the armies of ants approaching – with certainty I was done for. I called upon the gods with a prayer from the depths of my heart. Suddenly I saw something looking like a large dark cloud full of water descend from the skies and swoop down upon the armies of ants, sweeping them clear off the face of the earth.

**QUEEN:** How extraordinary!

**SAVANT:** The scientific composition of this cloud is well known: it consists of a network of threads from a large piece of moistened cloth.

**KING:** Neither the cloud's origin nor its scientific composition is of interest. What is important is who sent it down and wiped away the ants with it.

**PRIEST:** Speak to him, Oh King, and ask him who sent it down from the sky and with it destroyed the armies of the ants – who?

**SAVANT:** This is not a question that science can answer. However, I very much doubt the existence of any connection between this Priest's prayer and the descent of the cloud.

**PRIEST:** How is it that the cloud descended after my prayer?

**SAVANT:** Pure coincidence.

**PRIEST:** What blasphemy! What apostasy!

**KING:** I am a believer like you in this, and I believe that your prayer was useful. And so I ask that you pray. Pray long and hard for success.

**MINISTER:** Particularly a cost-free prayer without sacrifice.

**PRIEST:** Yes, all right, I shall pray.

**QUEEN:** Look – look! It's the army of the ants! (we hear the thumping of feet as the ants march in the distance).

(Minister sobs at the sight of his son carried high in the air by the ants)

**KING:** It grieves us oh Minister, to see you son borne off in this manner.

**PRIEST:** May the gods have mercy upon him! May the gods have mercy upon him!

**QUEEN:** Do not stir up the grief of a father with such talk! Let us either do something for him or keep quiet.

**KING:** Forgive us Minister, but as the Queen says, something must be done - this topic has occupied us since first we met today!

**QUEEN:** And the meeting has yet to achieve anything useful.

**KING:** My dear! Your Majesty! We are still in the state of conferring and exchanging points of view.

**QUEEN:** They are carrying off the Minister's son for food! Is it so difficult for you hulking males to attack and rescue him from their hands? There are four of you for heaven's sake!

**KING:** Four? Where's the fourth?

**QUEEN:** You of course!

**KING:** Ah. Quite right. Humph. Yes, but on second thought, leave me out of it, I am the King, and the King only rules, he does not join the fight.

**PRIEST:** Leave me out of it as well. I am the Priest, and the Priest raises his hands in prayer, but not for fighting.

**SAVANT:** Naturally, you must leave me out of it, for I am the Savant who's mind is used for research – not brawling.

**QUEEN:** You cowards! Then I shall go – not as Queen – nay, rather, as a female. Stand by you males, and watch with folded arms whilst females go to war.

**KING:** What about the Minister?

**MINISTER:** I do not want to put you in a predicament over my son.

**QUEEN:** The question is too important to be a purely personal one. These most excellent leaders of the kingdom, do nothing but sit around discussing matters of importance, without resolution, and without willpower to act.

**KING:** Do not be so headstrong my dear. You alone can do nothing. This is the relevance of a broad coalition. You want to attack like the ants, to make war, and to fight like the ants, but this will never happen.

**QUEEN:** And why not?

**KING:** Ask the Savant – he has the answer.

**QUEEN:** Speak oh eminent Savant!

**SAVANT:** First, the ants have a Minister of war who devotes all his time to organizing armies.

**QUEEN:** Then the question is a simple one – why don't we have a Minister of War?

**SAVANT:** That is a political matter, and I don't understand politics. Ask the King.

**QUEEN;** Answer us King.

**KING:** What is the question?

**QUEEN:** Why don't we have a Minister of War!?

**KING:** A Minister that specializes in war? Is that in my hands? Where is he, I'll appoint him immediately! We had a hard enough time finding our friend here, and he was good enough to look after everything without understanding anything!

**MINISTER:** Your Majesty, If I do not enjoy your confidence, I am ready to resign.

**KING:** Resign! Do you hear! Our one and only Minister is threatening to resign!

**QUEEN:** No dear Minister – I implore you to ignore what the King says. Take heart that you enjoy the confidence of everyone in our superior species.

**SAVANT:** We are the most superior creatures on the face of the earth.

**PRIEST:** Be careful not to raise yourselves too high. Superiority leads to Inferiority - a source of trouble for any species. We must be patient when dealing with our neighbors. We cannot hold those who are not like us, to the same standard of civilization as ourselves. Each has his own nature, his own environment, his own set of circumstances.

**KING:** Don't give us that product of the environment horseshit.

**SAVANT:** It's true. On this point I can agree with the Priest. For instance, ants are solely concerned with food, while we are concerned primarily with knowledge.

**QUEEN:** It's true – I'm always open to touching strange substances with my whiskers out of sheer curiosity.

**SAVANT:** A love for knowledge, a desire to know.

**KING:** (to Queen) Yet you say we are weak willed? On the contrary, we are the sturdiest creatures on earth – isn't that right Savant?

**SAVANT:** Yes your Majesty.

**KING:** Are the ants stronger than us? No! Impossible! They don't know us, they just want to eat us! Do the ants know us!

**SAVANT:** No, of course not.

**KING:** They haven't the slightest idea of who we are – our true nature. Do they even realize we are thinking creatures?

**SAVANT:** The only knowledge they have is that we are food for them.

**QUEEN:** Which certainly doesn't prevent them from eating us.

**KING:** We must be sure not to fall on our backs!

**QUEEN:** This is the only solution you offer in view of the situation?

**KING:** In view of us all.

**QUEEN:** We've ended up where we began! Our meetings, our discussions, have all led us to nothing – naught – zero!

**SAVANT:** In research, there is no such thing as naught – every investigation is useful. We derive profit out of things even if we do not completely understand their true nature. Which reminds me, we were saying earlier that we would like to explore the mysterious lake beyond the forbidden wall.

**KING:** Of course! We were talking about a lake beyond the wall and you wanted to take us there that we might see it!

**SAVANT:** We were in fact at the point of going to see it when the Priest came along.

**KING:** Let us go then! Let us go dear Majesty.

**QUEEN:** No. I shall stay here with the Minister, he is in no state for sight seeing.

**KING:** As you wish. And you Oh illustrious Priest, will you come with us?

**PREIST:** Such wonders of science explored in a context that excludes the gods is of no interest to me.

**KING:** Suit yourself. Then let us away, Oh Savant!

(The King and the Savant go off)

**QUEEN:** I am very sad for your loss, and I am shameful for the behavior of my husband.

**MINISTER:** Do not blame your husband, your Majesty. The King alone is capable of doing nothing. The situation is difficult.

**PRIEST:** But going around with that Atheist the Savant at his side, does not bode well for the King.

(Savant calls out from the top of the wall)

**SAVANT:** Help! Help!!

**QUEEN:** What's happened?

**SAVANT:** The King – he lost his footing and fell into the lake!

**QUEEN:** Fallen into the lake – how terrible!

**MINISTER:** Is he dead?

**SAVANT:** Not yet. The lake is dry.

**QUEEN:** Then let's go and help him to get out – for heaven's sake, we have to save him!

**SAVANT:** Don't move! Stay where you are! There is no way of saving him.

**QUEEN:** But we must do something. I beseech you all to save my husband!

**MINISTER:** Yes – the King must be saved!

(Savant returns)

**SAVANT:** No one can do so. He is in the very depths of the chasm. The walls are slippery, and any who tries will certainly meet the same fate as the King. I'm afraid only he can save himself.

**QUEEN:** But how?

**SAVANT:** Only by his own efforts or a miracle from the skies.

**PRIEST:** A miracle from the skies! Now you speak of miracles?

**MINISTER:** This is your chance oh Priest!

**PRIEST:** But the Savant said there was no one in the heavens to hear us.

**SAVANT:** Anyone who is able to do something should do so now.

**QUEEN:** Yes – do something oh Priest – save the King.

**PRIEST:** There is nothing for me to do but pray. All of us must pray. (looks at Savant)

**SAVANT:** I shall accept to do so such that I might invalidate your argument. If there is really somebody out there who hears our voices, understands our language, and pays attention to our situation, that's fine. If not, we lose nothing.

**MINISTER:** So he has accepted.

**QUEEN:** Be sure that our hearts are all with you at this moment.

**PRIEST:** (referring to Savant) But some only grudgingly.

**SAVANT:** I said I would join my voice to yours – what more do you want from me?

**PRIEST:** It's enough to have one doubting voice to spoil the rest, to cause us to lose hope.

**SAVANT:** And what's my voice to you? I'm addressing the heavens directly – leave it to them to listen or not.

**MINISTER:** That's reasonable.

**QUEEN:** Truly. Leave the matter to the heavens, oh venerable Priest, and don't bother yourself with it. Who knows? Maybe it will be accepted.

**PRIEST:** So be it!

**QUEEN:** Then let us pray!

**ALL:** (lifting up their hands and calling out upwards, and out to audience) Oh gods! Oh gods! Help us oh gods!

(fade to blackout)

**CURTAIN**