



**THE ENGLISH THEATRE  
OF HAMBURG**

presents

# **THE WHO & THE WHAT**

by **AYAD AKHTAR**

**STUDY GUIDE**

Premiere on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Preview performances at reduced prices on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Tuesday – Saturday	19:30
Sunday	14:30
Wednesday/Friday	11:30 (Matinee performances weekly alternating)

**THE ENGLISH THEATRE OF HAMBURG**

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The English Theatre will premiere *The Who & The What* on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April. You can use the cover of this publication to advertise the play in your school or workplace. Bookings have already started. Teachers who wish to preview the play before bringing a group of students to the theatre should contact [marketing@englishtheatre.de](mailto:marketing@englishtheatre.de). The text of the play may be obtained at Dramatists Play Service Inc. or or [Amazon](#).

### About the Author

Born on October 28 1970, Ayad Akhtar is an American of Pakistani heritage. He is a playwright, screenwriter, actor and novelist. He was nominated for the 2006 Independent Award for best screenplay for the film **THE WAR WITHIN**. In 2012 he published his first novel, **AMERICAN DERVISH**, a coming-of-age story about a boy growing up in Milwaukee. His first produced play was **DISGRACED**, produced at New York's Lincoln Center Theater in 2012. It was the recipient of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Akhtar's second play **THE WHO & THE WHAT** premiered at La Jolla Playhouse in February, 2014. Following a run at Lincoln Center Theater in June, **THE WHO & THE WHAT** went on to be produced around the world with notable productions in Berlin, Hamburg and the Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria where it ran for almost two years. Akhtar's writing covers various themes including the American-Muslim experience, religion, economics and immigration.

### About the play

Like the author's popular **DISGRACED**, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2013, **THE WHO & THE WHAT** also deals with matters of faith, family and the clash of cultures, albeit in a somewhat lighter vein. The play, as the author has said, "was written as a comedy. The events of the story may appear to take it into darker, more dramatic territory."

Zarina is a young, Pakistani woman living in Atlanta, Georgia with her father Afzal and younger sister Mahwish. Afzal is frustrated with Zarina because she is free-thinking and seems to have no interest in finding a husband. Little does he know that she is also writing a provocative book that humanizes and sexualizes the Prophet Muhammad as well as examines the subjugation of women in the Quran—topics that for the devout Afzal are problematic to say the least. Pretending to be Zarina, he signs her up on a Muslim dating website and then interviews (perhaps interrogates would be a better word) the candidates himself. He selects Eli, a recent convert to Islam. Although furious with her father for doing this, Zarina agrees to meet Eli. She actually likes him. All goes well until the manuscript of her "blasphemous" book on the Prophet falls into Afzal's hands and threatens to destroy the family.

## SUMMARY

### Act 1

#### Scene One

Present day. Atlanta, Georgia.

Zarina (32), of Pakistani origin, and her younger sister, Mahwish (25) are in the kitchen in the house they share with their father, Afzal. Zarina is preparing dinner as the girls talk, sometimes about serious matters and sometimes they tease each other. Mahwish is trying to persuade her sister to find a man and get married. This is especially important to Mahwish because according to Islam, the younger sister cannot marry until after the older one does. Their father adheres strictly to the rules of Islam and insists upon obeying them. Zarina reminds Mahwish that they do not live in Pakistan and she is free to marry at any time. Mahwish believes that Zarina is just flouting their father by her refusal to get married. Zarina asks where she learned the word "flouting". Mahwish answers that Manuel, her GRE (Graduate Record Examination) teacher, teaches her big words and explains their origin. Zarina knows that Manuel is the teacher with muscles and a tank top. Teasing her sister, Zarina asks her if her boyfriend, Haroon, knows about her infatuation with Manuel. Mahwish protests that she loves Haroon and has no feelings for Manuel. She complains again that she can't marry Haroon until Zarina is married because it is just not done. Zarina knows that Mahwish and Haroon have been physically intimate. Mahwish wonders if she is in danger of going to hell because of this. Zarina claims that she is not afraid of hell because she does not believe in it.

Mahwish knows Zarina is writing a book but does not know what it is about because Zarina won't let anyone read it. She's having writer's block right now and just stares out of the window when she goes to the library to write. Mahwish thinks Zarina is working on a book as a way of putting Ryan, a former boyfriend, behind her. She was in love with him, but foolishly broke off the relationship because her father insisted that she could not marry someone of another faith. Mahwish shows her a picture she found on Facebook of Ryan and his wife holding a baby. Zarina is emotionally affected by this, and when Mahwish tries to comfort her, Zarina walks out of the kitchen.

#### Scene Two

Afzal (60), the father of Zarina and Mahwish, is sitting on a park bench drinking coffee. Since the headstrong Zarina has shown no interest in getting married, he has taken matters into his own hands. He found a dating website exclusively for Muslims and secretly put photos of Zarina on the website and created a profile of her to attract serious Muslim men. He wrote to the men pretending to be Zarina. Eventually he found what he considered to be the perfect match for Zarina. But before introducing the man to his daughter, he arranged a meeting with him to make sure he has made the right choice. Afzal selected Eli, a white American who has converted to Islam. When Eli appears in the park for the meeting, he thinks he will be talking to Zarina. However, during their conversation Afzal reveals that he is the one that Eli has been corresponding with on the internet. At first, Eli thinks that Afzal is some kind of a pervert, but then Afzal explains that he wanted to meet Eli first because it is the custom in Islam that the father meet with the suitor of his daughter before the couple meet face to face.

Afzal asks Eli to tell him about himself. He assures him that he likes him already because he seems dignified, restrained and intelligent. He says he knows this because he went from driving a taxi to owning 30% of the taxis in Atlanta, so he knows a winner when he sees one. Eli says he runs a mosque and that he is a convert to Islam. He converted at the age of 23 after going to a mosque and experiencing the sense of community he found there. He also runs a soup kitchen with a daily meal for people in a run-down part of town. He adds that he is a licensed plumber and helps people who have very little money. His intention is more about serving others than bringing people to the faith, he explains. Afzal wants to know how much money he makes but receives no answer because Eli considers it a personal question. Afzal tells Eli he assumes he has matrimonial intentions because he wrote "interested in marriage" on his website profile. Eli tells Afzal that his daughter is amazing. Afzal is curious how he can know this from just seeing pictures of her on a website. Eli replies that he actually met Zarina a year ago at a lecture. He happened to sit next to her, but he

did not get a chance to ask her for her telephone number. He was thrilled to discover her on the Muslim dating site a year later. Afzal suddenly asks Eli if he is some kind of pervert with pictures of Zarina all over his walls. Eli objects to this accusation. Before concluding the interview, Afzal asks Eli again, "How much money do you make?"

### Scene Three

Zarina and Afzal are arguing at home. Afzal has admitted to Zarina that he posed as her on the Muslim dating site in order to find a good Muslim man for her to marry. She is furious with her father when she hears this. Afzal wants her to first patiently listen to his praise of Eli before refusing to meet him. Mistakenly thinking that Eli is a conservative Muslim who will make Zarina happy and cure her of her rebellious nature and unconventional view of Islam, he praises Eli to the sky. He tells her that she and Eli already met a year ago and Zarina recalls the meeting. Afzal reminds her that he paid for her to go to Harvard and to get a Master's Degree in creative writing. Zarina is appreciative of the help, but she is still unhappy because she is trying to write a book and is suffering from writer's block.

Afzal apologizes for making her cut off her relationship with her boyfriend Ryan because his religion was different, but Zarina has long forgiven him for that and put Ryan out of her mind. Trying to teach Zarina something about marriage, he discloses that it took three years before he really fell deeply in love with her deceased mother, whom they are all still grieving. In the United States people fall in love instantly, he claims. "The water is already boiling and has nothing to do but cool down," he says. Her mother, on the other hand, used to say, "You start with a cold kettle, so it has room to heat up over the years." He explains that if he made a mistake with Ryan, it is because he (Afzal) had a different experience of love. His marriage was arranged, and it took time for him and his wife to find their way to each other. He tells this to Zarina so that she understands there is no harm in just meeting Eli. He begs her to see Eli for his sake, a father who loves his daughters and would gladly give his heart and his life for them to be happy. Zarina considers all that her father has said.

### Scene Four

Zarina and Eli meet in a restaurant and talk. Eli explains to Zarina that he grew up in a household that was focused on finding ways to help other people. His mother had been a blue-blooded WASP (white Anglo Saxon protestant) from New England and his father was raised in a Southern Evangelical family, but in truth he rejected religion and became an atheist. His dad was also into black culture. His whole life was about improving the plight of the black man. All of Eli's friends growing up were black. They took care of him, but he was still regarded as the white kid. His attraction to Islam was not surprising because he'd also been around the older Muslim guys a lot and they were the ones he looked up to.

Tired of talking about himself, Eli asks Zarina to tell him about herself and her writing. She says she does not talk about it, and she reminds him that she barely knows him and has met with him only because of her father. Eli tells her he was surprised to find her on the dating site because it didn't seem to be in character. She agrees that it isn't like her to do something like that. Neither is it for him, Eli admits, but a friend of his met someone on the site and is now very happily married so he thought he would try it. Jokingly, Zarina says she doesn't think that he and her dad would make a great couple. Eli agrees and thinks he should have figured out what was going on. Now he is embarrassed.

They turn to the subject of Eli's impression of Malcolm X. He remembers reading the section of his autobiography where Malcolm discovers the terrible history of white colonial power. At dinner that night Eli railed at his grandparents for what the white man had done. His grandmother reminded Eli that he was white, but he retorted that he didn't have to be like the colonial whites. He understood the angry side of Malcolm, but it was the other side that really got to him. He taught that at its core, Islam is really about being equal...people of all colors and all walks of life, rich or poor, worshipping together.

Zarina becomes a little belligerent toward Eli without him knowing why. She wants the check so they can leave the restaurant. Eli wants to know if he said something that upset her. She replies that he seems to be a great guy, but all that stuff about Islam and equality was bullshit.



She points out that he didn't have to grow up as a woman inside Islam.

Eli tells her she is right and asks her again to tell him about her writing. She starts by saying only that it is a novel about gender politics. He asks if she is writing about the Prophet. She explains she is concerned about the negative, the human traits of the Prophet that everyone is always trying to airbrush out. She thinks that his contradictions only serve to make him more human which make him more extraordinary. She says her book begins with the Prophet wrestling with his desire for his son's wife and the fact that he saw her naked.

In short, Zarina says she is writing to show all the different influences, good and bad, on the Prophet and how the Quran reveals all the human things that happen to him. In a lot of ways, she thinks it might make more sense to see the Quran more as coming from Muhammad than God. She finds the story of Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, his son's ex-wife, and its effect on millions of Muslims since then, particularly ridiculous. According to the story, Muhammad is on his way to the marriage bedroom when he realizes people are following him. To keep them out he draws a curtain so no one can go any further, nor can they see anything. As a result, Muhammad proclaimed that "...if you ask the Prophet's wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain." The Arabic word for curtain is Hijab! Zarina finds it ridiculous that because of Muhammed's human need for privacy generations of Muslim women wear the Hijab on their faces.

Eli asks what is wrong if women see it as a form of devotion. In response she wants to know why Eli doesn't wear a veil over his face to show devotion. Eli answers, jokingly, that he was saving that for their second date. On a serious note, he tells her that he finds her book amazing, and he wants to read it. She reminds him that she is not finished with it.

Zarina goes on to say that she has this sense of "who" Muhammed was, but that all of the many stories that have been told about him over hundreds of years are all like a monument to "what" we have made of him. We don't know who he really was, she claims. That is the reason that she is calling the book THE WHO & THE WHAT. Eli finds what he knows about Zarina's book incredibly ambitious, but adds that depending on how she

goes about it, it could mean trouble. Zarina tells Eli she just had an idea and asks him if he has a pen. She writes something on a card.

### **Scene Five**

Afzal is alone in the kitchen looking at pictures that he has taken from a shoe box. He picks up one of his deceased wife and kisses it. Mahwish enters the kitchen and sees what her father is doing. She urges him to stop because she knows how it depresses him to look at photos from the past. Afzal says he is 60 years old and is entitled to look at pictures of his wife if he wants to. Mahwish asks if Zarina is back from the restaurant yet. When Afzal says she isn't, Mahwish sees that as a good sign. Eli and Zarina must be enjoying each other. When Zarina eventually returns, she asks what they are doing, not waiting up for her, she hopes. She says that she actually got some good ideas during her meeting with Eli. Zarina starts to leave to go to bed, but turns and says, "Hey, dad. Thank you." Afzal and Mahwish are delighted as they watch her go.

### **Scene Six**

Zarina is in her room reading what she wrote on the card in the restaurant: "What if it wasn't God speaking to him? What if it was just his own voice? Why did everyone need to pretend the Prophet didn't have doubts? Why couldn't he show himself to them as he was?" She continues this thought by writing, "If only he could forget the image of Zaynab's breasts. His desire for her was not to be avoided. For then they would all know what kind of man he truly was. Then they would know to turn not to him, a man, but to the Lord, their God." Meanwhile, Afzal, in his room, lays out his prayer rug for evening prayer, bows and prostrates himself on the rug and begins to pray.

## **End of Act 1**



## Act 2

### Scene One

One year later. Morning.

Zarina and Eli are at home. Both of them are wearing wedding bands on their ring fingers.

Zarina is in a bad mood. Eli wonders if Zarina's bad mood has something to do with her book. She admits she is upset because he read it two days ago and hasn't said a word to her about it. Eli says he wanted to be sure they had space and time to talk about it. Besides, he has been sharing the ideas in the book with her for an entire year, so he feels entitled to two days to think about it. He says that her portrayal of the Prophet is stunning. Eli was impressed by the Prophet's searching quality, his constant self-questioning and his rich conflicted inner life. Zarina says that was what she was trying to do.

But Eli goes on to say that the Prophet she portrays is nothing like the man he knew. He didn't recognize the man he fell in love with when he became a Muslim. The man in her book is overwhelmed by events in his life, he says. He's not always clear if he's hearing voices or going crazy or if it's God speaking to him. He's confused about his desires. We see him maneuvering for political advantage.

Zarina adds that he is charismatic and inspiring and generous, too. She thought Eli understood what she was doing. Apparently not. Eli is concerned that people who read the book will think that she has described the Prophet like he really was. Zarina protests that nobody really knows who the Prophet was except from what they hear from their parents in stories. Eli insists that what they hear in these stories is important to them. For example, the story of the woman who threw garbage on the Prophet every time he went to the mosque. He went to visit her on the one day she didn't throw garbage on him and found her sick. He spent the entire day taking care of her. Zarina says that she believes that story as much as she believes that George Washington chopped down the cherry tree. Eli asks what difference it makes if the story is true or not if it makes people want to be more honest or compassionate.

Zarina reminds Eli that he encouraged her to write the book and now he disagrees with her. Eli says that he just didn't realize how much she hated the man. Zarina replies that she doesn't hate him. She hates what the

the religion does to women. For every story about his goodness there is another that's used as an excuse to hide women, erase them. And the story of the veil takes the cake. Eli is concerned that if the young men and women don't recognize the man in the book, they are not going to listen to her. He tells Zarina he loves her. He is just worried that people won't understand what she is doing, and he doesn't want anything to happen to her.

### Scene Two

The same day. Sometime in the early afternoon.

Afzal and Eli are in Afzal's kitchen. Eli is under the sink and Afzal is watching him work.

Eli finishes his work and tells his father-in-law the sink was just clogged. Afzal tells him it is a luxury to have a son-in-law who can fix anything. He also asks him about an award he received. Eli replies that he received the "Young Muslim of the Year Award," but adds that he is not too happy with the organization that gave it to him. They are a little too conservative for him, he believes. He is not comfortable with the way they tell people what it means to be a Muslim. Afzal doesn't understand Eli's objection. Eli explains that people have the right to determine what Islam means to them.

Afzal is gradually finding out that Eli is not the conservative Muslim he chose for his daughter and that his beliefs are more like Zarina's. Nevertheless, he tells Eli it is always an honor to receive a convert like him into the faith and he puts an envelope of cash on the counter for Eli. It contains five thousand dollars for fixing the sink, he tells Eli. Eli refuses to take the money and tells Afzal he doesn't need it. Afzal says his daughter is used to wanting for nothing. "Then give it to her," Eli replies. Afzal insists that money is a man's matter, not a woman's. Then Eli tells him to donate it to the mosque or to the soup kitchen because he doesn't want it.

Afzal says that Zarina can now concentrate on something that matters. Children. Eli tells him not to hold his breath because she is not sure she wants any. Afzal is disgusted by this. He tells Eli to be a man. "Put it in her. Get her pregnant. Women don't always know what they want," Afzal says. Eli tells him that she's on birth control. This news is the last straw for Afzal. He is determined to have grandchildren. He knows Zarina is headstrong and he believes that Eli needs to break her.

This offends Eli. He claims that women don't need to be



broken. They need to be heard. Afzal argues that Zarina is not completely an American girl. Her mother's family was from Frontier Province, an area in Pakistan where conservative Islam was strictly adhered to. Zarina's mother was not like the others. She hated the veil and did not wear it, but she knew that the man was at the center in the structure of the culture, and she helped him be more of a man. She made his success possible. Afzal brings up Ryan, the guy Zarina dated in graduate school. Up to this point Eli had not been told about Ryan. Zarina kept it to herself. Afzal tells Eli he refused to let Zarina marry Ryan because he would not become a Muslim. She was in love with him, but she obeyed her Muslim father. With Mahwish there was never a problem. She married Haroon, the Muslim man she grew up with.

Eli is troubled by what Afzal has said. He excuses himself and goes outside to get some fresh air. When Eli is gone, Afzal takes the money and puts it in Eli's bag. As he reaches in the bag, he discovers Zarina's manuscript and slips it into a kitchen drawer so he can read it later.

### Scene Three

Zarina is on her couch and Mahwish stands beside her, looking worried. She confesses that her teacher Manuel asked her if she wanted to see his place. When they got to his apartment, he offered her tea and their hands touched and he kissed her. Zarina is shocked by this. She asks Mahwish if she is leaving anything out, if she slept with him. Mahwish claims they only made out a little before she left. Zarina does not judge her, but reminds her that she married Haroon. Mahwish can't stop wondering what their mother would think of her. Her phone then sounds with a text. Manuel wants her to come to him. Mahwish wants Zarina to assure her that the episode with Manuel was not a betrayal of Haroon, just a lark. It would only become a betrayal if she did it again. Zarina tells her to do whatever she wants.

Before Mahwish leaves, Eli enters with his bag and kisses Zarina. After Mahwish leaves, Eli tells Zarina that her father tried to give him money again, this time for the work he did on the sink. Zarina tells him to get used to it. Giving away his money is the meaning of Afzal's life. Eli asks why Mahwish hurried off so fast. Zarina says she probably shouldn't say anything, but she does. She tells Eli everything Mahwish just told her. She adds that it's

better to do what you want than to wonder the rest of your life what it would have been like. These words hit Eli hard.

Eli asks why Zarina never told him about what happened with Ryan. He had to hear the story from Afzal. Hearing about Ryan has made Eli unhappy. The thought of Zarina living with him while loving someone else is hard for him. Zarina assures him she doesn't know who Ryan is anymore, that he is just a thought in her head. She tells Eli that he is the one who changed her life and got her to start writing again. Eli is still bothered by her former relationship and the fact that she avoids saying "I love you" to him. He picks up his bag and starts to leave when he discovers that the envelope of cash is in it. Then he discovers that Zarina's manuscript is missing and assumes that Afzal must have taken it. Zarina and Eli share a worried look.

### Scene Four

Afzal's kitchen.

Mahwish is reading Zarina's manuscript to him aloud. She is reading the part where Muhammed sees his son's wife naked and lusts after her. Afzal is appalled. He asks Mahwish if she knew about this, if she asked Zarina about what she was writing. Mahwish says that she asked, but Zarina never told her anything about the manuscript. Afzal is furious now. He says that in Pakistan Zarina would be killed for writing that. Afzal looks like he is on the verge of a panic attack. Mahwish tries to comfort him.

Just then Zarina and Eli appear and a quarrel begins. Afzal admits that he took the manuscript and asks Eli if he has read it. Eli says that he has. Afzal asks what is wrong with him for not stopping her from writing it. Zarina tells her father there is nothing wrong with Eli. She asks Afzal if he has even read it. Afzal begins to read with his voice trembling with anger. Zarina tells him he can't read just a few sentences and know what it is about. She tells him that he has misinterpreted what he has read. It's about the Prophet, she explains to him, and the Quran and how what we think we know about those things is not real. Not human. Afzal tells her she is speaking nonsense. She says that she is writing about the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab and that it is the reason for the revelation of the veil. Afzal warns her, that if anyone sees this manuscript, she will never again be



able to go to Pakistan. And that she can be hurt here in the United States as well. She protests that she cannot stop writing things just because she is afraid someone will hurt her. This Afzal finds astonishing. Zarina asks him if he remembers telling her that because of the words in the Quran, she could not marry Ryan. She says he got it wrong. He retorts that what she has written is pornography. Eli interrupts and says it is not pornography. Afzal tells him to shut his bloody mouth, to which Eli replies that he will shut his mouth when Afzal calms down. Afzal calls him a fake Muslim. Zarina tells her father that he distorts the tales in the Quran which is what people have done with the veil for a thousand years. He tells her she makes him regret the day she was born. Mahwish takes her father's side, asking how Zarina can do this to their father. Reading the manuscript makes Mahwish want to start wearing the veil just to purify herself. She tells Zarina there is something wrong with her. Eli tells Mahwish she is not helping, but Mahwish says she doesn't have to listen to him. She tells Zarina what she has written is just filth and it's a good thing their mother isn't there to see what she has done. Afzal asks Zarina if she knows what she is doing to the family. Pointing to the manuscript, Afzal tells Zarina she must destroy it. Eli tells him she will not do that. He reminds Afzal that he made Zarina act against her heart once before, but he won't do it again. Afzal again tells him to shut his bloody mouth, but Eli reacts by telling him to just calm down. Afzal refuses and calls Eli a nonentity, not even a Muslim. Eli defends Zarina's thesis that Mohammed was just a man, and that we say we don't worship him, but we do. Eli maintains that all Zarina is doing is writing a testimonial to a complicated and remarkable man with conflicting emotions. Zarina tells Eli they should go. She takes his hand, and they start to leave. Before going, Afzal begs her not to leave if she loves him. She says she loves him very much, but with that they turn to go. After they are gone, Afzal takes a picture of Zarina from the wall and throws it in the sink. He proclaims that he never wants to hear her name in the house again. She is dead to him. He starts to leave but before doing so he says to Mahwish that whatever she did with Haroon he doesn't want to talk about it. She doesn't have to go back to that bastard. She can have her own room however long she wants. Afzal goes. Mahwish takes Zarina's picture from the sink and leaves.

## End of Act 2

### Epilogue

A summer day. Two years later.

Afzal is sitting on a bench in the park with prayer beads in his hand. Mahwish appears with two cups of coffee and hands one to her father. They hear a bird chirping and Afzal tells her it is a Kentucky warbler who often comes when he is there. Afzal asks how her new husband, Manuel, is and Mahwish answers that he is just fine. Afzal talks about her mother and how she always wanted him to slow down, to sell the business years ago. He and Mahwish regret not having said so many things to her. The bird chirps again and Afzal says he's become a good friend, always jumping around on the same branch, and singing his song. Mahwish excuses herself, saying she is going to use the restroom. She starts off, stopping just long enough to see Zarina appear. They nod at each other before Mahwish moves on.

Zarina watches her father from some distance. Then finally she approaches him. At first Afzal thinks it is Mahwish, but when he turns and sees that it is Zarina he is filled with emotion. Afzal realizes that Mahwish was involved in getting Zarina to come to the park. He tells her she should go because he can't talk to now. Zarina ignores this and tells him that she and Eli are going to move to Oregon because his congregation turned against him after learning about her book. Afzal tells her he lost so many taxi drivers, even after he told them he didn't agree with his daughter. Some of them even came and broke the windows of the house. He finally had to sell the business. She says that she knows about it and is sorry that he had to suffer because of something she wrote. Afzal says the suffering is not because of broken windows. She is the one he cares about. He wants her to be happy and he prays for her to be safe. She tells him she is happy, so his prayers are working. Afzal can't understand how she can be happy when people say awful things about her. She reassures him that people in the United States and all over the world have many good things to say about how her book helped them because it gave them permission to ask questions. The Kentucky warbler starts singing again. Zarina says that she misses him. Afzal says that he misses her too.





Mahwish and Eli join them. Mahwish asks Zarina if she told their father about the good news. Thinking of the move to Oregon, Afzal says that she told him. Zarina tells Mahwish that she hasn't gotten to that yet. Afzal wants to know what she is talking about. Mahwish tells him he is going to be a grandfather. Zarina confirms that it is true. Eli tells Afzal that he took his advice. How many months, Afzal wants to know. Zarina answers that she has been pregnant for four months. Afzal kisses Mahwish with a blessing. He is still unable to embrace Zarina.

Overcome with emotion he breaks down and hides his face. Then he gradually gets over his emotional breakdown and prays:

"Ya Allah...Please, please, please. I love her. I love her too much. Please understand. Please forgive me."

Zarina moves some distance behind her father while he continues to pray. He ends with:

"Inshallah, please let it be a boy."

Zarina waits a moment then says with defiance, "Dad!"

Afzal turns to face her, and she says: "It's a girl!"

## **Blackout**

## Study Questions

### Multiple Choice Exercise

- Zarina's ancestors all lived in (a. India, b. Pakistan, c. Afghanistan).
- Zarina and Mahwish are (a. unrelated, b. cousins, c. sisters).
- Afzal, the father of Zarina and Mahwish, is a devout (a. Christian, b. Muslim, c. Jew).
- Mahwish wants Zarina to get married so she can (a. have nieces and nephews, b. get married herself, c. get her out of the house).
- Zarina has stopped writing a book because (a. she has writer's block, b. she wants to write about another subject, c. her father objects to what she is writing).
- Afzal uses an internet dating website for Muslims and pretends he is Zarina because (a. he wants to find an appropriate Muslim man for Zarina, b. he is looking for a wife for himself, c. Mahwish refused to do it for him).
- Afzal finds Eli on the website and asks to meet him because he wants to find out in person (a. if he is a good conservative Muslim, b. if he would like to marry Mahwish, his younger daughter, c. if he is a liberal Muslim who, like Zarina, does not follow all of the laws of Islam).
- Eli is (a. a white American convert to Islam, b. Catholic, c. Pakistani).
- When Zarina meets Eli and finds out that her father chose him from an internet website for her to marry, she is (a. delighted, b. anxious, c. furious).
- Eli is (a. interested in Zarina's views on Islam, b. thinks she should stop writing her book, c. completely supports Afzal's strict views on Islam).
- When Afzal discovers the content of Zarina's book, he (a. wants nothing more to do with her or Eli, b. forgives her, c. considers returning to Pakistan).

### For Discussion or Written Work

- Zarina has lived in America all her life and has adopted the American way of life. Her father, Afzal, is from the old school and believes fervently in the laws of Islam that his ancestors followed. Give other examples of clashes in belief between generations and explain why they exist.
- The love between family members often suffers due to conflicts whether they arise from differences in religious beliefs, political beliefs, or radically different opinions about a variety of other things. Give some examples of families breaking up for various reasons.

### Answer Key

1. b, 2. c, 3. b, 4. b, 5. a, 6. a, 7. a, 8. a, 9. c, 10. a, 11. a