

*Build, Forget*

A ten-minute Play

By Ismail Khalidi

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## CHARACTER NAME

Woman 1	Confident, professional	mid-30s
Woman 2	Ditto	mid-30s
Old Man	Broken, beautiful	mid-70s

SCENE ONE.

Two women sit across each other at a glass table in a swank all-glass office full of architectural models. There are three models on the table itself. Very modern.

Almost offstage an old Arab man mops the floor slowly but silently. They do not see him.

(She reads)

WOMAN 1

‘The New Chosen State Museum of Architecture and Aesthetics’.

WOMAN 2

It sounds so Soviet.

WOMAN 1

As long as it doesn’t look Soviet.

(WOMAN 1 and WOMAN 2 laugh in unison, then simultaneously take identical sips of their espressos.)

WOMAN 1

It’s a tall order.

WOMAN 2

An honor. You were chosen out of hundreds, dear.

WOMAN 1

We have to decide on one of these three. It’s late.

WOMAN 2

They’re all good.

WOMAN 1

We’re behind, though.

WOMAN 2

We’re fine. And don’t look at me. You’re the one who was in New York Magazine.

WOMAN 1

(playfully)

Shut up! And it was Architectural Digest.

WOMAN 2

Whatever.

WOMAN 1

It's a lot of pressure to be the head architect for the national museum of architecture, ok!

WOMAN 2

I've noticed. You haven't even been doing your morning jogs along the beach. Maybe that's part of the problem.

WOMAN 1

The city is overrun with tourists this time of year. The beach is full of American kids here for the summer.

WOMAN 2

And Russians pack the cafes.

WOMAN 1

I know. Not to mention the Arab families.

(The old man looks up at this without stopping his mopping. They still do not see him.)

WOMAN 2

It really is something how their picnics and barbecues take up half the beach.. But you don't run that far out of the city do you? I hope not. It's not safe that far South.

WOMAN 1

No. Not usually. Anyway, I carry mace just in case. What about this one? The third.

WOMAN 2

I like it.

WOMAN 1

A lot of glass, though. We need some more...steel.

WOMAN 2

What about the first then?

This model is a ultra modern Frank Gehry-esque building, curves, metal, angles, etc.

WOMAN 1

It's good. But I am no Gehry. It's not me. It's not *us*.

WOMAN 2

You mean it doesn't feel like the work of two brilliant overworked modern women staying too late at the office, long after all the men have left?

They both laugh again then drain their espressos.

WOMAN 1

I mean us, here, in this country. What about the second? How does it say...*us*?!?

WOMAN 2

Ok. Well, it's new.

WOMAN 1

Yes. And the pillars give a hint of the ancient.

WOMAN 2

The Biblical.

WOMAN 1

But re-interpreted, cleaned up.

WOMAN 2

Polished.

WOMAN 1

Western!

WOMAN 2

And yet Eastern.

WOMAN 1

But just a touch!

WOMAN 2

Yes, just the arched windows on top and the date palms and fig trees on the edges.

WOMAN 1

Right. But it's strong at the same time with the tinted windows and the aluminum borders, no?

WOMAN 2

Yes. Exactly. Almost...Neo-Biblical.

WOMAN 1

But European.

WOMAN 2

And strong!

WOMAN 1

Right. And I think we succeeded in creating the illusion of an island with this one.

WOMAN 2

Yes, with the mote. It reads, it really does.

WOMAN 1

A fortress feel, defensible, but still welcoming.

WOMAN 2

A bastion. A warm bastion. Of/ civilization....

WOMAN 1

Civilization! I mean that's what we were going for.

WOMAN 2

Yes, yes, yet still somehow situated in the East. A Bridge.

WOMAN 1

Brilliant. Let's add a series of bridges.

WOMAN 2

I love it, I really love it.

WOMAN 1

(she points as she speaks)

Here, here, there, and here.

WOMAN 2

Got it.

(she takes notes and makes marks on the  
model)

WOMAN 1

We've got it, I think. And it will dominate this area, this valley overlooking the city.

WOMAN 2

Yes. But in a good way. Benignly.

WOMAN 1

Of course. Humanely. In harmony with the surroundings. I love the location more and more you know. Show me the map and the pictures again.

Woman 2 pulls out a map and a series of photos. They both look over it, their back to the audience. As they do so the OLD MAN walks behind them and looks over their shoulders at the map and photos. They do not notice him.

WOMAN 2

So here it is. It sits on state land, except for this sector to the East, but that should be no problem.

WOMAN 1

Right, I remember he said they were talking to the owners or something. And what are these mounds here on the ridge? The cactus around these stones?

OLD MAN

A village. That pile of stones was the well. Between the cemetery, the mosque and the church. And the deaf wood carver Hamza had his workshop right across. There.

The two women are startled and turn around to face the old man, who in turn is startled and almost falls down over his bucket.

WOMAN 1

What did he say?

WOMAN 2

I don't know.

WOMAN 1

(slowly)

Yes. You. Can. Mop. The floor.

WOMAN 2

Vacuuming. Wait. Until. We. Go home. Ok? Understand?

The old man nods his head and goes back to his mopping.

WOMAN 1

So the mound there, and these stones on the hillside...

WOMAN 2

We can have them cleared no problem.

WOMAN 1

Or moved. To the garden, and rearranged. Spread about on the grounds.

WOMAN 2

Maybe plant flowers in some too.

WOMAN 1

But we should bring in an archaeologist to make sure they don't have Biblical significance.

Woman 2 writes down a couple notes to herself.

WOMAN 2

I'll call the archaeologist tomorrow morning. We wouldn't want to move our forefathers' stable.

WOMAN 1

The state might even give more money to the project if the site turns out to be of any importance.

WOMAN 2

You never know.

WOMAN 1

Just as long as they don't make us move to another site. It is really perfect. The views of the valleys.

WOMAN 2

And you can see the sea from the top of the hill on a clear day.

WOMAN 1

Which is why we will have the observatory deck there, of course.

WOMAN 2

My idea, of course.

WOMAN 1

And a brilliant one. You know I really can't imagine why no one built there before?

WOMAN 2

You mean besides our forefathers?

They both chuckle.

WOMAN 1

Right. You would think some fancy artist from the city would have put a villa there at least.

WOMAN 2

Maybe we should scrap the project and build ourselves a nice house on the hills?

WOMAN 1

Never. Our 'New Chosen State Museum of Architecture and Aesthetics' is more than I could ask for. I'll go every day to marvel at the masterpiece.

WOMAN 2

So modest! So we're settled?

WOMAN 1

Model two it is.

WOMAN 2

Woohoo!

WOMAN 1

Indeed. And you know what that means? We can finally go home! Need a ride?

WOMAN 2

No thanks, I biked. It's the hip thing to do these days.

WOMAN 1

I bet.

The women pack up their things and leave together, talking. As they exit, they switch off the lights, leaving the old man, in mid-mop, completely in the dark. We hear the women talking and laughing in the distance, then the sound of a car pulling off and silence.

A sliver of moonlight creeps through the window, illuminating the model and maps on the table, as well as half the man's face. He puts his mop down and looks at the table. As he speaks he rearranges things on the model, his back to the audience...

OLD MAN

They got it all wrong. This does not blend into the hills. It has the wrong shape, too high, wrong colors, hurts the eyes, stands between the earth and the sky. More stone. Brown stones, like the color of grey sand. Low roofs, but domed, to keep it cool in the summer, thick walls and arched windows. No these two don't get it at all.

He then looks at the pictures on the table one by one. As he does he starts to speak the lines below and a series of projections appear on the back wall depicting, in reverse chronological order, the state of the/his village.

The first pictures are of the site in the present, overgrown with grasses and trees. Then the same scene but shortly after the depopulation of the village. Then a picture of the village right after its population was driven out, half destroyed by war.

Lastly, the screen shows pictures of the village as it was originally .....His words have reconstructed it by the end.

### OLD MAN

Where was the school? Oh yes. And the grove was here, right behind it. But it's gone. How can trees so old be extracted like the teeth of young children? And here is where the old woman from the church would go to look towards the sea in the distance to see if her son returned on some ship from America. That was a long time ago. Years. The mosque was hit by a shell, I remember that, just before we left, and the noise turned old man Zahi deaf in his left ear. And here was the place where I asked Dina Darwish to marry me. How she laughed at me when I climbed the fig tree to get the highest one, dripping with summer, and fell on my ass with the broken branch. What ever became of her and her brother Rami who could lift a stone bigger than his chest?

By now the images have come to the beginning, the village as he remembered it.

He lights a cigarette and looks up at it smiling and stares for a second.

His reverie ends and he grabs his mop and bucket and walks away, offstage.

The moon sets to darkness and slowly gives way to a light that signifies early morning.

### SCENE TWO.

Morning. Woman 1 is standing in silence, puzzled, taking in the revamped model, resembling the old village as it was, which sits on her desk.

Woman 2 enters.

WOMAN 2

Holy shit.

WOMAN 1

I know.

WOMAN 2

What got into you?

WOMAN 1

It wasn't me, I was going to ask you if/

WOMAN 2

I love it!

WOMAN 1

You do?

WOMAN 2

I knew you would come back last night and fiddle with it you crazy brilliant woman.

WOMAN 1

I

WOMAN 2

It's like it was built for the terrain. It blends

WOMAN 1

I know, I know.

WOMAN 2

You've outdone yourself. Created a new aesthetic, a tradition all our own.

They both look at the model in silence.

WOMAN 2

It really is perfect.

Woman 2 pats Woman 1 on the back and leaves.

WOMAN 1

Yes. I know.

The stage fades slowly to black as a series of old pictures of original villages appears on the back wall in silence.

END OF PLAY.