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Perfect Mendacity

by Jason Wells

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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***PERFECT MENDACITY* premiered at the Asolo Repertory Theatre,
(Michael Donald Edwards, Producing Artistic Director;
Linda DiGabriele, Managing Director)**

**And was originally commissioned by the Manhattan Theatre Club,
(Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director, Barry Grove, Executive Producer)
with funds provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**

**And was developed by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, through its New Plays
Initiative and presented as part of its First Look Repertory of New Work at
Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL; (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director;
David Hawkanson, Executive Director).**

PERFECT MENDACITY was produced at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, Illinois on July 26, 2008, as part of the First Look Repertory of New Work. The project director was Edward Sobel. The performance was directed by David Cromer, with sets by Kevin Depinet, costumes by Debbie Baer, lighting by Charles Cooper, sound by Joseph Fosco, dramaturgy by Rachel Walshe, and fight choreography by Joe Dempsey. The production stage manager was Kathleen Petroziello. The cast was as follows:

WALTER KREUTZER Matt DeCaro
D'AVORE PEOPLES Aaron Todd Douglas
SAMIRA KREUTZER Liza Fernandez
ROGER STANHOPE Tim Curtis
DR. DOLL Scott Aiello

PERFECT MENDACITY opened at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida on May 15, 2009. The performance was directed by Michael Donald Edwards, with sets by Jeffrey W. Dean, costumes by June Elisabeth Taylor, lighting by Aaron Muhl, and sound by Kevin Kennedy. The production stage manager was Marian Wallace. The cast was as follows:

WALTER KREUTZER David Breitbarth
D'AVORE PEOPLES DeMario McGrew
SAMIRA KREUTZER Diana Simonzadeh
ROGER STANHOPE Douglas Jones
DR. DOLL Jason Peck

CHARACTERS

WALTER KREUTZER – 50s, white American

D'AVORE PEOPLES – 40s, black American

SAMIRA KREUTZER – 30s or 40s, Moroccan

ROGER STANHOPE – 50s, white South African

DR. DOLL

SETTING

D'Avore Peoples' office

A suburban condo

A laboratory office

TIME

The Present

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The slash (/) indicates the point at which an overlap begins. That is, the actor with the next line will begin speaking at this point.

To Karen

Scene One

(WALTER KREUTZER and D'AVORE PEOPLES. *Peoples'* office.)

PEOPLES. Countermeasures.

WALTER. Right.

PEOPLES. That's what we call them. You been on the internet, right?

WALTER. Yes.

PEOPLES. Of course. But you come to me because you wanta cut through all the...

WALTER. Mmhm.

PEOPLES. All the *debris*. Of information.

WALTER. There's a lot of...contradictory...

PEOPLES. Information. Rigged for maximum, you know, sensationalism.

WALTER. It seems so.

PEOPLES. Everyone wants to think they know something.

WALTER. Well, your website said you had some experience in this area.

PEOPLES. Oh, and I do. I don't lie.

WALTER. Hm.

PEOPLES. And I am experienced enough to tell you that it's *very* difficult to beat a good polygraph examiner. Notice I said "examiner."

WALTER. Right.

PEOPLES. People think a polygraph is a machine that tells you if you're lying. Like it just says "true" or "false" and that's it. But that is not what it is.

WALTER. Right.

PEOPLES. You know this.

WALTER. Sure.

PEOPLES. The polygraph is a tool. Used by an examiner. Who studies the information before him and reaches a conclusion, which constitutes his personal opinion. If the examiner is good, there is no guaranteed method of deceiving him. And you should always assume that he will be good. Who is he?

WALTER. I don't know.

PEOPLES. I can provide you with a list of bad ones. Perhaps you could insist on one of them. Do you have a choice?

WALTER. No.

PEOPLES. Then you should start by complaining that you don't have a choice.

WALTER. I suppose I can bring it up. But you said no "guaranteed" way. But there are *ways*, right?

PEOPLES. What sort of trouble are you in?

WALTER. I told you on the phone... I'm embroiled in a divorce...situation.

PEOPLES. Divorce. Right.

WALTER. Right.

PEOPLES. And what about this divorce do you wish to lie about?

WALTER. Well. "Lie." I mean... It's a complicated financial issue.

PEOPLES. It is.

WALTER. I'd really rather not go into a lot of detail.

PEOPLES. I see.

WALTER. I'm obviously not totally comfortable with...with going into a lot of detail.

PEOPLES. Okay. Well...in any divorce case, your attorney would have the right to approve the examiner.

WALTER. I'd rather not pursue that, if I can avoid it. I'd rather appear...accommodating...if I can.

PEOPLES. Mhm.

WALTER. I don't want to appear to *hedge*.

PEOPLES. So, refusing the examination...that's out of the question.

WALTER. I'm afraid so.

PEOPLES. Even though it is your legal right to do so. In any and all cases.

WALTER. Yes.

PEOPLES. This must be a very ugly divorce.

WALTER. Yeah.

PEOPLES. For a man still wearing his ring.

WALTER. Yeah. So can you help me?

PEOPLES. I can tell you how to mess up the results. Mess 'em up bad, without tipping your hand. In most cases, "Inconclusive" is as good as NDI – No Deception Indicated. "Inconclusive" will sometimes do the job.

WALTER. I have to *pass*.

PEOPLES. Listen to me. You can set out to mess up the test, which is relatively easy. Or you can set out to *pass*, which is much, much harder. But these are two mutually exclusive processes. If you set out to pass and you fall short, you don't get "Inconclusive" for a consolation prize. You get DI – Deception Indicated. And that's the last thing you want. Am I right?

WALTER. It is my carefully considered belief that an inconclusive test will not end my problems. I have to *take* this test and I have to *pass* it.

PEOPLES. Let's go down the list, so that you can understand that we've thought of everything. Forget about drugs. Drugs leave a fingerprint, right on the graph, to anyone who can read it. Same goes for hypnosis. You've got to be alert and in control. Physical countermeasures: problematic. They look for muscle-flexing. Jaw movement. They got a pad that you sit on, it detects the constriction of your sphincter muscle. Now, when somebody goes and invents a device that detects the constriction of your sphincter muscle, this tells us two things: that physical countermeasures *work*, and that your examiner is salivating to catch you squeezing

up your buttohole. So it's a trade-off, see. And since the internet wasn't good enough for you, you must need the best. That's why you come to me, right? Hell, yes. This countermeasure has to be undetectable. We have to use psychology. I'm going to teach you my personal, exclusive method for how to work that machine with only the power of your imagination.

WALTER. Should I take notes?

PEOPLES. For the time being, we'll just have a conversation. Okay?

WALTER. Okay.

PEOPLES. But if you really want my help, it would behoove you to tell me what you did.

WALTER. I didn't do anything. I mean...I didn't...I'm not...

PEOPLES. / Drink some water.

WALTER. I...I didn't do anything *bad*. I'm not a bad person.

PEOPLES. I'm sure that's true. But let's start with what you did.

WALTER. I need to know that I can trust you.

PEOPLES. I don't know how I can help you with that. But I know you're not gonna get your money's worth unless you do.

WALTER. I'm just – I'm just – I'm just not prepared...to...

PEOPLES. You've seen my website: eight years in law enforcement, nine years as a polygraph consultant... I wouldn't last long if I was indiscreet, now would I? What would happen if I started turning in my clients?

WALTER. Sure. Sure. But, um, this information would be very valuable to certain people.

PEOPLES. Is that right?

WALTER. Yes.

PEOPLES. Well, now you're putting ideas in my head.

WALTER. I – I'm sorry? I –

PEOPLES. I'm just joking with you. Look, if you gonna pass this polygraph, you gonna have to trust someone.

WALTER. Aren't the rules of, of beating the polygraph, aren't they going to be the same, whatever the situation?

PEOPLES. How we gonna practice? If I don't know what to ask you?

WALTER. We're gonna practice?

PEOPLES. Sure, we're gonna practice. I've got a unit right here. State of the art. Almost.

WALTER. Okay. I don't want to offend you. But until we get to that point, can we just keep the discussion...in *generalities*?

PEOPLES. That's fine. No offense taken. Trust everyone, but cut the cards, right? Who said that?

WALTER. I don't know.

PEOPLES. I'll look it up later. Now, let me ask you: What is the one and only...reality...which has permeated human behavior since the beginning of humankind. So indelible in our psychology, that even a tiny child will teach himself to do it with no adult intervention whatsoever?

WALTER. Lying?

PEOPLES. (*his thunder stolen*) Well. Yes. You must be a very intelligent man.

WALTER. Well. It *was* the subject at hand.

PEOPLES. Yes. *Lying*. The ability to keep our own secrets. And there are some who would seek to take this human gift from us.

WALTER. Mr. Peoples:

PEOPLES. Now:

WALTER. Mr. Peoples: With all / due respect...

PEOPLES. You're cramping my style. This is part of the training.

WALTER. Really.

PEOPLES. Yes. Because if you want to beat the polygraph, you gotta go in there with a fundamental belief in your right to lie.

WALTER. I see.

PEOPLES. The polygraph is a machine that measures stress. And the more that you are persuaded by its infallibility, the greater will be your stress at lying to it.

WALTER. I read that.

PEOPLES. It's an instrument of propaganda. If you believe the propaganda, you will fail.

WALTER. Hm.

PEOPLES. The examiner will dazzle you with science. He'll claim a ninety-eight percent success rate. Make it seem hopeless. Undermine your confidence.

WALTER. Yes.

PEOPLES. Let's say your company has experienced a theft, and one hundred employees are given a polygraph. Okay?

WALTER. Yeah.

PEOPLES. Now let's say the examiner picks the wrong fellow. That fellow is fired, his life is ruined, and the thief goes free. Now, you would call that a complete catastrophe, would you not?

WALTER. Yes.

PEOPLES. Well, the examiner will *not* call it a complete catastrophe; he will call it a ninety-eight percent success. 'Cause he tested a hundred people, and was only wrong *twice*. You see?

WALTER. Wow.

PEOPLES. Wow indeed, Dr. Krootzer.

WALTER. What?

PEOPLES. Mr. Jamison. I forgot to call you Mr. Jamison.

WALTER. How did you know my name?

PEOPLES. I beg your pardon. Never mind.

WALTER. How do you know my name?

PEOPLES. Well. I'm the black private dick that's a sex machine for all the chicks.

WALTER. What?

PEOPLES. I'm Shaft, baby.

Okay. Never mind. But, you would think, my line of business, a lot of people would want to pay cash, right? But you'd be wrong. You're the first ever. So, just for fun, you understand, just to entertain myself, I thought I'd run your cell phone number, and you know what I found, right? It's a pre-pay. Man with enough money he's worried his wife's gonna get it, you didn't sound to me like a pre-pay kind of guy. So, I'm like dang, his wife must have *some lawyers*, he goes out and gets a pre-pay phone. So, just because it's a challenge for me now, you understand, just for fun I had my niece run out and mark down your plate numbers so I could run your plates while you was waiting.

WALTER. Is that why I had to wait so long?

PEOPLES. I'm sorry about that. Sometimes I can't help myself. But you must have more confidence in me now, don't you think, see how *competent* I am.

WALTER. You said "Doctor." It doesn't say "Doctor" on my driver's license.

PEOPLES. Dang. You are very perceptive. Well, I run your name through Google, turns out you're a respected botanist or...botanical...*scientist* or something. And I run you through YouTube, turns out you been on Fox News a bunch of times, talking about terrorists and whatnot.

WALTER. Oh, my God.

PEOPLES. It's all right. We were gonna have to get there anyway. I'm just helping the relationship along.

WALTER. What happened to my fundamental right to keep my secrets?

PEOPLES. I don't pay attention to irony. I'm a Christian man. Now, shall I call you Jamison, or Krootzer?

WALTER. Kreutzer.

PEOPLES. Kroyster?

WALTER. Kroyt-zer.

PEOPLES. I'm gonna call you Walter. Now, Walter: What did you do?

WALTER. I work for a large, private contracting firm. Chenoweth. As you probably already know.

PEOPLES. I didn't get that far. I couldn't keep you waiting.

WALTER. Yes. Well, someone leaked confidential information to the media. Chenoweth wants to know who did it.

PEOPLES. And when you say "someone," you mean *you*.

WALTER. No.

PEOPLES. No? Then what are we talking about?

WALTER. They're going to ask me if I know who did it.

PEOPLES. So just tell 'em who did it. You can't lose your job for someone else.

WALTER. Yes, I can.

PEOPLES. How?

WALTER. Because I think it was my wife.

PEOPLES. Your wife works at Chewbaccawhatsit?

WALTER. No.

PEOPLES. Then how did your wife get confidential information?

WALTER. From me.

PEOPLES. And she ran off to the media with it?

WALTER. I think so.

PEOPLES. Did you ask her?

WALTER. No.

PEOPLES. Why not?

WALTER. I'm... I'm afraid.

PEOPLES. You're afraid of your wife?

WALTER. I'm afraid she'll say she did it. Then I'll know. And I'll fail the test.

PEOPLES. That ain't how it works. You're gonna fail the test anyhow, because you *think* you know.

WALTER. I know.

PEOPLES. So why don't you ask your wife? Maybe she'll say she didn't do it.

WALTER. I think she did it.

PEOPLES. Why don't you ask her?

WALTER. I'm... Maybe I'm just afraid.

PEOPLES. Afraid of your wife.

WALTER. Maybe.

PEOPLES. What kind of secrets are we talking about?

WALTER. I'd rather not say.

PEOPLES. You said it's already in the media.

WALTER. I'm not comfortable discussing it.

PEOPLES. You know I'm just gonna look it up.

WALTER. Fine.

PEOPLES. Something illegal?

WALTER. Not in *this* country. But unsavory.

PEOPLES. 'Cause we got whistleblower laws.

WALTER. How does *that* work?

PEOPLES. I have no idea. But if your company was doing something illegal, there must be protections.

WALTER. My work is Government Classified.

PEOPLES. *Huh*. Like Top Secret?

WALTER. Well, "Classified." But *like* that. Yes.

PEOPLES. Okay. That's a problem. They gonna arrest you for treason?

WALTER. No. I don't think so.

PEOPLES. You're not a traitor to your country, are you?

WALTER. Absolutely not.

PEOPLES. 'Cause I gotta draw the line somewhere.

WALTER. I'm not a traitor. But I signed an ironclad non-disclosure agreement. Whistleblower or no, I'll be in court for the rest of my life, and my career as a microbiologist...not *botanist*, by the way... It'll be over.

PEOPLES. And you're not even a whistleblower.

WALTER. I'm not?

PEOPLES. No. Your wife is.

WALTER. Right. So...

PEOPLES. So you don't even have that.

WALTER. Right.

PEOPLES. So this is bad for you.

WALTER. My point exactly. The best way, the *only* way, is simply: pass the test. And I'm clear.

PEOPLES. Or turn the woman in.

WALTER. What?

PEOPLES. Turn the woman in, and I bet they'll make a deal with you.

WALTER. *Maybe*. But they won't make a deal with *her*. They'll go after her.

PEOPLES. They *might* make a deal with her. To avoid publicity, / or...

WALTER. I don't think so. She's Moroccan.

PEOPLES. Uh huh. So?

WALTER. That's...she's...Arab.

PEOPLES. Oh. She's not, uh...

WALTER. "Political"?

PEOPLES. ...In a religious, sort of... / way?

WALTER. *No*. And *no*. She's a simple woman.

PEOPLES. And you sure you don't wanta just throw her to the wolves?

WALTER. No. What / kind of a...

PEOPLES. Easy now, Walter. / I just...

WALTER. I'm not here to... / throw my wife...

PEOPLES. Easy. I just have to assess all the particulars.

WALTER. I just want to pass the test. I just want to keep the life I have now. That's all.

PEOPLES. Okay, Walter. Drink some water. We're gonna get to work.

You know about method actors?

WALTER. Method actors?

PEOPLES. Yeah. Method actors. How they use psychology to play a part.

WALTER. I guess so. Yeah.

PEOPLES. What they do is, when they're supposed to feel something, a particular thing, they think of something in their own life makes 'em feel that way. Okay?

WALTER. Okay.

PEOPLES. So that it's real, okay? Not just faking it, right?

WALTER. Yeah.

PEOPLES. But when they *need* it, they gotta come up with it right away. They don't have time to sit there and *conjure* it all the time, you know?

WALTER. Yeah.

PEOPLES. That's what *you* gotta do. You gotta turn it on, turn it off, just like that. So what they do, the method actors, they attach an image to that feeling. A single, powerful image that represents that feeling. You following me?

WALTER. I guess so.

PEOPLES. It's not enough to see your father whuppin' you, even if he whupped you every day. It's too general. That feeling has to be, has to be, *distilled*. Into a single image, something that makes you feel that terror, that anxiety, every time, without fail. The ring on his finger. A spot of plaster on the tip of his shoe. A, uh...a vein in his eyeball. You gotta contemplate that beating all the time, every day, and as soon as you feel that anxiety, your mind has to go straight to that ring, that shoe, whatever, right away, every time. Until you have *attached* that image to that anxiety. So that when you produce that image, you will instantly produce that feeling. Do you see?

WALTER. Like Pavlov's dog.

PEOPLES. Okay. Now *what* is that?

WALTER. The dog got fed whenever it heard a bell. So, eventually...

PEOPLES. Right, right. / The dog...

WALTER. The dog would salivate, / whenever...

PEOPLES. Yeah, would salivate whenever it heard the bell. I heard about that. *What's that dog's name?*

WALTER. Uh. *Pavlov's dog.*

PEOPLES. The *dog's* got a name, don't he?

WALTER. I don't know the dog's name.

PEOPLES. I'll look it up. But that's right. It's just like the dog. You gotta salivate when you hear the bell. That's what the method actors do. You understand? This technique, *my* technique, the one I'm gonna teach you, it's all in the mind. It's pure. It's undetectable.

WALTER. And it works?

PEOPLES. Every person I have trained in this technique, who has absorbed it with the proper seriousness, has passed his or her polygraph examination. I guarantee that.

WALTER. Do you have testimonials?

PEOPLES. Testimonials? Hell yes, I got a million testimonials.

WALTER. People I can contact?

PEOPLES. People you – Now, how I'm gonna do that? You think these people want to be contacted?

WALTER. Well, then – Well, I'm kind of taking your word for it, then.

PEOPLES. I already told you, I don't lie. And if I *did* lie, I would have you give me a polygraph which I would pass, thereby proving to you that I don't lie. Now, you can't argue with that.

WALTER. Isn't there anyone I can talk to who has used this technique successfully, in the real world?

PEOPLES. You're getting off track, Walter, and you're missing the point. Which is that I know of which I speak. And you are going to pass this test with flying colors and you are going to say, "I did this with the help of my new friend, Mr. D'avore Peoples, and his magnificent method of the power of the mind over technology."

WALTER. It just sounds, kind of...

(PEOPLES *sighs.*)

...sketchy.

PEOPLES. Walter, let me ask you something, alright?

Do you have a *choice*?

Now, get out that pen. The time has come for you to take some notes.

(*blackout*)

End of Scene

Scene Two

(An upper-middle class condo; the home of WALTER and SAMIRA KREUTZER.)

(SAMIRA sits, holding a packet of papers. She is reading from one of the pages, though this may not be clear to us for a moment.)

SAMIRA. “Have you ever lied to get yourself out of trouble?”
“Have you ever stolen anything from work?” “Have you ever betrayed a friend?” “Have you ever lied to your supervisor?” “Have you ever cheated on your taxes?” “Do you dislike black people?” “Do you sometimes despair...?”

WALTER. *(offstage)* “Disparage.”

SAMIRA. “...disparage people of other ethnic groups?”
“Have you ever claimed credit for something when it was not deserved?”

WALTER. *(offstage)* Are you going to read them all?

SAMIRA. These are very undignified.

(WALTER enters from the bathroom, drying his face with a towel.)

WALTER. Yes.

SAMIRA. Why would they ask you questions like these?

WALTER. To see what I do when I lie.

SAMIRA. “Have you ever betrayed someone who trusted you?”

WALTER. Samira. Please.

SAMIRA. It’s embarrassing.

WALTER. Yes.

SAMIRA. You should refuse to answer.

WALTER. But I can’t do that. Can I.

SAMIRA. I don’t know.

WALTER. No. I can’t.

SAMIRA. Why not?

WALTER. You know why not. They'll fire me. They could even prosecute me.

SAMIRA. But you didn't do anything.

WALTER. No.

SAMIRA. So they can't persecute you.

WALTER. *Prosecute* me.

SAMIRA. Prosecute you.

WALTER. But they can fire me. *And* persecute me.

SAMIRA. So what if they do. They're evil.

WALTER. They're not evil. I don't know why you say that.
But what if they are? How am I supposed to make a living?

SAMIRA. You can teach.

WALTER. Who's going to hire me? If I've been fired for – as a suspect in some, in some breach of National Security.

SAMIRA. You exaggerate.

WALTER. I don't exaggerate, Samira. I don't *exaggerate*.

SAMIRA. I would like to move anyway.

WALTER. To where? "France"?

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. Sip wine and eat croissants all day?

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. We've discussed that.

SAMIRA. You don't like French people.

WALTER. No.

SAMIRA. Because they didn't want to go to war.

WALTER. That was just the...

SAMIRA. The what.

WALTER. The final straw.

SAMIRA. Because they weren't convinced by the evidence?

WALTER. I just don't want to go to France.

SAMIRA. ...Because the evidence was *wrong*.

WALTER. You don't understand the subtleties. And I've got news for you: They have evil corporations in France, too.

SAMIRA. It is not news to me. I am quite aware of it. I know more about the French than you. I just want to live there.

WALTER. I have a job here.

(re: the papers)

Can I have that? I need to study those.

SAMIRA. They're going to ask you these?

WALTER. No. They're just examples. I have to learn to spot the control qu— the, the “comparison” questions without, you know, without hesitating.

SAMIRA. Why do they make you admit these things?

WALTER. I'm not supposed to admit them. I'm supposed to *deny* them.

SAMIRA. Why do they want you to deny them? They want to catch you?

WALTER. No. I mean, yes, they do, but that isn't it. I have to deny these things so they can, they can, measure my response when I lie.

SAMIRA. So you'll *deny* that you dislike black people?

WALTER. For example.

SAMIRA. ...Which will be a lie?

WALTER. Are you...?

SAMIRA. What.

WALTER. Are you *picking* at me?

(She shrugs.)

What does that mean?

SAMIRA. I want to understand.

WALTER. They're not going to ask that.

SAMIRA. It's on your list.

WALTER. They'll go over the questions ahead of time. I can ask them to change the question.

SAMIRA. Will you ask them to change the question?

WALTER. What are you doing?

SAMIRA. Do you dislike Jewish people?

WALTER. What?

SAMIRA. They could ask you that, too.

WALTER. Possibly. Why are you acting like this?

SAMIRA. I'm trying to understand.

WALTER. They're not going to ask those things.

SAMIRA. It's on your list. I'm helping.

WALTER. You're not helping. You're trying to make me...

SAMIRA. What.

WALTER. I don't know. Feel foolish about something. I mean, are you *calling* me something?

SAMIRA. What would I be calling you?

WALTER. Okay. That's enough. We have Roger coming over.

SAMIRA. "We" do?

WALTER. Yes, "we" do. The two of us, who live here. Is this inconvenient for you?

SAMIRA. I'm tired. I didn't expect visitors.

WALTER. Really? So this *is* inconvenient for you. This situation, this *crisis*, that someone has created for me.

SAMIRA. You think *I* did this.

(*a beat*)

WALTER. (*cautiously*) Well?

SAMIRA. "Well" did I do it?

WALTER. I brought the memo home.

SAMIRA. Why?

WALTER. "Why?" Bec— What difference does it make?

SAMIRA. Why did you bring it home.

WALTER. To — It — It seemed valuable.

SAMIRA. For, what do you call it, "blackmail."

WALTER. No, that's not what I call it. I call it *leverage*, and it wasn't *leverage*, it was — I wanted to contemplate the *meaning* of it.

SAMIRA. For your conscience?

WALTER. No. Not for my *conscience*. To consider my *position*, in terms of legal...culpability, having seen the memo and not, you know, *acted*, and so forth.

SAMIRA. Why not for your conscience?

WALTER. Because it didn't *trouble* my conscience. I'm not a fool.

SAMIRA. You think I'm trying to trap you?

WALTER. Trap me how?

SAMIRA. If you say that it troubled your conscience and you didn't act on it, you think I'll say you're a coward. You would rather I think that you have no conscience at all, than think that you're scared. You would rather I think you approved of this memo.

WALTER. I didn't approve of it. I didn't *disapprove* of it. It was just a *thing*. An artifact of commerce. And why would I think that my wife wants to *trap* me into *confessing* to a *conscience*?

SAMIRA. To having a conscience and not *act*. Not *acting*. You think it's better to not have a conscience at all.

WALTER. No, I don't think that. I think *you* think that.

SAMIRA. And so this is why you think I'm trying to trap you.

WALTER. I'm – what?

SAMIRA. *I* can follow it. You can't follow it?

WALTER. No. I need to study these questions. / This is...

SAMIRA. And I don't think this, anyway. Is my point. It's better to *have* a conscience.

WALTER. And I do. I actually have one.

SAMIRA. You mean, you have a conscience, but you didn't *act*?

(She's trapped him.)

WALTER. What pleasure are you getting from this?

SAMIRA. Are you angry with me?

WALTER. I brought the memo *home*...

SAMIRA. I remember.

WALTER. I *told* you about it. You wanted to *see* it.

SAMIRA. So?

WALTER. So, a week later it's on the web.

SAMIRA. So?

WALTER. Is that all you have to say?

SAMIRA. Did you do it?

WALTER. Did I do what?

SAMIRA. Give it to the internet.

WALTER. Of course not. You know I didn't.

SAMIRA. Then someone else did.

WALTER. Yes. Someone else *did*.

SAMIRA. Others had the memo. The one on the internet may not be yours.

WALTER. Stop acting like you don't get it. It doesn't matter if it's mine. I wasn't supposed to bring it *home*.

SAMIRA. People make mistakes, dear, don't they? The important thing is that you did not give it to the internet. And you don't know who did.

WALTER. I don't?

SAMIRA. That's the important thing, yes?

WALTER. I don't know who did it, Samira?

SAMIRA. Good. And it's best that way.

(pause)

WALTER. Right. I have to work on this.

SAMIRA. Can I help?

WALTER. I don't think so.

SAMIRA. Why? What do you have to do?

WALTER. Okay. Um... Okay. I have to study these questions. These control questions. So th— “comparison” questions, so that I can, you know, *spot* them. Instantly. And push my, what he calls, my *red* button.

SAMIRA. What's your red button?

WALTER. My mental image. My red image. It's supposed to spike my reactions, draw a picture of a lie. Of *me*, lying. Then, when they ask a *relevant* question, I push my blue button, go to my “cool” image, suppress my natural reaction, see?

SAMIRA. I guess.

WALTER. So it won't match with the lie. It won't look like the lie, see?

SAMIRA. Oh.

WALTER. That's supposed to be the idea, anyway.

SAMIRA. Red questions and blue questions.

WALTER. And white. White ones are irrelevant: "Is your name Walter Kreutzer?" "Did you ever live in Africa?" That kind of thing. I push my white button. Blank page. Nothing. I see nothing.

SAMIRA. "Did you ever live in Africa?"

WALTER. Or whatever.

SAMIRA. That's not irrelevant, though.

WALTER. Yes. It's irrelevant. "Did you ever – " "Do you live at one-six-nine-three-nine Tidepool Court?" "Are your eyes blue?"

SAMIRA. These things seem relevant to me.

WALTER. Well, they're not. How could they be?

SAMIRA. A blue-eyed man has different lies than a brown-eyed man. Or a man who lives on Tidepool Court, or on Martin Luther King Drive...

WALTER. No, no. For God's sake, Samira. You're *way* overthinking this.

SAMIRA. And *Africa*, especially. This is not irrelevant. They're going to ask you about Africa?

WALTER. No. They're *not*. These, these, these *questions*... I'm describing...they have no meaningful context. They are *trivia*. To cleanse the palate.

SAMIRA. If you say so, yes. But they seem meaningful to me. They might be trying to trick you with these.

WALTER. No. *No*. It's not a *trick*. These questions are not meant to be pondered for philosophical significance.

SAMIRA. If you say so.

WALTER. Yes. Of course. It's like, "Is the carpet gray?" Like that. Now, please don't make something / out of the...

SAMIRA. No. I understand.

WALTER. ...Out of the / carpet...

SAMIRA. No, no.

WALTER. ...Being gray.

SAMIRA. Yes. I see. They're not *intended* to have meaning.

WALTER. The white questions are meaningless.

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. Yes.

SAMIRA. Except for Africa.

WALTER. What the *fuck*, Samira.

SAMIRA. Don't swear at me. If they / ask you about Africa...

WALTER. Even fucking Africa. What are you trying to say...?
/ What...?

SAMIRA. If they ask you about Africa...

WALTER. They're not going to ask me about fucking – It
was / an *example*.

SAMIRA. Don't swear at me.

WALTER. ...From my own *head*. In no way / relevant to...

SAMIRA. Why would you give that example?

WALTER. Because we lived in Africa. Why wouldn't I?

SAMIRA. You could talk too much about it.

WALTER. I'm not, I'm not – I won't be *extemporizing*, during
the examination. I won't be free-associating. Okay?
(*wary*)

What did you think I was going to say about Africa?

SAMIRA. Everything means something.

WALTER. You've made this harder for me now, do you know
that?

SAMIRA. No, please. Don't say that. I'm sorry. I want to help
you, sweetheart. I just don't see why you can't tell the
truth.

WALTER. Yes, you do. You *do* see.

SAMIRA. If you didn't want to send it, why did you bring it
home? Why did you show it to me?

WALTER. I told you.

SAMIRA. I think you wanted to send it.

WALTER. Well, you are absolutely wrong.

SAMIRA. I'm giving you the doubt, anyway, the benefits of the doubt.

WALTER. Why would you *prefer* to think I would be disloyal to the – to those who have *provided* for us? To those who – ?

SAMIRA. I don't know. I just do.

WALTER. To – ? I don't know what's gotten into you, but I've never been so confused about you in my life.

SAMIRA. Do you want me to help you with your homework?

WALTER. We're *ruined*!

SAMIRA. No. Because we know how to lie. I'll help you lie, and you'll win the test, and we'll keep the secret. If that's what you want. Is that what you want?

WALTER. Do I have a choice?

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. No, I *don't* have a choice, actually. So yes, that's what I want.

SAMIRA. Really?

WALTER. Goddammit. You're killing me.

SAMIRA. No. Stop saying those things. I'm going to help you. What's your blue picture?

WALTER. Please. I...

SAMIRA. The cool blue picture. The blue "button." What is it?

WALTER. When we went back to Rabat. On our honeymoon. We went to the market, and it was so hot. Then we met your sister at the hotel bar, and I had a Guinness. It was warm, but I took a big swallow, and I said "Man, that hits the spot." "That's a good Guinness." Remember that?

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. So, that's, that's it.

SAMIRA. The Guinness.

WALTER. Yes.

SAMIRA. That works for you?

WALTER. Well. Well, it was a good, it was a good moment.

SAMIRA. The *beer* you drank on our honeymoon.

WALTER. What's wrong with it?

SAMIRA. It's a drink that you had. You think it's going to, to *transform* you, in your mind?

WALTER. This is not, this kind of reflection, this is not something I claim to be good at.

SAMIRA. That's why I'm asking to help you. But what about me?

WALTER. What do you mean?

SAMIRA. You chose our honeymoon. But a drink? Not me? Don't *I* calm you?

WALTER. Yes, but. Yes, but, I need a specific *moment*. Something I can *narrow* my...

SAMIRA. (*thinking*) Hm.

WALTER. *Narrow* my...

SAMIRA. Yes.

WALTER. *Focus*.

SAMIRA. You went onto the, the place, the *veranda*. Later, when we went up to the room. It was late in the day, but it was still hot. I told you come in to the air conditioning, but you said you were just going to look out at the city for a bit. I came out with a bottle of water, very cold from the ice bucket. I put my cool hand on your shoulder, and you said "That feels good." So I put – I *pressed* the bottle to my lips, for a long...moment. Then I put my lips to the back of your neck. Held your chin in my hand and pressed your neck against my cool lips. And you said, "Ah, that's good."

WALTER. Right.

SAMIRA. Do you remember?

WALTER. Yeah. That could work.

SAMIRA. And your blue button will be here...on the back of your neck...where you can reach up and touch it...

WALTER. I won't be able to reach up...

SAMIRA. With your mind, then. Yes?

WALTER. Huh. Yes. Wow. You're good at this.

SAMIRA. Well. A compliment.

WALTER. Yeah. What do you mean?

SAMIRA. I can't remember the last compliment.

WALTER. I compliment you all the time.

SAMIRA. When was the last compliment?

WALTER. The – I said – I don't remember the *last* one, but
I said, just the other day I said "You're too smart to be
religious."

SAMIRA. Oh. That was a compliment?

WALTER. Of course. "You're too *smart*." "*Smart*." That's a
compliment.

SAMIRA. Oh.

WALTER. To grow up as you did. In an Islamic culture. To
turn your back on it. You – that's *heroic*. I mean, that's
quite a *compliment*, right? To you.

SAMIRA. I said it could be good for children, maybe, to be
raised in a spiritual household. If it teaches peace.

WALTER. And I said you're too smart for that.

SAMIRA. And "peace is bad."

WALTER. No. "Peace is overrated." Is what I said.

SAMIRA. It doesn't sound like a compliment.

WALTER. "Smart" is a compliment. What can I say? Now,
please. I have to work on this. Don't you understand?
This is the most important...*task* of my life.

SAMIRA. Yes. I understand. What is your red picture?

WALTER. It's supposed to be disturbing. Alarming. *Violent*,
maybe. It has to increase my stress. My cardiovascular.
Perspiration. Respiration.

SAMIRA. And you can't think of anything?

WALTER. No. I'm not good at this. It requires...

SAMIRA. Imagination?

WALTER. I don't have an "imagination," Samira?

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