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Acting Edition

The Betrothed

by Dipika Guha

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THE BETROTHED premiered at Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre in Wellfleet, MA on August 4, 2011. The Artistic Director was Jeff Zinn. It was directed by Jesse Jou, with set design by Ted Vitale, costume design by Moria Sine Clinton, lighting design by Bridget Doyle, and sound design & original music by Nathan A. Roberts. The Stage Manager was Alaina Sciascia. The play was subsequently produced at Chester Theatre in Chester, MA on August 15, 2012. The cast was as follows:

SIMON..... Andy Place
CECILIA / RASHEEDA..... Caitlin Clouthier
THE PRIEST / GONAN John Shuman
SOLOMON / CECIL (SIMON’S SON) Ron Daniels

This play was written and developed at the Yale School of Drama and owes its life to Paula Vogel and the actors who worked on it; Max Gordon Moore, Alex Henrikson, Babak Tafti and Ben Horner.

CHARACTERS

SIMON – mid-30s, an American man, a virgin, existentially anxious, his favourite movie is *When Harry Met Sally*.

ANNA CECILIA RASHEEDA SILOSA HANGI MARIA – as old as possible for a woman on stage, arises from a dark mythical Eastern European country, has never seen a movie but has lived the life of several.

***RASHEEDA ANNA CECILIA SILOSA HANGI MARIA** – mid-30s although insists she is in her early 20s, daughter to Anna Cecilia stunning, a model, does not like movies.

SOLOMON – late-50s, handsome, dirt underneath his fingernails, speaks with an accent of a man from a mythical Eastern European country who has spent his life watching American movies like *Die Hard* and *The Godfather*.

***CECIL** – early teens, Simon's son wants to be in the movies someday, a silent part.

GONAN – late-50s, Solomon's best friend and worst enemy, a fan of silent comedies.

***THE PRIEST** – late-40s, the local priest, has recently got into watching American teen shows like *90210* and *The Hills*.

*Characters with an asterisk are played by the primary cast: Anna, Solomon and Gonan as a breakdown for doubling.

SETTING

Place

Where the sun and moon are always a perfect circle. Where the night is perfectly black.

Where the mornings are bright hot.

(And the afternoons are even hotter...sleep is necessary or else you might be prone to error when delivering a calf.)

Where, despite the heat, the soil smells freshly rained on.

Where the earth is perfectly round. And you can feel its roundness.

Where one's main occupation is thinking the thought that occurs in the afternoon, just before that sleep.

Locations

An aeroplane

A graveyard

The afterlife

A home

TIME

Present Day

Action of Time

One week

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Extended ellipses look like this '...'

These are not pauses. They indicate that the characters are actively responding, but in silence.

Anna Cecilia Rasheeda's hair is described as black, and curly. The production may change this to whatever color the actor's hair happens to be.

These characters all possess the simplicity and purity of clowns. Every moment is deeply felt and true.

When lying, they believe wholeheartedly in the lie.

They live happily in the state of paradox and contradiction.

Music

Licensees are encouraged to create their own.

The Journey

Sunday Morning

*(A lone aeroplane seat floats in the darkness. **SIMON** sits. He plugs his earphones in. Loud music.* He quickly turns the volume down and shifts uncomfortably in his seat. He slips an airline eyemask over his eyes and clutches a blanket that he discovers only goes up to his knees. He tries to cover himself up, but, in the effort, he only exposes another part of his body. He rips the eyemask off. He talks to the woman in his seat next to him. She's invisible to us.)*

SIMON. Back to the old cow country, back to the old homeland.

*(She presumably responds with a polite smile; **SIMON** takes this as a cue to continue.)*

Don't you just hate it when people you don't know talk to you on the plane? Yakking about their lives, taking up your personal space? I can't stand it. I mean, I love to travel. I just hate leaving home because I really love America. But these days what with these airfares... fly anywhere you want for, like a dollar, right? And everybody has a dollar! So you can just go... *(He gets visibly nervous.)* find out where you came from...who it is you've been waiting your whole life to...

* A license to produce *The Betrothed* does not include a performance license for any third-party or copyrighted recordings. Licensees should create their own.

So, hey, listen to me yakking on! You gonna be gone long? You seeing the river and the, the hills and the geysers? Oh, you totally should. I bought this great guidebook. It's got everything we need you know, 'cause us Americans...boy they see us coming! We gotta stick together in these places. So, if you need anything, feel free to...here...take my card (*He digs out a card from his jacket.*). It's my first time. Flying, I mean, flying, it's my first... I've been to first base, I mean, domestic, I mean domestic bases uh airport bases, uhm but this is my first time over this body of of...water.

(He's dug his own grave, he presses on.)

I've been watching *Sex and the City*. Those girls! They just fly all over the place. I can see why you women like it. It's, like really, really, the women are really, I mean, women are really...anyway...my Mom always said women would take over the world and look at you now, I mean, not *you*, I mean not you personally, but you know I can't help feeling that the guys on these shows are uh... (have you seen them?) they're really...because how many men are...like *that*... My Mom always...you know she really worries...about me finding...someone so I'm... I'm...

Awwwww. Are you asleep? You look so sweet.

(She's most definitely faking sleep.)

That's okay, you sleep. I'll be fine, because it's my first time with, but everyone has a first time, right?

(He inhales deeply. Then quietly, to himself.)

Back to the old cow country Simon...back to the old homeland.

(Slow half-light. Roar of an aeroplane that sounds like it's both taking off and landing at

*the same time. The shadow of a plane passes behind **SIMON** and then seeps into his body.)*

(He watches the shadow leak into his skin and then releases it through the open palm of his hand.)

*(Lights fade and rise with uplifting Eastern European wedding music.)**

* A license to produce *The Betrothed* does not include a performance license for any third-party or copyrighted music. Licensees should create an original composition or use music in the public domain. For further information, please see the Music and Third-Party Materials Use Note on page iii.

The Test

Sunday Afternoon

(SIMON stands outside a door. Visible inside is a rickety table, three chairs, a fold-up bed and a tinny transistor radio [where the music now leaks out from]. The table has two plates, three mugs and a pack of cards. A second door leads outside. An empty mouse cage sits by the door.)*

(A window or a window frame with shutters hangs upstage for easy passage of day and night.)

(A pile of ragged men's shoes lies in one corner of the room. There is hay on the floor.)

(Inside, a hunched-over CECILIA in black sways gently to herself. The hunched figure rises.)

(She hobbles over to the doorway.)

(She holds her age in every limb, in every pore of her body, every crease in her face, every strand of her hair. It is as though time folded in on itself.)

(She flings open the door. They talk over the music.)

SIMON. I've come for my wife!

CECILIA. She's dead.

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(The music grinds to a halt.)

SIMON. ...

CECILIA. ...

SIMON. What? No? Is she inside?

CECILIA. No.

Because she's dead.

SIMON. Where is everyone?

CECILIA. They came for the funeral.

Then the sun came out, so they went for a picnic. They left their shoes.

(She points to a pile of men's shoes heaped in a corner of the room.)

SIMON. But... I flew all this way, I flew! I hate flying. They take your shoes away; they throw away your toothpaste. Strangers talk to you the whole time, it's terrible. All for what? I was going to be married TODAY. Today! Why did this happen to me?

CECILIA. I don't know. I don't know you.

SIMON. My father.

CECILIA. And her father.

SIMON. Made a pact. They betrothed their most beloved to their most beloved.

CECILIA. Your father.

SIMON. And her father.

CECILIA. Lost a bet. You won Gonan's ugliest daughter.

Lucky for you Gonan had no ugly daughters.

So, you got the smallest.

She was perfect, except for one extra finger on her left foot.

SIMON. Toe?

CECILIA. Finger.

But she's gone now.

SIMON. Dead?

CECILIA. Dead.

She was like a daughter to me.

SIMON. Rasheeda, my wife!

CECILIA. Rasheeda?

SIMON. My wife!

CECILIA. ...

There appears to be a mix up.

SIMON. She's not dead?

CECILIA. Oh no Rasheeda's not dead.

SIMON. What? So where is she?

CECILIA. I thought you meant the one who did die...

Ramida. Ramida died.

From warts.

Rasheeda's not dead.

She's out back with the cows.

SIMON. Is this the ugly one?

CECILIA. This *is* the ugly one. Here I was thinking "I wonder why Gonan offloaded the nice looking one with the extra finger?" Then I thought, the extra finger is useful for scrubbing those bits behind the toilet, so you see I was confused, but no reason, because the ugly one's right here, in the back. Waiting for you...

SIMON. Scrubbing the cows...

CECILIA. Or scrubbing herself. I can't tell, their behinds are so alike. I'll go fetch her.

SIMON. No, don't.

CECILIA. Then leave.

SIMON. If I leave, she'll think I'm a coward.

CECILIA. At least you won't be a married coward.

SIMON. She's waiting?

CECILIA. Waiting, washing, waiting...

SIMON. All those years.

CECILIA. Betrothed their most beloved to their most beloved.

SIMON. Waiting for me.

CECILIA. That's all she does. Wait.

Nowhere to go. Nothing to be.

Even when she wants to go far, far away.

To follow her dream.

Nowhere to go Nowhere to be.

Except, maybe, next to her beloved.

SIMON. Me?

But I didn't know what it would be like!

CECILIA. Like?

SIMON. Like!

CECILIA. You're a man, what's not to like?

SIMON. She'll understand if I go...

CECILIA. Go! Because once you give your word to a woman, living or dead, there's no turning back.

Especially if you were

CECILIA.

Betrothed.

SIMON.

Betrothed.

CECILIA. It's sacred.

Deadly.

Run! Save yourself!

(SIMON turns to run out. He stops.)

SIMON. My father and her father played cards back in the days when men were men. All I want is to lie under the covers and breathe. Breathe my father's breaths. To know where I belong. So, if this, if this is what it means to know my place, I'll, I'll stay.

(CECILIA stares at him and then turns quickly.)

(She exits out of the back door. SIMON waits. He sees the deck of cards on the table and pulls one from the pack. It is the Joker. He returns it hastily.)

(A small cough at the door. He turns.)

(CECILIA walks in again wearing a wedding dress.)

CECILIA. I am Rasheeda...your wife. This is *my* house.

Seduction of the Tongue

Sunday Evening

(**SIMON** and **CECILIA** sit at the table together.
SIMON looks dumbstruck. **CECILIA** pours coffee.)

CECILIA. Did you look outside Simon? How green the garden looks against the mountain gone dry from the happiness of summer. In winter he weeps, and the garden does not look as green. And the tree outside? She waits for me every day when I come home from my afternoon swim. I smell of the lake, the tree bends down to smell the nape of my neck. I dry in the heat of the sun.

SIMON. That's great.

CECILIA. Your English is weak.

Where did you learn it?

SIMON. Pittsburgh.

CECILIA. Don't worry, we'll return your language to you, Simon son of Simon.

You're as skinny as a rake. Just like your father.

SIMON. My father?

CECILIA. Your father was a rake who had all the girls; pretty girls, ugly girls, toothy girls, hairy girls, girls who existed, girls who didn't.

SIMON. What *is* this?

CECILIA. Your father once stole a girl from his brother's dreams. In that dream, his brother was sitting in a library reading a book, when in walked the most stop-your-heart beautiful woman. Now this library had tall ceilings and windows and enough books to build a house with.

Perfect for fucking.

So, this woman comes in and without any courtship, they began to do their business. So, they meet like this, every night, and then one night, the woman stops coming. Just like that, no warning, no sign. Nothing.

So that morning, your uncle comes down for breakfast looking like he dropped his heart down a well.

And your father, he's there, drinking his coffee. He says, "What's the matter brother, you look terrible" and back comes the reply, "You know brother, I have this dream every night this beautiful woman comes to me. We make love until I wake. I wake with her sound inside my skin. Last night she didn't come." So, your father asks, "Does she have dark hair on her upper arms, big eyelashes and a squint?" And your uncle replies "Yes, she's beautiful."

And your father says, "She's with me now." So that's the kind of man he was.

Long arms to steal women. Long everything...

Or so we heard.

SIMON. Okay. This is just like that movie where the couple don't meet until right at the very end. Only, we're at the beginning (even if it looks like the end for you.)

I never met my wife, but I know she doesn't look like you.

You're not the one Rasheeda.

CECILIA. I am the one.

SIMON. How old are you?

CECILIA. Thirty-two.

I only look like this because of age. You look as old as you feel.

And I feel. Like this. Old.

You should have come yesterday, Simon son of Simon, I was really good looking then.

Then I aged. It was sudden. Suddenly.

The world.

It turned round.

I saw one half of it was green, the other brown.

Half of the world in darkness while the other half in light. Only half of us have food to eat, the other half have nothing.

And some people fly halfway around the world to get something.

They cannot see

That there is no prize to get.

Then I felt this sadness, deep inside my life, I tapped a dark well of grief.

I sat under the tree outside and cried these tears that wet the earth. And then when I came back into the house and looked in the mirror.

I saw my face had aged. My hair had whitened. I became as you see me now.

Forever changed.

And then I remembered you were coming, and I thought "Nevermind, these things happen."

SIMON. Okay. So, where I come from, you have to be able to, to look at your wife. To take her to office parties or, or, Halloween parties. You have to be able to take her out. Side.

Where I come from Rasheeda. What your wife looks like. It matters.

CECILIA. The arch of her back, the strength in the soles of her feet, the dance her heart makes.

It all matters...

I love myself Simon son of Simon. How many women love themselves?

SIMON. (*Trying again.*) Okay. So, *this* is what it's like. It's like online shopping. You order something because the description looks great and even though there's no picture you order it anyway, and then it comes through in the mail except...

CECILIA. (*Interrupting him.*) You are a very handsome man...

SIMON. Okay! So this is what I want! I want to meet a woman in a railway carriage. She's sitting alone. A book falls on her head. She looks up. She sees me, I smile. It's my book. I don't want it to be heavy. I want it to be serious, but not heavy like a dictionary. I don't want to kill her. Just slight concussion so I can hold her.

CECILIA. I'm so happy Simon son of Simon, can you tell?

SIMON. No.

CECILIA. What if I do this with my mouth?

SIMON. No...

CECILIA. This?

SIMON. No!

CECILIA. It'll get better. That's the way marriages work, they get better with time, when the passion fades...

SIMON. WHAT passion?!

CECILIA. How sweet it is not to have to work so hard for love. To do nothing but wait with patience. Every fibre of your body active, humming quietly...like your aeroplane.

SIMON. (*Realizing.*) There was no profile picture online. Rasheeda, why was there no profile picture online???

CECILIA. My father he had all these issues. Depression, fibromyalgia. All these invisible problems.

So, when he heard about the internet it scared him right down to his grave.

We were getting ready for the funeral when we heard you were coming.

Too late for a profile picture.

SIMON. Were you afraid?

That if I saw what you look like, I might not come?

CECILIA. You would have come.

Everyone comes for their betrothed.

SIMON. People marry for love.

CECILIA. Not when they are betrothed!

When betrothed people marry, they know more than other people. When they close their eyes together in the dark, they become more compassionate, the wealth comes together, it's good for the environment.

Look outside, you have been here now one hour according to the cock.

SIMON. Clock?

CECILIA. Cock. He'll crow again in a minute.

(A cock crows.)

You see animals?

Always licking each other?

What would they do if they had no one to lick?

SIMON. What would they do?

CECILIA. They'd lick themselves.

Is this the behavior for a human being? The cock lives here Simon.

With me!

Tomorrow we'll bring the rabbits and hens to bed with us, okay?

They like to play, it's fun! We can play house in the sheets, you can show me what it's like to be cold in Pittsburgh. You can hold me like it is in the wintertime.

SIMON. This has been very nice Rasheeda, but I have to go now

CECILIA. (*Interrupting him.*) Ahh...listen...can you hear them? All the women out there.

In the starless skies.

In the sealess shores. In the tallest buildings. They all harbor longing.

Unspeakable longing for their betrothed.

SIMON. I... I flew here on a plane.

A plane with hard edges and soft seats.

I saw the hard nose of the plane flying straight into a heart. A heart good and pure.

A lap soft and sweet.

I never talk like this, my tongue feels loose...my head feels soft... What is this?

(*Drowsy, SIMON lies down on the bed.*

CECILIA closes the window.)

CECILIA. Some men wait their whole life to find their place. And you have found it.

Here. With me. Take your shoes off Simon son of Simon. Give them to me.

You do not feel it yet.

But this is going *very* well

(SIMON curls up on the fold-up bed. CECILIA tosses his shoes onto the pile of men's shoes. She reaches inside her clothes. She pulls out a pair of rings. She puts one ring on his finger and one on her own. She puts on her wedding veil and slips outside into the moonlight.)

(Outside, CECILIA sings.)

**[CECILIA'S SONG: "CECILIA SINGS A SONG
IN PRAISE OF HER OWN BEAUTY"]**

STRIP THE MOUNTAIN BARE, UNDERNEATH
THE RIVER DIES.
STRIP THE OCEANS COLD, UNDERNEATH
THE EARTH CRIES.
FOLLOWING THE HIDDEN SIGNS
SO MANY TIMES,
LOVE'S PASSED ME BY.
NONE COULD SEE ME, UNDERNEATH.
STRIP THE CLOUDS OF RAIN, UNDERNEATH
THE PEOPLE SIGH.
STRIP THE HOUSES CLEAN, UNDERNEATH
THE HOME SURVIVES.
FOLLOWING THE SECRET SIGNS
SO MANY TIMES,
LOVE'S PASSED ME BY.
NONE COULD SEE ME, UNDERNEATH.
NOW I'VE SPOKEN TO THE MOUNTAIN
SUNG TO THE EARTH. ARGUED WITH THE TREES,
CONVINCED THEM OF MY WORTH
OF HOW I'M BEAUTIFUL. I'M FUCKING BEAUTIFUL.
I KNOW THIS NOW THE EARTH'S DONE ITS (DUTIFUL)
RETURN
SO MANY TIMES, THAT I'M MORE BEAUTIFUL
I'M IMMUTABLE. STRIPPED OF MY VANITY, I CAN TRULY
BE.

STRIP ME OF MY BONES, UNDERNEATH
MY SOUL SHINES.
STRIP MY HAIR OF CURLS, UNDERNEATH
MY BALDNESS THRIVES.
FOLLOWING LOVE'S LITTLE SIGNS
SO MANY TIMES,
I'VE WEPT AND CRIED
FOR SOMEONE TO SEE ME, UNDERNEATH
OF HOW I'M BEAUTIFUL. I'M FUCKING BEAUTIFUL.
I KNOW THIS NOW THE EARTH'S DONE ITS (DUTIFUL)
RETURN
SO MANY TIMES
THAT I'M MORE BEAUTIFUL
I'M IMMUTABLE.
STRIPPED OF MY VANITY I CAN TRULY *BE*.
I'M BEAUTIFUL.
SO FUCKING BEAUTIFUL. BRIGHTER THAN BRIGHT STARS
WHO DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE.
CLEARER THAN THE RING
SOME POOR GUY HAD TO SPRING.
IT'S TIME FOR THE RECKONING.
OF JUST HOW BEAUTIFUL, IN FACT, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN.

(She speaks.)

Sleep Simon sleep...because you won't get much more
of that this week!

*(She runs inside as fast as she can and leaps
into bed.)*