Anon(ymous)
An Adaptation of *The Odyssey*

BY NAOMI IIZUKA

The teen goddess Naja (Sonja Parks) gives Anon (Michael Escamilla) a toy of epic significance at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis.
There's No Place Like Home

An interview with the playwright

BY DOMINIC P. PAPATOLA

DOMINIC P. PAPATOLA:
This play, commissioned by Minneapolis's Children's Theatre Company, was one of your first scripts for young audiences. Does writing for young people change your approach to writing, or the aesthetic geometry of the piece?

NAOMI IIZUKA: It does and it doesn’t. It forces you to distill your storytelling in a very pure and dynamic way. In a way, it makes everything a little bolder. You really have to hit the ground running in terms of story. But I’m not sure that I would make the distinction that Anon(ymous) is a play for young people or a play for adults. I hope it resonates for both.

What drew you to revisiting The Odyssey?
I loved the story from very early childhood. I remember I had this picture book of The Odyssey. I have these memories of some of the episodes—the Sirens and the Cyclops, in particular. It’s a story that’s always captivated me. As I got older, I also became obsessed by the idea that this was a journey to get home and to everything that home means.

Some of the parallels to The Odyssey are clear, and others are less so. Can you talk about how you developed these characters?
I lived in Minneapolis in the mid-1990s, and I have very vivid memories of taking the bus down Franklin Avenue in the middle of winter, and seeing women in full Muslim dress. I remember being fascinated by that: What must it be like to come from a place like Sudan, for example, or Laos or Cambodia, and arrive in Minnesota? To leave your home and arrive in this snowy foreign land—what must that be like?
What did they leave behind, and what were their lives like in this new place? I wanted very much to see those characters on stage, to see their experiences represented.

How much classical literacy do you think is necessary to apprehend this play?
None. I think—and I hope—that the play stands on its own. If you know The Odyssey, then your experience of the play will be enriched. But if you only vaguely remember it from when you read it in high school, or if you’ve never read it, the play will speak to you on its own.

You chose not to give your Odysseus character a name—he’s called Anon in the script and assumes different names as the occasion demands.
Part of that was a desire to be true to the original. Odysseus is this chameleonlike character—he survives by his wits. But it also seemed like a very apt metaphor for what people have to do when they come to a new land. You change your name, or it’s changed for you. I think of all those people who came through Ellis Island and had their names shortened or mangled.
But in a larger sense, you’re faced with the choice of having to change the core of your identity when you adapt to a new place. When you do, there’s a kind of a dissonance between who you are inside and who you have to be in the world to survive. Having the protagonist embody that conflict in his name makes sense to me.

Which of the characters you’ve borrowed from Homer do you think make especially effective contemporary translations in Anon(ymous)?
Odysseus, most of all. I was always intrigued by his reunion with
Penelope, and by the fact that she didn’t recognize him. It was as if all
the experiences he had had on his travels had transformed him so much
that he was a different person. And his home, too, wasn’t this static, reli-
able given—it had shifted in his absence. That idea struck me as really
contemporary. I think immigrants are transformed in huge, overwhelm-
ing ways by their experiences. Their relationship to the idea of home
seems very much in line with that disorientation Odysseus experiences.

You’ve riffed on the classics before—your play Polavoid Stories
was based on Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Why do you think artists
turn to these timeless tales again and again?
They’re stories about coming of age, navigating the world, fighting
monsters, grappling with loss. They present us with these primordial
struggles and conflicts that we all must deal with, no matter where
we come from. I think because of that, these stories are somewhat
magical. They crack open some seed of human mystery. And they’re
just amazing stories. I discovered that all over again when I returned
to The Odyssey in writing this play.

It’s a very sensory play. There’s the interplay of the refugees’
voices at the beginning, the sound of trains roaring by, the
sights of beaches and bloody butcher shops and—in the CTC
production—even the smell of curry spices wafting over the
audience. Did you imagine it in all of those dimensions?
When I was creating the play, I very much wanted it to be a sensory
experience that would contain within it all the sights and sounds of
many different kinds of Americas—whether that’s a family-run Indian

restaurant or the desert landscape on the border of Mexico. I wanted the audience
to feel the quality of light. I wanted them to be able to taste coriander and clove.

I wanted the overall experience of this play to be more than just watching a
play. I wanted to create a sense of lots
of different worlds colliding. I believe that Peter [Brosius, the artistic
director of the Children’s Theatre Company] and the designers found
this very smart, visceral, inventive and deeply theatrical vocabulary to
translate my stage directions in a way that surpassed what was in my
mind when I wrote them. It was one of the most beautiful productions of
my work I’ve ever seen.

How much of the play was influenced by the times in which
you were writing it? There are echoes in the script of the 2004
tsunami, immigration-related violence, and very contemporary
references to refugees and civil wars.
It’s interesting that you mentioned the tsunami. I wrote the play before
that happened, but there are these parallels to present-day events. I
want very much for the play to speak to our times—and these are
times that have been particularly harsh and unforgiving to refugees
and recent immigrants. I hope the play begins to honor some of their
experiences and their stories.

Any other old myths, legends or fairy tales you’d like to bring to the
stage?
Right now I’m working on an adaptation of the Rumpelstiltskin story.
I just had a baby, and I suspect I’ll be revisiting stories of childhood
more often in the near future.

Dominic P. Papatola is the theatre critic for the
Pioneer Press in St. Paul, Minn., and chairman of the
American Theatre Critics Association.

ABOUT THE PLAY Anonymous received its world premiere at the Children’s Theatre Company (Peter C. Brosius, artistic director; Teresa Eyring, managing
director) in Minneapolis on April 4, 2006. The production was directed by Peter C. Brosius, scenic design was by Kate Edmunds, costume design by Christal
Weatherly, lighting design by Geoff Korf, music and sound design by Andre Pluess and Ben Sussmann, video design by Rebecca Fuller and fight choreography
by Edward Sharon. The dramaturg was Elissa Adams and the stage manager was Jenny R. Friend. The cast included Rosanne Ma as Nesamani; Michael Esca-
milla as Anon; Tarry Hempleman as Mr. Yuri Mackus, Strygal, Lone Barfly and Ensemble; Steve Hendrickson as Senator Lalus, Mr. Zyclo, Nice American Father
and Ensemble; Annie Enneking as Helen Lalus, Mr. Zyclo’s Pet Bird, Nice American Mother and Ensemble; Becka M. Ollmann as Calista, Sewing Lady #3, Nice
American Daughter and Ensemble; Sorja Parks as Naja and Ensemble; Emil Herrera as Proteus, Ali, Ignacio and Ensemble; Hadija Steen-Omari as Nasreen,
Sewing Lady #2, Belen and Ensemble; Marvette Knight as Ritu, Sewing Lady #1, Serza and Ensemble; and Gavin Lawrence as Pascal and Ensemble.

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Anon(ymous)
An adaptation of
The Odyssey

CHARACTERS
ANON (also called Koo Ri, Lan, Monkey, Nobody), a teenage refugee
NAJA, a girl who is also a goddess
MR. YURI MACKUS, manager of a sewing factory; STRYGAL, a truck
driver; LONE BARFLY
SENIOR LAIUS, a war hero; MR. ZYCO, a butcher; NICE
AMERICAN FATHER
HELEN LAIUS, the senator's beautiful wife; ZYCO'S PET BIRD;
NICE AMERICAN MOTHER
NEMASANI (also called Penny), Anon's mother
CALISTA, a rich girl; NICE AMERICAN DAUGHTER; SEWING LADY #2
ALI, a proprietor of a restaurant; SHADOW; IGNACIO, Belen's father
NASREEN, daughter of Ali and Ritu; BELEN, a refugee
RITU, a chef; SERZA, a bartender; SEWING LADY #1
PASCAL, a refugee from West Africa
The members of the ensemble (except for Anon) also play:
THE CHORUS OF REFUGEES
THE SEWING LADIES
THE SHADOWS
A note about character names:
Nemasani derives from "Memosyne," the goddess of memory and
the mother of the muses. "Naja" is a Sanskrit word referring to the
spirit of the earth who protected Buddha during a terrible storm.

TIME
Now.

PLACE
A stage.

1. A light comes up on a boy named Anon.
ANON: Where I come from is far away from here.
The Chorus of Refugees, led by Naja, emerge from the darkness. Throughout
the play, when the Chorus speaks the individual voices may overlap, but they
can distinctly be heard.

CHORUS OF REFUGEES:
Where I come from is oxen in rice fields and hills the color of green
tea.
Where I come from is jungles filled with jaguars and pythons thick
as a grown man's thigh.
Where I come from is poison frogs the size of a thumbnail and squirrels
that can fly from tree to tree.
Where I come from is waterfalls taller than the tallest skyscraper
is olive trees and ancient desert
is sampan and temple bells
is sandstorms
is monsoon rains
is tapir and okapi and electric blue butterflies with wings as wide as
my arms.
Where I come from is the smell of orchid and mango and ripe
papaya
is the smell of my mother's fried bread
is the smell of yerba mate
lemon grass
horchata
coconut milk
pho
fried squid

Naja consoles a homesick Anon as they float mid-ocean.
cow's blood
joss stick
sheep's milk, fresh and warm.
The sound of war is heard, faint and distant.

CHORUS OF REFUGEES:
Where I come from is high up in the mountains and the sound of thunder is so loud it sounds like the end of the world.
Where I come from is the edge of an ocean so blue you can see straight to the bottom, and the sound of the waves crashing is so loud it sounds like the end of the world.
Where I come from giant birds circle overhead, so many you can't count them all, they caw caw caw, and the sound they make is so loud, it sounds like the end of the world.

The Chorus of Refugees disperses in all different directions. Naja remains.

NAJA: Do you remember?
ANON: No—
NAJA: All those memories—
ANON: I don't remember—
NAJA: Can you hear them—
ANON: No—
NAJA: You can't hear them, all those memories inside of you? You've locked them inside for so long and now they're pounding against your rib cage, against the walls of your heart. Can you hear them? Listen. Whispered fragments from the first chorus: "Where I come from is high up..." The sound of war grows closer.

ANON: I don't know how to begin. I don't know where to begin.

NAJA: Ssssssh.

Begin in the middle.
On the border.
On the crossing.
Begin in the place in between.

Naja begins to recede from view. Night falls. The sky is vast and inky blue. The sound of war grows closer. Distant gunfire. The whistling of bombs falling from the sky.

2.

Anon is alone in the night.

ANON: Where I come from is far away from here. Where I come from there was a war that lasted so long people forgot what they were fighting for.
Where I come from bombs rained down from the sky night after night and boys wandered the streets with M16s.
Where I come from mines are planted in the roads like deadly flowers, and the air smells like death, rank and sticky sweet.
Where I come from you go to sleep at night and dream about the faces of the people you love.

Light on Nemasani. She sings an ancient song. Anon sees her.

ANON: You dream the face of the one person you love. And that person, that person becomes like home. Their eyes. Their skin. Their voice, the sound of their voice. And so you dream about that person. You dream about home. You dream about going home.

Anon approaches Nemasani. The sound of war grows. It gets so loud. It sounds like the end of the world. The whistling sound of a bomb falling from the sky. The whistling grows louder, closer. Naja emerges from the darkness. She pulls Anon out of the path of the bomb. They leap into a vast, uncharted darkness. An explosion. Blinding white light. The sound of war transforms into the sound of sewing machines.

3.

A sewing factory in a city somewhere in America. The sound of the sewing machines like a buzz of metallicumblebees. A mountain of fabric reaching up to the heavens. Rows of sewing machines one after the next as far as the eye can see. The Chorus of Sewing Ladies sew in perfect unison. Nemasani is one of the Sewing Ladies. She sews a shroud. Mr. Yuri Mackus, the manager of the sewing factory, enters. He escorts Senator and Mrs. Laius around the factory floor.

MR. YURI MACKUS (To Senator Laius): The first thing I want to say is we are not a sweatshop. We are the first stop on the way to the American dream. Give us your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to be free, and we'll hire them. We'll give them a job, we'll put them to work, nothing wrong with good honest work. As you can see, Senator, the conditions here are first-rate. Light and airy. Modern. Cheerful. We have a great time—don't we, ladies? All the ladies love me and I love them.

SENATOR LAIUS (To the Sewing Ladies): Don't mind us please, don't mind us. We're just here to observe.

HELEN LAIUS (To the Sewing Ladies): What are you making?

CHORUS OF SEWING LADIES:
Blue jeans
T-shirts
Yoga pants
Sports bras.

Boxer shorts
Warm-up jackets
Polo shirts
Tube socks.

Short-shorts
Sweatshirts
Khaki pants
Baseball caps.

Mini-skirts
Baby bonnets
Oxford shirts
Bikini tops.

HELEN LAIUS (Seeing Nemasani's shroud): Ooooh I love this. What is it?

NEMASANI: A shroud.

HELEN LAIUS: Ooooh a shroud. How interesting. What's a shroud?

NEMASANI: It's a sheet you wrap around the dead.

HELEN LAIUS: Oh. I see. And do you sell a lot of those? Shrouds, I mean.

NEMASANI: It's not for sale.

HELEN LAIUS: It's lovely, the design is just lovely. I collect primitive art, you know, from all around the world. It's a passion of mine. I have baskets from Guatemala and little Buddhas from Cambodia. They speak to me. This speaks to me. I would love to buy this and hang it on my wall.

NEMASANI: It's not for sale.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Don't mind Penny.

NEMASANI: My name's not Penny.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Her real name is too hard to pronounce. We call her Penny. It's easier. Isn't it, Penny?

SEWING LADY #1: Mr. Mackus wants to marry Penny. He proposes to her every day. "Will you marry me, Penny," he whispers in her ear. He gets so close she can smell his breath. Coffee and Tic-Tacs. She tells him she'll say yes when she finishes the shroud.

MR. YURI MACKUS: I love Penny. I want to give her a good home. She's had a very hard life. I'm just doing my part. I have a big heart. It's my undoing.

SEWING LADY #1: Mr. Mackus had a mail-order bride from Russia.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Not true—

SEWING LADY #1: And one from the Philippines—

MR. YURI MACKUS: Lies lies all lies—
PLAYSCRIPT
Naomi Iizuka Anon(ymous)

SEWING LADY #: And one from Thailand, Romania and Honduras—
MR. YURI MACKUS: That's enough!
HELEN LAIUS: Who's it for? The shroud, I mean.
NEMASAN: My son.
HELEN LAIUS: Your son? Is he dead? That's so sad. That makes me very, very sad.
SENIOR LAIUS: Helen, darling—
HELEN LAIUS: You must be devastated. You poor thing. How did he die?
NEMASAN: He drowned.
HELEN LAIUS: He drowned! That's awful. It's so tragic, it's just so tragic. I feel your pain, I really do. How did it happen? If you don't mind me asking. It helps sometimes to talk, you know, to share. That's what human beings do, they share, they share their joy, they share their pain, it's only human, we're only human, you can tell me, go on tell me—and maybe I can help.
The sewing factory transforms into the ocean.

4.
Night. The ocean. Light on Anon. He holds a toy boat, which he steers through a dark ocean.
NEMASAN: Where we come from, there was a war. And my son and me, we escaped. We escaped in the middle of the night. We sailed out to sea in an old fishing boat. There were so many people all crammed together, old people and little babies. We huddled together in the dark in the belly of the ship. We listened to the roar of the waves. We listened to the boat creak and moan. And then the storm started.
The storm begins. Lightning. Thunder.
NEMASAN: The winds began to howl. The sky opened up and the rain came down, sheets and sheets of rain. And the lightning lit up the sky, bright bright light, and the thunder cracked. And the sound was so loud. And suddenly a giant wave rose up. It rose and it rose like a wall of water. And then it fell over us, and swallowed us whole.
The wave crashes down. Darkness.

5.
ANON: Some day I'm going to sail away.
CALISTA: No you're not. Don't be silly. You're not going anywhere. This is your home now.
ANON: It's not my home.
CALISTA: Yes it is.
ANON: It's not my real home.
CALISTA: Yes, it is. Now look at me. Look at me. Smile. I SAID SMILE!
Calista snaps a photo of Anon.
CALISTA: You're very photogenic. You could be a male model. You're so swarthy and exotic. That's very in right now. Exotic is very in. I wish I were more exotic. I'm too pale. I wish I had a tan. I wish my skin was the color of café au lait.
A new song begins on the portable CD player.
CALISTA: Ooooo I love this song.
Calista dances. And then she stops.
CALISTA: Do you want to watch TV? We could watch TV on my giant flat-screen plasma TV. It's so cool. It's so flat.
ANON: No thank.
CALISTA: What about a snack?
Calista retrieves a bag of candies. She begins to eat. She eats a lot. She stuffs her face with candy.
CALISTA: I have M&M's and Kit Kats and Nestlé Crunch and Snickers and Reese's Pieces and Charleston Chews and SweeTarts and Lemonheads and Skittles and Spree.
ANON: I'm not hungry.
CALISTA: Suit yourself.
We could do something else. We could kiss. You could kiss me. Do you want to kiss me?
ANON: No.
CALISTA: That's OK. You can kiss me later.
ANON: I'm never going to kiss you.
CALISTA: Fine.
ANON: Not now or later. Not ever.
CALISTA: FINE!
Pause.
CALISTA: Why are you so mean to me? You should be nice to me. I saved your life. You washed up on the shore of my dad's luxury beach-front condo and you weren't even breathing. I fished seaweed out of your mouth. I administered CPR. I gave you the kiss of life just like I learned in summer camp. And I thought you were so handsome and exotic and not like any of the boys from around here. I saved your life and you're so ungrateful! You won't even tell me your real name!
ANON: I told you my real name.
CALISTA: Your real name is not "Nobody." What kind of mom names their kid "Nobody"?
ANON: Don't talk about my mom.
CALISTA: I mean I'm sure she was nice and all, but it's not even like she's even part of your life anymore. I mean she's probably dead and even if she's alive, it's not like she's been trying that hard to find you. Honestly, if you want my opinion, she's probably moved on with her life. I know I would. I bet if you showed up on her doorstep like right this second, she probably wouldn't even know who you were. She'd probably be like: "Who are you? Do I know you?"
ANON: I SAID DON'T TALK ABOUT MY MOM!
Pause.
ANON: OK look, I can't stay here anymore. I can't do it.
CALISTA: Why not? It's nice here. It's pretty and clean. And I have satellite TV.
ANON: I gotta go. I'm going to lose my mind if I have to stay here one more day.
CALISTA: Where would you go?
ANON: Home.
CALISTA: But this is your home.
ANON: My real home.
CALISTA: Your "real home"? That's crazy. Your "real home" is a dirty little third-world shack with no running water. It's raw sewage in the streets and malaria and cholera and all kinds of disgusting parasites I don't even want to think about. I'm just saying how it is. Don't be mad. Now you're mad. Let's kiss and make up.
ANON: No.
CALISTA: Why not?
ANON: Because I hate you. And every time you open your mouth, I want to stuff sand down your throat.
CALISTA: OK you know what? I don't care. I don't care what you think. I don't care what you want. You will eat my Skittles and my Kit Kats and My Spree. You will enjoy my flat-screen plasma TV. And you will love me.
Naja enters from the ocean. She's a surfer. She wears a wetsuit. She has a surfboard.
NAJA: Hey.
ANON: Hey.
NAJA: Remember me?
CALISTA: Where did you come from?
NAJA: He called me.
ANON: I did?
**NAMA**: He sent telepathic brain waves out into the universe and I was listening.

**ANON**: You were?

**NAMA**: I was. I'm a really, really good listener.

**ANON**: That's cool.

**NAMA**: I know.

**ANON**: That's really cool.

**NAMA**: I know.

**CALISTA**: Uh, excuse me. Who are you?

**NAMA**: I'm a goddess. And you are?

**CALISTA**: I live here. My dad owns this place. He owns everything as far as the eye can see. He's very, very powerful. That's who I am.

**NAMA**: Is that supposed to impress me?

**CALISTA**: I'm just saying how it is.

**NAMA**: You know? You're like really pale.

**CALISTA**: Yeah? Well you're like really rude.

**NAMA**: Yeah, but you're really pale. How does a person get to be so pale? You're like Wonder Bread. You're like mayonnaise.

**CALISTA**: I am not like mayonnaise. Cow.

**NAMA**: Hag.

**CALISTA**: Witch.

_Naja pulls Calista's hair._

**CALISTA**: OW! This is a private beach. So you better just take your stupid surfboard and take a hike.

**NAMA**: You can't own a beach.

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**CALISTA**: Yes you can. My dad does. My dad owns the beach and the whole entire ocean.

**NAMA**: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. That's like saying you own a jungle or a mountain range.

**CALISTA**: My dad owns some of those too. My dad is very rich.

**NAMA**: Yeah! Well if he's so rich, maybe he can buy you a better bathing suit because that bathing suit is ugly.

**CALISTA**: Shut up.

**NAMA**: It's like the ugliest bathing suit I've ever seen.

**CALISTA**: Shut up!

**NAMA** *(To Anon)*: So you want to go or what?

**ANON**: Like now?

**NAMA**: Like right now. Like right this second.

**CALISTA**: He's not going anywhere. He's not allowed.

**NAMA**: He's "not allowed"? Who says?

**CALISTA**: My dad. My dad says we have to stay inside our luxury, gated community. My dad says it's dangerous out there. My dad says all these foreigners are flooding in with all their strange customs and their weird food, and they don't speak English, and they're not like us, and most of them are illegal, they're illegal aliens, that's what my dad says. Whenever he says that, I think of little green men in space suits, but that's not the kind of alien he means, it's a different kind of alien.

**NAMA**: You're an idiot.

**CALISTA**: Shut up.

**NAMA**: And your dad's an even bigger idiot.

**CALISTA**: My dad is not an idiot. My dad is really, really rich and really, really powerful. And you don't want to make him mad.

**NAMA**: Look, I don't care about your dad. I don't care what he thinks or says or does. I don't listen to people like your dad. And he doesn't either. *(To Anon)* Right?

**ANON**: Right.

**NAMA**: Ready?

**ANON**: Yeah.

**CALISTA**: Wait. You can't go.

**ANON**: Yeah, I can. Watch me.

_Anon and Naja dive into the ocean._

**CALISTA**: WAIT! STOP! COME BACK! I'M GOING TO CALL MY DAD! AND THEN YOU'RE GOING TO BE SORRY! Calista's voice becomes a tiny echo fainter and fainter. Calista becomes a tiny figure on the shore, a speck too small to see.

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6.

_The middle of a giant ocean. Anon and Naja are floating. It's very calm._

**ANON**: The last time I was in the ocean, I almost drowned.

**NAMA**: I know.

**ANON**: I was with my mom. We were in an old fishing boat. We were trying to escape and there was a storm—

**NAMA**: I know.

**ANON**: How could you know that?

**NAMA**: You don't remember me do you?

**ANON**: Yeah I do. We knew each other when we were kids.

**NAMA**: Oh yeah?

**ANON**: Yeah. You lived across the street.

**NAMA**: Is that right?

**ANON**: Yeah. You lived in a big old building. It's not there anymore. The bombs fell and it was destroyed.

**NAMA**: I know. *(Pause)* What was I like?

**ANON**: Kinda shy. Kinda cute. Your hair was different.

**NAMA**: Shorter? Longer?

**ANON**: Just different. I had a crush on you.

**NAMA**: Oh yeah?

**ANON**: Yeah.

**NAMA**: I think you're thinking of someone else.
ANON: Maybe. (Pause) OK. I think I remember now. You were this girl at the airport.

NAJA: Yeah?

ANON: You were waiting to get on a plane. You were going somewhere far away. You were all by yourself. You were reading a book.

NAJA: What book?

ANON: It was a big book. I remember it was like this really big, old book. It was really, really big. The title is on the tip of my tongue.

NAJA: You don't remember me.

ANON: No, not really. But I feel like I do. I feel like I know you. I feel like I've known you my whole life.

NAJA: That's because I'm a goddess and I come to you in your dreams.

ANON: Really?

NAJA: Uh-huh. And you're a mere mortal so you don't remember. Your brain's too small.

ANON: Is that how it works?

NAJA: Pretty much.

ANON: And what do you do? Like when you come to me in my dreams?

NAJA: I give you advice. I whisper it in your ear. Sometimes I save your life.

ANON: Is that right?

NAJA: Uh-huh. 
Anon and Naja kiss.

ANON: Do all goddesses kiss like that?

NAJA: No, just me.
Anon and Naja kiss again.

ANON: I'm really homesick.

NAJA: I know.

ANON: It's like a big empty room inside of me.

NAJA: I know.

ANON: What if you want to go home, but there's no more home to go home to? What if the one person you love more than anything, what if they don't remember you? What if they don't even know who you are?

NAJA: Ssssssh.

Naja kisses Anon, then pulls away.

NAJA: OK, no more kissing. You have things to do.

ANON: Like what?

NAJA: Like survive the storm.

ANON: Why does there always have to be a storm? Why can't it just be smooth sailing?

NAJA: Don't ask why. Just start swimming.


ANON: WAIT!

Anon and Naja are hurled in different directions.

7.

The ocean transforms into the sewing factory. The end of the day. The sewing factory is deserted. Helen Laius and Nemasani are alone. Helen has been listening to Nemasani's story.

HELEN LAIUS: And your little boy? Did you ever see him again?

NEMASANI: No. Sometimes I think maybe he was saved. Maybe the coast guard found him. Or maybe he was able to swim to shore.

HELEN LAIUS: Wouldn't that be something.

NEMASANI: And then maybe he was adopted by a nice American family.

HELEN LAIUS: Yes! We adopted a little boy from the third world. The senator and I found him in a refugee camp. He was so cute. We had such high hopes. But it didn't work out. He was nothing but problems from the start. He didn't blend in. He had a bad attitude. And then he ran away. Can you believe it? We gave him everything and he ran away.

NEMASANI: I think maybe my son, maybe he's alive somewhere.


Senator Laius and Mr. Yuri Mackus appear.

SENATOR LAIUS: Helen, darling, we really have to scoot.

HELEN LAIUS: I hope it all works out for you. I really do.

SENATOR LAIUS: Helen—

HELEN LAIUS: I mean I hope you can find closure and renewal. I find meditation and yoga—yoga can be really helpful, mindfulness and deep breathing—

SENATOR LAIUS: Helen!

HELEN LAIUS: Coming, darling.

Senator and Mrs. Laius exit. Nemasani returns to sewing the shroud. Mr. Yuri Mackus holds bags of takeout.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Mmm. I ordered some takeout for the two of us. It's from this Indian place on the other side of town. I got us a little chicken tikka masala, a little papadum, a little naan. Mmmm. Taste.

NEMASANI: I'm not hungry.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Marry me, you little vixen, you little minx.

NEMASANI: Mr. Mackus.

MR. YURI MACKUS: You know you want to marry me. You find me irresistible.

NEMASANI: Mr. Mackus, please.

MR. YURI MACKUS: This "playing hard to get," Penny, is getting really old. You either marry me or lose your job. I hate to be so blunt, but that's the way it is.

NEMASANI: Mr. Mackus, as I told you, in my homeland, it is customary—

MR. YURI MACKUS: Yes yes yes, "It is customary to make a shroud in which to bury the dead."

NEMASANI: That is correct.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Yes, but you're not dead. I'm not dead. We're alive. Penny. We're vital. We have needs and desires. We have appetites—

NEMASANI: Mr. Mackus—

Nemasani smacks the advancing Mr. Mackus.

MR. YURI MACKUS: OW!

NEMASANI: When I am done, we can get married.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Can't you speed things up?

NEMASANI: It takes as long as it takes.

MR. YURI MACKUS: What if I can't wait?

NEMASANI: Then you will incur the wrath of the gods. Bad luck like you have never seen before. Forget about the number 13. Forget about breaking a mirror or stepping on a crack. Do you want to tempt fate, Mr. Mackus? Do you know what happens to mortals who tempt fate? Vultures pecking at your liver and your eyeballs for all eternity. Your arms and legs ripped from their sockets, your head pried loose from its neck. Your skull smashed against a rock, brain-goo splattered all over the pavement—

MR. YURI MACKUS: Fine. No need to agitate the gods. My little crab apple. My little peach pit. I'll wait. I can wait. Sweet dreams, my little sweet potato.

Mr. Yuri Mackus exits. When Nemasani is sure he is gone, she begins to undo the stitches of the shroud. Sewing Lady #2 peeks out from behind a sewing machine and sees what Nemasani is doing.

8.

A police helicopter overhead. The chup—chup—chup sound of its propellers. A bright beam of light shines down. Night in a city somewhere in America. The sounds of a city at night. Freeway traffic. A constant twinkling stream of tiny cars. TV and voices and the clanking of garbage cans and the beep-beep-beep of trucks backing up. Somewhere in the giant city, the sound of a song from somewhere far away. Naja enters with a transistor radio that is playing the song.

9.

The song continues.

An alley behind an Indian restaurant. A neon sign spelling: CURRY. Nas-
Ali: Good, that’s good. My wife kills cockroaches, you know. She crushes them with her shoe.

Nasreen: His name is Koo Ri.

Ali: Koo Ri?

ANON: Look I should probably go—


ANON: Nice to meet you, Mr. Ali, but—

Ali: Not Mr. Ali, just Ali. And this is my lovely daughter, Nasreen. You’ve already met. I am the proprietor of this establishment. My wife Ritu is the chef. Each dish she makes is a masterpiece. The scents, the tastes of home in each delicious bite.

ANON: Look I really gotta go—

Ali: You will be our guest.

ANON: That’s really nice of you, but I can’t. I really have to get going—

Ali: I insist. I assure you it’s more comfortable indoors. This way, please—

ANON: No, see, I can’t do that. I can’t stay—

Ali: Nonsense. Nasreen, set a table for our guest. Ritu, we have company!

Ali utters Anon inside. Nasreen follows.

10.

The kitchen of an Indian restaurant. Steam and the sound of running water. Dishes piled high. The sound of chopping and the clattering of silverware and china. The hiss of the frying pan. A gust of flame. Ritu is cooking. Ali and Nasreen sit at a table full of assorted hot peppers. Anon watches them from the edge of the room. Ali pops a pepper into his mouth.

Ali: It’s so hot. It’s hot hot hot. It’s so hot I want to cry.

Ritu: Ali, you’re going to give yourself a bellyache.

Ali: Nonsense. I can take it.

Ali pops another pepper into his mouth.

Ritu: Ali, stop. You’re going to keel over.

Ali (Gasping): It’s the pepper. It makes me sweat. It’s very healthy.

Ritu: You’re turning red like a beet. Tell me this is healthy.

Ali (Picking up a tiny pepper): Very healthy.

Nasreen: It’s so little.

Ali: Don’t be fooled. It’s the hottest pepper of them all.

Ritu: Enough is enough. You eat that pepper, your tongue will fall out of your mulish old head.

Nasreen: What about our guest, Poppa? Maybe he wants to try.

ANON: No, that’s OK.

Nasreen: I thought you said you like spicy.

ANON: I do.

Nasreen takes the pepper from Ali and offers it to Anon.

Nasreen: Well here you go.

Ali: Nasreen—

Nasreen: But he said he liked spicy. That’s what he said. Isn’t that what you said?

Ali: Nasreen, my dove, there’s spicy, and then there’s spicy. I think our guest is wise enough to know the difference.

Nasreen: I think he’s scared.

Anon: I’m not scared. How bad can it be?

Nasreen: Bad.

Ali: A burning inferno.

Nasreen: The death star of peppers.

Anon pops the pepper into his mouth.

Ali: Well?

Anon opens his mouth. He’s swallowed the pepper.

Nasreen: He did it.


Ritu: I used to have a goat that could eat anything. Tin cans. Hubcaps. Hot peppers.

Nasreen: You did? What happened to him?

Ritu: I chopped him up and made goat stew.
PLAYSRIPT

Naomi Iizuka Anon(ymous)

ALI: Ritu.

RITU: Where do you come from, stranger?

ANON: I’m from all over.

RITU: And your family? Where are they?

ANON: I don’t know. I’m not sure.

RITU: I see. And what was your name again? I don’t think I caught it.

ANON: Nobody. I mean Koo Ri. I mean, Nobody. I mean, I mean Koo Ri.

RITU: Koo Ri or Nobody, which is it?

ANON: Nobody. I’m Nobody.

RITU: Cooking for “nobody,” am I? That seems like a waste of perfectly good food.

ALI: Ritu, please.

RITU: You’re too trusting, Ali. The city is full of liars and thieves. We don’t know him. We don’t know where he comes from. We don’t know anything about him.

ANON: She’s right. I should go. I’m really sorry—

ALI: No. You are our guest. Ritu has had a long day. Please forgive her.

RITU: Ritu has had many long days. Ritu has had many long weeks and months and years. And Ritu can speak for herself. (To Anon) Here. I cooked it, you might as well eat it.

Ritu sets a plate of food down in front of Anon. She sets it down hard.

ANON: Thanks. Thank you.

Anon eats in silence. Ritu and Nasreen clean up.

ANON: Cumin, cinnamon, nutmeg, turmeric, allspice, cardamom, fenel, clove... coriander.

RITU: Yes, coriander. How did you know that?

ANON: My mom used the same spices. She just put them together differently.

NASREEN: Where is she now?

ANON: I don’t know.

NASREEN: How can you not know where your mom is?

ANON: Where I come from, there was a war. There was a war and lots of people disappeared.

NASREEN: You mean they died.

RITU: Nasreen—

ANON: Some of them. But some of them, they just, they disappeared.

NASREEN: Maybe they escaped.

ANON: Maybe.

NASREEN: Maybe your mom escaped. Maybe she’s living in the city somewhere and you just don’t know it because she changed her name, but she’s looking for you, too, only she doesn’t know where to look because she came here from somewhere else, so she doesn’t know how to get around. Lots of people come here from someplace else. We did. Where we came from, there was a war, too.

RITU: Nasreen—

NASREEN: That’s how my dad became blind. There was a bomb in the marketplace. Lots of people died, old people and little children—

RITU: Nasreen, that’s enough. That was before. We don’t talk about that now.

NASREEN: I don’t remember where we came from. I was just a baby when we left.

ALI: You remember. You just don’t remember that you remember.

NASREEN: How can I remember what I don’t remember?

Naja enters. She’s unseen and unheard by everyone except Anon.

ALI: Sometimes in your dreams, something will bubble up from the depths, a tiny flicker of something you thought you forgot. A taste or a scent—

RITU: Jasmine.

ALI: Yes, jasmine.

Naja turns on the radio. An ancient song from far away. Ali caresses Ritu’s hair.

ALI (To Nasreen): Your mother used to wear jasmine blossoms in her hair. I come across that scent sometimes and it takes me back. All of a sudden I think of something from years before, some tiny thing. A piece of a memory, like a shiny coin at the bottom of a well.

Nasreen approaches Ritu and Ali. Ritu wraps her arms around her daughter. Anon watches the family from a distance. Naja approaches Anon.

NAJA: What do you remember?

ANON: I don’t know where to begin. I don’t know how. I don’t know how to begin.

NAJA: Begin in the middle

On the border

On the crossing.

Begin in the place in between.

The sound of distant war grows closer. Naja, Ali, Ritu and Nasreen recede from view.

11.


ANON: I remember my mom and how she used to hold me. She held me when the bombs fell. She held me when the ground shook and the city burned. She held me on the night that we escaped. She held me in the belly of the boat as we sailed across a giant sea. I remember how she held me and then one night there was a terrible storm. A storm at sea. Winds howling. Sheets of rain. A terrible cracking sound. The boat splits apart. An explosion of water. Nemasani vanishes under a giant wave.

12.

The roar of the surf. Anon is in the ocean. Water as far as the eye can see. Night. Tiny lights swimmer in the distance.

ANON: The next thing I remember: I was floating in a giant ocean. In the distance, I could see tiny lights. I started swimming towards them. I swam even though my clothes were soaked through and my arms and legs were numb, even though it hurt to breathe. I swam and I swam. I swam until I couldn’t swim anymore. And then everything went black.

Blackout. Total darkness.


The sound of a siren. Shouts. The sound of footsteps on pavement, on steel containers. The clank of chain link. The sound of running. Anon and Pascal are running through the darkness. Glare of headlights. The sound of a city. They run. They run.

13.

A tunnel underground. Graffiti and a giant t. & n painted on the wall. The sound of rats. Pascal and Anon catch their breath. Pascal is West African. He has traditional scars on his face, thin horizontal lines.

PASCAL: They won’t come after us here.

ANON: Who were they?


ANON: Where are we?

PASCAL: Tunnel.

ANON: What’s that sound?

PASCAL: Rats. Giant rats. Five foot long, nose to tail. They live down here. They eat human flesh. They got a taste for it. They hunt for humans in the night. They go in packs. And if they find you alone and sleeping, they attack. They rip you to shreds. They tear out your insides. They rip out your still-beating heart.

ANON: I didn’t know rats came that big.
PASCAL: What? You don’t believe me?
ANON: No.
PASCAL: Liar. You’re scared. I can see it in your eyes.
ANON: I’m not scared.
PASCAL: Yeah you are. You ran like a little girl just now.
ANON: Then that makes two of us.
PASCAL: Come again?
ANON: I said that makes two of us. Little girl.
PASCAL: I’m not a little girl.
ANON: No you’re right. You’re just a liar.
PASCAL: What did you say to me?
ANON: You heard me. Liar.
Pascal rushes Anon. They fight. They fight. And then eventually they stop. A draw. They sit in the dirt in silence.
ANON: Why did you help me? Before, I mean.
PASCAL: I don’t know. I guess you looked like you needed some help.
ANON: Thanks.
PASCAL: Whatever.
They sit in silence. Pascal pulls out potato chips from his bag.
PASCAL: Hungry?
ANON: Yeah.
Pascal shares his bag of potato chips with Anon. They eat.
PASCAL: Where did you learn English?
ANON: My mom, she taught me.
PASCAL: Yeah?
ANON: Yeah.
PASCAL: I’m Pascal.
ANON (Seeing the t. & N): I’m Lan.
PASCAL: Lan, huh?
ANON: Yeah. Lan.

Pascal and Anon stare each other down. Anon’s eyes drift to the scars on Pascal’s face.
PASCAL: Didn’t nobody tell you it’s rude to stare.
ANON: Sorry.
PASCAL: Where I come from, they cut your face when you turn thirteen. Like a warrior. You got any scars?
ANON: No.
PASCAL: Everybody got scars. Maybe yours you just can’t see.
A Shadow emerges from the darkness looking for food. Anon starts for him.
PASCAL (Holding Anon back): Don’t. He don’t hurt no one. He lives down there.
ANON: What’s wrong with him?
PASCAL: What’s wrong with him? He’s high. He’s high as a kite.
ANON: He looks like someone I know.
PASCAL: Yeah? He could be. He won’t remember if he is. His brain is fried. He don’t remember nothing. He don’t remember where he comes from, he don’t remember his family, he don’t remember the names of his kids. All he thinks about is getting high.
ANON: He must be lonely.
PASCAL: He ain’t alone. He’s got lots of company.
Other Shadows appear. They fill the tunnel. A faint rumbling.
PASCAL: Right on time. Come on, Lan. Or whatever your real name is. Pascal scrambles up a ladder to a ledge at the top of the tunnel. A bright light approaches.
PASCAL: You stay down there, you’re gonna get squashed like a pancake.
You think I’m foolin’, you watch and see.
The rumbling gets louder. The light grows brighter. Anon hesitates, then scrambles up the ladder. The sound of steel against steel. The roar of a giant engine. A train bears down. Pascal and Anon jump onto the roof of a boxcar. And then the train thunders past.
Night sky. Stars glitter. The top of the train speeding through the landscape. Pascal and Anon on top of the boxcar.

PASCAL: Listen.


PASCAL: You know, you kinda look like a monkey.

ANON: I don't look like a monkey.

PASCAL: Yeah you do. Around the chin. And the ears. You have monkey ears. What's wrong with monkeys?

ANON: I don't look like a monkey.

PASCAL: Monkeys are good luck. Relax, monkey.

The sound of the train. The landscape speeds by.

PASCAL: How far does this go?

ANON: Far.

ANON: We could keep going and going.

PASCAL: We could, but we won't. We got a destination.

ANON: Oh yeah? Where's that?

PASCAL: A place I hear we can get some work, make a little money, get set up. Get some new clothes. You, monkey, are in need of new clothes.

ANON: What would you do if you had all the money in the world?

PASCAL: First, I'd buy a brand-new car so I could go anywhere in style. Nice shiny rims, nice sound system so I could listen to my tunes. And then I'd eat all I could eat: steak and french fries and pizza. I love pizza, pepperoni pizza. That's the best. What about you?

ANON: I don't know.

PASCAL: Yeah, you do.

ANON: I don't know. I guess I'd buy my mom a house, you know, a big house with a big yard so she'd never have to worry, so she'd always have a place where she could go. You know, a home.

PASCAL: A home, huh. That's nice. That's cool.

The sound of the train. The landscape speeds by.

PASCAL: Do you believe in fate?

ANON: Like fortune-telling?

PASCAL: Kinda. Like everything that happens to you is already decided before you're even born.

ANON: And you don't have a choice?

PASCAL: No choice.

ANON: I don't know. I guess I don't think about stuff like that.

PASCAL: Where I come from, they try to tell your future from the stars.

ANON: Yeah? What do my stars say?

PASCAL: Hmm. You will travel far. And have a bumpy ride.

ANON: You know what, I knew that already.

PASCAL: The stars don't lie.

ANON: No, they're just telling me what I already know.

PASCAL: Look at them all. So many stars. They look exactly like they do at home.

ANON: You think about home?

PASCAL: Not so much. How about you?

ANON: I think about my mom sometimes.

PASCAL: Yeah? What's she like?

ANON: I don't know how to describe her. Like a mom.

PASCAL: Does she smell like soap?

ANON: Yeah. Like soap and clean clothes and some kind of flower, I don't know what it is.

PASCAL: Does she have a big enormous bag she carries everything in?

ANON: Yeah.

PASCAL: Do her eyes crinkle up when she laughs?

ANON: Uh-huh.

PASCAL: Does she sing sometimes when she thinks no one's listening?

ANON: Yeah.

PASCAL: Does she chop vegetables really fast?
PASCAL: Don't complain. We earn some money, and then we go.

ANON: How do we know he's gonna pay us?

PASCAL: He’ll pay. Before you know it, we'll earn enough money, we can go anywhere. We can do whatever we want.

ANON: I don’t like this place.

PASCAL: It’s just a job. You think too much.

ANON: Maybe you don’t think enough.

PASCAL: Maybe you should shut up.

Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird bursts through a door at the back of the room. She wears high-heeled shoes. She looks at Anon and Pascal. She squawks, then exits out the steel door. The click-click-click of her heels.

ANON: What's in there?

Anon opens the back door. Slabs of meat hang from hooks. Blood drips. The opera music grows in volume. Mr. Zyclo appears from the back room. He pulls a hatchet. He approaches Pascal and Anon as he speaks.

MR. ZYCLO: Have you seen my bird? I have a little pet bird. I feed her little morsels from my hand. She's very tame. I coo to her and she coos back. This is my freezer. It's very cold. Aren't you cold? I have to keep it cold like this or else the meat gets bad. Look at all this meat. Isn't it strange? When you cut off the head and scrape off the skin, when you boil away the fat and the gristle, it's hard to tell what something was. Was it a cow? Or a pig? Or a goat? Was it a little baby lamb? Or was it something else? A different kind of meat? Fleshy and tender and vaguely familiar. Do you know what goes into my sausages? Do you know what makes them so mouth-wateringly delicious? Do you have an idea? The tiniest inkling? What? Cat got your tongue?

Mr. Zyclo raises the hatchet. Blackout. The sound of the hatchet whizzing through the air and then a dull thud as it hits. The sound of the giant steel door closing. The opera song stops. Then the sound of a bird whistling.

16.

Lights up. The giant steel door is closed. Mr. Zyclo is making sausages with a meat grinder. Blood is everywhere, on the floor, on the walls. His white coat is splattered with blood. Pascal is gone. Anon watches Mr. Zyclo. Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird clicks and paces frantically. The click-click-click of her high-heeled shoes. She chirps and squawks and cries throughout the scene trying to speak.

ANON: Where's my friend?

MR. ZYCLO: What friend?

ANON: His name's Pascal. And he was here, he was right here just a second ago.

MR. ZYCLO: There's nobody here named Pascal. You must be confused. There's just me and you and my little pet bird.

ANON: He was right here. He was standing right here.

MR. ZYCLO: What was your name again? I don't think you ever said.

ANON: Uh. Monkey.

MR. ZYCLO: Monkey. How delightful. You do look a little like a monkey, one of those worried little monkeys you see in the zoo. They look like little old men, nibbling on a piece of fruit, scratching at their fleas, racing around their cage looking for a way out except, of course, there is no way out.

Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird squawks.

MR. ZYCLO: What a noisy bird. I used to have two, but then one of them, he flew away. Anon tries to open the steel door.

MR. ZYCLO: Now I keep the door shut tight or else she'll fly away, too, and then I'll be all alone. Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird squawks and cries frantically. A crescendo of squawking.

MR. ZYCLO: BE QUIET, BIRD, OR I'LL COOK YOU IN A POT! (To Anon) How do you like your meat, Monkey? Well done or rare? Anon doesn't respond. Mr. Zyclo opens a box, takes out a bottle of wine, uncorks it.

MR. ZYCLO: "Rare, please. I like my meat rare." What about a glass of wine? "Oh yes please. A glass of wine would be delightful." Only, I have to tell you, I'm a little tired of cabernets. I prefer chianti. A good chianti can be just the thing.

Mr. Zyclo's Bird chirps frantically to Anon.

ANON: I, I don’t know much about wine.

MR. ZYCLO: No?

ANON: No.

MR. ZYCLO: Well why would you? It's just wine.

ANON: I've always wanted to learn.

MR. ZYCLO: Really.


MR. ZYCLO: Some people are such snobs about wine. My feeling is, you like what you like. There's no right or wrong. There's only what you like. Here I'll show you. (Pours a little wine in a glass) Now here we have a lovely vintage. Full-bodied, robust. Twist it, see how it streaks. That's what it should do, that's exactly what it should do. And then we sniff. And now we taste. Ah. Oaky.

Mr. Zyclo finishes the glass. Then he downs the bottle.

MR. ZYCLO: Fine wine is one of life's great pleasures. It's civilized. We live in nasty, brutish times. I try to remember what it is to be civilized. Linen napkins. Opera. Fine wine. Because it matters. It means something. But sometimes it can be so lonely, it can be so very lonely. You have no idea. It's nice to have someone to share a glass of wine with. I'll miss you when you go.

ANON: Go?

MR. ZYCLO: THWACK. THWACK. Sausage doesn't grow on trees. Sorry, Monkey. That's just the way it is. And then it will just be me and my little bird. My little bird keeps me company, but she's sad. She had a little baby bird, but he flew away.

ANON: Maybe if you left the door open, he’d fly back.

MR. ZYCLO: Oh you’re very tricky. But if I open the door, you’ll run away, my little sausage-to-be.

ANON: Sssh. listen. I think I hear a bird outside.

Mr. Zyclo opens the heavy steel door.

MR. ZYCLO: No bird.

ANON: I swore I heard a bird just now.

Mr. Zyclo of the Pet Bird chirps.


MR. ZYCLO: Was that a bird? Cheep? Cheep? Cheep? Oh I feel so sleepy. So very very sleepy. Mr. Zyclo collapses in a drunken stupor. Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird comes over to Anon. The click-click-click of her high-heeled shoes. She takes a shoe off and gives it to Anon. Anon approaches Mr. Zyclo, raises the shoe, and smashes it down, putting out Mr. Zyclo's eye with the heel. Mr. Zyclo shrieks.

MR. ZYCLO: My eye! My eye! What have you done to my eye? I can't see. I can't see anything. My eye, my eye! It's killing me!

Mr. Zyclo bears Anon and his Pet Bird.

MR. ZYCLO: Little bird?

Mr. Zyclo approaches Anon.

MR. ZYCLO: Little bird? Is that you?

Mr. Zyclo lunges toward Anon. Anon overpowers Mr. Zyclo and stabs meat into his mouth.

ANON: HOW'S THAT? HOW DOES THAT TASTE? IS IT FULL-BODIED? IS IT ROBUST? IS IT CIVILIZED ENOUGH FOR YOU?

Mr. Zyclo's Pet Bird shrieks. Frenzied, she descends on Mr. Zyclo. She is all nails and teeth and stiletto heels. Mr. Zyclo howls. A chaos of feathers and screeching and blood. Anon slits through the giant steel door.

17.

Anon runs. He runs. He runs. The world transforms into a giant freeway. The sound of the interstate like an ocean. Fields of tall grass as far as the
eye can see. A wind makes the grass rustle and whisper. Anon doubles over, winded, unable to run any further. Ignacio appears through the grass.

ANON: Hey. Wait. Which way do I go? I don’t know which way to go. Say something. Why don’t you say something? Belen appears behind Anon. She holds a small suitcase.

BELEN: He cannot.

Anon turns around, startled. He sees Belen. The sound of the tall grass rustling and whispering.

BELEN: My name is Belen. What’s your name?

ANON: Nobody. I’m nobody. Do I know you? I feel like I know you.

BELEN: Maybe from a past life. Do you remember me from a past life?

ANON: I don’t remember.

BELEN: When you die, they say you forget. You forget where you come from. You forget the people you love. That’s what dying means: to forget. So you have to try very hard to remember. You have to keep what you love right in front of you, like a shiny coin at the bottom of a well.

The sound of Nemasani singing. Nemasani appears. Anon sees her.

ANON: I need to get back. I need to find my way back. I need to find my way home.

BELEN: Where’s home?

ANON: Far away.

BELEN: How far?

ANON: Far. Very far.

Nemasani fades away. The singing fades away. All that’s left is the sound of the tall grass rustling and whispering. Ignacio whispers to Belen.

ANON: What’s he saying?

BELEN: He says we should go now. He says we’ll die if we stay here. He says if we’re lucky a truck will come by and we can get a ride. He says I should go with you. He says you’ll protect me. (To Ignacio) Poppa, wait—

Belen tries to follow Ignacio, but she can’t. He walks away into the tall grass without looking back. The wind murmurs. Belen and Anon watch as Ignacio disappears.

ANON: Why doesn’t he come with us now?

BELEN: He would, if he could.

ANON: Why can’t he?

BELEN: When my father left our village, he promised to come back and get me. He never made it. He died on his way back. Don’t you see? My father is a ghost.


18.

The cab of a truck speeding down the freeway. Strygal drives. Belen sits between Anon and Strygal. The inside of the truck is hot. The faint sound of tapping.

STRYGAL: Hot enough for ya? Oooh boy is it hot. Never used to be this hot. It's the ozone. The ozone's all messed up. So where you kids headed to?

ANON: Home.

STRYGAL: Home sweet home. That's nice. So where's home? Far away is what I'm guessing. What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?

ANON: What did you say?

STRYGAL: What? "Cat got your tongue?" Ah it's just a thing my dad used to say.

ANON: Your dad? Who was your dad?

STRYGAL: Why do you care? He wasn't nobody. He was just a mean old drunk. Owned a butcher shop out in the boonies. Had one good eye. Can you believe it? Liked to listen to opera. If there's one thing I can't stand it's opera. I hate opera. (To Belen) Whaddya got in that suitcase, girlie-girlie? Diamonds? Rubies? State secrets?

Strygal reaches over to touch Belen.

ANON: Hey.

STRYGAL: Relax, pal. Relax. I was just picking some lint off the little lady's dress, just a little piece of fuzz. Hot, huh? It must be over a hundred. I'm sweatin' like a pig.

The sound of tapping grows.

ANON: What's that sound?

STRYGAL: Could be the troller.

ANON: What's in back? What are you haulin'?

STRYGAL: This and that. It's a cash business. I don't ask a lot of questions. ANON: I can hear something. There.

STRYGAL: Word to the wise: pal. Keep your nose out of where it don't belong.

ANON: I think we should stop. I think we should stop and check.

STRYGAL: Look, I already stopped for you and your little friend here, out of the goodness of my heart. I'm not stopping anymore. I'm already running late. (To Belen) Anybody ever tell you, you're very pretty. You got very pretty hair.

The sound of tapping is joined by the distant sound of murmuring voices.

STRYGAL: This clown, he's not your boyfriend is he? He can't be. You're too young to have a boyfriend. You're real quiet, ain't you. I like that. I can't stand girls who yak and yak and can't shut up. I like quiet girls. You speak English? I'll teach you how to speak English.

ANON: Listen. There. Right there. Somebody's back there. Who's back there?

STRYGAL: Nobody.

ANON: There's people back there. I can hear them. How many people are back there?

STRYGAL: That's none of your business, pal.

ANON: It's too hot. They'll suffocate. Stop the truck.

STRYGAL: You gotta be kidding me.

ANON: I said stop the truck! Pull over!

STRYGAL: No.

Anon grabs the wheel. Anon and Strygal struggle for control of the wheel.

STRYGAL: WHAT'RE YOU DOING? ARE YOU OUTTA YOUR MIND?

BELEN: STOP—

ANON: PULL OVER—

STRYGAL: NO—

BELEN: WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

ANON: I SAID PULL OVER—

STRYGAL: ARE YOU INSANE?—

BELEN: WAIT—


19.

Darkness. Inside the back of Strygal's truck. The Chorus of Refugees in the darkness.

CHORUS OF REFUGEES:

My name was Maria
My name was Amin
My name was Soo Chai
My name was Roberto
My name was Farid
My name was Aram
My name was Yelena
My name was Tjung
My name was Ricciella
My name was Sanjit
My name was Pran
My name was Malik
My name was Jiang Tsu
My name was Fatima
My name was Yousif
I came to America on a ship.
I came to America in a truck.
I walked a thousand miles.
I crossed a giant desert.
It was so hot I couldn't breathe.
It was so cold, my fingers froze.
I traveled in the night.
I always traveled in the night.
I was afraid.
I made no sound.
I was invisible.
I was like the murmuring wind.
I was the edge of a shadow.
I was a flicker out the corner of your eye.
I came here to make a better life.
My name was Dac. I had so many hopes.
My name was Sáid. I had so many dreams.
My name was Chía. But I died.
My name was Miguel. I died.
My name was Trinh. I died along the way.
My name was Faisál. Please tell my sister.
My name was Meena. Tell my brother.
My name was Abraham. Tell my father.
My name was Song. Tell my mother.
My name was Joseph. Tell my son.
My name was Alicia. Tell my daughter.
Remember me. Remember me.
Remember me.

A bowling wind. The sound of metal doors being pushed open. The Chorus of Refugees spill out from the darkness. They are ghosts. They disperse. A bowling wind. Anon emerges from the wreckage, cut and bleeding.

20.

SERZA: Well look at what the cat dragged in. Welcome to the last stop, stranger, the end of the road. Rock bottom. Come on in. Make yourself at home. We’re all friends here. The more the merrier, right? The Barflies snort.

ANON: Water. Please. Can I have a glass of water? Serza pours him a glass of water. Anon begins to drink.

SERZA: I gotta charge you for that, sugar. You know that, right?

ANON: I don’t have any money.

SERZA: No money? You come in here and ask me for a drink and you don’t have any money? What? Does it look like I’m running some kind of charity? Is that what it looks like to you? (To the Barflies) He thinks I’m running a charity. The Barflies snort. Anon pushes the half-drunk glass of water back across the bar.

SERZA: Never mind, take it. Just take it. It’s on the house. Anon drinks. Serza studies him. She notices blood on his face.

SERZA: What happened to you? You get in a fight?

ANON: No. It wasn’t like that.

SERZA: What was it like?

ANON: I don’t want to talk about it.

SERZA: You got some place to go?

ANON: No.

SERZA: You’re just a kid. You should go home. Just go on home.

ANON: I don’t have a home. I don’t have a family. I don’t have that. I don’t have anyone. Anon starts to exit and stumbles.

SERZA: Hey hey hey, it’s OK. It’s all right. Serza cleans off the blood from the side of Anon’s face. Anon lets her. The jukebox plays.

ANON: It hurts. It’s like all these bad things keep happening and I can’t stop them. It’s like everyone I get close to, they all go away. It’s like they all go away and there’s nothing I can do.

The jukebox plays.

SERZA: Ssssh. You’re getting yourself all worked up. You gotta let it go. You gotta just let it go. Dance with me. Why don’t you dance with me.

The jukebox plays. Anon and Serza begin to dance. The Barflies dance. Then Anon begins to pull away.

ANON: I gotta go.

SERZA: You don’t want to go. Just stay. Stay a while. You can stay here as long you want. You can stay here forever.

Anon struggles to get out of Serza’s bar. A mist rolls in. Sheets and sheets of billowing fog. The bar slowly fills with fog. The song on the jukebox begins to distort. Anon sees Ignacio walking in the distance. Anon pulls away from Serza and approaches Ignacio. Serza recedes from view.

21.
The world is engulfed in fog. The distant sound of war. Ignacio is walking away. Anon tries to catch up with him, but he can’t.


Ignacio vanishes. Straygal appears. Ghostly white. He clutches the steering wheel of his truck.

ANON: Hey. I want to talk to you. Hey. Straygal vanishes. Belen appears. She’s holding her suitcase. She’s walking past Anon.

ANON: Belen? Belen, is that you?

Belen turns around. Anon sees her dress is red with blood.

ANON: Belen, wait.

Belen continues walking away. Anon tries to follow her, but he can’t keep up. He loses her. The sound of war. Pascal appears.

PASCAL: Where I come from soldiers came to my village. I saw them coming, and I ran into the forest. I hid beneath the leaves. I was so still. I could hear everything. I could hear the sound of fire and men shouting. I could hear my little brother. I could hear him crying and my mother saying, “Don’t cry, don’t cry.” I could hear the machetes. I could hear their screams. And then it was quiet. It was so quiet. All I could hear was the sound of my heart beating. Will you remember me?

ANON: Pascal?

PASCAL: When you’re old and you look back, will you remember me? Will you remember a friend who died long ago?

Pascal recedes from view.

ANON: Pascal? Pascal, wait—

CHORUS OF REFUGEES: I disappeared.
I became invisible.
I ran away.
I escaped.
I shed my skin.
I changed my name.
I became Anonymous.
My name is Anonymous.
My name is Anonymous.
My name is Anonymous.

ANON: My name is Anonymous.
My name is Anonymous.
My name is Anonymous.

The sound of war grows closer. The Chorus of Refugees disperses in all different directions. The whistling of bombs falling from the sky. The bombs get closer. Anon hears a woman singing a fragment of a familiar song. Nemazani becomes visible. She sings. Anon begins to go toward her. The sound of a bomb falling. Naja appears and pulls Anon out of the path of the explosion. The world shatters. Brilliant light. Dust motes swirling in the light. Then darkness.

22.
Anon is alone in the darkness.

ANON: There was a war and me and my mom. We escaped on a boat. And then there was a storm, and the boat we were on sank, and lots of people drowned. I know this for a fact. And later I was in a refugee camp. And then later I was adopted by a nice American family. These are facts.
Lights on the Nice American Family posing for a photograph. The Father is played by the actor playing Senator Latius; the Mother is played by the actor playing Helen Latius; and the Daughter is played by the actor playing Calista.

ANON: They lived in a fancy house full of so many things. But they weren’t my family and it wasn’t my home. And I ran away. That’s a fact too. These are all facts. But facts are only part of the story.

Camera flash. The Nice American Family recedes from view.

23.

Lights up on Ritu, Ali and Nasreen in the kitchen of the Indian restaurant.

ANON: I think that your life is made up of all these bits and pieces. And sometimes the pieces don’t fit together. Here’s a piece that’s missing. And you try to fill in the blanks, you try to remember, and sometimes you can see a shape of something you can almost make out, you can almost see a face—

RITU: Your mother’s face.

ANON: Yes.

RITU: There’s a place I know. On the other side of town. I worked there when we first came to this country. I sewed clothes: blue jeans, T-shirts. It was a terrible place.

ALI: It was a sweatshop. They should’ve shut it down years ago. All those women from all those different countries. So many women from all over the world. Ah, Ritu—


ANON: What are you saying?

RITU: It’s a small world, stranger, smaller than you think.

ANON: You think my mother— That’s crazy.

RITU: Is it?

ANON: What are the chances? One in a million?

RITU: What do you have to lose? There’s no way to know unless you go and see. You’ve come this far. Trust me. I have an idea. Nasreen, put the rice on. Ali, get the ghee. (To ANON) Now listen to me, listen carefully. Ritu explains her plan to Anon. Nasreen and Ali begin to prepare food.


24.

The kitchen transforms into the sewing factory. The Sewing Ladies sew. Mr. Yuri Mackus strides toward Nemasani. Sewing Lady #2 follows him.

MR. YURI MACKUS (To Nemasani): LIES LIES LIES! I’ve had it with your lies! I’m on to you. You tell me you’re going to marry me when this shroud is done, but it’s never going to be done, is it? Is it? Because you undo it in the night when no one’s looking—except for Vanna here who happened to see what you were up to and had the decency to tell me. Thank you, Vanna. As for you, deceitful, duplicitous, mendacious minx, your little charade is over. We’re getting married now. No more stalling. No more delays.

Anon enters with Indian takeout.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Who are you? What do you want? Why are you here?

ANON: Somebody ordered takeout.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Who? Not me. I didn’t order any takeout. I’ve already eaten. And they don’t eat. Not when I eat. I don’t know when they eat. That’s not my concern. Why am I telling you this? Why am I even talking to you? I don’t have to explain myself.

Nemasani starts to exit. Mr. Yuri Mackus grabs her.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Where do you think you’re going? We have things to do. We’re getting married. And then we’re going to live HAPPILY EVER AFTER! HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY! THE END!

ANON: Leave her alone.

MR. YURI MACKUS: What did you say?

ANON: You heard me.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Is someone talking? I think it must be a little fly

is buzzing around my head. Oh it’s not a fly. It’s you. And who are you again? I’ll tell you who you are. You’re nobody. You’re a tiny cockroach I squash with my hand. You’re a piece of lint I flick off my jacket. You’re chewing gum on the bottom of my shoe. You’re faceless and nameless.

You’re a dime a dozen, people like you.

Nemasani tries to get free of Mr. Yuri Mackus.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Stop it. Be still.

NEMASANI: You’re hurting me.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Be still.

ANON: Leave her alone.

MR. YURI MACKUS: “Leave her alone.” You want me to leave her alone.

That’s funny. You’re a funny guy.

Mr. Yuri Mackus draws a sword.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Make me, little fly.

Naja appears. She throws a sword to Anon.

ANON: OK. If you insist.

Anon and Mr. Yuri Mackus battle like ancient warriors. An aerial, acrobatic battle. They twist and tumble and kick. They use pieces of the sewing factory—spindles and scissors and bolts of cloth and spools of colored thread. The sound of slashing. A shower of cloth. A tangle of thread. Anon corners Mr. Yuri Mackus.

MR. YURI MACKUS: Oh please don’t kill me, don’t kill me, please don’t kill me—what was your name, stranger? Friend? I don’t think I caught it.

ANON: Call me Anonymous.

Anon cuts a single thread with his sword. A ton of clothes rains down from the ceiling. Mr. Yuri Mackus is buried in an avalanche of clothes. Naja pushes open an exit door. A wind blows in from the outdoors. The sound of voices carried on the wind, echoes. The Chorus of Refugees echoes their opening ode:

THE CHORUS OF REFUGEES:

Where I come from is far away from here
Is oxen in rice fields
Is hills the color of green tea
Is jungles filled with jaguars
And pythons thick as a grown man’s thigh
Is poison frogs the size of a thumbnail
And squirrels that can fly from tree to tree
Is waterfalls taller than the tallest skyscraper
Is olive trees and ancient desert
Is sampans and temple bells
Is sandstorms
And monsoon rains
Is tapir and okapi,
And electric blue butterflies with wings as wide as my arms...

Nemasani’s shroud transforms into a butterfly and flies away.

25.

The rooftop of the sewing factory. Sunset. The sky is fuchsia and tangerine and indigo blue. Anon and Nemasani are alone.

NEMASANI: Where I come from, there are butterflies like nothing you’ve ever seen.

ANON: Blue.

NEMASANI: Yes, blue, so blue.

ANON: With huge wings.

NEMASANI: Hug.

ANON (Spreading his arms): Like this. Bigger even.

NEMASANI: Yes. (Recognizing something in Anon) Yes.

ANON: I remember.

Nemasani and Anon look at each other.

ANON: What if I told you—?

NEMASANI: No. Don’t say it.

ANON: What if somehow—?

NEMASANI: Please don’t.
ANON: But what if—
NEMASANI: I don't believe in "what if." "What if" will break your heart.
ANON: You have a son.
NEMASANI: My son died. He died a long time ago. He was just a little boy and he died.
ANON: What if he didn't?
NEMASANI: Stop!
ANON: What if he survived?
NEMASANI: I said stop!
ANON: Please listen to me.
NEMASANI: No. No. I can't. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. (Begins to exit)
ANON: What do you remember?
Because what I remember, what I remember is you.
How you used to hold me.
You held me and you sang to me.
I remember the song you sang to me. 
Somewhere in the night, the sound of a woman singing an ancient song.
Nemasani turns and looks back at Anon. She approaches him.
NEMASANI: How can I know you are who you say you are?
ANON: I'll tell you the story of my life and then you can decide.
It begins in the middle
On the border
On the crossing.
It begins in the place in between.
The song continues. Nemasani approaches Anon. The sounds of the city begin to filter through and fuse with the ancient song, making a new song. It grows like a beautiful hybrid bloom in the wilderness.

END OF PLAY