

SLAKE

by Martín Zimmerman

Di Glazer
Theater

ICM®

730 Fifth Avenue, 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10019

(212) 556-6820 (o)

(516) 840-4681 (c)

dglazer@icmpartners.com

CHARACTERS

ORA, early 30s.

ADEM, mid 40s. Ora's former tutor, and current mentor.

NASIA, mid 30s. Ora's sister.

JAMIE, mid 30s. Nasia's fiancé.

All other roles are played by the **CHORUS**, many. How many? That's something you'll have to figure out for yourself.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

- 1) In terms of ethnicity, casting should be flexible, but not blind.
- 2) Unless otherwise indicated, scene transitions should be swift and stark.
- 3) All stage directions in bold are either heightened movement or sound. How you choose to render these movements and sounds is open to interpretation, but if it's in bold, it needs to be reckoned with in some heightened, theatrical way.
- 4) The Chorus is not just an ancillary appendage to the story, but a vital, central character. Unless the script explicitly indicates otherwise in a particular moment, find ways to keep the Chorus involved and threaded throughout.

PART ONE

Prologue

(ORA enters in a modest, loose-fitting dress.

She wears a backpack, and, beneath her dress, hiking boots.

She sets her backpack down and stares at her surroundings, somewhat bewildered, when an older WOMAN approaches.)

ORA

Privish. . . uh. . . evet vant darvenaan—

(The WOMAN stares at her with a look of stupefaction.)

ORA

Ehhh. . . puh-ri-veesh. . . vant darvenana?

(The WOMAN still stares.)

ORA

Oh hell. . .

(ORA reaches for something in her backpack when...)

WOMAN

Lost?

(ORA freezes.)

ORA

Did you just say—

WOMAN

Are you trying to tell me you're lost.

ORA

You speak English.

WOMAN
I'm aware.

ORA
You have no idea how long I've been looking for someone who. . . I tried talking to this boy playing football up the road. . . I even tried a teacher outside the school and it was just hopeless—

WOMAN
You want to find someone who speaks English around here, you must speak to the elderly.

ORA (*a realization*)
The ones who were around when the British were in power.

WOMAN
Clever girl.
What are you trying to find?

ORA
Was I that obvious? I tried to dress the part. . .

WOMAN
You think you're the first foreigner who's come trekking through?
We get all kinds these days. Mostly Dutch and German. I'm guessing you're the latter?
Given your stubborn insistence on walking everywhere—

ORA
Oh no, I'm not—

WOMAN
Well, you're not British. I can tell that much.

ORA
I'm Australian.

WOMAN (*never heard of it*)
Aus. . .

ORA

Way far away. Across the ocean.

(We can clearly tell ORA is not Australian.)

WOMAN

And what brings you all this way?

ORA

What brings the Germans?

WOMAN

They want to see something "unspoiled."

ORA

By what?

WOMAN

The sort of things they wouldn't revile so much if they actually needed them. So I show them every fallow field and emaciated cow within twenty miles. There's one not more than five minutes from here that's positively skeletal. Chews his cud all day just trying like the devil to keep from keeling over. The Germans go absolutely ape over him. Call him Fritz or something. "I would like too see Fritz?" They say it just like that.

(imitating their cadence)

Like it's a question?

ORA

So you. . . run some sort of guesthouse?

WOMAN

What makes you so delusional you think anyone around here could afford a guesthouse?
I have a spare room.

ORA

Of course.

WOMAN

The bed's small, but it fits two.

ORA

Two?

WOMAN

Your husband's behind you?

ORA

Oh, no, I don't have a—

WOMAN

Your boyfriend?

ORA

Is in the hostel.

WOMAN

The closest hostel's—

ORA

In the capital. My boyfriend's a tad too fond of drinking and clubs.

WOMAN

It's settled then. You're staying with us.

ORA

I was actually hoping I could continue on to—

WOMAN

I thought you were clever.

ORA

I . . . am?

WOMAN

Then you should know it's not wise for a young woman to wander about here by herself. Any time of day. Much less just before dark. When men around here start to think a sight like you excuses any dirty thought that enters their heads.

ORA

But the guidebook insisted—

WOMAN

The guidebook is wrong. And I refuse to tell you where you are until you've at least spent the night. So. . .

(The WOMAN grabs ORA's backpack.

ORA follows the WOMAN across the space to her house. When they arrive. . .)

WOMAN

You'll stay in the second room on the left. It's small but I think you'll find it nice enough—

(An older MAN—the WOMAN's husband—appears in the doorway.)

MAN

Another one?

(WOMAN rushes over to MAN, pulls him aside as ORA takes in the space, the two photos hanging on the wall.

One of a Young Girl, the other of an Older Man.)

WOMAN

She was lost.

MAN

Then that's her problem, isn't it? Just because someone else makes a foolish choice doesn't mean we have to stretch ourselves thin.

ORA

I can pay.

WOMAN

See?

(shooting her husband a look like "That was my intention all along, you idiot.")

She can pay.

MAN

And what good's your money if the stores are empty?

WOMAN

Don't you listen to a word he's saying. We'll gladly accept your very generous offer. He's just being a grouch.

MAN

Oh, I'm a grouch, am I? Is that what you call a man who still grieves his daughter's death?

WOMAN

Shhh—don't go on about—

MAN

She should know if she's staying here. If she wants to know what life here is really like.

ORA

Is that her picture?

MAN

And it's her bed you'll be sleeping in if you stay the night.

(ORA stares at the photo.)

ORA

May I ask what happened to her?

WOMAN

You don't have to—

ORA *(to the MAN)*

I want to know.

MAN

She was murdered.

WOMAN

She was not—

MAN

She was!

WOMAN

Shhhhh—

MAN

What's she going to say about it? You think she's some spy? I thought she was just a lonely tourist.

WOMAN

You never know—

MAN

Then why'd you bring her in?!

ORA

I promise I won't say a word.

(Pause.

He points to the picture above his daughter's.)

MAN

She was murdered by that man.

ORA

Isn't that—?

WOMAN

The king.

MAN

Salt in my wounds that I have to look him in the eyes every day of my life. The bastard. . .

WOMAN

Don't speak ill of a man who's suffering.

(to ORA)

The king's been sick a long time now.

MAN

And I hope he continues to be for quite a bit longer. I hope it's a very slow and painful death. So he can taste the misery he's caused the rest of us.

(ADEM, mid-40s, appears at the edge of the space.

Unseen by everyone else, he listens to the conversation with acute interest.)

ORA

What did he do?

MAN

It's what he didn't do that was the problem.

WOMAN

She died during a famine. She was thirteen. It was all so sudden and she was never very big to begin with—there wasn't anything to be done—

MAN

He could've done something if wasn't such a coward.

WOMAN

No one knew for sure about the oil then.

MAN

They don't want you to believe they did.

A pirate's horde bubbling beneath our feet. Begging us to lap it out of the ground. And I had to watch my daughter starve to death.

WOMAN

It's not so simple as all that.

MAN

Oh, it's not? He's a king. If he'd wanted to do something about it, who could have stopped him?

WOMAN *(to ORA)*

The truth is I don't think he ever wanted to be king.

MAN

Here she goes. . .

WOMAN

You can see the sadness, the regret in his eyes. That longing for a life he couldn't have.

ORA

You can tell all that from a picture?

WOMAN

When you know the rest of the story. . .
His father was a very harsh man.

MAN

Who got things done.

WOMAN

Whose enemies were beaten to death and dropped in an unmarked hole.

MAN

Only if they chose to make trouble.
His father had to forge a nation out of nothing. When the British were busy carving up this corner of the empire, they left him all the nasty bits no one wanted and said "See if you can make this sluice stick together, and if you can't, well. . . someone will probably string you up, slice off your head, you know, that sort of thing, so. . . Cheers, mate!"

WOMAN

The country your standing in is an invention.

MAN

A giant myth.

WOMAN

Just like our language. Built by hired experts to keep us from collapsing into anarchy. And I suppose forging a nation out of nothing—I suppose such a task would make any man harsh. But they say it bled into other parts of his life. How he treated his wife, his children. . . And the current king. . . they say he was a sensitive child.

MAN

Oh, was he?

WOMAN

You'd have been, too, if you'd had his father.

MAN

His brother wasn't that way. But then he had to go and die in a car crash.

WOMAN

So the current king was plucked out of his quiet life and thrust into his father's unforgiving mold.

MAN

If only it had worked.

WOMAN

They say if it wasn't for his wife, he'd never have made it through. That she was his strength.

She was beautiful. Looked a lot like you.

ORA

Really?

WOMAN

She had the same expression. The kind that radiated calm.

Set an entire nation at ease.

Her husband included.

But then she died. So young. And the king became convinced it was the stress of being queen that caused it. That it'd never have happened if—

ORA (*a realization*)

He hadn't accepted the crown. . .

(As the WOMAN continues talking, ORA's attention drifts to the PORTRAIT of the King on the wall. . .

Which seems to take on a life of its own, though we can't quite tell why. . .

Until we suddenly realize the portrait has transformed into the SILHOUETTE of a confused and frightened KING, who pulls off his crown, stares at it in his hands.)

WOMAN

They say he was never the same after that. That he was crippled with doubt.

(Is the KING going to reject the crown in his hands? Toss it aside? Or even just drop it?

That would take willpower he just does not have. . .

So the KING sets the crown back on his head, where the crown's increasing weight slowly stoops him. . .

Until he becomes a frightened, quivering, pathetic figure.)

ORA

Of course. . .

(ORA tries to hide the tears in her eyes.)

WOMAN

Is everything alright?

ORA

It's fine. Really—

WOMAN *(to MAN)*

See? You've gone and made her upset running your mouth.

(ADEM pulls out a satellite phone, dials.)

ADEM (into the phone)

I think we may have something.

(ADEM hangs up, starts to approach the MAN and WOMAN's living space.)

MAN

It's you who made her upset. She didn't cry when I was talking. She cares more about a king than about a little girl who never had a chance—

ORA

I care about it all. I just. . . I'm so sorry. . .

WOMAN

For what? You didn't do anything.

ORA

I really, I should go—

WOMAN
You can't.

ORA
I'll still pay you, it's just—

(ORA throws a wad of cash on the table before she takes off. . .)

WOMAN
It's not safe!

(. . .runs out of the house. . .)

And freezes when she finds ADEM waiting for her.)

One

(Darkness.

*Distant **drums.***

That rumble so low you could almost mistake them for thunder. . .

If their throbbing rhythm didn't betray them as authored by human hands.

The drums seem to multiply, a call and response. A communication across vast distances.

They multiply and multiply. . .

Until their throbbing beat creeps into our guts. . .

Threatens to turn us inside-out. . .

Then—and only then—does their beat beckon the CHORUS. . .

*Who emerge singing a mournful **lament.***

A wailing melody that sounds ancient, though it certainly is not.

And though we think we can make out the odd word here and there, the only thing familiar about it is its unending, hypnotic repetition.

A repetition that must be endured rather than enjoyed.

A repetition these people have learned to live inside. . .

Surrender to. . .

Which they do in front of us all over again.

*Until the hypnotic, liquid lamentation is repeatedly interrupted by violent, staccato shrieks as each CHORUS MEMBER takes turns **throttling** themselves.*

It quickly escalates into a fierce competition in which each individual tries to outdo the others in order to prove they can most aggressively perform their grief.

The competition could almost be funny if their pain didn't seem so acute. . .

And if it wasn't so uncomfortably clear that the participants truly believe their lives might depend on the outcome of this perverse contest.

The contest's intensity escalates. . .

And escalates. . .

And as it does, it seems to inflate the stooped, tremoring SILHOUETTE OF THE KING into a towering FIGURE. . .

Rigid. . . erect. . . a monolith in human form. . .

Until finally the CHORUS's bodies break down out of sheer exhaustion. . .

And they crumple to the ground, where they keep softly singing their melody in the shadow of the massive SILHOUETTE, which almost becomes part of the architecture of the space. . .

ORA and ADEM appear.)

ORA

What's the matter, Adem? I thought you'd be proud. You're the one who taught me this trick.

ADEM

There's not a day I don't regret it.

ORA

You don't trust your own pupil can take care of herself?

ADEM

It's not my pupil I'm worried about.

It's the queen.

ORA

She's not a queen yet.

(ORA starts to walk away.)

ADEM

The palace is in a panic.

ORA

You couldn't lie to them? Say I wanted privacy? Stuffed some pillows in my bed?

ADEM

How long do you think they'd have believed me, Ora? You've been gone three days.

ORA

Well, now you can tell them all to sleep soundly.

I promise I won't wander far.

(She keeps walking.)

ADEM

I can't chase you like this forever.

ORA

Who says I expect you to chase me at all? Sometimes I do something, Adem, and it has absolutely nothing to do with you.

ADEM

The presumed queen disappears the second her father dies? Who exactly were you thinking they'd send?

ORA

In case you haven't noticed, I already have a father, and as the whole kingdom's finding out, he's dead.

Besides. No one will talk with a strange man sitting in the corner. But when it's just a naive Australian alone in a strange land. . .

(She starts off.)

ADEM

When you become queen—

ORA

My portrait will be the one on their wall. Everyone will stiffen as soon as they see me.

(Beat.)

And I'll never know another honest thought as long as I live.

ADEM

You'll know mine.

(A harsh laugh.)

ADEM

Your father was a good man. Whose people loved him in spite of his flaws.

ORA

And why should I trust you? The man he hired to teach his daughters, then took as his advisor—

ADEM

Because you told him to.

ORA *(turning on him)*

Why would I trust a single word you say about him? *You* didn't starve to death while he sat on his hands or watch the life drain out of your children while you sat atop a fortune in oil all because your king—the man who was supposed to *protect you*—was content to run out the clock—

ADEM

He was never content, Ora.

He was terrified. Of what would happen if he let anyone touch that oil. Terrified he'd lose control of his country. Terrified to have that control in the first place.

You and I both know that.

ORA

Do they?

(No answer.)

She starts to cry.

Then melts into his arms.

Though he has a slight discomfort with the intimacy of their contact, he accepts it nonetheless.

Now's not the time to resist.

As they stand there, distant shrieks once again invade the mournful melody, the throbbing drums.

The shrieks make ORA look up, and she's startled by the sight of the SILHOUETTE towering over the space.)

ORA (*re: the mourners*)

Listen to them. . . I want to go up and grab them, tell them it's not what he would've wanted.

ADEM

Too bad he didn't have the courage to say it himself.

(She looks at him.)

Don't waste your life looking for forgiveness. Go find redemption.

(He holds her. Pause.

Until the embrace becomes uncomfortably intimate. . .

And he promptly pulls away.)

ADEM

Your sister arrives this afternoon.

ORA

And you'd like me to manage her.

ADEM

She didn't spend a decade trying to ruin your life.

ORA

Why'd you stick around if it was so bad?

ADEM

I had a better reward waiting.

(A smile. Beat.)

ADEM

How long has it been?

ORA

Four years?

ADEM

I'm sure she'll act like it was yesterday.

ORA

Be generous.

ADEM

When she gives me reason to be. . .

ORA

Things haven't exactly been easy for her.

ADEM

You think she's the only one whose father didn't favor her?
The rest of us still find a way to act like human beings.

ORA

She tried to kill herself last time she was home.

ADEM

You're sure about that?

ORA

I saw the marks on her wrist.

ADEM

Doesn't mean she did it.

(She looks at him.)

Doesn't mean she tried.

ORA

I'm not sure I like where this is going.

ADEM

I'm not sure I like to see you taken advantage of.

You have such an open heart, Ora. It will make you a wonderful queen. If you can also see the ways people will try to exploit it.

ORA

Then I'll ask you to be vigilant for me. While I try to enjoy what little time she and I have before she goes.

(ADEM nods.)

(ORA starts off in the direction he came from.)

ADEM

You don't want a final word with your friends?

No one knows I've found you. Not yet at least.

(She looks at him, smiles.)

Do it while you still can, Ora.

Everything's about to change.

(As ORA and ADEM exit, the CHORUS's lament swells. . .)

Two

*(. . .until it turns into a desperate **clamoring**. . .*

*. . .frantic **shouts**. . .*

. . .longing mixed with—dare they even think it?—hope...

*NASIA and JAMIE enter, and are immediately assaulted by the tidal wave of **shouts**. . .*

*By individual CHORUS members fighting each other off as they **clamor** to be closest to the woman they believe will be their queen. . .*

They smile and wave, doing their best to hide their discomfort at the crowd's mounting adulation.)

JAMIE

What are they chanting?

NASIA

Damed if I know, dear. . .

JAMIE

You mean you can't even make out—

NASIA

How many do I have to tell you? I was a tenacious rebel any time my father tried to force me to learn.

JAMIE

So you're really about to become queen—

NASIA

About to abdicate the throne. Though I wonder if anyone's warned these poor fools. . .

JAMIE

You're next in line to rule a nation where you don't even speak a single word of the language?

NASIA
Bingo.

JAMIE (*baffled*)
That is just. . . bonkers.

NASIA (*amused*)
Poor little Jamie. You've lived your whole life in the States—

JAMIE
Not my *whole* life—

NASIA
—where everything fits into neatly into place like a jigsaw puzzle and everyone waits in line like good little robots. You must learn to check logic at the door, dear. This is "home."
(*She takes in the clamoring crowds.*)
Besides. It's probably for the best that I can't understand them. Keeps me from knowing all the nasty things I'm sure they're shouting.

JAMIE
Seems to me they're shouting the exact opposite.

NASIA
They'll change their tunes soon enough. When they discover how unfit I am to rule their bastard nation. You'd be shocked how quickly reverence turns to resentment.

JAMIE
You think that doesn't happen in the States?

NASIA
Not so quickly as it happens here, dear.

(*She smiles and waves. As the CHORUS continues to chant, sing, etc.*

Until the CHORUS vanishes.

We can still hear the faint sound of their chanting in the background as NASIA throws herself at JAMIE, starts kissing him ferociously.)

JAMIE

How much did you have to drink in the car?

NASIA

Just a bottle-and-a-half.

JAMIE

Nasia. . .*

NASIA

I'm in mourning. Aren't I allowed to act a little wild. . .

(She continues kissing him.)

JAMIE

I thought you hated your father.

NASIA

Who says he's what I'm mourning. . .

(She starts to unbutton his shirt, kiss his chest.)

JAMIE

Nasia. . .

NASIA

No talking. . .

JAMIE

What's gotten into you. . .

NASIA

When will you learn that some things only suffer from your tireless efforts to articulate them. . .

JAMIE

But—

NASIA

No words. No thoughts. Just touch. And smell. And taste.

JAMIE

What if someone sees us?

NASIA

What are they going to do? Punish their queen?

JAMIE

Soon to be ex-queen.

NASIA

Not ex yet. . .

(She unzips his pants, is about to take him into her mouth. . .

When ORA appears.

JAMIE sees her.)

JAMIE

Nasia. . .

NASIA *(massaging him)*

Shhh. . .

(He gently tilts her head so she can see her sister.

NASIA can't help but smile, almost as if she's glad she's been caught.

She slowly pulls herself to her feet, trying to maintain her balance so as not to betray her inebriation.)

NASIA

Well, here she is. . .

(She curtsies.)

Let Daan receive her queen. . .

It seems a silly sort of ritual, doesn't it? That a queen can't just reject her crown outright? That she has to have it in her hands before she passes it along like it's a bloody hot potato? Almost makes you want to throw your hands in the air and shout "Who made these damn rules?!" but. . . we both know the answer to that question, and it really has to make you wonder what we've got running through our veins, doesn't it?

(ORA can't help but smile.)

NASIA

At least she still finds me funny.

(Taking ORA's face in her hands.)

I don't know what on earth I'd do if my beloved little sister didn't find me—

ORA

Who's our guest?

JAMIE

Jamie.

NASIA

My concubine.

JAMIA

Her fiancé.

ORA *(To NASIA)*

Is that [true]. . .?

(NASIA lifts her hand, shows her ring.)

NASIA

Now you know why I'm a wee dwunk.

JAMIE

We hit some bad turbulence over the Atlantic—

NASIA

Don't listen to a word he says. The liquor didn't touch my lips till I was on the tarmac. It's not the flight I was worried about, but what was waiting for me when we landed.

ORA

And what's that?

NASIA

Take your pick. My sister meeting my fiancée? My father's funeral? And let's not leave out the part where an entire nation sets its disapproving eyes on the woman who would have been its queen.

ORA

You don't know that.

NASIA

You're a good little sister. The best. But you don't need to flatter me.

ORA

I'm not—

NASIA

Anyone who saw so much as a childhood photo of two of us knew which one would pan out.

JAMIE

Says the youngest creative director in the history of her agency.

NASIA *(To JAMIE)*

I don't remember inviting you into this.

JAMIE

You did ask me to marry you.

NASIA

I know what it takes to be royal material and I know that I am not it.

ORA

You can't know what they'll be thinking when they see you.

NASIA

I suppose you're right. They could just be so relieved at the sight of the crown on your head that they just forget about me.

(She takes her sister in, smiles.)

Yes. . . they could be so busy taking in the sight of my little sister. . . my beautiful, beautiful—has it really been—?

ORA

Four years.

NASIA

It has, hasn't it? The last time we must've seen each other was—

ORA

That summer.

NASIA

Am I a terrible big sister?

ORA

Not at all.

NASIA

Promise?

(ORA nods.)

NASIA *(To JAMIE)*

Last time I was home I was. . . let's just say I was in a bad way, so of course when father made me come, this place felt more like a prison than ever. I mean, after seven years in New York any place would've felt like a prison—but here? The palace with all its dark and endless corridors. . .? And one day when I'm at my worst, I wake up to this little rapping on my door—rap rap rap—and I open to see Ora standing right in front of me.

We haven't talked or even seen each other really since I've come back probably because I couldn't bear the thought of conversation with anyone. But she's not interested in talking. She just says. . . follow me. And leads me through this labyrinth of abandoned tunnels—

ORA

It really wasn't all that dramatic—

NASIA

To this day I'm not exactly sure why I followed her because I mean those things were in just dreadful shape—

ORA

They were holdovers from when the palace used to be a British army base—

NASIA

I kept thinking there's no way we're getting out of these alive—no way one of these doesn't collapse on us—and then what would become of the country? It'd be some great eternal mystery, the country that descended into chaos when the only two heirs to its throne just vanished—like those two little boys in the tower of London—

JAMIE

I think you might be losing the thread, Nani—

NASIA (*with a smile*)

Don't I always lose the thread, dear?

Anyway, all of this panic is swirling in my head when. . . suddenly we surface. And I see it. For the first time. The city. From the outside. Nothing in our way. No bulletproof windows, no security guards shielding me—just. . . the naked city. The way it was meant to be seen. And we just sit there staring at it in silence, and the sight of it just. . . lifts me out my mood.

I honestly don't know if I'd be here today if she hadn't done that for me.

ORA

That can't be true.

NASIA

But it is, Ora. But it is.

God only knows how she found those damned tunnels. . .

ORA

Adem showed me.

NASIA

Adem?

ORA

He and I finally had them sealed last year.

NASIA

He's still around?

ORA

Why wouldn't he be?

NASIA

Of course. . .

ORA

What do you mean, of course?

NASIA

Of course. . . is what I mean. Of course.

JAMIE

Who's Adem?

NASIA

My tormentor.

ORA

Our tutor from the age of ten until we went to college.

NASIA

That too.

ORA

More recently he was Deputy minister to the King.

NASIA

Since when?

ORA

Four years.

NASIA (*with a smile*)

I'm sure you played no part in that.

ORA

He's more than qualified.

NASIA

Ora here just so happened to wind up at Princeton, which is where Adem went, and she just so happened to write under his same thesis advisor. Though I'm sure she would say that's purely coincidental.

JAMIE
McNeill?

ORA
You know his work?

JAMIE
I'm in the midst of my post-doc at NYU.

ORA
In?

NASIA
Jamie's an economist.

JAMIE
Development economics.

NASIA
He did his doctoral work at Columbia. We met at an alumni event.

ORA
You must have studied under Frazier.

JAMIE (*with a slight laugh*)
Guilty as charged.

ORA
I'm sure you and I will have some lively conversations then.

JAIME
Oh, I don't know about that. I prefer to keep my feet firmly planted on the theoretical side of the fence.

ORA
Rare among his students.

JAMIE
What can I say? Constructing models has always appealed to me more than slogging through the slop.

NASIA

I'm sure you two will get along just famously.

ORA

I hope you'll have a wonderful stay, Jamie.

JAMIE (*to NASIA*)

I'll go get us settled while you two catch up?

NASIA

That would be wonderful, dear.

(They kiss. NASIA can't help but smile.

He leaves. Beat.)

NASIA

I know he's not as dazzling as some of my other men—

ORA

He seems nice.

NASIA

You don't have to say so if you don't think so. We should be honest with each other as dear sisters ought to be.

ORA

It's clear he makes you happy.

(NASIA studies her sister a moment, then cracks a wide, beaming smile.)

NASIA

He *does* make me happy. He really does. He's kind and considerate and. . . he has the patience of a saint. I know you'll think I'm ridiculous for saying that—but when we met I was. . . let's just say I was a bit of a mess and he didn't seem to mind at all—he just seemed to rise above it, ride the wave. . .

ORA

When was this?

NASIA

Eleven months ago.

(ORA takes in this information.)

I know I should've told you about him sooner—the truth is I tried to, Ora, but every time I started to put it in writing I thought. . . no. I can't. This is the kind of news you just have to share face to face.

(NASIA looks at her sister a moment, smiles.)

NASIA

You're sure I'm not a terrible sister?

ORA

I'm sure.

NASIA

And you forgive me for not telling you sooner?

ORA

Yes.

NASIA

And. . . for not coming right away?

(Beat.)

I did it for Father. You have to know that.

I wanted to rush right back. Be by his side, have some sort of deathbed reconciliation—I imagined it in my head over and over. . . I even booked a flight—

ORA

Nani—

NASIA

But when I was getting ready to go to the airport—staring myself in the mirror splashing water on my face—I had a sort of epiphany and. . . I don't know, it. . . sort of shattered my illusions. Suddenly I saw exactly what would happen if I came. How he would find some way to twist it, convince himself I'd only come to make it about me—found some way to resent me for it. For coming to be by his side.

ORA

He didn't want me to tell you. About the cancer.

(No answer.)

He made me promise I wouldn't.

But I lied to him.

(Brief pause. NASIA nods to herself silently.)

ORA

I'm sorry.

NASIA

You forgive me then? I can take anything—any news—so long as I know you forgive me.

ORA

I do.

(Beat.)

NASIA

Then why on earth are we sitting here crying like little children?

Let's be those sisters who let trying circumstances bring them together—make them inseparable.

(ORA smiles through her tears.)

NASIA

From here on out only happy news, OK?

(ORA can't help but laugh.)

ORA

OK.

NASIA

I gave you mine. Now you give me yours.

ORA

My. . .?

NASIA

That's not fair, Ora. I've gone and done my part. You can't hold out on me now—

ORA

I don't know what you're talking about.

NASIA

Telling me about the someone special in your life.

ORA

There's. . . nothing to say.

(NASIA looks at her.)

Between looking after father and trying to absorb everything I can before he—

NASIA

You can't just keep ignoring it, Ora. Not now. When you're about to become queen.

ORA

When was I supposed to have time to—

NASIA

Let me take charge of it.

ORA

Nani—

NASIA

Consider it my sisterly duty. My duty to the crown. Since I'll be so derelict in all my others. . .

I know tons of men in New York who'd die to meet a woman like you.

(ORA looks at her sister.)

NASIA

You have to take this seriously.

ORA

You think I'm not?

NASIA

These are the things people fixate on. Especially with a woman on the throne.

ORA

I need to get my feet firmly under me first.

NASIA

No one will believe they are unless there's an heir. It's all anyone will talk about.

ORA

The oil will do enough to distract them.

NASIA

You mean to do something about it, then?

ORA

I can't just leave it there.

NASIA

Father seemed content to.

ORA

While three million of his people starved.

NASIA

Of course.

ORA

What he did was irresponsible but. . . I understand why he did it.

NASIA

He was paralyzed with fear.

ORA

Always striking out at whatever he imagined was threatening him. Whether that thing was actually there or not.

NASIA

He was that way with everyone but you.

(Brief pause. They let that hang there for a moment, but none of them dares touch it.)

ORA

Which is all to say that the question of how to access the oil is a tricky one.

NASIA

But you have an answer?

ORA

Not exactly.

I want to put it to a referendum.

What we decide will alter the course of our country.

People need to have a voice in that decision.

NASIA

How will they know what choice to make?

ORA

We'll have to inform them. It'll be a big project. Massive.

NASIA

And in the mean time more people starve.

ORA

There's just no simple way to do it—

NASIA

Couldn't you make it simpler if you decided for them?

Isn't that a queen's job?

(Beat.)

Don't get me wrong, Ora. I think democracy is a wonderful thing. But these people—

ORA

Our people. . .

NASIA

They have no history—no concept of. . . how can you expect them to grasp—?

ORA

They'll just have to grasp it, won't they?

NASIA

And what if they can't come to a consensus? What if there's strife over the the outcome of the referendum? The whole reason we're a kingdom is because democracy would've torn us apart—we're too cobbled together, too—

ORA

Since when were you such a student of our history?

(No answer.)

I'm sorry.

NASIA

It's alright. You're dealing with a lot.

And I should be here for you. In whatever way I can.

(ORA is surprised at her sister's reaction.)

NASIA

We have to learn not to take everything the other says so personally anymore.

We're all we have left.