

**BLONDES WITH BLACK EYEBROWS**

**a one-act play  
by Tom Baum**

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LAYLA, an anthropologist, 30s-40s

RUDY, her teaching assistant, 20s -30s

NIGEL, a guide, 30s-50s

BAZIR, a tribal chieftain, 30s-40s

The time is the present.

*(Lights up on a lectern with a pitcher of water and a glass. RUDY enters, takes his lecture notes and a bottle of water out of his backpack. Sees the pitcher of water.)*

RUDY: Well thank you. I brought my own water, but I appreciate the hospitality.

*(RUDY sets aside his water bottle and his backpack.)*

So. This is Anthropology 201, the Anthropology of Dreams.

*(RUDY pours water into the glass, lays out his notes.)*

Out of respect for Layla...for Professor Stockwell...I intend to follow her syllabus...which, as many of you know, I helped design....I want to make it clear, this is not a memorial service. We don't know that any harm has come to Professor Stockwell...All right, those of you who need an introduction, my PhD thesis dealt with the use of dreams by preliterate societies. Professor Stockwell was my thesis adviser...and, that's how we ended up together on this field trip....from which she's...failed to return. So far.

*(RUDY takes a drink of water. Tastes it. Frowns. Recovers.)*

So. Why did we go on this trip? Simple enough. I wanted to see for myself. A tribe whose justice system was supposedly based on dreams... who claim to share their dreams the way you and I share the sights and sounds of this lecture room... for whom dream life is more real than waking life... how could such a culture maintain itself? And that a scientist of Professor Stockwell's stature...was willing to...to go to bat with the university...and then agree to come along...for me, and for her, this expedition was the opportunity of a lifetime...if you will, a dream come true.....

*(RUDY takes another worried sip of water. Blackout.)*

*Lights up on NIGEL and LAYLA at a table. NIGEL is drinking beer, LAYLA bottled water.)*

NIGEL: Can I interest you in a Tiger Beer? Might take the edge off. On the eve, so to speak.

LAYLA: I feel sufficiently relaxed, thank you. Nigel...may I call you Nigel?...what we need is somebody to take us there and leave us there.

NIGEL: Sorry, no. You're gonna want me on retainer. In case you're tempted to bail.

LAYLA: Oh no. That's not going to happen. I've looked forward to this trip for years.

NIGEL: You teach a course in dreams, is that right?

LAYLA: A cross-cultural analysis. What do different cultures do with their dreams? Are there universal symbols? Why has the West lost interest in dreams?

NIGEL: Because all they are is dreams. What about your assistant?

LAYLA: Rudy, ohmigosh, he puts me to shame. Dreams are his passion. I take it you have no interest in the subject?

NIGEL: I don't dream. Comes from years of sleeping with one eye open.

LAYLA: Well, oh gosh, then you don't know what you're missing. Last night for example—I dreamed I was at a concert. Full orchestra. Solo violin... full percussion section... a dozen trombones...there was even a celesta....and a wind machine!

NIGEL: Fancy that.

*(RUDY enters, hanging back.)*

LAYLA: I don't play an instrument, I can't read music, I can barely carry a tune....and in my sleep I composed this... this violin concerto. How is that possible? To invent things out of nothing...faces we've never seen....sounds we've never heard...and keep them going...from one moment to the next...without effort or forethought...it's as great a mystery as Creation itself.

NIGEL: Right. What are you taking for malaria?

LAYLA: Why, do I sound feverish? *(to RUDY)* What are we taking for malaria?

RUDY: Chloroquine. Why?

LAYLA: Nigel wants to know. Unless he was just being flippant. Nigel seems to think we're on a fool's errand.

NIGEL: Then again, maybe you'll hit the mother lode. (to RUDY)  
Rufus, there's a pharmacy two blocks down, tell them you want a script  
for Malarone. Mention my name.

RUDY: I will. And mine's Rudy.

NIGEL: Better get going. They close at eight.

(RUDY *exits.*)

NIGEL: What's the appeal here for him? Besides spending time with an  
attractive lady.

LAYLA: I don't think that was his primary motivation. But thank you.

NIGEL: Guess you don't hear that kind of talk in academia.

LAYLA: Oh gosh, academics? They're the randiest people on the planet.  
No, but Rudy and I are both totally obsessed. With this tribe, I mean.  
And the dream world they inhabit.

NIGEL: I've heard those tales. If I dream I steal a bloke's wife, he can  
bring me up on charges. Why would I ever tell him?

LAYLA: You don't have to tell him. He's dreamed it too.

NIGEL: Sounds like a crock to me. But hey, I get paid either way. Any  
profits, I share. Pleasant dreams, Professor.

(NIGEL *exits. Blackout.*

*Lights up on a forest clearing. NIGEL, stripped to the waist, is cleaning  
a pistol. It's night. A bird is shrieking. RUDY enters.)*

NIGEL: Hey there, mate. What's the matter, can't sleep?

RUDY: That shrieking sound, what animal is that?

NIGEL: Hanging parrot. Genus *loriculus*. There's a banyan tree over  
there, that's where they nest. I guess you're a light sleeper?

RUDY: Yes, my sleep phases are completely atypical. Too little Delta,  
too much REM. I wake up exhausted every morning.

NIGEL: Like a senior citizen. But I'm guessing you were born old.

RUDY: Nigel, why do you think you have to needle me? How is that helping our situation?

NIGEL: It's just a mannerism. You'll get used to it.

RUDY: Seriously, how many more days of this?

NIGEL: Oh, didn't the Professor tell you? I'm signed on for the duration. Tell me, she ever been married?

RUDY: She had one brief relationship. With a violinist. Really, I should have been present at that discussion—

NIGEL: Are you sleeping with her?

RUDY: No! Was that a serious question?

NIGEL: What's her real business here, Rudy?

RUDY: What do you mean, her real business. We're here to investigate a tribe that fascinates us both. I don't think I care for your tone—

*(LAYLA enters, half-asleep, shirt half-unbuttoned.)*

RUDY: *(to LAYLA)* Layla, Nigel seems to think he's with us for the whole trip.

LAYLA: Those were Nigel's terms. What's that unearthly sound?

RUDY: Hanging parrot. Genus *loriculus*. Um, Layla?

*(RUDY is miming "cover up" to LAYLA, who isn't paying attention.)*

LAYLA: Could we be there already? I swear I heard footsteps outside my tent. And the sound of breathing.

NIGEL: Human breathing?

LAYLA: Sounded human.

NIGEL: All right, stay put both of you.

*(NIGEL inserts a clip in his gun, exits.)*

RUDY: I don't care what deal you made with Nigel...the instant we make contact with the tribe, he's going back to Kuantan. Otherwise he'll contaminate our research with his cynicism. You don't have to say a thing, I'll take the heat. And please cover up.

(LAYLA silences RUDY as NIGEL enters.)

NIGEL: Whatever it was, it's gone. Everybody relax.

(NIGEL takes a can of insect repellent out of his pack, starts spraying his upper body.)

LAYLA: What's that for?

NIGEL: Keeps the bities at bay. How are you doing in that department?

RUDY: We're well-supplied with insect repellent, thank you. (to LAYLA) I meant what I said.

(RUDY exits.)

NIGEL: How long were you together? You and the fiddle player.

LAYLA: I see, you two have been discussing me. We were together three years. While I was researching my PhD.

NIGEL: You miss him?

LAYLA: No. It's over.

NIGEL: Then why did you dream a violin concerto?

(Pause.)

LAYLA: That's very astute. (slaps at an insect) I suppose I miss the companionship.

NIGEL: Not the sex?

LAYLA: Nigel, that's personal.

(LAYLA begins scratching at her neck.)

LAYLA: How about you? Are you married?

NIGEL: Wouldn't pay. I'm never home. Here, come here.

(NIGEL *sprays insect repellent into his palms.*)

LAYLA: What? What do you want?

NIGEL: You're getting bitten to death. Don't want to catch malaria, do you?

(NIGEL  *rubs insect repellent into LAYLA's neck. RUDY enters, hangs back, watching.*)

NIGEL: It might interest you to know, I had my first woman when I was 12. My dad paid. Does that shock you?

LAYLA: Not at all. That used to be a tradition in Middle America.

NIGEL: It's a bloody fine tradition. Everything my dad enjoyed, I enjoy.

LAYLA: For instance.

NIGEL: Shooting small animals, for a start.

LAYLA: What else?

NIGEL: Eating. Farting. Fucking.

(NIGEL  *broadens his massage. RUDY sees LAYLA shiver.*)

RUDY: We're there. We've found them. We've arrived.

NIGEL: What makes you think that?

RUDY: (*calls off*) Um, hello? Where did you go? (*no answer*) I'll be right back.

(RUDY  *exits, re-enters with BAZIR. BAZIR is wearing a gaudy polyester shirt, loose-fitting shorts, battered sneakers. He's sockless, tattooed, and appears to be sleepwalking.*)

LAYLA: Oh Rudy, good job!

NIGEL: (*to LAYLA*) Hang on a sec. (*to BAZIR*) I Nigel. What your name?

RUDY: He doesn't speak Pidgin. I tried.



NIGEL: Doesn't or won't. Probably speaks Malay. *Adakah anda sedar?*  
Anybody in there?

(NIGEL *strikes a match, peers in BAZIR's eyes.*)

NIGEL: Something's wrong with this bloke. He doesn't look like the  
full quid to me. Where did you find him?

RUDY: The next clearing. There's a path through the brush, I saw a  
bunch of huts.

NIGEL: (to BAZIR) What do they call you? *Apa nama anda?*

(No response. NIGEL *takes BAZIR's arm, twists the flesh in his  
fingers.*)

BAZIR: *Ow! Awak lukakan saya!*

NIGEL: All right, all right, take it easy. Sorry I woke you. *Nama anda?*

BAZIR: *Nama Bazir.*

LAYLA: *Nama Layla. Nama Nigel. Nama Rudy. Um.... Dimanakah  
tandas?*

BAZIR: (*puzzled*) *Apa yang anda bertanya?*

NIGEL: (to LAYLA) What were you trying to say?

LAYLA: I told him we were just visiting.

NIGEL: Well, you asked him, where's the toilet. Toilet's not part of his  
vocabulary. *Adakah anda penting?*

BAZIR: *Ya. Saya ketua.*

NIGEL: Says he's the headman.

BAZIR: *Da manakah anda dating?*

NIGEL: He wants to know where we're from. (to BAZIR) *Saya dari  
Australia. (indicating LAYLA) Dia dari America. (indicating RUDY)  
Dia dari America.*

(RUDY *has taken an iPad out of his backpack.*)

NIGEL: What are you doing?

RUDY: I'm showing him where he lives.

NIGEL: Are you daft? Satellite pictures? This bludger doesn't understand a map.

RUDY: Oh, that is so racist! All sorts of creatures can understand a map. Canada geese! Honeybees! Monkeys! The brain is a map of the body!

BAZIR: *Beritau suami anda menjadi tenang!* .

NIGEL: He says, tell your husbands to be quiet.

LAYLA: *(to BAZIR)* Sorry, Bazir. *(to NIGEL)* Tell him you're not my husbands.

NIGEL: *(indicating LAYLA)* *Belum berkahwin.* Not married.

BAZIR: *(to LAYLA)* *Anda membuat isteri saya gila!*

RUDY: Why is he getting so upset?

NIGEL: He's telling Layla to stop *gila*-ing his wives.

LAYLA: *Gila*-ing?

NIGEL: It's hard to translate. It means, making his wives crazy. Better cover up your chest.

LAYLA: *(buttons up)* Oh gosh. I'm sorry. I don't want your wives to be unhappy. Nigel?

NIGEL: *(to BAZIR)* *Saya melindungi kedua-dua orang. Jika mereka tercedera itu pengebumian anda.*

RUDY: Translation, please.

NIGEL: I said I'm minding two babes in the woods, and if they come to any harm, it will be on his head as well as mine. *(to BAZIR)* *Kamu faham?*

BAZIR: *Saya faham. Jumpa lagi, Layla.*

LAYLA: *(to NIGEL)* *Jumpa lagi?*

NIGEL: He's saying, see you later.

LAYLA: Oh. Yes. By all means. *Jumpa lagi*. See you later.

(BAZIR *exits*.)

LAYLA: Isn't that wonderful! We've made contact already. And on very good terms, don't you think?

RUDY: I don't like the way he was looking at you.

NIGEL: Yeah, I wasn't wild about that either.

LAYLA: I don't think he means us any harm. I sensed a very positive connection.

NIGEL: Yeah, well, you're new at this game. You two go back to your tents. If you hear any more footsteps, don't be afraid to holler for help.

LAYLA: Good night, Nigel. *Jumpa lagi*.

NIGEL: *Jumpa lagi*.

(*Blackout. Lights up on LAYLA asleep in her tent, writhing on her pallet. Sound of brush crackling. LAYLA's eyes open.*)

LAYLA: Who's there?

(BAZIR *enters*.)

BAZIR: *Jangan menjerit*.

LAYLA: What? I don't understand.

BAZIR: No scream.

LAYLA: No. I won't scream. Um...*apa khabar?*

BAZIR: No. Talk *ingerrish*. Where *suami*?

LAYLA: *Suami?* That's not *ingerrish*. Oh, you mean my husbands? They're sleeping. But no, I'm not *berkahwin*. I'm not married.

BAZIR: I married.

LAYLA: Two wives. You told me.

BAZIR: A lovely girl. The other not so lovely. They both angry at you.

LAYLA: Why? I haven't done anything.

BAZIR: You tempted me.

LAYLA: I certainly didn't mean to. The last thing I want to do is cause trouble. I'm a stranger here.

BAZIR: You depend on *bukan suami*.

LAYLA: *Bukan suami?*

BAZIR: Not-husband. The man from Perth.

LAYLA: Nigel. Yes, I depend on Nigel. How do you know he's from Perth?

BAZIR: Your lover, he's musical?

LAYLA: Nigel? No. He's not musical. I mean, Nigel isn't my lover. Neither is Rudy, oh gosh no. Wait, I'm sorry, you were talking about my ex-lover.

BAZIR: The fiddle player. He was only third chair. You deserve better. What's your purpose in coming here?

LAYLA: Oh goodness, you've been playing possum, haven't you? You speak perfect English. Why are we here? We're here to learn.

BAZIR: Learn what?

LAYLA: Your customs. Your wisdom.

BAZIR: *Bintang-bintang adalah pendidikan saya.*

(LAYLA produces a giant rat-trap out of thin air out of her pocket.)

LAYLA: I'm sorry, could you say that again? In *ingerrish*. I need to trap your words with my word-trap.

BAZIR: The stars are my education. Would you care to dance?

LAYLA: I thought you'd never ask.

*(LAYLA sets aside the giant rat-trap. They slow dance to Frank Sinatra: "My Funny Valentine.")*

BAZIR: I adore Mr. Blue Eyes. The Capitol era is my favorite.  
Precisely what wisdom are you seeking?

LAYLA: Well...I understand your tribe's justice system depends on dreams. How much do you sleep at night?

BAZIR: Sometimes for days.

LAYLA: For days. That's amazing. With the help of what herb?

*(BAZIR breaks away fiercely.)*

BAZIR: *Mangapa kamu semua di sini?*

LAYLA: What's wrong? What did I say?

*(BAZIR grabs her again and kisses her angrily. LAYLA struggles and then gives in. They start to make love. Blackout. Sound of a gunshot.)*

*Lights up. BAZIR is gone. The giant rat-trap is gone. NIGEL enters with a bird carcass and a flashlight. LAYLA's moans turn into a scream.)*

LAYLA: [*screams*]

NIGEL: Calm down. Shh. It's me, Nigel. Wake up. I'm here.

LAYLA: What's happening? Where's Bazir?

NIGEL: The chief? He's out there in a hammock, asleep with his two wives. What's the problem?

LAYLA: Nothing. I was just....Nothing. What's that you're carrying?

NIGEL: Peacock pheasant. We might get some meat out of it.

LAYLA: Is it real?

NIGEL: What do you mean, is it real? I just shot it. Wake up, you're still in dreamland.

(RUDY *enters.*)

RUDY: I heard a scream. What happened?

NIGEL: It's OK. She was having a nightmare.

LAYLA: It wasn't a nightmare. I was...I was dancing. To Frank Sinatra.  
With Bazir. And he was talking perfect English.

(BAZIR *enters.*)

BAZIR: (to RUDY) *Apa salahnya?*

NIGEL: No problem. Sorry we woke you. *Mimpi ngeri.* The pretty lady  
was having a dream.

BAZIR: *Isteri-isterinya adalah marah. Anda di sini untuk mencuri sihir  
mereka.*

LAYLA: What did he say?

NIGEL: He says, his wives are pissed off. They think you're here to steal  
their magic.

LAYLA: (*tightly*) Why would they think that?

NIGEL: *Mengapa?*

BAZIR: *Layla diberitahu me.*

NIGEL: He says you told him. (to BAZIR) *Menjadikan isteri tenang.*  
Go hose your wives down.

BAZIR: (to LAYLA) *Jumpa lagi.*

LAYLA: *Jumpa lagi.*

NIGEL: Go! *Pergi!*

(BAZIR *exits.*)

RUDY: What did he mean, steal their magic?

NIGEL: Yeah, have you been meeting this bloke on the Q.T.?

LAYLA: Of course not. Don't you see, this is proof!

NIGEL: Proof you've been lying out your ass.

LAYLA: Oh goodness, will you try to focus! The only time we talked was in my dream. I asked him about tribal magic. If they all took something to sleep. Don't you understand? He knew what I was dreaming!

NIGEL: *(to RUDY)* Sooner or later, they all go troppo.

RUDY: What magic are you looking for, Layla?

LAYLA: Whatever they have to offer.

RUDY: Uh-huh, I see. So who actually sponsored this expedition?

LAYLA: *(pause)* Our airfare. That's all they're picking up.

RUDY: Who is "they"?

NIGEL: It's Big Pharma, isn't it.

LAYLA: No! It's not Big Pharma. *(pause)* It's just a start-up.

RUDY: So what are you saying? We're being financed by a drug company?

LAYLA: Yes, Rudy, we're being financed by a drug company. Does that mean I'm going to hell? There's a rumor this tribe is onto something useful. Some sedative herb that promotes healing. If I knew you were going to be a PharmaScold, I'd never have brought you on this trip.

NIGEL: Don't look at me, I'm fine with it. We signed a paper. Share the wealth.

RUDY: Yes, and what's the tribe's share, I'd like to know.

NIGEL: What would they do with the money? Except paper the holes in their roofs.

*(Distant female shrieking.)*

RUDY: What the hell is that?

NIGEL: I'm guessing it's his wives.

RUDY: (to LAYLA) See what you started?

(BAZIR enters.)

NIGEL: What's the deal, mate? *Apa yang berlaku?*

BAZIR: (solemnly) *Layla dan saya melakukan zina.*

NIGEL: (to LAYLA) He says you committed adultery with him.

BAZIR: *Perbicaraan. Anda mesti tinggal.*

NIGEL: And you need to stick around for the tribunal.

RUDY: "Tribunal"?

LAYLA: Of course I'll stick around. Tell him yes.

RUDY: Wait. Can we talk about this please?

LAYLA: Rudy, it's the opportunity of a lifetime. We can experience their dream-justice system first-hand.

RUDY: What if you're convicted?

LAYLA: I fully expect to be.

RUDY: Then don't you think we ought to know the punishment? They know you're here for their magic. This trial could be an excuse to execute you.

NIGEL: I'll tell you what's gonna anger them. If you refuse to play along.

LAYLA: Rudy, he's right.

NIGEL: And don't worry. I'll be here in case things go sideways.

(*Blackout. Sound of drums.*)

(*Lights up on NIGEL peering through binoculars. RUDY enters. Sound of a wind instrument.*)

RUDY: What's that hideous sound?

NIGEL: Some kind of native panflute. They're getting this party started.



*(Spotlight on LAYLA and BAZIR. BAZIR has a bowl in his hand.)*

NIGEL: They're passing a bowl around....Layla's waiting for Bazir to drink...Now she's drinking too.

RUDY: I just hope it's not alcoholic. She gets looped on one glass of Chardonnay.

*(Spotlight on LAYLA and BAZIR. BAZIR has a sprig in his hand and is stripping the leaves into the bowl.)*

NIGEL: Whoa, we're getting warmer. He's crumbling some herb into the bowl.

*(Spotlight on LAYLA and BAZIR. She's drinking deeply from the bowl. Dancing shadows play across their faces.)*

NIGEL: The wives are getting into it now. They're dancing around her. Pelting her with something.

RUDY: Ohmigod, it's an exorcism. They think she's a witch.

NIGEL: Layla doesn't look too worried. Chief's smiling too.

RUDY: What have they got to smile about?

*(LAYLA and BAZIR touch foreheads.)*

NIGEL: I guess because their foreheads are touching.

RUDY: *(stricken)* That's the way they kiss. She's gone troppo. That's women for you.

NIGEL: I know how you feel.

RUDY: I mean I'm sure you've had plenty.

NIGEL: Only my share.

RUDY: Sometimes...this is going to sound weird....I can't stand to be around them.

NIGEL: Hey listen. You know what I call a man who won't admit women drive him nuts? A misogynist.

RUDY: Can I ask you a personal question, Nigel?

NIGEL: Why stop now?

RUDY: What about Latinas?

NIGEL: What about them?

RUDY: The pants they wear, three sizes too tight? And the T-shirts and the belly fat? And then they complain about macho culture.

NIGEL: Who says they're complaining?

RUDY: What about older women?

NIGEL: You mean like what Layla is to you? Yeah, I've had all ages.

RUDY: I'm not talking about Layla! I mean the ones you see in the supermarket, clogging up the aisles. Won't get out of your way.

NIGEL: They're old. They don't see you. Any other complaints?

RUDY: Girls in fedoras. Or engineer's caps. Or berets. Blondes with black eyebrows.

NIGEL: What about them?

RUDY: Do they want us to picture their pubic hair or what?

NIGEL: Rudy, here's a tip. Get some of those dilating drops the eye doctors use. They'll give you the look of love. Bloody irresistible.

RUDY: And now you're mocking me again. *(pause)* Does that really work?

NIGEL: Just trying to get you laid, that's all.

*(Spotlight up on LAYLA, alone. Staring, hypnotized. Shadows play across her face. She passes out, drowned in shadow.)*

RUDY: What's Layla doing now?

NIGEL: I can't see. Too many people in the way.

*(A tribal yell. Female shrieking.)*

RUDY: What's that? What's going on?

NIGEL: Wait here.

*(NIGEL exits in a hurry. RUDY paces. NIGEL enters, with LAYLA clinging to him.)*

RUDY: Ohmigod, Layla, what happened?

NIGEL: I think she's one toke over.

*(LAYLA collapses into NIGEL's arms. He carries her to a pallet. The female shrieking continues.)*

NIGEL: Easy does it, love. Can you hear me?

LAYLA: I'm here. Nigel, are we dreaming of each other?

NIGEL: We're both awake. When did you start to get buzzed?

LAYLA: I don't remember.

NIGEL: He sprinkled some leaves into that bowl. Remember that?

LAYLA: Yes, they disappeared. Soluble in water. No taste at all. Am I glowing? I feel like I'm glowing...

NIGEL: Yeah, I don't think his wives are happy with the deal. They sound mad as cut snakes.

LAYLA: Well, they'll just have to learn to share.

RUDY: What do you mean, share?

LAYLA: You were worried about the punishment? Apparently it's marriage. Bazir's got three wives now. Can't wait to tell Mom, she thought she'd never see the day.

NIGEL: Hey. Don't be so damn cavalier about this.

*(Shouts rise. RUDY picks up the binoculars.)*

RUDY: There's something on fire out there.

*(NIGEL takes the binoculars. Lights up on dancing shadows...the shadow of an effigy, aflame.)*

NIGEL: *(to LAYLA)* I think it might be you.

LAYLA: What? Let me see. *(takes binoculars)* Ohmigosh. His wives are burning me in effigy! This is fantastic!

RUDY: Fantastic? Are you kidding?

NIGEL: There's a possible upside. She's part of the tribe now. She'll have access to that herb. The wives, they're a roadblock, but we can work around them.

RUDY: Work around them?!

LAYLA: Rudy, please don't have another Pharma tizzy.

RUDY: Great. Two swigs of a native drug, and all your ideals go out the window. *(to NIGEL)* You, you let her participate in this ritual. Over my objections. Now they'll never let her go.

NIGEL: That's not gonna happen. Not so long as I'm in charge.

RUDY: You're to stop messing with these people. Both of you. That's an order.

*(RUDY exits.)*

NIGEL: He's having a jealousy attack.

LAYLA: I know he is. It's my fault. I started it. With that adultery dream. Or maybe Bazir started it. I don't know the mechanism. These dreams are collaborations, but I can't work out how they content gets integrated. I can't even frame a hypothesis.

NIGEL: Here's one for you: When a pretty woman goes native, the natives go for the pretty woman.

*(BAZIR enters, starts toward LAYLA.)*

NIGEL: Whoa. Back off. *Berhenti*. You hear me? I said don't come any closer. *Jangan dating dekat*.

*(BAZIR reluctantly backs off.)*

BAZIR: *Layla adalah isteri saya*.

NIGEL: In your world she's your wife. Not in my world. What did you make her drink? *Apa yang dia minum?*

BAZIR: *Jangan tanya.*

NIGEL: Well, I'm making it my business, OK? *Baik perubatan?*

BAZIR: *Dia akan tidur. (to LAYLA) Datang dengan saya!*

NIGEL: Did you not hear what I said? She's not going with you. She's staying with me. Your wives are on the warpath, go deal with them. (BAZIR *hesitates.*) I said go. *Pergi!*

BAZIR: *Saya akan kembali.*

NIGEL: Yeah, you'll be back, and I'll still be here.

(BAZIR *exits.*)

LAYLA: Now he's having a jealousy attack.

NIGEL: Yes, and you're loving it. No more head-to-heads with Bazir. It just inflames them. I'll figure out some way to get a sample of that herb, without exposing you to any more mumbo jumbo.

LAYLA: Nigel, I don't feel comfortable with that. This is a very delicate situation.

NIGEL: I'm just looking out for your interests. And mine.

LAYLA: I know you are. Stay with me. If I start to dream...wake me up. (*drowsily*) Unless I'm dreaming of you...then you'll be asleep too...nobody to wake us up....

(LAYLA's eyes close. *Lights fade to black. Lights up on NIGEL's tent. LAYLA is asleep on the pallet, head in NIGEL'S lap. Sound of brush crackling. NIGEL goes on alert. BAZIR enters the tent. Light down on LAYLA. Spotlight on NIGEL and BAZIR.*)

NIGEL: So? Did you hose down your wives?

BAZIR: *Isteri-isteri tidak menjadi masalah. Wanita pembenci.*

NIGEL: Who're you calling a woman-hater?

BAZIR: *Saya suka wanita tidur.*

NIGEL: Keep your hands to yourself, if you want to stay healthy.

BAZIR: Triangle stable. Rectangle not stable.

*(From outside the tent, unearthly female shrieking.)*

NIGEL: Appears to me we're looking at a hexagon.

BAZIR: Let the hex be gone. *Isteri selamat tinggal.*

*(Thunder. Lightning. The shrieking stops.)*

BAZIR: I make the weather. I am in control.

NIGEL: The hell you say.

*(NIGEL drops into a wrestler's crouch. NIGEL and BAZIR circle each other. BAZIR grabs NIGEL, slams him to the tent floor.)*

LAYLA: [screams]

*(Blackout. Lights up. NIGEL is flailing his arms, grappling with an invisible opponent. No more sound of rain, and BAZIR is gone. LAYLA has leaped to her feet in terror.)*

LAYLA: Ow...ohmigod...

NIGEL: What the fuck? Where am I.

LAYLA: Look out...ohmigosh....something in the bed. Something bit me.

*(NIGEL flings back the sheet. Nothing.)*

NIGEL: There's nothing. Take it easy. You're dreaming.

LAYLA: [screams with pain]

NIGEL: What? What is it?

LAYLA: Look!

*(LAYLA opens her blouse. There's a red welt on her chest.)*

NIGEL: Oh shit.

LAYLA: Nigel, it hurts. It hurts all over.

(RUDY enters, followed by BAZIR.)

RUDY: Ohmigod, what happened?

NIGEL: She got snakebit. Somebody put a snake in her sheets.  
(examines wound) Looks like a tree viper bite. (to BAZIR) Go ask your  
wives where they were tonight. *Di manakah isteri-isteri kamu.*

BAZIR: No no.

NIGEL: Yes yes. I think you're afraid to ask them.

BAZIR: No afraid. *Kita berjuang.*

NIGEL: (to BAZIR) That was a lucky move. You took me by surprise.

BAZIR: *Anda. Percubaan.*

NIGEL: Forget it, mate. No way you're putting me on trial. *Isteri-isteri!*  
*Pergi!* The lady's in pain! Go! *Pergi!*

(BAZIR exits.)

RUDY: Why did he want to put you on trial?

NIGEL: He claims we wrestled. In a dream.

RUDY: Well did you, or didn't you?

NIGEL: Yeah, OK, we dreamed the same dream. You happy now?

LAYLA: Nigel, I'm so thirsty.

RUDY: We have to get her to a doctor.

NIGEL: Be three days before we find one. Back off, I'm on this. I've got  
antivenin in my kit.

(NIGEL is digging in his kit. BAZIR has entered, unseen. He's  
crumbling leaves from a sprig into a bowl. He raises the bowl to  
LAYLA'S lips.)

NIGEL: Whoa whoa. What are you doing?

(*Too late. LAYLA drinks.*)

BAZIR: *Perubatan.* Medicine.

(*BAZIR places the sprig on LAYLA's chest. NIGEL crouches by LAYLA, applies a tourniquet, administers the antivenin.*)

NIGEL: Layla? Can you hear me? Layla?

(*LAYLA lies deathly still.*)

BAZIR: *Dia tidur.*

NIGEL: *Berapa lama?*

BAZIR: *Berjam-jam.*

NIGEL: I'll take it from here. *Pergi.*

(*BAZIR exits.*)

RUDY: What were you two saying?

NIGEL: I asked how long she'll sleep.

RUDY: What did he say? How many hours?

NIGEL: He didn't get specific.

(*RUDY bends over LAYLA.*)

RUDY: Layla? Can you hear me? It's Rudy.

NIGEL: Back off, mate. *Pergi!*

(*Pause. RUDY exits. Long pause. Jungle sounds.*)

LAYLA: (*in darkness*) Nigel? Where are you? Where did you go?

(*Lights up on LAYLA. NIGEL is sitting beside her.*)

NIGEL: I'm right here, love.

LAYLA: What was I just saying? Oh, I remember. I was thirsty. And Bazir, he gave me something to drink. Where is he?



NIGEL: Sweetheart, that was four days ago.

LAYLA: Have you been here the whole time?

NIGEL: Every minute.

LAYLA: Are you sure this isn't a dream?

NIGEL: Yeah, I'm sure.

LAYLA: How do you know?

NIGEL: *Saya suka*, Layla.

LAYLA: What does that mean?

NIGEL: If this was a dream, you'd know what it means.

LAYLA: But you speak Malay. Maybe this is your dream.

NIGEL: Layla, get a grip. I'm awake. You're awake.

LAYLA: So what does it mean? *Saya suka*.

NIGEL: It means what it means. Check out your bite. The swelling's gone. No redness, no sign of a puncture.

LAYLA: Is that what usually happens?

NIGEL: That's what never happens.

LAYLA: So everything shut down...except my immune system.

NIGEL: Yeah, that was working overtime. Low dose, you sleep. High dose, you heal.

LAYLA: That's amazing.

NIGEL: Fucking miraculous.

*(RUDY enters, hanging back.)*

LAYLA: So what do we do now?

*(NIGEL picks up the sprig.)*

NIGEL: We go to your backers and show them what we found.

RUDY: How do you know the magic will travel?

NIGEL: Christ, now he's gone troppo.

RUDY: Give it back, Nigel. I don't care what it cures.

NIGEL: Oh leave it out, mate. I just hope for your sake you never get snakebit—

*(Female shrieks.)*

RUDY: There go the wives again.

*(BAZIR enters. More shrieking.)*

BAZIR: *Beliau menanam ular. Anda terjebak suami mereka. Percubaan lain.*

LAYLA: What's he saying?

NIGEL: They want another trial—the wives do. They claim they didn't plant the snake. They're saying you witched yourself, to lure their husband to your side.

*(Sounds of a commotion.)*

NIGEL: *(looks out)* Well, hello.

LAYLA: What is it?

NIGEL: I believe they're on their way here. And they've got a couple of bulked-up blokes with them.

BAZIR: *Ipar-duai, undang-undang.*

NIGEL: Says they're his brothers-in-law. Rudy, go get your gear. We're not getting in the middle here.

*(Warlike noises, coming closer.)*

LAYLA: Nigel, can't we work out a compromise? We'll give back the herb. I'll stand trial again.

NIGEL: Are you daft? Last time they burned you in effigy. This time it's apt to be for real. You got what you came for, you're gonna make a helluva splash when we get back, so let's get ready to push off.

LAYLA: Bazir, do you want me to go?

NIGEL: Of course he doesn't. He's head over heels. The sooner you're gone, the sooner he'll come to his senses.

LAYLA: Tell him I wish I could stay.

NIGEL: *Yen paling suka anda. Jika anda cintakannya, biarkan dia pergi.*

BAZIR: *Menjaganya.*

NIGEL: I'll take good care of her. You bet I will.

BAZIR: *(to LAYLA) Saya suka.*

LAYLA: *(to NIGEL)* Please tell me what that means.

BAZIR: Means I love.

LAYLA: *(looking at them both)* Oh. I see.

*(Warlike sounds rise.)*

LAYLA: Will you at least let me say a last goodbye? After all, I am his wife.

NIGEL: Yeah, OK. Make it snappy.

*(NIGEL watches LAYLA lean toward BAZIR until their foreheads grind together, and, behind everybody's back, tucks the sprig into his pack. The warlike sounds reach a crescendo. Blackout.)*

*Lights up on a forest. NIGEL and LAYLA enter.)*

LAYLA: What happened to Rudy?

NIGEL: I think he stopped to catch his breath.

LAYLA: We shouldn't let him get too far behind. *(calling)*  
Rudy?!

*(RUDY enters, out of breath, fiddling with his GPS.)*

RUDY: How much farther is it? I keep losing the satellite.

NIGEL: About five more clicks. We'll camp here, make Kuantan in the morning. I'll start laying out the gear.

(NIGEL *exits*. *A night bird is shrieking*.)

LAYLA: Don't worry. If Nigel says we're safe here, we are.

RUDY: Oh really? He's been wrong at least a dozen times already.

LAYLA: When was he wrong? I think he's been right on the money.

RUDY: Money being the operative word. The great white hunter meets the academic sellout.

LAYLA: There's nothing to sell. We're going back empty-handed.

RUDY: You can always write your memoirs. My Days and Nights as a Tribal Wife. Your lectures will be SRO.

LAYLA: Rudy...when we get back...I want you sub for me.

RUDY: Why, what are you and Nigel planning? More colonial exploitation? (*pause; considers*) Which class?

LAYLA: Anthropology of Dreams. Maybe the introductory as well. As many as you want.

RUDY: And where will you be?

LAYLA: I don't know where I'll be.

RUDY: Well...be careful where you step, because Nigel's not the great naturalist he thinks he is. Tree viper, my ass. It wasn't a tree viper.

LAYLA: How do you know what kind of snake it was?

RUDY: Just take my word for it.

LAYLA: Did you see the snake?

RUDY: Yes, I saw it. Stop badgering me! Go be with Nigel.

LAYLA: Shh. Rudy. Calm down. You need to sleep.

RUDY: (*frightened*) Don't tell me that. Don't tell me to sleep.

(RUDY *backs away, trots off.*)

LAYLA: Rudy? Rudy?!

(*Blackout. Jungle sounds.*

*Lights up on NIGEL, asleep. LAYLA enters.*)

LAYLA: Nigel?

(NIGEL *opens his eyes.*)

NIGEL: What's the matter? Can't sleep?

LAYLA: I managed a couple of hours. Nigel, I feel so guilty.

NIGEL: You feel bad about leaving Bazir. Forget it. Focus on the future.

LAYLA: What future? Right now I don't feel I have a future.

(NIGEL *reaches into his pants and takes out the sprig.*)

LAYLA: No! Where did you steal that?

NIGEL: Relax. It's the one Bazir gave you.

LAYLA: He didn't mean for us to take it.

NIGEL: Maybe he did. Maybe he wants you to heal the world and win its admiration.

(NIGEL *takes a Nobel Prize medal out of his pants.*)

LAYLA: What's that?

NIGEL: It's your Nobel Prize.

LAYLA: (*takes the prize*) This is more than I bargained for. (*tenderly*) *Saya suka, Nigel.*

NIGEL: *Saya suka.*

(*Sound of a musical crackle in the underbrush.*)

NIGEL: What the hell was that?

*(Footsteps approaching. Sound of drums, operatic female screams.  
NIGEL reaches behind his belt for his gun. Can't find it.)*

NIGEL: What the fuck!—

*(RUDY enters, pointing NIGEL's gun.)*

RUDY: You looking for this, Mr. Know-it-all? You think you're in charge here, but you're wrong. All you've done is corrupt this woman. The rest has been totally out of your control.

LAYLA: Rudy, give him the gun.

RUDY: Shut up, Layla. I'm running this show.

*(Unearthly bird shriek.)*

RUDY: What's the name of that bird, Nigel? No? What's the matter? Can't identify it?

*(Unearthly animal growl.)*

RUDY: How about that? No? I didn't think so. Tree viper? That was no tree viper. That was a me viper!

LAYLA: That was your snake.

RUDY: My snake, that's right.

LAYLA: You dreamed it into my bed.

RUDY: I can't control my dreams. Nobody can.

LAYLA: But Rudy, ohmigod, you let everyone think the wives were to blame! You started a war! We have to go back!

RUDY: They'll incinerate us both.

LAYLA: Nigel won't let that happen.

RUDY: Didn't I make it clear? Nigel's helpless! I'm the one who has the power!

*(RUDY fires the gun point-blank at NIGEL's chest. Blackout. A cacophony of jungle sounds, animal screams, human screams, tribal music.)*

*Lights up on RUDY, asleep. Blackout. The cacophony gradually thins out.*

*Lights up on NIGEL, waking from a violent sleep. There's a spot on blood on his shirtfront. It's morning. The Nobel Prize medal is gone.)*

NIGEL: Layla?

*(Dead silence.)*

NIGEL: Where am I... Layla!?

*(RUDY enters.)*

RUDY: Morning, Nigel.

*(NIGEL looks down at his shirt—the bloodstain. Reaches into his pants. No sprig.)*

NIGEL: Oh Jesus. You shot me. With my own gun.

RUDY: I think you'll find you scratched yourself. Or it's a leak from an unhealed wound.

*(NIGEL reaches into his belt, finds his gun.)*

RUDY: You see? I never had your gun.

NIGEL: Where's Layla?

RUDY: Layla's gone. Believe me, I tried to keep my eyes open.

*(Still holding the gun, NIGEL starts gathering up his stuff.)*

RUDY: Where are you going?

NIGEL: Where do you think? I'm going back for her.

RUDY: I can't make it back to Kuantan alone. My GPS isn't working.

NIGEL: That's your headache, isn't it.

RUDY: Nigel, please don't leave me here.

NIGEL: I think the planet might be better off. I let you go home, how many other women will find snakes in their beds? The Latinas, the old ladies, the blondes with black eyebrows, nobody's safe with you around. You're a nightmare waiting to happen!

*(NIGEL starts to point the gun at RUDY, stops, contemplates the gun, holsters it, hands RUDY his GPS.)*

RUDY: Thank you, Nigel.

NIGEL: Now rack off. Go back to the ivory tower where you belong.

*(RUDY exits. NIGEL watches him go, opens his bag...looks inside...takes out the sprig. Hesitates. Considers. Then exits in the opposite direction from RUDY—the direction they originally all came from.)*

*Blackout. The jungle sounds slowly fade.*

*Lights up on the lectern. RUDY is guzzling from the glass. The pitcher of water is nearly empty. He speaks with difficulty, now and then stumbling over his words.)*

RUDY: ...Whether the tribe had moved on....or destroyed each other...I have no way of knowing. As for me...despite my limited survival skills....I was able to return to Kuantan. So there it is. What did we learn? Did the tribe really have a dream justice system? Or did we all go native? Was there something curative in that herb, or was Professor Stockwell's search for a magic healing herb basically a wild goose chase?

*(From the back of the room, a voice:)*

NIGEL: *(off)* What became of her?

RUDY: I'll take questions in a moment. Believe me, I'm not taking myself off the hook. I was the one who persuaded Professor Stockwell to make the trip. I like to think my own motives were pure, but I'm not about to cast the first stone—

NIGEL: *(off)* Never mind the bollocks. What happened to Layla?

RUDY: Oh Jesus... Nigel?

*(NIGEL steps forward.)*



RUDY: Everyone...this is Nigel. When did you get here? Is Layla here? Is she OK?

NIGEL: That's not for me to judge. You want to tell these people why she returned to the tribe?

RUDY: I thought I made that clear. She felt responsible for what she'd unleashed. Did they put her on trial again?

NIGEL: Oh Layla testified her ass off.

RUDY: And, uh, what was the verdict?

NIGEL: Someone other than you will be teaching her classes.

RUDY: You mean Layla's back? Layla? Are you here?

*(NIGEL has taken out his phone.)*

NIGEL: Take a squizz at this, mate.

*(RUDY stares at the photo NIGEL is showing him. Suddenly loses his balance. Steadies himself on the lectern. NIGEL takes the phone out of his hand, dials 911.)*

RUDY: *(reeling)* Ohmigod.

NIGEL: Easy does it, mate. *(into phone)* Hello. Could you send an ambulance to Durwood Hall? Durwood Hall on campus, that's correct. *(hangs up)*

RUDY: What's happening?

NIGEL: You were wrong, mate. The magic. It travels.

*(NIGEL has taken the sprig out of his pocket. It's been stripped of all its leaves.)*

NIGEL: And it cures absolutely everything.

*(RUDY picks up the water glass, stares at it...and collapses. NIGEL picks up the pitcher and experimentally pours out what little is left onto RUDY's upturned face. RUDY doesn't respond. NIGEL prods him with his foot. Nothing.)*

NIGEL: No problem, folks, he'll live. He'll be in a coma a few days, and don't worry, he won't be dreaming anymore. That part of his brain is history—he's been healed. No more obsessions. No more misogyny. No more snakes in anybody's bed.

(NIGEL *holds up the leafless sprig.*)

NIGEL: That was the last of the magic herb, I'm afraid. But justice had to be done.

(NIGEL *places the leafless sprig on RUDY's body. He takes RUDY's place at the lectern.*)

NIGEL: Rudy was right about one thing. This wasn't a memorial. No need for eulogies or tears. Layla made her bed, she's lying in it as we speak. (*studying his phone*) I'll miss the lady, that's for dead fucking sure. *Saya suka, Layla.*

(*Crossfade to a tableau of BAZIR and LAYLA. in a more or less Tantric sex position. LAYLA's draped with jewelry, as befits a queen. Drums and music drown out an approaching ambulance siren. The tableau comes to life; LAYLA and BAZIR begin to move. They make love to the music as the lights fade. END OF PLAY.*)