

DAMASCUS  
(first ten pages)

by Darren V. Michael



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## CHARACTERS

- WILLOW 50s, beautiful but dulled by sadness, an adventurous, almost whimsical spirit shackled just the slightest by the recent passing of her husband, a woman who has forgotten her best qualities and fallen into a despair so deep she is oblivious to its effect. She is a beautiful woman who is now broken.
- HAZEL an old friend of Willow
- JESSIE the only son of Willow, a momma's boy, adores his mother, very protective in this rough time of her life
- KALIL 30s, attractive, Middle Eastern man with a quiet, exotic nature. He exudes an almost unnatural peace. When he speaks, it is most often with confidence. Though fluent in the English language, he may not completely understand the nuance of language. He seeks to comfort people and only stumbles when he fails at that. Otherwise, he speaks with a haunting peace.
- A MAN a visitor. Later identified as Murhaf.

## SETTING

A brownstone home in a large city.

ACT I  
SCENE 1

The living room of a small brownstone home. The home is basically one large room that makes up the living area and a kitchen. On one side is a door to the outside. On the other, an exit that leads to two bedrooms and a bathroom. A late afternoon two weeks after the funeral. There is a kitchenette off to one side. HAZEL is preparing tea as WILLOW sits on the sofa talking to her. She speaks as if she is lost in a maze trying to find the exit.

WILLOW

The casket was indulgent and excessive. Ornate inside and out. But I wouldn't have it any other way. That's why he had me. I think he would have appreciated it. Of course, I could hear the whispers. "Why? Why is she doing this? Is this some weird way of grieving?" I don't know. Maybe. I just like the idea of giving Howard his dream funeral. He never would have done this for himself.

HAZEL

It was a beautiful service, honey. Howard would have loved it. The readings were so moving.

WILLOW

Howard loved James Joyce.

HAZEL

And the song? The video?

WILLOW

Oh, those were all my doing. We took photos and video everywhere we went. I probably won't watch them ever again. I don't think I could bring myself to do it.

HAZEL

Well, extravagant or not, who cares? It's for Howard, right? For you.

HAZEL brings the tea over to WILLOW and sits beside her. WILLOW continues as if searching for something.

WILLOW

Always saving a penny here or there. Wherever he could save money. But he loved when I insisted he spend money on himself. On big elaborate vacations. Once Jessie had grown and moved out, I made Howard think about us. I told him, after all these years, we can finally be stingy, selfish. Spend the time and money how we want to spend it. We can be ridiculous, even irresponsible if we want. He's retired. No strings. I always thought it was like adolescence all over again. I'm not sure Jessie was too thrilled, worried about our safety. Wanted us to settle down. "Mom, please don't. You're too old to snow ski." Too old. Me. "You're going to hurt yourself." "Please don't get Dad on that mountain." "Mom, what are you going to do on an African safari?" I thought he was going to have a stroke when Howard told him we were going to bungee jump from the Royal Gorge Bridge in Colorado. A thousand foot plunge! Honestly, Howard always complained initially – we don't have the money, we're too old to be doing this – I wonder where Jessie gets that?

HAZEL

Yes, I wonder. I do believe I saw Jessie smiling a few times. I guess as best as one can in light of things.

WILLOW

(laughing slightly)

Oh, yes. He tried. After every adventure you could tell Howard loved every minute of it. Jessie fought it, but I think for more selfish reasons. I love that boy, but if I'm being honest, I think he was worried about his inheritance.

(Laughs at this)

Inheritance. Like we're the Rockefellers. What inheritance? This house? Didn't want us blowing it all, before he got his share.

HAZEL

Jessie is a good son.

WILLOW

He is.

(Sighing)

I don't know what to do now. We did just about everything...together. Now I've got wonderful memories and a house that just seems too big for one person. I can't sell it. I

WILLOW (cont'd)

don't want to live anywhere else. Maybe renting that the extra bedroom is a good idea. Howard said we should have years ago. A little extra income, someone to keep an eye on the place while we're gone. But I always liked our life together. The two of us. Facing the world.

(Sighs again)

What do you do with half your life left and the one you thought you were going to spend it with is gone?

HAZEL

Now, now. Willow. You are too young to be talking like this. What would Howard say if he saw you acting like this?

WILLOW

You're right. He'd say move on. Move on. I know.

(surveying her home filled with boxes, seeing the laptop)

Jessie got me a computer. A laptop. Thinks I'll enjoy it or maybe it'll help me manage bills or something. Howard always did the bills.

HAZEL

You know I think you don't have to rush this. Take some time. You've got me. You've got plenty of time to decide. Just mull it over. Howard was a great man. You've raised a great young man in Jessie who loves you dearly, Willow. I'm sure this does little in the way of consolation but things will work out. It's a new chapter, right?

WILLOW

Jessie is a great kid.

HAZEL

Are you kidding me? That boy will make someone very happy. Gorgeous and smart. And dotes on his mother. That boy knows how to treat a woman. Don't you worry a bit. You'll see. We are all here for you, Willow.

WILLOW

(after a moment of contemplation then putting on a smile)

I guess so. Yes.

HAZEL

There you go. I've never known anyone as resilient as you, dear. You've gotten me through some rough spots. I think when Donald died I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you and Howard's visits. Good God, I couldn't keep you two out of my house.

WILLOW smiles briefly at the memory.

HAZEL

We're both widows now, Willow. Let this be my turn to help you out.

WILLOW

Widows. Sounds so final.

HAZEL

Bah. Stop that. We have each other. How about you get things settled here and then you and I take a trip? Just two single ladies. No children. Just you and me.

WILLOW

Jessie would want to come, I'm sure.

HAZEL

No. No Jessie. You and me. Away from the house for a bit. Everything will be here when you get back.

WILLOW

(with only the slightest of commitment)

Maybe. Let's see how I feel tomorrow. Next week even.

HAZEL

Well, any time you'd like. Howard would want that, wouldn't he?

WILLOW

Would he? I guess he would. Would I?

HAZEL

Where's that talk of extravagance now?

WILLOW

Maybe.

HAZEL

(attempting to change the subject to brighten the mood)  
Hey, you know what my neighbor Elizabeth gave me? A dirty novel.

WILLOW

She did?

HAZEL

The dirtiest. I mean, it is raunchy. Makes me blush.

WILLOW

Oh, Hazel. Stop it.

HAZEL

I'm serious. Don't judge me. It's a best seller. I can't put it down. I mean the stuff this woman can write. I'm going to finish it in a day or two and then I'll let you borrow it. You have got to read this.

WILLOW

I don't know.

HAZEL

Willow Dupree, you are going to read my dirty book. And then I'll have someone to talk to about it. I can't tell my kids I have it. I even keep it in my nightstand. Too scared someone might see it lying around. It is filthy. If my boys saw it, what would they think? But I can't stop reading it.

WILLOW

What about dinner? Are you coming by this evening? I have a great dinner planned.

HAZEL

Oh, honey, here I am prattling on about myself and romance novels, I just forgot. I meant to ask if it's ok that I take a rain check on tonight. My boys are "surprising" me this evening. Thomas called earlier to check in and see what plans I had. That always means there's a surprise visit in store. Boys. I'm sure I'll be cooking up something. I'm so sorry to back out on you this evening.

WILLOW

(once again forcing a smile)

Oh, stop it. Of course, you go be with your boys. I'll figure out something. There are still tons of boxes to go through and a lot of stuff that needs to be thrown out. I've got plenty to do. Go, go. Have fun. We'll connect tomorrow.

HAZEL

Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. Some friend I am, abandoning you like this.

WILLOW

Hazel, please. You are not abandoning me. A new chapter, right? This one will start a bit differently. A rough beginning but let's see how it turns out.

HAZEL starts to gather her things and move to the door. She stops, smiles, stares at WILLOW.

WILLOW (cont'd)

(putting on a smile)

Oh, stop it.

HAZEL

You are the best friend a woman could have.

WILLOW

Go be with your boys. Go. Leave now before we really start getting sappy and teary-eyed. Have fun.

HAZEL

You want to come? I have plenty.

WILLOW

As appealing as that offer really is, I think I want to stay in tonight. Tell the boys I said hello and thanks for the flowers. They were gorgeous as usual.

HAZEL

Thomas, of course. That boy knows everything about flowers, can't cook to save himself. You know he broke up with Chris?

WILLOW

No.



HAZEL

You know how I found out? The clothes he was wearing. Mismatched, wrinkled clothes. Awful socks. Chris always ironed everything. Would never have let Thomas outside looking like that. Wasn't going to tell me.

WILLOW

Oh, my. That is so sad. I did love Chris. He was so sweet. They were just adorable.

HAZEL

I blame Thomas. But don't tell him that. Goodness, what am I doing? I have got to get home and feed them.

WILLOW

Go. Go. We'll gossip later.

HAZEL

Ok. Tomorrow? Lunch tomorrow?

WILLOW

Lunch tomorrow. Have fun with the boys.

HAZEL

Willow, I love you, sweetie.

WILLOW

I love you, too. Go on. See you tomorrow.

WILLOW walks HAZEL out the door. She closes the door and turns back into the empty room, staring for a moment. She slowly walks to the couch and sits quietly for a moment, possibly surveying the room's contents. Realizing how empty the room really is and how little she wants to tackle, she slowly exits to her bedroom. There is a brief silence, then a knock at the front door. WILLOW reenters and goes to the door.

WILLOW

Just a minute. I'm coming. Be right there. Hazel, did you forget somethi -- ?

WILLOW opens the door to find KALIL, a Middle Eastern man around his early 30's, attractive, dressed neat.

KALIL

(with the slightest air of an accent)

Hello. My name is Kalil al Bayaat. I'm here seeking the room.

WILLOW is stunned by the question.

KALIL (cont'd)

Hello? The room? For rent? It is still available?

WILLOW

(finally and a little embarrassed)

Oh, yes. The room. I, ah...I hadn't really been thinking about it. I'd really just forgotten. We haven't had many people asking about it.

KALIL

Is it still available?

WILLOW

Uh, yes. Yes, it is. (a brief pause then – ) I'm sorry. Your name again?

KALIL

Kalil. Kalil al Bayaat. Is this a good time? I know it's a little late in the afternoon.

WILLOW

Late? No. Uh, pardon me. I'm a little distracted today.

KALIL

Distracted. Yes. I had been meaning to come by yesterday, but first day at my new job. Today is finding the place to stay. A little backwards possibly. But here I am. Is the room still available?

WILLOW

Oh, yes. Uh, please. Come in. Have a seat...Mr. Bayaat.

She opens the door wide for him and shows him to a couch in the middle of the room.

KALIL

Al Bayaat. The full last name is Al Bayaat. But please call me Kalil.

WILLOW

I'm so sorry, Mr. Al – . Kalil. You can call me Willow.

KALIL

(notices the boxes)

Willow. A very interesting name. Are you going somewhere?

WILLOW

Oh, no. Just organizing, getting rid of a few things.

KALIL

Oh, if this is not a good time, I could come back another time. I could go back down to the shelter.

WILLOW

The shelter? You're staying at the shelter?

KALIL

(only slightly embarrassed)

Oh, why, yes. I haven't been in the city very long. Didn't really have any place to go. I didn't want to spend my money on a hotel room. Hoping to find an apartment or room to lease as soon as possible, you see. It's not that bad.

WILLOW

It's terrible. Ah, my goodness. Well, ok...let's see what we can do.

KALIL

Madam? Are you okay?

WILLOW

Well, I must admit I'm a little out of my element. What do we do from here? Frankly I hadn't thought about I'd get a response so quickly. It's only been in the papers a few weeks. Right before...

An awkward pause. KALIL breaks the silence.

KALIL

(helping her)

Well, introductions maybe? I'm from Damascus. Syria. Born there. I have been in the U.S. for exactly fifteen days now. I am happy to report I am the newest employee of Tarvoli Electronics on 46<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

WILLOW

(awkwardly, but honest)

Well, welcome to our country, I guess.

KALIL

Thank you very much. It is a most interesting place you have here.

WILLOW

So you are looking for an apartment? How long?

KALIL

Excuse me?

WILLOW

How long? Of a lease? Six months? A year?

KALIL

Oh, I am looking for a home. I think I will be here forever in the U.S. Permanently. This is now my home.

WILLOW

Well...splendid. Uhhh, I'm very sorry for being so bad at this. Normally, I'm much more on top of things.

KALIL

(politely)

There is no need to explain. I believe you are doing just fine.

WILLOW

But we will not have you staying in a shelter. How inhospitable would that be? So new to the country, new in the city, and then thrust into a shelter. No, no, no.

KALIL

May I look around?

[THE PLAY CONTINUES...]