

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Call her.

Coquetta!

She doesn't know me.

Bring her here. Bring her.

Look at her.

She's ready to attack.

Come here.

She's ready to attack.

And then she bites.

Come here.

Come here, Coquetta.

I'm coming to get you!

I ran after her.

She's going downstairs.

Allah!

Did you learn some verses?

I didn't.

I didn't.

*In the name of Allah,
the Most Merciful*

Let's say it together.

Ok let's recite it.

*In the name of Allah,
the Most Merciful*

Tell the disbelievers

Tell the disbelievers

*I don't worship
what you worship*

*And you don't worship
what I worship*

... worship what I worship

*I will not worship
what you worship*

*And you'll not worship
what I worship*

And you'll not...

*You have your religion
and I have mine.*

And Allah the Great was right.

Very well!

*In the name of Allah,
the Most Merciful*

*The Pleasures of life
distract you*

- I don't know that one.
- We'll say it together.

*In the name of Allah,
the Most Merciful*

*The Pleasures of life
distract you*

Till you visit the Cemeteries

... you visit the Cemeteries

*There and then
you will come to know*

There and then...

You will...

...come to know

There and then...

- Repeat it.
- You will...

Allah! Yes, good girl.

You will come to know...

Our City of the Dead is the biggest necropolis in the world.

It's difficult to tell how big it is.

It's so big that you can drive for many kilometres on the highway along the tomb houses.

And it is a regular cemetery where people are buried every day,

with lots of men working in burials

and taking care of the tombs, just like me.

That's enough.

This tomb was used before.

It was occupied.

The owner of this tomb is called Ibrahim.

And this one belongs to Mother Kalthoum.

This one to Mustapha.

This belongs to Aisha.

This one to El-Gabarty.
And this tomb belongs to El-Khayat.

This one to El-Maghraby.

Here...

This one belongs to Mustapha as well.

This one belongs to Hussein.

This one belongs to El-Ramly.

This belongs to Mustapha, someone called Mustapha.

This one here.

Look, the entrance is here.

- Good morning.
- Hello dear.

This is a two chamber tomb.

One for women,
another for men.

There are two chambers.

Two rooms underneath.

One here and one there.

So there is a lot of rooms underneath...

Almost another city...

Another world, yes!

A City of the Dead.

You see?

When the tombs are full,
nothing gets out anymore, dear.

With the time they all turn into dust.

Didn't god make us from dust?

We turn back to dust.
Bones take a lot of time.

Then they become dust again.

Nothing lasts dear...

Praise God!

Wait... Let it fly!

You see how stupid you are?
Just give it to me.

No, let me do it...
It will fly.

Let it fly.

Give it to me.

Go catch it!

There's a huge difference between this place
and all other cemeteries around the world.

The difference is that
this is an inhabited cemetery.

People live here,
in the tomb houses or in the buildings.

...In the buildings that have grown up
around the tombs.

We have bakeries,
coffee shops, markets,

schools for the children,
mechanics for the cars,

everything inside the cemetery.

When you look at the tombs from the outside,

you never know how many people
live in each one.

Most of them look empty but it's not true.

Sometimes 10 people sleep in the same room.

These goats are thirsty.
It seems that they don't have water.

They're drinking soapy water.

Hey, Mohamed.

These goats are thirsty.

At first, I didn't know all this place
was a cemetery. I was a child.

When I got married,
they brought me here during the night.

I was just a kid.

On my the wedding morning
I saw a tomb in front of me.

But I didn't know
what a tomb was.

Little by little I got to know
what a cemetery is.

So my heart became tougher.

From the people I met
here in the cemetery

I realize they're very religious.

Because we are
living with the dead.

We should get some wisdom
from the place we live in.

When we see every day
the dead being buried,

when we see
the skeletons in the tombs,

how can we not get this wisdom?

Sometimes the smell is unbearable.

By tradition the tomb houses
have patios and rooms

for receiving the families of the deceased.

That is why people
started to move in

and adapt the tombs for living in.

The cemetery only became
crowded in the sixties,

when thousands of migrants
from the countryside came to Cairo.

At that time, they couldn't find
any other place to stay.

Sometimes they made agreements
with the tomb owners about the rent.

But many of the tombs were simply squatted.

No, there's no kitchen here.

I cook in the room where I live.

I use a small butagaz to cook on.

When my daughter was living here,
we had a big stove.

But there's no kitchen.

Real kitchen only exist in apartments.

In tombs we have no kitchen.

You can film the dead here.

Yes, go ahead.

We are sitting
on the bone house.

They are all dead.
Everyone has his day.

Everyone has his day.

I really love this place.

It's valuable for me. I gave birth to all my
children here. That's why it's so valuable.

Home is valuable.

Nothing is more valuable than home.

I was living in the main street.

I used to pay one and a half pounds.

The flat had a lot of humidity.
It was about to fall down.

So they evicted us.
It was about to fall down.

I kept looking for a place
and I moved here for 70 pounds.

In this room.

For 70 pounds per month.
Before I paid one pound and a half.

We end up here and we stayed.
We couldn't find anywhere else.

Are you happy here?

Praise God.
What can we do?

70 is not a lot?

The tombs owners
rented this for us.

It could have been
more expensive.

But they liked us
and charged only 70.

My husband is
a daily worker.

There are more
expensive tombs.

Some tomb owners
give it for free.

But the owners of this
tomb rent for money.

Nothing has really changed, dear.

People come and go.

But the cemetery stays.

And the system is still the same.

Only the humans change.

Nothing has changed.
Just the people.

As you see.
It's a still a cemetery.

If there is a dead body to bury,
people come and go. Nothing else.

Honesty is a must.

Where do you live?
In Garden City?

No. In the cemetery,
with the dead people.

Come to see us at home!

My daughter used to bring
her school friends here.

Where do you live? She would proudly say
"I live in the cemetery with the dead people".

People would reply: "Are you serious?"
And she'd invite them to come.

Afterwards they didn't want to leave!

You see?

They didn't
want to leave afterwards!

Sometimes God guided them.

Sometimes God guided them into Islam.

From the way we behave
Towards them, how we treat them.

Do you see?
Praise God.

Where are you from?
Qaitbay, El-Afifi street, 43rd area.

We sleep with the dead.

With whom we sleep?
With the dead.

Milk, cream,
yogurt and creamy rice.

Milk, cream,
yogurt and creamy rice.

Come!

Please give me some water.

Give me a ride.

Please give me a ride.

Shall I rent it per hour?

Let me go.

Shame on you, Anwar.

Milk, cream,
yogurt and creamy rice.

Be careful Ibrahim.

Mother I'll have a pie.

How much is it?

For you, 25 cents
Anyone else, 50.

I swear to God.

Come on. How much?

25 cents.

Didn't the groom come today?

He came and saw her.
And she saw him.

But I told her not to give him
her phone number.

Better fix the marriage first.

If you like each other...

Then he has to meet your parents.

- Her mother likes gossip!
- I know.

We decided not to bring her here.
The groom could be scared off.

You're right.
She's pushy.

Pushy and envious.

- What's the guy's name?
- Bibo.

I never talked to him before yesterday.

At the wedding he wasn't
talking about her.

He was talking about Doaia.

But Doaia didn't want him.
You don't know Doaia's mother!

- A very arrogant woman!
- I see.

Her father, God bless him,
was a good man.

But that woman...
No one can stand her.

You know, Rasha is a nice girl.

If she marries that guy, they will be blessed.
May God unite them.

May God unite them!

If the families agree
it will be easy.

They will have each other.

I don't get involved
not in a wedding, nor a funeral.

- I like to help.
- For me, I don't care.

As long as I trust the guy.

You know us.
And you know him.

- See you.
- God willing.

Have a nice day.

Thank you.

Thousands of people live here in the cemetery.

But it feels like a small village.

Mothers want to marry off their daughters...

Boys keep chasing the girls...

These things never change.

It doesn't matter if you live
in a big city, in a village or in a cemetery.

It's the same.

Tell me something...

Praise the prophet...

Which one of these dresses would you
choose for your wedding?

For my wedding?

Choose something not revealing.
Something more reserved.

Tell me which one.

Hold like this.

- This one?
- Yes.

- What do you like in this one?
- Everything.

Not everything.
Tell me something in particular.

- This.
- What's this?

- This one?
- Yes.

Or this one?

I want both.

- You want it because of this bare shoulders?
- Yes.

What do you want your
life partner to be like?

You want him educated?

A doctor.

A doctor? What kind of doctor?
What specialty?

What's his specialty?

There are doctors for women,
doctors for stomach, for children

... doctors for the bones, for brain
and nerves, that sort of things.

A doctor for children.

You're planning for your future...

So what do you want
from marriage?

What's your idea about it?
Good? Bad?

Good.

- Why?
- We'll have a party!

Just that?

After that, nothing?

You mean it's good because
of the party? And afterwards?

Because we can dance.

When a man is good,
he can make your whole life like a party.

But there is another kind who behaves badly
and hits you everyday.

So what is your ambition?

You want a good man, religious, who prays...

or a man who smokes hashish,
takes drugs and these things...

No, educated.

But if a bad guy proposes to you...

and he's rich and can get you a good house?

- No, both of us must be educated.
- What if your father accepts him?

No. It's not up to him.
I must choose for myself.

So it's your opinion that counts?

Yes.

Give me the ball.

I pray to God.

I just need to get these kids married.

I pray to get them married.
To have them in their own apartments.

Mustapha and Said.

To see them safe.

In order to feel comfortable.

- I don't want to get married.
- Why don't you want to get married?

I don't want to get married.

You want to live with me?

Come here.

Come here.
Call Mustapha.

Mustapha?

Why don't you want to get married?

I just don't want to.

You have to.
You just need to get your education first.

- Why don't you want to get married?
- Because.

- Because what?
- Just because.

There must be a reason.

I don't like marriage.

You don't like marriage?

You tried and you didn't like it?

When you grow up,
you'll know!

Why? Do I have to get married?

Yes you have to. Everyone has to.

I was going to ask
the same question...

I knew he was going to say that.

- You want to stay with me?
- Yes I'll stay with you.

You don't want to leave me?

I just don't want to get married.

- Do you want to get married, Mustapha ?
- He's not going to get married either.

- What did Mustapha say?
- He said no.

Do you want to get married?

Ok, he can get married.

- Mustapha?
- He can get married. It's up to him.

He doesn't know what marriage is.

But when he'll grow up,
he'll want to get married.

Don't you want to have a flat?

Yes, I want.

You see?

Sometimes the government offer apartments
to relocate the inhabitants of the cemetery.

Some people dream about it,
but not everybody.

For myself, I prefer to live here.

This place has a special magnetism.

I really couldn't live anywhere else.

-Come on, son of a bitch.

- Son of a bitch?

Go, go.

Keep going.

Get out of the way.

Watch the sand!

Go straight.

Where are you going, Zalabata?

Don't park the caravan here!

- It will not be here.

- Yes, it will.

- They are filming!

- So what?

What's this, Zalabata?

You're cutting the water and the light!

Why are you screaming?

Don't stop here, Zalabata!

We aren't staying.

We're just turning it round.

We're just turning it.

What's that?

Take it easy Zalabata,
what's wrong?

She's screaming! I'm telling her,
we're just turning it. And she's screaming!

- She's making a fuss.

- Take it easy. It's Ok.

Put it on the side.

Let's park it.

- Peace upon you.

- God bless you.

- Peace upon you.

- Upon you too.

- Peace upon you.

- Are you deaf or what?

Zalabata!!

Yes, Hassan?

I'm not Hassan, son of a bitch!

OK, Puppet.

Yes. Be respectful!

Behave!

I'm warning you...

Be respectful!

Come here!

No.

Just come!

No.

Come here, man!

You are disrespectful.

My wife.

What's up with her?

Her face looks like a bus!

Like a bus?

She looks like
she got out of a tomb!

A tomb? Do I look
like if I got out of a tomb?

Do I have anything
related to tombs?

You are the tomb itself!

It is because we live here
in the tombs...

That he's calling me a tomb?

I don't know.

How sad I am!

What's up?

How sad I am!

What's up with you?

How sad I am!

What's up woman?
Did a snake bite you?

- Hossein!
- What?

- I got married because of you.
- Because of me??

- Yes.
- Why?

You told me to marry him...
He's a good man.

Yes.

- He earns a lot of money.
- Yes.

He can get money from
the mouth of a dog.

It's all because of you.

Is it my fault that you get you married?

Oh, Hossein!

God may destroy your house!

I want children.

Go to a doctor, get a prescription.

We went to the doctor.

And he told me honestly...

We can't get children because...

This is the most important thing!
The defect.

The defect...

Just finish your sentence!

I'm shy to tell you!

Why?

Hossein was with me.

- Tell her Hossein!
- Are you sure I was with you??

Did you get out of a tomb too?

Out of a tomb?

Are you involving me in this?

Speak up!

- Shall I?
- Weren't you with me?

- Weren't you with me?
- Yes, I was with you.

- You never covered any lies.
- Never.

- And you never lied.
- Never.

- You're just a good man.
- Thank you.

And your nose looks like a cannon.

- Just tell me bit by bit.
- Yes.

Your mouth is like
an abandoned tomb.

- Be patient with me. We are just talking.
- I'm here.

- Honestly.
- Yes.

Did the doctor say it was his defect?

...His defect? No.

Tell her! Tell her!
Don't be shy.

I'm already telling her.

So, whose defect it is, Hossein?

God Knows. It seems it's you.

I spit on you, your mother
and all your family.

I was saying that your mouth is full of honey...

Your mouth is full of shit!

I'll tell you something...

For us life without children
is almost worthless.

You understand?

It's just impossible to explain. These are our main values.

Watch out!

You're destroying the plant!
Shame on you!

I know. What's the problem?

This plant is so sweet!

Put it in your tongue.
It tastes like honey.

Do it yourself.

- I don't like honey.
- Neither do I.

What a disgusting sound in the morning.
You're repulsive!

- How many sheep?
- Small and big?

Yes.

Small and big:58.

Hit them again!

When you were younger,
did you have a sheep that you liked best?

- Yes. I did.
- Tell me about. What was it called?

I was raising her on the roof.

I'm the one who raised her,
So she's mine.

But now I put her
with the other sheep.

She grew up.

You didn't tell me her name
and how old you were...

Would you name a sheep?

Sometimes we call her Aziza (dear).
We call her Aziza and she comes.

Grrrr... We call her Aziza and she comes.

Now I put her with
the other sheep to eat and drink.

She grew up.

Have you heard about things
that happen here?

Yes... like dead bodies and that stuff?

- You've heard about something?
- Dead bodies.

What did you hear?

I heard that a wolf was digging up the tombs to eat the dead.

A wolf who eats the dead bodies.

- Where?

- In Friday Market area.

We go to the market to buy and sell the sheep.

Then we go home to sleep a little and we wake up fresh.

Tell me the story of this wolf.

People told us about this wolf.

They just buried someone and left.

Later they came to recite the Koran.

They found that the wolf had dug up the tomb and eaten the dead body.

They called the tomb keeper and he explained what happened.

What did they do?

What could they do?

They cried and that's it.

They kept crying.

The night life in some areas of the cemetery is very intense.

Shops stay open till after midnight.

The air is softer.

We have time to chat...
And even to work.

It's also during the night that the biggest market in Egypt starts: the Friday Market

It takes place inside the cemetery, amongst the tombs.

Come Umu Ali.

They want to film you
with your merchandise.

They can wait a bit...

Tell them to wait until I set my things out.

Umu Ali is from Tanta.

I'm telling them you're from Tanta.

She's from Tanta.

She sells nuts.

And chocolates and sweets.

And peanuts.

Just like you buy in the stores.

He's talking about you, Umu Ali.

I'm telling them how good are
your products, from Tanta.

Yes, it's first class products!

If there's a burial during the Friday Market,

the merchants must clear
the way for the funeral.

Even if it's against their profits.

The burial must definitely take place.

If the family can't bury in their own tomb,
Where else could they bury their dead?

Good morning.

Stop playing, Mahmoud!
You're not helping me like this!

Get out of the way, Mahmoud.

We are living in the cemetery.
Come to film us at home!

In colours and in black and white!

4 of them for 10 pounds!

The area became populated
but regular cemetery activities still go on.

Lots of people come to visit their deceased.
They bring flowers and pray for them.

And we have hundreds of burials every day.
From early morning until late in the evening.

According to the Koran, you must bury
your deceased as soon as possible.

And so we do.

The ghosts where here before.

The ghosts where here
before the area got populated.

When it got populated,
I got more scared by people than by demons.

Ghosts don't really scare me.

Ghosts don't scare me.

Humans scare me more.

Ghosts are like the wind.

Like the wind and we can see
something almost transparent.

When you say:
In the name of Allah the Most Merciful

Nothing bad will happen to you.

People are the ghosts nowadays.

For example, when I walk
here in the cemetery alone

and suddenly someone surprises me
by its presence I get scared.

This place is scary, mysterious...

All the past is here.

You'll find blind Koran singers,
who recite verses for the deceased,

to earn their living.

You'll find old tomb keepers, like me.

But you'll also find lots of confusion...

traffic jams, passionate youngsters,

Well, real life!

There's a new deceased here.

Shall we go and offer condolences?

God bless him.

Drug seller!!

Where are you going, drugs seller?

What's up Drugs?

What's up, old man?

The cemetery is very crowded today.

It has a lot of girls.

It's like 13 whorehouses.

Go this way.

Maybe we meet the girl.

Her grandmother is sitting there.

Football players.

Hey slave!

Slave, son of a slave!

- Son of a bitch!

- Hey slave, son of the slave!

Mustafa! Yasser's house is burning!

Yasser's house...

Son of a bitch!

I swear to God It's burning.

The firemen are there!

I swear to God.

This place is great at night!

- To play football or...
- Or to bring girls.

Rami brought
a girl right here.

- Rami?
- Yes.

Hey, Rami!

- Did they catch you here?
- Not me!

It was you!

He was on the roof.
Watching!

Hassan too?
Hassan, sure.

You asked him what he was doing?

- Hassan was inside.
- He slept with the girl.
- Hassan sleeps with anyone.
- He would sleep with any rotten girl.

It doesn't matter to him.

Come on, she looks respectable.
Go straight on.

Oh, she's crying.

Eternity is only for God.

- If she's respectable, we have to leave.
- This is the place!

- Who was in the tomb?
- they had sex?

It was here.

They were watching from up there.

They were in this tomb?

- Watching Hassan?
- Yes.

- The tomb was open?
- Yes.

Hey!

- He's calling. He remembers you.
- Yes, he remembers.

- Ma'alem!!
- How is it going?

- There aren't any dead today?
- He's waiting for some.

Fuck! These guys pray
for people to die.

Once he said "Without dead people
how shall I earn my living?"

How shall I work then?

Imagine someone proposes to a girl
telling her "I'm an undertaker".

How does she feel?

You mean if his father is an undertaker?

I mean when an undertaker
wants to get married.

Do you think he'll marry
someone from England?

She will think:
"At least I'll have a tomb for free".

Wait. I know this girl.

- Tell them to slow down.
- Those motherfuckers!

- You know them?
- They seem dirty.

They are from up there.

She's really pretty.

Get her.

Come here.

Do you want a ride
or are you going home?

What did she said?

«Better your mothers
Had given birth to a couple of ducks.»

Here is the female suitable for marriage.

She's about 70 years old!

She's nearly dead.
You better choose her granddaughter.

She's still a virgin.

I really had enough of this girl's issue.

It's useless.

Everyone's dream is to
get married and to have a job.

Your dream is not
marriage or anything.

Your dream is only having sex.

Each one of us should get
a 10-year old girl.

- 3 or 4 girls!
- Raise them and just marry the good ones.

- Otherwise it won't work.
- They don't have to be so young.

Keep the young ones
on the shelves till they grow up.

The young ones
stay with their mothers.

When I was young
I was also courting the girls.

Until I met my wife. God Bless Her.

From this day on, everything changed.

Yes, it happens.
Such is the way of the world...

Doaia, Give Mohamed some bread.

You told me once that this tomb house
belongs to someone else.

What do you do
when the owners come to visit the dead?

When the tomb owners come,
if we are asleep,

we lock ourselves in that room
and we don't come out

until they finish reciting the Koran.

If we are up, Doaia cleans this tomb
and removes all our things until they leave.

Sometimes we remove the furniture

to make it empty for them.

I had some sofas and they
insisted I removed them.

I had to sell them.

They said "we don't want
furniture in the tomb, in the burial area".

Since my childhood,
I've always worked.

I didn't have a break until I gave birth
to Said, my son who died.

He was really good and kind.

Later he worked
And supported me.

But when he died,
I had to take charge again.

I took responsibility for his kids.

This room is valuable because
my husband and son are buried here.

I'd love people to come
here to make them company.

Dead people hear and know.

I put the radio Koran on for them.

I'd like they have some company.

To have always people coming and going.

There used to be someone living in this room.

I was really happy when
someone was living here.

I'll show you the tomb of Mother Hassan.

My wife, God bless her.

And I'll show you my tomb too.
I made it to be close to her, just me and her.

Come with me.

Allah!

Look, the entrance is here.

The stairs to go down are here.

She is asleep inside.

Her legs are here.

Her legs are here.

Up to there.

And the new tomb is there.

This way, please.

Here.

Mother Hassan Ahmed Abdulghani.
And me.

Nick name:
Ahmed El-Sefi.

Ahmed Abdulghani
known as Ahmed El-Sefi.

That's the new tomb I made for myself.

You've put your wife's name on it?

Yes.

I wanted to move her from there.

But our children objected to the idea.

So I took this one in order to be close to her.

Her name is still here?

Yes.

It was for her, to move her in.

After I prepared it.

My children said: No, she can't be moved.

So I made it for myself.

- May God make your life longer.

- And yours too, dear.

God be with us.

Come with me.

Do you miss her?

- Pardon?

- Do you miss her?

We had years together.

Years, not a few days.

When we met she was a revolutionary.

She was a revolutionary.

With the revolution.

With Mohamed Naguib, El- Boghdady
and all the revolutionaries

What was she doing?

A fighter, she was a fighter. God bless her soul.

We lived a long time together.

There is no God but Allah.

There is no God but Allah.

She's right there,
Hag Ahmed's wife.

One day, they will be sleeping side by side.

They will be listening to each other.

They will stay there, talking to each other forever.

There is no God but Allah!

Come here!

Tell me where Qaitbay mosque is.

Qaitbay mosque?

It's right behind you.

Just show me.

Here it is.

And where is the minaret?

The minaret?

- Yes.

- There.

What is this? A tomb?

It belongs to the mosque.

Yes.

But it's abandoned.

- And the mosque is there.

- Yes it's there!

There the tombs became
buildings for the people.

And it has a lot of tombs inside.

But it's still a cemetery.

*In the name of Allah,
the Most Merciful*

*The Pleasures of life
distract you*

Till you visit the Cemeteries

*There and then
you will come to know*

*Again, indeed,
you will come to know*

*If you could just
know for real*

You would see the Hell fire

*And again you would see it
with the eye of certainty*

*In the Cemeteries you will be asked about
the perfect happiness*

And Allah the Great was right.