

ON THE COUCH WITH NORA ARMANI

Full Synopsis

The actress enters while speaking on her mobile phone in a different language, visibly explaining something to a friend (probably the directions to the theatre) oblivious of the fact that she is already on stage and in the presence of an audience. A change in lighting intensity makes her suddenly aware of the situation. She immediately wraps up her conversation and hangs up the phone, gesturing to the audience to do the same. She comes forward, and while trying to cover up for this 'lapse', she greets the assembly: "Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen."

She tells her audience that she has prepared a show composed of favorite plays and poems collected over the years that she will gladly share. No sooner she starts the 'show' with panache than she abruptly stops dead in her own tracks, as if she has forgotten her lines or something has gone terribly wrong. After an awkward moment, she tells her audience that she has just spotted someone, an old flame, who she hadn't seen since their impetuous parting some 15 years earlier.

But instead of resuming the show as announced, she addresses him and embarks on an intensely personal journey examining her past and Middle Eastern childhood. As she draws parallels between his centuries-old Scottish aristocratic lineage and her own pedigree, she focuses on such issues as belonging, multiple cultures, life-coincidences and destiny with a capital D.

Over the course of the evening, alternating between humor and nostalgia (with more than a few poignant moments regarding her maternal grandmother's survival of WW I), she re-enacts her fascinating family story – including her grandfather's accidental landing in Egypt in 1914 while attempting to emigrate to America from his native Istanbul – and his decision to marry her grandmother as a result of a hilarious 'girl viewing visit' in order to find a 'suitable bride'. She talks of her maternal grandparents' forced deportation from their ancestral lands and separation on the deportation routes, only to be reunited three years later by some strange coincidence amidst hordes of refugees on the crowded dusty platforms of Aleppo train station in Syria. She remembers her growing pains in Nasser's post-revolution Egypt in an atmosphere of marginality and repression. Her learning the facts of life while dancing to an Italian slow tune (Guarda Che Luna) with a teenage boy, taking the bulge in his pants for keys in his pocket! She relives her own eventual emigration to America and Hollywood to pursue an acting career.

Amidst her own reminiscences Nora evokes stories told by her two grandmothers: the Bosphorus and Istanbul, the beautiful pre-1915 Anatolian summers, Alexandria and its ancient port, Old Cairo with its spices and legends. She shares with us her own experiences of Hollywood and its follies, and her eventual healing journey in the Scottish Highlands to reconcile with the sad ending of her true love story while marking her own new beginning.

The evening's voyage culminates with the pending question: "Where is my home? Where is my spirit?"

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ON THE COUCH WITH NORA ARMANI is a humorous yet poignant tale of a woman trying to reconcile her past and her heritage with who she is today and who she is seeking to become. Told with music, song, prose and poetry, the play takes the audience on a very personal journey of self-discovery filled with bittersweet memories, comical anecdotes, life and love; a journey all audiences can identify with.