

ACT ONE

AYLA'S HOUSE

A large living room. It is dim and dark. The furniture is old-fashioned, worn out and dark. Ayla's mother, is sitting in an armchair. Her knees are covered with a shawl. She is a nice-looking woman in her sixties. The most striking thing about her is the doleful look in her eyes that gives the impression that she has given up on life. She looks as if she has many sorrows weighing down on her.

Ayla is a young woman of twenty-eight. She looks indifferent to the world around her. Her clothes and her hair show that she does not care about her appearance. She has the same world-weary look as her mother has. Although she is mostly lost in thought, like her mother, she can at times become lively and active.

When the curtain rises, she is standing away from her mother, close to the entrance door whispering with Dr Adnan. The doctor writes something on a piece of paper that he has taken out from his pocket. He gives it to Ayla, who thanks him. Her mother is watching them both carefully from where she is sitting. The doctor takes his leave and exits.

AYLA'S MOTHER: What were you talking about over there? All that whispering with the doctor, I don't know! Am I really that sick? How long have I got left, then? Do tell, don't I have the right to ask? I mean I'm only asking about my own life here, so excuse my curiosity! Come on, don't keep me in suspense any longer! What did he say?

AYLA: Oh, mum! Stop being so paranoid! There's nothing wrong with you! That's what the doctor said. You're in perfect health, but you just invent illnesses at the

drop of a hat! Now stop stressing yourself out and stop stressing me out! You keep on moaning and groaning! You're a total hypochondriac. I don't know how I put up with you. Even if I was made of stone, you'd find some way to grind me down.

AYLA'S MOTHER: Then why were you whispering with the doctor? Why did you go over to the door to talk with him instead of talking with him here, in front of me? It's all right, I know, you don't have to tell me. I'm seriously ill and I've only got a few days left to live... It's the end of the road for me. But, please, can't you at least tell me how long I've got left until I can rejoin your father up there?

AYLA: What can I say? Shall I tell what you want to hear or do you want the truth? God, mum, all you do is torment me. You're obsessed with reminding me of the past. And I've had enough of it! It's not right; you're my mother and I'm your daughter. I can't take anymore of your sarcasm! What's past is past! We've got to move on! We should think of our tomorrows and try and build a new life, without all this pettiness and point-scoring.

AYLA'S MOTHER: Point-scoring? I don't need to score points against you! It's just your own overactive imagination.

AYLA: Dad died because of me, and you want to get your own back. I know you do. But what am I supposed to do? The damage is done. You're not ill at all and you know it. You and your pathetic stories! (Imitating her mother.) "I've only got a few days to live... it's the end of the road. How long have I got left?"

- AYLA'S MOTHER: Is that any way to speak to your mother? I brought you up better than that!
- AYLA: I don't pity you. You know there's nothing wrong with you. It's been fourteen years... but I'm still trying to cope with it all: with the pain and with you!
- AYLA'S MOTHER: Ooh, do tell me all about your problems. No, really. I could do with a laugh...
- AYLA: Look, I've been thinking and I've come to a decision. It's good news, so I want a reward for it... As of now, I'm declaring independence from you, mum. I'm going to be free as a bird. Oh yes, I plan to enjoy my freedom.
- AYLA'S MOTHER: Well done! I wish you well. I hope your star shines brightly. But what do you mean by freedom? No one was keeping you locked up here.
- AYLA: It's been exactly fourteen years. Fourteen years I've been living with the nightmares of that accident. But now, I'm cutting this tumour out of my brain: that's what I mean by freedom, mum.
- AYLA'S MOTHER: I'm at my wits end! I swear I don't know what I'm supposed to do with you anymore. You're tilting at windmills. But that's all they are: windmills. You should take the time to come back down to earth.
- AYLA: What? Take some time? But I spend all my time at your beck and call! And you've left nothing but tears behind. The house is full of your anxieties, your baseless complaints and your imaginary aches and

pains. So what am I supposed to do apart from listen to them and get upset?

AYLA'S MOTHER: You've never believed me, not since you were fourteen, not since that day. You've always been against me. My pain started the day your father passed away. Now, little by little, I'm going where he is. And, just so you know, dear, there's nothing I want more .

AYLA: (To herself.) My poor dad. My hero. My Lone Ranger, my Superman. Your own daughter killed you. She didn't mean to. She didn't know what she was doing. She was just a child! Only fourteen! How could she have known what would happen? God! What a terrible accident! But I must forget... I must try and build myself a brave new world to live in.

AYLA'S MOTHER: A brave new world? And what kind of world would that be? I'm sure there'd be enough room for my grave there too, wouldn't there?

AYLA: Sure, there'd be plenty of room for that. More than enough. A brave new world. No pain, no worry, no revenge, no spite. Everyone in it would love each other. Everyone: mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, friends, lovers... Love would be all they'd hear. Love would be all they'd feel. And there'd only be today. It'd be a rule: if you want to live in my world, you've got to leave all your yesterdays behind. It makes no difference if they're happy or sad. Memories are doomed to be forgotten. Whatever happened in the past should stay there, like in the pages of a finished book. (Looking at her mother, articulating each word distinctly.)

There'll be no place for anyone who thinks any differently. It doesn't matter who they are. Even if it's you, mum. I'll close the door to anyone who's against me.

AYLA'S MOTHER: Oh what a clever daughter I have! Bravo! Bravo! I wish you luck!

AYLA: Yeah, go on, go on... If that's what makes you happy. You'd make anyone lose the will to live .

AYLA'S MOTHER: Don't strain yourself with your ridiculous thoughts anymore. You should get out more, get some fresh air and take a look at other people... Then take a good look at yourself... how you dress... So frumpish! Do you have no taste? I've told you so many times but you haven't changed a bit. No, don't interrupt me... You don't want to change, to dress decently, to socialise, to make new friends; you don't want any of that. You live alone and you resent anyone who isn't like you .

AYLA: Well, maybe I am like that, but it's your fault. After dad died, you neglected me; I grew up on my own. Whenever a girl has a problem or when she needs help, she needs to be able to turn to her mother . But you, you had already turned against me; you've never been on my side.

AYLA'S MOTHER: What are you blaming me for? Whenever I try and say something, whenever I try and give you the tiniest piece of advice, you're distant. Ever since the accident, you've been running away from me...

AYLA: But what else am I supposed to do, mum? It hurts so much to remember and I can't take the pain. You've no idea how much I'd like to be able to forget that evil day. It's so hard! But it has to happen. I will succeed. One day, I will be able to forget. I want to cry, to bawl my eyes out... But I can't. Where are you, my tears? Come out from the depths where you're hiding and wash all my misfortunes away. All the bad memories... Come, my tears, I'm waiting for you. Come and drown this tumour in my brain. All I want is to be able to shout out that I'm free! We don't have to die with the dead. We have to keep on going. We have to carry on living. I have to pull myself together to build a brand new life. That terrible accident... I can't get it out of my head. Every breath I take, it's with me. It was fourteen years ago. A beautiful summer morning. We were on a boat going to Prince's Island, me, my mum and my dad. I was leaning on the railing... Watching the foam on the waves. I can still hear my father's voice in my ears.

AYLA'S FATHER: (Voice over the loudspeaker.) Ayla, keep away from the railing or else you'll have an accident. Come on, you're not a child anymore; you're a big girl now.

AYLA: Of course I wasn't a child anymore. I was fourteen years old. But spoilt rotten... I always got my own way. I was daydreaming by the railings, staring blankly into the sea, lost in my own world. Tiny drops of water, tiny drops of water... As they grow bigger, they form huge waves, destroying and sweeping away everything in their path. I was watching them in awe, fascinated at how those tiny drops of water

could become waves. They seemed like rabid, foaming gravestones to me. Did I sense what was going to happen? Who knows? Maybe it was all scripted. It doesn't matter what stage it's performed on or who performs it, fate is fate and no one can change it... All of a sudden the sky went black and everything got bigger and bigger.

VOICES: (Over the loudspeaker, shrill and screaming.) Man overboard! Get the captain!

AYLA: Commotion, people rushing around all over the place. I was the one who'd fallen overboard. I didn't know how to swim. I was shouting, "Daddy, daddy, save me!" My dad jumped into the sea and shouted, "Sweetheart, I'm coming." He grabbed me by the hair as I was sinking down into the depths. Yes, my dad, my hero, you saved my life... But by the time we'd got to the ropes and life belts they'd thrown out to us, you were too exhausted. When they pulled us back onto the deck, I still remember your brave, loving voice:

AYLA'S FATHER: (Voice over the loudspeaker.) Is my daughter OK?

AYLA: I remember the captain's voice too:

THE CAPTAIN: (Voice over the loudspeaker.) Your daughter's fine, my friend; she'll be right as rain in no time. The important thing now is you. What do you say to coming to my waterside house for a couple of drinks and a game of backgammon, eh?

AYLA: Ah, my dear daddy, you smiled at him, but a few minutes later and you had breathed your last. And there you have it, my fate: no more sunny days, only suffering, storms and hurricanes. They rule my life now and it's all my fault, all mine. I should have listened; I ignored your warning and it hurts so much... The hurt of losing your father and the hurt of there being no punishment for it. But, judge and jury, hear me, rest assured that I've given my conscience the harshest punishment possible. I've wedded this incurable pain to my weak ego.

AYLA'S MOTHER: You still haven't told me what it was about, you whispering with the doctor.

AYLA: I asked him a favour. I'm in a very bad way. I can't go on like this; I can't take this wound in my soul anymore. I poured my heart out to him and he suggested I get a job.

AYLA'S MOTHER: A job?

AYLA: Yes, a job. The doctor's got three friends. They run a clinic together. They're looking for a secretary, so he told them about me. He told me to talk to them.

AYLA'S MOTHER: You're going to get a job? Well, I'm sure you'll be fed up with it after three days and you'll end up running away from that too!

AYLA: I've got to do something. I've got to be productive. I need to regain my self-respect. Besides, it's about time I started earning some money.

- AYLA'S MOTHER: There's no need for you to earn money. We're very comfortably-off financially. That's something we should be grateful for, at least.
- AYLA: That's not the point. It makes no difference if we're well-off or not. I've got to work. The doctor thinks it's the best medicine. Working would help me hold on to life. (Fatma, the maid, enters.)
- FATMA: Your niece has just phoned to say she'll be here soon. She'll be staying the weekend.
- AYLA: Well, that should cheer you up, mum. Perihan's coming. Whenever you see her, all your aches and pains disappear.
- AYLA'S MOTHER: Yes, you're right. I can forget all my worries with her. It's like I'm born again.
- AYLA: I'm your daughter; she's only your niece. But you've always loved her more than me! But don't go thinking I'm jealous of her. Believe me, she's not worth it.
- AYLA'S MOTHER: She's full of life; she's thoughtful and sensitive. She's full of compassion and joy.
- AYLA: She sweet-talks everyone and wraps them round her little finger.
- AYLA'S MOTHER: She's like a volcano: boiling up inside and spreading the lava of love all around.

AYLA: An extinct volcano, more like. Not even smouldering, and the only thing she's erupting with is bullshit ...

AYLA'S MOTHER: Care and consideration!

AYLA: Yeah, any opportunity to show off!

AYLA'S MOTHER: You're so jealous you can't think straight. You just make a fool of yourself when you criticise her and belittle her. Where do you think it's going to get you, for God's sake? Do yourself a favour and take some advice: if you want to be successful and happy, you could do a lot worse than listen to what she says and do what she does.

AYLA: (With an exaggerated, theatrical voice.) I summon you all, my worst enemies. Take all that Perihan has to offer me, I implore you. There is no harm that I can do to you that would be worse than that! You will not be able to survive anything she might give you. You'll be finished off in no time.

AYLA'S MOTHER: Hmmph! Go ahead, pretend to be an actress if you want! But don't forget, however much you might dislike your cousin, you should always respect your guests.

AYLA: Respect is something you've got to earn. Any guest worthy of respect should know how to respect others. But don't worry, I'll be nice to her even though I don't want to.

Ayla's Mother exits.