

# House of Sand and Fog

(Drama) ( 2003)

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## Major Characters

- Kathy Nicolo.....Jennifer Connelly  
A young woman who has been living alone since her husband left her eight months earlier, who suddenly discovers that the local county government is taking away her house.
- Massoud Ami Behrani.....Ben Kinglsey  
An immigrant who was a colonel in the Iranian Air Force, who decides to buy Kathy's house at a government auction as a way getting back on the road to financial security for him and his family.
- Lester Burdon.....Ron Eldard  
A deputy sheriff in the local police department who serves the legal papers to kick Kathy out of her house, but then becomes romantically involved with her and thus tries to help her get her house back.
- Nadi Behrani.....Shohreh Aghdashloo  
Massoud's Iranian wife who is sweet and loyal, and who desperately wants to keep the standard of living she was used to having in Iran.
- Esmail Behrani.....Jonathan Ahdout  
Massoud's gentle 16 year old son, who is hoping to go to an American University when he gets a little older.
- Connie Walsh.....Frances Fisher  
Kathy's lawyer, who often works for poor people, who tries to help Kathy get her house back.

## Plot Summary

Some people say that good drama can be summarized in one sentence: Two dogs, one bone. This film is that kind of tragedy, as it is the story of two people who both have a genuine and reasonable belief that they own the same Southern California house. In fact, this house near the beach originally belongs to Kathy Nicoli, a recovering alcoholic who has not drunk in several years, but is still struggling because her husband had left her eight months earlier. She is not emotionally healthy, and thus often does not look at her mail. Unfortunately, because of this, she fails to read several letters from the local county government, which say they are about to legally seize her house and sell it, because she has failed to pay certain business taxes that the county says she owes. In fact, it appears that the county is mistaken, but by the time she realizes how serious the situation is, it is too late and her house has been taken.

The county sells Kathy's house at a public auction, and the person who buys it is Massoud Behrani, an Iranian immigrant who was a colonel in Iran's airforce before the 1979 revolution forced him and his family to flee to the United States. Massoud used to be wealthy and now works two low-skill jobs to support his family, but he believes he can begin the road back to financial security by buying this house at auction, well below its true market value. When he buys it from the county, he has no idea that it had belonged to Kathy, or that Kathy had been wrongly thrown out due to a mistake.

This horrible situation is made worse by deputy sheriff Lester Burdon, who first meets Kathy when helping the county to legally force her out of her home. Lester, who is married with two kids but unhappy with his marriage, is immediately attracted to Kathy, and thus he decides to help her find a legal way to get back her house, and as soon as possible. For Kathy, this is very important, since once she is kicked out, she is forced to live in cheap motels until even the money for that runs out. In the end, Lester clearly likes Kathy too much for their own good, and as he decides to take the law into his own hands, the result is a tragic outcome for all people involved...

A quick note on the language in this film: Some of the dialog is spoken in Farsi, which is the native language of Iran. When subtitled words in English are explained in the glossary, they are noted with a '[Farsi]' marker.

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

*Kathy loses her house, and Massoud sees an opportunity to find his American dream.*

It was a wonderful idea to cut down the trees at our house on the Caspian, to have the sea spread before us, to reach infinity with our eyes.

The Caspian Sea is in central Asia, north of Iran. In this case, "to spread" means to go out in all directions, and "infinity" is a mathematical word for forever, or without end.

Our lives went the way of the sea when the Ayatollahs ripped the soul out of our beautiful country.

"Ayatollahs" are religious leaders in the Islamic religion of Iran. "To rip" is to tear, and a country's "soul" is its spirit or perhaps its sense of community and history.

May she be a happy wife as she is a bride.

Note that "May + pronoun + subjunctive tense" is a poetic way of saying "I hope that..." The "bride" at a wedding is the woman getting married.

Retirement has been good to the colonel.

:: He's not retired, he works for Boeing.

"Retirement" is the condition of no longer working, often because of age. A "colonel" is a high ranking officer in the military. Boeing is the largest American manufacturer of airplanes.

Your father got up at 4:30 every day of his life. God bless his soul.

"God bless" is a way of wishing or hoping that God treats a person well. The "soul" of a human is the non-physical part of them that lives on after they die (At least in theory!).

**One day at a time.**

A popular way of expressing the belief that people need to deal with long term problems each and every day (In this case, a reference to Kathy's problems with smoking and alcohol).

How's your better half?

A person's husband or wife, or perhaps boyfriend or girlfriend.

Your aunt won a trip to Reno, and we're going to stop by to see you.

A city in Northern Nevada, that is a small version of Las Vegas.

Due to the non-payment of business taxes associated with this property, the **county** has petitioned the court on its behalf to reclaim these costs.

"Non-payment" of taxes means they have not yet been paid. If taxes are "associated with" a property, they are owed on that property. A "county" is an administrative division of a state (There are many counties in each of the 50 states). "To petition" is to officially ask a judge for something, and "the court" is an official way of referring to a judge or a group of judges. To do something "on behalf of" somebody is to do it for them, and "to reclaim" costs is to pay them back.

It should come as no surprise to you. I'm sure you've had ample warning.

If a person is given "ample warning," they are given enough time to prepare for something bad that may happen in the future.

The house is up for auction starting tomorrow morning.

If something is "up for auction," it will be sold to the person who agrees to pay the most money.

Are you **out of your mind**?!

A fun and slangy way of referring to a person who is completely crazy.

I'd dress lightly if I were you.

"To dress lightly" is to dress in clothes that are appropriate for hot weather.

You can't evict me. I never owed a fucking business tax!

"To evict" a person from a house is to legally throw them out, usually because they have not paid their rent, or if they own it, because they have not paid their loan payment (mortgage) or property taxes. "Fucking" is a very crude but common adverb that is used to express anger, frustration and similar emotion.

This is where I get off. Deputy sheriff Burdon will assist you in vacating the property.

A "deputy sheriff" is a relatively high level police officer, and "to vacate" a property is to officially or legally leave it.

This is the number of the legal assistance office.

An organization that helps poor people with their legal problems.

Nothing is written in blood.

One way of saying that nothing is permanent, and that a situation could change.

You just have to clear out today. You might be moving back in next week, OK?

"To clear out" of a building is a slangy way of saying to leave it.

I'll tell you what. I know some movers who owe me a favor.

An interesting little expression when you want to tell a person something that you know they will find interesting, or even very helpful.

The house was repossessed for tax payment delinquency.

If a house is "repossessed," it is legally taken away from its current owners (usually by the bank or local government). "Delinquency" is the status of not having paid what is officially owed (in this case, taxes).

What is this widow's walk? :: A deck on top of the house so you can see the ocean.

A "widow's walk" is a real estate term, which refers to a patio or other area where people can relax, usually with a beautiful view (A widow is a woman whose husband has died).

**Feel free to** take a look around.

If you tell a person to "feel free to" do something, you're inviting them to do it.

Do you remember our bungalow on the Caspian?

A "bungalow" is a type of one-story house.

I have purchased this house for a price no one would believe. It is worth two, three times that much.

"To purchase" something is to buy it.

All our possessions, damaged and ruined along the way! [Farsi]  
 If something has been “ruined,” it has been destroyed.  
 [Farsi is the official language of Iran. It is sometimes called Persian].

Perhaps you did not come here to live like a gypsy,  
 but I did not come here to work like an Arab!

A “gypsy” is an ethnic group that is famous for wandering from one place to another without ever settling down. Note Iranians are from the Middle East, but they are ethnically different than their Arab neighbors.

For four years we lived a life we could not afford and spent almost everything to marry Soroya with a good family!

In this context, “a good family” is one that is at least educated and middle class, and perhaps even rich.

Soon we will have nothing, and then you will see what it is to walk in the shoes of the gypsies.

“To walk in the shoes” of a people is a colloquial way of saying to experience what they have (In this case, to experience being poor, or moving from one place to another).

***Kathy begins the long legal journey to get back her house,  
 and Massoud and his family begin to create their new home.***

How much is this going to cost me? :: It’s on a sliding scale.

If the cost of a service is “on a sliding scale,” it costs as much as the client can afford to pay (i.e....middle class people pay more than poorer people).

I signed a statement saying I never owed a business tax because I never owned a business. I even had it certified.

In this case, a “statement” is a legal or official document promising that something is true. If a document is “certified,” it is also signed by a government approved official (a notary public).

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but evidently the county has already sold your house.

“The bearer of bad news” is a person who tells you bad news.

“Evidentially” is another way of saying apparently, or “it appears...”

The auction date has been set for months.

An “auction” is a sale of property in which the person who agrees to pay the most money gets to buy it. If a date of an event is “set,” it is officially scheduled for that day.

I’ll demand that they rescind the sale or we’ll file a lawsuit against the county.

“To rescind” a sale is to legally have it cancelled. “To file a lawsuit” is to sue a person or organization in court, usually for money after something damaging has been done to you.

You working undercover or something? :: No, I'm off.

If a policeman is "working undercover," they are working without their police uniform, so people don't know who they are. If a person is "off" work, they are not working at that time.

I figured I'd check in on you and see how you're holding up.

In this case, "to figure" is to think. "To check in on" a person is to see how they are doing, and if they are "holding up" well, they are doing or surviving well, despite having a lot of problems.

Technically, it's mine and my brothers. My dad left it to us when he died.

"Technically" is a common way of saying officially or legally.

I'm trying not to harp on the negative.

"To harp on" something is to constantly talk about it, often until it gets to be annoying or bothersome.

Do you mind if I give you some personal advice?

"Do you mind..." is a way of asking "Would it bother you if..."

Do it all through your lawyer, Kathy. I wouldn't even drive past that house 'til the keys were back in your hand.

This is Lester's way of telling Kathy that her house is now a legal problem, and she should only work with her lawyers instead of trying to get her house back herself. Lester's attitude will soon change!

Thanks for checking in on me.

"To check in on" a person is to make sure that they are OK.

This is my direct number at the department. Most of the time I'm on patrol, but if you ever need anything, just leave a message.

In this case, "the department" is short for the police department. If a police officer is "on patrol," they are out on the streets, doing their job.

Your credit card didn't go through. That's two days now.

In this case, if a credit card doesn't "go through," it will not approve the bill that the cardholder is trying to pay with it.

I'm gonna get my paycheck on Friday. Anyway can we just let it slide until then?

Note that "going to"----> "gonna" in rapid speech. If a person decides to "let it slide," they decide to not worry about it (Here, to not worry about the credit card. "To slide" means literally to move forward smoothly).

The only affordable way to put a terrace up there is to put the stairs on the outside.

If something is "affordable," it is not too expensive. A "terrace" is an outdoor porch or patio where people can eat and relax.

I could do that for about a grand. If we have to go through the roof, we're talking 4 to 7.

"A grand" is a common and slangy way of saying a thousand dollars.

This window must be obstructed?

"To obstruct" a window is to block its view.

What the fuck are you doing?! This is my house!

A very vulgar but useful filler that is added to Wh Questions in order to express emotion such as anger, frustration, etc.

Have you had a tetanus shot lately?

"Tetanus" is a disease caused by stepping on rusty nails or other metal objects that penetrate the skin. A "shot" is a vaccine that is given through a needle into the blood stream, in order to protect a person from disease.

I don't want to ruin your towel.

"To ruin" something is to greatly damage or destroy it.

Here, I use this for skateboarding.

"Skateboarding" is the sport in which people transport themselves on small boards that have many wheels underneath them.

I'll tell you what happened. My yard is a construction site.

A place where a lot of construction or building is taking place.

You got to let us handle this!

"To handle" a situation is to take care of it.

They're already more at home there than I ever was.

To feel "at home" in a house is to feel comfortable there.

They're Middle Eastern.

A reference to the countries of the Middle East, which include most Arab countries as well as Israel, Turkey and Iran.

***Kathy's situation grows worse, but Lester decides to save her.***

Will you type up a letter to the courier service and make sure it gets to Mr. Behrani?

A "courier service" hand delivers documents and makes sure the person to whom they're addressed personally accepts them.

It's damn hard to sell a house nowadays.

This is what you call a real buyer's market.

"Damn" is a filler word used to express emotion such as frustration. In a "buyer's market," it is easier to buy a house than sell one (And in a 'seller's market,' it is easier to sell than buy).

Sorry, but she comes in at 174.

This is the appraiser's way of saying that in current economic conditions, the house is worth \$174,000 (An appraiser judges how much something is worth).

So why tell me, man?

A meaningless filler word that is added to the beginning and end of sentences, especially in very slangy speech.

Under these circumstances...we request that you vacate the property immediately.

"Circumstances" are the facts of a situation.

"To vacate" a property is to officially leave it.

Mother whores! Goddamn it!

A "whore" is a crude word for a prostitute, and "Goddamn it" is a vulgar but common way of expressing anger or frustration.

I'm sure our letter came as a shock to you, Colonel.

If something "comes as a shock," its arrival shocks or stuns you.

Pacific County has made a number of mistakes. First, they levied a tax on my client which she did not owe.

"To levy" a tax is to officially or legally demand its payment. A "client" is a person who hires the professional services of another person, such as a lawyer.

Second, they evicted her for non-payment, and third, they attached the property, and unfortunately, this is where you come in.

"To evict" a person from their property is to legally remove them from it.

"To attach property" is when a bank or the government legally takes possession of it. "This is where you come in" is a way of saying this is the point at which you become involved.

I paid for it in cash and I have a bill of sale.

An official receipt or document that shows something has been paid for.

Would you be willing to sell the county back the house? I can assure you, they would make it as comfortable a transaction as possible.

A "county" is an administrative division (Each of the 50 states has several counties). A "transaction" is an official word for the sale of a product or property.

You only paid a quarter of that amount. :: The market can already pay me this.

A common way of referring to the economic marketplace (and more specifically, what people are willing to pay for something).

From a legal standpoint, you are in the right. But the true owner of this house is living in a motel.

“Standpoint” is another way of saying point of view or perspective. To be “in the right” is to have the correct or legal position. A “motel” is a hotel where all the rooms are directly entered from the outside.

All her belongings are locked in storage.

A person’s “belongings” are the physical things they own. In this case, “storage” is a space that is paid to house or store one’s physical belongings or possessions.

Why should she wait to get back into her house that was wrongly taken from her, just because you want to turn a profit?

“To turn a profit” is to make money in a business deal, often very quickly.

Things are not as they appear. It is a matter of necessity for me and my family.

If something is a “a matter of necessity,” it must be done.

I’m staying at the Bonneville now.

The name of a type of car (and possibly a hotel).

I haven’t had a drink in three years.

Note that in the right context, “a drink” refers to alcoholic drinks such as beer or wine.

The fog’s coming in.

A type of wet cloud-like condition that is very low in the atmosphere.

I’d like to ask you a personal question if I could.

A question about something that most people prefer to keep private, often about a person’s sex life, relationships or money.

**Get it over with.**

A way of telling a person to hurry up and finish whatever they’re doing.

I think he’s a fool.

A person who is silly or stupid, who often does things to hurt themselves.

Perhaps once we get a buyer, we will tell them to wait until autumn.

Another word for Fall (One of the four seasons with winter, summer and Spring).

There was this little runt of a guy, kept **beating up** his wife.

A “runt” is a physically small and weak person, and to “beat up” a person is to physically attack and hurt them.

Except he wouldn’t press charges.

To “press charges” is to agree to officially help the police and the state convict a person of a crime they have committed against you.

We'd **show up**, and they'd be at the door, like Romeo and Juliet. Arm in arm.

"To show up" is a common phrasal verb meaning to arrive, often without calling ahead of time. Romeo and Juliet are very famous lovers from a play by Shakespeare. If a couple are "arm in arm," they are holding each other's arms in a romantic way.

She had welts and bruises all over.

A "welt" is a lump on the skin caused by being beaten or hit. A "bruise" is a blue mark on the skin, also caused by a strike or blow, perhaps after being beaten up or attacked.

I slipped two eight-balls in his closet.

"To slip" something into a person's closet is to secretly put it there. An "eight ball" is a very slangy way of referring to several ounces of cocaine, but this is not widely known (It is also, literally, a black ball in the table game of billiards).

Turns out he was on parole.

"Turns out" is one way of saying "in fact." If a prisoner is "on parole," they are allowed to get out of prison early, and stay out, so long as they follow rules set by their Parole officers.

Did I just lose you?

"Are you no longer understanding what I am saying?"

To tell you the truth, I think the wine is distracting me.

"To distract" a person is to pull their attention away from what they were trying to concentrate on.

When I think of my sobriety, I don't think about wine.

"Sobriety" is the act or condition of not drinking alcohol for along time.

**Cheers.**

The one word to say when you raise a glass of wine while drinking with one or more other people, in order to wish everyone a good drink.

It's in a housing development.

A group of houses that are built at the same time, often all placed inside a walled off or fenced area.

What's your situation, Les? :: I married my best friend. For seven of the last nine years, I haven't wanted to give her more than a hug or a peck on the cheek.

A "peck on the cheek" is an innocent and short kiss on the cheek.

Les is telling Kathy he has never been sexually attracted to his wife.

We are **blessed**.

If a person is "blessed," they are fortunate or lucky, perhaps because God has decided to look after them.

Things are finally in motion. I'm finally going to get it over with.  
 If a situation is "in motion," it is starting to change quickly.  
 "To get it over with" is to finish or complete it.

We can sue the county, but that will take months.  
 "To sue" a person or government is to take a legal action against them, in hopes of winning money or some other form of justice, at a trial.

It would have been a lot easier if you had just opened your mail. You can't expect the law to work miracles.  
 This is Connie's way of telling Kathy that if she had read her mail, she would have known that the county was mistakenly prepared to take her house and thus she could have stopped it in time.

I don't expect miracles. I expect you to do your fucking job.  
 A "miracle" is an act or event that is so amazing it's as if the laws of science had been broken and God had caused it to happen. Here, "fucking" is used as a crude adjective to express frustration and anger.

*Tensions rise between Kathy and Massoud, and Lester decides to show the power he has as a policeman.*

Not until autumn at the earliest. :: That might work for us.  
 If a situation "works for" you, it may be convenient, helpful or advantageous.

She has come for a tool her boyfriend carpenter may have left behind.  
 A "tool" is any kind of instrument or handheld device, such as a hammer or screw driver, that makes a job easier. A "carpenter" is a worker who builds houses and other buildings as well as shelves and furniture.

You should be telling these things to the bureaucrats at the county tax office.  
 A "bureaucrat" is a somewhat negative word for a person who works in a big office or organization who is generally responsible for making sure the paperwork is done.

Why should I be penalized for their **incompetence**?  
 "To penalize" a person is to punish them, and "incompetence" is an important word that refers to lack of skill, or inability to do a good job.

I'll even sell you this house for the right price. That's all I require.  
 "To require" something is to need it, or insist on having it.

I don't know where he left his hammers.  
 A common tool that is used to force nails into wood.

You stole this house from me, you son-of-a-bitch!  
 A vulgar but common insult expression (A 'bitch' is a crude word for a mean or abusive woman).

My old man walked out on us. I swore I would never do that to my own.  
 "Old man" is silly slang expression for a person's father. "To walk out on" a family is to leave them. In this case, "to swear" means to promise (Note the past irregular past tense).

Maybe they didn't know their way around.  
 If a person doesn't "know their way around," they are not familiar with the location or situation they find themselves in.

I'm going to pay him a visit. Officers tend to listen to other officers. It's worth a shot.  
 If a person "tends to" do something, he is likely to do it a lot over time. If a plan of action is "worth a shot," it is at least something that should be tried because there is fair chance that it will work.

It is an investment property, Soroya.  
 Property that is bought specifically to be sold later, hopefully for more money.

Let us go to the roof porch for the view.  
 An outdoor deck for relaxing.

Fuck these people.  
 Note that "fuck you," the most vulgar 2<sup>nd</sup> person insult in English, can actually be used to insult other people as well.

You're a very wise man, to live in such a place that gives you a view of God's wonders.  
 If a person is "wise," they are smart and have a lot of wisdom or good judgement. "God's wonders" is a poetic way of referring to the beautiful aspects of nature, such as the ocean and mountains.

Did you post that sign, Sir?  
 "To post" a sign is to nail it or stick it up for public viewing.

I am new to the area. Is a permit required to post signs?  
 A "permit" is a useful word for a license or document that gives official government approval to do something.

The utility pole, that's city property.  
 A tall thick stick, shaft or pole that carries electrical, phone and other similar wires.

Thank you for informing me.  
 "To inform" a person is to let them know or make them aware.

This is my home. I'm an American citizen.

A legal member of a country, who is entitled to carry its passport.

I do not wish to offend, officer, but if you'll excuse me, I have work to do.

"To offend" a person is to insult them.

Civil Code 1101. I'm talking about the disclosure law, Colonel.

The "civil code" refers to the laws that control legal agreements, contracts, and other transactions between people (as opposed to the criminal code).

A "disclosure law" is a law that tells people what they must tell others when engaging in business or the sale of property.

You as the owner have the obligation to tell all perspective buyers anything about the property they have a right to know.

An "obligation" is a duty or something that must legally be done. "Perspective" is another word for possible or potential.

Are you interrogating me, Mr. Gonzalez?

"To interrogate" a person is to question them aggressively, often in the process of a government investigation of a crime.

I understand your friend the Shah made a real habit of it.

The "Shah" was the leader of Iran before he was overthrown in the 1979 Iranian revolution. "To make a habit of" something is to start to do it frequently.

Let me get right to the point here.

"To get to the point" is to say exactly what is the most important thing that needs to be said, rather than talking about other related things.

You don't want to do the right thing, which is to sell the house back at the price you paid for it, so it can be returned to its real owner.

"To do the right thing" is now a common expression which means to do that which is considered morally correct.

That just won't wash.

When referring to a story, one way of saying "that's not believable."

I have more than one contact at immigration.

A "contact" is a friend or acquaintance that a person knows, who has the power to make things happen (Here, at the Department of Immigration).

People get deported every single day.

"To deport" a person is to legally kick them out of the country.

***Massoud fights back against Lester as Kathy gets more desperate.***

The guy is obviously not right off the boat.

If a person is “right off the boat,” they just arrived and do not know much about the country or culture they find themselves in.

He probably buys up seized property just to make a killing.

If property is “seized,” it is legally taken over by a bank or the government. “To make a killing” is a colloquial way of saying to make a lot of money.

I set him straight. I think he’ll listen.

“To set a person straight” is to clearly explain to them the choices they have, or perhaps the difficult situation they find themselves in.

Look at us, we’re both homeless.

The sad and common word for people who have no place to live.

My friend has a cabin a few miles South. We can stay there.

A small wood-framed house.

Have you no faith in me, no respect?

“To have faith” in a person is to trust them, or believe in their abilities to do what they say they can do.

**Coward!** Liar!

A “coward” is an insulting word for a person who is always scared or has no courage.

It’s your fault that we’re forced to flee from Iran!

“To flee” is to run away, in this case because of persecution or oppression from the government.

Your fault, and your Savak friends!

Savak was the name of the hated secret police during the time of the Shah’s government in Iran.

How long can we stay here? :: Until we get things **figured out**.

In this case, “to figure out” a situation is to understand it and decide what is the best way to move forward.

Would this have happened anyway, even if you hadn’t met me?

Note the excellent use of the past conditional tense!

It took him 30 years to pay it off, and it took me 8 months to fuck it up.

“To pay off” a house is to no longer owe monthly payments to a bank.

“To fuck up” something is to do it very badly or even to fail at it, often so that there are problems that follow.

Do not follow the example of your father, one day when you are married.

“To follow a person’s example” is to behave or act just like them.

They have the eyes of small children who are forever looking for the next source of distraction, entertainment, sweet taste in the mouth.

This is Massoud's way of saying that Americans are not serious or mature, but are always looking to have fun in the present, instead of planning for the future.

We know rich opportunities when we see them and don't throw away God's blessings.

"God's blessings" is a way of referring to all the good things in life, from health to wealth, that religious people feel God has given them.

I must raise money for your university education. :: I could get another paper route.

A "paper route" is a common job for teenagers in which they deliver the daily newspaper to houses in their area, often very early in the morning.

You are a kind child, quickly becoming a man.

A good alternative word to nice, sweet or gentle.

Look at your children, and the damage you're causing!

One way of saying destruction or more generally, great loss or harm.

Do you want to get arrested?!

If a person is "arrested," they are stopped by the police, taken down to the local jail, and officially charged with a crime.

We checked, and we have no Joe Gonzalez on the force.

A short way of referring to the police force, or police department.

Did he have anything else on, pins, that might help us I.D. him?

In this case, a "pin" is a little metal badge or decoration that is put on a shirt. "To I.D." a person is to identify them (The noun I.D. refers to types of identification, such as a drivers license).

He wore a golden star, a badge with two pistol barrels crossed, and letters of gold spelling F-T-O.

A "badge" is a metal decoration that is worn on a shirt or jacket as a form of identification. A "pistol" is a type of gun or revolver, and the "barrel" of a gun is the long narrow part through which the bullet travels before shooting out of the gun. Here, F-T-O stands for a field training officer, which is a police officer that trains or educates other officers.

This is the man who threatened me.

"To threaten" a person is to try and scare or intimidate them by suggesting that you may try to physically hurt or harm them.

You're completely confident this is the officer?

In this case, a way of saying sure or positive.

I told the kids this was just temporary, you were taking time off, like a vacation.  
If something is “temporary” it will only last for a short or limited period of time.

This is Lieutenant Alvarez, with internal affairs.  
A “Lieutenant” is a high level officer in the police department (or the military). The “internal affairs” division of the police department looks into public complaints against the police.

I want you to dispatch yourself to my office immediately.  
“To dispatch” a police officer is to tell them to go to a specific location.

Can it wait until I’m on duty, Sir? :: Be in my office in 45 minutes, or you can come in tomorrow to drop off your badge.  
If an officer is “on duty,” they are actually working. A “badge” is the metal ornament that identifies a police officer, and in this case, if an officer is told to “drop off his badge,” he is being told that he is being fired.

The county evicted me from this house by mistake and your husband bought it, and now he wants to sell it back for more than four times what he paid.  
“To evict” a person from their house is to legally force them to leave, often because they have not paid their mortgage or property taxes.

If this goes to court... :: They are to deport us?!  
If a disagreement “goes to court,” there will be a trial to decide the result or solution. “To deport” a person is to kick them out of the country, and usually to force them back to the country from which they came.

You think you can frighten me with your stupid deputy telling lies?  
“To frighten” a person is to scare or intimidate them.

In my country, you’d not be worthy to raise your eyes to me.  
If a person is not “worthy” to do something, they do not deserve to do it (This is a very arrogant and snobby thing to say).

You can tell your deputy friend his superior officers know everything.  
A policeman’s “superior officers” are the higher-up people in the department who are his bosses and responsible for his behavior.

We just got the new models in, there’s inventory.  
In the business of sales, “models” are new versions of a product (such as a car), and “inventory” is what a store or warehouse has on their property, ready to sell.

Ma and the aunts will be out there on the 18th. They can help you, bring you back, straighten you out, OK?  
“Ma” is a way of saying mom. In this context, “to straighten out” a person means to help them get their life organized and back to normal.

All right, chin up, baby sister, OK?

“Chin up” is a way of telling a person to be strong so they can fight their problems (A person’s chin is the part of their face below their mouth).

*Kathy tries to end it all, and after Massoud and Nadi  
save her life, tragedy comes to all of them.*

Wild night? :: Seems to be heading in that direction.

In this context, a “wild night” involves a lot of drinking or drugs, and more generally, refers to a night of loud parties and sexual activity.

Have a good one. :: Thanks.

A slangy way of saying goodbye.

You need a funnel with that? :: No, just a book of matches.

A “funnel” is a plastic tube that is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, that allows you to pour liquids into a small container. “Matches” are the little devices that are used to light cigarettes.

Three on two.

Kathy’s way of saying she want \$3 of gasoline on gas pump #2.

She is a bird, a broken one. And your grandfather used to say that a bird that flies into your house is an angel.

In many religions, an angel is a spiritual being of goodness, often with wings, that works for God.

You must look upon her presence as a blessing.

A person’s “presence” is the act of being physically present or around.

We have a guest in the house. You must be a gentleman. Very kind, very polite, very quiet.

“Kind” means gentle or nice, and “polite” means well-behaved and respectful.

My wife says 20 tablets, perhaps half an hour ago.

Another word for a pill.

She has vomited the pills.

“To vomit” is to throw up, or more colloquially, to barf,

She was quite upset.

An important word meaning very angry, frustrated or worried.

She’d been drinking a great deal. :: That’s bullshit!

A crude but very useful slang word for lies, half-truths or nonsense.

I want you to pretend to be frightened of this man.  
To be “frightened” is to be scared.

You will get out when you call the goddamn county.  
A crude filler term that is used to express emotion such as anger.

I think I have a possible resolution.  
In this context, a resolution” is a potential answer or solution to a problem.

They can write a check for \$45,000. This check I will give to you and the woman in exchange for putting the house in my name.  
“To put a house in a person’s name” is to legally sell or give them the house, so that they are the official owners.

I think this can all work out.  
If a situation “works out,” everybody involved is satisfied with the end result.

It’s a win-win situation. No one gets hurt.  
A “win-win situation” is one in which all parties involved are happy with the proposed solution to a problem (The opposite is a ‘lose-lose situation,’ where nobody is happy).

We have an officer-involved shooting.  
A “shooting” is a violent incident in which at least one person is shot with a gun.

Burdon corroborates the whole deal. Mr. Behrani, you’re free to go.  
“To corroborate” a story is to agree that it is true and took place as it was told. In this case, “the whole deal” refers to the version of events, or the story, that Lester told the police investigators.

This is your recourse. You can press charges against Deputy Burdon.  
A “recourse” refers to the choices you have in a situation to protect yourself or your interests. “To press charges” against a person is to ask the police to charge them with crimes that they committed against you.

He’s three blocks East. We can get a police escort.  
A “block” is the area between city streets, usually occupied by buildings.  
A “police escort” is one or more policeman who follow a person in order to protect them.

He’s in trauma. You can wait in the lounge.  
In a hospital, “trauma” refers to the area where patients who are in a serious medical emergency are taken (Medically, trauma is a state of shock caused by serious injury). A “lounge” is a resting area for sitting, usually in a public building.

I will give everything to one who is less fortunate.

If a person is “less fortunate” than you are, they are probably poorer and have more problems.

If you heal my son, I will return her father’s house.

“To heal” a person is to bring them back to good health after they have suffered an injury or from a serious disease.

I beg you, I will do whatever is your will.

In this context, God’s “will” is his desire or what he wants.

I will purchase 10 kilos of the finest seed and I will find an American mosque, and I will feed them to all the birds outside.

“To purchase” is to buy, a “kilo” is a unit of weight, and “seed” is tiny grains that are used for planting, often eaten by birds. A “mosque” is a type of church in the Islamic religion.

I will let the birds cover me and peck out my eyes.

If a bird “pecks out” a person’s eyes, they tap on the eyes violently with their beaks (This is a very horrible image!).

It fluttered around, hitting the walls. [Farsi]

If a bird “flutters,” it tries to stay in the air, with great difficulty.

I have taken us so far off our course.

If a person is “far off their course,” they are far from the direction or location where they had originally planned to go.

It is time for us to go home to our destiny.

A person’s “destiny” is their fate or future, which has been predetermined by God or another supernatural power.

# House of Sand and Fog

## Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. Who has a stronger claim to the house—Kathy or Massoud?
2. Between Kathy, Massoud, and Lester, who was the most innocent? The greediest? The most unethical?
3. If you had been in Massoud's situation and you found out the house you bought was mistakenly taken from the owner, what would you have done? What would you have done if your family was counting on you to keep it as a place to live?
4. Was Massoud's offer of \$45,000 cash for the house really a win-win situation, as Lester thought it was?
5. Who is the person most responsible for the tragedy at the end?
6. Do you know any people who were rich and powerful in their countries who had to start over with almost nothing in the United States?
7. What did you like and not like about this movie?

