

THE PERSIAN VERSION

Written by

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A SERIES OF EXTREME CLOSE-UPS:

--A HAND pushes a needle through psychedelic aqua material.

1A-A MAGAZINE cutout: a young woman on the seashore wearing an ultra-conservative Burkini: everything covered save the eyes.

1B-A single hazel green EYE: heavily mascara'd fake eyelashes, heavy eyeliner, and eyeshadow that matches the fabric.

1C-The garment is fastened. Two hazel eyes alone are visible under the aqua burka. A hand grabs a surfboard.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

LEILA (29, mischievous, Iranian-American) walks through the streets of New York dressed in an outlandish Halloween costume: top half aqua burka, bottom half string bikini, matching shoes, and surfboard.

EXT. BRIDGE - EVENING

She continues across the bridge.

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The door is thrown open by a PARTYGOER in a chicken costume. Leila takes a breath and enters. Will the costume be a disaster?

Leila's shyness (and lingering depression) dissolve as she becomes the belle of the ball.

PARTYGOERS in various costumes lavish her with praise. Slow-mo as she soaks in all the attention. She is the most popular girl at the party.

A NUN makes an announcement:

NUN

And the winner of this year's Best
Halloween Costume is...Miss
Burkatini!

Everyone cheers and Leila accepts the Best Costume trophy. Just then, she locks eyes with a partygoer in HEDWIG drag.

LEILA

Nice legs.

HEDWIG
Nice cultural commentary.

Miss Burkatini flirting with Hedwig - its a sight to behold.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hedwig and Miss Burkatini, mostly out of her costume with just the basic bikini on, are making out.

LEILA
Oh my god, I love drag queens.

HEDWIG
Oh no, I'm an actor, I'm playing Hedwig at the Belasco. I was supposed to come in this Frankenstein thing but it --

LEILA
Shhh, okay? You're so beautiful until you talk.

Hedwig bites Leila's finger.

LEILA (CONT'D)
Ow! Why would you do that?

HEDWIG
I'm so sorry, I thought that was sexy.

They keep making out. He tries to take off her bikini top.

LEILA
Ow, ow! You're scratching me with your nails.

HEDWIG
Sorry.

Leila reaches for his bra.

LEILA
Here, let me show you.

She unhooks it with ease.

HEDWIG
(laughs)
You did that with one hand?

LEILA
Yeah, I've had a lot of practice.

He kisses her neck.

LEILA (CONT'D)
(to camera)
Obviously I've have some issues
with "culture". But can you blame
me? I come from two countries who
used to be madly in love with each
other.

She shoves Hedwig down onto the bed.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - VARIOUS

- Jimmy Carter shaking hands with the Shah.
- The Queen of Persia with Jackie O: fashionista heaven.
- Americans posing at the gorgeous Shah Cheragh mosque.
- Iranian Revolution street scene.

LEILA (V.O.)
And like any great romance, it
ended in a bitter divorce.

- U.S. Hostages held at the embassy in Tehran.
- ANIMATION: Couple carries a beating heart that drops and
breaks in half.

LEILA (V.O.)
As early as I could remember, my
two cultures didn't just hate each
other: they were at war.

- Khomeini posters being burned by Americans.
- American flags being burned by Iranians.

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Hedwig and Leila are in bed now; Hedwig is asleep and Leila
continues to address us directly, while trying to make her
getaway while not waking him up.

LEILA

(to camera)

And like a child of divorce, I was right in the middle, being pulled at from both sides. Being a girl, I couldn't be drafted into the Iranian military...

--ANIMATION: Indiana Jones-esque plane flies over map from New York to Shiraz.

LEILA (V.O.)

...so I was the only child of my family who could travel between these two countries...

-- ANIMATION: A smartly suited American man punches a bearded Ayatollah Khomeini whose turban transforms into a Mr. T-esque mohawk.

LEILA (V.O.)

..these two parents who wanted each other dead: Iran and America. I never fit in anywhere.

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - MORNING

Leila gathers her things and examines her disheveled appearance in the hall mirror.

LEILA (V.O.)

Too Iranian in America, too American in Iran. Unresolved childhood trauma.

--A monkey types on an old fashioned typewriter.

LEILA (V.O.)

Clearly this neurosis led me to become a writer. Hey, free therapy.

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SAME

Hedwig falls off the bed.

INT. HEDWIG'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - SAME

Leila sneaks out the door.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Writers and neurosis, what's more
 New York than that?

CUT TO:

INT. BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - 1982 - DAY

The entire Jamshidpour family - Young Leila (7), her parents, and eight brothers - pose for a family photo in early 1980s glory. SHIRIN, Leila's 36-year-old mother, adjusts her daughter's hair, a drop of femininity in a sea of boys.

LEILA (V.O.)
 As a kid growing up in Brooklyn, I
 thought we were the all-American
 family. Sears family portrait and
 all. We even had our archetypes.

INSERT: A series of photos is dropped into frame, showing each of Leila's siblings. In order: SHIVAZ, VAHID, DR. MAJID, HAMID, EMAN, ROSTAM, ZAL, ABBAS. Leila's photo is labeled "THE F@%K UP"

LEILA (V.O.)
 The disco king, the troublemaker,
 JFK Junior minus the plane crash,
 the braniac-future-Harvard-grad,
 the goth, the hippie, the greaser,
 and the metrosexual. And me, the
 outsider.

INT. BATHROOM - 1982 - DAY

Young Leila (7) teases her hair in the bathroom. Someone knocks on the door.

ALI REZA (O.S.)
 Leila!

YOUNG LEILA
 I'm almost done!

INT. HALLWAY - 1982 - SAME

ALI REZA sighs and walks down the hall.

INT. BATHROOM - 1982 - SAME

Young Leila continues fixing her hair.

LEILA (V.O.)
 I was just an all-American girl.
 But the Americans didn't see it
 that way.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - BROOKLYN - CLASSROOM - 1982 - DAY

Young Leila (7) is being bullied by the local Sicilian kids.

AMERICAN BULLY
 You smelly terrorist!

The other kids laugh.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Meanwhile, in Iran ...

CUT TO:

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - IRAN - CLASSROOM - 1982 - DAY

Young Leila sits in another second grade class, full of young girls wearing hijabs.

PERSIAN BULLY
 You smelly imperialist! Go back to
 where you came from.

The other girls laugh.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOM - BROOKLYN - 1982 - DAY

Young Leila watches a space shuttle lift off with the rest of her rapt second grade class.

YOUNG LEILA
 (to camera)
 In America, I learned how to put my
 faith in science.

The Challenger EXPLODES. The entire class gasps.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - IRAN - CLASSROOM - 1982 - DAY

The wall is filled with slogans, including "Modesty is beauty and heavenly."

YOUNG LEILA
 (to camera)
 In Iran, I learned how to put my
 faith in politics.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - 1982 - DAY

A line of Leila's brothers (aged 9-24) wait in line to use
 the one bathroom.

LEILA (V.O.)
 The only way to survive was not to
 put my faith in any of the rules.

Her brothers knock impatiently.

YOUNG LEILA (O.S.)
 Hold your horses!

YOUNG LEILA (CONT'D)
 Not science, not politics ...

YOUNG ROSTAM
 Leila!

The brothers BANG on the bathroom door. We follow to ...

INT. BROWNSTONE - BATHROOM - 1982 - DAY

On the other side of the bathroom door, Leila alone wears her
 brother's Batman Underoos.

YOUNG LEILA
 (directly to camera)
 ... the only thing I could put my
 faith in was ART!

She holds up a cassette tape: CYNDI LAUPER'S "GIRLS JUST
 WANNA HAVE FUN."

Young Leila shoves the tape in her underwear.

She's packing 80s tapes in her Batman Underoos.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - 1982 - DAY

Young Leila opens the door and tries to walk normally past
 her brothers.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Growing up in a home with eight
 boys, I knew that men had it
 easier. But still, being the only
 girl in a family had its benefits.

CUT TO:

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - IRAN - 1982 - DAY

Paramilitary TROOPS with machine guns.

Jet-lagged passengers apprehending the culture shock of the newly-formed Islamic Republic.

Young Leila stands in line for customs with Shirin (35); both of them have their hair covered. Young Leila tries her best to walk normally.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Both for getting in line first and
 for smuggling. So, after the
 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian
 government wanted to distance
 itself from its former lover: the
 US-of-A.

A spray-painted sign reads "Down With America."

LEILA (V.O.)
 So, if in the past everything
 American was cool, after the
 revolution, anything Western was
 forbidden and the source of all
 evil.

A LIST of banned items is below, and includes books, magazines, music recordings, etc.

LEILA (V.O.)
 So, logically, I became the mule
 for all good from America.

They get to customs. Young Leila looks nervous.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL
 (in Persian)
 Search their bags.

While Shirin opens her bags for the CUSTOMS OFFICIAL, Young Leila squirms uncomfortably and puts a hand over her crotch.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian, to Leila)
 What the hell is wrong?

LEILA (V.O.)
 I smuggled Michael Jackson, Prince,
 and Cyndi Lauper back to the
 homeland. But I had to play it just
 right. If we were detained at
 baggage control, they would do a
 full-body check and I would be
 busted.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - BROOKLYN - 1982 - FLASHBACK

Back to Young Leila shoving the tape down her pants. A record
 SCRATCHES. She looks at the camera with fear.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - IRAN - 1982 - DAY

Their bags are inspected.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL
 (in Persian)
 Take them for a body search.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 Leila! Why are you squirming so
 much?

Young Leila tries to play it cool, but the Customs Official
 clocks her.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL
 (in Persian)
 You alright little girl?

YOUNG LEILA
 (in Persian)
 I have a really bad rash.

That's TMI for the Customs Official. Shirin eyes her askance.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 What?

Their passports are stamped.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL
 (in Persian)
 You're free to go.

YOUNG LEILA
 (whispered)
 Yes!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY HOME - SHIRAZ, IRAN - 1982 - DAY

Leila and her mother arrive at the old family home - it's a sweet homecoming. Hundreds of relatives kissing and laughing.

LEILA (V.O.)
 I loved those mother-daughter trips
 to Iran.

Young Leila approaches her skeptical cousins.

COUSIN
 What did you bring us?

LEILA (V.O.)
 We brought a little America to
 Persia.

Young Leila reaches into her pants and pulls out ... THE
 SMUGGLED TAPE!

Young Leila holds it aloft, triumphant.

YOUNG LEILA
 (in Persian)
 Victory!

She takes the tape, pops it into an old-school boombox, and
 "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" blasts in the house.

The entire family - some in western clothes, some wearing the
 traditional head scarf - from Grandma and Great Grandma down
 to the youngest kids - dance in choreographed unison.

It's a Bollywood scene set to Cyndi Lauper. We are in a
 musical and it's magical.

Leila winks to the camera.

SMASH CUT:

TITLE CARD : THE PERSIAN VERSION

EXT. SUBWAY - NEW YORK - NIGHT

The train rattles across the Brooklyn Bridge.

EXT. STREET - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

TITLE: PRESENT DAY(ISH), THE 2000s, BROOKLYN

Leila (20s) walks to the market.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Leila rubs her head, hungover. She collects toiletries as a KID runs around the aisles.

In the distance she spots: ELENA (37, beautiful Hapa); ZIBA (45, Iranian-American, a more beautiful and successful version of Leila).

Leila ducks into another aisle and looks in the mirror. She looks like shit- Gatorade stained sweatshirt and crazy hair. Not a time to run into your ex! She lets her hair down and peeks around the corner.

Elena clocks her. Leila panics and puts on a furry gorilla Halloween mask.

LEILA (V.O.)

If you ever wonder what it's like
to run into your ex when you look
like shit --

LEILA

(under her breath)
Oh my god, okay, okay, okay.

A little kid runs into Leila. He opens his mouth in terror at the gorilla face.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Oh. Shh. Don't scream.

He SCREAMS. HOLD on his face.

LEILA (V.O.)

It feels something like this.

EMPLOYEE

Ma'am, do you know this child?

LEILA

I'm sorry. I don't know him.

Leila sees Elena approaching the scene and tries to escape.

KID

She put on the gorilla mask.

ELENA

Leila --

LEILA

(under her breath)

Fuck.

ELENA

Is that you?

Leila is busted.

LEILA

Elena, hi, how are you?

ELENA

Evidently better than you. You've got to stop calling me.

LEILA

Maybe I called a few times.

ELENA

I have fifty-four missed calls from you.

LEILA

Okay, maybe more than a few times.

ELENA

Leila...

LEILA

I just, I think we should give it another shot. I still love you.

ELENA

I don't think you know how to love. You have too much baggage.

LEILA

Ouch.

ELENA

One day you're really gonna have to learn how to confront your family. Especially mommy dearest.

LEILA

Really, Elena, we're still going there?

ELENA

I've moved on. Let me have my life. Maybe you can finally come pick up the rest of your stuff.

Elena leaves and Leila charges away, ripping off the mask.

LEILA (V.O.)

You know the best thing about gay marriage? Gay divorce.

LEILA

(under her breath)
Fuck.

EXT. JAMSHIDPOUR SUBURBAN HOME - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

TITLE: NEW JERSEY

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

A Persian soap plays on the TV. SHIRIN, a spry 55 year old, pulls a blanket over her mother, MAMANJOON (77), who is asleep on the sofa.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)
Shirin, darling. Make peace with your daughter.

SHIRIN

(in Persian)
Okay.

INT. SHIRIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ALI REZA (63) sleeps in bed.

INSERT: TEXT MESSAGES FROM MAJID AT 8:55PM: PICK UP YOU NEED TO GET TO THE HOSPITAL NOW!

TEXT: THE HOSPITAL SAID THEY CAN'T GET THROUGH TO YOU.

TEXT: THE HEART IS HERE!

Shirin returns to the darkened bedroom. She checks her phone and shakes Ali Reza awake.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
Ali Reza! Ali Reza! The hospital
called three times. Wake up! It's
our turn.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
What's happened?

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
You're getting a new heart.

INT. CAR - NEW YORK CITY TRAFFIC - NIGHT

Ali Reza and Shirin are trapped in traffic, some sort of accident ahead blocking the road.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
What if we don't make it?

ALI REZA
Maybe it's not my destiny.

SHIRIN
You're getting a heart.
(in Persian)
Crazy traffic!

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

SHIVAZ (41, Iranian homeboy who looks like a Dominican Rapper), ABBAS (29, hipster metro-sexual), and HAMID (35, coke bottle glasses and a personality to match) jog down the hallway toward the ER.

They pass a Vietnamese NURSE on the way, which stops Shivaz dead in his tracks. Hamid and Abbas know their brother too well.

ABBAS
Where's Leila?

SHIVAZ
You know Leila, God knows.

They approach the nurses' desk.

HAMID

Uh, hi, our father is going to have surgery soon. His name is Ali Reza Jamshidpour.

EXT. PENN STATION - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Leila enters through the NJ Transit doors.

EXT. NEW JERSEY TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Leila gets off the train.

LEILA (V.O.)

Crazy, my dad's about to get a heart. Imagine carrying someone's heart in your body but not really knowing anything about them.

EXT. STREET - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Leila walks from the train station to her parents house, passing Indian shops. No one in Jersey walks - she's pissed. Her phone buzzes.

LEILA

Hi, Mom.

SHIRIN (O.S.)

Leila, I didn't want to call you, actually, but we had to leave. We are in the car, Mamanjoon is waiting for you at home. For some reason, she won't stay with anyone but you.

LEILA

Okay, well, how's Dad!

SHIRIN (O.S.)

(in Persian, yelling at another car)

Hey moron, it's a car not a donkey! Move it!

The call disconnects.

LEILA
 Hello?
 (frustrated)
 Oh my god.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Back with Shirin and Ali Reza.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 Why is it so busy? Come on, go!
 It's getting late. Yah Imam Zaman!
 We need your help.

A MYSTERY MAN with a helmet covering his face appears on a motorcycle out of nowhere, parks his bike and opens the blocked shoulder lane.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 (in Persian)
 He came!

LEILA (V.O.)
 Stop! Wait, wait, wait, wait.

Leila APPEARS in the back seat. Her parents are frozen in place.

LEILA
 (to camera)
 Okay, this is where I have to stop
 the story.

She gets out of the car.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Literally the entire scene is in freeze frame. Leila steps out of the backseat of the car and addresses the camera; she is the only person not in freeze frame.

LEILA
 So, Shi'ah Muslims are really into
 this magic realist stuff. In our
 family there's always someone who
 comes in to save the day. His name
 is...
 (whispered)
 Imam Zaman.

INSERT: Animations of Imam Zaman.

LEILA (CONT'D)

(normal voice)

He's this amazing saint. He disappeared a few hundred years ago, literally disappeared into thin air one day. He's a busy guy. A true believer says his name and he appears in times of need. And he can appear in human or animal form.

INSERT: Imam Zaman's different forms.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Oh, you're skeptical, huh? Well I sort of am too.

INSERT: A human heart beating.

LEILA (V.O.)

This close to getting what she wants, of course she pulled a favor from the big guy.

INSERT: A frozen Imam Zaman on motorcycle with helmet.

LEILA (V.O.)

My mom really believes in this stuff. I'm not sure I do. She's old world, I'm new world. This is my mom and I's relationship in a nutshell.

INSERT: A human heart beating.

Leila walks by the frozen motorcycle man/Imam Zaman. She walks towards the cause of the bottleneck. A huge accident with smoke billowing and the men in mid-argument - all still frozen.

LEILA

(addressing the camera)

Imam Zaman is cute tonight, am I right? Well, obviously you can't see his face. Well, because you just can't. Just trust me on this.

The scene starts moving again. The motorcycle man/Imam Zaman signals directly to Shirin, to hurry into the lane.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

SHIRIN

I told you he'd come.

EXT. STREETS - CONTINUOUS

As her parents drive past her in the car, Leila turns to camera.

LEILA
He's doing his magic.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - ER PREP - NIGHT

DR. MANZANO (50, mousy woman, 4'10"), and DR. MAJID JAMSHIDPOUR (36, sophisticated, devastatingly handsome) enter the room, where Ali Reza lies in bed. Shirin, Shivaz, Hamid, Abbas, Rostam, and Eman surround him.

MAJID
You're gonna have your very own personal Persian fan club after this.

Dr. Manzano is overwhelmed by the sheer number of people in the room.

DR. MANZANO
Just immediate family, please.

MAJID
(trying to set her at ease)
These aren't even all my siblings. We're like a litter of cats.

DR. MANZANO
Usually the stronger kittens eat the weaker ones.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
Does she think we are cannibals?

MAJID
Maman, Dr. Manzano's the best heart surgeon in New York. Dad, unfortunately the same can't be said for the heart you're getting. We're on the B-list. But still, a second-rate heart is better than the one you have now. You've been in and out of hospital for so long. This should give you another two years, five if we're lucky.

DR. MANZANO
That's like 35 years in dog years.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
Is she saying I'm a dog?

Shivaz, seeing his father's look of fear, breaks into sobs.

SHIRIN
Shivaz, be strong for your father.

MAJID
Dad, with your history, this procedure could take eight hours, maybe more.

DR. MANZANO
That's a lot for a man of any age. I haven't lost many patients, but this is still an experimental program.

With that, Dr. Manzano leaves.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
Find Vahid.

HAMID
We'll find him, Dad.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
And when I wake up, I want to see all my children. Both Vahid, and Leila.

EXT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Leila approaches the house.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - NIGHT

Mamanjoon sits on the couch watching TV. Dialogue in Persian.

LEILA
Oh, I love Persian soap operas.
Where's the popcorn?

She sits next to Mamanjoon. They hug - there's a deep and loving relationship here.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Mamanjoon. Are you okay? They told me you were sick.

MAMANJOON

I feel good when you're here.

LEILA

You're the only one who likes me. Shall I take you to the hospital?

MAMANJOON

Your mother doesn't want me there.

LEILA

It's me she doesn't want there. MY MUM IS HEARTLESS!

Her Mamanjoon smiles sadly, knowingly.

MAMANJOON

You two can't fight forever. You're a writer. If you want to understand your mother, write about her.

LEILA

(sighs)
I'm tired.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LEILA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leila's room is a time capsule of the past. She lays in bed staring at the ceiling.

INT. LEILA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - MORNING

Leila wakes up in her teenage-years bedroom. Surrounded by all her high school medals and trophies.

Leila stares at the ceiling, remembering a dark memory.

EXT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - NJ - 8 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Elena and Leila stand at the door.

LEILA

So, are you ready to meet my family?

ELENA

I love you, okay? This is gonna be great.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - 8 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Elena and Leila enter.

SHIRIN

You're early.

LEILA

Okay, well, happy Thanksgiving, Mom. You remember Elena?

Leila kisses her mother on each cheek.

SHIRIN

Happy Thanksgiving.

Elena moves in to kiss Shirin, but she recoils.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)

I actually have a cold. Yes.

Awkward.

Leila cautiously walks across the room to her father. Ali Reza, sickly, is immersed in a book. She approaches timidly.

LEILA

Hi, Dad.

BROTHERS

Oh, hey Elena!

ABBAS

Come sit with us! You play Backgammon?

ALI REZA

(in Persian, to Leila)
How's life?

LEILA

Is that a trick question?

Abbas and Shivaz sit with Elena on a couch.

ABBAS

Play with us.

ELENA

I mean, I haven't played since I was five.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - 8 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Leila joins her mother in the kitchen.

Leila and Shirin work together in silence, preparing a sumptuous, professional-grade feast.

Leila is beginning to relax: maybe this will be okay.

SHIRIN

You know what today is?

LEILA

Of course. It's the anniversary of Grandpa's death.

Shirin almost seems disappointed that she didn't have to remind Leila.

SHIRIN

I remember --

LEILA

I read Elena some of his poems on our way here.

SHIRIN

Well, I think if he saw you today, he would be so ashamed of you.

It's like a gut punch, but Leila is defiant.

LEILA

No he wouldn't. He was a poet. He wasn't afraid of something just because he didn't understand it.

SHIRIN

You barely knew him.

LEILA

I read his books more than you, Mom. Of all people, Grandpa would want me to live my truth.

SHIRIN

(contemptuously)

Your truth? Your truth is going to kill your father.

LEILA

Wait, sorry, now we're talking about killing Dad? I thought I was supposed to be scandalizing Grandpa on his anniversary!

(beat)

You're such a coward, Mom. Hiding behind dad, hiding behind your father. But it's not them who don't want me to be who I am, it's you!

SHIRIN

You were always like this, ever since you were a kid. Stubborn. Selfish. And there was not one rule you did not want to break.

LEILA

I'm not breaking any rules.

Shirin can't bear it.

SHIRIN

I think you should leave - you and Elena. Both of you.

This would be serious in any family, but the Persian tradition of embracing travelers and the sacred importance of feeding family makes this a grave insult.

LEILA

You're throwing us out on Thanksgiving?

SHIRIN

You want to live outside of the rules? Live outside the rules.

INT. LEILA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - PRESENT - DAY

Leila sits up in bed.

LEILA (V.O.)

My mom could be so cruel.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Leila sits at her computer, typing a Thanksgiving scene about her and her mom in script format.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Shirin and her sons sleep in chairs by Ali Reza's bed.

LEILA (V.O.)
 She just didn't have room in her
 heart for me.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Leila and Mamanjoon watch TV.

INSERT: A flood of texts from Hedwig over the last few weeks.

MAMANJOON
 (in Persian)
 How's Duncan?

LEILA
 (to camera, in English)
 If you're going to have one last
 boyfriend before becoming gay, you
 can do a lot worse than Duncan.
 (to Grandma, in Persian)
 We're not together anymore. We
 broke up like nine years ago.

MAMANJOON
 (in Persian)
 You did good. You don't love him,
 leave him.

LEILA
 (in Persian)
 Mom wanted me to marry him.

MAMANJOON
 (in Persian)
 Forget it. Have fun with someone
 new. Just don't get carried away.
 But if you must...put it in the
 back door so you stay a virgin. I
 let grandpa do that before we got
 married.

LEILA
 (in English)
 Oh my god, okay, Grandma! Stop stop
 stop.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

You think we just stared across the room at each other?

LEILA

(in Persian)

Can we change the subject?

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

Spoiled! You're just like your mother. You overreact just like her.

LEILA

(in Persian)

I'm nothing like my mother.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

You'd be surprised.

Mamanjoon's demeanor changes. Something is weighing on her.

MAMANJOON (CONT'D)

(in Persian)

Do you know why your parents came to America?

LEILA

(in Persian)

Sure. It was 1967...

CUT TO:

NEWSREEL FOOTAGE OF AMERICAN DOCTORS IN VIETNAM.

LEILA (V.O.)

(in Persian)

The U.S. had a shortage of doctors because of the Vietnam War ...

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRSTRIP - DAY

Young Ali Reza (27) and Young Shirin (18) head down the stairs of an airplane, each carrying a CHILD. Fresh off the plane. The rest of the voiceover is in English, Leila has heard her family's origin story a million times

LEILA (V.O.)
 (in English)
 So they recruited doctors from Iran
 to work in America's inner cities.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - BED STUY - DAY

Young Ali Reza examines a young BLACK GIRL in 1960s Brooklyn.

LEILA (V.O.)
 My dad opened his practice in Bed
 Stuy, Brooklyn. They were supposed
 be here 5 years, for my dad to
 complete his internal medicine
 speciality...

CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - BROOKLYN - LIVING ROOM - PAST - DAY

The Jamshidpours pose for a family portrait in front of the
 same cheesy backdrop thru the years.

Jamshidpour Family portrait 1980s - 9 kids. Young Leila with
 big hair, and her 8 brothers in a mix of goth, punk, and
 preppy.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Then 5 years became 15. Then there
 was the Revolution, and then the
 war...

Jamshidpour Family portrait present day - stylish, modern.
 Leila is a out of place in the image.

LEILA (V.O.)
 So we didn't go back.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)
 (in Persian)
 No, Leila. That's only one version.

LEILA (V.O.)
 Mamanjoon, what are the other
 versions of the truth?

EXT. VILLAGE - RURAL IRAN - 1960S - DAY

Young Shirin (14) rides on a donkey through a remote village.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)
 (in Persian)
 Your parents were escaping.
 Escaping a scandal.

LEILA (V.O.)
 (in Persian)
 A scandal!

CUT BACK TO:

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - PRESENT - DAY

Mamanjoon falls asleep.

LEILA
 Mom never talked about any kind of
 scandal.

Mamanjoon is snoring.

LEILA (CONT'D)
 Mamanjoon? Mamanjoon? Mamanjoon?

Leila eyes blink wildly - trying to understand.

INT. BROWNSTONE - BROOKLYN - 1982 - DAY

A Young Leila, blinks wildly as chaos ensues around her,
 she's trying hard to concentrate on chopping.

LEILA (V.O.)
 What could be the scandal?

5:55 pm. Shirin (39 and vibrant), her hair in rollers.

Shirin teaches her only daughter the family recipes and a
 deep connection to the homeland. Young Leila chops a mound of
 herbs, Shirin corrects her daughter's grip on the knife.

SHIRIN
 Even finer, even finer.

YOUNG LEILA
 (frustrated)
 Why does it matter?

SHIRIN
 Because, if you want to learn how
 to make ghormeh sabzi, you have to
 learn it the right way.

LEILA (V.O.)

My mother was an enigma. Hard to ever understand what she was thinking. She held her cards tight with everything, except her criticism of me.

SHIRIN

Okay, more, keep going. Watch your finger, Leila.

TITLE: THE 80S, BROOKLYN

The doorbell RINGS.

Young Leila's brother looks out the window.

YOUNG BROTHER

(in Persian)

They're here!

SHIRIN

The Americans are on time? Why are they on time?? Your dad is not even home! Leila! Watch the rice. I have to get ready.

The BELL rings again.

Young Leila leads her motley crew of brothers - Young ABBAS (9), Young ROSTAM (11), Young ZAL (10), SHIVAZ (24), Young MAJID (19), Young HAMID (15), and Young EMAN (12) in the panicked immigrant clean-up mission

YOUNG LEILA

Okay, everybody, clean up time!
Everybody, get dressed now!

Young Leila directs the action sequence: Young Abbas and Young Rostam shove shit in the closets! Shivaz tilts the sofa and hides shoes underneath while Young Eman brings dirty GLASSES to the kitchen, where Young Hamid quickly loads the dishwasher!

YOUNG LEILA (CONT'D)

Vahid, get your ass off the couch.

INT. BROWNSTONE - BEDROOM - 1982 - CONTINUOUS

Young Leila's eager to help: Shirin frantically removes her hair rollers, and Young Leila helps her while Shirin tries to make up her face.

SHIRIN
Leila, get the shoes.

Young Leila brings over two pairs of heels. Shirin steps into them.

YOUNG LEILA
Mom, your shoes.

Shirin is wearing a black shoe and a red shoe. Young Leila tosses her the matching red shoe.

YOUNG LEILA (CONT'D)
Cinderella, catch.

Shirin puts it on and she sails into the main room.

SHIRIN
(in the main room)
Happy New Year!

Young Leila tries not to let it get to her.

YOUNG LEILA
(to herself)
You're welcome, Mom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - 1982 - CONTINUOUS

The party is in full swing. Ali Reza and Shirin feel at home with their people, their culture, their language.

DR. DABIRI and his new American wife, LINDA, who has convinced him a 6pm invitation means to actually arrive at six. SOUSSAN SHOJAEI (42) arrives with her husband NADER SHOJAEI and daughter, ANAHITA (15), who is, in Leila's eyes, the epitome of cool: short shorts, knee-high socks, and big 80s hair. Leila touches her own two braids and feels uncool.

LEILA (V.O.)
My mother was also the master multitasker. Cook a huge meal, clean the house, and get ready for a party effortlessly. Something I probably learned from her. And helped me become a director.

Soussan Shojaei twirls around.

SOUSSAN SHOJAEI
(to Shirin, in Persian)
What a gorgeous dress you made me.
(MORE)

SOUSSAN SHOJAEI (CONT'D)

Look. I've gotten so many
compliments.

She discreetly puts some cash in Shirin's hand.

SOUSSAN SHOJAEI (CONT'D)

(in Persian)

Just take the money.

Shirin hides it in her bra.

SOUSSAN SHOJAEI (CONT'D)

(in Persian)

Don't mention it to your husband.
None of his business how you make
money.

More GUESTS enter.

WOMAN

(in Persian)

Happy Persian New Year! I brought
you a little gift. I hope you like
it.

Shirin pops the CASSETTE TAPE tape into the boom box. It's
1962's Persian pop superstar: Googoosh.

PARTY TIME! Bellies start moving, hands wave in the air.

Women dancing with women, men with men. Seductive and fun.

Meanwhile, Young Leila jumps between her mom and her mom's
best friends Soussan and Linda. Young Leila expertly dance
Persian style like the adults. Young Leila's the center of
attention of the dancing ladies - Shirin beams with pride.

INT. BROWNSTONE - VARIOUS ROOMS - 1982 - CONTINUOUS

When the song ends, Young Leila joins the kids playing hide-
and-seek while Shirin cleans up as she checks up on her
tribe: Shivaz puts the moves on a girl. Majid and Hamid
battle Anahita on Atari. Eman plays Dungeon & Dragons with
the outsiders.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - 1982 - CONTINUOUS

Young Leila looks out the window.

By the trash cans, Vahid passes a joint to a PREPPY BURNOUT.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 Why are you spying here? Instead of
 helping me, you're doing this? Go
 back to the party.

Young Leila is surprised and upset at her mother's rudeness.

YOUNG LEILA
 But Vahid was smoking, Mom!

Shirin looks out the window. Vahid and Shirin stare at each other for a long moment. DENIAL WINS. Shirin decides Vahid wasn't smoking and heads back inside.

INT. BROWNSTONE - BATHROOM - 1982 - NEXT DAY

Young Leila teases her hair in the mirror.

LEILA (V.O.)
 It's amazing what a good night's
 sleep can do. Erase all the worries
 of the night before. And erase the
 past.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - CONTINUOUS

Shirin preps breakfast for ten people.

Young Majid in preppy attire - grabs a banana and bolts.

The rest of the breakfast rush comes in - 8 kids who all want different things, and Shirin makes them all.

Young Eman and Young Abbas - late-80s punk coolness - softboiled/fried eggs.

Young Hamid - coke bottle glasses - french toast.

Shivaz - legal eagle chic - and Young Rostam in a Batman shirt - pancakes. And Young Zal in his new track suit.

Young Leila enters, hair a monument to big hair everywhere - waffles.

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 What are you wearing?

YOUNG LEILA
 I like it.

SHIRIN
(calling out)
Vahid!

SHIVAZ
(to Leila)
Nice hair, sis.

YOUNG LEILA
Thanks.

SHIRIN
Vahid!

Vahid enters, like a truck ran him over. Shirin serves him an omelet - he rejects it and grabs the Frosted Flakes.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
Your omelet is ready. You have to go to school today.

VAHID
(ignoring his Mom)
I'm not going to school.

Vahid retreats to his room. Shirin watches him pained.

SHIRIN
(chastising)
You boys are not helping Vahid enough.

SHIVAZ
We can't make him study...

YOUNG MAJID
What do you want us to do, Mom?

SHIRIN
I'll keep you from using the car unless you are ready to help him.
(in Persian)
How's that?

Shivaz knows to hold his tongue, and eats his breakfast.

Everyone crams the last bites of breakfast and rushes out. Shirin alone surveys the overwhelming mess.

Ali Reza in the living room armchair is surrounded by paperwork and is slumped in his chair.

Shirin enters to see her husband...

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 Ali Reza? Ali Reza? Ali Reza?

INT. HOSPITAL - RECOVERY - 1982 - DAY

Shirin and Shivaz hover over the comatose body of Ali Reza, who is connected to a raft of machines.

SURGEON
 Ali Reza Jamshidpour?

SHIRIN
 Yes.

SURGEON
 To recover from a triple bypass is serious - there's going to have to be lifestyle changes.

SHIVAZ
 Maybe that way he can stop smoking.

Shivaz vacillates between freaking out and passing out.

SHIRIN
 Can he return to work?

SURGEON
 The damage to his heart was severe. No stress whatsoever. He'll be lucky if he can walk around the block. But he's alive.

The surgeon leaves.

SHIVAZ
 Okay. I'll quit law school and get a job.

SHIRIN
 You will not. We didn't come to America for you to be a hamal. You will finish school. I will figure it out. I will figure it out.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - 1982 - NIGHT

Shirin walks overwhelmed, lost in the thought.

LEILA (V.O.)
 My mother is not one to take "no" for an answer.
 (MORE)

LEILA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

No one ever gave her the memo that Muslim women were supposed to be passive good girls. There was never a mountain that was insurmountable.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - DAY

She sits at the counter with a cup of coffee and looks through the help wanted ads. She's circled a few prospects.

She makes a series of calls.

SHIRIN

(into phone)

Hello. I am calling about the receptionist position. I -- yes. How much typing? And do you need a high school diploma?

(she shakes her head)

Okay. Thank you for your time. Thank you.

In her frustration, she slams the phone down.

EXT. STREET - 1982 - NIGHT

Back to Shirin walking.

PRE-LAP:

BILLING BUREAUCRAT (O.S.)

The bill is a little steep because you don't have health insurance.

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

Shirin sits in front of a poker-faced hospital bureaucrat.

SHIRIN

He has worked in this country for twenty years as a doctor.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - DAY

Shirin dials another number.

BILLING BUREAUCRAT (O.S.)

But you don't have health insurance.

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

Handing her a bill.

BILLING BUREAUCRAT
I'm afraid you're going to have to
pay the whole bill.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - DAY

Shirin makes another call.

SHIRIN
(into phone)
Hello, I am calling about the --
what?

She hangs up.

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

Shirin looks at the bill.

SHIRIN
He does not even make this in one
year. He has to be here for another
two weeks! He can't work, we have
nine kids.

EXT. STREET - 1982 - NIGHT

Back with Shirin as she walks.

BILLING BUREAUCRAT (O.S.)
Well, some declare bankruptcy.

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

SHIRIN
Bankrupt -- we are Iranian. We
don't do "bankruptcy."

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - DAY

Shirin is on the phone again.

SHIRIN
 (into phone)
 Hello, I am calling about the part-
 time office assistant --

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

BILLING BUREAUCRAT
 I can see here that he owns his own
 office.

SHIRIN
 Okay, so?

BILLING BUREAUCRAT
 Well, consider selling the office.

Shirin laughs, then it dawns on her this woman isn't joking.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - 1982 - DAY

Shirin holds her head at the table.

LEILA (V.O.)
 She was too proud to fail. She was
 never going back to her home
 country, so it was success in
 America or bust.

INT. HOSPITAL - BILLING - 1982 - DAY

SHIRIN
 Sell the office to pay a hospital
 bill?

EXT. STREET - 1982 - NIGHT

Shirin leans on a cab, smoking a cigarette.

LEILA (V.O.)
 My mom was the queen of
 stubbornness, a trait I'd later go
 on to perfect.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - 1982 - DAY

Ali Reza is still recovering in bed, but he's hooked up to
 fewer machines and is propped up with a book on his lap.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
The building is worth 200 thousand.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
I bought it for 40 thousand and
that is what I'll sell it for.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
Fine. How do you expect to pay your
hospital bills? We talked about
this, Ali Reza. The building is
worth five times what you paid.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
It is what it is.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
We can take a loan.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
We won't take any loans. We won't
borrow from anyone. There is a word
for that...usury.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
This isn't Iran. We live in America
now.

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
Do you think God cares where we
live? There are not two right
things to do.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
And feeding our nine children? And
paying your medical bills? What
does God have to say about that?

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
God is generous.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - 1982 - NIGHT

Shirin has reached the end of her rope. Tears stream down her eyes as she walks, utterly brutalized by her life.

LEILA (V.O.)
My mom became a single-minded
woman. The path was right in front
of her.

She mutters a desperate, angry prayer.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
God help me!

LEILA (V.O.)
And then everything changed.

She looks up towards the heavens, but before her eyes get there, she sees a huge billboard - like a sign from God.

CLOSE ON BILLBOARD

MAKE \$\$\$ FAST TODAY! CALL 1-800-REALTOR

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
Yah Imam Zaman.

Shirin walks to a payphone.

With trembling hands, she reaches into her purse and pulls out various items: a half-eaten apple, used and new tissues, eyedrops, until she finds a ... DIME.

She drops in the coin and dials the number.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
I am calling about becoming a
realtor.

Intercut with a RECEPTIONIST wearing a telemarketing headset.

RECEPTIONIST
Hello!
(singing)
Welcome to 1-800-Start-Being-A-
Realtor, yeah!

SHIRIN

Okay, thank you? So how can I become a realtor? I have to make money right away.

RECEPTIONIST

I like your enthusiasm! After you take our brief eight week course, you can start working at any real estate agency.

SHIRIN

Are there any other requirements?

RECEPTIONIST

You just need a high school diploma or a GED.

SHIRIN

And I can make lots of money?

RECEPTIONIST

Your opportunities as a realtor are endless, always remember that.

SHIRIN

Okay, thank you.

She hangs up.

LEILA (V.O.)

When she found the path, she took multitasking to another level. And all this without Adderall.

INT. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT SCHOOL - 1982 - NIGHT

Shirin takes her place at the front of the class of misfits, immigrants, and pregnant teens. She's the odd one out but her pencils are sharpened and she's ready to rock.

TEACHER

Welcome to the accelerated GED program. Over the next eight weeks, we're going to be meeting every Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 7-10pm. You cannot miss a single class.

INT. BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - 1982 - NIGHT

The apartment is in a state of utter chaos. As the boys run wild, Young Leila and Shirin sit at the kitchen table - both working on numbers. Young Leila on her math homework, and Shirin on her real estate mortgage calculations for the test, and the math section of her GED.

YOUNG LEILA
I solved it! God, I love math.

Shirin smiles proudly.

SHIRIN
Can you help me, here?

YOUNG LEILA
Abbas's better than me, ask him.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
You can do anything, better than your brother.

Young Leila loves this vote of confidence.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - 1982 - DAY

Shirin walks to her class.

INT. REAL ESTATE CLASS - 1982 - DAY

Shirin is at the front of this classroom too, which has a student body with a totally different demographic: yuppies-in-training, recent divorcees, all white.

Shirin is clearly gifted at the complicated math concepts; she helps a DIVORCEE calculate a closing cost.

SHIRIN
Uh, excuse me. You have two hundred thousand dollars left on your mortgage, but you have paid one hundred thousand dollars. That is your equity.

DIVORCEE
Thank you.

SHIRIN
Yes. Of course.

The INSTRUCTOR watches, approvingly, then stops Shirin.

INSTRUCTOR
You're a natural.

Shirin is too tired to appreciate the compliment.

SHIRIN
Oh, thank you.

INSTRUCTOR
Any news about your GED?

SHIRIN
I have already mailed for it. It will be here, um -- I will have it in a few weeks.

INSTRUCTOR
Okay. But before the test, alright?

INT. PATHMARK - 1982 - NIGHT

Shirin is speed-shopping. She fills the cart in record time.

In the distance, a STONED MAN is waxing the floors, walkman blaring and wearing sunglasses inside, at night.

At the frozen foods, Shirin shuffles thru her STACK OF COUPONS before she grabs a few frozen spinach packs.

At the check out, Shirin piles the food and hands the girl a huge stack of coupons. She's in a big hurry.

CHECK OUT GIRL
Sorry. This coupon is for the 24 ounce frosted flakes. You have the 16 ounce.

SHIRIN
Seriously? My kids are waiting. It's fine.

CHECK OUT GIRL
If you want the half off coupon...

SHIRIN
I -- okay.

Shirin has no time for this shit. She runs full speed to the cereal aisle. She scans the shelves. 24 oz...

WHAM! Shirin is knocked down by the waxing machine operated by the stoned employee in sunglasses. Shirin falls flat on her back on the tile floor of the supermarket. CRACK!

Shirin SCREAMS in pain. Her neck is broken.

WOMAN

(muffled)

Call 9-1-1! The ambulance is coming.

LEILA (V.O.)

But my mom wasn't one to let a broken neck get in her way. She was going to get that license at any cost.

INT. BROWNSTONE - BEDROOM - 1982 - DAY

Shirin is lying on the couch in incredible pain but trying to put on a happy face for her daughter.

LEILA (V.O.)

Even if it meant making my life miserable.

SHIRIN

(in Persian)

Are you not going to cook dinner?

YOUNG LEILA

Mom, can we just get pizza? I want to play basketball.

SHIRIN

We don't have money.

YOUNG LEILA

You ask me to cook cause I'm a girl.

SHIRIN

No, I ask you because I can count on you.

YOUNG LEILA

I want to play basketball.

Shirin loses her cool and throws her water glass across the room. SMASH.

SHIRIN

I am in so much goddamn pain,
Leila!

YOUNG LEILA

Fine. I'll make the damn dinner.

LEILA (V.O.)

And then, a miracle appeared again.

The doorbell BUZZES. Shirin has no choice but to get up.

MOMENTS LATER

LAWYER

Judging from your injuries, we can
get you up to one hundred thousand
dollars.

Is she hallucinating? They sit on the couch surrounded by
broken glass.

SHIRIN

A hundred thousand dollars?

LAWYER

That's right.

SHIRIN

Would that money go to my husband's
account or can it go directly to my
account?

LAWYER

Wherever you want.

LEILA (V.O.)

And the path became even clearer.

INT. REAL ESTATE CLASS - 1982 - DAY

Shirin slams a paper on the instructor's desk.

SHIRIN

Here is the GED. Can I take my real
estate exam, please?

INSTRUCTOR

Huh. The GED.

Shirin takes her seat. She washes a fistful of Advil down with a can of Tab. It makes a loud sound as she cracks it open.

SHIRIN

Sorry.

LEILA (V.O.)

My mom wasn't the only one with shoulder pads and ambitions. What was I trying to do with this writing? Prove myself?

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - PRESENT - MORNING

Leila types on her laptop. She's trying her best to concentrate on her new screenplay.

LEILA (V.O.)

I was doing my best to fail my parents and I was doing a good job.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Leila sits in an empty theater watching a film projection.

LEILA (V.O.)

I dreamt of being an Iranian-American Martin Scorsese. Seeing my stories on the big screen.

INT. TACKY BANQUET HALL - PERSIAN WEDDING - PAST - DAY

Close up of Dr. Jamshidpour's daughter: frozen in panic, wearing a bridal dress.

LEILA (V.O.)

But my parents had other ideas.

BRIDE'S MOTHER

(in Persian)

When is Leila getting married?

Shirin and Ali Reza are standing amongst the crowd.

SHIRIN

(in Persian)

Good question.

They all pose for a photo.

LEILA (V.O.)
And this campaign was endless.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER BANQUET HALL

BRIDE'S MOTHER
(in Persian)
So, when is Leila getting married?

ALI REZA
(in Persian)
A miracle must happen.

LEILA
(to the bride)
Hey, what are you doing later
tonight?

INT. TACKY WEDDING HALL - PERSIAN WEDDING - PAST - DAY

Ali Reza and Shirin watch with despair as another friend's daughter has a successful wedding. Leila is at the wedding and addresses the camera.

LEILA
Their disappointment in me was like
artistic rocket fuel.

CUT TO:

INT. ALICE TULLY HALL - NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL - PAST - DAY

A scene from Leila's film plays to a rapt audience. The camera moves onto one audience member, Shirin, who watches in horror.

LEILA
(addressing the camera)
And I finally was showing my work
at the fancy New York Film
Festival, every filmmaker's dream.

LEILA (CONT'D)
(to her mother)
Mom, what do you think?

SHIRIN
You do this to hurt me.

The credits roll, and the audience leaps to its feet, but Leila can only see her mother's dismay.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Leila stares at her screenplay.

LEILA (V.O.)

I still had no idea what the scandal was. Delving into my own psychosis wasn't helping writer's block. Best to be more productive and search ways I was probably dying.

On her computer: 10 SIGNS OF BREAST CANCER.

LEILA

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

EXT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - DAY

Leila charges out of the house.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - DAY

Leila, sits across from her doctor and childhood best friend, DOCTOR ANAHITA SHOJAEI (31).

LEILA

I don't know, like, I've just been feeling really under the weather lately.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

I have the test results back.

LEILA

I have cancer. I knew it.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Do you want to have cancer? Or do you want to know what's going on.

LEILA

Is that a trick question?

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Alright...you are pregnant.

LEILA (V.O.)

Fuck.

FLASH to Leila and Hedwig hooking up.

LEILA

Oh my god, I love drag queens.

BACK in the doctor's office.

LEILA (CONT'D)

(to camera)

Oh, fuck.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Very pregnant. Did you notice you missed last 2 periods?

LEILA

I thought it was just, like, stress from my film.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Well at least its not cancer, okay? That's good news, right?

LEILA

No, I'd prefer cancer.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

So...how did all this happen? I assume this was not planned.

LEILA

No, I didn't know you could get knocked up from a one night stand.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Leila, it just takes once.

LEILA

Now you give me the sex ed talk...

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Well, I didn't know I had to since you're a lesbian!

EXT. STREETS - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Persian female rap music plays.

As Leila walks, she feeds her anger. She stuffs her face with a ridiculous spread of food: pizza, noodles, cheese burger, milk shake, and cheesecake.

LEILA (V.O.)
Holy fuck. I'm a lesbian. I can't be pregnant.

LEILA
(to camera, shoveling
cheesecake)
It's not considered binge eating when you're pregnant, right?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - 8 YEARS AGO

Leila flashes back to this dark memory.

SHIRIN
I think you should leave.

EXT. BELASCO THEATER - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Leila walks to the door, hesitates, and turns to leave. Then, she pivots, breathes, and decides to enter.

INT. BELASCO THEATER - HEDWIG DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Leila sneaks back to Hedwig's dressing room, the door says Maximillian Balthazar. Maximillian is starring as Hedwig.

Leila enters. Hedwig, half out of costume, is surprised to see Leila. Without the wig, he is halfway between Maximillian and Hedwig.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
I'm glad you came. Did you like it?

Leila sits across from Hedwig. Just two girls having a heart to heart.

LEILA
You were amazing.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
You finally called.

Let's call it a pregnant pause.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG (CONT'D)
So how long has it been?

LEILA
Twelve weeks.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
(a little alarmed)
That's a very specific number.

LEILA
Well, I just got out of my first
trimester. Um...

He is floored.

A KNOCK at the door.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
Ah ... can you give us a couple of
minutes in here?

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
(through door)
You got a lot of people out here
waiting for you.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
(to stage manager)
Yeah, I'll be right out.

LEILA
I can go. I just wanted to tell
you.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
No, no, please, please. I want to
help ... What do you want to do?

LEILA
Um, I think I'm going to keep it.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
Really?

LEILA
There's no pressure or anything,
I'm just letting you know.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG
Yeah, okay. Good. So you want to
keep it.

LEILA

Yes, I think so. Yeah, I'm as surprised as you.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Well, then let's give it a go.

LEILA

No, no pressure or anything.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

No, I would like to see you again...

LEILA

I mean, you got me locked in for another 6 months.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Does this mean you'll return my calls?

He smiles charmingly, but with a twinkle of fear.

LEILA

Just to be clear, right, I'm not gonna stop working just because I'm having a baby.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Yeah, neither am I, so --

LEILA

Like, if I want to work in Japan during a tsunami while I'm pregnant I will.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Ok.

LEILA

Or, like, to Sri Lanka during mass genocide I will...

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

I mean, if you really want to. I think that war's been over for a few months now...

LEILA

Right.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Right, so, can I take you to dinner?

LEILA

It's so late right now, so, I am going to get some rest.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Okay, um, tomorrow, lunch?

LEILA

I have lunch plans with my family.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Perfect. They can meet me, that's perfect. Where do they live?

LEILA

In Jersey.

MAXIMILLIAN/HEDWIG

Jersey, Jersey, hm...

LEILA

What the fuck is wrong with Jersey?

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Maximillian, now fully out of his Hedwig drag, looks a typical clean cut white bread British boy.

Seven Jamshidpour brothers (Shivaz, Majid, Hamid, Eman, Abbas, Rostam, and Zal), Shirin, Mamanjoon, Leila, and Maximillian sit at a huge round table, which nearly buckles under the weight of the food.

Maximillian is keenly aware of himself as the center of attention: he's putting on his best charm offensive but it's clear that he could very well be the next course.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

(*Pasar Zeshtoo keya?*) Who's this ugly guy?

MAXIMILLIAN

Uh, what'd she say?

MAJID

She said you have, um, really nice teeth.

MAXIMILLIAN
Oh, uh, my dad's a dentist.

MAJID
Oh, no way.

MAXIMILLIAN
Um...
(to Leila)
How do you say "dentist" in
Persian?

LEILA
Not now. So, Mom, how's dad?

MAJID
Hopefully he'll wake up soon.

SHIVAZ
Dad is asking about you.

HAMID
When was the last time you graced
us with your presence,
Lululollipop?

MAXIMILLIAN
Lululollipop?

SHIVAZ
Well we're honored you're here.

LEILA
Well, I could never resist a good
lo mein.

EMAN
Hey, at least she's not as much of
a fuck up as Vahid is.

SHIRIN
Hey, do not talk about someone who
is not here.

MAXIMILLIAN
(under his breath)
So, are you going to tell them?

LEILA
(whispered)
I'll send them an email.

MAXIMILLIAN
(whispered)
Are you crazy?

LEILA
(whispered)
It's a cultural thing.

MAXIMILLIAN
No it's not.

EMAN
What are you guys whispering about?

The table goes cold for a minute. Maximillian takes the opportunity to blurt it out.

MAXIMILLIAN
I'm having a baby.

SHIVAZ
You're having a baby?

MAMANJOON
(in Persian)
What did he say?

BROTHER
(in Persian)
He says: I'm pregnant.

MAMANJOON
(in Persian)
My God, men get pregnant in this country?

LEILA
No, I'm pregnant.

HAMID
You're pregnant by a gay guy.

LEILA
He's not gay, he's European.

MAXIMILLIAN
Only on special occasions. No, uh,
I'm not gay.

SHIVAZ
Clearly - considering you knocked
up my gay sister.

EMAN

He's thespian, not a lesbian.

LEILA

Okay, classy. I'm still gay - I just happened to get pregnant.

MAXIMILLIAN

(whispering to Leila)

You weren't gay on Halloween.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

What did he say?

ZAL

(in Persian)

He said: I'm a child of England.

ROSTAM

(in Persian)

Meaning: Leila is pregnant.

MAMANJOON

(in Persian)

Leila! Didn't I tell you "from the back door"? The front!

The brothers laugh.

SHIRIN

Maman!

SHIVAZ

Some people like coffee and some people like tea.

ABBAS

Not that we have any problem with gay people.

EMAN

Wait you and Elena aren't together anymore?

ABBAS

They broke up six months ago.

SHIVAZ

Some people like coffee and tea.

MAJID

Some people like thespians.

ABBAS

Congrats, sis. You're gonna be a great mom.

He puts out his fist. Leila bumps her brother's fist.

LEILA

Thanks. I'm gonna get some water.

Leila gets up to go to escape to the kitchen. Shirin takes Maximillian in for a long moment, then goes to the kitchen herself.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Leila rests her head in her hands, trying to figure out what to do next. Shirin walks and it's a stare-down.

SHIRIN

Leila, how can you be so irresponsible? I hope you are getting married.

LEILA

I was married to Elena and you destroyed that. If you ever want to see your granddaughter, you'll never bring up the word marriage again.

SHIRIN

(in Persian)
It's a girl?

Leila nods defiantly, then leaves her mom alone in the kitchen. For a moment Shirin realizes her part in this estrangement, but the cycle of pain and rejection continues.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Hamid is having everyone pose for a photo, setting up the timer on his mini tripod. Hamid keeps indicating for everyone to squeeze closer together.

Maximillian is surrounded by the Jamshidpour clan for a crowded photo. Leila is at his right, Shirin at his left, and the brothers are all around them. Nobody says a word.

LEILA

(looking at her mother and then camera)
Did she break up my marriage?
(MORE)

LEILA (CONT'D)

We were so in love. I was living the out of the box lifestyle I always wanted.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Leila and Elena in love. Leila serenading Elena, very badly, with Indigo Girls' cover of ROMEO and JULIET.

ELENA

I love you.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Leila continues to address the camera.

LEILA

...until life intervened.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NEW JERSEY - DAY

Elena and Leila later in their relationship. They are in mid-fight.

LEILA

I thought that the whole point of being in a radical queer relationship was I wouldn't be forced to be a damn housewife.

ELENA

Being responsible isn't being a housewife. It's keeping your word and us having a child this year. Not leaving for six months on a film shoot.

LEILA

(defiant)

I'm making my film now. I'm not gonna postpone.

ELENA

How can you be so disgustingly selfish?

LEILA

(to Elena)

I need to be selfish.

ELENA

Well, then, I need to break up with you.

LEILA (V.O.)

So, it's not all my mom's fault.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - BACK TO REAL TIME

Everyone waits for the flash of the camera to go off. Leila looks over to her mother surrounded by the sea of men.

LEILA

(addressing the camera)
But it's so much easier blaming our mothers...isn't it?

LEILA (V.O.)

I was just terrified to be like her. I had to do motherhood my way.

Leila gives this statement some thought.

LEILA

(addressing camera)
The thing is, just when I thought I had my mother figured out...

CU of Leila with an impenetrable expression.

INT. J.J. ELEK REALTY - WOODBRIDGE, NEW JERSEY - 1989 - DAY

CU: Leila (14) with big hair and the same expression. All the glory of the late 80s.

LEILA

(addressing camera)
...she would throw a monkey wrench into my story. She was a character I couldn't pin down - who kept reinventing herself.

Leila freezes. That images become the pictures in the frames on Shirin's desk. Shirin (42) writes diligently at a desk.

LEILA (V.O.)

And this time, she invented herself as an ultra-successful immigrant businesswoman.

PULL OUT TO:

The office of JJ Elek realty attracts two types of people: white and those that are here to see Shirin. An enormous FAMILY of Chinese-Americans enter the main office and are lead by the secretary to Shirin's small private office.

TITLE: THE 90S, NEW JERSEY

Shirin has Twinkies and Oreos ready for the kids, and a samovar of tea for the parents: old country in New Jersey.

SHIRIN

So, Mr. and Mrs. Park, it is a very big day. Are you excited?

THE PARKS

Yes.

SHIRIN

You are going to absolutely love it. I have prepared everything for you like we discussed, I just need you to sign right here, and here. Perfect. Congratulations! You are going to be inside your new home very soon.

MR. PARK

Thank you.

SHIRIN

Of course!

JIM (50), the JJ in JJ Elek, watches Shirin prep paperwork and hand out the snacks to the family, trying hard not to judge.

They sign the closing forms and Shirin opens the door to her office, where Jim is waiting.

JIM

So, Shirin, are you running a refugee camp here or what?

SHIRIN

Third closing this week.

JIM

You're doing better than me.

SHIRIN

The funny thing about refugees is they love to buy homes.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - OPEN HOUSE - 1989 - DAY

Leila stands against their station wagon while her mom sets out a large sign for the open house on the lawn. The sign has a large beauty photo of Shirin on it.

LEILA (V.O.)

My mom always leaned on me hard. To be her little helper.

SHIRIN

Don't work too hard, honey!

LEILA (V.O.)

I had to stand up to her or she would crush me.

With the sign perfectly set in the grass, Shirin grabs a box of goodies from the car.

SHIRIN

I need your help setting up inside for the open house tonight.

LEILA

I'll just wait here.

SHIRIN

Just 10 minutes.

LEILA

You always say 10 minutes.

But Shirin gives her the look of death

SHIRIN

Let's go.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - OPEN HOUSE - 1989 - DAY

Leila opens up her math homework on the kitchen counter, which hasn't been remodeled for a couple of decades. Shirin arranges flowers, arranges the color fliers, sprays the air with scented spray.

LEILA

(coughing)

Mom!

Shirin looks over her daughter's shoulder with pride and a little jealousy.

SHIRIN
That looks fun.

LEILA
It's calculus. There's no way you'd understand this.

Shirin swallows hard and says nothing. She finishes filling out her own forms.

SHIRIN
Can you check the spelling of this contract? Just one minute, please.

Leila looks over the contract.

LEILA
Mom, oh my god, you're such a bad speller! You didn't even spell "thousand" right!

SHIRIN
I am a bad speller so you could be a good one.

LEILA
(impatient, embarrassed)
I have mid-terms. There's so many mistakes. This is going to take all day.

Shirin takes a breath and tries hide her embarrassment.

SHIRIN
Just fix it please. Thank you for helping.

INT. J.J. ELEK REALTY - SHIRIN OFFICE'S - NJ - 1989

Shirin flips thru a binder of listings with her newest client, a traditionally-dressed Indian PRIYA ANAND. Shirin has decked out her office - it's kid heaven. A play area for kids includes TV/VCR cartoons, bean bags, and snacks galore. Priya's 4 KIDS (ages 4-9) munch on Cool Ranch Doritos watching cartoons while the grown women talk real estate.

SHIRIN
But Mrs. Kahn, why throw away money on rent?

PRIYA
We can barely make that rent as it is.

SHIRIN

The house I am about to show you -
the mortgage is going to be \$200 a
month less than your rent.

(looking at the kids)

It has four bedrooms. Your mother
in law can visit.

PRIYA

My mother in law is like an
Impressionist painting. You can
appreciate her better at a
distance.

They laugh. Shirin has her in the palm of her hand.

PRIYA (CONT'D)

We can't afford a down payment.

SHIRIN

First time home owners, no down
payment needed.

PRIYA

You must be joking.

SHIRIN

Oh, I never joke about business,
Mrs. Kahn.

INT. J.J. ELEK REALTY - SHIRIN'S OFFICE - LATER

Shirin eats pizza while studying the map of Edison NJ. She
circles foreclosures in the newspaper in red ink.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - 1989

The American Dream: a single family home in New Jersey.

Ali Reza, dressed in his wife's pink house robe, watches TV
while making sandwiches for the kids. Teenage Leila, with
really big hair, plays gameboy on a handheld device seated
next her father.

Shirin, in a power suit and with a hot mug of coffee, joins
the family. Gone are the days where she takes the kids'
breakfast orders, she's now the breadwinner.

SHIRIN

(in Persian to her
husband)

Wow, you shaved.

(MORE)

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 (to Leila, in Persian)
 You should've worn more makeup.

WPIX news coverage of racial violence in Jersey City plays on the TV: a newscaster is interviewing three Indian brothers.

NEWSCASTER
 (on TV)
 ... Can you tell us what happened last night, Mr. Patel?

RAJ PATEL
 (on TV, near tears)
 We've been here for ten years.

SHIRIN
 (to Ali Reza, in Persian)
 Turn it up.

RAJ PATEL
 They burned everything we have. Everything we worked for. I don't know what we did. We are good people. And they just came and ruined everything for us.

NEWSCASTER
 This is the seventh such attack in the Jersey City area. We're here in Journal Square...

Shirin gets an IDEA.

INT. J.J. ELEK REALTY - SHIRIN'S OFFICE - 1989 - MONTAGE

Shirin's office now has several certificates on the wall, marking month after month of Shirin as TOP SELLER at the agency. She meets with various clients.

SHIRIN
 So, Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez...Patel...Garcia...today is a very big day. Are you excited? I've prepared everything for you the way we discussed, all I need is for you to sign right here, and here. Amazing and congratulations!

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - 1989 - MONTAGE

With chaos ensuing, Shirin reads home renovation books.

INT. STORE - EDISON, NEW JERSEY - 1989 - DAY

The RAJ PATEL from the TV news story walks in.

SHIRIN

Right this way, watch your step.
Three thousand square feet for your
grocery store.

RAJ PATEL

You're renovating this yourself?

SHIRIN

Immigrants, we know how to save
money. We go through a lot. You
know, like I said, I was so moved
by your story. And I am so happy
that you are here and excited. And
you know what the best part is? In
this whole neighborhood, no market.
I don't know why.

RAJ PATEL

Then why are you giving us three
months free?

SHIRIN

If your business does well, then we
can negotiate terms that we both
find fair. Your success will be my
success. And I know you will have
success.

RAJ PATEL

This seems too good to be true, no?

SHIRIN

Do you know what my boss said when
I first started selling real estate
to immigrants? He said, "Bring one,
and the whole village comes." He
meant it as a warning, but I, I saw
that as an opportunity. I
understand something that they
don't. I have been the top seller
in my agency for the past six
months. I haven't done commercial
yet, but I own these three
buildings free and clear. I see an
opportunity. I believe in this
project. And I believe in you, Mr.
Patel.

Leila brings over a sign that reads "Patel Brothers."

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
A little presumptuous maybe, but --

RAJ PATEL
Wow.

SHIRIN
Nice, right?

RAJ PATEL
Very nice.

LEILA
(to camera)
The opportunity my mom saw? Today,
we call it Little India.

EXT. STORE - EDISON, NEW JERSEY - CONTINUOUS

They carry the sign out.

SHIRIN
Right, Leila, go on the other side.
Sorry, one second.

They hold the sign up above the door.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
Right in the center now, you see
what I see?

RAJ PATEL
Yeah.

SHIRIN
What do you think?

RAJ PATEL
Yes.

They shake.

RAJ PATEL (CONT'D)
Thank you so much.

SHIRIN
Congratulations, Mr. Patel.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL COURT - NEW JERSEY - 1989 - DAY

The New Jersey State Quarterfinals for Girls Basketball are underway and the stands are packed. Gulf War paraphernalia everywhere.

Shirin, wearing her real estate power suit, stands inconspicuously in the back of the gym, watching her daughter drive to the basket.

Leila draws a foul so blatant she's knocked to the ground.

Shirin instinctively puts her hand to her mouth in horror, then watches her teammates lift her up and smack her on the ass. Leila's bruised but she's fine. She winks at the GOON who knocked her down, because the free throw line is where Leila is truly unstoppable.

Shirin clocks Abbas, Leila's twin brother, in his cheerleader uniform. He hurls a CUTE WHITE GIRL into the air and catches her effortlessly. America is truly topsy turvy.

Her babies have really grown up.

Leila sinks both baskets, and her team pulls ahead. The crowd erupts. Shirin wants to see the end of the game, but her watch tells her she needs to go.

INT. J.J. ELEK REALTY - JIM'S OFFICE - 1989 - LATER

Shirin rushes in late to her meeting with her boss.

SHIRIN

Sorry I'm late.

JIM

Did they win?

SHIRIN

Well, I had to leave before halftime. But Leila was on the way to another triple double.

JIM

Do I hear basketball scholarship?

SHIRIN

No. She is going to get academic scholarship.

JIM

So, you've been agent of the month for eight months. What's next?

SHIRIN

I'm glad you asked. Do you know Oak Tree Road? Okay, all the stores are boarded up and I have this plan...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - BASKETBALL COURT - LATER

Leila, still wearing her basketball uniform, and Abbas, in his cheer uniform, are waiting in a near-empty gym doing their homework on the floor. Not the first time their mom is late.

SHIRIN

How was the game?

LEILA

You would know if you were there. The quarterfinals. You forgot.

SHIRIN

Sorry I'm too busy putting food on the table.

ABBAS

Did anyone see my smoking guns?

SHIRIN

Guns?

ABBAS

Like, muscles.

SHIRIN

(to Abbas)

I really love that you support your sister, but you need to get involved in a real sport. Not throwing those white girls in the air looking under their skirts. Leila, sweatpants.

LEILA

No, it's too hot.

SHIRIN

Do you want to start this with your father again?

ABBAS

Leila, don't be a bad Muslim.

LEILA

I'll stop shaving my legs if you grow out a nice long Muslim beard.

SHIRIN

This country, my daughter plays basketball and my son a cheerleader. Leila, pants, let's go!

ABBAS

Put your pants on, you slut.

LEILA

Shut up.

ABBAS

You should give me some of your facial hair too.

LEILA

Get out of here.

Leila sighs and pulls the sweatpants out of her gym bag.

SHIRIN

Hurry up!

LEILA

So stupid...

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Leila upset, calms herself by cooking an elaborate Persian feast. The same way her mom cooks, chops, dices, fries, spices by taste. You just want to reach out and eat the food.

LEILA (V.O.)

I always thought I had to stand up to my mom. I finally realized, I needed to try to understand her. Any maybe uncovering the scandal could let me do that.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Leila enters to see her mother, Abbas, and Hamid sleeping at her father's bedside. Machines sprout from his body.

After a moment, Shirin opens her eyes. Leila and her mother just look at each other, each holding their cards tight. *Is a reconciliation possible?*

SHIRIN
 (in Persian)
 Weren't you supposed to be taking
 care of Mamanjoon?

LEILA
 (whispering)
 I made you some food.

Leila takes out a Tupperware filled with Persian delicacies.

SHIRIN
 My favorite.

Leila smiles, mother looks at her daughter with a flash of
 love.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 We don't need you here, Leila. Go
 home and take care of Mamanjoon.

Fuck this! Leila leaves the hospital room filled with rage.

EXT. BRIDGE - EVENING

Leila walks home.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LEILA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - EVENING

Leila finds Mamanjoon sleeping in her bed.

LEILA
 Mamanjoon?
 (in Persian)
 I really need you.
 (in English)
 Need some cheering up, Mamanjoon.

EXT. BACKYARD - EVENING

Leila and Mamanjoon dance together.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Shirin looks at Ali Reza. Her words echo.

SHIRIN (V.O.)
 We don't need you here, Leila.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LEILA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - MORNING

Leila wakes up remembering the dark moment.

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Leila serves Persian food to Mamanjoon, who is impressed by the beautiful spread. Conversation in Persian.

MAMANJOON

Thanks, love! You still got it.

LEILA

If film doesn't work out, I could open a restaurant.

MAMANJOON

In the West you live to work. You are your work. What about joy? You don't even have a family to support yet. So why work, work, work?

LEILA

I work because I have ambitions...

MAMANJOON

Remember to live your life amongst all those ambitions. You'll be a mother soon. So don't forget yourself.

They eat in silence.

LEILA

So about the scandal you mentioned before...

EXT. VILLAGE - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin looks out over the village

LEILA (O.S.)

(in Persian)

Why did my parents come to America?

INT. JAMSHIDPOUR HOME - LIVING ROOM - PRESENT - DAY

MAMANJOON

Your mom was a lot like you when she was young.

EXT. GIRLS SCHOOL - SHIRAZ, IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin (13) dominates in the Mathematics competition.

TITLE: THE 60s, IRAN

MAMANJOON (O.S.)

She was brilliant.

YOUNG SHIRIN

The square root of 4356 is 66.

Young Shirin answers the final question to win the school mathematics gold ribbon.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

Back then, girls didn't have the same chance as boys.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAMILY HOME - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin and Young Mamanjoon (40) sit outside.

YOUNG MAMANJOON

You're so selfish.

YOUNG SHIRIN

So what if I'm selfish? I want to finish 7th grade. I don't want to get married.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin, Young Ali Reza, and their family pose for a wedding photo.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

When she married your father, they moved to a remote village with no water or electricity. Opposite of where she grew up. When your brother Shivaz was born I went to the village to help your mom.

CUT TO:

INT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Mamanjoon sweeps while Young Shirin washes the laundry in the cold well water. She wants to connect with her daughter but doesn't know how.

YOUNG MAMANJOON
Why are you washing all those clothes? Leave it.

YOUNG SHIRIN
I'm fine.

YOUNG MAMANJOON
You just had a baby, let me help you.

YOUNG SHIRIN
I said I'm fine.

Baby Shivaz cries. Young Mamanjoon runs to pick up her grandson.

YOUNG MAMANJOON
I'll get Shivaz.

INT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin brings her mother tea as she sings to the baby.

YOUNG MAMANJOON
You don't have to suffer like this.
You're a new mum, and need some rest.

Baby Shivaz cries and Young Shirin raises to rock his crib. Young Mamanjoon continues singing.

EXT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Mamanjoon hugs her pregnant daughter goodbye. They are both holding back tears.

Young Ali Reza holds baby Shivaz.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)
It was 2 days journey home. Their village was so remote. It was one day by donkey to the closest bus stop.

We see her ride a donkey, led by a local villager, toward a larger country town.

EXT. BUS STATION - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

And then of course, we had to wait
for the bus.

Young Mamanjoon sits in the crowded waiting area, which has a mix of villagers in colorful outfits, and modern Persians in western dress.

A VILLAGE WOMAN in colorful garb sits next to Young Mamanjoon. A man serves the women tea from a silver tray.

Young Mamanjoon pulls out the little care package her daughter has made. She unwraps a Shirazi delicacy: dates stuffed with walnuts. She offers one to the woman sitting next to her.

YOUNG MAMANJOON

Have some.

VILLAGE WOMAN

Thank you, my dear.

YOUNG MAMANJOON

May you have a long life.

They sip the tea and delight in the dates for a moment.

VILLAGE WOMAN

What brings you to our part of the
country?

YOUNG MAMANJOON

Well, my daughter is married to the
doctor here.

VILLAGE WOMAN

Dr. Jamshidpour?

YOUNG MAMANJOON

(surprised)

Yes. How did you know?

VILLAGE WOMAN

He is the only doctor for the
entire region. A great honor for
your daughter. Is she the first or
second wife?

It takes a moment for Young Mamanjoon to realize what she is being asked; what she is being told.

YOUNG MAMANJOON

What?

VILLAGE WOMAN

Are you the mother of the young bride, or of the old nurse?

INT./EXT. BUS - RURAL IRANIAN ROAD - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

A Young Mamanjoon, takes the bus from a snowy village station to the metropolis of old Shiraz, trying to contain her anger.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

First or second wife? We didn't give our daughter to your dad so he could betray us. What was he trying to do, start a medieval Harem?

EXT. ALLEYWAYS - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Mamanjoon walks at a brisk pace with her bag in tow. Her anger now has a clarity and purpose.

Their neighbors gossip.

MODERN WOMEN

A scandal in the making.

MODERN MAN

What humiliation!

MODERN WOMAN

I can't believe it.

YOUNG BOY

You'd think since he's an educated doctor, it would be different.

RELIGIOUS WOMAN

Men will be men. Even modern ones.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

BABAJOON, a Persian Pablo Neruda complete with cap, sits at his desk, writing a poem in a book with an ink pen.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

There's a time for poetry. And a
time for action. Your grandfather's
book would have to wait.

Young Mamanjoon bursts in.

BABAJOON

What's wrong?

INT./EXT. JEEP - MOUNTAIN PASS - IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Mamanjoon, their son MOHSEN (21, Persian Clark Gable),
and Babajoon ride a Jeep on a treacherous mountain pass.

MAMANJOON (V.O.)

Your grandfather and uncle did what
any respectable family would do
when their daughter's husband has
decided to live like an animal.

EXT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

It's like the old westerns.

As a cloud of dust settles - Young Mamanjoon, Mohsen, and
Babajoon appear. They load their pistols and pound on the
front door.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

The three vigilantes enter.

BABANJOON

Ali Reza. Come here!

Young Shirin, seven months pregnant, stands in the corner.

Mohsen and Babajoon wave guns and yell at Young Ali Reza.

YOUNG ALI REZA

What's going on? Why you creating a
scandal?

BABANJOON

I hear you took a second wife. You
damn peasant. Say goodbye to your
life.

Young Shirin is overwhelmed. In SLOW-MOTION: Villagers gather
and whisper. Angry faces of her father, brother, and husband.

The pressure is incredibly intense, and building, until

YOUNG SHIRIN
(screams)
STOP IT.

The entire room freezes. Literally frozen in time and space. Young Shirin speaks out of time, directly to us, with an understanding beyond her years. She talks of a future she already knows.

YOUNG SHIRIN (CONT'D)
I came to America. I left everything behind. Everyone I knew, everything familiar. My food, my family, my language. So I could narrate my own story. Control my own destiny. Take care of my own life. Not have the gossips rule my life. Now, I will tell my own story.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

A group of OLDER WOMEN pull an INFANT from a weeping AUNT MAHDIS (17).

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
I wasn't going to be like my Aunt Mahdis. Aunt Mahdis was divorced at 17. According to the law, the custody went to the father.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - COURTYARD - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Aunt Mahdis is being taught to ride a bicycle by Young Shirin's father, Babajoon. Young Shirin watches her from the courtyard.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
She nearly went mad with grief. Her brother, my father, tried to cheer her up. He gave her a bicycle and he taught her to ride.

SHOTS of Aunt Mahdis riding in all hours, in all weathers.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
Once she learned, she never stopped. Day and night, rain and sun, winter and summer. Aunt Mahdis would be pedaling.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin continues to address the camera directly.

YOUNG SHIRIN

I am not going to ever ride a damn bicycle. And I am not going to divorce this man. I understand him better than even he knows himself. Ours was a different story. It would have a different ending. I would make sure of that.

EXT. CEMETERY - SHIRAZ - A VERY LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Very Young ALI REZA (11) watches his father lowered into the ground, surrounded by his young MOTHER and eight SIBLINGS.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)

When a boy's father dies, something changes in his soul. He has no male role model. He doesn't know what kind of man he can become. My husband's father died helping the sick. After he died of yellow fever, his son became the man of the house.

INT. BOOKSTORE - SHIRAZ - A VERY LONG TIME AGO - NIGHT

Very Young Ali Reza in a lightning storm with a uniform that is too big for him, a NIGHTSTICK in one trembling hand.

PULL OUT to reveal shelves upon shelves of valuable books.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)

His responsibility was to protect the books. Books were valuable then, and needed protection.

A CRASH of thunder.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)

He protected the books, and the books protected him.

VERY YOUNG ALI REZA

I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid.

Very Young Ali Reza grips the nightstick.

Time has passed. Young Ali Reza (20s), now older, looks out the same window in a different rainstorm. He pulls a book off the shelf to calm himself.

YOUNG ALI REZA
I'm not afraid.

INT. CONCERT HALL - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - NIGHT

Young Ali Reza in his early 20s, Young Shirin in her early teens look up in awe at the marquee: GOOGOOSH IN CONCERT.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
When we married, I was 13 and he
22. But inside he was still a boy.
He had been to medical school, but
I was his intellectual equal.

Indeed, Young Ali Reza has the same mannerisms as the child he once was. He hands TWO TICKETS to the USHER.

YOUNG ALI REZA
Googoosh is your age.

Young Shirin is impressed that a girl her age could be afforded so much attention and control of her life.

YOUNG SHIRIN
I've never been to a concert.

Young Shirin and Young Ali Reza look like hicks compared to the ultra-sophisticated concert goers from the city, smoking cigarettes and wearing the latest western fashions.

Young Shirin unwraps a sandwich and shares it with Young Ali Reza as GOOGOOSH, Iran's Barbara Streisand, takes the stage.

Young Ali Reza and Young Shirin are swept away by the music.

EXT. VILLAGE - TURKISH-IRANIAN BORDER - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin and Young Ali Reza ride into the town on donkeys led by two MEN from the village; other donkeys carry their bags toward their new home.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
After we married we were sent to a
remote village.

The doctor and his wife are in modern dress and the villagers are in colorful tribal clothes.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
 When we arrived, it was like they
 had never seen a doctor.

This may be the biggest event the village has ever seen; the VILLAGERS crowd around the doctor, offering gifts and asking impromptu medical advice they've been waiting months for.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
 But they really knew how to cook.

The women set up a delectable feast on a traditional tablecloth on the floor. The doctor and his wife are at the head of the feast. Guests of honor.

Young Shirin and Young Ali Reza eat with relish. NURSE ROYA (36) joins them at the meal, sitting next to Young Shirin. A friendly smile between the two women. Instantly, Young Shirin takes a liking to Nurse Roya.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
 In the village, I only made one
 friend.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 What's your name?

NURSE ROYA
 Roya.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Ali Reza sees an unending line of patients in a rudimentary clinic. All of them have different ailments, and each of them has brought a gift for the new doctor.

Young Ali Reza is utterly overwhelmed. He wouldn't be able to handle it if not for a very calm NURSE ROYA, who prepares the vaccinations and injects a separate line of patients.

Young Shirin takes some initiative and restocks the supplies they have brought with them. Nurse Roya is extra kind to Young Shirin.

NURSE ROYA
 (to Shirin)
 Shirin, let me show you how to do
 injections.

She hands Young Shirin a needle.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 I don't know how to.

NURSE ROYA

That's why I'm going to teach you.
I've prepared this. Make sure
there's no air in it. You take her
arm like this. Ready? Give it a
try. Okay. First you pull up her
sleeve.

INT. VILLAGE HUT - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Ali Reza frantically studies a pile of medical books.
Young Shirin brings him a tea. She has a baby bump.

YOUNG ALI REZA

We never learned this stuff in
medical school.

YOUNG SHIRIN

You'll learn.

YOUNG ALI REZA

What if I kill someone? I just
graduated, they think I'm a real
doctor.

YOUNG SHIRIN

You are a real doctor. Not only
real, but a great doctor.

YOUNG ALI REZA

(smiles weakly)

Thanks for encouraging me. Do we
have any sugar?

INT. NURSE ROYA'S HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

A timid KNOCK. Nurse Roya puts down her book of Forugh
Farakhzad's poems, turns down the radio, and opens the door.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Could I borrow some sugar?

NURSE ROYA

Of course, come in.

Nurse Roya wraps sugar cubes and cookies into a cloth.

YOUNG SHIRIN

(re: the music)

I love this song.

NURSE ROYA
Googoosh is amazing.

YOUNG SHIRIN
We heard her in concert.

NURSE ROYA
Lucky you. Let's have a tea
together.

YOUNG SHIRIN
My husband is waiting.

NURSE ROYA
Just a quick tea.

Young Shirin smiles and sits at the table.

NURSE ROYA (CONT'D)
Sugar? Sweet like your name.

YOUNG SHIRIN
Lucky you. We don't have a radio at
home.

NURSE ROYA
We're friends now. Come listen to
the radio, even if I'm not home.
Music is good for the baby.

YOUNG SHIRIN
Hopefully.

Young Shirin instinctively rubs her belly and Nurse Roya
hands her the cloth of sugar and sweets.

NURSE ROYA
If you have any questions about
pregnancy or birth control...don't
be embarrassed. It'll stay between
us.

Young Shirin takes this in.

YOUNG SHIRIN
I wish I could continue my studies.

NURSE ROYA
You still can.

YOUNG SHIRIN
No, it's too late.

NURSE ROYA

I was 30 when I went back to school. It wasn't late for me.

YOUNG SHIRIN

How old are you?

NURSE ROYA

36.

YOUNG SHIRIN

(surprised)

You're older than my mother.

NURSE ROYA

(smiling)

You see? It's never too late.

EXT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

TITLE: TWO YEARS LATER

Young Shirin and Toddler SHIVAZ (18 months old) ride into the village in the back of a Jeep driven by the KATKHODAH (village chief).

The village women greet her like a returning queen, showering her with gifts and flowers.

She is visibly pregnant.

EXT. SMALL MARKET - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin approaches a stall.

YOUNG SHIRIN

A small jug of milk and three eggs.

A VILLAGE WOMAN brings her the goods.

VILLAGE WOMAN

(of the unborn baby)

You're carrying high. You'll have a girl.

Young Shirin's eyes light up; this woman has given voice to her secret hope.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Do you think so?

The village woman laughs kindly and Young Shirin smiles innocently.

INT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Ali Reza gulps down the last of his tea and walks to the door without kissing his wife or young son.

YOUNG SHIRIN

You won't believe how much Shiraz has changed. It's amazing. Hasn't Shivaz gotten so big? Kids grow up fast, right?

YOUNG ALI REZA

I have to go, I'll be back tonight.

He leaves and darkness descends. She has to fight it.

Young Shirin puts Toddler Shivaz in a little crib, then goes into her suitcase and wraps a small gift with paper and twine.

EXT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin walks the short distance to Nurse Roya's cottage.

INT. NURSE ROYA'S HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin enters the empty home.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Roya?

She places the gift atop the radio, which she turns on.

Music melts all of her cares away, makes her feel in the middle of life. She dances, holding her swollen belly like a dancing partner.

EXT. SMALL MARKET - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin speaks to the village woman at the market.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Have you seen Roya lately?

VILLAGE WOMAN

I spit on her.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Why?

VILLAGE WOMAN

You will shine pure. Even if that bitch tries to drag you into dirt, she can't. You're beautiful. You're pure.

Young Shirin doesn't want to hear any more but a seed is planted.

INT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - NIGHT

Young Shirin feeds Toddler Shivaz and watches her husband eat in silence. He won't look at her.

He finishes and puts on his coat.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Won't you come to bed?

YOUNG ALI REZA

I have to go. I have a patient.

As soon as he closes the door Young Shirin puts Shivaz down in his bed. She follows her husband into the dark night.

INT./EXT. NURSE ROYA'S HOME - RURAL IRAN - NIGHT

Young Shirin spies her husband enter.

Through the small window, Young Shirin can see her husband tending to Nurse Roya - taking her pulse.

He pulls up her shirt and listens to her big belly. Shirin is surprised to see Nurse Roya pregnant. She got married and didn't tell her?

Her husband is checking on a patient, Young Shirin thinks maybe her fears were unfounded...

Until Roya's hand caresses Young Ali Reza's head. He smiles in a way he never does at home, and leans in to kiss Nurse Roya. Young Shirin is in shock.

She stumbles back in the moonlit path toward her house.

EXT. WELL - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAWN

Young Shirin stands above the well alone. She starts shaking with sobs. Her tears drop into the well.

She prepares to throw herself in. End the pain, end the humiliation. End it all.

But in the distance she hears a CRY: her son. She looks back toward her house, without even thinking. Then back at the well.

INT. NURSE ROYA'S HOME - RURAL IRAN - FLASHBACK

Young Shirin dances and speaks to her pregnant belly.

SHIRIN

I promise, one day we will dance together.

EXT. WELL - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAWN

Young Shirin can't follow through with it. She climbs down from the well.

YOUNG SHIRIN

I'm sorry. I promise to be stronger. I'll make myself stronger.

Her hands shaking, she walks back toward the house, toward the screams of her sobbing son.

EXT. VILLAGE HOME - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin holds her son close to her pregnant belly. Both mother and son are traumatized, and cling to each other as if they both sense how close they came to losing each other.

YOUNG SHIRIN

(whispers to her son)
Sweetie, don't be afraid. I'll be back for you.

She hands Toddler Shivaz over to the village woman.

YOUNG SHIRIN (CONT'D)

I can't stay here anymore. Please take care of my son.

VILLAGE WOMAN
 Be careful, it's a dangerous
 journey.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - RURAL IRAN - A LONG TIME AGO - DAWN

A GUIDE leads Young Shirin on a donkey.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 We can't turn back.

INT. BUS - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin has made it to the bus. Her fellow passengers are wildly diverse: people in hijab, village people in colorful clothes, Persians in western clothes, and even an American HIPPIE with a large backpack next to him on the seat.

A small trickle of BLOOD runs down her leg.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 (touching her belly)
 Hold on a little longer.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - SHIRAZ - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

A nurse escorts Young Shirin through the chaos of a modern hospital in an almost-modern country...

YOUNG SHIRIN
 Help me, my baby's coming.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

...into an austere delivery room. A young OB/GYN examines her and frowns. Shirin starts to bleed. Sweat beads on her forehead. She is in excruciating pain, but cannot, or will not scream. The blood pours out of her. Spills out under the door...

OB/GYN
 The baby is stuck. Your hips are narrow. I need you to push hard. I need your help. Okay? Push. Push harder. Push harder! It's a girl.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 Let me see her.

The nurse brings Shirin the dead child. Young Shirin strokes her thick black hair.

OB/GYN

I'm sorry, she didn't survive.

YOUNG SHIRIN

My sweet, beautiful girl. Arezoo.
My love, your name will be Arezoo.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Mamanjoon and Young Shirin's Aunt Mahdis walk into the hospital room. Young Shirin is still holding the dead baby.

YOUNG MAMANJOON

Shirin darling, enough. Give her to me. Mahdis, take her for burial.

Something about Aunt Mahdis gives Shirin the strength to let her daughter go. Young Mamanjoon takes the dead baby outside. Shirin's shirt is wet with milk and she falls asleep.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - A LONG TIME AGO - DAY

Young Shirin wakes to the sound of WHISPERING in the doorway. There's a commotion; and the sound of a newborn WAIL.

Young Ali Reza comes in. He checks her chart and her IV. And sits in a shamed silence.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Our daughter had beautiful black hair.

YOUNG ALI REZA

I'm so sorry. Forgive me.

Young Shirin says nothing.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Why should I?

YOUNG ALI REZA

For your son. For Shivaz.

YOUNG SHIRIN

Enough.

YOUNG ALI REZA
 I'll take you some place far from
 here. Far from gossip. We'll go to
 America. But I need your help.

Young Ali Reza leaves and comes back with a NEW BORN BABY.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 What?

The baby is crying.

YOUNG ALI REZA
 His name is Vahid. Roya died in
 childbirth.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 Never mention her name in my
 presence. Do you understand?

YOUNG ALI REZA
 Vahid needs a mother. He won't take
 formula.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 Have you no shame to ask me this?
 (choking back a sob)
 That's my daughter's milk.

YOUNG ALI REZA
 This child is innocent. He's
 suffering, have mercy.

A profound silence.

The baby cries ferociously. Young Ali Reza does his best to
 console him. Young Shirin has sympathy for the baby.

Young Shirin extends her arms. Young Ali Reza places the baby
 in her arms. She pulls out her breast. She breastfeeds. As
 she feeds the baby, she cries tears of sorrow that drop onto
 the baby's face.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
 (in Persian)
 I always wanted a daughter to talk
 to. One day, many years from this
 day, I would give birth to her. But
 when she grew up, something strange
 happened. I couldn't talk anymore.

INSERT: Adult Shirin smokes silently against a taxi cab in
 the 1980s NYC.

YOUNG SHIRIN (V.O.)
 When we were together I was silent.
 I needed to be silent.

INSERT: Adult Shirin sits silently next to teenage Leila in 1990s NJ.

INSERT: Young Shirin sits silently at the top of the mountain in Rural Iran.

YOUNG SHIRIN
 (direct to camera)
 My silence was my strength. It was me keeping control of my story. A way of dealing with the sadness, and not being touched by it.

Young Shirin lifts her eyes and looks right into the lens of the camera. Right into the audience.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - PRESENT - DAY

Leila, 8 months pregnant, waits on an examination table. A TECHNICIAN waits nearby.

LEILA
 (to camera)
 I inherited that from my mother. The strength of silence. Pain can't touch you if you don't talk about it. Right?

Maximillian enters.

MAXIMILLIAN
 So sorry. I'm so sorry I'm late.

LEILA
 Oh great, the sperm donor's here, we can start now.

MAXIMILLIAN
 I'm Max, I'm not the sperm donor. We're dating. Well, we're not dating, we're...it's complicated.

TECHNICIAN
 Uh...can we begin?

MAXIMILLIAN
 Yeah, yeah. Yes, of course.

TECHNICIAN
(to Leila)
Lay down, please.

LEILA
Okay.

MAXIMILLIAN
Can I help you?

LEILA
Haven't you caused enough problems?

MAXIMILLIAN
Yeah. Okay.

Leila watches as the technician photographs the baby. Maximillian looks at the screen, awestruck. Leila looks at his child like awe, she's not sure what to feel.

TECHNICIAN
The head size is normal.
Appendages, limbs, and feet are
normal. Most importantly is the
heart. Heart is looking...normal.

MAXIMILLIAN
Wow! This is totally amazing. I was
thinking what if we kept dating?

The technician tries not to listen to their conversation.

LEILA
Were we dating? I thought we just
fucked once.

MAXIMILLIAN
Yeah, I mean, that's the most
awkward thing, right? Now the
sexual tension is out of the way,
we can actually go on a date and
find out if we like each other. Do
you know what I mean? It's worth a
try, right?

LEILA
Um.

MAXIMILLIAN
Do you like dumplings?

LEILA
I mean, who doesn't like dumplings?

TECHNICIAN
I like dumplings.

MAXIMILLIAN
I, yeah, I mean...

The technician has seen weird shit, this makes the top ten.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Leila and Maximillian eat piles of dumplings. What starts as an awkward dinner slowly becomes warmer, and more connected. They laugh and connect. Leila is opening up.

MAXIMILLIAN
(eating)
Oh my god, that's amazing. I'm kind of a big deal in the dumpling scene. It's kind of embarrassing, but, um, I'm the dumpling king.

LEILA
The dumpling king?

MAXIMILLIAN
Mhm, yeah, dumpling king.

LEILA
Is this self-proclaimed or they named you the dumpling --

MAXIMILLIAN
No, no, no. There's a guy, he plays a trumpet for me every time I come in the shop.

LEILA
Really?

MAXIMILLIAN
Yeah. I get everything for free.

LEILA
I really believe that.

MAXIMILLIAN
Mm. It's true.

Leila reaches for a piece of sushi.

MAXIMILLIAN (CONT'D)

No, you can't have sushi, sorry.
Leila -- it's like -- I read a
thing. World Health Organization.

LEILA

Japanese people eat sushi when
they're pregnant.

MAXIMILLIAN

You know, it's not -- I'm not
making it up, like, I read
something that --

LEILA

You know what you should do? You
should call the Japanese government
and tell them about these serious
allegations that you're claiming
against pregnant women.

MAXIMILLIAN

Okay, fine. Fine, fine, whatever,
fine.

He hands Leila a piece of sushi. He drops it.

LEILA

Way to go! It's okay, just give it
to me.

She struggles to reach for it over her swollen belly.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Okay, seriously?

MAXIMILLIAN

Yeah, yeah. You really want the
best piece. You wanna try this.

LEILA

(eating)
Mm. Mhm.

MAXIMILLIAN

How good is that?

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - RECOVERY ROOM - DAY

DR. MANZANO is examining her patient. Ali Reza's hair turned
from salt and pepper to black.

SHIRIN

His hair, it is darker than in years!

DR. MANZANO

He's getting twice the amount of oxygen he had than before. In Ancient Persia, cats whose hair changed in the night have magical powers!

ALI REZA

(in Persian)

Is she saying I became a cat?

SHIVAZ

He's cleared for the wedding tomorrow, huh?

DR. MANZANO

Unfortunately his magic hasn't helped his immune system. Sorry.

Ali Reza masks his disappointment by changing the subject and spreading the guilt.

ALI REZA

Leila isn't coming?

SHIRIN

She's running some errands for me. She'll come by later.

ALI REZA

Ok.

Vahid and NAZANIN (27) enter hand in hand. As is tradition when a bride and groom enter a room, Ali Reza and Shirin KELL, the Persian ululations.

SHIRIN

(ululating)

KELLELLEEEELL-LEHHHLL-LEH

Ali Reza is moved by Vahid's recovery from addiction.

Ali Reza kisses both Vahid and Nazanin on the head. And he whispers a Quranic prayer in each of their ears.

ALI REZA

Congratulations. Congratulations on your wedding. You look good, Vahid.

VAHID
I'm better dad.

SHIRIN
Get going to the bachelor party.

SHIVAZ
Bachelor party!
(to Nazanin)
And for you, ladies night at the
spa.

Everyone leaves - Shirin and Ali Reza are left alone.

ALI REZA
Shirin darling, thank you...

SHIRIN
It was a good thing. He found
someone who would love him.

ALI REZA
Will you forgive me?

SHIRIN
This is not a time for that.

Ali Reza starts to cry.

ALI REZA
I love you.

SHIRIN
You've become so sentimental, like
the Americans. I have a lot of
work. Tomorrow is the wedding. See
you later.

Ali Reza is left with tears in his eyes, a lifetime of love
and regret.

INT. BANQUET HALL - GROOM'S PREP ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING DAY

The rest of the Jamshidpour siblings, including Leila, get
ready in the cramped room. Chaos is a kind word for it.

Leila fixes one of her brothers' cuff links.

LEILA
Just hold on, stand still, it's
really easy. You just pop it, just
like this.

She grabs a perfume bottle from Abbas.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Seriously? I said stop. Put it down. Too bad Mamanjoon had to go back to Iran.

KNOCK-KNOCK. It's Maximillian, bearing a gift for Leila. The brothers are intrigued but try not to eavesdrop.

ABBAS

(in Persian)

(*Pasar Zeshtoo keya?*) Who's the ugly guy?

MAXIMILLIAN

They love the teeth.

BROTHERS

(in Persian)

(*Pasar Zeshtoo amad*) Mr. Ugly is here.

Maximillian awkwardly hands Leila a box.

MAXIMILLIAN

A corsage for the wedding.

LEILA

How retro. Thanks.

MAXIMILLIAN

You like it?

LEILA

Love it.

MAXIMILLIAN

You look beautiful.

LEILA

Thank you.

MAXIMILLIAN

I was thinking I could come by after the show.

(beat)

I mean if that's okay.

LEILA

(pleased)

Yeah. How many Jamshidpours can you stand at once?

MAXIMILLIAN

Yeah, we'll see. It will be a good opportunity to find out. Socially awkward dives into the deep end.

Leila laughs.

MAXIMILLIAN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go.

Maximillian kisses her on the cheek.

MAXIMILLIAN (CONT'D)

Oh, uh, how do you say "goodbye" in Persian?

LEILA

We mostly all were born in America, so we all speak English.

MAXIMILLIAN

Yeah, right, I know. But, just, I don't know, I want to get into the culture.

LEILA

(in Persian)
(*Khafeh Shoh*) Shut up.

MAXIMILLIAN

(in Persian)
"(*Khafeh Shoh*)?" Shut up?

As he leaves, he calls out to the brothers:

MAXIMILLIAN (CONT'D)

(in Persian)
(*Khafeh Shoh*) SHUT UP! Everybody.
(*Khafeh Shoh*) SHUT UP!

The brothers laugh.

BROTHERS

(in Persian)
(*Khafeh Shoh*) Shut up.

Maximillian leaves and the siblings laugh.

LEILA

Don't tell him.

ABBAS

The corsage, is it fake?

She opens it and they all "Awwwww."

ABBAS (CONT'D)
That's cute. He tried, you know?

INT. BANQUET HALL - BRIDE PREP ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING DAY

Nazanin, in a slightly gaudy wedding gown, is doing her hair and make up Persian style - loud and tacky. Vahid helps his bride-to-be - it's a tender moment.

Shirin watches her and Vahid. Vahid is in a tuxedo for the first time in his life, but it's a good look.

SHIRIN
(in Persian)
Vahid, I'm proud of you.

Vahid beams with pride and love, trying to repress his shame.

VAHID
Thanks for everything you did for me, Mom.

SHIRIN
See you in a minute.

INT. BANQUET HALL - GROOM'S PREP ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING DAY

Back with Leila and her brothers.

LEILA
No one came to my wedding with Elena.

SHIVAZ
No one even told me you broke up with Elena. You know?

ABBAS
Did you even have a wedding? I thought you registered at City Hall to get health insurance.

LEILA
Okay, you're missing the point.

SHIVAZ
Do you even believe in marriage?

LEILA
You know, I have a lot of issues.

ABBAS

Maybe it's time to deal with some of them, sis.

SHIVAZ

Yeah, for real.

LEILA

I'm trying.

ABBAS

Maybe it's also time to let go of some of that anger.

SHIVAZ

If not for your own sake, then at least for your bambino. Just saying.

LEILA

Thanks for the advice.

ABBAS

What is "bambino"?

INT. BANQUET HALL - MAIN ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING - NIGHT

It's Vahid's Persian wedding in NYC. The Persian wedding banquet table with all the traditional elements, an overabundance of Persian food, flowers, and all things gold.

We see all the characters from the family parties - they are getting down to some Googoosh.

The whole family dancing. Even mother and daughter - it's a moment of joy and connection.

Shirin dances with Vahid, until Nazanin cuts in to dance with her new husband. Shirin moves to the sidelines and watches as others dance with the couple at the center.

Leila approaches her mother, looking for a moment of connection, seeing a chance to share what she knows about her mother's struggles and her secret past.

LEILA

Must have been hard to raise Vahid.

Shirin is disarmed for a moment: how much does Leila know?

SHIRIN

I love my kids all the same.

LEILA

Yeah, but he was different, wasn't he?

This is way too close to home. Shirin knows how to change the subject.

SHIRIN

You and him were not that different. You both just had bad friends.

Leila takes the bait.

LEILA

(snapping)

Yeah. We're so similar. My friends forced me to get two Master's degrees while Vahid was living in a crackhouse.

Shivaz and Abbas have seen the trouble brewing and come to the rescue.

ABBAS

(to Leila)

Hey Lululollipop, I know you can dance!

Abbas pulls her onto the dance floor, while Shivaz pulls his mom out for a dance on the opposite side of the floor.

After the song is over, Leila slips away. From the corner of the room, Leila watches her family and her mother - all enjoying themselves. Even the black sheep is being celebrated.

Leila keenly feels herself the outsider, as if all the years of not fitting in have been crystallized in this moment.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Leila leaves the wedding in a haze of emotion, not even caring where she's walking. A deep physical sensation cuts through her emotions: she realizes she's in labor.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Leila walks into the hospital alone, up to a NERVOUS NURSE.

LEILA

I just snuck out of my brother's wedding. I think I'm in labor.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MAIN ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING - LATE NIGHT

It's the end of the night. All the brothers, are extremely drunk except for Vahid...

SHIRIN

Have you seen Leila?

MAJID

Leila? Um, I don't know...paging Lululollipop! I can't see her, Mom, I'm sorry.

SHIRIN

(to Shivaz)

Have you seen your sister?

SHIVAZ

Who?

SHIRIN

Have you seen Leila?

SHIVAZ

No.

SHIRIN

(to Abbas)

Have you seen -- have you seen Leila?

ABBAS

No. Sorry.

INT. HOSPITAL - NURSE'S STATION - LATE NIGHT

The nervous nurse gives Leila's file to a CALM NURSE.

CALM NURSE

No one came in with her?

NERVOUS NURSE

No, I don't think so.

CALM NURSE

Is there a next of kin?

The nervous nurse is too flustered to remember.

NERVOUS NURSE
 (checking the form)
 Her mother.

CALM NURSE
 Okay. Let's call her mother.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MAIN ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING - LATE NIGHT

Shirin answers her phone.

SHIRIN
 Hello? No -- I'm sorry I can't
 hear.

EXT. STREET - LATE NIGHT

Shirin, in full wedding garb, tries in vain to hail a cab.

SHIRIN
 Taxi! TAXI!

Shirin gives up and starts running, á la "When Harry Met Sally." She stops completely out of breath and desperate.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 (in Persian)
 Imam Zaman, help!

This time Imam Zaman APPEARS in the form of a Tuk Tuk driver!
 And again we can't see his face.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 Cornell Hospital please.

It's surreal - Shirin in a Tuk-Tuk thru the NYC streets.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 (to camera)
 Imam Zaman truly comes in the most
 unexpected forms.

Shirin sends a group text on her flip phone, takes forever.

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Leila is in stirrups, DOCTOR ANAHITA attends.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MAIN ROOM - VAHID'S WEDDING - LATE NIGHT

The Jamshidpour brothers' eight phones all BEEP simultaneously with an incoming text message. They all bolt from the room.

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - LATE NIGHT

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Okay, I see the crown, she's got beautiful black hair. Okay? Alright, come on, let's push. Push, honey, come on. Okay, Leila? Deep breaths, okay?

INT. BELASCO THEATER - HEDWIG'S DRESSING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Hedwig, in full garb, is reapplying mascara between scenes. His cell phone BUZZES. He looks at it.

HEDWIG

Oh shit!

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Listen to me, you got to channel your anger, okay? You gotta push it out.

LEILA

I'm not angry! I'm not angry!

Leila silently white-knuckle her way through a contraction.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Seven drunk groomsmen and an even drunker bride run to the hospital, led by the only sober people: Maximillian (in full Hedwig drag) and the groom, Vahid. Hedwig's STILETTO gets caught in a GRATE.

Vahid pulls him free and tries to give the insane impromptu marathon some direction.

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

LEILA

Do I look angry?

DOCTOR ANAHITA
 You look a little angry, that's
 okay. That's okay. Push.

LEILA
 I can't.

Shirin rushes into the room to be at her daughter's side.

LEILA (CONT'D)
 Mom. Mom.

SHIRIN
 I'm here. I'm here.

DOCTOR ANAHITA
 Leila, the baby is stuck in the
 canal, okay? Your hips are too
 narrow. I need you to push. Please.

SHIRIN
 Leila, listen to me, I need you to
 scream as loud as you can so you
 can push. Please push.

Leila doesn't want to.

LEILA
 Is the baby going to die?

DOCTOR ANAHITA
 I need you to concentrate, okay?

INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY LOBBY - NIGHT

The eight brothers, the bride, and Hedwig arrive at the
 hospital.

HEDWIG
 We're looking for Leila
 Jamshidpour, she's in labor, do you
 know which room she's in?

NERVOUS NURSE
 Is one of you the father?

HEDWIG
 I'm the father.

NERVOUS NURSE
 Oh lordy.

CALM NURSE

Room 345.

BROTHERS

Room 345!

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Leila, drenched in sweat, almost giving up.

SHIRIN

Push, Leila, push.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

You're both in danger, I need you to concentrate.

SHIRIN

Scream as loud as you can so you can push. You can do it. Come on, honey.

Hedwig and the brothers enter the room. They cheer in encouragement. Leila gives a small scream.

LEILA

Damn it.

This time Leila opens her mouth and lets it all out.

LEILA (CONT'D)

(in Persian)

AHHHHHHH!!!! MOTHERFUCKER!!!!!!

The scream traverses generations of women, and literally SHAKES the walls. And a baby is born...

But there is silence. The room itself holds its breath. Anahita holds the baby upside down and slaps its behind. Then...

BABY

WAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

The scream has been passed to the next generation.

DOCTOR ANAHITA

Aw, you have a beautiful baby girl!

DOCTOR ANAHITA (CONT'D)

Dad, do you want to cut the cord?

MAJID
Just like in the movies.

Hedwig cuts the cord.

HEDWIG
Just like this?

DOCTOR ANAHITA
Yep.

The baby is put on Leila's chest. She's beautiful. It's one of those movie moments.

HEDWIG
You're a mom. You're all uncles!

SHIRIN
And I am a grandmother.

DOCTOR ANAHITA
Alright, the show's over, gentlemen and lady. Thank you, thank you.

MAJID
I'm medically trained, do you need me to --

DOCTOR ANAHITA
Alright, thank you, bye.

They all leave.

HEDWIG
Leila, I'll be just outside.

MAJID
Great job, Lululollipop.

HEDWIG
(in Persian)
(*Khafeh Shoh.*) Shut up. Shut up.

DOCTOR ANAHITA
Great job, Leila.

The overwhelming scent of body juices and antiseptics is too much for her: Leila vomits all over the baby.

SHIRIN
Oh.

DOCTOR ANAHITA
Let me get her cleaned.

LEILA

(to the camera)

This is not how it happens in the movies.

SHIRIN

It is okay, honey. It's very natural. Honey, what did you eat?

INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY LOBBY - NIGHT

The entire wedding party and Hedwig are passed out.

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Only Shirin is awake, looking out the window.

Leila has the baby in her arms. The vomit is cleaned up. The nurse walks in with a clipboard.

CALM NURSE

So, we are doing the birth certificate today. I already have Hedwig's information. So, we just need a name. What shall we call her?

Leila looks into her baby's eyes, she caresses the baby's long hair.

LEILA

Her name is Arezoo.

Shirin is shocked. Of all the names: Arezoo?!

CALM NURSE

Arezoo. Oh, what a beautiful name.

SHIRIN

Why did you choose that name?

LEILA

She's just Arezoo. Would you like to hold her?

SHIRIN

Yes.

Shirin holds baby Arezoo - who looks shockingly like her own Arezoo. A baby with long black hair, alive and well. A miracle. Or a reincarnation. Or time folding on itself. Tears well up in Shirin's eyes.

For the first time, she has let the full weight of sadness and joy into her heart. She looks at her only daughter.

SHIRIN (CONT'D)

Leila. I -- I am sorry. I love you.

LEILA

Don't be so American.

SHIRIN

(to the baby)

Arezoo!

(in Persian)

My love.