

# SHAYDA

Written by

Noora Niasari

NOTE: *italic font* is spoken in Farsi, regular font is spoken in English.

1995 - Melbourne, Australia.

1A INT. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DEPARTURES - DAY 1A  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA, MONA)

Close-up on the anxious face of MONA (6, Iranian) as she's rushed through a chaotic airport entrance, daunted by sounds of flight announcements, crowds and distant soaring planes.

Her attention is split between her mother SHAYDA (27) and social worker JOYCE (45, Australian) who guard her closely.

Joyce points to a row of check-in counters where SEVERAL TRAVELERS stand in line with their bags, attended by AIR HOSTESSES in burgundy suits.

JOYCE

See these counters love? It's important you remember what they look like.

Mona presses her lips together and looks up at Shayda for reassurance.

SHAYDA

*Understand sweetheart? You have to remember this place.*

Mona nods, her eyes are full of fear. A machine beeps.

1B INT. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - SECURITY - DAY 1B

Handbags are placed onto a conveyer belt by Joyce.

Mona moves in, fascinated by the machine until the bags are violently swallowed by the plastic strips. She retreats.

A SECURITY OFFICIAL steps Shayda aside and scans her body using a digital wand.

It's all routine procedure, but it doesn't seem that way to Mona. She is really scared now.

She pulls at Shayda's long skirt to get her attention.

MONA

*Mummy... I wanna go home.*

SHAYDA

*We're almost done.*

Mona doesn't buy it.

CUT TO:

Mona, Shayda and Joyce descend down a tall escalator into a dark zone. Mona looks back up, toward the receding daylight.

1C

INT. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - CUSTOMS - DAY

1C

Mona looks up at a tall AVIATION SECURITY OFFICER in a blue uniform. As he meets her gaze, she hides behind Shayda.

Shayda listens intently to Joyce's instructions.

JOYCE (O.S.)

Tell her that if he brings her here, she needs to run to one of these officers in blue...

Mona eyes the passport control signs, glass booths with IMMIGRATION OFFICERS and MULTIPLE TRAVELERS standing in various lines with their passports. She's overwhelmed.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

She's gotta give him her full name. They'll search her on the watchlist and notify us straight away.

SHAYDA (O.S.)

(broken English)  
What if she can't find?

JOYCE (O.S.)

She will Shay. She just has to remember the blue uniform.

Mona huddles up to Shayda who leans down to her.

SHAYDA

*Darling, listen to me, if Daddy brings you here-*

MONA

*It's my fault... Daddy didn't say anything about coming here.*

Shayda points to an advertisement of an Qantas Australia plane, ascending above sunlit clouds.

SHAYDA

*Remember the phone call yesterday? He said he wants to take you on a big plane, to see the stars?*

Mona nods.

MONA

*I wanna see the stars.*

SHAYDA

*What else did he say?*

MONA

*He asked me... if I want to see  
grandma.*

SHAYDA

*And what did you say?*

MONA

*That I miss her.*

SHAYDA

*And what else?*

MONA

*I... I don't remember.*

Shayda feels short of breath, her body trembles and weakens.

Joyce sits her in a chair nearby. She grabs a bottle of water from her handbag.

Mona is frozen, helpless.

Shayda drinks some of it and closes her eyes, her head is spinning. Joyce pats her sweaty forehead with a tissue.

JOYCE

*Deep breath in... and out.*

Shayda repeats this a few times.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

*She's safe. We did the right thing.*

She nods. Mona touches Shayda's leg and stares at her with a guilty expression. Shayda puts her hand on hers.

2

INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN/DINING AREA- DAY  
(SHAYDA, MONA, JOYCE, VI, CATHY)

2

Dozens of tiny wheat grains are slowly poured into a shallow glass dish. There's a magical sense to this ritual. Shayda spreads them out evenly with her fingers.

SHAYDA

*(with enthusiasm)*

*Okay, now what do we do?*

Mona shrugs and fiddles with a pink Barbie doll.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*We cover them with water.*

She pours an inch of water to cover the grains. She puts her finger in the dish and swirls the grains around.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*See Persian New Year is at the  
start of spring. A time of rebirth,  
when everything is new again...*

Shayda holds out a single grain on her fingertip to Mona.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*That's why we make this wheatgrass.  
See, each of these will become a  
biiig tall green sprout.*

Mona flicks the grain into the sink.

MONA

*I wanna go play.*

Shayda sighs and dries her fingers on a tea towel.

SHAYDA

*Go.*

Mona smiles and skips away with her toy.

Shayda picks out the broken grains. Her expression changes to exhaustion; her enthusiasm was just a front.

JOYCE (O.S.)

When's the last time you saw him?

VI (O.S.)

(Vietnamese accent)

Tuesday night.

Shayda turns her attention to the conversation behind her, revealing a large communal space with four fridges, each with different magnets and kids drawings on them.

Joyce sits at the big dining table with VI (late 20s, Vietnamese, bruised eye, colorful nails and fashion sense).

JOYCE

Are you familiar with this area?

Vi shakes her head slowly, her expression is blank. Her usual zest for life is currently buried under her trauma.

Shayda clocks Vi's distress.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Do you or your husband have any  
family in this area?

VI

No.

JOYCE

It's important you and the girls  
keep our location secret. Okay?

Vi nods. Shayda places a glass of water beside her. They exchange a knowing glance as Vi takes a sip.

Shayda places her wheatgrass dish in the corner by the windowsill. She opens the curtain for a shaft of sunlight.

CATHY (50s, strong physical presence yet somewhat dead inside) opens her fridge (the only one with no kids drawings). She heats up a shitty frozen pizza and gives Shayda a weird look for her wheatgrass dish.

A girl screams from a distance. Shayda rushes up the stairs, Vi follows behind.

3 INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING/KIDS AREA - CONTINUOUS 3  
(SHAYDA, MONA, JENNY, VI, RENEE, FEMALE SOAP CHARACTER, MALE SOAP CHARACTER, JILL, CATHY)

Shayda sees Mona holding the dismembered Barbie doll close to her chest, huffing and puffing.

SHAYDA

*What happened?*

MONA

*This is mine.*

SHAYDA

*No, these toys are for everyone.*

Mona shakes her head.

MONA

*It's mine.*

Vi consoles her two daughters, JENNY (7, outspoken) and JILL (9, introvert), they're both very upset with Mona.

Jenny is clenching her sore bicep with one hand and holding the arm of a Barbie doll in another.

JENNY

*She pinched me. It hurts.*

Jenny shows Vi the red mark. Vi kisses her bicep.

VI

*(in Vietnamese)*

*Poor thing... it's okay.*

Cathy watches them from the staircase, biting into her pizza.

Mona caresses her Barbie's hair and talks Farsi to Shayda.

MONA

*It was her fault.*

RENEE (19, party girl, not ready for motherhood), sits with her newborn on the couch, watching Home and Away.

RENEE  
She did it. I saw.

FEMALE SOAP CHARACTER (V.O.)  
"And what do you want me to do about it?"

MALE SOAP CHARACTER (V.O.)  
"I want you to leave him."  
(and etc. UNDER SCENE)

Jill stares Mona down.

SHAYDA  
Mona... say sorry.

JILL  
Say sorry!

MONA  
No!

Mona crosses her arms and looks away. Shayda turns to Jenny.

SHAYDA  
Sorry.

Jenny hides in Vi's embrace. Vi pities Mona.

VI (O.S.)  
(in Vietnamese to Jenny)  
Let it go, she's younger.

VI (CONT'D)  
She's a sad girl. Aren't you love?

Mona can't handle this question, she storms off, down the stairs. Shayda follows.

SHAYDA  
*Stop... Mona!*

Mona ignores her. Shayda grabs her little arm.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*I SAID STOP!*

Mona yanks her arm away and cries uncontrollably.

MONA  
*I don't like them! I don't like this place! When... When do we go home? I wanna go home...*

Shayda is at a loss, she comforts her.

INT. SHELTER - OFFICE - DUSK  
(SHAYDA, MARYAM)

Fragments of Shayda's shadow are visible through a dimly-lit doorway as she paces the room.

SHAYDA (O.S.)  
*I don't know what to do.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
(deep husky voice)  
*How is she eating and sleeping?*

Shayda sits down.

SHAYDA  
*It's different each day.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*You should make Chicken with  
Barberries. She loves that.*

SHAYDA  
*I know.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Remember to soak the barberries for  
ten minutes before you-*

SHAYDA  
*I know.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Do you still have that saffron I  
sent you?*

SHAYDA  
*No. It's finished.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*I can send you more.*

SHAYDA  
*I can't give you the address  
here... I think there's a post box.*

Maryam sighs. Shayda stretches the curly phone cord.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*It's not even clear where you're  
living. What kind of life is this  
you've created for yourself?*

Shayda has heard this before. A headache is coming on.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*You have to be tolerant. When his  
studies are over, you'll come back  
to Iran and things will improve.*



Shayda sighs, frustrated.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Think about the wellbeing of your  
 child. This talk of court is just-*

SHAYDA  
*Mum, I told you what happened.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*But what is solved by running away?  
 You can't escape your destiny.*

Shayda looks out the barred window with a pensive gaze.

A flock of Black-Cockatoos shriek in unison as they fly  
 across the fiery sunset sky.

5 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 5  
 (IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR, MONA, SHAYDA, CATHY, RENEE, BABY  
 DYLAN)

IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR (V.O.)  
*Now the shoulders, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2...*

Shayda moves her hips to the beat of Persian pop music as she  
 ties a scarf around Mona's waist.

MONA  
*I don't wanna.*

Mona tries to untie it. Shayda stops her.

SHAYDA  
*Please try for Mummy.*

Mona sighs and looks up at the TV/VHS setup. A very camp  
 Iranian-American instructor leads his spandex wearing troupe.

IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR (V.O.)  
*Now the feet, 1, 2, 3, with a flick  
 of your hair...*

Shayda expertly moves her feet to the movements of the  
 dancers and the beat of the music, smiling at Mona.

Mona reluctantly moves her feet, distracted by Renee and  
 Cathy's drunk antics in the next room. She is out of sync.

Shayda turns up the volume then grabs Mona's hand.

SHAYDA  
*Look at my feet. Look... Left  
 behind, right behind, left behind,  
 right...*

Mona starts to pick up the steps, she half smiles.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*Well done!*

IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR (O.S)

*Arms, arms...*

Shayda lets go of Mona's hand and starts to sway her arms side to side with a flick of the wrist. Mona looks at Shayda and the video and tries her best to copy.

Renee and Cathy burst into the room a bit tipsy, wearing clubbing clothes.

They're giggling about something else, but it makes Shayda and Mona feel self conscious. Mona takes off her waist scarf.

CATHY

We're headin' out...  
It's her birthday.

Shayda perks up and smiles.

SHAYDA

Happy Birthday.

CATHY

Still a baby though.

RENEE

Piss off.

Cathy sniggers.

SHAYDA

Where is the party?

CATHY

In the city.

Shayda is wide-eyed.

SHAYDA

Is there dancing?

Renee looks at the TV screen with shimmying Persian Dancers.

RENEE

Not really your kind.

Renee cracks her bubblegum. Cathy nudges her to step forward.

RENEE (CONT'D)

Can you look after Dylan?

Shayda's heart sinks a little.

CATHY

Just for a few hours.

RENEE  
Trevor's gonna be there and I  
haven't seen him in weeks.

SHAYDA  
Ask Vi.

RENEE  
She's out with the girls. Please.

Cathy wheels in the pram, baby Dylan is cosily wrapped in a fluffy blue blanket.

Shayda looks at him, he's adorably drooling and staring, trying to make sense of her.

RENEE (CONT'D)  
Fuck c'mon, I'll pay you.

Renee unzips her glittery handbag.

RENEE (CONT'D)  
Please. Look, I've got a ten, I've  
got...

Shayda turns it down.

SHAYDA  
Okay. I do it.

Renee is overjoyed, she hugs Shayda, it's a little forced.

Shayda watches with envy as the girls giddily rush away.

Mona sways baby Dylan's arms to the Persian song.

6 EXT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S WINDOW - NIGHT 6  
(BABY DYLAN, SHAYDA)

Baby Dylan cries. Behind the curtain of her barred window, Shayda's silhouette appears as she sways him in her arms.

7 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 7  
(VI, BABY DYLAN, MONA, SHAYDA)

Mona and the baby are fast asleep in one bed.

Shayda is wide awake, she looks at the clock, it's 3.15am.

Shayda looks inside a half empty box. She quietly lifts out a few empty picture frames and a dusty photo album.

She sits on the floor with the photo album in her lap. She dusts off a farsi embossed title, 'Memories.'

She flips it open and looks at the first photo with a slight smile;

she's 16 wearing a hijab and school uniform, elated in her parents embrace. A caption in farsi handwriting says, "Graduation. Tehran, 1988."

The next page has four photos of her and HOSSEIN (22, full head of hair, stocky yet handsome). They pose as awkward newlyweds. She's a naïve 17-year-old bride.

The next pages show colorful photos from their arrival in Australia (seven years later). Shayda in hijab, looking worse for wear, Hossein forcing a smile, Mona's distant gaze.

They pose with kangaroos and koalas, in front of Sydney Opera House, and on outings with other religious families.

Shayda's gaze holds a mixed sense of sadness and anger - she doesn't fit into this world anymore; she's an outsider now.

She comes across a singular photo of Hossein, the stern look in his eyes makes her uneasy.

She tries to remove it, but it's stuck in the plastic slot. As she yanks it out, the rustling noise wakes baby Dylan.

CUT TO:

Dylan cries in Shayda's arms. She rocks him side to side, with one eye on Mona shifting in her bed.

Vi walks past, wearing her robe and holding a glass of tea.

The baby cries louder. Vi enters the room and puts her glass down. She gestures to take the baby.

Shayda gently hands him over. Vi murmurs a Vietnamese lullaby, slowly calming him down.

Vi gestures that Shayda drink her tea.

VI

(whispering)

Jasmine. Good for sleep.

Shayda picks it up and takes a sip, smiling with tired eyes.

8 INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN - DAY 8  
(SHAYDA)

Shayda renews the water of her wheatgrass dish and places it near the windowsill. She opens the curtains slightly.

9 INT. SHELTER - OFFICE - DAY 9  
(JOYCE, INTERPRETER 1, SHAYDA)

Shayda and Joyce sit in front of the speakerphone. Shayda bites her nails while Joyce reads from a folder.

JOYCE

"5th January, 1995. Tehran. Three days had passed since they'd taken Mona away from me. Those three days passed like a lifetime."

A female INTERPRETER 1 is on the line (40s, Iranian). She live translates to Farsi with an apathetic tone.

INTERPRETER 1 (V.O)

*Panjomeh janvier, hezaro nohsado navado panj. Tehran. Seh rooz gozashteh bood az vaghti keh Mona roh az man gereftan. Oon chand rooz mesleh yek omr gozasht.*

Shayda nods to Joyce, she continues.

JOYCE

"My mother-in-law said, 'if you continue this path, you'll never see her again.' So I withdrew my application for divorce and agreed to return to Australia until the end of his studies."

INTERPRETER 1

*Madar shoharam goft 'ageh edameh bedi, hichvaght digeh bacharo nemibini.' Banabarin, ghabool kardam bargardam Australia ta vaghti keh darsesh tamoom besheh.*

Shayda shifts in her seat.

SHAYDA

*Ghesmateh talagh roh nagoftin.*  
(You didn't say the divorce part)

INTERPRETER 1

*Moshakhaseh.*  
(It's obvious)

SHAYDA

*Na moshakhas nist.*  
(No it's not)

INTERPRETER 1

*Hala beharhal, agaram talaghet midad, dokhtareto az dast midadi mageh na Shayda khanoom?*  
(Well anyway, even if he'd granted you the divorce, you would've lost your daughter, isn't that right Miss Shayda?)

Shayda looks stunned, frozen.

JOYCE  
What's she saying?

INTERPRETER 1  
She doesn't like my translation.

SHAYDA  
Turn it off.

Joyce picks up the phone and covers it with her hand.

JOYCE  
What's wrong?

SHAYDA  
(trembling)  
She said my name... She knows me.

Joyce hangs up the phone.

10 INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING ROOM - DAY 10  
(SHAYDA)

A sleep deprived Shayda sets up her Nowrooz spread (Haft Sin) whilst listening to the sound of falling rain.

Her tranquil ritual is interrupted by a mechanical sound from outside. She anxiously opens the blinds to look out.

11 INT. SHELTER - STAIRCASE/OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 11  
(JOYCE, DEB, SHAYDA)

Shayda rushes down the stairs toward the office.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
I warned Annabelle... it's a small  
community.

DEB (O.S.)  
Wasn't she interviewed?

JOYCE (O.S.)  
Yeah but -

Shayda enters. Joyce and DEB (20s) are filing paperwork.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
What's up Shayda? You right?

SHAYDA  
A man in car, watching outside.

JOYCE  
How long's it been there?

SHAYDA  
One hour.

JOYCE  
 Deb, keep your eye on it.

DEB  
 Sure.

Joyce dials the office phone.

JOYCE  
 Hi, I'd like to report a suspicious  
 vehicle.

12A EXT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS WINDOW - DAY 12A  
 (SHAYDA)

Shayda peeks out the venetian blinds once more. A voyeuristic  
 gaze on her from afar, through the rain.

12B INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING ROOM - DAY 12B  
 (MONA, SHAYDA, VI, JOYCE, CATHY, RENEE, BABY DYLAN)

A white car slowly stalks the shelter in the rain. Its  
 windscreen wipers move rapidly and violently.

MONA (O.S.)  
*Mummy... who's outside?*

Mona hugs Shayda's leg and cries. She's scared.

SHAYDA  
*I don't know darling.*

Vi anxiously paces back and forth behind them.

VI  
 (Vietnamese prayer)  
 God, please protect us...

Shayda puts her hand on Vi's shoulder, they share a glance.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
 What time did you two get in last  
 night? Or should I say this  
 morning?

Shayda turns to see Renee, Cathy and Joyce by the staircase.  
 Renee holds Baby Dylan, her make-up is a mess. Cathy is  
 grumpy and half-awake.

CATHY  
 (mid-yawn)  
 Midnight.

RENEE  
 Same.

Joyce looks at Renee. Renee keeps her head down and gives Shayda a dirty look. Shayda avoids her gaze.

Joyce walks them to the window.

JOYCE  
You recognize it?

Cathy flicks open two of the blinds and shakes her head.

Joyce nudges Renee. She pushes past Shayda and looks down.

RENEE  
Nup.

Renee stands aside. Joyce is at a loss.

CATHY  
This what you woke us up for?

JOYCE  
Cathy.

Mona sobs louder. Renee's baby starts crying.

CATHY  
I just don't get what all the fuss  
is about.

JOYCE  
You know what it's about.

Vi continues her buddhist prayer, a little louder now. Her hands tremble as she bites her fingernails.

VI  
(in Vietnamese)  
God, please protect us... Please  
protect my children...

Shayda puts her arm around Vi to calm her.

Cathy looks at Vi then fiddles with her cigarette.

CATHY  
Look, she's about to have a panic  
attack. And for what? I think we'd  
all know when someone's really  
comin' for us... after all the shit  
we've been through.

Shayda and Vi look at Cathy, then at Joyce who feels undermined by her rant.

CATHY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I just wanna have some bloody peace  
and quiet, that too much to ask?

Joyce gets a beeper message.



JOYCE  
 (as she walks off)  
 There's a hotel down the road. If  
 you feel safer there, be my guest.

Cathy puts her cigarette in her mouth.

Baby Dylan cries louder, Renee looks down at crying Mona.

RENEE  
 Can you shoosh?

Shayda faces her.

SHAYDA  
 Excuse me?

RENEE  
 She woke him up. Make her stop.

SHAYDA  
 You left me all night with your  
 baby and you-

RENEE  
 S'if you had somethin better to do.

Renee storms off to tend to Dylan.

Shayda kneels down to crying Mona and cradles her.

Shayda and Vi look down at the idling white car.

Its headlights switch on. Joyce approaches and knocks on the window. The car speeds off, leaving her yelling behind.

Shayda kisses Mona's forehead. Police sirens approach.

SHAYDA  
*See? The car got scared and left.*

Mona stops crying. Vi rests her hand on Shayda's shoulder.

13

INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT  
 (MONA, SHAYDA)

13

Shayda is woken up by Mona's kicks and screams in the next bed. She sits beside her and shakes her awake.

Mona catches her breath for a few beats and looks at Shayda. Shayda wipes her sweaty face and unclenches her fists.

MONA  
*Mummy, there's a monster outside.*

Mona pulls the blanket off and gets up. Shayda notices wet patches on the sheets and Mona's pajama pants.

Mona stands on her bed and looks out the barred window.

It's dark outside, all she sees is her reflection. Shayda swiftly closes the curtains, but Mona isn't satisfied.

14 INT. SHELTER - STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS 14  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Mona follows Shayda down the stairs. She wears fresh pajamas.

The distant sound of Renee's laughter startles Mona, she grabs onto Mummy's leg. Shayda takes her hand.

15 INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS ENTRY - CONTINUOUS 15  
(SHAYDA, MONA)

Shayda shows Mona the locks on the front door.

SHAYDA  
(whispers)  
*See... They're locked.*

Mona presses her lips together and points to the windows. Shayda closes the curtains on the windows.

Mona still isn't satisfied. Shayda leans down to her.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*Wanna know what I do when I feel  
scared?*

Mona nods.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*I tell myself, 'I am not afraid.'  
Want to try?*

MONA  
(whispers)  
*I am not afraid.*

SHAYDA  
*Again.*

MONA  
*I am not afraid.*

SHAYDA  
*Will you remember that?*

Mona nods. Shayda hugs her.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*Good girl.*

They hear whispers and giggles in the adjacent room. Mona is curious, she approaches it, but Shayda stops her.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
*It's nothing, come.*

Shayda leads Mona up the steps.

16 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 16  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda tucks Mona into bed and kisses her.

MONA  
*Love you Mummy.*

17 INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS ENTRY - NIGHT 17  
(RENEE, SHAYDA, TWO YOUNG MEN)

Shayda slowly approaches Renee's door, the sound of male voices guide her. She discreetly peers through a small gap.

She sees Renee sitting on a couch with TWO YOUNG MEN (20s) drinking beers. Several empties are on the coffee table.

One of the men is shirtless, lighting up a joint. The other has his hand on Renee's thigh.

Her head is tilted back, her eyes are half closed. He enjoys a puff then puts it in her mouth. She inhales then giggles.

The second man grabs the joint, takes a puff whilst touching her up. Renee is enjoying herself.

Shayda rushes away, shocked by what she's seen.

18 INT. SHELTER - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 18  
(SHAYDA)

Shayda quickly dials a number on the landline, she waits for it to ring out.

SHAYDA  
(whispering)  
Joyce...

19 INT. SHELTER - LAUNDRY / RENEE'S ROOM - DAY 19  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA, LARA, CATHY)

Shayda throws dirty clothes into the washing machine.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
This here's your fridge... I'll  
give it a clean in a tick.

CUT TO:

Shayda notices Cathy asleep on the couch with a few empty beer bottles and a dirty ashtray on the side table.

She peers into Renee's room; her belongings are gone, the beds are bare.

She notices Baby Dylan's blue blanket bunched up on the floor. She picks it up; a sense of guilt comes over Shayda.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Here we are.

Joyce enters the room carrying folded bed sheets and towels with LARA (35, British, upper middle class, introvert).

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Lara this is Shayda. Shayda's here with her daughter Mona.

Shayda half smiles, fiddling with the blanket.

SHAYDA

Hello.

LARA

Hi.

JOYCE

Lara's had a long flight from the UK. You must be tired.

Lara nods and looks around the room. Shayda watches her.

Joyce starts making one of the beds. Lara puts her luggage aside and makes the other.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Hopefully your boy'll join us soon. What's his name again?

LARA

Tobias.

20 INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS LIVING ROOM - DAY 20  
(CATHY, SHAYDA)

Shayda gently places Dylan's blue blanket over a sleeping Cathy - she wakes up, startled and grumpy.

Cathy yanks the blanket from her hands and gives her a look.

Shayda quickly moves off, hiding her sorrow.

21 INT. SHELTER - BATHROOM - DAY 21  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Mona sits on the pink tiled floor, drawing a Persian New Year calendar on a big scrap book with a black pencil. Her color pencil set is immaculately sharpened and ordered, with her initials 'M.K' on the side of each one. She's humming a little tune, in a blissful world of her own.

Using a small ruler, she gets the boxes aligned. A distant car alarm startles her, causing her to make a mistake.

Annoyed, she rubs out the line and redraws until she's satisfied with her perfect squares. She counts them.

MONA

*10... 11... 12... 13 days!*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*Well done! Now draw a symbol for 'Fireworks Wednesday' - a little fire.*

MONA

*Where?*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*Before day one.*

Mona nods and picks a red pencil to draw a spiky fire symbol.

SHAYDA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*What do we say when we jump over the fires?*

MONA

*Umm.*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*'Your redness is mine, my paleness is yours.' So the fires take our problems and replace them with new energy.... Now you say it.*

Mona's eyes light up.

MONA

*Your redness is mine, my paleness is yours!*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*Good girl.*

Shayda stands in front of the bathroom mirror, with multiple women's toiletries and toothbrushes scattered in front.

She considers her long hair, gathering it in her hands, testing different lengths against her face.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*What do you think? First or second?*

Mona looks up at her.

MONA  
*Hmm... First.*

Shayda nods, trusting her opinion.

She picks up the scissors. She hesitates, then attempts a big chop, but the scissors are blunt, it's a horrible cut.

22 INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN/DINING AREA - DAY 22  
(MONA, SHAYDA, JOYCE, CATHY)

Shayda desperately rummages through the kitchen drawers. Her back is to Cathy who eats a bowl of Corn Flakes at the table.

Mona touches her Corn Flakes box. Cathy moves it away.

Shayda finds a pair of kids scissors, but they're useless.

MONA (O.S.)  
*Mummy... I don't like eggs. I want  
barberry rice.*

SHAYDA  
*Darling, we ate eggs yesterday.*

MONA (O.S.)  
*But I don't like it.*

Shayda sighs and slams the last drawer shut.

SHAYDA  
*That's all we have for now.*

Mona watches the egg sizzle with a disappointed gaze.

Joyce mops the kitchen floor, amused by Shayda's hairstyle.

JOYCE  
*Love the new look Shay.*

Cathy sniggers.

Shayda doesn't find it very funny, even though it is.

23 INT. SHELTER - BATHROOM - DAY 23  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA)

Shayda sits on a chair with a towel on her shoulders. Joyce stands behind, cutting with precision, and better scissors.

Shayda is impressed.

SHAYDA  
*You are good.*

Joyce has a wry smile.

JOYCE  
Used to cut my daughter's hair.

Shayda is taken aback.

SHAYDA  
Your daughter?

Joyce takes a moment to compare the two sides in the mirror.

JOYCE  
Julie.

SHAYDA  
I didn't know.

JOYCE  
We um... Haven't spoken in a while.

Joyce combs her hair.

SHAYDA  
So-

JOYCE  
Happy with the length?

Shayda nods and smiles. Joyce removes the towel.

24 INT. JOYCE'S VAN - EXT. INNER CITY STREET - DAY 24  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA, YOUNG IRANIAN COUPLE)

Shayda flips open the sun-visor and looks at herself in the tiny mirror. She adjusts her beanie and her fringe.

She notices a YOUNG WOMAN IN HIJAB with her HUSBAND exiting a shop with shopping bags. They bicker as they cross the road together. Shayda keeps her head down.

Joyce hands her a pair of sunglasses, Shayda puts them on to complete her disguise.

25 EXT/INT. LITTLE PERSIA SUPERMARKET - CONTINUOUS 25  
(ROYA, SHAYDA, IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER)

With trepidation, Shayda approaches the 'LITTLE PERSIA SUPERMARKET.' It has several posters of upcoming community events and various farsi stickers on the windows.

The door chime rings. Shayda's body tenses up as she enters.

A pre-revolution song by Hayedeh plays on the speakers. The entrance features ceramic tea pots and a display of sweets.

An IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER (40s, tacky glam queen) is on a step ladder fixing Persian New Year decorations to the wall.

Her daughter, ROYA (19, university student) leans on the counter, studying her notes.

Shayda keeps her head down. She picks up a basket and walks down the aisle. She stocks up on dried herbs, sumac, rosewater, barberries and dates.

She picks up the smallest container of saffron, she looks at the price tag of \$10 then sighs and puts it back.

Shayda takes the last bag of pistachios from the shelf, revealing a YOUNG BOY (6) in the next aisle. They lock eyes.

He yanks on his IRANIAN MOTHER'S hijab to get her attention. As she turns, Shayda hurries away.

Shayda places her basket on the counter. She looks at the school of lively goldfish in the plastic container of water.

ROYA puts her notes aside to serve Shayda at the register.

ROYA  
*Hello Miss.*

SHAYDA  
*Hello.*

Shayda watches nervously as Roya scans the items and places them inside a plastic bag.

ROYA  
*Anything else?*

SHAYDA  
*Yes, one goldfish please.*

She grabs a freezer bag. Using a small net, she scoops out a goldfish puts it inside the bag with water.

ROYA  
*Anything else?*

SHAYDA  
*Sweet pudding (samanoo)?*

ROYA  
*Samanoo... Mum do we have Samanoo?*

IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER  
(still facing the wall)  
*Samanoo...*

Shayda looks down the aisle, the mother and son are incoming.

SHAYDA  
*Never mind. These are fine.*



Shayda readies her wallet. The attendant finalizes the amount at the cash register.

ROYA  
*That comes to \$18.50.*

Shayda places her only \$20 note down, the attendant takes it.

Shayda looks again at the mother and son. They've stopped to bicker over fruit rolls (lavashak).

ROYA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*Here you are.*

Shayda places the change in her wallet, relieved. Roya looks at her.

ROYA (CONT'D)  
*This new style suits you.*

SHAYDA  
*Sorry?*

ROYA  
(with a smile)  
*You've changed your hair.*

Roya's mother turns around and looks at Shayda.

Shayda quickly grabs her things and makes a swift exit, fumbling her way through the plastic strips.

ROYA (O.S) (CONT'D)  
*Happy New Year.*

26

INT. JOYCE'S VAN - IN MOTION - DAY  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA)

26

Joyce weaves through the traffic on the freeway. Shayda sits beside her, holding the goldfish bag in her lap.

JOYCE  
You sure she recognized you?

Shayda nods and looks at the rear view mirror. As Joyce changes lanes, a blue car behind them changes lanes.

SHAYDA  
That car following us.

Shayda starts hyperventilating, her eyes feel heavy. The onset of a panic attack.

JOYCE  
Which car?

Joyce looks in the rear view mirror.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

The blue one?

Shayda nods. Joyce accelerates and changes lanes again. The car follows.

Shayda is in a sweat, she removes her beanie, and continues looking at the mirror with a terrified gaze.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Put your chair back. Breathe.

Shayda fumbles with the car seat toggle and finally reclines.

Joyce turns the air con to full blast, Shayda feels the air on her face and breathes deeply.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That's better.

Shayda stares at the goldfish bobbing in the bag of water.

Joyce takes the exit onto the suburban road and looks into the rear view mirror.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

It's gone. Look.

Shayda checks the mirror, the empty road recedes behind them. A sigh of relief.

Joyce looks at her with concern.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Maybe we should get the ball rolling with the new interpreter?

Shayda turns to her window.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The longer we delay, the longer the court stuff will take.

Shayda stares at the endless blur of tree lined houses.

27

INT. SHELTER - LIVING ROOM - DAY  
(MONA, SHAYDA, JOYCE)

27

Mona stares at her goldfish in an enchanted way.

MONA

*He's my Simba.*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*You promise to take care of him?*

She nods, very careful about the amount of fish flakes she pours into the glass bowl.

MONA  
 (quietly counting)  
 4... 7... 9.

Mona stops and smiles at Simba as he eats her food.

SHAYDA (O.S.)  
*He symbolizes... livelihood...*  
 (sarzendegi - a difficult  
 farsi word)

MONA  
*Sarzen-deh-what?*

SHAYDA (O.S.)  
*It's like life. Fuuull of movement.*

Shayda pulls Mona into her lap and attacks her with kisses.

They sit in front of their small Nowrooz spread, complete with a goldfish bowl, a mirror, tall candles, six bowls with various items and a Hafez poetry book.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*Let's review our haft-seen table...*  
*Seven items starting with 'S.'*

MONA  
*They help us to be happy.*

SHAYDA  
 (pointing to the bowl)  
*Exactly. So Sib (apple) symbolizes  
 health. And...*

A phone rings downstairs.

MONA  
 (pointing to other bowls)  
*Somagh (sumac), Sekkeh (coins),  
 Serkeh (Vinegar) um...*

SHAYDA  
*Serkeh (Vinegar) symbolizes...*

MONA  
*Patience.*

SHAYDA  
*And Sekkeh (coins) symbolizes...*

MONA  
*Money, money, money! But Mummy,  
 when do we go fire jumping?*

Joyce comes up the stairs.

JOYCE  
*Shay, it's Annabelle.*

Shayda nods and gets up.

SHAYDA  
*Stay here with Simba okay?*

Mona nods.

28

INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS OFFICE - DAY  
(ANNABELLE, SHAYDA, JOYCE)

28

Shayda stands next to Joyce and the speakerphone, her solicitor ANNABELLE is on the line.

ANNABELLE (V.O.)  
The judge has issued Hossein temporary access.

Shayda takes a moment, trying to process.

SHAYDA  
I don't...

JOYCE  
It means Hossein can see Mona alone, unsupervised.

ANNABELLE (V.O.)  
Saturdays. Half a day.

Shayda is taken aback. Joyce sighs.

JOYCE  
They cut his phone access but they approve this?

ANNABELLE (V.O.)  
I know it's not ideal but it's in our best interests to co-operate.

SHAYDA  
Until when?

ANNABELLE (V.O.)  
Until the court hearing.

Shayda's chest feels tight, her gaze goes blank. Joyce puts her hand on her shoulder.

JOYCE  
It'll be okay.

ANNABELLE (V.O.)  
We need to clarify your statements with the new interpreter next week.

Shayda looks at Joyce. Joyce takes the phone off loudspeaker.

JOYCE

Annabelle, just to confirm, she's  
from interstate right?

(nodding)

Right. Good.

29 INT. SHELTER - STAIRCASE - DAY 29  
(SHAYDA)

Shayda sits alone on the steps, gathering her thoughts.

30 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - DAY 30  
(SHAYDA, MONA)

In a shaft of sunlight, white bedsheets float in the air.

Mona giggles and jumps on a squeaky bed in her pajamas. She reaches up, trying to catch the sheets, but Shayda playfully keeps them out of reach.

Mona tackles Shayda who lets herself and the bedsheets fall onto the bed. Mona hides herself beneath them.

Shayda pulls the sheets away to find her. She attacks her with kisses, Mona squirms with delight. Shayda tickles Mona who can't contain her laughter.

They lie together, legs tangled, catching their breath. Shayda holds her tight with a sense of worry in her gaze.

SHAYDA

*Darling... Daddy wants to see you.*

MONA

*When?*

SHAYDA

*Saturday.*

MONA

*Will you come too?*

SHAYDA

*I'll drop you and pick you up.*

Mona buries her face in the pillow and groans.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*You'll have fun with Daddy.*

MONA

*But why can't you be there?*

Shayda can't find the answer, she caresses Mona's hair.

INT. TRANSPORT HUB - CONCOURSE - DAY  
(SHAYDA, HOSSEIN, MONA)

Soundscapes of underground trains arriving and departing with announcements over the loudspeaker.

Shayda and Mona sit together on a blue bench, waiting.

Shayda is sleep deprived, wearing no make up and conservative clothes. She stares impatiently at the big clock on the opposite wall. It's nearly 12.30pm.

Mona wears sparkly tights and pink boots. She holds onto her Barbie doll as she bites her lip and kicks the ground.

Shayda pulls her close to stop the kicking.

SHAYDA

*Don't.*

She takes a chocolate egg from her handbag and offers it to Mona. Mona rejects it and stares into space.

Shayda eats the chocolate herself.

At a distance, she spots HOSSEIN (30, balding, nervous energy masked by bravado). He exits the male bathroom, tucking in his shirt and unrolling his long sleeves.

His expression changes to an endearing smile as he approaches them. He carries a heavy sports bag.

Shayda stands, her entire presence has frozen up somewhat. Mona stays put on the bench.

HOSSEIN

*Hey.*

SHAYDA

*Hi.*

Hossein puts the bag down and sighs. Shayda glances at it.

He kneels down to Mona to give her a hug, but Mona won't have a bar of it.

HOSSEIN

*How's my beautiful girl?*

She crosses her arms and avoids his gaze.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*You won't hug Daddy?*

SHAYDA

*You're thirty minutes late.*

HOSSEIN

*Sorry...*

*(to Mona)*

*Daddy was praying... remember when  
we used to pray together?*

Mona thinks on this. He sighs, a little frustrated.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Let's make it 1pm next time.*

Shayda nods.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Your hair looks nice like that.*

Shayda avoids his gaze.

He partially unzips the sports bag and offers Mona a gift.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Look what Daddy got for you.*

Mona is a little intrigued. She unwraps it; a child size Iranian national team soccer jersey and a small paper bag.

MONA

*What's this?*

HOSSEIN

*It's the Team Melli uniform...*

Mona doesn't care for the jersey, but opens the paper bag - it's full of lollipops. She excitedly unwraps one.

HOSSEIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*I ordered it two months ago, hope  
it still fits...*

Hossein takes out a small jewelry box from his pocket and offers it to Shayda.

Shayda looks at it. He grabs her hand and places it inside.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Come on, open it.*

Shayda tries to hand it back.

SHAYDA

*I don't want to.*

HOSSEIN

*Please.*

Shayda sighs. Mona pulls down her hand and grabs the box.

HOSSEIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*Shayda...*

Mona opens it and looks at the gold earrings with wide eyes.

HOSSEIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*When will you stop these games?*

Mona watches them, savoring her lollipop.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Whatever you want, fine, stop wearing hijab... I've changed.*

He takes Shayda's hand gently.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*My thesis is going well, my supervisor is pleased. I called the embassy about your scholarship. They might approve it this time.*

Shayda pulls her hand away. Hossein sighs.

SHAYDA

*Darling, have fun okay?*

Shayda leans down and hugs Mona, reluctant to let go.

32

EXT. PARK - DAY  
(HOSSEIN, MONA)

32

A quiet park surrounded by autumn trees. Mona runs awkwardly with a soccer ball, she can't control it with her pink boots.

Hossein playfully intercepts the ball from her.

HOSSEIN

*Can you get it back from me?*

Mona tries, but he slides it back, she tries again, he does a circular move around her. She gives up.

With the back of his foot and a sense of ease, he flicks the ball high up. Mona watches it ascend and arc across the sky with a sense of awe.

It drops down. She chases it, then slips over the ball and falls onto her butt. She's annoyed.

Hossein giggles and lifts her up.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*It's okay... Here, look... Look at my feet.*

She does. He demonstrates the ball slide trick.



HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*When they approach. You slide it  
 away. But slowly. See?*

She nods.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Now you try.*

Mona takes the ball under her foot. Hossein approaches. She slides it back, just like him.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Good! Again.*

She does it again, starting to enjoy it. He's pleased.

MONA  
*But I wanna learn the other thing.*

HOSSEIN  
*Which thing.*

MONA  
*The thing... when you kicked the  
 ball in the air.*

HOSSEIN  
*Ohhh the rainbow.*

MONA  
*Yeah the rainbow!*

HOSSEIN  
*No, the rainbow is for later. It's  
 too soon.*

She sighs.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Let's set up some goals for now.*

He picks up his bag and a stick and walks toward the edge of the park. She follows.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Wanna be the goalie or the striker?*

MONA  
*The striker!*

HOSSEIN  
*Ohh, so you think you can score  
 against me?*

MONA  
*Yeah!*

Hossein is amused as he sets up the makeshift goals.

Mona prepares with some weird stretches she's seen on TV.

33 INT. CAFE - DAY 33  
(FEMALE WAITER, SHAYDA)

Shayda sits alone at a table in the corner. She adjusts her hair to cover half her face.

She glances up into the mirror, scanning the rest of the cafe in a paranoid way. It's quiet with ONE COUPLE and ONE FAMILY.

A FEMALE WAITER places cups and a pot of tea on the table.

FEMALE WAITER  
Can I help you with anything else?

Shayda shakes her head as she arranges the cups.

34 INT. TRANSPORT HUB - FOODCOURT - DAY 34  
(HOSSEIN, MONA)

Mona sits in front of a McDonald's happy meal box, blissfully enjoying the fries and fish fingers.

Hossein sits across from her. His focus is split between studying a folder of notes and studying Mona.

HOSSEIN  
*Is there a Mcdonald's near your new house?*

She shakes her head.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*What about a park?*

She shifts in her seat.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Maybe we can practice the rainbow there...*

She hesitates then nods.

MONA  
*It has big tall trees.*

HOSSEIN  
*That's nice.*

He puts his notes down and bites into his fish burger.

She unwraps her happy meal toy with a big grin, it's a Lion King figurine.

MONA  
*When will we see the Lion King?*

HOSSEIN

*Next time.*

Hossein wipes his mouth with a napkin.

Mona is happily playing with the figurine.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Are you in school yet?*

Mona shakes her head.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*What about Persian school? Your Mum was supposed to enroll you...*

Mona shakes her head. He sighs heavily.

He runs his finger over his chemistry notes.

MONA

*Daddy what's that?*

HOSSEIN

*Daddy has to prepare for an important lab test at University.*

MONA

*What for?*

HOSSEIN

*We're testing the blood cells of sick cows.*

Mona raises her eyebrows, she's kinda impressed.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Did you know there are many sick cows in Iran?*

MONA

*Why are they sick?*

HOSSEIN

*Many reasons, like stress, or... the food they eat, or the group they are in... they can get sick from each other. Like humans.*

Mona nods wide-eyed.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*(excitedly)*

*Daddy is going back to help them... after I become a doctor... And we get a biig house near the mountains.*

She looks down and smooshes the last fries with her fingers.

Hossein scrunches his burger wrapper and packs his big bag.  
He looks at her, sensing a shift.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*What's wrong?*

MONA  
(innocently)  
*Are you going to hurt Mummy again?*

A flicker of remorse in his expression before he stands.

HOSSEIN (O.S.)  
*Let's go.*

She hesitates then looks up at him.

35

INT. CAFE - DAY  
(ELLY, SHAYDA)

35

Shayda pours steaming black tea into two porcelain cups.

ELLY (O.S.)  
*He called a few times.*

She fumbles and spills tea on the table.

SHAYDA  
*Oh... To say what?*

ELLY (O.S.)  
*To ask how you were...*

ELLY (mid-20s, secular Iranian with curly dyed hair) puts sugar in her tea.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*He said he's returning to Tehran after graduation.*

Shayda nods knowingly, removing tea leaves with a spoon.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*Most of us want to stay, he wants to go back... It's interesting.*

SHAYDA  
*Because of his scholarship, he feels a sense of 'responsibility.'*

ELLY  
*Some people are really attached.*

Shayda takes a sip of her tea.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*Listen, he asked me... if you are  
in a relationship.*

SHAYDA  
*What?*

ELLY  
*He thinks you have a boyfriend.*

Shayda is slightly amused.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*He seemed convinced, I think he's  
been telling others...*

SHAYDA  
*What did you say?*

ELLY  
*I said I didn't know anything.*

SHAYDA  
*Don't tell him you saw me here.*

ELLY  
*Of course I won't.*

Shayda looks at her.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*I said I won't... We barely speak  
to him anyway... I always found him  
a little... close-minded.*

SHAYDA  
*A little?*

They exchange a knowing glance. Shayda feels more at ease.

ELLY  
*So where are you living now?*

Shayda hesitates.

SHAYDA  
*Woman's shelter...*

Elly is taken aback.

ELLY  
*Are you comfortable there?*

Shayda nods.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*You know you can count on me right?*

SHAYDA  
*I don't know what to do.*

Shayda slowly dunks a sugar cube in her tea.

SHAYDA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*He'll take Mona if I go back... He  
 won't accept a divorce...*

ELLY  
*Remember Leila? She sees her son  
 once a month now, supervised...  
 poor thing lost her job, moved in  
 with her aunt who has  
 Alzheimer's... she's basically her  
 nurse now.*

Shayda shakes her head in disbelief.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*Have you spoken to your Mum?*

SHAYDA  
*She says to go back.*

ELLY  
*Won't you tell me what happened?*

Shayda looks down at her hands.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*He said you had a fight.*

SHAYDA  
*Um...*

Tears well up in her eyes. She can't bring herself to say it.

Shayda wipes her eyes with a napkin. Elly senses her struggle and holds her hand. They sit together in silence.

36A INT/EXT. TRANSPORT HUB - CONCOURSE - DUSK 36A  
 (SHAYDA)

Shayda anxiously paces in front of the blue bench.

She looks at the clock, at the strangers who pass her by, at the reflections in shop windows.

Shayda rushes down the escalator steps, and along the red brick pavement.

36B EXT. TRANSPORT HUB - BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS 36B  
 (SHAYDA, HOSSEIN, MONA, MOUSTACHE MAN)

Shayda quickly approaches a bus stop.

A bus draws near at high speed, Shayda scans the windows.

It comes to a halt - doors open, SEVERAL STRANGERS exit. Her eyes dart through the crowd, but no sign of Mona.

The doors close with a violent mechanical sound.

She wanders around the bus stop, trying to process all the possibilities, from bad to worse.

She is enlivened by the sound of a second bus approaching, its bright headlights illuminate her face.

Finally, the doors open revealing A GROUP OF SCHOOL KIDS, followed by Hossein and Mona.

A sense of intense relief overcomes Shayda. She hugs Mona like she hasn't seen her in weeks.

Mona shows Shayda her happy meal toy and smiles. Shayda nods and gives Hossein a look of warning.

SHAYDA

*Where were you?*

HOSSEIN

*I wouldn't be late if I had more time with her.*

SHAYDA

*No.*

HOSSEIN

*Why not?*

The sound of a bendy bus approaching.

MONA

*(pointing)*

*Bendy bus!*

Shayda clocks it.

SHAYDA

*We're off.*

Shayda grabs Mona's hand, causing her to drop her toy. Mona is annoyed, she wants to pick it up but Shayda won't let go.

MONA

*Mummy...*

HOSSEIN (O.S.)

*Answer my question.*

SHAYDA (O.S.)

*Because, that's the arrangement and we have to travel a long way.*

Shayda moves off dragging Mona toward the front of the bus.

MONA

*My toy!*

Hossein picks it up for her, before an awkward hug.

HOSSEIN

*I'll miss you.*

Mid-embrace, Mona sees AN IRANIAN MAN (30s, thick moustache) enter the back door of the bus - he locks eyes with her.

Shayda pulls at Mona's backpack, she turns and follows her into the front door.

37 INT. BENDY BUS - STATIONARY/IN MOTION - CONTINUOUS 37  
(HOSSEIN, MONA, MOUSTACHE MAN, SHAYDA)

The mechanical sound of doors closing. Mona and Shayda sit towards the front of a crowded peak hour bus.

Mona is happy to hold her toy again. She looks out the window, Hossein waves, she waves back.

Shayda is unnerved, grabbing her hand as the bus moves off.

A sigh of relief from Shayda, before closing her eyes.

Through the gaps of standing UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, Mona looks back toward the bendy bits of the bus, fascinated by the accordion motions.

The moustache man leans against one of the bendy walls, looking at her and Shayda.

He pulls a silly face at Mona, she does a silly face back.

38 EXT. SUBURBAN BUS STOP / PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE - NIGHT 38  
(MONA, MOUSTACHE MAN, SHAYDA)

A howling wind shifts a pile of dead leaves into a gutter as Shayda and Mona disembark the bendy bus.

They walk up a concrete ramp, onto a pedestrian bridge that crosses a suburban freeway.

Through the gaps of the steel balustrade, Mona sees the moustache man below, entering a phone booth.

39 EXT. SHELTER - OFFICE - NIGHT 39  
(SHAYDA)

A storm ensues with moonlit tree branches shaking wildly in the wind. Shayda sits behind a rainy steel barred window.



INT. SHELTER - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS  
(CATHY, VI, JILL, TELEPHONE VOICE, JENNY, SHAYDA, MARYAM)

Shayda glances at a piece of paper with handwritten Farsi numbers as she dials a number on the landline phone.

'Everybody's free' by Rozalla plays on a distant stereo.

CATHY (O.S.)  
What time's he gonna be there?

VI (O.S.)  
Eight.

CATHY (O.S.)  
Will he bring any mates?

Vi giggles.

CATHY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hey, old bags need love too.

VI (O.S.)  
(singing along to song)  
Everybody's freeeee...

Vi's girls run down the hall, catching Shayda's attention. She sees Cathy and Vi in the small living room.

VI (CONT'D)  
You not old.

CATHY  
I'm an old bag.

They're half dressed to go out, drinking. Vi does Cathy's nails with her treasured mini cosmetics suitcase by her side.

JILL  
Can we come too?

VI  
(in Vietnamese)  
No. It's for grown ups.

Shayda loses track of the phone number.

TELEPHONE VOICE (V.O.)  
Your call cannot be connected.

JENNY (O.S.)  
Aw... But we want to see Mr. Pierre.

VI (O.S.)  
(in Vietnamese)  
Not tonight. You will see him next week.

The girls leave the room sulking.

Vi notices Shayda watching them. As she moves to close the door, Vi stops her.

VI (CONT'D)  
Why don't you come?

SHAYDA  
Umm... Mona-

VI  
Lara stay. You need to dance!

Vi grooves to the funky beat.

VI (CONT'D)  
(singing along to song)  
Everybody's free to feel good!

Shayda clocks Cathy behind, giving her a dirty look.

SHAYDA  
(to Vi)  
Next time.

VI  
What next time? Life is short.

CATHY  
Forget the Persian Princess, goodie  
goodie, rat.

VI  
(turning around)  
Cathy...

CATHY  
What? She ratted Renee.

Shayda gives Cathy a look then closes the door on them.

CUT TO:

She taps her fingers nervously. Outside, there's a downpour.

SHAYDA  
*We set the haft-seen together. Mona  
is in love with her goldfish, she  
even gave it a name. But the grocer  
didn't have all the items, like the  
sweet pudding but...*

There's some interference on the line.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*That's nice.*

Shayda is taken aback by her cold, short response.

SHAYDA  
*Maybe you can tell me the recipe so  
 I can make it myself?*

Maryam sighs.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
 (frustrated tone)  
*Don't you have better things to...*

The interference worsens. Shayda can barely hear her.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*...apart from... do you have any  
 idea... people are saying about us?*

Lightening hits. Flashes of light frame Shayda's silhouette.

SHAYDA  
*Alo?*

The call is cut off - a dial tone. She sighs and dials again, but stops midway.

41 INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING/KIDS AREA - CONTINUOUS 41  
 (LARA, SHAYDA, MONA, VI, JENNY, JILL)

Shayda anxiously paces the living room, lost in her thoughts.

LARA (O.S.)  
 (British accent)  
 Hey.

Shayda looks at Lara who sits on the couch sipping a tea.

LARA (CONT'D)  
 You okay?

SHAYDA  
 My Mum... she doesn't...

LARA  
 Slow down... Sit.

Shayda nods and sits with her.

LARA (CONT'D)  
 Some things needs time.

Shayda thinks on this. She notices a photo of a five-year-old boy on Lara's lap.

SHAYDA  
 Who is that?

LARA  
 My son.

SHAYDA

Can I?

Lara hands over her wallet. Inside the plastic sleeve, a photo of a boy smiling in his school uniform.

LARA

His first day of school... in London.

SHAYDA

He is handsome.

Lara nods and half smiles. Shayda hands it back.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

Where is he?

LARA

Here... with his Dad.

SHAYDA

Oh.

Lara finds another photo. Shayda looks at it, the boy is a few years older, on a beach, fishing with an Indonesian man and his Australian father.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

He is big boy here... You haven't seen him?

Lara's eyes glaze over.

LARA

886 days.

A beat as Lara tears up. Shayda puts her hand on hers.

SHAYDA

I'm sorry.

Mona walks into the room rubbing her face and yawning.

Lara wipes her eyes. Mona sits next to Shayda.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

(In Farsi)

*Did you sleep a little?*

Mona nods. She looks at the photo on Shayda's lap.

MONA

*Who's that?*

SHAYDA

*It's this lady's son. She hasn't seen him in a long time.*

MONA  
*Is he lost?*

Shayda doesn't know what to say.

Mona looks at Lara with pity.

MONA (CONT'D)  
 (In English)  
 Where is he?

LARA  
 The police are looking for him.

Mona's eyes widen.

Jill and Jenny hold toys and VHS tapes, shyly approaching Lara. She taps on the couch, they sit beside her.

Mona gives them a look.

Vi emerges from a room with two different dresses in her hand. One is a silver sequined number, the other is a white strapless dress (looks like a tiny bit of fabric).

VI  
 Which one?

LARA  
 (puzzled)  
 That's a dress?

Vi puts the sequined one on the couch. She switches off the light, the room goes dim, the girls squeal.

Vi stretches the white fabric against her body and poses.

VI  
 See. It glows.

Shayda nods, intrigued.

SHAYDA  
 It's fun.

Shayda runs her hand along the silver dress somewhat mesmerized as it catches a glimmer of moonlight.

VI  
 Fits you, don't worry.

Lara looks at Shayda with a smile. Shayda turns to Mona, who is distracted by Jill and Jenny's VHS tapes.

LARA  
 Let's choose a movie.

They react excitedly.

VI (O.S.)  
 (in Vietnamese)  
 Girls, would you like me to make  
 you some popcorn?

They nod. Jenny offers her FernGully VHS to Mona.

JENNY  
 This one's my favorite... It has a  
 magical rainforest.

Mona takes it and smiles.

42

INT. SHELTER - VI'S BEDROOM/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT  
 (VI, SHAYDA, CATHY, JENNY, JILL, LARA, MONA)

42

Shayda stands in front of the mirror wearing the tight, sequined, off the shoulder silver dress. From her body language, it's clear she's a little uncomfortable.

Vi rummages through her cosmetics box. Shayda's make-up is nearly done, she looks feminine and mature.

VI  
 If you don't like it, I have more.

Shayda shakes her head and pulls the shoulder sleeves up.

SHAYDA  
 I think it's okay.

VI  
 Not just 'okay', very sexy.

Shayda half smiles, almost believing it. She looks around Vi's room: a row of colored high heels, a family photo wall and magazine cutouts of Tham Thuy Hang and Elizabeth Taylor.

Shayda clocks Cathy looking at them as she passes the room.

Vi finds a red lipstick and turns Shayda's face toward her. Vi presses her lips together, Shayda copies. Vi applies it.

SHAYDA  
 (whispering)  
 Do you like Cathy?

VI  
 (nodding)  
 She has big heart. She suffer a-  
 lot... Like us.

Shayda thinks on this. Vi wipes the excess lipstick.

Shayda notices the edge of Vi's bruise, it's yellow-green.

SHAYDA  
 Your eye...

Vi looks in the mirror, realizing she missed a spot, she finds her concealer.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

Can I?

Vi nods and hands it to Shayda, who gently dabs it.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

Does it still hurt?

Vi shakes her head then checks it in the mirror.

She gifts Shayda her red lipstick as she packs her bag.

VI

Boys will go crazy.

SHAYDA

Can I invite my friend?

Vi smiles cheekily.

VI

I'm bringing mine-

SHAYDA

No I mean-

Vi takes out her gold chain and shows off her engraved pendant. The names 'Pierre' and 'Vi' are etched together.

VI

Look.

SHAYDA

Wow.

VI

He promise to take us to Paris.

SHAYDA

He is French?

Vi nods and revels in her pendant.

Shayda takes a closer look at her reflection. Vi exits into the corridor with her things.

VI (O.S.)

Enough mirror. Hurry.

Shayda exits the room. Vi rushes down the stairs with Cathy.

Shayda pauses - a sense of guilt comes over her as she watches Mona sleeping next to Lara and Vi's girls under the glow of the TV.

43

INT. NIGHTCLUB - VARIOUS - NIGHT  
 (SHAYDA, ELLY, FARHAD, VI, CATHY, HOSSEIN, PIERRE)

43

Red, blue and white lights flash across Shayda's face, her eyes are full of wonder; this is her first club experience.

She holds Elly's hand as they push through the crowded dance-floor, following Vi & Cathy's lead. 'Another Night Another Dream' by Dick Van Jam plays on the sound system.

Shayda looks up at the silver undulating ceiling, at the half naked dancers on podiums and groups of young people, just like her, having the time of their lives.

CUT TO:

The girls jump up and down amongst the packed crowd. Shayda watches and then copies them, slowly losing her inhibitions; it's new, it's freeing, it's dangerous...

CUT TO:

At the bar, Shayda sips on her drink, disliking the strange taste of alcohol. She puts it down and sways to the beat of 'Sweet Dreams of Rhythm and Dancing' by Clarkson Jay.

Shayda watches Cathy drinking shots with Vi's French boyfriend PIERRE (30s). Vi stops him from ordering more.

She notices a YOUNG IRANIAN GUY (23, baby face, fair complexion, curly hair) checking her out from a distance.

She looks at him suspiciously then turns to Elly, yelling over the music.

SHAYDA

*Some creep is looking at me.*

ELLY

*Who?*

Shayda gestures behind Elly but the guy is already making his way towards them. Elly gestures to him and smiles.

ELLY (CONT'D)

*You're late!*

He kisses Elly hello. Shayda realizes she misread his look.

FARHAD

(Canadian accent)

This place is crazy.

ELLY

*Shayda, my little cousin, Farhad.*

FARHAD

(baby Farsi accent)

*Who's little?*



Elly cuddles him playfully.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Hey.*

SHAYDA

(a little thrown)

*Hi.*

Song change to 'Be My Lover' by Bouche, the crowd loses it. Elly dances between them. Farhad points to Shayda's drink.

FARHAD

*Another one?*

SHAYDA

*No, thanks.*

Farhad gestures to Elly.

ELLY

*Tequila!*

He smiles at Shayda then moves to a free space at the bar.

Shayda looks at Elly with annoyance, she clocks it.

ELLY (CONT'D)

(leaning in)

*Don't worry, he's a good kid.*

SHAYDA

*Does he know about-*

ELLY

*No way. He just arrived from  
Canada... doesn't know anyone.*

Shayda nods. Elly sways her arms to the beat.

CUT TO:

'100% pure love' by Crystal Waters blares on the dance floor. Shayda dances with Vi, Pierre and Cathy. Farhad with Elly.

Shayda notices his gaze on her. Vi nudges Shayda.

VI

*He's cute.*

Shayda shakes her head and continues dancing. Pierre pulls Vi close and kisses her sweetly. He stops to admire her.

Shayda and Cathy exchange a knowing glance and smile.

The song changes to 'Everybody's Free' by Rozalla, Elly grabs Shayda's hand and they dance together.

Shayda is in her element and sings along to the chorus with Elly and the girls.

SHAYDA (AND OTHERS)  
*Everybody's free to feel good!*

Farhad does a smooth slide right past her to join Elly. Shayda clocks his quirky move, she smiles.

He slides again, around Elly to dance with Shayda. Shayda looks to Elly for help, but Elly just smiles and dances.

Farhad puts Shayda's drink down and takes her hand. She hesitates then follows his lead, slowly relaxing into it.

Occasionally one looking to the other as they dance, much said in their fleeting glances. *He is cute*, Shayda thinks.

Shayda looks into the crowd for a moment, flashing blue and red lights illuminate A GROUP OF MIDDLE EASTERN GUYS dancing on the stairs.

The lights flash again, Shayda sees a momentary glimpse of Hossein until his figure is obscured by another man.

Shayda is small and frozen in this sea of dancing bodies.

Triggered, she pulls away from Farhad and pushes herself through the crowd, desperate to escape.

She looks over her shoulder, Elly and Farhad chase after her, yelling inaudibly over the deafening music.

44 EXT. INNER CITY ALLEYWAY - NIGHT  
(ELLY, SHAYDA, FARHAD)

44

Shayda walks rapidly ahead of Elly who struggles to keep up.

ELLY

*Stop.*

Shayda exhales and speeds up. Elly struggles with her heels.

SHAYDA

*I have to go.*

ELLY

*I'll take you.*

Elly catches up and grabs her arm to stop her. Shayda catches her breath, her gaze is full of mistrust.

ELLY (CONT'D)

*What's going on?*

SHAYDA

*How did they know we're here?*

ELLY  
*You think I told someone?  
 I swear to God I didn't.*

Shayda crosses her arms.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*If it was Hossein he'd be out here.*

Shayda thinks on this.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*Is this how you want to live your  
 life?*

Shayda looks at Elly, a sense of remorse comes over her.

Elly shakes her head and walks away. Shayda sees Farhad standing at the door. Their eyes meet for a moment.

Elly says something to Farhad, before leading him inside.

Shayda turns her gaze away and flags down a taxi.

45 EXT. TAXI IN MOTION - NIGHT 45  
 (SHAYDA)

Shayda stares out the window. A myriad of city lights create patterns across her face, she's in a world of emotions.

46 INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN/DINING AREA - DUSK 46  
 (MONA, SHAYDA, JOYCE)

A large platter of Chicken with Barberries sits on the table.

Mona finally has her favorite Persian food, but she's barely touched it, she's too preoccupied with sulking.

MONA  
*It's not fair...*

Shayda is tired with little appetite, she's had an earful all day. She tries to ignore her ominous stare.

Joyce is digging into her plate like she hasn't eaten in days. She's loving the home cooked meal and flavors.

SHAYDA (O.S.)  
 How old?

JOYCE  
 In her 70s I think...

SHAYDA  
 From Adelaide...

JOYCE  
Know anyone there?

Shayda shakes her head then cups her face in her hands. This is all too much.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
(gently)  
Shay... there isn't a wide pool of  
Farsi interpreters.

Mona taps her spoon incessantly against the plate, it grows louder and louder. Shayda grabs the spoon from her hand.

SHAYDA  
*Don't.*

JOYCE  
And we don't have much time before  
the court hearing.

Shayda nods pensively.

Mona starts flicking rice off her plate with her fingers, making a complete mess.

Joyce finishes her last mouthful.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
It was divine. Thank you.

Shayda puts on a smile. Mona bangs her fist on the table.

MONA  
*Not fair! You had fun but I can't?*

SHAYDA  
*Enough.*

Mona yells and bangs both her fists on the table. Her colored pencils roll off the edge. Shayda picks them up.

MONA  
*I wanna go! I wanna go!*

SHAYDA  
*I said enough! I told you why we  
can't go. Now eat your dinner or go  
to your room!*

Joyce notices them not coping.

JOYCE  
What's wrong?

Mona points to her meticulously hand drawn fire symbol on the Persian New Year calendar, the page is filled with drawings.

MONA  
Jumping fire night.

Joyce picks it up and takes a closer look.

JOYCE  
(to Mona)  
Oh... look at your beautiful  
drawings.

Mona enjoys the compliment and glances at Shayda.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
You think he'll be there?

SHAYDA  
He don't like party but...

She shrugs, nervous about it.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
I could come for a bit.

47

EXT. SUBURBAN PARK - NIGHT  
(SHAYDA, MONA, JOYCE, ELLY & PARVIZ, ELLY, FARHAD, PARVIZ,  
IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER)

47

An IRANIAN FATHER AND DAUGHTER heroically jump over a row of mini bonfires. They merge into a small crowd of SECULAR IRANIANS - A YOUNG MAN emerges playing tombak drum to the rhythm of 'Sabzehzar (Greenery)' by Bijan Mortazavi.

Mona watches this mythical scene in awe. She looks up at Shayda who yanks her hand as the drum beat speeds up.

SHAYDA  
*Run!*

They run and jump over the fires.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*Your redness is mine, my paleness  
is yours!*

MONA  
*Redness is mine, paleness is yours!*

Mona squeals, exhilarated as they slow down to meet a smiling Joyce at the edge of the circle.

JOYCE  
Wow, you jumped so high!

MONA  
*Can we go again?*

Shayda looks at the line.

SHAYDA  
*It's too busy now.*

Mona's shoulders slump.

They walk together with Joyce, holding hands. They pass a light post with a pre-revolution Iranian flag tied to it.

A YOUNG GROUP dance *Bandari* in a circle to one side. A few handicraft stalls serve FAMILIES AND COUPLES on the other.

Shayda sees Farhad emerging up the hill with Elly and her husband PARVIZ (32, nerdy, quiet intellectual type).

Elly and Parviz eat Persian noodle soup from a paper cup, Farhad is halfway through a barbecued corn cob (*balal*). Elly and Shayda wave. Farhad is happy to see her.

ELLY & PARVIZ  
*Hey. Hi.*

SHAYDA  
*Hello.*

Elly kisses her and notices Joyce. Shayda freezes up.

ELLY  
 (to Joyce)  
 Hello. I'm Elly.

The boys nod at Joyce. It's an awkward moment.

JOYCE  
 Hello.

Farhad wipes his sticky face with his sticky hands.

FARHAD  
*How's it going?*

ELLY  
*I didn't expect you to come.*

SHAYDA  
*I didn't want Mona to miss out.*

FARHAD  
*Hi beautiful girl... She's like  
 your little twin.*

Shayda half smiles. Mona simply stares at his corn cob. There's nothing she wants more in this moment.

Joyce is left out by the Farsi. She points to Parviz' cup.

JOYCE  
 How is it?

PARVIZ

Very nice.

She receives a message on her beeper.

Shayda looks at Joyce. Mona pulls at Shayda's bag.

MONA

(shyly whispering)

*Mummy, I want balal.*

SHAYDA

(whispering back)

*Didn't you eat dinner?*

MONA

*But... balal...*

Joyce pulls Shayda aside.

JOYCE

I've gotta get back. Do you wanna stay or?

Shayda feels Mona's gaze on her.

SHAYDA

Um... We take the bus.

JOYCE

You sure?

Shayda hesitates before nodding.

Joyce hugs her and eyes off Farhad.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

(in Shayda's ear)

Be careful.

Shayda watches her go. Mona yanks her hand.

SHAYDA

*Okay. Let's find the balal.*

Farhad leads the way, down the footpath.

ELLY

*Who was that?*

SHAYDA

*My friend.*

ELLY

*Aha...*

FARHAD

*Any plans for Persian New Year?*

SHAYDA

*Not yet.*

FARHAD

*Elly's having a party.*

Elly looks at Farhad, then at Shayda.

ELLY

*Yeah... you should come.*

Mona gives Shayda an excited look.

Shayda senses the invitation is forced. Elly clocks this.

ELLY (CONT'D)

*Right Parviz?*

PARVIZ

*Of course. The more the merrier.*

SHAYDA

*Who's coming?*

ELLY

*Friends from uni, Parviz's work.*

Shayda nods.

Farhad shifts his position to walk next to Shayda.

FARHAD

*Are you studying here too?*

SHAYDA

*Um... I was studying English so I could finish my degree but...*

ELLY

*Those bastards cancelled her scholarship.*

FARHAD

*One of those Iranian scholarships?*

Shayda nods, disheartened.

PARVIZ

*It's for the best, you'll find another way.*

FARHAD

*Why don't you come and study with us? (struggling with Farsi) We're at the uni library most afternoons.*

SHAYDA

*Yeah, maybe... If you want we can speak English?*



ELLY  
*No, he needs to practice. He's  
 become too much of a 'Western boy'  
 in Canada.*

FARHAD  
 (with a Western accent)  
*My farsi isn't bad! I'm not  
 Western, I'm Iranian!*

ELLY (O.S.)  
*Yeah, your accent is cute.*

Shayda nods. Farhad looks at her.

SHAYDA  
*How long are you staying?*

ELLY  
*He's doing a student exchange in  
 Engineering.*

FARHAD  
*Let me say it. Daneshjoo-yeh...  
 (student) Umm...*

SHAYDA  
*...daneshjooye mehman.  
 (exchange student)*

Farhad nods.

ELLY  
*Engineering is... mohandesi.*

FARHAD  
*Aha, I knew 'mohandesi.'*

Shayda smiles shyly, their eyes lock for a beat.

FARHAD (CONT'D)  
*So you grew up in Iran, like Elly?*

Shayda nods. Farhad stops to throw his *balal* in a bin.

FARHAD (CONT'D)  
*Do you have any family here?*

Shayda hesitates then looks at Mona.

SHAYDA  
*It's just us.*

Shayda notices Elly give Parviz a look.

Behind them, A YOUNG COUPLE pass by eating *balal*, giving a  
 fleeting look to Shayda.

Shayda keeps her head down. Mona is deeply envious.

MONA  
*Mummy... I want Balal.*

SHAYDA  
*We'll be there soon.*

Mona doesn't buy it, annoyed with the world.

MONA  
*I'm cold.*

Shayda stops to help Mona put her yellow coat on.

Over her shoulder, she sees Elly and Parviz bump into their IRANIAN FRIEND. Farhad rejoins Shayda and Mona.

MONA (CONT'D)  
*Mummy, can we go fire jumping?*

SHAYDA  
*Darling, we went already.*

MONA  
*Please.*

SHAYDA  
*Don't you want balal?*

FARHAD  
*We can do both.*

Mona nods, happy he's on her side.

SHAYDA  
*No... it's getting late.*

Mona sulks and kicks the ground - start of a tantrum.

THREE IRANIAN MEN (30s) pass, one gives Shayda a look.

She turns away from their gaze - to a handicrafts stall.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
 (grabbing Mona's arm)  
*Come, let's have a quick look here.*

Mona nods, the colors catch her eye, she's giddy.

IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER  
*We have special New Year discounts.  
 Just let me know which you like.*

Mona looks at the handmade jewelry with wide eyes at Shayda.

She points out a necklace with a little fish theme.

MONA  
*Little fish!*

FARHAD

*It's pretty!*

SHAYDA

(quietly to Mona)

*Darling, it's expensive.*

Shayda points out a simpler style.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*What about this?*

MONA

*I want little fish.*

Farhad points to Mona's choice.

FARHAD

*How much for this?*

IRANIAN SHOPKEEPER

*With discount, it's \$50.*

Farhad takes out his wallet.

SHAYDA

*No, I'll get it.*

Shayda rummages inside her wallet.

FARHAD

*No need.*

Farhad puts down a \$50 note and gives Shayda a cheeky smile.

The shopkeeper hands over the necklace. Mona is pleased.

SHAYDA

*What do you say?*

MONA

*Thank you.*

Shayda kneels down to put the necklace on a smiling Mona.

SHAYDA

*It's pretty. You shouldn't have...*

FARHAD

*My pleasure.*

They lock eyes as she gets up. He offers her a hand. She stands without it, then looks over her shoulder.

She notices Mona waving to someone at a distance.

SHAYDA

*Darling, who are you waving to?*

MONA

*That lady.*

Mona points toward the fire jumping crowd. Shayda is worried.

SHAYDA

*Which lady?*

Shayda looks into the crowd but can't see who it is. Shayda gets lost in her paranoia...

SEVERAL IRANIANS pass by, she feels them staring at her, one after another, an endless collective gaze. A quickening drum beat merges with voices and laughter from the crowd.

She grasps onto Mona's arm tightly. Mona feels uncomfortable in her grip, she's squirming, trying to break free.

MONA

*Mummy...*

Iranian pop music culminates into deafening noise in her ear. Farhad is talking but Shayda can't make out the words.

Her breath quickens. Farhad leans in, touching her arm.

FARHAD

*Shayda?*

He shakes her.

Parviz and Elly arrive, she notices Shayda's state.

ELLY

*What happened?*

She looks at Farhad, he is equally at a loss.

Mona frees herself from Shayda's sweaty palms and shakes her.

MONA

*Mummy.*

Shayda looks down into Mona's worried eyes, it's reassuring and grounding. She takes a deep breathe and snaps out of it.

ELLY (O.S.)

*You okay?*

She nods and puts on a smile. Homemade fireworks is launched.

An explosion of light in the sky flickers on Shayda's face.

A moist paper-towel is removed from the wheatgrass dish unveiling an array of short green sprouts.

Shayda touches them with her fingertips. Mona is fascinated.

MONA

*Can I?*

Shayda nods and lets her touch them too, Mona grins.

Shayda runs a new paper towel under running water. She places it over the sprouts and moves the dish by the windowsill.

49

INT. TRANSPORT HUB - ESCALATORS/CONCOURSE - DAY  
(SHAYDA, HOSSEIN, MONA)

49

Shayda and Mona stand on a descending escalator. Shayda wears hoop earrings, make up and a flattering flowy dress.

SHAYDA

*Promise me something?*

Mona nods.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*We need to keep our new friend a secret. Okay? Otherwise Daddy will get angry.*

She reaches her pinky out.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*Promise?*

Mona looks at her then locks her pinky with hers.

They travel down toward Hossein. He stands with his back to them, leaning against a railing, waiting.

As they move off the landing, Hossein turns to face them, he's sleep deprived and a little disheveled.

Shayda holds Mona's hand tightly. He looks her up and down.

HOSSEIN

*What a nice dress, and earrings...*

He reaches to touch her earring but she turns away.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*You're a 'foreign (western) girl' now? Who do you have plans with?*

Mona glances up at Shayda.

SHAYDA

*No-one.*

HOSSEIN  
*You can change your appearance but  
 it doesn't change who you are.  
 Remember that.*

Shayda's whole body is tense.

HOSSEIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*Let's go.*

Hossein grabs Mona's other hand to move off. She's split between the two of them. He yanks her hand.

Shayda hesitates to let go but she has no choice.

She kisses Mona before she's dragged away.

50 INT. TRANSPORT HUB - PASSAGEWAY - CONTINUOUS 50

A dispirited Mona walks with Hossein through a florescent, narrow passageway.

She looks back toward Shayda - she stands alone gathering her thoughts before descending the escalators, out of sight.

51 INT. TRANSPORT HUB - FOODCOURT - DAY 51  
 (HOSSEIN, MONA)

Mona and Hossein have finished another McDonald's meal. Mona has a second Lion King figurine to add to her collection.

He sits beside her, teaching her Farsi from a grade one book. The page has an illustration of a family having a picnic.

HOSSEIN  
*Dad... gave...*

MONA  
*Water.*

HOSSEIN  
*Dad... gave...*

MONA  
*What about Mum?*

HOSSEIN  
*No, it's only about Dad. What did  
 Dad give? Focus on this word.*

She looks at him, then at the page.

MONA  
*B...*

He writes the letters out and points to them.

HOSSEIN

*No see, B and N look similar but they are different. For B the dot is on the bottom, for N the dot is on top.*

She nods.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

N-A

MONA

N-A-N (Bread)

HOSSEIN

*Dad gave bread.*

She nods.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Has Mummy been saying anything about me?*

She hesitates.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Does she say I'm a bad person?*

She shakes her head, avoiding his gaze.

Hossein sighs, licks his finger and turns a few pages ahead; a lesson with an apple and a tray with incomplete sentences.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*This is an...*

Mona points to the apple, an easy win.

MONA

*Sib (Apple).*

Hossein points to the second sentence.

HOSSEIN

*What about this?*

MONA

*This...*

HOSSEIN

*This is...*

Mona sighs, it's too hard.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*This is a SEE-NEE (tray).*

She gets distracted by her toy. He snatches it from her hand.

MONA

*Ow.*

HOSSEIN

*Concentrate. This is important.*

Mona doesn't think so, she slumps back in her seat.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*If Daddy gives you a prize, will you try harder?*

Mona shrugs.

He takes out a small box from his bag. He opens it, revealing a beautiful gold necklace with a house of Mecca pendant.

He dangles it in front of Mona.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*Grandma sent it for you. Do you like it?*

Mona nods.

MONA

*It's pretty.*

As he puts it around her neck, he's surprised by the fish necklace tucked under her shirt.

HOSSEIN

*Who got this for you?*

Mona looks down at it and hesitates.

MONA

*Mum.*

Hossein nods with a watchful gaze on her. He fastens and adjusts the necklace so it sits on top of the other.

52

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - VARIOUS - DAY  
(SHAYDA, FARHAD, ELLY, PARVIZ)

52

Shayda ascends a spiral staircase, the overlapping circular patterns captivate her. It's an aspirational moment.

CUT TO:

She stands on the balcony of an atrium with high windows framing autumn trees. She scans GROUPS OF STUDENTS studying below, she sees a FEW RELIGIOUS IRANIANS - she turns away.

CUT TO:



She walks down a seemingly endless corridor of wall to wall books. She pauses to scan the titles of the Psychology section, there's a sense of melancholy in her touch and gaze.

Through the gap of the next aisle, she sees a glimpse of Farhad deeply focused on a book. She approaches him.

SHAYDA

Farhad...

He turns around, surprised to see her.

FARHAD

*Hey!*

He goes in for a hug, she shakes his hand instead.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Sorry.*

She shrugs it off.

SHAYDA

*What are you reading?*

FARHAD

*'Ethics in Engineering Practice, volume five.'*

SHAYDA

*Interesting...*

FARHAD

*Not really.*

SHAYDA

*Where are the gang?*

FARHAD (O.S.)

*Over there.*

He points to a few distant tables on the other side of the hallway where she sees Elly and Parviz studying.

Shayda wanders over to the next aisle. Farhad follows.

She stops by a secluded window, the sight of an autumn tree takes her attention.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Autumn is my favorite.*

SHAYDA

*It's beautiful.*

FARHAD

*Yeah.*

Shayda looks closer at the tree branches, some leaves have fallen, others are in transition from green to red.

SHAYDA

*But I still have this strange feeling here... Even though it's Nowrooz (new year), we don't have the growth of spring, the grass isn't green, the flowers aren't blooming... you know it feels-*

FARHAD

*Like death?*

SHAYDA

*No... It's just... a different feeling.*

FARHAD

*But it is like life and death.*

SHAYDA

*It depends on how you look it. From death comes life... it's a shedding, a letting go (raha shodan)... maybe Australian Nowrooz is about that.*

FARHAD

*Deep. Yeah... 'Raha...' Letting go.*

She playfully shoves him. He smiles. Their eyes meet.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*No, you're right. Let's take a moment - to let it go.*

SHAYDA

*And what are we letting go?*

FARHAD

*It.*

Shayda rolls her eyes.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*I'm serious. Okay. Now close your eyes.*

Farhad closes his eyes. Shayda still has hers wide open. She crosses her arms.

SHAYDA

*Why do I have to close my eyes?*

He opens one eye.

FARHAD

*So you can imagine the thing you are letting go. Otherwise it won't work.*

He reaches to her crossed arms.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*And you have to let these go too.*

She hesitates then drops her arms. She closes her eyes.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Okay ready?*

SHAYDA

*Yeah.*

She sighs and shakes her head.

FARHAD

*One, two... when I say three - we visualize 'it' and take a deep breath in and out - to let it go. Okay.... One, two, three.*

They both inhale and exhale slowly. Farhad finishes with a high pitch noise. Shayda opens her eyes. They laugh together.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*So - Did you let it go?*

Shayda thinks then slowly nods.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Good.*

There's an intense gaze between them. He leans forward and adjusts her hair. Her heart is in her throat - it's too much - she steps back and looks around.

An awkward silence, he fumbles with his book.

FARHAD (CONT'D)

*Umm... Wanna grab a coffee?*

Shayda shakes her head.

SHAYDA

*Don't tell Elly I was here.*

He nods. She walks away, down the aisle.

Shayda sits on the toilet and gathers her thoughts. She's being hard on herself; she takes a deep breath.

She steps out. At the sink she is taken aback by the presence of AN IRANIAN WOMAN IN A LOOSE HIJAB (40) drying her hands.

Shayda keeps quiet with her head down. Her hands tremble a little as she uses the soap dispenser.

She quickly washes her hands, feeling the woman's gaze on her. Shayda avoids it.

The woman exits, pushing the door wide open. As the door closes, Shayda looks through the fleeting gap, the woman glances back at her once more.

54

INT. TRANSPORT HUB - CONCOURSE - DAY  
(HOSSEIN, SHAYDA, MONA)

54

A grade one Farsi book is handed to Shayda.

HOSSEIN  
*Here. Practice with her.*

Shayda nods and looks at Mona.

SHAYDA  
*Get up darling.*

Mona yawns and slumps further into the bench.

Hossein zips up his bag.

HOSSEIN  
*Weren't you supposed to enroll her?  
She's fallen behind.*

SHAYDA  
*Since when are you so concerned  
with her studies?*

HOSSEIN  
*Since always.*

SHAYDA  
*Persian school is too far for us  
now.*

HOSSEIN  
*How will she fit into school when  
we get back to Tehran?*

Shayda can't believe how naïve he is. She puts the book in her bag and concedes - just to get him off her back.

SHAYDA  
*Fine. We'll practice.*

Hossein nods, satisfied. Shayda grabs Mona's hand.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

Let's go.

Mona gets up. Hossein hugs her and touches her fish necklace.

HOSSEIN

*This is pretty. Who got it for her?*

Shayda is put on the spot. Mona keeps her head down.

SHAYDA

*My friend.*

HOSSEIN

*Which friend?*

She hesitates.

SHAYDA

*Elly.*

Hossein clocks the mis-matched lie.

Mona is fidgety.

HOSSEIN

*Oh... You're seeing Elly again?*

SHAYDA

*So what?*

HOSSEIN

*Shouldn't I know who my child is socializing with?*

Shayda sighs, tired of the questioning.

HOSSEIN (O.S) (CONT'D)

(trailing off)

*I'm her father... Shayda...*

She grabs Mona's hand and steps onto the escalators.

Mona looks back at Hossein watching them from above.

She turns away from his gaze, hiding in Shayda's skirt, feeling guilty.

SHAYDA

*Are you okay darling?*

Shayda lifts her chin to face her.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*Ha?*

Mona shrugs and looks away.

Shayda notices Mona's gold mecca pendant, touching it as it glistens under the florescent light.

Shayda looks up at Hossein; his figure becomes smaller until the empty steps of the escalator fill the frame.

55

INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING/KIDS AREA - DAY 55  
(FEMALE SOAP CHARACTER, VI, LARA, SHAYDA, CATHY, JENNY, JILL, JOYCE, MIRANDA, MONA, TOBIAS)

Vi and Cathy are entranced by the climax of a TV soap opera.

FEMALE SOAP CHARACTER (O.S.) VI (O.S.)  
"He did this to me. I had no Pfft, you had a choice!  
other choice."

Shayda grabs her Hafez poetry book from the Nowrooz table where Mona is feeding her fish and Vi's girls play connect 4.

Lara looks out the barred window with anticipation. She wears a pretty dress but her makeup barely masks her tired eyes.

LARA  
What if he changed his mind?

Shayda takes Lara's arm to sit down with her.

SHAYDA  
Hafez poet knows.

Shayda hands her the book.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
Close your eyes and make a wish...  
find a page with your finger.

Lara does, then hands it to Shayda - she smiles knowingly, then reads the English translation next to the Farsi poem.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
Your lost Joseph will return to  
Canaan, do not grieve. This house  
of sorrows will become a garden, do  
not grieve...

Lara tries to hold back her tears but she can't.

SHAYDA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Oh grieving heart, you will mend,  
do not despair. This frenzied mind  
will return to calm, do not grieve.

Shayda looks at Lara and puts her hand on hers.

LARA  
How does he know?

SHAYDA

Hafez wish is always true.

Lara wipes her eyes, calmer now. Shayda closes the book.

A car arrives outside. Lara and Shayda go to the window.

MIRANDA (40s, Child Protection worker) and TOBIAS (8, shy, skater-boy) exit the car. Joyce approaches and greets them.

Lara turns away, overwhelmed with emotion, Shayda takes her trembling hand.

Vi looks at Lara with a smile, Cathy doesn't.

56 INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS ENTRY/CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS 56  
(JOYCE, LARA, TOBIAS, MIRANDA, CATHY, JENNY, JILL, MONA, SHAYDA, VI)

Lara and Shayda descend the stairs. Vi, with her girls and Mona follow behind.

Lara approaches the door. She hesitates a moment and looks at Shayda who stands right behind her with a reassuring smile.

Joyce's keys can be heard in the door, but Lara quickly opens it, revealing Joyce carrying several bags.

JOYCE

Look who we have here.

She steps aside to reveal Tobias and Miranda.

Tobias runs into Lara's embrace. It's prolonged. She gasps for air as she cries.

LARA

I missed you...

TOBIAS

Me too.

She looks at him, kisses his face then hugs him once more.

LARA

(to Miranda)

Thank you so much.

MIRANDA

Glad we could help.

Shayda, Vi and Joyce watch on, all misty-eyed. Mona, Jill and Jenny lovingly embrace their mothers.

LARA

Look how you've grown! Your hair!

He is teary-eyed, lost for words. She wipes his wet cheeks.

Joyce hands Shayda one of Tobias' bags and nudges her.

JOYCE  
(under her breath)  
Let's give em' a minute hey.

As they move toward the stairs, Shayda notices Cathy standing at the landing, looking on with envy. Their eyes meet.

Before Shayda can reach her, Cathy turns away, opens the sliding door to the backyard and steps out for a cigarette.

57 INT. SHELTER - LIVING ROOM/KIDS AREA - NIGHT 57  
(IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR, SHAYDA, JOYCE, VI, CATHY, JILL & JENNY, LARA, TOBIAS)

IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR (O.S.)  
*Now use your arms, 1, 2, up, 2...*

In front of the big TV, Shayda shimmies and shakes perfectly whilst Mona just sways her body. Shayda stops to demonstrate.

SHAYDA  
*No, you have to shimmy forward...  
See my shoulders? See how they are  
shaking?*

Mona nods, then shimmies her shoulders forward and back.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*Well done!*

Lara, Tobias and Joyce enter the room, each holding party snacks, they watch on with smiles.

Mona is suddenly shy. Shayda notices them and gestures to join in. They shake their heads. Shayda smiles and pulls Lara and Joyce into the imaginary dance floor.

Tobias peels off to play with his yo-yo. Mona watches him.

IRANIAN DANCE INSTRUCTOR (V.O.)  
*Imagine it's a party, come into the  
middle.*

On screen, the Iranian dancers make a circle around one girl who shimmies, shakes and spins alone while the others clap.

Shayda starts copying the lone dancer. Mona starts clapping.

Vi enters the room with Jill and Jenny, she's clicking her hands and attempting to shimmy with her girls.

Vi grabs Lara and Joyce's hands, they move in. Mona takes Tobias' hand, he gives into her cute gesture.

They all stand around Shayda in a circle, unified, clapping and cheering her on.



JOYCE  
Go Shayda!

VI  
Wooo Wooo.

Shayda moves her arms in a circular, wavy motion, she spins around, shaking her hips with a smile from ear to ear.

She's in her element, there's a freedom about the way she moves. She spins and takes Mona's little hands to join her.

Joyce smiles, moved by their mother-daughter connection.

After their moment in the spotlight, Shayda clocks Cathy outside; still alone and smoking in the yard.

Shayda exits the circle, Vi takes centre stage.

Mona runs after Shayda. Joyce picks her up and sways to the music. Mona giggles, they enjoy this playful dance.

58

EXT. SHELTER - BACKYARD - NIGHT  
(CATHY, SHAYDA, JOYCE, MONA)

58

The muffled beat of Persian pop music ensues upstairs.

Cathy offers Shayda a cigarette. Shayda takes it and holds it awkwardly between her fingers.

Cathy holds her lighter up. Shayda places the cigarette between her tight lips. Cathy sparks it off.

Shayda doesn't know what she's doing. She inhales a big drag quickly then has a coughing fit.

CATHY  
Shit. You really are a Persian  
Princess...

After Shayda recovers, she makes a chic, cool pose holding the cigarette. Cathy shakes her head. They both smile.

A collision sound startles them. Mona presses her cheek against the cold window, making faces.

Shayda looks annoyed and waves her off. Mona runs back.

Shayda clocks Cathy look at Mona with a sense of sadness before she takes another drag of her cigarette.

SHAYDA  
So... show me.

Cathy nods. She inhales and exhales with ease.

CATHY  
Small drag... slow exhale.

Shayda copies, there's a little less coughing this time. She puts her tongue out like she hates the taste.

It's a déjà vu moment for Cathy. She stares into the darkness of the backyard as she reminisces.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Jamie was the same... He hated it... He would flush em' down the toilet when I wasn't home... little shit used to rile me up...

She glances at Shayda, whose eyes are full of compassion.

Cathy looks back down at her cigarette, her hand trembles.

CATHY (CONT'D)

He'd come home from footy practice... He saw me on the floor... You know, he tried to stop him, but I saw that look, that look in Stuart's eyes... I didn't want my baby to get hurt... I said 'run, run Jamie!' So he bolted outa the house, into the street, but that car... that bloody car... You know, he died tryna save me... but I... I should've left... It's all my fault...

Cathy looks at Shayda between her tears.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Don't do it... don't go back to him... promise me?

Shayda takes this in, nodding, comforting her.

SHAYDA

It was accident. Not your fault.

Cathy shakes her head and falls into a heap on the floor. Her body can no longer contain her sorrow. She sobs like a child.

CATHY

It is. I'm good for nothing.

Shayda kneels down and puts her arm around her.

Joyce comes to the door - Shayda nods that she's got this.

MONA  
Lion King!

HOSSEIN  
*Sure darling.*

Mona does a little dance.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Why don't you join us?*

MONA  
*Yeah Mummy, come!*

Shayda looks at Hossein with annoyance. He holds her gaze.

HOSSEIN  
*She can't come, Mummy has other friends to see.*

Mona looks disheartened.

SHAYDA  
*Daddy is joking.*

Shayda leans down to kiss Mona.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*See you at 4.*

Hossein nods. Shayda steps onto the descending escalators.

Mona waves until Hossein grabs her hand. They walk a few paces in the opposite direction towards the foodcourt.

Then, Mona's arm is yanked as Hossein doubles back.

60

INT. TRANSPORT HUB - ESCALATORS - CONTINUOUS  
(HOSSEIN, OLD WOMAN, MONA, SHAYDA)

60

Hossein and Mona step onto the escalators, he rushes down the steps, Mona thinks it's a race.

Shayda is a distant figure, stepping off a second set of escalators leading into the shopping mall.

Hossein holds Mona's hand as he descends the second escalators with even more speed and determination.

HOSSEIN  
*Why didn't you tell Daddy about Mummy's friend?*

Mona looks at him, confused.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Ha?*

Mona remains silent. Hossein rudely pushes past SEVERAL SHOPPERS, dragging Mona behind him.

OLD WOMAN

Excuse me.

HOSSEIN

Sorry.

61 INT. SHOPPING MALL/DEPARTMENT STORE - CONTINUOUS 61  
(MONA, HOSSEIN, MIDDLE AGED MAN, SHAYDA)

They step off the escalator and rush through a shopping corridor flanked by shops with bright lights.

Mona sees the sign for 'Hoyts Cinema' but they are going in the opposite direction to the arrow.

MONA

*But the cinema is that way.*

Hossein ignores her, walking toward the entrance of a department store.

CUT TO:

Mona is rushed through the various aisles of the store, Hossein hides her behind a make-up stand.

Mona looks at the different eye-shadows and picks one up. Hossein takes it from her hand and puts it back.

MONA (CONT'D)

*Daddy.*

HOSSEIN

*Shhh.*

MONA

*What about...*

Hossein leans down and holds her arms.

HOSSEIN

*(whispering)*  
*It's important that we don't talk here... Otherwise we won't see the Lion King today.*

Mona shifts her shoulders, feeling uncomfortable in his grip.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*(whispering)*  
*Okay?*

Mona frowns and nods. He kisses her head. She turns away.

He positions them behind a wall.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
 (whispering)  
*Don't move.*

She stands as still as possible, watching him as he steals glances of Shayda across the way. Mona is very annoyed now.

Shayda's hair is untied. She checks herself in a mirror and applies the red lipstick Vi gave her.

Hossein unzips his bag and readies his camera. Mona is fidgety, he gives her a look.

A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN (30s) walks towards Shayda. He seems to be asking her for directions, but Hossein sees it differently; he takes several shots of them.

Mona clocks his distracted moment and makes a run for it through the maze of clothes racks toward the entrance.

She looks over her shoulder, Hossein chases after her.

Mona keeps running but she is puffed out, her shoelace comes undone. She trips, falls and cries.

Hossein arrives, out of breath. He leans down to lift her.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Get up.*

She resists and gives him an angry stare.

MONA  
*I don't want to.*

Hossein glares at her, about to unleash some discipline.

A MIDDLE AGED COUPLE interrupts.

MIDDLE AGED MAN  
*Everything okay here?*

Hossein puts on a smile and nods. He ties her shoelace in a fatherly way.

HOSSEIN  
*Come on darling.*

The couple move off.

Hossein grabs her hand to pull her up and sees she has wet herself. Mona is embarrassed, her lips are trembling.

Hossein's rage quickly transitions to sorrow.

He slides down to the ground and weeps.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*I'm sorry... I just...*

He touches her little hand.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*I love you both... I just want us  
 to be together again...*

He looks at her, searching for sympathy.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Promise you won't tell Mummy?*

Mona is silent. He embraces her tightly.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Promise me?*

She presses her lips together, not reciprocating the hug.

62

INT. TRANSPORT HUB - CONCOURSE/PASSAGEWAY - DAY  
 (SHAYDA, HOSSEIN, MONA)

62

Shayda sits on the blue bench with shopping bags. She looks at the big clock impatiently.

Hossein and Mona approach Shayda looking worse for wear.

Mona runs toward Shayda and hugs her legs, hiding from Hossein. He sighs, a little out of breath.

Shayda gets up. She looks at Mona's puffy eyes and notices her outfit change.

SHAYDA  
*What happened to your pants?*

HOSSEIN  
*She wanted new ones.*

SHAYDA  
*And Lion King?*

HOSSEIN  
*We missed the last session.*

Shayda doesn't buy it, she looks to Mona who avoids her gaze.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*I saw you with that guy.*

Shayda slowly realizes what this means.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*In the store. I saw you.*

Shayda swiftly grabs Mona's hand and a handful of her bags and walks off. As she makes ground, rage builds inside her.

She glances back, Hossein is a few strides behind her.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Others have seen you too.*

She quickens her pace through the passageway.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Shayda...*

SHAYDA  
*Leave me alone.*

Mona struggles to keep up.

MONA  
*Mummy...*

Mona cries. Hossein is right behind them now.

HOSSEIN  
*Don't cry darling... See what  
 you've done? I'm babysitting for  
 you, while you're out having your  
 fun. Isn't that right?*

He pulls her handbag violently towards him, stopping her.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*I have evidence...*

She tries to pull away but he yanks her even closer. Her body is trembling.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Do you know what they'll do to you  
 back in Iran? They'll kill you.*

Shayda slaps him, feeling energized by her own defiance.

SHAYDA  
*Who says we're going back?*

HOSSEIN  
*You can't stay here, get your  
 divorce and keep the child...*

She stares him in the eye.

SHAYDA  
*Watch me.*

Hossein is weak for a moment.

She frees herself from his grip, grabs Mona's hand and storms up the stairs, towards the bright day-lit street.

HOSSEIN (O.S.)  
*You're still my wife!*

63 EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS 63

Shayda and Mona rush along the street towards Joyce's van.

Mona is frazzled as they reach it. She's lifted inside by Shayda. Joyce swiftly slides the door shut.

64 INT. JOYCE VAN - DOWNTOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS 64  
(JOYCE, MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda is breathless and triggered, struggling with their seatbelts. Joyce gets in the driver's seat.

JOYCE

What happened?

SHAYDA

He was... stalking... all access.

As she finally gets the seat belt in place, there's a loud tapping at her window.

Startled, she turns to see Hossein with a smile, holding up one of her shopping bags. He signals to pull the window down.

JOYCE (O.S.)

That bloody...

Joyce accelerates away. Hossein recedes from Shayda's view.

65 INT. SHELTER - OFFICE - DUSK 65  
(JOYCE, INTERPRETER 2, SHAYDA)

Shayda and Joyce sit together next to the speakerphone.

Shayda has a slumped posture, she's anxious and fidgety. A folder is open on Joyce's lap, she reads from it.

A female INTERPRETER is on the line (70s, Iranian). She's live translating to Farsi in a matter-of-fact way.

JOYCE (O.S.)

"On our last trip to Iran, I told her everything."

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Akharin bari keh raftim Iran, man hamechiro behesh goftam.*

JOYCE (O.S.)

"And my mother said, 'This is your destiny and you cannot change it.'"

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Va madaram goft, 'In sarneveshteh toh hast va nemisheh avazesh kard.'*



Shayda has a distant, absent gaze. She nods.

JOYCE (O.S.)

"13th January, 1995. Brisbane. Two days after our return... It was late at night, I came out of the shower, he pushed me hard up against the wall..."

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Sizdahomeh janvier, hezaro nohsado navado panj. Brisbane. Doh rooz bad az safareh bargasht... Dirvakhteh shab bood, az hamam amadam biroon, va oo man ra gereft va zad beh divar.*

Shayda nods, we slowly get closer to her face.

JOYCE (O.S.)

I screamed. He hit me on the head and forced me onto the bed..."

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Man faryad zadam. Oo mano zad too saram va mano part kard rooyeh takht...*

With every word, Shayda is reliving this horrific scene.

JOYCE (O.S.)

"He put his hand over my mouth so that I could hardly breathe and forced himself onto me..."

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Oo dastesh ra feshar dad rooyeh dahanam, nemitoonestam nafas bekesham. Dar oon lahzeh, khodesho beh man tahmil kard...*

Shayda is frozen in her shame; it's as though she has exposed herself to the whole community by hearing her story read by this one woman; a familiar stranger.

JOYCE (O.S.)

"I was crying and protesting but he just continue. When he finally let go, I ran from the house and called the police."

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Man geryeh mikardam, va eteraz mikardam vali oo karesh roh edameh dad. Bad az ye modat, mano nejat dad, man az khaneh farar kardam va beh police zang zadam.*

Shayda breaks. She cries, the pain is unbearable, eternal. Joyce gives her a tissue and rubs her arm reassuringly.

Shayda wipes her eyes with her trembling hand. The interpreter breaks the silence with her warm elderly voice.

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)  
*Agar ejazeh bedin, man pishnahad  
 midam keh loghateh 'tajavoz' roh  
 ezafeh konim... Benazareh man  
 daghlightareh.*

Shayda nods. After a long beat of taking this in...

SHAYDA  
*Basheh.*

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)  
 She would like to add the word  
 'rape' in the description.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
 Yes, I agree... Um... Was it the  
 first time?

Shayda shakes her head slowly. Feeling the tears coming on once more, she gets up from her seat and exits the room.

Shayda takes a moment behind the door, gathering herself.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 She's just stepped out.

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)  
 Okay.

Joyce comes to the door.

JOYCE  
 (quietly)  
 Shay, we can continue another day.

Shayda paces around, breathing deeply and shaking out her arms. After a long beat, she steps back into the room.

They sit once more.

JOYCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Hi.

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)  
 Hi.

Shayda sits up with a sense of determination.

SHAYDA

*Oon ghesmati keh... mano zad beh divar, behem goft, 'Man toro dobareh hameleh mikonam... keh natooni az man joda shi.'*

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

She says, during the part where he pushed me against the wall, he said, 'I'm going to make you pregnant again, so you cannot separate from me.'

Joyce sighs and writes this down.

JOYCE (O.S.)

And... where was your daughter during the incident?

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Dokhtaretoon koja bood dar tooleh in hadeseh?*

Shayda hesitates for a beat.

SHAYDA

Um... In her room.

JOYCE (O.S.)

Was she already asleep before you had a shower?

Shayda nods, slowly.

INTERPRETER 2 (V.O.)

*Dokhtaretoon khaab bood ghabl az inkeh berin hamoom?*

SHAYDA

(uncertain)

I... read her bedtime story.

JOYCE (O.S.)

Was she awake when the police came?

SHAYDA

(slow nod)

Yes.

Joyce nods. She makes a note then continues reading.

JOYCE (O.S.)

"The police told me that it would take at least six months to deal with my complaint in court, that if they locked up my husband, I might have no way of supporting myself." Is there anything else they said that night?

Shayda shakes her head.

66 INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN - DAY 66  
(SHAYDA)

Circular swirls of golden batter sizzle in a saucepan of oil.

Shayda dunks the *Zoolbia* Persian sweet into warm rosewater syrup before resting it on a tray with a dozen other pieces.

A Butcher bird sings outside. Shayda enjoys its sweet song.

She steps to the windowsill to remove her fully grown wheatgrass dish. The bird flies from a naked branch to the window's edge where Shayda stands. They admire each other.

67 INT. SHELTER - LIVING/KIDS AREA - CONTINUOUS 67  
(SHAYDA)

Shayda places the wheatgrass dish onto her now complete Persian New Year table and ties a red ribbon around it.

She notices a few hard boiled eggs on a piece of newspaper. They are half painted with black paint. She touches one with her finger, the black paint is still wet. She sighs.

68 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - DAY 68  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda peers through the door.

She sees Mona sulking and lying in bed... Fiddling with Hossein's gold mecca necklace with her black painted fingers.

Shayda enters with her tray of *Zoolbia* sweets. Mona sits up and takes one. Her mood shifts as she relishes the taste.

69 INT. SHELTER - STAIRCASE/OFFICE - DAY 69  
(CATHY, SHAYDA, JOYCE, DEB)

Shayda walks down the stairs with her tray. Cathy walks past.

CATHY

Ooh.

SHAYDA

Happy Persian New Year.

Cathy stops to take a *Zoolbia* sweet.

CATHY

Happy New Year.

Shayda keeps walking with a smile.

Shayda enters the office.

Deb is busily filing away paperwork. Joyce is packing her bag and putting on her jacket, done for the day.

Shayda offers a sweet to Deb and then to Joyce.

SHAYDA  
*Nowrooz Mobarak.*  
 (Happy New Year)

JOYCE  
 You made these?

Shayda nods. Joyce smiles and takes two.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
 Wow... (crunching into one) yum...  
 What are they called?

SHAYDA (O.S.)  
*Zoolbia.*

JOYCE  
*Zoolbia!*

Joyce gestures goodbye to Deb as they walk toward the door.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
 Any plans?

Shayda shrugs, not giving much away.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
 Don't have too much fun.

A knowing smile. Joyce opens the door and looks at Shayda.

JOYCE (CONT'D)  
*Noroo-*

SHAYDA  
*Nowrooz Mobarak.*

JOYCE  
*Nowrooz-mobarak!*

Joyce closes the door behind her.

70

INT. ELLY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/FOYER - NIGHT  
 (ELLY, SHAYDA, MONA, PARVIZ, FARHAD, MR & MRS BAGHERI)

70

Iranian 90s pop music plays at a deafening tone. Mona runs her little hand along the top of a majestic wheatgrass dish.

Shayda takes her hand; they pose for a photograph in front of a beautiful New Year spread (triple the size of hers). They both wear new dresses, Mona in white, Shayda in red.

Mona is distracted by the festive living room complete with Persian style rugs and floor cushions occupied by a CROWD OF IRANIAN SECULAR TYPES and A HANDFUL OF NON-IRANIANS.

ELLY (O.S.)  
*One, two, Mona look at me! Three.*

Mona looks straight ahead. The camera flashes on her face.  
A Polaroid film ejects from the camera. Elly dances with it.

SHAYDA  
*Let me see.*

Shayda grabs the photo. Elly is pulled away by Parviz - he whispers in her ear as they rush off.

Shayda shows their photo to Mona.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)  
*See how pretty your dress looks?*

Mona smiles shyly as they bop to a Shahram Shabpareh song.

Through the party crowd, Shayda eyes Elly at the front door bickering with MRS BAGHERI and her conservative husband (same woman from the University bathroom).

Mrs. Bagheri points in Shayda's direction with a look.

A FEW PARTY MEMBERS have sensed the tension. They whisper amongst themselves and glance at Shayda. Her body tenses up.

MONA  
*Mummy...*

Shayda turns to Mona and the Persian New Year spread.

SHAYDA  
*Look how many goldfish they have...  
One... two... three...*

MONA  
*But Simba is bigger and smarter.*

Shayda nods then glances over her shoulder once more.

Mrs. Bagheri gives her one last look before taking her husband's arm and walking to their car. Elly shuts the door.

PARVIZ (O.S.)  
(yelling over the music)  
*Friends, dinner is served!*

Shayda watches the crowd move toward the elaborate buffet. A FEW WOMEN look at her as they pass.

Elly clocks Shayda's discomfort and pulls her aside.

ELLY  
*Don't worry about them.*

SHAYDA  
*Is it because of me they didn't  
 come in?*

ELLY  
*Yeah but don't worry about it, it's  
 their problem.*

Parviz approaches and interrupts.

PARVIZ  
*Sorry... Elly, where'd you put the  
 big salad?*

ELLY (O.S.)  
*In the other fridge.*

Shayda grabs Mona's hand and walks to the foyer.

Shayda reaches for their jackets and bags from the hooks. She attempts to put Mona's on. Mona resists.

MONA  
*I don't wanna go!*

Elly rushes over and stops her. They jostle over the bags.

ELLY  
*But you just got here.*

SHAYDA  
*I know but...*

ELLY  
*Stay, I went to all this trouble.*

The doorbell rings multiple times. Shayda is a little jumpy.

Suddenly, Farhad enters the front door.

FARHAD  
*Salam, Salam. Happy Nowrooz.*

Elly kisses him hello.

SHAYDA  
*Happy Nowrooz.*

FARHAD  
*Leaving already?*

Shayda looks at him and hesitates.

SHAYDA  
*No... We just got here.*

Farhad smiles at Mona.

FARHAD  
*Hello. Don't you look like an  
angel.*

Mona is shy (and dislikes her dress).

Farhad moves off to greet the guests.

MONA  
*Mummy, I'm hungry.*

Shayda hangs up their things. Elly helps with a smile.

71

INT. ELLY'S HOUSE - SMALL LIVING ROOM - NIGHT  
(SHAYDA, FARHAD, ELLY, MONA, PERSIAN CROWD)

71

A pre-revolution Iranian ballad plays on the speakers. Elly and Farhad set down a few plates on the coffee table.

SHAYDA  
*Sit up darling.*

Mona tries to sit up, but she keeps sliding down the very slippery formal sofa.

FARHAD  
*Herb rice and fish, herb omelet.*

He sits on the adjacent armchair.

SHAYDA  
*Thanks.*

ELLY  
*My pleasure.*

Elly rushes off to tend to other guests.

MONA  
*I want herb omelet.*

Shayda breaks the omelet into small pieces and hands the plate to Mona, but she's still trying to find a comfortable way to sit on the slippery sofa. She whines.

Shayda puts the plate back on the coffee table and lifts Mona to sit on the floor in front of the table.

SHAYDA  
*Is this better?*

Mona nods and digs into her omelet.

Shayda leans back with her plate, finally a moment of peace.

She's lost in thought as she eats. Farhad senses this.



A beat of eating in silence then...

FARHAD  
Knock Knock.

Shayda looks at him with confusion.

FARHAD (CONT'D)  
*It's a joke. You have to say-*  
*'Who's there?'*

Shayda half smiles.

FARHAD (CONT'D)  
Knock Knock.

SHAYDA  
Who's there?

FARHAD  
Iran.

SHAYDA  
Iran?

FARHAD  
*No, you have to say- 'Iran who?'*

SHAYDA  
*Aha.*

FARHAD  
*Let's go again.*

Shayda is amused.

FARHAD (CONT'D)  
Knock Knock.

SHAYDA  
Who's there?

FARHAD  
Iran.

SHAYDA  
Iran who?

FARHAD  
Iran all the way here. Let me in  
already!

It doesn't land for Shayda.

Farhad cracks up at his own joke. He is a bit embarrassed.

Shayda smiles at how cheesy he is.

INT. ELLY'S HOUSE - LARGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT  
(FARHAD, ELLY, MONA, PERSIAN CROWD, SHAYDA)

On a dimly-lit make-shift dance floor, Elly and HER MARRIED FRIENDS are at the centre of a typical Iranian dancing circle, most party guests surround them and clap.

Farhad tries to follow the beat of Persian Pop music with a Dayere drum. He's a little out of beat, clearly a novice.

To the side of Elly's circle, Shayda and Mona are in their own little world. Mona is shy and hesitant. Shayda takes her limp arms into the air and sways them to the beat.

The song changes to the same tune from Shayda's VHS lessons.

Shayda smiles and uses the dance moves they practiced at the shelter. She encourages Mona, her confidence builds, they're a dynamic duo.

As Shayda does a circular dance around Mona, she catches a glimpse of Farhad through the crowd, he smiles at her.

Mona then does a circular dance around Shayda, it's impressive. A few other guests start clapping and surrounding them, they've created a mini circle of their own.

Farhad moves into the fold and whispers in Shayda's ear.

FARHAD

You're an amazing dancer.

Shayda smiles. Parviz wolf whistles.

ELLY

*Friends, 10... 9... 8... 7...*

Shayda grabs Mona's hands, they count together.

MONA

*6... 5... 4... 3...*

The crowd erupts into celebration.

PERSIAN CROWD

*2... 1... Happy New Year!*

Shayda lifts Mona up and kisses her.

SHAYDA

*Happy New Year darling.*

Mona giggles and claps.

All the guests around them are kissing and hugging.

In this elated moment, Farhad leans in, so does Shayda, they share a fleeting kiss on the cheek.

Their gaze interlocks as she circles around him and Mona, shimmying to the music with a big smile.

73

INT. ELLY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT  
(MONA, HOSSEIN, ELLY, PARVIZ, REZA, BAHAR, PERSIAN CROWD)

73

In the adjacent room, the party guests drunkenly sing along to a nostalgic Iranian ballad 'Gharibe Ashena' by Googoosh.

Mona wears a red party hat and eats a slice of chocolate cake with her new friend BAHAR (7).

They play a game of snakes and ladders on the kitchen bench.

Mona rolls the dice on the board. She moves her figure up the ladder. She claps and giggles.

Bahar smiles, picks up the dice and shakes it in her hand.

Mona looks across the room and sees Hossein and REZA (mustache man from bendy bus) walking through the crowd.

She's scared - she knows Daddy shouldn't be here.

Two dice slowly drop onto the board.

Mona's little feet run across a chaotically patterned Persian carpet. She hides behind the slippery sofa.

She's a little breathless, she closes her eyes and whispers to herself.

MONA

*I am not afraid... I am not afraid...*

A beat.

HOSSEIN (O.S.)

*Hi little lady.*

Mona opens her eyes, Hossein is leaning over her.

She gets up to run but he corners her, out of sight.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

(whispering)

*Wait...*

(calm as possible)

*I just wanna talk.*

She avoids his gaze, she's fidgety.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)

*I missed you... You look so pretty.*

He touches her dress collar, notices her naked neck.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Where's Daddy's necklace?*

She pushes his hand away.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Don't you love Daddy anymore?*

She hesitates.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Am I a bad person?*

MONA  
*I wanna go play.*

HOSSEIN  
*Okay I'll let you play, just one last question...*

(earnestly)  
*Do you wanna go back to Iran or stay here?*

She looks at him.

MONA  
*I wanna stay with Mummy.*

A beat as this sinks in for Hossein, he's devastated.

HOSSEIN  
*Did Mummy tell you to say that?*

She keeps her head down. He shakes her.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*Ha? Did Mummy tell you?*

She whinges loudly, before bursting into tears.

Mona sees Elly rush over to the slippery sofa.

ELLY  
*Hossein, get up.*

Hossein ignores her, desperate for an answer from Mona.

HOSSEIN  
*Did Mummy tell you to say that?*

ELLY (O.S.)  
*Enough.*

Elly reaches out to Mona.

ELLY (CONT'D)  
*You're upsetting the child!*

Hossein turns to Elly.

HOSSEIN  
 (pleading)  
*Did you know Shayda's plan?*  
*Ha?*

For a moment, Elly buys into his anguish.

HOSSEIN (CONT'D)  
*She's brainwashed my child.*

Then, she looks at Mona, crying, desperate for help.

She leans over the sofa to grab Mona, he resists...

ELLY  
*Parviz!*

Mona is caught between their grips. A long beat in this physical struggle for the child.

Parviz jumps in and helps pull Mona away. She's in a state of shock as Elly cradles her.

Hossein gets up, on a new mission. Mona keeps her eye on him.

HOSSEIN  
*Where is she?*

Parviz tries to stop him, Hossein pushes past easily.

He makes his way toward the music, toward the dance floor.

Parviz stands in his way once more.

PARVIZ  
*Be reasonable.*

HOSSEIN  
*Move!*

Reza appears and holds Parviz back.

PARVIZ  
*Let me go.*

REZA  
*Calm down.*

PARVIZ  
*Who the hell are you!*

Elly follows Hossein with Mona in tow.

He circles the living room, searching for Shayda, weaving past dancing couples; they look at him with confusion.

Mona is anxious and afraid.

MONA

*Mummy!*

PARVIZ (O.S.)

*Someone call the police!*

REZA (O.S.)

*Have you no honor? He has a right  
to see his wife.*

PARVIZ (O.S.)

*You're not the lawmaker here!*

Elly switches on the lights and turns off the music.

74

EXT. ELLY'S HOUSE - PATIO - CONTINUOUS  
(FARHAD, SHAYDA, HOSSEIN, ELLY, PERSIAN CROWD, REZA)

74

Amidst the autumn trees of the garden, Shayda and Farhad are a little tipsy, he recites a Persian Poem by Shams Tabrizi.

Shayda is impressed. He is taken aback by the sudden silence.

FARHAD

*What happened to the music?*

Shayda turns to see Hossein at the kitchen window, watching. Their eyes meet, his gaze is momentarily filled with sorrow.

Shayda panics, she runs toward the side gate.

Hossein exits from another door and grabs her.

SHAYDA

*Let me go!*

He pushes her against the brick wall with a strangle hold.

HOSSEIN

*I knew it! You dirty whore!*

Shayda gasps, struggling to breathe.

Farhad intervenes, Hossein turns and shoves him. Farhad pushes him back.

FARHAD

*Fuck you!*

Shayda slides to the ground, trying to catch her breathe.

Hossein wrestles Farhad and pins him down on all fours.

FARHAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*Get off me!*

Shayda is frozen and powerless. She watches in horror as Hossein throws a few messy punches, completely enraged.

Suddenly, Parviz and TWO MEN storm out, grabbing at Hossein. Hossein throws a final punch, before they pull him off.

HOSSEIN

*I'll kill you!*

He's forcibly dragged away with a vengeful gaze to Shayda.

Shayda crawls toward Farhad, trembling, fighting her tears. His face is badly injured but he's breathing.

Elly arrives with A FEW OTHERS to tend to Farhad.

As Elly helps Shayda up, her gaze meets the crowd of Iranians gathered beyond the glass wall.

Some look on with pity, others with shock and disbelief. Several of them including Reza peel away from the scene.

75

EXT. ELLY'S HOUSE - SIDE ENTRANCE/GARAGE - CONTINUOUS 75  
(SHAYDA, ELLY, HOSSEIN, IRANIAN WOMAN, MONA)

A shellshocked Shayda hurries behind Elly down a narrow path.

SHAYDA

*Where's Mona?*

ELLY

*In the car.*

As they reach the carport, a loud thumping noise ensues from inside the house.

Shayda is alarmed to find an IRANIAN WOMAN holding Mona in the backseat of Elly's car.

The woman clocks Shayda's gaze and exits to the other side, handing the keys to Elly and exchanging a few words.

Elly enters the driver's seat, Shayda slides in with Mona and clutches her tightly.

Through the windscreen, Shayda notices the storage door handle being jerked violently. The thumping grows louder.

Elly's hand shakes as she turns the ignition key.

As they reverse, Hossein kicks down the door and chases after Elly's car towards the street.

Elly stalls as she shifts into drive.

Hossein catches up and bangs on Shayda's passenger window with his bloody hand. Mona screams, Shayda shields her eyes.

Elly quickly accelerates away down the street, leaving him yelling and running into the night.

76 INT. ELLY'S CAR - IN MOTION - NIGHT 76  
(SHAYDA, ELLY, MONA)

The car ride is silent and tense. Elly drives in an expressionless way, Shayda looks at her from the backseat, then at her hands. Mona slowly dozes off on Shayda's arm.

Shayda looks at Elly again.

SHAYDA  
(hesitantly)  
*Will you... keep me updated?*

A long beat in Elly's silent anguish.

ELLY  
*I think it's best we don't see you  
for a while.*

Shayda nods, on the verge of tears.

She turns to the window and feels the wind on her face.

77 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT 77  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda and Mona watch Elly's car disappear down the road.

They walk quickly down the dark footpath. Shayda is frightened by the sound of a car approaching.

She picks up speed, almost running, but Mona is beyond exhausted; Shayda has to drag her most of the way.

Off screen, the car screeches away in the opposite direction, but Shayda doesn't slow down.

78 EXT. SHELTER - NIGHT 78  
(JOYCE, POLICE OFFICER 1, LARA, MONA, POLICE OFFICER 2,  
SHAYDA)

They arrive to find Joyce arguing with TWO POLICE OFFICERS at the front door. Lara stands right behind her.

JOYCE  
No, around eight o'clock he was  
right across the road there... she  
saw him.

Lara nods.

POLICE OFFICER 1  
As I said, we contacted him and he  
had an alibi for being elsewhere.

JOYCE  
She saw him!



Joyce is furious and too caught up in the argument to notice Shayda and Mona coming in.

POLICE OFFICER 1 (O.S.)  
I'm afraid there's nothing else we  
can do without evidence.

JOYCE (O.S.)  
What more evidence!

79 INT. SHELTER - DOWNSTAIRS LIVING ROOM/STAIRS - CONTINUOUS 79  
(MONA, SHAYDA, DEB, CATHY, TOBIAS)

Mona clocks Cathy passed out on the couch.

MONA  
*I wanna go upstairs.*

SHAYDA  
*Go darling.*

Mona passes by the office and gets a glimpse of Tobias. He sits near Deb who is on the phone, pacing back and forth, very frustrated with the call.

DEB  
To Munich... yes...

As Mona ascends the stairs, she waves at Tobias, he waves back in a dispirited way.

DEB (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
No, not tomorrow. We need a flight  
tonight...

80 INT. SHELTER - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 80  
(VI, SHAYDA)

Shayda enters the kitchen where Vi is busy at the stove, making a late dinner for the others.

She offers a plate of egg rolls.

VI  
No pork.

SHAYDA  
I had... Thanks.

Vi nods and puts the plate down.

VI  
(with a wry smile)  
How was the party?

Vi picks up a roll and bites into it.

## VI (CONT'D)

Did you see that cute guy again?

Shayda goes silent for a beat, then starts tearing up.

Vi puts the egg roll down and gives her a hug. Shayda cries on her shoulder.

81 INT. SHELTER - SHAYDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 81  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Mona's little feet kick the bedsheets around. She's sweaty, sleep-talking gibberish in her nightmare.

Shayda opens her tired eyes, crawls into Mona's bed and cradles her to sleep.

82 INT. SHELTER - UPSTAIRS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 82

It's dead quiet. A lamp illuminates the small Persian New Year spread on the coffee table.

The goldfish swims in the fish bowl beside the fully grown wheat grass, painted eggs, poetry book and colored bowls.

Suddenly, the sound of a window shattering downstairs.

83 INT. SHELTER - VARIOUS - CONTINUOUS 83  
(CATHY, SHAYDA, MONA, VI, JENNY & JILL, LARA, TOBIAS)

Shayda, wide awake now, gets up and exits her room.

Shayda leans over the staircase railing as Cathy runs up. Light smoke trails her. A deafening fire alarm sounds.

CATHY

(shouting over alarm)

Get Mona! I'll get the others!

Shayda hesitates.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Just go! I'll handle it!

Shayda nods and rushes off. Cathy opens Vi's bedroom door.

CATHY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Fire! Get out! Get the kids out!

Shayda pulls sleepy Mona out of bed.

SHAYDA

*We have to go!*

MONA

*What's going on?*

She grabs a bag and frantically fills it with her purse, jewelry box, passports. She hands Mona's backpack to her.

Mona hurriedly packs her Barbie doll and scrapbook but leaves the gold necklace behind.

Vi and her girls run past, coughing and struggling with bags.

VI

Hurry!

Shayda takes Mona's hand, they make a run for it with Vi.

They move through the orange haze, down the stairs in a frenzy of panic and terror as the fire spreads quickly.

Through the heavy smoke, Shayda is horrified to see Cathy holding a bucket, running toward the flames.

SHAYDA

Cathy!

Mona lets go of Shayda's hand and runs back up the stairs.

MONA

Simba!

Shayda turns to stop her, but she trips and falls. Vi pulls her up, Jill grabs Mona's hand and they flee, breathlessly.

Shayda looks around for Cathy as fire truck sirens approach.

Lara and Tobias evacuate from the laundry. They run with Mona and Shayda across the yard, through the darkness and haze.

Their beloved staircase left behind, swallowed by a roaring blaze.

84

EXT. SHELTER - STREET - NIGHT  
(FIREFIGHTER, SHAYDA, JOYCE, VI)

84

A FEW FRIGHTENED NEIGHBORS are gathered under a street light, an Ambulance approaches from afar.

In front of the burning shelter, a FIREFIGHTER stands with Shayda, Joyce & Vi.

FIREFIGHTER

Where did you last see her?

SHAYDA

Downstairs... holding a bucket.

JOYCE

A bucket?

Joyce cups her hands to her face.

SHAYDA  
She panic.

VI  
She want to save us.

Shayda nods knowingly.

FIREFIGHTER (O.S.)  
(into two-way radio)  
Check area two.

As FOUR FIREFIGHTERS put out the blaze, two peel off. The ground level is mostly burnt out, so too are the tree trunks.

85 INT. JOYCE'S VAN STATIONARY / EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS 85  
(LARA, SHAYDA, VI, CATHY, JENNY & JILL, JOYCE, MONA, TOBIAS)

Inside the safety of Joyce's van, Mona trembles and whimpers.

LARA  
It's okay... We're safe now.

Jenny and Jill hug Mona while Lara puts a blanket on them.

Tobias leans over his seat to Mona, he offers her his yoyo. She takes it and slowly calms down.

Mona looks out the window, Shayda glances back at her.

A few meters ahead, Shayda, Vi and Joyce wait anxiously.

TWO FIREFIGHTERS emerge from the smoke, carrying Cathy, her body has second degree burns, she struggles to breathe.

Shayda gasps, Vi holds her. Joyce is frozen in shock.

TWO PARAMEDICS immediately place Cathy onto an ambulance bed and put an oxygen mask over her mouth.

Shayda runs toward her with Vi, they stand by the trolley.

SHAYDA  
Cathy...

Cathy glances at them.

VI  
We love you.

Cathy reaches out and squeezes their hands before her trolley is lifted into the ambulance and the doors are closed.

Joyce kneels down to the pavement, letting her tears go. Vi and Shayda comfort her.

86 EXT. STREET / INT. JOYCE'S VAN STATIONARY - NIGHT 86  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Red and blue lights illuminate Shayda's gaze behind the van window. She holds Mona close as the vehicle moves off, leaving the ruins of their shelter behind.

87 INT. JOYCE'S VAN - IN MOTION - NIGHT 87  
(JENNY & JILL, JOYCE, LARA, MONA, SHAYDA, TOBIAS, VI)

A night storm has hit - the group ride in the van, all deeply traumatized; only the sound of rain fills their silence.

Vi stares into space, her girls sprawled across the backseat.

Mona sleeps on Shayda's arm. Tobias sleeps on Lara's.

Lara takes Shayda's hand across the kids seat, they exchange a comforting glance.

Joyce drives alone in the front seat with bags and boxes and the weight of the world on her shoulders.

88 INT. MOTEL - BATHROOM - NIGHT 88  
(MARYAM, SHAYDA, MONA)

Shayda sits Mona down on a toilet. Her little head drops down in a lifeless, despondent way.

Shayda unwraps two single use toothbrushes and a tiny toothpaste. She squeezes the toothpaste onto both bristles.

She lifts Mona's hand, opens her palm and places her toothbrush in it. Mona looks at it for a beat and sighs.

Shayda starts brushing her teeth. Mona looks up at Shayda then slowly lifts the toothbrush and copies her mother.

Their eyes are vacant, thoughts traveling elsewhere in this routine moment...

MARYAM (V.O.)

*What did the police say about it?*

SHAYDA (V.O.)

*It was planned...*

MARYAM (V.O.)

*Thank God they saved her.*

SHAYDA (V.O.)

*Poor woman...*

MARYAM (V.O.)

*Try to put it out of your mind.*

INT. MOTEL - LIVING AREA/BEDROOM - NIGHT  
(MARYAM, MONA, SHAYDA)

A dimly lit space with mute colors and bare essentials.  
Shayda sits alone in the corner, holding the landline phone.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Have you heard from Hossein?*

Shayda sighs.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*La ilaha illallah.*  
*(I don't know what to say)*

Shayda's lips tremble, trying not to cry.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*I bought you a rice cooker... I'll post it to you.*

SHAYDA  
*It's fine, I am managing without.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Life will be easier with the rice cooker.*

SHAYDA  
*Okay.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Is there anything else you need?*

SHAYDA  
*No, it's fine.*

Maryam bursts into tears.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*What can I do for you from here?*  
*... How do you plan on surviving there all alone?*

Shayda stares into space, wondering the same as Maryam sobs.

Mona appears in the corridor, half awake, her hair a mess, walking toward Shayda. She sits beside her.

MONA  
*I can't sleep.*

SHAYDA  
*Mum, Mona is awake... she wants to talk to you.*

Mona gives her a look like she's too tired; Shayda nods and holds the phone up to her ear.

Maryam pulls herself together on the other line; she puts on a very nice voice for her granddaughter.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Hello my darling.*

Mona smiles hearing her voice. Shayda leans in to listen.

MONA  
*Hello.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*You don't know how much I miss you.*

MONA  
*Me too.*

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Is there anything you want from Iran?*

Mona thinks on this.

MONA  
(innocently)  
*I want to see you... when will you come?*

Silence on the other line.

Tears well up in Shayda's eyes, knowing how impossible her daughter's request is.

MARYAM (V.O.)  
*Don't worry darling, I will try to come one day... God willing...*

Shayda stands and walks down the corridor.

MONA (O.S.)  
*I miss your saffron pudding...*

Shayda enters the dark bedroom, slides down to the floor and lets her tears go. A long beat in her grief.

The sound of suburban crickets fills the silence between her and the room. We pan from Shayda, across the wall to a fixed view outside the window; a lone moonlit tree shakes in the strong wind, its autumn leaves float into the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

Shayda opens the curtains, she takes a moment to look out the window; a peaceful street lined with several autumnal trees.

Her hair is noticeably longer and she's wearing nurse scrubs. A pre-revolution Iranian ballad plays in the living room, 'Parandeh' by Googoosh.

As she walks away from the window, we recognize a Persian New Year table and Mona sitting beside it, painting yellow eggs. She's a little older, wearing a school uniform.

The townhouse is small, but cosy. It's lived-in with a floral furniture set, Persian rugs, paintings and a modest photo wall featuring Cathy, the shelter women and Shayda's family.

Shayda moves her biology textbooks and English/Farsi dictionary from the small four seater table to the bookcase.

SHAYDA

*Darling, come set the table.*

Mona gets up and walks to the kitchen cupboards. She stacks up their plates, cutlery and cups in a routine way.

CUT TO:

They sit together with a traditional Persian New Year meal; herbed rice and fish. Shayda has finished but Mona has barely touched her plate.

Shayda unties a plastic bag. Mona watches on anxiously.

Shayda reveals an envelope and a square shaped gift. Shayda opens the envelope to a card with a yellow daffodil theme and \$20 cash.

Mona reaches for it. Shayda retracts.

MONA

*I wanna read it first.*

Shayda has a sneaky read before handing it over.

Mona opens it and reads the card aloud.

MONA (CONT'D)

*"To my darling Mona, I think about you every moment of every day... I hope all your dreams come true this year... Happy Nowrooz... Love Always, Daddy."*

There are some sentences written in Farsi underneath. She holds the card closer to her face and tries her best to read.

MONA (CONT'D)

*Mona darling... I...*

Annoyed she can't get past the third word, she points to it.

MONA (CONT'D)

*What does it say here?*



SHAYDA

*Monayeh aziz, Man har rooz, va har  
lahzeh beh fekreh toh hastam.  
Omidvaram emsal beh hameyeh  
arezoozat beresi. Nowrooz mobarak.  
Dooset Daram. Baba.*

Mona nods, disappointed.

MONA

*But it's just the same.*

Shayda takes the card and sighs.

Mona unwraps the gift; a shiny new soccer ball.

She half-heartedly touches it. Shayda looks at her.

SHAYDA

*What was our deal?*

Mona slowly nods. She pushes the box aside and puts a spoonful of rice in her mouth. She eats, deep in thought.

91 INT. SUBURBAN TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN - DUSK 91  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda washes the dishes. A repetitive thumping sound comes through the wall. It sounds menacing at first.

Then, Shayda looks through the blinds; we see Mona alone in the back yard where the grass is slightly overgrown. She kicks the soccer ball against the brick wall, over and over.

92 INT. BENDY BUS - IN MOTION - DAY 92  
(MONA, SHAYDA)

Shayda tries to study her textbook, but there's a sense of unease in her. Mona is visibly anxious and fidgety, biting her nails. Shayda pulls Mona's hand away from her mouth and gives her a look. She closes her textbook and comforts her.

Mona is impatient; she leaves Shayda's embrace and skips over to the bus map a few meters away. She sits up on the seat to figure out where they are.

Shayda watches her carefully.

She looks around at the nearby passengers who are simply minding their own business; AN OLDER MAN reading a book, A YOUNG WOMAN sleeping on her BOYFRIEND's shoulder, TWO TEENAGE SCHOOL GIRLS chatting to a TEENAGE BOY.

CUT TO:

Shayda and Mona stand near the door. The bus slowly comes to a halt. There is anticipation in Shayda's face.

93 INT. TRANSPORT HUB - PASSAGE/CONCOURSE - DAY 93  
(JOYCE, SHAYDA, MONA)

They walk amidst a PEAK HOUR CROWD, towards the same meeting point they used to frequent. Then, Mona waves at someone.

Shayda looks across - we reveal Joyce who's waving and smiling at them. Mona runs, Shayda follows.

They finally unite and share a long embrace like they haven't caught up in a while. Joyce pulls away slightly.

JOYCE

Let me look at you.

Shayda smiles, a few tears in her eyes.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Gorgeous. As always.

SHAYDA

You too.

MONA

What about me?

Shayda and Joyce giggle as they walk toward the exit.

94 INT. TRANSPORT HUB - ESCALATORS - DAY 94  
(SHAYDA, JOYCE, MONA)

The three of them stand together, ascending the tall escalators, catching up.

Shayda's English has improved.

SHAYDA

I haven't decided.

JOYCE

Do you enjoy it?

SHAYDA

Nursing is good, it's practical,  
but Psychology is more my passion.

Joyce nods, she is proud of her.

JOYCE

Are you able to transfer to Uni?

SHAYDA

When I get my Permanent Residency.

JOYCE

I say follow your gut. And hospital work is tough. Julie always hated the night shifts.

SHAYDA

How is she?

JOYCE

Good, hands full with Benny. He's intense, but clever, really clever.

Shayda smiles.

Mona looks down at the busy interchange, buses coming and going, people scurrying about, the chaos of life seeming so miniature yet so grand before her eyes.

95

INT. HIGH SECURITY FACILITY - DAY  
(SHAYDA, MONA, JOYCE, GUARD)

95

Shayda, Mona and Joyce pass through a security checkpoint. It has a cold, procedural, somber atmosphere.

A GUARD steps Shayda aside and scans her body using a wand.

Mona keeps her eye on her, then looks at the OTHER STRANGE GUARDS and cameras, feeling a little intimidated by them.

CUT TO:

The three of them huddle in the elevator as the doors close.

CUT TO:

Joyce and Shayda sign in at the reception desk. They get provided with visitor passes.

Shayda, Mona and Joyce sit in the waiting area. Shayda squeezes Joyce's hand, Joyce looks at her reassuringly, Shayda quietly mouths the words, *thank you*.

ONE OTHER FAMILY is seated across the corridor; A DISABLED BOY in a wheelchair with his GUARDIANS. They too wait.

Mona grows increasingly anxious and fidgety, biting her nails. Shayda takes her hand into hers and softly sings a Persian song to calm her (Parandeh by Googoosh).

SHAYDA

*I'm... that bird... who is mute and tired... each one of my pure feathers... sits...*

MONA

*... sits on a stone...*

They gaze deeply into each other's eyes...

*Each feather that was your clothing, is now beautiful clothing for the earth... I'm that bird...*

A distant buzzing noise goes off. It releases a security door that is situated behind a glass partition.

Shayda and Mona sit up expectantly.

From the security door, emerges Hossein in a prison uniform accompanied by a GUARD. He walks up to a glass partition; his gaze is lifeless, of a broken man, full of remorse and shame.

Shayda can't bear to hold his gaze; the sadness is too much, but she holds it in with everything she's got. Her hand is shaking, Joyce takes it.

Another GUARD approaches the women, Joyce stands.

JOYCE

Hi.

The guard simply nods.

GUARD

Are you ready to come through?

Mona looks at her father behind the glass, he waves at her with a forced half smile, she turns away from him and bursts into tears, she can't stop crying.

Shayda pulls Mona into a prolonged embrace. Hossein turns away from the glass partition, trying to hide his sorrow.

Shayda and Joyce exchange a knowing glance.

Mona continues sobbing, while Shayda continues to hold it together, being an island of strength for her daughter.

SHAYDA

*Didn't Mummy tell you it would be hard?*

Mona eventually pulls herself together and lifts her reddened face up to her mother. Shayda wipes her cheeks.

SHAYDA (CONT'D)

*We can come back another day.*

Mona thinks on this for a long beat but decides to stay.

Shayda watches Mona move off with Joyce and the guard. The door buzzer sounds.

We slowly get closer to Shayda, sitting in the middle seat of three chairs on her own; her head is down, she is fragile for a moment. Sounds of the prison facility emanate around her.

Then, she takes a few deep breaths and slowly sits up. She looks down the barrel of the camera with a resolute gaze.

After a long beat, she stands and walks off screen.

We stay on the three empty chairs as we hear Shayda's footsteps grow distant. The door buzzer sounds once more.

Various moments of prison life passes the foreground of these static empty chairs. **End credits** roll on this image.