

HALA

Written by

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**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

HALA, 17, face blank and expressionless, lies beneath the water in a full bathtub.

She blinks. This is the most naked she will ever be.

ERAM (O.S.)

Hala. *Hala!*

After moment, Hala climbs out of the tub in SLOW-MO, as if waking from a languid dream.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

A ceiling fan rotates.

Wrapped in a towel, Hala opens the window, leans out and looks. The sun falls harshly onto her face.

She squints, closes her eyes, takes a deep breath.

**EXT. WINDOW / HALA'S POV - DAWN**

Families and young professionals have moved into this gentrifying, quiet corner of Echo Park.

Hala sees a family at their breakfast table from their kitchen window. They appear happy. She shuts the window.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

INSERT SHOTS:

1 - LITTLE PORCELAIN & GLASS ANIMALS sit on a DRESSER

2 - HAIRBRUSH thick with DARK, CURLY HAIR

3 - A JEWELRY HOLDER

4 - DOG-EARED COPY of THE BELL JAR by Sylvia Plath

Hala carefully applies makeup in front of her vanity mirror.

She flattens out stray hairs. She picks up her hijab from a clothing hook and folds it over her head, tucking in all the corners with practiced ease.

For a moment, she sits there, clearly transformed.

A KNOCK at the door.

ERAM (O.S.)  
Come downstairs for breakfast.

One last look at herself in the mirror before she's gone.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Hala kisses ERAM, 40s, on the forehead; she is the more conservative parent of the two. Hala sits down at the table across from her father, NADIR, 50s, dressed in work attire.

Nadir reads the newspaper and Eram places breakfast on the table for the three of them.

ERAM  
You're going to be late.

HALA  
I have a few minutes.

Hala places a piece of toast in her mouth.

NADIR  
Am I picking you up?

As she picks up her jacket from the back of her chair, mouth still full:

HALA  
No, taking the bus. Bye.

She heads out. Nadir and Eram exchange an exasperated look.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala looks out the bus window with her earbuds in.

SLOW-MO: kids on skateboards and bicycles racing down the block. In her POV: she sees JESSE, 17, punk-rock epitome of effortless cool, skateboarding next to the bus.

He turns to look at her and --

**EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

-- THE BELL RINGS.

She sprints inside, just in time before the doors close shut.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER**

Bored faces in a literature class: freckled, youthful faces propped up on elbows; chewing gum between teeth; a

INSERT SHOT of a page from LOLITA. The following text is being highlighted by a hand (with chipped blue fingernail polish) as it is read:

HALA (V.O.)

A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnapped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts -- that last mad immortal day behind the "Roches Roses."

Hala, the only headscarfed girl in a sea of teenagers, looks up from her book. A few students contain their laughter.

MR. LAWRENCE, 34, boyish, clearly an object of affection for some of the girls in class, closes his book.

MR. LAWRENCE

Okay, that's enough for today. You have a writing journal on what we just read. In your notebooks, handwritten please.

A collective groan. The bell rings once more.

As students shuffle their books into their backpacks and push in their chairs,

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

I want you to finish up and be ready to discuss next week!

Hala shoots a 'let's go' look at a girl in the back of the class - this is MELANIE - who raises her eyebrows suggestively, giving a glance at Mr. Lawrence and then, back at Hala.

**INT. CAFETERIA - DAY**

Girlish laughter bubbles up from the cafeteria table. Hala steals Melanie's french fries.

MELANIE  
He'd look better without the  
glasses.

HALA  
Who?

MELANIE (17), contrarian and comfortable in her own skin, retaliates by taking a french fry off Hala's own plate.

MELANIE  
Lawrence. Ah-doy.

HALA  
I really don't understand the  
fascination. He's so old.

MELANIE  
Not that old.

HALA  
He's more than twice our age.

MELANIE  
But he's so *bookish*. Like a cute  
professor-type. You know.

HALA  
You're such a creep.

MELANIE  
You're boring.

As the other GIRLS chatter at the table, Hala notices JESSE, a mop of messy hair atop his head, sit down at a table across from them with his friends.

MELANIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
So we good for Saturday?

Melanie's chatter disappears for a moment --

HALA

What?

MELANIE

Are you even listening to a thing  
I'm saying?

Her eyes follow Hala's. From her POV, Jesse is laughing uncontrollably at a stupid joke his friend's just told.

HALA

What?

MELANIE

Oh, *man*. Are you for real? I'm just  
a little surprised that *that* is  
your type.

Hala picks up her lunch tray and gets up.

#### **INT. LOCKER ROOMS - DAY**

Hala waits outside a stall, a T-shirt and sweatpants under her arm as partially-naked girls shamelessly change into their gym clothes.

Hala raps on the door of the stall.

GIRL IN STALL (O.S.)

Hang on!

Hala sighs.

#### **EXT. TRACK FIELD - DAY**

Dressed in thick sweatpants now, Hala lounges on the bleachers with the other girls.

She watches the boys run track around the field until they complete a lap and the P.E. INSTRUCTOR approaches them.

P.E. INSTRUCTOR

All right, ladies. Let's go. Come  
on. Get up.

Everyone warms up on the tracks and bursts forward as soon as their instructor blows his whistle.

Hala loses focus for a moment when her eyes connect with Jesse's as she turns a corner and she turns her head to COLLIDE into another GIRL.

GIRL  
Jesus Christ!

**INT. LOCKER ROOMS - DAY**

Hala collects herself in a stall, breathing hard, stripping out of her gym clothes with urgency.

**INT. HALLWAY - HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

Hala opens her locker and finds a BLACK CARD with gold lettering on the outside that reads: *YOU'RE INVITED*.

She hands it to Melanie, who studies it with curiosity.

MELANIE  
You're coming with me, like it or not, Hala.

HALA  
You know my parents.

MELANIE  
But guess who's probably going to be there.

Hala contains her embarrassment.

HALA  
Shut up.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala sits in the back of the bus with her earphones in.

She sees SKATEBOARDING TEENAGERS pulling tricks in a PARK from outside the window.

**INT. HOME - DAY**

Hala arrives home. The house is quiet. She heads upstairs.

**INT. HALLWAY - HOME - DAY**

She walks down the hall, peeks into her mom's room and sees:

Eram kneeling down in a white hijab for prayer. She rises, puts her hands above her abdomen and continues *namaz*.

**INT. ROOM - DAY**

In front of the mirror, Hala carefully takes off her hijab.

**INT. DINING ROOM - DAY**

Eram and Hala set the table. Nadir is busy on his phone.

ERAM

I thought you were going to settle.

He looks up from his phone in irritation.

NADIR

Nobody wants to ever go to trial.  
There's too much there for us to  
not to. We've got a strong chance  
of winning if we go forward. We're  
deposing in New York.

ERAM

Ramadan is coming up.

NADIR

I don't have a choice, dear.

Eram joins him at the table.

ERAM

You always have a choice.

NADIR

Let's drop this, please.

Hala watches this exchange go down, looks down at her plate.  
They murmur a prayer before eating.

ERAM

(to Hala)

How was school?

HALA

Good.

She pushes around the food on her plate. Eram exchanges an  
exasperated look with Nadir.

NADIR

What are you reading?

HALA

The Russians in world lit. Tolstoy,  
Dostoyevsky. That stuff.



She shrugs.

NADIR

That's some of the best literature  
ever written, you know that?

HALA

I know.

Hala smiles at her father. Eram looks on, envious of their  
easy relationship.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

Hala burns through Lolita in bed. At some point, she puts the  
book down, turns off the table lamp and lies down.

She closes her eyes and lowers her hand beneath the sheets.

A sharp intake of breath. Hers. After a moment, she lies back  
in bed, frustrated. No resolution.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Melanie and Hala sit side-by-side on the bus.

HALA

You're thinking about boys, aren't  
you? I can just tell.

MELANIE

What else am I gonna think about?  
How much homework we have? I've got  
you to do that for me.

Two rows in front of them: Jesse laughs with his friend,  
WHITNEY (17), a tall, blonde-haired, doe-eyed junior.

From Hala's POV: Whitney is the most beautiful person in  
their class; she and Jesse look like they belong together.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Everyone's busy with their literature tests. Mr. Lawrence  
reads at his desk.

Hala places her test face-down on his desk. He checks his egg-  
timer - there's a good twenty minutes left.

MR. LAWRENCE

You double-check it?

She nods.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)  
Triple-check?

She nods, a little annoyed.

HALA  
Yeah.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Okay, let me see.

He checks the class (they're all still working) and flips her paper over.

Mr. Lawrence covers the paper so she can't see him making marks. He takes a red pen and marks it up.

HALA  
Wait.

He continues making marks. When he's done, he places it face-down. Smiles at her.

MR. LAWRENCE  
You may take your paper.

Hala takes the test, folds it, returns to her desk. She unfolds the test underneath her desk.

It's 100%.

But he's made all these tiny scribbles all over her paper. She looks up at him; they share a conspiratorial smile.

**EXT. SCHOOL - DAY - LATER**

Melanie and Hala people-watch on the bench outside.

**EXT. STREETS - DAY - LATER**

They walk side-by-side on the streets. Echo Park, the grimmer part, the part that is real, diverse and gritty. Melanie's got a skateboard under her arm.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DAY - SAME**

TEENAGERS of all kinds skateboard across the park, pulling tricks on the mini-verts, tubes and railings.

Melanie stands on a skateboard and successfully moves forward a bit. Hala watches on.

MELANIE (O.S.)  
So, like, you gotta even out your  
weight, simple.

Hala balances on a skateboard and nearly falls over. She tries this a couple of times. They laugh.

Exhausted, they sit back down.

Jesse and his crew are at the other end of the park. He's out-of-focus at first, and then finally clear.

They make eye-contact, but it's quickly broken when a friend of his gives Jesse a playful shove.

#### **INT. HOME - HALLWAY - EVENING**

Hala stands outside her parents' bedroom.

Through the sliver in the door: Nadir packs, Eram touches his hand and he tensely moves it away from her.

Their conversation is too quiet, quick and in Farsi for us to comprehend it.

#### **INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING**

They've already finished dinner. Hala picks up her plate and takes it to the sink.

ERAM  
Hala, can you take care of this?  
I'm a little tired.

Eram puts her plate in the sink and exits the kitchen. As Hala washes the dishes,

NADIR  
Don't give your mom a hard time  
when I'm gone.

HALA  
I won't.

NADIR  
I mean it. She's already worked to  
the bone as it is. She doesn't need  
to worry about you on top of it.

There's a buzz from Nadir's phone on the table. He checks it.

NADIR (CONT'D)

I have to pick up some paperwork  
from one of the lawyers. You want  
to come with me?

Hala puts the last dish in the drying rack and dries her  
hands with a paper towel.

HALA

Okay.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Nadir turns a corner.

NADIR

When I get back, we should make a  
list of colleges for you.

HALA

That's four months from now.

NADIR

You should already be working on  
them, they'll sneak up on you. And  
I don't want you doing all of that  
work last-minute, stressing  
yourself out.

HALA

You mean you.

NADIR

What?

HALA

Stressing you out.

NADIR

It's your future.

HALA

Where are we?

They pull up to a nice condominium complex.

NADIR

Stay right here, okay?

Nadir leaves the car running. He steps outside.

From Hala's POV: Nadir walks up to BRIGITTE, 30s, a dark-haired lawyer at the same firm as Nadir.

She hands Nadir a file folder. They talk, but Hala's too far away to make out any of their conversation. Brigitte laughs; stolen moment between the two of them.

Hala glances up at the complex.

A little DARK-HAIRED GIRL presses her face against the glass from a window on the second floor. She and Hala meet eyes.

The Dark-Haired Girl gives her a little wave.

Nadir sits back in the car. He and Hala exchange a glance, but say nothing.

HALA (O.S.)  
How did you meet Mom?

#### **INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Hala lowers her window and rests her head on her arms as they pass under a tunnel. She closes her eyes.

NADIR (O.S.)  
My parents were looking for someone  
for me, and her parents were  
looking for someone for her, and we  
found each other that way.

HALA (O.S.)  
That doesn't sound romantic.

NADIR  
It doesn't always work the way it  
does in movies, Hala.

Off-screen, Nadir laughs.

#### **INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala pulls up the covers over herself when she hears a quick knock on the door.

HALA  
Yes?

Eram enters and sits down at the foot of her bed.

ERAM  
(quietly)  
Hala. Where were you after school today?

HALA  
We went to the skate park... it's not a big deal.

ERAM  
One of the neighbors saw you with a group of boys...

HALA  
(quickly)  
-- I wasn't with anyone other than Melanie, it was just the two of us.

Eram gives her a concerned look.

ERAM  
I just want you to be careful. And stay focused on your school work. This is an important year for you.

HALA  
I know.

Eram kisses her forehead, turns off the light and exits. The room is cast into darkness again.

After a moment of lying awake in bed, Hala reaches over for her copy of LOLITA.

#### **EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

All the lights in the household are off except the tiny window on the second floor, still aglow.

#### **INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

INSERT SHOT of the cover of Lolita. Hala rests her head on top of her book.

JESSE (O.S.)  
You're missing lunch.

Startled, Hala picks up her head.

HALA  
What do you want?

JESSE  
Take a walk with me.

HALA  
Take a walk by yourself.

JESSE  
(teasing)  
What's your problem?

HALA  
I'm not allowed.

JESSE  
To walk? That must make life pretty  
hard for you.

HALA  
(matter-of-factly)  
To walk with a boy alone.

JESSE  
Your dad's definitely watching you  
right now.

HALA  
(gesturing around her)  
He's like air, invisible but  
everywhere.

Jesse gets up out of his chair.

JESSE  
All right, then.

HALA  
(quickly)  
If Melanie comes, I'll go with you.

**EXT. BEHIND THE SCHOOL - DAY**

The trio walk the path behind the school. Hala in the middle.  
Clear from body language that Melanie's smitten with Jesse.

MELANIE  
Smith, Wesleyan, maybe NYU. Ugh. I  
probably won't get in.

HALA  
You'll get in.

MELANIE  
The power of positive thinking.

JESSE  
(to Hala)  
What do you want to do?

HALA  
I don't know. Maybe study law like  
my dad.

MELANIE  
Law. That sounds right for you. "I  
object!" You could be the next Elle  
Woods.

Hala laughs. The bell rings.

JESSE  
Oh, fuck.

Melanie sprints back.

MELANIE (O.S.)  
Race you!

Hala follows her when -

JESSE  
Hey, gimme your phone.

HALA  
I don't get yours?

JESSE  
No.

She hands it to him. He enters his number, hands it back.  
Hala gives him a curious look.

#### **INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Mr. Lawrence is going on about Lolita, but it doesn't matter  
because Hala's opened her phone underneath her desk.

Selects Jesse's name. Types: "This is Hala."

She looks up at him in class. He appears not to notice. She  
checks to see if the teacher's looking. He's not.

Her phone lights up. A reply: a SQUID EMOJI. *What the fuck?*  
would accurately describe her expression.

She looks over at him. Jesse stifles a laugh. Mr. Lawrence  
notices the interaction, but lets it pass.



**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala's in the back row, earphones in, reading the flurry of texts on her phone with newfound interest:

Jesse: "party this wknd?"

Hala: "maybe"

Jesse: "should be fun"

**INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala waits at the front door. A car honks impatiently outside. Nadir comes down the stairs, carry-on bags in both of his hands.

ERAM (O.S.)  
So you'll be back in a week.

NADIR (O.S.)  
Next Friday.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Eram drives. Nadir connects his iPod to the speakers. He scrolls through his music library and finally arrives at one.

His face lights up. He presses play.

NADIR  
Here we go.

Eram gives him a curious look. And then the song begins. It's *Soghati* by Hayedeh; their past catching up to them.

Eram laughs, embarrassed.

ERAM  
Oh my God.

NADIR  
This is your mother's song.

ERAM  
Makes me feel so old.

NADIR  
We are old.

ERAM  
I don't remember all the words.

NADIR  
Yeah, right. You know all of them.  
You're just too embarrassed to  
admit it.

Nadir begins to sing. The car is quiet as he does so - and everyone bursts into laughter.

Eram joins in, quieter, embarrassed to be singing. He belts it out; she sings softly.

In the backseat, Hala smiles to herself.

**EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NIGHT**

Nadir hugs Hala before he leaves.

NADIR  
No trouble for your mom.

HALA  
I know.

NADIR  
And your college applications.

HALA  
Have a safe trip.

He squeezes her tight. Then lets her go. Eram waits in the car and Hala joins her.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Quiet in the car as they drive home.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala places her earphones in and --

CUT TO:

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DAY**

Hala skateboards across a curve. She steadies herself on the board and moves forward. Takes her a bit of trying.

She's getting the hang of it.

**EXT. STREETS - ECHO PARK - DAY**

Hala skateboards down a hill. Eyes closed, her hands in the air, doesn't care who's watching.

**INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING**

Eram and Hala eat dinner. The empty chair where Nadir usually sits separates the two of them.

ERAM  
Don't stay up too late.

HALA  
I won't.

ERAM  
Not even to read.

As she heads out:

HALA  
I won't.

**INT. BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT**

Hala lies wide awake in bed. Texts light up her phone:

Jesse: are you going to make it tonight?

Hala: can't leave, mom home

Jesse: fuck that. come already.

Hala lies back in bed. After a moment, she sends a quick text to Melanie. She takes a deep breath. Her phone lights up. She reads the text.

**INT. HALLWAY - HOME - NIGHT**

She peeks into her mother's room. Eram is fast asleep.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala puts on her makeup, then her hijab. Carefully of course, all the corners tucked in.

**EXT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala exits the house and sprints toward a waiting car, opening the passenger door and -

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

-- and closes it shut before sinking down in the seat.

Melanie gives her a look.

MELANIE

You are too much.

HALA

Just drive.

**EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Melanie parks the car.

**INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Inside, TEENAGERS are packed in tight, mixing and mingling with Solo cups in hand.

From an OVERHEAD VIEW: Melanie pushes through the crowd with Hala in tow. Hala looks around at everyone in wonder. Teenagers laugh, talk and fool around.

As Hala stops to peer at two boys making out, Melanie moves on without her.

**INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Hala searches for Melanie in the crowd. She reaches for her phone: low battery.

Hala moves through the crowd to the kitchen. She examines a half-empty Solo cup and drinks it as teenagers drunkenly make out around her.

She squints. It doesn't taste good. But she takes a large sip. And then another. And another.

**INT. STAIRS - HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Hala drunkenly walks up the stairs. Everything feels too loud and too close.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR - HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Hala spots a dark-haired GIRL and places a hand on her arm.

HALA

Hey.

The GIRL swivels around, delivering a glare. Not Melanie.  
From behind Hala, there's a burst of giggling and snickering.

BOY

What do you look like without this?

A BOY reaches for her headscarf and tugs.

HALA

Stop.

She turns around to face him when the Girl behind her does  
the same thing, nearly pulling her headscarf off.

Hala hangs onto her headscarf, fearing that it will slip off  
with their jostling.

HALA (CONT'D)

I said stop it.

The Boy makes another grab for it, and she tries to twist  
away from the group.

JESSE

(O.S.)

Hey. Back off.

A bunch of 'ooohing' commences.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Come on.

Jesse takes her arm and leads her down the hall, away from  
the others. Hala appears nauseous.

**INT. BEDROOM - HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Jesse pushes the door open. There isn't anyone inside, so he  
helps Hala to the bathroom --

**INT. BATHROOM - HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

-- whereupon she immediately vomits into the toilet bowl.

HALA

I'm going to die.

JESSE  
No, you're not. Is this your first  
time or--?

She vomits some more.

**INT. BEDROOM - HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - NIGHT**

Hala finishes washing her face and leaves the bathroom light on as she sits down next to him on the bed.

She lies down on the bed and takes a very deep breath.

JESSE  
You going to make it?

HALA  
I think so.

He touches her hand. She doesn't stop him.

JESSE  
Just breathe.

HALA  
I should find Melanie.

She sits up and for a moment, their faces are very close together in the darkness, but they say nothing.

A sharp KNOCK at the door interrupts them.

**EXT. HOUSE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - NIGHT**

Hala, wearing her jacket now, steps outside with Jesse on her heels. Melanie glances at him, then at Hala.

MELANIE  
(to Hala)  
There the fuck you are. Do you not  
pick up your phone? I called you a  
million times.

She waves her phone at Hala.

HALA  
Oh, god.

Hala checks her phone. Thankfully no messages from Eram.

MELANIE

Now let's get you home before your  
mom finds out.

Hala glares at Melanie. Jesse appears impressed.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Hala touches her lips as Melanie drives.

**INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala opens the door and carefully shuts it close behind her.

**INT. HALLWAY - HOME - NIGHT**

She passes by her mother's bedroom. Eram's still asleep.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Before Hala even reaches her bed, she takes off her clothes and lies down, completely exhausted by the night's events.

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

Hala takes a hot shower, clearly sexually frustrated.

ERAM (O.S)

(muffled)

I'm waiting on you.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Eram smiles, unaware as a very bored Hala looks out the passenger window.

ERAM

I thought it would be good for us  
to get some time in together now  
that your father's gone.

**EXT. CAFE - DAY**

Eram and Hala eat lunch on a terrace.

Hala's texting under the table. A SQUID EMOJI. She replies with a QUESTION MARK.

ERAM

Give it a rest, Hala. She can survive an hour without you.

Hala puts her phone away.

HALA

How did you sleep?

ERAM

Not so well.

HALA

It's just a few more days.

ERAM

I wanted to talk to you about something.

Hala tenses. *Does she know?*

ERAM (CONT'D)

I asked your dad to talk to you about college applications. I need you to be serious. They are coming up... and I haven't seen you working on them.

HALA

I told him I'd take care of it.

ERAM

I'm talking about your future. What you want to do with your life. You should be thinking about that. You're not going to be this young forever, not having to decide what you want to do.

HALA

(annoyed)

What about you?

ERAM

What about me? I'm raising you. That is my job. What kind of question is that?

HALA

I didn't mean it like that.



ERAM

Then what did you mean? Maybe you can make your own breakfast and do your own laundry then. You're old enough, anyway. Nadir tells me I spoil you, still doing all of that when you're old enough to do it on your own.

The WAITER comes up to them.

WAITER

Excuse me.

And the conversation's already over.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Eram drives with her shoulders hunched and tense, as if she's ready to fight someone. Hala's in her own little world.

**INT. HOME - DAY - LATER**

They arrive home and Eram immediately heads up the stairs.

HALA

I'm sorry.

ERAM

You don't appreciate what you have. You're used to your father giving you everything, but someday he won't be there, and it will be just me. Just know that, Hala. That day will come. It's not always going to be all about you. You'll hurt people and face the consequences.

HALA

I didn't mean to say what I did.

ERAM (O.S.)

Do whatever you want.

Followed by the sound of a door slamming shut.

**EXT. STREETS - ECHO PARK - EVENING**

Hala heads to the skate park.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DAY**

She skates by herself down a dark tunnel.

The familiar sounds of skateboards hitting concrete and asphalt flood our senses.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - EVENING**

She's about to leave when she hears --

JESSE (O.S.)

Oi. Hey.

Jesse skates up to her.

HALA

Hey.

JESSE

Let's see what you got.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - MOMENTS LATER**

Pretty soon, they pull off tricks, showing off, one-upping the other. They goof off with their skateboards.

**INT. ALLEY - NIGHT**

Jesse and Hala walk together. They say nothing. He offers her a cigarette between his fingers.

JESSE

Smoke?

HALA

No, thank you.

He takes it back, digging his hands into his pockets, afraid to speak and ruin their moment.

They avoid each others' eyes as they pass by a pickup basketball court.

**EXT. PICKUP BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT**

A fence separates them from the court, where TEENAGERS play an intense game of pickup basketball.

She and Jesse press themselves against the chain-link fence and look out at the kids playing ball.

Without warning, he tosses his skateboard over the fence, climbs it and leaps over to the other side.

JESSE

Come on.

They look at each other through the fence. His fingers brush over hers. She breaks his gaze.

HALA

I have to go home.

She turns away.

#### **EXT. STREETS - LATER**

Hala's face catches the orange light of passing street lamps as she skateboards down the block with newfound energy.

#### **INT. HALLWAY - HOME - NIGHT**

As Hala settles down at the kitchen table, Eram heads over near the hallway. Over her shoulder,

ERAM

We should do something nice for your dad when he comes back.

HALA

Yeah, that'd be nice.

ERAM

Good.

Eram dials Nadir's number on her cellphone. It rings and rings and rings and finally:

NADIR

Hello?

ERAM

How are you--?

NADIR

I'm at a dinner right now, it's not a good time, can I call you in a few hours?

ERAM  
I'll be asleep by then.

In the B.G. of Nadir's call, she hears a woman's voice.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
Who're you with?

NADIR  
That's the waitress. Call you back.

He hangs up. Eram, confused, puts the phone back.

**INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

Eram violently scrapes her utensils against her plate as she eats. Hala watches her as she stabs her food. Her phone lights up under the table.

Hala reaches for it.

ERAM  
Put that away.

**INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Hala washes her face, dries it, looks at herself in the mirror, deep in thought.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala lays in bed. Her eyes grow heavy with sleep.

**EXT. ABANDONED PARKING LOT - NIGHT (DREAM)**

SLOWLY PULL OUT as Hala lies on the asphalt of a parking lot. She gets up and looks around. The lot is empty.

A dance track like "Say My Name" by Odesza fades in.

She dances, completely alone, in this parking lot. Twirling. Jumping. Floating. Free. No fucking boundaries.

Her movements are unashamed and fluid. As she wheels into a spin, she comes CRASHING DOWN.

CUT TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK**

MELANIE (O.S.)

Hala.

**INT. MELANIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala opens her eyes, realizes she's fallen asleep in Melanie's lap on her bed.

MELANIE

You're so quiet when you sleep.

Hala's phone is vibrating. She picks it up and reads a text from Jesse: BEAR EMOJI.

HALA

He's on his way.

MELANIE

How do you know that?

HALA

That's just what it means.

MELANIE

What about the squid?

HALA

I have no idea.

They laugh.

**EXT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - EVENING**

Hala and Melanie pile into the backseat of Jesse's car. His friend ANDREW, 17, the "fun one", is in the passenger seat.

**EXT. TUNNEL - NIGHT**

The car speeds down a tunnel as we hear teenagers singing to a tune from inside --

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

The song is something old school, a 90s beat that everybody loves to late. They are all terrible singers, but it's fun and nobody gives a fuck.

When the song fades away, Hala watches her friends in wonder and doesn't ever want to lose them.

This is the youngest and most free she has ever felt.

**EXT. ABANDONED BUILDINGS - NIGHT**

Jesse's parked his car. He and Andrew head around the car and pop open the trunk. Hala and Melanie exchange confused looks.

The girls stay in the car.

Jesse and Andrew, doing a terrible job of containing their excitement, carry spray cans on the inside of their sleeves over to the exposed brick wall.

MELANIE  
(under her breath)  
We're gonna get caught.

Hala opens the car door and joins them.

Jesse sprays a big 'J' and then a 'K' next to each other. He stands back to admire his handiwork.

HALA  
Just kidding.

JESSE  
Also J - Jesse, K - Kravitz.

HALA  
Really clever.

Melanie sneaks up behind them.

MELANIE  
Boo!

She picks up a spray can herself.

JESSE  
(to Hala)  
You wanna try?

Hala gives him an uncertain look.

MELANIE  
Oh COME ON! Be a little bad. For  
once in your freaking life. Augh!

With a sigh, Hala takes the spray can and right as she's about to aim it at the wall.

ANDREW

Fuck - think someone saw us.

Andrew sprints back to the car.

MELANIE

(whispers)

Fuck fuck fuck.

JESSE

Let's go.

The kids run back to the car and drive off.

### **INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala walks back in. The kitchen light is on. Eram is at the table, and as soon as Hala steps into the hallway, she turns to look at her.

They meet eyes down the hall from each other. Eram looks as if she's been crying.

ERAM

Where have you been?

HALA

With my friends.

Eram nods, as if she's just too tired to make a point.

ERAM

You should get to bed. It's late.

Hala lingers for a moment.

HALA

You should, too.

ERAM

I'll try.

### **INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala sits in front of her computer, surfing the web. Her phone screen lights up.

She opens her text. It's a SKATEBOARD emoji from Jesse. She smiles to herself.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DAY**

Hala circles the full vert without stopping, each turn slowly building momentum into the next.

Seemingly forever. Jesse skates past, flips and --

**EXT. PARK - DAY**

Hala sits down on the whirl-a-gig and Jesse joins her.

HALA  
Come on, push me.

He pushes. The whirl-a-gig goes.

HALA (CONT'D)  
Go! Faster!

He pushes harder.

HALA (CONT'D)  
Oh, God. Oh, God. Too fast.

Jesse laughs, gives her one last push.

HALA (CONT'D)  
Ahh. I can't. I can't. Stop.

She steps off the whirl-a-gig and appears a little sick.

JESSE  
You okay?

HALA  
I'm fine.

JESSE  
Are you going to throw up again?

She glares at him.

HALA  
No, I just have to breathe.

She leans on the fence. He hangs from the monkey bars.

HALA (CONT'D)  
You look like a monkey.

JESSE  
Me?



HALA

Yeah, you.

He jumps off the bars.

JESSE

Sorry for pushing you so fast.

Hala leans her head onto his shoulder. He pulls her close into a hug. They're quiet for a moment.

HALA

It's okay.

Jesse leans in to kiss her when --

They hear laughing from behind them. A bunch of TEENAGERS walk by, snickering and laughing.

JESSE

(to the Teenagers)

Get lost.

HALA

Forget them.

Jesse takes her hand.

#### **EXT. PARK - EVENING**

They walk, side-by-side, out of the park, toward the street.

JESSE

Coffee?

HALA

I should probably go home.

JESSE

You'll need it for all the studying you're going to be doing.

HALA

And if my mom calls?

JESSE

Then she calls, and you tell her you're with me.

She gives him an uncertain look. He grins.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You need to seriously lighten up.

**INT. DINER - NIGHT**

Hala and Jesse sit down at a booth in the back.

From her POV, she sees the back of the diner. From Jesse's POV, he can see everyone as they enter.

Their fingers touch across the table. A WAITER comes by, disrupting their moment.

WAITER

What can I get you?

JESSE

Coffee. Just two.

When the Waiter returns, he puts the coffee down in a huff.

He gives them a dirty look and heads back.

JESSE (CONT'D)

What's with that guy? Didn't even give us napkins.

HALA

He's probably had a shitty day.

The door opens and a couple walks in. Hala looks back, pays no mind to them, until she double-takes --

It's NADIR and BRIGITTE; they sit down at a table in the corner of the diner, near the entrance.

JESSE (O.S.)

Hey.

She immediately turns back. Jesse studies her face.

JESSE (CONT'D)

What's up?

He looks in the direction of the couple.

HALA

Don't look at them.

JESSE

Why? Who is that?

HALA

Just don't do it.

JESSE

-- You know that guy?

HALA

He's not supposed to be back until tomorrow. If he sees us...

JESSE

Who?

HALA

My dad.

There's a beat.

JESSE

He doesn't even know who I am.

HALA

I think we should go. I don't want him to see us.

JESSE

That's the only exit.

Jesse looks around, doesn't see another way out.

HALA

What's he doing?

JESSE

They're just ordering drinks.

HALA

Let's go.

JESSE

If you get up now, he's going to see you. Just wait until he leaves.

Hala's phone VIBRATES.

HALA

Fuck.

The phone screen reads: MOM.

JESSE

Aren't you going to pick that up?

HALA

Are they looking over here?

JESSE

They're still talking.

HALA

Let's ask the waiter for the check.

Jesse squints.

HALA (CONT'D)

Jesse?

He says nothing.

HALA (CONT'D)

What's happening?

He looks back at her.

JESSE

He kissed that woman.

There's a pregnant pause.

HALA

You're lying.

JESSE

Why would I lie about that?

HALA

This isn't funny.

JESSE

Look for yourself.

She doesn't want to look. But she quickly turns -

-- and sees Nadir with his hand on Brigitte's knee. Their heads are unusually close together.

Hala sits back in the booth.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm sorry.

Her phone VIBRATES again. She turns it off. Stares at it.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Hala?

She looks like she's about to cry.

HALA

Are they leaving yet?

Jesse watches them.

JESSE  
They're paying now.

A moment later:

JESSE (CONT'D)  
They just left.

We HEAR the diner's door close off-screen. Hala is glued to her seat, unable to move.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
Hala.

HALA  
What?

Jesse pulls a five-dollar bill from his pocket and leaves it on the table. She snaps out of her daze.

HALA (CONT'D)  
You can't drive me home.

JESSE  
Then call Melanie.

But she's glued to her chair.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
Hala.

HALA  
What?

JESSE  
(firmly)  
Let's go.

**EXT. DINER - NIGHT**

It's raining. Hala and Jesse stand outside, without talking to each other.

Melanie's car pulls up. Hala gets in without so much as a look behind her.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Melanie drives. Hala appears pale.

MELANIE  
You don't look so good.

HALA  
Can you just take me home?

MELANIE  
I am. Geez. Did something happen?

HALA  
No.

MELANIE  
Your mom was calling me, I told her  
you were in the bathroom. I felt  
horrible lying to her. You put me  
in a shitty position.

HALA  
You didn't have to do that.

MELANIE  
What else was I gonna say? I'm  
sorry, but Hala's out with some boy  
even though I know that's totally  
against your religion.

Hala buries herself into the corner of the passenger seat.

**EXT. HOME - NIGHT**

Melanie's car pulls up and Hala opens the passenger door  
without waiting for the car to come to a full stop.

MELANIE  
(shouts after her)  
You're welcome!

**INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala comes in, but as soon as she opens the door, Eram's  
already standing there.

ERAM  
You should have told me you went to  
Melanie's.

She's startled by Eram's presence.

HALA  
Is Dad home?

ERAM  
No, his flight gets back tomorrow.  
I thought he told you.

Hala blinks, about to cry.

ERAM (CONT'D)

What's up with you? You're all wet!

Hala suddenly notices her clothes are soaked and a puddle of water has formed around her on the floor.

**INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

Hala and Eram drink chai together.

ERAM

I have a hard time sleeping here  
without your dad.

Hala nods, fucking upset but can't do anything about it.

ERAM (CONT'D)

That's what it's like, Hala.  
When you're in love.

Hala puts her mug in the sink and leaves.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala lies in bed, puts her head in her hands, tries to breathe through the anxiety.

She pushes a pillow to her face, sobbing now, not being able to hold it in anymore.

She breathes. And breathes.

CUT TO BLACK.

And then:

ERAM (O.S.)

(softly)

Hala.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAWN**

The room's still mostly dark. Eram opens the blinds. It's still pitch-black outside. Before dawn.

ERAM

Did you forget what today is?

She did.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
It's the first day of fast. I made  
breakfast, come.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAWN**

She and Eram sit together at the table.

ERAM  
(in Arabic)  
I intend to fast.

Hala stirs her chai with her spoon.

HALA  
(mumbles, in Arabic)  
I intend to fast.

Her eyes are puffed up. Hala and Eram reach for a date at the  
same time, chewing in silence.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala sits next to Melanie on the bus. This sounds faraway  
even though she's right next to her:

MELANIE  
You finish the book?

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

The class is deep in conversation about Lolita.

Mr. Lawrence guides the discussion, but it all sounds as if  
it's happening underwater, like it doesn't really matter.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Hala.

She looks up from her book.

HALA  
Yes?

MR. LAWRENCE  
What do you think?

She seems lost. He sighs.



MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)  
About the subjective narrative in  
the book? Do you think Humbert  
Humbert is a reliable narrator? Can  
we trust him?

HALA  
No.

There's a beat.

HALA (CONT'D)  
We can't trust him.

Mr. Lawrence nods.

MR. LAWRENCE  
And why is that?

HALA  
We never witness the story from  
Lolita's perspective. He's written  
the story, so of course he's  
telling it in such a way that makes  
him seem like a hero.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Very good. When Humbert Humbert is  
describing Lolita, he describes her  
as tempting him, as luring him to  
her. What do you guys think about  
that?

GIRL  
-- she's too young to have done  
that. I mean, what is she, like  
twelve in the book?

BOY  
You don't know if he's telling the  
truth but we never get to see her  
side, so we don't know for sure --

GIRL  
But it's unlikely, that's all. We  
don't know what she feels like,  
only how he does. The story's all  
about him. He's not a hero. He's a  
douchebag.

The class laughs.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Settle down, everyone...

The conversation submerges once more.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER**

Students file out as class is finally over. Mr. Lawrence taps Hala's desk with a finger.

She's sitting there, staring at her blue eraser with unsettling intensity.

MR. LAWRENCE

What's going on, space-case?

HALA

It's the first day of fast.  
Ramadan. You know. I'm just a  
little out of it.

MR. LAWRENCE

Well. You can always hide out here  
if you want to avoid the cafeteria.

HALA

That's okay. I'll be fine.

But she won't be.

**INT. CAFETERIA - DAY**

Everyone eats lunch around her.

Hala looks around, lost in a crowd of teenagers who know who they are (or at least do a good job of pretending).

Everything in SLOW-MOTION, because nothing is being processed like it usually is.

Jesse looks back at her from his table, attempting to engage, but she doesn't return the look. Hala gets up from the table and quickly leaves the cafeteria.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DAY**

She skateboards down the full vert, this time into the darkness, instead of toward the light.

We lose track of her somewhere in the black.

CUT TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK**

Flip. Flip. Smack. Flip. Smack. SMACK.

The skateboard aggressively slaps the asphalt.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - DUSK**

Hala skateboards home as the light outside is fading fast.

**INT. DINING ROOM - DAY**

Hala sits down at one end of the table, Eram on the other.  
Nadir sits down next to his wife.

Hala looks at him.

ALL TOGETHER  
(quietly, in Arabic)  
Thirst is gone, the veins are  
moistened and the reward is certain  
if Allah wills.

They eat. But she watches him the whole time.

And this conversation largely takes place off-screen as we  
PUSH IN on Hala's face.

ERAM  
How was it?

NADIR  
I slept well on the plane.

ERAM  
And the depositions? They were  
okay?

NADIR  
We had a little trouble with one of  
them, but it turned around.

ERAM  
That's good.

NADIR  
It's good to be here with you.

ERAM  
Flatterer.

There's laughter, but Hala's face is devoid of emotion.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

INSERT COMPUTER SCREEN

A search engine. The words being typed: "Herald, Scotsman and Wright." The page loads. Then, a cursor clicks on that link.

The pointer clicks on the 'Lawyers' page. The page scrolls down a list of lawyers, their names and accompanying photos.

The scrolling stops at BRIGITTE WHITE. A smiling photo, followed by an accomplished biography.

BACK TO ROOM

The door opens and Hala quickly closes the browser window.

Eram peeks her head in.

ERAM

Goodnight.

HALA

Night.

Eram leaves right as a text pops up on Hala's phone:

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

Jesse: u okay?

The cursor blinks. The words form: 'no' but are quickly erased. The screen goes black.

BACK TO ROOM

Hala turns away from her phone and lies down.

Another text message lights up her screen:  
"look outside"

Hala slowly rises from her bed, opens her window and sees Jesse's car parked in the alley.

**EXT. HOME - NIGHT**

He waves at her. Inside, she can hear her phone vibrate from the receipt of a new text. She picks up her phone.

The message reads: "come with me"

Hala looks out at the waiting car.

**INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala quietly makes her way down the stairs and opens the front door.

**EXT. HOME - NIGHT**

Jesse's car pulls up to the front of her house and Hala piles into the passenger seat.

Just as the car drives away, however, we glimpse a light turn on in a window on the second story of the house.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Hala adjusts her giant sweatshirt.

HALA  
Where are we going?

JESSE  
You'll see.

**EXT. SKATE PARK - NIGHT**

The car pulls up to the skate park.

Jesse puts on the radio. He and Hala listen to it for a while. He glances at her, she looks away; she glances at him, he looks away; neither saying a word.

He reaches over to place his hand over hers. *She glances over at him, as if to ask is this real?*

JESSE  
Come on.

He exits the car from his side. After a moment, Hala follows him, too.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

They sit on the hood of the car. The stars are bright. The music rises in volume until it's no longer diegetic.

She raises her arms up, real slow, as if to touch the sky - the same way she had when she was skateboarding - and sways.

Hala's lost in her own moment. Forgotten he's there. There is only this song, this moment, before she loses it entirely.

She spins, and then, right as she's holding herself, as if she might fall apart at the seams --

-- he reaches over to pull her into a kiss.

The kind of kiss that exists only in dreams - explosive, fleeting, a flash of color.

And then it's gone.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Jesse places his hand on top of Hala's in the car.

**INT. HOME - NIGHT**

Hala opens the door. The inside of the house is pitch-black.

She heads up the stairs --

**INT. STAIRWELL - HOME - NIGHT**

-- but there's a FIGURE blocking the light at the top of the stairs. A threatening presence.

She ascends the staircase, stair by stair, fists clenched at her sides.

In the darkness, she can't make out the expression on Nadir's face. Hala attempts to move past him, but he blocks her path.

He twists her arm back. In a harsh but low whisper, so as to not wake Eram:

NADIR  
Where were you?

She looks him in the eye.

NADIR (CONT'D)  
Who was he?

HALA  
No one.

Nadir gapes at her. Hala yanks her arm away from him and speeds toward her room.

Hala's bedroom door shuts close behind her. She locks it from the inside.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala makes sure the door is locked. When she turns around, her hands are shaking.

She can hear a slow shuffle toward the door, and, after a long while, the shadow below the door disappears.

But the glow underneath her door remains. After a long moment, it disappears.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala draws in her notebook while Mr. Lawrence lectures.

He notices the look Jesse shoots in Hala's direction and the small smirk with which she replies.

**EXT. SCHOOL - DAY**

Hala sits on the bench, alone this time. Mr. Lawrence joins.

MR. LAWRENCE

If you ever feel like talking, my  
class is never too far away.

Hala nods, as if to say, please get lost.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

You have a good one.

He gets up and leaves right as Jesse approaches her bench from far away.

In the B.G., Nadir's car pulls right up to the school.

**INT. CAR - DAY**

From his standpoint inside his car, Nadir sees Hala join Jesse and leave the school-grounds with him.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Nadir slowly follows behind Jesse and Hala.

**EXT. PARK - DAY**

Hala and Jesse walk side-by-side as they head deeper and deeper into the forest.

JESSE  
She deserves to know, doesn't she?

HALA  
It would ruin everything.

JESSE  
You'd want to know, if it was you,  
wouldn't you? She's your mom. She  
deserves to know.

It's quiet for a while, as they walk further, until Jesse tries to put his arm around her and she cringes at his touch.

They walk separately; a safe distance between them.

**EXT. WOODS - DUSK**

They arrive at a clearing in a more secluded part of the woods. They have reconciled since we last saw them.

JESSE  
I wish I could see what you looked  
like without it.

He's appears ashamed to have said it.

HALA  
You want me to take it off?

JESSE  
No, no. I don't. Not unless you  
want to.

HALA  
Okay.

He sits down. She gets up, and stands right in front of him.

HALA (CONT'D)  
I want you to see me.

Hala slowly pulls on a corner of her headscarf until the rest of it slips off her head. Truly naked now.

For a moment, Jesse says nothing.

He gets up, pulls her toward him into a kiss. But this kiss is different than last, less innocent - growing in intensity.

He touches her breasts through her sweater. She embraces him.



JESSE  
(breathless)  
I want to take your clothes off.

He's already easing her onto her back, onto the ground.

Light peeks in from the treetops.

She hears a belt unbuckle and a zipper unzip. He pulls her jeans and underwear down. She cannot make out the sky from where she is lying down.

Jesse leans forward.

CUT TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK**

A sharp intake of breath. Hers.

JESSE (O.S.)  
Are you okay?

**EXT. WOODS - NIGHT**

It's still dark. Without missing a beat:

HALA  
(strained)  
Yeah.

Her face is tight, belying her words.

She counts the number of leaves on the branch of a nearby tree. Jesse pushes forward. She loses track and then -

-- his breathing quickens, faster and faster --

HALA (CONT'D)  
Pull out.

He makes a sound.

HALA (CONT'D)  
(scared)  
I said pull out.

JESSE  
Oh, fuck.

He does, spills onto the ground.

Hala pulls her jeans up. Jesse pulls up his own pants and offers his hand, which she clearly ignores.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, happened really fast,  
that usually never...

HALA  
I'm fine.

Hala hears strange moans from nearby. She gets up, and peeks over the small hill.

Below them, a PROSTITUTE performs oral sex on a MAN. The Man makes eye contact with her.

Jesse pulls her away from the sight.

#### **INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Hala looks out the passenger window. Outside, the trees are dappled with light. She's quiet.

JESSE  
Maybe you can tell me what I can do  
better next time --

HALA  
(cutting him off)  
I'm really tired.

#### **INT. MELANIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala and Melanie lie sandwiched in her bed together.

MELANIE  
The first time is always the worst.

HALA  
I thought it would be different.  
That I would feel something.

MELANIE  
That's only in the stories.

HALA  
This isn't a story?

MELANIE  
No.

A beat.

HALA  
What is it then?

MELANIE  
It's just life.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Eram and Nadir have already broken their fast when the front door opens and Hala enters the hallway.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Eram gets up out of her chair, but doesn't approach her.

ERAM  
You missed iftar. You know how awful that is, Hala. That is not acceptable in this home.

HALA  
I'm sorry.

ERAM  
No, you're not. You're not sorry that you missed iftar. You're sorry that you got caught.

HALA  
What do you want me to say?

ERAM  
I don't understand what's going on with you. Always going out with your friends. As if you don't like it here.

Eram's out-of-focus for Hala now. Instead, it's Nadir, who's glowering from behind her, who's in-focus.

He appears ready to burst.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
I'm heading to bed.

HALA  
Mom.

Hala turns to join her when --

NADIR  
I need to talk to you.

Hala stays standing.

NADIR (CONT'D)  
Sit down.

She does so.

NADIR (CONT'D)  
I went to pick you up today. I want  
to know where you went.

**EXT. PARK - DAY - EARLIER**

Nadir parks outside. From his POV: Jesse and Hala walk further into the forest.

HALA (O.S.)  
What do you mean?

**EXT. WOODS - DAY - EARLIER**

He follows them into the woods. STAY on his face, tightening with disgust, as we hear the strained sounds of sex.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Nadir never breaks eye-contact with Hala.

NADIR  
I don't want you to lie to me. I  
followed you and that boy to the  
park. You went into those woods and  
you didn't come out until an hour  
later. I would have followed you  
inside but I didn't, because I  
didn't know what you were doing  
with him and I didn't want to know  
what happened.

Contrary to what he's just said, Nadir saw everything. But he's testing his daughter's honesty.

She stares at the floor for a moment. One of the kitchen tiles is a peculiar shade of gray.

NADIR (CONT'D)  
I want you to tell me what you did.  
I don't want you to lie to me. I  
will bring out the Koran and make  
you swear on it if I have to.

HALA  
He's a classmate of mine.

NADIR  
What is his name?

HALA  
(quiet)  
Jesse.

NADIR  
Speak louder and look at me when  
you're talking to me.

HALA  
He's a classmate.

NADIR  
And what were you doing with him  
after school?

HALA  
We were talking.

NADIR  
Did he touch you? Hala?

HALA  
What?

NADIR  
Did he touch you? Answer me when I  
am talking to you.

HALA  
No.

NADIR  
Don't lie to me.

HALA  
I didn't do anything wrong.

NADIR  
(increasing urgency)  
Are you lying to me right now?  
Don't make me bring out the Koran.  
I should tell your mother. During  
Ramadan, for God's sake, Hala, what  
were you thinking? What were you  
doing? What the fuck were you  
thinking?

HALA

I didn't do anything wrong.

For a moment, all is quiet.

Nadir picks up the glass and tosses it, smashing into pieces against the wall, missing her head by inches.

Nadir smacks her across the face. She falls to the floor, protecting her head with her arms.

NADIR

Do you want me to bring out the  
Koran right now? Will you lie on  
the Koran?

Hala chokes on her own spit, she's sobbing now.

HALA

I DID NOTHING WRONG.

Nadir gets right up into her space and shakes her fiercely.

NADIR

You are not my daughter. My  
daughter could not do this. She  
would not do this. How could you do  
such a thing.

HALA

(quietly)

What were you doing with Brigitte?

Nadir is startled. Eram hurtles in through the door.

ERAM

Nadir, what is going on in here?

She leans down to help Hala and examines her face.

ERAM (CONT'D)

You hit her? Why in Allah's name  
did you raise your hand?

NADIR

(to Hala)

Tell your mother where you were  
after school today.

ERAM

(to Nadir)

Lower your voice in this house!

NADIR  
Ask her where she's been.

HALA  
(spits back at him)  
I'll tell her what I've done when  
you tell her what you did. Who you  
were with at the diner.

Eram looks between the two of them.

ERAM  
What's going on? What is she  
talking about? Nadir? Hala? What do  
you mean --

HALA  
He was at the diner --

Nadir shoves Eram aside and twists Hala's arm and yanks her  
to the floor, raising his hand to smack her --

NADIR  
You ungrateful little bitch.

He smacks her HARD. She gives out a yelp. Eram tries to get  
between them --

ERAM  
NADIR!

Eram shoves him off.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
What is wrong with you? STOP! In  
God's name. Stop hitting her.

HALA  
(crying)  
Mom.

Her cheeks are reddened and eyes puffy.

NADIR  
Ask her where she's been!

Hala's lip is bleeding. Eram helps her up.

ERAM  
(to Nadir, venomously)  
You're an animal.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala's trying to hold it all together. But it's no use. She strips off her clothes. Holds her chest, as if she's about to fall apart at the seams.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

She fills the tub with water. When it's full, she gets in and submerges herself under the water.

Holds her breath with her eyes open.

And SCREAMS.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER**

There's the sound of intense arguing outside, the noise traveling from her parents' bedroom to her own.

After a while, the arguing dies down; the voices get quieter. Hala lies on her side, completely spent.

Eram peers into Hala's room, not quite able to comfort her daughter or let her marriage slip away.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala and Melanie sit in the back of the bus together. Their eyes are lidded with sleep.

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

Hala and Jesse walk to the fences. No conversation, just uncomfortable body language.

JESSE

This is about your dad, isn't it?

HALA

No, it's not.

JESSE

Everything was fine until yesterday. And now you've changed your mind, I don't know where it's coming from.

HALA

I can't be with you.



He looks away, clearly hurt by this. Hala turns away when he takes her arm.

JESSE  
Tell me why.

HALA  
It doesn't matter why.

JESSE  
You don't get to just walk away  
without telling me, because I have  
to understand. I want to  
understand.

HALA  
There's nothing to understand.

He appears stunned at this.

HALA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.

As she walks away, Jesse beats the fence with his fists.

#### **INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala draws in her notebook as Mr. Lawrence lectures up front. When she looks up - the class is empty.

There's a Post-it note on her desk. She turns it over. It reads: "Mr. Lawrence" followed by a phone number.

#### **INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

Hala sits across the table from her soft-spoken guidance counselor, MRS. YOO, 40s.

MS. YOO  
You were supposed to have turned in  
your college list last week.

HALA  
I need a little more time.

Ms. Yoo studies her face. The bruised lip.

MS. YOO  
That wasn't at school, was it?

Hala avoids her gaze, shrugs it off.

HALA  
I was skateboarding.

Ms. Yoo senses that something is off, but unable to say anything about it.

MS. YOO  
Come talk to me if you need anything, okay?

HALA  
Okay.

But Hala's already on her way out.

**EXT. PARK - DAY**

Hala lies alone on the whirl-a-gig, her face appearing and disappearing with each turn; as we PUSH IN on her, she gets up and leaves frame.

**EXT. CONDOMINIUMS - DAY**

A beautiful condominium complex for young professionals.

Hala slips inside the gates right after he swipes his card to enter the complex.

**INT. HALL - CONDOMINIUM - DAY**

Hala lingers in the hallway.

She approaches an apartment at the end of the hall. She reaches for the doorknob but draws her hand back.

Hala's finger lingers on the doorbell.

There's only quiet behind the door. Then shuffling. Sounds like small feet.

The door opens. It's the DARK-HAIRED GIRL, 3, from before.

DARK-HAIRED GIRL  
Hello.

Hala says nothing.

DARK-HAIRED GIRL (CONT'D)  
Who are you?

HALA  
Who are you?

BRIGITTE (O.S.)  
Lo, what're you doing? You're not  
just supposed to open the door  
without mommy.

Brigitte appears at the door. She appears more ordinary than she did at the diner - no-makeup, just an ordinary mom.

BRIGITTE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry about that - can I help  
you?

Hala looks at Lo.

LOLO  
I know!

BRIGITTE  
Shush, Lo.

LOLO  
With Dada.

BRIGITTE  
(exasperated)  
Get back to your room, Lo.

Lolo turns away, giving Hala a long look before disappearing back inside the apartment.

When Brigitte looks back up, Hala's already broken into a full-on sprint down the hall.

BRIGITTE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Excuse me! Are you okay? Do you  
need any help? Hello?

Hala's heart pounds in her ears.

#### **EXT. STREETS - EVENING**

Hala crosses the street. She only hears the sound of brakes being SLAMMED and the SCREECH of tires.

Followed by the HONK HONK HONK of a car behind her. Hala swivels her head -

A DRIVER leans out of his car.

DRIVER  
The fuck are you doing?! Move!

**INT. BUS - MOVING - EVENING**

Hala sits in the back row of the bus, hand shaking as she dials a number on her phone, Post-it-note in her other hand.

**EXT. LAWRENCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Fireflies wind their way in the air on the lit porch. Mr. Lawrence opens the door and sees Hala sitting on the stoop.

She turns to look at him with tear-stained cheeks.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - LAWRENCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mr. Lawrence hands her a cup of tea and sits across from her.

HALA  
Thank you.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Your parents are probably worried about you. You should call them. Let them know where you are.

HALA  
I wanted to talk about the future. I thought I'd study law like my father. But now I'm not so sure. I don't know if I want to be anything like him. I just never really thought I had any options.

MR. LAWRENCE  
I see.

She drinks her tea.

HALA  
The problem is I don't know what I care about. I don't know where I'm going to be in five years. I don't know where I'll be in a year. Maybe I'll be in college. But I don't know what kind of person I want to be. Or who I should be.

MR. LAWRENCE

You don't have to figure everything out in a day.

HALA

What if I never figure it out?

He laughs, nervous at her intensity.

MR. LAWRENCE

You'll be fine.

HALA

Can I stay here?

Mr. Lawrence is startled by the question.

HALA (CONT'D)

With you? For the night? I'd just prefer not to go home.

MR. LAWRENCE

That wouldn't be appropriate.

HALA

I don't have anywhere to go. I don't want to go home. I could call Melanie, but she'd probably call my parents, too.

MR. LAWRENCE

Are you finished?

He takes her teacup and heads back to the kitchen.

**INT. KITCHEN - MR. LAWRENCE'S HOME - NIGHT**

He puts dishes away. Hala enters, lingers in the hallway.

HALA

It's not safe for me at home.

MR. LAWRENCE

Have you talked to Ms. Yoo about this?

HALA

She can't help me.

MR. LAWRENCE

Hala.

HALA  
I'm not asking for anything other  
than a place to sleep tonight.  
Nobody has to know you helped me. I  
just can't go home tonight.

Their eyes meet meaningfully.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Mr. Lawrence sets a comforter on top of the mattress.

MR. LAWRENCE  
There's towels in the closet and an  
extra toothbrush in the bathroom.

He turns the light on and off in the bathroom.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)  
Light switch. You're all set.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)**

Hala lies awake. She tosses off her covers.

**INT. MR. LAWRENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Mr. Lawrence is asleep. Hala takes off her clothes and slips  
under the covers next to him.

He immediately wakes up and gets out of bed. He turns on the  
table lamp with a shaking hand.

In the dim light, he sees that she's half-naked.

MR. LAWRENCE  
What are you doing?

HALA  
I couldn't sleep.

MR. LAWRENCE  
This is wrong.

HALA  
I don't want to sleep alone.

MR. LAWRENCE  
Please go.

She stands there for a moment and then sits down on the bed.

Mr. Lawrence turns away from her, paralyzed. Unable to move.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)  
You should go home.

HALA  
My father hit me once.

It's quiet for a long while.

MR. LAWRENCE  
I'm sorry to hear that.

She slips in bed next to him, reaches over, takes his face and turns it to face her.

Hala touches his face with her hand, first his forehead, then nose, then mouth, and finally, down to his chin.

He sees her bruised lip.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)  
What happened to your mouth?

Hala kisses him. He goes stiff. She reaches underneath the sheets and, with her free hand, turns off the light.

CUT TO BLACK.

# **OVER BLACK**

A sharp intake of breath. His.

# **EXT. ECHO PARK - MORNING**

The morning after. Hala skateboards down the block. The sun is coming up behind her, like a halo behind her head.

# **INT. HOME - DAY**

She sneaks inside.

# **INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

She turns on the shower, to a too-hot setting. Hala reaches between her legs. The water running down her legs turns a slight pink.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

Hala emerges, fully dressed, and runs right into her mother, who's been waiting outside the whole time; her face furrowed in concern.

ERAM

Where have you been?

HALA

I was at Melanie's.

She moves past Eram to pick up her backpack.

ERAM

I called her and she said you weren't with her.

HALA

I was with somebody else. Who cares who I was with.

Eram stops her and takes her shoulders.

ERAM

I don't know who you're with, where you are, I don't know what's going on with you. I know things haven't been easy at home --

HALA

(forcefully)

I'm going to be late for school.

ERAM

I need you to talk to me, Hala.

Hala slings her backpack over her shoulders and leaves Eram alone, who sits down on the bed, completely overwhelmed.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala sits down at her desk. Melanie leans over.

MELANIE

(whispers)

What's going on?

Mr. Lawrence comes in, gives Hala a glance.

MR. LAWRENCE

(to Melanie)

Please take your seat.



Melanie sinks back into her seat, giving a concerned glance in Hala's direction. He takes roll call.

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

Hala scribbles in her notebook. It's a letter to Mr. Lawrence. She tears off the sheet and folds it.

MELANIE

What did you want me to say? She was grilling me -

HALA

You could have said I fell asleep at your place.

MELANIE

I legit didn't know whether you were even alive. Sorry for actually trying to be a good friend and worrying about you.

HALA

You really messed shit up for me.

MELANIE

I just tried to do the right thing.

Melanie gets up and leaves. Hala picks up her bag and heads back toward school when --

ANDREW (O.S.)

What'd you do to Jesse?

She turns to face him.

HALA

What do you mean?

Hala's eyes follow as Jesse walks past them, without a look in their direction.

ANDREW

He's upset.

HALA

I didn't do anything.

She continues walking.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Hala sees Mr. Lawrence talking to Ms. Yoo. He catches Hala's eye but continues talking to her.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

The bell rings. STUDENTS head out of class.

Hala walks over to Mr. Lawrence' desk and drops the note in his letter tray. Jesse sees this.

Mr. Lawrence glances up, takes the note and

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

Hala follows Mr. Lawrence to his car.

HALA

Hey.

He turns on her.

MR. LAWRENCE

This can't continue. What happened last night was very irresponsible.

He takes the note out of his pocket and returns it to her.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

And don't write me anymore letters. If someone read those...

HALA

Do you regret it?

The question startles him. Mr. Lawrence moves in closer, so as not to be overheard.

MR. LAWRENCE

You are my student and I am your teacher. What happened should not have happened. And it would be best if you didn't write these, and if we never discussed this again.

Hala appears as if she's been hit by a brick. He storms off.

Melanie walks up, taking Hala's shoulder.

MELANIE

Hala.

Melanie has a bewildered expression on her face.

MELANIE (CONT'D)  
What just happened? Are you okay?

HALA  
Fuck off, Mel.

Hala walks off, wobbly, off-kilter.

MELANIE  
What's going on? Where were you  
last night? Jesus Christ! If  
someone would fucking tell me!

#### INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Hala walks into her room, collapses onto her bed in tears.  
She tries to regulate her breathing. In, out, in.

#### INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

It's just Nadir and Eram. Hala's seat is empty.

NADIR  
Everyone pulls overtime. It's all  
about who has the most billable  
hours, who the clients trust the  
most. I have to pull my weight.

ERAM  
You're not pulling your weight  
here. In this home. In raising our  
daughter. *In this marriage.*

NADIR  
There is nothing to say to you.  
You're being unreasonable.

ERAM  
She's lost and she needs you.

NADIR  
It doesn't matter how hard you try,  
or what you do to raise them the  
right way. They always end up  
disappointing you.

ERAM  
You can't give up on being her  
father.

(MORE)

ERAM (CONT'D)  
Just because your father gave up on  
you doesn't mean that she doesn't  
deserve hers --

NADIR  
(snaps)  
-- this has nothing to do with my  
father. You can stop presuming you  
know who I am.

ERAM  
I am your wife. I know who you are.

NADIR  
Our parents were friends. I chose  
you, not the other way around.

Eram appears devastated.

NADIR (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that  
way. Eram.

ERAM  
Don't talk to me.

She pushes her plate back and leaves the table.

NADIR  
Eram, please.

The door slams shut.

#### **INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT**

Hala, crouched on one of the stairs, has heard their entire conversation. She goes back upstairs.

#### **INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala looks out the window. She looks smaller, hunched over, a blank expression on her face.

All the students leave the room in SLO-MOTION as Hala stays in her seat, rigid and in place.

#### **INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala's furiously writing another note. She drops it on Mr. Lawrence's desk and makes a beeline for the exit.

Mr. Lawrence picks up the note, folds it, and places it into his bag.

**EXT. HALLWAY - HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

From outside the class, Jesse has seen this happen. He watches Hala disappear down the hall.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Jesse waits near his locker until Mr. Lawrence leaves the classroom for a moment.

As soon as Mr. Lawrence is out of sight, he heads back inside the classroom.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Jesse opens Mr. Lawrence's bag, sifts through it, finds the note, unfolds it.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (LATER)**

Mr. Lawrence packs up his books and computer. He picks up his bag and heads out.

**INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY**

Hala sits across from an empty chair; the desk bears a PLACARD that reads PRINCIPAL, MS. REBECCA SCHOETTE.

REBECCA SCHOETTE, 40s, stern and sympathetic at the same time, sits down across from Hala.

REBECCA  
How are you?

HALA  
I'm fine.

REBECCA  
Do you know why you're here?

Hala shakes her head.

HALA  
No.

REBECCA

A classmate of yours has informed me that he read a note that you had addressed to Mr. Lawrence, the contents of which implicate him in a relationship with you. Did you write that note?

Hala doesn't meet her eyes.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Did Mr. Lawrence pursue a sexual relationship with you?

Another beat.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

I will need to contact the authorities. You do understand that..?

She's quiet.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Hala?

HALA

I want my mother.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Mr. Lawrence reads out loud from *Notes from the Underground*. A knock at the door; it's Rebecca. She opens the door.

REBECCA

Can I have a word?

MR. LAWRENCE

I'll be back in a minute.

As he heads to the door -

REBECCA

(in a whisper)

Would be best if you brought your bag with you.

Students in class whisper, already speculating and gossiping.

Melanie notices Hala's empty desk.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Students press their faces against the glass, watching intently as Rebecca and Mr. Lawrence walk outside; there's a police car parked in front.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Eram drives and dials her husband. She reaches voicemail.

ERAM

I need you to meet me at the police station. It's about Hala. Please call me when you get this.

**INT. POLICE STATION - DAY**

Hala sits in the lobby. Eram walks in and embraces her.

ERAM

I called your father.

HALA

Why would you do that?

ERAM

(harshly)

Because he needs to know.

A POLICE OFFICER approaches Eram.

POLICE OFFICER

Do you have a lawyer on their way?

ERAM

He should be here any moment.

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

Mr. Lawrence sits across from two POLICE OFFICERS. They wear grave expressions; their expressions are stern.

**INT. POLICE STATION - DAY**

Eram and Hala wait in the lobby.

ERAM

I taught you to stay on the right path, and you did whatever you wanted to do.

(MORE)

ERAM (CONT'D)  
There will be consequences, Hala.  
And I won't be able to save you.

Right then, Brigitte walks in, her eyes searching for them --  
-- she and Hala meet eyes. Brigitte quickly masks her  
embarrassed recognition.

BRIGITTE  
You must be Eram.

Brigitte extends her hand; Eram doesn't take it.

ERAM  
Who are you?

BRIGITTE  
Brigitte White. I'm one of the  
junior lawyers at the same firm as  
your husband. He sent me to  
represent your daughter.

ERAM  
I need Nadir in here.

BRIGITTE  
He's in a deposition right now.

ERAM  
This is my *daughter*.

BRIGITTE  
I'm very sorry. He thought it would  
be best if I came in his place.

Police Officer approaches them.

POLICE OFFICER  
(to Eram, gesturing toward  
Brigitte)  
Is this your lawyer?

Eram hesitates for a long moment.

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

Police Officer leads Hala, Brigitte and Eram into the room.

BRIGITTE  
(to Police Officer)  
I'd like to speak with my client  
alone first.



POLICE OFFICER  
That's fine.

He exits.

BRIGITTE  
(to Eram)  
I think it's best if you let her  
speak for herself.

ERAM  
Nadir should be here, I don't care  
if he's --

BRIGITTE  
-- he's in a deposition.

ERAM  
(exasperated)  
Then he should get out of it and be  
here for his daughter! What is he  
thinking? I don't know what I'm  
supposed to be doing.

BRIGITTE  
I'm sorry. I'm just doing the best  
that I can.

ERAM  
(snaps)  
Your best isn't good enough.

HALA  
Mom.

Eram is startled out of her anger.

HALA (CONT'D)  
(to Eram)  
Please just go.

Eram finally storms out, but not without shooting Brigitte a  
dirty look before she goes.

As soon as the door shuts close --

BRIGITTE  
Why did you visit me?

HALA  
Are you sleeping with my father?

There's a long silence.

BRIGITTE  
I'm going to do everything in my  
power to help you.

HALA  
I need to know the truth.

BRIGITTE  
Whatever your father and I had, it  
is over. Our relationship is  
strictly professional now.

HALA  
Am I supposed to forgive you?

BRIGITTE  
I need you to trust me if you want  
me to represent you in that room  
with those officers. They'll ask  
you difficult questions.  
Uncomfortable questions. I'm here  
to help you. I don't need you to  
like me. I need you to trust me.

Hala gives her an uncertain look.

HALA  
Okay.

BRIGITTE  
From this point forward, you tell  
me the truth and nothing else. Did  
you have a sexual relationship with  
your teacher, Mr. Lawrence?

HALA  
No.

BRIGITTE  
Did you have sex with him?

Hala hesitates.

HALA  
No.

BRIGITTE  
Did he perform any sexual favors?

HALA  
Yes.

BRIGITTE  
What did he do? Oral sex?

Hala nods.

BRIGITTE (CONT'D)  
Was it consensual? Did you agree  
for him to do this?

HALA  
Yes.

BRIGITTE  
How many times did it happen?

HALA  
Once.

BRIGITTE  
You understand that Mr. Lawrence  
may be arrested because he is in a  
position of power over you? He is  
your teacher and you are his  
student. The law sees it as immoral  
for him to have asserted his  
authority over you in this way.

There's a knock at the door. The Officer comes in, digital  
recorder in hand. He sets it down on the table.

OFFICER  
Are you ready?

Brigitte's face doesn't betray any uncertainty.

BRIGITTE  
Yes.

Officer presses the record button.

Hala opens her mouth to speak.

CUT TO:

**EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY - LATER**

Eram sits outside on a bench. Brigitte joins her, taking a  
long drag on her cigarette.

ERAM  
Is it over?

Brigitte nods. She blows out her smoke.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
What are those?

BRIGITTE  
These? American Spirits.

Eram absorbs this.

ERAM  
Nadir smokes those.

BRIGITTE  
They're popular at the office. You  
want one?

Brigitte hands her a cigarette. Eram uncharacteristically  
takes one. After a long moment:

BRIGITTE (CONT'D)  
He wanted to be here.

ERAM  
If he wanted to be here, he would  
be here. When Nadir wants  
something, he gets it.

Eram gives her a pointed look.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Eram drives.

HALA  
It was Brigitte. He was with her at  
the diner.

ERAM  
I know.

HALA  
I'm sorry.

Hala looks over to see her reaction, but Eram's face betrays  
no emotion.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Nadir opens the kitchen window to let the air out. He's  
smoking a cigarette at the table.

Eram walks in, sets her bag down on a chair and levels with  
him; her face is tight.

ERAM  
You didn't come.

NADIR  
It worked out, Eram. You don't have  
to be so tense. Everything's fine.

ERAM  
Everything is not fine, and it will  
never be fine again.

They share a look.

ERAM (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Talaq.

NADIR  
Eram. You can't be serious.

ERAM  
Talaq.

NADIR  
Dear, if you say it one more time,  
you can't take it back.

ERAM  
(firmly)  
Talaq.

NADIR  
Now you've really done it.

ERAM  
Yes, I have.

Eram leaves him smoking at the table. Nadir puts his face in  
his hands, overwhelmed.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hala sits awake in her darkened room.

**EXT. STREETS - NIGHT**

Hala skateboards alone. Her face appears anguished.

**INT. METRO STATION - NIGHT**

She pushes past the turnstile.

**INT. METRO PLATFORM - NIGHT**

The platform's relatively empty. She walks past the groups of people waiting for the train.

Hala walks up to the EDGE of the platform, past the yellow bar where it's "safe" to stand.

She CLOSES her eyes.

She can feel the air move and hear the distant sound of the train coming in from the other end.

*Will she jump?*

A WOMAN SCREAMS.

Hala opens her eyes and sees --

-- A MAN JUMP IN FRONT OF THE INCOMING TRAIN.

The train SLAMS against his body. He's CRUSHED underneath the speeding train cars.

A WOMAN shields her CHILD'S eyes but he's already witnessed the grisly horror.

**EXT. STREETS - NIGHT**

Hala sprints home. Her anguished face emerges and disappears under the passing orange street lights.

She gains speed, running away from herself, this world, this life, the futility and meaninglessness of existence.

CUT TO BLACK.

**INT. BUS - MOVING - DAY**

Hala watches the passing scenery. Spring now; the trees are showing new signs of life.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

The SCHOOL BELL rings. Students settle in; different haircuts and lighter clothes. A different TEACHER lectures at his desk. Some time has passed.

Hala looks out the window.

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

Hala appears healthier than before, but no less sad. Melanie sits down next to her.

But they don't talk. They watch the other STUDENTS laughing and talking in the yard.

**INT. METRO - DAY**

Hala holds onto the pole in a mostly empty subway car.

**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

Hala walks up to the apartment.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

She passes by the LANDLADY.

LANDLADY  
Say hello to your mother for me.

HALA  
I will.

**INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Hala and Eram sit on opposite sides of a small dining table in a cramped apartment; their new home.

They say nothing as they eat together. No words, just the sound of utensils.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

The new Teacher paces at the front of the class as students busily finish their exams.

Hala concentrates on her test, fills in answers. The timer reaches zero.

TEACHER  
Pencils down. Please turn in your exams.

Hala passes up her test. The SCHOOL BELL rings.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Melanie drives as Hala sits in the passenger seat.

MELANIE

I'm glad I'm getting to see you  
before I leave for the summer.

HALA

What?

MELANIE

Dad's getting relocated to London  
for work, so we're packing up.

HALA

You didn't tell me that.

Melanie shrugs.

MELANIE

You never asked.

**INT. THEATER - DAY**

Hala sits next to Melanie. We don't know what the film is,  
but it sounds like a drama.

PUSH IN on Hala's face during the film.

Her face cycles through sadness, anger, despair, resignation,  
and numbness in a SINGLE, CONTINUOUS TAKE.

The sound of a GUNSHOT pulls us out of it.

Hala takes in a breath as if she had been holding her breath  
underwater for too long.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

It's just Melanie and Hala now.

HALA

I think I'm going to apply for a  
driver's license.

Melanie looks over in surprise.

MELANIE

I could teach you.

They smile at each other.



**INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Hala sits down next to her mother on the couch. Eram has a community college pamphlet in her hands.

ERAM  
How was the movie?

HALA  
It was all right. We should go together sometime.

Eram 'mhms'. She's still reading. Hala notices the pamphlet.

HALA (CONT'D)  
What's this?

ERAM  
I thought, why not? Especially if you're going away to school, I thought I'd finally have the time to myself to go and learn something, maybe accounting...

HALA  
You can definitely do it.

Eram taps her on the head with the pamphlet.

ERAM  
(a little sad)  
Oh, I thought you believed your mom was always a little dumb.

HALA  
I've never thought that.

ERAM  
Is it the truth?

HALA  
Yes.

After a beat, Eram begins to cry. Hala embraces her. They sit there on the couch, holding each other for a long time.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

A very cramped bedroom. Not as nice as her previous one. Hala lies in a single bed.

**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

SLOWLY PULL OUT as Hala leans out her window and watches the people on the streets below.

**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

Hala sprints across the street.

**INT. METRO - DAY**

Her eyes are closed as people chatter all around her.

HALA (O.S.)  
Will that be all, sir?

MAN (O.S.)  
Yes, thank you.

**INT. RESTAURANT - DAY**

Hala, in a waitress uniform, takes a COUPLE's order.

**INT. BACK OF THE RESTAURANT - DAY**

Hala picks up two plates of orders.

**INT. RESTAURANT - DAY**

She places the Couple's orders on the table.

When she looks back up again, she sees Jesse and Andrew enter the cafe and sit at a table near the front.

She hesitates. Another WAITRESS gives her a look. Hala sighs, heads over to them.

HALA  
What can I get you?

JESSE  
I didn't know you worked here.

Hala's face tenses. Andrew flips open the menu.

HALA  
What would you like?

**INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Andrew and Jesse are done eating. Jesse places a large tip on the table when Andrew's not looking.

Andrew exits. Jesse lingers. Hala approaches the table and picks up the plates.

She sees the large tip.

HALA  
You don't have to give that much.

JESSE  
I want to.

HALA  
Thank you.

JESSE  
(ashamed)  
You all right?

She picks up their plates, turning away from him, signaling the end of their conversation.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
Goodnight.

HALA  
You too.

She watches him and Andrew cross the street.

**EXT. STREETS - NIGHT**

Hala stuffs her hands rubbed raw from washing dishes back into her pockets.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Hala waits in line as each of the students goes up, one by one, to be photographed in front of a blue-sky background.

She watches the other students take their photographs. They all appear annoyed to be doing it, but in front of the camera, they smile on command.

Hala sits down on the stool in front of the backdrop.

PHOTOGRAPHER  
All right. Smile.

There's a FLASH of WHITE LIGHT.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)  
Okay, let's try that one more time.

This time, she forces the smile.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)  
Perfect.

Another FLASH of WHITE LIGHT as we PUSH IN on the faux blue-sky background --

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

-- and transition into a real sky.

This is from Hala's POV as she lies on the fresh grass. She takes a handful of grass in both of her fists and squeezes them tight.

She takes in a deep breath. As if coming to terms with what's happened, she lets a shaky breath out.

**INT. APARTMENT - DAY**

In a dimly-lit room, Hala blows out the candles on a birthday cake surrounded by her mom and her friends.

The girls at the party sing 'Happy Birthday' with gusto. They all clap and laugh.

Eram slices the cake, which everyone scarfs down.

**INT. APARTMENT - DAY**

Dirty paper plates are stacked on the table. Melanie connects her iPod to the speakers. She picks something dance-y.

She gets up in front of the others, as if to present a show.

MELANIE  
(to Eram)  
You have to dance.

MONICA  
We know you have some moves!

Eram laughs.

MELANIE

Come on!

ERAM

If Hala says so -

HALA

- Do it! Go.

Melanie pulls Eram to her feet. With much embarrassment, Eram starts to dance with the girls.

Slowly at first, and then, with greater enthusiasm -

Hala is both embarrassed and proud.

HALA (CONT'D)

Oh my God, mom.

MELANIE

Ohhh! Yeah! Come on. Everybody!

They all dance together and Hala looks on - a small smile forming on her face.

A small semblance of normalcy returning to her life.

#### **INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT - LATER**

Hala and Eram pick up dirty paper plates and cups and toss them into garbage. The landline RINGS.

Eram picks up the phone.

ERAM

Hello?

Someone on the other end speaks. Eram watches as Hala takes the garbage out with a smile on her face.

ERAM (CONT'D)

Okay.

She hangs up. Eram approaches Hala.

#### **EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

Hala exits the complex and sees Nadir beyond the gate, gift box in his hands.

She opens up the gate, allowing her some space to stand, but now allowing Nadir in.

NADIR

Happy Birthday. I thought I'd just come by to give you this. A little congratulations.

He hands her the box and she reluctantly takes it.

HALA

Thanks.

She shuts the gate and heads back to the apartment.

NADIR

(trying to make conversation)

That's very impressive, getting into Harvard. You get the smarts from your father. Always did.

Hala stops. Her fingers dig into the box. She turns around.

HALA

No, I don't.

Nadir watches her enter the building.

The door slams shut behind her.

#### **INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Hala tears into the wrapping paper at the kitchen table. Eram washes dishes and watches from out of the corner of her eye.

Hala pulls out a VINTAGE RECORD - it's classic Iranian music. From over her shoulder, Eram peers at the gift.

ERAM

Looks expensive.

HALA

(unimpressed)

He's just showing off.

Hala sets the record on the bedside table, no longer interested in it.

#### **EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY**

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, all wearing blue gowns, stand in a line, waiting for their names to be called so they can go up and receive their diploma from Rebecca.

Parents watch expectantly in the crowd. Rebecca finally arrives at Hala's name.

Hala walks up to the podium, shakes the Principal's hand and receives her diploma in the other.

In the crowd, Eram bursts into tears. Elsewhere, Nadir looks on with anguished pride.

Hala walks off the podium as students continue to be called up to receive their diplomas.

CUT TO:

Students toss their graduation caps in celebration. In the midst, Hala's face has lit up. She can leave this all behind.

**EXT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - DAY**

Melanie and Hala embrace as Melanie's parents load cardboard boxes into the car.

MELANIE

You better come visit. Would be fun to have you around.

HALA

Let's plan on it.

MELANIE

(whispers)

I'll see you soon.

**EXT. STREETS - DAY**

Hala watches the car become smaller and smaller until she can barely see it in the distance.

**INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Hala picks up Nadir's record. Looks at it. Hesitates to put it in the cardboard box.

From the other room:

ERAM (O.S.)

You sure you don't need any help?

HALA

No, I'm good.

**INT. BEDROOM - APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Her room's full of taped cardboard boxes, save for the record that her father bought her for her birthday still sitting on a shelf, collecting dust.

After a moment, Hala packs it inside one of the larger boxes.

**INT. BEDROOM - APARTMENT - NIGHT**

She can't fall asleep.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Hala drives this time. Eram's in the passenger seat, connecting Hala's iPod to the radio.

Eram cycles through the music, hesitates over a song, hiding her disappointment.

Hala looks over.

HALA  
You should play it.

ERAM  
It doesn't feel right.

HALA  
It's our song, too.

Eram presses play. *Soghati* by Hayedeh.

Hala looks over at Eram, small smile on her face, as she begins to sing.

Eram joins her, and in this moment, they are still a family.

**INT. AIRPORT - DAY**

Eram looks ready to cry but doesn't. She hands Hala the last of her carryons.

HALA  
I'll call you when I land.

They embrace.

ERAM  
Don't make me worry about you.



As Hala parts from the embrace,

HALA  
I won't.

**INT. AIRPLANE - MOVING - NIGHT**

She looks out the window as the scenery shifts.

**EXT. DORMITORIES - HARVARD UNIVERSITY - NIGHT**

The CAB DRIVER helps her carry her luggage to the door.

**INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT**

Hala walks into an empty room with a bed, a nightstand, a bookcase and a writing desk.

She puts her luggage down and collapses onto the bed. Taking a long, good lung-ful of air and lets out a breath.

There's a KNOCK at the door. It's HANNAH (18), her suitemate.

HANNAH  
Hey. Hala, right? I'm Hannah.

HALA  
Yeah.

Hala gets up and shakes her hand.

HANNAH  
Didn't mean to bug you. I, uh, don't know anyone here and a couple of the freshmen on the first floor got a few of the older kids to buy them beer, so if you wanna come join, it'll be on the first floor, can't miss it.

HALA  
Thanks so much.

HANNAH  
Awesome. Well, I'll leave you to it. Let me know if you need anything.

Hala gives her a small smile and returns to unpacking boxes.

**EXT. STREETS - HARVARD - NIGHT**

FOLLOW Hala closely from behind as she walks out of her dorm and onto the streets. She digs her hands into her pockets.

When she hears the sound of people carrying on a conversation behind her, she glances over her shoulder, turns back and continues on.

**INT. CAFE - HARVARD SQUARE - DAY**

Hala sits down at a stool on the counter. The Waitress brings her coffee.

A dark-haired BOY, 18, with an intense expression on his face, checks her out. He's new, too.

BOY

Hey. You just moved in?

Hala stirs the coffee with her little spoon.

HALA

What's your name?

Hala looks down at her coffee, lost at first; the swirl in her coffee dissipates.

She turns to him, after a moment, and speaks, self-assured this time:

HALA (CONT'D)

Hala.

CUT TO BLACK.

FIN.