

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 grimier 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.

ERAMM

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 hate. 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 shes 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 scarf's 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.