

TOWELHEAD

a screenplay by **Alan Ball**

based on the novel by **Alicia Erian**

The SCREEN IS WHITE. Gradually we become aware of SHAPES WITHIN THE WHITE, of thick MIST RUSHING PAST. SLOWLY PULL BACK FROM AN AIRPLANE WINDOW to REVEAL

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY.

JASIRA MAROUN (13), staring at the white nothingness outside. Not yet a beauty, but well on her way to becoming one. Dark features, a mane of curly black hair. She's crying. A red-faced male PASSENGER in the coach seat next to her smiles, pats her knee gently. Leaves his hand there.

PASSENGER ON AIRPLANE

(Southern accent)

Don't you be scared, darlin'. We'll be okay. You got a better chance of getting killed in a car wreck.

Jasira stops crying, looks at his hand on her knee then up at him, her eyes wide, solemn.

JASIRA

I'm not scared. I really and truly hope we crash.

She means it. He stares at her, astonished; removes his hand. She looks back out the window.

EXT. AIRPLANE - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

ON THE WINDOW: Jasira peers out, expressionless. In an instant, THE PLANE FLIES AWAY, DISAPPEARING INTO THE CLOUDS. We HEAR MOURNFUL ARABIC MUSIC as a TITLE FADES IN AND OUT:

TOWELHEAD

MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY as we CUT TO:

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - BATHROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK).

EXTREME CLOSE ON A MAN'S RAZOR, being rinsed under clear water. "A NEW SENSATION" by INXS plays in another room.

CREDITS BEGIN.

IN THE MIRROR we see **BARRY (early 30s)**, an aging slacker still getting by on his genial sex appeal. Concentrating on rinsing his razor. MOVING around him to REVEAL JASIRA standing in the bathtub behind him, wearing a TWO-PIECE BATHING SUIT. SHAVING CREAM is smeared on her inner thighs, around her pubic area. Her arms are folded over her newly developed breasts tightly, as she watches Barry in the mirror. He catches her eye and smiles - a sweet, genuine smile. Jasira smiles back, shy.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY.

ANGLE ON THE SEAT BELT SIGN, as IT LIGHTS UP, accompanied by the familiar, muted DING.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.C.)
Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned on the seat belt sign, as we begin our descent into the Houston area...

ON JASIRA AND THE PASSENGER, putting their seat backs into an upright position. Jasira shuts her eyes, prepares to land.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - DEN - DAY (FLASHBACK).

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN: Cheers. The episode where Sam can't get up from the table because Rebecca has given him an erection.

Jasira and Barry are on a not particularly comfortable-looking couch. Jasira wears sweatpants and a T-shirt without a bra. She LAUGHS at something on TV; Barry smiles at her.

ANGLE ON A DOORWAY leading to the rest of the condo. Jasira's mother **GAIL MAROUN (late 30s)** appears, holding a small WAD OF WET BLACK PUBIC HAIR in her hand. Gail is attractive, but worn; life hasn't turned out the way she thought it would.

GAIL
What is this?

Jasira and Barry both look up at her, blank-faced.

GAIL
(to Jasira)
Did I say you could shave? Did I?

OFF JASIRA, caught. She looks at Barry, he just stares back at her blankly, as if it's all news to him.

GAIL (O.C.)
Take off your pants.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY (FLASHBACK).

A typical thirteen-year-old girl's bedroom, circa 1990. Gail shuts the door, turns to Jasira, who faces away from us.

GAIL
Now.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira knows better than to protest. Gail kneels to inspect Jasira's pubic area, which remains unseen to us. She is not pleased by what she discovers.

GAIL
Give me the razor.

JASIRA
I don't have one. I used Barry's.

OFF GAIL, staring up at her in disbelief.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - DEN - MOMENTS LATER - DAY (FLASHBACK).

Jasira stands, Gail behind her, looking solemnly at Barry.

JASIRA
I'm sorry for using your razor.

BARRY
It's okay.

GAIL
(stares at him)
No, Barry, it is not okay. Okay?

Barry is silent. Avoids Jasira's eyes.

EXT. HOUSTON INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT - RUNWAY - DAY.

Jasira's PLANE TOUCHES DOWN.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK).

Jasira lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. We HEAR GAIL AND BARRY in the next room, but can't make out what they're saying, until...

GAIL (O.C.)
(her voice rises)
Oh my God, you did what?

BARRY (O.C.)
It's not what you think. Gail! I would never do anything wrong to Jasira, I swear. I love her.

Jasira smiles, happy to hear him say that. SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GAIL'S FORD TAURUS - DAY (FLASHBACK).

Jasira sits in the passenger seat, bawling her eyes out. Gail is driving, quietly furious.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

This whole thing is your fault. The way you walk around sticking your boobs out, it's impossible for him not to notice. And you're always talking about your pubic hair --

JASIRA

Once! And only because those girls at the pool called me Chewbacca!

GAIL

I don't even know what that is.

JASIRA

Barry does.

GAIL

(stares at her, sharply)
The bottom line is this, Jasira: When Barry offered to shave you, you should have said no. There are right ways and wrong ways to act around men, and for you to learn which is which, you should probably go live with one.

Gail's anger almost masks the primal vulnerability she hates that she's feeling right now. Almost.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY.

Jasira is the only one left on the plane. She just sits there. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT approaches.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(Southern accent)

Honey? You need to get off now. Don't you have somebody to meet you?

Jasira nods. A beat, and then she stands and starts down the aisle, her head hung like a doomed prisoner. **CREDITS END.**

INT. HOUSTON INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT - TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira walks slowly through the heavily-trafficked terminal. Other TRAVELERS in a hurry pass her, some friendly, some not so. She starts moving even more slowly when she spots:

HER POV, THROUGH THE MOVING CROWD: Her father **RIFAT MAROUN**. He gestures for her to hurry up. Rifat is Lebanese, in his late thirties, with dark wavy hair and penetrating eyes. He gestures for her to hurry up again. Not a patient man.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira quickly picks up speed, approaches him.

JASIRA

Hi, Daddy.

He looms over her, silent, biblical. Finally:

RIFAT

(slight accent)

Your plane was late.

JASIRA

I'm sorry.

RIFAT

Why are you sorry? Did you fly it?

He LAUGHS at his own joke, smiles at her; she looks up at him, her eyes wide, solemn. Rifat has an impulse to laugh again - then catches himself, as if reminding himself not to let her off the hook so easily. He studies her critically; the last time he saw her, she was a child. Now she's well on her way to being a woman, and it throws him a little. Abruptly:

RIFAT

Come on. I don't want to hit traffic.

He's already walking away. Jasira quickly takes off after him. We HEAR Fairuz singing "LA TEJI ALYOUM."

INT./EXT. RIFAT'S HONDA/INTERSTATE - DAY.

FROM THE PASSENGER'S WINDOW OF THE MOVING CAR: MOVING past a BILLBOARD featuring a gorgeous, barely clad BLONDE MODEL on her hands and knees, her back arched, her head thrown back, her expression managing to be lewd, inviting and contemptuous all at once. Underneath her are the words:

**Psst -- I'm in HEAVEN
Houston's most beautiful showgirls
Lap Dances - Private Shows**

Jasira squints at the billboard, uncomfortable but fascinated. Rifat drives, wearing sunglasses; he glances at the billboard, quickly looks away.

JASIRA

(upbeat)

What is this music?

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

(stares at her)

You are half Lebanese and you don't know who Fairuz is? Your mother is an idiot.

Jasira is tempted to smile when Rifat speaks about her mother this way, but she doesn't.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - LATER - DAY.

A brand-new FAUX-MEDITERRANEAN HOUSE in a generic suburban development. A couple of spindly trees in the freshly sodded front yard. RIFAT'S HONDA pulls INTO the driveway. As he and Jasira climb out and he unloads her LUGGAGE from the trunk:

JASIRA

You live in a house now?

RIFAT

Of course. You think I cannot afford it? I make a very good salary at NASA.
(hands her a suitcase)
Besides, I don't want you going to a city school.

JASIRA

Why not?

RIFAT

The schools are better in the suburbs. Everyone knows that.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER - DAY.

Jasira and Rifat sit at a sleek dinette table and chairs - bachelor furniture, not family furniture. Rifat has prepared DINNER - chicken, potatoes, salad. After a beat:

JASIRA

Thank you making for dinner.

RIFAT

I had to learn to cook when I married your mother.

JASIRA

(grins)

Yeah, she never cooks. Barry does.

He looks up, eyes her intently. Finally goes back to his dinner. Jasira feels shamed.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING - DAY.

Beige walls, beige curtains and carpet. An inexpensive, French Provincial TWIN BED and matching BUREAU are the only furniture. Jasira is asleep under brand new, still-creased WHITE SHEETS. RIFAT OPENS THE DOOR, dressed for work. He WHISTLES sharply, abruptly. Jasira wakes up, disoriented. Rifat LAUGHS, turns and leaves.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Rifat sits at the dinette, reading The Houston Chronicle; The HEADLINE reads **Hussein Calls Blockade "Act of War."** Jasira enters in a T-SHIRT AND PANTIES AND NO BRA. Rifat looks up at her; she smiles as she starts to sit down, but before she hits the chair he reaches across the table and SLAPS HER, hard.

RIFAT

Go and put on some proper clothes!

Shocked and hurt, Jasira bursts into tears.

RIFAT

You're not in Syracuse any more.
Things are going to be different here.

Jasira runs out of the room. Rifat stares at the table in front of him, shaken.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM/HALL - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira is curled up on her bed, crying. There is a KNOCK at the closed door. She stops crying immediately, scared.

IN THE HALL: Rifat stands at the door, conciliatory.

RIFAT

(gently)
It's okay, I forgive you.

OFF JASIRA, wondering exactly what she is being forgiven for.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH CLASS - DAY.

MR. JOFFREY, a blandly handsome man who's grown bored with teaching (and probably life as well) stands at a chalkboard, on which are scrawled the words **WATERSHIP DOWN**.

MR. JOFFREY

Who can tell me what Hazel and his warren's predicament might be a larger symbol for?

(CONTINUED)

REVERSE ANGLE: A CLASSROOM full of bored, listless STUDENTS, Jasira among them.

MR. JOFFREY
(checks his roll book)
Jazz-ura Ma-rown?

ON JASIRA, slinking a little lower into her desk.

JASIRA
(barely audible)
I don't know. And it's Jasira.

Mr. Joffrey moves on to someone else. **DENISE**, a pretty, blonde, slightly pudgy girl wearing EYE SHADOW and LIP GLOSS, turns from her desk and gives Jasira a friendly little wave.

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
President Bush made gains today --

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - DAY.

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN: CNN footage of the first President Bush.

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
-- in his effort to isolate Iraqi
President Saddam Hussein --

Jasira and Rifat sit on the BROWN VELVET COUCH, watching.

RIFAT
(disgusted)
Fucking Saddam.

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
-- when Soviet President
Gorbachev warned Baghdad he
would back additional UN
measures --

Jasira stares at Rifat, a little taken aback by the intensity with which he says this. The DOORBELL RINGS.

RIFAT
(a groan)
Now what?

INT./EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - DAY.

THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR AS IT OPENS to REVEAL **THE VUOSOS** on the step outside. **MR. VUOSO** is in his late thirties, his glossy brown hair cut short, his expression aloof, guarded. His biceps stretch the sleeves of his black T-shirt; his jeans look ironed. His wife **MRS. VUOSO** is younger, but her completely gray hair make her seem older than him. She wears a beige skirt and flat shoes and holds a freshly baked PIE. Their sullen-faced ten-year-old son **ZACK** looks up at

(CONTINUED)

Rifat stands in the door, not entirely trusting this. Jasira appears behind him. After an awkward beat:

MRS. VUOSO
Hi, we're the Vuosos, from next door.
I'm Evelyn, this is my husband Travis,
and this little boy is Zack!

She speaks with the automatic cheer some Southern women never lose, even if, like her, they haven't actually felt cheerful in years. Rifat manages a smile, nods slightly.

RIFAT
I am Rifat Maroun.

Mr. Vuoso eyes him curiously. Rifat eyes him back.

MRS. VUOSO
(nervous)
I brought a pie!

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER - DAY.

The Vuosos sit together on the couch, trying to look relaxed as they eat their pie. Jasira sits on the edge of the fireplace's raised hearth, watching them as if they were animals in a zoo. Rifat enters with a TRAY OF TALL GLASSES filled with hot mint tea.

MR. VUOSO
Keep things pretty chilly in here,
don't you?

He WINKS at Jasira, as if letting her in on a joke.

RIFAT
I keep the thermostat at sixty-eight.
Everyone thinks I'm crazy, but I don't
care. I love walking into my home and
saying "Ahhhh."

He places the tray on the coffee table.

MRS. VUOSO
Hot tea in a glass! How unusual!

RIFAT
Not in my part of the world.

MR. VUOSO
Where exactly are you from, Maroun?

RIFAT
East Beirut, Lebanon. Vuoso.

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO

Huh. You must have some interesting opinions on the situation over there.

RIFAT

I certainly do.

MR. VUOSO

Maybe I'd like to hear them sometime.

It seems like he doesn't really want to hear them at all.

MRS. VUOSO

(a nervous laugh)

Not today. No politics today.

She sips from her tea. An awkward silence.

ZACK

(to Jasira)

Hey. Do you play badminton?

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - BACK YARD - LATER - DAY.

JASIRA AND ZACK PLAY BADMINTON in the Vuoso's back yard. Jasira hits the birdie with her racquet; it's returned by Zack and hits Jasira in the breasts. Zack cracks up LAUGHING as if this is the funniest thing anyone has ever done.

ZACK

(off her glare)

I can't help where it lands.

Jasira smacks the birdie; it sails into the FENCED-IN BACK YARD of the two-story house on the other side of the Vuosos.

ZACK

That was stupid.

JASIRA

We'll just go knock on their door.

ZACK

They're on their honeymoon. Stupid.

JASIRA

Then I guess the game's over.

Jasira drops her racquet and walks away.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Mr. and Mrs. Vuoso are headed toward the front door, with Rifat a few steps behind.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

Thank you for the pie. I will have to make *Kenefe Bejeben* for you.

MRS. VUOSO

Ree-Fat, that's not necessary. We're just being good neighbors!

Mr. Vuoso glances at his wife; for a moment we see his contempt for her, then his guilt over that contempt, then he pushes it all away. The DOOR OPENS; JASIRA AND ZACK ENTER.

MR. VUOSO

Who won?

ZACK

I did. She quit.

MRS. VUOSO

We don't say "she" when the person is right beside us.

ZACK

I don't remember her name.

MR. VUOSO

Jasira. Her name is Jasira.

He smiles at Jasira, a warm, unguarded smile; for the first time we notice how handsome he is. Jasira smiles back, suddenly self-conscious.

MR. VUOSO

A very pretty name for a very pretty girl.

Jasira blushes; Mr. Vuoso CHUCKLES and follows his family out the door.

MRS. VUOSO

Say thank you for the tea, Zack.

ZACK

I didn't drink any.

Rifat closes the door behind them; his plastered-on smile immediately fades.

RIFAT

This guy is something else. He's an army reservist, and he thinks I love Saddam. It's an insult.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

Did you tell him you don't?

RIFAT

I told him nothing. Who is he to me?

He turns and heads back into the house.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - LATER - DAY.

A cluster of beige, POD-LIKE BUILDINGS, connected by COVERED WALKWAYS.

ANGLE ON a thirteen-old-couple, leaning against a column, clumsily making out.

ON JASIRA, watching. She stands alone, away from other students who are waiting for the bus. A middle-aged Hispanic JANITOR comes out of the school, carrying GARBAGE BAGS. He spots her, shakes his head, smiling.

JANITOR

Que linda! Ay-ay-ay...

He walks away. Jasira watches him go, wondering what he said.

RIFAT (O.C.)

I don't want you learning Spanish.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT.

Jasira and Rifat are seated at the dinette, eating.

JASIRA

People always talk to me in Spanish. I want to know what they're saying.

RIFAT

You will sign up for French. Much more refined. It's the only other language my family in Lebanon speaks. Maybe one day, you will get to meet them.

(then)

By the way, I found you a job.

OFF JASIRA, afraid to hear what kind of job it might be.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - DAY.

Jasira and Zack play badminton. Zack is pissed.

ZACK

I don't need a baby sitter.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

I'm just keeping you company.

ZACK

You're only three years older than me.
Towelhead.

Once again, he smashes the BIRDIE into her breasts. This time, he doesn't laugh; he throws down his racket and storms inside his house. After a beat, Jasira follows him.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

The FRONT DOOR OPENS and JASIRA ENTERS.

JASIRA

Zack. Zack.

No answer. She starts up the stairs, a little nervous.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

A small room, cheerless in spite of the warm yellow paint and the floral prints on the wall. Mr. Vuoso's BARBELLS and WEIGHT BENCH occupy the space between the double bed and the closet. A white WICKER CHAIR in the corner. One gets the feeling the Vuosos probably don't have that many guests.

Zack sits on the edge of the bed, leafing through a PLAYBOY MAGAZINE. Jasira appears in the open doorway.

JASIRA

What are you doing?

ZACK

(without looking up)
Leave me alone.

She glances toward the open closet, empty except for Mr. Vuoso's hanging ARMY UNIFORMS and a STACK OF OTHER PLAYBOY MAGAZINES on the floor beneath them.

JASIRA

Zack. Put that away. You're too young.

He ignores her. A beat, then Jasira walks over to the closet and gets a magazine of her own. Sits in the wicker chair and opens it up to --

ON THE MAGAZINE IN HER HANDS: The CENTERFOLD, which she doesn't open all the way. The overleaf features a PRETTY BLONDE WOMAN; she's wearing clothes, but they're falling open to expose her breasts and crotch;

(CONTINUED)

her BLONDE PUBIC HAIR has been meticulously shaped into a perfect, thin vertical strip. She smiles at us in a friendly, non-sexual way.

Jasira stares at this picture, finds it somehow comforting.

ON THE MAGAZINE IN HER HANDS as she turns the page: We see BITS OF THE CENTERFOLD'S DATA SHEET, in childish, overtly feminine script: **Deep-dish pizza, my collie Chester...**

CLOSER: **People who are mean to waiters, censorship...**

EVEN CLOSER: In tiny print, running vertically along the edge of the page: **Photographs by PHILIP SILVERMAN**

Jasira's eyes widen at this. We suddenly FLASH ON:

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY (FANTASY).

The MODEL in the pictures is smiling as if she has no idea she's naked, as a MALE PHOTOGRAPHER TAKES PICTURES of her. It's all sunny, Eisenhower-era innocence until... without warning, the Model assumes the same position [shot from the side] as the model from the BILLBOARD Jasira saw on her way home from the airport. She looks back at the Photographer and licks her lips obscenely --

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Jasira SLAMS THE MAGAZINE SHUT. Puts it back in the closet.

JASIRA

You can't look at these anymore.

ZACK

I can do whatever I want, towelhead.

JASIRA

(not sure what it means)

I'm not a towelhead.

ZACK

Your dad is. So you are too.

JASIRA

(gets it, makes a face)

Stupid. My Daddy doesn't wear a towel on his head. He's a Christian, just like everyone else in Texas.

Zack SNORTS, not believing her.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT.

Establishing.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

FROM THE SIDE, TO AVOID NUDITY: Jasira sits on the toilet, her pants and panties around her ankles. She squints down at

HER POV: In the crotch of her WHITE PANTIES is a RED SPOT.

OFF JASIRA, alarmed.

INT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT.

Rifat and Jasira are in the FEMININE HYGIENE AISLE. Rifat studies the boxes, a distasteful look on his face.

RIFAT

(off box in his hands)

Would you describe your situation as light, medium, or heavy?

JASIRA

Can't I pick them out?

RIFAT

You're not wearing tampons, if that's what you're thinking. Tampons are for married ladies.

A thin, older female SALESCLERK approaches. She wears a blue SMOCK and has a pair of GLASSES on a chain around her neck.

SALESCLERK

Do you need any help?

RIFAT

We're fine, thank you.

SALESCLERK

(smiles at Jasira)

These for you?

Jasira nods. The Salesclerk reaches for a GREEN BOX.

SALESCLERK

This is the kind my daughter likes.

RIFAT

(re: box in his hands)

What's wrong with these?

SALESCLERK

They're thicker. Not as comfortable.

Rifat takes the green box from her, checks the price.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

These are twice as much.

SALESCLERK

Well, that's probably the comfort issue I was referring to earlier.

Rifat rolls his eyes, letting her know he's too smart to fall for that. Puts the green box back on the shelf.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - ART CLASS - DAY.

Jasira, wearing her BACKPACK, approaches her work table, which she shares with three adolescent BOYS.

BLOND BOY

(leers)

Hey, Jizz-eera.

Ignoring him, she pulls her DRAWING PAD out of her backpack. A MAXI PAD falls out and drops to the floor. Jasira stares at it, mortified. Before she can do anything, another BOY grabs it, starts tossing to his friends, HOOTING.

JASIRA

Give it back!

The Blond Boy pulls the thick pad out of its packet, peels off the adhesive strip and sticks it on his forehead. The entire class LAUGHS. Jasira's face is crimson.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - GIRLS' RESTROOM - DAY.

IN A CLOSED TOILET STALL: Jasira sits on a toilet with the seat down, crying, as she stuffs TOILET PAPER into her panties, which remain on. WE HEAR A DOOR OPEN outside the stall; Jasira tries to stop crying, but she's too humiliated.

FEMALE JANITOR (O.C.)

(Spanish accent)

You okay?

The DOOR TO JASIRA'S STALL OPENS; a FEMALE JANITOR stands outside peering in at Jasira.

FEMALE JANITOR

Madre de dio.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - GIRLS' RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

The Female Janitor stands leaning against a sink, a cheap-looking PURSE slung over her shoulder, holding a BOX OF TAMPONS. The doors to all the stalls are closed, but we can see Jasira's feet in the only occupied stall. After a beat:

FEMALE JANITOR

You get it in yet?
(off her silence)
Just relax.

We HEAR A TOILET FLUSH. Jasira comes out, embarrassed. The Female Janitor smiles, compassionate.

FEMALE JANITOR

Será más fácil. Te prometo.

JASIRA

No habla español. Sorry.

FEMALE JANITOR

Your parents don't speak Spanish at home?

Jasira shakes her head. The Female Janitor shakes her head like it's the saddest thing in the world.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT.

FROM THE SIDE, TO AVOID NUDITY: Jasira sits on the toilet, grimacing slightly as she pulls a TAMPON out from between her legs. She looks down, surprised to see how much BLOOD there is, worried there might be something wrong with her. She drops the tampon into the toilet, takes a gigantic WAD OF TOILET PAPER and wipes scrupulously.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira stands at the sink, washing her hands. Dries them with a towel and starts out, glancing into the toilet on her way.

Her POV: A WAD OF TOILET PAPER BLOCKS THE DRAIN. PINK WATER OVERFLOWS ONTO THE CARPET.

JASIRA

(alarmed)
Daddy! Help!

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Rifat kneels by the toilet, working with a PLUNGER, sending more water and bits of toilet paper onto the carpet. He works with intense focus, like an emergency doctor at a disaster site. Soon the bowl begins to drain, and he leans back, crisis averted. Gives her a curious look.

RIFAT

What is that?

He's pointing at the TAMPON, now on the carpet. Not as bloody as it was, but it's still clearly been used.

GAIL (O.C.)

What the hell is going on down there?

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - GAIL'S BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Barry is in bed, SNORING. Gail is next to him, on the phone, smoking, flipping through People magazine.

GAIL

Your father just called and said you ran away.

JASIRA (O.C.)

(over phone line)

He locked me out, and I came to the pay phone to call you!

GAIL

You should be calling him. He's worried sick.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD POOL - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

MOVING SLOWLY ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE ILLUMINATED POOL, traces of STEAM rising like ghosts. Jasira stands at a pay phone, upset.

JASIRA

But he locked me out!

GAIL (O.C.)

(over phone line)

Jasira. You and I both know your father overreacts. That means you have to adjust your behavior.

Intercut as necessary with Gail in the Syracuse Condo:

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

I mean, if Daddy tells you that you shouldn't be wearing tampons -

JASIRA

What's so wrong with wearing tampons?

GAIL

That's not really the question, is it? The question is, what's wrong with wearing tampons when Daddy explicitly told you not to? Because there's definitely something wrong with that. Just like there's something wrong with shaving when your mother tells you not to. Or asking someone else to do it.

JASIRA

I never asked him! He volunteered!

Gail shoots a look at Barry. This is news to her.

GAIL

I don't want to talk about it. Hang up now and call Daddy.

Gail hangs up. Jasira hangs up as well, just stands there.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN/HALL - LATER - NIGHT.

The house is dark, quiet. Jasira appears outside the back door, KNOCKS very quietly. After a beat, she tries the door. It opens, and she slips in quietly. We FOLLOW HER into the hall, which is dark except for a CRACK OF LIGHT at the bottom of Rifat's door. We HEAR Fairuz singing "YALLA TNAM RIMA" from inside. Jasira walks by, and the floor CREAKS. She quickly tiptoes toward her room and OUT OF FRAME. After a beat, the MUSIC CUTS OFF, then the LIGHT UNDER RIFAT'S DOOR GOES OUT.

We hear a RHYTHMIC CREAKING.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - DAY.

CLOSE ON A PHOTOGRAPH in Playboy: A blonde WOMAN in a GOLF CART with her shirt open, laughing, innocent and happy.

ANGLE ON JASIRA'S FOOT, swinging back and forth.

ANGLE ON ZACK, looking at his own magazine in his usual place on the bed. He sighs, irritated, turns and looks at

Jasira sits in the chair, engrossed in the magazine, swinging her foot. The CREAKING starts to speed up a little.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON HER EYES, focused and intense. We FLASH UPON

EXT. GOLF COURSE/INT. VUOSO GUEST ROOM - DAY.

The WOMAN FROM THE PHOTOGRAPH drives her cart recklessly across the course, LAUGHING --

MOVING CLOSER ON JASIRA'S EYES...

THE WOMAN'S POV, from the moving golf cart. BARRY runs backwards, PHOTOGRAPHING US. His CAMERA CLICKS in syncopation with Jasira's CREAKING --

MOVING CLOSER ON JASIRA'S EYES...

ON ZACK, watching, uncomfortable.

ON JASIRA, laughing, now driving the golf cart --

EXTREME CLOSE ON JASIRA'S EYES, widening suddenly and

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

A WIDE ANGLE. Jasira suddenly emits a brief, startled GASP, and suddenly STOPS MOVING HER LEGS. Both she and Zack sit there, frozen. Then:

ZACK

Why were you jumping around like that?

JASIRA

I just couldn't get comfortable.

She goes back to her magazine, starts to move her legs together again. Creeped out, Zack shoots her a pointed look, but she doesn't care. Nothing is going to stop her from repeating the experience. Nothing, that is, until:

MR. VUOSO (O.C.)

What the hell?

MR. VUOSO stands at the door to the hall, tight-faced. He wears a KINKO'S UNIFORM, and a NAME TAG on his shirt.

MR. VUOSO

Who said you could look at my magazines?

Busted, Jasira and Zack both close their magazines.

MR. VUOSO

(baffled)

Jasira? Why are you looking at these magazines?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

I don't know.

MR. VUOSO

You're the baby-sitter. You're supposed to know.

(off her silence)

Give me the magazine, Zack. Now go and wait for me downstairs.

Zack slips out of the room, running down the stairs so fast it scares Jasira. Mr. Vuoso quietly closes the door behind him, turns to Jasira, still holding Zack's Playboy.

MR. VUOSO

I really would've expected more from you than this, Jasira.

He takes the other magazine from her; puts both magazines in the closet, shuts its door. He sits on the edge of the bed, looking at her sternly; she stares at the floor, frightened. Mr. Vuoso suddenly feels sorry for her. After a beat:

MR. VUOSO

Why were you looking? Don't you know you're not supposed to? You're too young. Plus, it's for men.

JASIRA

I'm sorry.

She looks up at him, contrite. Holds his gaze. A long beat. Mr. Vuoso shifts. Softens.

MR. VUOSO

Do you like looking at these magazines?

(off her silence)

C'mere. Tell me.

JASIRA

No.

MR. VUOSO

(smiles)

No?

JASIRA

I have to go home.

MR. VUOSO

All right. Fine. You go home.

Jasira doesn't move.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

Are you going to tell my father that I was looking at magazines?

MR. VUOSO

Your father's a fucking towelhead.

(then)

Did you like looking at them? Tell me why, and I won't tell your father.

(off her silence)

C'mere.

Jasira takes a step toward him, stops. They eye each other, silent, then...

MR. VUOSO

Do you still want to go home?

(off Jasira's nod)

Okay. Go home.

She doesn't move.

MR. VUOSO

(a smile)

I thought you wanted to go home.

JASIRA RUNS OUT. Mr. Vuoso sits, lost in thought. He suddenly seems like the loneliest man in the world.

RIFAT (O.C.)

Finally! A woman I actually like.

INT. PANJO'S PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT.

Rifat and Jasira sit in a booth, eating pizza. Rifat is drinking beer; he's happy, energetic. We HEAR The Fine Young Cannibals' "SHE DRIVES ME CRAZY"

RIFAT

Usually, I would not care for a woman to invite a man to dinner, but Thena is different. She is Greek. She is sophisticated. Not a peasant like American women.

JASIRA

(preoccupied)

She sounds nice.

RIFAT

(laughs)

Jasira. We are celebrating! Here, have a sip of my beer.

(CONTINUED)

He holds his glass to her lips; she sips.

RIFAT

I want you to do me a favor. I want you to write a letter to your grandmother in Beirut.

JASIRA

I don't even know her.

RIFAT

She loves you very much.

He flips over her paper PLACE MAT, takes a PEN from his pocket, thrusts it toward her.

RIFAT

'Dear Grandma. I miss you.'

Jasira starts scribbling, trying to keep up.

RIFAT

'I am living with Daddy now. We have a very nice house. Daddy is engaged to a woman from NASA.'

(off her skeptical look)

I may very well get married. This woman likes me a lot.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S HANDWRITING on the back of the MENU. We HEAR MOURNFUL ARABIC MUSIC.

EXTREME CLOSE ON THE TIP OF A FOUNTAIN PEN, scratching over the surface of ONIONSKIN PAPER. WRITING IN ARABIC.

CLOSE ON RIFAT, concentrating. He sits at the dinette table, lit only by the LIGHT FIXTURE overhead, translating Jasira's letter. The rest of the house is in darkness.

Jasira, in a night gown, appears from the hall; stops when she sees him. He's too engrossed in his translation to notice her. She just stands there, watching him write.

MADAME MADIGAN (O.C.)

Bon soir.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - FRENCH CLASS - DAY.

MADAME MADIGAN, the French teacher, paces in front of the class, speaking French with a Texas accent.

(CONTINUED)

CLASS
(unison)
Bon soir.

MADAME MADIGAN
Bon nuit...

MOVING THROUGH THE BORED STUDENTS as Madame Madigan drones on. PAST DENISE, taking notes... PAST **THOMAS BRADLEY (14)**, a handsome African-American boy... until we FIND JASIRA, staring blankly at the teacher. SLOWLY DRIFT DOWN to her legs, under the desk, her knees pressed together, her legs rubbing together silently...

CLOSE ON JASIRA as every muscle in her face relaxes and she lets out a long, satisfied SIGH. She blinks once or twice.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Jasira is sprawled on the couch, staring at some sexually charged video on MTV. Zack sits on the floor, watching. Bored, Jasira stands and heads up the stairs. Zack keeps watching.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - MASTER BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira stands at the twin sinks, running her fingers over Mr. Vuoso's DEODORANT, SHAVING CREAM, COLOGNE. She picks up his RAZOR, drags it over the surface of her hand. Puts it back. Notices a COOKIE JAR on the back of the toilet. Opens it, looks inside. Reaches in, pulls out a handful of TAMPONS, still in their wrapper. She slips a couple into her pocket, puts the rest back. Flushes the toilet.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

A meticulously clean room, free of character. A LARGE GREEN DUFFEL BAG sits at the foot of the crisply made CANOPY BED.

Jasira emerges from the bathroom, heads toward the hall. Stops, listens, hears nothing except the MUFFLED TV from downstairs. She drops to her knees and unzips the duffel bag. Inside are Mr. Vuoso's neatly folded clothes. She sticks her hand in and feels around, taking care not to mess things up. Finds something. Pulls out a STRAND OF PACKAGED CONDOMS.

ON THE CONDOMS IN HER HANDS: ***Durex. Extra Sensitive. Super thin for more feeling.***

CLOSE ON JASIRA, mesmerized. We suddenly FLASH UPON

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY (FANTASY).

One of the MODELS from Playboy, throwing her head back with a GASP, like the Model on the billboard we saw earlier --

(CONTINUED)

A Photographer CLICKS his camera --

It's MR. VUOSO.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - MASTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Jasira impulsively RIPS ONE OF THE CONDOMS OFF THE STRAND AND PUTS IT IN HER POCKET.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira comes down the stairs. Zack is still watching TV.

JASIRA

Is your Dad going somewhere?
(off Zack's blank look)
There's a duffel bag in the bedroom.

ZACK

That's in case we go to war with Iraq.
He has to be ready.

He turns back to the TV. Jasira looks worried. Then:

ZACK

(giggles)
I know what you were doing. In that
chair.

JASIRA

I wasn't doing anything.

The DOOR OPENS and Mr. Vuoso enters, in his KINKO'S UNIFORM. He sets his briefcase down, starts going through the MAIL. Jasira smiles, waits for him to speak, but he doesn't.

JASIRA

Hi.

MR. VUOSO

(avoiding looking at her)
Everything go okay?

JASIRA

Yes.

MR. VUOSO

Good to hear.

Still avoiding her eyes, he heads up the stairs. Jasira stands there, wondering what she did to upset him.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER - DAY.

Jasira slumps at the table, trying hard to concentrate on her homework. Rifat enters, excited, wearing a new BLAZER and conservative TIE. He's paid a lot of attention to his hair.

As he opens the fridge, pulls a TV DINNER out, slips it out of its box and pops it into the microwave:

RIFAT

Do you think Thena will like it?

JASIRA

Yes.

RIFAT

Let's hope so. Be sure to wash the plate before you put it in the recycler bin.

He heads out the back door, leaving Jasira alone with the SOUND OF THE MICROWAVE.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

MOVING SLOWLY DOWN THE SURFACE OF JASIRA'S BED, the bedclothes undisturbed, we FIND JASIRA in her nightgown, sitting on the floor at the foot of her bed, facing the full-length MIRROR on her closet door, her knees up, her thighs masking her hands as they move between her legs. She watches herself in the mirror.

CLOSE ON HER FACE in the mirror, filled with pleasure and relief as she climaxes. She sighs, then just sits there, staring at herself, hating how quickly the feeling subsides.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING.

ON JASIRA, as she lies sleeping, her face lit by the early morning sun. From elsewhere in the house, we HEAR a WOMAN MOANING, obviously during sex. The MOANS increase in frequency and intensity. Jasira's eyes pop open.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - HALLWAY/KITCHEN - LATER - DAY.

FOLLOWING JASIRA, now dressed, as she shuffles down the hall. We HEAR VOICES, low LAUGHTER. Jasira stops just shy of the kitchen, startled to see...

HER POV: IN THE KITCHEN, Rifat sits at the dinette with **THENA PANOS (30s)**. Thena's Greek, pretty and petite with a friendly face. She's wearing one of Rifat's shirts, her shapely bare legs curled under her chair. Rifat is in pants and a T-shirt, his feet bare. He seems looser, more relaxed than we've ever seen him. They're eating PANCAKES.

(CONTINUED)

ON JASIRA, staring from outside the door, wondering why Thena isn't getting slapped for not wearing proper clothes.

RIFAT
(spotting her, cheerful)
Bonjour, Jasira! This is Thena Panos.

Thena smiles, holds out her hand. Jasira shakes it awkwardly.

THENA
It's so nice to finally meet you.

RIFAT
(to Jasira)
Sit! Eat!
(as she does)
Thena, Jasira is a wonderful baby-sitter. You should see how much this kid next door likes her.

Jasira stares at him like he's insane.

RIFAT
(raises an eyebrow)
His father is a reservist. He found out I'm Lebanese and now he thinks I'm in love with Saddam.

THENA
Typical.

RIFAT
I only let Jasira work for him so she can save for college.

THENA
What do you want to be, Jasira? You could be a model, you're so pretty.

RIFAT
She's going to be an engineer.

THENA
Don't be an engineer. Be a model, make a lot of money, then spend the rest of your life traveling.

RIFAT
Don't put ideas in her head!

THENA
We're just having a conversation.

(CONTINUED)

She smiles and touches her hand to his cheek, which makes him seem to forget everything. Jasira watches in wonder.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S EYES, closed, as Thena uses her fingertips to blend eye shadow on her lids.

THENA

Okay... open your eyes now...

A WIDE ANGLE: Now fully dressed, Jasira and Thena sit at the dining room table, Thena's make-up spread over its surface.

THENA

A little mascara...

ON JASIRA, as Thena applies mascara. Her eyes suddenly widen the tiniest bit, as she catches sight of...

HER POV, THROUGH THE DINING ROOM WINDOW: Mr. Vuoso, in jeans and a T-shirt, is digging in his front yard with a shovel.

Jasira keeps watching him as Thena puts lipstick on her. Satisfied, Thena leans back and surveys her work. Picks up a COMPACT MIRROR and hands it to Jasira.

Jasira stares at her reflection in the mirror. She looks older, more sophisticated... quite pretty. She smiles.

THENA

Rifat! We're ready.

Rifat enters, spots Mr. Vuoso through the window.

RIFAT

(to Thena, re: Mr. Vuoso)
That's the reservist. I guess he didn't have duty this weekend.

THENA

What do you think of Jasira? She really could be a model.

RIFAT

(glances at her)
Yes. She looks very nice.
(laughs, re: Mr. Vuoso)
What is he doing, digging for oil?

Thena glances at Jasira and smiles, a little embarrassed by and determined to make light of Rifat's lack of interest.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE/VUOSO HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Rifat opens the passenger door of his Honda for Thena; Jasira watches from the front door.

THENA

Bye, Jasira! See you soon, I hope.

RIFAT

(to Thena, pleased)

I hope so too.

He shuts the door, crosses around to the other side, gives Jasira an excited grin as he gets in the car.

ON MR. VUOSO, wiping the sweat from his face, glancing over as Rifat's Honda pulls out of the driveway.

ON JASIRA, watching Mr. Vuoso. She's still wearing makeup. A beat, then SHE WALKS OUT OF FRAME.

ANGLE ON MR. VUOSO digging, his back to Jasira, unaware of her as she approaches.

JASIRA

Are you digging for oil?

Mr. Vuoso turns to her, startled. He LAUGHS.

MR. VUOSO

No. For a flagpole.

He stops digging, leans on his shovel. Looks at her, smiles.

MR. VUOSO

Your father lets you wear makeup? How old are you?

JASIRA

Thirteen.

MR. VUOSO

You look older. About seventeen, eighteen.

JASIRA

I miss looking at your magazines.

MR. VUOSO

(after a beat)

Why?

JASIRA

Because. They make me have orgasms.

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Vuoso doesn't say anything, just eyes her, wary... then goes back to digging, as if she weren't even there. She stands there awkwardly, unsure of why he's suddenly shut her out, then turns and walks back to her house. He looks up, watches her go, his brow furrowed.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Jasira watches TV, bored. She's washed her makeup off. The DOORBELL RINGS.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira opens the door to find no one there, notices a PAPER BAG on the WELCOME MAT. She reaches down, picks it up, and pulls out...A PLAYBOY MAGAZINE.

OFF JASIRA, a small, shy smile creeping across her face as she slowly closes the door.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE/VUOSO HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON - DAY.

Rifat squats at the base of a new FLAGPOLE, adjusting a ground-mounted FLOODLIGHT. Jasira stands behind him.

RIFAT

You have to do this if you want to fly
the flag at all times.

He looks up to check the angle of the light on an AMERICAN FLAG hanging from the flagpole. Satisfied, he stands.

RIFAT

Otherwise, you have to take it down at
sunset and put it back up at sunrise,
like that idiot next door. What is he
trying to prove, that he's more
patriotic?

A WIDE ANGLE: Two houses, two similarly placed FLAGPOLES. Two identical AMERICAN FLAGS. We can just barely make out the illumination on Rifat's flag in the late afternoon light.

RIFAT

Well, he's not. It's more patriotic to
fly the flag all the time.

He brushes his hands off and goes inside, leaving Jasira outside, staring up at the flag.

(CONTINUED)

ZACK (O.C.)
My mom said to give you this.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY.

CLOSE on a pastel ENVELOPE in Jasira's hands. Written in delicate FEMININE SCRIPT: **Jasira**

Jasira sits on the couch, looking at the envelope, Zack stands next to her, leering.

ZACK
I bet you're in trouble.

Jasira opens the envelope, pulls out a NOTE CARD.

JASIRA
(worried)
I'm not in trouble, Zack.

CLOSE on the NOTE CARD. In the same feminine script: **Please don't borrow any more of my tampons. They're expensive. Thanks, Mrs. V.**

We HEAR a CAR DOOR SLAM outside. Jasira looks out the window next to the front door.

HER POV, THROUGH THE POLYESTER SHEERS: **MELINA HINES (30)** retrieves reusable MESH BAGS filled with GROCERIES from the back of her older model VOLVO STATION WAGON. Her snug T-shirt reveals she's about FIVE MONTHS PREGNANT.

ZACK
She got fat on her honeymoon.

JASIRA
She's pregnant. Stupid.
(has an idea)
Now we can get all those birdies we knocked into her yard back.

We HEAR KNOCKING AT A DOOR.

INT./EXT. HINES HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR AS IT OPENS TO REVEAL JASIRA AND ZACK:

JASIRA
Hi, I'm Jasira and this is Zack. Can we get our birdies out of your yard?

REVERSE ANGLE ON MELINA, looking down at them, eating ALMONDS from a PLASTIC CONTAINER. She has dark roots in her blonde hair and looks like someone who doesn't put up with much.

(CONTINUED)

MELINA

Birdies?

ZACK

We shot some into your back yard while you were gone.

MELINA

(realizes)

Oh, you mean shuttlecocks. Sure, c'mon in. I'm Melina, by the way.

She steps back from the door to let Jasira and Zack inside.

ZACK

(to Jasira, snickers)

Shuttlecocks?

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

There are BOXES everywhere, rolled up RUGS on the hardwood floors. Soul II Soul's "BACK TO LIFE" plays on a STEREO. Melina unpacks groceries. Jasira looks around, noticing:

Some BOOKS on a shelf have ARABIC TITLES along their spines.

MELINA

What grades are ya'll in?

JASIRA

I'm in eighth, he's in fifth.

Jasira studies a framed PHOTOGRAPH, of a SANDY-COLORED building set into a rocky CLIFF.

JASIRA

What is this?

MELINA

My husband Gil's old house in Yemen. He was in the Peace Corps. He dug toilets.

She comes out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her pants.

MELINA

Bend your legs and squat.

Jasira obeys.

MELINA

No, more. Even more. As far as you can without your butt touching the floor.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira does so, all the time staring at

HER POV: The nub of Melina's bellybutton poking through her T-shirt, directly at the squatting Jasira's eye level.

MELINA

That's how they go to the bathroom.
They just dig a hole in the floor and
crouch over it. Can you imagine doing
that when you're pregnant?

Zack enters through the back door, clutching several RUBBER BIRDIES. He stares at Jasira squatting; she scrambles up.

ZACK

C'mon, Jasira. Let's go.

MELINA

Jasira. What kind of name is that?

ZACK

(laughs)
It's a towelhead name.

MELINA

(sharply)
Don't use that word in my house.

Zack stares at her, stung. She stares back at him, not particularly inclined to make him feel any better. He turns and walks out the front door. Jasira smiles, embarrassed.

JASIRA (O.C.)

(confused)
Who's Nathalie Maroun?

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jasira and Rifat sit at the table, eating KFC FRIED CHICKEN. Jasira is staring at an open LETTER in her hands.

RIFAT

(stares at her)
She's your grandmother.

JASIRA

I can't read it, it's in French.

RIFAT

Aren't they teaching you French?

JASIRA

I just started!

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

Ask your teacher for help. I expect a full translation tomorrow night.

JASIRA

(after a beat)

The people next door to the Vuosos came back from their honeymoon.

RIFAT

The woman needs to cover her stomach. No one wants to see that.

JASIRA

Her name's Melina. Her husband used to live in Yemen.

RIFAT

We don't call adults by their first name.

JASIRA

She told me to!

RIFAT

I don't care what she said. Find out her last name, call her that.

OFF JASIRA, on the verge of speaking back, deciding not to.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY.

Establishing.

MADAME MADIGAN (O.C.)

Jasira asked me to help translate this letter from her grandmother.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - FRENCH CLASS - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Madame Madigan passes out XEROX COPIES of the letter.

MADAME MADIGAN

...so we're going to split up into groups, and each group will work on a paragraph...

She places a copy on Jasira's desk. Jasira stares at it, mortified.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - FRENCH CLASS - LATER - DAY.

ON DENISE, in front of the class, reading from a PAPER.

(CONTINUED)

DENISE

"One day we will meet and I will kiss
you until I smother you."

The CLASS LAUGHS. Jasira is humiliated.

DENISE

"It is important for you to know your
Lebanese family. Please come to Beirut
soon. I love you very much. Grandma."

REVERSE ANGLE on the students, listening. THOMAS BRADLEY is
among them, grinning. The handsome BLOND BOY who stuck
Jasira's maxi pad on his forehead whispers something to
another boy; they both LAUGH. Jasira sinks even lower into her
seat; she couldn't be more miserable.

MADAME MADIGAN

Tres bien, Denise.

DENISE

Merci.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira exits the classroom; other students spill out behind
her, "accidentally" jostling her as they do.

BLOND BOY

Nice letter, towelhead.

OTHER BOY

Yeah, Jizz-eera. How come you never
told us you were a camel jockey?

They LAUGH and swagger off. Thomas Bradley passes Jasira,
smiles. She smiles back, grateful, then:

THOMAS

Sand nigger.

He LAUGHS, saunters off. Jasira stands there, dejected.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - LATER - DAY.

Jasira and Zack are playing badminton. She angrily SMACKS a
BIRDIE and it flies across the fence into Melina's yard.
Jasira starts toward Melina's house; Zack yells at her.

ZACK

You hit it over there on purpose! So
you can go talk to that lady!

(CONTINUED)

MELINA (O.C.)
Where's your friend?

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Most of the unpacking has been done; it's obvious the Hines value comfort over style. The room is warm, cluttered, unpretentious. Melina is on her knees, organizing ALBUMS, CASSETTE TAPES and a few CDs on a shelf. There are PENCILS sticking out of the messy bun at the back of her head. Jasira stands watching her, holding a BADMINTON BIRDIE.

JASIRA
Zack? He's at home.

MELINA
What a mouth on that kid.

JASIRA
He didn't mean it. He's only ten.

MELINA
I don't care how old he is. There's no excuse for being a bigot.

JASIRA
Do you have any tampons?

MELINA
What would I be doing with tampons?
(off her look)
You don't get your period when you're pregnant. All that blood stays in your uterus to keep the baby cushioned.
(then)
Can't your parents buy you some?

JASIRA
It's just Daddy. And I'm not allowed to wear tampons until I'm married.

Melina stops what she's doing, looks at Jasira.

MELINA
You're kidding.

JASIRA
I need to know your last name. I'm not supposed to call you Melina.
(off her look)
It's Daddy's rule.

(CONTINUED)

MELINA

He sure does have a lot of rules.
(then, smiles)
It's Hines, but just call me Melina
when he's not around.

OFF JASIRA, smiling.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - NIGHT.

RIFAT (O.C.)

I don't like the way Thena fusses over
you, with her makeup --

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

Rifat puts a PLATE OF FOOD in front of Jasira.

RIFAT

You hog all the attention, I don't
know how you do it, but you do.

He wipes his hands, grabs a GARMENT BAG and slings it over his
shoulder.

RIFAT

Well, I need attention too, so from
now on I'll see Thena at her house.

He heads toward the front door.

RIFAT (O.C.)

You're a big enough girl to stay alone
a couple of nights a week.

And we HEAR A DOOR SLAM.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Jasira sits alone at a table, her legs rocking rhythmically
under the table. Thomas Bradley walks up, holding a TRAY of
cafeteria food, and sits. Some WHITE STUDENTS nearby stare.
Jasira looks at him blankly. He starts eating.

THOMAS

I'm sorry I called you that name.

JASIRA

It's okay.

THOMAS

No. It isn't. You should never let
anybody call you names like that.

(CONTINUED)

A beat. Thomas grins.

THOMAS
You've really never even met your
grandmother?

JASIRA
No.

THOMAS
That's wild.

Jasira smiles, ever so slightly.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Zack sits in a chair, staring at the TV. We HEAR A DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE, and Jasira enters, still smiling.

ZACK
Long time no see, towelhead.

JASIRA
Don't call me that.

ZACK
Okay. Camel jockey.

JASIRA
Shut up.

ZACK
Okay. Sand nigger.

Angry, Jasira steps forward and hits Zack in the arm, not hard, but Zack starts crying big phony tears.

ZACK
(screams)
You're in big trouble! Towelhead!

He runs up the stairs, we HEAR HIS BEDROOM DOOR SLAM. Suddenly worried, Jasira turns and hurries out of the house.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira sits at the kitchen table, a glass of water in front of her. She takes a sip, puts the glass back exactly where it was. The DOORBELL RINGS. Jasira takes a deep breath.

INT./EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

An angry Mr. Vuoso stands on the front steps, still wearing his Kinko's uniform. Jasira opens the door a crack.

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO

Don't you know enough not to hit small children?

Mr. Vuoso pushes the door open, steps inside.

MR. VUOSO

I want to speak to your father.

JASIRA

He's staying at his girlfriend's.

A beat. Suddenly he's not so sure of how to proceed. Finally:

MR. VUOSO

I want my magazine back.
(off her silence, sharply)
Go and get my magazine!

Scared of him, Jasira doesn't move. He grabs her shoulders, turns her around so she is facing away from him.

MR. VUOSO

Go and get that fucking magazine.

She still doesn't move. Her perceived disobedience coupled with their close physical contact affects him strongly; he suddenly moves his hands down over her breasts, his eyes shut. She tries to pull away, but this only makes him hold her tighter. His HANDS move down further, MOVING OUT OF FRAME as he reaches into her jeans.

JASIRA

(scared)
Please. I'll get the magazine.

But he's not listening, as he reaches deeper into her pants.

JASIRA

(an intake of breath)
Ah --

CLOSE ON BOTH THEIR FACES... his eyes are shut, his face expressionless, but Jasira's face jumps between pleasure, fear, happiness, pain...

JASIRA

(barely audible)
Uuh... uuh...
(then, sharply)
Don't --

But Mr. Vuoso isn't listening.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
You're hurting me --

She starts to cry; he registers this, stops. He looks down, unnerved by what he sees; PULLS HIS HAND UP INTO FRAME to inspect it. He's horrified to see BLOOD on his fingers.

MR. VUOSO
(freaking)
Oh Jesus. Oh my God.

He rushes into the kitchen, and we HEAR WATER RUNNING. Jasira stands there, frightened, trying to stop crying. Mr. Vuoso comes back in, wiping his hands on his pants.

MR. VUOSO
I swear I didn't mean to do that.

Jasira moves to hug him; he recoils from her. A beat. Not knowing what else to do, he abruptly steps toward the door.

JASIRA
(reaches for him)
No, don't go --

But he's already opened the door.

MR. VUOSO
(on his way out)
I didn't mean to, I'm so sorry --

And he pulls the door shut behind him. Jasira stands there, still crying.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

A SERIES OF QUICK JUMP CUTS:

Jasira unzips her pants, pulls up her shirt to see BLOOD on her panties and stomach. There's even some on her jeans --

Jasira, now in a bathrobe, scrubs her jeans in the sink, furiously --

She scrubs her panties even more furiously, but is unable to remove the stain entirely --

She wads up the panties in toilet paper --

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira stuffs the toilet paper-wrapped panties into a plastic bag, which she then stuffs into the garbage can. She stuffs them down as far as she can.

RIFAT (O.C.)
Thena's moussaka was delicious, but
the baklava? Terrible.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira sits on the sofa with Rifat, eating CHINESE TAKE-OUT, watching CNN. Rifat eats voraciously, in a good mood. Jasira picks at her food.

RIFAT
She might call and ask you to go
shopping. Just say you have homework.
She needs to find friends her own age.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

RIFAT
(a groan)
Now what?

He gets up WALKS OUT OF FRAME. We PUSH IN ON JASIRA, expressionless, as we HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPEN.

MRS. VUOSO (O.C.)
Hello, Ree-Fat. May we have a moment
of your time?

RIFAT (O.C.)
Certainly.

Jasira's face fills with dread, as Mrs. Vuoso and Zack enter. Mrs. Vuoso glares at Jasira; Zack avoids her eyes.

MRS. VUOSO
We've come to give Jasira her last
paycheck. It won't be possible for her
to baby-sit Zack any longer.

ZACK
She hit me really hard in the arm.

RIFAT
(to Jasira)
Is this true?
(off her nod)
Why did you hit him?

(CONTINUED)

ZACK

It wasn't because of anything!

MRS. VUOSO

Well, I don't think there are any circumstances under which hitting would be appropriate. I just think Jasira seems like a very unhappy little girl.

ON JASIRA, wondering if this is true.

MRS. VUOSO

And I hate to say it, but this isn't the first problem I've had with her. I recently discovered --

Jasira's eyes go wide and she blurts --

JASIRA

He called me a towelhead.

A beat. Rifat raises an eyebrow, turns to Mrs. Vuoso.

RIFAT

Did you know your son called my daughter a towelhead?

Mrs. Vuoso looks at Zack. She hadn't known at all.

JASIRA

And a camel jockey. And a sand nigger.

RIFAT

(a low laugh)
Jesus Christ.

Mrs. Vuoso flinches, obviously uncomfortable with the Lord's name being taken in vain.

MRS. VUOSO

Look, if Zack used inappropriate language, I'm sorry. But violence --

RIFAT

You said you had Jasira's last check. Where is it?

Mrs. Vuoso hesitates, then reaches inside her jacket pocket. Rifat grabs the CHECK from her hand.

RIFAT

You can show yourself out.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. VUOSO
(thrown)
Well, all right, then.

She and Zack leave. Rifat sits back down, returns his focus to the TV.

RIFAT
Her redneck husband will get called up soon and Saddam will gas him, and that will serve them all right.

He digs into his Chinese takeout as if nothing has happened. Jasira struggles to hide her relief.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY.

Jasira stands at her locker, retrieving books for her next class. Smiles when she see Thomas approach. He takes her books and they start down the hall. Some kids look, but nobody says anything. Thomas is a good six inches taller than any other kid. AS THEY WALK:

THOMAS
My parents want to meet you.

JASIRA
Why?

THOMAS
Why do you think?

THEY WALK OUT OF FRAME.

EXT. BRADLEY HOUSE/INT. RIFAT'S HONDA - NIGHT.

A pale brick house, a little larger and a little nicer than the Maroun house. RIFAT'S HONDA PULLS TO A STOP at the curb.

Rifat drives; Jasira sits next to him, wearing a khaki skirt and a nice blouse.

RIFAT
(peering at the house)
They probably paid twenty thousand more than I did, and for what? An extra bedroom? Idiots.

He reaches into the back seat, retrieves a BOTTLE OF RED WINE and a BOX OF GODIVA CHOCOLATES, and gives them to Jasira.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

Now, don't talk with your mouth open,
and be sure to say the food is good,
even if it isn't.

(as she gets out)

And you're not allowed in that boy's
room, I already told his mother on the
phone.

JASIRA

Okay.

RIFAT

Call me when you're ready to come
home. No later than ten.

He gives her an unexpected smile, then drives off. Jasira
starts toward the house. We HEAR "AHO DAH EL KALAM" by Warda.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

MOVING across the MIDDLE EASTERN FEAST Mrs. Bradley has
prepared: HUMMUS, LAMB KEBOBS, PITA BREAD, RICE and TABBOULEH.
"AHO DAH EL KALAM" continues, on a STEREO.

MRS. BRADLEY

(warm)

I hope it's as good as you must be
used to.

Jasira sits at the dining room table with Thomas and his
parents. Thomas is wearing khakis and a grey turtleneck. MR.
BRADLEY wears khakis and a plaid shirt; MRS. BRADLEY is a
little more stylish. They're both drinking the WINE Jasira
brought. We can see their CHRISTMAS TREE in the next room.

JASIRA

(lying)

It's very good.

MR. BRADLEY

So what's Lebanon like?

THOMAS

She's never even been. She has a
grandmother there she's never met.

MR. BRADLEY

(laughs)

That would never fly in my family.

MRS. BRADLEY

Ooh, this wine is delicious.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
Daddy picked it out.

MRS. BRADLEY
(laughs)
Seriously? He didn't even want you to
come, I had to talk him into it.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Thomas stands in front of the fireplace, passionately playing
air guitar to Jimi Hendrix's "HEY JOE" on the STEREO. Jasira
watches politely. Mr. Bradley suddenly sticks his head in.

MR. BRADLEY
(in a good mood)
Mom and I are going upstairs.
(then)
Nice to meet you, Jasira.

JASIRA
You too.

Mr. Bradley disappears; we HEAR MRS. BRADLEY LAUGH as they
head up the stairs.

THOMAS
That wine you brought made them horny.

He LAUGHS; Jasira smiles vaguely. Thomas changes the record to
"IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER" by Lenny Kravitz. He smiles
slyly at Jasira, kneels in front of her and puts his hands on
her breasts. She looks at him, surprised. He starts to
tentatively move his hands over her breasts; she just keeps
looking at him. SLOWLY PUSHING IN ON THEIR FACES as he reaches
under her shirt... she keeps looking at him, breathing a
little deeper... closes her eyes, her face relaxing
fully...then GASPS. Thomas looks at her, fascinated; Jasira
opens her eyes and bursts into tears.

THOMAS
What happened? Did I hurt you?

JASIRA
(crossing her arms)
No. I had an orgasm.

THOMAS
Wow. Was that the first time?

JASIRA
No.
(off his disappointment)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA(cont'd)

I've had them before, with myself. But
I don't want to anymore.

THOMAS

Why not? I thought everyone liked
them. I wish I could have one now.

JASIRA

(shrugs)
You can if you want.

THOMAS

Will you watch?

JASIRA

I don't know.

Thomas leans back, unzips his pants, reaches inside.

ON JASIRA, no longer crying. We HEAR Thomas start to MOAN
softly, as he masturbates OFF CAMERA. We stay with Jasira as
she watches, curious...

The TELEPHONE RINGS, startling both Thomas and Jasira. Thomas
scrambles to answer it.

THOMAS

(into phone)
Bradley residence... oh, yes sir, Mr.
Maroun. She's right here...

He hands Jasira the phone.

JASIRA

(into phone)
Hello?... But it's not even nine
o'clock yet...
(irritated)
Okay. Bye.
(hands phone back to
Thomas, sighs)
He's tired and doesn't want to wait up
any longer.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira stands at the sink, wiping her hands after washing
them. She opens the cabinet under the sink, looks inside.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Thomas is on the couch. Jasira enters with a BOX OF TAMPONS.

JASIRA

Can I have these?

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

Sure.

JASIRA

Could you bring them to school for me
on Monday?

THOMAS

Can't you just take them home?

JASIRA

No, Daddy won't let me wear them.

THOMAS

Why not?

Jasira shrugs.

EXT. BRADLEY HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira and Thomas are on the front porch, waiting for Rifat.

THOMAS

Is it because you're a virgin?
(off her silence)
You're not a virgin?

JASIRA

I don't know.

THOMAS

How can you not know?

She doesn't answer. He suddenly leans down and kisses her. She remains very still, but kisses him back.

JASIRA

Does your mom have any razors? Because
I need razors, too.

THOMAS

Sure. I could get you some razors.

We HEAR RIFAT'S CAR PULLING UP.

JASIRA

Just don't tell your mom about it.

And she starts down the walk toward the car.

ON RIFAT, THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, his jaw tight, staring at

INT. RIFAT'S HONDA - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

RIFAT'S POV, THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: Thomas waves awkwardly from the front porch.

Jasira gets up, shuts the door. Rifat doesn't look at her, just shifts the car into reverse.

INT. RIFAT'S HONDA - LATER - NIGHT.

Rifat drives in silence, obviously not happy. Finally:

RIFAT
(controlled)
You are not to see that boy again.
(before she can respond)
You didn't give me the full
information about this. So I could
make a proper decision. Do you
understand what I'm referring to?

JASIRA
I think so.

RIFAT
Good. Because if you continue to visit
this boy's house, no one will respect
you. I know what I'm talking about.

OFF JASIRA, unhappy and confused.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - DEN - LATER - NIGHT.

Gail is on the phone, in her nightgown, smoking. Barry is nowhere to be seen.

GAIL
Your father isn't even black and
people used to call me nigger-lover.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

Jasira sits at the dinette, on the phone. Rifat leans against the counter, watching her.

JASIRA
I can handle being called names.

Intercut as needed with Gail in the Syracuse Condo:

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

Oh, really? Can you handle wasting the best years of your life trying to make a marriage work with someone from a completely different culture?

JASIRA

Thomas is American!

GAIL

You know what I'm talking about.

JASIRA

No, I don't. I don't know what you or Daddy are talking about!

She hands the phone to Rifat and walks out.

RIFAT

Jasira. Jasira!

(into phone)

What the hell did you tell her?

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira sits on the edge of the bathtub, still dressed. We HEAR RIFAT elsewhere in the house, arguing with Gail. Jasira pulls her skirt up, runs her hand across her thigh.

CLOSE ON HER HAND, smoothing the fine, dark hairs on her leg.

CLOSE ON HER FACE, her eyes blank. A KNOCK AT THE DOOR startles her.

JASIRA

I'm in the bathtub.

RIFAT (O.C.)

Now your mother is coming to Houston for Christmas. I hope you're happy.

(his voice receding)

Don't think you're going to come crawling into my bed, Gail, because you're not...

OFF JASIRA as she just sits there, staring at her legs.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Jasira sits alone at a table, eating. Thomas walks up, slides into the seat next to her, drops a PAPER BAG on the table in front of her. Curious, Jasira looks inside the bag: it's filled with ten or so WRAPPED TAMPONS. She closes the bag.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
(quietly)
Thanks.

THOMAS
How far up are you going to shave?

JASIRA
I don't know.

THOMAS
You should shave everything.

JASIRA
I'll think about it.

THOMAS
I could do it for you. I'd be really
careful, I promise.

Jasira stares at her food, avoiding his eyes.

JASIRA
I have to tell you something...

But she trails off, unable - or unwilling - to say she can't
see him anymore.

THOMAS
(softly)
Jasira. Let me shave you.

Jasira blushes, embarrassed, looks up at him. He smiles
warmly. Finally, she smiles back, enjoying this intimacy.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - STREET - LATER - DAY.

Melina stands in the middle of the street, as Zack kicks a
SOCCER BALL around her. Whenever it comes close enough that
she can kick it without much effort, she does. A yellow SCHOOL
BUS pulls up to the curb in the B.G.

ANGLE ON THE SCHOOL BUS DOOR as it opens and Jasira and Thomas
step out. Jasira spots Melina and Zack, looks worried. Thomas
reaches to take her books, but she won't let him.

JASIRA
It's okay.

They start walking slowly toward Jasira's house.

MELINA
(spots them)
Jasira! C'mon over.

(CONTINUED)

ZACK
I'm not supposed to play with her!

MELINA
Oh, shut up.

Jasira approaches reluctantly, with Thomas.

MELINA
(to Thomas, extends hand)
Hi, I'm Melina. Jasira's neighbor.

THOMAS
(shakes)
I'm Thomas. Jasira's boyfriend.

Jasira stares at him; this is news to her. Melina turns to her and makes an excited face.

ZACK
Melina!

MELINA
Zack? I'm talking to Jasira and Thomas right now.

THOMAS
Is that your son?

MELINA
God, no.

JASIRA
That's Zack. He lives next door to me.

THOMAS
Hey, Zack. Want to kick the ball around?

Zack eyes Thomas doubtfully.

ZACK
I'm going inside! I'm not supposed to be anywhere near her!

MELINA
Good! Beat it!

Zack storms into the Vuoso's house and slams the door.

THOMAS
What kind of kid doesn't want to kick a ball around?

(CONTINUED)

MELINA
A weird kid.

JASIRA
(checks her watch)
We have to go too.

She takes Thomas's hand and leads him toward her house. Melina watches them go.

MELINA
Bye.

ON JASIRA AND THOMAS as they walk away.

JASIRA
You can't stay long. I didn't ask
Daddy.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - LATER - DAY.

Jasira and Thomas sit on the bed, leafing through Playboy.

THOMAS
Where'd you get this?

JASIRA
(after a beat)
I found it.

THOMAS
This is how you should shave it.

CLOSE ON THE PLAYBOY MAGAZINE: Thomas's finger points to a coy FULL BODY SHOT of a reclining NUDE WOMAN reclining, her legs tightly clenched, her pubic hair shaved or waxed into a MANICURED STRIP.

OFF JASIRA, admiring it.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Thomas sits on the edge of the bathtub, holding a RAZOR under the tub faucet. Jasira enters, holding a CAN OF SHAVING FOAM.

JASIRA
Should I put on my bathing suit?

THOMAS
How am I going to shave you if you're
wearing your bathing suit?

(CONTINUED)

Thomas undoes her jeans, pulls them down. Waits for her to step out of them, then reaches to pull her underwear down. Before he does, we cut to:

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S FACE, expressionless, looking down at him she steps out of her underwear.

CLOSE ON THOMAS'S FACE, staring at her unseen body, curious.

THOMAS
You look nice.

JASIRA
(shy)
Thanks.

THOMAS
Do you want to stand or sit?

JASIRA
Usually I stand.

THOMAS
(grins)
Okay. We can try that.

"WHILE THE BIRDS SING" by Vox plays over a MONTAGE:

Jasira's feet stepping into the tub;

Thomas squirting SHAVING FOAM into his hands, his eyes on the unseen Jasira as he works it into a lather;

ON JASIRA'S FACE, flinching slightly, as he applies the foam to her body;

ON THOMAS'S FACE as he shaves her, concentrating intently;

The RAZOR, BLACK HAIRS on its blade, being washed clean under the pouring water;

SLOWLY PUSHING EVEN CLOSER ON JASIRA'S FACE as she watches Thomas shave her...

SLOWLY PUSHING EVEN CLOSER ON THOMAS'S FACE, looking up at her and smiling...

STILL PUSHING IN ON JASIRA'S FACE, smiling back at him, reveling in the experience of being seen by him, fully seen, knowing he likes all that he sees...

MUSIC abruptly stops as we CUT TO:

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - RIFAT'S BATHROOM - LATER - DAY.

Bigger and nicer than Jasira's bathroom, TOILETRIES arranged by height on his sink counter. Jasira slips in, a towel wrapped around her body, puts the shaving foam back in its proper place, adjusts it once, then slips out.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Thomas sits on the bed, leafing through Playboy. Jasira enters, goes into the bathroom, comes back out with her jeans and panties in her hands.

THOMAS

Wait. You can't get dressed yet.
(unbuckles his pants)
I want to have an orgasm.

JASIRA

(worried)
What time is it?

THOMAS

It won't take long, I promise.
(then)
Let me see it.

Jasira, her back to us, opens her towel for him, as he starts to masturbate OUT OF FRAME.

THOMAS

Do you like it?

JASIRA

(looks down, nods)
Do you?

THOMAS

Yeah. I like it a lot.

JASIRA

Thanks for doing it.

THOMAS

(breathing heavier)
You're welcome.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - LATER - DAY.

Jasira, now fully dressed, stands with Thomas at the door.

THOMAS

Let me know when it grows back. I can
shave it for you again.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

Okay.

He kisses her. She opens the front door and he leaves; she shuts the door. Stands for a second, then looks worried.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

CLOSE ON THE BATHTUB DRAIN, as Jasira's hands work to pick up the PUBIC HAIR stuck in it.

Jasira kneels next to the bathtub, concentrating. We HEAR THE DOORBELL RING.

JASIRA

(just like her father)

Now what?

EXT./INT. MAROUN HOUSE - PORCH/FOYER/GREAT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR, from the front porch, as it's opened by Jasira. She's surprised to see

REVERSE ANGLE ON MR. VUOSO: His hair's a little mussed, his jacket is askew. His emotions are running high.

MR. VUOSO

What the hell do you think you're doing with that nigger?

JASIRA

Don't call him that!

Jasira tries to shut the door, but he sticks his foot inside.

MR. VUOSO

You're going to ruin your reputation.

JASIRA

You ruined my reputation.

She tries to shut the door again, he puts his arm up to hold the door still.

JASIRA

(means it)

Leave me alone or I'll tell my father what you did!

Mr. Vuoso stands there, breathing heavily. Finally withdraws his foot, removes his hand from the door. Jasira shuts it in his face. Quickly locks it. Stands there, shaken, knowing there's no way she could ever tell Rifat.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - DAY.

CLOSE ON A RED AND WHITE FLOWER - A Persian Cyclamen.

RIFAT (O.C.)

I want this place to look nice when
your mother gets here.

PULLING BACK, we see Jasira and Rifat kneeling on the
sidewalk, planting the flowers on either side of it.

RIFAT

If she thinks she's the only one who
can plant a decent garden, she's about
to experience a rude awakening.

Mr. Vuoso and Zack approach. Rifat eyes them darkly.

MR. VUOSO

Zack and I were wondering if we could
talk to you and Jasira.

RIFAT

Aren't you talking to us now?

MR. VUOSO

There's no need for that. We're here
to apologize. Right Zack?

ZACK

I'm sorry I called you a towelhead.
Will you be my baby-sitter again?

Jasira doesn't know what to say.

RIFAT

Since they want you so much, I'd ask
for a raise.

MR. VUOSO

Sure. We can give you a raise.

(then)

I want to apologize, too. For saying
things I shouldn't have. I mean, maybe
Zack heard me, and -

RIFAT

(a laugh)

Maybe?

MR. VUOSO

Did anyone ever teach you how to
accept an apology? Because you're not
very good at it.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT
(stands, peels off gloves)
Why should I be good at it? Why!

JASIRA
I don't want to be Zack's baby-sitter.
(off their looks)
I have things to do after school.

Mr. Vuoso looks at her long and hard. She looks right back. He turns and walks off; Zack hurries to catch up with him.

RIFAT
(without looking at her)
I'm proud of you, Jasira.

Jasira stares at him, wondering what she did that he would be proud of. We HEAR CANNED LAUGHTER.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT.

Jasira sits on the couch, eating microwave macaroni and cheese, watching TV, bored. The DOORBELL rings.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira opens the door to REVEAL MR. VUOSO. He's cleanly shaven, his hair neatly combed.

MR. VUOSO
It's okay. I won't try to come in.

He's friendly, conciliatory. Jasira looks at him, silent, blank-faced.

MR. VUOSO
Zack and his mom went to visit his grandma. Her cat just had kittens. I guess they're pretty cute.
(after a beat)
Is your dad staying at his girlfriend's?
(Jasira nods)
I figured. Anyway, I thought maybe we could do something together.

JASIRA
(after a beat)
What would we do?

MR. VUOSO
We could go get Mexican food. I know a great place.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira is silent. Mr. Vuoso reaches into his pocket and retrieves a green-handled ARMY KNIFE. He unfolds it, showing her the blade, then quickly folds it back in.

MR. VUOSO

You can borrow it for the night. To protect yourself.

(gives it to her)

Put it in your pocket.

(she does)

Now go get your coat. I'm hungry.

We HEAR MEXICAN MUSIC.

INT. NINFA'S MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT.

An authentic, downscale place, off the beaten track. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS strung on the ceiling, HANGING piñatas, etc. Jasira sits with Mr. Vuoso at a table near a tiny FAKE WATERFALL surrounded by plastic plants, happy to be there. A Waiter in a SOMBRERO approaches with two FROZEN MARGARITAS.

WAITER

(Mexican accent)

Margarita for you, sir... and a virgin Margarita for your daughter.

After he walks away:

JASIRA

I'm not your daughter. I'm your girlfriend.

MR. VUOSO

You're too young to be my girlfriend.

JASIRA

You did that thing to me. I'm your girlfriend.

MR. VUOSO

That thing. Jesus.

He rubs his eyes. Stares at the nearby fountain. Abruptly:

MR. VUOSO

This whole setup is going to have me pissing all night.

He gets up to go to bathroom. As soon as he's gone, Jasira SWITCHES THEIR DRINKS. Takes a couple of long sips from his Margarita. The Waiter approaches with their food.

(CONTINUED)

WAITER
Chicken enchiladas?

Jasira indicates that's for her. As he sets food down:

JASIRA
This virgin Margarita is delicious.

The Waiter smiles, then leaves just as Mr. Vuoso returns.

MR. VUOSO
Just in time.

They eat. Jasira takes another long sip from the Margarita.

JASIRA
How come it took so long to get here?
It's so far away from where we live.

MR. VUOSO
I didn't want to run into anybody I
knew.
(takes a sip from the
virgin Margarita, reacts)
Jesus, Jasira.

He switches the drinks back. Jasira LAUGHS.

JASIRA
I'm drunk.

MR. VUOSO
How can you tell?

JASIRA
Because I feel so happy.

MR. VUOSO
You think being drunk makes you happy?
(off her nod)
Well, I guess it does sometimes.

JASIRA
Why do you like me?
(off his silence)
I know. My boobs.

MR. VUOSO
(sips his drink, then)
Maybe. But that's not all.

She grins, basking in his attention. He can't help but smile.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

When I grow up, I want to be in
Playboy.

MR. VUOSO

(sharply)

No you don't. It's for sluts. Are you
a slut?

JASIRA

I don't know. I don't think so.

MR. VUOSO

Well, you're not. And you're not going
to be in Playboy. Although, if you
keep hanging around with that black
kid, you'll be a slut.

JASIRA

He's better than you. He only touches
me when I say he can.

OFF MR. VUOSO, silent.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT.

Mr. Vuoso's PICKUP TRUCK pulls into the driveway, stops. The
LIGHTS GO OFF.

INT. MR. VUOSO'S PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

COUNTRY MUSIC plays on the RADIO. Neither Mr. Vuoso or Jasira
make a move to get out. A beat.

JASIRA

Thank you. I had a nice time.

MR. VUOSO

You did? Me too.

He smiles at her - a surprisingly sad smile. Uncomfortable,
she digs in her pocket, pulls out his knife.

MR. VUOSO

See? You can trust me.

He takes it; she opens the door to get out.

MR. VUOSO

I'm not a bad man. I'm really not. I
never would have done that thing to
you, if... if I'd...

(CONTINUED)

Jasira stays in her seat, waiting to hear what he'll say. He rubs his face, leans back in his seat.

MR. VUOSO

The only reason I married Evelyn is because she got pregnant. I didn't love her, I barely even knew her. She's... she's not the kind of person I thought I would... I mean, my whole life now is...

(fondly)

If you could have only seen me, when I was younger... Nothing could stop me then. Nothing.

(then, ashamed)

Sometimes I actually hope I will get called up.

ON JASIRA, seeing his anguish, which is genuine. He shakes it off, suddenly uncomfortable with anyone seeing these emotions. Smiles as if it never even happened.

MR. VUOSO

Will you write me letters?

JASIRA

Sure.

He smiles at her, touches her hair. She pulls back slightly; he withdraws his hand. A beat, then she gets out. Mr. Vuoso just sits there, hating himself.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE/SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

Jasira shuts the door of the pickup, walks toward the sidewalk. A RUMBLING SOUND causes her to look over at

Melina's husband **GIL (30s)** rolls his GARBAGE CAN to the curb. He glances at Mr. Vuoso still in his car, then back at Jasira, a questioning look on his face.

Jasira smiles nervously, walks quickly toward her house.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - DAY.

ANGLE ON A SCHOOL BUS, turning onto the street.

Jasira stands on the sidewalk, waiting for the bus.

MELINA (O.C.)

Jasira!

Startled, Jasira turns to see a pregnant Melina hurrying awkwardly toward her.

(CONTINUED)

MELINA

Gil said he saw you last night in Mr. Vuoso's car.

JASIRA

I wasn't in his car.

The SCHOOL BUS PULLS UP TO THE CURB in front of them.

MELINA

Mr. Vuoso is a pig. Just so you know.

The BUS DOOR OPENS. Jasira moves toward it. Melina takes her by the arm and speaks softly but intently.

MELINA

Any man who wants a girl your age to be his friend is a pig.

JASIRA

(angry)

I wasn't in his car!

MELINA

If he asks you to be his friend, I want you to come and tell me. Okay? I mean it, Jasira.

JASIRA

(pulling away)

You're not my mother.

Jasira boards the bus, the DOOR SHUTS and the BUS PULLS AWAY.

OFF MELINA, watching the bus as it drives away, worried.

THOMAS (O.C.)

Do you need me to shave you again?

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Jasira sits with Thomas at their usual table.

THOMAS

I'll leave before your Dad comes home.

A beat. Jasira knows she shouldn't. But...

JASIRA

Okay.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - LATER - DAY.

CLOSE ON A CHILD'S SOCCER BALL. A BOY'S FOOT KICKS THE BALL OUT OF FRAME.

Zack kicks the soccer ball around in his front yard. THOMAS AND JASIRA WALK INTO FRAME, holding hands.

THOMAS

Hey, Zack!

Zack looks up, stares at them, poker-faced, then goes back to kicking his ball. Thomas lets go of Jasira's hand.

THOMAS

What the fuck is the matter with this kid?

JASIRA

I don't know.

THOMAS

Yes you do, you know exactly what's wrong with him.

(yells)

Hey Zack! Kick that ball over here!

Zack ignores him. Thomas trots over, kicks the ball away from him, starts kicking it back toward Jasira.

ZACK

Hey! Give that back!

THOMAS

You say hi and I'll give it back.

ZACK

Fine! Hi! Now give it back!

Thomas stops kicking the ball and picks it up, but doesn't give it back to Zack. Zack is scared, and Thomas knows it; he relishes the power he has over Zack.

THOMAS

Where's your baby-sitter?

ZACK

I'm old enough not to have a baby-sitter. I just turned eleven.

THOMAS

What'd you get for your birthday?

(CONTINUED)

ZACK

I don't have to tell you.

THOMAS

Of course you don't. And I don't have to give you this ball.

Zack turns to Jasira; she just stares at him, curious to see what's going to happen next.

ZACK

(on the verge of tears)

I got a kitten.

THOMAS

Cool. Can we see it?

ZACK

No! No one's allowed in the house!

THOMAS

So bring it outside.

ZACK

No! She's an indoor cat!

Zack suddenly punches the soccer ball out from under Thomas's arm, chases it down. Thomas watches calmly as Zack runs inside his house with the ball and slams the door.

THOMAS

Stupid little cracker.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER - NIGHT.

Thomas sits on the bed, pissed off. Jasira stares at him, waiting for him to say something. He doesn't. She starts to take off her pants.

THOMAS

I don't feel like it any more.

She pulls her pants back up and stands there, feeling bad, then opens a bureau drawer and pulls out a KEY. Holds it up for Thomas, smiles.

JASIRA

The Vuosos forgot to take it back from me when I got fired.

It takes him a moment, but Thomas grins.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Zack sits on the bed, facing away from the door, looking at a Playboy. He doesn't see Jasira and Thomas when they enter silently, but the tiny white KITTEN does. It MEWS.

THOMAS
(enjoys this)
Hi, Zack.

Zack jumps off the bed, scaring the kitten. His face turns bright red and he starts to cry.

ZACK
What do you want? Are you trying to kill me? Get out of here!

JASIRA
(going for the kitten)
You're scaring the kitten!

ZACK
Don't touch her! You leave Snowball alone!

THOMAS
Zack, we just wanted to see her, that's all.

ZACK
You broke into my house!

JASIRA
The door was open.

Zack narrows his eyes at Jasira, realizing.

ZACK
You still have your key. I'm telling my dad.

THOMAS
(quiet but firm)
You're not going to tell your dad anything. You hear me?

Zack is silent, terrified. Thomas eyes him, letting his point sink in, then picks up a Playboy from the stack in the open closet and leafs through it, nonchalant.

THOMAS
Shit. You gotta let me borrow a couple of these.
(grabs a couple)
I'll bring them back tomorrow.

ZACK
No! You can't come back here!

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

Fine. I'll keep 'em.

He turns and walks out. Jasira shoots Zack an apologetic look, then hurries after Thomas.

PRESIDENT BUSH (O.C.)

The main thing that I hope will come out of today's session of the United Nations --

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN: The first President Bush on CNN.

PRESIDENT BUSH

-- is that we send perhaps the clearest signal of all to Saddam Hussein that the world is deadly serious about reversing this aggression.

Jasira and Rifat sit on the couch, watching. Rifat looks irritated; Jasira looks nervous.

RIFAT

What signal? You should blow his fucking head off.

We HEAR the DOORBELL RING. Jasira's face fills with dread.

RIFAT

(a groan)
Now what?

EXT./INT. MAROUN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

ON THE FRONT DOOR as it's opened by Rifat, surprised to see

REVERSE ANGLE: Mr. Vuoso and Zack stand on the porch. Zack is pouting so furiously he might dislocate his jaw; Mr. Vuoso just looks angry. Rifat LAUGHS.

RIFAT

What are you apologizing for now?

MR. VUOSO

We just want our key back.

RIFAT

Jasira already gave that back.

MR. VUOSO

No, she didn't.

(CONTINUED)

Rifat rolls his eyes, heads back into the great room. Mr. Vuoso and Zack follow. Rifat stands above Jasira.

RIFAT

Didn't you give their key back?

Jasira nods emphatically.

ZACK

(screams)

She's lying! She used it to get into my house today with her black friend! They scared my cat!

Rifat stands very still.

RIFAT

Were you with a black friend?

Jasira is silent. Rifat raises his hand. Jasira instantly flinches, but he's just wiping his brow. Mr. Vuoso's eyes darken at Jasira's flinch.

MR. VUOSO

(no longer angry)

Okay, there isn't any reason for that. We just want our key back.

Rifat raises his hand again, testing her. Again she flinches.

RIFAT

(yells)

Why do you keep doing that?

MR. VUOSO

Zack, I'll see you at home.

Zack looks pissed, leaves. Mr. Vuoso and Rifat eye each other.

RIFAT

(evenly)

Jasira, go and get that key.

Jasira starts toward the back of the house, stops in the hallway, reaches into her pocket and pulls out the key. She stands still, listening to...

MR. VUOSO

You hit her, I'll call Protective Services.

RIFAT

You discipline your child, and I'll discipline mine.

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO

You hit her, I'll know it, and I will
call Protective Services.

Rifat look like he's more interested in hitting Mr. Vuoso.
Jasira hurries back in and gives Mr. Vuoso the key.

RIFAT

Get out now.

Mr. Vuoso looks at Jasira apologetically, gives Rifat one last
look, then leaves. Rifat turns to Jasira, irate. He raises his
hand to hit her. He doesn't, though; he just brings his hand
close enough to make her flinch. He does this several times,
and she flinches every time.

RIFAT

(struggling to stay calm)
You are grounded. You are to come
straight home after school and stay
indoors. If I find out you haven't, I
will find a way to beat you so that no
one will ever know.

Rifat sit back down and watches TV, as if the matter's
resolved. Jasira sits next to him, frozen; looks over at his
hands. They're shaking.

INT. HOUSTON INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT - GATE - DAY.

TILTING DOWN from some random, plastic CHRISTMAS DECORATION
over the JETWAY DOOR as PASSENGERS EMERGE from their flight.
Some carry CHRISTMAS PRESENTS; all look frazzled. CHRISTMAS
MUSIC plays over the P.A.

We FIND JASIRA AND RIFAT among those waiting for loved ones.

RIFAT

You know, if you want to go back to
Syracuse with your mother, that's fine
with me.

JASIRA

(alarmed)
I don't want to go back!

RIFAT

Well, I can't seem to control you.
(spots Gail)
There's your mother.

THEIR POV: GAIL EMERGES FROM THE JETWAY, carrying SHOPPING
BAGS filled with CHRISTMAS PRESENTS. She smiles and waves.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira waves back; Rifat remains expressionless. When Gail reaches them, she drops to her knees and hugs Jasira tightly. She's crying; Jasira starts to cry as well.

RIFAT
Try to calm down.

GAIL
(stands)
Shut up, Rifat.

She dabs at her eyes with a Kleenex, then gives him a hug and a kiss, surprising him.

RIFAT
(eyeing shopping bags)
Just so you know, we've decided not to exchange gifts this year. We're protesting the fact Bush is waiting until after the holiday to wage war.

GAIL
(hands them to him)
Do whatever you want.

She takes Jasira by the hand and starts off; Rifat follows.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

Rifat's HONDA PULLS INTO THE DRIVEWAY and everyone gets out.

GAIL
What's with the flag?

RIFAT
I'm showing support for the war.

GAIL
I thought you were protesting it!

RIFAT
(unloading luggage)
I'm protesting one aspect of the war and supporting another aspect. The mark of intelligence is the capacity to hold two conflicting ideas in your head at one time.

GAIL
Uh-huh.

Gail makes a "he's crazy" face for Jasira's benefit.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT.

Jasira is brushing her teeth when Gail enters in her nightgown. She closes the toilet lid and sits down.

GAIL

I'll drive your father to work tomorrow and we'll go get a Christmas tree, would you like that?

Jasira nods.

GAIL

I hope you like your presents. I spent a fortune. But I hope you didn't get me anything. I don't want anything.

(then)

Barry and I broke up. He moved out.

A beat. Jasira takes her toothbrush out of her mouth.

JASIRA

That's too bad.

GAIL

No it's not. He was an asshole. And Jasira, I feel terrible about what went on last summer. When I took his side over yours.

(a beat)

So do you like living here? With your father?

JASIRA

(careful)

I guess I should finish out the school year here. I like my school.

GAIL

Oh. I thought you didn't. And I thought you didn't like Daddy.

Jasira resumes brushing, avoiding Gail's eyes.

GAIL

I don't have anyone. It's very lonely for me.

JASIRA

(rinses and spits)

I'll come back next summer.

Gail sighs, gives Jasira a hard look.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

Well. I guess I misunderstood. Good night.

As she starts out:

JASIRA

Can I kiss you?

GAIL

Sure.

She leans down and lets Jasira kiss her cheek, checking her own reflection in the mirror as she does.

EXT. KINKO'S - DAY.

RIFAT'S HONDA PULLS INTO THE PARKING LOT with a CHRISTMAS TREE strapped to the roof.

INT. KINKO'S - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

TINSEL is strung around the windows in honor of the season. Mr. Vuoso is behind the counter when Jasira enters with Gail.

JASIRA

Hi. This is my mom.

The color drains from Mr. Vuoso's face.

JASIRA

(quickly, reassuring)

She just needs to make some copies.

Gail eyes Mr. Vuoso, likes what she sees. She holds out her hand, smiles warmly. It's the first time we've seen this smile from her.

GAIL

Hello. Gail Monahan.

MR. VUOSO

(shakes)

Travis Vuoso.

JASIRA

Mr. Vuoso lives next door. It's his kid I used to baby-sit.

GAIL

(to Mr. Vuoso)

I'm visiting for the holidays.

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO

Great.

(an awkward beat)

Well, single copy machine's over there. Go ahead and make as many as you need, it's on me.

GAIL

Why, thank you. Travis.

She heads over to a XEROX MACHINE. Mr. Vuoso looks at Jasira, then heads into the back. Jasira joins Gail at the copy machine, where she's already making copies.

JASIRA

Daddy doesn't like him.

GAIL

Your father is easily intimidated.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - DAY.

CLOSE ON A TOASTER as a couple of FROZEN WAFFLES pop up.

Jasira and Gail are seated at the dinette. Gail is still in her nightgown, smoking. Rifat throws the waffles onto a plate, puts it on the table as he sits.

GAIL

The least you could do is make your special pancakes. It's Christmas morning, for Christ's sake.

RIFAT

(are you kidding?)

It takes too much time.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

The TREE that Gail bought is in front of the window, decorated with cheap LIGHTS, POPCORN GARLANDS, PAPER CHAINS and not much else. Several PRESENTS have been opened, all CLOTHES for Jasira. Jasira holds up a SWEATER.

JASIRA

It's pretty. Thank you, Mom.

RIFAT

Well, I guess that's it.

Gail stares at Rifat and Jasira, dumfounded.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

I thought you were kidding about not getting me any presents.

RIFAT

Why would I have been kidding?

GAIL

(to Jasira)

You could at least have made me something in art class.

An awkward beat. Gail gets up and storms out of the room.

RIFAT

(shakes his head)

You mother can be very hard to live with.

GAIL (O.C.)

You cheap bastard!

She comes back in, holding XEROX COPIES of Rifat's pay stubs.

GAIL

I put you through fucking graduate school so you could make this kind of money, and you can't even buy me a fucking bottle of perfume!

She throws the copies on the floor; Rifat picks them up.

RIFAT

(furious)

You made copies of my paychecks? Where did you get these? My salary is none of your business!

GAIL

Of course it's my business! We have a child! She costs money!

RIFAT

(to Jasira)

Did you find the key to my desk and give it to her?

JASIRA

I don't even know where the key is.

RIFAT

(yells)

I don't believe you!

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

Oh, for Christ's sake, I used a nail file. So lay off her.

RIFAT

It's not the first time she's broken into something, you know. She broke into the neighbor's house with that black boy.

GAIL

(to Jasira)

But you're not supposed to see him.

RIFAT

She does what she wants.

GAIL

Well, then she can come back and live with me.

JASIRA

I have to finish the school year!

GAIL

(yells)

What is this school year bullshit?

RIFAT

Let her live where she wants.

GAIL

But you hate your father! That's what you told me on the phone.

Rifat stares at Jasira, deeply hurt.

JASIRA

I did not!

(to Rifat)

I don't hate you.

But Rifat is already up and grabbing his KEYS.

GAIL

Selective memory.

RIFAT

I'm going to Thena's.

He heads out the front door and SLAMS it behind him.

GAIL

What a fucking asshole.

(CONTINUED)

And she lights a CIGARETTE.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - LATER - DAY.

Through the open door we can see a TAXI parked out front. The DRIVER carries Gail's luggage outside. Gail walks to the door with the smallest bag; Jasira tries to help her with it.

GAIL

(curt)

I've got it.

At the door, she turns to Jasira.

GAIL

This is your last chance. If you want to come home with me.

(off Jasira's silence)

You know what? Never mind. I don't want to live with someone who doesn't want to live with me.

And she walks out and shuts the door, leaving Jasira there, facing away from us.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - NIGHT.

Rifat's FLAG is lit up. We can see the CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS through the window. We HEAR a PHONE RING.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

The room is dark except for the LIGHT OVER THE STOVE. Jasira is at the counter, answering the phone. A half-eaten MICROWAVE DINNER is on the table.

JASIRA

Hello?

We HEAR a WOMAN'S VOICE on the other end; the connection is faint and pretty bad.

GRANDMOTHER (O.C.)

(over phone line)

Jasira? *Joyeux Noël*, Jasira!

JASIRA

(a beat)

Merci. Pareillement.

GRANDMOTHER (O.C.)

C'est ta grandmère!

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
Oui. Je sais. Joyeux Noël.

A beat. Jasira starts to cry.

GRANDMOTHER (O.C.)
Jasira? Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? Tu pleures?

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - DAY.

Rifat enters, closes the door. Jasira stands there, smiling.

JASIRA
Mom left.

RIFAT
Good riddance.

He calmly takes off his coat, hangs it in the closet.

JASIRA
Grandma called.

Rifat pays no attention to her, shuts the closet door. Jasira reaches out to hug him. In a flash of uncontrolled emotion, he pushes her away roughly, but she flinches and ducks and the butt of his palm smacks into one of her eyes, hard.

RIFAT
(his voice shaking)
We don't hug people we hate.

Jasira is speechless, dazed; she covers her eye instinctively. Rifat is horrified and immediately ashamed; unable to deal with his emotions, he heads into the back of the house.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY.

ON JASIRA, at breakfast, sporting a nasty-looking BLACK EYE.

Rifat sits across from her, reading the Houston Chronicle; the HEADLINE reads: **Gulf G.I.'S To Get Germ War Shots**. Rifat avoids looking at her.

RIFAT
(quietly)
Just so you know, if anyone sees you like that, you won't be able to live with me anymore. You'll have to go and live with your mother.

They continue to eat in silence.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS (O.C.)
I can bring you your homework.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - DAY.

Jasira sits on the bed, speaking on the phone. Her black eye has faded a little, but it's still there.

JASIRA
Daddy's already doing that.

THOMAS
Then I'll just come visit you.

JASIRA
You can't come over. You're black.

THOMAS (O.C.)
Ha-ha.

JASIRA
I'm serious. My parents don't want me to be friends with a black boy.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - THOMAS'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Thomas lays on his bed, speaking into the phone.

THOMAS
I really hope you're kidding.

Intercut as necessary with Jasira in her bedroom:

Jasira is silent.

THOMAS
(baffled)
Why would you listen to them if they said something like that?

JASIRA
(angry)
Because! They're my parents!

She hangs up the phone, tired of trying to please everybody.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - DAY.

Jasira sits on the couch, watching Oprah on TV. Rifat enters, shuts the door. Throws some PAPERS and a PLASTIC BAG on the coffee table, then disappears into the back of the house. Jasira pulls a bottle of COSMETIC CONCEALER out of the bag.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

(sarcastic)

I thought I wasn't allowed to wear
makeup.

RIFAT (O.C.)

I am the one who makes the rain and
the good weather in this house.

OFF JASIRA, wondering what the hell that means.

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY.

A CHRISTMAS TREE in the corner, decorated with lots of interesting DECORATIONS from around the world. Melina is sprawled on the couch, napping. There's a KNOCK at the door. She gets up, with difficulty, opens it. Jasira stands outside. She's put the concealer on, around both eyes.

MELINA

Jasira. Come on in.

Jasira enters. Melina closes the door, clearly surprised - but pleased - to see her.

MELINA

Excuse the mess. I promised Gil I
would take that tree down today, but I
just got too tired.

JASIRA

I can't stay long.

MELINA

Are you wearing makeup? Why is it just
around your eyes?

JASIRA

Oh, I didn't get a chance to finish.

MELINA

Okay. Oh, I got you something. For
Christmas.

She reaches under the tree, grabs a large PAPERBACK BOOK with a RIBBON tied around it.

MELINA

I meant to bring it over earlier, but
Gil's parents were here, and my mother
and stepfather, it was exhausting.

She hands Jasira the book.

(CONTINUED)

ON THE BOOK in Jasira's hands: Over a group of smiling, ETHNICALLY DIVERSE TEENAGE GIRLS are the words **CHANGING BODIES, CHANGING LIVES**. She opens the book to a CROSS SECTION OF A FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS. Immediately closes it.

JASIRA

I'll have to hide it from Daddy.

Melina stares in disbelief, but knows better than to say anything.

MELINA

Uhhh... we'll just keep it here. You can come read it whenever you want.

JASIRA

I'm sorry I didn't get you anything.

Melina smiles, touched.

MELINA

That's okay. I don't need anything.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN: A NIGHT-VISION VIEW of BOMBS EXPLODING over Bagdad.

Rifat and Jasira watch, eating pizza. Her black eye is gone.

RIFAT

Finally! Saddam'll be dead before long.

CLOSE ON THE TV: A CNN ANCHOR reports.

ANCHOR

At the request of Defense Secretary Cheney, President Bush authorized the call-up of up to one million National Guardsmen and other reservists, for up to two years --

OFF JASIRA, stricken.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY.

CLOSE ON an INDEX CARD taped to a door window: **SCHOOL NEWSPAPER MEETING TODAY**

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH CLASS - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

CLOSE ON JASIRA.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

I'm interested in war reporting.

Jasira sits at her desk with several other students; among them is DENISE. Their desks are arranged in a circle. MR. JOFFREY, the English teacher, sits at his desk, eating a sandwich and grading papers. Denise keeps glancing at him.

The newspaper editor, CHARLES (14), stares at Jasira like she's out of her mind. A few other students LAUGH.

CHARLES

What kind of war reporting?

JASIRA

Well, I guess I'm interested in reservists and what it's like to get called up. My next-door neighbor is one. Maybe I could interview him.

CHARLES

(thinks about it)

Good angle.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - LATER - DAY.

Jasira emerges from the class room, followed by Denise.

DENISE

Hey, want to come to my house this weekend to work on our articles?

JASIRA

I can't. That's when I'm going to try to interview the man next door.

DENISE

Then I'll come over to your house. After the interview. We can have a sleepover. Want to?

JASIRA

(worried)

Well... I have to ask Daddy.

DENISE

Want to know why I joined the paper? You can't tell anyone.

(whispers)

I'm in love with Mr. Joffrey. I want to have sex with him.

Jasira smiles as THEY WALK OUT OF FRAME.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON A NOTEBOOK, as Jasira writes:

*Are you scared to get killed?
Do you think you'll kill an Iraqi?
What kinds of things will you take with you from home?
Do you think this is a war for oil?*

Jasira sits at the dinette, writing in her notebook. Rifat enters, gets a beer from the fridge.

JASIRA

Can I have a friend sleep over? She's a girl. A white girl.

RIFAT

(irritated)

It doesn't matter what color she is if she's a girl. Don't try to make me out to be a racist when I have your best interests at heart.

(looks over her shoulder)

What's this?

JASIRA

Questions for Mr. Vuoso. I'm going to interview him for the school paper. Because of the war.

RIFAT

(you gotta be kidding)

Here you are, living with someone from the Middle East, and you want to interview the scumbag next door? Who are you?

He stares at her, shakes his head and exits. After he's gone:

JASIRA

(barely audible)

Idiot.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - DAY.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Mrs. Vuoso and Zack get into the car. Zack has his kitten in a PET CARRIER. We HEAR KNOCKING on a door and we're in

INT./EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - FOYER - LATER - DAY.

Mr. Vuoso walks toward the front door. He's shirtless, carries a BEER. He opens the door to REVEAL JASIRA, carrying a BLACK NYLON BAG. She's taken aback to see him shirtless.

(CONTINUED)

REVERSE ANGLE: Mr. Vuoso is even more taken aback to see her.

JASIRA

(brightly)

Hi. Is it okay if I interview you for our school paper about the war? Since you're a reservist.

A beat. Mr. Vuoso seems to be experiencing some sort of internal struggle, then:

MR. VUOSO

Sure. Come on in.

He steps back as Jasira enters, glances out at the street to see if anyone is watching, then shuts the door.

EXT. HINES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

ANGLE ON THE BATHROOM WINDOW: Inside, Melina stands at the sink with WET HAIR and a TOWEL wrapped around her body, brushing her teeth, frozen, having just witnessed this.

JASIRA (O.C.)

Are you scared to go to war?

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Mr. Vuoso and Jasira sit on the couch. He's put on a T-SHIRT. Jasira holds a MICROPHONE toward him. The open BLACK NYLON BAG is on the table, along with a TAPE RECORDER.

MR. VUOSO

No. I'm not in a fighting unit. I do humanitarian stuff, like passing out food.

JASIRA

But Daddy says Saddam is going to gas all the troops.

MR. VUOSO

Well, I would expect that from someone who loves Saddam.

JASIRA

That's racist. You're making an assumption about him because of where he's from. Daddy probably wants Saddam dead more than you.

MR. VUOSO

If you say so. Next question?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

Why did you pack rubbers in your
duffel bag if you're married?

A beat. Mr. Vuoso reaches over and turns the tape recorder
off. Takes the microphone from Jasira and puts it down.

MR. VUOSO

(quietly)

Who said you could go through my
personal things?

JASIRA

Why did you pack them?

MR. VUOSO

Why do you think I packed them?

He eyes Jasira, she holds his gaze. The air is suddenly
charged... until someone starts POUNDING on the front door.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Melina, her hair still wet, is still pounding on the door when
it's opened by Mr. Vuoso. Jasira stands behind him.

MELINA

What is going on over here?

MR. VUOSO

(offended)

Nothing.

JASIRA

(butt out)

I'm interviewing him for my school
paper. About the war.

MELINA

Well, the interview is over, and
you're going home.

MR. VUOSO

Now wait just a minute --

MELINA

(in his face)

You want me to call somebody?

OFF MR. VUOSO, who definitely does not want her to do that.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira is angrily gathering up her stuff; Mr. Vuoso watches.

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO
(quietly)
Did you tell her anything?

JASIRA
No. I swear.

MR. VUOSO
(upset)
So what's her fucking problem? I
hardly get to spend any time alone
with you, then I get this one chance
and that bitch ruins it.

OFF JASIRA, pleased he wants to spend time with her.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Melina is sitting on the grass when Jasira comes out.

MELINA
Help me up.
(as Jasira does)
I'll walk you home.

FOLLOWING THEM as they walk:

MELINA
I want to give you something.

She reaches in her pocket, hands Jasira a HOUSE KEY.

MELINA
If you ever need to come over, at any
time, for any reason, just let
yourself in. You don't even have to
tell me why. Just come over, watch TV,
read your book.

JASIRA
(angry)
Why are you doing this?

MELINA
If anything ever happened to you, I'd
never forgive myself.

JASIRA
Nothing will happen to me!

But Jasira takes the key before she stomps away.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

Jasira sits on the bed, taking her TAPE RECORDER out of the black nylon bag. Rifat appears at the door.

RIFAT
Give me the tape. I want to hear what
garbage he told you.

JASIRA
(scared)
It's private.

RIFAT
(laughs)
Nothing you have is private.

As he reaches for the tape recorder, the DOORBELL rings.

RIFAT
(a groan)
Now what?

He heads out. Jasira quickly stuffs the tape recorder back into the bag and stuffs it under her bed.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

CLOSE ON DENISE, smiling cheerfully. As always, she's wearing EYE SHADOW and LIP GLOSS. She carries her OVERNIGHT BAG.

DENISE
I'm early. My mom had some errands to
run, so she just dropped me off.

PULLING BACK, we see Jasira and Rifat, standing with Denise.

JASIRA
Daddy, this is Denise.

DENISE
(a small wave)
Hi.

RIFAT
(warm and friendly)
Hi, Denise. May I offer you a snack,
or perhaps a cold soda?

Jasira stares at him, wondering why he's never been this friendly to her.

(CONTINUED)

DENISE

Just water, thanks. I went jogging
before I came over.

RIFAT

Of course. Welcome to our home.

He exits toward the kitchen. Jasira just keeps staring.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Denise is on the bed; Jasira is in a sleeping bag on the
floor. They're listening to Billy Ocean's "GET OUTTA MY
DREAMS, GET INTO MY CAR" and eating JUNK FOOD.

DENISE

Your dad seems nice.

JASIRA

He's not that nice.

DENISE

My dad introduces himself to the
waitress every time we go to a
restaurant. He's like, 'HI, MY NAME IS
PORTER AND THIS IS MY DAUGHTER,
DENISE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?' He has a
hearing aid in his right ear. At least
your dad isn't deaf.

JASIRA

No, but he's a racist. He won't let me
go out with Thomas anymore because
it'll ruin my reputation.

DENISE

But your dad is an Arab. He comes from
the African continent.

JASIRA

I guess it ruined my mother's
reputation for her to go out with
Daddy, and he doesn't want mine to get
ruined. And now Thomas is mad at me
just for following my father's rules.

DENISE

I'd be mad at you, too. If you do what
a racist tells you to, that makes you
a racist.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

But if I don't do what he says, he'll
make me live with my mother. And I
can't leave Houston. Ever.

Jasira has never had a sleepover before, and she gets caught
up in the spirit of the moment.

JASIRA

Because I'm in love with Mr. Vuoso.
The reservist. Next door.

(off Denise's blank look)

I mean, would you want to move away
from Mr. Joffrey?

DENISE

Oh God, no! Does he like you too?

JASIRA

He took me out for dinner. I drank a
Margarita.

DENISE

Wow. Where was your dad?

JASIRA

At his girlfriend's. You can't tell
anyone what I just told you. I'd
definitely have to go live with my
mother then.

DENISE

Don't worry. I don't want you to go
and live with your mom. Then I
wouldn't have any friends!

She smiles at Jasira. Jasira smiles back, wondering if she
really is Denise's only friend.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - DAY.

Denise stands with Jasira and Rifat, saying goodbye.

DENISE

Thank you for the pancakes, Mr.
Maroun. I had a great time.

RIFAT

So did we, Denise. Hopefully we'll see
you again.

DENISE

Great. Bye!

(CONTINUED)

She gives a small wave, then opens the door. We see her MOTHER'S CAR waiting outside before the door shuts. Rifat immediately turns to Jasira.

RIFAT
Okay, give me the tape.

OFF JASIRA: She knows it's useless to argue.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Jasira and Rifat sit on the couch. The TAPE RECORDER is on the table; we HEAR the static-y RECORDING OF THE INTERVIEW.

MR. VUOSO (O.C.)
(on tape)
I would expect that from someone who loves Saddam.

RIFAT
Idiot.

JASIRA (O.C.)
(on tape)
That's racist. You're making an assumption about him because of where he's from. Daddy probably wants Saddam dead more than you.

Rifat smiles at Jasira. She just looks scared.

MR. VUOSO (O.C.)
(on tape)
If you say so. Next question?

JASIRA (O.C.)
(on tape)
Why did you pack rubbers in your duffel bag if you're married?

The RECORDING RUNS OUT. A beat.

RIFAT
(quietly)
Why did the tape turn off?

JASIRA
Mr. Vuoso got mad that I asked him that question. He hit stop.

RIFAT
Then what happened?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

He asked how I knew about his condoms.

RIFAT

How did you?

JASIRA

I found them in his duffel bag.

RIFAT

What kind of person goes through another man's things? Do you go through my things, too?

JASIRA

No.

RIFAT

(shakes his head)

Condoms. You have a foul mouth and a foul mind.

JASIRA

(hurt)

No I don't.

HE SLAPS HER across the mouth, then grabs her arm and squeezes hard.

RIFAT

Yes. You do. You do.

JASIRA

Ow.

Rifat keeps squeezing, abruptly lets go and walks out, as if stopping himself from going further. Jasira sits there, rubbing her arm, wondering why everyone always seems to be angry with her.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Thomas sits at a table, eating spaghetti. Jasira approaches tentatively, sits next to him and smiles. He looks at her, SNORTS. They eat in silence for a moment, until:

JASIRA

I did an interview with the guy next door for the school paper. It's coming out next week.

(off his silence)

I had to make most of it up, because -

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS
So you interviewed some redneck, so
what? I'm not impressed.

A beat.

JASIRA
What would impress you?

THOMAS
Nothing. It's too late.
(after a beat)
Wait, I know. Have sex with me.

JASIRA
Okay. But not at my house.

THOMAS
(can't believe his luck)
We can do it at my house. My parents
both work late. Can we do it today?

JASIRA
Do you have a condom?
(he shakes his head no)
We'll have to wait 'til tomorrow. I
have one at home I can bring.

She smiles, happy he's no longer mad at her.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - THOMAS'S BEDROOM - DAY.

This entire scene to be shot CLOSE ON JASIRA AND THOMAS, IN
PROFILE, his face above hers.

THOMAS
It'll only hurt for a few seconds.
Just tell me if you want me to stop
and I will.

JASIRA
But then you'll think I'm still a
racist.
(off his startled look)
You said if I had sex with you I would
impress you and you wouldn't think I
was a racist anymore.

THOMAS
Forget about that, okay?

He obviously enters her, starts to move.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

Oh my God.

JASIRA

(worried)

What?

THOMAS

It just feels so good.

(then)

I'm sorry if it hurts. The first time is always painful for girls.

JASIRA

I know.

Thomas abruptly climaxes with a YELP.

THOMAS

Wow.

He rolls off her. They lay there for a long beat.

THOMAS

Is there a lot of blood?

She leans up and OUT OF FRAME. When she leans back down, she has a CLEAN WHITE TOWEL she shows him. He stares at her.

JASIRA

Maybe some girls don't have it.

THOMAS

It was painful though, right?

JASIRA

(reassuring him)

Yes.

THOMAS

You just didn't look like it was bothering you that much. I mean, it's not like I have a small dick or anything.

He leans up and OUT OF FRAME.

INT. BRADLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER - DAY.

Thomas, now dressed, eats PEANUT BUTTER out of the jar with a spoon. Jasira enters, also dressed.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS
The cab'll be here in fifteen minutes.
(a beat)
Who'd you do it with before me?

JASIRA
No one.

THOMAS
But nothing popped. It's supposed to.

JASIRA
I don't know, Thomas.

THOMAS
I'm not going to be mad if you had sex
with someone else. I'm just curious.
Was it back in Syracuse?

JASIRA
(shut up)
It was nowhere.

A beat.

THOMAS
Do you feel like a woman?

JASIRA
Uh-huh.

THOMAS
(grins)
I feel like a man.

INT. SYRACUSE CONDO - DEN - NIGHT.

Gail sits on the couch, grading papers. The PHONE RINGS.

GAIL
(answers)
Hello?

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

WIDE ANGLE: Jasira stands at the counter on the phone, facing away from us.

JASIRA
Hi, Mom. It's me.

Intercut as necessary with Gail in the Syracuse Condo:

(CONTINUED)

GAIL
Hello. How are you?

JASIRA
Great.

GAIL
Me too. I have a new boyfriend.
Richard. He's very nice. Much nicer
than Barry. We went to a pickle
festival last weekend. Guess who loves
pickles? The Japanese. Who knew?

Jasira manages a smile, feeling a need to connect in some way -
any way - with her mother right now. Then:

GAIL
Do you ever see your friend Thomas?

JASIRA
No! I mean, sometimes I see him in
school, but I can't help that.

GAIL
Yeah, well. The thing is, Jasira, I
might have been wrong about that...

JASIRA
(baffled)
Does that mean I can see him?

GAIL
I'll talk to your father about it.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON THE TV: On CNN, VIDEO FOOTAGE of Iraqi soldiers
running from a bunker just before an American plane bombs it.

RIFAT (O.C.)
What do you mean, you changed your
mind?

Jasira sits on the couch, watching.

RIFAT (O.C.)
(yells)
Well, she's living with me, so I make
the rules! *Nibray! Skiteh!*

We HEAR HIM SLAM THE PHONE DOWN. Jasira's face falls. Rifat
enters from the kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

I don't care what your mother says. If I ever find out that you've been seeing that black kid, I will punish you severely. I mean it.

JASIRA

(blurts, angry)

But you're from the African continent!

RIFAT

(stares at her)

Who told you that? Lebanon is in Asia.

JASIRA

(confused)

So we're Asian?

RIFAT

No! We're Lebanese! What are they teaching you at that redneck school?

He sits, glares at the TV. Jasira, angry at him and at her mother, for raising her hopes, gets up and walks out of the room.

THOMAS (O.C.)

Did you get raped?

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Jasira and Thomas are at a table, eating lunch.

THOMAS

Is that why you won't tell me what happened?

JASIRA

I didn't get raped.

THOMAS

Well, there wasn't any blood last week, so you either had sex with someone before you had sex with me, or you got raped. Which is it?

JASIRA

Maybe it's from using all those tampons. I got stretched out.

THOMAS

I doubt it.

EXT./INT. HINES HOUSE - DAY.

The DOOR OPENS to REVEAL MELINA. She's gotten more pregnant.
Jasira stands on the porch, still carrying her school books.

MELINA
(glad to see her)
Hey! Why didn't you use your key?

JASIRA
You were home.

MELINA
It doesn't matter if I'm home or not.
I gave it to you for a reason.

JASIRA
Can I read my book?

MELINA
Sure.

Jasira goes inside and Melina shuts the door.

INT. HINES HOUSE - KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

CLOSE ON THE BOOK in Jasira's hands: The CHAPTER HEADING reads **RAPE**.

Jasira sits in the kitchen while Melina makes dinner. MUSIC TO COME is on the STEREO.

CLOSE ON THE BOOK: **Whenever someone forces you to engage in any sexual activity you don't want to do, it's rape.**

SLOWLY PUSHING IN ON JASIRA, reading.

SLOWLY PUSHING IN ON THE BOOK: **You can take up to three years to report it.**

MELINA
(cheerful)
Whatcha reading about?

JASIRA
About kissing.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - LATER - DUSK.

Jasira stands at the front door, knocks. It's opened by Zack.

ZACK
What do you want, towelhead?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
Is your daddy home?

ZACK
No.

Zack's WHITE KITTEN suddenly darts out the front door.

ZACK
Now look what you did!
(runs after kitten)
Snow-ball... Snow-ball...

He chases the kitten as it darts across the street. Unsure of what to do, Jasira turns and heads back to her house.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira sits at the kitchen table going through the MAIL. She opens an envelope addressed to her. Inside is a letter and a PHOTOGRAPH. She stares at the photograph, turns it over.

ON THE BACK OF THE PHOTOGRAPH in her hand: Written in a tense script is **Me and Richard at the Pickle Festival**. She turns it over and we see Gail with a middle-aged AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN, surrounded by JAPANESE PEOPLE. A DOOR SLAMS.

RIFAT (O.C.)
Goddamnit.

Rifat enters, flustered and visibly upset.

RIFAT
First your idiot of a President declares a cease-fire, even though Saddam isn't dead yet, or even captured. And then I run over a cat, about a block away.

JASIRA
Was it little and white?
(off his look)
That's the Vuosos' cat. I was talking to Zack and it ran out.

RIFAT
(stares at her)
You're kidding me.

He thinks for a moment, then opens the cabinet beneath the sink, reaches inside, gets a pair of DISH-WASHING GLOVES.

RIFAT
Here. I cannot do this.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

The DEAD KITTEN LOOMS IN THE F.G., its WHITE FUR SMUDGED WITH RED BLOOD. Behind it, RIFAT'S HONDA PULLS UP AND STOPS. The passenger door opens and Jasira gets out. Approaches the cat, wearing the DISH-WASHING GLOVES, kneels to pick it up.

JASIRA
(staring at it)
I'm sorry, Snowball.

Rifat blows the CAR HORN behind her, making her jump.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira stands at the counter with Rifat. The DEAD KITTEN HAS BEEN WRAPPED IN SEVERAL LAYERS OF SARAN WRAP. Rifat holds open a ZIPLOC FREEZER STORAGE BAG.

RIFAT
(squeamish)
Put that in here.

JASIRA
Don't you want me to take her back to the Vuosos?

RIFAT
Are you kidding? So that asshole can call me a murderer? Put it in the freezer. We'll take her out with the trash Wednesday night.

JASIRA
But they'll never know what happened to her.

RIFAT
Well, you should've thought of that before you got her killed.

Rifat washes his hands as Jasira, struck by his words, gingerly places the dead kitten, now in the Ziploc bag, in the freezer. He grabs a towel from the dinette table, notices the PHOTOGRAPH Gail sent Jasira. Picks it up.

RIFAT
(to Jasira)
Your mother is dating Colin Powell now? Good. I hope he marries her.

He crumples the photograph up and tosses it in the garbage.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT

What a hypocrite. How are you ever supposed to learn anything?

(on his way out)

I'm going to Thena's. I might stay there for the rest of the week.

And he's gone.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY.

FROM INSIDE THE FREEZER, as it's opened by Jasira and Thomas. The DEAD KITTEN in the ZIPLOC BACK is in the F.G.; they stare at it. Jasira seems on the verge of tears.

THOMAS

Oh, man. That's just sad.

JASIRA

She's dead because of me.

She starts to cry. Thomas shuts the freezer, takes her in his arms.

THOMAS

No she's not. She's dead because your father ran over her. Besides, she's in heaven now. You know what heaven is like for cats? It's pretty damn good.

She looks up at him, grateful. A beat, then they kiss. They kiss again - a long, soft, romantic kiss.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - JASIRA'S BEDROOM - LATER - DAY.

Again, this entire scene to be shot CLOSE ON THOMAS AND JASIRA IN PROFILE: They're still kissing. He is above her, moving. He breaks the kiss.

THOMAS

Are you going to come? The girl has to come first.

JASIRA

I'm not sure I know how to if I'm not by myself.

Thomas shifts upward, reaches down and OUT OF FRAME.

THOMAS

Can you come like this?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
(involuntarily)
Aaaahhh -

She leans up and kisses him intensely.

INT. VUOSO HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN: NFL FOOTBALL.

THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOW, we see Thomas leaving the front door of Jasira's house.

WIDE ANGLE: Zack watches the TV blankly. Mrs. Vuoso sits, her legs curled up under her, knitting. Mr. Vuoso stands at the window with a BEER. He looks both angry and sad. Abruptly:

MR. VUOSO
I'm going to go look for Snowball.

He exits, draining his beer on his way out. Zack watches his father go; Mrs. Vuoso never looks up.

INT./EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira OPENS THE DOOR to REVEAL MR. VUOSO. He smiles.

MR. VUOSO
Can I come in?

Jasira stands at the door, holding it half-open.

JASIRA
Can't we just talk like this?

MR. VUOSO
Okay, sure. I got called up.

JASIRA
But the war is over.

MR. VUOSO
The fighting part is over. They still need plenty of help.

JASIRA
Could you get killed?

MR. VUOSO
I don't think so. I mean, I hope not.
Of course, it's still dangerous,
but... I leave tomorrow.

(a beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MR. VUOSO(cont'd)

Anyway, I just wanted to say goodbye.
It was nice knowing you.

He smiles sheepishly, turns to go.

JASIRA

Wait. You can come in.

And she opens the door.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Mr. Vuoso enters as if he owns the place, sits on the couch.
Jasira stands across the room from him, nervous. A beat.

MR. VUOSO

(smiles)

Can't you come over here?

Jasira walks slowly toward him. He pats his lap. After a moment's hesitation, she sits on it. He brushes a lock of hair out of her face, looks at her, smiles.

MR. VUOSO

(softly)

You act like you're so young and don't know what you're doing, but you know. You know exactly what you do to men.

He puts his hands on her. JUMP TO:

FROM BEHIND THE COUCH: Mr. Vuoso and Jasira are kissing; he's passionate, hungry. One gets the idea it's been a while since he felt this way. He breaks the kiss.

MR. VUOSO

Stand up. Strip for me.

JASIRA

(unsure)

Why?

MR. VUOSO

Because it's sexy.

Jasira stands, starts to tentatively unbutton her blouse. JUMP TO:

The BACK OF JASIRA'S BARE LEGS are in the F.G.; Mr. Vuoso looks at Jasira from the couch, taking her in.

MR. VUOSO

Get on all fours.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S FACE. She's outside of her body. [Throughout the rest of this scene, we will avoid any graphic nudity and only see Jasira's face.]

JASIRA

Why?

MR. VUOSO

Because that's how I want to do it.

JASIRA

But I can't see you.

MR. VUOSO

(unbuckling his belt)

You'll feel me.

JUMP TO:

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S FACE as Mr. Vuoso enters her. He starts to move pretty fast right away. We suddenly FLASH ON:

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT (FANTASY).

The BLONDE from the Heaven BILLBOARD, on her hands and knees, her back arched, her head thrown back, as Mr. Vuoso fucks her from behind. SHE LOOKS DIRECTLY INTO CAMERA, moaning dramatically like a porn star.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

BACK ON JASIRA'S FACE. She tries to behave the same way. Again, we FLASH ON:

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT (FANTASY).

ON THE BLONDE'S FACE. Her expression of overstated ecstasy gives way to one of discomfort, quickly dissolves into pain and humiliation.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

BACK ON JASIRA'S FACE. She can't pretend that she's enjoying this anymore, and starts to cry.

CLOSE ON MR. VUOSO'S FACE, completely unaware of her, feeling a sense of power and abandon he hasn't felt in years.

MR. VUOSO

Yeah. You like that.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

WIDE ANGLE: Rifat's AMERICAN FLAG is illuminated; the great room lights are on, but we can't see inside. It looks like any other middle-class suburban home.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira sits on the couch, her clothes back on, hugging her knees. Mr. Vuoso, now dressed, buckles his belt. He smiles at her, friendly.

MR. VUOSO

I'll think about you in Iraq.

He lets himself out. Jasira doesn't move.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - DAY.

Jasira stands on the curb, with her schoolbooks, waiting for the bus. Mr. Vuoso comes out of his house, wearing his KINKO'S UNIFORM.

MR. VUOSO

(friendly)

Morning.

He smiles at her, gets in his pickup and drives away.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE/VUOSO HOUSE - LATER - DAY.

Jasira stands at the edge of her yard; Zack stands at the edge of his.

ZACK

My dad's not going to Iraq! Didn't you hear, retard? The war's over. We kicked Saddam's ass!

He stomps away from her.

EXT. HINES HOUSE - DAY.

Jasira walks down the sidewalk mechanically, her face a blank, when MELINA PULLS INTO HER DRIVEWAY, gets out of her car.

MELINA

Hey, Jasira. Want to come in and read your book?

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
(avoiding her)
No thanks. I have homework.

And SHE HURRIES OUT OF FRAME.

OFF MELINA, watching her go. Concerned.

EXT. MAROUN HOUSE - DAY.

Jasira and Rifat are weeding the flower bed when Melina's husband Gil approaches.

GIL
Hi. I'm Gil. Melina's husband?

Rifat eyes him, not trusting this.

GIL
Listen, do you guys want to come over for dinner? We thought we could celebrate the end of the war.

RIFAT
Celebrate? What's to celebrate?

GIL
We don't have to celebrate. We can just eat.

RIFAT
(thinks about it, then)
We would be happy to come.

Jasira doesn't look happy about it.

GIL
Great. We'll see you Monday night around seven-thirty.

INT. MALL - DAY.

JASIRA'S POV, MOVING through the mall: slightly slower than feels right. The usual stores one finds in any mall in America. People wander aimlessly, as if in a trance.

REVERSE TRACKING ON JASIRA, walking, staring, feeling like such a stranger in this world. DENISE LEANS INTO FRAME SUDDENLY, grabs Jasira's arm.

DENISE
Oh my God. We have to!

She pulls Jasira toward

(CONTINUED)

OVER JASIRA'S AND DENISE'S SHOULDERS as they hurry towards a STORE. A HAND-LETTERED SIGN reads

MAKE YOUR OWN GLAMOR SHOTS

Jasira and Denise enter, leaving us to stare at the PHOTO ENLARGEMENTS in the DISPLAY WINDOW: Regular people, all women, wearing artfully applied makeup, in low-cut tops. HYPNOTIC SCORE bleeds in over

INT. GLAMOR PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

A WIDE ANGLE: Jasira and Denise sit on a haphazard SET in a cramped, makeshift PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO. They're both wearing elaborate makeup and their hair is a little teased. They're wearing loose fitting, low-cut tops. A male PHOTOGRAPHER, bored out of his mind, directs them in a nasal monotone as he snaps shots of them.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Oh, that's great... give me a smile,
you're having fun... good, good...

THROUGH THE CAMERA'S VIEWFINDER: Jasira and Denise vamp for the camera. Denise is on the verge of laughter throughout, self-conscious and giddy. Jasira however, seems remote, not really there.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.C.)

Now give me a big kiss...

ON JASIRA, suddenly being overly lascivious as she puckers up. Some sarcasm and resentment leaks out.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.C.)

(couldn't care less)

Yeah, that's sexy.

Jasira, suddenly curious how far she will go, arches her back seductively and really starts to seduce the camera.

REVERSE ANGLE on the Photographer, snapping away. He barely notices, but remains emotionally uninvested.

PHOTOGRAPHER

That's good. Arch your back, let me
see as much of your throat as
possible...

Jasira does so, trying to please him. But he finds no pleasure in this work.

(CONTINUED)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Turn away from me, look back over your shoulder, just like that... try to look like you just woke up...

Jasira obeys, and for the first time she feels like Mr. Vuoso was right, that she does know what she does to men. This time, the Photographer gets interested.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Wow. You're good at this, little girl.

Jasira relaxes, revels in being seen, in posing. She's discovering that she really is good at this.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Why don't you drop the blouse down a little, let me see your shoulder...

Jasira starts to oblige, then...

JASIRA

No.

She seems suddenly repulsed by the whole experience.

JASIRA

I'm thirteen.

She walks off the set, suddenly creeped out. Denise stares at her, baffled, then turns to the Photographer, who is equally baffled.

EXT. MALL - LATER - DAY.

Jasira and Denise sit on the curb outside the entrance. Jasira wears a T-shirt and a denim skirt. Denise sits on the curb next to her, studying their glamor shot.

DENISE

You know, Jasira, when I squint, you kind of look like Julia Roberts in this picture...

JASIRA

I had sex with Thomas.

Denise stares at her, dumbfounded.

DENISE

But I thought you were in love with that guy next door.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA
I guess I wasn't.
(then)
So at least Thomas doesn't think I'm a
racist any more.

DENISE
(sharply)
The first person you have sex with
should be someone who thinks you're
special, not someone who's using you.

JASIRA
(unsure)
Thomas is not using me.

Rifat's HONDA APPROACHES. Jasira stands.

DENISE
Are you kidding? Making you trade your
virginity for forgiveness? That is so
stupid. I hate that I know anything
about it.

Rifat leans out the open driver's window as Jasira starts
toward the car. Smiles at Denise.

RIFAT
How was the mall?

DENISE
Great, Mr. Maroun.

JASIRA'S POV as she MOVES TOWARD THE PASSENGER DOOR: On the
seat next to Rifat is Jasira's PLAYBOY MAGAZINE.

Jasira stops. Scared.

RIFAT
(quietly)
You get in this car. Now.

Jasira does; the HONDA PULLS AWAY. Denise waves.

INT. RIFAT'S HONDA - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Rifat drives in silence, deeply troubled. Finally:

RIFAT
Where did you get this magazine?
(off her silence)
Answer me!

(CONTINUED)

But Jasira remains silent. Rifat punches Jasira in the thigh, hard. He does it again. And again. Jasira just stares out the window. Rifat SIGHS, exasperated.

RIFAT

(pained)

You are not living in the moral universe. The things you do are not normal. You look at pictures of whores and like them so much you keep the magazine. You do not obey me, or your mother. One day, you will run out of places to live.

OFF JASIRA, feeling like she already has.

EXT. MAROUN/VUOSO/HINES HOUSE - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

Rifat's HONDA PULLS INTO THE DRIVEWAY, stops. He gets out, starts toward the house. Jasira gets out slowly, as if walking through lead, still holding the Playboy. Rifat is already at the door.

RIFAT

Hurry.

He goes in, leaves the door open for her to follow him.

ON JASIRA, staring at the open door. She knows if she goes in, a part of her will never come out. She slowly starts to walk toward the Vuosos, limping. Breaks into a painful run and ends up on MELINA'S FRONT PORCH.

RIFAT (O.C.)

Jasira!

Jasira turns, frightened, sees Rifat standing in their driveway. She digs in her backpack for her KEY, finds it. Her hands are shaking but she manages to open the door just as RIFAT BREAKS INTO A RUN toward her.

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Jasira enters, locks the door behind her. Turns to see Gil on the couch, paying bills, wearing GLASSES.

GIL

Oh, hey. Come on in.

He glances at the Playboy, glances away. Suddenly there is POUNDING at the door.

RIFAT (O.C.)

Open the door! You open this door!

(CONTINUED)

Jasira looks at Gil; he doesn't move. Almost against her will, she moves toward the door. Gil gets up, calmly.

GIL

Why don't you go use the bathroom upstairs. Second door on the right.

Jasira nods, unable to speak. Starts up the stairs, clutching her leg; it's clear she's been injured. Gil registers this.

INT. HINES HOUSE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Jasira enters, locks the door. Sits on the toilet, numb.

RIFAT (O.C.)

She's my daughter - !

GIL (O.C.)

No one is saying she isn't.

RIFAT (O.C.)

- and I'm here to pick her up.

GIL (O.C.)

Well, she's not ready to go just yet.

RIFAT (O.C.)

(yells)

Who are you to tell me anything about my own daughter?! You go get her!

A DOOR CLOSES. We HEAR SOMEONE CLIMBING THE STAIRS. Jasira gets up, pushes against the door to keep whoever it is out.

GIL (O.C.)

Jasira? I just wanted to let you know your father went home. Okay?

(off her silence)

Melina will be home from prenatal yoga soon. Can I get you anything?

JASIRA

No, thank you.

We HEAR GIL WALKING AWAY. Jasira relaxes a tiny bit.

INT. HINES HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER - NIGHT.

Jasira, Melina and Gil sit at the table. They're having LAMB.

JASIRA

This is good. Daddy's is always dry.

(CONTINUED)

GIL

The Arabs overcook everything.

JASIRA

He's not Arab. He's Lebanese.

(after a beat)

When do I have to go home?

MELINA

Do you want to go home?

Jasira shakes her head no.

MELINA

So don't worry about it.

GIL

Don't tell her not to worry about it.

She's worried.

MELINA

No one's going to make her do anything
she doesn't want to do.

She gives Gil a look that he knows not to challenge.

ON JASIRA, wanting to believe what Melina said... then there
is a KNOCK AT THE DOOR, and hope drains from her face.

MELINA

Go upstairs.

(off Jasira's inaction)

Go!

Melina watches Jasira hurry up the stairs, still limping.

HER POV: As Jasira's skirt moves, we can see the DARK PURPLE
BRUISES on her left thigh.

Melina looks at Gil, he saw it too. Their eyes stay locked for
a beat, then they both move toward the door.

INT. HINES HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALL/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS -
NIGHT.

Jasira rounds the corner at the top of the stairs, just stands
there against the wall, listening to:

RIFAT (O.C.)

I'm here to take my daughter home.

IN THE LIVING ROOM: Melina, Gil and Rifat stand just inside
the door, which is still open.

(CONTINUED)

MELINA

Well, Jasira doesn't want to go home with you.

RIFAT

(enraged)

This is kidnapping! And I will call the police!

MELINA

Oh, I doubt that.

GIL

(in Arabic, subtitled)

You don't want the police to see what you've done to her.

ON JASIRA, surprised. She never expected Gil spoke Arabic.

Rifat eyes Gil, suddenly subdued. Gil remains calm.

GIL

I just don't see the harm in her staying with us for a couple of days. She'll come back when she's ready.

Rifat stands, eyeing him, silent, then abruptly turns and walks into the night. Gil shuts the door.

GIL

He'll probably be back.

MELINA

So? We'll get rid of him again.

OFF JASIRA, unable to fully trust what just happened.

INT. HINES HOUSE - UPSTAIRS STUDY - LATER - NIGHT.

Melina is putting sheets on the sofa bed when Jasira enters, in a T-shirt and panties.

JASIRA

(re: clothes, apologizes)

This is all that I have.

MELINA

We'll go over and get some of your stuff tomorrow.

(off her fearful look)

We'll go right after school, before your father comes home from work. You've got a key?

(CONTINUED)

Jasira nods, starts to quickly get under the covers, pulling the left side of her T-shirt down to hide her bruises as best she can. Melina reaches out, grabs her hand. Jasira lets go of the T-shirt and her bruises are exposed.

JASIRA

Daddy was mad about the magazine.

Melina gets up, gets a POLAROID CAMERA from a shelf.

MELINA

Mind if I get a couple of pictures?

Jasira shakes her head. Melina aims; Jasira smiles.

MELINA

Uh... let's try one without the smile.

(lowers camera)

Is there anything else I should take a picture of?

Jasira shakes her head, gets into bed. Melina studies her, reaches over to the end table and picks up the Playboy, starts leafing through it. Jasira watches her, fascinated.

MELINA

I wouldn't even mind this stuff if it wasn't for all the airbrushing.

(points to picture)

See how smooth her skin is? She probably has cottage cheese thighs, but they painted over it, and now men look at these pictures and think that's how women should look. And women look at these pictures and think that's how they should look.

JASIRA

(intrigued)

Women look at these pictures?

MELINA

Yeah. They look at them and feel like shit.

JASIRA

Do... women ever look at them and feel good?

MELINA

Maybe. Is that how you feel? I mean, they're sexy pictures.

(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MELINA(cont'd)

How anyone feels when they look at this doesn't matter. It's private. But how a kid your age has a magazine like this, that isn't private. Who gave you this?

(off Jasira's silence)

Jasira. Did an adult give you this?

JASIRA

Yes.

MELINA

Was that adult your father?

JASIRA

No.

Melina sighs, gives up. For now.

MELINA

Try to get some sleep, okay?

Without thinking, Melina tucks Jasira in. They both unexpectedly find themselves enjoying this gesture. Melina smiles, touches Jasira's face, then exits, taking the Playboy with her.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

CLOSE ON JASIRA, unwrapping her lunch - a LAMB SANDWICH. She's wearing one of Melina's maternity dresses; it's quite uncharacteristic for her.

Thomas sits across from her, grinning.

THOMAS

I was thinking maybe I could come home with you after school today.

JASIRA

You can't. I don't live there anymore. I live with Melina.

THOMAS

That pregnant lady? Why?

JASIRA

Daddy was hitting me too much.

THOMAS

(after a beat)

He hit you? Why? Because of me?

JASIRA

No. He found my Playboy.

(CONTINUED)

OFF THOMAS, staring at her. Concerned.

INT./EXT. MELINA'S VOLVO/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - LATER - DAY.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, as we drive up to the curb in front of the school. Thomas stands with Jasira.

Melina pulls up. Thomas leans in the open passenger window.

THOMAS

Can I come over and hang out with Jasira for a while?

MELINA

(to Jasira)

Is that what you want to do?

(off Jasira's nod)

Okay. Get in.

As Thomas and Jasira climb in:

MELINA

We just have an errand to run first.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Thomas sits at the dinette, waiting. Jasira and Melina enter with GARBAGE BAGS loaded with Jasira's clothes. Melina suddenly falters, out of breath; Thomas jumps up, takes the bag from her. She sits.

MELINA

Whoa. I'm a little light-headed.

THOMAS

(takes Jasira's bag too)

I'll take these over to your house.

He exits. Jasira looks at Melina, concerned.

JASIRA

Are you okay?

MELINA

Yeah. I just needed to sit down.

(stands)

You ready?

JASIRA

There's something I need from the freezer. It's kind of gross.

She opens the freezer, takes out the ZIPLOC FREEZER BAG with the dead kitten inside. Melina stares at it.

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA

It's Zack's cat that he lost. We were supposed to put her in the trash, but Daddy kept forgetting. I don't want to put her in the trash.

MELINA

Uh... I have a lot of food in my freezer for when the baby comes. I'm not sure I have room for a cat.

JASIRA

Okay.

Jasira looks at it, deeply sad. Melina SIGHS.

INT. HINES HOUSE - KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

FROM INSIDE THE FREEZER as it's opened by Melina. Jasira gingerly places the plastic bag inside.

MELINA

Just keep it away from the meat.

Thomas watches as Melina and Jasira finish, shut the door.

MELINA

I need to take a nap. The last couple of days have been maybe more excitement than I'm used to.

And she disappears up the stairs. Thomas grins at Jasira.

THOMAS

I've got a surprise for you.

He pulls CONDOMS from his pocket. Jasira stares at them.

THOMAS

Don't you want to have sex with me?

JASIRA

(worried)

If Melina finds out, she'll send me back to Daddy's.

THOMAS

She's not going to send you back to someone who hits you.

He crosses to her. Takes her hand, puts it on his crotch.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

(softly)

See how excited you make me? Nobody else does. You're the only one. Don't you want to be the only one?

OFF JASIRA: She wants that more than anything in the world.

INT. HINES HOUSE - UPSTAIRS STUDY - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

Jasira straddles Thomas on the sofa bed. They've kept most of their clothes on.

ON JASIRA'S FACE, losing herself, discovering new sensations from this new position. Forgetting everything that's happened.

ON THOMAS'S FACE, head back on the pillow, enjoying watching her.

Jasira reaches a deeper, more intense orgasm than she's ever had. Involuntarily, she CRIES OUT. Jasira and Thomas immediately freeze. Listening.

MELINA (O.C.)

Jasira?

Jasira and Thomas scramble to re-fasten their clothes.

THOMAS

(whispers)

Ugh. I still have the condom on.

We HEAR MELINA COMING DOWN THE HALL. Thomas pulls his sweater over his head just before MELINA ENTERS. His blue WINDBREAKER is still on the sofa bed.

MELINA

Why was this door closed?

JASIRA

I don't know.

MELINA

Okay, you guys need to go downstairs.

THOMAS

I just need to go to the bathroom.

He exits.

JASIRA

(guilty)

Did you get enough of a nap?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JASIRA(cont'd)

You can finish it now. We'll go downstairs, I promise.

MELINA

Why did you yell?

Jasira is silent. We HEAR A TOILET FLUSH.

MELINA

We'll talk about this later.

She stands there until Jasira leaves, gives the room one last look, then exits, shutting the door behind her.

INT. HINES HOUSE - KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER - NIGHT.

CLOSE ON JASIRA'S HANDS, placing PEPPERONI SLICES on a HOMEMADE PIZZA.

Jasira and Melina are preparing two pizzas. Jasira finishes placing pepperoni on one, starts on the other.

MELINA

No no no, not on this one. I can't have salt. My blood pressure's high, because of the baby.

As Melina opens the oven, places the two pizzas inside:

MELINA

Thomas seems like a nice kid. A little bossy, but nice.

JASIRA

He's a really good guitar player. He likes Jimi Hendrix.

MELINA

Well, he's got good taste.

They head into

INT./EXT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

Thomas is on the couch with Gil. A BOWL OF POPCORN and some paper NAPKINS on the coffee table in front of them. Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians' "WHAT I AM" plays on the STEREO. As Jasira and Melina enter:

THOMAS

Marhaba.

(off Jasira's blank look)

Gil taught me how to say hi in Arabic.

(CONTINUED)

MELINA

Dinner'll be ready soon. Thomas, don't you want to call your mother?

THOMAS

Oh yeah, I guess I'd better.

He gets up and heads into the kitchen as THE DOORBELL RINGS. Jasira looks alarmed; Melina puts her arms around her. Gil opens the door to REVEAL RIFAT AND THENA ON THE FRONT PORCH. Rifat is wearing a suit, carries a BAKING DISH. Thena, also a little dressed up, carries a WINE BOTTLE with RIBBONS around the neck. She seems a little embarrassed.

RIFAT

Good evening. We're here to celebrate the end of the war.

An awkward beat.

GIL

(after a beat)

Uh... come in.

RIFAT

(enters)

This is my friend Thena.

GIL

Hello.

THENA

Pleased to meet you.

RIFAT

(to Gil, re: baking dish)

This is for you. Baklava. I made it myself, it's delicious.

THENA

(to Melina, re: bottle)

And this is for you. Sparkling cider.

Melina stares at her from across the room.

RIFAT

(very friendly)

Good evening, Melina. This is my friend Thena.

MELINA

(are you insane?)

Hello.

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT
Hello, Jasira.

Jasira eyes him nervously.

JASIRA
Hi.

RIFAT
Say hello to Thena.

JASIRA
Hi.

THENA
It's good to see you again, Jasira.

Jasira attempts a smile, with limited success. Thomas enters from the kitchen.

THOMAS
My mom says I can stay.

An awkward beat. Finally:

JASIRA
This is Thomas.

THENA
(warmly)
Hello, Thomas. I'm Thena.

THOMAS
Nice to meet you.
(to Rifat)
Hello.
(off Rifat's silence)
It's Thomas.

RIFAT
I know.
(then, to Gil)
Well, I guess you forgot about our dinner tonight.

MELINA
It's not just that. I mean, yes, we forgot, okay. But circumstances have changed, don't you think?

RIFAT
The war is still over.

(CONTINUED)

THENA

We don't want to intrude. I just think Rifat would like the chance to visit with Jasira and let her know that he misses her.

RIFAT

Yes. I would like to do that.

Jasira looks to Melina and Gil, who trade a look. A beat.

GIL

Well, why don't you both come in and sit down for a few minutes?

RIFAT

Thank you.

Rifat and Thena enter, sit. A beat. Thomas lays on the floor.

RIFAT

(re: Thomas)

Excuse me, but may I ask what he is doing here?

THOMAS

I'm a friend of Jasira's.

RIFAT

Uh-huh. Except Jasira isn't supposed to be seeing you.

MELINA

Why not?

THOMAS

Because I'm black.

THENA

(to Rifat)

Is that the reason?

(off his silence)

My God. That's ridiculous.

Rifat struggles to contain his anger.

RIFAT

I did not make the world the way it is! I am only trying to spare her shame! And now these people have decided to butt into our lives -

MELINA

Hey, we're trying to help her -

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT
(sharply)
Who are you? Why should you help? Who
told you to help?

Jasira flinches at his raised voice.

GIL
(equally sharply, in
Arabic, subtitled)
*Show her respect, or you will have to
leave.*

Rifat fumes. Thena puts her hand on his shoulder. A beat.

THOMAS
Marhaba.

Rifat glares at him, stands.

RIFAT
I would like to see where Jasira is
staying. I have a right to see where
my daughter is sleeping.

GIL
Uh, sure. It's the first door on the
left, at the top of the stairs.
(off Melina's look, as
Rifat heads upstairs)
He has a right, Mel.

INT. HINES HOUSE - UPSTAIRS STUDY - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

Rifat enters, looks around. Picks up Thomas' blue WINDBREAKER
from the sofa bed. Stares at it grimly. Opens the drawer of
the side table, rifles through its contents.

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT.

THENA
(to Melina)
May I ask when your due date is?

MELINA
Officially April twenty-third. But it
feels like it could be any day. She's
already dropped.

THENA
Oh, so you know it's a girl? How
exciting! Congratulations. Girls are
so much more fun than boys.

(CONTINUED)

OFF JASIRA, wondering why that would be.

RIFAT (O.C.)
(angry)
Thomas!

RIFAT COMES LOUDLY DOWN THE STEPS, holding wadded up TOILET PAPER in his hand. He looks homicidal.

RIFAT
Get up.

THOMAS
(sits up)
What?

Rifat stands over Thomas, turns the toilet paper upside down and something we can't quite see drops into Thomas's lap. When Thomas realizes it's a CONDOM, he scrambles to get it off him.

THOMAS
What the hell! That's disgusting.

RIFAT
(to Melina, yells)
I found a rubber in your toilet!

MELINA
(appalled)
You were snooping in our toilet?

RIFAT
(points at Thomas)
His jacket is on her bed! And his rubber is in your toilet! He's the only one here who needs one! Right?

MELINA
Oh my God.

Rifat's face is bright red and we can see the veins on his temples, he's so angry.

RIFAT
You both think I'm so terrible. But then, you let my daughter take boys in her room and use rubbers?

MELINA
We don't. We didn't.

RIFAT
Jasira! Go and get your things. You're coming home.

(CONTINUED)

A beat, then Jasira slowly stands, an odd look on her face, as if she's decided to just give up completely.

GIL

Hold on a second -

RIFAT

(sputtering, livid)

Go ahead! Call the police! You have pictures of her leg and I have this rubber! You are terrible too!

THOMAS

Look, it's all my fault. Blame me.

RIFAT

Of course I blame you!

JASIRA

(quietly)

It's not his fault.

RIFAT

(ignoring her, to Melina)

And you, for letting my daughter lose her virginity in this house!

JASIRA

(louder, to be heard)

I didn't lose it here!

Everyone stares at her. A beat.

THOMAS

She lost it at my house.

JASIRA

No.

Everyone waits to hear what she says next. When she finally speaks, it's with some trepidation, but mostly with relief.

JASIRA

(to Rifat)

I lost it at your house. Mr. Vuoso did it. With his fingers. I didn't want him to, but he did.

No one moves. Total silence, for a good ten seconds, then Melina starts to cry.

EXT. HINES HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT.

A Houston Police PATROL CAR is parked out front.

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT.

Gil opens the door for a UNIFORMED POLICEWOMAN to leave.

IN THE KITCHEN, we see Rifat sitting alone at the table, his head in his hands. He sobs silently; the only way we know he's crying is the way his shoulders bounce up and down.

Jasira and Melina are on the couch, Melina's arms around Jasira, who's been crying. Jasira looks out a window at:

HER POV, THROUGH LOOSE-WEAVE CURTAINS: A UNIFORMED POLICEMAN, African-American, knocks on the Vuoso's front door. It's opened by Mrs. Vuoso, obviously frightened that there's a policeman on her front steps.

RIFAT (O.C.)

(sadly)

I can't understand why you never told me about this before.

Rifat has silently approached. He kneels before Jasira, looks at her, his face softer than we've ever seen it.

JASIRA

I thought you would be mad.

RIFAT

(truly baffled)

Why would I be mad if someone was hurting you?

GIL

Okay, let's call it a night.

Rifat turns to him in disbelief.

RIFAT

What if I want to stay with my daughter?

MELINA

Come on, Rifat.

RIFAT

(to Jasira, pleads)

You can't come home with me? Not even for one night?

Jasira looks at Melina.

RIFAT

I'm talking to you. Not her.

(CONTINUED)

Jasira looks at him, her face a blank. Takes a breath, then:

JASIRA

No. I can't.

She speaks with an authority that's new for her. Rifat's face remains still, be we see him crumble inside. He looks down, back up at her, attempts a smile for her benefit.

RIFAT

Okay.

He touches her hair, gets up and lets himself out.

INT. HINES HOUSE - UPSTAIRS STUDY - LATER - NIGHT.

Melina sits behind Jasira on the sofa-bed, brushing her hair.

MELINA

My God, you've got a lot of hair.

JASIRA

I didn't tell the policewoman this, but... the other time I did it with Mr. Vuoso, I acted like I wanted to, even though I really didn't.

MELINA

(no judgement)

Why?

JASIRA

I don't know. I thought I was supposed to.

MELINA

Jasira. You never have to have sex if you don't want to. And a grown man knows that. If he has sex with anybody under sixteen, it's rape. Even if she wants to do it.

JASIRA

But I feel sorry for him...

MELINA

Don't you feel sorry for him. Ever.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY.

Establishing.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY.

Jasira sits alone at a table, eating. Thomas approaches, sits next to her. They eat in silence for a beat, then:

THOMAS
You should have told me.

JASIRA
I didn't want to tell you.

THOMAS
Was there a lot of blood?
(off Jasira's nod)
That was my blood, not his.

JASIRA
(stares at him)
No it wasn't. It was my blood.

A beat.

THOMAS
I don't think we should have sex any more.

JASIRA
Are you mad at me?

THOMAS
No! No, I... I just don't think it would be right. Not after what that asshole did to you.

Jasira thinks.

JASIRA
I don't want to stop. I like having sex with you. I like being the only one who makes you excited like I do. I don't want to have to lose that because of what Mr. Vuoso did.

Thomas considers this. He takes her hand, kisses it.

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER - DAY.

ON MELINA, laying on the couch, SNORING, her mouth open.

CLOSE ON A PAGE from Changing Bodies, Changing Lives:

THE LAW SAYS...

(CONTINUED)

Age 10 to 15 - No one can have sex with you, touch you sexually or engage in a sexual act in front of you --

Jasira frowns. Reads further:

EVEN CLOSER on the page:

If they are more than two years older than you. Even if you agree.

Jasira breathes, relieved. We HEAR A DOOR SLAM next door, and she looks up. JUMP TO:

INT. HINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

JASIRA'S POV, MOVING toward a window. THROUGH OPEN-WEAVE CURTAINS, we see MR. VUOSO TAKING DOWN HIS FLAG.

Jasira glances at Melina, heads quietly into the kitchen.

EXT. VUOSO HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Mr. Vuoso is detaching his FLAG from the nylon rope on the flag pole. He seems like he's aged since we last saw him. Unseen by him, Jasira approaches, holding the ZIPLOC FREEZER BAG with the dead kitten inside.

JASIRA

Hi.

Startled, Mr. Vuoso turns to her. His eyes go dark.

MR. VUOSO

(scared)

What are you doing here? Get away.

He starts folding the flag as fast as he can.

JASIRA

Did they let you go?

MR. VUOSO

I'm out on bail.

JASIRA

(holds out Ziploc bag)

Daddy ran over Snowball. And then we froze her.

Mr. Vuoso stares at her. Finally takes the bag.

JASIRA

She ran out when I was talking to Zack. I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

He looks up at her, his eyes filled with sadness.

MR. VUOSO
It's not your fault.

He's not talking about the cat. He reaches out, touches her face... There's nothing sexual or exploitative in this gesture. Just tenderness, regret. A tear rolls down his cheek.

MR. VUOSO
Jasira. I'm so sorry...

MELINA (O.C.)
Stop!

They turn to see Melina, coming out of her house.

MELINA
Don't you dare touch her -

SHE TRIPS COMING DOWN THE FRONT STEPS, collapsing into a painful-looking heap on the walkway.

Jasira is horrified, runs toward her. Mr. Vuoso starts running for his house. We HEAR SOMEONE BANGING ON A DOOR.

INT. MAROUN HOUSE - A SHORT TIME LATER - DAY.

FOLLOWING RIFAT as he crosses to the front door.

RIFAT
Jesus -

He opens the door to reveal Jasira, agitated.

JASIRA
Daddy, Melina fell! And there's blood
between her legs -

RIFAT
(on his way out)
Call 9-1-1, tell them we need an
ambulance -

Jasira starts back toward the kitchen, but we already HEAR AN AMBULANCE APPROACHING.

RIFAT
(from outside)
Never mind, it's already here!

EXT. MAROUN/VUOSO/HINES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - DAY.

Jasira comes out the door, sees Rifat running toward Melina, still prone on the sidewalk, as an AMBULANCE pulls into the Hines' driveway. Jasira starts running, glances over at

ON THE VUOSO'S FRONT WINDOW: WE CAN SEE MR. VUOSO BEHIND THE WHITE SHEERS, his PHONE to his ear.

INT. HOSPITAL - OB/GYN WAITING ROOM - LATER - DAY.

Rifat sits, nervous, reading Time. ON THE COVER: A young woman with an American flag embraces a uniformed Desert Storm soldier. The HEADLINE reads: **A MOMENT TO SAVOR - And the Lessons of Victory**

Disgusted, he closes the magazine, throws it on the table next to him. Jasira enters from a corridor.

JASIRA

She wants you to be there.

RIFAT

(horrified)

I'm not watching her have a baby. It's none of my business.

JASIRA

But her husband might not make it here in time.

OFF RIFAT, uncomfortable.

INT. HOSPITAL - BIRTHING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY.

Melina is in a delivery chair, her feet in stirrups. Doctors and Nurses are prepping for the birth. Jasira and Rifat stand nearby. Jasira is putting on a PAPER SURGICAL GOWN.

NURSE

Sir, if you're going to stay, you'll need to put on a gown.

RIFAT

I'm just saying hello.

MELINA

You're really not staying?

RIFAT

I'd rather not.

MELINA

Didn't you see Jasira's birth?

(CONTINUED)

RIFAT
(shakes his head)
Those were different times.

Melina looks at him, disgusted. Rifat is embarrassed.

RIFAT
Jasira will stay with you. That will
be much better.

His eyes meet hers; unbeknownst to Jasira, something more is being said here. Rifat looks at his daughter with great affection.

RIFAT
She's a good girl.

MELINA
Yes, she is.

Rifat gives Jasira a hug, looks deeply into her eyes, hoping to find some sort of forgiveness... then abruptly leaves.

JASIRA
(to Melina, apologetic)
Daddy doesn't like bodies.

Melina looks at her, smiles, then grimaces as a CONTRACTION HITS.

SOUND SLOWLY FADES OUT. We HEAR Tunge Jegede's "SONG OF THE WATERFALL" over a SERIES of graceful M.O.S. CROSS-FADES:

ON MELINA, pushing. It's painful. A Nurse blots her forehead...

ON JASIRA, now wearing a SURGICAL MASK AND CAP, so that only her eyes show. She watches, fascinated. Fearless...

A NEWBORN BABY GIRL is cradled in a Doctor's latex-gloved hands...

A Nurse gives Jasira a pair of SURGICAL SCISSORS, to cut the umbilical cord...

ON MELINA, crying uncontrollably, as she sees the baby for the first time.

A Doctor hands her the Baby, and she cradles her new daughter against her breast. Looks up at Jasira, smiling through her tears. Puts her hand on the side of Jasira's face.

ON JASIRA: The way only her eyes are showing is oddly reminiscent of the faces of traditionally-garbed Arab women.

(CONTINUED)

She's crying too, but for the first time we've ever seen, her tears are tears of joy.

FADE TO BLACK.

"SONG OF THE WATERFALL" continues to play over **END CREDITS**.