

LIGHTS OF KABUL

by

Denise Harkavy

CAA
Darian Lanzetta
(424) 288-2000

Heroes and Villains Ent.
Mikhail Nayfeld
(323) 850-2990

Based on a true story.

Due to the sensitive nature of the events,
the names of the characters involved have been changed.

OVER BLACK

The Islamic CALL TO PRAYER rolls out, piercing the silence.
FADE IN on a MOSQUE, MINARETS painted red by the setting sun.

EXT. RISHKHOR NEIGHBORHOOD, KABUL (AFGHANISTAN) - SUNSET

CLOSE ON a concrete wall, SPRAYED with ARABIC LETTERS.
SUBTITLES appear below with the translation:

"DEATH TO AMERICANS"

A SUPER READS: "KABUL, January 10th, 2015"

A convoy of MILITARY TANKS rumbles across the pavement in a slow crawl, toppling flowers under their treads. Riding on top are SIX tougher-than-hell MARINES in camouflage fatigues. Hair cropped close, eyes scanning PEDESTRIANS with suspicion.

Their GAZE shifts, landing on a GIRL in a HEAD SCARF by the side of the road, clutching a GROCERY BAG. Her demeanor differs from those around her -- it's not tainted by HATRED.

She looks up at the passing Marines with a SMILE, waving gently. They warmly return the greeting.

Meet NOORA SOLTANI (14) -- quick-witted and wise beyond her years with a smile that could make desert flowers bloom. She looks too young and fragile to be THE HEROINE OF OUR STORY.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A modern home, tastefully furnished. Warm colors and intricate rugs create a delightful Middle Eastern ambience. Noora enters through the front door, making her way to --

A KITCHENETTE, where her mother RASHIDA SOLTANI (35), an elegant and devout housewife, is preparing a meal. Noora empties the contents of the grocery bag on the counter.

RASHIDA

Can you help with the onions?

NOORA

I can. After I teach you another letter.

Before Rashida can protest, Noora retrieves a BOOK from the nearby table. She flips it open, letting her INDEX FINGER run across a row of ARABIC LETTERS, from right to left.

NOORA (CONT'D)
This is an "n".

RASHIDA
(exasperated)
We're not doing this. I made it
this far without doing any reading.

NOORA
That's the problem, maman. They
don't want our minds to be free.
Because freeing our minds is the
first step to us being free.

Rashida shoots her a baffled look.

RASHIDA
Who teaches you these things?

NOORA
Baba. He's getting me a new book
from the market.

RASHIDA
Keep it hidden. I don't need the
neighbors talking. And give your
father a call while you're at it.
We're out of saffron.

Noora lets out a fatalistic SIGH.

INT. CAMP MOREHEAD - BACK ROOM - SAME TIME

SHARIF SOLTANI (43, charismatic and earnest) sits at a metal
table in a bleak room. His lack of facial hair and modern
clothing indicate a man with liberal views. He looks down at
his pocket -- his PHONE has started to VIBRATE. He picks up:

SHARIF
(into phone)
I haven't forgotten about the book.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SOLTANI HOME - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Noora, CELL PHONE pressed to her ear, delighted to hear her
father's voice. These two are close.

NOORA
That's not why I'm calling. It's
because of maman.
(MORE)

NOORA (CONT'D)
 She needs turmeric.
 (remembers)
 And saffron.

SHARIF
 Tell that woman she's going to
 bankrupt me.

Noora CHUCKLES, amused.

SHARIF (CONT'D)
 I'm with a customer. I'll see you
 tonight.

He hangs up. WIDE TO REVEAL he's sitting inside a briefing room opposite MAJOR MICHAEL BARRETT (50s), an imposing man forged in the furnace of a lifetime of war. Sharif switches to ENGLISH, which he speaks surprisingly well:

SHARIF (CONT'D)
 (apologetic)
 My daughter...

MAJ. BARRETT
 Does she know?

SHARIF
 (shakes his head)
 She's too young to understand.

MAJOR BARRETT
 Good. We can't risk losing another
 interpreter.

SHARIF
 You won't, Sir. I'm very careful.

MAJ. BARRETT
 That's what Amir used to say.

Barrett places a grisly PHOTOGRAPH on the table, showing AMIR, spread-eagled on a dirt road. His SEVERED HEAD lies nearby, EYES WIDE, neck ragged. FLIES circling above.

Sharif swallows hard at the sight.

MAJ. BARRETT (CONT'D)
 The Taliban's been tracking 'em
 down, one by one. Using information
 from bus and taxi drivers, even
 mullahs.
 (beat)
 They left this message on him.

He produces a LETTER, bearing the TALIBAN FLAG. Sharif EXAMINES the ARABIC letters and TRANSLATES:

SHARIF

"We know you work with the US special forces. You must stop helping these infidels and surrender yourself to us. If you obey, we will spare you."

MAJ. BARRETT

We're going to need that in writing. And a response to encourage the Afghan people to keep resisting these threats.

SHARIF

I'd be glad to help with that, Sir.

TIME CUT TO:

Sharif dips an old-fashioned QUILL into a pot of INK. With careful STROKES, he crafts a LEAFLET, featuring the drawing of a LION, chasing a STRAY DOG, symbols for the never-ending battle between the AMERICAN FORCES and the TALIBAN.

Off Sharif, eyes narrow with CONCENTRATION...

EXT. PUL-E KHISHTI BAZAAR - KABUL (AFGHANISTAN) - DAY

An ancient open-air market -- a cacophony of sight, scent, and sound. VENDORS peddle their wares: slaughtered sheep hanging upside down on heavy iron hooks. AFGHAN MEN gather to smoke opium, a fleeting escape from poverty and war.

CLOSE IN on a narrow wooden stall, stuffed with harvest fruits and vegetables: clusters of grapes, purple eggplants and pale-green melons, piled like boulders.

CAMERA FINDS JAMAL SOLTANI (17), boyish and handsome, as he hands a CUSTOMER a small container of FENUGREEK in return for 250 Afghanis (equal to a few dollars).

CUSTOMER

Tashakor.

JAMAL

Please, come again.

(NOTE: Hereafter, italicized dialogue indicates "spoken in Dari with English subtitles.")

A BEARDED MAN is next in line. Judging by his religious HEADDRESS and ROBES, we're dealing with a MULLAH.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Chief Syed. What an honor. Are you looking for anything specific?

CHIEF SYED

I am.

But the Chief isn't surveying the produce...

CHIEF SYED (CONT'D)

Is your father here?

JAMAL

He's making a delivery. But he should be back any moment.

CHIEF SYED

A delivery? Where to?

JAMAL

Rhishkhor, I think.

CHIEF SYED

(disapprovingly)

With all the infidels in the area?

SHARIF (O.S.)

They're everywhere.

The Chief spins to face Sharif, carrying a CARTON of OKRA.

SHARIF (CONT'D)

If I were to avoid them completely, I'd have to close down the store.

Sharif meets his eyes, UNFLINCHING. His face betrays nothing. Slowly, the Chief's cold expression softens, turning into a polite SMILE.

CHIEF SYED

You're right, of course.

SHARIF

Can I interest you in some okra?

CHIEF SYED

Maybe some other time.

The Chief steps out of the stall, melting into a sea of BUYERS. Jamal and Sharif make eye contact -- not fooled by the Chief's feigned friendliness.

JAMAL
 (a suspicion)
 He knows something.

SHARIF
 I doubt it. But I'll stop going for
 a while, just to be safe.
 (a warning)
 No word about this to your mother.

Jamal NODS reassuringly.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Noora is helping Rashida set plates and utensils on the table. We hear the RATTLING of a KEY and the sound of the front door opening.

Noora abandons her task, excited to see --

NOORA
 Baba!

Sharif enfolds her in his arms.

SHARIF
 How is the prettiest girl in Kabul?

RASHIDA
 Don't exaggerate, dear.

SHARIF
 I'm not. She may be a grape today
 but she'll be wine tomorrow.

JAMAL (O.S.)
 (jokingly)
 Vinegar is more like it.

Jamal walks in, followed by their baby brother ISMAIL SOLTANI (9), who shoulders a BACKPACK with a SOCCER SYMBOL on it. He's bright-eyed, innocent and a bit spoiled.

Noora playfully boxes Jamal in the shoulder.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 Ow!

RASHIDA
 (to Ismail)
 How was school?

ISMAIL

Boring.

NOORA

(longingly)

I would give my left arm to go to that boring school of yours.

ISMAIL

(doubtful)

You say that now.

TIME CUT TO:

The entire FAMILY is seated, passing around servings of FLAT BREAD and AFGHAN STEW -- a riot of color, taste and aroma. Their exchanges are full of good-natured TEASING:

RASHIDA

(to Jamal)

Have some more. Ever since you started working for your father, you're too skinny.

JAMAL

(friendly reminder)

You wanted me to help him.

RASHIDA

Since when do you listen to me? Maybe he wouldn't need your help if he didn't leave the store in the middle of the day to do God-knows-what.

SHARIF

I'm expanding my business.

(beat)

And finding treasures for my treasure.

He removes a tattered PAPERBACK version of "*HOMER'S ODYSSEY*" from his inner jacket pocket, hands it to Noora.

SHARIF (CONT'D)

It's a classic. About bravery, adventure --

RASHIDA

Unsuitable for a girl.

SHARIF

(ignoring Rashida)

Can someone pass the salt, please?

Jamal reaches for the salt container, but Rashida's faster -- moving it out of his reach.

RASHIDA

Nu-uh.
 (to Sharif)
 Mind your blood pressure.

SHARIF

You want me to die of starvation?
 This stew needs some spice.

RASHIDA

Maybe if you would've brought some
 from the store like I asked --

RASHIDA

What good is having a husband
 who trades spices if he
 doesn't bring any home?

SHARIF

If I did that I'd have
 nothing to sell. Just -- hand
 me the salt. Don't be
 ridiculous.

The children LAUGH, amused by the banter of their parents.
 ANGLE shifts to Noora, taking in the JOY of the moment. The
 feeling of togetherness. Face full of CONTENTMENT.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A CANDLE flickers inside a LANTERN. Noora's in her pajamas,
 brushing her long, raven-black hair. She takes her new BOOK,
 tries to squeeze it into a CUPBOARD, filled to the brim with
 a vast COLLECTION of HARDBACKS.

SHARIF (O.S.)

I thought you'd like it.

She spins to find Sharif in the door frame.

NOORA

I do...

SHARIF

Why do you hide it then?
 (then)
 Your mom told you to, didn't she?

NOORA

She says it's for my own benefit.

SHARIF

I'm not sure how you benefit from
 hiding your God-given gifts.

(MORE)

SHARIF (CONT'D)

By doing that you're depriving
everyone around you of your light.
As a woman, the world needs your
light. Now more than ever.

NOORA

It does?

To illustrate his point, Sharif picks up the LANTERN and spins it -- throwing PATTERNS against the darkened wall.

SHARIF

(he nods)

To move people, inspire and
encourage them. To be a catalyst
for change. Why do you think I
named you Noora? It means --

NOORA

(finishes his sentence)

Light, I know.

(uncertain)

But I don't know if I can do any of
those things.

SHARIF

Of course you can. Anything my boys
can do, you can do tenfold.

Deeply AFFECTED by her father's words, Noora positions the book on her bedside table -- for all to see.

NOORA

Better?

SHARIF

Much better.

Noora crawls into bed. Sharif covers her with a blanket, BLOWS out the candle, shrouding the room in darkness.

NOORA

Good night, baba.

SHARIF

See you in the morning, my light.

And with that, he exits.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - NOORA'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Noora is curled up in bed, fast asleep. Suddenly, we hear the front door being KICKED OPEN with a splintering THUD! The POUNDING of heavy BOOTS on the wooden floor.

Noora JOLTS awake, rattled. Drawing heavy BREATHS as --

A FLASHLIGHT slices the darkness, blinding her. Her eyes ADJUST to see SIX TALIBAN FIGHTERS, wearing BLACK BALACLAVAS over their heads -- leaving only their eyes exposed. BOLT-ACTION RIFLES trained on her.

TALIBAN FIGHTER #1
Just a girl. Look in the next room.

The fighters keep moving, storming in her parents' BEDROOM. Rashida's CHILLING SCREAMS fill their home.

RASHIDA (O.S.)
Oh, God! Please! Please, I beg you!
My husband is a God-fearing man! He
hasn't done anything wrong!!

STAY WITH Noora as she throws the covers back and hops out of bed. Yanks the door open. A HANDHELD CAMERA races behind her as we FOLLOW her out -- the image fast and shaky as she sprints down the corridor, where --

Two TALIBAN FIGHTERS are savagely beating Sharif. FISTS POUNDING IN his face, drawing blood. A SYMPHONY OF VIOLENCE.

Rashida stands nearby, unable to interfere.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
Please, I beg you! Spare him!

TALIBAN FIGHTER #2
Quiet, woman!

The insurgent backhands her, knocking her out. Noora barges into Jamal AND ISMAIL'S BEDROOM --

Finding both her brothers cowering under the bed.

NOORA
(low, to Jamal)
Get out before they find you.

Jamal's eyes SNAP to the window, cracked open. His ONLY CHANCE. He swallows his fear and climbs out onto THE LEDGE.

NOORA (CONT'D)
 (to Ismail)
 Come here.

She takes Ismail's hand, ushers him over to the WARDROBE, where she gives him a leg-up, hoisting him upward. He scrambles up, reaching the top, just as --

The TALIBAN COMMANDER strides inside. Noora finds herself staring INTO THE BARREL OF HIS RIFLE.

She's so overcome with shock she can barely speak.

TALIBAN COMMANDER
 Someone else in here with you?

Tense silence.

TALIBAN COMMANDER (CONT'D)
 Speak.

NOORA
 N -- no.

TALIBAN COMMANDER
 Where's your brother?

NOORA
 In Herat... with my uncle.

CAMERA PANS UP to expose Ismail, lying on top of the wardrobe, every ounce of his body shaking with FEAR.

The Commander regards her for an unreadable beat. Goes to the window and peers out. Noora holds her breath, hoping Jamal is out of sight.

A chilled silence as the Commander surveys the gardens below. Unable to make out his prey, he turns, leaving the room.

THROUGH the OPEN DOOR, Noora catches a glimpse of Sharif being dragged to his FEET by the TALIBAN. He struggles to stand, shirt and face speckled with blood.

The SIGHT brings tears to Noora's eyes.

TALIBAN COMMANDER
 Where's your son?

Sharif remains silent -- an act of defiance. A TALIBAN FIGHTER brutally kicks him in the stomach. He GROANS, reeling in PAIN, unable to breathe.

Noora lets out a scream of ALARM.

NOORA

Baba!

The beating comes to an abrupt halt. Sharif meets her eyes, dazed. Forces a weak smile.

SHARIF

It's okay, my light. Go back in your room.

TALIBAN COMMANDER

(to Taliban fighters)

Take him.

The MEN grab Sharif up by the scruff of the neck and YANK him BACKWARD out the front door. Noora hurries back in her room, leans out the window, craning into the dark.

Noora's POV -- the TALIBAN FIGHTERS violently hustle Sharif into a parked JEEP out front. The vehicle SCREECHES away from the curb, disappearing into the night.

ANGLE ON Noora, heart SHATTERING into a million pieces.

INT. RELATIVE'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A framed PHOTOGRAPH of Sharif has been placed on a table. Rashida cries hysterically while Noora kneads her hand, trying to soothe her. They're both wearing black.

A group of MOURNERS, some neighbors, others distant relatives has gathered. MONIR (50s), the family's spinster aunt, takes a seat next to Rashida.

MONIR

The police chief says they haven't found his body yet.

RASHIDA

(dabbing her eyes)

Who's going to look after this family with him gone?

Monir looks up to Jamal, who's serving tea to the guests.

MONIR

He's the head of the household now.

She leans in close to whisper:

MONIR (CONT'D)

They'll come for him next.

RASHIDA
But... he's a child.

MONIR
Boys younger than him have been recruited. Sooner or later, they'll find him and give him a choice: join them or be killed. Either way, you'll lose him to the Taliban. If you stay.

RASHIDA
Where am I supposed to go?

MONIR
Anywhere but here.
(beat)
Think of your children.

STAY ON Rashida, as the severity of the situation SINKS in.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

A SUPER READS: **"January 22nd, 2015"**

Rashida frantically rummages through drawers, dumping a handful of clothes into a DUFFEL BAG. She carefully removes a HIDDEN COMPARTMENT, pulling out a JEWELRY BOX.

She selects a few pieces -- the smallest and easiest to transport -- and stuffs the remainders back inside.

Ismail watches her, perplexed.

ISMAIL
Where are we going?

RASHIDA
Somewhere safe.

Taking Ismail's hand, she ushers him out into the hallway, where Jamal and Noora are waiting, BAGS already packed.

Rashida spots the BOOK in Noora's hand --

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
What did I say? Only what's necessary.

She snatches it from her, tossing it aside, as she rushes her children towards the exit.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
Hurry, we have no time to lose.

Noora throws a last glance at the book -- her father's last gift to her -- before tearing herself away.

EXT. BUS STATION - KABUL - AFTERNOON

A long line of TRAVELERS has formed in front of a BUS. Among them we FIND the Soltani's, bags slung over their shoulders. Full of trepidation, they clamber aboard.

EXT. BUS STATION - HERAT - NIGHT

The PASSENGERS file off the bus, taking in the their surroundings, far more provincial than the capital.

Further down the road, hidden in the bushes, is a LARGE VAN. A group of YOUNG MEN has gathered out front.

Rashida and her children move towards them, looking on as they pay a LOCAL SMUGGLER a large sum of money.

RASHIDA
I hear you can take us across the border to Turkey.

She drops a WAD OF CASH in his palm. He counts it, satisfied with the amount.

SMUGGLER
You hear correctly. But I wouldn't recommend you go. You won't make it.
(re: Noora & Ismail)
Not with a girl and a little boy in tow.

ISMAIL
(offended)
I'm nine.

RASHIDA
Quiet, Ismail.

SMUGGLER
It's up to you.

ON Rashida, suddenly reconsidering her plan.

SMUGGLER (CONT'D)
 (calls out)
 Everyone get inside!

The men begin to form a line, shuffling into the back of the VAN. Jamal is next, when he twirls around...

And notices Rashida hasn't moved.

JAMAL
 Are you coming?

RASHIDA
 No.
 (re: Noora & Ismail)
 These two are too young for the journey. You have a better chance if you travel alone.

He looks at her, aghast.

JAMAL
 I can't just leave you here!

RASHIDA
 If you don't, the Taliban will get you.

JAMAL
 And you? What about you?

RASHIDA
 We'll go to Iran. It's easy to get in. And we'll be safe there.

Listening in, Ismail's growing increasingly more distressed.

ISMAIL
 (to Rashida)
 Why are you sending Jamal away? I don't want him to go.

He begins to WAIL loudly. In an attempt to calm him, Noora steps forward, spinning a tale:

NOORA
 She's not sending him away. She's just... letting him go ahead. Once he's settled in Europe, he'll send for us and we'll join him there.
 (to Jamal)
 Isn't that right?

Jamal nods, playing along.

JAMAL
 (reassuring)
 Yes, that's right.

ISMAIL
 (not convinced)
 Do you promise?

JAMAL
 I promise.

Jamal holds out his PINKIE FINGER, wraps it around Ismail's, sealing his word.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 But till that day, you have to protect them for me. You think you can do that?
 (off his nod)
 I'm counting on you.

SMUGGLER (O.S.)
 Last call, last call!

RASHIDA
 (to Jamal)
 Go, my son.

Jamal's face fills with DREAD. Anxious to be separated from his family, he pulls them into a last embrace.

JAMAL
 I'll see you again soon.

Then he jumps in the van. Rashida looks on, tears in her eyes, until the vehicle recedes into the far distance.

INT. SMUGGLER'S VAN (MOVING) - LOADING AREA - PRE-DAWN

Twenty AFGHAN (mostly male) FUGITIVES sit in the cramped loading area of a van. We FOCUS on Rashida and her TWO CHILDREN huddled among them.

Suddenly, the van comes to a halt, causing an anxious MURMUR to break out among the travelers.

FUGITIVE #1
 (low)
 What's happening?

FUGITIVE #2
 Shhh... border patrol.

EXT. IRAN/AFGHANISTAN BORDER - CHECKPOINT - PRE-DAWN

CAMERA HOLDS on a SIGN written in Arabic letters that READS:

"YOU ARE NOW ENTERING IRAN"

The van has stopped at a SECURITY CHECKPOINT. Two uniformed BORDER GUARDS approach the Smuggler, who leans out the driver's side window, SLIPPING them a handful of BILLS.

BORDER GUARD #1
You're early.

SMUGGLER
You said sunrise.

BORDER GUARD #1
(motions to the sky)
See the sun anywhere?

SMUGGLER
(a veiled threat)
I can stick around until your
Commander comes in?

The Guard frowns. He raises an arm, giving a SIGNAL. Slowly, the AUTOMATIC BARRIER opens, clearing a path. The van throttles out of the gravelly lot.

TIME CUT TO:

The sun begins to RISE as our van races down a winding DESERT ROAD, leaving a trail of dust behind as we close in on the ANCIENT CITY of YAZD with its distinctive DOMED ROOFS and mud-walled WINDCATCHERS, drenched in the golden light of DAWN.

OFF this image, we --

SNAP TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD OVER BLACK:

ONE YEAR LATER

FADE UP ON:

A PAIR of WORN-OUT SHOES, shuffling down the dirt road. PAN UP TO REVEAL they belong to Noora (now 15). The morning sun gently caresses her olive skin as she scurries towards --

A rural BAKERY. A LONG LINE of CUSTOMERS has formed outside.

INT. BAKERY - YAZD (IRAN) - MORNING

FLAT BREADS bake over pebbles. TRACK ALONG as they're fished out of the oven by a BAKER and carried over to a pile, where a SALESMAN picks them up and wraps them, distributing them to CUSTOMERS in exchange for a few RIALS (Iranian currency).

Noora waits in line. We NOTICE she's not as well dressed as the others. Money has been sparse this past year. Finally, it's her turn. She walks up to the Salesman.

NOORA

Two pieces of taftoon, please.

The Salesman recognizes her AFGHAN ACCENT.

SALESMAN

(points)

To the back of the line.

NOORA

Excuse me?

SALESMAN

(more firm)

Afghans to the back of the line.

Her expression sours. This kind of treatment is common for Afghans who live in Iran. Before she can react, the next customer elbows her aside, placing his order.

Noora bites her bottom lip, holding in her ANGER.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - SAME TIME

We see VARIOUS ANGLES of a sprawling house with floor-to-ceiling windows. Gold accents on the furniture indicate a decent amount of wealth.

CAMERA FINDS Rashida, sleeves rolled up, kneeling on a winding staircase, scrubbing the MARBLE FLOORS with a bristle WIRE BRUSH. Ismail (now 10) helps her unenthusiastically.

RASHIDA

I can still see that spot. You're not going outside until it's gone.

ISMAIL

(sighs)

Yes, maman.

He keeps scrubbing with more effort.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

WATER boils inside a GLASS SAMOWAR. Rashida pours it into a TEA KETTLE. Places CREAM and ROSEWATER JAM on a SILVER TRAY.

Then she reaches into the BREAD BIN... it's empty.

EXT. SIDEWALK - YAZD (IRAN) - SAME TIME

Noora breezes through the streets, cradling two pieces of BREAD, avoiding eye contact with the other PEDESTRIANS.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - FOYER - SOON AFTER

Noora hurries inside to find Rashida waiting, arms crossed.

RASHIDA
Why are you late?

NOORA
(out of breath)
It wasn't my fault --

RASHIDA
(agitated)
I don't want to hear it. Do you
have any idea how lucky we are to
have a roof over our heads?

Noora lowers her head, apologetic. She knows her mother's patience is wearing thin these days.

NOORA
I'm sorry. It won't happen again.

Rashida places the bread on the SILVER TRAY she left on a nearby table. She starts up the staircase, heading to the UPPER FLOOR.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOME - MARYAM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rashida lowers the tray for MARYAM EBRAHIMI (34), a gaunt woman who, judging by the WHEELCHAIR next to her bed, is paralyzed from the waist down.

Rashida is her live-in CARETAKER.

RASHIDA
Apologies for the delay, Miss.

MARYAM
 (good-natured)
 How many times do I have to ask you
 to call me Maryam?

Maryam lifts her tea cup and inhales: heaven.

MARYAM (CONT'D)
 (as she takes a sip)
 Any news from Jamal?

RASHIDA
 I spoke to him a few days ago. His
 German is getting better, he says.

MARYAM
 How much longer until he finds out?

RASHIDA
 A week or two. If his refugee
 status is approved he gets to stay.

MARYAM
 And bring you over to live with
 him.

RASHIDA
 Inshallah.

Suddenly, a SHARP PAIN hits Rashida. She cradles her STOMACH.

MARYAM
 What is it?

RASHIDA
 Probably something I ate.

Maryam reads the pain in her face, uncomfortable at her
 distress.

MARYAM
 Why don't you go lie down a bit?
 Send up Noora to do the rest.

RASHIDA
 Are you sure?

MARYAM
 You have to be healthy and well-
 rested when you see Jamal again.

Rashida smiles, comforted by her words.

INT. CLASSROOM - BERLIN (GERMANY) - DAY

RAIN pelts against the window of a bare classroom. MELANIE (26), a strawberry blonde, bespectacled German teacher paces in front of her STUDENTS -- some Iraqi, others Somali, Syrian or Afghan, as they jot things down in their notebooks.

MELANIE

Choosing between the informal "du" and the formal "Sie" to address someone can be tricky. How do we handle things when speaking to an older person?

A SINGLE HAND shoots up in the air.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Jamal.

ANGLE ON Jamal (now 18) his clothes more Western than the last time we saw him. His mannerisms more laid back. He's assimilating into a new society very different from his own.

JAMAL

The older person is always the one to suggest the informal "du" as opposed to "Sie" in conversation.

MELANIE

Can you give me an example?

JAMAL

(in German)
"Sie können mich gerne duzen."

MELANIE

(impressed)
"Sehr gut."

JALEEL

"Danke."

Her approval earns Jamal a JEALOUS LOOK from another student -- a gangly Afghan boy named TARIK (18).

TARIK

(low, in Dari)
Kiss-ass.

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - BERLIN (GERMANY) - AFTERNOON

An overcast SKY encases the entire city like a grey tarp. Jamal holds an UMBRELLA, breath visible in the cold air.

The SUBWAY TRAIN pulls up to the platform. He steps inside, looking for an open seat. He sits down opposite an ELDERLY GERMAN WOMAN who pins him with a SHARP, DISAPPROVING GLARE.

Her hands TIGHTEN around her purse. Jamal reads between the lines: she thinks all refugees are thieves. He averts his eyes, uncomfortable, but unwilling to antagonize her.

EXT. REFUGEE HOME - ESTABLISHING - AFTERNOON

Jamal walks through the housing project's maze of DEAD TREES approaching a particularly DEPRESSING CONCRETE BUILDING. ASYLUM SEEKERS loiter outside, smoking CIGARETTES.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Jamal strolls down the DECREPIT HALLWAY. Stops when he sees a GERMAN MAN waiting for him. This is FRANK ERNST (52), his case worker. An aging hippie with a warm but commanding face and a hint of "rebel" lingering beneath the surface.

FRANK

It's here.

He lifts an ENVELOPE, bearing the STAMP of the GERMAN IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - GROUP ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A tiny room, the furnishings shabby and sparse. Jamal's roommates KHALIL (18) and ADNAN (17) are playing cards on their BUNK BEDS. There's no privacy or personal space here.

Jamal walks in, staring at the envelope, afraid to open it.

FRANK

(encouragingly)

Just rip off the band-aid.

Jamal draws in a DEEP BREATH, then tears the envelope open. His anxious eyes SCAN the LETTER. Frank and his roommates look on, waiting for some kind of reaction.

ADNAN

What does it say?

JAMAL

(nervous, stammering)

I'm -- I'm not sure --

Frank snags the letter back and reads it.

FRANK

You've been approved!

The roommates erupt in CHEERS. Jamal just stands there, rigid.

JAMAL

Does that mean... ?

FRANK

You can stay. And file for reunification.

Jamal's knees are about to buckle. Frank seizes his elbow as he sinks to his knees, curbing a rising tide of emotion.

JAMAL

I have to tell my family.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - SEWING ROOM - YAZD (IRAN) - DAY

Noora watches patiently as MR. SAEED EBRAHIMI (60), a TAILOR with a greying beard and protruding stomach, struggles to THREAD a NEEDLE, one eye opaque white with blindness.

NOORA

Would you like me to -- ?

MR. EBRAHIMI

I'm quite capable, thank you.

Maryam sits in her wheelchair, busying herself at the nearby WORK STATION.

MARYAM

Let her help you, papa.

Finally, he gives in. Hands Noora the needle.

NOORA

It's easier when you dampen it...

Under his supervision, Noora threads the needle and STARTS UP the SEWING MACHINE using the FOOT PEDAL. With precise hand movements, she guides the FABRIC across the STRIKING NEEDLE.

MR. EBRAHIMI

You have to place it --

NOORA

(confident)

Perpendicular to the line where the seam will go.

He nods his APPROVAL.

MR. EBRAHIMI
You've learned a lot in the short
time you're here.

NOORA
I had two great teachers.

Maryam waves it off, uncomfortable with praise.

MR. EBRAHIMI
Maybe it's time they compensated
you for your service.

He holds out two SILVER COINS.

NOORA
I can't take it, Mr. Ebrahimi.
Maman says it's illegal for us to
receive a salary.

MR. EBRAHIMI
It is. But I don't see any
government workers in here, do you?

Noora pockets them, grateful.

Just then, we HEAR the SOUNDS OF STRUGGLE through the open
window. Mr. Ebrahimi and Noora poke their heads out to see--

Ismail in a messy scrap with two IRANIAN BOYS his age. A
dusty SOCCER BALL rolls around nearby.

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
(calls out)
What's going on out here?

The Iranian boys freeze, looking up.

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
Get out of my yard or I'll tell
your parents!

They SCATTER off, leaving Ismail in the dirt.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Noora dabs blood off Ismail's lower lip with a NAPKIN.

ISMAIL
Why do they hate us?

NOORA

Not all Iranians are like that. Mr. Ebrahimi and Maryam aren't like that.

ISMAIL

Sometimes I think they're the only ones.

(re: Iranian boys)

They called me a dirty Afghan.

This strikes Noora at her core. A pained moment.

NOORA

From now on, you'll stay inside.

ISMAIL

(whiny)

But it's boring in here.

NOORA

Find something useful to do.

We hear quick FOOTSTEPS as Rashida hurries up a narrow staircase leading down to the BASEMENT.

Her eyes fall on Ismail's injury.

RASHIDA

What happened to your face?

The siblings trade a look -- a silent pact between them.

NOORA

(covers:)

He was playing soccer and got hit by the ball.

Rashida finds her explanation dubious but has more important matters on her mind at the moment.

RASHIDA

Come on down. Jamal's on the phone.

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

A cramped, airless, windowless basement room featuring two ragged MATTRESSES on wooden pallets. RAGS and TOWELS make up the sheets. This is where the Soltanis live these days.

They huddle in front of a propped-up SMART PHONE, BEAMING at the good news. ON the miniscule SCREEN: a live-feed of Jamal, constantly freezing due to spotty RECEPTION.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. REFUGEE HOME - COMPUTER ROOM - EVENING

Jamal is seated in front of an old WINDOWS COMPUTER. A long line of inhabitants behind him, patiently waiting for their turn to speak to their families.

JAMAL

Now that it's official, I'm going to fill out the application.

RASHIDA

For all of us?

JAMAL

You think I'd leave one of you behind?

(feigns reflection)

Well, maybe Ismail.

Ismail GRINS, in on the joke.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(to Ismail)

You're going to like it here. Children don't have to work. All they do is play and go to school.

NOORA

Even the girls?

JAMAL

Especially the girls.

Noora's mind drifts off into a DAYDREAM about life in Europe. The kind of life their father would've wanted for them.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

My case worker says it may take a while until you're granted asylum. And there are some things that need to be taken care of first.

Rashida nods, face set in determined lines.

RASHIDA
What do I need to do?

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

Rashida rifles through her belongings. Finds a small GOLDEN BRACELET and matching AMBER RING. It isn't much.

JAMAL (V.O.)
Take any jewelry you have on you...

ON A MARKET SQUARE, Rashida shows the jewelry to an OLDER WOMAN, persuading her to buy it. The woman inspects the items critically, then hands her a few rumped bills.

JAMAL (V.O.)
... and sell it.

INSIDE THE LIVING ROOM, Rashida and Noora pour over a STACK of PAPERWORK. Noora fills out the forms as Rashida watches.

JAMAL (V.O.)
Then you have to apply for passports. Germany can't process your visa applications without them.

NOORA
(to Rashida, points)
You have to sign it.

Rashida appears troubled, ashamed even.

NOORA (CONT'D)
That's why I was trying to teach you.

RASHIDA
This isn't the time to have this conversation.

She's right. Noora thinks, reaches for an open INK POT.

NOORA
It doesn't say it has to be a written signature.

Rashida dips her THUMB in the ink, presses it on the paper, leaving a FINGERPRINT.

JAMAL (V.O.)

Next, you have to go to the Afghan consulate in Tehran. Use the jewelry money to pay for expedited processing.

EXT. SIDEWALK - TEHRAN (IRAN) - DAY

Face obscured by a black TSCHADOR, Rashida shuffles down the well-trafficked road, grasping a FOLDER containing the FORMS.

We PAN around to a vast, impressive building with high ceilings: the CONSULATE GENERAL of AFGHANISTAN.

JAMAL (V.O.)

And whatever you do, don't get caught by the police. We can't risk you getting deported back to Kabul.

UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS mill about outside the ENTRANCE. Rashida hesitates, unsure if she should proceed or not.

RASHIDA (V.O.)

Don't worry. I'll do everything just as you said.

Gathering her courage, she scurries onward, head low to avoid eye contact with the Officers.

They hardly notice her as she enters the consulate.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. REFUGEE HOME - COMPUTER ROOM - DAY

We're back where we left off: Jamal in front of the computer, face to face with his family. One of the ASYLUM SEEKERS in line impatiently clears his THROAT.

JAMAL

I gotta go. But I'll call again soon. Love you guys.

RASHIDA

We love you, too.

They WAVE at the screen. Jamal presses the red HANG UP button. His eyes go down, somehow GUILTY.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - BERLIN (GERMANY) - DAY

A WAITRESS brings Frank's coffee and green tea for Jamal. Spread out on the cluttered table is Jamal's CASE FILE.

FRANK

Sure you don't want anything else?

JAMAL

Not unless they're hiring.

Frank doesn't follow.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I'm legal now. Which means I'm eligible to work, right?

FRANK

Technically. May I ask why the rush?

Jamal hesitates, searching for the right words...

FRANK (CONT'D)

I think it would be more beneficial for you to concentrate on your language class.

JAMAL

I won't ditch the class. But I need to help my mother. The family they're staying with only provides room and board. They need money for legal fees, travel expenses...

Frank studies him, tentative.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Please. I'll take anything.

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

Six burger patties sizzle on the grill. PAN UP to Jamal, wearing a ridiculous HAT and matching APRON, flipping burgers with a SPATULA. PHILIP (29), his burly German co-worker, calls out from behind the register:

PHILIP

(to Jamal)

Yo, Mohammed. Where them cheeseburgers at? This ain't Iraq or wherever you're from. Things gotta move on time.

He SNAPS his fingers at him. Jamal feels the sting of the insult, but keeps himself from reacting. He needs this job.

JAMAL
Coming right up.

He quickens his work pace.

EXT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Rashida is sweeping the floor when Mr. Ebrahimi walks over, passing her an ENVELOPE with the STAMP of the AFGHAN CONSULATE.

MR. EBRAHIMI
This just came for you.

RASHIDA
Is it from the consulate? What does it say?

Mr. Ebrahimi rips it open, squinting at the letters.

MR. EBRAHIMI
The passports are ready for pickup.

Rashida instantly BRIGHTENS at the news.

EXT. SIDEWALK - YAZD (IRAN) - DAY

Rashida trudges along the busy sidewalk, PUFFING and PANTING with each step. She staggers, grimacing in pain, one hand on her STOMACH. She wills herself to go on, until --

She suddenly FAINTS, collapsing onto the concrete. An alarmed BYSTANDER hurries across to her.

BYSTANDER
(worried)
Miss, are you alright?

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - SEWING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON Noora's FINGERS threading a needle, when Mr. Ebrahimi barges in, phone to ear.

MR. EBRAHIMI
Noora. Your mother... she's in the hospital.

Shocked at this revelation, Noora accidentally pokes herself, drawing a small DROP OF BLOOD.

INT. MORTAZ GENERAL HOSPITAL - TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON Rashida's SWOLLEN STOMACH. A DOCTOR inspects her, carefully applying pressure. She reacts with a VIOLENT SCREAM.

INT. MORTAZ GENERAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Doctor steps out on the hallway, where he's met with deeply worried looks from Mr. Ebrahimi and the kids.

DOCTOR

The cause of the pain is a
gallstone. It's an easy surgery.
She'll be able to go home tomorrow.

A WAVE of RELIEF washes over them.

INT. MORTAZ GENERAL HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Sitting on plastic chairs, Noora struggles to keep from nodding off. Ismail rests against Mr. Ebrahimi's shoulder. Suddenly, we hear the SOUND of a LIFE MONITOR, BEEPING.

A NURSE HURRIES past them, running straight for Rashida's room. Seeing this, Noora's face DARKENS.

She advances towards the door, stands on her toes to peek through the WINDOW PANE as the BEEPING grows more frequent...

INT. MORTAZ GENERAL HOSPITAL - TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

The Doctor and several NURSES hover over Rashida, pressing DEFIB PADS on her chest. A THUMP as voltage pours through her body. She arches and lies still.

ON Noora, the fabric of her reality crumbling.

HARD CUT TO:

A WHITE BEDSHEET, obscuring Rashida's lifeless face. Noora, stands at her bedside, numb with shock. Hopeless tears rolling down her cheeks. The Doctor is at her side.

DOCTOR

The infection already spread to her
blood. There's nothing we could do.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Should I call a funeral service?

NOORA

No.

We know why. So does the Doctor.

DOCTOR

There are inexpensive ones. She needs a burial.

NOORA

I'll do it myself.

INT. MORTAZ GENERAL HOSPITAL - WASHING ROOM - DAY

Rashida's remains are laid out on a steel table, covered in a piece of WHITE CLOTH from the waist down. Noora suppresses her tears as she pays her last respects to her mother.

A SERIES OF SHOTS

We're about to witness a "GHUSL" -- the traditional washing and shrouding of a deceased Muslim.

Noora pulls on a PAIR OF GLOVES. Gathers the materials: a vial of PERFUME, SOAP, a SPONGE, a COMB and a JUG OF WATER.

She dots perfume on Rashida's FOREHEAD, the PALMS of her hands, her KNEES and the bottom of her TOES.

She pours WATER from the jug, washing her HAIR with soap, then combing and braiding it.

She folds the largest piece of cloth, wraps it tightly around the body. Ties it at both ends, creating a SHEET-LIKE COCOON.

EXT. ESMATI HOUSE - BACKYARD - EVENING

Rashida's fully-wrapped body is lowered into a shallow pit by Noora and Mr. Ebrahimi. Maryam morosely looks on from her wheelchair, one arm around Ismail who weeps convulsively.

Mr. Ebrahimi places a handful of ROCKS on top of the body.

MR. EBRAHIMI

"In the name of Allah and in the faith of the Messenger of Allah."

Noora is next. Places THREE HANDFULS of soil in the grave. Ismail does the same.

ISMAIL
 (sobbing)
 Good-bye, maman.

NOORA
 You did good.

Noora tries to comfort him, fighting the emotion bubbling up. She loses. Tears start to roll down her cheeks, when --

MR. EBRAHIMI
 (to Maryam, re: Ismail)
 Take him inside.

Maryam takes Ismail by the elbow, leads him inside. As soon as they're out of earshot --

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
 Don't you ever do that again.

NOORA
 (through tears)
 Do what?

MR. EBRAHIMI
 Let him see you cry. You're responsible for this boy now. You have to be strong for him.

A look of DAWNING REALIZATION comes over Noora: at 15 years of age, she is the new matron of the family. She wipes at her eyes with the back of her hand, composing herself.

NOORA
 You're right.
 (re: Rashida)
 I have to finish what she started.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - COMPUTER ROOM - DAY

Jamal starts up the computer with giddy ANTICIPATION. Eager to tell his mother about his new job.

But unlike the other times, only Noora appears on SCREEN.

JAMAL
 Salaam.

NOORA
 (downcast)
 Salaam.

JAMAL

Where's maman? I've got some great news I want to share with her.

NOORA

She's... not coming.

JAMAL

What do you mean, not coming? Where is she?

She can't bring herself to say it. So she remains silent, naked GRIEF telegraphing across her face.

For a moment, Jamal seems confused... then it DAWNS on him. He sits back, stunned, all color draining from his face.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jamal sits in class, sledgehammered with GRIEF. He's not paying attention to the GERMAN VERBS Melanie scribbles on the CHALKBOARD: "SEIN" (to be) and "HABEN" (to have).

MELANIE

And what's the conjugation for "sein" in the third person?
(beat)
Jamal?

He SNAPS out of his stupor.

JAMAL

Sorry, can you repeat the question?

Eager to please, Tarik jumps in.

TARIK

It's "er, sie oder es ist".

MELANIE

Very good.
(pointed, to Jamal)
At least someone's paying attention.

Tarik throws him a VICTORIOUS grin.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank's on the phone, in mid-conversation, his expression severe. He begins PACING, something OUTSIDE THE WINDOW catching his attention.

FRANK
 (into phone)
 When did this start?
 (listens)
 I understand. I'll talk to him.

WE GO OVER HIS SHOULDER, to see Jamal on the street below, making for the entrance.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - GROUP ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jamal silently unpacks his backpack from school, while Adnan and Khalil are in mid-argument:

ADNAN
 You can't just take my shit
 whenever you feel like it!

KHALIL
 (deflecting)
 It's just a fucking towel, man!

They instantly fall quiet when Frank enters.

ADNAN
 Are we too loud?

FRANK
 The answer is yes. But it's not why
 I'm here.

His eyes flick to Jamal.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 I need to talk to you.

They retreat to a corner of the room for some privacy, their backs to the roommates, who continue arguing.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Your teacher called, said your
 performance dropped dramatically.
 You're not concentrating, you don't
 participate in class. We both know
 that's very unlike you.

Jamal averts his red, bloodshot eyes, hates disappointing him. Frank studies his morose expression.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 What is it?
 (suspicious)
 Are you on drugs?

Jamal throws him a quizzical look.

FRANK (CONT'D)
It's okay if you are. Just be
honest so I can get you help --

JAMAL
My mother died.

A beat as this news LANDS. Frank trades dumbfounded looks
with Khalil and Adnan. They all had no idea.

FRANK
I'm so sorry.
(then)
Why didn't you say anything?

Jamal shrugs, unsure himself.

JAMAL
I needed time to think about the
next step. I promised my sister I'd
bring them here. I still intend to
do that, even with my mother gone.

Frank grows weary, despises being the bearer of bad news.

FRANK
I'm afraid that's no longer an
option.

JAMAL
(alarmed)
Why not?

INT. EBRAHIMI HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

ON the phone, RINGING incessantly. Maryam pumps the wheels of
her chair across the foyer to pick up the RECEIVER:

MARYAM
(into phone)
Ebrahimi.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. REFUGEE HOME - FRANK'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Jamal, trying desperately to keep calm but failing miserably.
Frank hovers nearby, appearing troubled.

JAMAL

It's me. I need to speak to Noora.
It's urgent.

MARYAM

She's not here. She and Ismail went
to the consulate to pick up the
passports with my father. They
should be back in an hour.

EXT. AFGHAN CONSULATE GENERAL - TEHRAN (IRAN) - DAY

ARMORED HUMVEES transporting armed Special Forces patrol the
street. Half a block down, a TOYOTA LAND CRUISER glides to
the curb, Mr. Ebrahimi at the wheel. Noora sits shotgun,
wearing a HEAD SCARF. Ismail's in the backseat.

INT. AFGHAN CONSULATE GENERAL - WAITING ROOM - SOON AFTER

A multitude of AFGHAN WOMEN and MEN is queued up in the
aisles, fanning themselves in the mid-day heat.

A CLERK shouts from behind a GLASS COUNTER:

CLERK

Soltani!

Noora approaches, Ismail and Mr. Ebrahimi in tow.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Rashida Soltani?

NOORA

She passed away last week. I'm her
daughter.

CLERK

(to Mr. Ebrahimi)

Are you the legal guardian?

MR. EBRAHIMI

I am.

CLERK

Please sign here.

He hands him a DOCUMENT to sign. Mr. Ebrahimi's SIGNATURE
appears on the dotted line.

INT. MR. EBRAHIMI'S TRUCK (MOVING) - EVENING

The unremitting SOUND of HONKING. Mr. Ebrahimi steers the Toyota through traffic gridlock while our siblings examine their newly acquired AFGHAN PASSPORTS.

ISMAIL
(unimpressed)
That's what a passport looks like?

NOORA
It's more than that, Ismail. It's our ticket to a better life.

MR. EBRAHIMI
(enraged)
The whole street is blocked!

He sticks his head out the window and PALES when he SPOTS a SECURITY CHECKPOINT, brimming with armed POLICE OFFICERS.

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
Shit...

He CRANKS the wheel, trying to maneuver onto another street. But he's trapped -- too many cars lined up behind him.

A stern-faced POLICE OFFICER notices, saunters over.

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
(to siblings)
Let me do the talking.

The Officer appears next to the window.

POLICE OFFICER
Where are you headed?

MR. EBRAHIMI
To Yazd. With my niece and nephew.

POLICE OFFICER
You have identification on you?

Mr. Ebrahimi displays his IRANIAN ID CARD. The Officer gives it a fleeting look.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
(re: siblings)
And them?

MR. EBRAHIMI
 (apologetic)
 I'm afraid I forgot to bring
 theirs.

The OFFICER throws a suspicious glance at the siblings in the back seat, sitting absolutely still, clearly ANXIOUS.

POLICE OFFICER
 (opens car door)
 Please step out of the car.

Our group cautiously emerges from the Land Cruiser, letting the OFFICER frisk them, faces full of trepidation. Reaching into Noora's pocket, he comes up with the AFGHAN PASSPORTS.

They've been found out.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
 Niece and nephew, huh? Harboring
 illegals is against the law.

MR. EBRAHIMI
 If you'd just let me explain --

But the Officer's done listening. He gives a SIGNAL to his colleagues, who CLOSE IN on the siblings.

MR. EBRAHIMI (CONT'D)
 Please don't do this. They're only
 children.

POLICE OFFICER
 Not children of Iran.

The OFFICERS seize Noora and Ismail, wrestling them into the back of an ARMORED DEPORTATION VAN.

INT. DEPORTATION VAN (MOVING) - SOON AFTER

The vehicle rocks from side to side. Noora pulls Ismail close, staring fearfully at the ARMED GUARDS who ride with them. Her eyes fall on an AFGHAN COUPLE who were also arrested -- HABIB (45, tall and chiseled) and his wife FATIMA (42, kind-faced and empathetic).

Fatima reads the FEAR on Noora's face, tries soothing her with a maternal SMILE. It doesn't work.

EXT. STREET - KABUL (AFGHANISTAN) - NEXT MORNING

The deportation van navigates the knot of overheated Kabul traffic: dusty and dented cars, riding low on their axles from too many passengers, lurch forward inches at a time.

SUPER READS: "February 17th, 2016"

INT. DEPORTATION VAN - MORNING

Suddenly, the van comes to a halt, back doors swinging open.

POLICE OFFICER
Out! Everybody out!

The arrested AFGHANS file off the van, find themselves in the middle of a bustling intersection. Noora looks around, furtively. Scanning her surroundings.

A JEEP passes by them, cargo area occupied by SEVEN heavily armed TALIBAN MILITANTS.

She pulls Ismail out of sight, taking cover behind a parked car. So does the couple. They lock nervous eyes, aware they're hiding from the same people. The same threat.

With bated breaths, they wait for the vehicle to pass.

HABIB
(low, to Fatima)
We have to go.

Fatima hesitates, swamped with GUILT.

FATIMA
We can't just leave them here.
(to siblings)
Do you have a place to stay?

They shake their heads in unison.

INT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A rat trap with worn wooden floors and peeling wallpaper. Dusty FANS spin on the ceiling. Fatima pours a watery concoction into bowls for her husband and the siblings.

FATIMA
(offering bowl)
I'm sorry it isn't much...

NOORA
 (lies)
 Oh, no. It's delicious.

Ismail grimaces at the taste. Noora shoots him a sharp look that says "behave yourself".

HABIB
 We were on our way to the Turkish border when they caught us.

NOORA
 You're leaving Iran?

FATIMA
 We don't have a future here. Neither do you.

HABIB
 We're going to try again. As soon as I contact the smuggler.

FATIMA
 You can come with us if you want.

NOORA
 To Turkey?

HABIB
 Greece. Europe is our destination.

NOORA
 Thank you... but I'd rather wait a bit longer so my big brother can bring us there legally.
 (remembers)
 I should call him.

She lowers her bowl, steps out into the HALLWAY where she DIALS a number on her CELL PHONE.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. REFUGEE HOME - GROUP ROOM - NIGHT

Faint SNORING is heard. Jamal lies awake, sick with worry. And then: salvation. His PHONE vibrates. He gets out of bed, tiptoes outside to avoid waking his roommates.

JAMAL
 (picks up)
 Maryam told me what happened. Where are you guys now?

NOORA
 Back in Kabul. Is Mr. Ebrahimi
 okay?

JAMAL
 (with a smile)
 You got deported and you're worried
 about him? He's fine. He'll have to
 pay a fine, but... no jail time.

She's glad to hear it.

NOORA
 (consolation prize)
 At least we have the passports.

JAMAL
 They won't help us now.

NOORA
 What do you mean?

JAMAL
 According to the Geneva agreement,
 the right to family reunification
 is only applicable between parents
 and their children.
 (beat)
Not between siblings.

NOORA
 (utter disbelief)
 So we can't be together? Because
 mother died?

JAMAL
 I know it's not fair. But it's the
 law.

ON Noora as she ABSORBS this -- all hope draining from her
 face. Her FRUSTRATION is palpable.

NOORA
 We did all this for nothing?

His silence confirms her fear.

NOORA (CONT'D)
 It can't be. What am I going to
 tell Ismail?
 (beat)
 There has to be another way.

JAMAL

There is.

Noora leans forward, listens intently:

JAMAL (CONT'D)

The Dublin Regulation says that any refugee who reaches European soil has to be granted asylum. Usually, they're made to stay in the same country they first entered. Unless there's a relative who's already been given asylum elsewhere.

NOORA

So if we make it to Greece --

JAMAL

You'd be allocated to Germany. Assuming you'd survive the journey.

NOORA

You did, why can't I?

JAMAL

I'm a boy.

NOORA

Baba always said: anything my boys can do, you can do tenfold.

JAMAL

This is the real world. You know what they do to girls who travel alone. The road isn't safe.

NOORA

Neither is Kabul.

(beat)

If we stay, we'll die. The Taliban will find us sooner or later.

She's making a good point.

NOORA (CONT'D)

If we leave, we may also die... but at least there's a chance we can live.

JAMAL

You want to take that chance?

ON Noora as she ponders this question, TORN. COURAGE and FEAR struggling for the upper hand.

INT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fatima, Habib and Ismail have finished eating, when Noora returns -- a different air about her.

NOORA
 (to Habib & Fatima)
 I changed my mind. Ismail and I are
 going with you.

ON Ismail, REACTING to this news.

HABIB
 How much money do you have?

Noora searches her pockets, comes up with a few bills, hardly anything.

HABIB (CONT'D)
 You're going to need more.
 (beat)
 A lot more.

Noora's mind is RACING, trying to come up with a solution, when Ismail speaks up:

ISMAIL
 Maman has a gold watch. I saw it.
 She was hiding it under her drawer.

STAY ON Noora, an IDEA forming...

EXT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Habib pops his head out the front door, scanning the desolate street to make sure they're not spotted. One after another, he, Fatima and our siblings step out.

HABIB
 (repeating, to Noora)
 Don't forget: we're meeting at
 three in the morning underneath --

NOORA
 (finishes his sentence)
 Pul-e Sukhta bridge.

FATIMA
 Don't forget to bring provisions, a
 change of clothes and --

NOORA
 The money. I won't.

Satisfied with her answer, Fatima and Habib take off in one direction while our siblings head the opposite way.

EXT. SOLTANI HOME - SOON AFTER

Noora stealthily creeps along a brick wall, followed by Ismail. PAN UP to see their old home, looming on the other side. Windows barricaded.

NOORA

I need you to stay here and be my
lookout. If someone comes, you
whistle.

ISMAIL

(protests:)

I'm not staying here by myself!

Noora takes him by the shoulders, eyes intense:

NOORA

Listen to me. Baba and maman are
gone. All we have is each other. I
can't do this without you. If we're
going to make it, you need to be a
big boy, do you understand?

Ismail NODS, putting on a brave mask. He looks on, secretly terrified, as Noora moves to the front door. Taut. Alert.

INT. SOLTANI HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Noora moves down the corridor. A thick layer of DUST covers the furniture -- all in their original place. Even *Homer's Odyssey* lies on the floor. She picks it up, dusting it off.

A melancholy beat. Lots of memories in this place.

At the end of the hallway, the door to her parent's bedroom stands wide open. Noora moves towards it, momentarily lost in a bad reverie: Rashida's SCREAMS and Sharif's PAINED GROANS echo in her head. She shakes off the VOICES.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INSIDE HER PARENT'S BEDROOM, Noora finds the right drawer, removing the false bottom. Hidden beneath is some CASH and a GOLD WATCH, just like Ismail said.

Inside Jamal'S ROOM, Noora pulls open DRAWERS, pulling out CLOTHES for Ismail and stuffing them into his BACKPACK.

She catches her reflection in a MIRROR. She studies herself for a moment, an IDEA dawning. She goes to Jamal's wardrobe, removing a TUNIC, only worn by men.

Then she picks up a pair of SCISSORS. Lifts a LONG strand of her hair... and CUTS it off.

EXT. SOLTANI HOME - SAME TIME

Ismail keeps staring at the door, waiting for his sister. Anxious. He doesn't notice he's being watched by...

A wiry TEENAGE BOY (16) wearing a PRAYER CAP steps into FRAME. His eyes narrow, trying to place Ismail as he strolls across. Seeing him from the corner of his eye, Ismail starts to WHISTLE, doing his best to look innocent.

TEENAGE BOY

What's your name?

Ismail doesn't respond.

TEENAGE BOY (CONT'D)

Do you live here?

ISMAIL

No.

TEENAGE BOY

Then what are you doing here?

ISMAIL

Nothing.

Just then, Noora emerges, carrying two BACKPACKS.

To Ismail's SURPRISE her long mane has been cut short. Her HIJAB removed. She's wearing loose pants and a tunic. For all intents and purposes, she looks just like --

TEENAGE BOY

(to Noora)

Are you Jamal? The boy who used to live here?

Noora hands Ismail his bag, motions for him to start walking, widening the distance between them and Teenage Boy.

TEENAGE BOY (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm talking to you.

Noora nervously checks over her shoulder, when --

TEENAGE BOY (CONT'D)
 (calls out loud)
 Uncle! Come quick! It's Jamal! He's
 back!

THREE AFGHAN MEN, KEFFIYEHs wrapped around their necks appear
 down the sidewalk. They're TALIBAN SYMPATHIZERS. And they're
 already GIVING CHASE.

NOORA
 (to Ismail)
 Run.

They BOLT, running for their lives.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

ON Noora, BREATHING HARD as she RUNS -- PUSHING -- ON a MAD
 DASH -- never letting go of Ismail's hand.

They hear the MEN shouting after them, GAINING.

NOORA
 Faster!

They stumble-run across the street, through traffic, to the
 opposite sidewalk, when --

HONK! A JEEP barrels STRAIGHT at them. The DRIVER'S eyes GO
 WIDE as he HITS THE BRAKES! The tires SCREECH as it swerves --

Missing them by a hair.

The PURSUING MEN have almost caught up with them when Noora
 and Ismail CHARGE headlong into --

EXT. MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

A bustling bazaar. Men in LONG ROBES and HEAD COVERS stroll
 past roadside vendors. Our siblings push their way through
 the masses, the PURSUING MEN close on their heels, dodging
 obstacles, tearing through hanging clothes, vegetable carts --

TALIBAN SYMPATHIZERS
 Stop them!/Stop those boys!

Before anyone can react to their SHOUTING, our siblings SLIP
 AWAY, DISAPPEARING in the crowd.

EXT. PUL-E SUKHTA BRIDGE - OUTSKIRTS OF KABUL - EVENING

A foreboding OVERPASS spans the dried-up, garbage-strewn Kabul River. THREE DELIVERY TRUCKS are parked nearby.

A SUPER READS: **"February 19th, 2016"**

Below, a LARGE GROUP of (mostly male) AFGHAN FUGITIVES -- 30 people total -- stand assembled, bags strapped to their shoulders. FIND Habib and Fatima among them.

HABIB

Maybe they got cold feet.

Fatima dismisses this with a look.

FATIMA

Something happened...

A SMUGGLER enters the FRAME, his back to the CAMERA as he addresses the group:

SMUGGLER

Split up in groups of ten and get
in the trucks. We don't got all
night.

The FUGITIVES follow his command, fanning out into separate trucks, one by one. Fatima lags behind, scanning the shadows for a sign of our siblings. There is none.

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

(to Fatima)

We're leaving now. Either come or
don't.

Fatima reluctantly climbs into the truck, when --

NOORA (O.S.)

Wait for us!

Noora and Ismail DASH out of the shadows, coming face to face with --

Their smuggler, YUSEF (48), an intimidating miscreant with sharp eyes and a weather-beaten, pock-marked face. The kind of man their parents always warned them about.

Ismail recoils, startled by his frightening looks. Yusef gives them a critical once-over.

YUSEF

(to Noora)

He's too young. So are you, kid.
Don't bother me -- go home.

NOORA

We can pay you.

She holds up the GOLD WATCH, glistening in the headlights.

YUSEF

You're going to slow us down.

NOORA

We'll keep up.

YUSEF

You're still going to die.

NOORA

Better than having to live in this
hell.

She isn't backing down. Yusef regards her for an unreadable beat. Then he steps aside, motions for them to --

YUSEF

Get in.

(threatening)

If you become a nuisance, I'll kill
you myself.

Noora and Ismail brush past him and climb aboard, joining Habib and Fatima, who CLOCK Noora's changed appearance.

Yusef SLAMS the large double doors SHUT.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - TABRIZ (AZERBAIJAN PROVINCE, IRAN) - DAY

BIRD'S EYE VIEW of the trucks, forming a CONVOY as they speed down the mountain road. MASSIVE snow-capped HILLS loom on either side of the barren wasteland.

MATCH CUT TO:

A detailed MAP of the region. Jamal jabs his finger on his siblings' present position and down the proposed route.

JAMAL (O.S.)

They're going to cross the border
to Turkey in Tabriz. Right here.

INT. LAW FIRM - MR. HOFFMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

A small, dimly lit office. Jamal and Frank sit opposite PAUL HOFFMAN (38), an immigration lawyer in an ill-fitting suit.

JAMAL

From there they'll go to Izmir,
where they'll take a boat across
the Aegean Sea to the refugee camp
on the Greek island of Lesbos.

Hoffman can hardly believe what he's hearing.

HOFFMAN

I'm sorry... how old did you say
those two are?

JAMAL

My sister's fifteen. My little
brother, ten.

He sits back, stunned.

HOFFMAN

The sea route is very unsafe. Many
of the ships sink --

FRANK

(interrupts)

Thank you, Mr. Hoffman. We're
aware.

(pointed)

If you have a better suggestion,
please let us know.

He does not. Jamal places a FOLDER on his table.

JAMAL

I've brought copies of their
passports. And a notarized copy of
my mother's death certificate.

(beat)

Can you help them?

HOFFMAN

Sure. Once they actually get to
Greece. And provided you can
compensate me for my services.

This gives Jamal pause.

JAMAL

Would it be possible to pay you off
in installments?

Hoffman scowls. It's not how he conducts his business.

INT. LAW FIRM - HALLWAY - LATER

Jamal struts down the hallway alongside Frank, trying to contain his anger.

FRANK

We'll find someone else. He's not the only lawyer in town.

JAMAL

He's the cheapest. And I can't even afford him.

He looks at Frank, vibrating with helplessness.

EXT. BORDER FENCE - TURKISH/IRANIAN BORDER - DAY

A dry flatland studded with rocks and twisted trees. Using a DAGGER, Yusef cuts his way through a tangle of BUSHES.

Behind him are the FUGITIVES, including Noora, Ismail, Habib and Fatima. They part the hedge, staring up at --

An ominous STEEL FENCE, topped off with barbed wire. About fifty feet away is a WATCH TOWER, made of steel.

HABIB

Are the watch towers guarded?

YUSEF

Usually they're not. But we better be quick.

The group heads out to a clearing, abandoning COVER.

They RACE towards the FENCE, start to SCALE it. Noora watches their ascent -- a steep climb.

She turns to Ismail encouragingly.

NOORA

You can do this. Don't look down. I'm right behind you.

Together, they start CLIMBING the fence.

Noora surges upward, using all her strength. Ismail's right above her, trying to find a toehold below him.

His FOOT reaches out... and SLIPS!

She CLASPS the scruff of his neck, stabilizing him before he DROPS. Ismail claws his way back up, inching forward.

Finally, they reach the BARBED WIRE at the top.
How will they get past it?

Noora looks over to her right: SEVERAL MEN are stuck in the wire, arms and legs RAVAGED as they struggle to get through.

Yusef, on the other hand, has a simpler method: he throws his jacket over the barbed wire, using it as a BUFFER.

NOORA (CONT'D)
(to Ismail)
Give me your jacket.

Careful not to lose his hold on the fence, Ismail slips out of his jacket. Noora throws it up, covering the SPIKES.

She goes first, carefully lifting her leg. For a moment, she totters at the edge... but doesn't lose her balance. Reaches the other side.

NOORA (CONT'D)
Your turn...

CUT TO:

The WATCH TOWER. A BORDER GUARD lights a CIGARETTE, looking off into the distance. Suddenly, he catches a glimpse of our group, clambering across the fence.

He rushes across to a CONTROL STATION, pressing a BUTTON. A piercing ALARM BELL starts to BLARE.

CUT BACK TO:

THE FENCE. A WAVE OF PANIC sweeps the FUGITIVES as they hear the ALARM, PUSHING on at breakneck speed. From opposite sides of the fence, Noora locks scared eyes with Ismail as --

GUNSHOTS RING OUT.

A bullet RIPS through a CLIMBER'S chest. His body PLUMMETS, hitting the dirt with a sickening THUD.

NOORA (CONT'D)
Keep going!

She reaches out for him. But Ismail is FROZEN with FEAR, unable to move.

NOORA (CONT'D)
I'm not leaving without you!

Hearing this, Ismail gathers his courage -- grips her hand. Noora STRAINS, hoisting him across the fence.

They clamber downward, pace quickening. They're about halfway down, when --

Another CLIMBER is hit in the HEAD, TUMBLES to the ground.

NOORA (CONT'D)
We have to jump!

TIGHT ON Ismail, in a blind PANIC.

NOORA (CONT'D)
Do it, now!!

They LEAP BACKWARD, launching themselves off the fence. HURTLING towards the ground below...

Landing HARD.

They stumble to their feet, breaking into a WILD RUN --

NOORA (CONT'D)
(to Ismail)
Go! Go!

Ducking and diving as they run forward -- BULLETS ROARING right past them. Other FUGITIVES are struck, DROPPING LEFT and RIGHT.

In the near distance, Yusef tears behind a large BOULDER for cover. Noora and Ismail follow, heads low, just as --

Bullets RAKE the stone, inches from their heads.

EXT. FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Our siblings arrive at a ROCKY INCLINE, out of breath. Thrown to find only HALF of their group there -- the herd has been thinned out. Habib caresses a gash on his lower thigh, dripping with BLOOD.

FATIMA
(alarmed)
You're hit.

HABIB
It just grazed me. I'm fine.

Fatima rips off a piece of her HEAD SCARF, drapes it around his wound to stop the bleeding.

YUSEF
Can you walk?

Habib GRITS his teeth, forcing himself to stand. Seeing this, Noora confronts Yusef, hit with a surge of ANGER:

NOORA
You said there'd be no guards!

YUSEF
I said usually there aren't.

NOORA
(accusing)
Tell that to the men who died.

ANGLE ON the REMAINING MEN, taking note of Noora standing up for them. Yusef loses his cool, grabs her by the lapels.

YUSEF
Listen, kid. You think I got more than this one life? There are things I can't control. And I told you what we're doing is risky.

He roughly releases her.

YUSEF (CONT'D)
You want to try and get to Turkey on your own? Be my guest.

Fatima steps in, protective.

FATIMA
He's just a boy. I'm sure he didn't mean it.
(to Noora)
Did you?

Noora glances at Ismail, his survival being her main priority. Swallowing her pride, she SHAKES HER HEAD.

YUSEF
Watch yourself, kid. No amount of money's worth dealing with a pain in the ass like you.

She stays silent, not wanting to aggravate him any further.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

A blistering sun BEATS down on our TRAVELERS as they trudge through the endless vista of rocks and thorny thickets.

Noora and Ismail have fallen behind, barely able to see the group ahead of them. She waits for him to catch up.

NOORA
You have to walk faster.

ISMAIL
(whiny)
I'm thirsty.

She offers him water from her BOTTLE. He guzzles it down.

NOORA
Not all at once. You never know
when we'll get more.

Ismail obeys, limiting himself to a few sips. Suddenly, Noora hears something. The ROARING of WATER nearby. They continue on their path, getting to a ridge, overlooking --

A FAST-FLOWING RIVER.

TURBULENT RAPIDS crashing against the rocks of the river bed. The Fugitives ready themselves for the crossing.

Noora and Ismail scramble down a sandy slope. Yusef is already knee-deep in the river.

YUSEF
(calls out)
The current is strong. Make sure
you go in slowly.

The first MEN wade into the STREAM, struggling against the current. Habib is forced to lean on Fatima, to stay on his feet. Ismail stares at the WHIRLING WATER with TERROR.

He turns to Noora, who is busy placing the CELL PHONE and dry clothes into PLASTIC BAGS to keep them from getting wet.

ISMAIL
I'm not going in there.

NOORA
If you want to see Jamal again --
you have to.

She gently pushes him towards the river's edge. Ismail sets one foot into the raging water. It's ICE COLD.

Feeling the force of the current, he tiptoes backward, tears of FEAR welling in his eyes.

ISMAIL

I can't, I'm sorry, I can't!

YUSEF

(to Noora)

The hell is his problem?

NOORA

He can't swim.

YUSEF

That's too bad, kid. Out here, it's every man for himself.

He turns his back on them, making his way through the river, followed by multiple men. But one, a KURDISH MAN, stops mid-stream, facing our siblings with COMPASSION.

KURDISH MAN

I say a man can't survive alone.
If we form a chain, we can all get across. It's not very deep.

STAY ON the faces of the FUGITIVES, each of them remembering the moment when Noora stood up for them.

To Yusef's astonishment, the men begin to interlock their arms, forming a HUMAN CHAIN all the way across the river. An act of COLLECTIVE HEROISM.

Together, they help guide Ismail into the achingly cold water. He and Noora suck air through their teeth:

ISMAIL

(shivering)

It's cold...

Very soon, the water is up to their collar bones. PANICKED, Ismail cranes his neck, trying to keep his head above water.

NOORA

You're okay. Keep breathing.

Slowly, they make their way across.

KURDISH MAN

Pull, everybody!

The men STRAIN, pulling our siblings to the other side of the river. They stumble onto the sand bank, completely soaked.

Noora looks up to see Yusef, glaring at her with disapproval. He despises being proven wrong.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - RIVER'S EDGE - LATER THAT DAY

Muddy water splashes on the ground as Noora, wearing a dry change of clothes, wrings out her brother's wet shirt.

Ismail emerges from behind a 'curtain' Fatima built using her HIJAB, dressed in clean clothing. He lifts his arm, taking a whiff of his skin.

ISMAIL

I smell like dirty water.

NOORA

You and everyone else.

She flattens the wet clothes on a rock, leaving them to dry there. Then she grabs the PLASTIC BAG, retrieving her CELL PHONE. To her delight, it didn't get wet.

Then, she checks the RECEPTION: zero bars. Her face falls.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - AFTERNOON

BIRD'S EYE VIEW of the group, hiking up the RIDGE. ENDLESS MOUNTAINS, as far as the eye can see stretch beneath them.

ANGLE ON Habib, trying to keep up with the rest of the group. He's out of BREATH, fighting the PAIN in his leg. With Fatima's help, he DRAGS himself onward.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - HILLTOP - EVENING

Our group has stopped near the top of the hill. To the west, an epic vista dipped in the red light of the sinking SUN.

YUSEF

We'll spend the night here.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - HILLTOP - NIGHT

A small fire BURNS in the middle of the ENCAMPMENT, providing a minimal amount of light and warmth.

ANGLE ON Noora, pouring over a chapter of *Homer's Odyssey*, enraptured. A brief escape from her present misery. Ismail rests on her lap, SHIVERING in the cold.

Sensing this, Noora removes her jacket, covers him with it.

YUSEF

(to Noora)

Keep it on, kid. Unless you want to freeze to death.

NOORA

I don't mind if I do.

(re: Ismail)

As long as he's alright. I promised maman I'd take care of him.

YUSEF

Your parents are... ?

She gives a slow nod. Yusef isn't sure how to comfort her. So he offers her his lit cigarette.

YUSEF (CONT'D)

Take a hit. It'll warm you up.

Noora is hesitant but decides to take a drag anyway. She coughs, choking on SMOKE --

Yusef lets out a hearty LAUGH.

ANGLE ON Habib carefully changing the bandages on his leg. Fatima squats nearby, placing wood into the fire.

FATIMA

How's the leg?

CLOSE ON the wound: it's infected, oozing with YELLOW PUS. Before Fatima can see the injury, Habib hastily covers it.

HABIB

(a lie)

Better.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - EARLY MORNING

Our group traverses the ROCKY LANDSCAPE. Yusef leads the way. They crest the hill and start down the winding path, when they come upon --

A YOUNG MAN, lying face down in the sand, arms splayed out at a strange angle. Flies BUZZING overhead.

Noora covers her nose from the STENCH. ISMAIL picks up a STICK. Pokes the body. Nothing. Pokes it again. Still nothing.

NOORA

Ismail, stop that.

He drops the stick, miffed. Slowly, the rest of the group walks past the corpse, making a wide berth around it.

Habib is the last one, his face gaunt, his strength waning.

HABIB
(to Yusef)
When will we reach the city?

YUSEF
Soon.

TIME CUT TO:

Ismail stumbles along the rocky road. He's pale, cheeks hollow from dehydration.

He pauses, taking a seat on a log, trying to catch his breath. Noora gazes at him with great CONCERN.

She pulls out her water bottle, shaking out the last few drops. They drip on Ismail's blistered lips.

NOORA
(to Yusef)
Are we almost there?

YUSEF
Almost.

TIME CUT TO:

ANGLE ON Noora, carrying the only partly conscious Ismail up a steep bank on her back. Her hand touches down on a craggy rock. It gives way, crumbling.

She slides back, then gathers her strength -- inching upwards, clawing her way back up.

NOORA
(low, to Ismail)
Don't worry. I got you.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - HILLTOP - DUSK

A dying sun tints the clouds. Our group takes a rest on top of a ledge when Noora arrives, standing on uncertain legs. Fatima scurries across, helping her lower Ismail to the ground, alarmed by his waxy complexion.

FATIMA
He needs water.

Anxiety ripples through Noora. She staggers towards the remaining MEN, desperately calling out:

NOORA
Does anybody have any water left?
Anybody?

The MEN shake their heads. Negative.

NOORA (CONT'D)
(to Yusef)
How close are we to the city?

YUSEF
Very close.

HABIB
You've been saying that for three days. You're lying to us.

YUSEF
You bet I am.
(beat)
Had I told you how far it really is, none of you would've taken the first step.

There it is. The confirmation. And possibly, the death sentence for Ismail. TEARS brim in Noora's eyes.

NOORA
(re: Ismail)
If he dies, it'll be on your conscience.

YUSEF
It'll be on yours. I told you not to bring him!

NOORA
You also told me you'd take us to Turkey!

YUSEF
And I did.

Yusef motions to an OVERLOOK. Noora crests a rise, followed by several FUGITIVES. Eyes wide as they look out to see --

A VIEW of ISTANBUL and the surrounding country-side. And beyond that, the AEGEAN SEA. It's breathtaking!

Noora STARES, incredulous, as the men emit CHEERS of joy.

INT. CLASSROOM - BERLIN (GERMANY) - MORNING

Melanie's in the middle of a presentation, using a PROJECTOR to throw images against the blank wall.

MELANIE

The Brandenburg Gate for example. A former city gate that is now used to symbolize Berlin's unity --

Jamal tries hard to pay attention. He looks tired and gaunt, dark circles under his eyes. He surreptitiously checks his PHONE for new messages from Noora. There are none.

His brow CREASES with concern.

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - BERLIN (GERMANY) - DAY

Jamal places a greasy TRAY OF FRIES on the counter top. Philip retrieves it, handing it to a CUSTOMER. Jamal prepares the next batch, wiping cold sweat off his brow, when --

His VISION goes IN and OUT of clarity. He sways back and forth, reaching out for something -- anything to hold on to -- as he FAINTS, TEARING a piece of equipment down with him.

Drawn by the NOISE, Philip turns around --

PHILIP

What in the -- ?

To see Jamal on the tile floor. Unconscious.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - BERLIN (GERMANY) - DAY

A DOCTOR shines a PEN LIGHT into Jamal's eyes. Frank waits nearby, curious about her assessment.

DOCTOR

He's in good health.

FRANK

Healthy people don't faint.

DOCTOR

They do. Mostly due to lack of sleep and nutrition.

(to Jamal)

Have you been experiencing a lot of stress lately?

His haggard appearance says it all.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I can prescribe an antidepressant.

FRANK
That won't be necessary.

He waits until she's left the room.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You starving yourself is going to help matters.

Jamal's caught off guard by this comment.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Did you think I don't know where your lunch money goes?

JAMAL
I need to save every cent for the legal fees.

FRANK
What you need to do is write to this organization.

Frank produces a BROCHURE for MIGRATION HUB, a German human rights organization.

FRANK (CONT'D)
They give grants to refugees and might help us pay for a lawyer once your siblings get to Greece.

JAMAL
You mean if. If they get to Greece.

His expression says he no longer believes this is possible.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
I haven't heard from them in three days. I don't know where they are or if they're still alive...

EXT. STREET - ISTANBUL (TURKEY) - EVENING

Colorful advertisements draw the eyes of the COSMOPOLITAN crowd. Traditionally clad men and Western tourists -- a mix of ancient and modern societies coming together.

A SUPER READS: "ISTANBUL, February 22nd, 2016"

CAMERA FINDS NOORA, looking curiously after two TURKISH WOMEN who don't wear HIJABS -- an alien view to her. And a signpost for the changing cultural landscape.

VENDOR (O.S.)

You gonna buy something or not?

Snapped out of her stupor, she digs inside her pocket coming up with a few crumpled bills. The last she has left.

NOORA

What can I get with this?

TIME CUT TO:

Noora, clutching two loafs of sesame-crusteD BREAD and two PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES as she walks towards Ismail, who sits on a dirty curb nearby, unkempt and malnourished.

His eyes BRIGHTEN when he sees the food.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Big boys get the big portions.

She hands him the LARGER PIECE. Ismail WOLFS it down so fast he almost chokes. Noora PATS him on the back.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Slow down or it's all gonna come back up again.

Then she takes out her cell phone to check the RECEPTION. She has one bar... which is all she needs.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - GROUP ROOM - EVENING

Beads of rain SMACK against the closed window. Jamal is at the table, forcing himself to do homework despite the NOISE his roommates are making. His CELL PHONE buzzes at his side. He snatches it up immediately:

JAMAL

Noora?

Reception's bad, their voices FIZZ with STATIC.

NOORA

Yes, it's me.

JAMAL

Thank God. I was starting to think...

He doesn't finish the sentence. Instead he asks:

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Did you make it to Istanbul?

NOORA
Barely. But yes, we did.

JAMAL
Then the worst part is behind you.

NOORA
It better be...

Noora's face darkens with uncertainty. Then:

NOORA (CONT'D)
Any word on our visas?

JAMAL
Not yet. Getting a lawyer is a lot more expensive than I thought.

NOORA
Can't we borrow the money?

JAMAL
It's not that simple. My case worker did mention an organization that might be able to help, but... I think it's a long shot.

NOORA
Why do you say that?

JAMAL
Thousands apply for this grant. Why would they choose us?

Noora catches a glimpse of *Homer's Odyssey*, peaking out of the inner pocket of her tunic.

NOORA
Because of our story.
(beat)
If all we do is ask for the money, we're just going to be one of many. It's our family's story that will make us stand out.

A beat as this SINKS in.

JAMAL
 (unsure)
 I don't know...

NOORA
 The least we can do is try.

Jamal thinks it over, considering his limited options.

JAMAL
 I'll see what I can do.
 (then)
 When are you leaving?

NOORA
 We're taking a bus to Izmir
 tomorrow. The smuggler said our
 boat leaves in two days.

JAMAL
 Be careful. And don't get on board
 if the sea is choppy.

His voice GARBLES in and out due to FUZZY RECEPTION.

NOORA
 What did you say? I can't hear you!

JAMAL
 (louder)
 I said, be careful!
 (listens)
 Noora?

They've been disconnected. Jamal puts down the phone,
 suddenly anxious. His eyes fall on the BROCHURE.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - COMPUTER ROOM - SOON AFTER

Brochure in hand, Jamal walks to an unoccupied computer, his
 gait purposeful. He pulls up the organization's WEBSITE,
 CLICKING on the email LINK they've provided.

ON SCREEN: a blank page appears, waiting to be filled. Jamal
 INHALES DEEPLY, placing his fingers on the KEYBOARD. Inspired
 by his sister's words, he begins to TYPE.

EXT. IZMIR PENINSULA (TURKEY) - MORNING

Thunder RUMBLES in the distance as a STORM roams over the
 Turkish coastline, sending down a torrent of RAIN.

Yusef, the siblings as well as Habib and Fatima take cover behind a brick wall, clad in BLACK RAINCOATS, hiding from a group of TURKISH COAST GUARDS who patrol the area.

YUSEF

There they are. Lookin' to grab anyone who tries to get on a boat. I've seen these fuckers pluck people out of the sea, dragging 'em back to the shore for deportation.

HABIB

How do we get past them?

YUSEF

We don't. All we can do is wait and hope they abandon their post.

Habib SNEEZES, three big ones in a row.

FATIMA

We'll get sick if we stay out here.

Noora's eyes land on the burnt-out husk of a rusty BEACH SHACK, not too far away. She pulls at Yusef's sleeve, bringing it to his attention.

INT. BEACH SHACK - IZMIR (TURKEY) - MOMENTS LATER

WHAM! The door is kicked in by Yusef, the broken LOCK dangling uselessly off the hinges. Fatima, Habib and the siblings scurry inside, seeking refuge from the icy WIND.

They crumple to the floor with exhaustion. Noora drapes an arm around Ismail to keep him warm.

ISMAIL

I'm hungry.

NOORA

Once we're in Greece you can eat all the pitas you want.

ISMAIL

I don't think we'll get there. Not in this weather.

NOORA

That's what Poseidon wants us to think.

ISMAIL

Who?

NOORA
Poseidon. God of the sea.

Noora opens her book, shows him an ILLUSTRATION of ODYSSEUS on a self-made RAFT, trying to escape POSEIDON'S WRATH.

NOORA (CONT'D)
When Odysseus tried crossing the ocean to get to the Greek mainland, he called up a storm.

ISMAIL
What happened? Did he make it?

NOORA
He did. And if he can, so can we.

Yusef, listening to their exchange, snickers. Amused.

YUSEF
Odysseus ain't real, kid.

NOORA
I know that. But there has to be a reason baba wanted us to read about him.

YUSEF
There's no reason. He just wanted to comfort you. That's what stories are for. We make them up to convince ourselves that there's a higher power, a reason behind everything. That life and death make sense. It's all bullshit.

Noora digests his "wisdom".

YUSEF (CONT'D)
Real life don't work that way.

NOORA
Sometimes it does.

She meets his gaze, unaffected by his cynical views. There's so much conviction in her eyes, he doesn't dare contradict her. Instead he goes to the window, brushes off a layer of SOOT with his bare hand, keeping an eye on the COAST GUARDS.

INT. BEACH SHACK - IZMIR (TURKEY) - NIGHT

Moonlight filters through gaps in the tin roof. Noora and Ismail are asleep, when a FLASHLIGHT illuminates their faces, waking them. Noora squints into the BRIGHTNESS.

YUSEF

It's time...

NOORA

Are they gone?

YUSEF

For now.

Noora nudges Ismail awake -- they have to hurry. Yusef goes to wake Fatima. She sits up, still groggy.

FATIMA

It's still raining.

YUSEF

Thankfully. Otherwise the coast guards would still be out there.

FATIMA

If it isn't safe enough for them,
it's not safe for us either.

(to Habib)

Don't you think so, too?

Fatima touches Habib' arm. He's unresponsive.

She turns his head around to face her, revealing BLANK EYES, staring into nothingness. His skin white as a SHEET.

A horrible moment passes as the reality begins to SINK IN for Fatima -- her husband is gone. Suddenly, she releases a high-pitched, agonized CRY.

INT. BEACH SHACK - IZMIR (TURKEY) - LATER

Fatima is slumped on her knees, rocking back and forth, WEEPING. Cradling Habib' motionless hand. Yusef and the siblings wait at the door, dressed in their raincoats.

NOORA

(to Yusef)

We can't leave her here.

YUSEF

(to Fatima)

Are you coming?

FATIMA

How can I leave him here? Alone? In
the cold?

YUSEF

(to Noora)

There you go.

He pushes the door open for them. But Noora won't give up so easily. She walks to Fatima, taking her hand into hers.

NOORA

When our parents died I didn't
think I could leave without them.
But then I realized they would want
me to keep going.

Fatima looks up at her, blind with tears.

NOORA (CONT'D)

(re: Habib)

He gave his life to get you all the
way here. He wants you to live.

Noora waits for a REACTION. After a moment, Fatima lifts her dead husband's hand and kisses it -- a last good-bye.

FATIMA

Forgive me, my love.

She pulls a blanket over his face before she rises to go.

EXT. SHORELINE - IZMIR (TURKEY) - NIGHT

Yusef, Fatima and our siblings are on the move, barreling across the shoreline, assaulted by HARD RAIN.

EXT. SHIPPING DOCKS - IZMIR (TURKEY) - NIGHT

An old FISHING BOAT, encrusted in rust and barnacles, squeals and groans, swaying from side to side in the storm-tossed ocean. A weatherworn CAPTAIN scans the harbor as TWENTY ASYLUM SEEKERS assemble, soaked by the DOWNPOUR.

CAPTAIN

Everybody on board! Move, move!

He SPOTS Yusef dashing down the dock, Fatima, Noora and Ismail in tow. These two know each other well.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Only these three?

YUSEF

For today.

He hands them a handful of wet BILLS, a steep price for a risky endeavor. A FISHERMAN hands out LIFE JACKETS nearby. Fatima turns to him, holds out an expectant hand.

FISHERMAN

(re: life jackets)

They're not free.

Fatima digs in her pocket, barely any money left. The Fisherman hands her one of the last jackets he has left.

Fatima balances along the slippery gangplank, boarding the OVERCROWDED BOAT. Ismail casts a look at the STORMY SEA, CLINGING to Noora's arm, overcome with PRIMAL FEAR.

ISMAIL

We have to go back!

NOORA

Back where? There's nowhere for us to go. We've already come this far.

ISMAIL

I don't care!

NOORA

I know you're scared. But when you're scared of something you can't run away from it. You have to find your courage, charge right at it and say "you don't scare me!". That's what Odysseus would've done.

ISMAIL

(terrified)

He could swim! I don't want to drown!

NOORA

You're not going to drown. Not with one of these on.

She reaches for a LIFE JACKET, but the Fisherman won't hand it to her. Not without payment.

NOORA (CONT'D)

I have no money left. Can't you make an exception? Please.

He shakes his head, ignoring her pleas.

To Noora's astonishment, Yusef steps forward, handing her his flashlight as he removes a few bills from his coat.

YUSEF
(to Fisherman)
This should cover the two of them.

FISHERMAN
Only got one left.

He hands Noora the LAST JACKET. She wraps it around Ismail's chest, making sure it's tight.

Fatima appears on the edge of the boat, reaching out --

FATIMA
(to Ismail)
Come. It's perfectly safe.

Ismail isn't convinced. But he comes slowly, gingerly down the boarding ladder all the same. Gathering all his courage --

ISMAIL
(low, to himself)
You don't scare me.

-- he takes Fatima's outstretched arm, jumping on board.

Noora's next. Before she embarks, she turns to Yusef, wanting to return his flashlight. He doesn't take it.

YUSEF
Consider it my farewell gift.

She pockets it, throwing him a grateful glance.

YUSEF (CONT'D)
You're a very brave girl, you know that, right?

NOORA
(taken aback)
You knew? This whole time?

YUSEF
'Course I knew. I ain't as dumb as I look.

They share a wistful smile.

NOORA
I'll never forget you.

YUSEF

I hope you do. I hope you forget
all of this. And start building new
memories. Better ones.

(beat)

Bye, kid.

There's nothing more to say. Noora turns around and LEAPS
onto the ROCKING boat as it hurtles forward.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - NIGHT

The boat plows through the storm-tossed sea -- a turbulent
RIDE. The MIGRANTS hold on to the railing for dear life.

Noora surveys the crowd: 30 people are on this ship.
FAMILIES. Mothers and FATHERS holding their INFANTS. A
PREGNANT WOMAN. An ELDERLY MAN with his GRANDSON.

A LARGE WAVE crashes against the boat. Ismail SHRIEKS,
CLINGING tightly to his sister.

TIME CUT TO:

Noora RETCHES, fighting the urge to vomit. Fatima clutches
her shoulder as she leans over the railing, HEAVING into the
churning sea.

TIME CUT TO:

The atmosphere begins to lighten. The ORANGE TINT of PRE-DAWN
SHIMMERS on the surface of the water.

Beyond it -- a MAGNIFICENT COASTLINE. The CAPTAIN GUIDES the
boat towards SANDY WHITE SHORES.

Suddenly, the boat is STRUCK by an onrushing wave. SEAWATER
sloshes on the deck, lapping over Ismail's feet. Rushing in
FAST. The Fisherman CUPS his hands, SCOOPS out the water.

FISHERMAN

(to Migrants)

Don't just stand there! Help me!

The MIGRANTS ladle out the water as fast as they can, when --

Another WAVE CRASHES into the boat, rocking it violently to
one side. It starts to tilt, about to CAPSIZE.

PANIC breaks out. Several MIGRANTS dive off the boat --

ON Noora, in the middle of the chaos -- eyes flitting back and forth to -- Fatima, SCREAMING, the PREGNANT WOMAN, cradling her CHILD, the OLD MAN mumbling his final prayer.

OLD MAN

"Praise Allah, Lord of the seven heavens and seven earths. Lord of the Great Throne. From Him we come and to Him we will return."

Over the HORRIFIED SCREAMS of the Migrants, we hear --

A FOG-HORN!

The CAPTAIN uses a pair of BINOCULARS to peer into the distance. About fifty feet away -- a COASTAL PATROL BOAT rocks violently on the waves.

CAPTAIN

Coast guards! Be quiet or they'll see us!

PUSH IN ON Noora, an IDEA forming, born of DESPERATION.

NOORA

(to Ismail)

Stay with me!

She grabs Ismail's hand, PUSHING past other MIGRANTS to the opposite end of the boat where she raises Yusef's FLASHLIGHT -- sending out quick PULSES. An SOS signal.

ANGLE ON a COAST GUARD on the deck of the PATROL BOAT as the FLICKERING of the FLASHLIGHT catches his eye.

BACK WITH Noora as the Captain furiously wrestles the flashlight from her hand.

MIGRANT

Are you crazy? You're leading them right to us!

NOORA

If I don't we're all gonna drown!

Just then, the boat OVERTURNS, SINKING rapidly --

Ismail's eyes widen with terror as SEAWATER RUSHES towards them, only giving them seconds to --

NOORA (CONT'D)

(to Ismail)

Hold on to me!

Our siblings LINK HANDS, just as --

The boat CAPSIZES, tugged under by the force of the sea. Our siblings are SUCKED underwater.

CLOSE ON their hands, staying interlocked. Not letting go...

ANGLE ON Noora and Ismail, WATER LEVEL, as they BREAK the SURFACE, searching for breath. Ismail's LIFE VEST the only thing keeping them AFLOAT.

They hold on to each other -- PADDLING -- STRUGGLING -- TRYING to STAY ABOVE WATER amidst the violent waves.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Hold your breath!

An ONRUSHING MOUNTAIN of WATER ROARS straight at them... WASHES over them with a HUGE SPLASH, pulling them under.

CUT TO:

TWO RUBBER DINGHIES, hurtling towards the MIGRANTS, floating on the TIDE in their life vests, CRYING FOR HELP.

They reach Fatima, pull her to safety. Another MIGRANT swims towards them, clutching the side of the boat.

CUT BACK TO:

Noora and Ismail float back to the SURFACE, GULPING for AIR. Noora's eyes drift to a nearby MIGRANT in a swim vest, bobbing on the waves up to his chest --

-- and back to Ismail, COUGHING up water as he cranes his neck, struggling to keep his head above water.

In a stomach-lurching moment, Noora realizes what's happening: her added weight is pulling Ismail down!

TIME SLOWS briefly as she makes a FATEFUL CHOICE, eyes steeling with resolve as --

She suddenly releases her hold on Ismail. Startled by her action, he CLUTCHES her arm.

ISMAIL

What are you doing?

NOORA

My weight's pulling you down. You have to let me go.

ISMAIL

I won't!

NOORA

One of us has to make it to Jamal.
I want it to be you.

ISMAIL

Don't do this! Take my hand!!

CLOSE ON Ismail's hands, white-knuckling Noora's arm. Slowly, she begins to SLIP from his GRIP, when --

ISMAIL (CONT'D)

PLEASE!!!

They get CLOBBERED by a WAVE.

BELOW WATER, we see Ismail's hand slowly losing HOLD of Noora's arm. Suddenly, she's torn from his GRASP --

BACK AT WATER LEVEL, all we can see is OPEN WATER.

Finally, Ismail re-appears. Alone. Scanning the ocean's surface for a sign of his sister. There is none.

ISMAIL (CONT'D)

(panicked)

Noora!?! Noora!?!

ANGLE ON a COAST GUARD, busy fishing drowning MIGRANTS out of the ocean and into the RUBBER DINGHY. Hearing Ismail's CRIES, he spins around, alerting his CO-WORKER:

COAST GUARD

(in Greek, subtitled)

The boy! Over there!

They throttle the engine, gliding towards him --

UNDERWATER

We're with Noora -- THRASHING -- FLAILING -- air is running out. She can't hold her breath much longer...

Feeling the last of her strength draining from her, she ceases to resist... opening her mouth to INHALE... a strange CALM overcomes her as gulps of seawater rush into her LUNGS.

Slowly, her expression changes from dawning HORROR to ACCEPTANCE. Her eyes begin to CLOSE as she SINKS into the depths of the OCEAN, disappearing into DARKNESS...

SMASH TO BLACK.

SMASH UP ON:

Jamal's eyes, POPPING OPEN as he wakes from a nightmare. He feels for his throat, sucking air in great gasping gulps.

He sits up, woozy, looking around his room. His CELL PHONE rests on the bedside table. He quickly checks for new text messages from Noora.

Nothing.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank is on the phone, listening, his face growing more concerned with each passing moment, when Jamal enters.

FRANK
(into phone)
I understand. Give me a call as soon as you find out.

He hangs up. A pregnant beat passes.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I just spoke to the R.S.A. -- it's a refugee support group that covers the area around Greece.

JAMAL
(suddenly anxious)
Did they find them?

FRANK
They're... still looking.

Jamal studies Frank's contained expression. Knows instinctively he's hiding something.

JAMAL
What is it, Frank? There's something you're not telling me.

Frank's eyes go down, somehow guilty.

FRANK
A storm hit the Turkish coastline last night.

Jamal knows what this could mean. He begins panicking, his breathing heavy and erratic.

JAMAL
 (afraid to ask)
 Did many of the boats sink?

FRANK
 Four.

JAMAL
 Out of how many?

FRANK
 Five.

STRUCK by the full weight of the situation, Jamal sinks to his knees, his WHIMPERS deteriorating into JAGGED CRIES.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 We don't even know if they got on a boat. They might still be in Izmir.

JAMAL
 This is all my fault. I should've insisted they stay in Kabul.
 (beat)
I failed them.

Frank looks on, no words to comfort him.

CUT TO BLACK.

COMPLETE BLACKNESS.

Noora's POINT OF VIEW as her eyelids flutter open, flooding the FRAME with DAYLIGHT. The rain has died down, leaving a blazing blue sky beyond a few drifting clouds.

Her eyes ADJUST to see Ismail and Fatima looking down at her, flanked by TWO PARAMEDICS.

PARAMEDIC
 (in Greek, subtitled)
 Pressure's stable.

She sits up, woozy. Blinking back to reality. Fatima bursts into a DAZZLING SMILE. Ismail wears an angry frown. Without warning, he boxes Noora in the shoulder.

NOORA
 Ow.

ISMAIL
 Don't you do that again.

He's referring to the moment she released him in the water.

ISMAIL (CONT'D)

We go to Jamal together or we don't
go at all.

NOORA

(a solemn nod)

I'm sorry.

After a moment, his expression softens and he flings himself into her arms. Cradling her brother, Noora takes a look around, eyes SEARCHING the layout of the island.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Where are we? This doesn't look
like Turkey.

FATIMA

It's not.

(beat)

We're on Lesbos.

NOORA

The coast guards didn't take us
back?

FATIMA

They're no Coast Guards. And
they're not Turkish. They're Greek.

Fatima motions to the GREEK RESCUE WORKERS, uniforms bearing the symbol of the R.S.A. (Refugee Support Aegean) organization.

They tirelessly run to and fro, lift SURVIVORS onto gurneys, loading them into the back of parked AMBULANCES.

This should be a moment of VICTORY. But it's not.

The MOTHER we previously saw cradling her INFANT kneels by the shore, empty handed, releasing PRIMAL SCREAMS of ANGUISH. The GRANDSON chases the RESCUE WORKERS, desperate:

GRANDSON

My grandfather. Did you see my
grandfather? Please.

ANGLE ON the surviving MIGRANTS, faces drained of hope as they stare blankly out at the sea. BODIES in orange life VESTS BOB on the waves, floating FACE DOWN.

ON Noora as the horror of this moment LANDS.

EXT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - LESBOS (GREECE) - DAY

SUPERIMPOSED ON SCREEN: **"February 26th, 2016"**

The ambulance doors open, releasing the SURVIVING MIGRANTS, including our siblings, their faces full of HOPE and EXPECTATION. The rescue workers usher them towards --

A METAL FENCE, topped with barbed wire, guarded by armed MEN IN UNIFORMS. Noora and Ismail take in the SIGHT:

HUNDREDS of ASYLUM SEEKERS crammed behind BARS like cattle. Makeshift tents line the muddy grounds. Underfed children scour the grounds for leftover food.

Noora's face falls. This place isn't the safe haven she was longing for -- it's a prison.

TIME CUT TO:

The SURVIVING MIGRANTS stand in line, moving towards a REGISTRATION STATION at a glacial pace.

Noora removes the plastic bag from her tunic, containing the only possessions they have left: an uncharged CELL PHONE, *Homer's Odyssey*, pages crumpled, and TWO PASSPORTS.

Two Greek AID WORKERS wave them over. Our siblings step forward, presenting their passports.

AID WORKER #1
(re: Noora, in Greek)
That one's a girl.

AID WORKER #2
Afghanistan?

NOORA
(nods)
Kabul.

AID WORKER #2
(in Greek)
Where are your parents?

She looks at him, uncomprehending.

AID WORKER #1
(switches to English)
No parents?

She shakes her head. The AID WORKER gives a SIGNAL to a GUARD, who goes to seize Ismail.

Noora protectively moves in front of him.

NOORA
Don't touch him.

The Guard doesn't understand Dari. He tries to push past her, his tone calming. But Noora steadfastly refuses to leave her brother's side.

NOORA (CONT'D)
(sharp)
I said, don't touch him!

With no choice left, the GUARDS start CONTAINING her.

Noora THRASHES, trying to wriggle free. SCREAMING violently as the Guard takes Ismail by the arm, dragging him away.

NOORA (CONT'D)
LEAVE MY BROTHER ALONE! YOU LEAVE
HIM ALONE!

INT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - SHIPPING CONTAINER - SOON AFTER

Noora is thrown into an overcrowded SHIPPING CONTAINER, filled with WOMEN. The Guards close the heavy gate, trapping her inside. She SLAMS her palms against the rusty metal.

NOORA
(cursing)
Son of a bitch!

OLDER WOMAN
Oh, hush. The more you fight them,
the worse they'll treat you.

Noora sinks to her knees, utterly defeated. ANGLE ON Fatima, who quickly rushes across, crouching beside her.

NOORA
(to Fatima)
They took Ismail.

FATIMA
Don't worry, dear. They're just
putting him with the other men.

Noora sags with relief.

NOORA
How long do you think they're going
to keep us here?

FATIMA
 I have no clue.
 (to older woman)
 How long have you been here?

OLDER WOMAN
 (thinks)
 About two years?

ON Noora and Fatima, struck by this REVELATION. And aware they may have to endure a SIMILAR FATE.

INT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - SHIPPING CONTAINER - ANOTHER DAY

Some time has passed. Noora's face is covered in dirt as she sits on the floor next to Fatima, cradling her cell phone and the matching charger.

Fatima perks up at the SOUND of the METAL DOORS opening. The women congregate in front of a make-shift STATION, dispensing FOOD and WATER. Fatima gets up on her toes to sneak a glance.

FATIMA
 (to Noora)
 Looks like we're having rice today.

NOORA
 Go ahead. I'm not hungry.

FATIMA
 You have to eat.

NOORA
 I have to find a power outlet so I can call Jamal. But they won't even let me out of this thing.

FATIMA
 They might. Once you're added to the registry.

NOORA
 And how long's that going to take? He's going to think we're dead.

FATIMA
 You will be if you don't eat something.

Fatima moves off, making her way to the front of the container, past the other women.

EXT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - FRONT GATES - ANOTHER DAY

CLOSE ON a massive steel bar door as it SCREECHES open, revealing a short-haired GREEK WOMAN in a pant suit with intense eyes. This is humanitarian lawyer ELENA AGOURIS (42).

With her is her Afghan TRANSLATOR, KAREEM (25).

A SUPER READS: **"March 12th, 2016"**

MULTIPLE ASYLUM SEEKERS stare at them, intrigued, as they plow through the crowded camp, on a mission.

KAREEM
(in Dari)
Make some room!

The MIGRANTS part, making space for them to pass.

EXT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - REGISTRATION - SOON AFTER

Ms. Agouris walks briskly across the muddy ground, heading straight for the registration booth, where a STERN GUARD stands watch.

(NOTE: the following conversation is in Greek, SUBTITLED)

STERN GUARD
This area's off-limits.

MS. AGOURIS
Not to us.

She presents her BADGE, identifying her as an R.S.A. lawyer.

MS. AGOURIS (CONT'D)
We're looking for two siblings -- a boy and a girl from Afghanistan. Noora and Ismail Soltani.

STERN GUARD
(dismissive)
You think I know everyone in here by name?

Ms. Agouris looks him square in the eye.

MS. AGOURIS
I don't. But you do know where the new arrivals are kept.

INT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - SHIPPING CONTAINER - DAY

The incessant CHATTER and BICKERING of the WOMEN is heard.

IN THE BACK OF THE CONTAINER, Noora squats on the ground, flipping through pages of her book. The INK is smudgy in places, making reading difficult. In an attempt to drown out the NOISE, she covers both ears with her hands.

AT THE FRONT OF THE CONTAINER, we FIND Fatima, standing in line as a VOLUNTEER hands her a BOWL OF RICE. She nods her thanks, turns to go, shouldering her way back inside.

Just then, the container doors are opened. The STERN GUARD we met earlier steps inside, followed by Ms. Agouris and Kareem.

STERN GUARD

Anyone in here know a Noora
Soltani?

The WOMEN briefly glance over, then continue CHATTERING, going about their business.

STERN GUARD (CONT'D)

(to Ms. Agouris)

Told ya. You'll never find her in
this place.

Ms. Agouris looks over at Kareem -- a silent understanding between them. He brushes past the Guard, stepping forward.

KAREEM

(shouting)

EXCUSE ME, LADIES!

Startled by the VOLUME of his voice, the women turn. Convinced he has their attention, Kareem unfurls a large PRINT, showing Noora's FACE.

KAREEM (CONT'D)

Have any of you seen this girl?

The women fall quiet, everyone (including Fatima) craning to see the PHOTOGRAPH. RECOGNITION floods Fatima's face.

Without further ado, she makes her way through the masses, all the way to the BACK OF THE CONTAINER, where Noora is crouching on the floor, absorbed in her book.

FATIMA

Noora! Come, quickly! Someone's
looking for you!

ON Noora, confusion on her face.

BACK AT THE FRONT OF THE CONTAINER, Kareem lets out a defeated sigh as he rolls up the print again.

KAREEM

(to Ms. Agouris)

We could go through the register to be sure.

MS. AGOURIS

(grudgingly)

It's going to take a week, at least.

They turn to go, just when --

NOORA (O.S.)

I'm right here!

Ms. Agouris and Kareem twirl around, astounded at the short, fragile girl pushing her way past a multitude of women.

She pauses in front of them, meeting their eyes.

NOORA (CONT'D)

I'm Noora Soltani.

(beat)

Who are you?

KAREEM

(in Dari)

I'm Kareem. This is Ms. Agouris -- your lawyer.

Surprise floods Noora's face. She has a lawyer? Ms. Agouris says something in GREEK. Kareem translates:

KAREEM (CONT'D)

She says it's an honor to meet you.

NOORA

Tell her my brother is being held in the men's section. And that I'm not leaving without him.

He tells Ms. Agouris, translating her response:

KAREEM

Neither are we.

EXT. MORIA DETENTION CAMP - MALE SECTION - LATER THAT DAY

Kareem holds Ismail's hand, guiding him past a fenced-off area, inhabited by MEN.

The boy looks hallow-cheeked, but otherwise in good spirits. Noora embraces him, inspecting every inch of him with her eyes.

NOORA
Are you alright?

ISMAIL
(nods)
I'm a big boy now, remember?

She cracks a smile.

The two follow Kareem towards the heavily guarded FRONT GATES as HUNDREDS of REFUGEES longingly look on from behind bars. One of them is Fatima. She raises her hand, WAVING good-bye.

Noora glances back one last time, WAVING back. Deep down both of them know they'll never see each other again.

OUTSIDE THE FRONT GATES, a colorful MINIBUS is parked, the DRIVER awaiting them. Ismail is the first to board it, not even wondering --

NOORA
(to Kareem)
Where are you taking us?

KAREEM
A better place.

NOORA
Anyplace is better than here.

Kareem smiles faintly, in spite of himself.

KAREEM
You'll see for yourself.

As Noora climbs aboard the bus, ANGLE SHIFTS to Ms. Agouris, whipping out her MOBILE PHONE to make a call.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Frank barrels down the hallway, phone in hand, ecstatic. Eager to share the news with --

INT. REFUGEE HOME - GROUP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jamal, who lies in bed, facing the wall. Multiple prescription pill bottles rest on his bedside table. He's heavily sedated, not reacting when Frank bursts inside.

FRANK
Jamal, get up.

JAMAL
(half asleep)
What is it?

FRANK
I just got a call from a human rights lawyer in Greece -- she found your siblings!

Jamal's head turns, his mind clouded by medication. He sits up, gathering his wits.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Did you hear what I just said?

JAMAL
(confused)
That must be a mistake. I didn't hire a lawyer.

FRANK
Migration Hub did. You wrote to them, apparently?
(off his stare)
They've agreed to pay for the application, the processing fees. Everything.

It takes a beat for Jamal to realize what he just heard, gears sluggishly turning in his head.

JAMAL
Are you sure? My brother and sister... ?

He can't bring himself to finish the sentence.

FRANK
(nods)
They're alive. I've got them on the phone right now.

This revelation SOBERS him instantly. Jamal chokes back tears as Frank hands him the receiver.

JAMAL
(through tears)
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MINIBUS (DRIVING) - SAME TIME

Noora and Ismail, keeping their heads close to speak into Ms. Agouris' CELL PHONE. On the other end they can hear Jamal, WEEPING, releasing a week of pent-up emotions.

NOORA
Why are you crying?

JAMAL
I thought you were gone.

NOORA
(joking)
It takes more than that to get rid
of us.

Jamal can't help but LAUGH.

ISMAIL
You didn't tell us we have a
lawyer.

JAMAL
I didn't know until just now. You
were right, Noora. About our story.
It did set us apart.

Hearing this brings a smile to her face.

NOORA
What now?

JAMAL
The legal fees are taken care of.
It's just a matter of getting the
paperwork approved.

NOORA
How long until we can be together
again?

JAMAL
I'm not sure -- I'll ask. But I
can't imagine it taking any longer
than a few weeks.

INT. REFUGEE HOME - FRANK'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Jamal stands across from Frank, completely thrown by the news he just received.

JAMAL

Eight months? What kind of lawyer is she?

FRANK

She's doing her best. It's just how long these things take. The application has to be processed. And we have to prove you're fit to be a legal guardian.

JAMAL

What kind of proof do they need? I'm eighteen.

FRANK

(reminds him)

You just turned eighteen. It doesn't mean you can provide a stable living situation.

He motions around, indicating the derelict REFUGEE HOME they're currently in.

JAMAL

Fine. I'll get my own place.

FRANK

I'll help you.

Jamal starts pacing restlessly.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I understand this is frustrating for you but you have to be patient.

JAMAL

(interrupts)

Frustrating? For me? This isn't about me. It's about them.

FRANK

They're being brought to an orphanage for refugee children. They'll be well taken care of.

This sparks something inside Jamal. His face HARDENS.

JAMAL

Have you ever been in one of those orphanages?

Frank has not.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I have.

(beat)

There's a reason I ran away and got on that train to Germany.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - MITILINI (LESBOS) - DAY

The MINIBUS comes to a stop. Noora and Ismail emerge, looking up at a DILAPIDATED BUILDING, overgrown with dead ivy. The place REEKS of DEPRESSION.

A burly, grim-faced Greek woman waits for them at the entrance. This is AGNES (50), the SENIOR CARETAKER.

JAMAL (V.O.)

They're a breeding ground for depression. If the journey doesn't break you, those places will.

(beat)

I don't want to keep them there a day longer than necessary. So don't tell me to be patient.

She eyes the children CRITICALLY. Noora's face CLOUDS as a troubled feeling rises in her gut.

Something isn't right with this place.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Agnes ushers our siblings through the dank hallway, giving us an OVERVIEW of the crowded INSTITUTION and its residents: two dozen, mostly male, CHILDREN and UNDERAGE TEENS, many of them showing signs of TRAUMA -- ANXIETY or severe AGGRESSION.

Noora's eyes LAND on a CHILD, humming a RHYTHM as he repeatedly hammers his forehead against the wall. A YOUNG CARETAKER sits nearby with a magazine, ignoring him.

The view sends a chill down Noora's spine.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

We're inside a barren room, featuring two FOLDING COTS, a table and two chairs as well as a small mirror. Other than a CALENDAR, there are no decorations on the BLANK WALLS.

A rosy-cheeked GIRL with curly RED HAIR perches on the windowsill, looking out at dead tree branches swaying in the wind. This is SHIRIN (15), the picture of innocence.

Her head turns when she hears Agnes opening the DOOR and letting Noora inside.

AGNES

Noora, this is Shirin. You'll be sharing a room.

The two girls lock insecure eyes.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Do you have a phone on you?

Noora digs up her CELL PHONE.

NOORA

The battery's empty.

AGNES

If you want to make a phone call, you'll do it from the office. Hours are every Wednesday from ten to one. If you miss it, you'll have to wait a week.

Agnes takes and pockets it.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Classes begin every morning at seven. If you're late or you miss a class, you get detention. Lunch is served at one, dinner at six. It's lights out at seven. No exceptions.

ISMAIL

(confused)

My brother said kids in Europe get to play every day.

AGNES

(pointed)

That depends if the kid is well-behaved.

Ismail swallows.

AGNES (CONT'D)

(to Ismail)

Come. Your room is in the boys' section.

Agnes turns to go, seizing Ismail's elbow. He looks back at his sister, who gives him a reassuring smile. Then he's gone.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

The Eerie SOBBING of a BOY can be heard from somewhere in the building, carrying through the walls. Noora lies on her cot, tossing around, restless. Unable to sleep.

BOY'S VOICE (O.S.)
Mommy! I want my mommy!

Shirin, lying in the cot beside her, addresses her.

SHIRIN
You get used to it after a while.

NOORA
Someone should tell him crying
won't bring his parents back. Trust
me, I've tried.

SHIRIN
Your parents are gone?

NOORA
(taken aback)
Aren't yours?

SHIRIN
No, they're in Izmir. They sent me
and my grandma here on a boat. She
passed away at the camp. I'm
waiting for them to come get me.
(beat)
Do you have any relatives left?

NOORA
A big brother. He's in Germany.
(beat)
I wish he was here.

SHIRIN
Why do you say that?

NOORA
Then Ismail wouldn't have to be by
himself.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Ismail sits on the grass, keeping a safe distance from the other BOYS who bounce around on a rusty JUNGLE GYM.

MAHDY (10), wearing horn-rimmed glasses climbs up a ladder, reaching upward, when --

ABDULLAH (13) appears on top, his two best friends FAIZ and HAMZA (both 12) close behind.

He SLAPS Mahdy's glasses off his face. Mahdy BLINKS, unable to see, grasping for the next step of the ladder.

ABDULLAH
 Look at this, guys. A blind monkey
 trying to climb. Don't you know
 what happens to blind monkeys?
 (beat)
 They fall.

The trio HOLLERS and JEERS, amused.

Ismail picks up Mahdy's glasses, shaking off the sand. Then he moves up the ladder, handing them to him.

Mahdy takes them, grateful. Quickly scampers off before --

ABDULLAH (CONT'D)
 Hey...

Abdullah turns his rage on a new target.

ABDULLAH (CONT'D)
 (to Ismail)
 What's your name?

Ismail doesn't respond. Which earns him a hard SHOVE.

ABDULLAH (CONT'D)
 I asked what your name is, faggot.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - SAME TIME

Noora sits by the window, reading sections of *Homer's Odyssey* out loud to Shirin, who listens, enraptured.

NOORA
 (reading)
 "But Neptune did not forget the
 threats with which he had already
 threatened Odysseus, so he took
 counsel with Jove..."

Drawn by the commotion, she glances up to see Ismail running away from the TRIO OF BULLIES, who GIVE CHASE.

Without hesitation, she jumps off the windowsill --

SHIRIN
 (alarmed)
 What's wrong?

RACES outside --

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Noora SPRINTS down the long corridor, turning a corner -- and COLLIDES with one of the CARETAKERS.

CARETAKER
 Where do you think you're going?
 Girls aren't allowed outside right
 now.

NOORA
 I know, but --

She tries to squeeze past, but the Caretaker blocks her path.

CARETAKER
 There's no but. Go back to your
 room.

NOORA
 (imploring)
 I have to help my brother! A couple
 of boys are beating him up!

CARETAKER
 He's going to be fine. We have an
 overseer keeping an eye.
 (point to her room)
 I'm not going to ask again.

Noora just looks at her, frustrated and helpless.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - BACKYARD - SAME TIME

The OVERSEER is busy pulling two squabbling CHILDREN apart. He doesn't notice Ismail cowering on the ground in the near distance, shielding his head as the trio PUMMELS him with their FISTS. He doesn't fight back, waiting for them to --

ABDULLAH
 Stop.

The boys back away.

ABDULLAH (CONT'D)

I think he's had enough.

(adds)

For today.

They scurry off, leaving Ismail in the dirt, face contorted with PAIN. Mahdy guiltily watches from a few feet away.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - CAFETERIA - NEXT DAY

Ismail sits at the BOY'S TABLE, picking at his food but not eating, his face CUT and BRUISED.

From the GIRL'S TABLE, NOORA looks past the Overseer to Ismail, eyes lingering on his bruises. She wants nothing more than to be by his side.

NOORA

Why won't they let me see him? I don't understand.

SHIRIN

It's to keep you from running away together. They know you won't leave without him so they keep you apart.

ON Noora, processing this information.

NOORA

Did other kids run away?

SHIRIN

(nods)

Many.

NOORA

Who can blame them? This place is awful.

SHIRIN

Nothing we can do about it.

NOORA

We can do something.

(thinks)

I'm going to tell Jamal. He might be able to get us out of here.

She looks to Shirin for reassurance, only to be met with a DOUBTFUL LOOK.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - AGNES' OFFICE - DAY

Agnes is at her desk, signing documents that are being handed to her by a CARETAKER. A KNOCK on the door. Noora enters.

AGNES

Did I say you could come in?

She closes the door again, KNOCKS.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Come in.

Steps inside.

AGNES (CONT'D)

How can I help you?

NOORA

I want to make my weekly call.

AGNES

You can't.

NOORA

(confused)

But... today's Wednesday.

AGNES

We only allow children to make calls who follow the rules. You left your room without permission.

NOORA

(defensive)

I only stepped out for a second!

AGNES

(casual)

And now you'll have to wait until next week. Raise your voice again and I'll make it two.

ON Noora -- quaking with rage -- fists CLENCHING.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - EVENING

Noora KICKS the door out of frustration, leaving a small DENT in the wood. This earns her a warning look from Shirin.

SHIRIN

If Agnes sees this --

NOORA
 (simmering)
 I don't care. I hate her.

SHIRIN
 (an idea)
 I know what's going to make you
 feel better.

Trying to lighten the mood, she picks up Homer's Odyssey.
 Flips it open, struggling to read a section out loud:

SHIRIN (CONT'D)
 (stammering)
 As she spoke Min-- Minerfah touched
 him with her wa-- her wand--

NOORA
 (corrects:)
 Minerva. She's the Roman goddess of
 wisdom. See?

She points to an ILLUSTRATION of MINERVA, clad in a billowing
 ATHENIAN GOWN, white as snow.

SHIRIN
 I like her dress.

NOORA
 I can make you one just like that
 if you want.

SHIRIN
 (impressed)
 You can sew?

Noora nods, proudly.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - COMMON ROOM - DAY

Shirin unfurls an old CURTAIN, made of white LACE. The color
 has faded and turned a light beige. Noora inspects it, runs
 the fabric through her fingers.

NOORA
 That'll do.

They trade excited glances.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - CLASSROOM - DAY

Ismail sits in class with the other boys, listening to a GREEK TEACHER instructing them on proper pronunciation:

TEACHER
Charika gia ti gnorimia.
(in English)
Nice to meet you.

BOYS
(repeating)
Charika gia ti gnorimia.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - HALLWAY - LATER THAT DAY

The boys pour out of the classroom. Ismail moves along the corridor, clutching his TEXTBOOK. Further down the hall, we SPOT the TRIO OF BULLIES waiting for him. They advance, SNEERING with anticipation.

Seeing this, Mahdy scurries off and around a corner. Ismail is about to break into a SPRINT, too, when --

Something SHIFTS inside him. He PAUSES, his expression CHANGING from ANXIETY to COURAGE as --

He turns around, steeling himself, facing them head on.

ABDULLAH
What's going on, faggot?

ISMAIL
(to Abdullah)
You don't scare me.

This is the moment we realize how much Noora's words have affected and changed him. Before Abdullah can react --

WHAM! Ismail whips a PUNCH at his face. He reels, clutching his cheek, incredulous. Taking advantage of his confusion, Ismail CHARGES at Abdullah, knocking him flat on the ground.

The two bullies back away, intimidated at first. Then they start to HOLLER, watching with glee as Ismail and Abdullah roll around on the floor, tearing at each other.

FAIZ
C'mon, Abdullah -- hit him!

Suddenly, the Overseer comes around the corner, led by Mahdy. Clearly, the boy has alerted him about the bullies.

Caught in the act, Faiz and Hamza flee the scene. Ismail deals PUNISHING BLOWS to Abdullah's ribs and kidneys, when --

The Overseer roughly pulls him off the much larger boy.

OVERSEER

That's enough!

(to Abdullah)

You again. Why am I not surprised?

You're coming with me.

The Overseer grips Abdullah's arm. Hard. Forcefully guides him towards Agnes' office. Ismail wipes blood off his lip with his sleeve, when Mahdy turns to him excitedly:

MAHDY

(impressed)

That was awesome!

Ismail grins, beaming from within.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - COMMON ROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON THE WHITE DRESS as Noora eases the fabric through the presser foot. She SNIPS OFF the loose threads, presenting the finished product to Shirin. It's a poor woman's version of the Roman Goddess dress, yet reminiscent of it.

NOORA

Try it on.

Before she can, Agnes wanders in, flanked by a uniformed RESCUE WORKER from the R.S.A. They both look DOWNCAST.

AGNES

Shirin.

(beat)

This man needs to talk to you. It's about your parents.

PUSH IN on Shirin as her expression DARKENS...

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - HALLWAY - NIGHT

We HEAR hysterical CRIES echoing down the hall. Only this time it's not coming from the boys' section, but from --

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Shirin, who lies on her cot, curled up in the FETAL POSITION, SOBBING in uncontrollable GRIEF. Noora sits beside her, gently stroking her hair, trying to calm her.

NOORA

Shhh. I know it hurts. But at least we're still here. And we're safe.

SHIRIN

(crying)

I don't want to be here. Not without them.

She continues to cry, broken.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - COMMON ROOM - NEXT DAY

Shirin, wearing the white dress, vacantly stares ahead as Noora makes last adjustments with a pair of SCISSORS.

One of the CARETAKERS pops his head in.

CARETAKER

Lunchtime.

SHIRIN

(to Noora)

Go ahead, I gotta go to the bathroom.

Not thinking anything of it, Noora lowers the scissors to the floor and exits.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - LUNCH ROOM - SOON AFTER

In the middle of her meal, Noora looks over to Ismail at the BOY'S TABLE, who's snickering with Mahdy. She smiles, comforted to know he's made a friend.

She glances at Shirin's empty seat. She hasn't come.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - COMMON ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We FOLLOW Noora as she re-enters the common room. Her work station is just how she left it.

NOORA

Shirin?

She goes to the WOMEN'S BATHROOM, jiggles the DOOR KNOB.
It's LOCKED.

NOORA (CONT'D)
Are you in there?

No answer. Her eyes FLIT ABOUT, looking for help. It arrives
-- in the shape of a JANITOR.

NOORA (CONT'D)
(in Greek)
Help me. My friend locked herself
in the bathroom.

The Janitor hurries across, motions for her to step back.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Janitor SHOULDERS the door open. They barge into the
stall, all COLOR DRAINING from their faces when they see --

SHIRIN, wrists gashed wide open with the scissors. BLOOD
FLOWS onto the WHITE fabric of the dress, tinting it RED.

ON Noora, TERROR flooding her face.

The Janitor acts quickly -- pressing a towel on Shirin's
wrists, applying PRESSURE to stop the BLEEDING.

JANITOR
(to Noora)
Get Agnes! We need an ambulance!

Still shell-shocked, Noora scrambles out...

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - FRONT YARD - SOON AFTER

Shirin lies on a gurney. PARAMEDICS hustle her into a parked
AMBULANCE. Noora looks on, still in a state of SHOCK.

Agnes sidles up to her, maintaining her composure.

AGNES
You did well.

High praise coming from this woman.

AGNES (CONT'D)
She'd be dead if you hadn't found
her in time.

NOORA

I know.

(sincere)

Do you think she'll hate me for it?

A beat as this question LINGERS.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Noora sits in semi-darkness, staring at Shirin's empty COT, bordering on a nervous breakdown. Her only friend in this world is gone. Her only company: the PAINED WEEPING of ORPHANED BOYS filling the desolate corridors.

Noora slumps over, head in her hands, teetering toward DESPAIR, trying to hold it together as best she can.

At first, she lets out a soft WHIMPER... that slowly grows louder... building... into a SHRIEK of PURE GRIEF.

This entire time we've secretly been wondering when this young woman -- still a girl, really -- is going to break under the pressure of her horrific circumstances.

That moment is NOW.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - DAY

The curtains are drawn, keeping out the light. Agnes enters with a BREAKFAST TRAY. Finds SEVERAL untouched TRAYS of food on the floor next to Noora's cot. Noora just lies there, a broken figure, her eyes vacant. Her hair is slightly longer than before, indicating a PASSAGE OF TIME.

AGNES

I'll just leave it here.

She lowers it to the floor.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Ismail keeps asking about you.

No response. Or even the slightest movement. Agnes sighs, then turns to leave, closing the door behind her.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - FRONT YARD - NEXT DAY

A flower is plucked from the dirt. Ismail inspects it, adding it to a small bouquet of WILDFLOWERS he's collecting. We can see that his wounds have completely healed.

MAHDY (O.S.)

Ismail!

He looks up to Mahdy and the other BOYS, who are gathered around a table, decorated with balloons.

Agnes brings out a candle-lit birthday cake.

MAHDY (CONT'D)

Don't you want any?

He sure does, quickly scurries over. Agnes places a piece of cake in front of him. He's about to dig in, when --

A look of GUILT overcomes him. His eyes FLIT to Agnes, then back to the entrance, guarded by the Overseer.

TIME CUT TO:

THE ENTRANCE

Ismail approaches the Overseer with two plates of CAKE. Offers him one. A bribe. The Overseer throws a glance over his shoulder, making sure Agnes doesn't see.

He silently SIGNALS for Ismail to head inside. Careful not to be seen, Ismail edges slowly, cheekily, through the door.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - GIRL'S QUARTERS - SOON AFTER

The door opens, revealing Ismail. He creeps in, a bunch of wildflowers in one hand, a plate of birthday cake in the other. Noora hasn't moved since we've last seen her.

ISMAIL

Hey, you.

She turns, startled to see him.

Ismail is momentarily stunned by her lean appearance. She's hollow-cheeked, eyes sunken deep in their orbits.

NOORA

You're not allowed to be here.

ISMAIL

I brought you something.

He passes her the flowers, picks up a plastic fork and carefully starts to feed her -- their roles reversed.

ISMAIL (CONT'D)
 Why don't you come downstairs
 anymore?

NOORA
 What for?

ISMAIL
 To spend time with the other kids.
 We may not see them again in a few
 weeks. Once we go to Germany--

NOORA
 Ismail, stop. Just... STOP!

He falls quiet, taken aback by her intensity.

NOORA (CONT'D)
 Everything Jamal said was a lie.
 We're not going to Germany. Not
 now. Not ever. This is our home
 now. So let's just stop pretending.

Ismail mulls this over. Comes to a conclusion:

ISMAIL
 Even so, that's no reason not to
 show up to Mahdy's birthday party.
 He's never been mean to you.

ON Noora, reflecting on her brother's words...

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME - FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Noora reluctantly joins the boys at the table, looking a bit
 better for having eaten. Mahdy offers her a PARTY HAT, when
 Agnes clinks her fork against a GLASS, readying herself to
 give a speech.

AGNES
 Quiet, everyone.

It takes a moment for the kids to settle down.

AGNES (CONT'D)
 We're all here to celebrate Mahdy's
 birthday. But there's another
 reason for celebration today...

Her gaze shifts to our siblings.

AGNES (CONT'D)

It's also a farewell party for Noora and Ismail. Who will be leaving us next week.

A SWELL of APPLAUSE, children ROARING their approval. We PUSH IN ON Noora, the tiniest trace of HOPE dawning on her face.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME - HALLWAY - A WEEK LATER

TRACK along with Noora and Ismail, suitcases in hand as they take their last walk down the hallway, passing the SAD FACES of the other boys.

The two exit through the MAIN ENTRANCE, where Ms. Agouris is already waiting for them. Noora stops a moment, turns to Agnes, holding out an expectant hand.

NOORA

My phone.

She's not asking, she's demanding. Agnes shoots her a SOUR LOOK as she retrieves Noora's SMART PHONE from her coat.

Noora takes it and moves off.

INT. AIRPORT - LESBOS (GREECE) - DAY

Our siblings head down the terminal with Kareem and Ms. Agouris, who accompany them to the security checkpoint. Then it's time to say good-bye.

KAREEM

You got the tickets?

Noora nods, patting her jacket pocket.

KAREEM (CONT'D)

The flight will take three hours and fifteen minutes. Don't forget to change planes in Athens.

ISMAIL

What if we get lost?

KAREEM

(laughs)

You made it all the way from Afghanistan without getting lost.

(reassuring)

You'll be fine.

Overcome with GRATITUDE, our siblings pull him and Ms. Agouris into a TIGHT HUG.

NOORA
(humble)
Thank you. For everything.

A tender beat between them.

EXT. AIRPORT - LESBOS (GREECE) - DAY

A United 747 barrels down the runway and LIFTS off. Passing overhead with a DEAFENING ROAR.

SUPERIMPOSE: "January 6th, 2017"

INT. AIRPLANE - LATER

Ismail and Noora stare out of the window, utterly mesmerized. It's their first time on a plane.

BELOW, we WATCH as THE LANDSCAPE CHANGES: the verdant hills of Greece getting replaced by flat, dormant farmland... and, finally, the perfectly manicured grounds of Germany.

We hear the PILOT'S ANNOUNCEMENT over the LOUDSPEAKER:

PILOT (V.O.)
Ladies and Gentlemen, please return
to your seats as we now begin our
descent to Berlin Tegel airport.

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - ARRIVALS - DAY

A predominantly German crowd swarms around the arrival area, waiting for their loved ones behind a railing. Faces expectant. We note the difference in their open demeanor and Western manner of clothing. Not a single veil in sight.

Jamal squeezes past them, making his way to the front, looking both nervous and exhilarated. He's dressed the best we have seen him -- hair combed, pants pressed, boots shined.

And he's not alone. With him are Frank and a REPORTER, cradling an ANALOG CAMERA.

REPORTER
(to Jamal)
You're finally going to see your
siblings again. How do you feel?

JAMAL

Uh... good.

A man of few words. Frank can't suppress a smile.

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - SECURITY CHECKPOINT - SAME TIME

Noora and Ismail are in the METAL DETECTOR line. AIRPORT SECURITY waves them through to a TSA OFFICER, who PATS them down while asking questions in GERMAN:

TSA OFFICER

Do you have residence permits?

They pull out their passports.

TSA OFFICER (CONT'D)

No. You need a permit to enter the country.

(louder)

Permit?

They shrug, no idea what he's saying. He gives a SIGNAL to an unfriendly-looking OFFICER, standing nearby. Our siblings trade worried looks as he approaches.

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - INTERROGATION ROOM - SOON AFTER

A flustered IMMIGRATION OFFICER sifts through Noora and Ismail's LUGGAGE, speaking GERMAN with his COLLEAGUE.

ISMAIL

(to Noora)

What are they looking for?

NOORA

I have no idea.

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - ARRIVALS - SAME TIME

Jamal looks on, increasingly anxious, as the last PASSENGERS from the Athens flight leave the terminal with their families.

JAMAL

(to Frank)

They landed an hour ago. What's taking so long?

Frank's been wondering the same thing.

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - INTERROGATION ROOM - SOON AFTER

Noora becomes increasingly impatient -- so close to her goal. The Immigration Officers close the folder containing their paperwork and stand.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
I can't find a permit. They probably don't have one.

IMMIGRANT OFFICER #2
So what do we do?

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
Send them back to Greece, I guess.

Noora's eyes widen at the one word she can understand:

NOORA
Greece?

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
Yes, you have to go back. C'mon, let's go.

He points to her carry-on bag. Noora stares -- at a loss. She shakes her head rigorously, starts protesting in DARI:

NOORA
(upset)
I'm not going anywhere! We're allowed to be here!

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #2
What is she saying?

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
The fuck am I supposed to know?

NOORA
My brother brought us here legally! His name is Jamal Soltani! You need to call him up right now!

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
(to his colleague)
She's gotta calm down.
(to Noora)
Calm down, young lady!

They're about to get into a SHOUTING MATCH, when the door is opened by Frank. He locks reverent eyes with the siblings, conscious of the perilous journey they have had.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
Excuse me... who are you?

FRANK
Frank Ernst. I'm the case worker
for these children.
(beat)
I've come to pick them up.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #1
We can't let them go with you. Not
without a residence per --

Before he can finish, Frank SLAPS the permits on the table in front of him. The Officer falls quiet.

FRANK
You were saying?

INT. BERLIN AIRPORT - ARRIVALS - MOMENTS LATER

The automated airport doors remain closed. ANGLE on Jamal, eyeing them longingly. Hoping for the impossible to happen.

Then, the doors finally slide open, revealing --

Frank, flanked by Noora on one side, Ismail on the other. Time seems to SLOW DOWN as their eyes meet.

Tears well in Noora's eyes as she drops her SUITCASE. She starts to SPRINT, Ismail close behind.

ANGLE ON Jamal, jumping across the railing. DASHING across the terminal, getting closer and closer to his siblings --

Then, they come to a sudden stop, only a few steps away from each other. Gazing at each other with DISBELIEF.

JAMAL
You're here. You're really here!

NOORA
I thought I'd never see you again.

Finally, they fall into each other's arms -- reunited at last. They hold on to each other, never wanting to let go.

JAMAL
Baba was right about you. He would
be proud to know what you've done.

A triumphant SMILE reshapes Noora's face, her heart swelling with pride.

ISMAIL

Don't let them take us away.

JAMAL

No one's going to take you away. I
won't let them. I promise you --

Jamal briefly breaks away, taking a closer look at Ismail. He
does a double take:

JAMAL (CONT'D)

My God. You're almost a man now.

ISMAIL

(re: Noora)

Well, yeah. Who do you think was
looking after her the whole time?

The tears continue to roll -- but this time they're tears of
UNPARALLELED JOY.

Standing nearby, Frank regards them tenderly. Knowing he's
done his part in restoring some justice to the world.

Taking advantage of this emotional atmosphere, the Reporter
lifts her camera. The SHUTTER CLICKS as -- FLASH!

A SNAPSHOT is taken, forever conserving this moment in time.

STAY on the FROZEN IMAGE of the reunited siblings,
representing ABSOLUTE JOY and hard-earned TRIUMPH.

CAMERA HOLDS ON this iconic PHOTOGRAPH, until we --

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK, the following words appear ON SCREEN:

JAMAL, NOORA AND ISMAIL SOLTANI STILL LIVE TOGETHER.
THEY RESIDE IN BERLIN, GERMANY.

ACCORDING TO UNHCR, IN 2016 ALONE, 75,000 CHILDREN
APPLIED FOR ASYLUM AS UNACCOMPANIED MINORS.

MOST WERE FROM AFGHANISTAN AND SYRIA.

FADE OUT:

THE END