

# MOTHER

by

SEAN MALCOLM

WGAW #1840990  
sean@seanmalcolm.net  
310-528-3984

EXT. ALEPPO, SYRIA - DAY

Punishing heat waves flicker across the Syrian desert.

AERIAL VIEW: THE SHATTERED SKYLINE OF ALEPPO

Once the largest city in Syria, home to over four million people before the civil war began.

Now miles of concrete buildings stretch to the horizon, mostly reduced to smoking rubble.

SUPER: ALEPPO, SYRIA - 2016

Blown-out concrete neighborhoods, block after block of devastated apartments, schools, mosques.

A moonscape with laundry lines, dotted by satellite dishes.

ON THE STREETS

Small signs of life: a garbage pile burns; an old woman in black hijab pushes an overloaded cart; a beat-up taxi races through an intersection.

EXT. ALLEY MARKET - DAY

Two tall buildings divided by an alley protect the makeshift market from the open sky.

Desperate people search among the ad-hoc vendors. An old woman sells a few pieces of fruit; a boy sells cooking fuel in plastic bottles; an old man offers bags of rice.

Everyone buying, selling, begging; scraping coins, bartering with cigarettes, spices, bullets; whatever they have.

In everyone's eyes: fear and desperation.

In the crowd, FARIDA MOHAMMED, Syrian mother, late 30's, traditional hijab covering her hair and neck, guides her six year-old son SAMI through the market at a determined pace.

He rushes to keep up, his REAL MADRID jersey too large, his mangled flip-flops nearly tripping on the rocky path.

Farida stops at a young RICE SELLER. Standing nearby is a rebel FREE SYRIAN ARMY SOLDIER, smoking a cigarette.

The soldier is roughly handsome, with a cold intensity in his eyes. They speak in Arabic, subtitled.

FARIDA  
I only need half a bag.

RICE SELLER  
No portions. One bag or two.

FARIDA  
(indicating her son)  
Please. We can't afford much.

The rice seller is annoyed. He looks at the soldier, who studies Farida, then Sami.

The soldier finally nods approvingly, dragging on his cigarette.

RICE SELLER  
Two hundred pounds.

FARIDA  
It was fifty last week.

He shrugs. It's war. She digs in her purse as he pours rice into a bag and ties it off.

The soldier looks at Sami clinging to his mother.

FSA SOLDIER  
(to Sami)  
Are you a good boy?

Sami is shy, but doesn't look away. There's a quality in his eyes: an old soul trapped in a boy's body.

Sami nods "yes" without breaking the soldier's gaze. The soldier bends down, hands Sami something.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
A mother's love knows no bounds.  
(beat)  
Allah be with you.

Farida looks at the soldier. There's a direct, fearless quality in her eyes, too.

FARIDA  
And with you.

She hands her money to the seller and he hands her the rice.

Farida tugs on Sami, and they disappear into the crowd.

EXT. ALEPPO - STREETS

Farida guides Sami down a street between shattered buildings.

An elderly woman in black hijab, AMIRA, and her teenage grandson HASSAN, in ragged clothes and a pair of dirty white Adidas sneakers, walk toward them.

Farida sees them and approaches, somehow managing a smile.

AMIRA  
(seeing Farida)  
Thanks be to Allah.

Amira and Farida exchange kisses on the cheek.

FARIDA  
How are you faring?

Amira tilts her head, forces a smile too.

AMIRA  
(looking around)  
Every day is a blessing.

Hassan pats Sami on the head.

FARIDA  
I suppose it is.

AMIRA  
And Adnan and Tarek?

FARIDA  
We still get by.

AMIRA  
Peace be with them. Will you come  
for tea soon?

FARIDA  
Of course. Very soon.

AMIRA  
Good. It helps to have something to  
look forward to.  
(beat)  
May the Prophet keep and protect  
you, Farida.  
(to the teen)  
Come Hassan.

She takes Hassan by the arm.

FARIDA  
And you, Amira.

Farida guides Sami on.

EXT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - DAY

Farida and Sami scamper across their rubble-strewn street.

Hollowed-out windows and bullet pockmarks everywhere. Garbage in the doorways. A burned-out car on the road behind them.

They duck into a passageway, next to an old shop with metal bars covering broken windows.

A dangling sign reads "ELECTRONICS REPAIR" in Arabic.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - STAIRWEL

Farida and Sami walk up the stairs, past a landing with more garbage, abandoned apartments, and a crying kitten which scampers away, until they reach the fifth floor.

Farida unlocks two separate locks on the door, pulls Sami inside, and locks it shut.

INT. FARIDA'S APT.

A modest, tidy space. Afternoon sun pours through windows with a view of the devastated neighborhood.

The living area has a couch and prayer rug; a small TV on a table. An oil portrait of long-gone relatives hangs above.

Farida moves into a small kitchen with a table and four chairs in a dining area, as Sami kicks off his shoes and jumps on the couch.

He opens his hand, studying what the soldier gave him: a small Lego space soldier with helmet and laser gun.

He turns the head in circles, fascinated.

INT. APT. - KITCHEN

Farida opens the cabinet beneath the stove and lifts a tank to feel what's left. Not much.

She lights the stove and sets a pot of water to boil.

She measures a single cup of rice and sets it aside.

She turns to the living area, removing her hijab, her long dark hair flowing free. She's home.

She watches her son play with his Lego soldier, a bittersweet mix of love and concern in her eyes.

FOOTSTEPS come up the stairs outside...

The door UNLOCKS and in steps ADNAN, early 40's, lean but strong, Farida's husband; then Farida's father, TAREK, 70's and frail, with a regal head of white hair.

Sami runs to his dad and hugs his legs.

SAMI

Baba, Baba look what I got!

He shows him the space soldier.

ADNAN

(forcing a smile)

Wow, what a lucky boy!

Adnan locks the door as Tarek eases himself onto the couch, catching his breath.

Adnan hands his wife a small bag, like a peace offering.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

Chicken.

She kisses his cheek without smiling, the tension palpable. She takes the bag to the kitchen.

TAREK

Show me what you have, Sami.

Sami sits next to his grandfather, showing him the toy.

INT. APT. - DINING AREA - NIGHT

Farida, Adnan, Tarek and Sami eat dinner, small portions of chicken and rice. It's not much, but she's a good cook, and they're hungry.

Everyone is focused on their food, until Adnan finally breaks the silence with his matter-of-fact tone.

ADNAN

The last pharmacy in Al Masharika is gone. Suicide bomber hit the street. Daesh.

She sighs, finishes the bite in her mouth.

FARIDA

Why attack a pharmacy instead of the government? Why destroy the very country you're trying to take over? It makes no sense to me.

She stares at her plate, not really expecting an answer.

TAREK

They destroy precisely in order to take over, that's why. They're animals.

Sami chews his food, then unnoticed, puts a small amount of chicken in his napkin.

FARIDA

(to Tarek)

How many pills do you have left?

TAREK

Four days.

A long look between the adults.

ADNAN

I heard a pharmacy may be open in Sukkari.

She looks at him.

FARIDA

And how will you get there and back?

TAREK

We can use the papers with my old address.

She shakes her head, discouraged.

FARIDA

If you're going to take that risk, we should take it together.

(looks at Adnan, pleading)

We could leave, and not come back.

Adnan is tired, and they've had this debate before.

ADNAN

And where would we go? To the  
camps, to die?

FARIDA

Germany.

ADNAN

It's too late for that. The border  
is closed. Merkel has come to her  
senses.

A long silence as Farida looks down, moves what's left of her  
food around on her plate.

TAREK

You should have moved back home  
with us when the war started.

ADNAN

Not that again. And how would we  
have survived, without the shop?

TAREK

I would have found you a job in the  
government.

Adnan stares back at him coldly.

ADNAN

Not on my life.

FARIDA

None of it matters now. The  
government is collapsing, no one  
comes to the shop, and rice is two  
hundred pounds.

Another long beat.

TAREK

I don't need the pills. They only  
make me tired.

FARIDA

If you don't take them --

ADNAN

(re: Sami)  
No more of this, not now.

They look at Sami, concerned they're scaring him, but he's tuned them all out, fiddling with his food.

Adnan sets his fork down with an air of finality.

ADNAN (CONT'D)  
We'll use the old papers. We'll go  
tomorrow, after morning prayer.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - KITCHEN - LATER

Farida cleans the dishes, TV NEWS on in the background.

LIVING ROOM

Adnan and Tarek both snooze on the couch as the news is read on TV by a FEMALE ANCHOR with hijab.

FEMALE ANCHOR (V.O.)  
Today Government forces destroyed a  
terrorist camp outside Homs, with  
the aid of the Russian Federation  
Air Force. President al-Assad  
hailed it as the final phase of the  
battle to liberate Homs from the  
terrorists that have brutalized the  
population.

ON TV: SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD smiles widely to a  
conference table full of military advisors.

He's winning.

FARIDA (O.S.)  
Sami, time for bed.

No answer. Farida enters the living room, wiping her hands.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Sami?

She sees both men dozing, but the front door is cracked open.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Sami!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Farida runs toward the stairs --

FARIDA  
 (louder)  
 Sami!

She gets to the staircase, finds Sami crouched down a few steps from the top. He's feeding a kitten with bits of chicken, the kitten licking it from his hand.

SAMI  
 (softly)  
 Shhhh, Mama. You'll scare him.

FARIDA  
 I told you, never leave the house.

He looks at her with pleading eyes.

SAMI  
 But look how skinny he is.

What can she say?

FARIDA  
 Give him the rest, then it's time  
 for bed.

Sami gives the last bits to the kitten, and it wipes its face with its paw.

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Real Madrid posters on the wall. A small dresser with a few toy dinosaurs and Legos strewn about.

Sami is in his pajamas in his small bed, Farida reading a book next to him.

FARIDA  
 And so the three sisters cried and wept, as all the roasted lamb and spicy rice was gone. And soon after, they died from sadness, and broken hearts.

She catches her breath, having forgotten how depressing the ending is. Sami looks up with curiosity.

SAMI  
 I feel bad for them.

FARIDA  
 It's not supposed to be sad. It's just...

(MORE)

FARIDA (CONT'D)

to remind us, that no matter how  
poor you are, there are people with  
less than you.

(beat)

But if you share what you have,  
Allah will bless you.

SAMI

Like with my kitty?

Her beautiful, sweet little soul.

FARIDA

Yes, like with your kitty. Now go  
to sleep. I love you.

SAMI

I love you too, Mama.

She kisses him on the forehead, he rolls over and pulls his  
blanket up, and she turns out the light.

EXT. STREET - ADNAN'S SHOP - DAY

Adnan locks the bars over the broken windows, removes the  
hanging sign, hides it inside, and locks the metal door, a  
canvas bag slung over his shoulder.

He turns to Farida, Sami and Tarek standing in the street.

TRAFFIC BLARES in the background. Somewhere KIDS YELL as they  
kick a ball. The sun blazes like a normal day, immune to the  
heaviness in their hearts.

ADNAN

We'll take a taxi across. I'll pay  
extra, and go the long way around  
the Citadel.

Tarek looks dejected. Sami just clings onto his mother,  
staring up at his father.

FARIDA

Can we afford that?

Adnan unzips the canvas bag, shows her a portable TV, a  
tablet, two cheap cellphones in sealed boxes, and high-end  
two-way radios.

ADNAN

The rest is in the storage safe, if  
you need it.

SAMI  
When will you be back?

Adnan bends down and looks him in the eyes.

ADNAN  
Tonight, Allah willing. You know  
Grandpa needs his medicine.

SAMI  
I know.

Sami grabs his father's neck in a tight hug. Adnan closes his eyes for a squeeze, then pulls back, scruffing Sami's hair.

ADNAN  
Don't worry. Just listen to your  
mother, okay?

He kisses Sami on the cheek, then stands. Sami grabs his grandfather's leg. Tarek pats him on the shoulder.

Farida and Adnan hug. She holds him tight, until he shifts back to meet her eyes.

They share a long look. She won't allow herself to speak her fears out loud.

ADNAN (CONT'D)  
Allah be with you both.

FARIDA  
And with you.

EXT. ALLEY MARKET - DAY

The market is busy. Farida guides Sami through the crowd. She stops at a vendor to buy a few limp vegetables.

INT. TAXI - SIMULTANEOUS

Adnan and Tarek ride in back, a young DRIVER navigating a pothole-filled road. They circle a roundabout with a partially-destroyed statue of Bashar al-Assad.

EXT. ALLEY MARKET

Farida moves quickly, vendor to vendor, pulling Sami along. She buys a small sack of goat meat, and they keep moving.

EXT. REBEL CHECKPOINT - MOMENTS LATER

The taxi approaches a four-way intersection with a burned-out truck and razor wire blocking traffic, two beat-up Humvees stationed to the side, mounted with 50 cal. machine guns.

ADNAN

What's this?

TAXI DRIVER

(nervous)

New checkpoint.

Rebels with irregular uniforms, AK-47s, faces hidden by scarves, check a line of vehicles in both directions.

TAXI DRIVER (CONT'D)

Can you pay?

ADNAN

Yes.

Tarek gives Adnan a look.

EXT. ALLEY MARKET / PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

Farida and Sammy leave the alley and walk across an open plaza where vendors spread their wares on blankets.

Sami notices a woman with a few small cages of animals: a colorful parrot, a small pig, and two puppies. He pulls Farida's arm toward them.

FARIDA

Sami --

SAMI

I just want to look, Mama.

She lets him drag her over. He bends down and looks at the puppies as they wrestle.

EXT. REBEL CHECKPOINT - CONTINUOUS

A car in front of the taxi gets waived through, and now the taxi pulls up. A CHECKPOINT GUARD sticks his head in the window.

CHECKPOINT GUARD

(scanning the cab)

Why are you traveling west?

Adnan leans forward.

ADNAN

(re: Tarek)

My father-in-law. We need his heart medicine. I heard of a pharmacy in Sukkari.

CHECKPOINT GUARD

(skeptical)

That's a dangerous trip.

(beat)

Papers, and open the trunk.

Adnan rolls down his window, offers their papers plus a sealed Chinese cellphone in its box.

Adnan looks the guard in the eye -- the guard takes both as the driver pops the trunk.

As the guard reaches the rear, LOUD SCREAMING outside -- other guards up front point west --

One guard looks through binoculars at hills in the distance.

GUARD'S POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

A Syrian Army TANK leads a column of ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS as they plunge down a hillside, kicking up dust as they barrel toward the checkpoint --

AT CHECKPOINT

SCREAMING GUARD

Army! Army coming!

Rebels draw their AK's, the ENGINES ON THE HUMVEES fire up and gunners swing the mounted machine guns toward the hills.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Adnan sees the checkpoint guard run toward the cover of the burned-out truck, taking their papers and the phone.

ADNAN

Hey!

Cars start to drive around the checkpoint and the rebels could care less; they're ready to fight --

ADNAN (CONT'D)

(slamming the seat)

Go - just go!

The taxi driver steps on the gas, careens off the road --

AT CHECKPOINT - CONTINUOUS

The taxi rumbles into a shallow ravine and around the Humvee as the rebels prepare to engage --

The taxi barrels around the checkpoint, back up to the road, and the driver punches it --

EXT. MARKET PLAZA - SIMULTANEOUS

Sami pets the puppies though the cage. A RUMBLING SOUND buffets the air -- Farida turns and looks up --

Two ominous-looking HELICOPTERS approach from the west --

She pulls Sami's arm --

FARIDA

Let's go --

She starts running, practically dragging him -- people point, run for cover, SCREAM -- some trying to grab their wares --

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Driver guns it on the open road, and then BANG BANG RANG -- the rebels fire at the Syrian Army --

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION -- a SHOCK WAVE ROCKS THE TAXI --

Adnan and Tarek and driver duck as FLYING ROCKS AND METAL BOUNCE off the cab, SHATTERING the rear window --

EXT. MARKET PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

Farida and Sami race toward the shelter of a high building wall, vegetables spilling in the street --

The HELICOPTERS split directions -- one coming lower and closer, nearly overhead --

She pulls Sami to the corner, away from the open plaza --

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

TWO SYRIAN AIR FORCE SOLDIERS ride with the main door open -- looking down on the plaza -- people scurrying like ants --

One soldier gives the thumbs up, rolls two large WOOD BARRELS toward the open door --

The other soldier rolls ONE BARREL and then the OTHER BARREL out the side, directly over the plaza --

EXT. PLAZA - AROUND THE CORNER - CONTINUOUS

Farida pulls Sami into a doorway -- tries the door's knob, but it's locked --

The BARRELS DETONATE above in TWO HUGE EXPLOSIONS --

Explosives, fire, metal fragments, nails and ball-bearings BLAST THROUGH THE AIR --

The CONCUSSION BLOWS PEOPLE OVER, shreds flesh, SHATTERS WINDOWS --

Farida and Sami are blown off their feet, into the street --

EXT. THE TAXI - CONTINUOUS

The taxi races west, as a FIRE FIGHT breaks out behind -- MORTARS, AK's, 50. CAL MACHINE GUNS --

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Driver panics but doesn't know what else to do --

ADNAN  
(yelling)  
Just keep going! Go!

Tarek sweats like he might have a heart attack.

EXT. PLAZA AREA - CONTINUOUS

People cry in the smoke and dust, blood in the streets -- there goes a burning arm --

Farida rolls on the ground, half-conscious, forehead bleeding; sucks in her stomach, looks down: stomach and hand bleeding -- she rolls over, MOANS --

Sees Sami's body a few yards away, face-down on the concrete.

FARIDA  
Sami.

She lifts herself, but doubles over from the pain, can barely walk -- staggers toward her son -- nearly trips on debris, someone SCREAMING behind her --

She falls to the ground next to his body -- bloody knees on glass -- reaches out, afraid to touch him... then lightly, on his shoulder --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 (softly, crying)  
 Sami...

She rolls him over, his face covered in blood -- especially his left eye -- she pulls his little frame to her chest --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 (screaming at the sky)  
 Why? Why him? He loves you! Damn you!

She collapses onto him, squeezing him tight -- and then, COUGHING, WHEEZING -- not her, him -- she looks down --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 Sami?

He coughs a small amount of blood, and his right eye opens...

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, Sami --

She turns to the street: fires, chaos... she screams from the depths of her soul:

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 Help! Help me! My son is alive!

In the distance, SIRENS APPROACH.

EXT. PLAZA AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Farida staggers forward, Sami in her arms, rubble, flames, bodies all around --

A small AMBULANCE VAN with a RED CROSS on the sides SCREECHES to a halt -- MEN AND WOMEN IN WHITE HELMETS and flak jackets burst out -- two WHITE HELMETS see Farida stumbling toward them, Sami in her arms --

MALE WHITE HELMET  
 Give him to me!

She doesn't process, she's in total shock --

MALE WHITE HELMET (CONT'D)

(louder)

Please, he must go to hospital,  
now!

The female white helmet puts her arm around Farida, whispers in her ear, and Farida finally releases Sami to the man, as they guide her toward the ambulance --

INT. HOSPITAL - MINUTES LATER

Chaos. Badly damaged, threadbare equipment, stretchers in the hallway, crying children and parents -- volunteers and patients in a hallway running with human blood.

The male white helmet rushes in with Sami in his arms, bandages covering his little head and face; carries him down the hall to the back --

Farida comes in with the support of the female white helmet, and a third man carries an elderly man with a makeshift tourniquet where his arm was minutes ago --

Sami is rushed into a side room where a FEMALE DOCTOR lifts him onto a stretcher --

Farida collapses outside the room, wipes her tears with blood-stained hands.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF ALEPPO - DESERTED ROAD

The two-lane road is the only way in or out of eastern Aleppo. Both sides are protected by miles of six foot sand dunes, built to thwart snipers on either side of the line.

The taxi speeds west along the highway between the dunes, no traffic to stop it.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Adnan and Tarek stare at the passing landscape: collapsed buildings, kids playing in rubble; a burned-out fuel truck.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Farida is bandaged up, sipping water, crouched on the floor outside the operating room, the door closed.

She makes eye contact with a YOUNG MOTHER on the floor, cradling a baby.

YOUNG MOTHER  
He has a fever. We have no clean  
water.

She starts to tear up. Farida nods, understanding.

The FEMALE DOCTOR opens the door, and Farida stands, a look  
of dispare in her eyes.

FEMALE DOCTOR  
We removed a piece of shrapnel from  
his left eye.

Farida is confused, exhausted.

FARIDA  
Okay. So he's...

FEMALE DOCTOR  
We did what we could, but I doubt  
he will regain sight on that side.

FARIDA  
But he's --

FEMALE DOCTOR  
He's going to live.

Farida begins to cry.

FEMALE DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
(re: her stomach bandage)  
And you?

Farida touches her stomach.

FARIDA  
Flesh wound, they said.

SCREAMING down the hall as more patients come in.

FEMALE DOCTOR  
Allah is watching over both of you.

Farida can only nod, and watch the doctor move on toward the  
approaching new patients.

EXT. SUKKARI DISTRICT - REGIME CHECKPOINT

The taxi approaches a regime checkpoint: a tank, armored  
personnel carriers, etc.

INT. TAXI

DRIVER

What now? He took your papers.

Adnan pulls new papers from his jacket.

ADNAN

Those had my address.

(re: Tarek)

These have his.

Two REGIME GUARDS approach the taxi, weapons pointed straight at the driver.

REGIME GUARD

Papers.

The second guard goes to the back, bangs on the trunk, and the driver opens it.

Adnan leans forward, hands over his papers and some cash. The guard scans the papers, stares through the window.

Tarek coughs, pail and feeble. The guard looks at the shattered rear window.

ADNAN

We were trying to get to Al  
Masharika, a lung specialist... we  
hit a rebel checkpoint. Filthy  
dogs.

Guard smiles to himself.

REGIME GUARD

We're making a push for all of  
Aleppo now. The rebels won't last  
long.

ADNAN

(forcing it)

Praise Bashar.

The second guard closes the trunk and nods affirmatively.

REGIME GUARD

Praise Bashar.

He knocks the roof, waves them through; the barrier opens. As the taxi drives through, soldiers stare intensely at them.

ADNAN  
(under his breath)  
Dogs of the earth.

EXT. SUKKARI DISTRICT - DAY

The taxi lumbers down a dirty street with a few other cars, pedestrians, and regime soldiers on patrol, then pulls to the curb in front of a small pharmacy.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Adnan leans forward, offers the driver a small wad of cash.

ADNAN  
Just fifteen minutes. If you're  
still here, I'll pay double on the  
way back.

Driver takes the money, as he notices regime FOOT SOLDIERS coming down the sidewalk in his rearview mirror.

INT. SUKKARI PHARMACY - MOMENTS LATER

The door creaks open and Adnan and Tarek enter. An older PHARMACIST, 60's, looks them over.

PHARMACIST  
I'm closing for prayer.

Adnan guides Tarek to the counter and hands a prescription to the pharmacist.

ADNAN  
Please. Dr. Hummari wrote this,  
from the University.

Pharmacist reads the paper.

PHARMACIST  
Seven months ago.

The DOOR SWINGS OPEN and the FOOT SOLDIERS enter. Adnan looks at them, then continues with even greater urgency.

ADNAN  
He could die without it.

A FOOT SOLDIER steps forward, puts his hand on Tarek's shoulder.

FOOT SOLDIER  
Uncle Tarek?

TAREK  
(stunned)  
Hamsi?

The FOOT SOLDIER is stunned too, but then stiffens --

FOOT SOLDIER  
We looked for you for months. Your  
apartment was empty.

The soldiers draw their pistols, grab Adnan and Tarek by  
their arms, shove them both to the counter --

ADNAN  
Wait --

Adnan struggles, but gets slammed harder, and now there's a  
gun barrel to his temple --

FOOT SOLDIER  
Shut your mouth, or you'll never  
speak again.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Driver sees a REGIME ARMY VAN SCREECH to a halt in front of  
the pharmacy --

Soldiers pull Adnan and Tarek out of the pharmacy, drag them  
into the van, jump in, and the doors slam shut.

INT. REGIME VAN - CONTINUOUS

Adnan and Tarek are hooded and slammed against the van walls.

EXT. SUKKARI DISTRICT - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The van disappears into the alleyways.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Rows of stretchers, patients of every age and condition,  
sleeping, moaning in pain, dried blood on the floor.

In a corner, Sami sleeps on a stretcher, swaddled in  
blankets, left eye heavily bandaged.

Farida sleeps in a chair next to him, her head at his side.

Across the room, the male white helmet enters. He's covered in concrete dust and blood.

He takes his helmet off, scanning the patients as he walks along the room. He sees Farida and Sami, passed out in the corner.

He approaches the foot of Sami's stretcher. Farida senses him, lifts her head. Her exhausted eyes stare into his, trying to place him.

He shows her his white helmet. Now she remembers.

KARAM (WHITE HELMET)

He survived?

She lifts her head, nods yes, just slightly.

FARIDA

Thank you.

He looks at Sami, the handsome little face now bruised and bandaged, resting.

He passes his hand nearby, almost like a healing motion, wanting to comfort, but not disturb.

KARAM

They don't deserve it. Any of them, on any side.

FARIDA

No, they don't.

He turns, begins to move back.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

I don't know how you do this.  
Praise Allah that you do.

He looks at her.

KARAM

Are you a godly woman?

FARIDA

We all struggle, but I keep him in my heart.

KARAM

Then perhaps you know the Koran teaches that saving one life is equal to saving all of humanity.

He reaches into his jacket, pulls out a small bottle, and hands it to her.

KARAM (CONT'D)

Antibiotics. Only give him one per day, so they last.

(re: the doctors)

They're running low. They keep them locked up so no one steals them.

She takes the bottle.

KARAM (CONT'D)

You can't stay here. The regime tightens its grip every day. This attack -- they're circling the last rebel-held parts of the city. Soon there will be no way out.

FARIDA

I'm waiting for my husband and father to return from Sukkari.

KARAM

It may be impossible for them to get back in.

He looks back at Sami.

KARAM (CONT'D)

There's one way to get you both out... but you must leave tonight.

She's puzzled.

KARAM (CONT'D)

We can get three ambulances out to the west. Only patients, no rebels. I could take you.

The reality is finally hitting her.

FARIDA

Where would we go?

KARAM

Lebanon.

She swallows hard.

FARIDA

The camps?

She looks down at Sami, then shakes her head "no."

FARIDA (CONT'D)

My husband will be back.

She's holding back tears. They both look at Sami, asleep in recovery, then at each other.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

My husband says the rebels are winning, that God and history is on their side. If I cannot trust my husband, who can I trust?

He's impressed with her strength, yet disappointed.

KARAM

I understand. We all must choose our path.

(beat)

Allah be with you both.

He takes one last look at Sami, then turns to walk away.

FARIDA

Wait. How can I repay you?

He looks back, hope tainted with fatalism in his eyes. He looks one last time at Sami, then back at her.

KARAM

Live.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight shines through the windows, patients in stretchers casting long shadows on the walls.

A woman MOANS, calling out for someone not coming.

AT SAMI'S BED

He's in the same position, asleep, Farida resting her head by his side.

His face twitches, breathing heaves; she raises her head just as his good eye opens, looks around in the moonlight --

SAMI

Mama...?

She jumps up --

FARIDA  
I'm here, Sami.

She puts her face close and his good eye sees her now.

SAMI  
It hurts --

He moans, tries to turn in the bed, but she holds him --

FARIDA  
No, no don't move -- not yet.

SAMI  
Where are we?

FARIDA  
A hospital.

SAMI  
I'm scared.

FARIDA  
It's okay, Mama's here.

She leans forward, gently stroking the side of his head.

In the distance, the HEAVY THUD of ARTILLERY HITTING BUILDINGS -- the windows RATTLE --

They're startled -- she looks around, sees some patients moving --

TWO NURSES and a DOCTOR enter the far end of the room, throwing on the overhead lights with a BLINDING FLASH --

NURSE  
Everyone -- we must evacuate --

People stir and moan in the light, an old man cursing as another THUD and BOOM shakes the building --

Farida jumps up as the NURSE approaches, panic in her eyes --

NURSE (CONT'D)  
Take him -- get out --

The other DOCTOR and NURSE are helping a patient to his feet.

FARIDA  
We can't leave, he's --

A WHISTLING SOUND PIERCES THE AIR and then something STRIKES THE NEXT BUILDING OVER -- BANG AND CRASH as glass flies -- Farida lunges onto Sami to shield him --

The concussion throws the NURSE and others to the ground --

Farida steadies herself as people scream and lights FLICKER --

She throws the blankets off Sami, slides her arms under and lifts him up -- he's heavy, but she's determined.

SAMI

Mama...

Clutching him close, she staggers forward as the room goes dark, people running and YELLING --

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Farida pushes forward with Sami in her arms, caught behind other people rushing out by an EMERGENCY LIGHT --

EXT. HOSPITAL - STREET - CONTINUOUS

People stream into the street -- FIRES BURNING all around --

She pushes through the doorway, nearly trips on rubble as someone shoves from behind, dragging a crying girl --

She runs across the street as another EXPLOSION hits down the block, the STREET ROCKING as she stumbles forward --

She makes it around a corner, huffing and panting --

Turns another corner, lugging him around a burning car --

Then crosses another street, nearly collapsing from his weight, but staggers onward --

It's darker, she keeps running, only her footsteps and rough breathing louder now than the chaos behind them --

She turns another corner, collapses onto the ground, Sami in her arms -- she leans against the wall, looks down at him -- he's awake -- staring at her --

FARIDA

Sami --

His good eye searches hers. She looks at him, exhausted, panting, wants to cry, but won't give in.

Relieved he's still conscious, she gains a bit more strength.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Come on.

She grunts, shifts her weight, pushes herself up and off the wall, lifting him again.

He slings his free arm over her shoulder, holding tight -- she steadies herself, stiffens her back --

She lurches into the street, son in her arms -- falters on a chunk of twisted metal, but pushes forward --

She stumbles over broken concrete and turns another corner, and then sees it:

The corner of their building -- the shop with its sealed windows -- she plows forward, arms burning --

They reach the corner, and she opens the door --

INT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

She hobbles in, arms collapsing with Sami's weight --

She can't go further, gently sets him down, nearly collapsing afterward. He stretches his legs, to feel his own weight --

And then he stands, sort of -- holds up his own weight, leaning on the first two stairs --

SAMI

I can do it myself.

FARIDA

Are you sure?

SAMI

I can do it.

She takes his arm, and they carefully climb the stairs together.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - MOMENTS LATER

She unlocks the door and they stagger in -- she collapses on the couch, and he crawls up next to her.

She holds him tight, both panting, ARTILLERY FIRE somewhere in the dark, flashes of light through the window.

She cries quietly, holding onto him for dear life.

INT. REGIME CELL - DAY

Adnan, Tarek, and several other MEN are shackled to a wall and hooded.

Two REGIME THUGS enter through the metal door. They unlock the chains on Tarek and pull him to his feet.

TAREK  
(weakly)  
I need water.

They ignore him.

ADNAN  
He's sick. Please, give him water.

One REGIME THUG walks over and kicks Adnan in the stomach, and he buckles over.

They drag Tarek out and SLAM the door shut.

INT. REGIME INTERROGATION ROOM

Tarek, hood now off, is shackled to a table. Exhausted, dehydrated, frightened.

REGIME THUG sits across from him, Tarek's identity papers laid out on the table.

REGIME THUG  
(reviewing papers)  
You lived in the neighborhood?

TAREK  
Fifty-two years.  
(re: the papers)  
But you can see that.

REGIME THUG  
You should have stayed. But you went to the rebel side. And now you're caught, using old papers and lying to the police.

TAREK  
My wife died, and I'm sick. My daughter lives in Hanano so I went to stay with her. She takes care of me. Her husband has a shop there.

(MORE)

TAREK (CONT'D)

We're not rebels. I swear on the Prophet, it's the truth.

Thug smiles sickly.

REGIME THUG

Don't worry, old man, we'll get the truth, soon enough.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DAY

Farida wakes on the couch, Sami asleep in her arms. She looks around to be certain they're really home after last night.

She tries to slide her arm out without waking him, but he senses her, opens his eye, looks up from behind his bandage.

SAMI

Mama?

The sweetest words in the world.

FARIDA

Good morning, my precious boy.

She leans in and kisses him gently on his head.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

How are you?

He touches the bandage on his head.

SAMI

It hurts.

FARIDA

I know, don't touch it. It will heal in time.

His eye closes for a beat and then opens it again. He sits up on the couch, looks around.

SAMI

Mama?

FARIDA

Yes?

SAMI

How is Kitty?

FARIDA

I haven't seen her. Shall we check?

SAMI  
Kitty is a boy, Mama.

FARIDA  
He is, is he? And how do you know?

SAMI  
You can just tell.

He smiles, and her heart sings a little.

SAMI (CONT'D)  
Can we find him?

FARIDA  
We can try.

She reaches out to help him, but he stands on his own. She's impressed. He smiles with a flash of pride.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - STAIRWELL

Sami and Farida are at the bottom of the stairwell, deflated.

They've searched; no Kitty. Sami has a plate with scraps on it, and nowhere to put it.

FARIDA  
I have an idea. Come on.

She takes his arm, helps him back up the stairs.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
(re: door step)  
Put it here, and maybe he'll come tonight.

He sets the plate down, hopeful.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Are you hungry?

SAMI  
Uh huh.

She puts her arm around him, guides back into the apartment.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

She opens the small refrigerator. Not much. She lost her groceries in the bombing.

She finds two eggs and yogurt and some old pita bread, sets it next to the stove, then checks the gas tank: it's only getting lower.

She starts the stove with a match, sets down a pan.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DINING AREA - LATER

Farida sits next to Sami, guiding his arm to dip his pita in a bowl of yogurt.

Her plate is empty, only remnants of egg shell next to a cup of black tea. He eats slowly, mouth sore, face swollen.

SAMI

When is Baba coming home?

She thinks, looks out the window, blue sky beyond rubble, fires burning on the horizon. She refuses to lie.

FARIDA

I don't know.

Sami turns his head from the food, his hand touching the patch over his eye.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Come on, you need the food to heal.  
We can't waste it.

His arm drops limply.

SAMI

But it hurts.

FARIDA

I know. Just one more.

She gives him a last bite of pita, he swallows it, then she offers him water and he washes it down.

She sets a large white pill on the table.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Now I need you to take this.

He looks at it, shakes his head "no."

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
It's for your eye. So it doesn't  
become infected. Baba would tell  
you --

Suddenly outside, a LOUD SCREECHING OF BRAKES --

Farida puts the pill in her pocket and moves to the window,  
peaks over the ledge --

FARIDA'S POV - OUT WINDOW

A JEEP has stopped at the corner. THREE REBEL SOLDIERS in  
street clothes with AK-47's leap out.

They enter the building across from her, while the driver and  
another soldier remain in the vehicle.

She watches the second soldier talk on his radio, head  
turning as he searches the windows of buildings.

He turns toward her -- she ducks below the window sill.

WIDER

Sami looks at her, afraid. She says nothing -- peaks over the  
ledge again, just in time to see:

FARIDA'S POV

The three rebel soldiers exit the building across from her  
and spread out toward hers.

WIDER

She runs from the window, pulls Sami from his chair and  
toward his bedroom.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Stay in your room -- don't come out  
until I call for you, understand?

SAMI  
Okay.

She shuts his door. Somewhere -- BOOTS POUNDING ON STAIRS --  
getting closer -- she runs toward the front door.

She leans against it, using her weight to block it and her  
ear against it to listen --

The POUNDING OF BOOTS ON CONCRETE is right there --

BAM BAM BAM - a forceful KNOCKING on the door, then a calm, persuasive male voice:

VOICE (O.S.)  
Open the door. We're here to  
protect you from Bashar's forces.

She suppresses her panicked breath, turns her head to listen.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I know you're home. I can smell  
your cooking.

She remains totally still.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
We need to count who's left,  
especially women and children. So  
we can defend you before the  
Prophet.

He KNOCKS again, more firmly this time.

REBEL (O.S.)  
Don't make us break it down.

She hears something behind her: SAMI WHIMPERING in his room.

She finally breathes, then unlatches the bolts, cracks the door open and peeks through.

A sweaty, intense face stares back -- the FSA SOLDIER from the market, who gave Sami the toy soldier.

FSA SOLDIER  
I know you.

She stiffens, but he doesn't try to push the door further.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
A half bag of rice. I gave your son  
the toy.

She loosens.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
Are you okay? Where is he?

His eyes search hers. It seems he truly wants to know.

FARIDA  
He was injured in the market  
bombing. He's resting.

FSA SOLDIER

We can help you.

He pushes the door open and enters, lowering the American 7.62 Mk-11 sniper rifle in his hands.

She steps away, checks for her hijab and realizes her head is bare and hair down. She's embarrassed, but he ignores it.

FARIDA

My husband will be home soon.

FSA SOLDIER

I doubt that. The regime has completely surrounded the eastern part of the city. No one can get in or out. We need to know who we can count on to resist.

(beat)

Do you have running water?

She stares at him.

FARIDA

Sometimes.

FSA SOLDIER

Do you have food?

FARIDA

Very little.

He looks her up and down; she looks away, modest.

FSA SOLDIER

That's better than none.

He scans the room, sees a lamp in the corner -- it's on.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

You have power today.

He walks around the living area, taking mental notes.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

We're taking positions to hold the neighborhood. We can protect you, but we need to rely on you for support.

(turning to her)

When we come, we'll knock. Five times and then once.

He scans the room one last time, sees little of interest.  
Turns back and stares at her with that same intensity.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
Allah be with you.

He turns and leaves, closing the door behind him.

She locks it, listens as his BOOTS POUND down the stairs, and  
as soon as the sound fades, runs to Sami's room.

She opens the door, finds him sitting on his bed, wiping a  
single tear away.

Relieved, she hugs him, careful not to press his bandage too  
hard against her shoulder.

FARIDA  
That was the nice soldier who gave  
you the toy. He was checking on us.  
Everything is going to be okay,  
understand?

He nods meekly.

INT. REGIME INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Adnan is chained to the table, papers in front of him, Regime  
Thug on the other side. The same routine as Tarek.

REGIME THUG  
You live in Hanano, a rebel-held  
area, and could have fled with the  
rest, but chose to stay.

ADNAN  
Yes.

REGIME THUG  
And you expect me to believe you're  
not a rebel spy, or supporter.

ADNAN  
I don't care about politics. I had  
a business, small, but good. We had  
nowhere to go.  
(beat)  
I have a wife and son there.  
(breath tightening)  
I have to get back to them.

A tear builds in Adnan's eyes as he implores him.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

I don't care who wins the war.

Regime Thug leans back, smug.

REGIME THUG

Good. We've circled the eastern part of the city. It's only a matter of time before they run, like rats. Or die.

Shock in Adnan's eyes. Thug stands, puts on a leather glove, walks around the table and puts his face in Adnan's.

REGIME THUG (CONT'D)

Now... tell me something new. Something I can use.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - WASHROOM - NIGHT

Small and dim, an old porcelain tub and sink, a cracked wall mirror, patterned towels to spruce it up.

Sami stands in the tub, head bandage on, as Farida bathes him with a sponge. He shivers.

SAMI

It's cold.

FARIDA

It's better than being dirty.

She gently wipes dirt and dried blood off a scrape -- he winces -- but she's gentle. She squeezes out the sponge.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Okay, that's enough for tonight.

She wraps him in a towel. He steps out, stares at his own reflection, his wet body; the bloodied head bandage.

She bends down, looking over his shoulder at their shared reflection.

IN THE MIRROR

They stare at each other for a beat.

SAMI

When can we take it off?

FARIDA

We have to wait for it to heal.

He touches where his left eye is bandaged, the frayed gauze.

SAMI  
I'm scared, Mama.

She rubs his shoulder.

FARIDA  
That's okay. Just imagine it will  
get better, every day. That's what  
I do.

She squeezes him tight.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Farida cooks rice. Just as she opens their small fridge and searches through what's left of the vegetables, the light goes black as the POWER IS CUT.

The only light is a small blue flame from the stove. Sami runs in, a comic in his hand -- she takes him by the arm.

FARIDA  
The power is out again. Come on.

She guides him toward a cabinet, takes out two flashlights and activates one, casting a beam across the apartment.

She uses the beam to guide him into his bedroom.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Let's make a picnic in here. I  
don't want anyone to see our light  
in the window.

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She guides him to his bed.

FARIDA  
(patting the couch)  
Here, jump up.

She flips on the second flashlight and offers it to him.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
You can finish your comic while I  
get dinner, okay?

SAMI  
Okay.

He takes the flashlight, pointing at the pages.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

As she passes toward the kitchen with her flashlight, FIVE KNOCKS on the door, followed by ONE MORE.

She freezes, makes no move, waits for a beat. FIVE KNOCKS followed by ONE again.

She moves toward the door, shining the beam on it.

FARIDA  
(softly)  
Yes?

FSA SOLDIER  
I have something for you and your  
son.

She thinks for a moment... no choice; she unlocks the door and opens it, shining the flashlight on him.

He's holding a grocery bag, wincing in her light as he shows it to her.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
From our supplies. May I come in?

She thinks, then lowers the beam, opens the door wider, and he enters.

She shines her beam across the room, as he leans his rifle in a corner, then opens the bag and sets it on the table.

He pulls out smaller bags; grains, flat bread, rough-looking vegetables, and pieces of butchered lamb.

She's surprised.

FARIDA  
I cannot accept this.

He smiles at her for the first time, disarming.

FSA SOLDIER  
Make us a home-cooked meal. It's  
been too long, at least for me.

She's unsure.

FARIDA

The Koran would say a woman never dines with a man who is not her husband or relative.

FSA SOLDIER

I'm sure Imams say that, but I doubt the Koran does. And I'm certain the Prophet would say that a woman and her child should not starve, either.

She looks at the food; it's more than she's seen in weeks.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DINING AREA - LATER THAT NIGHT

The power is still out. The dining table is lit by two candles and a flashlight.

Farida sits with Sami next to her, the soldier across from them. They're enjoying minced lamb with bread and chickpeas.

All three eat with gusto. Sami is shy, not looking up much, but enjoying the food.

FARIDA

My husband says not to eat near the window when the power is out.

FSA SOLDIER

We've established a solid perimeter around the area. It's safe.

He chews heartily, then washes it down with water.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Between the snipers like myself, and our anti-tank missiles, every time they try to enter, we stop them.

She listens, eating modestly, rarely looking up. Sami looks up for a moment, stares at him.

SAMI

Are they going to blow up our house?

Soldier studies him for a long moment.

FSA SOLDIER

No. The regime can't afford to waste munitions on empty buildings, so they wait on the outskirts, avoiding losses.

(beat)

They believe if they circle us and wait, we will give up. But we will never surrender Aleppo, right?

Sami nods as if he understands, looks back to his plate. Soldier takes another bite, savoring it.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

(to Farida)

We have re-enforcements coming, armed with more gifts from the Americans.

(beat)

If we can hold out, there's talk of a negotiation in Geneva. A ceasefire.

Those words send a glimmer of hope across the table. She looks at Sami, notices him rubbing his eye.

FARIDA

Excuse me, my son is very tired.

She rises, picks up one of the flashlights.

SAMI

I'm not tired, Mama.

She takes him by the arm.

FARIDA

I know, I know. Say good night to Mr. Hamid, and thank you for dinner.

Sami looks at him.

SAMI

Thank you for dinner, Mr. Hamid.

Soldier smiles at him.

FSA SOLDIER

Goodnight, little soldier.

She guides Sami away by the beam of the light.

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She tucks him under his blanket and hands him the flashlight.

FARIDA  
Don't waste the battery, okay?

SAMI  
Okay.  
(beat)  
Will you feed Kitty?

FARIDA  
Yes, I will feed Kitty.

SAMI  
Okay.  
(thinking)  
I miss Baba.

FARIDA  
Me too, my love. Every time I pray,  
I ask Allah to bring him home.

SAMI  
Me too.

FARIDA  
Good. Allah is watching over us,  
remember that. Good night.

SAMI  
Good night, Mama.

She turns off his flashlight, leaves his door slightly ajar.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Farida sits back at the table across from Soldier.

FSA SOLDIER  
I can see you're a caring mother.

FARIDA  
Thank you. Loving your child isn't  
hard, it's natural.

FSA SOLDIER  
Yes. Instinct.

She sips her water, then looks over at the sniper rifle  
leaning against the wall.

FARIDA

I could never do what you do.

He thinks for a moment.

FSA SOLDIER

No one is born a killer. We only fight because we have to.

He stares at her.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Maybe we're not so different, you and I.

She looks at him, not sure she agrees, but unwilling to challenge him.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

I don't know whether it's instinct, or destiny. But I know it's His will.

FARIDA

It seems to me, our instincts often go against His will. But how could I know for sure.

He shrugs.

FSA SOLDIER

Here's what I can tell you: when it's your life or theirs, the act is simple.

(leaning forward)

Raise the barrel, resting it on your arm, or the window sill.

(demonstrating with his arms)

Focus the scope, finding your target in the cross-hairs.

(beat)

Hold the butt tight against your cheek, to move with the recoil.

(beat)

Exhale deeply, so your breathing doesn't move the barrel.

(beat)

And when all your breath has left your body, and not one ounce remains... pull the trigger.

(beat)

Physics does the rest.

She looks at him. His eyes only seem colder in the dim light. He puts his arms down.

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
Something changes in you. You know  
it can never be undone. But when  
you accept this, it becomes easier.

She looks at him, suddenly aware of how uncomfortable she's become with a stranger in her house at this hour.

FARIDA  
I hope you enjoyed the meal. We  
appreciate your kindness.

He leans back, studying her.

FSA SOLDIER  
It's not a problem. I can protect  
you, and your son.

She looks at him a bit sideways.

FARIDA  
We are fine, thank you -- my  
husband and father --

FSA SOLDIER  
I didn't want to say it in front of  
your son, but you realize you will  
never see them again, right?

She stares at him hard, gaze narrowing.

FARIDA  
He's a survivor, and he'll be home  
any time, I know it. He's very  
resourceful.

He bores back into her with his eyes.

FSA SOLDIER  
You're lying to yourself. We're  
surrounded. The regime would never  
let him pass through. He's been  
disappeared, if he's not already  
dead.

She stands.

FARIDA  
I want you to leave now. Please.

He looks at her, a dark glint in his eyes. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a 9mm pistol, and casually rests it on the table, keeping tight in his hand.

FSA SOLDIER

Don't make this difficult. You knew  
I wanted more than a meal, and you  
let me in.

(beat)

No one has to know.

He stands, the gun in his hand, moves closer. She's shaking --

FSA SOLDIER (CONT'D)

A pious woman like you could be  
stoned to death. Do the right thing  
for your son, keep your mouth shut.

He rushes forward, smothering her with one hand as he puts the gun to her head with the other --

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sami hears the CRASH OF A PLATE, switches on his flashlight and rockets up in bed --

A MUFFLED SOUND -- STRUGGLE in the dining room -- his eyes fill with fear, he crawls from his bed and goes to his cracked door -- pries it open --

SAMI'S POV - THROUGH DOORWAY

The flashlight has fallen on the floor next to the dining table, a RUMBLING SOUND -- he hears muffled cries of his mother and sees shadows moving --

He shines his flashlight: sees Soldier has Farida pinned on the table, ripping at her skirt, her bare legs flailing and his bare ass in the light --

Soldier turns, wincing in the beam -- devil in his eyes --

FSA SOLDIER

(screaming)

Get to bed, boy!

Sami begins crying --

SAMI

Mama! Mama!

FARIDA

Sami!

Soldier slaps her face, points his gun at Sami --

FSA SOLDIER

Get out!

Sami cowers, crying but never taking the flashlight off her --

REVERSE ANGLE - AT THE TABLE

Soldier begins thrusting into her, gun back to her head, grunting like a pig --

She struggles, squirming but pinned down -- Sami wailing from the hallway now, his light on them --

As Soldier grinds into her, she almost seems to give up -- her arms go limp onto the table, as Sami cries --

In the chaos, by the beam of Sami's light, her arm sweeps across the table, hands searching, then grabbing something --

And in a single thrust, she gouges a long knife straight into his neck -- blood erupts and his body stiffens --

He drops the gun, grabs his neck, gasping for air, but collapses onto the floor --

SAMI

Mama!

He runs toward her -- Soldier crumples to the ground, a hideous HISSING SOUND as he gasps, but his carotid artery is open and his wind pipe cut in a single stab --

He lies bleeding out on the floor, paralyzed --

Farida grabs Sami and drags him away from the carnage, as his flashlight falls to the floor, beam pointing directly on the Soldier as he dies in a bloody pile in the corner.

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Farida holds him tight to her chest, as his cries begin to calm -- she strokes his hair, panting --

FARIDA

(softly)

It's okay, Sami. It's okay. We're going to be okay.

They curl into a shaking ball together in the darkness.

INT. WASHROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Farida stands under a dripping shower head, covered in soap, scrubbing her skin intensely.

She scrubs and scrubs, removing dried blood from under her nails, nearly scrubbing her hands raw, as if she might somehow wash away the memory of what has happened.

She finally rinses and wraps a towel around herself.

CLOSE-UP - IN THE MIRROR

She stares at her reflection, the scratches and cuts from the barrel bombing and the attack. Her eyes are hollow, empty.

She's numb.

She touches her face, fingers tracing the cuts and bruises, removed from herself, like she's examining another person.

What has she become?

She inhales, to pull herself back to reality.

Her expression tightens, and her eyes fill with steely determination.

EXT. ALEPPO - DAY

Smoke billows, as dawn breaks over the embattled city.

The WAIL OF THE MUEZZIN OVER A DISTANT LOUDSPEAKER high up in a tower calls the faithful to prayer.

INT. FARIDA'S APT.

Farida prays on her rug facing Mecca. She whispers softly, an inaudible prayer, from the pit of her soul.

Finally rises, rolls up the rug and puts it away.

She grabs a mop and finishes mopping the floor around the dining table. Rinses it in the sink.

The evidence from last night, including the FSA Soldier's body, is gone. She's exhausted.

Sami enters from his bedroom, groggy and searching for her.

He stands in the dining area, looking around, confused.

FARIDA  
Good morning.

He scratches his head around the bandage, looks at the light of dawn coming through the window.

SAMI  
I had a terrible dream.

He scans the room.

SAMI (CONT'D)  
Was it a dream, Mama?

She crouches down and hugs him, then pulls back.

FARIDA  
Let's say that it was.

He looks at her for a long beat, half-asleep.

SAMI  
Okay.

He looks around, searching for something, trying to reconcile his nightmare to the reality of daylight. Gives up.

SAMI (CONT'D)  
I'm hungry.

She nearly has a tear -- not for herself, but everything her boy has been through.

FARIDA  
Okay, my love.

He follows her to the kitchen.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - KITCHEN

Farida turns on the stove, but the burner doesn't light. Opens the cabinet, shakes the gas tank.

FARIDA  
Empty.

LIVING AREA

She guides Sami to the couch with a few of his toys.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
You wait here, I'll be right back, okay?

SAMI

Okay.

She unlocks the door and moves into the hallway, closing it behind her.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - STAIRWEL - CONTINUOUS

A cracked skylight leaks light into the stairwell.

She locks the door behind her, steps around Kitty's empty dish, and heads downstairs, switching on a flashlight.

AT THE BOTTOM FLOOR

She ducks under the stairs and shines her light onto the wall -- an area the size of her hand, painted to blend in --

She pushes on it, loosens the plywood and pulls it off, exposing a secret passageway --

INT. ADNAN'S ELECTRONICS SHOP - CONTINUOUS

She comes through the hidden door into the dusty shop, scanning the room with her light.

The glass counter is shattered. Nothing underneath but spare radio parts.

She moves to the back, past empty boxes in the hall.

Her flashlight highlights a trail of faded red stain on the floor, leading farther back.

She follows the stain to a filing cabinet.

Grabs the cabinet and slides it sideways along the wall.

This exposes another cut-out panel, larger than the last.

She pulls the panel off the wall, sets it aside, revealing a small reinforced metal door with a combination lock.

She spins the combo until it UNLOCKS WITH A CLICK.

She pinches her nose, crawls through the door open --

INT. HIDDEN STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She stands inside, shines her light in the corner: a body-shaped pile wrapped in a rug, where the faded red trail ends.

She scans the light across shelves of cheap cell phones, radios, and batteries. Next to the batteries is the soldier's 9mm pistol and a spare cartridge.

She grabs a few batteries.

Scanning down, her light reveals a series of large canisters and tanks against the opposite wall.

She grabs the edge of a gas tank, tilting it toward herself, checking the weight.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - MINUTES LATER

She lifts the tank in, sets it down, and locks the door. Sees Sami asleep on the couch.

She lifts the tank up to keep it from dragging, waddling forward toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She connects the tank under the stove, lights the burner, and fills a pot with water and sets it to boil.

EXT. ALEPPO - OUTSKIRTS OF HANANO DISTRICT - DAY

A no-man's land of rubble and burned-out cars separates regime positions from the remaining rebel neighborhoods.

Two REGIME ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS (APCs) RUMBLE onto the street, CRUSHING a barrier of wire, bricks and tires.

The APCs continue down the street into the heart of the rebel neighborhood.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

As the APCs roll down the street, they start taking RIFLE FIRE from hidden locations -- GUNSHOTS and BULLETS RICOCHETING off the armor plating --

INT. NEARBY BUILDING - 5TH FLOOR

Two REBELS man a machine-gun nest fortified with sand bags.

They see the APCs approaching.

REBEL GUNNER  
The dogs are coming!

They immediately start FIRING A BARRAGE of lead at the APCs --

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

A HAIL of bullets POUNDS the APCs -- they turn to opposite sides of the street as their gun turrets RETURN FIRE -- SPRAYING BULLETS in the direction of the machine-gun nest --

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

The FIRE FIGHT wakes Farida and Sami on the couch -- the SHOOTING is closer than any she's heard before -- she jumps up, pulls Sami into his room --

SAMI  
What is it, Mama?

FARIDA  
Stay here and don't come out, okay?

SAMI  
Okay.

She shuts the door and scurries to her dining window, staying low to the floor --

FARIDA'S POV - OUT THE WINDOW

Several blocks down the rubble-strewn street, the regime APCs ARE FIRING indiscriminately into buildings --

They've stopped in their tracks, SWEEPING the windows with RETURN FIRE --

INT. MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

The Rebel Gunner fires at the APCs while his fellow Rebel yells into a radio -- someone YELLS BACK --

He drops his radio, grabs an anti-tank missile and mounts it on his shoulder, aiming it at the APCs through a second window, and FIRES --

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The anti-tank missile DIRECTLY HITS one of the APCs with a MASSIVE EXPLOSION --

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

Farida ducks just as the APC EXPLODES -- metal and fire flying -- her WINDOWS RATTLE from the force --

After a beat, she peeks back over and sees the APC engulfed in flames -- the second APC sprays the machine-gun nest with more FIRE --

INT. MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

Total DESTRUCTION -- the rebels instantly killed -- chunks of concrete flying --

FARIDA'S POV

The second APC stops firing, having neutralized the nest --

An eerie calm, just the CRACKLING OF THE FIRST APC ON FIRE, black smoke billowing.

She watches as the second APC turns its turret forward, drives twenty yards closer.

It stops, the armored hatch opens and FOUR SYRIAN SOLDIERS with AK-47's spill out --

Two soldiers take positions behind rubble, searching for shooters nearby -- the other two soldiers enter a building.

She watches as the APC idles, and the two soldiers behind the rubble scan for rebels on the street.

Suddenly the two soldiers exit the building, dragging a woman in black and a young male by their collars at gun point, and shove them against the wall.

The soldiers yell at them but it's too far for Farida to hear their words.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

She backs away from her window, goes to the couch, pulls it forward, and pulls out the dead FSA Soldier's sniper rifle.

She moves back to the window, staying low, lifts the rifle onto the window, waiting to see if she's been spotted.

After a moment, she peeks up, looks through the scope:

## FARIDA'S POV - THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE

The cross-hairs float around, then settle on a soldier smoking a cigarette, yelling at the two civilians lined-up against the wall.

And now she sees: he's yelling at Amira and her grandson, Hassan, who she met returning from the market.

Amira cries, Hassan just stares at the ground, as the soldier screams at them between puffs of cigarette.

She scans with her scope, sees his fellow soldier talking to someone on a radio.

She pans down, finds the 3rd and 4th soldier still positioned behind the rubble, guarding for any rebels coming.

Then back to the first soldier -- screaming now at Amira and Hassan.

Amira drops to her knees, crying, hands folded in prayer.

The soldier extinguishes his cigarette, pulls his pistol and aims it her head, continuing to scream --

Hassan drops to his knees too, begging, and the second soldier comes over, rifle pointed at them both --

Farida steadies herself, breathing in and out -- then with one last exhale, holds her breath, and the scope is absolutely still...

Focused right on the first soldier's chest as he yells, his gun aimed at Amira's head --

Farida pulls the trigger -- a single POP, and he goes down --

The remaining soldiers scramble for cover -- in the chaos, Hassan lifts Amira off her knees, and they run --

Farida sees the APC turret turning, machine-gun searching --

The second soldier takes cover in a doorway, frantically YELLS into his radio --

The APC rolls forward and the armored hatch opens, someone YELLS and all three remaining soldiers run toward it --

POP! She fires again, just missing as her shot CHINKS off the metal APC armor --

The soldiers pile in, the HATCH SHUTS, ENGINE REVS, and the APC RUMBLES backward, leaving the dead soldier next to the burning APC.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

Farida sets the rifle down, collapses backward against the wall, stunned.

INT. REGIME INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Adnan and Tarek are chained to the interrogation desk, exhausted, badly beaten, yet somehow awake.

A new man sits across from them: the local regime commander, CAPTAIN MIFSUD, 40's, polished, Syrian Army jacket, insignia on his chest. High-ranking, not a thug on the payroll.

He stares at Adnan with dead eyes.

CAPT. MIFSUD

It pains me to see good men like  
you, aiding these bastards who rip  
our country apart.

He searches their eyes, but his words fall flat. Answering in any fashion would only confirm or deny, and both Adnan and Tarek are beyond games now.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)

I know you don't want to stay here.  
So let me explain: there's one  
door.

He points at the metal door.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)

It passes through me. So, let's  
talk about how you are regular  
citizens, who got caught up in the  
rebellion. Tell me what, and who,  
you know.

(bending closer)

Admit your role, and ask  
forgiveness. You'll find I'm a  
reasonable man.

Adnan and Tarek both stare straight ahead, motionless. Mifsud stands, exhaling, paces about.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)  
 You understand "innocents caught in  
 the crossfire" is unoriginal. And  
 pointless.

He walks up to Adnan, stares at him closely.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)  
 Do you know why? Because there is  
 no "middle" anymore. Everyone has  
 chosen a side, even within  
 families.  
 (beat)  
 If you supported Bashar, you would  
 have left Aleppo by now. And if you  
 didn't care, you would have left  
 Aleppo by now.  
 (beat)  
 But you didn't leave Aleppo, did  
 you? You stayed, in rebel  
 territory, by your own choice. By  
 definition, that makes you a rebel.

ADNAN  
 (weakly)  
 I already told your men... we had  
 nowhere to go. I have a shop, and a  
 family.

CAPT. MIFSUD  
 Only those determined to resist  
 stay behind, and face certain  
 death.

He paces again, rubbing his chin, then turns to the Regime  
 Thugs in the corner.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)  
 They're useless to me. Send them to  
 Palmyra. Let them rot in hell.

Mifsud walks out. Adnan and Tarek share a grave look,  
 somewhere between momentary relief and a deeper fear.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A ground-floor space with bare walls, only curtains over the  
 blown-out windows to block dust and sunlight.

Amira sits on a stool in a black dress and hijab, a wicker  
 table between her and Farida, also in full hijab.

Sami plays with his Lego soldier on the floor nearby.

Amira sips from a teacup, hands trembling.

AMIRA

There's no way out of the city.  
Besides, I'm old, and I was born  
here. Where else should I want to  
die?

Farida sets her cup down.

FARIDA

Don't speak that way. We have hope,  
right?

Amira looks away, then back at her.

AMIRA

I forbid him to join the rebels,  
and now he's angered because I  
won't risk our lives to leave, yet  
I forbid him to fight. So he stays  
locked in his room, refusing to  
speak to me.

(beat)

I can't blame him. They nearly  
killed us.

Farida looks at her harder, as if she doesn't know.

AMIRA (CONT'D)

A rebel sniper, he saved us at the  
last second -- we never saw him.

Suddenly a RUMBLE SHAKES the building -- the porcelain  
teacups RATTLE ever so slightly.

Sami looks at his mother, fear in his eyes -- but she stays  
calm. The RATTLE stops. Only a distant thud.

FARIDA

Are you certain there's no way out?

Amira searches her eyes.

AMIRA

What way could there be?

Farida looks away to Sami, and he looks down at the floor.

AMIRA (CONT'D)

Perhaps I should just let him join  
the rebels then. Does it even  
matter now?

Farida looks at her without blinking.

FARIDA  
Of course it matters. And the  
rebels can't be trusted either.

EXT. AMIRA'S APT. - STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Amira stands in her doorway, kisses Farida on both cheeks.

AMIRA  
Please come again soon.

FARIDA  
We will. Stay strong. Allah be with  
you.

AMIRA  
And you.

Farida leads Sami into the narrow, rubble-strewn street.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - MOMENTS LATER

Farida and Sami navigate the narrow alleyways. Farida turns his head away as they pass bodies covered in flies.

EXT. STREET CORNER - CONTINUOUS

Farida and Sami turn the corner to approach their building, and she freezes --

Two REBEL JEEPS are parked in front of the shop, one jeep empty, the other with two armed rebel soldiers.

The driver sees her, taps the other soldier and they jump out, running toward her with rifles pointed --

REBEL SOLDIER  
Stay where you are!

Sami grips onto her, starts crying --

SAMI  
Mama? What do we do?

She holds him still, frozen -- but before she can answer, the soldiers are right in front of them, barrels pointed --

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - MOMENTS LATER

Farida unlocks the door and enters, the two soldiers pushing her and Sami from behind.

She moves across the living area to the window, turns back and sees the soldiers step aside.

Two more rebels enter: a male fighter, and then NASIM, a butch, female rebel leader in fatigues and black bandana.

Nasim lowers her rifle and scans the room. She's clearly in charge.

NASIM  
(to fellow rebels)  
There's nothing left in the shop.

Farida looks down to avoid eye contact, Sami gripping her hand, crying quietly.

Across the room, Nasim spots the sniper rifle propped in the corner.

NASIM (CONT'D)  
(to her soldiers)  
Check the other rooms.

Two rebels leave to check the other rooms, as Nasim casually walks around the apartment.

Nasim peaks in the kitchen, then moves to the window where the sniper rifle is resting. She looks at the rifle but doesn't touch it. She looks out the window --

NASIM'S POV - OUT WINDOW

She sees down the block, where Farida shot the regime soldier and saved Amira and Hassan. The soldier's body is still there, rotting, his boots stolen.

WIDER

She turns to Farida, a puzzled look on her face. This time Farida stares back with that fearless, unblinking gaze.

The two rebels return from searching the other rooms.

REBEL SOLDIER  
Empty.

NASIM  
Leaves us alone.

The male rebels step out, shutting the door behind them.

Nasim studies the rifle a moment longer, then turns to Farida.

NASIM (CONT'D)

One of our local commanders was  
last seen searching this building.

Farida looks at her but says nothing.

NASIM (CONT'D)

He was a sniper. He had an American  
rifle, just like this one.

Farida takes a deep breath.

FARIDA

I found it in the street. I took it  
for protection, until my husband  
returns.

Nasim studies her, then walks over and squats down to Sami's height. He wipes a tear from his eye.

NASIM

Don't worry, I won't hurt you. My  
name is Nasim. What's your name?

SAMI

Sami.

She studies his eye patch.

NASIM

What happened to you, Sami?

He looks down.

SAMI

They bombed me.

Nasim looks at him for a long beat, then he looks back up at her, less frightened.

Nasim takes a deep breath, then stands, and stares at Farida. She studies the fresh scratches on her face.

Farida looks down, the shame too much to admit.

Nasim walks toward the kitchen, speaking without looking back.

NASIM

Where is your husband?

FARIDA

He went to the pharmacy in Sukkari a few days ago. We haven't seen him since.

NASIM

I'm sorry to tell you, but he won't be back. We're surrounded.

She opens the fridge. It's nearly empty and has no power.

FARIDA

We try to remain hopeful.

Nasim closes the fridge, walks back over to them.

NASIM

Our only chance is to survive long enough to reach a ceasefire. To do that, we have to make it very painful for the regime to enter these neighborhoods.

She looks down at Sami and his bandaged head.

NASIM (CONT'D)

You need food and medicine. And I need more fighters. Come tomorrow to the Maqam Gate.

Nasim walks toward the door, opens it, then turns back.

NASIM (CONT'D)

He was a good sniper. But he wasn't a good man.

They share a knowing look. Nasim leaves, shutting the door behind her.

EXT. PALMYRA - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A regime army bus and convoy of armored vehicles pass through the ancient desert city of stone temples and ruins.

INT. ARMY BUS - CONTINUOUS

Adnan, Tarek and other prisoners chained to their benches, look out with apprehension through their barred windows, as the bus approaches:

EXT. TADMOR PRISON - ESTABLISHING

An imposing complex of concrete and barbed wire in the desert, its appearance only hinting at the horrors behind its infamous walls.

The army bus and vehicles pass through the first of multiple manned barricades.

INT. TADMOR PRISON - CELL BLOCK

Guards escort a chained and exhausted Adnan, Tarek, and two others down a long, dark stone hallway. WAILING and PLEADING of men somewhere beyond ECHOES OFF THE STONE WALLS.

The guards unlock a cell, unchain the four prisoners, push them inside, and slam the doors.

INT. TADMOR PRISON - CELL

A small, decrepit room with a narrow slit for a window high up the wall.

Four metal bed frames attached to the wall, and a small hole in the floor for a toilet.

Adnan and Tarek just stare at each other, resigned to an unknown fate, as the other two men collapse on the floor.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sami sits on the edge of the bed next to Farida, a cup in his hand, a flashlight as their lamp on the nightstand.

Farida shows Sami her open palm with a pill in it.

He stares at it, swallows hard, then takes it, followed by a mouthful of water from the cup. He swallows both with a gulp.

She smiles, bittersweet, so proud, taking the cup and setting it on the table by the light.

SAMI

Is Baba ever coming home?

She looks at him, strokes the hair over his ears near his bandage.

FARIDA

I hope so.

A quiet beat as he processes this, then starts to whimper; he's trying to hold back, but a tear spills from his eye, as his mouth curls in sadness --

SAMI

But he said he would come back.

FARIDA

I know my love, I know.

He turns toward her on the bed.

SAMI

Will we ever see him again?

She starts to tear up, but then catches herself.

FARIDA

We will see him again, in this world, or in God's heaven.

She wipes his tears, holding back her own.

SAMI

Are we going to run out of food?

FARIDA

No, I won't let that happen.  
Tomorrow, you'll stay with Amira  
and Hassan while I get us some  
help, okay?

He shakes his head "okay" as she kisses him, and turns out the light.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Farida locks the door, Sami by her side. Her hijab covers her head, a duffle bag and the rifle slung over her shoulder.

Sami sees the empty plate in the corner.

SAMI

Hey, Mama, look! Kitty ate his food again!

FARIDA

Yes, he did my love. Now come, we must go.

She takes his arm and they head down the stairs.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Amira stands in her living area, Hassan behind her, staring down at his ragged Adidas sneakers on the bare concrete.

Sami stands next to Amira, holding the duffle bag, facing his mother. Farida's expression, hijab, and rifle make for an intense combination.

FARIDA

I'll be back in a few hours, no matter what, okay?

SAMI

Okay.

FARIDA

You listen to Ms. Amira and Hassan. And try to have some fun.

She bends down, kisses him on the head, careful not to disturb his bandage, then rises again.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

(to Amira)

Thank you.

AMIRA

Don't worry. Allah is watching over us.

Farida thinks for a beat, as if to say something else, then thinks better of it.

FARIDA

Of course he is.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - STREETS - MINUTES LATER

Farida moves stealthily among the rubble and burned-out vehicles, staying in the shadows where she can.

She checks each corner before she turns it, rifle ready.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - MAQAM GATE - MINUTES LATER

Farida turns another corner and sees the Maqam Gate, a stone archway and wall opening to a narrow street, one of the medieval gates of Aleppo.

Rebels have fortified the area with concrete and barbed-wire barriers, backed up by commandeered APCs and their familiar Toyota pick-ups with mounted machine guns.

A hum of activity surrounds the area as rebels search citizens and vehicles approaching either side of the gate.

INT. REBEL COMMAND POST - MOMENTS LATER

A bare concrete room with a desk covered with maps. Several rebel leaders pour over the battle lines, talking on radios.

Two rebel guards enter, holding Farida by the arms, her rifle in one of their hands.

REBEL GUARD

She says Nasim requested to see her. Her name is Farida Mohammed.

The rebels part and Nasim steps forward. She exchanges a look with Farida then turns to the guards.

NASIM

Assign her to Sheikh Maqsud brigade six. Rifle training, bullets and two rations per day.  
(to Farida)  
Allah be with you.

The rebel guards nod, and whisk Farida away.

EXT. ALEPPO - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - DAY

A rebel jeep carries Farida and two other female passengers, bumping and bobbling along the potholes, past a burning vehicle on the roadside.

The jeep is waived thru by guards manning another makeshift checkpoint. The level of destruction is near-total as they approach the front lines.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - HASSAN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Sami stands in the doorway of Hassan's room, a messy bed and Western rock band posters on the decaying walls.

Hassan sits on his bed, reading Sami's comic.

SAMI

Do you have any toys?

Hassan looks up.

HASSAN

I'm sixteen, I don't play with toys  
anymore.

Sami moves toward a small table, sees a dusty hand-held video game and picks it up.

SAMI

Can I try?

HASSAN

Go ahead. No batteries for a year.

Sami reaches into his duffle bag and pulls out his flashlight, unscrews the top, and shows Hassan the silver AA batteries. Hassan's face brightens.

INT./EXT. COURTYARD - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - DAY

The interior courtyard of a four-story building, roof open to the sky.

Farida stands with rifle in hand, next to the other women from the jeep:

HAYAT, 18, skinny and punk-rock, and SANIA, heavy-set and 50's; both holding old Russian SVD sniper rifles.

Standing in front of them is ABBAD, a wiry rebel in his 30's, in jeans, sleeveless soccer jersey and bandana.

He throws the bolt on his rifle, ejects the ten-round magazine to the ground, snaps another magazine in, loads and locks the weapon.

ABBAD

Try it again.

Farida, Hayat, and Sania go through the motions with varying fluidity, but Farida manages well with her American version.

ABBAD (CONT'D)

One more time.

He paces, rifle down, lights a cigarette as he watches.

SANIA

(under her breath)

They say he's the only man allowed  
to be alone with us.

Hayat watches Abbad circle, smiles to herself as she runs through the motions again.

EXT. - NO MAN'S LAND - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - LATER

Sun beats down on a mile of open rubble, partially-standing buildings and melted vehicles -- the "no-man's land" that divides Eastern and Western Aleppo.

A Russian helicopter banks away in the distant sky.

INT./EXT. COURTYARD - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - LATER

Now all three women crouch on one knee, the barrels of their rifles resting on the backs of plastic chairs, as they stare down their sights.

ABBAD

Exhale. And hold... fire.

POP POP POP as they pull their triggers, bullets WHIZZING and CHINKING off the far wall.

INT. BELL TOWER - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - LATER

Farida is perched in the small window, five stories up, facing no man's land, scanning the horizon with her scope.

Abbad stands behind, also scanning with a pair of binoculars. Sania and Hayat stand behind him.

ABBAD

On the very edge of the horizon, do you see them?

FARIDA'S POV - THRU SCOPE

She pans across trees and buildings, finds two APCs parked under a tree on a hill, just beyond the rubble buildings, well camouflaged in the shade.

FARIDA (O.S.)

I see them now.

ABBAD (O.S.)

Good. They aren't attacking for now, just choking us off.

(beat)

From time to time, civilians try to pass, or the regime probes our defenses.

(MORE)

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

(beat)

Anything going out from our side  
you let pass. Anything suspicious  
coming towards us you think you can  
hit, you shoot.

WIDER

Abbad lowers his binoculars.

FARIDA

(turning to him)

Aren't we exposed up here?

ABBAD

Yes. But it's the best vantage  
point. See the burned mosque about  
halfway out?

She looks again thru her scope.

FARIDA'S POV - THRU SCOPE

She pans again, and settles on a still-smoking mosque with  
only half of its original tower and minaret.

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

That was the last post. Rocket-  
propelled grenade.

WIDER

ABBAD (CONT'D)

Are you certain you want the first  
watch?

FARIDA

I have a son. I can't leave him at  
night.

ABBAD

Then Allah be with you.

Abbad guides the other two women out.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - HASSAN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Sami and Hassan sit on the edge of the bed, Sami playing the  
video game, smiling, even giggling for the first time, Hassan  
watching over his shoulder, urging him on.

INT. BELL TOWER - SHEIKH MAQSUD DISTRICT - SUNSET

The day is fading. Farida scans the horizon, only sees one lone woman in black pushing a cart, scavenging.

In the distance, the regime APCs seem to disappear in the darkness of the trees.

An evening PRAYER BELL tolls loudly in the room next to her. She sets her rifle down, exhausted from hours of staring.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Farida stands in Amira's kitchen, Sami clinging to her leg. He's had a good day.

Farida hands Amira a small brown sack. Hassan stands behind her, more upbeat than before.

FARIDA

I know it's not much, but --

AMIRA

Allah blesses you.

FARIDA

And you. Good night.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - STREET - NIGHT

Farida guides Sami quickly thru the dark streets, the faint RUMBLE OF ARTILLERY somewhere in the distance.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - NIGHT

Farida and Sami share a small bowl of lamb and rice with water, in the dim light of a flashlight.

After Sami finishes his final bite with gusto, and follows it with water, she looks at him.

FARIDA

So, now do you think you're ready?

He nods "yes."

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - WASHROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sami sits on the edge of the tub, shirt off, nervous.

Farida comes in with a pot of hot water and carefully fills the sink. She has scissors, a wash cloth and sponge.

She turns to face Sami. He's terrified.

FARIDA  
Stay very still, like a statue.

She places the scissors on his forehead, gets one blade under the gauze, and snips. She peels back the dirty gauze, unwinding it from his head, removing his hair from it.

She snips a long piece off, lets it drop to the floor -- continues cutting...

Unravels another section, clips it off, closer to his eye -- she breathes in deep, scared to see for herself --

She clips the last piece, gently tugs on it, trying not to pull his skin -- he winces --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
You okay?

SAMI  
(shaking)  
I'm okay still.

FARIDA  
Okay, good. You're doing really well.

She pulls back the last strand, stuck to a cotton pad full of dried blood, and reveals his closed eye: heavily bruised, swollen; three stitches across the lid --

She readies herself --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Can you open your eye, my love?

SAMI  
I'm scared.

FARIDA  
Don't be scared, just try.

SAMI  
No, I mean I can't, Mama -- it won't open --

He starts to cry --

FARIDA

Okay that's alright, don't cry --  
you don't have to open it.

He leans into her and she hugs him as he cries, resting his chin on her shoulder. He hiccups as she rubs his back.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

You're still my beautiful little  
boy, and you always will be.

(beat)

Do you want to see?

He nods "okay" and scoots off the tub, stands where she's kneeling.

She turns him to face his reflection and he studies himself: the filthy bandage is off; he's stitched, bruised, and scraped; but despite it all, he can see his face again.

He smiles a little, and she smiles with him.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - DAY

Abbad navigates the jeep through another devastated neighborhood, Farida, Hayat and two male rebels riding along.

They pass a smoking building that was a clinic thirty minutes ago, civilians in a daze, covered in dust and blood, someone carrying a lifeless child -- clearly they just got hit.

Abbad speeds by, as if nothing more than a roadside fender-bender. Farida shudders, memories flooding back. They yell over the din of the JEEP'S ENGINE.

FARIDA

Shouldn't we stop?

ABBAD

No time.

FARIDA

Are we going to the mosque?

ABBAD

(yelling)

Not today -- Al-Nusra is making gains up ahead, we need to keep them out, whatever it takes. They're just as determined to destroy the Free Syrian Army as Assad is.

The jeep speeds around another makeshift rebel checkpoint, manned by what appear to be twelve-year-olds with rifles.

INT. ABANDONED SHOP - LATER THAT DAY

Farida crouches on the floor by a window, her rifle peeking out from behind a curtain. The air is dead still. A CRACKLING two-way radio on very low-volume sits nearby.

FARIDA'S POV - THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE

At the end of her visible range, something moves near a burnt SUV in the street.

She focuses in: sees TWO BEARDED MEN in street clothes crouch-walk between the rubble, then disappear into a doorway.

She pans up to an empty window on the third floor of the building they entered, sees one of the MEN appear and kneel, setting a rifle on a tripod and aiming thru the window.

A sniper position.

She steadies herself, watches as the SNIPER does the same, focused towards her, but a lower angle.

WIDER

She looks up from the scope, follows his line of sight to an intersection several hundred yards away.

She looks thru the scope again.

FARIDA'S POV - SNIPER SCOPE

The SNIPER loads his cartridge, focuses his scope on the intersection.

A long beat as he watches, and she watches him. Then he tightens, focuses his scope -- he's found a target --

Farida pans down until she finds TWO FIGURES: a woman in black hijab, and a girl holding her hand, standing at the corner, the woman peeking around.

The woman turns and grips the girl's hand tighter. Farida can see a bump around the woman's waist. She's pregnant.

The woman pulls the girl into the intersection -- Farida gasps -- pans up to the sniper --

He exhales, prepares to pull the trigger -- she forces her breath out, emptying her lungs -- pulls her trigger first --

POP! Her bullet chips the window -- he winces as he FIRES --  
AT THE INTERSECTION

the bullet HITS THE DIRT near the woman and girl --

FARIDA'S POV - SNIPER SCOPE

The woman runs, dragging the girl to safety across the street. Farida pans up to the sniper's perch -- he's gone.

A RUSSIAN JET streaks across the sky, ENGINES HOWLING --

She grabs her rifle, scampers toward the doorway and into a stairwell as the JET'S BOOM RATTLES WINDOWS --

The jet drops munitions with a MASSIVE THUD on a target.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - DAWN

Farida prays on her rug toward Mecca, the WAILING OF THE MUEZZIN coming from some distant speaker in the neighborhood.

Sami stands at the window, watching helicopters hover over the skyline -- a THUD pulses through the ground, and they bank away as smoke rises.

Farida rises, rolls up her rug and sets it against the wall, then slings her duffle bag and rifle over her shoulder.

FARIDA

Time to go.

Sami puts on his flip-flops and follows her out, and she locks the door behind.

As the CALL TO PRAYER continues to ECHO THRU THE CITY:

SERIES OF SHOTS

A door opens, and Farida and Abbad step onto a rooftop in a stiff breeze. Abbad points toward a stadium in the distance, as Farida sets up her sniper position.

Outside the stadium, terrorists line up blindfolded men and boys. A terrorist is about to shoot them point-blank, when Farida's bullet rips through his chest and he collapses; the terrorists scatter.

In a dusty courtyard, Sami and Hassan play soccer, Sami trying to keep Hassan from scoring against the wall.

Inside Tadmor prison, Adnan, Tarek, and their cell mates march slowly down a concrete hall, feet chained together. They look like hell.

Hungry civilians stand in line at the Maqam Gate, receiving rations from the rebels, Nasim standing nearby as Farida takes her daily portion, bowing appreciatively.

Amira picks a tomato from a vine in her small garden.

Farida, Sami, Amira and Hassan share a small dinner around Amira's table.

On television, Bashar Al-Assad and his generals laugh at a banquet table, followed by a shot of Al-Assad shaking hands with Vladimir Putin.

Nasim and her fellow rebel leaders watch the news on a small TV in their outpost, disgusted.

Tarek stands in a concrete shower, naked, being hit with a firehose of water.

Russian fighters scream over a neighborhood, dropping white phosphorous bombs streaking toward the ground.

Farida dials in her scope from a perch inside a building, exhales, and pulls her trigger.

An armored fuel truck EXPLODES in the middle of a street, taking out two regime APCs nearby.

Farida, on a roof, under a poncho in the rain, pulls her trigger.

A jeep rumbles along a road in the rain, two soldiers in front. The driver takes a bullet to the chest, and the jeep careens into a ditch, flipping over.

Farida motionless in her mosque tower, facing no man's land. She looks thru her scope and sees movement on a roof in the distance. Zooms in closer, and sees a REGIME SNIPER looking directly at her. He fires. She ducks, as concrete explodes near her head. The regime sniper sees her run out of the tower, her long hair flowing freely behind her.

Moments later, the MOSQUE TOWER IS DESTROYED BY TARGETED ARTILLERY fire.

In a TIME LAPSE, the now-bare tomato vine in Amira's garden slowly withers.

The sun lowers on a panoramic view of Aleppo, fires burning all around.

In their dining room in the amber light, Farida and Sami share a small meal.

Farida lays Sami down, pulls a sheet up over him, kisses him goodnight, and shuts off the flashlight.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Farida, visible only from the glow of distant fires through the window, listens to her radio from the couch.

FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

Today the Prophet's Army fought the dog and his forces in Daraa. The regime continues to rely on Russian air power to withstand the forces of freedom.

The RADIO spews STATIC -- she fiddles with the tuning and it clears a bit:

FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

Daesh continues to lose ground in the south to our coalition. And in Aleppo, Syrians from every walk of life continue defending their neighborhoods by any means necessary, refusing to be defeated. Local commanders report that female snipers are now some of the most effective fighters, and are greatly feared by the regime's cowardly thugs.

She reaches for her tea, sips; sets it back on the table.

She picks up her rifle, pops out the cartridge, sees it's empty, pops it back in, points across the room, aims, and CLICKS the TRIGGER.

She goes through the sequence again. Reloading, aiming, and firing; then repeats it, each motion smoother and quicker than the last.

INT. REGIME COMMAND POST TENT - DAY

A dusty tent with a folding conference table -- a regime radio tech mans a bank of multi-channel radios.

At another table, Capt. Mifsud studies a map with a JUNIOR COMMANDER.

JUNIOR COMMANDER  
 (pointing on map)  
 We believe the attempt will be  
 somewhere in this area.

CAPT. MIFSUD  
 If they think our guard will be  
 down for the holiday, they have a  
 rude surprise coming.

A REGIME MP and the REGIME SNIPER who nearly killed Farida  
 burst into the tent.

REGIME MP  
 Sir, I told him to wait outside --

Mifsud turns calmly.

CAPT. MIFSUD  
 I want to hear it from his mouth.

REGIME SNIPER steps forward: 30's, cold-eyed.

REGIME SNIPER  
 I saw her myself. I nearly killed  
 her but she got away. She had long,  
 dark hair.

CAPT. MIFSUD  
 And you let her get away?

Regime Sniper seems ashamed to say it.

REGIME SNIPER  
 I fired, but --

CAPT. MIFSUD  
 If you're killed in battle by a  
 woman, you can never be a martyr,  
 and will never meet Allah.

Sniper knows this. Mifsud turns, fuming at all of them.

CAPT. MIFSUD (CONT'D)  
 Five years. Seventy percent of the  
 city, and still there are  
 neighborhoods you can't clear. And  
 who are these people? Are they even  
 soldiers? No. These are peasants.  
 Lower than dogs.  
 (beat)  
 Tomorrow, those streets better be  
 running with rebel blood.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DINING AREA - DAY

Farida shares a bowl of beans with Sami for breakfast.

SAMI  
I'm tired of beans.

FARIDA  
I know.

SAMI  
Is tomorrow a holiday?

FARIDA  
Yes, tomorrow is Martyrs' Day, a special day. How did you know?

SAMI  
I heard it on the radio. The dog Bashar was giving a speech.

FARIDA  
Sami! Never speak that way.

SAMI  
That's what Baba says.

FARIDA  
Well it doesn't matter, you are a child and never speak that way.

SAMI  
(looking down at his beans)  
Sorry.

He chews another bite.

SAMI (CONT'D)  
What are martyrs?

She thinks.

FARIDA  
A martyr is someone who dies for what they believe in.

A long beat.

SAMI  
Are we martyrs?

FARIDA  
No. We can't be martyrs. We're alive.

(MORE)

FARIDA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Come on, it's time to go.

EXT. AMIRA'S APT. - DAY

Amira and Sami stand outside Hasan's door, Sami at her side. Amira knocks hard, then puts her ear to the door.

AMIRA

Hassan, stop being rude. Come out  
and say hello to Sami.

Exasperated, she opens the door. His room is empty, just a curtain blowing in the window.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - MAQAM GATE - DAY

The area hums with activity. Farida approaches a line of civilians at a table, where rebel leaders hand out orders.

A hand taps her on the shoulder. She turns to find Hassan, wired and nervous.

FARIDA

You shouldn't be here. Where's  
Sami?

HASSAN

He's safe with my grandmother.  
(stepping closer)  
I have to join. You can't stop me.

She's about to argue --

ABBAD (O.S.)

Farida Mohammed.

She sees Abbad smoking a cigarette, staring at her. Hayat is behind, with another soldier who seems slightly edgy.

ABBAD (CONT'D)

Come with us.

FARIDA

(turning back)  
Please Hassan, go home.

HASSAN

This is my home.

They share a look, and she can see he won't be dissuaded; she turns and follows Abbad.

INT. REBEL TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Canvas pushes sideways and light pours in, as Abbad, Farida, and Hayat enter the tent, squinting. Nasim steps up, wipes her brow, drained, but tough as ever.

NASIM

Tomorrow during the holiday, a supply convoy will try to break through the regime's line. We have to make sure they succeed.

Nasim lifts two small backpacks off the ground and hands one to Farida and one to Hayat.

NASIM (CONT'D)

We'll be camped overnight near the airport.

Farida lifts the backpack onto her already-loaded shoulder.

FARIDA

I can't leave my son that long. I'm not sure he can manage.

Nasim steps closer as she lifts her own pack.

NASIM

If they don't get through, none of us will manage much longer.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - DAY

A beat-up red Fiat sedan navigates thru another devastated neighborhood, passing kids picking garbage along the road.

The Fiat approaches a checkpoint manned by local militants with rifles, covered head to toe in black, flying a black flag from their Toyota pick-up.

One of the militants approaches the Fiat, rifle pointed at the driver, then leans in.

The driver is Abbad, looking extremely effeminate with eye liner and some cheap jewelry. Nasim rides in the passenger seat, looking more butch than ever, but not like a rebel.

Farida and Hayat are in the back in their full hijabs.

LOCAL MILITANT

(looking over them)

Well, this is a sight. Where do you think you're going?

ABBAD

(in his gayest voice)

Please. Al-Nusra has taken our neighborhood, we have to get out.

(re: Nasim)

They'll kill me and my friend for sure.

(re: Farida and Hayat)

Them, they will take as slaves.

He looks at them like they're pathetic.

LOCAL MILITANT

Open the trunk.

Another black-clad militant comes over to help inspect. Abbad gets out and circles back to the trunk and opens it.

Both militants step back as flies and a foul stench are released. The first militant covers his nose, looks closer: a dead goat, rotting and partially-wrapped in paper, is the only thing in the trunk.

LOCAL MILITANT (CONT'D)

Looks like a Martyr's Day feast.

He slams the trunk shut. Abbad offers him a wad of cash.

ABBAD

Please, it's all we have left.

The militant takes it.

LOCAL MILITANT

The regime is only two miles down the road. You'll never get past the airport.

ABBAD

I'd rather go to prison than risk staying.

The militant tries to read his eyes.

ABBAD (CONT'D)

Do you want me on my knees? I can... take care of you.

(re: other militants)

All of you, if you want.

The militant punches him in the face -- Abbad collapses, holds his jaw, then sits back up in the dirt.

The other militants aim their rifles in case he tries to fight back.

MILITANT

Get the hell out of here, you disgust me.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - ROAD TO AIRPORT - MINUTES LATER

The Fiat cruises along a deserted highway, a sign reading "ALEPPO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT" over destroyed and abandoned vehicles by the side of the road.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Amira and Sami sit at her dining table in candlelight. Sami draws on paper with a crayon.

SAMI

(not looking up)  
Do you think they'll be here soon?

Amira tires to hide her concern.

AMIRA

I'm sure it won't be long. If you get tired, you can rest until they get back, okay?

Sami doesn't answer, just keeps drawing.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - HILL ABOVE AIRPORT - NIGHT

Stars blanket the clear sky, fires burning orange and red on the horizon.

Nasim and her team have positioned themselves under a dark clump of tress on a hill overlooking the airport road.

Farida lies on the ground, wrapped in a blanket, staring up at the stars between the branches.

Nasim is next to her, sitting up, scanning the airport with binoculars. Abbad and Hayat are asleep under blankets nearby, rifles on the ground.

FARIDA

(staring at sky)  
Do you ever wonder why this is happening to us? All of this evil, and killing?

Nasim continues searching with her binoculars.

NASIM

I don't question His will. Allah made each of us, how and where we are. And each must face their own destiny. Mine is to fight back. I don't believe fighting back is evil.

Seeing no activity of interest, she sets her binoculars down.

NASIM (CONT'D)

You had no trouble killing when the time came.

Farida just stares into space.

FARIDA

I had no choice. But I don't know whether God can forgive me now.

(she starts to tear up)

I don't know if I even believe in him anymore.

NASIM

There is evil in this world, all around us. So God must be real too, right? He has to be. It would not be just, if there was evil but no God. So therefore God exists. And since God is all-knowing, he knows we are fighting the evil, that we are not the evil ourselves. He must know we have no choice, so he forgives us.

Farida wipes away a tear. She no longer knows what she believes.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sami stirs on Hassan's bed, and Amira re-covers him and herself with a blanket, and rolls over back to sleep.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - HILL ABOVE AIRPORT - DAWN

The first rays light the gray sky. Nasim, Farida, Abbad and Hayat are awake, laying prone among the trees, rifles positioned on the ground.

Farida looks thru her scope.

FARIDA'S POV - THRU SCOPE

The airport road is blocked with a regime checkpoint: reinforced barbed-wire fencing, machine gun nests surrounded by sand bags, and backed-up by two APCs.

WIDER

Hayat looks up from her scope.

HAYAT

That's going to be tough to get through.

Nasim checks her watch.

NASIM

They just need a little distraction.

The whole team keeps watching, scanning the horizon for anything unexpected.

ABBAD

Okay, here we go. On the runway.

They all look thru their scopes again.

FARIDA'S POV - THRU SCOPE

Just off the side of the runway, a large FUEL TRUCK has pulled up. The driver exits, goes around the back, and connects a long tube from the truck to a valve in the ground, then disappears behind the truck.

NASIM (O.S.)

Farida and Abbad on the truck. Sit tight. I'll tell you when. Hayat, you and I are on the checkpoint.

EXT. AIRPORT ROAD - CHECKPOINT - SIMULTANEOUS

Several heavily-armed regime soldiers stand around the barrier, smoking cigarettes, one talking on a radio.

Soldiers man the two machine gun nests on either side. One machine gun pointed to the eastern approach, one to the west.

The soldier manning the eastern-facing machine gun yells out.

MACHINE GUNNER

Hey -- we have visitors!

Far down the road, two unmarked cargo trucks appear, speeding toward the checkpoint --

Soldiers rush to positions - a ground commander on the side of the road starts yelling into a radio -- the machine gunner locks his weapon, ready to fire --

EXT. HILL ABOVE AIRPORT - SIMULTANEOUS

NASIM  
 (checking watch)  
 Right on time. Five, four, three,  
 two, one... fire.

All four snipers pull their triggers --

EXT. AIRPORT ROAD - CHECKPOINT - SIMULTANEOUS

POP POP and both machine gunners are hit --

ON THE RUNWAY

Multiple shots hit the FUEL TRUCK -- but nothing happens.

AT THE CHECKPOINT

The two cargo trucks barrel down on the checkpoint as soldiers FIRE at the trucks --

BULLETS SHATTER the windshield of the lead truck --

But it PLOWS THRU THE BARRIER, crashing off to the side of the road, clearing the way for the truck behind, which flies thru --

EXT. HILL ABOVE AIRPORT - SIMULTANEOUS

The sniper team watches the chaos as the trucks crash thru the checkpoint --

NASIM  
 (firing at the fuel truck)  
 It seems empty --

Nasim sees a HELICOPTER approaching from the direction of the airport terminal --

NASIM (CONT'D)  
 It's a trap!

They jump up with their rifles and run back into the cluster of trees --

EXT. AIRPORT ROAD - SIMULTANEOUS

The lead truck has crashed off the road, but the second truck is thru and speeding west toward Aleppo --

The RUSSIAN MI-24 HIND attack helicopter swoops down from behind and lays down WHITHERING MACHINE GUN FIRE --

The road behind the truck, the truck itself, and the road in front are totally destroyed in seconds --

The second truck weaves and then flips and rolls sideways in the road -- a total wipeout.

EXT. HILL ABOVE AIRPORT - SIMULTANEOUS

Farida and the team run down the hill toward a small barn in a field behind the hill --

Overhead the buffeting air THROBS from the ATTACK HELICOPTER as it approaches --

All four scatter as they run toward the barn --

Farida staggers into an area with tall reeds, then stumbles and falls into a deep, muddy ditch beneath the reeds -

Hayat runs into the open field --

AT THE BARN

Abbad and then Nasim reach the barn, burst thru a side door --

INSIDE THE BARN

Abbad and Nasim jump into the Fiat, just as the barn is PULVERIZED with MACHINE GUN FIRE from above --

BULLETS RIP through wood, metal and glass in all directions -- instantly killing them both.

AT THE DITCH

Farida struggles up out of the mud ditch, just in time to see the barn SHREDED BY GUN FIRE --

In the sky above, the helicopter passes, banks hard, then swoops back down toward the open field --

And lays down another RAIN OF BULLETS in the direction of Hayat, as she runs, helpless, and is finally cut down.

The helicopter lifts up, turns, and flies toward the city.

Farida collapses back into the muddy reeds.

INT. TADMOR PRISON - CELL - AFTERNOON

Adnan and Tarek, thin and beaten, sit on their metal beds, devouring small plates of rice and chickpeas.

ADNAN

I guess even these heartless bastards respect Martyrs' Day.

TAREK

(mouth full)  
Almost like home.

Adnan chews in agreement.

ADNAN

But nothing compares to Farida's cooking.

Tarek studies him for a beat. Finishes the bite in his mouth, then leans back against the concrete.

TAREK

I never told you, but when you two first met... I told her you weren't right for her.

Adnan looks up from his food, surprised. Not that he didn't know, but that Tarek is now admitting it.

ADNAN

Let me guess: with no dowry, what fool would marry for love?

Tarek smirks.

TAREK

So you knew?

ADNAN

I suspected.  
(beat)  
But you only helped me when you told her that. You know she's a hopeless romantic.

TAREK  
 (thinking)  
 That's true.

Adnan stops eating, becomes deadly serious.

ADNAN  
 Since we're confessing... I have to  
 tell you... I'm sorry I didn't  
 listen to you. You were right, we  
 should have left when we could.

They share a long look.

TAREK  
 It's war. There are no good  
 choices.

ADNAN  
 No, it's more than that. It wasn't  
 just the shop. Or my pride.

Now Tarek is confused. Adnan looks around the cell, as if a camera or microphone is listening, then leans in and whispers:

ADNAN (CONT'D)  
 I supported them. The rebels. Spare  
 equipment, some extra money. I  
 thought I could make a difference.  
 I thought I was being a patriot. I  
 thought if everyone did their part,  
 Bashar would lose.  
 (beat)  
 I never told her. I never told  
 anyone. I'm sorry.

Tarek thinks, shakes his head as if refusing to hear it.

TAREK  
 That's just politics. You left your  
 family, and risked your life, all  
 to find my medicine.  
 (beat)  
 I should be apologizing to you.

ADNAN  
 But if I hadn't been so stubborn, I  
 could have admitted it. Maybe I  
 could have traded me for you, and  
 they would have let you go. You  
 didn't have to go through this.

Tarek is struck by this, chokes up a bit.

TAREK

Nonsense. You would be dead. And probably me. They only keep us alive because they think they haven't gotten everything out of us. As soon as they do, we're buried.

(beat)

Listen to us, complaining like two old women. Who are the martyrs now?

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - EVENING

A broken Farida stumbles through the streets, looking like every other destitute civilian in her muddy hijab, rifle gone, and no supplies.

EXT. EASTERN ALEPPO - MAQAM GATE - MINUTES LATER

Farida turns the corner and sees the entire area is devastated, the ancient Maqam Gate badly damaged, rebel bodies litter the street, a few civilians picking thru the remnants of a brutal battle.

She stumbles forward in a daze, walks among the bodies and wreckage, toward the rebel leader's tent area.

Where the tent once stood is a smoking hole in the ground, bodies and melted equipment everywhere.

She turns to walk away, and sees a pair of dirty white Adidas sneakers poking up from a pile of bodies.

She approaches, then covers her mouth as tears fill her unbelieving eyes: it's Hassan, his lifeless eyes still open.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Amira is holding Sami as he cries gently next to her on the couch, when a KNOCK comes at the door.

AMIRA

Stay here.

She gets up and opens the door. It's Farida, dirty, red-eyed, but alive.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - KITCHEN - DAWN

Farida has cleaned herself up. She tries the faucet but it only drips. She finds some old water in the bottom of her teapot. Sets the pot on the burner, lights it.

While she waits, she portions out a small amount of beans from one of three cans left. This will be their breakfast.

She pours the heated water into a cup with a used tea bag. She takes her cup, turns to face the window.

Dead silence outside. No gunfire, no artillery. Just eerie calm and the usual smoke in the morning.

She stares at the hazy sky, listening to the CALL TO PRAYER as it begins. She hears the call, but wonders whether anyone can hear her prayers.

She unfolds her prayer mat, and begins the ritual anyway.

INT. DINING AREA - LATER THAT MORNING

Sami and Farida share a plate of beans. Sami is listless.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. BUILDING - STAIRWEL - MINUTES LATER

Sami sits on the ground, a small plate of beans and a lid of water in front of him. He calls out quietly --

SAMI

Come Kitty, come and get it.

And there, at the top of the stairs, Kitty appears. He's grown, but is still too skinny, even for a kitten.

Kitty approaches cautiously, but smells the food. Something in Sami's calm demeanor -- Kitty trusts him, pads toward him.

Sami smiles, stays very still.

Kitty walks up, smells the beans, but turns to the water lid first, lapping it up.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - EVENING

Sami sits on the floor, playing with a few Legos, a small mock battle; his space soldier has just died.

Farida listens to the radio, staring into space.

## FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

The surprise attack on Martyr's Day has left the rebels in Aleppo in a terrible state, as Bashar's forces tighten their siege on the city, attempting to starve the last remaining population until they relent. But the people of Allah will never surrender to his terrorist regime.

Somewhere ARTILLERY thuds in the distance.

## INT. TADMOR PRISON - CELL - NIGHT

Adnan on his metal bed. Staring at the slit of moonlight coming through the tiny window high above.

A GROAN -- then WHEEZING -- Adnan jumps up and crosses the cell to Tarek -- Tarek is choking, gripping his chest --

Their eyes lock -- Tarek surprised -- wanting help -- as Adnan presses on his chest --

Tarek grabs his arm and squeezes it, and with his final ounce of strength, speaks:

TAREK

I...forgive... you.

His eyes go wide, chest tightens more, pupils freeze...

ADNAN

Tarek -- no... No!  
(turning, yelling)  
Help! Someone help!

Tarek's soul fades through the back of his eyes. He's gone.

Adnan falls backwards, collapsing against the wall, helpless.

## INT. FARIDA'S APT. - FARIDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sami fidgets and squirms in his sleep next to her, kicking off his sheet, waking her.

She turns on a flashlight, sees him shirtless, sweating, tossing. She feels his forehead. He's burning up, and his eye is swollen.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - WASHROOM - NIGHT

Sami sits on the edge of the tub, shirt off, as Farida wipes him down with a wash cloth.

The sink faucet only dribbles as she soaks the cloth, then wipes around his swollen eye. She feels his head.

She shows Sami the last two pills.

FARIDA

I need you to take these okay? It's all we have left.

SAMI

Can I have water?

She puts a glass to the faucet, turns it as hard as she can, and it spews an ounce or two -- SPUTTERS, then stops, dry.

She cranks the faucet harder; nothing. She turns to Sami, a few ounces of water in the glass.

SAMI (CONT'D)

(looking at the glass)

It's okay, Mama. I can do it with that.

FARIDA

Are you sure?

He breathes deep, digging for courage.

SAMI

Uh huh.

He puts the first pill in his mouth, she raises the glass, and he sips a little -- tries to swallow, squeezes his throat, then chokes it down.

He looks at her for approval; she smiles.

FARIDA

One more time, my love.

He puts the second one in his mouth. Looks at the glass, barely any water in it.

She raises the glass, he closes his eye, and washes it down. Actually easier this time.

She smiles. Her good boy. She ruffles his hair.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Sami?

SAMI

Yeah, Mama?

FARIDA

I love you.

SAMI

I love you too, Mama.

INT. SAMI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sami is curled up next to his mother, as she reads a story by flashlight.

FARIDA

And the three angels swore they would always be there for her. And she knew it was true.

She closes the book. He's asleep on her shoulder. She studies him for a beat, then snuggles close to him, pulls a sheet over them and switches off the flashlight.

EXT. ALEPPO - HANANO DISTRICT - DAY

Empty streets filled with nothing but garbage and destruction. A ghost town.

ANGLE ON MARKET

No market now, only empty stalls.

ON THE STREET

No cars. A three-legged dog scampers across an intersection.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - DUSK

As the sun sets, Farida sits on her couch, listening to the radio, Sami laying his head in her lap. She strokes his hair, as he stares into space, listless and weak. His eye looks horribly infected now.

## FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

Today al-Assad's killers continue laying siege to any Free Syrian Army-controlled areas, cutting off the last water and power, and preventing the entrance of any humanitarian supplies, food or medicine. Innocent Syrians are dying every day. Our representatives meet with the regime, the Americans and the Russians in Geneva, to find a path to ending the bloodshed.

(beat)

But still today, anyone who tries to leave these areas is captured or killed. And they intend to continue this siege until what remains of the Syrian people revolt against us, or die.

(beat)

But the Syrian people know who is on their side, who represents freedom, and who is the Devil. True Syrians will never give in to this illegitimate government or their terrorist tactics.

(beat)

We will endure, and if it is His will that we die in resistance, then His eternal heaven awaits us.

She can't take any more, shuts the radio off. Tears fall down her cheek, and Sami can feel her shaking and sits up.

SAMI

What's wrong, Mama?

FARIDA

I failed us.

SAMI

Why?

FARIDA

We should have fled when the war started, but my pride, and believing your father that we would prevail, that Allah would protect us... it made me blind.

SAMI

But it's not your fault!

FARIDA

Yes, it is my fault! I've done terrible things, and now He has forsaken us.

SAMI

No, Mama, don't cry. You didn't do anything bad... we're the good guys, right?

She just keeps crying.

SAMI (CONT'D)

Aren't we the good guys?

FARIDA

I don't know anymore, Sami. I don't know what that means. I don't know anything.

He holds onto her, comforting her as she weeps on his shoulder.

INT. HIDDEN STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

A flashlight switches on. Farida steps in the beam, scans the nearly empty shelves, then she finds it: the 9mm pistol and cartridge. She takes them both.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Farida loads D batteries into a multi-battery power strip. She plugs two cords into the power strip.

She turns on the TV, and loads an old VHS cassette into the VCR, presses play.

ON THE TV

Static snow. And then a picture, a blue sky, trees, the  
CAMERA MOVING HANDHELD --

And then finding BABY SAMI, barely two years old, chunky legs in a cloth diaper, with a shock of black hair and big brown eyes, standing on the grass, smiling.

A sunny day in a park. Birds and a breeze and kids playing in the background.

ADNAN (O.S.)

Come on Sami, you can do it! Come on now - come to me!

Baby Sami smiles, takes a wobbly step forward, then another, then plops down into the grass giggling --

ADNAN AND FARIDA (O.S.)  
 Good boy, Sami!

Farida appears to lift him up, helping him stand again. She's laughing, a younger, glowing version of herself.

ADNAN (O.S.)  
 Come on Sami, one more for Baba!

Sami smiles at him, a few tiny teeth, steps toward him, holds out his arms to the camera --

BABY SAMI  
 Baba! Baba!

He falls in the grass again laughing --

WIDER

Farida watches the scene continue, tears silently rolling down her cheek.

She picks up the 9mm cartridge next to her, and methodically inserts two bullets in the bottom...

She snaps the cartridge into the 9mm, feeling its weight, as the tears continue to flow...

She stands up, pistol in hand, and grabs the flashlight off the table, turning toward the bedrooms --

And the beam lands on Sami, standing in the doorway.

He looks groggy and sad, rubs his good eye in the glare.

SAMI  
 I had a nightmare.

She's stunned -- just stands frozen for a moment, then snaps back to reality -- she sets the gun down, and opens her arms.

FARIDA  
 Come here, my love!

He walks over, and she swoops him up in her arms, squeezes him and starts crying loudly, guttural --

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry, Sami, I'm so sorry...

She holds him tight, crying as he rests his head on her shaking shoulder.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - DINING AREA - DAY

Farida and Sami sit at the table. She's feeding him the last of their beans. No water. They're exhausted and hungry; his swollen eye looks horrible now. He doesn't want to eat.

FARIDA  
Sami, please, you must.

He takes a bite, barely energy to chew. She feels his forehead.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
You're getting warm again.

Frustrated, she stands, walks into kitchen area. In the corner, she cries quietly, so he won't see her.

She finally gets her determination back, wipes the tears, turns and goes to the window.

Outside on the street, nothing moves, no signs of life. None of the sounds of battle they have grown accustomed to.

She turns to Sami.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
Sami, listen to me. I have to go and find us water, and food, and medicine, okay? If I don't...

Sami looks scared.

SAMI  
What if you never come back, like Baba?

FARIDA  
I promise you, I will come back. I won't be gone long at all.

SAMI  
But I want to go with you.

FARIDA  
It's too dangerous. You must stay here.

SAMI  
But I'm scared, Mama.

FARIDA

I know. But it will be okay. Allah  
is watching over us.

He stares at her with his one good eye, the other looking  
worse by the minute. He doesn't believe her.

SAMI

You said He doesn't listen anymore.

She walks over, rubs his shoulder.

FARIDA

I was upset, it wasn't true. He  
never gives up on us, if we don't  
give up on ourselves.

He still doesn't believe her.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

I have an idea.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - LIVING AREA - MINUTES LATER

Sami is on the couch, stroking the fur of a very weak but  
sweet Kitty, Farida next to them.

FARIDA

Now he can keep you company, and  
you can take care of him, right?

Sami pets him slowly.

SAMI

I'll take good care of him.  
(beat)  
Promise you'll come back?

FARIDA

I promise.

SAMI

Can you bring Kitty some food and  
water too? He's hungry like us.

FARIDA

Yes, I will.

Sami starts to tear up, hugs her. She grips him tighter than  
she ever has, a tear in her eye that she quickly wipes away  
before he can see.

She pulls back, looks him in the eyes.

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 Now stay here, and no matter what,  
 don't leave. Okay?

He looks at her and nods "yes."

FARIDA (CONT'D)  
 Are you going to be okay?

He wipes his own tears away, and puts on a brave face.

SAMI  
 We'll be okay.

He pets Kitty.

FARIDA  
 I love you my precious boy.

SAMI  
 I love you too, Mama.

She kisses him on the head, then slips out the door before she loses her courage.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Farida tries to lock her front door from the outside. The rusted lock and the crumbling frame just barely bolt shut.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - STREETS

She moves along the buildings as before, doorway to doorway, stealthy, 9mm at the ready, checking around corners, watching behind every step of the way.

She sneaks past the burned APC, the body of the soldier she shot, still rotting in the street. She searches his body, finds nothing.

She hears a SCUFFLING NOISE -- takes cover in a doorway, then sees it's only PIGEONS FLAPPING through empty windows.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - SIMULTANEOUS

Sami turns the dial on the radio, stopping on a REGIME NEWS BROADCAST:

REGIME SPOKESMAN (V.O.)

-- parties have agreed to a temporary cessation of hostilities, to allow for a period of humanitarian aid in certain districts --

Sami turns the dial again, settles on some old Arabic comedy show. He sits back on the couch, petting Kitty next to him.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - STREET - SIMULTANEOUS

Farida peeks around another corner, sees the main plaza where the barrel bombs were dropped -- the destruction, shrapnel and glass, burned car, dried blood - all bear witness.

No one around.

She breathes deep; gains her courage; turns a corner, 9mm pointed forward -- runs down an empty alley --

Up to the side entrance of the abandoned hospital.

She looks around, gently pries open the broken metal door --

INT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Panting, she steps into the hallway, pistol pointed forward. Scans the hallway. Garbage and collapsed roof tiles. No one around.

She moves down the empty hallway -- stops at the door where Sami had surgery, pries it open.

FARIDA'S POV - OPERATING ROOM

Rubble, broken equipment, dried blood.

HALLWAY

She moves on to the next room; peaks in:

INT. HOSPITAL - STORAGE ROOM

Ransacked, desk overturned, cabinets sideways on the floor.

Her eyes are drawn straight to a metal storage cabinet, sideways in the corner.

She moves inside, gently closing the door behind her.

Bends down, sees it's locked, but the lock is damaged.  
 Someone tried to break it, but quit before they were able.  
 She finds a piece of rock from the wall, picks it up.  
 Feels the weight, closes her eyes; listens for anyone coming;  
 no one.

SMASH! She smashes the rock into the lock, hand bouncing  
 back, the metal behind the lock bending slightly --

SMASH! into the lock -- dust flies -- the metal resists --

She breathes in, anger building -- SMASH! SMASH! SMASH! She  
 pounds on it, relentless -- SMASH! SMASH! SMASH! SMASH!

She stops -- judges it -- the metal bending inward -- SMASH!  
 SMASH! She stops, panting -- hand bleeding.

She tries the handle -- the locked is badly damaged, but  
 still locked.

She takes the 9mm, aims directly at the lock --

She's about to fire when she hears VOICES SOMEWHERE IN THE  
 HALLWAY -- a MAN and WOMAN TALKING --

She raises the pistol toward the door and slowly backs into  
 the corner --

She bends down behind an overturned desk -- points the barrel  
 at the door -- hands shaking, ready to shoot --

The door opens... a white helmet peeks through -- a man --  
 Karam -- the White Helmet -- he looks in.

KARAM  
 (without seeing her)  
 Who ever you are, tell us what  
 you're looking for, we can help.

He steps forward, sees movement -- the second FEMALE WHITE  
 HELMET (YANA) pushes through behind him --

Farida stands -- barrel pointed straight at them.

FARIDA  
 You?

KARAM  
 We're not armed. Please.

She lowers the gun just slightly as he steps forward, and then recognizes her.

KARAM (CONT'D)  
You're alive?

She's unsure how to answer, just slightly nods.

KARAM (CONT'D)  
And your son?

FARIDA  
He needs medicine.

He looks down, sees what she's done to the locked cabinet. Looks at her desperate, withered expression.

KARAM  
There's a cease-fire, seventy two hours. We don't know if it will hold, but we got in to retrieve any hospital patients. We can take you with us.

She hears him, but like in a dream.

FARIDA  
We're hungry... his eye is worse...

KARAM  
I understand. You must come with us tonight, we can get him help.

YANA  
Where is he?

She's almost delirious -- she collapses onto the ground, everything going to her head -- they can see she's horribly dehydrated, starving.

FARIDA  
He's waiting.

Karam reaches in his flack jacket, hands her a canteen.

KARAM  
Drink this.

She takes it, drinks slowly, then guzzles, drinking the whole thing in one long gulp, then looks at him, catching her breath, a small spark in her eye.

KARAM (CONT'D)

Good. We have less than an hour to search for others, and then we must go.

FARIDA

Others?

KARAM

Only patients, severely injured, or parents of injured children.

YANA

Can you bring him here?

She nods "yes." Karam offers her a small bottle of pills.

KARAM

Take these, just in case.

She takes the bottle.

INT. REGIME COMMAND POST TENT

Junior Commander listens to someone speaking on a radio handset, then sets it down.

JUNIOR COMMANDER

An aid convoy is on the move in the Hanano district.

He circles an area on the map.

CAPT. MIFSUD

I don't care what Damascus says, there are still pockets of resistance there. Keep the helicopters flying until no one is left to evacuate.

JUNIOR COMMANDER

Yes sir.

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - STREET

Farida pushes forward thru the streets, 9mm at her side, exhausted, but a new energy driving her.

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - SIMULTANEOUS

Sami is on the couch with Kitty as the air begins to MOVE - FLUTTERING - and then the WINDOWS RATTLE --

He runs to the window just as a HIND ATTACK HELICOPTER ZOOMS BY OVERHEAD --

Terror in his eyes -- he runs to the front door and tries to open it --

EXT. HANANO DISTRICT - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Farida turns the corner and stares down the street to her building: one hundred yards of rubble and burned cars --

Just as the helicopter FLIES OVERHEAD -- shaking the air -- and banks in a large circle, searching for targets --

She breaks into a full run toward her building --

INT. FARIDA'S APT. - SIMULTANEOUS

Sami RATTLES and KICKS the door, screaming --

SAMI  
Mama, where are you?

He throws himself at the door and the locks BUST off the frame and it flies open -- he runs into the hallway --

SAMI (CONT'D)  
Mama!

Between his legs, Kitty runs out and down the stairs -- he sees him, and chases him down the stairs --

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sami exits the building, chasing Kitty down the street --

SAMI  
Kitty, come back!

He follows Kitty as he scampers along the street --

Farida sees Sami in the street and runs toward him --

FARIDA  
Sami!

In the distance, the HELICOPTER BANKS in a circle and returns toward them -- as Sami chases Kitty down the street, Farida finally catches up to him --

She grabs him in her arms and pulls him into a doorway just as the HELICOPTER THUNDERS OVERHEAD --

They fall to the ground in the doorway, he's crying --

SAMI

Kitty!

FARIDA

Let him go, Sami! Let him go!

She hangs on to him for dear life, as he kicks and struggles and cries, until the POUNDING BLADES OF THE HELICOPTER slowly fade away, searching elsewhere.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Farida sits with Sami at her side, as she pleads with Amira, now devoid of any emotion.

FARIDA

This is the last chance.

AMIRA

Nothing matters any more.

FARIDA

Don't say that -- just because we lost so many, doesn't mean we have to die here, too.

Amira just shakes her head.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Let me ask you one question, and you answer me honestly.

Amira looks at her.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Do you think he gave his life trying to defend you, so you could die here in defeat? What would he want for you?

A tear appears in her eyes.

FARIDA (CONT'D)

Am I right?

AMIRA

I don't want to admit it. But I know you are.

FARIDA

Do you trust me?

AMIRA

I trust you.

EXT. AMIRA'S GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Amira closes her eyes and turns her head away. Farida takes Amira's hand, extends her arm toward her, then puts the 9mm underneath Amira's bicep, and FIRES --

Amira SCREAMS, falling to the ground.

INT. AMBULANCE - BACK - NIGHT

Farida, Sami and Amira, now with a bandaged arm, sit across from a WOMAN WITH TWO GIRLS, aged nine and four.

The nine-year-old is missing her right arm, nothing but a bandage over her shoulder.

All three of them look just as drained and sad as Sami and his mother. They see themselves in each other.

Another Ambulance pulls up and then passes them, as Karam starts the ENGINE, and they head out.

As they drive over the bouncing road, Sami just cries into his mother's arm, softly, for everything he's leaving behind.

She whispers into his ears.

FARIDA

(whispering)

Don't worry. Kitty will survive.  
He's very strong, just like you.

EXT. ALEPPO - REGIME CHECKPOINT - NIGHT

A heavily fortified checkpoint with APCs and a tank, razor wire barriers blocking any escape.

Three ambulances are in a row, waiting to pass.

INT. AMBULANCE - CONTINUOUS

Karam turns to his passengers in back.

KARAM

Remember, you came from the hospital. Speak as little as possible.

Karam and Yana share a look in front. This is it.

A CHECKPOINT GUARD shines a blinding flashlight into their eyes as he approaches.

CHECKPOINT GUARD

How many?

KARAM

Six. Three women and three children.

CHECKPOINT GUARD

Open the back.

Karam hits a button as the Guard goes to the back.

INSIDE THE BACK OF AMBULANCE

The doors open and the blinding light shines in, the Guard scanning Farida, Sami, Amira, and the woman with two girls.

He focuses on Amira and her bloody bandaged arm.

CHECKPOINT GUARD (CONT'D)

Why is she here?

FARIDA

She's my mother. She was shot.

CHECKPOINT GUARD

Why doesn't she speak for herself?

FARIDA

She hasn't spoken since she was raped.

He looks at Amira again, shakes his head in disgust.

He looks under their bench seats. Nothing.

He stares at each of them, shining the light directly into their eyes, Sami turning his face away.

But Farida stares straight back, unblinking.

CHECKPOINT GUARD  
(toward Karam in the front)  
On your soul, there are no rebels  
here?

KARAM  
By the Prophet. They are wounded  
women and children.

Guard looks at Farida harder, and finally she turns her eyes  
down, submissive.

CHECKPOINT GUARD  
You never know what someone is  
capable of.  
(re: Sami's eye)  
Tell your boy not to play with  
nails.

He chuckles, and SLAMS THE DOOR shut.

At KARAM'S window, Guard reappears.

CHECKPOINT GUARD (CONT'D)  
I should arrest you for hauling  
garbage.

He BANGS on the hood, then waives to someone at the gate.

CHECKPOINT GUARD (CONT'D)  
Get them out of here.

Karam says nothing, puts the van in gear, drives forward,  
following the other ambulances through the check point.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF ALEPPO - NIGHT

The headlights of the ambulances pierce a dark desert road.

INT. AMBULANCE - BACK

Farida watches out the back window, as burning fires across  
Aleppo fade into the night.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Karam and Yana stare at the red tail lights on the ambulance  
in front of them as they drive in the dark.

A RADIO IS ON, Free Syrian Army Radio.

## FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

The seventy-two hour cease fire is allowing some humanitarian efforts in Aleppo and other regions; however the regime has still not allowed a single aid vehicle through into Daraya or Mouadamiya or the other rebel-held suburbs in Damascus. This is a violation of the agreement and will continue to be raised in Geneva at tomorrow's meetings.

Farida sleeps against the wall, Sami asleep on her lap, like the woman across from them, rumbling along.

## FREE SYRIAN ARMY RADIO (V.O.)

The only party not represented at the meetings or part of the cease fire is Daesh. The terrorists have used the cease fire to launch an all-out assault on Palmyra, and appear to be expelling the regime quickly.

The ambulance continues into the night.

EXT. REFUGEE TENT - DAY

SUPER: LEBANON, THREE DAYS LATER

A small tent in the mud. Sami crouches outside it, playing with two plastic cars.

His eye is no longer swollen, but the scarred lid is closed.

He hears LOUD YELLING -- stands quickly, nerves still raw --

The YELLING OF MEN AND WOMEN --

He runs toward it, between tents, along a muddy path, the YELLING GROWING LOUDER --

He comes to a clearing, sees two busses with red crosses on the side, where men in every condition are being unloaded -- the YELLING are CAMP STAFF and WHITE HELMETS rushing to assist the men --

Sami walks closer to see, no one to stop him.

Some men walk on their own, some with bloodied bandages are being helped onto stretchers.

TWO OLDER WOMEN walk behind Sami as he walks forward --

OLDER REFUGEE  
Must be the prisoners from Tadmor.

OLDER REFUGEE #2  
Freeing them is the only good thing  
Daesh has ever done.

OLDER REFUGEE  
They only did it because they know  
everyone in that horror house is  
against the dog Bashar.

Sami sees a man coming down the steps of the bus, in between  
other men, and he staggers forward onto the ground --

He looks up -- it's Adnan -- and he sees his son --

Sami sees him, drops his Legos and runs --

SAMI  
Baba! Baba!

He runs into his father's arms and Adnan swoops him up,  
crying, squeezing him tight -- he kisses his son's face, sees  
his eye, then hugs him again, harder, and they both cry in  
each other's arms.

EXT. REFUGEE TENT - SUNSET

Adnan and Farida sit with Amira on the ground outside their  
tent, eating rice from small bowls.

A few feet away, Sami rolls his cars in the mud.

CLOSE-UP - SAMI

He looks up and smiles, his bad eye now open; gray scar  
tissue, and blind. But both his eyes are open, and he's  
smiling.

Sami continues playing cars on the ground, making little  
VROOM VROOM noises.

And for one minute, it's like he never saw any of the things  
we know he did. He just sees his toys... on the ground,  
playing in the moment.

Like a child should.

PULL BACK - ABOVE TENT

Their tent is one in a row of tents... and the row is part of a block... and higher still, the block becomes a city.

A tent city, stretching to the horizon, filling a valley in between two rolling hills in Lebanon.

In the distance, the sun burns red, as it sets into the Mediterranean Sea.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARDS ON BLACK:

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, growing out of the regional protests known as the Arab Spring.

To date, over 500,000 men, women and children have been killed in Syria, and nearly 4,000,000 have fled the country.

Bashar al-Assad remains in power, and the majority of the rebels have been defeated.

Some Syrians have begun to return to Aleppo and begin rebuilding.

Over one million refugees are just over the border in Lebanon.

FADE OUT.

THE END