

THE STONING OF SORAYA M.

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Based on the true story

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BLACK SCREEN, and then a LEGEND appears, simple words cutting *
across the screen:

Don't act like the hypocrite,
Who thinks he can conceal his wiles
While loudly quoting the Koran.

-- Hafez, 14th Century Iranian poet

FADE IN:

1 EXT. STREET - DAWN 1

A HUGE FACE -- painted on a large banner -- FILLS THE
SCREEN: the image of AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI, the man who led
Iran's revolution. It is a fierce-looking portrait, gray-
white beard, dark eyes flashing, black turban. The banner is
attached to the side of a building in the:

2 EXT. VILLAGE OF KUPAYEH - DAWN 2

In the muted tones of pre-dawn light, like photos of a
haggard dream, we see the following images from the village:

---quiet dirt and stone paths

---an olive tree flickers in the breeze

---blotched shreds of white cloth stick to a stone

---a banging gate

---tightly shuttered windows

---a broom against a wall

---a group of battered cars

---a pile of juggler's balls, heaped costumes

---a motorbike leans against a wall, rubble and stones
everywhere

---small contained fires in metal trash barrels, flames
flickering above the rims

3 EXT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE, COURTYARD - DAWN 3

A door creaks open. A bent, veiled WOMAN we'll come to know
as ZAHRA, clutches her chador across her face, threads her
way through her tiny courtyard to the street.

- 4 EXT. VILLAGE OF KUPAYEH, STREETS - DAWN 4
- Like a black ghost Zahra floats silently past the fires, skirts the town center, the group of old cars. A cat slinks past. Without pause, she moves...and as she advances up the street we get a better view of the village...
- Some trees, some greenery, hard-baked dirt and cobblestone, a main square with brick-rimmed well. Most of the buildings and dwellings are one and two-storied structures, a few shops, garage, a tiny brook.
- 5 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAWN 5
- A road snakes through vast and desolate mountains. On it, one car labors, chugging...
- 6 INT. FREIDOUNE'S CAR, MOVING - DAWN 6
- A single man, FREIDOUNE (pronounced "Fray-doon"; late 20's, early 30's), dressed in khakis and polo shirt, Western style, drives the wheezing car. Gauges read hot. The car barely moves up the twisted road.
- 7 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAWN 7 *
- Freidoune's car moves with a CLUNK and a jerk, the car rolls to a stop near the edge of a cliff. *
- 8 INT. FREIDOUNE'S CAR, MOVING - DAWN 8
- Freidoune leans forward, forehead resting on the steering wheel as he groans.
- 9 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAWN 9
- Freidoune lifts the hood of the car, STEAM hisses and escapes from the damaged radiator. He glances around. Not a sign of humanity as far as he can see.
- 10 EXT. STREAMBED - DAWN 10
- Zahra comes through some trees down to the stream, the village a mile behind her. She nears a spot where --
- A PACK OF DOGS loll and sniff. They're satiated, muzzles covered in blood. Shredded cloth litters the ground. She THROWS A ROCK at the nearest dog. It moves off with a snarl.

Others stir. She throws more rocks, cursing them. The dogs back off.

Zahra takes off her black headscarf. Long hair streams down her back. Using the cloth as a sack she stoops to collect something, bit by bit, scattered along the side of the stream. She reaches for what the dog dropped. It is...

PART OF A SKULL, a bit of hair still attached. Zahra stares at it, surreal, she retches, wiping her mouth with a corner of her chador.

11 INT. FREIDOUNE'S CAR - DAY

11

The hood is up, car stalled at the side of the road. Freidoune sits in the driver's seat, transcribing tapes, door open. Papers strew the passenger seat, as he hits the tape recorder to play, then stop, then replay while he jots down the words.

RECORDED VOICE

"...since the fall of the cursed Shah, there has been radical change in Iran. The Ayatollah, blessed of God, as a servant of Allah in all his mercy has re..."

He stops and rewinds a bit. Hits play again.

RECORDED VOICE

"...Allah, in all his mercy, has returned our great land to its former sanctity and glory. True Islam now has a torch that will light..."

Stop and rewind again. Freidoune stretches, rips open a candy bar. This is the painstaking task of journalism. He notices something in the rearview mirror, gets out --

12 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

12

Freidoune's eyes scan the landscape. In the distance --

-- A BUS crawls around a curve in the road, coming in his direction.

Freidoune, pleased, returns to the car, begins to pack away his papers, etc.

13 EXT. STREAMBED - DAY

13

Morning has bloomed. Zahra finishes washing her collection of BONES --

-- She wraps them in her scarf and kneels in a shady, private spot. With a flat stone she begins scraping the damp ground, trenching as deep as she can. Gently, tenderly, as if they were a sleeping infant, she lays the bones to rest.

A RUMBLE on the road catches Zahra's attention as she puts the final rocks on top of the grave. Wiping tears away she glimpses --

-- THE BUS, towing a CAR, heads toward the village. Her eyes follow it as we --

CUT TO:

13A	EXT. MAIN ROAD INTO VILLAGE OF KUPAYEH - DAY	13A	*
	THE BUS, towing Freidoune's car, comes down toward the small square, PASSERSBY stop to look, staring.		* *
13B	INT. BUS (MOVING) - DAY	13B	*
	Freidoune, seated near the bus driver, looks out the window at the village. The bus slows near a garage --		* *
13C	EXT. HILLSIDE TRAIL ON OUTSKIRTS OF VILLAGE - DAY	13C	*
	Zahra walks up the rocky hill toward the village.		*
14	EXT. VILLAGE OF KUPAYEH - DAY	14	
	As Zahra passes through the village, chador firmly in place. She keeps walking. Up ahead as she goes deeper into the village, she notices:		* * *
15	EXT. GARAGE - DAY	15	
	FREIDOUNE speaking with HASHEM (60-something), the town mechanic, as the car is unhitched from the bus with the aid of the BUS-DRIVER and a few PASSENGERS who wave and nod and go on their way.		
	Few people are out. A motorbike whizzes by. A radio plays music mixed with whining reception.		
	Zahra approaches inconspicuously, curious. She overhears:		
	HASHEM When I have time. I'm a little tired today.		

FREIDOUNE

Listen, I need to get to the border
by nightfall. I'll pay you extra.

*

HASHEM

It's probably the radiator. That
road's a bitch, burns through them
all the time.

He scratches his belly, shakes his head, looks at the
stranger. Freidoune understands, pulls out his wallet, hands
Hashem some bills. Hashem counts it.

HASHEM

I'm very tired.

Freidoune gives him more.

HASHEM

Check back later. It will be fixed
if it can be.

FREIDOUNE

Just get me to the border.

HASHEM

Yes. To the border. I get it.

Shaking his head, Freidoune gathers his recorder and backpack
from the front seat. Zahra, checking around her, moves closer
as the stranger asks the mechanic:

FREIDOUNE

Is there a cafe around here?

Hashem cocks his head toward an awning down the street as he
lifts the hood on the car.

Freidoune turns, bumps into Zahra. She speaks to him in
English:

ZAHRA (in English)

He'll fix it. He does not want a
stranger here for long.

Slightly freaked, he backs away from her, responds in kind.

FREIDOUNE (in English)

You speak English?

Zahra reacts, looking past Freidoune, seeing:

TWO MEN APPROACH RAPIDLY. One, MULLAH HASSAN (30-something),
is bearded, and wears the white turban and loose dark brown
outer cloak of a cleric. The other man, older and meeker with
large wire-rimmed glasses, is EBRAHIM, the mayor or *kadkhoda*.

ZAHRA

I must talk fast. There are things
you do not know about this village.
They cannot get away with it, these
devils...

The TWO MEN interrupt, pushing past Zahra as if she doesn't
exist.

EBRAHIM

Ignore her. She is old and insane.
She tries all our patience.

ZAHRA

...You have no patience....

EBRAHIM

(hisses at her)
And you have no worth on this
Earth, woman. Talking to strange
men now?
(waves her off)
Go! Out of our sight!

They block her access to Freidoune, address him:

EBRAHIM

Sir, as mayor of this village I
welcome you. Myself and Sheik
Hassan, our mullah, would like to
share our breakfast, if you would
join us...

Behind them, Freidoune glimpses:

---THREE YOUNG MEN (ALI's friends) glare straight at him

---A MOTHER slaps her son for laughing

---a CLUSTER OF WOMEN (LEILA and friends) whispering, then
covering their mouths with their chadors upon catching his
eye

---a LITTLE GIRL crying as her MOTHER yanks her out of sight

Freidoune glances toward Zahra as she slips away, then looks
at the men. MULLAH HASSAN speaks at last:

MULLAH HASSAN

As the ranking authority, it is my
custom to greet visitors to our
town.

FREIDOUNE

Thank you -- I'm here only to get my car repaired. And I have work to do.

MULLAH HASSAN

(noting his backpack)

What kind of work would that be?

Freidoune is finding this town to be strange, unsettling. He shrugs.

FREIDOUNE

Just paperwork.

EBRAHIM

-- Ah, paperwork! --

MULLAH HASSAN

Are you an accountant?

FREIDOUNE

Journalist.

MULLAH HASSAN

Your accent. Where is it from?

FREIDOUNE

I'm going back to France. That is where I live.

Mullah Hassan and Ebrahim exchange a look at this, relieved.

MULLAH HASSAN

Our Ayatollah, the blessed Imam Khomeini himself, spent a good number of years in France. They were good to him.

Freidoune nods at this, grins uneasily.

EBRAHIM

But surely you must eat. Come!

FREIDOUNE

I appreciate your hospitality but, no, thank you.

MULLAH HASSAN

I myself will not be able to eat unless you join us.

EBRAHIM

It is the least we can do for a visitor.

FREIDOUNE
 (rubs his stomach)
 Well, I am reluctant to admit this,
 but the fact is that I stopped on
 the drive here and ate kabob from a
 roadside stall, and I haven't been
 right since.

MULLAH HASSAN
 Chicken?

FREIDOUNE
 How did you know?

MULLAH HASSAN
 It's always the chicken.

The two townsmen nod.

FREIDOUNE
 I should know better, but I was
 hungry, and then driving most of
 the night...it was a nightmare.

EBRAHIM
 -- Tea, then? --

FREIDOUNE
 ...Perhaps next time.

The two townsmen are not happy, not used to refusal, but
 Freidoune holds his ground with a guileless smile.

16 INT. MOSQUE - DAY

16

A modest place of worship richly furnished with Persian
 carpets, pillows, prayer mats, and raised chair for the
 Mullah during Koranic instruction.

MULLAH HASSAN is at the window, peering out at Freidoune,
 seated across the street at a cafe. He seems vexed by this
 stranger, fingers toying with a *tasbih*, worry beads.

MULLAH HASSAN
 A journalist on his way to France?
 (turns, then)
 Decides to stop in our village,
 only the day after?

EBRAHIM
 You are reading too much into it.

MULLAH HASSAN
 (resumes looking outside)
 Why today of all days?

*

Ebrahim seems surprised at how concerned the Mullah is, watching him fiddle with his worry beads, first in one direction, then back again -- eyes focussed on Freidoune. Then, finally, Mullah Hassan turns from the window.

17 EXT. CAFE - DAY

17

Freidoune sips a Fanta and works at a small outdoor table under a lemon tree. A few TEENAGE BOYS slouch nearby smoking, watching him without meeting his eyes. Soon a few more join them. Hanging. Watching.

A HISS attracts Freidoune's attention. From nearby --

-- ZAHRA gestures to him. The boys can't see her.

Freidoune shakes his head, ignores her.

She hisses again, louder. He looks at her, shakes his head "no", irritated.

He begins jotting on his pad when A BALL OF TIN FOIL HITS HIM IN THE HEAD. He looks up. The boys are laughing, pointing at Zahra. One of them spins his finger around his ear like she's crazy.

They snicker and shuffle off.

He looks at Zahra. She pantomimes unwrapping the foil. He picks the ball off the ground and smooths it open.

Inside is a FINGER BONE, with some flesh attached. With it is a diagram of a street with an arrow pointing to the backdoor of Zahra's home.

Freidoune looks up and down the street, then leaves money on the table and gathers his papers.

18 EXT. VILLAGE ALLEY - DAY

18

Freidoune makes his way past a row of homes. Rugs hang over rooftops, airing out. Antennae rise to the sky. Nearby, cats fight over nearby trash mounds.

Checking the crude map, he slips down an alley and across a desolate bridge. Making his way up a walkway, he comes to the back of a small home. No one is around. He opens a wooden gate into...

*
*
*
*

19 EXT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE, COURTYARD - DAY

19

...a tidy front courtyard.

*
*

ZAHRA stands inside the back door, gestures him inside --

ZAHRA
Did anyone see you?

*
*

FREIDOUNE
No.

*
*

20

INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

20

Zahra steps aside as he slides into her home. Two young girls, MALAKA, four, and KATANEH, six, play quietly with a doll.

*

ZAHRA
Did anyone see you?

FREIDOUNE
No.

Seeing Freidoune, the two girls rush to Zahra's skirts, clinging. She bends to them, whispers comfortingly, settles them on cushions.

*
*

ZAHRA
Forgive them. They have been through an ordeal.

FREIDOUNE
Are they yours?

ZAHRA
No. My children are long gone. To the city, thank God. And my miserable husband is dead, Peace be upon Him.
(as she checks the tea)
They are the daughters of my niece, Soraya. I am Zahra.

*

Freidoune takes in the modest home, places the "map" on a table.

FREIDOUNE
Zahra...are you crazy? Everyone thinks so. After this...
(waving the tin ball)
...and inviting a stranger into your home...I am inclined to agree.

She snatches the tin foil ball from his hand, tucks it in her pocket.

ZAHRA
Sit. Please.

He remains standing. She goes to an ancient charcoal-fired brass Samovar and places tiny ornate glasses (*estekan*) on a tray, pouring from the china teapot. She turns the tap of the samovar to dilute the rich, strong tea as it fills the glass.

ZAHRA

I will get you some tea and you can decide for yourself how crazy I am.

FREIDOUNE

Where did you learn English?

ZAHRA

I was nanny to an American family working for an oil company. Years ago, when I was respected in this town.

Meanwhile, he scans the tiny room, *still standing*. One good rug blankets the floor. An orange silk chador hangs on a hook. Everything else is cheap, but clean. She hands him the tiny glass of tea, then dons the orange chador and sits opposite him, *lights* a cigarette.

ZAHRA

Smoke?

FREIDOUNE

(shakes his head, then)

The Ayatollahs have banned women from smoking.

She gives him a look that makes it quite clear what she thinks of the Ayatollahs. The TWO GIRLS huddle in the corner, whispering. Zahra *puffs and paces*.

ZAHRA

Today I am old. A hundred years older than yesterday. And I am poor. I have never left this town in all my life, but I know right from wrong. What happened here yesterday was wrong.

FREIDOUNE

-- Yesterday? --

ZAHRA

The Devil himself visited this town, and Allah the Merciful knows it. Now, God-willing, you will too.
(*glances at his backpack*)
You are a journalist?

Freidoune nods. Zahra *grabs* a FRAMED PHOTO from a *shelf*.

ZAHRA

This is a photo of my niece,
Soraya, with her husband, Ali.
(looks at it a moment)
It's all I have left of her. That,
and that bit of bone in the foil.

He reacts.

INSERT - PHOTO of the sweet sad face of SORAYA standing
beside her husband, ALI...

Zahra takes it back, kisses the photo of Soraya, sets it on
the table with a withering glance at the husband.

ZAHRA

I'm going to cut him out of the
picture. It was a bad match.

Soraya's TWO DAUGHTERS have fallen asleep, entwined in each
other's arms on a floor pillow. The youngest sucks her thumb.
Zahra lays a blanket over them.

ZAHRA

She was only fifteen. Her father,
when it came time to sign the
marriage contract, beat her until
she said "yes".

*

(gestures, resigned)
Her family had little to offer a
potential husband besides her
beauty.

FREIDOUNE

What did Ali have to offer the
marriage?

ZAHRA

(takes the photo back)

*

Ha! A promise to beat his wife and
labor in crime. At least, that's
how it turned out.

Zahra rubs her swollen eyes, exhausted, motions to his
recorder.

*

*

ZAHRA

Turn on your machine, if you like.
(indicating the tape
recorder in his backpack)
The voices of women no longer
matter here. I want you to carry
mine with you.

FREIDOUNE

Why should I listen to you, when
the voices of women no longer
matter anywhere in this country?

*

She pulls the recorder from his backpack, places it on the
tabletop.

*

*

ZAHRA

Once you hear my story, you'll know
why you should listen.

*

Her expression promises it. Freidoune sighs, **sits**. What's he
getting into? He sets up his equipment, inserts a cassette,
as Zahra **lights** another cigarette.

*

*

ZAHRA

There are men in this town who act
like a pack of jackals. They
terrify, they collaborate, they
hunt...

Quietly, he presses the record button on his cassette player.

ZAHRA

...This hunt began only a few days
ago, with Soraya's husband, Ali...

DISSOLVE TO:

21 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

21

Two men walk together. One is Mullah Hassan, the other is
ALI, 42 years old, Soraya's husband. **PASSERSBY exchange
greetings with Mullah Hassan who responds in kind.**

*

*

ALI

Soraya will agree if she knows
what's good for her.

MULLAH HASSAN

Yes, but women can be stubborn. You
of all people should know this
about your wife.

ALI

You must convince her.

MULLAH HASSAN

God-willing.

ALI

No! Convince her. She has NO
choice!

MULLAH HASSAN
(with attitude)
God-willing.

This burns Ali --

ALI
Don't "God-willing" me. You're no
more mullah than I am...

FLASH CUT TO:

22 INT. PRISON - DAY

22 *

Images of raggedy men chained together, shuffling in a line. Glum expressions, furtive looks. One of them is MULLAH HASSAN, in old clothes, dirty beard, and not at all "religious."

ALI (V.O.)
...Don't forget I know that. I have
all the proof I need of your back-
ground down at the jail.

Ali, in his uniform as a prison guard, moves along the line of men unlocking their chains. Behind him the WARDEN speaks.

WARDEN
You men who've been convicted of
crimes such as...
(leafing through papers on
a clipboard)
...robbery, extortion, fraud,
blackmail, and rape -- by judges of
the corrupt shah are now declared
innocent by our new holy regime.
But, be aware, we will not tolerate
future crimes.

Ali comes to "Mullah" Hassan, unlocks his cuffs.

WARDEN (V.O.)
You are now free to go.

The prisoners cheer as Ali and "Mullah" Hassan lock eyes and we:

FLASH CUT BACK:

23 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

23

Mullah Hassan fixes Ali with his criminal gaze.

MULLAH HASSAN
Are you threatening me?

ALI
Just remember who knows the truth
about you.

Mullah Hassan huffs and puffs -- then backs off.

MULLAH HASSAN
We, you and I, are of one mind.
It's Soraya's mind I am not certain
of.

ALI
Then make her certain. Convince
her.

Mullah Hassan nods as the men separate.

CUT TO:

24 EXT. SORAYA'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

24

SORAYA, 35, a natural beauty faded by depression, bids good day to her Aunt Zahra and friend, MRS. HASHEM, in her tiny courtyard.

SORAYA
If there's anything you need, just
ask. You know that.

MRS. HASHEM, late middle age and going frail, nods appreciatively as Zahra guides her out the front. Soraya's young daughters, MALAKA and KATANEH, play a form of hopscotch nearby.

ZAHRA
(re: Mrs. Hashem)
We must get her to the city to see
a real doctor, not that quack we
have here.

MRS. HASHEM
Doctor Gharabaghi's helpful
sometimes.

ZAHRA
Helpful if you want all your food
eaten.

*

Mrs. Hashem coughs, pounds her chest.

MRS. HASHEM
 It's the blood that scares me. My
 husband says tea, lemon, sugar...
 tea, lemon, sugar...over and over
 like it's some kind of magic spell.

ZAHRA
 Cheaper than medicine.

They all share a cynical laugh as the two women exit the gate.

25 EXT. SORAYA'S HOME, ROAD - DAY 25

Soraya kisses them on both cheeks. She looks down the road.

SORAYA
 Look who's coming: Our "holy"
 Mullah.

Covering their grins with their chadors, the women recognize Mullah Hassan approaching. With a nod toward him, the two women move off, one going right, the other left. He mutters and waves a benediction at them as they pass.

MULLAH HASSAN
 God be with you, ladies.

Once past him, Zahra steps around a corner, peeks as the Mullah approaches Soraya.

26 EXT. ALLEY - DAY 26

Zahra turns back down an alley running along Soraya's home.

27 EXT. SORAYA'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY 27

Mullah Hassan enters Soraya's courtyard uninvited.

MULLAH HASSAN
 Good day, Soraya Khanum. I trust
 you are well.

SORAYA
 Ali is not here.

MULLAH HASSAN
 I wish to speak with you.

Soraya reacts at the impropriety of it. He smiles, nods to indicate it's okay, he's a man of God --

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

28 EXT. ALLEY - DAY 28
 Zahra snakes around the side of Soraya's tiny home. She steps over a low wall, enters...

29 EXT. SORAYA'S HOME, BACK - DAY 29
 Zahra enters Soraya's home through a side door.

30 INT. SORAYA'S HOME, BACK ROOM -DAY 30
 Zahra silently crosses a small kitchen/bedroom. Through a filigreed partition, she can see into the front room where Soraya and Mullah Hassan enter. She positions herself to observe secretly what is going on.

31 INT. SORAYA'S HOME, FRONT ROOM - DAY 31
 Soraya admonishes her girls to stay in the front courtyard, then faces Mullah Hassan.

MULLAH HASSAN
 I am here at the request of Ali,
 your husband.

*

He takes out his prayer box and sets it with his Koran on a low table as he takes a seat on a floor cushion.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)
 He has come to me with a complaint about you. He says you no longer speak to him, that you neglect him, that you have...
 (shrugging helplessly)
 ...abandoned him.

Standing straight, she holds his gaze. Firm.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)
 He is your husband. He has all the rights you know very well, all the rights. You cannot refuse him anything.

SORAYA
 (softly)
 Ali, my husband of twenty years -- more than half my life-- beats me, has turned our sons against me, and brings home money from places I do not know.

The mullah shifts on his pillow.

Behind the screen, Zahra pushes her scarf behind her ears to hear better.

MULLAH HASSAN

Then you'll welcome his offer. He would like a divorce. He's met a woman in the city he wants to marry, but he doesn't have the means to support two wives. He's prepared to give you the house, the furniture, the girls, and the little field for you to cultivate for your needs. However, he will not give you a single rial more.

SORAYA

This tiny house and that rocky field cannot sustain me and my daughters.

MULLAH HASSAN

It's a generous offer. More than generous.

(then, after a moment)

Come, you can confide in me. What is it really? Jealousy? Desire? I am a man of God, like the Prophet himself...

Soraya lets her silence speak.

Through the screen, from Zahra's POV, we watch as the mullah combs his eyebrows with his fingers. Fiddles with his prayer box.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)

...and there is something else I want to propose to you. This comes from me and me alone. It has nothing to do with Ali.

(looking around)

Could I have some tea with sugar?

Soraya doesn't move.

SORAYA

We're out.

He eyes the teapot steaming on the counter.

MULLAH HASSAN

Of tea?

SORAYA

Of sugar. I wasn't expecting you.

Mullah Hassan waves it off.

MULLAH HASSAN

No need. I will be direct. I would be happy, as a man of faith and as an admirer, to provide for both you and your charming children.

*

---off her recoil.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)

Honorably, of course, with utmost propriety. I would pay you a visit here and there, we would come to know each other, talk. In time... you know the word, *sigheh*, a temporary wife authorized fully by Islam?

At this Zahra, pounces into the room from behind the screen, shocking the mullah. Her chador flies off, her arms flailing.

ZAHRA

-- Get out! --

MULLAH HASSAN

What is this? This is private! How dare you eavesdrop!

ZAHRA

Leave this house at once Sheikh Hassan, or mullah, or whoever you are -- or I shall stir up the entire village!

Mullah Hassan leaps to his feet.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

You should be ashamed of yourself. You disgrace and dishonor the Holy Book you carry!

Zahra moves toward him as he steps back.

MULLAH HASSAN

Zahra Khanum, you misunderstand! I have utmost respect for Soraya. I come with pure intentions.

ZAHRA

The only thing pure is your lust. A *sigheh*, a holy whore!? How dare you? Get out of here!

(MORE)

ZAHRA (cont'd)
 May the wrath of God rain down upon
 you, may the undertaker bear you
 and yours away for three
 generations!

Humiliated and mad about it, the mullah points his finger at the women.

MULLAH HASSAN
 You witches. Your venom will come
 back to poison you. This I promise.

With a look of pure loathing, he pockets his Koran and prayer box and leaves.

Zahra immediately turns upon Soraya.

ZAHRA
 What is going on with your
 marriage?

The girls peek into the room, and Soraya waves them back.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 Is he still seeing prostitutes in
 the city? Who is this other woman?

Off Soraya's resistance---

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 Do you sleep with him? Do you give
 him what you owe him? The rumor is
 that you don't.
 (then, off no response)
 Answer me!

Frustrated, Zahra SLAPS Soraya. Soraya slouches. Zahra immediately regrets it.

SORAYA
 Not you, Aunt. Not you.

Soraya unwraps her scarf, pulls down her collar to reveal a blue and red terrain of bruises across her neck and chest.

SORAYA (CONT'D)
 He takes what I owe. I have nothing
 left to give.

Zahra tenderly traces the wounds with her fingertips, strokes Soraya's cheek.

ZAHRA
 The divorce. Give him that.

SORAYA

And become a *sigheh* to Hassan? I'll have no choice. The children will starve. I cannot. I cannot become a whore.

ZAHRA

This girl...in the city? Who is she?

FLASH CUT TO:

32

INT. PRISON - DAY

32

Ali ushers A YOUNG GIRL and her mother down a dank corridor. A series of cells runs along one side, each crowded with prisoners. Ali, acting the big man, whacks the bars as he passes, driving the prisoners back from them.

SORAYA (V.O.)

Mehri, her name is Mehri. She is fourteen, has green eyes and her father is a doctor.

Ali opens a door to a small cubicle. At a chair sits MEHRI'S FATHER, a doctor, who leaps to his feet at the sight of his wife and daughter. The three family members embrace.

The doctor and his wife whisper, and she passes him an envelope hidden in the folds of her chador. He motions to Ali, who accepts the envelope and tucks it in his shirt.

Ali nods to the doctor in shared agreement, and closes the door so the family can visit.

SORAYA (V.O. CONT'D)

He must have money. He is to be hanged. But Ali has promised to help him.

ZAHRA (V.O.)

In exchange for the daughter?

SORAYA (V.O.)

I'm sure arrangements are being made.

Ali makes his way down a hall.

33

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

33

Ali slips inside. He opens a few drawers, finds a file titled "scheduled executions", and starts flipping through it.

ZAHRA (V.O.)
How do you know this?

SORAYA (V.O.)
Ali. He boasts to his sons, as if
they should admire him for it.

Ali finds what he's looking for. It's a photo of the doctor with a list of his crimes etc. The word "DEATH" is stamped in red across the page. He rips it out, crumples it, and slides the file back into the drawer.

FLASH CUT BACK:

34 INT. SORAYA'S HOME - DAY 34

The two women hold hands, locked in a shared prison of oppression.

ZAHRA
This was planned, between them, Ali
and the mullah. We must watch
everything. They won't let this
pass. Not Ali. And certainly not
that...that... supposed Man of God.

*

35 INT. MOSQUE, LIVING AREA - DAY 35

Mullah Hassan seems shaken by the encounter with the women as he speaks to Ali --

MULLAH HASSAN
This Aunt is wicked, you should've
seen how she spoke to me --

ALI
-- She's a witch, afraid of nothing
and no one. When her husband was
mayor she practically ran this
village --

MULLAH HASSAN
-- How much does she know?

ALI
You mean the fact that you're a
thief, a murderer, and an ex-
convict?
(shakes his head)
She knows nothing.

MULLAH HASSAN
Did you tell your wife? Because if
you told Soraya she told her Aunt.
(MORE)

MULLAH HASSAN (cont'd)
 How else to explain her speaking to
 me like that?
 (then, angrily)
 You have a big mouth, Ali.

Ali waves it off, dismissive --

ALI
 Forget Zahra, this is about my
 divorce!

MULLAH HASSAN
 Soraya won't give you one. Not
 without a settlement. This is the
 law and she is within her rights.

ALI
 I won't pay her a thing. I'm tired
 of her, do you understand? She is
 old and and dull and I have a
 chance for a young wife in the
 city...

MULLAH HASSAN
 Patience is what's called for here.
 You can wait.

ALI
 ...I can't wait! The girl's father
 is in the prison. I have to marry
 her before he's executed.

MULLAH HASSAN
 There are other girls.

ALI
 I want this one.

Ali, dissatisfied, marches out of the room --

36 INT. SORAYA'S HOME - EVENING

36

The family at dinner. Five sitting on the floor around a
 cloth: Soraya, her two daughters, and two cocky teenage sons,
 REZA and KAMRAN. Ali, their father, is notably absent. Then,
 the door bursts open --

-- ALI CHARGES IN. Soraya leaps to her feet, backing away as
 he bores in on her --

ALI
 You have shamed me, woman! In my
 own home. To a man of God! I am a
 joke, a laughing-stock. How dare
 you? HOW DARE YOU!

He raises his hand and she cringes. Little Malaka starts crying, and runs to climb into her older sister's lap.

ALI
(to Malaka)
Shut up!

Malaka chokes her sobs, stuffing her thumb in her mouth. Ali turns to his sons.

ALI (CONT'D)
Mullah Hassan came here today with
an offer, a generous offer of
divorce for your mother. And
she...
(points at Soraya)
...she turned him down.
(scanning the food)
A woman who does not even put meat
on the table.

SORAYA
You give me no money. I can't make
meat from rice.

ALI
(to his sons)
Mehri will have meat on the table.
And more, much more. Every night.
She knows how to be a wife.

SORAYA
-- Don't talk about her --

ALI
(ignoring Soraya)
I could move to the city. Near my
work. Marry a young wife. And you
boys could become revolutionary
guards.

The boys like what they hear.

SORAYA
Ali, not now. Not in front of the
children.

REZA
Really, Father, we could come with
you?

ALI (CONT'D)
Of course, there's nothing for you
here. But *she*...
(indicating Soraya)
(MORE)

ALI (CONT'D)
 ...seeks to stop all that. To
 deny her husband and sons --

REZA
 Why won't you let us go, Mother?

SORAYA
 -- Sons? What about our daughters?
 I will not see my children
 starve...you have a duty. As a
 husband. As a father. By law and by
 God you cannot abandon us.
 And what about me? Your wife!
 (as he walks away from
 her)
 Your mullah insults YOU. He propo-
 sitioned me. Yes! He seeks to make
 a whore of me. What kind of husband
 does that make you? Where is your
 honor? *That* is the joke.

*
 *
 *
 *

Ali reacts -- this is news to him, something the mullah
 didn't tell him.

REZA
 Don't talk to father like that!

His brother, KAMRAN, throws a piece of bread at Soraya. *Reza*,
 inspired, knocks over a glass of water.

*
 *

ALI
 Time for cleanup, woman.

Humiliated, powerless, Soraya fights her tears, *then picks up*
 the water pitcher *as if to meekly remove it, then SMASHES IT*
 against the wall. Everyone is shocked, including her. She's
 never done such a thing before.

*
 *

ALI
 You owe me 25 rials for that.

The boys burst into laughter, then realize their dad means
 it.

ALI
 This is a man's world.
 (to his sons)
 Never forget that, boys.

The boys nod, caught up in the moment. Soraya wraps her
 chador around herself in a panic, gathers her daughters,
 moving to the door.

Ali blocks her, rears back, SLAPS HER FULL ACROSS THE MOUTH.
 Once. Twice.

Blood trickles from her lip.

Kamran reflexively moves to halt the violence. His older brother pulls him back, whispering, "Don't."

Ali SLAPS HER one more time.

She pulls her chador across her face, grabs the girls and leaves. As she shuts the door behind her, the sound of laughter erupts from inside. We see the hurt and the fear on Soraya's face.

37 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

37

Soraya and Zahra huddle together. Soraya dabs her cut lip with a cloth.

ZAHRA

If he wants this divorce he will have to pay.

SORAYA

He won't. I know him.
(whispering so her daughters can't hear)
I want to die.

ZAHRA

No! He can pay. That car he drives, the women he brings to YOUR house. Everyone knows --

SORAYA

-- And admires him for it! He's a big man who works in the big city and drives around in his big car.

ZAHRA

I will talk with Ebrahim. He'll listen to me. After my husband died, he wanted to marry me.

SORAYA

I won't become a whore for that mullah. I won't. Never. When I was a child my parents made me work for a man who did everything to me but intercourse. They sent me away to work for him so they wouldn't have to feed me. I will not return to that. Never. And neither will my daughters.

*

*

ZAHRA

Then you must protect them. Do nothing to provoke. You are above reproach. Remember that.

*

Soraya sighs with hopelessness.

SORAYA
Can we stay here with you?

ZAHRA
No. You must go home. Staying here
will only fuel his charge of
neglect.

Soraya looks at her girls curled up and sleeping. One snores slightly.

SORAYA
They don't sleep well at home.

Suddenly there's a BANGING at the door. The women rise, anxious. Zahra cracks the door to see MR. HASHEM, the mechanic we saw earlier. He's nervous, worried, in a panic.

HASHEM
Zahra! You must help me.

Zahra swings the door open wider --

HASHEM (CONT'D)
-- My wife! --

ZAHRA
-- What? What about her? --

HASHEM
(near tears)
Please come! Please!! The Doctor,
he's gone to the city, I didn't
know where to go --

Zahra reacts. More bad news. She goes into action, grabs her chador --

ZAHRA
Yes, of course.

She puts the head-scarf over her head, meeting Soraya's eyes.

SORAYA
I'll come too.

ZAHRA
No. No. Remember what we talked
about.

Soraya nods, covering her head with her scarf as Zahra disappears into the dark with Hashem.

38 EXT. STREET - NIGHT 38 *

ZAHRA moves with a panicked HASHEM up an alley, emerging to the street where they are forced to halt as -- *

Ali's convertible rumbles into sight, slowing. Zahra sees: *

ALI drives with a LOUD BLONDE PROSTITUTE (hair exposed beneath her head-scarf) snuggled up against him. As the car passes slowly like an Iranian drive by, Ali stares daggers at Zahra. Nearby, a group of ALI'S FRIENDS wave and nod from the curb, approvingly.

Zahra and Hashem move on, toward his residence -- *

39 OMITTED 39 *

40 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT 40 *

Mrs. Hashem's pale dead face. She lies on a bed in a room lit by a single bulb overhead. Around the room we notice bolts of fabric, a sewing machine, and other tools of a seamstress.

Zahra stares down at her, hand covering her own mouth in shock. Hearing voices, she looks to the outer room, sees:

HASHEM comforts a teenage boy with Downs Syndrome. This is MOHSEN, the Hashems' son. He guides the boy to another room, saying:

HASHEM
You heard me, go to sleep, my boy.

The boy, sleepy, confused, wets his pants.

HASHEM
Not now, Mohsen. Back to bed.

The boy turns, spies an apple in a bowl, snatches it and disappears back into his room.

Zahra finds a towel, pours water on it, returns to the bedside. She begins to clean the body. Then:

HASHEM enters --

HASHEM
She is strong, Zahra. She had a child after thirty years of marriage. No one thought she could, but she did! Tell me that she's all right...

Zahra's heart melts a little for Hashem, his incredulity and despair, but she has no time to indulge in her feelings.

ZAHRA
Hashem Jan, I have to prepare the
body for burial...
(then, off Hashem's
grimace)
...I'm sorry.

Disbelieving, he tries to thrust past her, but she stops him--

ZAHRA
No! You know the custom: once dead,
a woman's body cannot be seen by
any man, even her husband.

Hashem nods, his eyes aching with emotion.

41 EXT. VILLAGE STREET (#2) - DAY 41

VILLAGERS make their way toward a house of mourning.

42 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, BEDROOM - DAY 42

ZAHRA pulls the white sack in which Mrs. Hashem lies up over the corpse's face. She secures it with a rope. It has fallen to Zahra to wash the body and place it nude in the traditional white bag.

Zahra positions a screen to further hide the body from view if the door should be opened to the room. As she does...

A FEW WOMEN in black chadors boldly enter, opening drawers, boxes, holding up bolts of cloth, checking themselves in a mirror. Small tugs-of-war begin, voices rise and fall as the vultures move in.

Disgusted, Zahra shoos them out as we walk with her into:

43 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, MAIN ROOM - DAY 43

A gaggle of WOMEN chatter as they riffle through Mrs. Hashem's belongings. Some plates of food sit out on the table. A few bouquets brighten the scene. The elderly MRS. MASSOUD is alarmed by the women's behavior.

MRS. MASSOUD
(more to herself)
This looting is not proper.

44 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

44

SORAYA, carrying a vase of flowers, bows her head as she passes A GROUP OF MEN gathered outside in the courtyard. Present are ALI, MULLAH HASSAN, EBRAHIM, and HASHEM among others.

Ali watches her closely as she glides by them. The only one seated is Mullah Hassan, who has positioned himself so his back is to the house itself, and therefore to all the women inside.

45 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, MAIN ROOM - DAY

45

Soraya enters through the front door with the flowers. She sets them on a low table.

Around her women poke through Mrs. Hashem's belongings. As usual, the men and women have segregated. Men outside. Women inside.

One fat woman, LEILA, tries to force on a ring she's found in a drawer. Soraya pulls it off her finger, puts it back.

LEILA

What? She can't use it.

Another woman has decided on a bolt of cloth, tucks it under one arm. Another comically chases a chicken, that has made the mistake of coming indoors.

Leila, exits the bedroom with the sewing machine, hoisting it to check its weight.

SORAYA

Put that down.

LEILA

I saw it first.

SORAYA

These things now belong to Hashem.
He may need them.

LEILA

A sewing machine? He wouldn't even
know what a needle is.

SORAYA

Put it back. He has to go on, you
know.

The woman "tch"s Soraya and gives a crude gesture. Soraya grabs the sewing machine -- they struggle a moment -- and she pulls it from her. Leila angrily leaves.

46 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY 46

Mr. Hashem, who stands with the men outside, watches Soraya through the open window, appreciating her kindness. Ali also notices, puts his arm around Hashem and guides him back to the huddle of men.

47 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, MAIN ROOM - DAY 47

Zahra slaps another woman's hand as she tries to slip a pair of Mrs. Hashem's shoes into her carry-all.

EBRAHIM
(gesturing through the
window)
Zahra! Zahra, come over here.

Zahra and Soraya exchange looks. Zahra, exhausted but regal and a little angry, walks outside to the men.

48 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY 48

The men part to reveal Mullah Hassan seated in the center like a king, looking up at Zahra.

MULLAH HASSAN
Zahra, Hashem has told us how kind
you were to him and his dear wife
last night. Our gratitude is yours.

ZAHRA
She should have been in the
hospital days ago. Someone could
have driven her. Perhaps you, Ali,
in that fancy car you have suddenly
acquired. But it seems there are
more important passengers for you
to drive.

Ali barely holds his temper.

MULLAH HASSAN
Now now Zahra, all that doesn't
matter now. This is a time for
mourning. And we have our concerns
now about Hashem and his future.

ZAHRA
She isn't even buried yet.

This pains Hashem and he ducks away, enters the house.

MULLAH HASSAN

You know he cannot manage on his own. Cooking, cleaning, gardening, and Mohsen -- a boy like that without a mother to take care of him is very vulnerable.

Zahra waits. What do they want with her? Ebrahim, her old friend, steps in to quell her defensiveness.

EBRAHIM

Could you talk with Soraya? We thought perhaps she could help him out-- when she's done with her duties at home.

The other men nod, waiting.

MULLAH HASSAN

You know as a community we look out for each other.

ZAHRA

Is that what this is? You look out and she does all the work? Talk to her yourself.

MULLAH HASSAN

We thought she might be more receptive if it came from you.

ZAHRA

She might be more receptive if you offer her a wage.

MULLAH HASSAN

Of course! Didn't we mention that? Naturally there would be a fee.

ZAHRA

There better be, and a good one too.

(glaring at Ali)

But it would be her money. Hers alone.

ALI

Yes. What else? Hers alone.

ZAHRA

Not for food, not for gasoline, not for your women.

ALI
You have a big mouth, hag.

ZAHRA
All the better to hit, I suppose.
Isn't that right?

MULLAH HASSAN
Enough! It is settled. We have
decided. Soraya will work for
Hashem. We have a burial and
prayers for the men to attend to.

With a snort, Zahra leaves the men.

49 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, STREET - DAY

49

Ebrahim follows Zahra for a step.

EBRAHIM
You go too far, Zahra. This is not
like the old days. The Shah is not
around anymore.

ZAHRA
How I know it.

EBRAHIM
I warn you. As a friend. Soften
your tongue. These men can get
angry. Work with them. Respect
them. Give them what they want.

ZAHRA
That's what you do, isn't it?
Ebrahim? But at what price? Do you
think of that?

50 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

50

Ali looks from Zahra's conversation over to the window where
Hashem is inside talking with Soraya.

51 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, MAIN ROOM - DAY

51

Hashem speaks with Soraya who's still inside with the other
women.

SORAYA
They're like crows in a cornfield.
They would have robbed you of your
wife's body if you turned your
back.

HASHEM

And you stopped them. Thank you.

SORAYA

For now. But I wouldn't close my eyes tonight if I were you.

Hashem can't help but smile.

HASHEM

She thought of you as a good friend.

Soraya feels his grief.

SORAYA

I loved her too.

She lifts the sewing machine, offers it to him --

SORAYA

Put this somewhere safe.

52 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

52

Ali watches Hashem and Soraya through the window. As he takes the sewing machine from her, their hands touch slightly. Ali reacts.

A smile spreads over Ali's face as a thought begins to take hold in his mind.

53 INT. SORAYA'S HOME, FRONT ROOM - EVENING

53

Zahra stands on a crate while Soraya pins the hem on her skirt. A radio plays some modern Middle Eastern music, a kind of cheesy disco. Zahra is "hand dancing" and swaying slightly.

SORAYA

Stand still.

Zahra continues swaying and Soraya does her best pinning the hem.

ZAHRA

This is ridiculous. I don't need a new skirt. You could be doing this for someone who pays.

SORAYA
 Hashem said I can do what I want
 with the fabric, and I want to do
 this. Besides, I'm practicing on
 you.

The music stops, garbled talk taking its place.

ZAHRA
 Hashem treats you well?

SORAYA
 He's sad, but he's fair.

ZAHRA
 And how's Ali?

SORAYA
 Who knows? I barely see him. He's
 either in town, at the jail, or
 hanging around with the men.
 (her eyes light up,
 remembering)
 Actually..
 (digs in her pocket)
 ...would you mind keeping this for
 me.

She pulls out a small roll of bills.

SORAYA (CONT'D)
 It's all I've earned so far. Every
 rial. I want to keep it safe in
 case...

ZAHRA
 ...the pig gets hungry?

Soraya shrugs. Zahra takes the money and puts it in her skirt pocket.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 This is the beginning. This is your
 opportunity to get out.

SORAYA
 Like you said, patience. As long as
 it takes.

The women smile.

Ali and Mullah Hassan approach Ali's parked car. Cleaning and buffing it are his sons, REZA and KAMRAN.

ALI
Okay, boys, on your way --

He tosses them each a coin. Both boys tease: "Thanks, Boss!"

REZA
When are we moving to the city,
Father?

ALI
-- Soon --

KAMRAN
And Mom and the girls, what about
them?

ALI
No problem. I'm going to take care
of everything.

They run off. The street is quiet, a dim street lamp the only
illumination. Ali and Mullah Hassan speak quietly:

ALI
I think there's something going on
between Soraya and Hashem.

MULLAH HASSAN
She's not the type.

ALI
(glaring)
How would you know?

Mullah Hassan backs down. No need for that conversation.

ALI
She works at his house, he's a
widow...they're alone a lot....

Mullah Hassan knows exactly where he's going with this.

MULLAH HASSAN
...Adultery by a woman is
punishable by stoning.

*

ALI
And if she's dead I won't be paying
support to her, will I?

He seems pleased with himself. Mullah Hassan isn't so sure.

MULLAH HASSAN
But she's earning money now. In
time, she'll give you a divorce.
Why be so extreme?

ALI
 Because I can't wait!... And who
 are you to be so righteous? I know
 your record. In a just world, you'd
 be the one stoned.

Mullah Hassan reconsiders --

MULLAH HASSAN
 But we'll have to convince Ebrahim.
 (then, off Ali's look)
 He'll want witnesses. He's known
 Soraya for a long time.

ALI
 I'm a witness -- Why can't you be a
 witness?

MULLAH HASSAN
 I can't. The mayor and I have to
 preside. You need somebody else.

Ali gestures as if to say, "don't worry", then gets in his
 car to pull out.

ALI
 We'll find someone. But first we
 need to start the rumor mill in
 this shithole town.

55 EXT. MARKET STREET - DAY

55

ZAHRA comes walking down the street, lined with STALLS
 selling shoes, fruit, spices, batteries, etc. She slows upon
 noticing:

MULLAH HASSAN and EBRAHIM engrossed in a game of backgammon
 at a small sidewalk table outside a STORE. Nearby, MEN smoke
 waterpipes, FRIENDS huddled in conversation with ALI who
 looks up as if caught doing something. He nods to her. She
 nods back, moves on, wondering what's up.

Zahra enters --

56 INT. BAKERY - DAY

56

Zahra enters a dim sort of do-it-yourself bakery. Several
 women pound out bread dough on large round stones. Behind
 them are a couple of brick ovens. It's cave-like, private,
 dark compared to the glare outside.

Zahra takes out the dough she had prepared at home and
 settles down to start forming it into flat bread. They're all
 acquainted and murmur their hellos.

Zahra exchanges a warm smile with one old woman in particular, MRS. MASSOUD.

A BREAD-MAKER tends to the ovens.

LEILA, who we saw at Hashem's earlier, speaks up:

LEILA
Is that a new skirt you're wearing?
It looks a lot like the fabric I
saw at Hashem's.

ZAHRA
Yes. My niece made it.

LEILA
That's Soraya, isn't it?

ZAHRA
You know perfectly well it's
Soraya.

Leila nods, continues to work her dough. Zahra eyeballs her, notices a ring on Leila's finger.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
I see you got Mrs. Hashem's ring
after all.

Leila huffs, offended and embarrassed both.

LEILA
What's he need it for-- unless he
has a new woman to give it to.

A few women in the shadows titter.

ZAHRA
Are you implying something about
Soraya?

LEILA
What do you mean?

ZAHRA
Don't act innocent with me. You've
been a gossip your whole life.

LEILA
Who made you so much better than
the rest of us? Huh? Just cuz
you're friends with the mayor.

Another woman, BITA, speaks from the shadows.

BITA
 Zahra's right. You are a gossip.
 You should keep your mouth shut
 when you don't know what you're
 talking about.

LEILA
 Well maybe I do know something.

ZAHRA
 There is nothing to know.

LEILA
 I know Soraya rejects Ali. Why else
 would he cavort around with other
 women?

In the shadows TWO WOMEN nod their heads in agreement.

ZAHRA
 Because he is a dishonorable man.

Leila breaks into laughter.

LEILA
 Ha! He's like any man. Feed him and
 he's happy, starve him and he takes
 what he craves and blames you for
 it.

The other patrons and the baker listen attentively while
 pretending not to.

BITA
 I know Soraya well. She is a good
 woman.

LEILA
 Are you married to her? You can't
 blame Ali for a frigid wife.

Disgusted, Mrs. Massoud noisily gathers her basket and bread.

MRS. MASSOUD
 No one knows what passes between
 husband and wife. You should know
 better, Leila.

Leila is silenced. Mrs. Massoud leaves. Zahra pounds her
 dough harder, exchanging glances with the sympathetic Bitia.

The baker opens the hot oven and slides another bread into
 the red heat.

57 EXT. MEADOW - DAY

57

A bright red flower fills the screen.

MALAKA, Soraya's four year old daughter, holds it out for her mom to sniff.

MALAKA
Isn't it pretty, Mommy?

Soraya and her daughters, Malaka and Kataneh, stand in a field of wildflowers.

SORAYA
Yes, it is...

The little girl puts it in her sister's basket, which holds other picked flowers.

MALAKA
Mommy, Mommy, what am I?

Malaka hops around, holding two fingers up on the sides of her head.

Kataneh, the older girl, rolls her eyes at her mom. This is so childish. *She moves off.*

*

SORAYA
Ah. Let me guess. A cow?

MALAKA
No! Not a cow!

She resumes hopping with more vigor.

SORAYA
How 'bout an...elephant?

MALAKA
Mommy!

SORAYA
That's enough. We have to get back.
I have to make dinner. Now where's
your sister?

Soraya looks around, sees only fields of flowers and rolling hills.

SORAYA (CONT'D)
Kataneh! Kataneh! No more hide and
seek.

The older girl pops up in the field of flowers, holding her finger to her lips to shush her mom.

Soraya quietly makes her way through the growth to her daughter.

Kataneh is crouching by a ground nest of BABY BIRDS. The birds peep and pump their heads up and down. All around them the bushes are alive with sound.

Suddenly Malaka pounces, just missing the nest.

MALAKA
I'm a bunny!

Suddenly with A WHOOSH --

-- HUNDREDS OF BIRDS TAKE FLIGHT from the thicket. It's a nesting ground, and Malaka's scared up a cloud of wings and feathers.

The birds swoop and swarm, screeching and calling in shape-shifting flight.

KATANEH
Stupid sister!

SORAYA
Hush. They're beautiful.

The three females watch the air ballet.

MALAKA
Angels Mommy! Lots and lots of
angels!

On the sound of Soraya's laugh we:

CUT TO:

58 INT. HASHEM'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

58

Soraya arranges a vase of the flowers she and the girls picked. She sets them on the small table, then attends to a pot of stew on the stove.

Hashem watches Soraya through the door for a few moments, then pokes his head into the room.

HASHEM
Soraya.

Soraya jumps.

SORAYA
You startled me. You're home early.

HASHEM
There wasn't any work. Too few cars
in Kupayeh. Where's Mohsen? *

SORAYA
Napping. He fell down and scraped
his knee. He cried himself to
sleep.

Off Hashem's look---

SORAYA (CONT'D)
It's nothing. I bandaged it. He
just gets upset easily.

Hashem nods.

HASHEM
It's hard for him.

Soraya wipes up the last bit and unties her apron. She wraps
a chador around her.

SORAYA
I'm done here. There's dinner on
the stove.

HASHEM
Smells good.

SORAYA
Thank you. The lamb was fresh
today.

HASHEM
Would you like to stay and eat with
me?

Soraya pauses. How to handle this?

SORAYA
No, I really have to get home to my
family.

HASHEM
Oh, of course. Yes. Yes.
I...sometimes I get tired of eating
alone.

SORAYA
Mohsen will be awake soon.

Hashem nods, a little too enthusiastically.

SORAYA (CONT'D)
I'll see you tomorrow morning.

Soraya slips out of the house. Hashem steps to the window, watching her graceful figure move down the street.

59 EXT. MOSQUE - DAY

59

On the mat are three pairs of shoes. Around the alley is a parked car, Ali's convertible.

Zahra glances around a moment to see that no one's watching her, then peers through a window into the mosque, seeing three men talking inside -- Ali, Mullah Hassan, and Ebrahim.

59A INT. MOSQUE - DAY

59A

Ebrahim is agitated by what he's heard from Mullah Hassan and Ali:

EBRAHIM
If you expect me, as mayor, to authorize a trial -- especially a trial such as this -- you must bring me evidence. An impartial witness --
(continues, firmly)
-- Not your sons, not your friends, not chattering women who dislike Soraya -- strong witnesses who have strong evidence. Testimony! I won't be reckless.

*

MULLAH HASSAN
Islamic law dictates that any witness can come forward --

EBRAHIM
(to Ali)
-- You're saying that your wife is sleeping with another man in our village, a man whose wife just died! This is a serious charge. Very serious. Think of your daughters.

ALI
I am thinking of them.

EBRAHIM
Good -- then bring me evidence, not gossip...

He leaves the room. Mullah Hassan looks at Ali's disappointed face.

MULLAH HASSAN
I told you he would be difficult.

59B EXT. MOSQUE - DAY

59B

Zahra, shuffling beneath an awning of a nearby building, spies the entrance to the mosque. She reacts upon seeing:

Ebrahim emerge, step into his shoes, start on his way --

60 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

60

Zahra descends on him as he starts walking toward the village square.

ZAHRA
Ebrahim! Ebrahim!

Ebrahim hears her, but barely slows as she catches up.

EBRAHIM
Not now, Zahra. I'm busy.

ZAHRA
Seeing our beloved mullah?

EBRAHIM
Yes. What of it?

ZAHRA
He must be a pretty interesting fellow, you go there everyday. Or is it always for prayer?
(glances at Ali's parked car)
Ali too. I know he's not praying. You'd think Ali was the mayor around here, the way he struts around.

Ebrahim stops in his tracks. Confronts her.

EBRAHIM
Are you spying on me?

ZAHRA
I have eyes.

EBRAHIM
(dismissive)
Mind your own business.

Ebrahim walks on. Zahra tags along.

ZAHRA
Soraya is my business.

EBRAHIM
Soraya?

ZAHRA
I know you're cooking up some plot concerning her and that husband of hers --

EBRAHIM
-- There is no plot! Merely complaints --

ZAHRA
-- I'm warning you now that I won't let any harm come to my little niece.

Ebrahim looks around to see if anyone's heard Zahra. He ushers her around a corner, out of sight of the villagers on the street.

EBRAHIM
Muzzles should be for women, not dogs.

ZAHRA
There's no better wife and mother in this town than Soraya. And you know it.

EBRAHIM
We are *all* of the opinion that she goes to Hashem's too often and stays too long.

ZAHRA SLAPS HIM. He's shocked. Never has she nor any women done that. But she's furious and bears in on him.

ZAHRA
WE are of that opinion? Well, WE made her take that job. WE accompanied her there on her first day. WE decided she should cook and clean for two households. WE gave her no choice. *I want to know what's going on!*

Ebrahim will not tolerate this from a woman.

EBRAHIM
 (hissing in fury)
 This is men's business, not
 women's. You're not capable of
 understanding. Ignorant *female*!

Ebrahim spits, ugly disgust distorting his features. He turns on his heels, leaving Zahra to scurry after him.

ZAHRA
 He's a fake, that so-called mullah.
 Soraya said Ali told her so!
 (this slows Ebrahim, she
 tries to reason with him)
 He's stolen this town from you,
 Ebrahim.
 (he resumes walking)
 A lifetime of honesty, authority
 and goodness gone...and I
 considered marrying you!

*
 *

Zahra can't keep up with him. She's left shouting at his retreating figure.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 You're no better than a servant, a
 slave, a *sigheh*! Yes, like a
 temporary wife! A wife to a
 monster!

*

Zahra's figure shrinks in the distance as Ebrahim strides with the vigor of a much younger man. His once thoughtful face has hardened, more stone than flesh, more hatred than humanity. No woman can talk like this and get away with it.

61 EXT. VILLAGE ALLEY - DAY

61

Soraya fills pails of water from a community spigot. Zahra speaks to her --

ZAHRA
 There is a plot, Soraya. I don't
 know what it is, but it's against
 you. I know it.

Soraya hefts the pails, one in each hand, walks down the alley -- Zahra leans to assist with the pails, but Soraya refuses, continuing to walk. Zahra moves with her.

SORAYA
 I'm just an inconvenient wife,
 hardly worthy of a plot. I'm
 practically invisible.

ZAHRA

Those men are planning something.
Ebrahim as good as told me. You
have to quit this job. You cannot
go back to Hashem's.

Soraya stops, looks at her aunt --

SORAYA

Quit?! This job is my only hope. I
save every rial. No, I cannot quit.

ZAHRA

You cannot stay.

SORAYA

In case you've forgotten, I was
told by the same men you're talking
about to take this job. I did what
I was told, and now the job's mine.
I'm keeping it.

Soraya, rattled, starts walking again toward home, straining
with the pails of water.

ZAHRA

Ali's complaining about you.

SORAYA

He always complains about me.

ZAHRA

What do you say to him?

SORAYA

Nothing. If I do he hits me.

ZAHRA

You're not hearing me. They will
find a way to hurt you. That mullah
could get a snake to swallow its
own tail.

SORAYA

I don't want to hear it. There is
no plot, there is no crime, there's
just one Auntie with too much
imagination.

Soraya turns toward her home, more shaken than defiant, sets
the pails down before entering. Zahra calls after her.

ZAHRA

You never learned to listen between
the words, Soraya.

Soraya dismissive, goes inside --

62 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME - DAY 62

Soraya leaves Hashem's house with a basketful of laundry on her hip. Behind her, we see:

Hashem and Mohsen, smiling, disappear back into their home. Out of sight, across the street --

-- ALI leans against a wall smoking, watching...

FADE TO:

63 EXT. VILLAGE OF KUPAYEH - DAWN 63

A rooster CROWS as the horizon glows with a saffron dawn. People are already stirring. A low-tech CALL TO PRAYER -- a young man bellowing on a rooftop -- floats over the town.

64 INT. MOSQUE - DAWN 64

Mullah Hassan leads Ali and GROUP OF MEN in prayer, kneeling on mats, then bowing their heads in the direction of Mecca.

As they continue...

TIME CUT TO:

65 INT. MOSQUE, LIVING AREA - DAY 65

Later. Another lavish room, carved low tables, silver platters, brass pitchers, chandelier, and even a television in the corner. Pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini and other chiselled holy men adorn the walls. Brown outlines of the whitewashed walls belie where other pictures of the Shah and his family had hung before.

A SERVANT GIRL, about ten, sets down some nuts, fruit, and tea, from a platter before:

MULLAH HASSAN and ALI. A bell rings. Mullah Hassan gestures the girl to let him in. Moments later she returns with --

-- HASHEM nods in greeting.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)
Please, Hashem, come. Sit. Have
some tea and fruit.

HASHEM

All right. Thank you. Those
pistachios look good.

The mullah, fiddling with his worry beads, waves to the girl who knows to start pouring tea for the men.

Hashem sits on an ornate cushion, a rough-hewn man out of place in such luxury. Ali slaps him on the back, lightening the moment. Hashem is clearly eager to please all present. He takes some nuts, trying to look at ease.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)

We have business to take care of today. Your friend, Ali here, has some serious concerns about Soraya. The time she spends with you. What she does. How she behaves.

Off Hashem's look---

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)

And as you know, I am beholden to our ayatollah to enforce all standards of virtue as required by *Sharia*.

Ali paces, shaking his head as if truly disturbed. Hashem squirms.

The mullah takes out an illuminated document, very formal, and hands it to Hashem to look at it.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)

Islam demands it. Otherwise, a judge from Teheran could be called in, and then, well, it would be out of my hands. An official who doesn't know you as I do...

The mullah shrugs. The illiterate mechanic, Hashem, is duly intimidated by both the words and the document, which he cannot read, and the mullah knows it.

HASHEM

I can not read.

The mullah turns it over to Ali with a look. Ali is working up some anger.

ALI

We're old friends, are we not?

Hashem nods, wary, worried.

ALI (CONT'D)
 Then I will just say it. Friend to
 friend. Man to man.
 (pause)
 Does my wife sleep at your house?

HASHEM
 (half-rising in panic)
 No! Ali, you know she's home every
 night.

ALI
 That is not an answer. Does she lie
 down? Does she nap?

HASHEM
 (frantic)
 I don't know.

Disapproving glares. Ali leans in, calming, guiding Hashem.

ALI
 Hashem, old friend, be honest. You
 surely know if she lies down on a
 bed in your house. This is not a
 subtle act.

Hashem looks at their stern faces. Then, summoning whatever
 courage he has left, he rises to his feet.

HASHEM
 I am sorry, I'm a simple man -- I
 don't know what you're talking
 about --

ALI
 -- Sit down, Hashem --

HASHEM
 -- No, no, I have to go. I am
 going.

He turns to leave. Ali wants to stop him, but Mullah Hassan
 gives him a gesture of calm.

Hashem exits --

66

INT. GARAGE - DAY

66

Hashem works beneath a jeep while his son, Mohsen, plays with
 a spinning top.

HASHEM
 Mohsen, hand me the oil pan --

He reaches out from beneath the car, arm extended...

HASHEM (CONT'D)
-- Mohsen, the oil pan --

Still no response, no movement. Hashem rolls out from beneath the vehicle, looks at his son who is staring toward the open garage door where:

ALI and MULLAH HASSAN stand. They have just entered. Hashem rises. Ali hands him the oil pan.

HASHEM (CONT'D)
Thank you...

Mullah Hassan pats Mohsen on the shoulder.

MULLAH HASSAN
How are you, Mohsen?

The boy, frightened, looks at his father who says nothing.

ALI
We need two witnesses, Hashem. We already have one. Now, if you wish we can talk to the boy, see if he has seen Soraya lying about the house.

HASHEM
He doesn't know what you're talking about.

MULLAH HASSAN
Sure he does. Don't you, Mohsen?

Mohsen nods, confused, wanting to please them.

HASHEM
Leave him out of it.

ALI
We can't -- Because, Hashem, if my wife was indecent with you, perhaps you enjoyed it. Were part of it.

MULLAH HASSAN
Such a man could also could be charged -- and punished.

ALI
In some cases, stoned, along with the woman.

Hashem tosses a rag aside, looks away.

MULLAH HASSAN
 What would happen to Mohsen if his
 father was not around to care for
 him? A mental hospital?

ALI
 Or I could take care of him in the
 jail where I work.

Hashem doesn't say anything. Mullah Hassan addresses Mohsen:

MULLAH HASSAN
 Tell us, boy, what does Soraya do
 at the house? Does she touch you?

Mohsen is confused, then Hashem speaks up:

HASHEM
 Enough! Stop!

Both men now focus on Hashem. Ali takes the lead:

ALI
 She lies down on the bed in your
 house, correct?

HASHEM
 (near tears, pitiful)
 Why are you doing this? It's not
 right --

ALI
 -- Tell us that she lies down in
 your house --

HASHEM
 All right!
 (angrily, to mollify them)
 Maybe when I'm out...

ALI
 Maybe?

HASHEM
 I think once I came home and she
 was lying down. Napping. She said
 she had a headache.

Ali nods like he's known it all along. Hashem is disgusted
 with himself, but he is weak. Weak for his son.

ALI
 And she says things, doesn't she?
 Things she used to say to me.
 Things only a husband should
 hear...

Hashem nods slowly, giving them what they want.

67 EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY 67 *

Zahra feeds a piece of bread to a canary she keeps in a cage. She whistles at it trying to coax it to sing.

The sound of yelling erupts in the distance. She listens. It quiets down. She resumes whistling to the bird.

There it is again. Louder. Distinct. A man yells:

 ALI (OS)
 Soraya!

Other voices join in. She rushes inside, re-emerges with a scarf on, heads out the front door to see what's happening. *

68 EXT. ALLEY OUTSIDE ZAHRA'S HOUSE - DAY 68 *

A HALF-DOZEN PEOPLE STREAM PAST her house, heading to the noise. She joins them. *

69 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 69

Zahra bumps into a veiled woman moving down the street.

 ZAHRA
 What is it? Do you know?

The woman shakes her head. Zahra pushes forward. Up ahead, she can see the top of Ali's head, then his arm raised as he WHACKS someone violently. Zahra can't see over the SMALL CROWD beginning to form.

 ALI
 My own wife. A whore! How could
 this be? In my own household. This
 cannot be...

Ali, muttering, acting shocked and hurt, circles Soraya. She tries to slip away, but she is blocked by people wherever she turns. A ring forms around her. She tries to break through, but is shoved until she reels back to the center. A domestic theater-in-the-round.

 MAN IN CROWD #1 & #2 & #3
 What'd you do, Soraya?... Have you
 no shame?... One husband not enough
 for you?...

ALI HITS her again, then KICKS at her as she tries to scurry away. Soraya rises, trembling, grasps a woman's arm.

SORAYA

Please. Please. Help me. Let me through.

The woman considers helping her until a man (no doubt her husband) gives her a dirty look and shoves Soraya. She stumbles, gets up, staggers across the circle, begging another woman for help. Again she is pushed back.

Ali climbs on a low wall, pointing at his wife, crying out. He's the real victim...and he lets them all know:

ALI

Whore in my bed! No husband is safe. Allah, save us from this filth...

Zahra pushes her way forward. People stand on tiptoe, crane and sway to see what's happening, excited by a break in the small town boredom. The crowd has grown to thirty people, with more coming.

Zahra emerges into the clearing.

ZAHRA

What is wrong?! What's going on here?

Someone shoves her too, and she nearly sprawls on the ground.

Everyone falls silent. Zahra is respected in this community and this is a breach. But no one assists her. Then:

Soraya rushes to her aunt, steadies her. Zahra touches her niece's battered face. Resolve fills her.

Ali struts on the wall.

ALI (CONT'D)

Keep out of this Zahra. This whore doesn't deserve your protection. Stay away. We will handle this without you.

Zahra, only a lone woman in a headscarf, commands the scene with the force of her presence alone.

ZAHRA

What are you doing, Ali? This is beneath even you.

She looks around at the crowd, meeting eyes with all people she knows. Some stare back boldly, others look away. She walks from one to another, pointing at them.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 What are you doing, Amir? And you,
 Hamid? Maryam, you know better.

Ashamed, they step back, calm down. Ali's little drama is
 collapsing, and this enrages him.

ALI
 She is getting what she deserves.
 She has been unfaithful to me. Do
 you know that? Unfaithful! Yes! She
 is a whore! She sleeps with another
 man!

Low shouts:

MAN IN CROWD #1 & #2
 Who? What man? Are there others?...

Grumbling. Spitting.

ZAHRA
 What do you mean she's been
 unfaithful? When did this happen?
 Where? Who is this man?

ALI
 Hashem! He admitted it!

A gasp arises. Tongues start wagging, heads nodding. Many are
 the same MEN Ali was talking to outside the market when Zahra
 passed by earlier. The onlookers, including LEILA and
 friends, want more details.

Zahra takes Soraya by the shoulders, addresses the crowd.

ZAHRA
 Quiet! Quiet down! All of you.
 Hush!

Many quiet down, slap those who are still noisy.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 We're going to my house.

Noises of disapproval, calls for "Here! Now!"

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 Just Soraya, Ali and I.
 (to Bitu)
 Fetch Ebrahim.
 (to others)
 We will settle this like civilized
 human beings.

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

People grumble. Teenagers laugh. Ali jumps off the wall, displeased but intent.

Soraya and Zahra clutch each other and walk toward the knot of people. Ali approaches.

ALI
You're not running this show,
Zahra. This is between me and my
wife.

ZAHRA
Is that why you beat her in public?

---off Ali's glare.

ZAHRA
My house. Come if it really is so
important.

Trembling, Soraya pulls her chador across her face. Zahra holds her tight, as the villagers part to let them pass.

70

INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

70

*

Ali paces. Soraya sits on a cushion, holding and rocking herself. Zahra oversees. There's a knock at the door.

Zahra lets in Ebrahim. He meets her gaze with reptilian coldness. Behind him a group of villagers waits silently. Zahra shuts the door.

EBRAHIM
I see you've put yourself at the
center of things, Zahra. So I'll
ask you, what is this about?

Ali jumps in.

ALI
She...
(points at his wife)
...has betrayed me! With Hashem. I
suspected it all along, but now I
know. I caught them in the act.

Coolly, Ebrahim removes his glasses, checks them for spots, wipes the lenses and puts them back on. He looks down his long nose at Soraya.

EBRAHIM
Soraya, is this true? Did you
betray him?

SORAYA
No. I did not.

ALI
(hysterical)
You're lying! Admit it! The whole village knows. You go to Hashem's every day. You neglect me and take care of him. You sleep with him!

SORAYA
(to Ebrahim)
That's not true. I'm a married woman. I would never even think such a thing.

ZAHRA
(to Ali)
You say she's betrayed you. That you caught her in the act. Exactly what has she done?

FLASHBACK TO:

71 EXT. HASHEM'S HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

71 *

It's the wake for Hashem's wife. Hashem and Soraya speak to each other in the main room as Ali watches them from the courtyard through the window.

ALI (V.O.)
I saw them standing close to each other. I saw them whispering.

Soraya and Hashem touch hands accidentally as he takes the sewing machine from her.

ALI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She touched him. I caught her!

CUT BACK TO:

72 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

72 *

ALI
And another day I saw her leaving, smiling at him, talking in a friendly way.

EBRAHIM
Is this true? Soraya?

Soraya lifts her chin, fights back her fears.

SORAYA
I told Hashem that after I marketed
I would take the clothes home to
iron, and that I would come back
later to make dinner.

FLASH CUT TO:

73 INT. HASHEM'S HOME - DAY

73

Soraya is leaving, shopping basket stuffed with laundry in hand. Hashem and his son, Mohsen, wave to her.

HASHEM
You'll be back to cook our dinner,
won't you?

Soraya smiles, a little laugh.

SORAYA
Yes, Hashem. Don't worry. I won't
forget your food.

Hashem and Mohsen grin at this.

SORAYA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We did smile at each other.

FLASH CUT BACK:

74 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

74

*

Ali, jumpy, opens the front door, peers out.

*

ALI
He's here. Hashem. Now we'll get to
the truth.

Ali opens the door, and an anxious Hashem enters while Zahra speaks with Ebrahim.

ZAHRA
Speaking to the man who employs you
is not an offense. Speaking to the
husband of a friend is not an
offense. Smiling? Smiling is not
against the law!

Ebrahim turns to Hashem, tries to steady him with a flat voice and fixed stare.

EBRAHIM
Hashem, when you and Soraya were
whispering, what did she say?

SORAYA
We weren't whispering...

With a gesture Ebrahim silences her. Hashem, very uneasy, looks to his two male friends for reassurance. Zahra notices, shoots Ali the evil eye.

HASHEM
She said she was going to iron some clothes, then fix dinner after... uh... after she took a nap.

SORAYA
I never said that. I don't nap. There's no time. I have too much work.

The men ignore her.

EBRAHIM
Hashem, look at me closely. Don't look at the women, just me. I want you to answer yes or no, all right?

Hashem nods.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Did Soraya suggest she would like to rest at your house?

HASHEM
(glancing at Ali)
Yes, yes she did. Like she has before. She's always at my house. She lies down on my bed. She says embarrassing things to me.

Ali nods in agreement. Ebrahim sees this, senses possible coercion here, something about Hashem's story he doesn't trust.

SORAYA
That's a lie! I never stay one minute extra when my work is done. Never! The door is always open. I swear before you and Allah.
(turning to Hashem)
Why are you saying these things? I loved your wife. I tend your sweet son. I was asked to work for you BY *THESE MEN*. I have done nothing wrong.

Ebrahim steps up to Hashem, speaks plainly:

EBRAHIM

Hashem, a man accusing his wife of adultery could bring down the wrath of the entire community. These kinds of crimes cannot be tolerated. You must be absolutely sure.

ALI

He's telling the truth!

After an awkward pause, Hashem addresses the men.

HASHEM

I tell you the truth. Ali knows it. I told him. I told Mullah Hassan also. Even the gossips on the street know.

ZAHRA

Those gossips know nothing. They just repeat what they hear. It doesn't make it true.

ALI

I saw them whisper. They held hands.

SORAYA

No! I smiled. That's all. I smile at everyone.

ALI

Like the village idiot.

SORAYA

(pleading with Ebrahim)
The whole town knows me. I am honorable.

ALI

They say you're pregnant.

SORAYA

What!?

(turning on Ali)

Well, if I'm pregnant, just wait nine months and you'll know I'm not!

Ebrahim holds his hands aloft, playing the arbiter, the judge...all the things he does in his capacity as mayor.

EBRAHIM

Soraya, two men are accusing you of conduct unworthy of a wife and mother. Can you prove your innocence?

SORAYA

Prove? How can I prove my innocence? They're the ones accusing me. They have to prove it.

EBRAHIM

When a man accuses his wife, she must prove her innocence.
(shrugs like it's obvious)
That is the law. On the other hand, if a wife accuses her husband, she must have proof of his guilt. Do you understand?

ZAHRA

Yes, it's clear. All women are guilty, and all men are innocent.

Ebrahim turns on her. Once again, she hit his buttons.

EBRAHIM

You are incapable of understanding the nuances of the law. It is my duty to conduct this inquiry with the cooperation of the religious authority. Sheik Hassan and I will be the judges.

Soraya crumples into herself. Zahra panics, tries to stop the momentum. The men move to the door. Hashem gets out fast as he can, Ali, agitated follows. Ebrahim is the last. Zahra grasps his arm.

ZAHRA

We have known each other all our lives. You cannot lie to me. She has done nothing wrong. This is a plot. This is about Ali and that girl he wants to marry.

EBRAHIM

(incensed and intense)
This is about a crime committed against a husband, a father, two sons, a town... and Islam itself. That's what this is about. That's all this is about. Now out of my way, woman.

Ebrahim scrapes Zahra off his arm like she's mud. From Soraya we hear the sound of sobbing. Ebrahim leaves without a word to her.

Zahra sits beside her niece, gently removing the chador from the younger woman's head. She smooths out Soraya's hair like she's a child, then lifts Soraya's chin to peer into her eyes.

Soraya sees the question on her aunt's face.

SORAYA
You...don't believe me?

For the first time, Soraya seems really unglued.

SORAYA (CONT'D)
You, of all people. I was raised to
never even have such *thoughts*, much
less...

*

Soraya weeps. Zahra melts. Embraces her niece.

ZAHRA
I had to hear you say it, child. I
had to. May God protect you. These
days men have gone crazy.

A face peeks through the window. It is Bita, the nice woman we met in the bakery.

BITA
Zahra! Zahra! Are you there?

ZAHRA
Yes, Bita. The door is open, come
in.

The door swings open and three women enter, all in black chadors.

BITA
Ebrahim sent us. He asked us to
stay with you. He's rounding up the
men. They're having a meeting.

Zahra and Soraya exchange looks. Soraya grips her aunt's hand.

ZAHRA
Who is with him?

The two other women move to the kitchen, begin making tea, being useful.

BITA
There's the mullah and Ali, of
course. And Hashem...

75 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY 75

Ebrahim and the mullah walk through:

A CORRIDOR OF PEOPLE who have crowded the street.

76 EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY 76

They head into the doorway of the low building. The mullah is dressed in his best robes and carries an illuminated Koran. Close behind are Ali and Hashem. It has the feel of a boxer and his team leaving the ring as fans crowd their route.

ALI'S FRIENDS, who were smoking from a waterpipe with him earlier, hang by the door.

*
*
*

BITA (V.O)
...Both of your sons, Soraya. Ali's
friends...that old blind man,
Mohammed, who lives by the
stream...

*
*

Now nearing the door is MOHAMMED, a blind man with milky eyes. People guide him by passing his hand from one person to the next up the line. Soraya's teenage boys, Reza and Kamran, follow.

*

BITA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...and there's Morteza Ramazani.

An ancient, bent man with wild white hair, a white beard, and a cane pushes through the pack. This is MORTEZA RAMAZANI. A elderly woman whom we met earlier, MRS. MASSOUD, watches warily as the old man is allowed into the town hall, exhorted by Ali's Friends and the TEENAGE BOYS. One of them, a YOUNG THUG, moves off with his TWO BUDDIES, talking excitedly.

*
*
*
*
*

FLASH CUT BACK:

77 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY 77 *

Soraya raises her head to gaze at Bita.

SORAYA
My own father.
(pauses, then)
He'll go along with whatever they
decide. He always has.

BITA

All the men are that way. They
won't stand up for us.

Bit a nods. Soraya shakes her head.

ZAHRA

In all my life, the only
punishments ever meted out by a
mayor for moral crimes were fines
or a community service, just to
make an example. That is all.

SORAYA

(quietly)

This is different.

The words hang in the air because they're true. Zahra rouses
Soraya from her seat.

ZAHRA

You are going to lie down in my
bedroom.

SORAYA

No, I don't want to.

ZAHRA

This time you will listen to me.

Without resistance, Soraya heads to the bedroom. Zahra turns
to Bit a.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

Why do you come wearing black
chadors?

BITA (CONT'D)

Forgive me. It means nothing.

ZAHRA

I know what you're thinking. I am
too. I want you to go find out what
they're saying. Tell me as soon as
you know anything.

BITA

Yes, Zahra *Khanum*.
(turns, stops; then)
I *know* she is innocent.

*

ZAHRA

Yes. Now go.

Bit a leaves. The other two women caw together like crows in
the kitchen.

78 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY 78

In a daze, Soraya enters Zahra's dim bedroom. She lowers herself slowly onto the bed, touching the old family quilt as if reading memories with her fingertips.

She puts her head on the pillow. In her line of sight on the nightstand is AN OLD PHOTO OF ZAHRA AND HER HUSBAND WITH EBRAHIM AND HIS WIFE. Everyone is laughing, except Ebrahim. Next to it is the PHOTO we saw earlier of Soraya.

Soraya studies the face of the innocent girl that was her. She pulls her knees up, curling into a fetal position, and closes her eyes, lips moving silently in prayer.

79 OMITTED 79 *

80 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY 80 *

Zahra drinks Coke and smokes silently with the two black scarved women. There's a tap on the door...another, louder...then a flurry, sounding almost like gun shots.

Zahra pokes her head out her window --

-- A GANG OF TEENAGE BOYS ARE THROWING ROCKS at her house. *

81 EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY 81

Zahra leans out and shrieks: *

ZAHRA
Stop it! Go away! Get out of here! *

They laugh and continue. She grabs a broom, strides toward them. *

ZAHRA
Get out of here you thugs. I know
who you are. I'll tell your
fathers.

One YOUNG THUG stands up to her.

YOUNG THUG
Your niece is a slut and you're a
tired bag of shit.

Zahra SLAPS HIM full in the face. He almost falls down,
embarrassed in front of his friends. *

ZAHRA
Is that how your parents taught you
to talk?

YOUNG THUG
Ha! My parents? They know I'm here.

He takes a few steps away from Zahra, then throws one more
rock at the house and SMASHES A WINDOW. Zahra glares at them
as they leave. Once gone, she hurries inside, stepping over
the stones that strew her doorstep.

*
*

82 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

82

Soraya sits on the edge of the bed as Zahra hurries in, goes
directly to a closet.

SORAYA
What was that noise?

ZAHRA
Teenagers.

Zahra roots around in a chest, pulls out a large box.

SORAYA
What did they do?

ZAHRA
Just being boys. You know. They
think they run the world.

Zahra puts the box on the bed, opens it. Carefully, she pulls
out a beautiful embroidered white dress.

SORAYA
Your wedding dress.

Zahra drinks it in for a moment.

ZAHRA
Yes. And you must put it on.

SORAYA
What? Why?

ZAHRA
Because you cannot go before them
in your work clothes. You will have
dignity.
(pause)
That is who they will have to face--
a woman of value.

Soraya slumps. Stunned. Resigned.

SORAYA
They think I am nothing. A dress
won't change that.

ZAHRA
Look at me.
(lifting Soraya's chin)
You are my niece. My blood flows in
your veins. You will hold your head
up high and you will make them see
you.

A small smile creeps across Soraya's face.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
You! Soraya. A child of this
village. A wife of twenty years. MY
niece! Do you hear me?

Zahra waves Soraya to her feet. Holds the dress up to her.

ZAHRA
You're innocent. Don't forget it.
(then, under her breath)
But even if you weren't no one
deserves such a punishment.

SORAYA
I wish I were strong like you.
Brave like you...

This breaks Zahra's heart. She embraces Soraya.

ZAHRA
You are. I promise.

SORAYA
(softly)
Dear God, make this go away.

Bitra enters the room with Mrs. Massoud at her heels.

Zahra and Soraya wipe their tears, ready for news.

BITA
The men have decided.

BANG! The large wooden door of the town hall BURSTS OPEN.

The entire town, all 250 residents, surges toward the steps.
Anxious with anticipation a few call out: "Verdict!"
"Justice!" etc. Women cluster, chatter, concerned.

Those who can't see climb on the fountain in the center of the square, on surrounding walls, rooftops etc.

First out is Ebrahim, the mayor, followed closely by Mullah Hassan. The crowd reacts, murmuring. The two men step aside.

The old bent man with wild white hair and beard, Soraya's father:

MORTEZA RAMAZANI steps out. He raises his eyes and arms to the crowd. They fall silent.

His voice quavers, then builds with conviction.

MORTEZA
Mahkum! MAHKUM! Guilty! SHE IS
 GUILTY!

Someone FIRES off a GUN. Dogs everywhere are barking. Children cry. Birds take off. Lizards hide. Cats scat.

Now Ali emerges from the building. All eyes turn to him. Slowly he raises his right hand. A hush comes over the mob as they hold a collective breath.

ALI
 I demand vengeance! Vengeance by
 blood! May God punish her!
 (pause)
 May God punish her!

THE MOB becomes animated. Insults fly. One man bursts into dance. Ali gets caught up in the support, screams at the top of his lungs:

ALI (CONT'D)
 I must have vengeance!

Ali's friends climb the steps, surround him, slap him on the back, kiss him on the cheek -- expressing their sympathies and supporting his desire for vengeance.

The mob -- men, women and children -- picks up the chant, "Punish her...punish her...vengeance!" It's a frenzy, an infection of vengeance. The air itself throbs with blood lust.

Barely noticed, Ali's sons, the mayor's assistants, and the blind man, MOHAMMED, exit the town hall, remaining on the portico.

Ebrahim steps forward trying to get the mob's attention, but it's hard. They're too excited. He has to repeat himself.

EBRAHIM
 Please, may I have your
 attention...Silence, please. My
 friends, please...

At last the crowd calms a bit. Ali is carried back to the portico by the crowd where he beams, standing among the group of nine men who convicted Soraya.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
 My friends, we are gathered here in
 the company of our beloved Morteza
 Ramazani...
 (gesturing toward Morteza)
 ...Soraya's father, and the
 saddest, most humiliated and
 loneliest man on the face of the
 Earth today.

Calls of "True! Poor man!" from the crowd.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
 His honor has been sullied. Not
 only that, but the honor of our
 village has also been tarnished, as
 has that of our families. All our
 families.

A shout arises. Men shake their fists. Women seem shocked, some excited, others pained. And from the back of the square like an engine revving, "Read the verdict...Read the verdict...READ THE VERDICT!"

Again, Ebrahim settles the mob.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
 My friends...my friends...
 citizens...
 (raising his hand)
 Let me read.

Ebrahim takes out a paper, adjusts his glasses.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
 In the name of God, the
 Compassionate, the Merciful.

---as a chorus the Muslims respond.

VILLAGERS
 Praise be to Thee, oh Lord, All-
 powerful and just, praise be to
 Thee!"

EBRAHIM

Today, the sixth day of Mordad in the Islamic year 1365, the municipal council of Kupayeh, in a meeting lasting forty minutes, has reached a unanimous decision. Not one member tried to defend the accused.

A few male voices yell. A woman wails. Ebrahim continues.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)

We have all decided that the guilty party, Soraya Manutchehri...

The mob erupts. "Slut! Bitch! Shame! Death!"

Ebrahim looks to his fellow "jurors." The crowd is too enthusiastic. The mullah steps forward.

MULLAH HASSAN

Children! Children! There must be order. Quiet. Your mayor is speaking.

Again the mob settles down. Ebrahim thanks the mullah with a nod.

EBRAHIM

We have decided that the guilty party, Soraya Manutchehri, shall be stoned before the day ends, until SHE... IS... DEAD.

A lone male voice slices the air.

LONE VOICE

It is illegal. Stoning is forbidden by Islam!

SILENCE throughout the throng.

*

MULLAH HASSAN

(gestures, reassuring)

True! It's true. Muslims cannot stone a human being. However, once a woman is convicted of infidelity, she ceases to be human. This is Sharia!

*

Relieved, a cheer erupts. Men throw their hats. Women keen. But Ebrahim needs a few more moments.

EBRAHIM

Quiet! NOW! QUIET!

A man shouts, "Let's do it now!"

Another adds, "Let's get her! Why wait?"

A third, "I'll kill her like I do a rabbit, with one stone!"

The crowd yips in agreement.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)

My friends, listen. Listen to me.
You will have your revenge, each
and every one of you, but this will
be done in accordance with the will
of God and our revered imam. In one
hour it will take place here. On
the town square. There are
preparations to be made. Now,
everyone, get to work!

*

A CHEER and smattering of applause. The crowd begins to
disperse. The GRAVEDIGGER grabs a shovel. Another man grabs a
pickaxe --

*

*

*

84 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

84

*

The SERVANT GIRL we saw earlier at Mullah Hassan's house
races through the streets, weaving and bobbing through the
crowd. She clutches a piece of paper in one hand, and holds
her scarf on her hair with the other.

A CAR arrives and TWO MEN get out, green fatigue jackets,
jeans, and weapons on shoulder slings, one being a
Kalashnikov. Their beards are unkempt and their bearing un-
military. They are REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS.

The Servant Girl turns a corner past more walkers and runs
into:

85 EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY

85

She flies past the flock of black draped women keening in the
courtyard and pounds on the door.

Zahra opens the door expecting an adult. Instead the little
girl, panting, hands her the paper in her hand.

SERVANT GIRL

From Mullah Hassan.

Zahra opens the paper, reads it. She loses her breath.
Shocked, she steadies herself on the doorframe. The women in
the courtyard look at her and renew their keening. The little
girl tugs at her skirt.

SERVANT GIRL (CONT'D)
 (embarrassed)
Khanum, the mullah asked if you
 would please put your mark on the
 paper so he knows that you received
 the message.

Zahra looks closely at the girl.

ZAHRA
 He wants my mark?

Zahra crumples the paper in her fist and gently hands it back
 to the girl.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 Tell him I got the message.

Worried, the little girl takes the paper, bites her lip...and
 runs off.

86

INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

86

*

Zahra turns into her home. Bitra takes her by her arm.

ZAHRA
 (frantic)
 They're going to stone her to death
 in the square...

Her eyes fly to the kitchen table where Soraya's young
 daughters and Mohsen, Hashem's son, play checkers and drink
 juice. Above them a clock reads 3:00.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
 ...in one hour.

Bitra gasps, then looks to the bedroom where Soraya is.

BITA
 Are you going to tell her?

ZAHRA
 (turns, reeling from the
 knowledge)
 I can't...you tell her.

Bitra recoils at the thought. Zahra comes to a decision --

ZAHRA
 No! We can't let it happen.

Bitra nods, then:

ZAHRA
Keep the children here.

She hurries to the bedroom, goes inside. Bita stares at the door.

87 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

87

Zahra addresses Soraya, under her breath:

ZAHRA
We're going. Now.
(waving her hands)
Hurry!

SORAYA
What have they decided?

ZAHRA
There's no time.

Zahra tosses a dark chador at Soraya. She wraps it around herself as she speaks.

ZAHRA
We have to go.

*
*

SORAYA
-- Tell me --

*

ZAHRA
They've found you guilty and will
execute the sentence in one hour.
We have to get out of here.

*
*

Before Soraya can react, Zahra grabs her hand, pulls her to the back door.

SORAYA
Where will we go? We can't drive.
We have no food.

ZAHRA
We'll worry about that once we get
out of here.

Zahra cracks the back door. A REVOLUTIONARY GUARD, rifle slung over his shoulder, lounges by the back wall. He turns slowly, looks at her. Zahra closes the door, stymied.

ZAHRA
So our mullah's called in the
revolutionary guard.

She gestures Soraya to follow, rushing toward the front of the house where they almost bump into Bitu coming toward them.

BITA
There's one out front too.

Silence. They hesitate. Then Zahra pulls her along.

ZAHRA
I don't care.

They exit --

87A EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY 87A

Zahra and Soraya steer away from the REVOLUTIONARY GUARD who turns as one of the Teenagers points. Shouts are heard, "Halt!" --

Where are you going?! **YOUNG THUG**

Zahra keeps pulling Soraya --

ZAHRA
Keep walking....

They are cut off by the Revolutionary Guard and OTHERS. Zahra stops. She and Soraya stare at them.

ZAHRA
Leave us be. We're getting out of here.

87B INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY 87B

Zahra and Soraya are SHOVED ROUGHLY into the house -- Bitar and the girls come over, alarmed. Silence.

Soraya stares back at the door a moment, then says simply:

SORAYA
So...he's finally done it, he's
finally gotten rid of me.

CUT TO:

87C EXT. VILLAGE STREET (#10) - DAY 87C

---KIDS of all ages, boys and girls, race around picking up stones, place them in pockets, scarfs, pouches, etc.

87D EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY 87D

---in the surrounding hills, fields, etc. stones are tossed in buckets, bowls, other containers, a rush of activity. Some stones are too small, others too large, palm-size is perfect.

87E EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY 87E

---a wheelbarrow, a basket, a toy wagon -- filling up with rocks. A DONKEY GROANS as its pouches are filled with rocks.

87F EXT. VILLAGE STREET (#10) - DAY 87F

---wheels rolling, feet racing, toward the village square

NOTE: The shots and sounds of gathering stones can be intercut with scenes leading up to the stoning, a kind of punctuation or ticking clock toward the inevitable...

88 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY 88 *

Three pickaxes take turns tearing at the hard ground. The hole is about a foot deep, darker the deeper it gets. One of the men puts down his tool and wipes his brow as:

A wheelbarrow loaded with stones rolls past. It is followed by another and another. They clatter and clang as they're pushed quickly to a growing pile of rocks.

A four year old BOY in a worn Mickey Mouse tee shirt pulls his wagon loaded with stones to the pile too. He empties them. One of the laborers pats him on the back and he smiles.

The boy holds out his hand to the man, spreading his fingers to reveal another stone.

89 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY 89

Soraya sits on the bed. Her two daughters, four year old MALAKA and six year old KATANEH stand at her knees. Soraya takes off a gold necklace and drops it over Malaka's head.

SORAYA

I want you to keep this always.
Don't lose it and don't ever take
it off. Do you understand?

The little girl nods, awed by her gift.

Soraya takes a ring off her finger and holds it up for Kataneh.

SORAYA (CONT'D)

And this is for you Kataneh. It belonged to my mother, and to her mother before her, and her mother before her. Someday, you will give it to your oldest daughter.

(as Kataneh nods, pleased)

It's too big for you now, so you have Aunt Zahra wrap thread around it so it fits.

KATANEH

I can do that all by myself.

Soraya nods. She glances at Zahra who stands quietly in the corner. Also nearby is Bitu.

*

SORAYA

I want you both to be good girls. You listen to your Aunt Zahra. She's going to take care of you. And if anybody says bad things about me, don't listen to them. No matter who says it. Just listen to your great aunt.

Kataneh senses the seriousness, gets scared and sad.

KATANEH

Why can't you take care of us anymore, Mommy?

Soraya can't help it, tears well up and she hugs her daughters.

SORAYA

Because I can't.

Malaka pulls back, upset that her mom's sad.

MALAKA

Don't cry, Mommy. You can have your necklace back.

Soraya laughs through her tears and sweeps her girls up into a giant bear hug.

The clock on the dresser reads 3:20

90 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

90 *

The rock pile grows. An old woman empties her apron full of stones onto it.

The mayor supervises the digging of the hole at the edge of the square. Dusty and sweaty, the men work feverishly. Ebrahim points to one of them

EBRAHIM
You there. Hold this.

The mayor hands the digger the end of a piece of string.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Now get in the hole.

Skeptically, the man hops in. It's now over two feet deep.

Ebrahim takes 8 paces, stretching the string between him and the man holding it. He proceeds to circle the hole at that distance, dragging his foot to mark the circle's circumference in the dirt.

Then, a man steps up and pours quicklime on the circle Ebrahim scraped around the hole.

91 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

91

Zahra enters, sees Soraya standing alone. The clock reads just past 3:30.

*

ZAHRA
Time to get dressed.

Soraya nods, but doesn't move, almost like she's in a trance. Zahra faces her niece, brushing her hair off her face. With trembling fingers, she begins to unbutton Soraya's blouse for her.

SORAYA
When I woke up this morning I
thought I might plant some flowers
in those empty pots I have on the
windowsill.

Zahra continues to undress Soraya, pulling her blouse off her shoulders. She wears a slip underneath.

ZAHRA
I knew they were planning
something. I should have taken you
away.

SORAYA
Violets maybe. Or pansies. The
girls like pansies.

Zahra tugs Soraya's skirt down. Soraya steps out of it.

ZAHRA
I'm a blind old fool. I should have
seen this. How could I miss it? I
have some savings, we could have
left.

Soraya stops Zahra from moving away, speaks firmly:

*

SORAYA
How could you know what they were
planning? Betrayal like this...how
could you recognize something
you've never seen before?

ZAHRA
I should have protected you.

SORAYA
My husband and father and sons
should have protected me.

ZAHRA
Forgive me.

SORAYA
It's my daughters they'll come for
next. You know this. Protect them,
Aunt. They're the ones who matter
now.

ZAHRA
You don't have to worry.

*

*

SORAYA
And when they're older tell my
girls about me -- so they won't be
ashamed of their mother.

*

*

*

*

ZAHRA
I will tell them the truth. I will
tell everyone...I will tell the
world...

*

*

*

*

Zahra stares into the deep dark wise eyes of Soraya.

*

INT. MOSQUE - DAY

EBRAHIM enters quietly. No one else is here. He removes his shoes, crosses to position, kneels, and carefully goes through the ritual of Muslim prayer. He bows his head to the east several times -- deeply serious, drawn in on himself, full of religious contemplation. Then, having completed his prayer he rises slowly and crosses toward an altar with candles.

Ebrahim lights some candles and says softly, pleading:

EBRAHIM

Dear God...if we are doing as you wish, as it pleases you, then grant me the strength to go on. But if what we do is wrong, then give me a sign...a signal...please...

92 INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

92

Close on Mullah Hassan's eye. As we pull back, we see he's admiring himself in a hand mirror, checking out his newly trimmed beard.

The BARBER is nervous. He's the only one working. He combs the mullah's hair, fussing over him.

Mullah Hassan glances at a wall clock. It's nearing 4:00.

MULLAH HASSAN

I think we're done here.

The barber pulls the apron off of the mullah's chest. Shakes it. Mullah Hassan puts on a pair of sunglasses, brushes off his robe, tucks his illuminated Koran under his arm and checks out his appearance once more before exiting into the street.

93 EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY

93

Outside on the patio are the flock of mourners praying and rocking themselves. Bitá and the children are here.

94 INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

94

Zahra wraps a long black chador carefully around Soraya, tucking in every wisp of hair. They are alone. Soraya stares into space, impassive except her whole body trembles.

ZAHRA

Are you frightened?

Soraya blinks out of her state.

SORAYA

Not of death. In this country, only
a dead woman is a free woman.

(pause)

But of dying...of the stones...the
pain.

Soraya nods her head.

ZAHRA

You are innocent. God knows it. He
will take care of you. He will give
you courage.

Tears come. Zahra kisses her on the forehead. Then, a
rustling from the front, someone rushing in and we see it's
KAMRAN, Soraya's younger son, upset --

KAMRAN

Mommy, mommy -- why're they doing
this! Why?! I don't want you to
die!

Soraya hugs him tight, the boy unable to grasp it all.

SORAYA

Don't watch it, my son, don't have
anything to do with it --

KAMRAN

-- But why? Did you do anything
with Hashem? They say you did --

SORAYA

-- I did nothing, but your father
wants to be rid of me and he's
clothed himself in Islam to carry
it out --

Then, more NOISES as REZA, the older brother, steely-eyed,
comes in with other TEENAGERS (the ones who threw rocks).
They GRAB Kamran, roughly drag him out --

REZA

Act like a man, you little fool! --

Kamran is crying ---

YOUNG THUG

-- Little girl, that's what he is --

Kamran, chastened, glances once back at his mother before
leaving with the boys.

Zahra, who has been frozen by this, looks immediately to Soraya -- more tears, head shaking with disbelief. Zahra shuts the door, goes to her.

94A EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD/ALLEY BEHIND HER HOUSE - DAY 94A *

The boys -- and other MEN, including Ali's friends, push and shove and kick at young KAMRAN with phrases like "Stand up and be counted, boy! Time to grow up!" He does so, call it peer pressure or mob control -- but he gains control, stands upright. He and Reza are handed stones...

94B INT. ZAHRA'S BEDROOM - DAY 94B

Zahra still rocks Soraya, holding her close -- *

*

ZAHRA

Go ahead and cry...cry all you want. There's no one here but me...let yourself go, my child. *

-- THUMP on the door. Then another, louder. Bita enters -- *

BITA

They're here. It's time.

Zahra and Soraya double kiss cheeks. *

BITA

Hurry up. People are waiting. *

*

Soraya won't be hurried. She looks at Bita whose eyes are moist with emotion. She gives Bita quick kiss on the cheek, looks at her. *

*

BITA

The girls will be here with me. *

*

*

*

With one more look at each other, a squeeze of hands, Zahra and Soraya walk through Zahra's front room to the door, open it wide to: *

*

95 EXT. ZAHRA'S COURTYARD - DAY 95

They emerge, cross to the outside door, joined by the BLACK-DRAPED WOMEN, open it. Zahra, protective of Soraya, sees: *

*

CITIZENS are crowded outside, staring at the women. DOZENS of pairs of eyes fixed on them. *

*

95A EXT. ALLEY OUTSIDE ZAHRA'S HOUSE - DAY 95A *

Soraya **steps out with Zahra**, raises her bowed head to stare out at the mob. Though hostile, they are rendered silent, staring. There are different GROUPINGS here that we will track: ALI'S FRIENDS, the ELDERS (all men), LEILA and friends, MRS. MASSOUD and other women in black (supporters of Soraya), the TEENAGERS, and for lack of a better word, the MOB as a whole, intent and excited by the prospect of what's ahead. *

Ebrahim's two bearded revolutionary GUARDS, in blue jeans and green jackets, appear before the women. They act as an escort. With the black draped mourners behind them, they begin to move through the crowd. **A path opens for them. As they progress down the alley toward --** *
* *

95B EXT. BRIDGE IN KUPAYEH - DAY 95B *

A dry-bed beneath it. As the procession crosses, MORE PEOPLE, dozens, advance across the rocky ground, angling toward the bridge. These added people and the tumult of VOICES gives courage to the already hostile populace. *
* *
* *

CHILDREN, including Soraya's own sons, REZA and KAMRAN, carry stones, as do many of the adults. Two stones, one in each hand -- REZA raps the stones together, rhythmically, producing a CLACK-CLACK sound -- Others do the same, in chorus, CLACK-CLACK, the stones clapping in unison as the CROWD moves with the accused.

People bump and jostle the women as they walk, VOICES humming. SOME SPIT ON SORAYA, KICK HER, HISSING INVECTIVES. She stumbles to her knees. Zahra catches her, helps her up. More invective, but Soraya ignores them, keeping her eyes fixed ahead. Zahra does her best to protect her niece, shoves people brusquely.

A hairy fist STRIKES Zahra on the back of her head. She stops and the entire procession stops with her. She faces the man.

ZAHRA
Bastard! I have something for you.

Zahra clasps her hands together and brings them down on the man's neck as hard as she can. He coughs and backs away.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
There's more. Anybody want more?

This breaks the tension. Silence. A few giggles. Mrs. Massoud tries to reason with the waterpipe men and the teenagers:

MRS. MASSOUD
Show some respect, please -- some
decency...in God's name....

The CLACKING together of the stones begins again. The path before them opens up, and they walk on toward the center of town unmolested.

CLACK-CLACK go the stones. The five mourners resume their chants as they walk.

MOURNERS
All powerful God, forgive us our
sins...Oh, Mohammed, have pity on
us...All powerful God, forgive us
our sins...Oh, Mohammed...

96

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

96

The procession ends near the fountain in the center of the square. Ebrahim climbs up on it to speak. At the base of the fountain stand Ali, Soraya's father, and the newly coiffed mullah. The women are brought before them, with the rest of the town gathered around.

EBRAHIM
Soraya Manutchehri, after fair and
honest deliberation we have reached
a verdict. You are aware what the
verdict is.

Arising from the crowd: "Death! Death! Death!"

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Did you hear what they said? Our
country's justice has declared that
you should be put to death.

HOOTING. JEERING. The crowd ebbs and flows, the CLACK-CLACK of stones. The "authorities" are aware they have to be quick to keep order. The Revolutionary Guards do their best to keep the crowd off the women, but still they are pushed.

The mullah mounts the fountain. Raises his hands to the mob.

MULLAH HASSAN
My friends, my children. I haven't
lived here long, but Almighty God
has dispatched me to be among you.
(now pointing)
This woman has defiled our village
and this demands atonement.

The cry arises: "*Sang sar! Sang sar!* Stone her! Stone her!"

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)
 With each stone you throw your
 honor will return. A pile has been
 collected over there. Now go get
 your stones.

In the corner of the square the pile of stones, broken tile,
 and bricks has reached six feet tall and twice as wide. Those
 in the crowd who don't have them, rush to gather their
 ammunition, filling pockets and bags. People shove and swipe
 one another for the best stones.

MULLAH HASSAN
 Hold your stones -- hold them --
 no throwing -- we will execute the
 law in a civilized fashion.

Standing still and regal, Soraya stares at the mullah who
 hides behind his sunglasses. He looks over her head, basking
 in the power of his position.

Zahra catches Ebrahim's eye. Pure hatred pours from her
 glare. He adjusts his glasses and stares back as if to say
 "so there, bitch." Suddenly:

A HIGH-PITCHED WAIL plays tinny-sounding MUSIC. The noise
 draws everyone's attention. Some cover their ears, others
 frown and look about, wondering where the annoying SOUND is
 coming from. Then:

The RUMBLE OF ENGINES and black smoke draws everyone's
 attention.

97 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE/EXECUTION SITE - DAY 97

At opposite end of the square, near the execution site, TWO
 OLD VANS PULL UP, The van SPEAKERS whine down, engines still
 rumbling.

Men in greasepaint and gaudy costumes pour out of the
 vehicles followed by a goat, a few trick dogs and two monkeys
 in hats.

98 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY 98

Ebrahim and the mullah share a look of displeasure at this
 unfortunate timing.

The circus has come to town. KIDS drop their stones, run and
 point with glee shouting: "The circus, the circus!"

99

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE/EXECUTION SITE - DAY

99

SIX ITINERANT PERFORMERS survey the town. Next to their vans, they notice the hole with the quicklime circle around it, but dismiss it. Some kind of construction.

Otherwise, the town is great. Everybody's already out and about, and they're all looking at the troupe. Their RINGMASTER, a wiry man with bushy hair, makes his way toward the crowd at the fountain. With a flourish of a hand, a bouquet of flowers springs from his palm.

RINGMASTER

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We bring you greetings.

He points at one of his colleagues, who does a handspring.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)

In the city, we heard that today is market day in your fair village, so we came to amuse and distract you after a hard day's work.

With that he flings a handful of confetti high into the air. Then another. During this, another performer beats A DRUM.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)

Come one, come all. That includes the children. Don't be afraid. See all the wonderful things we have in store for you. Catch!

He reaches into his pockets and tosses wrapped candy to the right, to the left, everywhere!

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)

Catch the candy if you can!

Dropping their stones, kids scramble and scratch, diving for the sweets.

The adult villagers stand stock still. Not a movement. Not a flinch. The drumbeat has stopped.

The smile plastered across the Ringmaster's face starts to melt. He and his fellow clowns share a look. From across the square, the stern mullah looks down upon them.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)

Ah...Finish your prayers. Don't pay any attention to us. Excuse us, please. We didn't know. Later on -- when you're done -- come and see us.

(MORE)

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
 Tricks and magic, animals, things
 for young and old alike. We'll, uh,
 just, uh, get ready for later.

The performers head back to their vans, and pull back, away
 from the main square and park a distance away.

*
 *

100 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

100

Ebrahim speaks to Zahra.

EBRAHIM
 Take the criminal by the arm and
 follow me. Tell the other women to
 come behind.

*

ZAHRA
 Her name is Soraya, your highness.

Ebrahim doesn't have to tolerate attitude anymore. He's a
 man, dammit.

EBRAHIM
 Things have changed, Zahra. No more
 warnings.

He turns his back to her. She spits at his feet. He pretends
 not to see.

Like an army of zombies, the crowd moves toward the execution
 site, toward the performers and their vehicles.

*

101 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE/EXECUTION SITE - DAY

101

The performers are busy. Their ringmaster straightens up,
 notices the entire population walking toward them. Some carry
 pickaxes and shovels. Others chant Koranic verses. He calls
 to his companions.

*

RINGMASTER
 Hey! Look! Look at that...they're
 coming toward us!

The men stop, unsure, wary. One starts throwing stuff back in
 the van. The Ringmaster addresses those coming closest.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
 Gentlemen, uh, what is it? What's
 going on? Do you want us to leave?
 We'll be happy to oblige.

The other performers bob their heads "yes, yes". Ebrahim
 emerges from the fierce-looking crowd.

*

EBRAHIM
We're in the middle of something
important.

*

RINGMASTER
Yes sir. Absolutely. What...what's
going on?

*

EBRAHIM
You may watch if you like, but just
stay out of things. Now move.

The ringmaster puts it together, the pile of stones, the hole
-- he knows what's up. He turns to his troupe and they start
to set up on the other side of the vans, away from the
execution site.

*

*

*

102 EXT. CLOWN CAR AREA - DAY

102

Beyond the execution site, but close enough to the action,
the PERFORMERS set up. The drummer among them, inspired by
the rhythm of the crowd, sets up a LARGE DRUM, BEATS a STEADY
THUMP with beaters that accompanies and accentuates all that
follows.

*

*

*

*

103 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

103

*

Soraya, with Zahra at her side, Ebrahim, and revolutionary
GUARDS, and the mullah stand near the hole. At the edge of
the circle around it stand Soraya's father, Ali, Soraya's two
sons, Hashem, and the blind man, Mohammed. The rest of the
town press behind them, awaiting word.

EBRAHIM
The time has come...

Someone shouts, "Louder!" A workman brings over a stepladder,
and Ebrahim climbs it.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Now! Can you hear me?

Shouts abound, from Ali's friends and the teenagers: "Get to
it!" "Death to the bitch" "Kill her, kill the slut!" People
CLACK the stones together in their hands.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
All right. All right. All will be
done as God has decided. Soraya's
father, the respected Morteza
Ramazani, will throw the first
stone. Once he hits the mark...

Shouts, "Yeah!" "Hurry up!" "What about us?"

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
...Then will be Ali's turn.

Shouts, "That's fair!" "Long live Ali!"

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Next will be Mullah Hassan's turn,
as God's representative in our
village.

Voices ring out, "Praise be to God! Allahu Akbar!"

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Then will be the sons, Reza and
Kamran, who have suffered greatly.
By this their honor will be
restored.

Reza, the elder son, shifts from foot to foot, eager. Kamran, the fourteen year old, is less certain, torn. He has no choice but to stand among the "wounded."

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Finally it will be your turn.
(with a sweep of his arms)
All of you will have the right to
throw a stone at this filthy woman
who has shamed us all. Come no
closer than the line that has been
drawn.

Cries of joy fill the air. The mob is electric with anticipation. A few people on the fringes wander away from the scene, but they are the exceptions.

Ebrahim climbs down from the stepladder. Approaches Zahra.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)
Remove her chador.

Zahra carefully unwraps the black fabric from Soraya who stands frozen, eyes to the ground.

ZAHRA
(to Soraya)
Pray, pray with all your might. God
and paradise are waiting for you.
Pray for us too.

Soraya raises her eyes, looking directly at the crowd. Zahra gives Soraya a kiss on the cheek. A chorus of BOOS and HISSING answers it.

SORAYA
(softly, to Zahra)
I'm not going to cry. Don't you.

She steps back, revealing Soraya, resplendent in the white wedding gown of Zahra's. Long shining black hair streams to her waist.

Shocked for a moment by her beauty...then the crowd goes crazy. "Harlot! Slut! Rot with the pigs! Beast of hell! Whore!"

EBRAHIM

(to Soraya)

If you have something to say, now
is the time to say it.

Soraya's gaze remains fixed, trancelike

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)

I repeat, speak up now. This is
your last chance.

Soraya tightens her lips and juts her jaw, shoulders back, head held high as possible.

The crowd quiets, strains to hear her voice. A long moment--

She speaks plainly, not pleading.

SORAYA

How can you do this? I am Soraya.
You know me. All of you know me.
I've been in your homes. I've
shared your meals. I've mourned
your dead. I am your
neighbor...your friend...

Her eyes sweep across the mob. Some stare back, others look away or down.

SORAYA

...your sister...your aunt...your
wife...

(looking at her sons)

...your mother...

(now at her father)

...your daughter. How can you do
this to me?

Her question hangs in the air. Silence holds the crowd, fixed in Soraya's unwavering gaze. Mullah Hassan swats at a fly. A dog barks. A child cries softly.

Zahra nods, proud of Soraya's composure. Then, from the back an anonymous voice.

VOICE IN CROWD

It's the law! The law of God!

*

The crowd, relieved of guilt, joins in. Shouts of "Yeah, the law! Justice! Praise Allah!" etc. One old man hangs his head and drops his stones, turning away.

At Ebrahim's command, two assistants bind Soraya's arms to her body and pick her up to set her in the hole. The shovelers begin to shovel in dirt.

104 EXT. CLOWN CAR AREA - DAY

104

The six men sit on their haunches, studying the back of the crowd across the square. A huge roar goes up from the mob. They don't know what to think.

RINGMASTER
(to one of his friends)
I saw a bullfight once. It sounded
like this.

His friend hands him a cigarette, and he lights it. One of the others begins to apply makeup. The DRUMBEAT continues:

105 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

105

*

Soraya is buried up to her waist. Her black hair fans over the ground around her.

Ebrahim motions for the deputies and Zahra to leave the circle. He alone stands there with Soraya. He addresses her father standing at the line.

EBRAHIM
Morteza, do you have anything to
say?

MORTEZA
(spitting with anger)
She is no longer my daughter. I am
no longer her father. Let's get
this over and done with!

Ebrahim walks up to Morteza, hands him a large stone. Morteza tosses aside his cane, prepares himself a moment to throw the stone. Then:

ZAHRA, torn up inside, intercedes --

ZAHRA
No! Do not!

CROWD
-- Get out of there, woman! --

ZAHRA
Stone me! Spare her, she has young
children -- I will take her place!

The CROWD JEERS at her --

ZAHRA
Stone me! --

EBRAHIM
-- Go away, Zahra, this isn't about
you.

He gestures the GUARDS who move toward her. She appeals to
Ebrahim:

ZAHRA
Please, Ebrahim, I beg you -- I'll
do anything --

EBRAHIM
(hisses at her)
-- You'll do nothing --

THE GUARDS GRAB ZAHRA forcefully, drag her away. She fights
them, but they're too strong. The crowd continues to JEER,
someone tosses a stone in her direction, misses, hits one of
the Guards who reacts with an angry glare.

ZAHRA, as she's pulled through the crowd, glances once back
at Soraya. They share a look, Soraya's eyes thanking her for
all she's done.

Finally, Zahra is shoved beyond the crowd, tumbles to the
ground, her face grimed with tears and dirt. She sits there a
moment, defeated. Guards return to the front.

EBRAHIM
Let us continue!

MORTEZA (CONT'D)
Allah be praised!
(as he rears back to
throw)
There whore, take that!

Morteza throws the rock, missing Soraya. Soraya looks
straight into her father's eyes, steady, unblinking. He's
frantic, manic. A cheer goes up.

MORTEZA (CONT'D)
Give me another!

He's handed a stone by A BOY next to the pile of rocks.
Misses again. More yelling from the mob.

*

MORTEZA (CONT'D)
More! More! Give me more!

MRS. MASSOUD, on the fringes with other supportive women,
shouts:

MRS. MASSOUD
It's a sign?! Your stones do not
strike because God knows she's
innocent!

Other women, and scattered voices, echo support for this
view. Ebrahim, for a quivering moment or two, seems like he's
going to step out and do something -- but then locks eyes
with the Mullah who stares at him fiercely. *
*
*

Morteza throws again. Misses again. He's crossed the line,
Ali pushes him back, the old man is angry. *

MORTEZA (CONT'D)
Die you cunt! I'm going to crush
your skull!

During this, in the back, Zahra rises slowly to her feet,
watches from a distance. *

ALI
That's all right, old man. I'll
take care of it.

Ali picks up a hefty stone. Weighs it like an athlete, spins,
rears back, throws...and misses. *

ZAHRA, at the edge of the crowd, speaks out: *

ZAHRA
Bastards! Murderers!!

A MAN turns, shoves her back. She staggers away, then turns
back, unsure what to do. Meanwhile, at the front of the
crowd:

MULLAH HASSAN
(to Ali)
Try again. You'll get her next
time.

ALI
You bet I will.
(loudly)
Here comes, bitch!

This one just grazes her temple, infuriating Ali. The crowd
whoops and comments with every attempt.

The third rock hits her shoulder, and she makes a slight sound. Ali smiles.

He picks up his fourth rock, studies his target and hurls as hard as he can. This one finds her forehead. SORAYA'S HEAD JERKS BACK, blood flows.

ALI (CONT'D)
Forgot to duck, huh?

He laughs as others crowd the line for a better look. Some CHEER while others gasp. Soraya struggles with her arms and hands, trying to free them from the tight bindings.

At first blood, Zahra turns from the mob, trembling, starts walking to leave the clot of people behind.

Now is the mullah's turn.

FROM SORAYA'S POV-- She looks up at the mullah looming 25 feet away. Sound is muffled. She's dizzy. But she doesn't stop watching him. She blinks the blood out of her eyes. He takes off his sunglasses, and for a second, their eyes meet.

MULLAH HASSAN
(to the mob)
I am not the one throwing this stone. It is God who is guiding my arm. Only her blood can cleanse us of her filthy crime. This is revenge for God!

A strike on the cheek. The sound of bone cracking. A gasp from Soraya. A cheer from the mob.

Now it is her sons' turns. Reza is ready. Kamran is scared. They both handle their stones.

MULLAH HASSAN
Go ahead, boys. For God.

Reza nods at Kamran to encourage him.

REZA
Do it, brother!

Near tears, Kamran nods back, and they throw simultaneously.

CLOSE ON SORAYA as she watches her sons. Bleeding forehead, split cheekbone. Her lip quivers and a tear spills. Her head jerks to one side, struck again.

106 EXT. CLOWN CAR AREA - DAY

106

One of the clowns edges near the action. He wants to look, but doesn't want to get in trouble with this crowd.

Zahra passes him as she leaves the scene looking older than she ever has before.

The crowd allows the CLOWN closer, nudging him forward.

Zahra staggers, then turns back -- not wanting to leave entirely, but also not wanting to see the carnage -- she drops to her knees, moans, despondent. She remains there, immobile.

107 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

107 *

Now the mob has ringed their victim. In quick cuts:

---People gather more stones from the pile. They stuff their pockets, hats etc.

---Young boys toss stones at one another in imitation stoning.

---Successive stones pummel her, shoulder, chest, face, her neck snapping back from impact. Ali's friends, the Teenagers, others males fire stones in rapid succession.

---Hashem presses to the line. He fingers a rock, hardly able to look at Soraya.

---Soraya's shoulder is blood-soaked, white gown now red and torn.

---A quick succession of thrown stones: Citizens, one after-the-other firing away, like a ball machine spitting rocks.

---Soraya's face is covered in blood. As stones strike her, pink mists of blood spray upward, her head sags.

---The CLOWN THROWS A STONE, receives applause.

---Her sagging heads swings the other direction from the weight of the stone striking her, blood flying.

---With each strike, a mixed cry arises. There's cheering and booing. Fist-shaking and dancing, hideous faces distorted with wrath.

---From behind, it appears that one of her shoulders is gone. Her head falls at a peculiar angle.

---Mohsen rushes to his father, Hashem, and hugs him around his waist. He buries his face in his father's clothes.

---Female mourners beat their chests and flap their chadors as they cluster on the edge of the mob. LEILA retches, turns away. MRS. MASSOUD and two other women sit in a circle nearby, uttering prayers, shaking their heads.

---Dirty dusty feet stumble and cross the quicklime line.

---Hashem drops his stone, puts his hand on his afflicted son's back and leads him out of the mob.

---Someone hands the blind man, Mohammed, a stone and positions him at the line.

---Another cheer. A child sits on her father's shoulders. She cries, scared of the chaos. Her father points for her to watch.

108 EXT. CLOWN CAR AREA - DAY

108

The itinerant performers start making a fire, preparing some food. The character who was applying makeup is covered in it now, assumes his role, with a goofy smile, makes his way toward the crowd.

RINGMASTER
Cook everything we have. They're
going to be hungry.

One of the clowns sets up a table and covers it with a cloth.

109 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

109

*

Bitá stays with Soraya's two daughters. The girls huddle together on a cushion.

KATANEH
Is mommy out there? What are they
doing?

In the distance, we can hear another shout from the mob.

BITA
Cover your ears, girls. Tight. Just
like me.

Scared, the girls obey, and all three try to keep out the sound. Bitá hugs them close -- tight, protective.

110 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

110 *

Stones litter the ground around Soraya. The dirt is blood soaked, dark. Her hair is matted with blood, bits of it strewn the ground where the scalp flew off. Flies buzz everywhere.

A dog approaches, sniffing, is hit with a stone and runs off.

Soraya is little more than a bloody stump. One shoulder is gone. Her neck broken, her head lops to one side. Only one eye remains, her face a gaping wound, toothless, jawless. A low moan resonates from her.

Ali enters the circle, holding up his hand to the crowd. Everyone stops, watches.

Ali looks down on Soraya's broken body. He lies on his stomach, pressing his ear to her mouth, listening for breath.

He leaps to his feet.

ALI
The bitch still lives!

A shout goes up. Disbelieving, but re-energized, the mob rearms for a final assault.

CLOSE ON SORAYA'S BLOODIED FACE, one eye open, barely breathing, and we go into her silent world...

111 EXT. MEADOW - DAY

111

We're in Soraya's mind, a dreamy rendition of her day with her daughters in the meadow.

The wildflowers sway in a gentle breeze. The sun streaked mountains loom blue and green in the distance. Birds twitter.

The shouting of the mob becomes the sweet giggles of her daughters. The girls take off their headscarves and dance in a circle around Soraya, hair flying and laughing. Soraya smiles, radiant and whole.

FLASH CUT TO:

112 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY

112 *

From Soraya's POV, tilted, we circle around-- the hideous, angry faces of the mob stare at us, spitting, threatening, features distorted by anger and righteousness.

ALI
Everyone grab a stone! Everyone!

People fight and grapple for remaining stones. Some grab them from inside the circle.

SORAYA'S POV: The people look woozy and elongated like an El Greco. The sounds they make stretch and waver, just as distorted as the visuals.

FLASH CUT BACK:

113 EXT. MEADOW - DAY 113

Soraya chases after her girls who are skipping ahead, waving to their mom to follow. They're running toward the thicket, now bursting with blooms.

FLASH CUT TO:

114 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY 114 *

Ali struts around the inner circle, readying everyone for the "grand finale", making sure they all have stones. He's orchestrating like a maestro.

ALI
Are you ready?

He turns, arm upheld as PEOPLE scurry and fight for position for the grand finale. Ali drops his arm, and as...

...A MASS, THE ROCKS FLY. The barrage fills the sky with dark spots.

FLASH CUT BACK:

115 EXT. MEADOW - DAY 115

The birds EXPLODE from the thicket, filling the sky, just like the rocks.

MALAKA (V.O.)
Angels, Mommy. Lots and lots of angels!

We follow the birds that blur and disappear into a brilliant white light.

FLASH CUT TO:

116 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY 116 *

Shouts of "Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! God is great! God is great!" ripple through the throng.

MULLAH HASSAN
(raising his Koran over
his head)
Let us give thanks to God, the All-
powerful.

The crowd and the mullah intone together.

MULLAH HASSAN & MOB
In the name of God, the
Compassionate and Merciful.

Quick cuts: A man takes his daughter off his shoulders... Stones hit the ground as people drop them... Angry faces relax, drain, turn away... REZA, Soraya's son who was an enthusiastic participant, finds a private spot, crouches, covers his head and sobs...

117 EXT. CLOWN CAR AREA - DAY 117

As the throng breaks up, the clowns get a clear view of Soraya's remains beneath a pile of stones. They approach...

118 EXT. VILLAGE EXECUTION SITE - DAY 118 *

Nearly decapitated, the gore is unrecognizable as human. A dog slinks in, tugging at her head until the ringmaster scares it off.

One of the clowns, the one who threw a stone, is now sickened, turns away. Another drags an old blanket over the corpse.

119 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE/EXECUTION SITE - DAY 119 *

From above we see the whole square and execution site as people abandon the scene of the crime. *

Zahra approaches as the villagers disperse. Ebrahim crosses to her.

EBRAHIM
It's all over. Justice has been
done.
(pause)
Don't you have anything to say to
me?

ZAHRA

My poor Ebrahim. May God Almighty
forgive you for what you have done
this day.

Ebrahim slowly limps off. Zahra turns and heads home.

120

INT. MOSQUE, LIVING AREA - EVENING

120

The council -- those who condemned Soraya -- meet. Mullah Hassan sits in a chair in the center of the room. The others lounge on cushions or stand.

Everyone is silent. It's sinking in. The mullah, from behind his dark glasses, studies them in turn. He sips his tea, then speaks.

MULLAH HASSAN

God wanted us to take these few
moments for reflection. Tomorrow I
shall inform the authorities and
our village will become an example
talked about throughout the
country. Let us pray.

Before they can, Morteza, Soraya's father, falls prostrate on the floor, SOBBING and pounding himself on the head.

MORTEZA

I am ashamed, so ashamed. God have
pity on me. My daughter, my sweet
Soraya, forgive me!

This taps into everyone's unease. The old man writhes in grief on the floor. The mullah moves fast.

MULLAH HASSAN

Morteza, we love you. We shall
never forget that it was you who
cast the first stone --

He pulls him up, the old man crying, helpless. Mullah Hassan aggressively straightens him against the wall.

MULLAH HASSAN

--showing us the way, as a father
shows a son. For that we shall
always be grateful.

A smattering of applause. Morteza turns, buries his head in the wall, cries aloud. Guilt hangs in the room.

EBRAHIM

Who knew this morning when we woke
that such things would come to pass
today? It will be a long time
before we can forget.

Ali leaps from his cushion.

ALI

Not for me. I've already forgotten.
I don't ever want to talk about it
again. It's over and done with!

He exits, slamming the door behind him. The mullah gestures
for calm.

MULLAH HASSAN

Now we must talk of the burial.

121 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - EARLY EVENING

121

Ebrahim stands inside the door, facing Zahra awkwardly. Bitu,
Mrs. Massoud, and Soraya's daughters sit on floor cushions,
listening.

EBRAHIM (CONT'D)

She will not be buried in the
village cemetery. That is only for
proper Muslims.

He glances self-consciously at the women watching him. They
don't flinch.

ZAHRA

She can be buried with my family,
next to her mother.

EBRAHIM

Mullah Hassan, along with the
council, has decided she will not
be buried at all.

Zahra and the women exchange looks, unbelieving.

ZAHRA

Not buried *at all*?

EBRAHIM

That is right, according to God's
law. Mullah Hassan is very clear on
it.

ZAHRA

You will leave her in that hole in the middle of town for the dogs and scorpions? Is that God's law?

EBRAHIM

(too exhausted for anger)
Men are unearthing her now. You women can take her out of town if you want. But no burial.

---off Zahra's shocked look.

122 EXT. ROAD BY STREAMBED - NIGHT

122

A mile out of town, the three women, Zahra, Bitra and Mrs. Massoud, laboriously pull a cart bearing Soraya's body. She's been wrapped in a gray blanket. A pack of wild dogs follows close behind.

123 EXT. STREAMBED - NIGHT

123

They come to a spot near a stream and stop.

ZAHRA

This is far enough. She loved this spot.

(pointing)
Down there, by the stream.

MRS. MASSOUD

Why can't we bury her?

Bitra glances back, then says angrily:

BITA

You heard what they said! They're watching, just dump it and let's be done with it!

With great difficulty, the women begin to pick up the body.

124 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

124

The scene is transformed, hallucinogenic, a grotesque Mardi Gras. The hole where Soraya died has been filled and a huge bonfire burns there. Other fires, in metal barrels, burn throughout the square. Villagers dance and sing. All black chadors are gone, replaced with bright colors and party clothes.

The CLOWNS PERFORM TRICKS WITH FIRE AND HOOPS. Tables overflow with food. Music plays. Trained dogs in skirts hop on their hind legs as children giggle and clap.

Bonfires cast flickering shadows of revelers on the stone walls. Like the hot breath of hell, sparks swarm into the dark sky. Painted faces of the clowns mock Satan. Villagers sweat out their guilt in dance. Soraya's blood soaks into the thirsty dirt.

The three exhausted women in their black chadors trudge slowly through the celebration like three shadows from the underworld. No one notices.

ZAHRA (V.O.)
That was yesterday. This morning,
before dawn, I went back to the
river and buried what the dogs had
left behind. There wasn't much.

In the background, we hear the rhythmic pounding of a drum.

125 INT. ZAHRA'S RESIDENCE - DAY

125 *

Freidoune sits shocked as Zahra finishes her tale. They share a long silence, as Zahra fingers the tin foil that holds the bit of Soraya's bone. Then she gestures at his tape recorder. He "comes to" and clicks it off.

A knock at the door. Hashem sticks in his head, sees Freidoune.

HASHEM
So you're here.
(a nervous look at Zahra)
Your car's ready.

Freidoune gets up, grabs his things, starts to fill his backpack. Zahra stares down at the cassette he has removed from his player.

126 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

126

Hashem, having come from Zahra's house, approaches Mullah Hassan, Ebrahim, and the revolutionary GUARDS, waiting for him.

EBRAHIM
What happened?

HASHEM
Nothing. They're coming. He is
ready to go.

MULLAH HASSAN
 (to Ebrahim)
 We can't let him just go.

EBRAHIM
 He has done nothing but talk to a
 crazy woman.

MULLAH HASSAN
 He's a journalist, a writer --
 leaving the country! These things
 must stay inside our borders. I
 want to know what they talked
 about.
 (to the Guards)
 Be prepared.

HASHEM
 Here they come...

Freidoune emerges with Zahra. People stare at them. Then,
 everyone turns as:

ALI'S CONVERTIBLE turns into the street. ALI drives, alone.
 He slows as he comes by the group. They are surprised to see
 him.

MULLAH HASSAN
 What happened? Aren't you supposed
 to be getting married?

ALI
 Her father was executed. No
 wedding.

Mullah Hassan's face drops, as do the others. All this was
 for naught...?

ALI (CONT'D)
 (filled with self-pity)
 I wanted her so badly...

Zahra, crossing with Freidoune, reacts with a glance to
 Freidoune.

MULLAH HASSAN
 (quietly, out of their
 earshot)
 Zahra has been talking to this man
 -- a reporter.

Ali glances to them, shrugs.

ALI
 It doesn't matter to me.

He drives on, oblivious. Hashem looks at the others, befuddled.

HASHEM
 So it was all for nothing, then?
 The trial, the stoning...all of it?
 (to Mullah Hassan)
 You forced me to lie against that
 poor woman --

Ebrahim is shocked by this --

EBRAHIM
 -- What are you talking about? --

HASHEM
 -- They threatened to stone me, or
 involve my son, if I didn't testify
 against Soraya. It was all lies,
 lies --

Ebrahim turns vehemently to Mullah Hassan --

MULLAH HASSAN
 Don't give me that look. You were
 as much a part of it as any of us.

EBRAHIM
 No -- that is not true. You and Ali
 lied to me.

MULLAH HASSAN
 This is your village, Mister Mayor.
 Nothing happens without your
 consent. After all, you conducted
 the trial.

Ebrahim is slammed by this reality. Mullah Hassan indicates Freidoune with Zahra, crossing to the garage.

MULLAH HASSAN
 We can't let him go -- Come on!

And they cross toward them, meeting at the garage --

127

EXT. GARAGE - DAY

127

The car is parked in the garage, ready to go.

MULLAH HASSAN
 I hope our Zahra didn't intrude
 upon your time?

FREIDOUNE
Not at all. I got everything done.

MULLAH HASSAN
She is a talker. Quite an
imagination, isn't that right,
Ebrahim?

The Guards block Zahra. She shrinks away as the men form a
knot around Freidoune.

EBRAHIM
Yes. Sometimes it's hard to tell
where imagination ends and lying
begins.

Ebrahim is still reeling from what he's just learned, but
playing along because he has to.

FREIDOUNE
I'll leave that to you gentlemen. I
need to get going.
(then, to Hashem)
Let's discuss the car.

MULLAH HASSAN
What's the hurry? Your stomach,
it's better?

FREIDOUNE
(firmly)
Excuse me, I have to pay my bill.

Freidoune and Hashem go inside the garage, the others remain
outside. Ebrahim turns from Mullah Hassan and the Guards,
advances toward Zahra.

128 INT. GARAGE - DAY

128

Freidoune, having paid Hashem, puts away his wallet and
starts toward his car. The mullah comes over.

MULLAH HASSAN
We can't let you leave.

Freidoune gets inside the car, tosses his backpack, papers,
etc. on the seat.

FREIDOUNE
What are you talking about?

MULLAH HASSAN
What did she tell you?

He inserts the key into the ignition.

129 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 129

Ebrahim confronts Zahra in the street outside the garage.

EBRAHIM
You told him, didn't you?

ZAHRA
What if I did? We're a law-abiding,
God-loving town, aren't we?

Ebrahim, irritated, looks back at the garage as the car
starts. Zahra moves off.

*

*

*

130 INT. GARAGE - DAY 130

Freidoune starts the car, inches it forward.

131 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 131

Mullah Hassan becomes impatient with Freidoune.

MULLAH HASSAN
Tell us what she said.

Freidoune rolls forward, exits the garage. Mullah Hassan
gestures the GUARDS to stop the car --

MULLAH HASSAN
Stop him!

The Guards step out, gesture the car to halt, hands on their
weapons. Freidoune stops.

Ebrahim moves away from Zahra, rushes toward the car.

Mullah Hassan notices the backpack, papers, recorder, etc. on
the passenger seat --

MULLAH HASSAN
-- Get out of the car --

132 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 132

Moments later. The contents of Freidoune's bag empty onto the
ground. Notebooks, papers, books, clothes -- all strewn onto
the dirt by the Guards. A breeze ruffles papers, taking loose
sheets...

More and more VILLAGERS have gathered, curious.

...The Guards go through more items, tossing them aside when they find nothing. Mullah Hassan grabs the recorder, opens it, removes a cassette.

MULLAH HASSAN
(holds up the cassette)
Is she on this? Did you tape her?

FREIDOUNE
-- That is my property! --

EBRAHIM
No one has property here. We are a village, with community concerns.

MULLAH HASSAN
And we do not cower before foreigners.

FREIDOUNE
-- I am not a foreigner! --

MULLAH HASSAN
You're going to France, aren't you?
Or is it America?! To write
critically of our Islamic republic?

He unspools the tape, uncoiling it, bunching it up into an unusable mess. He is handed more tapes by the Guards, which he also destroys, enjoying it.

MULLAH HASSAN (CONT'D)
Not anymore.

FREIDOUNE
How dare you?

EBRAHIM
You forget where you are, sir.

Freidoune grabs his remaining things, tosses them in his car.

FREIDOUNE
I plan to go to the nearest
governmental authority and file a
complaint.

MULLAH HASSAN
Do as you please.

Freidoune gets back in his car, starts it up, shifts and swerves out of there. They let him go.

Then, they notice....

133 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 133

THE CAR SLOWS as ZAHRA crosses toward it.

134 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 134

They see she has something **raised** in her hand. A cassette. *

EBRAHIM
Wait! Stop!

MULLAH HASSAN
Come back here!

135 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 135

Zahra comes right up to Freidoune's slowing car, **hand raised,** *
still holding the cassette. She leans into the passenger *
window, drops the cassette into the passenger seat.

ZAHRA
Go. Now.

FREIDOUNE
What about you?

ZAHRA
I will care for her daughters.
Don't worry, they will do nothing.

The car stalls. Freidoune frantically fiddles with the
ignition, turning it over -- to no avail. Zahra looks up the
street, sees:

136 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 136

They run toward the stalled car...Mullah Hassan, Ebrahim, the
Guards...racing....

Hashem watches them run.

137 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 137

Freidoune keeps trying to re-start the car, turning the
ignition, pumping the gas. *

VILLAGERS, curious, angle toward the car as Freidoune keeps *
pumping. *

138 EXT. GARAGE - DAY 138

Hashem watches, smiles a little.

HASHEM
(to himself)
Don't pump so hard, friend. It will
start.

139 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE GARAGE - DAY 139

Mullah Hassan still runs, the revolutionary guards beside
him, gaining ground. Mullah Hassan stoops, picks up a stone.
One of the Guards unslings his weapon. *

140 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 140

Freidoune finally starts the car, ZOOMS out of there, tires
spitting dirt -- and he SWERVES past converging VILLAGERS --

141 INT. FREIDOUNE'S CAR - DAY 141

The clunk of the stone echoes in the car. In the rearview
mirror we see Zahra gesticulate at the approaching men,
defiant to the end.

Freidoune reaches to the passenger seat, with a gentle hand
he touches the cassette and focuses on the treacherous road
ahead.

142 EXT. STREET OUT OF TOWN - DAY 142 *

STONES hit the back of the retreating vehicle. Villagers
getting in their last licks --

143 EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY 143

Zahra faces the approaching men, defiant.

ZAHRA
Justice was served, wasn't it?
Isn't that what you said, Ebrahim?
What are you scared of? God is
great! Allahu Akbar!

She turns now, noticing VILLAGERS encroaching --

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

What are you afraid of? I thought
our village was an example for the
rest of the country. Well now the
world will know. Yes!

(exultant)

The world will know what happened
here!

Zahra remains in the center of the square, jubilant, arms
raised to the sky, toward heaven --

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

The world will know-wwwww!!

Arms still raised, her eyes glistening with tears -- AND WE
FREEZE ON ZAHRA -- Moments later a legend appears:

**Freidoune Sahebjam published the "Stoning of Soraya M."
in Europe to much acclaim. It became an international best-
seller focussing attention on stoning in Iran, as well as the
lack of women's rights.**

**Officially, the present Iranian government claims to prohibit
stonings. However, over one-hundred such barbaric executions
occur there every year, sanctioned by Islamic fundamentalist
clerics.**

THE END