

AMERICANIZED

Written by

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Hello Sunshine

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COLD OPENEXT. SAN JOSE STREET - DAY

OPEN ON LAYLA (14, insecure, awkward, melodramatic AF. Think the Persian Lady Bird) as she races down a quiet street in the suburbs of Silicon Valley. She's in complete hysterics.

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ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

See that hot mess on the verge of a nervous breakdown? That's me, back in 1994. Hence the baby doll dress, the denim scrunchie, and the black Doc Martens boots.

*

Layla, out of breath, frantically glances behind her.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

As far as years in history go, ninety-four was a dumpster fire.

*

OVER STOCK FOOTAGE OF THE EVENTS DESCRIBED:

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

The white Bronco chase happened, Nancy Kerrigan got clubbed in the knees, Kurt Cobain died, Justin Bieber was born...

BACK TO Layla, running. We hear MULTIPLE HONKS.

*

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

It was also the year I learned a very hard truth. One we all figure out eventually: our parents aren't superheroes... they're just very flawed human beings.

LAYLA

(between sobs)

My-entire-life-is-a-lie.

REVEAL a Toyota Camry, driving alongside her. Behind the wheel, sits ALI (40s, eternal optimist, lovable softie, rarely in a bad mood). He leans out the window.

ALI

(Persian accent)

We never wanted you to find out like this, Layla. I didn't want you to find out at all. Now please, get in the car!

*

(CONTINUED)

LAYLA

No! You're strangers to me.

In the passenger seat, we meet SHOHREH (late 30s, fierce, opinionated, way too hot for any kind of head scarf). She leans over Ali, as Layla lets out another sob.

SHOHREH

(Persian accent)

Please don't cry!

(then)

Tears dry out your skin.

LAYLA

My skin is fine. Leave me alone!

A desperate Shohreh turns on the car stereo and CRANKS UP the volume on a Persian song (something by Googoosh).

ALI

What are you doing?

SHOHREH

I'm trying to cheer her up.

(to Layla)

What do I always say? Dancing is like chicken soup for the soul!

Shohreh starts to dance enthusiastically. A hopeful Ali joins in. Layla glances at her parents, mortified.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

While I did find it hard to resist a good dance party -- I wasn't about to get in that car. I was a moody teenager and stubborn as hell. That was my superpower.

Ali suddenly stops the car. Shohreh gets out and chases Layla on foot. Layla looks back and goes into a full on sprint.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Also, my mom always wore high heels. So I had this in the bag.

CUT TO:

MAIN TITLES

ACT ONEINT. SAEDI HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLIER THAT DAY

A middle class home with Middle Eastern influences: Persian rugs, faux gold, lots of marble. The kitchen table is graced with lavash bread and feta cheese. The same Googoosh song from the COLD OPEN plays on a nearby stereo.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Behold: our last, typical, happy family breakfast before my life was destroyed.

At the table, SAMIRA (16, poster girl for zero-fucks given) peruses a copy of *Sassy* magazine. KIA (8, equal parts adorable and precocious) brews tea at the stove. *

In the middle of it all, Ali and Shohreh dance together.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Normally, my parents' penchant for Persian dancing didn't embarrass me. Especially when it was behind closed doors. I mean, have you ever seen two people more in love? My dad was the living embodiment of "happy-go-lucky"...

Ali steals a kiss from Shohreh. She lifts up her leg, showing off stilettos.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

And my mom? The woman could bring a butter knife to a gunfight and she'd still win. She was tough as nails and gorgeous enough to make my struggle with hormonal acne feel particularly cruel. Getting married was the best decision... their parents ever made for them. *

As Ali dips Shohreh, she eyes Samira's issue of *Sassy*.

SHOHREH

Any free perfume samples? I'm running low.

SAMIRA *

I don't know. I got sucked into an article about a girl who divorced her parents. She's so brave.

(CONTINUED)

Ali and Shohreh stop dancing.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

My older sister, Samira, was the black sheep of the family. But the kind of black sheep who thought all the Persian sheep were seriously ruining her life.

ALI

You can't divorce your parents.

SAMIRA

This is America, *baba*. You can do anything.

SHOHREH

(unfazed)

Including abandon your children at a fire station.

Samira rolls her eyes and goes back to her magazine. The tea kettle WHISTLES.

KIA

Who's ready for their Earl Grey?

Ali and Shohreh take their seats at the table. Kia approaches and fills everyone's teacups. Shohreh breathes in the aroma.

SHOHREH

What is that? Nutmeg?

KIA

Cardamom. It prevents bad breath and cavities. We're gonna save a lot of money at the dentist.

Ali pats Kia on the back.

ALI

My son. So resourceful. It's the refugee in you.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

My little brother, Kia, wasn't actually a refugee. The rest of us escaped war-torn Iran, but he was born years later at a Kaiser Permanente in Cupertino. He was the baby of the family by a lot. So if condoms were one-hundred percent effective, there's a good chance he wouldn't exist.

(CONTINUED)

An excited and somewhat sweaty Layla enters the kitchen. *

LAYLA

Guess who hiked the ritzy Saratoga hills this morning to hawk magazine subscriptions? *

SHOHREH *

You shouldn't be hiking. It bulks up your legs. *

LAYLA *

Small price to pay when it also paid for my class trip to Montreal. (waves an order form) *
Vive le Capitalism! *

Samira raises an eyebrow. Shohreh throws Ali an "oh shit" look. He shrugs it off. But Layla doesn't notice. She's too busy turning up the music. As she goes into a series of very enthusiastic dance moves, Kia joins in to help her celebrate. An unmoved Samira goes back to her magazine. *

Layla twirls around the kitchen and pulls Shohreh up from her seat. Shohreh manages a smile as they dance together -- seemingly simpatico. *

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Don't be fooled by that carefree, well-adjusted, teenager who actually danced like no one was watching. That was only me when I was at home... *

INT./EXT. - SAMIRA'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Samira drives. A tense Layla sits in the passenger seat.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

This was me on my way to school. *

LAYLA

I'm not ready to face the masses. Can you drive around the block a few times? *

SAMIRA

No. My friends get panicky if they don't get to see me before class.

LAYLA

Then can we please hang out at lunch? *

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAYLA (CONT'D)

Eating in the bathroom is starting to feel very unsanitary. And also, sad and lonely.

*
*

SAMIRA

Just wash your hands before and after.

Samira pulls the car into --

EXT. LYNBROOK HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

She screeches into a spot, touches up her lipstick, and happily hops out of the car. Layla looks in the mirror, places a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses on her head, and reluctantly follows. As Samira surveys her kingdom:

*
*

SAMIRA

Walk ten feet behind me.

Layla glares at her as she walks away, then steels herself for the day and heads toward campus.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

My freshman year in high school was my personal Vietnam... except that if I went AWOL here, no one would bother looking for me. I guess you could say I hadn't found my squad yet. My sister, on the other hand?

*

Samira's swarmed by a bevy of COOL GIRLS -- all in flannel and denim overalls. They are JOCELYN, JILL, and JUNI.

JOCELYN

Sami! Liquid Courage is playing at The Fillmore this weekend. Can you get us in?

JILL

And help us plan our outfits?

SAMIRA

Yes to both.

JUNI

We are not worthy.

Layla observes her sister with a mixture of envy and bitter indignation. Samira glances at her. Just when it feels like she might invite Layla into the fold... she turns back to her friends. Layla slides her heart-shaped sunglasses over her eyes.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

That bitch was the Ho Chi Minh of
our school. Except that Ho Chi Minh
was nicer to his family.

The bell RINGS. Layla gets swallowed up by a sea of STUDENTS.
She tries to hold her head up high, but she hates it here. *

EXT. PENINSULA LUGGAGE - DAY

A quaint storefront. Suitcases are arranged behind a display
window, along with the sign: "You Break It, We Fix It!"

INT. PENINSULA LUGGAGE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Ali and Shohreh work in tandem, repairing the lining in a
Samsonite. Ali's calm, while Shohreh's clearly agitated.

SHOHREH

How did Layla sell a hundred
magazines? Why couldn't we raise
our children to be spoiled and lazy
like normal teenagers?

ALI

Because we need affordable help
around here.
(then, shrugs it off)
Layla thinks we're perfect. Nothing
will ever change that. *

SHOHREH

Except the truth. *

ALI

And that's why we'll never tell her
the truth. *

A skeptical Shohreh hands him a threaded needle. He carefully
sews the new lining into the suitcase. *

SHOHREH

We have to eventually. Today, it's
a trip to Canada. Tomorrow, it's
college. We can't lie forever. *

ALI

Sure we can! Lies are the glue that
holds a family together! And soon
enough, we'll be back in Tehran,
picnicking at Azadi Tower. America
will be a distant memory. Why rock
the boat now? *

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH

Because *Sassy Magazine* says lies
lead to premature aging. I don't
want to go grey before I'm forty.

*
*
*
*

ALI

Don't worry! You'll get to cover
your hair in Iran.

*
*
*

A frustrated Shohreh bites her tongue. This was not the
response she wanted.

*

INT. LYNBROOK HIGH SCHOOL - FRENCH CLASS - DAY

Layla sits by her lonesome in the back row. Two TEEN GIRLS
engage in a debate nearby.

TEEN GIRL #1

Dylan McKay, any day of the week.

TEEN GIRL #2

But he's so broken. Brandon Walsh
has way less baggage.

*

LAYLA

(confidently pipes in)
I'm partial to David Silver, but
I've got a weakness for Jewish DJs.

*
*
*

The girls look at Layla like she's an alien. Before she can
backpedal, her gaze drifts toward the door...

MUSIC CUE: *Lovefool* by The Cardigans.

Everything goes into slow-mo as EVAN PARKER (15, hot in a
Timothée Chalamet kind of way) swaggers into the room.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Full disclosure: I wasn't into any
of the middle-aged men playing
teenagers on *90210*. My fantasy guy
was as real as they come. Evan
Parker was my reason for living,
for breathing, for not begging my
parents to homeschool me. And
unlike everyone else at school --
including my sister -- he made me
feel seen.

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*
*

Layla fidgets as Evan takes the seat next to her.

LAYLA

Hey, Evan.

(CONTINUED)

But Evan just stares off into space. After a tortured beat:

EVAN

Do you ever, like, wake up in the morning and think... I really wish I was an orphan?

LAYLA

Never. I love my parents more than anything.

EVAN

You're lucky. My mom's making me get a job at Hot Dog on a Stick. They pay a lot, cause no one wants to wear those butt ugly uniforms.

LAYLA

They do have really good lemonade. Not too tart, not too sweet. You'd like it. *

EVAN

I do like it, but that's not the point, Lila. *

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

I didn't care that Evan always called me Lila and that the only physical contact we ever had was the time he touched my unibrow and told me to buy tweezers.

Their FRENCH TEACHER hands them permission slips for Montreal. *

FRENCH TEACHER

Permission slips are due next week.

Layla puts the slip in her binder and steals glances at Evan.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

I was convinced our romance would begin on the flight to Montreal and end in a quaint nursing home somewhere in Sausalito. He would die first. I would die a day later.

INT. PENINSULA LUGGAGE - DAY

After school. Ali and Shohreh work behind the counter. Samira and Kia enter. Layla beelines past them and walks up to her parents with the permission slip for Montreal.

(CONTINUED)

LAYLA

Sign on the dotted line. Your
girl's got a province to conquer.

*
*

ALI

Layla, we're very busy right now.

Aside from one CUSTOMER, the shop is empty.

LAYLA

It'll take like five seconds.

SHOHREH

Let's not have an uncomfortable
conversation in front of customers.
That's why we have a back room.

*

An uneasy Layla follows her parents to the BACK ROOM. Samira
takes up the mantle behind the register. Kia turns to her.

*

KIA

What was that all about?

*

SAMIRA

It's a private family matter, Kia.
Go sweep the sidewalk and stop
asking questions.

Kia sighs, grabs a nearby broom, and exits. The customer
smiles at him, then approaches Samira.

CUSTOMER

What a lovely family. Where are you
all from originally?

SAMIRA

We're Italian.
(salesperson mode)
Speaking of Italy, we're having a
sale on Bric's Milano...

Samira ushers the customer toward a display of suitcases.

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An anxious Layla sits across from her parents. Shohreh,
mustered her strength, takes a deep breath.

SHOHREH

Layla, you can't go to Canada.

LAYLA

But... Montreal is my only chance
to make some friends.

*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAYLA (CONT'D)

They assign four people to every hotel room, so girls will be forced to talk to me.

(then, urgent)

Don't take this away from me.

*

ALI

What your *maman* meant to say is that you can go to Canada.

SHOHREH

That's not what I meant to say.

*

ALI

But if you go, you won't come back.

LAYLA

Why not...?

SHOHREH

Because --

ALI

(cuts her off, lies)

You will be the victim of a Persian hate crime.

SHOHREH

This is your big solution?

LAYLA

Would it gain me national attention?

*

*

ALI

(to Layla)

I don't know. But what I do know is that Canadians are... bigots. It's a very well-kept secret.

*

*

*

*

SHOHREH

They're not bigots. Well, every country has some bigots.

ALI

And Canada has the worst bigots.

LAYLA

What's actually going on here?

*

Shohreh lets out a heavy sigh, then:

SHOHREH

We're illegal immigrants, Layla. Which means if we leave the country, we can't come back.

(CONTINUED)

This HUGE bombshell hangs there for a beat. Layla, reeling:

LAYLA

We're... WHAT? How long have you
known about this?

*
*

ALI

This is news to me...

SHOHREH

Since we came to America.

LAYLA

But we moved here when I was two.

*

SHOHREH

Yes, on a Visitor's Visa...

*

As Shohreh explains, Layla struggles to process it all.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

According to my mom, we stuck
around after our Visa expired. Then
my uncle sponsored us for a Green
Card, but that application was
still in limbo. None of that
mattered to me then. All I could
think was that my mom was my idol.
To quote Michelle Obama, I thought
her word was her bond, and now I
could barely look at her. Also, it
was kind of hard not to look at my
dad.

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Ali makes the "crazy" gesture and subtly points at Shohreh.

*

LAYLA

So this means I'm...

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*

INT. SALES FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Samira, still helping the customer, zips open a suitcase.

LAYLA (O.S.)

A CRIMINAL! And an accomplice.

*

CUSTOMER

Is everything okay back there?

SAMIRA

Everything's fine.
(opens suitcase)
Surprise! Pockets for your shoes!

LAYLA (O.S.)

What's next? This place is a front
for guns and money laundering?

(CONTINUED)

SAMIRA

M'am, I assure you, we are not that kind of Italian.

*

The customer nods, then quickly exits. Samira storms into --

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LAYLA

Oh my God. Could we get deported?

Ali shakes his head. Shohreh clears her throat.

SAMIRA

Yup. Probably today if you keep screaming about breaking the law.

LAYLA

You knew? So even this family has a clique that I'm not a part of?

(to Shohreh)

I knew Samira was your favorite!

*

*

*

Samira shrugs. An emotional Layla races out of the store.

ALI

See. The truth rips families apart.

*

*

Shohreh stares daggers at Ali. After a tense beat, they both hurry out after Layla.

EXT. SAN JOSE STREET - DAY

Back to our COLD OPEN. Layla sprints, while Shohreh chases her and Ali keeps dancing in the car. Suddenly, Layla looks up and sees Evan and his FRIENDS loitering on a street corner.

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*

Shit! She can't let him see her like this.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Did I forget to mention this was the day I got hit by the harsh realities of life...

She looks from Evan to her parents, then frantically runs across the street and... GETS HIT BY A CAR!

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

... and a classic red Mazda Miata?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOINT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A frazzled Layla, sporting a boot on her leg, lays on a hospital bed. Kia, arms folded, sits next to her. A bored Samira listens to music on her Discman. Ali and Shohreh fill out paperwork and argue amongst themselves.

ALI
(to Shohreh)
She could have been killed!

KIA
Layla, what do you always tell me?

SHOHREH
(to Ali)
She runs really fast! It's those calf muscles. *
*

LAYLA
(admits to Kia)
Um, look both ways before you cross the street. *

KIA
Oh, the hypocrisy... *

LAYLA
Apparently, it runs in the family. *

Shohreh tries to fix Layla's hair. Layla swats her hand away. *

LAYLA (CONT'D)
(to Shohreh)
How could you lie to me every day and still live with yourself? *
*

Samira places her headphones over Kia's ears and turns up the volume. He's too young for this conversation. *

SHOHREH
Your *baba* lied too! *

LAYLA
Way to deflect! *

ALI
We thought we'd get Green Cards before you ever had to find out. We didn't know it could take years. *

(CONTINUED)

LAYLA

It's fine. I don't have to go to Montreal. I'll just create some imaginary friends. Girls who also eat lunch in the bathroom...

(a glance at Samira)

... and don't treat me like I'm invisible.

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*

SAMIRA

Layla, wake up! Who cares about Canada? We can't go to college without Green Cards.

Layla's jaw drops. This is almost too much.

ALI

I have had enough of all this honesty.

LAYLA

(stunned)

The only thing getting me through high school was the idea of finding my tribe in college. It's where people like me go to shine. And where guys find unwanted hair cool and exotic.

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SAMIRA

What college brochures have you been reading?

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SHOHREH

You will both have Green Cards in time for college. That's why we came to America in the first place. And your *baba* is on top of it. He's met with several lawyers, he goes to your Uncle for advice all the time...

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(off a sheepish Ali)

Please tell me you're doing all of those things.

*

ALI

Lawyers are expensive. Your brother is very overbearing. We're moving back to Iran anyway.

SAMIRA

I'm a woman of the nineties. I can't thrive under Islamic Law.

(CONTINUED)

ALI

Don't be silly. Last week, your aunt had a strand of hair peek out from her headscarf and the police let her go with a warning. It's getting better every day!

*

SHOHREH

Sounds like heaven.

*

*

LAYLA

Baba, please. Ask if Uncle Mehrdad can help. Do it for me.

*

SAMIRA

(hello)

And me.

Ali opens his mouth to interject, but Shohreh stops him. She puts her arms around Layla and Samira.

*

*

SHOHREH

And also me.

(sotto to Ali)

Because women are allowed to leave their husbands in this country.

Pre-lap: the sound of a LOUD DOORBELL.

EXT. UNCLE MEHRDAD'S MANSION - NEXT DAY

Pillars, fountains, a long winding driveway. Ali and Shohreh stand before a massive front door, ringing the doorbell.

ALI

It's not too late to play doorbell ditch.

SHOHREH

You'd never make it up the driveway fast enough.

(then)

Mehrdad's got a lot of connections. And fixing other people's problems is his favorite hobby.

*

Shohreh rings the bell again. The door swings open, REVEALING MEHRDAD (40s, ball of energy, always in a suit and tie). He holds a travel coffee mug in his hand.

MEHRDAD

Before you say anything, I already told Layla she can't live here.

(explains)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MEHRDAD (CONT'D)
We've been on the phone all
morning. We're very close.
(leads them in)
Come in.

As they enter --

INT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- we see his home in all its opulent glory. Real marble,
real gold, real Persian rugs. CATERERS and VENDORS move
equipment in and out of the room throughout.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)
My Uncle Mehrdad was the Michael
Corleone of our family, if Michael
Corleone had an affinity for
paisley ties, was never seen
without his travel mug, and...
didn't murder people.

Ali and Shohreh take a seat on an antique sofa. Mehrdad paces
around the room. This is not a man who can sit still.

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)
He was also the first in our family
to become an American citizen. So
that made him the white savior who
sponsored us for a Green Card.

MEHRDAD
If I could bribe the INS to grant
you citizenship, I would. But this
country doesn't work that way.

SHOHREH
Is extortion a possibility?

MEHRDAD
No.

ALI
Then I guess we're out of options.

Ali gets up. Shohreh pulls him back down to the sofa.

SHOHREH
Rich friends with government ties?

MEHRDAD
No one I want you mixed up with.
(claps his hands)
I've got it! Hamid Pouraghabagher!

(CONTINUED)

ALI

His name sounds very suspect.

MEHRDAD

He's an immigration lawyer and he'll be at a fundraiser I'm hosting tonight. I would have invited you already, but you don't have money. You can show up, charm the pants off him, and see if he can fast track your application. Just be discreet about your situation. My circle can be judgmental.

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SHOHREH

I can handle your circle.

*
*

Ali frowns. As he confabs with Shohreh:

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Fun fact about Iranians? They're one of the richest waves of immigrants to come to America. So from where my uncle's friends were standing, my family was flat-ass broke. My dad avoided his parties because he hated to be reminded of this fact. Male pride: the common denominator in every culture.

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*

ALI

(to Mehrdad)

Fine. We'll come.

*

MEHRDAD

Fantastic!

SHOHREH

And we'll bring Layla.

ALI

What? That is a terrible idea! Layla's a disaster in public.

*

SHOHREH

Layla's a disaster at school, because she doesn't fit in with Americans. She shouldn't have to wait till college to find her tribe. If we can help her find Iranian friends, then our immigration status won't be such a big deal.

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(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH (CONT'D)

(admits)

Plus, I have been dying to give her
a makeover. It's a win-win. For me.

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*
*

INT. SAEDI HOUSE - LAYLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Layla winces as a dolled-up Shohreh teases her hair.

*

LAYLA

Do I have to go? I had big plans to
crawl under the covers and listen
to *Everybody Hurts* on repeat.

*
*
*

WE PULL BACK to REVEAL Layla's wearing a flouncy gold
cocktail dress that stops just short of her boot cast. She
fidgets in it.

SHOHREH

You can do that any night. The
party will be fun! And you'll make
so many new Persian friends.

*

LAYLA

Not if they don't like me.

SHOHREH

Be yourself and they will love you.

Shohreh pulls Layla's hair into a French twist. Layla glances
at her reflection in the mirror.

*

LAYLA

I look nothing like myself.

SHOHREH

No one has to know that!

(then)

Also, do not tell them we got our
dresses for half off at T.J. Maxx.

*
*

INT. SAEDI HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Kia watches an episode of TGIF and eats a plate of *ghormeh
sabzi* (herb stew). Samira crosses through, on the phone.

SAMIRA (INTO PHONE)

Tell the doorman that you're
friends with Sami and he'll let you
in... No, don't wear denim on
denim. It's so 1993... I wish I
could come too, but I'm stuck
babysitting... Talk to you later.

*
*

(hangs up, re: Kia's food)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAMIRA (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
Where'd you score the *ghormeh sabzi*?

KIA
I made it.

SAMIRA
You made that?

KIA
Why else would I have an herb garden?

SAMIRA
You have an herb garden?

KIA
I'm the baby by six years. I've had to learn to fend for myself.

*

EXT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - NIGHT

Luxury cars line the driveway. Shohreh and an anxious Ali get out of their Camry, while Layla hobbles out of the backseat. She's now completely transformed for the party: the gold dress, hair in a poofy French twist, makeup galore. Shohreh rubs a CK One magazine sample on Layla's wrist.

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*

LAYLA
What about our car? Should I lie about that too?

ALI
Yes, we drive a black BMW 7 Series with tinted windows and gold rims.

Shohreh takes Ali's hand. As they walk a few feet ahead of Layla, she confidently buoys him up.

SHOHREH
We'll meet this Hamid person, then toss some *kabob* in a Tupperware, and be home in time for 20/20.

A grateful Ali nods, but he's still visibly nervous.

INT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The party is bumpin'. Mehrdad plays the Tonbak, while a BELLY DANCER works the room. RITZY GUESTS do the "Persian snap" and place bills in her waistband. The Saedis take it all in. Once Mehrdad spots them, he stops drumming, and greets them with a kiss on each cheek (i.e. the Persian way).

(CONTINUED)

MEHRDAD

I'm so glad you made it!
(perplexed)
Layla, you look like...

*

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Princess Jasmine at a strip club?

MEHRDAD

... An angel! Now come, eat! I had
fifty tins of caviar shipped from
the Caspian Sea and they thawed in
transit. By morning, they'll be
completely inedible.

*

*

*

*

EXT. MEHRDAD'S BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

CRAZY RICH PERSIANS dance, drink, and graze on Iranian delicacies. A group of fancy PERSIAN MEN and WOMEN linger at the bar, sipping martinis. Mehrdad ushers Ali toward them.

MEHRDAD

Hamid! Meet my brother-in-law, Ali.
He's also a Tehran University alum.

HAMID (40s, tall, dark, handsome) extends his hand for a shake. Ali grips it a little too hard.

HAMID

Class of '77, pre-law.

ALI

'75. Mechanical Engineering with a
minor in tequila. But that was
before the Mullahs lifted their
robes and pissed all over our fun.

*

The group laughs and makes room for Ali. Mehrdad turns to Layla and hands her a giant plate of caviar.

*

MEHRDAD

Bring this to the kids hanging out
in the family room. They can't wait
to meet you. And ix-nay on the
illegal-ay immigrant-ay. They're a
tough crowd.

*

*

*

INT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

An old video of GOOGOOSH plays on TV. A group of PERSIAN GIRLS, dressed to the nines, sip tea and watch. GOLNESA (15, the ringleader) and SEEMA (15) argue over the footage. A nervous Layla enters. Shohreh hovers closely behind.

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

SEEMA

At least Madonna's still relevant.
Googoosh peaked in the seventies.

*

GOLNESA

That's because Googoosh is trapped
in an Islamic society where she's
banned from making music.

LAYLA

(can't help herself)
And she doesn't need to wear a cone
bra to fool you into thinking she's
talented!

*

*

The girls look at Layla. She freezes. Shohreh frowns, then
subtly adjusts Layla's posture, and comes in for the save.

*

*

SHOHREH

My daughter Layla loves Googoosh.
Tell them your favorite song.

*

LAYLA

Man Amadeh-am. I love the flute in
the opening and the moment her
voice comes in --

*

GOLNESA

-- is perfection!

Golnesa sings a few lines. Shohreh gives Layla a little shove
and she sings along. Soon, they're harmonizing. Shohreh
smiles. It's about time her daughter got a win.

*

INT. SAEDI HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Kia and a ravenous Samira share his dinner.

*

SAMIRA

How did I not know you could cook?

KIA

You ignore me. You ignore our whole
family. That's why Layla hates you.

SAMIRA

Layla worships me.

*

KIA

Pretty sure she hates you.

*

*

SAMIRA

Ten bucks and I'll prove you wrong.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

KIA

Make it twenty and you're on. *

EXT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Shohreh and Ali are mid-story, while Hamid and his wife, ZEEBA (30s) hang on their every word. *

ALI

So while my father was dead asleep,
we snuck into his room and sewed
his pajamas to his bedsheets!

SHOHREH

Then we went to the yard and set
off firecrackers. You should have
heard him trying to get out of bed.
(imitates)
"Help! Help! The Iraqis got me!"

The group explodes into laughter. Ali sighs at the memory.

ALI

Tehran in the good old days...

HAMID

Tell me about it. Sometimes I swear
I can still smell the street corn
at Tajrish Bazaar.

A nostalgic lull. Shohreh opts to seize the opening. *

SHOHREH

Hamid, we hear you're a big shot
immigration lawyer. Which is a huge
coincidence, because we're -- *

ALI

Honey, please. The man doesn't want
to discuss work at a party. *

Before Shohreh can argue, Layla and Golnesa approach -- arms
linked. Golnesa points to Zeeba's dress. *

GOLNESHA

And that's what I'm wearing to
winter formal. My mom's wardrobe is
all that and a bag of chips. *

ZEEBA

You can never go wrong with Chanel
couture. Who made your dress,
Shohreh? It's stunning. *

(CONTINUED)

Shohreh and Layla exchange a knowing look. *

SHOHREH *

Uh... it's Lewis Vuitton.

ZEEBA *

I think you mean "Louie" Vuitton. *

SHOHREH *

(feigning confidence) *

Actually, both are correct. *

ZEEBA *

I don't think so. *

Shohreh's face falters. Layla clocks this. She's never seen her mom this out of her depth. As Golnesa drags an uneasy Layla toward the dance floor, Shohreh does her best to flash her a reassuring smile. *

HAMID *

My wife. She loves her name brands.
You should see her closet!

ALI *

You should see Shohreh's! It's full
of...

SHOHREH *

(grasping)

Tumi... and Samsonite... and
Travelpro...

(then) *

Will you excuse us for a minute?

Shohreh pulls Ali away. As soon as they're alone:

SHOHREH (CONT'D)

Why didn't you let me ask Hamid
about our Green Card application?

ALI *

What's the rush? Let's enjoy
ourselves a little longer.

SHOHREH *

We're not here to enjoy ourselves!

ALI *

One of us is...

Ali gestures to the dance floor where we now find Layla surrounded by Golnesa and the rest of the Persian girls. *

(CONTINUED)

PERSIAN GIRLS

Go, Layla! Go Layla go!

Layla confidently busts out her best Persian dance moves.
Even a boot cast can't stop her. *

SHOHREH

(proudly, to party guests)
I taught her those moves! *

Off Ali and Shohreh, comforted by their daughter's happiness. *

INT. LAYLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Samira casually takes Layla's diary out from under her
mattress and cracks it open. Kia shakes his head, horrified.

KIA

Once we cross this line, we can
never go back.

SAMIRA

Relax. I cross it all the time.
Layla mostly just writes about Evan
Parker and how he smells like --

KIA

Nutella and a hint of patchouli.
(off Samira's look)
Layla and I talk to each other.

SAMIRA

Whatever. Here's a recent entry. *
(reads aloud) *
Dear Diary, sometimes I wish I was
just like my sister Samira, but
then I remember...
(trails off, then)
... she hella sucks. She goes by
"Sami," because it's "less ethnic".
She tells people we're Italian,
cause it's "sexy." And she
completely ignores me at school.
But maybe you have to be fake and
shallow to fit in. Anyway, I hate
her, diary. I hate her so much...
(covering hurt)
She is very judgmental.

KIA

I'll take my money in crisp bills. *

PRE-LAP: Iran's pre-revolutionary National Anthem...

INT. MEHRDAD'S MANSION - NIGHT

Dinner. At the table, Mehrdad, Ali, and Hamid lift their drinks and sing Iran's national anthem. Across from them, Shohreh sits next to Zeeba. Layla and her new group of friends huddle within earshot. The mood is loud and raucous.

GOLNESA

The Eiffel Tower was so meh compared to the Taj Mahal. Where'd your family vacation this summer?

LAYLA

Um... Bora Bora. A.k.a. Boring Boring. I was like, I get it, the ocean is blue. Next!

GOLNESA

Oh my God! That's how I felt.
(then, excited)
Any chance you're free to sleepover next weekend? My parents just bought me a Karaoke machine. We can sing to Googoosh all night!

*

LAYLA

(grins)
I'll try to clear my calendar.

*

*

As Golnesa scribbles down her number, we ANGLE ON the ADULTS.

HAMID

(to Ali)
Mechanical engineering, right? Let me guess. You work for Lockheed.

MEHRDAD

Actually... Ali had a career change when he moved to America.

ZEEBA

Of course. Silicon Valley. Did you switch to tech?

*

SHOHREH

We switched to selling luggage.

*

ALI

(lies)
But business is booming. We're franchising as we speak!

*

*

*

*

Shohreh gives Ali a pointed look, but he pretends not to notice. She finally decides to take the bull by the horns.

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH

Hamid? Speaking of business, we had some questions for you about our immigration status...

HAMID

Can you speak up, Shohreh? It's very loud in here.

Mehrdad and Ali both signal to Shohreh to abort the mission.

SHOHREH

(ignores, louder)

If we needed a Green Card fast...

HAMID

What about a Green Card?

ALI

The movie. Green Card. It's her favorite.

Shohreh, now at the end of her rope, yells:

SHOHREH

WE'RE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS! WE NEED HELP GETTING GREEN CARDS!

Record. Scratch. PARTY-GOERS look at them with pity and contempt. Ali hangs his head. Layla's beyond mortified. A flustered Shohreh takes a healthy gulp of her wine.

GOLNESA

So then you lied about Bora Bora?

LAYLA

No! Ignore my mom. She's got a problem with the sauce. She's even worse than Meg Ryan in that movie.

GOLNESA

(not buying it)

Talk to the hand.

(slides away her number)

I can't build a friendship on lies.

Layla's eyes fill with hot tears. Off a guilty Shohreh, wishing she could turn back time...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREEINT. ALI'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

An emotionally exhausted Shohreh drives the Saedis home. In the back, a tearful Layla yanks bobby pins out of her hair.

LAYLA

I finally meet someone who likes me
and then you sweep in and take it
all away.

ALI

Tell me about it. Did you see the
look on Hamid's face? It was like
he didn't know me at all.

SHOHREH

He doesn't know you. You met
tonight. And I was only trying to
help us. *

LAYLA

By announcing to a room full of
rich Persians that we're illegal?

ALI

Your voice does carry, Shohreh.

SHOHREH

I'm a proud Iranian woman! We are
born with loud voices! I refuse to
apologize for it. *

Shohreh pulls into their driveway. Layla gets out of the car. *

LAYLA

Why did you even drag me to the
party, *maman*? So you could trot me
out in this ugly dress and force me
to lie to people... just so I could
find out I don't belong anywhere?
Well, mission accomplished. *

Layla SLAMS the car door closed, leaving a stung Shohreh in
her wake. A sympathetic Ali's not sure what to say. *

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

Not my finest moment. In my
defense, I was a fourteen-year-old
girl and... actually that's it.
That's my only defense.

INT. LAYLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Layla storms in and turns on her boombox. *Everybody Hurts* starts to play. She lifts up her mattress, grabs her diary, and furiously scribbles in it. We hear a KNOCK on the door.

SAMIRA (O.S.)

Layla, are you okay?

LAYLA

I'm fine.

INT. SAEDI HOME - ALI AND SHOHREH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shohreh applies night cream, while Ali changes into pajamas. The mood is tense. Finally, Shohreh breaks the silence.

SHOHREH

Why didn't you ask Hamid for help?

ALI

I don't know. I'm sorry. We were just having such a good time, talking about Tehran...

SHOHREH

Is that what this is about? You don't want a Green Card, because you really want to move back?

ALI

Yes... and no. In Iran, I felt like I was somebody. I didn't have an accent that people made fun of. I had a better job. I was a citizen. Tonight, I felt like the old me.
(a beat, this is hard)
But if we get Green Cards and stay here... I'm afraid I'll never be somebody again.

SHOHREH

Ali, you made a million sacrifices to bring our family to this country. Who cares if you're somebody out there? You're everything to us.
(squeezes his hand)
Remember what we said the night we decided to leave Iran?

ALI

(of course he remembers)
Let's give our girls a better life.

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH

Then... let's give them one. *

This lands hard on Ali.

ALI

I'll call Hamid in the morning.

They kiss. Partnership back intact. Then:

SHOHREH

Is it really pronounced "Louie"
Vuitton?

INT. HAMID'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

An unreadable Hamid sits at his desk. Ali and Shohreh sit
across from him.

HAMID

I have one rule for everyone I
represent and you already broke it.
I can't tolerate lies. I require
honesty from all my clients. *

ALI

And from now on, you will get it.

SHOHREH

You're wearing too much cologne.
See, we can be honest. *

HAMID

(amused)
Good.
(re: their file)
In that case, it looks like the
wait time on your application is...
fifteen years, give or take.
(off their stun)
You may have other options, but my
firm isn't cheap. *

ALI

We'll find a way to make it work.

Hamid glances at his watch and takes a small American flag
from his desk drawer. *

HAMID

Then let's meet again next week.
I've got a swearing-in ceremony to
get to with one of my clients.
(waves the flag)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HAMID (CONT'D)

It's the best part of the job. Talk
about inspirational. I always say
they make the years of pain and
anxiety feel worth it.

SHOHREH

(idea forming)

Are they open to the public?

INT. SAEDI HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

The Oprah Winfrey Show plays on TV. Layla, wearing her heart-
shaped sunglasses, scribbles in her diary. A paranoid Samira
steals glances at her. Just then, an energized Ali and
Shohreh enter and turn off the TV.

LAYLA

(lifts up her glasses)

Great. Now you're taking Oprah
away. Is nothing sacred?

ALI

We have good news! Hamid agreed to
help us. It'll take time and
money...

SHOHREH

Which means we might have to dip
into your nose job funds --

SAMIRA

(disappointed)

This world is so unjust.

LAYLA

(touches her nose)

Our what?

SHOHREH

Don't change the subject. The point
is, we're fixing this. And right
now, we're going on an adventure!
Come on, off the couch.

Samira gets up, but Layla returns to writing in her diary.

LAYLA

(reads her writing aloud)

Dear Diary, I want a new family.
Preferably one who doesn't lead a
double life.

Ali and Shohreh instantly deflate.

SAMIRA

Get Kia. We'll meet you in the car.

Ali happily exits, but a guilt-ridden Shohreh lingers.

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH
(sotto, to Samira)
Just be gentle. She's very fragile.

SAMIRA
I will, *maman*. I promise.

Shohreh leaves. Samira turns to Layla. The moment feels ripe for a "cue the heartfelt music" kind of scene... until:

SAMIRA (CONT'D)
When are you going to stop acting like you're the victim here?

LAYLA
I am the victim. And you have no idea what I'm going through.

SAMIRA
I'm going through the same thing! Except I found out years ago and I couldn't tell anyone. You're lucky. You get to talk to me.

LAYLA
Are you kidding? Talking to you is like talking to a wall. With really pretty wallpaper, but still a wall.
(then)
It sucks not having friends at school, but do you know what's even worse? My own sister treats me like I'm an embarrassment.

SAMIRA
You're not an embarrassment. Those heart-shaped glasses are a bit much and you have weird opinions that no one else shares, but that's what makes you you. I'm sorry for acting like I'm too cool for you. I'm not. But now I'm begging you to... SUCK IT UP AND GET IN THE CAR!

LAYLA
(a beat, then)
Why are you being nice to me?

SAMIRA
I read what you wrote about me in your diary and it made me feel bad.

LAYLA
You read my diary?!

(CONTINUED)

SAMIRA

Jesus, Layla. Can you not make everything about you?

INT./EXT. ALI'S CAR (MOVING)/PARKING LOT - DAY

The entire family is now crammed in the car. A thrilled Kia sits between Layla and Samira in the backseat.

KIA

I hope we're bungee jumping. It's been on my bucket list for years.

*

Ali parks outside a LOCAL THEATER. The kids appear confused.

INT. LOCAL THEATER - DAY

The Saedi kids follow their parents inside... where we REVEAL a NATURALIZATION CEREMONY is taking place. They're handed small American flags, as they gather on the sidelines with other SPECTATORS. A CROWD on the brink of citizenship watches the end of a VIDEO MESSAGE from PRESIDENT CLINTON.

PRESIDENT CLINTON (ON TV)

I'm proud to welcome you as citizens to this country. May God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.

The MASTER OF CEREMONIES takes the stage.

M.C.

And now, let's recognize the great countries represented here today: Argentina, Austria, Chile...

KIA

This is our adventure? What are we even doing here?

SAMIRA

Don't ask questions you don't want the answers to, Kia.

Samira covers Kia's ears, as Shohreh turns to the family.

SHOHREH

Do you know what every parent wants for their child?

LAYLA

Good posture and no split ends.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

SHOHREH

Yes, but they also want their kids
to have a better life than the one
they had. That's why we left
everything to bring you to America.
We know it hasn't been easy.

*
*
*

ALI

And that sometimes, it feels like
we don't belong here. But we do. If
you don't believe me now, I promise
you will when we're standing on the
other side of this room.

*
*
*
*

LAYLA

(verging emotion)

Okay, fine. You're the best parents
ever. Stop laying it on so thick.

*
*
*
*

Ali laughs. Shohreh wells-up. Layla grabs her hand.

*

LAYLA (CONT'D)

Don't cry, *maman*. Tears dry out
your skin.

*
*
*

Shohreh nods. She wipes away her tears, then grabs Layla's
heart-shaped sunglasses from off her head and puts them on.

*
*

M.C.

Honduras... India... Iran...

The moment the M.C. says "IRAN," something breaks in Samira.
She takes the earmuffs off Kia and CHEERS at TOP VOLUME. A
surprised Layla follows suit. The rest of the family joins
in. They scream and dance and wave their American flags. As
the CAMERA PULLS BACK...

*
*
*

ADULT LAYLA (V.O.)

We brought the ceremony to a halt
for a solid two minutes and I
wasn't embarrassed at all. I was
too busy having an epiphany -- my
family was so much more than our
immigration status. We weren't
defined by the country we came from
or the country we lived in. We were
defined by how much we loved each
other. This was where I fit all
along. For now, that felt pretty
damn great.

*
*
*
*
*

END OF ACT THREE

TAGEXT. PENINSULA LUGGAGE - DAY

Layla hangs a sign on the window: "10% off duffel bags with Student ID." Evan, in his Hot Dog on a Stick uniform, cruises by on his skateboard.

EVAN

Sup, Lila?

LAYLA

Sup.

(then, all out of fucks)

My name isn't Lila. It's Layla.
It's Persian and it's beautiful.

EVAN

My bad. Layla.

(sings)

Got me on my knees, Layla.

LAYLA

Did you just make that up?

EVAN

No, it's an Eric Clapton song.

LAYLA

Right. I totally know who that is.

(then, points to the sign)

We're having a promo on duffel bags
for Montreal if you need one.

EVAN

Nah, I can't go. My mom says it's
too expensive.

LAYLA

I can't go either...

EVAN

Looks like we're stuck together for
a week. Stop by the food court. I
can hook you up with free lemonade.

Layla stifles a smile. Maybe there's a silver lining to not
having a Green Card after all... PAN UP TO:

INT. PENINSULA LUGGAGE - SAME TIME

The Saedis have been spying from the store window.

(CONTINUED)

KIA
(breathing in)
He does smell like Nutella and a
hint of patchouli.

SAMIRA
I think he might be into her...

SHOHREH
He's very cute.
(re: uniform)
Even in those strange colorful
stripes. *
(then, proud) *
Look at her posture around him. *
She's standing up straight! He's a *
good influence. I like him. *

ALI
His eyes are bloodshot. And he's *
very... not Iranian. They can't *
date.

Just then, Layla giggles loudly at something Evan says.

SHOHREH
Why not?
(wistful)
I'm sad I never dated in Iran...

ALI *
(surprised) *
You are? How sad?

Ali and Shohreh look at each other -- once again, on opposite *
sides. Theirs is a deep well of parenting conflict. Shohreh *
glances back at Layla and Evan.

SHOHREH *
(smile forming) *
Sad enough to plan and chaperone *
their first date. *

END OF PILOT