

AMIR'S RIDE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE STREETS OF TEHRAN. DAY.

A sweaty July afternoon in Tehran, Iran. The air is thick. Cars honk and clog the streets, bodies roam the sidewalk and men sit idly in outdoor cafes. It is 1988, the apex of the decade-long Iran-Iraq war. The city, a microcosm of the state, is a whirlwind. War propaganda posters are omnipresent. A title: "Tehran - Summer 1988" appears.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. DAY.

CLOSE UP: a foot on a gas pedal accelerates. We start to INTERCUT between the following scenes and the TAXI.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

MARYAM (50s) has a weathered face and curly greying hair. She stands behind a counter and sells cigarettes to two male customers, as she has been doing for years.

CLOSE UP: the HAND of the DRIVER of the taxi switches gears.

CUT TO -

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY.

MINA (30s) struts down the sidewalk, piercing through a sea of pedestrians. She has business to take care of. She flaunts a fashionable handbag, outfit, and sunglasses.

CLOSE UP: the FOOT abruptly breaks on the gas pedal. A short HONK. Then, it accelerates.

CUT TO -

EXT. PARK. DAY.

KASRA (late 20s) is scruffy with an infectious smile. He leans against a tree and strums a guitar.

CLOSE UP: hands on the steering wheel turn it to the left.

CUT TO -

EXT. SCHOOL GATES. DAY.

HAMID (30s), late, gets out of his car to pick up DARYA, his 6-year-old daughter, from school.

CLOSE UP: an ARM hangs out the driver's seat window, waiting for a stoplight to turn green.

CUT TO -

EXT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

SHAPOUR (20s), wounded inside and out, wears a cast on his leg. He props his crutch against his chair, sits, and pulls out a newspaper to read.

CLOSE UP: two hands TAP on the steering wheel.

CUT TO -

EXT. BENCH. DAY.

YASMIN, LEILA, and NOUR (20s) are deep in conversation.

CLOSE UP: the back of the taxi, rattling. EXHAUST flows out of the car.

CUT TO -

INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

HASHEM (30's), handsomely dressed for work, quickly ties his shoes on the edge of his bed.

CLOSE UP: a hand turns the key in the ignition, silencing it. Then, the car door opens, and we follow FEET as they walk onto the pavement, then up steps.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT. DAY.

AMIR (late 50's), facing a mirror, drinks a cold glass of water, then stares at himself while he tightens the buttons on his shirt. He looks as if he has been tired for decades. His clothes are worn, his hair is greying, but his face is not uninviting. Title sequence.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. DAY.

AMIR drives his taxi down a residential street with MINA, the fashionable woman, in the rear.

MINA
 Could you let me out at this next
 light, please?

AMIR
 Sure.

AMIR (cont'd)
 Twenty-six, please.

MINA hands him a wad of cash.

MINA
 Thank you.

MINA gets out, and AMIR looks ahead. AMIR turns off his taxi's sign.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

MARYAM, the woman behind the counter, counts the money in her drawer. The café, undeniably hers, is welcoming: ordinary, but has built up an element of charm over the years. A television is on, in a corner opposite of her, airing the news. AMIR enters.

MARYAM
 Amir. Good afternoon.

Without looking, she picks a pack of cigarettes from behind the counter. She knows what to get for him.

MARYAM
 And a tea?

AMIR
 No, no, not today.

MARYAM
 Oh, I almost forgot. I think you
 told me... today's your last day?

AMIR
 It is. It's hard to believe.

(CONTINUED)

MARYAM

Time for a change?

AMIR

You could say that. You know I'll miss your cooking here.

MARYAM

And I'll miss your visits. Tell me where you're going again?

AMIR

To Ahvaz. For a little while, at least. So, not too far.

MARYAM

I assume you have family there? In Ahvaz?

AMIR

Well, I... Some family, yes.

MARYAM

Oh, so good. You'll have some people to show you around.

AMIR

(smiling)

If they're up for it.

MARYAM

Amir, it's much safer in Tehran, I heard. You know just on the news the other day, they said that further South is -

AMIR

Yes, I know... I wish I didn't. You know Tehran is home for me.

MARYAM

Sure.

AMIR gazes out the window of the café.

MARYAM (cont'd)

Amir. Everything alright?

AMIR

Yes! I should get going. I have some things left to pack.

(CONTINUED)

MARYAM

You leave tomorrow morning?

AMIR

Tomorrow morning.

Beat. MARYAM smiles and shakes AMIR's hand warmly.

MARYAM

We'll miss you.

AMIR smiles at her, then turns to take one last look at the café.

CUT TO -

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR parks his car on a quiet residential street with slightly-shabby row houses. The neighborhood is peaceful, and feels like spring despite the usual July heat. He exits his car, ducks into his basement apartment and picks up a watering can. He walks down the street, watering his neighbors' plants and picking up their newspapers to put by their doors. One of the neighbors comes out and waves to him. He waves back.

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR cooks himself an omelet for dinner in a claustrophobic kitchen with ancient appliances. The whole apartment is cluttered and in dire need of a renovation. Wallpaper is peeling and surfaces that were once white have turned mildly yellow. Old newspapers lying everywhere, almost hoarder-like. The space is dimly lit. The few belongings he has are packed into bags and boxes. AMIR takes his dinner to the couch, where he watches the news. Eventually, he falls asleep there.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT. EARLY MORNING.

The TV is still on. AMIR wakes to a news broadcast.

REPORTER

...from Iraq admits they have used chemical weapons in the war against Iran. However, he is adamant that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REPORTER (cont'd)
the Iranian government was the
first to do so. We now move to
Jaleh Square.

AMIR gets up to pack up what is left: clothing he stuffs into a bag. Next to his door, there are stacks of newspapers and boxes and bags. He picks up a box to move it aside, and finds a paper slip by the door that he has been ignoring. He picks it up and it reads:

LATE NOTICE.

DEAR TENANT: WE DID NOT RECEIVE YOUR PAYMENT FROM LAST MONTH'S RENT. RENT IS NOW 14 DAYS OVERDUE. PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR PAYMENT AND A 25% LATE FEE BY 21 JULY.

AMIR looks at his watch. It is July 21st. He rushes over to his desk. An envelope, reading "JULY RENT" sits there. Shoot. He forgot. He runs out the door.

CUT TO -

INT. LANDLORD'S APARTMENT. MORNING.

AMIR knocks on his LANDLORD's door. Soon he comes out, looking disgruntled, sporting a wife-beater and slippers. His cigarette smoke puffs as he opens the door for AMIR.

LANDLORD

Yes?

AMIR

I forgot to turn this in this month. I'm sorry.

AMIR hands him the envelope. LANDLORD counts the cash.

LANDLORD

You need to pay the late fee.
Twenty-five percent.

AMIR

Please, I've lived here for years,
I've never been behind on rent. I'm
supposed to move out today and I
don't have the money just now.

LANDLORD

I know you're moving. But I can't
just let you leave without paying
all of this month's rent. If you
don't pay, I'll call the police.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

But all my bags are packed, I was just getting ready to pack up the car.

LANDLORD

I'll give you until midnight tonight, instead of 5PM like we asked.

They stare at each other. Then, the LANDLORD closes the door.

EXT. AMIR'S STREET. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR exits his building, pocketing the empty envelope. He walks to his taxi.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR gets in the car. His leather seats have been sat on by hundreds, maybe thousands. CLOSE UP: AMIR's key in the ignition.

CUT TO -

INT. MINA'S HOUSE. MORNING.

MINA, the first woman in Amir's taxi, reads a newspaper in her kitchen. The place is well-lit and tastefully decorated; modern, but professional. HASHEM is her husband. He is dressed for work again and opens the refrigerator looking for something to eat.

HASHEM approaches the table where MINA sits.

HASHEM

Hot out today.

MINA does not look up from her paper.

MINA

Yeah.

A long pause.

MINA (cont'd)

We need to call someone in to look at the front door. The hinge is still pretty stiff.

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM

Did you try the number I gave you yesterday?

MINA

They're out of business. We could just get a whole new door. I never liked this one. It's ugly.

HASHEM

It's just a door.

MINA

Still. I want something lighter that has a window.

HASHEM

We also need to buy screws to fix the knob.

MINA

I thought you did that already.

HASHEM

I got the wrong kind. It needs a Philips Round-Pan, not a Philips Round. The Rounds get jammed in the flatter parts of the -

MINA

I thought they told us we needed square screws.

HASHEM

I don't know.

MINA

Make sure you get the square ones.

HASHEM

And the round ones?

MINA

Do we need the round ones?

HASHEM

I told you, I don't know.

MINA

While you're there, grab some caulk for the kitchen, too.

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM

I also think we're out of toilet paper.

MINA

Okay.

HASHEM

I have to get going.

MINA

I'm going to get in the shower.

HASHEM throws on his blazer and heads out. As he exits, he fusses with the door. It is hard to open. When it shuts, it closes heavily: one more wall between the two of them. They are miles apart.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET. CONTINUOUS.

HASHEM hurries out of his house and hails a taxi. AMIR pulls over.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

HASHEM gets in the back seat.

HASHEM

Good morning, sir. To the TBC, please.

AMIR

Sure.

Beat.

AMIR (cont'd)

Busy day?

HASHEM

Not more than any other day. Headed to the office. Uneventful.

AMIR

Uneventful? You should think about taking up cab driving.

They share a laugh. HASHEM starts to open up.

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM

I don't know, I'd like to think I'm doing what I was born and destined to do. Selling insurance to carpet store owners from a cubicle on the 3rd floor of a building.

AMIR

You sell insurance... To carpet stores?

HASHEM

(smiling)

Sure. Why not?

AMIR

Well what kind of insurance?

HASHEM

The kind that you can't find for a better price anywhere else.

(chuckles)

A lot of terrible things can happen to people in carpet stores, you know. Maybe there's a really really big carpet. And maybe it's sitting there, propped up against a wall, rolled up. And maybe one day a customer comes in and walks by, and he hits something, causing the carpet to topple over. Then the giant carpet falls over and crushes the customer, and he's dead.

AMIR starts to laugh.

HASHEM (cont'd)

Or maybe there's a fire. Could you imagine, someone lights a match in there and something goes wrong. All the carpets go up in flames - and the carpet store is on the bottom floor of some ridiculously tall building. And the burning of the carpets causes the entire building to crumble from underneath.

Beat.

HASHEM (cont'd)

That's why insurance.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR
You make a fair point.

HASHEM grins.

HASHEM
It's what pays the bills I guess.
You do whatever you have to do.

AMIR
So, carpets.

HASHEM
(smiles)
Carpets. Exactly. You married?

AMIR
No.

A beat.

HASHEM
My wife and I, we'll be married
four years next month.

AMIR
Congratulations.

HASHEM
(out the window)
If we even make it that long.

AMIR
Oh, I see...
(pause)
You know... Are you sure it's not
just the beard? My cousin and his
wife were married 20 years, he
decided he wanted to start growing
a beard one day, and she threatened
divorce. He shaved the stubble and
then everything was fine.

HASHEM laughs.

HASHEM
Is my beard really that bad?

AMIR
You never know. That could be the
answer to fixing your marriage.
Just try it. Shave the beard.

HASHEM

You know, maybe I will. Maybe there's -- oh, you know what, we're close to my stop now. The end of this next block is fine.

AMIR

Sure. 18, please.

HASHEM hands him money. AMIR counts it.

HASHEM

Well, I'm off. Thank you... very much. I'm Hashem, by the way.

AMIR

Amir.

HASHEM

Good meeting you, Amir. I'm going to give you my card. If you ever decide you need insurance. For your carpet store.

HASHEM hands AMIR a business card. He exits the car and AMIR waves to him, then drives off. Soon enough, he gets flagged down and he pulls over.

CUT TO -

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET. MORNING.

KASRA, carrying the same guitar from before on his back, wanders down the street, in no hurry. After some time he reaches his destination: an apartment. Before he buzzes the door, he peeks around, checking to see if anyone sees him. Then, he rings.

INT. MINA'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

MINA opens the door for KASRA. MINA smiles.

MINA

I thought you wouldn't show.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

Enter HASHEM.

HASHEM
Hello, hello.

MARYAM
Morning Hashem.

HASHEM
You know what it'll be. I'm running
behind, sorry to rush you.

MARYAM
I'm used to it.

She winks. She pops a pack of cigarettes on the counter and
he slides her cash.

HASHEM
Good day!

EXT. THE STREETS OF TEHRAN. CONTINUOUS.

HAMID walks up to a dark, brutalist office building.

INT. HASHEM'S CUBICLE. CONTINUOUS.

HASHEM's office space is pathetic and mundane. The cubicle
towers over him, boxing him in. HASHEM is on the phone with
an irritating customer.

HASHEM
No, no. The first one, not the
second one. Yeah.

Beat. HASHEM sighs.

HASHEM (cont'd)
No, ma'am, I've already told you,
that plan doesn't cover the problem
you've described to me.

Beat. He raises his voice.

HASHEM (cont'd)
That's not what I said. What I said
was--

His BOSS (50's), scruffy and slightly disheveled, walks up
behind him and crosses his arms. HASHEM lowers his voice.

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM (cont'd)
What I said was... Actually, hold on. I'll call you back in a few minutes and we'll get this sorted out.

He hangs up, stands and turns to face his boss.

HASHEM (cont'd)
Hi.

BOSS
Is this all... a joke to you?

HASHEM
What? No.

BOSS
Hashem, this is not the first time I've heard you disrespecting our customers.

HASHEM
Disrespecting? I wasn't disrespecting, this person was just--

BOSS
Hashem. Tell me. What does this job mean to you?

HASHEM
It means... It means uh, selling insurance to... To people who need it.

BOSS
Oh. Well. Selling to people who need it, that's nice. Hashem, this job... is more than just a job. It's a *way of life*.

HASHEM is speechless.

HASHEM
I-

BOSS
My father, my grandfather, my great grandfather, they all worked in insurance. Do you think it's just a coincidence that I'm standing here today?

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM

Um. No, no, I don't think it's
just a coincidence.

BOSS

Right.

They share a very awkward silence.

HASHEM

Alright.

HASHEM turns back to his desk and picks up the phone. His
BOSS returns.

BOSS

One more thing.

He drops a huge stack of papers on HASHEM's desk.

BOSS (cont'd)

Get these done before the end of
today.

HASHEM puts his head in his hands.

CUT TO -

INT. MINA'S APARTMENT. MORNING.

KASRA and MINA are seated on her couch. KASRA is holding his
guitar.

KASRA

Alright. You ready?

MINA

I'm ready.

KASRA plays guitar and sings a song. Soon, MINA joins in.
It's a new kind of high that neither of them can shake.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. MORNING.

After picking up his daughter from school, HAMID gets in
AMIR's taxi, and lifts DARYA onto the seat next to him. She
sports a bowl cut and a tiny pink backpack. She eats a
chocolate bar, looking sullen.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

Candy isn't allowed in this taxi.

DARYA looks up. She is too cute to refuse.

AMIR (cont'd)

But I'll make an exception this time. Where to?

AMIR smiles and so does HAMID.

HAMID

Darrouis.

AMIR

Going home for lunch?

HAMID

Yeah.

DARYA puts her head back down. HAMID puts his arm around her.

HAMID

Hey, it's alright, it's alright.

HAMID looks up at AMIR.

HAMID (cont'd)

She has an art project due at school tomorrow, which she was almost done with yesterday. She brought it to school today to show her friends, and someone spilled something on it.

AMIR

Oh. I'm sorry.

HAMID

I know. Bad luck. Tell him what the project was, Darya.

DARYA

It was a drawing of a pond.

HAMID

They had to pick their favorite place to go to in Tehran, and draw or paint about it. She loves the ponds in Jamshidieh Park. We would go back and have a look at it again, but we have to be back at

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HAMID (cont'd)
school in an hour and a half, and
the park will be closed in the
afternoon.

(to DARYA)
So I think we'll have to try and
recreate the picture from scratch.

AMIR
Jamshidieh Park, you said?

HAMID
Yeah.

AMIR
Well, she's absolutely right. They
have the prettiest fish in them,
did you know? I've seen them
myself.

DARYA looks up and smiles.

AMIR (cont'd)
But that isn't all that far, is it?
Just a little north from where
you're going?

HAMID
I'm pretty sure it's still a
detour. And, I'm sure traffic on
the expressway is bad at this hour.

AMIR
Oh, of course you can't take the
expressway. You should try one of
the boulevards. I'd say Niavaran
Street is the way to go.

HAMID
Oh, I didn't know you could take
that way. We just moved here
recently, so we're still getting
acquainted.

AMIR
Well, it's your call... shall we
go?

HAMID
We are supposed to be home pretty
soon...

DARYA looks up at HAMID.

HAMID (cont'd)
(to DARYA)
Maybe he knows a shortcut. What do
you say? Shall we go back?

DARYA smiles and nods.

HAMID (cont'd)
To Jamshidieh, then.

As AMIR accelerates:

CUT TO -

EXT. STREET. MORNING.

KASRA, done visiting MINA for the day, exits her home and
walks down the street.

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. CONTINUOUS.

KASRA walks in to MARYAM drying glasses behind the counter.
He comes up and sits at a bar stool, facing her.

MARYAM
Hi, there. One tea?

KASRA
(smiling)
Sure.

There is a small TV in another part of the cafe, behind
KASRA, showing a news broadcast about the ongoing war.
Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, appears on
screen repeatedly, giving speeches. Then, MARYAM brings
KASRA the tea.

KASRA (cont'd)
Thank you. How's business?

MARYAM
Not bad, not bad. And you? How's
everything?

KASRA
It's alright. Still looking for
work, but I have a feeling
something good will come soon.

KASRA pauses for a moment, and investigates the wall behind
MARYAM: blank, with a few screws in it. He points at it.

(CONTINUED)

KASRA (cont'd)
What happened to the portrait?

MARYAM
You have a good eye.

KASRA
You're redecorating?

MARYAM
Well... no. It's uh... Farhad - you know him, right? He owns the property. Well, his son was drafted just recently, and so they're getting ready to move further south to be closer to him.

KASRA
Oh. And so... this place...?

MARYAM looks up at him.

MARYAM
I'm sorry Kasra, but, it's... on its way out.

This hits KASRA. This place, a relic, soon to be gone. The cafe's walls, its own little history, crumbling too.

KASRA
...What about you?

MARYAM
(chuckling)
Me? Oh, I'll be just fine. Look, I have almost a lifetime's worth of cafe experience under my belt. There's not a single person in all of Tehran who can refuse to give me a job.

KASRA
I know so many people who love it here, and you've been here for so long, and--

MARYAM
I know. But it will all be okay.

MARYAM reaches across the counter.

MARYAM (cont'd)
Would you have some pie? It's made
in-house.

KASRA is still shaken from the news. MARYAM hands him a
plate anyway.

KASRA
I know a lot of people who are
going to miss this place.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. MID-DAY.

AMIR sits alone in his taxi, waiting, anxiously. He looks at
his watch. He opens the glove box, pulls out a piece of
paper and scans the list of his trips made so far that day.
Then, he takes out an envelope from the glove box, and
counts his earnings for the day. He's very short for his
midnight deadline. HAMID and DARYA are taking their time,
and the clock is ticking. He gets out of the car and paces
around, waiting.

EXT. PARK. CONTINUOUS.

Jamshidieh Park is stunning: the perfect escape from city
life and turmoil. Sunlight penetrates leaves, illuminating
the glistening stone, still wet from the many ponds and
falls. AMIR leans against his car. Then, HAMID and DARYA
come back from their walk in the park.

HAMID
Oh! Sorry we took a little long.
She got caught up. You're right,
those fish are a sight to be seen.

HAMID ushers DARYA into the back seat of the car.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

HAMID
I hope we didn't make you wait too
long.

AMIR
It's alright.

AMIR looks at his watch again, worried about time and being
behind on money. They start driving. After some time:

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)
Where should I drop you?

HAMID
Up by the gates, when you get
there, that's fine.

DARYA pokes HAMID and pulls him into her, and whispers in
his ear.

HAMID (cont'd)
(whispering)
Well then, why don't you tell?

The car pulls to a stop.

DARYA
(to AMIR)
This is what I made.

DARYA shows him the drawing she made. It's just about as
good a kid's art can be, but equally touching. AMIR can't
help but be flattered. He smiles.

HAMID
Well, this is us.

He hands AMIR money.

HAMID (cont'd)
Thank you, again. You really helped
us.

DARYA
Bye, thank you!

AMIR
Bye now.

AMIR drops them off, then drives away.

CUT TO -

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE. DAY.

AMIR enters the store and beelines straight to the counter.

AMIR
Could I borrow your phone, please?

(CONTINUED)

The CASHIER takes a corded phone from behind her counter and hands it to AMIR, looking at him intently. AMIR dials, then picks up the phone and moves away from the counter, his back to her.

With AMIR close in the frame, we see a television behind him, on a wall in the store. It is a news broadcast, showing a REPORTER speaking, interspersed with clips of Ayatollah Khomeini.

REPORTER

The Supreme Leader just recently announced that he would endorse a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq. However, this news is still tentative, as it is unclear whether Saddam Hussein will have a similar response to the news...

AMIR

(on the phone)

Hello? Hi, it's Amir. Uh, so listen, this is urgent. I have kind of a problem...

Then, the CASHIER changes the channel.

AMIR (cont'd)

(on the phone)

I know, I know. I'm trying. I just really wasn't expecting this.

AMIR listens.

AMIR

It's not that easy. I told you, I have to leave today, as soon as possible. Well, because... It's complicated. I'm really not supposed to say why right now. I'll try my best fix it.... Yes. I will. I will. Okay.

We see AMIR's back turned toward us, as if the whole world is watching him. He hangs up.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

KASRA

So you have looked for work already, right? I mean, do you have an idea of where you'll go next? It's tough out there right now.

MARYAM

To be completely frank with you... It hasn't been easy. I've been looking for several weeks now. It seems like almost every cafe in this town is boarded up, about to be, or isn't looking for people because they've been relocating for months, or even years now.

KASRA

I know the feeling.

MARYAM

I do have a customer, though - Amir, I don't know if you know him. Taxi driver, comes in here a lot. Older guy.

KASRA

Yeah, I've seen him around. Always clutching a newspaper.

MARYAM

Right. Amir gave me the number to someone a few days ago - his cousin, I think. Apparently he owns a bakery 15 minutes north. Maybe they'll have room for me. Who knows.

KASRA

I'll keep hoping for you.

KASRA gets up to leave.

INT. KASRA'S APARTMENT. DAY.

KASRA lets himself into an apartment in a tall, soul-less high-rise: it's beat up, cramped, sterile. His MOTHER (70s), more unhealthy than she is old, is hunched over, drinking from a mug. A portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini graces the wall behind her. KASRA puts his arm around her.

(CONTINUED)

KASRA

Hi, mom.

MOTHER

Oh, Kasra... You're here.

KASRA

How do you feel?

MOTHER

Good. I'm fine. Everything is fine.

KASRA kisses her on the forehead, when his older SISTER (30s) barges in, disgusted by the sight of him.

SISTER

Kasra, my God.

KASRA

Hi. How are you?

SISTER

It's never easy with you, is it?

She cleans the plates left on the kitchen table.

SISTER (cont'd)

You have the two us worried sometimes, you know. Dropping in and out whenever you want, sometimes sleeping here, sometimes not, every single day it's, "Where's Kasra?" "Is he coming home?"

KASRA

Okay, hold on -

SISTER

She's very sick you know.

MOTHER

(senile)

Oh I'm not sick anymore, I feel great!

She starts to cough.

SISTER

You can't leave it up to me to do all this while you're running around day and night doing God knows what.

(CONTINUED)

KASRA

Okay wait, now I told you, I'm trying to find a job - things are just really hard now, for everyone -

SISTER

Kasra, you drop by here, whenever it's convenient for you. You eat the food that we don't have enough of, and sleep on the beds that I wake up at 6 a.m. to make. And I don't want to hear anything else about how you're trying, or how hard this is on you. Because you know I didn't ask for this either.

A pause. She stares out the kitchen window, and says:

SISTER (cont'd)

Give Ma her meds, please. I'm going to lie down.

She exits. KASRA gets two pill bottles from the cabinets and takes out one pill from each. He sits next to his mother, still out of it, who says:

MOTHER

Kasra, she seems so angry. What happened?

KASRA chuckles.

KASRA

Just take these, Ma.

CUT TO -

INT. CLOTHING STORE. AFTERNOON.

We find YASMIN, LEILA, and NOUR, the three young women who were chatting in the park, at their job: they work as sales clerks in a small women's clothing boutique. They start the day off alone in the store, unsupervised.

YASMIN

(to LEILA and NOUR, elsewhere in the store)

The class is fine, I guess. I can't stand the teacher though. She lectures like she's the host of a cooking show.

(CONTINUED)

NOUR

(imitating)

"And welcome back to class, everyone! Today, we'll be exploring geopolitical conflicts in Southeast Asia! Let's get started! First we'll crack two eggs in a bowl..."

LEILA

Hey, I mean, she has to keep things interesting for herself.

The three of them laugh.

YASMIN

Leila, you should see Nour in class every morning. She can't even make it five minutes before knocking out. And she sits right in the front row, so everyone stares.

NOUR

That's not true!

YASMIN

Sometimes she'll snore.

LEILA

Come on Nour. Get it together.

NOUR

How am I supposed to stay awake? Her voice sounds like a robot. It's all soulless and fabricated. I can't do it.

More laughter.

LEILA

Psst. Yasmin. What if you -

MINA, from earlier, walks in to the store, interrupting their conversation.

MINA

Hey. What did I say about personal conversations in the store?

Although MINA is in charge, the four share an amicable rapport.

(CONTINUED)

NOUR

Not personal, academic. Yasmin was just telling us about school.

LEILA

And Nour's snoring.

MINA

Everyone snores, guys. Right. Okay, Yasmin, I need you on inventory. Leila, you're on sales. And Nour, fix these displays. You-know-who is coming in today, so everything needs to be in order.

The three disperse around the store, and MINA goes to to the register, to join LEILA.

LEILA

(staring at MINA)

Nice ensemble you have on there. What are you all dressed up for, Mina?

MINA

No reason.

LEILA

How long til Crazy shows up?

MINA

(tidying up the counter)

He didn't give me a time. As far as I know, it could be any minute now.

We see MINA, LEILA, YASMIN, and NOUR all working throughout the store. Then, after some time, we hear a door chime. MINA turns around.

MINA (cont'd)

Shit.

MASOUD (50s) enters. His body, a commanding presence; his face, one to be avoided. YASMIN, LEILA, and NOUR continue working in silence, watching their every move. MINA walks over to him.

MINA (cont'd)

Good afternoon, how was the weekend?

MASOUD does not look at MINA. He paces around the store, an eye on every little speck of dust.

(CONTINUED)

MASOUD

Good.

MINA

Sales have been pretty decent. And, I must say, the girls have been hard at work here since this morning.

MASOUD

(pointing to a shelf)

Weren't the scarves hanging up here?

MINA

Yes, they were, last week, but they were selling so well that we decided to move them closer to the front.

MASOUD

Closer to the front. Well they're no longer hanging. Scarves need to be hanging so people know what they are, and how they'll look on, don't they?

MINA

Yes. A customer told me she hadn't noticed them up there, so we moved them, and we sold more.

MASOUD wanders. Even the walls of the store are quivering. MINA is abnormally good at keeping her calm. Next, he reaches the jewelry counter.

MASOUD

Pearls. You have so many pearls out. Pearls are quite out of fashion, are they not?

MINA

Sure, but... You told us to put them out because they're more expensive.

MASOUD continues his survey. He moves towards the back, where YASMIN and NOUR are working.

MASOUD

Where is the new inventory?

(CONTINUED)

NOUR
The new inventory?

MASOUD
We had a new shipment come in
yesterday morning, did we not? Why
don't I see any new things put up?

NOUR
Oh, well, I didn't know there was-

YASMIN
Yes, it's here. In those boxes,
over there. We were busy with so
many customers yesterday, and we
had to tidy up from all the
business, so... we haven't gotten
to it yet.

MASOUD
You haven't gotten to it yet?

NOUR
No.

We see MINA. Her heart just stopped.

MASOUD
I thought I made myself very clear.
Do you know when shipments come in?

YASMIN
Monday morning.

MASOUD
That's so that they can be out on
the floor early on Monday, at the
start of the week. Do you
understand?

YASMIN & NOUR
Yes.

MASOUD
Here, in my store, we put
merchandise up as soon as it comes
in. There are customers who come
here every week because they expect
to see something new.

He starts to raise his voice.

MASOUD (cont'd)

So if someone comes by and sees nothing new, that's a sale lost. A sale lost for my business. Do you understand? This is not-

MINA rushes towards them.

MINA

Masoud. Please. Please. It's my fault. The girls only do what I tell them. I said it would be best to put the new things up later. It's my fault. Forgive them. Please.

MASOUD

Mina, can me and you talk privately? You three, back to work.

MASOUD and MINA shuffle to another room. NOUR plops down, shrouding her head in her hands. We CLOSE UP on YASMIN's hand, resting on one of the shelves. It trembles.

NOUR

(to YASMIN)

Yasmin... Do you think Mina is okay?

YASMIN

Shhhh. Not now. Here, take these.

She hands NOUR the cardboard box of new clothing. The girls work solemnly. Eventually, MINA and MASOUD emerge, and MINA shows him to the door. She shuts it and watches him leave. LEILA walks over, cautiously. MINA closes her eyes and rests her forehead against the door. LEILA hugs her from behind. Then, YASMIN and NOUR join.

CUT TO -

INT. BAKERY. AFTERNOON.

MARYAM and an EMPLOYEE (30s, male) of the bakery chat over tea, sitting at a window towards the front of the shop. A great spot for people-watching. EMPLOYEE is taking notes on a pad.

EMPLOYEE

It's been quite the ride, I'll say. Do you have kids?

(CONTINUED)

MARYAM

Yes. About thirty of them. They sit in my cafe all day and watch TV and eat all my food.

The two laugh.

EMPLOYEE

How long have you had your place?

MARYAM

Almost twenty years.

EMPLOYEE

And you're closing now? After all this time?

For a moment, MARYAM loses her peppy disposition.

MARYAM

I wish it were up to me, but sadly it isn't.

EMPLOYEE

Oh, I understand.

MARYAM

Let's just say this war has gotten to me - well, all of us - in ways we never would have predicted.

EMPLOYEE

You're right.

A beat.

EMPLOYEE (cont'd)

So, uh, this all looks good to me, really. I do have to check in with the boss and see if he's okay with it. And then, I guess we'll be in contact.

MARYAM

Really? That's great.

EMPLOYEE

I'm sorry you all have to close. I want to say I've been to that place a few times. You guys are on that corner, with the big green awning, right?

(CONTINUED)

MARYAM

Yeah, that's the one. Well, thank you for having me.

EXT. THE STREETS OF TEHRAN. CONTINUOUS.

MARYAM makes her way down various streets, smoking a cigarette and taking in the sights of the city she knows so well.

We INTERCUT between MARYAM and AMIR. She walks and he drives throughout the city.

MARYAM eventually makes her way back to her cafe. She stares at its facade.

CUT TO -

INT. CLOTHING STORE. AFTERNOON.

MINA is closing up shop for the afternoon.

MINA

(to NOUR, LEILA and YASMIN)
I'll be back in an hour and a half.
Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

LEILA, YASMIN and NOUR are circled around the counter in the store.

LEILA

So... What are we thinking?

YASMIN

I'm thinking today we mess with the world a little bit.

YASMIN points to the front of the store, where there is a silver tray close to the entrance. RACK FOCUS onto the tray, which holds a plate of pastries, tea, and a note that reads: WELCOME. PLEASE ENJOY SNACKS AND TEA, OUR COURTESY.

EXT. CLOTHING STORE FACADE. CONTINUOUS.

The three young women exit the store and start walking. The mid-day heat is unbearable.

NOUR

I'm burning.

(CONTINUED)

LEILA
How far is the walk? Five blocks?

YASMIN
More like twelve.

NOUR
God, Yasmin.

LEILA
Let's hop in a cab. We can split
the fare.

LEILA hails a taxi, and it pulls over in front of them.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR
Good afternoon.

YASMIN
Hi. Just drop us off at the nearest
pharmacy you see, please.

AMIR
Sure.

NOUR peers out the window.

NOUR
I hate this neighborhood. So
boring.

AMIR
Is it? I don't come around here too
often.

NOUR
Exactly. Nobody wants to come here.

AMIR
But you know, it's funny, I was
just on this block just yesterday.
I picked someone up over there, a
few blocks back, then I drove her
home.

The three chuckle.

LEILA
Oh. Mina.

NOUR

She's our manager. We work at the store down the block.

AMIR

Oh, I know that place.

YASMIN

Well, Mina comes in early in the morning, then drops by one or two times in the afternoon to make sure things are in order.

(playfully)

But, everyone knows we do all the work.

They laugh.

AMIR

You know, I could never work in retail. You have to be so friendly, to everyone. You have to keep up a smile for the whole day...

NOUR

Well you're a cab driver. You have to be friendly, don't you?

AMIR

Yeah, but I get the luxury of having my back turned to my customers. For all you know, I could be crying right now.

LEILA

Crying! Oh, I'm sure you don't have to deal with the kind of crazies that come around our way. Nothing worse than a newly married couple coming into our store with a husband who thinks he knows what jacket looks best on his wife.

AMIR

Oh, no. There's worse. I promise you.

NOUR

Oh, wait! Sir, could you turn it up?

AMIR raises the volume on the radio. "Wild World" by Cat Stevens plays. YASMIN, LEILA and NOUR start singing along.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR, forgetting his worries from earlier, looks at them in the rear view mirror, taken by their enthusiasm. He joins in. As the music plays, we watch the streets of Tehran fly by from the perspective of the passenger's seat. After some time, AMIR pulls over in front of a pharmacy.

YASMIN

Thank you sir, here's fine.

They start to get out, and then:

YASMIN (cont'd)

Oh, actually, we'll just be a few minutes, and then we're headed back. Do you mind just waiting?

AMIR

You'll be quick?

YASMIN

Yes. Just a few.

AMIR

Okay.

AMIR looks at his watch.

INT. PHARMACY. CONTINUOUS.

YASMIN, LEILA and NOUR wander the aisles, mischievously. Anyone, even the SALES CLERK (40s), can tell they are up to something. The three are comically aware of how conspicuous they are. Their actions unfold like a graceful, perfectly coordinated dance. YASMIN slides her hand over the shelves. Then, LEILA grabs something off the shelves, and tosses it to NOUR.

SALES CLERK

Can I help you ladies find something?

YASMIN

(sporting a faux, theatrical smile)

Oh no ma'am, we're just fine.

The three continue waltzing around the store, smirking. Finally, YASMIN gasps, and her eyes light up: she's found the treasure. She rests her hand on the box, and turns to LEILA and NOUR. LEILA nudges NOUR: this is what they're looking for. YASMIN, milking this whole thing, holds the box behind her back, hums, and starts walking away. Then,

(CONTINUED)

because she can, sprints down the aisle, and the other two follow suit, before screeching to a halt when they reach the front counter. The SALES CLERK gives them a look.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

The girls return, YASMIN holding a plastic bag.

AMIR
Ready to go?

AMIR drives off.

CUT TO -

EXT. MARYAM'S CAFE. AFTERNOON.

SHAPOUR, the young man with the leg cast, has returned to Maryam's cafe, this time smoking a cigarette. At a table, he observes the passersby. Soon, HAMID, DARYA's father, appears.

HAMID
(to SHAPOUR)
Brother.

They embrace.

CUT TO -

INT. CLOTHING STORE. AFTERNOON.

YASMIN, LEILA, NOUR and MINA are scattered around the store, working meticulously. MASOUD enters.

MINA
Hi, Masoud. Good afternoon.

He peruses the store, looking for something to be wrong. He takes his time. He walks by LEILA.

LEILA
The new items are up now, just like you asked.

He nods. He keeps going, furious at how perfect the store looks. Spotless. He moves toward the front of the store, as if on his way out. NOUR, who is working close to the door, arranging the window displays, takes a pastry from the silver platter and eats it. MASOUD eyes her with contempt. She quickly goes back to work.

(CONTINUED)

MASOUD grabs the door handle, to exit. We see YASMIN: her plan is foiled, and she is crushed.

But MASOUD clears his throat, then backtracks. He pours himself a cup from the tea on the silver tray. YASMIN and LEILA glance at him, then quickly spin away.

He sips. The three of them wait, with their backs turned.

MASOUD
(yelling)
Mina!

MINA
(from across the room)
Yes?

MASOUD
Come here.

She comes to face him.

MASOUD (cont'd)
You need to make sure this tea is restocked multiple times a day. We don't want customers coming in to an empty pot. And -

We pan away from MASOUD and MINA: the three girls keep an eye on them. From their perspective, MASOUD is still giving orders.

Then, suddenly: he coughs loudly. Then again, more violently.

MINA
Are - are you okay?

MASOUD nods. He continues his lecture, holding his stomach. He can't help but cough in the middle of it. Now he looks nauseous. Customers in the store look at him. Then, he clutches his mouth.

MASOUD
Mina, I'm sorry, I have to go -

He bolts out of the store. All the customers in the store stare at MINA, and at each other. NOUR, LEILA, and YASMIN, purposely removing themselves from the scene, are grinning to themselves. MINA breaks the awkwardness: she picks up the pot of tea, and brings it over to YASMIN.

MINA
Go rinse this out.

CUT TO -

EXT. MARYAM'S CAFE. AFTERNOON.

HAMID peers into his brother's eyes, desperate. He sees, painfully that he is hanging on by a thread.

HAMID
Shapour, we all missed you so much.
I can't tell you how happy I am to
see you.

HAMID touches SHAPOUR's cheek.

HAMID (cont'd)
Darya can't stop asking about you.
Do you remember the paper cranes
you guys made together, a while
ago?

HAMID grins.

HAMID (cont'd)
She loves them. They're hanging
from her ceiling in her room. She's
made new ones, too. But she always
wishes you were there with her. You
taught her.

SHAPOUR
I miss Darya too.

Beat.

HAMID
So... what about work, have you
started to think about places you
might want to work?

SHAPOUR
No, Hamid, no...

SHAPOUR looks down. His hands come into view. They're torn up with scratches and bruises.

HAMID
It's hard. I know it's hard.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR

Most days, I just think... I don't know if I can...

HAMID

Can what?

SHAPOUR starts to cry.

SHAPOUR

Everywhere I look, everywhere I go, is terrifying. I turn down a street alone, and I think someone is following me. I can't sleep. Every time I lie down, I feel like I'm suffocating. Every night, any dream turns into a nightmare. I can't talk to anyone. Everyone I know is afraid to be around me. Some of the people I know don't even recognize me anymore.

SHAPOUR breaks down, and HAMID wraps himself around him.

HAMID

Shapour, Shapour...

MARYAM, serving customers near them, approaches HAMID.

MARYAM

I'll get some tissues, and some water, perhaps?

HAMID

Please.

(to SHAPOUR)

Shapour. We can make it better. Come, come with us. You can live with me and the family, at least for a while. It'll be nice. You won't have to worry. You'll be with us again.

SHAPOUR stares at him, still with tears in his eyes.

SHAPOUR

I can't do that.

HAMID

Yes, you can.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR
I don't deserve it.

HAMID
Please... Can you think about it?

He nods. HAMID hugs him.

CUT TO -

EXT. THE STREETS OF TEHRAN. AFTERNOON.

AMIR's car rests at the bottom of an incline on one of the busiest avenues in Tehran. The mid-day heat is unforgiving. The air is a canvas for exhaust. What may be an accident a ways ahead has congested the road. Vehicles pulse as they idle, waiting for a light to change.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR inches forward, but very little progress. He is stuck. He opens his glove box again, counting the money he has made today. Short. Half the day has already slipped away. He looks up at the road: it's jammed for at least half a mile. He rests his head on the steering wheel.

Then, cars ahead begin to move. He begins to accelerate forward when another car abruptly swerves in from his left side. Asshole. AMIR honks. Stuck again.

He tries to finesse his way somewhere: sideways, front, any way to get off this street, but can't. Cars keep pouring in from behind.

AMIR can't take it. Not today, not now. He covers his face with his hands, face down onto the steering wheel again. When he lifts his head back up, there are tears. He waits and waits.

Finally, an escape route: the path straight ahead is still clogged, but two lanes to the right have openings. He swerves into the first one, then into the second, allowing him to reach an exit lane that pours into an uninhabited, half-street-half-alleyway. The road is ghostly, not leading to any important part of town. It is elevated, and has a substantial view of the sky: a pastel, grey-blue dip-dyed in sunlight pink. AMIR rests his head on the headrest, looking forward. He watches the sun begin to set.

CUT TO -

EXT. UNDER AN OVERPASS. DUSK.

SHAPOUR walks down a shady road under an overpass. Dumpsters, fences, dirty sidewalks. He walks almost aimlessly, humming.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

AMIR, leaning forward with his head perched over the steering wheel, coasts around looking to find a road that will lead him back into town.

CUT TO -

EXT. UNDER AN OVERPASS. SAME.

SHAPOUR keeps walking, looking to move off the road. He kicks a loose can on the sidewalk. He crosses the road, barely looking to see if cars pass. A blaring honk as a car has to swerve to avoid him. On the other side, stuck onto the structure of the overpass is an Iranian war poster, with Ayatollah Khomeini in the upper left corner, painted like God. Soldiers, guns, cities. The poster is dirty and partially torn off. SHAPOUR stops before it.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

AMIR has found his way back onto normal streets. He moves at a comfortable speed.

CUT TO -

EXT. UNDER AN OVERPASS. SAME.

SHAPOUR has moved off the road. He is on the outside of the overpass structure. There is a fence connecting the column holding up the overpass with another structure. The pole of the fence lines the side of the overpass. SHAPOUR jumps onto the fence and starts climbing. He is agile despite the injured leg. When he nears the top of the fence, he starts to get shaky. Suddenly, he hears the sounds of planes and helicopters blaring right above him. A hallucination. He looks up to the sky and freezes, as if to hide from them. After some time the planes fade away, and he continues climbing.

There is roughly a four foot delta between the top of the fence and the top of the overpass. SHAPOUR balances himself atop the fence, and quickly latches his hands onto the top of the overpass. His arms are strong enough to lift himself up to swing his legs over.

EXT. OVERPASS. CONTINUOUS.

SHAPOUR walks down the shoulder of the road. Not many cars pass by. Beyond the road, we see nothing but a vast, watercolor blue sky, moments away from turning dark. He keeps walking, as the overpass gets higher.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

AMIR takes a few more turns, then drives onto a ramp that leads to a small highway.

CUT TO -

EXT. OVERPASS. SAME.

SHAPOUR is crouched on top of the barrier of the overpass, looking downwards. Cars rush below him. Almost half of his weight is leaning forward. His eyes, full of tears, are mirrors to the moving lights down below.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

AMIR drives down the same almost-empty highway. Up ahead, he sees a figure, perched atop of the edge of the overpass.

AMIR

No!!

He slows down and drifts onto the shoulder, about 50 feet from SHAPOUR. He exits his car with caution.

EXT. OVERPASS. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR shuts his door quietly. He moves towards SHAPOUR slowly at first, one step at a time, then speeds up as he gets close. At once, he swings his outside arm around SHAPOUR as he moves, pulling him towards him and back onto the shoulder

(CONTINUED)

of the road. SHAPOUR is on the ground, looking up at AMIR. He breathes heavily.

AMIR

You alright? You alright?

SHAPOUR sobs. AMIR dusts him off.

AMIR (cont'd)

Come on now, I'll help you up.

AMIR places himself under SHAPOUR's arm, lifting him up to stand: no easy feat for an older man like AMIR. WIDE, we see it: a tall, fit, but injured war soldier leaning on a plump older taxi driver.

Now, what? The two face each other, standing on the shoulder of a highway overpass. They're both thinking it: they have to meet, or say something - anything - just like you would during an uncomfortable silence at a dinner party, or a coffee shop. They forget the world they are in, just for one moment.

Wide shot of AMIR and SHAPOUR, standing on the barren highway overpass. AMIR extends his hand.

AMIR (cont'd)

Amir.

SHAPOUR

Shapour.

They walk side by side and in silence back to the taxi.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

SHAPOUR gets in, the passenger seat too tight. His limbs are tight up against the glove box.

AMIR

Oh, I'm sorry... I'll move that.

He moves the seat back.

AMIR (cont'd)

Could... I take you somewhere?

SHAPOUR

Uh... sure. I'll... Check and see if I have any cash...

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

Oh, no no that's fine.

SHAPOUR

Oh, actually I do,
(showing some crumpled bills
in his pocket)
uh, right here, so we're good.

AMIR

No, this is on me, trust me. Do you
know where?

SHAPOUR

Um, yeah... North Shahrán. Is that
fine? I hope that's not too far.

AMIR

That's alright. I need to get back
that way anyway.

Some time elapses as they drive. Nobody knows what to say.
Both try to grapple with what words would feel right. None.

AMIR (cont'd)

Do you... want me to stop
somewhere, so you can call someone?
I can also call for you, if you
want...

SHAPOUR

No.

AMIR

Okay.

A long beat.

AMIR (cont'd)

So, you... Are you from here, or?

SHAPOUR

Yeah. I've just been in and out of
here, you know, for the past
several months because of...

He points to his cast.

AMIR

Oh, right, yes. Thank you for your
service.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR
You're welcome.

Another silence.

AMIR
Do you... feel okay?

SHAPOUR
Sure.

AMIR
That's good.

A beat.

AMIR (cont'd)
You know... Uh, you don't know me,
and I don't really know you. But
I'm an old man. And I could sit
here and tell you things like,
"there are so many people out there
who love you," and "the world
wouldn't be the same place without
you," or something like that. But,
I'm sure you've heard it all
before.

SHAPOUR
I have, in one way or another.

AMIR
And also, like I said. I don't
really know you, so what do I know.

SHAPOUR half-laughs. Another silent eternity. AMIR's only
tactic is to speak: say something, anything, to fill the
air.

AMIR (cont'd)
I, uh... Look, I'm not really sure
what to tell you right now, forgive
me. But I know when I'm in a rut I
always think about this one thing I
heard a few years ago. It was on
some radio program somewhere, I
think. It's that... The best thing
you can do in life is make the best
decisions you can with all of the
information you have at that given
time.

SHAPOUR nods.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

So... In other words... You can't judge yourself, or expect more from yourself for making decisions based on something you didn't know about at that time. You know?

SHAPOUR

(sincerely)

Sure.

A short beat.

AMIR

I don't know. That's my two cents. That's just one thing that... over the years, I always come back to. So, you can take that and run with it, I guess.

SHAPOUR

Sure, I'll run with it.

SHAPOUR looks down at his leg cast.

AMIR

Or... In your case... Hop.

SHAPOUR laughs gently.

AMIR (cont'd)

You were drafted, I presume?

SHAPOUR

Yeah. My parents are bakers. This isn't exactly what any of us planned on.

AMIR

I see.

SHAPOUR

You want to know what's so crazy?

AMIR

What?

SHAPOUR

The craziest thing is that... Sometimes, there's a part of me that misses it. At least out there, fighting every day, it felt like I had a purpose. Here... I just feel so powerless.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR
Yeah. I know what you mean.

A pause.

SHAPOUR
So how long have you driven cabs
for?

AMIR
Too long.

SHAPOUR
You're from Tehran?

AMIR
Been here my whole life.

SHAPOUR
Where'd you grow up?

AMIR
Punak. Still there.

SHAPOUR
Oh, no kidding, I was born there,
but then we moved to Niavaran.

AMIR
Nice place.

A beat.

AMIR (cont'd)
Getting ready to move, though. Very
soon.

SHAPOUR
Oh, to where?

AMIR
To Ahvaz.

SHAPOUR
To Ahvaz? Down South?

AMIR
Can you keep a secret?

SHAPOUR
Sure.

AMIR

Out of Tehran. A few years back, I,
uh... Do you remember the MEK?

FLASHBACK TO -

EXT. THE STREETS OF TEHRAN. DAY.

SHAPOUR (V.O.)

I do. They were rioting in the
streets when I was still in high
school.

The MEK, aka Mujaheddin e-Khalq, a leftist
political-militant organization that seeks a violent
overthrow of the Iranian government, engage in street
battles with the Revolutionary Guard.

AMIR (V.O.)

Right, you remember how anti-regime
they were. And so, after the
government and MEK riots, and the
state murdered thousands of
left-wing civilians, and after the
MEK assassinated Beheshti and
Rajai, they uh... Not that many
people know this, but the regime
went around murdering suspected MEK
members for at least four years.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS AND TIMES

We see more violence, more unrest. Members of the regime
break into people's homes, and harass civilians. Some of
them get thrown into jail cells, others put in military
vehicles, never to be seen again.

END FLASHBACK

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

SHAPOUR

I knew.

AMIR

And you probably know, then, that
after some time, many of the people
they were targeting weren't even in
the MEK at all. Just people.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR
Yeah. I knew a few.

FLASHBACK TO -

INT. NONDESCRIPT ROOM.

AMIR (V.O.)
Students.

Eight STUDENTS (20's) stare into the camera.

CUT TO -

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY.

AMIR and MOHAMMAD (late 50's) are enjoying food and conversation. Then, the phone rings and MOHAMMAD picks up.

AMIR (V.O.)
A good friend of mine, Mohammad...
We were childhood friends. Grew up
together, did everything together.
People joked that he was the more
successful version of me. The two
of us were having lunch one day.

CUT TO -

INT. SCHOOL. SAME.

MOHAMMAD'S DAUGHTER, gripping a telephone, covers her ear with one hand, looks around, and yells into the phone.

AMIR (V.O.)
He got a call from one of his kids.
Something really strange was
happening at school, they said.
Some of their friends had heard
that police were showing up in
certain areas and were arresting
people like crazy, and nobody knew
why.

CUT TO -

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. SAME.

AMIR and MOHAMMAD, each in their own cars, drive hastily.

AMIR (V.O.)

We suspected something was up, with everything that had been going on already... So we told the kids to get out of the area immediately, before any authorities got to them, and that we'd come get them.

EXT. ALLEY. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR and MOHAMMAD, with nothing to lose, let the students into both of their cars.

AMIR (V.O.)

We got so lucky. They told us that by the time we got there, everything had turned to madness: the regime was arresting people left and right, with little to no justification. In some cases, for people with prior records or suspected family members, they were threatening executions.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR drives with four STUDENTS in his car. They sit upright, stoic, as to not be obvious, but their eyes give away the fear.

AMIR (V.O.)

Mohammad and I ended up with eight of them, total. Three were his children, and the rest were family friends.

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR and four STUDENTS rush into his apartment. In a matter of seconds, he shows them places they can hide.

AMIR (V.O.)

They stayed in my apartment for the night. Nothing happened.

The STUDENTS lie down in the dark, unable to shut their eyes.

(CONTINUED)

MOHAMMAD shows up at AMIR's, and takes the students with him. He hugs AMIR goodbye, passionately.

AMIR (V.O.) (cont'd)

In the middle of the night,
MOHAMMAD came back. He told me he
and his wife had packed up, and
they were taking the kids and
leaving Tehran. They were moving
out to the country, to stay with a
cousin, I think he said.

EXT. AMIR'S STREET. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR stands alone outside his door, watching MOHAMMAD's car
drive off into the night.

AMIR (V.O.)

And that was the last I heard of
that. For four years.

END FLASHBACK

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. NIGHT.

The sun is now completely set. They've reached a busier part
of the highway: blurred headlights speed past our view. They
keep driving.

SHAPOUR

So... now?

AMIR

Last week... I got a call from a
mutual friend of ours. Saying that
one of the four Mohammad took with
him - not one of his own children,
I presume - had been arrested and
interrogated for treason. They
traced back to the incident from
that day and surely got him to
reveal that Mohammad had picked him
up.

SHAPOUR

What happened?

AMIR

Mohammad is in jail now. I'm not
sure about the rest of his family.

AMIR looks at SHAPOUR.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

I'm not even sure if he's still
alive.

SHAPOUR

Are they going to find you?

AMIR

Maybe.

Beat.

AMIR (cont'd)

They already caught eight students.
We took eight of them, total, four
of which were with me. I imagine it
won't be difficult for them to find
one of those four soon enough and
trace their steps back to me. So
I'm leaving Iran.

SHAPOUR

But you said you're going to Ahvaz.

AMIR

That's the first step to getting
out of the country. I can't just
fly or drive out like normal,
obviously. They could catch me
within seconds. So, being a cab
driver, I get to meet many
different types of people. I found
someone, who knows someone, who
knows someone, who's going to help
me out.

SHAPOUR

Someone to help you flee.

AMIR

Yeah. They have a car that drives
out early tomorrow morning from
Ahvaz, so I need to get there
before then.

SHAPOUR

Well, you better speed, Mister.

AMIR

I know.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR

Is it selfish for me to say that that story made me feel a little less shitty about my life?

AMIR

No. I think you're right.

SHAPOUR

I think we're close now.

By now, they are off the highway and on an attractive residential street.

SHAPOUR (cont'd)

It's this next block, on the right.

They pull up to a beautiful row house: brownstone-esque.

AMIR

Nice place.

SHAPOUR

Not mine. A friend's.

AMIR

So you won't be alone?

SHAPOUR

No.

AMIR

Do you promise?

SHAPOUR

I promise.

AMIR

Good.

SHAPOUR reaches into a number of pockets and pulls out bills.

SHAPOUR

Well, sir... Almost all my life's savings. I owe you my life, after all.

AMIR

Keep the money. Please.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR
God willing.

AMIR
Take care of yourself. God willing.

SHAPOUR exits the taxi.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET. CONTINUOUS.

SHAPOUR walks up to the door of the house, and rings. The door opens. It's YASMIN, from the clothing store.

INT. AMIR'S TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

From AMIR's perspective, we see SHAPOUR telling YASMIN something before he enters the house. YASMIN cries and hugs SHAPOUR like she won't ever let him go. With her hands on his face, SHAPOUR keeps talking, and points to AMIR's car. The two of them turn to face him. YASMIN waves, and AMIR waves back. He begins to drive off.

AMIR is low on gas. After a few blocks, he sees a gas station/mini mart and pulls up to it.

EXT. GAS STATION. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR is pumping gas. While his pump is in the car, he checks that his keys are in his pocket, and heads over to the mini mart. He buys something to eat, then heads back to his car.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS

He gets back. He puts the key in the door, but, somehow... it is already open. He slides into his seat. A quiet panic. He sees the glove box: it's ajar. He shuffles through it, breathing frantically. The envelope of money is gone.

EXT. GAS STATION. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR bolts around the gas station, looking for a sign, an answer, something. But he is aimless. There is nobody to turn to. WIDE, we see that AMIR is alone, the concrete of the gas station like a gargantuan corn field he is lost in. It is now quite dark. The only signs of life are the harsh, filthy lights illuminating the fuel dispensers, and the dying neon signs in the windows of the mini-mart.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

In a whirl of spastic movement, AMIR shuts the glove box, puts the key in the ignition and the car into gear. As he presses the gas pedal, he moves out of the gas station and onto a straight, infinite-looking road. He presses down on the pedal hard, then harder, then harder as the engine revvs...

CUT TO -

EXT. IRAN/IRAQ BORDER. NIGHT.

On the border, the site of the conflict, is the aftermath of chaos: while the fields and trenches are empty, shreds of combat uniforms, used weapons, and debris lie on the cut up earth.

It is silent, completely still, almost like this land is forgotten.

Then, suddenly, in mass coordination, from one side of the border, hundreds of soldiers appear, launching an attack. The earth below them is suddenly in pieces, flying everywhere.

Soon after, more soldiers appear on the opposite side. Now, the conflict, involving hundreds of young men, is in full force.

They quickly move to the trenches, where the violence ensues. We CLOSE UP on the faces that have been subjected to fighting in the war. We hear gunshots and grenades blast without restraint, until they echo out and we fade away, as we

CUT TO -

INT. DARYA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

DARYA, in a colorful bed wearing colorful pajamas, reads a book. She's sleepy, and tilts her head backward on her pillow, gazing up: about a dozen paper cranes hang from the ceiling. She soon notices voices from offscreen: YASMIN, HAMID and his WIFE.

INT. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

YASMIN

(re: SHAPOUR)

I'm not sure. He won't tell me everything. He's going to stay with me tonight. He was sleeping when I left. I have someone watching him, though.

HAMID

(urgently)

God, I should have predicted this could have happened. I wasn't paying enough attention...

WIFE

There's nothing more you could have done, Hamid. He's safe now. It's okay.

HAMID

Who found him?

YASMIN

I don't know. He won't say.

INT. DARYA'S BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

DARYA gets up from her bed and tiptoes to her door.

INT. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

The adults notice DARYA walking toward the kitchen. HAMID tries to quickly compose himself. Then, YASMIN, perfectly on cue:

YASMIN

Hi, baby!

She scoops up DARYA playfully, then twirls her around as she brings her back to her bedroom.

INT. DARYA'S BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

YASMIN

Look at these crazy cute pajamas!

YASMIN tickles her. She leans into her ear:

(CONTINUED)

YASMIN (cont'd)
Your dad told me you made something
really pretty today. Can I see?

DARYA
Yeah. We went back to the ponds
today.

DARYA gets her painting from earlier and shows YASMIN.

YASMIN
Wow! You are... an artist!
(in an Italian accent)
Madame, you are like Picasso!

DARYA cracks up. HAMID and his WIFE appear at her door.

YASMIN (cont'd)
I want you to show me how to paint
like that. What about next week,
when I pick you up from school?

DARYA
Okay.

HAMID
I say we hang this one up, yes?

YASMIN
Good idea.

HAMID tapes it to DARYA's wall, hanging above her bed. The
four of them take a moment to stare at it.

YASMIN points to the stick figure of a man in the corner of
the painting.

YASMIN (cont'd)
Wait, who's that?

DARYA
That's the man who drove us to the
park today.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. NIGHT.

The city has lost something now. There's an eerie beauty to
the street lights illuminating what's left of it, but it is
disturbingly lifeless. AMIR keeps driving - it's almost
pointless now. He is almost a mirror of Tehran.

(CONTINUED)

He drifts into a shabby part of town, then gets flagged down and pulls over.

KASRA gets in.

KASRA
14 Hafez Street.

AMIR
Sure.

CUT TO -

INT. MINA'S HOUSE. SAME.

MINA, shoes off and cozy on her couch, watches the news.

REPORTER
We are live from Tehran this evening, during the aftermath of yet another Iraqi offensive. On this day, both sides agreed to send their foreign ministers to the U.N. for peace negotiations and yet Iraq launched a new offensive on the Iranian border just hours ago, injuring and killing dozens...

We hear someone fussing with the front door from outside. Then it opens: it's HASHEM, carrying a bag. His beard is gone.

HASHEM
I got the stuff we needed.

MINA
That's good. Thank you.

He heads toward the couch.

MINA (cont'd)
You're home early!

HASHEM
Yeah. Thought I'd take off early today. What are you watching?

MINA
The news. You shaved your beard!

(CONTINUED)

HASHEM
I did.

MINA
Why?

HASHEM
Why not?

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. SAME.

AMIR and KASRA are closer to MINA's now.

AMIR
I know this neighborhood. You're not going to the white row house on the corner, are you?

KASRA
Yes, actually, I am. Could you pull up a few houses down, though?

AMIR
Sure. I... was here just this morning. Hashem? Do you know him?

KASRA
Uhh, well, yeah, I do.

AMIR
Are you guys related?

KASRA
No, I'm friends with his wife.

AMIR
Friends with his wife?

KASRA
Yeah.

AMIR pulls over in front of the house. KASRA doesn't move.

AMIR
I don't know if you should get out here. She's married you know.

KASRA
Her husband doesn't know.

He pauses.

(CONTINUED)

KASRA (cont'd)
Which doesn't make it any better.

AMIR
It's your choice.

CUT TO -

INT. MINA'S HOUSE. SAME.

MINA
Hashem, I have something to tell
you.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. SAME.

KASRA looks up at MINA's house, looking at the light that's
on in her living room window.

He hands AMIR a slip of paper.

KASRA
Here's the new address.

They take off.

CUT TO -

INT. MINA'S HOUSE. SAME.

HASHEM is now standing, feet away from MINA, while she is on
the edge of her couch.

MINA
It wasn't your fault, Hashem. We
were just bad timing, that's all.

HASHEM stares at her, then heads to the bedroom and shuts
the door.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. NIGHT.

They pass a cluster of ominous high-rises.

KASRA
This is the one.

AMIR
Forty-six.

KASRA
Sir, I'm so sorry, I actually only
have forty on me right now, I -

AMIR
That's fine.

KASRA
Thank you.

INT. KASRA'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

KASRA quietly enters the apartment from earlier that day.

KASRA
Mom?

He sees no one. He checks other rooms.

KASRA (cont'd)
Mom?

No response. He finds his SISTER asleep in a chair in a
bedroom.

KASRA (cont'd)
Mom?

INT. BATHROOM. CONTINUOUS.

He flings open the bathroom door, finding his mom seated on
the edge of the bathtub.

KASRA
My God, Mom.

MOTHER
Oh, Kasra, I was waiting for you!
The neighbors upstairs, they play
this beautiful music sometimes. You
can hear it if you listen closely.

(CONTINUED)

She points to the vent. Quiet, muffled jazz music is audible.

KASRA

Okay, Mom. Let's get you out of the bathroom. You might hurt yourself.

INT. KASRA'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

He helps her onto the couch.

KASRA

Are you tired? Do you want to go to bed?

MOTHER

No, no. I'm not tired.

He sits next to her. Then, he grabs a blanket from underneath and drapes it over her.

A long pause. His MOTHER is too senile to make conversation.

KASRA

Do you want to play a game?

MOTHER

I'll play a game.

KASRA pulls out a deck of cards from his pocket.

The camera begins to pull away from the scene during the following:

KASRA

Okay, so this game is called Captain's armor. What you want to do is group three cards of either one suit, one color, or one number together -

MOTHER

What about Jokers? What do we do with the Jokers?

KASRA

There are no jokers in this game. So the way it works is we put 9 cards out at once, then both of us look at the cards, then the first person to see a set of three, yells "SET." Does that make sense?

(CONTINUED)

MOTHER

Yeah, I got it.

KASRA

Okay, cool. So that's the first part.

CUT TO -

INT. TAXI. NIGHT.

Since dropping off KASRA, AMIR has not moved. The car is still on, parked. It rattles as AMIR is still, his hopeless, blank gaze piercing the windshield.

He drives, again. One or two people flag him down, and he drifts past them.

After some time, up a winding road he reaches a secluded area: a sort of overlook surrounded by trees.

EXT. OVERLOOK. CONTINUOUS.

AMIR parks and gets out. The overlook is a dirt hill of sorts with a splendid view of downtown Tehran. He sits down, alone on the hood of his car, taking it in. His figure is illuminated by the city lights. He is lost in thought, and we

BEGIN MONTAGE

-AMIR and MOHAMMAD, his partner in crime and best friend from the flashback, praying together in MOHAMMAD's home.

-Iranian police capturing protesters in the streets.

-Ayatollah Khomeini giving a sermon in front of thousands.

-AMIR, MOHAMMAD and his family happily seated at an outdoor dinner table.

-Ten Iranian soldiers lining up in uniform.

-A lecture hall full of young students, listening.

-A battle field: guns, bombs, machinery and hundreds of soldiers fighting for their lives. Then, an explosion, and we

END MONTAGE

(CONTINUED)

AMIR gets up, quickly heads back to his car and shuts the door.

CUT TO -

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

AMIR pulls up to an outdoor payphone. Picking up the receiver, he reaches into his pocket for a business card: HASHEM's from earlier. He dials, and it rings...

HASHEM (O.S.)

Hello?

AMIR freezes.

HASHEM (O.S.)

Hello? This Hashem, hello?

AMIR

I...

HASHEM

Hello?

AMIR hangs up, and as he spins around to head back:

MARYAM

Amir??

AMIR

Maryam. I need your help.

AMIR falls back against the side of the payphone and the wall behind it. MARYAM helps him up.

MARYAM

What's the matter? What's the matter?

AMIR

I have to leave Tehran. I have to get to Ahvaz before dawn. They're going to find me.

MARYAM

Who? Who's going to find you?

AMIR

Maryam, I was one of the people hiding the students and MEK members the government was targeting.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

They've been busting people left and right. I need to get to Ahvaz so I can flee Iran.

MARYAM

Go then! Go! What's the matter?

AMIR

I owe my landlord money. I had to have it to him by tonight.

MARYAM

Money?

AMIR

Yes, I'm behind. I have to give him the money back, but I don't have it. He said he'd call the police.

MARYAM

Well do you have all your things with you?

AMIR

Yes. In the car.

MARYAM

Well it's too late now. Good Lord Amir, are you out of your mind? The state could be after you and you're worried about your landlord?

AMIR

He might call the police. They'd find me that way.

MARYAM

Amir. They're going to find you any way. You have to leave. Now. Let's go to your car. We're getting your things.

With MARYAM leading the way, they head back to the taxi.

MARYAM (cont'd)

Three streets up and two over, there's an alley behind a large red apartment building. Meet me there in ten minutes.

From AMIR's point of view, leaning on his taxi on a street corner illuminated by nothing but one street lamp, MARYAM

(CONTINUED)

throws a scarf over her head and disappears into the darkness.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. MINUTES LATER.

MARYAM, in the driver's seat of a truck with a cigarette loosely hanging out of her mouth, inches up towards AMIR's taxi and blinks her lights. She gets out.

EXT. ALLEY. CONTINUOUS.

She bends down to AMIR's window, and he rolls it down.

MARYAM

I don't think it's smart for you to drive your own car 400 miles. You need to stay as low as possible.

AMIR

I don't have another car to drive.

MARYAM

I know. That's why I'm taking you. Get your bags and get in.

She goes to wait for him in the car. AMIR gets out and transfers his luggage over to MARYAM's trunk.

MARYAM (cont'd)

Make it quick. We have to get going quickly.

With his bags all set, AMIR has one last possession to care for: his taxi.

INT. TAXI. CONTINUOUS.

He gets in to park it. He reverses and finds a tiny opening between two walls, just wide enough to fit the car. He pulls up then backs into it, such that the front is still visible from the alley.

EXT. ALLEY. CONTINUOUS.

He gets out. He faces it, and in the pitch black alley, somehow, its headlights and windshield exhibit a subtle glimmer. Tonight, all feels dead and hopeless, but the taxi graces an unexpected valor.

AMIR stands before it, looking it dead in the eye as if to say goodbye. Then, a HONK.

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. CONTINUOUS.

MARYAM

Can we go?

AMIR

Yeah.

He peers out the window as they drive off. A few streets later, they're on a highway.

MARYAM

What time do they leave Ahvaz?

AMIR

Six.

MARYAM peeks at a clock on her dashboard: it's just after midnight.

MARYAM

Shit. We really don't have time for stops.

CLOSE UP on MARYAM's foot as she accelerates. WIDE, we see the truck zooming off into the distance.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. HOURS LATER.

It's the middle of the night, and both of them are wide awake. The drive along the highway is a peaceful refuge from what's coming.

MARYAM

How many people were you hiding?

AMIR

Four.

A beat.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

That was just that one time. There were others. And there were people that I wanted to help that didn't make it.

MARYAM's gaze is still on the road. Then, the truck slows down as road signs direct cars to one side.

MARYAM

Shit.

Police direct the vehicles. AMIR and MARYAM try to keep their calm. Now, there's a jam on this part of the road.

One of the OFFICERS directing traffic approaches their car. MARYAM rolls down the window.

MARYAM (cont'd)

Hello, there.

OFFICER

Ma'am, we're checking licenses for everyone who passes through here.

She reaches for her license and hands it to him.

MARYAM

How long is this road block?

OFFICER

(not looking up from the license)

It could be up to a forty-minute delay. There was an attack nearby just a few days ago. Parts of the road are still crumbling.

MARYAM

Oh. My husband here, he's sick. So... I'm driving to bring him to see his family.

The OFFICER hands the license back.

OFFICER

Drive safely. And please keep to this side of the road.

MARYAM

Thank you.

They inch forward. We CLOSE UP on both of them: they are both sweating.

EXT. HIGHWAY. CONTINUOUS.

A series of shots of the congested highway suggest MARYAM and AMIR are stuck in the jam for quite some time.

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. LATER.

The truck has nearly reached the end of the jam.

MARYAM

Damn it. Now we're behind.

They move forward more, almost to the opening up ahead. When they reach it, MARYAM accelerates forward. This part of the highway is quite elevated, overlooking land on the right.

Now past the traffic jam, on the clear part, they take a good look beyond the road: destruction. Trash and shards of machinery pollute the land. They keep going.

CUT TO -

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. DAWN.

Now they are pressed for time. MARYAM's clock reads 5:16am, with still a ways to Ahvaz. Maryam looks up at a road sign:

MARYAM

We still have 36 miles to Ahvaz.

She looks forward and takes a deep breath.

CLOSE UP on MARYAM's hands gripping the steering wheel like she won't let go, then on AMIR rubbing his palms together, then on beads of sweat on his eyebrow.

MARYAM accelerates more - this time, illegally.

EXT. AHVAZ CITY LIMITS. DAWN.

Ahvaz is the most polluted city in the world. From HIGH UP we see the truck is on a road lining a body of water, but only the foreground is fully visible: thick smog conquers the road up ahead, the subtle outline of the city, and the water. The pollution and the morning sunlight has rendered the city a vicious orange tint.

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. CONTINUOUS.

Moving quickly is more challenging now. We are in an urban environment, with foot traffic, cars and bicycles swerving in and out of lanes with little caution.

MARYAM stops and goes and stops and goes, pounding the gas pedal as much as possible between stops, then slamming the brakes.

We see AMIR: barely breathing as he sees the clock on the dashboard read 5:47. Jaw clenched, both of his arms grip the seat.

There is nothing to say now.

A green light leads them onto a rather empty road, and MARYAM floors the pedal.

MARYAM
Direct me!

AMIR
A turn here, right on the left,
here.

She swerves.

AMIR (cont'd)
Four blocks up.

Fast.

AMIR
Turn here. Right.

5:55.

AMIR
Up more. Keep going until I tell
you to stop.

Very fast. 5:57.

AMIR (cont'd)
(pointing left)
Here, here!!!

She brakes violently. Turning left, they venture up, up, up a skinny gravel road - part forest, off the grid. 5:59.

Finally, they reach a clearing: a large sandy patch, boxed in by trees.

They get out of the car immediately.

EXT. CLEARING. CONTINUOUS.

No one.

CLOSE UP on AMIR, panting, scanning the area, looking for a sign. Nothing.

MARYAM is behind him, eyes on AMIR, hands gripping her head.

AMIR whips his head around, again.

They both take aimless steps around the clearing, until...

In the distance, the nose of a vehicle appears.

MARYAM

Amir!

They both stand frozen, unsure of what is coming. AMIR clenches his fists. Then, as the van approaches, barely slowing down and swerving harshly in front of the two of them, the MAN sitting in the passenger's seat pops out of the van's sunroof.

MAN

Yalla, we must go, we must go!
Quickly!

MARYAM sprints to her truck, opening the trunk. AMIR runs to meet her. She grabs his two bags, ready to hand them to him.

MARYAM

Here! Here!

He takes the bags, and MARYAM turns around to the trunk again. She turns around to the trunk again. A box is left.

MARYAM (cont'd)

Amir, the box!

AMIR

I can't take it. There's no room.
Keep it.

They embrace, swiftly.

MARYAM

Go! Go!

(CONTINUED)

He runs to the van. The back doors open, and someone lifts AMIR in. It speeds off, leaving a trail of dust behind. AMIR waves to MARYAM from the back of the van.

From the van's point of view, we see we are leaving MARYAM. She gets smaller and smaller as we pull away from her and dust fills the air.

We move back to MARYAM, now alone in the clearing, in silence. She dusts herself off and climbs back into her truck.

INT. MARYAM'S TRUCK. CONTINUOUS.

MARYAM makes her way back to urban Ahvaz. The road she is on is quiet and covered in trees. Shortly the trees begin to thin out as she approaches the city. She hears a flurry of sounds coming from a distance: pops, shouting... then cheers.

Now, the city and water is in full view. People run in groups across the street, holding hands. Someone on the side of the road jumps up and down, an Iranian flag in hand. Then: fireworks. Above the water, above buildings, everywhere. She looks up at houses on the hills: people singing and dancing and blasting music. The city is a celebration.

With MARYAM stopped at a red light, A TEENAGE BOY holding a bell slams into her car.

TEENAGE BOY

The war is over! The war is over!

MARYAM chuckles at first, which soon turns into a full-fledged, vivacious laugh. She then gets to driving, headed straight for Tehran.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. STORE FRONT. MONTHS LATER - DAY.

YASMIN stands on a ladder facing a clear glass window with mannequins in it. There are letters on the glass, freshly painted, and paint cans everywhere.

MINA

No, you're not doing it right! I told you you have to let the paint dry first before doing the next layer.

(CONTINUED)

LEILA

You didn't tell us that at all!

NOUR

Mina, why would we do this ourselves, can't we hire a guy to come and make the sign for us?

MINA

"A guy"? So "guys" are free then, huh?

The three laugh.

MINA (cont'd)

Look. Let me show you.

MINA gets on the ladder and begins painting the glass. She's doing well, until she slips and messes up one of the letters. YASMIN, LEILA and NOUR crack up.

MINA (cont'd)

Quick. Hand me a paper towel.

LEILA hands her one. She scrubs.

NOUR

Come on, Mina.

MINA

Fine, you're right. We're calling a guy. We're calling a guy!

She gets down and moves the ladder aside. We face the four of them, looking up at the sign.

YASMIN

It doesn't look bad, you know.

MINA

You're right. It doesn't.

From far behind them, we see the entire store front. The lettering reads: *MINA'S BOUTIQUE*.

CUT TO -

INT. APARTMENT. SAME.

HASHEM, in a work-in-progress apartment, sports a tank top and cargo pants covered in paint. A team of contractors work alongside him.

He and some men first hang a mirror onto a wall, then move furniture around, then paint the living room walls. He steps back and looks at the work he's done, satisfied.

CUT TO -

INT. NURSING HOME. SAME.

It is social hour at the nursing home. People play bingo, eat lunch, and socialize in a large open room with round tables.

KASRA is their waiter. He hops around to various tables taking orders, friendly with everyone.

Once he is done serving, he takes off his apron, grabs a guitar and plays music for people to hear.

CUT TO -

EXT. PARK. SAME.

DARYA, HAMID and his WIFE have a picnic in the park, overlooking the pond from earlier. The parents play with DARYA.

CUT TO -

INT. YASMIN'S HOUSE. SAME.

SHAPOUR buttons his shirt in front of a mirror.

YASMIN
(from elsewhere in the room)
Are you nervous??

SHAPOUR
Not really. More excited than nervous.

YASMIN
I don't have to go in until later today, want me to ride with you?

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR

Sure.

YASMIN

Okay, I'll get my shoes on.

SHAPOUR

Do you mind if we make one quick stop on the way?

YASMIN

Yeah, sure.

CUT TO -

EXT. AMIR'S STREET. DAY.

YASMIN peeks her head out of the car window.

YASMIN

Is this the one?

SHAPOUR

I think it is.

They get out and walk up to the building. SHAPOUR rings the doorbell, and the LANDLORD from the beginning emerges.

LANDLORD

Can I help you?

SHAPOUR

Hi, uh... You don't know me, uh...
I'm here to make a payment.

LANDLORD

Which apartment number?

SHAPOUR

Uh, so actually I... don't live here.

The LANDLORD is skeptical.

SHAPOUR (cont'd)

There's a woman, named Maryam -

LANDLORD

I don't know a Maryam.

(CONTINUED)

SHAPOUR

No - I know - she owns a cafe downtown. Anyway, she told me something about a previous tenant that didn't pay off a late fee. It was quite some time ago.

LANDLORD

Do you remember the name?

SHAPOUR

Yes. Amir.

LANDLORD

Yeah. I remember.

SHAPOUR

Yeah, well anyway I... Wanted to pay that fee on his behalf. Get rid of any bad record of his.

LANDLORD looks at him strangely. SHAPOUR pulls out an envelope and hands it to him.

SHAPOUR

So... Here. I wasn't sure of the exact balance. But that should be enough to clear it.

LANDLORD

Okay.

SHAPOUR

Have a nice day.

The LANDLORD shuts the door. They walk back to the car. SHAPOUR puts his arm around YASMIN.

YASMIN

He was weird.

They snicker.

CUT TO -

EXT. MARYAM'S CAFE. DAY.

The exterior of the cafe is barely changed from before, except for a *REOPENING* sign that is draped over the front awning.

INT. MARYAM'S CAFE. CONTINUOUS.

MARYAM is behind the counter, greeting people and making and serving coffee, as always. The cafe is perfectly full of life again: all the usual decorations and patrons inhabit it. The TV is on, this time showing a wrestling match. A crowd of men surround it and cheer on.

MARYAM turns around to get something from the cabinet behind her, but notices one thing that is missing. Above her, on the wall, are the four screws from before, still holding nothing. On the floor to her right is AMIR's box that he left behind when the van came to get him. She digs through it: it's full of newspapers, photographs, trinkets. She pulls out a framed photo of AMIR, taken from the outside of the taxi. He's in the driver's seat, looking at us, doing a thumb's up sign. She places it up on the empty wall spot, covering the screws.

From the point of view of the front counter, we look outward at the front patio area of the cafe. All the outside tables are in sight, as well as the busy streets of Tehran as the backdrop.

In a series of cuts we see the various people we know on the outdoor patio: drinking, smoking, socializing, reading, people watching. First KASRA, then LEILA & NOUR, then HAMID & DARYA soon joined by YASMIN and SHAPOUR, then MINA, then HASHEM.

Finally, we look out on an empty patio, with downtown Tehran still in view. The city, still busy, still standing, still full of character - a city almost always littered with unfortunate things... but, God. Doesn't Tehran wear it well.

FADE OUT