

SANFISH

Screenplay by

Annemarie Jacir

Based on

The novel by Maha Gargash "The Sand Fish"

1 INT. TENT - ARABIAN PENINSULA, 1950 - DAY 1

A young woman's face is tilted upwards and held in place as if being examined.

Another woman's hand runs a hand across her cheek, then lifts her lips up to check her teeth.

A row of WOMEN nod their approval of NOORA, 17.

A man's hand reaches out and shakes the hand of another.

An ELDERLY WOMAN throws her head back and trills congratulations into the sky.

2 EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - DAY 2

The petite bride, Noora, veiled in a traditional bridal *thoub*, walks amongst a small crowd of people. Her steps are slow and uneasy. She keeps her head down.

By her side, her brother SAGER, 18, escorts her to the shore.

JASSEM, a man in his 50s, proud and sturdy, stands on a boat waiting for them to approach. A young man, HAMAD, obediently stands behind him, steadying the boat from the waves.

As Noora and Sager approach, the sight of the sea terrifies her and she freezes. The crowd is disturbed. Sager pulls at her to keep moving. She grasps his arm, her wide eyes fixated on the water beneath the bobbing boat.

Sager pulls her forward. Her body refuses to move. She eyes look up towards Jassem, waiting on the deck...

...and collapses.

Sager immediately falls to her level.

JASSEM

(bellows from the boat) What's going on here? Is this how she acts after I came all this way?

Noora grasps the sand, unmovable.

Sager leans into her.

SAGER

It's done, Noora. Keep your dignity!

She shakes her head.

SAGER (CONT'D)
It will be a better life. You'll
live like a princess.

NOORA
But you're staying here.

SAGER
It's different.

Her eyes flicker to catch the crowd whispering to each other.

Carefully Sager lifts her chin up to face him. But somehow he
can't seem to make eye contact.

SAGER (CONT'D)
He'll give you protection. Safety.
Everything. You'll never be hungry.

She searches his face, eyes wide with betrayal.

SAGER (CONT'D)
I gave my word. It would be
dishonorable to break it.

He looks down at the sand.

Understanding he won't save her, her expression changes, like
a cloud passing over.

She turns her face towards the waiting boat.

3 EXT. SEA - ON BOARD DHOW - DAY 3

Sails capture the breeze. The wooden dhow moves ahead on an
open and exquisite sea.

4 INT. DHOW - BELOW DECK- DAY 4

Sitting within the wood skeleton of the ship, below deck,
Noora leans against a sack of rice.

Across from her is Jassem's first wife LATEEFA, 50, well
rounded, and comfortably propped up on another mattress.
Surrounding them are more sacks of rice, dates and other
storage items.

Lateefa eyes her.

LATEEFA
He doesn't like radishes. He likes
onions with most meals.
(MORE)

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
But not too much in the summer. You
will have to learn all those
things.

Lateefa switches her weight to her other arm.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
As wife number three, you will
share the responsibility of the
household.

Noora nods, hiding her lack of knowledge of yet another wife.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
When Jassem married Shamsa Bint
Juma Bin Humaid three years ago the
villagers celebrated for three
days. She is the most beautiful
woman in Wadeema, daughter of a
wealthy merchant. We welcomed her
to our household with pride.

NOORA
Why didn't Shamsa come with you
here?

Lateefa drops her chin.

LATEEFA
To live in the grandest home in
Wadeema, you must also learn to
conduct yourself differently. And
not to speak in such a low class
accent.

Above their heads, the sounds of the men on deck are heard faintly.

The boat suddenly takes a dip. Noora grabs what she can to balance herself.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
You will call me *Ommi* Lateefa
(*mother* Lateefa)

NOORA
Yes, *Ommi*.

As the boat continues to rock, she breathes deeply through her nose.

From above deck, they men continue to call to each other. Sound of their feet stomping on the wood above their heads.

NOUKHADA (CAPTAIN)
(OS) Coming to open sea!

Noora looks upwards towards the ray of light coming in from above deck. Her lips are partly open and her breath heavier than usual.

LATEEFA
It is expected, of course, that you
will not lose too much time
bringing us a child into the
family.

Lateefa nods as if agreeing with herself.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
After all, it's your duty as wife
to Jassem Saeed Bin-Mattar.

The boat continues to rise and dip.

Noora focuses on breathing.

5 EXT. DHOW - ABOVE DECK - DAY 5

Jassem commands his men from his raised position.

He watches as Hamad and the other crewmen adjust the sails.
The waters are rough.

From the opening beneath deck, Lateefa's head suddenly pops up. She calls to Jassem concerned.

LATEEFA
The bride...!

Jassem jumps down to see what the matter is. He peers down into the opening. Noora is collapsed into a ball, clutching her body in fetal position.

JASSEM
Hamad! Bring the mattresses up!

He points to one side of the boat.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
Make a space for the women.

A white cloth is spread across the screen. Hamad and another man secure two wooden poles in place, which hold the newly created white screen separating the women's new quarters from the rest of the deck.

Jassem assists Noora above deck and helps her sit at the ledge of the boat in the new quarters.

Lateefa, following behind, clucks her tongue and shakes her head.

Her face yellow, Noora grasps the side of the rocking boat and breathes deeply.

Lateefa arranges her things and mumbles to herself.

LATEEFA

A terrible inconvenience having to
move everything...

Feeling worse, Noora bends her body towards the sea. The waves splash up towards her. A strong gust of wind blows her veil off and her unruly hair upwards.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

For god's sake, tame your hair. You
look like a wild animal.

Noora tries to hold down her curls.

NOORA

It's the wind. I can't do anything
about it.

LATEEFA

Why do you click your words like
that anyway? It sounds awful!

NOORA

That's how we speak in my village
Ommi Lateefa.

LATEEFA

Well you have to learn to speak our
way. Otherwise everyone will think
you are stupid.

Jassem flips open the flap, returning with a lime.

JASSEM

It always takes getting used to.

Gently he sits next to her and extends the lime.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
It will be OK. Try sucking on this.

She looks up at him, moved by his kindness.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
And let the wind cure you.

He nods a supportive smile at her. She reaches for the lime...

...and instead her body lurches forward to vomit.

Jassem jumps back in shock. Lateefa runs forward to help him wipe his *dishdasha* clean.

An embarrassed and ill Noora, hand over her mouth, leans over the side of the boat, vomiting again.

7

EXT. DHOW - DAY

7

Luscious saffron-like dunes as the dhow passes from one landscape into another.

The deep voice of the boat's *Nahham* (singer) rises above the sound of the sea in a haunting and melancholic song.

Noora lies on the mattress in the women's quarters.

Lateefa, like a queen in Odalisque position, lies on the other side, deep in her afternoon nap.

Bored, Noora stares up at the billowing sails.

She rolls over on her side and notices a small tear in the cloth barrier between the women's quarters and the eight-man crew working hard on the other side.

She positions herself and peers out through the tear.

The *Nahham* continues to sing while Jassem is propped up at the front, pleased with what he hears.

The other men work in the hot sun, their naked flesh shining with sweat. Her eyes drift until she stops on Hamad, young and handsome.

She lingers on the way his arm muscles brace with each movement.

A deep sound from Lateefa makes her jump.

She turns guiltily only to find Lateefa sound asleep and rolling into another position.

8

EXT. DHOW - MORNING

8

Waves gently lap against the boat. A net breaks the surface as several fish flip and flop in their final moments of life. Hamad and a few of the men take advantage of the calmer sea to fish.

Noora sits on her legs while Lateefa attempts to fix her hair.

LATEEFA

My god, girl. More.

Noora passes her a bottle of oil. She yanks one side of her hair.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

More will tame it. We'll do it.

NOORA

Ommi Lateefa?

LATEEFA

Yes?

NOORA

Is Jassem angry at me? For ruining his *dishdasha*?

Uninterested, Lateefa remains focused on straightening her hair.

NOORA (CONT'D)

He hasn't come to visit us since I did that.

Lateefa scoffs.

LATEEFA

Who do you think you are? He's an important man, he's needed to run the ship. Not coddle his silly young bride and her weak stomach.

9

EXT. DHOW - LATER

9

Jassem and his men sit in a circle enjoying the fresh fish lunch and rice.

JASSEM
We should eat food of the modest,
be simple in life.

His men nod in agreement.

On the other side of the sheet barrier, Lateefa and Noora also enjoy the delicious catch of the day. As they eat, they listen to Jassem's voice.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
You see, if you live a simple life,
you can still live happily if one
day you lose your riches.

Lateefa calls across the barrier.

LATEEFA
Jassem. Do you have any more limes?

A beat.

Then a slender, muscular arm slips through the cloth flap holding a lime. He waits.

Unsure of what to do, Noora looks at Lateefa, who indicates her to take it.

Noora reaches for the lime and the arm quickly retreats.

Lateefa takes it and squirts it over the lunch. Noora looks back at the empty space where the arm was.

10 EXT. DHOW - AFTERNOON

10

The *nahham's* sweet voice fills the skies.

Noora pretends to nap. She hears the quiet mumbling of some of the sailors on the other side.

Carefully she positions herself so she can watch them through the small hole.

Sun-kissed skin, brown feet pass by on the wooden deck as the men quietly work.

Jassem is asleep.

She searches for Hamad but can't manage to see enough.

Quietly she uses her finger to try to open the hole wider. With tiny movements, she tears at the hole to see more.

She spots Hamad and strains to watch him work. He leans his body forward. Slim, his body is wired with muscles. A man who has spent his life doing manual labor.

Drawn to his movements, she allows her eyes to explore his body again...

... WHAP! She's struck in the face by the cloth flap.

She whips her head back, eyes stinging from the pain of the hard cloth the wind has slapped at her.

11 EXT. WADEEMA SHORELINE - DAY 11

The shoreline of a busy, trading village.

12 EXT. DHOW - SAME 12

A confident Jassem is propped at the front of the ship. He looks out at towards the approaching port.

Jassem snaps open his time piece. He smiles. They have arrived.

The men control the boat. Lateefa gathers their belongings while Noora stands intrigued by the new sights before them.

13 EXT. WADEEMA PORT - DAY 13

The port opens up in front of them, buzzing with people from all walks of life.

Local men help pull the ship in.

Noora's hungry eyes take it all in... the lines of other ships, fishermen and sailors, running children,...

Jassem confidently disembarks. He extends his arm to help Lateefa off the ship. Although her movements are heavy, she is clearly happy to be on land again.

Jassem smiles and extends his arm to Noora. She blushes and smiles back at him, happy to feel he's not angry at her.

JASSEM

Welcome!

He indicates the new world in front of them.

Even Lateefa gives her a nod to indicate she's noticed Jassem's happy mood.

As the other men unload the ship, Lateefa, Noora, Jassem, and Hamad head into the nearby souq on foot.

14 EXT. SOUQ - DAY

14

Crowded and alive, Noora is delighted with this special world; a market place full of fruit, vegetables, fabrics, and knickknacks.

SELLER

Hello! Come, come...

A man selling brass calls out to her. Noora slows her pace.

SELLER (CONT'D)

For you...

As he waves his hand over his goods, Lateefa clucks her tongue at Noora to keep walking.

Other women and men selling their wares call out to her. A commingling of languages dance all around Noora, floating off the tongues of various merchants. Persian, Indian, African,...

Another merchant holds out a silk cloth. Lateefa touches it in order to examine the quality. Noora does the same.

NOORA

We never had these things!

Lateefa nods knowingly.

As they continue through the souq, Lateefa indicates a tall structure.

LATEEFA

A wind tower.

NOORA

Wind tower?

LATEEFA

Only the rich have wind towers.
(beat) We have two at home.

Noora's eyes shine.

As the four of them continue through the souq, this feast for the eyes seems endless.

Lateefa stalls in front of a stand full of red pomegranates and waits until Jassem notices.

JASSEM
What do you want pomegranates for,
woman!

She's quick on her toes.

LATEEFA
A treat! For you and your new wife!

He scowls.

JASSEM
Too messy. And it's not the season.

LATEEFA
It is, they always come from Iran
at this time.

But it's too late, Jassem has his own idea...

JASSEM
Hamad! Mangoes! Find the best
mangoes you can!

Hamad nods and heads towards another stand.

Noora notices Lateefa muttering to herself.

LATEEFA
But it's not the season for
mangoes...

Jassem is full of energy.

JASSEM
And we must distribute food at
Wadeema to honor the arrival of my
new bride! A full day of rice and
meat for all!

Noora feels special.

An elegant man in his 50s, JUMA BIN HUMAID, approaches them.

Jassem seems surprised but pleased to see him.

Lateefa hisses quietly to Noora.

LATEEFA
Shamsa's father.

The men exchange a traditional greeting.

JUMA
Congratulations on your new bride
Jassem.

JASSEM
Thank you dear friend.

JUMA
I am delighted for you. However you
know Shamsa. Her heart is made of
fire. She's very upset...

Jassem straightens himself.

Lateefa quickly pulls Noora away and pretends to look at
fabrics.

JASSEM
How did she know I was taking a new
wife?

JUMA
From you. Aren't you the one who
told her before leaving?

A dark cloud passes over Jassem's face, his eyes dart across
the souq in search of Lateefa.

Lateefa ducks her head low feigning closer examination of the
fabrics. The shopkeeper leans in....

INDIAN SELLER
Silks for the new wife..?

JASSEM
What else did she tell you when you
came to visit our home?

JUMA
Oh I didn't come to your home. She
came to me.

Jassem is confused.

JUMA (CONT'D)
She returned to our home.

Jassem almost chokes.

JASSEM
What???

Juma reassures him.

JUMA

I told her she could stay only
until you return. She belongs to
you now.

Jassem pats his back.

JASSEM

Good friend you are.

Juma holds up his hands as if to say "it's only natural".

JASSEM (CONT'D)

But I want her home before we are.

As Lateefa continues to hide between the fabrics, Noora by
her side, the Indian seller sings out...

INDIAN SELLER

Women always bring trouble!

He snickers to himself.

15

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

15

Riding on the backs of a donkeys, Noora watches Jassem's
back. He rides ahead of the small group.

The mood has changed: Jassem is now silent and sullen. No one
speaks anymore.

They pass a group of BEGGARS. One of them comes right up to
Noora, extending his hand desperately.

She is unsure how to react. The beggar follows her.

BEGGAR

Please sister...

Noora looks to Lateefa for guidance. Lateefa raises her chin
and clacks her tongue dismissively at him to leave them.

As they move forward, Noora quickly glances behind her
shoulder at him. His wide, liquid eyes hold her gaze. A
broken man.

Further down the road, they pass a group of pearl divers and
fisherman who obediently greet Jassem with respect.

PEARL DIVERS

Welcome back *seed'na*.

On the side of the road, simple mud homes. A few women peer from the doors as they pass.

Noora sees two women in a doorway whispering to each other as they scan the figures of the veiled women on donkeys.

WOMAN

Which one is the bride?

Unsure, the other shakes her head.

16

EXT. HOME - DAY

16

Noora looks up at the beautiful home before them in awe. An elaborate wood door. Beautiful windows.

A childlike voice shrieks out...

YAQOOTA

Welcome, welcome!

YAQOOTA, a young woman around Noora's age, skinny and slightly unkept, comes bursting out of the house to help them off their donkeys.

Noora is intrigued by her presence.

His mind elsewhere, Jassem slips away without a word to the others.

LATEEFA

(to Yaqoota) Take the new one to her room so she can wash up.

YAQOOTA

Yes Ommi Lateefa.

LATEEFA

Show her our ways, how we do things. Everything. She never lived in a proper household.

Yaqoota nods.

Noora smiles at her.

NOORA

Are you Shamsa?

Yaqoota shrieks with laughter. Lateefa rolls her eyes and then turns her attention back to Yaqoota.

LATEEFA

And then come to my room. I need my
back rubbed.

Suddenly Noora notices a figure in one of the windows: a
woman watching them...

SHAMSA.

She's stunning. Noora attempts a smile.

Shamsa narrows her eyes and abruptly turns away.

17 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

17

Noora follows Yaqoota through the open courtyard as Yaqoota
babbles, seemingly to herself.

Yaqoota points out the majlis.

YAQOOTA

That's where we sit in the summer.

And upwards...

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

See that? It's a wind tower. It
pulls in the air and blows it into
the room.

She points to the other side.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

The men's majlis. There's also a
wind tower there...

18 INT. COORIDOR - SAME

18

They make their way down a cooridor. Yaqoota continues to
explain the layout of the house.

YAQOOTA

Arbab Jassem's room, Ommi Lateefa's
room, Shamsa's room...

She enters a door.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

Your room. Let's get you ready.

Inside Noora's room, Yaqoota helps Noora change.
She touches her face admiring her beauty.

YAQOOTA
Very pretty. What's your name?

NOORA
My name is Noora al Salmi.

Yaqoota squeals in laughter again.

YAQOOTA
How you speak! Where do you come from?

Noora is taken back.

NOORA
From Jebel Hneish, it's a mountain village.

YAQOOTA
Do you all speak like that? Say more words! Please please!

Noora scrunches her brows.

NOORA
What? You understand what I am saying, don't you?

Yaqoota breaks out in laughter again.

Suddenly a pounding on the wall...

SHAMSA (V.O.)
Be quiet! I'm trying to sleep!

Yaqoota slaps her hands over her mouth still giggling. She straightens herself up and indicates the window.

YAQOOTA
Outside there is a toilet and a washroom.

Noora peers out into the courtyard.

NOORA
Do I fetch water for the house from that well each day?

YAQOOTA

Oh no. That's not your household duty.

NOORA

What's my duty?

YAQOOTA

Don't you know? Your duty is to make a baby.

Before Noora has a chance to respond, we discover Shamsa at the door.

With the confidence of a proud peacock, she enters the room and sizes up Noora.

SHAMSA

And if you can't give a baby to Jassem, you will be thrown out.

She flips her hair.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

You have no other value to him or to our household.

Before she exits, she gives a quick glance to Yaqoota.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

You may start preparing dinner now.

20 INT. COORIDOR - NIGHT

20

Noora stands in the hallway in front of Jassem's door. Very cautiously she knocks.

No response.

She peers down the hallway where Lateefa waits.

Encouraging Noora, she signals her to knock again, louder.

Another knock.

JASSEM

(O.S) Yes?

NOORA

(meekly) Dinner is ready.

He grunts something inaudible.

She looks back at Lateefa, who's already disappeared.

21 INT. DINING AREA - NIGHT

21

Dinner time. Lateefa sits comfortably with Shamsa at her side. Noora settles down with them.

NOORA
He's coming.

And they wait. Noora notices Shamsa's gold bracelets and shiny dress.

NOORA (CONT'D)
(To Shamsa) That's a nice dress.

SHAMSA
(disinterested) Thanks.

Jassem enters the room. As he settles, Yaqoota immediately brings out the food.

He eats in silence, lost in thought.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)
You must have missed our food being away for so long.

He nods.

LATEEFA
It was a long journey but a worthy one.

Noora smiles, feeling complimented.

SHAMSA
Is it true they jump around the mountains barefoot there?

She looks down at Noora's feet.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)
No wonder your feet look thick as leather. They must be hard as hooves!

LATEEFA
Not everyone Shamsa. Isn't that right Jassem?

Noora tucks her feet under the dress. She watches as Lateefa and Noora seem to vie for attention.

Jassem finishes his plate and leaves.

Once out of earshot...

SHAMSA

He's in a bad mood. I don't know what happened on the journey but he's not happy at all.

She looks at Noora when she speaks.

LATEEFA

He has a lot on his mind. Poor man works too hard.

SHAMSA

Well poor man, having to travel so far. To some backwards mountain village...

LATEEFA

Shamsa control yourself.

SHAMSA

I'm just being honest...

LATEEFA

Shamsa! Enough! You know very well why he's in a bad mood.

Shamsa leaves the table upset.

After a beat, Lateefa leans in to Noora.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Now listen to me. When he comes to you tonight, just lie back and do nothing.

Noora nods.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

And after he's finished, stay very still. It will help the seed plant so we can have our baby.

She smiles and pats Noora's knee.

22

EXT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

22

The moon is low.

Noora lies in bed, her wide eyes move around the room as she listens to the strange sounds of the night: A cat fight in the distance. An odd howl. Shamsa crying next door?

And then... The sound of Jassem clearing his throat at the door.

She sits up and faces the window, her back to the door.

She listens as the door creaks open and his footsteps approach.

As he places a lantern down, she catches his large shadow on the wall.

He moves in front of her but she keeps her chin down. He tilts her head up to him. She notices he is still wearing his glasses. Gently he pushes her back.

She lies down. Her gaze drifts from their distorted shadows cast on the wall to the bars on the window.

A lizard scurries across the ceiling, pausing for a moment as if to look back at Noora. Jassem grunts.

She closes her eyes, keeping her pain to herself...

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

24

EXT. NOORA'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGE - DAY

24

CU of a woman's henna'd feet running across a sand dune.

The repeated image of a handshake. Noora's brother Sager and Jassem finish the deal.

Cut to Noora, her face distorted with tears, running through the desert barefoot. She wears a worn, colorful dress.

Noora and Sager together inside a simple tent.

SAGER

We can't remain alone like this.
You need a mother figure to teach
you how to be a woman. I can't do
that. A husband can feed you, give
you what you need.

CU Hands clap in celebration.

Noora runs across the dunes.

CU The rhythm of the hands clapping increases. More and more hands....

Noora falls, stretching her hands in front of her...

END OF FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

25 INT. MAJLIS - DAY 25

Noora crouches under the wind tower, her forehead wet with sweat.

She waits for a breeze. Nothing.

She returns to sewing one of Lateefa's large dresses.

26 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 26

Noora sweeps the courtyard area.

She hears the mumbling of voices.

Her bare feet tip toe across the courtyard, following the sounds of men chatting.

She peers into the men's majlis.

Jassem sits with the men from his ship.

CAPTAIN

My men need to be paid.

He brushes his hand towards the other men.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I promised them no more delays.
They have to feed their families!

JASSEM

We all must feed our families. I
ask for your patience. How many
need money this time?

CAPTAIN

All of them!

Jassem removes his spectacles.

JASSEM

What? All of them?

CAPTAIN

Twenty divers and twenty haulers.
They have families...

Jassem's voice rises slightly.

JASSEM

Most of them haven't even covered
last years advances. What do they
think? That it's easy to make
money?

Noora spots Hamad pouring tea for them. He is unaware of her
gaze.

CAPTAIN

We have been very patient. But you
know as well it's been getting
harder to find pearls. I don't know
why.

JASSEM

Well what do you want me to do? Put
my own pearls in the oysters?
You're losing your grip with them!
You should be stricter. Work them
more, they are becoming lazy.

Jassem shakes his cup at Hamad.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

I'm already having to stock the
boats and feed them. Getting empty
oysters back isn't very fair, is
it?

CAPTAIN

I know. I am planning to find new
reefs this dive.

JASSEM

Inshallah you will find. And
inshallah I will sell more this
year as well. They are not selling
as before. You know how it is.

DIVER

You've said the same for three
years!

CAPTAIN

And what about the ship's repairs?
We cannot make another trip with
the boat in that condition.

Jassem sighs.

JASSEM
With God's faith, this month I will
take care of everything.

She watches as Hamad pours another glass. A voice from the women's quarters calls out....

LATEEFA
Noora!

Noora darts back across the courtyard.

27 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

27

Lateefa lords over Yaqoota, making sure she is cooking the daily meal just as they like.

Yaqoota sprinkles spices onto the chicken.

LATEEFA
It's too much! Too much!

Shamsa's eyes are full of tears. She slices onions.

Noora sits next to her and gestures to help.

SHAMSA
You don't know how Jassem likes his
food.

NOORA
I can help.

SHAMSA
Just watch and learn mountain goat.

She quickly wipes a tear.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)
Damn onions.

Noora shrugs, losing hope for a friendship with the fiery Shamsa.

28 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

28

Noora lies in bed, her eyes open.

The sound of Jassem clearing his throat at the door.

Politely he waits a moment before creaking it open...

29 INT. TOILET - DAY 29

Noora has her dress pulled up.

She looks down at herself.

30 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 30

Noora's undergarments submerged in dirty water. She scrubs and washes her clothes.

Lateefa appears, standing above her.

LATEEFA

You got your period again?

Lateefa crinkles her brow and sighs with disappointment as she returns to the house.

Noora continues to scrub.

As Noora hangs her clothes out to dry, Yaqoota, in a mischievous mood, emerges.

She pulls at Noora to follow her.

They creep across the courtyard towards Jassem's window. Yaqoota hisses at Noora to keep her head down.

They peer into the window.

Jassem sits on a carpet on the floor, his back to them, in front of the rosewood cupboard.

Uncomfortable, Noora tries to leave but Yaqoota grabs her arm.

YAQOOTA

You have to see now what he keeps inside!

Noora's curiosity gets the better of her and she peers in at him again.

He unlocks a metal safe, hidden within the closet. Then he takes out a handful of pearls.

Noora is mesmerized.

The pearls shine with light like a spectacular vision.

A KNOCK at Jassem's door startles everyone.

JASSEM

Enter.

Hamad quietly enters, shutting the door behind him.

The girls duck down under the window.

31

EXT. COURTYARD - SAME

31

Noora and Yaqoota run across the courtyard and towards the back of the house. Yaqoota giggles uncontrollably.

NOORA

Enough!

Yaqoota can't stop.

NOORA (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be so nosy!

Yaqoota flings her arms up into the air....

YAQOOTA

Your face! Under the spells of pearls!

She gestures eyes popping out of her head.

NOORA

Not true!

YAQOOTA

True as pearls!

They collapse near a palm tree, now both of them in giggles. Suddenly Yaqoota grows serious.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

Don't think you can touch them.
It's *haram* to steal.

NOORA

Steal? Are you saying I'm a thief?
I'm not a thief you hear me!

Noora wiggles her head around in imitation and Noora realizes she's joking. Noora playfully slaps her and they burst out laughing again.

After a moment they see Hamad in the distance storming away from the house.

Angry, he kicks the ground up around him.

Yaqoota makes an animated angry face and they both burst into giggles again.

32 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT 32

CU on Noora's face. It's Jassem's nightly visit. She is bored. She closes her eyes...

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

33 EXT. NOORA'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGE - DAY 33

The wind tosses Noora's uncovered, wild hair.

Her bare feet leave imprints in the sand as she climbs.

A sandfish scurries across in the opposite direction, moving quickly and gracefully through soft sand.

Noora gasps for breath.

The sandfish moves quickly until it hits a rock.

Frustrated the sandfish thrashes back and forth, ramming into the rock again and again, as if in an attempt to end his own life...

END OF FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

34 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT 34

...On top of Noora, Jassem suddenly mumbles something to himself. Jolted back to reality, Noora is confused.

He mumbles again.

She tries to understand what he's saying.

He sits up, his face distorted.

JASSEM

You're not working hard enough.

NOORA

I am.

He moves away from her.

JASSEM

Not working. The witch doctor. She said it would work. She said so.

NOORA

What witch doctor?

JASSEM

In your village. Your witch in the mountains... She promised me! You will give me a child.

Noora sits up, holding the sheets to her body confused.

Jassem paces up and down the room.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Why? Why? I'm so silly to believe. What's the point of having hope when you're not even trying...

Suddenly he looks at her, as if for the first time.

NOORA

(nervous) I'm trying. God willing...

He quickly moves to her and places his hands across her mouth.

She stares at him afraid unsure of what's coming.

A beat as they both hold still.

JASSEM

I want the flame in your eyes that you hide from me.

Slowly he removes his hand.

Slowly he sits down.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Do you know India?

NOORA

(confused) The country?

JASSEM

It's the most magical place on earth. Colors, light, markets full of spices and cloth! Not like our silly market here!

She smiles.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
India is something else. Full of
life!

Noora listens intently.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
I go there for work sometimes.
Sometimes twice a year if I can. We
travel first by boat...

As he continues his story, Noora relaxes. His face seems
softer in the moonlight.

35 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 35

Noora traverses the court yard carrying cushions from the
majlis with her.

Hamad enters. He carries a sack of rice.

They pass each other. He does not look at her, his head held
straight.

She places the cushions down in order to clean them. He walks
right into the kitchen.

36 INT. MAJLIS - LATER 36

Noora brings the cushions into the majlis. She places each
one in its respective place before sitting down herself.

Shamsa sits comfortably in a corner, her jewelry and bangles
spread before her.

She cleans a shiny bracelet aware of Noora's gaze...

SHAMSA
Some of it is from my father. Some
from Jassem.

Noora tucks her feet under her body.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)
Our wedding was one of the biggest
the village has ever seen.

Shamsa holds the bracelet higher, letting it catch a glint of
the sun.

Dinner is set. Lateefa and Noora wait patiently.

LATEEFA

You did a very good job with my dress.

NOORA

Thank you Ommi Lateefa.

LATEEFA

Where did you learn such sewing skills?

NOORA

My mother showed me. Before she died.

As Yaqoota brings the food to the table, Shamsa enters.

She looks especially beautiful in a delicate dress and with her long black hair in a shiny braid on the side. Her eyes lined carefully with kohl.

Noora jolts her head back suddenly inhaling the perfumed air.

Yaqoota also notices the perfume in the air. She decides to tease the women.

YAQOOTA

The *arbab* is in a good mood these days.

She shakes her chin at Noora.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

He keeps visiting Noora at night, more than anyone else!

Lateefa hisses at her defensively.

LATEEFA

It's his right to do as he pleases!

Shamsa pretends not to pay attention.

Yaqoota giggles at Noora, quickly controlling herself when she sees Jassem enter.

Shamsa smiles sweetly at him.

SHAMSA

May I serve you?

He nods at her.

JASSEM

Thank you.

Stern as usual, it is just before he takes his first bite he glances up at Noora warmly.

38

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

38

Jassem sits cross legged in front of Noora on her bed. They seem comfortable with each other.

JASSEM

...When Masoud entered the shop, I knew I would lose the deal. There he was poking his nose in as usual, and the Sheikh decided not to buy!

NOORA

You should tell him not to visit you when you have customers.

Jassem laughs.

JASSEM

Imagine if I could do that!

They speak in low and intimate voices so the others won't hear.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

In the afternoon I passed by the shore to see the boats. To check if any more needed repairs. Everything has to be in order for diving season.

NOORA

When does it begin?

JASSEM

We'll take the first ships out in a few weeks. The water starts to get warmer now. The divers can stay down longer as well.

NOORA

How long?

JASSEM

Oh a long time! They are experts at holding their breath.

(MORE)

JASSEM (CONT'D)
They practice when they are kids.
Some for two minutes and some even
longer! Three or four minutes...

Noora is excited.

NOORA
Wow! How long is that?

JASSEM
How long? It's three or four
minutes.

It's clear that doesn't mean much to her but nonetheless
she's intrigued.

He smiles gently at her.

39 INT. DINING AREA - MORNING

39

At breakfast, the mood is light. Everyone seems in a good
mood.

Yaqoota moves around the house, humming to herself.

LATEEFA
That girl's humming is worse than a
bleating goat.

JASSEM
No need to insult the poor goats.

They laugh together.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
Come Noora, Shamsa... I have some
news.

He smiles at the three ladies.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
I have to go to India soon for
work. I won't be long but I must
go.

LATEEFA
But isn't the Big Dive coming?

Jassem smiles at her.

JASSEM
Yes, and that's my big news. This
year will be the last dive.

He looks around at his wives.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

It's costing too much. So I've decided not to waste money but to open other roads. The way to go is trade. Not just with India or Africa but right here in our own village.

SHAMSA

Here in our village?

JASSEM

There are *ingleez* coming here now. We can buy and sell from each other...

The women nod.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Trade. Maybe I'm telling you more than necessary. But it's good for you all to understand a little about the world.

LATEEFA

Yes, you're right. Trade is the way to go.

JASSEM

While I'm gone, Hamad will stay here to take care of you.

He dips bread into some laban.

LATEEFA

May god ease your journey.

40

INT. MAJLIS - DAY

40

Inside the majlis, the women relax.

Lateefa lies flat on her back hoping to nap. Noora sews clothes.

Yaqoota is in the middle of one of her stories.

YAQOOTA

They usually come at night...
Renegade bedouins with no god!

She swallows.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

They kidnap people and no one ever hears from them again. First they check that you are all alone. Then they wait for you in the shadows. And then when you don't expect it, they grab you and stuff you into a sack! You can't escape because you faint before you can even scream!

Yaqoota is truly terrified by her own story.

On the other side of the room Shamsa rolls her eyes.

SHAMSA

That's a silly old wives tale.

YAQOOTA

It's not! It's true! I know a boy who vanished!

Finding a more captive audience with Noora she faces her.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

He was so sweet. Still a child.. They showed up on a full moon.

From the doorway, Noora catches a lizard scurry by.

He turns his head at her for a moment, then scurries off again.

41 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

41

Noora sits up in bed, facing the door. She anxiously awaits Jassem's nightly visit.

He clears his throat and enters. She smiles before noticing he carries something with him this time: a notebook.

He places it down on the bed between them. With a pencil he draws a long slim letter...

JASSEM

Alif.

NOORA

Alif?

JASSEM

It's the first letter of the alphabet.

He hands her the pencil.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Try.

She is delighted. She takes the pencil and carefully holds it between her fingers.

He adjusts her hands intimately. Their faces are close to each other.

Her shaky hand begins to write...

Alif.

42 INT. MAJLIS - MORNING

42

Lateefa and Noora in the majlis. Yaqoota sweeps the floor.

LATEEFA

Again? That's not good at all. Can you tell me why did you get the habit?

NOORA

I don't know.

Yaqoota stops sweeping.

YAQOOTA

That's why they call it the habit Ommi Lateefa. It comes for a visit every month...

Lateefa immediately lashes out at her.

LATEEFA

Hold your tongue before I cut it off!

She hurls her slipper at Yaqoota.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

I'll throw you out onto the streets. See if you can survive out there!

Yaqoota scrambles away, passing Shamsa entering.

SHAMSA

What on earth's wrong with that silly girl now?

The vein in Lateefa's neck quivers with anger. Frightened, Noora looks down.

LATEEFA

I'll tell you why the habit came again... Because you are not pregnant!

Shamsa sits down next to Lateefa.

SHAMSA

Ommi Lateefa you are right to be concerned. What is taking you so long Noora?

NOORA

I've been cooperative. I have never said no to him...

Shamsa snaps her head back.

SHAMSA

Cooperative? As if you have a choice!

Noora looks down averting her gaze.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

You can't even do the one thing you've been brought here for. You think you'll last here now? Ha!

Suddenly Noora looks up at her.

NOORA

Why are you picking on me as if you're so perfect? I don't see a baby from you!

Shamsa is surprised by her reaction.

SHAMSA

I could have. But he never tried as hard with me as he's doing with you!

Her lips quiver at the edges.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

He eats with you, spends all his time with you, ... Is that fair? Is that what Islam says?

(MORE)

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

We should all be treated equally
and instead he treats you like a
princess when all you are is a
pauper from the mountains!

NOORA

That's not true! I come from the Al
Salmi tribe! It is a strong and
honorable tribe and just because
they don't live in houses like this
doesn't mean they are not
important!

Shamsa points her finger at her.

SHAMSA

Ha! Well he visits you every night!
He ignores the rest of us.

NOORA

I never told him to ignore you!

SHAMSA

You "never told him"? Like you have
power over him!

Shamsa flings her hair back.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

Let me remind you of who I am. I am
the daughter of the most prominent
merchant, richer than our husband!
I lived in a house two times the
size of this one! I was fed pure
cow's milk growing up. I ate dates
all my life from the finest quality
from Basra!

NOORA

Dates are dates!

SHAMSA

No they are not!

NOORA

Yes they are.

SHAMSA

You will never know the dates I
grew up on. They are nothing like
the dates you were fed, full of
sand and grit while you ran around
with your herd.

Lateefa throws her arms out.

LATEEFA
Stop both of you!

SHAMSA
It's not my fault Ommi Lateefa. It seems the mountain goat has found a voice now and she plans to use it.

Noora narrows her eyes and starts to interject.

LATEEFA
Not now! Blame each other when you are alone! I want peace and quiet! You two should act as sisters, not like this!

Noora leans back.

NOORA
Yes. Shamsa should guide me wisely and not throw insults at me. I'm the younger one. And it's not my fault that our husband wants to be with me. He sets the rules.

Shamsa laughs.

SHAMSA
Nothing stays the same forever. Enjoy it sister. Soon he will get bored of you. And then what? I only pray he doesn't throw you out. I mean, where would you go? You have no one.

Noora sits up straight.

NOORA
He'll never get bored of me. You'll see.

43

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

43

Clutching her notebook, Noora practices writing.

A KNOCK on the door.

Noora hides her notebook as Yaqoota enters.

YAQOOTA

Do you want to join the others for tea?

NOORA

No thank you.

Yaqoota lingers.

YAQOOTA

Shall I tell you a joke?

NOORA

Not now Yaqoota, I'm busy.

44

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - LATER

44

Jassem and Noora sit across from each other in bed, their ankles wrapped together.

His hand gently plays with her foot as he speaks.

JASSEM

The first time I went to India, I was a young boy. With my father. We went on a British steamer. He booked us on deck class, for a cost of 9 rupiahs.

He chuckles.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

We took our food, our pots and bedding, and slept on deck. Every morning they would wake us up and make us move so they could clean the deck. The British India Steam Navigation. That was it's name.

NOORA

Britishin stim nashun? What kind of name is that?

Jassem smiles and leans into her.

NOORA (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Can I help it if those *Ingleezi* people choose stupid names for their boats?

JASSEM

We went to the most beautiful palace. He offered a Dana to the maharaja.

NOORA

A Dana?

JASSEM

It's the most beautiful of all pearls. But not more beautiful than your eyes...

She smiles. He opens his arms to her and they hug.

She lets herself sink deep into his arms and chest. Inhaling, she closes her eyes feeling his comfort and protection.

He continues to hold her tight. But his eyes are wide open. His facial expression suddenly changes and he looks disturbed.

Noora feels his grip tighten on her. He squeezes her harder. She squirms to release herself but he keeps squeezing her harder and harder.

NOORA

Are you feeling OK?

He doesn't answer.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Jassem, can I get you something?

Her body feels pain now. She finally lets out a small yelp.

He throws her off of him towards the end of the bed, staring at her with anger.

JASSEM

You are playing with my mind!

He stands up and straightens his clothes.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

When the heart takes you away, one does stupid things, says too much. What weakness!

Totally overcome with paranoia, he paces.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

You are making me weak to control me.

He turns to her, pushing his spectacles up.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

From now on when I look at you, I want you to close your eyes. You have got witch's brew in them.

NOORA

I...

He points at her.

JASSEM

I rescued you from poverty. Never forget that. You should be kissing my feet, not making me speak worthless talk!

NOORA

I don't. I...

JASSEM

That witch said there would be a child. But there is nothing! Lateefa was right. What have you given me? What is your worth in the end?

He pushes her backwards. She looks up at the ceiling as the lizard quickly scurries across.

45 INT. DINING AREA - MORNING

45

Breakfast. The wives look up as Yaqoota enters.

She stands in the doorway facing them.

YAQOOTA

The *arbab* isn't feeling well. He wants to rest in his room.

LATEEFA

Noora, why don't you bring his breakfast to him.

Noora starts to stand up.

Yaqoota stutters.

YAQOOTA

Actually, he asks that Shamsa bring him breakfast.

Like a wilted butterfly spreading her wings again, Shamsa sits up, making sure she heard correctly.

Shamsa and Noora lock eyes for a moment.

Then a smile spreads across Shamsa's face and she rises, but not before shooting a victorious glance at Noora.

46 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY 46

Inside her room, Noora presses her ear against the wall. She hears slight giggles and low voices from Shamsa's room. Angry she falls onto the floor and kicks her legs out.

47 INT. MAJLIS - DAY 47

Yaqoota prepares tea for Lateefa and a distracted Noora.

LATEEFA

The whole village changes when the time of the Big Dive arrives. Everyone is part of the preparations. Then the men leave, and we wait. Jassem's men are the best. He knows how to choose well. One of them can stay underwater longer than any other man ever has.

Shamsa, glowing, enters the room and reclines on a floor cushion.

SHAMSA

Where will you go when Jassem throws you out I wonder.

Lateefa jumps to her defense.

LATEEFA

She still has time to prove her worth to our household.

Noora drinks her tea, holding her anger in.

48 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 48

Noora roughly cleans dishes in the kitchen.

Yaqoota enters carrying more. As she places them down, she tries to make Noora laugh by tickling her.

Noora isn't in the mood.

Outside the window a lizard scurries by. The same one? she wonders.

YAQOOTA

Every year it's the same. The men go and the women wait. And when the boat comes back, either it's good news or bad news.

NOORA

How much hope these women carry in their hearts, waiting all summer.

YAQOOTA

Nothing to be sad about! It's God's will.

NOORA

It's still sad.

YAQOOTA

Look pretty one, if we sit and wait, we will never get what we want. We have to do what we can to survive.

Noora turns to her. Yaqoota puts dishes away.

NOORA

What do you mean?

YAQOOTA

Does it matter? A woman must do what she can for her peace of mind, that's all. She finds ways to make the passing hours tolerable.

NOORA

How?

Yaqoota wipes her hands.

YAQOOTA

You want me to show you how?

Noora's interest is piqued.

Noora and Yaqoota are dressed conservatively, their faces entirely covered. Yaqoota holds a finger up to her mouth as they cross the courtyard, passing the majlis.

Noora turns to see if anyone is watching.

YAQOOTA

No one will recognize you. Plus you won't even be missed here. You're not the favorite anymore.

Her words sting Noora.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

Oh come on. I'm teasing you.

She pulls her hand.

Fully covered from head to foot, the two women venture the streets.

As they walk through the village, Noora listens to the conversations around her.

A diver says goodbye to his wife.

As they enter a narrow street, a man comes towards them in the opposite direction.

In her loud voice...

YAQOOTA

Women passing through!

The man immediately steps to the side and averts his eyes as they pass him.

Yaqoota giggles and flaps her arms around like a chicken.

She yells into the streets again.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

Coming through!

As she continues flapping her arms around, the man turns to look at them.

MAN

Yaqoota! It's you!

Yaqoota bursts out laughing and grabs Noora's arm.

YAQOOTA

Come on!

MAN

Who's the other one? I'm sure you are a respectable woman but don't go walking with that slave. She will spoil your manners!

The girls run through the alleys until they reach an empty part of the shore.

NOORA

How did he know who you are?

YAQOOTA

I'm famous!

On the sand, they remove their *abayas*.

Playful, Yaqoota pulls her *serwal* up and kicks water around. Noora follows her lead.

They splash at each other, totally lost in the joy of this moment by the sea.

Finally they collapse on the sand.

They lie in silence.

NOORA

I hate him. I hate how he makes me feel. Like he owns me. I hate the way he touches me. The way he gropes...

YAQOOTA

Shhhhhh!

She plugs her ears shut.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

I'm unmarried, never been touched. You can't tell me these things!

Yaqoota rolls onto her stomach and sticks her head in the sand.

Noora rolls her eyes.

NOORA

You know I wasn't always this quiet. I used to have a voice louder than yours.

YAQOOTA

Louder than mine? Not possible!

NOORA

OK maybe not louder. But I was loud. When my brother bossed me around, I always fought back. And my father always agreed with me. No one could force me to do anything I didn't want to.

Noora fingers an empty sea shell.

NOORA (CONT'D)

You don't want to hear about that I guess.

She tosses the shell to the side.

YAQOOTA

I prefer to talk about the present rather than the past.

NOORA

Good idea.

Yaqoota shifts her eyes towards Noora.

YAQOOTA

By the way, Hamad wants to talk to you.

Noora blinks at the sea.

NOORA

Let him come.

51 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

51

In darkness, Noora listens to Jassem and Shamsa in the next room.

A tear forms.

Then... an almost indiscernible KNOCK at the door.

She waits a moment. Another KNOCK.

She wraps herself and moves towards the door.

Hamad stands on the other side, looking awkward.

NOORA

What do you want? Don't you know everyone is asleep!

HAMAD

Shhhh...

He holds up a white garment.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

My father is leaving on the Big Dive, but his diving suit needs to be fixed. It protects him from the jellyfish stings. They say your stitches are strong. I want to be sure the seams don't come undone.

He stares directly at her face. She hides behind her veil.

NOORA

And how do you know I can do that?

HAMAD

All of Wadeema knows you sew well. But if you can't do it, just tell me.

Noora looks up and down the hall.

NOORA

Don't you know you're not supposed to come here. What if someone sees you? Tiptoeing around like a thief.

HAMAD

It's the only time I can ask you to do this. I promised my father I would get this done and we don't have money for a tailor.... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come.

He looks down.

She snatches the cloth from his hand.

NOORA

I'll see what I can do.

52 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - MORNING

52

She spreads the old diving suit on her bed. The shape of a man lying on his back.

It's full of holes. She runs her hands over it.

She pulls out her needles and begins to mend.

53 INT. LATEEFA'S ROOM - DAY

53

Lateefa sits cross-legged on the floor, piles of clothes spread before her.

Yaqoota folds an 'abaya and places it in a beautiful, brass-studded, wood trunk.

Noora stands at the door.

LATEEFA

Yaqoota, put those away. I don't want them.

Lateefa returns a pile of clothing to the cabinet.

NOORA

Where are you going?

Lateefa smiles.

LATEEFA

Where am I going? Where are we all going! Yaqoota, I need the other trunk. Ask Hamad to help you.

Yaqoota darts out of the room.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

You need to pack too. We only need light clothes for where we are going.

In the courtyard, we hear Yaqoota's high pitched voice call out...

YAQOOTA

Hamad!!!

LATEEFA

Take only one dress, the rest should be thoubas. It's too hot to stay here in the summer so we go to where it's cooler.

Yaqoota and Hamad re-enter carrying another beautiful box.
Hamad keeps his eyes down.

54 INT. DINING AREA - DAY

54

Lunch.

Shamsa lies back.

SHAMSA

I'm not feeling good today. I don't
know why.

LATEEFA

Nausea? Again?

She gently touches her stomach and checks that everyone sees.

Jassem enters, full of energy.

JASSEM

I have important news to share.

The women gather around.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Lateefa already knows...

Lateefa seems proud of this fact.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

But my trip to India may be longer
than expected. I've made some
important connections. It's
official.. This year's dive is the
last. From now on: Trade.

Lateefa nods her approval.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

I am sure you will all enjoy the
cool night air at Om Al-Sanam until
my return.

55 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

55

Hamad crouches under a tree carving out a diving clip made
from bone.

Noora walks past him with a small pile of clothes.

She places the clothes down and hang them carefully. She leaves.

One piece remains on the ground.

Hamad looks at it. He recognizes the diving suit.

56

EXT. WADEEMA ROAD - DAWN

56

The sun has just cracked the sky.

Hamad, Yaqoota and Noora walk along the sand, while Lateefa rides a donkey which barely supports her.

Another donkey carries their belongings including the trunks.

Hamad leads the way in the front.

NOORA

Why didn't Shamsa come?

YAQOOTA

She asked Jassem permission to stay with her family over the summer.

They both smile at each other, glad for that.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)

So what did Hamad want?

NOORA

I don't know.

YAQOOTA

What do you mean? Didn't he come see you.

She shakes her head.

NOORA

No.

YAQOOTA

But why?

NOORA

I don't know and I don't care.

YAQOOTA

But he told me he wanted to see you. To talk to you about something.

NOORA
And why do you care?

Yaqoota shrugged.

YAQOOTA
I'm just asking. What's wrong with
you anyway?

NOORA
Look forget me. And why do you have
to speak to loudly?

YAQOOTA
Loud?

NOORA
Yes loud.

YAQOOTA
And why are you acting so snotty.
As if you're the favorite of the
house. Snotty, snotty, snotty...

She moves away from her and they walk separately now.

57

EXT. OM AL-SANAM - DAY

57

Rows of barasti huts, made from palm fronds, cover rolling
white dunes. Women and children are everywhere, veils loosely
fluttering in the wind.

In front of a small cluster of three huts, Lateefa lords over
Hamad and Yaqoota.

LATEEFA
Place our clothes in there. And
Hamad, the food ...there, there...
no not there!

She points in various directions making sure all their
belongings are properly put into place.

Hamad and Yaqoota continue to unload the various goods: pots,
pans, cushions, flour, dates, rice, coffee, tea...

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
I will sleep there.

She points to the hut next to her.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
And you there. With Yaqoota.

Yaqoota corners the goats and chickens into a small area of their own.

58

EXT. OM AL-SANAM DUNES - DAY

58

Noora walks across the soft dunes.

She lifts her arms up as the wind whips her 'abaya around.

On one dune, a group of children are playing, rolling and stumbling down the steep sand hills.

A young girl, AFRA, grabs her hand...

AFRA

Come on! Race with us!

NOORA

I'll get all messy. And look at your hair... Here let me fix it.

AFRA

It's only sand. You just shake it off. Like this.

She wiggles her head around.

AFRA (CONT'D)

Come on!

She pulls Noora to the top of the dune.

Noora laughs.

NOORA

What's your name anyway?

AFRA

Afra.

The kids throw themselves freely down the dunes, sand flies up everywhere.

Afra flops onto her stomach and looks up at Noora.

AFRA (CONT'D)

Come on!

Noora joins, carefully lying on her stomach too. They face downwards.

AFRA (CONT'D)
Hold your hands out like this...
Now swim!

Noora begins sliding down the dune. Recklessly she flips her body around as she picks up speed.

She rolls to the bottom, sand flying in all directions, laughing hysterically.

Happy with the tension reliever she has just discovered, she lies on her back at the bottom of the hill, covered in sand.

Catching her breath, she closes her eyes and smiles at the sky.

In the distance, a MOTHER CALLS to the kids to come back, and their voices peel away.

Noora lies still, her body totally relaxed.

She jolts to find Hamad standing over her.

HAMAD
Sorry.

She sits up embarrassed, brushing sand off herself.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
I just wanted to say thank you for the diving suit. It's perfect.

NOORA
Who do you think you are sneaking up on me like that? What nerve.

HAMAD
I'm sorry.

She stands up as sand falls out of her clothes.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
The work was so good. My father kept asking me which tailor I took it too, and every time I had to avoid him.

Noora looks around to see if anyone is watching.

NOORA
Ok, ok. Your welcome.

HAMAD
I feel I have to do something for
you now.

NOORA
No. Nothing. Just don't make
problems.

59 INT. HUT - DAY

59

Back at the hut, Lateefa sings as she prepares coffee.

LATEEFA
There you are! Come in...

Noora notes her good mood.

NOORA
It's beautiful here.

LATEEFA
Yes. Magical.

Lateefa even serves her coffee.

Together they settle down and happily watch the other women
roam about. 'Abayas and veils have come looser and more
relaxed.

60 EXT. OM AL-SANAM DUNES - DAY

60

A swing hangs from a tree.

As Hamad tightens the final rope, the children squeal in
delight and run towards it from across the dunes.

Noora trails behind them.

The children excitedly take turns on the swing and from the
way Hamad steals a glance at Noora, she knows it was built
for her.

As the kids play, Hamad retreats to watch from a distance.

CHILD
Try it Noora!

AFRA
Yeah come on!

She mounts the swing. The kids start to push her.

She rises up and down, wind tossing her head coverings to the side. She throws her hair back feeling the freedom of this special place.

In the distance, Hamad watches her.

61 INT. HUT - DAY

61

Lateefa arranges her personal accessories; henna, perfumes, a comb...

LATEEFA

Noora!

Noora enters.

Lateefa hands her a bottle. She inhales the sweet incense.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Try it.

NOORA

Me?

LATEEFA

Yes, yes child. Try it.

Noora dabs a drop of the oil onto her skin.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

You're welcome to use any of my perfumes any time.

NOORA

Thank you Ommi Lateefa.

She rubs her skin.

62 EXT. OM AL-SANAM - SUNSET

62

A blood red sun descends over the hills.

Screams of children in the distance playing, while the women prepare dinner.

Hamad plays with the children.

Lateefa and Noora have visitors. THREE WOMEN from a neighboring hut.

They sing and play instruments -- a lamenting song about a woman awaiting her son, a pearl diver, to return home.

Noora stares into the distance, taken by the soulful song...

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

63 EXT. NOORA'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGE - DAY 63

...The kind face of a man with deep lines and skin toughened by the sun. He prepares food.

A young Noora plays with her brother.

The man laughs.

She runs towards him, her arms open.

He spins her in the sky...

END OF FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

64 EXT. OM AL-SANAM DUNES - DAY 64

Noora swings high into the sky.

AFRA (O.C.)
It's my turn!

Afra stands near the swing, a hand on her hip.

Hamad, crouched on a dune, watches Noora.

Noora slows down...

NOORA
Okay, okay...

She gets up. Afra quickly takes her place and begins to swing.

Noora sees Hamad watching her. She meets his eyes directly.

He doesn't lower his.

She stares at him defiantly; a challenge to break his gaze.

But he doesn't. Boldly he holds eye contact with her.

Aggressively she holds her head up high and narrows her eyes at him.

The smallest and sweetest of smiles forms on his lips instead.

Her face softens.

65

INT. HUT - AFTERNOON

65

Lateefa lies on a mat in front of the shaded hut fast asleep.

Noora sews indoors while Yaqoota prepares food outside.

Noora attempts conversation with Yaqoota.

NOORA
(loudly) It's so hot, no?

Yaqoota continues preparing the food.

YAQOOTA
Hot, hot, hot... here, there. You complain no matter where you are.

NOORA
What are you so upset at me for?

YAQOOTA
You should know.

NOORA
And what if I don't know?

YAQOOTA
You know everything. Especially how to keep secrets.

NOORA
There are no secrets to keep.

Yaqoota enters the tent.

YAQOOTA
Just tell me the truth. That's all I want. Then I'll know if we're friends or not.

NOORA
What truth?

Yaqoota fixes her gaze on her.

NOORA (CONT'D)
If you're talking about Hamad, he
didn't come to see me as you think
he did.

Yaqoota turns and leaves.

YAQOOTA
Okay. As you say.

66

EXT. OM AL-SANAM DUNES - DAY

66

Hamad and Noora sit side by side on a far dune, watching the
children play.

Little Afra orders the other children around.

HAMAD
I imagine you must have been just
like her - so bold.

NOORA
I don't know Maybe. A long time
ago.

A fat girl tries to get on the swing. Afra pushes her off.

AFRA
You're too fat.

The girl protests as Afra gets on instead.

NOORA
Afra! It's her turn. She didn't
have a chance yet.

Afra pouts.

AFRA
Ok fine. But not too long. If you
break it, none of us will get
another chance.

Noora and Hamad hide their laugh from her.

NOORA
And what about you?

HAMAD
What about me?

NOORA
What were you like?

He smiles and looks into the distance.

HAMAD

Shall I tell you a secret?

Noora nods excited.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

I always dreamed to be a diver. Like my father. I spent years practicing holding my breath. I'd go with him and try to learn their patience, and the strength of a diver. It's the harshest of lives but I imagined I could be a sort of hero one day...

He laughs.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

That I'd go under water and hold my breath so long. So long that they'd think I was dead. But then I'd come up with more oysters than anyone ever saw. And inside them, the most beautiful pearls. Even a dana.

NOORA

So what happened?

HAMAD

The first time I was allowed to dive all my dreams sunk.

NOORA

Why?

HAMAD

I was so prepared. The stone tied to my foot, my breath saved. It started pulling me down. Further and further to the bottom.

He indicates the stone sinking down and his body descending.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Then suddenly I panicked. I couldn't see a thing. Everything was foggy. I looked around and couldn't recognize the other divers, couldn't tell the difference between the rocks and the oysters. My eyes were stinging so bad. And the sea...

(MORE)

HAMAD (CONT'D)

I felt the weight of the whole sea
crushing me, crushing my lungs. I
didn't know water could be so
heavy.

He puts his hands on his ears.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

And my ears, my throat.. Such pain.
My ears were throbbing. I tried to
swallow to clear them but the pain
only got worse. I thought I would
die.

NOORA

Then what happened?

HAMAD

My hauler could sense I was in
trouble. He pulled me up. I could
have been dead but God was
merciful. When they pulled me up to
the surface I was like a dying
fish. Belly up and struggling to
breathe.

He takes a breath and looks off into the distance.

67

INT. HUT - DAY

67

Lateefa rummages through her travel trunk frantically.
Yaqoota searches the floor near her bed.

NOORA

What are you looking for?

LATEEFA

I can't find it... I am sure I
packed it...

Noora enters the room and kneels next to her.

NOORA

Let me help you. What did you lose?

LATEEFA

My mirror. I just can't find it
anywhere.

NOORA

But it's there. Next to your
perfumes.

LATEEFA

Not that mirror! That one's too small. I can't see my face with it - only parts of my face. I need my big one - with the bronze handle. You know which?

Noora nods.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

I must have it. You have to go back and get it for me.

Yaqoota jumps up.

YAQOOTA

I'll get it!

LATEEFA

No you won't. You are needed here. Noora will go.

YAQOOTA

But Noora doesn't know the way.

LATEEFA

Hamad knows the way. Let him guide.

YAQOOTA

But Ommi Lateefa, Noora isn't savvy enough and she doesn't even know where anything is in the house and she doesn't even know how to...

Lateefa sits to her full height and raises her voice.

LATEEFA

Quiet you! Noora is the wife of Jassem! You will speak respectfully to her! She will be the mother of his children.

Yaqoota lowers her head.

Noora looks at Lateefa, moved at her defense.

68

INT. HUT - DAWN

68

The quiet of early morning.

Holding a tiny mirror, Noora puts the last touches of kohl on her eyes.

She leans back and straightens her recently oiled hair.

69 EXT. OM AL-SANAM - DAWN

69

Lines of Barasti huts.

As Om Al-Sanam sleeps, Noora and Hamad set off across the dunes.

70 EXT. DESERT - DAY

70

The sun is higher in the sky and getting stronger.

Hamad and Noora make their way through the landscape.

Hamad stops and unties a small pouch.

HAMAD

Breakfast?

She sits down near a rock.

He offers her a date.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

No trees here. The desert must look so ugly to you.

NOORA

Mountain life is harsh. But I never wanted to leave.

HAMAD

How did it happen?

NOORA

My mother passed away when I was very young. My father took care of us. When he died, my brother decided I couldn't stay like that. Alone in the mountains. He couldn't take care of me and I couldn't take care of him. So now I belong to Jassem.

HAMAD

Do you miss home?

NOORA

I miss not being afraid. I miss not answering to anyone.

HAMAD

I know what you mean.

NOORA

How? You're a man. You can go anywhere you like, do what you want. You can decide what to do with your life.

HAMAD

Not really. I don't have money. Without money, you cannot choose your life.

NOORA

But Jassem pays you.

HAMAD

Pennies. He promised he'd take me with him when he travels and teach me to be a merchant. That was four years ago.

NOORA

You don't need him. You can go and work for someone else. You can manage to do anything if you really wanted it.

HAMAD

I bet the same goes for you.

Hamad offers her water.

She watches him from the corner of her eye as she drinks. A drop of water remains on her lips.

She passes the thermos back to him.

NOORA

Come on. Let's get this over with.

She rises.

71 EXT. DESERT - DAY

71

A jeep rumbles in the distance.

Hamad grabs Noora's arm and pulls her down behind some rocks.

They watch as a group of ENGLISHMEN descend from the jeep and discuss plans with each other.

As Hamad strains to listen, Noora's eyes wander across his brown skin.

He lies on his stomach. A small vein beats on his neck.

He turns to her to translate, catching her gaze.

HAMAD
They're looking for petrol.

NOORA
What's that?

HAMAD
It's black. It comes from under the sand and it's supposed to make life easier.

They turn and watch the *Ingleez* spread a map out on the hood of their jeep.

72

EXT. DESERT - LATER

72

The sun is at its peak.

The pair walk together, red faced and tired.

HAMAD
Do you need to rest?

She shrugs him off pretending she's not out of breath.

NOORA
I'm fine.

HAMAD
You sure?

NOORA
Yes.

HAMAD
It's not too far.

A gust of wind is welcomed by the pair.

Noora stops to let the wind hit her. Her veil falls to the side, revealing a bit of hair.

Behind her Hamad watches. Noora doesn't adjust the veil.

Hamad turns his face away and walks ahead of her.

73 INT. WADEEMA HOME - DAY 73

The front door opens and white light spills into the room.
Silhouettes standing on the outside, Hamad and Noora enter the empty house.

74 INT. LATEEFA'S ROOM - DAY 74

Noora pokes through a trunk in search of the mirror.

75 INT. MAJLIS - DAY 75

Noora continues rummaging.

Hamad is on the other side of the room searching under cushions.

No sign of the mirror.

Noora starts to search under the large cushions as well.

She struggles to lift one. Hamad moves quickly to help her, startling her as the mirror slips out simultaneously...

They smash heads. Hard.

NOORA

Owww!

Her hand goes up to her head. Instinctively he reaches out and places his hands over hers.

HAMAD

Are you ok?

NOORA

No!

He removes his hands. Noora's forehead immediately shows a red lump.

HAMAD

I'm sorry.

She holds her head.

NOORA

Are you ok?

HAMAD

Me? Yes. I think you got the worst
of it...

She picks up the mirror and holds it up in front of her. She
notes the lump.

NOORA

Oh no...

She looks as if she's about to cry but suddenly bursts out
laughing hysterically.

Hamad is confused.

NOORA (CONT'D)

How are we going to explain that to
Lateefa?

Hamad gently touches her forehead again.

HAMAD

Maybe it will go down by the time
we get back.

A beat.

Ever so slowly he leans in to her forehead and kisses the
bruise.

His lips quiver. He doesn't pull away entirely. She's unsure
what to do.

They hold this position, neither one of them daring to move.

Then Noora, ever so slowly, tilts her head up to him.

Their lips meet.

76

EXT. HUT - SUNSET

76

Lateefa waits outside the hut. The sky is red, holding onto
it's last moments of light in a whirl of colors.

She narrows her eyes. She spots something in the distance...
Two figures...

She smiles.

Lateefa wraps a blanket around Noora's shoulders. Her hair covers the bruise.

LATEEFA

You're shivering. You must be exhausted from the walk, poor thing.

Lateefa pats her head, only to notice the bruise.

She crouches down.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

My goodness, what happened?

NOORA

Oh... Well I.. I accidentally hit my head on the door...

Lateefa nods.

LATEEFA

I know. So easy to do. Happened to me so many times.

She brushes her hand on Noora's cheek maternally.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

I'm so happy you found my mirror. Thank you.

Noora smiles, glad her secret was not revealed.

The wind kicks up sand.

Women walk around, their loose 'abayas flirt with the wind.

Yaqoota sweeps outside the hut. Noora emerges.

NOORA

Good morning.

Yaqoota nods and continues sweeping.

Noora and Hamad sit side by side in the dunes.

Her bare toes sink into the sand and emerge again.

They are perfectly at ease together.

80 EXT. HUT - DAY

80

A thoub is tossed to the floor.

And another.

Lateefa, frazzled, rummages through her trunk.

LATEEFA

Now why didn't I bring that orange
thoub with me?

She tosses another 'abaya to the side.

81 EXT. HUT - DAWN

81

Lateefa kisses Noora.

LATEEFA

Remember to drink water. Rest when
you can.

NOORA

Don't worry Ommi. We'll be back in
no time.

Hamad patiently waits for her.

82 EXT. OM AL-SANAM

82

The pair makes their way across the sand.

83 INT. WADEEMA HOME - DAY

83

Hamad closes the front door. He turns to a smiling Noora.

Happy to finally be alone, they hug each other. Hamad spins
her around.

HAMAD

Imagine if we lived in a house like
this. Just me and you.

NOORA

Wind towers and all!

HAMAD
Floor mats for our guests.

NOORA
A kitchen full of spices and
treats.

HAMAD
Warm blankets for the winters.

NOORA
And a closet full of pearls!

They laugh.

HAMAD
You're the pearl.

She smiles.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
I guess I finally found one.

They hold each other.

84 INT. HUT - EARLY EVENING

84

Lateefa holds up her orange thoub. She is pleased.
Noora rests on her mat, a small smile on her lips.
Lateefa brings her a glass of milk and pats her head.

LATEEFA
You poor thing. Exhausted because
of my absentmindedness.

NOORA
Don't worry Ommi. It's fine.

Lateefa fans herself.

LATEEFA
It's this hot weather. Makes me so
forgetful!

She sighs.

85 EXT. HUT - MORNING

85

Lateefa and Noora sit in front of their hut drinking tea.

A small group of women pass by. They carry bundles. A donkey carries a trunk with more of their things.

They wave.

LATEEFA
Safe journey home!

DEPARTING WOMAN
God be with you!

Yaqoota pours herself tea.

YAQOOTA
Always goes too fast.

She leans on the wood pole and watches the women pass.

86 EXT. OM AL-SANAM DUNES - DAY 86

Green henna blends with the red sand of the Arabian desert.

LATEEFA
Akh. Silly me.

An upset Lateefa looks down at the dropped henna, her brow crinkled.

87 INT. WADEEMA HOME - DAY 87

Noora and Hamad lie in each others arms.

NOORA
Summer is over.

He brushes a strand of hair off her face.

NOORA (CONT'D)
What will we do?

HAMAD
Don't worry.

Her gaze lingers at the window.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
You can divorce. Marry me.

She sits up and faces him.

NOORA
Divorce Jassem? Who said he'd
agree?

HAMAD
We'll think of something. We'll
make him agree. It can happen,
really happen.

Her voice shakes.

NOORA
As if we matter. As if we can
choose what we want.

She takes a breath, trying to speak calmly.

NOORA (CONT'D)
I'm a woman. A married woman. You
are a poor man. We aren't in a
position to make choices.

HAMAD
I'll find a solution. I promise.

He holds her hands.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
I will take care of everything and
we'll be together. Always.

88 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

88

CU Noora lies on her back. We hear the sounds of a man
breathing.

A tear forms in her eye.

Jassem wipes it away.

JASSEM
No need to cry. I am back now.

She tries to manage a smile.

He gets up and leaves her alone in the darkness of her
bedroom.

89 INT. MAJLIS - MORNING

89

An open palm holds shiny white buttons.

JASSEM

See? This is what they do with the nacre.

He bites into the button for his three wives to see.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Top quality. So strong it doesn't even break.

Shamsa wears a bright blue silk thoub. Her skin glows. She looks more beautiful than she ever has.

Lateefa carefully picks a button from Jassem's hand.

LATEEFA

And this little thing will open new possibilities?

JASSEM

The point is not the buttons but to establish a relationship with the Ingleez. Soon they will want to trade more things, bigger things. They will already know me and know I am an honest and efficient businessman.

SHAMSA

You trust the Ingleez?

Jassem laughs.

JASSEM

You must start observing things with the vision of men. Not the narrow outlook of women. See what this all means. Open your minds. With this...

He holds up the button.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

... I am opening big possibilities for the future.

He looks over at Noora.

She feigns interest in what he's saying.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Times are changing. We must change with them.

90 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 90
Noora hangs the laundry.
Hamad enters with a delivery for the kitchen.
She turns her face to him.
He avoids her eyes.
She sighs and hangs the last item up.
Feeling tired, she squats down and rests for a moment.

91 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT 91
Noora wakes up sweating.
She opens the windows for fresh air but there is no breeze.

92 INT. MAJLIS - NIGHT 92
Noora enters the majlis, weak and breathing heavily.
She lies under the wind tower with her feet up and falls asleep...

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

93 INT. NOORA'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGE 93
A funeral. Noora sits amongst the people of their village, her face solemn.
A woman whispers to another.

WHISPERING WOMAN
They have no one. Haram.

Noora looks up at them.
Her father is buried.
Her brother Sager looks up at her and then turns his face away.

94 EXT. NOORA'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGE 94
Sager walks away.

Noora calls to him. No response.

She runs after him.

Sager turns his face back to her. Only there is no recognizable face. Just a blur.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE

95

INT. MAJLIS - NIGHT

95

... A sharp whisper wakes Noora up.

HAMAD
Noora! Noora!

The door to the majlis is open.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
I have to talk to you. We haven't
talked since we got back.

She stands up.

NOORA
(panicked) Go! You shouldn't be
here!

HAMAD
Everyone's asleep. It's ok.

He takes her hand and tries to kiss it.

HAMAD (CONT'D)
I miss you.

She yanks her hand away.

NOORA
Me too. But you have to go...

HAMAD
I know what to do. I have a plan.

She shuts the door of the majlis.

NOORA
Keep your voice down.

HAMAD
I want to be with you. Noora, when
I think of Jassem near you, I...

NOORA

Forget Jassem! What's your plan?
Quick.

He takes a deep breath.

HAMAD

I want you to run away with me.

NOORA

Run away?

They keep their whispers low.

HAMAD

I don't like who I have become. I'm
not a man anymore. Always afraid.
You were right. We're going to get
out of here. Start a new life.

NOORA

Start a new life? How?

HAMAD

There's a boat. We'll go to India.
Get a house there.

NOORA

How do you expect to do that!? How
will we live? How will we eat?

HAMAD

The answer is right here in this
house.

They hear a SOUND in the distance.

She pushes him towards the door. He grabs her body and holds
her against the wall.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

The answer is here. And we can be
together forever. I love you!

NOORA

What on earth are you talking about
Hamad?

HAMAD

The pearls! Just a few of them.
Jassem will never know.

She freezes.

NOORA
How do you know about the pearls?

HAMAD
We just need the keys.

NOORA
You want to steal?

HAMAD
Borrow. I'll use them just so we
can start off. Then I'll send him
their worth later. We just need
something to start.

They hear Yaqoota's morning song in the distance.

NOORA
Go!

She uses all her strength to push him off her.

96 INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

96

Noora, Yaqoota and even Shamsa peer out at the English
visitors entering the house.

Jassem leads them across the courtyard.

YAQOOTA
Look how they dress! It's
ridiculous!

She giggles.

Shamsa stretches her neck out.

SHAMSA
Look, Look! That one... His cheeks
are so pink! Like the insides of an
animal.

Jassem gestures the visitors into the majlis. Right before
entering himself, he shoots the women a disapproving glance.

They duck out of view and burst out laughing.

97 INT. COORIDOR - DAY

97

Noora crosses the hallway, the sound of the English voices
drift through the air.

Checking that no one is around, she carefully pushes open Jassem's bedroom door.

98 INT. JASSEM'S ROOM - DAY

98

Noora's fingers slide across the top of the cupboard until they find a key.

She slowly unlocks the cabinet where the pearls are.

Carefully she places her hands inside the safe and on the velvet bag that Jassem keeps them inside of.

SLAM!

She jumps. The shutter of the window flaps from a gust of wind.

Quickly she locks the cabinet, leaving the pearls in place.

99 INT. DINING AREA - NIGHT

99

At dinner, Jassem is excited. He pushes his spectacles back.

JASSEM

Now that there won't be any more diving, my boats can easily collect the shells for the buttons.

He flails his arm around.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

All over this land. To the mountains. To Nassayem, and all the other mountain and sea villages where those large shells cling to the rocks.

Shamsa narrows her eyes mischievously, not missing this opportunity.

SHAMSA

Ah, isn't that where the mountain goats live? Isn't that where you got Noora?

Noora is not feeling strong enough to respond. She's concentrating on her breathing.

LATEEFA

Shamsa!

Her breathing gets heavier, her face pale.

JASSEM

Then we will bring those shells
back to Wadeema and scrape off the
algae. Wash them. Pack them in
crates and sell to the Ingleez...
The Ingleez have their company in
Bombay to make the buttons. Our own
nacre buttons to be sold to the
world...

They finally all notice Noora's really not doing well at all.

LATEEFA

Are you alright my child?

She nods but only feels dizzier.

Lateefa reaches out to touch her face.

SHAMSA

What's wrong with her?

Noora can't sit up anymore and leans back, grasping for air.

SHAMSA (CONT'D)

It's not that hot!

Lateefa presses her hands all over Noora's body.

LATEEFA

Too much meat or too little can
only mean one thing...

She stared into Noora's eyes.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Are you pregnant?

Noora faints.

100

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

100

Noora wakes up alone in her room.

She huddles into herself and cries.

Someone shrieks in the distance. There seems to be a fight.

The door creaks opens and she sees Lateefa's dark silhouette
peer at her.

She closes her eyes in fear and pretends to be asleep. But Lateefa enters anyway.

She sits on the opposite side of the bed.

Noora is afraid to move. A wet cloth is lowered onto her forehead.

Noora looks up at Lateefa confused.

Lateefa smiles and pats her head.

LATEEFA

You must rest. So you can get strong now. For our baby.

Next door we continue to hear Shamsa's shrieks which now sound more like crying.

Lateefa rolls her eyes.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Shamsa is so selfish sometimes. She should be happy for Jassem that his dream in life has come true. His child will be born. Instead she has to make her own drama over there.

She sighs.

Noora's eyes widen, and she passes out again.

101 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

101

A tiny slither of light from the door.

Lateefa enters again with a bowl of soup.

Carefully she perches herself on the side of the bed.

She feeds Noora.

LATEEFA

You're having feverish dreams. Mumbling strange things in your sleep.

NOORA

Like what?

LATEEFA

Just nonsense. Now have soup. Let's break your fever.

She holds out a spoon to Noora.

BEGIN MONTAGE SEQUENCE

An images of Jassem at the door. Or Hamad?

Yaqoota's face.

Cries from Shamsa.

Noora continues to toss in bed overpowered by this fever.
Past and present mix.

Noora, looking younger and wilder, is in a small tent, two elderly women admire her sewing and nod pleased.

A man's voice...

MAN

She must get married. She needs to
learn how to be a woman. We can't
teach her that.

Her wild hair blowing in the wind, thick with sand.

The handshake. Followed by deafening silence.

We see Afra running through the dunes, only to realize it's
Noora in flashback.

She turns to her father and asks him to lift her up to the
sky.

He does, twirling her round and round, her face beaming with
happiness.

Suddenly he drops her. She crashes to the desert floor.

Blackness.

END OF MONTAGE SEQUENCE

102

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

102

Lateefa enters the room, carefully locking the door behind
her.

Noora sits up in bed now, looking considerably better.

Lateefa feeds her pomegranates.

NOORA
(irritated with Lateefa) I'm
annoyed.

LATEEFA
With what dear?

NOORA
With you. I want to go out. I want
to see the others. I'm suffocating
in this room.

Lateefa peels another part of the pomegranate.

LATEEFA
It's not possible - they carry
germs and that could hurt our baby.

Noora, feeling rebellious, counters her.

NOORA
What about your germs Lateefa?

Lateefa smiles at her.

LATEEFA
I know you're moody on account of
your pregnancy. It's OK my child.

She passes her more pomegranate.

103 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

103

Noora lies in bed gazing at the window, her hand on her
belly.

The familiar sound of Jaseem clearing his throat, ever so
gently, at the door.

She turns to see him standing there awkwardly. Even looking
shy.

JASSEM
How are you feeling?

She smiles.

NOORA
Good. Do you want to come...

Lateefa suddenly appears from behind him. She gently shoos
him away.

LATEEFA
She's very fragile. We have to take
care.

She shuts the door and locks it.

Noora is annoyed again.

NOORA
I want to go out.

LATEEFA
No, that's not a good idea.

NOORA
I'm not fragile. I feel good. I
want to go out!

Defiant, she stands up and heads for the door.

Lateefa blocks her.

Noora manages to pass her.

She goes for the door.

LATEEFA
(warns) You'd be wise to listen to
me.

Noora smirks.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
I decide the rhythm of the house...

Noora's hand goes for the door latch.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
And to do that I have to know
everything about the household...
And you better trust me when I tell
you I do. For your own good, do as
I say.

Noora stops.

104 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

104

Alone, Noora paces in her room.

She grasps the bars of her window staring at the empty
courtyard.

She smashes her fist on them and turns her face to the stars above.

They shine with the promise of other worlds a million miles away.

105 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY 105

Noora's belly now shows.

She sits on the bed combing her wet hair.

Yaqoota bursts in.

YAQOOTA
Shamsa is leaving!

Noora doesn't understand.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)
She's leaving. You won. She lost.

NOORA
But... Why? What does Jassem say?

Yaqoota laughs.

YAQOOTA
He doesn't mind. She has no purpose now.

Yaqoota shrugs her shoulders and proceeds to clean Noora's room.

106 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 106

Shamsa's father, Juma Bin Humaid, waits in the courtyard for her.

Her belongings are brought out by two men accompanied by Yaqoota.

107 INT. COORIDOR - DAY 107

Noora peers out from her bedroom door into the hallway.

Shamsa, fully veiled, exits her bedroom.

Noora takes a step outside the room, wanting to say goodbye.

Shamsa stops in her tracks, feeling Noora's presence behind her.

A beat.

Noora opens her mouth to speak, but Shamsa walks on without looking back, proud as she always was.

Noora watches her from the window as she enters the courtyard. Shamsa and her father greets each other warmly.

Shamsa stands tall as she says goodbye to Lateefa and Jassem.

Noora peers from the window as her father gently takes her arm, a gesture full of love and support.

Together they walk away.

108

INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

108

Noora, alone in her room, is miserable. She sits in the middle of her bed.

She has a hand on her now rounder belly.

Jassem's voice booms orders from the courtyard.

JASSEM

Seal the wind towers! Rain is coming!

She kicks her legs back and forth.

Lateefa enters.

LATEEFA

No, no... My dear, you must never, ever swing your legs. It's not good. Lie down now.

Jassem lingers at the door.

JASSEM

(sweetly) Lateefa is right. You must take care.

Moved by his concern, Noora lies down.

He nods at her and smiles. Then he teases by making a "behave" face behind Lateefa's back.

Unaware, Lateefa adjust the bed. Noora giggles.

LATEEFA

It's my duty to take care of you.
And most of all of our baby.

She closes the shutters.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

I'll have Yaqoota prepare a warm
drink for you.

She leaves.

Jassem takes the chance to enter the room.

JASSEM

I'm very happy Noora.

She sits up and places a hand on the bed inviting him to sit.

NOORA

I'm glad for that.

JASSEM

This child will be a happy one.
He'll have all the things a child
can have in life. All the things
you never had Noora. I will give
him everything.

She sits up, excited by his enthusiasm.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

I will bring a tutor from India.
Teach him English, math and
science...

Jassem's eyes sparkle.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

He will be ready for the new world.
He will know everything and have
everything.

Noora smiles for the first time in days.

109 EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

109

Noora's belly protrudes in front of her. She rubs her stomach
in the moonlight, smiling up at the stars.

She hears rustling SOUNDS... Chickens wings flap, goat hooves
scuffle.

Suddenly a figure appears in the shadows.
Her eyes widen as she recognizes Hamad.
He marches towards her -- full of confidence.
She's frozen. He grabs her hand with urgency.

HAMAD

Come!

And pulls her into her room.

110 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT

110

In the darkness of the bedroom, he whirls Noora into sitting position on her bed.

Frantically he gathers her things.

HAMAD

We don't have a lot of time! I
found sailors who will take us
across the sea. But we have to go
now..!

NOORA

Take us where?!

HAMAD

To India! It's like Paradise there.

He drops to his knees in front of her.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Did you think I was going to leave
you in this horrid place? We'll be
free there. We can begin our
future. Our baby's future.

He hugs her stomach.

She's at a loss.

He jumps up manically.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

But we have to move! Come on, come
on!

He pulls her arm.

NOORA

I can't.

She places her hand protectively on her belly.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Where have you been all this time?
You just disappeared!

HAMAD

I was made to disappear. I was told
not to come back.

Noora's eyes widen.

NOORA

Who told you? Jassem?

HAMAD

No, not Jassem. Doesn't matter who.
What matters is us. It's done my
love.

He smiles, a crazed look in his eyes and opens his hands.

Jassem's pearls shine in the moonlight.

He pulls at her again.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Come!

Noora can't seem to move fast enough for him. She stares at
his face, frozen.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Let's go! Before they wake up!

A beat.

NOORA

You think you can just come here
and take me wherever you want?
Whenever you decide? Look at me.
What about my situation? How can I
travel like this?

HAMAD

I'll take care of you. Both of you.

NOORA

No Hamad. I can't. I have to stay
here. This is now my home.

(MORE)

NOORA (CONT'D)

Ommi Lateefa took care of me when I was sick. It was Jassem who asked about me and came to check on me. And now you want to take from them their pearls and this child, their dream.

HAMAD

It may be their dream but it's not their child.

He moves towards her.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Of course you had to keep it a secret from them, but not with me. You don't have to pretend anything with me.

She moves her body away from his.

NOORA

What are you talking about?

HAMAD

It's my child. Our child.

NOORA

It's not your child. It's Jassem's.

HAMAD

Jassem's!

His voice rises.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Hah! The whole village knows, in fact everyone knows, he can't have children! Do you know how many mystics and healers he's gone to see in Bombay?

NOORA

That's just talk! Old people's talk!

HAMAD

Are you really so blind Noora!

NOORA

Get out.

HAMAD

So blind you can't even see it's
you who's been played! You don't
know what I'm talking about do you?

The vein in his neck pulsed.

NOORA

All nonsense what you say!

HAMAD

You haven't guessed have you? You
didn't feel something strange was
taking place? What, you think it
was normal for us to have been
together all that time, encouraged
by your protecting *Ommi* Lateefa?

Noora turns her back to him, her breath heavy.

HAMAD (CONT'D)

Lateefa saw the wild in you. She
planned it all. So you and I could
be together so you'd have a child
for her Jassem. Then she got rid of
me. Where do you think I've been?
She forced me to leave!

She turns around to face him again.

NOORA

(slowly) How cruel. If it's true,
why did you go along with it?

He looks at if he might cry.

HAMAD

I didn't know her plan at first.
But then I understood. I couldn't
say anything. I fell in love with
you. So I kept quiet, so I could
see more and more of you.

His eyes are now full of tears.

A beat.

NOORA

Shame on you. Sneaking into my room
that way. I'm a married woman. Get
out.

HAMAD

When did your heart turn to rock?

NOORA

When I understood I had to think of myself, worry about myself. Because no one else will do that for me.

He reaches out to her.

HAMAD

You do every filthy thing and then pretend you didn't. Now you want to dig a hole in the sand and fill it with your shame. It won't be buried forever. Sand is soft and never stops blowing.

NOORA

It's sand which becomes a rock. I won't hit my head this time.

HAMAD

They are being nice to you now because of the child. Once you deliver, they will take it and bring it up the way they want. You won't have a thing to say about it. Look what they did to Shamsa. They don't need her, so she's sent home.

NOORA

That was her decision. Go Hamad. It's the last time I'm going to ask.

HAMAD

And what about you? Where will you go once they don't need you?

She plugs her ears with her fingers and lowers her head.

She rocks back and forth.

When she looks up at him, he's standing by the door. He holds his hand out with the pearls.

NOORA

Return them. We can make things right again here.

His face contorts into something unrecognizable.

Then he pulls his arm back and hurls the pearls at her.

HAMAD

You return them!

He runs from the room.

Noora collapses to the ground desperately trying to collect the rolling pearls.

111 EXT. WADEEMA HOME - DAY 111

The sky is pregnant with heavy clouds.

112 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY 112

Yaqoota brings Noora lunch. Fish.

YAQOOTA
Today's catch.

NOORA
Mmmm....

YAQOOTA
I went down to see the fishermen
pull them myself. They're so funny
some of them.

Noora begins to eat.

YAQOOTA (CONT'D)
Do you want to come with me next
time? We'll have fun.

Noora smiles motherly.

NOORA
No, dear Yaqoota. I'd rather not.

YAQOOTA
But now you can move more, now that
your first months are finished.
Lateefa said so.

Noora nods.

NOORA
I know. I just would rather not.
You can come and tell me about your
adventures. Now who did you see?
Did you play by the sea?

Yaqoota smiles childishly.

YAQOOTA

Yes! Oh it's lovely the sea! And
Sheikh Khalid's wife might have
seen me, but I'm not sure.

She laughs happy to share a story with Noora who listens
patiently.

113 INT. MAJLIS - DAY

113

Lateefa sifts tiny black stones from rice.

Noora appears at the door. She watches her work before
Lateefa notices.

LATEEFA

Noora habibti! Come sit next to me.

Noora decides to sit on the other side of her.

She props herself up and watches Lateefa clean the rice.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

This rice. So many stones...

She flicks one to the side.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

We have to make sure to get them
all out, otherwise that will be the
end of my teeth!

Noora watches her like a cat deciding when to make a move.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Be careful to keep your legs
straight. Folded like that you'll
cut off blood. Not good at all.

NOORA

You worry so much Ommi Lateefa. You
keep fussing over me, but really
all is fine.

She touches her stomach.

NOORA (CONT'D)

I eat all the chicken and fish you
bring me every day. I've been
drinking milk. Resting a lot. The
baby is growing fine. My belly is
as strong as a drum.

LATEEFA

Anything I tell you is for your own good. For your own protection. You should know that by now.

NOORA

But the danger's over no? Isn't that what you wanted Yagoota to let me know? Maybe there's another danger I have to look out for?

Lateefa chuckles to herself.

LATEEFA

Danger's over. You were always one full of adventure. I spotted that in you from the start.

She looks up at Noora and taps her temple near her eyes.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

It was all in the eyes.

NOORA

Adventure. Is that what you saw in my eyes?

LATEEFA

That. And other things.

NOORA

What other things?

LATEEFA

(laughs) You've got the wild in you, child. But I can tame it. Turn you into a soft and sweet lady.

Noora keeps her gaze on Lateefa.

NOORA

But you didn't say what else you saw in my eyes exactly.

LATEEFA

I don't know how to describe it really. Restlessness, impulsiveness... I saw everything in fact. I saw all that you were capable of.

Noora sits straight.

NOORA

Are we talking about my pregnancy?

Lateefa hums to herself, not bothering to answer.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Are you talking about my pregnancy?

Lateefa looks up at her.

A beat. Then she continues to sift the rice.

LATEEFA

So quiet today with everyone out of the house. Jassem at his shop. Shamsa went back home. Even that fool Yaqoota is out. Probably lazing about by the shore. Everyone is out, or gone. Even that Hamad is... gone.

She looks up at Noora again.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Gone. Left! Poof.

Noora restrains herself from speaking.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Don't you want to know where he went?

NOORA

(too quickly) What do I care?

LATEEFA

Gone to India. He booked himself a passage. Didn't even have the courage to tell us himself. Sent his poor father. Can you imagine? After all we gave him, ungrateful boy. I imagine he'll end up nothing ore than a beggar on the streets. And probably he'll go mad too. Anyway...

She sighs.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

What does it matter, right?

NOORA

Absolutely.

She pulls the tray of rice closer to her.

NOORA (CONT'D)
Let me help you, that way we will
finish quicker.

She begins sifting as well.

LATEEFA
Ahhhh.... Working together. Now
that's what makes an agreeable
household. That was another thing I
saw in your eyes: Intelligence.

The two women smile at each other.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
I think we should leave the house
for a bit tomorrow. Go visiting.
What do you say to that?

NOORA
If you think that's alright, then
yes.

LATEEFA
I do, I really do. We'll visit my
friend Atheeja. It will be good for
you to get out a little. We'll take
Yaqoota too. What do you think?

NOORA
Yes, it would be very nice.
Excellent idea.

The two women work in harmony, sifting through the rice while
the clouds rumble outside.

114 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON 114

The house is quiet.

Noora collects the pearls hidden in her room.

115 INT. JASSEM'S ROOM - SAME 115

Noora's hands search the top of the cupboard. No keys.

She struggles to move with her large belly.

She continues searching around the room, finally finding them
under the rug.

She moves towards the cabinet

A sound outside. She freezes.

She hears Jassem's voice calling out.

She tries to open the cabinet, but grabs her side in pain.

Footsteps approach.

The cabinet pops open and she drops the pearls in just as the door opens.

Jassem stares down at her.

JASSEM

What are you doing?

NOORA

Cleaning!

She pretends to dust under the cabinet.

JASSEM

Didn't you hear me call. And are you supposed to be like that? Good god.

She struggles to stand up.

NOORA

Yes, you're right. It's just that...

Suddenly she grabs his hand and places it on her belly.

NOORA (CONT'D)

I wanted to share this with you.

Jassem is uncomfortable, and confused.

He tries to pull his hand away but she holds it to her.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. You won't harm it. It's strong.

Suddenly his expression shifts.

JASSEM

What's that!

She smiles.

NOORA
He's starting to kick.

He smiles widely.

JASSEM
Really?

NOORA
Here. Move your hand down.

She guides him and he feels around her belly, overjoyed.

NOORA (CONT'D)
I don't care what anyone says about
how proper or not proper it is. I
wanted you to feel it.

She looks up at him sweetly.

NOORA (CONT'D)
It is your child after all.

He laughs, mesmerized by her belly.

JASSEM
Yes, yes. That's true.

He keeps exploring.

JASSEM (CONT'D)
It's incredible! They'll think I'm
crazy.

NOORA
We don't have to tell them.

He smiles widely at her.

116 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

116

Noora sits up in bed eating.

The door knocks and Jassem peers in.

NOORA
Come in!

He holds something behind his back.

JASSEM
I brought you something...

He holds a small box out in front of her.

She opens it to find a beautiful necklace. Thick gold with a tiny pink coral set in the center.

NOORA

It's beautiful! Thank you!

She fingers it.

He sits on the side of the bed eager to touch her belly.

JASSEM

Can I?

Cautiously he reaches his hands out. He feels around.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

You're bigger. Mash'Allah.

NOORA

The baby too!

They are startled by Lateefa's angry voice at the door.

LATEEFA

Shame on you!

He pulls his hands back.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

What do you think you are doing?
Touching a pregnant woman like
that!

Embarrassed, Jassem stands. He's lost for words.

NOORA

It's nothing Ommi Lateefa. He just
wanted to feel the baby move.

LATEEFA

Feel the baby move? Pregnancy is
women's business, not men's. We
have customs here we have to
follow.

NOORA

It's normal. My father touched my
mother's belly every day when she
was pregnant with my brother.

Lateefa lowers her chin.

LATEEFA

Maybe where you're from, where
goats run wild. But here we have
our ways.

NOORA

Is there any harm in it?

LATEEFA

Harm? Well that's no the point is
it?

Jassem finally finds his voice.

JASSEM

Stop it women. Both of you. I won't
have you fighting like cats in my
house.

He stands between them.

LATEEFA

It's her. She's always putting
blame on me, making me feel
everything I do is wrong.

NOORA

Nothing I do is good enough for
her.

He turns to face her. Without Lateefa seeing, he winks at
her.

JASSEM

I know, I know. But she's older
than you and she needs respect.

Lateefa quips from behind his shoulder.

LATEEFA

Yes, respect that all I ask for.

Noora nods, but gives Lateefa a victorious look nonetheless.

117 INT. DINING AREA - DAY

117

At dinner, Lateefa and Noora organize themselves around the
table as they wait for Jassem's arrival.

LATEEFA

Shamsa has asked for a divorce.

She settles into her seat.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
And our husband has agreed.

NOORA
He has?

LATEEFA
Yes of course. It's a relief
really. Less food to cook, less to
worry about.

NOORA
I thought you liked her.

LATEEFA
She wasn't really useful anymore to
us, no?

Lateefa sticks a pepper into her mouth and chomps.

NOORA
Well I suppose that's like me...
After I deliver, you won't need me
anymore.

Lateefa spits out the pepper and shrieks.

LATEEFA
Jassem! Jassem!!! Come quick!

He comes running in.

JASSEM
What is it? What's going on?

LATEEFA
Shame on you Noora!

Shrieking, she points at her.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
Listen to what this ungrateful
woman is saying about us Jassem!
I'm so hurt, I'm so hurt!

Noora is totally confused by the distraught display of
emotions coming from Lateefa.

JASSEM
What did she say?

LATEEFA
Oh...

She inhales deeply and sniffles.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

She said.... She said... that we are cruel and we would throw her out of the house once the baby is born.

Jassem looks at Noora.

JASSEM

Is that true? That's what you think of us?

NOORA

Of course not! You are my family. My life.

JASSEM

Then why would you say that?

Noora sizes up Lateefa.

NOORA

It's just...

Her eyes start to quiver and moisten as she draws energy.

NOORA (CONT'D)

Ommi Lateefa doesn't understand how things get confusing when you are pregnant. You feel angry and happy at that same time. You say things without meaning. So many silly things.

She starts to cry.

NOORA (CONT'D)

I didn't mean it of course. You must believe me.

Jassem and Lateefa stare at Noora as her tears become heavier and heavier.

NOORA (CONT'D)

And I don't blame her for reacting that way. How would she know what's happening inside me. She's never been pregnant. It's just all kinds of crazy feelings.

JASSEM

Enough, enough... It's not good for you to get worked up. Right Lateefa?

She sniffles.

LATEEFA

Yes, enough. You need your strength. That baby is coming soon. And once he comes, you'll be able to rest finally. Leave him to me, leave everything to me. Ommi Lateefa will take care of it.

NOORA

No!

LATEEFA

See, husband? She has no trust in me!

NOORA

It is my child.

Tears begin to stream again.

JASSEM

Now, shhhh. Everything will work out.

NOORA

It's different. It's my child. A mother always knows what's best for her child. Ommi Lateefa never felt a baby growing inside of her, she doesn't know.

LATEEFA

How silly you are sometimes. The child is part of us too.

Noora narrows her eyes at her.

NOORA

But growing inside of *me*.

JASSEM

And made by me.

A beat. Both women turn to him, suddenly silent.

JASSEM (CONT'D)

Now let's have lunch. Yaqoota!

The women make eye contact across the table.

Lateefa looks back at Jassem. Noora is terrified.

Then Lateefa drops her eyes and reaches for a radish.

Yaqoota brings fish out.

As they begin to eat, Lateefa rearranges herself again.

LATEEFA

I think there is no point to go round and round. This is your child - we all know that - in the body. I think we have to focus on the important things only. Don't you agree, husband?

Jassem grunts, stuffing his mouth with food.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)

Most important is that when the child is born, it will belong to all of us, so that we can give it everything together. Don't you think that's fair to share it? He will learn more from his father Jassem and from me than from you. You are still a child yourself, with so much to learn.

NOORA

I can give it other things. Like love.

LATEEFA

Yes, yes, of course. But the best thing is that I will always be with you as you do that, to make sure this child follows the good way, the right way. My foot and your foot making the same prints, how beautiful is that?

Jassem nods.

JASSEM

That's very beautiful.

Lateefa holds her palms up to the sky.

LATEEFA

You will give him life and Jassem and I will teach him morals, how to be like us. May this child be born healthy, may he be blessed with wisdom, may he follow the moral way, inshallah. God be blessed for all that He has given us.

JASSEM

Amen.

118 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - DAY

118

The midwife moves her hands around Noora's belly.

LATEEFA

Is it time?

MIDWIFE

Almost. But it's still early.

She examines Noora.

LATEEFA

You must come right away when I call you.

MIDWIFE

Yes, yes, of course. I will be here with her.

She places the various salts and herbs near by.

LATEEFA

Yes, we will need you with us. And at the beginning. Until we get used to how to do things.

MIDWIFE

I'll come quickly.

She starts to pack up her things.

MIDWIFE (CONT'D)

So many die. It starts fine, but then... we lose the poor mother and we never know why. In the end it's all in God's hands. But not you, mashaallah not you. You are strong and young. Everything seems fine.

Noora feigns a smile.

LATEEFA

She's young but she will be weak after and in need of rest and recovery after birth. With your help, we will deliver a beautiful, healthy child. I will be the first to hold the child and take care of the baby until the mother is capable.

Noora rolls over in pain.

119 EXT. WADEEMA SKY - AFTERNOON 119

The sky opens up and heavy rains descend onto the desert house.

120 EXT. COURTYARD - SAME 120

Yaqoota, drenched, squeals and runs around the courtyard desperately trying to cover what she can.

LATEEFA

There, there! Hurry!

Lateefa squawks at her from the window pointing at the laundry which has collapsed onto the sandy earth now in a mud puddle.

Noora watches them from her window.

Her face is pale and serene, full of restrained emotion. She observes as Lateefa continues to shriek at Yaqoota. The sky BOOMS with thunder.

121 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - EVENING 121

Noora's hand locks her door.

She throws her head back onto her bed and closes her eyes in a silent scream. Thunder claps and lightening.

Someone tries to open her locked door. They shake at it.

Violent rain crashes down.

Noora grabs the bed post as tight as she can.

FADE OUT.

Outside Lateefa is frantic.

She orders Yaqoota out into the torrential rain.

LATEEFA
Call the midwife!

Yaqoota tries to herd the chickens inside a coop.

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
Yaqoota!

Yaqoota shouts into the rain.

YAQOOTA
(Terrified) I CAN'T! THE BEDOUINS
WILL KIDNAP ME! I'm AFRAID!

Jassem runs across the courtyard.

JASSEM
I'LL GO!

LATEEFA
Don't be ridiculous! This is
woman's business. Lateefa you are
going!

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
No! I won't go out in the dark!

LATEEFA (CONT'D)
Yes you will!

The wind continues to howl and lightening strikes.

JASSEM
I'll go with Yaqoota then so she
doesn't get kidnapped!

Lateefa, Yaqoota and Jassem are hysterical.

FADE OUT.

A wood scaffold collapses. They scamper about like madmen,
drenched.

Jassem and Yaqoota head out.

Lateefa runs back across the courtyard and slips on the mud,
crashing down to the ground.

Her voice explodes with stultifying pain. They run back towards her.

LATEEFA

My leg!

The wind's howls turn into the sounds of a baby crying.

FADE OUT.

123 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - NIGHT 123

Inside, Noora breathes slowly, looking down at the wet baby in her arms. A miracle.

124 EXT. WADEEMA HOME - MORNING 124

Calm. Total quiet.

125 INT. NOORA'S ROOM - MORNING 125

Noora holds her sleeping baby.

The door creaks and she looks up to see Jassem.

Her face beams.

Carefully he walks across the room to her.

He sits behind her.

She smiles and gestures him to hold the baby.

He looks down at the sleeping child.

A tear forms in his eyes.

JASSEM

You have made me the happiest man on earth.

NOORA

Our baby. He is the most beautiful child on earth.

He embraces her.

NOORA (CONT'D)

How's Lateefa doing?

JASSEM

The doctor says it's broken. She
won't be able to walk for at least
two months. Maybe more.

Noora tilts her head to express sympathy.

NOORA

Poor thing.

The slightest mischievous smirk crosses her lips.

Jassem kisses Noora's forehead.

Then they turn their attention back to the baby.