

1

EXT. STREETS OF BAGHDAD - DAY

1

Title fades up: "Baghdad 2000"

EXT. STREETS OF BAGHDAD - NIGHT

SHAKIR, early 40's, bald, walks towards a closed pharmacy. There is something in his hand covered with a scarf. He stands in front of the pharmacy. He peaks at the glass that displays a variety of medicine. He puts the scarf on his head revealing a tire iron on his LEFT HAND.

He looks around him. He waits. The call for prayer echoes throughout the street. Immediately after he hears it, his left hand breaks into the glass of the pharmacy with the tire iron. The glass shattering is overcome by the call for prayer. The bleeding left hand struggles to reach for antibiotics. He grabs the antibiotics, runs. A man sees Shakir and runs after him. A LITTLE BOY joins the chase and runs after the man too. A woman yells at Shakir as he is being chased.

Wide back shot of Shakir, hand bleeding, runs with full force as he is being chased by a group of people.

Shakir's feet running and his hand is bleeding.

Shakir's POV of the streets of Baghdad

Wide tracking back of PEOPLE running after Shakir

Shakir goes down the stairs, overlooking the Euphrates river, he runs towards a Canoe.

Shakir rows into the sunrise.

2

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

2

An older Adobe structure School with English architecture with a sign that reads in Arabic: "HURRIYAH SCHOOL"

3

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

3

A FEW WORDS IN ARABIC are calligraphed on the board, SADDAM HUSSEIN'S PICTURE IN HIS TWENTIES looks defiantly at a group of GIRLS dressed in white, grey and blue uniforms sitting on desks with ink cups. The classroom is decorated with various paper drawings. A nearly empty bookcase houses a few old books of Literature and poetry. MR. KAREEM strolls to the side window of the classroom, for the thousandth time--

MR. KAREEM
 (apologetic but ecstatic)
 And I know, that my students will
 greet their new teacher with
 respect and kindness...

A soft hand doodles the name: "Karim," in Arabic surrounded
 by hearts the way lovers dreamily encrypt each others names.
 AMAL, a 13 year old girl, listens gloomily among CLASSMATES.

MR. KAREEM
 And will show how well Mr. Kareem
 had taught them about our glorious
 literary heritage.
 (chuckles awkwardly at his
 little joke)

Some girls put on polite smiles. The school bell rings.

4 INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

4

As classmates descend quickly down the stairs, Amal, with
 thoughts weighing heavily on her mind, descends slowly.

STUDENT 1
 Another teacher leaving us, how
 many? *Four this fall.*

STUDENT 2
 Who could blame them, a job
 anywhere that wasn't Iraq.

STUDENT 1
 A cockroach lives better than a
 teacher here.

More students pass Amal.

AMAL (V.O.)
 Good people always go away. My name
 is Amal. I am a girl from Baghdad.

5 EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

5

Amal crosses the schoolyard. Some GIRLS shoot basketball,
 others jump rope, some gather in little knots eating Syrian
 bread sandwiches. HALA, a beautiful, popular girl stands
 surrounded by RAFEEKA, MONA and OTHER GIRLS. Amal drifts
 towards them, an outsider.

HALA
 (assertive)
 He taught Arabic literature for centuries. It's time for a change, somebody young and handsome, perhaps? Right from the University.

RAFEEKA
 Is anybody studying Arabic literature at the University? Is anybody studying anything?

HALA
 Well, of course, the world has to go on, doesn't it? So we'll just go to the principal and tell her that we insist on a young and handsome teacher to take his place.

The girls laugh.

MONA
 Right, we don't care if he knows anything about Arabic Literature.

HALA
 Mr. Kareem is so...skinny.

At this remark, Amal remembers --

6

INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

6

Amal, a year earlier, bedridden with a fever, eyes almost too big for her colorless face, arms hung like withered branches. She coughs continuously. Amal's mother, NAWAL sits by her bedside. Nawal almost mechanically wets a towel and lays it on her head. SHAKIR, her father barges in. His left hand is wrapped in a bloody towel, holding medicine. He immediately kisses Amal on her forehead, hands NAWAL the medicine.

NAWAL
 Haram. How could you do this?
 (throws the medicine,
 harshly)
 Expired...

SHAKIR
 (after recovering)
 Can Omar send us any medicine from America?

NAWAL

He is coming next year.

SHAKIR

A year? She'll miss a year of school.

BACK TO:

7

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

7

Just then, Amal catches sight of Mr. Kareem making his diffident way across the school yard. OTHER GIRLS take a short break in their chatter when they spot him.

AMAL

I think we should give Mr. Kareem a gift.

Seven faces turn to face her as if she had broken a rule.

HALA

Why? To reward him for giving us such low grades?

AMAL

He - he gives us the grades we earn.

She is the center of attention, feels "almost" like the Amal, of a year earlier.

AMAL

Mr. Kareem tries hard. Don't you think so? He cares, he wants us to really like the stuff he's teaching.

Two girls mutter in agreement.

RAFEEKA

That's true, he's not so bad.

AMAL

(more firmly)

And now he's leaving, and we probably won't get someone as good. We should honor him. It's an honor to honor a good teacher.

DEENA

Yes, that's what my father says.
Amal's right.

HALA

(resuming command)

Of course ! I never said we
wouldn't. Naturally, we'll give him
a present. You always do that, for
a good teacher.

(faces Deena)

And as **my** father says: "It's not
what you know, but who you know..

Hala takes out a few dinars and as the camera zooms in on the
picture of Saddam Hussein imprinted on them at the sound of
"who you know" The others girls nod in agreement, for Hala's
sake. Amal sees the noddings and then turns uncomfortable.
These girls Amal knew had a few coins in their pockets and
mysterious connections.

HALA

Everybody bring some money
tomorrow, or soon. Let's say a
hundred dinars. We can all chip in
that much, can't we? Well, somebody
suggest something.

MONA

A sweater..a shirt.

Her suggestion is shot down by Hala.

DEENA

A scarf?

HALA

Don't be dumb. In the gulf he's
going to need a *scarf*?

RAFEEKA

Then a necktie. That old brown one
he wears has got to go.

MONA

A desk set - you know, with places
for his pens and ink.

AMAL

A book. I think we should give him
a book.

HALA

Books are so dull. And I doubt he will want to carry a whole library with him.

RAFEEKA

We don't have to give him a whole Library. Just one book..would be nice.

AMAL

A book is personal..but not too personal.

RAFEEKA

(with a theatrical toss of her curly hair)

Right. I vote for a book.

Others agree. Hala folds her arms and looks aside.

HALA

(declares)

Okay, we'll give him a book. That's just what I was thinking of. So we need a committee. Rafeeka, you, me..and..

AMAL

I can choose a book.

HALA

You? How do you know what kind of book Mr. Kareem would like?

AMAL

Something to do with literature, of course, Shakespeare, or --Tolstoy, one of those people. My family can help me. My grandfather taught literature at Baghdad University.

Silence follows.

HALA

All right. Then you do it. After all, what's so hard about buying a book? Does anybody want to go with Amal? Well, whoever wants to, can.

Amal looks around her and stands defiant. More girls begin to check Amal out, with admiring looks for standing up to the most popular girl at school.

AMAL

Good, when we have enough money,
I'll - and whoever else wants to --
go get a beautiful book. Something
Mr. Kareem will like. We want him
to leave with nice thoughts..

HALA

And nice grades.

The girls laugh. Hala loses interest and leaves, all the girls follow her except for Rafeeka and Amal.

RAFEeka

You know, Mr. Kareem would see
through a bribe.

AMAL

We'll give it to him after the
final exam, on the very last day.

Amal reaches for Rafeeka's hands and reads the time. She pats Rafeeka amicably and quickly splits. CLOSE Rafeeka.

8

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

8

Amal with her school pack crosses the bleak playground toward the drab decaying building of an elementary school. BILAL, her seven year old brother jumps up and down in a frenzy.

BILAL

HE IS COMING. HE IS COMING.

He rushes up to Amal.

BILAL

Isn't he Amal, dumb old Sami
doesn't believe me. And I told
everybody over and over. He is
coming. Tell them. Amal.
(he clutches to her dress)

SAMI, tugged by his MOTHER's hand, turns back --

SAMI

(making a face)
It's not true. Bilal is just
telling stories.
(his mother yanks him
away)

Bilal yells back. SUHAD, Bilal's teacher comes out and stands dazed next to the school bell. Her hair looks as though it is coming from the battlefield. Amal turns to her for comfort.

SUHAD

I am afraid we had quite sometime with Bilal. I'd better tell you so your mother can deal with it.

(takes a deep breath,
looks towards the
horizon, recounts)

Somebody gave me a book for the children. Some relief organization sent it. Anyway, it is about Christmas but it's not religious. It's about Santa Claus -- Baba Noel. They call him Santa Claus in America.

(slower pace, almost
believing it herself)

Santa Claus and his deer who pull a wagon through the sky and bring gifts for the children. So I read it and they like it and wanted to hear it again. And again, and again, and again. It was a mistake.

BILAL

No, it is not a mistake. He is coming. Tell her Amal.

Suhad nods her head to Bilal with a hopeless smile.

AMAL

(making connections)

We have uncle Omar coming from America. Maybe that's what Bilal thinks. He should be here tomorrow.

BILAL

SANTY CLAUS IS COMING. He is bringing toys and presents for us -- Mama told me. A red car! It's Santy Claus, Amal.

SUHAD with a "good luck" glance at Amal, walks away. Amal nods, agreeing with her brother.

Amal and Bilal walk over the train tracks.

AMAL

It's all right, yes somebody's coming to us - Santa Claus or Baba Noel, or somebody just as good. He's bringing...good things. Maybe clothes or shoes...

BILAL

A red car.

AMAL

We'll see. But you mustn't talk about it, because then the other children will feel bad at school.

BILAL

(hums a tune)

Yes, Santy Claus is coming to town. Uncle Omar is coming to town. Santy Claus is coming tomorrow. Santy Claus is coming to....BAGHDAD !

Excited, she holds his hand and they both walk faster along the tracks. They cross over a foot bridge that overlooks the Tigriss river.

10

INT. HOME - DAY

10

Amal's house is hardly furnished, like a museum that has been robbed of most of its belongings, with only a few absolutely necessary furnishings left. Amal passes by her mother in the kitchen, in a flurry of cooking.

NAWAL

(excited)

Uncle Omar is in Baghdad. He is already making the rounds with everyone. Like a grass hopper, the poor man.

Amal instinctively grabs the plate eggplant and starts throwing them on the pan on top of the kerosene burner. The egg plant splashes her face with oil, Amal lowers down the kerosene burner. Her mother eyes the kerosene burner, takes the eggplant away from Amal.

NAWAL

I'll do it. Go do the lahm mishwi.

Amal opens the fridge that hosts nothing but a plate of meat and a plate of cutup onions and garlic.

After she grabs these two plates, she stares at the nothingness in the fridge for a while. Loaves of Syrian bread and a jar half full of olives is all that is left. Mother reads her concern.

NAWAL

We'll be okay. So.... we'll eat lentils for a month. We'll be okay.

Amal takes the plates out to the balcony. She cuts the meat chunks out of the skewers and cuts them extra small, making little go so far. She wipes the sweat off her brow with one hand while tending the meal with the other. She rushes back in the kitchen. Bilal barges in towards them, stares at the making of the feast.

BILAL

But he only eats milk and cookies.
listen to me --

Amal holds in a smile as she heads out to the balcony. The mother nods to him, the least of her worries; as she cooks and he rambles on. She nods agreeing to every word he says.

11 EXT. BALCONY - DAY

11

Clothes are left to dry on a rope in the balcony. Amal moves aside a pot full of soaked beans with routine in her hands. She moves up a little aluminum grill, cleans it up. She lays down pieces of scrap wood. She lights it up with matches, it flares up but dies quickly. She blows air into the wood, covering her eyes from the sparks, then uses an old newspaper. Mother barges out onto the balcony with chicken skewers.

12 INT. LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - DAY

12

Amal and mother spread out a piece of long cloth, on the floor. Amal notices her mother's pained look.

NAWAL

(almost obsessively)
Move a little to your right, this
is where it was.

AMAL

(looking at the floor)
No Mama, it was here. Look at the
marks.

Mother doesn't need to look at the old table marks

NAWAL

But we moved it again. You don't remember?

AMAL

What difference does it make mama?

Mother and Amal move the cloth to where the table used to be. Bilal immediately lies across it and rolls.

NAWAL

Bilal!

BILAL

I want to sit next to him all the time.

Amal signals him to hush and he remembers the promise. He makes a gesture that his lips are sealed.

NAWAL

We have Fareeda, Radwan, and their three kids, Omar and us. Yes for ten.

BILAL

(rolling over)

And the reindeer can stay in the balcony.

Amal closes her eyes in disbelief.

NAWAL

Please keep him calm, I don't want him all worked up before Omar comes.

13

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

13

UNCLE OMAR and Shakir behind him lugging the suitcase, climb up the building stairway, out of breath. Uncle Omar looks weary, red eyes, heavy cheeks, chubby, loose tie. At his sight, Mother ululates. The kids carry the widest smiles.

Shouts and kisses in Arabic from the family echo throughout the hallway. Mother can't stop patting his face. She cries.

NAWAL

Allah. Ten years, dear one, ten years
(keeps crying)

Uncle Omar kneels and kisses Amal and Bilal on their cheeks, he cries too. FAREEDA, RADWAN, and their three kids arrive behind them on the steps and the shouting, hugging, kissing and tears start all over again. Amal's eyes grow watery. She finally notices Bilal's pulling on her dress.

BILAL

(whispers)

He doesn't look like he's supposed to Amal. Why doesn't he look like he's supposed to?

For a moment she is puzzled. Then makes the connection.

AMAL

(quickly)

Yes. You're right. Those are just his traveling clothes, his *other* clothes..probably need cleaning.

BILAL

No, he doesn't have his beard.

AMAL

He shaved it off. Men do that sometimes. They think a beard is nice for a while, and then they don't like it anymore.

BILAL

(looks at her dubiously)

But he doesn't look --

At that moment, AHMED, their cousin, sweeps him off the floor and starts showing him off to Uncle Omar. Uncle Omar shakes his head back and forth smiling so close to Bilal's face, who in turn becomes amicable for the time being.

14

INT. LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

14

Fareeda and her Daughter move in with the dessert which they brought with them, as MOTHER pours after-dinner mint tea proudly from a silver tea pot. Amal is happy to see the happiness and laughter in her mother's face. Shakir pulls the suitcase from the bedroom. Almost all adults sit on available chairs, and the kids gather on the floor facing the suitcase. Amal holds Bilal in her lap. Uncle Omar jokes with Bilal as he opens it --

UNCLE OMAR (SUBTITLE)

(yells)

Open Sesame !

A hush atmosphere falls over the room. He pulls out the first item as the camera CIRCLES SLOWLY from behind them. But suddenly the lights dim to pitch black in the room. In a flash, mother yells:

NAWAL

Oh, not now. Amal!

Amal, Mother and Father who know the drill fetch in the dark for the oil lanterns.

UNCLE OMAR

(laughing)

Yoooooooooooouu. I forgot about this.

In moments, lantern lights make the faces barely visible and an extra lantern is placed next to the suitcase. Uncle Omar takes a sip of tea and pulls out the treasure --

UNCLE OMAR

(almost theatrical)

Antibiotics, three and seven day courses, from a special friend.

The adults watch closely as Uncle Omar opens each new treasure.

UNCLE OMAR

Arthritis deep penetrating pain relief cream.

MOTHER cheers.

UNCLE OMAR

Aspirin super strength eight hour relief with bonus fifty gels extra!

Shakir exhales a sigh of relief. The adults greet with appreciative murmurs.

UNCLE OMAR

Cough suppressant, alcohol-free. One year supply.

Father eyes Amal with some sadness. Fareeda claps in excitement. Bilal watches every item lifted from the suitcase as if his life depended on it. Amal feels his small body fidgeting as he leans forward at every lift.

UNCLE OMAR

(reads)

Allergy antihistamine, one hundred percent more product free, buy twenty tablets get twenty four free. Skin medication, stops itching immediately upon contact.

The children begin to lose interest. Amal runs her fingers through her hair. Bilal is like a statue.

UNCLE OMAR

Overnight lip treatment. You asked me for that dear sister.

Farida almost jumps with joy, blows him an air kiss.

UNCLE OMAR

Stimulant laxative

(reads from label)

Experts in gentle dependable overnight relief. Diarrhea relief, easy to swallow. Two hundred sterile single use syringes, cholesterol test tablets. Prostate check, a certified laboratory home test

(to Radwan)

You can do it at home now.

The children wait patiently for the display to end. The cousins look at each other in glances of disappointment.

UNCLE OMAR

(reads another label)

Multi vitamin, senior performance now with heart healthy ingredients two times the amount than any other supplement.

NAWAL

Drink your tea habibi.

UNCLE OMAR

(sips quickly and resumes)

And most importantly...

At that moment, the children's eyes gleam. The power comes back on among cheers and clapping their hands together, a cheering that has to do with this generation's putting up with the common outages.

Now with the electricity back and Uncle Omar saving the best for last has Bilal breathless.

He takes out jars of pills, reading glasses, scissors; hinged knee brace, displaying and cherishing every item like the home network channel. The suit case is empty. He stares at Bilal, smiling.

UNCLE OMAR
(clapping his hands with
nothing in them, teasing)
Khalas, bah. What do you want you?

Bilal's eyes open wide. Uncle Omar stands up with a great breath and pulls out his wallet. He pulls out some dinars.

UNCLE OMAR
(apologetically to the
adults)
I couldn't bring presents for the
children. Not enough room, with all
this. And how do I know what they
like? This is from their auntie and
me.

With quick gestures hands out a couple of bills to Amal and her two cousins. He then hands a couple of bills to father.

UNCLE OMAR
(smiling, eyeing Bilal)
For the little one.

The cousins and Amal quickly rush up to Uncle Omar and kiss him on the cheek, thankful. They walk away and their eyes are dazed in a world of imagination traveling to places where they will spend it. A hush falls back upon the room, same long hush when all the gifts have been unwrapped from under a Christmas tree. Nothing is left.

BILAL
(with a shaky voice)
I..I want a red car. A red one. A
racing car.

One of the boy cousins gives a short laugh. Everyone turns to Bilal.

BILAL
Where is my car? Where are the
toys?
(louder)
Santa Claus has toys!
(MORE)

BILAL (cont'd)
He doesn't have just--just this
stuff. Listen to me, please. Give
me my red car.

NAWAL
(walking over to him)
But Habibi, Uncle Omar wasn't able
to bring any cars. He had to - to
bring other things instead.

Amal looks at her brother, withholding the emotion. Others
look at Bilal, feeling his situation.

SHAKIR
A car wouldn't fit into that little
suitcase
(with a forced laughter
that follows)

Bilal faces Amal.

BILAL
You promised. You said Santy Claus
was coming...and would bring me
toys. Where are they?

A cold dismay goes through her. She looks down in regret,
unable to look in her brother's eyes. Uncle Omar jumps in
with quiet embarrassment --

UNCLE OMAR
I don't have a car, but I have--I
have--

He rummages through his pockets and pulls out a box of
Chicklets.

BILAL
I want toys. I want a car.

NAWAL
(sharply)
Enough. Bilal. There are no cars.
There are only things we need.

In a flash, Bilal throws himself on the floor, crying and
shouting, pounding his fists. Amal makes a grab for him but
catches a sharp kick and backs off. Others get busy grabbing
the treasures of medicine and putting them in order. Totally
out of control, Bilal screams and beats anything within
reach. Mother fumbles quickly among the medicines until she
finds a bottle and opens it.

NAWAL
 (as if in E.R.)
 Amal quickly...A spoon.

Amal rushes to the kitchen while --

NAWAL
 (whispers to Shakir,
 holding the cough syrup)
 Maybe there is something in that
 will calm him down.

Mother holds him down while Amal manages to get a spoonful into his mouth. His writhing subsides, Mother nods to Amal who nods back and Mother carries him up and to the bedroom. She closes the door behind them. As the screams grow fainter, a quiet dismay settles on everyone in the sitting room. Then Aunt Fareeda gathers her share of the treasure and announces--

AUNT FAREEDA (SUBTITLE)
 Hamdella ala Salama Habib Kalbi.
 (welcome back my dear)

She hugs Uncle Omar and leaves. Her family follows.

UNCLE OMAR
 (murmuring through the
 goodbyes to father)
 I'm sorry. I didn't realize...I
 should have brought something..

FATHER
 No! We beg your forgiveness. What
 can we say? It is a shame, a
 disgrace. I don't understand -- I
 have no idea why the boy should act
 like that. What a shame. He will be
 punished.

Amal rolls her eyes up knowing it will not happen. She looks to the closed bedroom in sorrow. He is still too young to have learned that you can't expect anything, in this world.

15 INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

15

Amal's half asleep in what's left in her bedroom. The shadows of her parents arguing and their whispering is barely seen and heard through the stained glass of their bedroom door.

16 INT. PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

16

The bedroom is barely visible with lantern light. A sepia-colored picture of the GRANDPARENTS hangs on the wall in a golden frame. A book shelf with several leather-bound books is in the background.

MOTHER

(agitated)

How could you? Those books - you know what they meant to your father.

FATHER

What else is there? There is nothing.

MOTHER

Look, if you must do this, then at least get him something he needs.

FATHER

Needs? He needs everything. Omar's money will go for that. This, I must do myself. My son hasn't had a toy in his whole life. I can't face myself. It was bad enough, having Omar think I couldn't -- A man must make his son happy.

(hints)

It is bad enough that he was born that way - with this syndrome.

MOTHER

This is not going to stop. Is it?

17 INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

17

Amal tucks herself tight. She covers her head with the pillow, shutting her mind off. She had heard these conversations a million times before. At the pronunciation of each item sold Amal sleeps in a different position recalling the many nights she heard this. Whispers grow louder into decipherable words and sentences imagining her mother in similar countless situations.

18 INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

18

The dining room is dragged away. Mother stands like a stone.

19 INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 19

Amal sleeps on the right side of the bed, covering her head, remembering --

20 INT. DINING ROOM - DAY 20

Mother's hands wraps the china into a box. She finds a greeting card with a cartoonish picture of a wedding. ^

21 INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 21

Amal sleeps on the left side of the bed, covering her head.

22 INT. LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - DAY 22

WORKERS roll in carpets. Mother is not in the room.

23 INT. AMAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 23

Amal sits on the side of the bed, hugging her knees, rocking her knees, back and forth.

24 INT. LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - DAY 24

Shakir eats lentils and soup with a look of suppressed eagerness. Bilal sits eating opposite him, one hand with a spoon and the other holding a matchbox with a live ant inside it that he periodically opens and closes.

SHAKIR

Bilal. Something wonderful had happened. Uncle Omar had a surprise for you. He couldn't find it in the big suitcase.

Oh papa, thought Amal, be careful. Shakir pulls out from behind his back a little red sports car resting on his palm. Bilal stares at it for a moment. Bilal finally holds it like a sacred object examining it from every angle.

25 EXT. BALCONY - DAY 25

Bilal plays with the car euphorically in a montage series:

- Bilal swings the car up and down the rail of the balcony with sounds of "Vroom Vroom"
- Bilal on his knees swings the car out of little crevices within the banisters making car screeching noise.
- Bilal carefully pushes it carefully along a slanted wooden board.
- Bilal places wooden sticks alongside the car and imagines them as people, drivers, talking around the car.
- Bilal crashes the car and rolls it over several times making wild sounds.
- Bilal moves the car out of a creative bridge he made from silverware and two plates.
- Bilal sits still with his arms crossed, breathless staring at the car. Like a holy grail.
- Bilal resumes the game playing all over again.
- Shakir stares with watery eyes at his son outside the balcony door. He gestures to Mother who sneaks up rubbing her hands against the cooking apron and catches a cold glimpse.
- Amal glances at her parents as they watch him. She digs in her pocket for the Uncle Omar money, pensive. In her other pocket, she pulls out a twenty U.S. dollar bill, as her eyes travel to places she would not dare to imagine --

26 EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY 26

Amal glances at a street carnival. The Ferris Wheel with girls her age are screaming, a Carousel with girls her age are laughing.

27 EXT. DOWNTOWN BAGHDAD - DAY 27

Amal looks gazes at the different dummy models posing in stores with the latest fashions and newest shoes.

28 A EXT. AL MUTANABI BOOK MARKET - DAY 28 A

Amal squeezes in a tight Alley and sees a sign for "Al Mutanabi" street. A man on a bicycle, almost runs over a couple of BABY LAMBS. a WOMAN argues with a MERCHANT about the value of her caged bird.

VARIOUS MERCHANTS stand behind huge donkey carts, carrying a surreal variety of paintings, silverware, candle sticks, various furniture, tires, household goods, musical instruments, the flea market of Baghdad's family possessions. The merchants stand around smoking, joking with each other. Amal passes the junk section of the market. She spots one of her mother's paintings, but quickly glances the other way. She enters the book section of the market, full of medical books, science books, literature books. The BOOK MERCHANTS look uninterested in their collection. She runs her fingers across Medical books of all sorts, history books, sociology, science, computer technology lying on the curb...she recalls:

29

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

29

Mr. Kareem strolls through attentive students, proudly walking with his hands behind his back across different desks

MR. KAREEM (O.S.)
 (more like a performance)
 And in those days, Baghdad was the
 center of learning for the whole
 world. A thousands years ago --

BACK TO:

EXT. BOOK MARKET - DAY

She stands silent between TWO MERCHANTS, the leftover of Baghdad's libraries reduced to knowledge no one could afford and the echoes continue --

MR. KAREEM (O.S.)
 --at the height of Islamic
 civilization, the libraries of
 Baghdad had brought together books
 from as far away as Spain and
 China. Scholars, too, had come from
 all over the known world to bring
 books and to study and copy and
 translate volumes of Baghdad's
 "House of Wisdom."

MR. KAREEM (O.S.)
 Books and Baghdad were practically
 synonymous.

One of the MERCHANTS, stands behind a cart with stacks of various books. He looked more intellectual, much more caring about his books. Amal approaches him.

AMAL
Salam Alaykum

MERCHANT
Salam Alayum

AMAL
I am looking for a book of
literature. For a gift.

The frayed and stoop-shouldered merchant, rubs his unshaven chin thoughtfully.

MERCHANT
I have some here. You look around.

Amal notices a whole set of books by Thomas Hardy, volumes by Shakespeare, Hemingway, Dickens, a salad of classical writers. Amal finally settles on one book titled: "Moby Dick," with a picture of a whale on it. Then she changes her mind and almost decides on a book of poems by Robert Frost. She rifles through the pages of short poems. She opens it and runs her fingers across a name and doodling by a previous owner. "My name is Firas, take care of this book" it reads in Arabic. The merchant hands her another book.

MERCHANT
Here. Have a look.

A beautiful book, tooled satin cover embossed in faded gold, in Arabic. Opening to a place in the middle, Amal delicately touches the pages. The pages have decoration with rich colors painted by hand. She reads the name on the cover. Gibran Khalil Gibran..she remembers --

30 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

30

MR. KAREEM
And in this section Gibran Khalil
Gibran talks about Freedom...

Mr. Kareem strolls through the desks. He stops with the book of poetry on his side, not needing to look it, recites verbatim looking out the window as if addressing the nation

MR. KAREEM
At the City gate and by your
fireside I have seen you and
worship your own freedom. Even as
slaves humble themselves before a
tyrant and praise him though he
slays them.

(MORE)

MR. KAREEM (cont'd)

Ay, in the grove of the temple and
in the shadow of the citadel I have
seen the freest among you wear
their freedom as a yoke and a
handcuff. And my heart bled within
me for you can only be free when
even the desire of seeking freedom
becomes a harness to you, and when
you cease to speak of freedom as a
goal and fulfillment.

Sadly, Mr. Kareem walks to the window and in a final breath:

MR. KAREEM

Damned are the people who come from
different races and not stand
united...

CUT TO:

Mr. Kareem walks over next to Amal and sits on the edge of
her desk, reciting yet another verse by Gibran.

AMAL

Speak to us of giving, and he
answered: You give but little when
you give of your possessions, it is
when you give of yourself that you
truly give.

CUT TO

MR. KAREEM

(to Hala)

There are those who give little of
the much which they have - and they
give it for recognition and their
hidden desire makes their gifts
unwholesome. And there are those
who have little and give it all.
These are the believers of life and
their coffer is never empty. They
give with joy and joy is their
reward...

BACK TO:

Amal presses on the book. This was it. The Merchant reads her
like an open book.

MERCHANT

It's expensive. Very rare. Over a hundred years old.

The merchant counts her money.

MERCHANT

I am sorry miss.

Amal is pensive.

AMAL

I....I want this book. I will come back tomorrow. Please don't sell it to anybody else.

She hands the book back to him. He rolls his eyes up. She walks away. The merchant shakes his head in resignation. With her back to him, a few yards away, she pulls out the twenty dollar US bill from Uncle Omar. She looks down at her worn out shoes, faded with a hole in it. She sighs and hurries back past the kitchenware, baby clothing, furniture, toys, watches, blind television sets and dead computers. An expression of joy and joy is her reward. The merchant rises from his chair with the most astonishing look.

32

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

32

Amal runs up the stairs, two at a time, hair flying loose, sealed book in hand. Hala meets her at the top of the stairs, defiant --

HALA

Have you got it?

AMAL

Yes..yes and it's good.

Hala shoots her a skeptical glance. Hala softly asks her for the book. She looks it over and puts it under her armpit. She turns around and walks up the stairs.

HALA

Okay then I am going to announce the party..

Amal, frozen in time, follows her in a rush.

33

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

33

Mr. Kareem passes out the corrected exam papers, expressions of relief are painted on the students faces. Most jump out with excitement. Tension breaks into chatter.

As Mr. Kareem makes his way to the front of the class, Hala stands in her customary pose of authority. Amal tries to struggle out of her seat but it is broken and tilted too close to the desk.

HALA

(in ringing tones)

Mr. Kareem, we are sorry you are leaving, and so we have arranged a little party for you. No music or dancing, but some very nice sweets. Rafeeka, are they ready?

Rafeeka brings out a tray of nice pastries, which Hala takes from her hand with a grand gesture and offers them to Mr. Kareem. As the sweets make their way around the room --

HALA

We also have a gift for you, Mr. Kareem, so you can remember us. We all thought a long time about what would be best, and I decided --

Hala pulls out the brown-wrapped package from her bag. Amal steps forward --

AMAL

We decided -- we decided.

Hala almost interrupts her.

HALA

That this --

AMAL

That this -- this sort of thing would probably be the best. I hope..we all hope..you like it.

Hala holds out the package. Mr. Kareem's eyes widen in surprise. Hesitantly he accepts the offering, with mumbling thanks in Arabic. He starts to open the package but retreats to his teacher's desk next to the window, sits and takes out his magnifying glasses. The girls gather up closer and surround him with Amal in the middle. At last, he unwraps it and holds the fine, slim volume in his hands.

MR. KAREEM

Allah! My God..Gibran. It is
wonderful...beautiful. Beautiful!
What can I say? This is from the
class, from all of you?

Several voices answer in unison as the girls cluster to look
at the book. Amal is quiet.

MR. KAREEM

But, how could you? This is worth --
how did you find such a thing?

RAFEEKA

Amal said she could..

AMAL

I..I jus..went shopping. I
remembered you talked about Gibran
a lot...and we read all his poems.

Mr. Kareem's bony fingers traced the exquisite gold on the
edge of the cover.

MR. KAREEM

It is too beautiful. I never
thought in my life to own such a
book. I thank you my class with all
my heart.

Amal senses the eyes of her classmates turn to her,
impressed.

HALA

We're glad you like it Mr. Kareem.

MR. KAREEM

Oh yes, I like it so very much.

The school bell rings and all of the girls split. Hala and
Amal linger around Mr. Kareem.

AMAL

I almost chose another book. By
another man with a funny English
name. But when I saw this beautiful
cover and read the title...

MR. KAREEM

(turning the pages one by
one)

Yes, yes, You couldn't have chosen
something better.

Then as he spreads out the very first page of the book, he frowns and peers more closely. Amal wonders what could have displeased him.

MR. KAREEM
(peering over page)
Oh the shame of it, the tragedy.

HALA
What? What's wrong with the book?
Amal, why didn't you check it --

Amal tries to say something but Mr. Kareem jumps in.

MR. KAREEM
There's nothing wrong with the book, except that it's in my hands, this book belonged to --
(he swallows audibly)
It belonged to my professor at the university. A superb scholar, an excellent teacher, a wonderful man. Oh, how he must have treasured this book. And now his family had to sell it. How it would have broken his heart to know...Look, here is his name.

He holds out the book for the two girls to see the signature on the page. Amal's eyes widen. Watching closely, Amal recalls...

34 INT. PARENT'S BEDROOM - DAY 34

GOD'S POV HIGH CAMERA ANGLE as Shakir reaches out to a high shelf and pulls down a satin covered book.

35 INT. LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - DAY 35

Bilal takes the little red car out of father's hand.

36 EXT. BOOK MARKET - DAY 36

Amal adds her own money and walks past the TV sets, lamps and assorted furniture to rush to the book merchant.

37 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

37

The brown-paper wrapped gift being passed through different delicate hands in the classroom.

BACK TO:

38 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

38

Amal's eyes gleam, understanding how her sacrifice came full circle. She looks up at Mr. Kareem and they hold each other's gaze for a moment. He nods slowly, understanding where it came from.

MR. KAREEM

(in a quiet tone)

I wish I could return this to the family of that great man.

Amal looks around her speechless, feeling the joy in her teacher's voice.

AMAL

Maybe someday...I think they'd be happy to know the book is with you.

(pause)

Our teacher.

MR. KAREEM

(proudly, understanding)

For now I am honored to keep it.

As the two girls leave the classroom, Amal is unaware of Hala's chatter but as CAMERA DOLLIES OUT ON HER FACE with Mr. Kareem in BG.

39 EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DUSK

39

Amal walks with her back pack. Bilal straddles along behind her. In a balancing act, he now uses the car more like a plane, while tiptoeing on the tracks. He circles around with it, manages to follow her and play with the car at the same time.

BILAL

See Amal, Santy Claus didn't forget me.

AMAL (V.O.)
You're right. Santa Claus didn't
forget...the children of Baghdad.

Amal walks down the tracks with her little Brother, lingers
to the precious images in her mind, walks on and joy is her
reward.

