

INT. LATE MORNING - THE FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Open on a pan with zereshk/barberries sauteing in onions. MEHRNAZ FASSIHI is standing over her stove. Adjacent to the kitchen is a living area, in which the TV is on. The TV is never not on. The sizzle of the food bleeds into the sound construction coming from outside. DARIUSH enters from outside.

DARIUSH

I've told him 10 times: that if you lay the- it's not the- you have to put all the materials in order, or else the tile will not hold. He's skipping steps trying to get away with less work.

MEHRNAZ

Don't get yourself upset. Let him do his job.

DARIUSH

I'm already upset.

MEHRNAZ

You must calm down. It's not good for you to get excited.

DARIUSH

Well ...

INT. NOON - THE FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Dariush watches TV, while side-eyeing in the direction of his cooking wife to grumble about what he's watching.

DARIUSH

How many times are they gonna tell the same story? From morning until now I have seen these same clips, 20 times. That's not an exaggeration.

MEHRNAZ

Okay, turn it off.

He does not. Mehrnaz brings a big dish of Zereshk Polo and a casserole dish of saffron chicken. Then, a bowl of salad: romaine mixed with mesclun greens, cherry tomatoes and carrots. They sit down at the dining table, which is between the kitchen and living room. They both glance at the TV occasionally.

MEHRNAZ

Is it good?

DARIUSH

It's excellent.

MEHRNAZ

I put a little cayenne this time, it didn't get too spicy?

DARIUSH

Maybe a little but it's okay.

We watch them eat for a moment.

INT. LATER THAT EVENINGS - FASSIHI HOUSE: UPSTAIRS

Through an open doorway we see Dariush sitting on a chair in the TV room upstairs watching The History Channel.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Pots are heating up on the stove, as Mehrnaz separates pills. The doorbell rings. We follow her out of the kitchen into the foyer, where the stairs are.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: FOYER

MEHRNAZ

Dariush ... ! come down. We wanna have dinner.

Mehrnaz opens the front door. Their son BIJAN is at the door.

MEHRNAZ

Hi dear! Come in. Eh! You're not cold out there? You're not wearing anything.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Dariush and Bijan are settling into the seats at the table as Mehrnaz serves, the food, which is the same meal from lunch, reheated. A fresh bowl of salad. Bijan is very stiff, nonetheless his presence brings color to Mehrnaz.

MEHRNAZ

How was work? Did you have a good day?

BIJAN

Yes, yes I did. Non-eventful. You

know.

MEHRNAZ

What happened with that woman, did she get fired? *What was her name?* Jenny?

BIJAN

Janey.

MEHRNAZ

Janey.

BIJAN

No, no she didn't. Her job's not the one on the line. Not yet at least. He, the guy, has been put on probation. It's all a mess really. I actually wrote a letter to the department- what's it called? The name's escaping me now, how strange. Human interest? Humanities? It escapes me at the moment, but it's the department where these sorts of things are settled. Anyway, I wrote a letter to them.

MEHRNAZ

You did?

BIJAN

Yes. Well, I felt compelled to.

MEHRNAZ

What did it say?

BIJAN

I basically said, that, you know, I was there, and I didn't really think things had occurred quite in the way she had depicted them, that's all. I felt obligated to weigh in as I was a witness. We'll see if it changes anything.

DARIUSH

Human Resources

BIJAN

Ah

MEHRNAZ

Is that what it's called?

BIJAN

Yes, I believe that's correct. Human Resources.

MEHRNAZ

Okay, now we'll see what happens ...
Oh, did you end up seeing that girl again? Hannah?

BIJAN

... No. No, I, we didn't really have much in common as it turns out.

MEHRNAZ

Really? I thought you said she was nice.

BIJAN

Well she is nice. She may be nice, but that isn't really the point, is it?

MEHRNAZ

You didn't like her?

BIJAN

I'd rather not discuss my dating life, mom. If it's okay with you.

MEHRNAZ

Why not? Who are you gonna talk about it with?

BIJAN

Drop it Mehri. Can you pass me the rice please.

WIDESHOT OF FAMILY EATING. TV IN THE BACKGROUND.

INT. NEXT MORNING - THE FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Close up on onions and pieces of bread frying in a pan, which Mehrnaz cracks an egg into. Her landline rings, she turns the stove off and picks up.

MEHRNAZ

*Hello? Hello? I'm sorry who is this?
Who? Betta? Betta dear, I'm sorry I
didn't know who it was, I didn't
recognize your voice, it's been so
long since I've heard it! Is
everything okay? Are you calling from*

Iran? Shayda? Yes, of course I remember Shayda. Of course when I saw her she was a little girl holding onto your skirt, she couldn't be without you for a moment, it was so cute. That was a long time ago, at Maryam's wedding, but have been, I don't know 25 years ago! Wow. How is she? Yes! I saw she is acting.

Betta is faintly heard through phone.

BETTA

Yeah, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I have a very big favor to ask of you.

INT. LATER THAT MORNING - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Mehrnaz and Dariush are serving themselves the eggs she cooked, with toasted bread, butter, and feta cheese. There is a small bowl of toasted walnuts.

MEHRNAZ

She said she had worries about the film from the start, but Shayda insisted that she wanted to do it. Then got released, and they have pulled this section from the film and put it on some Web site. Someone in the government got a hold of it, and they're threatening to punish her if she goes back. Who knows what they will do to her. She can't go back.

DARIUSH

So what are we supposed to do?

MEHRNAZ

She has to stay here for a little while. She came to New York for a premiere or something, and now she can't go back. Honestly, thank God we were here.

DARIUSH

She didn't think this was going to happen?

MEHRNAZ

I don't know.

DARIUSH

What kind of film was it.

MEHRNAZ

Just a regular film, but there was some I don't know. There was some nudity.

DARIUSH

What did she show?

MEHRNAZ

I don't know. I haven't seen it. Probably her, you know. (She refers to her chest).

DARIUSH

Mm.

CU ON RAISED EYEBROWS AND CHEWING FACES.

WIDESHOT OF TABLE AND TV IN BACKGROUND.

INT. LATER THAT DAY - FASSIHI HOUSE: FOYER

Mehrnaz opens to door to SHAYDA, who is wearing tight jeans and a puffy jacket, she has teased and died hair and is wearing a lot of makeup. She has a small suitcase.

MEHRNAZ

Eh! Hello, hello Shayda dear. Welcome. Come in, come in.

SHAYDA

Hi. Thank you so much.

MEHRNAZ

It's so good to see you Shayda. It's been a very long time.

SHAYDA

Thank you so much for having me!

MEHRNAZ

Of course! Of course.

SHAYDA

Should I take off my shoes?

MEHRNAZ

If you like. Bijan!!!

SHAYDA
Bijan's here?

MEHRNAZ
Bijan! Come help with Shayda's bag!
Theose are nice shoes!

SHAYDA
Thank you! I like your earrings.

MEHRNAZ
Thank you! Bijan!!

Bijan enters.

BIJAN
Hey hey I'm here no need to yell.

SHAYDA
Hey. Wow. It's been a long time. How
long has it been, like ... 30 years
since I saw you last?

BIJAN
I don't think it's been that long.

Polite laughter.

BIJAN
Is she staying on the 3rd floor, I
presume?

MEHRNAZ
Yes. I put fresh sheets and there are
towels in the hall closet.

BIJAN
I'll take these.

SHAYDA
Thank you so much.

MEHRNAZ
Of course. Are you hungry?

SHAYDA
Um. I could eat, definitely. Thank
you.

MEHRNAZ
Dinner will be ready soon, so you can

settle in upstairs. It's the bedroom at the top floor.

SHAYDA

Okay thank you. Thank you.

Bijan comes down the stairs, and Shayda goes up them.

INT. LATER THAT EVENING - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Mehrnaz, Shayda, Bijan and Dariush sit at the dining table, Mehnaz has served Khoresh-eh Badem Jan (Eggplant stew).

DARIUSH

Shayda, how is your mom?

SHAYDA

She's good, she has a dog now. Which seems to make her very happy.

DARIUSH

Good. It's good when people get dogs. When a person gets older, it's nice to have that company; something which will never leave your side, is pining after you all the time.

SHAYDA

Yes, hehe, that's true.

BIJAN

And how's your work. Is everything going well.

SHAYDA

Yeah, it's good. You know it can be stressful at times, but I like it a lot. It's very rewarding, you know ... it's something I feel like I'm good at, which is strange and surprising to me, but also very fulfilling you know. So yeah.

BIJAN

Yeah, I imagine it could be quite a lot of pressure, no? Lots of, competition?

SHAYDA

Yeah, yes definitely. There is, a lot, of competition. The field is very

saturated, so to speak.

BIJAN

Well you certainly have the voice, and the looks for it.

SHAYDA

Oh. Thank you. That's nice.

DARIUSH

What?

Bijan doesn't repeat himself, he just smiles politely, almost chivalrously. He continues to look at Shayda, inquisitively, seemingly longing for something to say. It's unclear. For a moment there is only the sound of eating, silverware on plates, and the TV. A commercial comes with a popular song comes on. Shayda impulsively sings along, getting the attention momentarily of everyone at the table.

SHAYDA

Sorry.

INT. LATER THAT EVENING - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Dariush settles into the couch in front of the TV. As Shayda helps Mehrnaz gather dishes, Bijan lingers around for a moment by the kitchen, then abruptly slips out. Mehrnaz starts doing the dishes.

SHAYDA

Can you let me do those please?

MEHRNAZ

No no, no way. I'm just gonna put them in the dishwasher, it's nothing. Bless you, dear. Don't worry.

SHAYDA

Thank you again. Dinner was so delicious, it was perfect!

MEHRNAZ

Bless you dear. Do you want anything else, we have lots of fruit.

SHAYDA

Oh, no I'm stuffed. Thank you. I'm gonna go read, I'm quite tired.

MEHRNAZ

Okay dear. Do you need anything?

SHAYDA

No, I have everything I need, thank you so much.

MEHRNAZ

Okay, goodnight dear.

SHAYDA

Good night. Good night, Uncle Dariush.

DARIUSH

Oh! Good night.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: STAIRS/HALLWAY

On her way up to the bedroom, Shayda hears piano coming from one of the rooms. She follows the sound to a pair of glass doors. Peering through them, she sees Bijan, playing. She watches him for a bit.

INT. NEXT MORNING - THE FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Mehrnaz, Dariush and Shayda are eating the same style of eggs. The TV plays.

SHAYDA

Mm.

INT. LATER THAT DAY - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Mehrnaz cleans up, and sorts through mail.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: UPSTAIRS

Dariush is watching TV in the upstairs TV room.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: GUEST BEDROOM

Shayda does Yoga in her bedroom, and pauses to check her phone, which has no activity. She goes back to stretching. The doorbell rings.

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: STAIRS/FOYER

SHAYDA

I'll get it!

Shayda opens the door, it's Bijan.

SHAYDA

Hello.

BIJAN

Oh. Hi.

SHAYDA

Come on in, welcome. Hehe.

INT. LATER THAT EVENING - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Bijan, Dariush, and Shayda are sitting at the table, as Mehrnaz is serving dinner. A special about THE YOUNG POPE is playing on the television. Mehrnaz sits at the table.

MEHRNAZ

Is that Diane Keaton? She's gotten so old. I guess that means I'm old.

SHAYDA

I love her.

BIJAN

Yeah, she's great.

SHAYDA

Yeah.

MEHRNAZ

I'm so glad she didn't mess with her face.

DARIUSH

Yes, it's very American to do that; they all get that same kind of face.

Dariush pulls his face back imitating the face, everyone giggles.

MEHRNAZ

Yeah, but in Iran they do it too. Even more.

DARIUSH

Is that right?

SHAYDA

Yes, it's true everyone is doing it. There's a lot of pressure to get that kind of work done.

BIJAN

Do you feel that kind of pressure.

SHAYDA

Um. Sometimes, yeah. I've thought a lot about certain cosmetic surgeries.

BIJAN

Oh? Like what?

SHAYDA

Well, like, a nose job, you know.

MEHRNAZ

No!

DARIUSH

That nose gives you character. Why does everybody want to look the same?

SHAYDA

Yeah, no, I decided not to do it. Hehe. I accept myself, and if it means that I don't get certain jobs, then so be it.

BIJAN

Do you feel like you don't get certain jobs because of that?

SHAYDA

Um, well it comes up you know. I can never know for sure but sometimes I do wonder I guess, so. Yeah.

BIJAN

You're beautiful as you are.

SHAYDA.

Oh. Thank you.

Shayda looks at Bijan, with peculiar intensity. It's the way Beast looks at Belle, as if to say: "you may be categorically unfortunate, but I am the real unfortunate one."

SHAYDA

I heard you playing the piano last night.

BIJAN

Oh.

SHAYDA

It sounded really good.

BIJAN

Oh. Thank you.

MEHRNAZ

He's been playing since he was very little. He never wanted to go out. Just play the piano. All the other kids were so resistant to lessons, but he was always ready to go, standing by the door, waiting for me to take him.

SHAYDA

That's amazing. I wish I could play.

BIJAN

I could teach you.

SHAYDA

That would be nice, but it's probably too late for me to learn.

BIJAN

No, that's a myth. You seem very bright, you would probably pick it up quickly.

DARIUSH

Hm.

The TV plays.

INT. LATER THAT EVENING - FASSIHI HOUSE: KITCHEN

Same routine as before: Dariush settling in front of the TV, Shayda and Mehrnaz gathering the dishes. Bijan lingers awkwardly.

BIJAN

I was thinking I might do some playing. If you want to come along you certainly can.

SHAYDA

Okay, unless, Aunt Mehrnaz can I please help you clean up?

MEHRNAZ

No, not at all. Go go!

INT. CONTINUOUS - FASSIHI HOUSE: UPSTAIRS - PIANO ROOM

Bijan plays something dramatic, and Shayda sits in a nearby chair and watches.

BIJAN

You can come sit here if you'd like.
There's room.

SHAYDA

Oh okay.

BIJAN

Do you know the basic chords?

SHAYDA

No, I don't know anything.

BIJAN

Let me see your hands

She gives him her hands, he takes one of them in hers.

BIJAN

Spread these out. Is that as far as
they go? They're small. You'd have to
do a lot of stretching.

She stretches them out.

BIJAN

I was joking, sorry. I mean not
joking, stretching would probably help
but.

SHAYDA

It's okay, I can stretch them.

...

BIJAN

You did a film right? And, that's why
you're here?

SHAYDA

Yeah. Yeah.

BIJAN

Right. That must be awful. I'm so
sorry.

SHAYDA

Yeah. Thank you.

BIJAN

And what- what was the reason, what was so bad that you were, what? Literally barred from going back?

SHAYDA

Yeah, I guess I'm a defect, hehe.

BIJAN

And what was it? Why did that happen?

SHAYDA

I show my breasts in the film.

BIJAN

Oh.

SHAYDA

Yeah. So now I guess I can never go back. But we'll see.

BIJAN

Wow. I'm so sorry. For whatever it's worth I think that's incredibly stupid.

SHAYDA

Thank you. I agree

BIJAN

I mean- why would they- ugh. I don't know. Anyway, I'm- I'm sorry.

SHAYDA

It's okay. I think maybe a part of me doesn't want to go back.

BIJAN

Oh, really?

SHAYDA

I mean, it's my country, of course I love it, but also, you know it's so hard everything. They have us by the throat. Everything is so limited, freedom is difficult. So. What's the point of that kind of life, you know.

BIJAN

Mm. Yeah, I'm so sorry you have to go through that.

SHAYDA

It's okay I mean, it's not your fault, you don't have to be sorry.

BIJAN

I know but-

SHAYDA

Unless, you treat women badly.

BIJAN

No, I don't I mean I- I- I certainly try not to.

There is tinkering on the keys.

SHAYDA

Is it difficult?

BIJAN

Pardon?

SHAYDA

You said you try, but is it difficult to treat women good?

BIJAN

No, I don't think it is. I- I never really had much luck with women but-

SHAYDA

Luck?

BIJAN

I mean it always falls apart rather quickly, but that's not because ... I don't respect them. I do, I very much do. More than men probably. Fact, I probably respect them too much, so it sort of becomes rather paralyzing.

SHAYDA

Sounds difficult.

BIJAN

I suppose so.

SHAYDA
Relationships are difficult.

BIJAN
Yes.

They play.

SHAYDA
You're very good.

...

BIJAN
I suppose I do feel that women, do lie
more than men.

SHAYDA
Hm.

Pause.

BIJAN
But I suppose they probably have to
more, isn't it.

Moment. Then, they giggle softly as he plays, she may join
in.

WIDESHOT OF THEM PLAYING.

WIDESHOT OF KITCHEN: MEHRNAZ COOKING, DARIUSH ON THE COUCH.
TV IS ON.

WIDESHOT OF HOUSE. CREDITS ROLL.

THE END.