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Sunny Square: From Script to the Big Screen

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Sunny Square: From Script to the Big Screen

by

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Report

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Dedication

This movie project is dedicated to my parents. You guys are truly inspiring.

Abstract

Sunny Square: From Script to the Big Screen

Hammad Qamar Rizvi, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Stuart Kelban

This report dives into the process and journey of Hammad Rizvi's thesis film *Sunny Square* at the University of Texas' RTF program. It explores the various stages of getting the film from an initial idea to a finished product, including but not limited to the screenwriting process, production, post-production, and overall thought process.

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INTRODUCTION

I have finally reached the end of my graduate film experience, and hence writing a long report about my creative process does feel self-indulgent and egotistical – especially considering the large team that made it all happen. For that reason I'll start by acknowledging the A-Team involved in the production of *Sunny Square*, some who have been there every step of the way. Afterwards I will attempt to be as honest as possible as I share this filmmaking journey with you, keeping any ego at bay, and of course making this as enjoyable a read as possible. And with that let's buckle down and enjoy the ride.

The A-Team (in no particular order)

Hammad Rizvi - writer/director/producer

Elizabeth Chatelain – producer

Chirag Patel – lead actor “Jamal”

Nancy Nave – actress “Selena”

Yaksha Bhatt – actress “mother”

E.J. Enriquez – Director of Photography

Stuart Kelban – Thesis Committee Chair

Taylor Thompson – Production Designer

Hanan Townshend – Music Composer

Ibu Madha – Additional Music

Ashley Harkrider – Line Producer

Monique Walton – 1st AD

Deja Bernhardt – 1st AD

Catherine Licata – 1st AD

Nina Vizcarrondo – 1st AD

Roshan Murthy – Production Sound

Hallease Narvaez – DIT/Sound

Carmen Hilbert – Grip

Scott Hathaway – 1st AC

Gavin Cantrell – 2nd AC

Brad Burton & Kim Williams – Casting

Ian Reese – Gaffer

JT Campos – Actor “Vasquez”

Tim Tsai – Editor
Russell Bush – original DP
Anne Lewis – Committee Member
Don Howard – Committee Member
Charles Ramirez Berg – Committee Member
Qamar & Uzma Rizvi – Co-Executive Producers
Farhad & Fatima Rizvi – Production Assistant
Hala Nasser – Production Assistant/Overall Consultant
Brian Holtz – The Waxing Studio owner
Mohammad Khan – Madina Market owner
Leo – Madina Market night watch
Billie Klein – Camera 2nd AC
Patrick Hoy – Grip
Herbie Wei – Grip
Dave Mikol – Actor
Bill Wise – Actor
Nguyen Stanton – Actress
Sylvia Carroll – Parlor Extra
Alicia Lemly – Cop Extra
Misty Horne – Sheriff
Courtney Hans – News Reporter
Marisol Madrino – Lead PA
Drew Daniels – 1st AC
Bryan Choi – Raid Cop
All the Kickstarter donors

Inception

It's been great to have amazing support from my professors at RTF, notably my thesis committee. Anne Lewis has always supported my work, Don Howard has always been a great listener, Stuart Kelban is amazing with ideas, and Charles Ramirez Berg provides amazing insight. It was with this confidence that I took the time I needed to make my thesis film something I would be proud of – instead of rushing something. My first year film at RTF, *Haze*, took place during a dystopian future. My pre-thesis film *Road to Peshawar* in contrast took place during the late 1980's. Hence with my thesis it was only natural I'd tackle the last time period available – the present. And with regards to the present, there were already a number of ideas fomenting in my head that I wanted to speak about.

First and foremost was the issue of human trafficking. Having spent my teens in the Middle East, I was exposed to the global issue of human and sex trafficking. Countless girls and boys are traded throughout the developing world, which in turn fuels some of the sex tourism found in various countries. Having seen this, I was even more shocked when I stumbled across news from Houston about a string of massage parlor raids. The girls were all trafficked victims, from all parts of the globe. I thought to myself, "How can this be happening right under our noses?" This instigated some research, leading me to the book *Girls Like Us* by Rachel Lloyd – the author herself going from being a sex-trafficking victim to a successful sexual slavery abolitionist. The book was an eye-opener, revealing the disturbing number of girls that are picked up from a young age and sold to pimps all over the USA. Even more disturbing was the number of American girls included – many of them brainwashed to the point where they find

comfort and solace with their pimps or establishments. This theme stuck in my head, and would come back during the screenwriting process.

Another issue I kept going back to was the use of police informants for the wars on drugs, terrorism, and sometimes vice operations. In the book *Snitch* by Ethan Brown, it was revealed that it was all indeed a dirty business – with corruption alive and well within the judicial system. Informants usually look after themselves, or their own interests, and thus will do anything to give police what they want. We have seen this time and time again with drug rings, and now we're seeing it with the war on terrorism. Muslim Americans are often intimidated by the possibility of an informant walking around at their local mosque or coffee shop – often posing as a friend. Now of course it would be unfair to completely discredit the informants – after all *it has* in fact captured a large number of guilty culprits...but not always. It's for this exact moral dilemma that the topic has intrigued me.

Thought Process

Houston. I've always wanted to make a film that was very Texas-centric – the state being my home after all. Houston. I kept thinking of this city, complete with its oil, industrial feel, sprawl, intense diversity, and no zoning laws. Then it struck me – the city has a long history of post 9/11 informant cases. The city also is the leading point of human trafficking in the United States. Boom! There I had it, two issues I was interested in that could be interwoven easily. I decided to drive there and spend a day soaking in the city.

I went with my brother and my DP from my previous film *Road to Peshawar*, Russell Bush. Driving around and exploring areas of the city made it all make sense. The city was characterized with dense diversity, concrete and industry, lots of driving, and strip malls. The city also had a very distinct culture and feel. I wanted to capture this in some capacity, and to capture the diversity aspect of it as well. Bottom line, I wanted to show audiences a side of America they hadn't seen much of - the hardworking folks in the countless strip malls. And to add spice to the mix, I wanted to share a story of an ordinary man faced with an unordinary dilemma. With the seedlings of human trafficking and police informants, I was confident I would find something to write about.

PRE-PRODUCTION

The Beginning

I began by writing an outline of characters I'd like to see on screen. I followed by writing a long list of scenarios. A close friend of mine, Javed Islam, joined for hours upon hours at a coffee shop hashing out ideas. After days of long deliberations and debates, we settled on a character *Jamal* – a 1st generation American who runs his father's grocery store and is lonely and discontented. This would form the basis of our story, as I wanted to make a film very character-driven. In contrast, *Road to Peshawar* was a hybrid of being circumstance-driven with dosage of character influences – I wanted to peel away from that and try something new.

Writing, Writing, Writing

This film went through nearly 8 completely different rewrites, with the final version going over 20 drafts. Being a different kind of film from my previous work, writing this film was quite challenging. There was more dialog, more character development, and lots and lots of plot layers. I nearly pulled my hair out deciding what elements to keep and what elements to leave out. My thesis chair Stuart Kelban was instrumental in helping me focus on what was crucial and what wasn't for a short film – reminding me I'll be making other films in the future. Stuart and I may come from slightly different worlds, but we speak openly, honestly, and sometimes crudely – and hence share great conversations regarding life and creativity. It's for this reason, and his expertise on screenwriting, that I sought him as my committee chair. Back to my

screenwriting process, it was very difficult to settle on a story I personally felt wasn't too cliché or expected. With characters representing minorities it was especially challenging. I decided to seek opinions from non-film folk and began bothering my girlfriend Hala, whom I had just recently met, with thoughts and suggestions. She must have thought I was crazy, but has continued to be the most supportive and patient person I know. There from day one, she has supported me with just about every aspect of production and has provided influential critique, ideas, and perspective.

That said I was adamant to challenge myself to make this story – or at least some form of it – work. After my entire wardrobe started smelling like coffee shops I began to whittle down to a story I felt strong and passionate about. By introducing a mother character to Jamal's life, it wall started to make sense. I was able to create a world where Jamal has his mother and the status quo on when hand, and a sexy yet problematic massage parlor girl on the other.

Casting

Soon enough the task of casting came around. By this point I began to work heavily with my producer and close friend Elizabeth “Beth” Chatelain. This is how Beth and I work: I spew a crazy idea; she slaps me down with reason. Sometimes I like to think I'm right, but I'm definitely glad she talked me out of getting a helicopter shot for the film...I really hadn't thought about the true cost. I did however want to allocate a healthy amount of money for talent, especially given the character-drive of the film. Only issue was finding ethnic actors in Texas that were solid as gold and believable. Beth helped find a casting agency that would be able to give us good time and energy.

Brad Burton and Kimberly Williams with Burton Casting were brought onboard, and soon thereafter we were having auditions both at the UT campus and via online submissions. It was such a wonderful experience getting to work with a casting agency for the first time. Yaksha Bhatt was quickly cast as the mother when she came in; I believed her performance right away. After seeing several contenders for Jamal, I was feeling disheartened until Chirag Patel walked in. He was confident, considerate, and above all a very likable guy. He had arrived early to the auditions and was waiting outside patiently. After a couple lines he delivered for us I immediately knew he was going to work. Brad glanced over at me during the rehearsal and threw me a discrete smile and gentle nod – he *really* liked Chirag as well. The roles of Detective Vasquez and Selena were more challenging roles to fill, due to the careful balance of their character’s personalities, but finally J.T. Campos and Nancy Nave were found to fit the roles quite nicely. Both brought ample personality and personalization to the characters, and were able to understand the roles very, very well.

This would be the beginning of a very fruitful experience with these talented actors. With Chirag as my lead, I spent lots of time prepping with him and exchanging ideas. As a director nothing makes me happier when an actor/actress texts me with ideas or suggestions before shooting. It shows commitment and dedication, as well as confidence in the work I’m doing as a filmmaker. I consider the talent I’ve worked with as friends now, and would take the chance to work with them again in a heartbeat.

Team Assembly

A couple weeks before production started I got a call from Russell, apologetically telling me he wouldn't be able to dedicate time for prep anymore due to his unforgiving schedule. He was neck-high in finishing his own thesis documentary (which was recently nominated for a Student Oscar), and wanted to give me a heads-up. I was in the midst of crunch-time, and so this was bad news – we had a very awesome working relationship. It was very unfortunate but there was a lot of prep work to do, and so after talking about it more I decided to approach E.J. Enriquez, an *extremely* talented DP and friend. Luckily he was available during the production, and so a heart attack was graciously avoided. We quickly got down to the script and the visual approach that same day, and discussed what could be done in the week or so before production.

Beth went into hyper-drive getting together prospects for extras, crew, and other essential personnel for production – essentially asking for whatever favors we could get. I also began running rehearsals with the actors, exchanging ideas in the meantime. Though of course the camera falls under equipment territory, I like to consider it a team member due to its importance and limited availability (many students films shoot around the same time). It was for this reason that I was super-ecstatic to learn that RTF was getting a brand-new Arri Alexa camera package. I was debating earlier whether to shoot on 16mm film or the RED, but was super-set on the Alexa for it was the first digital camera ever to have won my approval. I loved the way it looked and played just like 35mm film, in terms of latitude and image. I was the first student to checkout the camera for tests, and the second student to use it for a project. Long story short, I couldn't be happier!

Locations

One last reason for my mounting headache during pre-production was finding a suitable location. I had already ruled out using a studio, partly due to time but mostly because I wanted the dynamics and feelings you get from being on location. Looking back at my other films, I have almost always chosen shooting outdoors/on-location – it brings me and my crew energy and ideas that make all the difference.

Jamal's apartment was quickly found after asking my friend for his apartment. The grocery store took several days, but I found this Indian-Pakistani grocery store in north Austin that has amazing character to it – it's called Medina Mart. After chatting for a long time with the owner, I learned he was from Karachi – the same city my parents grew up in. I pulled out whatever Karachi lingo I could muster, lit his cigarette for him, and soon thereafter gained his trust. For a reasonable fee he would let me shoot early mornings and overnight. Perfect.

We thus decided to shoot all principal photography in Austin, except some crucial exteriors that would take place in Houston. Hence I started searching for massage parlors, which was near impossible. First I tried finding vacant medical offices in strip malls, even contacting property realtors. Nearly all the owners were hesitant to let 'a bunch of kids with cameras' run around their property – even though we had \$1 million property insurance from UT. Thinking more and more of the scenario, I thought perhaps we could use an existing massage place. Then driving down Lamar one day I noticed that waxing studios or tanning salons were very comparable in terms of interior looks. I thus started contacting many waxing studios until one responded - Brian from The Waxing Studio (a fellow UT longhorn) graciously allowed us to use his store. We were set.

The Houston Trip I'll Never Forget

Before production I made 3 Houston trips. The first I met up with Hala as we collected Houston-based props and had a rehearsal with my Houston-based actors. My last trip was with Beth in which we focused towards confirming outdoor locations that could be used, and finding a place to stay for the two nights we would be there.

However it was my second trip that was most memorable. I was alone, driving around the city finding places to shoot. I had contacted Alfred Cervantes from the Houston Film Commission for advice. I went to the location where a string of massage parlors was raided, it was an eerie and dilapidated strip mall. I went to nearby stores to talk with the owners, and they were all happy the stores were gone. They remembered folks coming all day and night for their massage fix. Peeking inside a vacated building, a Harris County constable pulled up to me – I guess I was fairly suspicious with my DSLR hanging around my neck peeking inside the vacant parlors. He told me they're doing the best they can to shut them down, but they haven't gotten them all yet. I asked him why they couldn't just bust the many obvious establishments in Houston, and he responded with a lengthy excuse involving law and jurisdiction. Just then the strip mall groundskeeper came up to us to make sure all was OK. After talking to him he reluctantly agreed to let me into one of the larger clinics that was vacant.

It was a mess inside. It wasn't a massage parlor per say, but a clinic of something I couldn't decipher. The office had crayon drawings from the 'nurses' kids. There were a couple large massage rooms, as well as a shower room. I'd seen enough. On my way out of the strip center I decided to question a medical supply store that seemed to be busy. The owner was Indian and he told me the whole massage parlor issue was like an infestation. He then pointed across the street to an establishment. "There,

that's one if you're so keen to investigate. They're right under our noses." As I began to leave he said, "Son, they can be dangerous you know."

It bothered me that I was making a film about a subject matter I had little personal experience with. I had never set foot inside a massage parlor or such. So before I knew it I was parking next to the massage parlor. I parked away from the camera that was pointed at the door. With one big deep breath and a strong heartbeat I walked over.

The door was locked, so I pressed the strange doorbell. A moment later the door opens and an Asian woman cautiously greets me.

She asks, "Been here before right?"

Without thinking I say, "Yes. Is Elena here?"

She looks at me carefully before motioning me inside.

"Elena? I don't know her. But we do have a latina and white."

Oh shit. What have I gotten myself into?

Keeping my cool, "Okay, I'll check her out. The white one."

I'm led into the establishment as she leads me into the back where there are rooms. The place is dim and candle-lit. The mama-san fixes a flower basket as she walks me over, I'm mentally noting the entire place in my head. She leaves me inside a small cozy room, the bed-sheets all freshly made and clean. I sit there for a moment, analyzing the room and surprised how well kept it is. It must make good money.

A moment later a slightly chubby white girl, wearing very skimpy lingerie, shows up at the door. She stands there, as if waiting for my approval.

I stammer, "Hey. Isn't this place called Elexia?"

Her expression doesn't change, "Ummm. No. Door fee is \$60."

"Oh, I see. Well, I got confused then."

I stand up and walk up to her. Her face is dead, her eyes slightly dilated. There is no expression on her face at all, even as I attempt some humor as I leave.

I ask, "So where did you come from?"

"Canada."

I noticed I'm locked inside, so she goes up to the buzzer to let me out. The mama-san looks at me cautiously.

She says, "Have a good day."

Walking towards the door I get a moment alone with the girl.

I turn to her, "Canada is long way from here. How'd you end up in Houston?"

Without a moment to spare she blurts, "I have family here."

"Family?"

"Yes. It's my family. Okay?"

Sensing my welcome had quickly faded I left the establishment, feeling the wave of adrenaline seeping and being replaced with utter sadness. I knew right there and then *Sunny Square* was the film I needed to make, and felt ready to jump into production.

PRODUCTION

Calm Before the Storm

The day before production starts, I sit on my bed charging my phone after being on the phone for hours - chatting with my production designer, DP, producer, actors, location owners, and all the vendors that lost my props in the mail. I go over to the living room and fire up FIFA 13 on my Playstation. An hour of intense gaming later, my mind was back on track and ready for the battle ahead.

Our team spends nearly three hours at RTF's equipment checkout, checking every nook and crevice of the cameras, lights, grip gear, and sound devices. The Alexa package being so new, we were still figuring out filters and cases that were still being shipped in on behalf of Keefe Boerner – RTF's equipment manager. Packing it all into a U-Haul we prepare finalized scheduled sheets later that evening. It doesn't help that Beth is helping us virtually from New York, since she is working on editing her thesis documentary. That said though, everything seems to be moving forward as planned and smoothly.

Ready for Battle

DAY ONE

4:45 AM – I climb out of bed and grab a bite before driving over the U-Haul to location. Our first scene is working with Chirag and Bill Wise, a local actor who’s extremely funny. By mid-morning we get our first shoot off and everything is going smoothly. Bill’s energy and humor helps propel the crew’s attitude and enthusiasm for the grueling week ahead. For the initial days we have the grocery store until 10:30AM when it opens, so around 11AM we break for lunch and move our shoot to the strip mall exterior. Nothing beats trying to squeeze in a scene while right outside a door a growing line of impatient customers begin to form. I say that with the utmost sarcasm.

The rest of the day goes by smoothly. We shoot the fight scene in the alleyway during the late afternoon. EJ comes up to me after and verifies, “Are you happy with it?”

“Yes.”

“It’s your thesis, we’ll keep shooting until you’re happy.”

One thing I learned from my pre-thesis is that nothing will be as you imagined. The trick is getting as close as possible...and often times you’ll get something great or close. The moments you know you lost a scene, you’ll know it right away. But EJ’s words reminded me how lucky I was to have such a hardworking cast and crew making the script come to life.

A few moments later our AD for the day Deja Bernhardt reminded me that we had to release the actors within 30 minutes. Having worked with union actors for the first time, it was a nice little reminder.

DAY TWO

After some sleep we continue on with energy into the second day, filming again during the morning at the grocery store – focusing now on the cop scene. It goes longer than expected, with a few hitches getting in the way. The crew's patience is tested as we cross into the 8th take for a shot that wasn't working. It doesn't help the impatient customer is long outside, but our AD for the day Catherine Licata is running around taking care of the house. We finally nail it and move on. After a few shots outside we wrap for the day, a relatively light day for everyone.

The first issue of the shoot arises. The catering was inadequate. Food wasn't great, and not enough. After a brief discussion with them, I realized I had no time whatsoever to deal with drama – so I told them we'd just complete our contract and have no further service from them. To save time I quickly jumped in my car and drove to nearby Pakistani restaurants and took all their samosas. The cast/crew devoured them and were grateful for the extra food. It's times like that where you have to worry less, and just find a solution fast. I couldn't stress enough that attitude and morale of a crew is extremely important.

DAY THREE

The night prior the actress playing the mother, Yaksha Bhatt, arrived in town. I got a call from Beth telling me the hotel was verifying some documents from our online reservation – making Yaksha wait over an hour until she was given the room. She was understandably tired and cranky, having driven straight after work from Houston. She told me though she was ready to go.

The next morning we continued the store shooting, and everything was good to go indeed. She and Chirag worked very well and efficiently. It was a fun morning with some performance surprises that as a director you can't plan in advance. Soon after we had our first company move to an apartment complex. Upon arrival the sun wasn't what we hoped due to the cloud cover. We decided to ignore it and move on, turning my friend's apartment into a makeshift movie set. After filming I quickly realized the major scene we had planned was going to be difficult to cut – partly due to its placement and also due to its relevance to the plot. Discussing it with our AD and with EJ, it was difficult for me to stop thinking about it and jumping ahead to the editing phase – where I knew there would might be a problem. After talking a long walk outside to clear my head, I was able to realign my focus for the day ahead, which would take place at the waxing studio.

DAY FOUR

The next shooting day was during night, which gave the crew a 24-hour turnaround time – nobody complained! We were shooting inside the rooms of the establishment, and luckily everything went according to plan. Being the first overnight shoot, it was extremely important to have good strong coffee available at all times.

During the last takes of an intimate scene, everybody was drained and ready to go home. After about 7 takes of the tricky shot, I took Chirag and Nancy to an empty room where we discussed the scene in private – and what we felt was missing. Nancy and Chirag decided to break a couple rules and let their characters flow a little more naturally. The following takes were brilliant, and in my opinion made the entire third act work so much better.

DAY FIVE

This day was a very tough one. The overnight shoots were quickly taking its toll on the cast and crew. Chirag was getting visibly tired, but carried on like a real trooper. We filmed all the interior non-room shots, with EJ and Ian getting some very beautiful lighting setups that I was quite happy about. After a long night, I was stayed behind to clean up the waxing studio with our production designer, Taylor Thompson.

The following morning we got an angry phone call from the owner, claiming we left it in a mess. Turns out the wife of the owner, Brian, and the workers found the place somewhat disheveled and were afraid something had happened overnight. I guess he never told them we were filming a movie there! Well, after consoling him over the phone and assuring his wife that a money plant was with accidently sitting in our U-Haul truck, the situation was deescalated successfully.

DAY SIX

Back at the grocery store, this time at night. One of the workers of the store, Leo, decided to stay with us all night for the remainder of the shoot. He would nap in the truck, was incredibly supportive and nice. It's amazing when out of all the stress and hustle you meet someone like Leo who makes life easier. Here we filmed some interior and exterior shots that we couldn't get to earlier.

One thing I wish I did that I will likely do from now on is have my own set of headphones. During certain scenes during this day I allowed the actors to incorporate some improv within takes, and had I heard what they were saying clearly I could have directed them a little better.

DAY SEVEN

This was also a very difficult day to complete, but was made much more tolerable since Beth had returned from New York. It was such a relief!! The first obstacle was the “perfume scene” that wasn’t working as we had hoped, mostly due to blocking and timing. EJ, Beth, and I requested a little break as we talked about the scene in detail. Beth and EJ both proposed we adjust the blocking to make it flow better, and also that we get additional coverage for cutting ease. By the 7th day fatigue and pressure to finish has built up to the point where the idea of changing up setups is just about scary – but I trusted their intuition and went with it. I’m very glad I did.

Then another headache. The property owners showed up around 11:30PM to inform me that a parking lot tar company would be redoing half of the parking lot all night the following day. That was the same day we planned to shoot all night...on that very parking lot. They discussed it over among themselves, and for whatever reason felt compelled to let me shoot no matter what. They called one person after another, and convinced them to fulfill their HEB contract instead. I hugged them before running back inside the store to finish filming the scene.

DAY EIGHT

This was by far the biggest shooting day I had ever attempted, though with careful planning Beth and I were confident it would go relatively smoothly. The day consisted of 8 fully costumed extras, 3 minor actors, 3 main actors, two ‘police’ cars, a police raid, and a crew of nearly 13 people – a total of 27 people. Not to mention it was very chilly outside. We started the evening at the Shalimar Restaurant nearby, using their dirty back alley for shooting. The scene involved police with fake guns, and considerable police lights. Given my track record of having the police called in on virtually every major film

I directed, I was sure to give Austin Police a gracious heads-up. Especially since we were in a part of Austin known for a relatively higher crime rate. Hence when a cop pulled up during production to make sure we were okay, I felt quite relaxed.

The second part was a tad more chaotic. One of the PA's became in charge of wardrobe, helping everyone change in and out of costume. Among the props being used were prop guns, handcuffs, leg cuffs, police lights, a second camera running for reporter footage, and all the police gear. Shooting well into the night we marched on, take after take, adjusting whatever we needed to. Finally that time came when we were done. It was almost like a blur, since a light AM fog started to materialize. As we were finishing up packing, fate wanted to punish us for having a miraculously smooth shoot. The U-Haul's battery died. Beth, EJ, and I bought jumper cables, fired up the van, and with good spirit went to have a delicious breakfast. We had done it.

BREAK

It would be a good week before we geared up again for our Houston filming. Due to everyone being busy the crew would just be E.J., Beth, and me – with Chirag joining us for one day of filming. I took this time off to evaluate what we needed, to catch up on sleep, and of course spend some time with Hala, Farhad, Fatima and friends. As hard as it may appear to be, I strongly believe in finding a balance between work and life. Sure, many will say “but filmmaking *is* life” – I just think filmmaking is a *part* of life.

DAY NINE

After filling our stomachs with great food at Hoover's, we drive towards Houston. We arrive at my friend's vacant apartment, where we unload our gear and get some sleep.

The first day is quite hectic, with Houston's traffic driving everyone a little bit insane. With our car mount we made quite a few friends, including a taxi driver who threw his business card inside ours – revealing he was an aspiring music composer. Chirag was awesome in helping us as a temporary grip. Towards the end of the evening the concern regarding digital cameras “when do we call cut?” came into effect. We kept shooting and shooting the car mount footage with our actor Chirag. There were times that I wanted to call cut and call it a night, but for some reason kept pushing and pushing. Everyone's energy started to slip. But then a happy accident occurred. I told Chirag to drive into a parking lot so we could load up, but I told him to stay in character. A downtown vagrant came up to the car, knocking on the window. Chirag stayed in character, his annoyance and exhaustion coming through beautifully. That last shot was brilliant and made it into the cut, and hence I felt better about all the energy we had put it – ultimately it was worth it.

DAY TEN

I woke up next to an empty bed. Wait a minute, wasn't EJ sharing a bed with me? Oh shit. EJ! I checked my phone and saw a number of texts and miscalls. EJ had gone to dinner with a Houston friend the night before, and got delayed coming back to our apartment. Being exhausted I completely passed out waiting, and poor EJ got locked out the apartment. I ran into the living room where Beth was sleeping and she also woke up alert, “EJ!” Turns out he checked himself into a nearby hotel. We all apologized to each other afterwards and enjoyed a big breakfast. What a way to start the day.

Filming time-lapse footage throughout the day we enter night, and end our Houston trip with car mount footage of cityscapes. Driving towards Pasadena we capture

the beautiful sea of oil refineries – no problems. Then as we drive up the toll-way bridge, we get pulled over. Great. I couldn't go a single shoot without the cops, oh well. He stares with awe at our elaborate camera mount. Soon after another squad car pulls up. I'm soon informed that this specific bridge is monitored by Homeland Security, and that they need to notify them and inspect all our gear. They then take Beth aside to verify she knows EJ and I - I'm hoping it wasn't because she was female or white. After verifying we are all students and UT-affiliated, we wait to hear back from Homeland Security. Another squad car pulls up. I unload my car and open every camera box, explaining them what everything is. EJ is not pleased at all. A couple of the county cops share an interesting conversation with me...I'll just say it *was not* politically correct.

Over an hour later we're allowed to go. Tired, annoyed, and flustered, we finish the shots for the night. After packing up we decide to grab a bite, but have a hard time finding a place that late. Two hours later after finding the 24-hour pie diner and eating, we make our way back to Austin. A strong storm decides to pass by, with very strong winds. All that in combination with utter exhaustion, we decide to drive slowly back. As soon as I sat down on my bed early that morning, I passed out like there was no tomorrow.

LAST BIT

In late April, after the movie had been more or less picture-locked – I wanted to shoot another evening at the store. We shot inserts and time-lapse footage that I had previously test-shot with my DSLR. Very painless, very efficient. EJ and I completed all shooting within 4 hours. After uploading the footage to my drive, we were officially done.

POST-PRODUCTION

The Editing Process

Over the 2012 Winter break I began syncing footage and audio, and planting them into a timeline. One thing I learned from editing my pre-thesis film, as well as a series of shorts I made for Shamak (a sandal company I co-founded with my brother), is that editing the work you direct can be a nightmare. It can be extremely difficult to be objective and efficient, as you are essentially married to the footage from day one. My first assembly cut was a whooping 32 minutes...I knew I was going to need help.

During a get-together on East 6th, I ran into Tim Tsai. Learning that he had some free time from Megalomedia – where he works as an editor – I approached him to give my film a pass. He agreed, and over the next few weeks we discussed ideas and cuts. He had many great ideas, always respected my vision, and made some bold editing choices that I eventually loved. It was a huge relief to be able to step away from my work.

With roughly a couple months left until my sound mix, I got the cut back and began to work on it myself. This time around I was able to focus on details such as plot elements, various takes, and most importantly character development. Going back and forth on several scenes, and started showing people rough cuts – including a private screening at UT. The interesting thing about *Sunny Square* so far was the wide range of comments I was receiving. The only option I felt at that point was actively filtering out what I needed and felt were appropriate for the film to move ahead. Don Howard and Anne Lewis have always given me very encouraging and pointed feedback for my films. We speak freely and openly about not only the film but also the thought process of

editing. After speaking with Stuart, Don, and Anne - it was clear I need to make the film I wanted to make.

Music

I wanted to make sure the music used in *Sunny Square* was memorable, but never overbearing. Furthermore, I wanted a soundtrack that was original and unique. For my last film I used copyrighted music, and quite personally did not want to go through the licensing headache again. But most importantly, making *Sunny Square* was a lot of firsts for – such as union actors, proper crew, etc – so I figured why not have freshly composed music? I first contacted Ibrahim “Ibu” Madha, a childhood friend who composes music on the side. His specialty is electronica, and often composes tracks with a cinematic feel to them. After working for a while he was able to develop a couple tracks that a very appropriate feel to them. The only issue was the music did not have enough depth to them, partly due to the lack of real instruments. After a daylong session when he came to visit from San Francisco, we mutually decided we needed more help.

I had briefly talked to Hanan Townshend when I filmed b-roll for Russell Bush. Thus I decided to approach him and we met to discuss composing for *Sunny Square*. Given his talents and experiences working on several films, including for Terrence Malick and Paavo Hanninen’s film that I shot, I was sure he was have some interesting ideas in store. After our meet I was sure he could deliver just what I was looking for, especially with his use of strings and other instruments. The only problem was finances, since by this point in film school I was completely broke. I had just recently received some money from Kickstarter, but it wasn’t much. But I decided to take the plunge

anyways, and get the music that I really wanted. After several weeks of going back and forth with the music, we finally got to a point that Hanan and I felt happy about.

Even better – we were able to use Ibu’s track as a base layer to build upon for one of the key themes of the film. I absolutely love when collaboration works out like this, and love it even more when it makes the film much stronger.

Coloring Fun

A year ago I TA’ed for Dan Stuyck for the Intro to Editing class, a class I actually enjoyed very much. With a couple months left in my editing cycle, Dan emailed me and offered to color my film for free at this studio. How amazing was that? I was hoping to get help anyways due to the Arri Alexa’s raw image format – which was a bit much for me to color correct.

Once I was picture-locked I went over to Dan’s and we began the process. Using DaVinci Resolve, we were able to do amazing things with the footage. By the end of the couple-day marathon the film’s images began to breathe a new life. EJ sat on a session as well, making sure the images were all good. It was a huge relief, and a nice reminder favors for favors is key in this industry – I owe him!

Finishing Up

Finally the time came around for my sound mix. At first I was quite apprehensive, since everything was moving so damn fast I didn’t get a chance to properly do my own intensive rounds of sound design and cleaning. However, from my previous experiences

with mixing so much changed during my sessions I figured I'd be okay. I had messed with sound throughout the edit anyways.

On the first morning I met Korey Pereira and we jumped right into it. Working 9 hours straight for three days, we went through the cut and fixed many problematic areas, adding sound design, and making the film sound nice smooth. I wasn't entirely happy with the mix though; there was still a lot that bothered me about it.

Luckily I got a few extra hours the following day due to another student's postponement – it's amazing how things just work out sometimes. Korey, Beth, and I finished up touches on the film. Aside from some technical hiccups, sound was completely mixed and good to go.

Only steps remaining were replacing some signs in the movie via After Effects in order to better sell my fictional world, doing a final color pass to add film grain texture, adding titles, and any last tweaks. The very talented Deepak Chetty volunteered to help me with this. As I write this paper, it's amazing to be able to finally say, "I can see the finish line."

Something Learned

My time at UT's film school was a constant learning experience, as many of my classmates would also agree with. Whether it was regarding the art of filmmaking, story, marketing, or just learning more about oneself – it was a draining yet rewarding journey. However, I will say that the program will not push you hard enough to learn those things. Rather, the program serves as a platform for students to experience their own journeys, just depends how badly he or she wants it. Filmmaking is not for the light-hearted or the complacent, it's a bloody battle from start to finish. And just when you raise a victory flag (or admit defeat) you're faced with your next battle.

My experience with *Sunny Square* has definitely left me with a fair share of healthy battle scars. I learned how important character development is in the writing process. The more the character and his/her personality comes to life, the more the world around his/her conflict comes to life too. Learning this has allowed me to focus less on creating a world – and rather creating a character that in turn creates a world. I've also come to realize how fruitful collaborations in movies can really be. I've always collaboration is key, but aligning with talented DPs, musicians, colorists, editors, etc can do so much for a film! I came to film school doing practically every aspect of the film, and now I can't imagine ever doing half the things I tried to by myself.

Taking everything I've learned from my professors, classmates, and the various projects I've been lucky to be a part of – I look forward to the challenges ahead. Writing this I keep reminding myself...the real journey has only begun.

APPENDIX

The following pages contain the actual schedule, script, and storyboards used for production on *Sunny Square*. The schedule, generated from the producing software Movie Magic, was instrumental for keeping the production chugging along smoothly. It includes both the Austin and Houston shoots, as well as estimated lunch and dinner schedules. A quick note: during the night shoots dinner was considered ‘lunch’ and the super-late night meal was considered ‘lunch’. The script and storyboards are the versions sent to the cast and crew, and were generated using Final Draft and Microsoft PowerPoint. Lastly, the budget is a general approximation of the total cost of the film – taking into account in-kind and deferred payments.

Production Schedule

SUNNY SQUARE SHOOTING SCHEDULE					
Sheet #: 16 7/8 pgs	Scenes: 16	INT Day	FOOD MART Fat customer asks for condoms.	1, 7	Est. Time 4:00
LUNCH 1:00					
Sheet #: 15 2 pgs	Scenes: 15	EXT Day	SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY Jamal and Selena talk about the future.	1, 2	Est. Time 6:00
End of Shooting Day 1 -- Wednesday, November 28, 2012 -- 2 7/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 11:00					
Sheet #: 9 1 4/8 pgs	Scenes: 9	INT Day	FOOD MART Vasquez talks to Jamal about being a John.	1, 4, 9	Est. Time 6:00
LUNCH 1:00					
Sheet #: 17 4/8 pgs	Scenes: 17	EXT Day	SUNNY VILLAGE Jamal watches fat customer talk to Selena and ge	1, 2, 7	Est. Time 4:00
Sheet #: 18 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 18	INT Evenir	CAR Jamal drives home to mother.	1	Est. Time
End of Shooting Day 2 -- Thursday, November 29, 2012 -- 2 1/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 11:00					
Sheet #: 6 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 6	INT Mornir	FOOD MART Jamal awakens to knocking.	1	Est. Time 2:00
Sheet #: 7 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 7	EXT Mornir	FOOD MART Jamal's mother pushes her way into store.	1, 3	Est. Time 2:00
Sheet #: 14 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 14	INT Mornir	FOOD MART Jamal watches tv and prepares coffee.	1	Est. Time 1:00
Sheet #: 8 3/8 pgs	Scenes: 8	INT Mornir	FOOD MART Jamal's mother makes her way to the broom close	1, 3	Est. Time 1:00
COMPANY MOVE/LUNCH 1:30					
Sheet #: 12 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 12	INT Evenir	APARTMENT Jamal's mother gives him food as he leaves.	1, 3	Est. Time 1:00
Sheet #: 22 7/8 pgs	Scenes: 22	INT Night	APARTMENT BEDROOM Jamal finds mother, comforts her.	1, 3	Est. Time 2:00
Sheet #: 21 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 21	INT Night	APARTMENT Jamal enters apartment, looks around.	1	Est. Time 1:00
End of Shooting Day 3 -- Friday, November 30, 2012 -- 2 1/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 11:30					
Sheet #: 1 1 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 1	INT Night	PALM TREE MASSAGE ROOM Selena and Jamal are interrupted by a fight, Selen	1, 2	Est. Time 6:00
LUNCH 1:00					
Sheet #: 26 1 5/8 pgs	Scenes: 26	INT Night	PALM TREE MASSAGE Jamal questions Selena.	1, 2	Est. Time 5:00

End of Shooting Day 4 -- Saturday, December 1, 2012 -- 2 6/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 12:00

Sheet #: 25 1 3/8 pgs	Scenes: 25	INT Night	PALM TREE MASSAGE Jamal waits for Selena, the two walk to her room.	1, 2, 5, 11, 12	Est. Time 5:00
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LUNCH 1:00

Sheet #: 2 3/8 pgs	Scenes: 2	INT Night	PALM TREE MASSAGE ROOM Selena leads Jamal through a hallway towards a t	1, 2, 5, 6	Est. Time 3:00
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Sheet #: 27 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 27	INT Night	PALM TREE MASSAGE HALLWAY Jamal peers down the hallway.	1	Est. Time 1:00
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End of Shooting Day 5 -- Sunday, December 2, 2012 -- 1 7/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 10:00

Sheet #: 11 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 11	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE Jamal and mother walk to car, see men at massag	1, 3	Est. Time 2:00
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Sheet #: 34 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 9.1	INT Day	FOOD MART Vasquez talks to Jamal about being a John.	3	Est. Time 1:00
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Sheet #: 33 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 10.1	INT Night	FOOD MART Mother interrupts Jamal and Selena.	1, 3	Est. Time 1:00
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LUNCH 1:00

Sheet #: 31 6/8 pgs	Scenes: 31	INT Night	FOOD MART Ted, now wearing uniform, buys a coke from Jam	1, 6	Est. Time 2:00
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Sheet #: 29 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 29	INT Night	FOOD MART Jamal reveals his wires.	1	Est. Time 2:00
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Sheet #: 4 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 4	INT Night	FOOD MART Jamal walks through his store, sees picture of fath	1	Est. Time 1:00
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End of Shooting Day 6 -- Monday, December 3, 2012 -- 1 6/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 10:00

Sheet #: 3 2/8 pgs	Scenes: 3	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY Jamal walks down the alley to another back door.	1	Est. Time 1:00
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Sheet #: 32 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 32	INT/E. Night	SUNNY VILLAGE Jamal stands at his door and smokes cigarette.	1	Est. Time 1:00
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Sheet #: 10 2 6/8 pgs	Scenes: 10	INT Night	FOOD MART Jamal and Selena joke about perfume.	1, 2, 9	Est. Time 9:00
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LUNCH - DURING SCENE 10 1:00

End of Shooting Day 7 -- Tuesday, December 4, 2012 -- 3 1/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 12:00

Sheet #: 28 4/8 pgs	Scenes: 28	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY Jamal opens door, police raid.	1, 8, 13	Est. Time 2:00
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Sheet #: 5 3/8 pgs	Scenes: 5	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE Jamal sees Houston police writing reports.	1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13	Est. Time 3:00
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LUNCH 1:00

Sheet #: 30 4/8 pgs	Scenes: 30	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE Selena and girls are busted, put in cop car. Jamal	1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15	Est. Time 4:00
Sheet #: 24 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 24	EXT Night	SUNNY VILLAGE Jamal pulls into parking lot and walks towards ma:	1	Est. Time 1:00
End of Shooting Day 8 -- Wednesday, December 5, 2012 -- 1 4/8 Pages -- Time Estimate: 11:00					
HOUSTON SECOND UNIT					
Sheet #: 13 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 13	EXT Evenir	HOUSTON PARK Jamal sits on the hood of his car, thinking.	1	Est. Time
Sheet #: 19 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 19	EXT Evenir	HOUSTON HIGHWAYS AERIAL SHOT		Est. Time
Sheet #: 23 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 23	EXT Night	WILLIAMS TOWER Spotlight.		Est. Time
Sheet #: 20 1/8 pgs	Scenes: 20	EXT Night	APARTMENT COMPLEX Jamal jogs into apartment building.	1	Est. Time

Script

SUNNY SQUARE

Written by
Hammad Rizvi

Draft XVI
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INT. PALMS TREE MASSAGE ROOM - NIGHT

JAMAL, a scrubby South Asian-American male, lies on a worn bed with **SELENA**, a middle-aged olive-skinned Asian woman. The two are embraced close, kissing, relaxing, listening to music. Neither has a shirt on.

The room around them is dimly lit with a sheer curtain surrounding them - it could be a bedroom for all we know.

SELENA

You smell nice today.

JAMAL

So I usually smell bad?

SELENA

No I mean today it's better.

JAMAL

Well it's my natural scent.

SELENA

Yeah right. What is it?

JAMAL

No really.

SELENA

Stop it.

JAMAL

Stop what?

Selena hits him gently before starting to kiss him again - but a loud yell interrupts them. Selena jumps off the couch.

SELENA

Stay here.

Selena vanishes and we hear a door close. Jamal is all alone in the dark. Seconds later Selena reenters the room and flicks the light on.

The room is revealed to be one at a massage parlor, complete with a crude massage table, candles, and posters of cats and waterfalls.

SELENA (CONT'D)

You need to go baby.

JAMAL

What's going on?

Selena grabs Jamal - who is still shirtless - by the arm and leads him out the door. She also grabs his shirt, which sits next to a pile of non-matching envelopes.

INT. PALMS TREE MASSAGE - NIGHT

Selena leads Jamal through a hallway towards a back-door. Jamal turns around and sees a tall white male **TED** - 45 years old - standing and holding his bleeding ear.

Ted and Jamal make direct eye contact.

SELENA

Come on.

A petite girl **ISABEL** jumps out and continues hitting Ted.

TED

Calm the hell down!

ISABEL

LEAVE! You're a pig! PIG!

Ted grabs Isabel and pushes her against the wall. Selena opens the back-door.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Jamal is thrown out along with his shirt as the door is slammed shut. He stands alone in the dark, shirtless, confused and slightly dazed. Above him the spotlight from the Williams Tower glides across the sky.

A car is parked down the alley with its dim, orange lights on. Jamal lights up a cigarette and walks down the alley towards another door, unlocking it with his set of keys.

INT. FOOD MART - NIGHT

Jamal flickers the lights on, revealing a small grocery/convenience store. He puts his shirt back on.

Several aisles of stationary items and supplies are meshed with Middle Eastern/Asian grocery supplies. The store is antiquated; tube-lights flicker and the tiles have mold.

Still smoking Jamal passes his cash register, over which hangs a photo frame of his **FATHER** with a younger version of himself standing in front the store.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - NIGHT

After unlocking his front door, Jamal stands at the front of his food mart. A medium-sized strip mall is revealed with several stores. To the right we see a Houston Police squad car pull up to Palms Tree Massage with its lights flashing.

Isabel is yelling at a **FEMALE OFFICER**, angrily pointing towards Ted - who is now walking towards his own car. Selena is talking to a **MALE OFFICER**, who calmly writes down on his pad.

Jamal inhales deeply from his cigarette before flicking it away. Turning to his left he sees a fellow shopkeeper, **DAVE** - 55 - locking his stationary store and watching the scene with disgust. He makes eye contact with Jamal as he nods his head. Jamal goes back into his store, locking the door.

EXT. HOUSTON SKYLINE - DAY/NIGHT

Time-lapse transition of the Houston skyline from night to day.

INT. FOOD MART - MORNING

KNOCK KNOCK. Jamal is awakened by constant bangs on the door. His eyes open slowly, facing the portrait of his father and him. KNOCK KNOCK.

JAMAL

Yeah, I'm coming.

Jamal is lying on the aisle floor. Next to him is a bottle of whiskey. He quickly gets rid of it into a box and devours a couple strong breath-mints from the cash register.

EXT. FOOD MART - MORNING

Outside his store an elderly woman in hijab, his **MOTHER**, walks in circles - banging on the door.

MOTHER

Jamal? Jamal? Jamal?

JAMAL

Yeah yeah, I'm here Ma. What are you doing?

MOTHER

Why didn't you come home? You want to give me heart attack too?

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

And why isn't store open yet? Your father would have beat you for opening late. Hey, Jamal!

JAMAL

I got it! It's been a long night Ma. Wait, how did you get here?

His mother pushes past Jamal and enters the store.

INT. FOOD MART - MORNING

Mother heads straight for the broom closet.

MOTHER

Bus. You smell like piss.

JAMAL

Dammit Ma! You can't do that. You should have called me.

MOTHER

I wanted to go out. You won't take me, so I went out. I'm not a baby. Where's the mop? This place is a mess...like you. God help us. Where's the mop? Jamal?

JAMAL

(rubbing his temples)
MA! I got it!

INT. FOOD MART - NOON

Jamal mops the floor, prepares the coffee machine, tidies the shelves. A **CUSTOMER** buys cigarettes and rice.

Next in line is **VASQUEZ**, a steely-eyed vice-cop. He grabs a Houston Chronicle newspaper and drops it on the counter.

Jamal, confused, looks at the newspaper. The heading:

"VICE CITY. Houston's war on sex-trafficking"

VASQUEZ

Vice City. Isn't that a bit much?

JAMAL

What?

VASQUEZ
But there's truth to it. How much
have you spent over at Palms Tree?

JAMAL
Wha-who are you?

VASQUEZ
Sergeant Vasquez, Harris County
Vice. Don't worry, I'm not here to
arrest ya.

Jamal tenses up.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
Jamal right? Jamal - you have a
cute store here, it's too bad
you're selling it. Though I really
wonder how much it would be worth
at a police auction.

JAMAL
Wait. I haven't done anything.

VASQUEZ
Harboring undocumented workers,
soliciting sex, providing groceries
and aid - do I really need to go on
man? You're in deep shit friend.

Jamal, breathing fast, watches his mother in the background
arranging the shelves. Her small frail body moving slowly.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
But I'm here to give a second
chance. You're not a bad guy, no
drug charges, no terror links -
just poor judgement. Let me lay it
out, these girls - they ain't
talking. They're afraid. But you
got leverage that we don't. I want
names.

JAMAL
You're asking me to snitch? I don't
get what's the big deal.

VASQUEZ
Think of it this way, those girls
need your help. They'll be put into
a safe-house thanks to you.

He leaves a business card on the counter and exits.

JAMAL
What if I refuse?

VASQUEZ
Nothing, you get to carry on.

Vasquez stops at the door and watches Jamal's mother.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
But we won't be there to help y'all
when shit goes down - and believe
me friend it will sooner or later.

Jamal watches him leave, slamming his fist on the counter. He rests his head on the counter and closes his eyes.

INT. FOOD MART - EVENING

Jamal has fallen asleep at the register. A cold mango soda bottle is pushed against his sleeping face, condensation dripping into his eyes.

He jolts awake. Selena stands there watching him.

SELENA
Good afternoon sleepy head.

Jamal wipes his eyes and looks at the clock.

JAMAL
You owe me an apology.

SELENA
I know, I'm sorry baby. I had no
choice, didn't want you tangled in
anything.

JAMAL
Care to explain?

SELENA
I'd rather not 'kay? Just a bad
night. So...how ya been?

Selena holds Jamal's hands, causing him to ease up.

JAMAL
Usual. A couple interested buyers
called, but mom won't budge. I feel
she'd even turn down \$1 million.

Selena sits on the counter, sipping on the drink.

SELENA
Oh she'll come around. How is she?

JAMAL
Napping in the back probably, she's
okay.

Selena glances towards the back and moves her hand away.

SELENA
Jamal, I'm so tired.

JAMAL
Me too. I need to talk to you
privately about something.

SELENA
Sure, we'll talk. What's this?

She grabs a small plastic perfume bottle, labeled with a
homemade printer.

JAMAL
Perfume. When can we talk?

SELENA
(surprised)
Whenever. Looks all weird.

She reads the label before bursting out in laughter.

SELENA (CONT'D)
What is this?! *Lakosta*? It even got
one of them alligators.

She picks up another bottle.

SELENA (CONT'D)
Tommy Hills? These are fake!

Jamal is annoyed.

JAMAL
Keep it down. Of course they are.
They're alcohol-free.

SELENA
What? Why?

JAMAL
Some customers don't like alcohol -
just put them back. You're going to
wake her!

She begins going through the selection on the counter.

SELENA
I'm having fun. Christina Door.
Door? Paris Hilton, oh they got
that right.

Her laughter is nearly uncontrollable as she covers her mouth. She holds up the box, which has a picture of a Hilton hotel. Jamal begins to laugh too.

SELENA (CONT'D)
Obama fragrance? Jamal! Where do
you find these?

Jamal is laughing along now.

JAMAL
I haven't smelled that one yet.

Selena opens the Obama fragrance and rubs it on Jamal somewhat intimately. A **CUSTOMER** walks in.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Not now. Stop - someone is here.

SELENA
Wait wait, here. Smell.

Selena finishes rubbing it on his shirt before taking a whiff.

SELENA (CONT'D)
Mmmm, you smell so....presidential.

They both laugh hard. Selena kisses Jamal on the cheek and squeezes his hand before exiting the store. Jamal's mother waddles out of the back office, groggy.

MOTHER (O.C.)
Take me home Jamal. I missed my
prayer and medication. When will
you start praying again? Jamal?

SELENA
(whispered)
Ciao el presidente.

Jamal smiles as she leaves, smelling himself. Too strong. He tends to the customer at the counter.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - EVENING

Jamal watches **MEN** walk towards the massage parlor. Dave comes up next to him.

DAVE

I remember when that place used to be an ice cream parlor. Your old man loved their pistachio. Shame.

He smiles and pats Jamal's shoulder before leaving.

We follow behind Jamal and his mother as they walk across the parking lot towards their car, Jamal opening the door for her. Mid-rises and an overpass litter the horizon.

EXT. APARTMENT - EVENING

Jamal helps his mother out of the car.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

A small, cramped apartment - sparse and simple furniture. Jamal's mother gives him food in a to-go box as he leaves.

EXT. HOUSTON PARK - EVENING

Jamal drives up to a parking lot at a public park - the skyline shimmers in the distance. He sits on the hood eating carry-out food, thinking. The sun falls beneath the horizon. He holds Vasquez's card before tossing it onto his car seat.

INT. FOOD MART - MORNING

Jamal sits at the counter, watching TV and preparing coffee.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY - AFTERNOON

Jamal takes out two black trash bags, tossing them into a dumpster. Several yards away Selena sits on the steps - unlit cigarette in mouth. Thunder grumbles in the clouds overhead.

SELENA

Hi baby.

JAMAL

Hey.

He digs in his pocket and tosses her a lighter. She lights up her cigarette.

SELENA

Um. My phone bill came in today.

JAMAL

How much?

SELENA

65 dollars, 46 cents.

JAMAL

Don't worry about it.

A beat. Selena stares at Jamal.

SELENA

Come over tonight.

JAMAL

I want to.

SELENA

You should, you seem really tense lately.

Jamal smiles as he lights up a cigarette as well.

JAMAL

I've been thinking, why don't you work for me?

SELENA

Your store? Is that what you've been wanting to talk about?

JAMAL

Yeah.

SELENA

Want to make me only yours? Or do submissive employees turn you on?

She laughs briefly. Another light thunder clap.

JAMAL

I'm serious, I'll pay you well.

SELENA

I don't know, maybe in the future. Besides mommy wouldn't approve.

JAMAL
Why not now? I'm giving an option.

SELENA
I don't got options. Things are good now, stable.

JAMAL
You got all the options in the world here. I can even get you legal papers, I know a guy.

SELENA
And do what then? Go to college? Get rich? Argh, options my ass.

Selena looks at her pink plastic watch.

SELENA (CONT'D)
Been 10 minutes, you're going to get me in trouble.

JAMAL
They got you on a god-damn leash. Know what? Fine. You wanna play with cock for the rest of your life? Go ahead. I'm trying to save you from this shit.

Selena stops and turns around. She is fuming with anger.

SELENA
Save me? What if I like this? It's a dream come true Jamal. If you don't like it go fuck yourself.

Selena leaves abruptly, flicking her cigarette towards Jamal.

INT. FOOD MART - EVENING

Jamal enters the store again, punching a bag of rice repeatedly until he tires.

He lights a cigarette and smokes in his store, coughing hard.

A JOVIAL CUSTOMER, white and elderly, walks in. He has dirty jeans, muddy boots, a cowboy hat, and a booming voice.

JOVIAL CUSTOMER
Howdy.

JAMAL
Hey.

He goes to the back of the store and grabs a 20oz soda. He walks to the next aisle where there are spices, looking around before returning to the counter.

JOVIAL CUSTOMER
Y'all carry condoms?

JAMAL
(taken off-guard)
Uh, no. Sorry.

JOVIAL CUSTOMER
A pack of the reds as well. This stuff any good?

He holds up the Middle Eastern soda as Jamal reaches for the cigarettes.

JAMAL
It's real sweet. \$8.50.

The customer pays and leaves, Jamal eyes him curiously.

JOVIAL CUSTOMER
Have a good one.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - EVENING

Jamal stands at his door watching the jovial customer walk down towards Palms Tree Massage. It's beginning to rain.

Selena stands outside her door, smoking a cigarette. She puts it out as the jovial customer enters, prompting her to look over at Jamal. The two make eye contact that seems to last an eternity. Selena tilts her head down and disappears into her door. Jamal's phone rings.

JAMAL
Hello.

MOTHER (V.O.)
Jamal? Where are you?

JAMAL
At the store. What's the matter?

MOTHER (V.O.)
Come home, please. Hurry.

JAMAL
What's the matter? Ma?

The phone is hung up.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Hello?

INT. CAR - LATE EVENING

It is raining very hard now as Jamal drives along the overwhelming Houston freeways.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jamal enters the apartment, looking around quickly.

JAMAL
Ma? Where are you?

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jamal finds his mother in a corner, on a prayer mat. She is crouched low.

JAMAL
Ma, what's the matter?

MOTHER
Farooq? Where have you been?

JAMAL
It's me Ma. Jamal. Did you take your medication?

MOTHER
I can't find them.

Jamal leaves his mother sitting. Thunder claps intercut with clatter from the kitchen. Jamal brings pills and water.

JAMAL
Here.

MOTHER
I don't like thunder.

JAMAL
I know, it's ok. I'm here now.

He helps his mother take the pills with water.

MOTHER
I'm glad you're here Farooq. It's been quiet since you left.

Jamal continues to hold her and rock her back and forth gently.

JAMAL
It's gonna be ok, I'm right here.

EXT. WILLIAMS TOWER - NIGHT

Williams Tower stands tall over Houston, its spotlight going in circles.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - LATE NIGHT

Jamal pulls up to the parking lot. He faces the road ahead, it is quiet. He plays with his keys before he begins walking towards Palms Tree Massage.

INT. PALMS TREE MASSAGE - NIGHT

Jamal waits at the front desk of the parlor. The reception area is dark and dimly lit. A couch sits among a table with newspapers. He rings the bell.

Isabel, the Mama-San, comes out from behind the divider.

JAMAL
Selena here?

ISABEL
She's busy.

JAMAL
Tell her it's Jamal.

Isabel looks at Jamal absentmindedly.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Go.

Isabel throws a cold glance before yelling in Vietnamese. Jamal taps his fingers on the desk.

A few seconds later Selena emerges. She walks up to the counter, making eye contact the entire time. The two stand there awkwardly, not saying a word.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

SELENA
You came through the front.

Selena peers behind him to see if anyone saw him.

JAMAL
It's fine, most of them have left
for the day anyway.

SELENA
Come.

Selena holds Jamal's hands and leads him through the small property.

SELENA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
I forgive you for being a prick.

JAMAL
Good. So where's my apology?

She reaches over and kisses him on the cheek.

SELENA
I'm glad you came.

As they walk down the hallway Jamal peers into the other rooms. We see a **THIN GIRL** lying in her room, reading a book and having her hair braided. Another **GIRL** cooks in the room next to her.

JAMAL
Y'all seem close.

Selena smiles faintly.

SELENA
We take care of each other.

We hear sizzling from the cooking. A TV plays a reality show.

JAMAL
Doesn't the landlord care what
y'all do?

SELENA
All he care about is rent.

INT. PALMS TREE MASSAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Selena enters her room and closes the door behind her.

SELENA
I'm really glad you came tonight.

JAMAL
So who owns this place?

SELENA
We don't ask too many questions,
and neither should you.

JAMAL
Yeah but who's your manager?

SELENA
Why do you care?

JAMAL
I'd really like to know. Call me
jealous.

Selena smiles.

SELENA
He works at the port - goes by
Scorpio. Never met him though.

JAMAL
Never?

SELENA
Nope. Don't care to either, heard
he's a cheat.

She holds his hand and guides him to the couch.

JAMAL
Is it just him?

SELENA
What? No of course there's more - I
just know *Scorpio*. I don't want to
talk about this anymore. Please
baby? You're ruining the moment.

Selena gently lies Jamal down on the couch. She cuddles next to him. Jamal's eyes are wide and pensive. Jamal stares at one of the paintings on the wall, it's *Niagra Falls*. The calm, soothing waterfall relaxes him as Selena plays with his collar.

Jamal takes an envelope from his pocket. Selena is curious.

JAMAL
There's 66 dollars in there.

SELENA
(whispering)
Oh. Thank you baby..now tell me
what you want. I like this shirt.

Jamal looks at the clock. Selena shifts his head to face her.

SELENA (CONT'D)
Don't worry about the time, I'm
only yours tonight. Tell me.

JAMAL
I want you. I want things to be
different - for both of us.

SELENA
You have me baby. Tell me what you
want tonight. I'll do anything.

JAMAL
I know.

Jamal glances at the clock again as Selena begins to kiss him
and move her hands down his shirt and under. He stops her.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
You got, ehem, any soda or
something? I'm dehydrated.

Selena looks at Jamal and nods.

SELENA
Of course sweetie. Be right back.

Selena gets up and exits the room. After a beat Jamal quickly
gets up and follows after her. His heart races.

INT. PALMS TREE MASSAGE HALL - NIGHT

Jamal peers down the dimly-lit hall, voices come from
makeshift kitchen room. He quickly makes his way for the back
door.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Jamal opens the door and finds himself face to face with **TWO
COPS** - both wearing tactical gear and looking him straight in
the eye.

The cop motions Jamal to move away. He talks into his
shoulder mic.

MASKED COP

Bravo team in position, waiting for
your go.

Jamal lights up a cigarette as he walks back to his store,
his hands slightly shaking. The police make their move.

MASKED COP (CONT'D)

RAID! RAID! Hands where I can see
them!

Their voices trail off as Jamal enters his store.

INT. FOOD MART - NIGHT

The lights are flickered on. Jamal stands against a wall,
allowing his heartbeat to slow down.

He then coolly takes his shirt off, revealing an array of
wires and tape on his body. He takes them off and places them
on a box near the bathroom - next to Vasquez's business card.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - NIGHT

Jamal walks out his store as time seems to slow down. Isabel,
Selena, and TWO GIRLS are being led out in cuffs and
shackles. They are being escorted by a **FEMALE OFFICER**. Selena
trips several times, Isabel is crying profusely.

A **NEWS REPORTER** and **CAMERAMAN** follow the girls.

NEWS REPORTER

Where are you from? Where are you
from?

Vasquez sips on coffee and nods approvingly at Jamal. Dave
walks by and sees Jamal, shaking his hand and whispering in
his ear. All the while Jamal watches Selena being dragged to
an unmarked squad car. Selena watches Jamal from the
backseat, before turning away.

Jamal walks up to the window and knocks on it, but Selena
ignores him. He knocks again. He then puts his face up
against the window.

JAMAL

Selena? It's better this way. Hey.

As she is driven away Jamal watches the car as it disappears.

INT. FOOD MART - NIGHT

Jamal sits at his cash register, lost in thought. He is watching the local news on TV. A masked policeman is seen giving an interview.

MASKED POLICEMAN

...found condoms, dark-lit rooms, massage tables. But we have to peel the layers back, ya know. We got the girls, but we got to find out who's bringing them in. They don't want to talk, they're afraid.

A large coke is set on the table. Jamal turns his attention from the TV to his customer. It's Ted, from the altercation earlier, wearing full tactical gear.

TED

They cut out the best part.

He turns to look at Jamal, they recognize each other.

JAMAL

2.09.

Ted, after a beat, begins reaching for his wallet.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

On the house.

Ted grabs the bottle and salutes Jamal with it as he exits.

A phone call - it's Jamal's mother. After a hesitation Jamal rejects the incoming call.

EXT. SUNNY VILLAGE - DAY

Jamal walks up to the front door, revealing the strip mall. He smokes a cigarette as he watches cars drive away, coughing hard. **Credits roll here. END**

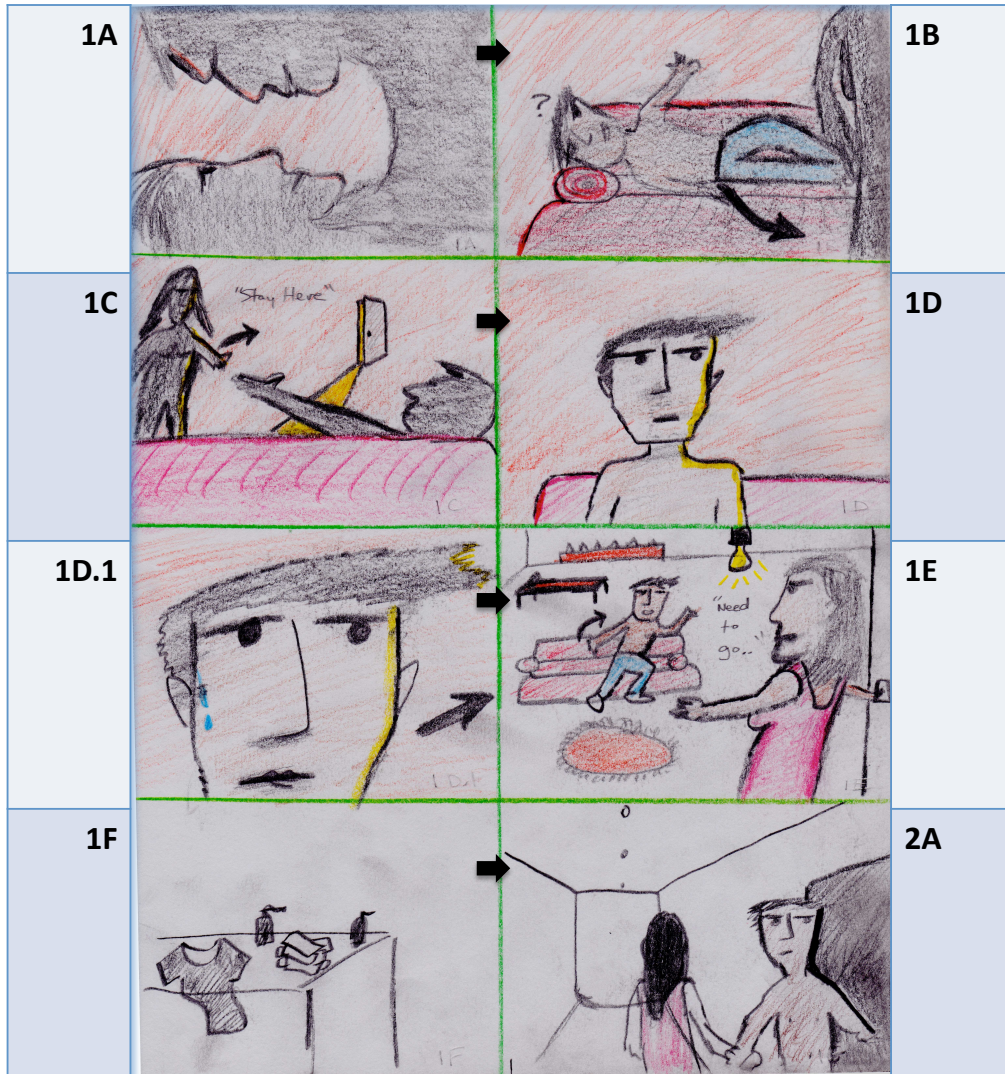
Storyboards

SUNNY SQUARE



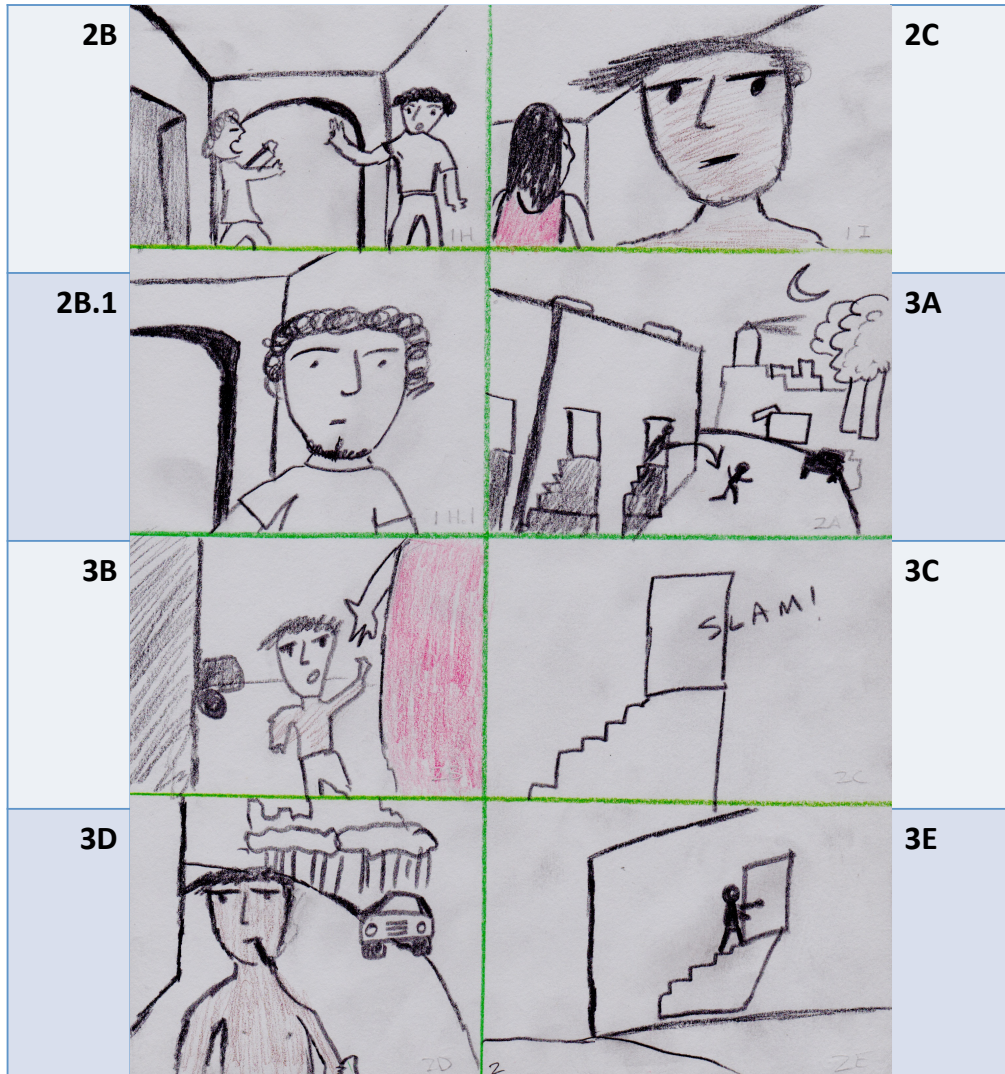
STORYBOARDS

Sunny Square



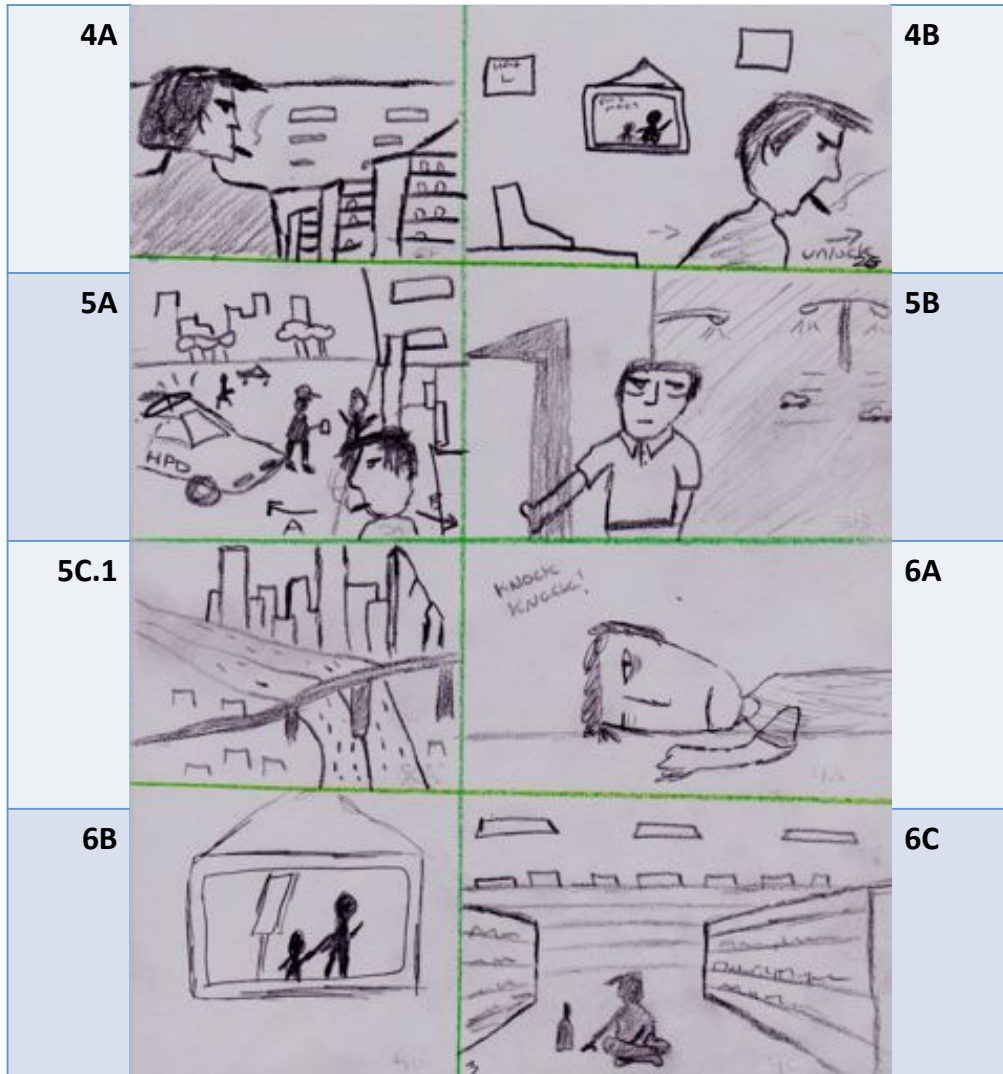
Notes:

Sunny Square



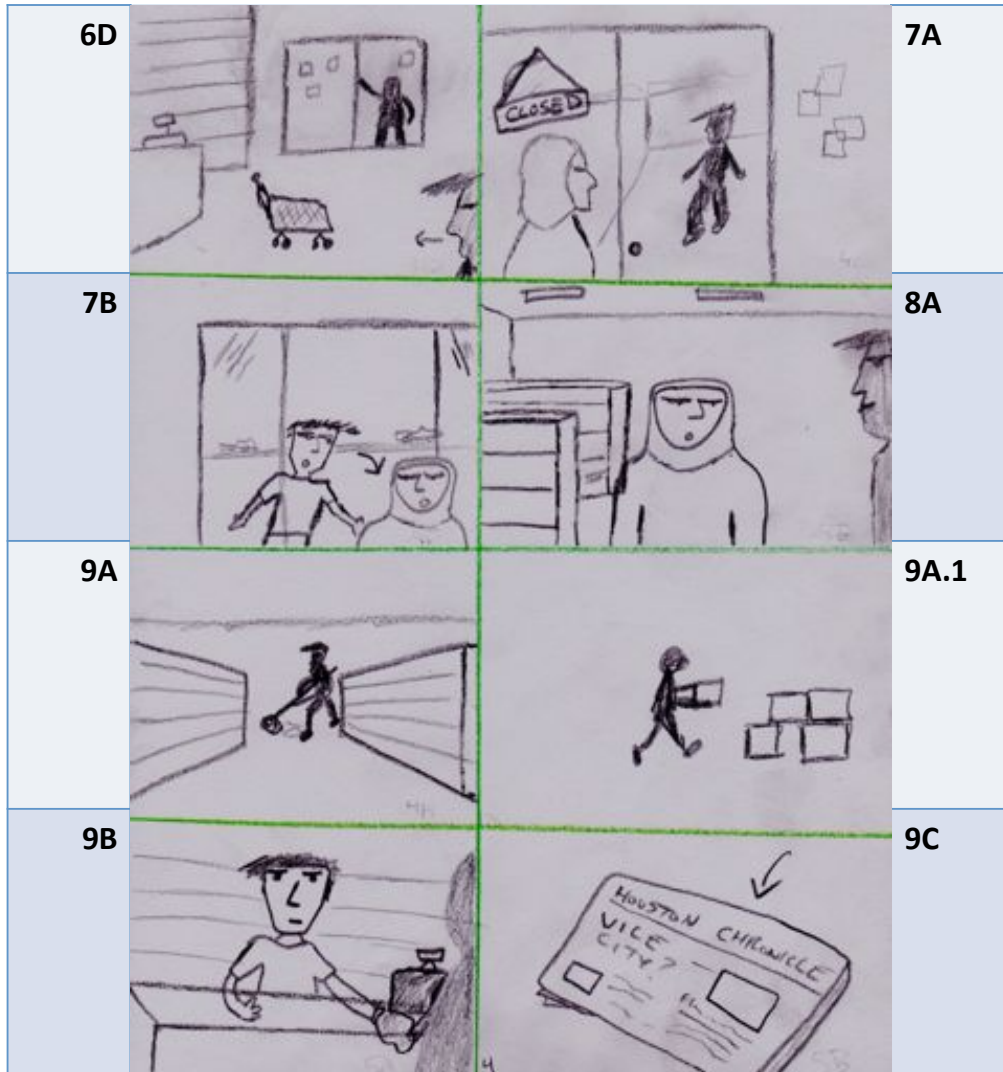
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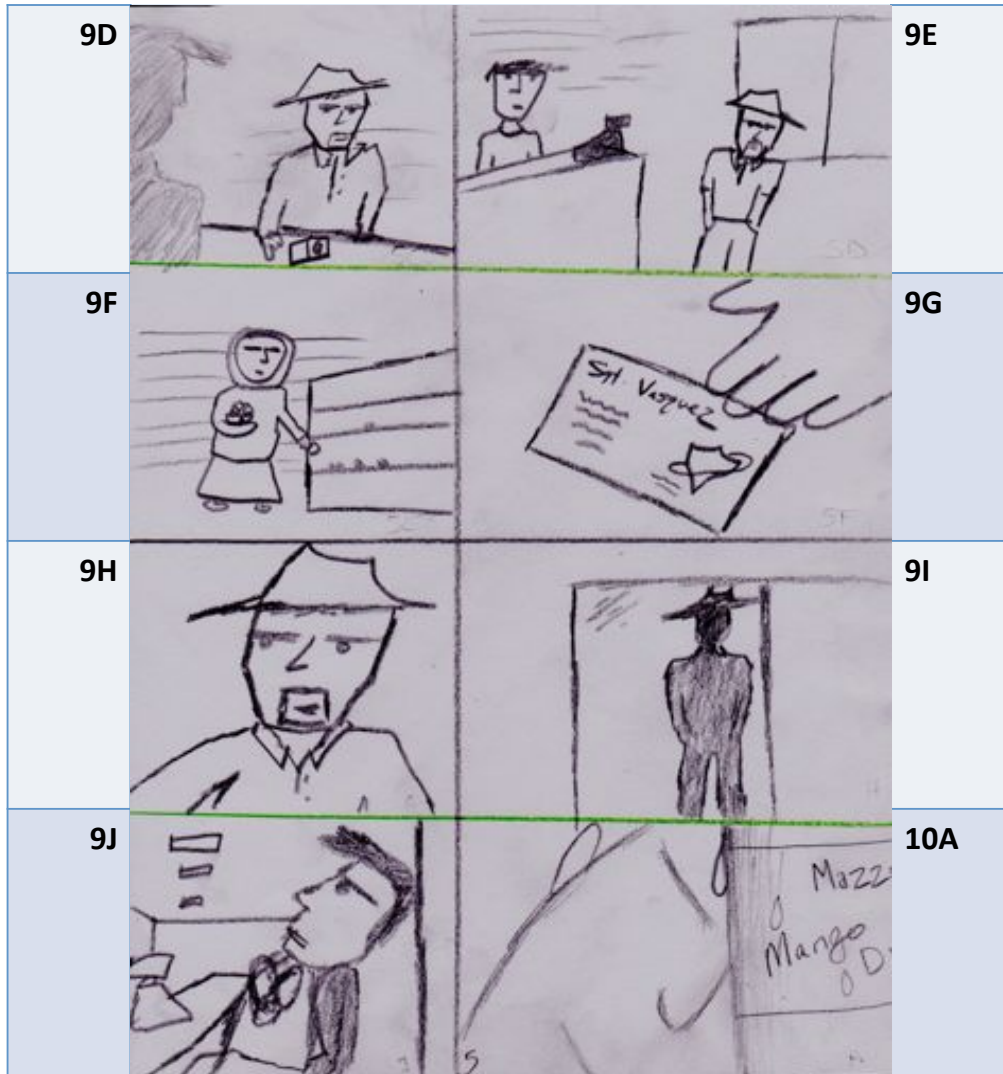
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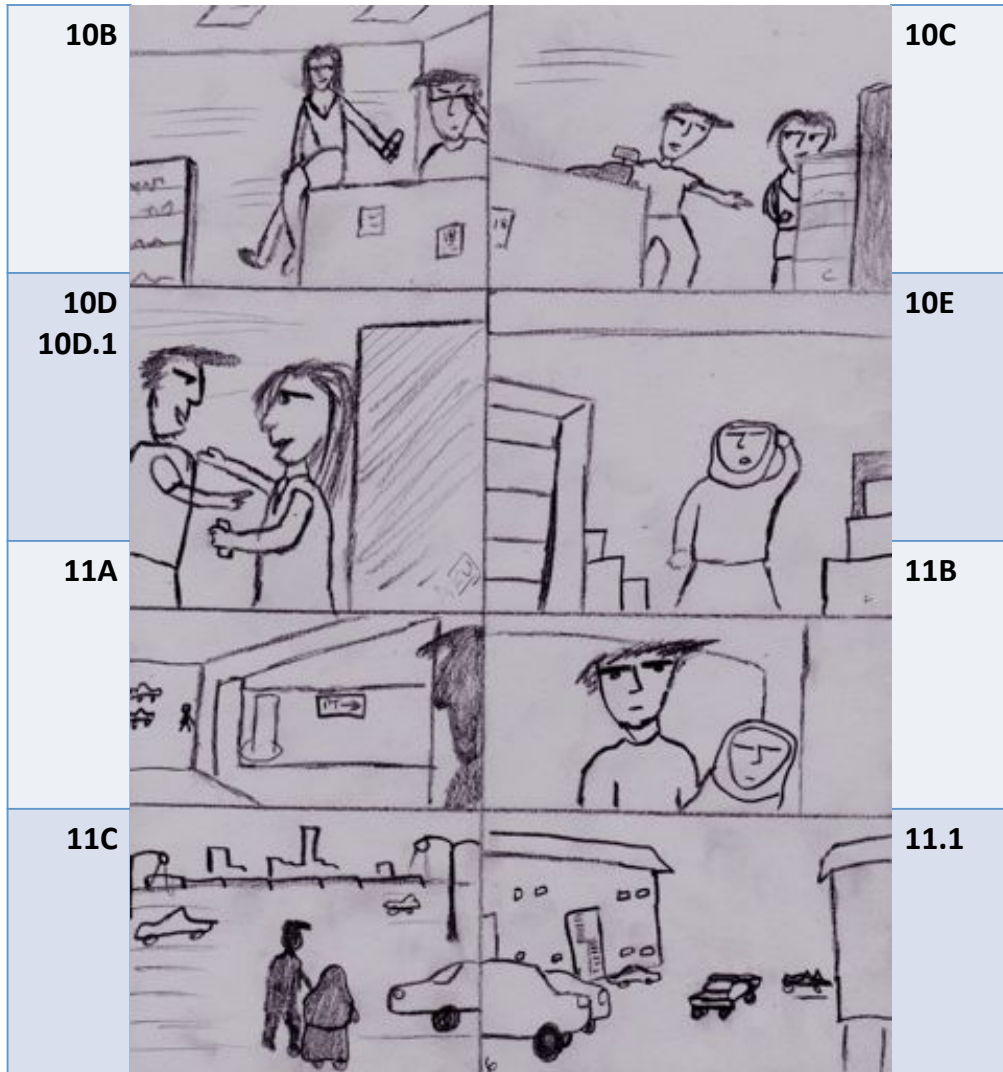
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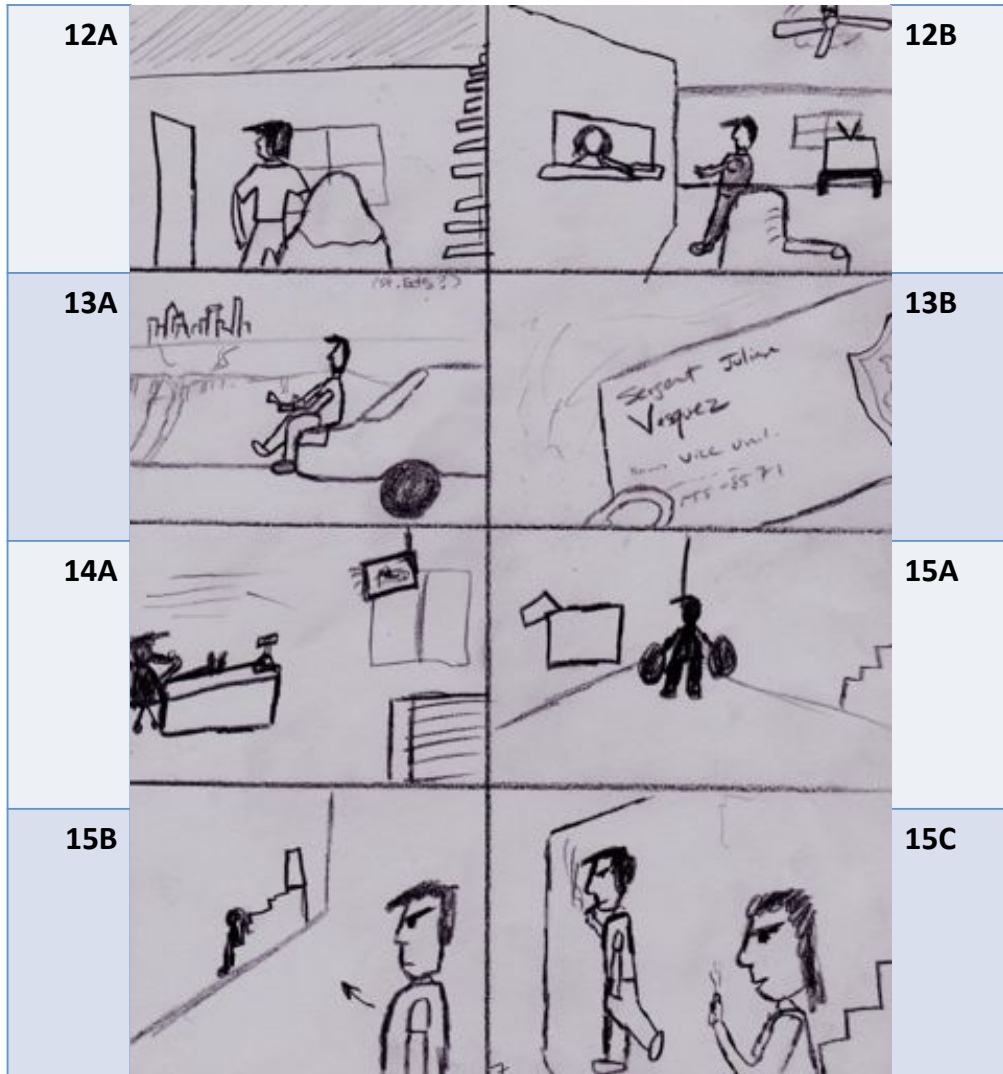
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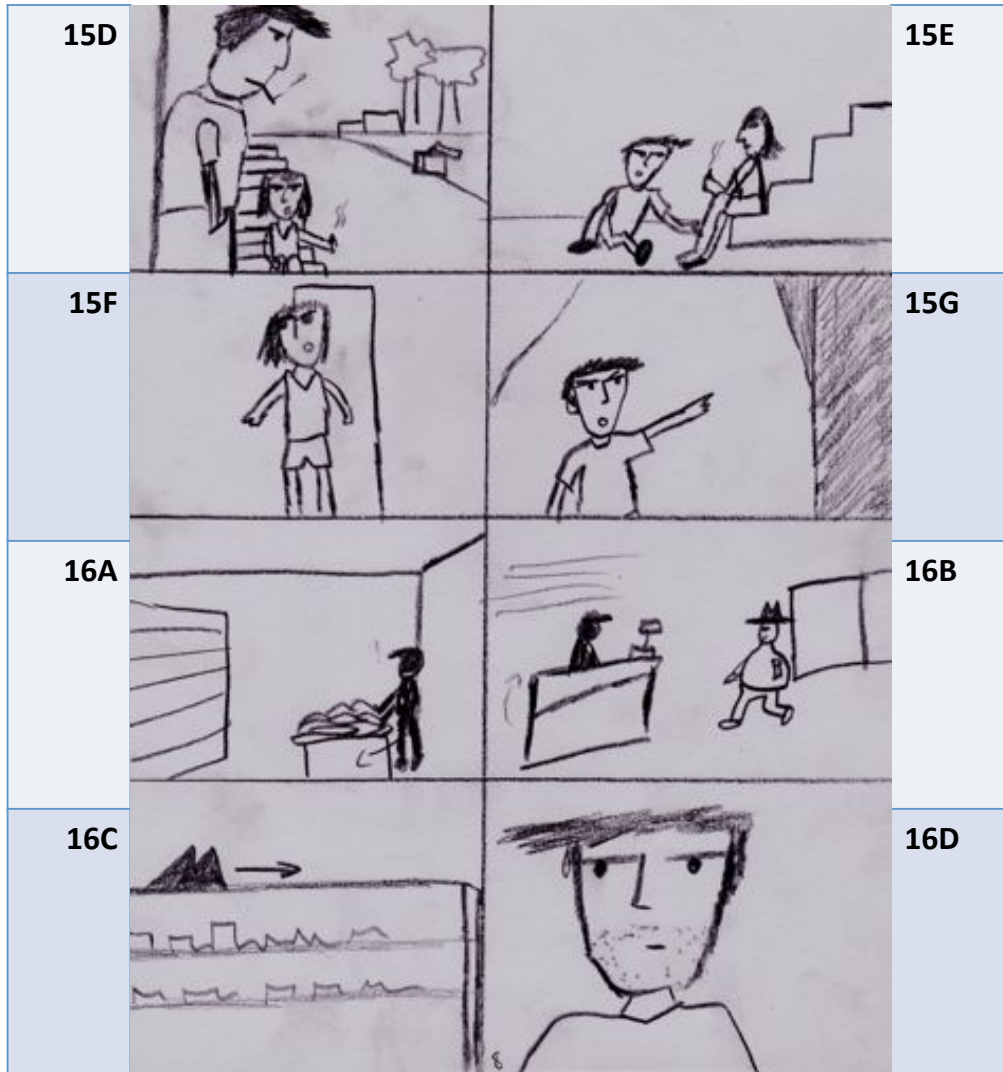
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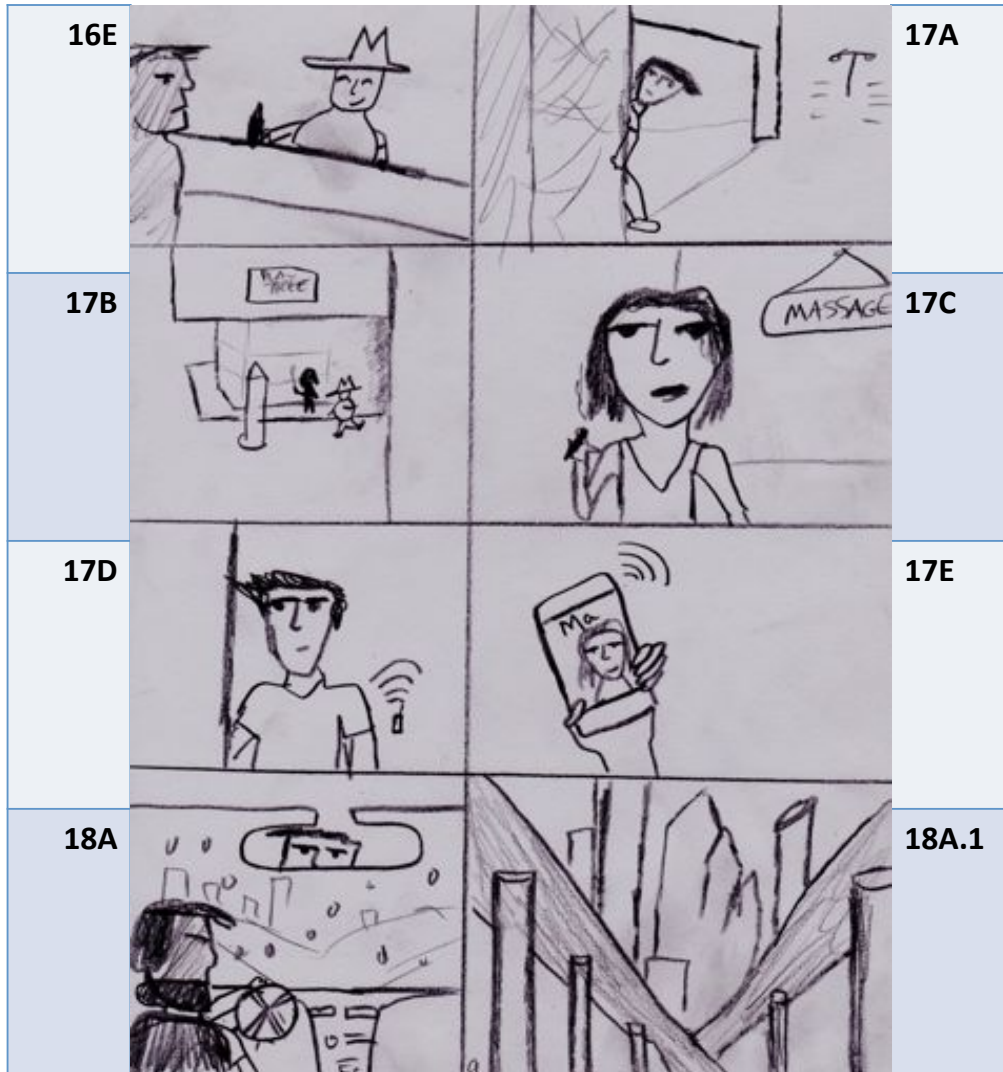
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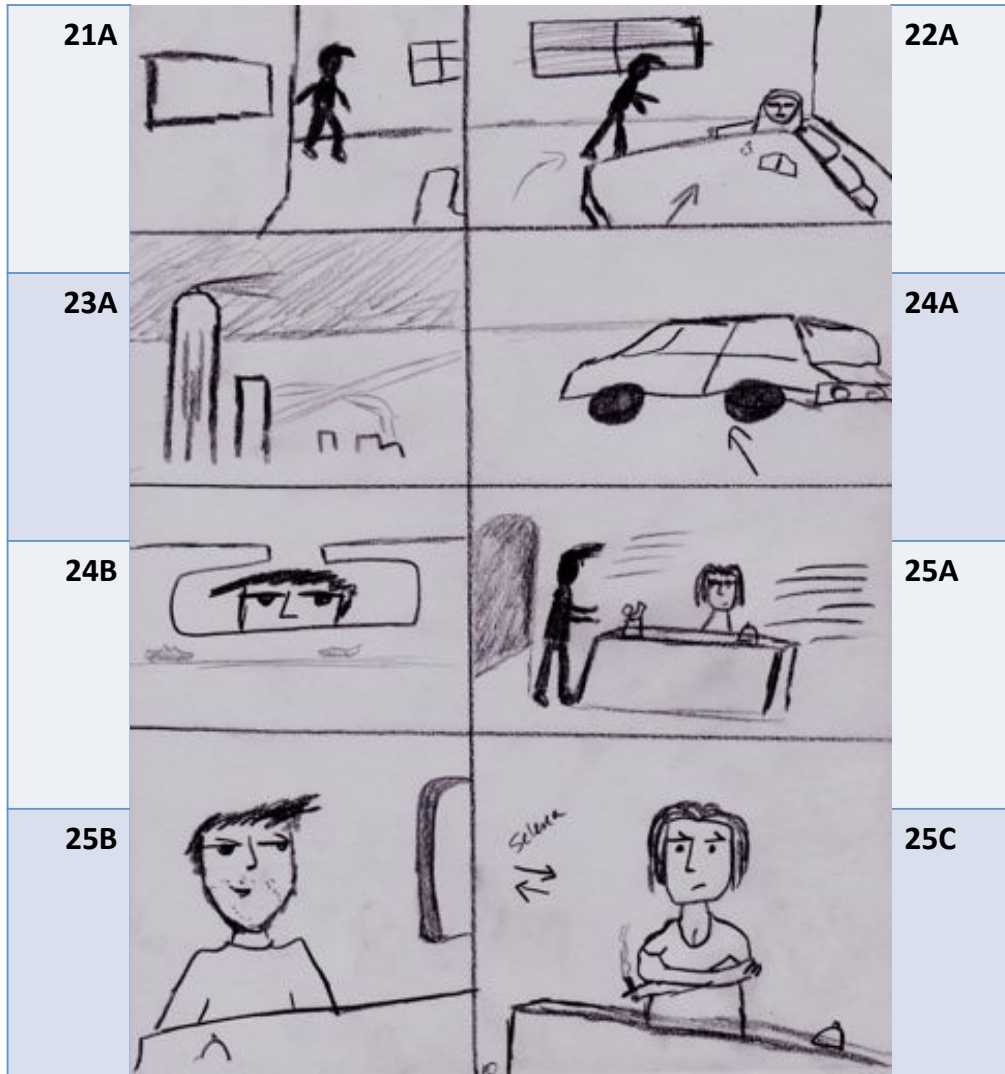
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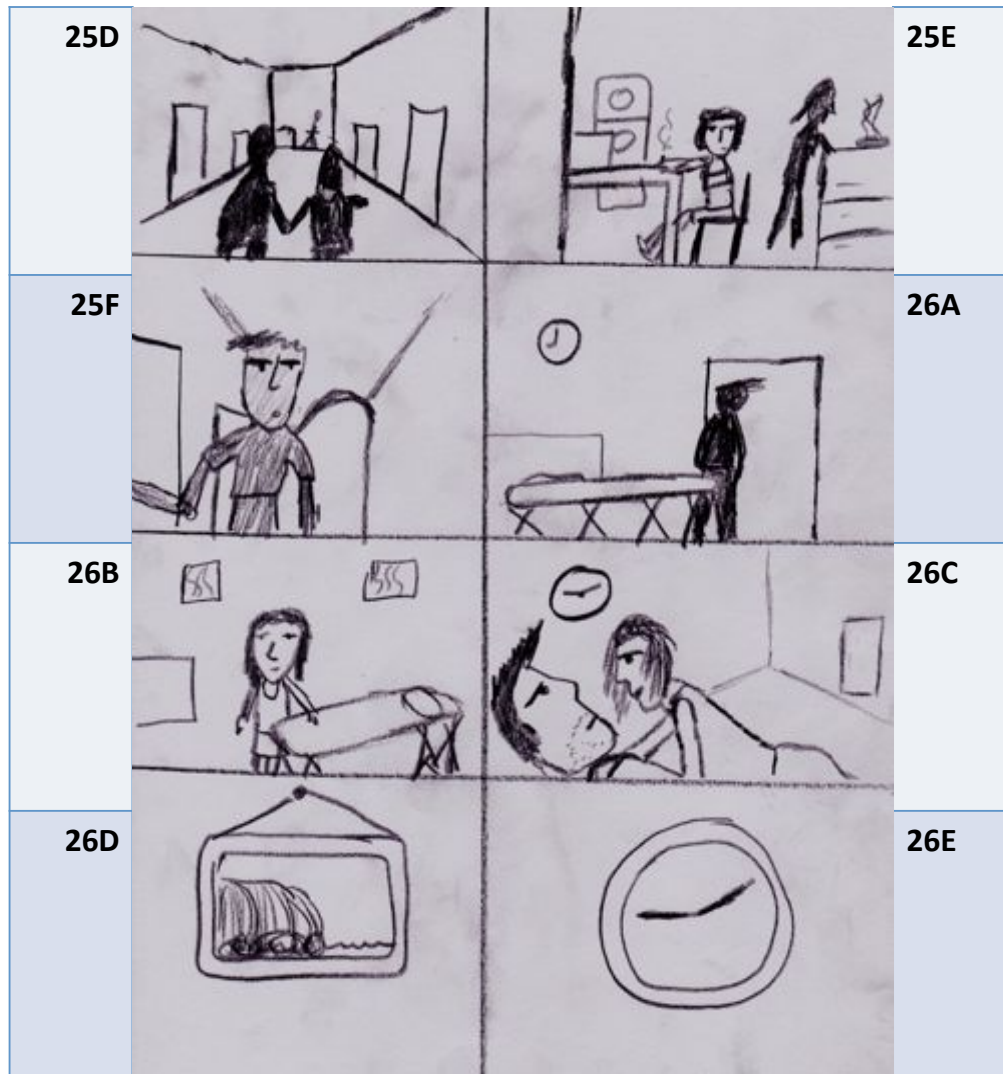
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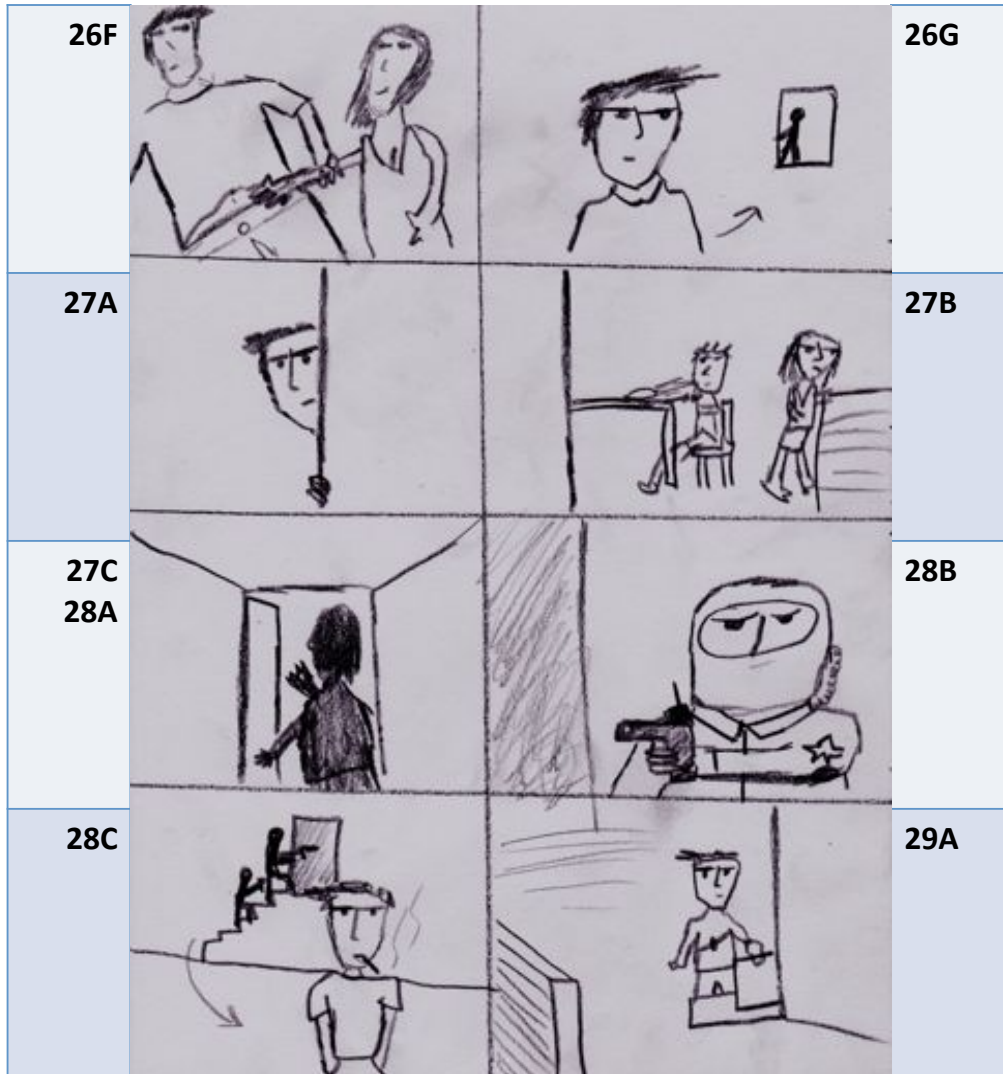
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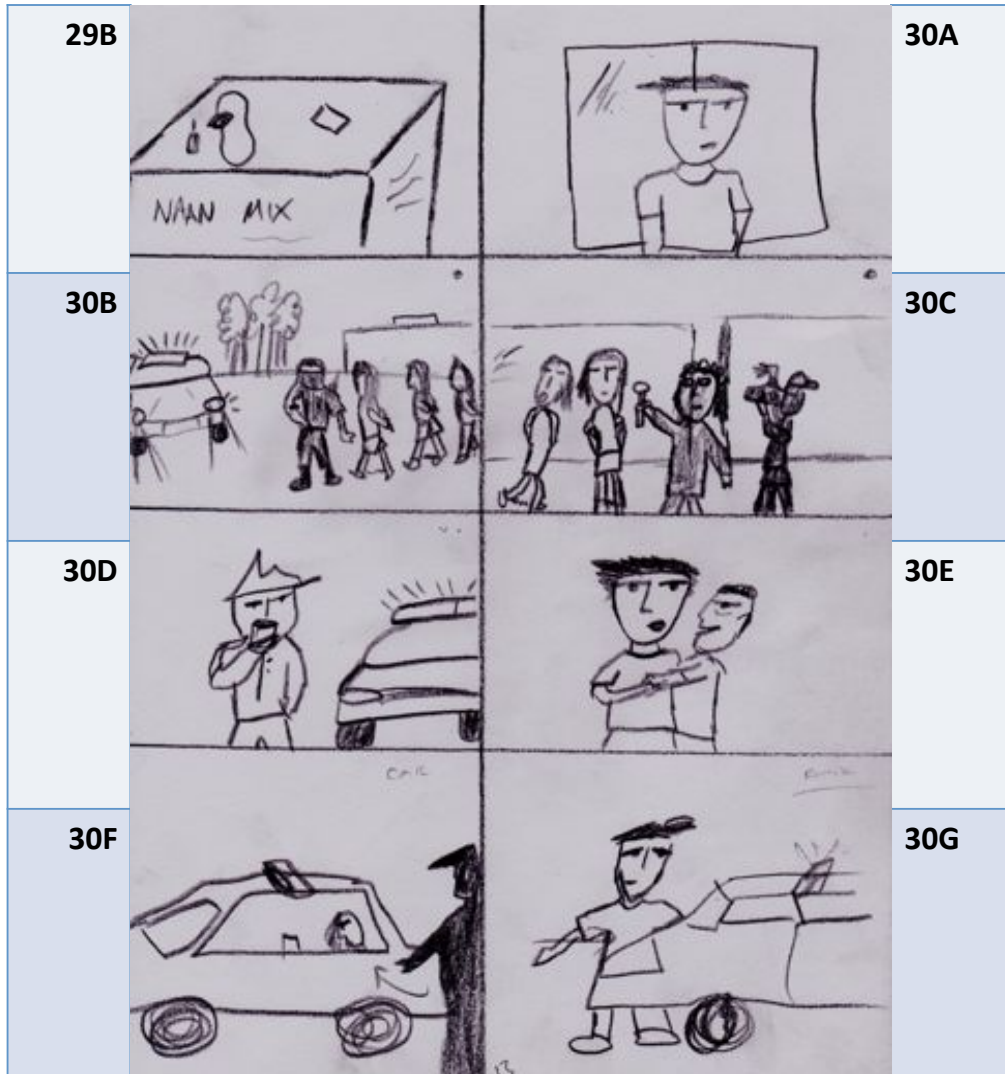
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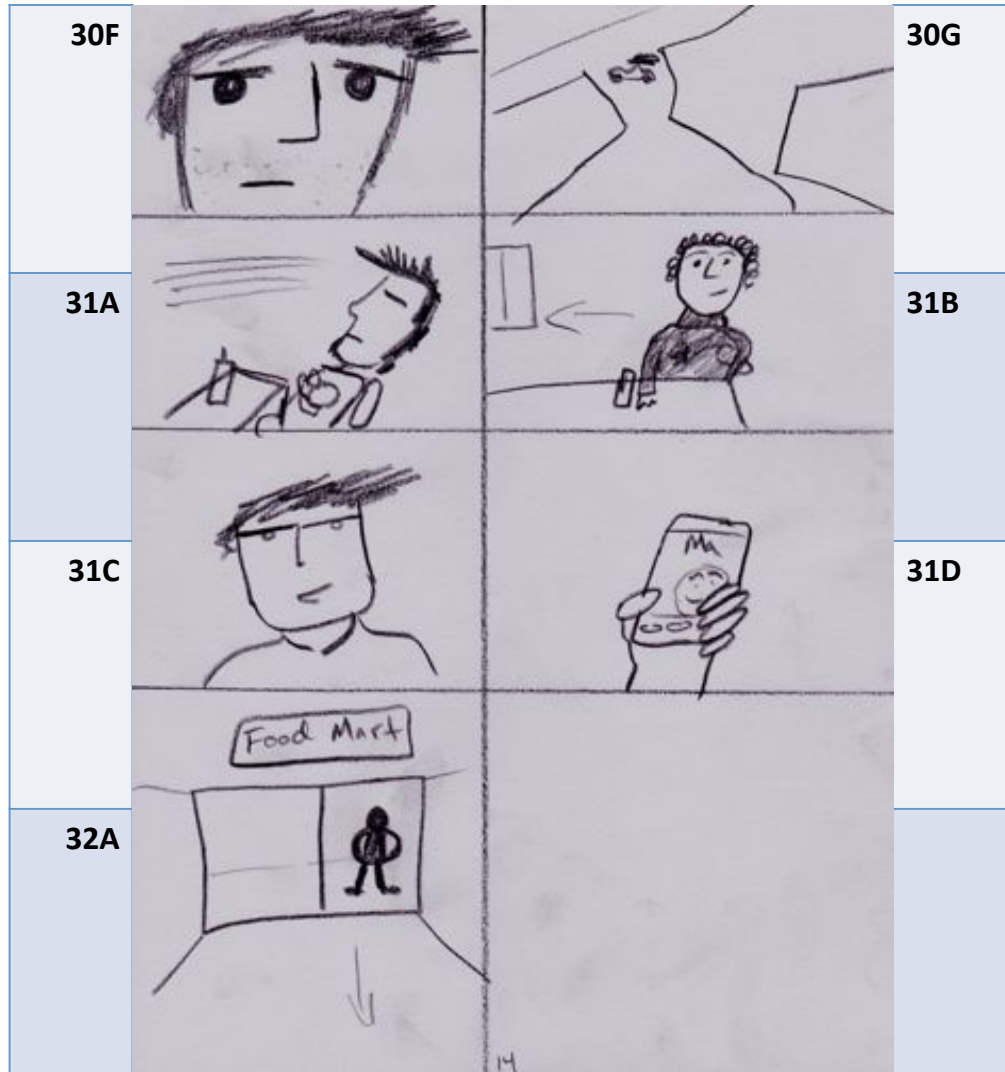
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Sunny Square



Notes:

Budget

The following budget represents an approximation of the film's actual, evolving budget.

BUDGET - *Sunny Square*

HD Video, color 12:1 shooting ratio

8 weeks prep 10 weeks post

Above the Line

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Producer	1000	1 FLAT		1,000		\$1,000
Director/Writer	500	1 FLAT		500		500
Cast						0
-Jamal	100	9 days			900	900
-Selena	100	5 days			500	500
-Vasquez	100	2 days			200	200
-Jamal's Mother	100	2 days			200	200
-Child 1	100	2 days			200	200
-Child 2	100	1 days			100	100
Casting Director	1500	1 FLAT	1,500			1,500
Talent Travel & Lodging	2000	1 Allow	\$2,000			2,000
Subtotals			\$3,500	\$1,500	\$2,100	\$7,100
Fringe benefits	19%					389
			TOTAL Above the Line			\$7,489

Below the Line

Production Crew (STUDENT)

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Director of Photography	800	2 weeks			\$1,600	\$1,600
Assistant Director	300	2 weeks		600		600
1st AC	300	2 weeks		600		600
Key Grip	200	2 weeks		400		400
Gaffer	250	2 weeks		500		500
Sound Recordist	150	2 weeks		300		300
SUBTOTALS			\$0	\$2,400	\$1,600	\$4,000

Post-Production Crew (STUDENT)

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Editing Team	2000	1 FLAT		\$2,000		\$2,000
Colorist	3000	1 FLAT		3000		3000
Sound Designer	300	1 FLAT		300		300
Sound Mixer	600	3 days		1800		1800
Music Composer	3000	1 FLAT	2000	\$1,000		3000
SUBTOTALS			\$2,000	\$8,100	\$0	\$10,100
LABOR SUBTOTALS			\$2,000	\$10,500	\$1,600	\$14,100
			BTL Labor Subtotal			\$14,100

Pre-Production

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Set Construction	300	1 Allow	300			300
Props	300	1 Allow	300			300
Wardrobe	300	1 Allow	300			300
Hard-drives	100	3 Drives	300			300
SUBTOTALS			\$1,200	\$0	\$0	
			Pre-Production Subtotal			\$1,200

Production

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Arri Alexa	1000	2 weeks		\$2,000		\$2,000
Lens Package	500	2 weeks		1,000		1000
Lighting Package	300	2 weeks		600		600
Grip Equipment	200	2 weeks		400		400
Rental Truck	225	2 weeks	450			450
Sound Equipment	200	2 weeks		400		400
Craft Services	30	9 days	270			270
Expendables	100	2 weeks	200			200
Houston Travel	150	2 days	300			300
Security Escort	75	2 days	150			150
Food Catering	5	300 meals	1,500			1500
Comprehensive Insurance				1,000		1000
SUBTOTALS			\$2,870	\$5,400	\$0	
			Production Subtotal			\$8,270

Post-Production

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Editing Suite	200	10 weeks		\$2,000		2,000
Color Correction Suite	200	1 week		500		500
Hard-drives (Back-up)	100		100			100
SUBTOTALS			\$100	\$2,500	\$0	
			Post-Production Subtotal			\$2,600

Distribution

	Rate (\$)	Units	Cash	In-Kind	Deferred	Totals
Website	500	1 week	500			500
DVDs	200	1 allow		200		200
Festival Fees	200	1 allow	200			400
Postal Fees	200	1 allow	200			200
SUBTOTALS			\$900	\$200	\$0	
			Distribution Subtotal			\$1,300

TOTAL Below the Line 27470

ATL + BTL Total 34959

Contingency @ 10% 3496

(w/all extra fees) **TOTAL BUDGET \$38,454**

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Vita

Hammad Rizvi is an award-winning filmmaker based in Austin, Texas. He has traveled around the world - having lived in the Middle East as an expatriate - but considers Texas home. After obtaining a finance degree from the McCombs School of Business, Hammad spent time in Seattle working and studying. Soon after he left to enroll at the University of Texas at Austin's RTF program, where he completed his MFA in film production. Hammad is currently working as an editor, writing a feature film, and planning where to travel next.

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This report was typed by Hammad Qamar Rizvi.