

SOUL TO SQUEEZE

Written by
Alex Arabian

Based on true events

Steelhead Productions, LLC
651 N. El Camino Real, #203
San Mateo, CA 94401
650-740-8885
alex.arabian89@gmail.com

March 15, 2021

"[Azerbaijan's] monstrous crimes are not a clash of civilizations or cultures, but a continuation of the [Armenian] Genocide stemming from Pan-Turkism's anti-Armenian policies." - Historian Edward Danielyan

"It's extraordinarily destructive, emotionally and psychologically wounding reality for an Armenian community worldwide - ten million people - to have to deal with assaults of the perpetrator regime's legacy a century later. In fact, it's one of the most extreme situations of its kind." - Author Peter Balakian, "Intent to Destroy"

INT. RICKSHAW STOP - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

HAIG (23), fit, clean-cut, olive-skinned with a round but distinguished facial bone-structure, and AMIRA (35), jet-black hair, dark-olive skin, slender face, prepare to perform a live set.

JERRY (65), beer belly, jeans, and a black t-shirt, walks onstage.

JERRY

Lads and lasses, as a dedicated fan of their music, mostly 'cause they always bring a giant crowd to my club when they book a show here--

--The audience buzzes with laughter.

JERRY (CONT'D)

It's my sincere pleasure to introduce, "Amira & Haig!"

Ground-vibrating applause follows as Jerry leaves the stage and the two musicians walk onstage.

HAIG

Thank you, Jerry.

Haig plays a few scales on piano as Amira stands in front of her microphone, swaying back and forth.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to Amira)

You sure you're good to play?

AMIRA

(to Haig)

I'm fine. I gotta go to the bathroom real quick.

LATER

The audience grows restless. Slowly, the volume of chatter decreases as the crowd thins out.

HAIG

(to audience)

Hi, folks. We're going to get started in no time. One sec.

Haig walks to the bathroom and knocks three times.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Amira! I can't hold the audience
any longer.

Silence.

Haig knocks louder.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Amira! Are you ok?
(to himself)
Fuck!

Haig tries to open the locked door. He throws his bodyweight
against it three times until the lock busts and the door
swings open.

Amira sits on the toilet, unconscious, with a needle stuck in
her arm.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Amira wakes up with Haig holding her hand.

AMIRA
What happened?

HAIG
You overdosed. Jesus fucking
Christ, I thought you were dead.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)
I thought you were done with this
shit.

Amira pulls her hand apart from Haig's.

AMIRA
Is Cara still with the sitter?

HAIG
Yes.

Amira fights back tears.

EXT. HAIG'S BALCONY - DAY

Haig and Amira, black sweatpants, grey hoodie with the edges
of its elongated sleeves in the firm grip of either hand, sit
on his balcony, passing around a joint.

HAIG
 (deadpan)
 Ok. But let's just say Kevin was
 the Zodiac Killer.

Amira inhales the joint and coughs.

AMIRA
 Change the fucking subject, dude.

HAIG
 I'm just kidding, freakazoid.

Amira passes the joint to Haig.

AMIRA
 You rolled a nice one, freakazoid.

Haig nods in acknowledgment as he takes a puff of the joint.

HAIG
 (exhaling)
 I'm hungover. Excellent
 craftsmanship is paramount.

AMIRA
 Speaking of *Zodiac*, how's *The
 Chronicle*?

HAIG
 Same old. It's a bunch of
 egomaniacs, failed artists, abusive
 editors...toxic hierarchical
 relationships...It's a 160-year-old
 publication, so I'd say that's
 pretty goddamn progressive.

Haig hands the joint to Amira.

AMIRA
 Fucking Mark. Why the fuck do we
 need a pop culture critic and a
 film critic?
 (sarcastically)
 Like, stay in your pop culture
 lane, Markus.

HAIG
 (overly-exaggerated,
 generic impression)
 Get your finger off of my
 zeitgeist, bro!

Haig and Amira crack up as Amira passes the joint to Haig.

AMIRA
 Fuck 'em all to hell, bro.

Silence.

HAIG
 I really miss playing together.

Haig hands the joint to Amira, who inhales it deeply.

AMIRA
 Me too, Haig.
 (beat)
 We had a good run, man.

Haig looks down at the ground.

Amira shakes her leg to the beat of an unheard metronome, occasionally scratching her arms as if the razor burn from shaving her arms were unbearable.

HAIG
 Hey. Maybe you shouldn't be
 blazing?

AMIRA
 (massaging her jaw)
 Please don't start micromanaging
 me, dude. I'm already doing the
 steps...
 (with bass)
 ...which reminds me - I could
 really use GRANDMA'S KHACHKAR for
 that--

Amira puts the joint out on the ground, her sleeve inching up to reveal track marks that halfway resemble gas station locations on a highway roadmap.

HAIG
 Oh, don't start with the khachkar.
 I got Grandma's diasporan khachkar,
 you got Grandpa's Hamidian journal.
 How was I supposed to know you
 wanted the cross?

AMIRA
 (curtly)
 Alright. Whatever, dude.

Haig picks the joint crutch off of the ground and places it in the ashtray on the table in between Haig and Amira.

HAIG

I know we had a good run. Couldn't we have a better run, though?

Amira rolls her eyes.

AMIRA

I got out. I'm doing me now.

HAIG

(condescendingly)
Oh, are you? Really?

AMIRA

Yup. And I don't need you bringing me down with your bullshit nostalgia routine.

Amira opens her mouth to say something else, but shakes her head in silence instead.

EXT. FORT POINT - NIGHT

Haig jogs along the ocean toward the Golden Gate Bridge, headphones in ears.

He looks at his running app to check his progress.

ON THE SCREEN

4.24 miles

HAIG

sprints for 100 more meters before winding down his run.

INT. AMIRA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Haig, Amira, and CARA (5), short, straight, blonde hair, bushy eyebrows, and seemingly oversized eyes that halfway resemble the subject of a Margaret Keane portrait, cram together to cook dinner in the tiny kitchen.

Haig sings as he sautés chicken and an assortment of vegetables in a pan.

HAIG

*When a moon hits your eye like a
big pizza pie / That's amore...*

Cara looks up at Haig and smiles.

CARA
What song is that, Uncle Haig?

HAIG
That's an old Dean Martin tune.

AMIRA
Sweetie, go set the table.

CARA
Is daddy coming?

AMIRA
(to Cara)
No, he's working late tonight.

As Cara sets the table, Amira inches closer to Haig.

AMIRA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Fucking degenerate.

HAIG
I'm so sorry, Amira.
(beat)
How much did they find on him?

Cara walks behind Amira, attempting to eavesdrop.

AMIRA
Oh, he's felony fucked.

HAIG
Jesus.

CARA
Who's Melanie?

AMIRA
Cara, how long have you been
listening?

CARA
Not long.

HAIG
You're sneaky.

CARA
People say I'm pretty much Violet
from *The Incredibles*.

Amira rolls her eyes, smiling.

AMIRA

This is her superhero phase. I don't know if it'll ever end.

HAIG

(to Cara)

Really? You can turn invisible?

Cara nods.

Haig squints at Cara.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Are you sure about that?

CARA

Yep. Whenever I want. My mom and dad barely even know when I'm here.

Haig stops cooking for a second and looks at Amira, who refuses to look up from the ground as an overt blush appears across her cheeks.

HAIG

That's really cool, Cara.

(beat)

Can you finish setting the table?
I'm almost done with the chicken.

Cara walks to the dinner table.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to Amira)

How you feeling?

AMIRA

(glancing around the kitchen)

I mean, it's this massive weight off my shoulders since I've been clean, you know? Thinking straighter. Going to my meetings.

(hastily)

I have to go to the bathroom real quick. Watch the stove.

Amira leaves the kitchen.

Haig walks over to Cara.

HAIG

(to Cara)

Does she usually just get up and go to the bathroom in the middle of things like that?

CARA

Sorta. She says she has a small internal pee container.

HAIG

(rolling his eyes)

Her bladder is fine.

Haig pulls out a stack of black and white fliers. The fliers read, "One half of the famous 'Amira and Haig' is looking for a new bandmate!! Extra points for singers! Call (415)555-8585 for more information! - Haig Hagopian"

HAIG (CONT'D)

What do you think of these fliers?

Cara examines the fliers with great intensity for only a few seconds.

CARA

(matter-of-factly)

They need to be more colorful like my construction paper, Uncle Haig!

Amira returns to the kitchen.

Haig looks at her and shakes his head.

AMIRA

(blushing)

What?

(glancing at fliers)

I see it didn't take you long to move on.

HAIG

Nice subject change.

Cara looks back and forth at her mother and uncle, intently, attempting to decipher their conversation.

INT. AMIRA'S FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Haig, Amira, and Cara eat ice cream out of the carton on the couch as *Real Housewives* plays on the TV.

CARA

What happened to Grandma and Grandpa?

Amira and Haig exchange cautious glances.

AMIRA

Um. They had us when they were really old, sweetheart.

HAIG

Yeah. They passed away from old people stuff. But they would have adored you.

Haig passes Cara the ice cream carton as she scrunches her nose and brings her eyebrows together in dissatisfaction of her familial investigation.

CARA

And what about their moms and dads.

Haig mouths "fuck" to Amira.

HAIG

Oh, that's probably a story for when you're older--

AMIRA

Grandma and Grandpa's parents were murdered by Turkish people.

HAIG

(taken aback)

Jesus, Amira.

Cara's eyes glaze over as Amira and Haig proceed to explain their family history to her.

INT. HAIG'S CAR - NIGHT

Haig drives alone in his blue Subaru Forester on the highway.

There is neither a moon nor point of reference in the sky. The only other light source, other than the headlights on the other side of the highway, comes from the San Francisco cityscape in the rearview mirror.

The oscillating headlights from the drivers passing by Haig intermittently reflect off of his face in flashes of moments, revealing his uncommon profile. His protruding brows seamlessly blend with his large, Roman nose.

As he turns on the radio, a NEWSCASTER's voice carries throughout the vehicle.

NEWSCASTER (ON RADIO)
 On September 26, twenty Armenian soldiers and five civilians were killed in an apparent drone attack in Baku, Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed breakaway state between Armenia and Azerbaijan also known as Artsakh.

Haig places his hand over his mouth in horror.

NEWSCASTER (ON RADIO) (CONT'D)
 Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh fear that Azerbaijan's growing Turkish-backed military presence in the region echoes the deadly pan-Turkish expansionist policy of 1915.

Haig turns the radio off, pulls his phone out of his pocket, and makes a phone call.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Amira pulls out her ringing cellphone and answers.

AMIRA
 Hey.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

HAIG
 Hey. What's up, freakazoid?

AMIRA
 I'm still at home with Cara.

HAIG
 I'm kinda second-guessing giving Cara "The Talk."

Amira rolls her eyes.

AMIRA
 Mom and dad told us at that age and we turned out fine, right?

HAIG
 (facetiously)
 Oh, yeah. We're perfect.

AMIRA
 She doesn't even know what Red
 Sunday is, dude.

HAIG
 Yeah. But, like, she could look
 that shit up online any time and
 see all those fucked up
 descriptions and images. That could
 really mess her--

Silence.

AMIRA
 Haig? You there?

The flashes become more frequent as the drivers whisk by. The blinding sea of oncoming headlights becomes an ocean blocking Haig's vision, blending together before complete darkness and nothingness encompass him as he loses consciousness.

His back overarches, his head jolts back, and his eyes roll upward into the back of his head. ARGH-AWK-GAK! He struggles for air as his body seizes, his arms unpredictably overextending in either direction.

His right arm grasps the headrest of the passenger's seat as he convulses, increasingly violently. His left arm grabs the left side of the steering wheel, turning it sharply downwards and inwards.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Forester suddenly veers left into the center divider, causing the car to flip three times before it slides on its top as Haig continues to seize.

Haig's eyes roll back into his head as he seemingly loses consciousness.

Darkness.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Haig, Amira, and Cara eat ice cream out of the carton on the couch as *Real Housewives* plays on the TV.

AMIRA

You see, Grandpa escaped a bunch of massacres in the 1890s on a boat from Turkey, to Russia, to, finally, San Francisco.

HAIG

Before the Turks tried to completely exterminate us, like, twenty years later, of course.

Cara suddenly drops her ice cream spoon in the carton.

CROSS-FADE TO ARMENIAN GENOCIDE:

EXT. CONSTANTINOPLE, TURKEY - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Ottoman soldiers and former Hamidiye loyalists raid the homes of 250 Armenian community leaders, some of them sexually and physically assaulting the women and children, even killing some of the their captives' entire families.

SUPERIMPOSE: RED SUNDAY. APRIL 24, 1915. THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE HAS BEGUN.

HAIG (V.O.)

Grandma's journey here was a lot tougher than Grandpa's was. She faced the extermination a couple decades later. The Genocide.

CARA (V.O.)

Genocide?

HAIG (V.O.)

The organized, violent elimination of our people. And it's still happening today by Turkey's friend, Azerbaijan.

Particularly brutal are the Hamidiye, who don't discriminate whom they kill based on gender or age.

INT. HOME - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

HAIG'S GREAT GRANDFATHER (35), prominent nose, well-built, appearing swarthy against the home's crepuscular walls, shoots two Hamidiye soldiers dead.

His daughter, HAIG'S GRANDMOTHER (5), minute figure, white dress, dark-skinned, bug eyes, protects her brother, HAIG'S GREAT UNCLE (3), skin Artsakh-brown, black, curly hair.

Shielding both of them with her body is their mother, HAIG'S GREAT GRANDMOTHER (30), fair-skinned, gaunt, tattered bed garments.

Haig's Great Grandfather loosely grasps a shaking gun in one hand, and desperately clenches the same BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR that Haig possesses in the present day in the other hand as he stares in utter terror.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER, SYRIA - LATE AFTERNOON - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

Starving Armenians march in exile along the Euphrates, while rotting corpses lay scattered among them across the ground.

SUPERIMPOSE: THE DEATH MARCHES. JULY 4, 1915.

HAIG (V.O.)

Grandma survived Red Sunday in Constantinople, after which she was forced to march without food in the desert along the Euphrates in Syria.

Haig's Great Grandfather, Great Grandmother - who holds the BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR, or Armenian Cross - Great Uncle, and Grandmother step around the bodies of their people as they form a line connected by each other's begrimed hands.

EXT. 101 SOUTH - NIGHT - [PRESENT DAY]

A HUSBAND (50) and WIFE (45) pull over immediately to investigate the accident. They run toward Haig's car and pull him out, laying him on his back as he comes to.

LATER

Ambulances, firemen, police, and concerned citizens arrive at the scene as Haig slowly regains consciousness. The flickering red and blue lights surrounding him appear hazy, hallucinogenic, and illusory in his post-seizure state.

A service dog licks Haig's face as a PARAMEDIC (35) shines a blinding light in his eyes. Haig's breathing is fast, shallow, and wheezed.

HAIG
What's going on? What happened?

PARAMEDIC
Take deep breaths and try to stay calm. Alright?

HAIG
What? What happened to me--

PARAMEDIC
You've been in an accident.

HAIG
What do you mean?

Haig grabs his back.

HAIG (CONT'D)
I'm in a lot of pain.
(scowling)
I think I fucked up my back...and my arm...I can barely move my jaw...Fuck!

PARAMEDIC
Deep breaths, remember?

The paramedics slowly shimmy Haig onto a stretcher and into the ambulance, tightening the strap as he winces in pain.

HAIG
(hyperventilating)
I can't breathe! Somebody please loosen the strap!

The paramedics loosen Haig's strap.

The doors slam shut, creating a deafening noise.

LATER

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig lays on a pre-surgery hospital bed as a DOCTOR (40) speaks to him.

DOCTOR
Individuals with hippocampal sclerosis have similar initial symptoms and rates of dementia progression to those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease...

Haig's eyes glaze over as he stares at the mechanics of the doctor's mouth while he moves lips as he speaks.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

A diagnosis of hippocampal sclerosis can have a significant effect on the life of patients because of the high mortality, morbidity, and social impact related to epilepsy...

The doctor speaks for a while more before realizing Haig has fallen asleep.

He leaves the room, the reflecting light on Haig's face in the hospital bed from the outside hallway diminishing as the hinged doors in front of him slowly swing to a close.

INT. HAIG'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Complete darkness.

HAIG

(to himself)

The car hit the center divider...

Slowly, one can barely make out a shadowy silhouette of a figure standing in a windowless room void of light.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

And then, he died...

A congested throat clears, temporarily filling the void with an echoing grunt.

The figure lets out a flustered sigh reminiscent of wind billowing through a thick forest on a blustery evening.

A light switch ignites the room. The relentless electricity screams as the light reveals a claustrophobic bathroom with an anemically white aesthetic.

HAIG (28), overgrown beard, 20 pounds overweight, wearing nothing but red tartan boxers, slowly mopes toward the sink.

SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE YEARS LATER.

Haig looks at himself in the mirror, exposing his abnormally hairy chest, unkempt facial hair, and unruly hair.

He looks tired, with charcoal shades under his melancholy eyes.

HAIG

(to himself)

Hi, how are you? Haig Hagopian,
nice to meet you.

(clearing throat)

Hello, I'm Haig.

(pretending to laugh)

Thank you, but the pleasure is all
mine!

(beat)

What the fuck are you doing?

Haig places his elbows on either side of the sink, then his head in his hands, running his fingers through his greasy hair.

He looks back up into the mirror, his hair even more unruly now. A post-it note stuck to it reads, "Don't miss Chronicle deadline today!!!!"

Haig sings a haunting, albeit brief, a cappella verse from the song, "The Partisan" by Leonard Cohen.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

*Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing /
Through the graves the wind is
blowing / Freedom soon will come /
Then we'll come from the shadows...*

His angelic voice and perfect pitch offset his moroseness.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Haig sits at his electric piano against his bay windows, continuing to sing "The Partisan" while he plays piano, glancing aimlessly out the window.

Haig gets up from the piano and walks to his couch, opening his laptop on his coffee table.

He cracks his fingers and neck before ultimately closing the laptop and grabbing the TV remote.

As he's about to turn the TV on, Haig bites the remote and grabs his tooth as he winces in pain from the plastic against his enamel-thin dentures.

He sends an email on his laptop instead.

HAIG (V.O.)

*Hi Jane,
Please find attached the draft of
my Prop 10 piece. I decided to go
with the quote from the small
business instead, as the other one
made the story come off as a bit
too sensationalistic.
Thanks for your patience. Been a
bit of an adjustment having to work
from home.
Haig*

Haig pulls out medical marijuana from a container on his coffee table. He packs flower in a pipe, smokes it, and works on his *Chronicle* piece.

LATER

He closes his laptop, pulls out his phone, and brings up Amira's contact.

He drafts a text message.

HAIG (V.O.)

*Hey. I know it's been a while. But
I really want to start playing
again. I miss you.*

Haig deletes the text message without sending it.

EXT. MISSION DISTRICT - DAY

Haig staples fliers - now neon and varied in color, appearing almost blinding in the sun - to every tree, lamppost, and electrical post he passes on the sidewalks of the bemused Mission neighborhoods.

Haig's fliers now read, "Haig Hagopian, formerly the frontman of 'Amira and Haig,' needs a new bandmate. Extra points for guitarists and singers. Please call (415)555-8585 for more information."

Haig happens upon one of his fliers on a lamppost that's been drawn on. It reads, "Fuck Kardashian Nation! Turk AZ! Azerbaijan! 'Our main enemies are Armenians of the world.' - Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan."

Haig tears up the fliers into halves.

HAIG
(to himself)
The car hit the center divider.

Haig tears up the fliers into fourths.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to himself, louder)
And then, he died.

Haig crumbles up the fourths into tiny pieces.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to himself, louder yet)
The car hit the center divider!

Haig throws the pieces to the ground.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to himself, screaming at
the top of his lungs)
And then, he died!

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

AMIRA (40), gaunt with frazzled hair, frantically searches for half-smoked cigarettes strewn throughout the dank and grimy rooms of her apartment.

She trips over an empty liquor bottle and hits her right temple on the ground.

AMIRA
(to herself)
God fucking damnit!

She continues to peruse the ash-laden ground for a cigarette before finally relinquishing control of her half-baked mission.

As blood weeps from her wounded temple, Amira pulls her phone out of her pocket and attempts to text Haig through her shattered screen.

AMIRA (V.O.)
*April 24 is coming up. We should do
another Armenian Genocide benefit
show...for old times' sake.*

Amira deletes the text message without sending it and walks up the stairs and into her bedroom.

INT. AMIRA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Out comes the heroin kit from under her bed. Rubber band, lighter, and needle.

She also sings the lyrics, a cappella, to "The Partisan" by Leonard Cohen.

AMIRA
 (to herself)
*Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing /
 Through the graves the wind is
 blowing / Freedom soon will come /
 Then we'll come from the shadows...*

Her euphoric voice echoes throughout the bedroom.

After Amira fills the needle with heroin, she stabs herself in the arm, over and over, trying to find a vein, before finally succeeding.

Her eyes roll into the back of her head and she takes five final, diminishing breaths before she CEASES TO EXIST.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Haig sits up from his bed to examine a picture of Amira and him as kids on the nightstand. He receives a phone call on his cellphone. As he answers, he glances up at his Grandmother's BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR, hung above his bed.

HAIG
 This is Haig.

INT. CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - MORNING

CINDY (33), casually dressed, sits behind a desk, hunched over.

CINDY
 Hi, Mr. Hagopian. This is Cindy
 from Child Protective Services.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

Haig let's out a hoary-sounding grunt.

HAIG
 (passive aggressively)
 Cindy.

(MORE)

HAIG (CONT'D)

We go through this every time. I'm not the best person to contact for this shit--

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian--

HAIG

I just don't know how you except me to--

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian--

HAIG

I haven't spoken to her in...like...five years--

CINDY

This is important--

HAIG

She neither wants help nor me in her fucked up life.

(to himself, trailing off)

Her fried brain conflates the two.

I can't be a part of it. I need to--

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian! This is about Cara.

HAIG

What? Did something happen to her?

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian...Amira passed away.

Haig mutes his phone and begins pacing throughout his apartment, heavily breathing.

CINDY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry for your loss...

Haig bursts into tears on his bedroom room floor. Then, he grabs the khachkar from his wall to squeeze and a pillow from his bed and screams as loud as he can into it.

CINDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Mr. Hagopian?

Haig unmutes his phone.

HAIG
 (voice shaky)
 Yeah, I'm here.

CINDY
 Again, I'm sorry--

HAIG
 How did she die?

CINDY
 She relapsed and overdosed.

Haig runs his fingers through his hair, slowly shakes his head, and clenches his khachkar.

CINDY (CONT'D)
 Mr. Hagopian, I realize that this is awful timing, but Amira listed you as Cara's legal guardian.

HAIG
 What? That makes no sense. Why would she do that? I'm disabled.

CINDY
 Ah. Yes. And how is your epilepsy?

HAIG
 Put it this way: If I have enough seizures, I need a super advanced brain surgery that could actually kill me. Did you think about that?

CINDY
 Because of your hippocampal sclerosis?

HAIG
 Yes. Exactly. Like, what was she thinking?
 (to himself, trailing off)
 Oh. Right. She was probably high when she did this--

CINDY
 We are aware of your condition and how it may affect your ability to take care of Cara.

HAIG
 (ignoring Cindy)
But if I don't have a lot of major seizures, I'll be totally fine.
 (MORE)

HAIG (CONT'D)

Which shouldn't be a problem
because I'm on medication.

(beat)

Although, I haven't seen Cara since
I've seen Amira.

CINDY

I see.

Haig massages each winged section of the khachkar up to the
small disks protecting the end of its four arms.

HAIG

What happens if I take her in?

CINDY

We feel, given your condition, that
it would be necessary to try a six-
month trial to see if you'd be a
capable guardian.

HAIG

Ok...well...what happens if the
trial doesn't work out?

CINDY

It's likely that Cara would go into
foster care.

Haig stares outside, then up at the ceiling. He closes his
eyes, shakes his head quickly, opens his eyes widely, and
takes a deep breath.

HAIG

Fuck.

Haig hangs up the phone.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

The car hit the center divider...

Haig clears his throat.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

And then, he died.

INT. HAIG AND AMIRA'S PARENTS' HOME - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Haig (15) and Amira (27) reside in rooms at opposite ends of
the upstairs hallway, separated by an antique, Persian runner
rug extending from door to door.

INT. HAIG'S ROOM - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

On Haig's nightstand sits an old family portrait. Surrounding Haig's *Superman*-themed bed are various worn and torn, pop culture-infused posters.

INT. HALLWAY - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

Haig hears a muffled crinkling of tin foil and a lighter behind Amira's closed door.

He attempts to open the door, but it is locked. He knocks three times.

HAIG

Amira. Hey...Amira. What's going on? It smells like...like...burnt Sharpie.

AMIRA (O.S.)

Get the fuck away from my room.

HAIG

Jesus. Is everything ok?

AMIRA (O.S.)

It's fine! Just get the fuck away from the door.

INT. HAIG'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

Visibly distraught, Haig grabs his khachkar off of his wall, clutches it, puts his head in his pillow, and cries.

HAIG

(to Amira, shouting)

I'll tear down all of your posters!
I swear!

A door opens from down the hall, and footsteps draw closer to Haig's door until Amira bangs on it.

AMIRA (O.S.)

Let me in!

HAIG

(sobbing)

Why should I?

AMIRA (O.S.)

Because I said so.

Haig walks toward the door and unlocks it as Amira storms in and begins taking down her posters, despite Haig's cries of protest.

AMIRA (CONT'D)

You wanted it? You don't deserve my Elliott Smith...my Beatles...my Molly...my River...my Johnny...say goodbye to both Coreys...

Haig guards the last poster as Amira furiously approaches it.

HAIG

You can't take this one!

AMIRA

Oh, fuck off. You wouldn't even like *Edward Scissorhands* if it weren't for me.

Amira walks toward Haig's door before turning around.

AMIRA (CONT'D)

If you tell mom and dad about what I was doing, I'll fucking kill you.

EXT. FILLMORE STREET - NIGHT - [PRESENT DAY]

Haig walks from storefront to storefront, asking the proprietors if he can post his fliers on top of the multitude of others competing for window space.

They read, "Come see Haig Hagopian, of 'Amira and Haig' fame, live at The Record Room, Thursday the 22nd at 8 PM!"

As Haig walks past a liquor store, he notices a newspaper headline that reads, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Ceasefire Violated, Nagorno-Karabakh at War Again."

Haig grabs the paper and skims through the article, rereading one line in particular: "With Turkey and Israel funding Azerbaijan's destruction of Artsakh, Armenians across the globe consider this an extension of the irreconciled Armenian Genocide."

INT. UCSF NEUROLOGY CENTER - MORNING

Haig sits in a metal, fold-out chair placed in a circular formation with five other people. The epilepsy support group leader, JEREMY (41), heavyset, jeans, oversized sweater, thick glasses, listens intently as Haig speaks.

HAIG

Hi, I'm Haig. Temporal lobe
epilepsy and hippocampal sclerosis.
(looks around)
I see some new faces here...I guess
I'll start from the beginning.

JEREMY

Thanks, Haig. Please, go ahead.

HAIG

I had a seizure driving on the 101
at night a while back. They say the
headlights triggered it.
(beat)
Next thing I remember, I was in the
hospital with a bunch of broken
bones and torn shit. The works.
Basically, I felt like I was hit by
a train.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER

Basically, you felt like you had a
seizure while driving sixty-five.

The group laughs.

Haig faintly smiles.

HAIG

And then came the diagnoses.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 2

HS fuck with your memory too?

HAIG

Mostly my emotions at this stage. I
cry, constantly. I mean, it's
embarrassing.

JEREMY

As cliché as it sounds, there are
no judgments here, Haig.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 2

Hey, bro. I cried during a Toyota
commercial last night. You're good.

Silence envelops the group as the members wait for Haig to
address the elephant in the room.

HAIG

(crying)

It should've been me, Jeremy. Cara doesn't deserve this shit.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER

Be easy on yourself, bro.

Haig shuffles his feet.

HAIG

"The car hit the center divider...And then, he died."

(beat)

I've been saying that a lot...like I'm posthumously narrating my life.

Haig's cries morph into sobs.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I hate getting this emotional.

JEREMY

HS directly effects the emotions. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

Haig stands up, walks to the center of the circle, and grabs a box of tissues.

HAIG

My therapist says I have PTSD from the accident. That I repeat the mantra because I'm somehow mentally stuck in that post-seizure state. And that it's not uncommon to fantasize about near-death experiences ending differently.

Haig looks around at straight faces.

HAIG (CONT'D)

But I'm pretty sure she was just trying to make me feel better.

Faint laughs.

JEREMY

You still having trouble in the mornings?

HAIG

I feel like these nightmares I've been talking about are memories.

JEREMY

Your memories?

HAIG

Not necessarily. Memories of hearing the shocking accounts of my ancestors surviving the Genocide when I was, like, half Cara's age.

Haig rubs his temples as he closes his eyes.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Hearing first-hand accounts of this shit from my Grandparents and Great Grandparents was like having my ancestors' memories, like, implanted in me. Laying dormant until my epilepsy broke them loose.

JEREMY

That's one, scientific way of interpreting it, but--

HAIG

And I didn't start having these seizures until the threat of another genocide against my people started looming, like, five years ago.

JEREMY

Stress can definitely be a contributing factor to the manifestation of epilepsy--

HAIG

I want these memories to just stop so I can--

Haig stops himself to take an introspective inhale.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I awake at the crack of dawn, confused, continuously. I can't quite gather my thoughts, which are scattered among the vast, endless annals of my broken brain.

Haig begins moving his hand in a circular motion.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I awake at the crack of dawn,
confused, continuously. I can't
quite gather my thoughts, which are
scattered--

JEREMY

Mantras are a solid coping
mechanism.

HAIG

Call me a record-skipping poet.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig watches *Game of Thrones* on the couch while he sorts
through his mail.

Upon opening a letter from Child Protective Services, Haig
sorts through a legal guardian contract along with various
pamphlets of literature.

HAIG

(to himself)

How the fuck am I supposed to do
this?

Haig's breathing intensifies and tears ooze from his swollen
eyes as he suffers a panic attack.

He begins to practice breathing exercises in an unsuccessful
attempt to calm himself.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

Haig lays, horizontally, on the couch, his laptop on his
stomach.

He begins typing an email.

HAIG (V.O.)

*Hi Dr. Hirschfeld,
Still using cannabis for day-to-day
myoclonic seizures/jerks and
anxiety. I think my hippocampal
sclerosis might be getting worse.
Please advise.
Thanks,
Haig*

EXT. MARINA DISTRICT - DAY

Haig offers a flier to every heedless passerby he encounters while walking throughout the flourishing Marina neighborhood, promoting his The Record Room Gig.

INT. UCSF NEUROLOGY CENTER - MORNING

Haig sits in a metal, fold-out chair placed in a circular formation with Jeremy and one other attendee.

HAIG

I love Cara, and the way Amira and I were raised is that you do anything for your family, no questions asked. It's part of our culture...our people have been through hell.

(beat)

But, like, if I'm being honest, this feels forced upon me right now.

JEREMY

These are important feelings to explore.

Haig let's out a sigh in frustration.

HAIG

(semi-bluntly)

No shit. That's why I'm exploring them, Jeremy.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Sorry. That was rude.

JEREMY

If you haven't already, I would do a simple pros and cons exercise. Write the predicament down. Contextualize it.

HAIG

I mean, Amira and I grew up together. She essentially raised me along with my OG parents. I did all I could to stop the...wildfire that was her addiction long after they died.

(beat)

(MORE)

HAIG (CONT'D)

We had a band. We were best friends, man. We always said we'd die for each other, for fuck's sake.

Haig leans forward in his seat and rubs his eyes.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I know I'm going back and forth, here, but do you think it's unfair to have a child be taken care of by...me?

JEREMY

Unfair to you or to Cara?

INT. HAIG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Haig sits at his kitchen table with a pen next to a paper with a table titled, "Pros and Cons."

He begins writing, filling out the "Pro" category more quickly than he had anticipated.

Haig writes, underlines, and circles "FUCK FOSTER CARE" in all caps.

EXT. SAINTS PETER AND PAUL'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

Above the church facade lies a mosaic phrase from Dante Alighieri's "Paradiso," reading. "The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates and grows throughout the universe."

INT. SAINTS PETER AND PAUL'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

The FATHER (75), traditional vestments, conducts Amira's memorial mass in front of a Carrara marble High Alter.

Haig sits in the front row next to his niece.

CARA (10), now with dark-brown, wavy, shoulder-length hair, hasn't yet grown into her enlarged eyes. She's dressed in a black and red tartan dress with shiny, polished shoes.

She stoically sits with her lips pursed, eyes dry throughout the mass. As the memorial ends, she glances, for the first time, up at Haig, observing him with a precocious gaze.

FATHER

And so, I leave you with these two verses of the Bible, Isaiah 57: Verses 1 and 2: "The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death."

Haig finally leans over and makes eye-contact with Cara out of the corners of his eyes. He whispers to her with a slight smile on his face.

HAIG

(facetiously)

What is this bullshit he's saying? God kills people to save them from evil?

Cara fights a smile slowly emerging upon her face.

CARA

Um, you can't swear in church, Uncle Haig.

She smiles at Haig without hesitation this time.

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - AFTERNOON

Haig, Cara, and Cindy sit on one of the benches at the grass field across from the church.

Haig pretends to carefully read over the agreements and sign them, handing the paperwork back to Cindy.

CINDY

And we're set. You have my card if you need anything.

Haig takes a deep breath.

HAIG

(smiling at Cara but speaking to Cindy)

I really appreciate your help in this, Cindy.

Haig continues to smile at Cara, who squints up at him in an attempt to smile through the overbearing sunlight.

CINDY

You're welcome, Mr. Hagopian. My
condolences are with you and Cara.
We'll be in touch.

Cindy crouches down to Cara's eye level.

CINDY (CONT'D)

You're a very brave young woman,
darling.

Cindy points to a tattoo on her forearm.

CINDY (CONT'D)

(smiling)

You see this? This is the labyris.
The double-sided axe. It symbolizes
power and independence.

(placing hand on Cara's
shoulder)

That's everything you embody.

INT. UBER - DAY

Haig and Cara sit in the back seat of an Uber with the window
down, creating a vibrating suction throughout the car.

CARA

Uncle Haig, can I get a labyrinth
tattoo?

HAIG

It's labyris, and your mom didn't
get her first tattoo until she was
fourteen...So, you got four more
years, Cara.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(plugging ear)

Do you not feel that on your ears?

CARA

What?

HAIG

It's deafening.

CARA

I don't hear it.

HAIG

It's not something you hear. It's a suction feeling on your eardrums.

Cara cups her ears and leans in closer to her window.

CARA

Hm. Still nothing.

HAIG

Could you please just roll up the window?

Cara rolls up the window without acknowledging Haig.

CARA

Hey, Uncle Haig?

HAIG

(irritable)
What?

CARA

Why aren't you Catholic?

HAIG

Why aren't you Armenian Orthodox? Your mom wanted to get baptized when she was 15. Thought it was her best bet of getting into heaven.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Any more questions?

CARA

Do you work at *The Daily Planet*?

HAIG

No. I'm not Superman. I work at *The Chronicle*.

(to himself, trailing off)
Well, not physically there anymore because I work from home now.

CARA

Why did my dad used to call you a spazz?

Haig snaps out of his trance.

HAIG
 God, that fucking asshole.
 (beat)
 Shit. Sorry, Cara.

CARA
 (smiling)
 Don't worry. It's not like I
 haven't heard bad words before from
 my parents.

HAIG
 About the spazz thing. I think what
 Kevin meant is that I have
 epilepsy, which causes you to have
 seizures. It's a brain disease.

CARA
 What's a seizure?

HAIG
 Basically, I drop to the ground and
 shake a lot. Sometimes, I make a
 choking sound. It's like a brain
 short-circuiting.

Haig looks at Cara, who stares out the window opposite Haig.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 (louder)
 Since we're gonna be one big, happy
 family, if I ever have one, you
 gotta grab my phone and call 911.

CARA
 I can just use my phone.

HAIG
 You have a cellphone?
 (beat)
 Do you have any idea what kind of
 shit you can get exposed to on the
 internet? Ever heard of *To Catch a
 Predator*?
 (imitating Chris Hansen)
 "Why don't you have a seat."

Cara scrunches her face, as if to attempt to decipher a
 complex puzzle.

CARA
 No.

HAIG

Good.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig's dimly-lit apartment is a combination of Mediterranean and Victorian architectural styles. Haig follows Cara as she walks around the apartment, inspecting every inch of it.

INT. HAIG'S KITCHEN - LATER

Haig and Cara eat two microwave dinners.

HAIG

So, I'm still waiting for your mattress to arrive. In the meantime, you can take my bed, and I'll crash on the couch. Deal?

Cara plays with her food, seemingly unaware of Haig's voice.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Cara, you hear me?

CARA

What?

HAIG

You can take my bed until your mattress arrives.

Cara looks up at Haig for the first time during dinner.

CARA

Why do I have to live with you?

Haig takes a breath and sighs.

HAIG

Cutting right to the chase, here, huh?

(beat)

Your mom wanted us to be together in case she...in case anything happened to her.

CARA

Yeah, right. She totally hated your guts.

Haig places his silverware down.

HAIG
 (taken aback)
 No, she didn't. Why would you say
 that? We're family...

Cara looks down at her food, ignoring Haig.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Haig and Cara sit in The Wave Organ, which emits improvisational melodies from the sound of the ocean waves crashing against its pipes.

HAIG
 So, what grade are you gonna be in?

CARA
 Fifth.

HAIG
 Hey! I was thinking we could cook
 dinner together tonight?

CARA
 No, thanks.

Haig sighs and looks at the ocean.

HAIG
 Look. We have each other for, at
 least, six months, here, and I
 don't exactly know what I'm doing.

CARA
 Then what am I doing here?

HAIG
 Honestly? Your father's rotting in
 prison right now. That's not
fucking changing. So, that's what
 you're doing here.

Cara fights back tears.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 Look. Family sticks together
 through thick and thin.

CARA
 Then where were you when we needed
 you before?

HAIG
That's complicated.

CARA
Nuh-uh! You just said family sticks
together through slick and slim!

HAIG
Your mother and I grew apart as we
got older.

CARA
And you ditched us.

HAIG
That's not what happened. There's
more to it than that.

Haig watches the seagulls fish for their next meal.

Cara picks up a rock and throws it into the Bay.

HAIG (CONT'D)
You know, I think you and I have
probably shared a lot of similar
experiences with your mom.

CARA
Uh-huh. That's what they all say.

Haig reluctantly laughs.

HAIG
Yeah? And who's they?

CARA
You know. Everyone.

Cara pouts at the random pattern of waves competing for the
shoreline.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - MONTAGE - [FLASHBACK]

A) Cara (3) hides behind the stairs as she witnesses her
mother shoot up heroin with a homeless person on the family
room couch during the day.

B) Hearing screams from the family room, Cara (4) witnesses
KEVIN (41), overweight, male pattern baldness, beer in hand,
punch Amira in the nose from the stairs. Amira drops to the
ground as Kevin continues to strike her unconscious head.

C) Cara (5) cries on the stairs as blatant sex sounds emit from Amira's upstairs room.

D) As smoke leaks from under Amira's door atop the stairs, Cara (6) bangs on it, screaming at her mother to stop using.

E) Cara (7) rushes to her mother as she falls down the stairs. Amira laughs, proclaiming how high she is.

F) Cara (8) closes her ears as Amira passes her walking down the stairs, scratching her arms, screaming about being haunted by her fallen ancestors of the Armenian Genocide, emptying every drawer in the apartment.

G) Cara (9) lays her head on her mother's shoulders. Amira's eyes are glazed over, her stash halfway out of her pocket, track marks decorating her arms. Cara moves Amira's sleeves down to cover her arms.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT - [PRESENT DAY]

Haig dials his phone, legs sprawled out sideways on his couch.

INT. CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - NIGHT

Cindy plays a game on her phone, struggling to keep her eyes open.

She places her phone down as her ringing desk phone abruptly sends her out of her trance.

CINDY

Hello?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

HAIG

Hi. Cindy?

CINDY

Yes. Sorry. Who is this?

HAIG

This is Haig. I know it's late, but I wanted--

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian, is everything ok with Cara?

HAIG

Oh, no. Yes. It's fine. She's great. Totally.

CINDY

(smiling)

Couldn't even make it two weeks, huh?

Haig nervously laughs.

HAIG

I guess you could say I'm just a little concerned. I feel like she isn't really fully processing everything.

CINDY

How do you mean?

HAIG

She's just, like, emotionally distant.

CINDY

Well, there isn't really an appropriate way to grieve. In Cara's case, this traumatic life event is taking longer to process. Would you say you've had a chance to truly grieve in a way that's appropriate to you since Amira's passing?

HAIG

Point taken.

CINDY

You have to realize that Cara was physically and emotionally abused before Kevin went to prison. She has more to process than just the immediate past.

HAIG

She was so, weirdly, calm at the funeral and in the car ride home, you know?

(beat)

(MORE)

HAIG (CONT'D)

I've seen that same look on her face before. She seemed so...indifferent.

CINDY

Be patient with her. She's still in emotional shock. It can last for months for some people. But if it persists and you think that it isn't just a phase, let me know and we can talk about looking into a grief counselor.

HAIG

For sure. That makes sense. And Cindy?

CINDY

Yes, Haig.

HAIG

Considering the immense pressure she's facing, I'm not going to tell Cara about my H.S. until I feel it's right.

CINDY

I actually agree. I think that's a fine gameplan, Haig.

As Cindy tidies up her desk to go home, she hesitates to turn off her computer.

Her head inches from her screen, Cindy types, "Amira and Haig" on Google.

She clicks a San Francisco Examiner article titled, "Local Band, 'Amira and Haig,' Call it Quits," and meticulously reads through it.

CINDY (V.O.)

They used their notoriety to raise awareness for the Armenian Genocide. They were a brother and sister act decidedly NSFF (Not Safe For Family), yet refreshingly accessible with their humble, garage set-up-inspired sound. Whatever the factors contributing to "Amira and Haig's" downfall may have been, their singular sound will be sorely missed.

Cindy shakes her head in disappointment.

INT. PREFONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MORNING

Cara sits at her desk in a classroom with twenty students and one TEACHER (35), plainly dressed, frizzy hair.

As the teacher walks up and down between the rows of desks, lecturing, NICK (10), army veteran t-shirt, in the row next to Cara, turns around and whispers to her.

NICK

I heard your mom was a drug addict.

Cara frowns and bangs her hand on her desk.

CARA

Shut up!

TEACHER

Is there something you'd like to share with the class, Ms. Johnson?

Cara blushes.

CARA

No.

TEACHER

Very well. As I was saying...

The student turns back around, smugly smiling.

NICK

My dad said that you're probably gonna end up like her.

Cara looks down at her desk, holding back tears.

MICHELLE (10), dark hair, fair skin, matching pink outfit, in the other row next to Cara, tosses a piece of paper on Cara's desk.

Cara opens it. It reads, "Don't listen to Nick. I think you're really cool. - Michelle Tanaka:)"

Cara glances at Michelle and smiles.

INT. HAIG'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Haig prepares dinner while listening to music.

HAIG

(to Cara, yelling)

Hey, how much pasta do you want?

CARA (O.S.)
I'm not hungry!

HAIG
Cara, you gotta eat something,
kiddo!

Cara enters the kitchen.

CARA
(bluntly)
I said I'm not hungry.

Haig rubs his eyes with his hands, repeatedly.

HAIG
Fine. No TV until you eat.

CARA
Why?

HAIG
Those are the rules.

CARA
That's not how it was at my mom's--

HAIG
I don't give a shit how it was at
your mom's house. We're at mine.

Cara storms out of the kitchen.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to Cara, yelling)
Cara, I'm sorry. Please come back.

BOOM! A door slams.

INT. HUMANE SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Haig and Cara amble through the hallways of the canine adoption wing, analyzing each one of the dogs.

CARA
Why are we doing this, Uncle Haig?

HAIG
I come here sometimes when I'm sad.
It helps to cheer me up.

CARA
And you never adopt a dog?

HAIG
Well, no. But I play with them.

CARA
That's even worse. You're messed
up.

HAIG
(laughing)
Look. If I had the capacity to take
care of another being, I would.

CARA
(firmly)
Don't blame your animal abuse on
me.

HAIG
Ok. I'm sorry. Now, can you please
just look at these little chubs?

Cara abruptly stops in front of an old, haggard-looking
Bernese Mountain Dog.

CARA
This one's funny. He's so big and
dumb-looking.

HAIG
That's not very nice.
(looking at the dog)
Although, he does look a bit
spacey.

CARA
(giggling)
The hair doesn't help. He needs a
makeover.

Cara looks up at Haig.

HAIG
What?

Haig rolls his eyes.

HAIG (CONT'D)
No, we can't get him.

CARA
Why not?

HAIG
 Can't afford it...and my apartment
 is too way small for that guy.
 (to dog)
 No offense, buddy.

Cara pouts.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 You know, your mom used to sulk
 just like that when she didn't get
 her way. She would ask for dogs,
 ponies, books on demonology and the
 occult, Exodus tickets--

Cara throws her hands in the air in a state of discomfiture.

CARA
 (fighting back tears)
 You don't just get to take me to
 see cute puppies then talk about
 mom like that.

Haig tries to rub her back, but she elbows his arm away.

EXT. NOB HILL - DAY

Haig hangs fliers in the neighborhood while Cara meanders
 along, disinterested.

CARA
 (rolling her eyes)
 This is so boring--

HAIG
 (with bass)
 What am I to you?

CARA
 What?

HAIG
 Am I a random relative? Am I just
 some guy that used to occasionally
 be in your life? Am I a total
 stranger? Am I a means to an end?

Silence as Haig staples a flier to a streetlight.

CARA
 I...I don't--

HAIG

I'm your mom's only brother. We grew up together. She helped raise me. When she got sick, I took care of her until I got sick, too. You and me? We're bonded by blood, whether you like it or not.

Cara looks down at the cracks in the pavement.

INT. HEMLOCK TAVERN - EVENING

The audience is almost as empty as the stage, as Haig picks up a guitar among several unoccupied instruments.

Cara sits front row.

HAIG

Two things: My niece should probably be in bed. This is a rare occasion you'll ever see me play guitar...and this is an old "Amira and Haig" tune that I wrote.

CARA

(booing)
That's three!

Intermittent laughter.

HAIG

(sarcastically)
Thank you for that, Cara.

Haig begins fingerpicking.

HAIG (CONT'D)

*He walks a tightrope between
misanthropy and altruism / He begs
and begs but 'round and 'round the
boot is all you give him / All this
division builds and builds inside
his brain, a schism / And all he
can do is lay in silence, save his
heartbeat's rhythm.*

The muscles around Cara's eyes and eyebrows loosen as she sits forward in her seat.

*For he let's his sleeves get wet /
And those feelings bleed and drip /
Last call, come pay respect / For
this life is just a blip.*

(MORE)

HAIG (CONT'D)

*A prince waiting for his princess
charming to come take him away / He
prays and prays until the his knees
are sore and night's turned into
day / O lord, o lord, o lord,
please stop keeping all your sheep
at bay / God-given grief, take the
pill and find the needle in the
hay.*

Tears begin to reluctantly fall from Cara's eyes as she listens to every note and word of the song, her eyes locked onto the stage.

*For he plants all of his bad days /
And they grow into months and years
/ Last call, I'm taking the stage /
I'm going to make it clear / Last
call, I'm making a change / I'm
going to face my fears / Last call,
break free from this cage / I'll
try and replant those years...*

Haig finishes fingerpicking as Cara stealthily wipes the tears from her eyes before he can notice.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig and Cara argue in front of the TV.

HAIG

(rubbing temples with
fingers)

Can you please just brush your
goddamn teeth before bed?

CARA

(smugly)

Nope.

Haig rubs his temples.

HAIG

So, you just lived like an animal
at your mom's house?

CARA

Pretty much.

Haig briefly picks at his lips.

HAIG

I'll make you a deal. You brush your teeth, and I'll show you some embarrassing pictures of your mom when she was younger.

Cara's eyes widen in curiosity.

CARA

Fine. I'll brush my teeth. But this doesn't change the fact that you're a jerk. And deal's a deal. I want all the pictures you have!

Haig puts his hand over his chest.

HAIG

I'm a man of my word.

LATER

Haig and Cara gather around the coffee table on the couch, old photo albums spread across the surface of the table.

HAIG

(pointing to a picture)
This was her "Riot grrrl" phase.

CARA

What's a "Riot grrrl?"

HAIG

It's a genre of punk music.

Haig shuffles through another album, stopping suddenly.

HAIG (CONT'D)

This must have been...like...five years ago.

Silence as Haig analyzes a picture of himself and Amira onstage at Rickshaw Stop.

Haig shakes his head to break his daze.

HAIG (CONT'D)

That was the last time we were onstage together.

Haig examines a picture of himself onstage, mid-jump.

HAIG (CONT'D)
But I've been playing solo gigs,
lately.

CARA
What's a gig?

HAIG
A live musical performance.

Haig plays the air guitar.

HAIG (CONT'D)
You know...what you just saw?

CARA
Oh.

HAIG
I've been kinda trying to find a
new bandmate. But, let's be honest,
nobody can replace your mom...So, I
figure I'll just make it on my own.

Cara glances at the picture of Haig jumping.

She opens her mouth to say something before pursing her lips.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Ok. Bedtime.

CARA
(annoyed)
How do you expect me to sleep in a
room with nothing but a desk and a
mattress on the ground?

HAIG
(frustrated)
I'm working on it. Jesus Christ.

LATER

Cara inspects Haig's electric piano while Haig watches TV on
the couch. She eventually joins him.

CARA
What are you watching?

HAIG
This show called *Game Of Thrones*.
It's probably too mature for you.

Haig pauses the show.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Hey, look. I know things have been a little tense, but if you want to talk about--

CARA

It's ok. I'm fine.

Haig sighs as Cara grabs the remote out of his hand and changes the channel to Bravo.

HAIG

You're kidding me, right? How do you know about this *Real Housewives* bullshit? Sorry. Fuck, sorry. Fuck. Damn it, stop saying fuck. Sorry.

CARA

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

HAIG

Hey! You can't say that word.

CARA

Um, you just did, dummy. And my parents say it all the time in front of me.

HAIG

Well, I'm an adult.

Cara crosses her arms and shoots Haig an accusatory glance.

CARA

You used to watch it with me and my mom all the time.

HAIG

Watch what?

CARA

Bravo.

Haig scratches the back of his head as he reciprocates Cara's look with a concerned one of his own.

HAIG

Wait...She let you watch it with us?

CARA
 (facetiously)
 Hello? Is everything working
 alright up there?

HAIG
 (stuttering)
 Yeah. I don't know...why I...forgot
 that.
 (beat)
 It's still a really...bad...show.
 It sets a shitty example for how
 people should act.

CARA
 It's not like I wanna be a Real
 Housewife! I watch it just because.

HAIG
 Good.

CARA
 (pithily)
 Good!

Haig grabs the remote back and changes the channel to a particularly violent *Game of Thrones* scene.

HAIG
 Ok, maybe this isn't exactly a
 better option.

CARA
 (louder, ignoring Haig)
 Just because I watch *Real
 Housewives*, doesn't mean I think
 it's real. It's basically fantasy
 like this warlock show.

HAIG
 (proudly smiling)
 Fair enough...What other shows do
 you like besides Bravo?

CARA
 (shrugging)
 I like *Supergirl*.

HAIG
 No way? Me too. I'll strike a deal
 with you.

Cara rolls her eyes as Haig mutes the TV.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I'll watch my adult TV shows on my own time. And when we're watching TV together, we can watch something we both like.

Haig reaches out his hand to shake Cara's and seal their deal. She reluctantly shakes it without making eye contact.

EXT. THE RECORD ROOM - NIGHT

A standee reads, "Haig Hagopian Live @ 8 PM," crossed out in Sharpie, followed by, "'Our goal is the complete elimination of Armenians. You Nazis should be able to understand us.' - Deputy PM," written in the colors of the Azerbaijan flag.

Haig walks up to the standee, spits on it, and cautiously glances around.

As people walk by and read the sign, Haig throws up his hands in frustration.

HAIG

(to general passersby,
yelling)

Nobody cares about this blatant
hate speech and threat?

Haig kicks the sign.

HAIG (CONT'D)

The Armenian Genocide hasn't ended!

Passersby walk faster, trying their best not to look at Haig.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(crying)

Turkish-backed Azerbaijanis are
exterminating Armenians right now,
and all we get is fucking bullshit
reactions ranging from indifference
to denial!

INT. THE RECORD ROOM - NIGHT

Haig finishes performing an old "Amira and Haig" original on the onstage piano.

HAIG

*You march across mountains and
deserts / You sail across oceans to
live on the outskirts / You laugh
at our struggle, forgotten / We'll
naturalize you, so this blow can be
softened.*

*It cuts, it hacks, it saws, it
snaps The skin, viscera, bone, the
back / It stings when it seeps
through the vaguely-veiled cracks /
Oozing with puss, march on, don't
look back...*

As Haig finishes the song on piano, he stands up and bows to a thin audience applauding.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Thank you. And if you're looking to join a band, I'm looking for a lead singer and guitarist. I'll be at the bar if anyone's interested.

LATER

Haig sips a water at the empty bar, his head in his hands.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Haig tosses and turns in his sleep.

Darkness.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Haig (23), Amira (35), and Cara (5) eat ice cream out of the carton on the couch as *Real Housewives* plays on the TV.

Cara appears baffled, in a trance-like fixation on the ice cream carton, fidgeting her fingers while maintaining her hypnagogic gaze.

FLASH - HAIG'S SUBARU FLIPS THREE TIMES ON THE FREEWAY

CROSS-FADE TO ARMENIAN GENOCIDE:

EXT. TUR ABDIN REGION, TURKEY - MORNING - [FLASHBACK]

The Ottoman Third Army, joined by Hamidiye soldiers, conservative nationalists, released criminals from the Special Organization of the government, and the Young Turks, raid a small Armenian village on horseback.

SUPERIMPOSE: MUŞ MASSACRES. MAY 29, 1916.

HAIG (V.O.)

After Grandma survived the death marches, she crossed the border back to Turkey to try and seek refuge in Azakh, Tur Abdin, with the Assyrians, but was driven out by monsters.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

The soldiers gather the men, women, children, and elderly around the village church.

They rape, then, with various cutlery, slice to pieces many of the wives and daughters while they force the men to watch.

Blood-curdling screams drown out the church bells.

LATER - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

The soldiers then align three pregnant woman on their backs, caving in their stomachs with large rocks.

LATER - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

The soldiers proceed to line the men and boys on their knees, beheading each husband, father, and son, one at a time, in a row, in front of those left alive.

They display the severed heads to girls and elderly.

Exhausted, the soldiers merely shoot the elderly.

EXT. VILLAGE - MORNING - [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

After burning the village, they gather the surviving girls to take with them on their blood-soaked escapades.

One of them, Haig's Grandmother, white dress now stained with bodily fluids and mud, carries the BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR, in shock and eerily impartial to the carnage around her.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - [PRESENT DAY]

Haig awakes from his dream in a cold sweat and grabs the same BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR from his wall, pressing it against his chest.

EXT. BUS STATION - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

It is a characteristically bleak San Francisco morning. The views of the downtown cityscape are blocked by the fog oozing in from the coastline. Haig walks Cara a few blocks down the street from his apartment to the bus station.

HAIG
You know what they call the fog in
San Francisco?

CARA
What?

HAIG
Karl the Fog.

Cara nods in feigned interest as the bus arrives.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Remember what your principal said.

Haig squats down to Cara's eye level.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Any time you want to come home,
just have your school call me.

CARA
Ok.

HAIG
Especially if that little Nick shit
gives you any trouble.

Haig and Cara hug.

CARA
See ya later, Uncle Haig.

Haig tears up as he watches the bus leave.

INT. SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Cara sits in the office, below eye level, at a desk marked "PRINCIPAL," while the principal hands her a ringing phone from across the desk.

INT. HAIG'S APARTMENT - DAY

In the middle of a midday nap, Haig's phone rings.

HAIG
This is Haig.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

CARA
Uncle Haig? It's Cara. I'm not feeling well. Please come get me.

HAIG
Is this an emergency?

CARA
Just come get me, please.

EXT. MUSEUM - DAY

Haig and Cara walk past the monstrous Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton fossil at the entrance of the Academy of Sciences.

HAIG
Nick poked you with a pencil? What the fuck!

Other museum goers glance at Haig and Cara after his shout echoes through the vast walls of the structure.

CARA
I couldn't stand up for myself.

Silence.

HAIG
You're human...Nick isn't. He's a just a walking, talking, shitting byproduct of his racist parents. Try name-calling. See if you can defeat him at his own game. You'll demolish him with your wit.

Haig surveys the four-story building for a few minutes.

CARA
Can we just go hom--

HAIG
Indoor rainforest, planetarium,
aquarium, earthquake stimulator, or
the penguins?

Cara looks at the indoor rainforest, her eyes widening, and points at it with intent.

CARA
(hiding her excitement)
That one, I guess, if we have to
choose one.

HAIG
Awesome. Indoor rainforest it is.

INT. MUSEUM - DAY

Haig and Cara navigate the upward-slanted, spiral walkway of the indoor rainforest.

HAIG
Cara. I'm sorry for not being there
the way I should've been for you
and your mom--

CARA
It's fine.

HAIG
No, it's not ok. This has been
eating away at me.
(beat)
Since the diaspora, family is the
most important thing in this world
to us.

CARA
(bluntly)
What's the diaspora and what does
it have to with my mom?

HAIG
Well, it's the word we use for when
our people escaped the genocide and
had to flee to safer parts of the
world. We were sent, far and wide,
from our homeland.

CARA
That's messed up, right?

HAIG
You're goddamn right it is. And
over generations, family and
culture kept those Armenians spread
all over the world alive.
(beat)
Without family, we fade from
history. It's me and you against
the world from now on. Deal?

Cara purses her lips.

CARA
(confidently)
Deal!

Haig walks into a spiderweb and screams.

Cara laughs.

HAIG
(brushing shirt)
Is it gone?

INT. CARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Haig stands in Cara's doorway while she dives onto her new bed.

HAIG
Now that we have an actual bedframe
and new mattress, I managed to turn
my home office into a make-shift
bedroom for you.

CARA
What's a make-shift?

HAIG
It just means something that's put
together out of a bunch of
different things lying around.

Cara examines the scant furnishings: her full-sized bed, a nightstand, and a dresser.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Don't worry. You can decorate it
with posters, or whatever.

CARA

Dad never let me get a *Supergirl* poster because he said she's a feminist, and feminists hate men.

HAIG

Wow. First of all, a feminist is just somebody who wants equality between boys and girls. Second of all, your dad isn't around to boss you around anymore. And third of all, I'm getting you that poster, first thing tomorrow.

CARA

(reluctantly smiling)
Really? Ok. Thanks, Uncle Haig.

LATER

Haig stops by Cara's bedroom on his way to his room.

HAIG

Look. I know you don't want to think about what happened over the past couple of weeks. But just know, I'm here if you...

Haig begins choking up as tears stream down his face.

CARA

Uncle Haig? What's wrong?

HAIG

Just been a long day. Goodnight, Cara.

CARA

Night.

HAIG

Are you sure you don't want to talk about what happened to your mom?

CARA

No. I'm fine.

HAIG

Well, I'm not.

As Haig turns around to leave the room, Cara pulls a book out from under her pillow, frantically skimming every line with her fingers.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Haig lays, horizontally, on his couch, his head facing the TV.

He smokes medical marijuana, the associated paraphernalia of which are placed on the coffee table.

Edward Scissorhands plays on the television.

HAIG
 (to himself)
 The car hit the center
 divider...And then he died...He's
 dead...Fuck, there it goes again.

Edward Scissorhands ends as Danny Elfman's titular score emboldens Winona Ryder's closing monologue.

Haig recklessly sobs, snot bubbles emerging from his nose, his eyes hazy-red.

Haig perks up, finds a pen and a magazine to write on against his coffee table, and rigorously scribbles, "Chronicle pitch - The everyday life of a 30-year-old living like an elderly man with the emotional intelligence of a ten year old..."

Haig narrows his eyes and itches his chin before his jaw drops and he immediately begins scratching out the prior note and writing something new: "Sitcom pitch - Man with Benjamin Button-esque disease and his quirky, adoptive daughter...Jk lol."

INT. THE RECORD ROOM - NIGHT

Haig sips water at the bar when DAVE (41), bald, goatee, jeans and a leather jacket, sits next to him.

DAVE
 (bear hugging Haig)
 Hey, Haig. It's so good to see you,
 brother. Thanks for waiting. Been a
 busy night.

HAIG
 No problem at all, Dave.

DAVE
 You know I'm a friend and fan,
 brother...I just can't get you
 another gig.

HAIG

Come on, man. There's gotta be something else you can do.

DAVE

The demand just isn't there, Haig.

Haig attempts to retort, but ultimately succumbs to silence.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(leaning closer)

Listen. Linda and the kids miss you. We all do, brother.

HAIG

(stoically)

I appreciate that, Dave.

Haig's eyes begin to well up.

DAVE

I mean it. We love you, Haig.

HAIG

(trying not to choke up)

That means a lot. Really. I should get back to Cara.

As tears build up under his eyelids, he makes a beeline for the exit.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

Haig lays, horizontally, on the couch, his laptop on his stomach.

The echoes of Haig's rigorous typing on his keypad overlap, drowning out Cara's footsteps as she creeps up behind him, reading the screen.

CARA (V.O.)

*Hi Jane,
I'd like to do a piece on Amira &
Haig. It's not the one you've been
bugging me to do, however :). If
you meet me halfway, I think this
piece can go national.
Best,
Haig*

Haig jumps as Cara clears her throat.

HAIG

Jesus! Go get ready for school.

CARA

I am ready...Why don't you just go to work?

HAIG

Because it's a hellish workplace full of average assholes, all competing for a headline until they scratch each other's fucking eyes out.

CARA

Wow...How about you tell us how you really feel, Uncle Haig?

HAIG

I don't go in for the same reason Cindy has me on a six month trial, and the same reason your piece-of-shit father calls me spazz.

Silence as Cara looks down at her mismatched socks.

CARA

(softly)

Fuck that asshole.

HAIG

(spacing out)

Seriously.

EXT. BUS STATION - AFTERNOON - ESTABLISHED

Haig stands at the bus station as Cara arrives.

CARA

Hey, Uncle Haig.

HAIG

Hey, Cara! How was your day? What grade are you in again?

CARA

I'm in the fifth grade. I already told you that.

HAIG

Oh, right on. My bad. Well, did you have a good--

CARA

My day was ok. School stinks. They teach you things you don't even need to know. And the kids suck.

HAIG

I can't argue with that. It does suck, but I promise you one day it'll pay off big time.

CARA

How?

HAIG

Well, the more you learn, the smarter you get. You'll probably be, like, a rocket scientist. Or even president.

CARA

I dunno. I kinda wanna be a singer.

Haig's facial expression transforms into pleasant surprise.

HAIG

No way? Why didn't you tell me this before? We have to form a band.

CARA

I dunno, Uncle Haig.

HAIG

First of all, it would be a great way to spend some time together over the next however-many months we may or may not have left together.

Cara rolls her eyes.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Second of all, your mom and I nearly made it to the top, and we were only half-assing it. Imagine what we could accomplish.

Cara taps her chin as she ponders Haig's proposal.

HAIG (CONT'D)

And third of all, I really do need a lead singer in my new band, so this is pretty serendipitous.

CARA

I guess I'm not sure if I'd be a good musician or not.

HAIG

That's absurd. Of course you'd be.

CARA

I'm nervous. This is why I didn't wanna tell you.

HAIG

Don't be. I bet you're amazing. It runs in the family. I'll teach you.

CARA

(biting lip)
I'll think about it.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Haig opens the door to Cindy.

HAIG

(shaking hand)
Hey, Cindy.

CINDY

Mr. Hagopian. Inspection time.

HAIG

Already? Wow. Time flies.
(noticing Cindy's shirt)
Nice shirt. I dig The Runaways.

CINDY

Thanks! This girl I used to see got it for me at a Joan Jett concert.

HAIG

(blushing)
Nice.

CINDY

(peaking inside)
Cute place.

HAIG

Thanks. Just your typical San Francisco spot.
(beckoning)
Please...do come in.

Cindy walks in and hugs Cara.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 (pointing at various
 cabinets and doors)
 So, I keep the semi-automatics in
 there, the fully-automatics in
 there, Cara's assortment of
 handguns right here...and the
 explosives over there...

CINDY
 (deadpan)
 I'm tempted to write you up for
 even joking about that.

INT. CARA'S ROOM - LATER

Cara hastily makes her bed as a copy of *Black Dog of Fate*
 falls to the ground.

Cara attempts and fails to pick it up before Cindy does.

CINDY
 (examining the book)
 Where did you get this?

CARA
 I took it from Uncle Haig's
 bookshelf.

HAIG
 Without asking?

Silence as Cara's face floods with a rosy pigment.

CINDY
That's what you're worried about,
 here?

Haig shrugs in defiance.

CINDY (CONT'D)
 I'm a fan of Balakian. But with all
 due respect, this isn't exactly
 child friendly, Mr. Hagopian.

HAIG
 And with all due respect to you, we
 can't really help what happened to
 our ancestors, can we?

Haig pauses after responding with this rebuttal, as if to examine its validity, before continuing.

HAIG (CONT'D)
This is part of our culture.

CINDY
(a more muted tone)
I suppose that's a fair point.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - LATER

After showing Cindy around the apartment, Haig walks her back to the front door.

CINDY
And you both sing?

HAIG
Yeah. And I play piano.

CARA
(nonchalantly)
We're going to start a band.

Haig proudly smiles at Cara and pumps his fist in celebration.

CINDY
Very cool.
(to Cara)
Hey, Cara. Would you mind speaking with me alone for a second?

Haig walks into the kitchen.

CINDY (CONT'D)
How is everything going for you?

CARA
It's good.

CINDY
Good. If you notice anything different about Haig's health, you give me a call, ok?
(patronizingly)
We both have to look after him.

INT. PREFONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MORNING

As the students begin to arrive before class, Nick walks up behind Cara, who's sitting at her desk, and pulls her hair.

CARA
(turning around)
Ouch! Why'd you do that?

NICK
Because you don't belong here. You caused 9/11, stupid sand nigger.

CARA
I did not!

NICK
(sarcastically)
Sure. Tell your cave-dwelling friends that.

MICHELLE
Stop picking on her, you Neanderthal!

Classmates laugh in the background.

NICK
Shut up, Michelle. Go back to your Naruto, dumb little Jap.

CARA
You're a white trash dipshit. Why don't you go fuck your daddy's guns, you weird psycho!

The background laughter noise level rises.

EXT. PACIFIC HEIGHTS - AFTERNOON

Haig and Cara walk home, glancing at the cars and the occasional pedestrian and canine passing by.

CARA
(sighing, rolling eyes)
Hey, Uncle Haig.

HAIG
Hey, Cara. Everything ok? How was school?

CARA
Same old, same old. It was fine.

HAIG
 (skeptically)
 Alright th--

CARA
 It's Nick again. He said I was
 responsible for 9/11.

Haig stops, turns squarely to face Cara, crouches down to her level, gently places his hands on her shoulders, and looks her directly in the eyes.

HAIG
 (slightly frustrated)
 Listen to me. We've been bullied
 for millennia--
 Wait, what? We aren't even Muslim.
 Wrong stereotype. But that's
 neither here nor there.
 (beat)
 Anyways, my Uncle Ara always used
 to tell me people like Nick are the
 Scrappy Dappy Doos of history, like
 the Turks who killed our ancestors.

CARA
 Please don't talk about the
 Genocide. My mom used to rant about
 it when she was high.

HAIG
 (with bass)
 Ignoring it is exactly how you end
 up like your mom, Cara.

CARA
 Fuck you!

Cara walks briskly ahead.

Haig attempts to catch up.

HAIG
 Hey! That "fuck you" may or may not
 have been warranted, but hear me
 out.

Cara continues to walk.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 It tore Amir-- your mom apart!

Cara turns around to face Haig.

CARA
No duh. I was there.

HAIG
News flash: So was I!
(beat)
Look. Did you get to part five in
Black Dog?

Cara looks down without answering.

HAIG (CONT'D)
The Genocide accounts?

CARA
(quietly)
Yes.

HAIG
Those images stay with you. We're
all still suffering from the
recycled trauma of that shit.

CARA
You're suffering too--

HAIG
Yes! Of course. I'm terrorized by
our past.

CARA
I didn't--

HAIG
We can't forget the past, Cara.
That's how bullies like little
Nicky boy keep doing this shit and
getting away with it.
(to himself, trailing off)
He represents every chauvinist
perversion of the human race.
History repeats itself like
clockwork. The only way to break
the clock is with knowledge. And,
sometimes, when all else fails, you
need to find it deep inside
yourself to get angrier.

Haig bites his lip as he glances around at the jagged San
Francisco cityscape.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to Cara)
Punch him next time.

CARA

Really?

HAIG

Absolutely. You have my permission.
You'll know if and when it comes to
that.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Haig and Cara sit on the couch as Haig glances at his piano
in front of his bay windows.

HAIG

Come on. Time to get up. I have an
important project for us. No TV. No
thinking about Nick. Just me, you,
and 88 ivory black and whites.

They walk to his piano. Haig sits at the seat in front of the
piano, looking out at the Presidio of San Francisco, while
Cara sits on top of the piano.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Ok. I think you're ready to hear
this after stealing *Black Dog* from
me. I'm gonna play you a song your
mom and I wrote. I'll sing really
quietly, so feel free to join in
any time.

Haig begins playing in standard 4/4 time for the entirety of
the song (forming an accompaniment of floaty chords - G, G/B,
C; G, G/B, C; D, C; A7, C, D - for the first verse).

HAIG (CONT'D)

*You march across mountains and
deserts / You sail across oceans to
live on the outskirts / You laugh
at our struggle, forgotten / We'll
naturalize you, so this blow can be
softened.*

Haig picks up the tempo as the chorus begins (strumming a
passive aggressive arrangement - C, A7/C#, D, D#dim; Em, B7,
C, Am7; C, A7/C#, D, D#dim; Em, Cm6).

HAIG (CONT'D)

*It cuts, it hacks, it saws, it
snaps The skin, viscera, bone, the
back / It stings when it seeps
through the vaguely-veiled cracks /
Oozing with puss, march on, don't
look back.*

Haig approaches the second verse, quieting his voice (his playing of G, G/B, C; G, G/B, C; D, C; A7, C, D slightly slows in tempo again).

HAIG (CONT'D)

*Left here to fend for my thoughts /
And sort out a history that you
never bought / I scour across
worlds for the broken pieces / Just
to cut my trembling hands on the
sharp-edged glass shards.*

Haig sings louder than the previous chorus (strumming C, A7/C#, D, D#dim; Em, B7, C, Am7; C, A7/C#, D, D#dim; Em, Cm6 more vigorously).

HAIG (CONT'D)

*It cuts, it hacks, it saws, it
snaps The skin, viscera, bone, the
back / It stings when it seeps
through the vaguely-veiled cracks /
Oozing with puss, march on, don't
look back.*

Haig approaches the bridge (playing an aesthetically pleasing sound of chords expressing conflict, resolve, and resolution - Em, B7/D#, D, A7/C#; C, G/B, Bbmaj7, Am; Em, B7/D3, D, A7/C#; C, Cdim).

HAIG (CONT'D)

*Careful, I'm an open wound /
Hostile, like an open nerve...*

Haig abruptly stops and begins crying.

CARA

Are you ok?

HAIG

Yeah. I'm fine. Those lyrics really hit home, don't they?

CARA

You don't seem fine, Uncle Haig.
You're still crying.

HAIG

I have a brain disease that makes it hard for me to remember things sometimes. And everything feels amplified. You know? It's a different disease than epilepsy, but they're related.

(beat)

I also can't stop thinking about your mom, to be honest.

Cara sighs.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Hey, I'll cut a deal with you.

CARA

You make a lot of "deals."

Cara makes the gestures of finger-quotes.

HAIG

Yeah? Well, I guess life is all about making deals. Like, compromises...My deal is, since you have to live with your crazy uncle--

Haig smiles and Cara giggles as he says "crazy."

CARA

You're not crazy.

HAIG

Well, regardless, my deal is that you tell me what's on your mind, and I'll tell you what's on mine.

Cara rolls her eyes.

CARA

Ok. Fine. You first.

HAIG

Fine. I guess I feel guilty for not trying to stop your mom from getting worse.

Haig looks reflectively out the window.

HAIG (CONT'D)

When we were kids, I used to live right down the hall from her. And I knew she did drugs, but I never confronted her...Your turn.

Cara looks down.

CARA
Mom always tried to use me for
sympathy to get drugs.

Haig shakes his head.

HAIG
Well, I stopped lending her money,
and then stopped talking to both of
you...Guess that makes me
responsible for her taking that
shit out on you.

CARA
That's just how she was. She didn't
even care about me or you.

Haig fights back tears.

HAIG
That is not true. She loved you so
much.

Cara grows angry for the first time.

CARA
Then why did she kill herself!?

HAIG
She overdosed.

Cara screams louder.

CARA
Same thing! She didn't even pick me
up from school that day!

Cara's tone shifts from exasperated to distressed. Her bottom
lip begins to quiver.

Haig sits forward and listens as Cara's face lights up.

CARA (CONT'D)
I had to walk home. I s-s-saw her
laying on her bed and t-t-tried to
shake her--

--Haig embraces Cara as she bursts into tears.

HAIG
It's ok, sweetheart. I'm sorry. I'm
so, so, so sorry.

CARA
Sh-she...didn't wake up.

HAIG
I know...We're traumatized...but
we're going to be ok.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)
I won't let the bad thoughts get to
you, sweetheart. You're Supergirl,
so you can defeat them. Say, "Away
with you, vile demon thoughts!"

CARA
Away with you, vile demon thoughts.

HAIG
Yes! Again! Louder!

CARA
Away with you, vile demon thoughts!

HAIG/CARA
Away with you, vile demon thoughts!

NOSY NEIGHBOR (O.S.)
(through the walls)
Can you guys please keep it down?

Haig and Cara's expressions resemble two young siblings
caught by their parents for staying up past their bedtimes.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

Haig turns the volume on his keyboard all the way up and
slams the keys with his hands, creating an unpleasant noise.

HAIG
Wake up! Family meeting!

Yawning, Cara drags her feet into the family room and sits on
the couch.

CARA
I don't have to go to school for,
like, two hours, Uncle Haig.

HAIG
If we're gonna be in a band, we
gotta practice. I mean everyday
after school. Ok?

CARA

I guess. If that's what it takes.
 (beat)
 But what if Cindy gives us bad
 grades on our report card?

HAIG

Don't think like that. I think
 we're solid right now. More good
 things than bad on Cindy's report,
 I'm sure. Plus, she loves us.

HAIG (CONT'D)

We need to advertise.
 (beat)
 But before we do that, we need good
 branding.

Cara begins dozing off.

Haig scratches his chin.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(loudly)
 We need a band name!

Cara jolts awake.

CARA

Uh...totally. I agree.

HAIG

Don't worry. It'll come to us.

Cara simultaneously smiles and rolls her eyes.

INT. CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - NIGHT

Cindy leans back in the chair at her desk, watching *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* by Slavoj Žižek on her computer.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

"Perhaps the ultimate quarrel of a
 desire is to be fully filled in,
 met, so that I desire no longer.
 The ultimate melancholy experience
 is the experience of the loss of
 desire itself."

As she drifts off to sleep, her ringing phone suddenly
 prompts her sit up and answer.

CINDY
Child protective services--

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Haig sits upright on his bed with his phone in one hand, and his nightstand picture of Amira and him as kids in the other.

HAIG
Cindy. It's Haig.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

CINDY
Mr. Hagopian? Is everything ok?

HAIG
Yeah. I wanted to talk to you about something.

Silence.

CINDY
Alright...I'm all ears. Shoot.

HAIG
You've been observing me for a while, now...Do you think I'm doing a good job with Cara?

CINDY
Well, she likes you. There's no denying that.

HAIG
I know, but, like--

CINDY
I know what you mean.

Cindy turns off her computer.

CINDY (CONT'D)
You're certainly more aware of the fresh hell this world has to offer than the average person is.

HAIG
Didn't realize you were a pessimist.

CINDY

I'm not. But when you do what I do
for as long as I have, you get to
know some of society's dark sides.

(beat)

Unfortunately, you've been exposed
to some of those more unsavory
sides of humanity.

Haig laughs.

HAIG

I'm well-aware.

CINDY

All of this adversity also makes
you acutely perceptive as a
guardian. You'll do everything to
keep Cara away from being exposed
to even more of the world's
destruction than she already has.

Haig removes the khachkar from above his bed, seemingly
analyzing every disk at the end of its four arms.

CINDY (CONT'D)

You've got a leg up, Mr.
Hagopian...And a band.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Haig sits at his piano in front of his bay windows while Cara
sits on top.

HAIG

So, this is one that's always on
the back of my mind. Join in if you
want, anytime. K?

EXT. VARIOUS - DAY - MONTAGE

Haig plays "The Partisan" by Leonard Cohen.

A) Haig and Cara practice their cover of "Amira and Haig's"
song.

B) Haig and Cara walk along the Palace of Fine Arts' manmade
lake, interacting with the swans and mini turtles.

C) Cara poses in front of the Golden Gate Bridge, making a
silly face and flexing both bicep muscles as Haig takes her
picture.

D) Haig and Cara read the names on the various tombstones of the fallen soldiers who fought in WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam at the Presidio National Cemetery.

E) Inside of Coit Tower, Haig poses against a backdrop of San Francisco's Southwestern cityscape, making a silly face and flexing both bicep muscles as Cara takes his picture.

F) Cara and Haig take selfies together while riding a cable car.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Haig lays, horizontally, on his couch and rubs his eyes. He pauses the show he's watching and sits up, placing his head in his hands.

HAIG
 (to himself)
 The car hit the center
 divider...He's gone. He's dead. He
 died.

He grabs his laptop and starts outlining his *Chronicle* pitch.

CARA
 Did you just say you died in a car
 accident?

Haig jumps, nearly frightened to death upon hearing Cara's voice. He turns to face her behind the couch.

HAIG
 Cara! Aren't you supposed to be in
 school?

CARA
 Did you walk me to the bus station
 this morning?

HAIG
 Oh, shit. Did I forget?

CARA
 No. It's Saturday, dumbass.

HAIG
 Oh yeah.

Haig pauses, briefly, before processing Cara's insult.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Hey! You've upgraded your cursing since being around me.

CARA

I've been doing that for a while. Nice of you to catch up...You didn't answer my question. Why are you saying that stuff? That's really weird...and scary.

HAIG

Oh....That's just something I say.

Cara takes a sharper tone.

CARA

Well, why are you saying it?

HAIG

Remember when I said the genocide still haunts me?

CARA

Uh-huh?

HAIG

Well, I guess it's one of my odd PTSD coping mechanisms. Trust me, it's not like I want to die.

CARA

Is that supposed to make me feel better, Uncle Haig? My mom basically just killed herself! If you're feeling icky like that, you should tell an adult, immediately, or call the suicide hotline.

HAIG

First of all, I am an adult. And...

ARGH-AWK-GAK! Haig chokes as his neck stiffens. His eyes roll into the back of his head and he falls off of the couch onto his stomach, upon when the violent convulsions begin.

CARA

Uncle Haig? Oh my god!

Cara screams.

CARA (CONT'D)

Uncle Haig!

Cara pulls out her phone and dials 911.

A 911 operator picks up on the other end as Cara listens.

CARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
My Uncle is dying! He can't
breathe.

Cara begins sobbing as she listens further.

CARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I...I think he's having a seizure.

Cara waits impatiently as the operator responds.

CARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Please just come. We're at 224
Scott.

Cara attempts to straighten Haig's body out, but his violent convulsions overpower her.

CARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Stay on the phone, please! I'm
scared!

Haig's convulsions gradually come to an end as slime-like spit emerges from his mouth. He gasps for air as if he were reaching the surface of the ocean after a deep underwater dive.

CARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
He's awake!

Cara hangs up without thinking.

CARA (CONT'D)
(to Haig)
Uncle Haig?

HAIG
Why am I on the ground?
(looking around)
Oh, shit...I had one, didn't I?

Cara wraps her arms around Haig as if to squeeze his newfound breath right back out of his lungs.

CARA

That's what a seizure is?

Haig slowly sits up, leaning against his couch.

HAIG

My ribs are broken again.

CARA

What? How come?

HAIG

Yeah. It happens sometimes during seizures. I don't think I can get up right now.

Haig grabs his ribs with his hands and winces.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(half jokingly)

This is good practice for you for when I go senile in...like...I dunno, fifteen years?

Cara appears shocked at Haig's casually-uttered comment.

CARA

What are you talking about?

HAIG

I'm exaggerating. But remember that brain disease I was talking about where it's hard to retain memory and control emotion, and all that jazz?

CARA

Yeah?

HAIG

It's kind of like Alzheimer's Disease.

CARA

Like what Great-Grandpa died of?

HAIG

Exactly.

CARA

But you're not even an adult yet!

HAIG

Again, I am an adult. But you really don't have to worry...it only gets worse with a shit-load of seizures.

INT. SUTTER HEALTH ICU - NIGHT

Haig wakes up in a bland hospital bed within a blindingly white room. The lights hiss as Cara's giant hazel eyes seemingly gaze into Haig's soul.

CARA

It's alive. It's alive!

Haig squints up at Cara in an attempt to smile through the overbearing lights. Cara grabs the doctor's clipboard on the table across from Haig's bed, attempting her best impression.

CARA (CONT'D)

Well, Mr....let's see here...Mr. Hagopian, is it? The results came back, and, it's true. You have no heart.

HAIG

How does one survive without a heart, doc?

CARA

You'll have to ask...
(turns around then faces
Haig again, hunched over)
...Igor!

HAIG

(in a funny accent)
Yes. Well, Dr. Frankenstein has done a wonderful job reanimating this, poor, heartless, creature!

Haig and Cara crack up.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Well, what did you think? Welcome to the big leagues.

Silence as Cara looks off into the corner of the room.

CARA

It kind of reminded me of when I found my mom.

(MORE)

CARA (CONT'D)
(fighting back tears)
The spit on your m-m-mouth.

Cara begins to cry.

HAIG
Oh my god. I'm so sorry, Cara. I
can only imagine how scared you
must have felt. But my seizures are
worse than they look.

CARA
Yeah, right. That was one of the
scariest things I've ever seen in
my whole entire life. I thought you
were dead.

HAIG
Hey. Speaking of death.
(beat)
Look. About what we were talking
about. Before you showed up, I was
in a really bad place. But
everything with your mom and you
has really helped put things into
perspective for me. It's you and me
against the world, remember?

Haig grabs Cara's hand.

HAIG (CONT'D)
I'm not going to do anything stupid
to myself. Unless I, like, get hit
by a bus. Then, you're fucked.

Cara lets out a reluctant laugh.

CARA
Why do you say things that are mean
but still funny?

HAIG
It's all about timing and delivery.
(pinching nose)
I'll teach you the tricks of the
trade if you promise to take a
goddamn shower.

CARA
(laughing)
Shut up! I don't stink! It's your
upper lip!

Smiling, Haig looks around the room.

HAIG

Did the doctors already do X-rays?

CARA

Yeah...they said you have a minor
slicked disk and cracked ribs.

Haig cracks up.

Cara throws her hands in the air in oblivious defense.

CARA (CONT'D)

What?

HAIG

It's "slipped" disk, not "slicked."

CARA

Whatever! Hey, I saved your life! I
think that's unlimited TV forever
and, like, at least 10 free stay-up-
past-midnight passes.

HAIG

We can negotiate that later. But
thank you, really. I forgot how
nice it is to have somebody around.

A doctor enters the room as Cara opens her mouth to answer.

DOCTOR

He's awake. How are you feeling,
Mr. Hagopian?

Haig winces as he attempts to move closer to the doctor.

HAIG

Between you and me, doc, I've been
having some memory issues
lately...like...I forgot where I
was after that seizure.

(to himself, trailing off)

Like, I feel like it's starting,
and I'm low key freaking the fuck
out.

LATER

Cara sleeps in a chair next to Haig's hospital bed, emitting
a snoring sound akin to a bear snarl.

Haig turns off the television, opens his phone, and begins
rigorously typing an email on his keypad.

HAIG (V.O.)

*Hi Jane,
I'm making good progress on my new
piece. It covers the challenges;
the triumphs; our music. I've also
incorporated some of the ancestral
history that our family has
internalized, and how that ties
into the current conflict with
Artsakh. Captivating stuff. Should
have it done no later than next
week, pending good health.
Best,
Haig*

EXT. PACIFIC HEIGHTS - DAY

Haig sluggishly meanders up the steep hills, posting fliers to every tree, lamppost, and light post he passes on the sidewalks of the bustling Pacific Heights neighborhoods.

The fliers read, "Haig Hagopian, formerly the frontman of the famous 'Amira and Haig', has a new band...with none other than Amira's multitalented daughter, Cara, as the new frontwoman!!

"Help us think of a band name on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/caraandhaig!"

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig's iPad is hooked up to his TV while Cara goes through a Spotify playlist. Haig stretches, as if to prepare for a run.

HAIG

Alright, we doing this, Kara Zor-El
of Planet Krypton?

Silence. Cara freezes, shooting Haig a gleaming grin.

CARA

Dance party!

Haig and Cara begin dancing around the room, each in their own little worlds.

HAIG

Alright. Now, I'm gonna pass these
dancing boots to the one, the only,
Kara Zor-El for a rad solo!

Cara does her best to improvise new dance moves, displaying a natural aptitude for rhythm.

CARA

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, the groove master, Uncle Haig the Leg!

Haig emulates Cara's moves to the best of his abilities, despite his injuries. He falls to the ground after tripping on the coffee table. Angry knocks at the door stop Haig and Cara in their tracks.

HAIG

Uh-oh. You get it.

CARA

What? No. You're the "adult," remember? You get it.

Haig and Cara hide behind the couch instead, shooshing each other's bursts of nervous laughter before the sounds of footsteps eventually pitter-patter increasingly distant outside the front door.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

Haig sits at his piano while Cara sits on top.

HAIG

Ok, Cara. This session, we're gonna practice our harmonies. Something all good bands can do. They'll come in handy for the chorus of your song and our cover of mine and your mother's.

CARA

Ok!

Haig proceeds to guide Cara through a series of vocal harmonization exercises.

INT. PREFONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Cara sits at her desk as the teacher walks up and down between the rows of desks.

Nick turns around and passes a note to Cara.

Cara opens the note at her desk. It reads: "I'll give you a lifetime supply of heroin and sand nigger food if you stop coming to school."

Cara stands up, walks across the row to Nick's desk, and punches him in the nose, creating a cracking noise.

The classroom gasps in astonishment.

Silence until--

MICHELLE
(throwing hands in air)
Whoa! That was badass!

INT. HAIG'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Haig heats up some takeout on the counter in the microwave as Cara sulks at the kitchen table.

HAIG
Well, it's not gonna look fantastic for our case for an extension after our trial period, not gonna lie. But we'll cross that bridge if we get there.

Haig looks at an indifferent Cara.

HAIG (CONT'D)
We don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.

CARA
(accusatory)
It was your idea.

HAIG
And I'll take full responsibility. Look--

CARA
Everyone just thinks I'm a loser.

HAIG
(taken aback)
You're not a loser. You're smarter than the rest of your class. They're fucking stupid.

Haig gets emotional.

HAIG (CONT'D)

It takes a lot of courage to be us.

Cara bites her nails.

CARA

You shouldn't say "stupid" so much.
It makes you look like the stupid
one.

HAIG

Jesus. You're like a hawk.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Haig sits at his piano while Cara sits on top.

HAIG

Everything's been building to
this...Our first original song.

Fear engulfs Cara's eyes.

HAIG (CONT'D)

It's ok. I'll help. I'll just
play...like...four chords. Ok,
Supergirl?

CARA

I guess so.

Haig plays four simple but profound chords on the piano (Am, F, G, and D in four-four time, repeatedly). Eventually, Cara begins singing.

CARA (CONT'D)

*Wake up and feel like you don't
belong today. It's ok / Tomorrow,
you'll feel like you might belong
someday. Someday...*

(to Haig, speaking)

I don't know. This is dumb.

Haig fights back tears and infectiously grins.

HAIG

No! Keep going!

CARA

*Makeup to feel like you might fit
in ok. Everyday / Coverup those
scars. I hope it makes the pain go
away...*

(MORE)

CARA (CONT'D)
 (to Haig, speaking)
 I think I'm running out of things
 to say.

Overwhelmed with emotion, Haig tries his best not to ugly-cry.

HAIG
 You're doing incredible. I'll try
 to make up a chorus real quick so
 we don't fuck up our rhythm.

Haig plays an uplifting progression of major chords for the chorus (cadenced half-notes of F, G, C, and D, repeatedly, for the chorus).

HAIG (CONT'D)
*When I got stuck here with you / I
 could see the light shining through
 / They can call us stupid, us two /
 We just flip 'em off, yell, "Fuck
 you!"*
 (to Cara, speaking)
 One more time!

HAIG/CARA
*When I got stuck here with you / I
 could see the light shining through
 / They can call us stupid, us two /
 We just flip 'em off, yell, "Fuck
 you!"*

Haig stops playing. Cara and Haig high five.

Cara pumps her fist.

INT. PREFONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - EVENING

Haig sits in a chair in the back among the auditorium-like seating arrangement at a PTA meeting in the teacher's lounge.

The parents speak quietly amongst themselves, awkwardly glancing at Haig.

The PTA LEADER (40), white, blonde hair, blue eyes, chinstrap style beard, stylish glasses, introduces Haig.

PTA LEADER
 Everyone, let's welcome Haig, Cara
 Johnson's Uncle. He's been kind
 enough to take an interest in what
 we do, and wants to help.

HAIG

What's up, everyone? I'm not used to being the youngest in the room, so bear with me...I'm learning as I go.

A portly PTA MEMBER (37), jeans, faded plaid button down, with a trucker hat, butts in.

PTA MEMBER

Well...you now basically have the same responsibility as us. As far as I can tell, you're already PTA material.

HAIG

(feigned laughing)
I really appreciate it.
(looking around, smiling)
I feel kind of like I'm being initiated into a secret society.

Silence.

PTA MEMBER

(defensively)
Sure, we're a close-knit group, but we're just like any other faction.

HAIG

(anxiously)
Yeah...it might not be a fit for me, just because Amira never subscribed to these kinds of things. Organizations and such. I might want to respect that.

Haig begins to sweat, his breathing becoming increasingly shallow.

PTA LEADER

(condescendingly)
Are you sure Amira had Cara's best interest in mind?

HAIG

What exactly are you implying?

Haig meanders over to the PTA member, attempting to dry his palms by rubbing them, his eyes twitching.

PTA MEMBER

We'd love for Cara to have a more reliable support system.

(MORE)

PTA MEMBER (CONT'D)

This could help curb some of Cara's problematic behavior. Especially toward my son, Nick.

HAIG

Wait...you're Nick's father? This is making a lot more sense, now. You're the asshole who raised that kid?

PTA MEMBER

Excuse me?

Haig, now rubbing his arms in panic, walks out and slams the door.

EXT. PREFONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - EVENING

Haig exits the gym, nearly tripping over the PTA sign. ARGH-AWK-GAK! He falls to the ground in an epileptic fit.

INT. SUTTER HEALTH ICU - DAY

Back in a plain, white room again. The overhead lights scream.

HAIG

Hello!?

Silence.

FLASH - THE PTA MEMBER WALLOWS IN HIS OWN SUPERCILIOUSNESS

HAIG

You're the asshole who raised that kid?

BACK TO SCENE

HAIG

(to himself)

Jesus. I can't fuck up like that anymore.

A doctor walks in.

DOCTOR

Mr. Hagopian. I don't know if you remember consenting to the MRI. You weren't exactly cognizant.

HAIG

Good. I needed to get one, anyways.

DOCTOR

So, your neurologist, Dr. Hirschfeld, took a look at your results--

HAIG

Where's Cara? My niece. I'm supposed to cook her dinner.

DOCTOR

Mr. Hagop--

HAIG

Haig. It's just Haig.

DOCTOR

Haig, you've been in a coma for three days.

Haig's face drops in awe.

HAIG

That can't be right. Why do I feel like I'm on drugs?

DOCTOR

It's the last medication Dr. Hirschfeld wants to try before we try the surgery.

HAIG

I feel...slow.

DOCTOR

That's common, and also why Dr. Hirschfeld and CPS had to make the very tough decision to rescind your guardianship until you adjust and make cognitive improvements.

HAIG

(frustrated)

You haven't answered my question.

DOCTOR

Cara is staying in a temporary foster home.

INT. CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - THE NEXT DAY

Haig sits, holding a walking cane. To his left is Cara, her arms suffocating him. At the opposite end of the desk sits Cindy.

HAIG

Of course you already have a family picked out.

CINDY

George and Susan have been doing this for over 30 years. I've informed them of Cara's, potentially, temporary situation.

Cara holds back tears.

CINDY (CONT'D)

It will be like living in a really nice hotel, Cara! It's a big three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment.

HAIG

This really doesn't feel like the right choice for us.

CINDY

Cara's six-month trial has always revolved around your ability to take care of her. For now, foster care is the best option for Cara.

HAIG

Why? We need to be in each other's lives. This is fucking horse shit.

CARA

(fighting back tears)
This isn't fair!

CINDY

We received an update from Dr. Hirschfeld, Mr. Hagopian. Your...
(looks at file on desk)
Well, I'm not going to attempt to explain the medical jargon. But it doesn't look good for your health and longevity. Furthermore, the medication change that she's recommended would have an impact on your ability to take care of Cara.

Cara gasps.

CARA
What? What the heck, Uncle Haig!

HAIG
(to Cara)
Don't worry. The prognosis is
always worse than it actually is.
(to Cindy)
This medication is supposed to be
the best on the market.

CINDY
What does that mean for you?

HAIG
It means I highly doubt I'll need
brain surgery.

CARA
What?

CINDY
Cara, can you leave the room for a
moment, please?

Cara looks at Haig for approval.

HAIG
(to Cara)
It's ok. Just walk over to the
lobby and read the *People*. I think
Kim K is on the cover. You can draw
a mustache on her, or something.

Cara leaves Cindy's office.

HAIG (CONT'D)
Look. I know it might not look good
right now--

CINDY
I truly admire your resilience, Mr.
Hagopian.

HAIG
Please. It's Haig. It's just Haig.

CINDY
Ok, Haig. Try to leave Cara out of
the equation right now. Assess
whether you want to stay on the new
medication or have the surgery.
After that, we can reassess Cara's
situation as it pertains to you.

Haig looks down for a minute as tears well up in his eyes.

HAIG

I guess I'll stay on this medication for now. I mean, these side effects can't last forever. If you think it's best for Cara to stay in foster care in the meantime--

-

CINDY

George and Susan are great--

HAIG

I don't care if they're Saints Peter and Paul. I'm determined to get my niece back. We had a family...and a kickass band. You said so yourself.

CINDY

Don't think I haven't noticed Cara picking up on your cursing habits...I also see how much she's taken to your interests. However, it's a narrow line to walk because she feels responsible for you. And it's supposed to be--

HAIG

The other way around. Yeah. Look. We're a team. It's not fair to judge our household like that. We rely on each other a little, but I understand my role as guardian.

Cindy sighs and shrugs at Haig.

CINDY

I'm sorry it's come to this, Haig. I really am.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - AFTERNOON - [PRESENT DAY]

Edward Scissorhands plays on the television as Haig lays, horizontally, on the couch, his beard overgrown.

Haig takes several hits out of his marijuana pipe.

WINONA RYDER (ON TV)

"Sometimes, you can still catch me dancing in it."

Haig bawls, hysterically.

EXT. BUS STATION - MORNING

It's an uncharacteristically sunny day. The views of the downtown cityscape, Alcatraz, the Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge, Berkeley, and Oakland are oblivious to Haig as he looks down at his shoes.

Haig walks to the bus station and sits down.

LATER

Haig takes a series of buses to Pier 7 on the Embarcadero.

Upon getting off of the Muni, he sprints the wooden-planked pier to the end.

Out of breath, Haig sits on one of the benches facing the bay and cries in his hands.

HAIG (V.O.)
(to Jeremy)
I miss Cara.

INT. UCSF NEUROLOGY CENTER - MORNING

Haig sits, hunched over, in a metal, fold-out chair with Jeremy.

JEREMY
Let's talk, Haig. I'm still working on group outreach. Looks like it's just you and me today--

HAIG
Good. I don't really feel like telling my life story, here, so I'll just cut to the chase.

Haig takes a deep breath.

HAIG (CONT'D)
My sister died, I had to adopt my niece, Cara, we really bonded, and now the government deems me unfit to take care of her until I can get my seizures under control. Now, I'm on this medication that controls them, but, ironically, makes me more unfit to take care of her.

Jeremy stares at Haig, speechless.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Only way I can get her back is
brain surgery. Risk losing a part
of myself or, worse, dying.

JEREMY

(empathetically)
That's fucking rough, man.

HAIG

I feel guilty that I kinda chose
the medication over her.

JEREMY

That's a very black and white way
of looking at it. I think you're
buying each other some time while
you figure out a serious medical
decision. What kind of medication?

HAIG

A high dosage of zonisamide.

JEREMY

Fuck. That's definitely fucking
rough, man. I feel for you.

HAIG

I'm zombie'd out. I can barely take
care of myself on this shit.

Haig leans back on his chair and extends his legs outward.

HAIG (CONT'D)

To operate, or not to operate? That
is the question.

Jeremy smiles, then looks at Haig, whose hand covers his
face.

Silent sobs.

Jeremy walks a box of tissues over to Haig.

JEREMY

It's alright, Haig.

HAIG

I don't want to die. I'm not ready
to go yet. Not when my life is just
starting to get better.

Jeremy places his arm on Haig's back.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

Haig aimlessly plays the piano while smoking a joint.

He stares out the window as his eyes glaze over.

INT. HAIG'S CAR - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Haig's Subaru flips three times on the freeway.

Silence.

During the first flip, Haig's right arm dislocates, his shoulder snapping at the joint as his flailing arm ricochets between the base of the back of the center console and the base of the middle backseat foot area.

Silence.

During the second flip, Haig's torso is thrust forward, the steering wheel crushing his ribs before the airbag knocks his arched back into the seat, his head cracking the passenger side window as it knocks into it.

Silence.

As the third flip begins to slow the flipped Subaru, Haig's jaw dislocates as primal choking noises emit from his throat.

His convulsing body fights the final, unpredictable movements of the car's crash trajectory, the seatbelt inhibiting the full force of the seizure as his back, ribs, and neck crack and pop.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - MORNING - [PRESENT DAY]

HAIG
(to himself)
The car hit the center divider...

Haig coughs and then returns to the thought.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to himself)
And then...and then...Nope.

Haig takes a puff of his joint.

HAIG (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 And then, he was terribly injured.

Haig puts the joint out on his ashtray atop the keyboard. He begins playing his and Cara's original song.

HAIG (CONT'D)
*When I got stuck here with you / I
 could see the light shining through
 / They can call us stupid, us two /
 We just flip 'em off, yell, "Fuck
 you!" / When they told us we
 couldn't do / All the things that
 we needed to / We just laughed it
 off and made do / We cheer each
 other up when we're blue.*

INT. CARA'S FOSTER HOME - NIGHT

The Petersons are a "shoes off" kind of household.

GEORGE (70), aloof, is mostly seen dressed in slacks and white golf sweaters that blend in with the home's window shades, carpeting, and furniture upholstery color scheme.

SUSAN (75), free-spirited, walks around the house in long, floral dresses.

The couple and Cara eat around a dinner table, which is covered in a tartan plaid design.

SUSAN
 (to Cara)
 Sweetie, don't worry about that kid
 at school. What does he know about
 your uncle?

CARA
 It's bullshit!

George nearly chokes on his food, laughing, before Susan nudges him in half-jest.

GEORGE
 Now, Cara. We don't allow swearing
 in this home.

Cara looks down at her dinner plate.

SUSAN

Hey, sweetie! Did you hear about the lunar eclipse coming up this Sunday? It's supposed to be magical.

CARA

(indifferently)

No. You guys won't let me use the internet on my phone.

SUSAN

Well, the last time I checked, we do get *The Chronicle* every Sunday. Reading is far more enriching than surfing the internet.

GEORGE

When Susan and I were your age, we didn't have cellphones or the internet. We just had nature, music, fresh air, free love--

Susan's face turns bright red at the words, "free love."

CARA

My Uncle Haig writes for *The Chronicle*.

SUSAN

I've read some of his writing. He's very talent--

CARA

He's gonna write an article about us.

Silence as Cara forms a scowl upon her face.

GEORGE

Something on your mind, Cara?

CARA

My uncle is not crazy. Uncle Haig took care of me. He was awesome. And we had a b-b-band--

Cara begins sobbing.

SUSAN

Oh, honey. We're sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.

EXT. CEMETERY - DUSK

Haig places his black pearl khachkar on Amira's gravestone, the soil beneath it still fresh.

HAIG

Hey, freakazoid. It's my first time
visiting you since...you know.
(fighting back tears)
I lost Cara.

Haig sits down next to her gravestone to light up a joint.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(exhaling marijuana smoke)
I don't know how to say this, but I
saw Grandma.
(taking a giant puff of
the joint)
Either the seizures made me
crazy...or they created some sort
of ancestral passage in space and
time...or I'm just too stuck in the
past.

Haig pauses after that last sentiment.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(to himself, trailing off)
I think I'm stuck in the past.

Haig relights the joint after a gust of wind fades the embers.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I'm giving you Grandma's khachkar.
I recently learned that another
name for it is the "Siroun Cross."
Mom and dad almost named you
"Siroun."
(choking up)
It means "lovely" in Armenian.
(beat)
We both know I'm not very
superstitious, but I realize now I
should have given this to you a
long time ago.

Haig pretends to pass the joint toward Amira's gravestone.

INT. CARA'S FOSTER HOME - DAY

The Peterson's greet Haig and leave him and Cara alone to talk as they embrace.

HAIG
Hey, Supergirl. I miss you so much.

CARA
I miss you too, Uncle Haig!

Tears cascade down Haig's cheek.

HAIG
I think I really misjudged this whole foster care situation. It's been giving me time to adjust to my meds. As soon as I stop acting like a mummy, it's jammin' time.

CARA
How much longer?

HAIG
I don't know. It may be a few more weeks. It may be longer.

Cara swiftly wipes tears off of her cheeks in protest.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig watches *Game of Thrones* on the TV while slouched over on the couch.

Cindy stands next to him as she writes in her notebook before closing it, placing it on the coffee table with her pen, and joining Haig on the couch.

SUPERIMPOSE: THREE WEEKS LATER.

CINDY
Still seizure free? I'm impressed.

HAIG
(semi-sarcastically)
Hooray for me, right?

Haig pauses the TV and let's out a seemingly apathetic sigh.

CINDY

Oh, no. Please. By all means,
Unpause it. I'm a *Game of Thrones*
fanatic.

Haig smiles and unpauses the TV.

HAIG

I'm pleasantly surprised.

CINDY

What? I'm not a government
robot...So, what episode are we on?

EXT. VARIOUS - DAY - MONTAGE

- A) Haig attends physical therapy.
- B) Haig runs, looking in shape, clean-shaven, and determined.
- C) Haig visits Cara at her foster home.
- D) Haig finishes his *Chronicle* pitch piece and sends it to Jane.
- E) Haig works on his and Cara's original song and "Amira and Haig's" cover.
- F) Haig watches a particularly intense *Real Housewives* episode, spellbound by its suspense and dramatic flair.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. ROXIE THEATER - NIGHT

Haig and Cara sit in the back of the theater, their feet propped up on the headrest of the seats in front of them.

HAIG

A lotta firsts at this theater.
First time I ever smoked weed was
with your mom before a Roxie
showing, I first saw this movie
with your mom at this very theater--

CARA

Edward Scissorhands?

HAIG

That's right. Wait, you've seen it?

CARA

I've "background watched" it, like, a bajillion times. My mom talked about it all the time. I still have no idea what it's about.

Haig zones out at the screen as a preview comes to end.

HAIG

Without giving away any spoilers, it's about a lonely, disabled man who doesn't really fit in with society...Nobody understands him.

CARA

It sounds kinda sad.

HAIG

I think it's beautiful.

INT. HAIG'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Haig prepares dolmas, rice pilaf, and lamb shish kebab for Cara and himself as Cara's Spotify playlist blasts.

HAIG

Alright, Cara. In honor of me being granted partial custody, we're cooking an authentic Armenian meal. Because food and family are all we have left, really.

Haig meticulously rolls each dolma.

CARA

Ok! My mom only knew how to make rice pilaf.

HAIG

That's what happens to some families of diaspora. We lose some ties to our culture.

(beat)

In fact, that's why we don't speak Armenian. But you know this already. Quick! What are the five ingredients of Grandma's journey.

CARA

(counting on each finger)
Red Sunday. Constantinople.
Euphrates. Russia...and...Armenian
Cross!

HAIG

That's my girl! That's how you got here, remember? You wouldn't be alive today without her superpowers.

Cara perks up at the word, "super."

HAIG (CONT'D)

And she left the language behind because she had no cultural ties. So don't ever take any shit from other Armenians when they ask why you don't speak the language. Got it?

Cara nods.

CARA

Can we still learn it?

HAIG

(smiling)

I'd love that, actually. Great idea, Car.

(pointing to a green platter)

Over here we've got dolmas, which are basically rolls of rice wrapped in grape leaves.

Cara tries a bite of a dolma, forms a sour facial expression, then gives a thumbs up.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Yeah? Are you sure about that? Because you looked a little unsure for a second, there.

CARA

It's good. It's just really sour.

Haig points his index finger in the air toward the ceiling.

HAIG

That's the vinegar and lemon. It's like wine. It's an acquired taste, as they say. Of course, I wouldn't know. I can't drink anymore because I'm a spazz, remember?

Cara and Haig laugh.

HAIG (CONT'D)

So, while you were at school today, I walked down to the meat market and bought the freshest lamb. And I dug up the old family recipe for shish kebab. The way my Great-Great Grandfather made it. You marinate it with onions, garlic, lemon, vinaigrette, a little bit of Dijon mustard. Then, you let it sit for hours, and the meat absorbs all of the flavors.

Cara smells the lamb.

CARA

Can I try it?

HAIG

Well, it's a family tradition. So, I'd be offended if you didn't. Only thing is, it hasn't been cooked.

Haig leans in closer.

HAIG (CONT'D)

(quietly)

But, I'll let you in on a family secret...The lemon essentially cooks the raw lamb.

Haig hands Cara a piece of Lamb.

CARA

Ew! Are you sure I won't get Mad Cow's disease?

Haig laughs.

HAIG

Mad Cow's disease from a lamb? No. I promise.

Cara tries it, drops to her knees, and raises her hands to the heavens.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Right? Who thought a recipe so simple could be so amazing?

Haig teaches Cara how to roll dolmas with the grape leaves.

Haig and Cara use kitchen utensils as microphones to sing along to the lyrics of Cara's Spotify playlist.

EXT. HAIG'S BALCONY - NIGHT - LATER

Haig shows Cara how to grill the meat on his balcony barbecue. Both of them periodically taste it for approval.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Haig and Cara practice their original song and cover of "Amira and Haig" while intermittently checking on the lamb.

INT. HAIG'S KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER

Haig and Cara eat the whole meal with their hands, laughing hysterically while dancing to the music.

LATER

They sit at the dinner table after eating, hands on stomachs, groaning.

CARA

I'm dying.

HAIG

I'm slipping into a coma. Alert the authorities.

CARA

Aren't you supposed to tell me to eat my food slowly?

HAIG

Clearly, I never learned how to do that, despite your mom always telling me, "chew before you swallow."

Silence. Then a choking noise. ARGH-AWK-GAK! Haig has a tonic clonic seizure.

CARA

Uncle Haig!

Cara rushes over to assist Haig, placing a pillow below his head before pulling out her phone and dialing 911.

INT. UCSF ICU - MORNING

Cara and Cindy hover around Haig, who's lying in a hospital bed in the ICU. The lights roar.

DR. HIRSCHFELD (63), long, red hair with curly ends, short, slightly overweight, white lab coat over slacks and a button-down, walks in.

DR. HIRSCHFELD

Haig, your brain isn't responding the way we would have liked to your new medication--

HAIG

What? I was doing fine on it.

DR. HIRSCHFELD

Such can be the case when initially adjusting to a new medication. The anti-epileptic properties of the medication can wane quite fast for certain patients. Our other option is to remove part of your hippocampus.

Cara gasps.

CARA

What's a hippokrampus?

DR. HIRSCHFELD

(to Cara, smiling)

It's a fancy word for a part of the brain.

(to Haig)

It can minimize further cognitive deterioration--

HAIG

What's the success rate?

Dr. Hirschfeld clears her throat.

DR. HIRSCHFELD

It's fifty-fifty.

Haig takes a deep breath in, holds it for a few seconds, then slowly exhales.

HAIG

I'll do it.

CINDY

Haig, are you sure?

HAIG
I'm positive. I'll sacrifice a
goddamn goat at this point. I'm not
losing Cara again.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig and Cara sit on the couch watching *Supergirl*.

HAIG
(to Cara)
Look. About what I said to the doc.
I meant it. I'm having the surgery.

CARA
What? On your brain?

HAIG
Yes, Amira.

CARA
Cara.

HAIG
What?

CARA
It's Cara.

HAIG
Yeah, I know. What did I call you?

CARA
You called me Amira. This isn't the
first time you've gotten confused.
I'm really worried about them
cutting into your brain.

HAIG
I know. I'm scared too, but I'm
gonna make it. I'm young and
healthy, and I have a good feeling
about this. I may experience side
effects. I may mix up more words,
maybe even have some memory issues,
but I'll still be me.

CARA
(accusatory)
You've been on WebMD, haven't you.

HAIG
(blushing)
Yes. Yes, I have. It's a fucking
dumpster fire.

INT. HAIG'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Haig bangs on Cara's door in the middle of the night, his eyes closed.

HAIG
Amira! Amira! I know what you're
doing in there! I'm telling mom and
dad!

CARA (O.S.)
Uncle Haig? What are you talking
about?

INT. CARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A thump outside the door abruptly stops Haig's rambling.

Silence.

Cara sits by the door with her arms wrapped around her legs, tears zig-zagging down her sullen cheeks.

CARA
Uncle Haig? What was that?

Slowly, a faint whimper from Haig grows.

INT. HAIG'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Haig's whimpers have morphed into sobs. A confused look encompasses his face as he lies on his back on the floor.

HAIG
Amira? Where'd mom and dad go?

Cara opens the door and rushes to Haig's side.

CARA
It's Cara.

HAIG
Who's Ca-- Oh. Yeah. I know that.

CARA

I think you were having a nightmare. You thought my room was my mom's room and that you were at Grandma and Grandpa's old house.

HAIG

Fuck. I need that surgery, like, yesterday.

Haig slowly sits up.

HAIG (CONT'D)

They have these how to videos on YouTube if you want to give it a try. I think my kitchen knives and a couple of your Grandfather's old tools should do the trick.

Cara tries not to laugh.

CARA

That is not funny!

HAIG

Well, I don't know about you, but since I just pulled a *Still Alice*, I need to wind down a bit before bed. Let's play some tunes.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig sits in front of the piano while Cara sits on top. Haig adjusts the volume to its lowest setting. He holds a slipper to his mouth, feigning a microphone.

HAIG

Sing really quietly so we don't wake the neighbors. Or neighbor, I should say. That miserable hag.

(to the window)

This is our pre-surgery performance for our many fans out there. We love you guys.

CARA

What are we playing?

HAIG

This is a song I know. It's by this guy, Elliott Smith. He was a genius overlooked by everyone.

CARA

What kind of music is it?

HAIG

I'll just play you a song. Your mom played this for me when I was a kid, and it changed my life.

Haig takes a long breath in. He plays and sings "In the Lost and Found (Honky Bach)" by Elliott Smith on the piano.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I'm alone / but that's okay / I don't mind / most of the time / I don't feel afraid to die / She was here / passing by / Don't go home / Angelina / Stay with me / hanging around in the lost and found...

Haig finishes playing the song.

CARA

Oh my god, Uncle Haig. That might be one of the best songs I've ever heard.

INT. AMIRA'S ROOM - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Heavens to Betsy, Sleater-Kinney, Elliott Smith, Bob Dylan, Prince, Rancid, Beastie Boys, Talking Heads, Joy Division, and a plethora of 1980s actors ranging from Johnny Depp to River Phoenix are plastered on Amira's wall.

Tie-dyed curtains surround her bed, to the left of which is a night stand, upon which a picture of her with her high school sweetheart sits.

Amira (28) and Haig (16) sit cross-legged on her bed, smoking a joint.

At the foot of her bed, sitting atop a mahogany chest, is her vintage record player.

AMIRA

Pull out a record called "Elliott Smith". It's self-titled. The album artwork is trippy, bro. It looks like two people either jumping or falling in between two buildings.

Haig moves the record player, grabs the record out of the chest, replaces the player, and puts the record on.

AMIRA (CONT'D)

Ok. Now, turn on the player and
switch it to track five.

Haig puts the track on, sits back on the bed, and lays his head down on Amira's lap as "The White Lady Loves You More" plays. He stares at the ceiling, mesmerized by Smith's hauntingly whispery voice and meticulous guitar picking.

HAIG

This might be one of the best songs
I've ever heard.

Amira laughs.

AMIRA

You're just stoned, dude. I haven't
even showed you his best shit.

Haig looks up at her.

HAIG

Amira?

AMIRA

Yeah, dude?

HAIG

You're the coolest person I know.
Promise me you won't ever change.

Amira tears up for a second.

AMIRA

I love you, Haig.

HAIG

I love you too, sis.

AMIRA

I'm sorry I've been so moody over
the past couple of years.

INT. UCSF NEUROSURGERY CENTER - MORNING - [PRESENT DAY]

Haig lays in a hospital bed in the pre-surgery room as the doctors and nurses prepare him for surgery. The deafening lights are unbearable. Cindy and Cara sit beside his bed.

CINDY

Well, the three of us keep running
into each other at just the worst
of times, don't we?

Tears begin running down Haig's face.

HAIG
I'm sorry, Cindy. I'm not dad
material.

CINDY
If you weren't, we wouldn't be
here. You're supposed to be smart.

Haig reluctantly forms a grin.

CARA
Cindy, I think Uncle Haig needs a
girlfriend.

Cindy laughs.

CINDY
Maybe I can assist Haig with that
next.

HAIG
Cara...I don't know if that's
appropriate. We're technically
Cindy's client--

CARA
(to Cindy)
We'd have to do six-part interviews
with each potential candidate.

HAIG
That's not really how dating works.

The skin around Haig's eyes, mouth, and jaw suddenly loosens.

HAIG (CONT'D)
(giggling)
Holy shit. I think the morphine
just kicked in.

Cindy rolls her eyes as Cara paces around the hospital room.

CARA
You have to check out our band,
Cindy!

Cindy smiles.

CINDY
(to Haig and Cara)
And shouldn't you have a name for
this band?

CARA

We do! We're, like, number one on the Billboard.

HAIG

Cindy. Come on, you've never heard us on the radio?

(to Cara, whispering)

What are we called? That Facebook group fucked us.

CARA

Um...we're called...

Cara's eye's widen, an unwavering smile emerging upon her face, her bushy brows reaching for the ceiling.

CARA (CONT'D)

Keeping Up With The Kryptonians!

HAIG

Holy shit. Did you just come up with that on the spot?

CARA

(nonchalantly)

Uh-huh. I did.

HAIG

That's fucking genius!

A woman clears her throat upon entering the room.

NEUROSURGEON

Ok. You must be Haig?

HAIG

That's me.

NEUROSURGEON

I'm Doctor Bendino. I'll be performing your surgery today. You're in excellent hands. I've done this surgery a million times.

HAIG

I'm not sure if I find that disquieting or comforting.

NEUROSURGEON

I'm impressed. People don't usually have a sense of humor during moments like these.

A sudden desperation emerges in his tone.

HAIG
(breathing heavily)
I might be having a panic attack.

NEUROSURGEON
I've seen it all. Panic attacks.
Heart attacks.

HAIG
I'm serious. I can't catch my
breath.

NEUROSURGEON
It's ok. Take deep breaths. You're
on benzodiazepines. We call this
the pre-surgery jitters.
(to Cara and Cindy)
Alright. I'll give you a minute,
then we have to move you two to the
waiting room.

HAIG
How long is the surgery?

NEUROSURGEON
About six or seven hours, usually.
Then, you'll be in the recovery
room for a few hours.

The NEUROSURGEON leaves the room.

CINDY
We'll see you soon, Haig. You're
gonna be great. You've got a leg
up, remember?

Haig smiles.

HAIG
And a band.

Cindy grins as she leaves the room.

Cara fights back tears and hugs Haig.

CARA
Good luck, Uncle Haig.

Haig and Cara both silently sob.

HAIG

I'm not going anywhere. Ok? I'll be right here in this room.

Cara begins walking out of the pre-surgery room.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Cara.

Cara turns around.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I love you.

CARA

I love you too, Uncle Haig.

Darkness.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Haig (23), Amira (35), and Cara (5) eat ice cream out of the carton on the couch as *Real Housewives* plays on the TV.

Cara attempts to sink impossibly further into the couch, as if to hide from the abundance of unwarranted information seeping into the far-reaching crevices of her innocent mind.

CARA

(voice shaky)

Why did they kill us?

AMIRA

It's called the banality evil. They were just following orders, as messed up as that seems.

HAIG

They did it because they don't like us. They did it because they knew they could get away with it. They're still doing it because denial runs deep.

AMIRA

And our country cares more about money than saving our people.

HAIG

That's why we're all so loud. We need the truth to be heard. We need justice.

FLASH - HAIG'S FLIPPED SUBARU SLIDES TO A STOP ON THE FREEWAY
 CROSS-FADE TO ARMENIAN DIASPORA:

EXT. SHIPPING PORT - MORNING [FLASHBACK]

Situated on the titular-suggested shape of Golden Horn Bay, the bustle of thousands of humble travelers, workers, and eccentric cosmopolitans inside the massive port drowns out the clanky echoes of the neighboring Trans-Siberian Railway.

SUPERIMPOSE: VLADIVOSTOK, PRIMORSKY KRAI, RUSSIA. MAY 8, 1917. THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA HAS BEGUN.

HAIG (V.O.)
 Grandma escaped to San Francisco by
 way of Russia.

Haig's Grandmother, now carrying the BLACK PEARL KHACHKAR that lies with Amira, steps onto a large passenger ship, her expression now characterized by an exhausted assuagement; a wary smile on her face - a semblance of hope.

HAIG (V.O.)
 And she got through it all by never
 letting go of her lucky khachkar.
 Her Armenian Cross.

INT. AMIRA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - [FLASHBACK]

Cara gingerly lifts the carton off of the coffee table, robotically mixing the ice cream with the spoon.

AMIRA
 And lucky for Grandma, she was
 adopted by a nice family from
 Hillsborough when she arrived to
 San Francisco, but Grandpa was
 raised in foster care--

HAIG
 He always said foster care was like
 a stale marriage...
 (to himself, trailing off)
 ...neither party wants to be
 present or participate. And abuse
 is commonplace.

AMIRA
 Real nice analogy for a five-year-
 old, Haig.

Haig throws up his hands in confusion.

HAIG
(laughing)
And Arendt is?

INT. UCSF NEUROSURGERY CENTER - DAY - [PRESENT DAY]

Cindy and Cara eagerly await in the waiting room. Haig's neurosurgeon walks out, looking down at her notepad. She glances up at them, giving them a feigned smile.

SUPERIMPOSE: TWELVE HOURS LATER.

NEUROSURGEON
(to Cindy and Cara)
Well, it turned out to be a more complicated partial removal than we had initially anticipated. The best way to describe it is...it's like separating vinegar from oil, the vinegar being the part of the hippocampus that's removed. It isn't exactly like cutting into--

CARA
Doc! Is he ok? Is he alive?

NEUROSURGEON
The long and short of it is the surgery was a success. The extra time even allowed us to remove the affected part of the hippocampus entirely without damaging any of the other cellular walls. In fact, the damage was less extensive than the initial MRI suggested--

CARA
Ok. Ok! OK! You're killing us, Doc! Haven't you seen the movies? You're supposed to start with the good news, first!

The neurosurgeon let's out a genuine smile this time and extends her arms outward.

NEUROSURGEON
Haig is going to be ok!

Cara pumps her fist in celebration.

CINDY

Thank you so much, Dr. Bendino.
Does this mean Haig might live
longer than the initial prognosis?

NEUROSURGEON

Should he be seizure free? Yes. I'm
very optimistic about it. It's
common to see a decrease in
seizures after a successful
transcortical selective
amygdalohippocampectomy. Time will
tell how Haig responds to it. But
it's looking good, initially.

CARA

Wow. Uncle Haig, I think you might
actually be Superman!

Dr. Bendino kneels down at eye level with Cara.

NEUROSURGEON

Well, he sure is! And word has it
that you're Supergirl, herself.

CARA

Basically. We share the same first
name. And I'm just as strong.

Cara flexes her biceps.

HAIG (V.O.)

(to himself)

The car saved his life...And then,
he survived.

INT. HAIG'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Haig lays, horizontally, on his couch while Cara sits by his
feet. He gently applies an icepack to his bandaged head.

SUPERIMPOSE: THREE WEEKS LATER.

CARA

(to Haig)

When are you going to get those
bandages off, Frankenstein?

HAIG

Very funny. I got these for another
week. Then I'm good to show the
world another battle wound.

CARA
Yes! Just in time for our gig!

HAIG
Oh, get ready to get your mind
blown.

CARA
Your mind.
(pointing to Haig's head)
Blown.

Cara makes an explosion sound with the accompanying hand motion.

HAIG
(to Cara)
I'm glad you're learning your music terminology.
(beat)
Quick, what's the word for when the music suddenly gets really loud?

CARA
Um...crescendo!

HAIG
Fuck yeah!

LATER

Haig and Cara sit on the couch watching *Game of Thrones* on the DVR.

Cara squints her eyes at the screen.

CARA
What's going on?

Haig gestures toward the TV as if to hold a laser pointer during a presentation.

HAIG
So, the whole reveal was that Jon Snow is not a bastard after all. I find it funny how everyone on the show has Armenian last names.

CARA
I'm so lost.

HAIG

I mean, I can barely keep up. And I research this shit for hours.

Haig's face lights up in excitement.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Hey! Guess what?

CARA

What?

HAIG

The Chronicle is publishing that piece about us tomorrow!

CARA

Are you serious?

HAIG

Yeah. My editor loved it.

CARA

Does this mean we're gonna be famous?

HAIG

I mean, we're not not going to be famous.

EXT. RICKSHAW STOP - NIGHT

A vigil of more than 100 Armenians stand outside of Hemlock Tavern. Signs read messages such as, "RIP AMIRA JAN," "#ARMENIANSTRONG," "STOP AZERBAIJANI AGGRESSION," "AMIRA AND HAIG 4EVER," and "WE WILL NOT GO EXTINCT."

A chalkboard standee propped up outside reads, "Keeping Up With The Kryptonians, Live at 8 PM!" Haig's *Chronicle* piece is taped to the standee below the chalk. There is no Turkish or Azerbaijani hate spewed upon the signage this time.

INT. RICKSHAW STOP - NIGHT

Haig and Cara sit behind the onstage grand piano as Jerry prepares to introduce them.

CARA

What's happening outside?

JERRY

I think Haig's story went national.

HAIG
 (shaking head)
 No. It went international.

Haig punches Jerry in the arm.

JERRY
 Hey! Goddamnit, Haig.

HAIG
 (superciliously)
 I brought you a fucking audience.

Haig and Jerry laugh.

Jerry removes one of the microphones on the stand and speaks into it.

JERRY
 Ladies and gentlemen, we are proud
 to host the debut of San
 Francisco's own, Keeping Up With
 The Kryptonians! Enjoy!

HAIG
 Thanks, Jerry. This one is
 dedicated to Amira, my sister and
 Cara's mother.

Cara begins singing before Haig gently plays the piano, which crescendos as the song progresses.

HAIG (CONT'D)
*You march across mountains and
 deserts / You sail across oceans to
 live on the outskirts / You laugh
 at our struggle, forgotten / We'll
 naturalize you, so this blow can be
 softened.*

HAIG/CARA
*It cuts, it hacks, it saws, it
 snaps The skin, viscera, bone, the
 back / It stings when it seeps
 through the vaguely-veiled cracks /
 Oozing with puss, march on, don't
 look back.*

CARA

*Left here to fend for my thoughts /
And sort out a history that you
never bought / I scour across
worlds for the broken pieces / Just
to cut my trembling hands on the
sharp-edged glass shards.*

HAIG/CARA

*It cuts, it hacks, it saws, it
snaps The skin, viscera, bone, the
back / It stings when it seeps
through the vaguely-veiled cracks /
Oozing with puss, march on, don't
look back.*

CARA

*Careful, I'm an open wound /
Hostile, like an open nerve /*

HAIG

*Careful, I am cancerous / Test me
please, I'm feeling rapturous.*

HAIG/CARA

(shouting)

*When there's blood on the streets,
buy stock / What did the paperboy
say to the Irish beat cop / Please
Mr. Piggy, I need this job / He
took his baton and closed up his
shop.*

The crowd roars in applause as Haig and Cara bow.

HAIG

*Thank you. This next one is our
first original. This is for Cara,
next to me, here, who makes me a
better person everyday.*

Haig begins playing piano as Cara snaps to the rhythm. They perform their first original.

CARA

*Wake up and feel like you don't
belong today. It's ok / Tomorrow,
you'll feel like you might belong
someday. Someday / Makeup to feel
like you might fit in ok. Everyday
/ Coverup those scars. I hope it
makes the pain go away.*

HAIG/CARA

*When I got stuck here with you / I
could see the light shining through
/ They can call us stupid, us two /
We just flip 'em off, yell, "Fuck
you!" / When they told us we
couldn't do / All the things that
we needed to / We just laughed it
off and made do / We cheer each
other up when we're blue...*

LATER

After Cara repeats the first verse, the song ends, prompting Cara and Haig stand up and bow in unison to a thunderous standing ovation.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Haig lays in bed in his now-cozy room. He wakes up, disoriented for a moment, but that moment fleets before he smiles, marveling at the way the sunlight reflects off of his sheets through the windows.

HAIG (V.O.)

(to himself)

I awake at the crack of dawn,
confused, but only for a moment. My
thoughts and new memories are
scattered among the vast, endless
annals of my less-broken brain.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Haig wakes up, again, disoriented then relieved and gracious.

HAIG (V.O.)

(to himself)

I awake at the crack of dawn to my
new family. A new life. One that I
thought I would never have.

(MORE)

HAIG (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's in our blood to endure the disabilities, the addictions, the Kevins and Nicks, the life-threatening surgeries, the misguided Turkish nationalists who tried but failed to annihilate our bodies and spirits, Azerbaijan's Armenophobia and attempts at furthing Turkey's bloody legacy, the generational trauma, and the existential and emotional weight of untimely, untoward deaths. Like Amira's and my Grandmother, Cara and I will survive...Armenians always thrive in the face of extinction.

INT. HAIG'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Haig wakes up, yet again, disoriented, then gleaming with joy as Cara runs in and jumps onto his bed to get him up.

HAIG (V.O.)

(to himself)

I awake at the crack of dawn to my amazing Cara. However short my life may or may not be no longer concerns me. Because I'm enjoying it while there's life in and around me. I know now that Cara is going to be able to live the life she deserves. With her as my heart and soul...I got this.

FADE OUT.

THE END