

## HOPE IT GIVES YOU HALAL

### ACT I SCENE 1

**Fatima's Falafel Stand. Interior. Kitchen. It's a food truck, except it's been mounted on a permanent foundation. A tented dining area with half-walls and outdoor heaters is visible through the window, as is the parking lot.**

**FATIMA, in her early twenties, pretty, tired, is at the grill making falafel. JJ is her younger brother. She's wearing a gauze peasant blouse (Oaxacan, not anything from the middle east) and jeans, and big hoop earrings, and her dark hair is pulled up in a high pony-tail. He's in a t-shirt and jeans and an LA Dodgers baseball cap.**

FATIMA: Get your filthy hand off me, JJ, the falafel is burning and after what your ferret did to the doctor, I think you have a lot of explaining to do!

JJ: In my defense, Fati, Sheldon is not *my* ferret; he is the *class* ferret. It was just my turn to take care of him for the week, and I didn't know I was getting my cast off that day because no one tells me anything.

FATIMA: You didn't need to know. You're eleven. You're supposed to go to school, and come home, and do your homework, and help out here, and go to the doctor without fussing about it all the time. It's not like he was going to cut off your arm. And you wouldn't have even had a cast if you hadn't been riding your bike without a helmet.

*Fatima has lifted the falafel basket out of the fryer while she's been talking. Now she serves it onto a plate with lettuce and tomatoes.*

FATIMA: Can you manage to stay here for five minutes while I serve these people? Don't touch anything. Don't move anything. And don't get in trouble.

JJ: Okay.

*Fatima exits with the falafel plate and returns without it.*

JJ: Having a helmet on wouldn't have saved my arm, you know. And it wasn't because I was riding my bike... exactly.

FATIMA: Oh? Exactly why was it that you broke your arm and made us have to close the restaurant early to rush you to the hospital?

JJ: (sheepish) It was 'cause I was riding my bike in the skate park.

FATIMA: Are you insane? Are you seriously insane?

JJ: (quietly) Mama used to say I was twice-blessed because I do all sorts of stupid things and still manage to live.

FATIMA: (angry) Well, Mama isn't here now. (realizing, quietly) And Daddy isn't either. Oh, Jay, I miss them, too. Mama can't come back to us, ever, but at least Daddy is alive and well and not in ICE custody like so many others. And at least they left us a way to pay the bills.

*Fatima peers through the window and determines that those final customers have left. She kills the lights in the parking lot and turns off the OPEN sign.*

FATIMA: Go bus those last couple of tables, will you, and I'll shut down in here, and then we can go home. Kevin's making chili tonight.

JJ: (brightly) No leftover shawarma?

FATIMA: (affectionately) No leftover shawarma.

*She turns out the lights, ending the scene.*

## SCENE 2

**FATIMA and KEVIN's apartment. KEVIN is anglo, ginger, pale, tall, everything FATIMA and JJ are not, and he's wearing an apron that says "Kiss the Cook." He is stirring chili on a stove while JJ and FATIMA are sitting at the breakfast bar opposite him. A mirror on the upstage wall allows the audience to see the woman and boy's faces.**

JJ: So, I carry the two, and add that and then the answer is... seventeen?

FATIMA: Yes, that's right.

KEVIN: Way to go, math whiz!

JJ: That's the last problem.

FATIMA: Good. Make sure you put the worksheet in your notebook. I don't want any excuses about the dog eating your homework when I know you did the work and we don't have a dog.

JJ: I will.

FATIMA: Go do it *now*, please.

JJ: But –

KEVIN: Better go, Jay. Dinner's about ready. Wash your hands on the way back.

JJ: I don't have to be told that. 'm not a baby.

KEVIN: Hey, I'm almost *thirty* and my parents still tell me to wash my hands before dinner. It's habit. I don't think you're a baby.

JJ: Oh. (beat) Thirty? Really?

KEVIN: Really.

JJ: That's like, really old.

FATIMA: It's not that much older than I am.

JJ: Yeah it is. It's like... old enough to be a *parent*.

FATIMA: (warning) Jay...  
*JJ exits toward his room, homework sheet waving as he runs. He is gone for a while.*

KEVIN: Am I old?

FATIMA: (softly) Not so old. (she leaves her bar stool and moves behind the counter to stand behind him, wrapping her arms around him and leaning her head against his shoulder) Just the stabilizing influence we need. Chili smells wonderful.

KEVIN: I bought the meat at that organic, halal butcher on tenth.  
*Fatima releases him and begins collecting bowls and spoons and napkins.*

FATIMA: You know I don't care about that.

KEVIN: I know you say you don't. But... it's on the way home, and it's not like it's a major inconvenience. (beat) Besides, it could be a whole new thing. Halal Mexican food.

FATIMA: Made by an Irish-American? Brings new dimension to the concept of 'fusion.'

KEVIN: Or 'melting pot.'

FATIMA: Seriously. So... did you know JJ's been riding his bike at the skate park?

KEVIN: No! Wait! Is *that* how he broke his arm?

FATIMA: Apparently. (sighs) I don't know what to do with him, Kev. I love him. But if I can't get him to behave... one wrong report and they could take him away from me, send him into foster care. And I mean... you're awesome, but we're not married, and my status is questionable, and it doesn't look good to the social workers and...

KEVIN: (turns off the stove) Hey... hey... you know they're unlikely to remove a kid from a blood relative. And you're doing the best you can. And... he hasn't done anything bad... just a little... mischievous.

FATIMA: I wish my parents were here. I wish Mama hadn't died. I wish Daddy had gotten his green card. I wish...

KEVIN: I know. I'm sure he wishes, too. Have you heard anything from the lawyers?

FATIMA: We have a phone appointment next week.

KEVIN: Let me know when. I'll try to be home.

FATIMA: You don't have to –

KEVIN: I *want* to.

*Kevin and Fatima share a kiss, but it's interrupted by the return of JJ.*

JJ: (teasing, mostly) Ieewww. Gross. Do you have to do that in the same room as our *dinner*? Get a *room*.

*Fatima and Kevin laugh.*

FATIMA: Have a seat, JJ. I don't know about you, but I'm starving.

*They all take seats, not at the bar, but at the round table downstage left. Kevin serves the chili from the pot he's brought to the table, and they begin to eat.*

JJ: Man, Kevin, you should cook all the time. This is awesome.

KEVIN: I'm glad you think so. I'm glad to give your sister a break. I could teach you how to make it, if you want.

JJ: That'd be cool.

KEVIN: We'll do that, then. (beat) So, there's something that I've been dying to know... how exactly did your ferret manage to crawl up the doctor's pants-leg without him noticing?

JJ: Sheldon is *not* my ferret. (beat). I might have accidently squirted hot dog juice on the doctor.

KEVIN: Hot dog juice?

JJ: My appointment was right after lunch, and I was sharing my hot dog with Sheldon, and have *you* ever tried to hold a ferret and a hot dog with your arm in a sling?

KEVIN: Uh...

FATIMA: Have you written your apology yet?

JJ: Um... kinda?

FATIMA: After dinner?

JJ: (resigned) After dinner.

*The lights fade out.*

**SCENE 3: JJ's Bedroom, later that night. It's a pretty typical boy's bedroom. Sports posters, rocket ships and similar toys decorate the space. A skateboard is propped against the wall, and the Dodgers cap is on the bedpost. JJ is still awake, playing a game on an iPad.**

**FATIMA** knocks on the door, and then enters, and sits on the bed.

JJ: (annoyed) I didn't say 'Come in.'

FATIMA: Well, where do you think you get your rebellious streak from.

JJ: You're no rebel.

FATIMA: Maybe not now... but when I was your age, I was pretty bad. You know, we lived out in the country when I was little. Mama and Daddy wanted to live on the land, and for a while they were caretakers for this sweet older couple that owned a farm.

JJ: I didn't know that.

FATIMA: Oh, yeah. It wouldn't have been so bad, if I'd been a little younger, or old enough to drive, but I was just old enough that the little town was too small and too close, and my friends and I decided it would be fun to make some mischief.

JJ: What did you do?

FATIMA: Well, we hooked up one of the burros to a radio flyer wagon –

JJ: (interrupting) Like from that movie?

FATIMA: - like from that movie. And we put my best friend Sandra's little sister in it. And we led it into the town square, into the farmer's market on Saturday morning, which was market day. Someone's dog got loose, and it spooked the burro, and it took off with the wagon and the baby and ran through the center of the market and knocked over Mrs. Hoover's pickle stand and everything was drenched in pickle juice.

JJ: You're making this up.

FATIMA: (laughing) I'm not. I swear. All I remember is that I got into a ton of trouble. A ton. And Mama told me they almost lost their job because of me.

JJ: (frightened) Like you could lose me if I'm too rambunctious.

FATIMA: You heard that?

JJ: Is it true?

FATIMA: (hedging) I worry a lot. Probably I worry too much. But...

JJ: I'll try to be better.

FATIMA: I know you don't mean to do half the stuff you do.

JJ: It just... happens.

FATIMA: Yeah. The thing with the burro just happened.

JJ: Was the burro okay?

FATIMA: Scared. But fine. Wouldn't go near wagons again, ever.

JJ: And the baby?

FATIMA: (laughing again) Slept through the whole thing. (suddenly sober) Oh, god, but Sandra's mother.... That was scary.

JJ: What happened?

FATIMA: Well, Sandra got a bare-butt spanking right there in the middle of the market.

JJ: Ouch.

FATIMA: Yeah.

JJ: And you?

FATIMA: Well, she couldn't touch me. But she screwed up her face real tight and got real red and loud and said, "If I see your red-tailed donkey in the shopping center one more time, I'll send the geese to eat your kids."

*Brother and sister stare at each other for a long moment, and then both burst out laughing. The implication is that they'll both be a bit kinder and more understanding toward the other. Fatima ruffles her brother's hair and turns out his lamp, but she lingers in her door, the way a mother would, watching him, as the lights fade out.*

**FIN**