

# *Sketch*

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Amreekia

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## Amreekia

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### Part 1

Remind yourself that you are only living with his mother for the summer to save money. You can't afford your \$800 a month rent with no student loans and no job. Your fiancé is at an interview in San Francisco. Hopefully, he will get employed to be able to support the both of you while you go to grad school in Women's Studies. He will fly back in one week. You keep Skype open and wait for "abuzooz06" to get online. You have to tell him you knew all along his mother really does hate you.

Pots and pans bang against the sink just outside the door of the guest bedroom. You get up and lock the door. She won't come in, but you feel safer knowing the door is locked because she is washing her Kasumi titanium knives. She bought them on credit, but who are you to judge? You remember that your iPhone is on the dining room table, next to your uneaten lunch of *fasoolia* and *tabbouleh*. You pace around the room, pausing every once and while to crack your neck or wiggle your toes around in the shag carpet. You like how this feels. You take a deep breath and realize you hear Lady Gaga's muffled lyrics ringing from your phone in the other room. Your heart beats faster and you move towards the door; someone is calling you, someone to process the argument with. You press your ear against the door and hear her turn off the water, walk to the table, and turn the phone off. It makes a loud noise against the glass table when she throws it back down.

You check Skype again. "heidijo5541" and "Melanie.isu.2007" are online. Both women are friends you met in college, but you don't want to talk to them; they wouldn't get the politics of interethnic relationships. "abuzooz06" is still offline. Your phone goes off a second time. You have to talk to someone. You run over to the door and unlock it. You pull the door in a little too fast and it hits your elbow, then meet her halfway to the table, shaking your arm and cursing. You half-snarl at her and walk sideways past her to get your phone. The call has already gone to voicemail. She is standing there, dish towel in her hand breathing short, shallow breaths. Her mouth hangs open. You imagine she is about to tell you to leave and go home to stay with your own family, but she says nothing.

You wonder why she doesn't start yelling in a mix of Arabic and English again—reminding you that you are not the woman her son is supposed to marry. You are *Amreekia*. Worse yet, you are a white, tattoo-covered, free-thinking *Amreekia*. You do not regret screaming back at her over an hour ago that if she didn't want her son to marry a woman like you she should have stayed in the Middle East. You hold her stare and sidle back into the room, slam the door and lock it. Recalling the argument has only made you more upset. You check Skype. Slam your laptop shut.

The guest room is small and the walls are painted dark red, which makes the room feel even smaller. You try to open the window, but the string is caught and the plastic blinds get stuck at an angle. After five minutes of struggling to align the blinds, you sit on the edge of the bed and stare at your fiancé's CD's stacked on the dresser: Serj Tankian, John Butler Trio, Snoop Dog, and Tom Waits. He has eclectic tastes and so do you.

Remember that his mother is the only family he has left. Maybe a peace offering is in order. Remind yourself that she called you a “dumb white bitch”. Jump up off the bed and march into the bathroom attached to the guest bedroom. Stare at yourself in the mirror. Wonder if mixing up the gene pool is really so scandalous.

Shut the bathroom door and lock it. Decide that since this is the only time in your life you will have a Jacuzzi tub so you should use it. Turn on the hot water all the way, and the cold water only half way and push the button that makes the jets go off. Take off your sweat pants and tank top and stand there naked. You remember you have eucalyptus essential oil with you in your makeup bag and put three drops into the tub. Turn off the water and slide in. Lay there until your skin adjusts to the hot water. Remind yourself that you will only be there for two more months. Close your eyes. Wonder what your lover is doing. Wonder why you have always done things the hard way.

## Part 2

You can't understand why this girl hates you so much. It must be because she is *Amreekia*. Shake salt onto your lemon wedge and pull the fruit off the rind in one bite. Wonder why your son ever fell in love with her. Open the junk drawer next to the refrigerator and pull out the list of girls from Lebanon your sister recommended to you. Amina, Lara; those were your favorites. They are from your village. They are fluent in your language. They can

cook *lebne*, *falafel*, *kebbe*, *baklava*, and *shawarma*. They will be able to raise your grandchildren with the customs of your culture. Remember the way your son threw the list to the floor. He was insulted and declared that he had already met someone and was going to propose to her after graduation.

You tuck the list under the extra place mats and start washing dishes. You scrub a large pot and it slips from your soapy fingers and drops into the sink. The sound resonates in a crude way through the kitchen. You wonder if she thinks you are doing it on purpose to annoy her. Her phone is still on the table and you hear an obnoxious American pop song ring loudly. It sounds like Madonna but you aren't sure what she is singing about. You walk over to the table and see "Mom" is calling her. You turn off the phone and put it back on the table. You realize that she probably thinks you just dropped it intentionally when it clanks against the glass. You decide you don't care what she thinks. Walk back to finish the dishes and just as you lift up the knife you used to chop parsley for the *tabbouleh*, the phone rings again. You turn quickly and go to shut off the phone, but she has opened the door and is running out to grab it before you. You meet her and stare at her, surprised she had the courage to leave the guest bedroom.

She grabs her phone and stares at you. You remember what she said to you and start to breathe faster and your face gets red. You want to tell her that she will never know what it is like to be forced to immigrate to another country to work as a waitress only to find out you are pregnant and will have to wait until your husband finishes his college degree to go back home. You would have stayed in Lebanon, but the civil war was too dangerous for a young woman expecting to start a family. Instead of telling her any of this, your mouth just hangs open. She hurries to the bedroom and slams the door shut. You hear the click of the lock.

You finish the dishes and leave them to dry in the sink. You sit down on your leather recliner and switch on your favorite Turkish soap opera and listen to the Arabic voiceover. You open your laptop and smile into the black screen to check your reflection. Use your nail to pick parsley out from between your two front teeth. Let the television play quietly in the background while you check your email. Your son lets you know that the interview went well and he will be looking at an apartment called Collins Circle tomorrow afternoon. He CCed *Amreekia* in the email. Shut your laptop and turn the television off. You think that you have too much drama with her here to enjoy that the

affair of Farah and Hamoudi will finally be revealed once Farah's sister tells Hamoudi's wife.

You walk to your bedroom and slam the door. This is intentional. You think about going to get some coffee at Panera bread, or maybe going to the club for the Yoga class at 7pm. Decide you aren't in the mood to go out and crawl into your bed. Download a "Taste of Home" magazine on your Kindle. Think about your sister Aisha and your brother Anwar and know that they will say she is beautiful, but that she is not right for him. It is *haram* to date her. Imagine yourself telling them you gave him other options, but he is stubborn. He is *Amreeki* now.