

THICK LIKE HONEY

Outline

by

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### Characters: Major

- **Claire Barnes.** Professor, specializes in identity politics and history in the Middle East. Gay. 30-35 years old. Upper middle class background. Determined, intelligent, less confrontational. White, Virginia businessmen ancestors.
- **Yara Ibrahim.** Claire's partner. Arts and calligraphy expert and exhibition artist. Gay. Family from Nablus, and left Palestine when her mother died 20 years ago. Upper middle class. Determined, grounded, less conflicted. 30-40 years old.
- **Hadeel Barghouti.** Student in Claire's class. Jordanian Palestinian, never been to Palestine. 19 years old. Wears a headscarf, family is observant but not overly conservative. Bright, focused, bold, studious. Middle class.
  - *Hidaya.* Hadeel's mother. Cautious, intelligent, observant, gentle. 55.
  - *Abu Kareem.* Hadeel's father. Perceptive, aware of community status and politics, consistent, supportive. 57.
- **Daniel Kim.** University's lawyer. First-generation citizen, son of Korean immigrants. 35-40 years old. Warm, tough, perceptive, wise, surprising, witty.
- **Ronald Keith Tate.** President of the University. 'Old white male' type with minimal, or pretend, awareness of other narratives and communities. Late 50s. Bulky. Think Dursley plus Trump. Avoidant, overly comfortable, relies on others, curt, dull, sour.
- **Eleanor Rubeck.** Claire's lawyer. Middle class background. 40-45 years old. Whip smart, no nonsense, warm, experienced, women's college graduate. Straight. European mutt heritage.

### Characters: Minor

- *Michael Collum.* Student in Claire's class with dual Israeli citizenship. 20 years old. Mansplainer type. Plays at macho, but only in packs. Intellectually not quite up to par. Stuck enacting historical narrative and structural violence. Resentful.
- *University department heads and dean* (unnamed).
- *Eli Klaus.* Israeli official, 50+ years old, bulky. Think Joe Biden, but slightly colder.
- *Amit Goldman.* Israeli official #2, 35 years old, upwardly mobile. Think NCIS's recent visitor who did all the interrogations and suavely snuck under the radar. Less experienced, but sharp and hungry.
- *Candice King.* Student in Claire's class. Gay. Black. 19.
- *Tali Schwartz.* Visiting Israeli student/passersby witness, on-campus reporter. 19 years old. Middle class. Observant but not overly conservative. Feminist. Intelligent and bold.
- *Liana Jones.* University student/passersby witness. White lower class from rural area. 18 years old. Firsthand experience with sexism and structural violence, but timid.
- *Justin Herrera.* University student/passersby witness. Second-generation citizen, Mexican heritage. 21 years old. Middle class. Accustomed to racism, but not aggressively bothered by it. Cool headed, intelligent, progressive.
- *Hajj Ali Saeed.* Yara's father. 60 years old. More observant in his older age.

Open-minded but mindful of community. Feels between places, born and raised and started his family in Palestine, uprooted. Aware of having to balance his identities and doesn't have the energy to spend on inner turmoil or negotiations.

- *Jack Barnes*. Claire's father. Anthropologist, 65 years old. Pleasant, supportive, loafer-wearing, well-traveled, formerly well-informed but currently uninformed, well-meaning, distant. Upper middle class. Now occasionally lectures, warmly (but not intimately) welcomes Yara.
- *Lucille Barnes*. Claire's mother. Retired Montessori teacher, 65 years old. Supportive, waning health, water color artist in her older years. Welcomes Yara and was instrumental in Claire's development of current interests and skills.
- *Victoria Christ*. Reporter who interviews on campus. Takes herself very seriously. Prioritizes the 'truth' and the 'story' above the humanity. Insecure, no context for the story, toes agency line.
- *Conrad Wolfe*. News anchor for national or international news outlet. An asshole idiot.
- *University2 Representative*. Offers Claire a job after the trial.

## 15 Beats

### 1. Opening Image.

**Claire** is comfortable, but split. She is passionate about her subject and teaches with minimal friction, bringing little from her own life into the classroom. She is personally available and invested in her students, particularly the bright and bold **Hadeel**. Claire comes home to her wife, **Yara**. They talk about baby names. **Yara** tidies her studio and **Claire** prepares for tomorrow's class.

### 2. Theme Stated.

**Claire** is an outsider (she is queer and teaches on the Middle East, and her partner is a Muslim woman), and outsiders can't and shouldn't do anything of import. Claire is participating in a national effort to 'unionize' or organize a collective of professors in M.E. studies departments who favor fair, fact-based narratives of conflict in the M.E. **Claire** lectures on identity politics (sexuality) in the Middle East, where the loudest voices touch on Israel's 'progressive' laws, Islam's 'backward' rules, and local comparisons. **Candice** is offended: what could **Claire**, a straight, white, upper class woman, possibly know about the realities of identity politics? **Claire** outs herself. Feels slightly terrified and slightly emboldened afterward class. **Claire** and **Yara** discuss the collective. Yara isn't sure it's a good idea for a variety of reasons. *Theme: there is no room for personal authenticity in the intellectual sphere.*

### 3. Setup.

**Claire** is summoned to a meeting with the **Department Head and Dean of the University (or someone from the board)**. Conversation is overwhelmingly favorable toward teaching around the official line that Israel is the beacon of democracy in the Middle East, strategically important and an essential counterbalance to Palestine's terrorism; **Claire's** personal life and 'feelings' on the matter have no place in the classroom, and they are tired of having to continually manage **Claire**, even after their prior warnings. If she cannot control herself in the classroom...veiled threat of dismissal. *Message: **Claire** holds multiple identities that are irreconcilable: her personal and professional lives are in friction, and the result is a feeling of suspension and distance from each.* Establish boundaries between lives, self-reinforced but also policed by administration and 'party line.'

### 4. Catalyst.

**Claire** gives a balanced and factual lecture on feminism and the architecture/design of public spaces in Jerusalem, resulting in a heated debate. That night, Arab student (and hijab-wearing) **Hadeel** is attacked by dual-Israeli student and crew. Passersby, including student reporter, overhear the attack and the ethnic slurs, and interrupt. **Hadeel** flees to **Claire's** home, interrupting a turkey baster moment; **Hadeel** is immediately tended to by **Claire** and **Yara**.

### 5. Debate.

**Hadeel** does not want the crime reported, for personal, familial, and political reasons. The student reporter passerby (a visiting Israeli student) does her research (discovering that **Hadeel** went to her professor, and with ample clues to the identities of the attackers), and publishes it. **Claire**, who has experienced her own attack as a grad student abroad, doesn't know what to do, and everyone around her has their own opinions (**Hadeel**, **Yara**, **university officials**). Respect **Hadeel's** wishes and let the attack go unpunished? Corroborate the report, and risk her job, her relationship, and potentially create a huge international diplomatic problem?

### 6. Break into Act 2.

**Claire** gathers her courage and meets privately with the **University President** to corroborate the story of the attack on **Hadeel**. The **President** tells her to keep quiet, and dismisses her, telling her he has already removed the article from the paper and dealt with the student reporter. Tells **Claire** she'll meet with the **University's lawyer** that evening. **Claire** is bewildered, and continues to her afternoon class, where **Hadeel** is no longer outspoken, but timid and fearful. That evening she meets with the University's lawyer, **Daniel Kim**, with whom she shares the overwhelming nexus of personal and professional woes. He is surprisingly sympathetic, and

encourages her to, rather than going for the little fish (Hadeel's attack), to go for the big fish (sue the University for obstruction of academic freedom, intimidation, and unlawful threat of dismissal).

#### 7. B-story.

**Claire** goes public with the lawsuit. She is heavily investigated by local and national news outlets, especially after they get wind of her connection to **Hadeel's** case, that the University attempted to bury. Lots of publicity. **Yara** learns she is pregnant, but doesn't inform Claire.

#### 8. Fun and Games.

**Claire's** publicity is incredible. Her old academic work is dug up and re-analyzed. Public support floods in from academics around the world, as well as some positive and negative comments from various religious communities and political groups. She's in the spotlight, and the University can't fire her with all the attention. Her teaching is on fire. **Yara** sends flowers to her classroom -- a public acknowledgment of their relationship, and Claire is unashamed.

#### 9. Midpoint.

Joint national and Israeli officials have consulted with the office of the University President, and **Claire** is "asked" to resign. The power and energy of the spotlight disappears, leaving a battery of awful publicity that interferes with her relationship and her commitment to her chosen course of action. Claire's case against the university still stands.

#### 10. Bad Guys Close In.

The tiny progress **Claire** had made in uniting her personal and professional lives, with the support of many in the academic community, has fallen flat. **Claire** is made out by the media to be a liar, inappropriate, abnormal, 'white terrorist'. Worst thing that could happen has happened. Israeli officials 'interrogate' **Yara**, and then **Claire**, informing her that her wife is pregnant. **Claire** is unnerved and angry. Her relationship was all she had left, and now this? They tenuously reconcile.

#### 11. All Is Lost.

**Yara** and **Claire** Skype with **Yara's father** to tell him of the pregnancy. He's been following

Claire's story and, while generally supportive, is put off by the discord her choices are creating within the Muslim community, for him personally, and for his daughter. Wonders if having a child is good right now. **Yara** excuses herself, upset. **Claire** Skypes her parents, alone, to give them the news, and they ask after Yara. She's gone. Claire is alone.

## 12. Dark Night of the Soul.

**Claire** is alone in the house. Wanders through extra room (for nursery), photos of them together. Montage! "Lovestain"-ish mood. From dark, to settled, to pinhole of light. Was the lawsuit a good idea? Who is it really helping? It's done nothing for Hadeel, nothing for Claire or the greater cause of academic freedom, and has rocked her career and relationship. Is she ready to be a parent to a multi-identity child born to such parents?

## 13. Break into Act 3.

Later, **Claire's** case finally goes to court. Various communities and **witnesses** appear in her support. She is questioned regarding the attack on Hadeel, but struck as irrelevant. More information is examined with regard to academic freedom and threats to Claire's career. **Yara** testifies, is the bridge for personal and professional.

## 14. Finale.

**Claire** loses the academic case (not enough evidence to meet burden of proof), but it is still a landmark precedent for filing. Attacker is made to quietly withdraw from the university: we learn that the **Israeli student reporter** has secretly submitted her collection of evidence in support of Hadeel's story and Claire's appropriate response (to help), and positively identifying the attacker. Claire is approached by another university and offered a teaching position: they acknowledge Yara and the baby, and it's clear they value her personal and professional lives equally.

## 15. Final Images.

There IS room for authenticity! Yay! Model for the future! Both freedom and support from her new institution, and less personal self-policing. **Claire** teaches in her new atmosphere. **Hadeel** emails with pictures from Jordan, where she and her father are visiting. Returns home to **Yara** with baby bump and nursery decorations (Islamic calligraphy on wall in pastel colors, representing every identity they hold together).