

Just Be Yusuf

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INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

A computer screen reads: *THE END*.

YUSUF, 17 and slightly nerdy, sits at a laptop. He looks at the last lines of a short story:

And the man who came from nothing realized he now had everything.

YUSUF smiles at his work, and types: *By: Yusuf.*

When he hits the space bar, the program keeps changing his name to the word "yourself." He attempts to fix this, but it keeps changing his name.

DAD (O.S.)

Hey Yusuf! Dinner's getting cold,
come on!

YUSUF tries to fix the error once more.

MOM (O.S.)

Yusuf! You know we don't start
eating without y-

YUSUF

I KNOW, I HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME.

YUSUF gets up and rubs his temples.

DAD (O.S.)

...So why didn't you acknowledge
us?

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

YUSUF eats dinner with his mother and father in the dining room at the dinner table. It's a decent portrait of what a typical family should look like.

MOM

So, how was school?

No response.

MOM

Hello...

YUSUF

Huh? Oh, sorry. Thought you were
asking dad. It was fine.

(CONTINUED)

MOM

I guess that's all I'm gonna get from you, huh?

YUSUF

Well, I always say the same answers because it's always the same thing. Nothing happened!

MOM

How's your story coming?

YUSUF

It's done. I just finished it and e-mailed my teacher.

MOM

Without letting us read it first?
Yusuf-

YUSUF

Mom, you know I don't like you guys reading my work. All I can tell you is: I'm really proud of it. I think I'm gonna get a really good mark.

YUSUF'S MOM smiles, and then looks at DAD.

MOM

And how was school for you?

DAD

It was a nightmare. I'd tell you more, but we're eating.

MOM

What happened?

DAD

Some kid took a shit in the urinal. The poor janitor complained to me, and it was a whole thing.

MOM

Oh no. That's awful.

DAD

Yeah! And it's the third time this month! At least we finally caught who it was though. I had to call the poor kid's parents. They didn't take it too well.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
Dinner's good, ma.

DAD
Yeah, great job.

YUSUF'S DAD stands up and kisses her on the forehead. She looks at a clock nearby.

MOM
Come on guys, it's time to pray.

YUSUF'S DAD looks outside the window.

DAD
I'm not sure we should pray yet,
the sun hasn't set.

MOM
It's fine, the chart says now's the
time.

DAD
Yeah but they don't always have the
right sunset time on it...

They wait there in silence briefly. Eventually, YUSUF'S MOM looks outside.

MOM
It looks dark enough to me.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF prays the traditional Muslim prayer with his mother and father. They bend, kneel, and return to standing.

YUSUF looks very focused.

After a moment, his concentration is broken slightly and he looks at his mother and father while they're still very focused and lost in prayer.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

YUSUF is at the end of the prayer with his parents.

His father leads them in a final prayer. They each hold up their hands as DAD speaks.

(CONTINUED)

DAD

Oh Allah, please forgive us for any mistakes we have made throughout our prayer, knowingly or unknowingly. Please forgive all the Muslims that passed away and any mistakes they may have made when they were alive on this Earth. Please bless the holy prophet, peace be upon him. Oh Allah, please keep us safe, healthy, and protect us from the path of those who have gone astray. Please continue to help all our elders, and make it easier on them when the time comes...

The father ends the prayer and they put their hands on their faces.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Tired teenagers walk like zombies to the front doors of their large high school building.

It takes a second, but we finally spot YUSUF in the large crowd. His face is one of the few brown ones in a sea of white people. He walks with his friend ROB, 18.

ROB

A bunch of us are gonna get high and watch Salo at my house. Wanna come?

YUSUF

What's that about?

ROB

It's this arthouse movie where these rich people force poor people to eat their own poo and crawl around on the floor and do all this crazy stuff. But it's an arthouse movie, so it's considered smart!

YUSUF

Why would...Why would anyone want to see that? I appreciate the offer, but I have some family stuff to take care of.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

I knew it. That was your excuse last time too, by the way.

YUSUF

I'm sorry, I'm an introvert I guess. I'm good with people one on one, but...I don't know. Something happens to me with larger crowds. But anyway, today I actually can't. Not lying.

ROB

What do you have to do that's so *important*?

YUSUF

Well...it's the end of Ramadan for my family.

ROB

What's that again? The thing where you don't eat all day, right?

YUSUF

There's more to it, but pretty much yeah.

ROB

Dude, that is so fucked up. I don't know if I could do that. I mean, I'm hungry right NOW! And I just had breakfast like half an hour ago!

YUSUF

It's not for everyone.

ROB

How do you do it?

YUSUF

I'm used to it at this point. Plus I don't do it everyday.

ROB

Huh. Anyway, I gotta get to class. See ya, Yusuf.

YUSUF

Talk to you later.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

YUSUF sits in class and looks up at a teacher, MR. SHORT (50s), addressing the students.

MR. SHORT

Guys, I want you to do well on this. Please, just try to remember: these were real people we're learning about here. I want you to write like they're as important to you as other very real people or things in your lives right now.

Some of the students look bored.

MR. SHORT

Playstation 12. The cute boy behind the counter at the soda pop shop. That girl that doesn't like you...whatever it is.

Some of the students giggle.

MR. SHORT

Yusuf already handed in his story last night! You all have some serious work to do. It's just a simple assignment: write a story in the style of one of your favourite authors. How hard is that?

The students groan.

MR. SHORT

Good luck! Get creative.

The bell rings.

MR. SHORT

Now get lost.

MR. SHORT smiles at YUSUF.

INT. MOSQUE - EARLY MORNING

YUSUF sits with his DAD among a large group of other men with their sons of various ages. Women of various ages sit behind them.

They're all looking up as the IMAM (60s), addresses everyone.

(CONTINUED)

IMAM

I want to take this time to congratulate you. Well...those of you that deserve it. You know who you are.

YUSUF looks around at everyone. They're all intensely focused. He's the only one that looks a little bored.

IMAM

This is never an easy thing. Ramadan is always a challenge. It's challenging to have to be around temptation all day. We're challenged by the media all day. And it's challenging to fight urges. And hunger. This month we were all challenged!

YUSUF nudges his DAD with an elbow.

YUSUF

When is he gonna talk about the challenges already?

His DAD looks like he is stifling laughter.

DAD

Shut up.

IMAM

You may have had times where you said to yourself, "Why don't I just have that cup of water?" Or, "Why don't I have a piece of bread? Who is going to know? Brothers! Sisters! You should be-

A man interrupts and quietly whispers in the IMAM'S ear. He hands the IMAM a small piece of paper.

IMAM

Friends, every week I have to make the same announcement. And I'm afraid I must make it again. You are forbidden to park in certain marked spots at the mosque! those of you that come late should have consideration to the people who came early enough to get proper parking spots. Some of you are parking on the front lawns...or blocking the entrance. I've been

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IMAM (cont'd)
given the license plate of a
vehicle.

The men look at each other.

IMAM
But I won't say it. I don't want to
embarrass anyone. But I *will* say:
will the owner of a white Honda
Civic please move your car. A WHITE
HONDA CIVIC. It is a FIRE HAZARD to
EVERYONE IN THE MOSQUE. IF
SOMETHING WERE TO HAPPEN IT WOULD
BE YOUR FAULT. Again, I'm sorry to
say this, but...YOUR CAR WILL BE
TOWED.

After a moment someone sheepishly gets up and hurries to the
front exit.

IMAM
Now...where was I?

A man in the front row puts his hand up.

RANDOM MAN
You were talking about lying to
god.

IMAM
Oh. Right. Thank you, brother. You
might say to yourself: why can't I
eat in secret? Who will know?
Haven't I earned it? My friends:
god is always watching. Those of
you who have done the right things
all month, kept your noses
clean...you know who you are. But
there is a separate group. Some of
you may even be AMONG US. You don't
know the seriousness of the
religion. And the repercussions of
lying!

YUSUF looks a little more focused.

IMAM
If you lie now, don't think you're
getting away with anything in the
long run. God is always watching.
And believe me: he has a plan for
everything.

INT. DAD'S CAR - DAY

YUSUF sits in the backseat of an older Honda Accord as his DAD drives, and his mother sits in the passenger seat.

DAD

Let's beat the rush. Come on.

MOM

Look at this lady.

MOM points to a woman wearing a hijab outside the car. She has a sign that says "PLEASE HELP."

MOM

Stop the car.

DAD

Are you serious?

MOM

Stop the damn car.

MOM goes through her purse and pulls out a \$10 bill. She rolls down her window and hands it to the woman.

BEGGAR

Thank you, sister. May god bless you.

MOM

Inshallah.

DAD drives off as MOM rolls the window back up.

MOM

So...what did you guys think?

YUSUF

Are you kidding me? Why would you give money to that lady? I don't think you should've done it. We already donate to the collection, and that goes to the poor. That lady's double dipping. And besides, half the time these people put on hijabs and come and beg and they're not even Muslims.

MOM

Yusuf, no. Don't be so cold. I was talking about the speech. What did you think?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

I don't know.

MOM

You were there for over an hour,
you must have thought *something*.

YUSUF

Fine: I thought it was crap.
Nothing he said was that special or
blew my mind or anything.

MOM

What do you mean?

YUSUF

Are you sure you want me to go on?
You're not gonna like this.

MOM

Go ahead.

YUSUF

He never answers anyone's
questions. Like...why do women have
to sit behind men at the mosque?
Why are we still following that
tradition? And if god has a plan
why do we have to pray? If we're
praying doesn't that mean we're
trying to alter god's plan? Isn't
that arrogant of us?

MOM

No. There's a plan and prayer is
part of it.

YUSUF

Well, I don't get it.

The car gets quiet.

MOM

You disappoint me more every day.

She looks at DAD.

MOM

Are you hearing this? Are you gonna
let him say this stuff?

(CONTINUED)

DAD

What can I do? Let him figure this out on his own.

MOM

He's our son! Do you get it? If he ends up making mistakes that's our fault.

YUSUF rolls his eyes.

DAD

I don't know about that. Look: I've told him how *I* live. I can't force him to choose how *he* lives.

YUSUF

Mom....I never said I don't believe in god or anything like that. I'm just....starting to have my doubts.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

YUSUF walks around aimlessly. He spends a brief period bouncing around from section to section.

He tries finding something in the "BIOGRAPHY" section. The people are so unlike him, it's discouraging.

He then checks out the "WORLD RELIGIONS" section, but quickly looks restless.

Finally he walks to the "MEDIA" section, and discovers all the DVDs. He eventually stumbles across a copy of the film *Salò*.

He laughs to himself quietly and walks to the front of the library.

He tries to take the DVD out with the self-checkout machine, but it seems to be frozen.

He walks to the front counter, where he sees a bored girl, LAURA (18). She's being "trained" by an older staff member.

OLDER STAFF MEMBER

Sometimes they might ask you to use their health card as ID. That doesn't count.

YUSUF stands there, still unnoticed.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
Hi....Hey.

They don't notice him.

YUSUF
(clears throat)
Hey there.

No response.

YUSUF
Salo, I'd like to take hello out.

The two staff members look startled.

YUSUF
Sorry, other way around. Sorry to
interrupt. The machine's not
working.

OLDER STAFF MEMBER
What? That's gonna ruin this whole
day. The lines are gonna be
endless. Let me go check it out.
You got this?

LAURA
I'll be fine.

YUSUF puts the DVD case face down on the counter, trying to
conceal what he's taking out.

LAURA immediately picks up on this, and flips it over. She
smiles when she sees the front cover.

LAURA
The barcode is on the front.

YUSUF
Yeah...well...okay.

LAURA
Have you ever seen it before?

YUSUF
No. I've heard a lot about it.

LAURA
Don't eat popcorn while you're
watching.

YUSUF

Thanks, I'll keep that in mind.

LAURA finishes scanning the title and hands it back to him.

LAURA

Enjoy...

She reads from the computer.

LAURA

Yusuf.

YUSUF

Thanks....

LAURA

It's Laura.

YUSUF

Laura. Alright, great. Thanks.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF sits around a table having dinner with his MOM, DAD, UNCLE, AUNT, and cousin ASIF.

DAD

We went to the service at our mosque.

UNCLE

Ohhh, I was wondering why I didn't see you!

AUNT

We went to the service at ours.

MOM

I will never understand that.

DAD

Stop it. Just leave it alone!

UNCLE

We've been through this a hundred times. You have your favourite mosque, we have ours!

YUSUF looks at his cousin ASIF, and they share a laugh.

(CONTINUED)

MOM

I just don't see how you can go to a place further away. You have one that you live near. That seems...disrespectful almost.

AUNT

It's not! It's a different experience, I'm telling you. Last time I went to your mosque I got yelled at by some old lady because my hair was showing through my hijab. You just don't have to deal with stuff like that at our mosque.

MOM

Well maybe the lady had a point.

DAD

Enough already. How was Eid for you guys otherwise?

UNCLE

It was great. Asif helped to make the turkey this year. Had a lot of fun.

ASIF

Yeah, it turned out pretty well! Better than I thought it would. I can't get over how vulgar turkeys look though.

YUSUF laughs.

YUSUF

That's-

AUNT

And he's been leading us in prayer! We really lucked out with Asif.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

YUSUF walks with ASIF around his neighborhood.

ASIF

The other day some girl was doing the attendance in class and she stood up and said, "As if?" I tried to explain it's pronounced Asif, not As If. But everytime I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ASIF (cont'd)
corrected them they just kept
laughing and repeating AS IF.

YUSUF
I would too, that's pretty funny.

ASIF
I guess it is.

YUSUF
Hey, can I ask you a question? Why
do you still put up with that stuff
in there?

ASIF
What stuff?

YUSUF
Your parents. Why do you still
listen to them?

ASIF
I don't know, it's not so bad.

YUSUF
Not so bad? They make you pray with
them everyday and memorize passages
from the Quran and stuff. I mean,
how does that not feel like abuse?

ASIF
Yusuf, man. Whoa. The way I look at
it is this: I live under their
roof. I don't pay rent. The least I
could do is humour them, you know?
Sure, I do a lot of stuff I don't
want to. But I have no emotional
investment in any of it. To me,
it's like helping someone move a
couch. No one WANTS to help a
friend move, but you don't do it
because you want to. You do it to
be a good person.

YUSUF
That's crazy.

ASIF
Maybe, but what's the other option?
Tell them the truth? That would
never work.

ASIF pulls something out of his pocket.

(CONTINUED)

ASIF

Come on, let's smoke this thing quick before we get back. You know what a marathon is? One person takes a pull and passes it, and they can't breathe until the other person takes their pull, and passes the joint back. You have to go as fast as possible.

YUSUF

What? No way. You can, I'll walk with you.

ASIF

Yusuf, that's not how a marathon works. You need two people.

YUSUF

I'm not smoking weed.

ASIF

Suit yourself.

YUSUF

Aren't you worried you're gonna smell?

ASIF

Nah, I do it all the time. Let's walk around the block. By the time we get back maybe dessert will be ready.

YUSUF

Okay.

ASIF

You've never smoked weed before?

YUSUF

Hell no. Not my scene, how am I supposed to get writing done if I can't even stay awake?

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. SHORT hands back graded papers to all the students. When he gets to YUSUF, he doesn't give him a paper.

(CONTINUED)

MR. SHORT
(quietly)
Yusuf, come talk to me when you get
the chance.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

MR. SHORT sits behind his desk looking tired and stressed
out. He looks at YUSUF silently.

MR. SHORT
What do you think I wanted to talk
to you about?

YUSUF
I...I don't know.

MR. SHORT
Take a guess.

YUSUF
I really don't know.

MR. SHORT
Yusuf, you're one of my best
students. And you just handed in
one of the worst fucking stories
I've ever read.

YUSUF
What? Are you-

MR. SHORT
For some other student maybe this
might be solid work. Maybe even
perfect for some students. But
you're a lot better than this.

YUSUF looks down at the floor.

YUSUF
I'm...I'm sorry.

MR. SHORT
Is there anything you're not
telling me? Is your mind...are
you....

YUSUF
(looking up)
Am I what?

(CONTINUED)

MR. SHORT

Is your mind being clouded by anything?

YUSUF

Are you asking me if I'm on drugs? Of course not! Did you really hate my story that much? Jesus!

MR. SHORT

I'm gonna be honest with you: there's no real future for most people that say they want to be writers. I'm sorry, but that's just the truth. Statistically. But you...you've got a future doing something you love. I can tell.

YUSUF smiles sadly.

MR. SHORT

Unfortunately...I can also tell when you're phoning it in.

YUSUF

But I tried really hard on this!

MR. SHORT

"And the man who came from nothing realized he now had everything"? Yusuf, that was way too fast. It was just an uninspired ending. Didn't feel organic.

YUSUF

Okay.

MR. SHORT

Look, I don't give a shit what most of you do in my class. Students come in here all the time and don't listen to what I say. And I let them fail. Because?

YUSUF

You're not our babysitter. I know.

MR. SHORT

Right. But I'm being tough on you because I know you can do better than this.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Fine.

MR. SHORT

So I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. Because you were the first person to hand in your story, I'll let you redo this. You're the only student that didn't make the most out of every day you had. Read what you have again and do a second draft, and we'll go from there.

YUSUF

Okay, fine. Thank you.

MR. SHORT

Yusuf, remember: never let your excitement get in the way of whatever it is you produce. You need to be able to look at your stuff critically. Don't get married to the work!

YUSUF nods thoughtfully, and then leaves.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

YUSUF looks to the ground as he walks out of the school sadly. He almost looks like he's about to cry as other students loiter around the school happily.

Suddenly someone taps YUSUF on the shoulder. It's ROB.

ROB

Hey, man. How's it going?

YUSUF

Not having a good day. Not in the mood to talk, Rob. Sorry.

ROB

What happened?

YUSUF

I think it just might be the worst day of my life.

ROB

You're only 17! Don't worry, there'll be plenty more.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
Not funny, man.

ROB
Okay, okay. My bad, dude. Are you going to the dance tonight at least?

YUSUF stops walking.

YUSUF
Oh SHIT. That's TONIGHT?

ROB
Yeah. They've only been announcing it for like the past month.

YUSUF
Goddammit. I completely forgot.

ROB
Well fuck it, are you coming?

YUSUF
No. I don't have a date, what would be the point? Maybe I'll stay home and get some writing done.

ROB
How are you gonna be a great writer if you don't have any life experience to draw from?

YUSUF looks convinced by ROB's point.

YUSUF
Are you going with anyone?

ROB
I had a date but she got sick. I hope I see you there buddy.

YUSUF
I don't know. It's not just the date thing. I feel uncomfortable in social situations like that. I run out of shit to say and I don't really know where to go from there.

ROB
What, the introvert thing again? Are you serious?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
I know, it's stupid.

ROB
Yusuf, look around you.

YUSUF looks around at all the kids leaving school and hanging out.

ROB
Do you think anyone has any idea
what they're talking about?

YUSUF continues looking at everyone. Two students are playing catch, throwing a football to each other. Suddenly, the football hits one of the guys in the stomach.

ROB
None of this makes any sense.
People are just making this shit up
as they go along.

YUSUF
Maybe you're right. I'll be there.

ROB
Alright sweet. Meet you here at 7.

ROB runs off.

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

YUSUF looks at himself in the bathroom mirror. He's got on an ugly argyle sweater.

After a moment, his MOM walks past the bathroom.

MOM
Where are you headed?

YUSUF
The school dance.

MOM
Oh, right! Good luck. Maybe you'll
find your future wife!

YUSUF
I doubt it. I'm against the
institution of marriage, so that's
highly unlikely.

(CONTINUED)

MOM

That's a nice sweater! You look good.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

YUSUF stands alone, sipping from a red cup. He's surrounded by people dancing and joking around with each other.

ROB enters the frame eventually with a couple friends.

ROB

Yusuf, you made it!

YUSUF

Yup. Kinda wish I hadn't...

ROB

What is up with that sweater? It looks awful, man.

YUSUF

Really?

He starts looking down at his sweater.

ROB

Did you wear that on purpose or what?

YUSUF

I don't even know what that means.

ROB

Like, are you wearing it as a joke? I don't get it.

YUSUF

No...I thought it looked fine. But anyway, I think it's probably for the best. I'm gonna head home soon. This is boring.

ROB

What? Just stay for a bit. We'll drink or sneak out back and-

One of ROB'S friends whispers something in his ear.

ROB

Listen. We're gonna hit the dancefloor. I wanna see you here

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)
when I get back. Stop taking
yourself so damn seriously, Yusuf!

ROB punches YUSUF'S arm a little too aggressively. YUSUF smiles through the pain as ROB walks away.

YUSUF walks around the gym; everyone seems to be busy. He's the only one not dancing or talking to another person.

He tries to leave the gym, but it's a nightmare: with so many people surrounding him it looks like a human octopus keeping him trapped.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

YUSUF walks alone, breathing loudly and relieved to finally be outside.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

YUSUF continues his long walk home. He notices a bench, and takes a seat.

He looks like an athlete taking a well needed break from a game of life.

A bald headed man in a suit walks by. It's very strange: for all YUSUF knows, he could be imagining the man there. He's smoking a cigarette and walking very slowly and quietly. He eventually sits on the far end of the bench.

YUSUF
Hey, do you have another cigarette?

STRANGER
How old are you, kid?

YUSUF
Almost 18. But it's fine,
nevermind.

Silence.

STRANGER
I won't give you a cigarette. But
I'll leave one on the ground. If
anyone's watching, I can't get in
trouble. I didn't give it to you:
you just found it.

STRANGER puts a cigarette on the ground in front of them.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
Who would be watching?

YUSUF picks up the cigarette.

STRANGER
I just got out of prison.

YUSUF
No kidding?

STRANGER
None.

The man hands YUSUF the lighter and he starts smoking. He coughs his head off initially.

STRANGER
That your first?

YUSUF
Yeah, how'd you know? ...Mind if I ask what you went to prison for?

STRANGER
I came home from work one day and found my wife of 28 years in bed with my best friend. So I thought to myself, "Who do I kill first?"

YUSUF
What did you do?

STRANGER
What do you think?

YUSUF nervously smokes, trying to hurry up.

STRANGER
Why are you out here?

YUSUF
Me? There was a dance at my school and-

STRANGER
Obviously didn't go so hot, because you're here with me.

YUSUF
Yeah. No. It didn't.

STRANGER puts his hand on the space of the bench between himself and YUSUF.

YUSUF looks scared.

YUSUF
I gotta go.

YUSUF tosses the cigarette and walks away quickly.

STRANGER (O.S.)
Shouldn't ask for a cigarette if
you're only gonna waste it.

YUSUF looks back, and then starts running.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

The mess from the previous night is everywhere.

A surly gym teacher, MS. P, addresses the class.

MS. P
As you can all see...we clearly
cannot have gym indoors today
because of that stupid dance. We're
gonna go outside and run laps.

Groans from everyone in the class. A kid with glasses, MARK
(17), puts his hand up.

MS. P
Yes.

MARK
It's supposed to rain today. Can we
just stay inside and help clean up?

MS. P
No.

Everyone in the class laughs at him. Some of the students
throw leftover garbage from the party at him.

YUSUF looks at the kid sadly.

MS. P
Settle down guys. Let's make our
way outside. And I don't wanna see
anyone running without doing the
stretches first.

A bigger student puts his hands down his gym shorts and
smears it on MARK'S glasses, and then wipes it on his neck.

MARK takes his dirty glasses off to clean with his shirt.

(CONTINUED)

BULLY
(to friend)
My ball sweat is on him!

MARK
(quietly)
I can't wait until I graduate.

EXT. RUNNING TRACK - DAY

Students run and walk at various speeds while MS. P watches on the field.

MS. P
Faster! Get as many laps in as you
can in the time limit!

YUSUF runs until he can't anymore, almost collapsing on the ground. MARK almost walks past him, but stops.

MARK
Are you okay?

YUSUF
Yeah. Fine.

MARK
Come on, let's just walk for the
rest of it.

YUSUF
Good call.

They walk in silence for awhile as other students jog.

YUSUF
Fucking high school, huh?

MARK smiles.

YUSUF
You're new here, right? Where are
you from?

MARK
Japan.

YUSUF
Wow, really? You're the first
Japanese person I've ever met. You
ever hear of the writer-

(CONTINUED)

MARK

Haruki Murakami. Yes. Everyone says that.

YUSUF

What about Osamu Dazai?

MARK

Huh. No one ever mentions him. What's your deal, do you have some kind of Japanese fetish or something?

YUSUF

No, no. I want to be a writer someday.

MARK

Oh.

YUSUF

I wanna go to Japan someday too. What's it like over there?

MARK

Like here, but looks more like Bladerunner. Life is the same all over sometimes.

YUSUF looks around cautiously.

YUSUF

Hey, can I ask you something?

MARK

Go ahead.

YUSUF

What religion were you raised in over there? Like...do you believe in god?

MARK

No, why?

YUSUF

Just something I've been thinking about a lot lately.

MARK

I was raised Buddhist. So my parents didn't really tell me about that stuff.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

That's interesting. So you were never raised with the idea of god?

MARK

God? God can go fuck himself.

YUSUF looks shocked. He looks up to the sky for a second.

YUSUF

I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that before.

The teacher blows the whistle.

MS. P

GUYS! STOP SLACKING!

MARK

Anyway. Nice talking, maybe I'll see you around.

YUSUF

Bye.

YUSUF looks up at the sky again.

MS. P

Yusuf! Stop staring off into space and DO SOMETHING!

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

YUSUF eats dinner with his parents.

MOM

How was school, Yusuf?

YUSUF

Today a guy wiped his ballsack sweat on another guy in gym class.

She drops her fork.

DAD

Yusuf! We're eating.

YUSUF

You asked. How was work?

(CONTINUED)

DAD

Fine. Some kid got into a fight,
but other than that it was fine.

YUSUF

Really? Why?

DAD

We asked him and he said he doesn't
like people.

YUSUF

Smart kid.

DAD

His parents didn't think so.

MOM

Yusuf, have you thought of where
you're gonna go to college?

YUSUF

No.

MOM

You're gonna be 18 soon. Give it
some thought.

YUSUF

I have. To be honest-

DAD

What?

YUSUF

I don't think I want to go yet.

MOM

WHAT?

YUSUF

I don't think it makes any sense. I
think it makes more sense to wait a
year to figure things out.

MOM

No. No. I don't like the sound of
that at all. That won't do. That
won't do at all.

YUSUF

Think about it logically. I have
to-

(CONTINUED)

MOM

Logically! That's your problem!
You're thinking about things too
logically! Before you get some
faith, or...or...

YUSUF

I have to make this important life
decision at such a dumb age. I need
more time to think about it.

MOM

Don't give me that nonsense. You
need to make a move, you're going
to be an adult!

YUSUF

I *am* making a move! By not making a
move!

MOM

You're gonna sit around for a year
and do nothing and get lazy and-

YUSUF

No! I just need to think about it
for awhile!

MOM

BECAUSE YOU'RE SO SMART. YOU HAVE
ALL THE ANSWERS.

She leaves her dinner and storms out.

DAD sighs.

YUSUF

We're not even done eating dinner
yet. Where did she go?

DAD

Probably to pray for you.

YUSUF

Tell her not to waste her time. I
don't believe in god anymore.

DAD continues eating his dinner, ignoring YUSUF'S last
comment.

YUSUF

Dad, I've never asked you this
before...

(CONTINUED)

DAD gives him a curious look.

YUSUF

Why did you convert to Islam?

DAD

You already know the answer. So I could marry your mother.

YUSUF

Yeah, but...why?

DAD

Why what?

YUSUF

Why are you...How did you go from being not religious at all to believing in this stuff now? Doesn't it all seem pointless to you?

DAD

Maybe. But I figure I might as well pray just to be on the safe side. And anyway, even if I'm wrong...by the time I find out if god is real or not I'll be dead.

DAD smiles.

DAD

And it won't make a difference then, would it?

YUSUF

No, I suppose it wouldn't.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING - THAT MOMENT

MOM stands by the door listening to YUSUF and DAD speaking. She cries quietly.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

YUSUF walks into a church he has clearly never stepped foot in before. He looks around curiously: there are images of Jesus, and candles everywhere. It's nothing like the mosque he's used to.

Eventually, a PRIEST notices YUSUF.

(CONTINUED)

PRIEST

Morning.

YUSUF

Oh...hello.

PRIEST

Sorry, did I scare you?

YUSUF

A little bit.

PRIEST

I'm sorry.

YUSUF

No, no. My fault, I shouldn't have come in unannounced.

PRIEST

That's okay. We're always open.

YUSUF takes another look around.

PRIEST

How can I help you this morning?

YUSUF

I'm not really sure.

PRIEST

(laughs)

There must be a reason. What brings you here?

YUSUF

I don't know, I guess I just needed someone to talk to.

EXT. PARK - DAY

The PRIEST and YUSUF walk around a park together.

YUSUF

I guess I'm just having difficulty with this whole god thing.

PRIEST

That's not unusual for a boy your age.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Really?

PRIEST

Sure, I hear things like that all the time. You're 17, it's normal.

YUSUF

I know, but I feel weird about it.

PRIEST

That's just the devil whispering in your ear. God is always there, even if it doesn't feel that way.

YUSUF

Do you talk to him?

PRIEST

Oh of course. Every day and every night.

YUSUF

I was raised Muslim.

PRIEST

Okay...

YUSUF

So what would your god say about that? Do I go to hell or something? I always find it funny how every religion thinks they're the chosen people. And everyone else goes to hell.

PRIEST

We're all god's children. As long as you have him in your heart. That's all that matters, Yusuf.

YUSUF

Huh. Okay. Thank you.

They walk in silence for awhile. YUSUF looks at the people around the park.

YUSUF

I gotta get going.

PRIEST

That's it?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

It's not that you're not helpful.
It's just that I skipped class to
do this. I don't normally do this
kind of thing. Really: thank you
for talking to me!

The PRIEST smiles as YUSUF hurries away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

YUSUF walks quickly as ROB tries to catch up with him.

ROB

Hey, where were you this morning?

YUSUF

It's weird...

ROB

Weirder than that sweater you were
wearing at the dance?

YUSUF

I went to see a priest.

ROB

What? Why?

YUSUF

I don't know. I've been confused
about religion and shit lately.

ROB

So where are you headed now, a
synagogue?

YUSUF

No, the library. I gotta return
Salo.

ROB

You saw it!? Did you like it?

YUSUF

It was alright. Not really my
thing, but maybe sitting through
that movie is why I don't believe
in god anymore.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

So let me get this straight: you're an atheist now. How is that gonna work, I thought you believed in like 100 gods before?

YUSUF

What? I think you're talking about Hinduism. Muslims only believe in one god. You've mixed up your brown people.

ROB

My mistake. Common misconception, I guess.

YUSUF

Common to you, maybe. Fucking idiot.

ROB

Look, I'm sorry! You don't have to be a dick about it.

YUSUF

I'm not trying to be. Sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me these days. I feel depressed and shitty and anxious and-

ROB

Everyone is.

YUSUF

No, you wouldn't understand. I told my parents I don't believe in god last night.

ROB

Why the fuck would you do that?

YUSUF

I don't know. Honestly, I just hate being around religious shit all the time. I said it more out of wanting to piss them off.

ROB

Shit, good luck with that.

YUSUF

Anyway, sorry again for lashing out at you like that. It's just...I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF (cont'd)
don't know, sometimes I'm tired of
having to explain myself to white
people you know? No offense or
anything.

ROB
No, I get it.

YUSUF
I mean, there's probably stuff
about you I'd never understand.

ROB
I guess you're right.

They've reached the spot they both part ways.

ROB
This is me. See you tomorrow.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

YUSUF walks around the library with Salo in hand, looking
for the RETURN SLOT.

When he finally finds it there are too many people
surrounding it. He notices LAURA standing behind the
counter, with no one in line in front of her.

She smiles as he walks to the counter.

LAURA
Hey! Yusuf right?

YUSUF
Yes. Surprised you remembered.

LAURA
(pointing to DVD case)
I wouldn't forget that...

YUSUF looks a little embarrassed.

LAURA
Did you like it?

YUSUF
Uh...I don't think *like* is the
right word. I mean it's definitely
a smart movie. A smart movie I
never, ever need to see again.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
(laughs)
I take it you're not here to renew?

YUSUF
Nope. I want to get rid of it.

LAURA
Sorry, we actually don't do returns
here anymore. You have to line up
like everyone else.

He looks over to the line with frustrated, sad faces. The
line has gotten longer since he last checked.

YUSUF
Are you kid-

LAURA
I'm just playing around.

YUSUF laughs nervously.

LAURA
Helps to pass the time.

YUSUF
You're funny.

They smile at each other, but it fades quickly.

YUSUF
Hey...uh. Listen, I don't normally
do this. But...actually forget it.

LAURA
No, say it. I want to see you
suffer for a little.

YUSUF looks surprised.

YUSUF
I don't know if I can do it
anymore.

LAURA
Just go for it.

YUSUF
Okay. Can I have your number?

LAURA

Nope.

YUSUF laughs.

LAURA

I already have yours.

She points to the computer.

YUSUF

Oh yeah.

LAURA

I'll text you.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF is busy writing. He stops and smiles to himself.

Suddenly, a KNOCK on his bedroom door.

YUSUF sighs, his little moment of happiness gone.

YUSUF

Come in.

His mom enters.

MOM

What are you working on?

YUSUF

Nothing.

MOM

So that writing I'm looking at is "nothing"?

YUSUF

What did you want to see me about?

MOM

Tomorrow I've set up a meeting for you.

YUSUF

What?

MOM

I want you to talk to the Imam tomorrow. About how you're feeling.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Mom...no.

MOM

I know. You don't want to. But as long as you're under 18 and you live in our house...you're gonna listen to what I have to say.

YUSUF

And when I turn 18 you'll leave me alone?

MOM

If you find your own place.

Silence.

MOM

Tomorrow, you're seeing the Imam. I'm giving you notice now.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Imam addresses the audience of men and women.

IMAM

A woman complained to me this week. She sent me an e-mail. Desperate! Pleading. *Please, speak to my son.* And you know what the scary thing is? She isn't the only one. I get people reaching out to me all the time. They tell me their children have fallen off the straight path. They're doing drugs. They're visiting forbidden websites. Looking at things they're not supposed to! The young people today are poisoning their minds with all kinds of sights and sounds. And then they get out into the world and WONDER WHY they can't meet anyone. They wonder why they're so alone! My friends, let me ask you: how can anything in life compare to the cave you've built for yourself if you only choose what you want to see?

YUSUF gulps.

(CONTINUED)

IMAM

The children of today need to lower their standards. They need to get married and become adults. There are no values anymore, people are too choosy! They think they know everything, and they don't listen to what you tell them!

YUSUF looks around.

IMAM

And when young Muslim brothers and sisters DO meet...there's another problem. They're not going about a courtship like they used to. No! Gone are the days when people would form a friendship first. They jump to the extremes. Just last week...it pains me to say...we found a boy and girl at the back of the mosque. Acting... inappropriately. IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!

Gasps from the audience.

IMAM

While their parents were in the mosque, they snuck out to do these sinful things to each other!

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The IMAM sits quietly behind a desk reading from the Quran.

YUSUF enters.

IMAM

Ah, hello. Salaam.

YUSUF

I'm-

IMAM

Yusuf. I know. Sit down.

YUSUF sits down in front of the IMAM.

IMAM

You don't need to be nervous. I'm not going to yell at you.

YUSUF remains silent, staring at him.

(CONTINUED)

IMAM

Don't worry. Lots of parents bring their kids here. The truth is: I can't change your mind about anything. Your life is your burden.

YUSUF

Okay. Fair enough.

IMAM

All I can tell people is what I know...Everything else is your responsibility.

YUSUF

I agree.

IMAM

Yusuf...have you ever read your story in the Quran?

YUSUF

I'm familiar with it. Yes. That's who I was named after.

IMAM

Right. Prophet Yusuf! You're already aware, but just humour me.

YUSUF

Go ahead.

IMAM

The story is different depending on where you read it. But the basic way it's told is: Yusuf was a handsome boy. Like yourself.

YUSUF smiles awkwardly.

IMAM

Unfortunately for Yusuf, he had brothers that were...not as blessed. They all got together one night, and talked about their little brother. Why does dad treat him better than us? Why do people like him more? Well, after much discussion they came to the conclusion that it wasn't because Yusuf was a decent person. No, it had to be something else out of their control. They eventually came

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IMAM (cont'd)

to the conclusion that Yusuf was treated better because he was so handsome. So his brothers decided to kill him that night. They'd tell their father it was an accident. They ended up snatching Yusuf, and getting rid of him somewhere in the desert. He survived that somehow...only to be found by someone who sold him into slavery. So he lived most of his life as a slave. Until one day his boss' wife took notice of him: the handsome Yusuf. Diamond in the rough. She attempted to seduce him, but he declined. Finally, after being rejected by him repeatedly...she told her husband Yusuf had made advances toward her. Poor Yusuf was sent to prison for years.

Brief silence.

IMAM

Anyway, you know the rest of that story. He becomes a prophet in prison, and lives out the rest of his days that way.

YUSUF

Right, so why are you telling me all this?

IMAM

My point is...Yusuf faced betrayal his whole life. Tragedy, turmoil, over and over. Even when he knew he'd be in trouble for rejecting that woman, he did it anyway. He could've had a nice life: he could make love to this woman, and she could've made his life easier with grand gifts for keeping their secret. So why didn't he do the easier thing?

YUSUF

I don't know. Something about being a good Muslim. You tell me...

(CONTINUED)

IMAM

That's not why I'm telling you the story.

YUSUF

So what is it then?

IMAM

It's not about being a good Muslim. It's about being a good person. Yusuf stayed true to his character versus living a heaven on earth. And it all worked out for him in the end.

YUSUF

In prison, you mean.

IMAM

Yes, where he became a prophet.

YUSUF

Yeah...I don't know if that's the best example.

IMAM

Look, all I'm getting at is: you do what you need to. Whether it's Cat Stevens changing his name to yours, or you doing whatever it is you feel you have to do. Just be yourself.

YUSUF looks down, thinking about this for awhile. After briefly contemplating, he stands up.

YUSUF

I will. Thank you.

IMAM stretches his hand out, and YUSUF shakes it.

YUSUF

Honestly, I thought you'd be a little harder to talk to after that speech you gave.

IMAM

That's just for show.

INT. MOM'S CAR - DAY

YUSUF walks out of the mosque as his MOM waits for him in an older Toyota Camry. She reads from a book of translated Quran verses.

YUSUF enters.

MOM
How did it go?

YUSUF
Fine.

MOM
Just fine? What did he say!? Talk to me!

YUSUF
Nothing. He told me the Yusuf story.

She starts the car, and slowly starts driving.

MOM
Well I hope you learned something in there. I know you think I'm ruining your life, but it's for your own good. Someday you'll see the seriousness.

YUSUF
Agree to disagree. What are you gonna do if nothing works? Keep forcing me to be like you?

MOM
I'll probably kick you out of the house. I don't know.

YUSUF
Really?

MOM
Yes. No. I don't know, Yusuf, I've never had a kid that didn't listen to me before. This is new for me.

YUSUF looks out the window as she continues to drive.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF is busy writing, but he's having trouble focusing.

His cell phone is in the corner and he looks over to it a couple times.

He finally caves, and picks it up.

He looks really engrossed as he texts with LAURA, and then he gives a big smile.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

YUSUF sits with ROB, and MARK in a packed bus full of students.

ROB
I'm so excited.

MARK
I don't think that's appropriate...

YUSUF
Yeah, Rob, it's a world religions field trip. I don't think that's something to really be excited about.

ROB
Fuck you guys, I'm excited! I'm just happy to be out of school for a day, that's all.

MARK
I guess we can all agree about that.

A teacher, MS. GOOD, enters the bus and looks at a sheet of paper.

MS. GOOD
That's everyone. Okay, guys. You're all smart kids and I don't need to tell you this, but it doesn't hurt: please be respectful at all times. We've been lucky enough to be invited to visit an indigenous museum. That means what?

The students tiredly yell out:

(CONTINUED)

STUDENTS
(awkwardly in unison)
Best behaviour.

MS. GOOD
Thank you.

INT. MUSEUM - DAY

YUSUF stands with his class as everyone watches a tour guide speaking. There's a big sign above them that reads: BURIAL RITES.

TOUR GUIDE
If you look to your left you can see a painting of a sort of...what does it look like?

MS. GOOD
What does it look like? Anyone?

STUDENT
A coffin?

TOUR GUIDE
That's right! While it wouldn't have been called a coffin exactly, you're on the right track. This tribe was known for honoring their dead members. If you look at the paintings along the hall there, you'll see coffins of various sizes. Some are even as small as a deck of cards. This suggests that they valued life and death.

MARK
Wow. That's interesting.

YUSUF puts his hand up.

TOUR GUIDE
Yes, you in the back?

YUSUF
Did they believe in god?

TOUR GUIDE
That's a good question. Thank you. We're not 100% sure, but we think that they were more spiritual than religious. They had no...organized
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TOUR GUIDE (cont'd)
religion so to speak. However, they were very much invested in the loving of life, as evidenced by these paintings. As we continue the tour we'll see more of what it means to be a spiritual person versus merely being a religious person. Follow me...

The class follows the tour guide as YUSUF stays behind to look at all the paintings, and think about what he just heard.

INT. MALL - DAY

YUSUF walks around a surprisingly busy mall with LAURA.

YUSUF
I can't believe people still go to malls.

LAURA
I know, right?

YUSUF
I mean, don't people realize you can literally buy everything online?

LAURA
I guess that gets boring after awhile. It's the same reason people still go to the movies instead of watching everything at home like a bunch of fatasses.

YUSUF
(laughing)
Yeah, you're right. ...So did you have to get anything or...

LAURA
Nope. Just thought it'd be a fun way to pass the time.

YUSUF
It is.

LAURA
You hungry? I'm kinda fucking starving.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
Sure, why not? Let's get something.

INT. MALL/FOOD COURT - LATER

LAURA and YUSUF sit down in front of each other at a small table. They both have gigantic burgers.

LAURA
I love this place. Did you know they used to be called Lil Bobby's but the burgers were so big that someone told them it didn't make sense, so they changed it? That's why it's BIG BOB'S now.

She takes a bite.

LAURA
Oh man. So good.

YUSUF looks at her eating. He hasn't touched his burger.

LAURA
What's wrong?

YUSUF
It's...nothing.

LAURA
Don't make me feel like a loser, start eating!

YUSUF
Sorry, sorry. It's just...

LAURA
What?

YUSUF
I was raised Muslim, Laura.

LAURA
You're Muslim?

YUSUF
Well my family is.

She drops the burger and pretends to run away.

YUSUF laughs a little.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

So what?

YUSUF

I've never eaten pork before. This burger has bacon strips in it.

LAURA

Wow, really? So you're not allowed or something? Does it have to be drenched in holy water first?

YUSUF

Ha! No. It's like...it has to be blessed by someone.

LAURA

I'm sorry. I feel really bad now. You should've told me, we could've gotten something else.

YUSUF

No, no. It's fine.

She continues eating slowly.

LAURA

So you've never eaten pork before?

YUSUF

No.

LAURA

No bacon. Nothing?

YUSUF

Nope. None.

LAURA

Wow. Have you ever wanted to try?

YUSUF

Of course. As a kid they'd tell me all this stuff I wasn't allowed to try, and of course I wanted to, you know?

LAURA

So why not try it?

YUSUF

I don't know, Laura. They've been telling me I'll go to hell if I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF (cont'd)
have pork since I was a kid. I've
been living with this shit for
years. You figure it out!

LAURA
It's your choice.

YUSUF
The logical side of me knows there
isn't a heaven or hell. But part of
me still feels guilty.

LAURA
About what?

YUSUF
That eating pork is a sin.

LAURA
Well, I'm definitely going to hell.

She takes a gigantic bite.

YUSUF stares at his food. It's the only thing he can
concentrate on. LAURA, and everyone else in the mall are a
blur to him.

LAURA snaps him out of it.

LAURA
Man, looking at you is kind of a
bummer.

He looks at her, and then back at the food. Suddenly, he
takes a bite of the burger in one swift motion.

LAURA starts laughing.

YUSUF
Wow, this is actually amazing.

LAURA
Yup.

YUSUF
Jesus, this feels so weird.
Everyone's walking around normally
and I just...transgressed.

LAURA
TRANSGRESSED!

She starts laughing.

YUSUF

I'm serious!

LAURA

You'll be fine, Yusuf. You didn't murder someone or have an affair with someone's wife or steal from your neighbor. It's A BURGER.

YUSUF keeps eating. LAURA looks at him as he eventually puts the burger down and laughs almost crazily. He looks like he just got away with a bank heist.

YUSUF

Do you ever feel guilty about anything?

LAURA

Sometimes. I mean, I kind of know what you're talking about. I was raised Catholic.

YUSUF

So there's-

LAURA

There's a guilt there, yeah. But I don't know, as you get older it becomes less of a thing.

YUSUF

That's good to know.

LAURA

I'm just glad I got out of that shit at an early age.

INT. MALL/FOOD COURT - DAY - LATER

YUSUF has finished his burger, and there's now additional fast food garbage on the table; they ended up getting an unnecessary amount of food.

YUSUF

I can't believe we did that. Do you wanna do anything else today?

LAURA

No. Wait. Actually, I have an idea. You're not gonna like it, but just hear me out.

INT. MALL - DAY - LATER

YUSUF and LAURA stand in front of a dollar store.

YUSUF
What do you want from here?

LAURA
It's a surprise.

INT. DOLLAR STORE - DAY - LATER

LAURA shows YUSUF tweezers.

YUSUF
Seriously?

LAURA
They're for your unibrow.

YUSUF
What? I don't have a unibrow.

LAURA
You do a little.

YUSUF
So what, you want to pull my
unibrow hairs?

LAURA
(laughing)
Yes.

YUSUF
No fucking way. Not a chance,
Laura.

LAURA
How about...everytime I pluck a
unibrow hair I give you a tiny
kiss?

YUSUF
I don't know. It's gonna hurt.

LAURA
Well, now you know the shit girls
have to deal with.

INT. MALL/BENCH - LATER

YUSUF sits on a bench as LAURA stands, plucking his unibrow hairs.

YUSUF
AHHH! SHIT!

She kisses him on the cheek.

YUSUF
Can I at least get a countdown?

LAURA
We're almost finished.

YUSUF
OW! Jesus.

She give him another kiss on the cheek.

LAURA
One more.

YUSUF
OW.

LAURA
There. We're done.

YUSUF feels his eyebrows.

YUSUF
Wow. It actually feels better.

LAURA
It LOOKS better!

YUSUF
Well...thank you I guess. Hurts
like hell. Still not sure how I
feel about this.

She kisses him on the cheek once more.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

YUSUF watches JEOPARDY! with his family. It's nice: they're all smiling, and they look like a normal family for the first time in awhile.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX TREBEK (O.S.)
To continue to try and achieve
something.

DAD
(yelling)
PERSEVERE.

CONTESTANT (O.S.)
What is to persevere.

ALEX TREBEK (O.S.)
That's right.

CONTESTANT (O.S.)
I'll take "JUST DEAL!" for \$400.

ALEX TREBEK (O.S.)
Klondike is a type of THIS card
game.

DAD
SOLITAIRE.

CONTESTANT (O.S.)
What is solitaire?

YUSUF gets increasingly frustrated.

YUSUF
You don't have to yell out all the
answers.

DAD
Well, it's my house...so...

MOM
Guys, come on. Can we just have no
fighting for one day? Please.

YUSUF
No, he's right. It's your house. No
need to have any manners or
consideration for the people you
live with.

DAD
Who is OLIVER TWIST!

ALEX TREBEK (O.S.)
That's right, Oliver Twist! We're
gonna take a quick commercial
break, stay tuned for more
Jeopardy!

(CONTINUED)

MOM

So...Yusuf, are you excited for your birthday?

YUSUF

No, not really.

MOM

You're gonna be 18, that's a big deal! Do you want anything special?

YUSUF

Yeah, you already know what I want.

MOM

What?

YUSUF

A dog. I want a nice big Golden Retriever. I've been telling you my whole life. If you don't get me a dog, don't get me anything at all.

MOM

Yusuf, we've been over this a thousand times. We can't have dogs in this house. This is a Muslim family.

YUSUF

Right, so a dog is somehow against the rules. But for some reason we're allowed cats?

MOM

Exactly. Cats are clean animals. I'm sorry Yusuf, I didn't make the rules up.

YUSUF gets up.

YUSUF

I can't do this right now. This is ridiculous. You people are crazy.

He walks away.

MOM

Are you hungry? We have-

YUSUF

No thanks.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF walks past his parents, who are still sitting in front of the TV in the living room.

MOM
Where are you going?

YUSUF
I'm gonna hang out with Asif and some friends.

MOM
Okay. Don't be too late. Love you.

YUSUF
Yeah. Same here.

He leaves.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

YUSUF walks with ASIF on a dimly lit street. No cars are driving by and it's really quiet.

ASIF
Come on, follow me.

YUSUF
Here's fine.

ASIF
We're almost there.

They keep walking in silence for awhile.

Finally, they reach a house that looks a little unkempt. The front lawn is messy, and there's a FOR SALE sign on it.

ASIF walks directly towards the messy house.

YUSUF
What? No, I'm not going there.

ASIF
(whispering)
So you just wanna sit out here and be obvious? If we're out in the open we're sitting ducks. If we're inside, at least we have a little privacy.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Yeah, but...here? This place is disgusting!

ASIF

Why not? I do it all the time. It's like an accepted spot, everyone knows we're here. It's better to have everyone all in one place than in the middle of the street. They don't care, come on.

YUSUF

Fine. But make it quick.

YUSUF follows ASIF around the back.

There's a screen door that's broken, and they carefully walk through the broken glass to get inside the house.

INT. EMPTY HOUSE - NIGHT

There's a mattress on the floor, used condoms, and empty beer cans everywhere.

YUSUF

This is just awful, man. Let's go.

ASIF pulls out a joint.

ASIF

It'll be quick.

He lights it and starts smoking.

YUSUF

I don't think I want my first time getting high to be tainted by this place.

ASIF

Here.

He hands the joint to YUSUF, who looks at it oddly.

YUSUF

I don't know anymore, man.

ASIF

Look, you called ME. You had a rough day and wanted this. I'm not forcing you. But this was your goddamn idea.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF smokes reluctantly. He coughs as he passes it back to ASIF.

YUSUF
Oh...boy. That's really harsh.

ASIF
Harsh! That means it's good!

VOICE (O.S.)
EVERYONE PUT YOUR HANDS UP! THIS IS
THE POLICE!

YUSUF looks really scared.

YUSUF
Shit! What are we gonna do?

Three older guys enter, each in their early 20s. One of them has a shaved head and YUSUF gets terrified.

ASIF
Hey guys.

YUSUF
You know them? Jesus Christ.

SKINHEAD
Hahahaha. I'm sorry, buddy. Did I
scare you?

ASIF
Take it easy. This is his first
time smoking-

SKINHEAD
NO WAY! Glad to be part of the
memory.

He pulls out a pipe and weed, packs it, and lights it.

YUSUF
We should get going. Come on Asif.

ASIF
Just relax.

SKINHEAD
Check this out.

SKINHEAD pulls out a pistol. He starts waving it around, showing it off.

YUSUF

That's....that's a fucking gun!

SKINHEAD

Yeah, what the fuck do you think it is?

YUSUF looks like he's about to have a meltdown.

ASIF

Relax. Nothing's gonna-

YUSUF RUNS out as SKINHEAD and his friends LAUGH LOUDLY.

YUSUF sprints all the way to the front of the house as laughter subsides behind him.

ASIF

YUSUF! IT WASN'T REAL!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

YUSUF stops running, trying to catch his breath.

ASIF

Yusuf, it's only me man. Relax. Nothing's gonna happen.

YUSUF

I feel...tired.

ASIF

Yeah, that's normal. Come on, I'll take you home.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF looks at himself in the mirror, freaking out about how he looks. He plays around with his hair, looks at his eyeballs, and stares at his unibrow for awhile.

YUSUF texts LAURA: *Was pissed off at first. But you're right, my unibrow looks better. :)*

He goes on his laptop, and opens up a document called SHORT STORY. He tries to write briefly, but has trouble focusing. He keeps checking his phone, but LAURA hasn't responded.

He walks around his room and takes a deep breath.

Finally, he types something into a search engine: *ex-muslims support group near me.*

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

YUSUF enters a dark basement group of what looks like an AA support group. Except it's a support group for people that have left their religion. People are sitting on chairs in a circle and facing each other.

It looks like everyone is part of a big family of rejects, and everyone finally fits in.

YUSUF looks over to the only two people not sitting: two men seem to be guarding some kind of collection box at one side of the room.

A WOMAN (40s) is in the middle of talking as YUSUF finds a chair and sits down.

WOMAN #1

...And so finally...I just said to myself. Forget it. You've got one life to live, don't let anyone make you feel guilty about living it the way you want to.

She starts to tear up.

WOMAN #1

I wish my father and I could still talk...but...that will never happen.

She cries a bit more now, and sits down. The group claps, and another WOMAN stands up.

WOMAN #2

Thank you so much for sharing your life experience with us. Is there anyone else who wants to share?

A MAN (30s) puts his hand up.

MAN #1

I don't feel like standing up tonight.

WOMAN #2

That's alright.

MAN #1

This week my divorce was finalized. I knew it was coming for awhile now, but it's still such a shock. I have no clue what I'm going to do

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAN #1 (cont'd)
now. I've got a job, and I know I'm better off than a lot of people out there. But I have no family. Not many friends that can relate. It's tough. I'm just thankful I have you guys.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT - LATER

People are in the process of leaving: some of them are talking to each other, others are helping to clean up, others are just leaving entirely.

YUSUF stands alone watching everyone. He helps himself to a cup of coffee. He notices WOMAN #1, putting on her hijab. It's an intricate process, and he can't help but stare. All this hair somehow neatly hides away; it amazes him.

WOMAN #1 finishes, and sees YUSUF looking at her. She walks toward the coffee.

WOMAN #1
Hi. I've never seen you here before.

YUSUF
Yeah, I'm new.

WOMAN #1
You didn't speak tonight, but I'm sure you're going through a lot. Come back anytime and feel free to talk with us. I don't know your story, but you're young...you're in for a bumpy road.

She puts a hand on his shoulder, and leaves the building.

YUSUF stands there alone for a second, before realizing he's one of the last people left.

YUSUF makes his way to leave, but WOMAN #2 is standing in front of the exit.

YUSUF
Hi. Thank you for having me here. Seems like a great thing you're doing.

(CONTINUED)

WOMAN #2

Sure.

WOMAN #2 doesn't move from the door.

She points to the box with the two guys guarding it, at the other end of the room.

WOMAN #2

That's a collection box. A lot of people can't just leave the religion without repercussions...it's for people that got kicked out of their homes, single mothers disowned by their parents. The list goes on.

YUSUF

So it's a donation thing?

WOMAN #2

Sort of. But it's actually mandatory.

YUSUF

You're kidding.

WOMAN #2

I'm afraid not. It costs money to keep this place, and in addition to helping out ex-Muslims in need, we've got overhead bills to pay.

YUSUF

I'm sorry, I didn't know that.

WOMAN #2

That's fine. Lots of people come by once to check it out, but I'm just telling you now. If you come back, you'll have to pay like everyone else.

YUSUF looks at the box and the whole room seems to have taken a different tone now.

WOMAN #2 steps out of his way.

YUSUF

You know what? One of the reasons I left Islam is because I was tired of all the begging for donations. This shit is ridiculous: I thought

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF (cont'd)
I found a support system here, but
you're just the same.

He walks out.

YUSUF
(to himself)
Waste of my fucking time...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT - DAY

YUSUF stands with LAURA and ROB.

ROB
You guys wanna go get something to
eat?

YUSUF
Actually. Sorry, Rob. We have
plans.

ROB
What are you guys up to?

YUSUF
I don't know.

He gives ROB a look.

ROB
Oh...I get it. I'll leave you guys
alone.

ROB walks away.

ROB
(yelling)
See you tomorrow!

YUSUF
So what do you wanna do?

LAURA
I have to drop something off at my
work. But I forgot it at home. So I
gotta go there first. It's gonna be
really boring, but you're welcome
to come if you want.

YUSUF

Sure. Let's go before Rob comes
back with some stupid idea.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - DAY

YUSUF and LAURA sit together on an almost empty train.

YUSUF

How far away do you live?

LAURA

Not very. Like a couple more stops.

YUSUF

Is anyone home...or...

LAURA

My brothers. Mom's at work, dad's
dead.

YUSUF

Jesus...sorry. That's awful.

LAURA

No. It's really not, trust me. You
didn't know him!

YUSUF

Okay. Hey can I ask you something?
You don't have to answer-

LAURA

Sure.

YUSUF

What's your background?

LAURA

My parents are from Russia.

YUSUF

Makes sense.

LAURA

Why?

YUSUF

I feel like...no offense...children
of immigrants understand each other
a bit more. I've asked a couple
girls out and none of them have
really liked me except for you.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
Wow. You shouldn't have said that,
maybe I'm making a mistake!

The subway stops.

LAURA
We're here.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

YUSUF
What are your brothers like? I'm
kinda nervous now.

LAURA
They'll like you, don't worry.

She opens the door.

INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUED

The place is quiet and empty.

LAURA
Hello? HEY!

She turns to YUSUF.

LAURA
Guess they're not home.

She takes his hand.

LAURA
Wanna see my room?

She leads him to her room, and shuts the door.

YUSUF
Wait-

She abruptly starts kissing him.

LAURA
(quietly)
We have like an hour. Let's fuck.

YUSUF stops her.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF
I'm sorry, I feel weird.

LAURA
You don't want to?

YUSUF
No. I mean, yeah. It's just...I
don't know.

LAURA
What more is there to know? Let's
do it.

She carries on kissing him. They collapse on her bed. She reaches for her nightstand, and retrieves a box of condoms.

YUSUF
How do you have that there already?
Is this something you do regularly?

LAURA
Shut up Yusuf.

She keeps kissing him.

LAURA
Wait. Are you a virgin?

Brief silence.

LAURA
I'm sorry. You don't have to if you
don't want to.

YUSUF looks at his crotch.

YUSUF
I want to. I'm just nervous, I
can't get it up. Why didn't you
tell me you wanted to do this? I
hate doing stuff on short notice to
begin with and this-

LAURA
Relax. I'll help you.

They make out some more, his pants come off, and she eventually gets the condom on him. It goes by way too fast: she straddles him and he has a weird look on his face.

She's moaning, and he looks terrified.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

YUSUF walks out of LAURA's apartment, fumbling with his phone in the hallway. He dials a number and waits for a response.

YUSUF

Asif! It's me, I need to talk to you man!

ASIF

What's going on?

YUSUF

I'm having an anxiety attack or something. I don't know.

ASIF

What happened?

YUSUF

(whispers)

I just lost my virginity.

ASIF

So what? Congratulations!

YUSUF

No, man. It felt weird. I don't know how to describe it.

ASIF

Listen: you're probably just going through one of your Yusufy things. If you used protection it's fine. Stop overthinking everything and relax.

YUSUF

I don't know...it felt unnatural. Deliberate. Like she planned it or something, I don't know.

ASIF

Well you're LUCKY it was planned! That means you know for sure you'll be okay! What is there to worry about, man?

YUSUF

Do you have time today? I can't go home so soon after this. Feels strange. Traumatic. I can't look my

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF (cont'd)
mom in the eye right now after this
shit, you know?

INT. CAFE - DAY

YUSUF sits across ASIF.

ASIF
It's fine, man. You're not gonna go
to hell because you had premarital
sex. It's REALLY not a big deal,
dude. People fuck all the time.
There's probably people doing it
right now in the bathroom. Why do
you think these places have a key
to get in the bathroom? Because
people probably come in here all
the time and fuck and leave!

YUSUF
Thanks, I guess.

ASIF holds YUSUF'S hand and squeezes it.

ASIF
Lighten up.

YUSUF
Have you ever done it?

ASIF
Yeah. To be honest though...that's
not really my thing.

YUSUF
What do you mean?

ASIF
I like going to massage parlors. I
get high and go to get massages. It
relieves stress. And I like that
there's no penetration, you can't
get STDs from a handjob. You don't
have to work hard, you just lie
there and chill out.

YUSUF looks surprised.

YUSUF
How come you never told me this
before?

(CONTINUED)

ASIF
I never felt I needed to.

Silence for a second, as YUSUF processes this information.

ASIF
Do you wanna go to one with me?
It'll cheer you up.

YUSUF
Oh no. I already had an intense
day.

ASIF
That's perfect. That's exactly why
you should go!

YUSUF
Asif. No. I can't do this.
Emotionally, I'm not prepared for
it.

ASIF
You're coming with me. Case closed.

EXT./INT. MESSAGE PARLOUR - NIGHT

YUSUF and ASIF stand in front of a slightly disgusting,
shabby, run-down place.

ASIF knocks on the door in a way that suggests it's a *secret knock*.

An older Asian woman answers (50s).

They enter, she looks around outside, and then she closes
the door.

INT. MESSAGE PARLOR - NIGHT

YUSUF is flat on his stomach on a massage table. A woman is
massaging his shoulders. She takes her time getting to his
back, and then his lower back.

Eventually, she gets to his bum. She massages his bum for
awhile, before sliding a hand underneath...

YUSUF
Whoa.

(CONTINUED)

MASSEUSE

I make it go. I make it go for you.

YUSUF

What? I don't like this.

She continues to touch him, ignoring his discomfort.

YUSUF

Please.

MASSEUSE

Oh yes.

YUSUF

Please!

MASSEUSE

Yes. You like.

YUSUF

No, PLEASE! Stop!

She finally sees his face.

YUSUF gets up. He puts on all his clothes clumsily, and looks for his wallet. He retrieves \$20 and hands it to her.

YUSUF

Look, I'm really sorry. This wasn't my idea. Sorry for wasting your time.

MASSEUSE

You pay more! You lie!

YUSUF

I'm really sorry. I don't have anything else.

The MASSEUSE storms out of the room angrily. YUSUF leaves to see her standing with a HEAVYSET BOUNCER.

YUSUF

What is this? I already told her: I don't have anything else. If you just get my cousin, we can explain.

BOUNCER

Cousin not here. He gone. You pay now.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

I don't have anymore money.

BOUNCER

Lying to us. Give us the money.

YUSUF

I don't have any money!

BOUNCER

Lying.

YUSUF

I don't have any more money to give you!

BOUNCER says something to the MASSEUSE.

BOUNCER

She says you lying.

YUSUF

So we're just gonna go in circles like this? You're not gonna let me leave?

The BOUNCER shakes his head no.

YUSUF takes a deep breath, taking in the seriousness of the situation.

YUSUF

Okay, how about this. I'll go up the street and get more money from the ATM. Okay?

BOUNCER

Fine.

YUSUF

Just let me leave and I'll get you your money.

BOUNCER

I go with you.

YUSUF

What? No. That's not the deal. Either you let me go and I come back with your money, or you don't let me go and you get nothing.

The BOUNCER gets angry. He punches YUSUF in the face, and pushes him to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF gets up and hurries out of the building.

BOUNCER
FUCK OFF. DON'T COME BACK.

YUSUF runs away.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

YUSUF limps in pain and feels his face.

ASIF comes jogging into the frame.

ASIF
Yusuf!

YUSUF
As...hole!

ASIF
Hey, don't call me that. You know I hate it when people make fun of my name like that, I've heard it 100 times and-

YUSUF
No, you know what? Fuck you. You weren't there for me just now.

ASIF
What happened?

YUSUF
WHAT HAPPENED? Are you not aware they have security in there?

ASIF
Yusuf, there are women working with tons of gross men all day long. Of course there's security in there.

YUSUF
Why didn't you tell me that? I could've lost my life!

ASIF
Whoa, that's too far. All you had to do was pay the nice lady the money for her services. What's so hard about that?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

I didn't WANT the services.

ASIF

Wait, so you tried to leave without paying?

YUSUF

I gave her SOME money. Just not-

ASIF

It doesn't work like that, man. Sounds like it's your own damn fault. It wouldn't have been like that if you just PAID the money you were supposed to.

YUSUF

Whatever. Just...please...I can't talk to you right now. I've had a weird day, and...I can't look at you.

ASIF

Fine.

They part ways.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF sits at his laptop, and sends off an e-mail to his teacher MR. SHORT. It reads: ASSIGNMENT REDO.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

YUSUF wakes up and looks at an alarm clock. He feels his face and winces.

He sighs and gets out of bed.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING - CONTINUED

YUSUF enters the kitchen to see his parents standing happily, waiting for him.

MOM

Happy birthday Yusuf!

(CONTINUED)

DAD
Happy birthday.

MOM
You're officially an adult now.

DAD
How does it feel?

YUSUF feels his face.

YUSUF
It hurts.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

YUSUF walks around the library sadly, looking for inspiration in one of the sections. After searching through the library, he notices LAURA.

She's putting books back on one of the shelves.

He looks at her through the section he's at for awhile. Finally, he sneaks out of the library without talking to her.

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

YUSUF sits in front of MR. SHORT in an otherwise empty classroom.

MR. SHORT
Happy birthday. Welcome to the real world.

YUSUF
Thanks.

MR. SHORT
You're gonna be old like me before you know it.

YUSUF smiles.

MR. SHORT
The story was a little better this time. I could tell you took your time with it. If you keep writing, you could be great if you wanted to. I know it. What are your plans after high school?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

I'm not really sure. I think I just might take some time to figure myself out.

MR. SHORT

That's not a bad idea. But don't take too much time. You've got a real future in this.

YUSUF gets up.

MR. SHORT

Here.

MR. SHORT slips him a piece of paper.

YUSUF

What's this?

MR. SHORT

That's a list of authors and books I think you should read and reread. You'll find your influences and pick and choose from whoever you like.

YUSUF looks at the list. There are names scrawled down like: *Richard Yates, Caroline Blackwood, Chester Himes, Proust.*

MR. SHORT

And ten years from now if newspapers still exist I'll see the name *Yusuf* in a top 10 list of best books of that year. And I'll say to myself...*Hey! I knew that guy!*

YUSUF folds the piece of paper, pockets it, and smiles.

YUSUF

Thank you, Mr. Short. Goodbye.

INT. YUSUF'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - AFTERNOON

YUSUF enters his home to see a small kitten staring at him.

His parents enter the room shortly after.

MOM

Happy birthday, Yusuf! Surprise!

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

This is my surprise!? I want a dog!
This is a cat.

MOM

Lots of great writers have cats.
Hemingway had a million cats.

DAD

Don't be ungrateful.

YUSUF walks to his room.

YUSUF

Hemingway is FUCKING OVERRATED!

His parents GASP.

DAD

I don't know what part of that
sentence to be more shocked about.

MOM

Make sure you come back so we can
cut the cake!

YUSUF'S MOM picks up the kitten and sings to it.

MOM

(singing)

Happy birthday to you! Happy
birthday to you!

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

YUSUF sits down and takes a breath. He looks stressed out
and overwhelmed.

SUDDENLY....a loud meow is heard outside his bedroom door.

YUSUF looks to the door. The meowing continues. It gets
louder. He gets up and opens the door.

YUSUF

What do you want?

The kitten looks up at him and stops meowing. It enters
YUSUF'S room. When YUSUF tries to pick it up, it runs under
the bed and hides.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF cuts his birthday cake, smiles, and takes photos with his parents.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's really late, and YUSUF is dressed differently in all black.

He texts ROB.

INT. ROB'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

YUSUF sits at a table alone for a second, until ROB enters with tall glasses of beer.

ROB
Happy birthday, man!

YUSUF starts drinking immediately.

ROB
It's a weird feeling turning 18,
huh?

YUSUF
Yeah. It's bittersweet.

ROB
We have so much ahead of us. I'm
excited about the future.

YUSUF
Good for you. I'm worried about
everything.

ROB
Why? Life is great.

YUSUF
I'm worried about employment. How
I'll be able to afford to live...

ROB
That's not so hard.

He picks up his beer.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Anyway, while we're here we should
enjoy ourselves.

YUSUF and ROB toast their glasses together.

INT. ROB'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - LATER

Many drinks later. YUSUF and ROB are surrounded by empty beer cans everywhere in front of them. They're both noticeably drunk now, and it's so late that the mood has shifted enough for them to speak candidly.

YUSUF
The other day I went to a massage parlour. Did I tell you that? With Asif.

ROB
That's disgusting.

YUSUF
I know. It was terrible. Almost lost my life days before my 18th birthday.

ROB
(slurring)
Some people gotta do what they gotta do...

YUSUF
It's not for me.

ROB
I did something recently too.

YUSUF
What?

ROB
You can't tell anyone.

YUSUF
I won't. You can trust me.

ROB looks at him seriously for a second.

ROB
Alright, so...you know how I kept telling you about that movie Salo?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Yeah.

ROB

I don't know why, but for some reason I kept coming back to it. I liked watching the uh...naked guys.

YUSUF

You're gay?

ROB

I'm still trying to figure it out. I'm getting to that. Just lemme finish!

YUSUF

Sorry, sorry.

ROB

So I kept watching this movie, coming back to the scenes with these naked guys. I liked them, I'm not gonna lie. But I couldn't decide if I was sure or not.

YUSUF

So what-

ROB

I went to a gay bar. I sat there for a few hours drinking. Trying to work up the courage to do something.

YUSUF

And?

ROB

Eventually this guy sat down next to me and we started talking. We hit it off, and it was fine. Anyway, at one point I thought to myself, if I don't act now I'll never find out. So I kissed this dude...

YUSUF

And you liked it?

ROB

No! That's the thing! As soon as our lips touched I actually felt

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)
nauseous. I almost threw up. It was so embarrassing, I left the fucking bar and ran home. But here's the thing: when I came home I still had the urge to look at those naked dudes in the movie.

YUSUF
Wow....That's...I don't know, man.

ROB
The worst part about it is I still don't even know if I'm gay or not.

YUSUF
Man, that's tough.

ROB
I don't even know if I should tell my parents. There's no one I can talk to about this shit. I'm only telling you because you're going through a similar thing with the god shit...

YUSUF
Right, I understand. Man, if you want my advice? From my experience... I'd say hold off on telling your parents anything. Figure yourself out first a bit. And then your best bet is to tell them when you've got a more stable idea of who you are. I don't know though.

ROB puts his head in his hands.

YUSUF puts a consoling hand on ROB'S shoulder.

EXT. ROB'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ROB smokes a joint at the side of his house as YUSUF watches.

ROB eventually finishes the joint, and takes a piss on the side of the house.

YUSUF
Why didn't you just go inside?

After a moment, ROB finishes and walks back to YUSUF.

(CONTINUED)

ROB pulls out a small bottle of liquor from a pocket, and hands it to YUSUF.

ROB
Happy birthday again, buddy. It was good hanging with you. It's the first day of your life as an adult. Remember that.

ROB almost falls down right after he says this.

YUSUF
Are you okay? Do you want me to walk you back inside or something?

ROB
I'm good. See you later.

They part ways, but YUSUF turns around.

YUSUF
Hey Rob.

ROB
Huh?

YUSUF
Don't do anything stupid. You'll figure it out. You know that, right?

ROB
Yeah, yeah. You too. Happy birthday.

ROB heads inside, and YUSUF walks away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

YUSUF walks drunkenly. He walks slowly for awhile, periodically looking over his shoulder.

He walks at this pace, gradually picking up speed as he looks over his shoulder too often.

A POLICE CAR slowly follows him. When YUSUF starts walking a little too fast, the car's siren comes on and pulls over right beside YUSUF. He stops.

A POLICE OFFICER gets out of the car.

(CONTINUED)

POLICE OFFICER
Where are you going?

YUSUF
Home.

POLICE OFFICER
Are you okay?

YUSUF
I'm fine. What's the problem?

POLICE OFFICER
I could arrest you for public
drunkenness, kid.

YUSUF
Really? I didn't know that...I'm
not driving.

POLICE OFFICER
Doesn't matter. You're walking
around like that. It's causing a
scene. I could arrest you.

YUSUF
...Well...Are you? Or what?

The POLICE OFFICER walks over to him.

POLICE OFFICER
Empty your pockets. Slowly.

YUSUF takes out his wallet, cell phone, and a couple
receipts. POLICE OFFICER takes all of them.

He looks at YUSUF'S ID.

POLICE OFFICER
I should tell your parents. Today
was your birthday?

YUSUF
Yes.

The POLICE OFFICER unfolds the receipts, and the piece of
paper MR. SHORT handed YUSUF earlier.

POLICE OFFICER
(reading)
Crime & Punishment. Great
Expectations. Richard Yates,
Caroline Blackwood, Chester Himes,
Proust.

(CONTINUED)

He looks at YUSUF.

POLICE OFFICER
Smart kid.

He hands YUSUF back his stuff.

POLICE OFFICER
I'm gonna let you go.

YUSUF
Thank you.

POLICE OFFICER
Just remember: I have your address.

YUSUF
What's that mean? Are you gonna
tell my parents?

The POLICE OFFICER looks at him and returns to his car silently. He drives away.

YUSUF stands in awe. When the car disappears he keeps walking.

EXT. YUSUF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

YUSUF sits outside, hiding behind a parked car on the street. He looks at his house from outside. The lights are all off.

YUSUF drunkenly stumbles to his front door. He makes his best effort to enter the home as quietly as possible.

INT. YUSUF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

YUSUF walks through the home quietly.

He tiptoes through the kitchen and stops to look at framed pictures of himself, and his family on the walls.

He looks at one picture in particular for a second. It's him, his mother, and father all posing for a corny family photo. It looks like it was taken at a Wal-Mart. The photo is maybe a decade old; YUSUF is just a kid.

He picks up the picture frame, and takes out the photo. He unfolds a portion of the photo that was previously not in the frame before: the face of a girl (early 20s) is revealed.

(CONTINUED)

Tears well up in YUSUF'S eyes slightly as he looks at the girl. He wipes his eyes before it gets worse, and puts the photo in his pocket.

YUSUF
(quietly)
Fuck it.

He keeps walking.

INT. YUSUF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF gathers a few things: shoes, t-shirts, underwear, books, and his laptop. He stuffs them all in a duffelbag.

He counts money from a couple birthday cards, as well as money he has hidden away. It doesn't look like that much, maybe \$400.

He puts it into his pocket and makes his way for the door slowly. Before he can leave, he hears a movement from his bedroom.

He turns around to see the kitten, who has now crawled out halfway from under the bed.

YUSUF
Come on. You're my new family now.

YUSUF picks up the kitten, and carries him while still holding the duffelbag.

EXT. SIDEWALK - SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

YUSUF walks around, struggling to carry the cat and the duffelbag. He clearly has not thought this through at all, and he's sweating and frustrated from all the walking around.

He takes out his phone: 53 text messages, and 30 missed calls.

He throws his phone into the middle of the street.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

YUSUF sees a park bench and sits down on it. He falls asleep with the duffelbag on the ground, and the cat on his lap.

EXT. PARK - EARLY MORNING

YUSUF wakes up to see two police officers sitting in a parked police car on the street alongside the park.

INT. POLICE CAR - EARLY MORNING

Two POLICE OFFICERS sit in the car, watching YUSUF.

OFFICER #1
Sir, I think he's getting up!

OFFICER #2
Is that our guy?

OFFICER #1
Believe so.

EXT. PARK - EARLY MORNING

YUSUF sees the police car door open, grabs his bag, carries the kitten carefully, and jogs away from the OFFICERS. He heads for a forest nearby.

The two OFFICERS watch as YUSUF runs away, disappearing into the forest.

OFFICER #2
I'm not running after him, you can if you want to. ...Let's just say we didn't see him.

EXT. STREET - DAY

YUSUF comes out the other side of the forest looking rough.

INT. MOSQUE - DAY

YUSUF enters the mosque and doesn't see anyone. He looks around, and finds some paper and a pen. He writes: *IMAM - WANTED TO SEE YOU THIS MORN, BUT YOU WEREN'T HERE. TELL MY PARENTS I'M FINE. NO PHONE. WILL BE BACK AT SOME POINT. SELL THIS LETTER WHEN I'M SUCCESSFUL. -YUSUF*

Yusuf leaves the letter on the collection box, and leaves.

INT. PET STORE - DAY

YUSUF buys an ugly metal cat carrier and tries his best to put the kitten in it, as well as some cat food.

The cashier looks at him strangely.

CASHIER
Is that your first cat?

YUSUF
(distracted)
What? Yeah.

YUSUF struggles to close the carrier, but he's having a lot of difficulty with some kind of latch that keeps everything secure. The kitten stares at him inside the carrier nonchalantly.

CASHIER
You sure you know what you're doing?

YUSUF
Is anyone?

He finally gets the carrier door closed, and smiles at the cashier.

EXT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

YUSUF talks to a driver letting people on a bus. He hands the driver some money, who quickly looks inside the bus.

The driver comes back out.

BUS DRIVER
We've got space, but you're not allowed to bring your cat.

YUSUF
Listen to me. I'm not going anywhere without this damned cat.

BUS DRIVER
It's not allowed on, I'm sorry buddy.

YUSUF
Don't call my cat "it." This is a living, breathing, creature with a personality. And she's coming on the bus.

The BUS DRIVER looks at YUSUF and his cat, and then sees there's a line forming.

INT. BUS - DAY

YUSUF looks out the window as the bus leaves his life behind, and then he looks down at the kitten. He pets the kitten through the carrier, and smiles to himself.

EXT. BUS TERMINAL - AFTERNOON

The sun is setting as YUSUF walks out of the bus terminal with his cat and bag. He looks around curiously at a small town.

YUSUF

(to cat)

Take a look at that! Mom and dad are probably arguing about the sunset right about now.

INT. MOTEL FRONT DESK - NIGHT

An old man sits behind the counter of a quiet motel. He looks on cautiously as YUSUF enters with his bag, and kitten. He looks exhausted.

YUSUF

Hey. How much is it for the night?

OLD MAN

\$50.

He looks at the cat.

OLD MAN

\$75.

YUSUF counts the little bit of money he left with to see if he has enough.

YUSUF

Fine.

OLD MAN

You look young, why're you out here by yourself?

(CONTINUED)

YUSUF

Don't worry, I won't be here long
or cause any trouble.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

YUSUF'S cat eats some food out of a paper plate in the
corner.

YUSUF sits on his laptop typing away. He types out: *YUSUF*.

When he hits the spacebar, the computer changes his name to
"yourself." He retypes his name, and when he hits the
spacebar, the name "Yusuf" stays the way it is.

He looks at it for a second, surprised. He looks at the cat,
and then back at his name.

YUSUF

Are you seeing this?

The cat looks up from eating.

YUSUF

If I believed in that kinda stuff
I'd say maybe it was a
sign...You're a good luck charm!

The cat keeps eating.

YUSUF continues typing.

THE END.