

Aliens in America

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. ALTOONA, WISCONSIN - EARLY MORNING

Over the following voice over, we see shots of Altoona, Wisconsin, population 6237. We see the local movie theater, the simple houses, dairy farms, Altoona High, etc.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

If a space alien decided to land in Altoona, Wisconsin, and he was sixteen years old, and his parents didn't want to home school him, he would go to my high school. And it would be tough for him. People would make fun of his tentacles, his gills, his exposed brain. This would basically ruin his entire school year. And there'd be nothing he could do about it, except wait for his spaceship to take him home.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - JUSTIN'S HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK PHOTO

We see a photo of Justin Hobgood, an awkward, lanky sixteen-year-old wearing braces and a turtleneck. Even his smile seems awkward -- he's part Napoleon Dynamite and part Anthony Michael Hall in the Breakfast Club.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I didn't have a space ship. And each year of high school was worse than the last. But all that was about to change.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD KITCHEN -- MORNING

Justin sits at the kitchen table licking his upper teeth where his braces used to be. Across from him sits his father, Gary Hobgood, early forties, good natured. Franny Hobgood -- Justin's mom, attractive, early forties -- cooks breakfast. Both Gary and Franny speak with a pronounced Midwestern lilt.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Because right before my junior year, I got my braces off.

GARY

Justin, you need to stop licking your teeth like that. It's distracting to look at.

FRANNY

Gary, hush up. He's just excited because he's not going to look like he used to.

JUSTIN

I just can't get enough of how this feels. I mean, they're really gone.

FRANNY

Now open up. We don't need any hash browns caught in our million dollar smile.

Justin opens wide for Franny to examine.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

This is my mom. Three years earlier she resigned as president of the PTA because she wanted to focus on "normalizing me".

Satisfied, Franny steps back and admires her son.

FRANNY

Justin, if I was a girl your age...

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Now how normal would you be with this kind of guidance?

FRANNY

You know I should drive him over to Milwaukee. Visit one of those modeling agencies.

JUSTIN

Really?

GARY

Not a bad idea, Franny. They take all kinds. Stan Parker's kid just did a print ad for Home Depot. That's one year of college.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

My dad had a good job, but he was always looking for a new way to make money. He didn't like "traditional" investing. He said that was for suckers. He liked to think outside the box.

FRANNY

(to Gary)

Honey, did you feed the alpacas yet?

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Which is why we were raising six
alpacas in our backyard.

GARY

Ooh, thanks Franny.

Gary gets up from the table.

GARY (CONT'D)

One more month and I can start
shearing them. Then our new address
will be easy street.

Gary gives Franny a smooch and exits out the back. Justin
reaches for a blueberry from a bowl on the table. He picks
it up and is about to put it in his mouth when:

FRANNY

Justin Hobgood, if you eat that
blueberry, I will beat you into
tomorrow.

JUSTIN

That seems a little extreme, mom.

FRANNY

I'm sorry, honey. It's just...
with your braces off and your new
hair cut and now that the lisp is
gone... this is your year. And I
have -- no we have -- worked too
hard to undermine it with a blueberry
stain on those pearly whites.

JUSTIN

You're right.

As Justin carefully puts the blueberry back...

CUT TO:

EXT. ALTOONA HIGH SCHOOL -- MORNING

Justin, for the first time in his life, confidently walks
toward the entrance of the school. He stops to look at it.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

The only thing crazier than my mom
saying all those things was the fact
that I believed it. But that's what
made the dance between us so special.

As Justin stares off at the school with satisfaction he
unconsciously begins to lick his upper teeth where his braces
used to be.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Cut that out.

Claire, a sophomore, and Justin's younger sister steps into frame.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

This is my little sister Claire.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(re: licking)

Was I doing it again?

CLAIRE

Yes, and it's disgusting.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I forgot to mention her, but that's the way it goes with little sisters, right?

We now see Claire in full view and she's anything but forgettable. If you took a picture of her, and put it on a poster you could sell it to every high school boy in the country. And their fathers.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Listen, I gotta roll. I'm gonna drop by the office and say hello to Mrs. Schneider. See how her summer went --

GIRL (O.S.)

Claire!

CLAIRE

(screaming with excitement)

Oh my god!

Claire runs to a group of girls. They're thrilled to see her and they absorb her into a big group hug. Justin looks off at this and then continues on his way. But not before:

KURT PALLADINI

Hobgood.

Kurt and Mike Palladini approach. They're not cool kids, they're not jocks, they're not smart but they are jerks. They don't have a record yet but they will one day. Justin tenses, slightly. This is his first test.

JUSTIN

Hey.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 These are the Palladini twins. Last year they put a gun in my mouth. It turned out to be a water pistol, but I didn't know that at the time.

MIKE PALLADINI
 Dude, what happened to your sister?

JUSTIN
 What?

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 There are some things you don't notice about your sister until someone else tells you.

KURT PALLADINI
 Over the summer, she got fine.
 (gestures breasts)
 Where'd that come from?

JUSTIN
 Where'd what come from?

MIKE PALLADINI
 Her giant breasts! What are you gay?!

JUSTIN
 No, I just don't --

KURT PALLADINI
 Are you on that?

JUSTIN
 On my sister?

KURT PALLADINI
 You gotta get on that!

MIKE PALLADINI
 Man, if she was our sister, I'd be up in her room every night!

KURT PALLADINI
 No, man, I'd be up in her room every night!

Mike takes umbrage at this and gets in his brother's face.

MIKE PALLADINI
 If she's in our house, she's goin' me!

KURT PALLADINI
 Me!

Kurt pushes Mike. Mike pushes back. They fall to the ground and begin beating on each other. As a crowd forms around them, Justin walks off deep in thought.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

As the Palladinis pounded each other, something occurred to me: that went really, really well. Sure it was degrading and offensive -- and frankly a little confusing. I mean, they have a sister. What goes on in that house? -- But the truth is I came out unscathed. They didn't even call me a name. The day was starting out good, but it was about to get even better...

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY

Justin walks down the hallway. He is stopped by a student with a clipboard.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

In the hallway, a senior approached me and asked if I'd sign a petition. And I did.

Justin signs his name.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not because he was a senior. But because I did think the student body deserved a coke machine in the cafeteria.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

Justin is seated in a class full of students.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

And in civics, someone asked me to pass a note for them.

Justin surreptitiously receives a note from the guy behind him and passes it just as smoothly to the girl in front of him. He then signals a thumbs up to the guy who initiated the pass. Mission accomplished.

CUT TO:

INT. BOYS LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

A group of guys congregates in the locker room dressed in their maroon and white gym uniforms. Justin stands listening in but outside the circle.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Then before gym in the boys' locker room, historically a place of unspeakable torture, a group of guys were talking about the different girls they had sex with last night. And one of them took a step back so I could join the conversation.

We see a guy take a step back. And Justin, trying to be as cool as possible, even though his heart is exploding, steps into the circle.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All I did was listen, but that was enough for me.

We see Justin laugh with the group.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

One of the guys said he had sex with Claire last night, which I knew was a lie, but I didn't correct him. The moment was too perfect.

Justin licks his teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

Justin is at his locker.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

And just when I thought the day couldn't get any better...

AMY

Did you get your braces off?

We see Amy Greenblatt, cute, smart, a little on the fringe. Justin's dream.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Amy Greenblatt came over to talk to me.

As Justin smiles, and they begin to talk...

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- LATER

Claire is talking with some friends, including Stephanie and Jennifer.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Good things were happening to Claire
as well.

Debbie, a friend of Claire's runs up to the group.

DEBBIE

Claire, you made the list!

CLAIRE

What list?

The group gathers around Debbie as they look at a copy of "the list". In the background other students share copies of the list as well.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

"The list" was a compilation of names
that the coolest senior guys put
together of the ten "most bangable"
girls at Altoona High.

CLAIRE

Bangable? Is that good?

DEBBIE

Are you kidding? It's amazing!

STEPHANIE

And you're number three!

DEBBIE

No sophomore's ever been in the top
five.

STEPHANIE

Claire, you're like a legend.

A moment as Claire takes this in. Her world's about to change and she's just beginning to realize it.

JENNIFER

Oh my god. Look who's number eight.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- SAME TIME

We see Amy talking to Justin. It's actually happening.

AMY

Did you see Mr. Foster's skanky hairpiece?

JUSTIN

I know, it's like can't he wash it or something?

As she laughs, Kurt Palladini quickly approaches.

KURT PALLADINI

Hey, Hobgood, did you see who made the list?

JUSTIN

Hey, Kurt, we're actually in the middle of something.

KURT PALLADINI

(laughing)

You did! You're the eighth most bangable chick in the school!

Kurt pushes the list in Justin's face. We push in to an EXTREME CLOSE-UP of the list and scan down to number eight. There it is: "Justin Hobgood".

KURT PALLADINI (CONT'D)

How classic!

AMY

Shut up, Kurt.

Justin goes white.

AMY (CONT'D)

Justin, it's just a stupid joke. It doesn't mean anything.

Justin backs away and then begins running. And running.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALTOONA HIGH SCHOOL -- MOMENTS LATER

Justin runs out the front door of the school.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

But it did mean something. Every year some poor bastard gets put on the list. And this year it was me.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Justin continues to run.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

And in that moment, I realized the problem was never my braces or my height or anything like that. The problem was me. And I was never going to change.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

He's running down his block.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I might as well have had tentacles and an exposed brain.

Justin runs up to his house.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was a space alien. Only no one was coming to get me.

(beat)

At least not yet.

He disappears into his house and slams the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. ALTOONA HIGH GUIDANCE COUNSELOR OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Franny sits across from Justin's guidance counselor, Mr. Matthews, a pleasant looking man in his early forties.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

First thing next morning, my mother marched down to my guidance counselor's office. There was no danger of embarrassing me because I refused to go to school that day.

MR. MATTHEWS

Franny, I've also been thinking about Justin's situation, and I think I have a solution.

FRANNY

Okay...

MR. MATTHEWS

Exchange student.

FRANNY

You mean send him someplace?

MR. MATTHEWS

No, no, you take someone in.

FRANNY

Go on.

MR. MATTHEWS

It's a wonderful opportunity for you and your family to learn about another culture, and Justin's essentially guaranteed a friendship.

FRANNY

He does have some friends, you know.

MR. MATTHEWS

I know, I've met them. And more of those are not going to help Justin.

He comes around the desk for the big sell.

MR. MATTHEWS (CONT'D)

Franny, these kids we're bringing in, they're not the dregs. They're student leaders, athletes. I don't know if other countries have prom kings, but if they did, these would be the ones.

(handing her a brochure)

Take a look.

We see a handsome Nordic stud standing next to a very average looking kid. The copy reads "Meet your best friend in the world".

FRANNY

(making sure)

And this blond boy's the exchange student?

MR. MATTHEWS

He was in Madison last year.

(re: geeky kid)

And this young fella, he's now president of his student class. True story.

Beat.

FRANNY

How soon can we get one?

CUT TO:

INT. JUSTIN'S ROOM -- DAY

Franny is seated on Justin's bed. Justin is standing by his desk. Gary is in the doorway.

JUSTIN

You want to import a friend for me?!

FRANNY

Don't think of it that way. We'd be teaching someone about our culture and we'd be learning about his.

GARY

Franny, I'm not sure about this.

FRANNY

Well, it's too late, I said yes.

GARY

What?

FRANNY

Look, the original host family dropped out, and he's flying in tomorrow from London. I had to make a quick decision, these kids go fast.

JUSTIN

Well, how about what I want?

GARY

Justin, pipe down.

(to franny)

Honey, that's another mouth to feed. That would make eleven of us if you include the alpacas.

FRANNY

There's a five hundred dollar a month stipend.

GARY

(pleasantly surprised)

Oh.

FRANNY

Justin, I think this will be good for you.

JUSTIN

Forget it. Claire can be friends with him.

FRANNY

Honey, Claire's very popular right now. She's not going to have time for this boy.

GARY

Franny, how many of these kids can we get?

JUSTIN

Dad?!

GARY

What? That way you'd have a gang to pal around with. We could put some cots in the basement.

FRANNY

Gary, it's one per household.

Franny goes to Justin.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

(gently)

Honey, I just want what's best for you.

JUSTIN

(softening)

I know...

FRANNY

Look, we'll try it with this boy for a little while. And if it doesn't work out, we can return him.

Justin nods in acceptance.

CUT TO:

INT. CHIPPEWA VALLEY AIRPORT -- NEXT DAY

It's a tiny commuter airport. Gary, Justin, and Franny stand at the only gate, awaiting the arrival of their guest. Franny holds up a sign that says "Welcome friend from American International Exchange Program".

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I decided to try and be positive about this. My mom was just looking out for me. And besides, a lot of cool people were from England: Paul McCartney, Patrick Stewart, David Beckham. By the way, liking soccer instead of football is apparently another thing that makes me "gay".

Travelers begin arriving through the gate.

GARY

Hey, Franny, does the stipend come in a lump sum or monthly installments?

FRANNY

I don't know, hon.

Justin absently licks his teeth.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

Justin, please let's not have you
licking your teeth be the first thing
our visitor sees.

A good looking blond teenager starts walking toward them.
Franny excitedly takes a small step forward. The blond kid
walks right by her.

BLOND KID

Mom!

He hugs his mother. Franny's slightly deflated.

FRANNY

Oh, I guess that wasn't him.

EXCHANGE STUDENT (O.S.)

(upbeat)

Are you the Hobgoods?

Franny turns to see the exchange student, Raja Musharaff, a
sixteen-year-old Pakistani Muslim, dressed in traditional
Muslim garb, a kufi on his head and a shalwar kameez over
his body. An uncomfortable beat.

GARY

(wary)

Yes, we're the Hobgood's.

RAJA

(super upbeat)

I am Raja! Your exchange student!

JUSTIN (V.O.)

If you listen closely you can hear
my mom's heart shatter.

As they stand there in total discomfort, we...

Fade out.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. CHIPPEWA VALLEY AIRPORT -- CONTINUOUS

Gary, Franny and Justin stand speechless before Raja.

FRANNY

(struggling)

Um, Gary...

GARY

I'm sorry, son, there might be some confusion. We were told our student was coming from London.

RAJA

That's me. I started in Pakistan, but I flew in from London.

GARY

Oh, then that's what it must be. Our mistake. I'm Mr. Hobgood, this is my wife Mrs. Hobgood, and my son Justin.

RAJA

You are such good people to open your home to me. And I thank and praise Allah for bringing you into my life.

(looking up)

Thank you, Allah for the Hobgoods.

They stand awkwardly for a beat.

GARY

We should get going.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -- LATER

Gary, Justin and Franny are all squeezed into the front seat. Raja rides alone in the back, smiling out the window.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

That was the quietest car ride of our lives.

INT. HOBGOOD HOUSE/HALLWAY -- LATER

Franny enters with the key, followed by Justin, Gary and Raja who is carrying a giant duffel bag.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

As we welcomed Raja into our home,
he was too giddy with excitement to
realize the level of panic and
confusion that had over taken us.

RAJA

What a beautiful home?

FRANNY

Thank you, Raja. The first door on
the left is the guest room. Make
yourself at home and we'll see you
in the morning.

RAJA

(looks at watch)

Forgive my confusion. Is it not
6:30 here?

FRANNY

Raja, I'm your mother while you're
here. You've had a long flight.
And I insist you go to bed.

RAJA

(humbly)

Of course.

Raja carries his bag back to his room. They watch silently
until he exits and the door shuts. They immediately let out
all their anxiety in a hushed but frantic conversation.

FRANNY

What are we going to do?

GARY

Look, Franny, I don't think there's
anything we can do.

JUSTIN

But Mom said I could return him if I
wanted to. I want to return him.

GARY

Franny, would you please tell your
son that we can't do that.

FRANNY

I don't see why not. That is not
the boy I asked for. That is not
the boy I was promised.

JUSTIN

Dad, if I walk into school with him
tomorrow, I will be crucified.

FRANNY

This could be the worst thing that ever happened to him, Gary.

GARY

You two are looking at this all wrong. We just found someone a little lower on the food chain. I think Justin would enjoy not being at the bottom anymore.

Raja open up his door. They immediately fake cover.

RAJA

Excuse me. There is a book on the night stand. Would it be okay with you if I moved it, to make room for my book?

FRANNY

That'll be fine.

RAJA

Many thanks.

Raja goes back in.

FRANNY

What about the terrorist question?

GARY

(c'mon)
Are you serious?

FRANNY

They pose as students, Gary. Bill O'Reilly said so. You need to watch more news.

GARY

It's Altoona, Wisconsin.

FRANNY

Oh, so now Altoona's not important enough to blow up. Where's your civic pride?

JUSTIN

Well, I hope he does blow up Altoona. Because my life could not get any worse!

Justin dramatically exits to his room. A beat.

FRANNY

(softly)

Gary, I'm sure Mr. Matthews didn't intend for this to happen. Can we just go down there tomorrow afternoon and straighten this out?

GARY

Fine. But I want a replacement. We made a commitment to the program and that means something.

(then)

You know they might let us have two if we could find some twins. No one likes to split up a family.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD HOUSE/HALLWAY -- MORNING

Gary walks down the hall in his robe, sipping coffee.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Having gone to sleep hours before the rest of us, Raja woke up at 4 AM, but he waited until someone else was up before he made an appearance.

As Gary passes Raja's room, Raja quickly pokes his head out the door. He has a slightly pained look on his face.

RAJA

Mr. Hobgood, may I use the bathroom?

GARY

Raja, you don't have to ask to use the can.

RAJA

I'm sorry?

GARY

The john.

RAJA

I'm sorry?

GARY

(pointing)

The bathroom's over there.

Raja quickly crosses to the bathroom, as Gary wonders what to make of him. Who is this guy?

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD KITCHEN -- MORNING

Gary, Justin, and Raja are at the table. Franny serves breakfast. Raja again wears his traditional Muslim garb.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

At breakfast my mom found more reasons
to be suspicious of Raja.

FRANNY

(incredulous)
You don't want bacon?

RAJA

No, thank you.

FRANNY

Or sausage?

RAJA

Thank you, but no.

FRANNY

(a little frustrated)
Okay, I guess I can cut you some ham
from the fridge.

RAJA

I'm sorry, Mrs. Hobgood, but my
religion forbids me from eating pork.

FRANNY

Alright.
(under her breath)
I've just never heard of anyone not
having breakfast meat.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

My dad on the other hand was quite
impressed with Raja. He'd never
seen a teenager clean before.

QUICK MONTAGE OF RAJA CLEANING.

GARY LEANS BACK AS RAJA CLEARS THE TABLE.

GARY WATCHES RAJA WASH THE DISHES AS HE POURS SOME COFFEE.

GARY STANDS TO THE SIDE AS RAJA SWEEPS THE KITCHEN FLOOR.

JUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The only time I ever lifted a broom
was when I was a witch for Halloween.
That did not go over well with the
Palladini twins.

As Raja finishes sweeping, Gary walks over to Franny:

GARY

Are you sure you don't want to keep him around? You could use the hand.

FRANNY

(slightly offended)

I keep my house just fine by myself.

GARY

Alright. But just in case the next kid isn't as helpful, I'm going to have him brush down the alpacas before we ship him out.

CUT TO:

INT. JUSTIN'S ROOM -- MORNING

Justin lies in his bed playing a game boy. Raja pokes his head in the open door.

RAJA

Justin, your mother told me you are ill. I hope your condition improves. And I look forward to attending school with you tomorrow.

JUSTIN

Yeah, it could be awhile. I'm pretty sick.

RAJA

Oh. Then I will pray for you.

Justin takes Raja in for a beat.

JUSTIN

Can you dial it down at all?

CUT TO:

INT. RAJA'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Justin is going through Raja's clothes, picking out something for him to wear.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

No matter how much I wanted to get rid of Raja, I couldn't let him walk into school looking like that. As for his personality there was nothing I could do.

Justin pulls out jeans and a sweatshirt.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

How about this?

RAJA

No, I like it. It's mine. But today is my first day. I do not mean to sound prideful, but... I want to make an impression.

Justin hands him the outfit.

JUSTIN

Just trust me.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Raja, still wearing his traditional garb, walks to the car with Franny.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Turned out Raja could be somewhat stubborn. But I had to hand it to him, if I were in his shoes I would have been freaking. He had a real sense of himself.

RAJA

Thank you for driving me to school today, Mrs. Hobgood.

FRANNY

(tired of thank yous)
You're welcome, Raja.

Claire, looking awesome, approaches. As Franny gets into the front seat, Raja looks at Claire speechless.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

In fact the only time I saw him thrown for a loop that morning was when he met my sister.

CLAIRE

I guess you're Raja.

RAJA

(awe-struck)
Who are you?

CLAIRE

Claire.

RAJA

Are you here always?

Claire ignores this and gets into the driver's side front seat. Raja, now having learned the "custom" on the drive from the airport, tries to join them in the front seat.

CLAIRE

Mom?

FRANNY

Raja, three in the front is an airport rule. We're just driving in town.

(fake sweet, off his
confused look)

Just get in the back.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALTOONA HIGH SCHOOL -- MORNING

Raja and Claire step out of the car.

RAJA

Claire, do you know where --

Claire quickly heads off to her friends. Raja watches her go and then turns to speak to Franny who quickly peels away. Raja is on his own.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Students mill about, ready to start their day. But it's a little quieter than usual. Why? Because there's a Pakistani Muslim walking down the hallway.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

You know that nightmare where you're standing in front of your whole school naked. That's what Raja was going through. Only it was worse. Because he was wearing a shalwar kameez.

CUT TO:

INT. HISTORY CLASSROOM -- LATER

A typical high school classroom. Raja sits near the front. Miss Mirante, a thirty-something teacher, leads the class. She's the most free thinking educator at Altoona High. Which means she occasionally uses soy milk.

MISS MIRANTE

Class, I'm going to put aside our lesson today, because we have a special guest. For one year, we will be in the presence of a real live Pakistani. Who practices Muslimism. That means we have an opportunity to learn about his culture. And he about ours. So let's begin a dialogue.

She walks toward Raja.

MISS MIRANTE (CONT'D)
Raja, you're so different from us.
How does that feel?

RAJA
I am not sure I understand.

MISS MIRANTE
Think about it.
(then)
Now how does everyone else feel about
Raja and his differences?

A student, Jessica, raises her hand.

MISS MIRANTE (CONT'D)
Jessica.

JESSICA
Well, I guess I feel angry. Because
his people blew up the buildings in
New York.

MISS MIRANTE
(encouraging)
That's good.

RAJA
(confused)
But, that is not true.

MISS MIRANTE
Raja, in America you have to wait
until you're called on. And I'd
appreciate a raised hand.
(then)
Now who else is angry at Raja?

As other hands go up:

JUSTIN (V.O.)
Sadly, this was the highlight of
Raja's day.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD KITCHEN -- LATER

Justin is reading a comic book and licking his teeth. We hear a door slam. Raja marches into the kitchen, obviously agitated. He plops down in a chair and drops his head on the table. A beat.

JUSTIN

(wary)
So how was school?

RAJA

What is wrong with the people of
Altoona High?!

Raja stands.

JUSTIN

What?

RAJA

They are like wolves! And uneducated
about world events!

(where are my manners)

I'm sorry, how are you feeling?

JUSTIN

Oh, uh, better.

RAJA

(rolling again)

And what is "fudge Pakistan"? All
day long I'm called this!! It's
confusing. Fudge is so delicious.
Yet they keep laughing!

(then)

I hope these people are not your
friends.

JUSTIN

I think we're safe on that one.

RAJA

I will not lie. The brochure was
very misleading.

Raja closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and begins chanting
the *shahada*, a Muslim affirmation of faith.

RAJA (CONT'D)

(chanting)

Ashhadu al-la ilaha illa-Llah wa
ashhadu Anna Muhammadar-rasul Allah.

Raja takes a deep breath. He seems to have relaxed. A beat.

JUSTIN

(wary)

What's goin' on there, Raja?

RAJA

That is a prayer called the *shahada*.

(MORE)

RAJA (CONT'D)

It reminds me of my faith and bathes me in light when my soul is filled with darkness.

JUSTIN

Uh-huh.

RAJA

You do not pray sometimes when you are upset? What do you do to lift your spirit?

JUSTIN

I just usually eat a brownie or buy a CD.

RAJA

And this helps?

JUSTIN

For like an hour or so. And then you feel kind of empty again. So, then you just... eat another brownie or buy something else.

RAJA

I see.

Raja notices the empty plate of brownies on the table. He looks back to Justin.

JUSTIN

(re: plate)

Rough week.

RAJA

Is this something you want to talk about?

A beat. Justin begins animatedly talking to Raja.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Maybe it was because I just needed to vent or maybe there's just something about Raja that makes you want to open up. But either way, I just started talking. And once I got going, I couldn't stop.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD -- LATER

They kick a soccer ball to each other, as the alpacas roam around them.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I told him my whole life story. Not just what happened, but how I really felt about things. How lonely I could be, or how scared I could get. I mean stuff I wouldn't even tell the guys from chorus.

CUT TO:

INT. JUSTIN'S ROOM -- LATER

Justin holds his pillow as he continues to share. Raja listens intently.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

I even told him how sometimes I'd pretend my pillow was Amy Greenblatt and that I'd make out with it. And he didn't smirk, or laugh, or make fun of me. Not once. Even when I accidentally sprayed on his face.

Justin reacts, having just let some spittle fly from his mouth. Unfazed, Raja wipes his face and encourages Justin to keep talking.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD DEN -- LATER

Justin cranks up the stereo and begins showing Raja how to play the air guitar.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

It was strange. I always felt like an outsider and a weirdo, and then here comes this kid from a village in Pakistan, and suddenly I'm not an outsider anymore.

(content)

Just a weirdo.

Justin smashes his air guitar ala Pete Townsend.

Fade out.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. ALTOONA HIGH GUIDANCE COUNSELOR OFFICE -- LATER

Mr. Matthews is seated behind his desk. Gary and Franny are sitting down across from him.

FRANNY

Carl, thank you for seeing us. There has been a huge mistake.

MR. MATTHEWS

So, I take it you've met Raja.

Franny's jaw drops in disbelief.

FRANNY

You knew about this?!

GARY

And also, when's the first check coming?

FRANNY

Gary, please.

MR. MATTHEWS

If it means anything I do apologize.

FRANNY

You said he was from London!

MR. MATTHEWS

I said he was flying in from London. I can't help it if your imagination ran wild.

FRANNY

Carl!

MR. MATTHEWS

What could I do? I had a situation. Once the original host family learned that a Pakistani Muslim was coming, they were understandably concerned. So they dropped out.

FRANNY

Which is what I would have done.

MR. MATTHEWS

Which is why I didn't tell you. We can go round and round on this, Franny.

FRANNY

Carl, you might as well go back to selling cars, because you are nothing but a liar.

MR. MATTHEWS

Now hold on, Franny. That's my character you're talking about.

GARY

What Franny's saying is she'd like to trade in Raja for another model. Maybe one with a different coat of paint, if you know what I mean.

FRANNY

(for the record)

I'm not prejudiced. I don't have a problem with the boy's color. I have a problem with his religion.

MR. MATTHEWS

Franny, I gotta say I thought I was pawning off Raja on a much more tolerant family.

FRANNY

I came to you because I was concerned about Justin. How does this help Justin?

MR. MATTHEWS

Look, I'll admit there's some collateral damage here. But at this point, my hands are tied. I mean this thing is a political nightmare. The school board's involved, not to mention the American International Exchange Program.

(looks around, then
whispers)

They're a lot more powerful than you want to know.

FRANNY

What about terrorism?

GARY

Not that again, he's just a kid.

MR. MATTHEWS

I gotta agree with Gary. But if it means anything, authorities are monitoring the situation. Now I'm sorry you're upset. But maybe this will help.

Mr. Matthews reaches into a drawer and pulls out an envelope. He hands it to Gary who opens it up and examines the check.

GARY

We're doing the right thing, Franny.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD HOUSE -- LATER

Franny glumly enters the house and puts her stuff away.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

While my dad sprinted down to the bank, my mom shifted her concern to me.

FRANNY

(calling out)

Justin.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY/JUSTIN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Franny approaches Justin's room.

FRANNY

Justin.

Franny opens the door. She stops dead in her tracks and goes white with fear. Raja and Justin are on the floor performing *salat* which is a ritual Muslim prayer. At first they don't see her as their heads are bowed to the floor and both hands are flat on the ground.

RAJA

(chanting)

Wa min sharri ghaasiqin idhaa waqab,
wa min sharri-n-naafaathaati fi-l-
quad, wa min sharri haasidin idha
hasad...

They sit up from their prostrate position but remain on their knees. Justin notices Franny.

JUSTIN

(upbeat)

Mom!

FRANNY

(shell-shocked)

Hi, honey.

JUSTIN
 (how cool is this!)
 Raja's doing his daily salat so I'm
 praying towards Mecca with him.

FRANNY
 (bewildered)
 Okay, um, I, okay, yeah --

Franny closes the door, grabs the nearest phone and dials
 furiously. As she walks through the house:

FRANNY (CONT'D)
 (into phone, loud
 whispering)
 Gary, pick up. Pick up!
 (then)
 Gary, thank god.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK -- CONTINUOUS

Gary is at the teller window talking to Marge.

GARY
 (into cell)
 Hey, hon, while I'm down here, I'm
 having some new checks printed up.
 What do you want, sea gulls or pandas?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

FRANNY
 Gary, get home here right now!
 Justin's on the floor praying to
 Mecca!

GARY (O.S.)
 (into cell)
 What's that, hon?

FRANNY
 (slower)
 He is praying! To Mecca!

CUT TO:

INT. BANK -- CONTINUOUS

GARY
 Franny, I don't know what that means.
 (MORE)

GARY (CONT'D)
 (covers phone, re:
 checks)
 Margie, what do you like?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

FRANNY
 Raja is turning Justin into a Muslim!

CUT TO:

INT. BANK -- CONTINUOUS

MARGIE
 I like the pandas.

GARY
 Margie, likes the pandas. But I'm
 partial to the sea gulls.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Franny hangs up the phone in frustration. Claire enters
 through the front door.

CLAIRE
 Mom, I really need to talk to you.

FRANNY
 Claire, not now.

CLAIRE
 (deep breath)
 I want to go on the pill.

FRANNY
 What?!

CLAIRE
 It's my body, it's my life.

FRANNY
 (frantic, hands her
 money)
 I really can't do this right now.
 Please just go to the market and
 pick up a chicken for dinner. We'll
 talk later.

CLAIRE
 Fine. By the way, I'm bringing
 Jeffrey tonight.

Claire starts to leave.

FRANNY
Wait, who's Jeffrey?

CLAIRE
He's a part of this. I'll explain
later.

Claire exits. After a beat, Franny shakes this off and heads
back to Justin's room.

CUT TO:

INT. JUSTIN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Raja and Justin are on the computer. Franny bursts in.

JUSTIN (V.O.)
It was at that point my mother decided
to take matters into her own hands.

FRANNY
Justin, you need to come with me.
Now.

JUSTIN
Why?

FRANNY
Grammy is sick.

JUSTIN (V.O.)
This was probably the cruelest way
my mother could have tricked me.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Franny, still in a tizzy, is driving. Justin is trying to
keep it together.

JUSTIN
I can't lose Grammy right now! I
just can't!

FRANNY
Calm down, Grammy's fine.

JUSTIN
(sniffles)
What?

FRANNY
She's fine. Why were you praying
with that boy?

JUSTIN

I wasn't really praying. I was just --
why would you say that about Grammy?

FRANNY

You are not becoming a Muslim!

JUSTIN

Well, of course I'm not. What are
you talking about?

FRANNY

Raja is going home. I'm sending him
home.

JUSTIN

No, no, no, wait, I like Raja now.

FRANNY

You're so impressionable. This is
all my fault.

JUSTIN

Mom, we were wrong. Raja's awesome.

FRANNY

Justin, I know you don't understand,
but someday you will. Now after we
send him off we can go CD shopping
or I'll make you a big tin of
brownies, but this is how it has to
be.

JUSTIN

(earnest, pleading)
Please don't do this.

FRANNY

This conversation is over.

They ride silently.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

And it was over. My mom had made up
her mind.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAVEL AGENT -- LATER

Franny talks to a travel agent behind a desk.

FRANNY

I'd like one ticket from Eau Claire
to Islamabad, please.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD KITCHEN -- LATER

Raja is seated with Gary, who is showing him the checks.

RAJA
They are beautiful, Mr. Hobgood.

GARY
Thank you, Raja.

Franny and Justin enter.

GARY (CONT'D)
(to Franny)
I went with the sea gulls. Raja approves. Now what's this about Grammy? I just talked to her all she had was the sniffles.

FRANNY
That was a false alarm. But I'm afraid we do have some bad news.

GARY
What's wrong?

She sits down next to Raja.

FRANNY
It seems there's been a problem with the exchange program's insurance. Unfortunately, you're going to have to go home.

GARY
What?

FRANNY
We just picked up the ticket at the school. I'm sorry.

She puts it on the table. Raja takes all this in.

RAJA
(to Franny)
Me as well.

A beat.

JUSTIN
(looking at his mother)
Come on, Raja. I'll help you pack.

Raja follows Justin down the hallway.

GARY
 (softly)
 Franny...

CUT TO:

INT. RAJA'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Justin is helping Raja pack his clothes into his duffel.

Franny enters.

FRANNY
 Do you need any help in here?

RAJA
 Thank you, Mrs. Hobgood. I am almost done.

FRANNY
 I am really sorry about this.

RAJA
 I understand.

FRANNY
 But you know in some ways this isn't so bad. I'm sure you've been a little homesick. And I bet your mother will be happy to see you.

A beat as Raja continues packing.

RAJA
 My mother passed away about a year ago.

FRANNY
 (stunned)
 Oh. I... I didn't know.

JUSTIN
 Raja, I'm so sorry. That must have been awful.

RAJA
 It was... it is...

Raja zips up his duffel bag, as Franny continues to stare.

JUSTIN (V.O.)
 It's funny how everything you think about a person can change in an instant. For all the times my mother referred to Raja as "that boy", she really didn't see him as one until right then.

FRANNY

You know, this is silly. Justin,
start unpacking Raja's bag.

JUSTIN

Really?

FRANNY

If there's an insurance problem,
we'll just have to tell that exchange
program that the Hobgood's will cover
it. If they have an issue with that,
they can talk to me or Gary.

(then softly, to Raja)

That is if you still want to stay.

RAJA

I would very much like that.

FRANNY

So would I.

CUT TO:

INT. HOBGOOD KITCHEN -- LATER

Justin sits next to Raja at the table. Gary, Franny and
Claire are also there eating dinner with them.

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Dinner that night was one of the
best meals we'd had in a long time.
We stayed at that table for over
three hours. No one wanted to be
any place else. Raja said it reminded
him of home. I even think Claire's
new boyfriend had a good time.

We now see that Claire is sitting next to the captain of the
football team, Jeffrey. He is tall, handsome, and not that
it should matter, black.

JEFFREY

This was a great meal, Mrs. H.

FRANNY

(smiling politely)

Thank you, Jeffrey.

As she stares at him for a beat too long, and everyone else
continues to enjoy...

Fade out.