

The Algerian

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BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: ALGERIA, 20 YEARS AGO

EXT. DESERT PROVINCIAL TOWN - DAY

A five year old boy, ALI, rides his bike down a dusty dirt road past an old house. His MOTHER steps into the doorway and waves at him impatiently.

MOTHER
(in Arabic with subtitles)
Ali! Come inside for dinner! Your
food is getting cold! Ali!

Grinning broadly, Ali races past the house, peddling as fast as he can.

MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ali!

Grinning, he looks over his shoulder towards his Mother.

BOOM! A huge explosion throws him from his bike and he falls to the ground.

Ali looks up to see his home completely destroyed and a huge ball of smoke surge into the sky.

Ali sits frozen on the ground, his eyes staring at where his Mother stood a moment before.

ECU ZOOM IN to Ali's face.

ALI
(whispering)
Mama...

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Extreme Close Up on the face of a twenty two year old man, ALI. His closed eyes open suddenly, and he looks up to his right. The face of a pretty woman who looks similar to his Mother is looking at him with a smile. We see it is an Airline STEWARDESS wearing an elegant uniform.

STEWARDESS
(in Arabic with subtitles)
Sir, I am sorry to wake you, but we
are preparing to land. Please
buckle your seat belt and bring
your chair forward.

Ali nods his head and the Stewardess walks away. His gaze follows her for a moment as he buckles up.

CAPTAINS VOICE (O.S.)
(in Arabic first, followed
by English)
On behalf of the entire flight
crew, I thank you for flying with
us and welcome you all to Los
Angeles.

Ali turns his head towards the window and looks out. The Captain's Voice continues.

CUT TO:

EXT. SKY OVER LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

A JUMBO JET comes in for a landing and roars overhead.

The Camera TILTS DOWN from the sky to show a giant LAX sign.

INT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ali walks through the Airport with a leather bag slung over his shoulder.

INT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ali stands alone on an OVERPASS and watches planes take off.

INT. TAXI CAB. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ali looks out the Taxi window as it drives past crowds of people at the airport.

INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - DAY

The small barren STUDIO APARTMENT is quiet. A few shafts of light streak in from a couple windows covered in heavy drapes. Keys are heard trying to open the door with little luck. Finally, the apartment door opens, and Ali enters. He peers around for a moment before closing the door behind him and locking it.

INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The room is relatively dark except for a few shafts of warm orange light from the sunset. In the center of the room, Ali pulls out a small prayer rug from his bag, unrolls it, and prays on the floor. A shaft of the warm setting sunlight washes over his face.

INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

1. Ali sits in the center of the room. He pops open a can of tuna fish and eats with his fingers.
2. Ali turns the kitchen faucet on and drinks from the tap.
3. Ali, his shirt off, does push-ups on the floor.
4. Ali takes a shower.
5. Ali stands in front of the bathroom mirror that has fogged over and wipes his hand across it. He gazes at the distorted image of himself in the mirror, tilting his head to the side to see more of himself, further distorting his face.
6. Ali turns the light switch off. The apartment goes dark except for a glow from the street below. His naked silhouetted body crosses the room and lies on the floor where he's made a temporary bed: his rug, a towel, and his leather bag as a pillow.
7. ECU of his head as he lies back on his bag. He stares upwards at the ceiling. His eyes rarely blink...

TIME LAPSE LIGHT FX: SUNRISE... a slow gradual warm light increases in intensity as the window-frame shadows creep down the wall to the floor to show that the sun has risen into the sky, filling the room with blinding light. Sounds of the city awakening fill the room. Ali's eyes blink more often, and he finally falls asleep.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Ali is inside the phone booth, nodding his head, listening.

ALI

Yes Father, everything is fine.
The apartment is clean... Yes, the
flight was good. Yes, I know. I
will. I'll call you soon. Okay.

Ali looks around, hangs up the phone, and walks away.

INT. BIKE SHOP - DAY

Ali is looking at a bike. The owner, a good natured fat man in his fifties, MO, walks over to help. He has an olive complexion and speaks with a slight Jordanian accent.

MO

Let me know if you have any questions.

ALI

I'm looking for a good bike I can ride everyday, but isn't too expensive.

MO

How much do you wanna spend?

ALI

(charming)

The best bike for the best price.

Mo leads Ali over to another rack of bikes nearby.

MO

You're in luck. Right over here. This one was customized by someone who never came back to pick it up, so I'm stuck with it now. I'll give it to you for cost.

ALI

Wow, it's nice. How much?

MO

\$200

ALI

(impressed)

You have a deal.

MO

Great. Credit or cash?

Mo pulls the bike out and hands it to Ali.

ALI

Cash.

Mo walks behind the counter.

MO
So, where are you from, if you
don't mind me asking?

ALI
Algeria.

Mo smiles.

MO
(in Arabic)
Hello, my name is Mohammed
(switches to English) but my
friends call me Mo.

ALI
Pleasure to meet you, Mo. I'm Ali,
but you can call me Al.

Ali hands him the cash for the bike and Mo rings him up.

MO
How long you been here in the
States?

ALI
I just got here.

MO
Well, then, welcome to America! A
young man like you will love it
here, I promise.

ALI
I hope so.

Mo gives Ali his change and a receipt.

MO
Funny, isn't it?

ALI
What's that?

MO
You move half way across the world
to change everything, and the first
thing you change is your name. I
did the same thing.

ALI
(in Arabic)
Thank you for the deal.

Ali nods his head to Mo as he starts walking out the door.

MO
 (in English)
 My pleasure, Ali. Come by anytime
 you want to have tea and chat about
 the old world.

ALI
 Thank you, I will. Salaam
 Allaykum.

Ali waves goodbye, and Mo returns the gesture, smiling.

MO
 Wa-Allaykum e Salaam.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Ali rides his bike across campus. He takes notice of students from different ethnic backgrounds intermingling and smiling/laughing: black, white, Latin, Asian, Indian, etc.

Ali locks his bike up and walks into a LECTURE HALL.

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL - DAY

A HISTORY PROFESSOR lectures as STUDENTS take notes.

HISTORY PROFESSOR
 It wasn't until the visionary Pope
 Urban II gathered a council at
 Clermont in 1095 that the
 fragmented Medieval world of Europe
 would finally find internal peace
 and unite under a single purpose.
 That purpose was to launch a
 massive attack on the Middle East
 and capture the Holy city of
 Jerusalem for Christianity. The
 genius of the Pope was to harness
 the immense power of the self-
 destructive internal warring states
 and principalities that were
 destroying Europe like a cancer.

Ali is listening intently as he writes down his notes. A pretty blonde girl with glasses, SARA, sits nearby and looks over at him a few times. Ali notices.

HISTORY PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

The Pope re-focussed that power and built the largest military machine since the fall Rome, and thus was born the First Crusade.

Students begin to look at their watches and close notebooks.

HISTORY PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Class isn't over yet, folks! Your papers should reflect the psychological and political frame of mind for peasants, priests, and soldiers to collectively put their personal hatreds and wars aside and rise up as one people, united under the religious icon of the Christian Holy Cross. I don't want lists of battles and dates, people, I want to see your analysis of the data. Class dismissed.

The bell rings and students immediately begin to rise and exit. Ali continues to write his notes down without rushing out. Sara smiles at him as she walks by. He smiles back.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Ali walks across the campus eating an apple, keeping to himself.

INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ali enters his apartment. It is now meagerly furnished with some odds and ends. He walks to the windows and closes the curtains and begins his daily regiment:

1. He prays on the floor.
2. He eats out of a can of tuna fish with a fork.
3. He does pull-ups on a bar he's rigged by the bathroom door.
4. He does push-ups.
5. He takes a shower.
6. As he finishes shaving, he wipes the fogged mirror with his hand, but his face is still distorted.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Ali is hanging out at the bar, bopping to the music as he sips on a water and lime.

He notices a beautiful young woman scantily dressed, LANA, gyrating on the dance-floor. She looks at him, makes eye-contact, smiles, and turns away, melting into the crowd.

Ali turns away and orders another drink at the bar.

ALI
Club Soda and lime, please.

The female bartender smiles.

BARTENDER
Sure thing, hun.

She hands him a drink and refuses his money.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Water is on the house.

ALI
Thanks.

Ali turns back towards the dance-floor. He spots Lana again and stares. She dances up to him with a mischievous smile. Her eyes never leave his as she takes a drink from his glass, and hands it back with a wink. Ali stares back without smiling, completely taken in by her.

LANA
Why so serious?

She spins away and heads back to dance. A good-looking GUY slides up against Lana and they begin to dance and grind. His hands quickly move onto her hips. Lana enjoys herself. Ali watches for a moment before he turns and walks away, disappointed.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

People are exiting the club as it closes. Ali steps out and sees Lana and the Guy she was dancing with arguing nearby. He's had a few. Ali politely watches from a distance.

LANA
Fuck off! Get a life, creep!

GUY

Don't be a bitch, c'mon! The party's just starting. You're coming home with us!

He reaches for her wrist and she pulls away. Two of the Guys' FRIENDS are laughing.

FRIEND 1

Leave her alone, man. The fuckin whore aint worth your time!

LANA

God damn right he's not worth my time! Fuckin pencil-dick is only good for stickin his boyfriend's ass!

FRIEND 1

Oooohhhh!

Friend 2 laughs out loud. The Guy becomes enraged and steps up to Lana, slapping her down with one swing.

Ali springs into action and calmly pops the Guy in the throat, staggering him backwards to his knees. The two Friends attack Ali, but he quickly drops both of them with a blur of death moves, making one of them vomit, and knocking the other unconscious. The Guy is on the ground gasping for air.

A few people have gathered to watch. As Ali turns away from the three guys, the people step back in fear. He glares at them and they flee back into the club.

Lana is left alone with Ali. She's still on the floor, in shock from what just happened. Ali looks down at Lana. She stares back at him, stunned.

ALI

Are you okay?

Lana doesn't respond immediately as she squints her left eye.

LANA

(shaken)

Yeah, I'm okay.

Ali lends her a hand.

ALI

C'mon. We should go. The police are gonna be here soon.

LANA

Okay.

Ali helps her up, and puts his arm around her. As they walk past the three beaten men, Lana breaks free of Ali, runs over to the Guy that slapped her, and starts violently kicking him.

LANA (CONT'D)

You fuckin punk, sack of shit!

Ali pulls her off of him. Sirens are heard in the distance.

ALI

C'mon! We gotta go.

Ali and Lana walk briskly away.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Ali and Lana sit across from one another eating burgers and fries. They sit at a window table.

Lana holds a large glass of ice-water up against the left side of her face, which is now a little red. Ali hungrily eats his burger as Lana munches on fries and sips on a milk shake. They observe one another as they eat.

LANA

So, why'd you help me?

Ali sips down some water before he answers.

ALI

Where I come from, a man who hits a woman is no better than an animal.

LANA

And where's that?

ALI

Where's what?

LANA

Where do you come from?

ALI

Algeria.

LANA

Al-what?

ALI
Algeria.

LANA
Where's that? Europe?

ALI
Close. North Africa.

LANA
(surprised / amused)
Africa!? You don't look like no
brother I ever met.

ALI
Africa's a big place.

LANA
(smiling)
You have sweet eyes, you know that?

ALI
Thanks, so do you.

A WAITRESS arrives at the table. She looks at Lana with
judging eyes.

LANA
(sarcastically smiling)
I forgot to duck.

WAITRESS
(ignoring Lana)
Can I get you anything?

ALI
(smiling)
We're okay, thank you.

WAITRESS
Here's the check. You can pay on
your way out.

The waitress leaves.

LANA
Judgemental bitch. I bet she goes
home and slaps her kids around.

ALI
(smirking)
So, where are you from? L.A.?

LANA
Do I look like an L.A. chick to
you?

ALI
I wouldn't know. Just got here a
few months ago.

LANA
I grew up in the Bronx.

ALI
(chewing)
Is it far from here?

LANA
(surprised)
Yeah, New York is on the other side
of the fuckin country. You really
are new!

ALI
I adapt quickly. So, if you don't
like it here, why don't you go
back?

LANA
I had to get away for awhile.

ALI
How long you been away for?

LANA
Almost ten years now.

ALI
Sounds serious.

LANA
It was... is.

Lana picks up her burger and takes a bite, ending his
prodding.

ALI
So, who was that guy back there,
anyway?

LANA
Just a guy who couldn't take no for
an answer, that's all. Just met
him tonight.

ALI

Oh.

LANA

(playful)

So, my turn, superman. Where'd you learn to fight like that? I've been around tough guys all my life and never seen shit like that before. Was that some kind of kung-fu?

ALI

Just something I picked up here and there.

Ali takes a final bite of his burger and smiles. Lana smiles back and provocatively takes her straw in her mouth and sucks on her milk shake. Ali becomes uncomfortable under her gaze and looks down at the check, picking it up.

ALI (CONT'D)

We better get goin. I have to wake up pretty early tomorrow.

He gets up as she watches.

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

Ali and Lana are standing at the corner outside the Diner.

LANA

You sure you don't wanna share a cab?

ALI

No, I live in the opposite direction.

LANA

Okay.

An awkward silence ensues. Lana pulls out her phone.

LANA (CONT'D)

What's your digits?

ALI

My what?

LANA

Your phone number, silly.

ALI
Oh, 310-555-0728.

Lana punches the numbers in.

LANA
Al, right?

ALI
Right.

LANA
That's my number calling you now.
Give me a buzz sometime. Dinner's
on me next time.

ALI
Okay, I'd like that. But no
fighting.

LANA
(smiling)
Sure, no fighting before.

A taxi pulls up to the curb. Ali steps to it and opens the back door for her. She's about to get in and kisses him on the cheek.

LANA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Thanks, superman.

She hops in the cab, and Ali closes the door.

ALI
You're welcome.

They wave goodbye to each other as the cab drives away. Ali smiles and starts walking away alone.

EXT. ALI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment building windows are all dark.

INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A window is open and a breeze sways the curtains in the dark apartment. We hear labored breathing. On the couch, Ali, naked, is masturbating. He begins to bang the back of his head against the couch as his breathing becomes more rapid.

As he climaxes, he strains to keep quiet as his whole body flexes. Exhausted, he collapses into a fetal position and cries.

EXT. BEACH BIKE PATH - DAY

Ali rides his bike along the bike path.

EXT. OUTDOOR BEACH GYM - DAY

Ali arrives at a fitness area on the sand with ropes, pull-up bars, and rings. He puts his bike down and begins to stretch. Already there, working out, is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed All-American guy in his late twenties: PATRICK. He politely nods and acknowledges Ali, who nods back.

Ali walks over to the rings and begins to swing down the row. Patrick, impressed, watches him for a minute before returning to his pull-ups.

EXT. PARK OVERLOOKING OCEAN - EVENING

Ali sits on a bench alone and watches the ocean below as people pass nearby on a path. He looks left and right to see if he is alone, closes his eyes, and begins to whisper a prayer from the Koran. When he finishes, a man's voice, SULEYMAN, startles him. Suleyman is an African-American man in his forties.

SULEYMAN

That was wonderful, my brother.
Your recitation of the Koran is
very nice.

ALI

(uncomfortable)
Thank you.

SULEYMAN

It's okay. You can pray here.
It's a free country.

Suleyman smiles and offers Ali a hand shake. Ali accepts.

SULEYMAN (CONT'D)

Salaam Allaykum.

ALI

(surprised)
Wa-Allaykum e Salaam.

Suleyman turns his attention back to the evening sky.

SULEYMAN

Allah is truly great to create such
majesty for us.

ALI

Yes, he is.

SULEYMAN

My name is Suleyman.

ALI

Nice to meet you. Al. Ali.

SULEYMAN

Where are you from, Ali?

Ali seems apprehensive. Suleyman notices.

SULEYMAN (CONT'D)

It's okay. You don't have to tell
me.

ALI

No, it's just that you caught me
off guard. I've never met an
American Muslim before.

SULEYMAN

(smiling)

There's lots of us. We come in all
shapes and sizes. White, black,
yellow, you name it. Allah loves
diversity.

ALI

Yes, he does. I'm from Algeria.

SULEYMAN

Algeria? You're a long way from
home.

ALI

I just arrived a few months ago,
for University.

SULEYMAN

That's wonderful. Education is a
divine gift. What University?

ALI

LVU.

SULEYMAN

That's great! You must be going to our Mosque, the El Al-Jib. I'm an Imam there. It's a few blocks away from your school.

Ali looks away, towards the ocean.

ALI

I'm not going to a Mosque right now. I need some time to myself. I am praying alone.

SULEYMAN

Oh, I see.

A quiet ensues as they both stare at the ocean.

SULEYMAN (CONT'D)

That can be a good thing for a young man for a time, but eventually, he'll need to rejoin his brothers in prayer.

Ali turns to face him and study his eyes. He looks away again.

ALI

Thank you. I'll try and come by one day.

Suleyman stands up to go.

SULEYMAN

Glad to have met you, brother Ali. When you change your mind, I will be waiting for you.

Suleyman pats him on the shoulder and walks away. Ali continues to stare at the setting sun.

SULEYMAN (CONT'D)

Salaam Allaykum.

ALI

(whispering)
Wa-Allaykum e Salaam.

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL - DAY

Ali is in History class. Sara sits nearby.

HISTORY PROFESSOR

Last week we looked at the colliding worlds of Europe and the Middle East in the eleventh century leading up to the First Crusade. Today we will be discussing the factors that led up to the colliding worlds of Rome and Carthage. Located in present day Tunisia, Carthage fought three wars with Rome, known as the Punic Wars. As neighbors whose populations were growing beyond their ability to coexist harmoniously, war, not diplomacy, became the answer. In the end, Rome was victorious, and the Carthaginians were virtually erased from history, with only an echo remaining of them in the Berber language and people.

Ali raises his hand. The professor points to him.

HISTORY PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Yes, go ahead.

ALI

What about the Phoenicians?

A few students chuckle at the odd question. Sara looks at him with curiosity.

SARA

(to herself)
Phoenicians?

HISTORY PROFESSOR

(amused)
What about them? I don't think you read the correct assignment for today.

ALI

I think it's important to note that the Carthaginians, and thus the Berbers, are descendants of the Phoenicians, the great maritime power from Libya.

The chuckling students quiet, and the Professor's smirk vanishes.

HISTORY PROFESSOR

Well, the Phoenician connection to Carthage is still a historical dispute, I'm afraid.

ALI

There is nothing to dispute. Berbers are descendants of Phoenicians.

The class turns to look at Ali, interested at his challenge. Sara's eyes light up as she is thoroughly impressed with him.

HISTORY PROFESSOR

Well, young man. Tell me, then, what makes you so sure?

ALI

Because I'm a Berber. "Shalenyā migta vernal ix zergowye nirla ix loraxne mithralen." That's a saying every Burbur child is taught as soon as they can speak.

HISTORY PROFESSOR

(mocking)

Sorry, but I don't speak Berber.

ALI

I know.

The class chuckles as Ali digs into the arrogant Professor.

ALI (CONT'D)

It means, "honor the Eastern Sunrise across the sea, for there rest your ancestors."

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

A throng of students exit the lecture hall doors. Ali slings his backpack over his shoulder. Sara walks a few feet behind him, trying to catch up.

SARA

(calling out)

Hey, wait up.

Ali doesn't hear her and keeps walking. She jogs up alongside him.

SARA (CONT'D)
Excuse me, excuse me.

Ali stops and turns to face her.

ALI
Yes?

SARA
I'm sorry to bother you, but I
wanted to say that you were great
back there.

ALI
Oh, the Burbur thing?

SARA
Yeah. That guy's a know-it-all
jerk who needs a little humbling.

ALI
I was just protecting a little bit
of truth about my people, that's
all.

SARA
That's really cool.

They stare a moment at one another.

SARA (CONT'D)
So, are you a History major?

ALI
No, I'm in the Engineer school, but
I still have to take a few Liberal
Arts classes.

SARA
Cool, well, look, I need a study
partner for mid-terms and was
hoping you'd be interested in
partnering up.

ALI
Oh, well, I usually study on my
own, but, okay, we can do that.

SARA
Great!

Sara looks down at her watch.