

Stand, Sitting

By

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EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

TWO STUDENTS raise the American flag in front of the SCHOOL. They playfully chase each other around the flag pole before a TEACHER intervenes and hurries them into the school.

WE see STUDENTS AND FACULTY MEMBERS rush into the doors.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAYS

STUDENTS scurry to their lockers and classrooms.

The Assistant Principal, MR. FRANKLIN, mid-fifties, a distinguished Caucasian man, in a grey suit with a bow tie, slightly crooked, stands in the middle of the hallway, arms crossed, amidst all the chaos.

We hear the final BELL sound as he yells at a GROUP OF STUDENTS to hurry along to class.

Mr. Franklin nods to RICK, 40, the Caucasian Security Guard who, evident by his wrinkled jeans and stained shirt, has been there longer than he cares to remember.

Rick makes his way through the late stragglers and locks the front doors.

MS. REID, MID 30'S, a dreaded AFRICAN-AMERICAN teacher, stands at the door to visit the stragglers. Her fitted jeans and "Free Mumia" tee shirt screams young and hip.

TIMOTHY JAMES, 13, a pudgy Caucasian boy, with ruffled hair and a freckled face, rushes towards her with a bagel dangling from his mouth. He stops short of the door

MS. REID

Timothy?

TIMOTHY

Ma'am?

MS. REID

Is it too much to ask for you to finish your breakfast before you get to school?

TIMOTHY

Sorry Ms. Reid. I was at my father's this weekend. His power is cut off so --

(CONTINUED)

MS. REID

You know what, it's fine. Just go ahead and take your seat.

He quickly swallows down the last of his bagel.

TIMOTHY

Yes ma'am.

She glances down the hallway and closes the door.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

There are posters of historical events and replicas of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence plastered on the off white walls.

An American flag hangs from a lopsided flag pole in the corner of the classroom.

At the front of the class is a desk cluttered with piles of papers and a half-empty coffee cup.

The visual board has: "Ms Reid/American History" scribbled in the upper left corner. Under it is a quote from Thomas Jefferson that reads: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The STUDENTS entertain themselves with conversation. They all snap to as she shuts the door and sits her desk.

We hear a light knock at the door.

The principal MRS. JOHNSON, mid-forties, a porkly, Caucasian woman dressed in a pin-striped suit, pokes her head in the door.

The entire class turns in curiosity.

MRS. JOHNSON

Please excuse the interruption Ms. Reid.

MS. REID

No worries, what can I do for you Mrs. Johnson?

MRS. JOHNSON

I just wanted to escort our newest student to class.

FATIMAH, 14, a timid, Arab-American girl who appears to be your average middle school girl except for the the jilbaab cloaked over her head, walks in.

Mrs. Johnson guides her by her arm to the front of the classroom.

MRS. JOHNSON
(to Class)
Students, this is Fatimah. Please
make her feel welcomed. And let's
all be on our best behavior...

She glances over at the class clown, SAMUEL TUCKER, 14, a red-headed Caucasian boy with freckles and an obvious eating disorder.

He is pre-occupied with the pencil he is attempting to balance on the edge of his upper lip.

MRS. JOHNSON
(to Samuel)
All of you.

The pencil falls to the floor as he glances at Mrs. Johnson.

SAMUEL
What?

MS. REID
Thank you, Mrs. Johnson. We most
certainly will.

She nods to Ms. Reid and quickly finds her way out.

Fatimah grips onto her notebook. She stares at the floor.

MS. REID
Fatimah is it?

FATIMAH
Yes...yes ma'am.

MS. REID
Welcome to American History. You
can have a seat in any empty chair.

FATIMAH
Ye...yes ma'am.

Several students whisper and point as she navigates her way to a desk in the back of the classroom.

MS. REID
Okay class, settle down. Samuel?

SAMUEL
Yo. Right here! Yoo hoo.

He flares his arms around foolishly. The class erupts in laughter. He springs to attention and salutes the class and does an about face.

MS. REID
(to Class)
That's enough. Samuel- do I have to call your parents again and tell them why you're in detention for the rest of the week?

SAMUEL
N..no ma'am.

There are ooh's and ahh's heard throughout the class.

MS. REID
Since you're already standing, you can lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

SAMUEL
Yes ma'am.

Ms. Reid stands and faces the flag. She places her hand over her heart.

Samuel playfully gestures for the rest of the class to stand. They stand. All of them, except for Fatimah. Samuel glances back at her.

He gestures to his partner-in-crime RONALD REID, 13. An African-American boy who shares many of Samuel's goofy ways. Ronald turns to Fatimah.

RONALD
(whispers)
In this country, we stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

She looks at him with a blank stare.

RONALD (CONT'D)
What's the matter? You no speak English?

He mocks her in ridiculous jargon, supposedly Arabic.

(CONTINUED)

The classroom bursts out in laughter.

Ronald quickly turns and faces the front of the class.

MS. REID

Quiet! Okay Samuel...Ronald, you both just earned yourself a week of detention.

SAMUEL

But I didn't --

RONALD

(overlapping)
What did I do? She --

MS. REID

You want to go for a month?

SAMUEL

No ma'am.

RONALD

(overlapping)
No ma'am.

MS. REID

Okay then. It is Fatimah's choice of whether or not she stands for the pledge. Is that understood? Is it?

There are scattered acknowledgments from the other students.

MS. REID (CONT'D)

Go ahead Samuel.

SAMUEL

Ye...yes ma'am. I pledge allegiance...

The class joins in. Fatimah looks on with indifference.

They all sit.

MS. REID

Let's all get out our text books. Fatimah you can read along with one of your classmates, for now. Ms. Baxter?

Sarah Baxter, 14, a Caucasian girl playfully blows kisses to herself in her compact.

(CONTINUED)

MS. REID (CONT'D)
Ms. Baxter?!

Sarah jumps out of her skin. She stuffs her compact in her purse.

SARAH
Huh?! Ye...yes ma'am?

There are giggles heard from the class.

MS. REID
If you're done admiring yourself?

SARAH
No...huh...yes ma'am. Yes.

MS. REID (CONT'D)
Good. Please let Fatimah read along
in your textbook with you.

She gives Fatimah the once over and hesitantly slides her desk over.

MS. REID (CONT'D)
Oh and Sarah?

SARAH
Ma'am?

MS. REID (CONT'D)
Feel free to join Samuel and Ronald
in detention.

Sarah throws a miniature fit.

SARAH
Yes ma'am.

FADE OUT:

MS. REID (O.S.)
Ok. Let's pick up where we left off
on yesterday...

FROM THE BLACK WE HEAR--

The school bell rings.

MS. REID (O.S.)
Don't forget to answer the
questions in the chapter review for
chapters five and six. There will
be a quiz on Friday.

FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The students gather their belongings and rush to the door.

Ms. Reid is at the visual board putting up the assignment for her third hour.

Fatimah is at her desk scribbling notes from the lecture.

Samuel passes by her desk and shoves her things on the floor.

Ronald is right on his heels. He tosses a note on her desk as he leans in close to her.

RONALD

Why don't you go back to the desert
where you belong?

MS. REID

Ronald...Samuel...

They stop short of the door and turn.

SAMUEL

Huh?

She sets down the marker. She sets the textbook on her desk.

MS. REID

Make it a month of detention for
the both of you.

They squabble with each other and storm out of the room.

Ms. Reid turns back to the visual board. She erases the Thomas Jefferson quote.

Fatimah gathers her belongings off the floor. Ms. Reid glances back at her. Fatimah picks up the note and makes her way to the door.

MS. REID

Fatimah?

She stops dead in her tracks.

FATIMAH

Yes ma'am?

(CONTINUED)

MS. REID

(sits)

May I speak with you for a moment?

Fatimah makes her way to the front.

FATIMAH

Yes ma'am?

MS. REID

Sit, please. May I see that?

She sits and hesitantly hands her the note.

Ms. Reid opens it. It reads: GO HOME CAMEL JOCKEY! She quickly folds it and crams it in the desk.

MS. REID

Pretty rough first day, huh?

Fatimah shrugs her shoulders.

MS. REID (CONT'D)

I know it's hard being the new kid in a new school. Not knowing anyone. I...I just want you to promise me that you will come to me if you have any problems from anyone, like you did today. Can you do that for me Fatimah?

FATIMAH

Yes...yes ma'am.

MS. REID

Look. About the note. I'm not trying to make excuses for what Sam and Ronald did, but what you have to understand is that most of these kids have never been exposed to other cultures. They don't know the first thing about other religions.

FATIMAH

Ma'am?

MS. REID

I guess what I'm trying to say is that they may not understand, like I do. Most of them have probably never even been to church, much less heard of Allah, but that's just ignorance on their part, so --

(CONTINUED)

FATIMAH

I'm...I'm sorry, I'm afraid I don't understand.

MS. REID

I just don't want you to allow their ignorance about your people and about Islam to hinder your progress here. I know it's difficult to ignore the --

FATIMAH

I'm not Muslim.

MS. REID

You...you're not?

FATIMAH

No ma'am. I am a Christian.

Ms. Reid shifts in her chair.

MS. REID

Oh. Well...I just thought because of the --

She gestures at Fatimah's jilbaab.

FATIMAH

I was born in Yemen, but moved to the states when I was three. My parents are descendants of the Kahlani Qahtani tribe. I wear the jilbaab because my parents are both devout Christians. They still believe in the traditions of the Old Testament. Of the Bible.

Ms. Reid taps her finger nervously on her desk.

MS. REID

Then, why didn't you just explain that to the class? I mean, maybe if you did, they wouldn't be so quick to pick on you.

FATIMAH

Ms. Reid, with all due respect, in the Pledge of Allegiance, Francis Bellamy wrote, I pledge allegiance to the flag and to the republic --

MS. REID

...for which it stands. Yes
Fatimah, I know the pledge.

FATIMAH

Of course. Ma'am, it is my belief
that when he makes mention of the
republic, he not only speaks of the
country in the physical sense of
the word, but more so the
ideologies set forth by the
founding fathers. The same
ideologies expressed in the
Constitution which, by it's very
framework, was designed to give all
citizens the freedom of speech.
More importantly than that, the
freedom of silence.

MS. REID

Freedom of silence?

Fatimah sets her things on the desk.

FATIMAH

The freedom to be who I am without
the need to explain or defend my
choices. Just as long as those
choices do not prove detrimental to
the moral beliefs and practices of
the country as a whole. The irony
here, Ms. Reid is that I feel, more
important than the freedom of
speech, is the freedom not to
speak.

MS. REID

Oh...ummm...well...I...I guess I
never. I've never looked at it from
that perspective.

FATIMAH

Fortunately, for me ma'am, I know
no other way to see it.

We hear the sound of the school bell.

FATIMAH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry may...may I be excused? I
am late for my social studies
class.

(CONTINUED)

MS. REID
Huh? Oh, yes. Of course.

FATIMAH
(stands)
Thank you.

She collects her things and walks hurriedly towards the door.

MS. REID
Oh, Fatimah?

Fatimah stops at the door and turns to Ms. Reid.

FATIMAH
Ma'am?

MS. REID
I will make sure to get you a
textbook by the start of class
tomorrow.

FATIMAH
Thank you very much.

MS. REID
No, thank you Fatimah.

Fatimah nods graciously and disappears out the door.

Ms. Reid pulls open the top drawer of her desk to reveal the note. She reaches for it, but stops. She eases the drawer closed.

FADE OUT.