

INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

NAZIR (25 yrs) - Pakistani, wearing white linen pants, shoes, a smart, casual shirt, and the Islamic skullcap, enters.

Gaudy tinsel drapes amateurishly from the ceiling.

A small number of stalls line one of the walls - selling alcohol-free perfumes, Arabic calligraphy pieces, Islamic clothing.

Scattered around the room are circular tables - some of them have A SINGLE WOMAN sat at them - others have MORE THAN ONE PERSON.

A COUPLE OF PARENTS are whispering conspiratorially to their daughter.

A MOTHER adjusts her embarrassed DAUGHTER'S head scarf.

INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/ONE END OF THE ROOM - NIGHT

At one end of the room, around the snacks table, stand A NUMBER OF MEN (A MAN IN CHARCOAL SUIT - DASHING MAN IN TUXEDO - MAN WITH OPEN FLY). Some of them are gathering up snacks as if they're on Supermarket Sweep.

Stood off to the side, Nazir looks like a lost puppy.

A WOMAN smiles bashfully at ONE OF THE MEN. But his smile disappears as he notices HER FATHER scowling behind her.

INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 9 - NIGHT

FAHMIDA (25 yrs) is sat beside YASMIN (25 yrs). Fahmida appears more conservative in her head scarf and modest attire. Yasmin, on the other hand, appears more liberal in an elegant, sleeveless dress but no head scarf.

They are both looking towards THE MEN at the other end of the room - Fahmida is picking faults.

FAHMIDA

The one with the open fly -
clearly disorganised. And the one
playing pocket pool? Likely
sexual deviant.

YASMIN

Slim pickings?

FAHMIDA

No. These are anorexic pickings.

YASMIN

How about the one in the charcoal suit? He's handsome.

FAHMIDA

No, he's pretty. Probably a closet homosexual.

YASMIN

What about the dashing gentleman in the tuxedo?

Fahmida raises her pinky.

YASMIN (CONT'D)

(getting frustrated)

Fahmida, just please help me, okay? I'm not looking for perfection.

FAHMIDA

You've brought me here for a reason, right? Don't worry. My presence will make you impervious to losers.

4

INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/ONE END OF THE ROOM - NIGHT

4

THE MAN next to Nazir sprays breath freshener into his mouth.

NAZIR

Can I borrow that?

Suddenly, a BUZZER SOUNDS

The men all move forward. Confused, Nazir follows them.

5

INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 1 - NIGHT

5

MOMENTS LATER - AT TABLE NUMBER 1 Nazir is smiling and enthusiastic.

NAZIR

My name is Nazir and I am twenty five years old.

WOMAN 1

And what do you do for a living?

PAUSE

NAZIR

Masha Allah. Five minutes really doesn't leave any room for small talk, does it?

6 **INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 3 - NIGHT**

6

LATER - AT TABLE NUMBER 3 Nazir is still smiling ...

NAZIR

I'm currently between jobs.

WOMAN 2

So how do you get by?

7 **INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 1 - NIGHT**

7

AT TABLE NUMBER 1. Jovial and lively ...

NAZIR

(laughing)

Public transport mainly.

8 **INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 3 - NIGHT**

8

AT TABLE NUMBER 3 Answering the same question again, he is more serious and leans forward intently ...

NAZIR

I live with my folks so I'm not paying for rent or utilities or food.

WOMAN 2

Oh. So you're living off your savings?

NAZIR

(beat)

Yes.

9 **INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 7 - NIGHT**

9

LATER - AT TABLE NUMBER 7, Still smiling, but his eyes are no longer in it, Nazir is starting to look tired. His skullcap sits slightly askew on his head.

WOMAN 4

I'm really sorry if this is too personal but how much do you have in the way of savings?

Nazir sighs softly.

10 **INT. LARGE HOTEL BALLROOM/TABLE 9 - NIGHT**

10

AT TABLE NUMBER 9, Yasmin and Fahmida stare incredulously at Nazir, who looks drained, exhausted and is now becoming irritable.

The top buttons on his shirt are open - the hat has not been straightened - he isn't even faking a smile anymore.

Yasmin, despite clearly being disinterested, is attempting to be polite in their interaction.

Fahmida whispers to Yasmin.

YASMIN
(whispers to Yasmin)
I'm not asking that.
(Fahmida whispers)
No.

NAZIR
(to Yasmin)
What's Jiminy's problem?

YASMIN
Who?

Fahmida is about to speak but bites her tongue. And then immediately blurts out anyway ...

FAHMIDA
How do you expect to support a wife?

Yasmin laughs uncomfortably.

NAZIR
(sarcastic)
With love and goodwill.
(Fahmida rolls her eyes in disbelief)
You seem skeptical. Has nobody expressed an interest in you this evening?

FAHMIDA
I'm a chaperone.

NAZIR
Is that French for 'frigid'?

FAHMIDA
It's Latin for 'loser-repellent'.

PAUSE

YASMIN
So ... do you have any hobbies?

Dejected, Nazir walks out - the event still in full swing behind him.

12 **EXT. TAKE-AWAY - SHORT WHILE LATER** 12

Nazir sits by himself eating a takeaway outside the shop. Behind him, many couples happily pass by.

13 **EXT. TAKE-AWAY - SHORT WHILE LATER** 13

Nazir walks out and spots A HOMELESS MAN sat on the pavement. Nazir reaches into his pocket and, without looking at how much money he has, hands it over to the man.

In doing so, Nazir unknowingly drops a small piece of paper that is carried away by the wind.

14 **INT. BUS - SHORT WHILE LATER** 14

Nazir is trying to communicate with a lethargic BUS DRIVER.

NAZIR

No, it was right here. I always put my tickets in the right pocket.

(the Bus Driver shrugs)
Two pound thirty?

Yawning, the Bus Driver nods.

Nazir goes through his pockets for change but only finds a button and a piece of string.

A queue is forming behind him. Some of the passengers grumble at the delay. Nazir's money search becomes more frantic.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

One second.

Nazir scans around the bus for a friendly face and stops on an OLD LADY. He hesitantly approaches her but she instantly turns away.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

Understood.

He turns and sees Fahmida sat opposite. She is deliberately avoiding his gaze. He swallows his pride.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

Assalamu alaykum, Sister.

FAHMIDA

(reluctantly)

Wa alaykum asalaam, Mansa Musa.

NAZIR

You heard?

FAHMIDA

The whole bus heard. Your parents
must curse the day you were born.

NAZIR

(beat)

Not to my face.

(beat)

I'm in a bit of a predicament
here.

She finally looks at him.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

Please.

FAHMIDA

I shouldn't. As a point of
principle.

(pause)

How much?

NAZIR

Two pound thirty.

FAHMIDA

You're a travesty.

Fahmida slowly rummages through her handbag and hands Nazir
a fiver.

NAZIR

Jazak Allahu khayran.

15

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

15

Having paid for his ticket, Nazir goes towards Fahmida, who
has an empty seat beside her.

FAHMIDA

It's taken.

NAZIR

Clearly. But thank you.

He tries to hand over her change.

FAHMIDA

Keep it.

Nazir is clearly embarrassed.

FAHMIDA (CONT'D)

Is there anything else I can help
you with? Rent, perhaps? Weekly
shopping? Child support?

Nazir moves away and takes a seat at the back of the bus.

Fahmida looks to the front of the bus, where a DRUNK MAN in the queue coughs into his sleeve and then sniffs it. He looks at Fahmida, leers, and eyes up the seat beside her.

Fahmida looks around the bus, which is quite empty. As the Drunk Man walks towards her, she jumps to her feet and moves to a spare seat across the aisle. The Drunk Man, however, changes direction and heads towards her.

Fahmida jumps to her feet and looks around the bus ...

Her gaze settles on Nazir, sat quietly by himself, staring out of the window.

Nazir looks confused as Fahmida awkwardly sits beside him.

NAZIR

(re. the Drunk Man)

Erm ... He seemed persistent.

FAHMIDA

(beat)

I'm thinking 'how-was-your-evening' is a redundant question.

NAZIR

(smiles)

I'm sure it could have been worse. I can't quite imagine how, but ...

FAHMIDA

Your fly could have been open.

Nazir laughs. And then glances down at his trousers. He fastens his fly.

PAUSE

NAZIR

No-one was asking about things like love and affection. At the speed dating.

FAHMIDA

That stuff has it's place. But there's also a place for the more practical questions.

NAZIR

Like money?

FAHMIDA

You know that Islamically the man, i.e you, has to provide?

NAZIR

I know that. I get it. But does that mean a man who is unable to provide, lack of opportunity, recession, whatever, must remain single until he's in stable income?

FAHMIDA

How do you expect to be taken seriously when you are broke and live with your parents?

NAZIR

Yeah, my finances are unstable right now. But provision is decreed by Allah. So nobody knows what my, or anyone else's, financial situation is going to be in the future, no?

FAHMIDA

You're not very sensible with your money are you?

NAZIR

(beat)

I gave it away. There was this homeless guy. And my ticket must have fallen out when I was giving him the money.

FAHMIDA

You didn't think you should keep some for yourself?

NAZIR

(shrugs)

I just gave him whatever was in my pocket. Pretty sure he's got a couple of my spare buttons too.

Fahmida smiles.

16

INT. BUS - SHORT WHILE LATER

16

The DRUNK MAN, sleeping, startles himself awake by choking on his own saliva.

Fahmida and Nazir are immersed in conversation.

NAZIR

I'm just saying that a man's list of criteria isn't as long as a woman's.

FAHMIDA

Really? So what are you looking for?

NAZIR

A good-hearted, pious, Muslim woman.

FAHMIDA

Pious? Is that code for 'maid'?

NAZIR

Don't be cynical. Someone who values prayer and fasting and all that jazz.

FAHMIDA

So if I introduced you to a generous, kind, considerate
...

NAZIR

Yep.

FAHMIDA

... practising, pious, Muslim woman ...

NAZIR

Yep.

FAHMIDA

... who also happens to be a fat, hairy heifer ...

NAZIR

Er ...

FAHMIDA

...you'd be ready to marry her?

NAZIR

What about you? Criteria?

FAHMIDA

The only things my friends are looking for are protection and provision.

NAZIR

That's a blag. Looks?

FAHMIDA

Not that important.

NAZIR

Height?

FAHMIDA

Not really. As long as it doesn't drop below Tom Cruise.

NAZIR

Education?

FAHMIDA

To a certain extent. There's other things that individual women take into consideration but protection and provision are the unanimous ones.

NAZIR

Is that your friends or you?

FAHMIDA

We're not talking about me.

NAZIR

We are now. What are you looking for in a husband?

FAHMIDA

I'm not really looking for a husband. That's why I was a chaperone tonight, not an attendee.

NAZIR

Wait, where is Yasmin?

FAHMIDA

(sighs)

She found somebody she was interested in, despite my advice, and instead of going through the proper channels decided that she was gonna duck out with him for an hour or two. I disapproved. Hence the bus.

NAZIR

(beat)

You've not had the best of experiences with men have you?

FAHMIDA

I don't think I've ever met a man.

NAZIR

None taken.

FAHMIDA

A man is upright, moral, trustworthy, reliable. A provider. A protector.

NAZIR

Part man, part machine, all cop.

FAHMIDA
(smiling)
Robocop.

NAZIR
And you were questioning my
expectations? If I met a man like
the one you've described I think
I'd marry him myself.

FAHMIDA
Well, unfortunately for us both
such men just don't seem to exist
anymore. And you know what's
really depressing? Young Muslim
men seem to be the worst.

NAZIR
But you can't judge us all based
on our worst specimens. You're
not the Daily Mail.

FAHMIDA
(beat)
A friend of mine, Muslim, she's
considered marriage to an
Atheist. He was polite, mannered,
treated her well. He was willing
to accept her, past and all. And
it's not because he was an
Atheist. It's because he just
understood what it means to be a
man.

NAZIR
But doesn't she want her children
to be Muslim?

FAHMIDA
Of course she does.

NAZIR
But it'd confuse the heck out of
them if their father wasn't.

FAHMIDA
She knew that. But she needed
companionship. She's still not
found anyone.

NAZIR
Tell her that she just needs to
be patient. Allah will bless her
with the right man.

FAHMIDA
(annoyed)
Easy as that.

NAZIR

I'm not saying it's easy but ...

FAHMIDA

(interrupting)

... but you're going to judge her
anyway.

NAZIR

All I'm saying is that religion
has to come first.

FAHMIDA

Okay then. Self apply, Mister
Mufti. Would you be willing to
marry a widow?

NAZIR

Yeah.

FAHMIDA

What about a divorcee?

NAZIR

Yeah.

FAHMIDA

(beat)

What about a single mother?

NAZIR

(laughs)

Oh come on. I'm not a saint. A
widow and a divorcee is one thing
but a single mother? Somebody
else's child? That's a part of
somebody else. I don't know.

PAUSE - they both sit in silence.

Suddenly, Fahmida pushes the button - DING - to stop the bus. The Bus Driver pulls over at the next stop. Without a word, Fahmida strides off the bus and begins to walk off down the street.

Nazir leans back in his seat, confused. Then, realisation crosses his face. He jumps up and runs after her.

Nazir catches up to Fahmida.

NAZIR

Wait.

FAHMIDA

Piss off. Knob.

NAZIR

I'm sorry.

FAHMIDA

Good for you.

NAZIR

(beat)

Do you accept it?

FAHMIDA

No.

NAZIR

Come on. Let's get back on the bus. It's late.

The bus suddenly drives past them.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

Fine. Then I'm going to escort you home.

FAHMIDA

There is no chance in hell of that happening.

NAZIR

Look, I'd have to be a moron to let you make your own way at this time of night. You are going to get home safe and sound whether you like it or not.

FAHMIDA

We are about to walk into Whitefield which is probably ninety percent Muslim - a massive portion of whom know my parents, and would happily form a queue around the block just to tell them what a whore I am because they saw me walking home at night with a man who is not my brother.

Fahmida starts to walk away. Nazir waits for her to get a respectable distance away before following.

NAZIR

(loudly)

Is this a respectable distance?

FAHMIDA

(loud whisper)

Keep your voice down.

NAZIR
 (loud whisper)
 Give me your number. I'll call
 you.

FAHMIDA
 (loud whisper)
 No. Leave me alone.

Nazir catches up. They both stop.

NAZIR
 Fine. Let me get you a cab.

He dials a number on his mobile.

AUTOMATED VOICE ON PHONE
 Your current balance is six
 pence.

Nazir hangs up.

NAZIR
 That's not gonna work.

Fahmida tuts, rolls her eyes, and starts walking away.

NAZIR (CONT'D)
 Wait.
 (looks across the street
 at a bunch of washing
 lines)
 Last resort.

18

EXT. HOUSE - SHORT WHILE LATER

18

Fahmida stands looking at a house. A DARK FIGURE appears from the side of the house. It is a person in a BURQA.

FAHMIDA
 I don't know why I thought this
 might be something sensible.

The figure briskly walks across to Fahmida with a manly stride - incongruous with the attire. It is a shamefaced Nazir.

NAZIR
 We should get moving.

They beat a hasty exit.

19

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - SHORT WHILE LATER

19

Nazir and Fahmida are walking together. Nazir doesn't have the veil over his face. Fahmida looks embarrassed.

FAHMIDA

Aren't you ashamed?

NAZIR

Of course I am. I've never stolen anything in my life. But, as you said, man has a duty to protect.

An ELDERLY MUSLIM MAN approaches so Nazir throws the veil back over his face. Fahmida tenses up. As the Elderly Muslim Man passes, Nazir lifts the veil.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

(continuing where he left off)

Besides, I'm not intending to keep it and wear it on weekends. I'm gonna take it back.

(beat)

What's your house like?

FAHMIDA

You're not coming in.

NAZIR

I wasn't hinting. I'm just curious. I've always wanted my house to be an Islamic environment. You know, no distractions - conducive to focused worship.

FAHMIDA

What does that mean? Television?

NAZIR

Nope.

FAHMIDA

Pictures?

NAZIR

Nah.

FAHMIDA

Posters?

NAZIR

Of?

FAHMIDA

Celebrities.

NAZIR

No chance.

FAHMIDA

Calligraphy?

NAZIR
Hold that thought.

He drops the veil as ANOTHER ELDERLY MAN walks by, and then lifts it.

NAZIR (CONT'D)
Islamic?

FAHMIDA
Yeah.

NAZIR
Of course.

FAHMIDA
Music?

NAZIR
Only nasheeds. And Michael Jackson.

FAHMIDA
Because he's conducive?

NAZIR
Because he's a legend.

Fahmida laughs.

BEAT

NAZIR (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about what I said on
the bus.
(beat)
Boy or a girl?

PAUSE

FAHMIDA
I have a little boy. Ismail. He's six.

NAZIR
Masha Allah. And his father?
(beat)
You don't have to answer that.

PAUSE

FAHMIDA
Everyone has a history. And everyone makes mistakes.

PAUSE

NAZIR

I'm a virgin. By choice, I might add.

FAHMIDA

(beat)

That's your history? It's, like, the complete opposite of mine.

(beat)

After I had Ismail, I tried to find somebody, but eventually realised that a child is just a little too much baggage for most people.

NAZIR

I didn't mean what I said.

FAHMIDA

It's no big deal. We're just two people having a conversation. That's it. There's nothing else to it.

BEAT

NAZIR

What if there is?

FAHMIDA

'Is' what?

NAZIR

Something else to it. I've had many conversations with many random people and this didn't feel random. This feels ... decreed.

FAHMIDA

Everything is decreed.

NAZIR

Granted. But consider how we began this evening and look at how we've ended it.

Fahmida stops at a bus stop opposite a house.

FAHMIDA

That's my parents' house. This is your stop.

NAZIR

Oh. Wait, you live with your folks too?

FAHMIDA

(smiling)

It's different for a woman.

(pause)

Okay then ...

NAZIR

(interrupting)

I've been looking for a wife for five years. I've tried introductions through family, through friends, blind dates, matrimonial sites and speculative contact. All to no avail. I've met many women. But I didn't find any of them as easy to talk to as you.

A group of YOUNG MUSLIM BOYS suddenly run out of a back street and across the road. Nazir throws the veil back over his face.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

Now, I'm not suggesting that we elope. I'm just asking if you feel there is enough between us to warrant further enquiry.

FAHMIDA

I've allowed myself to form attachments to possible suitors in the past. And I've been left burned when they didn't come through. Why is this so different?

NAZIR

I don't know why. But it is, isn't it?

FAHMIDA

Would you please remove the veil?

NAZIR

(lifts the veil)

Sorry. I forgot it was there.

A bus pulls up.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get on this bus and I'm gonna sit at the back. If you also believe there is something between us, however slight, just give me a look.

FAHMIDA

What if I do? You haven't got my
number.

NAZIR

No. I've got your address.

FAHMIDA

(smiling)

What if I throw you a pity glance
so you don't lose hope.

NAZIR

Mean it or don't do it all.

Nazir gets onto the bus. The DRIVER stares at him
incredulously.

NAZIR (CONT'D)

(to DRIVER - in his
manliest tone)

You alright, mate?

(to Fahmida)

Assalamu alaykum.

FAHMIDA

Wa alaykum asalaam.

She slowly turns and begins walking towards her house. The
bus door closes and the bus pulls away.

20

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

20

Nazir makes his way to the back and sits down. He looks out
of the back window. Fahmida walks away. Nazir waits. And
waits.

21

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET

21

Fahmida stops walking - considers ...

And throws Nazir a glance over her shoulder, a smile
(genuine? mischievous?) on her face.

On the bus, Nazir smiles back, and waves.