

ERSTWHILE LIVES

by

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FADE IN:

DREAM SEQUENCE:

INT. ART STUDIO - DAY

The scene opens in a gloomy GREEN AND ORANGE color filter, conveying how the dreamer sees the world. The dream world is skewed with unnatural shadows moving about freely.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP of different people's mouths laughing silently. Intercut with a CLOSE-UP on a MAN in his mid-20s, laughing with tears streaming down his cheeks. His expression shifts to crying with every cut.

A hand holding a big brush slathers thick paint onto the man's face.

The camera CUTS TO REVEAL that the painter and the crying man are identical, creating a surreal mirror image.

The painter is roughly covering the face with different expressions of joy; broad, unnatural grins, wide bright eyes, etc. The painting continues, intercut by:

INT. CHILD'S ROOM - DAY

A YOUNG CHILD laughing and painting a tree with small orange fruits on a wall with his bare hands. An OLD MAN with eyes flushed white, sits behind him on an armchair, laughing eerily. With each cut, their faces and hands get splattered with paint.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Suddenly, the child and the old man are in a forest, but in their exact positions from before.

Around them, lengthening shadows like curtains are creeping from every side. The boy notices them and jumps on the old man's lap. The man, still laughing, flips backwards in his chair like a lifeless doll, yet his laughter continues. The boy peeks from behind the chair, crying in terror.

As the shadows engulf them, the boy and the man begin to melt into a puddle. A faint light flickers within the depths of the puddle like a cry for help.

The CAMERA slowly closes in on the puddle, then-

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A young man wakes up in a fright. The room is too dark to establish his face.

He sits up straight, takes a water bottle from the nightstand and drinks.

He leaves the bed, walks towards a sliding door and opens it.

It leads him to his ART STUDIO; a spacious room lined with tables against the walls and a couple of easels. Opposite the sliding door is a wall-to-wall window overlooking a small garden with a big tree.

The man stands in front of six squared canvases of portraits painted in green and orange.

A faint light in the corner of the room casts on his face; he's the painter from the dream; middle 20s, long hair, and edgy facial features.

He's still for a minute, then drinks more water, and heads toward the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. SAME BEDROOM - DAY

The man is sleeping. His phone rings, it takes him a while to answer it.

ARTIST
Yeah, what? Eleven!

He glances at the watch.

ARTIST (CONT'D)
Shit, alright, I'll see you in a bit.

A SEQUENCE OF QUICK CUTS:

He jumps out of bed.

Drinks a whole bottle of water.

Takes out a dark green pair of pants from the closet and puts it on the bed.

He enters the room while brushing his teeth, sits in the corner staring at the wall.

He walks to the paintings and starts stacking them neatly in two piles with the toothbrush still in his mouth.

A little bit of toothpaste drips on the top painting.

ARTIST

Oh shit!

He throws the toothbrush on the table, then quickly wipes the droplet with his shirt.

He's back at the closet trying to find a top to go with the pants.

Someone honks outside.

He looks out the bedroom window: a YOUNG MAN in a black minivan is gesturing him to come down.

ARTIST

Come up, I need your help.

He quickly changes into his clothes; the initial green pants and a tucked in white shirt.

QUICK CUTS STOP

The young man enters through the studio door, looking neat in jeans and a black T-shirt. He's the same age as the artist, and his face is instantly lovable and charming.

ARTIST

Thank god you called, Iskandar. I would've been still sleeping.

ISKANDAR

(Laughs)

Do you ever set alarms anymore, or am I your wake-up call now.

ARTIST

I mean, you're doing such a great job so...

Iskandar shakes his head and laughs.

ISKANDAR

So, what've we got?

The artist takes one of the stacked piles and hands it to him.

ARTIST

Take these and I'll carry the rest.

Iskandar looks at the first painting in his hand almost hypnotized by it.

ISKANDAR

This is quite something, man.

ARTIST

Thanks, I thought you've seen them.

Iskandar nods with a bittersweet expression on his face.

ISKANDAR

They're just really good, Basil.

Basil, the artist, looks quite relieved. His slim body becomes more relaxed, and for the first time we get a close look at his sharp face; wide cheekbones, deep black eyes and dark brown hair.

BASIL

I appreciate it. I just hope after the exhibition today they'll get me the residency.

ISKANDAR

Dude, you are so talented, the program directors will droll over them.

A sweet smile breaks on basil's face.

BASIL

Alright, I'll come down in a bit, I just need to comb my hair.

ISKANDAR

Okay.

Iskandar walks carefully out the studio.

Basil takes a brush from the vanity and stares at himself without brushing. He takes a deep breath, puts the brush down, and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRCASE - DAY

Basil carefully walks down the stairs. He hears Iskandar talking to someone.

ISKANDAR (O.S.)

And this one is of a really beautiful young lady. Her laugh melts your heart and her eyes leaves you spellbound.

MAN (O.S.)

Is she good for you.

Basil reaches the landing, and takes a right into the kitchen. The space is well lit and cozy. There's a luxurious dining table in the center where Iskandar is sitting next to an OLD MAN wearing black sunglasses eating breakfast. His build is very thin and hair almost all white. He's wearing a stylish navy suit and has a white cane by his side.

ISKANDAR

Oh she's perfect for me Mr. Shuail,
even in these tones she'd do just
fine.

Mr. Shuail laughs deeply.

MR. SHUAIL

It sounds like our charmer is here.

BASIL

Good morning, dad.

MR. SHUAIL

Morning, son. you ready for the big
day.

BASIL

It's not that big just a simple
cafe and six paintings on a wall.

MR. SHUAIL

You'll always remember your first
exhibition. It'll be the biggest in
your heart for as long as you
remember... What are you wearing?
Wait! Don't tell me. Iskandar,
describe to me how our boy is
dressed.

They all smile.

ISKANDAR

Pretty boy here is looking...
rather bold and artsy in flowy
green pants that charm you
instantly and a perfectly fit white
shirt, tucked in of course, like a
noble gentlemen.

They start to laugh.

MR. SHUAIL

Taking after your mom I hear.

BASIL

I think we all take after her in
this department, pops.

Mr. Shuail laughs.

MR. SHUAIL
Bless your hearts. Now go out there
and make us proud boy.

BASIL
Alright, I'll try my best, I guess.
Bye dad.

ISKANDAR
Bye Mr. Shuail.

Mr. Shuail puts his hand on the table and remembers the food.

MR. SHUAIL
Oh wait, boys aren't you gonna eat.

BASIL
We don't have time, but also
they're feeding use for the day. I
think thats the best part being
hosted in a cafe.

They take the paintings and leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE SHUAIL'S HOUSE - DAY

Basil and Iskandar are putting the paintings in the car.

BASIL
Umm, why did you come in your mom's
minivan?

ISKANDAR
Well I thought we needed bigger
room for the paintings, I didn't
know you were gonna stack them like
that.

The CAMERA rises to show the locale.

The boys get in the car and drive out the frame.

The town, Nubara, is an oasis in heart of a desert. The greenery is diverse and rich but retains a desert identity. Small lakes surrounded by sand and grass are juxtaposed in between rows of houses and trees. The whole region is almost flat and exudes a mythical atmosphere.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBOURHOOD - DAY

Rows of houses beautifully assembled amongst the greens in a lively area.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKES - DAY

Various lakes around the area with their unique features.

CUT TO:

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

An old colorful retro looking building. People going in and out.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN AREA - DAY

A modern business and leisure center of the town. Exotic looking garden, a buzzing spacious square, and the biggest lake in Nubara, which has a little island in the middle.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARTIST'S ALLEY - DAY

A long row of art and crafts stores and workshops. A few stylish cafes, and amongst them we see cafe "Les Murs." The cafe's facade is white and covered with different sizes of wainscots.

Iskandar's black minivan appears at the distance, and slows to a stop in front of the cafe.

An elegantly dressed, middle-aged GENTLEMAN opens the door and waits for the company.

GENTLEMAN

Good afternoon, Basil. I was
getting worried you would not show
up.

Basil opens the car door and takes one of the stacks.

BASIL

Good Afternoon, Zaid. Oh you have to forgive me but I had a bit of trouble with sleep last night.

Iskandar takes the other stacks, and closes the door with his hips. They approach Zaid and he leads them into the cafe.

CUT TO:

INT. LES MURS CAFE - DAY

The interior of the cafe is white with big wainscots decorating all walls. The coffee station is in the middle of the shop with a counter and chairs that goes all around it.

The cafe is set up so that people would enter and move along Two walls that are used to display the art and circle round to the middle bar.

On one wall already hangs three of the paintings. Basil is hanging the fourth painting on the second wall.

Iskandar is sitting across him and eating a 'chicken panini.'

Zaid, the cafe's art manager, is standing still in-between the two walls, smiling and nodding at people entering the cafe. He looks elegant in a black suit pant, a casual tucked-in white shirt thats open at the collar, and all the flashy accessories one man can wear.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LES MURS - DAY

MAIN HALL

The scene opens wide on the paintings, and we see smiling people coming in and standing in front of it and leaving in a much lower mood.

Two young girl with shopping bags stand and face each other with gossiping murmurs and smiles, then turn to the wall.

GIRL 1

It's... I... Uh....

GIRL 1 cannot explain what's happening to her, the second girl, Susan starts tearing

GIRL 2
I can't help it.

Every now and then they glance at each other confused.

GIRL 1
Why is it so sad?!

GIRL 2
I don't know what's happening...
But it reminds me of my dad's
laugh.

GIRL 1
I saw your dad this morning, he was
so sweet to me. Do you want to call
and check up on him?

Sarah proceeds to cry as well. They leave the frame
utterly melancholic, their chats fading away.

GIRL 2
Why? Isn't it weird? He's in the
office, he'll be home soon.

GIRL 1
I suddenly feel like I'm completely
alone.

GIRL 2
Me too.

CAFE'S STORAGE ROOM

Zaid is standing behind Basil, who is peeking through the
door at the visitors. Basil's anxious movements behind
the door are very noticeable like a glaring light to
passers-by.

ZAID
Why are you so worried about it,
that should be a sign of how good
the art is.

BASIL
Not when it makes people sad all
the time! I was trying to capture
that smile you get when you
experience inner joy like when
you're in the middle of a lavender
field, or a sea of puppies.

Zaid closes his eyes.

ZAID

Or when you're topless on a
Colombian beach feeling euphoric
from all that hot Colombian coffee
you drank all night.

Basil looks at him awkwardly and takes a step back.

BASIL

Yes, yes, well that second portrait
should perfectly express whatever
you're feeling right now. It's
literally of a person in the middle
of a laugh, it's supposed to be
infectious.

Basil stirs anxiously in his place.

Outside: more people circle in happy and out depressed.

ZAID

Basil, I think you should be proud
of yourself. You know how many
works I've hosted here. How many
times people come to see the art
and leave without single
expression: eyes, dead, not even
the slightest furrow.

Basil is considering everything and getting more anxious.

ZAID

(cont'd)

But I do recall one sturdy guy,
very stern and squared, stood there
in front of a floral scene and
after a while I saw some wrinkles
'round his nose, nostrils bit
flared.

BASIL

What is that?! I can't even grasp
expressions anymore, but I feel

(cont'd)

like I need that, anything other
than tears would do at this point.

ZAID

He was disgusted, Basil. And I felt
it in my bones, those red petals
looked like blood dripping on burnt
leather. But what I'm trying to say
here is that you don't want any
distasteful reactions, you should
be really happy about this, it's
bittersweet, like.. like key lime
pie.

BASIL
Sweet and sour...?

ZAID
What?

BASIL
You mean sweet an... Never mind,
also why do you host such bad art?
What would people think of me now
that I've displayed these along a
history of shit painters.

Zaid is taken aback.

ZAID
You really have a knack for
speaking your mind. Also, why did
you bring us here for? You should
be out there, maybe greeting people
and telling them more about the art
would change their views.

Basil gets all charged up and prepares to leave the
storage room.

BASIL
You know what, I think you're
right, I don't think these are
ready to be seen, especially not
here.

ZAID
Uhh, what are you going doing?

CAFE'S MAIN HALL

Basil leaves the room all wrought up. Islander is
chilling at the counter, chatting with a beautiful, dark-
skinned barista. He is showing her a picture of a milk
coffee ice cream on his phone called "coffee crema" that
he tried while traveling.

ISKANDAR
Look at how creamy that is. And
every place makes it their own way
with their own ratio of cream and
milk...

He notices Basil coming out of the room and nodding to
call him over. Iskandar nods back.

ISKANDAR
You have to experiment and create
some samples, I'll make sure to
pass by and try it.

Basil approaches the small crowd and apologizes to the viewers.

BASIL

I am sorry everyone, but it appears that these pieces were not ready to be exhibited for your, miserable pleasure.

Basil starts to take down one of the paintings and puts it aside.

Zaid blocks his way and sternly tries to talk him out of it.

ZAID

Basil, this is unacceptable. I know you're upset about the reactions, but this exhibition has been planned for weeks, and these should remain for a week straight.

BASIL

Look, believe me, I'm doing you a favor at this point.

ZAID

Doing me a favor?! You're trying to close shop and run away.

Zaid smiles and nods at a couple who are staring with astonishment to what's happening.

ZAID

Hold on a second, look, people are getting around.

Basil looks their way, revealing the painting in his hand.

The couple look at the painting and the woman starts to tear up.

BASIL

But it's a loud and prideful laugh!

She shies away into her sad husband's arms.

BASIL

Alright, sorry, none of this anymore.

(To Zaid)

You'll just have to excuse me now.

ANGLE ON Iskandar. He see's Basil taking down the paintings.

ISKANDAR

So unbelievably refreshing... and
on that note, I have to go.

BARISTA

Didn't he pin them up this
afternoon?!

ISKANDAR

Ah, yeah, but I guess something's
gone wrong. He's been that way, but
all's fine.

Iskandar swifts to Basil's side helping him taking the
rest down.

BASIL

Hey, man, can you stack these and
carry them with me to the car.

ISKANDAR

Yeah, yeah... you good? What
happened?

BASIL

Its not ready...

ISKANDAR

Basil, they're amazing.

BASIL

Besides, this place is shit... have
you seen the artists that were
hosted here.

ISKANDAR

Ahh, well... Okay, but how about
the residency?

BASIL

I'll figure something out, I just
can't look at these sad faces
anymore.

Basil and Iskandar carry the stacked paintings and leave
the cafe heading to their car.

Zaid is still trying and resorting to frustration.

ZAID

You singed a contract Basil. Who's
going to reimburse the loses?

OUTSIDE THE CAFE

BASIL

Zaid I am so sorry, but maybe I can refer a friend that could come in my place. If not, I can pay you what I can.

Zaid paces furiously, then gets back in as the black minivan zooms off.

CUT TO:

INT. SHUAIL'S HOUSE - DAY

LIVING ROOM

Scene opens wide on a family painting by Basil hanging over a fire place, it shows four members; the parents, Basil, and his older sister Samira. The CAMERA is pinned in the middle of a spacious modern living room and starts PANNING AROUND to reveal a warm, yet, pretentious setting that imbues an almost eerie atmosphere; faded illustrations on the ceilings, natural looking walls as if from stone or withered bricks adorned by dark climber plants, and antique furniture placed meticulously within the area in a ghostly composition.

As the CAMERA continues to PAN slowly, SAMIRA enters the frame confidently, striding back and forth between the study, the staircase, and out the frame (the garden) collecting her laptop, books, and testing instruments from around the house.

Towards the end of the pan: we arrive at the heart of the house; glass walls revealing a small outdoor garden situated in the middle of the building. It's a small square of exotic plants and flowers, a little koi pond, and an iconic fig tree in the middle. There's a long corridor leading to the backyard. The house was built around the fig tree, and you can see it from almost every room in the house.

In the garden, a beautiful OLDER WOMAN dressed in a black home gown sets a watering can aside, picks some green leaves and grinds them with a black flower petal.

GARDEN

Samira comes from the backyard corridor.

SAMIRA

(To the Older Woman)

Shailla, have you seen my testing instruments in the backyard?

Sheila eyes a shelf without moving her head much.

Samira follows her gazes to find the instrument on the shelf.

SAMIRA

Mom, would you please quit messing around with my instruments! I put it in the yard fo...

SHAILA

Emm...

Shaila gives her a corrective look.

SAMIRA

Sorry, SHAILA, I got carried away. But I would appreciate it if you don't move any of my sets, I was trying to collect results specifically in an open area like the backyard. God, I have to recalibrate all over again.

SHAILA

You said you wanted the data during the night and sunrise, I only moved it here an hour ago.

SAMIRA

(Sighs)

That's alright, I guess, but can you please stop doing that, please, Shaila?

SHAILA

Aren't you curious about this garden?

SAMIRA

It's a small surrounded enclosure, which, generally speaking, should stay cooler in all weathers, and it's connected to a corridor that's ought to send bouts of wind every now and then. What's to be curious about?

SHAILA

You just don't spend enough time here.

SAMIRA

Can you please just tell me what's so special about this place in your view.

Shaila goes back to her grinding.

SHAILA
Do you feel any bouts of wind?

SAMIRA
No, not now anyway.

SHAILA
That's because it doesn't happen.

They hear the front door open accompanied by loud chatter. Shaila leans over Samira to see who's coming through the hallway.

Basil and Iskandar appear with the paintings. Basil's anxiety precedes him in every gesture.

SAMIRA
It's Basil... why do you look... worried?

SHAILA
It's his exhibition today. We were gonna go see him later tonight, remember?

SAMIRA
Oh, yeah... are those the paintings. Is it over already?

Samira walks to the open glass door.

SAMIRA
Hey herb-boy, why home so early? Did they kick you out?

Basil answers her without stopping.

BASIL
That place was too shabby, I need to exhibit them somewhere nicer.

SAMIRA
It's 'Les Murs,' right? I was there last month, it was stylish.

Basil pauses and turns to her.

BASIL
And what about the art on the day?

SAMIRA
Well... too bland, but the coffee balanced it in my opinion.

Iskandar laughs slightly.

Basil gives them both a look.

ISKANDAR

What? You tried their coffee, that barista knows how to roast them beans.

BASIL

Okay, yeah, I'll give them that.

SAMIRA

Well isn't that the whole point of a cafe?

BASIL

Well, not in that case Sammy, I don't want my art to be apart of mediocre chain works. I know I'm just starting out, but think of the people who go there, there won't be any important figures that would like to go see bad art over and over again.

Samira starts to lose interest in their interaction.

Shaila comes in after hearing most of their talk.

SHAILA

Did they not like the work?

BASIL

I don't think it's ready, that's all.

Basil leaves the common area, heading up the staircase with his paintings.

Iskandar still standing in place.

ISKANDAR

How are you, Shaila?

Shaila gives Iskandar a questioning look.

ISKANDAR

He was upset that people found it sad. He thought it was gonna be different.

SAMIRA

I don't blame him honestly, I would've quit paints by now if I was in his place.

SHAILA

My sweet boy... you should be encouraging him to achieve his expressive voice not guilting him over it.

SAMIRA

I honestly don't get it Shaila, I
look at it and it seems fine to me.

Iskandar puts the stack on the floor and lifts one up to
show them.

SAMIRA

(cont'd)

I mean it's obviously joyful... but
maybe it's the colors, I mean we
know you see the world that way but
maybe an element of surprise would
do the trick.

SHAILA

An artist needs to stay true to
their vision, they need to listen
and work with the forces that churn
deep inside them. It's what makes
us unique.

(To Samira)

You feel it too, that is what's
making you run around town all day
collecting weather samples.

ISKANDAR

Isn't that just passion?

SHAILA

When you're an artist your passions
align with your modes of
expression, and when you hone it,
your expression becomes this
integral part of who you are.

ISKANDAR

Our passions are our identities...
I wonder what my passions are?

SAMIRA

Okay, I think that's my queue.

Samira collects the remainder of her instruments and puts
them in a bag.

SHAILA

You're a sweet, sweet boy, and you
like conversing and getting to know
people.

ISKANDAR

True, true... wait are we reverse
engineering this... okayy.

SAMIRA

See you later.

ISKANDAR

Later...

Samira heads out the garden and through the corridor.

SHAILA

Take care, don't get carried out by the wind.

SAMIRA

Haha, you're so funny mom.

CUT TO:

INT. TOP OF STAIRCASE - DAY

Basil is standing motionless, paintings still in hand, listening to the conversations below.

SHAILA

(O.S.)

Maybe you're more fit for public service in that way.

ISKANDAR

(O.S.)

I never gave it much thought, at least not with my English degree. I mean I don't like teaching or see it as an act of public service. But then how can I combine the two.

Basil walks straight, past a small common room that has wall piano, and takes a turn to enter his studio.

BASIL'S STUDIO

Basil lays the paintings upright on a long desk against the wall. He stops, looks at them for a minute and then goes through a sliding door into his bedroom.

BASIL'S BEDROOM

Basil grabs his tablet and a sketching pad, and throws himself on the bed and plays loud 80s music on the speaker. "Stayin' Alive" by *The Bee Gees* starts blasting. He's doing some research on art, and goes between sketching and reading. A glance on the tablet screen reads:

"...under an MRI, some participants displayed positive emotional responses when shown a selected number of Rorschach inkblots while others responded negatively to the same set..."

He scrolls down to reveal the infamous inkblots.

He's discouraged as he skims through the article.

He clicks on an open tap on the top which reveals a new article:

"...perceived effects of color and lines on 'highly sensitive persons'..."

CUT TO WIDE SHOT shows basil sketching in the foreground and the fig tree in the background.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. GREEN FIELD - DAY

MATCHING WIDE SHOT of a big tree with a retractable ladder leaning against it.

Samira is standing in the foreground with her hands resting on her hips, staring at a testing equipment that is attached to the top of the tree.

She checks her phone to see that the device is connected to the internet and is relaying information to her phone.

CUT TO:

INT. SAMIRA'S CAR - DAY

Her instruments are laid out on the seat next to her along with a book and her laptop half-opened.

Samira looks confidently inquisitive. On her left, we see a wide open desert, on the right we see the greenery of the oasis.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE CAR - DAY

A WIDE TOP VIEW of the road shows Samira's car alone on the path.

She slows down and takes a left towards the desert, trailing dust behind her.

The CAMERA pans to reveal a dead tree in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A leafless mesquite tree stands alone. Behind the tree rise low dunes. On the other side, we see the road Samira was driving on, bisecting the desert from a large area of greenery.

Hardy desert trees and bushes surround the outer most part of the green city; mesquite and acacia trees surrounded by green shrubs of different heights and shades of green. On one side, there are farms of lined olive trees. And in every other nook, between tall greens, there are small lakes surrounded by grass, shrubs, and sand.

MONTAGE:

...Samira is parked next to the tree.

...She is taking the ladder out of her trunk.

...The ladder is leaning against the tree, and She's climbing the ladder carrying a testing device.

...The device is secured and a light on it is blinking.

...Samira takes a minute to look around from atop the ladder.

...POV: She sees a dust cloud in the distance, opposite the greenery.

...She looks surprised.

...CLOSE-UP on the dust storm.

...It appears to be slowly coming towards the city.

...Samira in her car checking the weather on her phone, which shows "Clear and Sunny" and after a refresh shows "Dust and Wind blowing from the East."

...She takes her laptop in her lap to check on the signal of the testing device.

...She puts the laptop aside, buckles up and drives off the way she came.

...TOP VIEW of the tree and the nearing storm.

...Samira's car leaves the bottom of the frame.

CUT TO:

INT. BASIL'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Basil is upright on the bed. Beside him on the sketchpad are a few lines that roughly look like a cubist portrait.

Iskanadar is sitting opposite him on a low chair and reading something on Basil's tablet.

ISKANDAR

So you think a person with synesthesia would know exactly how lines and colors would feel like, and discern between their qualities? That's... That's interesting.

Iskanadar puts the tablet aside.

BASIL

This has to be it. Otherwise it's all just arbitrary except for a few colors, and since I'm not changing the colors then I need to find another way to interpret universal happiness.

ISKANDAR

It's a bizarre way, but people were biased in general, and it says right here.

He picks up the tablet and reads:

ISKANDAR

(cont'd)

That 'effects differ from one person to the other.' Like, how are you sure this is the way?

BASIL

I know, I know, but if I could start with an obvious set of happy paintings then the person with synesthesia would find a pattern, and then we'd be able to compile a list of things are guaranteed to make you happy.

ISKANDAR

You mean guaranteed to make them, specifically happy.

Basil looks annoyed.

ISKANDAR

Their biases of happiness an...

BASIL

Yeah, yeah, it's what constitutes happiness to them and it's not universal. But there needs to be a way. Like maybe the most basic blocks happiness are universal.

ISKANDAR

It's bonkers man. and I know you, you're gonna find yourself insulting people for their beliefs on joy and whatnot.

BASIL

Do you have any better ideas?

Basil's phone rings. The caller id shows: 'Hindlord.'

BASIL

Oh, shit!

ISKANDAR

What?

Basil answers the phone calmly.

BASIL

(Into the phone)

Hiii...

CUT TO:

INT. LER MURS - LATE AFTERNOON

A young HOT GIRL in trendy baggy jeans and cropped shirt stands in the middle of the cafe talking on the phone. The cafe is filled with people gathered around the empty walls.

HOT GIRL

What the shit dude?

BASIL

(o.s.)

Ahh.. you're at the.. cafe?

HOT GIRL

So you know where I am prick, hooray!

BASIL

(o.s.)

Yeah.. I just got home. I forgot to tell you.

Zaid approaches and hands her a cup of coffee.

HOT GIRL
(To Zaid)
Thanks

ZAID
He answered?

She nods.

HOT GIRL
What the heck happened? People are
confused and the manger is pissed.

ZAID
Tell that little prankster to come
back immediately!

She frowns in his face and turns away.

BASIL
(o.s.)
It wasn't working out, something's
missing. I don't think the pieces
were ready.

HOT GIRL
What in the bullshit man. There are
lots of people here who came to see
them.

BASIL
(o.s.)
What??

HOT GIRL
The manager said some girl's story
went off and people started turning
around asking about them.

BASIL
(o.s.)
Thanks, that settles it Hind. I'm
not coming. All that these tools
want is to feel sad. It's
completely misunderstood.

ZAID
Tell him we'll double the prices
and he gets 60.

HIND
Did you hear that?

BASIL
(o.s.)
Tell him to stuff it!

HIND

'Kay, fine. You feelin' alright?

Zaid starts to flip, he grabs the phone from her hand.

HIND

What the fuck dude?

ZAID

I can sue, you know... FINE, 70.
You little prick.

Hind snatches her phone back.

HIND

(Into the phone)

'Kay, I'm coming over in a bit.

She hangs up, drinks the coffee in one gulp, looks at Zaid who's furious, and throws the cup on the ground.

She turns around and starts swaying to the door.

ZAID

You're a bunch of undisciplined
hooligans. I don't want to see you
in here ever again!

CUT TO:

INT. BASIL'S STUDIO - LATER

Basil is pacing with a brush in his hand. Iskandar is laying on the bed and reading from an article.

ISKANDAR

'.. Even though interpretations show that the Mona Lisa expression is of happiness, the most recent study suggests that the asymmetry of her smile is only expressing happiness on one side, thus, her smile is non-genuine and appears when a person is lying.'

BASIL

That's eerie. And completely useless right now.

Iskandar swipes through the tablet.

ISKANDAR

Oh this is interesting. '..Visual expression inspired by nature and conveyed in an abstract form is found to provide an atmosphere that brings calm and comfort.'

Basil disappears into one side of the studio. We hear a shuffling of canvases and supplies.

He appears at the sliding door with a painting depicting a calm forest in his signature colors.

Iskandar looks at it, wrinkles cover his face and his eyes water, but he forces a smile.

ISKANDAR

It's so heartwarming.

Basil shakes his head and hides the painting behind the wall.

BASIL

God, I don't know what I need to do. What element is making people feel this way? I am sure it's not the colors.

ISKANDAR

Maybe it's all felt the moment you put your first brushstroke...

A nearing sound of heels calls their attention to the door.

Hind enters carrying a small bouquet of orange flowers. She shakes the bouquet and shoves it into Basil's chest.

ISKANDAR

Hindooo! How are you?

HIND

I was having a cute day until I reached a crowded exhibition that was deserted by the artist.

BASIL

Sorry.

HIND

Do you know how long it took to find parking.

ISKANDAR

Geez it was that full?

HIND

Yea, the manager was losing his shit.

BASIL

He kept calling so much, I had to block his number.

HIND

I know this subject is sensitive to you, but you've gotta let go a little. you do your thing and let life take care of the rest.

BASIL

I worked really hard on these with a specific outcome and expression in mind. I won't let all that work be defraud like that.

HIND

You wouldn't say that had you seen the turn-up.

BASIL

Well, it doesn't really matter.

She looks a bit disapproving.

HIND

So what are you sad boys doing? You coming to the party later, yeah?

BASIL

Nah, I can't, I need to work on this some more. Besides, I thought you cancelled it.

HIND

Cancelled! Why, who told you?

The boys look confused.

Basil picks his phone and shows her a picture of the dust storm that Samira sent him.

ISKANDAR

We thought you knew.

HIND

Knew that a dust storm decided to rail us on last minute! No!

She checks the weather app on her phone. It's shows "Clear and sunny." She refreshes, takes a while, then shows "Dust and Wind blowing from the East."

HIND

Let me see that photo again. Shit, it's huge. Imma need to make some calls.

She leaves the room. The boys look pitiful.

ISKANDAR
I was really looking forward to
rave in the desert.

BASIL
Were you gonna try that snake shit?

ISKANDAR
(Laughs)
Of course.

HIND
(o.s.)
Hey, Maleek, you sleeping? Dude,
get up, check your phone! There's a
dust storm, we have to cancel..

BASIL
Maleek?

ISKANDAR
(Nods)
Snake charmer!

HIND
(o.s.)
Yeah, tell people tomorrow. 'Kay,
bye.

She comes back in.

HIND
Its tomorrow.
(To Basil)
And you better be there!

BASIL
I'll see about that.

HIND
No. I'll come and drag you outta
here myself. Look you need to live
a little. You've been way too
worried about the exhibition and
residency. Just relax for one night
and have fun.

BASIL
Fine..

HIND
'Kay, I've to bounce now, gotta
reschedule with the venders. Love
you'lot.

BASIL & ISKANDAR
Love you, too.

She checks herself in the window's reflection and leaves.

ISKANDAR
I think she has a point. Maybe
letting go would give some
perspective on this.

Iskandar's phone rings, he answers it.

ISKANDAR
Yeah, mom? What?, oh no. yeah,
okay, I'll leave now. Okay, bye.

He hangs up and gets ready to leave.

ISKANDAR
My mom went to the grocery store
and forgot that she was driving my
car and the groceries won't fit. I
have to go pick her up.

BASIL
(Laughs)
I can't imagine her squeezed in
your tiny car.

Iskandar laughs, hugs basil, and leaves.

ISKANDAR
Okay bro, see you tomorrow.

BASIL
Bye.

Basil opens his phone and finds 16 missed calls from a
new number. He throws it on the bed and takes his tablet.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHUAIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Dust covers the entire neighborhood, the road is somewhat
visible, and the wind is swaying the trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHUAIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is covered with dust. Samira's car pulls over
to park at the house. She leaves the car and hurries
inside.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Samira is surprised to find no one in the living room. She places her bag in the study, and when she come out, notices that the garden door is slightly open. She opens the door and exits to the garden.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Everything seems to be calm out here. She looks at the corridor and then at the top in wonderment. The canopy looks still and the air clear, up until the opening of the garden.

MR. SHUAIL

It's wonderful out her tonight,
huh, Sammy?

She jumps in her place.

Mr. Shuail is sitting in a dark corner in the garden, wearing his glasses and his cane next to him.

MR. SHUAIL

You okay, honey?

SAMIRA

You scared me. I had no idea you
were here.

MR. SHUAIL

Oh, I'm sorry honey. With all the
sounds in my head, I always feel
seen by everyone around.

She hugs him and sits beside him on a wooden bench.

SAMIRA

It's alright dad.

She continues to look around with astonishment.

SAMIRA

Do you know that it's completely
dusty outside. Once you cross that
corridor you'll be blinded with
wind and dust for days.

MR. SHUAIL

Yes, I can hear it. I can slightly
smell the dust, but it's nothing
major, no?

SAMIRA

The house is wrapped in it. Dust
for miles, dad.

MR. SHUAIL

I've always felt a sense of safety
right here under this tree. A
feeling I have only felt once
before when I was much younger and
could see. I remember going to my
great-great-grandfather's house,
and there was a great big fig tree
in their backyard as well. It's
uncommon around here. But, there it
was, a towering mammoth. I went and
stood underneath it. Oh I can't
describe the feeling to you Sammy.
It was like.. Like I was a boy
again. I felt peace like nothing
before. It felt like home.

Mr. Shuail stands up and walks to the fig tree.

MR. SHUAIL

A feeling much like this one.

He takes off his glasses to reveal his white eyes, and
places his ear on the tree as if he's listening to it.

Samira follows him, puts a hand on the trunk.

SAMIRA

Dad...

MR. SHUAIL

Do you feel it? Do you feel the
beat?

SAMIRA

I..

She puts her ear on the trunk.

SAMIRA

I don't hear anything.

MR. SHUAIL

When I first came to Nubara, I was
driving around these parts, and
found this fig tree by accident, it
was a mesmerizing young trunk.
Later, my uncle examined it and
said that it was almost my age back
then.

SAMIRA

What are the chances.

MR. SHUAIL
Chances?

Samira looks hesitant.

SAMIRA
Dad, you never really tell us about
our extended family. At least
nothing past grandpa Roushd. This
is the first time you tell me about
your uncle.

Mr. Shuail is silent for a bit, then goes back to his
seat.

SAMIRA
What was his name?

MR. SHUAIL
What?

SAMIRA
Your uncle?

MR. SHUAIL
Salim. Uncle Salim.

SAMIRA
Were you..

MR. SHUAIL
Somethings are better kept that way
Samira. At least if we're staying
true to your grandad's wishes.

SAMIRA
I'm sorry dad. I didn't mean to
disrespect anyone. I'm sure
everything that had happened was
justified in one way or another.

MR. SHUAIL
Justified?

SAMIRA
I mean whatever happened, did so a
long time ago. I just don't
understand...

MR. SHUAIL
And neither do I, honey. Neither do
I.

He stands up, goes to the tree, pats it gently and enters
the house.

CUT TO:

INT. BASIL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Basil is sitting on the ground, surrounded by a dozen half-empty canvases with different shapes and patterns on them. His hands are covered slightly with paint. He hears a soft knock on the door.

His mom peeks in.

SHAILA

Hello sweetheart. Can I come in?

He nods.

Shaila approaches him with two bowls in her hands.

SHAILA

I made you the colors you've asked for.

One bowl shows a dark shade of green and the other a muted medium green with a hint of blue.

Basil takes the muted green and looks at it closely.

BASIL

This is supposed to be 'Sea Green?'

SHAILA

Fresh and fishy.

He smiles. Puts one of his clean fingers in the bowl, takes a little paint and smears it on one of the canvases.

BASIL

It looks pale and muted, like 'Moss,' or 'Pistachio,' but not rich enough.

SHAILA

The paleness is a slight hint of blue.

BASIL

The sky reflected on the surface...

She smiles, puts the other bowl on the table, and sits beside him.

SHAILA

Not one person found them happy?

BASIL

They're an internet sensation apparently. People gathered at the cafe to cry.

SHAILA
Do you believe in destiny?

BASIL
I believe we set out a concrete course. A path that leads us to our desires and ambitions.

SHAILA
Are you being led to these desires by your hand?

BASIL
Well, I've plotted the path.

SHAILA
And do artists always plot the path with their work.

BASIL
If the work was consciously created for a specific purpose, then I can't see how it's not plotting the path.

SHAILA
Then what's the destiny of the art.

BASIL
To bring awareness and express the artist's intentions, no?

SHAILA
That sounds like the purpose of it, yes.

She stands and walks over to the window. She sees Samira standing in the garden, and taking notes in her book. Shaila smiles and turns to face Basil.

SHAILA
I'm not an artist sweetie, so I'm not gonna lecture you about things beyond my passions. But I do know what it means to be fulfilled in this life.

She crosses the room to the six portraits.

SHAILA
Sometimes we're born with it. We feel it in our bones. And other times it takes us years to fully find our purpose.

BASIL

You really freak me out when you start talking about all of us that way.

She smiles.

SHAILA

You're an artist Basil. You were born with it. There's no doubt in that. And if the path seemed easy in the past, it's because it was. You were gifted with this talent, but we don't always try to understand the reason. We always strive to control what we have and what's beyond our reach.

She takes one of the paintings and shows it to Basil.

BASIL

You've done your work to the best of your abilities and intentions. That's your purpose. But art needs to be set free. The path it takes you on is its destiny. That's how we learn and grow.

She puts the painting back. Goes over to him, strokes his hair, and leaves the room.

He goes to his bed. Opens his phone on instagram and finds the story that went viral about his painting.

The story is a reaction reel: it shows a girl that is laughing, then shows the painting and then turns back to the same girl standing in front of it, her expressions turn into crying.

A voice over plays over the video: "This painting will access your deepest thoughts and emotions. Prepare to cry. Unreal"

He scroll over to the comments and reads that people were very disappointed when they didn't find it in the exhibition. Someone stated that it was a psychological experiment, and a girl replied that she saw the painter, he was a normal young man who was disappointed with his work and stormed out.

He scrolls more and reads a comment tagging a retreat center. The comment reads: "This would have been perfect for tomorrow's alternative therapy workshop @OasisSerenity."

He goes on the account of the center and sees that they are hosting a workshop on healing the inner child through alternative therapies that include yoga, art, dance, and breathing.

He finds the account of the facilitator, and contacts them. They respond quickly and call him back.

BASIL

Yes, hello. This is Basil. Yes, I'm the artist of that painting. Yes, it created a rather loud attraction. Yes, thank you.

He walks over to his paintings.

BASIL

Well, I was just reading about this workshop that you're hosted tomorrow. Yes, that's the one. And I thought perhaps displaying a couple of the paintings might attribute to something. Really? That's amazing. Well, people say that it's helping them get in touch with deep emotions, perhaps it could be used as part of the program; a case study perhaps. Yes, helping people bridge a path to deep emotions and thoughts to connect to their inner child. Really! Oh that's perfect. I will be interviewing some of the people at the spot to take their reaction and input on the art as well, if that's not a problem, of course. Perfect, perfect. What time are you starting tomorrow... Oh, that's early.. Ahh, yes, I'm busy, with ahh.. things, in the morning. Ummm. You know what, it doesn't look that bad out, how about I drop them at the center tonight. No, it's no problem at all, of course. Yes. Yes, you'll be there? Perfect, thank you. Alright, I'll see you then. Goodbye.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Basil heads down all cleaned up. He's carrying two paintings. His parents are sitting in the living room listening to an audiobook. Shaila pauses it when she sees Basil.

SHAILA
Where are you going?

BASIL
I need to drop these off at some retreat.

SHAILA
Right now? Didn't you see the weather.

BASIL
Umm.. well it doesn't look that bad. Besides, the retreat isn't far, and I'll drive carefully, I promise.

MR. SHUAIL
He'll be alright. Won't you son?

BASIL
Ahh.. yeah. Sure pops.

SHAILA
Be careful sweetie. Don't drive fast.

MR. SHUAIL
He just said that, honey. He's a tough, good kid. Play the book will ya'.

Basil leaves the house.

Shaila shakes her head and resumes the book.

CUT TO:

INT. BASIL'S CAR - NIGHT

Basil is driving on an empty road. The view is somewhat clear. He is speaking on the loudspeaker.

BASIL
No, bro. That was ridicules. Do you know how many people showed up. Just from that video.

ISKANDAR
(o.s.)
It's a sensation man, and you're the one behind it all, so just own it.

BASIL

I just want to get this over with and start the residency already. I feel like after today's noise they would probably accept me without much effort.

ISKANDAR

(o.s.)

Undoubtedly man. So where's this center you're heading to?

BASIL

It's in the Asturias. Right across the golf club.

ISKANDAR

(o.s.)

Oh, that's like a 20 minutes drive. You know, I could've probably taken them myself in the morning had you told me about this earlier.

BASIL

Thanks Iskandar, you've been really supportive of me the past few weeks. I appreciate it much. Hey, why don't you pass me by and we go there together tomorrow so I can do the interviews.

ISKANDAR (o.s.)

(laughs) Sure, what time do you want me to wake you up sir?

BASIL

(Laughs)

Hey, don't push it. Your services have been duly appreciated and valued, sincerely, Mr. Receptionist. Please don't mock your clientele.

Basil notices police car lights are flashing in the distance, creating a holographic effect in the dust.

ISKANDAR

(o.s.)

Oh is that so. Cause in that case, you owe quite a sum sir. One more night and the calls will start to come way too early, sir. I'm warning you. It's out of our hands.

Basil approaches the police car.

BASIL

Don't worry lobby boy, I'll make sure to leave a donation for the needy.

(Laughs)

Hey listen man, I have to go, I'll talk to you later.

A big and study police OFFICER leaves his car and comes to Basil's window.

Basil has prepared his documents for the officer.

OFFICER

Good evening.

BASIL

Evening Officer.

Basil hands out the documents.

OFFICER

It's not a checkpoint, son. The road is closed. A dune covers the road for a few meters straight ahead. You have to take a shortcut at this turn and then take the first left you see.

BASIL

Oh, alright. Thanks officer.

Basil reverse and takes the right turn.

A few hundred meters down the road, he sees a clearing between the row of bushes coming up on the right. Past the clearing on the left, he sees the left turn. As he approaches the clearing, he starts to feel a deep and calming heaviness in his body.

He starts to bring the car to a slow stop. He peeks into the clearing as he crosses it and sees a silhouette WOMAN standing in the distance. He backs up to the clearing and finds a short tree in her place, but no woman.

It's unclear, but the dust looks as if it's being repelled by the tree trunk.

Basil looks at the upcoming left turn, then at the clock, then back at the tree. He drives off, takes the left turn and continues to the center.

CUT TO:

EXT. OASIS SERENITY - NIGHT

Amidst the dust, the center looks modern and luxurious with big glass windows and natural wood. Basil skips the parking lot and stops at the entrance of the center. He takes out the paintings and dashes into the main entrance.

CUT TO:

INT. OASIS SERENITY - NIGHT

The reception is empty except for an armed security GUARD. The entrance past the reception is stopped by a short turnstile gate.

The guard approaches Basil.

GUARD

Good evening, sir, may I help you?

BASIL

Good Evening, I have to take these inside.

GUARD

I'm sorry sir, but the center is closed at this time, do you have permission to be here?

A fit, middle-aged WOMAN in a white training appears behind the gate and walks over.

WOMAN

It's okay George, he's with me.

The guard swipes his card at the gate, Basil enters, and follows the woman into a corridor.

BASIL

Hi... Faida? How are you?

FAIDA

Hi, Yes. I'm good. I hope the drive wasn't too cumbersome.

BASIL

No, not all, I'm sorry for being late, there was a closure down the main road.

FAIDA

Oh, don't be at all, it was a dangerous drive as it is, I'm glad you made safely.

Faida stops at a large door and opens it for Basil.

BASIL
Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. WELLNESS ROOM - NIGHT

Basil enters a big and spacious room with large glass windows overlooking a lake and a green field. There are many bean bag set-up in the middle of the room, and yoga mats spread on one side. He sees two standing easels next to the bean bags.

Faida passes him and walks towards the easels.

FAIDA
I'm excited for this program, and I hope the paintings would help the participants with their journeys.

BASIL
It sounds really interesting, I would've loved to join if I wasn't busy in the morning.

FAIDA
We are always hosting different workshops for inner clarity, you should join us soon.

They reach the easel.

FAIDA
Here we are. I hope these would do.

BASIL
These are perfect.

He places the paintings one by one.

FAIDA
Everyone here at the center is very grateful for this addition. Thank you, Basil.

BASIL
Of course, Faida. I am so honored that I can help.

Faida looks at one of the paintings. Her face turns soft.

FAIDA
Oh, My. These are quite powerful, Basil.

Basil takes a deep breath and looks at the painting with her.

BASIL

Does it stir about any inner child emotions?

FAIDA

I don't understand how these paintings have such a striking effect. But I think, it goes beyond that.

Basil takes a piece of napkin from his pocket and hands it to her.

She dries her tears and faces him.

FAIDA

Basil, you are truly a talented genius. These are beyond perfect, everyone will be thankful tomorrow when they experience them.

BASIL

Would you like a hug, Faida?

She nods and tears some more.

Basil leans in to hug her.

CUT TO:

INT. BASIL'S CAR - NIGHT

Basil is driving the same way he came through. He approaches the clearing and feels the same exact way as before. He stares at the lonely tree for a minute, then looks around: not a single car is around. He drives into the clearing.

The closer he gets to the tree, the more he feels the heaviness. He continues slowly, mesmerized by the tree, as if it is calling him.

He reaches the tree, and looks around: the land is grassy, spacious and empty except for this tree.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

He exits the car with the headlights on, and approaches the tree. There seems to be a round bubble of clear air around the trunk where dust doesn't enter.

He enters the bubble and takes a big deep breath as if by command. His eyes start to tear up. He gets closer and notices that it's a fig tree. He touches it and his eyes widen. He puts his ears on it and hears a beat.

He sits down, staring at the tree in disbelief.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END