

SCENE ONE:

*Dr. Jones stands at his desk, on the phone.*

DR. JONES

Look, I told you I'll be there as soon as I can. Please, I'm running a school here, you know what that's like.

*(He waits for a reply)*

See, you and I aren't so different, are we? So just give me about half an hour and I will be there to get him.

*(sighs)*

I am trying my best. Please.

*(nods)*

Yes. Thank you. And this won't happen again. I promise.

*Dr. Jones sits down at his desk. He fiddles with a picture frame.*

DR. JONES

*(repeating to himself)*

One more appointment... one more appointment... one more appointment...

*(Dr. Jones taps a button.)*

Karen, can you please send in the last one?

*The door opens. Niffran steps in. Dr. Jones shakes Niffran's hand from behind the desk.*

NIFFFRAN

Dr. Jones, thank you for meeting with me today.

DR. JONES

My pleasure.

*(Niffran sits down.)*

I should tell you that I only have a few minutes. I need to go pick up my son from daycare.

NIFFFRAN

This shouldn't take long sir, I just wanted to talk to you about something.

DR. JONES

Well go ahead mister...

NIFFRAN

Oh, my name's Niffran. 10th grade.

DR. JONES

Well nice to meet you. What's wrong Niffran?

NIFFRAN

Basically, I've noticed you've beefed up security in the hallways.

DR. JONES

You noticed huh? I didn't mean for it to be so apparent.

NIFFRAN

Oh, I've noticed Dr. Jones. In fact, a lot of the other brown students here have noticed it too. Especially our brothers in kufis and our sisters in hijabs.

DR. JONES

What do you mean?

NIFFRAN

Your new security guards... they follow us to class, they stop us in the hallways, I've even seen a few of them patting us down.

*(Beat)*

So I'm hoping you'll help us out.

*Niffran stares at Dr. Jones.*

DR. JONES

Well... They shouldn't be doing that.

*Niffran sighs.*

NIFFRAN

I agree.

DR. JONES

But what can I do?

NIFFRAN

You're the principal.

DR. JONES

Here's the thing, Neefran / these security guards are just doing their jobs.

NIFFRAN

Niffran.

DR. JONES

What?

NIFFRAN

My name. You mispronounced it.

DR. JONES

I only have a few minutes.

NIFFRAN

It'll only take a second to correct you. It's Niffran.

DR. JONES

Niffran.

NIFFRAN

Perfect. Now, my point is they're harassing us and we'd like it to stop.

DR. JONES

Neefran...

*(Niffran winces, decides to just let it go)*

These security guards, they're here for everybody's protection.

NIFFRAN

Protection from what exactly?

*Dr. Jones gets up. He glides over to the American flag. Niffran digs his nails into the chair.*

DR. JONES

We're all afraid Neefran. One day you're at work, handling paperwork, the next you're hearing about the Twin Towers collapsing. I never expected something like this to happen so close to home.

*(Dr. Jones moves back to the desk.)*

*He picks up his picture frame and hands it to Niffran. Dr. Jones stares at Niffran with accusing eyes. Niffran can feel it, but he doesn't look up.)*

That's my wife.

NIFFRAN

Did she...

*(Niffran looks up at Dr. Jones. Dr. Jones stops staring at Niffran)*

My brother was on the first plane.

*Niffran hands Dr. Jones the picture. Dr. Jones sits down.*

DR. JONES

I'm so sorry to hear that... I can think of few things more cruel than a family member being taken away too soon. You know, I often find myself thinking "maybe there was something I could have done..." And then I think "What a ridiculous thought." Still, it's up to me, in my limited role, to make sure no stone goes unturned at this school.

*(Dr. Jones glances back and forth between the frame and Niffran. He puts the frame down. He moves back to his seat)*

Do you ever feel afraid son? Scared something like this might happen again?

NIFFRAN

I'll hear a plane and I might duck down. I try not to, but I can't help it.

DR. JONES

Powerless. You feel powerless and being powerless is a terrifying thing.

*Niffran opens his eyes. He see his opening.*

NIFFRAN

Dr. Jones? Every time one of those guards stops one of us in the hall, we feel powerless.

*Dr. Jones leans back in his chair. He rubs his hands together.*

DR. JONES

I suppose you're right...

NIFFRAN

Look Dr. Jones, I can tell you're a good guy and I understand what you're trying to do. I get it. Just please, talk to them. Get them to ease up a little bit.

*Dr. Jones nods. He stands up.*

DR. JONES

Thanks for stopping by Neefran. I was unaware of how these guards were making my student body feel. We will conduct a thorough investigation and eliminate this problem.

*Niffran stands up. He shakes Dr. Jones' hand.*

NIFFRAN

Thank you Sir.

*SCENE TWO:*

*Dr. Jones sits at his desk, rubbing his temples. He's stressed, avoiding something. He sighs, realizing he can't avoid it anymore. Finally, he pushes the button on his desk.*

DR. JONES

Karen, please send him inside.

*Niffran enters with a black eye. He shuffles to the chair.*

DR. JONES

Hey kid, how you doing?

*Niffran doesn't answer, just electing to avoid eye contact all together.*

DR. JONES

Listen buddy, I'm gonna need you to tell me what / happened.

NIFFRAN

You don't remember my name?

*Dr. Jones eyes him for a moment.*

DR. JONES

Neefran.

*(Niffran scoffs)*

I want to help you. But I can't do that unless I know your side of the story. So could you please tell me what happened?

NIFFFRAN

I was walking to Geometry, but then I saw the security guard following me. I went to the bathroom to hide because... Something just didn't feel right. I was hoping he would just leave, but when I went outside he was just standing there waiting on me. He wanted to see my hall pass, but I didn't have one because I didn't go to class. Then he patted me down in the middle of the hallway and then...

*(Tears well up in Niffran's eyes)*

I don't even remember what happened... He just hit me and I was on the ground...

*(Niffran weeps. He tries to hide it. Dr.*

*Jones pushes a box of tissues towards*

*Niffran. Niffran neglects them)*

I thought you were going to talk to them.

DR. JONES

I did. I took your advice and had a long chat with the security guards. But then I talked to some students and our other staff here and well... Let me just say this: I understand that you and your friends feel uncomfortable. However, the majority of the school, including the faculty and staff, disagree with you. These security guards make most people feel much safer.

NIFFFRAN

Of course they do! Most of the school is white. Brad doesn't have a bully waiting for him outside the bathroom, why would he care? But I don't feel safe. Look at me. Nah look, you have to fire the one who did this. At least that one. You're gonna fire him right?

DR. JONES

I don't know yet... I'll have to conduct a thorough investigation.

*It feels like Niffran just got kicked in the stomach.  
He silently absorbs this blow Niffran bursts into  
tears. He's full on crying now.*

NIFFRAN

Why are you blaming us?

DR. JONES

Excuse me?

NIFFRAN

*(crying)*

You're treating us like animals. Like we're responsible or something.

DR. JONES

Responsible for what?

NIFFRAN

You know what. And that's not fair. We lost people too. My brother died that day. And you say you're trying to protect us? How exactly does some jerk patting me down in the middle of the hallway help you prevent an attack like the one that killed my brother?

*Dr. Jones leans back in his chair.*

DR. JONES

Well... when the security guards pat you down- or anyone else, what they're looking for is / dangerous items.

NIFFRAN

For what? A fucking bomb?

DR. JONES

Alright, Neefran, let's just watch our language.

*Niffran sits back. He takes a breath, gathers himself. He wipes the tears from his eyes.*

NIFFRAN

My name is Niffran.

*(Dr. Jones rolls his eyes. )*

I'm still waiting. How does patting me down in the hallway help anybody?

DR. JONES

When security pats people down, they're just making sure that that person doesn't have any contraband. You know, like drugs, weapons, anything like that.

NIFFRAN

No, I knew that part. So why aren't they patting down the white kids too? Why am I the only one with a black eye?

DR. JONES

It's random.

*Niffran scoffs.*

NIFFRAN

Don't tell me it's fucking random...

DR. JONES

Watch your language. And I gotta say, I don't understand why we're getting so hostile here.

NIFFRAN

I'm hostile? I'M HOSTILE? One of those security guards you employ to protect your school punched me in the face. You ain't protecting shit.

DR. JONES

I AM protecting the school.

NIFFRAN

That would only make sense if you don't consider us part of the school. You're blaming us and separating us and dividing us and I don't know why. Why are you blaming us?

DR. JONES

I never said you're not a part / of the school.

NIFFRAN

*(yelling)*

You don't need to say it.

*(Dr. Jones pauses. He looks at the ground, then back up to Niffran. He's trying to figure out what to say when Niffran chimes back in.)*

Dr. Jones, I have this idea I've been suppressing since it happened. I tried to slow it down because you genuinely seemed like you were willing to help us. But the more and more I think about it and talk to you, the more it makes sense... Did you ask that security guard to follow me?

DR. JONES

Neefran that is / ridiculous and you know it.

NIFFRAN

Did you tell that security officer to follow me after our meeting? To keep tabs on me or some shit so I wouldn't stir up any more trouble?

DR. JONES

*(Dr. Jones feels angry, annoyed at this question. He answers like he's trying to keep a blood vessel from bursting)*

The fact that you would even accuse me of that is so deeply offensive.

NIFFRAN

*(yelling)*

Fine, be offended then.

*Dr. Jones leaps out of his chair.*

DR. JONES

*(yelling)*

I'm done Neefran. Okay? I'm done. I did not do this to you. I / am not the person you should be mad at.

NIFFRAN

Yes you did! You fucking did! Regardless of if you sent him or if it was his idea, you let it happen.

DR. JONES

*(yelling)*

Maybe it was your own fault. Did you ever consider that?

*(Nifffran clenches his fist. The tears return.*

*Dr. Jones sits back down. He gets situated, calm.)*

Truth be told, I have no idea who's at fault here. Like I said, we need to conduct a / thorough investigation.

NIFFRAN

Thorough investigation. Stop saying "thorough investigation" like it means / anything.

DR. JONES

STOP. OKAY. IT'S DONE. This is what's gonna happen: I'm going to suspend you for / three days.

NIFFRAN

*(yelling)*

For fucking what?

DR. JONES

IN THE MEANTIME, we will get to the bottom of this.

*Niffan nods, not in understanding, but to keep him from strangling Dr. Jones.*

NIFFRAN

Bet that security guard is gonna be here. Bet you you'll give him the benefit of the doubt

DR. JONES

Go see Karen, she'll get your paperwork ready.

*They stare at each other for a beat, neither looking satisfied. Niffan gets up.*

DR. JONES

Neefran wait... Look I'm.... We should call your parents so they know / about the whole situation.

NIFFRAN

Dr. Jones, please don't call my house.

DR. JONES

I'm sorry Neefran, I have to. They need to know about this.

NIFFRAN

No, I get that. Just trust me... You can't be the one to tell them.

DR. JONES

Why not?

NIFFRAN

*(yelling)*

Would you just let me have this one thing? Please.