

FINDING SUPERMAN

Jami Todd

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FADE IN

INT. WAITING ROOM, HOSPITAL, NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

A hospital waiting room.

Harsh white lights. Patients sitting on plastic chairs anxiously awaiting to be seen. A father holds a crying little boy in his arms. He blows in his boy's ears to alleviate the pain likely caused by an ear infection.

A little girl [5, dark eyes and hair, Mexican origin] sits beside SANJAY [72, a short elderly man with white hair and tired eyes, East-Indian origin].

Sanjay observes the father holding his crying boy. Wasn't so long ago when he held his boy in much the same way. Or... was held by his own father.

A television mounted on a wall advertises soda pop.

A dozen or so patients blankly stare up at the fast moving images on the television screen. They watch a commercial of how a soccer player drinks soda pop after a game to refresh his thirst and rejuvenate his muscles.

Sanjay's gaze moves from the father blowing in his son's ear to the little girl as she sits mesmerized by the commercial. After a moment he points to the commercial and says-

SANJAY

You know that stuff is why we're in here.

LITTLE GIRL

(Turning to Sanjay, matter-of-fact)

It tastes good.

Sanjay shrugs. Nods. Agrees. It certainly does taste good.

Behind them, the girl's MOTHER [25, dark eyes, black hair] argues vehemently with a nurse. Something about insurance. Something about having to pay more than she actually has.

SANJAY

That's how they get you.

The little girl regards Sanjay.

LITTLE GIRL

Who's 'they?'

SANJAY

'They.'

LITTLE GIRL

Oh... They...

The little girl gazes at the TV.

SANJAY

They get your mom's money with soda pop outside the hospital. Then they get your money in the hospital when it makes you sick.

Sanjay shows his teeth.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Destroys your teeth. Destroys your stomach. Destroys your health.

Sanjay indicates the vending machine then the doctors and nurses.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Good for soda merchants. Good for medical merchants. Good for teeth merchants. Good for insurance. Bad for you and me. Gotta wonder who's watchin out for us?

LITTLE GIRL

Batgirl.

SANJAY

Yeah. That would be nice.

LITTLE GIRL

Still... Tastes good.

SANJAY

Smoking mirrors... smoking mirrors...

The little girl turns her attention to her mother who continues to argue with the nurse. She doesn't have the money to pay for the visit but refuses to be denied. Her daughter needs to be seen.

Sanjay follows the Little Girl's gaze. He realizes the woman arguing with the nurse is the Little Girl's mother.

The little girl's mother counts and recounts her money, searching her purse desperately for the means to pay for the visit. The Little Girl turns back to Sanjay.

LITTLE GIRL
My mommy doesn't let me drink it.

SANJAY
Your mommy loves you very much.
You're a lucky ducky.

The Little Girl smiles.

LITTLE GIRL
You sick?

SANJAY
That's what 'they' say.

The Little Girl grabs the remote control for the television she finds on a small coffee table. She begins to flick through the channels.

LITTLE GIRL
Me, too. Sucks.

She continues to flip through the channels. On the television: a morning show gives the latest news in New York.

The government's going to bail out a corporation before they go bust. Another news report. Another commercial. Then-

News concerning a Superman convention in Metropolis. Something in the report catches Sanjay's attention.

A comic.

One he immediately-

Recognizes!

His face suddenly tightens. He gasps. He turns to the Little Girl before she can change the channel-

SANJAY
Wait. Don't-

But the Little Girl changes the channel.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
Please. The other channel.

She nods and changes the channel for Sanjay, but goes the wrong way.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
No. No. Other way.

The little girl toggles back and finally lands on the Superman convention news report.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

There!

LITTLE GIRL

It's not even a cartoon.

SANJAY

Just one little bitty moment...

She nods.

On the TV screen at a booth marked "Old and New" he sees a comic [Superman 61], with the cover page all ripped and taped together. With a racing heart, Sanjay stares at the television as though he's just seen a ghost.

LITTLE GIRL

He's not as strong as Batgirl.

SANJAY

(Without taking his eyes
off the television)

You think so?

LITTLE GIRL

He's pretty tough.

SANJAY

He is.

LITTLE GIRL

But Batgirl's got gadgets, and she's a girl, which means she can do more than one thing at once and a better brain that communicates with itself.

Sanjay gives her a skeptical look.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Ask my mom. Seriously.

Sanjay turns back to the TV.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Can I change it now?

Sanjay nods. The Little Girl changes the channel.

After a moment, Sanjay opens an old Beat-up, hand-made satchel. It almost resembles a quilt. It's a satchel he's carried with him his whole life.

A satchel his mother made for him long ago with pieces of his parents and grandparents old clothes. It carries with it family history and love... like Superman's suit.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

I like your bag.

SANJAY

My mom made it for me.

LITTLE GIRL

WO!

She stares at him in disbelief. Sanjay thinks she's mesmerized by the bag, but really-

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

You have a mom?

Sanjay smiles but doesn't respond. He continues to rummage through the satchel. He soon pulls out some money from the satchel. He carefully puts it in an envelope and gives it to the little girl.

SANJAY

Here. Go give this to your mom.
Tell her it's for taking such good
care of you.

Sanjay stands to leave.

LITTLE GIRL

Where you going?

SANJAY

Metropolis.

LITTLE GIRL

To see Superman?

SANJAY

Yup.

LITTLE GIRL

I knew it. You feel better now,
don't you?

SANJAY

Much better.

LITTLE GIRL
Say 'hi' to the big guy for me.

Sanjay smiles.

SANJAY
Give the envelope to your mother.

The Little Girl nods.

Sanjay makes his way down the brightly-lit corridor.

The Little Girl approaches her mother. Pesters her mother to look down at her. But-

Her mother continues to beg the nurse to overlook some insurance clause on the forms. When her mother finally looks down at the Little Girl-

Her Little Girl hands over the envelope.

Sanjay stops at the exit door. Turns to watch-

The mother pulls out money from the envelope. Counts it. Looks around the waiting room, wondering who gave this 'gift' to her daughter.

The Little Girl then helps her mother find her benefactor by pointing Sanjay out at the end of the corridor.

Sanjay opens the door slightly. Turns to face the mother.

The mother stares at him at the other end of the corridor. He holds her thanking, disbelieving gaze for a moment.

The mother stares at him as though she were staring at an angel. Then-

She blows him a kiss.

Sanjay catches it, smiles, and just as he quits the hospital, a nurse walks into the waiting room with his file.

NURSE
Sanjay Sudha.

No answer.

NURSE (CONT'D)
Sanjay Sudha?

Sanjay Sudha has left the building!

INT. FIRST FEDERAL BANK HEAD OFFICE, NEW YORK - MORNING

An office building. Bright lights illuminate a floor with countless, labyrinthine cubicles. Dead-eyed employees in gray suits keying away at computers. Everyone crunching numbers and finishing off paperwork that seems to come from nowhere and go nowhere. A nameplate on a desk reads: Jami Sudha.

JAMI [32, real name Jeevan] scans over an excel sheet in a cubicle a little bit bigger than the other cubicles. Bigger, but not much bigger. It's still a cubicle.

Around his desk, on envelopes and paper there are countless doodles and sketches. He's maybe one of the only employees doing something remotely creative or 'out-of-the-box.' It's clear by these sketches that once upon a time Jami had dreamed of being a cartoonist or comic book artist.

One of Jami's employees steps up to him uncertainly. But Jami doesn't notice him. He merely continues away at his excel sheet. After a moment the employee clears his throat to get Jami's attention-

EMPLOYEE

(Nervous)

Jami, can I talk to you for a moment?

JAMI

What's up?

The employee doesn't answer right away. Jami turns to look at him, waiting. Finally, the employee musters up the courage-

EMPLOYEE

There's been rumors that we might be cutting.

Jami smiles, returns to his computer, keys in a few meaningless numbers.

JAMI

(Without taking his eyes off his computer)

Absurd. We've had a great year, and the work keeps coming in.

The employee releases a sigh of relief.

EMPLOYEE

So just rumors?

JAMI

Just rumors.

A message on Jami's computer suddenly pops up on his monitor.
'Come see me in my office.'

Jami regards his watch. Almost noon, yet his boss needs to talk to him before he heads out for lunch. He stands.

JAMI (CONT'D)
I have meeting with the Chief.

Jami places a hand on his employee's shoulder.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Feel better?

EMPLOYEE
Much.

Jami heads over to a large office. Meanwhile-

Sanjay walks through the maze of cubicles as he searches for his son. He gets lost, and it's not the first time.

Sanjay retraces his steps. Pulls out a map he created the last time he was at the bank to find his son. He stops. Thinks. Reconsiders his path.

Begins to retrace and count steps to see where he took a wrong turn.

MANAGERS OFFICE

Jami knocks and enters.

MANAGER
Jami! How are things in your department?

The manager is texting on his phone, before Jami can answer-

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Good, that's good. Listen I'm not gonna mince words.

Jami takes a seat in front of his boss.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Things haven't been as we expected in the last quarter and we need to find a way to cut costs.

Jami laughs but then goes silent when he realizes his boss is serious.

JAMI

But... I just finished telling Williams we had a good year. It's actually been one of our best. I can show you the numbers.

MANAGER

I know the numbers. Numbers are good, but we can do better. We can always do better.

Jami nods.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

I know you'll come up with a solution that won't harm us in the future.

Manager stares at Jami.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Put a smile on! You'll figure it out. Go team! And seriously... I've got my eye on you.

Sanjay stares at them through a window in the wall; they both turn to regard Sanjay.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Who's he?

Sanjay smiling at his son through the glass door.

JAMI

(Embarrassed)

My dad. We're having lunch.

MANAGER

Good. Very good. Family's important. Just be back for the meeting at 1.

Jami sighs. Raises his finger at Sanjay. Sanjay raises back a finger at Jami. He opens the office door. Steps inside, confused, holding up a finger.

SANJAY

What does it mean?

JAMI

One second, Dad. I'll be out in a second.

SANJAY
Okay. One second.

Sanjay closes the door and stares at them. Jami's Manager smiles.

MANAGER
Dads.

JAMI
Dads.

Jami puts on a fake, nervous smile.

JAMI (V.O.)
Dad, you just can't walk into my boss's office like that!

EXT. STREET, NEW YORK - LATER

Jami marches past restaurant after restaurant. Sanjay doesn't answer. He merely places an envelope addressed to 'DC Comics' in a mail box, and they continue to walk down the busy street.

Jami sighs. It's like pulling teeth with his dad. They pass by a small Italian Bistro. Jami evaluates the bistro from an efficiency point of view.

SANJAY
This one?

JAMI
(Shakes his head
anxiously)
No. Takes too long here. Look how relaxed the waiters are.

Sanjay peers at the waiters bustling about. He's not quite sure what his son means.

SANJAY
Relaxed?

Nevertheless, they continue to walk and stop at-

A GREEK RESTAURANT

SANJAY (CONT'D)
This one?

JAMI
Even longer. I have a meeting at 1.

SANJAY
Why take a meeting when we had
lunch planned?

JAMI
Unexpected.

Sanjay shakes his head, disappointed.

They continue to hunt for a restaurant with quick, efficient service. Jami leads the desperate hunt for an efficient restaurant to get him a meal in under forty minutes.

SANJAY
I hardly see you anymore.

JAMI
Wasn't my choice. Meeting just
popped up.

They walk by a Mexican restaurant. A line up at the door.

SANJAY
This one?

Jami shakes his head as he texts someone on the phone. He inches into the street, focused on his phone.

JAMI
Too relaxed.

Just as-

Jami nearly steps into the street in front of a moving car, trying to cross the street to find another restaurant-

A faster restaurant.

But-

Sanjay pulls Jami back, saving his life.

The car honks by them. The guy yells out at Jami to watch where he's walking and to get off his damn cell phone. He stares at the car, then his dad-

JAMI (CONT'D)
Thanks, dad.

Sanjay smiles.

SANJAY
That's what dads are for.

They cross the street and walk by a Chinese restaurant.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
This one?

JAMI
(Shaking his head)
Packed.

SANJAY
They're all packed.

JAMI
Too slow.

They walk in front of a Pizzeria and stop.

SANJAY
This one? Pizza?

Jami takes a look. Evaluates. Not sure. Is it fast enough?
Will he get out in time for his meeting? Maybe.

JAMI
Sure.

Evaluating the speed of the waiters and waitresses

JAMI (CONT'D)
Should be in and out.

Sanjay sighs at this comment without saying anything.

JAMI (CONT'D)
We can try.

They wait in a line to be seated. After a moment-

Jami's back on his cell phone, texting. He begins to get nervous about something business related.

Sanjay watches his son go, wondering how all this 'distracted living' is working out for him. Despite nearly being run over by a car Jami continues fiercely on his cell phone.

WAITRESS
Two?

Without looking up at her as he continues to text on his phone, Jami answers-

JAMI

Yes. And we're in a little bit of a rush.

WAITRESS

You and everyone else, buddy.

She leads them to the table. They take a seat and stare at one another silently. Jami can hardly keep still. He wants to be served and served fast.

Sanjay stares at him as though he hardly recognizes his boy-wondering what happened. With every passing second Jami gets more nervous until he finally bails.

JAMI

Look, dad, I'm sorry I don't have time for lunch. We'll reschedule. Promise. I need to get back to work. I'm really, really sorry. I'll make it up to you, and don't worry... this is on me.

Sanjay says nothing. Just stares.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Dad, come on.

Sanjay puts on a fake smile for his son. As Jami prepares to leave-

SANJAY

I found it.

JAMI

Found what, Dad?

SANJAY

I'm leaving tonight.

Jami stares, taken aback.

JAMI

What are you talking about? What did you find?

No answer. Dawning realization-

JAMI (CONT'D)

The comic? Not this again. Please... not this... yes this... dad... who cares... the thing is worthless. It really is...

SANJAY
I'm leaving tonight.

JAMI
We'll talk about this later.

SANJAY
Sure.

JAMI
Here.

Jami drops money on the table.

JAMI (CONT'D)
For lunch. Again, Dad. I'm really
sorry. Really, sorry!

Jami leaves the money on the table for him to pay lunch and
rushes out of the restaurant.

Sanjay watches his nervous, harried son rush back to the
office. Suddenly feels as though he might have failed him as
a father.

SANJAY
Me, too.

INT. FIRST FEDERAL BANK HEAD OFFICE, NEW YORK - AFTERNOON

In a gray meeting room reminiscent of a cold hospital room-

Jami gives a presentation about a new fund to his team. He
directs everyone's attention to a presentation on a big
screen TV.

JAMI
The projected growth for this fund,
making it one of the more
attractive products is 3% in two
years guaranteed with a maximum of
12% at the end of its life cycle.

Sanjay suddenly-

Enters the office with a steaming hot large pizza. Everyone
stares at Sanjay in disbelief.

No one says a word. Not even Jami.

Sanjay lays the pizza on the table. Slices it. Stares at the
gray suited, dead-eyed, bewildered workers around the table.
Regards his son. Then commands-

SANJAY

Eat!

Sanjay walks out, satisfied. Slams the door on the suits. Pulls out his map of the office and tries to get out of the maze of cubicles as everyone watches him through the glass wall.

When Sanjay finally disappears the suits shrug at each other, look to Jami who nods 'a pizza break is fine' and they all aggressively grab a slice of pizza. Apparently, no one had time for lunch.

EXT. SANJAY'S HOME, NEW YORK - LATER

A townhouse in the suburbs.

Jami pulls up to the sidewalk in his BMW. He disembarks. Makes his way toward the door. Checks to see if it's locked. Sighs when he discovers it isn't. He hears an old Superman radio serial playing inside. Superman VS. KKK. He enters.

INT. SANJAYS HOME, NEW YORK - MOMENTS LATER

Jami makes his way to the second floor where he finds his father packing a duffle bag. On his bed lies the satchel Sanjay's mother made for him a long time ago in India.

Jami watches him pack standing at the threshold of the door. After a moment-

JAMI

Dad. You can't just barge into a meeting and serve pizza.

Sanjay continues as he packs his stuff.

SANJAY

People need to eat. Need time to eat. Or did they not teach you that in your 'smoking mirrors' school.

JAMI

How many times do I gotta tell you... It's 'smoke and mirrors!'

SANJAY

(Correcting)
Smoking mirrors!

JAMI
Okay. Whatever. I'm not doing this
with you today.

Jami continues to watch his dad pack.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Did someone at DC finally answer
your letters? Cause that would
really surprise me.

Sanjay shakes his head.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Where'd you see the comic, then?

SANJAY
Convention.

Jami sighs. Approaches his father.

JAMI
What is it with that comic?

Sanjay doesn't answer. Continues to pack.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Seriously, dad, what's up? Why
won't you just let go?

SANJAY
Just taking a trip. Wanted to know
if you wanted to join. That's all.

JAMI
Now is not a good time.

SANJAY
Sure.

JAMI
Got some important things to take
care of.

SANJAY
I understand.

JAMI
Maybe we do this next month.

SANJAY
Next month, too late...

JAMI

What's the difference between this month and next month?

Sanjay stops to stare at his son, wondering if it's a trick question. Then he answers matter-of-factly.

SANJAY

Time.

Jami sighs.

Sanjay continues to pack as Jami begins to unpack and put his father's stuff away.

Everything that Jami unpacks, Sanjay re-packs. It's an endless loop. They're both getting nowhere.

JAMI

What's up with that comic? It's just a Superman comic. And it's not even a valuable one!

SANJAY

To you.

JAMI

No. Not just to me. To experts, too. Maybe it's worth a hundred bucks. Maybe. I'll pay you that right now, trip over. We forget about it.

Jami opens his wallet.

Sanjay stops packing. Stares at the money Jami hasn't fully pulled out yet.

Jami knows his father enough to know he cannot be bought or bribed in any way, shape or form. He's going on this journey, like it or not!

Sanjay stares at the money, his son, and the money. He swallows a lump of frustration.

SANJAY

All I see is... smoking mirrors.

Jami closes and returns his wallet to his pocket. Sanjay inches up to his son looking very sad.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, kiddo.

JAMI
For what?

SANJAY
For failing you.

JAMI
Not this again.

SANJAY
I really am. I don't know what I
can do. I really don't, but you're
not okay.

JAMI
I'm fine, dad.

SANJAY
No. You're not. Come with me, don't
come with me. It's up to you. I'm
going.

Jami lets out a sigh. He knows he isn't going to win this
argument.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
Things will always be tough if you
cannot see beyond the smoking
mirrors. I can't wait until you're
able to see.

Sanjay goes back to his packing.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
Go do your important things. We'll
talk when you have less important
things to do.

Jami stops unpacking his dad's clothes. With a sigh of
resignation-

JAMI
How long?

SANJAY
(Grinning)
Two days! To the convention and
back.

JAMI
To the convention and back?

SANJAY
That's it.

Sanjay moves in to hug his son.

JAMI

What?

SANJAY

Big hug.

Jami hugs him rather awkwardly.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Not big enough!

Sanjay embraces his boy hard. Harder.

JAMI

And that's too big.

SANJAY

Never too big.

EXT. SANJAYS HOME, NEW YORK - MORNING

Jami drives toward his dad's home in a spanking new BMW and parks in front of the driveway. He immediately notices his dad is tinkering under the hood of his old, Beat-up 1990s station wagon. He sighs. Exits his car. Approaches his dad.

JAMI

If we're doing this... we're taking my car.

Sanjay gazes at the BMW, then at his son, then returns to tinkering under the hood of his station wagon.

SANJAY

Too dangerous.

JAMI

Too dangerous? Dad, that's state of the art German tech.

SANJAY

Too dangerous. We take the superwagon.

JAMI

I'm not taking the superwagon.

SANJAY

You love the superwagon.

JAMI
When I was five! There's no way
we're back in two days with the
wagon. No way.

SANJAY
We take the wagon. Like old times.

JAMI
I'm not taking that hunk-a-junk on
a road trip.

SANJAY
(Insulted)
Hunk-a-junk?

Stands before Jami. Stares at him for a long moment trying to understand why he would call the superwagon a hunk-of-junk. Then-

SANJAY (CONT'D)
You've changed.

JAMI
Yeah. I grew-up.

SANJAY
No. Not grow-up. Something else,
but not grow-up.

JAMI
Come on, dad. I just meant we have
a better chance in my car than
yours.

Sanjay swallows hard.

They regard each other for a moment. Sanjay slams the hood. Grabs his two bags from the superwagon and walks by his son and reluctantly gets into the BMW.

INT. BMW, DRIVING TOWARD METROPOLIS - DAY

A long silence as father and son drive toward Metropolis.

SANJAY
You used to beg to take rides in
that hunk-a-junk.

Jami focuses on the road.

JAMI

When I was six. Look, dad, it's just that we got a long way to go and I don't think the old wagon can make it, that's all.

SANJAY

(Still in disbelief)
Hunk-a-junk?

JAMI

Wrong choice of words, dad. I'm sorry.

Jami puts on music.

Sanjay doesn't approve. Some forgettable rap song about the so-called high-life.

SANJAY

They even got to the music.

JAMI

Who's 'they?' And what have 'they' done to music?

SANJAY

(Slang Indian expression
for Bad Magic)
Baaefkoof.

JAMI

What?

SANJAY

Bad magic.

JAMI

I see. It's not what you grew up with so it's Baaefkoof.

SANJAY

Not what I grew up with... that's okay... but this... this is baaefkoof. Keep you hypnotized... thinking and meditating on nonsense...

JAMI

(Dismissive)
Sure, dad. Whatever you say.

Sanjay ejects Jami's CD and goes to put a CD with his old radio serials.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Not this.

SANJAY

Just relax. Enjoy. You're not with them, you're with me.

JAMI

Who's 'them?' Who's 'they?'

SANJAY

You know 'them' and you know 'they.'

JAMI

No. I don't.

SANJAY

You're a smart boy. You'll figure it out when you grow-up.

Jami sighs. *This is gonna be a long trip!*

LATER

Jami makes a face as the next Superman serial plays. The Clan of the Fiery Cross.

JAMI

Can we listen to music now? Not baaefkoof.

SANJAY

Not baaeffoof?

JAMI

No.

SANJAY

Good magic?

JAMI

Yeah. Whatever. Good magic.

Sanjay nods. Jami switches his MP3 to Louis Armstrong's 'It's a Wonderful World.'

SANJAY

That's nice.

JAMI

Sure.

SANJAY

Your mother used to dance you to sleep every night to this song. Only this song would work. Good magic... for the soul.

Jami doesn't say anything. After a moment-

JAMI

Why that comic, dad?

Sanjay doesn't really want to explain his reasons.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Just help me understand. All that time. Searches. Calls. Letters. Dead-ends.

No answer. Sanjay just stares at the road ahead of him.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Help me understand. I just want to understand why a grown man wants a comic so bad.

SANJAY

You wouldn't understand. You're not ready.

JAMI

(Insulted, taken aback)
Oh, okay I'm not ready. Really? Cause it's just on another level. A superior level of understanding.

Sanjay stays silent for a long moment.

SANJAY

You've been exposed to too much baaefkoof. One day you'll see.

JAMI

Why do you still treat me like a kid?

SANJAY

(Frustrated)
You are a kid. You're my kid, and you'll always be my kid even when you're my age.

Jami shakes his head. After a moment he loses his cool and slams the steering wheel.

JAMI
 What man in his seventies chases
 down a worthless comic book? Help
 me understand! Dad, please...

Sanjay refuses to answer.

Suddenly-

The front tire pops and the car skids left. Skids right. Jami almost loses control of the car.

JAMI (CONT'D)
 Shit!

Jami quickly regains control of the car. Pulls to the side. Lets out a deep sigh of frustration. After a moment-

SANJAY
 The superwagon never got a flat.

Jami sighs.

Sanjay adds-

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 We shoulda taken the superwagon.

Jami turns to regard his father. Not amused.

EXT. INDIA - THE PAST - DUSK

A low caste village.

With a great sense of urgency RAM SUDHA [32, a low caste scavenger] rushes through a dalit village to his small shamble of a home. He rushes into his little one room shanty where his wife is about to down a bottle of concentrated sodium.

Ram violently slaps the bottle out of her hand. His wife, Prem [26, short and thin], scrambles to the ground to find the bottle and drink its contents to abort the fetus growing in her belly.

Ram wrestles her away from the bottle and holds her down. She shakes and quivers in his hold. He waits for her to calm down. Then-

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Please... no...

She makes one more desperate attempt to break free.

RAM (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 No! You can't! Prem... you can't...

He shatters the bottle on the ground with the force of his anger. She stares at the broken bottle, then begins to cry.

Prem's cries grow louder and louder with every second. The anguish is more than he can bear.

He holds her tight and lets her cry in his embrace. Through her quivering, anguish she manages-

PREM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 I don't... want to... bring a child
 to this world... who cannot... who
 cannot... dream...

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 You won't. I promise.

He squeezes her. Takes a deep breath. Closes his eyes. Silent tears begin to slip down his cheeks.

EXT. HIGHWAY, TOWARD METROPOLIS - PRESENT - DUSK

Standing on the side of the highway, Sanjay watches Jami rummage desperately through the trunk. Through boxes of paper and pamphlets. He has a spare tire but-

No jack.

JAMI
 Shit! Shit! Shit!

SANJAY
 What shit?

JAMI
 I took out the jack!

Sanjay comes up behind Jami. Peers into the trunk where there should be a jack. Instead, he sees a stack of papers.

SANJAY
 The superwagon-

JAMI
 (Frustrated)
 Has a jack! I know.

Jami pulls out his cell. No battery. He sighs again.

JAMI (CONT'D)
 Dad, where's the cell I bought you.

SANJAY
 At home.

JAMI
 What? What's the use of having a
 cell phone if you leave it at home?

SANJAY
 I don't know. You bought it.

JAMI
 So you could be in touch.

SANJAY
 Does opposite of put me in touch.

JAMI
 Come on!

SANJAY
 Too distracting. Dilutes things.

JAMI
 What things?

SANJAY
 Life.

JAMI
 That's ridiculous.

SANJAY
 We lived fifty years without-

Jami interrupts. Doesn't want another lecture on a cell phone or 'Distracted Living.'

JAMI
 Enough! I already know what you're
 gonna say.

An old mini-bus covered in graffiti reflecting people in protest and the power of people pulls up to them.

A woman, Stevie [29], in the driver's seat opens the door.

Jami stares into a van filled with street performers. Musicians. Artists. And a Hulkster (Dressed in a green Hulk mask and costume).

 STEVIE
Need help?

 JAMI
No that's fine. Thanks.

 STEVIE
Sure.

 JAMI
Yup. Thank you.

 STEVIE
Suit yourself.

Stevie smiles at Sanjay, then shifts the bus into gear and takes off toward Metropolis.

Sanjay gives Jami a look. *We shoulda taken help!*

 JAMI
Kidding me. They woulda mugged us just as soon as we turned our backs. Bunch of gypsies in a mini-bus. I'll pass, thanks. We need a legit tow truck is what we need.

 SANJAY
Legit?

 JAMI
Guy in grease-stained overalls.

 SANJAY
Smoking mirrors.

 JAMI
 (Correcting)
We need someone who knows what he's doing tinkering with my car.

Jami considers the options, looks down the highway, then-

 JAMI (CONT'D)
We'll walk to the nearest exit.
Should be a gas station nearby.

Jami begins to walk down the highway. Sanjay follows behind. After a moment-

SANJAY

Next time-

JAMI

We take the superwagon.

SANJAY

No. Bring a jack.

EXT. HIGHWAY, TOWARD METROPOLIS - NIGHT - LATER

Jami and Sanjay walk on the shoulder of the highway toward the nearest exit which they still haven't reached.

JAMI

Where the hell is the exit?

SANJAY

We should have gotten on the bus.

JAMI

Sure, dad. That's what we should have done.

Jami sighs. Frustrated.

JAMI (CONT'D)

This comic better be worth it.

SANJAY

You should have just stayed at home.

JAMI

Don't do that. I have to make critical decisions in the next quarter which I've put off for this.

SANJAY

So busy. So important with your quarters.

JAMI

Quarter.

Jami sighs, again. A tow truck pulls up beside him. Rolls down the window.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

You the beamer?

JAMI
Shit. Thank god. Yeah, that's us.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Why didn't you call someone?

Jami raises his cell phone.

JAMI
No battery.

The tow truck driver grins.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
That sucks.

JAMI
How much?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Fifty dollar finder's fee. A
hundred for the tow. Another
hundred for the tire.

JAMI
Finder's fee?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Just found ya, didn't I?

JAMI
You take American Express?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Fifty dollar credit card fee.

JAMI
What?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Tough times. You gettin in or you
waitin for the next tow truck?

Jami stares at the tow truck driver. Shakes his head in disbelief. Then Sanjay and Jami hop in the tow truck.

The driver smiles, drives forward, does a u-turn, and heads back to Jami's BMW.

JAMI
Where's your garage?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Next exit.

JAMI
Where's that?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Twelve miles the way you were
headin.

JAMI
Twelve!

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Lucky I found you.

JAMI
You're telling me.

SANJAY
How far is Metropolis?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Metropolis? A few hours.

They pass the beamer. The tow truck driver pulls another U-turn. Then parks himself in front of Jami's beloved car.

The tow truck driver pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Pulls one out. Lights it up. Then asks-

TOW TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)
Mind if I smoke?

JAMI
(Annoyed)
We'll get some air.

Jami and Sanjay disembark.

JAMI (CONT'D)
(To himself)
That's it. Give us all cancer why
don't you.

Tow truck driver steps out. Extends his hand to Jami.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Keys.

Jami tosses him the keys.

The tow truck driver catches the keys. Walks to the beamer. Places the beamer in neutral. Walks back to his truck. Hooks a few cables to the beamer. Then he walks by Jami and Sanjay to his tow truck-

JAMI
Will the car be okay?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
It'll be fine. No worries.

JAMI
Just be careful.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Will do.

The tow truck driver gets in his truck. Reverses. Hooks the beamer. Jami and Sanjay observe him.

SANJAY
He's not wearing overalls.

JAMI
He has a tow truck. Good enough.

They watch the truck as it pulls the beamer into position.

SANJAY
(Concerned)
Is everything okay in your life?

JAMI
What do you mean?

The tow truck driver steps out. He heads to the front bumper to fasten the beamer to the tow truck.

SANJAY
I mean... do you have one...

JAMI
Have a what?

SANJAY
I mean... why don't you have time for lunch.

JAMI
This again. Dad, come on. I'm good.

SANJAY
No time for a relationship. No time for...

JAMI
You know how many people would kill to have my job. You know how much I make a year?

Hearing this Sanjay becomes very sad.

SANJAY
You don't need that.

The tow truck driver walks back towards his truck.

JAMI
Oh, no. What do I need?

SANJAY
A life.

The tow truck driver enters his truck and slams the door.

JAMI
Well, you're not living in the real world. You're not. You don't know how much things cost these days.

The tow truck driver starts his truck.

SANJAY
Smoking mirrors.

JAMI
No. Not smoke and mirrors. Reality.

The tow truck and the beamer drive off as they both go silent with the realization that they're being stranded.

Suddenly, the truck stops. The tow truck driver runs out toward them. Jami sighs in relief.

JAMI (CONT'D)
For a minute there I thought-

The tow truck driver pulls out a gun. Trains it on Jami. Jami and Sanjay take two startled steps back.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Your wallet and cell phone.

Jami hands over his wallet. Sanjay goes to give him his but-

TOW TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)
No, no. Not you.
(Indicating Jami)
Just his. I don't steal from the elderly.

JAMI
A thief with a code. Great.

SANJAY
Batman has a code.

JAMI
He's not Batman.

The tow truck driver rushes back to his truck and takes off with the beamer as Sanjay and Jami watch him disappear into the darkness.

A silence.

Then-

SANJAY
We should have waited for someone with overalls.

Jami turns to look at him. Says nothing.

JAMI
Fuck!

SANJAY
The superwagon never got stolen.

They both continue to stare down the highway for a long moment.

COP (V.O.)
So let me get this straight...

INT. POLICE STATION, NEAR METROPOLIS - MORNING

A small office with a few police officers attending to paperwork.

COP
... He picks you up. You don't ask to see a card or papers. You lead him to your car, hand him your keys, and he takes off.

A smile begins on the cop's face.

SANJAY
Smoking mirrors.

COP
What?

JAMI
Nothing.

COP
You didn't see his license plate?

JAMI
No.

SANJAY
It was covered with tape. Black tape.

JAMI
(Turns to Sanjay in disbelief)
When did you see that?
(Beat)
Never mind.
(To the cop)
Will I see my car again?

Cop stares at him for a moment. Thinks about it. Answers-

COP
Doubt it. Probably on a boat to Saudi Arabia by now.

EXT. POLICE STATION, NEAR METROPOLIS - LATER

JAMI
What do we do now?

SANJAY
I have enough for the bus.

JAMI
I'm sorry dad. This really sucks.

SANJAY
We'll make it.

Jami's face tightens.

JAMI
What do you mean we'll make it?
We're not taking a bus to Metropolis.

SANJAY
I have enough.

JAMI
No, no. Dad. You're not thinking straight. How are we getting home?
(MORE)

JAMI (CONT'D)

Where's the money for getting back home?

SANJAY

You'll see.

JAMI

What are you talkin about 'we'll see?' There's no money, there's no 'we'll see.' I'm going home.

Sanjay smiles.

SANJAY

You'll see.

INT. BUS, TOWARD METROPOLIS - LATER

A bus with a destination sign that says: Metropolis.

Sanjay and Jami sitting on a bus heading toward Metropolis. Jami stares at the seat in front of him.

Sanjay sits beside him, next to the window, not saying a word, letting his son vent his frustration.

JAMI

(To himself)

I'll see. I'll see what? How crazy my dad is for one worthless comic. It's not even worth this bus ticket! God damn it!

Sanjay turns away from Jami and stares out the window. Cars passing him. In one car a little boy stares at him. The boy waves at Sanjay. Sanjay waves back at him.

EXT. ONE-ROOM SHANTY, INDIA - THE PAST - NIGHT

Sanjay [5] watches Ram enter. He's covered in sweat, dirt and soot. He looks down at his boy pretending to sleep in his mother's lap as she stitches together a satchel out of old clothing for Sanjay. His parents are both preparing for a journey, or rather-

An escape.

Ram moves to a corner of their one-room home, he lifts a stone, digs the dirt floor, pulls out a plastic bag. He brings out a wad of rupees. He adds a few notes to the bundle, then returns the money to its proper hiding spot.

Then Ram sits beside his wife and shows her a comic. The cover is ripped in several places. He tapes it up.

Sanjay watches all this through half-opened eyes, the whole while pretending to sleep.

Ram sees Sanjay is still awake. He shows the comic to his wife, so his son can see it.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Look what a foreigner shot out today. Superman.

Sanjay instantly sits up.

RAM (CONT'D)
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Oh boy! Aren't you asleep?

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
I was pretending.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Could have fooled me.

Sanjay stares at the comic, amazed. Finally-

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Superman. Is he powerful?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Is he powerful?
(Beat)
The most powerful.

Ram opens a blind to let in some moonlight. Then he goes to see Sanjay. Sanjay sits between his father's legs, and together they look through the comic.

Though Ram can't read English, he makes up the story as he goes along, re-telling the origin story which he already knows from his friends.

INT. BUS, TOWARD METROPOLIS - DAWN

Sanjay stares out the window hearing his father's story in his head.

RAM (V.O.)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 A long time ago on a planet far
 away... two parents defied the laws
 of the scientists to give their son
 a chance to live and be free.

Sanjay watches the people on the street of Metropolis as the bus makes its way through the city.

RAM (V.O.)
 See these people from the other
 planet had very strange scientific
 laws that determined what children
 would be before they were born, a
 little bit like caste. So the
 parents worked hard to create a
 spaceship to send their boy to a
 planet far, far away where he could
 be whatever he wanted to be.

The bus comes to a halt.

JAMI
 (Calm, a little defeated)
 We're here.

Sanjay stares at Jami. He smiles, but Jami doesn't return his smile. He's preoccupied. Too concerned with how they're going to return home.

EXT. BUS STOP, METROPOLIS - LATER

Sanjay and Jami disembark the bus. Jami spots a phone booth and makes his way toward it.

JAMI
 Gonna see if I can collect call a
 friend for some help.

Sanjay takes a seat on a bench and watches his son make his call in one of the last public phone booths. After several attempts, he walks back defeated and downhearted.

SANJAY
 No help?

Jami doesn't answer. He just looks very disappointed. He sits next to Sanjay, realizing for the first time in a long time that he doesn't really have a friend. Just colleagues. He sits silent and thoughtful for a long sad moment.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
I have a credit card.

JAMI
You do?

Sanjay nods.

JAMI (CONT'D)
(In disbelief)
You do?

SANJAY
For emergencies only.

Jami lets out a sigh of relief.

JAMI
What's the limit?

SANJAY
I don't know.

JAMI
You don't know. You never used it?

SANJAY
You don't spend what you haven't-

JAMI
Earned. Yes, dad. I know.

SANJAY
Just for emergencies.

JAMI
Why didn't you tell me that before?

SANJAY
We had cash.

JAMI
Well, at least we can get home.

A long silence. Something seems to be bothering Jami. Sanjay picks up on this.

SANJAY
I'm sure they would have helped if
they could have.

Jami stares blankly into the abyss.

JAMI
 (Skeptical and defeated)
 Yeah. I'm sure.
 (Beat)
 Let's find this place.

EXT. CONVENTION CENTRE, METROPOLIS - AFTERNOON

Sanjay and Jami walk through a parking lot filled with adults and kids dressed as characters from the Superman franchise. They suddenly pass the mini-bus that stopped to help them on the highway. Sanjay smiles. Points it out.

SANJAY
 Don't tell me this is not magic!

JAMI
 Luck.

SANJAY
 Magic.

JAMI
 Let's just get the comic and get
 outta here.

Sanjay continues to stare at the bus in amazement. To him, nothing in the world is a coincidence. Everything is magic.

INT. CONVENTION CENTRE, METROPOLIS - LATER

Sanjay and Jami enter the convention through a crowd of Supermans, Superboys and Supergirls.

Sanjay searches a map on a wall for the booth. He searches for the store 'Old and New Comics.'

JAMI
 What are we looking for?

SANJAY
 Store. Old and New.

Jami regards the map. Finds the booth area.

JAMI
 Got it. This way.

He leads his father to-

OLD AND NEW BOOTH

The booth is set up like a small comic shop. People rummaging through boxes of old comics. Others wait in line to buy their selections. Vintage comic collectables-dolls, posters, necklaces-mounted on the booth walls.

A man buys a comic, and the clerk takes down his information in a small laptop connected to a printer. Behind him crates of old and new comics. A fan boy's dream.

The man pays for his comics and leaves.

Sanjay steps forward.

CLERK

What can I do you for?

SANJAY

Superman 61.

CLERK

Jesus. What's up with that comic?
We had one but sold it like right
away.

Sanjay lets out a sigh of disappointment. Jami puts a comforting hand on his dad's shoulder.

JAMI

Let's go.

But Sanjay doesn't give up that easy.

SANJAY

To whom?

CLERK

Can't give you that information,
sir. But it was somebody big.

SANJAY

Please. It's important.

CLERK

Wish I could... but I can't.

SANJAY

I need that comic.

CLERK

Why?

JAMI

Come, dad.

SANJAY
I want to take a look just in case.

CLERK
I'm telling you, I sold it. You
won't find it.

SANJAY
(Firm)
I want to look.

Jami whispers to his Dad-

JAMI
Okay, dad. Sorry it didn't work
out. I'll wait for you outside.

Sanjay nods. Watches his son leave. Sanjay points to a Spider-
man comic.

SANJAY
This one.

CLERK
That's a better comic.

SANJAY
This one.

Sanjay selects many other vintage comics, without really
caring what he picks.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
This one. This one.

Clerk piles the comics in front of Sanjay.

CLERK
You can afford all these?

SANJAY
With a name and address.

The Clerk laughs, thinking it's a joke. When he sees Sanjay's
serious he loses his smile and-

CLERK
You cannot bribe me, sir. Frankly-

Before the clerk can finish his sentence, Sanjay selects
another expensive looking comic.

SANJAY
This one.

Clerk swallows.

CLERK
I grew up with really strong
morals. Really strong... Batman
strong...

Sanjay grabs another comic.

SANJAY
This one.

CLERK
I used to be religious.

And another.

SANJAY
This one.

CLERK
I'm feeling weak.

SANJAY
This one.

Clerk stares at the stack of comics, then Sanjay. He then
grabs a vintage Superman necklace with Superman's shield and
puts it around Sanjay's neck.

CLERK
This one.

SANJAY
Will it make me powerful?

CLERK
All-Seeing. All-knowing.

Sanjay nods.

CLERK (CONT'D)
The comic you want ain't even worth
half of what you're gonna pay for
these.

(Beat)
Man. You must love that comic.

Sanjay smiles. Hands him his credit card. The clerk rings it
up. But the transaction doesn't go through.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Didn't work.

Sanjay sprinkles imaginary magic on the card. Then he tells the clerk-

SANJAY

Try again.

The clerk makes a face. He doesn't get how Sanjay's imaginary magic is gonna help. He tries again. It doesn't work.

Sanjay sprinkles more magic.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Again.

The clerk tries again.

Sanjay waits for it. At last-

CLERK

There you go!

As the clerk rings up the bill, Sanjay examines his vintage Superman necklace.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Sign here.

Sanjay signs.

The clerk prints out a receipt and hands it to him.

CLERK (CONT'D)

I may have accidentally on purpose
screwed up your address on the bill
of sale.

SANJAY

(Repeats with a smirk)
Accidentally on purpose.

CLERK

Accidentally on purpose.

Sanjay takes his bag of comics and turns to walk away.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Hey man.
(Looking into Sanjay's
eyes, very sincere and
respectful)
It's cool man. I get it.

Sanjay smiles.

CLERK (CONT'D)
 Hope that shield brings you luck.

SANJAY
 Magic.

CLERK
 Sure. Whatever. Magic.

Clerk does a Vulcan symbol.

CLERK (CONT'D)
 Live long and prosper.

But Sanjay isn't a Trek fan, he's a-

SANJAY
 May the force be with you.

CLERK
 Ah, no, you didn't. You were almost cool, man. Almost.
 (After a moment, the clerk gives in)
 May the force be with you, buddy.
 May the force be with you...

EXT. CONVENTION CENTRE, METROPOLIS - LATER

Sanjay exits the convention hall. Approaches Jami who observes the fans.

JAMI
 Can't believe I used to be like these guys.

SANJAY
 Me neither.

But Sanjay clearly means this in another way. *What happened to you?*

JAMI
 (Staring at the bag of comics in Sanjay's hand)
 Guess you found something you liked. So it wasn't all for nothing.

SANJAY
 Never is.

They walk by the mini-bus toward a car rental store on the other side of the street. All Jami wants to do is rent a car with his dad's credit card and drive home as quickly as possible.

RENTAL CLERK (V.O.)
Sorry. It didn't pass.

INT. CAR RENTAL STORE, METROPOLIS - LATER

Jami stands by the counter, staring at a clerk. The clerk hands him back his credit card. Jami looks to Sanjay. Sanjay shrugs.

JAMI
What do you mean? It's valid. It's gotta pass.

RENTAL CLERK
Didn't pass.

JAMI
That's really weird. It's not that expensive.
(To his dad)
How low is your limit?

Sanjay shrugs again.

SANJAY
Not so low.

Jami considers a moment.

JAMI
(To Sanjay)
We still got forty bucks cash between us.
(To the clerk)
Knock off forty and see if it passes.

RENTAL CLERK
It passed. 40\$.

JAMI
Awesome.

Sanjay hands over his money. Only 37\$

SANJAY
I bought chocolate.

JAMI
You bought chocolate?

Sanjay shrugs. Pulls out a bar.

SANJAY
Piece?

Jami turns back to the clerk.

JAMI
We only got 37\$. So just knock off
37\$.

The rental clerk tries again.

RENTAL CLERK
Doesn't pass.

Jami sighs and turns to Sanjay, thinking. He stares at his bag of comics.

JAMI
Can we return a comic? Or that
silly Superman necklace?

Sanjay shakes his head.

SANJAY
Can't.

JAMI
We just need a few bucks.

SANJAY
Can't.

JAMI
Be reasonable, dad. Please.

Sanjay shakes his head, looking guilty. Jami gives him a look. *What have you done?*

OUTSIDE

JAMI (CONT'D)
Ten fuckin grand for comics! Ten
fuckin grand!

SANJAY
Not for comics.

JAMI

For an address. And now what? How do we get to L.A to see a famous comedian who dropped off the face of the god-damn earth!

SANJAY

We'll manage.

Jami's livid. He can hardly contain himself.

JAMI

You have no value for money! All our life we lived in a crappy house in a crappy neighbourhood because... because... of this... kind of stupid, irresponsible thinking....

Jami holds out the bill of sale. Pissed. Accusing. Sanjay just shakes his head.

JAMI (CONT'D (CONT'D)

You go read your comics while I beg in the streets to get us out of this jam!

SANJAY

I'm sorry.

JAMI

You're sorry.
(Exasperated, really
disappointed in his
father)
Yeah. Me, too.

Sanjay walks away very alone. He spots a bar near the convention hall.

Jami watches his dad walk into the bar where a Korean street performer sings American folk songs for money.

Jami sits on the curb and puts his head in his hands. Broke. Frustrated. Friendless. Alone.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Fuck!

INT. BAR, METROPOLIS - LATER

Sanjay nurses a beer at the bar while Superman fans, drinking and arguing, surround him.

Not too far away, at a table, Stevie sits with her friends. They laugh and drink and eat birthday cake.

After a moment Stevie excuses herself. Walks to the bathroom. Smiles at Sanjay as she passes him.

Sanjay smiles back, thinking nothing of it. He just sips on his beer and waits. For what? He's not sure. All he knows is the world is magic, and it has a way of helping people who take chances.

When Stevie returns from the bathroom, she passes Sanjay, stops, considers, backs-up and approaches him. She stares at him. Smiles. He returns her smile.

STEVIE

Hey.

SANJAY

Hey.

STEVIE

You remind me of someone I know.
Why don't you join us? It's my
friend's birthday.

Sanjay looks past her shoulder. He sees three artists and a Hulkster [A man dressed in a Hulk suit] laughing, eating cake, and looking through a photo album of their journey across America. An old school album with actual printed pictures.

It is clear from their pictures that they are on a serendipitous journey and that they are not only chronicling their encounters but are in fact in search of America.

Hulkster [32] sits still. Says nothing. Goes through the photo album.

Violeta [25, Chilean painter] laughs and talks to her older sister Isabella [27, photographer].

Qwonee [Real name Qwon, 25, guitarist] strums his guitar.

Sanjay considers a moment. Decides. Shrugs. Stands. Follows Stevie back to the table.

LATER

Jami walks in the bar, searching for Sanjay. He spots him at the table laughing and drinking and eating birthday cake. He approaches his dad.

JAMI
Dad, what are you doing?

STEVIE
Have cake.

She passes Jami a piece of cake, but he just ignores her.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
Or just ignore me.

JAMI
(To Sanjay)
We need to go.

Sanjay wipes cake from his smiling mouth.

SANJAY
I'm going to L.A.

JAMI
No. You're not. We're going home.

SANJAY
We're going to L.A.

JAMI
Don't do this. I'm begging you.

SANJAY
When they found out my situation
they offered to help.
(Beat)
I'm gettin on the bus.

Jami sighs as he regards the table of gypsies and artists.
When will this nightmare end?

EXT. ONE ROOM SHANTY, INDIA - THE PAST - DUSK

Sanjay [5] and his father in their one room shanty. Ram is packing a small bag nervously.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Where's mama?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
She... she...

Ram stops packing when he realizes he can't answer the question. He doesn't know where she is.

All he knows is he last saw her with the police and probably won't ever see her again. Tears slip down Ram's face.

Sanjay comforts his dad. Ram fights back his tears.

RAM (CONT'D)
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
She's with the police.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
She's safe, then.

Ram doesn't answer. Though Ram knows it is quite the opposite. A sudden commotion outside.

Ram rushes to the window. Looks outside. In the distance high castes with kerosene and machetes ready to teach the low castes their proper place in their village.

The police escort the butchers to give them assistance just in case some low castes actually decide to fight back.

Ram rushes to the rock protecting his hidden money. Pushes it. Digs frantically. Grabs his bundle of money.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Listen, Sanjay. There are bad people coming. You listen to me without question. No matter what you see or hear you listen to me and you follow.

Sanjay nods, taken aback by his father's fear. Before they leave, Sanjay rushes back to get his-

Superman comic.

Ram grabs Sanjay and they run into the darkness with the sounds of low caste men and women being hacked to pieces all around them.

INT. MINI-BUS, ON THE HIGHWAY, TO LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Stevie chauffeurs the musicians and artists to Los Angeles. Everyone sleeping except for her and Jami.

Sanjay sleeps against the window. Stevie's lids are growing heavier and heavier with every passing second. It's becoming borderline dangerous.

She either stops driving or asks someone to come talk to her. Looking up at the rearview mirror she observes the only one who is awake is Jami, and he doesn't look very happy.

STEVIE

Wanna keep me awake?

Jami sighs, then moves to the edge of the bus seat. Leans toward her. A long silence. Then-

JAMI

What's your thing?

STEVIE

What do you mean?

Jami doesn't explain himself. She answers-

STEVIE (CONT'D)

No thing.

(Beat)

That's my thing.

JAMI

What's with the bus? I mean you gotta have a job. Can't just be drivin around in this thing all day like a buncha gypsies.

STEVIE

Why not?

A long silence.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Lost touch with my country. Guess we're just a bunch of curious souls in search of America.

(Beat)

Not the America on TV. The one in reality, if you catch my meaning.

JAMI

No. I don't.

STEVIE

I figured you wouldn't.

JAMI

I guess that's your thing.

STEVIE

If you need to call it a thing. Sure. That's my thing.

JAMI
You just happen to be from Los Angeles?

STEVIE
Guess you can call that insane crazy luck for you guys.

Jami doesn't buy it.

JAMI
(Skeptical)
And you're just covering us like that? Giving us money cause that's what you do?

Stevie raises her eyebrows.

STEVIE
What is this an interrogation? Your dad's cool. He's definitely on the bus. You? I wouldn't say you're on the bus. I wouldn't say you're off either. You're standing on the threshold.

JAMI
I don't even care what that means.

STEVIE
Of course you don't. You want to know why we're helping, I'll tell you. Thing is we had just been talkin about Dave Richie the comedian in the pub. When I got up to go to the bathroom I saw your dad, I recognized him from somewhere and realized I had seen him on the highway. He was lookin down so I invited him to join us. That's when he told us about the comic and how some comedian had bought it. By insane crazy luck it was Richie. That ain't a coincidence. That's the universe talkin. And that sealed the deal.

JAMI
(Sarcastic)
My dad's got so much insane crazy luck.

STEVIE

When the universe talks, you listen.

(Beat)

I do anyway.

JAMI

(With a laugh)

You think the universe wants him to find that worthless piece-of-shit.

STEVIE

You've got a bad attitude.

(Beat)

Anyway. Believe. Don't believe. You're dad was there for a reason.

JAMI

It's called coincidence.

STEVIE

(With a sardonic laugh)

Sure. Coincidence. We stopped on the highway for you. Coincidence. We went to the same convention. Coincidence. Your dad came into the bar we decided to celebrate Violeta's birthday. Coincidence. I felt the instinct to invite your dad over, something I don't usually do.

JAMI

Coincidence.

STEVIE

Dude!?

JAMI

What?

STEVIE

Get on the bus! Embrace it.

JAMI

Whatever. You think that crazy maniac Richie is gonna give us that comic? This is all a big waste of time.

STEVIE

Crazy?

JAMI

Yeah. Crazy. What else? Who turns down all that money to find his roots in Haiti or Africa or wherever the hell he went.

Stevie gives him a look of disappointment in the rearview mirror.

STEVIE

If it makes you feel better to call him crazy, then call him crazy. If it makes you feel better to dismiss him rather than listen, go ahead.

She peers at him through the rearview mirror.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

You wanna know what I think? I think he just woke up. Opened his eyes. Got on the bus. Like a lot of us are doin nowadays.

JAMI

On the bus or off the bus, you don't leave all that money and fame behind unless you're fuckin crazy.

Stevie sighs. No use debating the wisdom in giving up fame and riches for your soul.

INT. TRAIN, INDIA- THE PAST - DUSK

Sanjay [5] and his father stand in a box cart of a train with other dalits. Dalits generally don't mix with higher caste Indians, especially in places like Bihar.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Where are we going?

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)
On a boat.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Without mama?

Ram says nothing. Doesn't really know how to answer. After a silence, Sanjay asks-

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Where?

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Where you can dream. Where you can
 be whatever you want to be despite
 your last name.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Without mama?

Ram's eyes fill with tears, but he holds them back. Sanjay doesn't really understand why they had to leave without his mother.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Why can't we wait for her!

A tear slips down Ram's cheek. He kneels and looks at his boy. He embraces him.

Sanjay begins to cry.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled, through his
 tears)
 I want to wait for her. We should
 wait for her.

Ram embraces him stronger.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Please papa. Please... let's wait
 for her...

INT. MINI-BUS, ON THE HIGHWAY TO LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Sanjay chauffeurs the musicians and artists to Los Angeles. He's got Louis Armstrong playing on the speakers. Stevie chats with Sanjay as Jami sleeps with his head against the window. The other artists are still sleeping behind them.

SANJAY
 I spent most of my life chasing a
 lie not the dream.

Sanjay sighs.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

The corporate dream, not the American dream, and there is a difference. When my wife got sick. We lost everything. I took it one way. Jami took it another.

A silence.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

I said screw it all and found a job where I could spend more time with him. And I guess he wished I took a job that made more money. I should have been more aware of what was going on with him. He went from child to grown-up almost overnight. I should have explained things better.

STEVIE

Never too late. I mean look at you. Out here searching for what? A comic.

Sanjay smiles. Jami slowly rouses.

JAMI

Dad. What are you talking about?

SANJAY

Nothing.

STEVIE

(To Jami)

So I hear you like to draw.

JAMI

Liked.

SANJAY

Like.

Jami leans in toward Sanjay.

JAMI

Liked.

(Beat, changing the subject)

Since when can you drive a bus?

SANJAY

Since an hour ago.

STEVIE

Maybe two.

JAMI

Dad. You need a special license to drive these things.

(Turns to Stevie)

Don't you?

STEVIE

I think so.

JAMI

(Faces Stevie,
incredulous)

Think? You mean to tell me you don't have a license!

SANJAY

Hey, kiddo. Relax.

Jami shakes his head as he watches his father drive the bus. He's clearly having a great time.

Qwonee wakes up in the back. He begins to strum his guitar, singing he's hungry and that he would like some breakfast.

EXT. ALLEY, INDIA- THE PAST - DAWN

Sanjay and his father eat breakfast in an alley. They eat rotis and smile at one another for a while. A low caste woman suddenly begins to sweep the ally. She stops to look at Sanjay and Ram and then continues her sweep.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

She's like us.

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

Like me. Not you. You will be whatever you want to be.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

I will?

A thoughtful silence.

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

I hope.

Sanjay pulls out the comic and shoves in closer to his dad. Ram opens the comic and begins a story. Unable to read English, he makes up a new, impromptu Superman story for his son.

EXT. CAFE - DAWN

Qwonee jams on the sidewalk for money. Patrons toss change in his hat as they walk in.

INT. CAFE - DAWN

The Hulkster watches his friends eat and sip coffee. He doesn't sip or eat anything. He refuses to take his mask off even though Sanjay is pressuring him.

SANJAY
Take the mask off.

Hulkster shakes his head.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
Take it off.

He shakes his head again.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
How do you eat?

STEVIE
He can eat. Just can't talk. He took a vow of silence a month ago. Hoping to get a part on a television pilot.

JAMI
Vow of silence?

STEVIE
Made a deal with the universe.

Jami laughs.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
Never did that? If you help me do such and such I promise never to eat chocolate for an entire year.

JAMI
When I was five.

Jami laughs harder.

No one at the table finds him very funny. Isabella and Violetta ignore him, going through their photo album of their journey across America.

JAMI (CONT'D)
We ready to go?

STEVIE
Wait.

Stevie signals Qwonee outside. Qwonee regards the money in the hat. Shakes his head. Continues to jam a Victor Jarra tune.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
Not yet.

Jami suddenly figures out what's going on. They don't have cash.

JAMI
(Rising disbelief)
Wait... are we waiting for him to pay... you don't have any money?

STEVIE
Don't worry. We've managed for the last few months.

JAMI
That's precious.
(To Sanjay)
Did you know that? They don't have money.

SANJAY
It will come.

JAMI
And what if it doesn't? We doin dishes? We doin dishes all the way to L.A?

STEVIE
Hey, relax. As your dad says. It will come. It always does.

JAMI
Always?

STEVIE
Believe in the universe and the universe will believe in you.

JAMI

That's a load of hippy dippy
bullshit!

STEVIE

Maybe that's why things didn't work
out for you. But just because
you're living a miserable bullshit
life doesn't mean you get to shit
on our experience with your
negativity.

JAMI

What are you talking about? There
is nothing negative about my life.

SANJAY

Nothing positive.

JAMI

Thanks, dad. No really.

(Beat)

I'm pretty happy, thanks for
asking.

STEVIE

(Sarcastic)

You really look happy.

JAMI

Not here with you bums. But I'm
certainly happy at home.

SANJAY

He's alone.

JAMI

Dad! Stop! Stop talking about me
with these hippies.

SANJAY

No time for girlfriend. No time for
lunch. No time for life. I don't
think he has friends.

JAMI

I have friends.

SANJAY

Who?

JAMI

Can we not do this.

STEVIE

(To Jami)

You look like me one year ago.

Stevie gives Jami a sad, concerned look.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Why'd you stop drawing?

JAMI

What is this? It's something I did as a kid. That's all.

STEVIE

So you always wanted to be a bank manager?

JAMI

Yeah.

Sanjay laughs to himself. Hulkster stands to go outside.

STEVIE

Fair enough. Question. You have all the money in the world, you'd still be a manager?

JAMI

I'd be retired.

Stevie grins. *Exactly. People doing what they love don't retire.*

OUTSIDE

A family with two young boys with Batman shirts walk toward the cafe. The Hulkster puts down his hand, palm up. Extends it. Says nothing.

Each kid gives him five as they walk in. Superheroes are cool. Period. End of Story. Enough said.

BACK INSIDE

STEVIE

(To the kids)

Go Batman!

(To Sanjay)

I love Superman, but seriously you got to admit he's a bit outdated.

Sanjay thinks about this for a moment, then-

SANJAY
Not for immigrants.

She thinks about this and nods. *I can see that.*

INT. MINI-BUS, DRIVING TO LOS ANGELES - AFTERNOON

Stevie drives the bus. Sanjay sits between Isabella and Violleta going through the album.

ISABELLA
I respect you like Superman but he's too powerful. No one really knows why he does good. He does it just because and no one gets that. But I'm sure you have your reasons.

Jami looking out the window.

SANJAY
It's not his power... it's his parents.

Jami roles his eyes. *Not again.*

Qwonee reads the comics Sanjay bought at the convention.

STEVIE
What does that mean?

SANJAY
Superman is zero, nothing, without his parents. Superman, he's a good boy. He was brought up well, and he wants to do good not for 'just because'... but for the best reason. To honor his parents. He is selfless not 'just because'... but because of his parents. He wants to protect the poor and weak not 'just because'... but because that's what he saw in his parents growing up. That's how he was raised. His parents selflessly took in an alien and raised him like an American despite all the dangers to themselves. A boy wanting to make his parents proud, make his ancestors proud... that's a pretty big reason...

Sanjay lets this all sink in with the Superman skeptics.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

...does a hero need any other reason than honoring his parents and ancestors to use his powers for good?

Sanjay continues to look through their album as he speaks. He thinks of his own parents and ancestors.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

His motivation is the most honest and meaningful. It comes from within and reaches back through time and space to his family and ancestors. Not 'just because.' Never 'just because.' To make both his real and adopted parents proud. Why does he do what he does? To make his parents, ancestors and community proud.

Sanjay takes a moment to consider his words.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

The real heroes of Superman are his parents.

(Sanjay nods)

The day someone becomes a parent is the day they become a hero whether they know it or not. A protector and guardian of an entire world. Though if they don't take responsibility for that world they've been assigned to, they may end up raising a Lex Luthor and not a Superman. The original Superman and Lex Luthor were parables on parenting. Both are born with power in one way or another. But... One is raised one way. The other is raised in another way. Look at the end result.

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts. To Isabella-

SANJAY (CONT'D)

If you ever forget why Superman does what he does you just remember his name. His human name. Clark Kent. Clark is his mother's surname. Martha Clark. Kent is his father's surname. Jonathan Kent. What is a surname? A call to the past.

(MORE)

SANJAY (CONT'D)

A reminder of where we come from and what we stand for. Superman is all about family, parental sacrifice, and fitting in a new, adopted world, and he never does anything 'just because.' The power... who cares... that's not what Superman is about...

Stevie nods. This Sanjay clearly loves his Superman. She offers-

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Problem is people focus on the power not the parents. They call him a sun god or an immortal and who cares about all that. What he really is at the core is a testament to his parent's love. Their sacrifice, patience and teaching. A son who wants to be everything his parents raised him to be while... trying to fit in a world with people like Nazis and the KKK...

Sanjay considers a moment, then adds-

SANJAY (CONT'D)

That's Superman. An immigrant who wants to do his best for his parents because his parents did the best for him. His powers. Who cares. It's not the power, it's what you do with that power and who taught you how to use that power.

Sanjay is clearly one of the last great defenders of Superman in this world. Everyone else, he knows are Batman fans. But he knows they are both great for very different reasons. None of which have to do with power.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Once upon a time Superman was real to Americans. Now in the stories the motivation is hardly there. The parents are an afterthought. And everything is about spectacle and power. But that's what's happening to all our stories. Spectacle and power.

Jami rolls his eyes. He's heard this before.

STEVIE

What do you mean?

SANJAY

The story is everything.

STEVIE

What does that mean?

SANJAY

Stories define us, shape us, inform us, give us confidence or bring us down, make us strong or make us weak. Some stories are like magic and they remind us of our greatness. Others are like black magic. Baefkoof. They defeat us and say things that aren't true about us. But they affect us even when we think they don't. The second most powerful people on the planet are the musicians because they send us their stories through vibrations and repetitions of thoughts like fast-acting magic. The third most powerful people are the writers especially those who are able to touch and change us through emotions.

JAMI

Stop, dad.

ISABELLA

The first?

Before Sanjay can answer-

STEVIE

Those who control the singers and writers.

SANJAY

Yesterday it was religion. Today it is media. Yesterday it was a Bible. Today it is a TV. There's a storyteller in every house and I'm not sure what's going on. Control a people's story, control them.

The mini-bus slows down to a halt. They seem to be caught in traffic. Stevie looks ahead to see Homeland security checking cars for illegal immigrants. Stevie peers out the windshield.

STEVIE
Another illegal stop.

EXT. INDIA - THE PAST - DAWN

Sanjay and his father listen to prayers and stories sitting outside a high caste temple. They both seem to be really enjoying the hymns. When it finally ends, Sanjay wonders why they cannot enter the high caste temple.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Why aren't we allowed inside?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Dangerous.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Why?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
For High Born only.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
We are not high born?

Ram shakes his head.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Not according to the story. We are not even allowed to listen to the words.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Why?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Because... the story says so... the story says... we are... we are... not allowed to listen. The words are too good for us.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Did they take mama because she said it was not a true story.

Ram's eyes fill.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Yes.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Is it a true story? Are we bad?

Ram shakes his head.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled,
recounting how the high-
castes got hold of
India's story)
No. It is not a true story. We are
the opposite of what the story says
we are. We were the original people
of India. Once upon a time there
was no such thing as caste. There
was varma but not caste, and varma
just meant job and you could have
any job you wanted and you had the
freedom to change jobs whenever you
wanted. Priests could become
artists and artists could become
priests. Then a few priests changed
the story little by little until
varma somehow turned into fixed
caste with rules in this life and
the next, turning all artists into
slaves of the priests. Of course
many challenged the changes to the
story. But even as they did the
story changed more and more. A few
priests made it so only priests
could read and interpret the story.
If an artist tried to read or
interpret the story boiling hot
lead was poured down their ear.

Sanjay's eyes widen in horror.

RAM (CONT'D)
Once the priests had control of
India's story, they had India. With
the story they turned the original
people to dalit slaves and hurt
anyone who challenged their new
story.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled, very
 sad)
 Like mama.

Ram goes silent. He doesn't know how to answer his son.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Sanjay. Always remember this. The
 story is everything.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 The story is everything.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Yes. Stories define us, shape us,
 inform us, give us confidence or
 bring us down, make us strong or
 make us weak. Some stories are like
 magic and they remind us of our
 greatness. Others defeat us and say
 things that are not true about us
 to hurt us. But they affect us like
 black magic even when we think they
 don't. They plant seeds of failure
 and insecurity and inferiority.

(Holds his boy tight to
 him)

You're as good and powerful as any
 high caste boy and you will be free
 to do anything you want in life. I
 swear it.

(With the conviction of
 parent who would risk
 everything for his
 child's right to dream)

By god, I swear it.

Suddenly a police officer finds and startles them.

POLICE OFFICER
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Hey! What are you doing?

Ram snaps to his feet. He pulls Sanjay up.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
 What is your name?

RAM
 (Quivering with fear)
 Ramdas.

POLICE OFFICER
 Ramdas.
 (Beat, In Hindi,
 Subtitled)
 Last name?

Dramatic silence. Ram is not sure what to answer. The truth is a death sentence for both of them.

RAM
 Singh.

POLICE OFFICER
 Singh?

RAM
 Singh.

POLICE OFFICER
 Ram Singh?

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Yes, sir.

POLICE OFFICER
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Maybe you should leave this area
 before Brahmans see you.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Yes sir.

Ram leads Sanjay away. When he's out of sight he grabs his boy in his arms and runs for his life. The last thing he wants is to be caught in area reserved for high castes.

INT. MINI-BUS, DRIVING TO LOS ANGELES - AFTERNOON

Stevie watches homeland security intimidate two cars in front of her. She hands Jami a video camera.

JAMI
 What do you want me to do with
 this?

STEVIE
 Film.

JAMI
Film what?

STEVIE
Fascism.

JAMI
What are you talking about? It's
just a checkpoint.

STEVIE
No. It's a lot more than that. Just
film. And make sure they see you
filming.

JAMI
Is that legal?

STEVIE
Sure is.

Stevie drives forward. Stops. Opens the window to see what
the officer wants. Jami begins to film the interaction.

OFFICER
You all American citizens?

STEVIE
Sorry, what border am I crossing?

OFFICER
None. Just a routine check.

STEVIE
Routine check? More like a routine
violation of our rights.

OFFICER
Are you an American citizen?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

OFFICER
Are you an American citizen?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

OFFICER
Listen. Make this easy on yourself.
Just answer the question. Are you
an American citizen?

(MORE)

OFFICER (CONT'D)
(Pointing to the other
passengers in the bus)
What about them?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

OFFICER
No. You are not being detained.

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

OFFICER
Just answer the question.

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

OFFICER
When you answer the question!

STEVIE
Am I being detained? Am I free to
go?

The officer shakes his head. He calls his superior. Within
moments the superior officer marches over.

SUPERIOR OFFICER
(To the officer)
What's the problem here?
(Then to Stevie)
You all American citizens?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
No. Are you American citizens?

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
I can do this all day. Are you all
American citizens?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Are you American?

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
You American?

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

The officer stares at her for a long while.

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Pull over on the side.

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Pull over on the side.

STEVIE
Am I being detained?

The superior officer peers at Jami and the camera.

SUPERIOR OFFICER
No. Just want to ask you some
questions.

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

Another long silence. Stevie shuts the bus to conserve gas.
She opens a bag of chips. Begins to eat.

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Are you American citizens?

STEVIE
(Crunching on her chips)
Am I being detained?

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Are you American?

She pops a few chips in her mouth. Chews loud. Smiles. Grabs
another chip. She'll stay there all day if she has to.

STEVIE
Am I free to go?

She extends the bag and offers him chips.

SUPERIOR OFFICER
Get that out of my face.

Cars begin to honk behind them.

SUPERIOR OFFICER (CONT'D)
You're free to go.

Stevie smiles a smile of victory.

STEVIE
Have a nice day.

Stevie speeds away.

Jami sighs. He puts the camera down. Without admitting it, he's a degree impressed with Stevie. He's never really seen anyone stand up to authority in this way.

INT. MINI-BUS, DRIVING TO LOS ANGELES - DUSK

Sanjay drives the bus.

Stevie sits beside Jami as he goes through their collection of videos they took of homeland security trying to infringe on their rights.

JAMI
What is all this for?

STEVIE
Research.

JAMI
For what?

She considers, then-

STEVIE
I'm not exactly sure yet.

Stevie hands him a photo-album.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
There's more in here.

Jami looks at her, then grabs the album. He begins to go through the pages. Pictures of the homeless and empty, foreclosed homes. Pictures of people in suits living harried, disingenuous lives. Jami suddenly comes across a song written on a napkin.

JAMI
What is this?

STEVIE
Something we came up with at a
cafe. We're callin it the Battle
Hymn of Freedom.

JAMI
Battle Hymn of Freedom?

STEVIE
We'll see where it goes. It just
came to us and we went with it.

Jami flips the page. A homeless man. Another. And another.

JAMI
What's up with all the bums?

Stevie scrunches her face at the word 'bums.' She clearly
doesn't like this term. Neither does the Hulkster who grunts
behind Jami and shakes his seat. Jami turns to regard him,
confused, then back at Stevie. Whispers to Jami-

STEVIE
Careful. He's been on the street.
(Pointing to picture of a
homelessman)
That particular man. His daughter
was misdiagnosed with cancer. By
the time they realized the error
the chemo had taken its toll... and
she died shortly after. He lost all
his money to the medical merchants.

Jami feels a pang of sadness.

JAMI
We nearly lost everything, too when
my mom got sick.

Jami continues to flip through the pages.

STEVIE
No one in a civilized country
should ever lose everything trying
to save the ones they love when
they get sick. Something wrong with
that. Something that is the
opposite of civilized.

Qwonee begins to strum out old American folk songs. He plays
'Hard Times in New York' by Dylan.

Jami seems transfixed with the pictures, as though seeing this side of America for the first time in his life.

Pictures of people being evicted. People on the streets. The devastation in New Orleans. Nothing like the America he sees on everyday TV.

INT. MINI-BUS, DRIVING TO LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Jami stares at the same picture of the homeless man who lost his daughter. He turns to Stevie who is writing in her journal. Jami stares at Stevie for a long while. She feels his eyes on her.

STEVIE

Your dad ever teach you it ain't polite to stare?

JAMI

Journal?

She regards her journal, then-

STEVIE

I guess. Observations. Things I witness. Just keeping track of what I see and hear... maybe something comes out of it... maybe not... who knows... do my best and let the universe take care of the rest.

JAMI

The universe?

STEVIE

You just need to learn how to listen. You could learn a lot from your dad. Every time I steer away... the universe finds a way to put me back on my path.

JAMI

Steer you away from what?

STEVIE

Me. Ever since I could remember I wanted to become a journalist. Write things that would help people. Write things that would inspire and inform people. But there's no more journalism. It's opinion and entertainment and it's tough to find truth. It ain't news.

She shakes her head and sighs.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Not about people, anymore.
Informing them. Helping them.
Helping them protect the next
generation. Seems to me whoever
controls the media controls
democracy. In communism its the
government that controls the media.
In capitalism it's the
corporations. That's why people
don't try the stations anymore.
They know there's an angle. A
corporate angle.

JAMI

Someone's gotta pay for all that
producing and publishing.

STEVIE

Sure. I don't know. I don't know
what I'm thinking. I'm thinking
there's something wrong...
Something terribly wrong. We got to
a place where we don't know what
real news is anymore... where the
American dream is confused with the
corporate dream... where a business
tycoon can use that disillusionment
with the establishment and the news
to tweet lies and get elected to
the highest seats of power.
Constitution... I don't even know
if that's important anymore. I wish
there was a Superman... but there
isn't. We're all drinking from the
same well and I thought that before
I'd drink from the well I'd GOFB.

Jami gives her a puzzled look. She answers his look-

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Get on the fuckin bus. I tried to
write about these kinda things and
was told it wasn't news and that I
had to be more respectful of our
advertisers.

A silence.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

After a while, to get stories published I adopted a tough, internal editor that vetted all the stories that might prevent me from gettin published. No one had to tell me to stay away from the real news. I just did it to get published. Found myself writing things that distracted, entertained, or reinforced the corporate agenda, but not what I had always dreamed of doing as a writer. Not the real, unbiased, hard-hitting news that is so crucial to a true democracy. Something sick about that. Something really sick about that.

Stevie laughs. Then-

STEVIE (CONT'D)

By insane crazy luck I met these guys doing their own thing as they travelled around California creating music and art that challenged what sometimes feels like a corporate takeover of our country. Our minds. Our dreams. Did a story on'em. Paper rejected it. Dismissed them as, you know, crazies. Did a lot of soul-searching after that.

Stevie nods.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Yup. I looked beyond my fears, way beyond my fears, my fear of failure, my fear of gettin hurt, my fear of not being published, my fear of poverty. I looked hard and you know what I saw?

After a moment Stevie answers-

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Myself. Myself, trying to break free of this prison I had confined myself in. That kid who wanted to write for all the right reasons but had somehow lost her way.

Stevie smiles.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

I quit. Cashed everything in and asked if I could join these crazies on their journey and here I am.

Stevie faces Jami.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Here we are. Turns out they had been talkin about a trip across America for a bit but didn't have the cash to fix the bus. Gave them what I had and we fixed the bus and took off.

(Beat)

Guess by insane crazy luck it all worked out.

JAMI

Doesn't seem so fixed.

STEVIE

A lot better than it was. I know there's something in me that I need to do with all these experiences. Just not sure what it is yet.

JAMI

(Sarcastic)

Well, maybe some of that insane crazy luck will help you figure it out.

STEVIE

Who knows. Maybe there's a 'Grapes of Wrath' in me.

JAMI

Sure.

COMIC SEQUENCE BEGINS

Panel of John Steinbeck getting on a truck in the 1930s.

STEVIE (V.O.)

Steinbeck by some insane crazy luck ended up on a road trip. He had no intention of writing The Grapes of Wrath. Just wanted to see what was goin on in Oklahoma.

Panels of Steinbeck in the back of a ford gazing out at all the Oakies on the side of the road.

(MORE)

STEVIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Well he was so disturbed by what he saw that he wrote his book in about two weeks as the story goes.

Panels of Steinbeck FURIOUSLY writing The Grapes of Wrath.

Published it a month later. Didn't really sell. Wasn't really successful.

No one reading Steinbeck's book. Stack of books at a store.

Then by insane crazy luck the book ended up in Eleanor Roosevelt's hands.

Panels of Eleanor Roosevelt reading The Grapes of Wrath.
Panels of Eleanor Roosevelt recommending 'The Grapes of Wrath' to all Americans.

She said in one of her speeches it was a book all Americans had to read and it accused corporations and banks of orchestrating the depression for profit.

Panel of Bankers stealing land from farmers much like they stole homes from people in Detroit.

Well, the banks and corporations were so upset and so fearful of this one book that they tried to discredit Steinbeck.

Panel of Bankers hiring the best writer of the time to write a counter-novel to challenge the new story that had galvanized America: 'The Grapes of Gladness.'

When that didn't work they hired one of the best writers of the time who's name is forgotten to write a counter novel to 'The Grapes of Wrath' which they called 'The Grapes of Gladness.'

END OF COMIC BOOK SEQUENCE

Jami laughs.

JAMI
(Skeptical)
The Grapes of Gladness!

STEVIE

That's the god's honest truth. One story opened so many eyes and hearts. Not sure a book like that would ever be published today.

Qwonee strums a Victor Jarra tune.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Your dad's right. The story is everything.

EXT. INDIA - THE PAST - DAWN

Sanjay and his father sit in an alley reading the Superman comic.

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

But the bad people in Metropolis didn't count on one thing. An American from another planet was watching them. He wasn't going to let them give his new country a bad name. So-

Sanjay interrupts him.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled))

How come the pictures are the same but the story always changes?

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

You think so?

Sanjay nods.

RAM (CONT'D)

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

My English is not so good.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

Will I see Superman in America?

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

I hope so.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Will we be able to read whatever we
 want?

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Whatever we want.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Will we be able to walk on any
 path.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Any path.

SANJAY
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Will we be able to go in the
 temple?

Ram nods his head.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Will we be able to send for Mama?

Ram goes silent. He changes the subject. He still hasn't found the courage to tell Sanjay his mother was murdered by the Indian police.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Let me finish the story.

Ram clears his throat and begins a new story with the same old Superman comic. Ram has no idea what the text says. Every version of the story is different for young Sanjay.

INT. MINI-BUS, HOLLYWOOD BLVD - NIGHT

The mini-bus sits parked on the side of the boulevard. The Hulkster stands outside talking to a bunch of actors dressed up as Superheroes.

Sanjay and Jami and Stevie watch him from inside. Nearby on the sidewalk Qwonee tries to make some money with yet a Victor Jarra tune. Violeta and Isabella sell their paintings and photos beside him.

SANJAY
(Staring at Hulkster)
You think he'll get the part?

STEVIE
I hope he does.

JAMI
He hasn't spoken since the
audition?

STEVIE
Nope.

JAMI
What's he doing now?

STEVIE
Writing.

JAMI
He can write but not talk.

STEVIE
That's right.

Hulkster returns with paper. Stevie regards this.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
This is outside of LA. Sure this is
the right address?

Hulkster nods.

INT. MINI-BUS, DAVE RICHIE'S RANCH - DUSK

Sanjay and the gang drive out into the outskirts of L.A. They eventually pull into a dirt road, follow it down and come to a gated ranch.

STEVIE
Just an ordinary neighbourhood.

JAMI
(Gazing at the
neighbourhood through the
window)
What the hell is he doin out here?
Way out in the middle of no where.

STEVIE
Living life on his terms.

The bus idles by the gate. Sanjay disembarks.

OUTSIDE

Sanjay walks over to the gate. Presses the doorbell. Looks up into a security camera.

The camera moves to focus in on Sanjay.

SANJAY
Open please.

RICHIE (V.O.)
Who are you?

SANJAY
You have a comic I would like to buy.

RICHIE (V.O.)
This ain't a comic shop. Leave.

Sanjay just stands there. He waits. After a while-

RICHIE (V.O.)
Please. Leave.

SANJAY
I'm staying till you let us in.

RICHIE (V.O.)
You'll be stayin a long time.

LATER

Jami walks out of the bus. Heads to his father who stands in front of the gate staring up at the camera.

JAMI
Come on, dad. We need to go.

SANJAY
He wants to let us in. I can sense it.

JAMI
No, he doesn't.

SANJAY
The universe just wants to know if I'm willing to wait.

JAMI
 No, Dad. It doesn't. The
 universe... the universe doesn't
 care about some damn comic. You
 ain't getting through that gate.

SANJAY
 Smoking mirrors....

JAMI
 (Sigh)
 Smoke AND Mirrors. You ain't gettin
 in and we need to leave.

Jami turns around to find everyone walking out of the bus to
 join his father.

JAMI (CONT'D)
 What are you doing?

STEVIE
 Waiting with your dad.

JAMI
 Waiting for what?

STEVIE
 For the gate to open.

JAMI
 He's not gonna open it!

STEVIE
 Let's just see what happens.

With a sigh Jami gets on the bus. To his mind there's no way
 Dave Richie is gonna open his gate for a bunch of gypsies and
 an old man who wants to buy a worthless Superman comic. Yet-

Those 'gypsies' build a little fire in front of the gate.
 They camp out. Qwon strums his guitar. He begins to play-

'The Death of Emit Till'.

SUDDENLY the intercom comes to life.

RICHIE (V.O.)
 What's that?

STEVIE
 What?

RICHIE (V.O.)
 That tune.

RICHIE

Ask the British about the Irish. They'll tell ya. Toughest people to control. Couldn't screw around or change their history, which is exactly what you need to do to control a people. And why not the Irish? Simple. Their history, their culture, their beliefs all in songs and limericks.

SANJAY

Like Sikhs.

RICHIE

That a fact?

Sanjay nods.

SANJAY

Many songs. Songs like good magic for the soul.

RICHIE

Good magic. Nice way to put it. Irish sang songs every day at the church and bars. Songs that united them and made'em strong. Gave them a good idea of themselves. A good image. Observing this. Learning from this, the British and the powers-that-be figured if songs could empower they could probably do the opposite.

SANJAY

Baeffkoof.

Richie gives him a baffled look. He clearly doesn't know what this means. Jami explains.

JAMI

(Explaining)
Black magic.

Richie repeats the word and smiles. He likes it.

RICHIE

Baeffkoof. Songs that divide and destroy. Focus on ego, not community. Focus on greed, not charity.

Richie's young five-year-old boy walks in, observes the strangers then sits with his dad.

 RICHIE (CONT'D)

Lots of baeffkoof now in the mainstream. You want proof. Just observe the gap between Public Enemy and the shit they're calling rap today. Talent's there. Talent's definitely there. Love the beats and tunes. Love'em. But not the message. Some serious baeffkoof for young blacks and women if you ask me.

Richie grows reflective.

 RICHIE (CONT'D)

They were doing the same shit with TV and that was the line for me.

 (Meditative)

That was the line for me.

 JAMI

Media said you went crazy.

 RICHIE

Of course they did. Call me crazy, so it's easier to accept why I'd turn down all that cash. People don't listen to crazy people, that's why they call'em crazy.

Richie holds his boy close.

 RICHIE (CONT'D)

I ain't crazy. I don't know. I guess you can say my dad gave me some good advice when I was a kid and I followed it.

A long silence. Stevie breaks the silence-

 STEVIE

Hulkster here wants to be an actor and he's your number one fan.

Hulkster throws him a thumbs up but doesn't say anything.

 RICHIE

Well, he's definitely in character. He ain't said shit all night.

His son looks up at him for swearing.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
 (To his son for swearing)
 Sorry.

 STEVIE
 (Explaining)
 Deal with the universe. He stays
 silent until he hears back from an
 audition and the universe helps him
 out.

 RICHIE
 Deal with the universe is one
 thing... deal with the devil is
 another.

 STEVIE
 Any advice for an aspiring actor?

Richie takes a moment to think about this. Then he advises
 the Hulkster-

 RICHIE
 Same advice my dad gave me. Don't
 lose yourself in the game and know
 the line. Know what it is you won't
 do to be a star. That's just as
 important as knowing what you're
 willing to do. I wanted it bad man,
 but there was a line I wouldn't
 cross. When they wanted me to do
 shows and skits to hurt my
 community, to undermine them...
 that was the line for me. I'm
 supposed to be an inspiration and
 they want that inspiration to
 perpetuate a lie. Bullshit.

 (To his son)
 Sorry.

 (To the gang)
 No way. Dad didn't raise a sell-
 out. Anyway. Fuck it.

 (To his son)
 Sorry.

 (To the gang)
 Made enough money to do my own
 shows and my shows ain't the
 baeffkoof kind. I'm all about the
 good magic, man.

 (Peering at the Hulkster)
 Know the line.

He turns to Sanjay. Peers at him.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

So Superman. 61. You're like the second person who asked for it this week. What's up with that comic?

SANJAY

Can I see it?

RICHIE

You're fresh outta luck, brother. Gave it to Geoff Johns my buddy down at the Fortress of Superheroes in Burbank. When I told him I was goin to the convention he asked me to pick it up for him if I found it. Am I missing something? What's so important about that comic?

JAMI

Nothing.

SANJAY

(Defeated)

Doesn't matter.

RICHIE

I can give you some other Superman stuff. Stuff worth a lot more.

Sanjay shakes his head.

STEVIE

(To Richie)

Superman fan?

RICHIE

Dam right. Original Supermans were some true shit.

(To his son)

Sorry.

(To the gang)

None of these aliens and robots and leprechaun nonsense that make no sense to normal Americans.

Originals were all about real enemies that made sense to real Americans. The original Supermans now that's some good magic right there. When Superman first began he had 3 enemies. 3. The white knights in dirty laundry. Corrupt politicians. And greedy bankers and industrialists. That's it. That's all.

(MORE)

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Personally I think one of the reasons he's not as popular anymore is cause his enemies are all over the place. Superman's lost his magic. Green lantern, too. This is my favorite.

(Pulls out a Green Lantern comic)

In it the Green Lantern is challenged by a black man to help America against... well... corrupt politicians, industrialists and a buncha intolerant red necks in suits. So Lantern and Arrow go on a trip across America to make a difference.

Stevie grabs Green Lantern/Arrow Vol 1. No Evil Shall Escape my Sight, and leafs through the pages. It's a journey that almost parallels her own. Coincidence? Insane crazy luck? Synchronicity? All of the above!

STEVIE

Can I borrow this?

RICHIE

Nah.

Richie smiles at Stevie.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

You can have it. I've got forty.

(Beat)

Be careful with that. That's some real powerful American magic in your hands. Good magic. Not...

Winks and smiles at Sanjay.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

(To Sanjay)

What's that word again.

SANJAY

Baeffkoof.

RICHIE

Yeah. That ain't no baeffkoof.

INT. BUS, BACK TO LA - DAWN

Isabella drives. Stevie leafs through her new comic. Jami and Sanjay sit together in a seat. Sanjay gazes out the window at the slowly waking world.

STEVIE
 (Without taking her eyes
 off the comic)
 One cool guy.

Sanjay stares out the window. Isabella gazes at Sanjay through the rearview mirror.

ISABELLA
 Let's say we head to the Fortress
 of Superheroes.

Sanjay nods and grins. Stevie smiles and looks up at Isabella staring at Sanjay through the rearview mirror as she takes an exit to Burbank, California. Jami sighs.

EXT. SWEET STORE, INDIA - THE PAST - DAWN

Ram stares at a man sitting in front of his sweet store from an alley with Sanjay standing in the shadows behind him. He goes to talk to a baker. Sanjay stays put. Watches his dad.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 I am lookin for passage. To
 America.

BAKER
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Don't know what you mean?

The baker gives him a look of disgust, sensing Ram might be a low caste.

RAM
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 Don't look at me like this.

BAKER
 (In Hindi, Subtitled)
 What's your last name?

RAM
 Singh.

BAKER
 Singh?

He looks Sanjay over.

BAKER (CONT'D)
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
You're real last name?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
That is my real last name.

Ram refuses to answer. He knows that if he tells this man he's a low caste he won't get passage to America. He might even have Ram beaten for talking to him.

BAKER
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
One thousand. American.

Ram's eyes go wide. He didn't expect a ticket to be that much.

BAKER (CONT'D)
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Money must be changed first. Need
it by tonight for next passage.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Thank you.

BAKER
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
See you soon, Singh.

EXT. BURBANK SUPERHERO STUDIO, GATE - DUSK

Hulkster and Jami and Sanjay stand before the gate of the Superhero Studio in Burbank, California. A guard scrutinizes Sanjay's driver's license.

GUARD
Does Geoff Johns know you're
coming?

SANJAY
No.

GUARD
You can't just show up and ask for
Geoff Johns.

SANJAY
Why?

GUARD

Cause... he's Geoff Johns.

JAMI

Thank you. We're going now.

Jami pulls his dad away from the gate.

JAMI (CONT'D)

What did you think? He'd just let you in?

SANJAY

I'll try later.

Jami laughs.

JAMI

Dad. Stop. Stop this right now. This is ridiculous. Geoff Johns is not opening his door to some old man for some obscure comic. He's just not.

Sanjay steps onto the bus, refusing to be negative or respond to Jami's negativity.

Jami stands outside the bus a moment feeling frustrated and helpless. He shakes his head and scrunches his teeth.

INT. MINI-BUS, RESTAURANT BAR PARKING LOT, LA - LATER

Stevie parks the mini-bus in an open parking lot.

STEVIE

Let's get food and make a plan.

EXT. MINI-BUS, RESTAURANT BAR PARKING LOT, LA - LATER

The 'crazies' walk out into the parking lot. Sanjay carries his satchel bag with him.

JAMI

Dad. We're going home.

Sanjay continues to walk.

SANJAY

You go home.

Jami grabs his arm.

JAMI
Not without you.

SANJAY
I'm goin for food, then my comic.

JAMI
Will you listen to yourself? For a comic. For a damn comic! What happened to you?

SANJAY
(Releases everything he's been keeping inside this whole trip)
No! What happened to you! You used to want things! Real things! You used to want them bad enough that you'd cry and get angry for them. You used to believe you could do everything. Have everything! Nothing was impossible! Now... now you can't even have lunch.

Qwonee begins to strum his guitar in front of the ally. A homeless man of Latino origin likes what he hears.

The homeless man stands and peers at Qwonee. Smiles. Doesn't say anything. Just waits for the music.

Jami grabs Sanjay by the arm, pleading for him to come with him.

JAMI
Can you not do this, please? I'm begging you. Please. It's over.

Sanjay doesn't know what to say to his son. What he does know is that he cannot stop now even if he failed at doing what he really wanted to do on this trip: Free his son. Prevent his son from living an inauthentic life for all the wrong reasons.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Let's just go home. Please...

SANJAY
I'm sorry I lost our money. I'm sorry I failed you.

JAMI
Not this again. Let's do this another time.

SANJAY

No. No other time. I'm sorry your mom died. I'm sorry we lost everything. I'm sorry you became so scared of life that you would lose you lost your kingdom at such a young age.

(Regretful)

But I didn't realize what was happening. I didn't. If I did I would have taken you on trip like this long ago.

Jami shakes his head.

White men in suits [5] walk toward the restaurant, staring at them as though they were terrorists. Two in this group have shaved heads reminiscent of skinheads.

JAMI

Let's not make a scene. Please.
Let's just get out of here.

Sanjay peers into Jami's eyes.

SANJAY

No. Let's make a scene! We don't make enough of'em!

Jami doesn't respond. Sanjay makes a silent wish to the universe. Wishing his son the courage to be himself again.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

I want you back, kiddo. I want you back and I'll do anything for that.

JAMI

So let's go home and talk.

SANJAY

My only job as parent was to protect your kingdom and I failed and I'm sorry. But you need to remember and you need to believe... cause I won't always be around to remind you.

JAMI

(Frustrated)
Remind me? Remind me of what?

SANJAY

(Holding back his emotion,
but feeling every word)
(MORE)

SANJAY (CONT'D)

Remind you that you're bigger than that fuckin suit. You're bigger than what they make you do for a few dollars. Your bigger than your fears. And if you can know that you can have it all. You can have it all back.

JAMI

What are you talking about? Dad, what the hell are you talking about? You're not making sense. Have what back?

SANJAY

Your kingdom.

(Beat)

We used to talk for hours about what you would do and what you would draw growing up. And then... they got you. They did. You became scared. And because you became scared they got you. All of you. Your time. Your focus. Your magic. And they got all that and for what? Smoking mirrors.

JAMI

No dad. That's not what happened. You want to know what happened.

(Beat))

I grew up. That's all that happened. I grew up.

SANJAY

No. Not grow up. Opposite of grow up. Grow down.

(Beat)

Believe it, don't believe it, this world is magic, kiddo. Magic.

(Beat)

This world is magic and you can have whatever you want and you can be whatever you want so long as you stay true to this-

Sanjay places his hand on his son's heart. Jami looks down at the hand.

JAMI

(Sarcastically)

Magic.

Jami removes the hand.

SANJAY

(Firm)
Magic.

JAMI

Again, your magic. Same fuckin
magic that got us in this mess!

SANJAY

There are only two ways to see this
world. Either everything is magic
or nothing is. You choose what you
see.

(Beat)

I'm gonna get that comic with or
without you.

JAMI

Without.

SANJAY

I'm sorry.

JAMI

Gonna call a friend. And I'm gonna
get the hell out of here!

With these words Sanjay hands him the satchel his mother had
made for him long ago in India.

SANJAY

Not completely lost, is it?

Sanjay turns and walks toward the restaurant.

Jami watches his dad walk off, then he opens the bag. Looks
inside and finds to his amazement-

A scrapbook of all his doodles from work and home throughout
the years. Some have clearly been pulled out of the garbage
and preserved by his dad.

The comic art is actually quite incredible!

Jami is in fact an incredible artist. He stares at a picture
he drew of his father driving the Superwagon. Jami sighs as
Sanjay passes Qwonee and walks into the restaurant.

JAMI

Fuck!

Jami walks away. Passes the bus. Takes one last look at the
restaurant and sees a homeless man now dancing to Qwonee's
music.

EXT. DOCKS, INDIA- THE PAST - NIGHT

Sanjay stares up at Ram who is holding the comic and the duffle bag his mother had made for him.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Why?

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
There is only room for one.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
I won't leave you.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
You never will.
(Beat)
One day you will understand.

Sanjay shakes his head violently. He does not want to leave his dad.

RAM (CONT'D)
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Hey. Please. I made a wish when you were born and the world listened.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
And I wish you would come!

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
I know. But I am with you wherever you are... wherever you go. Do you believe that?

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Like mama.

Ram nods.

RAM
(In Hindi, Subtitled)
Don't let anyone ever look down on you. Don't let anyone make you believe you cannot do the things you want to do in life. Sky's the limit.

(MORE)

RAM (CONT'D)

No one or nothing of this world can stop you. Nothing. Only you can stop you. Listen to me. Listen to me carefully because this is the most important thing you will ever know.

(Beat)

The world is magic and thoughts and beliefs are more powerful than you think.

The Baker approaches them silently, waiting for Ram to say his final good-bye to Sanjay.

Sanjay, sensing this will be the last time he sees his father, embraces his father and begins to cry, mumbling through his pain that he does not want to leave.

SANJAY

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

Please... no...

Ram embraces him tighter.

SANJAY (CONT'D)

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

Please papa... come! Just come!

RAM

(In Hindi, Subtitled, in a defeated whisper)

I can't...

BAKER

(In Hindi, Subtitled)

We must go now.

A tear slips down Ram's face. Ram pushes away whispering something into Sanjay's ear. He places the Superman comic number 61 into the satchel his mother made. Gives it to Sanjay. The Baker pulls the boy away.

Father and son's eyes never leave one another as Sanjay is led onto a cargo ship.

INT. RESTAURANT BAR, L.A - LATER

A group of white men in suits at a table, drinking beer, making racist jokes, staring at Sanjay and the rest of the gang sitting at the table. Two of these men resemble skinheads in suits. These are clearly the men who passed by Sanjay and Jami earlier.

What Stevie and the others don't realize is they've walked into a white supremacist resto-bar and they're getting a lot of looks which they're completely oblivious to.

SANJAY

What's the plan?

STEVIE

Sources tell me they keep all the comics in a thing called 'The Vault.' That's where they're keepin your comic.

SANJAY

People are staring. They know what we're up to.

STEVIE

(Dismissive)

No, no. They always stare. Especially when you've got a Hulkster.

Sanjay seems satisfied with this answer.

VIOLETA

A vault?

ISABELLA

Inside the Fortress of Superheroes?

STEVIE

Yup.

Qwonee enters as the white supremacists in suits exit. They stare him down. He stares at them back. He finds his place with his buddies.

QWON

Not a dime.

STEVIE

We haven't even been served so maybe we should leave.

Qwonee looks around. Everyone staring at them. Not sure why they're in their bar. A waitress, sighs and begins to make her way to their table. A white supremacist band takes the stage and calibrates their instruments.

QWON

We even supposed to be in here?

STEVIE
She's about to let us know.

WAITRESS
Don't know if you noticed but this
is kinda a private club.

A long silence.

STEVIE
Didn't see the sign.

WAITRESS
No sign.

STEVIE
Then it's not a private club.

WAITRESS
You'll be sittin here a while.

The band begins to sing a song--

"White America Forever" a derivative work of the original
song, "White Canada Forever."

Hearing the lyrics, Hulkster stands, marches forward, wanting
to do something but Stevie grabs his shoulder, stopping him.
Stevie stands beside him. The others follow suit.

Stevie considers their options, then says-

STEVIE
Not worth it, Hulkster. Not worth
it.

Hulkster makes his way out. Sanjay follows. But the others
stare at the band and listen to 'White America Forever' in
mingled disbelief and disgust.

OUTSIDE

Hulkster walks out of the resto-bar to find the five red
necks in business suits humiliating the homeless man.
Surrounding him. Kicking him in the ass. Pushing him.
Throwing pennies at his feet.

Hulkster stares at them, and-

Breaks his vow of silence! With a roar-

HULKSTER
Get away from him!

Sanjay stares curiously at Hulkster, then, finding courage, takes a few steps forward, stands beside him, puffs out his chest, and-

SANJAY

Pick on someone your own size!

The red necks turn to regard them.

SKINHEAD1

Will you look at the shit they let
into our country?

Skinhead1 walks up to Hulkster. Faces him.

Seizing the opportunity, the homeless man makes a run for it. The other Skinheads make to go catch him but-

SKINHEAD1 (CONT'D)

Forget him! We've got ourselves a
Green Man to take care of.

Skinhead1 walks right up to the Hulkster to stare him down.

SANJAY

Leave him alone.

SKINHEAD1

And pick on someone my own size.
Like you?

SANJAY

No. Like a worm.

Hulkster laughs. Skinheads laugh. Suddenly-

Skinhead1 punches the Hulkster in the face.

The Hulkster goes flying through the air and to the ground. Sanjay rushes to his aid. The Hulkster slowly pulls off his mask to reveal a proud Black face.

SKINHEAD1

What the hell is that! Shit! Think
I preferred the green skin.

Hulkster stands.

Sanjay walks up to the Skinhead1 and stares him in the eyes.

SKINHEAD1 (CONT'D)

Watch it old man.

SANJAY
 You're a disgrace. To all
 Americans!

Skinhead1 Laughs to his friends. Turns to them. Then he reaches back and punches Sanjay hard in the face. Sanjay scrambles back to the pavement holding a busted nose.

Hulkster steps forward to face the skinhead leader.

SKINHEAD1
 What? Haven't had enough?

The Hulkster smiles defiantly.

HULKSTER
 You better kill me. Cause I'll keep
 gettin back up.

Skinhead1 laughs and punches him again.

Again the Hulkster flies and ends up next to Sanjay. Hulkster goes to stand to take another punch but Sanjay holds him back.

SANJAY
 (Through his pain)
 My turn.

Sanjay stands and walks up to the skinhead, blood gushing from his nose.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
 That all you got, worm?

Skinhead1 laughs. Shrugs. Regards all his minions. Then punches Sanjay.

Just as Sanjay falls back-

The Hulkster gets back up and stands before Skinhead1, waiting with pure defiance in his eyes.

Skinhead2 walks up to Skinhead1, whispers something in his ears. Puts something in his hands. Brass-knuckles.

Skinhead1 wraps the brass-knuckles around his fists. Smiles. Punches the Hulkster.

The Hulkster flies back. Lands on the ground beside Sanjay. After a moment her says-

HULKSTER
 Holy shit. That one really hurt.

SANJAY

Let's see.

Sanjay stands and walks up to him. Gets a punch in his face and goes down.

Hulkster, staggering, barely able to stand. Barely able to see or talk-

HULKSTER

Even with the brass advantage you ain't shit!

Hulkster laughs.

Skinhead laughs.

HULKSTER (CONT'D)

Now you givin up or are you actually gonna kill us.

With these words-

Skinhead1 loses it. Rushes the Hulkster while punching him in the face with his brass knuckles.

Sanjay tries to help him but the other Skinheads take him down and give him a boot party.

Stevie walks out of the resto-bar and, spotting the modern-day lynching, yells-

STEVIE

Call the police! Call the fuckin police!

The skinheads get off Sanjay and the Hulkster and leave them both unconscious on the pavement of the parking lot.

Sanjay's eyes close.

INT. CARGO SHIP - PAST, TO AMERICA - NIGHT

Young Sanjay stares at something with watery eyes. His comic. The one his father used to 'read' to him every night to fill his soul with strength, courage and hope.

All around him, other Indians sit, all of them looking for a better opportunity in America.

Sanjay stares at Superman. He flips to a page where his father wrote something in Hindi, Subtitled.

Soon his eyes begin to tear. He closes them. Falls asleep. A tear slips down his face.

INT. STATE HOSPITAL - LATER

Jami rushes through the brightly lit hallway. Reaches the desk. Asks-

JAMI
(Urgent)
Sanjay Sudha!? Sudha! Sanjay!

Doctor approaches him.

DOCTOR
Are you related to Mr. Sudha.

JAMI
He's my father.

DOCTOR
He took quite a beating but that's not what I'm concerned about.

JAMI
What? What else is there?

DOCTOR
I can't believe he made it all the way to California. By all the tests he shouldn't be... I'm not sure how to say this...

JAMI
What are you talkin about?

LATER

SANJAY'S ROOM

Jami walks in with a look of sheer terror on his face.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Dad... did you know?

Sanjay nods.

Jami nods. Bites his lower lip. Holds back his tears.

JAMI (CONT'D)
So they say you're gonna need treatment but that won't... that won't...

Sanjay shakes his head.

SANJAY
No treatment.

JAMI
Why didn't you tell me? They're
amazed your still breathing.

SANJAY
Insane crazy luck.

JAMI
(Choked with tears)
Yeah.

SANJAY
(Defeated)
Did you get help? We goin home?

JAMI
Turns out... turns out I don't
really have many friends.
(Grabs his father's hand,
holds it tightly)
And I'm about to lose my only real
friend in this fuckin world.

SANJAY
Not 'fuckin' world. Please... not
fuckin world... magic world...
magic.

JAMI
Magic.

A long silence.

JAMI (CONT'D)
What is it with that comic?

Sanjay stares at Jami hard. He just shrugs.

SANJAY
One day you'll understand.

Sanjay smiles, then loses his smile.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
It doesn't matter anymore.

Jami nods at his dad. He considers. Builds up courage. Then-

JAMI
Fuck it!

He reaches over and grabs his dad. Scoops him up from the bed.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Come on! We're gettin on the fuckin
bus and we're gettin that fuckin
comic...

Carries his dad toward the door.

JAMI (CONT'D)
...even if I'm gonna end up in jail
for the rest of my god damn life!
There gonna give me that fuckin
comic!

Sanjay smiles. Tears slip down his face.

SANJAY
That's my boy!

Jami carried Sanjay out the door into the waiting room where the others sit.

Stevie pops her head in the Hulkster's room.

Hulkster has his mask pulled over a massively swollen face as he lies in bed. The mask only goes half way.

HULKSTER
What's happenin?

STEVIE
We're doing it.

HULKSTER
Help me out.

She helps him out of his bed.

HULKSTER (CONT'D)
Get me a phone. We're gonna need
some help.

OUTSIDE

The exit doors.

The exit doors smash open and Jami, carrying his dad, rushes through with the whole posse behind him.

EXT. FORTRESS OF SUPERHEROES, STUDIO 7, BURBANK - LATER

The bus pulls in. Everyone disembarks and stares through the gated Fortress of Superheroes.

JAMI
What do we do?

HULKSTER
Wait.

JAMI
For what?

HULKSTER
Friends.

LATER

Hulkster paces around. Waits.

JAMI
You sure they're coming?

HULKSTER
They're comin.

An old van pulls in. Everyone stares at it, waiting to see who walks out. After a dramatic moment- in slow-mo-

Wonder-woman Street Performer, Batman Street Performer, and Superman Street Performer step out. All friends of Hulkster.

Hulkster quickly struggles to pull his mask down more without success.

SANJAY
(Dumbfounded)
The Trinity.

HULKSTER
That's right.

WONDER-WOMAN
We heard about your plight. Thought you could use an assist.

SUPERMAN
Friends of Hulkster are friends of ours.

Batman stares them over a long while.

BATMAN
I don't trust'em.

WONDER-WOMAN
Of course you don't.

HULKSTER
Listen Bruce, we don't have time
for background checks.

BATMAN
Dude! My secret identity.

SUPERMAN
How we gettin in?

Batman gives Jami and Sanjay a suspicious look. Then he gives everyone kid walkie talkies.

BATMAN
It's all I could find at this time.
(Beat)
Sources tell me Geoff Johns is
still in the office. Which means we
find him we find the comic. I'll
lead you two. Wonder Woman and
Superman will lead the distraction
team, leading the five guards to
the other end of the studio. That
should give us time to get the
comic and skedaddle to safety. We
clear.

JAMI
Batman would never say 'skedaddle.'

BATMAN
(Ignoring his comment)
We clear?

JAMI
Clear.

Sanjay nods.

Sanjay loses himself in a coughing fit.

BATMAN
Sure he'll able to do this? Maybe
he should stay behind.

Jami crouches. Sanjay embraces his son. Jami carries him on his back.

JAMI
He's comin!

BATMAN
I'm skeptical.

WONDER-WOMAN
Of course you are.

Carrying Sanjay on his back, Jami follows Batman along the gate until they reach an opening. They follow him through the opening. Then across a parking lot to a building.

BATMAN
This is the main office.
(Contacts Superman)
In position, Batman out.

SUPERMAN (V.O.)
(On Walkie talkie)
About to initiate delta omega.

Superman POV. Superman and Wonder-woman and Hulkster stare at five guards playing video games.

Just as Superman makes to get their attention-

STEVIE
What are you doing?

SUPERMAN
Initiating delta omega.

STEVIE
They're playing video games. Job done. They're distracted.

SUPERMAN
We'll see.

Superman goes to distract them.

Stevie holds him back.

STEVIE
I'm serious. Don't. Just let them be. We're good.

SUPERMAN
For now.

Batman POV.

Batman picks the lock on the office door. After some fiddling he opens the door.

BATMAN

Follow this hall all the way down.
At the end you'll reach the vault.
If they're keeping your comic
anywhere, that's where it is.

JAMI

Where you going?

BATMAN

Gettin some insurance.

THE VAULT

Jami and Sanjay approach the vault. They walk through halls lined with comics.

GEOFF JOHNS OFFICE

Batman finds Geoff Johns in his office listening to music, working on the plot of a comic. Batman takes a moment, then rushes him. Slams Geoff against the floor. His headphones going flying off.

GEOFF JOHNS

What the fuck!

BATMAN

Where is it?!

JEFF JOHNS

Where's what?!

Batman slams him against a desk.

BATMAN

Where?!

GEOFF JOHNS

What are you talkin about?

Batman goes to hit him again, but Jeff ducks and tackles him. Takes Batman's arm and twists it. Soon-

Batman taps out.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)

What the fuck you doin in my
office!

BATMAN
The comic. Where's the comic?

GEOFF JOHNS
Comic?! Which one?

Batman thinks about it, then-

BATMAN
I'm not sure.

GEOFF JOHNS
I'm callin the police.

Geoff grabs his cell phone. Makes a call.

Superman'S POV.

The guards continue to play their video game. One guard gets a call from Geoff. Startled, he shuts the game off and shouts at everyone to get to the Vault.

SUPERMAN
Great Krypton! They're busted!

A guard creeps up behind them.

GUARD
So are you!

WONDER-WOMAN
I thought Batman said five guards.

GUARD
Try seven. Don't try it. I'd hate to taze a super hero.

Superman makes a run for it.

Guard tazes him. Superman falls to the ground and quivers.

GUARD (CONT'D)
Anyone else wanna try that?

THE VAULT

Sanjay Searches through the cabinets. Searches for the comic.

JAMI
It's not here!

SANJAY
We tried.

JAMI
Shit! Fuck!

Batman approaches them with Geoff Johns holding his arm in a powerful Ju Jit Su grip.

GEOFF JOHNS
What's going on here? This is
sacred territory?

Guards approach them from behind. Sanjay and Jami give themselves up. The Guard searches Jami. Doesn't find a wallet. Searches Sanjay. Finds his wallet. Regards it.

GUARD
Sudha. New York.

GEOFF JOHNS
Sudha. I've heard that name before.

The guards begin to escort Sanjay and Jami out the door.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
Stop!

Geoff approaches Sanjay.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
Sanjay?

Sanjay nods.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
(To the guards)
Wait. You guys go. It's okay.

GUARD
(Confused)
It's okay?

Jami shrugs at the guard. He doesn't get it either.

GEOFF JOHNS
Yeah, yeah. They're friends. Just a
misunderstanding.

The guards leave without a word.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
Wait here.

Geoff leaves and soon returns with an envelop.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
Haven't mailed it yet.

Geoff hands the envelope to Sanjay. The envelope is addressed to his name.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
I've never had someone write me so many letters for one comic.

Sanjay opens it.

Superman 61! The exact one he was looking for.

GEOFF JOHNS (CONT'D)
A friend told me he was going to Metropolis for the convention. I had told him about this fan always writing about the same comic for the last twenty years. He found it and picked up for you. Thought I'd mail it out.

(Looking at Sanjay in the eye for a long moment)
I get it.

JAMI
I don't.

Suddenly-

Sanjay collapses.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Dad!

SANJAY
I'm okay.

Sanjay sits up.

Jami sits behind him, holding his dad up so he can at last read his comic. Sanjay flips through the pages. Gets weaker and weaker so that Jami takes over for his dad, flipping the pages.

INT. CARGO SHIP - PAST, TO AMERICA - NIGHT

Hundreds of Indian immigrants on a boat. Cries. Screams. Sanjay lies on the floor reading his comic. He flips through the pages until he comes to his father's last words written in Hindi, subtitled.

JAMI (V.O.)
Dad. What does it mean?

INT. THE VAULT - MOMENTS LATER

Jami holding Sanjay in his arms, staring at the inscription over his shoulder. Sanjay can barely keep his eyes open. He smiles at his father's handwriting. His whole heart fills with love and joy as he thinks of the sacrifices his father and mother made for him. He reads it.

SANJAY
(In Hindi, Not Subtitled)
Come on, my little Superman, show
this world who you are--who you
really are.

JAMI
You're dad wrote that? He gave you
this?

Sanjay can barely nod.

SANJAY
Big hug.

Jami hugs him.

SANJAY (CONT'D)
Not big enough.

Jami hugs him tighter than he ever has in his whole life. Tears begin to stream down his face.

JAMI
I'm so sorry dad... so sorry.... I
understand...

And Sanjay, with the last of his strength, pulls his son closer to him and whispers-

SANJAY
Come on, my little Superman, show
this world who you are--who you
really are...

Sanjay issues his last breath.

JAMI
Dad? Hey dad? No. Big hug... big
hug.... please...

He breaks down in anguish hugging him tighter and tighter, not wanting to let his best friend in the whole world go.

JAMI (CONT'D)
Thank you. Thank you....

INT. CARGO SHIP- PAST, TO AMERICA - NIGHT

Sanjay, sleeping, wakes up to find his bag missing. He searches the ship frantically. Finds his bag with all contents missing. He searches around desperately. Walks outside and is suddenly taken aback by-

The Statue of Liberty.

In all its glory!

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

INT. FIRST FEDERAL BANK HEAD OFFICE, NEW YORK - MORNING

Bright lights illuminate an office with countless cubicles and men in gray suits keying away at computers. Jami draws on corporate letter. He's in a wrinkled blue suit, wearing a strange necklace. A vintage Superman necklace.

EMPLOYEE
What's all this?

JAMI
Smoking mirrors.

EMPLOYEE
You mean smoke and mirrors.

JAMI
No. Smoking mirrors.

EMPLOYEE
(Nervous)
Cool. Didn't think you could draw.

Jami says nothing, just continues to draw.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)
They're calling you over.

His manager signals him over via communicator. Jami gets up and heads to the-

MEETING ROOM

Prepares to address the suits. Then-

JAMI

So I've thought about this a long time... and I've thought of ways to maximize profit for this coming quarter.

Everyone smiles.

JAMI (CONT'D)

Gonna have to make this quick as I've got a lunch with someone special.

They look at one another strangely.

JAMI (CONT'D)

So the problem is we made loads of money but we want to show we made even more money.

(Beat)

Usually we fire those who busted their asses to make us money and usually before they've been here long enough to get company benefits. But this time I propose we do something else. Something really insane crazy. This time I propose we... we cut bonuses. Specifically, your bonuses which would save us about six million dollars in change. I know, crazy! Six million! This quarter alone. But I did the math and yeah. We're paying out way too much in bonuses for upper management. Way too much.

(Beat)

I would also like to save you another hundred grand by tendering my resignation as of now.

He begins to walk to the door to take his leave. He stops suddenly to add-

JAMI (CONT'D)

One more thing. I've already mailed this proposal to head office and media outlets even if it means you sue the living shit out of me. Even if you do sue me... I don't really give a shit.

Jami smiles.

JAMI (CONT'D)

No American deserves to be put on the street especially when the company they worked for made a profit. And if that will be all, I'd like to wish you all a very good life as I begin mine.

Stevie searches for him in the maze of cubicles. Jami exits with all managers staring at him in stunned disbelief. Jami and Stevie exit the building together.

FADE OUT

THE END