

**SHORT FUSE**

by

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FADE IN:

INT - APARTMENT - DAY

A fifth-floor walk up on the West Side of NYC. Dingy and poky, the only concession to decorating is Islamic calligraphy art on the walls and Persian rugs on the floors.

Sunlight streams through an open window illuminating the strained features of TOBY, late 20s, unkempt greasy ginger hair and long beard.

Twitchy fingers, nails bitten to the quick guide a mouse over internet search results -

*Top Ten Tips for looking after your mental health during Isolation. Quarantine the easy way. Beat loneliness during ISO. Virtual Dating and Sex.*

The mouse stops on -

*Online Pandemic Counselling - No Waiting!*

Head in his hands, Toby sighs. He slumps in his seat, looks with disgust at the roll of belly fat spilling over his pajama pants.

Muttering something indecipherable he clicks on the link.

The familiar chime of a Skype-ringtone.

JUDY GOLDBERG, late 60s, appears onscreen seated behind an oak desk. A name plaque reads: *J. Goldberg, Psychotherapist.*

Heavy make-up, bouffant hair, matching red lips and nails and dripping in gold bling she hurriedly extinguishes a cigarette, waving away a haze of smoke.

JUDY

(Long Island accent)

Darling, good afternoon.

Toby reels back in his chair at the sight of her.

TOBY

Hi. Um... hello. Um, I'm actually ringing on behalf of a friend...

JUDY

Save the snaffle, darling, I can read you in my sleep.

Toby looks as if he's about to abort. For a moment nobody says anything.

JUDY  
How about I get things started?  
Whaddya' say?

Toby nods.

JUDY  
I'll talk, you listen.

TOBY  
Um, okay.

JUDY  
So, you're depressed, am I right?

TOBY  
Bit down in the dumps, yeah.

JUDY  
Feeling lonely?

TOBY  
Bit, yeah.

JUDY  
Lost your job, your connections?

TOBY  
At a bit of a loose end, yeah.

JUDY  
Join the club, sweetheart. World's  
a scary place and people just  
cottoned onto the fact it can all  
combust in a split second.

Toby's eyes well with tears -

TOBY  
I feel like I've lost my purpose -

JUDY  
Of course you do. Look, doll, I  
could give you a big spiel about  
how intrinsically linked your self-  
worth is to what you do for a  
living - how nobody is as good as  
you at what you do, am I right?

TOBY

Well, yeah...

JUDY

But that'd be BS. Lemme guess...  
You was always a high achiever.  
Before all this you was top of your  
game. You were going to set the  
world on fire, am I right?

QUICK FLASH TO DINGY BACK BEDROOM:

Toby tinkering with electronic wires, a battery pack, various  
chemicals and flammable paraphernalia.

BACK TO SCENE:

TOBY

Wow, you're really good at this.

Judy waves a hand in modesty, bats her eyelashes. Toby, not  
sure if it's a tic or a come-on looks away.

JUDY

Whole different ball-game now  
though, huh?

Toby nods solemnly.

JUDY

You're thinking what the hell do I  
do with my life?

TOBY

I failed to complete an assignment.

The tears threaten once more.

TOBY

It was... really important. My  
principle courier was grounded and  
my men were stranded at the  
airport. It was going to be my  
life's work, with great reward.

JUDY

Ha! I could write the script in my  
sleep.

Judy lights another cigarette, takes a drag, reaches for a  
sneaky drink under the desk.

JUDY

You thought you were the chosen one.

TOBY

I was number-one in my field, my recruiting efforts were unrivalled. I'd built a strong following -

FLASH TO:

A black flag of ISIS adorns the dining-room wall.

BACK TO SCENE:

JUDY

I'm sure you did.

TOBY

And then everyone disappeared. Literally.

FLASH TO LIGHTNING-QUICK IMAGES OF -

Times Square, Central Park, The Brooklyn Bridge and Grand Central Terminal. All deserted.

TOBY

It was a coordinated effort, months of careful planning, reconnaissance, logistics.

JUDY

A tough gig without an audience.

TOBY

Impossible. My reward was going to be heavenly, and then -

JUDY

And then just like that your hopes your ambitions, your life's work, it all just went boom!

Judy claps her hands together for emphasis. Toby jumps.

TOBY

You could say that... But, uh, no. Not exactly.

JUDY

Here's what you do, doll. You find yourself a bigger and better cause. Reassess your life. Be the new you!

TOBY

Oh, I don't know about that... I'm quite stuck in my ways.

JUDY

Listen up. This is a wake-up call for everyone. Whole world's been sleepwalking, dontcha' see? You think after all this people are going to change? Piffle.

Judy waves a finger at the screen.

JUDY

Thing is, you can!

TOBY

But I thought I'd already found my life's purpose -

JUDY

Toby, Toby, Toby. Adapt and change. From whence I sit you're the one wearing the pajamas in the middle of the day. Am I right?

Toby looks down, notices a chocolate-sauce stain on his pajama top, idly picks at it.

JUDY

You've tried bettering yourself, am I right?

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- In the KITCHEN, Toby takes batches of banana muffins from the oven. Breathes in their fresh baked scent.

- In the LOUNGE ROOM, a Youtube episode of Yoga with Adriene plays on a big-screen TV - Toby tries awkwardly to adopt a downward-dog pose, falls over.

- In the BEDROOM, Toby, pen poised over a notepad. A blank page below the heading: GRATEFULNESS JOURNAL.

JUDY

And that's great. But you need a new gig. A new audience. All you gotta do is think: how can my current skill-set transfer to a new opportunity?

Toby looks dubious.

JUDY

Everyone's scared of change, Toby.

EXT. APARTMENT - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Toby sets a dozen home-made incendiary shells in formation at the edge of the building, double-checks wires running from each mortar. A satisfied look on his face.

INT. APARTMENT - BALCONY - MINUTES LATER

Toby takes a cell-phone from his pocket.

A timer appears on the screen.

10 seconds...

Counting down...

A loud BANG!

The sky lights up with fireworks.

One by one occupants of the adjoining apartments cautiously step out onto their balconies.

JUDY (V.O.)

I think you have a very bright future ahead of you, darling. And I think you'll be fabulous.

Toby glances to the balcony of the next-door apartment. His eyes meet those of a YOUNG BOY, 5, hoisted upon his FATHER'S shoulders, face lit up like a Christmas tree, as he takes in the spectacle of the pyrotechnics as they fill the night sky.

FADE OUT.