

SAINT PAUL

Written by

Daniel Chervoniuk

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Dan.chervoniuk@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. THE AMARI RESIDENCE - MORNING

Close up on A 17 YEAR OLD BOY's closed eyes. The camera pans out as he sleeps peacefully in a twin sized bed that stops short at his shins. Back to the cracks on his cracked ceiling, the side of his head delicately cemented to his hilariously wide pillow that's the same width as his mattress.

6:30 AM. His digital clock whirls in its daily obnoxious duty as the boy continues to count sheep in his dreams. The alarm continues, as it should, and the boy continues to sleep, as he shouldn't. Eventually, an OLDER MAN'S (49) groaning is heard off screen. The older man enters the frame and shakes the boy awake.

DENJI  
(in Japanese)  
Wake up!

The boy groans.

DENJI (CONT'D)  
(in Japanese)  
Wake up!

ARTHUR  
(in English)  
I'm up! I'm up!

DENJI  
(in English)  
You have a big performance today.  
Brush your teeth and come down for  
tea.

Arthur's father leaves the bedroom as Arthur sits up in his bed, exposing his *Surfer Girl* album cover tee. Arthur walks to the bathroom next door to his bedroom. There are brief shots of him brushing his teeth, putting in his contacts, and drying his hair after a shower.

CUT TO:

INT: DEN, THE AMARI RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur and Denji sit across from each other on slightly tattered leather chairs. In between them rests a little coffee table with two cups of royal milk tea with steam escaping from the top.

Surrounding the two are an impressive collection of books; Tolstoy's "War and Peace", Nabokov's "Lolita" and Eliot's "Middlemarch" are some recognizable titles. Arthur and Denji sip from their cups as the conversation commences. Denji speaks with a slight Japanese accent. Arthur is noticeably tired.

DENJI

You nervous?

ARTHUR

Not really.

DENJI

You should be.

ARTHUR

Why should I be nervous?

DENJI

Your performance at school today!

ARTHUR

I'm not nervous about it.

DENJI

Arthur. "Greatness isn't defined by those who avoid mental adversity, but by those who power through it."

ARTHUR

Which motivational speaker did you hear that gem from, dad?

DENJI

I read it in Kameron Cook's book.

ARTHUR

Which one?

DENJI

I don't remember. I have a lot of Cook's books.

ARTHUR

Was it "The Power of Tomorrow" or "Tomorrow is Nothing Without the Power of Today" or what?

DENJI

I told you. I don't remember.

ARTHUR

Why do you even read those books?

DENJI

Americans eat it up. I want to be more American.

ARTHUR

Yeah - Americans eat it up and smart Americans use it as toilet paper.

DENJI

Spending \$36.99 plus taxes on a book just to use its 100 pages as toilet paper? How "smart"!

ARTHUR

You're talking to a born American Dad and lemme' tell ya - No one's reading those books anymore.

DENJI

You're right. These new generations are always on their phones. Always on social media, depressing themselves. Kameron Cook can save the lives of these young people.

ARTHUR

By doing what? Helping us "manifest and unleash our inner beast"?

DENJI

I thought you didn't read Cook.

ARTHUR

I don't.

CUT TO:

INT. MUD ROOM, AMARI RESIDENCE - A LITTLE LATER

Arthur checks his hair and puts on his shoes with his backpack slung lazily over his shoulder. As he approaches the door to leave the house, the door behind him opens. AN OLDER WHITE WOMAN (46) appears in the doorway.

CHRISTINE

Good luck at your concert, honey!

ARTHUR

Thanks, mom.

CHRISTINE

Did your dad leave already?

ARTHUR

Mhm.

CHRISTINE

Are you carpooling with Pierre?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

Christine checks her wrist watch.

CHRISTINE

It's still early; are you sure he's  
awake?

ARTHUR

He should be. We have to meet with  
the Principal soon.

Arthur opens the door and walks out.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Love you mom.

CHRISTINE

Love you Arthur! Break a leg!

EXT. 30TH STREET, ST. PAUL - CONTINUOUS

Arthur takes a right out of his house and up the intimidating slope of a hill via freshly paved sidewalks. Each house he passes seem to be copying the last in terms of exterior design and color scheme. Front yard signs advocating political candidates, scholarly achievements, and open houses seem randomly scattered about the healthy green lawns of Arthur's neighbors. DEREK LEE (17), a Midwestern hick and neighbor of Arthur's, calls out to him from his bedroom window.

DEREK

Hey, Amari!

Arthur sighs.

ARTHUR

What do you want?

DEREK

You're playing today, right?

ARTHUR

Yeah. You gonna try to cancel us  
again?

DEREK

No - I hope you all play your little hearts out. Of course, you'll only appeal to a "minority" of the audience, but whatever.

ARTHUR

Shove it, asshole.

DEREK

Up yours, racist! Maybe if you had an actual pure white in your band, the school would accept you guys!

Arthur flips him off and continues walking.

EXT./INT. THE NELSON RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Arthur turns off the sidewalk onto a cemented pathway to the front door. He knocks on the front door. Moments pass before A BLACK WOMAN (46) opens the door donned in a nurse's uniform and a smile.

ARTHUR

Morning, Mrs. Nelson! Is Pierre up?

Mrs. Nelson lets Arthur in.

MRS. NELSON

Hi Arthur! That boy better be.

ARTHUR

'Cool if I check on him?

MRS. NELSON

Oh come on, you know you don't have to ask. Do you want something to eat or drink before I leave?

ARTHUR

I'm okay; thanks, though.

MRS. NELSON

Mhm. Make sure he don't crash on the way to school.

ARTHUR

I will.

MRS. NELSON

Alright. Bye now.

ARTHUR  
Have a good one!

Pierre's mom stays in the living room as Arthur heads upstairs towards Pierre's room.

INT. PIERRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Arthur knocks on the closed door.

PIERRE (O.S.)  
Yeah?

ARTHUR  
It's me, bro.

PIERRE (O.S.)  
Uh, unless you wanna see my nuts,  
don't open the door.

ARTHUR  
Say less!

Arthur grabs the handle and jerks it without actually opening the door.

PIERRE (O.S.)  
Shit!

\*Thud\*. Arthur laughs as Pierre's cursing rings throughout the house.

MRS. NELSON (O.S.)  
I know I didn't just hear the Devil's language in my house!

PIERRE (18) slings open the door shirtless in gray sweats. He wears a silver chain with a silver guitar charm attached to the chain.

PIERRE  
(to Mrs. Nelson)  
You didn't!

MRS. NELSON  
Don't lie to me, Pierre!

PIERRE  
It's been a long morning!

Arthur can't contain his cackling. The two friends walk back into his room. Portraits of guitarists are messily scattered about the carpet.

A longboard, bass guitar, and an acoustic guitar with stickers of artists are propped against the foot of his bed, which is unmade. Arthur sits on one of the chairs in Pierre's room as Pierre finds a top to wear and tends to his bed. The conversation ensues during.

ARTHUR

Morning, buddy!

PIERRE

Why are you so uppity?

ARTHUR

Today's the big day!

PIERRE

The performance?

ARTHUR

Yes sir! You better have all the pieces memorized!

PIERRE

Loosely, but it's fine. I play better when I wing it, anyways.

ARTHUR

Nah - I'm not having you playing "Guitar Hero" while I'm singing.

PIERRE

So you're saying "Don't steal the spotlight while I'm stealing the spotlight."?

ARTHUR

I'm not stealing the spotlight. The singer is the one paid the most attention to in any band. That's not me being cocky; that's a fact.

PIERRE

Arthur -

ARTHUR

It's the truth; tell me that's not the truth.

PIERRE

You come into my house, scare the living and dead daylights out of me, get me in trouble, and now you're on your attention cravings.

ARTHUR  
You're right; I'm being a dick. I'm  
just really excited.

PIERRE  
Excited to prove a girl wrong or  
prove another girl that you're  
worthy of her attention? I forgot  
which dilemma you're having today.

ARTHUR  
I don't care about my ex anymore.  
That girl in Cambridge is another  
story, though.

PIERRE  
'Course ya don't care about your  
ex, but you care about her  
perception of you.

ARTHUR  
No, I -

PIERRE  
You want to complete the narrative.  
"Boy gets cheated on by girl, boy  
starts a band, boy makes it big and  
proves to girl that he's better off  
without her."

ARTHUR  
Okay, yeah, that doesn't sound too  
bad.

PIERRE  
Sweet ol' revenge.

ARTHUR  
Not revenge. Validation.

PIERRE  
(nonchalantly)  
Whatever sounds healthier.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. PAUL ROADS - MORNING

Pierre and Arthur sit in the moving car as "Bitter" by Worn-Tin plays. Pierre vibes to the music with a singular hand on the wheel as Arthur looks out the window. They drive on a bridge over the interstate. Arthur looks on past the interstate and onto the roads as far away as he can see.

ARTHUR

I wanna get out of Minnesota, man.

PIERRE

Why?

ARTHUR

Musicians don't make it big in  
Minnesota.

PIERRE

Prince, Bob Dylan, The Replacements-

ARTHUR

They're *from* Minnesota. They didn't  
make it big *in* Minnesota. New York,  
on the other hand -

PIERRE

They started here.

ARTHUR

So have I! Now I have to take the  
next steps and leave. We have to  
leave.

PIERRE

Where? To Chopin in the Big Apple?  
We don't even know if they'll  
accept us and tuition is insane  
there.

ARTHUR

I'd rather sing Besame Mucho to a  
city girl in Madison Square Park  
than sing some country song about  
beer and cattle to a farmer's  
daughter in a café in  
"MiddleOfNowhere", Minnesota.

PIERRE

That's some harsh generalizing.

ARTHUR

I can't have what I want in  
Minnesota, man. That's my point.

PIERRE

You can't let your happiness depend  
on external factors and  
imaginings, man. It has to come  
from within.