

COUCH SURFING (WORKING TITLE)
PILOT

INT. BACKSTAGE OF A THEATER - NIGHT

CLOSE UP on the back of what is clearly a Black man's head.

It's bushy. He needs a haircut. His mama would have something to say about it.

Through the soft focus around the outskirts of his head we see the heads of others. Their faces are blurry, but they are clearly turned in big head's direction. Watching. Waiting.

We hear a strong, authoritative VOICE. The voice is clearly coming from the head we're seeing. There's maybe a hint of nervousness or of excitement - it's hard to tell which.

VOICE (O.S.)

...We all know why we're here. To tell a story. A story that we've found ourselves in and, in finding ourselves, have found hope...

As the speech goes on, we PUSH IN to the back of the head we've grown accustomed to.

VOICE (O.S.)

...Tonight: we give the gift of hope to those who have come to spend however long it is they'll spend with us here tonight. And this is our charge. This is our gift...

The back of the head is getting closer. Maybe we even see the shadow of the camera - it's that fucking close.

Then, suddenly, black.

VOICE (V.O.)

...This is what it means to be Black, an Artist, and living in the 21st Century.

Then, just as suddenly, light again, but wait--

A forehead? Yup, a forehead. There's sweat on the brow.

We PULL OUT, just as slow as we pushed in, to see the face of KEN (25). He's handsome, but doesn't know it. And he wears a goofy smile, that might actually be a wince; this is his default expression.

We can see that his carotid artery (the one in your neck) is pumping faster than it should be for someone who is at rest.

We continue to PULL OUT. We see his shoulders now.

Nothing is happening. He's anxious but still. The clock on the wall ticks - It provides the tempo for a series of shots:

...Ken gulps.

...a WIDE SHOT of a circle of actors, a director is there too, Ken at the head of the circle. They all hold hands.

...CLOSE UP of intertwined hands.

...colorful (maybe period) costume pieces.

...CLOSE UP of wigs.

...CLOSE UP of make-up, coming off or not fully blended.

...a stray hair.

...an actor wiggles their nose to avoid the stray hair.

...an actor clears their throat.

...CLOSE UP on Ken eyes as they dart toward the "ahem."

Is this a sign? He takes it as one. Get on with it, already!

He opens his mouth to speak. It reminds us of the voice we heard, previously. Only, maybe, slightly different. Less confident.

KEN

So, yeah...I don't know...I love you all. And, yeah. You all know that. So. Don't suck?

(no response)

Kidding. Um, yeah, just go out there and--

A female voice comes over the nearby loudspeaker. More authoritative than Ken's--It's the STAGE MANAGER.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
PLACES. THIS IS YOUR PLACES CALL.

The Actors call out, in unison:

ACTORS
Thank you, places!

And just like that, the intertwined hands go solo, the circle breaks apart, and the actors disperse, off to their respective "places."

CLOSE UP on Ken. Nothing again.

Then, the Stage Manager on the loudspeaker again--

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
KEN? JUST WAITING ON YOUR ALL-CLEAR.

Ken sighs and moves to exit. Before he can--

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
I KNOW YOU DON'T LIKE TO WATCH THE SHOW. TEXT ME WHEN YOU'RE SAFELY OUT OF THE BUILDING. THANKS EVERYONE. HOLDING FOR KEN.

Ken's hand is on the doorknob. He's about to exit when...

The Stage Manager again--

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
ONCE AGAIN: WE'RE AT PLACES. WITH A HOLD FOR KEN TO LEAVE THE BUILDING BECAUSE HE DOESN'T LIKE TO WATCH HIS OWN BEAUTIFUL AND HEARTFELT WORK. THANK YOU.

Why you gotta blow up his spot? Ken gives the speaker on the wall a death glare. As if that's where the Stage Manager resides. Her little home of oversharing. It looks as if he's about to curse the speaker out when...

The actors call out again--

ACTORS (O.C.)
Thank you, place--

TITLE: COUCH SURFING

["If My Friends Could See Me Now" from Sweet Charity's Motion Picture Soundtrack starts in]

INT. SOUND BOOTH AT THE BACK OF THE THEATER - LATER

Ken is sitting against the wall, knees to chest, a kind of upright fetal position.

His Stage Manager (26), who we've only heard until now, but who looks very much how she sounds, is attempting to call the cues for the show while managing Ken's anxiety. They have history. But not that kind of history - Ken's a Queen, after all.

KEN

How's it going? Tell me, honestly.

STAGE MANAGER

(to Ken)

How do you think it's going?

(calling the show)

Cue 15. Go!

KEN

Don't do that.

STAGE MANAGER

Don't do what, Ken?

KEN

Patronize me. Not right now.

(re: his current position)

Not like this.

STAGE MANAGER

I'm not! You're the one who decided
you wanted to watch today.

KEN

Fucking right, I do! Thought it was
only appropriate after getting
called out...

Beat. A look from Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER

Nobody called you out! I was just
stating fact--

KEN

Don't flatter yourself! I don't
mean you...My Co-Star app said I
should "push myself today" so...

Stage Manger shakes her head, amused. She calls another cue.

STAGE MANAGER
Cue 16, stand-by. And...

KEN
Should I look?

STAGE MANAGER
What does your Co-Star app say?

A shady look from Ken. He mimics the Stage Manager's previous line, like how little kids do, then:

KEN
(under his breath, but
still playfully)
Bitch...

STAGE MANAGER
(back to work)
Cue 16. Go!

Ken moves from his ass to his knees. He can't quite bring himself to stand. He sighs, partly exasperated, partly for emphasis.

STAGE MANAGER
(noticing Ken)
Need some help there?

KEN
I can manage, thank you.

Baby's gotta walk on his own.

STAGE MANAGER
Alright...

Ken moves to the desk and up to the level of the Stage Manager. He isn't quite able to see out of the window of the booth yet.

We hear the Stage Manager's voice as Ken musters up the courage to look; her calling of cues corresponds to Ken's movements.

Maybe, all of this is in slow-mo. Maybe also accompanied by "Also Sprach Zarathustra."

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
Cue 17...

Ken swallows hard. Closes his eyes.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
Stand-by...

Ken takes a deep breath. Here we go.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S)
Cue 17. Go!

Ken puts both hands on the sill of the booth's window.

ANGLE ON: The booth from the POV of an actor onstage; a small black window at the back of the theater. The people in the booth look like little bobble-heads shrouded in darkness.

We see Ken's head slowly move to peek over the bottom edge of the window. We see his eyes. Just barely. Like that moment in Parasite. (Bummer, if you haven't seen it.)

ANGLE ON: The back of Ken's head. Very reminiscent of how we first met Ken.

We PUSH IN as Ken watches his work. The actors are blurred figures in the distance, but we can hear them. We can hear Ken's words.

The scene is pretty good.

No, it's VERY good.

We can't see it, but Ken is smiling.

CLOSE UP: Ken, from the nose up, peering at his work. He blinks a few times. Maybe his eyes even have tears in them.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - LATER

The sound of applause. Something's off about it.
We see the ACTORS hand in hand. They take their bows.
One bow. Two bows. They release one another's hands.
They gesture to the back of house - to the sound booth.

The CAMERA PANS away from the actors to reveal the audience.

There's an unfortunate amount of people there.
An embarrassingly unfortunate amount of people there.
Maybe, like, three, at most.
And only one of them is standing.

Tragic.

But they have smiles on their faces. The applause is genuine.

They enjoyed themselves.

The CAMERA PANS back around to the actors. They take a final bow.

CUT TO:

EXT. THEATER - LATER

Ken waits outside. (He doesn't watch the bows.) A few of the patrons exit the theater and pat Ken on the back as they pass him. Small congrats, but nobody stops...

A PATRON (23), the kind that can't read social cues and over-stays their welcome, stops to grace Ken with a kind word.

PATRON

Excuse me? Are you the writer?

Ken doesn't really like to talk after a performance, but obliges anyway.

KEN

Yes. Yes, I am.

PATRON

I have to say...That was excellent!

Ken smirks - or is that a wince? - and tries to hide it.

KEN

...Thanks.

PATRON

No, really. I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

KEN

Then, I did something right...

PATRON

What's that?

Ken is all praying hands emoji.

KEN

Nothing, nothing...I...really appreciate it. Thank you for--

One of the ACTORS (27), maybe more attractive than talented, exits the theater and sees Ken and the Patron, who just happens to be their friend. The ACTOR joins them.

ACTOR
Hey y'all, what's going on?
(to the Patron)
I see you've met Ken.

PATRON
Yeah! I was just telling him--

ACTOR
He's brilliant, right?

PATRON
Truly!

KEN
Oh, thank you, but no...I just hear voices in my head and write down what they say.

ACTOR
Brilliant AND humble...

KEN
Awww...

PATRON
Oh, yes!

KEN
Nah...

PATRON
(oddly aggressive; "take it")
Oh. Yes.

He'll take it.

ACTOR
My friend here...is an actor, as well.

Of course they are. Patron feigns modest. The game is afoot.

KEN
(playing it off)
Oh, you don't say!

PATRON
I would love to pick your brain sometime. Maybe over coffee?

KEN
(being polite, but with no
intention of following
through)
Sure!

PATRON
(oddly aggressive again)
Would. Love.

Ken goes into survival mode. Back away slowly...

KEN
Well, it was lovely meeting you--

ACTOR
Yo, what are you doing right now?

KEN
(keeping Patron in his
sights)
I-I was gonna...go home...

PATRON
(kinda creepy)
Where's home?

ACTOR
What, why? It's your big night.

Ken doesn't know who to answer first. Or if he should continue engaging with Patron, at all, really.

KEN
Uh, because...I'm-I'm broke.

ACTOR
Heard that.

KEN
And I live in Astoria. Queens. It's a trek to get home and--

PATRON
I have friends in Astoria. Love it out there.

KEN
...Yeah. Well, me and my roommates are looking to move at the end of the month, so--

ACTOR
Gotta save the coins. I get it.

Phew! Awkward social interaction avoided.

PATRON
(#obsessed)
How 'bout I get the first round.

KEN
(Abort! Abort! Abort!)
I'm tired. Very tired. I was just
gonna...just gonna--

ACTOR
Come get a drink with us!

PATRON
(wide-eyed)
Yeah. Come.

Ken closes his eyes and equivocates. This is his way of saying "no."

ACTOR
Just one.

Patron holds up a finger and does a little dance.

Tag-team peer-pressure at its finest.

KEN
Nah...I shouldn't. It's late and I
have work in the morning.

PATRON
Oh, what do you do for work?

KEN
(over-selling it)
I work as a hospitality liaison for
a high-end wellness brand that
caters mostly to white women, age
eighteen to forty-seven.

PATRON
Oh, cool.

ACTOR
Ken works front desk at a workout
studio.

KEN
Yeah. That. It's like church but
for Type-A Secular Humanists.

PATRON

Ah.

Ken needs to be done now.

KEN

Well, it was lovely to meet you.

PATRON

You too. Truly!

Ken moves to shake Patron's hand, but Patron goes in for a hug. They do the awkward dance of figuring out how long this hug should last. Does it need to be said that Patron is into it more than Ken?

Ken and Patron break from the hug - which couldn't have ended sooner. Ken moves to Actor and they embrace. It is more familiar and welcome than the previous hug.

Ken breaks the hug first. Actor holds onto his shoulders, and does that thing that sometimes really attractive - more attractive than talented - people do when they want something; they make a puppy dog face or pout a little or make extreme eye contact.

No words, just face. Pretty People Privilege. Ugh.

CLOSE UP: We see Ken's face soften.

CUT TO:

INT. MIDTOWN BAR - LATER

CLOSE UP: Same face, different location.

ANGLE ON: Ken alone. He holds a beer. Around him are hoards of people. Most of them disastrously drunk. Most of them devastatingly straight. The worst kind of people.

"Fat Bottom Girls" or "Pour Some Sugar on Me" or something of that ilk plays, very loudly. Why is he here? Why is anybody here?

Ken does that thing Millennials do when they're unable or unwilling to connect in a public space - he checks his phone. He dicks around on it for a minute until he finally settles on something. Must be something negative. We can tell because his face, all of a sudden, is screwed up.

KEN'S POV: His phone. He's checking his bank account on his mobile banking app. Oops. It's negative, alright. Probably because of the drink he's holding. He tries to make the best

of it. He puts his phone away.

He bops, unenthusiastically, to the music.

He takes a huge gulp of his drink. Maybe he chokes a bit.

He tries to enjoy his night.

He fails.

INT. WORKOUT STUDIO - THE NEXT DAY

An industrial white box. Accents of color, maybe. Inspirational quote decals plastered everywhere.

A sleek particle board desk also painted white.

Behind the desk we see Ken, his co-worker/friend, JENNY (23) who, is herself a white woman, but the kind that's an actual ally; a real one. They're work-husband and work-wife. 'Til death do they part.

Behind them, in B I G Helvetica ALL CAPS, floats the word...

SWEATCULTURE. One word. No space.

A class has just ended. Mostly white women exit the studio in a single file line, sweaty and beet-red. They move past the desk, past Ken and Jenny.

The two friends plaster on plastic smiles. This smile, fake as it is, looks good on Ken. He's giddy, he's at a 10 on the Positivity Scale, he's happy; albeit, pretend happy.

Ken offers high-fives to some of the women as they pass by him. Some of them even wink at him, a sign of familiarity.

This is their clientele's home away from home at \$40 a class.

A SWEaty WHITE WOMAN walks past Ken - he decides to engage.

KEN

Hey girl, how was class?!

SWEaty WHITE WOMAN

I killed it today!

KEN

Whoooo! You go, Miss Thang!

Jenny tries to remain composed. She knows this is bullshit at best. Trolling.

Once the last white woman passes, the smiles and positivity melt away. Jenny sighs a huge sigh. And Ken's wince is back.

KEN

I need another coffee after the next class goes in. You want?

JENNY

Nah, I'm good. Wouldn't say no to a bagel or something, though.

Ken imitates one of their clientele. It is very accurate and very mean-spirited.

KEN

"You silly bitch! This is a carb-free zone!"

A WHITE GIRL WITH WHITE GIRL VOICE - much like the one he's in the middle of imitating - echoes behind Ken. It sends a jolt through him.

WHITE GIRL WITH WHITE GIRL VOICE
(O.S.)

'Scuse me?!

Ken turns around, slightly embarrassed. Did she hear?

KEN

Yeah, hello?!

WHITE GIRL WITH WHITE GIRL VOICE

Hi. Yeah. I just checked my app and it says I have two classes. But actually. I have three, so...

Ken doesn't have the strength. He defers to Jenny. More like, throws her under the bus.

KEN

Actually, Jenny can help you out with that...

JENNY

(nice-nasty)

Yeah, I can totally help you out with that!

While Jenny steps behind one of the iPad kiosks to help the White Girl figure out her class situation. Ken moves behind the desk. He starts restocking waters, wiping down the desk, doing anything to look busy.

He sits on one of the nearby sleek, modern couches that

resides in the lobby area. He continues to "work" but mostly he's sitting. He uses a Clorox wipe to clean the glass top of the nearby coffee table that holds books like "Lean In" and "How to Unfuck Yourself." Next, he moves on to the metal legs on the couch, but that quickly morphs into him cleaning the white accents on his sneakers.

We hear remnants of Jenny's conversation with the White Girl. Other white women pass Ken as he continues to look busy. He catches pieces of their conversations, too. It all blends together into a cacophony of white girl voices.

But one voice pushes through. Another WHITE GIRL VOICE.

But this one, Ken hears it loud and clear:

WHITE GIRL VOICE (O.S.)

Athleisure wear is literally one of the most disgusting inventions on the planet. They don't tell you, but mostly, it's just a receptacle for bodily fluids and odors you will never be able to get out of the fabric, no matter how many times you wash it. And trust me, I would know--

The last few words ring in Ken's ears. How blunt and refreshingly real. But here? This is not usually the place for such realness. He chuckles to himself at this revelation and has to know more--

KEN
Excuse me?!

He didn't notice, until both Jenny and the white girl with white girl voice turn around, that he was shouting.

Jenny gives him a confused look. So does the white girl.

KEN
I'm sorry, did you--?

WHITE GIRL WITH WHITE GIRL VOICE
I'm sorry?

Ken smirks. Maybe only Jenny supposed to hear.

KEN
Never mind.

The White Girl With White Girl Voice turns back to Jenny. They continue to remedy her class count. Almost immediately, Ken hears the voice again:

WHITE GIRL VOICE (O.S.)

None of these bitches will admit it, but they're peeing themselves while they're in class. And where do you think it goes, huh? This whole studio is a fucking Petrie dish--

KEN

Woah, woah, woah...Girl, that is too real--!

JENNY

Ken!

Fuck! He's yelling again.

Jenny makes a small gesture. It means "shut the fuck up." She finishes up with the white girl.

JENNY

Is there anything else I can help you with today?

WHITE GIRL WITH WHITE GIRL VOICE

(taken aback by Ken)

No...that's it, I think.

The White Girl turns away from Jenny and moves past Ken to exit the studio. She gives him a strange look as she passes him. He can tell. He decides to "lean in." (The book on the coffee table told him to.)

KEN

(with the fakest fake smile)

Have a good one! See you soon!

The White Girl picks up the pace. And she's gone. Ken feels Jenny's gaze on the back of head. Ken turns to her; she's glaring. Her eyes say "what the fuck?"

Ding-ding! An iPhone message.

Ken ignores company policy and pulls out his phone. Maybe Jenny reprimands him from behind the desk and he gives her the finger, jokingly. Millennials and their phones, am I right?

CLOSE UP: A text from someone named NINO: "We need to talk. Apartment stuff."

Ken rolls his eyes. Maybe he even sighs, exasperated, and let's out a simple...

KEN
Fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. NINO'S APARTMENT - LATER

Nino, Steve and Ken are all sitting around a kitchen table.

Nino has a beer and by the way his tie is loosened, we can tell he's a little tense.

Steve gulps down his beer.

Ken hasn't touched his. In fact, it's not even open.

Awkward silence, then:

STEVE
...That's an IPA, Ken. Your favorite...
(no response)
It's not as hoppy as most IPAs, but it has this really nice fruit finish...
(no response)
I know you love a fruit finish...

NINO
Drink your beer, Ken.

KEN
I don't want a fucking beer right now...

NINO
Then, say something?

KEN
I'm just--

STEVE
It's really good...the beer...
(a look from Nino)
Just saying...

NINO
"Just" what, Ken?

KEN
I guess I'm just a little confused is all. I mean, we sent in the deposit to your cousin, yes?

NINO

Yes.

KEN

You sent yours in too, right?

STEVE

Yeah.

KEN

We sent in the photo IDs yesterday,
yeah?

(Beat)

I thought your cousin knew the
landlord.

NINO

He does.

KEN

So, please help me with my
confusion, guys...

Nino and Steve share a look. Nino decides to step up.

NINO

It's a difficult situation, Ken-
man. I want you to hear me when I
say this...

STEVE

When WE--

NINO

When WE say this...This has nothing
to do with you.

STEVE

Specifically.

NINO

Specifically. Exactly--

STEVE

But it has EVERYTHING to do with
the world we live in.

NINO

Exactly.

STEVE

Exactly.

KEN
("what the fuck?")
Okay.

NINO
The landlord was all set to have us move in. My cousin wasn't lying when he said we were golden...But also, he knows this neighborhood. And he knows this landlord, you understand?

KEN
What does that have to do with anything--?

NINO
(to Steve)
A little help here?

STEVE
Ken...It has nothing to do with you SPECIFICALLY--

KEN
You said that.

NINO
We don't want to offend you, Ken.

KEN
What does not offending me have to do with the fact that we sent your cousin the deposit, we sent in the IDs, we had everything we needed to have but NOW there's--all of a sudden--a problem. I mean, everything seemed to be on track until they got the...

Nino sighs. Steve looks away.

A ton of bricks falls on Ken. Not really, but he gets it.

KEN
The landlord doesn't want a Black tenant. Does he?

Silence. It speaks volumes.

KEN
Wow...

NINO

Ken.

Ken moves to stand. The other man don't. Shame keeps them from moving.

KEN

(a newfound attitude)

So, when do we start looking for a new place?

(no response)

GUYS?! WHEN DO WE START LOOKING FOR A--

NINO

Ken...

KEN

(an ultimatum)

If you guys take this apartment, we are done. Done. And that's not a threat, it's not an ultimatum--

STEVE

That's exactly what it is.

KEN

Well, tough, Steve. It's a fucking ultimatum.

STEVE

(under his breath)

Told you.

KEN

But also, it's the truth. You guys move into this place? We're done. The choice is yours.

NINO

Ken--

KEN

Decide, Nino. Decide.

Silence.

Nino and Steve share a look. You know, the way white people do when they're about to do or say something they know is shitty and racist, but they're gonna say it anyway.

STEVE

Look, we know it's not the best situation ever--

NINO
It's just--

KEN
(a dig)
"Just" what, Nino?

STEVE
It's just really hard to find a place in the city. Especially--

NINO
A place like this.
(no response)
At a price like this.

STEVE
We feel so bad about this, Ken.

KEN
You guys fucking suck.

Ken moves to exit. Steve calls after him.

STEVE
Ken, we're--

ANGLE ON: Ken opening the front door and exiting. He doesn't turn to leave his final message for his would-be, fuckhead ex-friend roommates. A grand exit! Maybe he even throws them deuces as he goes.

SLAM! The door behind Ken.

STEVE
--Sorry.

INT. KEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Ken is in bed, the blanket and pillows piled high, his face lit by a laptop screen. The curtains are drawn and the lights are off. A soft blue glow illuminates Ken's face, which isn't too happy. And, although he'd never say, this is somewhat routine for Ken - things get to be too much and he shuts himself in. Hides. It isn't completely joyless, though. He eats from a pint of Cherry Garcia ice cream, watching some bad tv.

Ken's phone rings. He looks down to see who's calling - Mom. He hesitates briefly, but answers.

MOM

Hey, boo! What are you doing?

KEN

(setting ice cream aside
and turning on the lamp)

Nothing. Just...working.

MOM

Oh! Are you at Sweat Series? I
thought you weren't supposed to be
on your phone at--

KEN

It's SweatCulture, Mom. And
no...I'm at home. I'm working
on...working on...Did you need
something?

MOM

Do I need something to call my son?

KEN

No...not...no.

MOM

So, if you're not working...what
are you working on?

KEN

A play.

MOM

A new one?

KEN

No, not a--

MOM

I was just telling Miss Carlson
about you, that grant you won. She
was so impressed and I said, "well,
my son doesn't--"

KEN

It's an old play, Mom. I'm just
making edits.

MOM

Oh...

There's a pause, a long one. Maybe Mom is sorting through
this information, figuring out something to say. In the
silence, Ken across a bit more, gives up, closes the laptop,

puts the lid on the ice cream, etc.

MOM
Kenny?

KEN
(softer, at this nickname)
Yeah?

MOM
What's going on?

KEN
Nothing, Mom. I'm fine. I'm tired.

A shift in tone from Mom - You know how Moms do.

MOM
Ken...

Another pause as Ken considers how much to divulge. He doesn't want Mom to worry, but also, this sucks and he needs his Mommy.

KEN
Remember that apartment I told you about...?

MOM
Yeah?

KEN
Yeah, well...It fell through.

MOM
Fell through? How?

KEN
Racism.

MOM
(thinking she misheard him)
What's that?

KEN
It's just...Not gonna work out.

Another silence as Mom figures out how much to ask.

MOM
What are you gonna--?

KEN

I don't know yet. But. I'll figure it out.

Ken is despondent in a way we haven't seen before, a way that is familiar to his mother and which worries her.

She switches gears - Momming 101 again.

MOM

Why don't you come home?

KEN

("No")

Mom.

MOM

It's nice here! We got a new Cheesecake Factor--

KEN

Mom. No. I'm not...I don't want to move back home.

MOM

Move? Who said move? I meant for a visit...A little vacation.

KEN

Only people with money take vacations.

MOM

People with money. And YOU.

KEN

Thanks, Mom.

MOM

Just come. I've got miles. So many miles...

(sounds of Mom scrounging around in her purse, typing)

Let me see...

KEN

Mom...

MOM

See, here's a flight tomorrow afternoon. That's easy.

KEN

Mom, what about work...?

MOM

I'll book it. Should I book it?

Ken surveys his room, thinking.

ANGLE ON: A pint of ice cream, books piled on the floor, a Sweat Culture t-shirt flung over a chair.

A break would be nice...

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL ROGERS AIRPORT, OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

Ken waits outside the ARRIVALS PICK-UP loop, overnight bag in hand. He looks a bit haggard - He hates to fly and must drink to get through it. Tipsy before 2pm doesn't look great on him.

ANGLE ON: A luxury car from the 90s in not-so-great condition. Bougie but busted.

We hear honking as Mom pulls up to the curb.

When she reaches Ken she rolls down the passenger side window.

MOM

There he is! Get in! Get in!

Mom reaches over to unlock the door - 90s car, remember? - and maybe they do a dance where Ken pulls the handle too early and then the car enables the child-safety lock and Mom has to re-lock and then unlock the door over and over. This frustrates, the tipsy and weary, Ken.

Once the door is unlocked, Ken opens it and gets inside the car.

Mom is so excited to see her son she's almost manic. Ken is more subdued.

MOM

There he is! Look at that cute jacket! Look at you!

(reaching over to touch
Ken's head)

Oooh, your hair is a mess! You need
a haircut!

Southern Mom - She just couldn't help herself. Ken pulls away.

MOM

That's okay. We'll go to the barber. My treat. You hungry?

KEN

Starving.

MOM

Then, let's go get you something to eat.

They pull off. As they do, Mom recites her list of things she's gotta do today. Ken turns 12 years old before our eyes.

MOM

We'll go to Sherri's and get some lunch and some pie. We can go to the barber and then to the store...I gotta pick up a few things. Then, I gotta run down to the church real quick and...

Mom keeps talking as Ken turns his attention out the window.

The Oklahoma plains pass by. Flat. Bland. Nothingness. It echoes how Ken's feeling at the moment.

[Music: Something morose but longing. Like Frank Ocean or something]

***A series of shots where Ken doesn't move within the frame, but his surroundings magically change around him. Maybe they're even cut to the beat of the song.

INT. SHERRI'S PIE PLACE - DAY

Ken and Mom sit with open menus. Maybe a server in an old-fashioned server get-up comes to take their order.

Mom talks, Ken "listens."

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Ken and Mom in the Men's section. Mom picks out clothes for him. We can tell immediately they are clothes he would NEVER pick for himself.

Mom talks, Ken "listens."

INT. BUTCHER STORE - DAY

Ken and Mom in line at the butcher.

Mom talks, Ken "listens."

INT. BAKERY - DAY

Mom trying a sample of some new sweetbread. She hands a toothpick with a little square of the same to Ken. He eats it, unenthusiastically.

Mom talks, Ken "listens."

INT. HOME GOODS STORE, CANDLE SECTION - DAY

Mom smells a scented candle. She holds one out for Ken to smell. He puts his face in it, blandly, and nods before Mom moves the candle back to her own nose and smells again.

She puts it back. Not for her.

Mom talks, Ken "listens."

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Mom talks while Ken gets a hair cut.

He's not really listening anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - LATER

Ken and Mom are finally home after a long day. Ken enters through the front door, arms loaded with shopping bags.

He puts them on the counter and immediately heads to the living room, which is connected to the kitchen via an open floor plan.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ken immediately moves to the couch and plops down. His phone is quickly unearthed from his pocket.

Mom continues talking in the kitchen as she unpacks groceries into the fridge and pantry. She doesn't yell, so her voice is a bit muffled - White noise, except she's Black...

Mom drones on and on about something or other while Ken checks his email (nothing), scrolls through Twitter (boring), opens his Instagram (no new DMs, no likes).

He looks over his shoulder - Mom's still yapping away - then opens up Grindr. The app refreshes, finds his location, and a new matrix of men appear. Ken starts to click on a few headless torsos. Slim pickings out here...

Suddenly, a voice, loud and clear - a lot like Mom's but tougher, more stern. WANDA SYKES would be fun!

VOICE
What the hell is the matter with
you?

Mom, still unloading groceries and, yes, talking, doesn't notice this.

Ken gives it a second. Then, turns back to his app. Scrolling, scrolling, torsos, torsos...

Then--

VOICE
You heard me! I said...What the
hell is the matter with you?!

Ken whips around towards Mom, confused.

KEN
Mom, seriously! What are you
talking about?

Beat.

MOM
(confused)
...Mrs. Carlson...her doctor said
it spread to her lymph nodes, which
you know, that's not good. Can you
imagine? Especially after
everything that happened with her
son--

KEN
Mom, mom...Never mind.

MOM
(still confused)
Baby...are you alright?

KEN
Yeah, Mom...I'm fine.

MOM & VOICE (IN UNISON)
You sure--?

Just then, the house phone rings. Mom, still mildly concerned, exits to the office to go pick it up.

MOM
Be right back, baby...

And she's gone. Ken alone.

He opens up Grindr again. He's getting back to business when--

VOICE
How dare you?

Ken whips around, afraid his Mom has snuck up on him. Nope. He's still alone. Alone and confused.

The voice continues...

VOICE
...Sitting up here in your mama's house, trolling for dick! What's the matter? They don't got enough dick up there in New York?

Ken is stunned. He doesn't know how to respond. This offends the Voice.

VOICE
Oh, so, what? You don't know how to speak when spoken to? The wordsmith? Ain't you supposed to be some fancy writer up there in--?

Ken has had it. He cries out--

KEN
Who are you? Who is that talking--?

VOICE
Who am I? Who am I...? I'll give you a hint: You're sitting on my face.

If it wasn't before, it is now clear to Ken: The couch is obviously the one talking.

Ken is, in a word, shook. He sits up, turns off his phone looks down at the couch. The couch takes this as her cue to continue.

VOICE

Although, if you're here sitting on
me...you aren't up there in New
York being fancy.

KEN

...I'm sorry?

VOICE

Why are you here?

KEN

Here? As in--

VOICE

Why are you back here at home when
you sat here on me, all those years
ago, and told your parents WHY you
couldn't stay here anymore.

KEN

I'm...I'm...On vacation.

VOICE

Only people with money take
vacations. And judging by the Taco
Bell scented mess you just let eke
out of you...money is NOT something
you have much of.

KEN

I'm just...I'm taking a break.
Don't I deserve a break?

VOICE

Sure you do. But there's a
difference between a taking a break
and making an escape. Which one are
you doing?

KEN

(taken aback)

...What?

Just then, Mom enters from the office.

ANGLE ON: Ken standing awkwardly in the middle of the living room, facing the couch. This looks odd and adds fuel to Mom's already growing concern.

MOM

Ken...you alright?

Ken turns to look at Mom. He realizes how strange he must look. He puts on a smile and decides to lie.

KEN
Yeah...I'm...great. When's dinner?

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Ken and Mom at the dinner table. They eat. Well, Mom eats and Ken picks at his plate. The sound of a light thunderstorm outside.

Once again, Mom talks and Ken "listens." He turns his head to look into the living room. The edge of the couch can be seen. Just the tiniest edge.

SLOW PUSH IN as Ken looks at the couch.

SLOW PUSH IN as the couch looks back at Ken. Ken's face.

The couch.

Ken's face.

The couch.

Lightning and sounds of thunder.

Mom drones on and on, all the while, until-- Ken suddenly stands.

KEN
I have to go.

MOM
Go? Go where?

Ken, fork in hand, exits. Mom sits, stunned.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOM'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ken stands outside Mom's house, bag in hand, in the rain.

There's a strange look on his face, determined and a little crazed.

We PULL OUT to see more of Mom's house; the driveway, the car, the manicured lawn, the front door.

Suddenly, the front door opens and Mom stands in the doorway.
She calls out:

MOM

Kenny? Honey? Do you want to wait
for you Uber inside?

["There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This" from Sweet
Charity's Motion Picture Soundtrack starts in]

Ken waits, smiling strangely, in the rain.

FADE TO BLACK.