

Shopping Carts (with VO)

INT. KAVYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The sounds of a city stirring in the morning - rustling trees, car engines, a truck beeping as it reverses - float in through the open window of a small bedroom.

Meet KAVYA VELUTHAT (24), hopeless, hapless, perennially bored, unsure of everything, often paralyzed, young woman.

Long, curly hair radiates around Kavya's head, spills out across a dusty, cheap, blue pillowcase. A persistent frizz makes for a makeshift, hazy halo around her head. A ratty, navy blue tank top cuts across her dark brown skin. Only her shoulders, collarbone, and head visible over the edge of her blanket, one of those ugly, rose-patterned, red-pink-cream heavy blankets bought from an Asian supermarket somewhere along the East Coast.

POV from Kavya - a bright, white popcorn ceiling.

Her phone, by her head, goes off, an annoying alarm sound. Without moving her eyes from the ceiling, she reaches her right hand out of the blanket, reaching around to find her phone, twist it right-side up, stretching the power cord. She hits the screen at random. It takes her a few attempts before her thumb lands on the snooze button.

Note: before each shift/overlap in tone, Kavya blinks or tilts her head to mark the change visually

KAVYA (V.O.)

(annoyed)

Get up, Kavya

(disparaging)

What a joke. You're never going to get up ever again, are you? This is how you die, isn't it? I mean, the snooze button? AGAIN?

(her mother's voice)

Why are you like this?

(tired)

It'd be nice to wake up one day NOT hating yourself, wouldn't it, Kavya? Will you EVER let the day come?

(exasperated)

How am I STILL this melodramatic, I'm fucking twenty-four-years-old, WHEN do I grow up? WHEN does this stop?

Kavya tilts her head to the right, then back, screws up her face, throws herself onto her side with a loud exhale.

POV from Kavya - her furniture all sideways, we see they're all second-hand, minimalist, and black to make for an easy interior design, if you can even call it that. Her desk is littered with books and open notebooks; her office chair draped with scarves, bras, and jackets; her nightstand with a cute lamp is covered in bottles of oil, nail polish, lotion; her plain, metal bed-frame; her bookshelf stuffed with books and other knickknacks.

On the walls are white posters covered with quotes written in neat, colorful handwriting, little knick-knacks that refuse to tell a cohesive story, posters of Nina Simone and Vidya Balan smile down at her from opposite corners of her room, photos of Kavya smiling with friends and family cluster in a non-symmetric pattern.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(parental)

Alright, Kavya, the first thing we're going to do is get up, okay, baby? We're going to sit upright like a big girl, and then we're going to swing our legs to the floor, and we'll get dressed, and we'll be so, so, SO productive.

(in the cadence of "Feeling Good" by Nina Simone)

It's a new day! It's a new life! It's a new dawn! And we're going to do all the things on your to-do list!

(anxious)

Breakfast, what about breakfast, you ate the last egg yesterday, you forgot to go to the grocery store yesterday, shiiiiit, the first thing you have to do is go to the grocery store, shiiiiit, the first thing you have to do is go outside.

(near tears)

I can't do that. I can't go outside. I can't even get out of bed.

Considering her room with a blank face, Kavya's eyes shift to the top of her nightstand, focusing on a pipe still half-packed with weed. She tosses herself onto her back again, looks up at the ceiling, lets out another annoyed exhale. Her eyes slide back to the nightstand, then she launches out of bed.

CUT TO:

INT. KAVYA'S BATHROOM - DAY

Kavya brushes her teeth with an electric toothbrush, the brush head irreparably frayed, buzzing.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(garbled)

Gotta get a new brush for this stupid thing because stupid Dr. Truong is going to notice if I use a regular toothbrush. Ugh. Bad teeth, bad genes, not my fault, Dr. Truong.

(inquisitive)

How did he get so dang good at his job anyways?

(disparaging)

And when the fuck am I going to learn how to do that myself?

She considers her reflection with disapproval, spits into the sink, gets a little bit of toothpaste in her hair.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(a roar)

GOD DAMN IT.

She bite down on the electric toothbrush, still vibrating, trying to keep more toothpaste from spilling out while she grabs a square of toilet paper and cleans up the foam. Grabbing her toothbrush, she looks at her reflection again.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(tired)

Girl. WHEN are you going to learn?
WHEN are you going to change?

Kavya shakes her head, disappointed, spits, and rinses out her mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. KAVYA'S CLOSET - DAY

Kavya slides the closet doors open, a personal vendetta against the rusty tracks twisting her face. Her clothes swing softly from the force. Kavya flips through several hangars.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(singsong)

Dress, dress, dress, gotta get dressed
e-ver-yyy day until you finally die!

Her hands linger over a blue dress with bright floral print.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (as if asking a close friend)
 Too much?
 (in reply, playful)
 Nah, never enough.

She pulls out the dress, fishes out lacy underwear and a bra from wicker baskets on the floor of her closet, a pair of strappy sandals.

CUT TO:

INT. KAVYA'S BATHROOM - DAY

Kavya, dressed, pokes several earrings through her ears before she finds the right pair, the pile of rejects precariously placed by the sink now substantial. She stops, tilts her head at her reflection quizzically as if she's seeing herself for the first time.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (inquisitive)
 When did you get this way?
 (quietly angry)
 I hate you, I actually hate you, and I guess I just have to live with the fact I fucking hate you.

She shakes her head disapprovingly, slathers sunscreen on her face and arms. She is rough with her skin, especially with the papery patches by her eyes. She spritzes herself with perfume, inhaling the scent from her wrists after she rubs them together. She struggles to get her natural deodorant on, arm going in through the neck and reaching for under the tight sleeves. She gets a smear of white deodorant powder on the outside of her dress.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (cruel)
 See, if you were just a tiny bit smarter, you would've seen that one coming years ago.

She wets another square of toilet paper, aggressively rubs it against the offending spot.

Finally ready to head out into the world, she puts her hands on the bathroom counter, leans towards her reflection, looking unflinchingly into her eyes, deep inhale.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 Ooooookay, you are ready, you are
 dressed, you smell good, your earrings
 match and most of all you are
 protected from the goddamn
 motherfucking sun so can we get on
 with it?

Dissatisfaction, a squint.

CUT TO:

INT. KAVYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kavya turns on a small bluetooth speaker, plays "Hello Lakisha" by Kilo Kish, sits on the edge of her unmade bed, lights up her bowl, inhales, holds her breath, then exhales, considering the smoke cloud with impatience. Putting her hands to her sides, Kavya sits still for a few moments, head turned to look out the window. Light falls across her face as the sun comes out from behind a cloud, she closes her eyes.

SCREEN GOES BLACK

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (first time we hear a neutral,
 slightly affirming tone)
 Okay.

In rapid succession, a worn-out floral wallet gets shoved in a ratty, black backpack along with her heavy key-chain, a water bottle, and nude lipstick. She zips up her backpack, yanks it on, plugs in neon pink headphones into her phone. The front door swings shut behind her.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK OF CULVER CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Kavya walks along a sidewalk, bopping her head to "Yenna Solla Pogirai" by A.R. Rahman, which we hear first through her headphones, then as part of the soundtrack.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (high)
 Alrighttttttt, girl, we are outside, we
 are listening to a great song, it is
 sunny, there is a breeze, I am alive,
 and everything is fiiiiiiine.
 (congratulatory whisper)
 You freaking did itttttt, Kavya, you

got out of bed, you got out the door,
and you're only the teensiest bit high
at 2 pm on a Saturday afternoon. I'm
so, so, SO proud of you.

As she walks, Kavya tends to keep her head down, watching her feet and the sidewalk pass her by, looking up only to cross the street or look at her surroundings - a chain link fence to one side covered in flowers, a mix of colorful buildings and boring ones on the other side. Kavya plucks a flower, fighting with the vine, and sticks it behind her ear.

Passing a YOUNG COUPLE, she looks up. MAN 1, pushing the double-stroller looks her up and down, a quick flicking of his eyes that slams into eye contact with Kavya. Kavya flushes but doesn't look away. WOMAN 1 sees Kavya, immediately turns to witheringly look at her partner, then at Kavya. This immediately pushes Kavya's head back to the ground. She purses her lips, gives her head a quick shake.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(angrily)

What an actual jagweed.

(a contemplative interruption)

Jagweed. Such a good epithet, gotta use it more often.

(resuming)

Back to the jagweed though - are you effing kidding me, dude? A woman carries two whole babies IN HER BODY for you, not to mention SHREDS HER VAGINA for you, and you can't keep your eyes straight.

(whispers)

But also so sorry, girl, I should've looked away too but also he WAS cute. You picked good. So happy for you.

(nearly inaudible)

Whore.

Kavya walks up to a supermarket, grabs a cart. As she's pushing it through the sliding doors, she realizes it has a sticky wheel, pauses, considers it, then continues.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Bright fluorescent lights, murmur of other shoppers, couples or individuals age 40-70, mostly white, squeaky shopping carts, the occasional paging on the P.A. system.

Kavya leans over her shopping cart, elbows on the bar, eyes

sharp, scanning the room for cute boys and the groceries on her shopping list.

KAVYA (V.O.)

Wasted, wasted, wasted, I am utterly
wasted out here. Waste. A piece of
garbage. A garbage person.

(brightly)

Hey, that's me, I'm a garbage person!

As Kavya turns the cart down the dairy aisle, MAN 2 makes eye contact with her and smiles as he's placing a dozen eggs into a shopping cart, more interested in her than Man 1, less cute. Kavya grimaces a smile back politely, as WOMAN 2 rounds the corner. Woman 2 glares at her. Kavya's head jerks back down to her shopping cart.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(apologetic)

My bad, girl, believe me, I am not
trying to get with your dude, I swear.
Total opposite of interested in that.
He's not even cute. Totally
disinterested. See?

(regretful)

But also yiiiiiiiikes, girl, the fact
that your guy is out here in a grocery
store at 2 pm, smiling at other girls
like that? Not a great sign.

(perplexed)

Should I tell her?

(exasperated)

Girl! What is going on! In your head!

Kavya turns a corner, hunching over her cart.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(sullen)

I'm fucking bored, that's what it is.

Kavya airs out a plastic bag, picks through tomatoes, squeezing them, tosses three of them in the bag. She moves over to the meat section, performatively taps her index finger on her lips, acutely aware of the well-built MAN 3 in a butcher's apron stocking the shelves.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(in an aggressively sexual voice)

Yeah, yeah, that's right, dude, look
at me. LOOK AT ME. That's right,
you're powerless because I'm super

hot, and I dress real cute, and I know how to cook, just look at me picking out all this meat like motherfucking Guy Fieri, you lil bitch. Look at these hips, you ho, I KNOW you want me to just birth all your kids right now.

As Kavya turns to put a package of sirloin steak in her cart, Kavya smiles demurely at MAN 3 who smiles back with some surprise. Kavya is unable to maintain eye contact for more than a second. Kavya pushes her cart down to the produce section.

KAVYA (V.O.)

Fruit, gotta get some fruit, you can always eat some fruit, super lazy, super healthy, what a combo.

Kavya picks up a box of blueberries, shakes them, peers at them from the bottom, looks at another two or three boxes before finding one that works for her.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(proud)

Alrighthtttt, got some fruit, got some fresh produce, let's wrap this up.

MONTAGE of Kavya walking through the aisles, tossing various groceries into her cart. The sequence ends as Kavya pushes her cart into a checkout aisle.

There's a WOMAN with a TODDLER ahead of Kavya in line struggling to manage her purse, the TODDLER, type in her phone number on the keypad, then pay. Kavya flashes the WOMAN an 'it's okay' smile, the WOMAN smiles back with relief.

The CHECKOUT LADY (45), a black woman, shorter and skinnier than Kavya, hair tied into two braids that end at her collarbone, dressed in a black shirt with a collar and black pants, speaks English with a non-American accent as she gives the person in front of her a receipt.

Kavya smiles warmly at her.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(fond)

She looks just like Amma. God, I miss her. Why am I always so awful to her? I need to do better.

(wry)

You know you can just call her

sometime.

Kavya gives her head a quick jerk at the suggestion and places her groceries on the belt, precariously placing her reusable bag and grocery store card on top. Kavya smiles at the CHECKOUT LADY.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(bright)

Look, Amma, I'm buying groceries and making food and living on my own. Aren't you proud of me?

The Checkout Lady scans the grocery store card and hands it to Kavya.

CHECKOUT LADY

How are you doing today?

KAVYA

(extra polite)

Doing alright, how 'bout you?

CHECKOUT LADY

Good, good.

The Checkout Lady starts scanning items, picks up the box of blueberries and rattles it, looking at it quizzically.

CHECKOUT LADY

(aside)

This should be more full.

Kavya blanches, looks at the Checkout Lady, back at the shopping cart, eye falls on a package of sugar, then cuts off a laugh.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(smiling)

Oh, shiiiiit, girl. Your high ass put a whole package of sugar on top of the blueberries...

The montage replays, but as a wide overhead shot. We see blueberries dropping out from her cart all over the store, people accidentally stepping on them, looking at Kavya's back curiously. We return to Kavya at the counter, looking dazed, then focusing back on the Checkout Lady.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(scared)

Oh SHIT, can't let Amma know you're a mess!

KAVYA

That's... that's so weird, huh.

CHECKOUT LADY

Yes, it is strange, the blueberries are usually more full. Usually three times more than this.

Kavya glances behind her, sees no one in line, hesitates, then makes up her mind.

KAVYA

Don't worry about it, I'll just... just go grab another box if that's okay?

CHECKOUT LADY

Yes, yes, you better, this is supposed to be more full.

KAVYA

I'll be back in a sec, I'll be just a sec, I'll be right back.

CHECKOUT LADY

Yes, yes, yes, it is not a problem.

Kavya power-walks to the produce section, beelines to the stand with blueberries.

KAVYA (V.O.)

(humorously)

You are *actually* ridiculous, running around this store like you're the shit, trailing blueberries like fucking Hansel and Gretel.

Kavya picks up the first box of blueberries and runs back to the line. There are now two people in line behind Kavya's cart. Kavya only gives them a cursory glance before handing the box of blueberries to the Checkout Lady.

KAVYA

(gushing)

Soooo sorry about that, again. I grabbed another box, here you go.

Checkout Lady takes the box from Kavya, confused by Kavya's effusiveness.

CHECKOUT LADY

Oh, it is okay.

Checkout Lady scans the box, rattles it at Kavya.

CHECKOUT LADY

Yes, see, it is more full than the other one. I don't know what happened with the other one, maybe...

Kavya cuts her off.

KAVYA

Yeah, suuuuper weird. Thanks again.

CHECKOUT LADY

Okay, so your total will be \$37.56 for today.

Kavya rummages in her backpack for her wallet, fishes it out, takes out her card and inserts it in the card reader.

KAVYA

Great, great.

We hear a clang of metal and Kavya's cart hits her hip. Kavya and the Checkout Lady look up startled. We see the person immediately behind Kavya is an OLD WHITE LADY, short, frail, with short blond-gray hair cut in a severe bob at her ears. Kavya blinks in disbelief.

KAVYA

I'm sorry, is there a problem?

OLD WHITE LADY

(pissed off, nearly shouting)

The sun is in my eyes, it's in my eyes, can you MOVE?

Kavya and the Checkout Lady exchange a glance. Kavya looks back at the Old White Lady.

KAVYA (V.O.)

Oh, this bitch did NOT just ram her cart into me to get the sun out of her blue damn eyes.

KAVYA
 (condescending)
 Yeah, I'm paying, I'll move it in a second.

The Old White Lady rams her cart into Kavya's cart again. Kavya whips her head to look her in the eye.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 Oh bitch, HELL NO.

KAVYA
 Excuse me! I am paying right now and I will move the cart in a second!

The Old White Lady shakes her head, huffs loudly, and looks at Kavya like she's not human. Kavya looks back at the Checkout Lady who is nervously stuffing the receipt into Kavya's bag.

KAVYA (V.O.)
 (warmly)
 Thank you! I really appreciate it

Kavya puts the bag into the cart, gives the Old White Lady a look of disdain, and pulls at the cart with attitude. The Checkout Lady runs around the end of her counter.

CHECKOUT LADY
 (flustered)
 Oh no, no, you can just leave that cart here, I'll get someone else to take it for you.

KAVYA
 (crossover, in protest)
 Oh no, that's fine, really, I can just...

CHECKOUT LADY
 (pleading)
 No, no, really, please, let me. I can call someone to get it for you.

Kavya looks at the Checkout Lady, back at the Old White Lady who huffs again, then back at the Checkout Lady.

KAVYA
 Okay, okay, that's fine.
 (beat, then warmly)
 Thank you.

The Checkout Lady smiles and starts to walk around the counter.

CHECKOUT LADY

(mutters under her breath)

That lady was really hitting your cart, wasn't she?

Kavya puts out her hand, puts it on the Checkout Lady's shoulder, smiles wryly.

KAVYA

She really was. But don't even worry about it. We'll be fine, you know?

Kavya and the Checkout Lady smile at each other. Kavya turns and walks out the sliding doors back into the sunlight. She shakes her head, puts her grocery bags down so she can put her wallet back and fish out her phone.

KAVYA (V.O.)

That old white woman *definitely* thought you were brown scum, coming into *her* country, fucking up her grocery store.

(devil's advocate)

Well, she was an old lady and no matter what, you have to treat them with respect.

(exasperated)

Get out of here with that! There's no excuse for acting like that *ever*. If she was a smart old lady, she'd be like Ammooma, really lean into that.

(frail)

Oh, I'm so sorry, dear, do you mind moving up your cart just a little bit, the sun is in my eyes and it's just that I have a condition, you know, at my age, you have all the conditions.

(miffed)

Yeah! I would've moved my cart so fast if she had been nice.

(defeated)

Why are people always like that?

(whispers)

Not everyone. Not that lady at the checkout that reminded you of Amma.

Not her.

(happy)

Not her.

Kavya smiles to herself, rolls her shoulders back, plugs her headphones back in. We hear "Bad Reputation" by Joan Jett. Kavya walks down the sidewalk.

SCREEN GOES BLACK

ROLL CREDITS

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK WITH TACO TRUCK - DAY

POV from the three Salvadorans working at the taco truck, a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, a YOUNG WOMAN, and a YOUNG MAN. The meat sizzles, there's a long line of people waiting. The Young Man and Young Woman are taking orders and making tacos. The Middle-Aged Woman stirs a tub of horchata idly.

Kavya walks down the sidewalk holding two grocery bags, head down, headphones in, brow furrowed. She looks up and flashes a small smile at the Middle-Aged Woman before looking back at the ground. The Middle-Aged Woman smiles back, then nods at the Young Woman and Young Man.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

(in Spanish)

That girl's always so sad. Every day, walking around with her head down like that, it's not good for her. What's so bad with your life, chica?

YOUNG WOMAN

What do you mean what's so bad with her life? What's with the confusion, mama. That girl needs to get laid. That's it.

The Middle-Aged Woman watches Kavya walk up the sidewalk and turn the corner.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

(shrugs)

You're not wrong.

ROLL CREDITS