

# MECCA

*Confronted by the belief he has been handed the world while getting away with murder, Robert must navigate guilt, abuse, and his personal demons in New York City the days following 9/11 to see if he, and the new city he calls home, can survive.*

## **November 1, 2001**

The movie begins with substantially the same opening sequence as GOOD (Forest Gump instrumental, sweeping camera view coming from above), but instead of the music becoming discordant, it abruptly slows down when the camera reaches the Statue of Liberty, and is reduced to an even slower single-key performance as the shot captures a glimpse of Ground Zero before zeroing in on a concession cart in Battery Park on what is expected to be an apple (again), before a pizza slice is handed to a customer, the camera fixing instead on the slice as the patron rushes toward the subway entrance, the instrumental matching the pace, until the pizza is knocked out of the customer's hand by another pedestrian exiting the subway, the pizza falling onto the platform, with the camera following, the cursing New Yorkers fading while the camera adjusts to the light to reveal a rat in the distance pausing its rummaging to take in the new bounty, thus introducing the audience to the origin story of Pizza Rat. It is not to be this time, however, because before Pizza Rat makes more than two steps toward the pizza slice, it is swooped up by the (clearly non-New Yorker's) tissue-wrapped hand of Robert Lyons, an optimistic, too eager to please 24 year-old young professional from Eugene, Oregon, arriving in New York with his partner Waleed after graduating together from the University of Michigan to apartment shop before starting their jobs and lives together in the big city.

These plans are very short-lived, however, as the environment of New York City after 9/11 prove too much for secular Muslim Amaan, who has a mental breakdown within days of arriving and returns to Michigan, leaving Robert suddenly feeling lost, scared and without a very needed source of security. He reaches out to the only other acquaintance he knows in NYC, his other known classmate to move there after graduation, the cool and collected Lisa Moore, whose financial and own personal motivations lead her to agree to become his roommate. Robert's challenges continue, however, when his new entry-level job at a top financial firm comes with a straight-out-of-central-casting Wall Street douche of a boss Max Villroy, who quickly recognizes Robert's personality traits as weaknesses, ripe for exploitation, and pounces at the opportunity. Villroy's abuse of Robert leads him to order Robert to procure him drugs to be delivered to Villroy at the firm's annual holiday party. Robert, however, due to a complete lack of experience in such transactions and a lack of nerve to ask for clarification, completely bumbles the purchase, leading him to procure the wrong drugs, thereby causing Villroy to have a wildly unexpected reaction to ingestion, flail about, lose his balance, and topple over the balcony of the party to his death, all of which witnessed only by Robert, who is frozen in horror until another guest screams. He runs

downstairs in disbelief, only to discover a little girl in the middle of the street staring at Villroy's body, who he pulls onto the sidewalk before running back inside in horror. The other guests, arriving on the scene see the state of Robert, the state Villroy left things, and instantly make the calculation that Robert was somehow (likely sexually) assaulted by his boss, who then took his own life. Horrified by the (mostly legal) implications this could have, the firm springs into action, instantly shielding Robert from liability by issuing a statement of events that remove any doubt of his innocence and providing him counsel prior to any police interaction; the firm praises his bravery and make him their new front-facing poster-child of LGBT outreach, both promoting him two levels and inventing a new firm-wide diversity role that he will have jointly.

Initially, Robert embraces his new-found fortune. He meets the owner of the boutique he goes to get styled, the older New York society fixture Marcus Kaminsky, and dates him briefly to much comic relief. His brief introduction to genteel New York leads him candy heir Tanner Vars, who Robert convinces himself is the reason all of this is worth it and far too quickly lets his guard down and latches on. Robert's romance with Vars is ill-fated, however, as Vars suddenly turns on Robert when his own paranoia is triggered, and Robert suffers the worst night of his life.

The next morning Robert receives a phone call from his best friend from high school, Joe, who he has not spoken to since graduation. Robert takes this opportunity to come out to Joe, as he was not out back then. Joe then discloses to Robert that he discovered that morning that he is sterile, and they commiserate over their shared struggle, as they looked so similar in high school people thought they were twins and always discussed their legacies and now their prospects for a family seemed dimmed. By the end of the phone call Robert offers to donate his sperm to Joe and his wife, Eva.

Robert, now convinced his only path to salvation lies in his confession to his role in Villroy's death, goes to Villroy's widow and tells her everything. Much to his surprise, she tells him that making himself a martyr will not correct the loss made by her husband's death. Rather, if he wanted to make up for what was taken away, he should live a full, positive and productive life – one that gave back as much and more than what was taken away. She then tells Robert that the reason Villroy wanted the drugs that night was because he discovered he had a 10-year old illegitimate daughter, and that she was the little girl who he pulled off the street, and that he saved her life by doing so. Not only that, but Villroy was being notified of his paternity because the mother had been committed such that the little girl was going to be a ward of the state, but the passengers in the cab that almost killed her have petitioned to become her guardians.

Lisa takes Robert out afterward to begin this new life of purpose, where they meet Perran Young, who hits it off with Lisa, predicting he could make her President of the United States. The little girl is taken by her new guardians to the Good estate in North Carolina called Greystone, where it is revealed her name is Lily.

### **After Credits Scene – Rwanda 1994**

A poster for Forest Gump goes up outside an army hall, where two captains from two countries (UK and Nigeria) meet in Kigali, Rwanda, for the humanitarian relief effort following the Rwandan genocide, Edward's father and Kwesi's father, neither knowing they are 1st cousins once removed. As they commiserate over their shared rank, love of country music (laughing over their admiration of Dolly Parton and "Islands in the Stream") and all things scientific, especially computers, they decide to team up during their tour to make the time pass easier. The Nigerian officer discusses his recent visit to America on scholarship, where he met his American wife who gave birth to his son before returning with him to Africa. The British officer marvels at their coincidental Nigerian heritage and similar looks, disclosing that he was saved from a ravaged village by his adopted grandparents, and invites the Nigerian back to his quarters to show him the research his classmate at Oxford, Jose Luis Polanco, was conducting on artificial intelligence theory, when masked gunmen ambush them, leaving the British captain dead. The Nigerian officer is wrongly implicated in the attack, leaving him disgraced, but also with all the British officer's (obscenely abundant) science library he left behind.